



PM CALLS FOR ASEAN, CHINA TO UPHOLD MULTILATERALISM

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\$88M RAKED IN FROM DOMESTIC TOURISM OVER WATER FESTIVAL

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CHINESE TENNIS STAR PENG SHUAI SAYS SHE IS 'SAFE', IOC CLAIMS

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PM: China an economic revitaliser

May Kunmakara

PRIME Minister Hun Sen praised China for its efforts in combating Covid-19, and revitalising and boosting socio-economic growth in Cambodia, the region and the world.

Hun Sen made the remark

on November 22 at the virtual ASEAN-China Special Summit to Commemorate the 30th Anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations, where he was accompanied by Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Prak Sokhonn, Minister of Commerce Pan Sorasak and Minister of Education, Youth and

Sport Hang Chuon Naron.

“With the effective containment of the spread of Covid-19, Cambodia would like to congratulate China on its rapid recovery with a growth rate of approximately 9.8 per cent during the first nine months of 2021,” the prime minister said citing a figure reported by China’s National Bureau of Statistics.

“Cambodia would also like to encourage China to continue providing assistance to ASEAN, and above all to support the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework [ACRF] and initiatives to respond to Covid-19.

“For the time being, Cambodia would like to persuade China to resume travel to and

from ASEAN, to strengthen and promote tourism, air transport services, business activities, trade and investment,” he added.

Cambodia Association of Travel Agents president Chhay Sivlin predicted that Chinese sightseers would become one of the biggest contributors to the recovery of the Kingdom’s tourism sector.

“We foresee now that the Chinese will be among the top foreign tourist arrivals to our country once we reopen to vaccinated tourists later in November,” she said.

According to the prime minister, Phnom Penh and Beijing have agreed to bring the bilateral

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Oz set to reopen to students, workers

AUSTRALIA on November 22 announced that it will reopen to foreign students and skilled workers from next month, easing some of the world’s most stringent pandemic travel restrictions.

Twenty months after Australia slammed shut its borders, some visa holders – as well as Japanese and South Korean citizens – will be able to enter from December 1.

“Australia is reopening to the world,” said home affairs minister Karen Andrews as she announced the news, adding it was “yet another step forward for Australia”.

The government of Prime Minister Scott Morrison lifted restrictions on Australians travelling overseas last month, sparking a flood of travel bookings for the southern hemisphere summer.

But Morrison – who is hoping to be re-elected next year – had pointedly refused to relax travel rules for most non-Australians.

That decision left an estimated 1.4 million skilled visa holders stuck in Australia, unable to return if they decided to leave.

There is no word yet on when leisure travellers may be able to return to Australia.

While some Australian states still require quarantine, vaccinated Australians, some visa holders and citizens of Japan, South Korea and Singapore will now be able to visit Australia with only a pre-departure negative Covid-19 test. AFP



Pick of the bunch

A vendor arranges her stall of fruits at Phsar Kandal Market in Phsar Kandal I commune of the capital’s Daun Penh district earlier this month. HENG CHIVOAN

General’s gun smuggling ring busted

Orm Bunthoern

THE Military Police sent six military officers to court on November 22 to face prosecution for possession of 105 illegal rifles and arms smuggling, while investigators say they are still hunting down additional accomplices.

Sao Sokha, deputy commander of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and commander of the National Military Police, said on November 22 that the six officers were arrested pursuant to warrants issued by the court.

He said some of the six arrested had already confessed their involve-

ment with gun smuggling, while others continued to deny the accusations, saying that they had not been involved with any crimes.

“Now, the case is in the hands of the court who will continue the investigation and see how many of them were really involved or not

involved and that will be up to the court to decide,” Sokha said.

According to Sokha, there have been two gun smuggling cases so far this year but authorities did not identify or locate the people involved in

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IAEA GIVES A LEG UP TO NUCLEAR SCIENCE CAPACITY IN KINGDOM

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AMRO PROJECTS 2.8% ECONOMIC GROWTH IN CAMBODIA FOR 2021

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National

Generals in charge of gun repair workshop among the accused

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the first case, which happened on October 19 in Battambang province's Kamrieng district.

Sokha did not give any details on the first case but *The Post* has learned that military officials found 42 rifle magazines and 508 bullets during a joint patrol of the border in Battambang province's Kamrieng district – which borders Phnom Proek district to the south where the second case occurred.

For the latest case, he said a total of 105 guns were recovered on November 12 and 13 in Phnom Proek district, including 100 AK-47's, two 12.7mm heavy machine guns and three M79 grenade launchers.

Sokha said that after questioning those involved, it seems likely that the two cases are connected and the work of just one group of smugglers.

"The ammunition we found in the first case could be used to load the guns we seized in the second case," he said.

Sokha said the first suspect was arrested on November 19 in Siem Reap province before two others were located and arrested on November 20 and 21 in Battambang. Three more suspects were then arrested on

November 22 in Phnom Penh.

All of them have been sent to the Phnom Penh Municipal court. He said one of the suspects is a two-star military general, or Major General, and another is a one-star general, or Brigadier General. They are the commander and deputy commander in charge of a weapon maintenance and repair workshop.

Two other suspects are a captain and lieutenant colonel whose job was to repair weapons in that same workshop and the last two suspects are the deputy commander for the Kamrieng district Military Police and a warrant officer from the Phnom Proek district Military Police.

Sokha said he was not at liberty to name the other suspects who his officers are still searching for because of the ongoing investigation.

"We are now trying to figure out who they are exactly because they were in military uniform but we can't find their names on our enrolment list. So we cannot say if they are military but using false names or people who were just disguised as military. We'll only know once we manage to arrest them," he said.



Dozens of AK-47 rifles hidden at a fruit plantation in Battambang province's Phnom Proek district were found on November 12. FACEBOOK



People queue to get their booster shots at a school in Phnom Penh's Meanchey district last month. HENG CHIVOAN

PM, defence minister urge vaccinations for eligible kids

Mom Kunthea

MINISTER of National Defence Tea Banh has called on all parents who serve in the military to get their children vaccinated against Covid-19 while extending the commitment of military personnel to carry out assignments on behalf of the Covid-19 vaccination sub-commission.

"I call on medical teams from the defence ministry

to continue to carry out the work assigned by the vaccination sub-commission.

"And I would also like to appeal to all compatriots to get their children vaccinated for the purposes of helping to restore and stimulate the growth of our national economy after the Covid-19 crisis and continue to follow the guidelines of the Ministry of Health by adhering to the three dos and three don'ts," Tea Banh said.

As of November 21, over 14

million people aged five and older out of Cambodia's total population of around 16 million people have been vaccinated.

At the ceremonial handover on November 17 of two million doses of Covid-19 vaccines from China, Prime Minister Hun Sen also reiterated his call for the general public to get their children vaccinated and to get booster shots for themselves.

He said that after almost two years of fighting Covid-19, the government has proven that

vaccinations are the key to managing the crisis, though other preventive measures remain important.

"[Get vaccinated] to prevent the spread of Covid-19, protect public health and save people's lives ... Cambodia considers vaccines to be a strategic commodity and we are working on a strategy that will guarantee us enough vaccines for our people on a timely basis without having to wait for global distribution," Hun Sen said.

Cheam Yeab elected as Assembly VP

Mom Kunthea

THE Standing Committee of the National Assembly (NA) on November 22 elected Cheam Yeab as the NA first vice-president and recognised Un Bunhan as an NA member representing Kampong Thom province – replacing Nguon Nhel who passed away on November 5 – according to NA secretary-general and spokesman Leng Peng Long.

Peng Long said in a press conference that the meeting was attended by all 10 members of the NA's Standing Committee and a five point agenda was approved.

"Cheam Yeab is currently the chairman of the NA's economic, finance, banking and audit committee but he has now been elected as the first vice-president of the NA. So we will nominate Chheang Vun for membership on the [NA's economic committee]," he said.

Peng Long added that at the meeting the committee also appointed Chiep Sivorn as a member of the NA committee on foreign affairs, international cooperation, propaganda



The Standing Committee of the National Assembly met on November 22 to elect Cheam Yeab as the NA's first vice-president. NA

and information.

"According to NA procedures, Chheang Vun must meet with the NA economic committee as a member and then the committee will elect a new chairman. Whether that will be Vun or someone else we do not know yet," he said.

The Standing Committee also decided to add some agenda items to the upcoming sixth session of the NA's sixth legislature: the draft law on ASEAN protocols for dispute resolution mechanisms, the draft law on finance for the 2022 administration and

the draft law on the payment of the general state budget.

"There are only three laws that the NA's plenary session must consider and discuss for approval. Therefore, the Standing Committee has decided to hold that session on November 25," Peng Long said.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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PM urges unity at ASEAN-China meet

Ry Sochan

PRIME Minister Hun Sen reiterated his call for ASEAN and China to uphold the principles of multilateralism in their relations in order to promote cooperation in all sectors and solve common regional and global challenges peacefully while relying on mutual trust in order to maintain peace, stability and harmony across the region.

Hun Sen renewed the call at the ASEAN-China special summit commemorating the 30th anniversary of ASEAN-China dialogue and relations on November 22.

The summit was held via video conference with Chinese President Xi Jinping hosting and serving as co-chair along with Bruneian Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.

"In this spirit, Cambodia supports the 2022 initiative celebrating the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. Cambodia also expresses its appreciation for the tremendous progress made in negotiating an efficient completion of a comprehensive Code of Conduct for the South China Sea," he said.

He said that over the past three decades, ASEAN and China have established close ties and fruitful relations that further united them by providing mutual benefits and contributing significantly to bringing about peace, stability, security, prosperity and sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development for both sides.

Hun Sen announced Cambodian support for the elevation of ASEAN-China relations to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and the adoption of the joint statement on the ASEAN-China Summit to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of ASEAN-China relations.

"Cambodia also welcomes President Xi Jinping's global development initiative which will become a major supporter of developing countries for revitalising their post-Covid-19 socio-economic growth while also promoting human rights through sustainable development and poverty reduction," Hun Sen said.

He said that since China has become



Prime Minister Hun Sen attends the ASEAN-China Special Summit to commemorate the 30th anniversary of ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations on Monday. FOREIGN MINISTRY

a superpower with important roles both regionally and globally while ASEAN's significance is also expanding, the importance and necessity of a strong ASEAN-China relationship has increased as well, especially to promote the post-pandemic socio-economic recovery.

Hun Sen also congratulated the Chinese people and government on achieving their national development goals and on the recent 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China.

During the meeting, Xi proposed that ASEAN and China deepen their relations in order to build a "prosperous home" together.

He said China is ready to provide \$1.5 billion in development investment funds over the next three years and is ready to work with ASEAN to fully tap into the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and

the upgraded ASEAN-China free trade agreement with increased support for human resource development.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation press statement on the outcome of the meeting, Xi also proposed that the ASEAN-China relations feature greater cooperation on green development and the blue economy.

"[Xi] proposed we build an amicable home together through the promotion of tourism and people-to-people exchanges, especially among our youth and young leaders.

On political-security, ASEAN and China's leaders reaffirmed their commitment to multilateralism and maintaining an open and inclusive regional cooperation framework," it said.

According to the statement, ASEAN expressed its appreciation for China's support for ASEAN centrality and the bloc taking a leading role in evolving

regional mechanisms to respond to regional and global challenges.

The two sides concurred on the need to advance cooperation in the relevant areas identified in the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific", which will enhance strategic trust and provide opportunities for win-win cooperation among the countries of the region.

Lim Meng Hour, deputy director of the Mekong Centre for Strategic Studies at the Asian Vision Institute, told *The Post* on November 22 that Hun Sen's remarks reflected a spirit of unity between China and ASEAN member states which was greatly bolstered by China's provision of aid and vaccines during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"This not only contributed to the countries of ASEAN by preventing the spread of the coronavirus, it also helped reduce the economic impacts of the pandemic and helped prepare the region for future pandemics," he said. ■

2nd building for hospital in T Khmum constructed

Mom Kunthea

THE groundbreaking ceremony to begin the construction of the second building of the Kroch Chhmar district referral hospital was held on November 22 in Kroch Chhmar commune's Khsach Pracheu Leu village of Tbong Khmum province's Krouch Chhmar district, while the construction of the first building is now about 90 per cent complete.

The event was attended by Minister of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction Chea Sophara, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Veng Sakhon, Minister of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation Vong Soth and Tbong Khmum provincial governor Cheam Can Sophorn.

In a press release, the land management ministry said the second hospital building would be 18m wide and 62m long with four floors. It is roughly the same size as the first building which began construction on July 27, 2020, and is expected to be completed soon.

Sakhon said in his remarks at the event that the two hospital buildings are a gift from Prime Minister Hun Sen and his wife Bun Rany Hun Sen, and the new hospital will soon be providing health services and meeting the health needs of the people of Kroch Chhmar district and the surrounding area.

The Kroch Chhmar district referral hospital was originally founded in 1966 on 13,229sqm of land. Construction of the hospital's first building is scheduled for completion in late 2021 with a total cost of about \$1.4 million. ■

Colder temperatures than usual forecast for this winter

Khouth Sophak Chakrya

THE Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology announced on November 22 that this winter the temperature will drop as low as 15 degrees Celsius in the country, especially in the mountainous areas and on the northeast plateau.

