



Congratulations

30
YEARS

ANNIVERSARY

THE PHNOM PENH POST

❖ — 1992 - 2022 — ❖



The Phnom Penh Post

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CEO'S MESSAGE

THREE DECADES AND COUNTING: *THE POST* HITS 30!

The Post publisher and CEO Ly Tayseng

THIRTY years ago today, *The Phnom Penh Post* was born. Three decades later, it continues to bring quality news and contribute to nation-building and professionalism in the industry.

The Post, as we have become known, has been steadfast and tenacious in its reporting throughout the years, whether it was the civil war in the 1990s, the Asian Financial Crisis in 2008 and the coronavirus pandemic in the last two years.

This is a testament to our core values and principles to make sure the nation is kept informed regardless of the circumstances of relevant matters. Our reporters have reported the truth without fear or favour.

Which is why we can proudly say that we were there reporting and documenting Cambodia's epochal moments, which have shaped the country's character.

We have made sure that the news we bring to the fore is factual, objective and truthful, and not guided by follies of sensationalism. To this day, we continue to have a good following of readers who rely on our clear and fair reporting.

Our reportage has covered major events and milestones in Cambodia, important policies, decisions and declarations by Prime Minister Hun Sen and the government, business and public interest issues – from environment, public health, national triumphs, tragedies to sports and entertainment.

Changing times

While the economy has started to recover following the blight of Covid-19, much of the media landscape has also changed with time. No longer is news read on printed paper only but also accessible digitally for an increasingly tech-savvy society that demands free, fast and to-the-point information.

Alas, like everything else, change is imminent. *The Post* continues to evolve with the times, finding new means and ways to bring news, whether via the internet and social media or on the newsstands.

We continue to uphold journalism ethics and freedom, and strive to engage our readers with evocative and insightful articles while giving our commentators – from public and private sectors, diplomats, NGOs and academicians – the platform to share their views and to be a mirror of the society.

Truth be told, the last two years have been difficult not just for the economy, business sectors and the people but for the media as well. But we did not shirk in our duty to keep people informed. We marched on and faced head-on challenges, focusing on bringing news to the people and recording events to mark the journey and transformation Cambodia and her people were facing in the scourge of Covid-19.

This in itself has proven our core strength in surviving through the odds for three decades and hopefully more.

Intelligent, in-depth, independent

As we move forward, we have embarked on a plan to reinvent ourselves to be more competitive and relevant in the current media landscape while ensuring our readers have seamless access to authentic and reliable reports.

The delivery of news has been extended to digital platforms to keep up with current times, where our social media pages – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram as well as Telegram – are regularly fed to update our readers on any breaking news, current affairs and news from the business world.

We now have over nine million followers on social media, including over

seven million on Facebook, placing us among the highest read publications by Khmer and English language readers in the Cambodian digital sphere.

On this notion, we hope to continue evolving in order to serve our readers and remain the “people’s paper” for a long time, just as we have in the past.

In doing so, we pledge to carry on our duty as journalists to bring intelligent, in-depth and independent news – as per our motto – to the nation.

Appreciation and gratitude

The road ahead is uncertain. Times are changing and we must change accordingly, but one thing will stay constant and that is our readers.

Therefore, we want to say a big thank you for being with us and giving us a reason to stay relevant for 30 years.

Equally important for our continued existence is thanks to the Royal Government of Cambodia, in particular the Ministry of Information, for its unwavering trust in us and providing an amenable and safe media landscape to operate in.

At the same time, we also owe our gratitude to our advertisers and business partners for their support, collaboration and confidence in our products and services.

Finally, I want to thank our staff – past and present in all departments – for their continuous commitment and passion to cover stories, investigate and report to keep this paper going all these years.

There wouldn't be much of *The Post* if it wasn't for all of them.

And so, on this milestone celebration, an epochal moment for *The Post* too, we are thankful to have come this far. Though the future is unclear, we hope you will stay with us as we forge ahead.

Till then, I wish everyone all the best! Three cheers to 30 years! Happy Anniversary!

The Post remains committed to ethical journalism**Mom Kunthea**

THE Phnom Penh Post has been an independent and in-depth media outlet in Cambodia for 30 years, and remains committed to the core principles of journalism to bring quality reporting to both Cambodian and foreign readers.

The newspaper's unbiased reportage has seen it hailed as a strong promoter of national development over the past three decades.

On its 30th anniversary, senior government officials, analysts and journalism professors air their views on *The Post* from its inception to the present day.

Ministry of Justice secretary of state and spokesman Chin Malin: “*The Phnom Penh Post* is a professionally-run newspaper that has played an important role in disseminating to the public information and knowledge that is in the interest of society.

“*The Post*, which is published in the Khmer and English languages, is a newspaper with good cooperation with all stakeholders. This means *The Post* can work with all stakeholders in transmitting factual, professional information, as well as sharing knowledge that is beneficial to the people and society.

“I encourage *The Phnom Penh Post* to continue to disseminate such information professionally, sharing knowledge in the interest of our society and our people,” Malin said.

Cambodian Institute for Democracy (CID) president Pa Chanroeun: “Importantly, *The Phnom Penh*

Post is available in both Khmer and English. It is one of the oldest media outlets in the country, having been established before the second birth of the Kingdom of Cambodia after the Paris Peace Accords and the elections organised by the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia [UNTAC] in 1993.

“*The Post* has played an important role in the democratic process, particularly in providing accurate information that is accessible, because in a democratic society, access to information is very important. Accurate information is valuable, with *The Post* and its journalists covering the stories from sources that are trusted and valid.

“I believe *The Post* – by providing the people and media leaders with accurate information – continues to play an important role in helping the democratic process in Cambodia improve, making a significant contribution to national development.

