

Dec 1975 - Political Developments, April-November 1975.

Following the surrender of Phnom-Penh to the *Khmers Rouges* on **April 17** [see [27149](#) A], little information on the situation within Cambodia was received abroad, as all foreigners, including diplomats and journalists, were expelled at the beginning of May. However, it was known that the entire population of Phnom-Penh was expelled immediately and sent to work in the country, apparently in order to solve the food crisis without having recourse to foreign aid, and was gradually replaced by peasants. At the same time, although it was decided that Prince Norodom Sihanouk should remain Head of State and M. Penn Nouth Prime Minister, they did not return to Phnom-Penh from Peking (where they had lived in exile throughout the war) until Sept. 9, and the former again left Cambodia on Sept. 28. Details of these and other developments are given below.

Resistance by the republican forces ended almost completely within a few days of the fall of Phnom-Penh. The *Khmer Rouge* radio claimed on April 19 that the provincial capitals of Kompong Cham, Battambang, Kompong Speu, Svay Rieng and Kampot had surrendered on April 17, and Sihanoukville (formerly Kompong Som), Takeo, Kompong Thom and Kompong Chhnang on the following day, and called on troops in towns still held by the other side to lay down their arms immediately. A broadcast on April 23 claimed that the remaining provincial capitals had surrendered on April 19.

The last republican fortress to hold out was the temple of Preah Vihear, on the Thai border in the north of the country, sovereignty over which had been disputed between Cambodia and Thailand in the past, leading to a ruling by the International Court of Justice in 1962 [see [18931](#) B]. On the Cambodian side the temple stands at the top of a 1,500-foot cliff, although access from the Thai side is easy. *Khmer Rouge* troops stormed the cliff on May 22, whereupon the 19 remaining members of the garrison fled into Thailand.

A number of unconfirmed reports of guerrilla resistance to the new régime appeared in the Bangkok press during the summer. Thai intelligence sources told a Radio Australia correspondent on Aug. 11 that they had evidence that roving bands of former republican troops were still active in isolated areas, but that the *Khmer Rouge* authorities regarded these activities as more of a nuisance than a threat at this stage.

In the afternoon of April 17, almost immediately after the surrender of Phnom-Penh, the entire population of the city, which had increased during the war from about 600,000 to 2,000,000, was ordered to leave for the countryside. Neither the very old nor the very young were exempted; even the 20,000 sick and wounded in the hospitals were forced to go, many of them on crutches or pushed along in their beds. Those with cars were ordered to abandon them and walk, as the Government wished to eliminate private motor transport in order to reduce petrol consumption and reliance on foreign aid. At sorting centres outside the city the evacuees were told where to go; the wartime refugees who formed the great majority of the population, many of whom had

begun to leave even before the order was given, were sent back to their original homes. On reaching their assigned destinations the evacuees were set to work in the fields to increase food production. Similar measures were reported to have been adopted in other cities and towns previously held by the republicans.

Foreign correspondents interpreted these drastic measures as inspired in part by the desire to rehabilitate the country's agriculture, largely ruined by the war, and in part by the hostility of the peasantry to the cities.

When questioned at the French embassy, *Le Monde* reported on May 10, "spokesmen said that this evacuation had been considered indispensable, taking into account previous similar experiences, in order to 'reorganize the city'. It was necessary to 'revolutionize' and 'purify' the citizens by sending them to work in the country. Frequently in Asia, the fall of a dynasty has been accompanied by the abandonment of its capital, and so the Cambodian peasants wished to destroy what they regarded as a satellite of foreigners, first French, and then American, this city which has been built with their sweat without bringing them anything in exchange...."

A *Guardian* correspondent wrote (May 16): "Though the majority of Cambodian peasants owned their own land in the formal sense, they were bound by ties of indebtedness... to the urban traders and moneylenders. Many of these were Chinese or Vietnamese in origin. In addition, in the mid-1960s the growing urban bourgeoisie began to invest in cheap agricultural land, becoming in effect absentee landlords. Thus the polarity between Cambodian town and countryside was already very marked before the war, which turned the towns into pro-American command centres for the bombing of the countryside.... It is the 'comprador capitalists' (those dependent on foreign business) who have thrived with American aid, mainly in the import and service sectors which contribute nothing to the new economy. Such industry as did exist had already been nationalized before the 1970 coup against Sihanouk. *Khmer Rouge* statements so far indicate that their strategy is to build a strong agricultural base, supported by local cottage industries and handicrafts, on which industries can develop over a longer term. It is both an extension of the self-sufficient rural economy of the war and a more fundamental strategy which is probably influenced by the Chinese policy of 'taking agriculture as the foundation'..."