According to the ministry's announcement, the winds coming from Siberia are now pushing a high-pressure system from China down to Cambodia. This is expected to cause temperatures during the "winter" months of December to February to drop to 15-17C in the Dangrek Mountains and on the northeast plateau while other regions are more likely to experience temperatures in the range of 18-19C.

Ministry spokesman Chan Yutha told *The Post* that winter is divided into two phases. The first starts from the first week to the third week of December, when the weather cools down to between 17-19C.

The second phase will start from the fourth week of December and run through Feb-

ruary with more cold weather but for a longer period of time and even cooler temperatures – as low as 15C in some places.

"In these situations, people should take care of their health and especially look after young children, the elderly and pregnant women because they may all be more susceptible to infectious diseases," he said.

Or Vandine, spokeswoman for the Ministry of Health, told *The Post* that in general when the cold weather arrives it affects the elderly more often because they have lower body temperatures to begin with due to the slowing of their metabolisms and reduced physical activity.

Therefore, the elderly are at heightened risk in cold weather, which can be life-threatening due to the body's response to cold temperatures – especially for those with diabetes and heart disease.

"In order to better protect ourselves and our families and to avoid cold weather diseases, wear a thick coat, a scarf, a hat and gloves to stay warm. People should try to

maintain their normal level of body heat," she said.

Vandine said she recommends people seek medical attention at the nearest health centre if they have symptoms like shortness of breath, fever, coughing, sore throat, muscle aches or any other concerning health problems.

She also called on police officers, Military Police officers and soldiers who are stationed along the border in the Dangrek Mountains and northeast plateau to pay more attention to their health and be sure to stay warm to avoid infectious diseases.

Lieutenant General Srey Deuk, deputy commander of the army's infantry and the commander of Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) Intervention Division 3, told *The Post* that he had already distributed 10,519 winter coats to military personnel.

"Twenty-five units guarding the Cambodian-Thai border including the temple of Preah Vihear have already received winter coats," he said.

On November 18, Prime

Minister Hun Sen called on people to increase their vigilance about their healthcare this winter due to the Covid-19 pandemic and an increased danger from other seasonal illnesses like the flu now that so-

ciety has reopened and people are mixing freely again.

"Winter often brings with it various diseases, especially the common cold and flu, and now it will be during an outbreak of Covid-19 ... So,

in conclusion, I would like to call on our people to take care of their health during the winter and fall because they always bring increased transmission of infectious diseases," he said. ■



A woman buys a sweater at Tuol Tompoung Market, commonly known as Russian Market. HONG MENEA

National

Hospital heals nearly 5K hearts

Lay Samean

THE Kantha Bopha Children's Hospital III – also known as Jayavarman VII Children's Hospital – in Siem Reap province has successfully operated on 4,669 children with heart ailments over the last 10 years since its Heart Corner programme began.

According to the hospital's Facebook post marking the 10th anniversary, its heart surgery centre called "Heart Corner Jayavarman VII" first opened on November 21, 2011.

As an example of its successes, Kantha Bopha pointed to a 15-year-old girl who had a rare congenital heart condition called an Ebstein anomaly and she had a pacemaker permanently implanted by the Heart Corner team on November 16, 2021.

"This is case number 4,669 for heart surgeries. Thank you and congratulations to the heart specialist team who are so dedicated to their work at Jayavarman VII Hospital," the hospital said, adding that all treatments at Kantha Bopha for any conditions are always free for all children without discrimination.

Professor Yay Chantana, director of the Jayavarman VII hospital, told *The Post* that this was a great achievement for Cambodian doctors to successfully perform this heart surgery. Every year, a



Parents bring their children to Kantha Bopha Children's Hospital for treatment in June. HONG MENEA

group of foreign doctors from Switzerland and France come to teach and assist in surgeries, but due to Covid-19 the foreign missions were suspended.

"In the last two years from 2019 to 2021 there were no foreign missions and our Cambodian doctors performed all of the surgeries successfully by themselves and this is a great achievement for Cambodian medicine," he said.

He said there are typically two to three patients requiring heart surgery per day at the hospital.

"There are many children with congenital heart problems who cannot normally af-

ford surgery because it's very expensive and needs specialised equipment. Dr Beat Richner began doing heart surgery for free in 2011," he said.

According to Chantana, surgeries for children with mild heart problems can be performed in Phnom Penh, but for severe cases the patient is sent to Jayavarman VII hospital in Siem Reap Province.

"For serious and complicated cases the surgeries are done in Siem Reap. Some patients' hearts are damaged from birth with as many as five complications that all need separate surgeries. All surgeries are free of charge," he said.

Chantana thanked the hos-

pital's benefactors both inside and outside of the country and also the Cambodian government for continuing to support Kantha Bopha Hospital.

According to the hospital's website, the five Kantha Bopha children's hospital branches provide free medical examinations and emergency services for tens of thousands of children and spend approximately \$45 million to \$50 million per year doing so.

The money is donated to the hospital's affiliated charitable foundations, including the Swiss Kantha Bopha foundation, Dr Beat Richner Kantha Bopha foundation and Kantha Bopha foundation of Cambodia. The Cambodian government also donates a portion of the money from each ticket sold to attractions like Angkor Wat to the hospitals as well.

Military officer sent to court for assault on 15-year-old boy

Lay Samean

POLICE in Phnom Penh's Kam-boul district are questioning a military officer from the 911 parachute regiment to build a case file for referral to court after he allegedly beat a 15-year-old boy unconscious on the evening of November 20.

District deputy police chief Chhim Savuth told *The Post* on November 22 that police had not completed their investigation yet and it was possible that a settlement may be reached between the officer, Vorn Vuthy, and the boy's family.

"The police will not intervene in the negotiations. If the two sides come to an agreement at some point that is a matter for those parties to decide," he said.

He added that neither the suspect nor the victim had requested police help with mediation but an official complaint had been made to the police who were now building a case file to determine the facts about what took place.

Savuth said he did not know when exactly the suspect might be sent to court.

"Because we are busy with dealing with crimes like murders it may take time but we will build the case file and collect the evidence in preparation for referral to court," he said.

Savuth added that the action was taken after receiving a complaint from the mother of the boy – Heng Sok – who requested that the police take

action against Vuthy for the alleged assault.

Her complaint details that the incident happened around 5:30pm on November 20 in Kamboul commune of Phnom Penh's Kam-boul district. She sent her son to pick up clothes from the laundry but they weren't ready yet so the shop owner told him to wait and while waiting he joked around with some friends of his.

The suspect was drinking beer with several of his companions nearby and according to her complaint he approached her son and asked him "Do you want to be a big brother somewhere?" to which her son replied that he was just playing around with his friends.

The suspect then allegedly slapped the boy, kned him and then grabbed his collar and slammed his head into an ice cooler which knocked him unconscious. Onlookers then intervened to stop the beating.

The boy is currently being treated at a private hospital and his mother, Heng Sok, could not be reached for comment.

"We leave it to the courts to decide because it has nothing to do with military crimes or the Military Law. We do not support the use of violence and we regret that this incident took place. We only ask that the police handle the case in a fair and impartial manner according to the law," said Ministry of National Defence spokesman Chhum Socheat.

ភ្នំពេញ ថ្ងៃទី **The Phnom Penh Post**

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Chinese trio under arrest for trafficking Thai workers

Kim Sarom

POLICE are set to send three Chinese men to the municipal court for confining 99 Thai nationals to extort money from them after the victims were cheated by an employment broker who told them that they were going to work for a Chinese online sales company in Phnom Penh's Sen Sok district.

National Police spokesman Chhay Kim Khoeun told *The Post* on November 21 that the three Chinese suspects were arrested on November 18 and were among a total of 77 Chinese nationals who had been questioned by the police.

"Our officers finished the questioning this evening [November 21]," he said.

Kim Khoeun added that On November 18, the National Police conducted a raid on a house in Sen Sok district being rented by a group of Chinese nationals where they discovered and liberated 99 Thai nationals who were being held prisoner and extorted.

The 99 Thai victims were taken into custody by Cambodian immigration police officers for deportation to Thailand as they



99 Thai nationals were rescued from Chinese extortionists in Phnom Penh on Friday. POLICE

were all in Cambodia illegally.

The operation involved the questioning of 77 Chinese nationals but only three of them were determined to be involved with the extortion scheme.

The other 74 Chinese nationals were not involved in any crimes and had come to work in Cambodia legally, prompting the authorities to allow them to return to work as normal, he said.

Minister of Information Khieu Kanharith pointed out the irony of the situation as in the past many Cambodian

people had been cheated by brokers when trying to work illegally in Thailand and now the same thing was happening to Thai people induced to come and work in Cambodia illegally.

"The Cambodian police have liberated 99 Thai people who were smuggled into Cambodia to work and were then confined to a building," he said.

A municipal court spokesman said on November 22 that no charges had been decided yet for the three alleged Chinese human traffickers.

Agriculture ministry and IAEA work to develop Kingdom's nuclear science

Post Staff

THE Department of Agricultural Land Resources Management is cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to receive technical support to build Cambodia's nuclear science capacity related to the agricultural sector in order to manage nitrogen nutrients more efficiently in rice production.

The IAEA's nitrogen "stable isotope" technique is used to quantify the amount of nitrogen plants take up from fertilizers, and then determined the precise amount of fertilizer that farmers should use at various stages of the crop's life.

Although the IAEA is more typically associated with tasks like nuclear power or nuclear weapons non-proliferation, they also do important work in other areas of nuclear science – such as assisting developing countries use of it for agricultural purposes.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries began instructing farmers on November 19 on the use of nitrogen fertilizers through its Department of Agricultural Land Resources Management after carrying out a series of studies on them in 2014, 2018 and 2019.

The department's guidelines call for applying the organic fertilizer in rice fields according to the information gleaned from the stable nitrogen isotope method as an effective way to increase yields.

The studies revealed that for middle-rice or round-doul the application of 98 kg of nitrogen fertilizer per ha of rice



Agriculture officials use nitrogen fertilizers in Samrong Tong district of Kampong Speu province last year. VENG SAKHON VIA FACEBOOK

planted in the Tuol Samrong soil type reduced crop failures due to excess nitrogen and increased the fertilizer's effectiveness with improved yields.

Nitrogen fertilizer levels can also be reduced by up to 42 kg per ha without significantly reducing yields which may be desirable depending on the farmer's economic situation.

The use of nitrogen fertilizer for middle-rice is done in three phases – 40 per cent during planting, 30 per cent

after 30 days have passed during the first transplanting and 30 per cent after 60 days have passed and then transplanting for the second time.

Farmers must also monitor the water conditions in their fields as it influences the efficiency of nitrogen fertilizers.

"In conclusion, the above research has provided insights into the management and application of nitrogen fertilizers for high efficiency in rice production. Farmers' awareness of

these factors is a smart choice to manage nitrogen nutrients, reduce fertilizer intake and increase yields," Minister of Agriculture Veng Sakhon wrote on his Facebook page.

"Effective nitrogen management increases rice yields and reduces greenhouse gas emissions ... Effective management of nitrogen nutrients in rice production is important for ... increasing yields, and reducing nitrogen losses to the soil and water or polluting the

ecological system," he said.

Field research was conducted at the Prey Pdav agricultural experiment station in Kampong Speu province's Samrong Tong district operated by the General Department of Agriculture. They evaluated the effectiveness of nitrogen fertilizer through the use of compost and manure in different rice growing scenarios using certain seeds and soil types by utilizing the nitrogen stable isotope technique. ■

Rice traders petitioning for border reopening

Nov Sivutha

OVER 400 farmers and rice traders have requested that Kampong Speu provincial governor Mao Thonin reopen the Prek Ansa corridor border crossing in Prey Tonle commune of Kampong Speu's Banteay Meas district to make it easier for them to sell rice to Vietnam.

They said they could sell their rice to Vietnamese buyers at nearly 900 riel (\$0.20) per kilogramme and currently the local price is just 700 riel per kg.

Hou Nath, a rice trader from the area, told *The Post* on November 21 that 416 people who were mostly rice traders and farmers signed a petition with their thumbprints to submit to Thonin this week asking that the Prek Ansa corridor be opened again.

He said many of the people involved had come from the Banteay Meas and Kampong Trach districts to request the reopening of the corridor crossing which has been closed for a long time due to Covid-19.

According to Nath, thousands of people wanted the immediate reopening of the Prek Ansa corridor, but only a limited number of people chosen from different communes registered their thumbprints.

He said that with Prek Ansa closed, all rice has to be transported to the Ton Horn corridor in Prek Kroes commune in Kampong Trach district where people have to pay a tax of about 50,000 riel per tonne – making the income from selling rice there even lower than the local price.

"It is hard for them to sell rice at this price. The tax is too high. People are very hard up now because many Cambodian workers have been jobless for a long time [due to the pandemic]," he said.

Toy Sreyleak, a farmer who registered her thumbprint, told *The Post* on November 21 that if the Prek Ansa corridor is reopened it will be easy for farmers to transport their rice for sales and they will get a better price.

"If they reopen Prek Ansa corridor, the price of rice will be close to 900 riel per kg but now it is only 700 riel per kg. That is why all the people here want the provincial authorities to facilitate the reopening of the corridor," he said.

Neither Thonin nor Chan Rith, director of the provincial Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, could be reached for comment on November 21.

