



The President's Daily Brief

9 December 1971

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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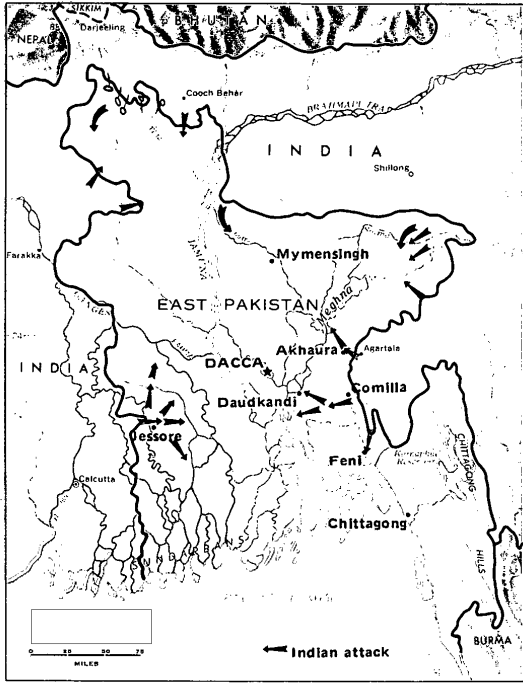
PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The defense of East Pakistan is crumbling as Indian troops advance on nearly all fronts. (*Page 1*)

The North Vietnamese 320th Division appears to be headed for the central highlands in South Vietnam. (*Page 3*)

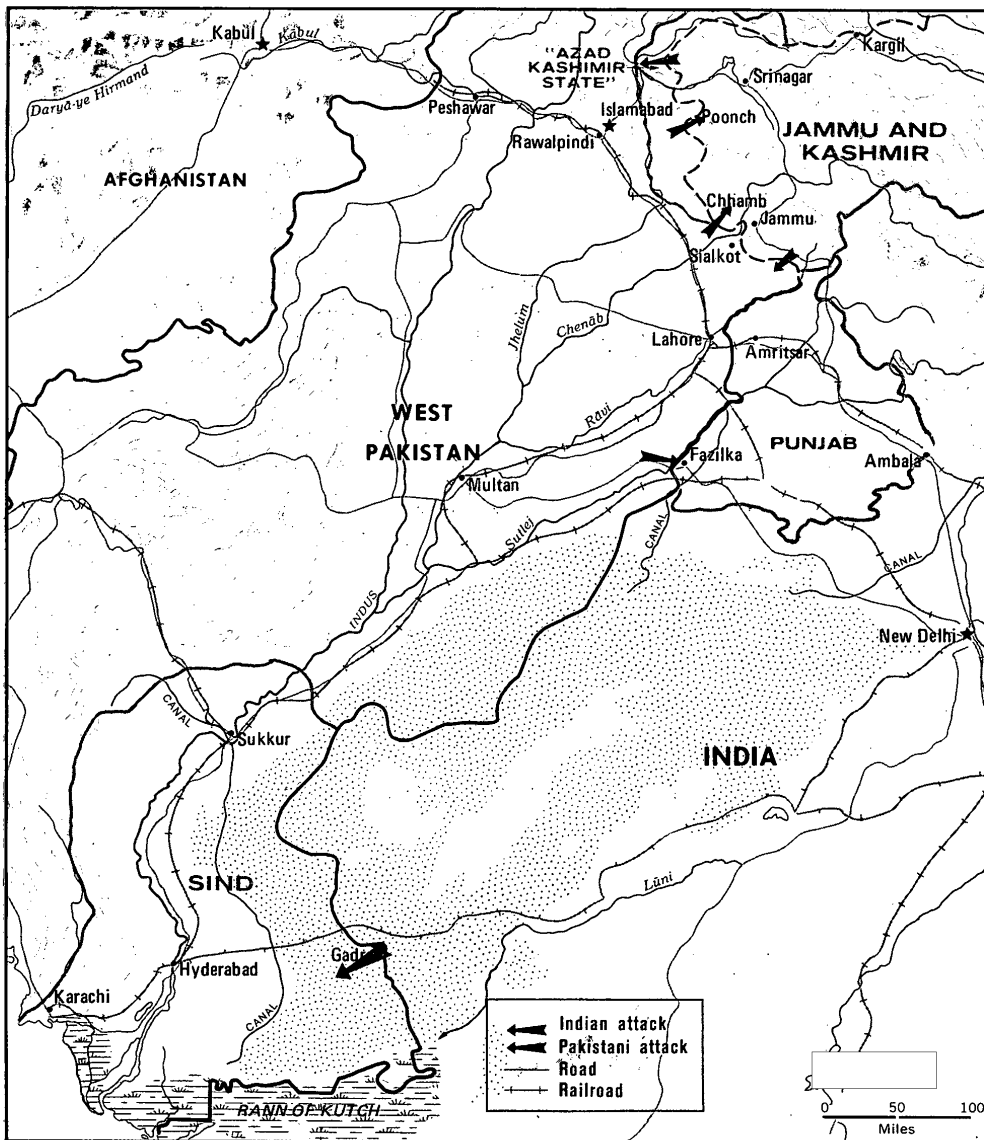
On *Page 4* we note the latest reports of Lon Nol's resistance to pressure to give up personal direction of military affairs, and appraise the Communists' military threat to Phnom Penh.

