

NHAY CHAMROEUN AND KONG SOPHEA

Summary

In late October 2015, Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) MPs Nhay Chamroeun and Kong Sophea were severely beaten as they left the National Assembly by a group of protesters that had amassed to demonstrate against then-CNRP Deputy President Kem Sokha. Shortly thereafter, three members of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces who participated in the beating were arrested and charged with aggravated intentional violence and property damage under the Criminal Code. Although the three men were convicted on the aggravated international violence charges in May 2016 and given four-year sentences, the judge suspended three years of those sentences, and the men were released from prison in early November 2016.

2015

26 October – Nhay Chamroeun and Kong Sophea are severely beaten during a protest outside the National Assembly against CNRP Deputy President Kem Sokha. The CPP denies any involvement in organizing the protest, although bystanders noted the presence of CPP district politicians among the crowd and Prime Minister Hun Sen warned about the protest the day before.¹

4 November – Three members of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces – Sot Vanny, Chhay Sarith, and Mao Hoeung – are charged with one count of intentional violence with aggravating circumstances and two counts of property damage (Articles 217 and 218 and 410 and 411 of the Criminal Code, respectively) for the attack on Nhay Chamroeun and Kong Sophea.²

5 November – Prime Minister Hun Sen is quoted in the media as saying that the three men arrested for the attack on Nhay Chamroeun and Kong Sophea were “only reacting to racial insults,” and Ministry of Interior spokesman Khieu Sopheak is quoted as saying that he would have “used a gun” against the two MPs.³

11 November – A lawyer for Nhay Chamroeun and Kong Sophea files a complaint at the Phnom Penh Municipal Court demanding that the attackers be charged with attempted murder and property damage and forced to pay 50,000 USD in compensation.⁴

2016

6 April – Kong Sophea suggests senior CPP MP Chheang Vun may have organized the assault after the latter made comments suggesting the attack would have been avoided had Nhay Chamroeun and Kong Sophea chosen to stay inside the National Assembly.⁵

28 April – *The Phnom Penh Post* reports that official documents seen by the paper confirm that the three men on trial for beating the Nhay Chamroeun and Kong Sophea are members of Prime Minister Hun Sen’s personal bodyguard unit.⁶

28 April – Nhay Chamroeun and Kong Sophea decide to boycott the opening of the trial of the three men accused of beating them outside the National Assembly, saying that the justice system is rigged.⁷

28 April – The Phnom Penh Municipal Court judge trying the case prohibits Nhay Chamroeun and Kong Sophea’s lawyers from questioning the suspects about their commander and from whom they received orders.⁸

10 May – Defendants Sot Vanny and Mao Hoeung testify in court that they attacked the MPs in response to “insults” leveled by the lawmakers.⁹

27 May – All three defendants are convicted on charges of aggravated, intentional violence and given four-year prison sentences, but the judge says they will only serve one year and are set to walk free in five months’ time, due to time already served in pre-trial detention. The defendants are also ordered to pay a 1,500 USD fine to the state, and 9,800 USD to each victim.¹⁰

29 September – Nhay Chamroeun, a dual Cambodian-US citizen, says he is considering filing a case against Prime Minister Hun Sen’s son, Hun Manet, in US courts. Hun Manet heads the Defense Ministry’s Anti-Terrorism Unit, as well as being the deputy commander of the Prime Minister’s bodyguard unit.¹¹

4 November – The three bodyguard unit members – Sot Vanny, Chhay Sarith, and Mao Hoeung – are released from prison after serving their one-year sentence.¹²

17 November – Sot Vanny and Mao Hoeun are promoted in rank from Lieutenant Colonel to Colonel as per a sub-decree signed by Prime Minister Hun Sen.¹³

28 November – A video posted online contains leaks of alleged conversations between former CNRP youth activist Thy Sovantha and Hun Manith, one of Prime Minister Hun Sen’s sons, in which they discussed plans related to the October 2015 protests outside the National Assembly, which resulted in the beating of Nhay Chamroeun and Kong Sophea.¹⁴

29 November – Defense Ministry spokesman Chhum Socheat announces that the leaks of the alleged conversations between Thy Sovantha and Hun Manith will be investigated, in particular their authenticity and how the leak could have happened.¹⁵

28 December – Defense Ministry spokesman Chhum Socheat tells reporters that they have no right to ask questions regarding the promotion of Sot Vanny and Mao Hoeun, two of the men convicted of the October 2015 beating of Nhay Chamroeun and Kong Sophea.¹⁶

2017

26 January – *The Phnom Penh Post* reports that the third man convicted for the assault on Nhay Chamroeun and Kong Sophea in October 2015 – Chay Sarith – was also promoted in rank, from colonel to one-star general, by Prime Minister Hun Sen.¹⁷

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² Phnom Penh Post, “Three RCAF members charged for beatings,” 5 November 2015, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/three-rcaf-members-charged-beatings>.
³ Cambodia Daily, “Hun Sen Says Lawmakers Hurling Insults Before Beatings,” 6 November 2015, <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/hun-sen-says-lawmakers-hurled-insults-before-beatings-99524/>.
⁴ Phnom Penh Post, “Compensation sought for attacked MPs,” 11 November 2015, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/compensation-sought-attacked-mps>.
⁵ Phnom Penh Post, “Saphea blames Vun for Assembly attack,” 7 April 2016, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/saphea-blames-vun-assembly-attack>.
⁶ Phnom Penh Post, “Of 16 who assaulted MPs, only three, all Bodyguard Unit members, face trial,” 28 April 2016, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/16-who-assaulted-mps-only-three-all-bodyguard-unit-members-face-trial>.
⁷ Phnom Penh Post, “Beaten lawmakers to skip hearing,” 28 April 2016, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/beaten-lawmakers-skip-hearing>.
⁸ Phnom Penh Post, “Accused soldiers’ superior off-limits,” 29 April 2016, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/accused-soldiers-superior-limits>.
⁹ Phnom Penh Post, “More testimony in MPs’ assault,” 11 May 2016, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/more-testimony-mps-assault>.
¹⁰ Phnom Penh Post, “Soldiers to serve five months for National Assembly attacks,” 27 May 2016, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/soldiers-serve-five-months-national-assembly-attacks>.
¹¹ Phnom Penh Post, “MP mulls suing Hun Manet in US court,” 29 September 2016, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/mp-mulls-suing-hun-manet-us-court>.
¹² Phnom Penh Post, “Bodyguard Unit trio released one year after MP beatings,” 7 November 2016, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/bodyguard-unit-trio-released-one-year-after-mp-beatings>.
¹³ Phnom Penh Post, “MP attackers promoted,” 28 December 2016, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/mp-attackers-promoted>.
¹⁴ Cambodia Daily, “Alleged Chats Between Thy Sovantha and Hun Manith Leaked,” 29 November 2016, <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/alleged-chats-thy-sovantha-hun-manith-leaked-121166/>.
¹⁵ Phnom Penh Post, “Manith message’ inquiry pledge,” 30 November 2016, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/manith-message-inquiry-pledged>.
¹⁶ Cambodia Daily, “‘Do Not Ask,’ Official Says Of Promoted Bodyguards,” 29 December 2016, <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/not-ask-official-says-promoted-bodyguards-122642/>.
¹⁷ Phnom Penh Post, “Third member of PM’s Bodyguard Unit seen kicking head of MP promoted,” 26 January 2017, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/third-member-pms-bodyguard-unit-seen-kicking-head-mp-promoted>.