



## OMICRON STRAIN NO REASON TO PANIC, AFFIRMS HEALTH MINISTRY

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# Mineral non-tax revenue 96% of goal

Hin Pisei

CAMBODIA generated 98.460 billion riel (\$24.21 million) in non-tax revenue from the mining sector in the first nine months of this year, up by 27.06 per cent year-on-year from 77.48924 billion, according to the Ministry of Mines and Energy.

This is equivalent to 96.15 per cent of the 102.400 billion riel target set in the 2021 budget law. "Non-tax revenue" refers to recurring income obtained by the ministry through sources other than taxes such as licensing fees, land leases, royalties and penalties, according to Yos Monirath, the ministry's former director-general

for Mineral Resources.

His successor, Ung Dipola, told *The Post* on November 29 that the reopening of almost all sectors, following the success of the nationwide Covid-19 vaccination campaign, has yielded positive effects on economic recovery.

Citing initial assessments, Dipola said the department

expects non-tax revenue from the mining sector to exceed the 2021 target by 20-25 per cent by the end of the year.

The ministry predicts that these revenues will continue to grow each year, buoyed by demand for minerals and materials for construction, he said, adding that existing gold production operations are ex-

pected to reach full capacity next year and that coal exports are also forecast to expand.

According to Dipola, the ministry plans to collect 140.772 billion riel in non-tax revenue from the sector next year, an increase of 37.47 per cent from this year's target.

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## Red carpet treatment

Lao Prime Minister Phankham Viphavanh is visiting Cambodia from November 29-30 at the invitation of Prime Minister Hun Sen, where he will be granted a royal audience with King Norodom Sihamoni at the Royal Palace, and meet with Senate president Say Chhum and National Assembly president Heng Samrin. SPM

## Covid-19 to cost global tourism \$2T in 2021: UN

THE coronavirus pandemic will cost the global tourism sector \$2.0 trillion in lost revenue this year, the UN's tourism body said on November 29, calling the sector's recovery "fragile" and "slow".

The forecast from the Madrid-based World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) comes as Europe is grappling with a surge in infections and as a new heavily mutated Covid-19 variant, dubbed "Omicron", spreads across the globe.

International tourist arrivals will this year remain 70-75 per cent below the 1.5 billion arrivals recorded in 2019 before the pandemic hit, a similar decline as in 2020, according to the body.

The global tourism sector already lost \$2.0 trillion in revenues last year due to the pandemic, according to the UNWTO, making it one of sectors hit hardest by the health crisis.

While the UN body charged with promoting tourism does not have an estimate for how the sector will perform next year, its medium-term outlook is not encouraging.

"Despite the recent improvements, uneven vaccination rates around the world and new Covid-19 strains" such as the Delta variant and Omicron "could impact the already slow and fragile recovery", it said in a statement.

"It's a historical crisis in the tourism industry but again tourism has the power to recover quite fast," UNWTO head Zurab Pololikashvili told AFP ahead of the start of the UNWTO's annual general assembly in Madrid on November 30.

"I really hope that 2022 will be much better than 2021." AFP

# Over 2,000ha of flooded forest seized in new push

Long Kimmarita

OVER 2,000ha out of more than 10,000ha of flooded forestland around the Tonle Sap Lake have been seized, with more than a dozen offenders already begging for clemency for their encroachment on the protected areas which the government

says must be preserved as fish-spawning habitat.

The confiscation came just one day after Prime Minister Hun Sen ordered Minister of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction Chea Sophara and other relevant authorities to investigate the "anarchy" taking place around the lake and crack down on the wide-

spread encroachment and deforestation there.

Before the operation began, the land management ministry set up six working groups with components from different ministries to investigate portions of six provinces around the lake: Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Siem Reap and Kampong Thom.

Kampong Chhnang provincial governor Sun Sovannarith told *The Post* on November 29 that the working group had already confiscated more than 2,000ha of flooded forestland in Kampong Leng district's Chranouk commune.

He said 13 people were involved in the encroachment

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## CHAPEI DANG VENG CONCERT MARKS FIVE YEARS ON UNESCO LIST

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## DOCTOR'S NEW CLINIC TO SHAPE CAMBODIAN ONCOLOGY LANDSCAPE

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National

# Ranariddh's eventful life paid tribute

Mom Kunthear

**K**IND words are being paid in tribute to the late Prince Norodom Ranariddh, the second son of the late King Father Norodom Sihanouk, who passed away in France at the age of 77 on November 28.

In his early political career, Prince Ranariddh served as First Prime Minister of Cambodia with Hun Sen as Second Prime Minister in a coalition government following an election organised by the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia in 1993.

"He was a person with a good heart who loved his colleagues and subordinates and achieved things for the people like building streets, water wells and making donations to the poor," said Nhek Bun Chhay, the prince's close companion since the 1980s and the leader of the Khmer National United Party (KNUP).

Bun Chhay said he was saddened by the loss of Prince Ranariddh whom he had followed since the 1980s through various struggles, including 1993 and the subsequent period where he was prime minister, although they did have some disagree-

ments with each other.

"I last saw him on September 13, 2019, before he left to get medical treatment in France. We both wanted the KNUP and FUNCINPEC parties to merge but the plan got hung up due to some problems. His intention was to unify all of the royalist factions but the attempt failed due to objections from some people," he said.

All Cambodian people, from ordinary citizens to government leaders, share the sorrows of the royal family. They include Prime Minister Hun Sen, National Assembly president Heng Samrin, Senate President Say Chhum, Minister of Interior Sar Kheng and Minister of Defence Tea Banh.

Ranariddh's eldest son Prince Norodom Chakravuth, who is once again apparently the president of FUNCINPEC, wrote a letter informing party members and the general public of his father's death.

"The body of Prince Norodom Ranariddh will be escorted to Cambodia soon," he said in the letter.

Chakravuth also led party members in a gathering to pay their respects to the memory of his father at Botum pagoda in Phnom Penh on November 29.

Keo Remy, president of the



The late Prince Norodom Ranariddh attends the FUNCINPEC party congress in 2017. HENG CHIVOAN

Cambodian Human Rights Committee, said he used to work with Ranariddh frequently and even when they had opposite views from each other he was able to find some middle-ground compromise with him.

The Australian embassy in Phnom Penh extended their condolences to the royal family and the Cambodian people on the death of Prince Ranariddh, saying his contributions to Cambodian politics would always be remembered.

US ambassador to Cambodia Patrick Murphy also expressed his condolences for

the loss of the prince, mentioning his many years of public service which included his role as prime minister from 1993 to 1997 and serving as NA president from 1998 to 2006.

"My condolences to the royal family and to the people of the Kingdom for your loss," he tweeted.

Similarly, UK ambassador to Cambodia Tina Redshaw tweeted: "My sincerest condolences to the Cambodian royal family and the people of Cambodia on the passing of HRH Prince Norodom Ranariddh, who played such

a critical role in Cambodian politics."

Veteran journalist and journalism professor Moeun Chhean Narith, who interviewed Prince Ranariddh many times over the years, said it was his view that the prince had a firm understanding of the principles of democracy, freedom of expression and freedom of the press that was rooted in the time that the prince spent as a law professor in France, which was his full-time career before he entered Cambodian politics in 1993.

"When he was the president of FUNCINPEC, first prime minister and president of the National Assembly, he always gave opportunities for journalists to interview him," Chhean Narith said, adding that he felt Ranariddh was a model for good leadership in a democratic society.

"Like the old saying goes – the leaf doesn't fall far from the tree. He had the mentality, heart and demeanour of his father. He was always friendly to everyone without discrimination and just loved all people in general," he said. ■

# Chapei concert marks fifth year of UNESCO listing

Orm Bunthoern

THE Chapei Amatak Association (CAA) will present a group performance by musicians playing the chapei dang veng – the traditional Khmer two-stringed guitar – in Kampong Speu province on November 30 to celebrate the 5th anniversary of the instrument being placed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list.

CAA president Pech Sarath said on November 29 that the show, to be held in Thmey Chhngrouk village of Thpong district's Ya Ang commune, will feature three generations of chapei dang veng players – including masters, journeymen and apprentices.

Sarath said that before the concert, which will start at 9am and run to 11am, there will be a folk game played called Chamroeu chapei dang veng and there are also volunteers from the Lakhon Khol Khmer Masked Theatre who will put on a traditional show as well.

Sarath said he had noted that young people in the modern era do not often meet to talk about the chapei dang veng or other ancient Khmer folk arts. Therefore, the con-



Poster announcing the big chapei dang veng concert in Kampong Speu on November 30. LIVING CHAPEI COMMUNITY

cert is organised with three groups according to age and skill, because Khmer traditional arts will be in the hands of young people eventually and they must be instructed in these matters to prevent the traditions from dying.

"I encourage children to participate because they are the heirs and successors of

the Khmer cultural heritage. If in the future we lose support, only the current youth and children learning these arts will be able to ensure they survive," he said.

Sarath said the performance will include a song dedicated to the craftsman deity Preah Pissukar (or Vishvakarma in Sanskrit). Another highlight

would be when the elders and young people sing the Ladi Tra song together while all playing the chapei dang veng.

There will also be a display of 21 chapei dang vengs with some sized for children and others for women or men.

Funan Art group leader Sup Sakara said the show was a good starting point because an audi-

ence will always show up when there is a celebration like this.

The audience will be able to see the kinds of shows that their group put on and perhaps become more interested in Khmer traditional art, and with this longer chapei dang veng performance, the organisers can present the songs in their original formats to the audience.

"Those who come to the concert will hear chapei songs and learn chapei history. We hope the young people present become interested in the instrument and want to find out more or even decide to take lessons and learn how to play it themselves," he said.

Sakara said that in order for the art form to catch on with the new generation of young people to encourage them to become more supportive of Khmer classical art, the current leaders in these art forms with the highest mastery of the skills required must spend time organising events like this one, motivating young people and educating them.

"If people know how to support Khmer traditional arts, then we believe that they will. So if there are training classes in the villages, communes or schools to make these arts

more visible, there will be more support," he said.

Siyonn Sophearith, the ministry's director-general of techniques for cultural affairs, said on November 29 that the association and its artists have raised the value of Khmer traditional arts and the ministry fully supports their activities and encourages all associations related to the intangible Khmer cultural heritage to grow and expand.

He added that the ministry has promoted the event in the form of a memorial night on November 28 and via posts to social media like Facebook and with advertisements on television.

The ministry has also asked those who are masters in an art form that is part of Khmer heritage to train apprentices in the communities where they live.

According to Sophearith, the ministry also plans to attract more participants after noticing that there is more participation after two concerts with chapei dang veng performing the stories of Sovannasam Chheadok and Soben Komar. "Those stories are very popular when done as a stage show and we can use them to showcase the chapei and increase people's interest in it," he said. ■

## Deputy prosecutor of K Thom faces charges

Continued from page 1

in that area but all of them had come forward and confessed in order to try and get clemency. The authorities did not arrest them but instead warned and educated them – despite Hun Sen's direct admonition in his speech the previous evening that the time for "educating" offenders was over with.

"We are working with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and provincial administration to come up with a plan to reforest this area. We will plant trees that are resilient and will thrive in the flooded areas," he said.

Royal Academy of Cambodia president Sok Touch – who set the wheels in motion on this operation with his investigation of the areas around the lake which he reported to Hun Sen – told *The Post* on November 29 that the 2,000ha of flooded forest was just a small portion of the total area that has been encroached upon by just a small group of people.

Touch said the other provinces around Tonle Sap also suffered from even more serious encroachments – covering tens of thousands of hectares – and that many high-ranking officials there were involved.

"The 2,000ha of land confiscated is just a small portion. There are numerous people involved. What I have found is that up to tens of thousands of hectares have been encroached upon and we have to seize all of the land back from them.

"In Pursat, the encroachment is bad enough that a village has

even formed in the middle of the forest there. The 2,000ha they just took back involved just one person's crimes. There are still hundreds of more people involved," he said.

Agriculture minister Veng Sakhon said the investigation had found that many thousands of hectares of flooded forested had been destroyed. In Kampong Thom alone, he said there are already a total of 40 cases being prepared for referral to court.