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INDIA-PAKISTAN

The defense of East Pakistan is crumbling as Indian troops advance on nearly all fronts. The town of Comilla was captured yesterday, and the Comilla military cantonment is under siege. When that falls, of the three major army bases in East Pakistan--Comilla, Jessore, and Dacca--only Dacca will remain in government hands.

The most immediate threat to the capital appears to be developing from the east. Indian troops, according to New Delhi, have reached the Meghna River at several points, including the ferry crossing at Daudkandi only 22 miles from Dacca. The drive may now face a major hurdle, however, if the Pakistanis can dig in and hold at the Meghna--a wide and difficult river to cross. This thrust, and a parallel drive into Feni to the south, have cut off two Pakistani brigades in the Chittagong District. For the present, the Mukti Bahini apparently have been assigned the primary task of eliminating resistance in this area with the help of Indian air strikes on the port of Chittagong.

Government forces in the northeast could be cut off from Dacca by the Indian offensive moving from Akhaura toward Mymensingh. In the extreme northwest corner of the province the Pakistani forces are falling back under increasingly heavy attacks from the Mukti Bahini. Farther south, the Indian drive that took Jessore is fanning out in an apparent effort to isolate the entire southwestern quadrant of the province from the capital.

Western correspondents have observed the civil population greeting the Indian forces as liberators. The Mukti Bahini continue active both in open engagements with West Pakistani troops and behind the lines. Most of the rural areas of East Pakistan have been in guerrilla hands for several weeks.

How long Pakistani resistance will continue depends on whether the West Pakistani forces are giving up as their posts are taken or are falling back in relatively good order toward a few urban centers, primarily Dacca, for a last-ditch defense. Despite some reports of desertions, there have been no indications yet that discipline is collapsing or that large numbers of Pakistani soldiers are surrendering. On the other hand, the major water-courses and Indian cuts in lines of communication will make any regrouping difficult.

(continued)

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On the West Pakistani front, the Pakistanis continue to press in the Chhamb area and also say they have taken Poonch. The Indians claim the capture of two towns northwest of Poonch, and say they have penetrated about six miles into West Pakistan near Sialkot. Farther south, the Indians also claim broad gains in Sind Province, but they are beginning to encounter opposition as they reach the more populous areas. [redacted] the Pakistani Army is about to launch a major ground offensive in the Punjab area.

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Communist 320th Division Going to Central Highlands



