PM rushes Covid-19 jab drive

Mom Kunthear

RIME Minister Hun Sen has instructed the vaccination team from the Ministry of National Defence to accelerate its campaign and immunise the roughly 520,000 residents in the red zone and not to worry about a shortage as one million additional doses of vaccines are scheduled to arrive this month.

In an audio message on May 5, Hun Sen said the ad-hoc national commission for Covid-19 vaccination programme had provided 900,000 doses of vaccines to the defence ministry for inoculating residents and workers in the red zones, which could cover around 450,000 people while more than 520,000 people are currently living there.

“I want to stress that in the red zone, unless all people are vaccinated, we cannot open it. I want to make it clear that we don’t have a shortage of vaccines for all the 520,000 people in the red zone because one million doses of vaccines will arrive on May 11 and 15,” he said.

He told defence minister Tea Banh to complete administration of the first doses by May 15 for all the 520,000 residents in the zones because facing hardship and therefore should be prioritised.

“We will shower everyone in Phnom Penh and Kandal province with vaccines, but first we must do this in the red zones. So, sooner than later, Phnom Penh and Kandal province will have plenty of vaccines that we have procured from China, a vaccine source that has never dried up,” Hun Sen said.

The military kicked off the vaccination campaign in the red zones on May 1 with a goal to vaccinate all of the people living there in one month.

The defence ministry said in its report on May 5 that in the first four days they have vaccinated nearly 150,000 people in the target districts of Meanchey, Dangkor, Por Sen Chey and Kambol.

Ith Sarath – Deputy Commander-in-Chief and Joint Chief-of-Staff of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces – said there are 37 vaccination units deployed at 54 locations within the red zones.

As of May 4, Cambodia had vaccinated 1,525,447 people across the country, according to the Ministry of Health.

Garment, travel goods, footwear exports drop 6%

Hin Pisei

THE Kingdom exported $2.410 billion worth of garments, footwear and travel goods in the first quarter of this year, shrinking 6.48 per cent from $2.577 billion in the corresponding period of 2020, according to data from the General Department of Customs and Excise of Cambodia.

Analysed by category, garments fell 6.43 per cent from $1,897 to $1,775 billion, footwear slumped 7.33 per cent from $341 to $316 million, and travel goods – including suitcases, backpacks, handbags and wallets – declined 5.89 per cent from $338 to $319 million.

Cambodia Footwear Association president Ly Khunthay told The Post on May 5 that the ongoing global Covid-19 epidemic has forced people to stay indoors and has shut down the tourism sector of each country, resulting in plummeting demand for footwear.

He said, however, that the dip in the volume of exports in the first quarter had not been as steep as in the third and fourth quarters of 2020, though he did not provide any concrete figures.

India pledges $6.7B in Covid loans

INDEHA released $6.7 billion in cheap financing for vaccine makers, hospitals and other health firms on May 5, to counter the devastating coronavirus surge gripping the country.

Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das also vowed to deploy “unconventional” measures if the crisis worsens. He spoke as India announced a record 3,780 deaths in 24 hours, as well as 382,000 new cases.

This week it became the second country after the US to pass 20 million cases and hospitals across the country of 1.3 billion people have complained of chronic shortages of beds, oxygen, vaccines and key drugs.

“The devastating speed with which the virus affects different regions of the country has to be matched by swift and wide-ranging actions,” Das said.

The new measures – making it easier for banks to give cheap loans to hospitals, oxygen manufacturers and even patients – aim to improve access to emergency healthcare, he said.

The central bank will also give some general business borrowers more time to repay loans to help underpin the economy, Das said.

“The immediate objective is to preserve human life and restore livelihoods through all means possible,” he added.

India’s underfunded health care system has struggled to cope with the latest Covid-19 onslaught, with patients dying in hospital parking lots due to a lack of beds and oxygen.
**National**

B’bang hospital shut as Covid case found; transporter reopened

Lay Samean

BATTAMBANG provincial authorities temporarily closed Sampov Loun District Referral Hospital on May 3 after an in-patient tested positive for Covid-19.

A notice signed by provincial governor Nguyen Ratanak on May 3 said the hospital’s closure - located in Trapeang Prolit village of Sampov Loun District’s Santeepheap commune - is to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

The patient was identified as a 61-year-old resident of Tumreiv village in Malai district’s Malai commune.

“During the temporary closure, the hospital will be conditioned off and its in-patient and out-patient services will be suspended to find people who had direct and indirect contact with the 61-year-old,” the notice said.

People who had contact with patient must immediately notify the provincial health department administration’s working group.

The letter also stated that laws would be applied if individuals intentionally fail to comply with the administrative and health measures imposed by the government and the provincial administration.

Separately, the Battambang Provincial Administration has permitted Viar Buntam, Express Tour & Travel (VET Travel) to reopen some branches in Battambang town after 88 staff members tested negative for Covid-19.

Provincial Department of Information director Sous Sophneak said the provincial hall decided to allow the firm to reopen the locations from May 3 after test results from its seven branches in the province returned negative.

Prior to the suspension, a Viar Buntam driver transported goods from Bananay Meanchey province’s Poipet town to Battambang’s border districts including Sampov Loun and neighbouring Phnom Pook and Kamrieng districts, Sophneak said.

“Late, Pailin provincial authorities found the driver to be Covid-19 positive using the Rapid Antigen Test for Covid-19. But then the driver was tested at Battambang provincial referral hospital, and the result came back negative. So the provincial administration allowed the company to reopen,” he said.

The decisions dated May 5 said, “Cancel the 14-day quarantine requirement for travel in infected passengers from Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.”

The quarantine measure was introduced on April 29 in a bid to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus from the country’s main Covid-19 hotspots.

Exemptions were granted to passengers who were travelling the province before travelling to other countries, travellers to hospitals, health centres, maternity centres or emergency medical facilities, passengers who are either public or private medical staff, civil servants, foreigners; armed forces who are carrying out missions for their countries, and people with essential and urgent reasons to skip quarantine, or as permitted by the authorities.

The decision dated May 5 said, “Cancel the 14-day quarantine requirement for travel in infected passengers from Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.”

Pheapishanok provincial governor Kouch Channreourn first imposed the quarantine requirement on April 29 in a bid to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus from the country’s main Covid-19 hotspots.

To make all reforms consistent and ensure that they support each other, we decided to name this process the ‘3+1’. That is because the other three related to administration have already been coordinated with each other, but the judicial reforms are different and harder to be made consistent with those three.

“When we talk about the judicial sector, it is related to the court system which is different from the others,” he said.

He said that to make the three other reform areas consistent with the judicial reforms, they needed a mechanism that included information and experience exchange as well as the exchange of documents.

When this is achieved, a common strategy will be set forth in the near future.

Pech Phey, Transparency International Cambodia (TI Cambodia) executive director, said the government reforms had made good progress, but there were still some points that needed more attention and clarification, such as monitoring and evaluating the national budget and other independent institutions tasked with oversight of the reforms.

“The core of reform in all of these sectors are strategic preparation and a clear work structure that effectively prevents corruption and bribery in all sectors.

“Attention should be paid to how to save money with the national budget and how to spend the budget with efficiency, because the overall amount in our national budget is low,” he said.
Rules set for factory reopenings

Mem Kuntheav

THE Labour Advisary Committee (LAC) of the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training issued a set of procedures to be applied for factory workers following the lockdown is lifted at the onset of May 6. The committee has decided that all of the workers in each factory will work just two weeks per month, with 50 per cent of the workforce working the first two weeks each month while the other 50 per cent working the following two weeks in an alternating scheme. However, factories with 80 per cent of their workers vaccinated – even with their first dose – will not be forced to run at half-capacity, but are expected to maintain Covid-19 preventive measures.

This decision was made at a video conference meeting attended by 28 LAC members on May 4, according to a statement released by the labour ministry. It said the ministry had proposed to the government suggesting temporal conditions determining the factories where workers had contracted Covid-19.

“When the factories and enterprises reopen after the lockdown, they have to comply with this ruling by only permitting 50 per cent of the total workforce to work at once and the other 50 per cent to work the other two weeks,” the statement said. The first two weeks of the month are prioritised for workers who have been vaccinated, either the first or second dose. However, they must not be among the residents of high-risk areas whose samples must be taken for testing.

Priority is also given to those who already have had their specimens taken for testing as certified by medical workers or the ministry’s medical staff. Corresponding to the amount of work being done, the employers have to pay 50 per cent of the minimum wage.

The factories and enterprises must provide each worker with a face mask during their shift and be equipped with sanitising agents. Workers must have their temperatures checked before work and good ventilation systems must be in place. The factories must have Covid-19 test kits on hand sufficient to test at least 10 per cent of the total workforce present. The factories must also take samples from workers for testing if their workplace location is changed from one building to another within the same factory.

Staff who have contact with outsiders such as those in the food services department, security guards, cleaners and others who are in charge of taking the samples and temperature checks must also be tested weekly.

The ministry requested the government provide food relief to the factory workers whose work is suspended or those who are undergoing treatment or quarantine.

The labour ministry stressed that workers living in red zones in the capital or provinces cannot go to work. Fa Saly, president of the National Trade Union Confederation, told The Post on May 5 that he was concerned about the factories reopening when the transmission rate remained high.