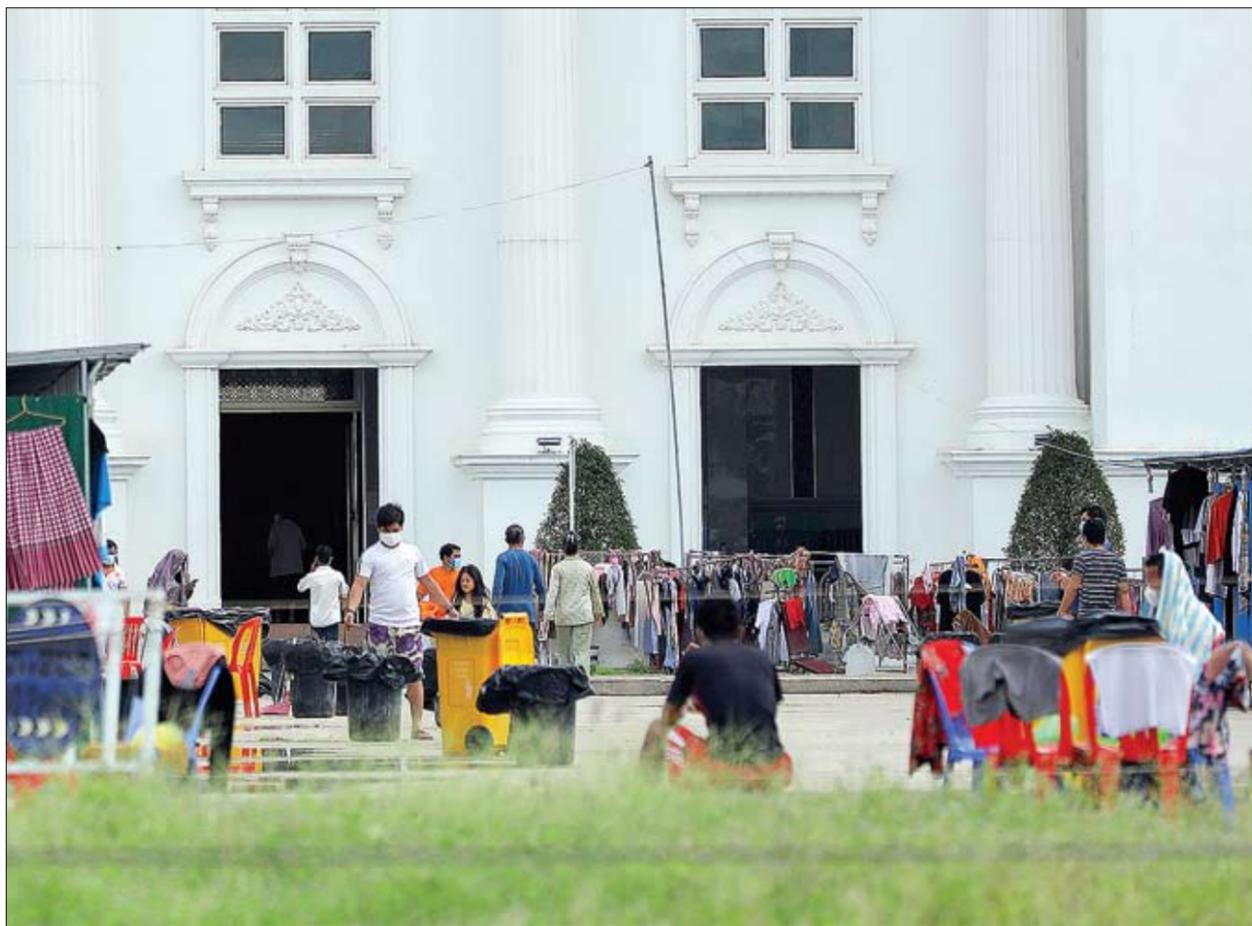
The 40 cases of encroachment upon flooded forestlands in Kampong Thom cover more than 3,566ha with the crimes taking place from 2019 to 2021 across the four districts of Stung Sen, Baray, Stong and Kampong Svay.

"All of these cases have been sent to the Kampong Thom Provincial Court by our officials from the provincial agriculture department who acted in their capacity as judicial police. The cases are now in the hands of the investigating judge.

"Only one out of the 40 cases has been tried, but the verdict has not yet been delivered by the court and the defendant in that case is – unfortunately – the deputy prosecutor of the Kampong Thom Provincial Court," Sakhon said.

Sok Touch said the flooded forests must be reclaimed and restored because they are where the lake's fish spawn.

He noted that fish from the Tonle Sap Lake has been the main source of protein in the diet of the Cambodian people for thousands of years and if the encroachment and deforestation continues, it will end up destroying those fisheries. ■



Covid-19 patients are seen at the Premier Centre Sen Sok in Phnom Penh's Sen Sok district in August. HONG MENEHA

## Health ministry says no need to panic over Omicron variant

Mom Kunthea

**T**HE Ministry of Health will advocate essentially the same preventive measures against the new SARS-CoV-2 Omicron variant as with earlier strains, its senior official said.

Or Vandine, the ministry's spokeswoman, said the ministry and other relevant institutions were continuing to monitor the Omicron variant, though scientists and the World Health Organisation (WHO) have yet to confirm what the effects of the new variant are on the human body.

"The health ministry is prepared because we have done this work for the past two years and the health minister has already instructed the relevant departments to focus on this variant, including

increased testing of samples taken from suspected cases for further analysis to see if this variant is present.

"We will all look into this issue. However, this is still a coronavirus and no matter how it mutates that's what it will be. So, the symptoms we have so far experienced are going to be the basic symptoms of it and we must always be vigilant and quick to find out if we have Covid-19 when we have any symptoms," she said.

Vandine said individuals must take the utmost responsibility to reduce the possibility of transmission from one person to another and monitor their own health.

WHO representative to Cambodia Li Ailan said what the government was doing was still effectively maintaining the balance between protection of pub-

lic health and people's health.

"More recent information will help in dealing with the new Covid-19 variant. Two points I think need to be strengthened are tracking the disease and analysing new mutations as soon as possible," she said.

Li said individual protective measures are still important such as wearing masks, washing hands frequently and keeping a safe distance from others. She said there should not be any overreactions at this time though some countries have imposed travel restrictions on parts of the African continent.

"Due to the uncertainty, we need to be prepared for outbreaks or a surge in infections that may occur in the near future," she said.

WHO said in a press statement on November 27 that

Omicron is worrying because it has a large number of mutations to the spike protein that the virus uses to enter human cells. This spike protein is also what some current vaccines – such as the mRNA vaccines – are focused on in terms of generating an immune response and too many changes to it may lower those vaccines effectiveness.

Preliminary evidence out of South Africa suggests the Omicron brings an increased risk of re-infection as compared to other strains of concern.

WHO said Omicron has grown exponentially as a percent of cases in certain parts of South Africa and at a faster rate than any previous surges in infections even from the Delta variant, suggesting that Omicron may be even more transmissible and able to infect people more easily. ■



Authorities investigate flooded forest encroachment at the Tonle Sap Lake in Kampong Chhnang province on Monday. FACEBOOK

## Cambodia welcomes 7th East Asian Sea Congress

Voun Dara

WITH Cambodia playing host this year to the 7th East Asian Sea Congress, the Ministry of Environment – in cooperation with the Preah Sihanouk Provincial Administration – has organised a press junket from November 28 to December 2 in Sihanoukville to promote the government's achievements in the coastal province such as the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity as well as showcasing the region's potential for seaside eco-tourism.

Environment ministry secretary of state Neth Pheaktra said Cambodia is ready to host this year's sea congress and has chosen Preah Sihanouk as the venue for the meeting.

Pheaktra said this year's sea congress would be held under the theme "Charting a New Decade of

HOPE [Healthy Oceans, People, and Economies]".

Thirty national and international journalists from 16 media outlets took part in the five-day press tour.

"This visit is designed to show the public the leadership of Cambodia under [Prime Minister Hun Sen] ... It will show our progress and achievements in the sustainable development of Cambodia's coastal areas, especially in Preah Sihanouk province where the government has created a multi-purpose model special economic zone," he said.

According to Pheaktra, journalists on the trip would also visit such places as the beautiful beaches of the province and also be shown the infrastructure that has been built recently including the 34 roads that have been constructed in an effort to modernise the province.

He said he would also be showing the journalists the wastewater treatment plant and the solid waste disposal system. Furthermore, he said he would explain the government's efforts to responsibly manage conservation of the Cambodian coast.

Pheaktra expressed optimism that the people of Cambodia and the world would soon become more aware of the developments taking place in the province and the richness of its potential.

"In recent years, Preah Sihanouk province has changed a lot from being a quiet province to a bustling and vibrant province for tourism with a growing economy and industry," he said.

Pheaktra said it is hoped that the East Asian Sea Congress will promote the creation of new opportunities for regional partnerships, the use of innovative technologies, and increase the investment and financing neces-

sary to sustain responsible development and conserve the coastal and marine environments.

He said the congress participants also hope to set a clear roadmap for solutions to maritime issues for the

coming decade in line with the UN Decade of Ocean Science, the 2030 Agenda for SD, UNFCCC, the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and related maritime and conservation agreements. ■



Environment ministry spokesman Neth Pheaktra leads the press tour. YOUSOS APDOULRASHIM

## National

# Kingdom, Czech Republic aim to boost bilateral trade

Lay Samean

THE Czech Republic has promised to encourage its small and medium-sized enterprises and private companies to invest in Cambodia and boost trade between the two countries, which in the past has been relatively insignificant in size.

The offer of assistance to increase trade was made when National Assembly (NA) president Heng Samrin met with new Czech ambassador to Cambodia Martin Vavra on November 29 at the NA to get acquainted and discuss matters of mutual interest to both nations.

Samrin requested the Czech Republic to continue promoting trade, investment and tourism to Cambodia after the Covid-19 pandemic eases.

"Cambodia and the Czech Republic have been linked together in cooperation for a long time and the two nations have always benefited from it," he said.

Samrin pointed out that historically the Czechs have contributed significantly to Cambodia's development ever since the era when they belonged to their former country of Czechoslovakia up to the present.

Vera then promised to work hard to encourage more Czech investors to invest in Cambodia.



NA president Heng Samrin (right) and Czech Ambassador Martin Vavra on Monday. HENG SAMRIN VIA FACEBOOK

"Czech companies are investing in Thailand and Vietnam, so I will study the situation and look for ways to boost trade cooperation between our two countries," he said.

Vera said that in addition to investments, the Czech Republic has also provided aid to Cambodia in the health and education sectors.

"Recently, a lot of medical equipment was provided to the Takeo provincial hospital, and the Czech Republic continues to provide humanitarian assistance to Cambodia, especially scholarships for Cambodian

students and government officials to study in the Czech Republic," Vera said.

Samrin stated that King Norodom Sihamoni once studied in the Czech Republic's high quality education system and spent a great deal of time there besides, so the country remains close to his heart.

Kin Phea, director of the Royal Academy of Cambodia's International Relations Institute, said relations between the two countries are good but it has not yet reached the point of being a comprehensive strategic relationship.

"In terms of relations, they are good – but the level of trade and the political and diplomatic importance of the two countries to each other are minimal at this time," he said.

Phea said that although the Czech Republic is a member of the EU and must operate within the EU framework to a large extent, they have in the past expressed support for Cambodia's positions even when it put them at odds with the official EU position.

"It's not because of the political situation or even the geographical location. There's just not much either side needs from the other right now in trade. It's like with Russia. Our relationship with Russia is good but we don't transact with them much either," he said.

Diplomatic relations between Cambodia and the Czech Republic date back to 1957 when the latter was still part of Czechoslovakia. According to the UN Comtrade database on international trade, bilateral trade between the two countries stood at just over \$80 million in 2020. ■

## Borey VIP customers petition PM for relief

Long Kimmarita

MORE than 150 people claiming to be victims of fraud at the Borey VIP gated community project in Spean Thmor commune in the capital's Dangkor district sought the intervention of Prime Minister Hun Sen after not receiving the homes they had paid for by instalment over the past several years.

Ten representatives of the families submitted a petition on November 26 to the prime minister's office requesting his intervention with the RN VIP Real Estate Co Ltd and their Borey VIP to force the company to finish construction and hand over the titles on the homes that they purchased and have been paying for under a contract that expired two to three years ago.

"We purchased houses from Borey VIP starting in 2018 and they have not completed the houses as scheduled... When we requested a meeting to resolve these issues, the company refused and kept making excuses when dealing with us," the group's petition says.

Yim Ratha, one of the representatives, told *The Post* on November 28 that they had filed a complaint with the district and with the municipal hall seeking their intervention many times but the company still had not provided them with any solutions.

"In the past the authorities have helped to mediate [these disputes], but the Borey has not given us any hope because after the meeting the Borey still hasn't had their construction workers working at the site. When we asked for another meeting, they declined," he said.

According to Ratha, there are more than 150 victims but not all of them are in the exact same situation. Some of them paid down payments and have not received any property titles while others have homes

where the construction has never been completed.

He said some people have continued to pay their monthly instalments, but the company has not continued to work on the construction of their home as promised.

He claimed that the company's contract with the buyers said it would complete their homes within 12 months. But the company failed to complete construction on the homes and pushed back the contract's end date to three or four years and have yet to put anyone to work finishing the construction.

Kong Chamroeun, representative for the prime minister's office, told *The Post* on November 28 that the cabinet had not yet officially received the petition but they have instructed the petitioners to prepare proper documentation of what took place in advance as the case will first be diverted to Dangkor district authorities to resolve.

"Dangkor district hall has advised them to arrange themselves into groups according to the terms of their purchases – some are fully paid, some are on instalment, and some have even finished their instalment payments. So their demands are different because of that. This must be done according to legal procedures in case this situation requires them to file lawsuits in court," he said.

Vorn Vannak, CEO of RN VIP Real Estate Co Ltd and Borey VIP, told *The Post* on November 28 that his company was meeting to provide solutions and respond to customer complaints on November 29.

