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Chinese firm invests in forest

Phak Seangly | Publication date 11 January 2018 | 06:50 ICT

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Local authorities discuss a massive new project to turn 20,000 hectares of 'degraded' forestland in Stung Treng province into a timber plantation on Tuesday. Photo supplied

A little-known Chinese company is investing \$200 million in a massive timber plantation in Stung Treng that the government has equated to "replanting the forest," despite concerns among environmental protection groups that existing forest will be destroyed in favour of non-native commercial species.

The scheme, backed by the provincial government, involves replanting 27,000 hectares of purportedly "degraded" forestland in Siem Pang district with fast-growing acacia and eucalyptus trees. Provincial authorities are billing the project as an eco-friendly way to restore forestland that was clear-cut by a previous owner, Green Sea Agriculture Co Ltd, owned by tycoon Mong Reththy.

"The land cannot grow anything," said provincial Deputy Governor Duong Pov, who led a meeting on Tuesday about the project. "Therefore, there is no choice besides replanting the forest."

However, environmental groups say they are not sure if the forest is destroyed in the first place.

"The company usually logs the natural trees and plants useless trees," said environmental activist Ouch Leng. "The company just logs and sells the trees, and it will run away later."

Last year, locals protested a similar project led by Korean company Think Biotech on land stretching between the Mekong River and Prey Lang forest, accusing the company of clear-cutting rich timberland and replanting it with acacia trees.

"[That project] was not ethical at all," said Cambodia-based anthropologist and forest researcher Courtney Work, who raised similar concerns about the new Strung Treng project. "It was an utterly cynical approach to the process."

According to Work, truly degraded forest should show no signs of regeneration - no sprouts or signs of growth - and less than 10 percent canopy cover.

She noted that acacia and eucalyptus - which are non-native - are the most common cash crops for timber because they grow straight and fast.

"If they're doing it as a restoration project and what we see is forest that's being clear-cut, then no, that's not a restoration project," Work said.

BirdLife International's Cambodia Program Manager Bou Vorsak said he was not sure about the current status of the forestland, but said he observed no large clearings when he last visited about a year ago.

Pov, who led a meeting to discuss a recent environmental impact assessment for the project on Tuesday, said the area carved out for the company was already fully degraded and that there would be "no impact" on valuable natural forest.

When asked about the environmental impact assessment, however, he said he could not give specifics on what the report suggested and claimed not to remember the name of the company that conducted the assessment.

The Chinese company leading the project, Siemon (Cambodia) Agricultural Comprehensive Development Co Ltd, could not be reached yesterday.

Lieng Seng, director of the provincial Agricultural Department, said the company has started preparing a nursery and that the project is scheduled to begin next year. The company hopes to recruit up to 5,000 workers for the plantation, according to Seng.

Additional reporting by Daphne Chen

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PM imposes nationwide Covid restrictions, curfew over Delta scare

Prime Minister Hun Sen late on July 28 instructed the municipal and provincial authorities nationwide to strictly enforce Covid-19 measures including curfew for two weeks from July 29 midnight through August 12 to stem the new coronavirus Delta variant. The instruction came shortly after he issued a directive



Two luxury hotels latest quarantine options for inbound travellers

The Inter-Ministerial Committee to Combat Covid-19 has designated two luxury hotels as alternative quarantine options for travellers who wish to enter Cambodia through Phnom Penh International Airport - Sokha Phnom Penh Hotel & Residence and the Courtyard by Marriott Phnom Penh. In a notice detailing guidelines issued



Provinces on Thai borders put in lockdown amid Delta fears

The government has decided to place several border provinces in lockdown for two weeks in a bid to prevent the new coronavirus Delta variant spreading further into community. According a directive signed by Prime Minister Hun Sen late on July 28, the provinces include Koh Kong,



Delta spreading in Kingdom

Cambodia has so far detected more than 200 cases of the highly contagious coronavirus Delta variant, with 109 found on July 31 and August 1. The Ministry of Health has expressed deep concerns that the variant may have already reached communities and be spreading as some of the cases



US' Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccines arrive

The first batch of 455,000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccine donated by the US touched down in Phnom Penh on the morning of July 30. They are part of the total 1,060,100 doses the US has pledged to provide to Cambodia through the World Health Organisation-led (



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