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Happy New Year from Cambodia!

Usually, I would write that I hope you have a peaceful New Year.

I wonder how everyone in Japan celebrated the New Year this time.

I will report on the latest COVID-19 situation in Cambodia since many people are concerned about it. According to the Cambodian Ministry of Health, as of January 15, 426 infections have been reported, and 381 have recovered. Most of them are imported cases from outside Cambodia.

At the end of the last November, the first cases of community infection were reported. There was a bit of a flurry of activity, including temporary closure of workplaces and stores related to the patients, inspection of contacts, and cancellation or postponement of meetings. Then, the number of patients has not increased, and people have become relatively calm again. Since the beginning of the last year, masks have been widely used, and people have been taking their temperature and disinfecting their hands with alcohol at the entrances of public facilities, supermarkets, restaurants, and cafes, while they have been losing substances recently.

In COVID-19 outbreaks, people often cite the Spanish flu, and I have heard my great-grandfather had also died of this disease in Shanghai. I had no idea that such an event, which happened almost a century ago, could happen again today. Considering the level of medical care in Cambodia and the risk of infection, we JICA experts temporarily returned to Japan in April 2020 as an evacuation.

April 5, 2020: Departed from Phnom Penh Airport,

April 6, 2020: Arrived at Narita Airport,

Self-isolation for two weeks at a hotel in the city of Narita,

April 21, 2020: Self-isolation ended, went to my parents' house in Chiba.

April-August: Project progresses remotely. Meetings and information exchange with MLIT, JS, and related parties.

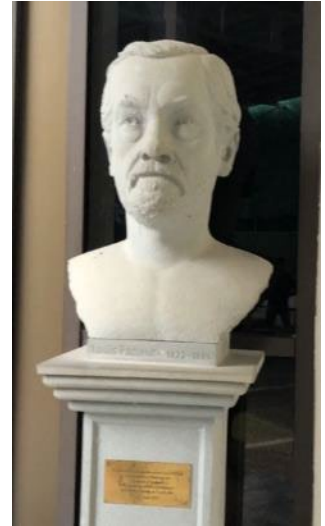
September 2: Obtained SARS-CoV-2 negative certificate in Japan,

September 4: Departed Narita for Phnom Penh Airport via Incheon, South Korea. -

On the 18th, two weeks later, I tested negative for SARS again and returned to everyday work on the 21st.

Before we departed from Cambodia, there was a rumor of a lockdown by a state of emergency. I felt like a character in an escape movie as I walked through the deserted streets to the airport to catch one of the few remaining flights to Japan, wondering if I could take off safely in the empty, dimly lit airport.

The tests are conducted at the Institut Pasteur du Cambodge, a laboratory named after Dr. Louis Pasteur, a biochemist and bacteriologist well known for his work in sanitary engineering. We wanted to pay homage to the great man who fought against disease, so we paid our respects to his bust.



I wish you all a healthy new year and look forward to working with you again this year.

After a year and a half in Cambodia, I finally went to Angkor Wat.



The above photo shows the view of Angkor Wat from a sightseeing balloon, a Hindu facility built by King Suryavarman II in the early 12th century, which now functions as a Buddhist temple. 802 to 1431, the Angkor dynasty ruled this region, which at its maximum covered most of the Indochina Peninsula and part of the Malay Peninsula. The Angkor dynasty, which ruled

this region from 802 to 1431, was a large empire that covered most of the Indochinese peninsula and part of the Malay peninsula at its peak. It seems that hundreds of ruins remain all over the area under their control. Many ruins of various sizes are in a dense forest in the back.



The photo on the left shows Sula Sultan, a pond built for the king to bathe in. I was amazed at the vastness of the facility for a single king, but the cleanliness of the water also struck me. I had imagined such ponds to be muddy water mixed with clay and silt or water with blue-green algae floating in it, but this pond and the encircling moat of Angkor Wat were filled with crystal clear water (which I had not seen much since I came to Cambodia). The area registered as a World Heritage site also has villages and restaurants and looks well managed to prevent sewage from mixing with the water of the ruins.

This area resembles a swamp or jungle dotted with buildings and artificial lakes. Before visiting the Angkor monuments, I thought they were political and religious structures based on the immense power of the dynasties. Throughout history, there has been a lot of use of large monuments to show the immense power of the rulers. On the other hand, managing water and securing food have been necessary for rulers since ancient times. What came to mind when I visited the site was that perhaps these ruins are the remains of a government that achieved both.

The ruins themselves are made of bricks or sandstone and laterite rocks. People might have used the soil to clear the ground for the structure's construction and turned the digging areas into artificial lakes. Whether as a result of this or intentionally, artificial lakes may be helpful for flood control and water utilization.

I have heard that Cambodia can grow crops in two to four seasons, so I thought there was no off-season for farming. I felt that the construction of the Angkor monuments may have been a public project during the off-season, just like the construction of the pyramids in Egypt.

In Cambodian cities, development and land reclamation are going on without a set urban plan or ignoring the plan. We hear conversations about which lakes are flooded because they were filled in. We have to ensure that

unplanned development does not negatively impact the water environment and flood control.



The photo above shows a village of water dwellers in the Tonle Sap Lake in central Cambodia, south of the Angkor Complex. Tonle Sap Lake is the largest in Southeast Asia. It has exciting features, such as its size changing significantly from 2,500 square kilometers in the dry season to 16,000 square kilometers in the rainy season. Water flowing back from the Mekong River enters the lake (cf. Lake Biwa, 669 square kilometers). Some Cambodians cannot live on land, Vietnamese refugees, and people without nationality, and it is said that more than one million people live on the water. However, the government is trying to reduce the number of people living on the water, in addition to individual houses like the one in the photo, stores, schools, religious facilities, and two-story rest houses for tourists. It was also impressive to see the boat we were on refueling at a gas station on the water and small children maneuvering it back and forth.

Nearly 2.6 million tourists visited the Angkor Complex in 2018, but in 2020 will decrease by about 98% from the previous year. The number of Cambodian visitors seems to have increased, and in some ruins, I was the only Japanese among the Cambodians. I asked for a guide who has national certification, but the site manager, souvenir shops, and Cambodian tourists approached the guide quite often. When I wondered what was happening, it seemed they were saying they hadn't seen the guide uniform for a long time and were expecting foreign tourists to return.

I hope that in 2021, the world will be a place where people from Japan can come to Cambodia for business trips and sightseeing.