



AUKUS SHOULD NOT FUEL RIVALRIES, SPARK TENSIONS: SOKHONN

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ANGKOR TICKET SALES JUST 228 IN SEPTEMBER AS COVID PROLONGS

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PHILIPPINES' NOBEL WINNER SAYS AWARD FOR 'ALL JOURNOS'

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Non-gold trade up near 24%, tops \$25B

Hin Pisei

CAMBODIA'S non-gold exports reached \$11.010 billion in the first eight months of this year, surging by 20.4 per cent year-on-year, while the analogous imports amounted to \$14.6 billion, marking a 26.7 per cent year-on-year jump, the Ministry of Economy and Finance reported.

This means that the Kingdom's non-gold trade deficit over January-August expanded by around 50 per cent, to more than \$3.5 billion. Total trade grew by nearly 24 per cent to over \$25.5 billion.

The ministry said the growth in exports was buoyed by increased shipments of bicycles, furniture, hides and skins, rubber, plank boards, solar panels, insulated wires and cables, electronic components and agricultural products.

It added that the surge in imports was propelled by an uptick in purchases of goods such as fabrics, construction materials and fuel.

The Cambodian economy continues to be affected by the Covid-19 crisis – especially after the February 20 community event – which drags on to date and exerts pressure on key indicators of economic growth, it said.

However, non-garment merchandise continued to enjoy significant growth in international sales, it added, highlighting bicycles, electronic components, wood-based goods and other agricultural products as notable examples.

"Cambodia's economy is expected to grow positively in 2021 due to the recovery of the global economic situation, the economies of Cambodia's trading partners, combined with a boost from a number of sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, non-garments, transport and communications and the possibility of diverting orders and garment factories from Myanmar to Cambodia," the ministry claimed.

Cambodia Chamber of Commerce vice-president Lim Heng told *The Post* on October 4 that Cambodian trade has remained in growth territory, even as the global

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Tamale season

A man dries 'nom ansorm' sticky rice cakes wrapped in banana leaves, reminiscent of Mexican tamales, in the wake of the Pchum Ben festival, in Roka Korng I commune of Kandal province's Mok Kampoul district on Friday. HENG CHIVOAN

Forces detain hundreds in Kashmir after rise in attacks

NEARLY 500 residents of restive Indian-administered Kashmir suspected to have links with banned religious and militant groups have been detained by police investigating a spate of targeted killings by suspected rebels, officials told AFP on October 10.

Tensions have been heightened in the Muslim-majority region – which is contested by nuclear-armed neighbours India and Pakistan – after New Delhi revoked Kashmir's semi-autonomy in August 2019 and brought it under direct rule.

Authorities say at least 29 civilians have been shot dead in Kashmir so far this year.

The latest deaths were two teachers from the minority Sikh and Hindu communities, who were shot by gunmen at a government-run school in Srinagar on October 7.

A relatively new militant group The Resistance Front has claimed responsibility for the latest deaths and accused those killed of working for "occupier mercenary forces and occupier stooges".

The statements, issued only in English, were circulated in numerous WhatsApp groups. They could not be independently verified by AFP. AFP

Dual citizenship ban for top office holders on way to King

Voun Dara and Mom Kunthea

THE Constitutional Council of Cambodia (CCC) will seek a consultation with King Norodom Sihamoni on amendments to several articles of the Constitution which would mandate that the Kingdom's top national leadership positions be filled by people solely in possession of Cambodian citizenship.

This followed a vote approving the changes by the Council of Ministers on October 8.

"The Constitutional Council, chaired by president Im Chhun Lim, will hold a plenary meeting [on October 11] to review and prepare a presentation of the key concepts in the draft law to His Majesty King Norodom Sihamoni..." the CCC's General Secretariat said in a press release on October 9.

The Council of Ministers passed the draft amendments to articles 19, 82, 106, 119 and 137 of the Constitution and articles 3 and 4 of the Additional Constitutional Law tending to ensure the regular functioning of national institutions.

The amended articles mandate that the positions of prime minister and presidents of the National Assembly, Senate and Constitutional

Council all be filled by persons who hold Cambodian citizenship with no dual-citizens allowed in those roles.

The impetus behind these changes was apparently fuelled by "false" media reports claiming that Prime Minister Hun Sen had acquired a Cypriot passport, an allegation which he strenuously denied and which

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KINGDOM VACCINATES 84% OF ESTIMATED 16 MILLION POPULACE

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INVESTMENT HOPES AS DRAFT PPP LAW SAILS THROUGH CABINET

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National



Children get vaccinated against Covid-19 in Rong Roeng market in Phnom Penh's Chroy Changvar district on Sunday. HONG MENEHA

Booster shot campaign in capital to begin Oct 11

Mom Kunthear

CAMBODIA has so far vaccinated over 84 per cent of the total population of 16 million, with more than 11 million people having received their second dose, according to the national Covid-19 vaccination committee.

A new campaign administering a third dose is set to begin on October 11. Thus far, nearly one million have received the booster shot.

As of October 9, the country had inoculated 99.18 per cent of the adult population of 10 million and 89.76 per cent of the 12-17 age group of nearly two million.

Vaccinations for children aged 6-11 have reached 72 per cent of that age group of more than 1.8 million.

Speaking at the Council of Ministers meeting on October 8, Prime Minister Hun Sen said he was very proud of Cambodia's vaccination rates and especially those of the 6-11 age

group and the potential fear of needles among some children.

"Now we have vaccinated more than 13 million people out of a population of 16 million against Covid-19 across the country. Those who refuse to be vaccinated will be the loneliest people of all in the future," he said.

The booster shot campaign will first launch in Phnom Penh before expanding to the other population centres in the Kingdom. Hun Sen noted that Cambodia has more than 11 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines to be administered as booster shots.

As part of the campaign, the Phnom Penh Municipal Administration has called on residents in the capital's 14 districts who have received their second dose of Covid-19 vaccine to get their booster shot after a four-month interval.

In a notice dated October 8, it said the third-dose vaccination campaign for Phnom Penh residents will kick off on October 11 in 11 districts and

on October 30 in the three others, noting that Sinovac jabs will be used.

Six of the 11 districts that will launch the jab drive on October 11 are Tuol Kork, Russey Keo, Meanchey, Dangkor, Kamboul and Por Sen Chey. This will be overseen by the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces under the Ministry of National Defence. Only those who have received their first and second doses administered by the military medics should get the booster shot at the above-mentioned districts. Vaccinations will begin at 2pm for these locations.

The five other districts that will also kick off their campaigns on October 11 are Boeung Keng Kang, Chamkarmon, Chbar Ampov, Prampi Makara and Sen Sok. This will be administered by medical personnel from the municipal Department of Health and volunteer medical workers. Vaccinations will start at 8am.

The three remaining districts – Daun Penh, Chroy Changvar and Prek Phnov – will begin vaccinations on October 30 in campaigns to be overseen by medical personnel from the municipal health department and volunteer medical group.

Vaccinees have to bring along their vaccination and national identification cards or other documents they used when receiving their first dose. They are advised to contact their local authorities or refer to the municipality's official announcement for further details.

Hun Sen also said he had ordered health officials to determine the cause of "vaccines hesitancy" among those who remain unvaccinated.

"We need to study because we want to know why they have refused to be vaccinated and we must educate them to get vaccinated against Covid-19," he said.

Hun Sen said even though vaccination rates had reached more than 84 per cent of the total population, there was still work to do reaching those who remained unvaccinated and that he did not want anyone to die because of misplaced belief in political propaganda by the opposition group. ■

Amendment aims to protect Kingdom from interference

Continued from page 1

was subsequently retracted by the UK-based *Guardian* newspaper.

The *Guardian's* amended reporting now states that unnamed members of Hun Sen's "inner circle" were in possession of such passports rather than the prime minister himself.

The information in their report was said to have been gleaned from the massive Pandora Papers data dump leaked to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

The organisation is working with over 150 media outlets to produce reports on the data contents which largely focus on the use of offshore trusts by some of the world's wealthiest people as a means to obscure their financial activities.

The now-retracted allegation was immediately echoed by former opposition leader Sam Rainsy on his social media accounts. Rainsy further alleged that Hun Sen had actually purchased the passport for an unknown sum.

During the Council of Ministers meeting on October 8, the prime minister said the drafting of the amendment was done quickly in urgent response to these false reports and was to maintain public confidence in the government.

He noted that the single-citizenship requirement would not be extended to undersecretary of state for ministries because the results would be too exclusionary and would affect a number of current government officials who were forced to flee abroad during the war and Khmer Rouge genocidal period and later returned to contribute to national development.

"We leave open the opportunities for those with duality to become senior ministers, ministers, vice-presidents of the National Assembly and Senate while only restricting them from eligibility in four national leadership roles," he said.

Hun Sen suggested that Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn and Minister of

Justice Koeut Rith work with their Cypriot counterparts to determine the source of the allegation because it negatively affected the reputation of Cambodian and Cypriot leaders.

"We have requested state-to-state cooperation [with Cyprus]. We cannot simply dismiss this matter as frivolous or treat it as unimportant because it concerns the slander of one of Cambodia's national leaders and it tarnishes the image of the Cypriot government, so we have to look into it," Hun Sen said.

He said a written note had already been sent to the EU ambassador in Phnom Penh and to the UK ambassador as well because the *Guardian* is based in the UK. Cambodian ambassador to China Khek Cai Mealy Sysoda also plans to discuss the issue with the Cypriot envoy there.

CCC secretary-general Taing Ratana could not be reached for comment on this matter.

However, according to Hun Sen, the CCC will examine whether the amendments run contrary to existing principles enshrined in Cambodian laws, especially as it relates to the constitutional monarchy and the requirement that Cambodia be a multi-party liberal democracy.

The CCC will submit their opinions to the King, who will then confirm the proposed changes and pass them along to the National Assembly for a full vote.

Government spokesman Phay Sihan said the government, National Assembly, Senate and CCC are the top national institutions responsible for making decisions deemed as matters of life or death for the nation, such as ensuring national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, he said.

"[The amendment] aims to protect the national interests and the people of Cambodia from interference into the internal affairs of the nation by foreign powers and to prevent external influences from shaping the country's national and foreign policies," Sihan said.

The new draft Article 119 states that at the request of the president – and with the approval of the two vice-presidents of the National Assembly – the King shall appoint the prime minister from among the parliamentarians of the party with the most seats in the National Assembly in order to form the government.

Article 119 states that the prime minister post must be filled by a parliamentarian from the ruling party with the most seats in the National Assembly and must be a Cambodian citizen from birth currently in sole-possession of Cambodian citizenship.

Similarly, the newly drafted Article 82 states the same about the National Assembly president while Article 106 stipulates it concerning the president of the Senate. ■



President of the Constitutional Council Im Chhun Lim during an online meeting on September 28. CONSTITUTIONAL COUNCIL SECRETARIAT

Police search for relatives of 15-year-old crushed by train

Voun Dara

THE Kantha Bopha Children's Hospital in Phnom Penh and police are searching for the relatives of a 15-year-old boy who is now receiving intensive care after being run over by a train at around 4am on October 10 in Por Sen Chey district.

On the morning of October 10, the hospital posted an urgent notification on Facebook attempting to locate the boy's relatives as surgeons were still working hard to save his life in the operating room.

"We would like to announce a search for the relatives of the

15-year-old boy known only as Chheurm who was run over by the train. He lost his left arm, both legs and suffered severe bleeding head injuries.

"The boy was rushed to the hospital without a relative. Surgeons are now trying to save his life. Please contact 012 812 248," the hospital said.

As of the evening of October 10, no relatives of the boy have come forward.

"The hospital helped the victim in every way, but so far no relatives have been seen and the child is in critical condition. We have given him blood transfusion, and we even sent

him to the ICU and operating rooms," it said.

Choam Chao commune police chief Theng Kosal told *The Post* on October 10 that the incident occurred at around 4am on October 10 on the Phnom Penh-Kampot section of the railway line near National Road 4 in Chaom Chao III commune's Ang village.

"We have not yet found the boy's relatives. We do not know where he comes from. He went to sleep on the railway. I contacted the Ang village chief to help find his relatives and where he lives," Kosal said. ■



CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST FOR TRANSPORTATION AND CASUAL LABOUR SERVICES SHORT-LIST

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in Cambodia is seeking expression of interest from capable **1. Transporters and 2. Casual Labour companies** for including in the WFP Services shortlists.

The transportation services will be expected to transport food and non-food items from Sihanouk Ville/Phnom Penh ports of entry to WFP's warehouse and distribution points throughout Cambodia. The casual labour services will be done at WFP's warehouse in Phnom Penh.

All interested suppliers are invited to download the WFP transportation questionnaires from the Internet link <https://bit.ly/3kAGDxW> and Labour Services <https://bit.ly/2XlPbdLY> or by request an electronic copy through an email address: phnompenh.procurement@wfp.org. Please note a follow-up interview may be required.

All companies that meet the qualification criteria for inclusion in the transportation and casual labour services shortlists will be subsequently invited to bid for a one year services.

The form is to be completed and Expression of Interest documentation should be submitted either via electronic copy in PDF form through email phnompenh.procurement@wfp.org or via sealed envelope sent to the below address with the title submission of Expression of Interest (in English Language) **by 17:00 local time on 18 October 2021**

World Food Programme - Cambodia
House No.108, Street 63/corner Street 208, Sangkat Boeung Raing,
Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia

Note: Existing WFP food suppliers need not apply.

Minister: Aukus should not fuel rivalries, tension

Youn Dara

MINISTER of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn expects that the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the US and UK, known as AUKUS, will “not fuel unhealthy rivalries and further escalate tension”.

