

Largest Ever Cocaine Haul Seized at Airport

BY SAING SOENTHRITH
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THE CAMBODIA DAILY

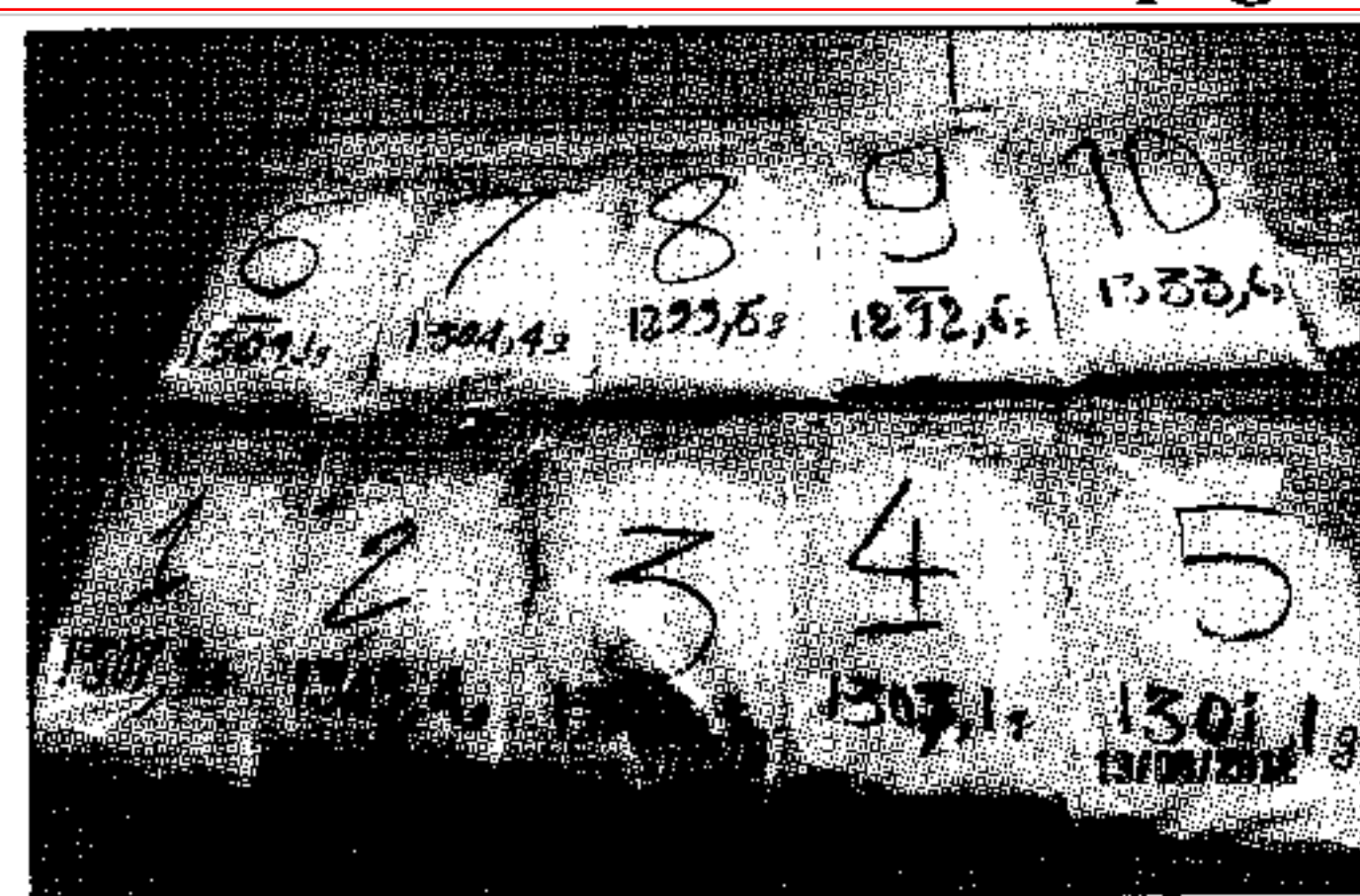
Two Thai women were arrested yesterday and Monday for trying to smuggle suitcases containing some 26 kg of cocaine through Phnom Penh International Airport, police said, in what is easily Cambodia's largest seizure of the drug.

The women, arrested on Monday night and Tuesday morning, were carrying nearly 13 kg of cocaine each in their luggage and are thought to have traveled together from Ecuador, according to three border police officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The busts follow the arrest on Aug. 7 and 8 of a 29-year-old Thai woman and an accomplice, also a Thai national, for smuggling 3.7 kg of cocaine from Ecuador to Phnom Penh.

Also on Monday, a 22-year-old Thai woman, with apparent links to Ghana, was caught at Phnom

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Customs
These bags containing about 13 kilograms of cocaine were found in a passenger's luggage at Phnom Penh International Airport on Monday night.

