



**LONG-RUNNING ROW OVER KANDAL LAND 'NEARS RESOLUTION'**

NATIONAL – PAGE 4



**PHILIPPINE ENVOY ASKED TO BRING IN MORE TOURISTS**

BUSINESS – PAGE 6



**CHILD LABOUR UP FOR FIRST TIME IN TWO DECADES: UN**

WORLD – PAGE 11

## Myanmar's Suu Kyi hit with graft allegations

THE Myanmar junta has hit deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi with corruption charges over claims she accepted illegal payments of gold and more than half a million dollars in cash, state media reported on June 10.

The country has been in turmoil since the generals ousted Suu Kyi on February 1, with more than 850 civilians killed in a brutal crackdown by security forces on near-daily protests against the coup.

The 75-year-old Nobel laureate, who has been in custody since the putsch, is facing a raft of wide-ranging criminal charges, including sedition and breaching a colonial-era secrecy law.

The latest charges relate to allegations by the former Yangon region chief minister that Suu Kyi illegally accepted \$600,000 in cash from him along with around 11kg of gold.

The Anti-Corruption Commission found evidence that Suu Kyi had committed "corruption using her rank", according to the *Global New Light of Myanmar*, a state-run newspaper. "So she was charged under Anti-Corruption Law section 55."

She is also accused of abusing her authority when renting two areas of land for her charitable foundation.

After weeks of legal wrangling, two of Suu Kyi's trials are due to start in earnest next week, hearing evidence from witnesses.

In Naypyidaw, the remote capital purpose-built by the previous military regime, her trial on charges of violating restrictions during last year's election campaign and possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies will start on June 14.

A separate case is scheduled to start on June 15, where she is charged with sedition alongside ousted president Win Myint and another senior member of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party.

Her lawyer, Khin Maung Zaw, dismissed the corruption charges as "absurd", claiming that the real reason behind the accusations was to "keep her out of the scene". He said Suu Kyi could face long prison terms on the secrecy and corruption charges. AFP



## Home is where the art is

The Cambodian embassy in Washington DC and the Office of the New York County District Attorney, also known as the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, hold a signing ceremony on Wednesday for the transfer of 27 trafficked Cambodian artefacts recovered by US authorities. SUPPLIED

STORY > 3

# Gov't disburses \$4M for lockdown-hit households

Lay Samean

THE government kicked off its post-lockdown cash handout programme on June 10, with projected transfers of around \$4 million to more than 60,000 households affected by the recent large-scale lockdowns in Phnom Penh, Kandal province's Takhmao town and Sihanoukville.

Speaking at a press conference marking the commencement of the programme on June 10, Theng Pan-

hathorn – the government delegate in charge of the directorate-general of planning – said the affected households have around 200,000 members in total.

"We started our interview process for those who were affected from May 18-30. As a result, we found 61,667 households in the lockdown areas who were eligible for benefits, totalling about 200,000 people. And the total funds that we plan to provide to them is over \$4 million," he said.

Panhathorn noted that this cash

handout is not part of the government's ongoing "IDPoor" cash transfer programme that provides assistance to roughly 700,000 poor households consisting of 2.8 million people who were already receiving Covid-19 related cash assistance from the government.

Chhour Sapanha, director of the ministry's social welfare department, told a press conference that the cash handout would focus on three categories of poor households: those with Covid-19 deaths, those

with members who tested positive, and the remainder.

Sophana stressed that not everyone in the lockdown areas was eligible for the assistance – only the low-income families.

"The people who will benefit from this cash handout programme are households that have been interviewed and verified as actually being poor," he said, adding that the term "large-scale lockdown" referred to

CONTINUED – PAGE 2



With herd immunity in sight, is the Kingdom ready to reopen for tourism?

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1 3 4 4 5 6 7 8 9 9

## National

## Kingdom urges MLC unity

Ry Sochan

MINISTER of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn urged all Mekong countries to join hands in tackling the Covid-19 crisis by ensuring that adequate supplies of vaccines and other vital medicines are available to their respective nations.

Sokhonn made the call at the sixth Mekong-Lancang Cooperation (MLC) ministerial meeting on June 8 in the southwestern Chinese city of Chongqing, where he also attended the special ASEAN-China foreign ministers' meeting. The MLC member countries are China, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

"His Excellency Deputy Prime Minister Prak Sokhonn stressed that the MLC must continue to show solidarity in addressing this global health crisis and attach a high priority to ensuring adequate access to vaccines and medications as global public goods," the ministry said in a press release on June 9.

Sokhonn spoke highly of China's leading role in and commitment to providing important medicines, medical supplies and millions of doses of Covid-19 vaccines to the Mekong countries in a timely manner.

All of the ministers commended the MLC countries' cooperative efforts as they worked together to fight the Covid-19 pandemic, the press release said.

They called for strengthening the joint cooperation on access to important medical supplies and vaccines, sharing their experiences with outbreak response and fully utilizing the MLC Special Fund for Public Health to address the current pandemic and any similar incidents that may arise in the future.

All of the ministers appreciated the MLC Special Fund's



Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn during the sixth Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Foreign Ministers' Meeting in the southwestern Chinese city of Chongqing. FOREIGN MINISTRY

support for over 500 projects in numerous areas of concern including water resources, agriculture, education, poverty reduction and public health since its establishment, the press release said.

"The ministers praised the six countries for making great effort towards implementing their projects during the pandemic, despite the added difficulties.

"The ministers welcomed the list of the projects supported by the MLC Special Fund in 2021, in which a total of 12 Cambodian projects were approved, accumulating to a total sum of 67 projects approved for Cambodia," according to the press release.

In the third MLC leaders' meeting that took place last year, Prime Minister Hun Sen expressed his gratitude for Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's proposal to import more quality agro-products and livestock from the Mekong countries.

"Recently, shipments of fresh mangos were exported from Cambodia to China in addition to existing shipments of other fruits and agricultural products," the press release said.

At the sixth MLC ministerial

meeting, all of the ministers agreed to adopt the initiatives aimed at deepening cooperation among the local governments of the MLC countries.

Other areas of accord were reached with joint statements issued on enhancing sustainable development cooperation and deepening cooperation on traditional medicines within the MLC framework.

Kin Phea, director of the Royal Academy of Cambodia's International Relations Institute, told *The Post* on June 10 that the fight against Covid-19 necessitated international cooperation because the disease did not respect borders and it was a global crisis.

"Thus, the joint efforts of the countries in the region are necessary, including on vaccines and economic recovery," he said.

Phea said China is still an economic locomotive for regional growth, especially in Cambodia, which has strong ties with China in terms of trade, exports and imports and investment.

In a bilateral meeting between Sokhonn and Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai, the two ministers

reaffirmed their commitment to work closely to strengthen their long-standing ties and friendly relations between their neighbouring countries.

Sokhonn praised Thailand for successfully producing vaccines and thanked the Thai government and the Thai private sector for their donations of assistance to Cambodia for controlling its Covid-19 outbreak. He also thanked them for taking good care of the Cambodian people who are working and living in Thailand.

In order to reach the two-way trade target of \$15 billion set by Cambodia and Thailand's two prime ministers at the third joint cabinet retreat, the two foreign ministers encouraged relevant parties on both sides of the border to redouble their efforts in facilitating the flow of trade through the border checkpoints, according to the press release.

"Both sides agreed to hold the 11th meeting of the joint commission for bilateral cooperation between Cambodia and Thailand later this year or early next year in Cambodia, and they hoped that it would be held face-to-face," the press release said.

## USAID planning out Preah Vihear project

Long Kimmarita

THE US Agency for International Development's (USAID) Greening Prey Lang Project is working on a "Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation" (REDD+) project that will provide sustainable financing for four protected areas in Preah Vihear province.

This project will prepare consultation meetings on Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) consultation in the 51 villages that fall within the REDD+ project area, according to USAID Greening Prey Lang.

According to UN human rights declarations, FPIC consultations are a right possessed by indigenous people that in principle requires that any development project being carried out in their territory must be consented to by them before proceeding.

This assertion was made on the USAID Greening Prey Lang Facebook page on June 8 after recent stakeholder consultation meetings between national and local authorities, who were provided training on the principles of FPIC and their roles and responsibilities.

USAID's Greening Prey Lang Facebook page stated that they will hold FPIC consultations in the 51 villages that fall within the REDD+ project area.

These villages are within and around Kulen Promtep, Preah Roka and Chhaeb Wildlife Sanctuaries in addition to the Phnom Tbaeng Natural Heritage Park.

"When forests are left standing, we can get a financial return through carbon sales. Carbon sales provide co-benefits to communities and finance protected area management," USAID's Greening Prey Lang project asserted.

Chhun Delux, project manager at the forestry administration of Cambodia, which will lead the implementation of the REDD+ project in Prey Lang, noted that the announcement of the REDD+ project has not been made official yet.

"There have been many announcements of initiatives around this issue, but there is no official document from the government to approve the REDD+ project. This announcement is just regarding what USAID plans to do if it is approved," he said.

However, Chhun said if the project is approved it could contribute greatly to protecting the environment and provide significant help to the communities in those areas. At the same time, he said that if the study of the project shows that the investment returns are less than the initial investment, then it should be reconsidered.

## Benefits bundles are for food and utilities

Continued from page 1

that of an entire district, not at the commune level.

He clarified that this programme was not for the households holding ID-Poor I or ID-Poor II cards who are already benefiting from a government cash transfer programme.

Factories workers in the garment and footwear sectors are also ineligible for this assistance because they are already receiving similar assistance through the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training.

Phnom Penh deputy governor Nuon Pharat said there were 62,590 families who have been affected by the lockdown in the capital.

However, he noted that only 53,745 eligible households were actually interviewed and only 48,120 were then selected to get the aid. The rest did not meet the criteria or were in other assistance programmes.

"I hope that this cash assistance will help to reduce the burdens of our people who have faced difficulties during and after the lockdown," Pharat said.

According to the instructions issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation dated May 19, the amount of assistance given would vary according to the size of each household.

Single people will receive 156,000 riel (\$40) in total benefits - \$25 for food, \$4.5 for clean water for two months and \$9.5 for electricity for two months.

Households with two to three members will receive a total of around \$60 in benefits - \$28 for food, \$11 to cover water and \$21 towards electricity.

For households with four or more members, the total benefit will be \$77 - \$31 for food, \$15 for water and \$30 for electricity.

Single people who have had a family member who died from Covid-19 will receive \$110 regardless of their personal wealth.

Households with two or three members who have had a member die from the disease will receive a total of \$156.

Households of four or more members with Covid-19 deaths will receive a total of \$190.

Prime Minister Hun Sen also made remarks on June 9 directed to those who will be receiving the cash. He said all eligible persons will receive it through electronic payment service provider Wing.

He urged any poor households affected by the large-scale lockdown who have not been registered for this assistance to go without delay to their local authorities no later than June 16 to be registered in order to get their benefits in this next phase.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

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The antiquities being returned by the US include Buddhist and Hindu statues with an estimated value of nearly \$4 million. SUPPLIED

## US returns 27 looted Khmer antiquities back to Kingdom

Ry Sochan

THE US has returned 27 Cambodian antiquities – including Angkorian Buddhist and Hindu statues – to Cambodia. Cambodian ambassador to the US Chum Sounry and Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr signed an agreement on June 9 between Cambodia and the DA's office for the transfer of custody of 27 trafficked Cambodian antiquities recovered by US authorities.

"The return of these antiquities proves once again the fruitful results of a memorandum of understanding signed between the Royal Government of Cambodia and the US government that gave a fresh start to positive bilateral cooperation on cultural preservation between both nations," Sounry said in an embassy press release on June 9.

"We hope the United States will continue its partnership

with Cambodia so that we can put a complete end to the illegal trafficking of Khmer cultural properties and return our cultural heritage back to our country," he added.

The press release said that the 27 artefacts – all of which were recovered by the Manhattan DA's office and the US Department of Homeland Security – include several Angkorian Buddhist statues and Hindu statues such as a bronze meditating Buddha on a Naga throne, a Shiva idol and a Buddhist sandstone sculpture of Prajnaparamita.

"The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts of Cambodia has played an important role in coordinating and reaching this historic agreement with the DA's Office," according to the embassy press release.

Minister of Culture and Fine Arts Phoeurng Sackona said via video conference from Phnom Penh that she extended her gratitude and praise for the cooperation and assis-

tance provided by the Manhattan DA's office, US Homeland Security Investigations, the US embassy in Cambodia, the Cambodian embassy in Washington, DC, and the working group of the culture ministry in bringing these important objects home, according to the press release.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation spokesman Koy Kuong told *The Post* on June 10 that the 27 artefacts are currently being stored at the Cambodian embassy in Washington DC. He said he did not know precisely when they would be transported to Cambodia.

Culture ministry spokesman Long Ponna Sirivath could not be reached for comment on June 10.

Chad Roedemeier, spokesman for the US embassy in Cambodia, declined to comment further on June 10 beyond referring *The Post* to the US embassy's press release.

"This ceremony is a tribute

to the cooperation between our two countries on preventing the looting and trafficking of Khmer artefacts," US ambassador to Cambodia Patrick Murphy said in his remarks to the press.

"The United States is proud to play a role in securing the cultural heritage of the Cambodian people," he added.

"The repatriation of these 27 stunning relics to the people of Cambodia restores an important link between the nation's classical Angkor era and its modern customs and beliefs that, for far too long, were disrupted by the greed of those who deal in stolen antiquities," Cyrus Vance Jr was quoted as saying in the press release.

"Today's event is a powerful reminder that individuals who plunder and sell culturally significant items are committing crimes not only against a country's heritage – but also its present and future," Vance said.

## Khmer-language app built to ensure safety of mothers, newborns

Mom Kunthea

THE Ministry of Health and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) have collaborated to develop the Safe Delivery app in Khmer language for healthcare workers to ensure the safety of mothers and newborns in Cambodia.

According to a joint press release, the app – a collaboration through the Project for Improving Continuum of Care with focus on Intrapartum and Neonatal Care (JICA-IIneoCProject) and the Maternity Foundation – is a tool that provides training and support to healthcare workers who are giving care to mothers and newborns.

Cambodian midwives and other obstetricians are responsible for the lives of mothers and newborns every day. To provide proper training and support to health care workers, the Safe Delivery app is one of the best new tools and is easy to use, effective and innovative, according to the press statement.

The app is free to use and can be used offline.

