

The President's Daily Brief

29 March 1973

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TOP SECRET

March 29, 1973

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

29 March 1973

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The South Vietnamese Government has taken a significant step toward reconciliation with the An Quang Buddhists, the country's most important non-Communist opposition group. (Page 1)

The political situation in Phnom Penh seems to have stabilized for the time being. Sirik Matak remains under house arrest, but no new arrests have been reported this week. (Page 2)

The Chinese have completed extensive parts of a long, all-weather road from Kun-ming to Laos. (Page 3)

In the Philippines, pro-Chinese Communists are trying to establish links with Muslim dissidents in the south. (Page 4)

Turkey still lacks an elected successor to President Sunay. Tekin Ariburun, presiding officer of the upper house, became acting president today. (Page 5)

Moscow's recent \$190-million credit for Iran's Isfahan steel mill and associated facilities raises Soviet aid for the project to more than a half billion dollars. This is more than the USSR has extended for any other economic aid project. (Page 6)

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SOUTH VIETNAM

One of President Thieu's aides recently met with Buddhist Senator Tran Quang Thuan to discuss the possibility of putting up some Buddhist candidates for the third segment of the Council of National Reconciliation and Concord.

Thuan told the aide that An Quang's participation would be contingent on the Buddhists' having a significant role in making the government "more effective" for political competition with the Communists. The two men discussed the names of several possible candidates, but reached no decisions.

Although the government has not committed itself to proposing any Buddhists for the council, the action follows other recent gestures toward reconciliation with the An Quang movement, the country's most important non-Communist opposition group.

The move suggests that Saigon may intend to propose some genuinely independent anti-Communist candidates for the third segment of the council.

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[redacted] the government might put forth only its sympathizers, in the expectation that the Communists would do the same.

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CAMBODIA

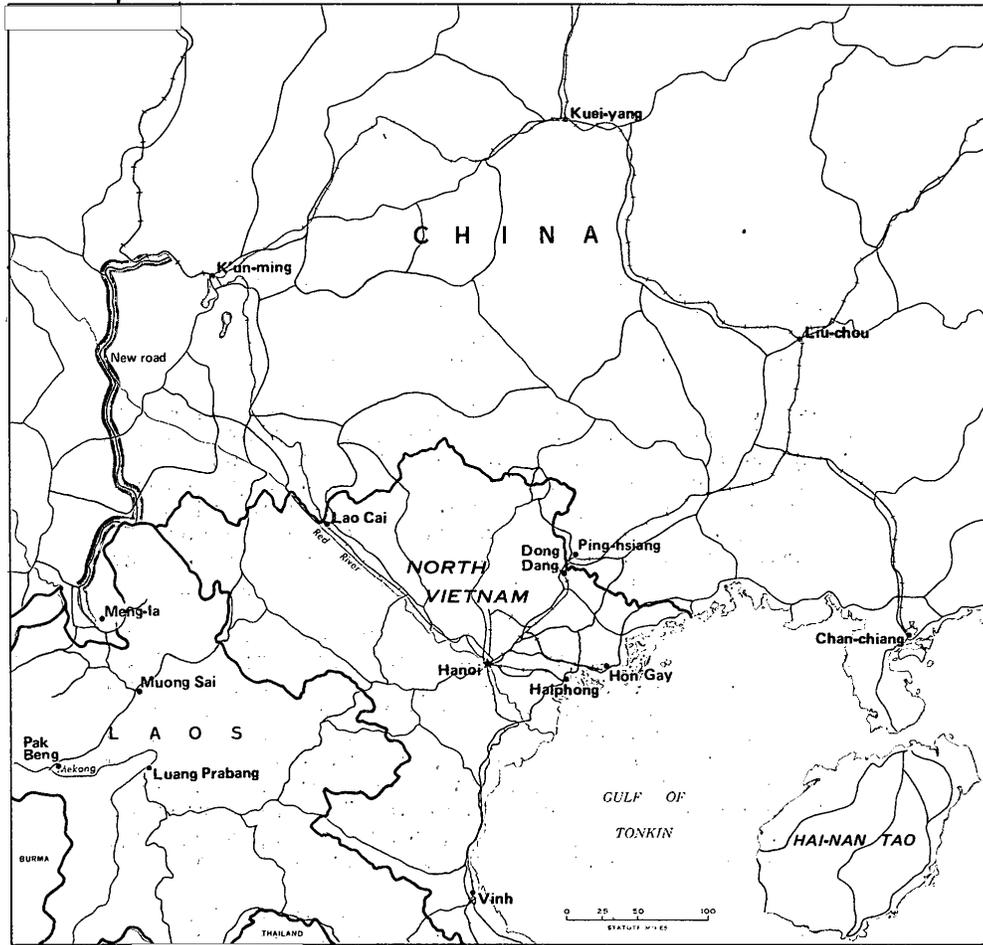
There are signs that the government crackdown on civilian opposition elements has run its course for the time being. No new arrests have been reported this week.

