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# Japan-aided Industry 4.0 centre in view

May Kunmakara

THE Cambodian government, through the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) and with the support of Tokyo, plans to establish the Cambodia-Japan Digitalised Manufacturing Centre (CJDM), in a move to provide high-quality professional training solutions in the Kingdom that focus on

the Industry 4.0 concept.

Mey Kalyan, RUPP chairman and RUPP-DMG Mori project founder, told a press conference on preparations for the CJDM on October 14 that Cambodia must keep pace with the breakneck speed of digital technology innovations and blistering rate of Industry 4.0 adoption that has taken the world by storm.

The Kingdom must maintain a

strong base of well-trained human resources to meet the demand of foreign investors who bring sophisticated equipment and techniques to Cambodian industry, he said.

"The initiatives incorporated into the project are for us, now the dream has come true. It is my conviction that human resources are everything, if we were to implement In-

dustry 4.0 without human resources, things wouldn't work out.

"It is truly amazing that we have done this, even during the tough time of the Covid-19 pandemic - we will now embark on our own initiative," Kalyan said.

He voiced appreciation to the Japanese

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## Grim outlook

Street artists paint a mural on a wall opposite the COP26 climate summit venue in Glasgow on Wednesday. AFP

# PM bolsters 'heritage building' conservation

Mom Kunthea

PRIME Minister Hun Sen has issued a circular to prevent the demolition and altering of heritage buildings, the changing or damaging of religious structures, public and private buildings, villages and ancient houses.

In the circular dated October 12 and seen by *The Post* on October 14, Hun Sen said the government had noted that modernisation had caused the loss of and damage to heritage buildings located on heritage sites in the capital and provinces. He said such buildings are invaluable.

The national heritage and

wealth, he added, have been placed at risk and threatened by development, and a balance between conservation and development is needed.

"Therefore, in order for conservation work on the city's heritage sites and religious buildings, public and private buildings, villages and ancient houses to be in

accordance with the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, the government prohibits the alteration of exterior features or damaging the beauty of urban heritage sites," Hun Sen said.

The prime minister recommended that the cultural,

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## Dane with bow and arrows kills 5 in Norway

A DANISH man suspected of killing five people with a bow and arrows in Norway had converted to Islam and was previously known to police over fears that he had been radicalised, officials said on October 14.

Five people were killed - four women and one man - and two others were injured on October 13 in the southeastern town of Kongsberg in Norway's deadliest attack in a decade.

Norwegian police official Ole Bredrup Saeverud told reporters on October 14 that the 37-year-old suspect had confessed during questioning. Those who were killed during the attack were all aged 50-70.

"We are investigating among other things to determine whether this was a terrorist attack," Saeverud added.

Reports that linked the suspect to radicalisation pre-dated this year, and police had followed up at the time, Saeverud said. "We haven't had any reports about him in 2021, but earlier ... We're relatively sure that he acted alone."

This was the deadliest attack in the Scandinavian country since far-right extremist Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people in 2011. Since then, Norway has seen one other far-right attack, carried out by a self-proclaimed neo-Nazi who opened fire into a mosque.

Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen reacted with "great sadness" to the "terrible attack".

The suspect was due to go before a judge on October 15 for a custody hearing and was undergoing a psychiatric examination on October 4, the prosecutor said. AFP



Will Evergrande change the way Chinese developers do business?

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# Vei Samnang: From career civil servant to Kampong Speu governor

The Post Profiles:  
**Vei Samnang**  
Governor of Kampong Speu Province

Mom Kunthear

**K**AMPONG Speu provincial governor Vei Samnang was born in 1974 into a family supported by his father's work as a civil servant in Kanh Chriech commune's Prey Pdao village of Prey Veng province's Kanh Chriech district, but his family was forced to move to Kampong Thom province in 1979-1980 after the Khmer Rouge was overthrown.

Samnang was just a school boy back then, but his childhood recollections are of a life of uncertainty and constantly being on the move until reaching the relative calm of his father's hometown, Kampong Thom, where he was able to begin school again regularly and focus on studying until he graduated in 1991.

"Immediately after graduating from high school, I took the entrance exam at the Prek Leap National Institute of Agriculture and attended school there until I finished my degree in 1994.

"At the time, Cambodia was transitioning from dependence to independence with help from the UN and the country still had a lot of unresolved political problems.

"There was obviously going to be a lot of work available staffing the new government so I signed a contract to work for the government for five years after graduation and I served in the department of forestry, as it was called back then," Samnang tells *The Post*.

While working as an official at the forestry department,



Kampong Speu provincial governor Vei Samnang speaks at the provincial hall in September. KAMPONG SPEU PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

Samnang didn't just rest on his laurels and collect his salary. Instead – in his spare time – he began to study for a law degree at Build Bright University and for a master's degree at the Royal University of Law and Economics (RULE).

As the old saying goes, education has no age limits and there's always more to learn no matter who you are. As a provincial governor, Samnang is in the upper echelons of government officialdom and yet he is currently pursuing a PhD at the Royal Academy of Cambodia.

"Scholarship, research, studying, academia – those are the sorts of things that are actually fun for me because I love learning. So the time I spend working on my PhD also doubles as my leisure time," he says.

Even though Samnang has risen to a higher rank or office than his father ever achieved, he says he still thinks of him as his primary role model and considers himself to be following in his footsteps.

"My father was a civil servant – and I am too – even

though I'm a governor. What is the purpose of a leader other than to serve the people? True leadership is service to the people and the nation above all else," he says.

Prime Minister Hun Sen decided to appoint Samnang as the deputy governor of Kampong Speu, putting him on a fast track to a top leadership role. He then served in that position for one year before his promotion to governor in 2016 under a royal decree.

Samnang says he loves the job he has today even though

being a governor has often turned out to be simultaneously challenging and frustrating. He says it is ultimately satisfying when he sees how his decisions, plans and ideas are really helping people.

He says he has no ambitions to achieve any higher office than the one he has currently, but whether he moves onto one isn't for him to decide anyways. If the prime minister tells him he is needed somewhere, he says, then that is where he will go.

"As I said, whatever my rank, I will always be a

humble civil servant like my father, and if [Hun Sen] orders me to move offices or change titles, whether it's a promotion or demotion – who am I to possibly argue?" Samnang avers.

Samnang – who has been married since 2003 and is the father to one daughter and three sons – says he has his hands full managing Kampong Speu for now because managing a province is like managing a family with many children.

"Each child demands that you buy them their favourite toy. The younger ones like dolls, the older ones motorcycles and all of them love phones.

"But as any working father with a large family can tell you, it is impossible to fulfil all of their demands and still put food on the table and keep the lights on at night.

Therefore, he says, what has to be undertaken is a balancing of interests, wants and needs for the greater good and then explaining those decisions to the family – that is, the officials and the public and persuading them to work to support and implement those policies.

"After all, I do very much need the public's cooperation and the officials' technical expertise and skills to get anything done. One man or woman on their own in this world is nothing and any decision or plan I make alone without the agreement and support of the people and help of my officials is no better than a foolish daydream.

"But when you have a nation of men and women who choose to work together towards the same goals? That's everything – and with them – you can accomplish anything," Samnang concludes. ■

## ANNOUNCEMENT

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## Decision rests with culture ministry

Continued from page 1

historical, ancient and heritage buildings currently under demolition be stopped so that they will be preserved based on strategies and policies to push for the sustainable preservation and development of heritage sites.

"The heritage buildings that will be restored, redesigned or demolished must be reviewed and a decision made by the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and relevant authorities first," he emphasised.

Hun Sen advised all ministries and relevant institutions across the country to implement the circular effectively and with a high sense of responsibility.

Banteay Meanchey provincial culture department director Yong Taing Koy said on October 14 that he was happy when the head of government issued such the circular because in the past heritage



An old French building which is currently the UNESCO office near the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh. HONG MENEHA

buildings in communities had been demolished without the proper authorisation.

"I fully support the content of this circular, and I also ask

for the implementation of this circular to effectively cover the capital and provinces, especially in Banteay Meanchey province. Old buildings are our

national heritage. All relevant institutions have to respect and implement it," he said.

Taing Koy added that the province had many old pagodas and temples. The Department of Culture and Fine Arts as well as other stakeholders had educated people and sent information to districts, communes and communities that have artifacts, ancient temples to preserve them.

However, he said some people had not cooperated with authorities and had covertly built near temples and demolished many ancient sites as well.

"We have cooperated with the authorities and police to prevent such incidents, and we continue to do this work on a regular basis. We convened a two-day meeting a week ago to find a solution for application forms for the construction of buildings in temple areas, and we also advised people to build houses in the Khmer style," he added. ■



Justice ministry spokesman Chin Malin speaks during a press conference last year. HONG MENEHA

## WJP's 'rule of law' rankings unreasonable, official says

Ry Sochan

**A** SENIOR Ministry of Justice official dismissed the report of World Justice Project (WJP) that ranked Cambodia second from the bottom in its Rule of Law Index 2021 launched on October 14.

Chin Malin, the ministry's spokesman, said the ranking did not reflect the reality on the ground.

According to the index seen by *The Post* on October 13, Cambodia was ranked 138th out of 139 countries. It said during the Covid-19 pandemic, the enforcement of the rule of law in countries around the world had deteriorated. In addition, 4.7 per cent of the

world population, or equivalent to 6.5 billion people, lived in the countries where the rule of law was diminishing.

The index ranked three countries that strongly adhered to the rule of law, with Denmark, Norway and Finland ranking first, second and third respectively.

Three countries were sent to the bottom of the index, with Venezuela, Cambodia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo ranking 139th, 138th and 137th respectively.

In 2020, WJP ranked Cambodia at 127 out of 128 countries.

Malin said the WJP ranking did not reflect the reality in Cambodia and the international context during the Covid-19 pandemic. He said

representatives from some countries had criticised Cambodia for implementing the Covid-19-related law, but those countries eventually had to enforce many measures and even stricter ones than what have been enforced in Cambodia, such as lockdowns and mandatory vaccinations, among many others, he said.

"Therefore, downgrading Cambodia and making the country worse than others is unreasonable. The ranking should be based on other sources or data such as from civil society or an opposition group otherwise there could be a wrong result."

WJP said the Rule of Law Index 2021 had surveyed more than 138,000 families and over 4,200 legal enforcement of-

officials and experts around the world. It said the rule of law referred to legal standards and the commitment to provide accountability, just law, open government, and access of justice.

Rights group Adhoc spokesman Soeng Sen Karuna said it was not unusual that the WJP had placed Cambodia in the bottom rankings as it is similar to previous years.

He said legal enforcement as well as rule of law in Cambodia had received strong criticisms, especially regarding social justice for poor people, politics, freedom of expression made by analysts and human rights activists.

"Based on these arguments, the evaluation for Cambodia reflects the criticisms," he said. ■

## Daun Penh rounding up homeless, addicts to stop Covid spread

Nov Sivutha

THE capital's Daun Penh district administration has ordered its 11 communes to round up all homeless people and drug users to test them for Covid-19 to prevent the spread of the disease.

Sam Sarith, the second deputy chief of Phsar Kandal I commune, told *The Post* on October 14 that the district had a lot of homeless people and drug addicts, prompting governor Sok Penh Vuth to make the move.

Phsar Kandal I commune authorities started rounding people up on October 14, while in other communes the process have been happening gradually.

He said the commune also had many homeless people and drug addicts, especially along the river. The reason the governor ordered the roundup, he said, was because authorities were concerned about security at night and Covid-19 transmission.

"At first, we were afraid of being infected with Covid-19

and were also worried that they would fight back. It is difficult. So, the district authorities cooperate on this work," he added.

Duong Davan, the first deputy chief of Phsar Thmei 3 commune, said she accompanied the district governor in rounding up 13 homeless people on October 13 and will continue the work.

"We are rounding up them up in order to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and we do not want them staying in front of people's houses to make them afraid [of transmission]. We do this regularly because there are complaints from residents," she said.

District governor Penh Vuth could not be reached for comment on October 13.

