City Hall, Interior Ministry at Odds Over Future Cooperation

BY COLIN MEYN AND KHY SOVUTHY
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Phnom Penh governor Kep Chhutema warned 1,000 of his personal police at the Interior Ministry yesterday to urge the national police force to cooperate more closely with city police when carrying out operations in the capital, officials said.

Although Mr. Chhutema has not publicly specified why he has requested heightened cooperation with national officials, his request—first made during a closed door meeting at City Hall last week—came a day after a January 3 sting operation targeting an online extortion ring. During the operation, national police accidentally targeted a Phnom Penh villa owned by Education Minister Im Sophya.

"The municipal authority (Mr. Chhutema) said that police and government authorities should inform him before they do anything," said Interior Ministry spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Khieu Sophal, who was present at yesterday's meeting.

Despite Mr. Chhutema's request, Lt. Col. Sophal said that in cases not deemed by national authorities to be a threat to national security, national-level officials retain the authority to conduct operations without informing local authorities.

"National authorities must be accountable in front of the law, but are not required to inform all local authorities," he said.

Mr. Chhutema yesterday declined to comment on the meeting, which was presided over by Interior Minister Sar Kheng. City Hall spokesman Long Dinname also declined to comment on the meeting.

To meet Mr. Sophya on January 6, national police commissioner General Neth Savoeun apologized to Mr. Sophya for police forces approaching his house during a "mission to raid cross-border criminals." The letter also said the exercise was conducted "with cooperation from the Phnom Penh municipal prosecutor and local police authorities.

"The National Police commissioner very much regrets..."In light of your Excellency's residence, which looked similar to the criminal's house, which was pointed out by the investigation unit," he stated.

The series of raids conducted on seven properties in Phnom Penh on January 3 successfully netted 80 Taiwanese and Chinese nationals suspected of involvement in operating a telecommunications extortion ring targeting people in Taiwan and China.

The arrests follow a spate of similar arrests by police in Cambodia and other countries in Southeast Asia. The alleged scam involves the use of Voice Over Internet Protocol technology to call people in China and Taiwan and use different numbers to defraud and extort money by tempting them to invest in fictitious investment portfolios.

UN Steps Up Efforts to Fight Drug Smuggling in Cambodia

BY KHY SOVUTHY AND ZSOMBOR PETER
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

After record seizures of narcotics in 2012, the organization in charge of the fight against drugs in Cambodia yesterday took possession of new equipment to help track drug trafficking across the country's borders.

A meeting in Phnom Penh yesterday, the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) donated more than $1.2 million worth of equipment to the National Authority for Combating Drugs (NACD), said Lieutenant General You Sun Long.

The equipment, which includes cameras, office equipment, walkie-talkies, and motorcycles, will go to two new liaison offices on the Cambodian-Vietnamese border in Banteay Meanchey province and in Kampong Speu province.

"Drugs are particularly of concern because of the number of seizures, the levels, the flows of trafficking. It's increasing all over the region, of course, mostly amphetamine and stimulants. So, yes, it's our way to try to support the government efforts to contain the drug flows," he said.

UNODC Chief of the Cambodia Office, Olivier Lermet, director of planning and training, said new border liaison offices were to be set up in four districts: Banteay Meanchey, Pursat, and Kampong Speu, where heroin and amphetamine are produced on a large scale.

"The flows going in and out of Cambodia are of concern, and the fact that some are targeting Cambodia to produce drugs—we have a few cases in the past—but there is a need to improve regional cooperation, capacity for law enforcement," Mr. Lermet said.

In 2012, more than 40 kg of cocaine—largely a rare drug to be found in Cambodia—30 kg of heroin and 20 kg of methamphetamine were seized, according to preliminary NACD figures.

Brigadier General Hout Sophal, NACD's director of planning and training, said new border liaison offices were planned for Oddar Meanchey, Pursat and Kampong Thom provinces.

"We would like to see more effective results at the border area, particularly in the field of effective cross-border cooperation whether it be building up trust or cooperation with neighboring countries more successful in case handling between front line officers of Cambodia and neighboring countries," he said.

Forest Officials Confirm Illegal Logging by Vietnamese Firm

BY AUN PHEAP AND BEN WOODS
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

During a joint investigation with police and military police last week, the Forestry Administration found evidence of large-scale illegal logging by the Vietnamese owners of a rubber concession in Kratie province's O'Dach district, officials said yesterday.

Phnom Penh, deputy chief of the provincial Forestry Administration, said that forestry officials and başd executive officers on land belonging to the Day Dong Yoeun rubber company—which was granted a 4,000-hectare economic land concession in 2007—over the course of an investigation that began on December 6.

"We know that logging is illegal, and although the company did not respect its agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, it agreed to pay tax on the logged wood, and we accept the payment, which will go toward the state revenue," Mr. Phoeun said.

The Forestry Administration decides to take further action against the company will be the decision of the Ministry of Agriculture, which has requested a report from the Forestry Administration's findings, Mr. Phoeun said. The report will be implemented if the top if they decide to handle this with a court case.

We will implement the orders from the top if they decide to handle this with a court case. Local officials and ethnic Jarai villagers living in Pakreum commune's Long village have accused Day Dong Yoeun and Company 72—another Vietnamese rubber firm with a land concession nearby—of extensive illegal logging and exporting the wood to Vietnam. Rights groups have called for the government to cancel the companies' concessions and begin criminal proceedings against officials responsible.

Forestry Administration spokesman Thun Sarath said yesterday that any company found guilty of violating the Forestry Law must face court prosecution, and that the Council of Ministers has the authority to cancel concessions belonging to companies that violate the terms of their contracts.

"The Prime Minister has the right to cancel the contract if the company [Day Dong Yoeun] destroyed forest resources," Mr. Sarath said.

"The Council of Ministers never objects to a proposal by Ministry of Agriculture," he said. "They will do it.

But Ben Bonmar, land and natural resources monitor for rights group Adhoc, said that while he is holding out hope that the government will pursue legal action against Day Dong Yoeun, "It is acknowledged that nothing has yet been done.

"I don't know why the Royal Government hasn't taken action to cancel the economic land concession," Mr. Bonmar said. "It is an example of all the cases in my life..."