

Subject: To Mr. Michael Hayes--A Letter for Publication  
Date: 4/13/99 3:46 AM  
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From: Bernard Krisher, bernie@media.mit.edu  
To: Michael.pppost@bigpond.com.kh  
editor.pppost@bigpond.com.kh

Tokyo, April 13, 1999

I would like to request that you publish this letter in your newspaper in its entirety in your next issue.

Best regards,

Bernard Krisher

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Dear editor:

As a reader of the Phnom Penh Post since its inception, when it was a credible newspaper, I was taken aback upon reading your article about the Sihanouk Hospital--Center of Hope, which I founded and of which I am chairman, that so few of the facts you cited resemble the reality.

In the very first paragraph you state that the hospital is under fire for its "alleged refusal to abide by an agreement with the Ministry of Health over its tenure." The tenure is in fact indefinite. One of the provisions which enabled me to establish the hospital was my assurance that we would not end such support abruptly. The agreement with the Ministry of Health clearly states that my non-profit private family foundation, Japan Relief for Cambodia (named so because my wife is Japanese), would guarantee to operate the hospital for three years under our own and friends' funding and thereafter through donations and support solicited by me in Japan and elsewhere.

The only mention of three years refers to the guaranteed source of funding by JRfC, not a turnover of management. In the process of your reporting I sent a letter to Michael Hayes, the editor of the Phnom Penh Post suggesting I be contacted for comment before you run this story but Sarah Stephens, who wrote the story, did not contact me.

It should have been easy for her to avoid her false assumptions and confirm the agreement by asking any of the signatories--myself or the State Secretary of the Ministry of Health or the vice governor of Phnom Penh to provide you copies of the documents which are a public record. You would then not have had to rely on your only source, Vira Avaloka, whom you describe as a Buddhist monk who occasionally works at the Municipal Hospital. Mr. Avaloka has an agenda to damage our institution which provides free health care and free pharmaceuticals to some 300 to 500 destitute out- and in-patients a day. Your source has not only repeatedly harassed the hospital staff and physically interfered with their work by shouting at them on our grounds but is also sending letters to our donors overseas aimed at halting their support of the hospital.

There never was nor is there any plan to turn this hospital over to The Municipal Hospital nor to any other entity as I am certain Dr. Beate Richner has no such plans either for Kantha Bopha. When I agreed in 1994 (you incorrectly state 1996) to establish this hospital, which is operated by the selfless, skilled team of volunteer medical specialists from Hope Worldwide, I was offered free government land by then-Foreign Minister

Prince Sirivudh and First Prime Minister Prince Ranariddh and also by the city of Phnom Penh. I opted for the city land because I believed it would be less bureaucratic to deal with a local than the central government. There was much empty land on the site of the Municipal Hospital and I was offered as much as I needed, so I accepted a very small plot. There was no discussion that our hospital would in any way be linked to the Municipal Hospital but as good neighbors we have provided them with equipment, pharmaceuticals as well as paid to build a fence for them and contributed to other improvements. And we shall continue to do so. Furthermore, our staff cooperates with them on a matter of other issues and the relationship between our doctors and theirs is good.

In your article you also failed to refer to our hospital by its correct name: The Sihanouk Hospital--Center of Hope. It is not the Sihanouk Center of Hope. We are an autonomous hospital. The only identifiable source for the rest of the article is the same expat monk. Not a single charge or quote is attributed by name to either a patient or hospital employee; or to a Municipal Hospital, city or health ministry official except to confirm there had been only one formal complaint to the ministry. That would hardly justify your description that our hospital was "under fire."

If you would provide the space I would be pleased to add more to this letter but I think it suffices to question the credibility of your single attributed source. The lack of attributed quotes to some of the charges, which therefore cannot be challenged, smack of McCarthyism and the failure to check some important facts with available documents would lead an intelligent reader to conclude that this story has little substance.

Sincerely yours,

Bernard Krisher  
Chairman  
Sihanouk Hospital--Center of Hope

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