



PM SET TO CO-CHAIR SPECIAL ASEAN-CHINA SUMMIT ON NOV 22

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DOMESTIC TOURISM SKYROCKETS 237% DURING WATER FEST

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VIDEOS OF CHINESE TENNIS STAR EMERGE BUT OUTCRY GROWS

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Kingdom wheels out tyre exports

Nov Sivutha

A LOCAL firm's recent first trial export shipment of tyres could be a starting point for a new stage in the diversification of the economy, and bring confidence and stability among rubber growers and investors in Cambodia to another echelon, experts have said.

This maiden consignment by Cart Tire Co Ltd, a subsidiary of Sailun International Holding (Hong Kong) Co Ltd, represents Cambodia's first export transaction involving locally-made finished tyres.

Men Sopheak, CEO of rubber grower and exporter Sopheak Nika Investment Agro-Industrial Plants Co Ltd, told *The Post* on November

21 that the shipment augurs well for the Cambodian rubber sector, raising hopes among growers and investors for a buoyant market.

Cart Tire plans to buy a sizeable share of the natural rubber used at its tyre factory from local farmers, he said, adding that historically, virtually the entire production volume of the commodity had been shipped abroad.

"This represents a great starting point. Rubber growers will be at ease since almost 100 per cent of Cambodia's rubber output had been exported, and now there's a company out there that invests into processing it into finished goods," Sopheak said.

Cambodia Chamber of Commerce vice-president Lim Heng hailed the development as another turning

point for the Kingdom, as more new products are incorporated into its export portfolio.

He noted that the company plans to export to a wide range of countries, with a focus on the US and European markets.

Heng claimed that the firm locally

CONTINUED – PAGE 6



Floating on a prayer

Two young women gaze wistfully over the Siem Reap river, whispering prayers, wishes and blessings to the souls of departed ancestors before setting their small elaborately-decorated lotus-shaped floats, known as 'pratip', to sail south towards the Tonle Sap Lake. PHUON CHANSEREIVUTH

Sudan military reinstates PM Hamdok after reaching deal

NEARLY a month after Sudan's top general ousted the prime minister, they signed a breakthrough deal on November 21 to reverse the military takeover that had sparked international condemnation and mass protests.

General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan appeared at the presidential palace in Khartoum for a televised ceremony with a haggard looking premier Abdalla Hamdok, who had just been freed from house arrest.

The 14-point deal restores the transition to civilian rule that had been derailed by the October 25 putsch, which threw the poverty-stricken northeast African country into renewed turmoil and set off a wave of street protests.

The agreement, which comes after weeks of crisis talks involving Sudanese and outside players, declared that "the decision of the general commander of the armed forces to relieve the transitional prime minister is cancelled" and to release all political detainees.

It raised hopes Sudan will be able to return to its fragile transition process toward full democracy that started after the 2019 ouster of veteran autocratic president Omar al-Bashir.

Despite the breakthrough, thousands of protesters again rallied in several cities, met by security forces who fired teargas in the capital – the latest of a series of protests that, medics say, have claimed 40 lives.

A frail looking Hamdok was seen on air extolling the virtues of the "revolution" that brought him to power in 2019.

Standing beside him, Burhan thanked Hamdok for his service and vowed that "free and transparent elections" would be held as part of the transitional process. AFP

ADB to aid three-city infrastructure plan

Post Staff

THE Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$180 million loan to help three Cambodian towns improve urban infrastructure and boost economic competitiveness.

According to an ADB press release on November 19, the Livable Cities Investment Project will help more than

140,000 residents in Bavet, Kampot and Poipet access better wastewater and solid waste management services. It will help the towns reduce flooding by upgrading their urban stormwater and drainage systems. The project also aims to strengthen the capacity of municipal governments to deliver urban services.

"More Cambodians are moving to

secondary cities, but limited access to urban infrastructure and services, as well as environmental degradation, has worsened living conditions and hurt urban economic growth," said ADB Urban Development Specialist Wei Kim Swain.

"The project will help the government upgrade sanitation and waste management and raise living

standards, especially among low-income households vulnerable to the health, economic, and environmental effects of poor sanitation. It will also help the municipalities attract private sector investment and create jobs," she added.

The ADB noted that Cambodia's

CONTINUED – PAGE 2



JAPAN AID CONTINUES TO PLAY LARGE ROLE IN DEVELOPING KINGDOM

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IMPORTS, EXPORTS AT SSEZ SURGES 39% TO \$1.77B IN 10 MONTHS

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National

PM to co-chair meeting of ASEAN-China with Xi Jinping

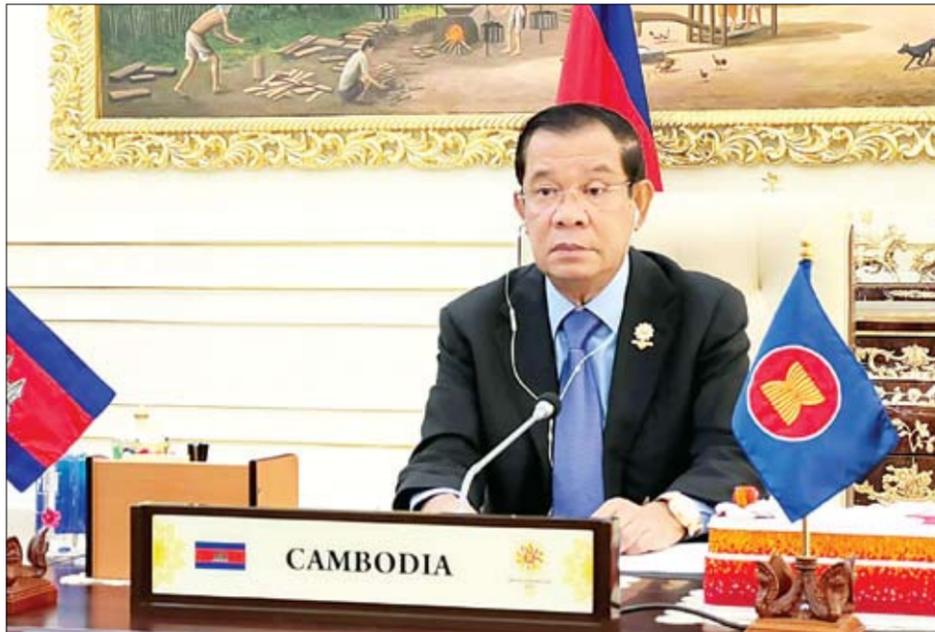
Ry Sochan

PRIME Minister Hun Sen will serve as the co-chair and host of the ASEAN-China special summit to commemorate the 30th anniversary of ASEAN-China relations on November 22 via video conference at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

According to the press release from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation dated November 21, foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn, Minister of Commerce Pan Sorasak, Minister of Education, Youth and Sport Hang Chuon Naron and other senior government officials will also be in attendance at the meeting virtually.

"ASEAN's leaders and [Xi Jinping] are expected to discuss the future ways and means to further enhance ASEAN-China relations as well as exchange views on regional and international issues of common interest and concern," the press release said.

Thong Mengdaiv, research fellow at the Mekong Centre for Strategic Studies at the Asian Vision Institute, told *The Post* on November 21 that under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China has done an outstanding job managing the Covid-



Prime Minister Hun Sen at his office while attending an online meeting recently. FACEBOOK

19 pandemic while protecting China's national economic growth and maintaining stability there, which are all accomplishments to be proud of.

Mengdaiv said the Chinese government has also taken care of its allies with financing and by providing millions of doses of vaccines aid to Cambodia and the rest of ASEAN.

He added that China and ASEAN have a vision for the ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership

2030 and building a closer ASEAN-China "common destiny community" in the future.

"China and ASEAN continue to push forward with the building of the East-Asian economic community and the Lancang-Mekong economic development belt, and continue to negotiate and consult on an expedited drafting of the South China Sea code of conduct to ensure a more peaceful and stable region with economic

integration," said Mengdaiv.

He said that for this meeting, Cambodia expects China to focus on strengthening cooperation with ASEAN in four major areas: politics, security, economy and culture, and to do so on the basis of equal respect for sovereignty, mutual independence and win-win cooperation to achieve a robust post-pandemic recovery and to further develop the entire region. ■

Water Festival road toll: 33 accidents with 22 dead, 44 injuries

Mom Kunthear

THE three days of Water Festival this year saw the number of injuries drop compared to last year's holiday, however this year also saw an increase in deaths.

According to a report from the National Police's Department of Traffic Police and Public Order on November 20 there were 22 deaths and 44 serious and minor injuries recorded in 33 traffic accidents over the holiday, which ran from November 18-20.

The report said that in the same period in 2020 there was a total of 19 deaths and 53 serious and minor injuries recorded in 36 traffic accidents.

"Phnom Penh had the most fatal traffic accidents, followed by Pursat, Battambang, Prey Veng, Kratie and Svay Rieng provinces. 14 people were killed in accidents in the capital and those five provinces," the traffic department report said.

The report further stated that the accidents were caused by speeding, disrespecting driving rights or the right-of-way rule, dangerous overtaking/passing, making a dangerous turns and drunk driving.

Kong Sovann, a public health specialist and direc-

tor of the International Safety Fund (ISF), told *The Post* on November 21 that the number of traffic accidents had decreased, but the death toll had still gone up and therefore relevant ministries and institutions needed to identify the specific factors involved with traffic deaths.

"Before the Water Festival the National Road Safety Committee and the Cambodian Red Cross instructed drivers to take greater care, but to no avail. The message may not have been effective or it may have been targeted at the wrong group, because we clearly failed to reach them," he said.

He added that the traffic safety information seemed to be reaching the vulnerable groups targeted, but not the offenders.

"How effective have the campaigns been so far? We can measure it because the goal of these education campaigns is to prevent deaths and serious injuries leading to permanent disability or loss.

"This requires that the National Road Safety Committee, coordinators from all ministries, civil society groups and the private sector find more effective methods and means of education," Sovann said. ■

ANNOUNCEMENT

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Request for Proposal : **Provision of Integration of Regional 2021 Human Rights Day**

Deadline : **Extended to 24 November 2021 by 04 : 00 pm, Cambodia time**

Download Link : https://procurement-notice.undp.org/view-notice.cfm?notice_id=85201

Proposal submission address: <https://etendering.partneragencies.org>

Business Unit code: **KHM10** and Event ID: **KHM53185**

Request for Proposal : **Provision of Service to Support to NCCDS to Review and Enhance the Concession Agreement on Clean Water Supply System under LGCC- WRP**

Deadline : **01 December 2021 by 04 : 00 pm, Cambodia time**

Download Link : https://procurement-notice.undp.org/view-notice.cfm?notice_id=85779

Proposal submission address: <https://etendering.partneragencies.org>

Business Unit code: **KHM10** and Event ID: **KHM53729**

Kampot, Poipet, Bavet receive loans

Continued from page 1

urban population rose to six million in 2019 from 2.6 million in 2008, which has posed a challenge for municipal administrations to provide services.

In 2019, about 47 per cent of Cambodia's urban population had access to piped water supply in dwellings. Untreated sewage is commonly discharged into the open environment through combined sewers and road drains or indirectly via open canals. Solid waste services are limited. A large proportion of solid waste is left uncollected, dumped in open canals, the open environment or burned.

The press release added that Cambodia's 2019-2023 National Strategic Development Plan aims to address those challenges. The plan prioritises investments in public infrastructure, including water supply and sanitation, and sets a national target for all cities to provide safe water by 2025 and strengthen solid waste management.

It said ADB's country partnership strategy for Cambodia 2019-2023 supports economic growth along the greater Mekong subregion southern economic corridor, where Bavet, Kampot and Poipet are located. Bavet and Poipet are entry points to Vietnam and Thailand, respectively, and the port city Kampot has become a tourist destination.

According to the press release, in Bavet and Poipet,



Officials gather to inspect river adjacent infrastructure in Kampot town in August of this year. FACEBOOK

the project will support the rehabilitation of existing canals and the construction of a wastewater treatment plant, sewage network, new stormwater drains, and landfills. In Kampot, the project will expand the sewage network and lay out a plan for local administrations to become self-sufficient service providers.

It said the project will deliver a road map to boost revenue collection by municipal administrations, which have relied heavily on subsidies from the government to provide services.

The road map will include tariff reform to cover city operations and maintenance and a plan to ensure efficient service delivery, including an assess-

ment of opportunities for private sector participation.

The press release added that ADB's new project will be supported by a \$2 million technical assistance grant from the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction. The technical assistance will focus on the sustainable and climate-resilient development of the towns, including improving land use planning, as well as institutional capacity and governance.

ADB will work with the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction in coordinating with the participating towns and the ministries for national regulatory and policy reforms.

Bavet town governor Lim Seang Heng said on Novem-

ber 21 that many towns in Cambodia applied for the funding and competed to be a part of the project and Bavet was lucky enough to be one of the three winners along with Kampot and Poipet.