“I am concerned and I urge the ministries and enterprises in Phnom Penh and adjacent Takmao town in Kandal province to reconsider whether to reopen in order to avoid transmission among workers,” he said. LAC urged the government to provide vaccines to factory workers, tuk-tuk drivers, tenants living near factories and the staff at restaurants, resorts and hotels.

Garment workers during their lunch break outside the factory in Chak Angrae Krom commune of Phnom Penh’s Meanchey district.

INVITATION FOR BIDS

Ministry of Public Works and Transport

Second Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth Project: ADB Loan 3701-COM (COL)

Contract Ref: PMU/MPWT/TIIGP2/NCB/CW02a

Koh Tunsay Pier and Tourist Facilities

1. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) represented by the Ministry of Economy and Finance has received a Loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for Second Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth Project and intends to apply part of the Loan proceeds to pay for the Bidding Documents including essential equipment and key personnel.

2. The Ministry and Transport now invites sealed bids from eligible and qualified bidders for the Contract No. PMU/ MPWT/TIIGP2/NCB/CW02a. The construction period is fifteen (15) months from date of notification to commence. The Bidder evaluation and qualification criteria are included in Section II of the Bidding document.

3. Procurement will be conducted through National Competitive Bidding Procedures outlined in the Government’s Standard Operating Procedures on Procurement for Externally Financed Projects/Programs.

4. This invitation is open to all qualified bidders from eligible source countries as described in the Bidding Document.

5. Bidders’ attention is drawn to Sub-Clause 6.3 of the Instructions to Bidders (ITB) on the Qualification requirements. Qualification requirements include:

- The average annual volume of construction work of the successful bidder over the last three years (2018-2019 & 2020) shall be at least US$52.76 million.
- The minimum amount of liquid assets and/or credit facilities net of other contractual commitments of the successful bidder shall be at least US$0.35 million.
- The bidder has satisfactorily completed at least one contract similar in size and nature as prime contractor in the last five (5) years from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2020 (to comply with this requirement, works cited should be at least 70% complete, billed and paid with contractual value of the contract of not less than US$3.38 million. The similarity of the works experiences shall include: Building/Bridge Construction.
- For Cambodian Bidders: valid registration from the Ministry of Commerce (MOC), and Land Management Urban Planning and Construction (LMUPC) or Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MPWT), and a valid registration/permit/patent issued by the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF).

- Bidders with duly audited financial statements by an independent firm, for the last three (3) years (2018, 2019 & 2020) demonstrating soundness of its financial position. As a minimum, the bidder’s net worth for the last three (3) years calculated as the difference between total assets and total liabilities should be positive. The financial statements and its audit should not violate the relevant national accounting standards.

- The qualification criteria are more completely described in the Sub-Clause 6.3 and 6.1(h) of the Instructions to Bidders in the Bidding Documents including essential equipment and key personnel.

6. To obtain further information from and inspect the Bidding Documents, Bidders should contact the following (contact details of the Bidding Documents including essential equipment and key personnel.

- i. General Departments of International Cooperation and Debt Management of the Ministry of Economic and Financial Located at St. 92, Sangkat Wat Phnom, Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh Cambodia, Tel: 023 724 664, Fax: 023 724 799
- ii. Ms. Siti Hasanah, Urban Development Specialist, Asian Development Bank, 6, ADB, Avenue, Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila, Philippines, Email: shauna@adblog.org

7. Late bids will be rejected. Bids will be immediately opened before 10:00 a.m. (Cambodia Standard Time), Monday through Friday, except public holidays.

8. A complete set of Bidding Documents may be purchased by interested bidders on the submission of a written application to the address above and upon payment of a non-refundable fee of USD 150.00 or its equivalent in Cambodian Riel being 600,000.00 Riel. The method of payment will be in cash or deposit to Bank Account Name:No; General Department of National Treasury:000000010000013350 of National Bank of Cambodia. The Bidding Documents may be picked up in person, or may be sent by email or courier, at the discretion of the bidder, but the bidder has to deposit the fee at the above bank account and to pay for courier charge by his/her arrangement as appropriate. Other than payment of the non-refundable fee specified above, there are no conditions for the purchase of the bidding documents.

9. In case of any difficulty in purchase of the Bidding Documents, interested parties may contact in writing:

H.E. Yang Puth
Project Director
Second Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth Project
PMU Office, First Floor, Road 598, Sangkat Chrung Chareums II, Khan Oumes, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
Tel/Fax: +855 23 426 110/ Mail: yang_puth@yahoo.com

10. Bids must be delivered to the address below (Para. 12) on or before 10:00 a.m. (Cambodia Standard Time) on 12 June 2021. Late bids will be rejected. Bids will be immediately opened after the deadline for submission of bid in the presence of the bidders’ representatives who choose to attend in person at the address above at 10:00 a.m. (Cambodia Standard Time) on 12 June 2021.

11. The minimum amount of liquid assets and/or credit facilities net of other contractual commitments of the successful bidder shall be at least US$0.35 million.

12. The address referred to above is:

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 ii. Ministry of Economy and Finance has received a Loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for Second Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth Project and intends to apply part of the Loan proceeds to pay for the Bidding Documents including essential equipment and key personnel.

13. The address referred to above is:

National

Mobile vendor's bread lands five in Anlong Veng referral hospital

Five people were rushed to Anlong Veng district referral hospital in Oddar Meanchey province on May 4 for food poisoning after eating bread bought from a motorcycle rider in the district’s Anlong Veng commune.

District police chief Sim Vanna identified the victims. Vanna said they then reported the incident to Anlong Veng commune police, who rushed them to hospital. They recovered and returned home the next day.

People receive treatment at Anlong Veng district referral hospital in Oddar Meanchey, 45 km from Phnom Penh. A 7-year-old boy died after consuming a slice of bread bought from a motorcycle rider.
Unity open heart matter in times of duress, Sokha says

Nov Sivutha

FORMER opposition leader Kem Sokha on Saturday said Cambodians should not lose hope or reject assistance from compartmentalisation and foreign “friends” amidst the ongoing community outbreak of Covid-19.

Sokha, former president of the Supreme Court-dissolved Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), made the call after meeting Carmen Moreno, head of the EU delegation in Cambodia, at his home in Phnom Penh.

In a Facebook post on May 4, Sokha said he had been purchasing and providing food and other supplies to nearly 300 people affected by the pandemic every month. But this was interrupted due to the lockdown of the capital and adjacent Kandal town in Kampong Chhnang province imposed, he said without elaborating.

He said that every month he usually meets with foreign ambassadors to exchange views and ask them to continue providing support to Cambodians.

“I believe that Cambodia is a small country and its people are still poor. When there is a crisis, we always need assistance in the form of equipment, financing, technical help, and perspectives from the international community so they offer it to us,” he said.

“We must not lose hope or reject the assistance provided on a humanitarian basis from our friends.

“But like I have said and done, what is really important is to start with the Cambodian people and increase our understanding about the livelihoods of our people and the country. We must love our people and participate in helping Cambodia in this difficult time.

“There must be forgiveness and unity among Cambodians. No one should put their individual interests ahead of Cambodians,” he said.

Sokha told reporters that Cambodia and the bloc should be conducted between the government that was elected in Cambodia and the elected representatives of the EU.

“The Moreno clearly knows this already because she is a diplomat, but if she talks to Sokha what is the process of that? She could come and talk with the government that was elected by the will of the people,” he said.

Wing Agents lead way with philanthropic endeavours during Covid-19 outbreak

Wing Cash Xpress Agents go the extra mile to help local communities with personal donations.

Wing Cash Xpress agents nationwide made further benevolent gestures with donations to support vulnerable local communities striving to make ends meet during the Covid-19 outbreak.

From Stung Meanchey district in Phnom Penh to the northeast of Cambodia, agents are sharing food and daily essentials to those in need in their neighbourhoods.

“Solidarity is critical in overcoming difficulties arising from such crisis situations. We are very proud that many of our agents have again made such inspiring contributions. Their generous acts will contribute to our community during times of need. I am also asking my relatives to join this charitable cause,” she said.

Wing’s chief consumer business officer Cheaengrong Snoun, who has been monitoring these selfless acts of charity, said they shared these stories online, advised them to follow all safety measures while helping others.

“We have seen many agents in Battambang, Baray Meanchey, Kampong Chhnang, Mondulkiri and other provinces making donations to support their nearby communities.

“We have asked them to adhere to health safety procedures including wearing face masks, maintaining social distancing and following all safety markings while they are donating,” he said.

Wing also joined the philanthropic endeavours by waiving money transfer fees for all Wing to Wing transactions using the Wing Money App and increasing the daily money transfer limits to $20,000.

The moves make it easier for all Cambodians to send money to their families while at the same time reducing the spread of the pandemic.

WingMail is also providing free delivery services to struggling merchants and to those purchasing food, groceries and essential items via the Wing Money App.

The general public can also make instant digital payments through the app for essential services such as utility payments, phone top-ups, payments to merchants and delivery services.

Six Chinese nabbed for illegally crossing int’l border from VN

Kim Saron

SIX Chinese men who were smuggled in from Vietnam were arrested and sent to a quarantine centre in Svay Rieng province’s Svay Rieng town on the night of May 3 after residents spotted them walking through Prasot 2 village in Svay Teap district’s Kandieng Reay commune.

