

pressing U.S. senators to support a resolution seeking Hun Sen's trial for rights abuses.

Many diplomats and observers, while admiring much of what he has to say are wary of his methods – there is a feeling that Cambodia is perhaps not ready for the kind of freedoms and opposition tactics taken for granted in the west -- and his almost obsessional crusade against Hun Sen. They believe the Sam Rainsy Party should challenge the government in parliament rather than on the streets and should see change as a gradual process rather than working to bring things down in order to rebuild.

Others see him as an irresponsible and egocentric maverick, who was responsible for bringing Cambodia to the brink after the polls, while his supporters -- many based overseas -- laud his courage and commitment. Ultimately the question is whether or not the CPP will be ready to tolerate the party as a determined vocal opposition.

2. The Cambodian People's Party

Hun Sen sought through the elections to improve his tarnished image and win international legitimacy for a CPP-led government – a crown denied his party for more than a decade. He wanted to win a clear victory over the opposition in elections recognised as free and fair, but he had also long insisted that Cambodia must be led by a coalition well into the 20th Century. The CPP wanted a coalition on its own terms. It wanted to maintain clear power and in that aim it has been successful, though it has had to compromise after a bitter struggle.

The international community's swift acceptance of the elections²³ gave the CPP a great fillip, but initial elation soon turned to gloom when the opposition stubbornly refused to recognise the results and enter into coalition negotiations.

The government showed admirable early restraint but mounting frustration led to the sad events of September – seen by some as a case of the CPP once more shooting itself in the foot. The government has since defended its actions in a White Paper prepared with the help of U.S. lawyers.²⁴

“What began as a protest against the election became an attempt to overthrow the government and an incitement to assassinate Prime

²³ The JIOG announced on 27 July 1998 that “what could be observed by us on polling day was a process which was free and fair that enables it to reflect, in a credible way, the will of the Cambodian people.”

²⁴ *White Paper. The Defence of Young Democracy in Cambodia – The 1998 Elections and Its Aftermath.* 13 October 1998, Office of the Council of Ministers. The report relied largely on the English-Language foreign and local press for its sourcing.