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2,500 riels

CPP in cyberspace: spreading 'the truth' on the Net

By KYRA DUPONT

CONFUSED about Cambodian politics? Not sure where to turn to for information, and who to believe? Relax, help is at your fingertips: the CPP home page on the Internet.

"Welcome to the Cambodian People's Party Home Page. You've come to the right place!" begins the introduction on the CPP's Internet website launched Dec 2, the 19th anniversary of the party's founding.

"We realize that the political world can be brutal and very confusing," the CPP avows. "Here we hope to step above that and offer a clear, intelli-

gent view of Cambodia."

It goes on to state the goals of the home page, including (No.1) "to refute liberalism and its allies in the media using the facts of the issues rather than deception".

Five months after images of tanks rolling through Phnom Penh streets were beamed around the globe, the CPP's foray into cyberspace is aimed at showing a softer face to the world.

The website bears the customary passport-type photos of the CPP leadership — Heng Samrin, Chea Sim and Hun Sen — in rigid poses. But there is also considerable effort to portray Hun Sen, the Second Prime Minister and

CPP vice-president, in a more casual and gentle fashion.

"In the beginning it was difficult because they could not find any friendly-looking pictures of Hun Sen," said a staffer at Lidee Khmer, an association of Khmer students which offers Internet services in Phnom Penh, who was asked for advice about the website.

But eventually something suitable was found; now, with a click on your computer mouse, you can download snapshots of "Hun Sen and the people" — such as him sitting on a woven mat with a group of elderly women villagers — and "Hun Sen and the future",

featuring a grinning Hun Sen clutching a laughing schoolgirl.

Another set of pictures shows Hun Sen the family man, arm-in-arm with his wife Bun Rany, as well as photos of the Second Lady engaged in "humanitarian activities", "social activities" and as an "environmental activist".

But it is politics — and particularly the events of July — which dominates the website. It features a "News Stand" section — or "Newstance" as it said when the *Post* accessed it this week — with articles explaining the pre-July, July, and post-July crises.

One is an article by academic

Michael Vickery — published in the *Phnom Penh Post* — under the headline "The real story of Cambodia cries out to be told".

Pieces of text about the CPP political platform and bylaws, and pictures of the party headquarters and CPP-funded schools, can also be seen. Pages about the party's standing committee and central committee are being developed. Soon, according to party officials, viewers will be able to see the CPP version of "Premier plays the China card", Hun Sen's "vision of neutral polls", and why Hun Sen denies "the strongman epithet."

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Red Cross left in the red by bank scandal

By CHRISTINE CHAUMEAU

THE CAMBODIAN Farmers Bank is in financial crisis, unable to pay up on

\$332,261 raised from the CRC's annual gala and charity bazaars, a \$52,952 donation from Pope John-Paul II, \$7,517 from the Angkor Wat



Net wars: CPP goes for the soft touch

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The CPP's move on-line is part of a broader plan to "adopt a new style of leadership", share "the truth" about Hun Sen and recent Cambodian events, and foster a friendlier, more modern image, say party officials.

"Everybody agrees that the [CPP's] image is so negative that we have to change it if we want to continue to receive assistance programs, for instance," said Ok Serei Sopheak, chief of cabinet to Deputy Prime Minister Sar Kheng.

"After the clash of 5 and 6 July, we had very bad reporting from the international media," said Khieu Kanharith, the Secretary of State for Information.

"One of the factors is that for more than a year Hun Sen showed us a tough person, a very strong man and he overlikes to use violence. All these stereotyped images are deeply [rooted] in most analysis of Cambodia. That's why... he has to change this image," explained Kanharith.

"For years, the CPP suffered from bad publicity. By creating a website for CPP, we hope that we can explain

to the world, and in particular to people interested in Cambodia, the background of the party and how it works.

"Many people accuse the CPP of being a communist party and Vietnamese puppet... even a dictatorial party," said Kanharith. "We are [also] trying to overcome this image by recruiting more

view and positive thinking."

Denying that the website was propaganda, Phay said it was aimed at clearing the distorted information put forward by others. "We want freedom of expression, and not freedom of distortion."

In particular, he said, the CPP site was "not like another [party's] site... not propaganda", an apparent reference to the Khmer Nation Party (KNP).

The KNP has had a much flashier spot on the Internet for some time: its subtleties include bloody images of the March 30 grenade attack and the July fighting, and headlines such as "Hun Sen is Pol Pot #2".

