

Questions

By Ed Bachrach
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Ed traveled in Cambodia from June 21 through June 29, 2005. This was Ed's sixth trip to Cambodia since 2002 and Laurie could not accompany him on this trip. In the middle of this trip he traveled to Laos for three days.

Highlights

- I took a two-day trip to Ratanakiri Province to examine the telemedicine project we have been funding and to see this poorest of Cambodia's provinces where there has been recent persecution of "Montagnards," a minority hill people.
- I took a three-day trip to Laos to visit a library built by my friend Chuck Theusch and to gain exposure to Cambodia's neighbor to the north.
- I took a day trip from Phnom Penh to Kompong Thom to return to a village where the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) tried to establish a self-help group among village men to reduce alcoholism and domestic violence.
- Since this trip I've met with some Cambodian leaders in the United States and have more closely followed political developments.

Ed's Trip

At the end of my previous trips to Cambodia I generally felt that I had learned something and managed to answer many of the questions that had arisen in my advance preparation and during the trip itself. This time I left with more questions than I arrived with. I witnessed a strange calm in political developments, rising civil dissatisfaction but not unrest, and a stagnation of commercial and humanitarian progress. I also found a striking contrast between the relative progress of Laos and Cambodia, countries that both experienced collateral damage from the Vietnam conflict and that were ruled for decades by communist dictatorships.

Since I returned to the United States in June, political developments in Cambodia have unfolded that are discouraging and ominous. The strange quiet has been broken by the ruling party with increasingly heavy-handed repression that is putting an end to free speech and civil society. Civic leaders are being arrested for defaming the Prime Minister or questioning government actions. Some have fled to Thailand and others have become silent. The peace and security enjoyed by elites and common Cambodians becomes more fragile and endangered by the day.

Even though the progress that we witnessed in previous trips seems to be receding and political developments are discouraging we are as determined as ever to help build a better future for Cambodia.

Ratanakiri

Ratanakiri Province, in the far northeast and bordering Vietnam and Laos, is Cambodia's largest and least populated province. It is considered the jungle because the land is better suited to trees than rice and because there are so few people and so little agriculture. Getting to Ban Lung, the province's capital, takes two days by dirt road. Alternatively, one can get there by air every other day, using a dirt landing strip at the airport on the edge of town. Beyond Ban Lung the rest of the province is accessible by dirt roads and motorcycle paths.

Being so remote, the region has seen less scrambling of the indigenous population during the upheaval of the Khmer Rouge era and subsequent civil war. As a result the population and culture of several tribal minorities in this region have remained intact. Some of these minorities are called Montagnards, French for hill people, who live in the highlands of both Cambodia and Vietnam. Others are Muslim Cham people, a vestige of an ancient Indochinese empire. Most survive on subsistence farming and living off the forest, and the only industry the area has known are the rubber plantations that make less of a contribution each year as technology decreases the demand for latex. Ratanakiri is perhaps the country's poorest province.

In recent years Ratanakiri has been the site of several human rights and rule-of-law abuses. Cambodian Khmers, the dominant majority, have persecuted the Montagnards who fled Vietnamese persecution to find refuge in Cambodia. Some think this persecution had tacit government encouragement. Human Rights Watch is actively monitoring these ongoing abuses. Over the past six years there have been several large, illegal or underhanded contracts allowing foreign (mostly Chinese) companies to log the large ancient hardwood trees that the villagers have worshipped as "spirit" trees for centuries. Each time that local villagers have protested these forest harvests they have been treated harshly--and sometimes with violence--by government police and military.

Bernie Krisher has been active in developing capacity in this province. In conjunction with U.S. technicians he has established a motorman Internet service. Remote villages are able to send and receive emails through a forwarding unit attached to an antenna in the village. Several times a week a man on a motorbike rides a circuit to the villages and as he passes, a transmitter on his bike transmits incoming and outgoing emails from the antenna. This electronic pony express allows the villagers access to the outside world.