Sokhonn expressed the optimism during a telephone conversation with his Australian counterpart Marise Payne on October 8 to discuss bilateral relations and international issues of common concern, including the recently established AUKUS, according to the Cambodian foreign ministry’s press statement on October 8.

Payne, who also serves as Minister for Women, briefed Sokhonn on the background of the AUKUS partnership, saying it has been built for the common interest of a peaceful, prosperous and secured Indo-Pacific region, and with no intention of acquiring

nuclear weapons or even civil nuclear capability.

AUKUS, she said, will not fuel an arms race in the region. As part of the security partnership, she elaborated, Australia will be able to acquire nuclear-powered submarines to upgrade the capabilities of its navy.

“She [Payne] reiterated that Australia is committed to the nuclear non-proliferation obligations and to working closely with the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA],” said the statement.

Payne also stressed that Australia is committed to upholding its obligations under the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), and the South Pacific Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SPNWFZ) and Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) treaties, it said.

Sokhonn encouraged Australia to have constructive engagement with ASEAN through all ASEAN-led mechanisms in building mutual trust and confidence in order to secure an open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based

regional architecture.

“He [Sokhonn] highlighted that Cambodia, as a country which had experienced war, destruction and suffering for many decades, wishes to see the whole region remaining peaceful, stable and prosperous, and expected that AUKUS will not fuel unhealthy rivalries and further escalate tension,” it said.

The ministry said the two foreign ministers noted with satisfaction the progress of bilateral cooperation between the two countries, including within the Mekong-Australia Partnership (MAP) framework.

Sokhonn and Payne reaffirmed the two nations’ commitment to working more closely to further strengthen the relations in both bilateral and multilateral frameworks for mutual benefits.

They also expressed commitment to strengthening peace, stability and prosperity in the region, particularly when Cambodia assumes ASEAN chairmanship next year.



Australia



Cambodia

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn (right) and his Australian counterpart Marise Payne. MARISE PAYNE VIA FACEBOOK

In her Facebook post on October 9, Payne said Cambodia is an important regional partner and Australia has a long-standing interest in the Kingdom’s development, noting that the two countries will celebrate the 70th anniversary of

diplomatic relations next year. She said the talk with Sokhonn also touched on development cooperation and commitment to supporting Cambodia’s recovery from the Covid-19 crisis, including through the MAP framework.

“Australia looks forward to supporting Cambodia as it takes on the position of ASEAN chair in 2022. ASEAN is central to our vision for a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region with ASEAN at its centre,” she said.

Covid rapid testing underway after Pchum Ben festival

Mom Kunthear

WITH the October 5-7 Pchum Ben public holiday finished, all public and private institutions have begun testing staff and officials for Covid-19 in accordance with the guidelines of the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training to prevent large-scale transmission of Covid-19.

Ministry of Environment spokesman Neth Pheaktra told *The Post* on October 10 that he supported the guidelines and said the ministry had always tested its officials for Covid-19 on Wednesday of each week.

“I supported rapid tests after this Pchum Ben holiday for safety and participation in controlling and prevent-

ing the spread of Covid-19,” he said.

Ly Sovanna, executive director of the Catholic Nations Office for Social Communication in Cambodia, also told *The Post* that he and more than 10 staff members took the rapid tests on the first day of work after the holiday.

“This post-holiday test is the right thing to do, and I agree that everyone has to do it because during this break, we do not know where they went or whom they met,” he said.

Sovanna added that the test was also to help relatives or friends they met during the holiday. If anyone is tested positive for Covid-19, they can immediately report the case and be treated or kept in quarantine in a timely manner.

Nguon Seng, sales executive of Kirirom Food Production (KFP), told *The Post* on October 10 that KFP also tested more than 100 employees for Covid-19 on Friday.

“More than 100 of my employees have already been tested. None of them was positive for Covid-19 and they returned to work as normal. I support this measure because it protects everyone from the coronavirus,” he said.

Ngy Mean Heng, director of the Phnom Penh municipal health department, said on October 8 that Phnom Penh was ready to respond to any outbreak of Covid-19 resulting from the Pchum Ben holiday.

Municipal governor Khuong Sreng

has also provided rapid test kits to the Department of Education, Youth and Sport to test teachers in all educational institutions in Phnom Penh, and the Department of Health will also test its officials on October 11.

“We will conduct the tests because we fear that some of them may have contracted the coronavirus during the holiday as we have seen some pictures showing people gathering in large crowds as if they are not living in the Covid-19 era,” he said.

He said there remain 11 treatment and quarantine sites available in the capital.

Prime Minister Hun Sen on October 3 issued a circular strengthening health measures to control the

spread of Covid-19 during and after the Pchum Ben festival. He urged relevant authorities to be vigilant during the holiday and to administer Covid-19 rapid tests to factory workers, civil servants and employees in the private sector after the holiday.

He emphasised that the rapid tests were to ensure safety as well as to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in ministries, educational institutions, factories and other business establishment.

Labour minister Ith Sam Heng also recommended the rapid tests but said they were to be conducted on a voluntary basis and no fines would be imposed on owners or the management of factories and enterprises.

National

Kingdom gets praise for human rights, job drive

Youn Dara

THE Kingdom's Permanent Mission to the UN Office in Geneva said a total of 22 foreign delegations spoke in favour of the Kingdom's efforts, progress and achievements in promoting and protecting human rights, while nine others voiced critical comments on civic and political space in the country.

According to the Mission's press statement on October 8, the recognition was given during an interactive dialogue between Vitit Muntarbhorn – the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Cambodia – and the delegations of 31 member states in Geneva, Switzerland, on October 6.

The statement said most of the 22 delegations congratulated Cambodia's high rate of Covid-19 vaccinations for the population, social protection schemes for the poor and vulnerable, and school reopening following a job drive that prioritised teachers and adolescents.

"Significant gains in human development, GDP [gross domestic product] growth, higher literacy, lower maternal and infant mortality rates were also mentioned.

"Other [member states] recognised initiatives to promote legal and judicial reform and to advance government-CSO [civil



An Sokkheurn, Cambodian ambassador and permanent representative to the UN Office in Geneva, during the UN's virtual 48th Session of the Human Rights Council on September 27. SUPPLIED

society organisation] partnership, including efforts to amend the LANGO and to create a National Human Rights Institution," it said, referring to the Law on Associations and Non-governmental Organisations.

The Mission said only nine delegations voiced critical comments on civic and political space in Cambodia, including freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

"Notwithstanding their grievances, most of them welcomed Cambodia's ongoing engagement with the Special Rapporteur and the OHCHR, thus indicating the Kingdom's commitment to engaging in human rights issues," it said, referring to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

It noted that even those who criticised Cambodia's political

and human rights situation recognised the country's rapid vaccination drive, economic growth and financial support programmes for those affected by Covid-19, among others.

The Mission rebuffed the allegation of shrinking political and civic space, freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, saying there are currently nearly 6,000 CSOs in Cambodia.

The government, it said, has even made the efforts to amend the LANGO as suggested by some CSOs.

The government, it added, has also paved the way for former opposition party members who had been banned from politics for five years to receive political rehabilitation, with 26 of them having returned to the political arena. ■

ANNOUNCEMENT



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Request for Quotation : **Supply 20 Laptops for UNDP Cambodia**
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 Download Link : https://procurement-notices.undp.org/view_notice.cfm?notice_id=83984

Proposal submission address:
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 Business Unit code: **KHM10** and Event ID: **KHM51924**

Request for Quotation : **Service Provision of Conducting Physical Verification and Count of Health Laboratory Equipment and Other Supplies under Long Term Agreement**
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 Deadline : **Extended to 12 October 2021 by 04:00 pm, Cambodia time.**
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 Business Unit code: **KHM10** and Event ID: **KHM50330**

Request for Proposal : **Design the Outcome Harvesting for Monitoring Co-Design Provincial Partnership Dialogue**
 Deadline : **18 October 2021 by 03:00 pm, Cambodia time.**
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Consultancy : **Gender Specialists (National Consultant)**
 Contract Type : **Long Term Agreement (LTA)**
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Consultancy : **National Consultant to Support Women MSME FinTech Innovation Fund Project beneficiary verifications and for conducting focused group discussions or beneficiary interviews**
 Contract Type : **Individual Contractor (IC)**
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 Deadline : **Extended to 15 October 2021**
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UNDP is committed to achieving workforce diversity in terms of gender, nationality and culture. Individuals from minority groups, indigenous groups and persons with disabilities are equally encouraged to apply. All applications will be treated with the strictest confidence. All selected candidates will, therefore, undergo rigorous reference and background checks.

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The Phnom Penh Post

Job Announcement

The Phnom Penh Post, the oldest independent media company in Cambodia, is seeking full-time candidate for the following position:

SUB-EDITORS: 02 POSITIONS

Main duties and responsibilities

- Report to Deputy Managing Editor PE/Managing Editor
- Lay out wire/National pages and manage layouts using InDesign/InCopy
- Communicate closely with reporters

Qualifications/experience required

- Bachelor's degree in journalism or other related fields (preferred but not a must)
- Excellent command of English is a must; proficiency in Khmer an asset
- News/business reporting experience
- At least one to two years' experience as sub-editor
- Familiar with names of state institutions
- Familiar with specific language used in court, business and politics
- Sound understanding of local politics and business atmosphere
- Cambodians preferred but foreign nationals are encouraged to apply

Interested candidates are required to submit a photo attached CV and cover letter with expected salary to the Human Resource and Administration Department at the following address no later than October 30, 2021.

Address: The Elements Condominium (Residence 9) Level 7, Hun Sen Boulevard, Chak Angre Krom commune, Meanchey district, Phnom Penh.

Tel: +855 (0) 23 888 161 -162

Email: jobs@phnompenhpost.com

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Post Media Co., Ltd is an equal opportunity employer. Only short-listed candidates will be contacted for interview. Application documents will not be returned.

Intelligent - In-depth - Independent

Ministries preparing assistance for poor farmers affected by disasters

Youn Dara

THE Ministry of Economy and Finance co-chaired a meeting with the National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to plan the distribution of rice seeds to poor farmers affected by disasters while flood waters have subsided considerably.

NCDM spokesman Khun Sokha told *The Post* on October 8 that NCDM vice-president Lam Heng Huot co-chaired the virtual meeting organised by the finance ministry with the participation of representatives from the agriculture ministry to provide the seed for rehabilitation.

"Normally, every year after the floods subside, the finance ministry cooperates with the NCDM and relevant ministries to prepare an intervention budget package to provide rice and other crop seeds to the poor farmers affected by disasters," he said.

"This work is done every year, and now we are planning to see which provinces have people affected by the floods to prepare and distribute the seeds," Heng Huot said.

Since September, flash floods have inundated several provinces in northwestern Cambodia, with Banteay Meanchey being the worst hit.

According to a NCDM report,



First NCDM vice-president Kun Kim (centre left) and officials visit flooded area in Banteay Meanchey province last month. NCDM

as of September 28, floods in Banteay Meanchey had affected 18,715 families in 38 communes of six districts with 1,150 families evacuated. It inundated about 25,223ha of rice fields, 301ha of other crops and affected 26 schools, nine pagodas and two health centres.

On October 9, Banteay Meanchey provincial governor Um Reatrey inspected flooded areas and the living conditions of people evacuated to higher ground. Flood waters have reduced consid-

erably and continue to drop.

Agriculture minister Veng Sakhon said on September 7 that the ministry had prepared 2,000 tonnes of rice seeds and 25 tonnes of vegetable seeds to assist farmers affected by natural disasters.

He said in recent decades, the agricultural sector has grown significantly but also faced a number of problems, especially natural disasters such as floods, droughts, storms, infectious diseases and pests that often destroy

farmers' crops every year.

In light of this, he said Prime Minister Hun Sen has encouraged and supported the preparation of food and crop seeds for storage and intervention to assist poor farmers affected by natural disasters.

"For 2021, the government has prepared 2,000 tonnes of physical non-seasonal light rice seeds and 25 tonnes of vegetable seeds and crop seeds for intervention to help farmers affected by natural disasters," Sakhon said. ■

Cambodia to reaffirm NAM commitment

Ry Sochan

OUCH Borith – minister attached to the prime minister and permanent secretary of state for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation – is slated to personally attend the High-Level Meeting to Commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the First Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the Serbian capital Belgrade.

In a press release on October 8, the ministry said Borith will deliver a statement on behalf of Prime Minister Hun Sen on October 11-12.

The meeting will be co-hosted by Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev, who currently chairs NAM, and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic.

The meeting will reflect the commitment of member states in upholding the NAM's five main principles – mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in domestic affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence.

The ministry said these five principles have always been contributing to the promo-



Ouch Borith, minister attached to the prime minister and permanent secretary of state for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. OUCH BORITH VIA ACEBOOK

tion of world peace and cooperation. Regional and international issues of common interest and concern are also expected to be raised.

"Ouch Borith's remarks will focus on the importance of supporting the NAM five principles and commitment to the UN Charter, promotion of sustainable development and human right, the crucial roles of the NAM and the rule of law for small states, vaccine multilateralism amid the Covid-19 pandemic and recovery response efforts," the statement said. ■

CCF busts 30 petrol businesses for illegal practices

SINCE the beginning of October, authorities found nearly 30 petrol depots exploiting customers in contravention of the consumer protection law.

A report from the Ministry of Commerce's General Directorate of Consumer Protection, Competition and Fraud Repression (CCF) said the depots were found in Battambang, Svay Rieng, Kampong Cham and Siem Reap provinces, with the owners fined and reprimanded.