"ADB approved the loan for the Livable Cities Investment Project in Bavet. The proposal includes a wastewater treatment plant and upgraded sewage network for the businesses, factories and houses constructed along the roadsides in Bavet town," he said.

He added that the Bavet town administration had studied the project for more than two years and planned to begin implementation of it in 2021, but due Covid-19 it was postponed until the following year. ■

Japan pledges continued support for Cambodia

Ry Sochan

JAPAN has pledged further support to Cambodia in its international peacekeeping efforts while the two countries have urged Myanmar to fully implement the five-point consensus reached by ASEAN on the situation in Myanmar.

The pledge was made on November 18 during a telephone conversation between Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn and his newly-appointed Japanese counterpart Yoshimasa Hayashi.

"In the area of political security, [Hayashi] commended Cambodia's contribution to international peacekeeping and pledged to further support Cambodia in this endeavour," said Cambodia's foreign ministry in a press release.

"[Sokhonn] thanked Japan for providing capacity building support to Cambodian peacekeepers and agreed with [Hayashi] that the two countries should resume exchange of visits and further expand cooperation, particularly in peacekeeping," the press release added.

The press release continued that the two ministers had expressed satisfaction with the ongoing level of active consultations between the two foreign ministers on bilateral cooperation, including the promotion of human rights in Cambodia.

Sokhonn recalled Japan's important contributions to Cambodia's reconstruction and expressed gratitude to Japan for continuing to assist Cambodia's socio-economic development and providing support for Cambodia's efforts to respond to



Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn and his newly-appointed Japanese counterpart Yoshimasa Hayashi. FACEBOOK

the Covid-19 pandemic, including through the provision of medical equipment and vaccines.

The press release said the two ministers had discussed at length the situation with Myanmar and they shared the view that ASEAN had an important role in assisting Myanmar in finding a peaceful approach to resolving the crisis.

"The five-point consensus agreed upon at the ASEAN Leaders' Meet-

ing on April 24, 2021, should be fully implemented without further delay," was the view of both Cambodia and Japan, the press release stated.

It said the two ministers noted with satisfaction the growing relations of friendship and cooperation between Japan and Cambodia and the year 2023 will be an important juncture for celebration as it marks the 70th anniversary of formal ties between the two nations.

They also expressed views on various fields of bilateral cooperation, including the development of Sihanoukville seaport, facilitation of trade and economic exchanges and reinvigoration of people-to-people connectivity following the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions.

Kin Phea, director of the Royal Academy of Cambodia's International Relations Institute, told *The Post* on November 21 that ever since the

1991 Paris Peace Agreements, relations between Japan and Cambodia had improved in all areas including politics, economic ties and cultural exchanges.

He said Japan has been especially helpful with the restoration and rebuilding of Cambodia, making significant contributions to the establishment and maintenance of peace in the Kingdom because Japan has always wisely prioritised political stability.

"Diplomatic relations between Cambodia and Japan have always been very steady because Japan has always been cautious with its diplomatic reactions and its formal diplomatic positions with Cambodia and this gentle approach has ensured that relations between the two countries have never had to sail through any rough waters after the Paris Peace Accords up until now," he said.

He added that today Japan is seen as a peaceful country and it actually has a pacifist constitution that was adopted following its defeat by the US in World War II. The US then went on to rebuild Japan and helped to turn it into the world's third largest economy.

"Cambodia-Japan relations are important because Japan is like a scale weighing Cambodia-US relations and Cambodia-China relations because Japan is a very close ally of the US.

"The US-Cambodia relationship has its ups and downs. Sometimes the waves turn choppy. But in many areas Cambodia and Japan are able to work very closely and smoothly like with issues of peace and stability in the region and Japan can then be a good mediator during those rough stretches," Phea said. ■

Khmer Enterprise and Wing Bank join hands to support Cambodian SMEs affected by Covid-19

The SME members of Khmer Enterprise now can access loans from Wing Bank and its financial digital ecosystem to aid recovery from the impacts of the pandemic.

KHMER Enterprise and Wing Bank (Cambodia) Plc have entered into a strategic partnership to support the operational development of the Kingdom's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

This aims to promote sustainable and workable ecosystems for entrepreneurs, startups and SMEs in Cambodia to amplify the impact within the country's ecosystem.

Under the partnership, Khmer Enterprise and Wing Bank will work closely to boost the operations of SMEs in four key priority sectors – agriculture, manufacturing, services and ICT – providing them with the opportunity to access loans from Wing Bank and its financial digital ecosystem.

"The partnership with Wing Bank will provide further options to our SME members who are seeking financial support for their business, especially those who have been adversely affected by the pandemic," said HE Dr Chhieng Vanmunin, CEO of Khmer Enterprise.

Wing Bank has a long experience in supporting SMEs in Cambodia to grow their business. As of 2020, Wing Bank has been working with more 2,400 SMEs for collection and disbursement services.

"SMEs play an integral role in our community through creating jobs, and supplying inputs to larger businesses.

"This partnership reflects our

relentless commitment to supporting SME growth and exploring further opportunities to help them sustain their businesses," said Hor Bunthe, Wing Bank deputy CEO.

Having launched a commercial bank licence in April of this year, Wing Bank has enhanced its efforts in supporting the community by establishing financial products and services for both individual customers and businesses.

All of these products can be accessed through the financial digital ecosystem of Wing Bank, which includes Wing Money and the more than 10,000 Wing Cash Xpress Agents across Cambodia.

Khmer Enterprise, established by the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF), aims to mobilise, invest and manage resources to support the development of a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Kingdom, thereby promoting entrepreneurial activities driving innovation and value-added creation in Cambodia's economy.

In response to the challenges and impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, Khmer Enterprise has filtered almost 700 applications, among which 59 startups and SMEs were chosen to receive government grants.

Next year, Khmer Enterprise aims to roll out another round of assistance package programmes to support startups and SMEs and see them thrive with the reopening of the economy. ■



Wing Bank deputy CEO Hor Bunthe (left) and Khmer Enterprise CEO HE Dr Chhieng Vanmunin. SUPPLIED

National



A meeting between Ratanakkiri provincial governor Nhem Sam Oeun and Lao ambassador to Cambodia Amphay Kindavong at the provincial hall on Friday. PROVINCIAL INFORMATION DEPARTMENT

Border provinces join Cambodia-Laos group

Ry Sochan

RATANAKKIRI province and Laos have agreed to strengthen and expand the Cambodia-Laos Association to push for better cooperation and relations between the two sides.

The agreement was reached at a meeting on November 19 at the provincial hall between Ratanakkiri provincial governor Nhem Sam Oeun and Lao ambassador to Cambodia Amphay Kindavong, who is close to the end of his term.

The Ratanakkiri provincial Department of Information

said on its Facebook page on November 19 that at the meeting Amphay Kindavong expressed that it was Laos' intention to strengthen the Cambodia-Laos Association by inducting the Cambodian border provinces as members.

"In response to the proposed strengthening of the Cambodia-Laos Association, His Excellency [Nhem Sam Oeun] expressed his support for this initiative to push for better cooperation and relations," the Facebook page said.

Nhem Sam Oeun said that although the term of the Lao

ambassador is ending soon, the traditionally good relations between Ratanakkiri province and the Laos border provinces would continue normally.

Amphay Kindavong said that despite the Covid-19 crisis, relations between Laos and Cambodia – especially the border provinces – remained cooperative and that both sides endeavored to be good neighbours to each other.

The ambassador also said he believes that Sam Oeun will make positive changes to Ratanakkiri province during his tenure due to his strong leadership skills. ■

Oz helping Kingdom update engineering

Ry Sochan

CAMBODIA and Australia have agreed to expand Australian assistance to Cambodia to update Cambodia's engineering standards, ease its transition to electric vehicles and assist with wastewater strategy development.

The agreement was reached on November 17 at a meeting between Australian ambassador to Cambodia Pablo Kang and Minister of Public Works and Transport Sun Chanthol.

"Ambassador Kang met this week with HE Sun Chanthol, Senior Minister for Public Works and Transport where they agreed to expand Australian assistance to update Cambodia's engineering standards, its transition to electric vehicles, and wastewater strategy development," the Australian embassy to Cambodia said on its Facebook page.

The Facebook post added that – 20 years ago – Australia helped Cambodia develop engineering standards for roads and bridges which have defined Cambodian infrastructure standards ever since.

The Australian embassy stated that Australia will continue supporting its long-standing quality infrastructure partnership by helping

Cambodia to update those standards to ensure climate resilience and incorporate recent technological advances through their new regional Partnerships for Infrastructure – P4I – programme.

Australian foreign minister Marise Payne recently visited Cambodia and met

with Prime Minister Hun Sen, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn and Minister of Women's Affairs Ing Kuntha Phavi, wherein she also pledged additional support for Cambodia, particularly in its role as chair of ASEAN for 2022. ■



A meeting between Australian ambassador to Cambodia Pablo Kang and Minister of Public Works and Transport Sun Chanthol on Wednesday. PUBLIC WORKS MINISTRY

B Meanchey gunfight sees 15 Thais arrested, three officers injured

Khouth Sophak Chakrya

THE Banteay Meanchey Military Police have arrested 15 Thai suspects and their accomplices after a gun battle between two Thai groups caused injuries to three police officers in the early hours of November 21, local authorities said.

National Military Police spokesman Eng Hy said that according to the preliminary report he has received, village residents reported a gunfight taking place between two groups of Thais – which was then met with an armed response by the provincial Military Police.

Hy said two groups of Thais were drinking alcohol outside of a store in town. They got into a dispute and the two sides were throwing wine bottles at each other at first, but then a gun fight erupted between them, taking onlookers by surprise.

The Military Police then rallied and intervened to break up the gun battle and bring the chaotic and dangerous situation under control, which resulted in three of their officers being shot, said Hy.

"I saw the information posted on Facebook and to some local websites that three of our officers were injured. One of the three was seriously injured by a bullet passing through

both of his cheeks. That officer was sent to the provincial hospital for treatment. But I do not know the officers' names yet because the provincial Military Police have yet to provide any details," he said.

Poipet district governor Keat Hul told *The Post* that authorities were continuing to search for additional suspects for questioning and possible arrest. However, he did not know what caused the initial violence or the ensuing armed clashes with officers.

"According to a preliminary report concerning the incident, three officers were injured and a group of 15 suspects were arrested and sent to the Poipet town Military Police command headquarters for questioning. But so far I have not yet received a written report from the Military Police forces," he said.

Hul said the violence was the work of troublemakers and it could seriously affect the social and economic stability of Poipet town. He said area forces would take strict action against those responsible without allowing any of them to escape.

Poipet town Military Police commander Nuon Ninaro and provincial military police commander Born Bin could not be reached for comment on November 21. ■

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR "PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION CONSULTANT (PMIC) OF UP TO FIVE IRRIGATION SCHEMES AND A NATIONAL WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT DATA CENTER"

EIB/MOWRAM/CS1-PMIC-2

IRRIGATION AGRICULTURE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (EIB-IAIP)

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), hereafter referred to as "The Borrower", has received a loan from the European Investment Bank—hereafter referred to as "EIB", towards the cost of the Irrigated Agriculture Improvement Project (EIB-IAIP). The RGC, through its Executing Agency (EA) which is Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MOWRAM), now requests Expressions of Interests from consulting firms who are interested in providing consulting services in Project Management and Implementation Consultant (PMIC-2) for the improvement and modernization of irrigation infrastructures.

Specific areas of work include the preparation of River Basin Management Plan, feasibility studies of irrigation schemes, detailed engineering design, construction supervision, preparation and implementation of a Social and Environmental Management Framework, Provide Support to EA on procurement and financial management, preparation of progress reports, and monitoring and evaluation. The project will cover up to five (5) existing irrigation schemes, enhancing their water supply reliability, improving irrigation efficiency, and reducing climate-related disaster (flood and drought) within a total command area of about 51,000 ha of existing agricultural land. The project will also support the establishment of the National Water Resources Data Management Center (NWRDMC) and the Water Resources Information System (WRIS) including establishment of a new Doppler Radar Station in Kampong Thom Province and will strengthen capacity of Farmer Water Users Communities (FWUC) in irrigation system Operation and Maintenance (O&M). The provisionally selected schemes are in the provinces of Battambang, Kampong Thom, Takeo and Kampot. This contract is expected to be implemented between June 2022 and June 2027.

A full Request for Expressions of Interest including Terms of Reference and a template for Expressions of Interest can be downloaded from the following link:

<http://pmu-adb-eib-wb.uplands-irrigation-mowram.gov.kh/public/procurement>

or by e-mail request to the address below.

suasdevim@yahoo.com; (copy to sokboren83@gmail.com)

Manager of the EIB-IAIP Project

PMU-ADB&WB MOWRAM Office

Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MOWRAM)

364, Preah Monivong Blvd, Sangkat PhsarDaeumThkov, KhanChamkarMon, PhnomPenh, CAMBODIA

Sar Kheng: Civil registry systems need tech boost

Ry Sochan

MINISTER of Interior Sar Kheng said that Cambodia would invest in a computerised civil registry system that permits registrations through websites and via mobile apps in order to facilitate the provision of civil registry services.