Krisher has also set up a Telemedicine Clinic at the Ratanakiri Regional Referral Hospital in Ban Lung. This clinic consists of a set of personal computers connected to both the motorman antenna and a satellite dish. Doctors at the hospital can see patients, take their picture and medical history, and transmit this information simultaneously to the Sihanouk Hospital Center of Hope in Phnom Penh and the Harvard Medical Center in Boston. Within twenty-four hours the doctors get replies with suggestions and additional questions for diagnosis and treatment. It is not uncommon that a case arises that requires transportation and treatment in Phnom Penh. For the past two years we have funded most of the costs of operating this telemedicine project.

During this visit to Cambodia I wanted to visit Ratanakiri and the hospital to see how the project was functioning and better understand the problems of the people. I flew from Phnom Penh to Ban Lung and stayed two nights at the lovely Terres Rouges

guesthouse on the outskirts of town, accompanied by Neou Ty, the director of Bernie's operations in Cambodia.

At the hospital I met with the Director of the hospital, Dr. Channarith Ly, and two of the doctors, Dr. Kok San and Dr. Sam Baramey. These doctors saw four patients the day I visited. Two of the patients complained of trouble swallowing and other symptoms that the doctors quickly diagnosed as goiter. Goiter is common in this area because of an iodine deficiency. The third patient, a young man, complained of chest pains and presented an irregular heartbeat. In addition to his examination an EKG was taken and a copy was included with his electronic transmittal. The fourth, a twenty-four-year-old woman, complained of pains in her chest. She had had surgery in Phnom Penh for a heart condition and now had recurring pains. She was divorced with one child and was not working. Her previous trips to Phnom Penh were paid for by our program.

The following day I returned to the hospital and found that there were replies from the Phnom Penh hospital but not Harvard. Due to the time difference, they normally get a reply from Harvard first. The replies were unexceptional and seemed to confirm the diagnosis of the three patients. The fourth, the young woman, will probably need further examination and perhaps another trip to Phnom Penh.

My impression of the operation of the Telemedicine Project must take into account the context of the Referral Hospital. These hospitals are often poorly equipped and this one in remote Ratanakiri was staffed with some young, rather inexperienced doctors. I was disappointed to see the low utilization of the telemedicine facilities and learned that the hospital had considered canceling that month's session but didn't because I was visiting. The doctors seemed to be inexperienced in basic physical examination and their fumbling would have unnerved a patient in the U. S. Nevertheless, the hospital and telemedicine program is giving vastly improved, albeit limited, health care for all those within the range of the motorman. This is a vast improvement over previous conditions.

During my visit to the hospital Dr. Channarith referred several times to a Dr. Fil and while I couldn't quite understand why, he eagerly hoped I could meet him. On my last day as I was waiting at the airport to depart I was able to meet and talk with Dr. Fil Tabayoyong. Dr. Fil is a Filipino doctor who has worked abroad for years on various health care administration projects in Indonesia, China, and elsewhere. He currently works for Health Net International (HNI), which has a three-year contract with the Cambodian government and the Asia Development Bank to administer the entire health care system in Ratanakiri province. This means that Dr. Fil oversees all hospitals, clinics, public health efforts and any other health care efforts in the province.

He is an energetic, forceful man with deep experience and high standards. While we chatted at the airport he offered feedback to Dr. Channarith on how he and the doctors could be more effective and forceful in administering the hospital and caring for patients. An effort like Dr. Fil's will be invaluable to the improvement of health care delivery in Ratanakiri.

While in Ban Lung I had plenty of free time. I took some time to visit a nearby lake and waterfall that were quite pleasant and scenic. Our driver also showed me a local hydroelectric project that was built years ago and seemed so antiquated and

inefficient that it could only be producing a fraction of its capacity. I also visited some other NGOs in town. I had an informative visit with the Ad Hoc representative, Mr. Meas Klasma, and learned of that organization's help and advocacy for the villages in land rights cases. I also found two organizations housed in the same office, The Non Forest Timber Products Organization and the Indigenous Youth Development Project. Both were founded by Mr. Gordon Patterson and they focus of helping the villages fight the big logging interests that are abusing land rights. I learned more about these abuses but was disappointed that I could not meet Mr. Patterson.