The Kampuchea Thmey newspaper on October 13 reported that in order to remove the homeless, especially drug addicts, from Daun Penh district, Penh Vuth ordered the 11 communes to round them up, resulting in 35 people being detained. Medical workers tested them for Covid-19, with one testing positive. ■



Daun Penh district authorities round up homeless people for Covid-19 testing on Wednesday. FACEBOOK

## UN offers praise for health reforms, advises others

Youn Dara

THE UN in Cambodia expressed support and praised the government's commitment to improving public health during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a press statement on October 13, it said the pandemic in Cambodia has disrupted all corners of society, including the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of communities.

The challenges responding to

the pandemic are similar across countries, including dealing with the variants of the coronavirus, making the transmission among young, healthy and mobile adults difficult to detect.

"However, these challenges have also brought opportunities to the health system and beyond, and the investment in these opportunities will have a ripple effect for years to come," it said.

The UN said the Cambodian government has been taking the opportunity to work for the future by investing in the health security system to ensure both a stronger response and a more prepared, resilient system.

"The United Nations commends the Royal Government of Cambodia's commitments to promote public health and has supported it throughout the pandemic with policy advice, technical cooperation in line with the World Health Organisation's technical guidelines, coordination of partners and agencies, training and procurements," it said.

Throughout the pandemic, the UN said the organisation and working partners had supported the Ministry of Health to expand the diagnostic capacity of laboratories with

technical advice, testing strategies, training, and procurement of more than \$2 million. By September, a total of 12 laboratories could test 12,000 samples per day, compared with a single laboratory which could test only 500 samples per day in early last year.

"These investments will advance the country's ability to detect new variants of SARS-CoV-2 and other novel pathogens that may emerge," it said.

The UN also said it had worked with development partners to support the health ministry in strengthening local capacity for detecting transmission in the field, assessing risk, and responding to outbreaks. Around 3,000 Rapid Response Team (RRT) members were trained last year on Covid-19 to support the response.

"They participated in on-the-job training lasting four to six weeks at the health ministry's Communicable Disease Control Department. These trained RRT members now serve as

contact-tracing and surveillance leads in the provinces," according to the press release.

It also procured critical supplies, such as personal protective equipment, at the cost of \$1.8 million and essential medicines and equipment for oxygen support at \$820,000 to aid that expansion.

It also assisted capacity building efforts for frontline healthcare workers, including critical care providers, in clinical management and infection, prevention and control measures.

The UN has given some recommendations for the government to deal with as ongoing transmission still brings the threat of new variants appearing at any time.

"The UN urges continued investment in provincial surveillance and response systems to enable provinces to detect cases more quickly and respond to clusters with targeted, localised measures, which will help minimise economic and social disruptions," it said. ■



Booster shots being administered in Phnom Penh's Stung Meanchey district on Wednesday. HENG CHIVQAN

National

# Sar Kheng mulls policy competition

Voun Dara

**I**N THE run-up to commune council elections, Minister of Interior Sar Kheng put forward the idea of organising a competition to implement the safe village-commune policy, focusing on the provision of services to people including dispute resolution outside of the judicial system.

While presiding over the oath-taking ceremony for new Kampot provincial governor Mao Thonin on October 13, Sar Kheng said the implementation of the safe village-commune policy will strengthen peace at the grassroots level.

He said if all villages and communes have good security and public order, the whole province will also prosper.

Sar Kheng also commended former Kampot provincial governor Cheav Tay for his implementation of the policy during his term with no commune being ranked badly. Citing Tay's report, the minister said all communes in Kampot had received a ranking from 1 to 3, with one acknowledged for appropriate enforcement of the policy.

Sar Kheng suggested that authorities spread the word and get the support and participation of people. Their participation is important for the policy to be successful.

He said the police and Military Police have to play an important role, but there are also other actors who must support and implement the policy, including citizens, government officials and other authorities.

He noted that the content of the competition should be more than



Interior Minister Sar Kheng talks to new Kampot provincial governor Mao Thonin on Wednesday. SAR KHENG VIA FACEBOOK

security concerns or providing the family and residence books, but it could cover services such as vehicle number plates and other documents, which require other ministries to get involved.

"So I think it should be a competition prior to the commune council elections. Because I see that if we can do this in Kampot province, other provinces can also get involved. The goal of our proposal is to minimise or

eliminate conflicts at the grassroots level. I do not say all the problems ... but on sensitive issues," he said.

The minister added that he will study the initiative with relevant authorities to reach a decision so that the competition can start soon and run until the commune elections.

He praised Thonin for solving land disputes in his former province of Pursat. He said Thonin's way of solving problems could be used by other

provincial governors, especially the good points he has made. He urged officials to spend once a week resolving disputes outside the judicial system.

"It's not necessary for a governor to resolve all issues. The governor can do it, but department directors or other stakeholders can also resolve disputes outside of the judicial system ... it would be easier if the matter did not have to go to court," he said. ■

# ASOD sees decrease in drug abuse

Long Kimmarita

NATIONAL Authority for Combating Drugs (NACD) secretary-general Meas Vyrih said anti-drug activities were still strong despite the difficult environment presented by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Vyrih made the remarks on October 13 at the closing ceremony of the meeting of ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters (ASOD) held virtually in the presence of representatives of drug enforcement agencies from ASEAN member states. The meeting was a lead-up to the 7th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Drugs in Phnom Penh.

"Solidarity, strong will, clear mechanisms, responsibility and the good cooperation of all relevant institutions in national and international frameworks have led to an effective fight against drugs. All ASEAN nations have been involved in the fight, especially in the difficult environment presented by the Covid-19 pandemic," he said.

He added that past lessons and experiences had assisted in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of combating drugs, in addition to high responsibility and good cooperation of all relevant institutions in national and international frameworks.

"Based on this view and the practical situation and trends of drug production, trafficking and use have decreased in ASEAN countries. I noted that the ASEAN mechanisms had really contributed and played an important role in combating the threat of drugs not only in the region but also globally," he said. ■

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Stung Treng authorities crack down on illegal fishing in Kbal Romeas Commune in June. STUNG TRENG PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

# Fishermen working in the off season nabbed by authorities

Kouth Sophak Chakrya

**DURING** the 150 days of the closed season for fishing, Stung Treng Provincial Fisheries Administration have netted more than 1,000 fisheries crimes and arrested nearly 800 offenders for instruction and fines, as well as sending five cases to court, according to Srey Sam Vichet, head of the provincial Fisheries Administration.

He said the administration's campaign to prevent illegal fishing during the last off season had seized and destroyed fishing equipment, including 4,210m of fishing nets and more than 1,000 fishing poles.

Of the fishermen arrested during the off season, 477 were instructed to sign a contract to stop using illegal fishing nets and 226 have been fined as they have repeatedly broken the law, he said.

According to Sam Vichet, 32 fish vendors were also fined and ordered to stop purchasing illegal stock, especially the purchase of rare and endangered species, such as the Thick Lip Barb, Mekonginaerythrospila, Labeodyocheilus and Osteochilusmelanopleurus.

"The other five cases involved 11 people, and they have been sent to court concerning the use of electric equipment to

shock fish in the breeder conservation area," he added.

He said that after instructing people on the fisheries law during the off season and observations by river guards and fishing communities, people are seeing that fishermen have contributed to better fish conservation than in previous years."

However, during the open season, he called on all fishermen to continue to protect the important biodiversity in the water and the main species, respect the law on no fishing in protected areas, prohibited areas or using illegal fishing equipment that threatens rare and endangered species. ■

# Join the 'Run/Walk with Prudential' to get healthy and support Kantha Bopha Hospital

**P**RUDENTIAL Cambodia is organising a fundraising drive to support the Kantha Bopha Hospital's charitable work treating sick children free of charge. Eighty per cent of the children hospital's patients are from households with incomes of less than \$1 a day.

"Run/Walk with Prudential" is a collaboration between Prudential Cambodia and KKRC Running Club with the support from ACLEDA Bank Plc, Wing Bank (Cambodia) Plc and footwear-maker Skechers.

Prudential will donate 1,000 riel (around \$0.25) to Kantha Bopha Hospital for every 1km run or walked from October 1-31 under the initiative, which is open to all ages.

"As a responsible insurer, supporting the communities we work in has been a critical focus of our operations. Additionally, with this fundraising drive, we want to spread awareness on the importance of an active lifestyle to combat the rise of lifestyle diseases.

"Run/Walk with Prudential for Kantha Bopha will allow participants to improve their health and the Kantha Bopha hospital to continue the critical work they do for Cambodia through the funds that are raised," said Prudential Cambodia CEO Sanjay Chakrabarty.

ACLEDA Bank's Financial Services Division senior vice president Neth Piseth said: "We are happy to be able to promote this charitable initiative and look forward to making our staff and customers aware of this initiative."

Wing Bank (Cambodia) Plc CEO Han Peng Kwang said: "Wing Bank is delighted to participate in this exciting charity event that will help support the financial needs of Kantha Bopha Hospital."

"Kantha Bopha Hospital has provided free medical care to those children most in need, and without discrimination.

"When you run with Prudential today, supported by Wing Bank and others, you are contributing to the crucial operations of Kantha Bopha hospital."

KK Running Club president Kim Kok said: "At KK Running Club we promote health and fitness. We are excited to collaborate with Prudential on this initiative as it not only benefits the runner or walker but also Cambodian society."

Those wishing to take part need to join the "Run-Walk with Prudential" Strava club and log their walks/runs on the app between October 1-31, 2021.

The club can be accessed via <https://bit.ly/3zQv7ms>. ■

## About Prudential Cambodia Life Assurance

Prudential (Cambodia) Life Assurance PLC (Prudential Cambodia) began operations in January 2013. By providing tailored life insurance solutions to individuals and families and conducting insurance seminars for the public, Prudential Cambodia helps Cambodians protect and secure their financial futures. Prudential Cambodia is a wholly owned subsidiary of Prudential plc.

Prudential plc provides life and health insurance and asset management, with a focus on Asia and Africa. The business helps people get the most out of life, by making healthcare affordable and accessible and by promoting financial inclusion.

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The fundraising campaign is aimed at supporting the Kantha Bopha Hospital's activities. SUPPLIED



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Date: October 14, 2021

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1	ABC	11,340	11,320	11,400	11,260
2	GTI	4,400	4,400	4,400	4,400
3	PAS	13,340	13,680	13,680	13,040
4	PEPC	3,130	3,140	3,150	3,100
5	PPAP	14,780	14,700	14,780	14,700
6	PPSP	2,040	2,040	2,040	2,030
7	PWSA	6,900	6,900	6,900	6,820



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## Two tourism edicts passed

Hin Pisei

**A**N INTER-MINISTER meeting passed two tourism-related documents on October 13, marking the next step in the reopening process and renewing hopes among the private sector for a prompt return of travellers to kickstart the ailing industry.

These were the "Policy Measures to Promote Internal Tourism Movement 2021-2023" and "Strategic Plan for Safe Tourism", the latter of which centres on creating a safe, comfortable and attractive environment for international visitors who are fully-vaccinated against the novel coronavirus.

The online meeting was presided over by Minister of Tourism Thong Khon and Minister of Economy and Finance Aun Pornmoniroth, and attended by leaders and representatives of various relevant ministries and institutions.

The instruments were designed consistent with instructions made by Prime Minister Hun Sen on September 17 regarding a two-phased reopening process of the service sector – tourism included – with an initial focus on reviving the domestic segment before reopening borders to fully-jabbed travellers, according to the Ministry of Tourism.

Ministry spokesman Top Sopheak told *The Post* on October 14 that the ministry



Prime Minister Hun Sen on September 17 outlined a two-phased reopening process of the service sector, tourism included, with an initial focus on reviving the domestic segment before reopening borders to fully-jabbed travellers. TOURISM MINISTRY

had set out some crucial conditions and key points in the safe-tourism edict, which he believes will soon receive the final greenlight.

On the same day, Pacific Asia Travel Association Cambodia chapter chairman Thourn Sinan told *The Post* that the meeting was a considerable step towards the resumption of tourism, with a special emphasis on safety concerns, noting a general downtrend in Covid-19 metrics, especially

imported cases.

He stressed that the reopening of tourism is crucial, saying that the monumental move would not only create a wave of new domestic jobs, but also enhance economic growth.

Sinan suggested the government make the final call on opening the Kingdom's doors to inoculated travellers ahead of neighbouring countries, and capitalise on the opportunity to woo and cater to more international guests.

