

# Voters Mob Polling

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SIEM REAP

As thunder crashed and rain poured down, a handful of villagers came to the polling office at Phum Thanal in Siem Reap province to cast their ballot. Some had walked as far as six kilometers just to have a say in the country's future. Others had come by bicycle or motorbike. But despite earlier fears of violence and intimidation, all seemed happy at the opportunity to choose their future government.

"I am very happy that this election is free and fair," said one rice farmer who had come from the small village of Angcha, four kilometers from Siem Reap. "The people here are not afraid."

In the nearby polling area opposite the market place, voters even volunteered the name of the parties they had voted for, although journalists had been banned from asking such sensitive questions.

U.N. electoral observers and military officials claimed that the election had so far been a resounding success, with more than 70 percent of registered voters going to the polls in the first three of a total six days of voting. They also said that while 60 percent of Siem Reap province is still controlled by the Khmer Rouge, 85 percent of the province's population remain in areas controlled by government soldiers.

"The result has turned out better than anyone could have imagined," said David Roberts, an in-

ternational poll station observer (IPSO) stationed in Siem Reap. "Maybe UNTAC over-exaggerated the problems."

Others point out that despite the May 3 attack on Siem Reap town, in which nine Khmer Rouge soldiers were reportedly killed, the people have not only put aside their fears about voting, but have actually welcomed it.

More than 86 polling stations are dotted around the province and despite some complaints by the Cambodian People's Party, election officials have to date reported no evidence of intimidation.

But for all the hope inspired by the elections, the situation in Siem Reap remains tense, with fear of the Khmer Rouge still strong amongst the people and even the slightest rumor of attack sending the town into paroxysms of fear.

In nearby Tonle Sap, scene of an earlier massacre of Vietnamese settlers, villagers cluster nervously among the rickety wooden buildings that front the lake, while the police station sits abandoned. Only a lone government soldier was in evidence and he advised journalists to leave because Khmer Rouge were all around.

Even in Phum Thanal polling station near Siem Reap, as the last voters filtered in at 4:00 in the afternoon the sound of shelling could be heard in the distance, a poignant reminder of the uncertainties that still plague this troubled country.