

The Phnom Penh Post

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*Special Supplement*

MONDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2021  
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LBL International has been involved in many of the Kingdom's high-profile construction projects. SUPPLIED

## Bringing the highest standards, 'LBL grew with development of Kingdom'

Lysine Khao-Levasseur – who is soon to step down as chairwoman after 30 years of driving LBL International forward – shares how the leading Cambodian construction company has played a pivotal role in shaping the Kingdom since its founding back in 1991, the challenges it has overcome and her optimism for the future.

**Q** Why did you create LBL International back in 1991? Why did you choose the construction industry, and why Cambodia?

I came back to Cambodia from France in 1991 after my family, who had returned in the 80s, told me that it was important to see the country as it was then – much different to how it was when I was growing up as a child in the 50s and 60s.

I saw that the whole country needed to be rebuilt as everything had either been destroyed or the new buildings were not at all up to standard.

In my personal network I had close friends who had a really successful construction company in the south of France called LBL Mediterranee.

After I pitched them with the opportunity to develop their activities in Cambodia to raise standards in the country – which was reopening to the world with the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements – two months later we set up the company and LBL was founded.

While before everything else it was about having a real willingness to contribute to the development and reconstruction of the country, it was also an adventure with friends and family.

We started out as three associates, with my good friend Robert Latil and my nephew Thierry Loustau Khao, who became managing director of LBL from 1992 to 2017, and who, by the way, did extraordinary work in bringing the company to where it is today.

**Q** What have been the biggest challenges you and your company have overcome in the past 30 years?

As LBL grew with the development of Cambodia, we have also faced the crises that have affected the country.

We established our activities when the country reopened with the Paris agreements and started to grow significantly after the elections in 1993.

Then we faced a major crisis with the political instability in 1997, as all our projects had to stop and many of them didn't resume after the events.

But with resilience and the certainty that Cambodia would develop as other countries in the region had, we managed to survive, and from 1998 and the beginning of the 2000s we started to thrive, working on a lot of projects and even expanding into Thailand.

The financial crisis in 2007-8, however, was a really big challenge for us, and so we decided to concentrate our activities to just Cambodia. Then we participated to the boom of the construction in the country until the Covid-19 pandemic affected not only our activities, but the whole country and the world.

It has been another big challenge that we have had to face – with many investors having delayed the start of projects, while others have been cancelled, which has impacted operations.

However, our history has shown us that if we manage to face a crisis, we have always been able to become stronger and grow after it.

**Q** Which of LBL's many achievements are you most proud of?

Our biggest achievement is to have participated, really since the beginning, in bringing the highest standards and best quality to all the construction projects we have been involved in.

After 30 years of hard work, it is time for me to take a step back.

With our management team – led by partner and managing director Stéphane Bigorre and my son Jerome

expect for our clients. I am very proud that all the engineers in the country know of LBL and know they can learn a lot at our company.

Our vision since the beginning has been to bring the best quality to our projects, and we have managed to do this by having our international staff impart all of their experience to our local staff.

International experience and standards combined with Cambodia's top experts and the best workmanship in the Kingdom is at LBL's core.

Most of our directors are people who started as interns many years ago – they shared in our vision, and they learned and gained the best experience with us.

**Q** What is your long-term vision for the company?

I believe that LBL has everything today to perpetuate what was initiated 30 years ago, and to grow much faster and even bigger than we have in the past.

Our portfolio of 400 projects, our reputation with all clients, our loyal and expert team, our expertise and knowledge of suppliers and the market, and our organisation, mean international, regional and local developers who have a serious project will naturally work with a company like LBL.

With investors and developers who have worked in all the countries in the region developing their activities in Cambodia, LBL will be their best construction partner.

After 30 years of hard work, it is time for me to take a step back.

With our management team – led by partner and managing director Stéphane

Bigorre and my son Jerome

This could only have been done by having a really strong and loyal team that understands exactly what we



Lysine Khao-Levasseur, LBL International chairwoman. SUPPLIED

## LBL's success driven by commitment to 'strive for excellence' in operations

Stéphane Bigorre, managing director of LBL International, outlines the key achievements in the company's 30-year journey to becoming a leading construction firm in Cambodia.