"Our company's principle is to always deal proactively with any complaints. The company is willing to solve these problems as they are encountered ... As for other issues, I can't speak to them all at this time, but the people's statements are sometimes right and sometimes wrong," he said. ■

### JOB ANNOUNCEMENT

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

#### COMMERCIAL WRITER: 1 Position

##### Main duties and responsibilities

- Reporting and editing for Post Focus
- Prepare supplements regularly
- To cover business assignments
- Attend corporate events
- Develop own story ideas
- Able to work with marketing staff and designers
- Taking photos when necessary
- Translate articles from English to Khmer and vice versa

##### Qualifications and experience required

- Bachelor's degree in Mass Communication or related fields
- At least three years work experience in print media
- Fluent in English, both spoken and written
- Able to edit and do page layout
- Knowledge in business reporting is essential

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

Address: The Elements Condominium (Residence 9) Level 7, Hun Sen Boulevard, Chak Angre Krom commune, Meanchey district, Phnom Penh.  
Tel: +855 (0) 23 888 161 -162 // Email: jobs@phnompenhpost.com  
www.phnompenhpost.com // www.postkhmer.com

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

## Coats and cash donated to capital's cyclo-drivers

Khouth Sophak Chakrya

WITH a cold weather front approaching in the next few days, the Phnom Penh Municipal Administration on November 28 distributed blankets, coats and cash to 300 cyclo-drivers – most of whom are elderly and poor.

Municipal governor Khuong Sreng said that in the near future, the weather is expected to get very cold, which can have a negative impact on the lives of people, especially the elderly and children.

Prime Minister Hun Sen on November 23 recommended that all capital and provincial authorities across the country focus on the health of the elderly and the poor and needy by providing them with coats, blankets and mosquito nets.

"As municipal governor and chairman of the board of the Cambodian Cyclo Foundation,

I would like to donate one winter coat, one scarf, one blanket and 50,000 riel [\$12.50] to each of the 300 cyclo drivers ... for use during the upcoming cold weather," he said.

Sreng advised the cyclo-drivers to continue to follow the Ministry of Health's three dos and three don'ts guidelines to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Lim Heng, a 67-year-old cyclo-driver from Kandal province's Koh Thom district, has been riding a cyclo in Phnom Penh since the 1990s. He told *The Post* that the gifts were very valuable to him because they would help keep him warm as the cold season approaches.

He said that Covid-19 made their livelihoods as cyclo-drivers almost impossible and that they had to live from hand-to-mouth because there were no tourists or goods to transport.

"I am really happy with the gifts ... They are very helpful

to me as a cyclo-driver while I try to make a living," he said.

Lim Heng added that since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, on some days they have not been able to earn any money – not even 5,000 riel – to buy food. But as a member of the cyclo foundation, he received a daily allowance of 7,000 riel for basic living expenses like food.

The foundation was established by Prime Minister Hun Sen in 2018 with the mission of preserving the traditional use of cyclos in Cambodia by improving the livelihoods of their drivers. The foundation currently has 320 members.

Im Sambath, president of the Cyclo Conservation and Careers Association, said the total number of cyclo-drivers in Phnom Penh was estimated at nearly 400 but about 60 of them had yet to register or fulfil the required conditions to become members of the foundation. ■

# MRC Council approves new hydropower strategy

Ry Sochan

THE Mekong River Commission (MRC) Council has approved the Sustainable Hydropower Development Strategy (SHDS 2021) for the Lower Mekong Basin to address the future potential for hydropower developments on the river.

According to its press statement, the approval of the strategic document took place at the 28th MRC meeting and the 26th Consultation Meeting with Development Partners – both held on November 25 – chaired by Thai Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwon.

The SHDS 2021 is the culmination of efforts to produce a strategy for hydropower on the river that first commenced in 2017. The formulating process included an additional study on a range of hydropower development scenarios which began in 2018 and engaged with developers, academia and civil society organisations.

“Water and environment ministers from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam agreed to the strategy and other organisational rules and procedures during the 28th meeting hosted by [Thailand] in an online virtual setting,” the statement said.

Prawit Wongsuwon said the updated SHDS stresses the need to move basin develop-

ment toward outcomes that can address long-term needs.

“The strategy represents a significant step forward in moving the basin toward optimal, safe and responsible outcomes that address interdependencies between environmental protection, water, food and hydropower production,” he said.

He said water infrastructure projects including hydropower dams have had a dramatic impact on the Mekong River systems over the last two decades. The approval of this development strategy will set the course for SHDS implementation as set out in the MRC Strategic Plan 2021–2025 to address emerging risks compounded by climate change.

The SHDS will also provide

opportunities for the MRC to work with member countries on better data and information sharing and coordination of operation of hydropower projects.

Minister of Water Resources and Meteorology Lim Kean Hor – who also serves as chairman of the National Mekong Committee and represents the Kingdom on the MRC Council – led Cambodia’s delegation for the online meeting.

“MRC member countries are committed to working together to further strengthen regional cooperation, support the effective implementation of the 2021–2023 Basin Development Strategy and achieve successful sustainable management and development in the Mekong Basin,” the ministry said. ■



Public works ministry secretary of state Yit Bonna (centre) hosts a Facebook livestream on taking care of roads and pavements. HENG CHIVAN

## Public works ministry says cease and desist road encroachment

Long Kimmarita

THE Ministry of Public Works and Transport has called for an immediate end to encroachment on pavements and the filling-in of drainage ditches on roadsides because it causes flooding and rapidly damages the roads.

The cease and desist order came during the ministry’s Facebook live show on November 29 which was held to answer the public’s questions about road management under the theme of “road maintenance and citizen participation”.

Transport ministry secretary of state Yit Bonna said encroachment committed by people along the roads had increased dramatically. The encroachment was causing damage to the roads due to activities such as piling dirt up higher than the roads, filling in drainage ditches and thereby making it impossible for water to flow off of the roads and causing rapid deterioration of the roads through flooding.

“From the beginning when we design roads, we comprehensively plan out the drainage systems and eliminate everything that could eventually cause rain-induced flooding to avoid damaging the roads.

“When we first built the roads people had not yet arrived and did not jostle for space by the roadsides – their houses were far away.

“But once we built the roads and the traffic started to increase, it attracted people to them and space next to the road then becomes something valuable ... This is one factor that was different before 1970. At that time, people respected and maintained the pavements and the road lanes were always protected,” he said.

Bonna called on the people living along the roads to stop such activities and take better care of them. He also urged the local authorities to spread the word and to prevent these activities to avoid damage to the roads because all of it is preventable.

“This is a problem that has to be addressed by all, not just the public works ministry or the traffic authorities who must come up with other means,” he said, also urging the public and the local officials to learn and respect the traffic laws altogether.

According to Bonna, the ministry manages roads spanning 18,125km throughout the country, of which about 55 per cent are paved.

Kong Rattanak, president of the Institute for Road Safety, said the encroachment on pavements was sharply rising because the number of people had grown and the problem became a chronic one a long time ago.

He added that to solve the problem, more must be done than simply calling on the public to do the right thing. Encroachment is caused by many factors and so there must be many different approaches to solving it. This, he said, requires the participation of local authorities and the people.

“We see that the people are encroaching on the roads because the authorities do not stop them. On the one hand, the authorities do not know the law and do not know how to ban them. But on the other hand, the authorities know but allowed them to do it,” he said.

He said the problem was widespread because people just followed the example set by their neighbours or community members who they see getting away with it.

“People do not think about the public interest. This problem happens almost everywhere in Cambodia,” he added. ■



Fishermen on the Mekong River in Chroy Changvar district. HONG MENEHA

### The Country Coordinating Committee (CCC) for the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (GFATM) in Cambodia

#### 2 VACANCIES for CCC Secretariat

The Cambodia Country Coordinating Committee (CCC) is a multi-sectoral national platform to coordinate and facilitate the Global Fund activities to fight HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria. This governance structure must demonstrate high level of performance to maintain country’s eligibility for the Global Fund financing. A CCC Secretariat was established to execute daily CCC functions as delegated by CCC and further described in the CCC Governance Manual.

#### Vacancy 1: CCC Oversight/Transition Officer:

- 1) Facilitate and support analytical data-driven discussions and decision-making;
  - 2) Provide support to oversight planning and implementation; and
  - 3) Provide technical and administrative support to the CCC oversight committee.
- The successful applicant will start as soon as possible, and the contract duration will be 18 months

#### Required Qualification, Experience and Skills:

- Bachelor’s degree required, with social science, public health, population studies orientation highly desirable and advanced degree preferred.
- At least 2 years of experience in monitoring & evaluation or oversight of projects/programs.
- Experience in project-level or state/national-level monitoring and evaluation system implementation.
- Familiarity with the Global Fund CCC Policy and Oversight Function is desirable.
- Familiarity with the country’s health system structures.
- Familiarity with epidemiological indicators for HIV, TB and malaria and financial indicators.
- Experience working in a multi-stakeholder governance environment.

#### Skills

- Proficiency in data collection and information analysis.
- Policy decision-support, strategic analysis and reporting.
- Proficiency in the use of Microsoft Office, particularly Microsoft Excel.
- Ability to work effectively with staff and organizational stakeholders.
- Strong inter-personal skills and proven ability to communicate and interact with high-level officials from the government, NGOs, UN agencies and the private sector.
- Strong writing, presentation, facilitation and communication skills.

#### Vacancy 2: National consultant to support Cambodia Country Coordinating Committee (CCC) Positioning

The national consultant will identify existing national health structures, governance mechanisms and platforms responsible for coordinating the health

sector and disease-specific issues. For the transition context, this should have an added focus on key national stakeholders that are most appropriate for strengthening transition planning, preparedness, implementation, and overall efforts to strengthen sustainability.

The consultant will be contracted for 25 days of work over a period of 2 months, starting ASAP.

The consultant will map each identified platform’s position within the national systems and in relation to the CCC. The consultant will also support the CCC in developing a Positioning plan based on three main phases (refer to the [Positioning Guidance Note](#)):

- Knowledge
- Coordination
- Sustainable Structure.

#### Qualifications, Experience and Competencies:

##### A. Qualifications

##### Essential:

Bachelor’s or Advanced degree in public health, finance, public administration or business administration, or related field.

##### B. Experience

##### Essential:

- Solid experience in developing partnerships in political environments and in mediating complex issues and deliverables at country, regional and international levels.
- Rich professional experience, including a track record of working in strategy and policy analysis, program planning and management, and/or equivalent experience.
- Solid understanding and experience of strategic, organizational, financial and management issues.
- Solid understanding of the Global Fund processes and of its funding model.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills.

##### Desirable:

- At least 3 years of professional experience (international or national) working in planning and management in the humanitarian sector.
- Experience in public health and disease program management with focus on HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.
- Documented experience of coordination across multiple stakeholders.

##### C. Competencies

##### Languages:

Working level of English as well as knowledge of the local language (Khmer) are a requirement for this role.

**Technical skills:** desirable knowledge of the software Visio.

How to Apply: Full Term of Reference will be provided upon request by email to [cccadm@ccmcambodia.org](mailto:cccadm@ccmcambodia.org)

Interested applicants should submit their CV and Cover Letter (with 3 references) by email to [cccadm@ccmcambodia.org](mailto:cccadm@ccmcambodia.org) by COB 15 December 2021

# Business

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ABA NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA GROUP

## TRADING INFORMATION ON CAMBODIA SECURITIES EXCHANGE

Date: November 29, 2021

Auction Trading Method (ATM)

NO	STOCK	CLOSING PRICE	OPENING PRICE	HIGH	LOW
1	ABC	10,900	10,900	10,940	10,900
2	GTI	4,220	4,220	4,260	4,220
3	PAS	13,500	13,500	13,580	13,500
4	PEPC	3,150	3,080	3,150	3,080
5	PPAP	14,620	14,540	14,640	14,540
6	PPSP	2,010	2,030	2,030	2,000
7	PWSA	6,900	7,000	7,000	6,860



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## KE, CMA liaise on financial access for SMEs, start-ups

May Kunmakara

THE Cambodia Microfinance Association (CMA) and state-owned Khmer Enterprise (KE) have entered into a partnership aimed at improving access to finance for entrepreneurs and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME) in the Cambodian ecosystem.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed to that end on November 26 at the CMA's Annual Microfinance Conference 2021 between the association's executive director Phal Vandy and Chhieng Vanmunin, CEO of KE, a unit under the Ministry of Economy and Finance.

Vanmunin said the partnership seeks to provide local start-ups and SMEs with access to financial information concerning rates and relevant fees, risks, and available financial instruments.

He said the government "has many policies to create additional funds in the financial system and to relax compulsory criteria for financial institutions".

"However, it is ultimately up to the financial institutions to pass down those benefits to SMEs



Cambodia Microfinance Association (CMA) executive director Phal Vandy (left) and Khmer Enterprise (KE) CEO Chhieng Vanmunin sign the memorandum of understanding (MoU) on Friday. CMA

and start-ups in Cambodia."

The CMA's Vandy suggested that the Kingdom's fast-growing economy provides evidence that SMEs and start-ups have become increasingly important sources of employment and engines of economic growth.

Microfinance has helped in

poverty alleviation in recent decades, he said, adding that the sector has shifted from exclusively serving the poor to providing others with all types of financial needs.

"The MoU between CMA and KE will tighten the relation of the two sectors, ensuring better financial ser-

VICES to SMEs and start-ups.

"The microfinance sector has been working closely with the government to support SMEs. CMA has played crucial roles in recent initiatives of SME Bank and Credit Guarantee Cooperation of Cambodia, both of which aim solely at boosting" smaller businesses, he said. ■

## China's Weibo seeks to raise \$547M with listing in Hong Kong

US-LISTED Chinese microblogging platform Weibo is seeking to raise up to \$547 million in a share offer in Hong Kong, documents showed on November 29, the latest China tech company to list closer to home as tensions with the US rise.