He made the remarks on November 19 at a virtual ministerial roundtable meeting on the development of a robust civil registry system and integrating the lessons learned from the pandemic into the second phase of the civil registry improvements.

“Cambodia will invest in a computerised civil registry system that allows registrations through websites and mobile technology and adjust the way the system works to facilitate the provision of services and civil registration,” he said

He added that the Covid-19 pandemic had disrupted socio-economic activities and it had also impacted the government’s ability to maintain the services and functions of the civil registry system and produce accurate civil registry statistics, according to the Ministry of Interior’s Facebook page on November 19.

He said that the government had defined vaccination

as a key strategic measure to prevent the spread of the disease in communities and to strengthen treatment capacity. The government had also laid out intervention measures in socio-economic areas to help maintain a balance between disease prevention and people’s businesses and livelihoods.

He added that the Covid-19 preventive measures had also contributed significantly to the inability of the civil registry system to continue functioning and that this was one of the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic but the civil registry system can be restored quickly and that work is now in progress.

Sar Kheng said on his Facebook page on November 19 that comprehensive and timely civil registry statistical data produced from civil registrations will help the government set goals and respond effectively to emergencies or disasters.

He noted that Cambodia is implementing a number of initiatives set out in the 10-year National Strategic Plan on Identification 2017-2026 that will help the civil registry system with the production of accurate civil registry statistics.



In-sea diving activities for tourists in Sihanoukville in November. Cambodia boasts rich biodiversity and strong efforts to manage and preserve the environment. KHMER DIVE GROUP

Kingdom’s biodiversity ‘strong’

Post Staff

CAMBODIA is still recognised as a global leader in biodiversity with 6,149 species living in Cambodia on record to date, Ministry of Environment spokesman Neth Pheaktra said on November 19.

“The number of species may even increase over time because new examples of Cambodia’s incredible degree of biodiversity may be discovered,” he said on his Facebook page.

He added that Cambodia has 162 species of mammals, 601 species of birds, 173 species of reptiles, 3,113 species of small and large plants, 1,357 species of fish, 671 species of vertebrates, and 72 species of amphibians, including 24 kinds of hard corals, 14 kinds of soft corals and 10 kinds of seagrass – all within the borders of a relatively small country.

He continued that most people are used to experiencing Cambodia’s wildlife through foreign documentaries rather than

in-person and he noted that at the bottom of the sea within Cambodia’s territorial waters the area is also rich in biodiversity.

According to the National Council for Sustainable Development, biodiversity helps farmers in the production of crops. People have taken advantage of Cambodia’s biodiversity by hunting or foraging for species to use for food, medicine and other products.

Biodiverse ecosystems play a role in purifying water, producing oxygen, preventing

floods and natural disasters and assisting plant pollination. Biodiversity can be viewed as a store of nature’s vast knowledge and full of mysteries for humanity, they said.

“Poor countries as well as developed countries rely heavily on natural resources. They have used their territory’s biodiversity for national economic development and to make large contributions to their gross domestic product (GDP),” the National Council for Sustainable Development said.

NEC voter registrations open until November 30

Om Bunthoern

THE National Election Committee (NEC) announced on November 20 that over the first 37 days of voter list inspection and registration 380,961 people had registered to vote and 180,762 names were marked for deletion from the voter list.

The NEC said that on November 19 alone there were 8,559 new registered voters while 3,131 entries were deleted from the voter list. 4,227 people had corrected their registration data and 2,255 people had registered moves to new communes that day.

NEC said that within the first 37 days of the registration peri-

od, there were 380,961 newly registered voters, and 180,762 names that were marked for deletion from the voter list. 152,976 people had corrected their registration data and 115,505 people had registered moves to new communes.

“The 2021 voter list inspection and registration takes place from October 12 to November 30, including Saturdays and Sundays. Citizens who become eligible to vote, please go and check the voter list and register in the voter registration offices currently located in some villages and communes,” the press release said.

The press release added that the voter list inspection and

registration period was intended to give people the opportunity to check their names and data against the final lists that will be used for the 2022 commune council election. If they find something that is wrong, they have to correct it and make sure their information accords with their Cambodian ID cards in order to vote in the upcoming election.

NEC is also trying to register those who have just reached the age of 18 or will before the 2022 election (those born before or born on June 6, 2004), Cambodian citizens who moved to a new commune and those who have never registered to vote before.



People check the voter list in Chak Angre Leu commune of Phnom Penh’s Meanchey district in October. HONG MENEA

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↑ 4,094	↑ 1.2564	↓ 6.3813	↑ 114.84	↑ 4.1790	↑ 1.3581	↑ 32.72	↓ 0.7280	↓ 1.1315	↓ 1.3431

ABA NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA GROUP

TRADING INFORMATION ON CAMBODIA SECURITIES EXCHANGE

Date: November 17, 2021

Auction Trading Method (ATM)

NO	Stock	Closing Price	Opening Price	High	Low
1	ABC	10,940	10,940	10,980	10,920
2	GTI	4,300	4,220	4,300	4,220
3	PAS	13,620	13,620	13,620	13,500
4	PEPC	3,140	3,150	3,150	3,110
5	PPAP	14,800	14,900	14,900	14,800
6	PPSP	2,010	2,010	2,010	2,000
7	PWSA	6,900	6,900	6,900	6,880



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Domestic tourism soars 237% over three-day Water Festival

Investments rev up Cambodia's auto assembly, tyre industries

Hin Pisei

HOLIDAYMAKERS made 910,150 domestic trips across Cambodia during this year's Water Festival on November 18-20, with the capital ranking as the top destination, according to the Ministry of Tourism.

The ministry noted that 899,869 Cambodians and 10,281 foreign residents visited Phnom Penh (199,835) and the provinces of Siem Reap (118,146), Preah Sihanouk (111,322), Kampot (83,466), Kep (75,865), Pursat (53,807), Battambang (38,667), Kampong Speu (37,465), Mondulkiri (32,957), Kandal (27,280) and Ratanakkiri (24,596). The remaining 16 provinces saw 106,744 visitors.

On a per-day basis, the number of domestic trips over November 18-20 rose by 236.54 per cent from the second weekend of this month – 180,296 from November 13-14, as reported by the ministry.

Known locally as Bon Om Touk, the Water Festival fell from November 18-20 this year, the second



Tourists visit Angkor Wat temple in Siem Reap province during the Water Festival. TOURISM MINISTRY

day of which aligns with the date of the full moon in the Khmer lunar calendar month of Katdoek (or Kartika in Sanskrit) when the long-cycle rice crops are ready for harvest.

Minister of Tourism Thong

Khon said local sightseers were all too delighted to get out over the three-day holiday, spurred on by the reopening of prominent destinations in areas such as Sihanoukville and Siem Reap-Angkor, rising Covid

full-vaccination rates, and the socio-economic situation's gradual transition to a "new normal".

He said tourist attractions have been preparing the infrastructure and embellishments to attract domes-

tic tourists, and adjusting to "new normal" rules and regulations.

"All of these factors reflect a return towards the 'new normal' and the resumption of economic activity, especially for businesses and private sector entities that had been suspended," said Khon.

Pacific Asia Travel Association (Pata) Cambodia chapter chairman Thourn Sinan told *The Post* on November 21 that the number of visitors rose at all tourist destinations, which he ascribed to a drop in active Covid-19 cases, increased awareness and participation in preventive measures, and a greater receptiveness among authorities to travel.

He suggested that the uptick in domestic trips could be a bellwether for the future of international tourism.

"This is a wonderful sign for Cambodia's tourism sector and could bring a new test for the management of the status of Covid-19 cases in the community," Sinan said.

"If there aren't any more outbreaks, I'd chalk it up as a huge success for the government in the nationwide vaccination campaign." ■

Continued from page 1

sources 100 per cent of the rubber that it uses, and that it could absorb as much as 50 per cent of local production once its factory is fully operational.

"The progress of the company will not only enhance the reputation of Cambodia's export products, but also help local investors and rubber growers in terms of market and price," he said.

He added that tyres and other goods made from local rubber could supply the Kingdom's steadily growing roster of auto assembly plants.

Interest by foreign investors in developing the Cambodian automotive industry has gained traction in recent years.

The Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC) said in a statement on November 12 that it had approved final registration certificates for two such investment projects.

These are RMA Automotive (Cambodia) Co Ltd's \$21 million car and components assembly plant in Pursat province's Krakor district, and EM Automobile Co Ltd's \$16.3 million assembly line for trailers and heavy trucks, machinery and components in Koh Kong province's Sre Ambel district.

Heng said the recent introduction of new export products signal a gradual shift towards medium and heavy industry, and a departure from a sole reliance on light industry – largely textile-based goods.

Leading a CDC delegation to assess the progress of the then-still under construction Cart Tire facilities on July 1, the council's secretary-general Sok Chenda Sophea affirmed that the company would exclusively buy domestic rubber as raw material in the production of the tyres.

In its first year, the plant would require about 50,000 tonnes of rubber, and up to 150,000 tonnes in the fifth, he said, underlining that this was equivalent to around 43 per cent of total domestic rubber production last year.

Earlier this year, the government approved Cart Tire's plans to set up the car tyre factory on 50ha in QiLu (Cambodia) Special Economic Zone, with an investment of \$350 million.

At the same time, other players are also vying for a slice of the burgeoning market.

For instance, Jiangsu General's tyre factory is scheduled to open in Preah Sihanouk province in mid-2022. The project involves a capital investment of more than \$200 million and is set to have an annual production capacity of up to six million tyres. ■

SSEZ imports, exports hit \$1.77B in Jan-Oct

Hin Pisei

THE value of imports and exports passing through the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone (SSEZ) reached \$1.767 billion in the first 10 months of 2021, marking a 38.81 per cent year-on-year uptick from \$1.273 billion, the operator reported on November 17.

"SSEZ is developing sustainably, focusing on preventing epidemics on the one hand and ensuring production on the other hand," Sihanoukville Special Economy Zone Co Ltd said in a statement.

Hong Vanak, director of International Economics at the Royal Academy of Cambodia, told *The Post* on November 21 that the upturn "confirms" that production lines and orders at factories in SSEZ have not

had any significant hold-ups.

"These numbers will be even higher when the socio-economic situation in Cambodia picks up further, especially from the end of November, when the government reopens [the country] to international tourists fully-inoculated against the novel coronavirus," he said.

The Kingdom expects trade growth to remain in positive territory each year for the foreseeable future, stimulated by "a series of new achievements", he said, offering new investment laws, and bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements as examples.

Cambodia Chamber of Commerce vice-president Lim Heng told *The Post* that the company's commitment to investing in production and "effective" measures against Covid-19

measures was the driving force behind the continuous growth of the SSEZ's imports and exports.

He predicted that growth would accelerate further, now that the government announced the resumption of almost all economic activity.

"The stability of the production chains and the growth in orders have led to the steady increase in imports of raw materials and finished exports of the SSEZ," Heng said.

In addition to progress on economic resumption, the newly enacted investment law will also be an important element in attracting more investment to Cambodia, he added.

The Ministry of Economy and Finance earlier reported that Cambodia's non-gold exports totalled \$11.010 billion in the first eight months of this

year, growing by 20.4 per cent year-on-year, while the analogous imports were worth to \$14.6 billion, expanding by 26.7 per cent year-on-year.

According to the operator, SSEZ handled imports and exports worth \$1.565 billion last year, an increase of 26.52 per cent over 2019.

SSEZ lies on a whopping 11.13sq km in Bit Traing commune's Pou Thoeung village in Preah Sihanouk province's Prey Nop district.

Established in 2008 and purportedly committed to creating multinational investment platforms for companies around the world, SSEZ is a partnership between by Jiangsu Taihu Cambodia International Economic Cooperation Investment Co Ltd and the Cambodia International Investment Development Group Co Ltd (CIIDG). ■

Absence of Korea crypto funds puts investors in danger: CEO

AN ABSENCE of funds in South Korea that consist of cryptocurrencies has put individual investors in danger, blockchain industry-focused investment firm Hashed founder and CEO Simon Kim said last week.

"I believe this current situation of not being able to establish a cryptocurrency fund despite its popularity and high transaction volume is abnormal and contributes to market distortion," Kim said.

Kim added that the cryptocurrency market, whose transaction volume sometimes exceeds that of the country's main bourse KOSPI, has become undeniably huge, but individual investors still have to make investment decisions about numerous cryptocurrencies and blockchain projects on their own.

Some investors do not necessarily have a full grasp of the blockchain industry or certain cryptocurrencies, but nonetheless they could want to bet on the prospects of the fledgling industry, according to Kim.

"That's why the participation of institutional investors is needed. Institutional investors can do that job of selecting promising companies and industries on behalf of retail investors and help the market



Hashed CEO Simon Kim (left) and Ground X CEO Jason Han talk about the blockchain scene in South Korea during ComeUp last week. THE KOREA HERALD

grow healthier," Kim noted.

