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## National Assembly says yes to four solar projects



*Cambodia News | 24 December, 2019*

Four solar projects, representing a total output of 140 megawatts, were approved during a plenary session of the National Assembly yesterday. Each solar farm will be built in a different province – Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Pursat, and Svay Rieng. Yesterday, the National Assembly approved a draft law on payment guarantees on the projects. “To increase investor confidence that all obligations surrounding the projects will be fulfilled, the financial institutions must issue guarantee letters on behalf of the government,” the National Assembly said in a statement. Green Sustainable Ventures Co Ltd is investing \$17.5 million on a 20-MW solar project that will occupy 30 hectares in Svay Rieng province’s Bavet town. The plant will be able to produce 34.67 million kilowatt-hours per year. Ray Power Supply Co Ltd will invest \$28.8 million on a 30-MW solar project in Banteay Meanchey province’s Sereysophon district. The project will generate 50 million kWh per year. Risen Energy Co Ltd will build a 60-MW solar farm on 80 hectares in Battambang province’s Thmor Kol district. With an investment of \$57.2 million, the farm will produce 107 million kWh per year. Finally, SchneiTec Infinite Co Ltd is planning to invest \$29 million on a 30-MW solar plant in Pursat province’s Kroko district. It will produce 48 million kWh per year. All projects will be developed as build-own-operation (BOO) schemes. They are all are

scheduled to come online by the end of 2020. The power generated at these facilities will be sold to Electricity of Cambodia (EDC) at a rate of \$0.076 per kWh, according to the Ministry of Mines and Energy. “These solar projects will give Cambodia clean energy. They will help fight power shortages,” said Suy Sem, the Minister of Mines and Energy. Mr Sem said the new facilities will help meet energy demand during the dry season, when hydropower dams operate at a lower capacity due to lower water levels. There are two solar farms supplying energy to the national grid. One in Svay Rieng’s Bavet town and one in Kampong Speu province. Together they generate 90 MW. The Council of the Ministers this year approved 7 solar projects with a capacity to produce a combined 320 MW. Last year, Cambodia consumed 2,650 MW, a 15 percent increase compared with a year earlier. 442 MW were imported from Thailand, Vietnam and Laos.

Source: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50672968/national-assembly-says-yes-to-four-solar-projects>

## Exporter urges Kampot pepper farmers to focus on quality



*Cambodia News | 24 December, 2019*

An exporter has asked farmers to focus on producing high-quality pepper by following strict standards to strengthen demand for their products abroad. Hay Ly Eang, chairman of Confirel, told the Khmer Times last week that Kampot pepper continues to sell well internationally, particularly in Europe. However, he said farmers must focus more

on quality to keep sales strong. “Most farmers just care about price. They forget quality. Quality is what they must prioritise,” Mr Ly Eang said. Kampot pepper was awarded geographical indication status in the EU in 2015, a distinction that guarantees a certain price for the commodity in international markets. According to the Kampot Pepper Promotion Association, 50 percent of Kampot pepper is exported to the EU, while 30 percent is consumed internally. The rest is exported to the United States, Japan, and South Korea. Mr Ly Eang explained that only high-quality pepper sells well in the EU. Pepper grown following organic methods sell particularly well, he pointed out. Confirel, which sells Kampot pepper under its Kirum brand, exported about 14 tonnes of Kampot pepper abroad this year, mostly to the EU, according to Mr Ly Eang. The company buys some of its pepper from farmers but also grows the spicey crop. KPPA president Ngoun Lay said many farmers are finding it difficult to sell their harvest. He said a lack of demand is driving a large number of Kampot pepper farmers to quit the crop. He estimated that 20 to 25 percent of small-scale farmers (those farming less than 3,000 square meters of land) have abandoned the crop after this year’s harvest season. “There are some challenges that are forcing those farmers to quit planting pepper,” he said, citing as one of those challenges the current oversupply resulting from the fact that buyers are beginning to cultivate the crop. “Orders from buyers have decreased substantially in the last few years because these buyers are now also

planting pepper,” he said, noting that buyers began growing pepper only two years ago. “Before a buyer would order 10 to 20 tonnes of pepper, but now they only need 2 to 10 tonnes because they are also growing the pepper themselves. This is hurting farmers,” he said. He noted that the crop is now grown in 290 hectares of land in Kampot province by 445 farmers. Together, those farmers produce a total of 100 tonnes a year on average, but buyers are demanding only about 70 tonnes a year. A kilogramme of Kampot black pepper fetches \$15, while red pepper and white pepper sell for \$25 and \$28 per kilogramme, respectively. However, some farmers have had to sell their black pepper for \$13 a kilogramme, red pepper for \$22 and white pepper for \$26, Mr Lay noted. Low-quality pepper used to fetch \$10 per kilogramme, but now, due to oversupply, some farmers are selling it to Vietnamese merchants for as low as \$2 per kilogramme, he added.

