

Cambodia New Vision

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The followings are selective excerpts of interview that Samdech Hun Sen granted to French Magazine "Le Point" on July 14, 1998

CPP leadership

"... (like in a football team) one never changes the winning team, and after the victory, one will not change the team which will continue to play for the period to come. If the team plays well, it will get through to the final. Therefore, as you see, CPP has undergone no changes in its leadership, but has absorbed new blood into the team. People in the leadership like Samdech Chea Sim, Heng Samrin and myself, Hun Sen, are not players but coaches. We are not taking part in the election campaign..."

Digested the 1993-election lesson

"... I generally sound out initiatives which are carefully discussed in the party. We have drawn lessons and experiences from the 1993 elections... In 1994, we (CPP leaders)

sat together to collect and reflect on these experiences. At the beginning of 1995, CPP set up an electoral commission with me as its president. Preparation for the contest in the July-26 election started since 1995. This should indicate that CPP has always been loyal to democracy..."

Prioritized tasks set in 1995

"... Our top priority is to serve people who will cast their votes... In the past three years, no other political parties made more achievements than CPP did. CPP mobilized all resources to lay a ground for extending assistance to the people... It is by no means a demagogic action..."

"Our second priority is to dismantle the military organization of the Khmer Rouge. We know the battlefield very well, but we have difficulties in coping with so many things with various directions at the same time. Worse still, the Khmer Rouge have always bled the CPP white, politically and militarily. If the elections were to be conducted in the context of there being the Khmer Rouge military forces, we would find ourselves in a hazardous situation because we have to pursue two different directions at the same time..."

"Our third priority is to make friends. As a result, CPP has, by now, many friends among the political parties that are to take part in the elections..."

Hun Sen ready to step down

"...If CPP fails to get elected, first of all, efforts have to be made to stabilize the situation so that a peaceful

transfer of power to the elected party will be possible. Right after that there would soon be a reform in the party in which I will make a political decision concerning my role as one of the leaders of the party, or as an ordinary member of the party... Since April 1998, CPP has pledged that if it gets a majority of votes, it will nominate Hun Sen as the premier. Therefore, in the event that CPP loses, it will mean that Hun Sen candidacy for the premiership is not acceptable to the Cambodian people i.e. I should no longer be a leader. It is timing that a new leader is required. I could stay as an advisor... If CPP fails to get the majority of the votes, it is incorrect to say that I will have to resign. My premiership comes to an end automatically. The winning party would set up a new government to take over the job while we step down..."

Should CPP win, a coalition in the making

"... CPP anticipates that though it will enjoy sufficient votes to set up a government on its own without participation from any political parties, it will always abide by its ideal of setting up a government which is a coalition of many seated parties. The prospective coalition government will be led by only one Prime Minister, not two. We will cooperate with any political parties which feel pleased to work with us. We will not accept coalition partners who foster dual roles of being a partner while maintaining its core of opposition. If any party wishes to stay on the side of the opposition, then it has to stay out of the govern-

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ment... ”

“... It is early to discuss the issue of possible formation of a coalition between CPP and Funcinpec or between CPP and Sam Rainsy party, though. One thing that is certain now is that setting up a coalition government does not necessarily mean to work with the second, or the third party. It could be a coalition with the sixth or seventh parties provided that it has parliamentary seats to be added to ours in order to attain a two-third majority to set up a coalition government. Generally, we do not reject any individual or any party that is willing to contribute to forming such a government for the sake of peace...”

Opposition leaders

“... Mr Sam Rainsy met me here (in Takhmao residence) and also in Phnom Penh for several hours. After the meetings, though, he continued to criticize me. It is his hobby and rights to make meetings possible and then to criticize. As for Prince Ranariddh, I have not met him in person yet. I did have a talk with HRH on the phone. His Funcinpec's Secretary General met with me at the National Assembly for a discussion and coordination on the Electoral Law and the Constitutional Council. I think the idea of having a coalition with someone will be more practical after the announcement of the election results...”

