

NATIONAL

Appeals Court slashes sentence of child sex offender to one year

Victims' lawyers express disappointment as jail term is cut by more than half for American convicted of indecent acts with teenage girl

BY CHRANN CHAMROEUN AND THOMAS GAM NIELSEN

THE Phnom Penh Appeals Court has slashed the jail sentence of an American national convicted in April of engaging in indecent acts with a 13-year-old Vietnamese girl, citing a lack of evidence.

In a ruling Thursday, presiding Judge Thou Mony upheld the charge against Thomas Wayne Rapanos, 55, but reduced his jail term from two and a half years to one year, saying there was not enough evidence.

In the same ruling, the judge also dismissed charges that Rapanos had sexual intercourse with a 16-year-old Cambodian girl.

Rapanos was arrested when police raided his room at a Phnom Penh guesthouse on March 5, where he was found with the two girls. Keo Thea, deputy police chief at the anti-trafficking and juvenile unit, told AFP after the arrest that one of the girls was naked at the time of the raid.

In Thursday's appeal hearing, lawyers for the two girls wanted judges to charge Rapanos for having sex with the Cambodian

girl, while Rapanos appealed to reduce the sentence handed down by the Municipal Court on April 17.

The girls' lawyer, Peng Maneth, provided by the French child protection NGO Action Pour Les Enfants (APLE), said that the one-year sentence was the lowest possible for an indecent act.

"The victims are not so happy with the trial, but this is the judges' ruling," she said.

APLE director Samleang Seila said the organisation has followed Rapanos' whereabouts since November 2006, adding that he was glad that the perpetrator was being sentenced, but that judges should have considered more evidence in the case - including a claim the older girl had witnessed sexual penetration.

"We still congratulate the fact that he was sentenced, but we wanted the judges to consider evidence not only from the night of the arrest," he said.

The Appeals Court hearing was closed to the public to protect the underage victims' privacy after a joint request from both the lawyers of the victims and the perpetrator. ■

Traffic accidents down, fatalities up, report

An interim report from the Ministry of Interior shows traffic fatalities, as NGO figures show drop

BY MOM KUNTHEAR AND KHOUN LEAKHANA

THE number of fatalities from traffic accidents is up from last year according to a temporary report from the Ministry of Interior, officials say.

"This year, traffic accident fatalities increased by 1.8 percent from last year," Keo Savin, department chief of land transportation at the Ministry of Public works, told the *Post* on Thursday, emphasising that these are only interim results.

According to the report, 1,545 people died in road accidents in 2007 compared with

1,572 deaths in 2008 to date.

"We always cooperate with NGOs, private companies, the public sector and citizens in order to reduce traffic accidents, and we usually broadcast to all people about the traffic law, but some of them don't care," said Keo Savin.

He said the overwhelming majority of fatalities were due to people not wearing helmets and driving drunk.

"In Cambodia, only 24 percent [of motorists] wear helmets," said Keo Savin, adding that "the accidents usually happen at nighttime because of the many drunken drivers".

Meas Channy, traffic safety



The congested streets of Phnom Penh, perilous to the driver, flood the city. TRACEY SHEPHERD

officer at Handicap International, said the first six months of 2007 saw 1,500 accidents, compared with 1,545 cases in the same period this year, according to International figures.

Preah Vihear security on alert for weekend heritage ceremony

RCAF forces and bodyguards deploy at the temple to ensure security at the inauguration of the World Heritage site this weekend

BY THET SAMBATH

MILITARY commanders stationed at the disputed Preah Vihear temple say security will be good when senior government officials visit the temple this weekend for a Unesco World Heritage inauguration ceremony.

DISPUTED HERITAGE

Tensions have run high at the eleventh-century Hindu temple since July, when Unesco announced it would be listed as a World Heritage site.

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