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Officials at the Poipet International Border Checkpoint in Banteay Meanchey province have drawn widespread criticism for allegedly charging exorbitant customs fees from people, traders and porters who travel or transport goods across the Thai border. Som Rein, a porter at the border checkpoint, told The Post on Sunday that officials had charged higher customs fees than legally required. Failing to comply, he claimed, would result in the goods getting stuck. "They charge us too much and we can't afford it. I have a few children in my care; I can hardly make ends meet. Both Cambodian and Thai customs officials charge us too much. Sometimes I just let the goods get stuck there," he said. Some have taken to social media, with a Facebook user accusing officials of making a fortune on the back of the poor. "At Poipet [border checkpoint], they charged 100,000 riel [\$25] for two [small] mattresses! That's why they can afford luxury cars [on meagre salaries]. Customs officials told us to leave our goods there if we can't afford the fees. They still kept me waiting even after I paid the fees." "It's OK for me but I pity porters who need their carts and goods to transport for a living," wrote a user under the name Kito Bong. Khem Chetra, the immigration police bureau chief at the border checkpoint, declined to comment on Sunday. But he recently addressed a press conference claiming officials charge residents only 100 riel for paperwork for each pass. Problem persisted for years. Sum Chankea, the provincial coordinator for rights group Adhoc, said the corruption issue at the border checkpoint has persisted for years. He dismissed Chetra's claims of only 100 riel paperwork fee as unreasonable, saying residents are generally charged no less than 100 Thai baht (\$3.15) for each pass. Chankea urged the government to eliminate alleged systemic corruption at the local level, where higher-ranking officials allegedly make their subordinates pay regular bribes to maintain their posts. "Corrupt officials are increasingly worried now after the prime minister started taking tougher measures against graft and inefficiency. To eliminate corruption, officials themselves must refrain from graft." "And higher-level officials need to stop extorting [bribes from] their subordinates. If they are to remove corrupt officials, they must do it across the board," he said. Din Puthy, the president of the Informal Economy Reinforced Association, said that generally there was no policy requiring such fees, which he said would wind up in the pockets of corrupt border officials. "I've seen it all. Every border checkpoint [official] charges exorbitant fees, sometimes without any paperwork [such as receipts]. It's a crime because people would not be allowed to cross [the border] if they can't afford it," he said. Both Chankea and Puthy appealed for an investigation into corruption at all border checkpoints and relevant institutions to lift the burden off the poor. Prime Minister Hun Sen on Friday renewed his calls for good governance through sweeping reforms. He threatened to dismiss officials who fail to follow. "No matter who they are – be they tigers, snakes, rats or flies – if they take advantage of the people for personal gain they will be punished," he said, referring to officials at all levels. Some officials have either been removed from their positions or investigated for misconduct including corruption since Hun Sen announced the tougher measures. Nuon Bophal, the deputy president of the Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU), told The Post on Sunday that he was not certain if the ACU would launch an investigation into alleged graft at the border checkpoints. But he said the ACU generally starts a probe when news of corruption leaks. "I'm not sure, but legally speaking we don't need a complaint to begin an investigation, as long as there are clues of corruption."

“Then again, I’m not sure if the ACU head will probe the alleged graft [at border checkpoints]. I wouldn’t know until he sends me a case,” he said, referring to ACU head Om Yentieng."Kirth Chantharith, the director-general of the General Department of Immigration, could not be reached for comment on Sunday.

Source: <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/border-officials-charging-too-much>

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Upcoming Korea biz forum



Aiming to enhance business ties between the two countries, the Cambodia-Republic of Korea Business Forum will be held in Siem Reap this month. The forum is scheduled to be held in the middle of the month coinciding with the official visit of Korean President Moon Jae-in to the Kingdom. It was announced during a meeting last week between Kith Meng, president of the Cambodia Chamber of Commerce (CCC), and Tiger Min-Sok Chu, president of the Korea International Trade Association. The aim of the business forum is to promote business ties between Cambodian and Korean firms, Ngoun Meng Tech, general director of CCC, told Khmer Times. Prime Minister Hun Sen and Moon Jae-in will preside over the forum, he said. Mr Meng Tech declined to provide more details on the event. According to the Korea International Trade Association, trade between the countries amounted to \$890 million in 2018.

