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EU finally slashes Cambodia trade benefits over 'rights violations'



Cambodia News | 2 March, 2020

AFP – The European Union has officially slashed trade benefits for Cambodia over the kingdom's human rights record, top officials said. The EU said it would partially suspend duty-free preferences under the "Everything But Arms" (EBA) deal, a scheme meant to help boost trade in some of the world's poorest economies. The EU was acting on a recommendation by its effective civil service, the European Commission. "The European Union will not stand and watch as democracy is eroded, human rights curtailed, and free debate silenced," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said in a statement. The decision was however a partial one, with the withdrawal hitting about 20 percent or one billion euros (\$1.1 billion) of Cambodia's yearly exports to the EU. Cambodia has reacted by seeking free trade deals with other countries. "The respect for human rights is non-negotiable for us. We recognise the progress Cambodia has made, but serious concerns remain," EU Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan said. In anticipation, Cambodia's leader Hun Sen said his country would not "bow its head" in the face of the EU's criticism. But the premier warned of economic rough seas ahead for his country, with some garment factories likely to close in the coming weeks as key supply chains from China slow amid the Coronavirus crisis. The move follows repeated calls from the EU to drop charges against opposition leader Kem

Sokha who is currently on trial for treason, a charge widely pilloried as politically motivated. "We have to try to survive" on our own, said Hun Sen. The move by the EU could make a big dent in the country's big garment sector, worth billions of dollars. The industry employs more than 700,000 workers, according to the country's factory association. Cambodia is the EU's sixth largest garment supplier and the country exports more than \$4 billion worth of clothing and textile products to the bloc in 2018. But other areas of the kingdom's economy have been backed with Chinese investment and soft loans – delivered without questions over rights and democracy.

Source: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50696924/eu-finally-slashes-cambodia-trade-benefits-over-rights-violations>

Warning to Kingdom's property-buyers



Cambodia News | 24 February, 2020

The Ministry of Economy and Finance has warned property projects that have not obtained a proper licence will face legal action. It is also alerting people to the possibility of buying such properties. "We have monitored property projects that include housing, condominiums and land plot projects. They are often advertised on social media such as on Facebook and some of these projects did not have a licence issued from the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the ministry said. It noted the ministry will take strict legal action against Facebook account owners who advertise non-licensed property projects. "The

ministry would like to appeal to the public who desire to buy property projects such as a house, condominium, apartment or land plot projects, that they have to be highly careful," it said. It explained that essential information has to be examined. That means regular housing, condominiums and land plot business licences issued by the Ministry of Economy and Finance and construction permit must be issued by Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction before the property is legally developed." The government last week also decided to exempt the 4 percent stamp tax on all residential properties valued less than \$70,000 until January in a move to stimulate the real estate and construction sector amid the epidemic fear of COVID-19, also known as Novel Coronavirus. This tax relief is applicable to property developers who registered at the Finance Ministry. It said the policy is aimed to help low- and middle-income people to buy a home. Meanwhile, the government also wants residential developers to consider the possibility of discounting home prices. Sean Sothea Nhem, a certified international property specialist at Keller Williams Cambodia, applauded the action taken by the government, explaining this will not only benefit people seeking low-price housing, but it is encouraging developers to do their business legally. "This is important because it incentivises those [developers] who do their business legally, while it also encourages more developers to register obtaining business licences at the Finance Ministry and construction permits from the Construction

Ministry. When they all do business legally, this simply means more contributions for government revenue," he said.

Source: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50696935/warning-to-kingdoms-property-buyers>

Farmers beef up production techniques against drought, floods



Laos News | 2 March, 2020

The National Disaster Prevention and Control Committee is helping farmers across the country to improve their cultivation techniques so that crops can better withstand drought and dry season yields can be increased. Committee officials said recently that the country is facing drought conditions as rivers in many provinces have continued to drop since last year. In recent years, the direct impact of global warming can be seen in the changing weather patterns around the world, including the recent prolonged dry spells in Laos, according to senior experts from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. In the first six months of 2019, rainfall in the Nam Ou basin, the largest of the Mekong tributaries in Laos, decreased 41 percent compared to the same period in 2018 and dropped by 29 percent from July to September 2019. These conditions are affecting farmers who face difficulties in sourcing water for their crops while challenging the government's targets for agriculture and forestry sector, with the dry season rice target set at 100,000

hectares from October to March. The rainy season rice target for 2020 is 870,000 hectares, with the rice crop set at 4 million tonnes. Commercial crops are targeted to be grown on 384,300 hectares, while the per capita average meat, egg and fish supply for personal consumption has been set at 65kg this year. Speaking during the Committee's recent annual meeting, Committee Head Mr Vilayphong Sisomvang said that preventing disasters and reducing risks was one of the government's priorities for the national socio-economic development plan (2016-2020). In response to disaster risks, the government has set aside a budget for prevention, control and preparedness each year, aiming to rehabilitate as well as reduce losses. To increase crop yields, Mr Vilayphong said the Committee would help farmers improve commercial crop cultivation techniques such as using fast-growing and hardy bean varieties to suit local conditions. In response to the country's extreme weather conditions, the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute has set up a rice breeding programme aimed at developing new climate-resilient rice varieties. This programme breeds rice varieties that have submergence and drought tolerance. The programme is also exploring grains that have different aerobic qualities, direct seeding processes and species that are shatter-resistant when harvested using large mechanical equipment.

Environmental experts say climate change is expected to bring increasingly severe drought and flood conditions to Laos, with crop yields possibly falling 10 percent by 2020 and 30 percent by the year 2050.

