

# Greeting from COMFREL,

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## Weekly Democracy and Electoral Digest Cambodia

11-15 February 2019

### **1.Elections/ NEC**

The National Election Committee (NEC) issued a press release on Wednesday on the candidates who are to take part in the third-mandate sub national council elections in May while the ruling party, Cambodian People Party will secure the result for all most 100% of the council seats.

<https://bit.ly/2GqdHG9>;

### **2-International Community**

The EU has today started the process that could lead to the temporary suspension of Cambodia's preferential access to the EU market under the Everything But Arms (EBA) trade scheme. EBA preferences can be removed if beneficiary countries fail to respect core human rights and labor rights.

The European Union yesterday started the process of intense monitoring and engagement for six months that could lead to the temporary suspension of Cambodia's preferential access to the market under the Everything-but-arms (EBA) trade scheme, it said in a statement. The European Union's move to revoke Cambodia's duty-free access could force major clothing brands out of the manufacturing hub and worsen conditions for workers, industry experts said.

<https://dailym.ai/2X6JiSf>; <https://bit.ly/2SrTQgg>; <https://bit.ly/2WXBNgw>; <https://bit.ly/2I87znN>;  
<https://bit.ly/2IcbcZP>; <https://bit.ly/2BAX46s>; <https://bit.ly/2X6C3Km>; <https://dailym.ai/2X4ZSC7>;  
<https://dailym.ai/2twkPZj>;

Trade ties between Cambodia and Vietnam were strengthened on Wednesday following a meeting between high-ranking commerce officials in which both countries agree to drop tariffs on a number of goods.

<https://bit.ly/2EbBnM3>;

### **3- Political Party**

The former head of Cambodia's main opposition party, Sam Rainsy, has warned Chinese nationals and investors in Cambodia to be sensitive to Cambodian culture and the political situation in the country. Cambodia's foreign ministry has condemned former opposition leader Sam Rainsy, who called for military officials to resist the government.

<https://bit.ly/2SyEJSn>; <https://bit.ly/2to8iqE>;

#### **4-Legislative and Executive**

Following the EU's announcement this week that they had formally launched procedures in preparation for the withdrawal of Cambodia's Everything But Arms (EBA) trade preferences, Cambodian premier Hun Sen warned against interference in the country's affairs on Tuesday (Feb 12), his first comments since the European Union launched steps to cancel trade benefits that would hammer the local garment industry.

While he modified his statement that declared that Cambodia "will not die even if the EBA disappears". However Hun Sen said in a phone call to government officers leaked to social media on Thursday that his government must work during the next 18 months to destroy the opposition party at the local level before European Union trade sanctions come into effect,. Cambodia government slammed what it called an "unjust decision" by the European Union to launch proceedings that could see its preferential access to the bloc's market suspended, saying the move amounted to interference in its internal affairs amid political tensions in the Southeast Asian nation. The Ministry of Commerce is planning a meeting with public and private actors to discuss the revocation of the European Union's Everything-but-arms (EBA) deal and to find ways to diminish its impact on the economy.

<https://bit.ly/2X0WTe5>; <https://bit.ly/2X5gPfy>; <https://bit.ly/2GERy6n>; <https://bit.ly/2GHmliK>;  
<https://dailym.ai/2EauXwB>; <https://bit.ly/2IepuJp>; <https://bit.ly/2STdWzp>; <https://bit.ly/2SQLpz5>;  
<https://bit.ly/2RZRct2>;

Minister of Interior Sar Kheng said on Wednesday that commune development budgets will double to more than \$70,000 in 2020, excluding administrative costs, and more than triple in 2023, in response to public needs – but an NGO has requested transparency over the allocation of funds. He also said on Tuesday that the recent violent crackdowns in Kratie and Preah Sihanouk provinces on people locked in land disputes were illegally implemented and procedurally wrong as the military was used.

Interior Minister Sar Kheng on Wednesday warned local authorities in Cambodia not to use armed forces to violently disperse protesters.

<https://bit.ly/2UWLEBj>; <https://bit.ly/2S4xT1H>; <https://bit.ly/2X71hlz>; <https://bit.ly/2S5S0wu>;

The Cambodian government on Thursday received \$7.66 million from the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) Special Fund 2018 to implement 19 projects.

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

#### **5-Judiciary, Authority and Military**

A probe was launched on Monday into the excessive wealth of the sacked commander of the Ratanakiri provincial Military Police, Kim Reaksmeay, despite no official complaint having been filed as yet, Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) president Om Yentieng said "Using our own authority and information available from other sources as the basis for the investigation, the ACU will work quickly to resolve the case of Kim Reaksmeay."

<https://bit.ly/2IdvYZ5>;

#### **6- Media and Social Media**

A Phnom Penh Post reporter was removed from the entourage of a Malaysian diplomatic delegation on

Thursday after his article on its efforts to assist 47 of its nationals held on gambling and fraud charges was deemed to be “spoiling negotiations”.

<https://bit.ly/2GK7pkb>; <https://bit.ly/2BC4M06>

Government spokesman Phay Siphon said he had filed a complaint with the Ministry of Interior, calling for the immediate arrest of a Facebook user who it said posted a death threat aimed at Prime Minister Hun Sen. The ministry, however, said it has not received any such information.

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

### **7- Civil Society**

A group of 19 non-governmental organizations and associations have urged the Kingdom’s legislative and executive bodies to expedite the passage of a draft law on freedom of information, which the group said had been delayed for years.

<https://bit.ly/2DGhR92>;

Members of Battambang province’s forest community and relevant authorities on Tuesday claimed that over 100ha of forest land in Samlot Protected Area have been illegally cleared by wealthy citizens and armed forces in order to place it under their ownership.

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

Unionists in Cambodia have warned that officials’ attempts to downplay the importance of trade ties with the European Union are not taking seriously the impact that the impending withdrawal of preferential trading arrangements will have on workers while pro- government union leaders have expressed their regret over Sam Rainsy asking the EU to withdraw the Everything But Arms (EBA) preferential agreement from Cambodia as it is the workers who will be severely affected.

<https://bit.ly/2GwPHkX>; <https://bit.ly/2tp2TiV>;

Long Kimheang, the wife of alleged filmmaker Rath Rott Mony, and 10 other family members gathered for the fifth time in front of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Phnom Penh, reiterating calls for his release.

<https://bit.ly/2Ne7LRn>;

### **8- Other and Political Opinions**

There is an assumption by some commentators and analysts (myself included, on occasions) that just because China is now Cambodia’s closest political ally, the influence of Western nations has become negligible.

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

Cambodia is teetering on the verge of economic crisis, as it faces higher export tariffs into Britain due to Brexit at a time when the European Union is considering suspending duty-free access to punish Prime Minister Hun Sen for political suppression.

<https://s.nikkei.com/2RUnd5Q>;

Rice exports in January saw a small decline that exporters have blamed on the European Union's decision last month to impose tariffs on local rice.

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

Cambodia has a good chance of achieving its social protection agenda under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but will need to balance different social protection investments, according to a report published on Wednesday by the Asian Development Bank (ADB)

[https://bit.ly/2V1U1vD;](https://bit.ly/2V1U1vD)

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**Thanks,**