

NEWSLETTER
KAS
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The following articles are a composition of the last two weeks' (1st-15th July, 2013) press releases in Cambodia. They give a review on current developments in the country.

Exiled Opposition Leader Sam Rainsy Granted Royal Pardon

Opposition leader Sam Rainsy received Royal pardon from King Sihamoni on 12th July, at the behest of Prime Minister Hun Sen.

It is not the first time that the former Member of Parliament and ex-Finance Minister is granted such pardon. In 2005 already, facing defamation charges, criticised by many as being politically motivated, he had chosen self-exile in France, only to be offered royal pardon the following year. In what seemed to be a repetition of this episode, Sam Rainsy was convicted *in absentia* of racial incitements and destruction of property in 2010, leading to another self-imposed exile to avoid the sentence. The King, at the request of the same Prime Minister as in 2006, granted him last Friday a second royal pardon.



Source: The Cambodia Daily

This decision comes as Sam Rainsy announced on 6th July his intention to come back to Cambodia before Election Day, whatever the consequences may be for him. Many analysts think this declaration forced Prime Minister Hun Sen to make a decision regarding Rainsy's case: granting him amnesty, or taking the risk of making a cause celebre of him.

Although such a move had been strongly demanded by political and human rights activists, NGOs, and foreign countries such as the United States – going as far as threatening to cut U.S. Aid to Cambodia (see below) – the government argued his decision was not influenced by any such pressures. The Cambodian Minister of Foreign Affairs said on Friday that this development shows the Prime Minister and his party, the CPP, "typically strive to create unity and reconciliation", and that the pardon was motivated by a desire to "create free and fair elections and strengthen democracy."

Sam Rainsy's return to Cambodia is expected 19th July.

Further reading:

Sam Rainsy to Return to Cambodia

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/breakingnews/359694/rainsy-to-return-to-phnom-penh>

US Welcomes Deals for Sam Rainsy's Return

<http://www.voacambodia.com/content/us-welcomes-deal-for-sam-rainsy-return-cambodia/1701645.html>

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Hor Namhong Says Rainsy's Pardon Ensures Fair Election

<http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/hor-namhong-says-rainsys-pardon-ensures-fair-election-34784/>

Rainsy Sets Friday Return

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/rainsy-sets-friday-return>

Congress wants a cut in US Aid

American lawmakers are calling for a cut in direct aid to Cambodia, should the elections prove not to be "credible and competitive."

In a speech made on July 9th at a congressional hearing, the head of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific said that Cambodia's fifth

election would be held under a "false veil of democracy." His list of accusations was long, including "incitement of political violence, corruption and nepotism" by the current government, political manipulation of the judiciary system with regards to the charges faced by the president of the main opposition party, Sam Rainsy (since then pardoned, cf. article above), as well as unsatisfying voter list, which election monitors assure is deeply flawed. The Republican US Congress member concluded his intervention in arguing that such a situation required "cutting off direct aid to the Cambodian government, specifically foreign military financing and international military education and training funding."

The U.S. is one of the main donors to Cambodia, with an annual aid accounting to roughly \$70 million (of which \$6 million went toward military assistance in 2011).

This speech comes a month after two US Senators proposed a bill aimed at cutting all aid to Cambodia if the election were deemed "not credible and competitive."

Opponents argue that the challenges faced by Cambodia require significant capital investment instead of a cut in U.S. aid. They also expressed concerns that such a measure would only strengthen China's position in the country, an actor for whom, they say, human rights and corporate social responsibility are not discussion points.

Further reading:

Congressional Hearing in US Pushes Cut to Cambodia Aid

<http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/congressional-hearing-in-us-pushes-cut-to-cambodian-aid-34389/>

Democracy Scrutinised – US Congress Discusses Cutting Aid to Kingdom

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/democracy-scrutinised>

Stigma of US Aid Cuts May Hurt More than Money

<http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/stigma-of-us-aid-cuts-may-hurt-more-than-money-34611/>



Source: Presstv.com

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Cambodia is South-East Asia's most corrupt country: Transparency International

Transparency International (TI) released on 9th July the 2013 Global Corruption Barometer, ranking Cambodia as the Asian country where most people have declared having paid for bribes in the last year (57% of the interviewed). The Kingdom also ranks in the ten most corrupt nations worldwide, only to be outdone by Yemen and seven African states.



