

Highlight News / March 9, 2021



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ADVISORY INSTITUTE FOR TRADE AND INVESTMENT BY TCC (AITI)

Cambodia faces risk of COVID-19 spreading to more localities



Cambodia News | 8 March, 2021

Cambodia is facing the possibility of more provinces being affected by the prevailing COVID-19 February 20 Community Event which broke out on the same date in the capital. The community event had its roots several days before the announcement of the February 20 Event, at the Sokha Hotel when four escapees, two of whom tested positive and were suspected of having the UK strain of the virus, went from one condominium to another and also to a popular nightclub, reported local media. Along the way, they left a trail of COVID-19 positive cases which has now spread to Sihanoukville with a total of 115 cases (including a handful of imported cases), Kandal, Svay Rieng with 2 cases, and now Kampong Thom and Prey Veng. Earlier on March 6, Kandal province sent 723 people in Yong Yuan in Koh Thom to quarantine after a Chinese man in this site was diagnosed with COVID-19. As of 8 am of March 7, the Health Ministry of Cambodia confirmed 31 additional cases of COVID-19, raising the total number of infections to 987, including 510 recoveries. VNA

Source:<https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50821805/cambodia-faces-risk-of-covid-19-spreading-to-more-localities/>

Pilot project to produce plastic-free bowls and plates



Cambodia News | 8 March, 2021

A group of environment lovers are launching a pilot project to use the leaves from areca trees in the production of bowls and plates. The use of the leaves to this purpose has advantages in biodegradability and the potential reduction of the use of plastics in flatware. Areca nut trees provide a fresh fruit that when ripened is a favourite snack among Khmer grandparents. Its flowers are used as symbolic blessings on weddings day according to traditional Khmer custom. Hor Chhai Ngorn, owner of Areca Cam Handicraft, which is made up of a membership of environmentalists, said that he sees real potential in the processing of the trees' dried leaves to make bowls and plates. The machinery to be used in processing does need to be ordered from abroad. The raw materials needed in the processing are brought from Kampong Cham province, where Chhai Ngorn has made contact with farmers who have planted areca trees on their property He said last week that the environmentally friendly project will help reduce the use of plastic-made products by replacing them with domestic raw materials and, in doing so, will provide additional income to farmers. "The bowls and plates and other products produced from areca tree leaves will be specifically marketed to environmentalists, restaurants, hotels and exporters," he said. The areca leaf-based plates are planned for sale to people at a cost between 800 and

1,000 riels in order to encourage their usage in the reduction of plastic and its eventual destination in landfill. According to the owner of Areca Cam, this small business is scheduled to officially open in April 2021. He is currently surveying how best to secure and move sufficient quantities of the needed materials from their source in Kampong Cham province to the point of production and processing to operate at full production capacity, the company will need to receive 100,000 dried leaves on a monthly basis, Chhai Ngorn said. He added that he expects a lot of support, given the government's encouragement in the reduction of the use of plastics and among society as a whole as people become more interested in and actively chose to use environmentally friendly materials in their day-to-day life. "Our products are not intended to compete with plastic based products. They are complementary products in the market that present consumers with a different choice based on their personal preferences and eco leanings," he said.

Source: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50821939/pilot-project-to-produce-plastic-free-bowls-and-plates/>

France extends support for Laos' sustainable agriculture value-chain through Mekong Tea Project



Laos News | 9 March, 2021

The government of France is further supporting the sustainable agriculture value-chain through the

Mekong Tea Project, aiming to strengthen the tea production value-chain in Laos and increase the benefits to small farmers. The official launch of the Mekong Tea Project took place in Vientiane recently and was chaired by the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Dr Linkham Duangsavanh, and the Ambassador of France to Laos, Ms Florence Jeanblanc-Risler. Speaking at the event, a representative of the Mekong Tea Project said "The upper Mekong region is the cradle of tea. In Laos, there are different varieties of wild tea, French Ambassador Ms Florence Jeanblanc-Risler (first row, 10th from left) and Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Dr Linkham Duangsavanh (first row, 11th from left) join other participants at the project opening ceremony in Vientiane. whose rich genetic heritage remains to be explored. Broadly present from North to South, fresh tea leaves are either collected in the forest as a non-timber product or from tea plantations in the uplands." "Medium to high quality tea offers relatively high incomes to local communities. This potential should be preserved and tapped so that both local communities and natural resources benefit from sustainable development models," she added. This is precisely the approach promoted by France through this project. The main objective of this three-year project is to increase tea smallholders' incomes through better governance of the tea value-chain and better

market access with the promotion of high-quality products. It is financed by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) through a 1.5 million euro grant. To achieve this objective, two pilot projects in Bokeo and Xayaboury provinces will be initiated to support tea producers towards the sustainable production of high-quality tea and ensure long-term and fair commercial relationships with international buyers. The project will also contribute to the revitalisation of the National Tea Learning Alliance, which gathers public institutions, stakeholders and development partners, to serve as a knowledge-sharing platform and unite efforts to define strategic orientations and a governance model based on inter-professional collaborations for tea sector development. The Mekong Tea Project is the continuation of a longstanding cooperation between France and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, in particular the Department of Agriculture, which will play an important role in the implementation of this project. The project will receive technical support from a consortium composed of AVSF, GRET and LCG. “Together, we hope that Lao tea culture can be built on a stronger foundation to promote the image and reputation of Lao tea on the international scene while safeguarding the interests of tea smallholder farmers and local businesses,” Ambassador Jeanblanc-Risler said. AFD director in Laos, Julie Gabet Ouahioune, said “The tea sector in Laos does

not yet have a national strategy. The context is therefore favourable to build a solid development path, using multi-stakeholder collaboration principles and building references at the local level to structure the tea value chain at the national level.”

