Colour revolution: A real threat or just an illusion?

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A photo combination shows Kin Phea (L), director-general of the International Relations Institute of Cambodia at the Royal Academy of Cambodia, Sophal Ear (C,L), associate professor at Occidental College in the United States, Chak Sopheap (C,R), executive director of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights and Sok Eysan (R), Cambodian People’s Party spokesman. Khmer Times and Facebook

Recently, the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) appealed to the military to prevent any signs of a colour revolution in the Kingdom. A Khmer Times journalist talked to government officials, scholars and ordinary Cambodians about whether a colour revolution is a real threat and how the government can avoid such a movement.
Two Cambodian scholars have painted a picture of a possible “colour revolution” in Cambodia, unless the government does something to respond to the grievances aired by people who feel they are victims of social injustice.

Chak Sopheap, executive director of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, said that in recent years, the expression “colour revolution” has become increasingly common in public discourse.

“It appears to refer to any and all statements or activities perceived as being critical of the authorities,” she explained. “This expression is regularly used as a pretext to silence any dissenting voice, and to ban the most basic exercise of fundamental freedoms.”

Sopheap said that since the dissolution of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) and the banning of its senior party officials from politics in 2017, both members and supporters of the ex-CNRP underwent a sustained attack on their freedoms, often justified by the government as necessary in order to defeat the colour revolution movement.

“In doing so, the authorities are violating the engagements they have taken under international human rights law and are gravely endangering democracy,” she said.

Instead of cracking down on dissents, Sopheap said the government has to focus on the many improvements Cambodia still needs to make to achieve human rights for all and sustainable development.
“Achieving such results, of which the benefits would be reaped by all for generations to come, would win the support of the people fair and square,” she said.

Sophal Ear, associate professor at Occidental College in the United States and author of Aid Dependence in Cambodia, said he preferred to call it a “colour movement” instead of a “colour revolution.”

He said colour movements use demonstrations, strikes and protests to rise against governments that are illegitimate.

“A colour movement happens because the rights of the people have been suppressed for decades and the people have had enough,” he said. “They want change.”

Sophal said colour revolutions or colour movements have good intentions to right the wrongs in society and that the government does not need to be afraid of such movements.

“Such colour movements bring accountability and democracy, which all governments should welcome,” he said. “When you have cancer, you have to get rid of it.”

Nevertheless, government officials have viewed a colour revolution as an illegitimate movement that could cause catastrophic consequences for Cambodia and thus needs to be prevented at all costs.

Sok Eysan, Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) spokesman, said a colour revolution is not democratic in nature and, therefore, is an illegal movement.

“As you know, a colour revolution does not follow the path of democracy,” he said. “It is in violation of the law and in violation of democratic principles.”

Eysan explained that any change in government needs to go through a democratic process and through an election, in order to choose people’s representatives who are then appointed to lead the country.

“However, a colour revolution does not follow this process,” he said. “It chooses a shortcut instead, meaning it is a coup to seize power.”

The CPP spokesman added: “A colour revolution is any action that bypasses the democratic principle and the rule of law, as well as bypassing the will of the people.”

Eysan said a colour revolution could have serious negative consequences and create insecurity and catastrophe in Cambodian society.
“People will live in misery without peace and political stability,” he said. “If there is [a colour revolution], there will be no development or improvement of people’s living standards.”

Kin Phea, director-general of the International Relations Institute of Cambodia at the Royal Academy of Cambodia, agreed with the CPP spokesman that Cambodia has to do what it can to prevent a colour revolution.

Phea said the role of the armed forces was important in preventing a colour revolution from happening in the country.

“They have an important duty to guarantee peace and national stability,” he said.

However, Phea added, there are no signs that such a colour revolution is going to happen in Cambodia any time in the near future.

“But, it may happen eventually if we don’t have any strategy to prevent it,” he cautioned.

He said colour revolutions that have occurred around the world usually involve outside super powers.

“They might have provided support in terms of strategies, methodologies or some kind of financial assistance,” Phea said.

Therefore, he said, the appeal by the RCAF was timely and necessary to curb any possible colour revolution from taking place in Cambodia.

“It is nothing wrong,” he said. “It is better than allowing it to happen, then trying to crack it down and leading to a big turmoil in the future.”

Phea said a colour revolution movement intends to change a regime and leadership in a country, which leads to the risks of losing national stability, security and peace.

“It can cause various catastrophes and plunge [a country] into civil war,” he said. “It is also a factor that hinders development in that given country, as foreign investors don’t dare to come to do business. In the end, the country will descend into poverty.”

Phea gave the example of the colour revolution that had happened in some countries in the Middle East, that reaped devastating consequences.

“These countries cannot stand up on their feet again,” he said. “Apart from national division that has become deeper with worsening civil war, the people don’t even have enough food to eat, let alone freedoms, rights and democracy that the colour revolution movement used as a label for some people to fall victim to.”
Meanwhile, ordinary Cambodians also shared different views on the consequences of a colour revolution and how the government can avoid such a revolutionary movement.

Venerable Try Thaney, a 28-year-old Buddhist monk and a media student at Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia, said to avoid an eventual colour revolution the government needs to try and fulfil what it promised to the Cambodian people during the election campaign days.

“The government has to take action to respond to the needs of the people, both in the urban and rural areas,” he said. “As a result, a colour revolution will not happen in Cambodia if government can fulfill the interests of the voters.”

Venerable Thaney said the government might want to follow Buddhist teachings that brought non-violence and peace to the country.

“You should treat people the same way you want to be treated,” he explained.

Likewise, 42-year-old former land dealer Prom Vimean said victims of social injustice would resort to anything, including a colour revolution, if there were no solutions to their problems.

“The main social issue in Cambodia is land disputes and land grabbing by powerful people,” Vimean said. “When the price of land increased, powerful businesses often tried to take land from villagers.”

He said it is easy for the government to prevent any possible colour revolution by healing all the social ills.

“If people think they have justice and are living peacefully, they will never dream about a colour revolution,” he said.

Kaing Chheang Korn, a 49-year-old school teacher, said she feared that a colour revolution could lead Cambodia to repeat the tragic past.

“We had a civil war for more than 20 years, so we don’t want to see more turmoil happening in Cambodia,” she said. “My father was killed during the war when I was very small.”

Details: https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50816895/colour-revolution-a-real-threat-or-just-an-illusion/?fbclid=IwAR2aGELPVhMEIl9ojISdLZ_oh5QfVUmTHhvPzW-zEhm3YxZsdmNrp24f4Ng