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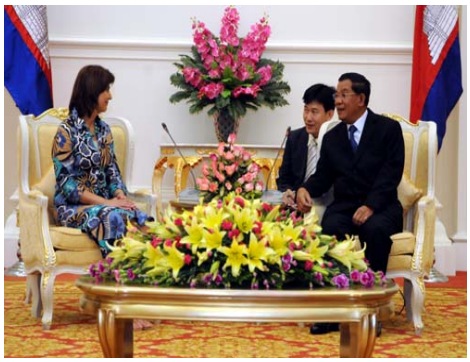
# POLITICS

## PM Meets Colombian Foreign Minister



Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, warmly received here on Jan. 19 at the Peace Palace visiting Foreign Minister of Colombia Ms. Maria Angela Holguin.

Ms. Holguin, who is on her first visit to Cambodia, said the current policy of the Colombian government is to strengthen cooperation with the ASEAN member countries and other countries. The Colombian foreign minister informed the Cambodian premier of the landmine problem in Colombia, and expressed deep thanks to the Royal Government of Cambodia for taking part in mine clearance in her country. She further expressed her full support to the 9th point set by Cambodia in the millennium development goal related to mine issue.

In reply, Samdech Techo Hun Sen thanked the Colombian government for sending its troops to join the peacekeeping mission in the UNTAC framework in Cambodia in 1992-1993.

The Cambodian prime minister also briefed Ms. Holguin on Cambodia's situation from 1979 to the present time.

Concerning the landmine issue, Samdech Techo Hun Sen stressed the successive reduction of the danger of mines in Cambodia during recent years, indicating that

only around 200 people are victims of mine each year, against 1,000 in the previous years, and this figure would reach zero in the near future.

## *Japan To Establish Motor Assembling Plant in Cambodia*

Japan's MINEBEA Co., Ltd. will establish a motor assembling plant in Cambodia in contribution to developing the country's economy and human resources.

Mr. Yoshihisa Kainuma Minebea, president of MINEBEA, informed Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen of his company's investment project during a meeting here on Tuesday, Ieng Sophalet, assistant to the Cambodian premier told reporters after the meeting.

The new Cambodian plant will assemble motors using parts/components supplied by Minebea plants in China, Malaysia and Thailand.

In reply, Samdech Techo Hun Sen welcomed the investment project and recommended the Japanese company to cooperate with relevant institutions in Cambodia, especially with the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training and the National Training Center as well as Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in selecting and training labor force.

## *Cambodian PM: ATF 2011 Is an Exceptional Opportunity for ASEAN Countries*

The ASEAN Tourism Forum 2011 (ATF 2011) is a good opportunity for the ASEAN member countries and their partners to promote different fields and to alleviate poverty, said here yesterday Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

"I am strongly convinced that ATF 2011 is an exceptional opportunity for us not only to inform the world of Cambodia's as well as ASEAN's tourism products, but also to enhance and show the importance of tourism and to continue to promote this field, so as to contribute to socio-economic development, the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals and the poverty reduction in the region and the world," said the Cambodian premier at the official opening ceremony of ATF 2011 held on Jan. 18 at Koh Pich Convention and Exhibition Centre, Phnom Penh.

Samdech Techo Hun Sen also believed that all relevant parties, both public and private sectors, will strengthen their cooperation to promote tourism development in ASEAN.

Cambodia has been hosting ATF 2011 from Jan. 15 to 21 under the theme of "ASEAN-A World of Wonders and Diversity", during which the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2011-2015 was adopted by the ASEAN Tourism Ministers.

The Cambodian government has been paying high attention and giving its full support to the development of tourism industry, considering it as a priority among the ten priority areas for social building and poverty reduction, underlined Samdech Techo Hun Sen.

He further highly evaluated the effective contribution of tourism in increasing regional demands and exportation, the main factors to promote macroeconomic growth, social development and poverty alleviation.

According to preliminary figures, ASEAN attracted more than 65 million visitors last year, posting a healthy 12 percent growth. Intra-ASEAN travel continued to be a major share of tourists, making up 45 percent of total international arrivals.

For its part, Cambodia received some 2.5 million foreign tourists last year, or an increase of 16 percent as compared with 2009, while the number of local tourists reached more than 7 million in 2010, or an increase of 7 percent as compared with the previous year.

## *14th Meeting of ASEAN Tourism*

## *Ministers*

The 14th Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers was held here today at the Peace Palace under the chairmanship of Cambodian Tourism Minister H.E. Thong Khon.

Tourism delegations from the ten ASEAN member countries as well as those from the ASEAN-Japan Centre and ASEAN-Korean Centre attended the meeting.

