

Significant Breakthroughs for Cambodia in 2023

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2023 was the year that Cambodia celebrated her achievements on multiple fronts, ranging from hosting the 32nd SEA Games and the 12th ASEAN Para Games—which significantly elevated Cambodia’s profile to the world stage and provided a platform to showcase its progress and the ongoing efforts toward restoration and development—to the success of 2023 National Assembly Election for the 7th Legislature—which resulted in the highest voter turnouts and the formation of a youthful new cabinet, led by Samdech Thipadei Hun Manet, as the Prime Minister, representing Cambodia’s political maturity.

32nd SEA Games and 12th ASEAN Para Games

In 2023, Cambodia hosted two major regional sport events, namely the 32nd Southeast Asian Games and the 12th ASEAN Para Games. As the Kingdom has enjoyed full peace and social progress, the motto “Sports Live in Peace” was an inspiration to reflect on the Kingdom’s remarkable journey. This regional multi-sport event received 6,210 athletes from the 11 members of the Southeast Asian Games Federation to compete in the spirit of sportsmanship. Cambodian athletes won a total of 282 medals in the SEA Games, including 81 gold, 74 silver, and 127 bronze medals, while Cambodia's ASEAN Para Games team won a total of 71 medals, with 9 gold, 18 silver, and 44 bronze medals.

The SEA Games and the ASEAN Para Games 2023 stretched beyond the games. Hosting these major regional events is a pivotal moment for Cambodia. Not only did it provide a good public

exposure of Cambodia to the international stage and attract international tourists, but it also provided an opportunity to display Cambodia’s cultural richness, sportsmanship, and the nation's capability in organizing such large-scale gatherings. It also signified a turning point of global perception, demonstrating the country's progress, development, and commitment toward regional cooperation and sportsmanship. Such events leave a lasting legacy, not just in sporting achievements but also in infrastructure development, cultural exchange, people-to-people connectivity, and fostering friendly international relations.

General Election 2023

Shortly after the regional’s commitment in hosting the 32nd Southeast Asian Games and the 12th ASEAN Para Games was completed, Cambodia had to carry on with its domestic duty, which was the National Assembly Election for the 7th Legislature. On July 23, Cambodia held a polling day for the election of the members of the National Assembly for the 7th Legislature with 9,710,645 registered voters and 8,214,430 voter turnouts, equivalent to 84.58%—the highest voter turnouts, compared to 69.61% in the 2013 National Election, 83.02% in the 2018 National Election, and 80.32% in the Communal Election 2022. The official result of the election was announced by the National Election Committee on 05 August, resulting in Cambodia People Party (CPP) winning 120 seats with 6,398,311 votes and the FUNCINPEC party winning 5 seats with 716,490 votes.