“I like *The Post* because it is available in both Khmer and English. The newspaper remains neutral, independent and covers a mix of news stories, both from the ruling and opposition parties, civil society organisations and the private sector.

“Staying true to this position and high professional ethics is the real positive point of this newspaper. I hope that *The Post* will remain neutral, independent and stand on the principles of professional journalistic ethics even more as it brings information to the people.”

Chhay Sopha, professor of jour-

nalism and author: “*The Phnom Penh Post* is a newspaper with a long history behind it. Printed in two languages, it continues to be published today, whereas a lot of other local newspapers are no longer published. So *The Post* still strives to publish the news, including online.

“I read *The Post* and have used its articles for references. I urge *The Post* to continue and encourage our journalists to keep up their efforts working on the mission of freedom of the press in Cambodia.”

Government spokesman Phay Siphon: “The provision of accurate news in the English language has made

a major contribution. *The Phnom Penh Post* has drawn a lot of attention, with people around the world having taken [sources] from it to use.

“As the [Government Spokesperson Unit], we thank *The Post* for its professional efforts. I read it every day, and the reporting is accessible and professional.

“We wish *The Post* well in moving forward with its work. We know that print media is facing reduced advertising budgets, but *The Post* has worked hard to remain professional and serve the interests of the media sector.”

Royal Academy of Cambodia eco-

nomics researcher Ky Sereyvath: I like reading, listening to and following the news. Gathering accurate information on the realities in the country is important in grasping situations, making decisions and formulating strategies.

“*The Phnom Penh Post* writes a lot of factual stories and spreads the ideas of researchers to inform people. It chooses those who give impartial interviews. The sources tend to be independent in their analysis and views rather than those who are either pro-government or anti-government.”

Meas Sophorn, undersecretary of state and spokesman for the Ministry of Information: “Let me congratulate *The Phnom Penh Post* on the 30th anniversary of its establishment, and wish it further growth and even more success.

“The media in the Kingdom plays an important and active role in disseminating information to the people both at home and abroad. That they can receive information quickly, anytime and anywhere contributes to the development of society in all sectors.

“*The Post* is a media outlet that has made an active contribution to the professional and factual dissemination information to Cambodians from across different strata of society.

“Long established with decades of experience behind it in promoting the profession in the Kingdom, *The Post* has also made a huge contribution to the training of journalists and the media profession in Cambodia.”



The Post pursuing mission to train budding journalists

Mom Kunthea

OVER its 30 years as a highly respected, independent media outlet in Cambodia, *The Phnom Penh Post* has built a strong reputation as the place for budding journalists to train, benefitting from the vast experience of its staff.

Since its founding in July 1992, *The Post* has, in addition to its professional and independent news coverage, offered opportunities for students and young people to learn and hone their journalistic skills as a proving ground for the Kingdom's news gatherers.

Sovan Philong, who is now the vice-president of the Photo Phnom Penh Association, joined *The Post* as a stringer in 2008. He said his time at the paper sharpened his skills both as a photographer and a journalist.

"Unlike other photographers who had experience in this area, working as a photojournalist at *The Phnom Penh Post* was a new experience for me, one where I learned significantly on the job.

"As a young photographer, it was a very valuable time for me, as before I only knew how to take photos. I knew about general photography but had no experience in photojournalism at all.

"I joined *The Post* to gain experience, and I learned so much from my time at this institution," Philong said.

During three years of working at *The Post*, he was able to gain invaluable experience, from how to work in a professional environment, form strong relationships with colleagues, and in particular, develop his use of language.

As part of projects in collaboration with *The Post*, Philong even got to work with Hollywood star Jackie Chan, known as Chhin Long in Cambodia, and other celebrities.

"For me, I am proud to have worked for *The Phnom Penh Post* from 2009 through 2011. *The Post* helped me to develop many new ideas and gave me the opportunity to attend workshops with foreign photographers and other journalists," he said.

Ith Sothoeuth, the director of the Cambodian Centre for Independent Media (CCIM), an NGO, said *The Phnom Penh Post* was the first media outlet he joined, in 2009.

He started as an intern for two months during a vacation after his second year of study at the Department of Media and Communication (DMC) at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), before joining full-time.

"During my time at *The Phnom Penh Post*, I gained a lot of experience in news writing and covering stories, as well as meeting in person with high- and low-ranking officials, and the general public.

"I worked at *The Post* full-time for nearly a year, which gave me an important base for continuing in the field of journalism," he said.

Sothoeuth added that such a foundation had been invaluable as he continued his career.

And *The Post* continues to offer such opportunities to budding news hounds.

Ro Kimlong, a student from the DMC, spent six months as an intern at *The Post* last year.



Cambodian Centre for Independent Media (CCIM) director Ith Sothoeuth (fifth from left) started at *The Post* as an intern in 2009 before joining full-time for nearly a year. Sovan Philong (second from right), who is now vice-president of the Photo Phnom Penh Association, joined *The Post* as a stringer in 2008. POST STAFF

Kimlong said he was interested in an internship at *The Post* because it is a well-established media outlet with decades of experience in covering current affairs.

Covering stories ethically and professionally to readers of all ages, *The Post* occupies an important space in Cambodian society, he added.

"I think that there are currently very few media outlets that produce and publish their articles as accurately and comprehensively, and according to professional ethics.

"This was a factor in my determi-

nation to do an internship at *The Phnom Penh Post*, due to the value of its work," he said.

During his six-month stint on the national news desk, he learned a lot about the process of working in a professional outlet that produces daily news articles, from the production process, writing compellingly and with clarity, to contacting commentators, he added.

"Working at *The Post* showed me what journalistic standards and professional ethics are, and provided me with the opportunities to strengthen my hard and soft journalistic skills in addition to my previous classroom experience," Kimlong said.