Svay Teap district police chief Khes Sophorn on May 5 identified the Chinese men, aged 18 to 22, who were referred to the higher authorities for further action following the quarantine.

“After we arrested and interrogated them, we sent them to the quarantine centre in Svay Rieng town. As for further steps, I do not know what actions my superiors will decide on,” Sophorn said.

According to the villagers, at around 8pm on May 3 the residents of Kandieng Reay commune’s Prasot 2 village spotted the Chinese nationals walking through their village.

As the people were all well aware of the border closure orders and the Ministry of Health’s Covid-19 preventive measures, they reported their presence to the Kandieng Reay commune police.

The provincial immigration police were also called in to help deal with the situation.

“We do not have passports with them, and because of the fear of infection with Covid-19 the authorities decided to take them to the quarantine centres now before taking further action,” Sophorn said.

Sar Kes, director of the provincial immigration police office, declined to provide further details, saying only that further legal action would be taken.

“Traveling without passports is illegal, and so is crossing the border when it is closed. But I didn’t dare go near them for now, we need to wait until they have finished their quarantine period,” he said.

A police officer in Svay Teap district who asked not to be named said the Chinese nationals illegally crossed the border from Vietnam.

Citing the authority’s preliminary conclusions, he said it was believed that they took taxi from the Bavet international border towards the Svay Rieng provincial town, but due to the unfavourable situation and the driver’s fear of authorities guarding the border area, he dropped the Chinese men halfway.

Tann SeakLeang gives a pack of rice, fish cans, and fish sauce to her neighbour in front of her Wing’s kiosk. SUPPLIED

Wing agent and her family set up donation in front of their kiosk. SUPPLIED

Tann SeakLeang gives a pack of rice, fish cans, and fish sauce to her neighbour in front of her Wing’s kiosk. SUPPLIED

Wing agent and her family set up donation in front of their kiosk. SUPPLIED
Cambodia, Singapore team up for online education conference

Yeon Dara

THE Cambodian Ministry of Education and Singapore’s National Institute of Education co-organised an online training course on 21st century school leadership and education management for school administrators, inspectors and national trainers beginning from May 4 with sessions running through September 30.

The workshop was held under the theme 21st Century School Management Tasks and 21st Century School Management Guidelines for 128 school administrators, inspectors and national trainers.

Education minister Hang Chuon Naron said during the opening ceremony via video conference on May 4 that the workshop was designed to develop the capacity of these target groups to lead schools, compile documents for further training for other school administrations and ensure sustainability within the framework of the education ministry.

“School effectiveness depends on leadership with responsibility, autonomy, evaluation and student’s parents and community involvement, management and leadership of the school management, continuous human resource development, teaching materials, infrastructure and financial resources,” he said.

Naron thanked Singapore’s National Institute of Education and the Temasek Foundation for their cooperation in training school management, inspectors and national trainers despite the Covid-19 crisis.

Education ministry spokesman Ros Soveacha said his ministry generally welcomes positive cooperation from ministries, institutions and all stakeholders in promoting digital education in line with the Education Strategic Plan 2019-2023 in response to Cambodia’s digital economy.

He said that in the next phase of Singapore’s National Institute of Education will be committed to achieving the fourth sustainable development goal on education based on the principles of quality, equity, inclusiveness and lifelong learning.

“On this basis, the education ministry has set two policies – the first is to ensure quality education with an equity, inclusiveness, and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all, and second is to ensure the effectiveness of leadership and management of educational officials at all levels.”

CSOs call for a permanent ban on alcohol advertising

Leng Kimmarita

AN ALLIANCE of nearly 40 civil society organisations lauded the government’s successful ban on all forms of alcoholic drink advertising during the Covid-19 outbreak but called for a permanently ban.

The government suspended the advertising of alcoholic drinks in the media for the whole April, including a ban on the sale and consumption across the country to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

A joint statement issued by the group on May 4 said that currently the number of Covid-19 cases in Cambodia was of great concern as the disease was spreading and threatening people’s lives.

The group emphasised that consumption of alcohol increased the risk of contracting Covid-19 and has a negative impact on health and social wellbeing, such as violence and the cause of more than 200 diseases, as confirmed by a report from the World Health Organisation in 2012.

Ministry of Information spokesman Meas Sophoan said on May 4 that the ministry had not decided on this request because Cambodia does not yet have a law on administering the consumption and sale of alcohol.

However, he stressed that given its success in suspending the distribution and sale of alcohol during the outbreak, the ministry will consider issuing further measures as the Covid-19 outbreak has not eased.

“Given the ongoing Covid-19 epidemic development, the ministry is looking into this,” he said.

Heavy rains, floods forecast as monsoon season beckons

Kheuth Sophak Chakrya

THIS year’s rainy season could see some provinces in the Mekong River Basin catchment area are at the centre of lands along the rivers vulnerable to floods, according to the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology’s first annual Mekong River flood forecast.

The forecast was announced earlier this week after a group of meteorologists and hydrologists determined that Cambodia was affected by weather that was 10 per cent El Nino (hot), 30 per cent La Nina (cold), and 60 per cent Neutral.

It said these conditions would cause heavy rainfall across the country.

The Mekong, Tonle Sap and Tonle Bassac rivers’ water levels are now higher than or close to the average of many years ago.

“Referring to the current Mekong River’s situation, weather factor and analysis on the relation between minimum and maximum water levels in 2021, the water level may reach 9.8m, which is considered a medium flood,” water resources minister Lim Kean Hor said.

He said that from May to October, there will be heavy rainfall in both the Mekong River Basin and across Cambodia, which is likely to trigger floods in the middle or at the end of the rainy season.

On the afternoon of May 4, Ministry spokesman Chan Sopha called on authorities in the Mekong Basin and the central lowlands adjacent to the Mekong River and its tributaries in Cambodia to increase vigilance.

“Right now, the water level of the Mekong River is still low, but it is likely to rise between August and September. Therefore, the people and relevant authorities should be better prepared to respond to and reduce the risk of floods that may occur this year,” he said.

Kao Vt, a senior adviser at the National Committee for Disaster Management, told The Post that to respond to and reduce the risk of floods, NCDM has already prepared the resources necessary to rescue people vulnerable to floods.

“At the moment, our team is helping build houses and provide food to families affected by the typhoon and lightning strikes, as well as families affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. As for our response to floods, we are ready, even though there are no floods yet,” he said.

Seventeen arrested in B’bang alcohol, drug raid sent to court

Lay Samean

POLICE sent 17 of 26 people arrested in a raid on a restaurant for drinking alcohol and using drugs to court.

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9 US franchising companies eye Cambodia entry

May Kunmakara

INE famous US franchising companies are looking for business opportunities and expansion into Cambodia to build a foothold for a strong foundation in Southeast Asia.

The US embassy in Phnom Penh, in partnership with the US Foreign Commercial Service and with support from the American Chamber of Commerce in Cambodia (AmCham), hosted the Cambodia Franchise Expo on May 5.


Cambodians seek out these high-quality products and services, and there is an appetite for more. This event is just one of many conduc-
ted by the US embassy to introduce more US companies to Cambodia.

You see many of these brands in Southeast Asia today – Bangkok, Singapore and Ho Chi Minh City. The time is right to see them in Phnom Penh as well.

I am confident that the expo will raise awareness of excellent business opportunities and establish connec-
tions that yield results for both coun-
tries,” Murphy said.

AmCham president Anthony Galliano told The Post on May 5 that the CCC will arrange exhibitions, in order to further promote investment opportunities and attract foreign investors.

US franchises present a superb oppor-
tunity for entrepreneurs in Cam-

The Kingdom was the US’ 66th largest goods trading partner in 2018, achiev-
ing $4.3 billion in bilateral trade.

Rising shipping costs affecting import orders

Continued from page 1

abroad from Cambodia since the sec-
ond quarter of 2020. Rising shipping costs are more or less affecting all orders, especially to distant destinations such as the US and Europe, he said.

“Since mid-2020, shipping costs have risen steeply, now five times higher to some destinations than in 2019” before the Covid-19 outbreak, Chanthy said.

The Kingdom exported $17.21537 billion in 2020, according to the Ministry of Commerce, and saw exports to the world’s largest economy skyrocket last year, growing by 40 per cent to reach $5.36 billion.

Commerce ministry invites businesses to China import event

Thieu Vireak

The Ministry of Commerce has called on local traders, businessmen and enterprises to participate in the 4th China International Import Expo (CIIE) and seize opportunities to forge new partnerships and expand exports to the world’s largest market.

The trade fair will be held on November 5-10 in Shanghai and the Kingdom will participate in promoting products and services online to the international arena, the ministry said on April 28.

Cambodia will take part in the event to find markets for domestic products, promote investment opportunities and attract foreign investors, it said, adding that the Kingdom will also send companies with branches or distribution networks in China to attend in-person and set up booths.

We invite private companies doing business in Cambodia, or those with branches or distributors in China who wish to participate in the fourth inter-
national import exposition timely to meet the needs of visitors and exhibitors to the Business Affairs Department under the Ministry of Commerce’s General Department of Trade Promo-
tion before May 5, 2021, as scheduled, so that the ministry can help.

