

# The Phnom Penh Post

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## CNRP cites assaults in nixing talks

Shane Worrell and Meas Sokchea

THE opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party yesterday withdrew from talks with the government scheduled for today in protest against soldiers cracking down on monks and demonstrators during a garment worker strike in the capital.

Special Forces Airborne 911 Unit soldiers with metal pipes, knives, AK-47s, slingshots and batons cracked down on demonstrators near the Yakjin garment factory in Por Sen Chey district, making a number of arrests, including monks and union leaders, according to rights groups Licadho and the Community Legal Education Center.

"We withdraw from the negotiation front, because they crack down and arrest [people]," CNRP lawmaker-elect Yim Sovann told the Post. "We condemn the act of violence against the monks, against the workers who are demanding the minimum wage of \$160."

Speaking to demonstrators at the CNRP rally in Freedom Park last night, party president Sam Rainsy said his party would "not talk with such barbarians".

"[We] do not talk with [persons] who



A man is dragged along a dirt road outside of Yakjin garment factory after being beaten by authorities yesterday in Por Sen Chey district. HENG CHIVOAN

Continues on page 2

# Strike violence erupts

May Tithara and Sean Teehan

UTHORITIES yesterday injured dozens of union leaders, garment workers and monks, arresting at least 15 of them, in a series of crackdowns against demonstrators protesting the industry's minimum wage.

Garment workers and their supporters who were gathered yesterday in front of the Yakjin factory, off National Road 4 in the capital's Por Sen Chey district, said tensions between dem-

## Troops beat, arrest protesters and monks

onstrators and soldiers from a local military base guarding the factory boiled over at 9am when soldiers began unprovoked attacks on them.

The demonstration occurred amid a national garment worker strike that began last week when the Ministry of Labour's Labour Advisory Committee set this year's minimum monthly wage for workers in the garment sector at \$95 – \$65 less than unions demanded.

The ministry this week tacked another \$5 onto the minimum wage, which will now rise to \$100 next month.

As the groups stood face to face on the dirt road just off the main road, soldiers began throwing water bottles at demonstrators, who picked up the bottles and threw them back at soldiers, said Chean Kongkea, a 20-year-old employee at Korean-owned Yakjin.

The groups then exchanged volleys

of projectiles, with soldiers using slingshots to fling rocks at demonstrators, said Sophorn, a witness who asked to be identified only by his first name.

During that first melee, soldiers also attacked people with batons, seemingly at random, Kongkea said. Soldiers grabbed two men off their motorbikes and three women from the crowd, heavily beat them and dragged them inside the grounds of the factory –

which had dismissed workers for the day shortly before.

A second outburst came at about noon, when four monks who approached soldiers were allegedly severely beaten with batons and three also dragged inside, Sophorn said.

The fourth monk was beaten unconscious and taken by witnesses to the Chom Chao clinic and treated for his injuries.

Soon after the monks were beaten,

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## National

# Violence erupts at protests

Continued from page 1

which coincided with more throwing of projectiles on both sides, a group of about three soldiers surrounded Van Peuv, an employee with NGO IDEA, unprovoked, and pummelled him severely, dragging him inside along with the others, said Uch Serey Juth, who was standing next to Peuv.

During Peuv's beating, Serey Juth pleaded with soldiers for them to stop to no avail, he said. "They said only my boss ordered me to," Serey Juth said.

The scene remained tense for hours after the arrests, with Chab Sophorn, the soldier giving orders to the others, shouting for the demonstrators and onlookers to back up and initially refusing to allow UN peacekeepers inside the factory to see the injured arrestees.

Authorities eventually allowed a group of people, including Cambodia National Rescue Party member David Sovann, inside the factory, but those arrested had already been taken to the nearby base of the Special Forces Airborne 911 Unit, where they were being held, Sovann said after emerging from the factory.

Bloodstains on the floor of the factory led Sovann to suspect the people taken inside were further battered after their arrests, he said.

A statement from rights group Licadho and the Community Legal Education Center described the incident as "unprecedented" and a "violent crackdown" by soldiers armed with a number of weapons.

