

Giant Chinese complex raises eyebrows in Mexico

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Tourists walk along the beach of Playa del Carmen, near Cancun in Mexico, on October 27, 2011. Construction of the second biggest retail complex for Chinese products outside China will begin in Mexico near Cancun next month despite environmental and business concerns, a project leader said Wednesday.

Construction of the second biggest retail complex for Chinese products outside China will begin in Mexico next month despite environmental and business concerns, a project leader said Wednesday.

The Dragon Mart will be built in a natural reserve near the beach resort of Cancun in eastern Mexico, with more than 3,000 retail spaces plus offices and 722 residences for employees within a 557 hectare (1,376 acre) area.

Pushed by Chinese businessman Hao Feng, it will be the second Dragon Mart ever built, after a similar, bigger complex opened in Dubai in 2004.

"Why Dragon Mart in (Latin) America? China is one of the countries with the largest, sustained growth in the past 10 years and [Mexico](#) and [Latin America](#) must consider east-west trade in addition to north-south trade," Juan Carlos Lopez, director general of the project, told a news conference.

Some 4,500 Chinese companies are interested in selling their products at the future complex, which could draw one million visitors and \$700 million a year, Lopez said.

But environmental groups are concerned that the project will cover 418 hectares of a natural reserve.

"It contravenes the municipality's environmental protection program," Alejandro Serrano, director of the Mexican Environmental Rights Center, told AFP.

The law allows for 25 percent of vegetation to be torn from the area, but the project secured a permit to cut down 35 percent, Serrano said, denouncing a lack of transparency in the permit application process.

The company counters that the project is sustainable and was given the green light by the state of Quintana Roo, which is needed to obtain a building permit from the municipality.

Mexican businesses are also worried, with the Confederation of Industrial Chambers saying that various national economic sectors have been hit by the competition from underpriced and subsidized Chinese goods.

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