



**Prime Minister sounds a sour note on trucks' musical horns**

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet has ordered a ban on musical horns, after videos posted on social media showed people dancing on roads and roadsides as passing trucks blasted rhythmic little tunes. Hun Manet, who last year took over the wheel of government from his father, Hun Sen — who led Cambodia for 38 years — called on the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation and police across the country to immediately take action against any vehicle whose normal horn has been replaced by a tune-playing one by ripping it out and restoring the standard honking type. He said the measure has already been implemented by provincial authorities, but he wanted to announce it publicly to make sure it was enforced nationwide. He commented on his Facebook page that recent social media posts had shown “inappropriate activity committed by some people, especially youth and children, dancing on the roadside to the musical sounds from trucks’ horns.” Hun Manet said such dancing affects public order and poses a traffic hazard that is a threat to life and limb, not least of all to the dancers themselves. One video showed three young people dancing in the middle of a road while a large trailer truck coming their way lays down a beat. For Cambodians, there will be no more dancing in the street.

**New Zealand slips into second recession in 18 months**

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — New Zealand has entered its second recession in 18 months after the latest round of GDP figures confirmed its economy contracted in the last quarter of 2023. The country’s economy shrank by 0.1% in the quarter to December, and 0.7% in per capita terms, the New Zealand’s official statistics agency, Stats NZ, announced in March. The latest slip follows a 0.3% contraction in the September quarter, which fulfils the technical definition of a recession. It is New Zealand’s second recession event in the past 18 months. Stats NZ said New Zealand had returned negative GDP figures in four of the last five quarters, and had a stagnant annual growth rate of just 0.6%. The slump was largely expected with New Zealand’s central bank forecasting a flat figure, while bank economists suggested a range of results between a narrow contraction and fractional growth. The data made for worse reading in a per capita context with the last five quarters all retreating by an average of 0.8%. Helping to prop up the south Pacific island nation’s economy has been a record migration intake, which hit a record peak of 141,000 new arrivals in 2023. Without that population growth stimulating an otherwise stagnant economy, New Zealand’s economic position would be slipping at an even faster rate. Regulation minister David Seymour said the current economic conditions would lead to cuts in the country’s forthcoming budget, including cutting the number of government workers. “We’re in a slump, but that won’t be news to you, because you’ve already been living in it,” Seymour said.

**Nissan, Honda to work together on EVs, intelligence tech**

TOKYO (AP) — Nissan and Honda have announced that they will work together in developing electric vehicles and auto intelligence technology, sectors where Japanese automakers have fallen behind. The chief executives of Nissan Motor Co. and Honda Motor Co. appeared together at a news conference in Tokyo to announce that Japan’s second and third biggest automakers will look into areas with a potential for collaboration. The details of the non-binding agreement are still being worked out, both sides said. The executives said the companies will develop core technologies together, but their products will remain different. The world’s automakers are rapidly shifting toward electric vehicles, focusing on batteries and motors instead of gas engines, as concerns grow about emissions and climate change.

**Blinken underscores “ironclad” support for the Philippines**

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — Secretary of State Antony Blinken underscored Washington’s “ironclad commitment” to help defend the Philippines in case of an armed attack against its forces after clashes between Chinese and Filipino coast guards in the disputed South China Sea recently turned more hostile. Blinken, the latest high-level official to visit the United States treaty ally, met his Philippine counterpart Enrique Manalo in March before separately meeting President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in Manila. President Joe Biden will host Marcos and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in a White House summit in April. The three are likely to discuss growing concerns over increasingly aggressive Chinese actions in the South China Sea and North Korea’s nuclear program. “We stand with the Philippines and stand by our ironclad defense commitments, including under the Mutual Defense Treaty,” Blinken said in a news conference with Manalo. “We have a shared concern about the PRC’s actions that threaten our common vision for a free, open Indo-Pacific, including in the South China Sea and in the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone,” Blinken said, using the abbreviation for the People’s Republic of China. He cited “repeated violations of international law and the rights of the Philippines: water cannons, blocking maneuvers, close shadowing, other dangerous operations.” The Chinese coast guard blocked and used water cannons against Philippine vessels in a confrontation several weeks ago that slightly injured a Filipino admiral and four of his sailors near the disputed Second Thomas Shoal. The March 5 faceoff in the high seas also caused two minor collisions between Chinese and Philippine vessels and prompted Manila’s Department of Foreign Affairs to summon China’s deputy ambassador to convey a protest against the Chinese coast guard’s actions, which the Philippines said were unacceptable.



