

Rescue ends with 36 dead, including 6 children, after Kep building collapse

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The rescue team carry a dead body from collapsed building in Kep province. Supplied



Rescue efforts were called off just before midday Sunday with 36 bodies recovered from the rubble of a building that collapsed in Kep province, while 23 survivors were sent to hospital.



Man Ry, 59, had been working at the site with her son and her wife. She was collecting sand near one of the entrances on the ground floor, and was about five or six meters outside the building around 4:45 p.m. on Friday when the seven-story, almost-completed structure came crashing down.



Her son was still working. Her daughter-in-law, Chhen Thuon — who was four-months pregnant — was resting inside as she had not been feeling well.



She told CamboJA News that she began to yell desperately for help.

“Brothers and sisters, please help my children,” she repeated, while a crowd formed around the rubble and local authorities began to arrive.

Her son, Phea Sophon, 25, was injured but made it out alive. His wife, Chhen Thuon, 20, was dead.

Rescuers worked from Friday evening through Sunday morning to pull people out of the debris, with the death toll already standing **at seven by mid-Saturday morning**. Sam Sarin, the provincial council chief, told CamboJA News that the building had only been permitted to build up to five stories but had continued to build to seven stories.

On Sunday, announcing the end of the rescue efforts, Prime Minister Hun Sen said the final toll was 36 dead and 23 injured, including 14 women killed and eight injured.

“This is very tragic event for our country,” Hun Sen said.

He said the collapse appeared to be due to “the foreman’s mistake,” and that the foreman had died in the collapse. The building’s owner had been arrested and would soon be sent to neighboring Kampot’s provincial court, he added.

The collapse in Kep followed a building collapse in Sihanoukville in June that killed 28 people and another in Siem Reap province last month that killed three.

Hun Sen said the government had passed a new construction law two months ago that it hoped would raise building standards in the country.

“I hope that after the construction law is fully implemented, this issue will be reduced,” he said.

Hun Sen added that compensation of \$10,000 to \$20,000 would be provided to each survivor, and \$50,000 to each of the families of the deceased.

More than \$1.7 million had been donated to the cause, including from King Sihamoni, the queen mother and opposition leader Kem Sokha, who is being tried for treason and has been banned from politics.

“This is not the time to have disputes with each other, but it is a time for Khmer to help Khmer,” Hun Sen said. “I welcome Mr. Kem Sokha’s stance, and even though he still has some problems, helping the people is the problem we need to focus on.”

Hun Sen continued by criticizing those — especially anyone in the government — who had looked to find someone to blame in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy rather than offer support.

Sokha “offered his regrets and shared his condolences, so Mr. Kem Sokha is better than some officials in the government,” he said.

Hun Sen added that Kep’s provincial governor, Ken Satha, would not be removed from his position.

According to a press release issued by the Kep provincial administration on Sunday, six among the 36 dead were children

were children.

Construction workers routinely live on-site with their families, a practice that the government has moved to end, but remains prevalent.

357 views

 Building collapsed, Hun Sen, Kep City

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