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Smart Axiata posts \$67M in profit



Cambodian mobile operator Smart Axiata posted a net profit of \$67.6 million last year, a slight drop from 2017 and down to what the firm said were unfavourable forex conversions. Smart Axiata's net profit in 2017 was \$68.1 million. According to a Smart Axiata statement provided to The Post on Tuesday, the firm's revenue last year grew seven per cent to \$287.5 million, while its "ebitda" – earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation – increased six per cent to \$134.8 million. However, the subsidiary of Malaysian's Axiata Group posted a decline in net profit as it converted its financial performance results in Cambodia to a parent company report in Malaysian ringgit. "In absolute terms, that is, in USD currency, Smart again outperformed its peers by achieving positive year-on-year growth despite having to face intense industry competition," the statement read. It added that the firm's 2018 revenue increase was fuelled by 28 per cent data growth, with data accounting for 60 per cent of total revenue. "Although several challenges related to the regulatory environment and market price elasticity are concerns for the Cambodian telecommunications market, Smart remains cautiously optimistic about the company's financial performance for the coming year." Smart plans to earmark approximately \$80 million in capital expenditures this year for network expansions and enabling advanced mobile technologies. It expects to further strengthen its mobile data leadership while introducing new digital, entertainment and lifestyle offerings to millions of Cambodians.

In July last year, Axiata Group sold a 10 per cent stake in Smart Axiata to Japanese group Mitsui Co Ltd for a second time. The Japanese firm holds 20 per cent of Smart Axiata, while Axiata Group still has the majority interest at 72.5 per cent. The remaining 7.5 per cent is owned by Southern Coast Ventures. According to an Axiata Group report, the company paid \$16.7 million in taxes last year. Telecommunication Regulator of Cambodia spokesperson Im Vutha said the Kingdom's telecom sector is growing, with revenue continuing to increase despite greater competition in the industry. He added that the success of Cambodia's telecom operators have contributed to government revenue through taxes, annual licensing fees and other non-tax revenue. "Future economic trends will be digitally based, so we believe that telecom companies will use more of their profit to invest in infrastructure and will be more helpful in boosting the local economy," he said. He added that industry growth is not only beneficial to the Kingdom in government revenue, but also helps boost other sectors, such as education and business. According to Ministry of Post and Telecommunications figures released last month, the number of registered SIM cards provided to the Kingdom's mobile operators reached 19.3 million by the end of last year, a nearly four per cent increase from the end of 2017. The figure is equivalent to 120 per cent of Cambodia's total population of more than 16 million. Last week, Vietnamese military telecom firm Metfone celebrated 10 years of operating in Cambodia and posted an accumulated revenue of more than \$2.2 billion during its nine years in the Kingdom, with an accumulated profit reaching \$300 million. The firm also reported that it has contributed an accumulated \$500 million in taxes to the Cambodian government.

Source: <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/smart-axiata-posts-67m-profit>

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Laos, Vietnam target 15% increase in trade



The Lao and Vietnamese governments will try to bolster two-way trade by at least 15 per cent this year as part of efforts to expand cooperation between the two countries.

The combined value of imports and exports between Laos and Vietnam exceeded US\$1 billion in 2018, representing an increase of 13 percent compared to 2017, Minister of Planning and Investment, Dr Souphanh Keomixay, who is also President of the Lao-Vietnamese Cooperation Commission, said at a press conference last week. To reach the 2019 bilateral trade target, both sides have to streamline procedures at border crossings and checkpoints to save time and enhance transparency and safety, Dr Souphanh said. "At the same time, we also have to improve transport, regulations and mechanisms to make business operations easier," he added. The two governments will further boost cooperation on investment promotion in different sectors, especially energy, mining and agriculture, in order to increase exports from Laos to Vietnam. Vietnam remained Laos' third largest trading partner in 2018, trailing Thailand and China. The main items exported to Vietnam included drinking water, minerals, wood products and agricultural produce such as rubber, coffee, maize, cassava, rice and also cattle. In contrast, imports mainly comprised petroleum, fertiliser, steel, machinery, electrical equipment, construction materials and spare parts. Vietnam has invested in 409 projects in Laos worth US\$4.1 billion, mostly in hydropower, mining, transport, industrial tree plantations and services. Trade and investment cooperation between Laos and Vietnam has helped to enhance Laos' GDP and has played an important role in the development of both countries and their relationship. The Lao and Vietnamese governments have agreed to further cooperate in different areas especially education and sports, human resources development, energy and mines, as well as information, culture and tourism. The main projects include transport development for enhanced integration and connectivity. On the drawing board are an expressway linking the capital cities of Vientiane and Hanoi, the Vientiane-Vung Ang railway, and Nongkhang Airport in Huaphan province, as well as the transmission of electricity from Laos to Vietnam.