The instructions it provides are a lively guide for healthcare staff in an emergency obstetric or neonatal care situation, as well as giving advice on managing the condition of patients who have Covid-19.

The app includes videos, questionnaires, descriptions of actual procedures and a list of medications that midwives and health care workers often

refer to when they are working or as part of their training.

Although Cambodia is recognised as one of the few countries that has successfully achieved the Millennium Development Goals for mother and baby, the maternal mortality rate is still estimated at 160 deaths among 100,000 live births and the infant mortality rate was 25 deaths out of 1,000 live births in 2017.

"Improving maternal and child health is a priority for the government," the press release said.

Anna Frellsen, executive director of the Maternity Foundation, said: "We look forward to the day we can get the Safe Delivery app into the hands of midwives and other obstetricians across Cambodia."

Anna added that they save lives every day and the Maternity Foundation can provide support to them through the app, a new complement to their work and training.

Anna thanked the health ministry and JICA for its wonderful partnership.

Kamel Haruko, chief representative for the JICA Cambodia office, strongly believes that the Safe Delivery app will encourage healthcare workers and help with providing safe delivery services for mothers and newborns in Cambodia.

The app can be downloaded for free from Google Play Store for Android users and in the Apple App Store for iPhone users.



The app is a tool that provides training and support to healthcare workers who are giving care to mothers and newborns. HEAN RANGSEY

## Migrant workers still headed both ways at Thai border



Migrant workers are seen at the Malai district police station after being rounded up on the Thai border in Banteay Meanchey province. POLICE

Kim Sarom

OVER 7,600 migrant workers who had illegally crossed the border into Thailand in search of work were sent back to Cambodia and placed in quarantine centres between February and June of 2021, according to the National Police.

National Police spokesman Chhay Kim Khoeun told *The Post* on June 9 that most of them had entered Thailand illegally and then tried to escape from quarantine, which resulted in them being sent back to Cambodia.

He said some of them were immediately arrested by Thai authorities shortly after crossing into Thailand, but some were found deep in

Thailand's interior, such as in Sras Keo and other provinces far from the border.

Upon their arrival back in Cambodia, many had tried to escape from quarantine centres but the police brought them to the centre in their hometowns.

"Sometimes, they escaped from the quarantine centres because they came from Thailand and they wanted to get home immediately. If they are subject to quarantine for 14 days near the border, it was too long of a wait for them. So they wanted to quarantine closer to their houses," Kim Khoeun said.

In a similar case, police on standby in Sangkae village of Boeung Beng commune in Malai district of Banteay

Meanchey province arrested 13 migrant workers and detained two children along with the broker helping them cross the border in the early hours of June 9.

Banteay Meanchey police's anti-human trafficking and juvenile protection deputy department chief Dy Soheat said on June 9 that the 13 workers – and the two daughters of one of the workers – were stopped while they were on their way to Thailand.

A broker identified as Yeurn Narong, 20, was also arrested by the police.

"The migrant workers were sent to quarantine centres in the provinces where they live. The suspected broker will be sent to court on allegations of human trafficking," she said.

## National

# Governor: Long-standing land dispute in Kandal nears solution

Nov Sivutha

ON JUNE 7, an inter-ministerial committee convened a meeting to discuss ways to quickly bring about a solution to a land dispute that erupted into violence on June 3 at the Chamkar Barang area in Tuol Prich commune of Kandal province's Ang Snuol district.

Kandal provincial governor Kong Sophoan told *The Post* on June 7 that resolving the land dispute, which involves state land, would not require much additional time because they have already formed a committee that just needs to review the facts to reach a decision.

"The inter-ministerial committee also discussed how to encourage the people involved in the land dispute to cooperate with the government to resolve this situation as soon as possible, principally through the payment of cash settlements," he said.

The land would be of great benefit to the nation, Sophoan said, pointing to potential military uses, such as for engineering facilities, or setting up solid and liquid waste processing plants and other installations.



Protests took place at Chamkar Barang lasting three days recently as villagers there tried to block bulldozers. HENG CHIVOAN

He said that according to the inter-ministerial committee's findings, the size of the area will be clearly defined in accordance with the law and

the committee will set out a solution policy plan for affected people, with a practical assessment made of the number of people who depend on it to separate them out from those who had no real connection to the land in question but still incited protests over it.

The committee will also establish formal procedures to summon those who create further problems related to the land for educational guidance, but serious cases of wrongdoing will still be prosecuted through the courts as per procedures.

Sophoan said the government does not want people to rely on the land anymore because it no longer provided much economic potential to them.

"For the affected people, the situation is now better and the state will address the issue of medical treatment and provide some funds to them to improve their living conditions, but perpetrators of mischief will be investigated and brought to court," he said.

The inter-ministerial meeting took place after more than 100 families gathered on June 3 to protest over disputed state land known as Chamkar Barang (French plantations).

The violence occurred between protesters and soldiers and culminated in a local villager named Mom Chantha, 56, being shot in the shoulder and then rushed to Calmette Hospital in Phnom Penh.

On June 4, *The Post* visited the disputed land and saw nearly 100 people protesting under trees and guarding machinery to prevent land clearance. They said they were protesting because soldiers had shot Chantha and taken the land away from the people who had been depending on it for many years amid rising land prices locally.

*The Post* also travelled to the

soldiers' encampment about 1km away from the protesters and attempted to secure interviews with them but none of the soldiers would comment on the situation to the press.

"My superior isn't here and nobody else will dare to speak about it," said a soldier at the scene who asked not to be named.

Koam Rith, 40, a resident of Tuol Prich commune's Ang Ta Set village, told *The Post* on June 6 that after a three-day protest that prevented the military bulldozers from proceeding to clear land on which the residents had relied, they had temporarily suspended their activities on June 6 after provincial administration officials went to each resident's house in the disputed area to tell them that they will seek a solution to the conflict and would not allow the bulldozers to continue their work.

Rith said the provincial hall had advised the commune and village authorities to request that the villagers stop protesting on the evening of June 5. They confirmed that provincial governor Sophoan would work to find solutions for the affected citizens.

"Now my villagers are sitting and looking at each other, waiting for the solution. They are calmer than they were before, but calmer isn't the same as calm," Rith said without elaborating.

Tuol Prich commune chief Chek Sophea told *The Post* that more than 100 people had been protesting for the past three days demanding compensation from the government for more than 300ha of disputed land.

Sophea said once a settlement is reached the villagers will allow the heavy machinery to dig canals or bulldoze

the land as usual. But there is no solution yet and the soldiers took some machinery belonging to them so they came out to protest and this had led to an altercation between the two groups.

The reason given by the soldiers for the shooting was that the protesters were holding sticks and knives and throwing Molotov cocktails at the machinery, preventing the land clearing work from going forward.

"This land dispute has been going on for two or three years. Over 300ha was given to the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of Environment by the government's sub-decree. But I do not know what these two ministries want to do with the land," he said.

Yan Sokhen, a 40-year-old villager in Tuol Prich commune's Ang Ta Set village, said residents would continue to protest until an acceptable solution was found.

She said that although the people did not have a title or deed to the land, they had been farming the land since 1979 – until they were suddenly banned by the military.

"People have been asking the authorities for land titles since I was 18, and I am now 40. But they have not given us titles, claiming it is state land. Some villagers have planted rice on the land since childhood," she said.

Similarly, Nouch Heng, a 50-year-old Ang Sre Po villager and a relative of the protester who was shot, said people have been farming on the French plantation all the way back to their ancestors up until now until these soldiers arrived and tried to stop them.

Heng said the government has allowed people to farm there since 1979, but now they had been stopped by soldiers.

Phann Phan, deputy chief of Ang Ta Set village, said the protesters were from seven villages – Kuol, Thlong, Ang Ta Set, Prey Toteung, Kraing



Protesters demand compensation from the government for more than 300ha of disputed land. HENG CHIVOAN




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Interested applicants should submit a **Proposal** in electronic format only (either PDF or Microsoft Word) via email to: [procurementcam@pactworld.org](mailto:procurementcam@pactworld.org). The deadline for submission is **June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 05:00 PM** in Phnom Penh.

Krouch, Ang Sre Po, Tuol Serey villages – all in Ang Snuol district's Tuol Prich commune.

Phan said some of the villagers had 1ha of land while others have plots of a smaller size which they had depended on since the end of the Pol Pot-era to the present.

"People have been farming here since I was little. Since I was born they have been living off of this land and now I am in my fifties," he said.

Regarding the history of the land, Tuol Prich commune chief Yun Sokhom said the local residents have been relying on it for three generations – from the time of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum.

The Sangkum Reastr Niyum era was from 1955 to 1970 under the late King Father Norodom Sihanouk. Sokhom said this plantation was state land back then and that the government planted the trees there.

From 1970 to 1979 – due to Cambodia's intense upheaval in that period – the land was not being actively cultivated by anyone.

Then in 1979 the previous residents returned and cleared the remaining forestland for firewood and to convert it into farmland – only to see the Forestry Administration take control of the land in 1983 without ever allocating any of it to any citizens as private property.

He added that after 1983 people still farmed the land but the Tuol Prich commune administration never dared to issue any legal titles or certificates because it had been designated as state land, despite

the local residents requests.

"People have the right to farm on this land, but they do not have right to sell it or use it for other business purposes. Even if they sold it in secret somehow, the commune would not acknowledge the sale or the buyer's claim," said Sokhom.

According to Sokhom, the late King Father had personally planted seedlings here such as the Thnong species and others. At the time of then-Prince Sihanouk's visit, Sokhom was only 7 or 8 years old – and now he is over 70.

Cambodia's post-2000 era saw King Norodom Sihamoni planting luxury tree species on the land such as beng, rosewood, and neang nuon – but now only cassia and eucalyptus trees remained.

He added that the name Chamkar Barang or "French Plantation" was given to the land by the locals because in the French colonial-era, the French planted rubber trees here. The land also has a well that people call the "French Well" to this day.

The commune chief said that during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum era there was a forestry supervisor or forest ranger that managed the land. Later, it remained under the control of the Forestry Administration under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries – until the government's recent handover of Chamkar Barang over to the defence and environment ministries.

He said the border posts in the area were planted at some point in the 1990's, but there



The protesters were from seven villages – Kuol, Thlong, Ang Ta Set, Prey Toteung, Kraing Krouch, Ang Sre Po, Tuol Serey villages – all in Ang Snuol district's Tuol Prich commune. HENG CHIVOAN

were no protests at that time.

Ly Vathana – director of the land management office in Ang Snuol district and a witness to what occurred on June 3 – told *The Post* that prior to the violence on May 30 the land dispute resolution committee had a meeting with the environment and defence ministries and the Ministry of Economy and Finance to mark the border of Chamkar Barang and determine how many families were actually depending on it.

He said that during the meeting, the second deputy chief of Tuol Prich commune said the local people did not object to the demarcation but

he requested a solution for those affected because they have been farming on the land for a long time.

Vathana said the committee had asked defence minister Tea Banh for guidelines and submitted a letter to the Kandal Provincial Administration to initiate the process of setting border posts on the land.

He added that on the third day, about 200 families came out to protest with knives and sticks while about 20 to 30 soldiers present also carried sticks, two-way radios or walkie-talkies – as well as handguns.

"People said that if we do not take matters into our own hands, [the soldiers] will start

to act like they do in Myanmar," Vathana said.

"The soldiers fired into the ground, but the protesters were not afraid of their guns. Suddenly a man was injured and ran from the protest, but when the authorities asked to check his wounds, they did not allow them to and walked away from the scene," he said.

According to Vathana, the plantation area was listed by the Forestry Administration as 410ha. But at the time of registration, it was 291ha.

According to the sub-decree signed by Prime Minister Hun Sen, 280ha of land was given to the environment and defence ministries and 25ha

was given to people for agricultural use in 1996.

Pursuant to Letter No 755 of the Office of the Council of Ministers on August 13, 2020, it was agreed in principle to provide 2.8 million square metres of land located across five villages – Kuol, Thlong, Ang Ta Set, Prey Toteung and Kraing Krouch – in Ang Snuol district's Tuol Prich commune.

This area is along National Road 51 and is privately owned by the defence ministry and any travel through it requires their coordination and permission.

Neth Pheaktra, spokesman for the environment ministry, said he did not have any information on possible solutions yet. But he said he knew that the government had handed over the state land in the area to his ministry to prepare to build infrastructure for solid and liquid waste disposal facilities meant to serve Phnom Penh and the surrounding areas.

Defence ministry spokesman Chhum Socheat could not be reached for comment.

Ly Chantola, president of the Bar Association of the Kingdom of Cambodia (BAKC), said that according to the 2001 Land Law there is no land in Cambodia that does not have an owner. If land is not private land, it belongs to the state.

"According to the law, no matter how you happen to be using it or for how long, it cannot be owned privately if the state wants it back. But it can be made into a social land concession for them," he said. ■

# Prudential Cambodia's Moos Som Chanh, an insurance plan for the monsoon season

The first digital and bite-sized insurance product in Cambodia available now on Pulse by Prudential, a digital health and wellness app.

DIGITAL healthcare and insurance leader, Prudential Cambodia is offering an affordable insurance plan *Moos Som Chanh* that provides financial relief to those diagnosed with dengue or malaria during the monsoon season.

Prudential Cambodia rolled out the insurance package *Moos Som Chanh* to help Cambodians cope with any unexpected medical bills if they contract dengue or malaria during the monsoon.

"Prudential's mission is to provide health protection to all Cambodians and *Moos Som Chanh* at a starting price of \$4 per year helps achieve that.

"This has been a trying time for Cambodians from a health perspective, and we would like to provide people with multiple options to safeguard their health and financial wellbeing," Prudential Cambodia CEO Sanjay Chakrabarty said.

This product launched on May 24 comes with four different packages for customers to select based on the benefits they would like to receive, offering flexibility and affordable solutions that meet the protection needs of every Cambodian households.

Prudential Cambodia is making

Package Name	Price (per year)	Benefits
Dengue Essential Pack	\$4	Dengue Diagnosis benefit: \$150 Dengue Death/TPD benefit: \$750
Malaria Essential Pack	\$4.75	Malaria Diagnosis benefit: \$150 Malaria Death/TPD benefit: \$750
Silver Pack	\$14.57	Dengue + Malaria Diagnosis benefit: \$250 Dengue + Malaria Death/TPD benefit: \$1,250
Gold Pack	\$29.16	Dengue + Malaria Diagnosis benefit: \$500 Dengue + Malaria Death/TPD benefit: \$2,500

*Moos Som Chanh* available for purchase on its Pulse by Prudential (Pulse) digital health and wellness app that is available to Cambodian residents aged between 1 and 60, and can be renewed or repurchased annually.

