

NATIONAL

Hun Sen Denounces Televised Comments on Passport Fees

BY AUN PHEAP
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THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Prime Minister Hun Sen yesterday criticized the Cambodian News Channel (CNC) for broadcasting an interview with an NGO worker who had claimed on air that the large number of illegal Cambodian workers to Thailand was due to the high cost of obtaining a Cambodian passport.

Speaking at the Ministry of Labor's annual conference in Phnom Penh, Mr. Hun Sen challenged comments made by the NGO worker on CNC's "Information Program" on Tuesday.

"I wish to deny that the government charges migrant workers for passports, and I think that CNC should not interview those stupid people because it will poison society's atmosphere," Mr. Hun Sen said, adding that the government spends "millions of dollars" each year paying for migrant workers' passport fees.

"Usually the government charges \$100 for the passport, but we do not charge for the passport for migrant workers," Mr. Hun Sen said. "We charge only \$20 for various things."

Nov Samphors, the editor of CNC's "Information Program," said the NGO representative was from Caram Cambodia, an organization working with migrant workers, though he declined to comment further on Mr. Hun Sen's criticism of the interview.

Ya Navuth, executive director of Caram, confirmed that he was interviewed by CNC about Cambodian migrant workers.

"When I talked to people at the passport office going to make passports, they said that some people pay \$100 for normal migrant workers, and others pay \$200 to \$300 for migrant workers visa when they are going through brokers," Mr. Navuth said. "That's the information I got."

Som Chhaya, deputy director of

CTN, which is owned by the local conglomerate Royal Group and is CNC's parent station, said that after Mr. Hun Sen's criticism of the interview, the station decided to remove the offending comment during re-runs of the program.

Despite the prime minister's very public defense of the passport fees, people waiting in line yesterday at the passport office in Phnom Penh reported similar figures as those referenced by Caram's Mr. Navuth.

Hei Bunlong, 30, said he plans to go to Thailand in March to work in an electronics factory and had to pay \$160 for his passport, which had been processed through the KLM recruitment agency.

"I paid \$160 but the company paid \$40, so the passport actually costs \$200," Mr. Bunlong said.

Vouch Mora, 20, said she had paid \$300 to her recruitment agency to get the passport and was only in line yesterday to pick it up. She will be leaving for Thai-

land in February to work in a fish-processing factory.

Hanging on a wall at the passport office yesterday was a signed letter from Mr. Hun Sen stating that migrant workers will only be charged \$24 for a passport. Officials at the office declined to comment on the cost disparity yesterday, saying they had no authority to speak to reporters.

Labor Minister Vong Sauth said during the annual conference that 82,379 legal migrant workers have left the country since 2009 until present through 31 private labor recruitment companies. Many more illegal migrants are thought to leave the country every year.

"As for illegal migrant workers, we are now working in Thailand with a committee in the ministry that will make them legal through a certificate of identity," Mr. Sauth said, adding that 152,578 Cambodians have been identified so far as requiring that certification.

Report Warns of Rise in Cocaine Trafficking Through Cambodia

BY SIMON LEWIS
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THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Cambodia is being increasingly used by international criminal organizations smuggling drugs, which are targeting Southeast Asia as a new market to peddle cocaine, a new report from the U.N.'s agency on narcotics warns.

"The manufacture, trafficking and use of illicit drugs is a significant and worsening problem in Cambodia," the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) says in its annual drug report for the Asia-Pacific region, released in Bangkok yesterday.

The report lists familiar concerns about the use of methamphetamines and crystal methamphetamines, the manufacture of these drugs in Cambodia and the activities of gangs smuggling them to and from the country. But recent seizures of cocaine,

both in Cambodia and elsewhere in the region, point to a worrying new trend, the U.N. report says.

"Cocaine traffickers are targeting the large and untapped cocaine market in East and South-East Asia," it says. "Large quantities of cocaine have been seized in several countries in recent years and Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam and Hong Kong...have emerged as transit locations for cocaine trafficking."

Although it says cocaine use in Asia remains limited, the report notes a massive 650 kg seizure of cocaine in Hong Kong in July "destined for markets in China and South-East Asia."

"Before 2012, the quantities of cocaine seized in Cambodia had remained limited," the report says, adding that the roughly 30 kg of cocaine seized in August at Phnom Penh's airport eclipsed previous seizures by some way and that the

cocaine was most likely bound for Thailand. Another 11 kg of cocaine was seized at Siem Reap airport in October.

"Cocaine is smuggled into Cambodia by air and post from a number of countries in South America, North America, West Africa and South-East Asia for export to other countries along overland routes," the report says.

Olivier Lernet, UNODC's Cambodia country manager, said by email that drug traffickers use Cambodia as a transit point.

"Generally using porous and very long land borders, mules [through] airports and maritime routes," Mr. Lernet said.

"Mexican and Colombian cartels, in collaboration with West African syndicates are clearly targeting the region as an expanding market," he said.

"The volumes of cocaine seized and the estimated consumption is

still very limited compared to amphetamine [type substances]," he added.

As well as West Africans, members of Chinese drug syndicates, often based in Taiwan, also use Cambodia as a hub, the report says. It cited Cambodian government figures saying that 20 Chinese nationals and 10 Nigerian nationals were arrested for drug offenses in 2011.

Khieu Samon, anti-drug police chief at the Ministry of Interior, said that 2012 had been a bumper year for seizures because Cambodian authorities have focused on high up figures in drug syndicates.

"We confiscated 56 kilograms of drugs by cracking down on the right targets, the ringleaders," he said.

Authorities in Australia and Taiwan have also intercepted large heroin shipments coming from Cambodia this year.

Boy Injured by Exploding Mortar in Banteay Meanchey Province

BY SAING SOENTHRITH
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

A 12-year-old boy became the latest victim of the country's thousands of remaining unexploded ordnance (UXO) on Tuesday while herding his family's ducks through a rice field in Banteay Meanchey province.

The incident adds to the 162 people killed or injured so far this year through October.

The boy, Chiv Hul, spotted the 60-

mm mortar shell sitting on top of a termite mound, likely placed there by farmers who had dug it out of the field some time ago, said O'Chrou district police chief Cheng Sokha.

The boy began hitting the mortar with his hammer, Mr. Sokha said.

"He removed the rust and hit it to make a sound, and it exploded," he said, adding that the blast sent shrapnel into his head, abdomen and both arms.

He said the boy did not have any limbs amputated, and was in a stable condition at a hospital in Mongkol Borei district.

"The UXO are still buried in the ground and rice fields because during the civil war this area was a hot battlefield," Mr. Sokha said.

Old mines and UXO have killed or injured more than 64,000 Cambodians since the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979.

Though the annual numbers of

victims has drastically declined thanks to demining efforts, year-on-year numbers compared to last year were up slightly this year, according to the latest data released by the Cambodian Mine Action Authority (CMAA).

According to CMAA, mines and UXO killed or injured 162 people between January 1 and the end of October, up from 155 during the same period last year. Of the 162, 41 died and 21 were amputated.