Source : <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50583380/upcoming-korea-biz-forum/>

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Premier urges rice traders to focus on China and Vietnam



Prime Minister Hun Sen on Friday said that rice exporters should turn to China and Vietnam in an effort to diversify the export market away from the European Union. Speaking at the groundbreaking of a China-funded hospital in Tboung Khmum province, Mr Hun Sen said exporting more to China and Vietnam is key to the survival of the sector after the EU imposed tariffs on Cambodian rice and initiated the process to temporarily halt the country’s preferential trade status. Mr Hun Sen asked exporters to focus on filling the quota the Chinese government has for imports of Cambodian rice, which was recently expanded from 300,000 to 400,000 tonnes. “At the moment the price of rice has decreased and I have instructed the ministers of agriculture and commerce to focus on China and Vietnam, which will help lift the price of the commodity,” Mr Hun Sen said. He said China is a priority market for the Kingdom, with the government doing its utmost to expand export of agricultural products to the East Asian giant. Last year, the world’s second-largest economy was the country that bought the largest amount of Cambodian rice, importing 170,000 tonnes. Hun Lak, vice president of the Cambodia Rice Federation (CRF), said diversifying Cambodia’s export markets is crucial. “We now face tariffs in the EU so we have to turn to other markets to restore investor confidence,” Mr Lak said. He said the government can help the private sector fill China’s quota by providing incentives that can reduce production costs. “The fact that the quota was expanded is a good sign, but in order to actually fill that quota we must reduce production costs so that we can be competitive in that market,” Mr Lak said. Last year, Cambodia exported 626,225 tonnes of rice to international markets, a drop of 1.5 percent compared to 2017. The largest market for Cambodian rice continues to be the EU, which imported almost 270,000 tonnes, equivalent to 42.98 percent of total exports. By individual country, after China, the largest buyers were France (90,000 tonnes), Malaysia (40,000 tonnes), Gabon (30,000 tonnes), and the Netherlands (26,000 tonnes).

CPP members urged to prepare for election



With a sub-national election approaching, the ruling CPP has called on its members to work hand-in-hand to promote its platforms. In a letter dated Friday and released to the public yesterday, CPP vice president and Senate president Say Chhum asked the party committee to have the CPP and candidates registered across the Kingdom. Mr Chhum said the CPP has to assign agents to observe the process of registration, election day and ballot counting “You must instruct commune councillors to register at commune offices and properly verify their names,” Mr Chhum said in the letter. Mr Chhum said that all CPP members should work hard with solidarity. “You must work hard to strengthen solidarity and remember party number on the ballots and ensure that you tick on it correctly,” he said. He also urged the CPP members to disseminate platforms and achievements the CPP had. “You must disseminate political platforms, policy, historic achievements and our reform,” he said. The Kingdom will hold its third provincial, municipal and district council elections on May 26. The election campaign period will be held from May 17 to May 24, according to the National Election Committee. All 11,572 commune councillors are expected to cast ballots. Political parties are expected to register candidates from March 7 to 11. There are 559 seats up for grabs in Phnom Penh and the 24 provinces, while there are 3,555 seats up for grabs in all districts and cities across the country. Kin Phea, director general of the Royal Academy of Cambodia’s International Relations Institute, said yesterday that the CPP is expected to win a landslide election because most commune councillors are CPP members. “Even if [the CPP] does not pay attention to the council elections, it will still sweep the polls,” Mr Phea said. “You know why the CPP is working hard? Because it wants to show the public that it wins seats due to hard work and not from cheating or fake elections.”

Source: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50583503/cpp-members-urged-to-prepare-for-election>

Hun Sen renews stance on One China Policy



Prime Minister Hun Sen on Friday reiterated support for the One China Policy and opposition against the creation of an independent Taiwan. Speaking during an inauguration ceremony of the \$50 million Chinese-funded Cambodia-China Friendship Tboung Khmum Hospital, Mr Hun Sen said Cambodia will always recognise that Taiwan rightfully belongs to China. “China defends its independence and sovereignty so Taiwan will not split from it,” he said, noting that his stance is the same for other parts of troubled China. “Do not cause problems in Tibet and Xinjiang.” “Taiwan is only a province of China. We allow Taiwanese companies to do business in Cambodia, but no Taiwanese flag will ever be flown here,” he added. “Respecting China’s sovereignty is the same as respecting Cambodia’s sovereignty.” During his speech, Mr Hun Sen said China only wants to be friends with the Kingdom. “We must understand clearly that first Cambodians will never allow Chinese control. Second, the Chinese do not want to dominate Cambodia,” he said. “Chinese foreign policy does not want to dominate anyone – China wants every country to be friends with it.” “No country wants another country to control it,” Mr Hun Sen added. “China is

not interfering in any countries' internal affairs. I say this before the Chinese Ambassador and the public. It is my message for people in the country and the world.”

