

All the News Without Fear or Favor

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Lauren Crothers/The Cambodia Daily

Riot police fire tear gas at protesters from the SL Garment factory in Phnom Penh's Meanchey district yesterday morning. Demonstrators threw stones at the police, who responded with rubber bullets and live rounds.

## Woman Killed as Police Open Fire During Garment Worker Clash

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THE CAMBODIA DAILY

One woman was killed, at least nine others injured and 37 arrested, including seven Buddhist monks, who were later released, after violence erupted yesterday morning in Phnom Penh's Meanchey district between protesting garment factory workers, civilians and security forces, who fired live ammunition.

Two police vehicles and at least two police motorcycles were torched after several hundred workers from the SL Garment factory, who were attempting to march to Prime Minister Hun Sen's residence, had their route

blocked by police.

During the clashes, six police officers were trapped in a room inside the Stung Meanchey pagoda for more than one hour, but escaped unharmed.

Street vendor Eng Sokhom, 49, who was not taking part in the protest, was shot and killed during the clashes as she served food to customers, human rights workers said. The slain woman's son, Vong Panha, 21, told reporters at the Khmer-Soviet Friendship hospital that his mother, who worked near the Stung Meanchey pagoda, had been serving food to a customer when she was shot in the chest.

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Colin Meyn/The Cambodia Daily

Eng Them sits beside a portrait of her sister, Eng Sokhom, who was shot dead by security forces yesterday during clashes in Meanchey district.

## Woman...

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Two Cambodia Daily journalists witnessed at least five police officers firing pistols in the direction of the protesters. One of the officers, who had been trapped in the pagoda, was seen drawing his handgun and shooting a young man in the torso at close range following his release. The shot man had not challenged the police officer in any way.

The clashes erupted at about 8:45 a.m. after about 2,000 workers from the SL Garment factory—the majority of whom were men—tried marching to Mr. Hun Sen's house, only to be met by a phalanx of military police who urged them to retreat.

About 60 riot police began banging their shields and pushing the workers back, aided by water cannon trucks, prompting a volley of rocks to be thrown from protesters around the nearby Stung Meanchey pagoda. Police retreated, leaving a truck inside the pagoda, which was swiftly pushed outside, topped and torched by the protesters. Two police motorcycles were also thrown on the fire.

Six police officers who were unable to retreat with their colleagues locked themselves in a room at the pagoda as an angry crowd of workers gathered outside. Outside the room, a growing crowd that included monks and bystanders became increasingly agitated—often breaking up and tearing off in different directions as those outside the pagoda grounds yelled various warnings and police massed on the nearby Stung Meanchey bridge.

Sok Sy Ngeth, a 20-year-old monk who was one of the seven arrested and later released, said during the fracas that he supported the workers.

"I support them. I have a great deal of sympathy for the workers. Most of them are poor and they work in the garment factory in order to get money to support their families in the countryside," he said.

As several hundred riot police advanced from Stung Meanchey bridge toward the pagoda, rocks were thrown from the protesters' side—many hurled by barefoot youths wearing kramas across their faces.

This was quickly met by a hail of 38-mm rubber baton rounds, tear gas and what appeared to be live ammunition fired from pistols wielded by police officers, which



Thomas Cristofaletti/Ruum

**A police officer holds a K59 pistol at a clash yesterday with garment factory workers during which one woman was killed and several others wounded by gunfire.**

forced the protesters to briefly retreat. It was one of several such clashes that raged on streets around the pagoda over the next couple of hours, culminating in the dispatch of several hundred military police officers, who stormed the pagoda and chased off the remaining stone throwers.

Shortly before the military police stormed the pagoda, the six police officers trapped inside were assisted in their escape by human rights workers and riot police officers. As one of the escaping officers fled, a Cambodia Daily journalist witnessed him raise a pistol and fire at Hoeun Chan, a 20-year-old university student, who was hit in the torso. Mr. Chan had not challenged the police officer, and was not even in his direct line of flight when he was shot.