On October 9, CCF officials inspected and found six fuel depots in Kampong Cham and Battambang provinces which were engaged in dishonest fuel business.

On October 8, CCF officials inspected petrol depots in Kampong Cham's Cheung Prey district and found four non-compliant establishments whose owners were immediately fined on the spot for dishonest business practice.

They also fined two depots in Battambang on October 3 and eight depots in Siem Reap and Kampong Cham on October 2 for selling insufficient amounts of petrol to customers.

On October 1, they found eight fuel depots in Svay Rieng and Kampong Cham provinces violating the law.

Officials say release of overloaded vehicles not an act of impunity

Long Kimmarita

THE 217 trucks initially impounded for one year for breaking load limits but then pardoned by Prime Minister Hun Sen have been returned to the owners, while another 12 trucks were still being processed.

Prime Minister Hun Sen on September 30 decided to return the 229 vehicles that had been impounded by the Ministry of Public Works and Transport over the past year for breaking the weight regulations. The move, he said, is to bolster Cambodia's economic recovery efforts from the damage inflicted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Taing Pov, head of the transport ministry secretariat, told *The Post* on October 10 that after the decision was announced, the truck owners came to fill out the forms to collect their vehicles.

He said that as of October 9, a total of 217 vehicles had been returned.

"Only [a dozen] vehicles remained because their owners are far away and some vehicles had malfunctioned. They [vehicles] had been left behind for a long time, but now the documents have already been filled out," he said.

Pov added that authorities had not recorded new offences as business owners may not dare take risks while the law is being

disseminated and enforced.

"Under the guidance of all ministry leaders, after we released the vehicles, we will not relent in cracking down on offenders, we will be twice as strict.

"And so far we have not impounded new offending vehicles as we have spread the law and believe that they will not do it again."

Pov continued that vehicles breaking the legal limits are subject to the full force of the law, and repeat offenders face double penalties as stipulated in the law.

Kong Sovann, a public health specialist and director of the International Safety Fund Programme, said that after the release of the trucks, the transport ministry will continue to spread the law widely. He expected that from now on, law enforcement on these offences will be stricter and vehicle owners who do not learn the lesson will be severely punished without exception.

"In the meantime, the right measures are to be taken ... I believe that the ministry itself will take action against them because it is not possible to use the Covid-19 issue as an excuse," he said. ■

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Business

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NO	STOCK	CLOSING PRICE	OPENING PRICE	HIGH	LOW
1	ABC	11,300	11,100	11,680	11,100
2	GTI	4,460	4,380	4,480	4,320
3	PAS	13,580	13,660	13,700	13,460
4	PEPC	3,160	3,170	3,180	3,120
5	PPAP	14,900	14,900	15,000	14,900
6	PPSP	2,050	2,090	2,090	2,040
7	PWSA	7,020	7,040	7,040	6,980

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Draft PPP law sails through Cabinet

Hin Pisei

AN EXPERT believes that the draft Law on Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), approved by the Cabinet last weekend, will be a driving force for investment opportunities for locals and foreigners, and a welcome supplement to the new investment law.

Comprising 14 chapters, 49 articles and two appendices, the PPP bill sailed through October 8's Plenary Session of the Council of Ministers, or Cabinet.

A press release on the minutes of the session noted that the draft law was prepared on the basis of the Policy Paper on PPPs for Public Investment Project Management 2016-2020, which was approved by the government in June 2016.

The bill was designed to replace the Law on Concessions after a review determined that it was "not fully compliant with international excellence and the actual situation of the management and implementation of PPP projects".

The release listed areas of contention such as the roles of competent institutions, forms of payment, state guarantees, the rights and obligations of contracting parties, and project operation management procedures.

It went on to explain that PPPs are best pursued in a number of key contexts, such as limited national budget resources, reductions in global grant financ-



The International Monetary Fund, World Bank and other financial institutions have all pegged Cambodia's economic growth rate for 2021 in the 1.8-2.2 per cent range. HENG CHHOVAN

ing, or the gradual loss of Cambodia's advanced concessional loans.

However, demand for public investment is steadily increasing, as the Covid-19 crisis undermines and erodes socio-economic gains made by Cambodia and hindering the Kingdom's development process, notably the possible delay in the vision of becoming a high-middle-income country by 2030 and a high-income economy by 2050.

These are part of efforts to prevent Cambodia from falling into "price traps" that can occur through long-term contracts without

the thorough and proper examinations and evaluations, promote growth, and maintain the economic life of Cambodia based on resources and innovations in the private sector, allowing private actors to participate in the development of public infrastructure and the provision of public services.

The law "aims to enhance the management of PPP mechanisms in the design and implementation of public infrastructure projects and public service projects aimed at strengthening Cambodia's regional and global economic competi-

tiveness for the benefit of socio-economic development and increase the attractiveness of the private sector in line with Cambodia's rating of international excellence and practical contexts".

Hong Vanak, director of International Economics at the Royal Academy of Cambodia, chalked up the law as a new mechanism to increase the Kingdom's attractiveness for investors, in addition to public-private forums organised by the government each year in coordination with the Council for the Development of Cambodia.

He told *The Post* on Octo-

ber 10 that the law will be very influential on investor confidence, especially among those capable of making sizeable investments in medium- and large-scale industries.

"This draft law can be said to be an important mechanism for increasing the attractiveness for both local and foreign investors to invest in Cambodia and ensure strong, long-term economic growth," he said.

Having recently bagged a number of regional and bilateral free trade agreements and established investment-related legislation, Cambodia must also consider strengthening its production capacity to meet international market demand as well, Vanak suggested.

At October 8's Cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Hun Sen said the draft law would be very important in promoting economic growth in Cambodia, especially after the Covid-19 situation has improved.

The International Monetary Fund, World Bank and other financial institutions have all pegged Cambodia's economic growth rate for 2021 in the 1.8-2.2 per cent range.

The prime minister said: "Economic growth is now projected at 2.2 per cent, but if we are able to reopen for the last two months of this year, especially domestic tourism and other services, economic growth will be able to increase a little more than that. National budget revenue will be able to return to a better state." ■

Optimism over trade as pacts enter into force

Continued from page 1

Covid-19 pandemic perdures.

He contended that year-on-year export and import growth figures above 20 per cent can be considered exceptional rates.

Heng attributes Cambodia's expansion in non-gold trade deficit over January-August to substantial volumes of raw materials purchased to support production in the Kingdom, along with processing for export to international markets.

"I remain optimistic about Cambodia's international trade, especially the growth of exports through the bilateral Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement and [a similar deal] with South Korea soon," he said.

In early August, the government downgraded its economic forecast for 2021 to 2.5 per cent from the 4.1 per cent projection announced at the beginning of the year, citing the deteriorating Covid-19 situation.

Noting continuing downward trends in Covid-19 infections, serious cases and deaths, Minister of Economy and Finance Aun Pornmoniroth recently said Cambodia would soon be able to fully reopen social-economic activities, predicting that the economy would likely show high growth momentum.

Late last month, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) pegged the economic growth rate for 2021 at 2.2 per cent and 1.9 per cent, respectively, with both institutions bringing up the prolongation of the Covid-19 outbreak.

In 2020, the Kingdom's exports reached \$17.21537 billion, up 16.72 per cent year-on-year from \$14.74874 billion, and imports stood at \$18.59048 billion, down 7.84 per cent year-on-year from \$20.17181 billion, according to the Ministry of Commerce. ■

E-commerce, digital shift power MSMEs: minister

Hin Pisei

E-COMMERCE and the ongoing digital transformation have been boosting the productivity and competitiveness of small and micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) in Cambodia, Minister of Commerce Pan Sorasak said last week.

The minister was speaking via video link at the 15th session of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Ministerial Roundtable IV on "Harnessing frontier technologies for shared prosperity",

co-organised by the Barbadian government and the UN trade body.

The quadrennial conference is attended by 195 UNCTAD member countries, as well as international organisations and other partners, to discuss and find solutions to challenges and complexities associated with trade and development.

Sorasak said the Cambodian government is actively engaged in formulating and strengthening policies, laws, other legal instruments, and related measures to spur development of the digital sector in a suc-

cessful, sustainable and inclusive manner.

"The digital transformation and e-commerce are major components in boosting the productivity and competitiveness of MSMEs, the backbone of Cambodia's economy," he said.

He added, however, that the rapid growth recorded by trade and the digital economy has also widened the digital gap between developed and developing countries, especially the least developed ones.

In this regard, bilateral and multilateral cooperation with trading

partners, development partners and relevant international organisations plays an important role in supporting the development of digital commerce and maximising benefits, the minister said.

These partnerships help build infrastructure, foster technology transfers, strengthen the legal and policy environment, and support capacity development to promote the creativity and innovation of developing and least developed countries, he explained.

He added that the government has

recently launched the Cambodia Digital Economy and Social Policy Framework 2021-2035, which will significantly contribute to the restoration of the economy, acceleration of new growth, and the enhancement of social welfare in the "new normal", following global Covid-19 crisis.

At the same time, Sorasak also called on UNCTAD to continue to support least developed countries, including Cambodia, in strengthening production capacity, institutional and human resource capacity development, and technical skills. ■



January-September milled-rice exports dipped by 15.97 per cent year-on-year in volume. HENG CHIVOAN

Milled-rice exports surge 43% in Q3 to over 130,000 tonnes

May Kunmakara

CAMBODIA exported 130,248 tonnes of milled rice in July-September valued at more than \$81 million, representing a 42.95-per cent rise in volume from the 91,115 tonnes posted in the same period last year, the Cambodia Rice Federation (CRF) reported last week.

But industry insiders have raised concerns about a sharp rise in shipping costs that has undermined export plans for this year.

Last month alone, the Kingdom shipped out 67,251 tonnes to the tune of \$35.34 million, far exceeding the volumes recorded in the previous four Septembers: 49,776 tonnes (2017), 47,626 tonnes (2018), 56,541 tonnes (2019) and 40,572 tonnes (2020).

Mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau were collectively the largest buyer of Cambodian milled rice over July-September, accounting for 49.50 per cent, followed by the EU and UK (26.91 per cent) and ASEAN (10.09 per cent), while other countries and territories bought 13.50 per cent.

Fragrant rice contributed the bulk of the exports at 69.71 per cent, followed by white rice (27.18 per cent), parboiled rice (1.71 per cent) and organic rice (1.41 per cent), the CRF said.

Milled-rice export volumes have been on a broad downward slide since the end of last year, a trend that the senior ranks of the CRF and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries ascribe to a lack of containers and rising shipping costs, especially to destinations in Europe.

CRF president Song Saran on October 10 claimed that the third-quarter increase in exports reflects federation members' commitment to boost sales to Chinese mar-

kets, which he noted had escaped much of the brunt of rising shipping prices.

Saran told *The Post* that the higher freight rates due to a lack of containers were hampering export growth, pointing out that while shortages had eased in the third quarter, shipping costs did not decline.

The total volume of milled-rice exports over January-September was 410,698 tonnes – valued at \$283.69 million – decreasing by 15.97 per cent from 488,775 tonnes in the first nine months of 2020, CRF figures show.

As of September 30, milled-rice exports were at 51.34 per cent of the CRF's 800,000-tonne target for this year set at the end of 2020. Saran has conceded that the target would likely not be achieved, despite rising exports to China.

"Had we not had a shortage of containers, we would have been able to achieve our export goals," he said. "[Regard-

less,] we will strive to export more than 600,000 tonnes, which is similar to last year."

Although exports are on pace to fall over 50,000 tonnes shy of the revised target, Saran noted that the CRF changed tack in the second quarter, pinning hopes on rising sales to the Chinese markets.

CRF vice-president Chan Sokheang affirmed that international shipping rates had skyrocketed since the beginning of Covid, especially from November, posing major headwinds to 2021 milled-rice export targets.

Sokheang told *The Post* that the transport sector by and large recognises the shortage of containers as the main driver of shipping prices.

Last year, the Kingdom exported 690,829 tonnes of milled rice, valued at nearly \$539 million, marking an 11.40 per cent surge in volume from 2019, according to the ministry's statistics. ■

HCMC's firms slowly resuming production

HO CHI MINH City (HCMC) companies are resuming production after months of closure, but remain cautious about the pandemic, only gradually reopening and getting workers back.

From October 1, firms in the southern Vietnamese city are not required to house workers onsite, and can merely register with local authorities if they want to reopen as long as they comply with safety criteria.

Some businesses with generous welfare policies have been able to keep their workers from going back to their hometown, and are able to resume easily.

Daehan Motors Co Ltd director-general Nguyen Hai Trung said the company's truck manufacturing facility in the HCMC Automotive-Mechanical Industrial Park in Cu Chi district complies with safety norms and has increased production compared to the lockdown period.

Around 80 per cent of workers have returned since most are Cu Chi locals, he said.

Meanwhile, many other companies are struggling with a lack of manpower since workers who had returned home are currently unable to travel due to lockdowns and other restrictions.

Most businesses are not reopening too quickly since they first want to ensure production will not be halted again by the resurgence of the pandemic.

For example, Vietnam Organ Needle Trading Co Ltd is watching how other businesses are operating before deciding when it can switch to the so-called 'four greens' model that requires workers to have

Covid-19 green cards, stick to a registered route while commuting to work and living in Covid-free areas, and workplaces to meet the city's pandemic safety regulations.

Many businesses are still keeping their workers onsite despite the high costs.

Lap Phuc Co Ltd which specialises in mechanical moulds, is encouraging staff to continue living onsite, even until Tet (Lunar New Year) if they agree.

Director-general Nguyen Van Tri told the *VnExpress* online newspaper that since the city still has a high number of Covid infections, workers travelling between home and the workplace could easily spread the disease.

