

Capital's Evacuation Described as Chaotic
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A witness and a civil party offered two different perspectives at the Khmer Rouge tribunal yesterday on the evacuation of Phnom Penh in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge's victory in April, 1975.

First, railway worker Sok Chhin told of the transfer of people through a way station at Leach, in Pursat province, describing trains carrying about 1,000 people at a time passing through his work area, dropping some passengers there to be interviewed on their personal history and transferred to other work sites, and carrying others to work sites in Battambang province.

"There were different kinds of people from different age groups: old, young, sick people," the 67-year-old, who spent the better part of the day matter-of-factly recounting what he saw as a railroad repair worker on a 21-kilometre stretch of track in Pursat, said.

"They would be there for a few days, or even a week, before they could be transferred to other locations."

According to Chhin, the wait treated some better than others, with several of those in transit dying after disembarking at Leach.

"I myself buried the dead bodies, because the bodies along the railway tracks decomposed," he said, adding later that the stench prevented people working.

Chhin finished his testimony in the afternoon, and civil party Lay Bunny took the stand to give her own account of the exodus from Phnom Penh.

"I was pregnant at that time," she said, describing the mood the city as "chaotic".

"There were rockets launched over the Cambodiana Hotel, so my mother did not send me to the hospital because she was afraid we would [be separated].

"She asked a midwife, the traditional midwife, to come and deliver the baby... I had to sustain long labour pains. Unfortunately, my baby died before it was born."

Bunny blamed the loss of her child on a lack of professional medical care, but she had not even fully recovered when she was forced to leave the city 20 days later by way of a road crowded with sick people – some still bed-ridden – who had been forced out of a nearby

hospital.

The road, she said, was dotted with dead bodies.

“We asked what happened to them, and we were told that they had wanted to go back and they were shot.”

Bunny’s testimony will continue today.