Source:http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent_Farmers_43.php

Trade deficit hits over one billion

USD



Myanmar News | 1 March, 2020

Till 14 February of 2019-2020 fiscal year, there was a trade deficit of 1.012 billion US dollars, up 40.795 million US dollars, compared with the same period last year, according to the Commerce Ministry. During this period, the exports amounted to 6.761 billion US dollars, up 1.053 billion US dollars, compared with the same period last year while the imports hit 7.774 billion US dollars, up 1.094 billion US dollars. This time last year, the trade deficit hit 971.805 million US dollars. "Myanmar is implementing the National Export Strategy for export sector promotion. The government is working to lower trade deficit. The country is unable to reduce the imports of essential goods. In practice, the efforts to reduce the trade deficit face some difficulties. Local consumption is high. Especially, small and medium-sized enterprises have to import raw materials," said Union Minister for Commerce Dr. Than Myint.

Source: <https://elevenmyanmar.com/news/trade-deficit-hits-over-one-billion-usd>

Vietnam posts trade deficit of 176 million USD in two months



Vietnam News | 29 February, 2020

Vietnam reported an estimated trade deficit of 176 million USD in the first two months of the year, according to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO). The domestic economic sector posted a deficit of 3.94 billion USD while the foreign-invested sector (including crude oil) grossed a surplus of 3.76 billion USD. The GSO said that total export revenue during January-February picked up 2.4 percent year-on-year to 36.92 billion USD despite the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, partly thanks to Samsung's export of its new mobile phone model S20. Products with high export value included telephone and spare parts (6.9 billion USD, up 2.3 percent); electronic products, computers and components (5.4 billion USD, up 26.7 percent); machinery and equipment (3 billion USD, up 19.6 percent); and footwear (2.7 billion USD, up 3 percent). Meanwhile, export revenue of several farm produce fell such as seafood (921 million USD, down 17.7 percent); coffee (497 million USD, decreasing 9.8 percent), vegetables and fruits (481 million USD, falling 17.4 percent); cashew nut (315 million USD, dwindling 19.3 percent); and pepper bean (81 million USD, dropping 18.8 percent). Rice is an exception, earning 372 million USD, up 20.5 percent. The US remained the largest importer of Vietnam,

splashing 9.8 billion USD on Vietnamese commodities, surging 19.6 percent from the same time last year. Revenues from exports to China increased by 3.7 percent to 4.8 billion USD and to Japan by 8.9 percent to 3.2 billion USD) while the value of exports to the EU and ASEAN dropped by 7.7 percent to 5 billion USD), and 9.3 percent to 3.5 billion USD, respectively. During the period, Vietnam's import revenue inched up 2.4 percent to 37.1 billion USD, with high-value imports including electronic products, computers and spare parts (8.6 billion USD); equipment, tools and components (5.3 billion USD); and telephones and components (2.1 billion USD). Vietnam imported 10 billion USD worth of products from China in the two months, falling 0.4 percent from a year ago. It spent 4.5 billion USD on goods from ASEAN, 2.8 billion USD on goods from Japan, 2.1 billion USD on EU products and 2.1 billion USD on US goods.

Source: <https://english.vov.vn/economy/vietnam-posts-trade-deficit-of-176-million-usd-in-two-months-410757.vov>

February CPI falls by 0.17 percent



Vietnam News | 29 February, 2019

The February consumer price index (CPI) slipped 0.17 percent from the previous month due to falling demand for goods after Lunar New Year (Tet) holiday, falling petrol prices, and the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, according to the General Statistics Office (GSO). Among 11 groups of products and services in the CPI basket, a decline

was recorded in six groups: transport service (2.5 percent); culture, entertainment and tourism (0.43 percent); beverage and tobacco (0.28 percent); garment, head wear and footwear (0.13 percent); housing and building material (0.03 percent); and post and telecommunication services (0.05 percent). Five groups with higher prices were restaurant and catering service (0.26 percent); other commodities and services (0.17 percent); medicine and medical services (0.13 percent); household appliances (0.08 percent); and education (0.04 percent). Head of the GSO's Price Statistics Department Do Thi Ngoc said that falling demands for goods after Tet made the prices of garment and textile, footwear, headwear, beverages and tobacco decrease. She also said the decline in travel and festival activities due to the COVID-19 outbreak was behind the fall in prices of tourism, hotel and entertainment services. In addition, prices of fresh and processed fruits dropped in the month as exports were impacted by close control at several border gates during the disease outbreak. Ngoc added that petrol prices were adjusted down on February 14, contributing to a 0.22 percent fall of the CPI. Meanwhile, there were some factors helping curb the CPI uptrend, Ngoc said, noting that the COVID-19 outbreak since January pushed prices of medicine up 0.18 percent from the previous month. Demand for power and water upped 0.44 percent and 0.64 percent, respectively, in February as schools were closed and students stayed at home as a caution amid the COVID-19 threat, Ngoc stated, adding prices of

vegetables also rose significantly in February due to shortage of supply caused by hailstones rain in the north and saline intrusion in the Mekong Delta region. In February, gold prices moved in tandem with global gold prices, surging 2.74 percent from January to hover around 4.45 million VND (192.12 USD) per tael. Gold prices increased as investors move to invest in safer assets due to fear of a cloudy economic prospect caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. The VND/USD exchange rate was kept stable, with one USD exchanged for 23,300 VND, thanks to abundant foreign currency reserves of the State Bank. The GSO said that core inflation (CPI excluding food items, energy products and commodities under the State management like medical and educational services) in February inched up 0.17 percent from January, and 2.94 percent from a year ago. The two-month core inflation climbed 3.1 percent from the same period in 2019.

Source: <https://english.vov.vn/economy/february-cpi-falls-by-017-percent-410755.vov>
