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ADB moots future of forestry

With deforestation now a major concern in countries throughout the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Thursday launched a 25-minute documentary about the future of GMS forestry.

The launch of Forests for Our Future coincided with the 38th World Environment Day, an annual promotion of sustainable and ecologically balanced development with a focus on the conservation of biodiversity.

The documentary, shown in Khmer, detailed forest conservation programs in six areas, including Yunnan province in southern China, the Cardamom Mountains in eastern Cambodia, southern Laos, eastern Thailand and mountainous areas of Vietnam. The film showed pilot projects where social and economic development apparently goes hand in hand with environmental conservation.

Programs like those shown in the film offset the negative impact of infrastructure develop-

ments such as roads, airports, seaports and dams, said Khong Sam Nuon, secretary of state for the Environment Ministry at the film's launch at the ADB's Phnom Penh office. "Environmental issues such as water scarcity and pollution emerge each year due to these development projects," he said.

Khong Sam Nuon stressed the importance of two pilot projects in the Cardamom Mountains and the Eastern Plains.

The Cardamoms are "1.8 million hectares of dense forest and an intricate network of rivers – the key watershed for western Cambodia," providing water for agriculture, he said. The dry forests in Monduliri that comprise the Eastern Plains "provide a wide range of habitats [including] the most important area of continuous habitat for the species ... associated with water river pools in lowland forests."

Urooj Malik, director of the ADB's Southeast Asia Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources Division, talked up the progress made by the GMS

countries. However, "US\$10 billion in infrastructure ... is bound to have an effect on the environment," he admitted, stressing that the ADB was working towards "sustainable infrastructure."

However, Khong Sam Nuon was guarded when asked about destructive, non-sustainable developments in the two pilot projects, telling a *Mekong Times* reporter to "make an appointment" to further discuss the matter.

Forestry Administration officials were unimpressed, one angrily stating in Khmer that Cambodia's forests "belong to us," rather than to foreign reporters.

Khong Sam Nuon was eager to clarify the role of his ministry in environmentally destructive developments such as mining concessions. "The Environment Ministry is only responsible for examining the EIA [environmental impact assessment] report," he said, assuring that all future development would be "in line with the rules and procedures of the Cambodian government."

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