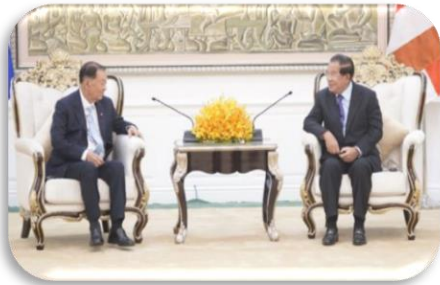




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## Call to elevate Cambodia, Thai ties amid bid to settle OCA.



*Cambodia News | 25 March, 2024*

Former Prime Minister Hun Sen recently called for strengthening the relations between Cambodia and Thailand in areas such as trade, labour and tourism by elevating the current Strategic Partnership to a notch higher to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Mr Hun Sen, President of the Supreme Privy Council to His Majesty the King and President of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP), made the remarks while receiving a visit from Wanmuhamadnoor Matha, President of the National Assembly and Speaker of the House of Representatives of Thailand, at the January 7 Palace in Phnom Penh on Friday. The former Prime Minister's call to elevate the ties assumes importance in the wake of the resolve of both countries to resume talks on joint exploration of the oil and gas reserves in the 26,000 sq km Overlapping Claims Area (OCA) of the Gulf of Thailand. A Comprehensive Strategic Partnership is an extensive form of bilateral cooperation between two countries, implying an all-encompassing approach to relations by collaborating on various issues across multiple sectors, including political, economic, social, cultural, and security. A Strategic Partnership, on the other hand, is a form of bilateral relationship where two countries decide to cooperate closely on specific strategic areas or shared interests. According to a statement by CPP,

the former Cambodian Prime Minister also thanked the Thailand government for its attention to Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand. Out of an estimated 1.3 million Cambodian migrant workers, over 1.2 million are working in Thailand. Mr Hun Sen also stressed the need to boost regional cooperation, especially in the ASEAN, ACMECS and GMS frameworks for the benefit of the two countries. On his part, Wanmuhamadnoor Matha lauded the good relations and cooperation between Cambodia and Thailand as neighbours and reaffirmed Thailand's commitment to take care of the Cambodian people working and doing business in the country. Matha and his high-level delegation arrived in Phnom Penh on March 21 for a three-day official and friendly visit, at the invitation of Khuon Sudary, President of the National Assembly of Cambodia. During their stay, the delegation also held a meeting with Cheam Yeap, Acting President of the Cambodian National Assembly, and paid a courtesy visit to Say Chhum, Acting Head of State. He also attended the 8th Ramadan Iftar Dinner, held on March 21 under the presidency of Prime Minister Hun Manet. Thailand is Cambodia's second-largest trade partner in ASEAN with a trade turnover of \$3.71 billion in 2023. The bilateral trade, however, showed a decrease of 17 percent last year from \$4.47 billion recorded in 2022, according to a General Department of Customs and Excise report. However, both sides are devising plans to raise the trade volume to \$15 billion by 2025, reports said. Cambodia's main exports to Thailand include

textiles, agricultural products, gems, raw materials and semi-finished products. It may also be recalled that Prime Minister Hun Manet discussed the OCA issue with Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin during his official visit to Bangkok on February 7 in a bid to resolve the contentious matter by arriving at a solution agreeable to both sides. A 2001 MoU between Thailand and Cambodia outlined a framework to settle the dispute, but in 2009, amid tension between the two countries, the Thai Cabinet unilaterally scrapped the MoU, adding further uncertainty on how to solve the dispute. Energy experts point out that even with a 50-50 revenue sharing model for OCA reserves, reportedly mooted by Cambodia in previous talks, Thailand would be the largest beneficiary, primarily due to the country having a more developed oil and gas industry. According to the experts, a Joint Development Area (JDA) within OCA seems to be the only realistic solution for both countries to develop and manage the huge energy reserves. If the talks prove successful.