Dai Dung Mechanical Construction Commerce JSC is also continuing with this model, but plans to relax it once the number of community cases drops.

Deputy director-general Trinh Manh Hung said some of the workers are fatigued from living on premises for three months, but the company is keeping their spirits up by providing leisure options and a "strong" Wi-Fi connection.

Around 720 businesses in the city's 17 export and industrial parks have been operating with onsite accommodation for staff since July 15.

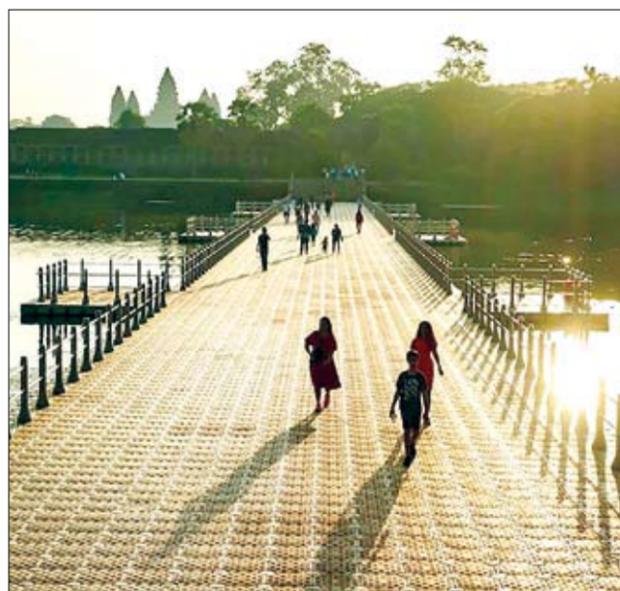
Only a few have allowed staff to return home since September 30.

City People's Committee deputy chairman Vo Han Hoan said businesses' responsibility to protect their premises from the pandemic has only heightened after the lockdown has been lifted. ■

NAM NEWS/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



A cafeteria at a company in Ho Chi Minh City's (HCMC) Binh Tan district that has been housing its staff since July. VIETNAM NEWS AGENCY



International visitors bought just 228 tickets to Angkor Archaeological Park for \$9,281 in September. POST STAFF

Angkor ticket sales hit 228 in Sept

May Kunmakara

THE prolongation of the Covid-19 crisis has resulted in a near total loss of foreign visitors to Angkor Archaeological Park and revenue from ticket sales over the first nine months of this year, newly published figures show.

Angkor Enterprise, the institution in charge of the temple complex's income management, reported 6,167 ticket sales to the tune of \$253,809 over January-September, down by 98.44 per cent and 98.62 per cent in volume and value.

And last month alone, the state-owned enterprise logged 228 ticket sales raking in \$9,281 in revenue, slumping by 92.27

per cent and 92.53 per cent in volume and value from September 2020.

Pacific Asia Travel Association (Pata) Cambodia chapter chairman Thourn Sinan said the ongoing regional and global Covid-19 epidemics continue to plague the tourism sector, although some countries, including Cambodia, have opened or plan to reopen their economies soon.

He said: "Although the government plans to reopen the local economy – but not yet to foreign tourists – revenue from ticket sales to the temples will continue to decline, as the current majority of visitors to Cambodia are businesspeople

or foreigners working in our country who have already visited Angkor Wat."

According to Sinan, the government will prioritise Preah Sihanouk province over Siem Reap in its plans to reopen tourism for vaccinated travellers.

"If Siem Reap does not take the risk to reopen tourism like Preah Sihanouk province did, things for those who make a living in the industry may worsen and worsen and completely collapse.

"Remaining on this course could have serious consequences in the long run. I have said many times that Siem Reap should not rely solely on tourism, we should also look at agricul-

ture and industry for sustainable economic growth," he proposed.

The entrance fee to the park is \$37 for a one-day visit, \$62 for a three-day ticket and \$72 dollars for a week-long pass, according to Angkor Enterprise's price list.

Last year, international visitors bought 400,889 tickets to the park for \$18,654,828, marking sharp year-on-year declines of 81.82 per cent and 81.17 per cent in volume and value, Angkor Enterprise reported.

From January-July, Cambodia received 112,544 international visitors, down by 90.6 per cent year-on-year, according to data from the Ministry of Tourism. ■

Business

59% of small VN firms saw cyberattack in year

AS BUSINESSES digitalise their operations in response to Covid-19, cyberattacks too are on the rise. Over half of small- and medium-sized businesses (SMB) in Vietnam have been victims of cyberattacks in the past year, according to a study by Cisco Secure.

According to its study, 59 per cent of SMBs in Vietnam suffered a cyber-attack in the past year, of which 86 per cent lost customer information to malicious hackers.

The study is based on an independent survey of over 3,700 business and information technology (IT) leaders across 14 markets in the Asia-Pacific, including 152 in Vietnam. The survey highlighted the multitudes of ways in which attackers can try to infiltrate online systems.

Thirty-nine per cent of affected SMBs in Vietnam have said that the biggest reason these attacks are successful is that current cybersecurity solutions are not adequate. Thirty-two per cent said they have no cybersecurity solutions in place.

Cisco Vietnam managing director Luong Thi Le Thuy said SMBs in the country have increased their pace of digitisation over the past 18 months. This has been driven



Cisco Vietnam managing director Luong Thi Le Thuy. SUPPLIED

by the need to leverage technology to continue to operate during the pandemic.

This digitisation has created a critical need for SMBs to invest in capabilities that safeguard themselves against cyberattacks. The more digital they become, the more attractive a target they are for

malicious actors, she said.

Besides the loss of customer data, SMBs in Vietnam that suffered a cyber incident also lost employee data (67 per cent), internal emails (61 per cent), financial information (58 per cent), intellectual property (56 per cent), and sensitive business informa-

tion (51 per cent). In addition, 61 per cent admitted that cyberattacks have hurt their reputation.

Disruptions caused by cyber incidents can have serious implications for SMBs. Downtime of less than one hour usually has a severe impact on revenue, while down-

time of more than a day can result in permanent closure.

"We are living in a world where customers seek instant gratification. They no longer have the patience for lengthy downtimes. SMBs must be able to detect, investigate, and block or remediate any cyber incident in the short-

est time possible," said Cisco ASEAN cybersecurity director Juan Huat Koo.

Cisco's study found that while SMBs in Vietnam are worried about cyberattacks, they are taking steps to improve their cybersecurity.

According to the study, 88 per cent of SMBs have completed scenario planning or simulations for potential cybersecurity incidents in the past 12 months. The majority have a planned response to cyberattacks (89 per cent) and recovery plans (88 per cent) in place.

Vietnamese SMBs are also increasingly aware that the biggest cyber threat comes from unsecured laptops and the use of personal devices.

The good news is there are now strong levels of investment by SMBs regarding cybersecurity. Some 87 per cent of Vietnamese SMBs have increased their investment in cybersecurity since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Cybersecurity is evolving rapidly. This is being driven by trends like expanding attack surfaces, moving to multi-

clouds, the rise of hybrid work, as well as new security requirements and regulations," said Kerry Singleton, Managing Director, Cybersecurity, Asia Pacific, Japan, China, Cisco. VIETNAM NEWS/ASIA NEWS NETWORK ■

Lao gov't shoots for 1% electric vehicle use by 2025

THE Lao government is aiming to increase the number of electric vehicles (EV) on the country's streets to one per cent by 2025 and over 30 per cent in 2030.

Prime Minister Phankham Viphavanh recently approved a new policy on the use of EVs to minimise fuel imports and reduce harmful gas emissions.

Laos is promoting the use of clean energy in the transport sector as part of measures to translate the government's policy into an action plan until 2025, a strategy for 2030, and a vision for 2050.

The policy is part of efforts to fulfil the national agenda on addressing the country's economic and financial difficulties, mainly through austerity measures aimed at reducing the import of fuel-inefficient cars and promoting the use of electricity.

Laos has abundant potential to produce electricity from water, solar power and wind, and waste. These

resources could be used to generate 26,000MW. So far, about 20 per cent of this potential has been developed.

In order to increase the number of EV dealers, the government will not set restrictions on the import of EVs, but vehicles imported and sold in Laos must meet international standards for quality, safety, after-sales service, and maintenance.

This must include a system for the management of waste resulting from the operation of EV businesses.

The government will encourage businesses to set up factories for the production of EV parts and other components, as well as invest in the development of charging stations throughout the country.

There will also be tax exemptions or reductions on the equipment imported for EV production and charging stations.

The government has appointed Electricite du Laos (EdL) as the service provider for the installation of charging stations, with the state-owned power company being instructed not to charge meter fees to residences or businesses that make use of these facilities.

EdL will provide priority EV parking spots as well as charging stations in public areas.

The testing of charging systems for EVs is a vital part of long-term preparations for switching to the use of clean energy.

Under the policy, the annual road tax for EVs will be 30 per cent less than for petrol vehicles of equal engine power.

The government aims to be a leader and model in the use of EVs in state administration, then encouraging state enterprises and public transport operators to use EVs.

Laos imports a large quantity of

fuel annually, which has contributed to a huge trade deficit in recent years, according to EdL.

In 2016, Laos imported almost

2,000 million litres of fuel, worth more than \$1 billion, with the cost shooting up to nearly \$2 billion last year. VIENTIANE TIMES/ASIA NEWS NETWORK ■



The government is aiming to increase the number of electric vehicles (EV) on Laos' streets to one per cent by 2025 and over 30 per cent in 2030. VIENTIANE TIMES

Sony, TSMC mull new chip plant in southwest Japan



Semiconductor giant Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co (TSMC) has been expanding its business overseas. TSMC

SONY Group Corp and Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co (TSMC), the world's largest contract chip manufacturer, have entered into discussions to jointly build a new semiconductor plant in Japan's Kumamoto prefecture.

The government wants an advanced semiconductor plant built in Japan and is planning to include related expenses to support the construction of the plant in the fiscal 2021 supplementary budget bill to be compiled after the lower house election.

According to sources, the

new plant is expected to start operations by fiscal 2024. The total investment is expected to be around 800 billion yen (\$7.1 billion), and the government is considering subsidising half that amount. Priority over the supply of products manufactured at the plant is expected to be one of the conditions to receive the subsidy.

The plant, which the sources said might be built near Sony's image sensor plant in Kikuyo, is expected to produce semiconductors used in automobiles and home appliances.

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a global

shortage of semiconductors, a staple of industry.

Japan used to dominate the global chip market, with a 50 per cent market share in the late 1980s, but with the rise of Taiwanese and mainland Chinese companies, its market share has fallen to around 10 per cent in recent years.

The Japanese government believes that a stable supply of advanced semiconductors is essential for future economic growth, and has decided that cooperation with global companies is necessary to quickly establish a production system in Japan.

Semiconductor giant TSMC has been expanding its business overseas.

In Japan, the company announced in February this year that it plans to establish a research and development base for cutting-edge semiconductor materials in Tsukuba, Ibaraki prefecture.

As there are no factories in Japan capable of producing cutting-edge semiconductors, the Japanese government is urging the public and private sectors to conduct joint research and develop a production system. THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN

(JAPAN)/ASIA NEWS NETWORK ■

World



Chinese President Xi Jinping on Saturday reiterated a warning against foreign interference in Taiwan. AFP

China's Xi says reunification with Taiwan 'will be realised'

CHINESE President Xi Jinping on October 9 said "peaceful reunification" with Taiwan "will be and can be realised", days after Chinese warplanes flew through the island's air defence zone in record numbers.

Taiwan authorities have never formally "declared independence", and China views the island as its territory and has vowed to one day seize it, by force if necessary.

"Realising national reunification by peaceful means best serves the interests of the nation as a whole including our brethren in Taiwan," Xi said in a speech marking the 110th anniversary of a revolution that ended millennia of imperial rule and led to the founding of the Republic of China.

"Taiwan independence is the big-

gest obstacle to the reunification of the motherland and a serious hidden danger," Xi warned.

A large portrait of Sun Yat-sen, a Western-educated doctor who led the 1911 revolution that toppled the Qing empire, towered over the stage as Xi spoke.

Sun founded the Republic of China, which remains the formal name of Taiwan, where defeated Nationalists fled after Mao Zedong's Communist forces won the Chinese civil war in 1949 and established the People's Republic.

"The complete reunification of our country will be and can be realised," Xi said.

He also warned against foreign interference in Taiwan after a Pentagon official confirmed US special operations forces have been quietly train-

ing Taiwanese troops for months.

"The Taiwan issue is purely China's internal affair and does not allow any external interference," he said.

Beijing has ramped up pressure on Taipei since the 2016 election of President Tsai Ing-wen, who views the island as "already independent".

Taiwan's defence chief on October 6 said military tensions with China were at their highest in four decades, after around 150 Chinese warplanes – a record number – flew through the island's air defence zone in recent days.

Xi's warning comes after Britain last week sent a warship through the Taiwan Strait, challenging Beijing's claim to the sensitive waterway, and a French delegation visited Taiwan despite warnings from China. AFP

North Korea accepts Covid aid from WHO amid border closures

THE Covid-19 medical supplies sent by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other UN agencies have reached the North Korean port of Nampo, an apparent signal that the reclusive regime is easing its strict border lockdown and welcoming outside help.

A few months ago, the WHO and other UN agencies were informed by North Korea's public health ministry that it would allow items stranded in China since the onset of the pandemic to be transported to the North through the seaport Dalian, according to a report on October 8 from Radio Free Asia that cited Edwin Salvador, head of the WHO office in Pyongyang.