Source : <http://annx.asianews.network/content/laos-vietnam-target-15-increase-trade-92174>

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Rakhine opens new beaches for hotel, tourism investments



The Ministry of Hotels and Tourism and the Rakhine State Government will open up new beaches along the Rakhine coast for new hotel projects in order to draw more tourism investments into the state, said U Ye Aung Moe, director of Ministry of Hotels and Tourism. So far, the ministry has designated the Gyite Taw, Maw Yone and Maung Shwe Lay beaches as new hotel destinations. The beaches are located near Ngapali Beach and Kantharyar Beach in Gwa township, which is in southern Rakhine. "These beaches are untouched and in their natural state. The ministry and Rakhine government will work together to invite responsible investors in the hotel development sector," said U Ye Aung Moe. Currently, an eco-tourism project involving a 150-room hotel is being implemented at Manaung Island, which also has a small airfield, by Manaung Public Company. The firm has been collaborating with Yangon-listed First Myanmar Investment since 2016.

On February 23, the Rakhine State Government led interested investors on a site visit of Maw Yone Maung Shwe Lay and Kantharyar beaches as well as of the Manaung Island eco tourism project. U Ohn Maung, Minister of Hotels and Tourism, said the prospects and investment opportunities at the newly designated beaches are good due to their proximity to Ngapali Beach, which is a popular tourist destination located around nine to ten hours by land from Yangon. In 2018, more than 60,000 foreign tourists to Rakhine State mainly visited Ngapali Beach and the Mrauk-U historical site. Hotel and Tourism sector is most interested to invest with other sectors including agriculture,

livestock and fisheries, and manufacturing, according to according to the investment opportunities of Rakhine State survey by Myanmar Investment Commission, Rakhine State Government and Myanmar Survey Research. Investors said that while there are opportunities for beach hotel projects and tourism in Rakhine, one of the barriers to entry is high land prices and poor transport infrastructure, according to a survey conducted by the Myanmar Investment Commission, Rakhine State Government and Myanmar Survey Research. The state government said that a slew of infrastructure projects, from road and airport construction are in the works and will soon begin. In addition, a total of five new projects that will drive tourism are expected to take place. These are the Mrauk-U new city, Mrauk-U airport, Ponnagyum industrial zone, the Kyaetaw – Mingan Development project, upgrading of the Ngapali airport and the eco-tourism project on Manaung Island. Foreign companies have so far invested up to US\$9 billion in hotels and tourism, livestock and fisheries and oil and gas in Rakhine, while local companies are mostly involved in hotels and tourism, according to official data

Source: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/rakhine-opens-new-beaches-hotel-tourism-investments.html>

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Govt says it can't take action against dishonest telecoms



The government is helpless against telecommunication operators that impose surcharges on customers, as shutting them down even for just an hour could hamper communications in the country, a senior transport official said on Monday. U Tha Oo, deputy minister of Transport and Communications, admitted that although mobile companies are charging users more than they should, no charges have been filed against them. "We are not in a position to sue telecommunications service providers for wrongdoing," he told the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Assembly of the Union) on Monday. The deputy minister was responding to a query by U Hla Moe, MP for Aung Myay Tharzan, Mandalay Region, who said that without their knowledge, mobile phone users are being subjected to unreasonable charges or have been charged for more time than they use. "Everybody in Myanmar is suffering. Charging more without letting customers know is theft. It is also abuse," he said. U Tha Oo said that there are laws and sanctions that can be slapped on the erring telecos. According to the law, wrongful acts by operators can be punished with warnings, temporary suspension or revocation of licences. However, the latter two are impossible to enforce, he said. "We can't shut them down even for one hour or 10 minutes. If we do, all users will be affected. All communications will be disconnected," he said. The ministry will study whether it is possible to sue these operators under section 66 (c) of the Telecommunications Law, he said. The four major telecommunications operators in the country have nearly 60 million mobile phone subscribers, U Tha Oo said.