Establishing a fund consisting of virtual currencies is impossible in South Korea, as custodians do not accept cryptocurrencies as assets.

Kim shared his thoughts on the current status of the industry during a session titled "Blockchain scene in South Korea: The hype and reality" with Ground X CEO Jason Han at ComeUp, a government-led start-up conference that took place from November 17-19.

Kim and Han discussed how South Korea, once a global leader in the blockchain industry, is

now lagging behind the leading countries due to heavy regulations on the emerging sector.

"South Korea used to be at the centre of the spotlight in the blockchain industry with top talents and interesting projects two or three years ago. Unfortunately, it is now difficult to call South Korea a market leader," Kim said.

Reckless remarks from government officials poured cold water over the then-fast-growing domestic market in 2017 and 2018. "Some government officials made comments like 'shut down everything' or 'stop

your kid from investing in cryptocurrencies', as if cryptocurrencies are somehow the root of all evil," Kim claimed.

The disappointing trend in blockchain adoption in South Korea led to valuable talent seeking out opportunities elsewhere in more promising industries, according to Han of Ground X, the blockchain arm of mobile giant Kakao Corp.

"While the brightest talent tends to go to the blockchain industry in leading countries, Korean talents were able to earn high salaries in the more mainstream industries other than blockchain," Han added.

Kim and Han urged the government to take more a progressive stance on the industry, which they call one of the most disruptive changes in history.

"The rules of business are reshaping. I sometimes wonder if big corporates and even start-ups could keep up with the changes in a near future," Han said.

"As this could be an opportunity of once in a lifetime for a country like South Korea, I hope the government supports the industry and create an atmosphere where more talents can do what they want to do, instead of following the practices of the US and Singapore." THE KOREA HERALD/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Hite Jinro to see leap in sales under 'living with Covid': analyst

HITE Jinro, South Korea's biggest beer and soju maker in terms of market share, is expected to become the "main beneficiary" of the liquor industry as the country shifts back to normal under its "living with Covid-19" scheme, an industry analyst said on November 19.

"With the resumption of entertainment facilities operating under the 'living with Covid-19' scheme, the recovery of related sectors in the metropolitan area is a sign of upward momentum for the beer maker, while it has already secured the industry's top position with soju sales," Kim Jungwook, a researcher at Meritz Securities, said in a report.

Hite Jinro's third-quarter report showed that it has earned 557.4 billion won (\$470

million) in sales and 44.9 billion won in operating profit, which fell 10.7 per cent and 30.3 per cent, respectively, compared to a year ago.

From July to September, the country was under the toughest social distancing rules, which made it inevitable for the liquor industry to go through market losses and a profit crunch, according to Kim.

Kim said the local liquor industry is expected to see a boom toward the year's end, mainly due to the "base effect" - which relates to inflation in the corresponding period of the previous year.

"With the market normalisation, Hite Jinro is expected to make growth in the fourth quarter," Kim said. THE KOREA HERALD/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



Hite Jinro's third-quarter report showed that it has earned 557.4 billion won (\$470 million) in sales and 44.9 billion won in operating profit, which fell 10.7 per cent and 30.3 per cent, respectively, compared to a year ago. HITE JINRO

Laos eyes mineral earnings of \$463M in fourth quarter

LAOS is expecting to earn about \$463 million from the sale of minerals domestically and for export in the last three months of this year, after earning \$1.464 billion in the first nine months of 2021.

The value of mineral sales this year is expected to be 15.04 per cent more than targeted, Deputy Prime Minister Dr Sonexay Siphandone told the National Assembly (NA) last week.

The value of minerals produced in the first nine months was 12.601 trillion kip (\$1.18 billion) or 91.21 per cent of the 13.812 trillion kip figure approved by the NA. The value for the whole year is expected to reach 15.889 trillion kip, he said.

Some 124 companies are operating 209 projects in the exploration and processing of minerals as well as feasibility studies on mining operations, of which 14 companies are currently constructing facilities, the Ministry of Energy and Mines reported at its Party Congress last week.

Over the last five years from 2016-2020, the value of minerals and mineral products produced rose to \$7.526 billion, while the value of minerals produced for domestic supply and export reached \$8.092 billion.

In the five years from 2021-2025, the value of minerals and mineral products produced is expected to hit \$7.832 billion, which is an increase of four per cent over the previ-



The value of minerals produced in Laos over January-September was 12.601 trillion kip (\$1.18 billion) or 91.21 per cent of the 13.812 trillion kip figure approved by the National Assembly. LANE XANG MINERALS LTD

ous five years.

The value of minerals and mineral products for domestic supply is expected to reach \$1.974 billion, which is an increase of 38 per cent over the past five years, while the value of minerals and mineral products exported is expected to fall by five per cent to \$6.362 billion.

Laos has been ranked as one of the most resource-rich countries in Asia. More than 570 mineral deposits have been identified, including gold, copper, zinc, iron, potassium, limestone and lead.

In a bid to use these resources to bolster development, the government will encourage

greater processing of minerals and reduce the amount of unprocessed minerals exported.

It will also improve mineral production so that raw mineral ores are processed and value added prior to export. Mining areas will be improved so that excavation does not have adverse social or environmental impacts.

Another goal is to create a stronger workforce in mining engineering and geographical engineering as well as establish sustainable financial mechanisms to manage natural resources and protect the environment. VIENTIANE TIMES/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST Endline Impact Assessment of Rice Farmers in Cambodia

IFC—a member of the World Bank Group—is the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets. We work in more than 100 countries, using our capital, expertise, and influence to create markets and opportunities in developing countries. In fiscal year 2021, IFC committed a record \$31.5 billion to private companies and financial institutions in developing countries, leveraging the power of the private sector to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity as economies grapple with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information, visit www.ifc.org.

IFC proposes to hire a consulting firm from January 3, 2022 to April 30, 2022 to collect data for impact assessment.

The objectives are to assess the attributable impacts of the projects on farmers participating in the IFC projects in the following areas: 1) Income from rice sales, 2) Adoption of SRP and other farm management practices recommended by IFC project and impacts of the adoption on average yield, 3) Financial literacy and farm management practices and 4) Gender related outcomes, particularly relating to women's roles and empowerment.

SCOPE

The consultant firm will collect quantitative and qualitative data which IFC will use to evaluate the two projects with activities implemented in Kampong Cham, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey and Kampong Thom provinces. In-depth analysis of the quantitative data collected by the consultant firm will be done by IFC.

It is required that the survey data will be collected and entered in digitally coded questionnaire on a tablet or android device through an online survey tool, preferably SurveyCTO.

- Sample size of the first project: 700 farmers (in Battambang, Kampong Cham and Kampong Thom Provinces), should be surveyed, 400 of which should be participating (treatment) farmers that are benefitting from the IFC program, whereas the comparison group farmers (300 farmers) will not be part of this program.
- Sample size of the second project: 700 farmers (in Battambang and Banteay Meanchey Provinces), should be surveyed, 400 of which should be participating (treatment) farmers that are benefitting from the IFC program, whereas the comparison group farmers (300 farmers) will not be part of this program.

KEY STEPS AND DELIVERABLES

All deliverables must be approved by IFC in writing before they are considered finalized, and payment is made. The deliverables will be submitted for each of the 2 projects are: 1) Inception report, 2) Questionnaires, (3) Enumerator manual, 4) Cleaned and coded data files and 5) Fieldwork report. All deliverables must be in English. The consulting firm must be available after submission of cleaned datasets to explain any datapoint that IFC may have question during the data analysis.

QUALIFICATION:

Firms participating in this competitive tender process must possess the following qualifications:

- Demonstrated prior experience in similar impact assessment studies with appropriate in-country knowledge; experience with agricultural data collection is strongly preferred.
- Experience (at least 2-3 completed assignments) with the use of tablets for interviews preferred.
- Strong capacity in data management.
- Knowledge of the key agricultural value chain: Rice in Cambodia.
- Good spoken and written English as well as local language skills of key staff.

Interested consulting firms are hereby invited to submit expressions of interest must provide information indicating that they are qualified to perform the services. Expressions of Interest should be submitted in English, electronically through World Bank Group eConsultant 2 by December 02, 2021 (<https://wbgeconsult2.worldbank.org/wbgec/index.html>) - Selection number 1277693.

NOTES

Following this invitation for Expression of Interest, a shortlist of qualified firms will be formally invited to submit proposals. Shortlisting and selection will be subject to the availability of funding. Only those firms which have been shortlisted will receive notification. No debrief will be provided to firms which have not been shortlisted.

Business

Vietnam prices rise despite easing Covid rules

WHILE most manufacturing enterprises resumed operations as pandemic restrictions were eased, significant challenges remain because of the rising cost of petrol and raw materials. The price of consumer goods is expected to increase sharply as a result.

Duyen Hai Economic Development Co (Cofidec) director Dang Thi Phuong Ninh told local media: "Every commodity has increased in price, in which, cooking oil is the ingredient with the highest increase, about 30 per cent higher compared to the same period in 2020 and is expected to increase even higher."

Ninh said prices of raw materials and accessories have increased since early this year and look set to continue to rise.

According to experts, the increasing cost of petrol and raw materials will put great pressure on consumer spending, and a great burden on businesses, especially in the context of restoring production after a long time of social distancing.

Ninh said the company is facing difficulties in hiring more workers to meet demand, adding that the "high cost of accessories is now the biggest concern".

As director of Vnflour Co, a firm that produces and supplies flour for brands such as



The price of essential items has increased across markets in Vietnam, due to a rise in production and transportation costs. VIETNAM NEWS AGENCY

Vifon, Thien Huong Food and CP Food, Nguyen Tran Ngoc Trinh said increasing petrol and raw materials prices were greatly affecting production since pandemic restrictions have been eased.

Trinh said: "The price of wheat has increased by 30-40 per cent, sometimes even up to 50 per cent, compared

to before so we are forced to change the price of raw materials provided to food enterprises."

Trinh is concerned that the sharp increase in raw material prices would affect product prices in the near future.

CJ Food Vietnam human resources director Nguyen Thi Thao Vien said the firm was

facing the same issue of rising prices but would try to keep prices stable to share difficulties with consumers. She said: "We cannot increase selling prices in the context of people's incomes plummeting."

Pham Thi Huan, director-general of Ba Huan Co, the biggest egg provider in Vietnam, said: "Currently, while

the input costs are increasing by 20-30 per cent, the purchasing power is weak because schools have not opened yet and businesses in industrial zones have not yet come back to their full activities."

Though the egg firm has not yet raised prices, Huan said: "We hope that purchasing power will increase so that we can keep prices unchanged but if the demand is too low in such situation, we will have to increase prices."

The food industry is not the only one seeing a rise in prices for raw materials; steel, wood and other enterprises are suffering the same. Nguyen Chanh Phuong, vice-president and secretary-general of Ho Chi Minh City Fine Arts and Woodworking Association, said most materials have seen prices increase.

He said: "The price of paint products increased quickly due to the influence of petrol and oil prices. From October to November, each week they have increased by five per cent."

He added that businesses have to adjust prices, but it is not always easy as they have agreed fixed prices with customers.

Phuong said: "As there are many orders to be finished, firms are concerned about the high production costs. Others are concerned about taking new orders because of the cost."

Phuong said firms must renegotiate prices with their

customers and look for cheaper suppliers to save costs.

The price of essential items has increased by 10-30 per cent, and food and beverage service prices have also increased by 10-15 per cent.

According to the market prices, a bottle of one-litre cooking oil has increased from 3,000 to 5,000 dong (\$0.13 to \$0.22), or an increase of 15 per cent from the prices listed in May. Vegetables, fruits and fresh foods also increased by three and four times compared to July.

An Aeon Vietnam representative said the increase in prices will affect small retailers and markets first. Big supermarkets, with advanced contracts, can better control the prices.

The Vietnam Institute for Economic and Policy Research forecasts that inflation pressure will increase in the last months of the year due to the sharp increases in producing prices, adding that this pressure will gradually be transferred to consumer prices.

