

Greeting from COMFREL,

Weekly Democracy and Electoral Digest Cambodia
2019

31 Dec. 2018 to 04 Jan.

1.NEC

The National Election Committee yesterday said that more than 8.5 million people have been officially registered on the 2018 voter list.

<https://bit.ly/2Qp6MO7>;

2- Political Party

The leader of Cambodia's now-dissolved opposition party called for "genuine reconciliation" amid a political stalemate in the Southeast Asian nation in a message he delivered on the eve of the new year from his home in Phnom Penh, where he is being held in detention ahead of a trial for "treason."

<https://bit.ly/2F9QpUm>;

A Cambodian People's Party (CPP) spokesperson mockingly told exiled opposition leader Sam Rainsy that he would be greeted with "handcuffs and prison" upon his return.

Cambodian People's Party (CPP) spokesman Sok Eysan on Monday hit back at claims from former opposition leader Sam Rainsy, who accused Prime Minister Hun Sen of being fearful about his potential return to Cambodia, as well as his speculation of an internal rift in the CPP.

<https://bit.ly/2s9VUty>; <https://bit.ly/2F8tfO1>;

Opposition leader Sam Rainsy faced a backlash after narrowing his prediction that "99 per cent" of banned Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) politicians would not seek the return of their political rights, saying "only two cheap, short-sighted officials" would do so. He has slammed the capital's newly inaugurated Win-Win Monument, claiming it represents Hun Sen's "treason".

<https://bit.ly/2LPAEST>; <https://bit.ly/2R6ZeVx>; <https://bit.ly/2CQmiip>;

Forty-four political parties are registered to legally conduct activities in the Kingdom, according to an Interior Ministry report.

The Khmer National Liberation Front (KNLF) – a group claiming to be Cambodia's "government in exile", led by Sam Serey who had been accused by the government as a terrorist – is set to register as a legitimate political party later this month, after its members collected more than 5,000 thumbprints, its spokesman Thuy Vy said on Tuesday.

<https://bit.ly/2Vv8UaM>; <https://bit.ly/2LPNSza>;

3-Legislative and Executive

Interior Minister Sar Kheng said on Thursday that the reinstatement of opposition leader Kem Sokha's political rights, which would open the door for his possible return to the political stage, was purely dependent on legal proceedings as his court case is ongoing. Interior Minister Sar Kheng yesterday denied an accusation by former opposition leader Sam Rainsy that he told the latter not to return to Cambodia following his flight to France.

<https://bit.ly/2VueTN3>; <https://bit.ly/2sbhduW>;

One party parliament of Cambodia People Party (CPP) on Thursday approved draft laws to increase the number of local level government positions, after Prime Minister Hun Sen suggested such legislation would encourage opposition officials whose party he had dissolved to defect to his ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP).

<https://bit.ly/2RxmWcG>; <https://bit.ly/2LPAbAk>; <https://bit.ly/2R8iAtd>; <https://bit.ly/2BWffTu>;

Hun Sen lashed out at Western governments for pushing "democracy and human rights" on his country, capping off a tumultuous political year with a fiery speech on Saturday. Long-serving Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen on Saturday inaugurated a monument marking the 1998 end of the threat from the communist Khmer Rouge movement, which ruinously ruled the country in the late 1970s and then carried on a guerrilla war. PRIME Minister Hun Sen used Saturday's inauguration of the "Win-Win Monument" to blast Western governments he accused of making policy mistakes damaging to Cambodia. Speaking at the inauguration of the Win-Win Monument on Saturday, Hun Sen said it cost \$12 million to construct and hailed it as a joint achievement by all Cambodians.

<https://bit.ly/2sbmse6>; <https://bit.ly/2BYlkyP>; <https://bit.ly/2SwbfjM>; <https://bit.ly/2F5VRHN>;

A senior government official on Monday said that the amendment to Article 45 of the Law on Political Parties has reached its final stage and is merely awaiting the signature of King Norodom Sihamoni, leaving 118 politicians facing the dilemma as to whether to return to the political stage or not.

<https://bit.ly/2AuBxMt>; <https://bit.ly/2Sxe97L>;

4-Judiciary, Authority and Military

Sen Sok district police in Phnom Penh on Thursday broke up a memorial ceremony marking the fifth anniversary of a crackdown on a protest on the capital's Veng Sreng Boulevard in 2014 that ended in violence.

<https://bit.ly/2Tula9Q>; <https://bit.ly/2QoHT4S>;

Cambodian authorities arrested 16,232 illicit drug suspects in 8,018 cases in 2018, said an Interior Ministry's anti-drug department report on Tuesday.

<https://bit.ly/2TxV2ef>;

5-Civil Society

Hundreds of workers from Prestige Garment Co Ltd in Kandal province's Kandal Stung district are on strike and said they will petition Prime Minister Hun Sen to intervene after negotiations failed to

reinstate their sacked representative who stands accused of intending to form a trade union.

<https://bit.ly/2F7eSJa>; <https://bit.ly/2RbzUh5>; <https://bit.ly/2sbnF58>;

The wife of detained alleged filmmaker Rath Rott Mony and 10 other protestors gathered outside the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Phnom Penh for a second time on Wednesday, reiterating calls for his release.

<https://bit.ly/2GSnSV3>;

Some 1,000 villagers on Tuesday blocked National Road 2 in Kandal province's Kandal Stung district, each demanding compensation of \$250 from the provincial authority for communal land they claim a former commune chief sold to a well-connected developer without their knowledge in 2008.

<https://bit.ly/2GSp8rf>;

Nearly 200 villagers from Dang Peng commune in Koh Kong province's Sre Ambel district on Friday stopped the authorities from dismantling the homes of four families alleged to have been built in a preservation area of the Cardamom Mountains.

<https://bit.ly/2R9im4X>;

6- Other and Political Opinions

The ruling party won a landslide victory in polls that garnered both criticism and praise internationally, while the EU began the process of withdrawing access to its 'EBA' trade deal and Kem Sokha was released on bail.

<https://bit.ly/2TvAHpP>;

More than 1.27 million Chinese tourists visited the country in the first eight months of 2018, a 72 per cent increase over the same period in 2017, but locals say Chinese-owned businesses are benefiting most from the surge.

<https://bit.ly/2SBZ98S>;

The New York Times last January published a list of 52 places to go in 2018. Subtitled "a starter kit for escaping into the world," the story was written around mid-2017 and put the "Cambodian Coast" in the number 13 spot. By December 2018, however, when the Times returned for a looksee, Sihanoukville just wasn't quite the same.

<https://bit.ly/2F9AWCT>;

From the ruling CPP's sweeping election victory, to the conclusion of multiple, high-profile court cases and freedom granted by royal pardons to jailed activists, the year saw many intriguing developments, along with several tragedies that included a spate of deadly wine poisonings in Kratie province and the cover up of a murder.

<https://bit.ly/2C2Xgec>;

Cambodia's economy enjoyed robust growth last year, driven by garment exports, construction and tourism, said a National Bank of Cambodia's statement on Thursday.

[https://bit.ly/2TtGRH4;](https://bit.ly/2TtGRH4)

About 150 casinos are now in operation, up from 98 in 2017. In the coastal province of Sihanoukville alone there are 88. The law bans Cambodians from entering casinos. For PIME missionary, “it is difficult to assess the consequences of the trend because all this has happened so fast”.

[https://bit.ly/2RuBTw1;](https://bit.ly/2RuBTw1)

Thanks,