The theme for the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2011 "ASEAN-A World of Wonders and Diversity" is very appropriate as ASEAN endowed with great potential, the richness and diversity of tourism resources would make up unique and interesting features for tourists, said H.E. Thong Khon in his opening remarks.

"There is certainly a need for ASEAN to be attuned to the realities of the situation that the world has started recovering from the global economic downturn; we need to sustain ASEAN's fame as the fastest growing tourism destination in the world," he said.

Therefore, he added, we must reaffirm our commitments for sustained ASEAN tourism cooperation; we must strive our best for the travel facilitation and connectivity for intra-ASEAN and international travels; and our important work now is the finalization and adoption of the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2011-2015, and to further enhance and ensure the successful implementation of work programmes and activities so that tourism can continuously contribute not only to fast track ASEAN integration but also to elevate living standard of citizens in ASEAN countries.

## *Cambodia Hosts 30th ASEAN Tourism Forum*

Discussion on the drafted 2011-2015 strategy to make the Southeast Asian region a more welcoming place for tourists across the world is a key agenda in the 30th ASEAN Tourism Forum hosted by Cambodia.

Taking place from Jan. 15 to 21, the ASEAN Tourism Forum gives floor to more than 200 senior tourism officials from the 10 ASEAN member countries and other concerned counterparts.

"We have to work more to ensure quality human resource development and to better transportation within ASEAN to boost tourism in the region," said Cambodian Tourism Minister H.E. Thong Khon in his opening address.

The Tourism minister also encouraged a consideration on the emerging tourists from China, Japan, Korea, India and Russia when preparing the five-year regional tourism strategy.

For 2010, ASEAN absorbed approximately 60 million tourists, 2.5 million of whom coming to Cambodia – making 16 percent increase in the country's tourism sector compared to the previous year, according to H.E. Tith Chantha, a general director at the Ministry of Tourism.

The seven-day forum under the theme of "ASEAN-A World of Wonders and Diversity" also entails special sessions between ASEAN member countries and India, China, Japan, South Korea and Russia, and GMS member countries.

Cambodia has hosted twice the forum of this kind. The first Cambodia-hosted ASEAN Tourism Forum took place in 2003.

## *DPM Hor Namhong: Release on Bail of Six Thai Detainees Is Purely Court's Procedure*

The release on bail of six Thai detainees is purely the court's procedure, said here today Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister H.E. Hor Namhong upon his meeting with visiting Colombian Foreign Minister Mrs. Maria Angela Holguin.

"The release does not happen after the meeting between me and Thai Foreign Minister H.E. Kasit Piromya in Indonesia," he stressed.

H.E. Hor Namhong, also minister

of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, further said that on the sidelines of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Indonesia, he met with his Thai counterpart and they agreed not to let the current situation affect the good relations between the two neighboring countries.

"I told H.E. Kasit that what we did is according to the court's procedure, we have no ill will against Thailand or we do not seek revenge against the Thais," he said, adding that H.E. Kasit even thanked us for granting bail to the six Thai detainees.

Seven Thais were arrested on Dec. 29, 2010 by Cambodian border protection troops for illegal entry into Cambodian territory in Banteay Meanchey province and then charged for illegal entry into Cambodia and unlawful entry into military zone.

Regarding the meeting with his Columbian foreign minister, H.E. Hor Namhong said he informed Mrs. Maria Angela Holguin of the situation in Cambodia, from the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, to the Paris Peace Accords and the Win-Win policy of Premier Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, which brought about full peace, national unification and reconciliation to the country.

Mrs. Maria Angela Holguin, who is in her first-ever visit to Cambodia, said there are many things Colombia should learn from Cambodia.

Both sides also agreed to do their best to strengthen the relationship and cooperation in all domains between the two countries.

Concerning East Timor's application to be an ASEAN member, the Cambodian foreign minister said as the country is located in Southeast Asia, its application is automatically supported by Cambodia, but we (the ASEAN member countries) have not discussed about it yet. We will discuss in the future and the problem is the benefits to ASEAN and to East Timor itself when the country becomes an ASEAN member.

## *Statement of Cambodian Foreign Ministry over Seven Thai Intruders*

The Spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation has issued a statement regarding the issue of the seven Thai intruders.

The full statement dated Jan. 14 reads as follows:

"On 29 December 2010, seven Thai nationals, including a Member of Thai Parliament, illegally crossed the border and went deep inside Cambodian territory. This group of Thai nationals was arrested and handed over to the Cambodian Court for legal action in accordance with the immigration law of Cambodia.

