

1998 April Interview Radio Free Asia

Interview With Pol Pot, Brother Number One of the Khmer Rouge Regime- part one



Picture: Pin Samkhon (right) interviewing Pol Pot (left) in Anlong Veng on the 2nd of April, 1998.

This interview was recorded by Mr. Pin Samkhon, head of Radio Free Asia's Khmer Service, in Anlong Veng on the 2nd of April 1998, two weeks before Pol Pot died in April, 1998.

Translated from Khmer by Khmerization. Khmerization's comment: The opportunity to interview Pol Pot was one in a life time but Mr. Pin Samkhon has not asked any relevant and important questions. Many questions that need to be asked remained unanswered. It seemed that he went to the interview unprepared. Now the opportunity has passed as Pol Pot has left our world. So most of the unanswered questions will remain to be unanswered forever. It is sad.

A Short Biography

Salot Sar, alias, Pol Pot, was born into a well to do landowner family on 19th May 1925 in Prek Sbov village, Kampong Thom province. When he was young he became a temple boy for six years before matriculating Kampong Cham College where he met Khieu Samphan, who had also studied there. After Kampong Cham college he studied carpentry at Phnom Penh technical college for one year and in 1949 he received a scholarship to study radio electronics in France.

Pol Pot joined an anti-French movement under Ho Chi Minh leadership in the 1940s. In 1946 he joined the Communist Party of Cambodia. During his studies in France from 1949-1953 Pol Pot had participated actively in the French revolutionary movement. Upon returning to Cambodia he became a teacher at a private college called Chamroeun Vichea. In 1963, along with Ieng Sary, Son Sen and other leftists, he fled to the jungle after the authority wanted him arrested for his communist and anti-government activities.

Pol Pot became secretary of the Communist Party of Cambodia in 1963 after Tou Samouth, the former secretary, mysteriously disappeared. He held this position until 1975. After the

Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975 he was elected prime minister of the Khmer Rouge regime from 1976-1979, in a sham and fraudulent election.

When the Vietnamese invading forces toppled the Khmer Rouge regime on the 7th of January 1979 Pol Pot and his cliques fled the Khmer-Thai borders and established his guerrilla bases there. In 1985 he was stripped off all of his political and military roles .

Pol Pot was arrested in mid 1997 after an internal fighting between forces loyal to him and forces loyal to Ta Mok. Shortly after his arrest he was tried by the Khmer Rouge “people’s court”, in a farcical show trial to showcase the international community. After a long illness, he died in April 1998 and was cremated in the jungle of the Thai-Khmer border area of Anlong Veng. His tomb is one of the popular attractions for many Cambodian and foreign tourists.

Pin Samkhon: Today is the 2nd of April 1998. This interview is being recorded in Ang Veng after there were rumours that Mr. Pol Pot was evacuated to Thailand. How is your health at the moment?

Pol Pot: first of all I would like to thank a representative of Radio Free Asia who had come to personally interview me about various current issues. First I would like to answer your question of where I am living now and where I was living before.

For many, many years I was always living in Anlong Veng. I have sometimes been moved to different locations around Anlong Veng according to the situation at that time. But after the event of June 1997 I was arrested and detained in an isolated house, where I was cut off from contacts with the general population. But I have been provided with enough food to feed myself and my family. So I want to tell the people that I was not evacuated anywhere but I wish to tell you that there was a fighting. The authority had arranged to send me to stay in a secret location, about half a kilometre or one kilometre from the centre of Anlong Veng. But the place is a secret place. So I wish to tell the people that I did not or was not moved anywhere. I could not move anywhere because their country (Thailand) has a law, they have their police and military forces. So how can I go in and out of that country as I wish? So I wish to tell people that I did not move to any other country. I am still in the same area. This is the first thing I wanted to tell you.

Secondly, about my health. In fact I was seriously ill since 1985 because I worked too hard, days and nights. I had severe headaches. My head become very hot. I have sore eyes and chest pains. I didn’t know what I was suffering from because when I woke up one night I couldn’t see anything. I thought that I just had a normal sore eye but when I scratched my eyes several time I become totally blind. When the doctors examined me they said that I was suffering from heart problem. When my heart tries to work very hard it causes a headache because my blood circulation could not reach my brain system. That’s why I have severe headaches, chest pains and sore eyes constantly because my heart has only one valve, not two valves as normal. But my heart has only one valve since I was born. So it cannot supply enough blood to all the systems. If I work normal it’s ok but if I work really hard then my blood circulation cannot supply to all the systems in the body. That’s why I was sick everyday. And from June 1997, because I was arrested and detained, my health has deteriorated. It is normal. As a human being one has to suffer at some point. But since that time my illness has deteriorated and now I got one more problem and that is lung problem.

When I have a cold shower I felt shiver and cold and that causes me to cough constantly. It causes me to have short breath and as a result it causes a heart problem because the lung supports the heart. So when the lung has a problem it cannot support the heart. Now my illness has become chronic. I cannot have a cold shower. If I use cold water it will cause the left part of my body to feel numb and it causes me to tilt to the left side when I try to walk. And if I don't use walking stick to support myself I will fall. I also caught malaria as well. It will not cure because I am living in the jungle infested with malarial diseases.