Several US-listed Chinese tech firms such as Alibaba have held initial public offerings in Hong Kong over the past two years as the US has stepped up scrutiny of Chinese companies.

Listing in Hong Kong is seen as a hedge against the risk of being removed from US exchanges and a way of accessing an investor base closer to their home markets.

China also has been encouraging its big tech players to list either in Hong Kong or Shanghai.

On November 29, Nasdaq-listed Weibo - China's answer to Twitter - said in a filing that it plans to sell 11 million shares for as much as HK\$388 (US\$49.75) each.

Shares are expected to start trading on December 8.

Weibo, which launched in

2009 and is among the earliest social media platforms in China, had 566 million monthly active users as of June, it said in a filing.

Its shares have traded on the Nasdaq since 2014.

Weibo is among the most widely-used social media platforms in China, where authorities have blocked major international players such as Facebook.

Weibo said it plans to use the funds raised from its Hong Kong listing to grow its user base and for research and development.

But it cautioned that it is "subject to changing laws and regulations regarding regulatory matters, corporate governance and public disclosure" that have increased both its costs and risks of non-compliance.

In recent months, Chinese regulators have launched a wide-ranging clampdown on tech companies like Alibaba, Tencent and Meituan - clipping the wings of major internet firms that wield heavy influence over consumers' daily lives. AFP

## Hotel Nikko Phnom Penh due 2024

Nov Sivutha

GLOBALLY renowned Japanese company Okura Nikko Hotel Management Co Ltd has postponed the launch of Hotel Nikko Phnom Penh from next year to 2024, in the expectation that the Cambodian tourism industry would have recovered from Covid-19 by then.

The hotel will be located in the upper level of the tentatively named Japan Trade Centre, currently under construction in Chamkarmon district's Tuol Tompoung II commune, the company noted in a statement.

Set to be "the first major complex in the Cambodian capital to be developed by a Japanese company", the centre will include office space, retail out-

lets and the new hotel, it said.

"This facility aims to act as a networking base for international businesses and to showcase a new form of collaboration whereby Cambodian companies deploy Japanese construction technology in joint ventures with Japanese firms.

"The hotel will offer 201 guest rooms each with a standard area of about 36sqm on floors 14-22 of the new building. It will feature a wide range of restaurants, including Japanese cuisine and all-day dining, and a skydeck bar on the 23rd floor where guests can enjoy stunning views across the capital," it added.

Pacific Asia Travel Association Cambodia chapter chairman Thourn Sinan welcomed

the hotel, stressing that it is well-known in Japan.

He said the Kingdom needs more famous internationally-branded hotels to enter the market to boost economic growth, trade and the confidence of investors and tourists from around the world.

"There are not many Japanese hotel brands in Cambodia - there is one Toyoko Inn in front of Koh Pich, which has contributed little to attract Japanese tourists," he said in a job at another property in Chamkarmon's Tonle Bassac commune.

"But that's why I need to have famous brand hotels come to Cambodia, it is better to attract Japanese guests, in the past there were very few brands from Japan," he said. ■

Admittedly unsure of the hotel's registration and permit status, Ministry of Tourism spokesman Top Sopheak underlined that, to operate in the Kingdom, the hotel has to properly register and apply for the required building and business permits, as well as the applicable licences at the ministry to provide tourism services.

He told *The Post* on November 29 that he welcomes all investments, especially in tourism, as long as the ventures comply with the pertinent laws, regulations and other requirements.

He said internationally-branded hotels could help promote tourism in Cambodia and lure in travellers from around the world, especially those from Japan. ■

## Mining sector chips in for local communities to develop: top official

Continued from page 1

While this amount pales in comparison to the different sources of tax revenue, the economic benefits from mining operations are substantial, above all from the supply of raw materials, which considerably fuels the development of public infrastructure and construction projects, he noted.

Mining also has a hand in the development of local communities, he said.

Hong Vanak, an economics researcher at the International Relations Institute of Cambodia, Royal Academy of Cambodia, attributed the steady rise in state revenues from mining to political sta-

bility and increased investment in the sector.

However, he suggested that mining would likely never become a primary source of national income, unlike in some countries in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.

"Although revenue collection from this sector has increased, it is still low compared to others," Vanak said.

In 2020, Cambodia raked in more than \$21 million in non-tax revenue from the mining sector, "a slight increase" compared to 2019, according to the ministry. ■

# Oncologist to drive cancer landscape

## BUSINESS INSIDER

May Kunmakara

**A**RMED with many years of oncology and haematology studies in Vietnam, France and the US, Dr Eav Sokha initiated and planned a National Cancer Centre, a cutting-edge facility at Calmette Hospital.

Public hospitals Calmette and Khmer-Soviet Friendship Hospital are the two primary institutions operating with established oncology services, both of which are located in Phnom Penh.

After serving in the civil service for nearly three decades and witnessing the number of new cancer cases in Cambodia climb each year as the reach and range of services offered at the two hospitals remained limited, Dr Sokha resigned and committed his time and resources to found the Orange Cancer Clinic, which is scheduled to open on November 30.

Located on National Road 6 in northeastern Phnom Penh's Chroy Changvar district, the clinic specialises in oncology and haematology, and brings the latest technology from Europe and the US, aiming to treat patients who are unable to seek medical attention abroad.

Oncology is the science that deals with tumours and cancers, and haematology is the study of blood, blood-forming organs and associated disorders.

Dr Sokha, whose name means "health" or "wellbeing" in the Khmer language, reveals his plans and visions for the future of the provision of cancer- and blood-related services in Cambodia, in an exclusive interview with The Post's May Kunmakara.

### What's behind your decision to establish the clinic?

I became the first oncologist in Cambodia, after liberation (from the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime) on January 7, 1979, and I entered the field because I like and enjoy learning and understanding difficult things and modern technology.

Although we have the two public hospitals providing oncology care, it's woefully inadequate, we cannot yet match up to the needs of patients. People seeking treatment today could wait as long as two or three months before receiving care.

And some of them are in so much pain, I've seen it with my own eyes as a doctor, leading me to ponder what I should do to assist the government in providing treatment to those in need and help as much as possible – even if we can't reach them all. That's why I quit my job as a public doctor, which I'd held verging on 30 years.

When I took time off from work at government hospitals, I provided treatment at home as much as I could, although I was getting older. But day by day I was seeing more and more patients.

Obtaining medical services abroad is a costly affair and encounters many obstacles related to language communication.

Witnessing cancer patients' struggles, I was motivated to set up this clinic in order to join the Royal Government to expand the capacity to alleviate these hardships.

### Could you provide a brief overview of the cancer situation in Cambodia?

Overall, cancer is not a problem exclusive to Cambodia, it's a pub-



Dr Eav Sokha poses with a CT scanner at the Orange Cancer Clinic, which is due to open on November 30, in northeastern Phnom Penh. SUPPLIED

lic health issue around the world. There had been a lot of concern when cancer death rates eclipsed those from heart disease, hypertension and strokes, according to a 2010 World Health Organisation (WHO) study.

Another WHO study found that in 2018 the number of new cancer cases in Cambodia reached 15,362, and cancer-related deaths clocked in at 75.75 per cent of that, or 11,636.

As a doctor, these statistics are very shocking, and that's why I stand resolved to do my best for the benefit of our people.

And these figures are unlikely to come down anytime soon – the WHO projects that by 2040, the number of annual new cases will double to 30,000. The question is, why is that?

Cancer is a non-communicable disease that tends to occur in older people. Although this does not mean that young people cannot develop it, the incidence rate is just lower.

This suggests that peaceful countries with a better quality of life, food security and higher life expectancy could be associated with an increased incidence rate of cancer.

This premise is backed by the fact that the longer we live, the more developed our countries become, but this also increases the risk of cells developing genetic mutations linked to cancer.

And infections caused by pathogens associated with cancer are also common in Cambodia.

Liver, lung, breast, gastrointestinal and cervical cancer are, in order, the five most common types of cancer in the country.

### What modern technologies will you bring to the table?

The global cancer treatment landscape is changing from year to year. In the past, we'd treat the condition with surgery, but the tech was not up-to-date, and chemotherapy was excruciating for patients, yielding a cure rate of a mere 10 per cent.

However, treatment has made substantial advancements going into 2021, registering encouraging gains in 10-year survival rates, counting patients that a few years back may well have died in just six months despite receiving care.

To further the goals of the clinic, we've imported the latest technology from Europe and the US to fulfil the needs of local patients – some of whom would have gone overseas for

treatment otherwise – offering them a viable option close to home at very reasonable prices, compared to those abroad.

We're bringing in the latest tech of 2021 – some just recently developed in Europe – and are equipped with state-of-the-art equipment that accurately detects cancer-causing genes, thus allowing us to better understand the early stages and design more effective therapies.

In addition, we'll be working with professional medical specialists in the region and in Europe, allowing us to make clearer assessments.

Our clinic will also be the first in the Kingdom to diagnose cancer using a simple blood test, without the need for tissue biopsies.

We'll use three types of cancer treatment: surgery; the latest in radiation therapy

– widely used in Europe, the US and Singapore; and immunotherapy, which uses genetically engineered immune cells that do not compromise patients' health along with drugs that boost immunity to fight cancer cells.

### Why else should Cambodians seek medical services locally?

Calmette and Khmer-Soviet Friendship Hospital can only cover 3,000 new local cancer cases a year, or 20 per cent, according to statistics from the WHO and some of my medical friends in Thailand, Vietnam and Singapore who provide the figures. About 1,500 Cambodians, or 10 per cent, go overseas for treatment.

These add up to only 30 per cent, however. Some people may not know where to go for the right care even if they have the financial and physical means, but others simply don't have the resources.

The clinic will provide additional access to more medical services locally, and alleviate the plight of patients.

Some key considerations for us as a local clinic are to set our standards at the European level, provide good services and clear and understandable communication in the Khmer language, and charge reasonable prices.

I've heard from friends who are doctors abroad about instances where linguistic communication between patients, doctors and interpreters was challenging, and seemingly diminished the effectiveness of treatment.

I'd also like to share that I have many foreign patients who are living here, some of whom flew in seeking treatment from me. ■

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



## Business

# Lean market rains on K Kong communities' mussel parade

Hom Phanet

UNFAVOURABLE weather and the lack of a market are threatening the livelihoods of blue mussel-raising communities in the Peam Krasop Protected Area, in Koh Kong province.

Production of blue mussels (*Mytilus edulis*) this year could fall below 2020 levels, resulting in limited funds for next year's cultivation, according to Vong Dara, the head of one such community.

Dara's is one of three Peam Krasop-based communities that raise the edible bivalve molluscs, according to Ministry of Environment director-general for Local Communities Khieu Borin.

Dara told *The Post* that blue mussels are typically harvested from September to March, but indicated that the harvest season this year could only start as early as end-December, due to unseasonal showers and thunderstorms.

"Traders from Vietnam and Thailand have come to see our mussels twice or thrice, but decided not to buy, saying the molluscs were too small and too thin" for commercial use, posing considerable headwinds to an already uncertain market, he said.



Blue mussels featured at a promotion event organised by the environment ministry at the Makro Sen Sok supermarket, in September. ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY

In September, the ministry organised a promotion event surrounding the Koh Kong blue mussels at Makro Supermarket in western Phnom Penh's Sen Sok district, in an effort to support biodiversity conservation in and around mangrove forests, and introduce the shellfish to a wider domestic audience.

Mangrove forests provide support in coastal saline or brackish waters for filter-feeders such as blue mussels, which are often found clumped together on tree roots.

But even so, Dara claims that there is very little demand, with

most buyers wanting just over 10kg a day to cook in restaurants or sell in supermarkets.

"If the market remains this narrow, my community's mussel diggers face a lack of capital to buy more stakes," he said.

"Out of 150 members, only 30 per cent can afford to buy stakes and prepare for next year."

But as the Gregorian New Year approaches, Dara hopes Thai traders will rush in and buy mussels for seasonal events, saying the community could start harvesting the molluscs by the end of the year.

Koh Kong provincial Department of Environment director

Hun Marady told *The Post* that the local market for the mussels is predominantly geared towards travellers to the province, which is why he says demand is currently so low.

On the other hand, most Cambodians are still unfamiliar with the shellfish and have not acquired a palate for them, he said.

"The ministry is looking for markets. They're available in supermarkets or hotels though, we're encouraging them to serve the mussels to their customers," Marady said.

Speaking at September's event at Makro Sen Sok, ministry secretary of state Neth Pheaktra said the ministry will explore potential local markets for the molluscs and work to improve the livelihoods and family economies in communities within the Kingdom's protected areas.

Dara notes that his community has some 186,100 blue mussel stakes set up in around 500ha of sea water, which yield an average of 3,163 tonnes of shellfish each year.

The community sells fresh shelled blue mussels at 1,500-2,000 riel (\$0.37-0.49) per kilogramme, and de-shelled ones at 40,000-60,000 riel, translating to about \$4,000-6,000 each year per household, according to him. ■

# Nissan plans 50% EV, hybrid sales by 2030

JAPANESE automaker Nissan wants half its global sales to be electric or hybrid vehicles by 2030 and plans to plough billions of dollars into the effort, it announced on November 29.

