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Germany to Assist Cambodia on Agriculture, Energy, Irrigation, Investment



Senior officials of Germany have expressed their strong commitment to supporting Cambodia, particularly Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, in developing the kingdom's key areas, according to Eang Sophalleth, personal secretary to Prime Minister Hun Sen. Norbert Barthle, German Parliamentary State Secretary of the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, told Strongman Hun Sen on Monday in a courtesy call at the Peace Palace, Phnom Penh that his visit aims to learn about German projects in Cambodia to further strengthen Cambodia-Germany cooperation as recommended by Chancellor Angela Merkel. "Germany will always be with Cambodia. We will assist Cambodia on agriculture, solar panels, and irrigation systems; encourage investors to Cambodia; and solve traffic congestion," Norbert told the Premier. Norbert praised the Premier that Cambodia prospers and enjoys peace and stability, and that German investors are now keen on investing in Cambodia under the leadership of Hun Sen. Prime Minister informed Norbert that back in 1979, the capital Phnom Penh had only 70 people. Cambodia is developing, yet facing challenges. In response, the government has set prioritized tasks, including human capacity building, irrigation, telecommunications, and energy.

Source: <http://en.freshnewsasia.com/index.php/en/localnews/13120-2019-02-25-15-41-17.html>

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Government of Japan Aids Nearly US\$930K to FIDR and JMAS to Assist Cambodia's Development Projects



The Government of Japan has provided a total grant of US\$925,630 for the development of the Japanese NGO projects based in the kingdom. The grant signing ceremony was held on Monday at the Japanese Embassy, presided by Japanese Ambassador to Cambodia Hidehisa Horinouchi, and the two grant receiving entities, namely Mrs. Yumiko Scheumann, Acting Country Director of Foundation for International Development/Relief (FIDR), and representative of Japan Mine Action Service (JMAS). The US\$237,666 grant was allocated for FIDR, whose mission is to promote pediatric in Kratie province and strengthen capacity of the staff at the health centers.

Another US\$687,964 was granted to JMAS, which aims to develop mine mechanical engineering with demining machines for mine clearance. JMAS will transfer an effective and safe clearance method to the Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC) in order to strengthen capacity and accelerate CMAC's efforts to make the nation safer. The financial grants from Japanese government to Cambodia began since 2002 to support Cambodia's development. Since then, Japan has provided over US\$36 million for 117 projects with the focus on basic education, health, agriculture and mines clearance.

Source : <http://en.freshnewsasia.com/index.php/en/localnews/13118-2019-02-25-14-32-35.html>

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Laos seeking sweeter deal on sugar exports to China



Laos is seeking to significantly increase sugar exports to the Chinese market this year to 100,000 tonnes, up from 55,000 tonnes in 2018. As part of efforts to increase bilateral trade and help sugar producers find foreign markets, the Lao government recently urged China to open up its market to more Lao-grown products. Minister of Industry and Commerce and Chairman of the Laos-China Cooperation Commission, Mrs Khemmani Pholsena, last

week told a visiting Chinese delegation to convey the request by the Lao side to the Chinese Ministry of Commerce for further consideration. "In a bid to encourage Lao farmers to keep growing more sugar and support the fight against poverty, 100,000 tonnes of sugar is a huge amount of produce for Laos but only a small quantity for China," she said. The minister made the request for consideration through the visiting Chinese delegation last week, led by Vice Chairman of the People's Republic of China National Development and Reform Commission, Mr Ning Jizhe. Mrs Khemmani is confident that the value of bilateral trade and investment between Laos and China will rise once several mega cooperation projects become operational, such as the Laos-China railway. According to a recent report, China mainly imports wood, ore, sand, rubber and rubber products, copper and copper products and fertiliser from Laos. The trade value of exported products to China in the first six months of last year stood at US\$619 million compared to about US\$1.27 billion in goods sold to Thailand, of which electricity earned the largest revenue. Exports to China reached US\$372.5 million in 2013, US\$672.7 in 2014, US\$1 billion in 2015, and US\$1.13 billion in 2016. The total trade volume between both countries reached US\$3 billion kip in 2017, according to the Laos-China Cooperation Commission. Additionally, sales of rice from Laos to China hit US\$14.2 million in 2016, dropped to US\$5.6 million in 2017, and sank to about US\$5 million in 2018. China is still the largest rice export market for Laos, and the second biggest trading partner of the country. Earlier this year, the governments of the two nations launched the Visit Laos-China Year 2019 programme with an influx of Chinese tourists expected to generate income for the Lao service sector including tour operators, restaurants and hoteliers.