Ministry of Environment secretary of state and spokesman Neth Pheaktra praised *The Post* for its role over the past 30 years and for providing a strong foundation for Cambodia's journalists.

Pheaktra worked as a deputy chief of staff at *The Post* from November 2008 until May 31, 2011, and then as managing editor of the Khmer-language edition of *The Post*.

He left to take on a new role as a spokesman for the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), commonly known as the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, on June 1, 2011.

"*The Post* provided the opportunity to apply the theory I learned at journalism school and from an internship experience in France, and it is where I reached the apex of my career in journalism and accomplished my proudest achievements," he said.

The Post has had an important



Ro Kimlong, a student from the Department of Media and Communication (DMC), spent six months as an intern at *The Post*. SUPPLIED



Eli Lillis was a photographic intern for seven months at *The Post*, from late 2016 to mid-2017. ELI LILLIS VIA FB

The Post provided the opportunity to apply the theory I learned at journalism school and from an internship experience in France, and it is where I reached the apex of my career in journalism and accomplished my proudest achievements.

NETH PHEAKTRA / ENVIRONMENT
MINISTRY SECRETARY OF STATE

role in promoting national stability and public understanding of Cambodian politics, by providing accurate, fast and reliable news based on clearly-sourced information, he said.

Pheaktra recalled one incident in particular that highlighted the crucial role that *The Post* has played as the voice of Cambodia.

"During the conflict over the Preah Vihear temple, Thailand could marshal much greater media resources to amplify its messages.

"But *The Post* was able to balance that by providing accurate information about Cambodia and its views as other nations looked on, unsure of what the situation might portend," Pheaktra said.

Eli Lillis was a photographic intern for seven months at *The Post*, from late 2016 to mid-2017.

He said the internship at *The Post* was his first position after graduating from university, so the knowledge he got from the job was extensive.

"Learning the daily realities of a press photojournalist, both good and bad was the biggest lesson. The biggest benefit from working there was realising where my interests lie in photography, and growth in my photography in general," he said.

He added that he will be forever grateful for his time at the newspaper, and wished it could have been longer.

The Post in the eyes of observers over the past three decades

Nov Sivutha

POLITICIANS, analysts and civil society organisations agree that *The Phnom Penh Post* has given accurate, ethical and professional information over its 30 years of covering Cambodian current affairs, contributing significantly to the promotion of democracy, rights and freedoms in the Kingdom.

Kin Phea, director of the International Relations Institute at the Royal Academy of Cambodia, said *The Post* has played an important role in relaying accurate social, political and economic information to the public.

"The *Phnom Penh Post* has through its professional news coverage played a role in helping people make informed decisions.

"Over these past 30 years, *The Post* has relayed masses of information, and I have used a lot of references from the newspaper in a lot of fields, while its reporters have also used my work. It is especially important that the newspaper is printed in two languages, Khmer and English," Phea said.

Cambodian People's Party (CPP) spokesman Sok Eysan said that compared to other media outlets, particularly those online, the ethics and the professionalism of *The Post* mean that people can trust its coverage, with its stories factual and not exaggerated or fabricated.

Eysan said trust is all important in journalism. Media outlets that strayed from ethics and pro-

fessionalism, publishing articles without basis in fact, lost all credibility and were left with a tarnished reputation.

"I find that in order for people to have trust in a news outlet, then it must adhere to ethics and write responsibly with only information based on the events as they occurred. We cannot fabricate them. I say this in good faith because *The Post* reporters have always acted professionally and ethically," he said.

Thach Setha, vice-president of the Candlelight Party, said he respects the coverage *The Post* has provided for three decades.

"We have seen all the news that *The Post* has published over the years, so we trust and take it seriously because of its professionalism, regardless of political affiliations," he said.

He called on *The Post* continue publishing professional and unbiased reporting, providing accurate information for the people and politicians to use as a valid basis for making informed decisions.

Grassroots Democratic Party (GDP) spokesman Loek Sothea praised *The Post* for its professionalism and taking a neutral stance. He said *The Post* had always used a variety of sources to provide comprehensive information.

"I think the presence of *The Post* in Cambodia had greatly helped in building democracy, free speech and access to information for the people.

"*The Post* has been doing a good job compared to other media in the



People hold a copy of *The Post* at a newsstand in Phnom Penh. HENG CHIVOAN

Kingdom, perhaps only second in all of Cambodian media outlets. I am not talking about followers, but the neutrality and professionalism of *The Post*," Sothea said.

Am Sam Ath, deputy director of rights group LICADHO, said *The Post* had played an important role in sharing information with all people.

Despite a change in ownership, *The Post* has still played an important role as an international newspaper locally.

"I find that *The Post* has a lot of readers and is considered independent, though it has received some criticism after the change in ownership. However, *The Post* still

plays an important role as an international newspaper in the country," he said.

Political analyst Em Sovannara said he is also a reader, often using articles in *The Post* to form the basis for analysis and research because the paper provides factual and comprehensive information. ■

Real estate scene sees decades of 'incredible' gains

Hin Pisei

THE Post has been on the forefront of covering stories from the world of Cambodian real estate and construction, sectors that have grown at a brisk pace of growth over the past two decades, especially in the capital and coastal Preah Sihanouk province, thanks to the rapidly-expanding economy and hard-won gains in political stability.

According to the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction, the government has authorised more than 57,000 construction projects nationwide in the last two decades, with total investment in excess of \$66 billion. The real estate and construction sectors employ an average of 150,000 people on any given day.

The Phnom Penh Municipal Administration recently said that, in the capital as of the beginning of 2022, there were 310 landed residential projects – including gated communities known locally as "borey" – and 1,603 "high-rise buildings" – those at least five storeys tall – of which 225 are 20 storeys or higher, or 14 per cent.