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Reuters

A crew member of a crashed helicopter builds a fire to cope with the freezing conditions on Mount Kenya in this photo released yesterday. Uganda said on Monday the pilot and four crew of a Somalia-bound Ugandan attack helicopter had been rescued but two other gunships and 10 crew members were still missing.

Adhoc Rights Worker Charged With Aiding 'Perpetrator'

BY KUCH NAREN
AND ABBY SEIFF
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

The Phnom Penh Municipal Court has summoned Chan Soveth, a long-serving senior investigator at rights group Adhoc, over charges of aiding an unnamed perpetrator in Phnom Penh earlier this year, according to a copy of the citation obtained yesterday.

Dated Aug. 9 and sent to Adhoc's office in Phnom Penh, the citation states that Mr. Soveth is charged "with providing Assistance to a Perpetrator, committed in Phnom Penh in May 2012, in compliance with article 544 of Criminal Code" and summoned for questioning by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court next Friday. If found guilty of the charges, Mr. Soveth could face up to three years in prison. Should he not appear, the citation notes, a warrant will be issued for his arrest.

"I haven't seen the warrant yet, but I've heard I have been charged with providing assistance to perpetrators, a charge that I have never committed," Mr. Soveth said. "I want to know what sort of assistance to a perpetrator the court has alleged I provided."

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Syria Tries to Skirt Sanctions Using Russian Banks

BY MARGARET COKER
AND JENNIFER VALENTINO-DEVRIES
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

NEW YORK - Syria's embattled regime laid plans to use Russian banks as part of an emergency effort to sidestep American and European sanctions on oil and financial transactions, according to Syrian government documents and correspondence reviewed by The Wall Street Journal.

The documents offer an inside look at how a shrinking group of regime loyalists is working to prop up President Bashar al-Assad's government. Over the past several weeks, senior Syrian officials have held a series of meetings to dis-

cuss how to conduct business after being cut off from most Western banking institutions and trade, the documents indicate.

The documents, which span a period from March until early July, also underscore the difficulties facing Western governments in sustaining comprehensive sanctions against Syria, as long as Damascus keeps its strong diplomatic alliance with Moscow. Earlier this month, Russia received a delegation of top Syrian economic officials, including its oil and finance ministers, to discuss the possibility of government loans and long-term oil deals, Syrian Deputy Prime Minister Qadri Ja-

mil said in a news conference.

The sanctions, which began last year and were strengthened this spring, are aimed at Syria's oil and financial sectors. The unilateral actions are coordinated by Western and Middle Eastern countries allied against Syria, but aren't legally binding on Russian and other companies that don't have operations in the U.S. or Europe. Russia and China have used their veto power at the U.N. Security Council to block the possibility of international sanctions.

A cache of documents reviewed by the Journal includes what appears to be authentic

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AND ALSO

Fresh Prince of Gitmo Bay

GLOBALPOST

BOSTON - The majority of the world is familiar with Will Smith's "Fresh Prince of Bel-Air" theme song, including the prisoners of Guantanamo Bay.

Gitmo librarian Milton, a U.S. Defense Department contractor who only gave his first name to visiting journalists, told the Miami Herald, "I just ordered all six seasons," of the '90s classic.

Milton gave no additional details as to why there was such a sudden rise in popularity of the sit-com about a kid from Philadelphia.

Before the Prince, there was Potter. Milton noted that prior to the prisoners new found love of Will Smith, they were enamored with the "Harry Potter" series. But Milton added, they are over that.

"They're over that [Harry Potter]; it's been more than a year."

NEWSMAKERS

■ BOSTON - U.S. President **BARACK OBAMA** yesterday congratulated NASA for Curiosity's successful Mars landing last week, adding, "If in fact you do make contact with martians, please let me know right away," according to The Wall Street Journal. "I've got a lot of other things on my plate, but I suspect that that would go to the top of the list, even if they're just microbes," Obama told the astronauts by phone from Air Force One while on his way to Iowa. The Curiosity team on the other end of the line laughed. Obama described Curiosity's Aug. 6 landing—the most complicated and expensive robotic Mars venture to date—as "mind-boggling," reported the Journal, going on to praise the team for a project that he said captivated the world. Massive crowds turned out to watch the landing live in New York City, and the event was followed minute-by-minute by news organizations and blogs across the world. (GP)

Adhoc...

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The court warrant does not specify whom Mr. Soveth is accused of aiding, and investigating Judge Chhe Virak declined to comment. But the charges against Mr. Soveth are dated just two days after Prime Minister Hun Sen implicated an unnamed NGO for trying to help a so-called secessionist movement in Kratie province. The independent radio owner Mam Sonando has already been charged on four counts related to fomenting the alleged secessionist movement, which was heavily cracked down on by security forces in May.

"There is some analysis which says it could have been connected to the Kratie issue," said Adhoc Secretary-General In Kea, stress-

ing that no information on the specifics of the case has been provided to Adhoc by the court.

"We are still unclear about this case. We were so surprised when we got the summons letter at lunchtime. We haven't received detailed information about this case or what exact offenses he has [been accused of being] involved in," Mr. Kea said.