Source : <http://annx.asianews.network/content/laos-seeking-sweeter-deal-sugar-exports-china-92102>

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Critics warn of hidden costs in forging ahead with more dams



THE DEBATE over Laos' strategy to become the "Battery of Asia" continues months after the deadly disaster at the Xe Pian-Xe Namnoy hydropower dam, even as the Lao government keeps building more dams. Despite the previous government's decision to suspend new dam projects and academics' concerns over the transboundary impacts of dams on the environment and the wellbeing of people in the Mekong River Basin, Lao officials maintain that investing in hydropower dams is necessary to eradicate poverty in the country and boost the economy. Singthong Phanthamala, head of the River Basin Planning and Development Division of the Lao Water Resources Department, said the country continues to pursue its mission to be a major power supplier in Southeast Asia through investments in dams. Singthong said Laos had learned an expensive lesson from the collapse of the Xe Pian-Xe Namnoy dam last July. He said the government has now come up with stricter regulations for the building and operation of dams to ensure they are safe. "The government is focusing on water supply, environment preservation and economic development, so our duty is to provide water to all sectors, including power generation, to ensure the prosperity of the country and offer a better quality of life for all citizens," he said. Shortly after the dam disaster last year, the government announced it would examine safety standards at all planned dams, suspend new projects and reconsider its "Battery of Asia" policy. The plan was intended to enrich the poor land-locked nation through large-scale hydropower dam development and selling electricity to neighbouring countries. According to a summary of Electricite Du Laos' 2018 operations report cited in the newspaper Vientiane Mai last month, the authorities last year were still pushing for dam development while sticking to the objective of becoming the "Battery of Asia". The report

revealed that, by the end of 2018, Laos had 53 hydropower dams, 21 of which were small structures with electricity generation capacity under 15 megawatts, while the other 32 were large. It was also disclosed that 36 more dams were under construction and scheduled for completion by 2020. From the opposite side of the Mekong River, Maha Sarakham University lecturer Chainarong Setthachua views with concern the reversal of the Lao government's suspension of dam investments and the resumption of its "Battery of Asia" policy. "Even though Laos can profit from selling electricity to Thailand and other countries with its 'Battery of Asia' policy, and Thai people can enjoy relatively cheap power, this business model has a hidden cost. Lao people will have to pay a heavy price through the loss of traditional livelihoods, degradation of the environment and, in Sanamxay's case, the loss of many lives," Chainarong said. He argued that dam development has been proved to create more poverty among local people, not enrich them. He explained that the dams damage the fragile river ecosystem on which the local population heavily relies for food and profit, especially in the Mekong region. "The 'Battery of Asia' policy is a product of the post-Cold War rise of neoliberal economics," he said. "Even though the government had earlier, wisely, halted consideration of all new hydropower dam projects, the leading international trade agencies and multiple transnational energy investors kept insisting that Laos should carry on with its controversial 'Battery of Asia' policy. "So, the resumption of large-scale dam development in Laos is a sign that transnational energy industrialists are having a very large influence over the government's policies." He stressed that Thai investors are also playing a major part in hydropower investment in Laos. He cited as an example Ch Karnchang borrowing money from many leading Thai banks for the Xayaburi dam in Xayaburi province in northern Laos, which will be the first on the Mekong mainstream south of China. It will sell up to 90 per cent of the electricity produced to Thailand. The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand has confirmed it would buy 1,120 megawatts from the Xayaburi dam and 269 from the Nam Ngib dam, by the end of this year. The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand International has invested in the projects. Currently, Thailand purchases 3,877 megawatts from Laos, representing 9.16 per cent of its total intake. This is the sixth and final in a series on the fallout from last year's dam disaster in southern Laos. Reporting for this story was supported by a grant from Internews' Earth Journalism Network and Southeast Asian Press Alliance.