Source: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/govt-says-it-cant-take-action-against-dishonest-telecoms.html>

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Less than 10 percent of seeds are top quality



High-quality seeds account for less than 10 percent of the total used by the country's farmers, a senior agricultural official said, noting low production yields in Myanmar. U Hla Kyaw, deputy minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, said that only maize growers use 90pc high-quality seeds. "Less than 10pc of quality seeds are used in planting rice, oil crops and beans and pulses, so we have to work on increasing that figure," he said

recently in Nay Pyi Taw. U Naing Kyi Win, director general of the Department of Agriculture Research, said most of the quality seeds used by maize farmers are produced locally. The use of quality vegetable seeds is only 30pc to 40pc among farmers, said U Hla Kyaw, adding that the need for high quality vegetable seeds is huge. "Poor seed quality results in poor crops, so farmers will suffer losses by using such seeds," he said. U Ye Tint Tun, director general of the Agriculture Department, underscored the need to promote trust and information exchange between seed producers and farmers. "We will try to build that trust so that seed producers will meet the demands of the market," he said. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and Japan International Cooperation Agency are helping the government to address the problem.

Source: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/rakhine-opens-new-beaches-hotel-tourism-investments.html>

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Kachin residents urge govt to stop quarrying on island



Kachin residents have urged the government to stop large-scale gold mining and sand quarrying on an island in the Ayeyarwady River, as the activities could harm the environment and the livelihoods of villagers. More than 600 residents from several villages in the state capital, Myitkyina, and Waingmaw township, sent a letter to the state government last Wednesday calling for urgent action. They said that the mining and quarrying had eroded the nearby riverbank, and the operations are very close to a road. "The residents are farming maize nearby. The extraction affects not only Labang village but also the riverbank," said U Naw Gayaung, village head. The letter said villagers augment their incomes with small-scale gold mining on Katat Island (the name villagers call it). In the summer, they fish near the island. For a long time, the government prohibited villagers from going near the island following a government directive to conserve the environment. However, villagers discovered equipment for gold mining and quarrying on the island earlier this year, according to U Tan Khamt, head of nearby Lamyang village. "They remove the upper layer of sand and gravel, and the extraction is done from the lower layer," he said. "Villagers are not allowed to enter the site." According to the villagers, the supervisors on the island are believed to be Chinese nationals who do not speak Burmese. About 20 people applied to the state government for business licence. Although they have been given permission, the licences have not been issued yet, said U Kyaw Htin Ko Ko, an official of Myitkyina township. "These operations are under investigation. If it is found out that they have adversely affected people and caused any losses, the business operations will be closed. Even if they have paid taxes, they will be seized as public possessions," said U Kyaw Htin Ko Ko.

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/kachin-residents-urge-govt-stop-quarrying-island.html>

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FDI in first two months of 2019 reaches \$8.5 billion



HÀ NỘI — Foreign investors have poured US\$8.47 billion into Việt Nam this year as of February 20, 2.5 times higher than the same period of last year, data from the Foreign Investment Agency under the Ministry of Planning and Investment revealed.

This number included newly registered capital, capital contributed and shares purchased by foreign investors. The country granted 514 new investment licences to projects with total registered capital of \$2.44 billion, up 75.7 per cent over the same period in 2018. As many as 176 projects registered to adjust their capital with total additional capital of \$854.8 million, up 22.1 per cent year on year. Meanwhile, the value of capital contribution and share purchases by foreign investors reached \$5.17 billion, four times more than the same period in 2018 and accounting for 61 per cent of total registered capital. Foreign direct investment (FDI) projects were estimated to have disbursed \$2.58 billion in the first two months of this year, up 9.8 per cent. This is the highest level of two-month growth in the last three years. Foreign investors pumped cash into 18 sectors, of which the manufacturing and processing industry remained the hottest sector with total pledged capital reaching \$6.93 billion, equivalent to 81.8 per cent of the total registered value. The real estate and science and technology sectors ranked second and third with respective values of \$478 million and \$306.7 million. Hong Kong topped the list of 66 countries and territories investing in Việt Nam in the first two months of the year with a total investment value of \$4.3 billion, making up 51 per cent of the country’s FDI. It was followed by Singapore with \$979 million and the Republic of Korea with \$873 million.

Hà Nội attracted the lion’s share among 44 provinces and cities receiving FDI with \$4 billion, or 47.3 per cent of the total. HCM City ranked second with total registered capital of more than \$1 billion, followed by Bắc Ninh Province with \$541.7 million. The foreign investment sector remained the major exporter with total export value of all goods (including crude oil) reaching \$25.95 billion, up 3.7 per cent year on year and making up 70.7 per cent of Việt Nam’s total export turnover. Import value of the sector also increased 5.1 per cent during the reviewed period to \$21.47 billion. The FDI sector recorded a trade surplus of \$4.48 billion. — VNS

Source: <https://vietnamnews.vn/economy/506072/fdi-in-first-two-months-of-2019-reaches-85-billion.html#BVGgkDiULE1JoPt1.97>

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