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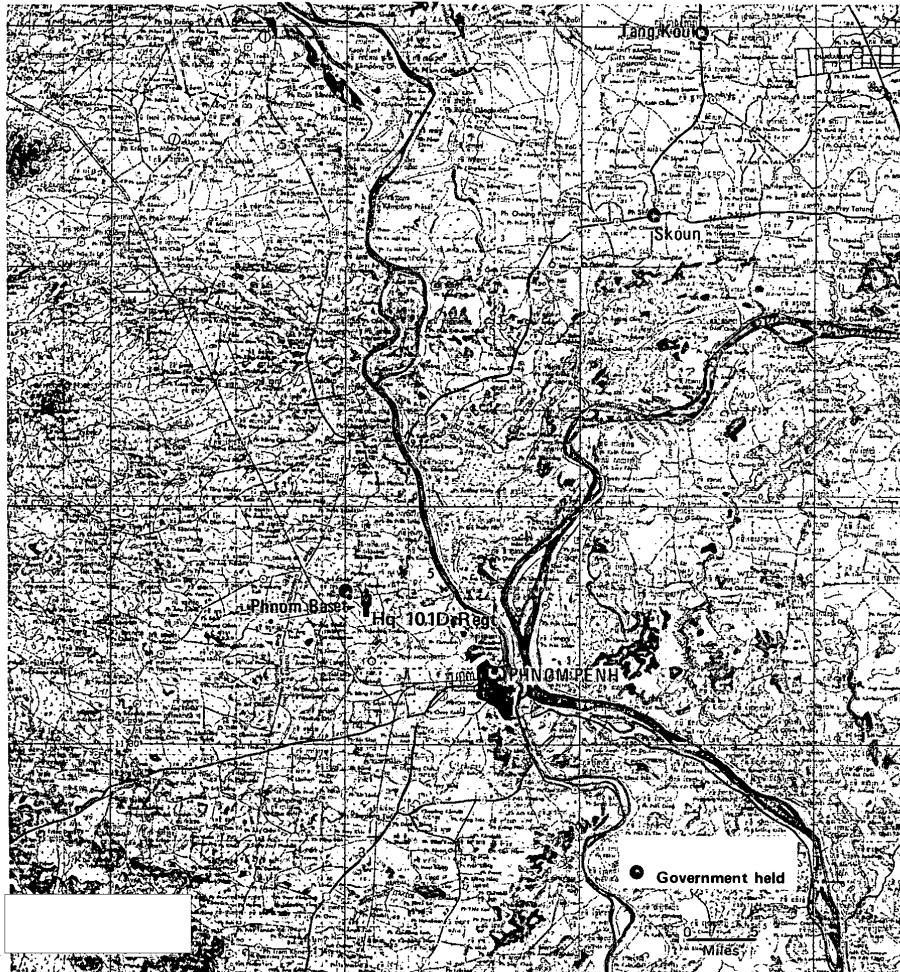
INDOCHINA

Intercepts indicate that the North Vietnamese 320th Infantry Division, which began moving southward in November, is en route to South Vietnam. On 2 December, the 320th established communications with the Communist B-3 Front in South Vietnam's central highlands, which is a good indication that the division is going to this area. Two days later a forward element of the division headquarters was located in Laos near the Ban Karai Pass.

If, as is usual, the 320th moves through North Vietnam by truck and through Laos by foot, all three of its subordinate regiments should arrive in the highlands by early January. This would be the first full infantry division to operate in the highlands in recent years, and its presence would nearly double the number of Communist combat forces available to protect infiltration routes and base camps in the tri-border area. At the same time, the Communist capability for launching large attacks into central South Vietnam would of course be substantially enhanced.

There are tenuous signs that a second North Vietnamese infantry division--the 324B--is also going south. During November, the 324B followed some of the same communications procedures as did the 320th.

CAMBODIA: Phnom Penh Area



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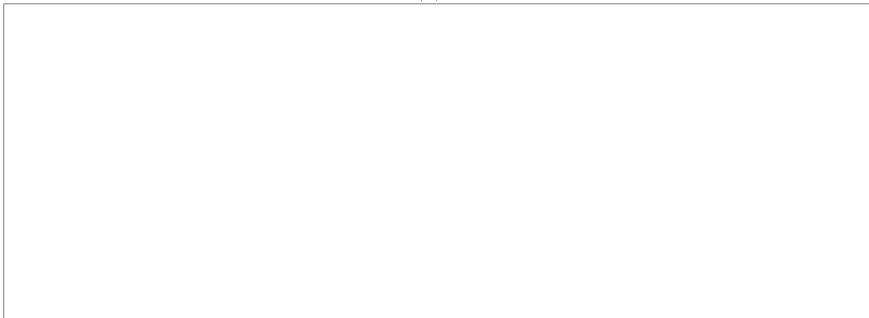
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CAMBODIA

Sirik Matak, Chief of State Cheng Heng, and several senior officers from the army general staff met with Prime Minister Lon Nol on Tuesday to propose reforms in the direction of military affairs, including a reaffirmation of the general staff's role in making and implementing decisions. According to the US Embassy, Lon Nol flatly dismissed the proposals and refused to relinquish personal direction of military affairs. He blamed the army's recent setbacks on inadequate South Vietnamese and US assistance.

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The political imbroglio could hardly come at a worse time. We reported in yesterday's President's Daily Brief that the North Vietnamese units are digging in along an arc about 15 miles north and west of Phnom Penh. We now have intercepts indicating that the headquarters of the NVA 101D Regiment has moved eastward and is within ten miles of the city. It seems likely that the 101D is moving against Cambodian positions near Phnom Baset. At last report, one Cambodian battalion there was in light contact with the enemy. The loss of Phnom Baset would further constrict the Cambodians' room for maneuver northwest of the city and would mean another breach of the city's outer defensive perimeter.

