January 7 Victory: 42 years later, conflicting views continue

Moeun Chhean Nariddh / Khmer Times

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41th anniversary of Victory Day from the Khmer Rouge attended by roughly 50,000 people. KT/Siv Channa

January 7, 2021 marks the 42nd anniversary of the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime after its reign of terror that had extended for three years, eight months and 20 days. Khmer Times journalist Moeun Chhean Nariddh talked to government officials and scholars about the legacy the victory has left for Cambodia and Cambodians.

You saved a life and you are responsible for that life,” says an ancient Chinese proverb.

Some 42 years ago, the Kampuchean Revolutionary Army, backed by the Vietnamese troops, launched a full-scale attack on the Khmer Rouge Army to save the lives of millions of Cambodians who were facing death at the hands of the Khmer Rouge regime.

Government officials and scholars have looked back and expressed mixed views about how well – or difficult – Cambodian people have lived their lives after they were saved from Pol Pot’s henchmen.
Sok Eysan, spokesman for the Cambodian People’s Party, said the current Cambodian government which has evolved from the Kampuchean Revolutionary Army had made a tremendous sacrifice to help Cambodian people.

“We saved people throughout the country, not just one or two, from the genocidal regime,” he said. “It was a historical truth that people all over the country were given a second life.”

He said it was not just for those who survived the Khmer Rouge but people the younger generation should also attribute their lives to the endeavours of the ruling party and government which saved the lives of their parents in the first place.

“Those nephews, nieces and grandchildren should also appreciate this second life,” he said. “And it is natural.”

Eysan said the Cambodian people would have been killed if they had not been liberated in time.

“Every day and every minute, they were waiting for their death when the Khmer Rouge came to take them to be killed,” he said. “Then, they survived and they have given birth to their children and grandchildren following January 7 [liberation day].”

The CPP spokesman said the current peace, stability and development have also arisen from the January 7 victory over the Khmer Rouge in 1979.

“Thanks to the January 7 liberation day, it led to the Paris Peace Agreements on October 23, 1991,” he said. “Because of the Paris Peace Agreements, it enabled us to have a new constitution and Cambodia entered a new historical stage with the introduction of the liberal, multi-party democracy and the constitutional monarchy since 1993.”

Despite the Paris Peace Agreements, Eysan said Cambodia did not have complete peace due to the Khmer Rouge’s boycotting the peace process spearheaded by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (Untac).

“It was the win-win policy of Samdech Hun Sen which led to the political and military organisational structure of the Khmer Rouge to totally collapse in 1998,” he said. “Then, we had complete peace and national unity which we had not had for hundreds of years in the history of Cambodia.”

The CPP spokesman said peace and national unity had also enabled Cambodia to have the opportunity to reconstruct and develop the country which had been destroyed by war and the Khmer Rouge regime.
“People all over the country have also seen their living conditions change [for the better],” he said, adding that Cambodia had also been able to maintain the economic growth of seven percent during the last 20 years.

He added that the poverty rate among Cambodian people had also dropped from around 40 percent in 1994 to only 10 percent in 2018.

Kin Phea, director-general of the International Relations Institute of Cambodia at the Royal Academy of Cambodia, echoed Eysan’s admiration of the January 7 victory over the Khmer Rouge.

“January 7 is a day that all Cambodians who survived the Khmer Rouge regime should remember because all Cambodian families had experienced misery under the genocidal regime,” he said. “Without January 7, we would not have survived and have what we are having today.”

Phea said January 7 was the historical lesson that all Cambodian children should learn.

“During the past 42 years, Cambodia has travelled along a difficult road before we have complete peace and all kinds of development,” he said.

However, the Cambodian analyst and scholar said they do not seem to see the achievements arisen from the January 7 victory distributed equally to all Cambodians throughout the country.

Chak Sopheap, executive director of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, said January 7 should remind the population of the dark times and of the importance of remembering the past to avoid repeating it.

Details: https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50801284/january-7-victory-42-years-later-conflicting-views-continue/?fbclid=IwAR0tiZwEfEeaCtKrrmEGhlxtUEK_TqcE4aqMHn7-EqGPnF2vIUxJxuv1Bzg