The only persons exempted from the order to leave Phnom-Penh were those employed on essential services such as water or electricity supplies, but within a few days the authorities began to repopulate it with peasants. Phnom-Penh radio reported on May 16 that Pochentong airport and other facilities were being repaired "so that the city can become active again"; on June 6 that the majority of the factories had resumed production; and on June 16 that the port had been partially restored and was handling a large quantity of goods. In an interview with *The Sunday Times* published on Oct. 12 Prince Sihanouk stated that 100,000 people, most of them factory workers, dockers and technicians, had moved back into Phnom-Penh, and that the population would gradually be increased to 300,000, who would be selected "according to their work and their attitude to Lon Nol".

A Special National Congress which met in Phnom-Penh on April 25–27 under the chairmanship of M. Khieu Samphan, the Deputy Premier and Defence Minister, decided that Prince Sihanouk should remain Head of State and M. Penn Nouth Prime Minister. The 311 delegates were officially stated to include 13 members of the Government, 125 representatives of "people's organizations", 112 representing the armed forces, 41 representatives of organizations affiliated to the National United Front of Cambodia (NUFC) and 20 representatives of the Buddhist clergy.

The Congress defined its aim as the creation of "an independent, peaceful, neutral, sovereign, non-aligned Cambodia with territorial integrity, and a national community living in happiness, equality, justice and genuine democracy, without rich or poor, without oppressing and oppressed classes, a community in which all the people live harmoniously in complete national unity and work to increase production and to build and defend the nation together". It defined its foreign policy as one of "independence, peace, neutrality and non-alignment, absolutely prohibiting any country from establishing military bases in Cambodia and struggling against all forms of foreign interference in Cambodia's internal affairs and against all forms of subversion and aggression against Cambodia from outside, whether military, political, economic, cultural, social or diplomatic". Prince Sihanouk expressed his complete approval of the Congress's decisions in a message to M. Khieu Samphan on April 29.

A national conference of the NUFC on Feb. 24–25 had approved a list of seven "traitors" who would be executed, and had offered an amnesty to all other republican politicians, officers and officials [see page [27150](#)]. Four of the seven named -Marshal Lon Nol, M. Son Ngoc Thanh, Lieut.-General Sosthene Fernandez and M. Cheng Heng-had already left Cambodia before Phnom-Penh fell, and M. In Tam escaped into Thailand on April 19. Of the two who remained in the capital, M. Long Boret gave himself up on April 17 and Lieut.-General Sirik Matak, who had taken refuge in the French embassy, surrendered on April 20. A statement by M. Hou Nim, the Minister of Information, broadcast on May 10 said that the sentence on the "traitors" had been carried out, and reaffirmed the offer of an amnesty to all other republicans.

Members of Prince Sihanouk's entourage who had returned to Peking after visiting Phnom-Penh with the Prince [see below] stated on Oct. 12 that they had been told that M. Long Boret and General Sink Matak had been shot, together with several generals and other high-ranking officers, and that General Lon Non (Marshal Lon Nol's brother, who had helped to negotiate the surrender of Phnom-Penh) had been lynched by an angry crowd. M. Ieng Sary, the Second Deputy Premier, however, told journalists on Nov. 1 during his visit to Bangkok that General Lon Non had been executed.

A radio station calling itself "The Voice of the Future Nation" began broadcasting reports of atrocities from near the Thai border immediately after the fall of Phnom-Penh-Prince Sihanouk alleging on April 22 that the radio station was being operated by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency in order to discredit Cambodia internationally. The foreigners evacuated from Cambodia on May 3–8 [see below] all stated that they had seen no evidence of mass executions; M. Patrice de Beer, the correspondent of *Le Monde*, questioned in particular allegations that officers' wives

had been executed, pointing out that he had himself seen M. Long Boret's wife leave freely with her children after her husband had given himself up.

