A man fires up a chainsaw in a village in Preah Vihear province. Villagers in three districts have been clearing areas of forest at will for timber exports.

MAY TITTHARA

Preah Vihear province

THE scale of mass logging in once-dense woodlands in Cambodia’s north now more closely resembles the free-for-all of a gold rush than the sustainable forestry more often associated with these communities.

With the financial backing of powerful businessmen, villagers in three districts of Preah Vihear are clearing at will, transporting the logs on homemade tractors to their houses, ready for Try Pheap’s MDS Import Export Co Ltd to carry them to the border with Vietnam.

Pheap has a licence to collect and transport timber impounded by Forestry officials in the province and logs cleared from economic land concessions. But the licence does not permit his company to pay villagers to log in community forests.

Nearly every household here has at least one chainsaw at the ready for the daily harvest. In two months, MDS will move its operations to another province – Stung Treng – as it becomes less profitable to continue the trade here.

The tractors, overladen with rare thnong wood, travel freely in Chey Sen district’s Thmear commune, unhindered by security forces and officials.

“The boss comes to buy timber at people’s homes, and they spray paint a notification of purchase,” says Thong Kosal, a resident protesting against the logging in one village in the commune. “But I do not know what it [the paint] says, because it is written in French. At night, after they collect it, they will transport it from the village.”

Kosal says a representative of MDS came to the village, asking them to go into the forest and clear as much as possible. Traders from the company arrive in the evening to weigh and price the stacks of wood piled under each house.

Villagers say the authorities are tolerating this great rush to log Preah Vihear because they have been bought off by the company.

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Three foreign nationals in Cambodia are facing life sentences on drug trafficking charges.

French national Charlene Savarino leaves Phnom Penh Municipal Court yesterday after being tried on drug trafficking charges. **AP**

**POLICE BLOTTER**

Foolish robber commits crime in front of police

ONE man’s ambition to be the next criminal genius went disastrously wrong on Tuesday when he tried to commit a robbery in the full sight of the police. The clumsy criminal was caught red-handed in broad daylight, as a female student driving home from school, and pulled out a local man who was on his way to the market on his motorbike.

His plans were foiled when police, who had been monitoring the area for the entire thing, put him in cuffs.

Det Chheng Kimsun

Mobs turn bruised thief over to the authorities

RESIDENTS in Ban Nay Khum’s Srei district yesterday showed the police a thing or two about solving crimes on Tuesday after catching the man who was involved in an attempted robbery.

A 22-year-old thought it was his lucky day when he pulled a gun on a bank in Amazon district, Kampong Speu province, with more than $110 and a laptop inside. But his plans were foiled when the banks were put in their place. He was caught red-handed.

Det Chhay Sen

**APPRAISED CASHT FIRST**

More bark than purr as cat burglar flat runs away

A cat burglar who tried to break into a flat in Takeo province yesterday ended up running away after police caught him ransacking the property.

The man had been looking for a way to make a living by stealing from a flat full of things. The police caught him just as he was about to leave.

Det Chhay Heng

**SAVAGE BEATING LEAVES VICTIM SERIOUSLY INJURED**

A BRUTAL gang attack in Pursat province on Tuesday left a man badly injured.

The victim was attacked by a group of men when he was leaving his home. They fled after they have been caught.

Det Chhay Heng

**Translated by Sen David**

Flood repair bill under estimate

Sen Davie

THE National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM) said yesterday that only $356 million was spent on the restoration of infrastructure destroyed by last year’s floods – far below the $500 million in damage estimated before the floods struck.

Vanda Nhim, vice chair of NCDM, said after the floods receded, the committee anticipated $500 million in damage, but that reports showed a much lower repair bill across the country. Local authorities had completed the restorations.

“We said that we lost so much in the floods, but (but) we found that only $356 million was spent (after we re- stored the infrastructure),” Nhim said.

The report studied the social, economic and infrastructure sectors in order to assess the costs of the clean-up.

About 40,000 households in 20 provinces were affected by the waters last year, 168 of which were destroyed. More than 1,000 schools, 78 hospitals and health centres, as well as other buildings and roads were destroyed. More than 200,000 hectares of fields and other crops were also damaged, he added.

Farmer Chan Veyna recounted the devastation the floods inflicted on his house and crops in Battambang’s Ravel district.