Source :

<https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501461617/call-to-elevate-cambodia-thai-ties-amid-bid-to-settle-oca/>

## Phnom Penh-Delhi flight from June 16



*Cambodia News | 25 March, 2024*

The national flag carrier Cambodia Angkor Air will launch its India flight on June 16 between Phnom Penh and New Delhi with four weekly trips. According to the airline's announcement on Friday, the new service will be operated on Sunday,

Monday, Wednesday and Friday. "Cambodia Angkor Air is embarking on an extraordinary journey as we launch the first-ever direct flight from Phnom Penh to New Delhi with four flights per week to serve the Cambodia-India Tourism Year 2024," the airline said. The new service is going to strengthen the bilateral ties between Cambodia and India, facilitating increased tourism and business opportunities between the two nations, stated the airline. "This new route will attract more tourists and business travellers, which contribute to the development of the tourism and economic sectors of both countries," the Phnom Penh-based airline said. The flight service begins amid the Cambodia-India Tourism Year 2024, a campaign to promote and encourage more people from both countries to visit each other's destinations. Tourism Minister Sok Soken said that India and China are the largest tourism markets that Cambodia is targeting. "With direct flights from June this year, Cambodia expects to welcome more Indian tourists to Cambodia," Soken said during a press conference recently. Meanwhile, IndiGo Airlines, India's low-cost carrier, has reportedly received approval from Cambodian authorities to operate flights between New Delhi and Siem Reap, home of UNESCO-listed Angkor Archaeological Park, according to the State Secretariat of Civil Aviation. Cambodia attracted 5.43 million international tourists in 2023, a sharp increase of 139 percent from 2.27 million in 2022, earning \$3.04 billion, up 115 percent from \$1.41 billion in a year earlier, official figures showed. The Ministry of

Tourism indicates that Cambodia welcomed 68,836 Indian guests last year, a surge of more than 102 percent from 34,016 in 2022.

Source :

<https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501461599/phnom-penh-delhi-flight-from-june-16/>

## Job Fest opens door to employment for young hopefuls.



*Laos News | 25 March, 2024*

The opening ceremony was chaired by the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Mrs Baikham Khatthiya, and the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to the Lao PDR, Martine Therer. The Job Fest took place at the International Cooperation and Training Centre from March 22-24, and was supported by UNDP. The event included the launch of a service tool that enables job seekers to learn about available jobs through a labour market information scheme operated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. The scheme gives advice about the use of various systems for identifying jobs and provides a platform for job hunters to meet with potential employers and access useful information about jobs. Those using the scheme gain an understanding of the current job market situation and what skills are most in demand by today's employers so they can prepare themselves to be strong candidates when applying for jobs. The Job Fest featured 56 booths set up by Lao and foreign companies and

organisations advertising 560 vacant positions that required at least 1,740 employees.

Source :

[https://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freefreenews/freecontent\\_60\\_Jobfest\\_y24.php](https://www.vientianetimes.org.la/freefreenews/freecontent_60_Jobfest_y24.php)

## Myanmar chairs 72nd Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Task Force meeting.



*Myanmar News | 25 March, 2024*

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), U Aung Myo Myint, permanent representative of Myanmar to ASEAN, chaired the 72nd Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Task Force meeting, which was held on 23 March. The talk discussed signs of progress of implementations of IAI Work Plan IV (2021-2025), and ongoing projects of the Work Plan III implementations were discussed. The IAI Task Force members approved 16 new projects involved in the ongoing project of Work Plan IV that will be assisted by Singapore, Germany, Australia, China, Japan and India. In addition, the talk also discussed matters related to involving the national coordinators from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Viet Nam in output monitoring works for the IAI Work Plan IV and the aid provided by the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) for developing strategies framework for Priority Economic Deliverable (PED) of Laos this year. Permanent representatives for the ASEAN Integration work group, personnel of the IAI and NDG Divisions from the ASEAN Secretariat, representatives of the



ASEAN permanent committee, and ERIA attended the meeting online. It has been more than two decades since the IAI was developed to narrow the development gap between ASEAN countries. The IAI plays a crucial role in building the ASEAN community.

Source: <https://www.gnlm.com.mm/myanmar-chairs-72nd-initiative-for-asean-integration-iai-task-force-meeting/>

### Construction-used iron shortage leads to higher price.

 Myanmar News | 25 March, 2024

As construction-used iron supply has been low, price has been good and it is expected the sale will be active in next months, according to construction materials shops. Before the monsoon, the sale of construction-used hollow irons is expected to be bigger and currently, prices have risen due to supply shortage. "At present, hollow iron prices have climbed up as the supply has been low. The supply has been short in the market. Even manufacturing companies have opened higher prices so we have to resell it correspondingly. The sale has been good. In April, May and June, building repairs such as repair roofs are usually done before monsoon. And in the monsoon, marble flooring and interior polishing are made. Iron sale is usually good this period only. The sale is expected to increase more in about next two months, and will decline back slightly in the monsoon. The iron sale is usually slow in monsoon," said an official from a hollow iron

wholesale shop in Dagon Myothit (South) Township. The supply of irons has currently been short but they have continued operating their business depending on the situation. "I'm not sure about big construction projects but small construction projects have been operating regularly and they haven't stopped," a businessman told GNLM.