Source: <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/national/30364687>

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Businesses call for policy changes to enable smoother operations



A February 22 meeting between the Private Sector Development Committee led by Vice President U Myint Swe and entrepreneurs from the Union of Myanmar Federation Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) saw the fisheries, steel-making, vehicle manufacturing and distribution and border trade promotion sectors call for policy changes to ease the challenges they face when doing business. U Win Kyaing, secretary of the Myanmar Fisheries Federation (MFF), called for a simpler land use policy which can facilitate fish and prawn breeding but which also includes all other businesses that rely on land to conduct their operations. He also requested to negotiate and settle the issues faced by fish farmers in Ayeyarwady and Mandalay who are still in the stage of land use applications and haven't obtained the rights but who are being penalised by fines of K 1 million an acre. As fish and prawn farming have been suspended and licenses have been banned in areas like Mandalay, the fish farms are deemed to be illegal. U Win Kyaing called for the fish and prawn farming activities to be legalised as well as for easier access

to financing for the sector. He also stressed the need for a bilateral trade agreement between Myanmar and China to facilitate exports of local freshwater catfish across the border.

Dr Soe Tun, chair of the Myanmar Automobile Manufacturer & Distributor Association, highlighted that as the market is diluted by different types of cars and generic car parts which were imported in previous years, many in the industry are facing difficulties when buying and assembling automobile parts which are produced by original factories.

Under the car import policy of Myanmar, the import of used cars and car parts such as radiators, bumpers and lamps were permitted by the Road Transport Administration Department between 2011 and 2018. However, it has since said that the cars and parts must be original.

Dr Soe Tun pointed out that international car buyers regularly modify their cars by changing lamps, radiator parts and bumpers. As such, car modifications, which were once allowed in Myanmar, should be permitted again in line with international standards especially if it doesn't interfere with road safety. "So, we request that the ministry set a deadline for issuing new directives amending these policies," he said. A proposal to impose the Safeguard Law and Anti-Dumping and Countervailing Law on iron and steel finished products and programs to provide a temporary solution to an existing oversupply of cheap imported products, was put forward by U Tin Hlaing, vice president of Myanmar Iron and Steel Association. An anti-dumping duty is a protectionist tariff that a domestic government imposes on foreign imports that it believes are priced below fair market value. According to the ASEAN policy, which grants full exemption from tax and import permission for trade within the bloc, local businesses are losing market share and face being forced to shut down, U Tin Hlaing said. He said that the governments of Thailand and Malaysia protect local businesses by imposing 25-30 percent anti-dumping duties on traders and that Myanmar, too, needs to implement such measures immediately to avert the collapse of the local iron and steel products market. Meanwhile, there are only three trade border gates at the China-Myanmar border, which has led to congestion and bottlenecks at the gates and trade routes. To solve that, Border Trade Promotion Committee Member U Ko Ko Gyi under UMFCCI proposed opening more border gates to facilitate cross-border trade. And as China has given six-month work visas to Myanmar workers, they should also allow border cross permits of up to six months as well, he said. Currently, Myanmar workers going to China only have seven days border cross permits because of Myanmar's passport procedures. As such, workers need to extend their permits every week, resulting in thousands of people having to wait in lines for the permit extension process. Besides, a permit extension costs around 80 yuan K15,000, which is really taxing for people and the respective immigration-related departments are also bogged down by workload, he said.

Source : <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/businesses-call-policy-changes-enable-smoother-operations.html>

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Multiple projects to reduce traffic in city



Although overpasses have been built to reduce the traffic jams at some intersections along heavily trafficked Pyay Road, congestion still occurs, said U Zin Min Htwe, MP of Dagon Seikkan Constituency (2). U Zin Min Htwe asked if the government has any plans to construct overpasses at the intersection of Pyay Road and Hanthawaddy

Roundabout in Kamayut township during the Hluttaw sitting held on February 20. Some of the most significant traffic congestion occurs in the area during rush hour and if an overpass is built, it would reduce traffic jams and reduce travelling time, he said.