The Pulse app was launched in October last year as part of the

Prudential's region-wide strategy to make healthcare more affordable and accessible. It currently provides all Cambodians with round-the-clock access to healthcare services and real-time health information and is constantly evolving with new features.

"This is the first insurance plan

we are offering on the Pulse app. Through the app, we want people to be able to access healthcare services and buy simple insurance plans conveniently from anywhere and at any time," Sanjay said.

To purchase a *Moos Som Chanh* plan, users must first download the Pulse app via the Apple App Store

or Google Play Store. They can then visit the e-store on the app, PRU Shoppe, to make the purchase.

## About Pulse by Prudential

Pulse by Prudential is a digital health app and the first of its kind in the region to offer holistic health management to consumers. Using AI-powered self-help tools and real-time information, the app serves as a 24/7 health and wellness partner to users, helping them prevent, postpone, and protect against the onset of diseases.

Pulse is part of Prudential's region-wide strategy to provide affordable and accessible healthcare to everyone across Asia by leveraging digital technologies and best-in-class partnerships.

Following the regional launch of Pulse in Malaysia in August 2019, it is now available in 11 markets in Asia and includes a growing suite of value-add services, such as a symptom checker and health assessment, personal wellness services, and video consultations with certified doctors and specialists.

Pulse has been downloaded more than 25 million times since its launch on May 31. For more information, and to download Pulse, log onto [www.wedopulse.com](http://www.wedopulse.com). ■

# Business

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USD / KHR	USD / CAD	USD / CNY	USD / JPY	USD / MYR	USD / SGD	USD / THB	AUD / USD	EUR / USD	GBP / USD
↑ 4,107	↑ 1.2109	↑ 6.391	↑ 109.53	↑ 4.1205	↑ 1.3254	↑ 31.17	↓ 0.7738	↓ 1.2167	↓ 1.4095

ABA NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA GROUP

## TRADING INFORMATION ON CAMBODIA SECURITIES EXCHANGE

Date: June 10 2021

Auction Trading Method (ATM)

NO	STOCK	CLOSING PRICE	OPENING PRICE	HIGH	LOW
1	ABC	16,300	16,380	16,400	16,280
2	GTI	4,300	4,300	4,300	4,260
3	PAS	14,420	14,440	14,440	14,380
4	PEPC	3,310	3,310	3,330	3,300
5	PPAP	15,000	15,000	15,000	14,920
6	PPSP	2,270	2,280	2,280	2,270
7	PWSA	7,260	7,220	7,400	7,160



## Philippine envoy asked to bring in more tourists

Thou Vireak

MINISTER of Tourism Thong Khon on June 9 asked Philippine ambassador to Cambodia Maria Amelita C Aquino to persuade more Filipino tourists to holiday in the Kingdom, as its government moves to allow visitors fully vaccinated against the novel coronavirus to enter the country with little or no quarantine stay.

At a meeting held at the ministry, Khon said the government is planning a strategic plan to reopen tourism as it strives to curb the spread of Covid-19.

"Currently, the Ministry of Tourism is studying and preparing a concept note on tourism packages geared towards holidaymakers who have been fully vaccinated, aimed at examining the possibility for those from low-risk countries to visit

areas in Cambodia deemed 'safe', in accordance with the country's safety rules guiding participation in Covid-19 prevention," he said.

He pointed out that the Kingdom earlier this year hosted the 24th Meeting of ASEAN Tourism Ministers, where measures and goals were developed to reopen tourism in the ASEAN region, with a focus on fully-vaccinated tourists.

"We have put in place a number of measures to prevent Covid-19 cases, including a plan to rehabilitate the tourism sector in accordance with the safety and hygiene rules that are to be implemented in the ASEAN tourism industry. This is part of Cambodia's preparations for hosting the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2022," he said.

Aquino agreed and pledged to further boost the number of tourists visiting Cambodia after the Covid-19 situation

eases. "I firmly believe that the new light of the growth of the Cambodian tourism industry will rise in the near future because of the rich potential of cultural heritage, history and natural resources," she said.

On May 24, a virtual closed-door meeting, led by the minister, set out key action plans that include preparations for the gradual reopening of tourism in October-December, with an initial focus on the Angkor area in Siem Reap province.

Cambodia Association of Travel Agents (CATA) president Chhay Sivlin said private tourism businesses are ready to work with the government, through the ministry, on the revival of the Covid-wracked industry.

"We are ready to work with the government to build trust with tourists. We've been waiting for this for a long time. We have to regroup to reorganise our services together to receive



Philippine ambassador to Cambodia Maria Amelita C Aquino (left) meets tourism minister Thong Khon on Wednesday. TOURISM MINISTRY

tourists," she said, stressing that Siem Reap's tourism sector is in dire need of rescue.

On April 1, Prime Minister Hun Sen formally approved a 2021-2025 three-phased national tourism roadmap and a 2021-2035 Siem Reap provincial tourism development master plan to navigate the sector's emergence from the

Covid-19 pandemic and support its recovery.

A tourism ministry report revealed that 1.31 million international tourists visited Cambodia in 2020, down 80.2 per cent from 6.61 million in 2019, while Cambodian travellers made about nine million trips to domestic destinations, a year-on-year de-

crease of 20 per cent.

Last year's decline in international tourist arrivals cost the Cambodian tourism industry more than \$3 billion lost in revenue, with revenues from international tourism generating only \$1.023 billion in 2020, down 79.2 per cent compared to \$4.919 billion in 2019. ■

## Borey breaks ground launches sales in southern Kandal

Thou Vireak

LOCAL developer Monarchy Land & Investment on June 10 simultaneously broke ground and launched sales for its first housing development in southern Kandal province.

Speaking at the ceremony commemorating the occasion, Sok Borey, sales manager of the Borey Khemarak Phumi gated-community development, said the project includes 100 housing units divided into three categories – link houses, shophouses and single villas.

Construction is scheduled to be completed by June next year, she said, without disclosing the value of the development.

The prices for link houses, shophouses and single villas start from \$48,800, \$98,800 and \$130,800, respectively, she said. "The prices of all three types of housing in Borey Khemarak Phumi are more affordable compared to other developments, and we design and care about quality."



The 3ha site is just 700m from National Road 2 in Kandal province's Kandal Stung district. SUPPLIED

She added that the 3ha site is just 700m from National Road 2 in the province's Kandal Stung district.

Khuon Leakena, Monarchy Land & Investment deputy director-general and project representative, described the units as modern, snazzy and

designed in a unique style, providing a pleasant living environment.

"Our Borey Khemarak Phumi is in a geographically favourable area, strategically located near the Third Ring Road and near the new Phnom Penh airport, not far from

Aeon Mall 3, where the commercial area is booming like a mushroom," she said.

According to Leakena, the company is also looking to develop a second project, a "natural housing project" near the riverside on about 30ha in the province's Takhmao town,

east of Kandal Stung. "We'll turn the area into a residential project, a park, a green environment, and we hope to garner a lot of support."

But her upbeat sentiment is not shared by players in the Cambodian construction and real estate sectors.

The global health crisis caused by the Covid-19 outbreak has dragged down investment in the sectors, which had shown positive signs for several years in a row.

CBRE Cambodia managing director Ann Sothida speculates that investment in construction will fare even worse this year than in 2020, on lacklustre progress in the Covid fight and fewer government infrastructure construction plans set in motion that in pre-pandemic days.

Even the real estate sector is on a less-than-satisfactory recovery course, she said.

"The value of investment in 2021 will continue to fall because there are not as many large investment projects, or

new infrastructure construction projects driven by the government as there were before, and the number of construction sites, condominiums and borey are also on the decline," Sothida said.

Last year, the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction approved just \$7.8 billion in new construction projects – down by 32.1 per cent from \$11.4 billion in 2019, covering 17 million square metres, down by 26.9 per cent, the National Bank of Cambodia's said in its latest Financial Stability Review 2020 (FSR 2020) released on May 31.

The residential, commercial and industrial segments made up the largest share of new projects, accounting for 46.1 per cent, 31.8 per cent and 14.6 per cent, respectively, the central bank said, adding that foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows to construction and real estate fell by 10.6 per cent, accounting for 17 per cent of FDI stock. ■

# Mineral exploration MoU signed for Kampong Speu

May Kunmakara

**H**HLH Agriculture (Cambodia) Co Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of a Singapore-listed Hong Lai Huat Group Ltd, and Cambodia Hei Shi Mineral Co Ltd will join forces for exploration and mining of Cambodia-Singapore Agriculture Hub's mineral resources in Kampong Speu province.

As reported by The Edge Singapore, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with an estimated investment value of \$20 million was signed to this end on June 8, which lays out a series of steps for the two parties to take over the next three months to enter into a legally-binding agreement.

According to a press release: "Through the MoU, both parties will establish a joint venture [JV] where HLH Agriculture will be responsible for providing the land and allocation of mining rights.

"Cambodia Hei Shi Mineral will leverage on its established mining track record to run the mining operations and be responsible for all costs incurred towards hiring enough skilled labour and personnel, machineries and technical supports, as well as developing infrastructures for mining operations within the operation budget agreed between both parties," it said.

Hong Lai Huat Group general manager and executive director Ong Jia Jing said mining operations would be under an allocated con-



Hong Lai Huat Group Ltd has said it grows cassava on a 90sq km plantation in northwestern Kampong Speu province's Oral district and manufactures starch at its processing plant for food industry clients from Europe and Southeast Asia. HONG LAI HUAT GROUP

struction-material zone in the Cambodia-Singapore Agriculture Hub.

"As exquisite natural minerals have been found on our land such as marble and granite, this partnership will enable the group to mine and supply these exquisite natural minerals to meet the market demand and to develop the infrastructures in" the agriculture hub, he said.

"The mineral resources extracted shall also contribute immensely to the growth of the group as well as our shareholders for many years to come," Ong added.

The JV will build infrastructure,

factories and other facilities inside the agriculture hub with the mineral resources produced from the land.

The partnership will create more job opportunities for Cambodians, especially for locals in northwestern Kampong Speu province's Oral district.

HLH Agriculture will be entitled to 60 per cent of the profit generated from the JV, which will last for 10 years, with an option to renew upon expiration of the term.

On the Singapore Exchange, Hong Lai Huat Group's share price rose 0.2 per cent to close at S\$0.094 (US\$0.071) on June 8.

# \$200M credit guarantee scheme gets first member

May Kunmakara

CANADIA Bank Plc has become the first member of the Credit Guarantee Corporation of Cambodia's (CGCC) Business Recovery Guarantee Scheme (BRGS), which aims to support business loans to enterprises of all sizes that are in need of funding for expansions or working capital.

A partnership agreement was signed to this effect on June 9 between Canadia Bank CEO Raymond Sia and CGCC CEO Wong Keet Loong.

At the signing ceremony, Sia said Canadia Bank's participation in the CGCC's "first scheme" is "another testament" of his institution's support for customers and the wider community.

"Canadia Bank is honoured to be the first bank to sign and formalise the partnership with CGCC to improve and increase financial access in our local business community, leveraging on" the BRGS, he said. "This reflects our commitment to grow and support the business community in Cambodia."

Wong said: "Our partnership with Canadia Bank will be very beneficial for CGCC to reach out to SMEs [small and medium-sized enterprises] throughout the country to support them in their loan applications when they do not have enough collateral to pledge to the bank.

"This partnership is an important milestone for CGCC to have a solid partner in achieving its objectives," he said.

Canadia Bank chief operating officer Song Khenglay said: "The scheme allows owners of SMEs and large firms to gain access to busi-

ness loans from Canadia Bank with existing collateral or without additional collateral, subject to the bank's assessment process.

"This scheme duration is from March 2021 until December 2021. Priority sectors such as agriculture, industry and services will have a lower guarantee fee and customers can apply for loans under the BRGS scheme of up to \$1 million for large firms.

"To date, we have an encouraging business pipeline of more than 35 customers who have applied for loans under the BRGS scheme of which two loans have been approved by the CGCC," she said.

The ministry launched the \$200 million BRGS scheme on March 29 so that businesses could take out larger loans with easier application processes to ensure their vitality amid the ongoing Covid-19 crisis.

Applicants must be majority Cambodian-owned to qualify for loans under BRGS, it said in a press release, noting that the initiative is consistent with government policy that addresses crisis survival and recovery support for the economy during the pandemic.

The CGCC is the Kingdom's first credit guarantee corporation, established by sub-decree No 140 ANKr BK on September 1, as a state-owned enterprise under the ministry's technical and financial direction.

The corporation's guarantee will act as collateral or security for 70-80 per cent of the loan amount borrowed from participating financial institutions and hence reduce the physical collateral required from borrowers, it said.

