

The Year in Cambodia: April 2007 to April 2008

Table of Contents

- *The Year in Cambodian Politics*
 - Introduction p. 2
 - Reform is the buzzword p. 2
 - Prime Minister Hun Sen and the CPP p. 3
 - The Sam Rainsy Party p. 3
 - Funcinpec p. 3
 - Prince Norodom Ranariddh p. 3
 - Jumping Ship p. 4
 - Newspaper Changes Political View p. 4
 - Foul Play p. 4
- *The Year in Human Rights*
 - Introduction p. 5
 - Essential Freedoms p. 5
 - Land p. 6
 - Courts p. 7
 - Religious Freedom p. 7
 - Born Samnang and Sok Sam Oeun p. 8
 - Hok Lundy/TIP p. 8
 - Prisons p. 8
 - Assassinations p. 9
 - Khmer Rouge Tribunal p. 9
- *The Year in Cambodia's Economy*
 - Introduction p. 11
 - Investment p. 11
 - Banking p. 12
 - Garments p. 13
 - Oil p. 14
 - Corruption p. 14
- *The Year in Culture*
 - Introduction p. 16
 - Preah Vichear Temple p. 16
 - Government Bans Marriages to Foreigners p. 16
 - Visiting International Celebrities p. 17
 - Art Festival p. 17
 - Phnom Penh's Landscape p. 17
 - Sports p. 17
 - Water Festival p. 18
 - Media Shake Up p. 18
 - Information Technology p. 18
 - Conjugal Matters p. 19
 - Music Festival p. 19
 - National Museum p. 19

The Year in Politics

By the end of the Cambodian calendar year the country's political scene showed signs that it was heating up for July's parliamentary elections.

Since the commune election at the beginning of April 2007, there has been continuous maneuvering among the Sam Rainsy Party, the Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP) and the newly formed Human Rights Party, which was officially launched by former Cambodian Center for Human Rights President Kem Sokha in July.

However, the country witnessed many defections from the SRP and Funcinpec to the ruling CPP. Laws were passed in the National Assembly at an unprecedented pace, a political achievement that will no doubt be used by the CPP while campaigning for the upcoming election.

Prince Norodom Ranariddh, president of the NRP, still hasn't returned to the country since being convicted in a breach of trust case in March 2007, where he was sentenced to 18 months in prison. Despite his absence, his party still managed to actively participate in many of the political happenings of the year.

The country's difficulties with skyrocketing inflation have joined Cambodia's continuing flood of land disputes on the list of key issues to be debated in the lead-up to the national elections.

§ Reform is the Buzzword

Having made the most comprehensive reforms to its internal structure, the SRP completed a process in 2007 that culminated in intra-party elections at the commune, district, provincial and national levels. Reform was also the buzzword of choice for Funcinpec officials after suffering from the royalist split and a dismal showing at the commune elections. Even the CPP has made internal adjustments, according to party officials.

Sam Rainsy, president of the SRP, has claimed that the internal reforms were meant to appeal to supporters by demonstrating to them their ability to actively participate in the party. The reforms were also meant to inspire leadership within the party to respond more closely to the needs of grassroots party members by making their jobs dependent on keeping supporters and their votes.

Sam Rainsy said that his party's strong performance in the commune elections, where the SRP doubled the number of commune councilor seats it collected in 2002, were a direct result of the internal reforms. Despite the party's reforms, the SRP appears to be open to possible partnership with the CPP. In an unprecedented statement in August, Sam Rainsy said that there were scenarios following the 2008 national election in which the SRP would consider forming a coalition government with its long-time arch enemy, the CPP. In November, Sam Rainsy and Prime Minister Hun Sen chatted at length in public at Phnom Penh International Airport, an occurrence few have witnessed in recent memory. The subject of their conversation was Prince Ranariddh, who had apparently been looking to negotiate with the CPP.

Even the ruling CPP claimed it had made minor reforms in its candidate selection process for the 2008 election, transferring the final say on candidates to provincial party committees instead of from the national authority. Before the 2003 elections, CPP provincial committees put forth a list of potential candidates to the party's commanding permanent committee, which would then select the final candidates and their order on the ballot list. However, for this year's election, the CPP

national authority claimed it would select the potential candidates and let provincial committees finalize the list. Whether this will actually happen remains to be seen.

Suffering from a dreary showing in the commune elections and the ever-growing rift between royalist supporters, Funcinpec indicated that it too was looking to change things around in the hopes of keeping at least some footing in the 123-seat National Assembly where it currently holds 26 seats. According to Funcinpec Secretary-General Nhiek Bun Chhay, party representatives from the village, commune and district levels will vote to create the election candidate lists for the 2008 poll. However, the names selected by supporters must still be weighed by Funcinpec's steering committee, which will take into consideration a candidate's seniority, as well as the time and money he or she has give to the party.

§ Prime Minister Hun Sen and the CPP

The CPP remains the nation's most likely choice in the upcoming national elections. Prime Minister Hun Sen continued to make strong, and what some considered threatening, speeches throughout the year regarding the possibility of his removal as the country's leader.

Some observers accused the prime minister of campaigning for the national election as early as June 4, when Hun Sen took credit for the explosion in land prices during his reign as the country's leader, but made an ominous warning that without his leadership, Cambodia would become politically unstable and the real estate market would plummet. It was a warning that was repeated by the prime minister throughout the year. "Now we have stability, but if a new leader replaces Hun Sen, one hectare of land that costs \$2 million will decline to only \$500 per hectare," he said in June. "The land prices will decline immediately if you choose the wrong leaders who don't have policies for stability," he added. The CPP itself made very few administrative changes within the party during the year.

§ The Sam Rainsy Party

The SRP's strong grassroots movement hit a snag in March when an apparent riff arose between the party and one of its long-time backers—the unions. On April 6 2008, the SRP carried through on its promise to hold a "massive" anti-inflation demonstration, but only about one-tenth of the expected 5,000 participants showed up and was made up almost entirely of men. Noticeably absent were members of the Cambodian Confederation of Unions, which includes the Free Trade Union led by Chea Mony. CCU President Rong Chhun claimed that his union did not show in an effort to remain neutral, particularly after receiving complaints from the international community concerning Cambodian unions' ties to political parties. However, observers believe that the unions have grown dissatisfied with the SRP, especially with the party's Secretary-General Eng Chhay Eang.

§ Funcinpec

Funcinpec announced that Princess Norodom Arunrasme, Prince Ranariddh's half sister, would head the party as its candidate for the upcoming election at its annual party congress in Phnom Penh. On the one hand, the choice of Princess Arunrasme is a singularly progressive one, making Funcinpec the first to select a woman as candidate for prime minister. However, it also indicated that the window for Prince Ranariddh to return to the party had closed. With the now NRP president out of the picture, it seems a near certainty that Funcinpec, once a powerful political force, will most certainly take a beating at the polls in July.