The main services requiring bribery reportedly are the Judiciary (65%), the Police (65%), the Registry and Permit services (62%), and the Land services (57%). Contrary to the other countries in South-East Asia, where grafts mainly aim at speeding things up, respondents in Cambodia said they had done so as a gift, or to express gratitude (51%), while 15% argued it was the only way to obtain the service.

In spite of these figures, Cambodia is, according to this Barometer, the South-East Asian country where the highest number of people reported having noticed a decrease in corruption over the past year. It also is the one where most of the population finds the government's fight against corruption to be effective (57%). Such high results are to be expected when a government begins an anti-corruption campaign though, said Preap Kol, Executive director of TI Cambodia.

The government dismissed the report, arguing the creation of the Anti-corruption Law and the formation of the Anti-corruption Unit was proof of its commitment to fighting graft. The Barometer was deemed "biased against Cambodia and the party in power, the CPP.

This Global ranking comes out as corruption is still considered one of Cambodia's main problems hindering its development, and less than a month after the United States downgraded the Kingdom to a Tier 2 Watch List status in its Trafficking in Person annual report.

Further reading:

Bribes Remain Rampant: TI

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/bribes-remain-rampant-survey>

Citizens See Cambodia as One of the Most Corrupt Countries

http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/citizens-see-cambodia-as-one-of-the-most-corrupt-countries-34205/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=citizens-see-cambodia-as-one-of-the-most-corrupt-countries

Transparency International's 2013 Global Corruption Barometer

<http://www.transparency.org/gcb2013>



Radio ban lifted, another one remains

A ban on foreign radio programmes was rescinded on June 29th, just twenty-four hours after its publication.

This ban targeted all Khmer-language foreign radio programmes aired by FM station, and was to have currency during the whole month leading up to the 28th July national election. The Ministry of Information argued this measure had been taken in order to

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ensure the neutrality of the poll's coverage.

The decision was met with immediate and strong protests from civil organisations, the radio broadcasters, and the U.S. State Department. The United States is involved in two of the main radio stations in Cambodia: Voice of America, its official overseas broadcaster, and Radio Free Asia, which it partly funds.

A previously unreported second ban remains. Dated 21st June, the notice states that "broadcasting and direct relay from all foreign radio stations about the survey or the results of the survey related to the election process" are to be forbidden during the five days leading up to the election.

Further reading:

Ban on Radio Broadcasts Lifted Amid US Pressure

<http://www.cambodiadaily.com/elections/ban-on-radio-broadcasts-lifted-amid-us%E2%80%88pressure-32700/>

And the Ban Played On

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/2013070166593/National/and-the-ban-played-on.html>

Critics of Radio Broadcast Ban Call for Accountability

<http://www.cambodiadaily.com/elections/critics-of-radio-broadcast-ban-call-for-accountability-32906/>

Increase in Cambodia's Tourism Figures

Ministry of Tourism revealed that 1.8 million tourists arrived in Cambodia in the first five months of this year. This represents a 20% increase compared with the corresponding period in 2012.

Regional tourism still makes up the majority of visitors, the Asia-Pacific region accounting for 72.1% of the total - a 22% increase compared to the same months last years. Vietnam, South Korea and China are the leading tourists supplying countries. The highest growth rate was to be seen in visitors from Africa (25.4%).



Source: foxnews.com

Meanwhile, outbound trips only saw an increase of about 10.5%.

Further reading:

Cambodia Enjoys Travel Growth

<http://www.ttrweekly.com/site/2013/05/cambodia-enjoys-travel-growth/>

Tourism Figures Rise in First Five Months

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/tourism-figures-rise-first-five-months>