Banteay Meas district governor Muong Noeun said he had yet to receive information about the petition. But if people have officially made a request then it would depend on the provincial governor to address it because he as district governor had no power to do so.

"The Vietnamese side closed the border crossing to prevent the spread of Covid-19 but this corridor was an illegal border crossing to begin with, though selling rice there was tolerated by the authorities on both sides. But we weren't the ones who closed it," he said. ■

Waste management plan proves effective during pared-down Water Festival holiday

Long Kimmarita

THE Ministry of Environment praised the improvement in waste management in public places and resort areas this year during the Water Festival while acknowledging that more work in the area of rubbish disposal in Cambodia still remains.

"We do not have comprehensive figures on waste disposal for the three days, just an overall assessment that we have received from regional and provincial sources that solid waste management was well done and citizens were also involved through volunteering," ministry spokesman Neth Pheaktra told *The Post* on November 21.

He also mentioned that waste management in public areas and resorts had achieved better than expected results due to the participation in efforts to manage waste by agencies from the ministry and the relevant local authorities.

However, Pheaktra said that while many parts of the country showed improvements this year there were still some people who were improperly disposing of rubbish.

According to the Ministry of Tourism's report, during the Water Festival more than 900,000 tourists were active



People enjoying the final day of the Water Festival holiday near the riverside area in the capital's Chroy Changvar district on Saturday. HONG MENEHA

including 899,869 citizens and 10,281 resident foreigners. Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Preah Sihanouk provinces saw the largest groups of tourists.

Khim Finan – the governor of Banteay Srei district which has been pitched as a model for waste manage-

ment – told *The Post* on November 21 that volume of rubbish there increased threefold as tourist numbers swelled in the district from November 18 to 20.

He said the increase was due to the large number of tourists visiting the district, while on a normal day the

rubbish collected is usually about 10 tonnes per day.

However, Finan claimed that despite the increase in the amount of rubbish, tourists had disposed of it properly, while only a small number of people littered.

"For me, the rubbish that is scattered is much less than before because our area is already clean and we have community workers waiting to clean up. If we don't have workers, the clean places will become dirty and it will make visitors think that these places are rubbish dumps," he said.

Finan still urged citizens to pack their used rubbish and dispose of it properly without leaving it out in the open, which is harmful to the environment and health.

According to a report from the environment ministry, the total amount of waste generated in Cambodia per day is more than 10,000 tonnes, which is equivalent to nearly four million tonnes per year, with 65 per cent of waste organic, 20 per cent is plastic bags and the rest is solids and other waste.

On November 19, the ministry released a short educational video calling on people to organise trips without using plastic. The ministry advised people to change their habits by using reusable equipment instead. ■

Business

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USD / KHR	USD / CAD	USD / CNY	USD / JPY	USD / MYR	USD / SGD	USD / THB	AUD / USD	EUR / USD	GBP / USD
↑ 4,095	↑ 1.2638	↑ 6.3817	↓ 114.11	↑ 4.1855	↑ 1.3614	↑ 32.87	↓ 0.7258	↓ 1.1284	↑ 1.3433

ABA NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA GROUP

TRADING INFORMATION ON CAMBODIA SECURITIES EXCHANGE

Date: November 22, 2021

Auction Trading Method (ATM)

NO	STOCK	CLOSING PRICE	OPENING PRICE	HIGH	LOW
1	ABC	10,920	10,920	10,940	10,900
2	GTI	4,280	4,280	4,280	4,180
3	PAS	13,600	13,600	13,660	13,320
4	PEPC	3,160	3,150	3,160	3,140
5	PPAP	14,660	14,800	14,800	14,100
6	PPSP	2,010	2,010	2,020	1,990
7	PWSA	6,900	6,900	6,900	6,860



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Amro projects 2.8% economic growth in Cambodia for 2021

PM calls for ASEAN-China connectivity improvement

May Kunmakara

SINGAPORE-BASED ASEAN Plus Three Macroeconomic Research Office (Amro) has forecast Cambodia's economic growth at a moderate 2.8 per cent in 2021, tempered by uneven growth across sectors.

This projection is more upbeat than the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) 2.2 per cent and Asian Development Bank's 1.9 per cent.

In its 2021 Annual Consultation Report on Cambodia released on November 22, Amro said: "Strengthening pandemic management and implementing flexible policies to support vulnerable sectors and put the economy on a firmer recovery path remain vital, while the ongoing fast rollout of vaccines will ensure a steady economic reopening.

"The recovery momentum is dampened by the slow return of international tourists, despite easing containment measures," it said.

It noted that amid improvements in the public health system, "Cambodia's high reliance on close contact services sector and a labour-intensive manufacturing sector renders its recovery more vulnerable



Singapore-based ASEAN Plus Three Macroeconomic Research Office (Amro) has pinned the Kingdom's economic growth for this year at 2.8 per cent. HENG CHHIVAN

to Covid-19 outbreaks".

Early last month, the IMF presaged that Cambodia economic growth would rise "gradually to pre-crisis rates of 6.5 per cent after a few years".

The Washington-based development lender underlined that the Covid-19 crisis triggered a sharp fall in ex-

ternal demand last year that dragged down the economy, and that the Kingdom's third coronavirus outbreak in 2021 – dubbed the "February 20 community event" marking the date it was first detected – further added to the woes.

The IMF noted that the Kingdom's economy has sustained

devastating Covid blows despite sweeping government safeguards, contracting by an estimated 3.1 per cent last year, following a decade of growth averaging around seven per cent each year.

"Although activity showed signs of picking up toward the end of 2020, the rapid spread

of the virus from February this year has set the economy back again. As in many other countries, the crisis has strained the ability of households and firms to service loans.

Meanwhile, Amro argued that risks in the financial sector could derive from a deterioration in credit quality and possible asset price inflation, and that Covid could leave long-term scars on the Kingdom's growth potential, impeding a rapid return to sustainable high growth.

"Given the slow and uneven recovery in an environment of high uncertainty, more targeted and flexible fiscal policy support is required," it said. "As demand for liquidity remains high, accommodative policy measures should continue while enhancing the monitoring and supervision of the financial system."

Amro recommended that the National Bank of Cambodia ensure that the unwinding of extraordinary measures is well-communicated to reduce policy uncertainties.

Coordinated efforts to address structural constraints should be accelerated to boost competitiveness and resilience of the economy, it advised. ■

Continued from page 1

Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA) into force in January, and renewed a pledge to boost trade to \$10 billion per annum.

Hun Sen made the remark on November 15 at a virtual meeting with his Chinese counterpart Li Keqiang to explore avenues to strengthen economic ties between the two countries.

Li vowed to push for joint mechanisms and work plans between the two sides to draw up and renegotiate quotas on the direct import of Cambodian milled rice and other agricultural goods to China.

At November 22's summit, Hun Sen encouraged ASEAN and China to continue to strengthen regional connectivity in line with the essence of the ASEAN-China Joint Statement on Synergising the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to optimise the flows of goods, services and people.

"At the same time, in addition to the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACTFA), ASEAN and China should further promote and place more emphasis on maximising the benefits of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership [RCEP] which will strengthen the foundation for long-term economic growth, and bring about mutual prosperity in line with the ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership Vision 2030," he added.

Bilateral trade between Cambodia and China reached nearly \$7.968 billion in the first nine months of 2021, increasing by more than 38.36 per cent year-on-year, the commerce ministry reported.

In January-September, Cambodia exported \$1.093 billion, up by more than 52.74 per cent year-on-year, and imported \$6.875 billion, surging by 36.32 per cent compared to the same period in 2020. This means that the Kingdom's trade deficit with China widened by 33.6 per cent over the period, from \$4.33 billion to \$5.78 billion. ■

\$88M made from Water Fest domestic trips

Hom Phanet

CAMBODIA reaped more than \$88 million from 1,147,359 domestic trips made from November 15-21 during the Water Festival holidays, in a positive sign of recovery for the tourism industry, clobbered by the Covid crisis for nearly two years.

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

be ready for harvest.

Ministry of Tourism spokesman Top Sopheak told *The Post* on November 22 that holidaymakers spent more on food, lodgings and other tourism amenities during the Water Festival than over the Pchum Ben fortnight in September-October, providing a substantial windfall for the private sector and workers at tourist attractions.

"Previously, a Cambodian tourist travelling for two nights and three days would pay \$50-80, whereas foreigners could splash out between \$90 and \$95 per day, accounting for food and accommodation," he said.

Citing research by the Cambodia Association of Travel Agents, Ho Vandy, an adviser to the association, said travellers who visit tourist resorts during major holidays – generally two or three days long – especially in top destinations such as the towns of Siem Reap, Sihanoukville and Kampot, can splurge as much as \$80-120 per person.

He opined that the fact "that local holidaymakers took lots of trips during the Water Festival inherently bodes well for attracting tourists to Cambodia".

The Ministry of Tourism reported that in November 15-21, 102,167 domestic trips

were made to the coastal province of Kampot in the Kingdom's southwest, an increasingly popular holiday choice.

This puts Kampot behind Phnom Penh (203,454) and the provinces of Preah Sihanouk (145,042) and Siem Reap (141,219), and ahead of Kep (92,538) and Pursat (75,578).

Kampot provincial Department of Tourism director Soy Sinol noted that the Teuk Chhou Resort ranked the top destination in the province with 30,000 visitors, followed by Bokor Mountain at 20,000.

While noting that no official figures on average tourist spending have been released,

Sinol offered an estimate of \$45-50 per trip made by his team.

He added that a study conducted by the department in 2017 found that 42 per cent of visitors to Kampot left the province on the same day.

Minister of Tourism Thong Khon said the heightened levels of domestic tourism for nearly a week have restored the trust and confidence of prospective travellers, and created significant economic flows into local communities and throughout the country, as tour operators latch on to opportunities for a more rapid recovery. ■

Bird's nest sector sours as export talks dawdle

Hom Phanet

LOCAL swiftlet nest industry players are showing more confidence that Cambodian edible bird's nests would thrive in international markets, amid an apparent rebound in investment in the commodity, even as talks with other countries for export requirements trudge along.

Edible bird's nest is made from the dried saliva of Southeast Asia's white-nest swiftlet (*Aerodramus fuciphagus*), and China is the largest market for the commodity.

Traditionally, the processed swiftlet nest is double boiled with rock sugar to make a delicacy known as "bird's nest soup", which is rich in nutrients and has a host of claimed health benefits, such as boosting a person's immune system and sex drive.

Cambodia has long pursued China as an export destination for the commodity, but as Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries director-general for Agriculture Ngin Chhay previously told *The Post*, Chinese authorities only consider a single product per country at a time to import.

This, combined with domestically-processed bird's nest generally falling short of local authorities' quality expectations, has dampened the prospects of official exports of the commodity in the near future, he said.

He noted that officials were in the process of preparing the required documents, but that the application for bird's nest would have to wait for negotiations on sanitary and phytosanitary issues to conclude for Pailin longan first, due to China's single-product approach.

The ministry has also floated proposals to the Chinese government for the direct export of peppercorn, durian and pomelos.

But Mean Neang, who has worked in a family edible bird's nest business for about two years, clings on to optimism that the commodity will gain wider access to international markets and that the project will pay off in the long run.

"In my book, formal exports to the international market would improve the market and there'd be more investors raising and processing edible bird's nests," she told *The Post* on November 21.

Nonetheless, Neang noted that the prices and sales of her product have not seen significant changes during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Try Nimol, the owner of a business that builds special structures to attract swiftlets to breed and make the valuable edible nests, recently told *The Post* that his team in January-October designed or built 50 such set-ups, large or small, up from 20 in full year 2020.

"The hunt for high-value market opportunities and Covid-19-induced business stagnation has drawn the attention of a number of resourceful people into investing in raising swiftlets," he said, adding that a set-up generally commands a price of at least \$10,000.

For the investment, Nimol recommends a house that measures at least 5m by 20m and costs \$35,000 at the minimum.

On the other hand, Cambodia Bird's Nest Federation president Nang Sothy said that Covid has blighted many investors' aspirations of get-



The hunt for high-value market opportunities and Covid-19-induced business stagnation has drawn the attention of a number of resourceful people into investing in raising swiftlets, says one industry player. SUPPLIED

ting into raising swiftlets to harvest their edible nests for direct export to China.

"For now, the market for swiftlet saliva is not showing any positive signs, due to the fact that there are no direct overseas buyers, even from China, which is a large market with considerable demand," he said.

Still, with lots of local operations in natural areas and away from industrial plant smoke, Sothy contended that Cambodia's bird nest is interna-

tionally recognised for its quality.

He said prices of the commodity have remained flat since end-2020, with uncleaned edible bird's nests currently worth \$500-800 per kilogramme and cleaned ones hovering in the \$1,800-\$3,500 range, depending on quality.

With at least 3,000 swiftlet homes in Cambodia, he said between 1,000kg and 1,500kg of the delicacy can be harvested per month in the Kingdom, of which about 30 per

cent is for domestic consumption.

The remaining 70 per cent is shipped abroad by traders, mostly in the form of informal exports to China, he said.