**Q** How has LBL contributed to the expansion of Cambodia's infrastructure?

Having been on operations for 30 years, LBL has both benefited from Cambodia's development and participated in it through numerous infrastructure projects.

Involved in work for the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in the early 90s, LBL was involved in developing some of the first infrastructure projects, including roads and bridges.

We have been involved in numerous sectors such as hospitals, with the construction of the Faculty of Pharmacy for the Ministry of Health alongside Fondation Fabre-Merleux; schools, with the renovation of the Institute of Technology and Royal School of Administration; and culture, with the refurbishment of the museum at Wat Phnom.

LBL has played a part in telecommunications with the installation of fibre optic cables from Phnom Penh to Poipet for the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications with Alcatel, and road works with the construction of sections



LBL International managing director Stéphane Bigorre. SUPPLIED

of road and bridges for USAID.

We have also participated in the energy sector with the provincial power supply project in Kampot in 2004 and the Sihanoukville power plant project more recently, and worked with the Ministry of Defence on military compound construction and renovations.

But I would say that our biggest contribution has been to mass transit through our deep involvement in the construction and continuous upgrading of Cambodia's three main airport terminals, in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville.

We have contributed to a significant extent to the development of these airports, either as a subcontractor for Vinci Construction Grand Projets or a direct contractor for Société Concessionnaire des

Aéroports, either for design-and-build or build-only projects.

**Q** What has been LBL's mantra over its three-decade success story?

LBL has always endeavoured to deliver high-quality products to its customers, and our corporate image has since the early days always been associated with the mantra "strive for excellence", something we always sought to achieve.

I joined the company

in 2014 and while the LBL journey and commitment to the highest standards started more than 22 years earlier, at the end of 1991, it wasn't a problem at all for me to adhere to this motto as I share the same vision and objectives.

We consider ourselves to be first and foremost customer-oriented. And these are not just words – it is conditioned in our way of doing business and our interactions with our clients. It is all related to integrity and reliability – two core values that we defend every day and showcase systematically.

We have strived to have our name come naturally to mind when a client is seeking reliability, timely delivery and high-end results – and from the feedback we get, we can say that this has been successfully attained.

**Q** It has been a rollercoaster ride for most sectors since the outbreak of Covid-19. How has LBL been navigating the pandemic?

We were lucky enough to have secured a substantial amount of work before the pandemic struck – 2020 would normally have been our best year ever – and this helped us tremendously in keeping afloat during the worst times of the pandemic.

Being in a position where we had continuously jobs in hands was a real advantage, as we could concentrate our focus on how to mitigate and deliver in the context of these very special circumstances, rather than having to look for business to survive.

We took the Covid-19 issue completely seriously since the very beginning and were proactive in the implementation of preventative

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LBL International's first headquarters in the 1990s was on Monivong Boulevard. SUPPLIED



The construction company's second headquarters was located on Sothea Blvd. SUPPLIED



Kalkin construction headquarter, a subsidiary of LBL International, in Koh Samui - Thailand. SUPPLIED

# LBL's growth a human success story across the decades



The 'Blue Night Party' held in 2018.



LBL staff pose for a group photo at head office.



The LBL Siem Reap team at AAK Project.



An LBL private villa team in Phnom Penh.



The LBL Tribe team.



Former managing director Thierry Loustau Khao receives the 2012 Excellence Prize from the French-Cambodian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.



The Cambodia Property Award given to Sun and Moon in partnership with ADA and LBL in 2017.



The LBL Sun and Moon Riverside team.

## THIRTY YEARS OF SUCCESS

LBL International has responded to the demands of Cambodia's urban development by building high-quality infrastructure. With a landmark portfolio and a host of awards, LBL continues to define the Kingdom's urban skyline. The company's history of success parallels the nation's remarkable development, one that has fuelled demand for much-needed world-class infrastructure to support the country's growth. With core values of integrity and reliability, LBL has grown in leaps and bounds since its founding in 1991, building a reputation as a premium player in the crowded construction sector and making significant contributions to developments in design, architecture, engineering, construction and human resources in the industry.

