

Holiday blues hit factories

Mom Kunthear and Shane Worrell

TENS of thousands of garment workers will enjoy an early start to the Pchum Ben holiday today as they trek back to their homeland. Their excitement, however, is not shared by their bosses, who will be left to rue a week-long halt in production.

“Enterprise and establishment” workers, including garment and footwear employees, have been granted time off by the government to register to vote or verify their details on the electoral rolls in the lead-up to next year’s national election, according to a Ministry of Labour notification issued on August 29.

Those who work in a province other than their homeland are entitled to three days off before the official Pchum Ben holiday that begins on Sunday.

Workers who have to travel within a province have been granted two days off, while others have been granted one day.

Depending on the province and the factory, garment workers will be off work until Tuesday or Wednesday.

Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia Secretary-General Ken Loo said factories will be affected



Garment workers ride in the back of a transport truck in Phnom Penh. Tens of thousands of garment workers will travel back to their home provinces for the Pchum Ben holiday and to register to vote. WILL BAXTER

by the week-long interruption in production.

“It’s a significant break. In a way, it was unaccounted for, because it was not part of the national public holiday,” he said, adding that factories were not told about specific dates until about a month ago.

“The garment sector would appreciate being notified as early as possible.”

For the owners of two Tai Yang Enterprises factories in Kandal province’s Ang Snuol district, an extra three days added on to the Pchum Ben vacation would mean a loss of about \$50,000.

“It’s going to cost my company a lot of money,” manager Wu Minghuor said.

The two factories, where thousands went on strike for months earlier this year,

would pay workers their full wages and bonuses for the holiday and voter registration period.

Chhorn Sothy, a worker at M&V factory in Kampong Chhnang province, said her bosses had promised workers full pay, and they would strike if they did not get it. “I am worried the company will break its promise,” she said.