"The conduct of the authorities is a flagrant attack on the freedom of association of Cambodian workers and a blatant and illegal attempt to break a legal strike," the statement says.

The two NGOs believed 10 people had been arrested, including at least four monks, Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association president Vorn Pao and Coalition of Cambodian Farmer Community coordinator Theng Savoeun.

In all, 15 people, including five monks were arrested, according to the National Police's website.

"We are gravely concerned for the safety of those still held, especially in light of recent threats to leaders of unions and



A man is beaten by authorities outside of Yakjin garment factory in Phnom Penh's Por Sen Chey district yesterday. PHA LINA

informal associations," Licadho director Naly Pilorge said.

At the scene, Chab Sophorn defended actions taken against demonstrators. They posed a threat to Yakjin's property, which they were charged with protecting, he said.

"I was ordered by my boss to protect the factory, so I have to protect the factory," Chab Sophorn said. "They threw a lot of stones at us."

Women from the Boeung Kak community, including Yorm Bopha, joined in, at times kneeling in prayer in front of soldiers standing in formation and at other times shouting at them. Monks standing in the front of a crowd of onlookers about 50 metres away from soldiers linked arms, refusing to leave as Sophorn ordered.

According to a press release issued by its partner firm last week, Yakjin Trading Corp, which also operates factories in Vietnam and Indonesia, makes clothes for Gap, Walmart and Old Navy, among other big brands.

The protesters strategy changed at 4:45pm, when about 400 people walked into National Road 4, blocking traffic on both sides with their bodies, tuk-tuks and motorbikes.

Just over an hour later, after several speeches made over loudspeakers attached to a tuk-tuk, the group mobilised, marching about a half-kilometre down National Road 4, and blocking it right in front of the street leading to the military base. Demonstrators soon blocked the base's road as well, demanding authorities release the people being held.

Traffic on the main road backed up with headlights going back far in the distance. Demonstrators blocked attempts by several people on motorbikes to



Garment workers line balconies along Veng Sreng Boulevard during a protest calling for a raise to the minimum wage for the industry yesterday. PHA LINA

get past the human barricade in front of the military base road.

As he helped block the road, Sieng Sovannara, chief of the Khmer Krom monk community, said he did so because five of his monks were being held inside the base, accused of being "fake monks".

"I decided to block the road because I want authorities to release the monks," said Sovannara, who added that the monks there had been defrocked.

Chan Soveth, a senior investigator for rights group Adhoc, also decried the military response to an initially peaceful protest.

"It was very wrong, because they are soldiers," Soveth said. "They have to protect the nation, not the factory, but they protect the factory and beat monks."

Council of Ministers spokesman Phay Siphan defended soldiers' role in detaining the monks and union leaders, comparing their role to that of the National Guard in the US.

"They have a job to protect

the nation," he said. "This is not a demonstration . . . this is a rebellion."

Asked whether monks involved could be said to be a threat to national security, Siphan claimed they were "fake monks" who had destroyed public and private property.

"They are abusing the law. If you have the uniform, you need to own the ethics . . . the monk should be in the pagoda."

At about 7pm, demonstrators left on their own accord.

Authorities later released the five monks at about 11:30pm.

Nearby, at the Canadia garment factory, authorities also carried out an unprovoked attack on peaceful demonstrators armed only with speakers, injuring 10 people, said Phoeun Chhorn, a 21-year-old worker at Canadia whose foot was injured during the crackdown.

A doctor at Ekreach Clinic said three people came in for treatment. Two were sent home and one was transferred to the

Cambodian-Russian Friendship Hospital. In the wake of that incident, a group of protesters estimated at more than 200 strong blockaded the street and set large bonfires.

After midnight this morning, an estimated 500 police in riot gear moved in to remove hundreds of remaining protesters from outside the factory.

At the sign of movement, most of the crowd scattered, though a few remained, throwing rocks from a distance, as police fired warning shots into the air.

At least one man was seen being dragged from a nearby building after attempting to hide from the police.

