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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Developments in Indochina

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25X1

28 February 1973



Page Denied

DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA*(Information as of 1500)*

	<u>Page</u>
SOUTH VIETNAM	1
<p>The Viet Cong radio charges that Saigon forces have killed Vietnamese Communist members of the truce teams. COSVN has provided additional guidance on its new Directive. Big Minh and Ky are re-emerging on the political scene. There is little change in the military situation.</p>	
LAOS	5
<p>The two sides are still skirmishing. The joint commissions have met for the first time. The rightists in Vientiane are grumbling about the terms of the cease-fire. The Japanese have donated their first foreign assistance.</p>	
	8
CAMBODIA	8
<p>Sirik Matak is concerned about the procrastination on the vice presidency. Insurgents are still harassing government units near Banam. The teachers strike continues.</p>	
NORTH VIETNAM	11
<p><i>Nhan Dan</i> is being spruced up.</p>	
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS	12
<p>The World Conference on Vietnam held in Rome failed to make much of a splash.</p>	

25X1

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28 February 1973

25X1

SOUTH VIETNAM

The Viet Cong's Liberation Press Agency, in a story beamed to outlets abroad on 27 and 28 February charged that a South Vietnamese "civil guard" company attacked a Viet Cong military delegation to the Joint Military Commission (JMC) in Dalat at a "reception" point, killing four men and wounding two others. A UPI story from Saigon on 28 February reports that Radio Hanoi has broadcast a similar story, claiming that the incident took place on 25 February and is an "extremely serious violation" of the cease-fire agreement. So far FBIS has monitored no Hanoi broadcasts on the alleged incident and official US sources in Saigon have received no confirmation of the Viet Cong charges. The charges may have been fabricated to document PRG claims in recent sessions of the Four-Party Joint Party Military Commission that Saigon troops have been attacking sites the Viet Cong designates as pick-up points for its members of the JMC field teams. On the other hand, Saigon could conceal incidents of this sort if no outside observers are along on pick-up helicopter flights into Viet Cong Zones. [redacted]

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Further Communist Guidance on New COSVN Political Directive

In late February high-level Communist cadre provided their subordinates further guidance on COSVN Directive No. 2, which was issued in late January to announce the beginning of the political phase of the revolution [redacted]

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[redacted] Although the latest briefings reiterated that the struggle would now be waged by peaceful means within the framework of the cease-fire agreement, the cadre stressed that military tactics might be initiated in order to gain a final victory if

28 February 1973

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Saigon proves "treacherous and intransigent" in negotiations. The briefers asserted that the armed forces must therefore continue to be supplied, reinforced, and developed as before the cease-fire.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] COSVN did not expect the negotiations with Saigon to solve the political situation and that general fighting might resume by the end of April--the expiration of the 90-day period in which some progress is called for under the Paris agreement.

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Stirrings Among Old Thieu Foes

Speaking out for the first time since the cease-fire, Big Minh this week addressed an "open letter" to the participants in the Paris conference and hosted a

28 February 1973

25X1

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cocktail party for opposition legislators and the press. In his letter, Minh stressed familiar themes, asserting that the majority of the South Vietnamese people support a "third entity" and implying that he represents this group. Minh also emphasized the need to ensure "democratic freedoms" in South Vietnam, as called for in the cease-fire agreement. He told newsmen that South Vietnamese exiles should be permitted to return home and said he was opposed to the Thieu government's position that Saigon and the Viet Cong should each choose half of the National Council for National Reconciliation and Concord. Minh remarked that he and his followers would never have a place in the council under such a formula.

Several prominent opposition figures, including An Quang Buddhist Senator Vu Van Mau, were present at Minh's gathering, but no anti-Thieu front was announced despite rumors that such a move was in the works. Instead, Minh is following his usual cautious strategy of avoiding any real action while trying to keep his name in the news and clearly signaling his availability.

Former vice president Ky, meanwhile, is taking an even more low-keyed approach. Ky, who has been inactive politically since he left office in 1971, was not present at Minh's gathering, but he reportedly has been in touch recently with Minh and other political and military leaders. Ky approached the US Embassy last week and suggested that he would like again to play an active role in the affairs of the country. Coupling criticism of President Thieu's policy with a suggestion that he would be willing to work with the President, Ky claimed that Thieu is unable by himself to organize the country properly for the political struggle with the Viet Cong. The former vice president said Thieu should be prevailed upon to set up a collective leadership. Ky, who does not have much support of his own, apparently realizes that he cannot regain political influence unless he has outside help--such as the backing of the US.

