Anakut episode two: Women in the Kingdom

Anakut: The podcast about Cambodia's future dissects the big issues impacting the Kingdom. This week, feminist figurehead Chak Sopheap and the next generation Ham Pidor discuss a topic directly impacting the lives of 50% of Cambodians – women's rights.

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Another week, another trip to the airwaves with the crew of Anakut!

That meant sitting down with Chak Sopheap, head of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, and Ham Pidor, social media influencer and body positivity advocate extraordinaire. Though the nature of their fields may strike a very different tone, these two have consistently used their respective platforms to speak up for Cambodian women of all walks of life.
To ground the episode in the present, Meng started with a look at the not-so-distant past. *Chbab Srey* (ច្បាប់ស្រី) is a ‘code of conduct’ for Cambodian women originally passed down as an oral tradition and later written into one of the major poems of the national literature. The poem defines a role for women in society along mostly stereotypical lines, sketching a nurturing figure subservient to a husband and working as a homemaker.

Up until 2007, the poem was taught widely in the Kingdom’s schools, and even after it was mostly removed from the curricula, it was still taught in a shorter form in Khmer literature courses. Drawing from that context, Meng posed the question to our guests as to what legacy centuries of Chbab Srey have had on the modern Cambodian woman.

In some respects, the attitude of the poem has been enshrined within the state and its institutions. We explored those points with our guests, talking through recent, troubling examples such as the case of Ouk Kosal, the former Kampong Thom police commissioner accused of sexually assaulting multiple female police officers. Even though the Ministry of Interior investigated Kosal and confirmed the accusations against him, he escaped any legal consequence. With our guests, we also discussed the country’s proposed public order law, a sweeping draft law that would potentially criminalise almost every aspect of life in the public eye. Among other things, that includes how women can dress, outlawing outfits deemed too provocative by a charging authority.

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Sopheap and Pidor saw these examples as two sides of the same coin, pointing to a state that allegedly declined to pursue a criminal case against Kosal to “to protect the dignity of the female police victims”, while seeking a way to prosecute women for their appearance in public.
These stories are vital to understanding the situation in Cambodia today, but we also wanted to highlight the resilience and promise for women both now and in the years to come. Meng had given this episode a lot of thought, drawing from her own experiences and upbringing to drive the conversation forward into places both insightful and personally significant.

For a young professional in a restless, growing Kingdom, there are plenty of mixed messages broadcast daily as to what’s expected – considered proper, even – for ambitious women, especially as they seek role models to reshape the world.

Where’s a woman to look? Hit the play button above to get an idea.

Details: https://southeastasiaglobe.com/anakut-womens-rights-cambodia/?fbclid=IwAR1lnXndXsdv-36Jp9JHX2LtHg99T8vRf0s3kohpOHQ5dbffMU4reuKGCVCc