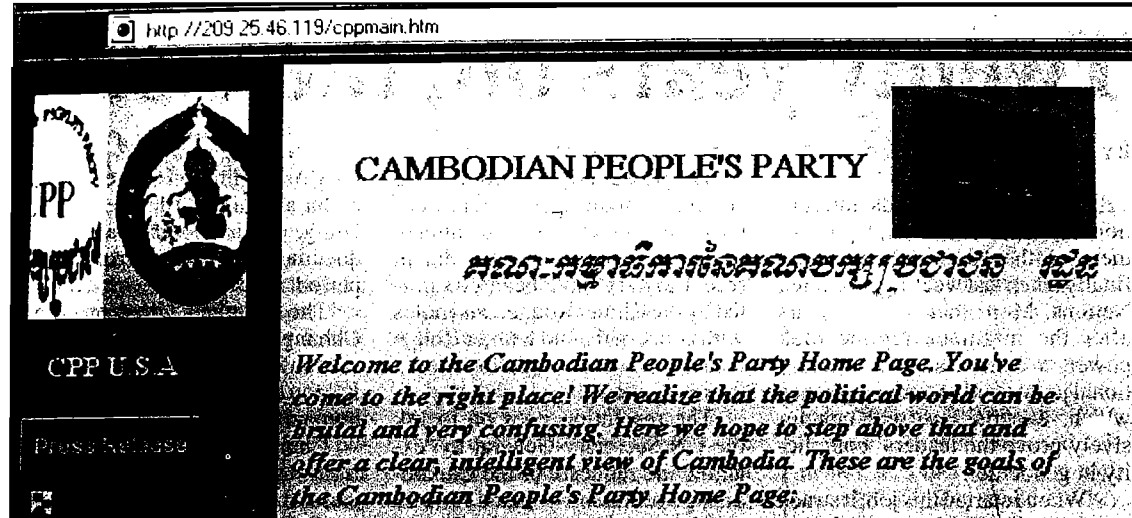
One piece of graphic artwork is a map of Cambodia with drops of blood and an AK47 superimposed over it, with the words: "The Killing Fields. Now playing in Cambodia. Starring Hun Sen & CPP."

Another KNP showpiece depicts "Cambodia's Most Wanted", which features a picture of Pol Pot, captioned "Brother No.1. Hiding in Anlong Veng." Next to it is a cartoon of a one-eyed Hun Sen in Vietnamese military uniform, captioned: "Saddam

Hunsen. Often seen in Vietnam". Beneath Hun Sen and Pol Pot is the old Khmer Rouge regime slogan "To keep you is no profit [gain]. To kill you is no deficit [loss]."

Coincidentally, KNP leader Sam Rainsy said this week that he has no control over the party website, which is produced by

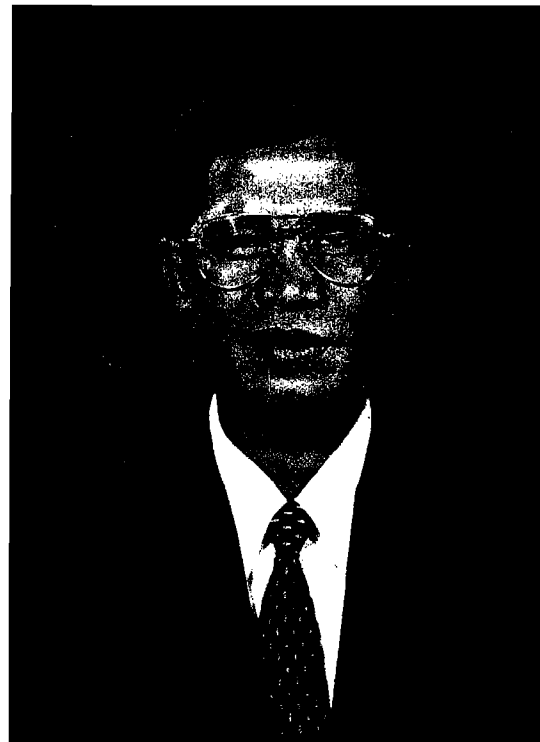
"What Hun Sen says is the truth. If you compare him with Clinton or Eisenhower, Hun Sen is less secretive — he speaks the truth..."



All photos from the Internet: Andy Eames

DOWNLOADING THE PARTY

Snippets from the CPP home page on the Internet and (below) photographs of Hun Sen — both on the Net — depicting the change in image the CPP is trying to promote around the world.



Hun Sen photos: Courtesy of CPP