Earlier yesterday, members of the six unions leading the strike announced they would suspend the strike if the government and the Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia begins negotiations with unions within three days. ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY SHANE WORRELL, MOM KUNHEAR, DANIEL QUINLAN AND BENNETT MURRAY ■

## POLICE BLOTTER

### A sex worker playing for keeps steals wallet

A MAN in the capital's Daun Penh district hoping to pick up a little company ended up losing his wallet on Thursday. Police said the man and his pals had just finished singing a little karaoke when they decided to take some sex workers to a nearby guesthouse. While the man was distracted, his paid companion allegedly grabbed his wallet and passed it off to a friend, who fled the scene. Noticing the wallet missing, the man called the cops, who are looking for her accomplice. KAMPUCHEATHMEY

### Man headed with his wife for prison life

A REPUTED drug addict in Banteay Meanchey's Sisophon town with a host of alleged crimes to his name finally ran out of luck on Wednesday. According to police, the man was known for snatching bags, grabbing phones and stealing in the early morning every time he and his wife ran out of money for drugs. But the good times finally came to an end when police were issued an arrest warrant and raided his guesthouse, sending him and his wife to court. KAMPUCHEATHMEY

### Dealer suspect plays peek-a-boo with cops

ANOTHER long run came to an end after a drug suspect led police on a multi-province game of cat and mouse. Acting on a tip, police had raided the man's Phnom Penh home, where he was allegedly selling drugs, but he was lucky enough to escape through a back door. A warrant was issued in August of 2012, but the slippery suspect skipped from Phnom Penh to Stung Treng to Kratie to Ratanakkiri, where he was finally apprehended on Wednesday. KAMPUCHEATHMEY

### Driver avoids arrest after near hit-and-run

TWO women were badly injured in a head-on collision on the road between Kampot and Phnom Penh on Wednesday. According to police, a car carrying six people attempted to overtake another vehicle. The driver failed to notice the oncoming moto and slammed into it, leaving the two riders seriously injured. The driver tried to flee, but was stopped by police, who declined to arrest him because there were no fatalities. He may, however, still appear in court in the future. KAMPUCHEATHMEY

### Theft-fuelled holiday plans cut short by cops

A MAN hoping for an all-expenses-paid holiday will instead be making a trip to the Battambang big house. Police said the man popped over to Banteay Meanchey and stole a farmer's moto, before heading off to Phnom Penh to sell it. However, police from the two provinces, intercepted him on Wednesday before he made it. The man reportedly confessed, saying he had planned to sell the bike for spending money on his short-lived vacation. RASMEI KAMPUCHEA

Translated by Phak Seangly ■

# Locals push for abbot's resignation

**Chhay Channyda**

SOME 300 residents of Kampong Thom province will submit their thumbprints to the provincial governor calling for the ouster of the chief abbot of a Stung Sen town pagoda – a move opponents say is motivated by the abbot's perceived support of the opposition.

However, Khieu Khean, chief of Krochab village in Achar Leak commune, maintained yesterday that residents

were upset with Krochab pagoda abbot Ann Mony because he had been uncooperative, and had had "scores of problems with people".

"He ignores people and was insincere about money with the pagoda committee by using pagoda money to buy a motorbike and a car," Khean said.

But some, like villager and Cambodia National Rescue Party supporter Kem Sosal, 31, accused Khean and others of seeking Mony's ouster in order to install a more pro-ruling party abbot.

"The village chief and his deputy have collected thumbprints, saying [the abbot] is involved in politics, so they want to drive him out, but when we ask why they say it is not political, and that [it's because] he is not honest with the pagoda instead," she said.

"As for the accusation of him buying moto or car, I can say that the mother of the chief abbot has money to buy one for him; [he was] not using pagoda's money."

Last month, Mony allowed the CNRP

to hold a Buddhist ceremony to collect money to build improved toilets for the pagoda. He also took part in the opposition's mass demonstrations in the capital, one of the reasons authorities intend to expel him, Sosal added.

Stung Sen town Governor Hok Rin said yesterday that he was unaware of the campaign, but that only the provincial or district board of monks could remove an abbot.