Private companies planning to seek investment partners or sign memorandum of understandings with participating countries should also contact the ministry immedi-
ately,” the ministry said.

Cambodia Chamber of Commerce (CCC) vice-president Lim Heng told The Post on May 5 that the CCC will arrange for its members to attend the CIIE and find more investment partners.

Heng stressed that the trade fair is very important for Cambodia to find international partners for trade, espe-
cially in agro-business and technology.

“We have already received this information from the Ministry of Commerce and have been promoting it to members of the commerce chamber who are looking for part-
ners or to do business with China and to attend and exhibits, in order to fur-
ther enhance cooperation,” he said.

While he noted that a sizable por-
tion of attendees are likely to join virtually, Heng did not have an esti-
mate for the number of CCC mem-
bers who will participate.

commerce ministry invites businesses to China import event

Thieu Vireak

The Ministry of Commerce has called on local traders, businessmen and enterprises to participate in the 4th China International Import Expo (CIIE) and seize opportunities to forge new partnerships and expand exports to the world’s largest market. The trade fair will be held on November 5-10 in Shanghai and the Kingdom will participate in promoting products and services online to the international arena, the ministry said on April 28.

Cambodia will take part in the event to find markets for domestic products, promote investment opportunities and attract foreign investors, it said, adding that the Kingdom will also send companies with branches or distribution networks in China to attend in-person and set up booths.

We invite private companies doing business in Cambodia, or those with branches or distributors in China who wish to participate in the fourth international import exposition timely to meet the needs of visitors and exhibitors to the Business Affairs Department under the Ministry of Commerce’s General Department of Trade Promotion before May 5, 2021, as scheduled, so that the ministry can help.

Private companies planning to seek investment partners or sign memorandum of understandings with participating countries should also contact the ministry immediately,” the ministry said.

Cambodia Chamber of Commerce (CCC) vice-president Lim Heng told The Post on May 5 that the CCC will arrange for its members to attend the CIIE and find more investment partners.

Heng stressed that the trade fair is very important for Cambodia to find international partners for trade, especially in agro-business and technology.

“We have already received this information from the Ministry of Commerce and have been promoting it to members of the commerce chamber who are looking for partners or to do business with China and to attend exhibitions, in order to further enhance cooperation,” he said.

While he noted that a sizable portion of attendees are likely to join virtually, Heng did not have an estimate for the number of CCC members who will participate.
Gov’t remains firm on control of aquaculture goods imports

Hin Pisei

The government has reaffirmed its stringent stance on the smuggling of aquaculture products into the Kingdom as a means to sustain local production. The confirmation came after a handful of calls were made by the Cambodian Aquaculture Association (CAA) over recent weeks concerning illegal imports.

A deputy for the Ministry of Economy and Finance has confirmed that restrictions on the smuggling of aquaculture products have been tightened by the General Department of Customs and Excise since last month after hearing the pleas of the aquaculture sector in late March.

His remark was in response to a May 2 letter from the CAA calling on the three directly-involved ministries – the ministries of Economy and Finance, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and Commerce – to increase restrictions on fish imports and put specific measures in place to address market issues and risks of the aquaculture sector in Cambodia.

The letter stated: “According to practical observations in April, the aquaculturists who have already sold all the fish in their ponds are very hesitant to continue raising more because they had to do so at prices below production costs, and they anticipate that the aquaculture market in Cambodia seemingly no longer has a clear future.”

Finance ministry spokesman Meas Sokhon told The Post on Monday that the domestic aquaculture sector has been troubled since the public outcry over large-scale fish imports.

He said the GDOE promptly issued Instruction No 564/21, dated March 26, to further strengthen and organise the management and prevention of smuggling of aquaculture goods.

Tariffs and customs duties apply to all fisheries imports, which require permits from the agriculture ministry in accordance with Sub-Decree No 17, dated February 26, 2020, legislation that introduced a list of prohibited and limited goods, he added.

“The customs unit is a law enforcement unit. All permits to import from the customs authority are in line with decisions made and permissions granted by the agriculture ministry in accordance with the regulations in force,” Soken said.

Commerce ministry spokesman Seang Thay declined to comment, referring inquiries to the finance ministry, or the “lead one”, as he described.

CAA president Sok Raden told The Post on April 27 that the illegal importation of large quantities of aquaculture products from neighbouring countries on a daily basis is a constant source of difficulties for local farmers.

Illegal imports with unclear quality control not only undermine plans towards exporting Cambodian aquaculture products to international markets, but even the begging operations that serve domestic needs could face bankruptcy,” he said.

According to the CAA, the 315 fish farms run by its members are on track to boost production by this month to 10,356 tonnes – 7,298 of “pur” (Pangasius djamal), 1,408 of “chok” (giant snakehead or Channa micropeltes), 893 of “po” (Pangasius larndaula), 155 of “andeng” (carp of the Clarias genus) and 191 of other fish species.

Number of new firms in Vietnam surges at fastest pace since 2017

THI number of new enterprises established in Vietnam in the first four months of 2021 rose 17.5 per cent from a year earlier, the fastest growth since 2017, and it increased in all economic sectors, according to the General Statistics Office (GSO).

Between January and April, nearly 44,000 new firms were set up with 827.7 trillion (1.2 billion) worth of capital and 340,390 employees registered, up 17.5 per cent, 41 per cent, and 7.8 per cent, respectively, from the same period last year.

The registered capital averaged 14.2 billion dong per business, rising 20 per cent year-on-year.

The total capital poured into the economy topped 1.42 quadrillion dong (94.1 billion) in the first four months of this year.

To create further momentum, the GSO’s Industrial and Construction Statistics Department Pham Dinh Thuy said it is necessary to stimulate investment among export manufacturers so as to increase supply over global markets are reopened and to capitalise on chances generated by free trade agreements, especially the one between Vietnam and the EU.

She also pointed out the need to swiftly develop supporting industries to ease the burden on the import of input materials.

Businesses expect the government will invest more in the transport system to boost the connectivity between key production areas and international ports of entry, develop the logistics network, set up technical centres to help companies meet export standards, and push ahead with strongly improving the business climate.

They added.

UK, India poised to kick off formal FTA talks in 2021

BRITAIN and India will begin high-level trade talks as soon as this month in a sign of growing economic ties. Under a post-Brexit “Global Britain” strategy, Prime Minister Boris Johnson is pivoting its foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific region, signing trade deals with countries including Japan and Singapore.

UK International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said India and Britain would start negotiations on an agreement “in the autumn”, following the announcement of a preliminary “Enhanced Trade Partner- ship” deal.

“We want to get these negotiations completed as soon as possible,” she told Sky News during an interview on Saturday, calling on trade partners to “work together to stimulate investment among the connectivity between trading industries to ease the burden on the transport system to boost the connectivity between key production areas and international ports of entry, develop the logistics network, set up technical centres to help companies meet export standards, and push ahead with strongly improving the business climate.

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The roadmap includes commitments to strengthen co-op- eration in areas such as health, climate, trade, education, sci- ence and technology, and defence.

Truss said the status of its relationship with Britain to a “comprehensive strategic partner” – the first with a Euro- pean power, Downing Street said in a statement. “The agreements we have made today mark the begin- ning of a new era in the UK-India relationship,” Johnson said.

Britain has close ties with India, where it was the colonial power until 1947. Some 1.6 mil- lion people in Britain are of Indian origin.

Truss said two-way trade between the countries stood at £32 billion, and she announced a “2030 roadmap” for closer ties before the end of the decade.

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The government approved six more investment projects with capital of over $106 million, even as the Covid-19 pandemic ravages the Cambodian economy, leading to a slowdown in construction projects.

In a May 5 press release, the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC) said it had approved registration certificates for Jin Bei Palace Co Ltd’s $48.7 million 195-room five-star hotel in Cambodia’s Village 4 in Sihanoukville, which the CDC estimates will create 380 new jobs.

It also gave the nod to Quantech (Cambodia) International Co Ltd’s $29.7 million assembly plant for electronic components, especially those used in electronic face masks and air purifiers. The project is set to be in Tram Kak district’s Polpe commune of Takeo province and provide 628 jobs.

Santhelys Pharmaceutical Co Ltd’s $12.5 million pharmaceutical factory in Khsach Kandal district’s Saaling commune of Kandal province, and Viankang Biological Technology Co Ltd’s $2.9 million food processing plant in Stung Hav district’s Tumnob Folok commune of Preah Sihanouk province will bring in 215 and 210 jobs.

Lesso (Cambodia) Trading Co Ltd’s $4.3 million PVC pipe and fittings factory in Ang Sioun’s Chhok Chhnesea Neak commune of Kandal province, and Ocean Treasure Dyeing Neang commune of Kandal province will bring significant socio-economic benefits to the Kingdom.

Hong Vanak, director of International Economics at the Royal Academy of Cambodia, told The Post last month that each direct investment project in Kong Pisei district’s Preah Sihanouk province will generate 201 and 218 jobs.

The office and residential sectors are seen to start improving only in 2022, to be supported by the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccination programme to the general population.

This is according to property consulting firm Colliers, which projected a 16 per cent vacancy rate for the residential property sector in the metropolis which would hit a record-high of 17.2 per cent by the end of this year.