I also had a delightful visit to the Ezra Vogel School; one of the Bernie Krisher built elementary schools housed in the walled compound with the referral hospital. The school had four classrooms with children of all ages working on English speaking, reading Khmer, and learning to use word processing and Excel in English on computers. This is a model school in this poor remote province. The teachers seemed excellent and the bright, attentive children were more interested in their work than my visit. Ty told me the excellent teaching is the result of teacher salaries of \$300 per month, compared to a typical teacher's salary of \$30 per month. Bernie's organization is funding these enhanced salaries.

I left Ban Lung with fond memories of a poor remote place that seemed quiet and peaceful on the surface but underneath was seething with many of the contemporary challenges that all Cambodia is facing.

From Ban Lung I was traveling to Pakxe in Laos. Pakxe was only a hundred miles as the crow flies from Ban Lung, but I had to fly to Phnom Penh, then to Vientiane, Laos, where I spent the night and then drove eight hours to get to Pakxe the following evening. Such are travel conditions in remote Southeast Asia.

Laos

I had arranged a flight to and from Laos but had made no other arrangements, except asking my friend Chuck Theusch to arrange a guide and accommodations so that I could visit his library project in Pakxe. I arrived Friday evening about 5:00 PM at the Vientiane airport and was picked up by Chuck's friend and Laotian guide, Detmahinh Souphanh. Flight schedules didn't allow us to fly to Pakxe, but if we could get there by ground transportation we could fly back on Sunday morning. So we stayed the night in Vientiane and hired a driver and van to take us the eight hours to Pakxe the next day. After a delightful dinner at an outdoor restaurant on the shores of the Mekong River, I retired to the modern and luxurious Don Chan hotel. The next morning a driver, along with his mother and mother-in-law, picked us up and drove us more than half the length of the country to Pakxe, a city of some 60,000 not far from the border with both Thailand and Cambodia. That night we dined again on the shores of the Mekong and retired.

Sunday we visited the Library that Chuck's organization completed in the last year. His organization, Libraries of Vietnam and Laos, has been building and supplying books to libraries in those two countries for several years. This library, the first of these I ever visited, was architecturally pleasing, clean, sparsely stocked with books, but well staffed with several conscientious and committed women. At 8:30 AM when we arrived there were four children sitting at a table reading books quietly. We understood from the women that their parents were vendors at a regional trade fair

that was taking place across the road and the children chose to stay in the clean, quiet library rather than loiter at the dusty fair. While the shelves were not well stocked, I found some interesting books in English that explained important matters of public health and nutrition. I asked the women what kind of books would be the most in demand and they told me that "how-to" books in the construction trades, mechanics, and other vocations were by far the most requested. The library stood out as a haven for study and information amid the dirt and chaos of this developing third-world city.

Sunday morning after breakfast and before we left for the library, I walked up to the rooftop of the seven story hotel where we stayed to take in Pakxe's skyline. It is a scenic city crowded into a bend of the Mekong. Across the street from the hotel I spotted a large red cross painted on the gleaming roof of a new building. I hurried downstairs and over to see this building. I found a new, clean, well-organized and bustling regional hospital. I learned that the hospital was only six months old and had been built with a loan from the World Bank. Since it was Sunday I could not see any medicine being practiced but as I roamed the wards I found them full, clean, and organized. This hospital was nicer than any I have seen in Cambodia.

My mission in Laos took about an hour but I spent two and a half days there traveling and talking with Det. His English was excellent as was his knowledge of his country. My time in Vientiane, Pakxe, and driving in between gave me a good introduction to the country and I couldn't help comparing it to Cambodia. My first impression was riding through Vientiane, seeing clean streets, lush grassy boulevards, and operating traffic lights that drivers obeyed. Buildings showed the discoloration and stains of tropical weathering but seemed better maintained than most areas in Cambodia. The road from Vientiane to Pakxe was smoothly paved and we made no stops for construction delays or detours. It was built like those in Cambodia with funds from the Asia Development Bank. Yet I have never experienced a road this complete in Cambodia. Throughout Laos the rice paddies seemed better built and more full of rice plants than what I had seen in Cambodia. When I flew across southern Cambodia into both Phnom Penh and on to Ban Lung on this trip, I saw widespread dryness and Cambodians were concerned that the rainy season was more than a month late in starting, the third year of a dry rainy season. In Laos, by contrast, it was already wet and rained heavily every day I was there.

