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# Cambodia Eyes Global Tech Industry

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) -- Eng Naleak was born with deformed feet, and only two fingers and a thumb on each hand. But she can type a respectable 30 words a minute in English, and that puts her at the forefront of Cambodia's high-tech hopes.

The proud 20-year-old is one of two dozen poor or disabled Cambodians hired to type the earliest issues of Harvard University's student newspaper into a computer for electronic archiving.

"My life was hopeless before this opportunity," she said. "Disabled persons in Cambodia are never given priority for jobs in Cambodia."

More than 300,000 of Cambodia's 11 million people are disabled, many of them by land mines.

Digital Divide Data, the company employing her, opened its local office Wednesday night with a project to put the 1873-1899 editions of the Harvard Crimson in databases by year's end and to help spread the wealth from the hi-tech revolution to Cambodia and its people.

The idea came from Jeremy Hockenstein, a Harvard-educated business consultant who helped start Follow Your Dreams Cambodia, a nonprofit organization to create technology-related jobs for Cambodians.

Though Internet cafes speckle the capital, there is no high-tech industry in Cambodia, a country still recovering from nearly 30 years of civil war that ended in 1998.

Nhev Sithsophary, general manager for Digital Divide Data, said data-entry jobs are ideal for most Cambodians.

"Our workers here have few skills, and little education, but they type very fast," he said.

Inputting data for Western multinationals and institutions has become an industry in India, Ghana and other developing countries, "and technology today allows Cambodia to compete," said Hockenstein, a Canadian who lives in Boston.

Hockenstein said he and like-minded friends, business executives who lend their expertise to nonprofit groups, started the project to give disadvantaged people opportunities and to help Cambodia benefit economically from technology.

During a visit in November, he saw many Cambodians in Internet cafes but "they were not using technology to increase the economy in any way."

Digital Divide Data signed a \$30,000 contract to retype articles from the Crimson, and Hockenstein

obtained the 1873-1899 editions on microfilm. He had the pages converted to digital images and loaded onto CD-ROMs for quick shipment to Cambodia.

The Crimson job is projected to employ 20 typists working two six-hour shifts a day on 10 computers for six months, with more editions of the Crimson to come if the work goes well.

For the Crimson it looks like a good deal at low cost, while from a Cambodian perspective, work conditions are better than usual.

The typists earn \$50 a month, better than the \$45 minimum wage paid in the garment sector, Cambodia's biggest industry. The company says it plans to raise salaries to \$65 after three months, will provide English lessons and pick up workers' medical expenses. It also hopes to expand into Cambodian villages.

Khive Rotha, 21, another typist, said conditions at the project's three-story villa in Phnom Penh are "much better" than those at the garment factory where she worked for 18 months.

There she worked double the hours for about the same wage, she said.

"I've always wanted to use English and computers to earn a living," she said, "so this is a big success for me and my family."

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On the Net: <http://www.digitaldividedata.org>