In Preah Sihanouk, 529 five storey-plus buildings have been completed, 278 (52.55 per cent) of which are reported to be in operation, according to local reports.

Sam Soknoeun, president of Global Real Estate Association and CEO of KW Sam Sn Realty Co Ltd, described the pace of growth in the real estate and construction sectors over the past two decades as "unbelievable", as property prices climb and hundreds of tall



In Preah Sihanouk province, 529 five storey-plus buildings have been completed, 278 (52.55 per cent) of which are reportedly in operation. YOUSOS APDOULRASHIM

buildings and commercial complexes reshape the Kingdom's urban centres into places that would have been virtually unrecognisable 20 years ago.

"When a country enjoys political stability, comprehensive peace, attractive investment laws, respect for the rule of law, and strong economic growth, the real estate and construction sectors will hands down run smoothly.

"The present contributions of local and foreign investors are providing really great impetus to the development of the Cambodian real estate and construction sectors," he said.

Still, he noted, the earlier momentum behind the industry has cooled in the past two or three years, in a trend primarily tied to the exodus of Chinese expatriates as an online

gambling ban took effect in 2020, the Covid-19 crisis, and most recently, the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Meanwhile Huy Vanna, secretary-general of advisory firm Housing Development Association of Cambodia (HDAC), was similarly impressed with the "incredible" progress in the real estate and construction landscape, which for him is highlighted by the emergence of a host of shopping malls, commercial buildings, condominiums and borey.

He also underscored the fact that locals are behind a burgeoning share of capital investment, shifted away from foreigners.

"The factors building the strong muscle of the Cambodian real estate and construction sectors are political stability, robust economic growth,



The government has authorised more than 57,000 construction projects nationwide in the last two decades. HENG CHIVOAN

abundant labour and infrastructure improvements," Vanna said.

Not confined to the capital and Preah Sihanouk, he pointed out that real estate and construction have also been gaining steam in up-and-coming provinces such as Kampot, Koh Kong, Battambang, Siem Reap and Kampong Cham.

Kim Kinkesa, senior manager of research and consulting at CBRE Cambodia, commented that although the sector had been growing faster than expected prior to Covid-19, the better part of the top-tier projects, worth hundreds of millions of dollars, were invested by foreign entities, either exclusively or in joint ventures with local partners.

Hence, the industry slowed to a crawl when Covid-19 struck, prompt-

ing countries around the world to impose travel restrictions, she said, predicting that it would take around three to five years for the sector to recover to its pre-2020 position, barring unforeseen pandemic aftereffects or other crises or challenges.

For now, there is no telling how the sector will progress in the next few years, especially as elevated oil prices linked to the Russia-Ukraine conflict send transport costs soaring, driving up costs of construction materials for ongoing developments.

Nonetheless, as land management minister Chea Sophara remarked in late May, the construction sector remains one of the four pillars that hold up the Cambodian economy, along with tourism, agriculture and industry. ■

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Agri industry eyes modern ways, tech to lift all-round lofty uptrend

Hom Phanet

THE Phnom Penh Post has been documenting the enormous changes and dramatic growth seen in the Cambodian agricultural sector over the last several decades in terms of productivity, output and exports as it shifts towards a more industrialised and technologically-based approach.

Since the introduction of a key policy document in 2010 that forever transformed the rice-farming landscape, the government, agricultural industry players and other stakeholders have embarked on a wide array of initiatives, with varying degrees of success, in pursuit of game-changing methods, technologies and systems to optimise the use of available resources and achieve the best possible returns.

There has also been a flurry of interest in value-added agriculture, where enterprises process raw agricultural products into finished or semi-finished goods, thereby creating additional selling value.

According to a recent Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries report, the total value added in Cambodia's agricultural value chains has grown on average by just over four per cent each year from 15,938 trillion riel (\$3.909 billion) in 2010 to 22.786 trillion in 2019 prior to the Covid-19 crisis.

From 2010-2019 to Covid

The agricultural sector was among the least hit by Covid-19, emerging as a bright spot that helped support an economy besieged by a series of shocks tied to the pandemic, which had grown at an average of more than seven per cent annually over the previous two decades.

The report noted that despite the Covid-19-linked economic shocks, the sector had managed to grow 0.6 per cent in 2020 and an estimated 1.1 per cent last year, at remarkable rates, all things considered, taking into account that the corresponding figures had been 1.7 per cent and 1.1 per cent in 2017 and 2018.

Broken down by sub-sectors, crops contributed the lion's share to agricultural production in the 2010-2019 period, at 57-59 per cent, followed by fisheries (22-24 per cent), livestock (over 11 per cent) and forestry (6.7-to-seven per cent).

In the crop sub-sector, paddy production grew at an annual average rate of 3.1 per cent from 8.2 million tonnes in 2010 to 10.8 million tonnes in 2019, before rising roughly one-eighth to 12.21 million tonnes last years. Of that, national paddy surpluses rose from 3.9 million tonnes in 2010 to 5.75 million tonnes in 2019, to 6.9 million tonnes in 2021.

Subsidiary and industrial crop production hit 6.14 million tonnes in 2010 and topped 19 million tonnes last year.

Rubber production passed 42,000 tonnes in 2010 and ratch-

eted up to 287,000 tonnes in 2019 and over 368,000 tonnes last year, while exports of the natural latex climbed from 42,000 tonnes in 2010 to 366,000 tonnes in 2021.

In the livestock sub-sector, small-holder and commercial production expanded by an average of 5.53 per cent annually in terms of livestock population, from 27 million head worth \$1.458 billion in 2010 to more than 45 million head valued at \$1.827 billion in 2019, before surpassing 59 million head last year.

In the fisheries sub-sector, production from freshwater and marine capture and aquaculture swelled from 550,000 tonnes in 2010 to 856,000 tonnes in 2021.

