

Phnom Penh Post

Volume 6 Number 11

Phnom Penh, May 30-June 12, 1997

2000 riel

Wanted — grenade suspects unmasked



By JASON BARBER
AND CHEA SOTHEACHEATH

COMPOSITE sketches of suspects in the deadly March 30 grenade attack were issued this week, while police officials from both of the ruling political parties claimed progress toward identifying some of the alleged perpetrators of the massacre.

The sketches were drawn by a visiting United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) sketch artist from eye-witness descriptions. For the past fortnight, Funcinpec officials had been pushing for their public release, but faced initial reluctance from their Cambodian People's Party (CPP) counterparts.

The joint Ministry of Interior commission set up to investigate the grenade attack decided May 28 to issue the sketches. A ministry statement urged the public to help the police find "the real terrorists" and promised confidentiality for anyone who came forward with information.

The names and telephone numbers of five top officials — co-Ministers of Interior Sar Kheng (012-833-333) and You Hockry (015-920-609), National Police Chief Hok Lundy (015-831-468) and his deputy Yeng Marady (018-812-941) or the investigation team head Teng Savong (015-831-112) — were provided for anyone who thought they recognized the suspects.

Yeng Marady said that one of the men in the sketches was a grenade thrower, and the other two were "protectors" or accomplices of the people who threw the grenades. Eye-witnesses have said there were at least two grenade throwers on foot and another two on a motorcycle.

A senior aide to Sar Kheng (CPP) said May 27 that some suspects in the grenade massacre have already been identified and may be arrested soon.

"The investigation process is nearly complete and we are going to arrest the suspects very soon," General Khieu Sopheak said. "We have got a lot of positive information and this...will lead us to the suspects."

Sopheak - speaking the day before the sketches were released suggested arrests should be made before the FBI pictures were made public.

Sopheak said that "70 or 80 percent of the suspects" have been identified. He would not say if they included people who may have ordered the attack but did not actually take part in it.

Asked whether arrests were likely within a week or two, he replied: "Not a week or two, not a month or two - the sooner the better."

Sar Kheng's co-Minister, You Hockry (Funcinpec), appeared less positive but agreed that one or two suspects "may" be able to be identified.

"I think that a couple of persons may be identified physically," he said.

In particular, Hockry referred to one of the men in the FBI sketches, saying: "I think there's one man who can recognize him [the suspect]. He knows who he is."

Hockry gave no indication that arrests were imminent. Even if the culprits were positively identified, "suppose they are not here, suppose they have escaped - that's another problem," he said.

At least 12 people died when four grenades were thrown at a Khmer Nation Party (KNP) demonstration in the park opposite the National Assembly on the morning of March 30.

(Continued from Page 1)

The FBI sent three agents to investigate because an American, Ron Abney, was injured in the blasts. One agent, the sketch artist, was specifically requested by the co-Ministers of Interior.

Funcinpec police officials have focused on a group of heavily-armed soldiers, part of the bodyguard detail of Second Prime Minister Hun Sen (CPP), in the park at the time of the attack.

Witnesses have said that at least two of the grenade throwers fled past the soldiers, who prevented other people from chasing them. The suspects are said to have run toward Wat Botum, behind which is a CPP compound.

Sources say the commander of the Hun Sen soldiers, General Huy Piseth, and his assistant, Major Chhin Savann, were interviewed by police and FBI agents May 9. Four days later, they returned, along with four of the bodyguards, for more questioning.

According to Hockry, the soldiers initially said they were sent to the park after the grenades went off but later acknowledged that they were there before the attack.

At least some of the soldiers who were interviewed said they saw the backs of the suspects as they fled but did not see their faces, according to Hockry.

On May 27, an FBI agent and Cambodian police interviewed Srun Vong Vanna, a bodyguard of KNP leader Sam Rainsy who has told journalists that the soldiers prevented him from chasing the grenade throwers.

Vanna, who had earlier turned down requests to give evidence to the police unless his safety was guaranteed, was taken to the massacre site by the police and the FBI agent.

(Continued on Page 6)

He was seen gesticulating as he re-told the events of Mar 30.

A member of the ministry inquiry team, Sok Phal (CPP), confirmed that the soldiers saw at least one suspect running into Wat Botum pagoda. "But I can't talk about this," Phal added.

Neth Savoeun, chief of Phnom Penh Municipal police and an inquiry team member, said he had no comment on the soldiers' testimony or on the FBI sketches.

Savoeun denied reports that the ministry had turned down FBI offers to provide lie detector machines for use on witnesses or suspects.

Rainsy - who escaped injury in the massacre and who has been implicitly accused by CPP officials of having arranged the attack - said publicly that he will submit to a lie detector test. He urged that other witnesses also be tested.

Hockry said the FBI had not spoken to him about lie detectors, adding: "If people submit to the lie detector, it is good. But we cannot force people to submit."

Hockry also referred to reports that a photograph of some of the crowd at the KNP demonstration, taken before the explosions, showed a man whom witnesses claimed had later thrown one of the grenades.

There have been persistent rumors in Phnom Penh of such a photograph, but Hockry said he had not seen it. If it existed, and witnesses could point out the grenade thrower to police, it would be useful to the investigation, he said.

Sam Rainsy, meanwhile, left Cambodia after a meeting with First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh (Funcinpec) May 25. In a statement issued from Bangkok the next day, Rainsy claimed that "there is enough evidence to prove that Hun Sen was behind" the grenade attack.

Rainsy said that Ranariddh had given him a confidential report on the investigation prepared by You Hockry. Rainsy claimed that extracts of the report included: "Eye-witnesses pointed their fingers at the Second Prime Minister"; "Hun Sen's people did not say the truth"; and "[A suspect] ran through [the] CPP compound and headed towards Hun Sen's residence."

Rainsy also publicly claimed the report said that Teng Savong, the CPP general in charge of the investigation, had admitted that "he knew who gave the order to attack the protesters" but had declined to name the person because it was "too dangerous".

Savong, contacted by telephone May 27, refused to hear or answer questions. Hockry told the *Post* he had been submitting regular written briefings to Prince Ranariddh, and the report cited by Rainsy appeared to be a compilation of these. "It should not be given to Sam Rainsy," Hockry said, citing the confidentiality of witnesses.

Rainsy said from Bangkok that he would go to France and return to Cambodia before the scheduled visit of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to Phnom Penh in late June.

In his May 26 communiqué, Rainsy urged the officials of foreign governments "who have been praising Second Prime Minister Hun Sen for a long time for his 'insight' and 'determination'" not to hinder the work of the investigation team or the publication of its findings.

"In normal circumstances, Hun Sen would have been questioned by the police," Rainsy wrote. "No wonder he is trying to increase political and military tension in Cambodia in order to divert public attention from his obvious involvement in the mass killing which, in a democratic country, would bring an end to his political career."