Source : <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50673130/exporter-urges-kampot-pepper-farmers-to-focus-on-quality>

## Govt turns to research to accelerate poverty alleviation



Laos News | 25 December, 2019

The authorities are looking to make use of studies undertaken by think tank experts to help formulate plans and expedite poverty alleviation after learning that poverty reduction is making slow progress. The Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) under the Ministry of

Agriculture and Forestry has initiated the research concept on community-based poverty reduction, inviting Lao experts to compete in the field. Seven teams of researchers from universities and the PRF were shortlisted to compete in the presentation of research papers, which is scheduled to take place tomorrow at the Confucius Centre, National University of Laos. Three or four teams will be selected to carry out the research. The move is seen as a significant step as state authorities are increasingly aware of the need to make use of think tanks and get them involved in policy making and planning. Financially supported by China, the research would include lessons learnt in poverty reduction, notably lessons learnt over the 16-year operation of the Poverty Reduction Fund – the government's core poverty fighting body. "We also want to find out why we are slower than neighbouring countries," said Mr Chit Thavisay, Executive Director of the PRF, referring to the slow pace of poverty reduction. The research will be the second of its kind following the first, whose findings were presented in October this year. In addition, the authorities are seeking foreign experts to carry out similar research. The findings of the research carried out by Lao and foreign experts will be consolidated and taken into account when drafting the poverty reduction plan and the 9th five-year National Socio-economic Development Plan for 2020-2025, of which poverty alleviation is an integral part. National Assembly members have stressed the need for the government to place more importance on scientific research and

make use of think tank experts to drive development. In its recent eighth ordinary session, parliament approved a resolution stipulating that 26 billion kip, representing one percent of normal state investment, should be allocated for scientific research. According to Mr Chit, since the introduction of the Poverty Reduction Fund, some 800,000 people living in more than 2,000 villages in 55 districts of 10 provinces have benefitted. Some US\$187 million (US\$1.65 trillion kip) has been spent to finance the Fund's activities over the 16 years of its operation. The money has come from the state budget, grants and low-interest loans from foreign countries and international financial institutions.

Source : [http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent\\_Govt277.php](http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent_Govt277.php)

## Ministry debates way forward for health sector reform



*Laos News | 25 December, 2019*

The Ministry of Health and other government bodies last week held a brainstorming session on the draft of Phase III of the Health Sector Reform Strategy which is being drawn up to ensure people of all ethnic groups have access to healthcare. The session was organised to encourage all the authorities involved to share their ideas on the content of the health reform strategy so that it is as comprehensive as possible. Speaking at the meeting, Minister of Health Associate Prof. Dr Bounkong Syhavong said phase III of the health reform strategy for 2021-2025 aims to achieve

Universal Health Coverage with an adequate package of services and appropriate financial protection for a vast majority of the population.

Health sector reform is intended to respond to the government's and National Assembly's concerns for the Lao people's health status, with access to good services being locally delivered at reasonable and affordable cost and quality by appropriately qualified staff, the minister said. The reform process needs to have an active, engaged and committed leading committee at the national and sub-national levels. The reform strategy identifies interrelated aspects of health services to be covered under the Health Sector Reform process: human resources; financing; governance, organisation and management; health services delivery; and health information. The ultimate goal is for good health services to be effectively delivered to the population, with the risk to people's health well covered by social protection, delivered by an appropriately trained workforce whose efforts are adequately rewarded and encouraged, the minister added. Health facilities are to be rationally distributed, adequately equipped and maintained, and information systems are to be well established to support services delivery and understanding of achievements, he said. The health sector reform programme was endorsed by the National Assembly in January 2013 following guidance from the Party and government. The long-term direction of health sector reform is to establish an effective system ensuring universal health

coverage for the whole population, and ensure good health for the people of Laos.

Source : [http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent\\_Ministry.php](http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent_Ministry.php)

## IMF sees stable growth but risks lie ahead for Myanmar



*Myanmar News | 24 December, 2019*

Myanmar's economy is growing steadily but held back by uncertainty ahead of next year's general elections and weaker private demand, according to the International Monetary Fund. IMF economists carrying out annual Article IV consultations in Myanmar reiterated warnings made last April that "risks are tilted to the downside" and cited concerns over fallout from the Rakhine crisis and weaknesses in the banking sector. "On the domestic front, growth could underperform if fiscal spending does not accelerate sufficiently. Delayed restructuring and recapitalisation of the banking system could increase systemic risks with large macro financial spillovers. A deterioration of the security situation and continued humanitarian issues in Rakhine could weigh on sentiment," the IMF said in a statement following last week's visit. Rising trade tensions and global market volatility, higher crude oil prices and spillovers from a slowdown in China remain risks from abroad. The IMF estimates growth of 6.5pc in 2018-19, up slightly from 6.4pc in 2017-18 on account of continued good export performance,