Laos is smaller than Cambodia and has a population of over seven million compared to more than twelve million in Cambodia. Laos is a long narrow country nestled against Vietnam and it housed most of the length of the Ho Chi Minh trail during the Vietnam War. As a result there was more bombing and destruction in Laos than Cambodia. In fact I have read that more bombs were dropped in Laos by the U.S. during this time period than all conventional bombs dropped in all other previous conflicts taken together. After the fighting with Americans ended in 1975, a government controlled by the Communist Pathet Lao continued to control society and the country was as closed as Cambodia. Yet there was no genocide, no forced migration of populations, and no totalitarian attempt to revert to a primitive age.

Both countries have much in common with wartime experiences and in the ideological base of their governments. But Laos is developing faster than Cambodia. Per capita income is over \$700 a year compared with \$400 in Cambodia. While still a poor developing nation, Laos seems better taken care of and better able to make productive use of the limited foreign aid it has received. As I flew back to Phnom

Penh Monday morning, I was asking myself why the disparity is developing. My thesis is that while Laos suffered much heavier bombing and U.S. meddling than Cambodia during the war the affected area was sparsely populated by Laotians. Therefore, there was very little harm to local populations and after the U.S. withdrawal the society held together and did not experience the genocide and civil war that Cambodia's did.

Kompong Thom

One of the fine organizations we have supported the past two years is the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO). During our trip in February 2004 we visited a village in Kompong Thom along with staff members from TPO to observe their effort to form a self-help group among the village men to reduce alcoholism, domestic violence, and idleness. When we left we wondered whether the men would form the group and whether it would make a difference. I decided to go back to this village on my last day of this trip to talk to some men and see what had happened.

Tha, my guide and translator, and I made the three-hour trip to Kompong Thom, arriving in the town at lunch. We were caught in the heaviest rainstorm I had ever experienced in Cambodia and waited it out over lunch for an hour. The rain was quite welcome as the rainy season was off to a slow and dry start. After lunch we made our way to the TPO office in Kompong Thom and were soon joined by Ms. Chan Theara, TPO Caseworker and Project Leader. I remembered Ms. Chan as the energetic professional who had been teaching village representatives about mental health in the pagoda on our previous trip. She got in our car and led us to the village of Lvea Chhom. The last two miles to the village were on a dirt road with a crown of red clay that was soaked from the rain and I had serious doubts whether we would make it without sliding off into a field. But we did. In the village we met with Sam Sorn, 56, the man whose home we had used for the first meeting the previous year. After we talked with him for a while we were joined by Lim Ly, 65.

My purpose on this trip was to get better acquainted with the villagers I met on my previous trip, learn about their pasts, their current lives, whether they had agreed to form a group, and, if so, how it had affected their lives. In the previous meeting there had been several comments of skepticism and even questions as to what the difference was between the indoctrination of TPO and what they received from the Khmer Rouge years earlier. I was pleased to learn that Ms. Chan and others from TPO had been successful in forming a group with these men. Once TPO got the group started, the men continued to meet on their own but meetings have slacked off without leadership from TPO.

Sam Sorn, the younger of the two men, would have been twenty-six at the beginning of the Pol Pot era. During that time his family was relocated to a village 40 km from his home, and although his home village was split up, his nuclear family was kept together. He was recruited as a group leader by the Khmer Rouge because he was a hard worker. Before the Pol Pot era he had never served in the army, but after the Vietnamese came there was a lottery and his son was conscripted. He joined in place of his son and served ten years, longer than any of his other fellow villagers had. During that period there was a lot of fighting and while he tried to farm he often had leave to fight. Now back in his village he farms two and one half hectares and is married with six children and nine grandchildren.

During the Khmer Rouge era Lim Ly was relocated to an area near where Sam Sorn had been relocated and was a mere farmer and laborer in this new camp. Returning to his village after this period he did not join the army but was a village guard. He farms two hectares and lives with his common-law wife, seven children and ten grandchildren. He loves the woman he has shared a life and family with but never married because his parents were strict and forbade his marriage.