PHOTOS SUPPLIED



LBL staff take part in a marathon in Siem Reap in 2018.



LBL founders Lysine Khao-Levasseur and Thierry Loustau Khao with staff at LBL headquarters in 1998.

Senior LBL management staff celebrate the first edition of *Le Mekong* newspaper in 1993.

LBL founders attend a Chinese New Year ceremony in 1995.



Thierry Loustau Khao, Lysine Khao-Levasseur and Robert Latil on a UNTAC site visit.



A staff gathering in 2012.

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FROM THE MANAGEMENT & STAFF OF

**SCG**

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# LBL International's towering portfolio transforming the Kingdom



Renovation and refurbishment of Hotel Park Hyatt in 2012-2014.



The Angkor Animal Kingdom project.



Starts Hotel Emion project for Starts Cam in 2016-2019.



Renovation of the Sihanoukville International Airport between 2020-2021.



The Toyota headquarters project in 2019.

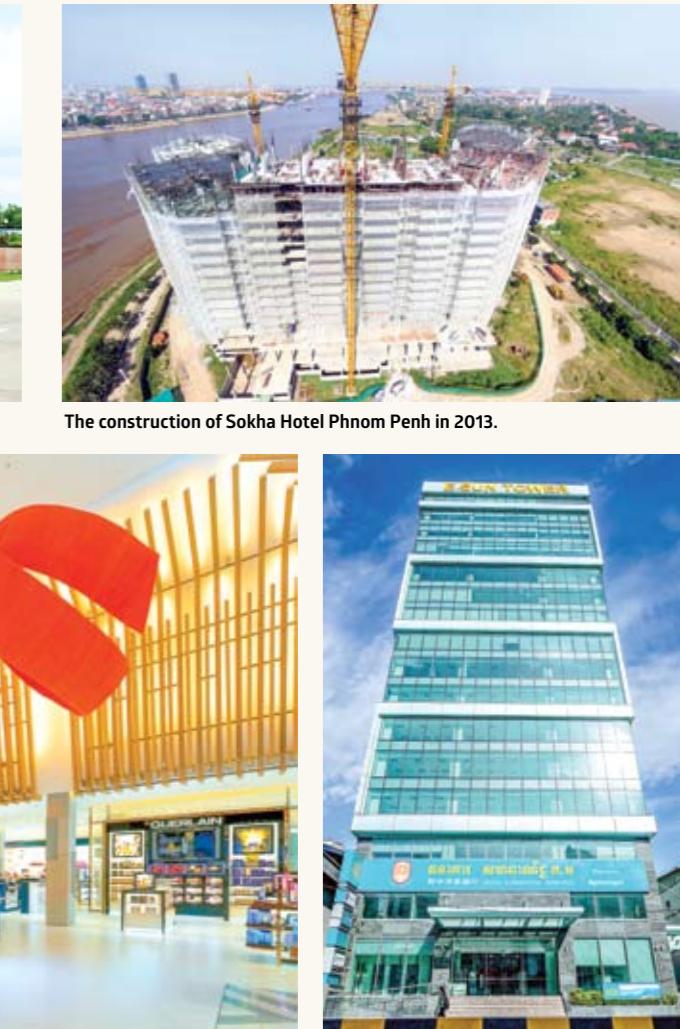
LBL International – with a portfolio of 400 projects including luxury hotels, coastal resorts, embassies, airport terminals, office blocks and residential buildings – continues to contribute to Cambodia's incredible growth story. With three decades of diverse experience, LBL combines high standards and strong leadership with a client-centric approach and a committed workforce, establishing itself as a respected leader in the construction sector, with a reputation unrivaled in the industry.



The Exchange Square project for Hong Kong Land in 2016.



Renovations of the T Galleria Siem Reap duty free shops.



E.Sun Tower for UCB Bank between 2014-2019.

PHOTOS SUPPLIED



From the management and staff of TK ELEVATOR (CAMBODIA) CO., LTD.



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## New brand image to steer LBL into future

**A**s a pioneer in the construction industry since 1991, LBL International has completed more than 400 high-profile projects that have helped shape the Cambodian landscape.

