

Hope Turned to Horror as City Fell, Says Witness
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On April 16, 1975, Meas Saran had to work the night shift in a medical centre in Borei Keila.

When his shift ended in the wee hours of the morning on the 17th, his replacement didn't show up, so Saran – now 63, with a shock of thick white hair – worked on, treating the wounded that kept streaming in as Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge.

“It was my hope, and I think that everyone shared my hope, that there would be no more war when the situation was over,” Saran, a civil party, told the Khmer Rouge tribunal yesterday.

His hopes, however, were dashed as he watched the Khmer Rouge make their way into the medical compound.

“On my return from outside, I saw a young girl. Her stomach was cut open,” Saran said, pausing to regain his composure.

“I saw that young girl; she had her stomach cut open and her intestines came out of her body... and I tried to insert the intestines back into the stomach, and then I sewed off the stomach. And I still have a vivid scene of that misery every time I recall it.”

Like the rest of the city's inhabitants, he was forced out of town, where he waited for five days for a purported US bombing that never came – ignoring calls from the Khmer Rouge for civil servants to return to the city to “work to rebuild the country”.

“In my mind, and from my observation from the chaotic situation... and the bombardment [that] turned out to be a lie, I formed my opinion that those people who returned would not be in a position to serve [the new regime],” he said, adding that he never saw the returnees again.

Earlier in the day, the bench and defence wrestled over the admissibility of an audio excerpt that seemed to show witness Pe Chuy Chip Se asking to see his notes during an interview with the co-investigating judges.

According to a translation provided by the court interpreter, a voice on the recording could be heard saying, “let me locate my notebook”.

Judge Nil Nonn and the prosecution, however, said that they were not sure they had heard the word “notebook”, and the chamber flatly refused to play the tape again to clarify.

“It is not me who characterised this evidence; it is the court-appointed translator who translated this audio for all the court’s English-speakers to hear,” said Nuon Chea co-counsel and Dutch national Jasper Pauw, who, after an objection from Canadian prosecutor Dale Lysak, suggested that simply playing the tape again would be better than “a Canadian and a Dutch person debating the Khmer language”.

Judge Silvia Cartwright, however, refused to replay the tape and declined to say why.