## Invitation for Bids

- The Kingdom of Cambodia has received a loan and a grant from the Asian Development Bank toward the cost of Climate-Friendly Agribusiness Value Chains Project (CFAVC), and it intends to apply part of the proceeds of this loan and grant to payments under the Contract No.: CW-19a/CFAVC/MAFF/2021: **The Installation, and Commissioning of 500 Biodigesters and 250 Compost Huts**, for the following Provinces:

Lot/ Province	Biodigester				Compost Huts
	4m <sup>3</sup>	6m <sup>3</sup>	8m <sup>3</sup>	10m <sup>3</sup>	8m <sup>3</sup>
Lot 1: CW-19a/CFAVC/MAFF/2021-01 Kampot province	110	15	0	0	62
Lot 2: CW-19a/CFAVC/MAFF/2021-02 Takeo province	105	20	0	0	63
Lot 3: CW-19a/CFAVC/MAFF/2021-03 Kampong Cham province	87	38	0	0	63
Lot 4: CW-19a/CFAVC/MAFF/2021-04 Tboung Khmum province	100	20	3	2	62

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) of Cambodia through its Project Management Unit (PMU) now invites sealed bids from eligible and qualified bidders for The Installation, and Commissioning of 500 Biodigesters and 250 Compost Huts, Batch 1, for 4 Provinces (Kampot, Takeo, Kampong Cham, and Tboung Khmum). The construction period is **183 days or 6 months**.
- Procurement will be conducted through National Competitive Bidding Procedures outlined in the Government's Standard Operating Procedures on Procurement for Externally Financed Projects/Programs.
- This invitation is open to all qualified bidders from eligible source countries as including ADB non-member countries as described in the Bidding Document.
- Bidders' attention is drawn to Sub-Clause 6.3 of the Instructions to Bidders (ITB) on the Qualifications requirements. Qualification requirements include:
  - Average Annual Construction Turnover: The average annual volume of construction work over the last 3 years (2018, 2019, and 2020) shall be at least per lot as follows:
    - Lot 1: Kampot province: USD134,337; Lot 2: Takeo province: USD135,597
    - Lot 3: Kampong Cham province: USD138,367; Lot 4: Tboung Khmum province: USD137,713
  - Specific Similar Experience: Experience as prime contractor in the construction of at least two (2) Contract(s) for works of nature and complexity equivalent to the Works with each contract value of at least per lot within the last 5 years as follows:
    - Lot 1: Kampot province: USD67,168; Lot 2: Takeo province: USD67,798
    - Lot 3: Kampong Cham province: USD69,183; Lot 4: Tboung Khmum province: USD68,856
  - Liquid Assets: The minimum amount of liquid assets or working capital or credit facilities of the Bidder per lot shall be as follows:

- Lot 1: Kampot province: USD44,779; Lot 2: Takeo province: USD45,199
- Lot 3: Kampong Cham province: USD46,122; Lot 4: Tboung Khmum province: USD45,904

- To obtain further information from and inspect the Bidding Documents; Bidder should contact the following during office hours from 7:30h to 11:30h and 14:00 to 17:30h Monday to Friday from **11 June 2021 to 12 July 2021**: Name of Contact Officer: **Mr. Sea Visalrath**, Procurement Officer, Project Management Unit, Climate-Friendly Agribusiness Value Chains Sector Project, 5<sup>th</sup> floor, Phka Romduol Building, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), #200, Corners Preah Norodom Blvd., and Mao Tse Toung Blvd., Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Mobile phone: 012778893, Email: svisalrath@gmail.com
- A complete set of Bidding Documents may be purchased by interested bidders on submission of a written application to the address above and upon payment of a non-refundable fee of **50 US Dollars**, or its equivalent in **Cambodian Riel being 200,000**. The method of payment will be by cash. The Bidding Documents will be sent by email in PDF Format or may be collected in person at the discretion of the bidder with bearing any cost occurs. Other than payment of the non-refundable fee, there are no other conditions for the purchase of the bidding documents.
- In case of any difficulty in purchase of the bidding documents, interested parties may contact in writing to Dr. Sam Chhom Sangha, Project Director, CFAVC at #200, corners of Preah Norodom Blvd., and Mao Tse Toung Blvd, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, telephone (855-17) 826 161 and also send a copy of the communication to:
  - Mr. Houl Bonnaro, Director of Department of Multilateral Cooperation (DMC), GDICDM, Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF), Building A, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Street 92, Sangkat Wat Phnom, Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Telephone (855-89) 656 669 and Email: bonnaro\_houl@mef.gov.kh
  - Project Team Leader (Development Partner), Dr. Srinivasan Ancha 23<sup>rd</sup> Floor, The Offices at Central World, 999/9 Rama 1 Road, Pathumwan Bangkok 10330, Thailand, Tel: +66 2 263 5300 Fax +66 2 263 5301 - 02, and Email: asrinivasan@adb.org.
- Bids must be delivered to the address below at or **before 2:30 p.m on 12 July 2021**. **Late bids will be rejected**. Bids will be immediately opened after the deadline for submission of bid in the presence of the bidders' representatives who choose to attend in person at the address below at: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), Project Management Unit (PMU) Office, Climate-Friendly Agribusiness Value Chains Sector Project (CFAVC), 5<sup>th</sup> floor, Phka Romduol Building, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), #200, corners Preah Norodom Blvd., and Mao Tse Toung Blvd., Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Attention: Mr. Sea Visalrath, Procurement Officer, mobile phone: (+855) 12 77 88 93, Email: svisalrath@gmail.com
- All bids shall be accompanied by a Bid Securing Declaration as described in the Instructions to Bidders (ITB).
- The Government and the Asian Development Bank will respectively declare a firm ineligible either indefinitely or for a stated period of time, to be awarded a contract funded by them, if they at any time determines that the firm has engaged in fraud and corruption as described in ITB3.

# SPECIAL REPORT

## With herd immunity likely in 2022, is Cambodia ready to reopen for tourism?

The government aims to inoculate 80 per cent of the target population by June next year, giving it a head start among regional peers to reboot the sector but first, it has to do a few things to up its game

Sangeetha Amarthalingam

**A**SIGN on a glass counter in Phnom Penh's latest Korean cafe and bakery chain Paris Baguette in the plush district of Boeung Keng Kang I or BKK 1, as it is locally known, tells customers that "only fully vaccinated customers can dine-in".

It caught a few by surprise as they were asked by the staff to produce their vaccination cards if they wanted to dine in after ordering their food while some left with their merchandise, assumedly for not possessing such documents.

"Thank goodness my friends and I already got both our doses. We have been planning to go to Paris Baguette for their cakes for some time now," said a 26-year-old marketing executive, who declined to be named.

The high-ceilinged outlet known for their pastries was packed with young people and office workers. "I imagine they must have all received their vaccines," she added, scanning the room.

Attempts to contact a top executive of the business proved futile.

It is not known how many business outlets have adopted the idea of "vaccine passports" in the capital but this might be a precursor for things to come in the near future.

Even in the West, the idea of vaccine passports at outlets is moot as it is seen as discriminatory against those who do not have Covid-19 vaccines for various reasons.

Although, it should be noted that several places in the US, according to *USA Today*, such as universities, are mulling it in a bid to boost vaccination among students.

Closer to home, Clais Chenda, president of Cambodia Hotel Association who was unaware of the sign at the bakery, however thought that "discrimination is not a good tool to boost tourism".

With millions of Covid-19 doses streaming into Cambodia, from China mostly, authorities are saying that herd immunity can be expected by June next year.

As of June 9, 2.3 million people had received both doses under the country's Blossom strategy, its mass vaccination campaign aimed at achieving 80 per cent of the targeted 10

million people. Based on this latest figure, 27.7 per cent of the targeted population have been immunised.

However, 54,312 people have been rejected due to health conditions while there are people who are not keen on the vaccine for reasons known to them.

The issue of vaccine passport has not been discussed in Cambodia but it has been bandied about in Asia with countries like Japan planning to introduce it soon. China implemented it in March.

Regardless, with plans to reopen tourism, starting with Siem Reap, home of the 12th century Angkor Archaeological Park, in the fourth quarter of 2021, vaccine passports might become compulsory by then.

It is a stance that is being taken by most nations as global travel sees an uptick in the second half of this year on the back of increased inoculation, such as in Europe where travel certificate holders or Covid-19 certificates will allow Europeans to move about the continent quarantine-free.

At the base of it though, the question of vaccination and discrimination remains a tricky one, said Hannah Pearson, founding partner of Kuala Lumpur-based Pear Anderson, a bespoke travel consultancy, adding that all countries will "inevitably end up facing it at some point".

"Not 100 per cent of the whole population will ever be vaccinated. There will always be people who are unable to take the vaccine due to medi-



Biding time ... Angkor Wat lies in wait for tourists who are expected in the fourth quarter of this year. HONG MENEHA

cal reasons or even their age group," she said.

Many countries are aiming for that "magical" herd immunity of 80 per cent but even this target might be hard to hit.

"At some point, governments must decide whether they will permit local businesses to legally turn away customers or reject potential employees based on their vaccination status.

"For reopening, although discriminatory, it does make sense to base the requirements on travellers being vaccinated. This adds an extra layer of assurance for Cambodians that the risks are being managed," Pearson said.

### 'State of clinical death'

A year after the collapse of the tourism sector which effected the closure of some 3,000 sector-related outlets and two thirds out of 700,000 jobs lost in the industry, efforts

are being made to revive it, which in itself is a gargantuan task, given that long-standing problems including exorbitant visa fees would have to be fixed first.

"Tourism business is in a state of clinical death with the pandemic dragging on far too long. There are no tourists, no business and no money," said Chenda.

The three-phased tourism roadmap (2021-2025) released early this year holds some answers to plans going forward, although it has been subtly criticised as being a mere "window dressing" with no concrete ideas on what quarantine would be for visitors and how to incentivise tourists and business travellers.

By September, Cambodia would start allowing vaccinated visitors on packaged tours only, which means independent travellers would be barred for the moment.

The concern here is that although tour operators would be able to design reasonably-priced packages, the add-on costs could deter tourists, said Chhay Sivlin, president of Cambodia Association of Travel Agents.

Chenda agreed, urging that the government set up a national app that featured hotels, food and beverage outlets, and tour agencies that will help the private sector reduce cost.

"[The added expenditure is because] of the commissions extorted by international online travel agencies ... they are too high," she said.

### 'Remove Covid-19 deposit'

In the same vein, industry players argue that quarantine and upon-arrival deposit of \$2,000 to cover expenses including the Covid-19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, food and accommodation, are troublesome.

The deposit has been allegedly criticised for its inconvenience, as travellers are only allowed to pay using cash and not credit or debit cards.

Added to that are the overwhelming complaints that the sum paid failed to commensurate with the standard of food and accommodation at hotels that acted as quarantine centers.

"We are worried that no guests would visit Cambodia because of the quarantine and deposit. We have requested the government to replace the quarantine process with a managed tour package that includes rapid testing.

"We also asked for the removal of the deposit and make insurance compulsory [which can] cover Covid-19 treatments," Chenda said.

The plea to the government is palpable, seeing that this

key economic sector suffered a huge loss in tourism revenue in 2020, recording only \$1 billion as the number of international tourists plunged 80 per cent to 1.3 million people.

A lot more would have to be done to heave this sector back to life, among them the reduction of visa fees of \$30 per visitor, which has been a point of contention for some years now as it is comparatively higher than other countries, impeding competitiveness.

This does not include the \$25 airport tax paid to French-owned Vinci Airports SAS' majority-owned Cambodia Airports, where \$5 is passed on to the government.

Based on international arrivals of 6.6 million in the years preceding 2020, a back-of-the-envelope calculation would show that nearly \$200 million was collected annually by the government in visa fees while airport tax would have raised the state coffers by about \$33 million.

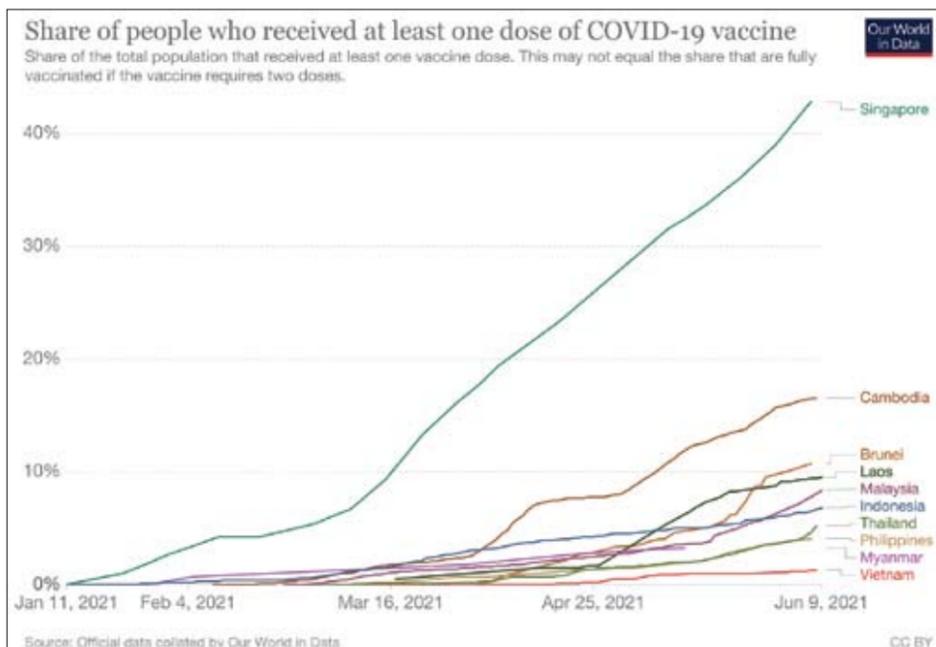
"Visas should be made free for a limited period to boost arrivals and entrance fees to temples should be reduced," Chenda prompted, while seeking a waiver of the value-added tax or "at least lowering it to five per cent" from 10 per cent currently.

Sok Sangvar, Ministry of Tourism undersecretary of state, could not be reached for comments despite several attempts to contact him.

### Provide guarantee

In 2019, the tourism sector represented 18.7 per cent of gross domestic product and nearly \$5 billion in tourist receipts, making it the second largest revenue contributor in Cambodia after the real estate and construction sector.

The continued surge in cases



Cambodia ranks second after Singapore in the tally of doses administered on the population.

on the heels of the latest wave echoed the situation in most of the regional countries, which meant that borders would stay shut for a while longer, although the occasional traveller have made their way into Cambodia for business and leisure.

For instance, the first quarter of 2021 clocked 70,901 international arrivals, albeit down 94 per cent year-on-year. Slightly more than half entered the country via land and waterways and the rest by air.

The highest number of arrivals in the first quarter was Thai nationals at 35,294 people, followed by 23,837 Chinese citizens and 3,562 Vietnamese.

The Cambodian airway was also kept open although only 18 airlines comprising five local firms, seven China-based companies, as well as Taiwanese (two), Korean (two) and Singaporean (two) airlines plied the air routes in Asia.

On the back of this, industry players continue to bleed with diminished cash flow, Chenda rued which was why they urged the government to help guarantee their loans with banks, seeing that many did not have sufficient collaterals.

She also hoped that banks would accept property as collateral in the provinces, something they have refused to do as it is "too far" from Phnom Penh.

In the meantime, the government has been asked to continue providing the \$40 salary support to all tourism staff in the country and "not just those in seven provinces".

A list of their pleas was shared with the Ministry of Tourism on May 31, she said, adding that hotels were ready to reduce their room rates by 20 to 50 per cent in time for the reopening.

**Neighbours' mistakes**

Cambodia's plan to reopen travel to Siem Reap – its crown jewel – falls in line with similar strategies taken by Thailand and Indonesia to start allowing visitors into their world renowned destinations - Phuket and Bali.