Kin Phea, director-general the Royal Academy of Cambodia's International Relations Institute, yesterday said Mr Hun Sen is committed in protecting sovereignty.“His comment was made in response to public worry about Chinese people and investment in the country,” Mr Phea said. “We respect the One China Policy – if we allow Taiwan to raise their flag here in Cambodia, it is the same as recognising Taiwan as an independent state.”

Source: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50583464/hun-sen-renews-stance-on-one-china-policy/>

04/03/62

Call for submissions on the Lao People's Democratic Republic in advance of country

visit



The United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, will conduct an official country visit to the Lao People's Democratic Republic from 18 to 28 March 2019 at the invitation of the government. His visit will focus on the links between poverty and the realization of human rights in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The Special Rapporteur is an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council. UN independent experts regularly undertake country visits to report on human rights issues. Country visits usually last about two weeks and include meetings between the Special Rapporteur and individuals affected by poverty, government officials, members of the legislature and judiciary, state institutions, civil society organizations, and academics. At the conclusion of such country visits, the Special Rapporteur presents a detailed statement of his initial findings. He subsequently submits a final report to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. The Special Rapporteur, Philip Alston, is a Professor of Law at New York University working in the field of international law and international human rights law. He has extensive experience as an independent UN human rights expert. Since 2014, when he was appointed Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, he has undertaken country visits to Chile, Romania, Mauritania, China, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Ghana, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Call for submissions

The Special Rapporteur invites all interested individuals and organizations in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, including civil society organizations, activists, and academics, to provide input for the preparation of his visit. Respondents are requested to limit their comments to a maximum of 1,500 words. Additional supporting materials, such as reports, academic studies, and other types of background materials may be annexed to the submission. While all submissions are welcome and the questions below are not meant to be exhaustive, the Special Rapporteur would be grateful for comments that address topics such as: The nature of poverty and inequality in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, including how poverty is or should be defined, its prevalence, and its distribution. The major challenges confronting those living in poverty. People disproportionately impacted by poverty, including women, children, minorities, and people living in rural areas. The most severe human rights-related problems that people living in poverty experience. The impact of poverty on civil and political rights, as well as on economic, social and cultural rights such as the right to health and the right to social security. The impact of environmental issues and

climate change on people living in poverty. The role of infrastructure and development projects; international financial institutions and bilateral lending; and multinational or domestic corporations in relation to poverty. Regions, provinces, districts, or cities in the Lao People's Democratic Republic the Special Rapporteur should visit because of specific problems relating to poverty and human rights. Individuals and organizations the Special Rapporteur should meet with during his country visit. Submissions can be sent to srextremepoverty@ohchr.org by February 4, 2019. Kindly send your submission as an attachment to an email. By default, all submissions will be treated as confidential and the issues raised will not be attributed to specific individuals or organizations. However, if instead you would like your submission to be published on the website of the Special Rapporteur, please explicitly indicate consent to publication in the submission. The Special Rapporteur will accept submissions via encrypted email at bassam.khawaja@nyu.edu with this public key. If you have concerns about digital security, you may wish to contact an organization working on these issues. The organization Access Now has a free digital security helpline to help keep individuals and organizations safe online. Inquiries can be sent to help@accessnow.org. The Special Rapporteur's visit will lead to a detailed end of mission statement on March 28 and a formal report which he will present to the UN Human Rights Council. The Special Rapporteur greatly appreciates the effort that goes into making such contributions and looks forward to reading the submissions.

Source: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/VisitLao.aspx>

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Trade deficit continues to narrow as exports accelerate