The men talked about their group meetings. They told us that a couple of the men quit drinking and all of them cut back by more than half. They didn't understand what the meetings were supposed to be about at first but learned to value the benefits of talking about their lives and behaviors. Ly had given up drinking ten years ago and valued what he could learn about farming from the other men. Sorn told me that many men cut way back on drinking but are probably drinking a little bit more now. Both agreed that the women now consume what the men don't drink. According to the men some drink quietly and some become annoyingly chatty when they have had too much. In the meetings Ly talked a lot about domestic violence and how to avoid it. He told me that although the other men agreed with what he said, they failed to curb their violence when they went home to their families.

I came away from the village with the impression that progress in changing social behaviors has been small but that these men and probably the other men in the group are conscious of their behaviors, pay lip service to improvement, and value the time to get together to discuss more serious topics. I choose to believe that TPO has helped create a social tool and a tool for self-improvement where none previously existed.

As I left these men I thanked them for their time, told them that I liked them, and that when I am in the U.S. I think of them often. Was there anything they wanted to ask me? Was there anything I didn't ask that I should have? Was there anything they wanted to tell me? Sorn spoke through Tha, "We are mere farmers, not educated people like you. What we want for our families and ourselves is more education. We have a primary school in the village but the secondary school is in Kompong Thom, twenty miles away, beyond the reach of their children." I have visited many schools in Cambodia but they have all been primary schools filled with young children doing a good job with elementary learning. On my next trip I will investigate secondary education and educational opportunities for adults. I fear that if higher-level schools are not available in the countryside, the full potential of early learning will be lost on the rural population.

Other Meetings and Experiences

The trip also included other experiences and meetings with organizations we met with and supported in the past. A brief synopsis follows.

Land Grab Demonstration in Phnom Penh - On Tuesday afternoon, June 28, as we were driving between appointments we noticed a small crowd in Soramrith Park, across from Pannasastra University. We stopped to check out what was going on and found a group of perhaps twenty villagers from an area near the airport protesting a land grab by the government. The village spokeswoman, and energetic older lady, told me that the village had sold its land to a Thai investor but was allowed to farm the ground for another six years. Now soldiers have come with a bulldozer and put up a gate in violation of the six-year tenancy. The villagers had come that day to the

city to seek redress, starting their protest at the home of the Prime Minister. They were expelled from there and were now demonstrating at this park. As we talked with the villagers I noticed two men nearby with an audio recorder. They were from the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR). I read that these questionable land sales and heavy-handed land grabs are becoming common but this is the first demonstration I have observed. I was encouraged to see CCHR actively involved. I have heard much about this organization and look forward to visiting it on my next trip.

Angsoeng Library - On one of our early trips to Cambodia we met a remarkable editor at the Cambodia Daily named Lor Chandara. Upon our return we became acquainted with the Seper family of Rockford, Illinois, whose Pookai Book Project supports a library started by Lor in his home province of Takeo. On this trip I took a morning to drive with Lor to Takeo and toured the library.

The trip to south to Takeo was pleasant, but the parched landscape from the dry rainy season was depressing. The library is a small well-built building on a dusty gravel road that leads to a pagoda. Inside the building were shelves half filled with an eclectic assortment of books donated by the Sepers or collected by Lor. There was also a computer and printer that were in constant use by younger and older children.

A room added on to the building serves as a school for primary school children. As I monitored a class in session, I watched a cute little girl struggle with the large pointer in her hand, but she had no struggle with her lesson. When she finished I asked the students to help me learn Khmer which they relished with both suggestions and snickers.

For a private institution started by a salaried journalist, this modest project and how much learning and social life it is nurturing is inspiring.

Wat Kokos Killing Field Memorial - On our way back to Phnom Penh from the library, Chandara pointed out a grand pagoda in a large field on the side of the road. He told me that this was the only known instance where the Khmer Rouge had used a sacred pagoda as a prison, torture facility, and killing field. As we toured this pagoda, Wat Kokos or also known as Wat Sophy, I was once again moved by the memorial that contained some of the eight thousand skulls excavated from the fields around the pagoda. The published map of the Documentation Center of Cambodia identifies some 80 memorials, 194 prisons, and 391 killing sites. Visiting this site reminded me of the immense scale of suffering and destruction during that three-year period.