Source: https://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freeContent/FreeContent_France_47.php

MOC grants temporary tariff

exemption for export, import items



Myanmar News | 8 March, 2021

The Trade Department under the Ministry of Commerce notified on 3 March that exporters and importers do not require to seek licences for 37 HS code lines for exports and 72 lines for imports between 8 March and 9 April 2021 to facilitate the trade. Export items with licence exemption include onion, garlic, rice, broken rice, raw sugar, refined sugar, natural rubber and cotton, while the exemption covers the following import goods; sliced fish (salmon and tuna), flour, soybean seed, palm oil, food commodity, cement, gasoline, diesel, pharmaceuticals, fertilizer and lubricant. Additionally, a two per cent withholding tax on exports and imports will be exempted until March-end 2021, owing to the difficulties to pay for tax amid the closure of private banks. Moreover, international trade transactions also cannot be done in the meantime. However, tax cut and licence exemption will not tackle the trade slowdown amid the current political conditions, an exporter shared his opinion.

Regardless of maritime trade disruption, border trade with China and Thailand remained strong. Withholding tax exemption will help smooth border trade businesses, a trader from Muse said. — HH/GNLM

Source: <https://www.gnlm.com.mm/moc-grants-temporary-tariff-exemption-for-export-import-items/>

Public investment disbursement rises 10.6% in first two months



Vietnam News | 8 March, 2021

NDO – Almost VND40.9 trillion (US\$1.77 billion) of public investment was disbursed in the first two months of 2021, equivalent to 9% of the year's plan – the highest level compared to the same period of the last five years. According to the General Department of Statistics (GSO), the disbursed sum went up 10.6% year-on-year, with the disbursement of centrally managed capital reaching VND5.6 trillion (US\$242.5 million), or 7.2% of the set target and up 13.6%. The Ministry of Construction reported the highest disbursement rate, meeting 10.2% of the year's plan, followed by the Ministry of Health with 9.4% and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment with 9.1%. Meanwhile, disbursement of public capital managed by localities stood at VND35.3 trillion (US\$1.53 billion), equal to 9.4% of the year's plan and up 10.1% over the January-February period in 2020. Some localities with high disbursement rates included Bac Ninh (15.8% of the plan), Da Nang (13.1%) and Nghe An (12.9%). In February 2021, around VND17.7 trillion (US\$766.7

million) worth of public investment was disbursed, down 3.1% year-on-year, including VND2.6 trillion managed by ministries and central agencies (up 1.2%), and VND15.2 trillion managed by localities (down 3.7%). The GSO attributed the decline to the fact that the month featured the Lunar New Year 2021 holiday and saw the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in some provinces and centrally run cities, causing a slowdown in the progress of some projects.

Source: <https://en.nhandan.com.vn/business/item/9650802-public-investment-disbursement-rises-10-6-in-first-two-months.html>

Vietnam eyes stepwise plan to reopen to foreign tourists



Vietnam News | 8 March, 2021

Nguyen Thi Thanh Huong, deputy director of the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, said the country would “not reopen completely” during a conference in coastal Quang Ninh Province on Friday. Speaking of Vietnam's stance on reopening its borders to foreign tourists, Huong stated that selected foreign markets, more specifically those with high demand and preference for all-inclusive tour packages to the Southeast Asian country, would be welcomed back to certain resorts that can ensure apt isolation and air connection. Echoing Huong's ideas, Nguyen Manh Tien, deputy chairman of the National Assembly Committee for External Relations, urged relevant ministries and agencies to devise regulations and standards to reintroduce foreign

tourists back in certain provinces, considering many secluded tourism complexes have been prepared in the country. Manh pointed to Vietnam's fellow ASEAN country Thailand, which is considering border reopening for foreign entrants who can provide proof of COVID-19 vaccination. Since March 2020, Vietnam has locked foreign tourists out of the country as part of its bid against COVID-19 infections. This decision, while proving effective against the epidemic spread in the country, took a huge toll on the nation's tourism sector, which consists of roughly 2,300 tourism companies and 3,000 lodging facilities. Vietnam has recorded 2,512 coronavirus cases as of Monday morning, including 1,585 local infections and 35 virus-related fatalities, according to the Ministry of Health's data. It already started vaccinating frontline workers, diplomats, military and police officers, and teachers on Monday. The country currently has 117,600 AstraZeneca vaccine doses it received on February 24. Vietnam aims to obtain 90 million COVID-19 vaccine doses by the end of the year, including 30 million through the COVAX scheme co-led by WHO, 30 million through AstraZeneca, and the rest through negotiations with U.S. producers.

Source: <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/business/20210308/vietnam-eyes-stepwise-plan-to-reopen-to-foreign-tourists/59656.html>