Source: <https://www.gnlm.com.mm/construction-iron-shortage-leads-to-higher-price/>

### Bad jobs, low pay, and the risk of a middle-income trap.

 Vietnam News | 25 March, 2024

Vietnam is now in the golden population period, but experts have warned about a workforce with 'bad skills, bad jobs and bad pay'. The 'good job with high pay' dream has become more distant for many workers amid the wave of automation and AI. After three decades of doi moi (renovation), Vietnam has become a 'rising star'. The extensive development with a labor-intensive outsourcing model has generated jobs for untrained workers and helped Vietnam join the group of low-middle income economies. However, Vietnam has been maintaining the model for too long and is not prepared with workforce and technology capability to shift to an intensive development model, which would help turn Vietnam into a developed country with high income. Education and training, and science and technology development need to be one step ahead to train the labor force and build technology capability. However, according to Pham Manh Hung, a lecturer

at the Economics Institute under the Hanoi National University, Vietnam still has not made appropriate investments in science and technology development. The budgets for education and training, especially higher education and vocational education, remain modest. In 2023, the budget for R&D (research and development) accounted for 0.4 percent of Vietnam's GDP, which was much lower than China's 2.4 percent of GDP. The budget for higher education in Vietnam was also low, just 0.18 percent of GDP in 2020, compared with Malaysia's 1.13 percent of GDP. Paying inappropriate attention to education and science and technology investment, Vietnam has been 'bogged down' in the trap of doing outsourcing and assembling components for foreign partners, especially in key export sectors, including textiles and garments, footwear and electronics manufacturing. In these fields, Vietnamese still earn money with their 'muscle' instead of 'brain cells' and most products have low technological content. Reports all show that the proportion of trained workers is modest, just accounting for 26 percent of the labor force in 2021, while workers with higher education levels just accounted for 12 percent. The number of untrained workers was over 73 percent, while informal workers accounted for 68.5 percent of total workers who had jobs in 2021, or 33.6 million. Over 61 percent informal workers had only a primary education level. Even trained workers could not satisfy requirements of the labor market which showed problems in training. As a result, a high number of workers have

fallen into the 'bad skill, bad job and bad pay' trap. They are facing the risks of losing jobs at any time. The number of workers who have good jobs and high pay now accounts for 10 percent. The figure is 60 percent in Singapore. Because of low pay, workers have to lead lives with full of hardships. About 75 percent of workers say their incomes are not high enough to cover basic needs as shown by a Vietnam Labor Federation report in 2023. The situation is even worse for informal workers with 47 percent of workers of this group having incomes lower than the minimum regional wage. The average income from major jobs of informal workers was VND4.4 million in 2021, just half of the formal workers' average income (VND8.2 million). Also because of low pay, workers don't have opportunities to improve their skills to find jobs with better pay. Meanwhile, enterprises, using unskilled workers, cannot generate good jobs. As such, the national economy is facing the risk of falling into the 'bad skill, bad job and bad pay' trap and 'middle income trap'. These factors explain why Vietnam's productivity is low. In 2022, Vietnam ranked 135th among 180 surveyed countries in terms of productivity, just equal to 11.4 percent of Singapore, 35.4 percent of Malaysia and 64.8 percent of Thailand. Because of low productivity, Vietnam cannot raise minimum wages rapidly, because the move, if taken, will cause Vietnam to lose its competitiveness. However, experts have warned that low-cost workforce will sooner or later cause Vietnam to be no longer competitive. It will also be influenced by the wave of automation and AI.

Therefore, developing high-quality human resources is a must.

