

All the News Without Fear or Favor

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Amid Latest Sex Scandal, Many Recall Piseth Pilika

BY ALEX WILLEMYNS
AND KIM CHAN
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Piseth Pilika was the most famous classical dancer and actress in Cambodia. A film starlet in the 1980s, she reached new levels of fame in the 1990s as the face of the booming karaoke music-video industry.

So her gruesome murder on the morning of July 6, 1999—gunned down in front of Phnom Penh's O'Russey market while standing beside her 7-year-old niece—sent shock waves through the country, not least because no one was ever arrested.

Rumors swirled in the following months that the star had been ordered killed by the wife of a high-ranking official who was infuriated after discovering she was having an affair with her husband.

Then the popular French weekly L'Express dropped a bombshell: an article built around diary entries written by Piseth Pilika, apparently recounting her yearlong tryst with Prime Minister Hun Sen and the discovery of the affair by his wife, Bun Rany.

The story quoted poems allegedly written by Mr. Hun Sen to Piseth Pilika, and the diary mentions gifts he gave her, including a house in Phnom Penh and hundreds of thousands of dollars deposited into a bank account, funds which the diary says Ms. Rany froze.

The prime minister and first lady staunchly denied the claims, blaming opposition leader Sam Rainsy for fabricating the story—Mr. Rainsy's sister-in-law worked for L'Express—but never followed through on

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Piseth Pilika

cambodiadaily.com



Supporters of ousted Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh climb pillars of the Unknown Soldier Monument in Yemen's capital of Sanaa during a rally yesterday protesting the one-year anniversary of Saudi-led airstrikes against Saleh's Houthi allies.

Hun Manet Pulls Out of US Parade Amid Protest

BY AUN PHEAP
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Prime Minister Hun Sen's eldest son, Hun Manet, announced yesterday that he would not be attending a Khmer New Year parade he was invited to in Long Beach, California, in the face of vocal opposition from some of the community's Cambodian-Americans.

According to the Long Beach Press-Telegram, Lieutenant General Manet was invited to join next

month's parade by the Cambodian Coordinating Council, a local group that organizes community events, following a request from the city's Cambodian Consulate.

But on Tuesday, the paper reported, some 200 protesters demonstrated outside the Long Beach City Council building to have it denounce Lt. Gen. Manet's visit and to get the premier's son disinvented.

The protesters threatened to boycott the planned festivities if Lt. Gen.

Manet showed up.

The pushback against the prime minister's son followed a protest staged by some Cambodian-Americans against Mr. Hun Sen himself during a meeting between U.S. President Barack Obama and Asean leaders in California last month. Members of the local Cambodian community—the largest outside of Cambodia—accuse Mr. Hun Sen and his family of running

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Red Tourism and Selfie Sticks in Mao's Hometown

BY EMILY RAUHALA
THE WASHINGTON POST

SHAOSHAN, China - On a sunny, just-spring morning, clusters of families line up in front of Mao Zedong's butter-yellow childhood home.

An octogenarian fan of the former dictator shuffles in front of a velvet rope and fixes his teary eyes on the camera: Click. Sisters in matching Red Star caps tilt their heads and purse their lips. Click. A rosy-cheeked toddler waves a Chi-

nese flag. Click.

Here in the knitted hills of Hunan province in central China, in the town where China's Great Helmsman was born and raised, is the heart of the Red Tourism trade, a sector that peddles nostalgia and amnesia both.

Fifty years after the start of the Cultural Revolution, pilgrims arrive by bus, train or car to trail megaphone-toting guides through refurbished relics and restaurants serving local dishes a la Mao. Over the course

of this year's Lunar New Year holiday, a reported half-million people made the trip.

Shaoshan's sites are heavy on details about Mao's childhood, his preferred cuts of pork, and the trials and triumphs of the Communist Party's early days. The famine that killed tens of millions is scarcely mentioned; the ravages of the Cultural Revolution don't rate.

It's not, as many imagine, that visitors don't know about the upheaval

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AND ALSO

Man Arrested Over Video Rental

REUTERS

A wanted North Carolina man was arrested this week on charges he failed to return a VHS tape to a video store 14 years ago, police said last week.

James Meyers, 37, of Concord, was driving his daughter to school when he was pulled over for a broken brake light, according to a video Meyers posted on YouTube.

Meyers said officers ran his driv-

er's license and told him he had an outstanding arrest warrant for not returning a movie to J&J Video in Salisbury, North Carolina.

The Concord Police Department confirmed the arrest, saying the warrant was issued February 28, 2002 by the now closed video store and signed by a magistrate.

Instead of arresting Meyers at the scene, police allowed him to report later that day to be served the warrant.

Tourism...

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of the era—they do. But the extended clans who flock to Shaoshan see those awful times as part of a larger, still-unfolding story.

“Chairman Mao brought the country together,” said Li Ermin, 29, the cap-clad woman posing for a selfie with her sister. “He is why we’re here.”

Shaoshan, like Mao, means different things to different people—and different things in different times.

Jude Blanchette, author of a forthcoming book on Mao’s influence on contemporary China, to be published by Oxford University Press, said the town is, and has long been, a “proxy” for the political climate of the country—a place to “take the nation’s pulse.”