It was the first communication from the North Korean government allowing medicines and supplies to be delivered into the country, he added.

"Consequently, WHO was able to transport some of the items by ship to Nampo seaport. We are informed that these items along with the other items from the other UN agencies, remain under quarantine," Salvador was quoted as saying in the report.

The WHO said its shipments to North Korea included medicines and medical supplies such as personal protective equipment, gloves, masks and Covid-19 test reagents.

These supplies had been locked up in China since the North sealed the border in January last year and suspended all trade with its northern neighbour, which accounts for more than 90 per cent of the regime's trade.

North Korea's strict border controls dealt a blow to its already tattered economy, which is suffering the fallout from international sanctions. Concerns are also rising as the regime appears to be bracing for a serious food crisis.

It appears Pyongyang is ready to reopen its border and resume trade with China as well as to receive aid from the outside, after its long pandemic blockade.

"Media reports show that there are signs that some goods

are being delivered [from China to North Korea] through maritime shipping routes, but no concrete changes have been confirmed about the resumption of movement via land between Dandong and Sinuiju," South Korean unification ministry deputy spokesperson Cha Deok-cheol said on October 8. Dandong is in China and Sinuiju is in the North.

He added that it was hard to predict when the land route might reopen and said the ministry would keep an eye on relevant developments.

South Korea and the US have sought to provide humanitarian assistance to the North despite the stalled denuclearisation talks.

The US Department of State on October 7 said it supports humanitarian aid to the North, but stressed that the regime was largely responsible for the suffering there.

"Even when we disagree with a particular regime, we believe that we must work to the best of our ability to do all we can to alleviate the suffering of the people. And so we continue to support international efforts aimed at the provision of critical humanitarian aid to the DPRK," the department's spokesperson Ned Price said, referring to the North by its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

"It's important to emphasise, at the same time, that the DPRK regime itself is primarily responsible for the humanitarian situation in the country. The regime continues to exploit its own citizens, to violate their human rights, to divert resources from the country's people to build up its unlawful WMD [weapons of mass destruction] and ballistic missiles programme."

Price noted that the US is still involved in efforts to facilitate humanitarian assistance to the North, which is evident in its ongoing work to speed up approvals by the UN Security Council's 1718 sanctions committee for organisations around the world to deliver "life-saving aid" to Pyongyang. THE KOREA HERALD/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Blackout warning for Indian capital as only 'one day' coal stock remains

NEW Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal warned of a looming power crisis in the Indian capital, saying on October 9 that some of the major coal-fired stations supplying the city barely have a day's stock left.

Several states in eastern and southern India have been hit by supply shortages, with utility providers resorting to unscheduled power cuts.

The shortage in India, the world's second-largest coal-consuming country, follows

widespread power outages in China that have shut factories and badly hit production and global supply chains.

"Delhi could face a power crisis," Kejriwal said, adding the megacity has been struggling with energy supplies for the past three months.

"I am personally keeping a close watch over the situation. We are trying our best to avoid it," Kejriwal said on Twitter.

Kejriwal urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to immediately resolve the crisis, saying any major interruption would affect hospitals and disrupt vaccinations against the coronavirus for Delhi's 20 million people.

India's coal-fired power stations had an average of four days' stock at the end of September, the lowest in years.

More than half the plants are on alert for outages and the

government is mulling bringing idled power stations back into operation.

Coal accounts for nearly 70 per cent of India's electricity generation and around three-quarters of the fossil fuel is mined domestically.

As Asia's third-largest economy rebounds following a coronavirus wave, monsoon rains have flooded coal mines and disrupted transport networks, leading to a sharp rise in prices for coal buyers, including power stations.

International coal prices have also soared.

State-run giant Coal India, which produces most of the country's supply, has said it is on a "war footing" to ensure adequate deliveries.

India's long festival season, currently underway, has also added to the surge in demand for power. AFP



New Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal warned of a looming power crisis as coal reserves run low. AFP



North Korean health officials spray disinfectant as part of preventative measures against Covid-19 in the Daesong Department Store in the capital Pyongyang on September 27. AFP



Living with Covid-19 also means reconnecting Singapore with the world and global supply chains so as to preserve the city-state's hub status, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said. THE STRAITS TIMES

S'pore relaxes travel curbs, eyes Covid-19 'new normal'

TRAVEL restrictions will be eased and health processes simplified as Singapore stays the course on living with Covid-19, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

The city-state will press on with its strategy of living with the virus, with a "new normal" expected to be between three and six months away. Right now, the crucial step is to update mindsets on the virus, Lee said in his ninth address to the nation since the pandemic began.

This means treating Covid-19 as a serious adversary without living in fear of it, and adjusting healthcare and recovery measures to prioritise those at greatest risk of severe illness, he told the nation in an address on October 9.

Singapore will also "drastically simplify" its healthcare protocols, said Lee, who acknowledged people's concerns and frustrations about keeping up with new policies and changes to measures.

"No more complicated flow charts. People must be clear what to do if they test positive, or if they come into contact with someone who is infected," he said in the live broadcast.

To this end, home recovery will become the default for almost everyone in Singapore from October 10, except the very youngest and oldest of patients and for those above 50 who are unvaccinated, the multi-ministry task force on Covid-19 announced on October 9.

Testing and isolation protocols have also been streamlined to three pathways that the task force said will apply to the vast majority of cases. The revised protocols and simplified time-based discharge approach – most patients will automatically exit home isolation after 10 days – will take effect from October 11.

Health minister Ong Ye Kung said that authorities had reset these Covid-19 protocols as the Delta variant causes high viral loads early in an infection that can be caught by a rapid test, and balanced against the unsustainability of restricting large numbers of people for prolonged periods to try and catch every case.

"A system like that is less watertight than today's quarantine system, but it can significantly and substantively manage the risk," he said at a multi-ministry taskforce press conference that followed Lee's address.

Unlike last year, when the consequences of infection were serious, widespread vaccination here has meant that more

than 98 per cent of cases now have mild or no symptoms and can recover well at home just like if they had contracted the flu, said Lee.

Only two per cent or fewer developed serious illness, while 0.2 per cent, or two out of every thousand cases – have died or needed intensive care unit (ICU) treatment, he noted.

"In other words, Covid-19 is no longer a dangerous disease for most of us," he said.

Now, the threat of Covid-19 is mainly to seniors – those aged 60 and above who are not vaccinated, or 80 and above even if they are vaccinated, said Lee.

A disproportionate number of cases with poor outcomes were unvaccinated seniors – while they account for barely 1.5 per cent of the population, they made up two-thirds of cases that needed ICU care or died.

"The remaining one-third were vaccinated seniors," Lee said. "We feel very single loss keenly. My deepest sympathies and condolences to all the families."

Lee urged unvaccinated elders to get their vaccines, while those who have been vaccinated should go for their booster shots. The third jab reduces a senior's risk of severe infection by more than 10 times, he said.

"Or to put it in another way, to the virus, the booster shot makes a vaccinated 80-year-old look like a much younger vaccinated 50-plus year-old," he said.

Noting that 142 people have died so far with six deaths on October 8 alone, Singapore's director of medical services Kenneth Mak said vaccination remains the key strategy in reducing the risk of developing severe infection.

"This is a sad statistic and we should not be numb to the fact that when a person develops a severe Covid-19 infection, he does have a high risk of dying from that infection," he said.

From October 9, the booster shots regime will be expanded to healthcare and front-line workers, staff in settings such as aged homes, and to people aged 30 and above.

Living with Covid-19 also means reconnecting Singapore with the world and global supply chains so as to preserve Singapore's hub status, said Lee.

As part of this reopening, the government announced on October 9 that Singapore will allow quarantine-free travel to eight more countries – includ-

ing the US, Britain and Canada – from later this month and South Korea from November 15.

Minister for Transport S Iswaran who was also at the press conference said that together with Brunei and Germany (which are already on the scheme), the 11 countries account for about a tenth of pre-Covid-19 annual passenger arrivals at Changi Airport.

"While still a far cry from where we were pre-Covid, this is a significant step in the reopening of our borders and crucial to reclaiming and rebuilding our status as an international aviation hub with global connectivity," he said.

The next few months will be trying as daily cases continue to rise for a few more weeks, but the surge will level off hopefully within a month, Lee said.

Everyone has a part to play in ensuring that the healthcare system does not get overwhelmed, he added. This includes cutting back on social activities, and not rushing to hospitals' accident and emergency departments if they have mild symptoms, so that bed capacity is reserved for those who need it most.

"Unity of purpose and hearts is crucial to get us through the next few months," he stressed.

Finance minister Lawrence Wong said that while some have called for a faster relaxation of the rules, others have expressed concerns about the health and well-being of their elders and the safety of their young children.

He said the government is taking all these considerations to heart as it develops Singapore's Covid-19 response and strategy.

"We want to ensure that we will always have the ability to provide medical care to anyone who falls seriously ill from Covid-19," he said. "And that's why we will ease out of our stabilisation measures in a calibrated manner."

Lee said people will know when the new normal has been reached – restrictions will largely be lifted, with only light measures in place; daily new cases will be stable at hundreds a day without growing; and hospitals will be able to go back to business as usual.

"We are in a much better position now, than a year or even six months ago," he said. "Sometimes it may not feel like it, but we are making steady progress towards the new normal." THE STRAITS TIMES

(SINGAPORE)/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Philippine Nobel winner says prize for 'all journos'

VETERAN Philippine journalist Maria Ressa on October 9 said her Nobel Peace Prize was for "all journalists around the world", as she vowed to continue her battle for press freedom.

"This is really for all journalists around the world," Ressa, a vocal critic of Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte, told AFP in an interview.

"We do need help on so many fronts – it is so much more difficult and dangerous to be a journalist today."

Ressa, co-founder of news website Rappler, and Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on October 8 for their efforts to "safeguard freedom of expression".

Philippine press groups and rights activists hailed Ressa's award as a "triumph" in a country ranked as one of the world's most dangerous for journalists.

Since Duterte was swept to power in 2016, Ressa and Rappler have endured what media advocates say is a grinding series of criminal charges, investigations and online attacks.

Duterte has called Rappler a "fake news outlet", and Ressa has been the target of abusive messages online.

Ressa, 58, said she hoped the prize would provide a protective shield for her and other journalists in the Philippines against physical attacks and online threats.

"This 'us against them' was never the creation of the journalists, it was the creation of the people in power who wanted to use a type of leadership that divides society," Ressa said, describing the award "like a shot of adrenalin".

"I hope this allows journalists to do our jobs well without fear." AFP



Philippine journalist Maria Ressa, pictured after her arrest in 2019, says her Nobel Peace Prize is for "all journalists around the world". AFP

Surge in anti-vax clips in Thailand sparks concerns

ASEAN P10 S3 269 WoTHAI authorities are concerned about the surge in anti-vaccination TikTok clips, which is also sparking worries among parents and students about the side effects of Pfizer shots.

Deputy government spokesperson Ratchada Dhnadirek on October 9 said 71 per cent or 3.8 million of Thailand's five million students in the 12-18 age range had registered for a Covid-19 jab.

As of October 7, 150,190 students had received their first Pfizer shot and 1,825 their second.

As for the TikTok clips released by anti-vaxxers, Ratchada said the Pfizer vaccine was safe and efficient. The vaccine has also received a stamp of approval from the World Health Organisation (WHO), both the US and Thai Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the health ministry, she said.

She added that though a few Pfizer recipients have devel-

oped some rare symptoms after the jab, the WHO Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety (GACVS) has said that the protection an mRNA jab can provide far outweighs the risk of developing side effects.

A very small percentage of healthy boys globally developed the rare symptom of heart inflammation after receiving the Pfizer shot.

Ratchada said jabs were necessary to boost immunity and allow children to attend classes when schools reopen in November.

The authorities are also looking into the option of conducting random tests among students every two weeks.

The Pfizer shot has been given to 12- to 17-year-olds in many countries, including the US, UK, South Korea, Japan, Spain and Norway. The vaccine manufacturer Pfizer-BioNTech is now seeking US FDA approval for emergency usage on children aged between 5 and 11. THE NATION

(THAILAND)/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



Thai deputy government spokesperson Ratchada Dhnadirek. SUPPLIED

Mental health is a challenge for the world's happiest nations, too

Opinion

Lars Bo Larsen

ON OCTOBER 10, we celebrated World Mental Health Day. Globally, more than 970 million people live with a mental health disorder, corresponding to more than one in 10 people.

Mental health is a challenge that concerns all nations and a large part of the population in our modern society. The first step is to recognise the challenge.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had devastating effects globally and millions of lives have been lost, but even a horrifying pandemic can provide us with some positive learnings. It is impressive how Indonesia has managed to put health on top of the agenda after Covid-19 and has realised that investment and innovation is needed to ensure proper healthcare across the archipelago. It is time to bring the same attention to mental health issues.

With school closures, economic struggle, work from home measures and isolation from friends, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a significant rise in mental health problems all over the world. Indonesia has been one of the countries that has kept children and adolescents at home for the longest period of time despite warnings from experts regarding learning difficulties and mental health. I have no doubt Indonesia will be able to cope with this challenge, but also that we have not yet seen the full cost of the mental side effects of Covid-19.

In the World Happiness Report by the UN, Denmark has typically ranked at the top. In the latest report, Denmark ranked second. However, in Denmark eight per cent of the population has depression and it is estimated that 25 per cent of all contact with a general practitioner is related to mental health.