The trade deficit for the first four months of the 2018-19 fiscal year, which starts in October and ends in September, has declined with imports increasing at a slower pace compared to the same period of last fiscal year. According to data provided by the Ministry of Commerce, trade volume for the period up to the second week of February reached US\$12.65 billion, a gain of US\$634 million compared to the same period of last fiscal year. Exports stood at US\$5.9 billion while imports dropped by US\$280 million to US\$6.8 billion. A breakdown of imports showed that industrial raw materials led the drop with a decline of US\$150 million, while consumer goods came in second with a fall of US\$110 million. Separately, the country's garment exports rose by US\$187 million to US\$885 million compared to the same period of last year. The export of farming products contributed US\$1.2 billion while animal products exports stood at approximately US\$250 million, earning US\$223 million more than in the same period of the last fiscal year. The mining sector contributed US\$340 million to exports, a drop of US\$280 million compared to the same period with forestry products contributing another US\$68 million. Industrial finished products contributed US\$3.37 billion to exports, a gain of US\$920 million while other products exports declined by US\$296 million to US\$300 million. Ministry assistant secretary U Khin Maung Lwin said the government is targeting a total trade of US\$31 billion for the current fiscal year, with US\$15.3 billion for exports and US\$15.8 billion for imports. This would reduce the trade deficit to US\$500 million. "Trade deficit seems to be reduced. It is likely to exceed the target," he said. According to the ministry's data, total trade stood at US\$33.53 billion in the previous fiscal year, with exports at US\$14.85 billion and imports at US\$18.69 billion. Trade deficit for the 2017-18 fiscal year stood at US\$3.84 billion. Myanmar exports items from seven major commodity groups. These include manufactured goods consisting mainly of garments, as well as agriculture produce, minerals, cattle, fisheries and forestry products. In

comparison, Myanmar's major import items are divided into four groups — capital goods, intermediate goods, consumer goods and cut-make-pack garment products. On one hand, the higher volume of exports reflects the government's efforts to reduce the trade deficit by screening luxury imports, encouraging import substitutes and boosting exports. They also come at a time when foreign direct investments into the country have eased over the past year, according to official data. Myanmar's current account deficit, which includes the trade deficit, is financed mainly by foreign direct investments into the country. On the other hand, the fall in imports of capital goods also reflects less demand and activity in the industrial and construction sectors, implying a slowdown in the broader economy, the World Bank said in its 2018 Myanmar report.

Source: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/trade-deficit-continues-narrow-exports-accelerate.html>

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Metro's Myanmar subsidiary secures US\$20m IFC loan



The Myanmar subsidiary of German retail group Metro AG has raised a US\$20m loan from the International Finance Corporation, the private-sector arm of the World Bank. The subsidiary Metro Wholesale Myanmar is a 85pc-15pc joint venture between Frankfurt-listed Metro AG and Singapore-listed Yoma Strategic Holdings, offering one-stop wholesale food service distribution for hotels, restaurants, retailers, and offices.

The IFC said the financing aims to drive up agricultural incomes as well as improve the quality and availability of local produce, benefiting buyers and end consumers. The terms of the loan were not disclosed. It also said the investment will help Metro source the majority of its produce from local farmers and companies, raising food safety standards and creating employment opportunities in food processing and logistic services. Since 2013, the Washington-based lender has invested over \$1.3 billion in the country.

Vikram Kumar, IFC's country manager for Myanmar and Thailand, said the move is to "ensure the availability of safe, high-quality foods from the farm to fork, increasing the agribusiness sector's export potential." He added the loan will eventually benefit small businesses and service providers along the value chain. According to Jens Michel, CEO of the JV, the company operates a warehouse and distribution centre in Thilawa Special Economic Zone for fast-moving consumer goods and food products and provides "doorstep deliveries" for customers. Logistics players see rising market demand from retailers and wholesalers just as the infrastructure has gradually developed. "With the expansion of the retail/ wholesale sector thanks to partial liberalisation, we are definitely seeing more market interest in the logistics," commented Tomoaki Yabe, managing director of Thilawa-based logistics company Daizen Myanmar. "While infrastructure and transport remain challenging in many rural areas, warehouse facilities in Yangon and Thilawa in particular have modernised." Some warehouses, including Metro's, can now cater for food products and have cold chain systems in place. An improvement in the reliability of power supply in the SEZ is also a boon, Mr Yabe said. The IFC investment comes at a time when Myanmar is opening up its retail and wholesale market to foreign players. Under regulations issued by the commerce ministry, 100pc foreign-owned firms must make initial investments between US\$3 million and \$5 million to operate a retail or wholesale business, respectively, in Myanmar. For joint ventures with foreign entities where the local investor has at least a 20pc equity ratio, the initial investments necessary for retail and wholesale are \$700,000 and \$2 million. Japanese Mycare, Aeon and local City Mart have set up joint ventures, which were approved by the ministry late last year. Lottemart and E-Mart, South Korea's two

biggest retailers, are also mulling plans to set up stores. Commentators said the IFC investment was likely to encourage other regional retailers who were hesitant about investing in Myanmar. "With the support of an international institution, the Yoma-Metro joint venture will be setting the bar for the industry in Myanmar. This lends investor confidence to the sector," Pietro Borsano, an academic based in Bangkok and Mandalay, told The Myanmar Times. "This will also boost foreign investment in local retailers and wholesalers, as well as the market entry of regional players. For example, Thai businesses are generally reluctant to take the first-mover risk. CP Group's Siam Makro, Central Group, The Mall Group, Siam Piwat and others will be more confident to expand their operations or invest in the Myanmar market."