About 1,500 people, the majority of them Cambodians, took refuge in the French embassy after the surrender of Phnom-Penh. On April 20, however, the authorities informed the French consul, M. Jean Dyrac, that they regarded it not as an embassy but as a regroupment centre for foreigners, and in consequence the Cambodians, among them General Sink Matak, were forced to leave. The foreigners remaining in the embassy included staff of the Soviet, East German, Indian and Pakistan embassies; *Khmer Rouge* troops were reported to have sacked the Soviet embassy as a protest against the Soviet Government's failure until recently to break off relations with the republican régime and to recognize Prince Sihanouk's Government as the country's only legal Government [see page [27152](#)]. The situation in the overcrowded French embassy, where food, water and medical supplies were running short, aroused great anxiety in France, especially after M. Dyrac was forbidden on April 26 to communicate with the outside world by radio.

The evacuation of all foreigners, including those in the embassy, began on April 30, when about 600 left for the Thai frontier in lorries. They crossed the border on May 3, having taken four days to cover 200 miles, and another 550 followed on May 8 the second party included over 200 Pakistanis who had been picked up on the way. The slowness of their journey was largely caused by the destruction of the road system by American bombing members of the first party stated after reaching Thailand that they had not seen a single bridge standing, and that entire towns and villages had been wiped out.

Phnom-Penh radio stated on May 10 : Our policy is not to allow foreigners to remain in our country, but this is only a temporary measure. We shall reconsider the question after the re-establishment of diplomatic, economic and commercial relations with other countries."

In its broadcasts Phnom-Penh radio laid great emphasis on Cambodian self-reliance. It stated on May 8, for example, that during the war the *Khmer Rouge* forces had seized arms from the enemy and had made their own bullets and mines, using scrap iron and wrecked tanks and aircraft, as well as their own medicines, and that this policy would be continued in peace. Prince Sihanouk declared on May 8 that Cambodia would not accept any offers of U.S. economic aid or reparations, which would allow the Americans to consider themselves absolved from their "abominable crimes". A broadcast on May 12, however, said that because of the great difficulties Cambodia faced in rebuilding its economy it could accept aid from all countries, provided that it was unconditional and not given "for the purpose of espionage or interference in our internal affairs".

It was announced on May 28 that all rubber plantations and on June 5 that all private enterprises had been nationalized.

Broadcasts were largely devoted to describing the process of reconstruction of agriculture, industry and communications.

In an interview on Aug. 12 M. Khieu Samphan said : "We have managed to supply food to the people throughout the country. Of course; it is not abundant, but it is enough.... All of us, from ministers down to village cadres, from high-ranking officers to the men and women fighters, merge with the people from all walks of life and take part in production.... Within a year or two Cambodia will be ample in the economic field, particularly in the supply of food, and will be able to export some of her products. By mid-July we had repaired all the major highways. Traffic has also been resumed on medium and small highways. We have basically solved the question of transport of rice, salt, cloth and farm tools. Rail and water transport is to a great extent under our control. Despite the grave damage done to industry by the enemy, a great number of factories and workshops have resumed production... "

The first independent account of conditions inside Cambodia was given on Sept. 2 by a journalist from Sri Lanka, Mr. Errol de Silva, who had recently spent 20 hours in Battambang province and interviewed one of the three officials administering the province.

Everyone, including officials and soldiers, was required to work in the fields, he stated, but the country was not expected to be self-sufficient in food for another two years. All movement across the provincial borders was prohibited, except for lorries distributing rice and petrol as Thailand had failed to respond to suggestions for the establishment of trade relations, these were purchased from smugglers at the Thai border with U.S. dollars left behind by the former régime, and were then distributed throughout the country. All republican currency had been confiscated.

According to U.S. intelligence reports, South Vietnamese troops on June 10 overran the island of Poulo Wai (about 60 miles off the Cambodian coast), which had been occupied by a Cambodian garrison, and subsequently seized the nine other islands forming the Wai group. The ownership of these islands had been disputed for many years, and the dispute had been intensified by the discovery of offshore oil in the vicinity [see 26222 A]. Phnom-Penh radio declared on June 27 that Cambodia would defend its territorial integrity against imperialists and others", but it wished to have friendly relations with "neighbouring countries and other countries which respect our sovereignty and territorial integrity" and to settle its problems with them " in a spirit of solidarity and mutual understanding". A subsequent broadcast on Aug. 8 reported that two islands off Kep, near the South Vietnamese frontier, were being transformed into "fortified bases to ensure the defence of Cambodian territorial waters".