Doug Collins - As happens so often I regularly hear about efforts in Cambodia from friends in the U.S. and vice versa. A year earlier the daughter of my neighbor in Decatur, IL told me of a classmate of hers from medical school who was working in Cambodia. His name is Doug Collins and he is both a physician and a missionary for the Church of Christ. He has spent more than two years learning the language and culture and in a few months he will take over a hospital and clinic in Cho Lun in Kratie Province. I visited with Doug on this trip, and in addition to our informative chat, he showed me the Phnom Penh Military Hospital where he works two days a week. Here is another case of the fine altruistic efforts of an American to give hope for Cambodia.

Mu Sochua - Earlier in the year we read an article from the November 2004 issue of Oprah Winfrey's magazine about a courageous Cambodian woman who goes out on the streets at night to try to redirect the lives of the hundreds of girls who feel they have no means for providing for themselves other than prostitution. While meeting with Pierre Tami of HAGAR I mentioned this woman, Mu Sochua, and he told me he was a close friend of hers and could arrange a meeting. Within three hours we were talking in a restaurant over tea.

Sochua is an elegant Cambodian woman, wife, mother of three teenage daughters, a former member of parliament, and a former Minister of Women's and Veteran's Affairs. While her main focus has been the organization she founded to help young women victims of sex trafficking, she has also produced *Virgin Harvest*, a documentary about these problem that will be released shortly. She has also left the ruling CPP party and is planning her campaign for parliament as a Sam Rainsay Party candidate.

We had a long and informative chat and I learned so much about current issues and politics in the country. We were talking in late June and Sochua was scheduled to speak at an AFL/CIO convention in Chicago on July 24. I told her I would welcome her visit.

On July 25, I hosted a dinner in Chicago for more than 30 people interested in meeting Sochua and hearing her message about the plight of women in Cambodia. I think she knows she has friends here and we hope she will stop here on subsequent visits to the U. S.

Human Rights Watch - I am active with the Chicago Committee of Human Rights Watch (HRW) and have appreciated the contacts made with HRW staff that have expertise in Cambodia. The head of the Asia Division is Brad Adams who spent many years in Cambodia and is completing a book about Cambodian history since the UNTAC elections of 1993.

The HRW fieldworker in Cambodia is Sara Colm. I have tried to reach her on previous trips but we finally connected for a very informative lunch on this trip. She has been focusing on the rights of the minorities in the hill country of the northeast and the general issue of land grabbing and corrupt logging contracts. I was heartened to know that there is a way for international pressure to be brought to bear on these crucial issues.

Returnee Integration Support Program, formerly the Returnee Assistance Program - We often start our trips out with a visit to Bill Herod and his Returnee Assistance Program. This benefits us by keeping us awake after the overnight flight but he has to face groggy patrons. This trip was no exception and Bill was my first visit when I arrived.

The RAP program has always been in need of cash to fund its operations and was relieved recently to get a two-year grant from USAID for \$300,000. The relief was short-lived when inspectors arrived and concluded that significant changes in the way Bill was managing the program were suggested. He could not agree to these changes and I have heard recently that he is leading a constructive turnover of the program to a new director.

We are quite interested in this valuable program, but more importantly have

immense respect, admiration, and appreciation for Bill's heroic and saintly work. We will stay in touch with him and follow his future effort but knowing him has been one of those rare experiences of seeing the selfless, tireless effort of one man in grim circumstances. I search for a word stronger than inspiration.

HAGAR - I visited Pierre Tami twice on this trip and continued to help him with ideas and support. Meanwhile his industrial catering endeavor flourishes, while his Hagar Design effort struggles in the face of increasing worldwide competition for all makers of sewn product.

Transcultural Psycho-social Organization (TPO) - In addition to my illuminating trip to Kompong Thom, I visited Dr. Sotheara Chim, the Director of TPO in Phnom Penh. TPO continues its invaluable work alleviating Cambodia's invisible but immense mental health problem. They can always use our support and can never get enough psychiatric drugs for all their cases.