This is higher than the 8.4 per cent vacancy rate during the Asian currency crisis. In the first quarter of 2021, vacancy rate hit 16.3 per cent.

Vacancy rate at shopping malls is seen to rise to 16 per cent this year, close to the record-high of 19 per cent seen in 2003. The rate stood at 12.5 per cent and further rose to 14 per cent in the first quarter of this year.

Office vacancy rates are projected to reach 12.5 per cent this year from only 4.1 per cent in the first quarter of 2020, when the pandemic was just unfolding, as existing tenants continue to rationalise office space by not renewing unused units and exercising pre-termination option.

In the first quarter of this year, vacancy rate was at 11 per cent, weighed down by the slowdown in take-up of the once high-flying Philippine online gaming operators.

While we have seen quarterly improvement, clearly we are not out of the woods yet so payment terms and rental will have to be flexible,” Colliers managing director Richard Raymundo said in a briefing on April 30.

Property prices are likewise softening, but not crashing as was seen during the Asian crisis, Raymundo noted, adding that the major difference this time around was that interest rates were at record low across the globe, unlike during the Asian crisis when monetary policy was tightened to address sharp currency devaluations.

In the residential sector, Colliers associate director Joey Bondoc said the pandemic continued to hamper residential demand in both the presale and secondary markets. Colliers projects take-up to be driven by mid-income-to-luxury projects over the next 12 to 24 months.

In the first quarter of 2021, residential prices and rents declined further by 2.5 per cent and 1.6 per cent, respectively. Colliers expects further correction this year, albeit at a slower rate, after the significant drop recorded in 2020, when prices and rents decreased by 13.2 per cent and 7.8 per cent, respectively.

“Starting 2022, the pace of growth for prices and rents is expected to reach 1.5 per cent and 1.7 per cent, respectively, due to the government’s vaccine roll out and a rebound in office space absorption,” Bondoc said.

Prior to the pandemic, the average rise in prices reached 13.9 per cent yearly from 2015 to 2019.

Due to the impact of Covid-19 on the leasing market, Colliers said tenants were putting housing requirements on hold. Given the current leasing market situation, selected landlords are now offering discounts of 20 to 25 per cent, particularly in commercial developments with higher vacancies, including those in the Bay Area.

Aside from discounts, some tenants have also started asking for additional concessions such as discounted maintenance fees.

In the office sector, Colliers director Dom Fredrick Andaya reported that the industry had seen the highest transaction volume in the first quarter of 2021 since the lockdown began last year. However, the resurgence in Covid-19 cases halted the rise.

“In our view, Metro Manila’s office market demand recovery hinges on the pace of the Covid-19 vaccination programme. Increasing vaccinations should reduce the number of Covid cases and bolster confidence for companies to return to the office,” he said.

Office rents on average declined by 3.7 per cent quarter-on-quarter in the first quarter. For the full year, Colliers sees office rents dropping by 15 per cent before a slow recovery in 2022.

In the retail sector, Colliers projects shopping mall rents to decline by another five per cent quarter-on-quarter in the first quarter.

For the full year, Colliers sees office rents slowing recovery by about one per cent starting in 2023.

Public Domain
**PM deadline to form new Israel govt ends**

**ISRAEL** Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's mandate to form a government following an inconclusive election expired on May 5, giving his rivals a chance to take power and end the divisive prime minister's record tenure.

Netanyahu, on trial over corruption charges he denies, had a 28-day window to secure a coalition following the March 23 vote, Israel's fourth in less than two years.

The 71-year-old's right-wing Likud party won the most seats in the vote, but he and his allies came up short of an absolute majority in the 120-seat Knesset, Israel's parliament.

The results delivered by a deeply fractured electorate left Netanyahu with a daunting path towards 61 seats, as voters broadly chose not to reward him for a successful coronavirus vaccination campaign.

President Reuven Rivlin's office said in a statement that Netanyahu had informed the presidency that he was unable to form a government and so returned the mandate to the president.

In power from 1996 to 1999 and again since 2009, Netanyahu has acquired a reputation as a master political survivor and Israeli media had over the past four weeks feverishly speculated about deals he was hatching to stay in power.

But the obstacles that faced Netanyahu the morning after the vote remained largely unchanged.

A Netanyahu-led coalition would have required tacit cooperation between the conservative Islamic Raam party and the far-right Religious Zionism alliance, whose leaders have hurled incendiary anti-Arab rhetoric during their political careers.

Raam's leader Mansour Abbas had said he was open to any arrangement that improved living standards for Israel's 20 per cent Arab minority.

But Religious Zionism's leader Rabbi Eli Ben Dahan had repeatedly called Raam "terror supporters" who he refused to work with.

Netanyahu also could have made up the numbers by finding a way to bridge one of the greatest divides in the political scene, a bloc of immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa.

Rivlin said he would consult political leaders on May 5 evening "regarding the continuation of the process of forming a government".

He can assign a new 28-day mandate to another lawmaker, with opposition leader Yair Lapid being the most likely choice after his Yesh Atid party finished second in the vote.

Lapid has confirmed that he offered Bennett the chance to preserve right-wing governance but saw no path for the prime minister to clinch a viable coalition.

Likud on May 5 blasted Bennett for what it called "his refusal to form a right-wing government."

Bennett has long been viewed as a hardliner and enthusiastic supporter of Jewish settlement expansion on occupied Palestinian territory in the West Bank.

But he sought to highlight his business and management credentials as pandemic closures ravaged Israel's economy.

Netanyahu has said his top priority is avoiding a fifth election and that he would work towards a unity government if Netanyahu could not form a coalition.

Bennett may end up leading such a unity government, despite his Yamina party only controlling seven seats.

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Lapid has confirmed that he offered Bennett the chance to serve first as prime minister in a rotational coalition, in the interest of ending Netanyahu's tenure.

"There is an historic opportunity: To break down the barriers at the heart of Israeli society. To unite religious and secular, left and right and center," Lapid said on May 3.

"It's time to choose. Between a unity government or ongoing division."

The former television presenter said last week's stampede that killed 45 mainly ultra-Orthodox Jews at a religious festival was a consequence of Israel lacking a "functioning government".

He conceded that an ideologically divided coalition forged mainly through shared opposition against Netanyahu "won't be perfect", but would prioritise national interests.

Rather than tap another lawmaker to form a government, the president could appoint the Knesset to select a name, a move unlikely to break the deadlock that could accelerate Israel's return to the polls.

In a widely-criticised manoeuvre, Netanyahu and his allies have flirted with legislation to create a direct vote for prime minister, hoping he would emerge victorious in a divided field.

Likud members made moves to advance such legislation as the prime minister's mandate was expiring on May 4, but with little sign of success.

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**Fears for stranded Tigray children**

ETHIOPIA's Tigray war has separated thousands of children from their parents, and many now face dire and dangerous conditions in displacement camps, the charity Save the Children said on May 4.

"Many of these children were separated from their parents while fleeing for their lives during the conflict. Others have lost parents to the violence," the group said in a statement marking six months since fighting began.

Some children are "not in safe care arrangements", housed in single rooms where more than 50 people sleep, it said, pointing to the risk that they could be exposed to physical or sexual violence.

The UN's International Organisation for Migration reported in mid-April that more than one million people were displaced in Tigray, including 4,056 "separated" and 911 "unaccompanied" children.

That data was collected in March, meaning the true figures could be higher now.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray in November to detain and disarm leaders of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the regional ruling party that once dominated national politics.

He said the move came in response to TPLF attacks on federal army camps.

Abiy declared victory after federal forces took the regional capital Mekele, but TPLF leaders remain on the run and fighting continues.

Save the Children is far from the only group sounding the alarm about sexual violence, which has been rampant during the conflict.

The International Rescue Committee on May 3 said rape was "being used as a weapon", and that women and girls faced "widespread abuse including mass rape and exploitation".

"Women are having to engage in sexually exploitative relationships, receiving small amounts of money, food and/or shelter to survive and feed their children," said Victor Otero, policy and advocacy adviser for the International Rescue Committee.

The US and EU are clamouring for the withdrawal of Eritrean troops, who have been implicated in some of the worst attacks on civilians documented so far, including brutal gang rapes.

Eritrea denies involvement in atrocities.

World leaders are also ramping up pressure on Abiy's government to pursue a political resolution to the conflict, but Ethiopian officials say fixing is minimal and normalcy is returning.

Over the weekend Abiy's Council of Ministers approved a resolution classifying the TPLF as a terrorist group, dealing a blow to the prospect of peace talks.

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**Mexican leader vows probe of metro crash**

MEXICAN President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on May 4 promised a full investigation involving international experts into a metro accident that left at least 23 dead in the capital.

"A thorough investigation will be carried out . . . to know the truth," Lopez Obrador said at his daily news conference.

"From that the responsibility will be established," he added.

The left-wing populist said that the investigation was in the hands of the federal and Mexico City prosecutors.

"We cannot get into speculation, much less blame the possible perpetrators without having proof. We will have the investigation carried out sooner," Lopez Obrador said.

The metro line that partially collapsed on May 3’s night was built while Secretary of External Affairs Marcelo Ebrard, a close ally of Lopez Obrador, was mayor of the capital from 2006-2012.