Around the world, inflation rates have skyrocketed, according to Bloomberg. The media said consumer prices in the US rose at their fastest pace since 1990. Chinese and Japanese producer price indexes fared better than expected and Germany, as the world's fourth largest economy, was no exception. VIETNAM NEWS/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA
Nation Religion King

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
Secretariat General

Request for Bids Works

Date: November 12, 2021
Grant No: GA04102019¹

Project: Construction of new administrative building of the National Assembly of Cambodia
Employer: Secretariat General of the National Assembly of Cambodia
Contract No: 002/2021/VNAB022
Contract Title: Construction of new administrative building of the National Assembly of Cambodia
Issued on: November 12, 2021
Deadline for submission of Bids: December 27, 2021 at 9 hours (Cambodia standard time)

- The Kingdom of Cambodia has received a 25 (Twenty-five) million USD grant¹ from the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam toward the cost of the Project of Construction of new administrative building of the National Assembly of Cambodia, and intends to apply part of the proceeds toward payments under the contract for the construction of new administrative building of the National Assembly of Cambodia.
- The Secretariat General of the National Assembly of Cambodia now invites sealed Bids from eligible and qualified Bidders for the construction of the new administrative building of the National Assembly of Cambodia, located on the premises of the National Assembly.
- Procurement will be conducted through international competitive bidding, ICB in accordance with Single stage, one envelope procedure using Request for Bids (RFB) as specified in the RGC Standard Operating Procedures on Procurement for All Externally Financed Projects/Programs and under the laws and regulations governing public procurement within the Kingdom of Cambodia.
- Interested eligible Bidders may obtain further information and inspect the bidding document during office hours at **Kohke room of the Secretariat General of the National Assembly of Cambodia from 08:00 to 11:30 and 14:00 to 17:00 hours** at the address given below: Rathasaphea Street, Sangkat Tonle Bassac, Khan Chamcarmorn, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- The bidding document may be purchased by interested eligible Bidders **upon the submission of a written application** to the address: **Kohke room**, Rathasaphea Street, Sangkat Tonle Bassac, Khan Chamcarmorn, Phnom Penh, Cambodia and upon payment of a nonrefundable fee of the ICB documents: 250US\$. The method of payment will be cash. The document can be collected in designated person of BEC. No liability will be accepted by the Secretariat General of the National Assembly of Cambodia for loss or late delivery.

1 Grant Agreement between the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on the Project of Construction of New Administrative Building for the National Assembly of Cambodia
2 A 25 (Twenty-five) million USD grant to implement all items of the Project, including: a. Hiring Consultant, b. a twelve (12)-Storey Administrative Building, c. Equipment.

- Bids must be delivered to the address at **Kohke room of the Secretariat General of the National Assembly of Cambodia on or before the deadline: December 27, 2021 at 9 hours (Cambodia standard time)**. Electronic Bidding will not be permitted. Late Bids will be rejected. Bids will be publicly opened in the presence of the Bidders' designated representative who chooses to attend at the address: Rathasaphea Street, Sangkat Tonle Bassac, Khan Chamcarmorn, Phnom Penh, Cambodia on **December 27, 2021 at 9 hours (Cambodia standard time)** at **Bayon room**, the Secretariat General of the National Assembly of Cambodia.
- All Bids must be accompanied by a Bid Security of as specified in **Bid Data Sheet (BDS), ITB 19.1**.
- Address:** the Secretariat General of the National Assembly of Cambodia, **Kohke room** Rathasaphea Street, Sangkat Tonle Bassac, Khan Chamcarmorn, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
Tel: (855-23) 213 535, 220 628 Fax: (855-23) 220 629, Email: sg@nac.org.kh, sp@national-assembly.org.kh, <http://nac.org.kh>, <http://national-assembly.org.kh>
Contact Persons: Mr Sonn Sok Heng, BEC member, Tel: 855-12 713 397, 855-16 762 772
Mr Keo Rady, BEC member, Tel: 855-97 666 6669

Rathasaphea Street, Sangkat Tonle Bassac, Khan Chamcarmorn, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Tel: (855-23) 213 535 220 628 RFB: 05112021
Fax: (855-23) 220 629 E-mail: sg@nac.org.kh Website: www.nac.org.kh

Thailand's EECO eyes farm products, Pattaya project to attract investment

TO BOOST farmers' income and attract investment, the Eastern Economic Corridor Office (EECO) has decided to start promoting five groups of agricultural products grown in the vicinity of the eastern Thai provinces of Chonburi, Rayong and Chachoengsao.

"Our preliminary survey revealed that farmers in EEC areas still use traditional farming techniques, which utilise limited technology and consume high amounts of resources," EECO policy and planning specialist Phojanee Attharajphinyo said on November 19.

"Traditional agriculture is taking up 66 per cent of land in EEC areas, 13 per cent of manpower and 64 per cent of water resource, but generates only 2.6 per cent of the country's gross domestic product [GDP]."

Phojanee added that the project aims to promote five agricultural product groups including fruits, fishery products, plants for bio-based products, herbal products, and high-value crops (like decorative plants and organic vegetables).

"We will operate under three strategies: improving product quality using high technology, using modern marketing techniques and innovations to maximise sales revenue, and developing new generation human resources in farms to incorporate modern agricultural practices into traditional farming techniques," she said.

She added that EECO estimates that in the next 20 years the population in the EEC area will increase by more than two million, while the number of visitors landing at U-Tapao International Airport could reach 60 million people.

"To support the increasing population, EECO is planning an urban development project for areas in a 30km radius of the U-Tapao Airport.

"Dubbed the 'Smart City Suitable for Living' project, we aim to establish a new city that is driven by the BCG [bio, circular and green] economy following the model of Singapore and Auckland, which have been ranked first in World Smart City Index in

2020 and 2021, respectively," she said.

She said the smart city will have features such as over 30 per cent of green areas, self-sustainable water resources, public transport system powered by clean energy, as well as enhanced public health and education systems.

Meanwhile, Sonthaya Kunplome, mayor of Chonburi's Pattaya city, on November 19 noted that EECO is also working with the tourism hub on the NEO Pattaya project with an aim to promote investment and tourism in Pattaya and Koh Lan, a resort island off the coast of the city.

"The NEO Pattaya project started in 2018, when I first became the mayor," he said. "It aims to develop Pattaya city as an economic and investment hub in EEC areas which span across three provinces of Chonburi, Rayong and Chachoengsao.

"The project will make the city ready for expanding economy, tourism and employment brought about by the EEC investments."

Sonthaya added that Pattaya city has drafted and implemented the first phase of development plan for 2018 to 2022 which covers five aspects of development, namely economy, society, environment, culture and integration.

"The second phase plan, which will be implemented from 2022 to 2027, has already been approved by the EECO. The office aims to attract up to 2.2 trillion baht [\$67 billion] worth of investment in EEC areas in 2022, while currently the total investment in 2021 is at 1.6 trillion baht," he said.

The mayor said that eight of 14 development projects under the first phase development plan have been completed, with the remaining six ongoing.

"Next year we have asked for a budget of 77 million baht to continue these projects, while aiming to generate up to 10 times the investment value in return.

"These projects include the development of tourist attractions in Old Town of Na Klua subdistrict, which expect to attract 1.2 million tourists per year and generate an income of 900 million baht annually," he said. THE NATION (THAILAND)/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



World

New videos of Chinese tennis star emerge but global outcry grows

CHINESE state media posted videos on November 21 purporting to show tennis star Peng Shuai smiling and well, as international pressure mounted for information about her whereabouts.

The two-time Grand Slam doubles champion has not been seen publicly since alleging earlier this month that former vice-premier Zhang Gaoli, now in his 70s, "forced" her into sex during an on-off relationship spanning several years.

Following a global outcry, including from tennis superstars and the UN, Chinese state media have released footage purporting to show all is well with Peng.

In one of the videos, tweeted by Hu Xijin, editor of state-run tabloid *Global Times*, Peng appears to be standing in a stadium at what he described as the "opening ceremony of a teenager tennis match final".

She is in a group of guests whose names are announced to a smattering of applause. Few spectators are visible in the stands.

A *Global Times* reporter tweeted another video showing Peng signing autographs for children at a stadium before posing for photos with them.

In one of two other clips posted on November 20 by Hu, she appears to be walking into a restaurant wearing a

coat, knit cap and face mask.

A visible sign says Beijing Yibin Guesthouse, a famous Sichuan restaurant a stone's throw from Tiananmen Square, owned by the Sichuan local government.

In the second, Peng is maskless sitting at a table chatting with people over a meal.

AFP could not verify the authenticity of the videos.

Hu tweeted in English that the second video shows "Peng Shuai was having dinner with her coach and friends in a restaurant. The video content clearly shows they are shot on Saturday [November 20] Beijing time".

The conversation revolved around "tennis matches". A man sitting with Peng and two women said "tomorrow is November 20th".

But one of the women quickly corrects him, saying, "It is the 21st", implying that the video was filmed on November 20.

The chat appears to be staged. It was filmed in the evening hours with a mobile phone. Peng appears relaxed in the footage.

Peng's claims against Zhang were the first time China's #Me-Too movement has touched the highest echelons of the ruling Communist Party.

They were quickly scrubbed from the Twitter-like Weibo platform, and concerns have grown for her safety since.

Of the new videos, Women's



Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai, seen here in 2017, has accused a former vice-premier of 'forcing' her into sex. STR/AFP

Tennis Association (WTA) boss Steve Simon said he was glad to see the images but "it remains unclear if she is free and able to make decisions and take actions on her own, without coercion or external interference".

"This video alone is insufficient," Simon said in a statement. "I have been clear about what needs to happen and our relationship with China is at a crossroads."

The WTA has threatened to end lucrative contracts

with China unless it gets word of Peng's safety.

Other Chinese state media have released what they say is proof that all is well with her.

First, state-run China Global Television Network (CGTN) last week tweeted a screenshot of what it said was an email from Peng to the WTA saying her accusations were not true and that she was "resting at home and everything is fine".

But doubts were flagged about the awkward language

and a cursor visible in the screenshot. Then photos of a smiling Peng emerged on November 19 on the verified Twitter account @shen_shiwei, labelled Chinese state-affiliated media by the social network.

The authenticity of the images could not be verified, and the user did not respond to AFP's request for comment.

These were followed by the videos posted on November 20-21.

China has repeatedly refused

to comment on the case.

Discussion about Peng's accusations is blocked on China's tightly controlled internet.

A growing chorus of voices in the sports world and beyond want to know where and how Peng is.

The White House has expressed "deep concern" about Peng, with President Joe Biden's press secretary saying his administration wanted China to "provide independent, verifiable proof" of her whereabouts.

Britain's foreign office also said it was "extremely concerned" and urged China to provide verifiable evidence.

The UN has insisted on a fully transparent investigation into the claims made by Peng against Zhang.

Some of the biggest names in tennis have spoken out about the case, including Serena Williams, Novak Djokovic and Naomi Osaka.

Superstar Roger Federer also weighed in on November 20, saying on Sky News: "She's one of our tennis champions, a former world number one. Clearly it's concerning. I hope she's safe."

Peng represented China at the Beijing, London and Rio de Janeiro Olympics and won gold for China at the 2010 Asian Games.

She is a former Wimbledon and French Open doubles champion. AFP

Tens of thousands protest Covid curbs in Europe, Oz

TENS of thousands took to the streets in cities across Europe and Australia on November 20 as anger mounted over fresh Covid restrictions imposed against a resurgent pandemic.

And Dutch police faced a second night of rioting – this time in The Hague – after the previous night's violence in the port city of Rotterdam.

Clashes erupted after a day of mainly peaceful protests else-

where in the Netherlands, with rioters throwing stones and fireworks at police and setting fire to bicycles. Several people were arrested.

Europe is battling a fresh wave of infections and several countries have tightened curbs, with Austria on November 19 announcing a nationwide partial lockdown – the most dramatic restrictions in Western Europe for months.

The Netherlands went back into partial lockdown on November 13 with at least three weeks of curbs, and is now planning to ban unvaccinated people from entering some venues, the so-called 2G option.

Several thousand protesters angry at the latest measures gathered in Amsterdam. Another thousand marched through the southern city of Breda near the Belgian border, carrying banners with slogans such as "No Lockdown".

Organisers said they opposed Prime Minister Mark Rutte's plans to exclude the unvaccinated from bars and restaurants.

"People want to live, that's why we're here," said organiser Joost Eras.

But "we're not rioters. We come in peace", he said, distancing himself from the chaos the previous night in Rotterdam, in which police said they had fired both warning and targeted shots and used water cannon.

In Austria, around 40,000 came out to protest in central Vienna near the Chancellery, responding to a call from the far-right FPÖ party.

They held up banners decrying "Corona dictatorship" and slamming the "division of society".

"It's not normal that the government deprives us of our rights," said 42-year-old teacher Katarina Gierscher, who travelled for six hours to attend the rally.

Some protesters wore a yellow star reading the words "not vaccinated", a nod to the Star of David many Jews were forced to wear during the Nazi era.

Austrian interior minister Karl Nehammer expressed his outrage, saying in a statement that it "insults the millions of victims of the Nazi dictatorship and their families".

From November 22, 8.9 million Austrians will not be allowed to leave home except to go to work, shop for essentials and exercise. The restrictions will initially last 20 days

with an evaluation after 10 days.

Vaccination against Covid-19 in the Alpine nation will be mandatory from February 1 next year.

Thousands also marched in Croatia's capital Zagreb and in Denmark, around a thousand people protested against government plans to reinstate a Covid pass for civil servants going to work.

"Freedom for Denmark," cried some of the marchers at a rally in Copenhagen organised by the radical Men in Black group, who believe Covid-19 is just a "scam".

In Australia around 10,000 marched in Sydney and there were also protests in other major cities against vaccine mandates applied to certain occupations by state authorities.