Federation of Malaysian Bird's Nest Merchants Association president Tok Teng Sai has said demand for the commodity has created a global market with annual revenue as high as \$5 billion, and Indonesia and Malaysia are the region's leading suppliers, Bloomberg reported in August 2013. ■

Jab drive uplifts manufacturing, ASEAN-Canada co-op prospects

Hom Phanet

MANUFACTURING activity has seen strong growth since November 1 when the government announced the reopening of all categories of businesses, an upturn that the commerce minister and industry players attribute to the success of the national Covid-19 vaccination campaign.

Cambodia Women Entrepreneurs Association (CWEA) president and Ly Ly Food Industry Co Ltd (Lyly Food) owner and CEO Keo Mom said the favourable effects of the jab drive coupled with the near-complete reopening of the economy has led to a steady pick-up in demand for domestic goods.

She told *The Post* on November 21 that Lyly Food has been up and running since Prime Minister Hun Sen lifted the coronavirus lockdown in the capital,

and that production was ramped up significantly following the recent launch of plans for a full economic reopening.

"As the number of new [Covid-19] infections and fatalities decline, and vaccination rates climb, businesses across the country are hoping to move forward and ride a new burst of momentum," Mom said.

At the virtual 10th ASEAN Economic Ministers- (AEM) Canada Consultations on November 17, Minister of Commerce and ASEAN Economic Minister for Cambodia Pan Sorasak shared that the Kingdom's Covid jab drive has seen promising gains as of late.

These positive outcomes prompted Cambodia to scrap quarantine requirements for all arrivals who are fully-vaccinated against the novel coronavirus, he said.

However, travellers must still

undergo an antigen rapid test and receive a negative result before they can gain entry into the Kingdom.

The consultations were co-chaired by Bruneian Second Minister of Finance and Economy Amin Liew Abdullah and Canadian Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development Mary Ng.

The event was attended by all ASEAN economic ministers, Canada-ASEAN Business Council (CABC) representatives, and the 10-nation bloc's secretary-general Lim Jock Hoi.

The CABC provided a series of recommendations on further work in promoting business and investment between ASEAN and Canada, the Ministry of Commerce reported.

Views were exchanged on the economic impact from Covid-19 as well as the cooperative action required to reduce the fallout on all peoples and places, address regional supply chain disruptions, and facilitate the flow of essential goods across borders, it said.

Participants highlighted the progress made on carrying out the 2021-2025 Work Plan to Implement the ASEAN-Canada Joint Declaration on Trade and Investment, and the current status of trade policy dialogue and capacity building initiatives under Canada's Expert Deployment Mechanism for Trade and Development (EDM), it added. ■



Ly Ly Food Industry Co Ltd (Lyly Food) significantly ramped up production following recent launch of plans for a full economic reopening, the CEO and owner says. LYL Y FOOD

ភ្នំពេញ ថ្ងៃទី ២៣ ខែ វិច្ឆិកា ឆ្នាំ ២០២១

The Phnom Penh Post

JOB ANNOUNCEMENT

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

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Business

Crypto bond-financed 'Bitcoin City' in pipeline for El Salvador

PRESIDENT Nayib Bukele said El Salvador plans to build the world's first "Bitcoin City", powered by a volcano and financed by cryptocurrency bonds.

Bitcoin City "is gonna include everything: residential areas, commercial areas, services, museums, entertainment ... airport, port, rail", Bukele said at the Latin American Bitcoin and Blockchain Conference on November 20.

El Salvador, which has used the US dollar for two decades, was the first country in the world to legalise bitcoin as legal tender.

Bukele said the Conchagua volcano "will power the whole city and will also power the mining".

Bitcoin mining is the process by which new bitcoin is created using computers that solve complex mathematical problems – a process which demands huge amounts of energy.

In El Salvador, some of that energy comes from a geothermal plant fed by the Tecapa volcano.

Bukele said the city would initially be powered by the Tecapa plant before his government builds a new geothermal plant powered by Conchagua.

"Zero CO2 emissions. This is a fully ecological city,"



President Nayib Bukele said El Salvador will build the world's first bitcoin city, powered by a volcano. AFP

Bukele told the crowd.

To fund the project, El Salvador will issue \$1 billion "bitcoin bonds" in 2022, according to Samson Mow, chief strategy officer of Blockstream, a blockchain tech provider.

On stage with Bukele, Mow

said half of "volcano bonds" would be invested in bitcoin, and the other half in infrastructure.

"El Salvador will be the financial centre of the world," Mow said.

Bukele said that Bitcoin City

will only charge value added tax (VAT).

"We will have zero income tax. Zero per cent forever. Zero capital gains tax ... zero property tax, zero payroll tax," he said.

No timeline was given for Bitcoin City's construction. AFP

In a first, Japan works on release of oil stores

JAPAN and the US will officially announce as early as this week the release of oil reserved for emergencies, according to an official related to the Japanese government.

Private-sector reserves have been released in the past, but this would be the first time for the government's stores to be released.

The aim is to prevent the prices of petroleum products, including petrol, from rising further by temporarily increasing the supply of oil to the market. However, the actual outcome is hard to predict.

The administration of US President Joe Biden had been quietly urging other countries, including Japan and South Korea, to make concerted efforts with Washington to release emergency stores of petroleum.

The Japanese government was initially cautious, as it has never released oil stored for emergencies in response to rising petroleum prices, but it ultimately changed tack.

There are at least two kinds of oil stockpiled for emergencies in Japan – oil owned and stockpiled by the state, and that stored by the private sector as required by law.

As of the end of September, the state's reserves were equivalent to the amount of oil consumed in the nation over 145 days. The private sector reserves were equivalent

to 90 days' consumption.

The Petroleum Reserve Law stipulates that the state should stockpile at least 90 days' worth of daily imports of crude oil, while the private sector must have at least 70 days' worth in reserve.

Both the government and the private sector currently have more than the required minimum. It has been suggested that the amount in excess of the target should be sold and supplied to the market.

Private sector stores were released during the Gulf War in 1991 and also when the situation in Libya deteriorated in 2011.

The Petroleum Reserve Law was revised in 2012, in response to the severe shortage of petrol that occurred in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake. The revision allowed the release of stockpiled oil at times of disaster, in addition to when there is a shortage of supply from overseas.

The average retail price of regular petrol in Japan stood at 168.9 yen (\$1.50) per litre as of November 15, the highest level in seven years.

Even if reserves are released, however, the amount is expected to be limited, making it uncertain how much this measure would hold down prices at the pump. THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN (JAPAN)/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

South Korea shares rise on memory chip rebound signs, metaverse technology wave

SHARES of South Korean semiconductor firms rose sharply on November 22 over market prospects on recovery of memory chip price on intensifying global race to adopt metaverse technology.

Memory chips are a critical component in the metaverse, in which users interact with each other in digital worlds, which could offset the bearish forecast for memory chip prices.

Samsung Electronics – the tech giant with interests in semiconductors, electronic devices and handsets – surged 5.2 per cent on November 22. Another memory chip giant, SK hynix, saw its share price rise 7.2 per cent.

The share price rebound led the bull run of the Korean stock market. The benchmark Kospi jumped 1.2 per cent to 3,013.25 points.

The combined market cap of Samsung Electronics and SK hynix – at over 534 trillion won (\$450 billion) – accounts for 24 per cent of the Kospi's total.

Samsung Electronics and SK hynix had fallen 14 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively, from January to November 19.

Analysts said the weakness in chipmakers' fundamentals from falling chip prices has already been priced in. Rather, the latest metaverse hype among investors could cause repricing of the shares.

"The projected memory chip price downturn that last until the first half of 2022 is no longer triggering a stock price drawdown, as long as we see no further factors to sap memory chip demand," Lee Seung-woo, an analyst at

Eugene Investment & Securities, wrote in a note to investors on November 22.

"Most of all, what is worth paying attention to is that memory chips constitute a core infrastructure of metaverse. Given the factor, memory chip-related stocks have been given excessively low value."

This is in line with the latest share price hike of US memory chip maker Micron Technology. On November 19, Micron stocks surged 8.4 per cent to \$83.52 apiece.

The Micron share upsurge is attributable to "an anticipation for a relief in supply bottleneck, as well as a market forecast that Microsoft and Meta Platforms would increase its expenditure to build servers for metaverse", noted Jeff Kim, an analyst at KB Securities, referring to the recently rebranded parent company of Facebook.

The views downplay investor concerns over DRAM oversupply, raising doubts about the sustainability of personal computers, handsets and cloud demand, coupled with buyers' high DRAM inventory.

Taiwan's market intelligence provider TrendForce has forecast a 15 per cent year-on-year decrease in DRAM average sales price for 2022, but at the same time hinted at a price rebound in the second half of 2022.

Samsung Electronics, SK hynix and Micron are the top three manufacturers of DRAM chips, with market shares of 44 per cent, 27.2 per cent and 22.9 per cent, respectively, in the third quarter, according to data compiled by TrendForce. THE KOREA HERALD/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



Vietnam's solar panel industry has avoided a US investigation against evasion of trade remedies. VIETNAM NEWS AGENCY

VN solar panels evade US probe

THE US Department of Commerce has recently announced it will not conduct an anti-tariff circumvention investigation against solar panels made in Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia at a request by a group of anonymous businesses called American Solar Manufacturers against Chinese Circumvention (A-SMACC), according to the Trade Remedies Authority of Vietnam (TRAV) under the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

According to the department, the companies' request to maintain confidentiality would prevent the agency from obtaining information it needed to evaluate the request, and hamper

interested parties from fully commenting on the requests for circumvention inquiries and hamper them from commenting on certain issues that could arise if the agency was to initiate circumvention inquiries.

Therefore, Vietnam's solar panel industry has avoided an investigation against evasion of trade remedies. However, solar panel products including photovoltaic cells and solar panels are still subject to safeguard measures by the US against all countries, including Vietnam from February 2018.

Data from the General Department of Customs show that, in the

first eight months of 2021, Vietnam exported more than \$2.9 billion of solar panels, including cells, panels and components, to the US.

The TRAV recommends solar panel manufacturers keep a close watch on the situation, information and next moves of relevant interest groups in manufacturing, exporting and consuming solar panels to take timely measures to respond to future trade remedies.

The agency will also monitor the export of this item to proactively provide information for businesses and handle arising problems. VIETNAM NEWS/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

World

Chinese tennis star Peng says she is 'safe': IOC

CHINESE tennis star Peng Shuai said "she is safe and well" during a video call with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) chief on November 21, the organisation claimed, amid international concern about her well-being after her explosive claims of sexual assault.

At the beginning of a 30-minute call with IOC president Thomas Bach, "Peng Shuai thanked the IOC for its concern about her well-being", the organisation said in a statement.

"She explained that she is safe and well, living at her home in Beijing, but would like to have her privacy respected at this time," it said. "That is why she prefers to spend her time with friends and family right now. Nevertheless, she will continue to be involved in tennis, the sport she loves so much."

Earlier on November 21, Peng was seen attending a Beijing tennis tournament, in official photos of the event, marking her first public appearance since she made her accusations against former vice-premier Zhang Gaoli, and they were scrubbed from the Chinese internet.

The 35-year-old two-time Grand Slam doubles champion alleged earlier this month that Zhang, now in his 70s, forced



International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach holds a video call with Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai. OLYMPIC INFORMATION SERVICE

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 reporters have released a flurry of footage purporting to show all is well with Peng.

A video from the Fila Kids Junior Tennis Challenger Finals event, tweeted by Hu Xijin, editor of state-run tabloid *Global Times*, shows Peng standing in a stadium among a group

of guests whose names are announced to a smattering of applause.

A *Global Times* reporter tweeted another video showing Peng signing autographs for children at what appears to be the same stadium before posing for photos with them.

Hu also posted two other videos on November 20, the first showing Peng walking into a restaurant wearing a coat, knit cap and face mask, and the second of a maskless Peng

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 chat appears to be staged. Peng appears relaxed in the footage, which appears

to have been taken with a mobile phone, but those with her are at pains to emphasise the date in somewhat stilted comments.

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 for her safety have mounted ever since.

The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) has threatened to end lucrative contracts with China unless it gets word of Peng's safety.

On the restaurant videos, 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."

A WTA spokeswoman later told AFP that November 21's images from the Beijing tournament still did not address their concerns.

IOC Athletes' Commission chair Emma Terho nevertheless said she was relieved after November 21's video call, in

which she took part.

"I was relieved to see that Peng Shuai was doing fine, which was our main concern," Terho said in the IOC statement.

"She appeared to be relaxed. I offered her our support and to stay in touch at any time of her convenience, which she obviously appreciated."

A growing chorus of voices in the sports world and beyond has been demanding answers about Peng's situation.

US President Joe Biden's press secretary said 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 release verifiable evidence, while France's foreign minister said she should be allowed to speak freely to clarify her situation.

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

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

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

Two of 17 Haiti kidnapping victims now free: aid group

TWO of the 17 North Americans who were abducted by a Haitian gang in mid-October have been freed, the church that they were affiliated with said on November 21, reporting that they were "in good spirits".

"Only limited information can be provided, but we are able to report that the two hostages who were released are safe, in good spirits, and being cared for," said US-based Christian Aid Ministries in a statement on its website.

The missionaries and family

members – a group of one Canadian and 16 US citizens – were abducted October 16 while returning from an orphanage in an area east of the capital Port-au-Prince controlled by one of Haiti's most powerful crime gangs.

Christian Aid Ministries has said the hostages are 12 adults aged 18 to 48, and five children ranging in age from eight months to 15 years.