Mony could not be reached for comment yesterday. ■



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Military police, some armed with automatic weapons, face off with rioting garment workers at the Canadia industrial complex in Phnom Penh on Friday morning. Heng Chivoan

## Crackdown turns deadly

Fri, 3 January 2014 Cheang Sokha, Sean Teehan and Shane Worrell

GUNFIRE at Phnom Penh's Canadia Industrial Park today killed at least four people, a military police official said, after armed forces firing weapons stormed the area – where garment workers and supporters set fires and gutted at least one building.

"We received news from the hospital claiming that four people were killed and another 26 strikers were injured," the official said on condition of anonymity.

Naly Pilorge, director of rights group Licadho, which tallied the casualties, also said four had been killed, adding that 29 others were shot in the crackdown and 12 more treated for injuries that have not been confirmed as gunshot wounds.

Rights group Adhoc has said that five people were killed in the crackdown, while Phnom Penh deputy police commissioner Chuon Narin told the Post only three people died and two were seriously injured.

The demonstration at Canadia comes amid an ongoing national strike that began last week when the Ministry of Labour's Labour Advisory Committee set a new monthly minimum wage of \$95 – \$65 less than striking unions demanded. The ministry raised the minimum wage another \$5 earlier this week, but many workers have remained on strike.

Bloodshed this morning and afternoon stemmed from a peaceful demonstration yesterday afternoon, which police broke up with an unprovoked attack, beating people with batons, witnesses said last night.

Demonstrators then started at least three tyre fires in the middle of roads, which they blocked to traffic using vehicles and debris.

After midnight, an estimated 500 police in riot gear moved in to remove hundreds of remaining protesters from outside the factory.

Road blocks and fires resumed this morning, with demonstrators also breaking windows and gutting EKreach Clinic, throwing medical equipment onto a bonfire burning on Veng Sreng Boulevard.

At about 10am, authorities began firing live ammunition at demonstrators, who

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allegedly threw stones at the security forces, a statement released by Licadho says.

Demonstrators began scattering from Veng Sreng at about 1:30pm, when military police descended upon the area, armed with automatic weapons.

Rapid volleys of gunfire and some screams could be heard for about 15 minutes, as soldiers walked behind buildings on the street, which protesters had ran toward.

Factories at Canadia Industrial Park supply to H&M, Puma, Adidas and PVH – whose brands include Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein – said Moeun Tola, head of the labour programme at Community Legal Education Center.

Pilorge, from Licadho, said the violence was the worst seen in Cambodia since the shootings and grenade attacks on political demonstrations in 1998.

"[Past violence] was all political... this was originally triggered by workers," Pilorge said. "In terms of labour, we've never seen this."

Dave Welsh, from labour rights group Solidarity Center, condemned the use of live ammunition as outrageous.

"In that economic zone, things have been getting out of hand," he said.

"Whatever the case, this is complete disproportionate use of force, illegal and completely outrageous on behalf of the government."

Rong Chhun, president of the Cambodian Confederation of Unions, said he had received information that four strikers had been shot dead and many more injured.

"Why are they cracking down on us when we are just demanding our salary?"

But National Military Police spokesman Brigadier General Kheng Tito defended the use of force.

"We're just doing our jobs. We fear the security situation, so we have to crack down on them," he said. "If we allow them to continue the strike, later on, it will become messy and more complicated to control."

Tito added that nine police officials were injured by stones, some fired from slingshots, during clashes with workers in the area.

As of tonight, authorities have secured the situation at all locations where clashes erupted and 11 protesters arrested will be sent to court for formal charges, he added.

Among the bloodied was part-time garment worker Yean Sothea, 25, who said he received head injuries during the crackdown.

"The workers didn't want violence. We just wanted to block the road ... the police attacked us and shot us," he said. "Most of the workers were injured. My friend went to the nearby hospital, but the police ordered them not to treat them – that's why they were angry."

San Sino, 28, whose brother, a garment worker, was shot dead, said staff at the Khmer-Soviet Friendship hospital had refused to release his brother's body for a funeral service in Freedom Park.

