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# Who is Ly Yong Phat?

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The central figure in Cambodia's sugar industry is Ly Yong Phat. His company website says he was born in Koh Kong province, in Cambodia's south-west, bordering Thailand. For many years, Koh Kong was known as the "wild west" of Cambodia, a hotbed of marijuana-growing, human trafficking, prostitution and illegal logging. Ly Yong Phat is believed to also hold Thai citizenship, where he is known by the name Pad Supa or Phat Suphapha.

Ly Yong Phat runs a casino, a hotel and a safari theme park on the Thai-Cambodia border. He owns large amounts of land across the province and in 2002 he bankrolled the construction of the 1.9km bridge which links Koh Kong to Thailand. This is Cambodia's longest bridge and reportedly cost US\$7.2 million to build. In the last few years, Ly Yong Phat has been awarded contracts for dredging sand from Cambodia's estuaries, exporting an estimated US\$250 million worth of sand annually for land reclamation in Singapore.

It has been widely reported that Ly Yong Phat owns 20 per cent of the sugar plantations and mill in Koh Kong. His casino company is also mentioned in documents for other plantations in the country's north-west.

Ly Yong Phat was appointed an official economic advisor to Prime Minister Hun Sen in 2000 and the following year became the vice president of Cambodia's Chamber of Commerce. In 2006, Ly Yong Phat was elected to the Senate, as a member of the ruling Cambodian People's Party.

While Ly Yong Phat is known as the "King of Koh Kong" and is one of the most powerful and well-connected tycoons in Cambodia, when it comes to sugar he appears to be playing the role as the Cambodian frontman for foreign interests.

Here are some of his partners:

## KSL / Khon Kaen Sugar Industry (Thailand)

KSL is one of Thailand's main players in the sugar trade, with roots going back to 1945. It produces and distributes sugar, operates supporting businesses in port and warehouse management, as well as manufacturing ethanol, electricity and steam.

The company has many subsidiaries organised under the KSL group that cover Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. One of the subsidiaries, Khon Kaen Sugar Industry, owns 50 per cent of Koh Kong Plantation (registered to Ly Yong Phat) and Koh Kong Sugar Industry (which is registered to Chamroon Chinthammit, president of Khon Kaen). The company says it has invested approximately US\$42 million to its operations in Cambodia in 2009. President Chamroon Chinthammit stood beside Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, as he opened the Koh Kong sugar mill in January 2010.

Khon Kaen Sugar Industry trades on Thailand's stockmarket. Its 2009 annual report put net profit at US\$27 million. The report also said, "KSL is always committed to operating businesses in line with Corporate Governance principle, also emphasizes corporate social responsibility policy beneficial to local communities and the environment around our plants."

## Vewong Corporation (Taiwan)

Vewong (meaning 'king of flavours') produces instant noodles, drinks, seasoning and MSG, among other products exported around the world. It holds 30 per cent of the Koh Kong sugar operation.

## Mitr Phol (Thailand)

Thailand's largest sugar producer, Mitr Phol Group, was established in 1946. Mitr Phol trades in sugar, ethanol, particle board and has warehouse and logistics operations. It has sugar plantations and mills in China and Laos.

Ly Yong Phat is involved with Mitr Phol, despite it being a competitor to KSL in the Thai sugar market.

The company postponed plans to build a factory in Cambodia, because of the global financial crisis. However, three land concessions of around 6,500 hectares each in Cambodia's north west are registered to companies established in the names of top executives: Angkor Sugar (Tat Wanakornkul, vice president), River Sugarcane (Buntoeng Vongkusolkitm group managing director), Cane and Sugar Valley (Krisda Monthiencichienchai, president). Rights groups say the separate registration of land is designed to avoid laws capping economic land concessions at 10,000 hectares.

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Mitr Phol's website says its philosophy is to "believe in the value of human dignity... stand tall in fairness... responsible for society."

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