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28 February 1973

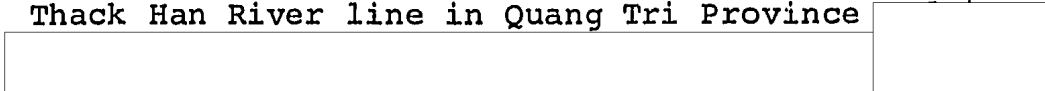
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The Military Situation

There has been little change in the over-all situation during the past few days, although there has been some increase in Communist shellings. Most of the artillery fire has been directed against South Vietnamese paratroop positions south of the Thack Han River line in Quang Tri Province

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In Binh Dinh Province, a light Communist ground attack was reported close to a South Vietnamese coastal radar site that was briefly overrun when Sa Huynh was captured by the Communists in late January.

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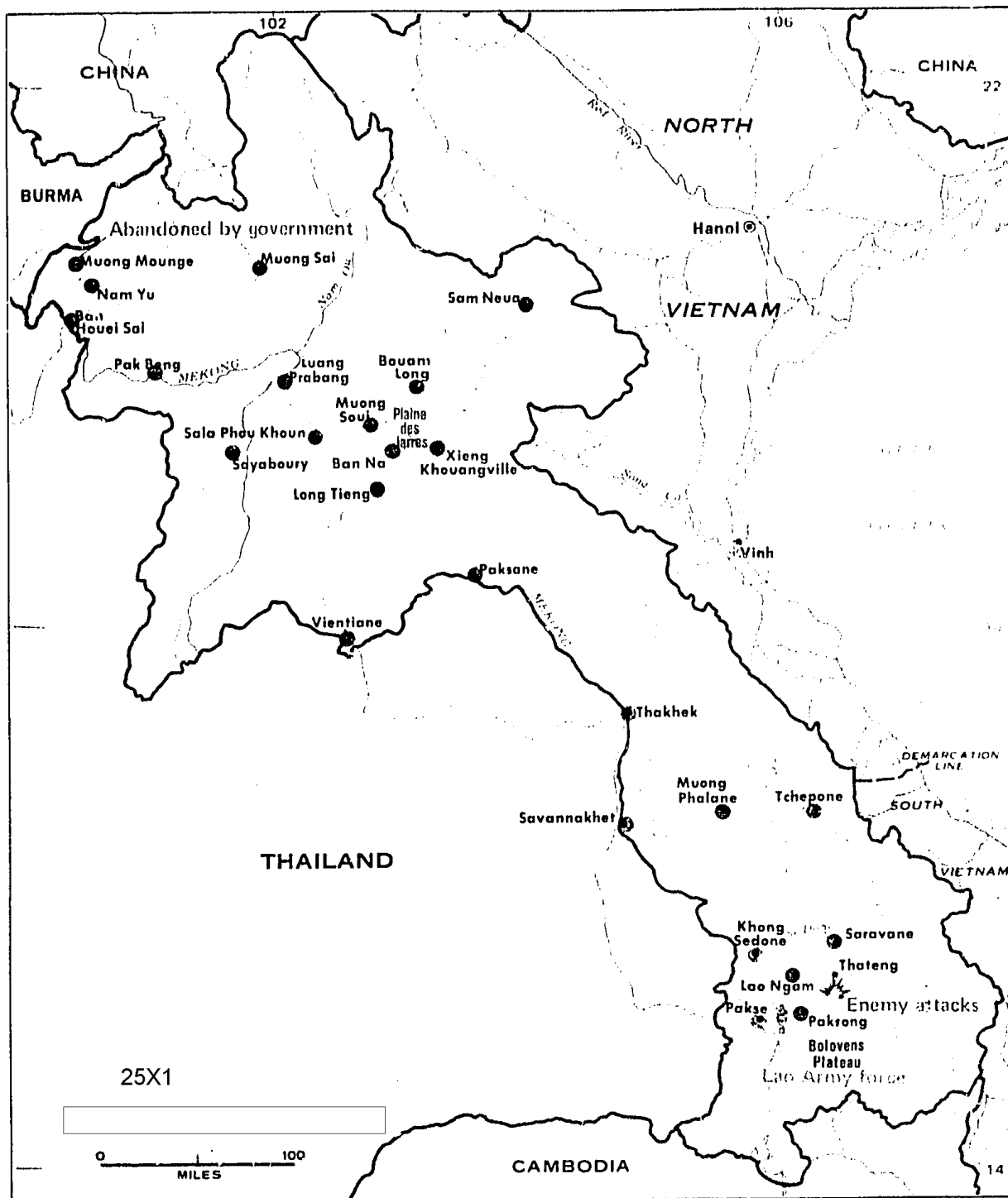


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28 February 1973



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○ Government controlled ● Communist controlled

LAOS

Communist units are persisting in their efforts to clear government irregulars from the northern Bolovens Plateau . One government battalion along Route 23 several miles south of Thateng was dispersed by a mortar attack on 27 February, while on the same day enemy ground attacks drove other irregulars from positions farther south of Thateng. Preliminary reports indicate that fighting continued in this sector during the morning of 28 February. In the Paksong area, field commanders reported several shelling incidents as lead elements of an 800-man Lao Army force edged to within three miles of the town.

