

# Small business operators beef up on e-commerce

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The operators of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are learning about electronic commerce (e-commerce) to broaden their understanding of online markets, with a focus on domestic and overseas markets, especially the Republic of Korea.

"This workshop will enhance managerial proficiency with regard to export operations as well as strengthen participants' e-commerce skills. It will broaden their access to information on current market trends and opportunities, and help them to expand their business networks in the Republic of Korea and other countries through e-commerce," said an official from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

The workshop is taking place on November 26-27 at

the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, attended by officials from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, members of leading SMEs, and related groups.

"This event allows entrepreneurs, especially women, to learn how to access online markets via the e-commerce platform and the website [www.plaome.com](http://www.plaome.com)," the ministry official added.

Plaosme.com arose from the Lao SME E-Commerce & Export Development Programme to support Lao SMEs in their e-commerce and export capability. Some 612 business units with nearly 1,800 products are registered as website members.

Speakers at the workshop are sharing their experiences of the South Korean market so that participants understand more about market

demand. Participants and lecturers are also discussing online trading.

Business operators from Lao and Korea are sharing information about e-commerce by video link.

The workshop is intended to help small business operators learn to use technology that can cut the cost of production and reduce shipping time as well as increase their sales in domestic and overseas markets.

Online shopping has become increasingly popular in recent years with buyers able to find the items and services they need on the internet. It also enables vendors to increase sales while reducing rental costs.

Online systems provide customers with convenience and have proved especially beneficial during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Business operators and officials attend the Entrepreneurship Development through E-Commerce Promotion workshop on Thursday.

## Indonesia seeks to boost production, attract investment to control sugar price in 2021

JAKARTA (The Jakarta Post/ANN) -- The government is ramping up sugar production and working to attract more investment in the industry to prevent a shortage of the commodity and price hikes in 2021 as the country seeks to recover from the pandemic downturn.

The Agriculture Ministry is preparing to work on intensification of 200,000 hectares of land on Java island with state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and [land expansion] of 50,000 ha of land outside Java with private businesses for sugarcane plantations. The aim is to raise sugar production by around 676,000 tonnes by 2023 and make Indonesia less reliant on imports.

"It will not be enough with the limited land on Java. So we need to prepare extensification outside Java, especially on the remaining available lands that are quite large," said Agriculture

Minister Syahrul Yasin Limpo during the National Sugar Summit.

Early this year, short supply led to an increase in the average price of sugar, which surpassed Rp 20,000 (US\$1.42) per kilogram, higher than the price ceiling of Rp 12,500 per kg set by the government. The logistical disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic on top of short supplies led to the price hikes, which peaked on average in April.

On Tuesday, the average price of sugar stood at Rp 14,400 per kg, still around 15 percent higher than the price ceiling, according to data from the Centre for Information on Strategic Food Prices (PIHPS).

With a shortage of sugar taking place across 30 provinces in April, the government has been issuing policies aimed at securing supplies in the short run, such as relaxing imports.

The government estimates that Indonesia's yearly sugar production needs to reach 5.9 million tonnes, of which 52 percent are for raw materials and the rest for direct consumption, according to data provided by Musdhalifah Machmud, the food and agribusiness deputy coordinator at the Office of the Coordinating Economic Minister.

This year, sugar production was estimated to reach 2.2 million tonnes, less than half of the estimated demand, Agriculture Ministry data show. Indonesia imports sugar to fill in the gap and ensure there is enough spare. In 2019, the country's sugar imports reached about 4 million tonnes, making it the world's largest sugar importer, according to data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS). Thailand, Australia, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Brazil were the main sources of imports.



Mr Aloun Bounyong and Ms Khanmany Southammavong chair the annual Lao Microfinance Association member meeting in Vientiane.

## Lao microfinance body seeks to strengthen networks

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The Lao Microfinance Association (LMFA) will continue to build its capacity to create a strong network within the microfinance sector in Laos, with sound management, microfinance information and training courses.

The association in partnership with the Bank of the Lao PDR (BOL), supported by ADA Luxemburg, on Tuesday held its annual member meeting in Vientiane to report on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the microfinance sector, as well as review the achievements of the association in relation to its members and society.

The meeting also discussed the association's strategic development plan for 2021-2023.

The meeting was chaired by the Director General of the Financial Institute Supervision Department, Mr Aloun Bounyong, and LMFA Vice Chairman, Ms Khanmany Southammavong.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on the profit and incomes of the association's members, who are mainly financial institutions around the country, Mr Aloun said.

The profit and income percentage of most financial institutions in the first 10 months of this year dropped compared to fiscal year 2018-2019 due to government budget issues, domestic investment, and customers' financial difficulties, he added.

Banks and other financial institutions have postponed credit to businesses and individuals due to the pandemic.

Also because of the pandemic, the LMFA has struggled to send employees and executives for training in other countries and to invite experts to give lectures in Laos, Ms Khanmany said.

"However, making use of technology, we will try to coordinate with our partners and stakeholders using online and digital systems," she added.

Under the three-year strategic plan for 2021-2023, the association hopes to earn almost US\$500,000 from its members and donors, the Deputy Director of LMFA, Ms Phayvanh Saleumsouk, told the meeting.

The association also plans to spend more than US\$1.3 million on various activities, she said.

These will focus on capacity building for LMFA members and their customers, knowledge development and coordination, advocacy and consumer protection, support for village banks, capacity building in green financial management, and organisation development.

The LMFA is the national microfinance industry's umbrella organisation. It gathers microfinance practitioners and other relevant stakeholders who share the ultimate goal of the association, which is to improve access to appropriate and affordable financial services for poor and unbanked people.

## Japan retains economic assessment but warns of virus resurgence

TOKYO (Kyodo News) -- The government on Wednesday retained its view that the Japanese economy is "picking up" in its assessment for November, but it also warned of downside risks from the global resurgence of coronavirus infections.

In its monthly report, the Cabinet Office downwardly revised its view of capital investment, among other components, with the pandemic clouding the business outlook. Meanwhile, the assessment of production was upgraded due to the gradual resumption of economic activity.

The economy "is still in a severe situation due to the novel coronavirus, but it is showing movements of

picking up," the office said, using the same wording for the fifth straight month.

Looking ahead, it said the improvement will continue, but added that "full attention should be given to the further downside risks" to the domestic and overseas economies due to the pandemic.

The office issued similar warnings in March and April when the economy was under pressure from the initial impact of the pandemic. Japan declared a state of emergency in early April and fully lifted it in late May.

"Domestically, private consumption of food services and travel is facing such downside risks, while exports could be affected

by resurgences of infections overseas, especially in Europe," a Cabinet Office official told a press briefing.

The evaluation of capital expenditure was cut for the fifth time this year. It is "decreasing recently," according to the office, which said last month that business investment was "showing weakness."

The report upgraded the view of industrial output for the first time in two months, saying it is "picking up." The official cited solid demand for cars both at home and abroad.

The report left its assessments of other major components unchanged, including private consumption which it said is "picking up."