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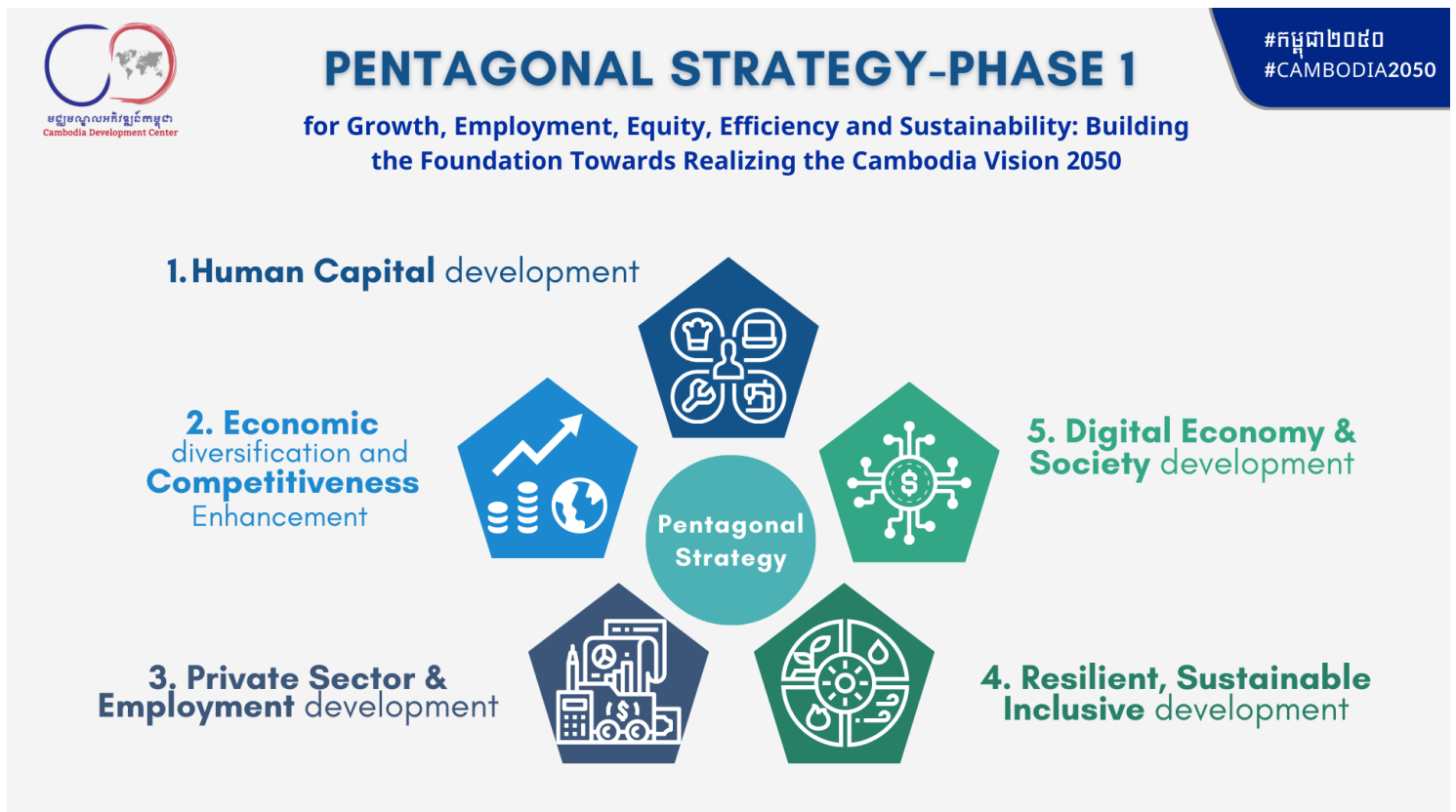
Following the result of the election, on 11 August, former Prime Minister Samdech Techno Hun Sen announced his decision to step down from the position of prime minister and the winning party CPP elected Hun Manet to be the PM for the 7th legislature of government. The government under the leadership of Samdech Thipadei Hun Manet as the Prime Minister is perceived to be youthful and progressive as most of the ministers are between the age of 38-45 and the new PM has promised a number of reforms that will seek to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of the government.

On 22 August 2023, Samdech Sapheathika Thipadei Khoun Sudary was elected by the members of the parliament to be the President of the National Assembly for the 7th Legislature, making her the first woman to hold this top position for the first time in Cambodia’s history.