On 13 January 2011, the Cambodian Court decided to release on bail two Thai culprits, Mr. Panich Vikitceth and Ms. Naruemol Chitwaratana on health ground. The Cambodian Court is still considering the case of the other five Thai culprits.

The Court of Cambodia is proceeding on this case in accordance with Cambodia's immigration law in taking consideration of the current good relations between Cambodia and Thailand, without any animosity towards the Thai people."

## *France To Continue to Assist Cambodia's Health Sector*

The French government will extend, through its embassy in Cambodia, some 800,000 Euro to support Cambodia's human resource training in the field of health from 2011 to 2013.

French Ambassador to Cambodia H.E. Christian Connan told Health Minister H.E. Mam Bun Heng during their meeting here on Tuesday.

The Cambodian health minister thanked the French government for having assisted Cambodia in the field of health, particularly in human resource training by providing scholarships to Cambodian medical students to continue their studies in France, in assisting Pasteur Institute of Cambodia in infectious disease research, and in strengthening health system at the grassroots level, etc.

France has played an important role in Cambodia's health sector, he stressed.

The French diplomat expressed his government's determination to continue to contribute to the development of Cambodia.

On the same day, H.E. Christian Connan and Minister of Education, Youth and Sports H.E. Im Sethy signed a framework convention, which enables Cambodia to implement the bilingual educational program for additional three years, from 2011 to 2013.

## *Cambodia, Myanmar Sign Direct Flight Agreement*

Cambodia and Myanmar have reached an agreement on direct flights from Yangon to Siem Reap province.

The agreement was signed here on Jan. 18 by Cambodian Tourism Minister H.E. Thong Khon and his Burmese counterpart on the sidelines of the 30th ASEAN Tourism Forum hosted by Cambodia.

The Yangon-Siem Reap direct flights will begin on Feb. 23, 2011

with two flights weekly, said the Cambodian tourism minister, adding that the establishment of direct flights between Cambodia and Myanmar is in line with ASEAN strategy on regional connectivity.

The Myanmar-Cambodia direct flights will help attract more foreign tourists to Cambodia. "Rice is white gold, while tourism is green gold," H.E. Thong Khon said.

Last year, some 2.5 million foreign tourists visited Cambodia, or an increase of 16 percent as compared with 2009.

## *Government's Reaction against Radio Free Asia (RFA) Editorial*

The Press and Quick Reaction Unit of the Office of the Council of Ministers has, in a statement, reacted against an editorial of Radio Free Asia (RFA) over the leadership of Prime Minister Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen.

The full statement dated Jan. 17 reads as follows:

"The most recent attack on Cambodia from Radio Free Asia (RFA) came in the form of an editorial comment in its broadcast of January 14 and re-aired on Monday morning 17 January 2011. That editorial used as its pretext the 26th Anniversary of the leadership of the Prime Minister, Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, who became Prime Minister of Cambodia on January 14, 1985. In fact, it is the opening guns by opposition parties and other critics of the Royal Government of the next national election campaign, slated for mid-2013.

The editorial started in a curious manner, by quoting the speech of Samdech Akka Moha Thomak Pothisal Chea Sim, President of the Senate and Chairman of the Cambodian People's Party, at the 32nd Anniversary of the January 7 Victory Day Celebration. In that statement, Samdech Chea Sim recounted the great successes of the Royal Government, including a solid economic growth rate and a reduction of poverty.

Given the solid economic indicators recounted by Samdech Chea Sim, one would have thought that this would lead to praise the record of the Royal Government and the leadership of the Prime Minister, Samdech Techo Hun Sen. But the RFA editorial quickly moved to the main point of its editorial – to launch a political attack on the Prime Minister. It did so by quoting one of the most virulent critics of the Prime Minister - Brad Adams of Human Rights Watch. Adams criticized Samdech Techo Hun Sen for having served too long in office. This is a strange criticism indeed, for longevity in office is not typically held as a negative attribute. But the Prime Minister is a relatively young man and in good health, and thus can be expected to contribute to the progress of the country for many years to come.

Moreover, Samdech Prime Minister has achieved a status which is rare in the world – that of a senior statesman. As the longest serving, democratically-elected Head of State in Asia, he has attained a status similar to that of Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and Mahathir Mohamed of Malaysia, the revered public figures in the region. He has not only provided a steady hand on the tiller of the ship of state, but raised Cambodia's profile internationally, making significant contributions at the United Nations, ASEAN, and other international fora.

After criticizing the Prime Minister for the length of his service to the country, Mr. Adams moves on to his main point: that the Prime Minister should 'give up his position and allow a free election in Cambodia'. But this strident critic ignores the Constitution – the CPP won the 2008 general elections and proposed Samdech Techo Hun Sen to be Prime Minister, His Majesty The King nominated him and the National Assembly voted for him. This complies with the Constitutional requirements set out in Article 119 and the current mandate is not finished. So why should Mr. Adams insist that he step down?

