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CAMBODIAN INFORMATION MINISTER HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE

Phnom Penh Domestic Service in Cambodian 0730 GMT 11 Apr 73 D

[Text] At 1100 this morning, 11 April, Mr Keam Reth, information minister and spokesman for the government, accompanied by Information Undersecretary of State Thong Lim Huong, held a press conference at the national radio station conference hall with foreign press correspondents and foreign and local journalists.

After thanking the correspondents and journalists for their presence the information minister told them that the conference was being held on the eve of the traditional Cambodian New Year's Day--an important traditional and family occasion of the Cambodian nation. He stated that the Cambodian people hoped to celebrate this New Year's ceremony in peace since they have confidence in the cease-fire agreements signed in Paris on 27 January 1973. However, he said, the Viet Cong-North Vietnamese aggressors will not allow us to observe this New Year's Day in peace and security. They have infiltrated fresh troops and arms and intensified their attacks on us in violation of the agreements regarding the entire Indochina region, in particular, regarding the Khmer Republic. In the present circumstances although the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong have robbed us of our hopes for peace and security, we have not lost our determination to fight. We are convinced that thanks to the resolution of our people and combatants in the struggle for the defense of the national rights we will succeed in preventing the enemy from achieving their aims at [word indistinct] cutting communications lines and in the process causing the situation in our capital to become critical. We are confident in the efficiency of our combatants and the efficiency of our air force and that of our friends.

The information minister added that the military and strategic situation is becoming advantageous to our side, because a river convoy ferrying necessary consumer goods recently arrived safely in Phnom Penh and National Highway 4 has been reopened. Therefore, the enemy whose attacks against us prior to the New Year's Day were aimed at psychological and political victories has failed to fulfill his objective.

Keam Reth then recalled the measures taken by the government in response to the situation, such as the proclamation of the state of emergency and state of danger to counter the aggression and subversion being carried out by the enemy at present. He said this decision is in accordance with the constitution. It enables us to take all necessary measures to compel the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong to respect the cease-fire agreements. Once the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong agree to respect these accords--that is, withdraw their troops from Cambodian territory--peace will surely prevail in our country.

The information minister and spokesman for the government then allowed questions. Asked by a foreign correspondent about reports that Sihanouk came to the so-called liberated zone in Cambodia, Mr Keam Reth answered that the Government of the Khmer Republic does not attribute any significance to these reports for two reasons. First, such news does not conform to the truth on the political and military plane. On the political plane, all the superpowers now want peace in the Indochinese region. Consequently, no one would allow Sihanouk, who is against peace, to provoke any more trouble. On the military field, our air force and that of our friends are carrying out activities to destroy infiltration of arms and troops by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong.

In such circumstances, those who know Sihanouk cannot believe that he dared to risk his neck to come to the so-called liberated territory. This news could just as well have been invented by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong in order to conceal their arms and troop infiltration into Cambodian territory. They use Sihanouk to lie to and mislead national and international opinion since he is a puppet of the Asian Communists. Besides, even if the news is true there is nothing for the Government of the Khmer Republic to become excited about, since Sihanouk has already been deposed from his functions as head of state by the people; and ever since this traitor invited the North Vietnamese-Viet Cong to invade and attack Cambodia and massacre his own Cambodian countrymen, our Cambodian tribunal has already sentenced this renegade.

The information minister then made the following statement in reply to query of foreign journalists; General Lon Non actually resigned from his function as a minister of the government at the request of high-ranking officers who are his classmates so that he can instead take charge of military tasks in accordance with the necessity of the situation in the country. General Lon Non's resignation has already been approved by the president but the government has not yet accepted it.

Regarding a Cabinet shuffle, Mr Keam Reth stated that so far no important changes have been made in the move to expand the government by broadening the political foundation.

After replying to various other questions of the journalists Keam Reth ended the press conference at 1145.

Refutes NUFC Control Claim

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[Text] The Government of the Khmer Republic has termed mendacious an enemy propaganda assertion that the so-called NUFC controls 90 percent of Cambodian territory with 5.5 million inhabitants. However, the government acknowledges that approximately one-third of Cambodia's territory and 1.5 million people are not under the control of Phnom Penh authorities.

In a statement to the press, Information Minister Keam Reth stressed, in particular, that it is the North Vietnamese-Viet Cong, and not the NUFC, who have forcibly occupied about one-third of our territory and imposed an outlaw regime of terror. This has been carried out, the minister added, with the complicity of some Khmer Rouge rebels. All the provinces that are at present under North Vietnamese occupation have a very low, if not insignificant, population, Mr Keam Reth said after pointing out that a large part of Cambodian territory is covered with forest and jungle that compels the inhabitants to take refuge mostly in the regions located in the South that are now under the control of the authorities of the Khmer Republic.

Regarding the flow of refugees from the invaded areas to the free regions and the nation's annual 2.2 percent population growth rate, he pointed out that out of the entire population of 7 million, about 6 million stay in the free regions under the protection of the government.