Samkhon: Now that you have been detained, are you provided for with enough food? And are you allowed to go out and walk around the house?

Pol Pot: I can walk short distance around the house because I'm too frail to walk far.

Samkhon: So you can walk around the house?

Pol Pot: Yes, but I'm not allowed to let anyone see me. If people can see me then people will know where I'm being detained. I can walk but I must not allow anyone to see me.

Samkhon: Are there any people living around you?

Pol Pot: I was neither so isolated nor was I so close to anyone. At night I feel bored but there are people living around my house, about 100 metres or 150 metres away. I have to grow my own vegetable. For rice and cooking oil I have to buy it. I can only eat vegetable because the doctors did not allow me to eat any meat.

Samkhon: When you are sick where can you seek medical treatment?

Pol Pot: At the moment I cannot get any but I have some medicines left before so I use those medicines with the instructions from someone who knew how to use them. I have lists for medicines so when they run out I asked for permission to buy some more. The medicines were not enough but they help my health to a certain extent.

Samkhon: Your illness happened at the same times when you are arrested and detained. Do you think that this illness caused by your detention?

Pol Pot: No, it is not. As a human being no one wanted to be ill. I don't believe that it is caused by my detention. I am sick by natural causes. First I am not that old but in Khmer saying, because I am sick, it means I'm old.

Samkhon: How old are you now?

Pol Pot: Now I am 73 years old. But in the Western world 73 years old is not too old because they have a good life. I am 73 years old now so it is time for me to rest. Even if there is no detention I will be unable to do anything because when I do something I am always coughing because of my lung and my heart. They cause me to have short breath. If it happened in the middle of the night I have to get up and take medicines straight away.

Samkhon: Now, I have seen that you are very far from the political scene.

Pol Pot: I have detached my self from the political scene since I was detained 9 months ago.

Samkhon: Did you know about the three foreign kidnapped hostages (Englishman Mark Slater, Frenchman Jean Michel Braquet and Australian David Wilson)? The other one is a deminer (Christopher Howes). Have you seen them?

Pol Pot: I wish to tell you that I was not responsible for any military affairs. I was responsible for political affairs and education only and I have never travelled anywhere. I have always stayed in Anlong Veng. If we talk about travelling by car I have never travelled for more than 10 minutes in travelling time. So I didn't know anything about those hostages.

Samkhon: So some decisions were made at the local level.

Pol Pot: Regarding this issue I have no comment to make because I didn't know anything about those hostages. In short, I knew nothing at all. I wish to say that there should not be any problem, so why did we cause a problem?

Samkhon: If there is a request to seek your help in searching for those people, even they are still alive or dead, is it possible?

Pol Pot: Even if I try to help where can I start to search for them, firstly. And secondly, I have no capacity or authority to help in the search for them. As I told you earlier that I was not responsible for what happened on the ground. I was only responsible for political affairs and political education of the cadres. I was never responsible the decision-making of anything.

Samkhon: Who was responsible for the decision-making process?

Pol Pot: It was the responsibility of the Military Committee or the Economic Committee and so on. I was in charge of political affairs only.

Samkhon: Mr. Pol Pot, thank you for the interview and hope to see you again in the future.

Pol Pot: Thank you, but I am afraid that I might not live long enough to see you again (laughter).

Samkhon: Now, time has changed and the Khmer people need to live in peace....

Pol Pot: Yes, finally I wish to thank Radio Free Asia and you as its representative. I wish to say that in my past struggle I have never harboured any personal ambitions or personal gains. Thank you. *(To be continued in part 2..)*

Continues from part one....

Pol Pot: First, because our country is a small country, we have to protect it and not to let it become another Kampuchea Krom. Secondly, I knew the Vietnamese very well. I don't talk about the ordinary Vietnamese people. The majority of the Vietnamese people are good people. But the Vietnamese leaders I knew them very, very well. I can even name them all. They are very, very bad. They have had a strategy of swallowing Cambodia and they hated me so much because I resisted against them, like Vo Van Giap, Pham Van Dong and many other Vietnamese leaders etc, they are really bad people. I knew these people very, very well. In front of us they say one thing. Behind us they say another thing. For example, about the border agreements. We have agreed at the administrative, the provincial and at the district levels but they changed their mind and attacked us and said that we attacked them first. How can we attack them? Cambodia is a small country with a small population and small poorly-equipped army. So we have always wished to live in peace with our neighbours. Vietnam had always wanted Cambodia to become part of the Vietnamese Indochinese Federation, before and even now.

Samkhon: Have they changed?

Pol Pot: They have not changed. At the moment I have nothing much to say but I wish to say a little about their puppet, the Cambodian People's Party. Before it was called the Indochinese Communist Party. And later it was divided and splintered into three parties, ie: the Workers' Party of Vietnam, the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party and the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. It was divided into three parties but in fact they were like one country having the same strategy. That's why they called the three countries the "Three Brothers". We will never be able to be free from them because Vietnam has a strategy of protecting its own territorial boundaries. I said to them: you have encroached on Cambodian

land how can you say you are protecting your borders? So we must protect our country as well. This is the first thing I wanted to tell you.