"We cannot provide or confirm the names of those released, the reasons for their release, where they are from, or

their current location," the church said.

"While we rejoice at this release, our hearts are with the fifteen people who are still being held," it added.

The US has advised its citizens not to travel to Haiti, in particular due to kidnappings they say regularly target US nationals.

The kidnapers had been demanding a ransom of \$17 million for the group's release, security sources had told AFP. No details on the matter were provided by the

church on November 21.

Haiti's recent surge in kidnappings throws into sharp relief the increased domination of gangs over the country, something law enforcement agencies are unable to contain.

The Centre for Analysis and Research in Human Rights (CARDH) late last month said at least 782 people had been kidnapped for ransom since January in Haiti, almost as many as in the whole of 2020, which saw 796 kidnappings in total. AFP



People protest against Haiti's spike in kidnappings and a gang-aggravated fuel crisis in Port-au-Prince on Thursday. AFP

US, Australia, UK ink key deal in nuclear sub alliance



The three-way deal gives Australia US nuclear-powered submarine technology. US NAVY

AUSTRALIA on November 22 formally embarked on a hotly-contested programme to equip its navy with nuclear-powered submarines in a new defence alliance with Britain and the US.

Defence minister Peter Dutton joined US and British diplomats in signing an agreement allowing the exchange of sensitive "naval nuclear propulsion information" between their nations.

It is the first agreement on the technology to be publicly signed since the three countries announced in September the formation of a defence alliance, Aukus, to confront strategic

tensions in the Pacific where Sino-US rivalry is growing.

"The agreement will permit cooperation, which will further improve our mutual defence posture," US President Joe Biden said in a statement on November 19 ahead of Dutton's signing ceremony in Canberra with US charge d'affaires Michael Goldman and British High Commissioner (ambassador) Victoria Treadell.

Under the Aukus deal, Australia would obtain eight state-of-the-art, nuclear-powered submarines capable of stealthy, long-range missions. It also provides for sharing cyber, artificial intelligence, quantum and

unspecified undersea capabilities.

The agreement has angered China, which describes it as an "extremely irresponsible" threat to stability in the region.

It has also infuriated France, which discovered at the last moment that its own diesel-electric submarine contract with Australia – recently estimated to be worth A\$90 billion (US\$65 billion) – had been scrapped.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has been unapologetic about his handling of the agreement, insisting it was in his country's national interest and that he knew it would "ruffle some feathers". AFP

Jl shifts tactics, goes mainstream in Indonesia

INDONESIA'S counterterrorism agency has warned that Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) militants continue to sow the seeds of radicalism as the group infiltrates mainstream religious organisations, government institutions and national politics as a new tactic toward achieving its ideological goals.

Ahmad Nurwakhid, deputy for prevention at the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) said JI members were able to infiltrate government institutions and mainstream Islamic groups because of their remarkable ability to blend in.

"It's possible they [have tried to infiltrate] other religious organisations, even NGOs and biking groups," Nurwakhid told the *Jakarta Post* on November 20.

"This is part of their strategy change since Para Wijayanto took over the leadership. They used to focus on combatants, but now they have shifted to 'dakwah' [religious propagation] and politics," he said.

Jl was nearly dismantled by authorities after staging a bombing attack in 2002 that ripped through nightclubs on the holiday island of Bali, killing more than 200 people including scores of tourists in what remains the country's deadliest terror attack.

But the organisation – whose spiritual leader, Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, was released from prison this year after serving time on terror-related charges – has been rebuilding and is believed to have changed its strategy.

Last week the police arrested three people suspect-

ed of involvement with the group, which is affiliated to al-Qaeda.

Among the three arrested on November 16 was Ahmad Zain An-Naja, a top official at the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), the nation's powerful semi-official board of Muslim scholars. Ahmad Zaid sat on its fatwa commission.

The others arrested were Ahmad Farid Okbah, chairman of the little-known Indonesian People's Calling Party, and Anung Al-Hamat, a university lecturer.

"Zain and Farid were members of Jl's advisory council," Nurwakhid said. "Farid Okbah has spent time in Afghanistan at the behest of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir."

Zain, a graduate of the Ba'asyir-founded Al-Mukmin Islamic boarding school in Surakarta, Central Java, served as chairman of the sharia board of the Abdurrahman Bin Auf (BM ABA) charitable foundation which, according to police, raised funds for Jl.

The arrest of such a senior figure within the MUI – a quasi-state body that receives state funding and controls the country's halal-certification scheme – raises question over the extent to which Jl may have infiltrated mainstream Muslim groups.

Nurwakhid said the move was part of its long-term strategy to achieve the end goal of establishing an Islamic state.

"This is part of the Jl tactic called 'tamkin' [infiltration] and 'taqiyah' [the denial of one's belief, which is permissible in the face of persecution], so that when they are strong, they can change the organis-



Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, the spiritual leader of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), was released from prison in January after serving time on terror-related charges. THE JAKARTA POST

tion they entered properly," Nurwakhid said.

Ulil Abshar Abdalla, NU Muslim scholar, said that Jl would have a huge interest in asserting its influence among mainstream Muslims through the MUI.

"They could have leverage in influencing opinion among the Muslim community in Indonesia if they were able to alter the trajectory of the MUI."

MUI chairman Muhammad Cholil Nafis said Ahmad Zain had been suspended, and that

his alleged ties with terror networks were his "personal affair" and not connected to his role in the organisation.

"We support law enforcement and the eradication of terrorism in Indonesia. The MUI has issued a regulation against terrorism and formed a mitigation group. The person arrested has been deactivated from the fatwa commission," he told a press conference on November 17.

The organisation's Executive Board of the Counter-Extrem-

ism and Terrorism Agency (BET) has said it will conduct profiling of its prospective members in response to the arrest.

Former Jl operative Arif Budi Setyawan, who has since written a book that warns of the dangers of radicalisation, said that Jl had been considering achieving victory by participating in democratic activities.

"Farid is a very interesting phenomenon. His establishing of a party, which is alleged to be a place for Jl members to disseminate their ideas among the public, seems to be a safe option," Arif told the *Jakarta Post*.

Reports released by the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict revealed that Jl members were initially forbidden to take part in elections because democracy as a system was a violation of the faith, but in the end, even that ban was relaxed.

A senior researcher from the Centre for the Study of Radicalism and Deradicalisation (Pakar), Moh Adhe Bakti, noted that while Jl under Para emphasised "dakwah", it did not neglect jihad entirely.

He said they are preparing for a future military confrontation when needed. "They sent aid to Syria and Afghanistan and sent people there to build water facilities, but also sent their members to take part in military training there, under the pretext of charity."

Adhe said that factions within the group could resort to violence as recent arrests could be seen as the authorities' attempt to dismantle Jl's leadership successor.

"The danger of Jl is not when the leadership is solid, rather when there is no leadership. That's when it reaches a vulnerable point," he said. "History already shows that when the organisation was leaderless, splinter factions often arose."

Adhe was referring to when the Malaysia-born Noordin M Top, who was believed to be a bombmaker in Jl before he left the group in 2003 or 2004, took with him some of Jl's smartest young militants, to set up a more violent splinter network believed to be behind a string of bomb attacks in luxury hotels in Jakarta.

Another instance was when Immarudin, finance manager for Jl's human resource division, planned an attack, following Para's arrest in 2019, on mainland Chinese investments as well as on Chinese workers in Indonesia, in the hope that these attacks would make the Chinese government send its military to protect its investments, thereby antagonising the Muslim community and sparking a war.

Stanislaus Riyanta, a security researcher at the University of Indonesia, said that many of an estimated 2,000 Jl followers who took part in military training in Afghanistan had been active by joining social organisations.

"They are not a threat for now. But in the long term, when they have already infiltrated many elements of society and can alter the trajectory of organisations that they ride on, they will be dangerous and could threaten [to undermine] the government," he said. THE JAKARTA POST/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Group slams 'betrayal' as ICC halts Philippine probe

THE suspension by the International Criminal Court (ICC) of its probe of the drug war killings in the Philippines was an "absolute betrayal" for the individuals who had provided testimony against President Rodrigo Duterte's brutal war on drugs, a coalition of human rights defenders said on November 21.

According to the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP), the suspension only "rewards" Duterte and further victimises those who gave evidence in support of the ICC probe.

In a statement, ICHR chair Peter Mur-

phy said their organisation was extremely disappointed over the ICC's decision.

"Any suspension or delay is an absolute betrayal of those brave individuals who came forward at great personal risk to provide evidence and testimony regarding these alleged crimes," Murphy said.

ICC Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan earlier announced the suspension of the probe following a November 10 request by the Philippine government to defer the investigation.

In a letter to Khan, Philippine ambassador to the Netherlands Eduardo Malaya said the government was

already looking into the alleged extrajudicial killings and that the country's justice system was working.

Malaya said the Duterte administration had begun its review of 52 drug war cases.

But Murphy cited the first and second reports by Investigate PH – an international coalition of civil, political and legal organisations – "clearly showed the flaws and failure of the domestic remedies now claimed to be operating".

Murphy pointed out that Philippine courts were only able to convict two police officers for the 2017 murder of

17-year-old Kian delos Santos.

Delos Santos was among the over 6,000 people killed under Duterte's war on drugs.

Human rights groups claim that close to 30,000 people, mostly poor Filipinos, were killed.

Murphy said Investigate PH had presented forensic evidence refuting government claims that victims in the war on drugs were killed by police in self-defence.

"The ICC needs to restart its investigation of all the evidence it has before it and give justice to the tens of thou-

sands of Filipinos murdered at Duterte's repeated incitement," he said.

The ICHR, Murphy said, continues to have confidence in the impartiality of the ICC and urged the body to resume its probe of the drug war killings and other human rights violations in the Philippines.

"We reiterate that the ICC should heed the call of these families to fully investigate the Duterte administration for these crimes against humanity so that, finally, justice may be served and impunity ended," he said. PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Laos, China to foster development alongside railway

LAOS and China have agreed to set up a joint committee to further broaden trade and investment cooperation along the Laos-China economic corridor.

The move is part of the two Asian nations' desire to fulfil their goal to boost economic activity in areas through which the 426km Laos-China railway will pass after becoming operational on December 3.

A memorandum of understanding on economic collaboration was signed on November 19 during a virtual meeting between Deputy Prime Minister

and Minister of Planning and Investment Dr Sonexay Siphandone and He Lifeng, head of China's National Development and Reform Commission.

The meeting was attended by deputy ministers and other senior officials from both countries.

The two sides also signed an agreement to reaffirm and jointly support 32 cooperation projects aimed at boosting production capacity and investment.

During the talks, Dr Sonexay asked the Chinese side to provide more investment in large-scale infrastructure projects,

notably the construction of expressways under the Build-Operate-Transfer model, public-private partnerships, and other forms of investment.

Over the past two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has severely impacted the Lao economy, resulting in shrinking trade, investment and tourism.

However, economic cooperation between Laos and China, particularly the construction of mega projects such as the \$5.9 billion Laos-China railway, continues to make progress.

The two leaders agreed to

define specific ways to translate the Laos-China economic corridor development cooperation framework into practice.

China agreed to help Laos formulate action plans to boost trade, investment and tourism in areas close to the railway.

During the meeting, leaders reviewed cooperation agreements signed by the two countries in past years, notably an agreement to jointly further China's Belt and Road Initiative, and an agreement to develop the Laos-China economic corridor from 2019-2030.

They also agreed to push for cooperation in areas relating to the sharing of technical expertise.

Earlier this month, a meeting of Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) Politburo members and the LPRP Secretariat Committee agreed in principle to a 2019-2030 development plan alongside the Laos-China railway drawn up by the government.

However, LPRP leaders instructed the government bodies involved to revise the plan and make it more precise by defining proposed development sites in detail, and the areas to be

jointly developed with China.

Party leaders will be proactive in ensuring that Laos can fully tap the potential offered by the Laos-China railway.

Preparations for the official inauguration of the railway are going full steam ahead, with the opening ceremony set to coincide with National Day of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on December 2.

The event will begin with a religious ceremony on December 2 before the official opening ceremony the following day.

VIENTIANE TIMES/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Why is China's growth rate falling so fast?

Opinion

Shang-Jin Wei

IN EARLY 2021, the consensus forecast for Chinese GDP growth this year among 25 major global banks and other professional forecasters was 8.3 per cent. In contrast, the Chinese government's own growth target was around six per cent, lower than the best guesses of 24 out of the 25 institutional forecasters. Did the government know something that outsiders had missed? Did it plan to do something that it regards as desirable even though it might compromise growth?

More recently, international banks have revised down their full-year growth projections for China as the economy's expansion has slowed. Third-quarter growth was only 4.9 per cent year on year, down from 18.3 per cent and 7.9 per cent in the first two quarters, respectively. The high first-quarter year-on-year growth came in large part because of the negative growth in the first quarter of 2020 due to pandemic-induced lockdowns. The low third-quarter growth is raising concerns about the growth prospects in the fourth quarter and next year.

Some of the reduction in growth stems from China's zero-tolerance policy towards Covid-19, which calls for more frequent lockdowns than in most other countries. A spate of local Covid-19 outbreaks in the summer has triggered lockdowns or travel restrictions in multiple Chinese cities. These have not only reduced manufacturing output but also severely affected many service-sector jobs just as tourism was beginning to boom.