While its first projects in the 1990s were related to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) and the rehabilitation of the infrastructure, LBL later ventured into the construction of commercial and residential projects, office buildings and luxury hotels.

It has even been involved in the construction of a power plant and built factories as the Cambodian economy developed after years of civil turmoil.

"During our journey, we have worked on some really original and innovative projects for Cambodia.

"We were, for example, the design and build main contractor for the Jay Pritzker Academy in Siem Reap, which is considered the first 'green' school building in Cambodia.

"The Pritzker Prize is widely considered the Nobel for architecture, and the fact we were chosen for the design and construction of this project in Cambodia speaks volumes.

"Just recently we were also the designer and main contractor for the first giant aquarium and zoo in the country," said LBL chief business development officer and deputy director Jerome Luciani-Khao.

### Contributions to sector

LBL's continuous success has certainly not been possible without its dedicated staff, especially the young engineers who produce such quality



LBL chief business development officer and deputy director Jerome Luciani-Khao.

work across a wide range of diverse projects.

"Without our staff, we would be nothing. It brings us pride to see young engineers and workers applying to LBL as they know that they will be at a place where they will work on a lot of really diverse projects.

"Our company is also a place where they will learn to work with the highest expectations of quality, both internally and from our clients," said Luciani-Khao.

There is no glass ceiling at LBL,

with anyone able to climb the career ladder, and that the majority of its directors and managers started at junior level or even as interns is testimony to this.

"We believe that through our system of training and promotions, we have contributed to providing our staff with experience and instilling high standards, and by extension the industry as a whole.

"Moreover, we believe that we have also contributed to the development of the country by having had thousands

of people on the payroll over three decades.

"With the adoption of the Law on Construction in 2019, LBL is already adopting all of these new requirements, contractually or by practice, and it is good that the sector will be better regulated as it will improve standards," said Luciani-Khao.

In order to prepare for the coming years, Luciani-Khao said LBL is to adopt a new brand identity, which will be presented next year.

"This new identity will be an illustration of our solid implantation in the Kingdom as a leading company in the sector, and will symbolise our expertise in design, engineering and construction," he said. ■

services and pricing for our clients, we need to have the best tools.

"Much investment in technology and digitalisation is planned to help our team be more efficient to be ready to meet new requirements for clients."

"We initiated these changes a few years ago, and our goal is for every department and all teams to have proper digitalised tools to support their work," he said.

### Sustainability drive

LBL also plans to increase the sustainability of its organisation as many aspects of its business are not yet optimised – including logistics and transportation, as well as material consumption and wastage.

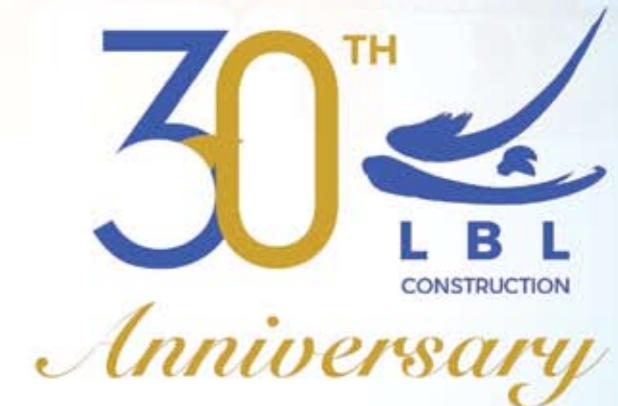
"We already started this change this year by participating in the CEE Competition to reduce our consumption of energy.

"The extension of this first initiative is to have a proper green team with a manager specialised in sustainability to change our company in the long term for the benefit of our employees, projects, our clients and the country," he said.



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## A record that speaks for itself...

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"LBL materialised our ideas through their creativity and expertise into our iconic office tower. The company put various design strategies into place, creating a state-of-the-art and contemporary headquarters for us, nestled in the bustling street of Monivong Blvd. Once again, congratulations to LBL on achieving such a significant milestone."

Belt Road Capital Management, Managing Director Khong Weng Fook



“

"We could not have chosen a more professional contractor than LBL. Both the staff at LBL's head office in Phnom Penh and the local team in Siem Reap, were comprised of some very talented, cooperative and eager individuals that accomplished some very challenging tasks." Angkor Animal Kingdom founder Roger Reynolds.



