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CAMBODIA SENDS 461 TROOPS TO MALI, S. SUDAN ON PEACEKEEPING

A total of 461 Cambodian Blue-Helmet Troops, of whom 29 are women, were dispatched to participate in the United Nations' Peacekeeping mission in the Republic of Mali and the Republic of the Sudan this week.

The send-off ceremony was held under the presence of Gen. Pol Saroeun, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) and Mr. Roger Carter, the United Nations Security Advisor and Representative of the UN Resident Coordinator in Cambodia.

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PARLIAMENT APPROVES NEW ELECTION COMMITTEE

The National Assembly of Cambodia approved this week nine candidate members for the new National Election Committee (NEC).

The nine members include four each from the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), and one "neutral" person, who is not related to political parties.

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PM'S GREETINGS TO ALL CAMBODIANS, ON THE OCCASION OF TRADITIONAL KHMER NEW YEAR, "YEAR OF GOAT"



Photo of Prime Minister Hun Sen (L) and his spouse, Lok Chumteav Kittiprittbandit Bun Rany Hun Sen (R)

Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, has extended his warmest greetings and best wishes to all Cambodian compatriots living in the country and overseas on the occasion of the upcoming Traditional Khmer New Year (the Year of Goat), to be held from April 14-16.

Samdech Techo Hun Sen extended the New Year greetings and best wishes to His Majesty Norodom Sihamoni, the King of Cambodia, and Her Majesty Queen-Mother Norodom Monineath Sihanouk as well.

Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen said in his new year message that the celebrations of Traditional Khmer New Year are taking place in the context during which the Kingdom of Cambodia has managed to

preserve the political stability, peace, security and public order in the entire nation that are the essential factors favouring the implementation of Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC)'s Rectangular Strategy, Phase III, in the 5th legislature, with a view to building prosperous future for Cambodia and her people.

During the past Year of Horse, the RGC patiently endeavored, struggled and surmounted all difficulties and challenging issues both at home and abroad. That is why the Cambodian economy has reached a new stage of development to get ready to enhance the competitive capacity in the regional and international framework; especially for the commencement of ASEAN Economic Community in late 2015.

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PM'S GREETINGS....KHMER NEW YEAR

In 2014, the economic growth was estimated at 7% which included the sectorial growths such as 9.6% in industry, 7.5% in services, and 2.6% in agriculture. The average GDP per capita increased from US\$ 760 in 2008 to US\$ 1,043 in 2013 and approximately US\$ 1,130 in 2014; whereas the poverty rate dropped below 18% in 2014, that is, the poverty rate had been decreased more than 1% (one-percent) each year.

The volume of rice production last year in both rainy and dry seasons reached the total estimation of 8 million tons, of which the rice surplus was around 4.6 million tons or approximated 3 million tons of husked rice for exportation.

Tourism sector, regarded as "Green Gold," has considerably contributed to the national economic growth. This sector has helped create jobs for people and taken part in poverty alleviation and in supporting the regional integration as well. In 2014, some 4.5 million international tourists (up 7%) visited Cambodia, allowing the tourism sector to net a revenue of more than US\$ 3 billion, an increase of over 19.34% in 2013. The RGC has provided the licenses for more than 1,960 construction projects, with the investment of US\$ 2.5 billion.

In the previous Year of Horse, public infrastructure constructions including river bridges and flyovers in Phnom Penh city, the national and provincial highways and hydropower plants were completed and underway one after another. Some of the infrastructures that were put into public services are 120-megawatt Tatai hydro-power plant, 176-Km highway No. B57 in Battambang province, Steung Meanchey flyover in Phnom Penh, 750-meter Chroy Changva 2 Bridge over the Tonle Sap River in Phnom Penh.

Recently inaugurated bridges were 858-meter Takhmao Bridge across the Bassac River, 1,730-meter Steung Treng Bridge linking National Highway 9 across the Upper Mekong River, and 2,215-meter Neak Loeung Bridge across the Lower Mekong River linking the western bank in Kandal province with the eastern bank in Prey Veng province.

