

three thirds of the assembly and CPP could only reach this target with the support of opposition members.⁴

The government reacted cautiously at first to opposition provocations and protests but Hun Sen become increasingly frustrated and needed by the fierce and at times irresponsible and inflammatory rhetoric of opposition leaders such as Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha.⁵

Hun Sen's patience reached breaking point after two grenades were lobbed into the yard of his town house on 7 September 1998 -- military police swept through and destroyed Democracy Square the following day. Hun Sen blamed Sam Rainsy and the opposition leader sought sanctuary with the United Nations as a warrant was issued for his arrest, though this was later withdrawn.

But far from silencing the protests, the government action stirred up a hornet's nest and protestors took to the streets in large numbers while opposition leaders remained in sanctuary or hiding, worried about arrest and fearing for their lives.

More than one week of bloody clashes between anti-government protestors and police and between anti-government and pro-government forces left at least two people dead and many more missing. The chances for a breakthrough looked remote as each side dug in.

2. Struggling to Convene a New Parliament

The immediate aim of the CPP was to avoid a constitutional crisis by ensuring that the new National Assembly be sworn in before the mandate of the old house ran out on 23 September 1998. The continuing protests threatened to stymie this goal and Hun Sen warned that he would continue ruling with the old government if necessary.⁶

⁴ The CPP won 64 seats, or more than half the house, with just 41.4 percent of the vote, FUNCINPEC picked up 43 seats against 15 for the Sam Rainsy Party, which was contesting its first elections. The NEC put official turnout at 93.74 percent of the electorate or just over five million people.

⁵ It should be noted that the opposition damaged their cause overseas with calls for attacks against Hun Sen and anti-Vietnamese rhetoric and must take some of the blame for the killings of at least four ethnic Vietnamese and damage to a monument to Cambodian-Vietnamese friendship. Animosity between the Khmers (Cambodians) and Vietnamese goes back at least two centuries and verbal attacks on the Vietnamese are a sure and easy crowd pleaser, but opposition reliance on such tactics is their Achilles Heel.

⁶ The National Assembly had voted in August 1997 to appoint FUNCINPEC Foreign Minister Ung Huot to replace Ranariddh as first prime minister -- Hun Sen was the second prime minister. The move was widely condemned as illegal but allowed Hun Sen to claim that his alliance with