Ebrard told the same news conference that it was "a very sad day for everyone" and said he shared the outrage and pain over the tragedy.

"For my part, I put myself at the full disposal of the authorities," he said.

"I understand that there are many motivations of a political nature," added Ebrard, considered among the possible ruling party candidates for the 2024 presidential election.

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An aerial view shows the site of a metro train accident after an overpass partially collapsed in Mexico City on Tuesday. **The Phenom Post**
US envoy for climate John Kerry said nations were moving too slowly to achieve the goal of checking warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times.

“Climate woes: Islands face ‘beyond existential’ threat”

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US ex-cop convicted of Floyd murder seeks new trial

Derek Chauvin, the white US ex-policeman convicted of murdering the African-American man George Floyd, on May 4 asked for a new trial on charges of jury and prosecution misconduct. The 45-year-old—who knelt on Floyd’s neck for more than nine minutes—faces up to 40 years in prison after being found guilty last month in a case that prompted a national reckoning on racial injustice and police brutality.

Chauvin’s defence attorney argued that his client did not get a fair trial due to publicity around the case, court and prosecution errors, as well as “race-based pressure” on the jury.

“The publicity here was so pervasive and so prejudicial before and during this trial that it amounted to a structural defect in the proceedings,” Nelson wrote.

The filing came as the impartiality of a juror in the case has been brought into question after a photo surfaced of him at an anti-racism rally.

Legal experts had said Chauvin’s defence attorney could potentially use the photo of juror Brandon Mitchell as grounds to appeal the verdict, though the matter was not mentioned in May 4’s pleading.

In the photo, Mitchell, a 31-year-old Black man, is wearing a T-shirt with a picture of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr on it, as well as the words “Get Your Knee Off Our Necks” and the letters “BLM” for Black Lives Matter.

Mitchell is one of only two jurors who have publicly identified themselves since the high-profile trial.

In a questionnaire, potential jurors were asked if they had taken part in any of the protests against police brutality that followed Floyd’s May 25, 2020 death.

Mitchell said he had not and could serve impartially.

He told the Minneapolis Star Tribune that the photo was taken while he was on march he attended in Washington in August 2020 to mark the anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech.

Jeffrey Frederich, a jury selection expert, said Mitchell’s answer may be “technically correct” since the Washington event was billed as a commemoration.

“Will be up to the judge to conduct questioning and to make a determination as to whether or not he felt that this juror was biased and, possibly, had lied during the course of voir dire or on the juror questionnaire,” Frederick told AFP.

The judge would then decide whether it “reaches a standard for affecting the outcome of the trial”, he said.

“The bar is high in terms of misconduct and the granting of a new trial,” he added. “Such determinations are rare.”

Steve Teller, another jury selection expert, said, “Judges do not want to declare mistakes, particularly in a case where there has been a verdict and given the special circumstances of this case.” Teller said.

Egypt buys $4.8b in Rafale fighter jets from France

EGYPT’S military has confirmed it ordered 30 Rafale jets from French defence firm Dassault Aviation to shore up national security.

The order, which follows the 2015 purchase of 24 Rafale jets, will be financed through a 10-year loan, the military said in a statement late on May 3.

Investigative site Disclose had reported earlier on May 3 that the order was part of a secret mega-defence deal worth almost $4 billion ($4.8 billion).

Egypt is the world’s third biggest arms importer after Saudi Arabia and India, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Its arms purchases grew by 1.7 per cent over the last decade and it has diversified its sourcing beyond the US, buying military equipment from France, Germany and Russia, the institute said in a report released earlier this year.

The new Rafale deal “reinforces the strategic and military partnership between France and Egypt”, French defence minister Florence Parly said in a statement on May 4.

“Contrary to press reports, this contract illustrates the strategic nature of the partnership that France maintains with Egypt, while our two countries are resolutely committed to the fight against terrorism and are working for stability in their regional security interests,” the statement added.

Cairo has positioned itself as a bulwark of stability in the region as the conflict in its western neighbour Libya, where President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and French counterpart Emmanuel Macron enjoy a close relationship built on mutual security interests.

At a joint press conference in Paris in December, Macron said the two countries face different regional security threats, with Egypt maintaining its “national security”.

Supplied content

Egypt buys $4.8B in Rafale fighter jets from France

A memorial to George Floyd on the Minneapolis street where he died.

US ex-cop convicted of Floyd murder seeks new trial

Egypt shows off three Rafale fighter jets newly delivered in 2015 under a previous deal with French defence firm Dassault Aviation.
Myanmar junta charges Japan journo for ‘fake news’ spreading

THE Myanmar junta has charged a Japanese journalist under a “fake news” law, a report said on May 4, in the latest blow to press freedom since the military seized power.

Freelance reporter Yuki Kitazumi was arrested last month and charged on May 3 – World Press Freedom Day – with spreading fake news, according to a report by Kyodo News agency.

He is one of 50 journalists currently held in Myanmar as part of the junta’s crackdown on widespread protests against its February 1 coup.

The country has been in turmoil since civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s government was ousted, with more than 750 people killed as security forces struggle to quash near-daily demonstrations against their rule.

Kyodo cited an unnamed Japanese embassy official saying Kitazumi had no health problems, despite spending several weeks in Yangon’s Insein prison, which has a long and unsavoury reputation for holding political prisoners.

Kitazumi has been in custody since April 18 - the second time he had been arrested since the coup.

In February, he was beaten up and briefly held during a crackdown on protesters but was later released.

Japan, for years a top aid donor to Myanmar, has been pressing for his release.

"Naturally, we will continue to do our utmost for the early release of the Japanese national being held," foreign minister Toshimitsu Motegi told Japanese journalists during a trip to Britain, according to national broadcaster NHK.

A total of 766 civilians have been killed in the military crackdown on protests, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a local monitoring group.

Kitazumi is the first foreign journalist to be charged since the coup.

A Polish photographer arrested while covering a protest in March was freed and deported after nearly two weeks in custody.

As well as arresting journalists, the generals have sought to clamp down on news of the crisis by shutting independent media outlets and throttling internet speeds.

The AAPP says there are 50 journalists in custody at the moment, 25 of whom have been prosecuted, while arrest warrants are out for another 29.

Despite the dangers, protesters continue to take to the streets, with early-morning demonstrations on May 4 in the second-biggest city Mandalay, as well as northern Kachin state.

In the southern region of Bago, five protesters were killed and another who was injured tried to plant a bomb in Pyi township, state media said.

The junta’s National League for Democracy (NLD) party was among those who died in the blast, state media added.

Bombs have exploded sporadically across the country in recent weeks, including with increasing frequency in Yangon.

The military has defended its seizure of power, pointing to fraud allegations in the November election, and condemned protesters as rioters and terrorists.

China Navy to help Indonesia salvage sunken sub

CHINESE navy ships have arrived off Bali to help haul up a submarine that sank last month killing 53 crew, the Indonesian Navy said on May 4 as it geared up for a deep-sea salvage operation.

The help arrived after other foreign ships from Australia, Singapore and Malaysia left the archipelago, having assisted Indonesian authorities in finding the sunken vessel.

The KRI Nanggala 402 – one of five submarines in Indonesia’s fleet – disappeared last month while it was scheduled to take part in live torpedo training exercises.

An underwater rescue vehicle supplied by neighbouring Singapore gave visual confirmation that the German-built sub was lying on the sea floor more than 800m deep, broken in three parts, confirming there was no hope of finding survivors.

Two Chinese salvage ships were on standby in waters off Bali, while a third was expected to arrive later on May 4, the Indonesian Navy said, adding that Chinese Navy officials in Bali were helping to examine data collected on the submarine.

All three salvage ships can dive up to 4,500m deep.

Indonesia’s Navy said Beijing’s ambassador to the country had offered the help to defence minister Prabowo Subianto.

"The offer was welcomed by the Indonesian government," it said in a statement on May 4.

A vessel from Indonesia’s upstream oil and gas regulator task force SKK Migas, used for drilling operations, will also join the salvage operations. It has a crane with a capacity of 1,200 metric tonnes.

Last week the Navy said high-powered magnets and air balloons were among the possible options to lift the submarine.

An underwater robot will also be used in the operation, it said.

The military has yet to offer an official explanation for the sinking of the decades-old submarine, which was delivered to the Southeast Asian nation in 1981.

Singapore ups virus curbs as infection clusters grow

SINGAPORE announced a slew of new coronavirus restrictions on May 4 including a ban on spectators at sporting events as infections rise in the wealthy city-state.

After a partial lockdown and rigor- ous regime of testing and contact tracing, Covid-19 had almost disappeared in Singapore, with authorities in recent months reporting hardly any local transmission. But cases rose last week with officials announc- ing several new clusters, and in the last seven days 60 locally transmitted infections have been reported.

A cluster at one of Singapore’s biggest hospitals has grown to 40 cases, including an 81-year-old patient who died on May 1.

Gatherings will be limited to groups of five and more people will be required to work from home, officials said at a press conference on May 4.

Indoor gyms and fitness studios will be closed and numbers further reduced for conferences, weddings and funerals.

Travellers arriving from most coun- tries will be required to quarantine for three weeks instead of two.

"The next few weeks will be critical for us," said health minister Gan Kim Yong.

He warned of further measures if the situation deteriorates, including the possibility of another partial lock- down.

