

For Small Cambodia, a Prescription of Neutrality

Men Kimseng, VOA Khmer | Washington, D.C, Thursday, 30 September 2010

Cambodia stands to benefit from the growing interest from major powers like the US and China, but to do that, it must remain neutral, a leading Cambodian analyst said Monday.

“For a small country like Cambodia, we have to adhere to a neutral foreign policy,” Chheang Vannarith, executive director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, said, as a guest on “Hello VOA.”

“Cambodia should not lean toward any side, so that it can absorb the benefits from both the US and China,” he said. “We cannot take one or the other.”

While staying neutral can be a challenge, he said, Cambodia can benefit from the backing of Asean. The US has shown interest in the region as a whole, he said, and the Southeast Asian states should stick together.

“Asean should act as one voice, so it can put Asean in the middle way,” he said. “If Asean is weak, Asean can be split up, with one bloc of Asean supporting the US and another going to China. With this scenario, I don't think our region can maintain stability and development.”

The US has begun reaching out toward Asean, whose leaders met with President Barack Obama last week. Meanwhile, Cambodia has maintained a strong relationship with China, which has proved a major investor and donor.

Chheang Vannarith said Cambodia and Asean both must strengthen their human rights records to make the best of US relations.