Outside the pagoda, on Veng Sreng Boulevard, 49-year-old Ms. Sokhom lay dying, shot in the chest by a bullet as she served rice to workers and other bystanders. Ms. Sokhom was taken to Khmer-Soviet Friendship Hospital, but was dead on arrival, doctors said.

As her grieving family awaited the release of her body from the morgue yesterday afternoon, three other shooting victims and a journalist with chest injuries were receiving treatment in the intensive care unit. An employee of Phnom Penh Municipality, who was also at the protest, was treated for minor tear gas inhalation.

Ms. Sokhom's 27-year-old son, Vong Sopheak, his pants still drenched in his mother's blood,

said he was about 20 meters away from his mother and had been looking in her direction when she was shot by police.

"At first the police hit in the air, then when the protesters moved forward they shot at them," Mr. Sopheak said.

"I saw her get shot and she shouted out 'Oy!' By the time I got her into a tuk-tuk, I could see she was dead."

Mr. Sopheak's younger brother, Mr. Panha said he was standing at his mother's side when she was shot and had been close enough to be splattered with blood.

"She was standing serving rice to a customer. She shouted 'Oy!' and fell down to the ground," he said, confirming that she had been shot in the upper right chest.

"This is an injustice. We are not protesters, we are just common people," he added. "After the funeral, we will gather our family to discuss filing a complaint."

Inside the hospital, family members were applying a block of ice to the chest of Ven That, who had been caught in a stampede of protesters. Mr. That, a cameraman for TV9, said he had been standing between police and protesters when chaos broke out as police began shooting.

"I saw the police shoot at the protesters first. Then the protesters began throwing stones back, and then I was knocked down and the protesters trampled me," Mr. That said.

Mr. Chan, the university student who was shot inside the pagoda by a police officer, went into surgery at 12:50 p.m., hospi-

tal documents show, and he emerged at around 2:30 p.m. in stable condition.

Dr. Bon Say, an anesthetist, said as he left the operating room that Mr. Chan had been shot in the spleen, which was removed along with the bullet that had hit him.

Hin Huon, a 48-year-old motorcycle taxi driver, said he had just left the nearby Doeumkor market, where he had dropped off a customer, and stopped to watch the protest when he was shot.

"I just stopped briefly to have a look at the protesters, and when the police pushed the protesters, I ran and was shot in my buttock," he said.

Dr. Sun Eang, a physician in the ICU, said Mr. Huon's injury was serious, with X-rays showing the bullet lodged in his hip bone, but that Mr. Huon should survive his injury.

Ty Sophanith, 30, an SL factory worker and the only person at the hospital yesterday who admitted to having participated in the protest, was shot in his right thigh and his back. X-rays showed a bullet lodged next to his broken thigh bone. Mr. Sophanith said the bullet had entered his lower back and exited his left shoulder near his neck.

"It is unjust that the police shot into the protesters because I came out to protest only to demand [that strikers] are reinstated to their jobs," Mr. Sophanith said, referring to SL workers who have been on strike since August.

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## NATIONAL



Lauren Crothers/The Cambodia Daily

**Protesters throw stones at police on Stung Meanchey bridge yesterday.**

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Naly Pilorge, director of rights group Licadho, said of the nine injured, two were police officers and another two were journalists from TV9.

SL Garment factory workers have been striking to demand a pay raise and the removal of plainclothes military police officers who were drafted in to provide security at the factory, as well as the reinstatement of a work schedule that includes half-hour meal breaks. The SL factory makes clothing for both Gap and H&M.

"Today we received news about the tragic incident when police and garment workers of SL garments clashed," said Anna Eriksson, spokeswoman at H&M's communications and press department in Sweden.

"Our thoughts go to the victim's family and hope that the situation will calm down and that no more people will get injured. We urge the parties to resume negotiations and come to an agreement through dialogue shortly," she said.

In a statement, the Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee, a coalition of 21 NGOs, condemned the "excessive use of force" by the authorities at the clash.