The party has steadily lost ground in each successive national election since being the victor in the 1993 elections. Despite being clearly biased, the SRP has stated that Funcinpec probably won't win a single seat in the National Assembly in July.

§ Prince Norodom Ranariddh

Prince Norodom Ranariddh had what could be considered politically a watershed year—an impressive, but not entirely positive feat for a man who has not been in Cambodia since Jan 2007. Since his breach of trust conviction in March 2007, where he was sentenced to 18 months in prison over the sale of Funcinpec headquarters, the prince has divided his time between France and Malaysia, but he and his NRP still managed to stay politically active. Following the commune election, the SRP called for a "Democratic Movement" to take on the CPP in 2008. Initially the prince appeared to approve of the idea, but the plan soon fizzled out. Ranariddh revived the idea himself in October, pushing for what he referred to as a mass movement of democrats and nationalists, but was then rejected by the SRP. Officials from the prince's former party, Funcinpec, seemed to vacillate weekly on whether they wanted the prince to return as the party's leader. Ultimately, however, the party rejected the prince in favor of his half-sister Princess Norodom Arunrasmeay as the party's candidate.

§ Jumping Ship

There was a wave of defections during the year from both the SRP and Funcinpec to the ruling CPP.

In February SRP founding member Lon Phon, who is also a member of the party's board of directors said that he had joined the CPP. A week earlier SRP lawmaker Ngor Sovann defected to the ruling party and claimed that out of 30 SRP officials in Svay Rieng province, 17 had defected to the CPP and nine had retired from politics all together. The SRP also announced in February that its party received the resignations of two members of the SRP's Board of Directors, Ly Chhoung and Kang Mao, along with SRP special envoy to Stung Treng province, Mom Bunthorn and Yin Soheat, deputy director of the party's legal and human rights section. SRP Secretary-General Eng Chhay Eang put a spin on the defections by stating that he was proud that his party had built up such a high level of human resources that the CPP now "needs to take from them."

A month earlier, Funcinpec announced the loss of several senior party leaders to the CPP. This list includes: Minister of Women's Affairs Ing Kantha Phavi; Minister of Cults and Religion Khun Haing; Finance Ministry Secretary of State Chea Peng and his wife Senator Khloth Tongphka. Funcinpec First Deputy President Lu Laysreng said that he viewed the defections as a betrayal by the CPP, which is still Funcinpec's senior partner in the government.

Additionally, the government removed Funcinpec's popular Tourism Minister Lay Prohas in May claiming that it was a standard reshuffle. CPP Tourism Ministry Secretary of State Thong Khon was appointed as Lay Prohas' replacement.

§ Newspaper Changes Political View

Defections during the year did not only come by way of political leaders. In March Hun Sen announced that Thach Keth, publisher of the SRP-affiliated newspaper Sralanh Khmer and an SRP board member, had defected to the CPP. A week later the Sralanh Khmer displayed its new colors by attacking three opposition political parties and praising the CPP on the front page.

Thach Keth said that he decided to run pieces critical of the SRP, the NRP and the HRP in response to their criticism of his defection.

§ Foul Play

The Committee for Free and Fair Elections claimed in March that reported cases of intimidation surrounding the 2007 commune elections were roughly twice as high as in 2002. Comfrel's study reported 29 cases of intimidation or physical threats against SRP activists, 12 against the NRP and six against the HRP, but none for the CPP.

In March, SRP lawmaker Ho Vann was beaten when about 10 security guards in Phnom Penh's Russei Keo district tried to prevent him from erecting a large SRP sign. The district's deputy governor, Chan Sovuth, appeared in one of photograph taken during the incident wearing a CPP hat.

Human Rights

It was difficult to say what noticeable advances in personal liberties may have occurred in Cambodia in the period under review, however sections of Cambodia's urban population did appear to enjoy greater freedom of movement and security in property as wealth spread to some small but growing sections of the country. Yet in its fundamentals the situation improved little, as has been the case for several years. At its highest levels Cambodia continues to be ruled in an informal manner by the same generation of leaders who took power during a war in 1979 and who achieved peace and stability by negotiating surrenders and defections through the reciprocal exchanges of territory and political or commercial dominion. Therefore, even today the power structure entails a degree of personal autonomy for most of its actors and, as a post-conflict society, Cambodia has had little success in becoming a nation of laws and not of men or in adhering to principles and institutions when these are at odds with personal interests.

As in previous years, the US State Department offered the broadest assessment in its annual report released in March: "The governments' human rights record remained poor [...]. [S]ecurity forces committed extrajudicial killings and acted with impunity. There was little political will to address the failure by government authorities to adhere to the rule of law. [...] Corruption was endemic and extended throughout all segments of society." In 2007 and early 2008, the Cambodian government began more frequently and actively responding to its human rights critics via the print and broadcast media. This appeared principally to be the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, which issued statements and organized events to contradict and even to mollify its critics. Reacting to the State Department's 2007 report on human rights practices in Cambodia, part of the Department's global accounting of human rights issued annually since 1977, the Foreign Ministry said in a March 13 statement that the US had relied too heavily on the work of anti-government NGOs.

"[W]e have found that many of the accusations contained in this report do not even exist or are simply over exaggerated [...]. We certainly recognize that human rights in Cambodia are not perfect. But is there any perfect human rights situation anywhere in the world?" the Foreign Ministry statement said. "Cambodia fully does not believe that the country report...will ever receive a good mark unless a Cambodian government has 'affectionate' relations with the United States of America."

§ Essential Freedoms

In 2007, the ice grew thinner and threatened to crack underneath Yash Ghai, the UN Secretary-General's fourth Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia, who was appointed in November 2005 and who continued his unalloyed criticism of Cambodia's government and state institutions.

A growing trend among member states at the UN's Human Rights Council in Geneva appeared ready to end the practice of dispatching human rights envoys to specific countries as they dislike seeing individual countries singled out for criticism that may later be directed at them.

The Cambodia mandate is up for review in September and, fearing that a majority could be forming to end it, both Kek Galabru, president of the Cambodian rights group Licadho, and Thun Saray, president of Adhoc, another local rights group, traveled to Geneva to lobby in favor of maintaining the mandate, which is separate from the mandate of the office holder, who is named by the Secretary-General. Cambodia has, since the late 1990s, expressed the desire to end international human rights scrutiny, arguing as early as 1997, the year of the famous coup in

which 2nd Prime Minister Hun Sen ousted 1st Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh amid street battles and a spate of extrajudicial killings, that it had made sufficient progress and that its reputation was harmed by the presence both of a rights envoy and by a country office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The presence of both resulted from the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements, in which Cambodia's warring factions (with the exception of the Khmer Rouge) agreed to lay down their arms. In December, Cambodia's ambassador to Switzerland Sea Kosal wrote to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon saying Cambodia had been "deeply upset with [Ghai's] aggressive behavior" and that Cambodia's respect for human rights was "better than many countries in the region where there are no special representatives on human rights."

