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Rubber plantation families denied access to PM

Mon, 3 January 2011 [May Titthara](#)

About 400 villagers from Kampong Cham province's Memot district have been refused access to a meeting with Prime Minister Hun Sen tomorrow, out of fear they will disrupt the event with protests relating to a land dispute, residents and officials said.

The people, who come from three villages inside the Memot Rubber Plantation in Tramoung commune, are engaged in a dispute with TTY Corporation Co Ltd, the private firm that has recently taken control of the plantation.

The premier is scheduled to speak with villagers at Memot Bun Rany Hun Sen High School tomorrow to mark the 32nd anniversary of the January 7, 1979 overthrow of the Khmer Rouge.

Local resident Oun Suo Chen said authorities selected about 3,000 villagers to attend Hun Sen's speech, but that they had barred access to residents from the three villages.

"I asked the commune chief and he said that villagers in these three villages are not allowed to attend the meeting because they have a land dispute, and they are afraid we will bring documents to pass to Hun Sen," she said.

Another villager, Preab Keo, said that as a Cambodian citizen and supporter of the Cambodian People's Party, he was disappointed with the lack of action by the authorities in relation to the dispute.

He said he had already prepared documents related to the land dispute to present to the premier.

"The local authorities said that they will take strict measures to not allow villagers from these three villages to meet with the prime minister," he said. "I wonder if they are afraid we will tell our story."

He said the Memot Rubber Plantation, in Tramoung commune, contains 950 families who have lived in and worked in rubber plantations in that area for more than 30 years.

Under a recent scheme to privatise the formerly state-run plantations, he said, residents have been pressured to relocate to a new location since 2008.

In total, seven plantations are set to be privatised, including six in Kampong Cham and one in Kratie province. The Asian Development Bank recommended the privatisation of the rubber plantations as part of a general plan to increase the efficiency of the old state-owned enterprises.

Tramoung commune chief Vinh Ny confirmed that authorities would not allow residents from the three villages to attend the meeting with the premier because of their dispute with the rubber firm.

He added and that the government had tried to relocate them to a new location, but that they had refused.

"We are afraid that they will protest if they meet with Hun Sen, because I saw them prepare a lot of documents," he said.

Vinh Ny added that the authorities had to prepare for the safety of the premier in advance, and that he could not allow the villagers to cause problems during the meeting.

Patrick Pierrat, a consultant with French firm Sofreco, which is implementing the government's plantation resettlement plan, told *The Post* in August that few of the people within the boundaries of the plantations had legitimate claims to the land.

"After the [Khmer Rouge period], these plantations were in fact state-run plantations, and the land was government land. After that, the plantations were organised and privately run, but the land belongs to the government," he said.

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