

Make-up madam charged by court

Buth Reaksmeay Kongkea

THE owner of a well-known Phnom Penh cosmetics shop was officially charged with human trafficking on Friday just days after police dismantled what authorities called an ongoing prostitution ring in which young women masqueraded as hairdressers.

Brigadier General Sea Sambath, deputy commander of the National Military Police, said that Chan Sreynuch, who ran Mikasa Coiffure and Beauty, was arrested by military police forces on Wednesday and sent to temporary detention at the capital's Prey Sar prison, where she is awaiting trial.

Sambath added that the accused madam, an elegant 38-year-old affectionately nicknamed Mom, ran the prostitution ring using employees at the Daun Penh district salon.

According to Sambath, a month-long investigation discovered that Sreynuch recruited aspiring singers and students, ferried them to and from high-end hotels, and delivered them into the hands of businessmen, the wealthy and, he claims, government officials.

"If she is found guilty, she will be facing from two to five years in prison, and a fine from one million riel (about \$250) to 10 million riel (about \$2,500)," he said.

Five of Sreynuch's girls were freed after being "educated" on the dangers of the business.

Kheng Tito, spokesman for national military police, said that Sreynuch admitted to setting up the intimate meetings between older men and her employees.

He added that according to follow-up interviews with the detained girls, Sreynuch was an influential broker, who kept a large slice of the profits.

"Sometimes, Chan Sreynuch required her customers to pay from \$1,000 to \$1,500 for having sex with the girls she brought, but they only received \$500 from her," he said.

"Most of the girls were young singers or [karaoke] video stars."

Tito added that the military police are now searching for other illicit businesses posing as cosmetics shops in Phnom Penh.

Neither Sreynuch nor her lawyer could not be contacted for comment. ■