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MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ASKS THE DIPLOMAT TO MAKE A CLARIFICATION

The Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFAIC) of the Kingdom of Cambodia H.E. Chum Sounry wrote a letter of the clarification to The Diplomat on its article entitled "Why Cambodia Needs to Incorporate More Women Into Its Foreign Policy Process".

In his letter addressed to Mr. Sebastian Strangio, Southeast Asia Editor of The Diplomat, H.E. Chum Sounry, pointed out that this article published in The Diplomat on February 15, 2024 has attracted attention of the leaders and staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, not only the women but the men also, including himself.

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THE UK SUPPORTS CAMBODIA'S INITIATIVE TO ESTABLISH GREEN SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

The United Kingdom has expressed her intention to cooperate with Cambodia in the establishment of Green Special Economic Zone to support environmental protection for sustainable development.

The intention was raised by H.E. Dominic Williams MBE, British Ambassador to Cambodia, in a meeting with H.E. Sun Chanthol, Deputy Prime Minister and First Vice President of the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC), at the CDC's headquarters in Phnom Penh.

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CAMBODIA, THAILAND UPGRADE BILATERAL TIES TO "STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP"



Cambodia and Thailand have agreed to upgrade the level of their bilateral ties from "Strengthening Partnership for Peace and Prosperity" to "Strategic Partnership" for the mutual interest of the two nations and peoples.

The agreement was made between Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei Hun Manet, Prime Minister of Cambodia, and his Thai counterpart H.E. Srettha Thavisin, during their official bilateral meeting in Bangkok, Thailand on February 7, according to a statement released after the meeting.

The two Premiers praised the outcomes of bilateral cooperation between Cambodia and Thailand, and exchanged views on the strengthening and expansion of cooperation between both nations in various fields, including politics, economy, defence, security, trade, investment, tourism, employment and energy.

Both sides also discussed regional and global issues, expressing their satisfaction over mutual support in international forums and

boosting cooperation in the fight against transnational crime and online scams, and in the building of the common border into a border of peace and prosperity.

Both prime ministers attached great significance to the 75th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Cambodia and Thailand in 2025. In this regard, the two leaders look forward to meaningful joint activities to commemorate this milestone year.

To further enhance cooperation and collaboration between the two countries, they underscored the importance of resuming meetings of bilateral cooperation mechanisms, including the Joint Cabinet Retreat (JCR), the Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation (JC), the General Border Committee (GBC) and the Joint Trade Committee (JTC).

Both sides are committed to redoubling their joint efforts to increase trade between our

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two countries to its full potential. To boost trade, Thailand will host the Seventh Joint Trade Committee Meeting at the ministerial level in early May. The two prime ministers acknowledged the important role and active engagement of the private sector in promoting trade and investment between the two countries.

On tourism cooperation, the two leaders tasked their tourism ministers to continue promoting the "Two Kingdoms, One Destination" mechanism to attract more tourists to the two nations. They also agreed to explore ways and means to facilitate cross-border travel for tourists from Cambodia, Thailand, and third countries.

The two prime ministers agreed to further strengthen cooperation on transboundary haze population to ensure clean air for the people of the two nations.

Both leaders expressed their resolve to strengthen close cooperation in fighting transnational crimes such as illicit drug smuggling, trafficking in persons, online scams and cybersecurity.

Samdech Thipadei expressed deep appreciation to the Royal Government for reducing fees for work visas (Non-Immigration LA Visas) from 2,000 baht for issues of new visas and 1,900 baht for renewals to 500 baht over four years – from 11 November 2023 to 10 November 2027. Prime Minister Srettha asked his Minister of Labour to consider Samdech Thipadei's request to exempt Cambodians from re-entry visa fees for those traveling home and returning to Thailand during Khmer New Year

(Songkran) holidays in April. Prime Minister Srettha reassured Samdech Thipadei that Cambodian workers in Thailand receive fair treatment and proper economic safety nets.

To provide assistance to each other's citizens, the two prime ministers agreed to establish a Cambodian Consulate-General in Songkhla and a Thai Consulate-General in Siem Reap. Samdech Thipadei took this opportunity to express his appreciation to Thai authorities for returning 16 artefacts and hoped that technical works will be done to expedite the return of the additional 20 pieces.