"With this set of measures … I think we probably will be able to avoid hav- ing to get to a circuit breaker situa- tion, but we cannot rule that out."

Singapore’s infection numbers have been very low compared with the rest of the world, but the new clusters have raised fears of a resurgence in the tiny city-state, whose economy suffered its worst recession last year due to the virus.

There are also concerns the clusters could scupper a travel bubble between Singapore and Hong Kong, due to begin on May 26 after an earlier failed attempt.

Singapore beat back serious corre- navirus outbreaks last year when the illness surged through crowded dormitories housing low-paid foreign workers, infecting tens of thousands.

But by global standards, its outbreak has been mild – officials in the city of 5.7 million have reported about 61,000 cases so far and 33 deaths.
Collectivist Asia fares better than individualist West during pandemic

Opinion

Paul Stapleton

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IN THESE difficult times where the importance of caring, showing kindness and sharing matters more than ever, artists Chea Serey and Adana Mama Legros felt the need to demonstrate the principles of hope and solidarity to people by integrating their art into an act of sharing by holding an exhibition and art auction aimed at raising funds for local NGOs that are working on social and psychological issues.

The initial idea for the 'The Art of Sharing' exhibition came about in early 2020 when the pandemic was just beginning. Adana says that a lot of time was spent working on the paintings – especially on the four special collaborative paintings – as well as the 18 individual art works that went into the exhibition.

After many weeks of work, in January 2021 the 22 paintings were hung in Sosoro museum and the exhibition was officially opened to the public. Due to the situation with the pandemic, the digital exhibition was opened simultaneously alongside the physical one, so that people could digitally experience it in interactive-3D as if they were there walking through the exhibition hall of Sosoro museum.

Twenty-one out of the 22 artworks were sold at auction. A collaborative piece, ‘Bewilderment’, was brought in the largest bid, selling for $22,500. “At 140cm by 140cm, Bewilderment is a rather large painting and our first collaboration together. We had two artists giving different interpretations of the imagery but in general we wanted to talk about the importance of mental health,” Adana tells The Post.

Serey, a Renaissance woman with many talents, elaborates further, explaining some of the symbolism behind her artwork.

“The dark gloomy sky is contrasted with colourful balloons, which are symbols of celebration and joy. Hurt and pain and happiness and joy all co-exist together, but it is up to us which of those we want to focus on.

“There is always light – symbolised by the balloons – at the end of the tunnel, which is the gloomy sky. But we always need to keep hope alive and remain positive,” she says.

Adana reveals that for years, depression didn’t allow her to truly see the world.

“Cancer became my salvation, liberating me from all fears and it pushed me to embrace life. Confronting your worst nightmare is the path to ultimate freedom. Only then I could see the beauty of what life has to offer,” she says.

The exhibition has been a great success and Serey says she is delighted with the outcome of the charity auction of the paintings displayed in The Art of Sharing and that she is very much humbled by the support they have received.

On March 24, three local NGOs – HelpAge Cambodia, Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation Cambodia (TPO) and Skillful Parenting Cambodia (ICS-SP) – each received a check for $20,000 out of a total of $60,000 raised by the exhibition.

“We set out to create a positive impact and to inspire people, and I’d say we have achieved both with the amount of funds we have managed to raise and with the messages we wanted to convey.

“My heartfelt thanks to everyone who came to our exhibition, bought the paintings or the souvenirs and donated to support our cause,” she says.

After receiving the funds, each of the organisations that were donated to were extremely grateful to Serey and Adana for what both have done for them.

A representative from one of the NGOs says this will go a long way to support their work and they hope that this exhibition will serve as a powerful example for what Cambodians can accomplish through charity and that many others will follow in their footsteps to create a real impact on many areas of Cambodian society.

NGOs in Cambodia receive most of their funding from western sources such as the US and the EU. During the pandemic, a lot of those donations were reduced or eliminated entirely because of the economic disruptions occurring in those donor countries and it has seriously affected many Cambodian NGOs’ operations and programmes.

“Right now we have a good opportunity to show solidarity within the country by having Cambodians helping Cambodia. One obvious thing is that all three NGOs have in common is that they are all local ones. Their activities and programmes impact a good variety of people and are things we’re interested in promoting,” Adana says.

For instance, TPO is a leading NGO in the field of mental health care and psychosocial support.

Adana says: “This is a field of work we want to support as people are struggling with the pandemic and all the anxiety, tensions and pressures could really affect their overall mental health.”

HelpAge works almost exclusively with vulnerable elderly populations who are in need of support right now and ICS-SP has the unique mission of improving parenting skills and helping young children grow up in more nurturing and positive family environments.

Adana says that with the current situation it would be a complex undertaking to launch another fundraiser even similar to what they just did. While there’s no clear plan to repeat this style of fundraiser on the horizon, they will always keep their minds open to things they can potentially do to contribute to a better society.

“My future project would be to try to find ways to help prevent a further outbreak of Covid-19. As for my art, multiple projects will be launched in the near future including a new collaboration with artist Desmond Doyle on a project called See The Big Picture that will be based in Austria,” Adana says.

Adana says she sincerely hopes that the themes of The Art of Sharing will resonate with others and that Cambodia will see more acts of artistic expression as well as charitable contributions even in the midst of an apparently worsening pandemic.

She also wishes to commend the invaluable behind the scenes support from Raksa Koma Foundation, a non-profit organisation founded by her fellow exhibition artist Serey, whose coordination and support in setting up the exhibition in cooperation with the Sosoro museum were of vital importance in the success of the event.

“I would also add that as the president and co-founder of Generation C Cambodia, the pandemic has shown the weaknesses inherent to our modern civilisation, having impacted our civilisation at every level. We have to understand that the pandemic and the sanitary and environmental crises are due to flaws in our modern global system.

“We have to prepare for the future. We must start with a sense of solidarity and fight for a shift in our understanding of the history of homo sapiens as a species,” says Adana.
Space aged: wine matured aboard int’l space station expected to fetch $1 million

IF a bottle of Petrus 2000 Château Pétrus is selling tastes out of this world it might be because it aged for 14 months aboard the International Space Station.

Christie’s hopes the bottle, now up for grabs in a private sale, will fetch $1 million, which would make it the most expensive wine ever sold.

The bottle is one of a batch of 12 that European startup Space Cargo Unlimited sent into orbit as part of research into how food and drink matures in space.

The wine spent almost 440 days in space, or the equivalent of 300 trips to the Moon, Space Cargo Unlimited’s Nicolas Gaume said in a press release.

It left for the ISS on November 2, 2019 in a spacecraft known as a Cygnus capsule and returned on January 14, 2020 aboard a Dragon capsule manufactured by Elon Musk’s SpaceX.

Tests carried out in March by a wine science institute in Bordeaux found that the bottles “positively endured all the constraints of preparation, travel, and storage on the ISS,” Christie’s said in its press release.

“At the end of a blind tasting, the researchers noted remarkable differences in the colour, aroma and taste components,” between the celestial bottles and equivalents which had remained on earth, it added.

“The wines sampled were commended for their complexity and considered to be great wines,” Christie’s added.

The sale is expected to smash the record price for a standard 750 ml bottle of wine.

The most expensive was a 1945 Romanee-Conti Burgundy which sold at Sotheby’s in New York for $558,000 in 2018.

The private sale means the buyer and price will remain confidential unless the buyer chooses to identify themselves publicly.

Proceeds will go towards funding future space missions focused on agricultural research.

Petrus, from the Pomerol region near Bordeaux, is considered one of the world’s finest wines. A classic bottle of Petrus 2000, considered a great vintage, currently sells for around €1,500 ($1,800).

Portugal inaugurates world’s longest suspension footbridge

THE local mayor is hoping to pull in the tourists, but crossing the longest suspended pedestrian bridge in the world will test anyone’s head for heights when it opens officially in northern Portugal on Sunday.

It hangs on heavy steel cables strung between V-shaped concrete towers and runs 161m across a canyon, at a height of 175m.

Before Sunday’s official ceremony, people from the nearby town of Arouca were allowed to walk over the mega structure’s see-through metal grids on Thursday.

Rui Brandão prefers not to look down but recommended the experience.

“I strongly advise you to come even if like me you have vertigo,” he said.

“I have to say I haven’t felt it at all,” he claimed.

“The inauguration is important because it will enable us to resume our tourist activity,” Arouca mayor Margarida Belém told AFP.

The bridge was a “fundamental attraction” for the region, the mayor said.

The structure baptised “516 Arouca” crosses the steep Paiva river gorge, which is already strewn with some 8km of wooden walkways.

“I live round here and when I first heard about the bridge project, I didn’t really believe it,” said Mário Soares.

“But today I’m very proud to be here ... it’s a unique experience,” he added.

Arouca 516 breaks the record for the longest pedestrian suspension bridge held since 2017 by the Charles Kuonen bridge at Randa, in the Swiss Alps.

Lifestyle

Thierry Belem, director of the Oenology Research Unit Institute of Vines, Science and Wine (ISVV), holds a 750 ml bottle of Petrus, that went into space. 