“

"Cambodia Airports has renewed the confidence placed in LBL. Both the staff at LBL's head office in Phnom Penh and the local team in Siem Reap, were comprised of some very talented, cooperative and eager individuals that accomplished some very challenging tasks." Cambodia Airports Technical Director Denis Fontanel.



“

"LBL carried out the full extension and revamp of our passenger facilities at the airport in Sihanoukville, Cambodia's main beach destination and growing commercial pole. LBL is a trusted partner whose mindset is excellence. Excellence and with the capacity of delivering it." Cambodia Airports CEO Alan Brun.



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"Tight collaboration between LBL International, the architects and the EU Delegation was carried out throughout the construction in a regular and effective manner. The LBL team were always available to deal with queries and I am sure this contributed in a big way to the success of the project." Jean-François Cautain, the then EU Ambassador, Head of Delegation to Cambodia.



“

"I certify that LBL has always satisfied their obligation to Starts Hotel Emion Phnom Penh project located in Sangkat Chaktomok, Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh." Starts Cam (Cambodia) Corporation director Keiichi Akita.



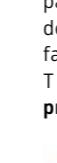
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"Overall, I am very satisfied with LBL's performance, attitude and measures taken to resolve the challenges we faced during construction. The company is known for its reliability and high quality works." Midori Techno Park (CAMBODIA) Co Ltd president of factory Seiichi Kobayashi.



“

"I will hire Thierry Loustau and LBL for our next expansion at JPA. Thierry came in on time and on budget for the original construction of the school campus and for a significant addition we did two years ago." Jay Pritzker Academy chairman of the board Dan Pritzker.





**LBL CONSTRUCTION**

**HAPPY 30TH ANNIVERSARY**

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## 'Passion, perseverance' in every project

■ CONTINUED FROM / P.3

measures on all our sites and with our internal policies.

It's such a long-lasting crisis like Covid-19, there are always multiple events with various concomitant effects and consequences succeeding one to another. The difficulty was in anticipating as much as possible and always being well prepared for the next possible event.

Before the first cases affected our company, we were ready to cope with such inconveniences and we didn't have to take emergency decisions – each and every action we took was well thought through.

We knew that we had to protect our best assets – our workforce – as we were very much exposed, working on sites with hundreds of workers, with many interfaces with other companies and sub-contractors, thus multiplying interactions and contact.

All these obstacles led to major delays and a significant rise in expenses, but we managed to keep most of our team.

During the lockdowns and the stoppages of our sites due to positive cases, we always supported our employees and did not lay off any of them, nor did we revise their salaries.

Q Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed the direction of the construction sector?

Covid-19 is still lingering and affecting our daily living and operations, even though the worst might hopefully be behind us. One thing is for sure though, the pandemic has had an adverse effect on the



LBL has gone from strength to strength over the past 30 years. SUPPLIED

construction sector and halted its momentum.

The sector was growing rapidly and less than two years ago all signs were pointing to further expansion. But the harsh reality is that the number of projects in Cambodia has dropped drastically since February 2020, beating all low records of the past couple of years.

Many investors have indeed postponed their projects or put them on hold, waiting for further certainty and greater clarity on the consequences of the crisis, and how it will affect their plans and prospects in the short, middle and long term.

Hopefully, it won't take too much time before a reasonable level of confidence is restored and business can resume in a more normal way.

On our side, we have noticed that as soon as quarantining requirements for fully vaccinated persons entering the

country were lifted in November, we immediately received more inquiries and we hope that some of these will soon materialise.

We will need more time to observe in hindsight whether the pandemic has only disrupted a trend temporarily, or if its effects are more nagging and will have initiated profound changes in the construction sector.

Q How is LBL positioned with increased competition from other players in a crowded market?

Our longevity, which comes with a large portfolio and a proven track record, as well as deep-rooted knowledge and understanding of the local market and its context, are certainly our best assets in a competitive market.

Having more than 400 completed projects to our credit in Cambodia – most with very reputable clients

convinced that this will pay back in the future as we will enjoy the advantages of having already implemented the proper internal procedures to address their application.

