

# Smiling on the outside, crying on the inside



FLASHBACK

Little Var in a rare happy moment

NATION

23/5/79

**ARANYAPRATHET**—This picture appeared in almost all local papers the day after UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim visited the Kampuchean refugee camp here.

But only a few, not even Waldheim who was impressed by her sweetness, could detect the anguish beneath the smiling face of this little Kampuchean girl.

As soon as Waldheim put her down and left the camp, this five-year-old child would be "on the run" again because she and her elder sister and mother are being hunted by the authorities to be sent back to Kampuchea.

They have been living illegally in the refugee camp for the last four months because they are not refugees but "illegal immigrants" as the Thai Government puts it.

They are afraid to spend the night at the same place twice for fear of being caught and pushed back to death in their own country.

This is their story as told by an official of the Red Cross in the camp.

Mrs Hong Var, now 32, and her two children were waiting for the return of her husband who was in France when Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge in 1975. And along with million other Kampuchians they were moved to the countryside.

Out of patriotic passion, her husband and about 300 other Kampu-

chean students in Paris decided to make a journey home hoping to cooperate with the new rulers to build a new country.

Their dreams, however, turned into a nightmare. There was circulating report that almost all of the foreign-educated Kampuchians were eliminated by the new regime.

"We presume that her husband too was killed during the large-scale genocide by the Khmer Rouge," said the Red Cross official.

by

**Thepchai Yong**

She said that Var decided to flee to Thailand in January this year with her two children because of the prevailing atrocity and general starvation.

When Van finally got through here she was half dead because of anthrax—an acute bacterial disease usually affecting the skin.

"If she had stayed behind in Kampuchea for a few more days, she would have died," the official said.

At the time all the Kampuchians crossing into Thailand were considered not as refugees but illegal immigrants who had to be pushed back sooner

or later.

But because of her sickness, Var was allowed by the authorities to be treated at the Kampuchean refugee camp here which is exclusively for Khmers who fled here since 1975. She also brought along her two children.

But now that she has recovered, she and her family have to go. She was supposed to have gone with the more than 10,000

Kampuchean who were forced by the Thai authorities to trek back to their country several weeks ago.

"They may as well send them back to die," observed a Red Cross official.

According to her, some third countries had already offered to resettle the trio but since they held no refugee status they were simply deprived of the chance.

Theirs is not an isolated case. They are many other

patients in the clinic in the camp who soon would have to be evacuated for the same reason.

The UNHCR, said the lady, had submitted to the Thai Government a list of 184 Khmers who were offered to be resettled in various third countries.

"Unfortunately, most of them are only illegal immigrants and not refugees. And the Thai Government definitely would not let them go," she said.

### SMILING

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