Cambodians still fear violence
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Even as police tried to reassure Cambodian residents of 50th Street that the Sunday night violence between blacks and Asian-Americans in the East San Diego neighborhood was not racially motivated, more than two dozen Cambodians yesterday pleaded for police protection.

"We're so scared we don't even dare to leave our homes," said 45-year-old Hor Ros, who yesterday met with San Diego Police Chief Jerry Sanders and Capt. Dan Berglund at the Indochinese police storefront on Euclid Avenue.

"They chased us all the way up the driveway to beat us up; what is there to guarantee they won't do it again?" asked Ros, who had a swollen left cheek that he said was caused by a punch by an African-American man Sunday night that knocked him unconscious.

A near riot ensued when a group of black men allegedly were harassing an Asian woman at 50th Street and Trojan Avenue, and one of the people coming to her aid fired shots that wounded three African-American men.

But Sanders cautioned yesterday that the violence does not appear to have been racially motivated, nor is it related to Thursday night's fatal shooting of a black youth in Valencia Park. Police say an Asian youth is a suspect in that case.

"Based on what we have so far, there doesn't appear to be any pattern of racial violence -- we're still labeling it as something to do with gangs," Sanders said during an appearance at the police storefront in the community.

And Leroy Brady, special adviser to the police chief, said, "Right now, we're looking at gang involvement.

"I hate to make a reference to one culture against another," said Brady, who is black. "It does a disservice to those of us who have tried so hard to knock down the walls."

But Rakim Carter, a 20-year-old African-American whose balcony faces the street, said as soon as the shots were fired, "the blacks just beat up everyone who was not black."

"They went up to all the apartments and started punching them and everybody started running," Carter said.

"They were beating mostly Asians -- to them, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodians, they all look the same to them," she said. "Something worse is going to happen here ...
something like (the) L.A. (riots)."

Indeed, the scene at 50th Street near Trojan Avenue was nearing "riot" proportions, with more than 200 people gathered in the street, Berglund said.

The initial team of three officers that responded to the shooting were quickly backed up by 50 officers from across the city.

At one point, police officers sprayed the rowdy crowd with Mace and released a police dog to bite a man who was fighting with an officer, Berglund said. He said officers were assaulted and pelted with rocks and had to use nunchakus to maintain order.

There are "a lot of guns and a lot of gang members" in the 50th Street neighborhood, said Berglund, whose Eastern Division oversees that area.

Last week police received reports of 20 to 21 gunshots in the area. "On New Year's Eve, we heard several hours of solid gunfire," Berglund said. "This area is a real challenge."

Mayor Susan Golding cautioned the media and the public against overreaction to the events in City Heights.

"I'm concerned about racial tension when it exists and hope the media will not create a situation that doesn't need to be created," Golding said, echoing similar sentiments from 4th District City Councilman George Stevens and Asian community leaders.

"Just because this has happened in other communities, everyone doesn't have to jump on the bandwagon in San Diego to say, 'Look, we have racial tension between Asians and African-Americans, too,'" Golding said.

Said Councilman Stevens: "Young people have been arguing and shooting each other for a long time. I don't want to put a big emphasis on this incident just because Asians shot blacks."

In a press release issued later, Stevens also said, "It is just as wrong for an Asian to shoot an African-American, and the same goes for African-Americans who also may be involved in the shootings. . . . Now it is my hope the entire city will pray that the killings will stop."

After Sunday's shooting, police arrested 25-year-old Thy Hur for suspicion of assault with a deadly weapon. Capt. Berglund said Hur, who police say does not have a criminal record, was identified by four people as the man who fired the shots. Hur's cousin, Mar Touch, 33, said police have the wrong man.

"He was beaten up worst among us," said Touch, who said he himself was hit in the temple and the back. "The police didn't stop the beating. Instead of helping us, they
arrested one of us."

Berglund reassured the Cambodians that the shootings will be thoroughly investigated, while also promising to increase patrols in the area "as much as possible."

But neighbors back at 50th Street say they still do not feel safe.

"I'm scared. In a few days, they will come back and shoot us again," said 9-year-old Patsy Felix, who saw the violence outside her apartment.

"You're standing in the middle of the war zone," said 38-year-old Emil Boucher. "It happens every night, every day. This place needs to do something to become the real United States and learn to live with each other again."

Caption: 4 PICS
1. Video verify: Hor Ros points out man he says hit him Sunday; Mar Touch (left) also says he was struck. 2. Standing in war zone: Emil Boucher calls 50th Street "ground zero" for violence and says gangs are a way of life even as children are walked behind him in neighborhood. (B-3) 3. Afraid to leave home: Kim Henh Hu, 22, is surrounded by her family's children as she related events of Sunday. Her uncle, Hor Ros, was among the injury victims. (B-3) 4. Saw Asians targeted: Witness Rakim Carter said "the blacks just beat up everyone who was not black" Sunday. (B-3) Memo: Head varies Editions vary Edition: 6,7,5,1,2,3,4 Section: LOCAL Page: B-1

Correction: CORRECTIONS An article yesterday (in some editions) that said last Sunday's violence in East San Diego does not appear to be linked to Thursday night's fatal shooting of a black youth was incorrect in saying the shooting was in City Heights. It was in Valencia Park. The San Diego Union-Tribune regrets the error. (930818, A-3:1,2,3,4,5)

Index Terms: ANIMALS ; ARRESTS ; ASIANS ; ASSAULTS ; ATTACKS ; BLACKS ; CAMBODIA ; CRIME ; HATE CRIME ; NEIGHBORHOODS ; RACE RELATIONS ; SAN DIEGO ; VIOLENCE ; YOUTH

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