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Grenades at Protest Leave 19 Dead, 150 Injured

Blasts Rip Through KNP-Led Rally

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At least 19 people were killed and more than 150 wounded Sunday morning when four grenades exploded at a Khmer Nation Party-led protest outside the National Assembly, police, witnesses and aid workers said.

Arms and legs were blown off by the blasts, which left scores of people bleeding on Sothearos Boulevard.

"Help me. Take me to the hospital. I can't walk anymore," begged one woman, sprawled on the ground across the street from the Assembly. The blast had blown a hole through her shin, and her foot dangled uselessly from her leg.

Hospitals put out an urgent call for blood donations in the afternoon, asking potential donors to go to the Red Cross clinic on Preah Ang Duong Boulevard.

Authorities said they have no suspects so far in what is being called the most serious political violence in Phnom Penh since the 1993 UN-sponsored elections.

The explosions came in rapid succession between 8:20 and 8:30 am, as KNP President Sam Rainsy was speaking to about 200 people protesting the condition of Cambodia's court system, according to police and witnesses.

One grenade exploded about 10 meters from Sam Rainsy, a witness said, and one of his bodyguards died about an hour later of wounds from the blast. Sam Rainsy was not injured.

Sam Rainsy later described the blasts as a "well-coordinated attack" on his party. The protest had been approved by the Phnom Penh Municipality and the Interior Ministry, according to a KNP statement.

Reports varied on exactly where the grenades were thrown from. Several witnesses reported



David van der Veen/The Cambodia Daily

A banner from Sunday's rally drapes a victim in front of the National Assembly 30 minutes after the blasts. She later died.

seeing something thrown from a car with dark-tinted windows.

"We were demonstrating... when suddenly two unidentified people set off three grenades and hurt many people," said one blood-stained eyewitness, as he stretched an injured friend out on the sidewalk to wait for an ambulance.

"The impact just blew everyone back... There were stacks of people who had been blown up," said Ron Abney, delegation chief for the US-based International Republican Institute, who was wounded by shrapnel in his left hip and later evacuated from the country.

Sam Rainsy, who reported seeing nothing of the attack, said he was told that one of the grenades was thrown from inside the Assembly compound, though no other witnesses could confirm that. "My bodyguard clearly saw one grenade thrown from within the National Assembly and another thrown from the side of the demonstration... this was a well-coordinated attack," Sam Rainsy said.

Several other people said they saw a grenade lobbed from a car with dark-tinted windows.

The conflicting reports are making it difficult for police to investigate, Secretary of State for Information Khieu Kanharith said Sunday.

Demonstrators scattered after the blasts. Protest posters, some smeared with blood, lay strewn on the street a half-hour later.

Blood was splattered in half-meter puddles on the sidewalk, on sandals that littered the street, on the seat of a motorbike—and on the clothes and bodies of dozens of people.

An apparent shortage of ambulances left several of the injured lying on the ground, some for more than an hour.

One man, KNP steering committee member Chhet Duong Daravuth, lay patiently on his side at 9 am, blinking his eyes in shock. His arm had been blown off in the blast, and the bloody stump dangled over his chest.

"The government has no ambulances, so these people are going to die now," bystander Suk Vibol commented.

Chhet Duong Daravuth raised his head a few minutes later, winced, then lay it back down.

When an ambulance arrived—at about 9:20 am—both the stretcher and the ambulance floor were already covered in blood from a previous run.

Medical workers loaded a woman into the back, but left behind Chhet Duong Daravuth,

who had died during the wait.

Hospital workers said that many of the injured, and at least two of the dead, were garment workers belonging to the Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia, a union Sam Rainsy advises.

At least nine journalists covering the protest were injured, according to police radio. Cambodia Daily reporter Kimsan Chantara was among them.

Four Interior Ministry police officers and two military police officers were injured, according to Yeng Marady, deputy chief of the National Police.

Yeng Marady said that as for suspects, "We have nothing right now." (Additional reporting by Chris Fontaine, Kimsan Chantara, Eric Pape and Lor Chandara)