



Additional Measures in Virus Fight



KT/April 05

Prime Minister Hun Sen has just issued an order for a week-long ban on all travel across the country from one province to another in a move to stem the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in Cambodia.

However, all transportation of goods by land, water and air, ambulances of state and private hospitals, fire trucks, and vehicles belonging to armed forces and civil servants and dump trucks are exempted from the ban.

PM also laid out more measures to be implemented to ensure citizens and medical staff have enough food and daily necessities amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government has already ordered 5.2 million simple masks, 200,000 medical masks and 5,000 sets of medical clothing for health workers.

Besides protective gear, he also ordered the purchase of petrol, which is to be stockpiled for use when troops are sent to retrieve migrants who may still return from Thailand.

In an effort to halt Covid-19 infections in the Kingdom, Prime Minister Hun Sen has recently postponed the Khmer New Year holidays scheduled from April 13 to 16. He promised to compensate with a five-day holiday at a more suitable time.

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World Bank Approves \$20M to Fight Virus in Kingdom



PPP/April 05

The World Bank has approved \$20 million for Cambodia's COVID-19 response and its strategic plan to combat the virus.

"The project will help Cambodia meet the targets set out in its COVID-19 master plan, which includes strengthening disease prevention activities, rapid detection, and preparedness and response," said the bank's press release.

World Bank Country Manager for Cambodia Inguna Dobraja said the fast-tracked financing will help Cambodia confront the unprecedented global health emergency.

It would help Cambodia to source much-needed medical supplies and facilities to diagnose and treat COVID-19, reduce the spread of infection, strengthen pandemic response capabilities, and shorten the recovery time for people and the economy.

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UNESCO Highlights Contribution amid School Closure

KT/April 06

UNESCO highlighted its role in supporting education initiatives in the Cambodia amid school closures caused by the COVID-19 global outbreak.

The government has closed down all schools as a safety measure to prevent virus infections. Students are now studying at home.

Kimlay Leav, a programme officer with the UN body, said it has supported the Ministry of Education to ensure continuous learning during school closures.

According to UNESCO, Strengthening Teacher Education Programmes in Cambodia (STEP Cam) continues to help the education of one million grade school children, while approximately 610,000 Basic Education Equivalency Program and Factory Literacy Program (BEEP) students have access to subjects online.

The Education Ministry has urged parents to help children study at home. •

Facebook Launched COVID-19 Information Centre in Cambodia

KT/April 07

Facebook has recently announced its Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information Centre is now live and available in Khmer, providing a central hub for Cambodians to find the latest information and resources from trusted health authorities, as well as actions they can take to stay healthy and support their family and community.

The Coronavirus Information Centre, featured at the top of one's News Feed, includes the latest COVID-19 information and guidance from the global and national health authorities all in one place. The content is available in more than 40 languages to make it as accessible as possible.

The top of the hub will include a daily update of key statistics and major headlines globally and in the region.

The hub will also include best practices for social distancing, prevention and what to do when you're not feeling well. People can opt to follow the centre to get notifications and see updates in their News Feed from health authorities.

Founder and CEO of Facebook Mark Zuckerberg said the top priority and focus for us has been making sure people can get access to good authoritative information from trusted health sources.

"We've built, in collaboration with a lot of our health partners, a Coronavirus Information Centre that we're going to be putting on everyone's Facebook feed. We're going to be rolling this out in a number of places around the US and Europe in the next 24 hours and then other places in the days to come. The goal here is to put authoritative information from organisations like the CDC and WHO in front of everyone who uses our services," Zuckerberg said. •

Affordable Housing for Middle-Income Earners



KT/April 10

The Land Management Ministry has recently handed nearly 700 affordable houses developed by Worldbridge Homes Co Ltd to residents of Kandal province's Koh Kor village in Takhmao city.

The ministry said the move is in accordance with the government's policies on National Housing and National Programme for the Development of Affordable Housing, both of which aim to provide safe and affordable shelters to middle- and low-income earners.

Through the project, Minister Chea Sophara along with representatives of the Finance Ministry, local authorities and the Kandal provincial Cabinet chief have handed over 680 of the projected 2,457 affordable houses.

