

危機四伏

wei1 ji1 si4 fu2

There has been a series of sea accidents recently. In one, a jetfoil hit a bridge pylon off Tuen Mun. In another, a policeman on retirement leave was killed when his small fishing boat was rammed by a much bigger one.

Captains told of the risk of accidents when operating sea vessels in the spring foggy weather. They said it is like “driving a car blindfolded” and is “危機四伏” (*wei1 ji1 si4 fu2*).

“危機” (*wei1 ji1*) is “a crisis,” “danger,” “四” (*si4*) is “four” and “伏” (*fu2*) “to hide in ambush,” “to lie low,” “to crouch.” Literally, “危機四伏” (*wei1 ji1 si4 fu2*) is “crises four lie low,” which does not seem to make too much sense.

The “四” (*si4*) “four” in the idiom does not mean four crises, or being hit by crises four times. It refers to the four directions. So “危機四伏” (*wei1 ji1 si4 fu2*) is “crises lying in wait in four directions,” “danger all around.”

Idiom by Lon Yan

The idiom is used to describe situations that are “perilous,” “crisis-ridden.” It also means “to be threatened by growing crisis.”

There are two other idioms that have a similar meaning and also contain “四” (*si4*) “four.” “四面楚歌” (*si4 mian4 chu3 ge1*) and “四面受敵” (*si4 mian4 shou4 di2*) both mean surrounded by enemy on all sides.

High-profile and high-power political jobs are “危機四伏” (*wei1 ji1 si4 fu2*) and people in those positions will find themselves “四面受敵” (*si4 mian4 shou4 di2*) all the time.

Terms containing the character “伏” (*fu2*) include:

伏擊 (*fu2 ji1*) – to ambush

伏法 (*fu2 fa3*) – to be executed

伏特 (*fu2 te4*) – a volt

屈伏 (*qu1 fu2*) – to bend in submission