"My brother was a factory worker. He went to demonstrate a few days ago," he said. "I begged him not to strike – because it is very risky. I came back from Takeo province to see my brother dead in the hospital."

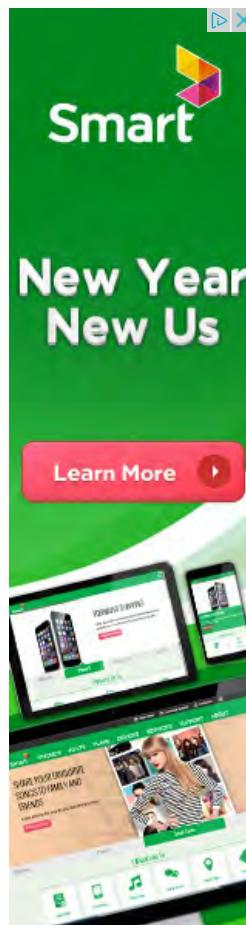
The opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party, whose protests calling for a re-election following last July's ballot and the resignation of Prime Minister Hun Sen have coincided with the garment strikes, said the violence was totally unacceptable.

"I condemn the act of violence. I condemn the use of armed forces led by the CPP to kill their own people," he said. "We cannot stand still and be calm. The CNRP will do its best to show solidarity with the workers. On the 5th, more people will [join demonstrations]."

Sovann said the opposition would not let "powerful people kill their own people."

"The CNRP together with the people" had organised a ceremony, also being referred to as a peace vigil, at Freedom Park today, Sovann added.

Opposition leader Sam Rainsy this evening met with demonstrators at Freedom



Park and began visiting victims in hospital.

In a statement released after the violence, the Ministry of Labour said the CNRP – not just the six unions groups it has previously attributed blame to – had encouraged “provocative behaviour” for their own political benefit.

“They have to cooperate with authorities,” the statement says. “The ministry will call the five unions to meet on January 8 to discuss this.”

A statement from the Ministry of Defence also took aim at the opposition, saying it had “provoked” outrage after July’s election by saying the military had been deployed to the streets and by urging soldiers and civil servants “not to fulfil their obligations” in protest against the election result.

“RCAF would like to appeal to the public to ignore such provocative and inaccurate information that could lead to violence and affect social order and national security in Cambodia,” the statement says.

Phnom Penh City Hall issued a statement blaming “anarchists” for the violence.

“The group of anarchists has used violence, blocked roads, burnt private property, intimidated investors [in economic zones] and threatened to set fire to factories in that area,” the statement says.

“Due to the high risk presented, the authorities were forced to take action to disperse these anarchists, who caused violence leading to clashes that injured both the authorities and some anarchists.”

But it also blamed politicians – though without naming the CNRP – for “causing unrest, chaos and violence that affected workers, investors and social order”.

The bloodshed follows violence yesterday at the Yakjin factory, in the capital’s Por Sen Chey district, when soldiers, armed with an array of weapons, injured dozens, including 15 people they also arrested.

According to the Cambodian Center for Human Rights, the five monks arrested in that incident – who authorities accused of being “fake monks” who had damaged private and public property – were released the same night.

The remaining 10, including Vorn Pov, president of the Independent Democracy of Informal Economic Association (IDEA), were taken to court this morning and charged with intentionally causing damage with aggravating circumstances and acts of violence with aggravating circumstances. They were sent to Prey Sar prison.

In the wake of that violence, the CNRP yesterday announced it would not attend planned negotiations with the ruling Cambodian People’s Party today over the political deadlock, which still has the opposition boycotting its 55 seats in the National Assembly.

In response to the violence, the US embassy, via its website, put out a “security message” to its citizens in Cambodia, warning them to avoid areas southwest of Phnom Penh International Airport.

