
More than 6,000 people have queued for the 20 seats in a courtroom public gallery in Japan to see a famous singer and actress go on trial. Noriko Sakai has pleaded guilty to using and possessing illegal drugs. Roland Buerk reports:

When she sang and acted, Noriko Sakai **could always draw a crowd** but rarely as big as the one that **turned up to witness her downfall**. 6,615 people queued, some all night in pouring rain, to get into the courtroom in Tokyo. Officials set up tents and handed out numbered armbands before holding a lottery draw to decide who would get the 20 seats in the public gallery.

When the hearing began the 38-year-old **pleaded guilty** to possessing 0.008 of a gram of what's been described as stimulant drugs, and using drugs too.

Noriko Sakai has been famous since she was a teenager, first as a **J-pop** singer, later as an actress. But her **girl next door** image was shattered in August when her husband was arrested over a drugs offence. She **went on the run** for several days before **turning herself in**. In the meantime the police have found more drugs in her flat.

In court, Noriko Sakai said she wanted a divorce and **to make a fresh start**, studying **nursing care** for the elderly. Her lawyers **pleaded for leniency**. The prosecution is seeking an 18-month prison sentence.

Roland Buerk, BBC News, Tokyo

Vocabulary and definitions

could always draw a crowd	was popular enough to be sure that her performances as a singer or actor would always attract a lot of attention (from her fans, the press etc.)
turned up to witness her downfall	came/arrived to see her failure
pleaded guilty	publicly declared in court that she was responsible for her wrongdoing
J-pop	short for Japanese pop, a style of music that began in the 1990s and has its origins in 1960s music, such as The Beatles
girl next door	someone who is sweet, wholesome, modest and easy-going and seen as very feminine in the traditional way
went on the run	disappeared, was hiding (usually to be on the run means to be hiding from the police or authorities)
turning herself in	coming to the police
to make a fresh start	to begin living her life differently
nursing care	when someone is professionally trained to look after sick, elderly or disabled people and does it as their job
pleaded for leniency	asked for a less severe punishment; asked to show mercy

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