But the pandemic is not the only factor behind the slowdown. The government's green industrial policy, tighter regulation of the property sector, and blacklists of online platforms also have collectively curtailed growth.

Following its pledge to halt



A container ship docked at Kwai Chung container terminal in Hong Kong. AFP

the rise in China's carbon-dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve net zero by 2060, the government has forcefully and often abruptly reduced electricity generation in coal-fired power plants, sometimes by 20 per cent. The resulting power outages disrupted production at affected factories.

In addition, the "three red lines" policy, initiated in August 2020 and intensified this year, sets ceilings on property developers' debt-to-asset ratio, debt-to-equity ratio, and debt-to-cash ratio. Because many of these firms could not meet one or more of the red lines, and banks and capital markets are reluctant to provide new financing, they must sell assets, scale down operations, or both.

Evergrande may be the most prominent Chinese property developer to have run into financial trouble, but it is not the only one. Moreover, a real-estate downturn can easily spill over to industries such as steel, cement, and home furnishings and appliances.

Lastly, the authorities' decisions to blacklist online-edu-

cation companies, ratchet up antitrust enforcement, and enact a broadly worded data-protection law have helped to halve the stock prices of many listed digital-economy companies over the last 12 months. And falling equity valuations are merely the tip of the iceberg, as many digital firms and their suppliers have had to scale back their ambitions and plans. Hundreds of online-education providers have folded and laid off their employees.

The goals of the policies are sensible, but the manner of implementing them is exacerbating their economic costs. A zero-Covid strategy was arguably reasonable in the pre-vaccine stage of the pandemic, and helped China to achieve a positive economic growth rate last year. But as new variants continue to emerge, all countries will eventually have to learn to live with the coronavirus. Luckily, the cost of doing so is becoming more manageable as rates of vaccination and natural immunity rise.

If China is to use its strong implementation capacity, then pushing for universal Covid-19 vaccination would

seem well justified (as individuals who decline the jab may end up harming others). On the other hand, periodic lockdowns and border closures are highly disruptive to the economy and people's lives, and not a sustainable strategy in the pandemic's post-vaccine phase.

Regarding green industrial policy, power generation is the most carbon-intensive sector in China, accounting for about 40 per cent of the country's energy-consumption-based emissions. So, reducing reliance on coal-fired electricity makes a valuable contribution to national and global emissions-reduction efforts. But there are different ways to manage the change.

China's own experience with economic reforms suggests that using price signals and market forces tends to minimise the costs of structural change. In particular, raising China's carbon price to a sufficiently high level and announcing a predictable price path with a sufficient lead time could enable electricity producers and users to adjust and adapt better, thus helping them to

achieve the same amount of emissions reductions with much less foregone GDP growth. Such an approach would also be less disruptive for Chinese households, including many in the north-eastern part of the country who may be worried about heating and power supply as a cold winter arrives.

Likewise, while moderating speculative price increases in real estate is a desirable goal, constraining property development does not necessarily help to achieve it. Given that roughly 30 per cent of the Chinese economy rises or falls with the real estate and construction sectors, an alternative path could cushion the adjustment pains. For example, promoting more affordable housing for low-income families and migrants from rural areas could create offsetting demand for furniture, appliances, steel and cement.

Restricting after-school learning programmes can free up time for children to engage in activities that nurture creativity and athletic ability, and alleviate the financial burden for families that previously felt pressured to purchase online-education content for their children. So, there is a laudable social rationale for the new regulation. Its relatively sudden implementation, however, not only reduces online-education firms' profits, stock prices, and employment, but also highlights the risk of abrupt policy changes in other sectors, affecting broader investor sentiment.

China can restore investor confidence and return to its potential growth rate. To do that, the country will benefit from reforms affecting how new regulations and pandemic-control measures are debated, vetted, and implemented. THE KOREA HERALD/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Shang-Jin Wei, a former chief economist at the Asian Development Bank, is professor of finance and economics at Columbia Business School and Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs

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Lifestyle

Japanese experts craft 'super clone' of Afghan mural destroyed by Taliban

JAPANESE researchers have crafted a "super clone" of an Afghan mural destroyed by the Taliban, using a mix of traditional and digital techniques that they hope will salvage the work's "spirit" for future generations.

Not a single fragment remains of the seventh-century cave painting demolished in 2001 along with two massive Buddha statues and other artefacts in Afghanistan's Bamiyan valley, sparking global condemnation.

But a precise replica, the result of three years of state-of-the-art reproduction efforts, went on display at a museum in Tokyo in September and October, just weeks after the Taliban returned to power in Kabul.

The mural on the ceiling of a cave near the famous statues depicted a blue Bodhisattva – or someone on the path to becoming a Buddha.

At 6m long and 3m high, the intricate full-size copy has been dubbed a "super clone" by the reproduction team at Tokyo University of the Arts.

"We have succeeded in recreating a very precise representation in three dimensions," from its texture to the type of paint, said the team's co-leader Takashi Inoue.

Japan is a major donor to Afghanistan and has long been involved in heritage protection efforts at Bamiyan, a crossroads of ancient civilisations considered to be one of the birthplaces of Japanese Buddhism.

The team digitally processed more than 100 photographs taken by Japanese archaeologists of the mural before it was desecrated, to create a computerised model of its surface.

They then fed this data into a machine, which carved the exact shape into a styrofoam block.

To complete the replica, artists applied a traditional paint in a lapis lazuli shade similar to the one used for the original mural.

Through this process, "we can reproduce designs that are very close to the real ones again and again, to hand down their spirit to future generations", said Inoue, a professor special-



A replica of a cave painting of a blue Bodhisattva that was destroyed by the Taliban in 2001 is displayed at the Tokyo University of the Arts in Tokyo. AFP

ised in Eurasian cultural heritage.

"Let's stop vandalism. Let's preserve priceless culture – the heritage of mankind – together."

'Everything can be digitalised'

Days ahead of the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan in August, the Taliban overran Kabul, sparking fears of a return to their brutal reign of 1996 to 2001.

The new regime insists it wants to protect archaeological heritage from destruction.

For historian Kosaku Maeda, a co-leader of the Tokyo reproduction team, the "massively shocking" images of the giant Buddhas disappearing into clouds of dust are still a vivid memory.

"I was worried that such an act would be inflicted on the remains once again," said the 88-year-old, who has visited the valley repeatedly

for more than half a century.

But their work shows that vandalism is "meaningless" in the face of modern technology, as "everything can be digitalised", he said.

On a recent visit to Bamiyan by AFP journalists, Taliban gunmen stood guarding the rock cavities that once housed the two Buddha statues.

Construction work on a \$20-million UNESCO-backed cultural centre and museum was still under way in Bamiyan when the AFP team visited the area in October – although its planned inauguration this year was delayed by the Taliban takeover.

Maeda said his dream is to build a separate "peace museum" in the valley and, if possible, display the replica cave painting there.

"We can't put it back in its original place, but I want to bring it to Bamiyan as a historical legacy that local people can inherit," said Maeda, also



Kosaku Maeda, historian and director of the Japan Institute for the Study of the Cultures of Afghanistan, poses at the Tokyo University of the Arts in Tokyo. AFP

a member of UNESCO's committee for the safeguarding of Afghan cultural heritage.

"A nation stays alive when its cul-

ture stays alive," he added, reciting the message written on a banner hung at the entrance of the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul. AFP

Russian rescue dog gets four titanium prosthetic paws



Monika – an amputee dog with four artificial limbs – at a veterinary clinic in Novosibirsk on Friday. AFP

MONIKA the Russian rescue dog is ready for her new life after she was fitted with four prosthetic titanium paws in a pricey and complex operation paid for by a crowd-funding campaign.

Two weeks after the procedure, the small beige pooch is still weak and tired, but she's back on her feet again.

"Luck and experience played its part," said Sergei Gorshkov, the vet who completed the challenging op.

The 33-year-old from the Siberian city of Novosibirsk has fitted artificial limbs on more than 30 furry patients, including a quadruple transplant on a cat.

But this was the first time he had tried the operation on a dog.

Monika had travelled far for this life-changing surgery. She was found by volunteers in a forest near Krasnodar, a city in southern Russia 4,000 kilometres (2,485 miles) from Gorshkov's clinic.

Her four legs were bloody stumps.

"Nobody really knows what happened to her. Some volunteers think that somebody cut her paws off out of cruelty," Gorshkov told AFP.

Monika – estimated to be between two and four years old – could have suffered the fate of thousands of stray dogs that are found injured: put down or just left to die.

Luckily, she ended up in the caring hands of Alla Leonkina, a volunteer from Krasnodar.

Leonkina said that for almost a year

she and a friend took care of Monika, who was in a "terrible state".

While looking after Monika, she heard about Gorshkov's clinic and launched an online campaign to fund the surgery.

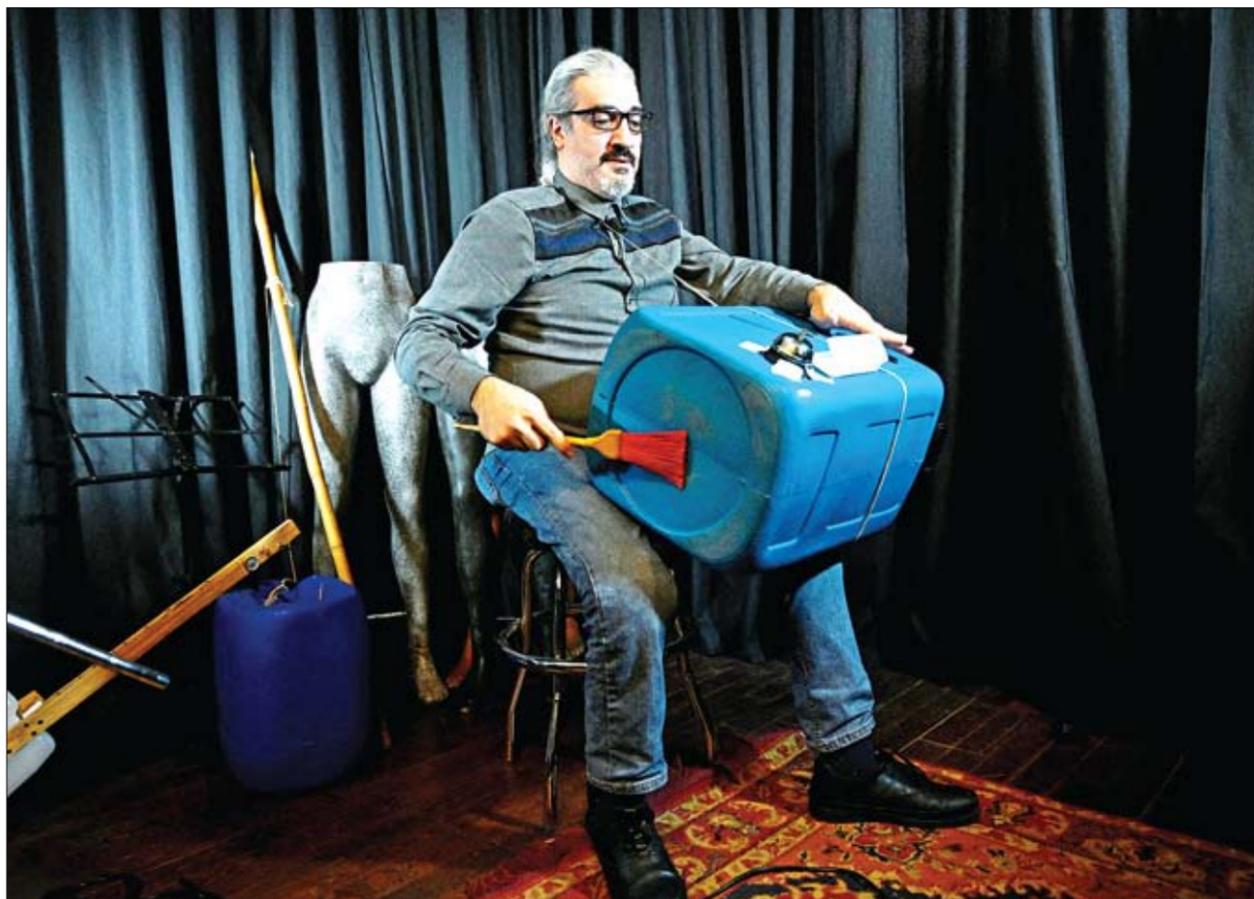
Within a month, they had 400,000 rubles (\$5,400, 4,800 euros) – a large sum for Russia.

Leonkina said that Monika flew to Siberia sitting next to her on the plane.

The campaign also financed the prosthetic titanium legs that were made using a 3D printer.

Gorshkov said that Monika's bones will grow and adapt to the artificial limbs "like antlers on a deer".

And once she's recovered, Monika will be able to walk into her new home. AFP



Fungistanbul band member Herman Artuc plays one of his instruments made with a discarded cannister in Istanbul on November 8. AFP

‘Trash music’: Turkish band recycles rubbish into sounds

AN EMPTY can, the base of a lamp and string: what sound like rubbish to some are music to the ears of a Turkish band that turns waste into instruments to promote recycling.

Fungistanbul, a trio that began experimenting with a sound they call “Trash Oriental” in 2019, have joined a growing global movement of groups that bang, strum and blow into things they find in dustbins.