The move follows in the footsteps of other major global automakers, which have increasingly signalled a move towards electric and hybrid vehicles as concern about climate change grows.

Unveiling its new long-term plan, Nissan said it will launch 23 new models, including 15 new electric vehicles (EV), in a bid to reach the 2030 goal.

Last year, only around 10 per cent of Nissan's global sales were EVs or hybrids, and the firm said the new target would help it achieve carbon neutrality across the lifecycle of its products by 2050.

Nissan has been battered by a series of problems in recent years, ranging from weak demand even before the pandemic, to the fallout from the arrest and subsequent escape of former boss Carlos Ghosn.

After falling behind rivals during the pandemic, it has begun clawing back performance, tripling its full-year net profit forecast earlier this month despite the impact of a global chip shortage.

In a statement, Nissan CEO Makoto Uchida said the long-term plan announced on November 29 would "transform

Nissan to become a sustainable company".

It's a move seen across the auto industry with Sweden's Volvo pledging to switch all sales away from traditional fuel cars by 2030, and Japan's Honda setting the same target by 2040.

Top-selling Toyota says by 2030 all the vehicles it sells in Europe will be electric or hybrid models, with a goal of 70 per cent in North America and 100 per cent in China by 2035.

Nissan said 20 of its new electric models would hit the market in the next five years, setting a target for electric cars to make up 75 per cent of sales in Europe by fiscal 2026.

The Japanese automaker said it will invest two trillion yen (\$17.5 billion) over the next five years to speed up electrification, aiming to launch EVs with its proprietary batteries by 2028.

Electric and hybrid vehicles are being increasingly adopted in the face of concern about climate change, with Britain moving to ban new sales of diesel and petrol cars in the UK from 2030.

US President Joe Biden earlier this year announced a target for half of all cars sold domestically by 2030 to be zero-emission.

At present, around 10 per cent of European car sales are EVs, but the US figure is just two per cent. AFP ■

# Metfone makes learning safer with novel SIS digital application

The novel School Information System (SIS) developed by Metfone to ensure teaching continues in schools without any interruption during the Covid-19 pandemic has proved to be a successful solution.

Metfone vice general director Nhung Dinthan said the SIS served as an important mobile application that allowed students and teachers to communicate conveniently during the pandemic.

"With the SIS application, teachers can set timetables for physical and online classes, including functions like correcting and marking homework, conducting online video classes, messaging students and parents, giving yearly grades, and examination functions.

"This multi-featured application can do traditional things that teachers do every day, but can even do better online from anywhere in Cambodia by using the internet," said Dinthan.

The School Information System (SIS) is developed by Metfone with the support from the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport.

"Today's generation needs

access to a digital education that will transform students learning process in Cambodia - from the city to the provincial schools.

"By changing the way students learn, SIS Cambodia has helped to improve the education sector by providing a safe learning environment for both students and teachers," said Dinthan.

There are plans to deploy SIS application in 1,000 schools across the country. During the first stage of implementation, over 300,000 students and about 20,000 teachers in 300 schools have effectively benefited from the system.

Metfone has been in the forefront to assist the Cambodian government in implementing its ambitious national digital transformation programme.

The company has so far worked closely with ministries and agencies to implement digital transformation projects in many fields including education, health and transportation.

As one of the leading companies in the field of telecommunications and digital technology sectors, Metfone has the largest network infrastructures serving around nine million customers across the Kingdom.



Around 300,000 students rely on Metfone's SIS application for uninterrupted education. SUPPLIED

# POST FOCUS



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ROYAL TRAIN SQUARE



CCF students and management visited Royal Train Square to attend the first Full Steam Ahead event. SUPPLIED



Artist Prof Carlo Santoro demonstrates the 'Expressive Computations' artwork to visitors. HENG CHIVOAN

## Full Steam Ahead showcases the power of art at Royal Train Square

**R**OYAL Train Square, the Cambodian Children's Fund (CCF), Krama NFT Marketplace and Field of Dreams on Sunday held the first of the monthly Full Steam Ahead events at the beautifully restored Phnom Penh Railway Station.

Full Steam Ahead – a 14-month arts and educational project in celebration of the 90th anniversary of Phnom Penh Train Station and to promote STEAM education – is to create 90 pieces of art live at a series of events at Royal Train Square.

Created by Cambodian and international artists working with CCF students, the collaborations will promote STEAM education and form part of a tapestry of all the works displayed next December celebrating the 90th anniversary of the capital's railway station and the relaunch of Royal Train Square.

The opening event saw the exhibition of the first Full Steam Ahead artwork – "Expressive Computations" – and pieces soon to be available on Krama NFT Marketplace, as well as a performance by Cambodian-American poet Kosal Khiev and music by Gerard Evans.

Royal Train Square managing director Scott Bolls said Phnom Penh's newly opened arts culture and F&B hub was the natural home for an event such as Full Steam Ahead and hailed its importance.

"We are delighted to be hosting Full Steam Ahead because as an art lover I fully appreciate the importance of including the arts as part of a fully formed education for students.

"It is wonderful that we have so many good artists here in the Kingdom, and we want to promote them and the Cambodian scene internationally, and with NFT Marketplace and

Royal Train Square we have the perfect platform to do so.

"This represents the beginning of the growth of NFTs in Cambodia, and with Krama NFT Marketplace the pioneering digital asset creation company in the Kingdom, it is an honour to have such distinguished guests here at the Train Station to showcase the first set of art that we will be putting on the Krama platform very soon.

"We are thrilled to have the sponsorship of Field of Dreams, a fully planned community utopia to be built on the outskirts of Phnom Penh and potentially the Kingdom's first tokenised real estate project. Alongside Royal Train Square and Krama NFT marketplace, we have a great set of partners supporting the wonderful work of CCF," said Bolls,

who is also director of Krama NFT Marketplace. The arts and sciences were traditionally viewed as two very different fields of study, but education

policymakers have reappraised this view.

While STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics – education focuses on innovation, influential educators believed it missed the crucial elements of design thinking and creativity, and STEAM was the answer.

Physicist Albert Einstein famously appreciated the importance of creativity – "To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science," he once said.

And the movement to have the arts included in STEM has been growing globally, and in the Kingdom.

"STEAM education is critical for our students and for Cambodia to have a solid base in infrastructure – physical infrastructure and digital infrastructure – as that's where the jobs will be and what will best enhance Cambodia's ability to compete on the world stage.

"Having the arts in STEAM is something very important to us at CCF and for the children to foster innovation while ensuring that Cambodian traditions and culture are not lost in this economic development," said CCF founder Scott Neeson.

Prof Santoro from Metaestetica Lab who created the "Expressive Computations" digital piece of art for Full Steam Ahead with a group of CCF students said STEAM education was important for integrating a range of disciplines to develop a greater understanding of the "alternative reality of the abstract world".

"At the CCF, our Expressive Computation Lab, promoted within the STEAM courses, offers students the opportunity to look at the world through a lens capable of synthesising interdisciplinary knowledge and exploring the reciprocal relationships between art, graphics, mathematics, geometry and psychology, focusing

on computation, visualisation and perception.

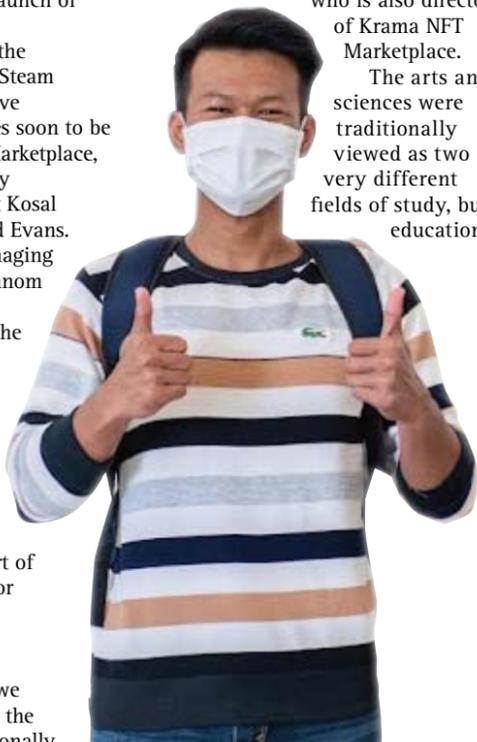
"This is an experience that has allowed them not only to familiarise themselves with computer software, but also to develop their cognitive skills through those processes of abstraction necessary for the conceptualisation of complex shapes that animate the virtual space of a screen," said Prof Santoro.

CCF Grade 11 student Kim Theory said the introduction of STEAM into

her education had proven to be an inspiration.

"Art has inspired me with many things, especially my imagination. Art allows me to imagine anything freely which gives me freedom in my own world.

"Art helps me understand many things that happen in the world such as tradition and culture. Art inspires me to picture a new world with many different things. Art makes my life easier," Theory said. ■



STEAM education includes the arts. SUPPLIED



CCF founder Scott Neeson (left) and Krama NFT Marketplace's Scott Bolls. SUPPLIED



Full Steam Ahead aims to promote STEAM education. SUPPLIED

# World

## UK readies new Covid rules as third Omicron case emerges

BRITAIN'S government on November 28 defended the pace and scale of its response to the new Omicron strain of Covid-19 as officials reported a third case of the emerging variant, and warned of more to come.

Health Secretary Sajid Javid said mandatory mask-wearing would return to shops and public transport in England on November 30, but told families to plan for Christmas "as normal", despite new rules to combat Omicron.

Also effective November 30, the government's website instructs all passengers entering the UK to take a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test for Covid-19 two days after their arrival, and to self-isolate until they receive a negative result.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson had announced the tougher measures at news conference on November 27, hours after the UK confirmed its first two Omicron cases, but did not specify when they would take effect.

A third case was confirmed on November 28 by the UK Health Security Agency, but it said the person had already left the country after visiting the Westminster area of London – where parliament is located – having travelled from southern Africa.

The agency said it was "very likely that we will find



Passengers, many wearing face masks, walk along a platform as they travel on the London underground in central London on Sunday. Health Secretary Sajid Javid said mandatory mask-wearing will return to shops and public transport in England on Tuesday. AFP

more cases over the coming days ... as we increase case detection through focused contact tracing".

British Airways meanwhile said it had taken the "difficult decision" to suspend flights to Hong Kong after a crew member tested positive for Covid, having been negative on leaving the UK.

Services to and from the former UK colony in China have already been scaled back sharply due to its strict Covid curbs.

Johnson was widely criticised for his own travel and quarantine policy earlier in

the pandemic when he kept UK borders open even as infection rates surged, yielding Britain one of the world's worst per-capita death tolls from Covid.

The government controversially dropped the masks mandate in July for England, after a prior lockdown, while the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland kept it in place.

All four UK nations are expected to adopt the same PCR rule, after England again diverged in July by requiring only a simple lateral flow test for incoming passengers on

flights, ships and trains.

### 'Holes in the defences'

Travel from 10 countries in southern Africa is now banned because of Omicron, but Javid conceded that hundreds of passengers had arrived on flights from South Africa on November 26 without being tested.

But he told BBC television: "I think the speed at which we acted at could not have been any faster."

Javid added that the government was "nowhere near" reintroducing social distancing rules and work-from-home

guidance, which were also controversially discarded in England earlier this year against the advice of scientists.

He said it was too soon to judge the effectiveness of existing vaccines against Omicron, as drugs manufacturers rush to research new treatments against the emergent strain.

But the government is seeking approval from its Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) to expand the rollout of booster jabs, shortening the time-frame between second and third shots, and broadening the age range to all over-18s.

The JCVI is expected to respond early this week, Javid said.

The opposition Labour party said the government was again doing too little, too late after Omicron emerged.

Even after November 30, passengers can enter Britain without a pre-departure test and travel freely from their port of entry on public transport, Labour's foreign affairs spokeswoman Lisa Nandy noted.

"We desperately want to see them tighten up the travel restrictions," she said on Sky News.

"There is a real problem when for 18 months the government has been warned that there are holes in those defences and still hasn't taken action to plug [them]." AFP ■

## Epstein assoc Maxwell set to go on trial for girl sex crimes

THE much-anticipated sex crimes trial of Ghislaine Maxwell, the British socialite charged with grooming underage girls for late financier Jeffrey Epstein, is set to begin on November 29 before a packed federal courthouse in Manhattan.

The 59-year-old daughter of the late newspaper baron Robert Maxwell faces an effective life sentence if convicted in New York of sex trafficking minors for Epstein, her former lover who killed himself in prison over two years ago.

Following the death of Epstein – a multi-million-dollar money manager who befriended countless celebrities, including Britain's Prince Andrew – prosecutors vowed to pursue co-conspirators, resulting in Maxwell's arrest in July 2020.

She has since been held at the Metropolitan Detention Centre in Brooklyn – where she has complained of unsanitary and inhumane conditions – under rigorous surveillance that one of her lawyers compared to that surrounding serial killer Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*.

Maxwell's alleged crimes occurred between 1994 and 2004, and relate to four unnamed women, including two who say they were just 14 and 15 years old when they were sexually abused.

Prosecutors say Maxwell befriended girls with shopping and movie theatre trips, later coaxing them into giving Epstein nude massages at his various residences, during which he would engage in sex acts before giving them money.