Source: <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/metros-myanmar-subsidiary-secures-us20m-ifc-loan.html>

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Chinese, Japanese investors show interest in Rakhine



While Western investors have shied away due to human rights violations related to the northern Rakhine crisis, Chinese and Japanese investors showed visible interest in the state at the Rakhine Investment Fair on February 22. State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who attended the fair, said economic development could be the answer to much of Rakhine State's woes, where communal conflict in recent years has turned away investors and damaged growth. With a political solution difficult to achieve under the circumstances, the government believes that developing the state's economy may be one way of lessening the conflict between communities and eventually ending it. Rakhine Chief Minister U Nyi Pu said at the fair that economic development supported by local and foreign investors was "the best solution for sustainable peace and development in the state". More than 700,000 Muslims fled northern Rakhine to Bangladesh since late 2017 after a crackdown by the military, which followed attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army. Almost all of those who fled are still living in border refugee camps. In light of the alleged atrocities in the region, the UN-mandated Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar (UNFFM) recommended that companies ensure their operations are compliant with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) when conducting business in Rakhine. Rakhine State is rich in natural resources and has potential as a transit route to China from the Indian Ocean. But foreign investments are scarce, mostly limited to Daewoo's offshore Shwe Gas project, China's development of oil and gas pipelines running to Yunnan province, and tourist developments on southern beaches like Ngapali. To be sure, Myanmar faces pressure from the European Union (EU), which has withheld the signing of an investment protection agreement with the country over the Rakhine issue. The EU has also considered withdrawing trade preferences granted to the country under the General Scheme of Privileges and Everything but Arms agreements. Yet, Chinese and Japanese investors, who showed visible interest in Rakhine during the fair, continue to support Myanmar. According to reports, China and Japan were the most interested in investing in Rakhine, followed by Singapore and Korea. Japan's ambassador to Myanmar Ichiro Maruyama said at the fair that the country will grant official development assistance (ODA) for much needed infrastructure such as roads and electricity. Japan has provided assistance in the form of ODA for areas such as education, health and transportation. According to the Kofi Annan-led Advisory Commission on Rakhine, which was set up by the government, sustainable economic growth would also depend on improved inter-communal relations, freedom of movement and closure of camps for displaced people, apart from improved infrastructure. There remain

restrictions on movement of Muslim communities in Rakhine right now. Japan External Trade Organisation deputy managing director Khun Tura told The Myanmar Times that Japanese investors were mostly interested in the re-export sector, especially of marine raw materials, to Japan and other countries, as well as the tourism sector. "Currently, there is not much investment from Japan in Rakhine State but I think Japanese investors will be more interested than before as Rakhine opens its door," Khun Thura said. Meanwhile, the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone comprising an industrial park and seaport has the backing of Chinese firms with plans to link the zone to the Belt and Road Initiative championed by China's President Xi Jinping. U Aung Naing Oo, secretary of the Myanmar Investment Commission, noted that there were twice as many attendees in the fair compared to other fairs, with many from Japan, Korea and Thailand. He said the fair will give the international community a better view of the situation in Rakhine State. "I believe good results will come out in the future," he added. In Rakhine, investments in the past year have largely been in the oil and gas (O&G) as well as hotels and tourism sectors. Research on investments in the state showed that hotels and tourism; agriculture; livestock and fishery and; energy sectors drew the most interest from investors. The Ministry of Electricity and Energy will also be calling tenders for onshore and offshore O&G projects in the coming months. Energy is also a main income source for Rakhine State. JTB Polestar chair U Kyaw Min Htin said investors will continue to invest if there are opportunities. "The Rakhine tourism numbers are increasing and the sector has good potential. But the international community needs to know about this and we need systematic arrangements for that," he said. Oceanfront Investments CEO Pascal Gerken said besides developing a sustainable seaside resort in Ngapali, his company was also interested in agriculture projects. "We are interested to continue investing," he said. Despite the investment push, observers said that land grabs and segregation of communities present major obstacles for responsible investors and manufacturers to do business in northern Rakhine. The fair saw 28 contracts inked worth a total US\$4.9 billion with most investments in the hotel and tourism sector. "These businesses will invest within a year," Rakhine's Finance, Tax, Planning and Economic Minister U Kyaw Aye Thein said.