When encountering the warm hospitality and positive drive of Indonesia, Indonesians easily appear happi-



People visit a mental health-themed art exhibition aimed at raising awareness in Shanghai in August. With school closures, economic struggle, work from home measures and isolation from friends, Covid-19 has caused a significant rise in mental health problems all over the world. AFP

er than Danes. Still, despite the abundance of smiles and a lower official depression rate, mental health is a growing issue and the access to consultation and treatment is limited especially outside urban areas. This means we need to work together to support mental health wellbeing, care and treatment.

In Denmark, we strive to improve mental health for all citizens and to break down stigma and secure prevention and early treatment. We have seen good results when taking a holistic approach, where we include not only the individual but also the family, work life and surroundings.

There are three ways in which Denmark supports mental health.

First, the fight against stigma. We need to continue to

work together to eliminate stigma against mental health disorders. The work of advocacy and patient organisations, such as One of Us in Denmark, and celebrations like World Mental Health Day are very important ways of

care and treatment, the better their chances of recovery will be. In Denmark, the "Mind My Mind" programme offers psychological treatment to children aged 6 to 16.

Third, suicide prevention. On average, one person dies

edge that mental health has risen to the top of the agenda during Covid-19, and we should continue to prioritise prevention, early detection, as well as intervention and treatments of mental health disorders. Even though mental health disorders are less visible, their impact on the daily lives and the economy of any country is significant. But luckily, we are together developing means and instruments to stand up to the challenge.

On this World Mental Health Day, let's celebrate mental health – starting with recognising the challenge and moving forward to address the important topic with all relevant stakeholders. THE JAKARTA POST/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

The writer is Danish ambassador to Indonesia.

“We should prioritise prevention, early detection, as well as intervention and treatments of mental health disorders”

eliminating stigma and educating on mental health.

Second, the importance of early interventions. Most mental health disorders appear in childhood and young adulthood. We also know that the earlier a person with a disorder accesses appropriate mental health

by suicide every 40 seconds in the world, but suicide is preventable. In Denmark, we established several suicide prevention clinics around the country in 2007, significantly reducing the rates of self-harm and suicide.

While we face many challenges, we want to acknowl-

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Lifestyle

Nobel-winning writer vows migration will stay in focus

NOBEL laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah on Friday pledged to keep speaking out on migration and other hotly-contested issues, branding Brexit “a mistake” and European governments’ policies “inhumane”.

The 72-year-old novelist, whose decades-spanning body of work is rooted in colonialism and immigration, landed literature’s top award Thursday for his unflinching portrayal of their effects on the refugee experience.

“I write about these conditions because I want to write about human interactions and ... what is it that people go through when they are reconstructing lives,” he told reporters at a news conference in London.

“I didn’t know it was going to happen,” he said of scooping the accolade. “You write the best you can, and you hope it will succeed and do well.”

But the acclaimed author of 10 novels and several short stories was at pains to point out he would keep speaking candidly on the issues that have shaped his work and world view.

“I’m speaking because this is how I would speak ... whether I had won the Nobel prize or not. I’m not playing a role, I’m saying what I think.”

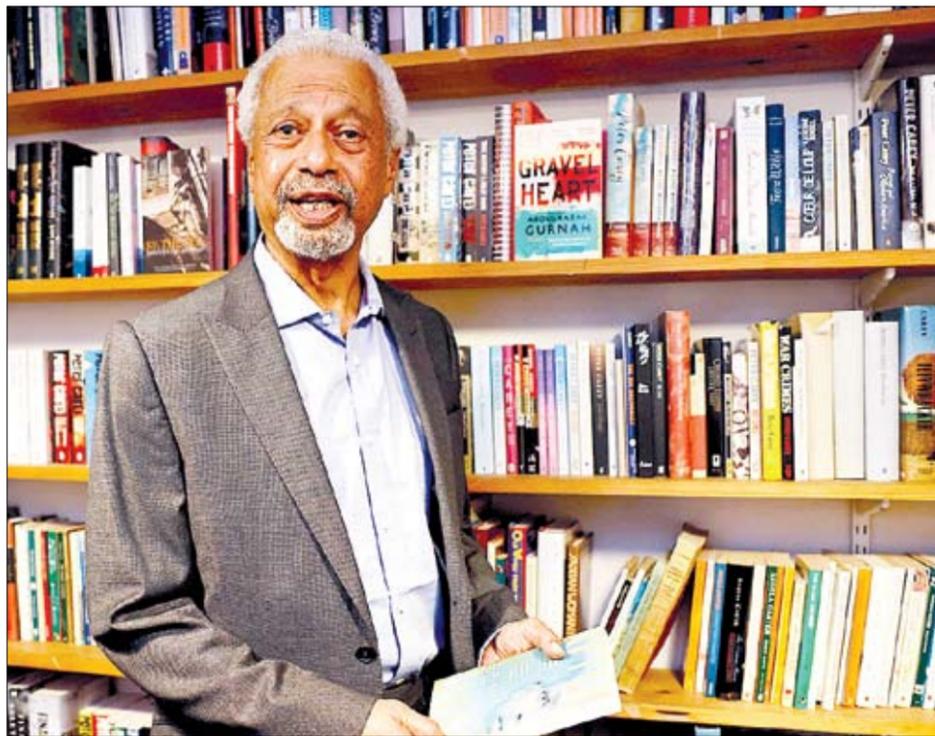
‘I’m from Zanzibar’

Gurnah, the fifth African-born writer to win the literature Nobel, fled to Britain from Zanzibar in late 1967, later acquiring British citizenship.

Growing up speaking Swahili, he had also learned English on the Indian Ocean archipelago, which was a British protectorate until unification with Tanzania.

Despite going on to write his literature in English, Gurnah retains links with, and an identity shaped by, his homeland that has informed his novels.

“I’m from Zanzibar, there’s no confu-



Zanzibar-born author Abdulrazak Gurnah poses at a London photo-call prior to attending his press conference after being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature on Friday. AFP

sion in my mind about that,” he explained.

“My experience of both work as well as living has been here in Britain. But that is not entirely what constitutes your imaginary life or imaginative life.”

“So I don’t feel the question of where do you come from is one that answers the question of what your work does.”

Self-deluding

After more than five decades in the UK, Gurnah argued there is now less blatant racism and greater awareness of the issue, but that the country’s institutions remain “just as mean and just as authoritarian as they were”.

He cited the “Windrush” scandal, which

saw immigrants from the Caribbean targeted by the government in recent years despite moving to Britain legally in the 1950s and 1960s, and the hostile treatment of asylum-seekers.

“This seems to me to be just a continuation of the same ugliness,” the writer noted.

Meanwhile, Gurnah said he was “suspicious of the force” behind Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union last year, which proponents campaigned for in 2016 partly on the basis of limiting immigration and re-

capturing “lost freedoms”.

“Maybe there is something nostalgic in that but there is also perhaps something self-deluding about that,” he added.

“Quite simply, I think it’s a mistake.”

Lack of compassion

The Nobel winner was also unsparing in his criticisms of other European countries’ politics, such as Germany, which he argued has not “faced up to its colonial history”.

His latest book, “Afterlives”, chronicles a little boy stolen from his parents by German colonial troops who later returns to his village to find his parents gone and his sister given away.

Gurnah said current European governments’ hardline reaction to increases in immigration from Africa and the Middle East was both heartless and illogical.

“In this terrified response – ‘who are these people who are coming?’ – [there] is a lack of humanity, a lack of compassion.

“Also, there is not only no moral but no rational grounds: these people are not coming with nothing, they’re coming with youth, energy, potential.

“To simply focus on the idea that ‘here they are, they’re coming to snatch something from our prosperity’ is inhumane.”

AFP

Comic Chappelle says he loves being ‘cancelled’ for jokes

US COMEDIAN Dave Chappelle has thumbed his nose at critics who accuse him of transphobia, telling a packed Los Angeles performance: “If this is what being cancelled is like, I love it.”

The stand-up has courted controversy with his latest Netflix special *The Closer* in which he asserts “gender is a fact”.

“Every human being in this room, every human being on earth, had to pass through the legs of a woman to be on Earth. That is a fact,” he said in the show, which is riding high on Netflix’s chart after its launch last week.

Chappelle also declared himself “Team TERF” – an acronym for Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists, who believe that womanhood is biologically fixed – and defended *Harry Potter* author JK Rowling, who has been vilified for making that case.

At a sold-out Hollywood Bowl on Thursday, Chappelle received a standing ovation, and lashed out at mainstream organisations.

“F--k Twitter. F--k NBC News, ABC News, all these stupid-ass networks. I’m not talking to them. I’m talking to you. This is real life,” he said, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*.

During his more-than-hour-long special, Chappelle is at



US comedian Dave Chappelle has thumbed his nose at critics who accuse him of transphobia. AFP

pains to stress that he does not hate transgender people, and tells a long anecdote about a trans woman comic, who he describes as a friend, who came to his defense in earlier entanglements with the group.

But LGBTQ groups, including the National Black Justice Coalition, have called on Netflix to remove the programme.

Last week Jaclyn Moore, producer of *Dear White People* and herself transgender, said on Twitter that she would no longer work with the video-on-demand platform “as long as they continue to put out and profit from blatantly and dangerously transphobic content”. AFP

Coconuts and prayers: Solomons pair survive 29 days missing at sea

LOST at sea for 29 days, two Solomon Islanders survived on coconuts, oranges and prayers before being rescued 400km away off the coast of Papua New Guinea.

The two men were travelling between islands in the notoriously unpredictable Solomon Sea, when their 7m boat got caught in rough weather a few hours into their journey on September 3.

Livae Nanjikana and Junior Qoloni lost sight of land in the “heavy rain, thick dark clouds and strong winds,” Nanjikana told the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation on Friday.

As the battery in their GPS died and nightfall approached, they switched off their 60-horsepower engine to save fuel.

The men spent their first night being battered by wind and rain which drove their boat further out to sea.

For the first nine days, they lived on oranges they had packed for the trip.

When those ran out, Nanjikana said they survived on rainwater, coconuts “and our

faith in God because we pray day and night”.

Collecting rainwater in a canvas bag, the pair would power up their engine whenever they came across a floating coconut, racing to pick it up.

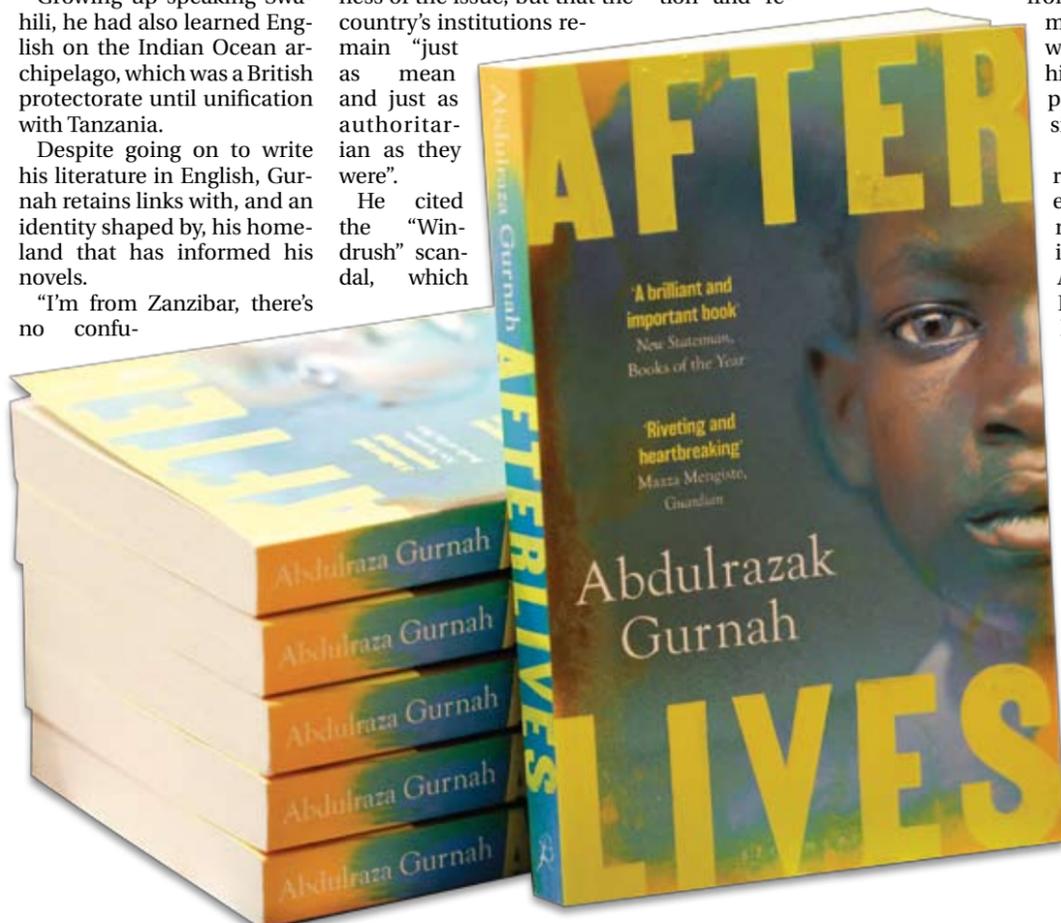
“After several days, because we prayed, God gave us this thought of constructing a device to sail. So we constructed a mast-like structure using paddles and canvas and set sail following the direction of the wind,” Nanjikana said.

The sail sent them towards New Britain island in Papua New Guinea where they saw a fisherman in the distance. Starting the engine for one final push, they motored towards him but ran out of fuel.

“It was then that we shouted and continually waved our hands to the fisherman that he saw us and paddled towards us,” Nanjikana said.

“When he reached us, we asked, where are we now? And he replied, PNG. Ooh, we are now safe.”