Q LBL has successfully completed over 400 projects. What does this say?

This impressive number shows that we are building our legacy project after project with the same passion and perseverance that we use every day in all our construction activities.

It's definitely very challenging nowadays to work and be successful in the construction business.

There was a construction boom

for sure, but the competition has

become very fierce with plenty of local

competitors and also a surge of Asian players in the market, which was earlier perceived as a possible threat to our business.

Many projects slipped through our

fingers as a direct consequence.

However, we have reached a point

today where observations and back

analysis of these lost projects can be

made, as well as conclusions drawn.

We are now in a position to use some

of these real references to highlight the

substantial differences and added value

we can provide.

Last but not least, LBL International's

compliance to all legal and operational requirements, which are steadily changing and strengthening, is an additional advantage we possess.

We have elected to be fully

compliant, and while there are

obviously some inherent costs

associated with this decision, we are

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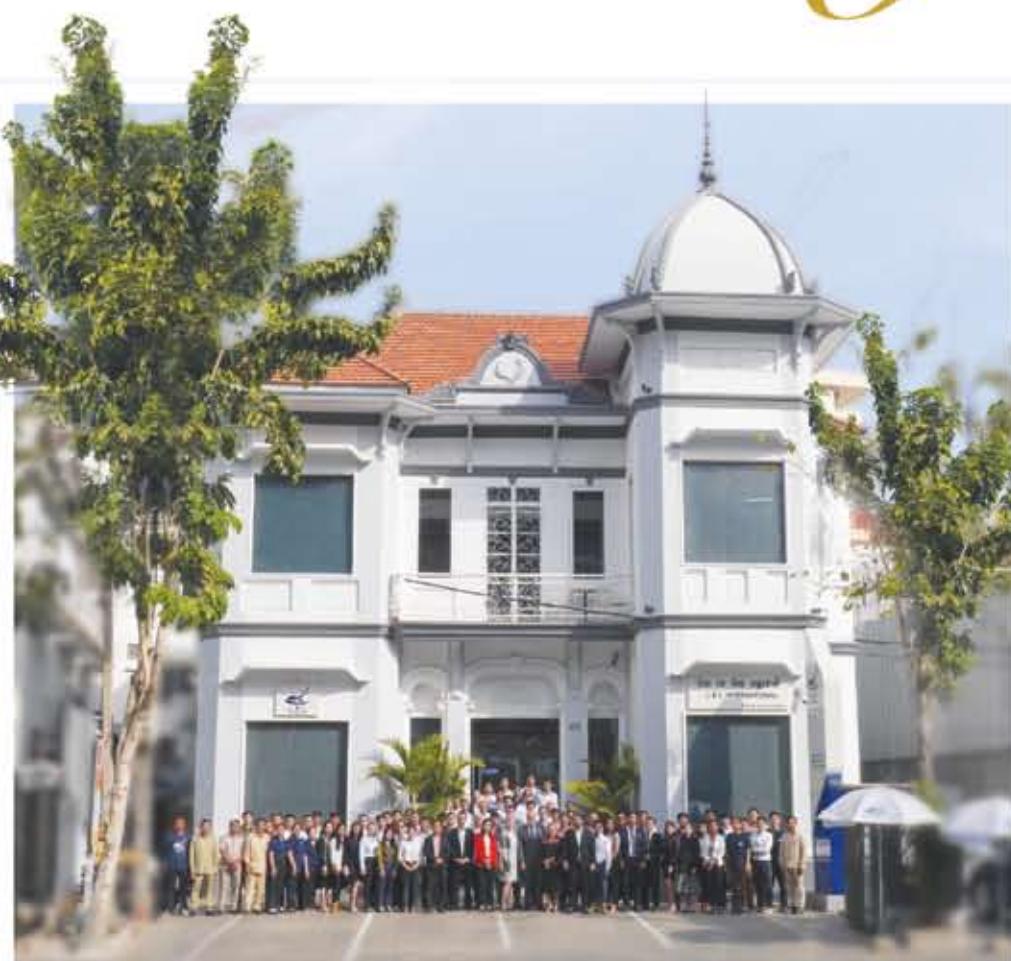
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