“My farm was dam-aged, I lost cows, rice and crops. But (but) I’m still awaiting the results. That’s why we find a job as a labourer in an other country to support my family and build a new house in my homeland,” he said.

NCDM also called on local authorities to prepare for the floods looming this year, and to educate the population on the measures to avoid damage as past seasons.

Kong Sok, a commune chief in Poipet, said that Banteay Meanchey province was relatively less affected by last year’s floods, but that its infrastructure was now restored.

“We are already under surveillance for this year,” he said.

Local authorities have come to meet the residents who have been affected in order to prepare the community for the coming floods.

**Three face life for heroin smuggling in Preah Vihear**

Buth Reaksmey Kongkea

A logging free-for-all in all Preah Vihear forests

Continued from page 1

Sreang Meng have come to the commune to encourage people to go to the forest to sell,” Kosal says.

“About $10 is paid to the people who cut the trees and then sell them,” Kosal said.

The money flowing into this commune are used by the local authority to pay for the equipment and to pay the local farmers for cutting the trees.

“Now it is the people’s turn,” he said.

Try Phoeak declined to comment on the allegations this week, initially saying a reporter called the wrong number, before adding “I am in Australia.”

Chheang Vuthy, a forest activist in Preah Vihear, said the last scraps of forest in the province will be gone if Pheach’s company continues its illegal activities.

“We are allowed to do business as our will without fear of the law,” he said.

In 2012, Chhim Savuth has been investigated for three months for smuggling cocaine from Australia.

Chey Sen district, says the four suspects made off with five computers as well as money and other belongings.

But interested neighbours called in the police who promptly returned the property to the victim, the leaving the burglar with nothing but a court date.

Arrest warrant for robbery

A 22-year-old suspected of attempting to rob a victim in the early hours of last Thursday was attacked by a group of dogs when they tried to rob a house in Ban Nay Khum’s Preah Vihear district.

Police arrested him together at Phnom Penh Municipal Court yesterday showing that only $356 million was spent (after we re- stored the infrastructure).

APRIL 10, 2014

NATIONAL
Gov’t as legit as junta: premier

Vong Sokheng
and Kevin Ponniah

IN A bid to reinforce the legitimacy of his government amid an ongoing parliamentary boycott by the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party, Prime Minister Hun Sen yesterday looked west for an analogy.

He chose one that didn’t involve a ballot box. Instead, he pointed to Thailand’s National Council for Peace and Order, which was formed after the military’s May coup and immediately began clamping down on dissenting voices, as a suitable parallel.

Both governments had received royal approval, Hun Sen said, and were therefore equally legitimate.

“I just want to send a message back [to the opposition], that you are stupid to go by yourself. You have to consider whether [the government and parliament] are legitimate or not … And a royal decree is the highest legitimacy above all others [in a constitutional monarchy],” he said.

“In Thailand, [General] Prayuth Chan-ocha received a royal decree from the King so he too can work [legally]. But here, the National Assembly obtained a royal decree for the convening of parliament. Here in Cambodia, it is impossible to convene the National Assembly without a royal decree,” Hun Sen added. "It’s not that easy at all."

Premier May Titthara said the opposition needed to come to the negotiating table to discuss political issues, adding that Hun Sen had “continually tried” to reach out to them.

The prime minister said he had received a request from the opposition to meet him and that he had accepted. "We are meeting this afternoon," he said. "The opposition has said that they want to talk about political issues."
Family torn after organ arrests

Khouh Sophak Chakrya and Alice Cuddy

A family feud at the centre of Cambodia’s first major organ trafficking case has left the victims blaming their relatives for costing them of their kidneys and pockets most of the money, while those closest to the two suspects rest on Tuesday say the allegations are an act of revenge.

Mot Hiriphin, 26, said that his family had been crippled by debt after taking out hefty bank loans to fund life-saving heart surgery for his dying father.

The operation was unsuccessful, and last year, Hiriphin and his family faced having their home repossessed.

“We were suffering, because we had no money,” Hiriphin said yesterday.

As the eldest son, Hiriphin felt duty bound to provide for his family. So when his cousin, Yem Au Sah, told him he could pay off the debt by selling a kidney, he asked few questions.

Hiriphin said he travelled in Thailand last June with a wealthy Cambodian businessman from Poper province who was in need of a transplant.