The RGC considers reforms the significant works and factors determining the success in implementing the Rectangular Strategy, Phase III, to achieve the good governance that is still the pivot of social justice and sustainable and equitable socio-economic development. The RGC has carried out ceaseless reforms in major sectors, including the anti-corruption, legal and judicial system, public administration, and armed forces.

Cambodia continues fruitful diplomatic relations with foreign countries and international organizations to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation in order to contribute to defending peace, stability and progress in sub-regions, regions and the world. During earlier year, Cambodian people welcomed the establishment of the International Coordinating Committee (ICC) Preah Vihear Temple for the restoration and preservation."

For the year of Goat, he said, "The RGC continues firmly securing peace, stability, safety, security and public order to ensure the favourable environment for the sustainable development through continuing more in-depth and more effective reforms in order to promote good governance, the eradication of corruption by providing the public services with trust, enhancing justice and equity for every individual, and controlling the stability of macro-economy and the sustainability of natural resources for the economic growth and poverty re-education. ■

PARLIAMENT APPROVES NEW....

The nine new members of the bipartisan National Election Committee (NEC), who are responsible for organizing the 2018 national elections, will hold their first meeting today after taking their oaths last Saturday at the Royal Palace.

The CPP's candidates are lawmaker Sek Bunhok, who has been nominated by the party as president of the NEC, NEC members Mean Sathik and Em Sophat and retired Interior Ministry official Duch Son.

The CNRP's candidates include ex-lawmaker Kuoy Bunroeun, who has been named as the NEC's vice president, Rong Chhun, president of the Cambodian Independent Teachers Association, Hing Thirith, a Supreme Court prosecutor, and retired civil servant Te Manirong.

The ninth nominee, who is selected by the two parties as the "neutral" NEC member, is Hang Puthea, director of election-monitoring group Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia (NICFEC).

Some 117 lawmakers, including Prime Minister Hun Sen and CNRP President Sam Rainsy, were present at the voting session. Some 113 lawmakers voted in favour of the nine candidates as 1 voted against, 2 abstained and 1 annulled.

Prime Minister Hun Sen said the nine members would be no longer the members of any political parties, but neutral NEC members.

"We have built confidence for free and fair elections in the future, the winner will win with honor and the loser will lose with satisfaction," he said. "I hope that the NEC will fulfill its duties with responsibilities before the history and the Cambodian people."

CNRP President Sam Rainsy said it was another milestone in the Cambodia's political history.

"From now on, the Cambodian people will have confidence in the future elections. Definitely, it will be no post-election dispute in the future," he said. ■

CAMBODIA SENDS 461 TROOPS TO.....



Gen. Pol Saroeun said the dispatch of the troops was the 10th year of agreed troops of the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC)

and the 9th year for allowing Cambodia to dispatch its forces to join in the UN mission, which has reflected sharp willingness of the RGC and which was a chance for the RCAF to strengthen its capacity to seek peace for people in the world.

Since 2006, Cambodia has sent a total of 2,816 Blue-Helmet Troops (of whom 81 are women) to UN peacekeeping mission in seven countries such as Sudan, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Chad, Syria, Lebanon, and Mali. ■

RICE EXPORT INCREASES BY 77 PCT IN 1ST QUARTER



Cambodia exported 149,464 tons of rice in the first three months of 2015, up 77 percent over the same period last year, according to data of the Secretariat of One Window Service for Rice Export Formality.

Cambodian rice exports saw a rebound in March, increasing to 75,867 tonnes and doubling February's export numbers, on account of increased Chinese imports, which benefitted from the relaxing of import restrictions by the Chinese government, according to the Cambodia Rice Federation.

The Kingdom's rice exports grew by more than 100 per cent year-on-year in March, more than doubling the 35,758 tonnes of rice exported in March 2014. This increase was a result of swelling Jasmine and long grain white rice (LGWR) exports, with the latter accounting for 52 per cent of rice shipments last month.

During the three-month period, Cambodia exported its rice to 19 countries, but only three countries that Cambodia exported to the most- China, Malaysia and France.

Last August, Cambodia signed a 12-month agreement with China to export 100,000 tonnes of rice from the Kingdom.