Speaking to the Human Rights Council in June, Ghai said Cambodia had stacked the deck against the disadvantaged. "The government tilts in favor of business companies whenever their interests clash with the interests of rural or urban people.... A wealthy and powerful social class has emerged on the back of the state—through the exploitation of the people and the country's resources," he said. Then the ambassador to Switzerland, Chheang Vun delivered an angry rebuttal, saying Cambodia was giving the UN formal notice that it no longer accepted Yash Ghai's mandate and called on Secretary-General Ban to reconsider Ghai's nomination. At the premier's instruction, pro-government broadcasters began to give extensive airtime to coverage of post-election unrest in Ghai's native Kenya. In his third report to the Human Rights Council, Ghai said Cambodia was a country 'marked by the absence of the rule of law' where a ruling elite violate the law in the process of seeking greater wealth and sometimes control a powerless majority through fear. Ghai wrote: "Movement of those who struggle against oppression is controlled. The desire of people to assemble freely is seen as dangerous, and the freedom of expression has to be curtailed [...]. Above all, people have to be taught to fear the rulers, by their caprice and unpredictability, and especially brute force." In delivering the report to the Council, Ghai said lack of respect for human rights was becoming a concern for national security. "The developments I have outlined are causing fresh conflicts in society, a greatly increased sense of insecurity, fear of the administration, and misery to large sections of society [...]. In the long run, the increasing inability of the courts to settle disputes in a fair manner will produce problems of law and order, aggravate tensions and conflicts and the risk of violence that will be hard to manage," he said.

The government took a lighter approach in its rebuttal this time, sending the premier's human rights advisor Om Yentieng who delivered only briskly-read remarks and engaged Ghai in conversation on the establishment of a long-awaited human rights commission, a planned investigative body with the authority to refer complaints to prosecutors.

§ Land

The permissive confusion of Cambodia's underdeveloped postwar legal system and its broad income disparities have made land and land tenure the nation's foremost human rights drama. The question of securing the right to live on and to work land has for the poor come to encapsulate most of the human rights problems faced in Cambodia, such as the venality of the court system and the weakness of the rule of law.

In a thematic report on Cambodia's controversial Economic Land Concessions, Ghai reported in June that as of the end of 2006 59 ELCs had been granted in 16 provinces and municipalities, covering 950,000 hectares or 5 percent of Cambodia and 14.5 percent of the country's arable land. Many such concessions were granted in violation of the 10,000-hectare size limit and

without prior consultation with local populations, who sometimes faced violence by concessionaires.

In its 2007 human development report for Cambodia released in October, UNDP said that in the five year period ending in 2004, the share of land owned by the poorest 40 percent dropped from 8.4 percent to 5.4 percent while the share owned by the richest 20 percent rose from 59 to 70 percent.

Amnesty International claimed in a February report entitled “Rights Razed” that as many as 150,000 Cambodians currently face the threat of illegal and sometimes forcible eviction from their land in which authorities are complicit. The report examined three cases in point, including an eviction in Sihanoukville’s Mithlaph district in which Military Police set fire to 80 homes. In a Feb 13 statement, the Foreign Ministry announced that there were “absolutely no ‘unlawful and forcible evictions’ in Cambodia.” At the Ministry’s request, Deputy Phnom Penh Governor Mann Choeun made a one-hour presentation to AI researcher Brittis Edman, the report’s author, in which he explained how the city had successfully relocated 1,200 families from Chamkar Mon district in the city center to two newly-built but remote sites in Dangkao district. “Although this is not a perfect solution, people can live there happily,” said Mann Choeun.

At the March 4 donor meeting, Ernest Loignon, Chargé d’Affaires at the Canadian Embassy, said such forcible resettlements “have created greater insecurity of land tenure” and “appear to have been permitted in contravention of the [2001] Land Law.” Mann Choeun again presented his Powerpoint slideshow to donor representatives.

§ Courts

On March 20, the court-monitoring NGO Center for Social Development released its annual report on court proceedings. This year’s report monitored trials and hearings in the Supreme and Appeal Courts, the Phnom Penh Municipal Court and provincial courts in Kandal, Battambang and Kompong Cham between October 2006 and September 2007.

Courts were under-funded, understaffed and did not respect the rights of the accused, according to the report. To serve Cambodia’s 14 million people, the justice system has only 214 judges and 601 law clerks. Twenty-two percent of adults in pretrial detention had been held past the six-month limit. More than 35 percent of defendants were not present at trials or hearings at first-instance courts. This figure rose to 67.43 percent at the Appeal Court. A quarter of suspects claimed coercion on the part of police or prosecutors. Witnesses testified at only 21.6 percent of trials in Phnom Penh, up from just seven percent the year before.

§ Religious Freedom

In September, the State Department released its annual report on religious freedom, saying there were few obstacles to freedom of worship or signs of religious intolerance. However the period under review in the report did not include the story of Tim Sakhorn, a Khmer Krom monk and chief of Phnom Den pagoda in Takeo province. Eyewitnesses in June told human rights workers that unidentified men had abducted Tim Sakhorn and deported him to Vietnam. Great Supreme Patriarch Tep Vong then ordered Tim Sakhorn defrocked for political agitation and authorities released a hand-written statement in which Tim Sakhorn appeared to be asked to be sent to Vietnam however the statement did not appear to be in the monk’s handwriting. In November, a court in Vietnam’s An Giang province sentenced Tim Sakhorn to a year in prison for undermining Cambodian and Vietnamese “solidarity.”

On December 17, about 50 Khmer Krom monks from the Samaki Raingsy pagoda in Phnom Penh's Meanchey district attempted to deliver a protest letter to the Vietnamese Embassy on Monivong Boulevard but clashed with police. At least one monk was knocked unconscious and police reportedly used electrified batons, though they denied this. Newspaper photographs of police striking monks caused shock and consternation.

Though once part of Cambodia, the land now comprising southern Vietnam was placed under Vietnamese control by French colonial authorities in 1949, prior to Cambodia's independence in 1953. A disputed number of Khmer now live in southern Vietnam and constitute a large ethnic minority. Buddhist monks there claim they face persecution for their peaceful worship, as do Khmer Krom monks in Cambodia who seek to act in favor of their fellows in Vietnam.