Secondly, they said that they need more land to accommodate their population because they have too many people, about 70 million of them now. So in my nationalistic heart I will never allow Vietnam to take over Cambodia. I swore to people that I'd rather die than let the Vietnamese take over my country. Now we have seen that Laos has already been swallowed by Vietnam through the 1977 agreement.

Samkhon: How many years was the agreement with Cambodia?

Pol Pot: No, that was Vietnam's agreement with Laos which abolished all borders demarcations between the two countries in order to make these two countries become one. I went to see Le Duan and proposed to him that we must establish a friendship and cooperative treaty between Cambodia and Vietnam but he didn't answer me. He didn't answer me at all.

Samkhon: That was before 1975?

Pol Pot: That was in 1975. And from then on Vietnam started to attack us along the border areas. So I felt that I have been stabbed in the heart because I was in charge of the country. They have taken over our border areas, that was one thing. But the other thing was that our people have no land to live. And when Vietnam toppled Democratic Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge regime) in 1978, it had its plans worked out already before establishing a Revolutionary Liberation Front. This front was not established by Hun Sen, Chea Sim and others but it was established by another leader named So Phim. But later the Hun Sen-Chea Sim clique fled to Vietnam and was later installed by the Vietnamese invading forces when it toppled the Democratic Kampuchea regime on the 7th of January 1979. This Cambodian People's Party, which was called the Cambodian Revolutionary Party, appointed Heng Samrin as its head of state and Hun Sen as its minister for foreign affairs and so on and so forth.

Samkhon: What do you think was Vietnam's strategy?

Pol Pot: Its strategy was not to fight Cambodia by military means but to use and incite Khmers to fight Khmers. Like now we see that they have incited Sam Rainsy, the Khmer Nation Party, Funcinpec party etc. to break up and now they have all been splintered. It's not one else's but it's their works (the CPP and Vietnam). Like when Samdech Krom Preah (Norodom Ranariddh) won the election. They attacked his forces first but they said that his forces attacked them instead. These people depended on the support of the Vietnamese forces because the Vietnamese have logging businesses and drug trafficking businesses with them in order to get the money to finance the Cambodian People's Party and bribe people from other parties to cause trouble within their parties and to splinter and break up those parties in order to weaken them. That's what happened. I have cried for Cambodia many times. I don't think that all Khmer people wanted the Vietnamese to swallow our country, firstly. And secondly, no Khmer like the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). The CPP has always claimed that they have immense popular support. But if the election was held democratically like in France, the United States or Australia they will not even get 10% of the votes. That's what I would like to tell you.

Samkhon: If I am not wrong, are you claiming that Hun Sen will try to win the election by all means and after winning the election he will abolish and open up the border to make Vietnam and Cambodia one country?

Pol Pot: They have already opened up the border.

Samkhon: When?

Pol Pot: Since a long time ago. Samdech Krom Preah has said that the Vietnamese have come to cut down the columns of the Khmer people's houses. And when he wanted to send our troops to investigate the claims Hun Sen told him to bring the coffins as well. That's very insolent. So who he has to depend on for support? Our people from the eastern part, like in Takeo for example, has nothing to use for firewood. They don't even have cow dung to burn for fuel. They lived a miserable and wretched life. They have suffered so much. So how can we solve this problem? If we try to solve it they will divide us from the Upper Cambodia down to the Lower Cambodia (Kampuchea Krom). In Kampuchea Krom people are waging a struggle too but at a smaller scale because the world has not paid much attention to their plight and because they don't want to support any separatist groups. But for the Upper Cambodia we get international support but even then can't help. Samdech Krom left Cambodia on the 30th (July 1997?) but on the 29th the CPP's people assassinated a colonel loyal to Samdech Krom Preah. On the day Samdech Krom Preah returned to Phnom Penh they organised a demonstration against him. You asked that we have already joined the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Yes, it's true that we have joined ASEAN but Khmers are still fighting against Khmers and the CPP has won, not by political means but by military means, because the Vietnamese were behind them, behind the curtain. As you can see they were not afraid of ASEAN. There were some people who thought that when we joined ASEAN, ASEAN will put pressures on them. But as you can see ASEAN cannot do anything because the Vietnamese did not attack us directly but it used a its proxy, the CPP, to launch the attack. So ASEAN cannot do anything. And they always use the policy of "non-interference" to stop ASEAN from intervening. Even Hun Sen dares to say like that too, so the ASEAN Troika dare not say anything. They dare not interfere but they did help. That's what happened.

So our people from Kampuchea Krom must struggle, even a small scale struggle, against the land confiscation. They even have weapons, but not much, for their struggle. But it was not a large armed struggle. That's why we need ASEAN, the United Nations and our friends combined, in order to solve the current (1997 coup) crisis. This is what I think. I am not a fortune-teller. I say this because it's for our Khmer survival. If we lose our motherland where can we live? I cannot run away from my country. I would rather die here with my people. I cannot run anywhere because I can't even walk. Thank you so much...// END.