"It seems that the lessons learned by the soft-handed approach by the authorities at the mass-rally of the opposition party in October—in which there were no injuries—have been forgotten and the authorities are returning to inadequate crowd control and the kind of violent crackdowns that left Mr. Mao Sok Chan, another innocent bystander, murdered at the Kbal Thnal overpass in Sep-

tember," it said, calling for a full investigation into Ms. Sokhom's death.

Rights group Licadho and the Community Legal Education Center said: "An innocent food vendor shot dead and over a half dozen people with serious bullet wounds is the tragic outcome of unnecessary and disproportionate police force and reflects the utter lack of will from the part of the authority to seek a peaceful way out of today's situation."

The use of force was branded "reprehensible," and Licadho called for an investigation into the killing.

Phnom Penh municipal police chief Chuon Sovann said his officers had shown restraint and were "patient." He declined to comment when asked about the use of live rounds by police and the death and injury to apparent bystanders.

"This morning we worked very hard to keep the peace, but as reporters have seen, the rocks were thrown all over at the authorities," Mr. Sovann said.

Chuon Narin, deputy municipal police chief, flatly denied that his officers had fired their pistols, despite witness accounts and photographs of police carrying handguns.

"They only fired tear gas and rubber bullets," Mr. Narin claimed. "It was an anonymous bullet," he said of the round that killed street food vendor Ms. Sokhom.

The National Police Commissariat issued a statement late yesterday that mentioned the dead woman, but not the use of live rounds by police, and blamed "opportunists" for the violence. It said that 47 police officers had sustained both minor and serious injuries.

"Opportunistic groups who were not demonstrators took a chance to incite and provoke violence on the police by throwing stones and using slingshots, and beat and destroyed and surrounded police armed forces as hostages," the statement says.

Thirty people remained in custody at the municipal police headquarters last night. Seven monks who had been detained along with other protesters were released and returned to Stung Meanchey pagoda, police and monks said.

Heng Sros, 20, one of the arrested monks, said after his release last night that police had insulted him and his colleagues, and had made them sign statements swearing that they would not partake in any more protests.

Van Sou Ieng, chairman of the Garment Manufacturers' Association of Cambodia, said the protesting SL workers should have followed the law.

"We are very sad to hear that [about the woman being shot], but everybody should be law-abiding citizens. You can't just allow anyone to go out and protest without authorization—even in politics, the opposition respects the law on demonstrations. We have to call on the public in Cambodia to be law-abiding citizens. Enforce the rule of law," he said.

Kong Athit, vice president of the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers' Democratic Union, deplored the use of live rounds by police during the protest and said union and government representatives would meet today.

"We are grieving strongly for the dead and injured people because the authorities used

rifles to shoot our protesters who were unarmed, and we are not able to accept this cruel action.

"[Yesterday] there were no negotiations with SL, but I was invited by the Ministry of Labor to hold a meeting [today] at 2 p.m.," he said.

"I will ask the ministry officials to intervene in pushing the authorities to stop using violence."

Sok Danoy Tharakthan, a Free Trade Union representative for the SL workers, said the blame lay with the police who blocked the road and prevented the protest march.

"We regret that the authorities used violence against the workers, since they do not have weapons," he said.

At her home yesterday, Ms. Sokhom's body was laid out on a blood-soaked white sheet.

Her family and neighbors gathered solemnly as a Buddhist layman oversaw a blessing ceremony, sprinkling water over her body and lighting incense.

Her sister, 64-year-old Eng Them remembered the mother-of-three as hard-working.

"She was a gentle woman," she said. "She worked hard to support her children and her husband."

Ms. Sokhom's husband, 51-year-old Nget Vong, said his wife would be cremated on Thursday and that City Hall had offered to cover the costs.

"We hope that they will find justice if they are willing to. We also regret that the authorities used excessive force against the people and those who were traveling and watching [the protest], especially killing my wife."

*(Additional reporting by Colin Meyn, Khuon Narim, Alex Willemys, Aun Pheap)*



Lauren Crothers/The Cambodia Daily

**A police truck burns after being set on fire by protesters in front of the Stung Meanchey pagoda yesterday.**