

Hun Sen takes firm stand

Written by Cheang Sokha and Sebastian Strangio

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Photo by: Uy Nouseireimony Hun Sen's body language is quite clear as he speaks at the Koh Pich Centre in Phnom Penh yesterday. He said the Preah Vihear issue could lead to "bloodshed" and deviation from the One-China Policy to "disaster".

Thai threat spurs calls for international conference talks sought on Thai issue

PRIME Minister Hun Sen has called for an international conference to address the Kingdom's simmering border dispute with Thailand, saying that the established bilateral mechanism is "not working".

Speaking at a forum on the government's sub-national development programme yesterday, he said direct negotiations had run their course.

"I would like to request to have an international conference on the Thai-Cambodian border issue," Hun Sen said, and added that the country would seek a "multilateral solution" by appealing to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the United Nations and the signatories of the 1991 Paris Peace Accords.

"The issue is very hot. It may cause bloodshed," he said.

The prime minister repeated warnings that any attempt to use military force to settle the dispute would be welcomed "not by shaking hands, but by military operations".

"Cambodia is poor and weak, but I can say that even an ant will keep an elephant from sleeping," he said.

The comments came a day after the premier sent letters to the UN Security Council and General Assembly accusing Bangkok of violating the UN Charter.

The letters referred to comments made by Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva at a Yellow Shirt

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rally on Saturday, when he was quoted as saying the government was willing to dissolve a border-demarcation pact and use “both democratic and military means” to safeguard Thai sovereignty.

“In the face of this serious threat of use of armed forces against Cambodia to settle the border demarcation, I earnestly request Your Excellency to circulate this letter,” Hun Sen wrote.

Hun Sen said that Thailand’s attempt to internationalise the border dispute at recent United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation meetings, including the World Heritage Committee meeting in Brazil last month, had compromised the bilateral process.

After informing the UN of the situation, he said, the government would also consider approaching the International Court of Justice, which awarded Preah Vihear Temple to Cambodia in 1962. Both countries claim a 4.6-square-kilometre zone adjacent to the temple.

Thai officials could not be reached late yesterday, but the government has long opposed multilateral talks on the border dispute.

Ou Virak, president of the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, said the involvement of international organisations was “starting to make more sense”, given the difficulty in solving the dispute through one-on-one talks.

“The strategy of Thailand was to buy time and make the issue as fuzzy as possible,” he said. “I think it’s long overdue.”

Also yesterday, Thai media reported that Foreign Ministry officials and legal experts were meeting to draft a letter that would be sent to the UN to respond to Hun Sen’s charges.

“The letter would comprise three parts,” The Nation newspaper quoted government spokesman Panitan Wattanayagorn as saying.

“The first part will explain the legal matters that Cambodia mentioned, the second part about the invasion into our territory, while the third would be an assurance that we would handle the matter with peaceful means and according to the laws.”