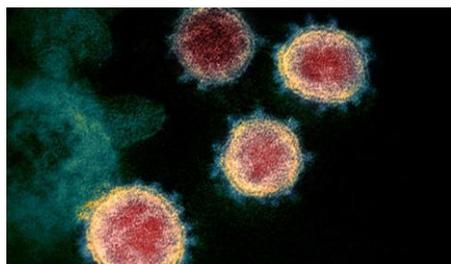




Measures Taken by Cambodia to Tackle COVID-19



KT/March 16, 17, 18, 19, 20

All schools in the country have been ordered to be closed until further notice via an emergency notice issued by the Minister of Education, Youth and Sport. The decision of the Ministry is to act as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The ministry encourages children to do home-schooling and avoid areas that are highly contagious, such as swimming, gym, playground and other places at risk of COVID-19.

Prime Minister Hun Sen advised citizens not travel to high-risk countries: the United States, Iran and parts of Europe.

The government later ordered KTV entertainment establishments and cinemas across the country to be shuttered to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

All religious gatherings are also banned as COVID-19 infection surges in the Kingdom. The ban came after 17 Cambodians who recently returned from a religious congregation in Malaysia tested positive for COVID-19.

The government urged all citizens not to discriminate against any group or race as COVID-19 fears mount in the Kingdom.

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New NBC Policies to Promote Liquidity

PPP/March 18

Cambodia's Central Bank issued a capital conservative buffer to ensure liquidity and promote lending amid the outbreak of Covid-19.

National Bank of Cambodia (NBC) director-general Chea Serey said the capital conservative buffer is an addition to three measures taken earlier this month to open access to credit.

In early March, NBC said the requirement for financial institutions to reserve at least 50% of their capital will be delayed until late 2021.

The Central Bank also reduced the interest rate on the liquidity-providing collateralised operation (LPCO), a financial tool that allows NBC to lend to financial institutions in the local currency.

LPCO's interest rate has been cut to 2.5% a year (from 3%); 2.3% for six months (from 2.8%), and 2.1% for three months (from 2.6%).

The last measure announced by NBC this month is the deduction of the interest rate on the negotiated certificate deposit (NCD), a tool that allows the financial sector to deposit with NBC to earn interest.

On March 5, NBC encouraged banks and money-deposit taking institution (MDIs) to continue disbursing loans and possibly suspend interest for businesses impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak, especially in the tourism industry. •

Sweden to Aid \$3 Million for Human Rights Education



KT/March 13

The Embassy of Sweden inked an agreement with Raoul Wallenberg Institute (RWI) of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law to strengthen human rights education in the Cambodia's academic institutions.

The agreement bears a three-year core support from 2020 to 2022 and a budget approximately \$3.2 million. The RWI said the assistance will allow the institute to continue supporting human rights education for the next generation of Cambodian decision-makers.

These will encompass research in human rights areas, including gender and environment and other programmes which can stimulate better-informed debates and advance increased cooperation between various sectors of the society.

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New ARDB Fund to Expand SME Access to Credit

PPP/March 17

The state-owned Agricultural and Rural Development Bank (ARDB) has recently launched a \$50-million fund to increase access to credit for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the local agriculture sector.

ARDB CEO Kao Thach said more than 500,000 local SMEs could benefit from the fund. Enterprises can borrow up to \$300,000 on each loan, with a 6% annual interest rate for loans used as working capital and 6.5% for that used for investment.

An International Finance Corporation report said Cambodia's women entrepreneurs continue to struggle with limited access to financing for business expansion. Only 3% have access to credit from microfinance institutions (MFIs) and banks.

The report estimates that the unmet demand for credit from women entrepreneurs is currently \$4.2 billion – equivalent to almost 63% of Cambodia's \$6.7 billion national budget for 2019.

A survey by the Ministry of Industry and Handicraft found they needed assistance in market research, service development, packaging, technology adoption, human resources, access to labour, access to finance, business registration, taxation and improving hygiene standards.

The SME Bank, a government-backed institution that aims to expand access to credit for local SMEs, is expected to launch soon. •

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Measures Taken by Cambodia...

The announcement of nationwide closure of museums came after a long list of establishments has temporarily closed its doors since the pandemic began.

Cambodia also closes border with Vietnam after Vietnam locked down its borders with the Kingdom and imposed a month-long entry ban to foreign travellers, except for diplomats. However, trades between the two countries re-open across the border located in Vietnam's Tây Ninh province and Cambodia's Svay Rieng province.

To minimize the spread of COVID-19 in the Kingdom, the National Assembly and five other ministries have instructed officials and staff to work online from home.

Cambodia has recently established a National Commission for Combatting COVID-19. The National Commission is headed by PM Hun Sen with five deputy heads and 40 members.

