

Highlight News / April 16/2020



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'No plan' to reduce electricity bills nationwide



Cambodia News | 15 April, 2020

Despite the reduction of electricity tariffs for factory workers suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Electricity Authority of Cambodia (EAC), the autonomous government agency responsible for managing and administering electric power in the country, has said that "a general plan for electricity bill reduction has yet to be raised." Yim Piseth, the chairman of EAC, points to the fact that the government already has a policy of decreasing electricity tariffs annually. "As far as we are concerned, this measure, which was implemented in 2015, helps the Kingdom's population," he said. Currently, the price of electricity is charged on a sliding scale, starting from 380 riel (\$0.095) per kWh for those who use less than 10 kWh per month and rising to 480 riel per kWh for electricity usage of between 11 kWh to 50 kWh per month. If power used registers between 51 to 200 kWh in the same period, it will be charged at 610 riel per kWh, with a 730 riel per kWh tariff for any usage of over 200 kWh per month. Victor Jona, director-general of Energy at the Ministry of Mines and Energy backed up Yim's comments, citing the narrow profit margins that Electricite du Cambodge (one of the nation's leading power suppliers) are working with. "We have recently made our annual reduction so it is unlikely we will make a further cut. The low profits EDC make are needed for further investment of power transmission

lines into areas currently with no power," he said. The Ministry of Mines and Energy has claimed that by 2020, no areas of Cambodia will be without electricity.

Source : <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50713248/no-plan-to-reduce-electricity-bills-nationwide/>

Price of exported rice doubles



Cambodia News | 15 April, 2020

The price of fragrant rice exports to international markets has doubled in the last month, from \$50 to \$100 per metric ton, according to the Cambodia Rice Federation (CRF). However, the domestic market trading price for white rice, the most in-demand variety within the country, has remained stable. Explaining the disparity, CRF secretary-general Lun Yeng said that the export price rocketed between March and April as a direct consequence of COVID-19 border closures and lockdowns. "Due to the pandemic, many countries are in lockdown which makes the transportation of goods, including rice, difficult and this has led to the increasing price of the commodity. Demand has also increased because the destinations we export to are running low on stock," he said. That demand has also seen the price of Cambodia Jasmine rice (Malys Angkor) increase by \$70 to \$950 per metric ton. Currently, Cambodia is only allowed to export fragrant rice because it fetches a higher price in the international market. In recent weeks, the Cambodian government temporarily banned the export of white rice and paddy until further notice to ensure there is enough

in stock to meet domestic demand through the uncertain times ahead created by the spread of COVID-19. Paddy rice is currently priced at 820 Riel (\$0.2) per kg, spelling good news for the nation's farmers of the staple, according to Veng Sakhon, minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. "Farmers are happy because rice traders are offering a good price of 820 riel per kg, a 120 riel increase compared to the previous record," Sakhon wrote on his Facebook page earlier this week. According to the Philippines-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), increasing rice prices could become a global trend in both the medium and long term if the COVID-19 pandemic shows no sign of abating. Production shocks coupled with a massive surge in demand would be the main cause of price hikes, said Jean Balié, head of IRRI's Agri-Food Policy Platform. "In the medium term, any shock on production that could result in a lower-than-expected harvest could trigger a price crisis. Likewise, a massive surge in demand fuelled by panic buying and hoarding could also trigger a price rise," read a quote from Balié in the Philippine-based publication BusinessMirror on April 14. "Decisions like limiting the flow of rice within and between countries, including export bans and other trade restrictions as well as excessive buying, can all precipitate a surge in rice price in spite of good market fundamentals," he added. Based on IRRI analysis, Balié said world rice prices could spike by at least 19 percent, to as high as 52 percent, if exporting countries, such as Vietnam, Cambodia

and India suspend shipments. Under these scenarios, the global price of Thailand 5-percent broken rice would increase from \$525 per metric ton to about \$671 metric ton. Cambodia shipped out 230,948 metric tons of rice in the first quarter this year, a 35 percent increase compared to the same period in the year before.

Source : <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50713246/price-of-exported-rice-doubles/>

Laos extends lockdown by 14 days for fight against Covid-19



Laos News | 15 April, 2020

Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith on Wednesday asked the Lao people to strictly follow the recommendations of the National Taskforce Committee for Covid-19 Prevention and Control as the nationwide lockdown was extended by 14 days till May 3. According to Prime Minister's Order No 06, dated March 29, the government initially directed people to stay at home for three weeks during April 1-19 to contain the spread of the deadly virus. On Wednesday, Prime Minister Thongloun announced the 14-day extension of the lockdown. "Each person must defend himself, and protect their families, their dear relatives, and others in society. People of all ages are at equal risk of contracting this deadly disease all the time," he said. The strict implementation of the stay-at-home directive will help the Party and State, lighten the burden of the taskforce and doctors who are working tirelessly in the face of great risks, he said. Besides, this

measure will help lighten the burden on society and help save the lives of people, he added. "The government is well aware of this change to the way of our social life that has occurred suddenly. It is desirable that people should be free to live, and get to meet each other," the Prime Minister said. The pandemic has affected business at all levels and the livelihoods of the people, and even the celebration of the Lao New Year, which is being observed during April 13-16, he observed." That is a tradition that has been practised for hundreds of thousands of years, but today we are limited," Prime Minister Thongloun said. "We are in an unusual situation because of what has happened, but everyone is required to make a sacrifice for one's self, for the sake of social peace, for stability and for the security of our nation," he said. "If we go through this crisis together, happiness will definitely come back again," he added. In the last session, the government had agreed to the directive No 31/ᨧᨶ that set out the socio-economic policies and measures to help alleviate the country's economic woes. The Prime Minister also asked every family and every citizen to consider this crisis as an opportunity to take action to increase productivity to cope with possible future food shortages. This will also lead to the betterment of the economy, he said. "I urge everyone - be conscious, don't abuse this difficult time. Individuals and groups shouldn't use opportunities to benefit themselves or cause trouble for people and society, because the people will never forgive them," he said.

