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Leaders Reflect on Top Cop

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After a memorial service Tuesday, leaders disagree on the legacy of former National Police Chief Hok Lundy, who died in a helicopter crash Sunday

AS the country's leaders grappled with the sudden death of National Police Chief Hok Lundy at his Tuesday memorial, officials were divided on the legacy of the often criticised top cop.

On one side are Cambodian People's Party members who say that Hok Lundy served his country with distinction during a career stretching back to the 1970s.

On the other side are opposition lawmakers and human rights groups who point to unsolved political murders and alleged links to crime rings that they say cast a dark shadow on his tenure.

Hok Lundy and three others died in a helicopter crash Sunday night, and Cheam Yeap, a senior CPP lawmaker, said the death meant that the ruling party had lost a valuable asset who spent half a lifetime serving the nation.

"I can tell you, the CPP and all Cambodians have suffered a huge loss from Hok Lundy's death. I am very sad to lose him," he said.

"The police chief brought experience and skill to the police force and army, to which he dedicated his life since the 1970s," he added.

"[Hok Lundy] fought against the Khmer Rouge and helped bring peace and social stability to the country."

But opposition lawmaker Yim Sovan said the former police chief's tenure was marred by corruption and murder.

Controversial cop

He pointed to years of international criticism for Hok Lundy's suspected role in political killings and human trafficking as evidence of an unsavory past.

"There were many criminal cases and murders that happened [during Hok Lundy's time as police chief] against politicians and young female stars," said the Sam Rainsy Party parliamentarian.

He added that none of the crimes have resulted in convictions.

He said he hopes the police chief position will be filled by someone who upholds the standard of law.

"I would like to call for a new top cop who can bring social safety and peace for people," he said.

Yim Sovan said he hopes the murders committed during Hok Lundy's term would be pursued in the same way that the UN and Cambodian government are bringing Khmer Rouge leaders to trial.

"Justice is a necessary tool for a developing country like Cambodia," he said.

There were many criminal cases and murders that happened [under hok lundy].

The Kingdom's top policeman was also regularly the target of human rights groups that criticised him as a brutal tactician.

Investigations into Hok Lundy's death, and the death of General Sok Saem, who was also in the helicopter, concluded that the crash was most likely caused by a mechanical failure.

About 40,000 police officers are now under the supervision of General Neth Savoeun, Hun Sen's nephew-in-law and deputy commissioner of the National Police.

"I strongly hope that Neth Savoeun will be able to handle the new job," Cheam Yeap said.

He added that the CPP would be watching the police boss before deciding whether to promote him as Hok Lundy's successor.