The National Commission has the responsibility to set national policies and strategies for the fight against COVID-19; lead the implementation of the strategic plan for the prevention, control and management of COVID-19; and respond to issues of political, economic and social aspects at all levels.

It also has the responsibility to lead and coordinate inter-institutional measures at national and sub-national administrations. •

UK, Germany Continue in Mine Clearance Aid



KT/March 17, 19

The Cambodia Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA) said the UK has pledged \$4.3 million in aid to support the Kingdom's mine clearing operations as part of the UK-funded Global Mine Action Programme Phase II (GMAP2).

CMAA First Vice President Ly Thuch said the implementation of the CMAA's projects, through the GMAP2, will be extended from April 1 this year to March 30 next year and will cost \$4.3 million.

The funds will be distributed by NGOs Halo Trust, Mines Advisory Group and the Norwegian People's Aid to be allocated for mine clearance, mine risk education and capacity building of the National Mine Action Authority.

VP Ly Thuch said since GMAP2 started in July 2018, thousands of mines have already been removed from nearly 20 km² of land.

The programme has strengthened the CMAA's capacity to effectively manage and coordinate the Cambodian mine action sector. Lastly, it has enabled innovation in mine risk education and has allowed for greater inclusion of people who have suffered permanent disabilities from landmines and UXOs.

The German government has also contributed an additional \$3.5 million in aid to support demining and social recovery efforts in the Kingdom's northwestern area until 2021.

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WWF: No Dam is The Right Decision

PPP/March 20

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has applauded the government's decision not to develop a hydropower dam on the Mekong River.

WWF Cambodia country director Teak Seng said: "Maintaining a free-flowing lower Mekong in Cambodia is the best decision for both its people and nature. WWF commends the Cambodian government for ruling out hydropower dam development and instead pursuing other energy sources, such as solar, to meet the Kingdom's power demand.

The ministry's director-general of energy and spokesman, Victor Jona said that the government has no plans to develop a hydropower dam on the Mekong River mainstream within the next 10 years from 2020-2030.

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IMF, CRF to Cooperate on Rice Research and Studies



KT/March 14

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) to Cambodia and Cambodia Rice Federation (CRF) have agreed to cooperate to undertake research and studies on the rice sector in the Kingdom.

The agreement was made in a meeting between Mr. Chan Sokkheang, Acting President of CRF and Mr. Yasuhisa Ojima, newly-appointed IMF Resident Representative for Cambodia.

In the meeting, the two sides shared views on a wide range of issues such as the contribution of the rice sector to the Gross Domestic Product of Cambodia, the CRF's role in rice sector development, and the impacts of ongoing COVID-19 outbreak on the current and future situation which could affect Cambodia's economy and rice sector.

The IMF side stated positive perspectives after getting more and deep understanding of Cambodia rice sector and IMF and CRF are looking forward to the collaboration on research studies on policies and regulations on Cambodia's economy and rice sector. •

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Germany, UK Continue in Mine Clearance...

There were 77 mine-related incidents last year, up to 33% compared with 58 in 2018, according to CMAA.

It said there were a dozen casualties in 2019, up from 10 the previous year, adding 65 people were injured last year, up from 48 the previous year.

Vice President Ly Thuch said the German government has contributed more than \$7.5 million through Halo Trust and the organisation has cleared 12 km² of land ridden with 3,421 anti-personnel mines, 127 anti-tank mines, and 3,506 unexploded ordnances. •

Continued from page (2)

Swedish to Aid \$3 Million...

Samuel Hurtig, the embassy head of development cooperation, said RWI's activities have significantly contributed to improving knowledge of human rights, gender equality and the principles of the rule of law among citizens and the public sector in Cambodia over the past years.

Since 2013, RWI has collaborated with numerous relevant institutions that have the capacity and mandate to make a positive impact on the human rights situation in Cambodia at the academic, policy and implementation levels.

Sweden and Cambodia established diplomatic relations in 1961, with the country providing its first development cooperation support to Cambodia in 1979.

Swedish bilateral development cooperation with Cambodia focuses on human rights, democracy and the rule of law, education, employment, climate change and the sustainable use of natural resources. •

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WWF: No Dam is The Right...

Marc Goichot, WWF freshwater lead in the Asia Pacific said in the statement that this is the best possible news for the sustainable future of the tens of millions of residents who would have been affected.

"This is crucial for the spectacular biodiversity relying on the river, particularly the Irrawaddy river dolphins, whose highest population is recorded in the area.

"Cambodia's correct decision is an example for other countries, recognising free-flowing rivers provide invaluable benefits for people and the countless wild species that they depend on," he said. •