"In Australia where a fanatical cult runs our health bureaucracies, they say it's OK" to vaccinate children, right-wing politician Craig Kelly told the Sydney crowd to large cheers.

On November 20, France dispatched dozens of elite forces to its Caribbean island of Guadeloupe after arson and looting overnight in the overseas territory, despite a newly imposed night curfew.

In Iran, the health ministry on November 20 said more than half of the population had been fully vaccinated against Covid-19, as infection and death rates in the country have started to drop.

Winter sports have again been hit by the pandemic. Germany has ordered next month's Ski Jumping World Cup in Klingenthal to be held behind closed doors.

But it wasn't all bad. In France, jubilant skiers hit the slopes as resorts fully opened their doors for the first time in almost two years.

"We're delighted to be able to get the lifts up and running again and to be able to do our job 100 per cent," rescue worker Emmanuel Laissus told AFP in the Val Thorens resort in the southeast. AFP



Austria's far-right Freedom Party FPÖ called the Vienna protest. AFP

ICC suspends investigation of Philippines 'war on drugs'

THE International Criminal Court (ICC) has suspended its investigation into suspected rights abuses committed under Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's "war on drugs" following a request from Manila.

The Hague-based court in September authorised a probe of the campaign that has left thousands of people dead, saying it resembled an illegitimate and systematic attack on civilians.

Duterte was elected in 2016 on a campaign promise to get rid of the Philippines' drug problem, openly ordering police to kill drug suspects if officers' lives were in danger.

At least 6,181 people have died in more than 200,000 anti-drug operations conducted since July 2016, according to the latest official data released by the Philippines.

ICC prosecutors in court papers estimate the figure to be between 12,000 and 30,000 dead.

According to court documents, Philippine ambassador Eduardo Malaya requested a deferral.

"The prosecution has temporarily suspended its investigative activities while it assesses the scope and effect of the deferral request," ICC



President Rodrigo Duterte was elected on a campaign promise to get rid of the Philippines' drug problem. POOL/AFP

prosecutor Karim Khan wrote in a court notification dated November 18.

He said the prosecution would request additional information from the Philippines.

Duterte pulled Manila out of the ICC in 2019 after it launched a preliminary probe, but the court says it has jurisdiction over crimes committed while the Philippines was still a member.

After long refusing to admit the court had any power to intervene and refusing to cooperate, Duterte backtracked

last month to say he would prepare his defence.

Despite its request to the ICC, Manila said it maintained that the court had no jurisdiction.

"We reiterate that it is the position of the Philippine government that the International Criminal Court has no jurisdiction over it," Duterte's spokesman Karlo Nograles said in a statement on November 20.

"In any event, we welcome the judiciousness of the new ICC prosecutor, who has deemed it fit to give the matter

a fresh look and we trust that the matter will be resolved in favour of the exoneration of our government and the recognition of the vibrancy of our justice system," he said.

In his letter requesting a deferral, ambassador Malaya said the Philippine government was investigating the alleged crimes against humanity committed during the drug war.

He said the Philippine government "has undertaken, and continues to undertake, thorough investigations of all reported deaths during antinarcotic operations in the country".

Human Rights Watch dismissed the claim that the Philippines' existing domestic mechanisms afford citizens justice as "absurd" and an attempt to stave off the ICC probe.

"Only 52 out of thousands of killings are in early stages of investigation. Despite many clear-cut cases of murder, no charges have even been filed," the rights group's Asia director Brad Adams tweeted on November 20.

"The reality is that impunity is the norm under President Duterte, which is why the ICC needs to investigate. Let's hope the ICC sees through the ruse that it is." AFP

Laos plant set to produce molnupiravir Covid-19 pill

LAOS' Ministry of Health has given approval for State Enterprise Pharmaceutical Factory No 3 to produce molnupiravir, an oral medication used in the treatment of Covid-19.

The factory's deputy managing director Dr Phoukhong Chommala told *Vientiane Times* on November 18 that the factory would start producing the pills in December, and would manufacture enough to treat about 1,000 Covid-19 patients, following advice from Minister of Health Dr Bounfeng Phommalsith.

The main benefit of molnupiravir is that it can be administered orally in pill form instead of needing to be injected.

"We expect to initially provide the drug to about 1,000 Covid patients under a pilot programme," Dr Phoukhong said, adding that use of the new drug treatment is part of government efforts to combat the spread of Covid.

The pilot programme will target people aged 18-65 who have mild or moderate symptoms of Covid and are in the early stages of the disease. To qualify for treatment, they must not show signs of pneumonia or oxygen shortage. They will be given the pills over a period of five days.

Other countries using molnupiravir are administering the drug to people over 60 and those with underlying health conditions.

A senior official from the ministry's Department of Food and Drugs, who asked not to be named, said the department is looking into the efficacy of molnupiravir and whether it is more effective than other Covid drugs developed for use through vaccination.

The manufacture of molnupiravir in Laos and the pilot programme will be monitored by the World Health Organisation.

Molnupiravir was originally developed to treat influenza at Emory University in the US. It was then acquired by Miami-based company Ridgeback Biotherapeutics, which later partnered with Merck & Co to develop the drug further. *VIENTIANE TIMES/ASIA NEWS NETWORK*



State Enterprise Pharmaceutical Factory No 3 has gotten the nod from the Lao health ministry to produce molnupiravir, an oral medication used in the treatment of Covid-19. *VIENTIANE TIMES*

Procurement Notice on 25 Sporadic Works of the Stung Atay Hydroelectric Power Project

C.H.D (Cambodia) Hydropower Development Co., Ltd. proposes to make an open inquiry procurement on 25 sporadic works of the Stung Atay Hydroelectric Power Project. The details are as follows:

1. Overview of Works

The Stung Atay Hydroelectric Power Project lies across the Stung Tachan at Ou Saom, Veal Veng County, Pursat Province in the West of the Kingdom of Cambodia. C.H.D (Cambodia) Hydropower Development Co., Ltd. is responsible for operation of the power project. The company plans to carry out the grouting treatment to concrete leakage at the bottom of the dam gate, installation of iron doors, installation of stainless steel water gauge weir, floor maintenance and other sporadic works.

2. Scope of Procurement

① Water leakage treatment to the arc gate bottom and dam foundation corridor; ② Installation of iron gate, fence, water gauge weir and warning sign; ③ Construction of easy access roads; ④ foundation pit drainage and filling of water retaining cofferdam; ⑤ floor maintenance and other sporadic maintenance.

3. Qualification Requirements for the Bidder

Cambodian construction engineering level 3 or above, or Chinese construction engineering general contracting level 3 or above, or water conservancy and hydropower engineering general contracting level 3 or above. It is required to have at least one performance of polyurethane chemical grouting construction in recent 3 years.

4. Sign-up means

Please send the Sign-up Receipt to the following email: jgszhaobiao@163.com. The format of the Receipt is shown as follows:

Full name of the company	Legal representative	Business scope	Contact person	Title	Telephone	Email

Scanned copies of qualification documents of the Bidder shall be submitted, such as Business License and Tax Registration Certificate issued by the Ministry of Commerce, etc., as well as company profile and business performance shall be submitted at the time of sign-up. The Procurement Documents will be distributed to each bidder upon the receipt of the Sign-up Receipt and our review. (Procurement document is free of charge)

5. Deadline for Sign-up

The sign-up time shall not be later than 17:00, November 26, 2021. Any applicants who delays in sign-up will not be accepted by the Procurement.

6. Contact Means

Contact: Mr. Shan Tel: 018 999 0037

Malaysia's BN trounces Anwar's coalition for major win in Melaka

MALAYSIA'S Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition led by Umno captured Melaka on November 20, winning 21 of the 28 seats in the state polls.

Rival pact Pakatan Harapan (PH) won in five constituencies and Perikatan Nasional (PN) won two seats, according to results confirmed by the Election Commission late on November 20.

This means that BN has won 75 per cent of the wards in Melaka, the second-smallest Malaysian state by land size after Perlis.

Umno president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who wore a neck brace when he appeared at the BN operations centre, praised the efforts of his deputy Mohamad Hasan, who led the coalition's election machinery in Melaka, and other state leaders.

Referring to former premier Najib Razak, he added to cheers from the crowd: "I did not forget Bossku's contributions."

Zahid did not join the Melaka campaign because he was away in Germany for medical treatment.

Najib was highly visible during the 12-day campaigning period as he made many public appearances, despite curbs by the federal government on public contact amid the pandemic.

BN lost Melaka to PH in the May 2018 general election, mirroring the unexpected PH victory at the federal level.

But the PH state government collapsed due to defections early last year, just as its federal counterpart was ousted for similar reasons.

Another round of defections last month saw the BN-led state government, which had replaced PH, also losing its majority, leading to the dissolution of the legislative assembly.

The PH coalition, which is an opposition

bloc at the federal level, conceded defeat on November 20, ahead of the release of the official results.

PH secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution said that based on the unofficial results it obtained, the Melaka voters have decided to give their mandate to BN.

"We would like to state that the people of Melaka have made their decisions through the ballot box," Saifuddin told a news conference, as quoted by the *Star* daily. "And based on that, it shows that they wanted Barisan to form a government and Pakatan needs to respect the results."

The state election is closely watched as Melaka has a racial composition and urban-rural split similar to the national averages, making November 20's polls a bellwether for the next general election.

The general election is not due until 2023 but is expected to take place next year.

PH chief Anwar Ibrahim suffered a crushing blow as his bloc won only five seats, compared with the 15 it won in the May 2018 general election.

His own Parti Keadilan Rakyat lost the three seats it won in 2018.

Former premier Muhyiddin Yassin's PN pact won two seats, and he said its candidates secured good chunks of the votes.

This was despite expectations that PN would do poorly as the third coalition standing between BN and PH.

PN is anchored by Muhyiddin's Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia and Parti Islam SeMalaysia.

Muhyiddin on November 20 declared that PN will be BN's main challenger in the upcoming general election.

"We have arrived here and will remain steadfast to become BN's main challenger," he told the media in Melaka. *THE STRAITS TIMES*



Voters wait outside a polling centre to cast their ballots for the Melaka elections in Masjid Tanah, Alor Gajah, on Saturday. *BERNAMA*

India and ASEAN must enhance their partnership

Opinion

Gurjit Singh

THE 18th India-ASEAN Summit was held virtually on October 28, with the presence of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei as ASEAN chairman and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The two sides will mark the completion of 30 years of their partnership in 2022, which is designated as the year of ASEAN-India Friendship. The milestone coincides with India's 75th anniversary of independence.

Details will be worked out and a plethora of activity is anticipated. India has Singapore, among the most organised of ASEAN countries, as its country coordinator. The ASEAN chairman in 2022 will be Cambodia, whose president Hun Sen is well known to India ever since he assumed power.

It is important that this year is celebrated imaginatively. Inclusion of contemporary ideas and refreshing ambience must avoid repetition of past celebrations of anniversaries. As both ASEAN and India have youthful populations, it merits focus on new areas.

The context and current focus of the India-ASEAN Summit is the Indo-Pacific. Modi noted the special role of ASEAN in India's Act East Policy and the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) as also in the Indo Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). Along with the ASEAN's Outlook for the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) these are the framework for the vision and mutual cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

ASEAN is aware that India was a protagonist of the Quad's focus on ASEAN centrality and its functional collaboration with Quad countries, all of whom are dialogue partners of ASEAN. Though the Quad is not mentioned in the documents, the collaboration is not restrained in any manner.

Significantly a Joint statement on Cooperation on the AOIP for Peace, Stability, and Prosperity in the Region was adopted. It builds on the Delhi



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (centre) taking part in the ASEAN-India Summit on the sidelines of the 2021 ASEAN summit, held online on a live video conference in Brunei on October 28. HANDOUT/ASEAN SUMMIT 2021/AFP

Declaration of January 2018. This reaffirms that ASEAN centrality, openness, transparency, inclusivity and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) would all remain important aspects of partnership. All ASEAN members supported this.

The statement mentions four areas from the AOIP: maritime cooperation, connectivity, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and economic cooperation. 21 paragraphs identify areas of cooperation, including sub-regional cooperation, human capital development, green infrastructure, agriculture and the utilisation of complementarities.

Strengthening this partnership remains the goal of the dialogue partnership between India and ASEAN. This is spelled out in the chairman's statement. Among various ideas which were discussed some significant one's merit attention.

Expansion of education, collaboration among universities, green economies, achieving the SDGs, start-ups and impact investment could be among the ideas to guide the expansion of the Indo-ASEAN partnership.

The Nalanda University, an East Asia Summit project, would welcome a collaboration with ASEAN. While some

ASEAN countries have contributed, it is now time for ASEAN as a whole, to be a partner.

The offer of 1,000 PhD scholarships at Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) needs modulation to master's level to allow greater utilisation. ASEAN countries have not utilised the PhD level scholarships adequately. The IITs are world class institutions and can help ASEAN scholars to achieve higher goals.

There are adequate fora and meetings already in place. They need to be result oriented and show achievements. All India-ASEAN activity is normally funded by the Indian contribution to the ASEAN and related funds. It would be a good occasion for ASEAN to start contributing to the emerging programmes.