Violence & threats on elections?

“... Some individuals raised issues to trouble the water... We have tried our best to create a neutral atmosphere and security for the elections to take place one year after a chaotic situation... At the moment, there remain two parties which are good at making criticism... Since they have said time and again that they would win the elections, what remains to be done from my part is perhaps to transfer power to them... At one point, they have even threatened to use force to compel me to hand over

the power...”

“... There have been no reports, up to now, of political violence in the process of election preparation. The opposition leaders safely returned from exiles to Phnom Penh to participate in the process without any problems. There will be 12 days from now to the polling day. Since we have passed the period of registration and early part of the campaign proceeds in calm, I hope there would be nothing bad to happen. In retrospect of a similar period in 1993, many people had already been killed. In a number of countries in Asia, there are usually reports of deaths in each election. For Cambodia, there has not even a single politician who gets killed during the electoral campaigns which are actively staged by the 39 political parties...”

July-97 incident thwarted a coup attempt by a partner in the RG

“... It was unfortunate that we could not avoid the clash. I concluded it was a coup attempt (by Samdech Krom Preah Ranariddh) based on proofs. The government troop captured the video tapes and maps for offensives that picture a coherent and secretive plan to assassinate me. They are further solidified by the announcement that ‘I was killed in the afternoon of July 5’, and moreover by the Khmer Rouge documents obtained by the Phnom Penh Post. Things are apparent. They allotted their tasks in a clear manner concerning power that they would seize. The Khmer Rouge would control the authorities from the district level to the grassroots, while Funcinpec will take the control of the central and provincial levels...”

“... Actually, I made two major mistakes. Firstly, I did not believe in the intelligence information concerning large scale military maneuvers which were organized in preparation for a Coup d'Etat. At the time when we discovered and captured a shipment of three tons of weapons

(under Prince Ranariddh's order) in Kampong Som, I still did not conclude that they would attack Phnom Penh. I thought that it was an attempt to seek a balance of military power for the 1998 election. Secondly, when the fighting took place at 3:15 pm on July 5, 1997, in the night of the same day, the military commander asked me to send intervention forces into Phnom Penh. I disagreed. The other side took the chance to launch an offensive on Phnom Penh in the morning of July 6 putting us on a defensive position... If I were to let the intervention forces accompanied by tanks and armoured vehicles to come into the capital on the night of July 5, Phnom Penh could have been freed earlier from the danger...”

“... Another miscalculation, perhaps, was that I did not timely approve an offensive on the Funcinpec headquarters, which is adjacent to the French Embassy... I approved the move only at 2:30 pm on July 6. Misjudgments came one after another because I did not believe the reports from low level intelligence. That a government partner had the guts to do such a thing, I found it hard to believe... By the way, there have been misunderstandings on us. In fact, we had no choice but to choose between to lose less or to lose completely. Both of the choices bore us no profit. If there existed profit and loss, we would have chosen the profit... If we had sat by and let Ranariddh with his Khmer Rouge forces occupy Phnom Penh, we would have lost completely. This would mean a complete devastation to the Paris Peace Accords. The only best way to solve these misunderstandings is to carry out a pluralistic election... I hope that the forthcoming elections will be a chance for Cambodia to return to the fold of international community, and will be a reflection that the July-incident was not staged by Hun Sen...”

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On July 16, 1998, receiving HE Issei Inoue, member of the House of Representatives of the Democratic Party of Japan, Samdech Hun Sen wholeheartedly thanked HE Issei Inoue for a school which was built in Takeo at his financial assistance in commemoration to Issei Inoue-Hun Sen friendship. Samdech Hun Sen hailed HE Inoue's initiative to organize an international conference on "Small Arms Disarmament" in Tokyo, and accepted the invitation, if Samdech gets elected in the July-26 election, to give a speech to this conference.