He asserted that Cambodia can now be considered safe for tourism, noting that a substantial share of industry actors, as well as more than 84 per cent of Cambodians, have received at least a first coronavirus jab.

From January-July, Cambodia received 112,544 international visitors, marking a steep decline of 90.6 per cent year-on-year, according to data from the tourism ministry.

## Construction sector investment records 24% dip in Jan-Aug

Hin Pisei

**C**APITAL investment in newly-approved construction projects over the first eight months of 2021 reached \$3.843 billion, contracting by 24.4 per cent year-on-year, largely as a result of the protracted Covid-19 epidemic.

The Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction greenlit 2,901 construction projects in January-August, falling by 13.40 per cent or 449 projects from the year-ago period, the Ministry of Economy and Economy reported.

The data show that 2,530 projects or 87.21 per cent were residential developments, dipping by 445 projects or 14.96 per cent year-on-year.

The finance ministry underlined that 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.

Cambodia Constructors Association general manager and secretary Chiv Sivpheng told *The Post* that Covid-driven restrictions related to trans-border human movement have deterred many foreign entities from investing in large-scale construction projects in the Kingdom.

Apartments and gated-community "borey" developments

owned by local investors, on the other hand, have avoided much of the chaos that has enveloped the sector, he noted.

"The number of projects and overall capital investment in the construction sector will increase when cross-border travel is reopened," he said, highlighting a steady uptrend in investment by locals during the Covid-19 crisis.

Cambodia is planning to reopen soon to foreign guests fully vaccinated against Covid-19, to boost national economic growth.

Last year, the construction ministry approved just \$7.8 billion in new construction projects – down by 32.1 per cent from \$11.4 billion in 2019, covering 17 million sqm, down by 26.9 per cent, the National Bank of Cambodia reported.

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

On the other hand, the number of new construction projects grew by one per cent last year, with 4,841 projects receiving the green light. That rate was 45.5 per cent in 2019.

## CJDM to guide Industry 4.0, long-term economic goals

Continued from page 1

people and government, underlining that their support was essential to make the centre a reality. "The centre will serve to educate our people on Industry 4.0 and provide real world applications," he said.

"We will follow through on these concepts and everything that has to be done, through engagement between the private sector and government. We've already started, and though we acknowledge that we still have a long way to go, we are committed to make it happen.

"We'll establish a centre for our people to conduct research and receive training, and we'll also aspire to become a hub linking industry and

academics – not only associated with science-related technologies but also with industry," Kalyan added.

Japanese ambassador to Cambodia Masahiro Mikami noted that the CJDM was funded by a grant aid from Japan, saying the centre would create highly-skilled engineers to cater to the needs of the Industry 4.0 revolution.

"We are very much pleased to cooperate with this project," Mikami said.

"With sophisticated digital technologies and the evolution of Industry 4.0 rapidly progressing all over the world, it is quite important for Cambodia to have human resources with high-level manufacturing skills, to be able to compete in the global manufacturing arena," he added.

The ambassador suggested that

the payoff of the CJDM would have considerable sway on Japanese companies' decisions to select Cambodia as their next investment destination.

CJDM project manager Nguonphan Pheakdey believes the nascent Industry 4.0 sector will provide marked boosts to the economy in the near future.

While admitting that the Kingdom is still far away from the wide adoption of the fourth industrial revolution, he noted that the government is embracing the concept in its visions towards 2030 and 2050.

The government has pinpointed science, technology and innovation (STI) as the key elements to pave the way for Cambodia to achieve its broader ambitious vision of becoming an "upper-

middle income" country by 2030 and a "high-income" economy by 2050, as defined by the World Bank.

To deliver those visions, Pheakdey highlighted the need for several policies, development strategies and reforms, such as industrial development and economic diversification plans, a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education strategy, and the promotion of research and development, and innovation.

"Industry 4.0 will be one of the key drivers that'll allow Cambodia to achieve its long term goal of becoming an upper-middle income and developed country," he said.

He added that RUPP will work together with DMG Mori "to contribute to the production of high capacity

resources and training programmes in the field of digital manufacturing at top-level quality and precision".

Pheakdey billed DMG Mori as "a Japanese-Germany joint venture and the world's number-one high-tech CNC [computerised numerical control] machinery manufacturer".

The ambassador stressed that training highly-skilled engineers who can use state-of-the-art machinery will be crucial to a slew of industries with great untapped potential such as automotive, medical and even aerospace.

"In this context, the Cambodian government has made every effort to realise industry 4.0, with the aim of advancing industry in Cambodia," Mikami said.

# Save 10-20% on outstanding tax due, GDCE says

Nov Sivutha

**O**WNERS of vehicles with a model year before 2021 that were brought into Cambodia without paying import duties or other charges can reduce any levy obligations by 10-20 per cent if they pay them before the end of this year, according to an October 12 letter from General Department of Customs and Excise (GDCE).

Signed by director-general Kun Nhem, the letter said reductions in import taxes and other duties would be granted on a tiered scale based on the vehicle's model year as follows: 20 per cent (prior to 2016), 15 per cent (2016-2018) and 10 per cent (2019-2020).

The move aims to bolster transparency in tax matters and improve national income, the GDCE said, adding that the cutbacks would promote a smoother and more equitable process of fulfilling tax obligations.

It rationalised the tiered reductions by suggesting that a large portion of owners of older vehicles would likely be facing financial difficulties in fulfilling outstanding duty and tax obligations.

Owners of most right-hand drive vehicles, however, must still convert them to left-hand drive by June 30, 2022 or risk having them seized, dismantled or destroyed. Mobile cranes

weighing over 20 tonnes are a notable exception to the rule, as noted in a September 4, 2008 letter from the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the GDCE's parent ministry.

The GDCE on September 9 said it would also waive related fines and other penalties until June 30, 2022.

And in Letter No 2076/21 dated September 22, the GDCE instructed customs and excise departments to report overpayments of duties and taxes, to review and determine a course of action on a per-case basis.

Preap Tith Ratana, owner of vehicle importer RVG, noted that the adjustments would benefit a fair share of owners of imported right-hand-drive vehicles, as well as left-hand-drive ones brought in for the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and National Police who have yet to pay their respective taxes owed.

He voiced general support for relaxations in customs rules, "as a legal vehicle importer", noting that used cars would account for virtually all of the vehicles owned by beneficiaries of the latest scheme.

He underlined that the discounted rates would reduce the ratio of vehicles in the Kingdom with unpaid duties and provide a boost to state coffers. "Whether you like it or not, it should be reduced," he asserted.

Hong Vanak, director of International Economics at the Royal Acad-



The customs department collected \$1.16 billion in revenue in the first half of 2021, down 8.9 per cent year-on-year. HEAN RANGSEY

emy of Cambodia, emphasised that although the proportion of vehicles with outstanding tax issues was relatively small, every little bit contributes to keeping the economy ticking.

He said the scheme would "inspire" vehicle owners to pay their dues, pursuant to applicable laws and regulations.

"When one refuses to pay up, it results in a loss for national income and affects public order, and what the GDCE is doing is ensuring equality in the nation, that is except for

vehicles that serve state agencies or those used to transport distinguished international guests," Vanak said.

Covid-19 has amplified the state's need for revenue, he said, analogising payment of these fees with pouring money into the development of infrastructure and other services for the people, and contributions to the achievement of economic growth, he said.

The GDCE collected \$1.1595 billion in revenue in the first half of 2021, down 8.9 per cent year-on-year.

Vehicles and machinery topped the list of sources of customs and excise revenue at 42.3 per cent, followed by petroleum and energy (23.5 per cent), and construction materials and miscellaneous fees (6.2 per cent), with other products accounting for 28 per cent, GDCE data indicate.

Last year, the GDCE collected \$2.4196 billion in revenue, down \$795.5 million or 24.8 per cent compared to 2019. This was equivalent to 83.5 per cent of the 2020 plan. ■

## Sovannaphum Life and Hattha Bank renew distribution agreement to promote financial protection in the Kingdom

Sovannaphum Life Assurance Plc and Hattha Bank Plc on Wednesday signed a renewal of distribution agreement to continue their partnership in providing financial protection to Cambodian families.

Through this well-built partnership, Sovannaphum Life banca executives provide comprehensive information on life insurance solutions to Hattha Bank customers so that they are able to make informed decisions concerning personal and family financial protection.

With a compound annual growth rate of 60 per cent for the last three years, the partnership with Hattha Bank, which began in April 2018, has been a great success for Sovannaphum Life.

"We are thrilled to continue the partnership with Hattha Bank. The partnership allows us to continue protecting the financial well-being of Hattha Bank customers through our trusted services and financial strength. This year marks the fifth anniversary of our operations in Cambodia.

"As of October 2021, we have provided financial protection to more than 120,000 Cambodians, equal to a total sum assured of over \$1.4 billion. We have also settled claims of more than \$3.3 million.



Sovannaphum Life Assurance CEO Loke Kah Meng (left) and Hattha Bank president and CEO Oknha Hout Ieng Tong. SUPPLIED

"We are really excited to launch a new product called SMILE Happy Saving

for Hattha Bank, with a special \$100 discount for the first 300 customers," said

Sovannaphum Life Assurance CEO Loke Kah Meng.

Hattha Bank president and CEO Oknha Hout Ieng Tong said: "The renewal of this distribution agreement truly proves the success of our partnership in providing financial solutions to Cambodian families.

"Hattha Bank has nearly 30 years of experience, with total active assets of more than \$1.8 billion and nearly 500,000 accounts nationwide. Our vision is to be a highly admired bank and the preferred choice for customers." ■



Sovannaphum partnered with Hattha Bank to promote financial protection. SUPPLIED

### About Sovannaphum Life Assurance Plc

Sovannaphum Life Assurance Plc is a subsidiary of Canadia Investment Holdings (CIH), with a legacy since 1991 and total assets of more than \$7 billion. Sovannaphum Life has a strong and reliable financial base, and has won many awards. For four consecutive years – 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 – it has won the "Fastest-Growing Life Insurance Company Cambodia" award from the London-based Global Banking and Finance Review. It was also awarded "Most Innovative Life Insurance Company Cambodia 2021" by International Business Magazine, which is headquartered in the United Arab Emirates.

Call 1800 21 22 88 (FREE).  
info@sovannaphumlife.com.  
www.sovannaphumlife.com.

### About Hattha Bank Plc

Hattha Bank is a subsidiary of Bank of Ayudhya (Krungsri), the fifth largest commercial bank in Thailand, and a member of Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (MUFG), a leading Japanese and global financial services group.

As of September this year, Hattha Bank had 177 offices and 137 ATM networks nationwide, a total deposit balance of \$866 million and a loan portfolio of \$1,525 million with more than 400,000 accounts opening.

Hattha Bank's state-of-the-art core banking system allows for a wide range of financial services to meet customers' needs and provides innovative digital banking facilities with secure and highly efficient financial service solutions. Hattha Bank will soon be launching further banking services to better serve its customers.

Call 1800 21 22 22 (FREE).  
info@hatthabank.com.  
www.hatthabank.com.

# SPECIAL REPORT

## Will Evergrande change the way Chinese developers do business in Cambodia?

China's property sector policy has exposed the grim financial condition of real estate developers including those operating in Cambodia, which raises questions over the viability of their projects and business going forward

Sangeetha Amarthalingam

**T**HE dark blue netting on one of Yuetai Group Co Ltd's Phnom Penh Harbour Bay project breaks the tone along the riverfront's largely French colonial architecture. Inside, work is going on as normal, albeit slower than expected.

The construction, made up of condominiums and shophouses, represents some bits of phases two and four which are being built to meet the demand of buyers.

What is not seen are the higher-end components of the \$800 million project that would feature twin office towers, shopping malls, an arts and cultural centre, high-rise condominium blocks, a Ferris wheel and a replica of Guangzhou's iconic five-star White Swan hotel.

When complete, the project covering nine hectares of Riverside land would display a plush skyline along the banks of Tonle Sap, flanked by the Royal Palace and neighbouring Koh Pich.

For now, the subsidiary of Shanghai-listed Guangzhou Yuetai Group Co Ltd, is focusing on delivering the lower-end portions of the project, priced between \$40,000 and \$100,000 for condos and \$200,000 and \$400,000 for shophouses.