❖ **100 Days Mission**

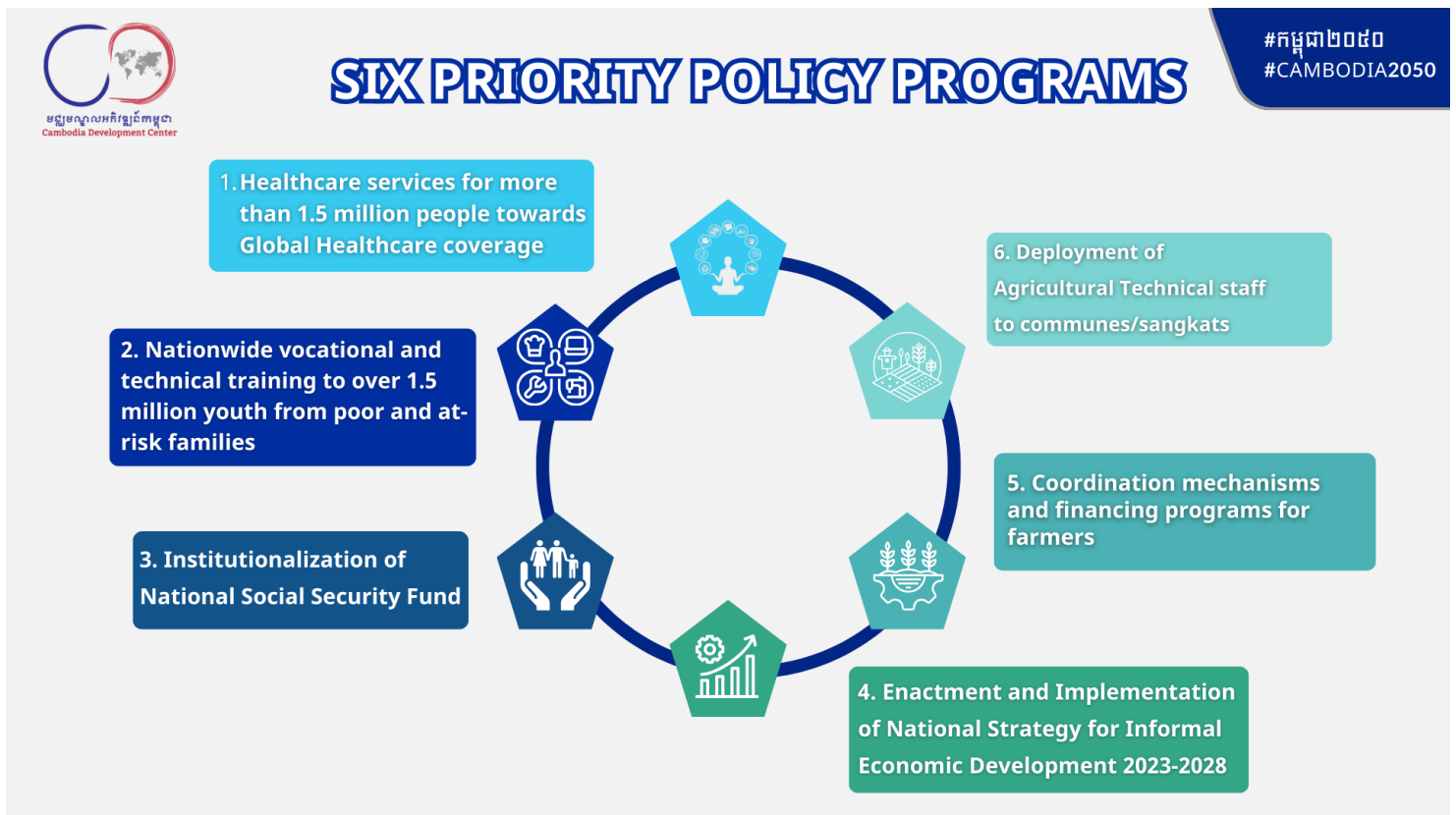
On August 24, 2023, the Council of Ministers for the Seventh Legislature of the National Assembly convened the first Plenary Session. Two important documents were unveiled, namely the “Pentagonal Strategy-Phase 1 for Growth, Employment, Equity, Efficiency and Sustainability: Building the Foundation Towards Realizing the Cambodia Vision 2050” (Figure 1) and the “Political Platform of the Royal Government of Cambodia of the Seventh Legislature of the National Assembly for Nation Building and Defense 2023-2028”. Samdech Thipadei also stressed that the government would start the implementation of the Six Priority Policy Programs (Figure 2) by the end of 2023. To date, all Six Priority Programs have been rolled out one after another.

Figure 1: Infographic Summary of Pentagonal Strategy–Phase 1



Source: Cambodia Development Center

Figure 2: Infographic Summary of the Six Priority Policy Programs to be rolled out by 2023



Source: Cambodia Development Center

Diplomatic Front

Cambodia’s diplomacy, with the new government, also elevates to a new level. The first diplomatic debut of Samdech Thipadei as the prime minister of Cambodia was the participation in the 43rd ASEAN Summit hosted by Indonesia, making him the youngest leader of this regional bloc. Since then, he continuously embarked on his diplomatic voyage on regional and international level, where he was received warmly by world leaders, including at the China-ASEAN Expo, the 3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, the 78th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the ASEAN-Gulf Cooperation Council, and the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan friendship and cooperation.