Elsewhere in the south, Communist troops harassed a government force along Route 13 north of Thakhek on 27 February. Lao Army units south of Thakhek claim that they have been hit by several company-sized enemy attacks in the past few days. No positions have changed hands, and no government casualties have been reported. Meanwhile, Lao Air Force T-28s are continuing to fly tactical missions throughout the south.

In the north, no cease-fire violations occurred in the Plaine des Jarres sector on 27 February. In the northwest, belated reports indicate that Communist shellings forced a Lao Army battalion on 26 February to abandon Muong Mounge, a village some 30 miles north of Ban Houei Sai.

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Joint Commissions Meet for First Time

After a delay of several days, the two joint commissions charged with implementing the political and military provisions of the Lao peace agreement

28 February 1973

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met for the first time on 28 February. The meetings were conducted in a cordial atmosphere. A government spokesman stated that the political group had discussed forming a Joint National Political Council. According to the agreement, the council--to be set up by 23 March--will advise the new provisional government on elections. The military group discussed procedures and jurisdiction related to the cease-fire. Both commissions will meet at least three times a week. [REDACTED]

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Critics Finding Their Mark

Journalists in Vientiane continue to circulate stories of grumbling among Lao rightists. One report recently carried in a Bangkok newspaper quoted a "leading rightist" as saying that Souvanna had not listened to his ministers, had obtained no concessions in the agreement, and had signed just what the other side imposed on him. These charges prompted Souvanna's chief envoy, Pheng Phongsavan, to issue a formal denial of such accusations on 28 February. He presented a detailed, but not too convincing, account of cabinet meetings on the negotiations to justify his assertions that he consulted with the ministers whenever he had "a problem." [REDACTED]

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Japanese Aid

Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma has announced that the Japanese have donated \$540,000 for refugee centers in Vientiane and elsewhere. This is the first commitment of foreign economic aid since the cease-fire agreements were signed. Tokyo, which annually contributes \$4-5 million in project aid and also provides support for the multinational Foreign Exchange Operations Fund, ranks third, behind the US and France, as Laos' major benefactors. [REDACTED]

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28 February 1973

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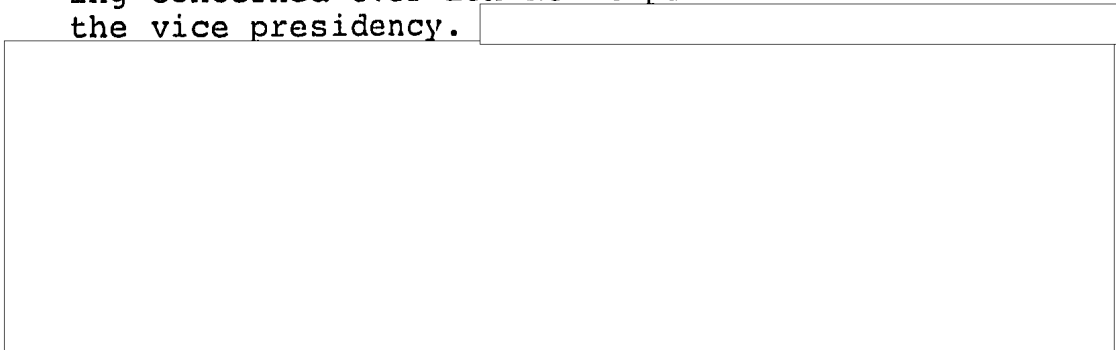


CAMBODIA

Republican Party leader Sirik Matak is growing concerned over Lon Nol's procrastination on the vice presidency.

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Matak's criticism of Lon Non's opposition is well founded. Last week, for example, Lon Non told a French journalist that Matak had taken "certain positions" that would make a "return to the past difficult." Besides making negative public statements, Lon Non apparently is resorting to some arcane political tactics to undermine Matak's appointment.