"We have sold about 70 per cent of the shophouse and condo units, but mostly to Cambodians," said sales representative Lim Seing.

However, he quickly dismisses any knowledge of the commencement for the rest of the construction and the alleged sale of land that was leased from the Phnom Penh Autonomous Port to develop the project. "I don't know about that," Seing said.

Neither was he willing to respond to questions relating to the filing of bankruptcy by Yuetai Group's parent company's controlling shareholder and parties acting in concert as a result of mounting debts and solvency issues.

Yuetai Group's situation is not unique, even as public records on the Shanghai bourse show alleged mismanagement of funds and that the company has been in financial doldrums in recent years.

It stands alongside scores of Chinese developers in mainland China that have failed one or more of the government's "red line" criteria on the property development sector, made prominent by fellow Guangzhou player, China Evergrande Group's financial crisis.

What this essentially means is that real estate developers looking to fund or refinance their projects would have to satisfy the three thresholds set by the regulators.

These criteria deem that developers should have a "70 per cent ceiling on liability to assets, a 100 per cent cap on net debt to equity, and cash to short-term borrowing ratio of at least one", as identified by Bloomberg.

"Developers will be categorised by



A worker crosses Hun Sen Boulevard which houses R&F Properties' \$2 billion City project featuring 20 high-rise condominiums. HEAN RANGSEY

how many of the three red lines they violated, and their debt growth will be limited accordingly but if a company passes all three, it can raise its debt by a maximum of 15 per cent in the next year," said Bernard Aw, an economist for Asia Pacific.

He said the aim for the red line policy is to reduce financial risks in their real estate sector by curbing excessive debt growth in Chinese

property developers that have over borrowed to finance their projects and operations.

This means that highly leveraged real estate developers will likely encounter problems in seeking funds for projects as financial institutions attempt to reduce exposure in the sector.

"If the Cambodian subsidiaries of these Chinese developers are de-

pendent on China's financial institutions for financing, then there could be an issue with access to credit if their parent company has violated at least one of the three metrics – leverage, gearing, liquidity.

"A lack of financing may contribute to the possibility that project completions are delayed, suppliers not paid on time, and debt interest payments defaulted," said Aw, who

is with global credit insurer Compagnie Française d'Assurance pour Le Commerce Extérieur (CoFace).

Against this backdrop, Hong Kong-listed Guangzhou R&F Properties Co Ltd has been struggling to raise funds to repay its maturing debts, only recently managing to secure \$2.5 billion by disposing of one of its subsidiary and borrowing from its major shareholders.

Moody's Investors Service Inc, downgraded its credit rating on R&F Properties to B2 from B1, indicating its fixed income obligation are "speculative and are subject to high credit risk".

Given the limited access to funds amid refinancing needs, Fitch Ratings, which also downgraded R&F Properties' bonds which will mature in 2022, turned its outlook to negative from stable, echoing Moody's call.

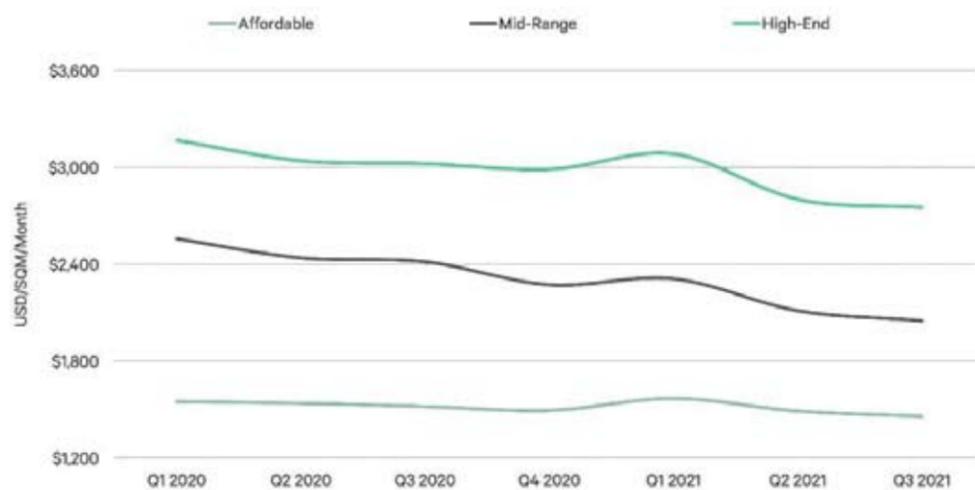
Back home, R&F Properties' \$2 billion City project on Hun Sen Boulevard soldiers on to ensure delivery of two phases of 20 condominium buildings by 2023. Phase one is apparently complete, according to a staff earlier this year.

Its Facebook page continues to entice buyers with low interest rate loans and progress news on the blocks.

However, about 1km away on Monivong Boulevard, the group's Glory project, which would feature 57-storey condominium towers, has been at a standstill for many months despite being partially built.

R&F Properties in China could not

Average Quoting Condominium Sale Prices (USD/SQM) (Q1 2020 – Q3 2021)



Source: CBRE Research, Q3 2021

be reached at its Guangzhou and Hong Kong offices, while its Cambodian office did not respond to questions.

### Under pressure

Foreign direct investments (FDI) in real estate and construction has in the past five years fuelled Cambodia's economy, and with that Chinese investments in that segment had been robust since the Belt and Road Initiative in 2017.

In 2019, up to 40 per cent of total FDI was made up of Chinese investments in the construction and real estate sector, the World Bank said in May last year.

Overall, Chinese FDI has grown to become the largest contributor, coming in at 51 per cent, as of December 31, 2020, the National Bank of Cambodia (NBC) stated.

Following rapid expansion in the last few years, the real estate and construction sector recorded negative growth as a result of stalled projects in the wake of the pandemic.

Value of investments in construction dropped 32.1 per cent to \$7.8 billion in 2020 from \$11.4 billion whereas FDI inflows to the segment including real estate slipped 10.6 per cent year-on-year.

That being said, Cambodia's real estate sector, particularly involving Chinese investors, remains at risk of a contagion effect from Evergrande going forward.

A report by Moody's this week states that the potential weakness in China's real estate market following the escalation of Evergrande's financial distress is credit negative for China's financial institutions.

But any potential direct loss is manageable in the context of Chinese financial institutions' large asset bases and loss-absorbing buffers, it said.

However, Evergrande's financial distress could trigger a "significant and industry-wide deterioration" in property developers' funding access and property sales.

This might have a significant effect on Cambodia, given that the business model for Chinese developers involves promoting the idea of overseas investment and resort lifestyle, which until recently spurred the growth of high-end condo units in choicest locations.

"The trend towards Chinese developers building overseas and selling to a domestic audience is certainly under pressure," said James Hodge, managing director of CBRE Cambodia.

But, this is not unique to overseas projects either, with projects in China itself also impacted by measures designed to cool the Chinese real estate markets.

"This is probably going to lead to a reduction in activity from Chinese developers in Cambodia, but each has a unique situation, target and approach, so there isn't going to be one size fits all answer," he told *The Post*.

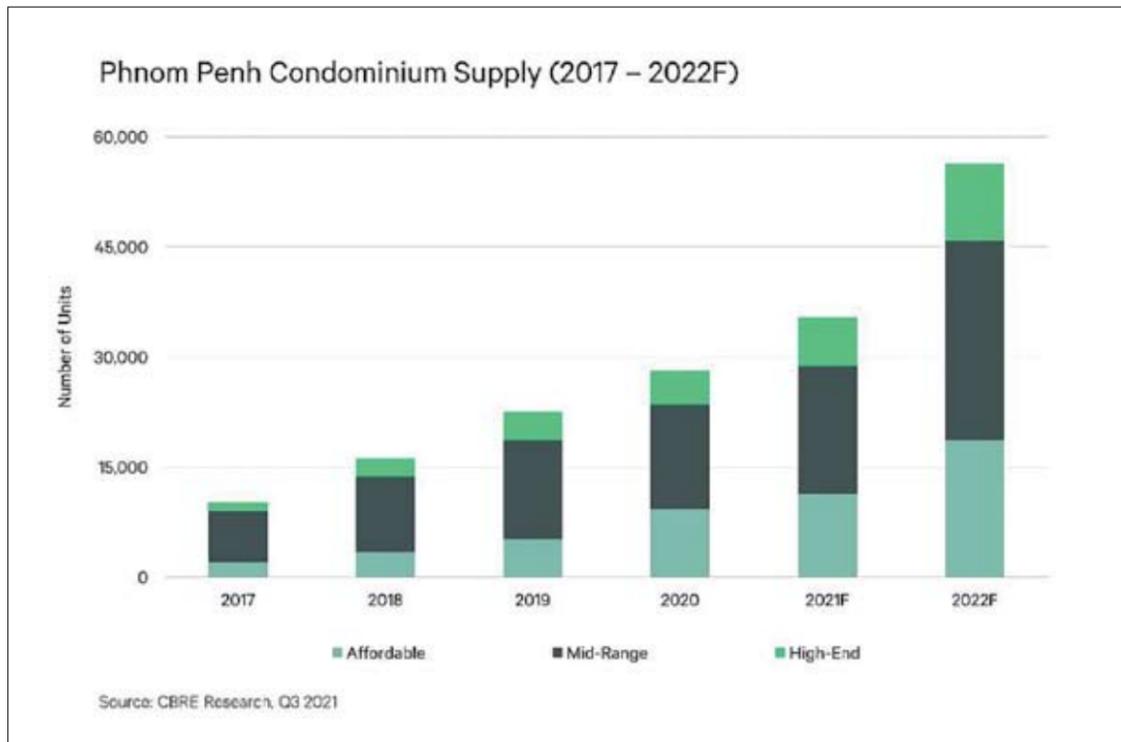
### Lending availability risk

Explaining that the troubles being faced by Evergrande have their roots in Chinese government regulations aimed at cooling China's real estate markets, he said the policies have also had an impact on Cambodia's real estate markets.

Beyond that, the fallout of Evergrande's problems hold the potential to impact the Kingdom's market further.

"Evergrande's plight highlights that speculatively building condominiums not backed by end user demand is inherently risky, and therefore could make lenders reassess their position in the sector. Reductions in lending availability is a clear risk for the Cambodian market," he said.

Granted, Phnom Penh's entire condominium market is many times



smaller than even Evergrande alone.

But, while there are "certainly questions about how to respond effectively to reduced demand and the models sustainability", he said these could be answered "quite quickly by comparison".

"And ultimately by answering these questions we should end up with a market that functions better for all," Hodge said.

That said, with high gearing, and financial institutions' reluctance to lend, he thinks that most developers would use debt financing of one form or another to finance their project.

"Leveraging provides them with many advantages, but of course [it] also increases risk in the instance their cash flow becomes disrupted," he said.

### Oversupply, price dips

Earlier in the week, CBRE's third quarter report for 2021 spoke about the rise in condominium supply in the market, around 30,000 units as of September 30, which had moderated pricing and rental rates on the back of declining occupancy rate due to the pandemic.

In that time, 1,586 high-end and mid-range units entered the market following the completion of The Peak on Koh Pich by Singapore-Cambodia joint venture firm Oxley-Worldbridge (Cambodia) Co Ltd and Singapore developer TA Corp Ltd's The Gateway on Russian Boulevard. This pushed up supply by 5.6 per cent quarter-on-quarter (q-o-q).

Based on CBRE's data, prices for mid-range units, the most popular segment among Phnom Penh house buyers at 48 per cent market share, slipped 2.95 per cent q-o-q.

Affordable and high-end units also recorded dips in sale pricing of 2.14 per cent and 1.78 per cent, respectively.

"These reductions were less than the previous quarter, likely due to developer's already having eaten into margins in a bid to attract prospective buyers," the local affiliate of US commercial real estate services and firm CBRE Group Inc said.

A compounding factor to that could also be the average five per cent guaranteed rental returns (GRR), a deal sweetener that foreign developers factored in their sales pitch in the past. But could this practice continue under current circumstances?

"GRRs are certainly being viewed with more scepticism," said Hodge, adding that the lure isn't something that is unique to Cambodia.

"In fact, there have been several instances of problems arising from the Thai market, which is similarly

disrupted. This isn't to say that all GRRs are equal, buyers will carry out more due diligence and check for themselves whether they believe the GRR is sustainable," he said.