particularly of garments and gas, despite global headwinds. Foreign direct investment inflows and project approvals, it warns, remain lower than in recent years because large projects have been completed and foreign investors remain cautious ahead of the 2020 elections. "For 2019-20, growth is expected to be broadly stable with higher government spending largely offset by pre-election uncertainty and weaker private demand," the Fund said. Myanmar is scheduled to hold parliamentary elections in late 2020. The Fund expects inflation to fall to 6-7pc in the medium term as the one-off impact from higher electricity tariff ends and pressures from rising food prices abate. It said domestic demand was mostly weaker reflecting slowing credit growth, a correction in real estate prices and declining investment. The fiscal deficit widened slightly to 3.5pc of GDP in 2018-19 from 3.0pc in 2017-18, and central bank financing of the deficit was higher than the preceding year. The IMF urged that bank restructuring should follow the new prudential regulations and said that a comprehensive financial sector reform strategy would minimise the eventual clean-up costs and risks of negative spillovers to the rest of the economy. It welcomed Myanmar's increase in electricity tariffs, the liberalisation of the financial sector for foreign insurance companies and banks, and the move to greater exchange rate flexibility. The finance ministry last month awarded

licences to five foreign life insurers and six foreign-local joint ventures to operate in the local market. Fiscal policy should seek to raise tax revenues, which remain very low by international standards, and boost Sustainable Development Goals-related spending, the IMF argues. In addition, Myanmar should implement a public-private partnership, or PPP, framework to improve project selection and ensure value-for-money through competitive bidding, building on the 2018 project bank regulation. A new bidding round for petroleum production sharing contracts should rely on a revised model contract to help maximise revenues and ensure transparency, the Fund said.

Source: <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/imf-sees-stable-growth-risks-lie-ahead-myanmar.html>

## \$420 m earned from jade export in two months



*Myanmar News | 24 December, 2019*

US\$420 million has been earned from overseas sales of jade over the past two months this fiscal year exceeding US\$419 million compared to the same period of last year, Permanent Secretary Khin Maung Lwin of the Ministry of Commerce told The Daily Eleven. From October 1 to December 6 in the current 2019-2020 financial year, jade export valued at US\$420 million whereas last year saw just about US\$1 million. "This year, we earned US\$420 million. The amount exceeded about US\$419 million

because last year's amount was just 1 million. This year, we held more gems emporiums. But we had few emporiums in the same period of last year. The more jade sales are held, the more earnings there are, he said. Mid-Year Myanmar Gems Emporium was held at Mani Yadana Jade Hall in Nay Pyi Taw from September 16 to 25 under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation. At the emporium, 15 percent special commodity tax was imposed on uncut jade stones and 10 percent tax on other gems such as ruby and sapphire excluding diamond and emerald. Except for diamond and emerald, five percent special commodity tax was imposed on other gems-embedded jewelry.

Source: <https://elevenmyanmar.com/news/420-m-earned-from-jade-export-in-two-months>

## Agriculture sector must grow

by 3 pct next year: PM



*Vietnam News | 24 December, 2019*

Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc said the agriculture and rural development sector must grow by 3 percent next year, during a teleconference in Hanoi on December 23. He elaborated that agro-forestry-fisheries export should top 43 billion USD, forest coverage reach 42 percent, and the rate of new-style communes rise to 59 percent next year. The leader further said there must be five more agricultural products that will earn 1 billion USD from export by 2025, thus raising the total export value to

50 billion USD, putting Vietnam at the top in ASEAN and the 10th globally. Reviewing the 2019 achievements, he hailed the sector for removing difficulties in the China, the US, Japan and other markets, as well as effectively fighting African swine fever. Minister of Industry and Trade Tran Tuan Anh lauded the ministries of industry and trade, and agriculture and rural development for bringing many Vietnamese farm produce to the world. He asked the two ministries to fine-tune policies to attract more investment, cut administrative procedures, and increase the supply of information for businesses, cooperatives and people. Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Nguyen Xuan Cuong said the sector will continue restructuring agriculture in combination with renewing the growth model and building new-style rural areas. He pledged to improve added value and competitiveness of Vietnamese farm produce, gradually curb African swine fever and fully deal with the European Commission's "yellow card" warning against Vietnam's fishing. Vice Chairman of the Son La provincial People's Committee suggested that the Government invest more in transport infrastructure in the northwest and Son La in particular. Dinh Cao Khue, General Director of the Dong Giao Foodstuff Export JSC, urged ministries and agencies to continue creating favourable conditions for firms to join exhibitions, especially international events.

Source : <https://english.vov.vn/economy/agriculture-sector-must-grow-by-3-pct-next-year-pm-407946.vov>

## Vietnam aims for 20.5 million foreign tourists in 2020



*Vietnam News | 24 December, 2019*

Hanoi (VNA) – The tourism sector has set the goal of attracting 20.5 million international visitors in 2020 and serving 90 million domestic travellers, it was said at a review meeting of the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) in Hanoi on December 23. The VNAT reported that an estimated 18 million foreign visitors came to Vietnam in 2019, up more than 16 percent from the figure of 2018. The number of domestic travellers also rose by 6 percent to 85 million. In total, the tourism sector earned more than 720 trillion VND (nearly 16.7 billion USD), an increase of 16 percent on a yearly basis. The average growth of tourists in the three consecutive years from 2016 was 22 percent a year, putting Vietnam among the 10 countries with highest tourism growth in the world. Next year, Vietnam will host a number of major events that are expected to draw tourists, including the Formula 1 Vietnam Grand Prix and the National Tourism Year 2020./.

Source : <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/vietnam-aims-for-205-million-foreign-tourists-in-2020/166003.vnp>