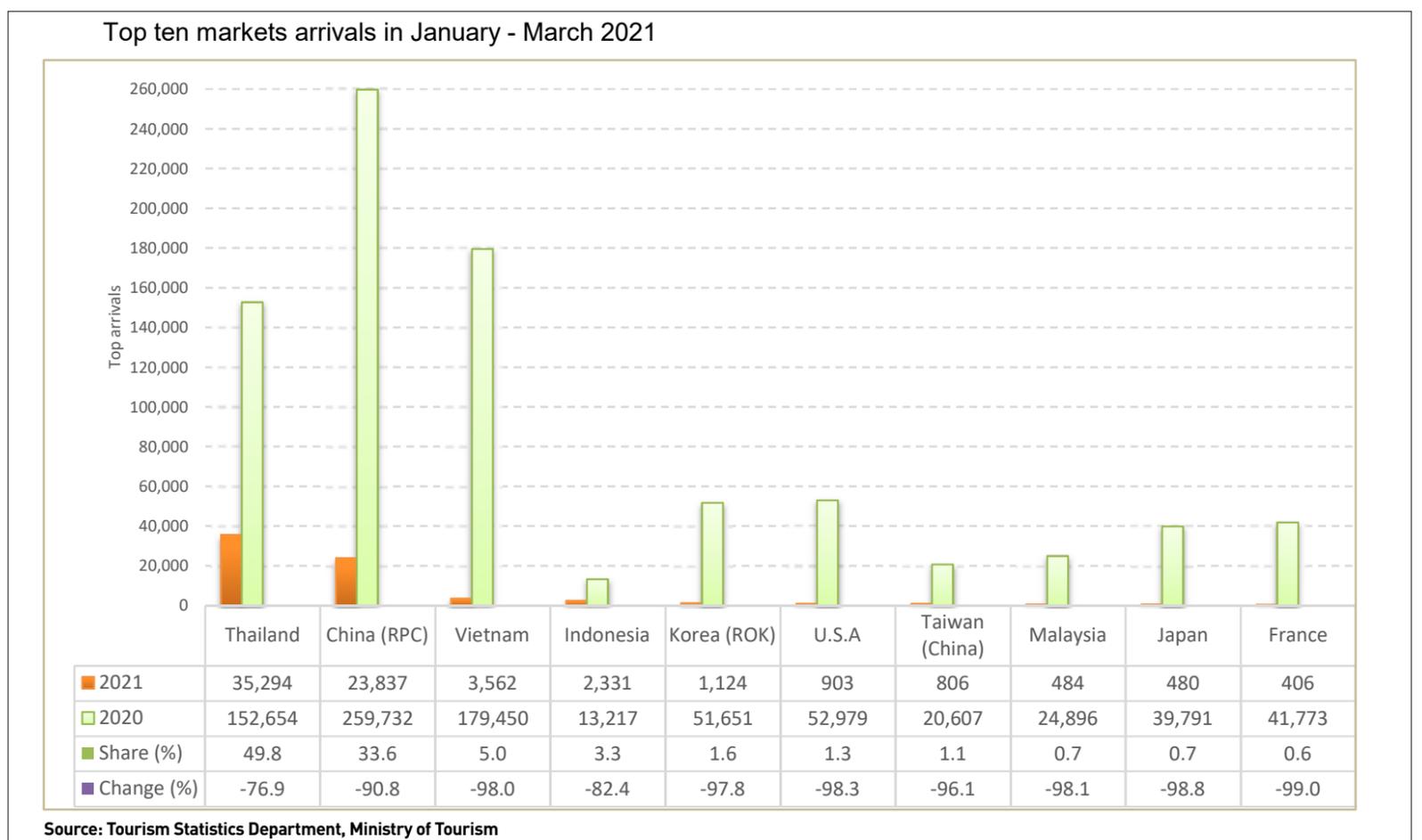
But as Covid-19 cases rise and fall, Thailand and Indonesia have had to revise their reopening dates as well as devise new safety measures that will keep both visitors and locals secure.

It resonated with the fallout in travel bubble arrangements between Singapore and Hong Kong as well as New Zealand and Australia due to the evolving infection rate in the countries earlier this year.

Nevertheless, talks of travel bubbles have resurfaced between Singapore, Australia, Taiwan and South Korea, notwithstanding the changing landscape.

Similarly, Siem Reap where the spread was fairly subdued up to two months ago has now seen an uptick with cases standing at 298 and two deaths as of June 10, but still way lower than Preah Sihanouk and Kampot, two coastal provinces that have a draw on tourists.

While a lockdown and curfew were inevitable, and have since been lifted but with a few red zones remaining, provincial authorities are vigilant, pending a successful nation-



Source: Tourism Statistics Department, Ministry of Tourism

wide vaccination.

This sets Cambodia apart from other ASEAN nations as its inoculation programme surges past them, only second to Singapore, giving it a head start in welcoming international visitors.

Pearson concurred, saying that while Covid-19 has been a leveller for destinations within Southeast Asia, in the short-term it "may well be that whichever country manages to both vaccinate a significant part of its population and reopen internationally, will win the majority of the inbound market to the region".

As it stands currently, Cambodia is well-placed to do this, she observed.

In a recent travel advisory by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Kingdom was identified as having moderate risk, suggesting that travellers fully vaccinate before travelling to Cambodia.

"The country earned itself an excellent reputation in 2020 for being one which has handled the Covid-19 crisis well, and it has accelerated the vaccination rollout much faster than many people, myself included, would have expected.

"Its smaller population compared to other Southeast Asian countries is an advantage - it means that procuring the vaccination supply and then administering the vaccines is easier than in countries such as Indonesia," she said.

However, Cambodia needs to be bold, should it choose to reopen its borders to international vaccinated travellers.

Pearson said the Ministry of Tourism needs to start defining procedures, and communicating clearly and repeatedly to both local tourism stakeholders and the international markets about what they should expect when it comes to reopening.

Over the last few months, she cited that news headlines were dominated by Thailand's Phuket Sandbox plan and Bali's Travel Corri-

dor Arrangement in July.

"Yet with just weeks to go, some parts of the framework for the Phuket Sandbox remain unclear, and Bali has yet to announce a firm date for reopening, or details of whether travellers need to undergo quarantine and testing.

"Cambodia can learn from their mistakes, and if it does choose to announce a reopening plan, the finer details should be as finalised as possible, to create a strong message that Cambodia is serious in its plans," Pearson remarked.

Meanwhile, Gary Bowerman, director of Check-in Asia Hotels and Travel, a content, marketing and trends research company, found that reopening to travel at the present moment in Asia Pacific is an "extremely complicated" process even to fully vaccinated travellers.

He said while Thailand and Indonesia are discovering a full range of challenges, and "more expected" once they actually reopen, it would serve Cambodia well to "wait and watch closely" how the two countries fare in the initial stages and over the next few months.

"This is an unprecedented process, and there are myriad considerations for governments, tourism authorities and travel industry players, as well as travellers themselves.

"In particular, there will be supply excess and demand shortfall challenges and gov-

ernments must also ensure the safety and freedom of residents and domestic travellers," Bowerman added.

**Travel bubbles?**

While travel bubbles are back on the cards, they still give out an element of uncertainty as Southeast Asia countries encounter ever-changing Covid-19 landscapes.

In Cambodia, talks have been underway since last year to launch travel bubbles with ASEAN member states as well as China, Japan and South Korea.

But Pearson felt that travel bubbles are "not at all easy" to get off the ground, citing the Hong Kong-Singapore air travel bubble which had its start date postponed twice, despite both countries having a good level of control over the virus and strict preventive measures in place.

"Cambodia's tourism roadmap focused on reopening to the ASEAN and ASEAN+3 markets, including China, with travel bubbles and charter flights.

"However, we've seen the borders in ASEAN remain tightly shut, and China has given no indication that reopening could happen in 2021," she said.

Instead, Cambodia might be better off considering opening the borders to vaccinated travellers from any low to medium risk country, as this enabled flexibility and avoided the risk of a travel bubble

partner suddenly experiencing a virus resurgence.

"... [and] all of your inbound travellers disappearing overnight. However, if you have multiple source markets, then you are less vulnerable," she noted.

That being said, work is needed to strengthen international air connectivity, and choices must be made between flying into Siem Reap or Phnom Penh, although, she pointed out, airlines are as keen as governments to fill airplanes.

"With the announcement of the July 1 reopening of Phuket, we saw airlines quickly add new routes to Phuket, such as El Al Israel Airlines, British Airways, Qatar Airways and Emirates.

"I imagine that if Cambodia announced that it would reopen, we would see a similar level of airline interest," she said.

**Local tourism safest bet now**

For the majority of 2021, and even into the first half of 2022, Pearson rendered that the focus for Cambodia should be on developing the domestic tourism market, as this is going to be the major source of revenue for local tourism businesses.

"Cambodia's tourism roadmap touches on domestic tourism, but there needs to be a robust strategy on how to keep it stimulated throughout the year.

"This should include mechanisms such as domestic tourism stimulus packages, supporting

local tourism stakeholders to create new tourism products which are aimed at the domestic market, and potentially even adding extra public holidays, for example to compensate for the Khmer New Year which was essentially a washout in 2021, thanks to the February 20 incident," she said.

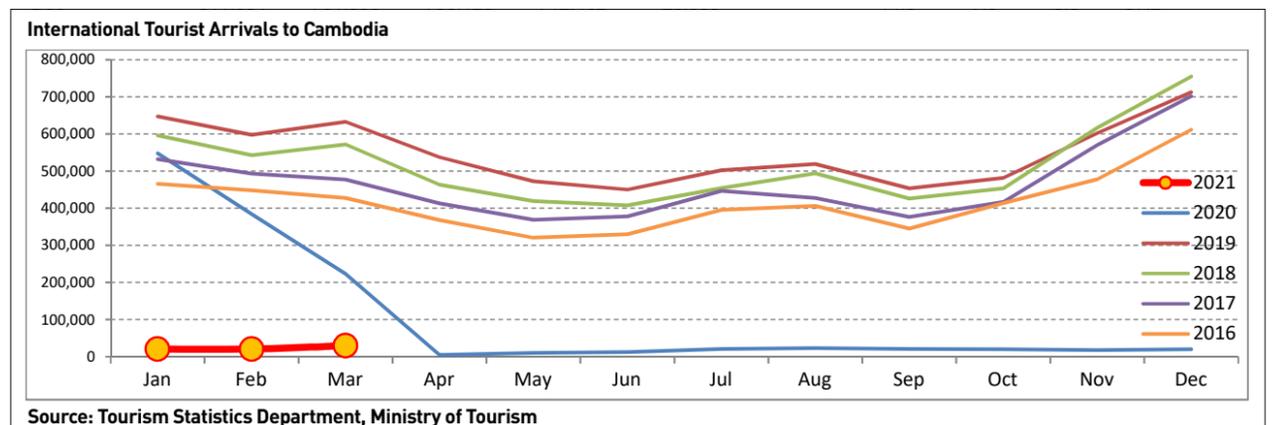
However, she noted that the key challenge for the domestic tourism sector is that local tourists do not have the spending power of international tourists, and travel differently, for example, taking road trips rather than buses or flying.

"[Therefore] attention needs to be paid to which sectors traditionally do not benefit from domestic tourism, [such as] airlines, and then working on stimulus packages and promotions to ensure that these sectors become more attractive," she shared.

This circles back to vaccine passports, which Bowerman opined might not be a big issue in Southeast Asia over the coming months.

"If it helps people feel safe and secure when they go to venues knowing that those who are around are going to be vaccinated. It could be an incentive to be vaccinated and also go out to spend money.

"There are so many overlays here but decidedly, vaccination as the be all and end all is kind of the point where we are at right now," he said. ■



Source: Tourism Statistics Department, Ministry of Tourism

# POST FOCUS

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ART



Minister of Foreign Affairs Prak Sokhonn and German Ambassador Christian Berger unveil a mural in 2019. SUPPLIED



Portraits of Ludwig van Beethoven and Ros Sereysothea now also adorn the German Embassy. SUPPLIED

## State of the arts: Cambodia's street scene going from strength to strength

STREET art in Cambodia continues to gain recognition with the latest mural on the wall of the German Embassy in Phnom Penh among the newest additions to the capital's artistic landscape.

Commissioned to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the birth of Ludwig van Beethoven and created by renowned Kingdom-based artist Chifumi – founder of the Cambodian Urban Art Festival – the legendary German classical composer is portrayed alongside “Golden Age” singer Ros Sereysothea.

It is the second wall at the embassy to receive the street art treatment after German artist Danilo Halle and Cambodia's Hour Soben worked together to create a unique mural on the embassy's main gate in 2019.

“As part of the German Embassy's ongoing mission of supporting, promoting and celebrating Cambodian and German culture, we are delighted to present the second of our embassy wall murals featuring musical legends Ros Sereysothea and Ludwig van Beethoven.

“In partnership with Gallery KB (KBach) and artist Chifumi, this follows the embassy's first wall mural created in 2019 as part of an artist residency between Cambodian and German artists Hour Soben and Danilo Halle.

“We believe strongly in the benefits of creativity and the arts, and hope to continue to support such projects in the future,” said German Ambassador to Cambodia Christian Berger.

A sign of street art's acceptance in the mainstream,

Minister of Foreign Affairs Prak Sokhonn and Ambassador Berger jointly unveiled the first mural on the embassy's main gate to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989

The benefits of street art – in terms of society involvement, aesthetic beautification of a city and increased tourism – that have been seen worldwide are now increasingly visible on the



We believe strongly in the benefits of creativity and the arts, and hope to continue to support such projects in the future

CHRISTIAN BERGER / GERMAN AMBASSADOR TO CAMBODIA



A local artist paints one of her favourite characters this week. SUPPLIED

Kingdom's streets as demonstrated with the latest public artwork at the German Embassy.

And for Sereysothea to be now portrayed in a public mural is perhaps symbolic of a rebirth of a Cambodian artistic scene not witnessed since the heydays of the 1960s, says Tony Francis, the founder of Gallery KB.

“The renaissance we have been witnessing in Cambodia is down to a number of factors, including the ‘Kbach style’ championed by the collective of companies now rebranded as Gallery KB (KBach).

“Art residencies have played a vital role in the success and acceptance of the artworks, with established international artists collaborating with Cambodian artists to produce murals in the ‘Kbach style’, which fuses the very best elements of the Kingdom's rich artistic culture with international styles and influences.

