



# The Phnom Penh Post

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## Calls to halt 'reforestation' plan

Phak Seangly and Shaun Turton | Publication date 10 May 2017 | 06:51 ICT

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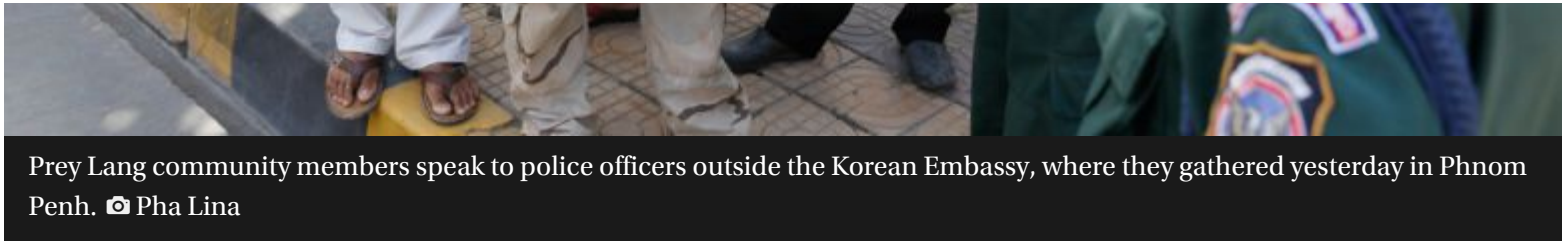
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Prey Lang community members speak to police officers outside the Korean Embassy, where they gathered yesterday in Phnom Penh. 📷 Pha Lina

Fourteen community representatives speaking for thousands of families yesterday petitioned the South Korean Embassy, Environment Ministry and Forestry Administration to halt the expansion of a controversial “reforestation” project by a Korean company situated between the protected Prey Lang forest and Mekong River.

Their petition – which calls for the reforestation concession to be converted into a Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) protected area – was not accepted by the South Korean Embassy, though Cambodian authorities received the request.

The 14 represent communities affected by the joint project between the Forestry Administration and Korean company Think Biotech, which hopes to convert about 34,000 hectares of ostensibly “degraded” land in Kratie and Stung Treng provinces into a timber plantation.

The project, approved in 2010 and started in 2012, was billed as “sustainable” and “eco-environmental”, but during a *Post* visit to the site last year, villagers inside the concession’s boundaries complained of land grabbing, and experts have called into question its environmental benefits.

Several thousand hectares in the concession’s south, around Kratie’s Kampong Cham commune, have already been cleared and planted, impacting about 400 families who had long used the land for farming and cultivating resin trees.

As the company moves north, some 1,500 families in Kratie’s Boeung Char commune and Stung Treng’s Siem Bok district fear a similar fate, according to yesterday’s petition.

Think Biotech, owned by South Korean weapons manufacturer Hanwha, contends the land is “degraded forest”, however, the community and researchers contend that the company underestimated timber stocks at the site and was clearing “rich forest”.

“The company never stops logging for good wood,” said Sam Nou, a member of the Prey Lang Community Network who came to the capital from his home near the site in Kratie.

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The project was facilitated by a 2009 memorandum of understanding between Cambodia's Forestry Administration and the Korean government's Forest Service to attract investment in reforestation as part of a broader agenda of climate change mitigation.

Villagers say the South Korean government has a responsibility to take action. "I am very disappointed," said community representative Hul Vet. "The embassy should have accepted the petition . . . the company will continue clearing as usual."

Reached yesterday, a representative of the South Korean Embassy declined to comment. Via email, Director of Think Biotech (Cambodia) Chung Hwanki said the company was respecting villagers' farming rights within its boundaries and would follow regulations in negotiations with those who owned resin trees.

He argued that the plantation created "healthy and abundant" forest to supply timber to take pressure off of protected areas.

However, in a recent paper, Cambodia-based anthropologist Courtney Work criticised the use of climate change mitigation as a justification for "green washing" for-profit monoculture plantations that ride roughshod over local villagers' livelihoods.

The paper compares Think Biotech to the Korean-run Tumring REDD+ project on the western side of Prey Lang. While the latter project may not have delivered strong results in terms of environmental protection, the study found, it at least mitigated the social impacts by paying affected communities to protect forests.

Yesterday, Work said "companies are using this climate change discourse to justify development as usual with high carbon emissions and dramatic land conversions to mono-crop agriculture, which is devastating for biodiversity".



Contact authors: Phak Seangly and Shaun Turton

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Prime Minister Hun Sen on Monday called on Cambodians living in Europe – both supporters and those against him – to prepare for his upcoming visits to Budapest next week and Geneva in early July. “I would



Court dissolved Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) gathering to eat the popular dish as a form of protest. He also attacked

Budapest next week and Geneva in early July. I would like to tell all brothers and sisters in Europe, both



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