Freshwater capture fisheries inched up at an annual average of 1.9 per cent from 405,000 tonnes in 2010 to 479,000 tonnes in 2019, and then to 383,000 tonnes last year.

Marine capture fisheries jumped at a per-annum average of 4.1 per cent from 85,000 tonnes in 2010 to 122,000 tonnes in 2019, and then to 125,000 last year.

Aquaculture production surged at an annual average of 19.9 per cent from 60,000 tonnes in 2010 to 307,000 tonnes in 2019, and then to 348,000 tonnes last year.

In the forestry sub-sector, reforestation efforts restored 4,080sq km of forest cover on state- and privately-owned lands in the 2010-2019 period, and registered forest communities rose from 636 in 2019 to 643 last year.

All not rosy

But along with the progress and advancements highlighted in the report, the agricultural sector faces a variety of challenges that continue to constrain domestic production and exports, especially those related to aquaculture, crop cultivation and markets, affirmed Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Veng Sakhon.

He said agricultural production in the Kingdom falls short of regional countries, which he blamed on sluggish efforts to modernise production systems, a lack of awareness when it comes to farm mechanisation or the ap-



Subsidiary and industrial crop production hit 6.14 million tonnes in 2010 and topped 19 million tonnes last year. YOUSOS APDOULRASHIM

priate use of inputs, and inadequate means of effectively disseminating modern methods and techniques.

As an example, the goal of exporting one million tonnes of milled rice in 2015, initially proposed by Prime Minister Hun Sen in 2010, was not met, nor has that amount ever been exported in a single calendar year.

And one of the key reasons for the letdown, according to Sakhon, is "because the infrastructure that supports the processing of our agricultural products is more expensive than in neighbouring countries, especially in animal husbandry and crop cultivation.

"Cambodia finds it difficult to compete in terms of market prices because its neighbours spend less on agricultural production than we do, so they can afford to sell at lower prices than us.

"Vietnam puts in more production effort than us, and consumer products such as fertilisers and agrochemicals are self-produced, while we import tonnes in Cambodia, and it's expensive," he said.

The minister said that the Kingdom's exports perform considerably below their potential each year, hampered by transportation hurdles, coupled with the reality that Cambodian products struggle to compete with local goods in neighbouring countries.

Stricter phytosanitary rules in certain markets, such as China, Japan and South Korea, translates to lower profit margins, he said, noting that even exporters of lucrative cash crops such as mangoes and bananas are plagued by a litany of issues when shipping their product to Chinese shores.

Offering a silver lining, Sakhon emphasised that the growing adoption of developed agricultural technologies has reduced manpower requirements, and improved the output and quality of products.

Resilient staple

Rice has long remained a linchpin of economic growth, with annual exports of milled rice consistently in the hundreds of thousands of tonnes over the last several years.

The Kingdom exported 538,396 tonnes in 2015, 542,144 tonnes in 2016, 635,679 tonnes in 2017, 626,225 tonnes in 2018,

620,106 tonnes in 2019, 690,829 tonnes in 2020, and 617,069 tonnes last year.

Cambodia Rice Federation (CRF) secretary-general Lun Yeng noted that the government in 2010 introduced the Policy Document on the Promotion of Paddy Rice Production and Export of Milled Rice, which primarily focuses on investment in irrigation and vital physical infrastructure.

This allowed many Cambodian farmers to make the transition from rain-fed rice cultivation to more self-sufficient models, with some able to take up a third annual crop, as opposed to the typical two, which drove up rice production by nearly one-half between 2010 and 2021, he said.

He underscored that milled-rice exports have progressed in leaps and bounds, reflecting on what a feat crossing the 10,000-tonne mark had been back in 2009, in a country that at one time produced rice solely for domestic food security.

Yeng views the Kingdom as a major player in the rice market, saying that its varieties have won the World's Best Rice award four times – in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2018 – and now reach 110 countries and territories.

Ministry data shows that paddy exports jumped by 61.16 per cent from 2020 to reach 3.53 million tonnes last year, or nearly six times the corresponding figure for milled rice. Agence Kampuchea Presse reported that the paddy exports were worth an estimated \$846 million, which translates to an average of \$0.24 per kilogramme.

CRF statistics indicate that last year's milled rice exports were worth \$418 million, meaning an average of \$0.68 per kilogramme. The added value is precisely why the federation aims to ensure that more rice exports are milled, Yeng explained.

Going forward, he said, the CRF will continue to lend a hand to farmers, and motivate them to adopt sustainable agricultural practices for health and safety.

Market issues

The last decade or so has seen many promising developments in the field of horticulture, especially concerning the more profitable cash crops such as longan, cassava, mango, cashew nuts and bananas, said Hun Lak, CEO of Rich Farm Asia Ltd and a major investor in bananas and mangoes.

"Horticulture" is a branch of agriculture that generally deals with the intensive commercial cultivation of high-value plants for food, medicinal ingredients or ornamental purposes. Horticulture farming as a rule sits between domestic gardening and field agriculture, in terms of scale.

Lak shared that these profit crops are similarly confronted with a host

of complications apropos cultivation and export, such as climate change and a lack of empty containers at harvest season, as well as restrictive weight rules for vehicles on the road when compared to neighbouring countries.

Additionally, high electricity rates discourage investment in sorely-needed facilities to process, package, sterilise or sanitise products, or provide cold storage, thus compounding the industry's woes, he said.

He also commented that copycat growers and businesses in horticulture tend to flood markets with excess supply due to a lack of proper market research, which drives down prices. According to Lak, the mango sector is particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon.

He also shared that bananas and cashew nuts were the most stable and least troublesome horticulture crops, explaining that they have wide markets and produce just one crop a year.

By contrast, Yang Saing Koma, a veteran agricultural expert, sees little progress in Cambodia's agricultural sector, which he says remains constrained due to a lack of markets and capital for farmers that needs to be addressed.