“We had no idea we would come up with this sound when we first started,” band member Roni Aran admitted in the group’s studio, tucked away in a grimy part of Istanbul filled with auto repair shops.

“We were all surprised with the result, and so was the audience.”

Fungistanbul’s emergence on the local music scene coincides with a steady rise in the environment’s importance to Turkish voters – especially the young, where it ranks next to the economy in importance

in opinion polls.

The vast country was ravaged by wildfires, flash floods and other deadly disasters this year, heaping pressure on President Recep Tayyip Erdogan less than two years before the next scheduled election.

Aran and his two middle-aged friends, who are all professional musicians, say they are promoting “up-cycling” – the process of adding value to old items that would otherwise have been thrown away.

“I found this near a garbage dump,” Aran said, showing off a large plastic can with a grin. “Luckily, it was clean.”

Playing an eclectic mix of melodic folk music, the three friends say it takes thought and effort to turn pieces of scrap into reliable instruments with consistent sounds.

They include a “can drum” made from a large plastic container on to which they attached a glasses case and a bell whose sound is sometimes enhanced using a small brush.

“No matter how primitive it

may sound, there’s technology behind all these instruments,” Aran said.

Rolling disasters

The focus on garbage is especially poignant in a city that last summer saw a thick layer of muck – dubbed “sea snot” – cover patches of the Sea of Marmara on Istanbul’s southern shores.

Scientists blamed the slime on a combination of factors, including years of improper disposal of industrial waste.

The mucilage took months to Hoover up with hoses placed along the surface of the sea.

But while fishermen and beachgoers were complaining about the mess, much of the country’s attention shifted to a rapid series of floods and fires that killed around 100 people across Turkey’s northern and southern coasts.

The conflation of disasters forced Erdogan’s government to end a more than five-year wait and finally force the Paris climate agreement through

parliament last month.

Now, Turks must hold their government to account and “make sure the agreements it signs up to do not remain on paper alone”, fellow band member Herman Artuc said.

“Global warming, marine pollution ... all these catastrophes remind us we urgently need a solution before we reach a point of no return,” Artuc said.

Higher purpose

A percussionist who specialises in Latin jazz, Artuc bangs on discarded plastic mannequins to produce various thumping sounds for Fungistanbul.

“They turned into a multi-percussion instrument after adding some artistic flair,” he said of his mannequins.

The band have two music videos in their “Trash Oriental” series and are working on a third, this one involving scrap metal.

Fungistanbul follow in the steps of groups such as Latin Latas (Latin Cans), formed in Colombia a decade ago who now have an international following and a strong social media presence.

The Turkish trio are still novices by comparison.

“We had to question ourselves,” Artuc said. “It took time before we could go on stage and really play these instruments.”

The band still suffers an occasional mishap on stage, although their fans usually take it in stride.

“The instruments sometimes fall out of tune in the middle of a concert,” Aran said.

“But you can lift the mood by saying ‘hold on, I will retune,’ and the audience will tolerate it knowing that the instruments are serving a more important purpose.” AFP

11-year-old tattooist just follows father’s footsteps

BRANDON Burgos carefully tattoos a customer’s arm in his father’s studio in Mexico. He’s only 11 years old, but the schoolboy already has around 30 creations to his name.

He is following in the footsteps of his father, who says his son has a natural talent.

His small hands covered by latex gloves, Brandon uses a tattoo machine under his father’s supervision in his small studio in the central city of Puebla.

He inks the image of an Egyptian cat’s face before carefully cleansing the skin.

Brandon is in the last year of elementary school, and while he dreams of being a sailor, his second choice is tattoo artist, he says with a smile.

He first put ink to skin just a year ago, drawing a skull on his father.

“I started helping my dad, watching videos, and there’s a book that’s a tattoo course so I started reading it,” he says.

After his father came uncles and friends who let Brandon hone his skills on them.

“Now more people ask me to tattoo them and, of course, they’re giving me confidence and I appreciate it,” says Brandon.

He no longer feels as nervous as he did when he first tattooed his father. He has even been invited to participate in his first exhibition, in Tepito, a rough neighborhood in Mexico City.

His father Jose Burgos, who has been a tattoo artist for seven years, says it was Brandon’s own choice to learn about his trade.

“He liked drawing from the age of six, but with the pandemic he got more involved. The only condition is that he gets good school grades,” he says.

Before tattooing people, Brandon practiced on synthetic silicone skin and fruit.

Now he has no shortage of human canvases.

“He’s done about 30 tattoos and everyone’s satisfied,” his father says.

“I never imagined that my son would tattoo me. He has a good hand, very light,” he adds. AFP



Brandon Burgos tattoos a person in the city of Puebla, Mexico, on November 10. AFP

Indian man alive after all nighter in morgue freezer

AN INDIAN man declared dead after a road accident shocked his relatives when they found him still breathing despite a night in the freezer of a hospital morgue.

Sriekesh Kumar was rushed to a clinic in a critical condition after he was hit by a motorbike in Moradabad, east of the capital New Delhi.

He was transported to a private medical facility where he was declared dead on arrival by the doctor, and then transported to a government hospital for post-mortem on Friday.

“The emergency medical officer examined him. He did not find any signs of life and hence declared him dead,”

Rajendra Kumar, the hospital’s medical superintendent, told AFP on Sunday.

The doctor said police were informed and the body was placed in the morgue freezer until his family arrived six hours later.

“When a police team and his family came over to initiate the paperwork for the autopsy, he was found alive,” he added.

Rajendra Kumar said the 45-year-old was undergoing further treatment but was still in a coma.

“This is nothing short of a miracle,” he added.

An investigation was under way to determine how the doctors mistakenly declared him dead. AFP



An empty can, an old lamp and some string sounds like rubbish to some people but it’s music to the ears of a Turkish band that turns waste into instruments to promote recycling. AFP



Staff working in the mortuary of Osmania Hospital in Hyderabad, India. An Indian man declared dead after a road accident was still breathing despite a night in the freezer in the hospital morgue. AFP

Lifestyle



From the rubble of Iraq's war-ravaged Mosul arises the strange sight of androids gliding back and forth in a restaurant serving the amused clientele. AFP

Robot waiters serve Iraq's Mosul taste of the future

FROM the rubble of Iraq's war-ravaged city of Mosul arises the sight of androids gliding back and forth in a restaurant to serve their amused clientele.

"Welcome", "We wish you a good time in our restaurant", "We would be happy to have your opinion on the quality of the service", chime the automated attendants, red eyes blinking out of their shiny blue and white exteriors.

"On television, you see robots and touch-screen tables in the United Arab Emirates, Spain and Japan," said Rami Chkib Abdelrahman, proud owner of the White Fox which opened in June.

"I'm trying to bring these ideas here to Mosul." The futuristic servers are the result of technology developed in the northern city, erstwhile stronghold of the Islamic State jihadist group.

"We saw the concept on social media in more than one restaurant," said Abdelrahman, a dentist by profession.

Voyage to space

Occupied by IS between 2014 and 2017, the northern metropolis of Mosul still bears the scars of war.

But at dinnertime, patrons of the restaurant that is packed every night can escape from the city on a voyage through space.

An astronaut floating across the muralled wall sets the

scene and views of Earth and other planets as seen from space give customers the sense of peering out through the portholes of a spaceship.

The ceilings are speckled with glowing constellations.

But the star attractions remain the two androids, sporting a scarf and black beret, shuttling back and forth across the restaurant on rails to deliver orders.

As they approach, smartphones come out and children promptly line up next to them for a souvenir snapshot.

Time for a selfie

The robots are imported, Abdelrahman explained without giving the source, adding that everything in the restaurant is digital, including the 15 touch-screen

tables with built-in menus.

A team from the University of Mosul's department of mechatronics – integrating several fields of engineering as well as robotics – was in charge of programming and connected a network and server to the restaurant.

Humans have not been completely replaced by machines.

Four young waiters are busy picking up the dishes from the robots' trays and placing them on the tables.

Having dinner with his wife, Bashar Mahmud was won over. He took a selfie, smiling broadly.

"I've travelled abroad and I've never seen anything like this, not in Turkey, Jordan or Saudi Arabia," exclaimed the 50-year-old blacksmith with a salt-and-pepper beard. AFP



A view of the exterior of the White Fox Cafe, which uses robot waiters. It is located in the eastern part of Iraq's northern city of Mosul. AFP

Thinking caps

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

"LITTLE SHOT"

ACROSS

- 1 "Little Women" woman
- 5 Rabbits' relatives
- 10 Irving Bacheller's "___ Holden"
- 14 Song for a diva
- 15 Japan's "City of Water"
- 16 Herr's wife
- 17 CBS reality show
- 19 Like some inaccurate watches
- 20 Reaches a goal
- 21 Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, e.g.
- 23 Venomous snake
- 24 Saturn features
- 25 Former Mideast grp.
- 26 Sweet snack
- 29 Cornered, as a hunted animal
- 32 Billionaire Bill
- 33 Chicken ___ king
- 34 Billy the "Piano Man"
- 35 Smokes meat
- 36 Quick cut
- 37 Not fore
- 38 Drops, as pounds
- 39 West Point student
- 40 Showing no mercy
- 42 La Brea ___ Pits

DOWN

- 1 Children's book elephant
- 2 Writer Jong
- 3 Too small
- 4 Customary
- 5 Thirty-first president
- 6 Michaelmas daisy
- 7 Part of a cheerleader's routine
- 8 Barely manage (with "out")
- 9 Canned fish
- 10 Protest dummy
- 11 Parade favorite
- 12 One of the coasts

- 13 Filberts, e.g.
- 18 Type of race
- 22 Justifiers of means
- 24 Is important
- 26 Greeting or playing items
- 27 "That's ___ and you know it!"
- 28 Spellbound
- 29 Partially open
- 30 Protein source for vegetarians
- 31 Classic cartoon character
- 32 Surmise
- 35 Second order of angels
- 36 Site of a pivotal 1777 battle
- 38 Speak thickly
- 39 Imitation chocolate
- 41 Rough, as a voice
- 42 Tucker and Roberts
- 44 Loud, in music
- 45 Word with "blood" or "organ"
- 46 "The Giant" of wrestling fame
- 47 Toady's responses
- 48 Type of opera
- 49 Useful word-processing feature for newbies
- 50 Old TV's talking horse
- 53 Gettysburg Address word

Sudoku Pacific

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

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Monday's solution

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

Monday's solution

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

Evicted villagers pay the price for MotoGP's Indonesia return

THE holiday island of Lombok welcomed thousands of fans on Sunday for Indonesia's first superbike race on a new circuit that is part of a mega tourism infrastructure project denounced by the UN over the eviction of local families.

With a population of more than 270 million people, many of whom get around on two wheels, Indonesia has one of the world's biggest communities of bike-race fans.

But the archipelago had not hosted a major race since 1997.

Several villages have been relocated voluntarily or by force for construction of the new Mandalika circuit. But around 40 families – along with their cattle and dogs – are still holding out in the centre of the track despite intimidation to cede their land.

Environmentalists also question the wisdom of hosting large-scale events on an island under threat from natural disasters.

The superbike spectacle on the 4.3km circuit on Sunday was a prelude to a MotoGP race – the top tier of the motorcycle Grand Prix – to be held on the island in March 2022.

"I am here to watch World Superbike. It is very cool and I almost could not believe [Indonesia has this circuit] ... The event will help the economy here," said Rini Yuniarti, a fan from Bali.

The government hopes to create thousands of jobs and attract up to two million foreign tourists a year with the circuit complex, which covers more than a thousand hectares bordered by white-sand beaches.

But the gleaming new project has been the subject of bitter conflict between authorities and local residents.

Near one village in the area the houses have been abandoned and a metal sign reads: "This land belongs to the state."

But Abdul Latif, 36, and his four children have so far stayed behind because they have not received any compensation for leaving.

"Life is difficult here now ... Access is very restricted," he said. "We play cat-and-mouse with security personnel guarding the area."

Another villager, 54-year-old Abdul Kadir, said young people struggled to get to school because they were blocked by security.

"We have to go through a tunnel to go to school," said her 10-year-old daughter. "I would like to go to school easily like before."

Making matters worse, local wells have run dry for six months since tunnels were



Turkey's Yamaha rider Toprak Razgatlioglu celebrates winning the world championship during the World Superbike Championship at the Mandalika International Circuit in Kuta Mandalika, in central Lombok, Indonesia, on Sunday. AFP

built under the circuit, leaving residents without water.

UN experts in March called on the Indonesian government and the companies involved in the project "to respect human rights".

Special rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty Olivier De Schutter said the project had seen "complaints about land grabbing, evictions of indigenous communities in the Sasak ethnic group and intimidation and threats against defenders of local populations".

Several international companies previously associated with the \$3 billion-dollar project denied still being a part of it, including construction giant Vinci and holiday operator Club Med.

The Accor group operates a Novotel on the site and is building a Pullman hotel.

The company told AFP it did not own the land or the hotel but would manage it on behalf of the Indonesian public company Indonesia Development Tourism Corporation.

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which is due to contribute \$250 million to the project, said it had carried out a study and did not identify any human rights violations.

'Just the start'

Lombok is one of 10 new locations that Indonesian authorities want to develop into tourism destinations in the same vein as Bali.

