

**FAX MESSAGE**

DATE: October 4, 1995
TO: Mr. Michael Hayes
COMPANY: Phnom Penh Post
FAX NO.: 85523-26568

FROM: Janet Cheung
COMPANY: The Freedom Forum Asian Center
FAX NO: 852-2598-8818
TELEPHONE NO: 852-2596-0018

PAGES: .1.... (including cover sheet)

Dear Mr. Hayes:

Our headoffice in Arlington would like to have some input from you to put in the free speech column for our Forum News Weekly. Could you please write 300 to 400 words summarizing the state of the press in Cambodia? The time is quite tight and they would like to have it by this Thursday, their time. Please see if you can fax it to me at (852)2598-8818 as soon as you can. Thank you.

I am looking forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'JC' or 'Janet Cheung', written over a horizontal line.

Janet Cheung
The Freedom Forum Asian Center

Sent
3:17 5 OCT '95

2598-8818

To: Janet Cheung, Freedom Forum,
Fax: 852-2598-8818
From: Michael Hayes
Date: October 5, 1995

EDIT AS YOU SEE FIT:

by Michael Hayes, Publisher, Phnom Penh Post

Since the arrival of the United Nations in 1992 and the commitment, via the Paris Peace Accords, of the four Cambodian factions to the principles of a multi-party liberal democracy, Cambodia's press has experienced a complete transformation in favor of press freedoms and openness.

Prior to July 10, 1992 when the Phnom Penh Post was established, there were no independent sources of print information. Since this date, more than 52 newspapers, news bulletins and journals have been established, so that at present there are about 45 Khmer language publications, five English-language newspapers, two in French and one newspaper in Chinese.

However, since the promulgation of a new Constitution in September 1993, and the departure of the United Nations peacekeeping forces, there has been a gradual reversal in the new government's willingness to tolerate complete press freedom.

Since March, 1994 a number of events have highlighted the growing climate of fear concerning this retrenchment. Over the last 18 months two editors and one journalist from papers who were critical of government officials and policies have been killed in mysterious circumstances. Seven newspapers have been shut down either temporarily or permanently by the government. Two papers have had grenades thrown at their offices, and two papers closed down after receiving death threats. Five editors have been prosecuted and convicted by the government of a variety of offenses including "spreading disinformation", creating instability" or "use of offensive language."

My own paper had a complaint filed against it in March of this year for spreading "disinformation". Of note, this was the first time the government had brought charges against a paper for a news article as opposed to "an opinion piece." In the last month, primarily as a result of the expressions of concern voiced by editorials, human rights groups, foreign governments, and His Majesty King Sihanouk, the government seems to have decided not to pursue the case. It seems clear that the Cambodian government realised that to push the case further would only result in more bad press.

Overall, given Article 12 in the new Cambodian press law which makes it a crime to write anything which "endangers national security or affects political stability" a climate of fear remains in the Cambodian press community. Journalists have become increasingly hesitant to cover sensitive issues or to express even the most benign opinion.

While newspapers still exist which carry articles critical of the government, there is a sense among observers of the press that efforts by the government to throttle these publications will continue. What is also clear is that in the absence of expressions of concern by those institutions who

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monitor press freedoms, it is likely that the continued crackdown of the press in Cambodia will result in the further closure of papers here.

END ALL