Philippe Darriet, director of the Oenology Research Unit Institute of Vines, Science and Wine (ISVV), holds a bottle of Petrus, that went into space.
Halep knocked out of Madrid Open, Thiem cruises through

World No 3 Simona Halep was dumped out of the Madrid Open on Tuesday, losing 6-4, 6-7 (7-5), 7-5 to World No 19 Belinda Bencic, who has never previously beaten a top 3 seed. Halep had defeated Bencic in their only previous meeting last year in the Madrid Open but there was no repeat for the Romanian in her 10th and last appearance in the Belgrade-based tournament.

Halep’s shock exit could not have come at a more crucial time for her as she bids to win her first title of the year. The Romanian was looking to build on her recent form, having reached the Madrid Open semi-finals last year, where she defeated Bencic in the last 16. However, she has struggled to replicate that form in 2023, with her best result so far this year being a quarter-final at the Charleston Open.

Bencic, on the other hand, is in excellent form and has won five of her last six matches. She will now face Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova in the quarter-finals, having defeated the Russian 6-4, 6-2 in their respective opening matches.

Thiem, on the other hand, continued his impressive form, defeating Italian teenager Jannik Sinner 6-1, 6-3 in a relatively straightforward victory. The Austrian has been in excellent form this year, having won three titles so far – in Qatar, Dubai, and Oman. He will next face austrian teenager Jannik Sinner, who was leading Harris 6-2, 3-0 when the South African retired injured, in the third round. Italian teenager Jannik Sinner booked his place in the second round when his opponent Guido Pella retired injured, with a leg injury in the second set while trailing 6-2 4-4. "I never played against him before, so you never know what to expect," said world No. 18 Sinner. "I was trying to keep focused on what I had to do. I think it has been a good first match obviously." Sinner, the Miami Masters runner-up, will face Alexander Bublik in the round of 16. Bublik, the 15th seed, lost 6-1, 6-4 to Norway’s Casper Ruud in the second round, while 11th seed Mager booked his place in the third round, defeating Italian teenager Jannik Sinner 6-1, 6-3.

Villarreal stand in way of Arsenal Vs Man Utd Europa League showdown

Arsenal’s season appeared to be ending with a whimper when they were reduced to 10 men after failing to 5-0 behind against Villarreal in last week’s first leg of their Europa League tie. The Spanish side won the first leg 2-0, and Villarreal are virtually certain to advance to the knockout stage of the competition they won in 2019. Their hopes hung by a thread when Dani Ceballos was sent off with just over half an hour to go in Spain last week after goals from Manu Trigueros and Raul Albiol had put the home side 2-0 up. But Nicolas Pepe stepped up to make the score 2-1 and give Arsenal genuine hope they can reach a second Europa League final in three years.

Captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang returned to the scoresheet for the first time since early March in Arsenal’s 2-0 win against Newcastle on Sunday. The 31-year-old has recovered after contracting malaria while on international duty with Gabon. Arteta said that match was the perfect preparation for the Villarreal game on Thursday. "Yes, because we had a strong start and a very convincing performance," he said. "We scored two goals, we kept a clean sheet, won the points, and had some really strong individual performances too." The only downside is the one with David Luiz, who was injured during the game. ""He added: "We have to get the best out of him to win,"" he said. ""We lost him today.""

Standing in Arsenal’s way are their former boss and Europa League specialist Unai Emery, who won the trophy three years in a row from 2011 when he was in charge of Sevilla and also took Arsenal to the 2019 final. Villarreal, who have never reached the final of the Champions League or Europa League, have put together a pronto- tional video ahead of the clash against Arsenal starring Paul Pogba, with the message: "Let’s rip the script ... it’s our time." United romp

While Arsenal and Villarreal fans face a nervy night, Manchester United are virtually assured of a place in the final of a competition they won in 2017 after hammering Roma 6-1 in the first leg. United were in trouble when they were trailing 2-1 at Old Trafford last week but bullied the Italians in the second half, with a stout performance from Paul Pogba and Edinson Cavani.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said after the game that the job was not yet done but he is on the brink of ending his semi-final hoodoo and reaching a final for the first time as United boss. The Norwegian will hope there will be no distractions after Sunday’s match against Liverpool was postponed following a pitch invasion at Old Trafford as part of a protest against United’s owners, the Glazer family.

A first trophy in four years would not magically ease the festering tensions at the club but would add gloss to a sea- son in which they are likely to finish second in the Premier League.
Mahrez double taking Man City into first Champions League final

Pep Guardiola said Manchester City’s first ever Champions League final had been five years in the making after Riyad Mahrez’s double saw off Paris Saint-Germain 2-0 on Tuesday to seal a 4-1 semi-final aggregate win.

City will look to set the seal on a third Premier League title in the past four seasons in the coming days as they remain 12 points clear at the top of the table, having already lifted the League Cup.

But their previous four Champions League campaigns under Guardiola ended in anguish before the semi-final stage.

Guardiola has won the competition twice before as a coach during his time at Barcelona.

However, the Catalans has also endured a decade of disappointment in Europe’s premier club competition since.

“It is for all of us and the club. I’m incredibly proud,” said Guardiola.

“Getting to the final now makes sense his time at Barcelona.”

He left Tottenham in April, having already lifted the League Cup.

But Guardiola’s side have shown enough quality going forward and a clinical counter-attack killed off the tie on 63 minutes.

Mbappe could only watch on from the stands due to a calf injury as, just like in last week’s first leg, his side imploded after an excellent first-half performance.

The visitors were left to rue huge missed chances by Marquinhos and Angel Di Maria in between Mahrez’s strikes before Di Maria was sent out of Ferlandinho to leave PSG down to 10 men for the final 20 minutes.

“We started really well, creating chances and dominating Manchester City,” said PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino. “That’s not easy. Not many teams can dominate a team like Manchester City.”

The French champions thought they had an early penalty to get back in the tie when Oleksandr Zinchenko was penalised for handball.

However, Dutch referee Bjorn Kuipers rightly reversed his initial decision on reviewing a replay of the ball bouncing off the Ukrainian’s shoulder.

Zinchenko was heavily involved again when the opening goal arrived at the other end.

He raced onto City goalkeeper Ederson’s thunderous long pass into the PSG area.

Zinchenko’s cut-back found Kevin De Bruyne and after the Belgian’s shot was blocked, Mahrez pounced to slot home on his weaker right foot.

The tie was still far from over as PSG continued to have to be at their best until the end of the final.

Mbappe’s co-star Kylian Mbappe, having already lifted the Champions League at Porto and Inter Milan, while enjoying domestic glory with Chelsea and Real Madrid.

But Mourinho’s impact had faded in recent years and his last three jobs all ended in the sack at Chelsea, Manchester United and Tottenham.

He left Tottenham in April after winning a trophy during his reign for the first time since departing Uniao de Leiria in 2002.

Once hailed as a serial winner, Mourinho finds himself reduced to working for serial underachievers.

Like Tottenham - last crossed English champions in 1961 – Roma, currently languishing in seventh place in Serie A, it bears some description.

The Giallorossi won the last of their three Serie A titles in 2001 and their only European Cup final appearance ended in a defeat against Liverpool 37 years ago.

There was a whisper of desperation about Roma general manager Tiago Pinto as he hailed Mourinho’s imminent arrival with the same kind of hyperbole that greeted his decision to join Tottenham in 2019.

“When Jose became available, we immediately jumped at the chance to speak with one of the greatest managers of all time,” Pinto said.

“Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy was no less gushing two years ago, but his praise ended up being laced with irony.

“In Jose we have one of the most successful managers in football. We believe he will bring energy and belief to the dressing room,” Levy said just 17 months before sacking the Portuguese coach.

Out of touch

Mourinho’s ability to get into the minds of his players, coaching them to reach new heights, was unparalleled during his golden spells at Porto, Chelsea and Inter Milan.

But he has looked increasingly out of touch with a younger generation of players less responsive to his tough love approach and bored by his rigid tactics.

Evidence of Mourinho’s steep decline was given a high-definition gloss when Amazon’s All or Nothing documentary series went behind the scenes in his first season at Tottenham.

Dele Alli and Danny Rose felt the lash of Mourinho’s tongue on camera, with Gareth Bale and Harry Kane and Son Heung-min on the receiving end.

Mourinho might struggle to lead Roma to Champions League qualification, let alone challenge champions Inter.

While Liverpool’s Jurgen Klopp and Manchester City’s Pep Guardiola have reaped the benefits of connecting with their players on a personal level, the acerbic Mourinho suffered 10 league defeats in a single campaign for the first time this season.

Mourinho hopes a return to Italy can revive his career in the same way he rejuvenated Inter Milan from 2008 to 2010.

He won the Italian title twice and was named FIFA’s world coach of the year in 2010 after leading a Champions League, Serie A and Coppa Italia treble.

However, Mourinho will inherit an ageing Roma team, whose flaws were laid bare in last week’s 6-2 defeat at Manchester United in the Europa League semi-final first leg.

Edin Dzeko, Pedro, Henrikh Mkhitaryan and Chris Smalling are over 30 and Mourinho might struggle to lead Roma to Champions League qualification, let alone challenge champions Inter.

Mourinho joked fun at himself in a recent TV advert when he admitted it “isn’t easy being special”.

But the self-appointed ‘special one’ hasn’t lived up to that boast for some while and few expect his fortunes to change in Rome.