

Saigon Reshuffle

In the Works

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SAIGON.

The South Vietnamese regime plans a moderate shake-up of the national cabinet and of the field command of the armed forces. A major rearrangement of the structure of government also is in the works.

The changes—expected to be announced officially within the next week—will not affect the status of Chief of State Nguyen Van Thieu or Premier Nguyen Cao Ky.

Both the cabinet and the government—held meetings late last week to work out details. Reliable sources say these changes are under consideration:

☐ Ousting two or three of the cabinet's 15 ministers and naming new ones.

☐ Creating at least three new ministries—possibly industry, trade and supply.

☐ Naming an 80-man national consultative council, which may eventually recall or supplant the junta as the legal base of government.

Premier Ky has announced publicly that a consultative council will be formed and, after thorough local discussions, a new constitution drafted.

The changes come at a time when American officials are expressing pleasure at the stability of the regime, and as President Johnson and a large group of his advisors are demonstrating America's keen interest in Vietnamese government affairs by holding three

days of discussions with Premier Ky, Gen. Thieu and others in Hawaii.

Some American officials are known to approve or at least not disapprove the plans but many low-ranking American officials in the provinces consistently have argued that at least six months' time is lost with the transfer of a province chief or division commander.

In the last two years, the Vietnamese government and the military command have been beset with personnel changes. They are believed to have impeded the war and rural pacification efforts.

But political necessity, or at least political pressures, are considered great by government leaders.

"The government hopes to buy time by making these changes," one Vietnamese source said. "It is attempting to keep one step ahead of the people's dissatisfaction with the local situation—especially inflation."

The consumer retail price index, which usually drops in the period after the Lunar New Year, has continued to rise sharply in the last two weeks.

Major political and religious groups outside the government are waiting for announcement of the consultative body's membership. They hope either to exploit or to attack it, Vietnamese sources say.

Considerable anti-war, anti-American political forces—possibly pushed by Communist subversives—are known to be lurking beneath the apparently calm of South Viet Nam's political waters.