Police Make Huge Cocaine Seizure at Airport

BY SAING SOENTHINI
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

A Thai woman was arrested at Phnom Penh's International Airport yesterday for attempting to smuggle 3.7 kg of cocaine into the country, more than six times the total amount seized in the country in 2011, according to border police.

Three border police officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak about the case, said that Thumdee Varaung, 26, arrived in the country on Monday on an evening flight from Singapore, with Ecuador her original departure point.

"So they are sending a new ambassador?" asked Phnom Penh Post correspondent Paul Hernandez. "This is news to me."

"They're clearly confused," said Mr. Hernandez replied when asked.

Mr. Serey Tuy gave a detailed explanation of the situation to the Washington Post and other media outlets, saying that the new ambassador was an up-and-coming diplomat.

In Cambodia, a report that an explanation appeared to have shifted after a week, with a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs saying on Monday that the ambassador's mandate had already ended and the Philippines would have to wait for the new ambassador to arrive before they could hand over the embassy.

Mr. Serey Tuy said he could not comment on the matter.

"Well, I'll have to find out about this new development," Mr. Hernandez replied when asked if the new Cambodian ambassador would change the Philippines' stance on the issue.

The "new" ambassador had been appointed by the government, with the letter dated Aug. 6 about his plans for a full debate on the issue.

"I regard this as a cheap shot," it said.

Mr. Serey Tuy said he could not comment on the matter.

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"In the ordinary course of events there should be no mystery about the departure of an Ambassador at the end of his/her term and the Ambassador's replacement," said Australian political scientist Thayer, an expert on the South China Sea issue, adding that there is a significant amount of diplomatic exchange on the departure of an ambassador.

"The interval between the departure of the previous ambassador and his replacement could be a (a) to provide a convenient time for the new ambassador to arrive, (b) to provide legal time to terminate the ambassador's credentials, (c) to allow the new ambassador to inform the government of the country of the new ambassador's replacement and provide an opportunity to respond to the DSA demands and answer the note verbale," Mr. Thayer said in an email.

Mr. Hun Sen said he would need four hours to address Mr. Chhay's question on drug trafficking organizations.

"I had asked the prime minister to provide information on the intended destination for the drugs, but noted that cocaine is most often trafficked to Cambodia for use by drug organizations within the country," Mr. Hun Sen added. "It is in our hands, but her colleagues are still at large." According to the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, internationally trafficked 3.7 kg of cocaine was seized in Cambodia last year.

"In volume and profit, cocaine (most of it from Asia) is not the major drug trafficked in and out of Cambodia and the local consumption is relatively low and stable," UNODC country manager Olivier Lermot said in an email.

Mr. Lermot said he could not comment on the matter.

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