

postpone plans to return to Cambodia and subordinates were delegated to take part in the coalition talks. The first working group meeting was held on 29 September 1998 in Phnom Penh but achieved little.¹³ A feature of the three working group meetings was that they showed the gap between the two sides – the opposition generally insisted on discussing their election complaints (above all the seat allocation formula) and the CPP said talks should focus on forging a coalition and getting parliament working.

Amid continuing stalemate,¹⁴ Sihanouk was persuaded to postpone plans to go to China for medical treatment until a new government was formed. The King flew into Phnom Penh as the second round of talks began but his presence failed to spur the longed for breakthrough.

The CPP, in a bid to end the stalemate, called on Sihanouk to host a fresh summit and the king said he would only do so if the opposition agreed. This triggered a time-wasting argument over where the talks should be held with the opposition saying they should be held overseas on security grounds.

On 22 October 1998, Hun Sen put more pressure on the opposition by making a policy speech at a ceremony marking the seventh anniversary of the Paris Peace Accords.¹⁵ It was a speech tailor-made to please donors¹⁶, but the strongman also issued a warning that he could no longer remain hostage to opposition maneuvering.

Pussyfooting followed about conditions until a breakthrough came on 7 November 1998 when Sihanouk met foreign ambassadors and, with encouragement, decided to offer his palace as sanctuary and his guards as security to Ranariddh and Rainsy if they returned. When Hun Sen gave written guarantees of safety, Ranariddh decided to accept and returned to the capital on 12 November 1998 for the first time since September.

for questioning about his alleged role in stirring up demonstrators. He finally appeared in court on 15 December 1998 and denied accusations that he had incited violence and racial hatred during the August and September protests.

¹³ Agence France-Presse quoted a CPP official as saying, "The first round of talks is like the first round of a boxing match. We do not know what the outcome will be just by watching the first round." Perhaps an unfortunate analogy given the past relations of the three parties involved.

¹⁴ An American diplomat told ICG, "People looked like they were settling in for the long haul. There didn't appear to be any progress."

¹⁵ The Paris Peace Accords, brokered by the United Nations and signed by the four warring factions on 23 October 1991, provided for building a liberal democracy under the rule of law. These legal documents were underwritten by 19 nations.

¹⁶ See section on CPP Aims and Achievements.