When The New York Times visited Shaoshan in 1982, just a year after the party ruled that Mao bore “chief responsibility” for the Cultural Revolution, the flow of tourists had gone from thousands to a few hundred a day. Then, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre, Beijing marshaled Maoism to unite the fractured nation, sending “work units” on study trips to Shaoshan.

In 1993, The Washington Post’s

Lena Sun found evidence of the economic transformation underway. “Shaoshan now has 2,240 private entrepreneurs, the highest percentage of any county or city in the province,” she noted. People sold Mao tie clips and “Rolexes” on the street.

In the years before Xi Jinping took power, Maoism enjoyed another revival thanks in no small part to former Chongqing party boss Bo Xilai. But Bo was purged, and months later the police crashed a Maoist gathering in Shaoshan, a sign that the party was worried, still, about things getting too Red.

Blanchette likens the challenge of marshaling Mao’s legacy to a “Goldilocks problem.”

“You need to get the right amount and the right kind of Maoism: too cold and the party loses part of its legitimizing story, too hot and you get permanent revolution,” he said.

Today’s Shaoshan shows this dynamic at play. Since assuming office in 2012, President Xi has quickly consolidated power, becoming what some scholars have called “the most powerful leader since Mao.”

To do so, he has leaned heavily, if selectively, on the former leader, showing reverence as required, picking out the parts of history that resonate with his vision for the present and playing down the rest.

One of Xi’s signature projects is

an anti-corruption campaign that has seen thousands of officials arrested. In Shaoshan, a museum recently opened an exhibit on Mao’s anti-corruption efforts.

As part of the nation’s “great rejuvenation”—one of Xi’s favorite buzzwords—the Communist Party “forged iron discipline, and built a steel great wall of anti-corruption,” reads the display.

But even as the party draws a line from Mao to Xi, it can’t afford to let the former shine too bright. The

“Mao did not grow up in the big house I imagined. Our chairman came from an ordinary family, too.”

—BAI JINYUAN

current chairman of the Communist Party wants absolute loyalty. Neo-Maoism is seen as a threat.

Of course, most people who make the trip to Shaoshan don’t come to ponder rectification campaigns or debate Xi’s evocation of “socialist core values.”

Visitors here said touring Mao’s old stomping grounds was simply a chance to think about how far they had come and to reflect on what

they hope to achieve. In addition to Little Red Book selfie sticks, the gift shop sells tomes such as “Mao Zedong Teaches Networking.”

Some came looking for a way back to a more egalitarian and spiritually fulfilling time. China’s economy may have grown by leaps and bounds over the past 30 years, said Wen Shuchao, 45, but “spiritual culture” has not kept up.

Wen, who stopped by Shaoshan on his way from his home in Henan to the southern city of Guangzhou, where he works, said he worries about the country’s growing wealth gap. Mao’s era may have been poor, he said, “but everyone was poor.”

Over a meal of Mao’s favorite dishes, the Bai family said they came to Shaoshan because, for the first time, they could. Seven members of the family packed into an SUV and drove from China’s far northeast to the south, stopping at points of interest along the way.

The matriarch, Bo Shurong, was a Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution and still loves Mao. Her younger son, Bai Jinyuan, 45, said he liked the central Chinese scenery. The kids seemed to enjoy the food.

For Bai, Shaoshan is a lesson in how far a life can take you. “Mao did not grow up in the big house I imagined,” he said. “Our chairman came from an ordinary family, too.”

NEWSMAKERS

■ NEW YORK - Facing a growing outcry, Tribeca Film Festival co-founder **ROBERT DENIRO** has decided to remove a controversial anti-vaccine film from the gathering’s lineup. Just a day after the actor revealed he had pushed for a showing of the film, titled “Vaxxed” and directed by anti-vaccine activist Andrew Wakefield, De Niro reversed his position. “My intent in screening this film was to provide an opportunity for conversation around an issue that is deeply personal to me and my family,” De Niro said in a statement Saturday. “But after reviewing it over the past few days with the Tribeca Film Festival team and others from the scientific community, we do not believe it contributes to or furthers the discussion I had hoped for.” The movie alleges a cover-up by the U.S. government over vaccines increasing the risk of autism—a position that has been widely discredited and criticized for leading to a dangerous drop-off in vaccinations. (LAT)



Reuters

A man sells souvenirs bearing the images of Chinese President Xi Jinping and China’s late Chairman Mao Zedong at Tiananmen Square in Beijing earlier this month.

— International Brief —

Bangladesh Asks US, Philippines to Help Recover \$81M

DHAKA, Bangladesh - The new governor of Bangladesh’s central bank has sent formal letters to the New York Fed, as well as central bank and money laundering chiefs in the Philippines, asking them to help recover its stolen \$81 million, a senior central bank official said yesterday. The news came as Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith said the government was waiting to hear the recommendations of an investigation committee to decide whether the central bank should file a suit against the Fed after one of the biggest cyber heists in history. Unknown hackers breached the computer systems of Bangladesh Bank in early February and attempted to steal \$951 million from its account at the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank of New York, which it uses for international settlements. Some attempted transfers were blocked, but \$81 million was transferred to accounts in the Philippines belonging to casino operators. The central bank official told reporters that Fazole Kabir, who became governor a week ago, had asked the New York Fed for help to investigate if there had been any lapses or whether it had any involvement in the heist, the official said. (Reuters)