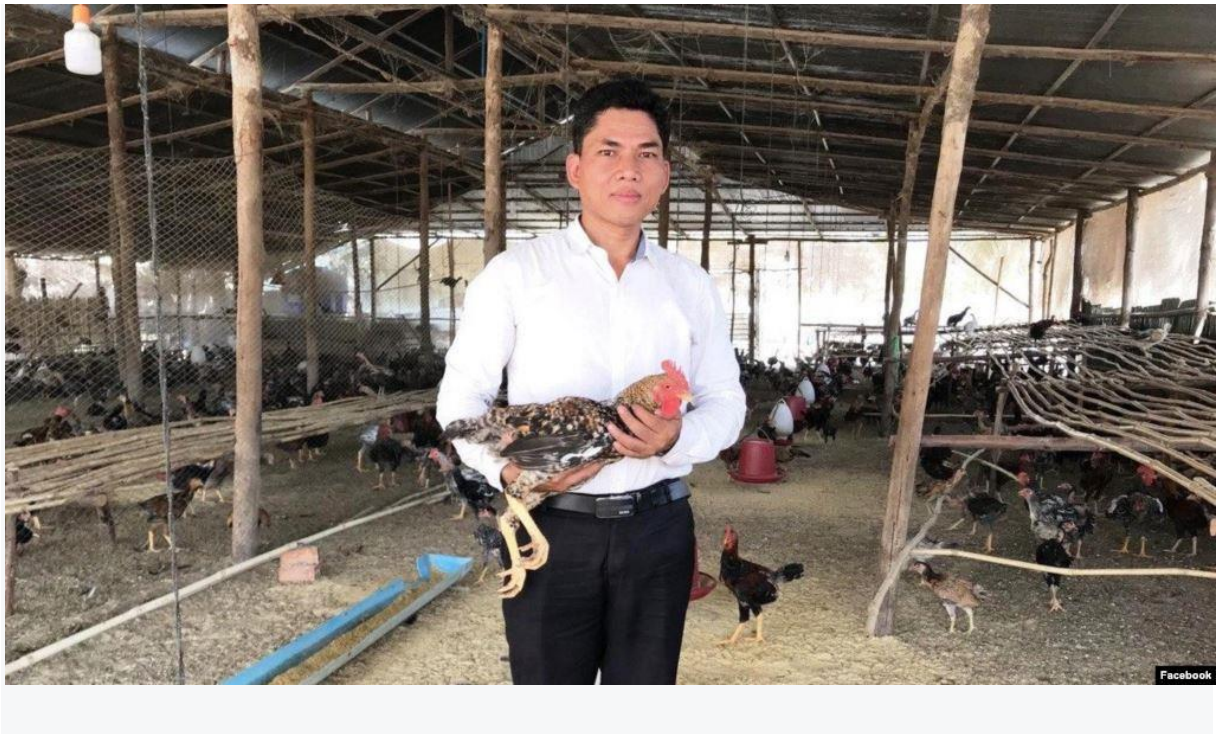


Agribusiness Owner Jailed After Poultry Commentary on Hun Sen's Speech

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Agriculture entrepreneur Nak Ny was arrested on December 11, 2020, after posting sarcastic comments on social media about Prime Minister Hun Sen's remarks on declaring a state of emergency. (Facebook/Nak Ny)

PHNOM PENH —

An outspoken Phnom Penh agriculturalist was charged with “insult” and “incitement” and sent to pre-trial detention after posting sarcastic comments on social media about Prime Minister Hun Sen's remarks on declaring a state of emergency.

Ny Nak, who often posts critical – and sometimes biting – commentary on the government's agriculture policies, as well as the agriculture minister, ran afoul of the police for posting the comments on his Facebook page, confirmed Kuch Kimlong, a deputy prosecutor at Phnom Penh Municipal Court.

He was placed in pretrial detention by investigating judge Hong Sokunvathana under the charges of “public insults” and “incitement to commit discrimination,” Kimlong added.

Days before his arrest, Ny Nak, using his [Facebook page IMan KH](#), made a sarcastic twist on comments made by Hun Sen about his reluctance to put the country in a

state of emergency to control the current community transmission cluster. He replaced mentions of the word “people” or “country” with poultry references.

“I have a draft of letter and document ready to place my poultry farm under a state of emergency over the spread of flu-like pneumonia,” Ny Nak wrote on his Facebook page December 7.

“But I don’t think I will reach that point of [declaring it] because it will severely jeopardize the economy of my chicken. I do hope my chicken shall wear masks and stay within their coops without going out if not necessary.”

A few hours later, screenshots of his post reached the 7,853-member Anti-Fake News Group on messaging application Telegram, which was created by government officials to identify and combat “false publication on social and traditional media causing chaos in society.”

Agriculture Minister Veng Sakhon said in a voice message sent to the group that Ny Nak’s comments were a “mockery” and that he was spreading “falsehoods” to “challenge the head of the government.”

Speaking to VOA Khmer, Veng Sakhon said using references to birds and the flu would also confuse Cambodians as to whether Ny Nak was talking about Avian influenza and affect economic activity.

“By mentioning the bird flu, it could affect our people’s incomes as they may be paranoid to a point of stopping the rearing [of chickens] amid our efforts of a gradual economic recovery,” Veng Sakhon told VOA Khmer.

VOA Khmer could not reach the family or lawyer of Ny Nak on Monday.

Before his arrest, Ny Nak seemed to realize that his comments could result in legal issues, as he complained of fake marketing phone calls to ascertain his address and location.

“I only talked about chickens but they are completely slandering me because they want to have me thrown in jail,” he posted on Facebook.

Ny Nak was one of at least three Cambodians detained by law enforcement in the last ten days because of comments relating to a new COVID-19 cluster, which has so far infected at least 40 people across the country.

A 35-year-old woman was arrested on December 4 after posting on Facebook that a market in Phnom Penh’s Kambol district was shut down after a phone shop owner allegedly died due to COVID-19.

Authorities disputed her claim as false, and “educated” her, and made her sign an agreement to refrain from such activities, according to the Anti-Cybercrime Police Department.

Police officials in Preah Vihear province’s Roveang district detained a 17-year-old high school student on Saturday after she posted on Facebook that a COVID-19-positive patient had visited an eatery in the area. She was made to apologize publicly in a video that was published by government mouthpiece Fresh News.

“After receiving the police’ instructions and education, I will try to improve myself to be a good citizen and stop publishing on Facebook any information that is polluting, false, or affecting the reputation and dignity of others,” the student was heard saying in the video.

The National Police posted on their website that Ny Nak had “insolent rhetoric” and his comments using chicken farm references appeared to “tease or defy” the prime minister.

“According to the observation and the investigation of our competent authorities, Ny Nak had often mocked and insulted public figures and institutions, but it appears that no action had been taken against him,” the National Police said.

Chak Sopheap, executive director of the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, said the authorities should instead help clarify any alleged fake news that is published rather than spend all their energy on arresting people.

“By doing so, it serves nothing more than increasing fear among the people to share information or participate by expressing their views,” she said.

Details: <https://www.voacambodia.com/a/agribusiness-owner-jailed-after-poultry-commentary-on-hun-sen-speech-/5698670.html>