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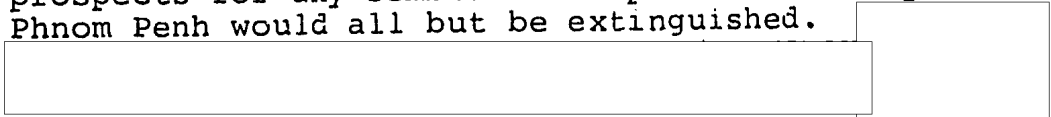
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Lon Non's latest anti-Matak machinations appear to be in direct defiance of Lon Nol's wishes and in violation of an earlier presidential injunction that such activities must cease. If Lon Nol does not soon rein in Lon Non on the Matak issue, it is quite likely that Matak will not only reject the vice presidency but also will make a permanent political break with the President. Should that happen, the flickering prospects for any semblance of political unity in Phnom Penh would all but be extinguished.

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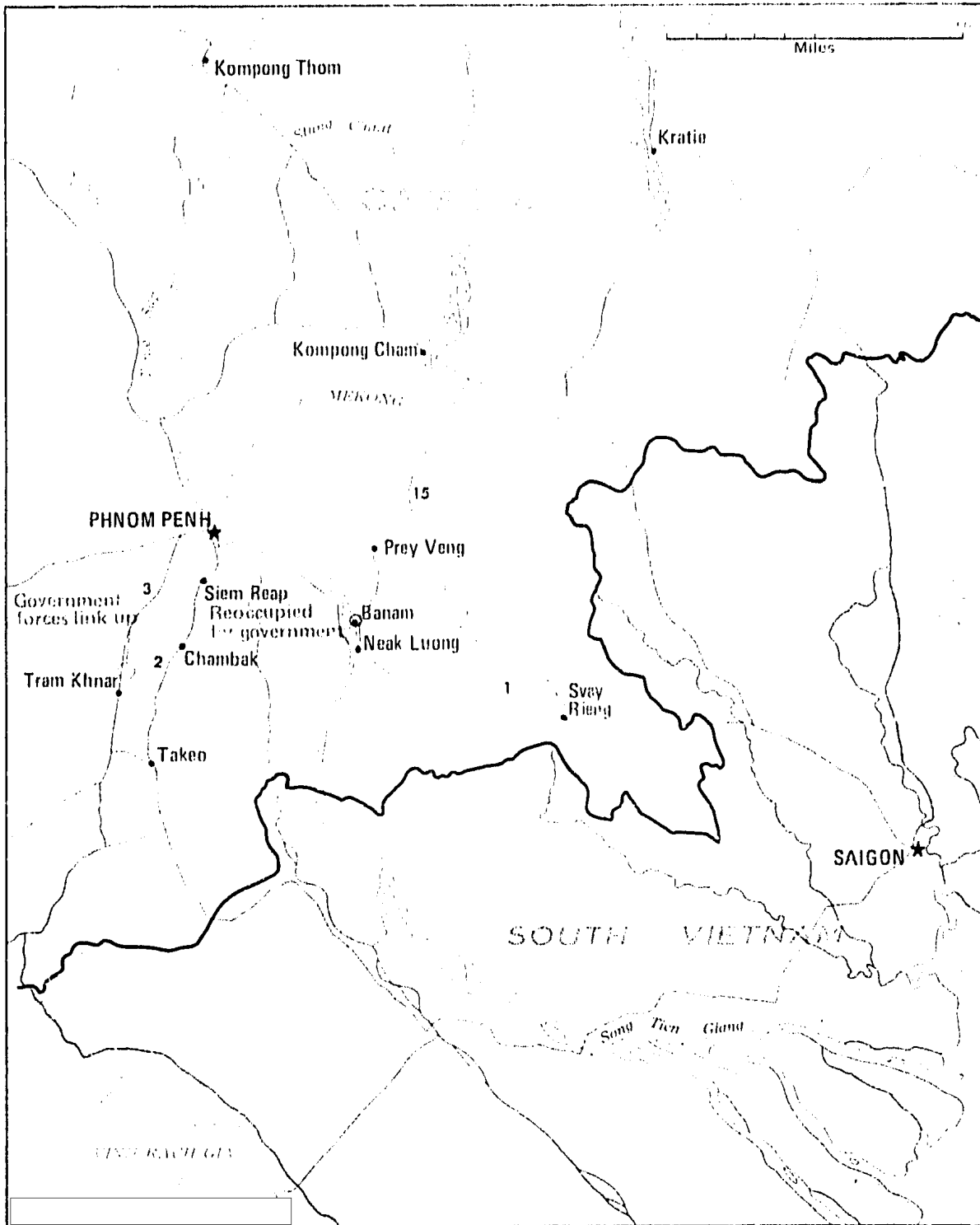
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28 February 1973

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The Military Situation

Khmer insurgent forces east of the Mekong River are continuing to harass government units in the vicinity of Banam, which was retaken by the Cambodians on 27 February. Four under-strength government battalions are still being pinned down by the insurgents north of the village. Thus far, no plans have been made to try to relieve these units or to regain control over Route 15 between Banam and Prey Veng. The government also has not yet organized an operation to clear sections of the Mekong's east bank below Neak Luong.

