

## Cambodian "jungle girl" struggles to adapt



By Ek Madra

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A Cambodian woman who went missing in the jungle for 18 years before being found last week is struggling to adapt to life as a human and wants to return to the forest, police said on Friday.

"She prefers to crawl rather than walk like a human," said Mao Sun, a district police chief in the jungle-clad northeastern province of Rattanakiri where the girl's family live.

"Unfortunately, she keeps crying and wants to go back to the jungle," he said. "She is not used to living with humans. We had to clothe her. When she is thirsty or hungry she points at her mouth," he told Reuters by phone.

The girl, called Ro Cham H'pnheng, went missing as an eight-year-old along with her cousin when they were sent to tend cows near the border with Vietnam.

Villagers believed they had been eaten by wild animals until a girl was caught last week by a logging team as she was trying to steal some food they had left under a tree.

With blackened skin and hair stretching down to her legs, she was unrecognizable apart from a scar across her back that allowed her father to pick her out.

After 18 years in the wilderness, police said she was able to say only three words: father, mother and stomach ache.

Villagers from the Phnong ethnic hilltribe minority believe the girl is still possessed by evil spirits of the forest. They

have brought in Buddhist monks to bless her and set up a round-the-clock watch on the family hut.

In December 2004, four families in the same province, which was crisscrossed by the paths of the Ho Chi Minh trail during the Vietnam War, emerged from 25 years in the jungle after fleeing the 1979 Vietnamese invasion that ousted the Khmer Rouge.

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