

NATIONAL

Briefing

Death Threats Made to Former Beauty Queen

Two unidentified men on a motorbike lobbed a dud grenade and two threatening notes into the Russei Keo district home of a former beauty pageant winner Tuesday night, police in Toek Thla commune said Thursday. Commune police chief Pen Thol said that while the incident had been reported by neighbors, the family who received the threat are not cooperating with police. The intended target, Prasat Davin, crowned Freshie Girl in 2005 in the beauty pageant sponsored by the Thai telecommunications firm Samart Corp, is believed to be in France, Pen Thol said. The letters threatened Prasat Davin and all her family with death, Pen Thol said. "That family seems to understand their situation very well. So they kept this and did not file a complaint with authorities," he said, adding that the grenade had been sent for analysis to the Cambodian Mine Action Center, which found that its explosive charge had been removed. (*Rann Reuy*)

IT Conference Comes to Phnom Penh on Saturday

Phnom Penh on Saturday will become the latest city to host a BarCamp, an IT conference concept that has spread across all continents since its inception in the US state of California in 2005. "This BarCamp is a place where [people] can come and talk to each other, and maybe learn from each other how to use technology for work and to improve their personal life," said Bun Tharum, an IT professional and one of the conference's organizers. "I think this kind of BarCamp can be a motor for IT conferences in Cambodia," he said. Dubbed "unconferences" because they stand at odd with the traditional, expensive professional conferences, BarCamp gatherings are user-generated: participants vote on the topics they want to hear about, anyone can teach, and all learn from one another, free of charge. "Tech conferences can be boring and formal and a real yawner," said John Weeks, a Web designer and blogger who plans to attend. "Other BarCamps seem to have got participants enthused." BarCamp starts at 9 am Saturday at the Cambodia-Japan Cooperation Center. (*Isabelle Roughol*)

Drought Over, Enough Rain To Plant Rice

BY CHHORN CHANSY
AND PAUL VRIEZE
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Rains across the country are bringing relief to farmers in areas that were suffering from drought, allowing them to start planting rice, government officials said Thursday.

Minister of Agriculture Chan Sarun said the drought in Cambodia was over and all farmers had enough water to plant rice.

Nine provinces had completed about 80 percent of the planting work and nine others 90 percent, while in the remaining six farmers had completed transplanting rice to their paddies, he said by telephone.

Chan Sarun said his ministry had distributed more than 100 tons of rice seed in four provinces to sup-

port farmers hit by drought.

According to a report by the Ministry of Agriculture's Statistics Department, the total area under cultivation stood at 2 million hectares this week, up from about 1.6 million hectares in late August.

However, the current cultivated area is still about 7 percent less than the total area under cultivation in mid-September 2007.

Chhaun Chhin, governor of Takeo province's Traing district, said villagers in his district had now started planting rice, but he feared an early end to the rainy season might still hurt harvests.

He said his district had received seeds from the Ministry of Agriculture, which had allowed farmers to grow seedlings.

Chhum Vorn, governor of Kom-

pong Speu province's Kong Pisei district, said rain had started falling in his area since last week and farmers had begun planting. With the rains coming late this year many of the rice seedlings in his district had died in early September, he said.

Yang Saing Koma, executive director of the Cambodian Center for Study and Development in Agriculture, said the late rainfall would not significantly affect rice harvests.

Some farmers would have to transplant relatively old seedlings, which could give them a reduced harvest, as there was not enough time left to grow new ones, he said, but unless the rainy season ends early, yields should be more or less the same.

Nuon Chea's Detention Prolonged 1 Year

BY DOUGLAS GILLISON
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Arrested a year ago today, Brother Number Two Nuon Chea had his pretrial detention period extended for up to another year by Khmer Rouge tribunal judges Tuesday.

Defense lawyers for Nuon Chea said Thursday that the detention had been renewed over their objections and that they intended to appeal, arguing that evidence and circumstances do not justify keeping their 82-year-old client behind bars for a second year without trial.

The most senior surviving member of the Khmer Rouge, Nuon Chea, 82, became the second person to be detained by the tribunal when about 70 police surrounded his home in Pailin's Spar Prum vil-

lage and escorted him to a waiting RCAF helicopter.

Under tribunal rules, people suspected of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity may be provisionally detained for up to a year ahead of trial. Judges may twice decide to renew detention for periods of a year.

In their decision Tuesday, co-investigating judges Marcel Lemonde and You Bunleng said they had overruled defense objections that evidence may not be strong enough to justify a second year of detention.

The court's Pre-Trial Chamber in March affirmed Nuon Chea's detention, saying S-21 prison director Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch, had

implicated Nuon Chea in the detention center's operation.

Nuon Chea's defense lawyer Victor Koppe said that under international law, justifying a suspect's detention becomes harder with the passage of time.

Koppe said the defense had 10 days from the order to file notice of an appeal, and added that while the trial of Duch was quickly approaching, the defense had seen little activity in the investigation of their client.

Judges Lemonde and You Bunleng said that since the March decision Duch had made 23 additional statements concerning the role played by Nuon Chea.

Continued detention was therefore justified, they wrote.

Gov't To Meet Suppliers To Discuss Petrol Prices

BY YUN SAMEAN
AND TIM STURROCK
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

Petroleum companies will meet today with Ministry of Finance officials to discuss lowering gasoline prices that over the past year have increased by about 30 percent, government officials said.

Prime Minister Hun Sen on Monday ordered the Ministry of Finance to discuss lowering petrol prices with the companies.

"I have noticed that the international price decreased 25 percent while the price in Cambodia has reduced only 10 percent," Hun Sen said.

Hy Heng, Sokimex marketing manager, said Thursday that his company will determine how

much it will reduce prices after the meeting.

Total Cambodia and Caltex Cambodia were selling regular gasoline at 5,600 and 5,300 riel per liter, respectively, one month ago and are now selling at 5,100 riel, company officials said.

At Total, the price of premium gasoline peaked at 5,750 riel in July and prices have tapered off since then, said Chung Ly, Total retail manager, who said the company is currently determining how much more they can cut prices.

"We cannot continue the high prices because the price of oil is dropping," he said. "People complain so we have to lower the price."

Total currently sells some of its gasoline at a loss because some of

its current stock in Cambodia was bought four weeks ago, before prices had dropped, Chung Ly said. To sell the older stock at a profit would mean losing a competitive edge with consumers, he said.

An official at Caltex said she was too busy to comment Thursday about the meeting.

Gasoline prices jumped 32.5 percent and diesel prices jumped 69.47 percent from Aug 2007 to Aug 2008, according to the Consumer Price Index released by the Ministry of Planning.

SRP Lawmaker Yim Sovann said that the government should at today's meeting require petroleum companies to reduce the price of regular gasoline to 4,000 riel per liter.