

Cambodia: Journalist Arrested for Reporting Hun Sen’s Advice on Covid-19

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<https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/cambodia-journalist-arrested-for-reporting-hun-sens-advice-on-covid-19.html>

Sovann Rithy, the director of the TVFB news site, was arrested on the evening of Tuesday, April 7 for quoting Prime Minister Hun Sen who advised motorbike taxi drivers to sell their vehicles if the Covid-19 pandemic leaves them in financial ruin. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) calls the authorities to drop the charge and release the journalist immediately.



TVFB Logo. Credit: TVFB

In a press conference on Tuesday April 7, Hun Sen said: “if motorbike-taxi drivers go bankrupt, sell your motorbikes for spending money. The government does not have the ability to help.” Rithy then quoted the statement on a Facebook post. He was arrested by the Phnom Penh municipal police on the charge of “incitement to cause chaos and harm social security” under Article 495 of the Criminal Code. Rithy faces from six months to two years in prison as well as a fine of between one and four million riel (around US\$250 to US\$1,000).

On Wednesday, April 8, the Information Minister Khieu Kanharits issued a letter terminating TVFB’s media license and shut down the media outlet’s website. The government granted the license to TVFB on January 3, 2017.

Rithy appeared in the municipal court on Wednesday, April 8, escorted by police. He asked fellow reporters to look after his wife while he was detained.

The IFJ said: “IFJ is shocked by the unwarranted arrest of Rithy who was simply doing his job and quoting the words of Prime Minister Hun Sen. IFJ demands the authorities release Rithy, without charge, and reinstate TVFB’s media licence. The current health crisis must not be used as an excuse for repressing freedom of speech.”