“KBach has over the past four years created galleries, competitions, residencies, the Artspace@Factory and numerous other projects including the



Stinkfish's famous Kathmandu Girl mural. SUPPLIED

Kingdom's most ambitious arts and culture project soon to be launched at Royal Train Square – the exciting redevelopment of Phnom Penh's iconic railway station – which is home to and under curation by Gallery KB,” Francis said.

The roots of Cambodia's blooming street art scene took hold more than a decade ago, when a group of international artists used a neglected corner

of Phnom Penh as a vibrant canvas, with Stinkfish's famous Kathmandu Girl mural stemming from this time.

With the world famous Seth adding a Cambodian element and local artists Lisa Mam and Peap Tarr brought to the mix, the embers were lit, before Chifumi and Theo Vallier helped evolve the “KBach style” and drive it forward with the Cambodian Urban Art Festival.

And Francis is confident that as the capital continues to develop apace, the Cambodian urban art scene is positioned for only increased growth and further global recognition.

“Artists such as Colombia's Stinkfish – a judge at this year's KBach Arts Competition – Poland's Sepe, Halle and a number of others have and will continue to visit and work with local Cambodian artists enabling more collaborations.

“The successful arrival of world class products in terms of art supplies via Dots MTN has also helped facilitate the interest and growth of the scene. The arrival of international creative brands and their ability to attract further world class artists bodes well for the future growth, quality and awareness of the Cambodian arts scene.

“This has led to a new generation of grassroots artists being inspired to express their creativity across the city. Supported by four years of increasing opportunities such as the KBach Arts Competition, now in partnership with Cellcard, a number of new Cambodian artists have emerged believing in the present opportunities available to become professional,” he said.

A situation demonstrated by the image bottom left of a young local artist this week creating a tribute to one of her favourite characters, a popular image with the new generation in the Kingdom.

The finale of the 2020-21 KBach Arts Competition will be held in July as part of the opening of Royal Train Square, with the winners in the three categories of canvas, street art and digital to be announced. ■



Cambodia's street art scene began taking off more than a decade ago. POST STAFF

## World

## Child labour 'up for first time in two decades'

**T**HE world has marked the first rise in child labour in two decades and the coronavirus crisis threatens to push millions more youngsters toward the same fate, the UN said on June 10.

In a joint report, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the UN children's agency UNICEF said the number in child labour stood at 160 million at the start of 2020 – an increase of 8.4 million in four years.

The hike began before the pandemic hit and marks a dramatic reversal of a downward trend that had seen child labour numbers shrink by 94 million between year 2000 and 2016, it said.

Just as the Covid-19 crisis was beginning to pick up steam, nearly one in 10 children globally were stuck in child labour, with sub-Saharan Africa the worst affected.

While the percentage of children in child labour remained the same as in 2016, population growth meant that the numbers rose significantly.

And the pandemic risks worsening the situation significantly, the agencies said.

They warned that unless urgent action is taken to help ballooning numbers of families plunging into poverty, nearly 50 million more kids could be forced into child labour over the next two years.

"We are losing ground in the fight to end child labour," UNICEF chief Henrietta Fore told reporters, stressing that "the Covid-19 crisis is making a bad situation even worse".

"Now, well into a second year of global lockdowns, school closures, economic disruptions, and shrinking national budgets, families are forced to make heart-breaking choices."



UNICEF says the number in child labour stood at 160 million at the start of 2020 – an increase of 8.4 million in four years. AFP

If the latest projections of poverty increases due to the pandemic materialise, another nine million children will be pushed into child labour by the end of 2022, the report said.

But statistic modelling shows that number could potentially be more than five times higher, according to UNICEF statistics specialist Claudia Cappa, who co-authored the report.

"If social protection coverage slips from the current levels ... as a result of austerity measures and other factors, the number of children falling into child labour can go up [an addi-

tional] 46 million" by the end of next year, she told AFP.

The report, which is published every four years, showed that children aged between five and 11 accounted for over half of the global figure.

Boys were significantly more likely to be affected, accounting for 97 of the 160 million children toiling in child labour at the start of 2020.

But the gender gap narrows by half when household chores performed for at least 21 hours per week are counted, the report said.

Particularly concerning, perhaps,

was the significant increase seen in children between the ages of five and 17 who are doing so-called hazardous work, which is deemed to affect a child's development, education or health.

This can include toiling in dangerous industries, like mining or with heavy machinery, and working for more than 43 hours a week, which makes schooling next to impossible.

A full 79 million children were considered to be doing such hazardous work at the start of 2020, up 6.5 million from four years earlier,

the report showed.

The study revealed that most child labour is concentrated in the agriculture sector, which accounts for 70 per cent of the global total, or 112 million children.

Some 20 per cent of child labour meanwhile happens in the service sector and around 10 per cent in industry, it found.

The greatest increase in child labour was seen in sub-Saharan Africa, where population growth, recurrent crises, extreme poverty and inadequate social protection measures pushed an additional 16.6 million children into child labour since 2016, the report found.

Nearly a quarter of children aged five to 17 years old in sub-Saharan Africa are already in child labour, compared to 2.3 per cent in Europe and North America.

The UN agencies warned that additional economic shocks and school closures caused by the Covid crisis meant that children already in child labour may be working longer hours and under worsening conditions.

And many more risk being forced into the worst forms of child labour due to job and income losses among vulnerable families, the report said.

"The new estimates are a wake-up call," ILO chief Guy Ryder said in a statement.

"We cannot stand by while a new generation of children is put at risk," he said, stressing that "we are at a pivotal moment and much depends on how we respond."

"This is a time for renewed commitment and energy to turn the corner and break the cycle of poverty and child labour." AFP

## US set to buy 500M doses for world: Biden

THE US is set to buy 500 million Covid-19 vaccine doses to distribute around the world, media reported on June 9, as France and Belgium relaxed virus restrictions to allow restaurants and cafes to serve indoors.

*The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, citing people familiar with the matter, said President Joe Biden was due to formally announce the huge donation of Pfizer-BioNTech doses at a Group of Seven (G7) meeting in Britain this week.

The move comes as the US faces pressure to do more about the global vaccine shortage, with rich countries having bought up the lion's share of early supplies.

With the global death toll at more than 3.7 million, many nations are still struggling to contain outbreaks.

Rapid vaccine rollouts in wealthier parts of the world, however, including the US and Europe, are allowing the return of activities unthinkable just a few months ago.

In France, that included sipping a drink inside a cafe, allowed on June 9 for the first time in months. With the easing of the curfew in the country, venues are not only opening up inside, they're open later outdoors too – an extra two hours to 11:00 pm.



Elephants at a reserve in southern India have been tested for Covid-19 after a lion died of the virus. SUPPLIED/AFP

Belgium also relaxed restrictions, allowing cafes and restaurants to serve indoors, while mask-wearing rules were eased in Brussels.

Europe is continuing to see infection spikes in some places – Portugal, for instance, delayed Lisbon's post-lockdown reopening on June 9.

But the bloc's accelerating vaccination campaign has fuelled hopes of a return to normality. Almost half of all adults in the EU have received at least one shot, with almost 26 per cent fully vaccinated.

Optimism in Europe and the

US, however, are still tempered by the outlook for billions of the world's poor still with no sign of a vaccine in sight.

In what is believed to be the first known death of an animal in India from the coronavirus, a nine-year-old lioness at Vandalur Zoo in Chennai in Tamil Nadu state passed away early this month, local media reported.

The feline was among nine lions that had tested positive for the virus, including two who were in critical condition, Chennai's *The New Indian Express* newspaper reported last week.

This prompted forest rang-

ers at Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in the south of Tamil Nadu to test 28 elephants, including two calves, for the virus on June 8 as a precautionary measure. The nasal and anal samples from the pachyderms were sent to Indian Veterinary Research Institute in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, with results expected to arrive in a week.

And while India is showing some signs of turning the tide against its brutal epidemic, that's come at a cost to the neighbours it was previously supplying with vaccines. They're now turning to Russia and Beijing for help with supplies.

Nepal, where barely two per cent of the population are fully vaccinated, resumed shots on June 8 after a million more Sinopharm doses arrived from China, the only country so far to respond to its appeals for help.

Sri Lanka has also been aggressively rolling out China's Sinopharm jab after receiving two million doses in the past week, opening its programme to pregnant women on June 9.

In a further sign that the fight against the pandemic is far from over, Russia on June 9 warned of a spike in new cases that would force it to reopen moth-

## S Korea building collapse crushes bus, killing nine

AT LEAST nine people were killed when a five-storey building being demolished in South Korea suddenly collapsed, crushing a bus, officials said.

Dramatic television footage showed the bus being buried in debris and smothered by a huge cloud of dust as the structure gave way.

The bus, which had stopped in front of the site, was carrying 17 people when the accident occurred on June 9 in the city of Gwangju, southwest of Seoul.

Nine of the passengers were

killed and the remaining eight were all seriously injured, according to the National Fire Agency.

All the workers on the demolition site had been evacuated before the collapse, they added.

The cause of the accident was not immediately clear. Police have launched a probe into the case, authorities said.

The largest peacetime disaster in South Korea involved the collapse of a department store in 1995, when more than 500 people were killed. AFP



South Korean rescue workers search for survivors in the debris of a collapsed building in Gwangju. YONHAP NEWS AGENCY

## ASEAN

# UN warns of mass Myanmar starvation risk

**T**HE UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar has warned of "mass deaths" from starvation and disease in the wake of fighting between rebel groups and junta forces in the east of the coup-stricken country.

Myanmar has been in chaos and its economy paralysed since the February putsch and a brutal military crackdown on dissent that has killed over 800, according to a local monitoring group.

Fighting has flared in several communities – especially in townships that have seen a high death toll at the hands of police – and some locals have formed "defence forces".

Clashes have escalated in Kayah state near the Thai border in recent weeks.

Locals have accused the military of firing artillery shells that have landed near villages and the UN estimates around 100,000 people have been displaced.

"The junta's brutal, indiscriminate attacks are threatening the lives of many thousands of men, women and children in Kayah state", Tom Andrews said in a statement posted on Twitter on June 8.

"Let me be blunt. Mass deaths from starvation, disease, and exposure, on a scale we have not yet seen ... could occur in Kayah state absent immedi-

ate action."

AFP images from Kayah state have shown villagers manufacturing guns in makeshift factories as local defence groups go up against Myanmar's battle-hardened military.

Diplomatic efforts to halt the bloodshed have been led by ASEAN – of which Myanmar is a member – but the bloc is riven with infighting and has managed to put little pressure on the junta.

An emergency summit in April produced a "five-point consensus" statement that called for an immediate halt to violence and a visit to Myanmar by a special envoy.

But a special envoy has yet to be appointed, and violence has continued across the country.

China – which enjoys exceptional leverage over Myanmar – has also been unwilling to condemn the junta and has refused to label its power-grab a coup.

Its foreign minister Wang Yi on June 8 said Beijing's policy towards its neighbour "is not affected by changes to Myanmar's domestic and external situation".

"China has supported, is supporting and will support Myanmar in choosing a development path that suits its own circumstances," Wang said at a meeting with junta-appointed foreign minister U Wunna Maung Lwin in Chongqing. AFP



Myanmar has been in chaos and its economy paralysed since the February putsch and a brutal military crackdown on dissent. AFP

## HCMC quarantine zones face risk of being overloaded

AS THE number of Covid-19 cases in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) has increased in recent days, concentrated quarantine centres are at risk of being overwhelmed.

According to the municipal Centre for Diseases Control and Prevention (HCDC), more than 21,400 people are cur-

rently in some form of quarantine in Vietnam's most populous city.

Of the figure, 7,770 are in concentrated quarantine areas, with the rest at home or special accommodations.

If F1 cases later test positive, then the F2 cases must be isolated in concentrated quaran-

tine areas.

HCMC plans to build a new field hospital with 1,000 beds at Phu Th Stadium in District 11 if the number of Covid-19 infections exceeds 1,000.

Health workers, beds and medical equipment will be prepared for the field hospital.

Earlier, the municipal department issued a Covid-19 response plan for treatment, with three scenarios – fewer than 100 cases, 100-1,000 cases and 1,000-5,000 cases.

The establishment of the field hospital is part of the southern Vietnamese city's preparation for the worst-case scenario.

The city's health department is also planning to set up other field hospitals at the Saigon Exhibition & Convention Centre in District 7, and culture and sports centres in city districts, with a total capacity of up to

5,000 beds and 1,000 ventilators.

Tan Phu district is considering using district cultural houses, children's houses, and political training centres as quarantine zones.

The city has five hospitals for Covid-19 treatment, Cho Ray, Cu Chi Field Hospital, HCMC Children's Hospital, the Hospital for Tropical Diseases and Can Gio Covid-19 Treatment Hospital, with a total of more than 970 beds and 42 ventilators.

The city has also requested military units to use military areas as concentrated quarantine sites to respond promptly if the city has more than 3,000 cases.

Go Vap District Health Centre director Nguyen Trung Hoa said the district continued to promote screening, focusing on high-risk places, testing in

quarantined areas, so F1 cases could increase. The health centre has set up an 80-bed quarantine area located at the Go Vap District Political Training Centre, but in the long run, it needed to increase its capacity.

Binh Thanh district has recorded the second highest number of infections in the city in this outbreak with 49 cases. The district's quarantine area has 585 beds but it is forecast that the F1 cases will increase, putting pressure on the existing quarantine area. The district has used schools in the area to set up quarantine centres with a capacity of 200-300 beds, said Dinh Khac Huy, chairman of the district people's committee.

To solve the problem of overloading quarantine areas in districts, HCMC People's Committee deputy chairman Duong

Anh Duc has agreed to allow localities to set up quarantine centres in local hotels.

Duc asked the municipal Department of Health to provide urgent instructions for districts about this task.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade has announced it will reduce electricity prices and power bills for customers from June to December following the government's approval.

Tourist accommodation establishments will also receive a price discount on electricity bills.

The concentrated quarantine areas and places for medical examination of Covid-19 patients will receive a 100 per cent discount off the retail electricity price. Medical facilities used for Covid-19 examinations, tests and treatment will receive a 20 per cent discount.