Source: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/chinese-japanese-investors-show-interest-rakhine.html>

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Over 160 inmates across the country to take matriculation exam



More than 160 prisoners will take this year's matriculation exam, which will be held on March 6, a senior Prisons Department official said. U Min Tun Soe, deputy director of the department, said the 164 inmates taking the exam will surpass the 104 who took it last year. "Inmates who take exam do not have to do any work in the prison so that they can focus on their lessons," he said. "Some of them are good at the English language, so they guide and help each other." Those taking the exam include 69 inmates at Mandalay's Ohbo prison, 69 at Yangon's Insein prison, four at Loikaw prison, 15 at Hpa-an prison, four at Taungoo prison, two at Myeik prison, and one at Thayet prison. The children inmates taking the exam are taught by teachers in the prison from Monday to Friday. On weekends, teachers from the Ministry of Education and volunteers help teach them how to pass the exam. Myanmar opened its first prison examination centre at Insein in Yangon in the 2016 school year to help inmates take the exam. Now there are examination centres in every prison in the country. The number of inmates taking and passing the exam has increased every year, U Min Tun Soe said. Last year, inmates who passed the exam with three distinctions

were allowed to continue their studies. "They are allowed to take distance education. Around 14 children will graduate this year, he said.

Source: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/over-160-inmates-across-country-take-matriculation-exam.html>

03/03/62

Banks promise loans to struggling rice exporters



The State Bank of Việt Nam (SBV) has urged credit institutions to ensure adequate funds to meet the capital demands of rice exporters for the winter-spring crop this year. Since the Lunar New Year (Tết) holiday, the rice export market has seen prices dropping due to oversupply. The SBV directed commercial banks to focus on timely lending to enterprises so they can buy rice from farmers. At a meeting held late last week in Đồng Tháp Province, commercial banks, including Agribank, Vietcombank and Sacombank, committed to providing loans worth trillions of Vietnamese đồng with an interest rate of 6 per cent per year to rice enterprises. Nghiêm Xuân Thành, chairman of Vietcombank, said the bank committed to provide low-interest loans worth VNĐ9 trillion (US\$387.82 million) to rice enterprises that have feasible plans. Trịnh Ngọc Khánh, chairman of Agribank's Members' Council, also committed to ensure sufficient capital for lending. The banks have committed to creating favourable conditions for individuals and businesses to access capital for production, and the purchase and consumption of rice. SBV Governor Lê Minh Hùng said the banking sector would strive to meet the needs of farmers and businesses in the production, purchasing, processing and consumption of rice with appropriate interest rates, terms and loan cycles. Banks have been urged to work closely with enterprises to resolve their capital problems and offer solutions, which could include increasing the loan limit and speeding up disbursement for enterprises so they can quickly purchase paddy. In addition, the central bank has asked its branches in 13 Mekong Delta provinces to closely follow changes in the paddy market and credit activities in the region to advise provincial people's committees and the central bank about solutions to boost lending. Lending to the rice industry and to agricultural and rural development in general is the focus of the banking industry, according to Hùng. The credit balance of the sector accounts for a large proportion of the credit of the entire economy. Nguyễn Quốc Hùng, director of the Credit Department of SBV, said that, as of the end of last year, the credit balance for agricultural and rural areas nationwide increased by 21.4 per cent compared to the same period in the previous year. Last year, total outstanding loans of the rice industry reached VNĐ99 trillion, an increase of VNĐ29.8 trillion compared to the end of 2017. Lê Minh Hoan, secretary of the Đồng Tháp Province's Party Committee, said it was important to create a longer-term vision for the rice industry, which affects millions of farmers. The region needs a specific action plan to resolve the problem of "high cost yet poor quality", he said. Cooperation among the sectors is needed and cooperative models are a promising solution in restructuring the agricultural sector. Phạm Thái Bình, director of the Trung An High-Tech Agricultural Joint Stock Company, said that large-scale fields could create value chains between businesses and farmers. However, the large-scale field model accounts for only about 100,000 hectares out of a total of two million hectares in the region. Bình has asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to address any issue related to the sustainable development of the rice industry. — VNS

Source: <http://vietnamnews.vn/economy/506208/banks-promise-loans-to-struggling-rice-exporters.html#61wqDjmzSMfFgOrB.99>