India-ASEAN projects need closer attention. The welcome establishment of a project monitoring unit within the ASEAN Secretariat shows the intent to focus on implementation and achieving the goals set when these projects were undertaken.

Another area of focus is the pandemic and its post-pandemic recovery. India has been working with ASEAN to support their facilities and provide material and monetary support. India's contribution of \$1

million to the Covid-19 ASEAN Response Fund was appreciated but the requirements are huge. With the reopening of vaccine exports, ASEAN countries would benefit. They would also benefit from the Quad vaccine initiative in a big way. It remains unclear whether ASEAN seeks a partnership or expects preferential treatment for its public health arrangements. Some ASEAN countries were generous in supporting India during the second wave of the pandemic.

The economic dimension of the partnership requires a review of the Free Trade Agreement. The chairman's statement mentioned the review of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) and ASEAN prefers to see "enhanced utilisation and effective implementation of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (AIFTA)". This is important since India is not in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). It needs the FTA to be updated, balanced and contribute to the development of resilient supply chains between India and ASEAN.

India-ASEAN trade is falling over the last three years from \$97 billion in 2018, \$79 billion in 2020. In the first half of 2021 it is only \$42 billion. Its true potential is yet to be realised.

ASEAN runs an annual average surplus of \$20 billion. A re-ordering of the FTA and a better utilisation of it could lead to expanded trade particularly through new supply chains.

The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is not mentioned among the 21 areas in the AOIP Cooperation Statement. The US has recently joined it to become the 101st member. Only Myanmar and Cambodia are ISA members. Nor is the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Initiative (CDRI) mentioned, with which no ASEAN member is associated. Most ideas are promoted by ASEAN. For a true partnership, mutual attention to each other's initiatives is necessary.

There is recognition of India's contribution to narrowing the development gaps within ASEAN countries. India extended support to Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam by setting up training centres for information technology, vocational training, English language and entrepreneurship development.

India also announced support to ASEAN's Cultural Heritage List. This is a nascent idea building on the ASEAN Declaration on Cultural Heritage. ASEAN will create its own list of such assets. India's prompt support will see officials of meet soon to discuss collaboration.

India has contributed to the restoration work in temples in Siem Reap and Yogyakarta. Given the shared histories and cultural roots of many Southeast Asian civilisations, this could be impactful.

The 18th summit focused on the gamut of activity, covering 30 mechanisms. The main emphasis was on the sturdy nature of Indo-ASEAN partnership which was raised to a strategic partnership in 2012.

India and ASEAN have shared values and ideas. Their relationship needs more substantive collaboration.

The 30th anniversary is a good time to deepen the partnership. THE JAKARTA POST/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

The writer is a former Indian ambassador to Indonesia, ASEAN, Germany, Ethiopia and the African Union.

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POST MEDIA

HEAD OFFICE

Post Media Co., Ltd.

The Elements Condominium Level 7,

Hun Sen Boulevard, Phum Tuol Roka III,

Sangkat Chak Angre Krom, Khan Mean

chey, 12353, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Tel: 023 888 161, 023 888 162

Cellcard: 078 555 166, 078 555 133

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SIEM REAP

No 629, Street 6, Dangcum Commune

Tel: 063 966 290, Fax: 063 966 590

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Vong Dun

TO CONTACT US

newsroom@phnompenhpost.com

advertising@phnompenhpost.com

subscription@phnompenhpost.com

webmaster@phnompenhpost.com

www.phnompenhpost.com

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Lifestyle

Graphic novel tells tale of 'Golden Voice'

Roth Sochieata

RECENTLY, Ros Saboeun – sister to Cambodian singer Ros Serey Sothea, dubbed “The Golden Voice” back in the 1960’s – celebrated what would have been the singer’s 74th birthday at the stupa dedicated to her and other victims of the Khmer Rouge located in Phnom Srouch district of Kampong Speu province.

By coincidence – just a day later – it was announced that a graphic novel about Ros Serey Sothea written by an American author is now almost ready for release.

Saboeun last saw her sister decades ago before the evacuation of Phnom Penh. When the city was emptied of its inhabitants Serey Sothea was sent to Kampong Speu by the Khmer Rouge and was executed there, according to witnesses.

On November 6, Saboeun finally got a chance to visit the stupa in Kampong Speu personally after learning about it on Facebook and how it was built in 2020 by senior officials from the Ministry of the Royal Palace and other generous donors who dedicated it in part to her sister.

“The moment I heard that there was a stupa dedicated to my sister and family I was really excited and I couldn’t wait to see it personally. When I arrived, I saw there were names carved on it and photos of my sister and my family,” Saboeun tells *The Post*.

“I had no idea – I wasn’t involved at all in building the stupa. In fact, I only found out about it maybe a half-month before visiting it. I asked permission from the senior officials of the Ministry of the Royal Palace to commemorate her death and celebrate her life and I chose that exact day because it was her 74th birthday,” she says.

The stupa is dedicated to Saboeun’s parents, four of her siblings and three of Serey Sothea’s children. The celebration for her birthday this year could only have about 20 attendees total since they still need to follow the Covid protocols.

Those present included the senior officials from the Ministry of the Royal Palace that sponsored the construction of the stupa, the local commune chief and the district governor as well as Serey Sothea and Saboeun’s remaining living family members and other friends.

Saboeun says there were also some artists, musicians and other admirers both locally and from abroad who donated to help with Serey Sothea’s memorial celebration.

“I would also like to express my deep gratitude to [the officials from the royal palace], village chief, commune chief and chief monk for helping the ceremony go smoothly. And thank you to all the nieces and nephews who attended the ceremony as well as relatives and friends who couldn’t attend but sent in donations for my sister’s birthday memorial celebration,” Saboeun adds.

Serey Sothea has always had many fans in Cambodia and increasingly she has an international following as well despite her career being cut short after recording just a single album of her own along with her famous collaborations with the legendary Sinn Sisamouth.

Among those international fans of Serey Sothea are author Gregory Cahill and illustrator Kat Baumann, who have penned a graphic novel about her life and music titled



The Golden Voice is a graphic novel about the life and music of Ros Serey Sothea written by Gregory Cahill and illustrated by Kat Baumann. SUPPLIED

The Golden Voice. They’ve just announced the project’s completion this month, having started work on it back in 2019.

Cahill’s first visit to Cambodia was back in 2007 when he came to research the life of Serey Sothea. He was introduced to Saboeun in Battambang and learned a great deal from her about her famous sister including important details that helped him to bring Serey Sothea back to life on the page.

He also visited the village where Serey Sothea is said to have died in Kampong Speu province during Pol Pot’s reign of terror and he says the local people there did seem to know a lot of names and details about what took place.

“I’ve been back to Cambodia many times since then. I love to visit,” says Cahill, an Emmy Award-winning television producer based in Los Angeles who is currently producing the CBS show *The Talk*.

Cahill says he first had the idea for the graphic novel about Serey Sothea when he saw the Cambodian-set crime thriller *City of Ghosts* which was released back in 2003.

“Back in 2006, I directed a low bud-

get short-film called *The Golden Voice* which was about Ros Serey Sothea. The short-film drew a lot of international enthusiasm and so I wanted to make a much bigger movie. So I wrote a script for the bigger movie in 2008, but over the next 10 years I just couldn’t convince anyone to finance the project.

“I think production companies were afraid that it wouldn’t be profitable, which I didn’t necessarily agree with. After ten years, I just got tired of people telling me no. So I had to figure out a new path for the story. And so instead of making a film, I decided to make a graphic novel. I hired artist Kat Baumann to start work on the graphic novel in October of 2019.

“So it has taken a little over two years for us to complete the book. We still have some editorial work to do but the heavy lifting is complete,” Cahill says.

He says the thing he loves about Serey Sothea and wants to share with the rest of the world is that she was pure talent with no ego. She came from a very humble agricultural background where she was raised by a single mother and her family was simply selling rice, fruits and boiled snails to get by.

Cahill points out that Serey Sothea

didn’t have any social or political connections to start out with to help her career along and yet she still became the number one female singer in the country based on her talent alone.

He says some people were shocked when they heard her sing because of the unique qualities of her voice and that her love songs vividly describe lots of places in Cambodia and have captured audiences all over the world who then want to visit the Kingdom.

“Kat delivered the last pages the day after Serey Sothea’s birthday! With a length of 184 pages, readers can expect a very powerful story with a blend of drama, politics, war, family and lots of philosophy about the nature of music and musicians.

“The book will come with a soundtrack so you can hear the music in each scene as you read it. We were also lucky to have an introduction written by Sin Setsochhata, the granddaughter of Sin Sisamouth. As you can imagine, Sin Sisamouth plays a big role in the story,” says Cahill.

The initial publication will be in English but Cahill says he plans to push the publisher very hard to do a Khmer

translation. He also wants to see the book translated into other languages, but Khmer will be the priority for obvious reasons.

“I know for a fact that Ros Serey Sothea has fans all over the world. On the internet I’ve met fans of her from Colombia to Sweden to Singapore. They’re out there everywhere. But that doesn’t surprise me because the Cambodian music scene in the 60’s and 70’s was just a magical era in the history of music, there’s nothing else like it,” he says.

No definite release date for the graphic novel has been set yet but he hopes it will be available some time in 2022, preferably in both print and digital editions.

“I also want to thank the many people who have helped me along the way on this project. I especially have to thank Serey Sothea’s sister Ros Saboeun. None of this would be possible without her guidance, knowledge, and support,” Cahill says.

For more information, check out their Facebook page: @thegoldenvoicemovie



The stupa built for the ‘Golden Voice’ Ros Serey Sothea with pictures from her family tree showing members who lost their lives to the Khmer Rouge regime. SUPPLIED



Officials, relatives and local artists gathered on November 6 at the stupa built for Ros Serey Sothea in Kampong Speu province. SUPPLIED



AmCham recognises CSR efforts with awards

The American Chamber of Commerce in Cambodia (AmCham) last Tuesday held its CSR Excellence Awards Ceremony 2021 at Raffles Hotel Le Royal in Phnom Penh to honour members for their noteworthy efforts in aiding society. With the pandemic bringing unprecedented hardships this year and other challenges to be faced, 18 AmCham members were honoured for their exceptional corporate social responsibility (CSR) endeavours in combating Covid-19, as well as their environmental and social impact. Awards were presented to Wing, Cellcard and Hyatt Regency in particular for their especially strong contributions in these areas. "With CSR, we must recognise the importance of giving back to the place where we do business. We are not only here to make profits, we are in a country that welcomes us, and we need to see ourselves as giving back. There are a lot of benefits to doing business in this country, and I think we should try to see ourselves, even though we are foreigners, as 'citizens in spirit'. That although we are not citizens of this country, we should in spirit try to give back as if we are," said AmCham president Anthony Galliano.



PHOTOS JOE CURTIN



New Uy Kuyteav Tonle Bassac gets thumbs-up

The newly opened Uy Kuyteav Cambodian Restaurant Tonle Bassac has brought a delicious new menu and a chic minimalist decor to wow diners on Phnom Penh's Koh Pich, having already received the thumbs-up from members of the Cambodian Chefs Society. The dining experience at Uy Kuyteav Tonle Bassac received approval from the members of the culinary association who visited the new restaurant on Tuesday for a sumptuous breakfast with Cambodian Master Chef Luu Meng, the CEO of Almond Hospitality, which manages the Uy Kuyteav brand. Uy Kuyteav Tonle Bassac's comfortable dining ambience is complemented by its contemporary take on the decor of a traditional Cambodian wooden home, with louvred windows and hanging rattan lampshades. Other design highlights include the brand's signature half-moon seats as well as a map of Cambodia featuring where from each province Uy Kuyteav sources its local produce. A charming 34-seat restaurant with outdoor dining area, the new eatery - located on Street Tonle Bassac Park, a minute's drive from Koh Pich's Rainbow Bridge - joins the Uy Kuyteav outlet on Kampuchea Krom Boulevard.



PHOTOS HENG CHIVOAN



SERC and Post Media bolster media partnership

The Securities and Exchange Regulator of Cambodia (SERC) and Post Media last Wednesday renewed their partnership to jointly publish educational articles related to the securities market in the Kingdom. SERC director-general HE Sou Socheat and Post Media publisher Ly Tayseng discussed ways to deepen the partnership that was established under a memorandum of understanding signed in May last year. Both parties successfully produced and published more than a dozen articles related to the sector, one that is vital to Cambodia's economic growth. The one-hour discussion ended with Sou Socheat presenting a letter of appreciation to Ly Tayseng for *The Post's* editorial support.