US government attorneys say Maxwell sometimes participated in the alleged abuse, at her London home and at Epstein's properties in New Mexico, Manhattan and Palm Beach, Florida.

Epstein died aged 66 in a Manhattan jail in August 2019 while awaiting trial on child sex trafficking charges.

The 12 jurors and six alternates who will decide Maxwell's fate will be officially seated on Monday. The trial, taking place in the Thurgood Marshall US courthouse in lower Manhattan, is expected to continue into mid-January, 2022.

Maxwell has pleaded not guilty to all six counts, which include sex trafficking of a minor, and faces up to 80 years in prison if convicted on all charges.

The French-born heiress has also been charged with two counts of perjury. Those counts are due to be tried after her sex crimes trial.

The charges relate to testimony she gave in 2016 in a defamation case filed against her by Epstein accuser Virginia Giuffre.

Giuffre alleges Epstein lent her out for sex with his wealthy and powerful associates, including Prince Andrew.

Maxwell, a long-time friend of Andrew, is known to have introduced the prince to Epstein.

Giuffre has sued the royal in New York, alleging he had sex with her more than 20 years ago when she was 17 and a minor under US law.

That civil lawsuit is expected to be heard before a jury in late 2022. AFP ■

## Barbados to cut UK ties, replace Queen

BARBADOS is about to cut ties with the British monarchy, but the legacy of a sometimes brutal colonial past and the pandemic's impact on tourism pose major challenges for the Caribbean island as it becomes the world's newest republic.

Famed for its beaches and love of cricket, Barbados at midnight on November 29 replaces its head of state, Queen Elizabeth II, with her current representative, Governor General Sandra Mason.

Ceremonies on the evening of November 29 and into the next day will include military parades and celebrations, as Mason is inaugurated as president, with Prince Charles – heir to the British throne – looking on.

In a speech to be delivered at the transition ceremony, Charles focused on continued ties between the two countries.

"As your constitutional status changes, it was important to me that I should join you to reaffirm those things which do not change. For example, the close and trusted partnership between Barbados and the United Kingdom as vital members of the Commonwealth," reads an excerpt of his speech, as released by the prince's office.

The dawn of a new era has fueled debate among the population of 285,000 over Britain's centuries of influence, including more than 200 years of slavery until 1834, and Barbados finally becoming independent in 1966.

"As a young girl, when I heard about the queen, I would be really excited," said Sharon Bellamy-Thompson, 50, a fish vendor in the capital Bridgetown, who remembers being about eight and seeing the monarch on a visit.

"As I grow older and older, I started to wonder what this queen really means for me and for my nation," she said. "Having a female Barbadian president will be great."

For young activists such as Firhaana Bulbulia, founder of the Barbados Muslim Association, British colonialism and slavery lie behind the island's modern inequalities.

"The wealth gap, the ability to own land, and even access to loans from banks all have a lot to do with structures built out of being ruled by Britain," Bulbulia, 26, said.

"The actual chains [of slavery] were broken and we no longer wore them, but the mental chains continue to persist in our mindsets."



Prince Charles, Prince of Wales (right) and Barbados' Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley during the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. AFP

In October, Barbados elected Mason to become its first president, one year after Prime Minister Mia Mottley declared the country would "fully" leave its colonial past.

But some Barbadians argue there are more pressing national issues, including economic turmoil caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has exposed overreliance on tourism – which, ironically, is dependent on British visitors.

Eerie calm in usually bustling Bridgetown, paltry numbers at popular tourist spots and a dead nightlife scene all point to a country struggling after years of relative prosperity.

Unemployment is at nearly 16 per cent, up from nine per cent in recent years, despite sharply increased government borrowing to fund public sector projects and create jobs.

The country has just eased a long-standing Covid-19 curfew, pushing it back from 9pm to midnight.

Opposition leader Bishop Joseph Atherley said the celebrations among dignitaries would largely not be accessible to ordinary people.

"Increasing numbers of Covid cases, an increasing sense of stress and fear – I just don't think that it is the right time." AFP ■

## S'pore, M'sia loosen Covid curbs at busy land crossing

MALAYSIA and Singapore eased coronavirus travel restrictions on one of the world's busiest land borders on November 29 after nearly two years, allowing some vaccinated people to cross without quarantine.

Before the pandemic, about 300,000 people used to commute across the border from Malaysia every day to the neighbouring city-state, to work in areas ranging from public transport to electronics manufacturing.

But most travel was abruptly halted in March, 2020, leaving many who previously commuted, and other Malaysians in Singapore, effectively stuck there as they needed to continue working.

From November 29, vaccinated Singaporean and Malaysian citizens, those holding permanent residency status and work permits can cross the 1km causeway separating the countries without having to quarantine.

"I feel happy to be able to go back and meet my family finally after two years," Eunice Teoh, a Malaysian getting the first bus from Singapore under the scheme, said.

"I do feel a bit nervous because this is the first batch, and I'm not really sure what will happen," added the 28-year-old, who works in finance and was heading to the Malaysian state of Pahang.

Initially, around 3,000 people a day will be able to cross using special bus services, and will have to take virus tests.

Officials say the first stage is aimed at workers who have been unable to see families for some time, and they plan to expand it later to other groups.

### Counting down the days

Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob made an official visit to the city-state to mark the start of the initiative, doing a fist-bump with Singapore counterpart Lee Hsien Loong as they met at a border checkpoint on the causeway.

Restrictions were also eased on November 29 on air travel, with vaccinated people allowed to fly between the countries' main airports without quarantining.

Christine Soong was heading from Malaysia to visit family members in Singapore.

"I have three [grandchildren] and they all miss me so much, so they're very excited," the 69-year-old said at Kuala Lumpur airport.

"They've been counting down the days since we booked the flight."

Prior to the easing of curbs, citizens and some other groups were still allowed to travel between the neighbours, but they had to quarantine on arrival.

Both Malaysia and Singapore – which were part of the same country during a stormy, two-year union in the 1960s – have high vaccination rates.

Singapore's outbreak has been mild by global standards, although Malaysia faced a serious wave this year driven by the Delta variant.

Malaysians have long been a key part of the workforce of wealthier Singapore, which has a population of just 5.5 million, and then can typically earn higher salaries than back home.

The easing of curbs comes despite the emergence last week of the heavily mutated Omicron strain, which is starting to spread around the world. AFP



## Monkey's uncle

Macaque monkeys climb onto a news photographer at the Phra Prang Sam Yod temple during the annual Monkey Buffet Festival in Lopburi province, north of Bangkok on Sunday. AFP

# Singapore keeps tabs on Omicron

SINGAPORE is watching the new coronavirus variant Omicron closely and may be forced to roll back the easing up of safety measures as it moves forward to tackle the disease, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on November 28.

But Lee said he is confident the country will be able to live with the virus, and held up how its people have made a lot of progress in dealing with the disease over the past two years.

In his first public comments about Omicron, Lee, who was speaking at the People's Action Party (PAP) convention on November 28, said that Singapore must be mentally prepared for "more bumps along the way" as it deals with an evolving virus.

"We are tracking this very closely. We are not sure yet, but we may well be forced to take a few steps back again, before we can take more steps forward," he said.

"But despite all this, I am confident that, eventually, we will find our way to living with the virus and safely resume all the things we love to do.

"We are making all this effort because we want to get there safely, with as few casualties along the way," he added.

Omicron, which was dubbed a "variant of concern" by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on November 26, is a new and potentially more contagious coronavirus strain, and Singapore and other countries have in recent days restricted travel from southern Africa, where the strain was first detected.

Singapore has largely managed to keep its Covid-19 situation under control through a series of safety measures that the government tightens to respond to the spread of the virus.

Last week, the government relaxed curbs on dining out, household vis-

its and some social activities, after nearly two months of stabilisation measures. These measures were introduced on September 27 following a surge in Covid-19 cases, and were intended to last a month but were extended as the country's healthcare system remained at risk of being overwhelmed.

Singapore had imposed a circuit breaker from April 7 to June 1 in 2020 to stem the initial spread of the disease, where people were not allowed to have social gatherings or dine out.

Lee acknowledged that the fight against Covid-19 has been tough on Singapore and its people. He said:

"It has been a long journey with many twists and turns. The virus has surprised us over and over again. Repeatedly we have had to adapt our response, pick ourselves up and then press on."

On November 27, the Ministry of Health reported 1,761 new cases of the disease, as well as a weekly infection growth rate of 0.75.

This was the 15th consecutive day the growth rate is below one. The number refers to the ratio of community cases in the past week over the week before, and a weekly infection growth rate that is consistently below one shows the number of new

weekly Covid-19 cases is falling.

Omicron was first identified in Gauteng, a province of South Africa, and the WHO was alerted on November 24. It was declared a variant of concern because of the large number of mutations detected in its spike protein, which may cause an increased risk of reinfection, among other negative effects. The spike protein is what the coronavirus uses to begin infecting human cells.

Lee on November 28 thanked healthcare and front-line workers, as well as PAP party activists, for working to keep Singapore safe. THE STRAITS TIMES (SINGAPORE)/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



Singapore Prime Minister Lee said the city-state must be mentally prepared for 'more bumps along the way' as it deals with an evolving virus. STRAITS TIMES



# Lifestyle

## Snowboarding baby stealing hearts and headlines in China

**A**T JUST 11 months old, Wang Yuji can't even walk, but she is already snowboarding and taking the slopes – and the internet – by storm.

The smallest of all the riders at a resort near Beijing, which is set to host the 2022 Winter Olympics in just a few months, Yuji is clipped into tiny boots by her parents and padded out with layers of protective clothing.

Once her parents let go, she swoops smoothly down the piste on her small board, giggling and flapping her arms.

Unlike many clumsy beginners who struggle to stay upright, her bemused parents say snowboarding somehow came naturally to their baby.

"We put her in the shoes and realised she could bring herself to stand ... then we brought her to a gentle slope and watched her slide down, squatting on the board by herself," Yuji's mother Fan Xueyin said.

Yuji's first attempt at snowboarding was only two weeks ago during a family holiday.

Each morning since then she has joined winter sports fans at the Thaiwoo Ski Resort in Chongli, Zhangjiakou – one of the hosting cities for the Winter Olympics.

"If she had been afraid or resisted, of course we wouldn't have made her do the sport," Fan adds.

But once on the board, "she would pat her legs and start giggling, so we could tell that she's not afraid at all and is enjoying herself".

As Yuji is still too small to control her direction or speed, a nearby parent is always ready to snatch her if she veers towards an obstacle.

"You're doing great!" they call at her, jogging alongside their child.



At just eleven months old, Wang Yuji can't even walk but she is already snowboarding and taking the slopes – and the internet – by storm. AFP



Wang Shu helps his 11-month-old daughter Wang Yuji take off her snowboard at a ski resort in Zhangjiakou in northern China's Hebei province on Wednesday. AFP

### Boarding 'Beibei'

Ahead of the Beijing Games, the government has been keen to promote winter sports, with huge construction of snow resorts leading to millions of fresh devotees.

Yuji's father Wang Shu is a new fan of the sport, having recently started to learn.

And after seeing his daughter's talent, he says he has been inspired to train as a professional snowboarding

coach, so that he can teach her when she's older.

When not on the board, Yuji crawls about in the snow and is learning to take her first tentative steps independently.

The little prodigy, nicknamed Beibei ("baby"), has earned reams of internet fans and videos of her have garnered tens of millions of views on Chinese social media.

At the resort, she is immediately recognised by people who stop to take photos with her.

"A lot of people are leaving messages like 'She's so talented and maybe can compete in the Winter Olympics in the future'," Fan says, admitting it made her "really think about it".

"It would be great for her to bring glory to our country – but she is still too young," she chuckles.

"We'll respect her own choices in the future." AFP

## Soweto's ice-cream truck veteran keeps generations smiling

THE melody of Siphon Mtshali's ice-cream van has drawn hordes of Soweto children since South Africa's violent apartheid years, running over for creamy soft servings. Decades later, it still is going.

He has worked "Monday to Monday" for the past 45 years, driving through the hilly township that was once home to South Africa's first black president Nelson Mandela.

Even during the violent liberation struggle that rocked Soweto during the 1970s, he sold ice-cream.

Only the winter weather occasionally stops him.

"If it's cold, you get the rest," said Mtshali, a 63-year-old father born and raised in Soweto, where students once rose against white-minority rule in 1976.

But politics have never been his thing.

"I have seen people grow from the ice-cream car," he said, remembering that prices were lower during apartheid, which officially ended in 1994.

Today he charges eight rand

(\$0.50) for a swirly serving of strawberry or vanilla.

Add a couple of rand for a sprinkle of hundreds-and-thousands or another crunchy topping.

Mtshali fondly recalls the round baby faces of his first customers, now adults, who today send their children to his van, coins in hand.

"They were young when we started," he said, serving some people directly into their cars as they ride past.

Under a bright summer sun, Mtshali drives slowly past small identical brick and iron-roofed houses built for black labourers on the outskirts of Johannesburg during apartheid.

He has to cut the engine to switch on his Italian ice-cream machine.

"Can't do both at the same time," he muttered, blades churning in the background.

