

Viet Buddhist Protests . . . Why?

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SAIGON.

South Vietnamese Buddhists and pro-Buddhist students, in a carefully prepared campaign of political protest against President Nguyen Khanh, yesterday staged a series of anti-government demonstrations similar to those that led to the overthrow last year of President Ngo Dinh Diem.

The biggest protest involved 30,000 Buddhists who deliberately defied the regime by marching to services in the holy city of Hue at 3 a. m., official sources said. The marchers thus violated a curfew, due to end at 4 a. m., which is part of President Khanh's current state-of-emergency regulations.

Stormy student demonstrations, in which President
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Khanh was denounced as a dictator, also occurred in Hue, Saigon, Tuy Hoa, Can Tho and other big towns.

Informed sources reported that small groups of students were discussing burning themselves to death publicly—as seven Buddhist nuns and priests did in the campaign against the late President Diem. More demonstrations were threatened for today.

"The Buddhists are back in politics again and anything can happen," commented one reliable source.

The immediate goal of the Buddhists and their student allies apparently is to influence the selection of members of a new government that President Khanh is forming. Beyond that, they are thought to be aiming at the construction of a massive, grass-roots religious organization that would also be an effective political weapon.

Just how the Buddhist hierarchy might use such a weapon—and specifically whether it might promote neutralism or pro-communism—is an urgent question in Saigon, but no one yet has the answer.

The revival of an organized political-religious protest against the Saigon regime came on the heels of a shattering government military defeat, in which four American military advisers were slain. A fifth American was killed in a separate action.

At least 130 South Vietnamese soldiers were also slain in the bloody ambush Thursday in Kien Hoa Province, 50 miles south of Saigon. More than 60 government soldiers were wounded, 14 were missing and many weapons were believed lost to the Reds.

About two battalions of Viet Cong guerrillas—more than 1,000 men—were estimated to have set the trap for the 500-man government column that was moving to the relief of Phu Tuc outpost, which had been overrun by the Reds earlier.

The engagement was thought to be the costliest single action of the Viet Nam war for both the government troops and their American advisers. Viet Cong losses were also presumed heavy.

"They put up a hell of a fight," said Maj. Gen. Richard C. Stilwell, U. S. chief of staff in Viet Nam, of the four Americans who were slain. The general, who visited the battlefield yesterday, said one of the four, a captain, had fired his M-1 rifle till he ran out of ammunition, then hurled all his grenades and finally fought on with a machine-gun wrested from a wounded South Vietnamese.

Gen. Stilwell said he expected all four dead men to be recommended for posthumous military awards. A full list of the casualties' names was not immediately released. Neither was that of the fifth U. S. fatality Thursday, a Special Forces non-com slain in the Ashau area 370 miles north of Saigon.

Yesterday's demonstrations followed Buddhist lie-downs Thursday that blocked a government armored column on an anti-Viet Cong sweep near Tuy Hoa, 230 miles northeast of Saigon. The lie-down came on the first anniversary of the "pagoda raids" carried out against the Buddhists by the late President Diem. He was overthrown and slain last November after months of popular unrest.

Student leaders promised more demonstrations today and said they will continue until President Khanh "carries out real democracy and stops dictatorial actions."

Ignoring a current ban on public demonstrations, 500 university students in Saigon marched in protest yesterday to the President's office after a rally at which speakers called him "not worthy of being the leader of the nation" and "a great liar." The denunciations concentrated on Gen. Khanh's elevation of himself from Premier to President in a government reshuffle.

Gen. Khanh was at Cap St. Jacques for political talks. Police did not intervene. Reliable sources said the march was organized by a coalition of several organizations. One was the Buddhist movement, with the power lying in the hands the Venerable Thich Tri Quang, strategist of last year's anti-Diem campaigns. Another organization involved was a minor political party named Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang, which holds political strength in Central Viet Nam.

In Hue, the opening demonstration was the violation

of curfew by the 30,000 Buddhists who went from pagoda to pagoda for ceremonies marking the anniversary of the "pagoda raids."

Later, 1,500 workers, school boys and girls marched to the University of Hue campus and urged students of law, medicine and letters to leave examinations. Government sources indicated the university students joined the demonstrators in demanding an end of "dictatorial" government and removal of Brig. Gen. Do Cau Tri, II Corps commander, who aided President Diem last year.

The Buddhist leadership charges that "remnants of the Diem regime" are still in the Khanh government and must be removed. The Buddhist-supported students say the government is "the Diem regime without Diem."

Much of their avowed support is focused on Maj. Gen. Duong Van Minh, who led the first military junta that overthrew President Diem. Gen. Khanh last Sunday took over Gen. Minh's post as chief of state when a new constitution was adopted.

Leaflets supporting Gen. Minh, who has popular support from the population and some army officers, have recently been found in Saigon and Hue. Young army officers are known to be dissatisfied with the deposing of Gen. Minh and it is a question whether their low morale will seriously affect the anti-Communist drive or the internal political situation.

However, unlike the authoritarian Diem regime which tightly controlled the military and administrative machinery, Gen. Khanh's weaknesses hardly justify the charges of dictatorship, according to diplomatic sources here. Although the new constitution makes Gen. Khanh a dictator on paper, sources believe his basic problem is that he is too weak rather than too strong, lacking control over ministries and corps and some division commanders. Even now he is known to be having difficulty getting ranking officers to accept key positions in the new government scheduled to be announced next week.

During the political-religious crisis last year, the Buddhists attacked President Diem but not American policy. This year, in their political protest, the Buddhists and students are also likely to attack American policy. Anti-American sentiments and propaganda are expected to increase.