Thun Bun Ly // Thun Bunly

Background:

Thun Bun Ly was a writer and the former editor of the opposition newspaper Odom K'tek Khmer (Khmer Ideal). He was also a prominent supporter of Sam Rainsy's Khmer National Party (KNP).

Prior to his death, Thun Bun Ly was convicted in two separate occasions, with the charges of defamation and disinformation for criticizing the government in articles, letters to the editor, and cartoons. In the first trial, the Phnom Penh Municipal Court fined Thun Bun Ly with five million riels (US $2,058) for publishing a letter to the editor headlined “Stop Barking Samdech Prime Minister”. The Court stipulated a one year prison sentence and indefinite closure of the newspaper should Thun Bun Ly be unable to pay the fine.

Then, on 25 August 1995, Thun Bun Ly was convicted of publishing false information and defamation for several editorials and cartoons critical of the two Prime Ministers. He was fined ten million riels (US $4,000). The court ruled that if Thun Bun Ly failed to pay, he would be imprisoned for two years.

The case followed two earlier temporary closures of the newspaper. The first, on the 9th of November 1994, came in response to the publication of the letter. The Ministry of Information lifted the ban on the newspaper on the 17th of January 1995, but reimposed it a month later saying the paper had continued to print libellous, defamatory and distorted articles, and that the Ministry had received a letter of complaint from the co-prime ministers. The newspaper was allowed to continue publishing pending appeals to the Supreme Court.

At the time of his death Thun Bun Ly was in the process of appealing these convictions. Six months before he died, Thun Bun Ly was quoted as saying: “I want to do whatever I can so that Cambodia has democracy the same as other people in the world...There is less democracy if we can’t print.”
One week before his murder, in the columns of his paper, he had virulently criticized the wife of Second Prime Minister Hun Sen – Bun Rany – calling her “piggy”.

On the morning of his death he published an article saying that an unidentified major in the security forces was out to “get him”. Some believe that the article may have provoked his assassination because it mocked the major as being drunk. Half an hour before his death he had telephoned a friend saying he was frightened, as he had been followed from KNP leader Sam Rainsy's house to home.

**Details of Incident:**
Around 10.30am on 18 of May 1996 Thun Bun Ly left his house in Phnom Penh, and hailed a motorbike taxi. As the bike drove down Street 95, another motorbike carrying two men, one in uniform, sped by and one of them fired a pistol at Thun Bun Ly. He was hit by two bullets in the chest and a third in his left arm. He fell to the ground and his driver fled.

**Aftermath:**
Thun Bun Ly died in the street. His body was then taken by some neighbors to a temple. Later that day – according to reports received by Amnesty International – Phnom Penh policemen came to the temple and, using sticks, dug out the bullets from his body. The whereabouts of these pieces of evidence were never disclosed. A statement by the Minister of Interior labeled the assassination as “a disgraceful act, which cannot be forgiven”. CPP General Hok Lundy carried out the investigation in Ly’s death. At the same time the report outlines that other than political can be the reasons that led to his death. A senior CPP official told the Phnom Penh Post after the murder of Thun Bun Ly: “Thun Bun Ly paid the price for his political choices. And Sam Rainsy will pay the price. They will get him. They just wait for the right time”. No one was brought to justice for Thun Bun Ly’s killing.

**Sources:**
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