

Sam Rainsy unveils border 'proof'

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OPPPOSITION leader Sam Rainsy has revealed additional evidence that he says substantiates his allegations of Vietnamese border incursions, a day after Svay Rieng provincial court handed him a two-year jail term for his involvement in the uprooting of border markers.

Speaking by live video feed from France, the Sam Rainsy Party president accused the court of convicting him at the request of Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung.

"We have enough evidence of the planting of border markers," he said during the video press conference. "These posts are not border posts because they are 200 or 300 metres from the border. Such posts are counterfeit posts, illegal posts, invasion posts planted in Khmer farmers' ricefields."

The new evidence released by Sam Rainsy consisted of a detailed methodology for the creation of the maps released by the SRP on Sunday, which showed Vietnamese border markers 184, 185, 186 and 187 sitting well inside Cambodia's legal territory as defined by French and American maps.

"If they planted the posts on our land without telling us, we have the right to pull them out," Sam Rainsy added.

In October, Sam Rainsy joined villagers in uprooting six temporary demarcation posts near the border with Vietnam, an act Hanoi described as "perverse". The villagers claimed the posts had been placed on their land by the Vietnamese authorities.

Sam Rainsy said that after he uprooted the markers in October, Vietnamese authorities hurried to remove other markers nearby, proving they were "worried" that word of the incursions would spread.

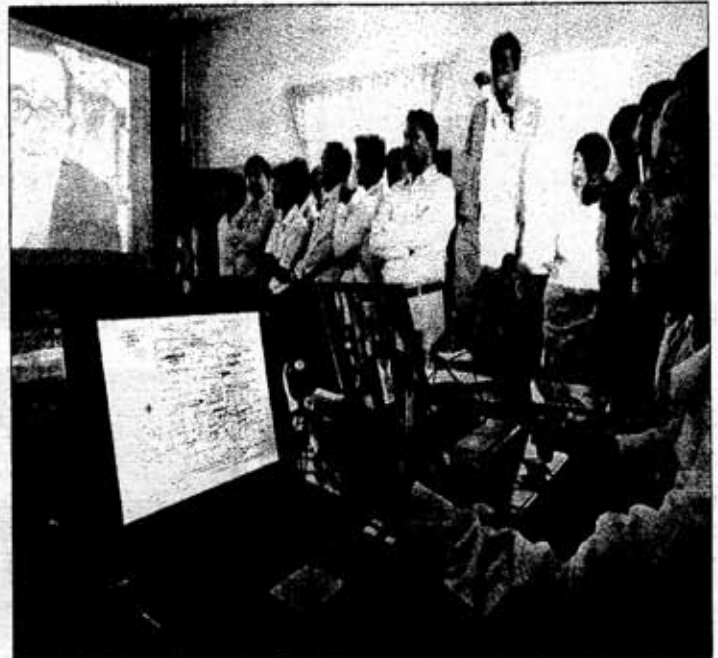
He also reiterated his offer to return to Cambodia to face arrest if the authorities release two local villagers imprisoned in connection with the uprooting of the border markers.

In Wednesday's court hearing, Meas Srey, 39, and Prum Chea, 41, were sentenced to one year each in prison on charges of uprooting the posts. All three accused were also ordered to pay 55 million riels (around US\$13,253) in compensation.

"This story is an international political issue," Sam Rainsy said, adding that he would take the case to international bodies in Europe. "It will not be resolved by the court because two countries have problems. It must be resolved by the international community."

Tith Sothea, a government adviser and member of the Council of Ministers' Press Quick Reaction Unit, dismissed the lawmaker's comments, saying Cambodia was not under the control of any outside power. He added that the court had tried his case in line with standard procedure.

"Sam Rainsy's announce-



Sam Rainsy, who is currently in France, addresses his party at its headquarters on Sotheas Boulevard on Thursday via videoconference. HENG CHIVAN



Chhoeung Sarin, wife of defendant Prum Chea, weeps after being denied entry to his trial Wednesday in Svay Rieng. HENG CHIVAN

ment that he will file a complaint to international courts is not surprising," he said.

But he said the opposition leader's appeals had come too late, adding that he should have made formal complaints while he was in the country.

"If he has evidence, he should have used his rights as a people's representative to inform National Assembly President (Heng Samrin) of his complaints," Tith Sothea said.

But some observers said Sam Rainsy's role in the border stunt had been consistent with the duties of an elected representative of the people.

"An MP in his case is doing his job as an MP. He went to see the people and went to solve their problems," said Son Soubert, a member of the

Constitutional Council.

"The National Assembly should support him instead of lifting his immunity, because he is just doing his job."

In a statement issued on Thursday, the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights (CCHR) said the outcome of Wednesday's trial was an example of the "rotten" state of Cambodia's democracy.

A familiar pattern

The current situation recalls Sam Rainsy's yearlong period of exile during 2005 and 2006, when he left the country to avoid prosecution on defamation charges. At that time, a Royal pardon paved the way for his return in February 2006.

Thun Saray, president of the rights group Adhoc, said that,

as in 2006, the two sides would likely reach a political settlement allowing Sam Rainsy to return from Europe and avoid prison.

"This is not the first time... There will be a resolution of the conflict later on," he said.

Prime Minister Hun Sen warned on January 5 that he would not request a pardon for the SRP leader, but Thun Saray said that such "deals" usually come prior to elections, when democratic legitimacy is more of an issue for the government.

"When the election happens without an opposition party, it doesn't have much credibility," he said. "I think both sides need each other."

The next major poll - the commune council election - is set to take place in 2012. ■