The bright spots of change have been fundamentally undermined by, inter alia, significant amounts of debt among farmers, the conversion of agricultural land into plots, and limited research into innovative agricultural techniques, he said.

"However, we have also seen some improvements, the area under cassava and cashew cultivation has increased quite a bit, but there are still market issues," he added.

The ministry developed the Agricultural Development Policy 2021-2030 to make the agricultural sector more modern, productive, sustainable, competitive, inclusive, climate-resilient; to increase household incomes; and to support the prosperity and wellbeing of Cambodians.

The policy is designed to ensure the availability of high-quality, safe and nutritious food products, and has a particular focus on the sustainable management of land, water bodies, forest resources and fisheries.

To achieve the aforementioned vision and policy objectives, the policy includes four key strategies: modernising and commercialising the agricultural value chain; pushing up public and private investment in the agricultural sector; boosting sustainable growth and increasing resilience to climate change; and institutional reforms and inter-sectoral coordination.

The policy also provides mechanisms for management, monitoring and evaluation, and mobilises financial resources to ensure its effective implementation. ■

Cambodians take to great outdoors to remedy Covid-19 claustrophobia

Hong Raksmei

OVER the past three decades, *The Post* has regularly published features and news related to tourism and travel in order to serve our readership by informing them about aspects of the Kingdom or the region that they may not be familiar with, while also helping to promote the tourism industry which is vital to so many Cambodians' livelihoods.

This mission wasn't deterred by the Covid-19 pandemic, despite the inability of most people to travel outside of whichever country they happened to be in. Instead, we took a different approach that focused on domestic travel including secluded wilderness destinations and adventure trips as well as futuristic trends like virtual reality tourism.

The virtues of virtual

Museums around the world are increasingly turning to immersive exhibitions that use technology and a theatrical manner of presenting historical information and artifacts as their star attractions. Cambodia will soon have an immersive exhibition of its very own to excite locals and tourists alike.

Immersive Angkor will allow visitors to travel back in time by stepping into a large room with 3D images that emerge from eight directions and surround them, allowing them to see momentous events of the past play out right in front of their eyes.

"This immersive experience will utilise cutting-edge technology that allows people to witness a recreation of the temples being constructed through ultra-realistic 3D animations," says Soreasmey Ke Bin, CEO of Confluences, the company responsible for building the attraction.

Of course, there are already hundreds of activities and apps that one can explore at home using virtual reality headsets like the Oculus, Valve, Vive or Playstation VR – all of which cost several hundred dollars each and they generally require a desktop PC with a fast processor, plenty of RAM and a graphics card that costs a few hundred dollars at minimum, so your total minimum cash outlay will likely surpass \$1,000 – and that's at the low end for pricing and, unfortunately, performance.

On the other hand, there's a domestic tourism option that has taken hold recently that is practically free aside from a few essential pieces of gear that most people prefer to bring along. The hot new trend? Old-fashioned camping.

Adventures in the great outdoors

The Kingdom has experienced a boom in interest for camping, hiking and getting back to nature, mostly driven by younger Cambodians who are acutely aware of the environmental challenges faced here.

The trend has been equal opportunity, with many women also taking part in group camping trips as a safe and secure pastime that enjoys the helpful support of a community of enthusiasts always willing to lend their advice and expertise.

As the government began easing restrictions during the pandemic, some of the first activities that were deemed safe were nature hikes and camping because of the inherent isolation from crowds and the circulation of fresh air while outdoors.

Due to the pandemic, many Cam-



Sreysor Pheng went on a gruelling 10-day journey to reach the spectacular views at the Chhay 100 waterfall. UNSEEN CAMBODIA

bodians turned away from intimate social gatherings and instead opted to visit more remote and out-of-the-way natural attractions, which spawned a social media trend of people taking selfies featuring scenic natural landscapes.

For example, Tho Phirom, an amateur outdoors adventure-seeker, decided to make her first foray into the wild in July, 2021, when she visited Knong Psar, which required a five-hour trek over mountainous terrain to reach the point of intersection of Kampong Speu and Koh Kong provinces.

With a dozen friends who were mostly new to the outdoors, Phirom admitted that they were following the social media trend essentially, but she just wanted to get some space to breathe after being forced to stay home for many weeks.

"I wanted to recharge my life battery," said Phirom, who said she enjoyed the stunning views of the mountain range and walking through meadows hidden away in the wilderness.

Though the five-hour hike wasn't easy for her, Phirom said it was worth it to test her physical capabilities and the empowering affect it had on her spirit.

Choun Phirom, a well-known veteran of the outdoors and camping within the Kingdom and abroad, brings his entire family these days including two children under the age of 10 when he ventured forth into the wilderness.

Phirom led a 250km trek through the Cardamom Mountains from Kampong Speu to Koh Kong and neighbouring Pursat province to promote commu-

nity-based ecotourism that is of great benefit to the mostly poor communities situated in these remote areas.

Phirom is interested in maximising the economic and social benefits that activities such as camping can bring to the forest communities and particularly how they might be able to profit from tourism by leveraging their knowledge of the local terrain to serve as hiking guides.

Picnic at Death Falls

Another wilderness adventure that garnered a lot of attention from the public recently was the story of Sreysor Pheng and her small group who went deep into the Cardamoms for 10 days in search of the Chhay 100 waterfall – also known by some as "Death Falls".

She said she'd heard tales from old folks in the nearby villages about a beautiful waterfall, towering in height, that was hidden out in the middle of the mountain forests.

Sreysor, 26, is an environmental activist who has been dedicated to protecting Cambodia's natural resources through volunteering and taking part in wildlife conservation missions since she was just a teenager.