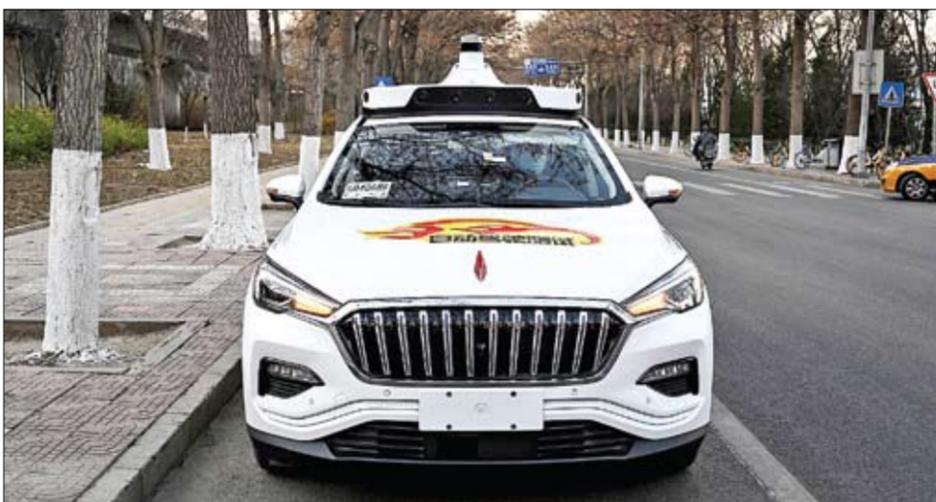
A small technical glitch that does not impact his passion for the smiles he brings.

"As long as I'm alive I'm gonna do it," he said. "Everybody is happy with ice-cream." AFP



The owner of an ice-cream truck, Siphon Mtshali, prepares ice-cream cones for children in Soweto on November 19. AFP

## First autonomous 'robotaxis' enter service in Beijing



An Apollo Go autonomous taxi on a street in Yizhuang, a town of Daxing District, in the southeast suburbs of Beijing on Thursday. AFP

IT LOOKS like a normal car but the white taxi by the kerb has nobody driving it, and communicates with customers digitally to obtain directions and take payment.

Beijing last week approved its first autonomous taxis for commercial use, bringing dozens of the so-called "robotaxis" to the streets of the Chinese capital.

The vehicles can only carry two passengers at a time and are confined to the city's southern Yizhuang area.

An employee of the taxi firm also sits in the front of the car in case any sudden intervention is needed, but the vehicle drives itself.

The roll-out is a significant

step forward for the driverless ambitions of Chinese tech giant Baidu and start-up Pony.ai, who were given the greenlight to deploy the cars on Thursday.

But it is expected to be years before the taxis operate fully without human intervention, due to regulations and safety requirements.

Developers are hoping Chinese consumers – who have embraced e-commerce, online payments and other digital solutions – will quickly get used to the sensation of travelling in a car without a driver.

Pony.ai co-founder Peng Jun said the key to moving the industry forward is "policy, technology and public acceptance".

More than 500,000 trips have already been made in Pony.ai's robotaxis during earlier testing stages, the Toyota-backed start-up said.

Passengers using Baidu's "Apollo Go" cars must download an app called "Luobo kuaipao" – meaning "radish run" – and can hail a cab at one of 600 pick-up and drop-off points.

Sixty-seven Baidu taxis are on the roads in Beijing charging just over two yuan (\$0.30) for a 5.9km journey.

Alibaba-backed start-up AutoX and ride-hailing giant DiDi Chuxing have also been running robotaxi pilot projects in cities around the country. AFP

Lifestyle



Indian businessman Anand Prakash Chouksey (left) poses along with visiting schoolchildren in front of a replica of the Taj Mahal at Burhanpur in India's Madhya Pradesh state on Thursday. AFP

# Indian builds Taj Mahal replica home for spouse

**A** LOVESTRUCK and historically minded Indian husband has emulated the world's most famous display of marital devotion by building for his wife a replica of the Taj Mahal. The original "Monument to Love" was constructed on the orders of heartbroken Mughal emperor Shah Jahan to house the tomb of his favourite wife, Mumtaz, in the 17th century. Anand Prakash Chouksey's beloved remains very much alive, and even helped consult on the project and his version of the marble wonder of the world, around one-third the size of the original. "My wife's only demand was for a meditation room. She's a spiritual woman," the 52-year-old businessman said. "She says the dome creates a different environment and there is a lot of positive energy."

**Teardrop**

The original Taj Mahal – dubbed a "teardrop on the cheek of time" by writer Rabindranath Tagore – is in Agra south of Delhi, however the new replica is 800km (500 miles) away in Burhanpur. But the central Indian city is none other than the place where Mumtaz died while giving birth to her 14th child in June 1632, having accompanied Shah Jahan to quell a local revolt. Mumtaz's body was even initially buried there too, and according to locals Shah Jahan had at first wanted to build the Taj Mahal for her on the banks of the river Tapti. "The soil structure back then was not suitable to build the Taj here that's how it was decided to be built in Agra," Chouksey explained. The city is still home to the dilapidated remains of the palace where the royals lived, in-

cluding a once-beautiful hammam or bathhouse built by Shah Jahan for his wife to relax in before she died. Chouksey's story has none of the tragedy and building his new home has taken him three years – a dozen less than the mausoleum that inspired it. It cost 15 million rupees (\$200,000) to build. "We used marble from Makrana to build the house, which is the same that was used to build the Taj Mahal," he said. Chouksey plans to mount an Indian flag on top of the main dome and add symbols from India's most popular religions to the four minarets surrounding his new manor. "We want to send a message of peace and religious harmony. There is a lot of hate around. Love solves all problems in life and Taj Mahal is a symbol of that." AFP

# Thailand's Lopburi hosts annual monkey fruit fest

THEIR table manners were shocking, but the guests of honour at a special banquet in the Thai town of Lopburi on Sunday loved monkeying around. Lopburi has been laying on an annual feast of fruit for its population of macaques since the late 1980s, part religious tradition and part tourist attraction. This year's Monkey Buffet Festival saw around 1,000 hungry simians descend on tables and wheelchairs piled high with fruit outside the town's 800-year-old Pra Prang Sam Yod temple. Organiser Yongyuth Kitwatananusont said the monkeys have a special taste for durian, the pungent love-it-or-hate-it tropical fruit popular across Southeast Asia. Covid-19 restrictions meant last year's party was missing

its usual crowd of spectators, but this year the humans were back in force, with more than 100 turning out to see the furry fruit fanatics. And the cheeky monkeys



Tourists gather and take pictures as macaque monkeys eat food left on tables outside the Phra Prang Sam Yod temple during the annual Monkey Buffet Festival in Lopburi province. AFP

were keen to renew their acquaintance with their distant cousins, clambering over on-lookers, stealing hats, chewing long hair and giving the occasional bite. AFP

## Thinking caps

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14					15						16			
17					18						19			
20				21							22			
23											24		25	26
	27					28	29	30	31					
			32		33		34				35			
36	37	38		39		40				41		42		
43			44		45				46		47			
48				49				50		51		52	53	
54								55	56					57
		58			59	60	61							
62	63				64						65			
66					67						68			
69					70						71			

## "WE GOT 'EM!"

**ACROSS**

- 1 Big name in cosmetics
- 5 Home of a steak-order business
- 10 Drummer Ulrich
- 14 "Molto \_\_\_" ("Very good," in Verona)
- 15 Copperhead weapon
- 16 Farm call
- 17 Arch type
- 18 Miserable feeling
- 19 Light black
- 20 Parental spider?
- 23 High school class
- 24 Ab strengthener
- 27 Work as a tracer
- 28 Soldier
- 32 Center of a ball, briefly
- 34 Elementary particle
- 35 Bros, for instance
- 36 Problem of the middle ages?
- 39 Cultivation place
- 42 You might put a lid on it
- 43 Corker
- 45 Football propeller
- 46 Standings stat
- 48 Bad thing for an NFL receiver to have

**DOWN**

- 1 Domicile
- 2 They're unlikely to bring home the bacon
- 3 Antsy
- 4 Razzed
- 5 Track shapes
- 6 Large unit of resistance
- 7 Soon, to a bard
- 8 \_\_\_ Kong (Chinese city)
- 9 \_\_\_ nitrate (Chemical reagent)
- 10 Open galleries
- 11 Runway, of a sort
- 12 Biochemistry abbr.

- 13 Blue hue
- 21 "Omigosh!"
- 22 Ballpark fig.
- 25 Convex shape
- 26 Head-turning summons
- 29 Assisted
- 30 Wealthy Brit, slangily
- 31 From scratch
- 33 \_\_\_ carotene
- 36 Big loser's nickname?
- 37 Distinctive atmosphere
- 38 More glistening
- 40 Long, long time
- 41 Luncheonette kin
- 44 Like a nest egg
- 47 Great meals, in London
- 49 The other woman
- 50 Support for a fracture
- 52 Crow's home, once (Var.)
- 53 Click beetle
- 56 Breaks
- 57 Parkinson's drug
- 59 Little devils
- 60 World's longest river
- 61 Kind of sack?
- 62 Stately tree
- 63 Brazilian port, for short

## Sudoku Pacific

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

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

## Monday's solution

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

## Monday's solution

Monday's Puzzle Answer

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



Napoli's players celebrate their victory at the end of the Italian Serie A football match against Lazio at Diego-Armando-Maradona stadium in Naples on Sunday. AFP

## Napoli honour Maradona

**D**AZZLING Napoli paid the perfect tribute to Diego Maradona on Sunday by thumping Lazio 4-0 to move three points clear at the top of Serie A.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino was among those present in Naples as the southern Italian city honoured one of its adopted sons, who led Napoli to their only two league titles and the 1989 UEFA Cup and died a year ago on Thursday.

Fans chanted Maradona's name as a statue, which depicts their idol in full flight atop the number 10, was carried around the pitch.

A tribute from Pele was shown on the stadium's big screens, while players came out for their pre-match warm-up to the sound of "Life Is Life" by Opus, the song to which Maradona does keepee-uppies in one of the most beloved pieces of footage of the Argentine in his pomp.

Inspired by the emotional ceremony, Napoli took full advantage of AC Milan crashing to a 3-1 home defeat against Sassuolo to go it alone at the summit with an at times electrifying performance.

"We put in one of our best performances, now the important thing is to always play like that, because you need to repeat those kinds of displays. The way we played today was perfect," Dries Mertens told DAZN, after scoring a superb double.

Wearing shirts bearing Maradona's face, Luciano Spalletti's table toppers came

out like a team possessed and blew Lazio away with three fantastic first-half goals.

### Mertens sweeps Lazio aside

In almost perfect harmony with the occasion it was another adopted Neapolitan in Mertens who led the charge, the Belgian nicknamed 'Ciro' scoring a brilliant brace of which Maradona himself would have been proud.

Piotr Zielinski got the ball rolling in the seventh minute by almost ripping a hole in the net with his rocket opener, and just three minutes later Mertens took the roof off the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona when he ended a brilliant move by dumping Patric on the deck with a feint and slotting home a cool finish.

After Luis Alberto and then Francesco Acerbi went close for Lazio in the space of a minute, Mertens effectively sealed the win with more than an hour to play with another wonderful goal, clipping a first-time strike that sailed over a despairing Pepe Reina and increased his club-record goal tally to 139.

Fabian Ruiz then capped a perfect night when he lashed home the fourth from distance.

The 34-year-old's three class strikes in his last two Serie A matches will also give Spalletti hope that he can get by without star striker Victor Osimhen, out for up to three months with facial fractures.

"These are goals which give me a

great deal of satisfaction ... Victor gets injured and that's the moment when you need to be ready," added Mertens.

### Sassuolo's San Siro success

Sassuolo emerged worthy winners at the San Siro earlier on Sunday after recovering from Alessio Romagnoli's 21st-minute header through a superb Gianluca Scamacca strike, Simon Kjær's own goal and a solo effort from Domenico Berardi.

Milan also finished with 10 men after Romagnoli completed a miserable afternoon by being shown a straight red card for taking out Gregoire Defrel.

Their first home league defeat of the season after the previous weekend's 4-3 loss at Fiorentina meant that city rivals Inter Milan are now only a point behind them in third, with Atalanta a further three back after beating Juventus in Turin on Sunday.

"It's clear if you concede seven goals in two games something's not working," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli, who on Friday signed an extension to his Milan contract until June 2023 with an option for another year.

Roma are three points behind Atalanta in fifth after Tammy Abraham's 32nd-minute strike gave them a 1-0 win over 13th-placed Torino. Earlier Andriy Shevchenko earned his first point as Genoa coach with a largely uneventful goalless draw at Udinese.

On Wednesday, his team host Milan, where the former Ukraine striker scored 175 goals and won one Serie A title and the 2003 Champions League. AFP

## Momota – badminton no 1 bounces back from crash

KENTO Momota suffered a career-threatening car crash and then flopped at the Tokyo Olympics, but the Japanese badminton star can end a turbulent two years on a high at this week's BWF World Tour Finals.

The world number one won the Indonesia Masters earlier this month – his first international title since being badly injured in the January 2020 accident – but then endured a shock defeat in the last 16 at last week's Indonesia Open.

It was typical of the roller-coaster journey that the 27-year-old has been on since he was almost forced to retire after fracturing his eye socket in the car crash.

Momota said that his "spirit was almost broken" as he tried to recover from the accident – hours after he won the Malaysia Masters – which killed the driver of the vehicle taking him to Kuala Lumpur airport.