Former Democratic Party leader In Tam has said that he believes that for now the government's attention will stay focused on Sirik Matak, who is still under house arrest, and on his Republican Party associates. In Tam does not rule out the possibility, however, that the regime may yet move against himself and the Democratic Party. One of his sources has told him that Lon Non plans to exile or jail all prominent opposition figures, including Sirik Matak and In Tam.

Lon Nol--aware of his younger brother's unpopularity--may at last be thinking of reducing Lon Non's authority, at least in appearance. A few days ago, the President told a Cambodian Army general that he would do "what is necessary" to remove Lon Non from the government. Lon Non, meanwhile, has been putting out the word that he would leave the government if that is what Lon Nol wants.

Such a shift would be primarily cosmetic and would not lessen Lon Non's political influence. It would help to reduce political tensions, however.

Chinese Improve Road Access to Laos



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CHINA-LAOS

The Chinese have completed extensive parts of an approximately 300-mile, all-weather road from Kun-ming to Laos. [redacted] that the road runs due south from a major rail-to-road transshipment point west of Kun-ming to Meng-la near the Laos border.

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Meng-la is the hub of the Chinese-built roadnets that cross into extreme northern and northwestern Laos. The Kun-ming to Meng-la road system has been under construction for over a year. The finished parts of the system are dual lane, with permanent stream crossings and oiled surfacing. Since 1965, the Chinese have steadily improved almost all their roads near their lengthy southwestern frontier.

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PHILIPPINES

The pro-Chinese Communist party has reportedly ordered its Muslim members to return immediately to their home areas in the southern islands. Some 35 have already left the Manila area with instructions to penetrate dissident groups or, failing this, to establish links with the Muslims.

Past attempts to cultivate the anti-government Muslims have foundered on traditional Muslim hostility toward the Communists. The recent fighting and the appearance of younger, more militant Muslim leaders has apparently encouraged the Communists to try again.

Acting independently, neither the Communist insurgent force in northern Luzon nor the Muslims pose a major threat to the government. The Communists may eventually be able to develop contacts with the southern Muslims, however, and some agreement might be reached on common anti-government efforts. Coordinated action could strain the Philippine Government's ability to cope with widespread dissidence. This possibility underlines the need for Manila to defuse the Muslim problem as soon as possible.

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TURKEY

Tekin Ariburun, Justice Party member and presiding officer of the upper house, became acting president today; he will serve until parliament elects a successor to President Sunay. The next round of voting is scheduled for March 30. Party leaders reportedly are still far apart on how to proceed.

The military will oppose any extended term for Ariburun. Air force commander at the time of the May 1960 military coup, Ariburun refused to join the junta and was imprisoned for more than a year. The military's dislike of Ariburun was compounded by his outspoken criticism of the military intervention in politics in March 1971.

Air force jets made repeated flights over the parliament building yesterday while the legislators were meeting. Such flights have been used in the past to warn the politicians that the military's patience was wearing thin.

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NOTE

USSR-Iran: Soviet agreement to provide an additional \$190 million for Iran's Isfahan steel mill and associated facilities raises Soviet aid for the project to more than a half billion dollars. This is more than Moscow has extended for any other economic aid project. With total Soviet aid commitments of nearly \$800 million, Iran ranks fourth among less-developed countries receiving Soviet economic aid. The new credit will help triple the annual capacity of the Isfahan mill to almost 2 million tons by 1975. Eventually the mill will produce 4 million tons annually. Iran pays for Soviet aid chiefly through exports of natural gas.

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