VIET NAM NEWS/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) plans to set up a new field hospital with 1,000 beds at Phu Tho Stadium in District 11 if the number of Covid-19 infections reaches over 1,000. SUPPLIED/VIET NAM NEWS

## Thailand private firms can buy Covid-19 jobs

LOCAL and private organisations in Thailand have been allowed to procure Covid-19 vaccines, according to a Centre for Covid-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) announcement published in the Royal Gazette on June 8.

The move aims to ensure that at least 70 per cent, or 50 million people nationwide, will be vaccinated in a bid to create herd immunity.

Under Covid-19 vaccine management guidelines, local and private organisations can procure vaccines from government agencies such as the Department of Disease Con-

trol, the Government Pharmaceutical Organisation, the National Vaccine Institute, the Thai Red Cross Society and the Chulabhorn Royal Academy.

However, the procurement must be in line with laws and guidelines issued by the CCSA, the prime minister, provincial governors or provincial communicable disease committees.

Meanwhile, both government and private agencies are required to cooperate on data sharing via the Mor Phrom (Doctors Ready) application to "ensure people's safety and data management efficacy". THE NATION (THAILAND)/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

## LSD kills over 100 bovines in Laos

AT LEAST 100 cattle and buffaloes have died from lumpy skin disease (LSD) in 126 villages in seven Lao provinces, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's Department of Livestock and Fisheries.

LSD is a viral infection that affects cattle but cannot be transmitted to humans. It is transmitted by direct contact, such as by eating contaminated food, proximity to a herd, and by contact with an infected animal.

More than 11,000 cattle and buffaloes have contracted the disease in Laos, of which at least 100 animals have died and more than 8,000 have been treated.

The provinces with the highest number of infected livestock are Khammuan with 5,100, of which about 3,000 animals have been treated and at least 60 have died, followed by Savannakhet with nearly 4,000 sick animals of which 3,000 have

been treated and 60 have died.

In Vientiane, more than 2,000 cattle have been infected, of which 12 have died and at least 1,000 have recovered.

Department director Vilaiphone Voraphim said the virus is also indirectly transmitted by blood-sucking beetles and mosquitoes.

Outbreaks of the disease have been reported since mid-April.

The department has issued instructions on preventing the spread of the disease in non-infected areas and advice on how to care for livestock in infected areas.

A temporary ban on the import, export and transit of cattle and buffaloes between countries, provinces, districts and villages has been imposed for a period of 30 days and essential medicines have been supplied to affected areas.

A vaccine for the disease is only avail-

able in other countries, such as Russia and those in Africa, which the department will try to procure although it is expensive. In the absence of vaccine, livestock farmers must take care of their cattle and buffaloes and follow the instructions of local authorities to prevent the disease from infecting their animals.

For example, groups of cattle feeding together should be monitored and blood-sucking beetles prevented from biting cattle as this can spread the disease. To prevent uninfected herds from falling ill, control is necessary, but getting rid of blood-feeding insects through the use of insecticides should be done with caution.

LSD was detected in Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe last year and also in neighbouring countries, including Cambodia, earlier this year. VIENTIANE TIMES/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

# Kingdom not interested in taking sides

## Opinion

Thong Mengdavid

**T**HE visit of the US' second-ranking diplomat to Cambodia last week is prompting Cambodia to think about being "pushed to the wall" and forced to choose sides between the world's two competing superpowers – China and the US.

It must be clear that Cambodia is not interested in taking sides. So pressuring Cambodia to choose sides will likely backfire. Navigating through the intensifying US-China rivalry, of course, is the top challenge for Cambodian policy makers.

In the two-hour meeting between US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy R Sherman and Prime Minister Hun Sen in Phnom Penh on June 1, Sherman used words that Cambodia considers as "threatening" or "bullying".

"She used diplomatic language, but the content of the message was an open threat," a senior government official said later. He added: "We are now very near to the position that we always wanted to avoid, that is, to have to choose a side." According to the official, Cambodia is exhausted by continued US allegations over China's military presence in the country's coastal province of Preah Sihanouk, a popular town among Chinese businesses and development.

In the meeting, Sherman "expressed serious concerns about the PRC's [People's Republic of China] military presence and construction of facilities at Ream Naval Base on the Gulf of Thailand. She sought clarification on the demolition of the two US-funded buildings at Ream without notification or explanation and observed that a PRC military base in Cambodia would undermine Cambodia's sovereignty, threaten regional security, and negatively impact US-Cambodia relations".

Sherman, meanwhile, urged Cambodia to maintain an "independent and balanced foreign policy, in the best interests of the Cambodian people". The statements and behaviour are largely viewed as "hot offensive", not "charm offensive" at all.

During the meeting with Sherman, Prime Minister Hun Sen rejected an accusation of a "secret agreement" between Cambodia and China concerning the Ream Naval Base, and he even "asked the US side to show him that 'secret agreement', a request to which Sherman responded: "We don't have it, but we have seen it."

Regarding Sherman's claim that there was no notification or explanation about the demolition of the two US-funded buildings at Ream, Cambodia did inform the US military



Prime Minister Hun Sen greets US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy R Sherman at the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh on June 1. INFORMATION MINISTRY

attaché in July 2019 about the relocation of the National Committee for Maritime Security Tactical HQ to allow infrastructure development and security enhancement.

Among the reasons behind the decision, the official said the site was too small, limited in capacity for multi-agency operations, had no docking facilities, limited for further expansion and presented difficulties for non-military personnel to work in that particular restricted area.

Carefully analysing the statements by Sherman, it is clear that the US does not believe the explanations Cambodia has made regarding the Ream Naval Base. And it is quite certain that the US won't believe any future explanations either, even as Cambodia allows the US defence attaché to visit the naval base.

Some Cambodian analysts argue that the US has applied "strategic narrative trap" to gain advantage on Cambodia with regard to the "alleged" Chinese military bases in Cambodia. The US will likely continue to put pressures on Cambodia and develop coordinated regional measures to deter China from unilaterally changing the status quo and challenging the US supremacy in the region.

The US is likely ready to sanction Cambodia on the basis of "her accusations" based on "her" information, no matter what the true situation is.

Cambodia again becomes the victim of the strategic narrative trap of a superpower. It needs to remember that the US lied to the whole world about weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq to get rid of Saddam Hussein. They also could lie again to punish Cambodia for being too close to China.

Cambodia has been trying to diversify its strategic and economic partnerships with regional and extra-regional partners, including the US. Cambodia wishes to have good relationship with the US – many examples could be cited, from the offering of prime land for the US embassy in Phnom Penh to humanitarian cooperation on the missing in action and prisoners of war.

US companies in Cambodia have done very well. And more US firms are interested in investing in this emerging market. Hopefully, the US business community can lobby the US government to have a more accurate and objective perspective in its engagement with Cambodia based on realistic point of views and evidences.

The relationship between the two countries depends on both sides. It needs two to tango. But the state of relationship between a big country and a small country depends more on the big, the strong – in the US-Cambodia case, it is on the strong. Cambodia, with limited resources and capac-

ity, does not have sufficient leverage to change the perspective and behaviour of the US in its favour. Cambodia has been on the defensive modus operandi.

On transparency regarding Cambodia's readiness to allow fact-finding over the alleged Chinese military presence, Cambodia has already presented facts and offered visits to military compounds – a gesture that should be applauded because generally no sovereign country would allow such a visit as this is a matter of national security. Perhaps it would be a wishful thinking that the US will be convinced after the visit. Regardless, this is the political will of the Cambodian side to promote trust and confidence building measures with the U.S.

The US needs to have a different view on Cambodia's foreign policy. The Kingdom's principles of independence, non-alignment and neutrality have been firmly adhered to. Hedging and diversification have been cautiously implemented. If the US wishes to help Cambodia maintain independence and sovereignty, it should offer this small country with strategic space to manoeuvre and economic opportunities to develop. ■

The writer is research fellow at Mekong Centre for Strategic Studies (MCSS) of Asian Vision Institute (AVI). The views expressed are his own.

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**POST MEDIA**  
**HEAD OFFICE**  
 Post Media Co., Ltd.  
 The Elements Condominium Level 7,  
**Hun Sen Boulevard**, Phum Prek Talong,  
 Sangkat Chak Angre Krom, 12353, Phnom  
 Penh, Cambodia  
 Tel: 023 888 161, 023 888 162  
 Cellcard: 078 555 166, 078 555 133  
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**SIEM REAP**  
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 advertising@phnompenhpost.com  
 subscription@phnompenhpost.com  
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# Lifestyle

## Global online fame for Cuban hip-hop crew

**I**N THE country of salsa and rumba, a troupe of sneaker-wearing Cuban youngsters have burst onto the dance scene with a style until recently all but unheard of on the isolated island nation: hip hop.

Under US sanctions and with the Communist Party in charge of all aspects of daily life, including what people get to see on public television, Cubans have had little exposure to the American genre that has taken the rest of the world by storm.

But this changed suddenly with internet arriving in the one-party state in 2015 – and mobile internet since 2018 – with some 4.2 million of Cuba's 11.2 million people now connected.

With no other platform on which to ply their trade, 16-member Cuban dance troupe Datway (a play on That Way) have taken to Facebook and Instagram to display their unique brand of hip hop moves, blended with more traditional, home-grown styles.

It has launched them to international fame, even catching the eye of Daddy Yankee, dubbed the King of Reggaeton – a Latin American music style that borrows heavily from hip hop and rap.

The Puerto Rican rapper, who co-starred on the hit single "Despacito", took to Instagram to comment: "Too good #Cuba" about a dance number the troupe performed to his latest hit "El Pony" and posted online.

In the video, the troupe jumps and gyrates to the reggaeton rhythm in sports clothes and sneakers, dyed hair and bandannas, and watched by a ragtag of neighborhood kids in a poor district of central Havana.

The video has earned them 2.2 million views.

"Hip hop videos from other countries are always [set] in these very beautiful places," Datway founder Dariel Lopez, aka Chaiky Dari, told reporters.

### Much talent, little exposure

"We always look for places that are ... well not ugly, because for us they are not ugly, but real – those balconies in need of a touch of paint, young people and children who are not very well dressed," said the 23-year-old with his wild mop of hair, parts of it bleached blonde.

Chaiky Dari boasts 33,700 subscribers on Instagram, a high hit rate for a country with the third lowest fixed broadband speed, according to Speedtest, though it ranks 88th out of 134 for mobile speed.

Under a tin roof held up by walls covered in graffiti, the members of Datway train from Monday to Friday, shooting their videos on weekends.

The troupe of 18-to-32-year-olds have backgrounds in contemporary and folk dance, some even worked in circuses.

Sometimes they go out on the street, plugging in their sound system at the house of a neighbor – an old lady who sells fruit from her front steps.

"Abroad, Cuba is still seen as the country of salsa," but "here there is also a lot of talent in hip-hop, with a lot of dancers from the street," said Liuven Dopico, 28, who himself learned to dance "in the street" and "by watching a lot of videos."

Datway's idea, however, is not to abandon their Cuban dance roots.

"We often mix hip hop with traditional Cuban music, we mix it all and we create something truly beautiful," said Dopico, his hair tinted turquoise.

"If it is a salsa we mix it with urban dance, if it is reggaeton, we add salsa steps to it," added Dari.

### 'The best!'

Fellow troupe member Paloma Duarte, 23, started off as a classical ballet dancer, then worked in a folk dance company.

Now, "I feel complete as a dancer, I have all the styles!" she said.

Duarte said the group receives frequent messages from amateur dancers, many of whom send in videos, as the hip hop phenomenon spreads.

But to encourage more youngsters, "it would be really good if at the level of the state, of television, there was some urban dance and not only salsa and rumba," she added.

In recent weeks, the glowing comments of Latin stars such as Daddy Yankee and Ricky Martin – "The best!", he wrote on Instagram – have propelled Datway to new heights, even signing a contract with a record company in Florida to appear in dance videos.

And when Puerto Rican-Cuban



Dancers rehearse in Havana. A troupe of young Cubans has attracted the attention of several stars abroad with their choreographies that mix hip-hop, reggaeton and salsa. AFP

Reggaeton duo Ozuna and Ovi launched an online challenge, inviting dancers to choreograph a video for their new song "Envidioso", the winners were none other than Datway.

The group received a prize of \$10,000 – a fortune in a country where the minimum monthly salary is \$87.

Half of the money will be used on "technology" – better internet connection and filming equipment, said Ernesto Rodriguez, 32, the group's technical director.

"The rest was divided among the members, and I also gave money to the children" from the neighborhood, who appear in Datway's videos. AFP



The troupe jumps and gyrates to the reggaeton rhythm in sports clothes and sneakers, dyed hair and bandannas as they are watched by a ragtag group of neighborhood kids in a poor district of central Havana. AFP

## 'Mole's World' game fuels nostalgia among Chinese



A photo illustration shows a user playing the 'Mole's World' game on a smartphone in Beijing. AFP

A RE-ISSUE of one of Asia's most beloved video games is taking the Chinese internet by storm 13 years after its original release, fuelling a wave of nostalgia among the country's young adults.

The mobile version of "Mole's World" has shot to the top of the free downloads on Apple's app store and has also been downloaded millions of times on Android phones, boosting the share price of its maker by 25 percent in the week it was released.

First available for PCs in 2008, the farming simulation game features a round-faced creature with a clown nose who cap-

tured the attention of a generation of gamers a decade ago.

Players who once burrowed into Mole's World as children are now adults who are showing their virtual farms to co-workers during office lunch breaks.

"I play it out of nostalgia for who I was when I played it back then," said Zhao Yiping, a 24-year-old postgraduate student and long-time Mole fan.

The game's popularity has given developer G-bits Network Technology's Shanghai-listed stock a nearly 25 percent boost, pushing the company's value to more than 41 billion yuan (\$6.41 billion).

G-bits has marketed the relaunch of Mole's World heavily to young adults, enlisting Chinese pop-punk band New Pants to play in a promotional video.

It is part of a wave of companies using nostalgia to sell products to young Chinese wanting an escape from the stress and uncertainty of adulthood.

Several 1990s-themed restaurants have sprung up in major cities and fresh interpretations of old-fashioned children's snacks such as White Rabbit and Want-Want have been released.

Boosted by Covid-19 lock-

downs, China's online gaming industry raked in 279 billion yuan in 2020, according to the China Internet Network Information Centre.

Videos of players showing off their proud achievements in Mole's World have received tens of thousands of views on Bilibili, China's equivalent of YouTube.

The game is "definitely a way to decompress", said Wang Jingwen, a 25-year-old Mole's World fan.