¶ *Born Samnang and Sok Sam Oeun*

Retired King Norodom Sihanouk wrote on May 9 to the parents of Born Samnang and Sok Sam Oeun to say the men are innocent of the January 2004 murder of the late Free Trade Union leader Chea Vichea. "I myself think that Mr Sok Sam Oeun and Mr Born Samnang are not murderers.... Please understand I have already retired and have no power and ability to help you with this problem," he wrote.

As of April 17, 2008, the pair had spent 1,541 days in detention for the crime despite the ever-widening chorus calling for their release. The pair lost an April 12, 2007 appeal at which even prosecutors said they lacked evidence. A Supreme Court date has yet to be fixed.

§ *Hok Lundy/TIP*

In June, the State Department said it was maintaining Cambodia's designation at Tier 2 Watch List designation in its annual ranking of countries' efforts to combat trafficking in persons. The designation is a notch below Tier 2 but above Tier 3, which can entail prohibitions on certain forms of US assistance. In announcing Cambodia's promotion to Tier 2 Watch List in 2006, the State Department said without significant improvements, Cambodia would likely fall back to Tier 3. However no such improvements were cited in maintaining the designation in 2007. In unveiling the 2007 report, the State Department acknowledged that political considerations did play a part in deciding on the designation. In April, the FBI made good on longstanding promises to invite National Police Commissioner General Hok Lundy to Washington for consultations. This is despite the fact that the State Department had revealed in 2006 that it had denied Hok Lundy an entry visa in 2005 because of suspicions he was involved in human trafficking. Human Rights Watch was outraged at the invitation. "The FBI should be investigating [Hok Lundy], not hosting him," Brad Adams, HRW Asia Director said in a statement, which accused Hok Lundy of involvement in a 1997 grenade attack on an opposition rally and other crimes. State Department officials said following the April 23 to 25 visit that they had taken the opportunity to deliver a tough, direct message to Hok Lundy about corruption, human rights and human trafficking. However in a May 1 interview with the pro-government broadcaster CTN, Hok Lundy said FBI, DEA and State Department officials had been broadly approving of his work and that of the Cambodian police.

§ *Prisons*

The rights group Licadho reported on March 7 that in the 18 prisons it monitors, 43 mothers and 4 pregnant women had by February given birth to or were raising 50 children who receive no

extra food, shelter or health care and are sometimes beaten or witness violence. Prison rules allow women to bring children under 6 to live with them but in practice innocent children as old as 13 were serving alongside their mothers.

§ Assassinations

On September 9, Lt. Col. Reth Nika, the 24-year-old deputy commander of Phnom Penh's Military Police, was chased down by a band of as many as eight assassins and shot dead in broad daylight inside a pagoda on a street frequented by tourists in Daun Penh districts Chey Chumneah commune.

One suspect was arrested that night. A police report obtained the following day indicated one of the attackers, who also died in the attack, had been Col. Roth Chanosody, 27, of the Interior Ministry's logistics department who reportedly died from bullet wound to left side of chest. No further developments had been made public in the case as of this writing.

§ Khmer Rouge Tribunal

A year after its 29 Cambodian and foreign judicial officers were sworn in, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) in June adopted at long last a working version of its crucial internal rules, which define the internal structure of the court and how a case proceeds from preliminary investigation to trial and appeals. The rules' adoption had been held up by bitter disputes in March over legal fees for defense attorneys, which the Bar Association of the Kingdom of Cambodia wished to impose on foreign lawyers.

With the rules adopted, the Office of the Co-Prosecutors on July 18 forwarded their first introductory submission, a confidential document of 110 pages, supported by nearly 16,000 pages of annexes, attachments and supporting documents including statements by 350 witnesses, the names of 40 potential witnesses and the locations of 40 undisturbed mass graves. This evidence, the prosecutors said in a statement, supported their contention that five unnamed individuals bore direct responsibility as part of a common criminal plan for twenty-five "distinct factual situations of murder, forcible transfer, unlawful detention, forced labor and religious, political and ethnic persecution as evidence of the crimes committed in the execution of this common criminal plan." The crimes under investigation included crimes against humanity, genocide, torture and religious persecution, all of which were carried out "to effect a radical change of Cambodian society along ideological lines", the Co-Prosecutors said.

On July 31, the identity of one of the suspects named was revealed when judicial police transferred former S-21 director Kaing Guek Eav, known as Duch, from military prison custody to the ECCC's detention center. He was then brought before the court's Co-Investigating Judges, questioned, charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity and ordered detained for a further year.

The subsequent arrests were those of former Brother No 2 Nuon Chea (Sept 19), former Foreign Minister Ieng Sary and his wife former Social Action Minister Ieng Thirith (both Nov 12) and former head of state Khieu Samphan (Nov 17). All have been charged with crimes against humanity and all but Ieng Thirith have been charged with war crimes. None, quite notably, have been charged with genocide despite the prosecutors' request. While investigating judges retain the ability to bring these charges, no such investigation is now under way.

The five-judge Pre-Trial Chamber in November 21 held the court's first hearing, bringing Duch into the dock where he appeal against his detention. Duch had been held without trial since May of 1999 and his lawyers Kar Savuth and French defender Francois Roux argued that he should be released pending trial as his due process rights had been so egregiously violated by Cambodian authorities. Observers had long predicted Duch would seek the outright dismissal of the charges due to abuse of process, a tactic his lawyers chose not to employ.

The Chamber decided in December it had no jurisdiction to rule on the actions of the Military Court, which had held Duch before his transfer into ECCC custody. And in March it also refused to grant pretrial release to Nuon Chea, saying grounds for his detention had been met and that he had knowingly waived his right to an attorney when being questioned by the co-investigating judges.

The court also announced a crisis of impending insolvency and began a fund-raising campaign to solicit a further \$114 million in donations to continue operations until 2011. The court had originally been budgeted at \$56.3 million over three years however officials have now acknowledged that this was unrealistic.

Originally budgeted at \$56.3 million over three years, the ECCC was supported in 2005 by contributions totaling \$38.5 million from several countries, including Japan, France, Australia, Germany, Canada, the European Commission and Holland. Among donors, there have been reservations about supporting a court that may not meet international standards of justice. Indeed, the United States has a Congressional ban on funding to the court, prohibiting US funding until the State Department certifies that the court does meet such standards (The State Department said earlier this year that discussions about possible US funding have been suspended as the Cambodians are confident of securing funding elsewhere).

When the allegations surfaced last year, donors demanded that the court reform itself to reduce the likelihood that malfeasance or corrupt practices would recur. Meanwhile, the initial \$56.3 million budget has proven to be grossly unrealistic and the court has all but exhausted its funding, with insolvency for both sides projected to occur in September.