The Center for Social Development - Visiting Chea Vannath again I was reminded how prescient she is to be fighting corruption as she has. The fight is getting more difficult and risky. New programs for CSD include a permanent court monitoring and parliament watch. CSD now has seven full-time court monitors. Vannath has a knack for finding just the right issues to work on, to work on them in an objective and thorough manner, and then carefully let her findings see the light of day.

Cambodian Defenders Project - Returning to CDP I found the Director Sok Sam Oeun busily involved with both board development matters and talking to the press about plans for the War Crimes Tribunals. We didn't have much time to catch up, but a contributor always likes to see a lean organization slightly overworked on such important projects.

LICADHO - On my last day of the trip I had a nice long meeting with the charming Kek Galabru, founder of the esteemed human rights organization, LICADHO. She rounded out my picture of current developments, and we tried to straighten out some funding issues for a grant to the Kompong Thom prison before she caught an overseas flight and I left for the village in Kompong Thom.

Kevin Doyle - When I can get time with Kevin Doyle, managing editor of the Cambodia Daily, it is not only enlightening but a lot of fun. We were able to have dinner at a favorite North Korean restaurant, Pyongyang. In addition to running the paper, he has done the direct reporting on a number of crucial issues including the persecution of the Montagnards in Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri Provinces.

Subsequent to My Return

I am late in filing this report; it has been more than four months since I returned to the U.S. Since then many of the issues that were simmering while I was there have heated up and new problems have arisen.

As noted above, I had a good talk with Mu Sochua when she visited Chicago in July. I have also had more meetings, phone calls, and correspondence with interested parties than after previous trips. Reading the Cambodia Daily and the Camnet news consolidation service has also kept me better informed. I have also read several

good articles about current events, including Hun Sen's Consolidation--Death or Beginning of Reform?, Steve Heder, Southeast Asian Affairs 2005, Cambodia's Performance, Caroline Hughes, chughes@ssccemail.bham.ac.uk, Patronage Politics and Hybrid Democracy: Political Change in Cambodia, 1993-2003, Kheang Un.

What has happened?

In my 2004 trip report entitled Progress, I concluded that the peaceful settlement of the election and constitutional stalemate and continued peace and stability bode well for civil society in Cambodia. I feel chagrined to have learned that some feel the peaceful settlement was a folding in of the FUNCINPEC opposition party into the corruption and patronage of the ruling Cambodian Peoples Party. This has given the CPP and the Prime Minister carte blanche to be more aggressive and overt in granting questionable concessions. Government buildings in choice downtown Phnom Penh locations have been sold or have been traded to private developers in closed deals. Timber concessions in the jungle continue operations as villagers are threatened and violently suppressed. Even the famous Cheung Ek Killing Field Memorial was supposedly leased to a Japanese company for \$15,000 a year. Investigation showed that no such company existed and that this was probably a mere taking of the revenue-producing site by a Cambodian insider. This would be consistent with the questionable destination for the revenue generated by the temples in Angkor Wat in Siem Reap.

More ominous is the suppression of freedom of speech and the opposition Sam Rainsay Party. The government has revoked parliamentary immunity for members of the SRP and so Sam Rainsay has been in exile for more than a year. He had planned to return to Cambodia in October. In August another SRP member was sentenced to seven years, charged with forming an illegal armed force when sources say he was merely organizing a shadow cabinet of thinkers. In October a radio host was arrested for defaming the Prime Minister, effectively shutting down the only independent radio station in the capital city. In the same month the president of the Cambodian Independent Teachers' Association was jailed for criticizing a secret border treaty the Prime Minister recently entered into with Vietnam. This is a mere sampling of developments of the past few months.

These discouraging events call into question the judgment I made a year earlier that progress, halting as it may be, is being made. Now I ask myself several questions. Why has Laos developed more in recent years and made better use of foreign aid? Why has the development of Cambodia's political maturity seemed to have reversed itself?

Will civil society and the economy continue to develop in such a discouraging political climate?

What can reverse the deterioration of political and civil freedoms and is there a risk of a return to instability and insecurity?

At every bend in the river, I find questions on current events in Cambodia.