

# Cambodian Leader Orders Shutdown Of Independent Media Outlet

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Cambodia's strongman leader ordered the shutdown of one of the country's few remaining local independent media outlets on Sunday after taking issue with a news report about his son.

One of the world's longest-serving leaders, Prime Minister Hun Sen has increasingly cracked down on any opposition as he prepares for elections later this year.

Online outlet Voice of Democracy (VOD) publishes and broadcasts in Khmer and English, and is frequently critical of Hun Sen and his government.

The premier said late Sunday that VOD would have its operating licence revoked, and must stop all broadcasting by 10 am Monday.

The move followed a February 9 VOD report that Hun Sen's eldest son, Lieutenant General Hun Manet, had approved financial aid to Turkey, which was struck by a devastating earthquake earlier this month.

Hun Manet has denied the allegation.

Hun Sen -- who has supported Hun Manet to succeed him in the future -- stated he signed off on the \$100,000 foreign ministry aid package.

"In the name of the government, which has to protect its dignity, I decide to end the case by ordering the information ministry to cancel the licence for VOD from now on and that it stop broadcasting by 10 am," Hun Sen wrote on his Facebook page.

We are just shutting down all kinds of broadcasting from this radio (station), but we don't touch their property."

He told foreign governments that funded the outlet to transfer the money to other countries or back into their own coffers.

He added that VOD journalists would "find new jobs at other places".

In the Facebook post, Hun Sen also attached a letter from VOD in which it said it was "regretful for confusions" regarding the article.

But Hun Sen said he could "not accept the term 'regretful' and the request for forgiveness instead of an apology".

On Saturday Hun Sen initially gave VOD 72 hours to apologise, with senior executives meeting with government officials Sunday in an attempt to hash out an agreement.

The report in Khmer is still available online.

Chak Sopheap, executive director of the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, tweeted that the outlet "plays (a) significant role" in promoting "access to information" in Cambodia.

The news organisation started broadcasting in 2003 before branching out online, and has almost two million followers on its Khmer-language Facebook page.

VOD did not immediately reply to a request for comment.