The Kingdom exported 387,061 tons of rice last year, compared with 378,856 tons a year earlier. ■

EUROPEAN CONSTRUCTION FIRMS MOVE INTO KINGDOM

Two large European companies working in the construction sector have announced plans to expand their distribution networks in Cambodia, according to a joint agreement signed.

Together with the Thai subsidiary of French building-materials giant Saint-Gobain, the France-based electrical installation multinational Schneider Electric signed a joint cooperation agreement with Cambodian company Camstar on March 31.

The companies are banking on Cambodian construction materials firm ISI Group – Camstar's parent company – to connect them to a nationwide distribution network of over 300 outlets and more than 100 contractors.

Thai Gypsum Products, which manufactures gypsum used in plasterboards for Saint-Gobain's Thai operations, said it saw a "big opportunity" to expand its networks for gypsum delivery in Cambodia ahead of the upcoming ASEAN economic community due at the end of the year, according to a statement.

More international construction companies are expected to enter Cambodia's building sector, said Koon San Ang, the president of Schneider Electric in Cambodia, adding that Schneider signed the agreement bolstering its local networks to stay a step ahead of the game.

"For Schneider Electric to follow on these developments and keep a close proximity with existing and potential customers, we strongly believe in extending our partnership to increase and strengthen our local presence in Cambodia," he said.

Construction projects approved in Cambodia stood at \$2.5 billion last year, according to the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning, and Construction, a 10 per cent decrease from last year. ■

OIL DEAL BEFORE PETROLEUM LAW



Singaporean energy firm KrisEnergy and the Cambodian government will conclude their long-drawn negotiations for extraction of oil from offshore oil field Block A before the passage of an upcoming law for the petroleum sector.

The petroleum law, which will be the country's first legislation governing the extraction of oil from onshore and offshore fields, is currently in the draft stage, and a final draft would be ready by the end of the year, according to Ministry of Mines and Energy.

KrisEnergy acquired Chevron's 30 per cent stake of Block A in August last year, adding to its existing 25 per cent stake, giving it a controlling stake in the project. At the time, the energy company said it expected to pump out 10,000 barrels of oil per day from Block A. ■

KAMPOT PEPPER OUTPUT EXPECTED TO INCREASE AROUND 40 TONS

Kompot pepper production is expected to reach some 40 tons this year, up from 35 tons last year, according to Kampot Pepper Association.

Despite an increase in the black pepper yield, white and red pepper seems to decline due to adverse weather conditions (drought), it continued.

This year the Kampot Pepper Association has signed an agreement with its pepper

buyer companies on 14 tons of pepper supplies, of which 5 tons of red pepper (US\$ 25 per kilogram), 1.5 tons of white pepper (US\$ 28 per kilogram) and 7.5 tons of black pepper (US\$ 15 per kilogram).

Japan, South Korea, China, and the U.S. and so on are the targeted foreign markets of Kampot pepper. In 2010, Kampot pepper gained Geographic Indicator (GI) status. ■

COLLECTING MONDULKIRI

“ WILD HONEY ”

SEN MONOROM, Mondulkiri Province –

Honey is one of the important forest based livelihoods that communities living in and around the protected areas of Mondulkiri are dependent upon. By motivating the communities with processing of wild honey, the intimate relations between people, forests and non-timber forest products are promoted.

Forest honey from the wild bee species living in protected areas and community forests has the potential to attract domestic and international markets if honey products meet standard requirements with regard to quality, quantity, price, packaging and product use. To ensure that forest honey collection is a sustainable community livelihood, honey collectors handle harvesting following proper methods, adopt hygienic and standardized practices in honey processing and product packaging with attractive labeling.



A community forest in Pich Chenda district in Mondulkiri province, where members of the indigenous Bunong community demonstrated how they cultivate and collect the province's prized wild honey. The EU supports efforts by the Bunong to get titles to their traditional lands.

The largest indigenous tribal group in Mondulkiri, the Bunong are largely animists. They speak a Mon-Khmer language, and are believed to have lived in what is now eastern Cambodia for 2,000 years.