The Ministry has planned five affordable housing projects – two in Phnom Penh, two in Kandal and one in Banteay Meanchey province – that aim to see the development of 8,331 houses and 7,256 condominium units.

The Ministry spokesman Seng Lot said the project was made possible through some tax exemptions on the import of construction equipment, and the construction of roads and electricity and water networks to the project locations. •

NBC Director-General Explains Economics of Riels and Dollars during the COVID-19 Crisis



KT/April 07

The National Bank of Cambodia (NBC) has called on the public to increase their use of Riels, to assist the central bank to utilise the national currency as an instrument to effectively stabilise pricing and interest rates in the market during the COVID-19 crisis.

The NBC's director-general Chea Serey explained that in most countries their central bank can intervene in an economic crisis through lowering interest rates for commercial banks and financial institutions. However, because Cambodia is a dollarised economy, these levers are not as effective because the NBC only has access to Riels.

"Typically when there is an economic crisis, a central bank will lower interest rates to encourage lending institutions to continue lending, allowing the continuation of public lending with low-interest rates. While the NBC has implemented these measures, its efficiency and effectiveness are limited. This is because the NBC only has access to lower interest rates effective on riels and, of course, cannot have influence over US-issued dollars," she added.

This is why the central bank has been offering loans in Riels at a low-interest rate, in an effort to encourage Cambodians to take out loans in their local currency. However, even with these policies, loans in Riels have decreased from 25% in 2016 to 10% this year. •

Response Fund to Be Created by ASEAN to Cushion COVID-19's Impact in the Region



KT/April 10

In the 25th ASEAN Coordinating Council Meeting via video conference, ASEAN foreign ministers agreed on the establishment of a response to help all member states alleviate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

The objectives behind the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund are to mobilise financial resources to address the shortage in medical supplies and to support the research and development of COVID-19. The fund also aims to prepare the member state for responding to future emergencies.

As of April 09, about 16,000 COVID-19 cases have been identified in Southeast Asia. •

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World Bank Approves \$20M...

The World Bank said the project would finance the construction of quarantine centres and treatment facilities, and help increase the diagnostic capacity of laboratories in all 25 of the country's provincial and municipal referral hospitals.

It will also finance the purchase of medical supplies required to treat patients and prevent the spread of infection.

The bank said the project will also help in the deployment of rapid response teams across the Kingdom by hiring and training additional staff and strengthening the capacity of the ministry's emergency operation centres.

The emergency response project complements the longer-term development work the World Bank is supporting in the health sector, including the Health Equity and Quality Improvement Project (H-EQIP), which is improving access to quality health services for the poorest of Cambodians.

\$14 million of the H-EQIP project funds were allocated through a Contingency Emergency Response Component (CERC) to purchase ambulances and medical equipment and to quickly develop national laboratory capacity to rapidly respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. •

Cambodian Blue Helmets protected from COVID-19



KT/April 09

The Cambodian government has taken measures to protect its peacekeepers on the United Nations mission abroad from the coronavirus.

This came in the wake of a statement from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that he has suspended the rotation and deployment of uniformed personnel, including individual officers and existing police and military peacekeeping units because of the novel coronavirus until June 30.

Lieutenant General Phal Samorn, deputy director-general and spokesman of the National Centre for Peacekeeping Force said that his institution has received the news about the suspension and is now waiting for a decision

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All government officials, the private sector, and factory workers are told to continue working as usual.

While the people will not have their usual break, nor will there be any public celebrations or gatherings at pagodas, the people can still celebrate within their families.

The PM appealed to the public not to return to their hometowns or visit any resort during this time. He also told some 150 Cambodian migrant workers from Malaysia, who are scheduled to fly back to the Kingdom today, to delay their return. •

However, he said a number of measures are already in place to protect the health of Cambodian peacekeepers from COVID-19.

Lt Gen Samorn added Cambodian peacekeepers have also been following UN's advice to avoid gatherings, which increase the chance of infection.

780 Cambodian peacekeepers, from engineers and medics to observers and demining specialists, are fulfilling the UN missions in Mali, Central Africa, South Sudan, Lebanon, and Yemen. So far, none of them has been reported to be infected with COVID-19. •