The second part of Mr. Adams recommendation is that Samdech Prime Minister should allow a free election in Cambodia. But he ignores the facts that Cambodia has already enjoyed a succession of free and fair elections, including the most recent national election in 2008. In fact, each of the four national elections has been judged more free and fair than the previous one. In the most recent national election, Cambodia received technical assistance from numerous democratic countries and international organizations, including Japan, Australia, Denmark, the United Nations, among others. There were 17,000 national and international observers present.

And the results of the election were impressive. For example, the US Embassy stated that the 2008 election 'was freer than any election previously held in the country and the vast majority of Cambodia's registered voters were able to express their will in a more open atmosphere than before.' The US Embassy praised the 'peaceful manner' of the electoral process and the 'professional conduct' of the election staff and political party agents.

Similarly, the EU observers found that the election procedures were 'well administered' and along with observers and political party agents contributed to the 'transparency and confidence in the voting process'.

There was no doubt that when the Cambodian people voted, if they chose the CPP, they were endorsing the candidacy of Samdech Techo Hun Sen to be the next Prime Minister. And the voters selected the CPP in overwhelming numbers. So the voters knew, with an absolute certainty and clarity, that if they voted for the CPP, they were endorsing the leadership of Samdech Prime Minister Hun Sen. And the CPP won in a landslide election.

Thus, the call by Brad Adams, apparently endorsed by Radio Free Asia, for the Prime Minister to resign and call for new elections is to disenfranchise the vast majority of voters who chose the CPP and, by implication, Samdech Prime Minister. There simply is no precedent for this kind of action, and it is anti-democratic in its very nature.

It also would be unconstitutional to hold new elections prior to the designated time for elections. As cited earlier, there are designated procedures in the Constitution and the National Election Law, with which Mr. Adams apparently is unfamiliar. He would do well to study the Cambodian Constitution and the National Election Law before he starts making proposals that are contrary to their provisions.

Why is Mr. Adams so set on overturning the results of the 2008 election? The answer simply is that he has consistently criticized Cambodia at every turn over the years. It is interesting to note that in 2008, he denounced the election as not being free and fair even before the election was held. Because of his long-time animosity against the CPP and Samdech Prime Minister, he prejudged the election. He did not wait until the voting was conducted, and the election observers could report. Because of his political bias, Adams already had made up his mind that the elections were not free and fair.

And among the observers, those that found some flaws in the election process nevertheless endorsed the result. For example, the chief EU observer stated that while some irregularities existed, the vote in favor of the ruling party that the irregularities could not have changed the result. And the statement of the US Embassy clearly said that the irregularities were 'relatively low in number and they do not appear to have affected the outcome or to have distorted the will of the Cambodian people'.

Thus, the intent of Brad Adams and Radio Free Asia appears to be to overturn the results of the 2008 election. As they both come from one of the world's oldest democracies, this is a surprisingly undemocratic message. Having elections means that all parties can have a chance to win it obviously does not give them the right to win. The fact that their preferred candidates or parties did not win is what bothers Mr. Adams and Radio Free Asia, but that is no reason to overturn the Constitution or the results of a free and fair election because of some disgruntled opposition figures or organizations.

Besides their interest in reversing the results of the 2008, a variety of other political attacks were made in the RFA editorial, and the comments of Mr. Adams. For example, there are vague accusations of corruption in the editorial. But there is no mention that Cambodia now has an Anti-Corruption Law, and the Anti-Corruption Unit is actively and publicly pursuing cases of alleged corruption. This is another indication of the bias and political agenda of RFA and the selective use of opposition parties and critics to support its editorial.

Another line of attack is to criticize the family of the Prime Minister. For example, RFA is critical of the promotion of the son of the Prime Minister, Hun Manet, to the position of Major General. But RFA gives short shrift to a compelling fact: the rapid rise in the ranks of General Hun is due, in part, to the fact that he is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, one of the most prestigious army schools in the World. He is representative of a younger generation of Cambodians, who enjoy the benefits of international education. RFA should explain why this is a bad development.

Time does not permit a refutation of each accusation made in the RFA editorial. But make no mistake about it: the principal point of the article is not to celebrate Samdech Prime Minister's 26 years of noble service to Cambodia, but rather to attempt to disenfranchise the voters who selected the CPP in 2008, undermine the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, and promote the opposition parties with an eye towards the 2013 national elections. With its highly prejudicial electoral, RFA is announcing the start of the next electoral campaign.