**EXTENSIVE ELECTIONS.** A man walks past a large model of a woman’s finger pressing a button on an electronic voting machine displayed outside the office of the Election Commission of India in New Delhi, India. From April 19 to June 1, nearly 970 million Indians — or more than 10% of the global population — are eligible to vote in general elections. The mammoth exercise is the biggest anywhere in the world and will take 44 days before results are announced on June 4. (AP Photo/Altat Qadri)

**India’s multi-phase election stretches 44 days. Here’s why it takes so long.**

By *Krutika Pathi*  
The Associated Press

**N**EW DELHI — From April 19 to June 1, nearly 970 million Indians — or more than 10% of the global population — are eligible to vote in general elections. The mammoth exercise is the biggest anywhere in the world and will take 44 days before results are announced on June 4.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a third successive term. He will face off against a broad but flailing alliance of opposition parties that are struggling to challenge his appeal. Most surveys predict Modi’s Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party will win comfortably, cementing him as one of the country’s most popular and consequential leaders.

**Why does it take so long?**

It boils down to two key reasons: the sheer size of India, the world’s most populous country, and the astonishing level of logistics needed to ensure that every registered voter is able to cast their ballot.

Over the years, the duration of voting has wavered. It took nearly four months to complete the vote in India’s first elections in 1951-1952, after it gained independence from British rule, and just four days in 1980. In 2019, voting took 39 days, and this year’s election is the second longest.

With 969 million registered voters, the size of India’s electorate is bigger than the combined population of the European Union.

The vote to choose 543 lawmakers to the lower house of parliament takes place over seven phases. India’s 28 states and eight federal territories will vote at different times. Each phase is one day, with the first held on

April 19 and the last on June 1.

While some states will cast their ballots in a day, voting elsewhere may take longer. Uttar Pradesh, the largest state the size of Brazil with 200 million people, will vote on all seven days, for example.

**Every vote counts**

The Election Commission of India, which oversees the vote, has to make sure there is a voting booth available within 1.2 miles of every voter.

“Election officials have to travel to great lengths to ensure that even a single voter can exercise their franchise,” said Chakshu Roy of PRS Legislative Research, an independent think tank.

Some 15 million election officials and security staff will traverse the country’s deserts and mountains — sometimes by boat, foot, and even on horseback — to try to reach every voter.

It can be especially arduous. In 2019, when India last held elections, a team of polling officers trekked more than 300 miles for four days just so a single voter in a hamlet in the remote state of Arunachal Pradesh, which borders China, could exercise their right.

Officials also travelled to a village tucked away high up in the Himalayas in 2019 to install a booth at 15,256 feet, the highest polling station anywhere in the world.

This time too, polling stations will be installed in remote places, including one inside a wildlife sanctuary in southern Kerala state and another in a shipping container in western Gujarat state.

**Tight security**

Experts say a key reason behind the multi-  
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**Asian Currency Exchange Rates**  
Units per U.S. dollar as of 3/29

Bangladesh Taka	110.09
Cambodian Riel	4032.8
China Renminbi	7.2212
Fijian Dollar	2.256
Hong Kong Dollar	7.8252
Indian Rupee	83.341
Indonesian Rupiah	15879
Iranian Rial	42004
Japanese Yen	151.33
Laos New Kip	21186
Malaysian Ringgit	4.7245
Nepal Rupee	133.42
Pakistani Rupee	277.95
Papua N.G. Kina	3.827
Philippine Peso	56.171
Russian Ruble	92.56
Saudi Riyal	3.7523
Singapore Dollar	1.3493
South Korean Won	1346.4
Sri Lankan Rupee	300.44
Taiwan Dollar	31.96
Thai Baht	36.33
Vietnam Dong	24813