Asi Sah provided him with fake documents and Hiriphin, after he had a kidney removed to be sold.

“I found out that he paid $12,000 for the kidney, so why did I get so little?” he said.

It was not until Aus Sah stole Hiriphin’s younger brother’s motorbike – as collateral for his own kidney operation – that the traffic ring came to the authorities’ attention and she and her 40-year-old stepfather Yem Phalla were arrested.

Both have been charged, said municipal court deputy prosecutor Kong Sam Sareth.

Sitting outside his home in Chroy Changva commune yesterday, Hiriphin said he regretted the procedure.

But in the house next door, his relatives told a very different story.

Nhem Roany, 22, said she had no idea her stepfather and sister were selling organs until they were arrested.

“Before, [my relatives] said their kidneys, they did it because they wanted to,” she said.

A friend, Phieng Pho, a Hope Timas, said “it was their choice.” She added, “My husband is not involved. He did not know about my daughter’s business,” she added.

“Do this kind of illegal business, so we have to pay them,” he continued.

Movers officials set up shop by the roadside in recent months, it has become much easier to communicate, as the officials have upped their phone numbers to passing traders.

“We are not afraid, because all the officers get money from us. They will not arrest us provided we tell them we are coming,” said Song.

Song and other traders – whom the Post travelled undercover with last week – questioned the government’s repeated pledges to stop forest crimes in the area.

“Even if we have no escape, we cannot do it, because they [officials] guard everywhere. That’s why I am always saying with my colleagues that forest crimes are not difficult to prevent, if the law enforcers take action,” Song said.

Another trader, Va Rad*, said it is difficult to pay the authorities off without bribing the authorities, while 44 were arrested in Siem Reap town’s Thvay Dangmune, while 44 were arrested in Phnom Penh’s Sen Sok district, Teuk Thla commune, while 44 were arrested in Siem Reap town’s Thvy Dangmune commune. An additional 28 suspects were placed in Taing province’s Taing district.

During the raids, officials also accused victims of using VoIP telephones, mobile phones, motorcycles and other related materials.

“Our police are still question- ing the suspects to work out this case,” said Sinath, adding that the foreign nationals would all be sent to court soon.

The initial trafficker was identified as Taiwanese Embassy in Phnom Penh declined to comment yesterday.

Figures for the number of VoIP* crackdowns and associated fines from 2010 until June 2013, about 600 Chinese and Taiwanese nationals were arrested for allegedly earning money from residents abroad using VoIP calls.

Bribery hinders and helps loggers

Continued from page 1

which can morph from dust bowl to muddy brook in a matter of minutes.

“Hello, brother, would you like to ask your permission to transport this stuff,” Sorn Song, one such trader, calls out to a snoozing police officer. Song deals with a dozen or so officials, from police and other security forces, to Forestry Administration officers whose job is to stamp out the trade in protected timber.

Song travels with six other traders and a couple of a scout whose job is to ride ahead through Kachon, Bakham and Phon Kom complexes and deliver the officials “tea money”, a euphemism for a bribe.

Mixed authorities who install posts along the roads to get money use motorcycle transporters, if we transport it through their area, to let them know, otherwise they will arrest us immediately,” he said.

“We do this kind of illegal business, so we have to pay them,” he continued.

More officials set up shop by the roadside in recent months, it has become much easier to communicate, as the officials have upped their phone numbers to passing traders.

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Another trader, Va Rad*, said it is difficult to pay the authorities off without bribing the authorities.

“We take tough measures in this case, so I do not think our officials took money from them, I want [the officials] to come, and I will point that they should not have acted like this,” he said, adding that “they would take some time to investi- gate the allegations.”

However, when the Post left the Forestry Ad- ministration office, two young men in hammocks, whom the loggers pointed to as being at the post, were arrested.

At the eerily quiet Veun Sai district police station, chief of police Yeur Thorn, who was also fingered as involved in the racket, said he was not involved in money theft from the traders, and took pains to inter- cep illegal transports.

“We take tough measures in this case, so I do not think which administrative police act like this, the rules are so strict. If the wood traders have licences, they will pay tax to the state,” he said.

According to the traders interviewed last week, they do pay a form of tax, though it wasn’t appear on the books at provincial hall in Banlung City.