A Cambodian government delegation, the first to go abroad since the surrender of Phnom-Penh, visited Hanoi on June 11–14 for talks with the North Vietnamese Government, but no statement was issued on their result. The North Vietnamese newspaper *Nhan Dan* reported on Aug. 8 that a delegation from the North Vietnamese Workers' Party headed by its general secretary, M. Le Dunn, had recently visited Phnom-Penh for talks on " questions of interest to the two parties which had resulted in "a complete identity of views".

Phnom-Penh radio announced on Aug. 12 that M. Ieng Sary had been appointed Second Deputy Premier in charge of Foreign Affairs and M. Son Sen Third Deputy Premier in charge of National Defence. Although the broadcast stated that all existing ministers would retain their

posts, the official communiqué issued on Aug. 18 after M. Khieu Samphan's visit to Peking [see below] referred to him only as Deputy Premier and C.-in C., and did not use his former title of Defence Minister, suggesting that M. Son Sen had taken over the Defence portfolio. The communiqué also made clear that Dr. Sarin Chhak remained Foreign Minister.

The new ministers were both former teachers educated in Paris who went underground in 1968. M. Ieng Sary, whose wife, Mme. Ieng Thirith, was Minister of Education, had previously acted as liaison between Prince Sihanouk and the *Khmers Rouges*, and M. Son Sen as chief of staff of the *Khmers Rouge* forces.

Prince Sihanouk stated on April 17 that he would not return to Phnom-Penh immediately because of the grave illness of his mother, Queen Sisowath Kossamak Nearireath (71), who had lived with him in Peking since 1973. Although she died on April 27, he remained in Peking until May 18, when he left for a visit to North Korea. According to diplomatic sources in Peking, he rejected on July 18 a proposal that he should return accompanied only by his wife, Princess Monique, and M. Penn Nouth, who had remained in Peking.

A delegation including M. Khieu Samphan, M. Ieng Sary, Dr. Sarin Chhak and Mme. Ieng Thirith had talks with the Chinese Government in Peking on Aug. 15–18. M. Khieu Samphan signed on Aug. 18 an agreement on economic and technical co-operation with China although no details were published, he described the aid as "free and unconditional". Diplomatic sources reported that under the agreement China had granted Cambodia an interest-free loan of about \$1,000 million, repayable in five to six years.

M. Khieu Samphan and M. Penn Nouth afterwards went on to Pyongyang, where they met Prince Sihanouk on Aug. 19, and returned to Peking with him four days later. After visiting Hanoi for the celebrations of the 80th anniversary of the declaration of Vietnamese independence they flew on Sept. 9 to Phnom-Penh, from which the Prince had been absent since Jan. 4, 1970 [see [24025](#) A], and where he was welcomed at the airport by an enthusiastic crowd. He presided over a cabinet meeting on the following day and a mass meeting and review of the armed forces in the Phnom-Penh stadium on Sept. 12.

The Guardian (Sept. 30) commented on the long delay before Prince Sihanouk's return : " The nearly six months since the fall of Phnom-Penh have already seen a process of long-range bargaining between the Prince and the *Khmer Rouge* victors. ... Sihanouk allowed the time between the end of the war and his return to drag out to the point where it became more embarrassing to the *Khmers Rouge* leadership than it was to him. According to one account, he even implied that he would consider resigning all his functions unless reasonable terms for his return and his future role were offered by the *Khmers Rouges*. The tactic worked, for their connexion with Sihanouk represents the *Khmers Rouges* only claim to legitimacy and legality... In addition, Sihanouk retains considerable popularity in Cambodia. Further, he has the backing of the Chinese... would not have stayed away so long if he had not had a list of minimum demands... While conceding that Cambodian politics have shifted violently to the left, Sihanouk still sees a spectrum in which he can operate. The new right consists of progressive non-

communists, the new centre of Marxist moderates like Khieu Samphan, and the new left of more uncompromising Marxists like Ieng Sary

Prince Sihanouk left Phnom-Penh on Sept. 28 to address the U.N. General Assembly, travelling via Peking and Paris.