CoFace's Aw, who is based in Singapore, said Cambodia's property sector suffers from a supply overhang after years of construction and real estate boom.

Measures taken to contain the spread of the pandemic hurt external demand for Cambodian's commercial and residential property market, which contributed to reduced construction activity.

"The recovery of [the] construction sector is linked to a few factors, including the relaxation of travel restrictions and quarantine rules, and whether foreign demand for Cambodia's real estate market will pick up," he told *The Post* via email.

### 'Elephant in the room'

This circles back to the question whether Evergrande might have put into motion the way Chinese developers do business overseas, seeing how the policies have laid bare the discrepancies in many of these companies' balance sheets, with defaults anticipated on bond payments.

There are possibilities there, given the net losses recorded by Chinese property developers in the past year, with Yuetai being an example relating to Cambodia.

R&F Properties recorded a 18.8 per cent drop in net profit at 3.2 billion yuan (\$494.1 million) in its first half ended June 30, 2021 compared to the corresponding period last year.

In a commentary by Aw on Channel News Asia last month, he cited how Singapore developer City Developments Ltd disposed of its 51 per cent-interest in China-based Sincere Property Group in a bid to cut its losses after the latter was sued for bankruptcy.

Looking at these events, some analysts comment that it could signal a fear among investors to work with Chinese developers.

David Van, senior associate public-private partnership of Cambodia-based Platform Impact Co Ltd, the impending collapse of China's largest developer is a cause for concern globally, seeing that the government seemed unwilling to bail it out.

It could trigger the fall of subsequent Chinese large developers as well within the first half 2022 should the domino theory apply, according to experts.

"We should carefully monitor any potential financial tsunami erupting from such predicaments, given that the majority of our real estate sector has been funded this past decade with Chinese hot money," he shared.

As it stands, Van said, industry players are already talking of an oversupply of condo units in the market and with the Chinese government tightening outflow of capital, negative repercussions may ensue for the local property market here.

"However, the elephant in the room is not much Chinese developers woes but the undeclared local governments' loans at risk throughout China that may trigger a financial crisis of global proportion as

international markets are closely knitted," Van stressed.

### Taking over bankrupt projects

In the meantime, Hodge noted that major repositioning has been taking place, most involving foreign developers because of their broad focus on foreign buyers for the bulk of demand.

"As foreign markets have been less accessible, they have had to pivot further to focus on the requirements of local buyers. Typically, this has meant a change in pricing, but also payment terms and handover condition," he said.

Dan Davies, executive director of property asset management firm DA&G in Phnom Penh, feels that many of the developers would be highly leveraged and rely heavily on the Chinese investor market and use sales as a way of funding projects.

He said in Phnom Penh particularly, the notion of which developers have funding or are relying on sales is evident "simply by driving by the sites and checking out the activity".

"There are a lot of 'still cranes' and quieter roads lately. However there are some developers that have carried on contracting, although they have slowed down possibly with the view that they are fully committed and that the market will recover eventually.

"They will then be in a good position to sell completed units rather than the majority selling off plan," he said.

Kim Heang, regional operating principal of Keller Williams Cambodia and CEO of Khmer Real Estate Co Ltd, said it was difficult to gauge whether affected Chinese developers in Cambodia would be able to complete their project, as there are many types of developers.

Although industry talk speculate that there might be fewer Chinese developers investing or completing projects in Cambodia, he opined that they "will keep coming" and "will complete" their projects because Cambodia "can be a paradise and second home for their investment".

In relation to that, he acknowledged that Yuetai has had financial problems "since the beginning" and that "many people knew about it".

"That is not good news for us and the real estate industry in Cambodia, however, we have to accept it," he said, adding that the impact on the local market is not negative as most of the buyers are not Cambodians.

"...sooner or later, there will be big players that [would] replace or take over [the] projects from Yuetai. Who knows it can be me or someone else," he remarked, confident that new developers would assume control of the projects by Chinese developers that have gone bankrupt. ■



# POST FOCUS

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EDUCATION

## True VISIONS easing parents' Covid concerns with safe, hygienic reopening



A HYBRID teaching model and the most hygienic of educational facilities combined with strict Covid-19 protocols are just some of the steps taken by True VISIONS International School as it welcomes students back to their classrooms.

With students' and staff members' health and safety given top priority, teaching is taking place in a safe and hygienic environment under the watchful eyes of caring and diligent teachers.

"It is time for children to return to school. They have been away from their classes for far too long. Online teaching is fine, but children really need to attend classes and meet their teachers and friends because this is a more productive way of learning.

"In every way, True VISIONS is ready to welcome back our students. My advice to parents is that we need to learn to live with Covid-19 and we need not fear it as most of us in Phnom Penh have been properly vaccinated.

"We at True VISIONS are following all the



True VISIONS gives students' and staff members' health and safety top priority. SUPPLIED



True Visions CEO Seng Bona. SUPPLIED

necessary SOPs [standard operating procedures] as set out by the Ministry of Health and the government," said True VISIONS founder and CEO Seng Bona.

High school students at Grade 7 to Grade 12 have returned since September, and once the government permits all schools to reopen after months of shutdown

due to the pandemic, kindergarten and primary students will rejoin their regular classes with all True VISIONS campuses having reopened.

Like the other educational institutions in

Cambodia, True VISIONS' in-classroom teaching was scuttled by the pandemic, disturbing regular timetables and forcing students to stay away from school.

In response, True VISIONS chalked out its own successful strategy to ensure education continued – quickly revamping its teaching methods, with traditional in-class teaching replaced with virtual learning to ensure students' studies continued uninterrupted.

With changing conditions as Covid-19 cases are showing signs of decline, the government is slowly permitting businesses and schools to reopen, and True VISIONS' management are reassuring parents that their children's health and safety is ensured when they send them back to the school.

"Some parents are still hesitant to send their children to school, but I would

encourage parents to do so because this is now the new normal and we must learn to adapt and live in the new era.

"Our staff are well informed in handling the children, with physical contact not allowed, and we check every student's



It is time for children to return to school. They have been away from their classes for far too long. Online teaching is fine, but children really need to attend classes.

SENG BONA /TRUE VISIONS CEO

temperature before they enter the campus.

"Students will be learning in a new environment when they return. Each classroom will accommodate only 10 students compared to the 18 to 20 students pre-Covid, and students will enjoy a 20-minute break after every 40 minutes of study.

"Fans have replaced air conditioners, while doors and windows are kept open for better ventilation. And a special isolation room is also available on campus for emergency cases," said Bona.

True VISIONS' focus on health predates the pandemic and even goes beyond the classroom.

Since its launch in 2013, hawkers have not been allowed to sell food or drinks in the surrounding area, with only healthy home-cooked food permitted for students.

To ensure the school's

campuses are reopening safely, students, teachers and faculty members all need to show their vaccination cards before entry.

"Students who have not been vaccinated are not allowed to attend classes but can study online at home," said Bona.

Teachers and faculty members over 50 years of age who have not been vaccinated for health reasons and students with medical conditions who have also not been inoculated are required to teach and learn online.

True VISIONS was founded in 2013 with a clear mission to nurture exemplary character and self-leadership in students.

The institution offers a well-rounded education in English, Khmer and Chinese from kindergarten to high school levels. True VISIONS has seven campuses, with five at high school and two at primary and kindergarten levels. ■



Temperature screening before entering campus and the wearing of masks are part of the SOPs at the school. SUPPLIED



## World

## US hints at force if Iran diplomacy fails

US PRESIDENT Joe Biden's administration hinted on October 13 that it could resort to force if diplomacy fails on Iran's nuclear programme, rallying more closely than ever behind warnings by Israel.

Amid a standstill in negotiations with Iran, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken voiced growing frustration as he held three-way talks with the top diplomats of Israel and the UAE, US allies that established relations last year amid shared alarm about Tehran.

Blinken renewed Biden's offer to re-enter a 2015 nuclear agreement, rubbished by former president Donald Trump, in which Iran drastically scaled back nuclear activity in return for unfulfilled promises of sanctions relief.

"We continue to believe that diplomacy is the most effective way," the top US diplomat told a joint news conference. "But it takes two to engage in diplomacy and we have not seen from Iran a willingness to do that at this point."

"We are prepared to turn to other options if Iran doesn't change course," he warned.

He did not elaborate, but Israeli foreign minister Yair Lapid, without being contradicted, said of Blinken's comments: "I think everybody understands – here in Israel and in the Emirates and in Tehran – what it is that we mean."

Lapid was more explicit, saying that both he and Blinken, as sons of Holocaust survivors, "know there are moments when nations must use force to protect the world from evil".



Israeli foreign minister Yair Lapid (left) and his US and UAE counterparts Antony Blinken (centre) and Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan take part in a joint news conference at the US Department of State. POOL/AFP

"If a terror regime is going to acquire a nuclear weapon, we must act. We must make clear the civilised world won't allow it," Lapid said. "Israel reserves the right to act at any given moment in any way. That is not only our right, it is also our responsibility."

Enrique Mora, the EU envoy in charge of reviving the troubled deal, planned to visit Iranian capital Tehran on October 14. He tweeted that he will "raise the urgency" of resuming talks.

The Biden administration held six rounds of indirect negotiations with Iran, with

Mora shuttling between the two sides in hotels across Austrian capital Vienna, but talks broke off in June as ultraconservative Ebrahim Raisi took over as Iran's president.

"We feel like coming back would still be the best outcome, but we're realistic," the US negotiator on Iran, Rob Malley, said at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "We know that there's at least a good possibility that Iran is going to choose a different path, and we need to coordinate with Israel and with our other partners in the region."

After taking part in the talks with Israel and the UAE, Malley said he would head in the coming days to the UAE, as well as Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

France, one of three Western powers that remain in the nuclear accord, on October 13 joined the growing criticism of Iran.

"Through its statements and actions, the new administration of President Raisi is sowing doubts on its intention to return" to the deal, a French foreign ministry spokesperson said.

Iran has said repeatedly

that it is ready to resume talks "soon", but no date has been announced.

Iran denies it is seeking a nuclear weapon, which the clerical state argues is religiously forbidden.

But Tehran believes it needs to defend itself in a hostile neighbourhood, with memories still vivid of the brutal 1980-1988 war launched by Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein with backing from the West.

An attack on Iran is likely to be only a very last resort for Biden, who ended the war in Afghanistan with vows to shift away from military solutions.

But Israel has already been engaged in a shadow war with Iran, targeting its military sites in ally Syria and carrying out a sabotage campaign inside Iran against its nuclear programme.

Israel has also rejoiced at a breakthrough with Arab states, normalising ties in quick succession last year with the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco in a signature achievement for Trump and then-Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In one point of continuity with Trump, Blinken promised to work to "expand the circle of countries" that have ties with Israel.

Lapid, a centrist who cobbled together a coalition to oust the veteran right-winger Netanyahu, has kept many of his priorities but promised a more collaborative approach with Washington, mindful of the backlash after Netanyahu openly campaigned against former president Barack Obama's Iran diplomacy. AFP ■

## 'Starvation risk' facing N Korea: UN report

NORTH Korea's most vulnerable are "at risk of starvation" with the economy worsening due to a self-imposed coronavirus blockade, and UN sanctions imposed over the country's nuclear programmes should be eased, a UN human rights expert said on October 13.

The impoverished nation has been behind a rigid blockade since early last year to protect itself from the pandemic, with the economy suffering and trade with key partner China dwindling to a trickle.

In June, state-run Korean Central Television (KCTV) admitted that North Korea was facing a "food crisis", sounding the alarm in a country with a moribund agricultural sector that has long struggled to feed the population.

The same month, leader Kim Jong-un said the food situation was "getting tense".

Ordinary North Koreans are "struggling on a daily basis ... to live a life of dignity", and the worsening humanitarian situation could "turn into a crisis", Tomas Ojea Quintana, UN special rapporteur on human rights, said in his latest report.

Pyongyang is under multiple sets of international sanctions over its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, which have seen rapid progress under Kim.

Quintana said such restrictions should be eased to protect the country's most vulnerable in the face of a severe food shortage.