"People born after the 90s are now the ones holding up society and face a lot of daily pressure studying or at work," she said. AFP

### Thinking caps

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14						15					16			
17						18					19			
20					21						22			
			23								24			
25	26	27	28					29	30					
31						32	33				34	35	36	37
38				39	40									
41											42			
			43						44	45				
46	47	48	49					50	51					
52					53	54					55	56	57	58
59					60						61			
62					63						64			
65					66						67			

### “ANGRY CRITICS”

**ACROSS**

- 1 Cakes with kick
- 6 Target of obscenity laws
- 10 “You can go to the next person”
- 14 Seize forcefully
- 15 Dance at a Jewish wedding
- 16 Puerto \_\_\_\_
- 17 “\_\_\_\_ beaucoup!”
- 18 Leaf angle
- 19 “Fine by me!”
- 20 Equipment for big shots?
- 23 Basilica area
- 24 Roman day
- 25 Raucous crowd
- 29 Brewery unit
- 31 Succulent houseplant
- 32 “The Wizard of Oz” character
- 38 Central American isthmus area
- 41 Product identifier
- 42 Islamic ruler (Var.)
- 43 Computer key
- 44 Shaped like a cylinder
- 46 Gig for a tenor
- 50 Rotator cuff injury
- 52 Formal group conversation

**DOWN**

- 59 “How unfortunate!”
- 60 River to the Caspian Sea
- 61 Saintly glows
- 62 Nerve network, e.g.
- 63 Actress Sorvino
- 64 Braid
- 65 Apple source
- 66 Surreptitious sound
- 67 Flavorful citrus parts
- 1 Road warning sign
- 2 Enjoying a cruise
- 3 Become charred
- 4 Chevron rival
- 5 Coil
- 6 Pillow cover-ups
- 7 Daring
- 8 Acid found in birds and reptiles
- 9 After-bath powder
- 10 TV spot
- 11 “American Idol” runner-up Clay
- 12 Cause alarm to
- 13 Bean plants (Var.)
- 21 King Kong was one
- 22 Cherub
- 25 Totally absorbed
- 26 Apple orchard spray, once

- 27 \_\_\_\_ fide
- 28 Rosary component
- 29 Orson Welles’ Citizen
- 30 Stat for pitchers
- 32 Formation over a wound
- 33 “Overhead” engine part
- 34 Ruler toppled by the Bolsheviks
- 35 “When in \_\_\_\_ do ...”
- 36 Words after “sit” or “step”
- 37 “The stockings \_\_\_\_ hung ...”
- 39 \_\_\_\_ detector (airport device)
- 40 Santa \_\_\_\_ winds
- 44 Nineteenth Greek letter
- 45 Imitation
- 46 Eyeball-bending graphics
- 47 Less hardy-looking
- 48 Descended on the mother’s side
- 49 Enjoy again, as a movie
- 50 Plural and alternate spelling of 34-Down
- 51 Acclamation
- 53 Hauler’s destination, sometimes
- 54 Tennessee state flower
- 55 “You bet!”
- 56 Instances of anger
- 57 Brewer’s kiln
- 58 Mysterious loch

### Sudoku Pacific

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

			3	8		5	2	
	1				4			6
				5	9	7		
	8	7						
3				7				5
						2	9	
		8	1	9				
6			2					1
	3	4		6	7			

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

### Thursday’s solution

G	N	A	W	S	G	E	M	S	N	A	K	E		
L	I	C	H	I	E	T	A	L	O	G	I	A		
A	S	T	I	R	T	U	G	O	V	A	L	S		
D	I	S	S	E	N	T	I	N	G	P	A	R	T	Y
K	N	E	E	E	L	S	E							
C	O	B	E	R	A	S	E	G	N	P				
A	V	I	S	O	R	I	N	G	T	A	I	L		
R	E	P	U	B	L	I	C	A	N	P	A	R	T	Y
O	N	E	P	I	E	C	E	A	O	U	T	R	E	
L	S	D	A	V	E	D	A	Y	H	O	R			
S	P	E	C	B	E	S	T							
M	A	S	Q	U	E	R	A	D	E	P	A	R	T	Y
A	M	O	U	R	E	A	U	O	P	E	R	A		
M	E	S	A	S	A	B	C	R	E	N	A	L		
A	N	O	D	E	M	A	T	T	R	O	P	E		

### Thursday’s solution

9	3	5	8	6	4	7	2	1
4	8	2	1	7	3	9	6	5
7	1	6	2	9	5	8	4	3
8	5	1	9	3	6	2	7	4
3	6	7	4	2	8	5	1	9
2	4	9	5	1	7	3	8	6
5	9	4	6	8	2	1	3	7
1	7	8	3	4	9	6	5	2
6	2	3	7	5	1	4	9	8



Tourists ride donkeys and horses as they visit Jordan’s ancient city of Petra on May 27 after it reopened following closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic. AFP

# Hard times for Jordan’s donkeys amid Covid-19

**H**ERDS of hard-working donkeys once carried hordes of tourists on the rocky paths of Jordan’s Petra, but visitor numbers crashed amid the pandemic and the loyal animals are left without a job.

“Before coronavirus, we all had work,” said Abdulrahman Ali, a 15-year-old donkey owner at the ancient rock-carved desert city, where the sure-footed animals carry tourists up steep paths in the blazing sun.

“The Bedouins of Petra made a living and fed their animals,” he said, sitting waiting for a handout of fodder from a charity, explaining that many owners today are struggling to meet the cost of feeding them.

In 2019, the number of visitors to the UNESCO World Heritage site topped a million for the first time.

But in March 2020, the famous tourist destination was closed, and the crucial income from the tourists dried up.

#### Dependent on tourism

“When tourism stopped, nobody could buy fodder or medicine anymore,” said Ali, who could earn as much as \$280 on a good day, supporting his mother and two brothers.

“Anyone who has a little amount of money now spends it on his own food, not his animal.”

Before the pandemic, tourism made up more than a tenth of Jordan’s GDP, but revenues slumped from \$5.8 billion in 2019 to \$1 billion last year, according to government figures.

Since Petra reopened in May, tourist numbers have been slow to rebound.

Only some 200 visitors a day come to Petra, compared to more than 3,000 before the pandemic hit, said Suleiman Farajat, heading the Petra Development and Tourism Regional Authority.

Farajat said some 200 guides used as many as 800 animals – including horses, camels and mules as well as donkeys – for tourist rides across the desert site.

The economic ripple effect of tourism was widespread.

“Before the crisis, 80 per cent of the inhabitants of the region depended directly or indirectly on tourism,” Farajat said.

“With the pandemic, not only working animal owners were affected, but also hotels, restaurants, those with souvenir shops or stores, and hundreds of employees have lost their jobs.”

Many donkey owners are turning to a clinic supported by the animal rights group PETA, where vets treat maltreated and malnourished donkeys for free.

“Before coronavirus, my family and I owned seven donkeys working in Petra,” said Mohammad al-Badoul, 23, waiting with four other donkey owners to fill a sack with animal feed.

“We had to sell them for lack of income. Now we only have one, and I can barely feed it.”

#### ‘Starving’

Egyptian vet Hassan Shatta, an equine surgery specialist who runs the PETA clinic, said he launched a donkey-feeding programme late last year.

“During the Covid-19 lockdown, and with the lack of tourism, people could not afford to feed their animals anymore,” Shatta said.

“Some of them ended up starving and we picked them up brought them here,” he added, noting some 250 animals had been treated, with some 10-15 cases arriving a day.

In the past, PETA had treated animals with deep cuts from being beaten or abused, but Farajat, from Petra’s tourism authority, says the working conditions of the donkeys is now “not that bad”.

But there are plans to replace some of the traditional donkeys with a new system of 20 electric cars introduced by the tourism board next month.

The cars will be “driven by the animal owners,” Farajat said.

Switching to electric cars will, Farajat hopes, put an end to the criticisms against the mistreatment inflicted on animals. AFP



A Jordanian donkey owner waits for customers in Jordan’s ancient city of Petra on May 27. AFP

# Curtain to be raised on pan-continental Euro 2020 after year delay due to Covid

**Post Staff**

**A**FTER a year's postponement due to the Covid pandemic, the curtain is finally to be raised tonight on the 2020 European Championship, with Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal aiming to defend their title.

Turkey take on Italy tonight (at 2am Cambodian time) in Rome's Stadio Olimpico as 24 nations vie to be crowned champions of Europe and lift the Henri Delaunay Trophy.

Matches will be played in 11 cities across Europe – in a departure from the tradition of one or two countries hosting the competition – to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the inaugural championship in 1960.

Reigning World Cup holders France enter the tournament as favourites, a youthful England are next with the bookmakers, while Fifa's No1 ranked side Belgium are third, with Portugal, Germany and Spain joint fourth.

"To win [the European Championship] again would be incredible, and of course we go to the tournament with that as our ambition.

"We have a good team, but also we know there are a lot of very strong teams there," Portugal captain Ronaldo



Euro 2020 mascot Skillzy poses with the trophy in central Saint Petersburg on May 22. AFP

Joachim Low is stepping down as coach of "Die Mannschaft" after the tournament and will be looking to leave his post on a high.

England also face a tough test in Group D, having been drawn against Croatia – who beat them in the semi-finals of the 2018 World Cup – the "Auld Enemy" Scotland and Czech Republic.

"The Three Lions", however, enjoy three home group games and the most promising talent pool in perhaps a generation, although there are concerns over defence.

Despite Covid restrictions, all 11 stadiums hosting matches will reverberate to the sound of fans, with attendances set to allow a minimum of 22-45 per cent of capacity, while Budapest plans for 100 per cent capacity but with strict entry requirements.

Games are to be played in Amsterdam, Azerbaijani capital Baku, Bucharest, Budapest, Copenhagen, Glasgow, Munich, Rome, St Petersburg and Seville – with the final set for London's Wembley Stadium on July 11.

While the pan-continental format is a new development, another is that the 2020 European Championship will be the first to feature the controversial video assistant referee (VAR) technology. ■

told Livescore ahead of the competition.

Ronaldo will be looking to make up for a disappointing domestic season in which his Juventus side were only able to finish fourth in Serie A by helping his nation retain their European crown.

He will be joined by English Premier League-winning Manchester City duo Bernardo Silva and Ruben Dias, and

Manchester United midfielder Bruno Fernandes.

However, "A Selecao" have been handed the toughest possible start as they bid to join Spain as consecutive winners, having been drawn in the "group of death" alongside France, Germany and Hungary.

The French boast a strike force including Paris Saint-Germain forward Kylian Mbappe, Real Madrid striker

Karim Benzema and Barcelona forward Antoine Griezmann.

This attacking threat is backed up in midfield by Manchester United star Paul Pogba and the dynamic N'Golo Kante, who won this year's Champions League with Chelsea.

Alongside them in Group F, Germany have a wealth of experience, with goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, Toni Kroos, Matthias Ginter, Thomas

Muller and Mats Hummels all members of the squad that won the World Cup seven years ago.

The three-time Euro winners' squad also includes four players who played in this year's Champions League final – Chelsea's Antonio Rudiger, Kai Havertz and Timo Werner – while Ilkay Gundogan, a loser in Porto, won the English Premier League with Manchester City.

## 2021 MATCH SCHEDULE

Stadium	GROUP STAGE												KNOCKOUT STAGE																
	Matchday 1			Matchday 2			Matchday 3			Round of 16				Quarter-finals		Semi-finals		Final											
	FRI 11.06	SAT 12.06	SUN 13.06	MON 14.06	TUE 15.06	WED 16.06	THU 17.06	FRI 18.06	SAT 19.06	SUN 20.06	MON 21.06	TUE 22.06	WED 23.06	THU 24.06	FRI 26.06	SAT 27.06	MON 28.06	TUE 29.06	WED 30.06	FRI 02.07	SAT 03.07	SUN 04.07	TUE 06.07	WED 07.07	THU 08.07	FRI 09.07	SUN 11.07		
<b>ROME</b> Stadio Olimpico CEST	ITA vs JTA					ITA vs SVK				ITA vs WAL																			
<b>BAKU</b> Baku Olympic Stadium CEST +2		WAL vs SWI				TUR vs WAL				SUI vs TUR																			
<b>ST-PETERSBURG</b> Krestovsky Stadium CEST +1		BEL vs RUS		POL vs SVK		FIN vs RUS		SWE vs SVK		FIN vs BEL																			
<b>COPENHAGEN</b> Parken Stadium CEST		DEN vs FIN				DEN vs BEL				POL vs DEN																			
<b>AMSTERDAM</b> Johan Cruyff Arena CEST			NED vs UKR					NED vs AUT																					
<b>BUCHAREST</b> National Arena CEST +1			AUT vs UKR					UKR vs MKD																					
<b>LONDON</b> Wembley Stadium CEST -1			ENG vs CRO					ENG vs SCO																					
<b>GLASGOW</b> Hampden Park CEST -1			SCO vs CZE					CRO vs SCO																					
<b>SEVILLE</b> La Cartuja Stadium CEST			ESP vs SWE							ESP vs POL																			
<b>MUNICH</b> Football Arena Munich CEST					FRA vs GER					POR vs GER																			
<b>BUDAPEST</b> Puskas Arena CEST						HUN vs POR				HUN vs FRA																			

**GROUP A**

- A1 Turkey (TUR)
- A2 Italy (ITA)
- A3 Wales (WAL)
- A4 Switzerland (SUI)

**GROUP B**

- B1 Denmark (DEN)
- B2 Finland (FIN)
- B3 Belgium (BEL)
- B4 Russia (RUS)

**GROUP C**

- C1 Netherlands (NED)
- C2 Ukraine (UKR)
- C3 Austria (AUT)
- C4 North Macedonia (MKD)

**GROUP D**

- D1 England (ENG)
- D2 Croatia (CRO)
- D3 Scotland (SCO)
- D4 Czech Republic (CZE)

**GROUP E**

- E1 Spain (ESP)
- E2 Sweden (SWE)
- E3 Poland (POL)
- E4 Slovakia (SVK)

**GROUP F**

- F1 Hungary (HUN)
- F2 Portugal (POR)
- F3 France (FRA)
- F4 Germany (GER)

Kick-off times are shown in CEST (Central European Summer Time), which is five hours ahead of Cambodian time. A match taking place at 15:00 CEST will kick off at 8pm in Cambodia.