The impoverished island has struggled to rebuild since a major earthquake struck in 2018, killing more than 500 people.

For most locals, tickets to the motorbike races are too expensive and many have to settle for watching from a hill overlooking the circuit.

But authorities are hopeful the venture will suck in investment.

Superbike and MotoGP events represent "one of the best ways to attract visitors and for significant investments to be made in our region", said Zulkieflimansyah, governor of West Nusa Tenggara province, of which Lombok is a part.

"This international road circuit will be just the start."

Asked about the accusations of human rights violations, Zulkieflimansyah -- who like many Indonesians goes by one name -- said he was "very optimistic" that the disputes would be settled to the satisfaction of investors and the local community.

Maharani, an environmental activist with NGO the Lombok Research Centre, said the risks from earthquakes and tsunamis were a worry.

"A landslide could directly come down to hit and cover the circuit area. In the case of a tsunami the circuit could become a water pit," he said.

Abdul Latif, stuck in the centre of the circuit clinging to his home, had no desire to watch the race.

"I feel abandoned and isolated," he said. "Like a bird in a cage." AFP

History on the line as fourth AFC Champions League crown beckons

AL HILAL face Pohang Steelers in the AFC Champions League final in Riyadh on Tuesday with both teams looking to be the first to lift Asian club football's biggest prize four times.

But South Korea's Steelers will have to overcome fervent home support with an expected 68,000 Al Hilal fans packing out the King Fahd Stadium after Covid crowd restrictions were lifted.

Managed by the Portuguese Leonardo Jardim, Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia will be looking for their second Champions League crown in three seasons to add to their 1991 and 2000 victories.

Standing in their way are three-time continental champions Pohang Steelers, who reached the final for the first time since 2009 by knocking out the defending champions Ulsan.

Kim Gi-dong's side recovered from a goal down to prevail in a penalty shoot-out in a Korean east coast derby.

Manager Kim is looking for a second Champions League title with Pohang -- he was a player when they claimed a then-unprecedented third Champions League in 2009 to add to back-to-back wins in 1997 and 1998.

The magnitude of the occasion is not lost on Pohang defender Alex Grant.

"There's photos up on the wall of past Pohang teams lifting the AFC Champions League," the former Australia youth international told the Asian Football Confederation official website.

"I knew they were a big club in terms of the AFC Champions League and their success in Korea," added Grant, who was signed from

Perth Glory 11 months ago.

"You do have that sense around the club that we're expected to do well in this competition.

"There's belief there that other Pohang teams have done well so there's no reason why we can't as well."

Pohang will start as underdogs against an Al Hilal side packed with talent -- eight of their players feature in the Saudi Arabia team who top their World Cup qualifying group and recently drew 0-0 in Australia.

They also boast well-travelled striker Bafetimbi Gomis, who played in the English Premier League for Swansea City and has 12 caps for France.

Gomis has already tasted Champions League success, scoring the final goal to cap a 3-0 aggregate victory in the last two-legged final, against Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds in 2019.

The final this time is only one leg.

"We'll lap it up," Grant said of the hostile reception promised by an expected capacity crowd in Riyadh.

It's a far cry from last season's Champions League knockout-stage matches -- played behind closed doors at centralised venues in Qatar because of the coronavirus pandemic, with Ulsan FC beating Iran's Persepolis 2-1 in the final.

"What an experience. If we win we'll deserve it -- but to sweep it from under their grasp would be great," said Grant.

"I can't wait, just to play in front of a fully packed stadium, especially with how things have been the last two years with Covid." AFP



Members of Saudi's Al-Hilal celebrate following their 2-0 victory in the second leg of the AFC Champions League final football match against Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds on November 24, 2019. AFP

India rout New Zealand by 73 runs to sweep T20 series

INDIA'S Rohit Sharma and Axar Patel starred in Kolkata Sunday as the hosts routed World Cup runners-up New

Zealand by 73 runs to make a clean-sweep of the T20 series.

Spinner Patel triggered the

New Zealand batting collapse in the third over with two wickets to push the steep 185 to win target beyond their reach.

Opener Daryl Mitchell and Mark Chapman were two of Patel's victims in an impressive career-best T20 international return of 3-9 which earned him the player of the match award.

India, playing under their new coach Rahul Dravid and the new T20 captain Sharma, won the three-match series in Ranchi on Friday.

Martin Gupthill was the only Kiwi batsman to put up a fight scoring 51 off 36 balls before falling to leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal.

Chahal, making his international comeback, had a forget-

table start but, after two expensive overs, found his groove in the third with Gupthill's wicket to finish with respectable 1-26.

Both teams rested several regular players for the series that began only three days after the Black Caps lost in the T20 World Cup final in Dubai.

Seamer Harshal Patel, who made it to the national team after a breakthrough IPL (Indian Premier League) season, impressed with 2-26.

Earlier Patel also came to India's rescue with a late order cameo scoring 18 off 11 along with Chahal who smashed 21 off eight.

Sharma top-scored for India, clubbing 56 off 31 as the hosts posted 184-7. He was also named player of the

series for scoring 159 runs in the three games.

Indian rookies impress

"Harshal did well the last two games, and the spinners did the job for us in the entire series. (Ravichandran) Ashwin, Axar, and then Chahal bowling after a long period of time," Sharma said.

"Venkatesh bowling those overs with the skill he has can be useful going forward," he added.

Rookie all-rounder Venkatesh Iyer, also an IPL breakout star, impressed with 1-12 in his first outing as a bowler for India.

The stand-in skipper for New Zealand Mitchell Santner was his team's most impressive bowler with 3-27.

Santner said that the Kiwis

found it "challenging to bowl with dew" in the second innings but saw the series as "an opportunity to see different guys in different roles."

Sharma had announced two changes for the hosts with Ashwin and KL Rahul making way for Ishan Kishan and Chahal.

Test skipper Virat Kohli opted out of the series and will also miss the first of two Tests against New Zealand.

The two teams will now head to northern India's Kanpur city for the first Test this week. Dravid said that it was "nice to start well" after his first series win as India coach.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson, who opted out of the India T20s, will return to lead the team in Kanpur. AFP



India's Rohit Sharma plays a shot during the third Twenty20 International cricket match against New Zealand on Sunday. AFP

Sport

Pumas coach says 'bubble' life has been a big struggle

ARGENTINA coach Mario Ledesma lamented two years of "bubble" life but insisted that was not an excuse for the Pumas' poor results this year, which culminated in a 53-7 whipping by Ireland on Sunday.

Argentina, who have not been able to play on home soil since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic two years ago, have lost eight of their last nine Tests – their sole win came against Italy earlier this month.

Their record defeat against the Irish brought down the curtain on four months of the players being together, first in the Rugby Championship and then on their northern hemisphere tour.

Ledesma said the past two years have been trying for all those involved in Argentinian rugby at the top level and the results reflected that – the one bright shining beacon an historic win over New Zealand in 2020.

"Obviously not playing at home for two years has been tough because we have been in a bubble everywhere we have gone," Ledesma said at his post-match press conference.

"Sometimes we have a day off where we can go sightseeing but just for a picture and then we go back."

The squad is renowned for being a tight unit but 48-year-old Ledesma said they still could have done with some time with their families.

"It's been really hard on the players and we don't have the budget to bring the families like some other teams do, so it has been tough and they have been grinding the whole year," he said.

"It is a big ask for players. We are always talking about player welfare and mental health and then you go two years without playing at home and being in a bubble ... I challenge any team to do that. It would be a struggle."

Ledesma, who won 84 caps as a player, insisted however that those drawbacks were not solely responsible for the poor run, especially Sunday's defeat in Dublin which saw Tomas Lavanini sent off as the Irish ran in seven tries.

"It is not an excuse," he said. "These are the conditions we are playing in and we have not been getting the results."

"We expected a different result today and thought that up until today we had a pretty good tour."

"A very good game against France [they lost 29-20], winning convincingly against Italy and then coming into this game with three weeks of work. Obviously we expected different for today's game." AFP

Tottenham's fightback gives Conte lift-off, Man City sweep aside Everton

TOTTENHAM needed a second-half fightback to launch Antonio Conte's reign in charge with a 2-1 win over Leeds, while Manchester City swept aside Everton 3-0 on Sunday to go second in the Premier League.

A severely depleted Leeds remain just two points above the relegation zone after threatening to spoil Conte's first home league game since he replaced Nuno Espirito Santo.

Tottenham had not even managed a shot on target in their previous two league matches and there was little change for the first 45 minutes.

Even without key men Raphinha and Patrick Bamford, a youthful Leeds were well worth their 1-0 half-time lead thanks to Daniel James' first goal for the club.

Harry Kane scored back-to-back hat-tricks for England during the international break, but has still netted just once in the Premier League this season.

Kane was denied in a one-on-one with Illan Meslier and Son Heung-min's deflected shot came off the bar as Spurs improved after the break.

But the goals came from unfamiliar sources as Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg's scuffed shot found the bottom corner to level just before the hour-mark.

Sergio Reguilon then grabbed the winner with his first Spurs goal after Eric Dier's deflected free-kick came back off the post.

A first win in four league games takes Tottenham above Manchester United, who sacked Ole Gunnar Solskjaer on Sunday, up to seventh in the table and within four points of the top four.

"This is a point to start. I say this to my players, they need to understand if we want it, we can do it," said Conte, who highlighted the change in his side's intensity after half-time.

"In the second half we changed something tactically and also we wanted to play with the same intensity



Leeds United's Northern Irish midfielder Stuart Dallas (left) vies with Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane (right) during the English Premier League football match on Sunday. AFP

as Leeds, higher up the pitch."

City cruise

City were far more convincing winners as goals from Raheem Sterling, Rodri and Bernardo Silva saw off Everton at the Etihad to cut Chelsea's lead at the top of the table to three points.

"In general we controlled the game," said City boss Pep Guardiola. "We played the game we should play to beat teams like Everton."

Sterling netted on his 300th Premier League appearance as he turned home

Joao Cancelo's sensational pass with the outside of his right foot for his 98th goal in the English top flight.

Without the presence of Dominic Calvert-Lewin up front, Everton rarely threatened.

Rafael Benitez's men have now taken just two points from the last 18 on offer in the Premier League to drop into the bottom half of the table and just six points clear of the relegation zone.

Rodri's stunning long-range drive into the top corner 10 minutes after the break ended the game as a contest.

City were then content to cruise for the final half-hour with one eye on Wednesday's Champions League clash with Paris Saint-Germain.

Sterling should have slotted home his second of the afternoon from Riyad Mahrez's inviting cross, but was instead denied by international teammate Jordan Pickford as he tried to round the goalkeeper.

City did get a deserved third five minutes from time when Silva followed up after Cole Palmer's shot was blocked. AFP

Solskjaer says he leaves United in 'better state'

OLE Gunnar Solskjaer said he hopes to have left Manchester United in a better state than he inherited them three years ago after the Norwegian was sacked by the club on Sunday.

A 4-1 thrashing at the hands of lowly Watford finally saw the

axe fall on Solskjaer's position after the club's hierarchy kept faith with the 48-year-old in recent weeks despite humiliating home defeats to rivals Liverpool and Manchester City.

"This club means everything to me and together we're a good

match, but unfortunately I couldn't get the results we needed and it's time for me to step aside," Solskjaer said in an interview with United's in-house media.

"You know what this club means to me and what I wanted to achieve here. For the club, for the fans, for the players, for the staff. I wanted us to take the next step to challenge for the league, to win trophies."

Solskjaer was handed the job on an interim basis in December 2018 thanks to his legendary status at the club after scoring the winning goal in the 1999 Champions League final to complete a historic treble.

After winning 14 of his first 19 matches, he was then handed the job on a permanent deal.

Two seasons of steady progress saw United finish in the Premier League top four in back-to-back seasons for the first time since Alex Ferguson retired as boss in 2013.

But silverware escaped Solskjaer as he lost four cup semi-finals and last season's Europa League final in a marathon penalty shootout to Villarreal.

Expectations were high of a Premier League title challenge this season after the signings of Cristiano Ronaldo, Jadon Sancho and Raphael Varane in the transfer window.

But United have lost five of their last seven league games to fall 12 points behind leaders Chelsea.

"I want to thank the board and the owners for giving me the opportunity because it's not for everyone and I've had the opportunity," added Solskjaer.

"I'm so honoured and privileged to have been trusted to take the club forward, and I really hope that I leave it in a better state than when I came."

"I think there is potential in this club. We all love the club, and we all want to see it continue."

Former United midfielder

Michael Carrick, who was part of Solskjaer's coaching staff, will take charge of Tuesday's crucial Champions League clash against Villarreal.

Solskjaer said he had spoken to the players on Sunday to encourage them to prove they are better than they have showed in recent weeks in Spain.

"As I've said to them this morning as well, trust yourselves, you know we're better than this," he added.

"We've not been able to show it but go out, chest out, enjoy being a Man United player, in the Champions League, on the biggest stage. If and when you win the game, you're through to the next round."

"Michael is going to be in charge. Michael, I have the utmost respect, I love Michael to bits. I'm becoming emotional now because he's top. They'll be fine. I'll watch them and support them." AFP



Manchester United's Norwegian manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer gestures at the end of the UEFA Champions League Group F match against Young Boys on September 14. AFP