"If anyone wants to visit Chhay 100, now that we've found the path to it, you will reach it in three days and enjoy very scenic views along the way," she said.

But anyone intent on following in her footsteps needs to do it responsibly, said Sreysor, whose own journey there was difficult and harrowing, with her group getting lost out in the middle of nowhere and spending several days longer than planned

wandering outdoors, which meant they were in danger of exhausting the supplies they brought for the trip before making it back to civilisation.

"Hikers can explore safely without disturbing nature and wildlife if they limit the number of tourists who can visit and don't let crowds of them flock to one place at the same time," she said. "And be prepared mentally for a tough hike. My physical strength as a woman may be less than that of men, but my inner power enabled me to overcome the obstacles in our path because of my love and affection for nature," Sreysor told *The Post*.

Race to the top

Recently, two expats named Jacob Sims and Julien Brewster teamed up to challenge the climbing record for fastest to reach the summit of Oral Mountain with the goal of beating the time established by Fred Zalokar, 59, and David Minetti, 42, who set their record of three hours, 27 minutes and six seconds back on February 17, 2020.

On April 3, 2022, the duo set a new record of 2 hours, 26 minutes and 36 seconds. Their climb was witnessed by Chhoeun Chhim of Sre Kan III village's Phnom Oral Tourism Community, who along with a few other observers confirmed the timing of their speedy ascent.

"We also really want to help Chhim and his ecotourism agency with publicity. Due to the Covid-19 downturn, local tour guide agencies have had a tough time making ends

meet," Sims said. "We hope that this record will elevate their profile and generate more business for the Oral Mountains tourism community."

Their record did not hold for very long, however, as Kim Saroeun, 53, and his team from KK Running Club – including Khy Sophea, Kan Kunthy and Hiroshi Ake of Japan – swiftly took up their challenge, in more ways than one.

On June 4, Saroeun reached the peak of Oral Mountain in 2 hours, 26 minutes and 8 seconds – meaning he arrived at the top and set the new record with just 28 seconds left on the clock. The rest of his team arrived at the top at various times within the next 30 minutes or so after him, but too late to be included in the record books.

After breaking the record, Saroeun and his team thanked Sims and Brewster for initiating public awareness of the Mount Oral climbing record and encouraged both of them to attempt to beat his new time at any time convenient to them.

"I believe Cambodia has a lot of strong runners and climbers, and I call on locals and foreigners – as well as Jacob and Julien – to try and break my record. Oral is the highest peak in the country and it is a very challenging run. If they cannot beat my time, they will at least set their own personal bests," said Saroeun.

Birds of a feather

In addition to climbing to the top of Oral Mountain, be it quickly or slowly, another big attraction present there are the many rare species of birds that flock to the area.

Chhim, Srae Ken Community chief who guides tourists to the top of Oral Mountain regularly, said the number of tourists has jumped dramatically now that the pandemic is fading.

"From the end of 2021 until now, our community guides have offered services to more than 2,000 visitors. But in 2020 and 2021, we received only a few local people, not many of them. But now we have a mix of nationalities again," said Chhim.

Chhim recommends that visitors plan on spending three days in the forest in order to take in all of the interesting places and activities such as exploring reputedly haunted forest sites and bird-watching, because you can often spot rare species with exquisitely beautiful plumage.

Some of the rarest birds present include the chestnut-headed partridge with white stripes on its wings and belly and the Cambodian Laughing thrush – both of which can only be found in the Kingdom exclusively, according to Chhim. ■



Tho Phirom decided to join the growing number of women going on outdoor adventure camping and hiking trips. SUPPLIED



(From left to right) Cambodian mountaineers Thy Sophea, Kan Kunthy and record-setter Kim Saroeun along with Hiroshi Ake of Japan summited Mount Oral on June 4. SUPPLIED

60 years building towards hosting SEA Games for first time in history

Chhorn Norn

AS THE Phnom Penh Post celebrates the historic milestone of its 30th anniversary, Cambodia's athletes are training in earnest. The Kingdom is preparing to host the South-east Asian Games (SEA Games) for the first time in history.

As a country that suffered from foreign colonisation before being torn apart by a series of bloody civil wars over decades, Cambodia struggled for decades to recover from its dark and bitter days. Today, it enjoys comprehensive peace and freedom.

Having gained independence from France on November 9, 1953, Cambodia in the 1960s enjoyed a Golden Age of optimism, marked by a surge in creative output across music, cinema and the arts.

In sport, the Kingdom was due to host the third edition of the Games – then called the South East Asian Peninsular Games (SEAP Games) – in 1963 but had to withdraw due to the political situation at the time, which would descend into the genocidal rule of the Khmer Rouge in 1975.

However, thanks to the Win-Win Policy of Prime Minister Hun Sen, the Khmer Rouge surrendered in 1998, ending three decades of civil war, and with the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements, the stage was set for Cambodia to re-emerge on the international stage.

With all parts of society once again able to function smoothly, Cambodia began to develop, and joined the ASEAN regional political and economic bloc on April 30, 1999.

The sports sector was not neglected by the government, which established a national sports federation to provide training and resources for both athletes and officials. In the past 40 years, Cambodia has sent sporting delegates out to compete on the international stage and seen them return home bearing medals, especially in the recent 31st SEA Games in Vietnam, a major event in the region.

Since the first Games were held in the Thai capital Bangkok in 1959, Cambodia has been unable to host the regional sporting extravaganza. Thailand and Malaysia have each hosted the biennial multi-sport event six times.

Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines have each hosted the event four times, Myanmar thrice and Vietnam twice, with Brunei and Laos each playing host once. The sole non-ASEAN participant East Timor, like Cambodia, has yet to host.

However, that is set to change on May 5 next year when the SEA Games cauldron will be lit at the state-of-the-art Morodok Techo National Stadium on the northern outskirts of Phnom Penh.