Third-party human resources consultants engaged by the UN Development Program have performed successive audits, reviews and interventions, which the court is touting to potential donors to reassure them that their money would be well spent.

Acting on victim complaints brought to the court, the Office of the Co-Prosecutors announced March 28 that it had made a "supplementary submission" of evidence the prosecution says implicates the five suspects currently under investigation in crimes thought to have been committed at a former Khmer Rouge detention center "where many Cambodians were unlawfully detained, subjected to inhumane conditions and forced labor, tortured and executed between 1975 and 1979."

The prosecution asked the co-investigating judges to widen their investigations of the current detainees to include these allegations, which they said were supported by 1500 pages of analytical reports, witness statements and Khmer Rouge-era documents and which could constitute crimes against humanity and violations of Cambodia's 1956 penal code.

Economy and Business

The shine on Cambodia's robust economy appeared to tarnish somewhat in 2007 and early 2008 due to decreasing foreign demand and to inflation. Growth forecasts for the region and for Cambodia were revised downward though remained comparatively high as regional and domestic demand seemed unaffected by the slowing US economy while corporate lending in Asia was largely insulated from the crisis affecting global credit markets.

The government also sought to react as quickly as possible to the alarming rise in the price of food staples, as Cambodia felt the effects of global food inflation. Prime Minister Hun Sen on March 26 banned the export of rice in an effort to insure the sufficiency of local supplies after the price of raw, milled rice rose 57 percent to \$0.55 per kg in just the first quarter of 2008. The following day he also reversed a ban on the import of swine and pork (which had been instated in August to prevent the spread of foot-and-mouth disease). The ban had driven the price of live pigs from \$1 to \$2.65 per kg while butchered pork rose from \$2.25 to \$4.50 per kg in the same period. Access to food, to the World Bank, was the untold story in reports of continued economic growth. The country's economy may continue to grow but where would the benefits of this materialize? "High food prices alone are unlikely to pose a serious threat to Cambodian growth," the Bank's said in its biannual East Asia and the Pacific Update released April 1. "However in a country of mainly net food consumers, the poor—who spend approximately 70 percent of their total household consumption on food—will be adversely affected." The Bank estimated in 2004 that roughly a third of Cambodians live below the national poverty line of \$0.45 per day.

Slowing garment exports, increased competition in export markets the depreciating value of the US dollar drove inflation to a 9-year high of 10.8 percent for the month of December and also caused the Bank to forecast growth of 7.5 percent for 2008, significantly lower than 2007's 9.6 percent estimated increase in GDP or the 9 percent growth which Cambodia had averaged since 2000, typically driven again by tourism, garments, construction and agriculture.

However the Bank said depreciating dollar could cut both ways for the Cambodia economy, acting not just as an inflationary pressure but also making Cambodian exports more attractive, enticing tourists to spend more in Cambodia and thus allowing growth in the construction sector to continue feeding off of the rising tourist sector.

The Tourism Ministry announced January 1 that unofficial figures showed that tourist arrivals had yet again posted gains of 20 percent with 2 million visitors arriving in Cambodia. Another 20 to 25 percent increase in the number of arriving tourists was expected in 2008, said Minister Thong Khon.

§ Investment

By late 2007, Cambodia's boosters said the country appeared ready to soak up investor capital as years of record profit taking had flooded financial markets with excess liquidity in search of investment opportunities.

In May, Marvin Yeo, a finance specialist for the Asian Development Bank, told a conference held by the Economic Institute of Cambodia that private equity investment would fuel the next wave of Cambodian growth. And in October, the UN Conference on Trade and Development released figures according to which inward flows of foreign direct investment had risen 27 percent to \$483 million between 2005 and 2006 (and had risen from 32.3 percent to 38.9 percent when expressed

as a share of gross fixed capital formation, or the total value of the fixed assets owned by industry).

In the same period, transnational investments rose worldwide to their highest value since 2000 at \$1.3 trillion, a record \$51 billion of which was invested in SE Asia, according to UNCTAD. In November the 5th Business Roundtable, a investor conference hosted in Phnom Penh by the government and International Business Club and sponsored by virtually every major company present in Cambodia, doubled its attendance over the 2005 conference to a capacity crowd of 600 people from around the world.

Furthermore, in its April EAP update, the World Bank said the collapse of mortgage-backed securities may have dried up credit markets in the US, making it harder for companies to grow or do business, but it had left East Asian banks largely untouched as they currently borrow little. “If there were to be a sudden contraction of credit to banks in East Asia, the banks in East Asia are not likely to feel it because they’re not that reliant on credit anymore,” Vikram Nehru, the Bank’s chief regional economist, told reporters via videoconference from Tokyo.

Decreasing US demand for exports in 2007 did not cause economies to slow as much as had been feared. “This suggests that increasingly domestic demand has been a driver in these economies,” said Nehru.

For those actually seeking to make their money perform in Cambodia, practical realities had to be considered. In its annual Doing Business report in September, the World Bank ranked Cambodia 145th out of 178 countries, placing the country behind Gabon but ahead of Djibouti. Even Iraq was two places ahead of Cambodia at 141st.

Assessing Cambodia’s performance in ten categories, such as starting a company, obtaining licenses, hiring new employees, registering property, gaining access to credit, paying taxes, contract enforcement and closing a business, the Bank found Cambodia among the least attractive places to do business. It took an average of 10 procedures and an average 86 days to start a business, while the same thing could be done in the top-ranked Singapore with five procedures over five days.

In October, the World Economic Forum had more bad news, ranking Cambodia 110th out of 131 countries in its 2007 Global Competitiveness report. Respondents to the survey cited corruption, poor infrastructure and lax law enforcement as their principal frustrations. Singapore was 7th, Thailand 28th, Indonesia 54th and Vietnam 68th.

§ Banking

The ratings agency Standard and Poor’s also took a more evenhanded view of Cambodia’s prospects, assigning a B+ to Cambodia’s sovereign debt on April 19 of 2007. The rating, which is below investment grade, puts Cambodian bonds below investment grade, making them off limits to most institutional investors.

Cambodia’s high level of public debt, its narrow economic base and limited ability to generate revenues were the main reasons for the middling grade S&P said. Cambodia however appeared unlikely to borrow much from bond markets and therefore the rating was more likely to be used to set a benchmark in international capital markets.

On January 10, S&P released its first-ever risk assessment for the Cambodian banking sector, giving it the weakest possible rating, 10 out of 10. The sector was likely to benefit from robust growth however poor transparency and lax law enforcement increased the liabilities faced by depositors in Cambodian banks.

