Youth cyclists blocked in Koh Kong province

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Koh Kong provincial police confiscated more than 10 bicycles from a group of Mother Nature Organisation youths who were riding from Koh Kong province to Phnom Penh to submit a petition to Prime Minister Hun Sen proposing that Koh Kong Krao Island be certified a protected area.

Koh Kong provincial hall spokesman Sok Sothy told The Post that authorities had taken the bicycles and blocked the group from moving forward because they had not cooperated with the authorities.

“We asked them to come in for a Covid-19 screening and they did not cooperate,” he said. He said the group had gathered without legal permission.

“They said they want to submit the petition to Samdach, but the government has announced a ban on large gatherings. They come from many groups and areas, including Koh Kong, Battambang and Preah Sihanouk and we have to restrain them,” he said.

Sothy said if the youth group intended to submit a petition to Hun Sen, they should have submitted a letter to the provincial administration to follow up on their journey and avoid any unpleasant incidents.
He said if the group had cooperated with the authorities from the beginning, there would have been no problems.

A member of the Mother Nature youth group Rai Reaksa, who participated in the campaign, told The Post that more than 10 people had been riding their bikes since Monday to travel to Phnom Penh to submit a petition to Hun Sen.

However when they arrived in Trapaing Roung district, they were restrained by Koh Kong authorities intent on preventing them from travelling.

“The authorities called for us to get a health checkup at Trapaing Roung Health Centre, but when we went in they kept demanding documents. They took away our bikes for not moving forward,” she said.

Reaksa said she considers the activity a violation of freedom and a serious rights abuse. She said the authorities did everything to prevent their journey.

“If there is no return of our bicycles we will walk from Trapaing Roung district to Phnom Penh and ask for them,” she said.

Cambodian Centre for Human Rights (CCHR) executive director Chak Sopheap wrote on her Facebook page that it is not new that youth and environmental activists are detained for promoting and protecting the environment.

She said a bicycle ban also occurred in 2014 on grounds that the group needed permission, although the peaceful demonstration law requires only notification.

“And this is not a demonstration. Do all meetings and cycling need permission? Authorities should enthusiastically support environmental protection campaigns and should spend resources in the prevention of deforestation and lake-sea erosion,” she said.

Government spokesman Phay Siphan told The Post that “there is no problem with this activity”. “It’s just their choice and standing up for their rights is an option. In this case, it should be relevant to the Ministry of the Environment.”

Environment ministry spokesman Neth Pheaktra said any campaign by the youth group was their right, but the blockade was the decision of the local authority and the ministry only supports legal activities.

He said that even though the youths did not campaign, the ministry has been conducting a study of documents and data related to the Koh Kong Krao area for the past three years to plan the outlying Koh Kong Krao area as a sea national park.

The area, he said, is rich in natural resources and biodiversity, and has beautiful beaches.
“The ministry found that Koh Kong Krao is home to endangered marine life like sea dolphins. The ministry will connect the new park to Peam Krasop Wildlife Sanctuary, Tatai Wildlife Sanctuary, and other conservation areas in the region of the Gulf of Thailand,” he said.

Meanwhile, Pheaktra said Cambodia has 69 protected areas including national parks and wildlife sanctuaries on 7.3 million hectares, equal to 41 per cent of the Kingdom’s land surface.

Details: https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/youth-cyclists-blocked-koh-kong-province?__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=042879a7f6847f40c8f6d1f344545d32134094fa-1591266878-0-AYQE30AWSAOREywopPs61GxaFQtVxo3kJ-Da-XRSv9nma9urhIPkk_wRGImXLc2Nin2DntOCuYjakBh8MpHlre_HrpMhvAjQ99szHVxHCijMXN BTCWQRTbFERpMChAt9Z_v1qHAKsFCzMO NSAfnD-NdGyEithI0XLcI03JqHvcHYCcXgkh1-phDpa7l1WzquHedNZ573YnqQIFVPU2FglS4xExdS8lOzQzC0pdrEWLMwQLPp4srQds6b6BaiYE-bNyReUhyDzl49mANj3RkdxabApS1O94ScDbkgL7fr1Qsov2x2I5SkpmUSBHNabiIL_yFoyy33x 4HGoQf3MDRs