With the phenomenal growth and potential of sports in Cambodia, the Kingdom – despite its small popula-



Defence minister General Tea Banh (centre) waves the SEA Games flag during an event to welcome Cambodian gold medallists on May 24. HENG CHIVAN

tion – has claimed medals at World Championships, and the Asian and SEA Games.

Winning gold medals at consecutive Asian Games for the first time – at Incheon 2014 and Jakarta-Palembang 2018 – and ever-increasing medal hauls at the recent SEA Games convinced Prime Minister Hun Sen that the time is right for Cambodia to host the 2023 edition.

The premier made officials and stakeholders aware of the serious responsibility that comes with hosting the Games.

“We need to remember that in our role as hosts, we must make sure the Games run smoothly from start to finish. We must not discourage the athletes of any of the participating countries as this would tarnish the image of our country.”

“Winning medals should be our secondary goal. As a responsible member of ASEAN, we must guarantee that the athletes and visitors from foreign nations return home with gratitude for the warm welcome we give them. No one should have any reason for criticising the Kingdom

because of poor hospitality or accommodation,” he said.

When the decision to accept the offer to host was made in 2016, the government established the Cambodian SEA Games Organising Committee (CAMSOC) to take on the responsibility of preparing a master plan for the event.

Cambodia has developed sports infrastructure – including arenas and stadiums – in the capital and provinces to serve the SEA Games. The Morodok Techo National Sports Complex, built at a cost of about \$150 million thanks to a grant from China, is the jewel in the crown of the Kingdom's sporting facilities, and will host the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2023 Games.

The athletes and officials of each sport have also been training hard, with each sport's governing body setting their own goals for the Games.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence General Tea Banh, in his capacity as the president of CAMSOC, spoke at a meeting of the SEA Games Federation Council, held in

Siem Reap in April.

“This is a wonderful opportunity. I would like to remind you that Cambodia has been waiting for 64 years to host this spectacular event. Thanks to the wisdom and leadership of our prime minister, Cambodia lives under the roof of peace and is well on the way to restoring the socio-economic situation and promoting post-Covid-19 prosperity for all.”

“The leadership of the Kingdom pays close attention to the development of sports. The work of CAMSOC, as we planned the journey to next year's Games, has been honourable, dignified and successful.”

“The government has invested vast resources, both financial and mental, in building the sports infrastructure we need to make sure the event is outstanding, most notably with the [new] national stadium. We now have the facilities to serve both international competitions and training in all kinds of sports,” he said.

General Tea Banh also said that the development of human resources – including athletes, coaches, and tech-

nical officials – is another area of which the Kingdom could be proud. Improved training and coaching had seen the performance of the Kingdom's athletes increase exponentially.

Cambodia has also succeeded in introducing the traditional sport of “bokator” to the 2023 SEA Games. At the April meeting, the members of the SEA Games Federation Council agreed to include it, along with 39 other sports. This means the 2023 SEA Games will feature 40 sports, the most of any Games since 1977.

“Introducing bokator at the 2023 Games has been a long-term goal of ours. It is an honour to share this cultural treasure with our ASEAN neighbours. Our plan was successful and all of the member states supported its official inclusion, so it is a great honour for us,” said Vath Chamroeun, secretary-general of both the National Olympic Committee of Cambodia (NOCC) and CAMSOC.

CAMSOC leaders also announced the arrival of the Games to the people when Cambodian sports delegates

– led by General Tea Banh – organised a parade of SEA Games flags and gold medal winners on May 24.

On that occasion, Tea Banh said: “Today, people across the country are happy – and rightly proud – that the Kingdom has opened a new page in their history and elevated national prestige by bringing the SEA Games flag to Cambodia.”

“I call on all compatriots, in and outside of the country, to be fully prepared to extend the best of Khmer hospitality. We will welcome Southeast Asian sports delegates and international guests from all over the world with friendly smiles and the gentle and dignified attitude of the Cambodian people, who are living in peace and developing in all fields.”

“Please be ready to take part in beautifying the Kingdom and eliminating social inactivity in order to enhance the honour and prestige of Cambodia during the historic events of the 2023 SEA Games and ASEAN Para Games. We shall achieve the great successes which a country with such a rich history deserves,” he added.

CONFIRMED SPORTS

- **CATEGORY I:** Athletics (Track and Field, Marathon); 2. Aquatics (Swimming, Diving, Water Polo)
- **CATEGORY II:** 3. Badminton, 4. Basketball (5x5 and 3x3), 5. Boxing, 6. Billiards, 7. Cycling (Road Race and MTB), 8. Canoe and rowing (inc Traditional Boat Race), 9. Chess (Ok Chakrong, Asean and Xiangxi), 10. Dance Sports, 11. Fencing, 12. Football, 13. Golf, 14. Gymnastics (Aerobic and Artistic), 15. Hockey (inc Indoor), 16. Judo, 17. Karate, 18. Muay, 19. Petanque, 20. Sailing, 21. Sepak Takraw (inc Chinlone), 22. Soft Tennis, 23. Tennis, 24. Table Tennis, 25. Taekwondo WT, 26. Triathlon (Including Aquathlon and Duathlon), 27. Volleyball, 28. Wrestling, 29. Weightlifting, 30. Wushu
- **CATEGORY III:** 31. Arnis, 32. BodyBuilding, 33. E-sports, 34. Floorball, 35. Jiu Jitsu, 36. Jetski, 37. KickBoxing, 38. Kun Bokator, 39. Vovinam, 40. Martial Arts Korea.



Cambodian sports delegates and athletes take part in the opening ceremony of the 31st SEA Games in Hanoi. SUPPLIED



As the next hosts, Cambodia performed at the closing ceremony of the Hanoi games, inviting all present to join them in the Kingdom. SUPPLIED