He suffered double vision and needed surgery on a bone near his eye that delayed his comeback, leaving him fearing his career was over.

"I thought about it. How long will it take?" he said in March last year, when asked if he was worried he might never play again.

Momota made a full recovery and headed into the Tokyo Games on home soil in July this year as the favourite to win gold.

But his Olympic dream turned into a nightmare when he was eliminated in the group stage. Momota admitted his killer instinct had deserted him and blamed his own "weakness" for the shock exit.

"Previously, when a match went like this, I would be able to recover and think clearly," said a visibly stunned Momota.

### Gambling ban

It was the latest unhappy chapter in his Olympic career, following a dramatic fall from grace just months before the 2016 Rio Games.

He admitted gambling in an illegal casino with a fellow player in April 2016, and was kicked off Japan's Olympic

team and banned from competition indefinitely.

He returned a year later and set about making up for lost time, beating then-Olympic champion Chen Long for the Asian title in April 2018 before working his way back up the rankings.

His comeback reached a climax in 2019 when he won a record-breaking 11 titles, including the World Championships, Asia Championships and All England Open.

The left-hander lost just six of the 73 matches he played that year and admitted he had surprised even himself with his blistering form.

"I feel like I am not yet a legendary player but I will work hard in order to play well in future tournaments," he said.

But then came the accident and a pandemic that forced the cancellation of badminton tournaments all over the world.

Momota played his first match in almost a year at Japan's national championships in Tokyo last December, starting tentatively before beating Kanta Tsuneyama in the final.

His hopes of returning to international competition were then dashed when he tested positive for coronavirus at the airport in January as the Japan team was about to depart for the Thailand Open.

He eventually resumed international play at the All England Open in March, but lost in the quarter-finals.

His form since his Tokyo Games heartbreak has been mixed.

He lost to new Olympic champion Viktor Axelsen in the final of the Denmark Open in October, then retired injured in the semi-finals of the French Open, before finally making the breakthrough at the Indonesia Masters.

While his name Kento is reportedly a tribute to Superman's alter ego Clark Kent, Momota has shown he is only human.

Now he's hoping he can be the "Man of Steel" by capping off his latest comeback with victory at the Tour Finals in Bali. AFP

## Portuguese league discuss 'disgrace' after 9-man start

PORTUGUESE league officials met on Sunday to discuss the farcical game between Belenenses and Benfica, which had to be called off in the second half after Belenenses started with only nine players, including two goalkeepers, due to an outbreak of Covid-19.

Belenenses played one of their goalkeepers, Joao Monteiro, as an outfield player and had no substitutes at the Estadio Nacional where Benfica strolled into a 7-0 lead before half-time on Saturday.

The Primeira Liga game was called off by referee Manuel Mota three minutes into the second half, after Belenenses were reduced to six players. They had emerged after half-time with only seven players before Monteiro went down injured.

According to reports in Portugal, Primeira Liga officials met on Sunday morning to discuss the controversial fixture and whether any disciplinary action should be taken against Belenenses.

The Portuguese health ministry also issued a statement on Sunday, saying "it does not comment on the holding of games, whether in football or any other sport".

Belenenses president Rui Pedro Soares said on Saturday the game was a "disgrace" and criticised the league for effectively forcing the club to play, under threat of being deducted points.

"What happened today was a great shame, there is nothing to justify what happened," he said. "Never in my life have I

witnessed such dignified behaviour as from those nine players."

After informing the league "that we didn't wish to play the match, we were told we had eight players able to play" and "not turning up could be considered an unjustified absence", said the Belenenses president.

Benfica president Rui Costa described it as a "black page for Portuguese football" but insisted "Benfica simply complied with the regulations" and were "not responsible" for the match being played.

Reports in Portugal claimed Belenenses were without 14 players due to Covid, as well as three members of staff.

Belenenses coach Filipe Candido had indicated on Saturday that he would have to promote

some under-23 players due to injuries and suspensions.

Supporters in the stadium chanted: "The league is a disgrace."

The decision to go ahead with the fixture also drew criticism from players, with the Belenenses team posting a joint message on Twitter that read: "Football only has colour if it has competition. Football only has colour when it is an example of public health. Today, football has lost its colour."

Manchester City's Portuguese midfielder Bernardo Silva wrote: "What is this? Am I the only one who doesn't understand why the game hasn't been postponed?"

Belenenses sat 16th in the Primeira Liga at the start of the game while Benfica were third. AFP



Belenenses' SAD players arrive at the pitch before the Portuguese league football match against SL Benfica on Saturday. AFP

# Sport

## Ben Stokes feared the worst after choking on medicine

ENGLAND star Ben Stokes has revealed the worrying moment when he nearly choked on a tablet that had become lodged in his throat.

The 30-year-old all-rounder took an indefinite break from all cricket in July to prioritise his mental well-being and rest a fractured finger.

But the Durham hero has used his newspaper column to say how it was neither of those issues which caused him the greatest concern ahead of the first Ashes Test in Brisbane from December 8-12.

The article does not say exactly when the incident took place but it appears to have been on the current tour of Australia.

"It was actually down to a simple tablet that went down the wrong way, and got stuck in my windpipe causing me to choke horribly before the glands in my face went into overdrive to flush it out," Stokes wrote in the *Daily Mirror*.

"Until it actually came out, I thought this might be the end. We've all had those moments when something gets stuck in the throat, and usually someone can help you out.

"But I was on my own in my room and I couldn't breathe as it became lodged and started to dissolve. It felt like my mouth was on fire."

Stokes added: "Without going into too much detail I have never seen as much saliva as I did on Sunday morning, it was a genuinely frightening experience."

He said the team doctor had explained how his body had reacted. "I'm glad it did, even though I was a mess," Stokes said.

He also feared he had suffered a broken arm after being hit by a ball in the nets, but was given the all-clear by England's medical staff.

Earlier on Sunday, England managing director Ashley Giles said he was hopeful Stokes would be ready to face Australia in the series opener in Brisbane after his return to action was delayed further when a warm-up match against the second-string England Lions was washed out.

"I'm hopeful and I'd always like to be confident, but we've got to treat Ben carefully, as we would anyone else who's been in that position, of not having a lot of cricket under their belts," said Giles.

"But he'll be a difficult man to hold back if he's ready to go," the former England left-arm spinner added. AFP

## Leaders Chelsea held to Man U draw

PREMIER League leaders Chelsea were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Manchester United on Sunday as Manchester City moved to within a point of top spot following a 2-1 win over West Ham in swirling snow.

Blues midfielder Jorginho rescued a point as the Italian's penalty atoned for the error that allowed Jadon Sancho to put the visitors in front at Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea fell behind when poor control from Jorginho allowed Sancho to score early in the second half.

But Jorginho made amends when he scored from the penalty spot after Aaron Wan-Bissaka fouled Thiago Silva.

It was an impressive result for United under former midfielder Michael Carrick, standing in following the sacking of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. United are set to hire former RB Leipzig boss Ralf Rangnick as their interim manager until the end of the season in the coming days.

### 'Disappointed'

Not that Carrick, who took the bold decision to leave Cristiano Ronaldo on the bench, was delighted with the performance.

"Disappointed actually," Carrick told Sky Sports. "When you are in front in a game like this to have it taken away is disappointing.

He added: "I don't think it was a penalty at all ... I am not getting carried away but I thought we defended well. I cannot fault the boys one bit."



Chelsea striker Romelu Lukaku (second right) jumps to head the ball against Manchester United defender Eric Bailly (centre) during the English Premier League football match on Sunday. AFP

Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel said: "I am happy, absolutely happy. I saw a huge effort. We put the pressure up high, we were brave and courageous."

Free-scoring Liverpool hammered Southampton 4-0 on Saturday to move to within one point of Chelsea.

But reigning champions City stayed in touch with victory at home to the high-flying Hammers.

City took the lead shortly after the half-hour mark when a Riyadh Mahrez ball into the box

was deflected into the path of Ilkay Gundogan, before substitute Fernandinho made it 2-0 late on.

Manuel Lanzini pulled one back deep into stoppage time but it was not enough for David Moyes's team to avoid a second successive defeat.

"We have an incredible groundskeeper - thanks to them we could play," City manager Pep Guardiola told the BBC, referring to the wintry conditions in Manchester. "The chances we created

... it could have been three or four. The players we have out ... those that came here were brilliant. All of them. We cannot forget which opponent we played. They have everything."

### Vardy double

Leicester's Jamie Vardy reminded Claudio Ranieri of his enduring quality even in his mid-30s, scoring twice at a snowy King Power Stadium in a 4-2 win against Watford.

Ranieri, who won the Premier League title with unfan-

ced Leicester in 2016, received a rapturous reception on his first return to the stadium as an opposition manager since leaving the club early the following year.

Midfielder James Maddison gave Leicester an early lead only for Josh King to level from the penalty spot in the 30th minute after Wilfred Ndidi brought down Emmanuel Dennis in the area.

Leicester regained the lead through Vardy four minutes later and the former England striker grabbed his second three minutes before the break when he glanced in Maddison's corner.

Dennis pulled a goal back just after the hour but Ademola Lookman scored from close range to restore Leicester's two-goal lead.

Brentford heaped the pressure on Rafael Benitez by beating Everton 1-0 to secure their first Premier League win since early October, courtesy of a first-half penalty from Ivan Toney.

Everton, who have taken just two points from their past seven league matches, face Liverpool in a daunting test in midweek.

"Every game is important for us," said ex-Liverpool boss Benitez. "Obviously the next one is more important because it is the derby. We must learn from the mistakes we are making."

The game between Burnley and Tottenham was called off a little under an hour before kick-off because of heavy snow at Turf Moor in north-west England. AFP

## Russians knock holders Spain out of Davis Cup

RUSSIA knocked reigning champion Spain out of the Davis Cup on Sunday to set up a quarter-final against Sweden.

The Russians' tie against the depleted Spanish team came down to a late-night doubles encounter in Madrid.

Aslan Karatsev and world No5 Andrey Rublev won 4-6, 6-2, 6-4 against Marcel Granollers and Feliciano Lopez to win Group A and deprive the Spanish team of

the chance to play in front of a home crowd in Madrid on Thursday.

The Russians, playing under the name of the Russian Tennis Federation because of sanctions against Russian sport for doping, made a bad start to the tie when Lopez beat Rublev 2-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the opening singles rubber.

US Open champion Daniil Medvedev stepped up to bring the tie level with a 6-2, 7-6 (7/3) win over Pablo Carreno Busta,

before the doubles decided the match.

Britain booked their place in the last eight with a comeback victory over the Czech Republic on Sunday and will play Germany in Innsbruck on Tuesday.

Kazakhstan and Croatia also reached the last eight.

Dan Evans' surprise 6-2, 7-5 loss to world No143 Tomas Machac left Britain needing to fight back to secure a second straight win and take top spot in Group C.

But Cameron Norrie overcame a second-set blip to see off Jiri Lehecka 6-1, 2-6, 6-1, before Joe Salisbury and Neal Skupski teamed up to beat Machac and Jiri Vesely 6-4, 6-2 in Innsbruck.

"We've been underdogs and managed to get wins. The Czech team played well - very young team. Machac turned into a top 20 player overnight!" British captain Leon Smith told the BBC.

The ties in Austria are being played behind closed doors due to new coronavirus restrictions in the country.

France, after winning against the Czechs and losing to Britain, are out of the tournament.

Germany backed up their shock victory over Novak Djokovic's Serbia by fighting back to edge out hosts Austria and go through as Group F winners.

Serbia had to settle for second place but progressed to a quarter-final against Kazakhstan in Madrid on Wednesday as one of the best runners-up.

Dominik Koepfer lost 6-1, 7-5 to Jurij Rodionov to put the Germans in trouble, but Jan-Lennard Struff levelled the tie by cruising past Dennis Novak 7-5, 6-4.

Kevin Krawietz and Tim Puetz completed the job in the doubles, as they did against Djokovic and Serbia on Saturday, winning 6-3, 6-4 against Oliver Marach and Philipp Oswald.

### Angry crowd

Croatia just needed to win one rubber against Hungary to wrap up first place in Group D and the 242nd-ranked Nino Serdarcic did just that in the opening match against Fabian Marozsan in Turin.

His 6-4, 6-4 success helped avoid a nervy finish to the tie for the two-time winners, as Marin Cilic lost the second singles 4-6, 7-5, 6-4 to impressive Hungarian youngster Zsombor Piros.

Italy will have the advantage of home support when they face the Croatians in Turin on Monday.

Kazakhstan moved into the knockout stage by downing 2019 runners-up Canada in Madrid.

Kazakhstan, which beat Sweden on Saturday, emerged victorious again thanks to singles wins for Mikhail Kukushkin and Alexander Bublik, over Brayden Schnur and Vasek Pospisil respectively.

Bublik drew the ire of the Spanish crowd for delivering an underarm serve at 4-4 in the second set, but that only seemed to spur him on.

"As one legend says, when you go to sleep guys, know that I won because of you," he said to the crowd, referring to US Open champion Medvedev.

The tournament was postponed last year because of the Covid-19 pandemic. AFP



Russia's Daniil Medvedev returns the ball to Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta during the men's singles group stage tennis match of the Davis Cup tennis tournament on Sunday. AFP