Prime Minister Thongloun further said: "Let everyone be conscious, don't believe fake news, but stay tuned only for official news. "We must unite. The whole nation is one, the Lao people don't give up. In the meantime, be patient at home, wash your hands often, put on a mask and stay at home to fight against Covid-19."

Source : http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeConten_Laos_extends_80.php

UN helps to safeguard Myanmar women rights amid pandemic



Myanmar News | 15 April, 2020

The United Nations affirmed on April 15 to work with the Myanmar government to protect women's rights and opportunities amid the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic in the country. While noting that the pandemic affects everyone, everywhere, it said the crisis "is having a devastating social and economic consequences for women and girls, in particular". "Nearly 60 percent of women globally work in the informal economy, earning less, saving less, and at greater risk of falling into poverty," the intergovernmental organisation said in a statement. "As markets fall and businesses close, millions of women's jobs have disappeared." The situation is more glaring in Myanmar, where women represent 60 percent of the employees engaged in the food and accommodation services, and between 70, to 90pc of the street food vendors. The UN said an estimated 789,000 Myanmar women are working

overseas for domestic or care work, and close to 35 percent of the tens of thousands of migrant workers who returned recently are women. Also, the women constitute the vast majority of Myanmar garment workers, many of whom have already been affected by factory closures. Aside from losing their jobs, women are also at greater risk of experiencing violence, especially when the government imposes movement restriction. The global body said when the government started implementing social isolation, UN agencies helped in providing training to over 80 social workers of the Department of Social Welfare on the gender dimension of COVID-19 and on psycho-social counselling. "Through this effort, 60 new cell phones have been provided to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, to ensure that it could ramp up its services and support to people in need across the country," the statement said. "The United Nations also strives to ensure that female frontline health workers, including midwives, traditional birth attendants and nurses across the country have access to critical services, knowledge and protection, without compromising their own health," it added.

Source : <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/un-helps-safeguard-myanmar-women-rights-amid-pandemic.html>

Vietnam eyes GDP growth of 7 percent in next five years



Vietnam News | 15 April, 2020

Hanoi (VNA) - Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc has issued Directive No. 118/CT-TTg on building a socio-economic development plan for the 2021-25 period. Ministries, sectors and localities nationwide have been asked to determine core issues for the next five years, especially the target to obtain GDP growth of about 7 percent in the period. The PM noted that in the next five years, the national economy will face various difficulties and challenges stemming from current drawbacks, as well as social and environmental problems such as an aging population, the income gap, diseases and natural disasters, among others. He added that the plan must be considered in line with complicated and unpredictable situations and fierce global competition. Furthermore, the global economy is forecast to slow due to complexities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic./.

Source : <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/vietnam-eyes-gdp-growth-of-7-percent-in-next-five-years/171771.vnp>

Agricultural land price increases during COVID-19



Vietnam News | 15 April, 2019

Hanoi (VNS/VNA) - While most of the realty segment has struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic, agricultural land is still a hot investment as more

people want to return to rural areas for a more environmentally-friendly life. According to land brokers, the prices of agriculture land have doubled and tripled in Vietnam's southern provinces, as many buyers leave the city for the countryside. The trend encouraging people to move from the city to the outskirts started more than a year ago and increased due to the pandemic. Social distancing measures have urged more people to look for gardens and agricultural land instead of being locked down in a crowded city. "The trend is making land prices rise," said land broker Nguyen Tung Lam. According to Lam, who mostly works in Da Lat city in the Central Highlands province of Lam Dong, each plot of 1,000 sq.m of agriculture land cost 400-700 million VND (17,000 to 30,000 USD) last year. Now the price of a plot could reach between 3 billion VND and 6 billion VND. Agriculture land prices have also soared in the Mekong Delta, in areas such as Long An, Tien Giang and Dong Thap. In Cai Lay district, Tien Giang province, the price of agriculture land ranges from 400 million VND to more than 1 billion VND per plot. They were about 200-230 million VND last year. Similarly, agricultural land plots around Ho Chi Minh City, such as the province of Dong Nai, are reported to reach 2-2.5 billion VND per plot. Nguyen Thu Nga, a land broker in HCM City, told local media that: "The demand has grown well since last year. Though there are fewer clients coming to see the land, they ask the brokers to check carefully for a purchase after the pandemic." Most investors in agricultural land see gains from their

investment. Nguyen Thu Hue, a member of the Facebook Group 'Leaving the city to the countryside', with more than 2,500 members, said: "I can sell the land I bought at a price three times higher, but I want to keep it." Hue believed that the prices would increase more after the pandemic. Tran Khanh Quang, Director of Viet An Hoa Realty Company, said that since the end of 2019, some investors have tended to put aside 5 to 10 percent of their budget to buy agriculture plots or small farms in HCM City's neighbouring provinces as a safe investment. As concern over the pandemic grows, the trend of returning to rural areas is getting more and more attention. As a result, he said it made the prices of agriculture land rise on the market./.

Source : <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/agricultural-land-price-increases-during-covid19/171770.vnp>
