

## Kokoda landowners lift blockade

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Papua New Guinean landowners have lifted a blockade of the historic Kokoda Track and are seeking compensation amid signs a controversial mining project will be canned.

Koiari landowners on Monday said they'd been told the PNG government would not renew an exploration licence for Australian company Frontier Resources, which wants to mine gold and copper along part of the track.

The project would have earned the landowners up to A\$100 million over 10 years, but has been opposed by Australia, amid fears mining activity would damage 600 metres of the historic World War II track.

The route is a pilgrimage site for thousands of Australians who walk it each year, remembering the 600 diggers who died there fighting the Japanese.

Landowners staged a blockade of the track earlier this year, in an attempt to pressure the government to renew Frontier's licence.

Earlier this week during a trip to PNG, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said a compromise that would satisfy all parties should be finalised at ministerial meetings next month in Madang, in PNG's north-east.

On Monday, the landowners said they were seeking a compensation package to make up for their losses from any decision to can the mining project.

The package would be focused on improving infrastructure, and should be jointly funded by the PNG and Australian governments, they said.

"(PNG's mining minister Puka) Temu told us this morning they will forego mining and will look at our compensation package to decide," local leader Bagua Watti said.

"We have given him our development and compensation claims and will wait for April's ministers' conference to see the outcomes."

Barney Jack - a spokesman for the Kodu Resource Owners Association, a local landowners' group - said locals wanted the two national governments to build schools and health centres, and seal roads with a view to establishing a highway linking Kokoda villages.

"We have reopened the track for tourism and trekkers," he said.

"We believe we have made a fair request. The governments must do something to improve infrastructure."

Kokoda Track Authority executive officer Warren Bartlett said Temu had indicated last week that Frontier's exploration licence would not be renewed.

"Temu suggested it is unlikely a licence will be issued and is prepared to make a compensation payment for loss of income," he said.

"We are happy the track is open again as there will be a commitment to infrastructure that goes with it."

A spokesman from Temu's office said a meeting took place on Monday and more would follow.

"All matters of social-economic progress for all stakeholders will come about for the Madang meeting," he said.

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