“We can reach the downtown area in less time if the overpass is built at Hanthawaddy Roundabout. As the roundabout is big, large overpasses would be expensive, but we can reduce the traffic jams to some extent even if smaller overpasses are built to reduce cost,” he said. Although YCDC doesn’t have plans to build any overpasses at the intersection yet, it is making plans to reduce traffic congestion as part of larger plans for the city, said Yangon Mayor U Maung Maung Soe. “For the Yangon Urban Development Plan, one of the biggest projects that will be implemented with official development assistance loans from the Japan International Cooperation Agency, is the reductions of traffic congestion and there are projects for it,” U Maung Maung Soe said. For this year, projects to improve traffic along main roads such as Pyay Road, Gabaraye Pagoda Road, Strand Road, Yangon-Pathein Road and Upper Pazundaung Roads have been drafted, he said. Besides, improving road islands, repainting faded road symbols, rechecking the traffic light system, enforcement and education of traffic laws are being carried out, he said.

Source : <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/multiple-projects-reduce-traffic-city.html>

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Imports of consumer goods hit US\$1.261 billion



Myanmar’s import of consumer goods hit US\$1.261 billion during the current 2018-2019 fiscal year, down by \$110 million against the same time last 2017/2018 FY, according to state media. Between 1 October 2018 and 15 February 2019, the total imports of consumer products included \$14.585 million by the public sector and \$1.247 billion by the private sector. When compared with the corresponding period last FY, this FY saw a decline in public sector’s imports of manufactured goods by \$24.682 million, whereas the private sector’s imports of the same went down by \$85.655 million. During the same time last year, the public sector imported consumer goods worth \$39.267 million and the private importers bought the same products amounting to \$1.332 billion, totalling \$1.371 billion

Source: <http://www.mizzima.com/article/imports-consumer-goods-hit-us1261-billion>

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Singapore tops the investment list in Rakhine State



Investors from many countries including Singapore, South Korea, China and India took interested to make more investment in Rakhine State and Singapore topped the investment list in the state, said the state chief minister Nyi Pu. Foreign investors made the biggest investment in energy sector in the state and local investors made most of their investments in hotel and tourism sector, he continued. A total of five local investments worth Ks14.223 billion are allowed in Rakhine State within a month and created about 590 job opportunities for locals. Local and foreign investments with responsibilities and a good materialization are taking an important role to push the Rakhine State to implement the economic development of the country in the future. The investment summit in the state will present the Rakhine State with full opportunities which are not explored yet, said State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

Moreover special economic zones are a main source for creating economic development, job opportunities and new hopes for locals. They can create many industries in a short time. They also can create investment links for

small and medium enterprises in the state. Singapore topped the list with US\$20.6 billion investment in Myanmar followed by China with US\$20.3 billion investment. Singapore occupied over 26 per cent of total foreign investment in Myanmar and China hold 25 per cent of total foreign investment, according to Directorate of Investment and Companies Administration (DICA).

Source : <https://elevenmyanmar.com/news/singapore-tops-the-investment-list-in-rakhine-state>

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AEON to invest in VN's financial sector



HÀ NỘI — AEON Financial Service (AFS) Co Ltd, the owner of Japan's AEON retail chain, wants to expand its financial services in Việt Nam through merger and acquisitions, said AFS Chairman Masaki Suzuki. In a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister VŨng Đình Huệ in Hà Nội yesterday, the AFS leader pledged long-term investment in Việt Nam to contribute to the country's consumer finance market. He said AEON considers Việt Nam a key investment destination in the region, with the group planning to pour some US\$5 billion into shopping malls nationwide, raising the total to 30 malls and creating jobs for 50,000 local labourers. The host, for his part, applauded the firm's plan to expand investment in Việt Nam, saying that besides bolstering exports, the Vietnamese Government is also interested in developing the domestic retail market.

The total retail sales of goods and services in Việt Nam in 2018 rose 12 per cent year-on-year, he said, adding that the AEON shopping mall model has been widely accepted by Vietnamese consumers thanks to its integration of business activities and other services. He also lauded AEON for bringing Vietnamese products to its shelves and shipping local goods to AEON chains worldwide. Huệ voiced his support for AEON's plans to expand investment in the financial sector, helping to improve the capacity and business efficiency of both AEON itself and payment methods in Việt Nam. — VNS

Source : <https://vietnamnews.vn/economy/506015/aeon-to-invest-in-vns-financial-sector.html#1EmI5RdeMDYfBE0i.97>

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