



FEATURES | GET THIS STRAIGHT | CHALLENGE | BOOKS | REVIEWS | LOG



THE CULTURE OF TECHNOLOGY
THE TECHNOLOGY OF CULTURE

SALON



"E-mail is a real revolution"

For a Cambodian opposition leader, the Net is a lifeline.

BY KYRA DUPONT AND ERIC PAPE

In Cambodia, which is not exactly renowned for being hooked into the online world, the Internet hasn't merely facilitated the work of a democratic political opposition under difficult circumstances. According to the leader of that opposition, the Net in Cambodia today is a lifesaver.

"Sometimes [the Internet] can save lives," says opposition leader Sam Rainsy. "If someone is arrested, the world knows they have disappeared. If the world knows, there is hesitation from the authorities."

When longtime Cambodian strongman Hun Sen ordered a crackdown on unprecedented mass protests against his disputed electoral victory last year and called for the arrest of Rainsy, he fled to the safest place he could think of -- United Nations headquarters. At the same time, a small network of the former finance minister's Internet-savvy supporters went online to spread the word that police had ordered Rainsy's arrest on trumped-up charges that he plotted to kill Hun

ALSO TODAY

	21ST	
L	O	
		G

[21st Log](#)
This Web site wants your spam

TABLE TALK

What's the dream operating system for cruising the Internet? It's another Mac vs. Windows go-round in the [21st](#) area of Table Talk

Search and ye shall find -- personal health, family wealth and bibliophilic happiness at barnesandnoble.com

Search by:

Keyword

Technology news from



[Will telcos kill the video store?](#)

RECENTLY

["Wing Commander" creator takes the director's chair](#)

By Howard Wen
Chris Roberts talks about his passage from the little screen to the big screen
(03/12/99)

[Beauty and the geeks](#)
By Janelle Brown
Female technology execs face cruel choices about selling their own sex appeal
(03/11/99)

[Amazon vs. the ants](#)
By Scott Rosenberg

Sen.

"When I was hiding at the United Nations office to escape Hun Sen's arrest, information was dispatched quickly by e-mail to the United Nations and journalists to put pressure on Hun Sen," Rainsy recounted during a recent U.S. visit. While members of the state security apparatus showed up outside the U.N. compound and confronted opposition supporters who had responded to Rainsy's online plea for help, the police "changed their mind at the last minute" and backed down from the arrest, Rainsy recalled: "Because of e-mail, people could move in time to warn Hun Sen [about repercussions]."

Undoubtedly, Rainsy's shrewd ability to dish out information fast has kept him alive in a long-running game of chicken with the forceful Hun Sen, who controls the army and the courts and is not afraid to use them.

Rainsy asserts that the Internet and simple e-mail access are helping him to do nothing less than doctor the birth of civil disobedience among Cambodians who have been resigned to decades of oppression. "Dictatorships are afraid of the truth ... Democracy is based on truth and truth is made of information," he says.

Aware that Hun Sen's government requires huge infusions of international cash to keep his political and military machine afloat, Rainsy often suggests that the government, made up mostly of uneducated former Communists, will accept his daring protests at home and lobbying for international conditions on aid abroad -- because it is seeking hundreds of millions of dollars in aid from Western democracies.

While Rainsy's gamble that international donors can save him from Hun Sen's wrath has generally served him well, the strategy has not always worked for others. Vocal supporters in the

Sure, David can beat Goliath on the Web -- if he's got a New York Times columnist in his corner
(03/10/99)

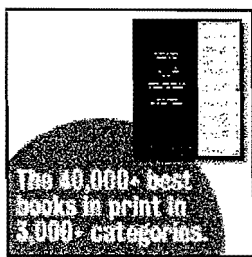
How can they patent that?

By Peter Wayner
The torrent of patents for e-commerce schemes raises new questions about an old-fashioned system
(03/09/99)

Fortress Microsoft

By Tony Seideman
Redmond's scorched-earth spin strategy has turned into a PR nightmare
(03/08/99)

BROWSE THE
21ST FEATURES
ARCHIVES



remote countryside are often more vulnerable as communications are weak, and human rights organizations are not always able to keep tabs on Hun Sen's local party leaders -- some of whom are former members of the Khmer Rouge, whose reign left an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians dead in the 1970s.

Danh Teav, the husband of one of Rainsy's party's candidates, is a case in point: He was arrested during the election campaign and held incommunicado on dubious charges.

"They couldn't go after the candidate, Rosamy Ly, because it would have discredited the election, so they went after her husband," Rainsy's American information officer, Rich Garella, explains via an e-mail. "He was beaten savagely in prison and held for ransom by the police. Through e-mail we got word to international human rights organizations. They agreed he was a political prisoner and sent out alerts through e-mail. The beatings stopped and a doctor was finally allowed in to see him."

Such cases are not rare and represented a real threat to the provincial network of the opposition in the run-up to the election, Garella says.

NEXT PAGE .|. "I don't know if the party could have survived without the Internet"

