

## Chour Chetharith

### ***Background:***

Chour Chetharith was deputy editor-in-chief of the royalist FUNCINPEC party's *Ta Prum* radio station.

*Ta Prum* is known for its critical reporting of Prime Minister Hun Sen. Hun Sen has criticised *Ta Prum* in the English-language *Cambodia Times*, accusing the station of insulting his leadership. He warned FUNCINPEC that it should monitor its media “to avoid any conflicts.”

Chetharith's murder came ahead of scheduled three-way talks between the FUNCINPEC party, the opposition Sam Rainsy Party, and the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP). The talks had been aimed at ending a political stalemate following the July 27 elections, when Hun Sen and his CPP failed to gain a two-thirds majority of the vote.

### ***Details of Incident:***

At 8:15am on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2003, Chour Chetharith parked his car a few meters from *Ta Prum* radio station on Street 472 in Phnom Penh. Witnesses say that as he locked his car door a Honda C125 motorbike drove past, with two young men wearing everyday clothes, and soft, fisherman-style hats. The driver turned the motorbike in front of Chour Chetharith, and the passenger alighted, carrying a K-59 pistol. Witnesses described how he then coolly walked toward the journalist, pointed the muzzle of his hand gun between the nape of the neck and base of the skull and fired a single shot at point blank range. Following the execution style killing, the assailants then drove slowly away from the victim.

Both FUNCINPEC and the Sam Rainsy Party claim it was a politically motivated attack.

### ***Aftermath:***

In early December 2003, Police Commissioner Heng Pov told the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) that although police had identified possible suspects in Chetharith's murder, they did not have enough evidence to make any arrests. The CCHR conducted an in-depth investigation into the killing and concluded that Chetharith was killed because of his work as a journalist.

*Ta Prum* Radio Director Noranarith Anandayath, an adviser to Prince Norodom Ranariddh, said Saturday he had also received threats, and believed the killing may have been a case of mistaken identity as the he drove a vehicle similar to the victim.

The Cambodian People's Party filed a law suit against Prince Norodom Ranariddh, the FUNCINPEC President, alleging that he made defamatory statements against Prime Minister Hun Sen of being involved in the killing Chour Chetharith.

FUNCINPEC filed a lawsuit against Prime Minister Hun Sen for incitement that led to the murder of Chetharith.

Hun Sen said that he would not drop his suit against Prince Ranariddh unless the prince apologized or paid compensation for remarks indicating that the premier and his party were responsible for the killing of Chour Chetharith. Hun Sen demanded compensation of 100 million riel (US \$25,000).

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