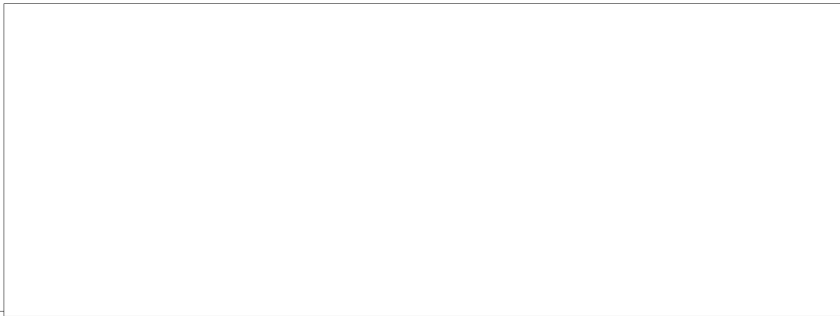
With as many as 6,000 main force fighting men for the first time within striking distance of the city, the Communists can exercise options that were not open to them just six weeks ago. At this juncture, it seems likely that they will try to keep the capital's troops on the defensive and to undermine the confidence of the city's

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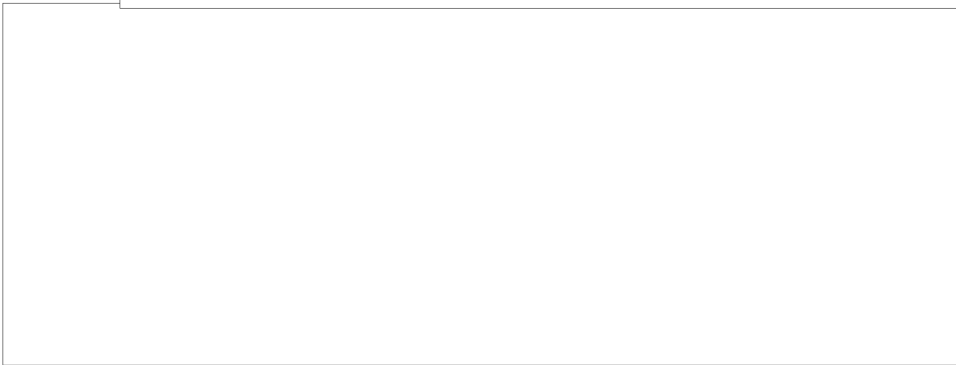
population and the government's leaders. This will almost certainly entail more attacks on Phnom Penh's periphery, though it could also bring some action in the city itself. The Cambodians are being whipsawed between the Phnom Penh and Route 6 fronts, and something is going to have to give. There are additional signs that the Communists will soon renew their Route 6 offensive. With Cambodian morale low at Tang Kouk and Skoun, another serious defeat is a distinct possibility.

The Communists could mount a dramatic frontal assault with the objective of capturing Phnom Penh. But we doubt that the Communists believe that they are strong enough to overcome the force currently arrayed against them--45,000 Cambodian troops backed with allied air support. The enemy would also have to anticipate that South Vietnamese forces would come to help in the defense of the capital.

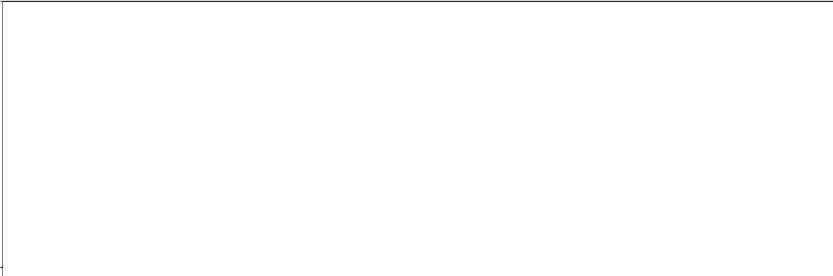
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NOTE

Communist China: An accumulation of evidence from satellite photography leads us to believe that a large industrial complex at Feng-chou in east-central China manufactures liquid propellant rocket engines, and possibly missile airframes as well. This would be the second such plant in China. The Feng-chou plant is equipped to test multi-stage systems of various sizes. We have already identified several multi-stage missiles in China.

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