"The most vulnerable children and elderly are at risk of starvation," he said. "Sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council should be reviewed and eased when necessary to both facilitate humanitarian and lifesaving assistance."

The report comes about three months after the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation said North Korea was facing a food shortage of around 860,000 tonnes this year, and could experience a "harsh lean period".

Pyongyang has stayed away from talks on its nuclear programme since the collapse of a second summit between Kim and then US president Donald Trump in Vietnamese capital Hanoi and has rebuffed South Korean efforts to revive dialogue.

Under President Joe Biden, the US has repeatedly declared its willingness to meet North Korean representatives, while saying it will seek denuclearisation.

But this week Kim blamed Washington for tensions on the peninsula, and insisted Pyongyang's weapons were for self-defence and not aimed at any particular country. AFP ■

## Nations reveal ransomware pain at summit

A DIGITAL "disaster" in Germany, growing attacks in the UAE and even Israel announcing a blitz underway – nations disclosed their struggle on October 13 against cyber-extortionists at a Washington-led anti-ransomware summit.

The US has convened some 30 countries – with the notable exception of Russia – to

boost cooperation in fighting the costly and disruptive attacks that have boomed around the world.

As if on cue, Yigal Unna, director of Israel's National Cyber Directorate, broke news of the latest incident.

"I can disclose now that Israel is experiencing, as we speak, a major ransomware

attack against one of its big hospitals," Unna said.

If the experiences recounted are any indication, the threat is painful, widespread, and growing.

Germany recalled that this summer, for the first time, a local government in the eastern district of Anhalt-Bitterfeld declared a state of "cyber disaster" after being crippled by a ransomware attack.

The US has also been hit, especially in the first half of 2021, by numerous ransomware attacks against businesses.

These attacks involve breaking into an entity's networks to encrypt its data, then demanding a ransom, typically paid in cryptocurrency in exchange for the key to unlock it.

"We talked about ... a 70 per cent increase year-over-year in South Korea, 200 per cent in the UAE," said Anne Neuberger, deputy national security adviser for cyber.

Hospitals targeted in Ireland and the Czech Republic as well

as severe disruptions to maritime infrastructure in South Africa were among the experiences recounted.

The UK, Australia, India, Japan, France, Germany, South Korea, the EU, Israel, Kenya, Mexico, and others joined in the virtual gathering that opened on October 13 and was set to continue on October 14.

"No one country, no one group can solve this problem," stressed White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan.

"Our governments may have different approaches with respect to the tools ... to counter ransomware" he said, but "we recognise the urgency of the ransomware threat".

In particular, he praised the active participation of Australia, Germany, India, and the UK in the preparations for the meeting.

These countries have organised workshops, which were to take place from October 13-14, around four themes – building resilience to the extortion attempts, the role of cryptocur-

rency in laundering ransoms, law enforcement and judicial action as well as diplomacy.

Asked about Russia's absence, a senior White House official said in a briefing on October 12: "In this first round of discussions we did not invite the Russians to participate."

The source said Washington and Moscow had already established a "separate channel" of communication on the subject.

Although Moscow denies any responsibility, most recent ransomware attacks against the US have been blamed on Russian-speaking hacker groups or those operating from Russian territory.

US President Joe Biden spoke with Russian leader Vladimir Putin in July, telling him to "take action" against ransomware groups operating in Russia.

"We've seen some steps by the Russian government and are looking to see follow-up actions," the White House official said on October 12. AFP ■



Washington has called an anti-ransomware summit to boost the fight against cyber-extortionists. AFP

# Increasing digitalisation way to recovery: WEF ASEAN poll

AS THE coronavirus and its variants continue to keep businesses and borders shut and halt economic growth, thousands of people in ASEAN have digitalised to stay afloat.

The speed at which they did so was blistering – but it was not fast enough. And many believe they will need to digitalise further to build on incomes and savings in the coming years.

Widespread recognition of the crucial role of digitalisation for economic recovery emerged as one of the key findings of one of the largest surveys of ASEAN youth, conducted by the World Economic Forum (WEF) and Singapore-based Sea, which owns e-commerce platform Shopee and digital financial services firm SeaMoney.

Nearly 86,000 people in six countries were surveyed in July and August for the “ASEAN Digital Generation Survey: Pathway To ASEAN’s Inclusive Digital Transformation And Recovery” report.

Eighty-five per cent of the respondents and 87 per cent of the micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprise (MSME) entrepreneurs surveyed saw digitalisation as the way forward for economic recovery – which many believe will take quite a while.

Furthermore, the survey also showed that those who were “more digitalised” tended to be more economically resilient while grappling with the pandemic.

Most MSME owners agreed that digitalisation would help them save time and automate production processes, and that it provides ease of access to information, more options to select goods and services as well as the ability to generate an alternative income.

“Reaching the post-pandemic world will be no easy feat,” wrote the authors of the report – Sea group chief economist Dr Santitarn Sathirathai and Lee Joo-ok, head of the WEF’s regional agenda for the Asia-Pacific and a member of its executive committee.

“Nearly 70 per cent of respondents expect the pan-



Eighty-five per cent of the respondents and 87 per cent of the micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprise (MSME) entrepreneurs surveyed saw digitalisation as the way forward for economic recovery. PIXABAY

demic to last beyond 2021, with 39 per cent expecting it to last for three years or longer and 13 per cent believing the pandemic would never end.

“However, once it does, nearly two-thirds think that life will be significantly different compared with pre-pandemic times,” they added.

The results of the survey were released in partnership with the *Straits Times* at a webinar on Wednesday.

The survey results come as many countries of Southeast Asia are still grappling with Covid-19 following the rapid spread of the Delta variant of the virus.

“Some 60 per cent of people reported a decline in income and savings, with over 40 per cent saying it was a significant deterioration,” said the authors.

“Beyond its economic impact, many respondents, particularly women, reported declines in social, mental and physical health outcomes during the pandemic.”

In terms of adapting to restrictions and the new economic climate, 64 per cent of those polled said they digitised

more than half their business tasks. For MSME owners, this was 74 per cent.

Amid the pandemic, 27 per cent of those polled created a new business, 12 per cent created employment for another individual and 25 per cent started a new job.

Nearly 50 per cent of those in the wholesale and retail trade sector started a new business, while the logistics sector had the highest share of people finding new jobs at 36 per cent.

Looking ahead, 43 per cent to 66 per cent of respondents want to increase digitalisation even further. The figures are even higher for MSME owners – ranging from 51 per cent to 75 per cent.

Survey results show nearly two-thirds identify payments as a key area for further digitalisation, while 43 per cent wanted further digitalisation of the loans and financing process.

A key deterrent remains access to digital infrastructure and digital devices. There were also concerns about digital trust and security.

Dr Sathirathai and Lee

said there is a continuing strong need for the reskilling and upskilling of the ASEAN workforce.

“Technology use, creativity and innovation, self-discipline, and resilience and adaptability were considered to be the most important skills to succeed in the post-pandemic world,” they noted.

However, less than half of those polled consider themselves proficient in the skills they deemed important.

“The complexity and cross-cutting nature of challenges require joint efforts and collaboration across sectors and countries to address the gaps,” the authors said, adding that policies are needed to enable a more sustainable, inclusive recovery for ASEAN as a whole.

This is the fourth year that the ASEAN Digital Generation Survey has been conducted to understand aspirations and perspectives of youth in the ASEAN region.

Respondents were from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. THE STRAITS TIMES (SINGAPORE)/ASIA NEWS NETWORK ■

# M’sia vows reform in healthcare after Covid-19 pandemic

MALAYSIA will undertake a medium to long-term reform of its healthcare sector while gradually aiming to increase healthcare spending every year, finance minister Tengku Zafrul Aziz said on October 13.

Speaking during a virtual briefing on the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) latest ASEAN Youth Survey – organised in collaboration with the *Straits Times* – Zafrul admitted that Malaysia’s public healthcare spending needs a review after the country reeled from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“We have a blueprint, we are looking at a new way forward, and a study will be undertaken to reform the healthcare system,” Zafrul said.

“We are committed to reforming the healthcare system in the medium to long term,” he said during the briefing on the survey titled “ASEAN Digital Generation: Pathway to ASEAN’s Inclusive Digital Transformation and Recovery”.

Malaysia’s overall healthcare spending is still below five per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP), way below the projected average of close to 10 per cent of GDP for Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

It is projected to hit five per cent of GDP in 2021 ahead of Malaysia’s next federal budget to be tabled on October 29, Zafrul had previously said.

Among the policy directions being considered is increasing public healthcare charges for higher-income earners, and incentivising people to buy health insurance. Social protection schemes should also provide health benefits for informal workers, Zafrul said.

Malaysia’s public healthcare system is almost free for all citizens. Zafrul said about 70 per cent of the 32 million population rely on the public healthcare sector.

The spread of the Delta variant had stretched the healthcare system in Malaysia, which last year was one of the early success stories in containing the pandemic.

Hospitals were overstretched, while Covid-19 bed utilisation was consistently beyond 100 per cent during its peak two months ago, leading to the construction of field hospitals.

Zafrul also said that as the virus now progresses from the pandemic to endemic stage, there is a need to improve the ability of ASEAN countries to coordinate an effective response.

“The region also needs to spend more on public healthcare,” he said. “We must increase our preparedness through ASEAN resource pooling.”

Zafrul said that the region needs to invest in regional disease centres, vaccine development and develop better understanding of communicable diseases.

Another panellist, La Hieu Hue, a businesswoman from Vietnam who is also part of WEF’s Global Shaper community, said that her country was not prepared for the spread of the Delta variant this year.

Vietnam was also seen as one of the early success stories in containing the pandemic, but like much of the region, has struggled with the Delta variant and a slower roll-out of vaccines compared with other ASEAN nations.

“We were unprepared, and this has caused a heavy disruption in the supply chain,” Hue said.

Both Malaysia and Vietnam are currently exiting their recent peak of infections.

Malaysia recorded 7,950 new Covid-19 cases on October 13 – the 11th consecutive day that cases had remained below the 10,000 mark – a sharp drop from the 24,599 cases recorded on August 26.

Malaysia has fully vaccinated 90 per cent of its adult population and lifted travel restrictions across the country after nine months of curbs. Sixty-six per cent of its total population have been fully vaccinated.

Vietnam reported 2,949 new cases on October 12, the lowest since July 15. THE STRAITS TIMES (SINGAPORE)/ASIA NEWS NETWORK ■

# No facility isolation for jabbed travellers to Philippines



Facility-based quarantine is no longer required for fully-vaccinated travellers to the Philippines from “green lanes” as long as they present their negative Covid-19 test. STR/AFP

STARTING on October 14, facility-based quarantine will no longer be required for fully-vaccinated Filipino and foreign travellers to the Philippines from “green lanes” as long as they present their negative Covid-19 test, presidential spokesperson Harry Roque announced on October 13.

According to Roque, who also serves as the spokesperson of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases, the reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) test of arriving travellers should be taken within 72 hours before leaving the country of origin.

“Upon arrival, no facility-based quarantine will be required but the passenger is enjoined to self-monitor for any symptoms until the 14th day,” he said in a statement.

Roque, however, said fully vaccinated Filipino travellers still have the option to avail facility-based quarantine until the release of a negative RT-PCR test which would be taken in the quarantine facility upon their arrival.

On the other hand, the Malacanang Presidential Palace official said, unvaccinated, partially vaccinated, or individuals whose inoculation status cannot be independently verified, as well as immunised individuals who fail to comply with the test-before-travel requirements, should undergo a facility-based quarantine until their RT-PCR test, taken on the fifth day of their quarantine, yields a negative result.

As for foreign nationals, they should secure hotel reservations for at least six

days for their quarantine, Roque also said.

Meanwhile, unvaccinated or partially inoculated minors traveling with their fully immunised parents or guardians “shall be required to observe the quarantine protocols corresponding to their vaccination status”. The child will be accompanied by his or her parent or guardian.

For validation of vaccination status, travellers may present either their VaxCertPH digital certificate, Bureau of Quarantine or World Health Organisation-issued international certificate of vaccination or prophylaxis, or the national digital certificate of the foreign government where they were vaccinated. PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER/ASIA NEWS NETWORK ■

# A new momentum in transforming agri-food systems to end hunger

Opinion

Qu Dongyu

**T**HIS year's World Food Day finds us at a critical moment. The Covid-19 pandemic remains a global challenge, causing untold losses and hardship. The impacts of the climate crisis are all around us. Crops have gone up in flames. Homes have been washed away. Lives and livelihoods have been thrown into turmoil due to conflict and other humanitarian emergencies. Global food security challenges have not been this severe for years.