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Hun Sen's transfer of power is certain, but opposition's acceptance of the results not sure"

"... A few weeks ago, Mr Sam Rainsy said that his group would use force if Hun Sen does not transfer power to the election winner. Last week, he said he would stage demonstrations with participation of civilians and armed forces, in case he loses. I do not understand his thinking. Any directions he is to take would not be right... I have already declared that "I will transfer power peacefully." If they resorted to using force, they would be not only wrong, but would certainly lose... On the condition that they (Sam Rainsy or Prince Ranariddh) fail in the elections, please do not cause chaos but let the people work..."

July-98 election - a new page of Cambodia's history

"... (I see this) forthcoming elections as a new historical era for Cambodia. It will be like a sheet of paper that is clean and new. I have already mentioned that I will set up an economy-oriented government after I win the elections... (The economy-

oriented)government will collect as many human, intellectual and property resources as possible to focus on improving the country's socio-economic development..."

Fought against foreign aggression at HM's appeal

"... It is my pride to have kept a photo (showing me as a Sihanoukist soldier) that was taken when I was 19 years of age. I have no regrets. It is also a souvenir between myself and Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk because I have always followed HM. If HM says he has no relations with the Khmer Rouge, neither do I. It was HM's appeal that I took to the jungle to fight against foreign aggression... Later on, I became a leader of a movement that fought against the Khmer Rouge who, up to now or 21 years later, have just been disintegrated..."

To try the Khmer Rouge leaders

"... (the) amnesty depends on whether there has a court's verdict or not. Mr Ieng Sary's case, the court verdict was issued in 1979. Therefore, there is a need to grant him amnesty. For other Khmer

Rouge, we do not talk about amnesty but also do not rule out the possibility of bringing them to justice. For instance, the court has issued Ta Mok and Nuon Chea the arrest warrants. Once arrested, they will be brought to detention centre awaiting trial. For the Khmer Rouge intellectuals who recently defected, there are neither court verdicts nor arrest warrants. So they should be able to live an ordinary life... As far as Khiev Samphan is concerned, we have yet to request for an arrest warrant from the court. If he disagrees to arrest Ta Mok and Nuon Chea for the government, it is possible that we will arrest him... It is not late to arrest him and request the arrest warrant afterwards..."

"... Nuon Paet will not stand a chance to escape... He appeared in Pailin, and in Kampot recently. We now have all documents needed for his arrest, including the arrest warrant issued in 1994... According to intelligence sources, Nuon Paet, who disguised and changed his names and residences from time to time, is not actually living in Pailin. We are tracking him. The Ambassadors of France, Australia, and Britain used to come to see me here for confirmation on this issue..."

Cambodian-French Relations

"... We are proud of our cooperation with France. While other people left the country, the French stayed on and poured in assistance, especially medical supplies in July 1997. A Khmer proverb goes "A friend in need is a friend indeed"... In this context, what the French have done could not be wrong... France together with the European Union has provided significant assistance to the July-98 elections from beginning to the final stage..." ■

HUN SEN'S RESPONSE TO THE WASHINGTON POST

As an active proponent of the elections to be held this month in Cambodia and a candidate for office, I was distressed by your June 16, 1998 editorial entitled "Cambodian charade." On one level, perhaps Cambodian should be grateful that instead of being bombed and invaded by foreign armies, ours is now a battle of words. Nevertheless, as a Cambodian citizen, I found the editorial unfortunate, partially because of inaccuracies, partially because of the damage it can do to our relations with other countries, including the United States, but most importantly because of its apparent disregard for the ordinary Cambodian voters and his or her judgment. Consider the following:

