

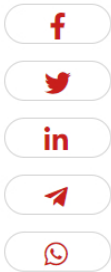


Company Linked to Scams, Human Trafficking Ousted from Cambodia Property Awards

26 July 2023 8:18 PM | Jack Brook | Runn Sreydeth



An illustration from Zheng Heng Group of its Long Bay development at Dara Sakor park in Koh Kong province. (Zheng Heng Group's website)



A company with well-documented ties to scams and human trafficking in Cambodia has been removed from a regional real estate awards ceremony run by the firm PropertyGuru Group, following an inquiry from CamboJA.

Media, anti-trafficking organizations and embassy reports have linked the Zheng Heng Group to human trafficking and scam operations through its Long Bay development in Koh Kong province's Dara Sakor special economic zone.

Yet PropertyGuru's Cambodia Property Awards announced on July 7 that the conglomerate's subsidiary Zheng Heng (Cambodia) Co., Ltd. had been short-listed for eight different nominations, the most out of any company in the Cambodia Property Awards competition. Winners of the August 18 awards ceremony advance to the Asia Property Awards.

Malaysia-based PropertyGuru online real estate firm dubs its event "the region's biggest and most respected real estate awards."

Zheng Heng's Long Bay was shortlisted for "Best Township Development" and "Best Mixed Use Development." The Long Bay Century Hotel and Long Bay Casino Hotel were also the sole nominees for "Best Resort Development" and "Best Entertainment Development." Zheng Heng had four other nominations for its Villa One project.

The Twitter account Cyber Scam Monitor, a watchdog group following the scam industry, renewed attention to Zheng Heng's connection to organized crime after the company's nominations.

"It is alarming," said PropertyGuru's Head of Brand and Marketing Services, Richard Allan Aquino, on July 17, when CamboJA informed him of the publicly available information about human trafficking at Long Bay.

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An “independent panel” of 10 judges determined the nominees, led by Sorn Seap, chairperson of the awards ceremony and president of the Cambodian Valuers and Estate Agents Association. The judges included a range of prominent Cambodian and expat lawyers, realtors, architects and executives. None responded to requests for comment.

The judging process included visits “to inspect the site” of each development. London-based HLB International Real Estate Group “undertook the supervision of the judging process” to ensure it was “fair, transparent, and credible,” the Asia Property Awards’ website states. HLB did not respond to requests for comment.

“For the judges, they look into the merits of the property, they are looking at the quality of the project, not really any business operator,” Aquino said. But he said PropertyGuru would review Zheng Heng Group’s links to criminal activity.

Eight days later, the company sent the following statement on Tuesday: “The Cambodia Property Awards will not include Long Bay Century Hotel and Casino and Zheng Heng Co. Ltd. in this year’s shortlist across categories.”



A promotional illustration of Long Bay at Dara Sakor, featured on Long Bay’s Facebook page.

Zheng Heng’s Chairman Denies Links to Human Trafficking, Scams

Long Bay is a luxury resort and entertainment project which launched in 2018 within the Union Development Group’s 45,000 hectare Dara Sakor concession in Koh Kong.

On Zheng Heng Group’s website, the company states “Zheng Heng Group...owns one of the best landed properties...called Long Bay in Dara Sakor.”

Al Jazeera reported that at least 50 people had been rescued from Long Bay in 2022. Cyber Scam Monitor profiled Long Bay and noted online recruitment ads seeking “customer service” staff and offering free flights and visas.

Reached by phone, Zheng Heng Group’s chairman Deng Pibing, who holds Cambodian citizenship and is listed as the sole director of Zheng Heng Co. Ltd. in commerce records, acknowledged his company was “in charge” of Long Bay but denied knowledge or responsibility for any human trafficking or scam operations inside the development.



Oknha Deng Pibing (left) with Prime Minister Hun Sen in a photo posted in 2021 on Long Bay’s Facebook page.

Zheng Heng Group's website as of July 26, 2023.

Pibing added in his email that the Long Bay residential estate, which is adjacent to the Long Bay hotel, had been sold in early 2022 and his company only managed “landscaping” and had “no control over the activities therein.”

The Taiwanese government sent a letter in June last year to Phnom Penh’s governor stating that a Taiwanese national had been “detained...in Long Bay Dara Sakor” and “forced...to do fraud online” and “is in fear of his life.”

In August last year, the Philippine embassy **sent a letter** to Cambodian authorities stating that Filipino nationals “are being forced to work as online scammers” and are “not allowed to leave the company premises” inside the “Long Bay Casino.”

A letter from the Philippines Embassy requesting Cambodian authorities help rescue Filipino nationals detained in Long Bay. (Cyber Scam Monitor)

A letter from the Taiwanese consular office in Vietnam requesting help to rescue a Taiwanese citizen “in fear of his life” at Long Bay. (Global Anti-Scam Org).

The Philippine Embassy did not respond to requests for comment. The Taipei Economic & Culture Office in Ho Chi Minh City, which had issued the letter, said it could not comment.

Zheng Heng’s Pibing told CamboJA over the phone that he blamed criminal activity connected to Long Bay Casino on **Som Chanmony**, the director of LongBay Entertainment company, which received the license to operate the casino in September 2022.

