

HELLBENT ON ESCAPE

From steel blades to prison plans, Radovan Krejčíř has persistently had items smuggled in to help him flee before his imminent sentencing

By JANA VAN DER MERWE

THERE didn't seem to be anything unusual about the attractive blonde estate agent who arrived at the Zonderwater Prison to visit Radovan Krejčíř. Along with some paperwork relating to the sale of one of the Czech criminal's properties she was carrying a pair of black shoes – she said his family had asked her to give them to him. But suddenly, as she was being escorted to his cell, one of the shoes started ringing...

When guards examined it they found a cellphone hidden in the sole. The phone's call history showed it had been Krejčíř's son, Denis, in Poland who'd made the unexpected call that had led to the device's discovery.

Suddenly Amanda Papoutsis (45) had a whole lot of explaining to do. She claimed she'd been visiting the prison east of Pretoria to speak to Krejčíř (46) about the sale of his home in Bedfordview, Gauteng. Apparently a member of his family asked her to bring him the shoes but she swore she had no idea a cellphone was hidden in one of them.

This is just the latest in a string of Krejčíř-related scandals that have dogged the prison. Prior to his arrest in 2013 the crime-lord's name was repeatedly linked to high-profile murder

cases, probably the best-known being that of Teazers boss Lolly Jackson. But behind bars Krejčíř has continued to thumb his nose at the law.

During his time in Zonderwater he's managed to smuggle in an array of forbidden items, including a firearm, cellphones, memory sticks, steel blades and even plans of the prison, which he apparently intended using to mastermind a brazen escape.

Clearly the mobster, his family and his henchmen won't leave any stone unturned in their attempts to get him out of jail before he's sentenced for the crimes of which he's been found guilty.

No one is more aware of this than judge Colin Lamont, who's due to sentence him this month. Although Lamont holds Krejčíř's fate in his hands recent events have clearly left him rattled.

"We don't know what's coming, especially when people have access to communication and can sit and plan things. Security is an issue I have to address, especially when it comes to myself," he said in a South Gauteng High Court sitting in Palm Ridge on the East Rand last month after circumstances led to

him postponing sentencing.

While Krejčíř is still being treated as someone awaiting sentencing and not a convicted prisoner, he's regarded as a ticking time bomb – even with cops armed with AK-47s and Uzi sub-machine guns guarding him every second.

Lamont first expressed fear for his safety in July last year when Krejčíř's former legal representative, Advocate Annelene van den Heever, was found to have brought a bread knife into court. She apparently brought it in to cut some of her leftover birthday cake to share with Krejčíř but its presence in the courtroom was an astonishing breach of security – especially in light of the harrowing testimony the court had heard.

A few months earlier Bheki Lukhele recounted in graphic detail how Krejčíř had poured boiling water over his head while interrogating him about the whereabouts of his brother, Doc, a cargo handler at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, who'd vanished with 25 kg of tik he'd agreed to transport to Australia on the mobster's behalf.

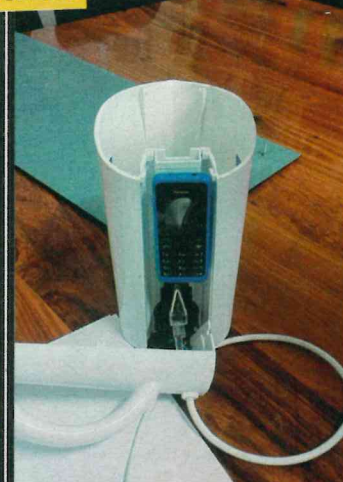
In August the crime boss and five others were found guilty on charges of attempted murder, drug dealing and kidnapping relating to this case. But this could just be the tip of the iceberg – it's thought he could have been involved in at least 15 murders committed in SA.

'It's common knowledge Krejčíř has cops on his payroll'

CONFISCATED!



Cellphone batteries were found in the bottom of an electric pan in Krejčíř's cell.



One of many phones smuggled into prison so Krejčíř could make outside calls.



The shoe in which a cellphone was concealed and started ringing.

WHEN news of Krejčíř's arrest broke in 2013 many heaved a sigh of relief. Yet in many ways the crime boss has proved to be no less of a problem behind bars than when he was a free man.

Within the space of two months officials discovered a pistol, two ammunition magazines, a knife, a screwdriver, cable ties, what's believed to be an electroshock weapon, a pepper-spray gun, 10 cellphones and memory sticks. Apparently there was also a notebook containing the names of witnesses, other prisoners and investigators involved in the case, as well as a plan and photos of the prison, including a "marked area" where a helicopter can land.

In pictures shown to YOU by the police you can see a cellphone hidden inside the plastic handle of a kettle and spare phone batteries stashed away in the base of an electric frying pan. But the cellphone hidden in the sole of the shoe takes the cake.

Papoutsis was released on R3 000 bail a few days after its discovery and is due to appear in court on 2 December. She claims she brought the footwear to the prison on the request of Krejčíř's family and that she was unaware there was an iPhone stashed in one of the soles.

On the same day as Papoutsis' bail hearing, Krejčíř's sentencing was postponed for a third time because of the absence of his advocate. The mob boss explained that Van den Heever wasn't there because he didn't have the funds to continue paying her.

Another High Court case against him and others, for allegedly plotting to mur-

der private forensic investigator Paul O'Sullivan and top cop Colonel Nkosana "Killer" Ximba, also stalled recently after his lawyers withdrew their services because of outstanding legal fees.

O'Sullivan maintains Krejčíř is deliberately playing for time because while he remains unsentenced he'll continue to be allowed more privileges in prison and is able to use this to his advantage.

"There's no doubt in my mind that Krejčíř will attempt to escape again before his sentencing. He's tried seven times before," O'Sullivan says, speaking to us telephonically from Prague.

At the time of our conversation O'Sullivan, who for the past six years has been probing the crime boss' activities, was in the Czech Republic as part of a bigger investigation of Krejčíř's mother, Nadezda, for her alleged involvement in his crimes.

"It's common knowledge Krejčíř has cops on his payroll, but his world is getting smaller. I can't see him getting less than 15 years," O'Sullivan says. But for many this wouldn't be enough.

"Krejčíř's arrest in connection with these charges [the Lukhele kidnapping] was just the beginning," national police spokesperson Lieutenant General Solomon Makgale told YOU. "Once we had him behind bars more witnesses have had the courage to come forward."

He recalls that when the special task team was set up in 2013 to investigate Krejčíř, people were dying "left, right and centre". It was around this time that YOU reported on the bombing that claimed the lives of two employees at the mob boss' business, Money Point, which sells gold, diamonds and jewellery. Krejčíř alleges the attack was aimed at him.

"All my life is like James Bond stuff. This is how I live my life," he said at the time (YOU, 23 November 2013).

"Krejčíř has always denied everything," Makgale says. "He says he's here to invest in South Africa. He'd talk about how much he loves this country. It was necessary to set up a task team to bring him down."

Makgale says with Krejčíř behind bars the investigators will have more time to examine other unsolved crimes. In addition to the long list of murders there are 20 cases of drug dealing and a string of money-laundering cases.

Like O'Sullivan, Makgale is convinced Krejčíř should be sentenced as soon as possible. "As the days pass his attempts to escape will only become more extreme," he warns. "We must always be a few steps ahead of him."

EXTRA SOURCES: BEELD, NEWS24, THE STAR, THE CITIZEN



TOP LEFT: Colin Lamont, the judge in the Krejčíř case. TOP RIGHT: Investigator Paul O'Sullivan. ABOVE: Krejčíř with his former advocate, Annelene van den Heever.