Domestically, Samdech Thipadei received the Prime Minister of Thailand, His Excellency Srettha Thavisin, both of whom are newly elected prime

ministers. The two sides stressed their willingness to promote ties on the notion of good neighborliness, friendship and multifaceted cooperation for mutual benefits, following their pledge to increase bilateral trade to USD 15 billion by 2025 (MFA.IC, 2023a). Samdech Thipadei also led his high-level delegation for his first official visit to Vietnam. During the visit, Samdech Thipadei and the Prime Minister of Vietnam, His Excellency Pham Minh Chinh, yielded their commitment to enhance cooperation on multiple fronts. Notably, the two leaders vowed to increase the trade tie to USD 20 billion in the near future (MFA.IC, 2023b). These trips have cemented Cambodia's global footprint and tangible gains. Consequently, Cambodia and its developing partners inked more than 20 bilateral cooperation documents. Secondly, it underlines Cambodia’s commitment to continuously contribute to the international efforts in promoting a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region and the globe, building on independency,

neutrality, rule of law, mutual respect, and adhering to the principles of international law. Ultimately, it emphasizes Cambodia's foreign policy that leans toward a delicate and gentle diplomacy, by engaging strategically and comprehensively to strengthen old friendships and expand new friendships, regionally and globally.

Economic Outlook

On the economic front, Cambodia's economic outlook is steady and resilient despite the uncertain global economy. According to the Economic and Finance Bulletin published by the Ministry of Economy and Finance, Cambodia's economic growth projection is at 5.6% in 2023 higher than the 2022 projection. This growth is largely owed to the steady growth in non-garment manufacturing which heavily supports the exports, the increase in infrastructure development projects, and the significant jump in the tourism industry. On trade aspect, according to 2023 Annual Report of the Ministry of Commerce, as of November, the two-way trade volume between Cambodia and the international market reached USD 43.52 billion, of which exports contributed USD 21 billion, an increase of 4.08%, compared to the same period in 2022 (MEF, 2023a). Remarkably, Cambodia's bilateral trade volume with the signatory countries of RCEP is worth USD 26.47 billion, with exports valued at USD 7.21 billion, a 27.9% increase. RCEP is a significant market for Cambodia as it has contributed more than 61.06% to Cambodia's total trade volume. Cambodia's main exports include garments worth USD 7.11 billion, footwear worth USD 1.2 billion, bags worth USD 1.47 billion and other textiles worth USD 118 million. USD 2.94 billion in electronics and components and USD 399 billion in bicycles. In the first 9 months of 2023, Cambodia received 1.3 million international tourists, a 77.5% year-on-year increase. In the summary of the draft Law on Financial Management for 2024 by MEF (2023b), Cambodia's economic prospect for 2024 is expected to thrive at a 6.6% annual growth rate, bringing its GDP to roughly 142.96

trillion riels (approximately USD 34.52 billion) as the GDP per capita is expected to increase to USD 2,071, up from USD 1,917 in 2023. Key economic sectors are predominantly driving the upward growth trend. The Industrial sector is projected to increase by 8.5%, up from 5% in 2023, primarily due to the projected revival of garment sub-sector. The service sector is expected growth by 6.9%, driven by domestic recovery, particularly in hotels and restaurants, which support associated sectors such as retail and transportation. Meanwhile, agriculture is expected to rise by 1.1% in 2024, up from 0.9% in 2023.

2023 marked as the year of rejuvenation, transformative and a milestone for Cambodia. As the country is closing her chapters in 2023 and marches toward 2024, it is without doubt that the new year will be the new year of prosperity, resilience, more initiatives and growth. With that being said, there are a number of expectations—centered around Cambodia—to keep an eye on in 2024. Those major events include the Senate Election for the 5th Legislature, the 4th Election of Capital, Provincial, Municipal, District and Khan Councils, the 2nd Triennial Review for Cambodia's LDCs graduation status, and the launch of National Strategy for Development Policy 2024-2028.

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ព្យួនជ្រុំ-និងពង្រីកកិច្ចសហប្រតិបត្តិក-ល-គ្រប់វិស័យ-
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