Long Bay Entertainment leases some of the property from Zheng Heng group and “operates the leisure and entertainment activities in the hotels and casino,” Pibing said in an emailed statement.

When contacted by a number for Chanmony provided by Pibing, a man who declined to identify himself stated “I don’t know about the [scam and human trafficking] case that happens. It’s just more of an accusation. This never happened before so I can’t say anything

more than this, I'm busy," before hanging up.

When CamboJA contacted Chanmony by a different number, he identified himself and acknowledged he was the director of the casino, but again denied there had been any criminal activity.

"No, no, no, no," he said. "I don't know."

Long Bay Entertainment director Som Chanmony in a meeting with the Koh Kong provincial administration. (Koh Kong provincial administration website)

Chanmony's Long Bay Entertainment in turn **leases the rights** to a range of gambling services at the Long Bay Casino to the Hong Kong-headquartered Century Entertainment International Holdings Limited, run by a Macau casino boss Ng Man Sun, known as "Street Market Wai", who has been **linked** to Chinese organized crime syndicates.

Zheng Heng had previously **threatened** to sue an anti-human trafficking group for publishing information about the company's business structure following a rescue made from the Long Bay development last year.

A public relations officer later **offered money** to local media Voice of Democracy (VOD) to remove information linking Zheng Heng to scams and human trafficking at Long Bay and then threatened to use "legal weapons" against VOD.

Another property owned by Zheng Heng in Sihanoukville was **raided in September** last year and police found evidence of illegal detainment.

In his emailed statement, Pibing described Zheng Heng as a "legitimate business entity" which was "very supportive" in fighting crime.

Cambodian Government Response to Long Bay

Interior Minister Sar Kheng, who oversees the national police and manages a hotline for human trafficking victims, **published a post** on his website on April 26, featuring a collage of photos of reports of trafficking victims. The images included at least three reports identifying Long Bay in Dara Sakor Park in Koh Kong province in Chinese script.

One report noted that three Chinese nationals requested "rescue" in a "case of human trafficking and detention" at Long Bay Casino and Hotel on December 4 last year. A second undated report noted a Taiwanese national was "detained" at "Long Bay" and had his passport confiscated, while another stated that four Chinese people sought "rescue" from "Lone Bav."

Images of reports linked to human trafficking cases shared by Interior Minister Sar Kheng on April 26. The Chinese characters 七星海长湾园区, circled in black by CamboJA, refer to Dara Sakor Long Bay Park. (Sar Kheng's website)

“We are happy that the Minister has updated the world on his post,” Pibing told CamboJA via email, when presented with Sar Kheng’s reports about Long Bay.

Pibing also sent CamboJA a [link](#) to a September 2022 post from the Koh Kong provincial administration noting that an 18-year-old Chinese national in Long Bay had requested authorities help him return home.

“He was working...without any threat, coercion or confinement or torture and received a salary of 1,500 US dollars per month,” Koh Kong authorities stated. “The reason for this complaint is because of fear for safety in the future and wanting to travel back to his home country.”

An image of a report shared by Interior Minister Sar Kheng and circled in black by CamboJA identifying Dara Sakor Long Bay Park. (Sar Kheng website).

The post showed Long Bay Casino's operator Chanmony meeting with authorities.

When contacted last week, Chou Bun Eng, permanent vice chairperson of the National Committee for Counter Trafficking in Persons, said "I don't know about cases in Long Bay Casino."

"Sometimes landlords who rent to others do not know what the tenants are doing and for what purpose," she added.

Koh Kong province Police Chief Kong Mono told CamboJA to contact his spokesperson. The spokesperson refused to answer questions.

Interior Ministry spokesperson Khieu Sopheak said human trafficking cases had decreased this year due to "the work of the authorities and the cooperation of the parties involved," but did not directly answer questions from CamboJA about Long Bay.

He told CamboJA that Long Bay had been nominated for the Cambodia Property Awards "due to their good service."

Pibing is a shareholder in a range of other companies, including BIC Bank, and has been invited to attend other high profile events despite his company's apparent ties to criminal activity.

In February, the United Kingdom ambassador Dominic Williams appeared alongside Deng Pibing, who chairs the Association of Angkor Digital Culture Council, at an event promoting "cooperation between Cambodia and the UK in the field of culture and art," according to the [Khmer Times](#).

"The Embassy did not host the event and was not involved in its organisation," the UK embassy said in an emailed statement. "The Embassy condemns strongly human trafficking and online fraud or scams."

Though all references to Zheng Heng are now scrubbed from the Asia Property Awards website, Pibing told CamboJA that his company "deserves every accolade and recognition."

1,196 views

Asia Property Awards, Awards, Cambodia, Cambodian Valuers and Estate Agents Association, Company, Cyber Scam Monitor, Dara Sakor, Deng Pibing, human trafficking, Long Bay, LongBay Entertainment, property, PropertyGuru, Regional real estate, Richard Allan Aquino, scams, Som Chanmony

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Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association

+ (855) 23 88 23 11

editor@cambojanews.com

#19, St. 388, Sangkat Tuol Svay Prey I, Khan Boeng Keng

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