

Viet Musical Chairs: Khanh In, Aid Out

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SAIGON.

South Viet Nam strongman Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh returned to his duties as Premier yesterday and immediately began dealing with dissident Buddhists and Army factions.

The first note of new discord was sounded early today when Defense Minister Tran Thien Khiem, one of three generals who ruled this war-torn nation in a triumvirate for the past week resigned.

Gen. Khiem's resignation came only a day after the country's caretaker government apparently reverted to Gen. Khanh's control.

It was not clear whether Gen. Khiem, a Roman Catholic, was resigning only as Defense Minister or as both Defense Minister and member of the triumvirate. But it appeared that he would be out of the government completely.

This morning the triumvirate—Gens. Khanh, Khiem and Maj. Gen. Duong Van Minh, former chief of state—held their first session since Gen. Khanh returned from five days of "temporary retirement" in the mountain resort of Dalat.

Immediately after the generals met, officials of the government were summoned to the Premier's office for

More on KHANH—P 2

Khanh in Control Again—He Wheels and Deals

(Continued from page one)
an emergency session of the cabinet.

Gen. Khanh, who was supposedly exhausted by the turmoil of the past two weeks, flew back to the capital unexpectedly; only a day earlier he had said that he might not take up the burdens of the Premiership for two weeks or more, after United States Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor had predicted that the Premier would take over again in a matter of days.

Reliable government sources said Gen. Khanh made these important decisions on his first day back at his desk:

☛ "Definitely decided" to reassign at least three officers who belong to the powerful Dai Viet party, which he says has already attempted one coup against his regime and might plan another.

☛ Ordered Nguyen Ton Hoan, one of his Deputy Premiers and a leader of the Dai

Viet faction, to get out of Sout Viet Nam within 48 hours.

☛ Made his biggest concession yet to Buddhist elements opposing his government by ordering the release of all Buddhist demonstrators arrested during last week's protests against alleged persecution.

☛ Won postponement of a new Buddhist hunger strike scheduled in protest against "indiscriminate arrests, provocations and oppression."

Barring unforeseen complications, Gen. Khanh is now expected to remain in power for another 60 days, until a 15-man council names a new chief executive and writes a new constitution.

For days government officials have been waiting to see whether the Premier would make a comeback and whether he would adopt a hard or soft line toward the Buddhist movement, which more and more qualified observers in Saigon now believe

is openly aiding the Communist cause.

In the face of a threat by the Buddhist leader Thich Tam Chau to begin a 48-hour fast, the Premier agreed to the release of all the rioters arrested last week, including those with Communist connections or previous police records. More than 500 have already been freed, the government said; Buddhist sources insisted that some 300 were still being detained.

The order to release the Buddhists was a severe blow to police officials, already badly demoralized after Gen. Khanh's attempt to deal with the Buddhist protests without repression. Army officers, too, are said to believe that the general may sell out openly to potentially pro-Communist Buddhist elements. Both the police and the army are apparently dividing into soft-line pro-Khanh and hard-line anti-Khanh factions on the Buddhist issue.

In a nation with more than its share of generals, the three

officers Gen. Khanh has reportedly decided to reassign are relatively low in rank, even though one of them, Brig. Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu, is the army chief of staff.

The other officers supposedly in line for transfer are Col. Huynh Van Ton, commander of the 7th Division south of Saigon, and Lt. Col. Duong Hieu Nghia, who commands the armored units assigned to protect the capital. Both commands would be vital to Gen. Khanh in the event of an attempted coup, and he evidently does not trust either of the commanders.

Gen. Minh was far to the north in Hue with Nguyen Xuan Oanh, the Deputy Premier who became Acting Premier last week end when Gen. Khanh went into seclusion in Dalat. They were trying to placate still another anti-government faction with promises that the 15-man council to be named within 60 days will help

restore democratic government to South Viet Nam.

Their promises were less than totally successful in the onetime imperial capital where Le Khac Quyen's People's Salvation Council is campaigning hard for more democratic government. Dr. Quyen, who heads the university medical faculty in Hue, seemed unimpressed. He said the council would "fight to the last man" unless something is done to restore civilian rule in Saigon.

He also conferred with his Justice Minister, Nguyen Van Mau, the mayor of Saigon, Brig. Gen. Duong Ngoc Lam, and the capital's police chief, Col. Nguyen Thanh Ben. All were reportedly restive under the order to release arrested Buddhists, and Col. Ben was said to have offered his resignation on the issue several times.

What particularly enraged the police chief, it was understood, was Gen. Khanh's order to yield police records on the arrested Buddhists to Buddhist monks on the ground that they were compiled under the regime of the late President Dinh Diem and were therefore inaccurate.