



Memories live strong for Khmer Rouge survivors
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FAR away from the courthouse, in the former Khmer Rouge stronghold of Pailin province, cheers erupted in a packed coffeehouse when Brother No 2 walked out in protest at the opening hearing of his long-awaited trial.

Lath Nhoung, a former Khmer Rouge soldier, said yesterday morning from Pailin town that “more and more people”, mostly former Khmer Rouge, were arriving in the coffee shop to watch the proceedings on television in a place considered safe for political banter.

Cheers could be heard when Nuon Chea – who is accused of crimes including genocide, crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions – announced that he was “not happy with this hearing” and left the courtroom.

“The people in the café laughed and cheered at his departure, because they saw that Nuon Chea did not support the court, and his stance remains very strong,” Lath Nhoung said.

A former mid-ranking Khmer Rouge cadre, who underwent political training from Nuon Chea, said from the Pailin coffeehouse yesterday that he approved of Nuon Chea’s “stance”.

“Nuon Chea’s stance is still very strong, as he had before. I like his stance so much. I do not know whether he is guilty or not, but I like his character,” the man said, offering only his given name, Nem.

But not everyone concerned was paying attention to the eventful proceedings.

Nuon Chea’s wife, Ly Kimseng, said from her home near the Thai border in Pailin province that she caught sight of her husband on TV only accidentally while flipping channels. “When I changed the channel from one to the other, I saw on television that they ran live footage on the trial and then I saw my husband sitting. I changed to another channel, because I did not want to see or listen to the court trial. I tried to listen to other news – any story,” she said.

Former Khmer Rouge navy commander Meas Mut, who is one of two suspects in the tribunal’s third case, said yesterday from his home in Battambang province’s Samlot district that the elements had prevented him from watching the trial. “I wanted to see the trial too, but I could not turn on the television because there is too much rain,” he said.

While some appeared to tune into yesterday's proceedings with a defiant attitude, victims and their family members said they were looking for answers from the tribunal's second case.

Phon Korn, a 46-year-old survivor of the Pol Pot regime who resides in Serei Sophon town in central Banteay Meanchey province and was visiting in Phnom Penh yesterday, said that he was "anxious" for an explanation from the four accused now standing trial.

"Now they are in the court, so I hope that they would tell us the truth – why they killed the people," he said.

Lim Teang, a vendor at Boeung Chhouk market in Battambang city, said she watched the day-long hearing because her mother and brother were killed by Khmer Rouge after they were caught stealing food. Although she said her once fiery anger had faded with time, she urged life terms for the accused.

"I do not pity them – I want history to write about them as killers," she said.