PHOTOS HEAN RANGSEY



Chief Bank launches 'Easy' micro loan app

Chief Commercial Bank (Cambodia) Plc last Monday at its Chbar Ampov branch in the capital announced the launch of the Chief Bank micro loan app - "Chief Easy" - which will ease the loan application process. Chief Bank CEO Soeung Morarith said that with the launch of the new app, micro loan applications via a smartphone can be processed in just 15 minutes. Borrowers can apply for loans ranging from \$100 to a maximum of \$1,000 using the digital platform. The launch of the Chief Easy app widens the financial institution's e-banking and comes in addition to Chief Bank joining the National Bank of Cambodia's Bakong mobile payment system and the Wing financial ecosystem.



PHOTOS SUPPLIED

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
68				69						70				
71				72						73				

“LOST KEY”

ACROSS

- 1 Oral hygiene tool
- 6 Cut the turkey
- 11 USNA student, briefly
- 14 Result of labor?
- 15 “Once more!”
- 16 Words of protest from Yoko?
- 17 Not offensive
- 19 Cartographer’s construction
- 20 Cornstock find
- 21 Kiltie’s headwear
- 22 Dir. opposite of WSW
- 23 Takes place
- 27 Estranged (Var.)
- 29 “Don’t mind if ___”
- 30 Jazz quintet’s home?
- 32 Denomination
- 33 “Fie” homophone
- 34 Place to lounge
- 36 Pretenses
- 39 Opera singer Lily
- 41 Key place?
- 43 Two-tone cookie
- 44 Santa’s reindeer, sans Rudolph
- 46 Sounds angry
- 48 Down with the flu
- 49 Sharing word
- 51 Change totally

DOWN

- 52 Hawaiian necklace
- 53 Alter in tone
- 56 Rotted
- 58 Pit-stop place, briefly
- 59 Word before “so!” and “not!”
- 60 Park one’s carcass
- 61 Clock face number
- 62 Proverbially newsworthy headline
- 68 Hail, to Ovid
- 69 Underdog’s dream
- 70 A sad thing to be in
- 71 Natural moisture
- 72 Hammer parts
- 73 1945 Allied conference site
- 1 G-man’s org.
- 2 Artist Maya
- 3 Grp.
- 4 Display a posture problem
- 5 Support, as with props
- 6 Common house pet
- 7 Khan’s title
- 8 Bob Marley was one
- 9 Blood pressure, heart rate, etc.
- 10 Foes
- 11 For an instant
- 12 Absurd

ACROSS

- 13 Drugged, as a racehorse
- 18 Word with 1-Across
- 23 Tutu wearer in “Fantasia”
- 24 Kind of committee
- 25 Angle
- 26 Grilled Thai dish
- 28 Cave phenomenon
- 31 Hatchet man’s counterpart
- 35 Cast an amorous eye toward
- 37 Wild fight
- 38 Nonliquid state
- 40 Fellow named Bellow
- 42 Firstborn
- 45 Concoct
- 47 The “S” in SPCA
- 50 Minor knee injury
- 53 Trojan War epic
- 54 Not street-savvy
- 55 Like a close game, usually
- 57 Where to find whales
- 63 Uncle of rice fame
- 64 Belonging to a thing
- 65 ___segno (from the repeat sign, in music)
- 66 Plate crumb
- 67 Government procurement org.

Sudoku Pacific

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

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ☆☆☆☆☆

Wednesday’s solution

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

Wednesday’s solution

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



A statue of character Shanks – also known as Red Hair – is displayed at the One Piece anime souvenir shop in Tokyo on Friday. AFP

Hit ‘One Piece’ anime marks milestone with release of 1,000th show

TWO decades after *One Piece* introduced the world to a swashbuckling pirate in a straw hat, fans of the Japanese cartoon series are giddily awaiting last weekend’s release of the 1,000th episode.

One Piece first appeared in manga [comic book] form in Japan in 1997, with an anime [animated TV series] version following two years later.

Since then the franchise has become a global cultural phenomenon, smashing records and winning fans around the globe.

Nonetheless, it wasn’t an immediate hit. “It’s a miracle,” Ryuji Kochi of Toei Animation, the Japanese company behind the anime series, said of the 1,000-episode landmark.

“From the beginning, it was a tough title. It was not easy to place on the TV,” he said, adding that growing a fanbase for the show was not easy either.

Kochi said it had taken 13 long years for the anime, following the adventures of hat-wearing hero Monkey D Luffy, to reach cult status.

Today, however, hundreds of millions of fans are gripped by every twist in the hunt for the eponymous *One Piece*, the treasure coveted by all pirates.

Netflix beckons

The popularity of the manga version has also endured as the TV show has taken off.

Its creator Eiichiro Oda holds the Guinness World Record for “most copies published for the same comic book series by a single author” – 490 million, to be precise.

The 1,000th episode of the anime series will

be released in 80 countries over the weekend.

In Tokyo, a giant banner of the main characters has been erected at Shibuya station, one of the Japanese capital’s main transport hubs.

Special screenings are planned across the US, while in France – the world’s biggest manga and anime market after Japan – more than 100 cinemas are planning a marathon watching binge.

Fans from Africa to Europe to the Middle East have posted some 20,000 selfies to a fan site in honour of the milestone.

“I’ve been a *One Piece* fan for 20 years!” tweeted one Japanese enthusiast impatient to watch the landmark episode.

“I’ve been watching it since junior high, and I’m still enjoying it even after growing up.”

French fan Alexis Poriel, who runs a manga fan group on online platform Discord, said the broad scope of *One Piece* was a key reason for its popularity.

“It talks about social issues, there’s action, there’s humour,” the 26-year-old said.

“*One Piece* manages to really make a link with societal questions,” he added, from racism to geopolitical intrigues.

The series also spans geographical and cultural references, from ancient Egypt to medieval Japan, that help to make it feel universal.

As for what’s next – a live-action adaptation by Netflix is in the works, with fans speculating that it could catapult the franchise to global household name status similar to *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter*.

Netflix’s announcement of the cast set social media alight earlier this month, with 18-year-old Mexican actor Inaki Godoy preparing to take on the role of Luffy. AFP



A woman walks past a poster of characters of ‘One Piece’ anime at Shibuya Station in Tokyo, ahead of the release of the 1000th episode on Sunday. AFP

Sport

No1 Djoko tight-lipped on Oz Open vaccination

NOVAK Djokovic refused to reveal whether he would defend his Australian Open title after the tournament's chief confirmed on Saturday that only vaccinated players would be able to take part in the first Grand Slam of the season.

The decision, revealed by Craig Tiley, piled more pressure on world No1 Djokovic who has refused to reveal if he has been inoculated.

"We'll see, we'll have to wait and see," Djokovic said to reporters after losing his ATP Finals semi-final against Alexander Zverev.

"I haven't been talking to them [the tournament organisers], to be honest. I was just waiting to hear what the news is going to be, now that I know, we'll just have to wait and see."

Melbourne, where January's Grand Slam is held, has spent more than 260 days under lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic and the government of the state of Victoria made it clear last month there would be no concessions for unvaccinated players.

Tiley said the playing group know they must get the jab to compete in the Australian Open, but that he would "love to see Novak here" and attempt to win a record 21st Grand Slam title at Melbourne Park.

Zverev, who was effusive in his praise of Djokovic after winning an exciting match in Turin 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 6-3, also said that he hoped his friend would be Down Under.

"Look it's a very tough one because it's very political," said Zverev.

"We are visiting another country, this is about the virus that is going around right, this is not about a tournament or tennis, this is we are visiting another country."

"If the country is allowing us to enter we need follow the rules and follow the guidelines. I hope he's able to play."

"I'm No3 in the world so if he doesn't play it's easier to win the tournament but also he's No1 in the world so he should be able to play. Hopefully the Australian government will make an exemption." AFP ■



Novak Djokovic reacts during his semi-final match of the ATP Finals against Alexander Zverev at the Pala Alpitour venue in Turin on Saturday. AFP

Saudi launches female football league

SAUDI Arabia's launch of its first women's football league on Monday will clear the way for girls who dream of turning professional – and maybe even playing in a World Cup.

Long condemned for harsh restrictions on women, Saudi Arabia lifted a decades-old ban on female footballers only a few years ago, and it is now aiming to develop a national team strong enough to contest major tournaments.

The ultra-conservative Muslim nation has faced criticism of using sports events to gloss over its poor human rights record and the jailing of women activists.

Its latest step in the reform drive came this month when the Saudi football federation announced the formation of a women's football league in which 16 teams will take part with games in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam.

Among those excited by the move was Farah Jafri, who said she hoped to turn pro and play in England's top division as well as represent her country on the biggest stage at the World Cup.

"In the beginning of my football journey, I faced some difficulties in that not all people accepted it," she said.

"But my family and friends used to encourage me a lot," said the pony-tailed 18-year-old dressed in a jersey.

Like many other girls who were passionate about football but unable to participate in competitions, Jafri played on the street with her relatives or at school with friends.

Her only other outlet was watching games on television, she said.

The kingdom adheres to a rigid interpretation of Islam, and the involvement of women in sport is still frowned upon in some quarters.

But since the rise to power of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2017, some restrictions on women have been lifted as the country opens up to the world through sweeping reforms.

The shift has enabled women to get behind the wheel and take part in mixed-gender settings, even as a rig-



German coach Monika Staab (right) leads a training session for the newly-established Saudi Women's National Football Team at the Prince Faisal bin Fahd Stadium in Riyadh on November 2. AFP

orous crackdown on dissent remains in place.

'Number one'

Jafri is one of around 30 players selected from 400 candidates to be part of the Saudi national women's squad, according to officials.

"I dream of the day I can represent my country in the women's World Cup," she said, adding that she also hopes to play for English side Manchester City at the club level.

There are no women's teams affiliated with sports clubs in Saudi Arabia, whose men's team has qualified for the World Cup five times.

During a training session in Riyadh, the women in the national team excitedly took to the field at Prince Faisal

bin Fahd Stadium, some of them without veils but wearing long tracksuits under their shorts.

Officials have yet to announce any sports clothing restrictions for the Saudi women, who in the past faced close scrutiny from the religious police enforcing a strict dress code.

The team's goalkeeper, Lama al-Oneizi, said she was elated to be part of the team.

"I fulfilled my dream and even my parents' dream because they are the ones who encouraged me a lot on this journey," the 25-year-old said.

Saudi Arabia has so far set up three training centres for girls between the ages of 13 and 17 across the country, with plans to establish up to nine by 2025.

It announced last week that Monika Staab of Germany was appointed as head coach of the women's national team, which has been dubbed the "Green Eagles".

"Everything is new, just like a baby starts to walk, to stand," said Staab, who won the inaugural UEFA Women's Cup in 2002 as the manager of Eintracht Frankfurt.

The Saudi national women's squad is currently preparing for its first friendly match in February.

Staab, who has previously coached the national women's teams for Bahrain and Qatar, said she was optimistic.

"In five to eight years, they would be number one in the Gulf and this would be a big achievement," she said. AFP ■

Man U to sack Solskjaer after 4-1 loss: reports

OLE Gunnar Solskjaer is to be sacked as Manchester United manager, according to widespread reports on Saturday following a humiliating 4-1 defeat at Watford.

Solskjaer admitted he was "embarrassed" after his team's fifth defeat in their last seven Premier League games.

The *Times*, *The Guardian* and the *Manchester Evening News* reported that the result of an emergency board meeting called after the Watford defeat was to bring the Norwegian's three-year spell in charge at Old Trafford to an end.

Solskjaer signed a new three-year contract in July and will reportedly be handed a £7.5 million compensation package.

The club's hierarchy stuck by Solskjaer during the recent international break despite humiliating home defeats to Liverpool and Manchester City.

But worse was to come at Vicarage Road as the struggling Hornets could afford to miss a first half penalty twice and still run out comfortable winners.

Solskjaer has managed to ride out the storm during previous poor runs since taking charge in 2018.

But United's latest slide comes after heavy pre-season investment on Cristiano Ronaldo, Jadon Sancho and Raphael Varane that were expected to turn the team into title-winners for the first time since 2013.

Financial results released last week for the first quarter of the season showed United's wage bill has risen 23 per cent.

However, that has not been rewarded on the field as the Red Devils find themselves 12 points adrift of Premier League leaders Chelsea down in seventh and out of the League Cup.

Much more was expected after steady progress during Solskjaer's first two full seasons in charge.

He secured back-to-back top-four finishes in the Premier League for the first time since the club's decline began with Alex Ferguson's retirement as manager in 2013.

However, Solskjaer, who famously scored United's winning goal in the 1999 Champions League final against Bayern Munich, has failed to win a trophy since his return to the club.

His legendary status as a United player meant the 48-year-old retained the support of fans even as results went downhill in recent months.

But even they began to turn on him on Saturday as he was booed while holding his hands up in apology.

"We were outfought," said Solskjaer. "The first half is the

worst we've played and it's hard for me to explain why we played the way we did."

"The boys are in a terrible place in their heads now – we have let ourselves down and the fans down. It's hard to stand here and explain that,

but that's football and we have to take the flak for it."

Former Real Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane, Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers and Ajax coach Erik ten Hag are the frontrunners to be Solskjaer's successor. AFP ■



Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer reacts during the English Premier League match against Watford on Saturday. AFP