

## Court Reduces US Pedophile's Prison Sentence

BY PRAK CHAN THUL  
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

The Appeal Court on Thursday reduced the prison sentence of convicted US pedophile Thomas Rapanos Wayne, who was found guilty in August of indecent acts against a 12-year-old girl, from 2½ years in prison to one year, according to Judge Thou Mony.

Rapanos Wayne, 55, president of the Bhaktivedanta Eco Village NGO at the time of his arrest, was found guilty by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court on Aug 6 of sexually abusing the 12-year-old.

Thou Mony, chief of the three-judge Appeal Court panel, said after Thursday's closed-door hearing that the court reduced his sentence but decided to uphold the municipal court's \$1,250 fine and order of \$1,000 in compensation to the victim's family.

With Rapanos Wayne having been arrested in March, the reduced sentence means that he will be free in three months. Thou Mony and panel Judge Seng Sivutha declined to comment on the reasons for the reduced sentence.

Samleang Seila, country director of anti-pedophile NGO Action Pour les Enfants, which assisted police in the arrest and provided an attorney for the victim, said he was upset with the decision, saying that the Appeal Court did not take into account that Rapanos Wayne had repeatedly abused his victim.

"If they continue to give light punishment, abusers will not be afraid," he said.

Samleang Seila noted that Rapanos Wayne's was the second lightest sentence for a sexual abuse crime, following the Appeal Court's July decision to reduce the sentence of convicted Russian pedophile Nikita Belov, 26, from three years in prison to six months and 15 days.

The Appeal Court's decision to reduce Belov's sentence sparked criticism by then-US Ambassador Joseph M. M. Mussumeli, who called the light sentence "disappointing."

Dun Vibol, lawyer for Rapanos Wayne, called the decision a "humanitarian act," saying that besides being innocent, his client is sick.

"We won't appeal. [Rapanos Wayne] is just waiting for the three months to finish and then go for [medical] treatment," he said.

(Additional reporting by James Welsh)

## Land-Clearing Suspect Injured by RCAF Fire

BY NEOU VANNARIN  
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

A tractor driver in Kampot province suspected of illegally clearing land was injured Wednesday after RCAF soldiers opened fire on his and another tractor when they apparently failed to obey a command to halt, officials said Thursday.

A district forestry official claimed that the injured man, Tem Ra, 20, had been injured by hitting his head on the tractor, but the injured man's brother said that Tem Ra's head was grazed by a bullet fired by a soldier.

The shooting started at about 1:30 pm in Chhuk district's Tra-paing Phlaing commune when one soldier opened fire in an attempt to stop the tractors, acting commune police chief Ou Han said.

One soldier used a handgun in an

effort to take out the tires of the tractors. Three other soldiers then also opened fire, spraying the tractors with bullets, he said. Once the tractors' tires were flat, the soldiers advanced on the vehicles, trying to pull the drivers out, Ou Han said.

The Forestry Administration has been working hard to fight illegal deforestation in the area, district Forestry Administration chief Chor Vangly said.

The tractors had been asked to stop because officials suspected they were being used to clear forest, and the Forestry Administration wanted to investigate, Chor Vangly said. The drivers had attempted to get away from the officials and that was when the shooting started, he said, adding, however, that no shooting had been aimed at people.

The two drivers, Tem Ra and his brother, Prak Heng, 25, claim they had been plowing farmland in Prey Leav village when they were approached by the Forest Administration and told to stop.

On Thursday, Prak Heng said they had done what the officials asked and left the land, but the shooting started about 1 km from the village when the soldiers showed up.

"One soldier took a handgun and shot at my brother, and another pulled me out of my tractor," Prak Heng claimed. "He tried to shoot my brother to death, but the gun ran out of bullets and my brother used his left arm to parry [the gun]."

Tem Ra was taken to the hospital after a bullet grazed his head and he was unconscious for a while, Prak Heng said.

## Schools Slowly Reopen as Flooding Subsides

BY CHENG SOKHORNG  
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Five out of six schools in Phnom Penh's Russei Keo district have reopened over the past few weeks as most of the flooding that plagued the area since October has subsided, school officials said Thursday.

Many of the area's schools have been closed since mid-October when water levels reached almost 2-meters-deep.

The schools have added extra days on their schedules to make up for the lost time, officials said, but some raised concerns that the damage caused by the water will require lengthy and expensive repairs.

"So far the authorities never take care of the school situation. They promise a new building, fences and

to fill the land, but we never see any results," said Hai Chanserey Vathana, principal of Chamroeuncheath secondary high school, which was one of the first schools to open about five weeks ago. Hai Chanserey Vathana said he needed at least one new classroom building and that he had filed many complaints but had not yet received any help from authorities.

Chea Sim Chamroeunrath high school is the only school in the area still affected by flooding, according to Um Hoerung, municipal education department chief, but students can still use classrooms in the primary school nearby, he said.

He blamed the flooding on poor drainage systems in the area, but he was not worried about the cost of

the damage because most of the schools are still in good shape.

The water is still 50 cm deep in Chea Sim Chamroeunrath and it will probably take at least two weeks before it can open again, the school's director Dy Kosal said Thursday. The water has caused significant damage to the buildings, desks and chairs, he said.

"I need at least one year to repair the school," Dy Kosal said, estimating the cost of the repairs to be at least \$7,000.

On Thursday, District Governor Klaing Huot said authorities are working on a plan to prevent such extensive flooding from happening again, adding that such a plan has already been given to the municipal public works department for review.

## More Pressing Issues Than NGO Law: Group

BY YUN SAMEAN  
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

The Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee has called on the government to focus its energy on improving governance and reforming the legal and judicial sector, rather than creating laws to regulate local associations and organizations.

Government officials are currently drafting a comprehensive law to regulate non-governmental organizations and community groups, which one senior official said would "redress serious irregularities of NGO activities."

Many in the NGO sector, however, see the law as a form of pressure being applied on groups that have been vocal critics of the government's poor track record on human rights, land rights and the fight against corruption.

"There are many other laws" of greater priority, CHRAC wrote in a letter dated Wednesday, referring to, among others, the long-awaited criminal code, anti-corruption law, freedom of information law, law on the statute of judges and the Supreme Council of Magistracy.

"The laws, as mentioned, are very important for legal and judicial reforms and good governance, [and] for ensuring for transparency," CHRAC wrote.

Despite the government's poor impression of NGOs, such groups for 15 years have contributed "[M]oral and material support to the Cambodian people who are poor and vulnerable due to the lack of state services access," CHRAC added.

CPP lawmaker Cheam Yeap said the government is working with the

"international community" to produce the NGO law, and that such a law is a necessity.

"We have observed that some NGOs are serving as political tools for political parties," Interior Ministry spokesman Lieutenant General Khieu Sopheak said Thursday.

"There are 2,000 NGOs, only a few NGOs have complained," he added.

Thun Saray, president of local human rights group Adhoc, said he feared the law would be used by the government to either shut down organizations, or control their financial budgets.

"NGOs haven't done anything to disturb the country and the people," Thun Saray said.

"We have helped the country. Why is the government concerned about the NGOs?" he asked.