Following their bilateral talks, the two leaders witnessed the signing ceremony of five cooperation documents: the MoU on cooperation in disaster risk reduction and emergency response between the National Committee for Disaster Management of Cambodia and the Ministry of Interior of Thailand; the MoU on cooperation in the field of science and technology education between the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation of Cambodia and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation of Thailand; the MoU on Transit Goods between the General Department of Customs and Excise of Cambodia and the Thai Customs Department; the MoU between the Cambodian Chamber of Commerce and the Export-Import Bank of Thailand; and the MoU between the Cambodian Chamber of Commerce and the Board of Trade of Thailand.

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H.E. Ambassador also shared his optimism in support of Cambodia on national infrastructure and promotion of development programmes in various areas like education by focusing on girls' education, economy, health, security and safety.

For his part, H.E. Sun Chanthol welcomed the UK's intention to collaborate with Cambodia in the creation of Green Special Economic Zone in contribution to global environmental protection.

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While sharing some points raised by the author in this article. He wrote to offer the positive side of the story backed by facts in order to shed light on women's increasing participation in the country's foreign affairs and development process.

The previous and current leadership of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation have clearly shown a great attention and a strong commitment to promoting gender equality and participation of women in the leadership and all levels of senior staff of the Ministry as well as the Diplomatic Missions abroad.

The fact that Cambodia's Deputy Prime Minister Sok Chenda Sophea, Minister of MFAIC, was the first person who shared this article within the Ministry with a comment "I didn't wait for the article to try to attract recruit women for the Ministry" proved this confirmation.

Currently, the Ministry has a total full time 525 diplomats, among which female diplomats are 170 that can be translated roughly 32 per cent. Of this 170 female diplomats, some of them are well trained, having comprehensive knowledge on world affairs which suit them in the diplomatic career and they are in the process of succession and in the near future, they will play an active role and take leadership in this institution.

Among more than 200 Cambodian diplomats posting in various countries, 65 of them are females which represent almost 30% of Cambodian diplomats posting overseas. While the overall percentage of women in leadership positions has not been at an impressive level, it's important to recognize the impact that individual women with strong qualifications and merit are already making. They are breaking glass ceilings, challenging stereotypes, and influencing policy decisions.

Female diplomats have been assigned to important posts such as Permanent Representative of Cambodia to the United Nations in New York, Permanent Representative

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of Cambodia to UNESCO in Paris, Ambassador of Cambodia to the People's Republic of China, Ambassador of Cambodia to the Republic of Korea, Ambassador of Cambodia to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, newly appointed Ambassador of Cambodia to the United Kingdom, and more women diplomats will be assigned to the higher positions at Cambodia's embassies and consulates-general gradually. These appointments highlight the achievements and leadership of specific merit-based and qualified women in Cambodian foreign policy that can inspire others and provide role models for future generations.

Furthermore, focusing solely on the numerical representation of women in Cambodian foreign policy doesn't tell the whole story. It's crucial to acknowledge the merit and qualifications of women already present in the field who are contributing significantly. Moving beyond simply counting women, emphasize the diverse skills and expertise they bring to the table. This could include strong language skills, cultural understanding, negotiation expertise, or knowledge of specific regional issues. Recognizing these valuable contributions ensures their voices are heard and valued.

It's important to remember that achieving strong women's representation in Cambodian foreign policy requires a multifaceted approach. While increasing the numbers is essential, ensuring merit-based selection, recognizing the achievements of existing qualified women, and tackling underlying biases are equally important for creating a truly inclusive and effective diplomatic corps.

As far as the government's policy is concerned, the previous and current governments have put a great political will and attached a great importance to promoting gender equality and participation of women in all sectors aimed at achieving economically, socially and politically inclusive and sustainable development.

The previous Cambodian government's commitment to uplifting women's status and empowering them to engage in the high-level leadership was echoed in its policies, including the Rectangle Strategy, Neary Rattanak, and the Cambodian National Council for Women Plan, National Strategic Development Plans (NSDP), each of which includes the prerequisite of

gender mainstreaming across all levels of governments. Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo HUN Sen, Former Prime Minister, underlined many times: "We continue to pay attention and promote women to participate at a higher level of leadership."

The current Prime Minister of Cambodia, Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei Hun Manet, in his address at the opening of the 7th Friends of Asia Pacific WAGGGS (World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts) Conference in Siem Reap on November 05, 2023, underlined that in response to the lack of opportunities for women to develop, the Cambodian government has made gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in all areas a priority in its policy agenda, reported Khmer Times in an article "PM wants women to play bigger role in government leadership" on 6 November 2023.

"By launching the Pentagonal Strategy - Phase I, Cambodia will strengthen its citizenship in a highly civilised society with morality, equity and an environment in which women are the core.