Yet in the midst of this all, there is an encouraging new momentum and energy building as we strive to overhaul the ways in which our food is produced, stored, distributed and consumed. We have started confronting the problems and making the structures more fit for purpose.

Last month's UN Food Systems Summit convened by UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres mapped out the broad outlines of how the world needs to move forward to transform agri-food systems.

The closing maxim of the gathering was: "From New York back to Rome", where the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and sister UN food agencies are based.

We at FAO have already rolled up our sleeves and got down to the practical tasks of leading the implementation and driving the transformation.

A groundbreaking World Food Forum was successfully convened here in the Italian capital early this month, powered by the global youth, and youth representatives at FAO and our sister agencies, focused on harnessing the creativity and resilience of our younger generations. They have the most at stake. They will be the ones living with the direct consequences of the climate crisis and malfunctioning agri-food systems. At the same time, the 1.8 billion young people in the world today between the ages of 10 and 24, of which nearly 90 per cent are living in developing countries, provide an unlimited potential to tap.

We have already started to leverage that into widespread awareness, holistic solutions and concrete youth-lead actions for change. Of course the young aren't the only ones who need to worry about our agri-food systems not being fit for purpose, and on how to make them more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable.



Behora, about 80 years old, stirs food in a pot at her house in the village of Fenoaivo, Commune llotaka, in August of this year. For lunch, Behor manages to find a half-cup of beans for her and her daughter. But the beans are already spoilt. She still manages to grow onions and small tomatoes in a 2sqm area. AFP

Even before Covid-19 shone a spotlight on the vulnerability of the world's agri-food systems, hundreds of millions of people worldwide were afflicted by hunger – and that number has increased in the last year up to 811 million. Despite the world producing sufficient food to feed all of us. This is unimaginable and unacceptable.

At the same time, 14 per cent of the food we produce is lost, and 17 per cent is wasted. Combine this with other stressors – such as pests and diseases, natural disasters, loss of biodiversity and habitat destruction, and conflict – and you can see the magnitude of the challenge we face in meeting the world's growing food needs, while simultaneously reducing the environmental and climate impact of our agri-food systems.

FAO, as the leading agency working on food and agriculture, has developed a toolbox which we are confident can enable us to make an impact on many of these complex systemic problems.

We have a clear sense of where we are going, framed in the objectives: Better Production, Better Nutrition, a Better Environment and a Better Life.

And our work is underpinned by a new Strategic Framework 2022-2031 for the next 10 years that defines the concrete actions and inputs needed to make the Four Betters a reality, and leave no one behind.

FAO estimates that as much as \$40 to \$50 billion in annual investments on targeted interventions are needed to end hunger by 2030. There are plenty of low-cost, high-impact projects that can help hundreds of millions of people better meet their food needs.

For instance, targeted interventions on Research and Development to make farming more technologically advanced, innovation in digital agriculture, and improve literacy rates among women can go a long way to reducing hunger. But there are also other essential elements such as better data, governance and institutions, that need to be added to the equation.

In addition, our approach can only be effective if it's rooted in working together with governments, and key partners, as they forge their own national pathways towards transformation in line with their specific conditions and needs.

We also need to realise that scientists

and bureaucrats and even food producers and distributors will never be able to bring about all these desperately needed changes on their own.

The transformation can and must start with pragmatic and concrete action by ordinary consumers and the choices we make. The decisions we make every day on the foods we consume, where we buy them, how they are packaged, how much food we throw away – all these have an impact on our agri-food systems and the future of this planet.

All of us have the potential to be food heroes. Our actions are our future. The process of transforming our agri-food systems – and making an impact on global hunger, healthy diets, environmental damage and waste – starts with you and me.

But it doesn't end with you and me. The old adage goes: "We are what we eat." It also holds true that how our children and grandchildren develop will also be influenced by what we eat. Hope is in their hands to carry on. Let us learn together, work together and contribute together.

Qu Dongyu is director-general of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

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# Lifestyle

## Vietnam's Huu Lien: Ecotourism destination in pristine Lang Son

**T**HE Huu Lien community-based eco-tourism village is an ideal destination for tourists when the Covid-19 pandemic is under control because of its beautiful pristine scenery.

About 120km northeast of Hanoi, Hu Lien village is located in Huu Lien commune of Lang Son province's Huu Long district.

The spot is surrounded by a wonderful landscape. The craggy limestone mountains, mysterious caves, underground streams and clear lakes create a unique ecosystem, making visitors feel like they are in harmony with heaven and earth, with wild and natural scenery.

Autumn is also the best time to visit Huu Lien village, when nature boasts its most charming appearance.

The entire commune is located in the 8.9ha Huu Lien National Forest Reserve, which has two primary forests and an extremely diverse and rich ecosystem with 776 species of plants and 409 species of animals, of which about 30 species of plants and 61 species of animals have been listed in the Red Book.

Huu Lien Forest is likened to the green lung of the northeast region thanks to its rich and diverse ecosystem, magnificent cave systems, underground streams and emerald lakes.

In addition to Huu Lien National

Forest Reserve, about 3km north of the Huu Lien Commune People's Committee, Dong Lam Steppe is an ecological area of around 100ha. It is surrounded by limestone mountains and adorned with streams that flow to Lake Dong Lam.

In the dry season, Lake Dong Lam dries up. In the rainy season, the steppe becomes more beautiful than ever, when the water rises to form small winding rivers. The water here has a jade green colour, creating a charming landscape. At this time, visitors can experience kayaking or rowing around the lake.

The Dong Lam Steppe is very spacious. Along with the cool autumn weather, tourists often choose this place to organise outdoor activities like camping. Tents and colourful kites are also indispensable for travel to Huu Lien. This area is suitable for both adults and children to fly kites together. With family groups, these can be memorable experiences.

The steppe and herds of horses have become a special attraction for tourists and photographers.

At the end of the steppe there is a small lake, visitors can go by raft around the lake to see the scenery and soak in the beauty of nature.

"I had the chance to discover Huu Lien community-based ecotourism village. It was wonderful. I love the immense steppe here with



It's perfect for camping in Huu Lien community-based eco-tourism village. TRUYEN HINH DULICH/VNA

the blue lake, delicious food and new experiences.

"This destination is not too far from Hanoi, the road is easy to travel. In our group, there are many people with different ages but everyone feels happy and comfortable. There is almost no sign of urbanisation in this area.

"The people here are gentle, friendly and hospitable. Early in the morning at the homestay, hearing the rooster crowing, going out to breathe in the fresh air by the stilt house and kitchen smoke makes me very excited," said Hanoi visitor Nguyen Phuong Dung.

### Learning about culture and cuisine

The prominent feature among the rice fields in Huu Lien village is the houses on stilts halfway between the mountains and clouds of the old forests.

The commune has a total area of more than 6,000ha and is home to more than 3,000 people, including

ethnic Tay, Nung, Dao and Mong people.

In the rice season, the landscape here is even more beautiful. Visitors can see the image of people harvesting in the field, smell the fragrant rice mixed with the smoke of burnt straw.

Mid-September and early October every year is also the persimmon season. On the way to Lake Nong Dung which is not far from the steppe, there are persimmon gardens right on the left. If you go at the right time, you can easily pick persimmons and buy them in the gardens.

After experiencing and enjoying the beautiful scenery, you should return to your homestay to enjoy local culinary specialties such as grilled chicken, grilled pork with mac mat (*clausena indica*) leaves, grilled stream fish, boiled mountain snails and pumpkin cake. If you want, you can also order food to cook in the steppe or lakeside, the homestay will prepare and bring it to you.

Huu Lien now has six homestay facilities to welcome visitors.

Vi Van Tuyen, the owner of Ngoc Bich Homestay, said Huu Lien villagers have received a lot of support and training from local authorities towards developing community-based tourism.

In addition, Huu Lien has many other attractions, depending on the season and weather conditions. About 10km from the commune, tourists can visit the field of buckwheat flowers, Khe Dau Waterfall and Xuong Pong Cave.

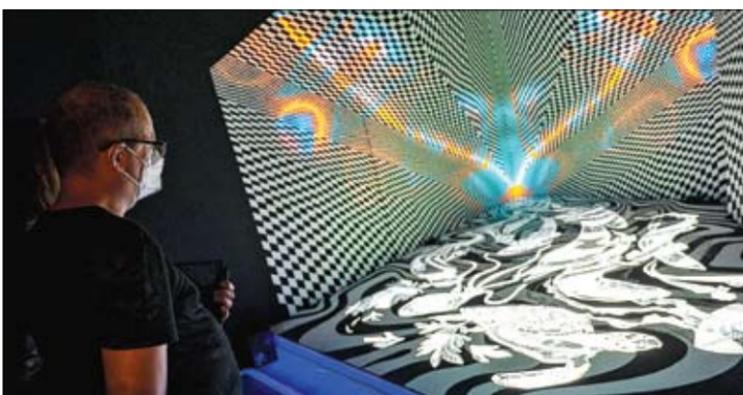
Huu Lien is also a place to keep the ethnic customs, traditions and culture alive, like the intangible heritage such as Go Chua festival, Pa Xoan singing, Then singing or ancient cheo (popular opera) performance.

Huu Lien is expected to be an attractive destination for tourists because of its unspoiled, beautiful nature and intact indigenous culture. VIET NAM NEWS/ASIA NEWS NETWORK ■



Huu Lien community-based eco-tourism village is an ideal destination for tourists. TO QUOC/VNA

## In Berlin, a street art show before it's 'game over' for site



A visitor looks at *The Last Goodbye* installation by art collective Crooshino at the *Game Over* exhibition in Berlin on October 5. AFP

FROM an image of Hulk who suddenly leaps over your head to a painting that changes its colours, one Berlin street art exhibition offers visitors a chance to experience paintings in 3D.

Called *Game Over*, the exhibition inspired by videogames is housed in a former casino stretching over 2,000 sqm which is due to be torn down.

Eighty artists are showcasing their work here, with a dedicated app enhancing the experience.

"After all these dry months with the coronavirus and this, yes, dark world, we have finally created a bit of colour, not only in our lives, but hopefully also

in the lives of the visitors and admirers," said Joern Reiners, a member of art group The Dixons and one of the curators of the exhibition.

"We try to bring together the right artists who will continue to develop and evolve creatively and ultimately create completely new layers and processes here."

The Dixons organised a similar pop-up exhibition in 2017, with artists plastering the walls of an old bank with their paintings before the demolition crew moved in.

This time the works stand out against a minimalist background.

But the special app allows visitors to

point their phones at the images to discover what lies beyond the analogue painting.

For painter Gita Kurdpoor, the show "which we have created here, together, is like a bit of a school trip feeling".

Berlin is a hub for urban culture and its particularly vibrant street art scene has left its mark on many of the capital's facades.

Tours are organised regularly for visitors to check out the most iconic images.

