

Chan Dara // Sao Chan Dara // Sao Chandara

Background:



Chan Dara was a reporter for the Khmer-language newspaper Koh Santeheap (Island of Peace), and also contributed to other publications.

He had published exposés of timber and rubber shady deals by government and military figures, like the notorious Lieutenant Colonel Sat Soeun. Prior to his death, Chan Dara had been gathering information about illegal logging in Kampong Cham province.

Chan Dara had reportedly received threats from local officials who thought he was writing articles for Preap Norn Sar (The Carrier Pigeon), an opposition newspaper that had reported on corruption in the region. The Khmer Journalist Association said that not only had Chan Dara recently received warnings from local army officials, but had reported to his newspaper's Phnom Penh office that he feared for his life.

Details of Incident:

Chan Dara was fatally shot on 8 December 1994 while leaving a restaurant in the north-eastern province of Kampong Cham, where he had been drinking with Colonel Sat Soeun. He was shot twice in the back at close range. Police later recovered the two bullets, which were from a K59 (9mm) pistol and estimated that the assailant had fired the gun from one meter away.

Aftermath:

Ministry of Interior police arrested Colonel Sat Soeun, who continued to send threats to the two papers (Koh Santeheap and Preap Norn Sar) and to Chan Dara's wife. However, the Colonel was released in May 1995 after a provincial judge acquitted him for lack of evidence. Reports suggest that there was strong circumstantial evidence, but no direct evidence. During the trial Colonel Sat Soeun admitted that he had been drinking with the slain journalist on the day of the murder, but testified that another man had emerged from some bushes and fatally shot Chan Dara in the back after they left the bar.

The Appeal Court upheld the acquittal and no appeal to the Supreme Court was made.

Since then, Colonel Sat Soeun has been implicated in other notorious murders, including another execution-style killing, but in a noteworthy example of impunity, no attempts have been made to prosecute him.

Sources:

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