"We will also increase access to education and vocational training for female students by increasing scholarships and refresher programmes at schools, providing accommodation, ensuring safety and increasing the number of female teachers, as well as increasing the number of female teachers.

"Increasing the proportion of women's participation in national institutions at all levels, strengthening employment opportunities, protecting women's labor rights, and continuing to promote women's role in decision-making at all levels," stated Samdech Prime Minister.

In fact, Cambodia has in the current public and political spheres: A woman as the President of the National Assembly, 17 women as members of the National Assembly and two as the chairpersons of the expert committees, a female Governor of the National Bank, a female National Auditor-General, three women Ministers, 42 percent female civil servants and 27 percent in decision-making roles, two female

THE UK SUPPORTS ...

The Cambodian DPM took the opportunity to thank the British ambassador for supporting the preparation of Cambodia's national infrastructure, and informed him of main infrastructure projects to connect Cambodia to her neighbouring countries, such as the National Road No. 5 expansion project, Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway, Phnom Penh-Bavet Expressway project, Phnom Penh-Siem Reap-Poipet Expressway project, and Funan Techo Canal which will become a historic waterway project in Cambodia.

Besides, the CDC first vice president also mentioned his planned visit to foreign countries around the world, including the UK, to attract more investors to invest in Cambodia.

CAMBODIA EXPECTS 220,000 NEW JOBS IN 2024

According to the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, Cambodia's national economic growth for 2024 is expected to reach 6.6 percent and create about 220,000 new jobs, up 2.3 percent year on year.

From 2024 to 2026, Cambodia will generate new jobs for 235,000 people on an annual average, and the total number of Cambodians employed will be 10.2 million by 2026. The sub-sectors projected to offer most jobs are accommodation and catering, construction, industries, wholesale and retailers, garments, transport, and telecommunications.

Skills in high demand in the country are English and Chinese proficiency, technical skills, critical thinking and problem solving, communication, time management, client coordination, and beyond.

provincial governors, six women district/khan governors, 176 female commune chiefs (increased from 130).

Another fact, since 2006, Cambodia has deployed a total of 9,465 peacekeepers, 801 of them women to partake in the UN's humanitarian, demining and peacekeeping operations in 10 countries. The proportion has ranked Cambodia 2nd among ASEAN and 13th among 122 countries for women's participation in the UN's missions.

KRATIE CITY, A BEST PLACE TO VISIT IN ASIA IN 2024

Kratie city, located in the northeast of Cambodia, is among the best places to visit in Asia in 2024 by Travel + Leisure, a famous New York-based travel magazine.

The magazine also recommends some interesting things to do in Kratie to the visitors, saying, "In Kratie, or Krong Kracheh, visit the Irrawaddy Dolphin Habitat Centre to interact with the beautiful, rare dolphins. Check out the waterfall of Cham Pey and the turtle conservation centre. If your timing is right, watch the turtles hatch and migrate to the sea, helped by human hands. During dry weather, the Kampi River dries out, making way for hammocks hung on the riverbed and makeshift bridges connecting villages."

The best time to visit Kratie is from November to May, the same source emphasised.

The other places on the list are Palawan of the Philippines, Takayama of Japan, Red Sea of Saudi Arabia, Incheon of the Republic of Korea, Pak Chong of Thailand, Zhangjiajie of China, Hue of Vietnam, St. John's Island of Singapore, Cameron Highlands of Malaysia, Mirissa of Sri Lanka, Meghalaya of India, Ras Al Khaimah of the United Arab Emirates, and Taipei of Taiwan.



GARMENT EXPORTS RISE; ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT, MACHINERY EXPORTS DECLINE IN JANUARY

Textile, garment and footwear exports were in a positive growth early this year after a significant decline in 2023, while the exports of electrical equipment and machinery showed a significant decline.

Cambodia's exports from the garment, textile and footwear sector totaled nearly US\$826 million in January 2024, an increase of 24 percent or US\$161 million compared to the same period in 2023, which was more than US\$665 million, said a report of the General Department of Customs and Excise.

At the same time, the exports of machinery and electrical appliances to international markets saw a year-on-year decrease by 42 percent to US\$134 million, the source underlined.

According to the report, Cambodia's total exports in January 2024 reached almost US\$1.96 billion, up 27 percent compared to January 2023.

Garment, footwear and travel goods industry is the biggest foreign exchange earner for the Southeast Asian country.

The sector consists of roughly 1,300 factories and branches, employing approximately 840,000 workers, mostly female, pointed out the Ministry of Labour.