Song says that getting environment officials, police, and military police to look the other way is the most costly – up to $5 per officer per load – whereas forest wardens settle for as little as $2.50.

“When they see us transporting good quality timber, they think we are really rich. But, in reality, we are working enough to pay the authorities more,” he said.

When their cargo of Tonlong wood reaches the dealers in Banlung City, who are thought to supply- try Phnom, Song will make about $295, he says, which will leave him with only about $20 by the time he gets home.

It is not unheard of, he adds, for the often slippery officials to take kickbacks in the process.

No evidence to confirm which country donated these weapons to the region, said the barrels “hold chemicals containing CS, or tear gas”.

Heng Ratana, director general of the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC), said that while he was unable to inspect the barrels, which were found lying around the district of young Kbal- eng village, he said he could “easily” confirm, based on the inspection, they are bombs.

Ratana said that there was “no suffi- cient evidence to confirm which country donated these weapons to the region”.

Two rusty barrels discovered in Mondolkiri province this week have been identified as 1970s-era chemical bombs, the CMAC said.

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In what may be the largest documented case of timber laundering in recent Cambodian history, one of the country’s most powerful tycoons, Try Pheap, allegedly made more than $220 million in unreported profit by illegally logging rosewood over a three-year period in the Cardamom Mountains, official figures suggest.

The evidence was included in an unpublished 2012 report by a major international conservation group, a leaked copy of which was obtained by The Post. The report provides the first substantial documentation of large-scale illegal logging by the Try Pheap Group of Companies.

According to the findings, which were never released publicly due to the gravity of the allegations, Pheap’s MDS Import Export Company, owned by his wife, Mao Mom, used permits for clearing timber within the Stung Atay hydropower dam reservoir and three concessions in the 330,000-hectare Phnom Sansak Wildlife Sanctuary as cover to move protected rosewood felled outside those areas.

The report concludes that Pheap transported more than 16,000 cubic...
Reports reveal staggering profits from illegal logging

Continued from Page 1

meters of rosewood out of the Cardamom forests in southwestern Cambodia using money to clear the dam site, despite an estimated reservoir zone stock of just 1,000 cubic metres. But Thurn Sarath, interviewed by the Forestry Administration – MDS bought the wood from brokers and sold it for $28,000 per cubic metre to Vietnam and China – the report says, referring to the reservoir area.

Officials have claimed the logging was ongoing to clear the dam site, but what they could not account for is the sheer amount of timber taken out of the Cardamoms by MDS.

“If they said that profit is illegal, I don’t know who will be selling it,” the cabinet chief at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Kranoung Wars

A short distance away from O’Som, on a pitch black August night in Pursat province’s Kravan district, a Post reporter was chased along narrow dirt tracks by men on motorbikes armed with assault rifles, who locals said were working for MDS and tipped off to the arrival of journalists by a network of spies whose job it is to protect brokers who are working for Pheap.

The logger had found a camp where dozens of workers were falling rosewood. Known locally as Kranoung, rosewood, for centuries it has been a haven for the illegal timber trail since the 1970s.

When the Post arrived Kranoung was described as a “lawless no-man’s-land” by local police, who said worked for MDS and had been armed with assault rifles, who locals said were working for MDS and tipped off to the arrival of journalists by a network of spies whose job it is to protect brokers who are working for Pheap.

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Obama dealt a setback in poll

Michael Mathes

REPUBLICANS cruised to victory in US midterm elections, gaining control of both houses of Congress in a stinging setback for President Barack Obama and his fellow Democrats and ensuring fractious co-existence in the last two years of his presidency.

The Republicans padded their control of the House of Representatives by at least 12 seats, and in the big prize of Tuesday’s midterm election they retook the Senate.

The Democratic implosion put the Republicans in position to shape if not dictate the congressional agenda, and their priorities are likely to focus on the economy.

Many pro-growth laws are ready for approval, such as authorisation for the Keystone XL oil pipeline running from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, boosting production of natural gas, helping small businesses and cutting back on government regulations.

The Republicans rode a wave of voter frustration with Washington incumbents and unpopular policies of the Obama administration to claim total congressional control for the first time since 2006.

The new legislature will take power in January.

Rowing pains

Teams gather on the Tonle Sap river in Phnom Penh, preparing to race their boats, on the first day of the Water Festival yesterday morning.

