

justification that it had been robbed of power by the CPP, was determined to put up a good showing and confident of victory.

But the decision of FUNCINPEC and the Sam Rainsy Party to run on separate tickets would split the opposition vote and help the CPP. They would likely have scored a resounding victory on a single ticket. Both men were also undoubtedly keen to see the downfall of Hun Sen, whom they believed was responsible for most of the ills that had befallen them and the country and their own set backs in particular.

While both parties did remarkably well in the elections -- considering the hurdles they faced and disadvantages compared to the ruling party -- they trailed the CPP and would not be able to prevent Hun Sen from becoming sole premier while their combined seat tally fell short of the absolute majority that would have allowed them to pass legislation.

An error was made, however, in not conducting a more thorough investigation into opposition charges of electoral fraud. While there was an element of the sore loser in the opposition intransigence, several of their complaints and demands had merit and should have been given more than a cursory and dismissive glance. When their concerns were rebuffed they started upping their demands, including calls for the resignation of Hun Sen.

In the face of mounting pressure and amid the violence, however, they scaled back their demands before agreeing to attend the convening of parliament. They now sought only a reconciliation of the unused ballots and resolution of the seat formula issue.²⁰

The next stage in the process, forming a coalition government, was slow in large part because the opposition leaders were reluctant to return to Cambodia to take part in top level talks. But it is wrong to see the opposition as spoilers in the whole process. While it is unfortunate that the process took so long and was marred by violence, this can not be blamed squarely on the opposition -- both sides appeared loath to budge.

The opposition had genuine concerns, though the government refused to act on them and the international community tried to push them to one side in its haste for a solution -- not necessarily in Cambodia's best interests. Opposition leaders also had good reason to fear for their safety and while their continuing absence gave them a certain amount of leverage it should not be seen simply as a ploy to win concessions from the CPP.

²⁰ The NEC finally announced on 10 October 1998 that 9,073,500 ballot papers had been issued and a check showed there were no major discrepancies. The opposition was not satisfied, saying their had been no verified reconciliation as they had not been allowed to witness the process