In Channy, president and CEO of Aceda Bank, said the rating would have little immediate and practical meaning for Cambodian banks as, like Asian banks, they borrowed little and their growth resulted from local deposits and lending. The industry had run a surplus in 2007, he said, collecting \$2.2 billion in payments but loaning out only \$1.4 billion. Aceda Bank had itself borrowed only \$27 million in the period while holding assets of \$472 million.

In April, the National Bank of Cambodia, however, gave voice to the government's keen fear of inflation. NBC Director-General Tal Nay Im confirmed rumors that the NBC was considering raising its minimum deposit requirement from eight to as much as 20 percent in a bid to curb inflation, a potentially radical step.

Cambodia is a largely dollarized economy with a very small securities market and little interbank lending, meaning manipulation of prime interest rates has little effect on inflation. The deposit requirement is most often used to maintain a fund to help banks remain solvent in case of heavy withdrawals and otherwise to stabilize the industry—however it can be used to help set monetary policy as it reduces the amount of money that can be loaned and encourages lenders to charge higher rates of interest; the policy in essence would allow the central bank to get commercial banks to do the dirty work. Word of the policy proposal caused consternation among banks with high loan-to-deposit ratios, which worried they wouldn't be able to meet the new requirement and real estate developers who feared buyers would find the new terms of mortgages too unattractive to purchase new high-price condominiums currently under construction in and around Phnom Penh.

The price of a square meter of real estate along Phnom Penh's axial Monivong Boulevard rose ten fold to \$2,500 between November 2006 and November 2007, according to In Channy.

§ Garments

The garment sector was cause for genuine worry in the period under review as decreasing demand, continued labor strife and the looming end of Chinese export safeguards (which expire at the end of 2008) converged as threats to continued growth. The hope of duty free access to the US market also dwindled as the latest version of the bill to provide it languished in the face of strong opposition from US labor unions and lobbyists for African textile producers.

It is difficult to overstate the social and economic importance of the industry, which was Cambodia's first postwar step toward industrialization and has the largest labor force of any industry, employing as many Cambodians as enter the workforce every year, or roughly 300,000 people, and accounting for 80 percent of Cambodia's foreign exchange earnings.

The February 2007 murder of Free Trade Union organizer Hy Vuthy, who was shot dead in Phnom Penh's Dangkao district as he left the night shift at the Suntex garment factory, remained officially unsolved as of this writing. On April 19, 2007, Business for Social Responsibility, which represents Eddie Bauer, Gap Inc, H&M Hennes and Mauritz, Liz Claiborne and Phillips-Van Heusen, called on the Cambodian government to address a "pattern of violence against union leaders" and for a full investigation into the Hy Vuthy killing. The statement was followed ten days later by a similar call from Adidas Group, the International Labor Organization and Human Rights Watch.

Growth in exports had already begun to slow in the first five months of the year. Commerce Ministry data showed that up to May, exports were valued at \$985 million, an 11.2 percent increase over the same period in 2006; however that period had seen growth of 30 percent over the same period in 2005.

In October, US Congressman Jim McDermott introduced the New Partnership for Development Act, which would offer duty free access to African garments and duty free access to Cambodian and Bangladeshi garments exported at 2007 levels, with the possibility to increase the duty free export quotient by 15 percent per annum if the latter two countries could demonstrate compliance with labor laws. The National Council of Textile Organizations and the hospitality union UNITE HERE immediately opposed the bill and observers said it had little chance of becoming enacted.

Meanwhile, the Garment Manufacturers Association of Cambodia reported in January that fourth quarter year-on-year figures for exports had dropped 46 percent while growth for the year had risen only two percent to \$2.93 billion. However Commerce Ministry data released later in the year indicated the rise had been eight percent, which was nevertheless a worryingly low figure.

The Free Trade Union in March demanded a \$5 increase in monthly wages, which stood at \$50, however GMAC offered only \$4. However a \$6 wage increase was ultimately negotiated following the intervention of Hun Sen.

Labor Ministry figures indicate that the number of work days lost to labor actions declined by 14 percent between 2006 and 2007 but nevertheless remained alarmingly high at 294,000.

§ Oil

Te Duong Dara, director-general of the Cambodian National Petroleum Authority, at last revealed in March that the government now believed that there were 500 million barrels of oil in Cambodia's offshore Block A, only 15 to 20 percent of which was recoverable due to the complex geology of the sea bed in the Gulf of Thailand. Extraction was expected to start in 2011, he said.

After rampant speculation and exuberance about Cambodia's supposed pending oil boom, the announcement confirmed fears long held by some that the off shore deposits were in fact not as great a prize as had been hoped and were in large part retrievable because demand for oil had driven prices to well over \$100 a barrel.

The real prize, the deposits believed to be in the so-called Overlapping Claims Area, which sits in a westerly portion of the Gulf Thailand claimed by both Cambodia and Thailand, remains off limits. However, recent media reports indicated that negotiations have renewed to arrive at revenue sharing agreements with the Thais.

§ Corruption

Transparency International released its Global Corruption Barometer report in December. Its results were not heartening.

Of 1,016 people surveyed in face-to-face interviews in September, 72 percent claimed to have paid a bribe to obtain a service in the previous 12 months, the second-highest score of the 60 countries surveyed. Respondents saw the courts, police, political parties and fiscal authorities as

the most corrupt. In September, as the survey was being carried out, Cambodia ranked at 162nd place of 180 on TI's corruption perceptions index.

Though in November, Cambodia signed the UN Convention against Corruption as well as an Asean anticorruption agreement, the situation could only be described long past due.

The draft Anticorruption Law, a bill first created in 1994, has languished in government corridors for nearly 15 years as less serious and weighty legislation, such as a 2006 ban on adultery, has been speedily enacted. Officials say the draft Anticorruption Law, which would establish an investigative body to punish official malpractice, cannot be enacted before a draft penal code, which was reportedly completed by the Council of Ministers in December. The Anticorruption Law itself has reportedly been passed from the Justice Ministry to the Ministry of National Assembly and Senate Relations and Inspection, where officials have not been available for comment.

Corruption is frequently cited as a blight on the justice system and human rights and a threat to national security as well as a hindrance to growth, education and health care. The investigative environmental group Global Witness described in a June report how corruption was depriving the public of the benefits of Cambodia's natural resources while assuring their depletion in an uncontrolled fashion.

The government in June banned the report, entitled "Cambodia's Family Trees: illegal logging and the stripping of public assets," calling it a partisan political attack. In a sweeping indictment, the 95-page report said a "kleptocratic elite" of officials and their kin are selling off Cambodia's natural resources in disregard for the law. According to the report, Cambodia's "most powerful logging syndicate" is comprised of Hun Sen's first cousin Dy Chouch, also known Hun Chouch, his ex-wife Seng Keang, who is reportedly a friend of the premier's wife, Bun Rany, as well as Khun Thong, brother-in-law of Agriculture Minister Chan Sarun and father-in-law of Forestry Administration Director Ty Sokhun. Those named in the report angrily denied its allegations. The premier's brother, Hun Neng, said he was considering legal action over allegations made against his son Hun To and wife, Lean Vouch Chheng: "If they come to Cambodia, I will hit them until their heads are broken."