Asked whether there was any truth to the allegations, Adhoc officials denied any connection.

"We never engaged in any illegal activities and we never supported the illegal acts. I think it's a very disturbing development, it shows that human rights defenders are more and more threatened with legal action," said Nicolas Agostini, a technical adviser at Adhoc.

"We are concerned" about what might happen to him, added

Mr. Agostini, "[but] as I said, Chan Soveth never engaged in illegal activity so he's ready to answer any questions."

In a brief statement, Adhoc called on embassies and rights organizations to show their support by attending Mr. Soveth's questioning.

"This move by the judicial authorities can be seen as nothing other than an attempt to intimidate Human Rights Defenders and prevent them from carrying out their legitimate activities," the statement says.

The charges against Mr. Soveth, who has worked at Adhoc for more than a decade and is involved in much of its most high-profile work, come a month after similar allegations were levied at the owner of the independent Beehive Radio station. Since Mr. Sonando's July 15 arrest, rights

groups have been calling for his release, saying that the charges are spurious and intended to stifle dissent.

"It seems like not a month goes by in today's Cambodia without another NGO worker being hauled into court on trumped-up charges where the evidence is thin to non-existent," said Phil Robertson, deputy director of the Asian division of Human Rights Watch.

"This case shows again why intimidation and persecution of human rights defenders by Cambodia's politically-compromised judiciary should be at the top of the list of governance challenges being raised by international donors with the highest levels of government in Phnom Penh."

Council of Ministers spokesman Phay Siphon said he had not heard of the case and would have to confirm the details.

Cocaine...

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Penh International Airport with 4.77 kg of a substance police said was high-quality crystal methamphetamine.

In all four cases, the Thai smugglers arrived in Phnom Penh on SilkAir flights from Singapore. Police have not yet linked the four cases.

Customs officers on Monday night became suspicious of Rodsiri Rungtiwa, 24, because she seemed nervous after arriving from Singapore, border officials said yesterday. Following a search of her suitcase, 12.9 kg of cocaine was discovered.

The second suspect, Bucha Preedaporn, 35, traveled on the same flight as Ms. Rodsiri, but her luggage—filled with 10 black plastic bags containing a total of 12.89 kg of cocaine—was delayed in Singapore and arrived in Phnom Penh on a flight yesterday morning. Ms. Bucha was arrested when she returned to the airport yesterday to collect her luggage, according to the officers.

Shaun Sng, a spokesman for Singapore's Central Narcotics Bureau, said the agency was not involved in any of the busts in Cambodia and would not comment on security checks at his country's airport.

The seizures of cocaine in the past week total almost 30 kg, dwarfing previous seizures. According to U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) figures, Cambodia's most prolific recent year for intercepting cocaine was 2006, when 5.1 kg was seized in the entire year, and only 1.1 kg was seized in 2011.

Lieutenant General Khieu Sopheak, spokesman for the Interior Ministry, said that the women arrested carrying drugs could not be working alone. "Where did these women receive the drugs from? Who were they taking it to?" he asked.

"This will be investigated."

Meas Vyrith, director of the National Authority for Combating Drugs' laboratory, confirmed that the packages contained cocaine, adding that the drugs were intended to be trafficked from Cambodia to another country.

The domestic market in Cambodia for cocaine is thought to be small, but experts say the drugs are likely bound for the nascent Thai cocaine market.

Gary Lewis, UNODC representative for the East Asia and Pacific region, said in an email yesterday that there was growing evidence that the market for cocaine in Southeast Asia was growing. "As with the trafficking of other drugs in the region, Cambodia has become a key transit country for cocaine trafficking," he said.

"Cocaine use in Thailand is still limited but has expanded considerably during the past few years. Most of the cocaine use in Thailand is used by the urban elite—most of whom consider meth use to be a drug for the lower classes."

Mr. Lewis said that, in particular, West African drug trafficking organizations were playing "a major role in the trafficking of cocaine from South America to Thailand by air passenger couriers," sometimes using Cambodia as a transit country.

"One of the reasons Cambodia may be being targeted [by drug

traffickers] is that casinos—which are increasingly becoming a feature in the economy of Cambodia—can play a role for drug-related [and other] money laundering," he said.

In March, Thai newspaper The Nation reported that a Thai woman was arrested in Thailand for smuggling nearly 1 kg of cocaine across the Thai-Cambodian border, near Poipet City. She admitted to bringing the drug from Brazil via Phnom Penh's airport.

In a 2007 U.S. diplomatic cable, released last year by WikiLeaks, then-Ambassador Joseph Musso-meli reported a conversation in which Moek Dara, the now disgraced former head of the National Authority for Combating Drugs, spelled out the route of cocaine coming into the airport and across the Thai border.

"He asserted that after the opening of Bangkok's new Suvarnabhumi International Airport in September 2006, drug traffickers became alarmed by the capability of new screening equipment and chose to re-route their shipments [through Cambodia]," the cable reads.