

was a hostage and was going to the negotiating table under threat. He said he wanted to avoid further bloodshed.

The summit meeting in Siem Reap on 22 September 1998 was a positive step in that it helped defuse the increasingly violent crisis, but it failed to address proposals for a coalition. The meeting brought together CPP leaders Hun Sen and Chea Sim with Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy – it was the first time the prince and Hun Sen had met in more than a year.

The cautious optimism of the Siem Reap summit was shattered two days later when the swearing in of the new parliament at the 12<sup>th</sup> Century temple, Angkor Wat, was marred by an alleged attempt on the life of Hun Sen. A B-40 rocket, apparently triggered by remote control, was fired across the road leading from Siem Reap town to Angkor Wat at around the time MPs were heading to the temple. Hun Sen claimed it was a fresh attempt on his life.

The opposition denied responsibility for the attack, which left a teenage boy dead when the rocket hit his home. Amid contradictory accounts of the circumstances of the attack, analysts remain divided as to whom should bear responsibility. Some see it as a CPP ploy and others blame it on opposition military figures – the Khmer Rouge or royalists based on the Thai border. Others say it may have been aimed at opposition leaders.

Without doubt, the rocket attack helped put back a rapprochement. Scared opposition leaders, sporting their new parliamentary immunity and prestige, left the country<sup>11</sup> the next day fearing that the incident would be used as a pretext to arrest them.

### 3. Forging a Coalition Government

The CPP was keen to see coalition negotiations open and backed away from initial accusations against the opposition over the attack, paving the way for the first of a series of working group meetings to start in Phnom Penh.

But renewed threats of arrests and court summonses against those involved in the street protests<sup>12</sup> persuaded Ranariddh and Rainsy to

<sup>11</sup> At one time more than 30 of the 53 opposition members of parliament were overseas, including all 15 deputies of the Sam Rainsy Party.

<sup>12</sup> Including opposition MP Kem Sokha, head of the parliamentary commission on human rights in the outgoing parliament. He was twice stopped from flying out of Cambodia by immigration officials. The government critic lost his parliamentary seat and immunity when the new assembly was convened and went into hiding the next day. He ignored two summonses to appear in court