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Bulldozing stopped, for now

Fri, 24 February 2012 Chhay Channyda



Five employees of Jing Zhong Ri Cambodia Co Ltd were released on Wednesday in Ratanakkiri province after being detained by local villagers.

Ethnic minority Tumpoun villagers yesterday delivered a thumb-printed petition to commune, district and provincial authorities in Ratanakkiri demanding intervention in a Lumphat district land dispute after villagers held five rubber plantation company employees hostage on Tuesday.

Five employees of Jing Zhong Ri Cambodia Co Ltd were released on Wednesday in Ratanakkiri province after being detained by local villagers.

Villagers detained the men for attempting to clear their land.

Villager representative Tuy Nheb said yesterday six

of the 150 villagers who thumb-printed the petition had hand-delivered it to all levels of authority requesting a moratorium on Jing Zhong Ri Cambodia's razing of what villagers claim is their farmland until a solution can be reached.

"We suggested the authorities stop the company bulldozing on villagers' land, which is impacted by the concession land of the company," Tuy Nheb said.

"We support development, but please don't touch our land."

On Tuesday, 300 Tumpoun villagers from Lumphat district attacked JZR company property and tore apart a bulldozer and a car before capturing the company's environmental officer and four security guards.

The five JZR employees were tied up with rope and held hostage in the local commune hall for about two hours until an agreement was reached for the company to temporarily cease bulldozing.

Lumphat police chief Souy Thay said land bulldozed by the company was state land inside a wildlife sanctuary that the Tumpoun people had cultivated for rice farming and other agricultural activities for many years.

"First, we must allow the expert authority to measure the border," Souy Thay said.

JZR administrator Chhay Em told the Post yesterday there was no intention yet by the company, the environmental officer or any of the security guards to file a court complaint against the villagers.

"What happened was unbelievable," Chhay Em said. "It is the authority's obligation to solve this problem.

The company does not want to have any more problems.

"The land is state property, and we have a licence from the environment ministry to be here.

The villagers, by contrast, damaged our bulldozer."

Jing Zhong Ri Cambodia Co Ltd has been granted a 70-year lease for a rubber plantation on a 9,224 hectare area in Lumphat.

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