Where logging’s an art

Museum, showroom to exhibit products from Pheap’s timber business

May Titthara and Daniel Pye

A T THE head of a sleek table below two gold-rimmed photographs of logging tycoon Try Pheap posing with Prime Minister Hun Sen, two carved Chinese serpents encircle a throne carved from beng – one of Cambodia’s most expensive and rare timbers.

The ornate throne awaits Pheap’s visit to his latest project: a “museum” displaying the end product of the Hun Sen adviser’s timber businesses, which the Post was granted unprecedented access to on Tuesday.

As visitors enter the museum, directly in front of them are two winding staircases, each step a weighty slab of luxury wood that Chey Sith, an amiable company man who is one of nine deputy general managers working for Pheap, says was taken from the Stung Atay dam reservoir in the Cardamom Mountains.

Artistic impressions of the museum, which is due to be completed next year, depict a fountain in the entrance car

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Timber trove on display

Continued from page 1

National

In Preah Vihear, raid angers local vendors

Phak Seangly

MORE than 200 vil-
lagers in Preah Vi-
heak province have
subverted a petition
requesting help from
their representative in
the National Assembly after local forestry administration officials raided a dozen of their handicraft and furniture shops, seizing raw timber and finished products.

Beginning on October 28 and lasting through the end of the month, the officials confiscated more than 100 cubic metres of timber and furniture. On the first day of this month, owners were joined by workers and villagers in a protest against the action in Preah Vihear town, and on Monday, they submitted a petition to ruling Cambodian Peo-
ple’s Party lawmaker Suos Yara.

"Some places are legal, with documents, and some are not," said Pek Sephon, chief of advocacy for local NGO Pnom-
kov Seangly.

Between 30 and 40 places bought timber and made furni-
ture, but officials only cracked down on 12, Sephon said, add-
ing that the rest of the shops hid their wares soon afterwards.

One protestor, a 50-year-old man who gave only one name, Kuy, said his furniture shop was raided and authorities took the timber he was planning on us-
ing to build a home.

"The provincial forestry offi-
cers entered my shop without a court order. They threatened to arrest us if we banned them from entering and confiscating our items," he said.

"We want to get our timber and furniture back. I bought it for $100,000 donation to the gov-
mor, which lies just off nation-
Continued from page 1

THE PHNOM PENH POST

November 6, 2014

Cardamoms’ rosewood stocks, he continues. "If their documents show that the rest of the shops hid their wares soon afterwards."

At the far end of the workshop, the head of the workshop says that "just one machine here costs almost $1 million." "Most of them we buy from French," the foreman adds. At the 4.3-hour use, agroindustrial products from Phnom Penh’s economic land concessions will be displayed for international tourists visit Cambodia for its cultural and natural sites, he said. Even though some people who come here engage in the illeg-
legally offload piles of plywood into stacks on the floor.

"It’s not all luxury wood," Sith says. "We deal in all kinds of tim-
ber. At the far end of the work-
shop, three “steam rooms” are loaded with planks and logs to be dried for cutting or carving. Dried redwood chippings from formalin-treated machinery and the air is thick with sawdust. “We do this just to provide jobs for Khmer people,” Sith says, hand-
out protective masks. The lead of the workshop says that "just one machine here costs almost $1 million." "Most of them we buy from French," the foreman adds. At the 4.3-hour use, agroindustrial products from Phnom Penh’s economic land concessions will be displayed for international tourists visit Cambodia for its cultural and natural sites, he said. Even though some people who come here engage in the illegal activity opens its doors to the public next year to showcase Cambodians’ artistry.

"The boss" also hopes to at-
tact tourists, mostly wealthy visitors from East Asian and ASIAN countries, after the fac-

Thnong and other threatened hardwood species.

Scores of sturdy wooden chairs and tables fill one side of the depot, while faux antique pieces are found in silver in the Kampong Saron style set at the other. Perched on the top of what was once a rosewood root system, a purely carved Buddha grins silently at his visitors. At one end of the warehouse, a door opens into an expansive workshop where villagers noisily unload piles of plywood into stacks on the floor.

"It’s not all luxury wood," Sith says. "We deal in all kinds of tim-
erials that his conglomerate

"I don’t know where you got "our master plan to build this

"We are hoping they are good," said Sith, "because we want to export to Europe and the US."