At a March 4 meeting with donors, government officials said that even in the absence of the anticorruption law they were committed to prosecuting corrupt acts and the law was nearing completion and could even be enacted during the current legislative session, a prospect that had been held out in the past. However US Ambassador Joseph Mussomeli said the time for indulgence was long past. "It is as if the house of Cambodia were on fire and instead of calling the firemen, instead of getting the water hoses, the government is simply pouring a glass or two of water on the flames," he said.

In April, the National Assembly ended its third five-year mandate again without having put the anti-corruption law to a vote. Eleven NGOs organizing a petition calling on lawmakers to enact the law said they expected to reach their goal of one million signatures and thumbprints by the end of the month.

The Year in Culture

Cambodia's cultural scene was one of controversy and firsts between April 2007 and April 2008. The contentious issue of who owns the ancient Preah Vihear temple was raised once again by Thai officials, leading the Thai prime minister himself to clarify during a visit to Phnom Penh in March that Thailand is not in fact seeking to reclaim the temple. In an effort to combat human trafficking through marriage brokers, the Cambodian government banned all marriages between Cambodians and foreign nationals in March, sparking criticism from those personally affected and from the Korean Embassy. The country's newspaper industry was shaken, but not yet stirred, with the opening of a new English language daily and the buyout of Cambodia's oldest English-language newspaper. Cambodia also experienced its first concert featuring an international music star since the fall of the Khmer Rouge. Irish singer Ronan Keating held an almost sold-out concert in May and according to organizers it was a huge success. Raising the question: Which international musical star will come next?

Still a country emerging from civil war and communist rule, Cambodia's cultural scene continued to have clear limitations, but there were some highlights in the music and art sectors.

§ Preah Vihear temple

Built in the 11th and 12th centuries and located at the northernmost point of Preah Vihear province bordering Thailand, Preah Vihear temple has long been a site of contention between Cambodia and Thailand. In 1962 the International Court of Justice ruled that Preah Vihear temple was situated within Cambodia's borders and that Thailand was obligated to withdraw any military or police forces in its vicinity.

The temple became a media hotspot in July after being denied a slot on the UN Heritage list by the World Heritage Committee in New Zealand, in part because of objections by Thailand. In late January Thai newspapers The Bangkok Post and The Nation quoted senior Thai military officials warning of diplomatic repercussions if Cambodia continued with its bid to have the Preah Vihear temple inscribed on the World Heritage List. The situation appeared to be settled in March, when Thai Premier Samak Sundaravej confirmed that Thailand would not oppose the temple's listing at the next World Heritage Committee meeting in July.

In early April the issue heated up again after Thai media reported that Cambodian Ambassador Ung Sean had been summoned to the ministry and told that the supposed troop build up on the Cambodian side violated a 2000 agreement not to modify a 4.6-square-kilometer disputed zone near the temple. Cambodian officials denied that additional troops had been sent to the area or that any such disputed zone existed.

The issue continues to be controversial as, according to the Thai Embassy, the two countries disagree over who owns an 8-square km area of land surrounding the temple, including the land leading up to the temple's stairs. Despite the ongoing controversy, officials in Cambodia have expressed confidence that Preah Vihear temple would be added to the World Heritage List in June by the World Heritage Committee, which will convene in Canada this year.

§ Government Bans Marriages to Foreigners

Late March, Cambodian officials announced that they have temporarily put a stop to all marriages between Cambodians and foreign nationals. In a March 29 directive from the Ministry of Interior, the government suspended marriages between foreigners and Cambodians in a proclaimed effort

to check the trafficking of poor, disadvantaged women to foreign countries through marriage brokerage agencies that make large profits. To “curb negative activities and to improve the nation’s and girls’ reputations and value, the Interior Ministry has issued the order...to temporarily suspend the issuing of permission and marriage certificates for Cambodian citizens to get married to foreigners until there is a new order,” the directive states. The issue received international attention following the March release of an International Organization for Migration report focusing on the vulnerability of Cambodian brides going to South Korea in increasing numbers.

§ Visiting International Celebrities

On May 9, 2007, Cambodia experienced its first post-Khmer Rouge era concert featuring an international pop star with the arrival of Irish crooner Ronan Keating. Several thousand Cambodians nearly filled out Phnom Penh’s Olympic Stadium’s indoor arena. Dancing on top of chairs, waving red glow sticks and belting out the words to their favorite choruses, the crowd appeared to be thrilled by Keating’s 90-minute set. In addition to songs from his chart-topping albums, Keating performed covers of the Goo Goo Dolls, Tracy Chapman, Van Morrison and Cat Stevens. He praised the crowd for their contribution to the chorus of his 2002 hit, “If Tomorrow Never Comes,” declaring, “that was the best version of that song I’ve ever heard.”

US actress Mia Farrow and her Dream for Darfur organization came to Cambodia in January to hold a ceremony at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh to raise awareness about the conflict in Sudan’s Darfur region. Things didn’t go as planned though, as the government regarded the ceremony as a protest against China in the run up to the Beijing Olympic Games and prevented Farrow from entering Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh.

Puerto Rican Pop star Ricky Martin paid a five-day visit to Cambodia in March. Like Farrow, Martin didn’t come to perform, but to promote a cause—the fight against human trafficking. The “Livin’ la Vida Loca” singer visited shelters to speak with victims of trafficking, and also visited rural areas to gain an understanding of the “push factors” that contribute to making people vulnerable to trafficking.

§ Art Festival

In February, more than 200 artists from seven Asian countries took part in an eight-day arts festival in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Dubbed “Spotlight: An Asian Festival of Inclusive Arts” consisted of stage and visual arts events presented by artists with and without physical disabilities. International performers included the Hitomi Deaf Puppet Theater from Japan, which uses music and gestures to talk about the changing world; deaf percussionist Lily Gohof, of Singapore; the Kosshu Roa Taiko group, which plays Japanese traditional drums, and partially disabled dancer Laxmi Kharel Basnet from Nepal.

§ Phnom Penh’s Landscape

The capital’s low-lying horizon is set to become a lot more jagged with the planned construction of three skyscrapers that are expected to reach heights of 30, 42 and 52 stories. The proposed \$1.1 billion International Finance Center Tower, designed to house 10,000 residents as well as offices, a school and a supermarket on its 52 floors will be the largest of the three and is expected to be completed in 2012 in Chamkarmon district’s Tonle Bassac commune. Deputy Prime Minister Sok An on Jan 24 presided over the official opening of a proposed \$2.4-billion, 193 meter-tall Gold Tower 42, which is to be constructed on the corner of Sihanouk and Monivong boulevards. And

Overseas Cambodian Investment Corporation plans announced plans to build a \$20-million, 30-story business center by 2009.