In his speech to the General Assembly he said on Oct. 6 that Cambodia wished to be completely neutral and economically self-sufficient, without asking for aid from any country. "Cambodia," he declared "does not and will not belong to any power bloc, has not and will not have any alliance, military or other, with other powers, is not and will not be integrated with any organization or group of states or nations, except, of course, the U.N. and the group of non-aligned countries." On the war he said " The struggle was between a small, poor and under populated country and a gigantic aggressor, an over-armed super-power which did not hesitate to use the most sophisticated and cruelly murderous weapons, so wealthy that it could spend nearly \$2,000 million a year to pulverize Cambodia and its small people-a super-power believed to be invincible.... The question was whether the justice of its cause and its patriotic heroism could enable a small underdeveloped people to stand up to an invader of such fantastic power..."

Prince Sihanouk returned on Oct. 9 to Paris, where he was received by President Giscard d'Estaing After leaving Paris he again visited North Korea, returning on Oct. 80 to Peking, where it was announced on the following day that he would make a tour of about 20 African, Middle Eastern and European countries.

During his first visit to Paris Prince Sihanouk defined his position at a press conference on Oct. 2 as "the symbol of national unity" and "Cambodia's No.1 ambassador", and said that Cambodia was "neither a republic nor a kingdom". In an interview with *Le Monde* during his second visit to Paris he said "My relations with the *Khmers Rouges* are unambiguous. On the eve of victory I told them it will soon be over. Now my mother is dead. I can retire.' They replied that I was the president of the United Front and the Head of State, and we must remain united. I said then that I could not stay outside the Cambodian family when they wished me to be part of it.... I do not rule anything out. I could cease to play any role tomorrow.... I could also remain Head of State for life

During October 42 members of Prince Sihanouk's entourage, some of whom had accompanied him to Phnom-Penh in September, left Peking for France, where they had decided to settle.

M. Nouth Cheoum, Prince Sihanouk's former press secretary, alleged in Paris on Oct. 27 that there had been a power struggle in Phnom-Penh, as a result of which real power was in the hands of M. Ieng Sary, "an ideological communist under the influence of the Vietnamese", and that M. Penn Nouth had virtually given up any role in government because of his age. "The Prince is in disagreement with the régime, but he feels obliged to stay with them," he said. "He feels he is the symbol of national unity." He added that the Prince's interview with President Giscard had been mainly concerned with arranging for the settlement in France of his followers who refused to go to Phnom-Penh.

In an interview in Pyonyang with a Japanese journalist Prince Sihanouk described the emigres as "rightists", while the Cambodian mission in Paris denounced them on Oct. 26 as "a handful of traitors introduced into the National United Front by our enemies to undermine it from within".

The new Government of Cambodia was recognized by Australia, Iran and Portugal on April 17; by Argentina, Jordan, Laos, Nepal, Switzerland and the ASEAN countries [see [27333 B](#)] on April 18 by Japan on April 19; by New Zealand on April 21; by Canada on April 25; and by Britain on May 2. (For earlier recognitions of the royal Government, see Page [27152](#).)

On his return to Phnom-Penh on Sept. 9 Prince Sihanouk was accompanied by the Chinese ambassador, Mr. Son Hau, who became the first foreign diplomat to enter Cambodia since the war. North Vietnam reopened its embassy in Phnom-Penh later in September.

In his interview with *Le Monde* Prince Sihanouk said : " We cannot receive a crowd of ambassadors all at once; there is a shortage of water and electricity in Phnom-Penh, and there is not even a market.... How could we feed 30 ambassadors and their staff ? We have drawn up a programme; the South Vietnamese and the North Koreans will come before the end of December. In 1976 our collective leadership expects the Cubans, the Romanians, the Yugoslavs, the Algerians and the Albanians to arrive. France ? The internal situation, which closely depends on the world situation, will decide..."

A delegation led by M. Ieng Sary visited Bangkok from Oct. 28 to Nov. 1 for discussions with the Thai Government. A joint communiqué stated that the two countries would exchange ambassadors at a mutually convenient date would respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity and abstain from interference in each other's internal affairs would not allow foreign military bases on their soil and would establish close economic and commercial co-operation. The Thai Foreign Minister, Major-General Chatichai Choonhavan, said on Nov. 2 that as a first step towards diplomatic and trade relations liaison offices would be established on the border. (Times - Daily Telegraph - Guardian - Financial Times - Sunday Times - Le Monde - New York Times - Peking Review - BBC Summary of World Broadcasts) (*Prev. rep. Internal Developments, [27149 A](#); Foreign Relations, [27333 B](#); Relations with United States "Mayagiez" Incident, [27239 A](#).)*