- *Voter registration closed in most of Cambodia in mid-June. Despite the editorial statement that "fear and intimidation abound," over 98% of the estimated eligible voters have registered to cast their ballot. This high level of voter registration was reported by other media on the day of your editorial, but was not mentioned by your newspaper.*
- *The leaders of all 39 political parties which are participating in this election, including Prince Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy, are all campaigning vigorously and openly.*
- *Since the start of the active campaign season on June 25, the streets have been full of political rallies, noisy car caravans, and other trappings of modern political campaigns.*
- *The press is actively covering the political campaign. Given the array of newspapers in Cambodia today, there is no candidate or political party, including me and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), that does not come under criticism.*
- *The election will be observed by an army of foreign observers, who have already begun to arrive in Cambodia. The non-governmental organizations in Cambodia already are diligently searching out electoral problems.*
- *The National Election Committee is hearing complaints lodged by political parties and observers alike about the registration process and alleged cam-*

paign violations.

- *Finally, the ballot will be secret, and because of the pioneering work done five years ago by UNTAC, the voters know it.*

In short, the July 26 vote, if not perfect, will stand well in comparison with the political processes of our neighbors in Southeast Asia as an authentic expression of democratic will. Cambodia has long been viewed, in your country and elsewhere, as a "sideshow" and as a testing ground for policies of outside powers, and has never been considered as a subject in its own rights. Such was the case with the US bombing of our country in the 1960's and 1970's, with interventionist policies of the 1980's, and even with the UN-run election in 1993. The Cambodian people deserve to decide their own fate through a "free and fair election," to which the CPP and I are firmly committed. This time they will do so. I also have stated my intention to abide by the result of this election. Among the many inaccuracies in your editorial is your characterization of the election as a forgone conclusion. While I hope and believe that the CPP will attract more voters than any of the other 38 parties, the election result cannot be now known. Indeed, a recent independent poll revealed that 60% of the eligible voters refuse to disclose for whom they will vote. The cavalier assumption that I will be victorious insults the Cambodian voters. Better allow the Cambodian voters to speak for themselves, and not prejudge the election.

Equally distressing is your editorial's criticism of the Clinton Administration's policy toward Cambodia. While all Cambodians suffered because of the cut-off of aid by the US Government last summer, we were encouraged by Assistant Secretary of State Stanley Roth's recent testimony in the Congress. No one would accuse the US Government of being "soft" on Cambodia. However, your editorial describes his testimony as "disturbingly rosy." While not agreeing with everything he said, I would characterize Mr Roth's testimony as balanced and realistic. Your editorial took the Clinton Administration to task for conceding the

reality that opposition leaders are operating freely, for observing that "significant progress has been made," and for the conclusion that "results now will largely depend upon the Cambodians themselves; how they exercise their rights to vote and the candidate they choose." The Clinton Administration has correctly analyzed the situation. It is time for Cambodians to exercise their sovereign rights and to make a decision. Whoever wins the upcoming election must immediately address the problem of bringing the leadership of the Khmer Rouge to justice by trying those committed genocide against the Cambodian people in an appropriate international tribunal. The Royal Government of Cambodia presently is working with the United States and others to achieve this end. In this vein, many in Cambodia are puzzled as to why last month's discovery of Khmer Rouge documents from a jungle redoubt, as reported in the Phnom Penh Post, hardly a supporter of the CPP, has not been reported more widely in the American press. For example, to my knowledge, this discovery has yet to be discussed in your paper. Those captured documents demonstrate that the Khmer Rouge were attempting to take advantage of Prince Ranariddh and were using the secret negotiations with him as a means for another power grab.

The captured papers speak most eloquently for themselves. The major issue facing Cambodia in the short-term is security -- to finally eliminate the Khmer Rouge threat and bring its leaders to justice. But Cambodia is facing a host of other profound social and economic difficulties as well. We are committed to a free and open market, to rural development, and to raising the standard of education. The Cambodia people need a government selected through a democratic election in which the will of the people is effected, capable of dealing with those issues. They deserve the opportunity to do so. And they deserve the support and understanding of the international community. Whether they select the CPP or choose another party to lead them, this July we will have such an election. ■