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Ex-KR Commander Ta Mok Diagnosed With TB
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Former Khmer Rouge commander Ta Mok is suffering from tuberculosis and a bad back, officials at the military hospital said on Monday.

Ly Sovann, director of Preah Ket Mealea Hospital, confirmed the diagnosis, and said he did not know how long it would take the aging prisoner to recover from his ailments.

Most believe Ta Mok, 81, will be among the first suspects indicted for crimes committed during the Pol Pot regime-if he lives long enough to make it to court.

“We will take the treatment step by step because the TB medicine is strong,” Ly Sovann said. “If the treatment is too fast, it could have side effects on his liver because he is too old.”

Efforts by reporters to visit Ta Mok Monday were unsuccessful. Several hospital officials said that the aging commander appeared to be recovering. One official said Ta Mok was so weak when he first arrived that he was shaking when doctors brought him into the radiology department for chest and leg X-rays.

Another hospital official said he appeared pale and sickly when first admitted, but had regained his color.

The aging military commander was hospitalized June 29 after going 10 days in prison unable to eat.

Ta Mok’s lawyer Benson Samay said that he met with his client at noon on Monday, and that he had recovered enough to eat rice and speak a little. His back, however, remains so bad that he is immobile, and he is still very sick from TB, Benson Samay said.

“He cannot sit, he cannot walk, all he can do is lie down,” Benson Samay said. “His condition is the same.”

The aging rebel chief- the last leader of the Khmer Rouge –has been jailed since 1999, when the government arrested him in his jungle stronghold near Anlong Veng.

In addition to being a likely defendant, some believe he will also be a key witness against other former leaders-a role that has prompted some, including Ta Mok’s relatives, to voice fears for his safety.

“It’s important to have an independent opinion from independent doctors and observers because he’s one of the most important witnesses called to testify,” said Youk Chhang, director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia.

“With all resources that the government is putting into this, they should be able to manage taking care of his health,” he said.

The lack of independent access to Ta Mok is currently a “small issue” that could easily turn into a “big issue,” he added.

Youk Chhang said that the UN High Commission for Human Rights should visit Ta Mok to verify his condition, just as several years ago they visited another high-profile prisoner, Duch, whose real name is Kang Kek Ieu.

Margo Picken, head of the UN human rights office in Cambodia, said her office has no plan to meet with Ta Mok. She said the International Committee of the Red Cross would conduct any such visit.

“We don’t have the expertise to check on him ourselves. Obviously if Ta Mok was very sick, he would contact the ICRC,” she said.

Efforts to reach the Bangkok office of the ICRC were unsuccessful.

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