“You should remain alert to local security developments by monitoring local news reports, be vigilant regarding your personal security and preparedness, be aware of your surroundings, and plan your activities accordingly,” the message says. Additional reporting by Sen David and Khouth Sophak Chakrya

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 Contact authors: [Cheang Sokha](#), [Sean Teehan](#) and [Shane Worrell](#)

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Two monks raise their arms in fear as a military police officer raises a baton to strike them on Saturday morning in Phnom Penh's Freedom Park.

## Military police storm Freedom Park

Sat, 4 January 2014 Shane Worrell, Cheang Sokha and Daniel Quinlan

A GROUP of Cambodia National Rescue Party lawmakers-elect are holed up at their party headquarters in the capital's Meanchey district, while top leaders Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha are meeting in "a safe place," after authorities forcefully evicted opposition demonstrators from Freedom Park today.

Amid rumours that the government intends to arrest key opposition and union figures, CNRP lawmaker-elect Mu Sochua said the party's lawmakers-elect had gathered in solidarity in its office – close to the Ministry of Interior.

"I don't think it [the arrest warrants] is a rumour," she said. "I think it is a reality. It's a matter of time, [but] I have no idea [what the government is accusing us of]. How would I? We've done nothing wrong."

Rainsy and Sokha, meanwhile, were meeting with leaders from the international community, she said, adding that she was not privy to the location.

When called for comment, Phnom Penh Municipal Court president Chiv Keng, paled ignorant of any warrants.

Negotiations with the government, meanwhile – originally planned for yesterday, but nixed by the opposition following a violent crackdown against garment workers and monks – appear to be off the table altogether now, Sochua added.

"[Interior Minister] Sar Kheng said he no longer wants to communicate with Mr. Rainsy," she said.

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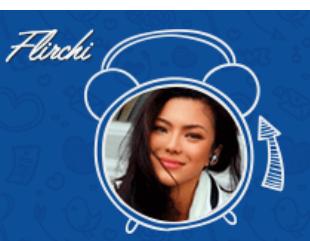
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Democratic Union (C.CAWDU), said he had moved to an undisclosed area on the outskirts of the capital.

"It's unbelievable," he said of the crackdown in Freedom Park. "I don't know what their plan is. But this is their own fear."

Athit said he had been trying to contact his president, Ath Thorn – one of the union leaders rumoured to be the subject of an arrest warrant – without success.

Earlier in the day, riot police in full body armour were seen blocking off Freedom Park ahead of its planned clearing.

Minutes later, two trucks with loudspeakers pulled into the northwest corner of the park, followed by a large contingent of military police who charged into the crowd with shields and batons.

Most of the peaceful protest quickly scattered, though a number of demonstrators, including monks, were seen being beaten by police as they attempted to flee.

Amid the large group of riot police, a separate group of men dressed in plainclothes and armed with sticks were also seen taking part in the operation. They were identified by a red ribbon tied around their arms.

After clearing out the majority of people, military police began violently dismantling the tents and tearing down the stage set up by the opposition.

The action followed a letter sent this morning from Phnom Penh city governor Pa Socheatvong to CNRP president Sam Rainsy, announcing that the opposition would not be permitted to hold further demonstrations due to recent violence.

"In order to maintain security and social order... the Phnom Penh Municipality decided not to allow the Cambodia National Rescue Party to hold further demonstrations at Freedom Park and rallies on streets in Phnom Penh starting January 4, 2014, until the security situation and public order is returned to normal," the statement says.

Long Dimanche, spokesman for Phnom Penh City Hall, conflated the party's peaceful protests with recent violence that has erupted during an ongoing national garment strike over the minimum wage, claiming that some CNRP demonstrators, including monks, had left Freedom Park to join striking workers, damaging public and private property and disrupting the public order.

Military police yesterday shot dead at least four people during a strike outside the Canada industrial park on the outskirts of the capital.

This afternoon, with Freedom Park cleared of all but journalists and rights activists, armed forces marched through the side streets surrounding Freedom Park, threatening and chasing bystanders as military helicopters, recently purchased from China, flew low overhead. Additional reporting by Stuart White

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Contact authors: Shane Worrell, Cheang Sokha and Daniel Quinlan

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heantl@hotmai.com wrote:

Sat, 2014-01-04 16:04

Ministry of labor should step

Ministry of labor should step in to check on the cost of living and salaries.

