Cambodia opposition leader loses parliamentary seat
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PHNOM PENH: Cambodia's opposition leader has been stripped of his role as a member of parliament after exhausting his appeals against a prison sentence, according to a statement seen by AFP on Wednesday.

Sam Rainsy was last year handed a two-year jail term in absentia for inciting racial discrimination and uprooting border markings with neighbouring Vietnam in a 2009 incident, a case his lawyer said was politically motivated.

The outspoken politician, who lives in self-imposed exile in France, lost his final appeal against the sentence when Cambodia's Supreme Court upheld the verdict earlier this month.

Citing the country's constitution, election laws and the Supreme Court's decision, the National Assembly announced in a statement dated March 15 that Sam Rainsy "loses his rights, privileges and membership as member of parliament... for the fourth mandate."

Yim Sovann, a spokesman for the Sam Rainsy Party, slammed the decision by a parliament dominated by MPs from the ruling Cambodian People's Party.

"We will not recognise the politically motivated decision by the parliament which violates the principle of democracy and human rights," he said.

"They want to... keep Sam Rainsy out of politics."

The Cambodian Centre for Human Rights expressed disappointment over the move, which it said showed "it serve the political objectives of the executive".

"The removal of his membership of the National Assembly comes as little surprise and the executive is one 'making the opposition die'," said the group's president Ou Virak.

Sam Rainsy now faces a total of 12 years in prison if he returns to Cambodia, after a court late last year also sentenced him to 10 years for publishing a false map of the border with Vietnam in a separate case.

The Sam Rainsy Party and rights groups have in the past said the convictions were an attempt to keep Sam Cambodia's national election in 2013.

He is the main rival to Prime Minister Hun Sen, 59, who has ruled Cambodia since 1985 and has vowed to r years old.

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