

Grenade suspect talk of the town

BY CHRISTINE CHAUMEAU
AND JASON BARBER

ATTENTION has focused on a possible suspect in the Mar 30 grenade attack, as Khmer newspapers trade allegations over the man's political affiliations.

The man's face purportedly matches one of the composite sketches (at right) of three suspects produced by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation. While there appear to be solid leads available, it is unclear whether Cambodian authorities are seriously attempting to identify him.

The name of the man is unconfirmed but he is reported to be known by several nicknames including "Ar Khmao" (Little Black) and "Brazil", references to his complexion.

Opposition newspapers have claimed the man is a bodyguard of Second Prime Minister Hun Sen. The daily newspaper *Rasmei Kampuchea*, widely considered to be CPP-influenced, responded this week with an article suggesting that the man was associated with Funcinpec.

Rasmei Kampuchea said the man, using the assumed name Kong Samrith, had been a bodyguard for a Funcinpec military official.

Meanwhile the *Post* has been told separately by three sources, who said they recognized his face from the FBI sketch, that the man is a bodyguard for a Phnom Penh businessman.

The man was involved in violence against striking garment factory workers earlier this year, sources said.

The man has reportedly been traveling freely around Phnom Penh, and was seen at a several places including a gymnasium in recent days.

Anti-CPP newspapers' allegations that a Hun Sen bodyguard was involved in the attack angered the chief of the Second Prime Minister's security corps, General Hing Bun Hieng.

"Why do they accuse us without any basic evidence? We are innocent people, we were not involved in that attack," an irate Hieng told the *Post* in a brief telephone interview June 11.

"They are crazy people. It is not true." Pledging to file a court complaint against the newspapers, Hieng said: "I am preparing documents for a complaint against them...but I still want to shoot and kill them."

"Publish this, tell them that I wanted to kill them...publish it, say that I, chief of the bodyguards, have said this. I want to kill...I am so angry."

It is unclear what progress, if any, is being made by the joint Ministry of Interior commission in charge of investigating the grenade attack.

National Police deputy chief and commission member Yeng Marady (Funcinpec) said June 11 that he had received one phone call about the sketches since they were made public. He didn't know whether other officials had received any calls.

The person who rang him claimed to recognize one of the sketches — the same one referred to by the Khmer press as "Ar Khmao" — and gave an address for him, Marady said.

He had passed the details on to his police but had yet to hear back from them. "But I can tell you, we are investigating," Marady said.

Commission head Teng Savong (CPP) said some information had been received since the sketches' release, but "no information like the reports in the newspapers".

Savong said the police had earlier investigated rumors that a Hun Sen bodyguard participated in the attack, and "the result was that Samdech Second Prime Minister was not involved". Because of the newspaper articles, "I have asked the police to investigate this information again."

At least 12 people died in the Mar 30 grenade attack on a Khmer Nation Party (KNP) rally.

Sketches of three suspects in the attack, drawn by an FBI artist from witnesses' descriptions, were made public May 28 with an appeal for help from the public to identify them. FBI agents, involved because an American was wounded in the grenade blasts, have since left Cambodia.

The *Oudom Katte Khmer* (*Khmer Ideal*) newspaper claimed June 2 that two of the suspects were Hun Sen bodyguards. One of them, nicknamed "Ar Khmao" and "Brazil", had been identified as a regular customer at Phnom Penh gymnasium.

Two sources at the private gymnasium, which is popular with bodyguards and police, told the *Post* this week that a man known as "Ar Khmao" regularly worked out there. The man resembled the face in one FBI sketch, they agreed.

One of them said the man, who had been at the gym last Sunday, was known among customers there as a bodyguard of a businessman. Two other sources also identified the man in the sketch as a bodyguard of that businessman.

None of the sources have approached the authorities with their information.

The man was seen in public this week with a group of bodyguards dressed in military or police uniforms.

One source told the *Post* that the man was involved in violence against striking workers at a Phnom Penh garment factory earlier this year.

A link to garment factories was also claimed by *Oudom Katte Khmer*, in a second article published June 9. The article claimed that "Ar Khmao" had intended to throw grenades at KNP leader Sam Rainsy during a protest at another garment factory in January, but had arrived there after Rainsy had left.

The newspaper claimed that "Ar Khmao" was now under protection at a "100 percent safe place" and had admitted taking part in the Mar 30 attack.

Other opposition newspapers also reported that "Ar Khmao" had been questioned or arrested, but police officials from both Funcinpec and CPP denied knowledge of this.

Rasmei Kampuchea — a newspaper which observers say usually takes a pro-CPP line — entered the journalistic fray June 10. In a front page lead article, it claimed that the suspect known as "Mao" or "Brazil" was a bodyguard using the assumed name Kong Samrith.

Samrith used to work at a military development training center in Stung Chhal as a bodyguard to its deputy chief, Chhem Sathya (Funcinpec), the newspaper said. Samrith later worked as a bodyguard at a nightclub.

Citing *Oudom Katte Khmer's* claim that Ar Khmao was now at a "100 percent safe place", *Rasmei Kampuchea* said: "It is assumed that he is in the safety barracks of Tang Kasang [a Funcinpec military compound]."

Chhem Sathya would not comment to the *Post* but said the *Rasmei Kampuchea* story was wrong. "Funcinpec does not defend bad people," he said.

Senior Funcinpec general Nhek Bun Chhay said: "There are no suspects in my camps."

Meanwhile, several of the more hardline CPP newspapers have alleged that the FBI sketches resemble KNP bodyguards.

A senior CPP source confirmed that the party believed two of the sketches — the two other than the "Ar Khmao" one — looked like particular KNP staff. Arrests of them had been

considered, he indicated.

One observer who has closely followed the investigation expressed concern that CPP officials may have put forward "witnesses", briefed to give descriptions of KNP staff present at the Mar 30 attack, to the FBI artist.

The CPP official maintained, however, that only Funcinpec had produced witnesses to the FBI.