

Postponed Trial Of Sex Offender To Go Forward

BY PRAK CHAN THUL
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Lawyer or no lawyer, the Sihanoukville Municipal Court will go forward today with the already twice-postponed trial of Russian businessman Alexander Trofimov in the largest pedophile case in the country's history, according to presiding Judge Taing Sunlay.

The Sihanoukville court attempted in September, and then again in October, to try Trofimov, who is accused of sexually abusing 17 girls, but on both occasions Trofimov had no lawyer and the court postponed the hearing.

Taing Sunlay said by telephone that he had been informed Monday that Trofimov had hired attorney Saing Vannak to represent him in today's hearing.

Asked if the trial would go ahead regardless of whether Trofimov appeared in court with a lawyer, Taing Sunlay responded, "Yes."

"If [the lawyer] doesn't come, we will have to do it," he said.

Trofimov is currently serving a six-year prison term after being convicted by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court in March of sexually abusing a 14-year-old girl. Trofimov's previous attorney resigned because of a sore throat just before his September hearing in Sihanoukville and Trofimov claimed he was unable to hire a lawyer in time for the October hearing date.

Saing Vannak confirmed Monday that he had been hired by Trofimov and insisted that he will be in Sihanoukville Municipal Court tomorrow to defend his client.

Anti-pedophile NGO Action Pour les Enfants attorney Peng Maneth, who is representing the victims in the case, said the court had first informed him Friday of today's hearing.

"Everyone was surprised.... We were not prepared," he said, adding that the victims live in various parts of the country and his organization had to scramble to get them to Sihanoukville.

An official with anti-pedophile NGO International Justice Mission, which aided in the police investigation of Trofimov, said the victims had been transported to Sihanoukville on Monday. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said he felt confident the trial would begin today.

(Additional reporting by James Welsh)

Even in the Monkhood, Vows Can Be Broken

BY ROLLO ROMIG
AND PRAK CHAN THUL
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

BATTAMBANG PROVINCE - Some men choose to enter the monkhood to repent for their spiritual transgressions. A few must leave to pay for their earthly crimes.

Toy Savuth, 49, just became a monk last month. Sitting in front of the Wat Keroum pagoda atop Phnom Sampov hill in Battambang province Sunday, covered in tattoos from the year he spent as a government soldier in 1984, he said he had temporarily separated from his wife in order to don his saffron robes.

"I have done many bad deeds," he said while chain-smoking "Elephant" brand cigarettes. "When I was a civilian, I killed many fish and frogs to survive. I'm worried that if I am reincarnated as a frog, I will also be killed," he said.

Last Tuesday, another monk at the same pagoda, Phorn Sophoan,

left Phnom Sampov in handcuffs.

Charged with the robbery and rape of a British tourist who had been touring the region's many caves, Phorn Sophoan, 17, was defrocked, then arrested.

"He said he is sorry he committed the crimes," said Adhoc investigator Krouch Chanpov, who spoke to Phorn Sophoan on Thursday. "He said that he could not stop his mind."

Banan district police chief Beauth Sambo called on religious officials to better investigate prospective monks before ordaining them.

Phorn Sophoan, he said, had been ejected from the monastic orders once before, at a pagoda in nearby O'Chheuteal commune.

"He stole things from another monk and was defrocked," Beauth Sambo said Monday. "He ran away, and then was ordained at the pagoda of Phnom Sampov."

In Cambodia, most Buddhist monks don't take their vows for life.

The shortest stints in the monkhood usually occur only during funeral ceremonies, social commentator Chea Vannath said Monday. But in Cambodia, it's common for men to enter the monkhood from a few days to a few years.

In the past, Chea Vannath said, parents hoped their daughters would marry former monks, not least because monks were more likely to be well educated.

Over the years, she added, the monkhood has lost some of its prestige. But men of all ages still take the vows, seeking education, spiritual merit, or refuge from grueling poverty.

Nuon Nget, supreme patriarch of the Mohanikaya sect, said that provincial monk chiefs are responsible for stopping defrocked monks from re-entering the monkhood, but he admitted that errant monks are difficult to keep out.

"There needs to be a law," he said. "I don't know what to do."

With Floodwaters Gone, RUFA Reopens Its Doors

BY CHENG SOKHORNG
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

The Royal University of Fine Arts reopened its doors Monday after months of flooding finally subsided, the university's director said.

Classes were supposed to begin Oct 1 but students have been unable to access the campus in Russei Keo district's Phnom Penh Thmei commune owing to two months of flooding at the campus and of the road leading up to the school's entrance.

"There is no problem to be worried anymore because now we can start the classes," RUFA Director Po Teang said by telephone Monday.

He said he has also begun to receive applications for enrollment, which had dropped since the university's north campus relocated to its current site in 2005 as part of a controversial land swap involving the Mong Reththy Group.

While only some students arrived for class Monday, all students would

"There is no problem to be worried anymore because now we can start the classes."

—PO TEANG,
RUFA DIRECTOR



Pring Samrang

A primary school student rides her bicycle Monday on the newly dry campus of the Royal University of Fine Arts in Russei Keo district, where floodwaters have finally subsided after two months of flooding.

be in class today, he said, adding that he would add classes and delay vacation to make up for the lost school time.

Po Teang said he was too busy preparing for classes and teaching to worry about damage to the buildings caused by the flooding, though he noted that cracks are visible in the some of the structures.

"I will [send a] request for the filling [in of] the land in the school's compound and the rebuilding of some buildings to the Minister of Culture and Fine Arts in order to discuss with the Mong Reththy Group," he said.

The Mong Reththy Group has agreed to pay for damage done to the school's buildings caused by

flooding and improper construction, Tann Monivann, vice president of the group, said Monday.

"I would rebuild for them, if it has any damage from the flood or technical error in the buildings' construction," he said by telephone, adding that he also plans to build new water drainage pipes near the campus and the access road to prevent future flooding.

Culture Minister Him Chhem could not be reached for comment.

Say Sreyoth, a 13-year-old student in second grade at the campus' fine arts primary school, said floodwaters had kept her from school for nearly two months.

"I missed my teacher...and my friends," she said Monday.