This to avoid factories close down and people out of job.

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ChrisBloor wrote:

Sat, 2014-01-04 20:09

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## Barbaric

The Cambodian government is showing the world they have no concern for human rights. Shooting on demonstrators with live ammunition and beating unarmed monks.Utterly shameful!

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 **vantheman** wrote:  
Sun, 2014-01-05 11:02

**violence**

Well, it is just matter of time before the ruthless regime led by a dictator Hun Sen flex their muscle and quell down anyone considered threatened their absolute power. Shame, shame....

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 **sdokkokthom** wrote:  
Mon, 2014-01-06 12:15

**Freedom Park**

The elite armed force of Hun Sen is clearing Freedom Park to a dictator Park. The opposition's leaders will soon to be arrested citing inciting people to violence. In fact CRNP has conducted peaceful non violence rally demanding for vote fraud to be investigated if not possible HUN SEN should step down. The act of human right violation in Cambodia should be taken seriously by international communities especially among Government and private business. Punish HUN SEN government by taking of EBA status in Europe and American corporations should cease their manufactured goods outsourcing in Cambodia until Human right violation is stopped and all garment factories whose product outsource in Cambodia should pay a minimum wage to employees at a negotiable rate at least \$160. a month.

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 **Rosely** wrote:  
Wed, 2014-01-08 13:46

**Hmmm**

I have only one wish for my nation now. It is the resignation of Hun Sen and its evil crew...

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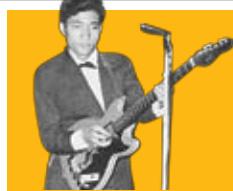
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# The Phnom Penh Post

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## Bangkok readied for 'shutdown'

THAI anti-government protesters began mobilising in Bangkok yesterday, a day ahead of their planned "shutdown" of the capital as they step up efforts to topple the government and halt upcoming elections.

The politically turbulent country has been shaken by weeks of opposition rallies against Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and her divisive former premier brother Thaksin, which have caused the government to call snap February 2 polls.

Demonstrators, who have vowed to disrupt the vote, packed equipment up at their main Bangkok rally site and began fanning out to seven locations across the city ahead of today's attempt to choke off transport into the capital.

"We hope everything will change in a good way [today]. The change we want to see is for this government to stop being corrupt or they should resign," said Komol, a protester at the site who gave only one name.

The protesters want an appointed "people's council" to run the country and oversee vaguely defined electoral reforms before new elections are held in around a year to 18



Cambodia National Rescue Party supporters gather in Battambang province yesterday. The opposition party held three days of rallies in areas including Siem Reap and Banteay Meanchey following a ban in Phnom Penh. HENG CHIVOAN

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## A family's anguish

Phak Seangly and Kevin Ponniah

IT'S been a week since Khim Saphath's family held a funeral for their missing son, last seen with blood pouring from his chest during clashes between striking garment workers and authorities on January 3.

Without a body to place in a casket, framed photos had to suffice as a physical reminder of a baby-faced 16-year-old who lied about his age to work at a Chinese-owned garment factory for \$8 a day.

### Search continues; hope fades

But although they say they have accepted the worst, Saphath's doting parents haven't stopped looking for him.

"I look for my son at pagodas, hospitals and clinics. Wherever we go, we ask people about him, but we have found nothing," Saphath's father, Khim Souern, 41, said yesterday outside the sparse rental room that the youngster shared with his older sister, a few hundred metres away from

the factory where he worked. "We just want to know what happened to him, if he survived or died. If he is dead, we need to see his corpse."

Turning up to work that Friday morning, Saphath had found the factory shuttered and followed his fellow workers to Veng Sreng Boulevard, where hundreds were caught in clashes with military police.

His friend and co-worker, 18-year-old Srey Ry, said other protest-

ers were throwing rocks at soldiers when security forces opened fire with live ammunition.

