

水深火熱

shui3 shen1 huo3 re4

One local newspaper has recently folded (倒閉) and another has suspended (暫停) operations due to financial difficulties.

Meanwhile a sizable (具規模的) news magazine is downsizing (縮減開支) and may have to cut half its staff. The headline of *The Standard's* related report called it "trying times" (難熬的時期) for the workers who "face the ax" (面臨解僱).

In fact, these are trying times not only for the workers but also for the print media as a whole as it is facing increasing competition from online counterparts. A Chinese idiom that portrays this kind of situation is "水深火熱" (*shui3 shen1 huo3 re4*).

"水" (*shui3*) is water, "深" (*shen1*) is deep, "火" (*huo3*) is fire, and "熱" (*re4*) means hot. Literally, "水深火熱" is "water deep fire hot."

The idiom conjures up images of struggling in

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deep water and surrounded by scorching fire. Such situations cannot be good. Therefore, "水深火熱" means "to be in deep distress" or "to be in an abyss of suffering."

It is similar to the English expression "in dire straits". "Dire" describes a situation or event that is extremely serious or urgent.

"In dire straits" means "in a very bad situation that is difficult to fix."

The company is in dire straits and it is not a time to ask for a pay rise. In this sentence, we can use "水深火熱" like this: The company is in "水深火熱" and it is not a time to ask for a pay rise.

Terms that contain the character "深" (*shen1*) include:

高深 (*gao1 shen1*) - profound, advanced

深夜 (*shen1 ye4*) - late into the night

深信 (*shen1 xin4*) - firmly believe