Source : <https://vietnamnet.vn/en/bad-jobs-low-pay-and-the-risk-of-a-middle-income-trap-2256840.html>

## Positive outlook for Vietnam's rice exports.

 *Vietnam News | 25 March, 2024*

HANOI (ANN/VIETNAM NEWS) — Vietnam's rice exports is expected to exceed 8 million tonnes, entering its second consecutive year, bringing in about USD5 billion. While the global rice supply is decreasing, and countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, China and some other markets are all increasing rice imports to ensure food security, it creates opportunities for Vietnamese rice export this year. After many fluctuations in supply and price last year, global rice trade continues to be "hot" from the beginning of this year. Limited supply due to unfavourable weather, exports being banned or restricted in some countries, increased import demand in many markets, and Red Sea tensions are the main reasons why the rice market heats up this year. Global ending inventories for the 2023-2024 crop year is forecasted at more than 167 million tonnes, down 8.6 million tonnes compared to the previous crop year and the lowest inventory in the past six crop years. India, the largest exporting country, with more than 20 million tonnes of rice per year, has applied policies restricting rice exports since the middle of last year. Many countries have turned to finding alternative sources of rice supply,

especially from Southeast Asia, creating opportunities for Vietnamese rice to increase exports, as well as get good export prices. Vietnam's rice exports earned more than USD4 billion last year, with earnings expected to rise even more this year. Nguyễn Anh Sơn, director of the Import-Export Department, Ministry of Industry and Trade (MoIT), analysed that Vietnam's rice industry has had remarkable growth through strong transformation in both production and export. The growth in output, product quality and improved production processes have helped expand the market and enhance the position of Vietnamese rice in the international market. Selective markets such as Europe, the US, South Korea and some new markets in the Middle East tend to favour high-quality Vietnamese rice. The MoIT requests localities and rice industry business associations to share information and propose solutions in market development, with close co-ordination between units under the ministry and Vietnamese trade offices abroad in building and implementing practical, effective trade promotion activities to support rice industry enterprises in exploiting diverse export markets, building and enhancing the Vietnamese rice brand. The Philippines can import up to 4.1 million tonnes of rice this year, up from the previous forecast of 3.9 million tonnes. Its rice imports soared due to the drought affecting domestic rice output. China was Vietnam's third largest rice import partner last year, with output of 917,255 tonnes, turnover of more than USD530 million, with an average price of USD578 per tonne.

It is predicted that this year, this market will increase rice imports to balance import and production to ensure food security, possibly exceeding the figure of more than 900,000 tonnes last year, while export price also has room for further increases. The Voice of Việ̣t Nam (VOV) online newspaper quoted Nguyệ̃n Ngỏc Nam, Chairman of the Việ̣t Nam Food Association, as saying that the association recommended that the MoIT strengthened information on import and export data this year, to balance rice supply and demand of the parties favourably. He also recommended conducting market research to conduct trade promotion programmes in markets, to promptly update information about rice exporters to best orient exports. Also vital are efforts to research and negotiate to sign preferential trade agreements with a number of potential markets to take advantage of the progress of the agreements that have been put into effect and request partners to open up more, increasing Vietnam's rice quota. Finally, there is the work of raising awareness of traders implementing free trade regulations to ensure sustainable production and export in Vietnam. With timely support policies from the Government, ministries and branches, and solutions to open the market, circulate goods and promote production, the export of rice has recorded a number of positive results, contributing to the consumption of rice and commodity rice at prices favourable to farmers. Rice prices in Indonesia soared early this year due to a serious supply shortage. Indonesia has experienced

eight consecutive months of rice supply shortage compared to demand as of February this year, with rice scarcity in supermarkets, while in the Philippines the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has asked people to switch to buying rice with stabilisation prices to avoid rice prices rising too high in the free market. Despite being one of the primary supply sources for Senegal, a country with one of the highest per capita rice consumption rates in West Africa, Vietnam's rice exports to the nation remain modest. According to the Việ̣t Nam Trade Office in Algeria and Senegal, Việ̣t Nam shipped 12,000 tonnes of rice to Senegal last year, resulting in a turnover of USD5.35 million, up 215 per cent year-on-year. However, the amount is small compared to the African country's purchase of 1.3 million tonnes of rice in that year. Senegal imports between 900,000 and 1 million tonnes of the grain annually, mostly low-priced 100 per cent broken rice. Its main suppliers include India, Thailand, China, Pakistan, Uruguay and Vietnam. Apart from serving the domestic market of over 18 million people, the country also imports rice for re-export to neighbouring Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau and Gambia. In the context of scarce supply and Senegal gearing up for presidential elections this year, it is likely that the nation will increase imports of broken rice from Asia. In the first two months this year, rice exports reached 920,000 tonnes, worth USD640 million.

Source: <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/positive-outlook-for-vietnams-rice-exports/>