§ Sports

It was also a big year in sports as Cambodia stepped up its efforts at the SEA Games in Thailand and hosted its first-ever pro-golf tournament in Siem Reap. Cambodia displayed its best ever showing on at the 2007 Southeast Asian Games, taking 18 medals home from Thailand. Overall, Cambodia won two golds, three silvers and two bronze medals in petanque; a silver and two bronzes in taekwondo; a silver and a bronze in athletics; three bronzes in wrestling; and bronze medals in tennis, boxing and beach volleyball. The number was up six from the 12 medals won in the 2005 games in the Philippines. In the overall table of medal winners, Cambodia came ninth—one place higher than 2005. Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam came first, second and third respectively.

In late November, Cambodia hosted its first ever pro-golf tournament at Siem Reap's Phokeethra Country Club. Part of the Asian Tour, golfers from around the world participated in the four-day Johnny Walker Cambodian Open golf tournament. None of the three Cambodian amateurs who participated in the event advanced to the last two days of the tournament, but 118th placed Lieutenant General Eth Savath, RCAF deputy chief of staff and secretary-general of the Cambodian Golf Federation, said that he was just happy to be there. "I feel very good because I am not a professional," he said after finishing the second round at 15 over par. American Bryan Saltus won the tournament and the 36-year-old celebrated his victory at the 18th hole by jumping into a nearby water hazard, bringing enthusiastic cheers from the hundreds of onlookers who came out for Sunday's round.

A rather bizarre incident occurred in August as a riot broke out at Olympic Stadium in Phnom Penh following a football match between the Cambodian and Brunei under-17 national teams. The reason for the riot appeared to have nothing to do with Cambodia winning or losing the game, but rather that the home squad had not covered the spread in betting on their victory against lowly Brunei. The riot occurred despite Cambodia winning the match by a score of 2-0.

On Nov 25, well-known Cambodian kickboxing coach Chea Tong, 71, was killed in a traffic accident in Battambang province while on his way to a medical checkup. Chea Tong's career spanned several decades and different regimes. He started out as a famous kickboxer in the 1950s before turning trainer later in his career.

§ Water Festival

Phnom Penh hosted its annual Water Festival in November, bringing as many about 3 million visitors from the provinces to the capital. As usual, the ever-popular boat races highlighted the festival and featured 434 racing boats that participated in the event. For the first time in the history of the Water Festival, all Asean countries were invited to participate in the boat races and all except Burma were represented at the competition. The event was dubbed the first-ever all-Asean Water Festival boat race.

Tragedy struck during the festival when five Singaporean men were killed after their boat capsized on Nov 23 during the annual boat races in Phnom Penh. The 22-man Singaporean team was paddling their dragon boat—a traditional, long, thin racing boat—back to the staging ground near the Phnom Penh port, when the capsized. Police boats managed to save 17 men, three of them unconscious from water inhalation, but five vanished. According to Singapore's Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, Prime Minister Hun Sen wrote to Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to convey his "shock and sadness" at the accident.

§ Media Shake Up

Cambodia's longest running English language newspaper, The Phnom Penh Post, was bought out by two Australians in February, marking the fortnightly newspaper's first change in ownership since its creation in 1992. The paper is now owned by Ross Dunkley, editor of The Myanmar Times—which operates under the strict scrutiny of the Burmese junta—and oil and mining executive Bill Clough. The pair agreed in December to purchase a controlling stake in the Post.

In February Sebastien Drans, director of the local news and publicity firm Media Consulting and Development, launched English- and Khmer-language daily newspaper The Mekong Times. The newspaper publishes five-days per week and represents the second English-language daily newspaper printed out of Phnom Penh after The Cambodia Daily which began publishing in 1993.

The 12-year-old French-language daily Cambodge Soir ceased operations in June following a labor dispute sparked by charges of political interference, only to return in October as a weekly publication under different editors.

§ Information Technology

In August the first-ever Cambodian Bloggers Summit was held in Phnom Penh. The two-day summit was held at Pannasastra University and was organized by five Cambodian bloggers with funding from NGOs International Republican Institute and Open Institute. Participants at the summit estimated that there are between 200 and 300 Cambodian bloggers out there, the vast majority of whom are under the age of 30—just like most Cambodians.

The International Telecom Union and the Vietnam Internet Center report that around 44,000 people use the Internet in Cambodia, compared to 8.4 million in Thailand and 16.5 million in Vietnam.

§ Conjugal Matters

Lawyers in Cambodia said they were bracing for a flood of cases against unfaithful spouses following the first conviction on Oct 26 under the country's controversial Law on Monogamy. The monogamy law, which was passed by the National Assembly in September 2006, makes unfaithfulness a criminal offense and prescribes prison sentences of one to 12 months for those found guilty of conducting extra-marital affairs. First to get prosecuted by the new law was Khek Ravy, former Funcinpec secretary of state and current Football Federation of Cambodia first vice-president. He was convicted of adultery in the Phnom Penh Municipal Court and fined \$250. No jail time was handed down to Khek Ravy by the municipal court.

§ Music Festival

The 4th International Music Festival lived up to its theme of "Exociticism Cross-Cultural" in November as those who attended were treated to a blend of Eastern and Western styles. The festival featured a series of nine concerts, including German Ensemble Selisih, pianists Gerd Isselhardt and Stephan Rahn and Cambodian flutists Him Savy and Chan Vitharo, as well as New

Zealander Jack Body, who recreated Indonesia's natural and street soundscapes in his composition "Suara."

§ National Museum

In December, more than 22 tons of priceless Khmer artifacts arrived back from an almost one year exhibition in Germany and Switzerland. Consisting of mostly sandstone sculptures and bronze statues, the 119 artifacts had traveled to Bonn, Berlin and Zurich as part of the "Angkor—Sacred Heritage of Cambodia" exhibition before being brought to the National Museum.

In January, a Bangkok-based collector of Khmer art handed over two gold-and-crystal king and queen sets of royal regalia, which may have been crafted during the reign of the Angkorian King Jayavarman VII, to the National Museum. The King's Set included a pair of ear pendants, a crown, a pectoral, a chest-cross chain, and arm and wristbands. The Queen's Set consisted of a hair cover, a pectoral, an armlet and a chest-cross chain. The Angkorian gold regalia, is believed to be from the 12th or 13th century, is now part of the National Museum's permanent collection.