South of Phnom Penh, three Cambodian battalions linked up with local units on 27 February on Route 3 near Tram Khnar, reopening the highway between that town and the capital. The government forces met no resistance. Meanwhile, there has been no significant change in the situation along Route 2. Cambodia paratroops are continuing their clearing operations north of Takeo. Other government troops south of Takeo that were recently forced out of several positions along the highway are still trying to regroup.

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The Strike is Still On

The government has thus far reacted negatively to demands by striking teachers and students in Phnom Penh for a roll-back in recent price increases and for more effective action against official corruption.

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President Lon Nol and Brigadier General Lon Non called in a spokesman for the teachers last week to ask him what the strike was all about and how the government could resolve it. When the spokesman explained that the teachers wanted higher salaries in order to live decently, Lon Non reportedly became angry and threatened to arrest the spokesman and to invoke martial law. Lon Nol and Lon Non later met with student leaders and offered vague

28 February 1973



inducements to end the strike. When the students would not back down, Lon Non again threatened to impose martial law.

First Minister Hang Thun Hak, Lon Non, and other government officials met again with student leaders on 24 February. In the course of their discussions, Hak reportedly stated that the rise in prices was the result of US insistence that economic reforms be instituted. Another official commented that the government's effort to develop the economy over the last two years had been thwarted by insufficient aid from the US.

Both the students and teachers reportedly have decided to continue their strikes until the government satisfies their demands. To prevent the strikes from leading to demonstrations and other forms of agitation, the government on 28 February banned all meetings in the capital.

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28 February 1973



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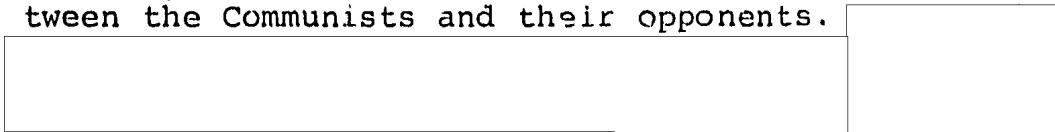


NORTH VIETNAM

Hanoi seems acutely aware that public relations is going to be an important arena of competition between the Communists and their opponents.

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the leadership decided last October to permit broader and more comprehensive coverage of the news. An important part of this policy was to be a face-lifting for *Nhan Dan* itself. Once the fighting stops, the regime reasoned in October, the North Vietnamese will have access to a wide variety of information, and *Nhan Dan* cannot be expected to hold its audience if it sticks to the standard fare of dialectical homilies, reports of meetings, and agricultural bulletins. Instead, the first page of the paper is to be devoted to world and domestic news. More reporters are being recruited, and the paper's management has been ordered to buy the most up-to-date printing equipment. By instituting these changes, the North Vietnamese hope to catch up with the Soviet Vietnamese media, whose journalistic superiority the *Nhan Dan* official candidly acknowledged.

North Vietnamese journalists have on rare occasions displayed considerable reportorial flair--most notably in a series of reports from the Ho Chi Minh Trail during Operation Lam Son 719 two years ago. It will be an uphill struggle, however, to change the attitudes responsible for the dreariness of *Nhan Dan's* day-to-day output. every- one from the Politburo on down is set in the old ways and that North Vietnamese media would naturally have to maintain a "firm party political line." As if to drive this point home, First Secretary Le Duan visited *Nhan Dan's* offices earlier this month to deliver some exhortations that sound very much as though Hanoi's journalistic wine will by and large be appearing in the same old bottles.

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28 February 1973

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Rome meeting of the World Conference on Vietnam on 22-24 February turned out to be a polemical exercise, rehashing standard anti-war positions. The conference, which four to six hundred delegates attended, issued an appeal to the US to stop violating the cease-fire agreement, condemned the US for wreaking various forms of destruction on Vietnam, and demanded that Saigon immediately release its political prisoners.

The meeting was dampened by the decline in public interest in Vietnam following the signing of the cease-fire agreement. Although a large delegation from US anti-war organizations was present, the traditional position of the Americans as the center of attention apart from the Vietnamese themselves was reportedly usurped by the very large Japanese delegation. [REDACTED]

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28 February 1973