

OPINION

Loss of Reach Sambath, a National Hero, Is Too Much to Bear

I got a text message from Em Sokhym at the Khmer Rouge tribunal's public affairs section a few minutes after Reach Sambath, the court's spokesman, passed away on Wednesday night.

**Letter
to the Editor**

I could feel that she was crying. I sent a short reply to her, and then I went to sleep pretending that this was just a dream.

The next day, I told Deputy Director Dara Vanthan to gather all our staff to pay their respects for Sambath. I did not join them, and pretended I was busy at the office.

News of Sambath's death was everywhere, but I pretended that it was a fraud, that it was not true.

When I read the Saturday-Sunday opinion piece by Ker Munthit ("Amid Sadness, Memories of Reach Sambath Bring Smiles"), I broke into tears—like a snowstorm in winter. It is because I have known both of them so closely and dearly.

Neither ever lied to me or to the public they served. I can find no more reason to lie to myself or to pretend that Sambath has not in fact already passed away. But I just cannot accept it.

I asked Munthit to send his article to me by e-mail, and I want to tell the world that we still can laugh.

But I cry. Munthit told me to give a new title to his article since it had already been printed in The Cambodia Daily. I call it: "Reach Sambath: Hero in My Heart."

I am breaking into tears now as I am typing this short letter, and I cannot stop regretting that I failed to have even one good meal with Sambath, despite many invitations from him for over a decade.

I always kept my distance from him since he was a reporter and I was working on sensitive research

to bring the Khmer Rouge to trial. I was afraid of failing in my research for a nation, but in the end I failed to accept a true friend of the nation.

Now I am regretful. I went to his home on Saturday—sitting in silence for hours. I could not find a word to say to his wife and kids. I still cannot accept that he is no longer with us.

He is the hero in my heart.

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