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







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

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."

trees. Provincial authorities are billing the project as an eco-friendly way to restore forestland

"The company usually logs the natural trees and plants useless trees," said environmental

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

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-

activist Ouch Leng. "The company just logs and sells the trees, and it will run away later."

cutting rich timberland and replanting it with acacia trees.

no, that's not a restoration project," Work said.

would be "no impact" on valuable natural forest.

Development Co Ltd, could not be reached yesterday.

about a year ago.

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"[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.

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

She noted that acacia and eucalyptus – which are non-native – are the most common cash crops

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

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

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

When asked about the environmental impact assessment, however, he said he could not give

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.

Contact author: Phak Seangly

Additional reporting by Daphne Chen

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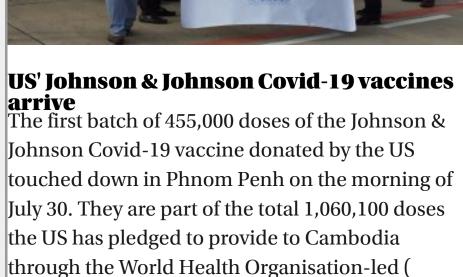
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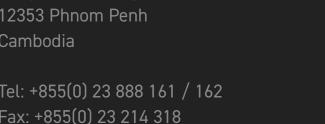
that the variant may have already reached

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