"I ran for my life and jumped to the ground, and when I got up, I was shot in the arm. My neighbour helped me get out of the scene to our rented room or else I would have been taken away by the soldiers like Chrouk was," Ry told the Post from hospital yesterday, using Saphath's nickname, meaning pig.

"Chrouk was about 30 metres from

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## National

# US envoy criticises violent crackdown

Kevin Ponniah

**U**S AMBASSADOR to Cambodia William Todd has weighed in on the government's brutal crackdown on striking garment workers earlier this month, calling the confrontation and subsequent ban on demonstrations a "significant setback" in the Kingdom's democratic development.

In his first "Ask the Ambassador" column of 2014, Todd criticises the government's use of military units to control protesting workers on January 2 and 3, which resulted in at least four deaths and 26 injuries from bullets, according to rights group Licadho.

"While the United States recognizes the fundamental responsibility of the Royal Government to maintain order and protect the general welfare of its people, appropriate proportional responses must be used," he writes in the column published yesterday.

"Part of exercising restraint is adhering to the rule of posse comitatus, which prohibits the use of military force in responding to civilian crises."

Ambassador Todd also said he was "deeply disappointed" in Phnom Penh Municipality's decision to ban opposition

demonstrations – enacted following a violent clear out of Freedom Park on January 4 – and called for renewed talks.

"The need for sustained dialogue between the two major political parties is more urgent than ever," he writes, despite noting that court summonses issued for opposition and union leaders are likely to stymie productive talks.

"I am equally concerned about the 23 detained protesters in Kampong Cham and the apparent violation of their basic rights guaranteed by the Cambodian constitution," Todd added, saying that transparent and fair judicial proceedings for the arrestees and summonsed leaders would show the government's willingness to work with the opposition and protesters.

"It is only through the hard work of negotiation and compromise that a sustainable and equitable way forward can be found."

Todd, who cut his end of year holiday short to return to Cambodia after the clashes, makes no mention of any punitive action if disproportionate military responses are again used by authorities against protesters.

Embassy spokesman Sean McIntosh yesterday said he would not "speculate on that point". ■



Military police move towards protesting workers amid falling Molotov cocktails on Veng Sreng Boulevard on January 3. POST STAFF



The older sister of Khim Saphath holds a picture of her brother yesterday. Saphath has been missing since the January 3 government crackdown on garment protesters on Veng Sreng Boulevard. HONG MENEA

## Search for missing son continues

Continued from page 1

me. I did not see him getting shot with my own eyes. I just saw him lying on the ground with a serious wound to his chest. Blood was coming out. A neighbour tried to get him away but more and more blood was coming out and he asked him to leave him there."

Ry said that others told him Saphath was taken away on a military police truck, but this could not be corroborated with eyewitnesses. Still, the story of a possible arrest gave the family hope that Saphath would be one of 23 protesters secretly detained at CC3 prison in Kampong Cham. But when rights groups were finally given access on Wednesday, they said he wasn't among the arrestees.

"We've all been looking for him, and he hasn't appeared

yet, so we now have asked the family if they want to do an announcement on the radio," Naly Pilorge, director at Licadho, said.

**I just saw him lying on the ground with a serious wound to his chest. Blood was coming out**

Chan Soveth, an investigator at Adhoc whom the family filed a complaint with on Monday, said he was calling on the government to investigate the case.

"His body has not been found, so he [can be considered] missing. [But] we can say that we are 99 per cent sure he has not survived, so he was put onto our list of dead [numbering five from the protests]," Soveth said.

Licadho has not added Saphath to its confirmed list of four dead from the crackdown and is still treating him as a missing person, although he

military police were just rumours, emanating in particular from the opposition party.

"We do not know whether it is true or not. They just said that, mainly the opposition party," he said, asking the parents of those missing to file a complaint with police.

"We will find the missing persons for them if they lodge a complaint with our police. Do not just say it."

Saphath's family say they are too scared to ask the authorities for information and will continue to search for their son, despite acknowledging he is likely dead.

"I don't have hope to find him alive. He's disappeared without a trace," Souern said, his vacant eyes staring down, his head resting on one hand.

"I am still continuing to look for him." ■

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