The pair have remained in Pomio while arrangements are being made to return them to the Solomon Islands. AFP



Bangkok cafe uses floods to attract diners

A THAI restaurant has taken dining with a water view to the next level – its customers perch precariously on wooden stools as murky brown floodwater laps at their tables.

Tropical storm Dianmu and heavy monsoon rains have caused flooding in 33 Thai provinces, inundating more than 300,000 households and claiming nine lives.

Riverside areas of Bangkok are bracing for flooding in the coming days and more storms are expected to hit the kingdom this week.

But the crisis has been a boon for the Chaopraya Antique Cafe in Nonthaburi, part of the vast sprawl of Bangkok upriver from the city centre.

In the afternoons and evenings the restaurant is full of diners munching miang kham, a fiery leaf-wrapped appetiser, giggling and jumping on their seats as boats and rice barges cruise past the Chao Phraya River, sending waves of caramel-coloured water towards them.

When flooding began owner Titiporn Jutimanon intended to close the restaurant but soon realised customers did not actually mind being surrounded by water.

"The concept has spread by customers' word of mouth," he said, adding footage of the quirky eatery quickly started trending on social media.

Restaurants in Bangkok and other hotspots yoyoed in and out of re-

strictions on in-house dining this year as a deadly third wave of coronavirus infections took hold.

Thai authorities allowed in-house dining to resume in September, as part of an easing of restrictions as new cases fell to around 10,000 a day, down from a peak of 23,000 in August.

An estimated 50,000 restaurants have shut down permanently according to the Thai Restaurant Association, and Titiporn is grateful he can keep his doors open.

"If I have to close down the restaurant again, it wouldn't survive for sure," he said.

Operating a flooded restaurant is a lot of hard work, Titiporn noted.

"You have to navigate your way through floodwaters while holding the customers' food," he said, adding staff also have to mop up mud at the end of the day.

The experience has proved popular with young people and families.

"The economy is pretty bad these days ... I think it's a very good idea. The owner has turned the crisis into an opportunity," customer Neung, 49, said.

Health authorities in many countries advise people not to expose themselves to or swim in flood water.

Faecal matter from overflowing sewage, chemicals and industrial waste can cause illness and skin infections can occur from contact with open wounds. AFP



People enjoy dinner at the Chaopraya Antique Cafe in Nonthaburi province north of Bangkok on Thursday. AFP



People stand up while enjoying dinner at the Chaopraya Antique Cafe as flood water from the Chao Phraya River surges into the restaurant in Nonthaburi province north of Bangkok. AFP

Azure waters and limestone cliffs: Afghans go back to Band-e Amir

THE stunning azure waters of the Band-e Amir lakes are once again attracting Afghan tourists, who brave bumpy roads to experience the so-called Grand

Canyon of Afghanistan.

The six lakes at the heart of the Hindu Kush mountain range were – according to legend – a miracle creation of

Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet of Islam, Mohammed.

Their striking colour is down to the rich mineral content of

the waters, thanks to the surrounding limestone cliffs.

After the Taliban seized power, the site in Bamiyan province was deserted, but seven weeks later tourists have begun to return.

They rent paddle boats in the shape of swans imported from Iran, paying the equivalent of eight dollars an hour.

Taliban guards brandishing rocket launchers have also taken trips out on the water.

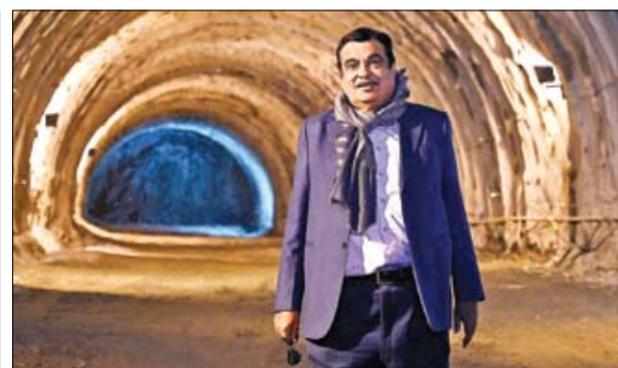
"We have come from Kabul for the first time," said 23-year-old teacher Asal Walizada.

"The route was safe and we had no problem. It's beautiful here," she added.

Visiting with friends, 17-year-old Hadi cried out with joy as he plunged into the brisk waters in bathing shorts reaching below his knees.

"I've lived here for four years and each day when the water is warm enough I swim in the lake," he said.

Bamiyan was long one of the safest regions in Afghanistan and for the souvenir and craft merchants who line the route to the main lake, the return of local tourists is uplifting. AFP



India's transport minister Nitin Gadkari at the Zojila tunnel. Gadkari wants to replace horns of all vehicles with Indian musical instruments. AFP

Official considers musical toots for noisy Indian roads

INDIA'S transport minister is mulling a law that would seek to replace the country's constant car-horn cacophony with the sound of music.

"I am studying this and soon planning to make a law that the horns of all vehicles should be in Indian musical instruments so that it is pleasant to hear," Nitin Gadkari told local media.

The horns could blast sounds made by the flute, tabla, violin, mouth organ or harmonium, he added.

Gadkari also said he wanted to replace the "irritating" sirens used by ambulances and police vehicles with soothing tunes.

India is home to some of the noisiest cities in the world, as

rickshaws, buses, taxis, weaving motorbikes and private cars fight for space on the traffic-clogged roads.

The horn is deemed almost as important as the gas pedal – and more so than wing mirrors – and is used by drivers more to alert other road-users to their presence rather than to rebuke.

India's colourful trucks often have messages painted on their backs aimed at overtaking drivers such as "Horn OK Please" or "Blow Horn".

The World Health Organisation says noise pollution can cause hearing loss, cardiovascular problems, cognitive impairment, stress and depression. AFP



People sit on paddle boats for a ride at the Band e-Amir lake in Afghanistan's Bamiyan province on October 4. AFP

Lifestyle



A gallery assistant poses at a photocall for the opening of David Hockney: *The Arrival of Spring, Normandy, 2020* at the Royal Academy in London. AFP

For David Hockney, lockdown was easy

BRITISH artist David Hockney has always been a workhorse, so his months of lockdown in France were a welcome opportunity to devote himself to observing nature.

"I really enjoy looking," the dapper 84-year-old said.

"If you look at the world, it's very beautiful. But you've got to have a clear head and there's lots of things that stop you looking."

Hockney was speaking at the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris, which is displaying the stunning fruits of that period in an exhibition, *A Year in Normandy*, that opens on October 13.

It features a 91m-long frieze made up from some of the 220 pictures he created during the strange year of solitude in 2020.

It is a clear nod to the 19th century masters of landscape, particularly Monet, who inhabits some of the neighbouring rooms in the museum.

"When the lockdown came I didn't mind at all," said Hockney, 84, resplendent as ever in his trademark round-rimmed glasses and a checked suit.

"We were in an isolated place and I worked every day because there were no visitors. Visitors put me off, get in the way."

All of the drawings were made on an iPad, which has become his preferred way to make art – much more than the photographs that used to be so central to his work.

"I'm really off photography now," he said.

"Everyone's a photographer. Everyone has a

mobile phone in their pocket, they can all take photographs. Photographs are very boring."

He loves drawing on the iPad, freeing him up from the paraphernalia of regular painting.

"It's a new technique. I don't think there's many people doing it," he said.

'You can't cancel Spring'

The dazzling colours of the Normandy countryside are a perfect fit for Hockney, who made his name with sun-soaked scenes from California in the 1960s.

Though known for his jet-set lifestyle, sartorial elegance and large retinue of friends, he has always been an industrial worker and was delighted to have time to devote himself to nature, which has become his principal muse in recent years.

"They cancelled the Olympic Games, but you can't cancel the Spring," he said with a mischievous grin.

"The first day we came to Normandy, we watched a marvellous sunset over the Seine estuary. We had the clarity of Van Gogh."

He dismisses the idea that landscapes are no longer an interesting subject for art.

"Nature is the source of everything. When I went to Yorkshire 16 years ago, people 'said you can't paint landscape today'. I said 'that's just because of the paintings – the landscape itself can't be boring'.

"The depictions of it have become boring, that's all. You've got to make them a bit different – and that's what I've tried to do." AFP



British painter David Hockney poses at the Orangerie museum in Paris on Thursday, in front of his painting *A year in Normandy*, a 91m-long artwork painted during the lockdown last year. 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									

"BETWEEN THE LINES"

ACROSS

- 1 Flowerpot material
- 11 Hung up on esses
- 15 Communism and others
- 16 Excited by
- 17 Letters to the editor
- 19 Draws to a close
- 20 Bold and sassy
- 21 "Superman" actor Christopher
- 22 Brazen one
- 23 Supply provisions
- 24 "___ well"
- 27 Figure to shoot for
- 28 Bundle
- 29 Common carrier
- 32 Early afternoon hour
- 35 Monopoly square
- 39 Babysitter's handful
- 40 007
- 41 Eagle's home
- 42 Amniotic ___
- 44 Fix firmly, in a way
- 45 Boozehound
- 48 Demolished a London flat
- 51 Acclaim
- 52 "Boola Boola" collegians

DOWN

- 3 The "fat" in "Fat Tuesday"
- 57 Lets have it
- 60 Famous clinic
- 61 Used Western Union
- 62 Negotiation problem
- 63 Providing support
- 1 Grow bored or impatient
- 2 Adam lived there
- 3 This puzzle's theme word
- 4 Towel holders
- 5 Pub favorite
- 6 ___ Christi
- 7 Baddies
- 8 Wedding cake parts
- 9 Cantank-erous
- 10 Fanged Nile menace
- 11 Like some equations
- 12 Map inside a map
- 13 Carell of Hollywood
- 14 Baffling problem
- 18 "Blackfish" animal
- 22 Bygone music system
- 24 "Don't forget about me"
- 25 Go bungee jumping
- 26 Man in the making

- 27 Islands dish
- 28 ___ Lanka (Ceylon)
- 29 It may come after many moons?
- 30 Coffee container
- 31 Young boy
- 32 Ripped
- 33 Bide one's time
- 34 Poem with complex stanza forms
- 36 Major network
- 37 ___ an egg (bombed)
- 38 Increase motor speed, briefly
- 42 Skilled mariner
- 43 Word with "industrial" and "martial"
- 44 Dwell permanently
- 45 Contract conditions
- 46 Deep blue sea
- 47 Costa del Sol feature
- 48 Strike anew
- 49 Last Olds model produced
- 50 "Cops" sound
- 53 '60s sports cars
- 54 Indian royal
- 55 Breezed through, as an exam
- 56 Eyelid affliction
- 58 Pan Am alternative
- 59 Mantra syllables

Sudoku Pacific

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

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Friday's solution

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

Friday's solution

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

Unbeaten Toulouse come good to crush Pau

LEAGUE leaders Toulouse remained unbeaten after six games as they put in a sparkling second-half performance to crush Pau 38-10 in the Top 14 on Saturday.

Pau had led 7-0 at halftime thanks to an intercept try by Thibault Debais, who also converted.

But the second-half saw a Toulouse side skippered by France scrum-half Antoine Dupont put Pau to the sword.

Veteran Maxime Medard crossed for Toulouse's first try, before Anthony Jelonch notched up a double either side of a try by Australian lock Rory Arnold.

Cyril Baille crossed for the team's fifth try, Romain Ntamack converting all five as well as hitting a penalty to ensure not only Toulouse's 10th successive Top 14 win stretching back to May but also a bonus-point victory that extends their lead atop the table over Bordeaux-Begles to seven points.

"Our first half wasn't at the level of which we are capable," was the blunt assessment of Toulouse coach Ugo Mola.

"The second half wasn't pretty, but at least we did what was required. It's not a match that'll be etched in Toulouse memories, but it's the five points that are important."

Jelonch, who captained France during their summer tour to Australia, said the second-half performance had been a "great reaction".

"That first half is a warning and



Toulouse's French prop Cyril Baille runs with the ball during the French Top 14 rugby union match against Pau on Saturday. AFP

we need to focus on that second half for the remainder of the season," the backrow forward added.

Struggling La Rochelle, high fliers domestically and on the continent last season, earlier beat Castres 29-10

for just the second win of their Top 14 campaign.

La Rochelle lost to Toulouse in

both the Top 14 and European Cup finals last season, but instead of taking the next step they have gone

backwards this time under new head coach Ronan O'Gara, the former Ireland playmaker.

Defeat at Montpellier the previous weekend meant they had won just one of their five opening games

and sat 13th in the 14-team table.

But O'Gara could take heart from the win over Castres, France internationals Pierre Bougarit and Gregory Alldritt crossing for tries in each half as fly-half Pierre Popelin converted both and also chipped in with five penalties for a personal tally of 19 points.

"The loss against Montpellier was unacceptable," said O'Gara. "But this was good."

"We showed a better side, but it's not exactly that which I want to show. We were aggressive and committed in our game plan, but we need to find more rhythm and speed."

"But our first job was to beat Castres, and we did that," he said, adding however, that it would not go down in the annals as "a reference point".

"We're playing some good stuff but I'm waiting to see how some players train ... because we're still a little lacking on both tactical and technical levels."

In other early games, Lyon thumped Biarritz 40-5. Bordeaux-Begles edged Montpellier 27-23 and Racing 92 snuck past Perpignan 17-14.

In Saturday's late game, three-time European champions Toulon defeated Brive 13-9.

On Sunday, bottom-placed Stade Français take on ASM Clermont Auvergne. AFP

S Korean Ko grabs 4-stroke lead at LPGA Founders Cup

SOUTH Korea's Ko Jin-young fired a two-under par 69 to seize a four-stroke lead after Saturday's third round of the

LPGA Founders Cup.

