Hun Sen Denounces Televised Comments on Passport Fees

**By AUN PERAT and DUME-HEUN CHEN**

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 changes migrant workers for passports, and I think that CNC should not interview those stupid people because it will set society's atmosphere," Mr. Hun Sen said, adding that the government spends "tens of billions of dollars" of foreign aid for migrant workers' passport fees.

"When I talked to people at the passport office to make passports, they said that some people pay $100 for normal migrant workers, and others pay $500 to $600 for migrant workers visa when they are going through brokers," Mr. Navuth said. "That's the information I've got."

Sompichiy, 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 retransmission 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 CNC's Mr. Navuth.

He Bunleng, 30, said he plans to go to Thailand in March to work in an electronics factory and 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 $120," Mr. Bunleng said.

Voeun Mark, 20, said she had paid $300 to her recruitment agency to get the passport and was only in line to finally pick it up. She was leaving for Thailand in February to work in a fish-processing factory.

Hangating 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 80,579 legal migrant workers have left the country since 2000 until present through 51 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 132,578 Cambodian workers were working in Thailand as of last month for an estimated 72,000.

Sy Chhum, deputy director of the passport department, said it was 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 12 Nigerian nationals were arrested for drug offenses in 2011.

Riaux Saron, 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 value figures in drug syndicates.

We confiscated 55 kilograms of drugs by crushing down the right targets, the ringleaders, he said.

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

**Report Warns of Rise in Cocaine Trafficking Through Cambodia**

**By SIMON LEWIS and SAINHE SOENTHEI**

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.'s 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 psychotropic and crystal methamphetamine, the manufacture of these drugs in Cambodia and the activities of gangs smuggling them to and from the country. Recent seizures of cocaine, methamphetamine and heroine are all set top of a terrorist-minded, lately freed these by farmers who had dug it out of the field some time ago, said O'Choung district police chief, Chhuon Chao.

The boy began breathing the mortar with his hammer, Mr. Solcha said. "He removed the rust and hit it to make a sound, and it exploded," he said, adding that the blast sent sharp metal 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 Mongkhol Borei district. "The UXO are still buried in the ground and rice fields because during the civil war the area was a hot battlefield," Mr. Solcha said.

O'Choung district authorities have killed or injured more than 64,000 Cambodians since the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979.

Although the annual numbers of victims has drastically declined thanks to defusing 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 102 people between January and the end of October, up from 135 during the same period last year. Of the 102, 41 died and 21 were amputated.