

It had also accepted establishment of an upper house, which could possibly obstruct Ranariddh's control of law-making in the assembly if the two sides fell out again.

The prince appears to see his party as a watchdog and counter-balance to guard against government excesses or any shift towards autocracy. But it should be remembered that it did not have a good record in this department during its earlier partnership with the CPP.

Sam Rainsy, shut out of a power-sharing role, welcomed the government's policy programme announced in parliament but voted against accepting the coalition saying he doubted the cabinet's ability to carry out its programme as it brought together mostly the same crew that had steered Cambodia towards the rocks after 1993.<sup>22</sup>

"To install the same people in the government is a recipe for disaster and we will not support it," he said, asserting that the division of ministries left the CPP in "control of the two founts of power in Cambodia: guns and money."

He may seem to have gained least from the elections, but Sam Rainsy should not be seen a loser. For three years Sam Rainsy was the voice of dissent in Cambodia though his Khmer Nation Party was never recognised by the government.

The elections and the fresh commitment to democracy mean the renamed Sam Rainsy Party has gained acceptance as the official parliamentary opposition – a historic step forward for democracy in modern Cambodia, where past regimes have never really accepted the concept of a loyal opposition. It also has chairmanship of a parliamentary commission and the swing vote in the assembly's 12-member permanent committee.

Sam Rainsy has said the opposition will create a shadow cabinet to critique government actions and suggest improvement and changes in policy. But many officials and analysts fear he could become a destructive element in Cambodia politics, rather than the leader of a loyal though vigilant opposition that challenges the government constructively.

His combativeness and confrontational streak has returned to the fore since the formation of the government and he has reasserted that the polls were rigged, rejected the senate solution, called on ASEAN not to admit Cambodia as its 10<sup>th</sup> member, accused FUNCINPEC of selling out to the CPP and renewed his attacks on Hun Sen, including

<sup>22</sup> See Sam Rainsy Party statement of 30 November 1998 -- "Main Points of Sam Rainsy's Address to National Assembly."