

Briefing

Gov't Inaction on Flood Assistance Irks Residents

Residents in Phnom Penh's Russei Keo district Thursday criticized the seeming inaction of officials to lend assistance amid flooding that has inundated communes with knee- and even waist-deep water for up to a month. District Governor Klaing Huot said Thursday that officials are in the process of determining how many families live in the seven affected communes—Tuol Sangke, Russei Keo, Kilometer 6, Svay Pak, Chraing Chamreh II, Phnom Penh Thmei and Khmuonh. "We will go help them soon, after we note how many families are affected, but I cannot say when," Klaing Huot said. The Cambodia Red Cross, which has helped flood victims in the past, has not been given the go-ahead to offer aid, said Chheung Ngan, who heads the Phnom Penh unit of the Red Cross. Locals said Thursday that the flooding is as bad as ever: "My children have had to stop school because the school is flooded too," said Chan Toeung, 50, of Svay Pak commune. "It is difficult to find clean water, and I have never seen any authorities ask about our situation," said Sok Chisen, 39, also of Svay Pak. (*Cheng Sokhorn*)

Warrant Out for Kratie Teacher in Abuse Case

Police now have an arrest warrant for Kratie province primary school teacher Op Sopy, 25, who is accused of sexually abusing five of his students. Parents of the girls, who were between the ages of 8 and 10 years old, first filed police complaints in June. However, an arrest warrant for Op Sopy was only issued by the provincial court "early last month," said Keo Srey Sey, the provincial anti-human trafficking police chief. "We've received the arrest warrant, and we also copied the photo of the suspect to send to police in various districts," he added. Investigators believe Op Sopy is now hiding in Phnom Penh with relatives, Keo Srey Sey said. "Our police will not forgive the suspect. We will try our best to hunt him down for prosecution," he said. (*Kuch Naren*)

NATIONAL

Russian Pedophile Trial Remains in Limbo

BY PRAK CHAN THUL
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

More than a year after he was arrested in the country's largest pedophile case, the trial of Russian businessman Alexander Trofimov remains on hold with little indication as to when it will take place.

Trofimov, who was initially arrested on Oct 18 and accused of abusing 17 girls, is currently serving a six year prison term after being convicted by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court of sexually abusing one 14-year-old girl.

Sihanoukville Municipal Court officials said Thursday that they don't know when the court would be able to try Trofimov for his alleged sexual abuse of the remaining girls.

Trofimov's second trial was postponed twice in September and October because his former attorney quit, reportedly due to a sore throat, and he has not hired a new lawyer.

Explaining the court inability to hold a trial without a lawyer to defend the Russian, Sihanoukville court Judge Taing Sunlay said Thursday that he requested a court-appointed lawyer for Trofimov from the Cambodian Bar Association on Oct 7, but had not received a response.

Taing Sunlay also said that he didn't know what would happen if the bar association doesn't provide a lawyer saying it is up to the court director.

Court Director Svay Sisarouth said Thursday by phone that she was not aware of the Trofimov case and hung up on a reporter.

Contacted on Thursday, outgoing bar President Ky Tech and the association's spokesman Nou Tharith

both said they hadn't received the request from the Sihanoukville court.

Trofimov was the executive director of Koh Puos (Cambodia) Investment Group Ltd when he was arrested—a company with a 99-year-lease to develop a \$300-million resort on Koh Pos island off the coast of Sihanoukville.

Peng Maneth, an attorney for the anti-pedophile NGO Action Pour Les Enfants, which is representing the victims in the case, said Thursday that she worries about the impact of the delays.

"He can't bring up this excuse. He can afford a lawyer," Peng Maneth said Thursday, adding that stalling a case was a tried and tested technique to avoid justice in Cambodia.

"They take this pretext to delay, and normally, victims might forget about what happened and become tired of [waiting]," she said.

ADB Food Aid Project Hit by Complaints

BY PAUL VRIEZE
AND CHHORN CHANSY
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

BATTAMBANG TOWN - Amid complaints over the selection of not-so-needy beneficiaries, rice distribution from the Asian Development Bank's Emergency Food Assistance Project, which was launched Wednesday, continued Thursday, officials said.

The three-year, \$40 million ADB project is attempting to distribute rice to 68,000 poor families in 200 communes across six provinces around the Tonle Sap lake and in Oddar Meanchey.

ADB project implementation officer Long Piseth said Thursday by telephone that there had been a few complaints over the selection of

households, adding that he had also heard of cases in which village chiefs, in charge of the coordination of the ADB's local rice distribution, had allegedly kept some of the rice.

All complaints will be recorded and reviewed after the distribution is complete, he said, adding that a complaint hotline telephone number can be found on the project beneficiary lists.

Banteay Meanchey Deputy Governor Pok Salny, who is also the project manager for his province, said there had been some complaints over the selection of villagers, most of them in Poipet. He said that he had heard of one case in which supposedly poor villagers were picking up rice in their trucks.

"If this happened we will take the

rice back," he added.

Battambang Deputy Provincial Governor Sun Heng, project manager for his province, said there have been complaints in Sampov Loun district's Santepheap commune from families excluded from receiving rice. He said that if those families are poor, he would ensure that they would be included in the second stage of the project, which consists of food-for-work programs.

By Thursday, households in 90 communes in Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Pursat and Oddar Meanchey province had received rice. Distributions in the remaining 110 communes in three more provinces would be completed by Nov 5, according to the ADB.

More Rice Key to Market Competition: Officials

BY SAING SOENTHRITH
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Cambodia's rice production is being outstripped by its regional neighbors and must grow both in volume and efficiency if the economy is to tap into the lucrative "white gold" market, officials told a conference in Phnom Penh on Thursday.

While Thailand sold 8 million tons of rice on the world market last year, and Vietnam 5 million tons, Cambodia, by comparison, had sold very little, Agriculture Ministry Secretary of State Chan Tong Yves said. Between January 2007 and April of this year, Cambodia sold just 5,400 tons of rice to Europe, he said.

"If we call it 'white gold,' we ought to produce rice for sale to compete with neighboring countries," he told

the gathering held by the Club of Cambodian Journalists.

"Currently our country has 6.7 million hectares of land for rice cultivation but our rice farmers have limited productivity on it... Vietnam can produce rice at four tons per hectare and Thailand three tons per hectare," he said. Cambodia averages only 2.6 tons per hectare.

In Kompong Speu province, poor quality soil, high in sand, reduces the overall rice output. However, this can be remedied with the proper use of natural and artificial fertilizers, Chan Tong Yves said. In Prey Veng province, unsuitable groundwater also hampers productivity but a solution has not yet been devised, he added.

"Seventy percent of our people are farmers and farm following our

ancestors' [methods]. So we need to do more to educate our farming villages to increase their rice production," he said, adding that many farmers depend on monsoon rains rather than irrigation.

Sun Solkhom, deputy director of the ministry's department of agronomy and agricultural land improvement, said that Cambodia had sent samples of Cambodian rice—Samaly, Phka Malis and Kra Ngork Pong—to Qatari investors who are considering importing Cambodian rice, but who have yet to make a decision.

Cambodian and Qatari officials announced in May they were near to signing a \$200-million deal to support modernizing rice production in three provinces.