



By: TA | AP Brief

Cambodia will send dozens of online scam suspects to South Korea



Dozens of South Koreans detained in Cambodia for alleged involvement in **online scams** will be sent home this week to face investigations, officials said Thursday, in what would be the largest group repatriation of Korean criminal suspects from abroad.

The 73 South Korean suspects allegedly scammed fellow Koreans out of 48.6 billion won (\$33 million), according to a South Korean government statement.

The suspects, 65 men and eight women, were among about 260 South Koreans detained in a **crackdown in Cambodia** in recent months.

Public outrage over scam centers in Southeast Asia flared in South Korea when a Korean student was found dead last summer after reportedly being forced to work at a scam compound in Cambodia.

Authorities said at the time he died after being tortured and beaten, and South Korea sent a **government delegation** to Cambodia in October for talks on a joint response.

South Korea will send a chartered plane to Cambodia, which is scheduled to return Friday with the suspects who will be immediately handed over to investigative authorities upon arrival, according to the statement.

The suspects include a couple who allegedly operated a deepfake romance scam to dupe 12 billion won (\$8.2 million) from about 100 people in fraudulent investment schemes.

South Korea has made various efforts to bring them back home, including more than 10 rounds of video meetings with Cambodian officials, the Justice Ministry said in a statement.

Romance and cryptocurrency scams

Cybercrime has flourished in Southeast Asia, particularly in **Cambodia and Myanmar**, as trafficked foreign nationals were employed to

run romance and cryptocurrency scams, often after being recruited with false job offers and then forced to work in conditions of near-slavery.

According to estimates from the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, scam victims worldwide lost between \$18 billion and \$37 billion in 2023.

In January, Cambodia said it had arrested and extradited to China a **tycoon** accused of running a huge online scam operation.

Since October, about 130 South Korean scam suspects from Cambodia as well as more than 20 such Korean suspects from Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines have been sent back home.

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After Friday's repatriation, about 60 South Koreans will remain detained in Cambodia awaiting repatriation, according to police.

South Korean officials said in October that about 1,000 South Koreans were estimated to be in scam centers in Cambodia. Some are believed to be forced laborers.

On Thursday, South Korean President Lee Jae Myung called for stern responses to transnational cybercrimes that he said erodes mutual trust in society and triggers diplomatic disputes with other countries.