Most famously, the longest remaining stretch of the Berlin Wall is covered with murals, first painted in 1990 and later restored. AFP ■

Thinking caps

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

“MEASURE UP”

ACROSS

- 1 Increased
- 6 Person of action
- 10 Fairy-tale beast
- 14 Anklebones
- 15 “Cogito, \_\_\_ sum”
- 16 Face-to-face exam
- 17 How some lay it on?
- 20 Tailor-made line
- 21 Sporty headgear
- 22 Pats down
- 23 Type of alcohol
- 25 Sugar bowl marchers
- 26 \_\_\_ von Bismarck
- 28 Matching audio to video
- 32 Zoo heavyweight, briefly
- 34 Goals
- 35 It’s on the streets
- 38 Tremendously, slangily
- 42 Bonanza find
- 43 Feature of 32-Across
- 44 Coach
- 45 Insomniac’s symptom
- 48 \_\_\_-European
- 49 London hoosegow, once
- 51 Class reminders

DOWN

- 1 Ogden’s state
- 2 Blanched
- 3 Watchful hours?
- 4 Low or high end?
- 5 Abandon
- 6 With all one’s heart
- 7 Dog bowl bits
- 8 It might need a boost
- 9 Good vantage point
- 10 Showing awe, perhaps
- 11 Matter for the mill
- 12 Sets up, as pool balls
- 13 Moose cousins
- 18 \_\_\_ down a bunt (sacrifices)
- 19 Word with “mass” or “rapid”

- 24 Vocal sound
- 26 About
- 27 God with a hammer
- 29 Mary Poppins was one
- 30 Oft-mooched item, briefly
- 31 “This tape will self-destruct ...” org.
- 33 Desdemona’s man
- 35 Exchange words?
- 36 Battery contents
- 37 Nevada city
- 39 Coal carrier
- 40 Anger
- 41 A Great Lake
- 45 Definitely not ripe
- 46 Ingratiate oneself
- 47 Creates an instant lawn
- 49 Ice-cold
- 50 Pay reparations, e.g.
- 52 Sealed, as a package
- 53 Strongbox
- 54 Discontinues
- 55 Not backing
- 57 Name on elevators
- 58 Dapper fellow
- 60 Cereal morsel
- 61 Doctor in a 1964 movie

Sudoku Pacific

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

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Thursday’s solution

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

Thursday’s solution

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



Equipped with seven cameras, the robots on wheels detect ‘undesirable social behaviour’ and issue warnings to the public. AFP

S’pore patrol robots stoke fears of surveillance state

SINGAPORE has trialled patrol robots that blast warnings at people engaging in “undesirable social behaviour”, adding to an arsenal of surveillance technology in the tightly controlled city-state that is fuelling privacy concerns.

From vast numbers of CCTV cameras to trials of lampposts kitted out with facial recognition tech, Singapore is seeing an explosion of tools to track its inhabitants.

Officials have long pushed a vision of a hyper-efficient, tech-driven “smart nation”, but activists say privacy is being sacrificed and people have little control over what happens to their data.

Singapore is frequently criticised for curbing civil liberties and people are accustomed to tight controls, but there is still growing unease at intrusive tech.

The government’s latest surveillance devices are robots on wheels, with seven cameras, that detect “undesirable social behaviour” and issue warnings to the public

This includes smoking in prohibited areas, improperly parking bicycles, and breaching coronavirus social-distancing rules.

During a recent patrol, one of the “Xavier” robots wove its way through a housing estate and stopped in front of a group of elderly residents watching a chess match.

“Please keep one-metre distancing, please keep to five persons per group,” a robotic voice blared out, as a camera on top of the machine trained its gaze on them.

During a three-week trial in September, two robots were deployed to patrol the housing estate and a shopping centre.

“It reminds me of Robocop,” said Frannie Teo, a 34-year-old research assistant, who was walking through the mall.

It brings to mind a “dystopian world of robots ... I’m just a bit hesitant about that kind of concept”, she added.

‘No constraints’

Digital rights activist Lee Yi Ting said the devices were the latest way Singaporeans were being watched.

“It all contributes to the sense people ... need to watch what they say and what they do in Singapore to a far greater extent than they would in other countries,” she said.

But the government defended its use of robots, saying they were not being used to identify or take action against offenders during the tech’s trial, and were needed to address a labour crunch as the population ages.

“The workforce is actually shrinking,” said Ong Ka Hing, from the government agency that developed the Xavier robots, adding they could help reduce the number of officers needed for foot patrols.

The island of about 5.5 million people has 90,000 police cameras, a number set to double by 2030, and facial recognition tech – which helps authorities pick out faces in a crowd – may be installed on lampposts across the city.

There was a rare public backlash this year when authorities admitted coronavirus contact-tracing data collected by an official system had been accessed by police. The government later passed legislation to limit its use.

But critics say the city-state’s laws generally put few limitations on government surveillance, and Singaporeans have little control over what happens to the data collected.

“There are no privacy law constraints on what the government can or cannot do,” said Indulekshmi Rajeswari, a privacy lawyer from Singapore who is now based in Germany. AFP



An autonomous robot named ‘Xavier’ patrols a shopping and residential district during a three-week trial by the Home Team Science and Technology Agency in Singapore. AFP

# Sport

## Court jails Hernandez for breaking restraining order in 2017

A MADRID court on Wednesday announced it had ordered the imprisonment of France and Bayern Munich defender Lucas Hernandez for violating a restraining order in 2017.

Hernandez, a 2018 World Cup winner, has been summoned to appear before a court next Tuesday but he has appealed against the sentence. He will have 10 days from October 19 to enter prison "voluntarily".

In Spain, those sentenced to less than two years do not usually go to prison, but in this case, as it was a repeat offence, Hernandez has been ordered to.

The 25-year-old was arrested four years ago for violating a court order banning him from contacting his partner after a violent altercation between the two.

In December 2019, Hernandez was sentenced to six months in prison for breaking the restraining order when the couple landed in Madrid after getting married.

In February 2017, Hernandez was arrested after his then-girlfriend was taken to hospital with minor injuries following a fight between them.

Neither made a complaint against the other but both were charged by Spain's public prosecutor.

The then-Atletico Madrid player and his girlfriend were each sentenced to 31 days of community service.

They were also ordered not to see each other for six months.

Four months later though, Hernandez was arrested at the Madrid airport.

He was in the company of his partner, who was not arrested as her own restraining order had not yet been formally served, as the pair returned to Spain after getting married in the US.

The couple have since had a son.

Hernandez was part of the France squad that won the Nations League title last weekend.

He became the most expensive player in Bundesliga history when he joined Bayern from Atletico in 2019 for €80 million (\$92.5 million). AFP ■



France's defender Lucas Hernandez during a training session on the eve of the friendly football match against Bulgaria on June 7. AFP

## US Open champ Medvedev stunned

**R**EIGNING US Open champion Daniil Medvedev is out of the ATP Indian Wells Masters, falling in stunning fashion in the fourth round to No 23 seed Grigor Dimitrov 4-6, 6-4, 6-3 on Wednesday.

Medvedev, who won his first Grand Slam title last month at Flushing Meadows, hadn't lost a set heading into the fourth round but dropped eight straight games against Dimitrov en route to a stunning early exit for the top seed.

World No2 Medvedev did not take a break after his emotional US Open victory and said his busy schedule may have finally caught up to him.

"I did feel exhausted in this tournament. Now I can say it. I couldn't say it before my matches. There are a few physical things that have come up," said Medvedev, who is hoping to eventually overtake Novak Djokovic for No1 in the world.

Medvedev won the first set, was up 4-1 in the second and appeared to be cruising to another easy victory when the wheels came off - his unforced errors mounting and service game falling flat.

Medvedev had no answers for the way Dimitrov was playing and predicted the Bulgarian would likely go on to capture the title.

"If he plays like this, like the way he played me from 4-1, then he is going to win the tournament," Medvedev said. "He played the second half of the match better than anyone did against me at the US Open. It is not like I gave him the match."

The match turned in the sixth game of the second set as Dimitrov broke Medvedev's serve for the second time in the set to cut the Russian's lead to 4-2.

Dimitrov held serve in the next game and then broke Medvedev twice more to take the set and set the tone for a dominating performance in the third.

The Bulgarian closed out the match on the first match point when Medvedev blasted a forehand long.



Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria hits a forehand reply to Daniil Medvedev of Russia in their Round of 16 match at the Indian Wells tennis tournament on Wednesday. AFP

"Been watching quite a bit of his matches," Dimitrov said of Medvedev. "I really wanted to play this match to be completely honest. What he has been able to accomplish this past year and a half is pretty amazing. I think it really pushes me also to do better."

Dimitrov will face Polish eighth seed Hubert Hurkacz, who rolled over Russian Aslan Karatsev 6-1, 6-3 earlier on Wednesday, in the quarter-finals.

### Minor setback

The 25-year-old Medvedev beat Djokovic in the US Open final last month to prevent the Serb star from becoming the first man since the legendary Rod Laver in the 1960s to win all four Grand Slams in the same year.

Medvedev managed to break Dimitrov

in the first game of the first two sets but that is small consolation for the loss.

Medvedev made six double faults and had his serve broken six times in the two hour, 15 minute match in the main stadium.

Medvedev, who has won 50 matches in 2021, described this as a minor setback because this event is not a Grand Slam.

"I don't see this as the end of the world. I don't think this would happen in a Grand Slam. There are some small points I could have done better," he said.

This is just the second time Dimitrov has beaten Medvedev in five career meetings. The last time was a three-set win in their first encounter in 2017 in London.

In other men's matches on Wednes-

day, Argentina's Diego Schwartzman defeated Casper Ruud of Norway 6-3, 6-3 to reach the quarters.

In the women's draw, two-winner Victoria Azarenka punched her ticket to the semi-finals with a straight set win, 6-4, 6-2, over Jessica Pegula.

Azarenka, who is the lone player left in the women's and men's field to have won in Indian Wells, captured the title in 2012 and 2016.

The 32-year-old from Belarus needed just 94 minutes to end the run of American Pegula and reach the final four of this event for the fourth time in her career.

"I really played well in the crucial moments," Azarenka said. "I felt like I stepped up to the occasion a lot. That's what I'm really happy with today." AFP ■

## Pakistan summons spirit of 2009 for T20 title

SHAHID Afridi, the box office trailblazer of Pakistan white ball cricket, believes his "unpredictable" nation can summon the spirit of 2009 and win a second T20 World Cup.

Afridi was man of the match in a nail-biting seven-run semi-final win over South Africa in the tournament 12 years ago where he made 51.

He then starred again in the eight-wicket rout of Sri Lanka in the final at Lord's where he smashed an undefeated 54.

Pakistan's victory came just three months after the terror attack on the Sri Lanka team in Lahore, an incident which sparked a shutdown of international cricket in the country.

"We had that issue of the Sri Lanka attacks on our minds," Afridi said.

"The whole nation was disappointed and frustrated so that win was very much needed.

"The win gave the whole nation happiness and some unforgettable moments."

Afridi famously stormed onto the scene in 1996 when he broke

the record for the fastest century in ODI cricket, reaching his hundred from 37 balls.

It was a record which stood until 2014.

Afridi, who played 99 T20 Internationals for Pakistan, thinks recent setbacks can again inspire Babar Azam's team in the 2021 T20 showpiece.

A month before the mega-event, head coach Misbah-ul-Haq and bowling coach Waqar Younis resigned, apparently believing new board chairman Ramiz Raja would sack them anyway.

Then New Zealand abandoned their tour of the country just minutes before the first ODI in Rawalpindi.

Three days later, England also withdrew its men's and women's teams from visiting Pakistan.

"This is Pakistan cricket for you, never ever a dull day," added Afridi ruefully.

"Pakistan can surprise any team in the world. Rule them out at your peril."

In his 22-year international career, Afridi was at the heart of

Pakistan's "topsy-turvy" ride in limited overs cricket.

### Heartbreak and drama

Afridi anchored Pakistan's run to the final in the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa in 2007, taking 12 wickets which earned him the player of the tournament award.

Pakistan, however, lost twice against arch-rivals India - including the final.

"Pakistan gave the best entertainment in the first T20 World Cup," insists Afridi.

"We lost to India in the group match after a bowl-out, which was something very new for us."

Pakistan then lost the final with Misbah-ul-Haq falling to an injudicious shot off the third ball of the final over, with just six needed for a win.

"Misbah brought Pakistan into the game but then we lost by the barest of margins," said Afridi.

Under Afridi, defending champions Pakistan then lost in the semi-final of the 2010 edi-

tion in the Caribbean when Michael Hussey clobbered 39 runs in the last two overs to give Australia an unlikely win.

"T20 suits our character," added Afridi. "We have the talent, approach and aggression required for this rapid format."

"It is a format which is loved throughout Pakistan. We won against every team and then

every team adopted that style.

"Bowling is now full of variety and new batting techniques have developed."

Afridi insists Pakistan can once again spring a few surprises in the UAE.

"The current Pakistan team is very talented although they lack experienced players. But, as we all know, never underestimate a Pakistan team!" AFP ■



Pakistan's Shahid Afridi (centre) holds the trophy with teammates after beating Sri Lanka in their final ICC Twenty20 Cricket World Cup match at Lord's in London on June 21, 2009. AFP