

Minister Hun Sen. What had been a peaceful situation changed into a violent one. None of this was by accident: As the events indicate, it was by design," said the White Paper, which alleged that the opposition had deliberately provoked violence as a tactical maneuver after losing the polls.

A frustrated Hun Sen, announcing a major policy statement on 22 October 1998, warned that he would go it alone if the opposition continued shutting the door to a coalition. In fact his speech, aimed at both donors and the opposition, established common ground between the rivals. It was probably aimed in part at warning the opposition that they did not have as much leverage as they might think.

His seven-point plan called for heightened security, new irrigation projects, a crackdown on illegal logging and protection of the environment, sweeping reforms of the administrative, fiscal and judiciary systems and measures to counter corruption and impunity -- all things guaranteed to please international donors.

But former Canadian Ambassador to Cambodia, Martin Collacott<sup>25</sup> noted that, "While he may have succeeded in pushing many of the right buttons in telling the international community what it wanted to hear, this is not the first time he has given such reassurances. One of the key indices in determining whether Hun Sen is serious about reform is how he deals with the lack of rule of law and state of impunity which pervades the country," he added. Most rights abuses of the past five years have gone unpunished and Collacott said opposition reservations about cooperating with Hun Sen were understandable.

But Hun Sen, though flawed, is not a monster. He cares about his country and has shown that he is slowly getting to grips with democratic concepts after tutelage under autocratic administrations -- under his leadership Cambodia has gone from communist isolation to becoming one of the freer countries in the region, relative as this may be.

He must also struggle against deeply vested military, political and business interests -- the sleaze factor -- if he is to achieve the goals set out in his 22 October 1998 speech and government programme of 30 November 1998. Pride at finally leading his country with the will of the world could push him to go the extra mile.

Ultimately, Hun Sen must be seen as the major winner of the elections. He is now the sole helmsman of the government, while his party has retained its dominant position and faces no significant military threat. The government has also regained its seat in the

<sup>25</sup> Phnom Penh Post, 30 October-12 November, 1998.