World number two Ko stood on 13-under 200 after 54 holes at Mountain Ridge Country

Club in West Caldwell, New Jersey.

A second-place pack four adrift on 204 included South Korea's Ryu So-yeon, Americans Lindsey Weaver and Elizabeth Szokol and Yuka Saso of the Philippines.

Ko, who matched her LPGA career-low round with an opening 63, broke 70 for her 13th round in a row on Saturday, leaving her one shy of matching Annika Sorenstam's all-time LPGA record for consecutive rounds in the 60s.

"I didn't play too aggressive," Ko said. "Play was good. I still made it 2-under par. I cannot wait for play tomorrow."

Defending champion Ko began the round with a two-stroke lead, stumbled with a

bogey at the fourth but answered with birdies at the par-3 fifth and par-4 sixth to reach 12-under.

That gave her a four-stroke advantage as Ryu, second when the round began, faded early with bogeys at the fifth and sixth before rallying to shoot 71.

Ko answered a bogey at the ninth with a birdie at the 11th and birdied the par-5 15th to stretch her lead to four strokes, then parred her way to the clubhouse.

"Last two days wasn't breeze much on the course, but today maybe 10 miles [16km per hour]," Ko said.

"So little hard to get like club choice. Still the course is amazing, fairways are really

good and greens are perfect."

Ko shared second the previous week at the LPGA ShopRite Classic after capturing her ninth career LPGA title, and second of the year, last month at Portland.

Reigning US Women's Open champion Saso birdied the fifth, sixth and par-5 eighth and added two more at 14 and 15 before taking her lone bogey at 17 to shoot 67.

"I'll keep doing what I was doing the past three days, have fun and enjoy every shot," Saso said.

The 20-year-old Asian star said winning a major title has not created major changes for her.

"It was very special for me," Saso said. "It didn't really

change my life but it feels good. It made me realise I have to focus more on what I have to do. I'm really thankful for that win."

A sixth-place pack on 206 included France's Perrine Delacour, Americans Lexi Thompson and top-ranked Nelly Korda, Germany's Caroline Masson and Mexico's Maria Fassi.

"Very excited to be under par and in contention," Fassi said. "I'm hitting the ball really good. I just have to keep doing what I'm doing."

Many of the leaders had to finish their second rounds Saturday morning after early fog delays Thursday and Friday kept golfers on the course until darkness each day. AFP



South Korea's Ko Jin-young watches her drive from the 14th tee in round 2 of the women's golf individual stroke play during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games on August 5. AFP

Desisa, Kipruto headline stalled Boston Marathon

AFTER being cancelled last year due to Covid-19 and postponed six months this year, the 125th edition of the Boston Marathon is finally scheduled to be contested on Monday.

Kenyans with marathon triumphs earlier this year are among the favorites in the 26.2-mile showdown over the streets of Boston, with vaccinations or a negative Covid-19 test at the race medical center needed to compete.

A field of 20,000, trimmed by 40 per cent from the usual size, will compete with organisers saying about 95 per cent of runners have been vaccinated. Masks will be needed in certain race areas while about 200,000 spectators are expected to line the route.

"We look forward mightily to what's coming Monday," Boston Athletic Association chief executive officer Tom Grilk said. "It has been more than 900 days since we last ran together here in person."

The spring classic will be contested a day after the Chicago Marathon and a few weeks ahead of the New York Marathon.

The men's race is up for grabs with Kenya's Benson Kipruto, 30, coming off a victory five months ago in Prague in 2:10:16, well off his best of 2:05:13 from Toronto in 2019. Kipruto was also seventh last year at London.

Kenya's Wilson Chebet, 36, ran his best on 2:05:27 a decade ago to win at Rotterdam and won from 2011-2013 at Amsterdam but in May ran 2:08:38 to finish 13th at Milan.

Ethiopia's Asefa Mengstu, 33, has the field's top personal best at 2:04:06 from 2018 at Dubai and placed seventh at last year's Tokyo Marathon in 2:06:23.

Ethiopian Lelisa Desisa, 31, was the 2019 world champion and won the 2013 and 2015 Boston titles as well as the 2018 New York crown, but failed to finish at the Tokyo Olympics in August. His best of

2:04:45 came in a 2013 Dubai victory.

Another Ethiopian, Lemi Berhanu, 27, went 2:04:33 in a 2016 Dubai runner-up effort trying to repeat as champion. He was a runner-up at Toronto in 2019 but failed to finish twice last year.

In the women's race Kenya's Angela Tanui, 29, won in January at Bangladesh in 2:29:04 and took the Tuscany title in Italy last April in 2:20:08.

The only runners in the field with faster times are Kenya's Edna Kiplagat and Ethiopia's Mare Dibaba, who both broke 2:20:00 in 2012.

Kiplagat, 42, is a two-time world champion with wins at New York, London and at Boston in 2017 in 2:21:52. She was also the 2019 Boston runner-up.

Dibaba, 31, won the 2015 world title and Olympic bronze in 2016. She was most recently the 2019 Berlin Marathon runner-up in 2:20:21. AFP



Kenya's Benson Kipruto leads in the elite men's race of the 2020 London Marathon in central London on October 4. AFP

Sport

McTominay gives Scotland dramatic win

SCOTT McTominay scored an injury-time winner as Scotland came from behind to claim a crucial 3-2 victory over Israel in World Cup qualifying on Saturday, while England thrashed Andorra 5-0 to stay on track to reach next year's global showpiece.

The win takes Scotland four points clear of Israel in second place in Group F with three matches remaining as they bid to qualify for the World Cup for the first time since 1998.

Group winners qualify automatically for next year's finals in Qatar, with the runners-up heading into the playoffs.

Scotland trailed twice in the first half at Hampden Park to goals from PSV Eindhoven forward Eran Zahavi and Mu'nas Dabbur.

John McGinn levelled once, but home striker Lyndon Dykes missed a penalty on the stroke of half-time.

He made amends before the hour mark with an equaliser, awarded after a VAR review after the referee initially disallowed it for a high boot.

A point would have been a decent result for Steve Clarke's men, but the hosts pushed for a winner which arrived in the 94th minute as Manchester United midfielder McTominay

bundled in at the back post.

The Scots still hold a slim chance of topping the group, trailing leaders Denmark, who cruised past Moldova 4-0 in Chisinau, by seven points.

"We've got a few games left and we have to just remain focused. We wanted a win tonight and we got it," Dykes told Sky Sports.

Changed England score five

England manager Gareth Southgate rested key players including Harry Kane and Raheem Sterling as his second string impressed in a 5-0 thumping of Andorra.

Ben Chilwell opened the scoring in the 17th minute, with the goal awarded by VAR after initially being disallowed for offside against Jadon Sancho.

Bukayo Saka made the points safe before half-time and Roma striker Tammy Abraham made the most of a rare start by scoring in the 59th minute.

Jack Grealish came off the bench and won a penalty which James Ward-Prowse saw saved, before turning in the rebound.

Grealish rounded off the scoring with a fine individual effort for his first international



England's forward Tammy Abraham (left) vies with Andorra's midfielder Xavier Vieira during the World Cup 2022 qualifier football match on Saturday. AFP

goal after collecting goalkeeper Sam Johnstone's long kick.

"It has been a long time coming and it's about time that I scored because everyone has been saying it to me," Grealish told the BBC.

"I think that is 16 games now. It was coming and I'm just delighted that I've got off the mark."

It was a busy night for Kateryna Monzul, the first female official to referee an England match, with five yellow cards as well as the penalty award.

England remain four points clear at the top of Group I after second-placed Albania won 1-0 against Hungary in Budapest.

Poland are a point further

back in third after seeing off San Marino 5-0 and next face Albania in Tirana on Tuesday.

Sweden continue Spain chase

Sweden moved within a point of Group B leaders Spain thanks to a 3-0 win over Kosovo in Solna.

Alexander Isak scored a magnificent goal to cap a bril-

liant individual display, with Robin Quaison and Emil Forsberg also on the scoresheet.

Sweden also have a game in hand on Spain, who they visit in their final qualifier next month.

Greece kept their hopes of pushing into the top two themselves alive as two late goals secured a 2-0 win in Georgia.

The Greeks remain unbeaten and are three points behind Sweden and also have a game in hand on Spain.

Switzerland remain close on the coattails of European champions Italy after edging out 10-man Northern Ireland 2-0 in Geneva.

The Swiss are three points behind Italy in Group C with a game in hand and lead third-placed Northern Ireland by six points.

Elsewhere, Serbia moved above Portugal to the top of Group A with a 1-0 win over Luxembourg.

Ukraine ended a run of five straight draws with a 2-1 victory in Finland to consolidate their grip on second place in Group D.

The Euro 2020 quarter-finalists are two points ahead of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who beat Kazakhstan 2-0, and four points behind France. AFP ■

Benzema still dreaming of clinching Ballon d'Or

REAL Madrid's on-form striker Karim Benzema has been dreaming of winning the Ballon d'Or since he was a little boy, he told Spanish daily AS in an interview published on Saturday.

Benzema was selected on the long list of 30 for the 2021 Ballon d'Or on Friday a day after scoring as France beat Belgium 3-2 and make the Nations League final.

"I've been dreaming of winning it since I was a kid, we all do, all professional players," said Benzema.

"So I've been doing everything possible and will continue to do so, because I hope to win it and fulfil my childhood dream."

With nine goals in eight games for Madrid this season

Benzema has flowered since Cristiano Ronaldo moved on two years ago.

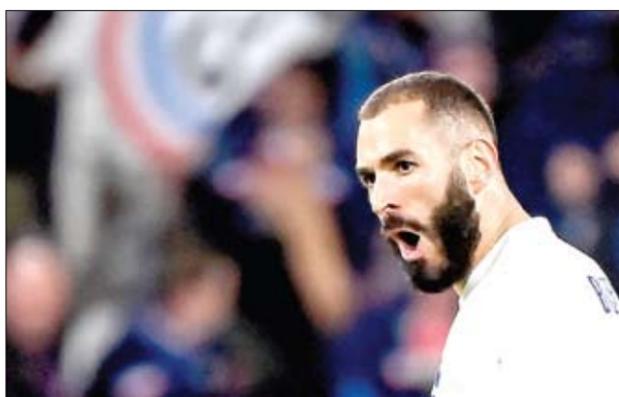
"What is important is that people enjoy my football and that I feel happy and proud.

"There are strikers these days playing very well into their 30s and scoring many goals," said Benzema, who will be 34 in December.

"Modern football allows for that," he said.

"It's always a pleasure to be named on this list of the top 30 players, and I'll keep it in my corner of my mind as an objective in the big matches."

"I'm sure it'll be a huge final. Spain are a young team, but a very talented one. I just hope above all that it's a great game," he said. AFP ■



France's forward Karim Benzema celebrates after scoring a goal during the UEFA Nations League semi-final football match against Belgium on Thursday. AFP

St Helens beat Catalans Dragons to claim record 9th Super League title

ST HELENS claimed a record ninth Super League title with a 12-10 Grand Final win against Catalans Dragons on Saturday to deny the French club's bid to make history.

Kevin Naiqama scored two tries and Lachlan Coote kicked the decisive conversion at Old Trafford as Saints became the first team to win three successive titles since Leeds in 2009.

Kristian Woolf's team also completed the fourth domestic double in Saints' history after winning the Challenge Cup in July and ended the Dragons' dream of a maiden title.

Steve McNamara's Dragons had already made British rugby league history by breaking the dominance of its northern English heartlands.

The club from Perpignan, southern France, joined Super League in 2006 and became the first non-English team to win the Challenge Cup knockout competition in 2018.

This year, they topped the regular-season table to lift the League Leaders' Shield for the first time and became the first non-English team to reach the Grand Final.

But St Helens held their nerve in the final in Manchester to ensure there would be no fairytale ending for the Dragons.

Australian Woolf hailed his "special" team for maintaining high standards since winning the 2019 Grand Final under compatriot Justin Holbrook.

"It was an outstanding game. There was drama, controversy and I'm extremely proud of this group," he told Sky Sports.

"They've had two coaches - that says a lot about the group as well."

Fijian Naiqama added: "I'm just so overwhelmed right now, I love this group.

"We are going to go and celebrate this for the next couple of nights."

McNamara called Catalans' loss "heart-breaking" but vowed it was not the final chapter in their story.

"It's been a major step forward for the club but it's not the final step - there's many more to take," he said.

St Helens dominated early on as Catalans' Sam Tomkins, who won the 2021 Man of Steel award for best player of the season, struggled to make an impression.

James Maloney gave the Dragons an early lead in his final game for the club with a 10th-minute penalty.

But Naiqama pierced the Dragons' defence and contorted his body to ground the ball past the line for St Helens.

Coote extended Saints' lead to four points with a 22nd-minute penalty before

Maloney converted his second penalty in the 28th minute to cut the deficit as St Helens led 6-4 at half-time.

Saints were reduced to 12 men after Tommy Makinson was sin-binned for a try-saving high tackle on Fouad Yaha.

The Dragons made their numerical advantage count in the 50th minute when Saints failed to defend a high ball and Mike McMeeken dotted down.

Maloney's conversion gave Catalans a 10-6 lead to send their small contingent of travelling fans wild.

But Naiqama, who will leave St Helens to spend more time with his family in Australia, scored a decisive second try.

He latched on to Lomax's kick in the 66th minute, with Coote's conversion putting St Helens 12-10 in front with 13 minutes remaining. AFP ■



St Helens' James Roby holds the Trophy aloft as they celebrate winning the Super League Grand Final rugby league match against Catalans Dragons on Saturday. AFP