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Revue de presse du 05 au 09 Octobre 2015



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➤ **Vientiane Times :**

- Luxembourg agrees 60 million euro grant for Laos
- Nam Ngiep 2 begins operations
- Four international airports need to be built
- New hospital boosts healthcare in XiengKhuang, Huaphan
- Laos prepares to host 12th High-Level Round Table Meeting
- Honorary consul impressed by Xayaboury dam
- Rural Oudomxayvillagers get free health checks
- EU campaigns to end capital punishment

Luxembourg agrees 60 million euro grant for Laos

(By Times Reporters)

Luxembourg has agreed to provide grant assistance to Laos comprising 60 million euros (more than 544 billion kip) for the period 2016-20. The grant agreement for the new Indicative Cooperation Programme was signed in Luxembourg recently by Laos' Minister of Planning and Investment, Mr Somdy Duangdy, and Minister of Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs of Luxembourg, Mr Romain Schneider.



Minister of Planning and Investment of Laos, Mr Somdy Duangdy (left), and Minister of Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs of Luxembourg, Mr Romain Schneider, shake hands after signing a grant agreement.

Under the agreement, Luxembourg and Laos will continue to focus on the sectors of health, rural development, technical and vocational education and training in tourism and hospitality, with increased support for governance. Mr Somdy successfully carried out sensitisation missions to Luxembourg and the European Union (EU) Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, last week. The visits to both countries are part of the sensitisation missions for the upcoming High Level Round Table Meeting (HLRTM) which will take place in Vientiane on November 27. Prior to the meeting, a field visit to Borikhamxay province to observe some related development activities will take place from November 25 to 26. These sensitisation missions aim to increase the visibility of Laos in terms of development progress and challenges, engage donor officials at headquar-

ters level directly in policy dialogue that will support Laos' efforts to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status, share the outline of the HLRTM agenda and key issues to be discussed in order to galvanise donors' headquarters officials in the HLRTM, link the post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and seek to firm up and continue development cooperation agreements with development partners as Laos enters the important phase of exiting LDC status and the Millennium Development Goals implementation in light of the roll out of the SDGs. These visits by the Lao government have helped create common understanding among the EU and its member states about Laos' current achievements, challenges, priorities and goals for the country's development agenda. Mr Somdy said the support from the EU and its member states is important for the development of Laos as sustainable development means the exchange of skills, technologies and other related policies that are suitable for the future of Laos. Mr Somdy added that the EU is a strong advocate for development effectiveness and as such actively participates in the round table process and its sector working groups. He also stressed that EU member states collectively are the top donors for Laos and the Lao government appreciates the EU's bilateral development cooperation that is focused on the three main priority areas of education, food and nutrition security, and good governance. At the same time, the Lao government supports the EU's approach that its assistance will be delivered through a range of implementation modalities including cooperation with international organisations including the World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF as well as project support managed by international and local civil society organisations and private compa-

nies. At the end of these visits, the Lao government and the EU including member states like Luxembourg underlined and reiterated the unique core strengths held by the EU, including its universal presence, legitimacy and convening power, as well as its depth

and breadth of experience and its ability to support partner countries as they translate global norms and standards into national policy and action. That puts the organisation in a unique position to confront modern challenges.

(Vientiane Times 03 October 2015)

Nam Ngiep 2 begins operations

(By Times Reporters)



Deputy Prime Minister Mr Somsavat Lengsavat (centre) cuts a ribbon at the opening ceremony of the Nam Ngiep 2 in Xieng-Khuang province last Friday.

The hydropower investment project between Laos and China, Nam Ngiep 2 in Xieng-Khuang province officially opened last Friday after over four years of construction. The project cost about 2.81 trillion kip (US\$345 million), with Electricite du Laos (EDL) holding 10 percent and China International Water & Electric Corp (CWE) holding the other 90 percent. CWE is the subsidiary company of the China Three Gorges Corporation. The new plant has an installed capacity of 180 megawatts (MW) and the generated electricity will contribute to the national power grid for local supply. The developers signed a project development agreement on Nam Ngiep 2 with the government in August 2010 and a concession agreement with the government a year later, August 2011. The power purchase agreement was signed between Nam Ngiep 2 and EDL in October, 2011 and construction work started in November of the same year. The project also has added expenditure for resettlement, environment and social support including infra-

structure construction and relocation and compensation worth about 51 billion kip (US\$6.25 million), livelihood development over US\$390,000, compensation for temporary impact above US\$250,000, social support of around US\$100,000 and environmental monitoring (biomass clearance and water quality analysis) of more than US\$660,000. During the opening ceremony, Minister of Energy and Mines Dr Khammany Inthirath said Nam Ngiep 2 project was part of the country's 2016 electricity system development plan in line with improving industry and modernising the nation. "We are so grateful for the completion of this project because it's very important to help us with basic socioeconomic development, especially commercialising agriculture to allow people in rural areas to reduce poverty", he said. The opening ceremony took place in XiengKhuang province and was attended by Deputy Prime Minister Mr Somsavat Lengsavat, Minister of Energy and Mines Dr Khammany Inthirath, Deputy Governor of XiengKhuang province, Dr Bouasone Sinanthong, President of the China Three Gorges Corporation Mr Wang Lin, and other participants. The government has to date signed memorandums of understanding (MoU) or is undertaking research studies on more than 70 hydropower projects. Some of these are either operational or under construction. Laos has also signed a MoU to provide 7,000MW of energy after 2015 to Thailand, and 3,000MW of electricity from now until 2020

to Vietnam. Representatives of the energy sectors in Laos and Cambodia signed a purchase agreement for the supply of about 5MW by the end of 2009. However, to date there is no MoU to officially certify the terms of the sale. The government intends to use the profits from hydropower sales to fight poverty in the country. In recent years, the energy sector has played a major part in social development, notably in the fields of education, human resources, healthcare, and job creation. Twenty-seven power plants are currently operational with installed capacity

of about 3,304MW, including 11 plants that have an installed capacity of 405MW which are operated by EDL. The other 16 plants, which have a combined installed capacity of 2,899MW, are operated by independent power producers. Laos was aiming for total installed capacity of about 12,000MW by 2025, a Ministry of Energy and Mines' report noted. The abundant resources of the Mekong River and its tributaries give Laos the potential to produce more than 25,000MW of electricity.

(Vientiane Times 05 October 2015)

Four international airports need to be built

(By Times Reporters)

Laos will need to build four new international airports as the existing four of Wattay, LuangPrabang, Savan and Pakse will be unable to accommodate growing air transport in the coming decades, a minister told the cabinet. Minister of Public Works and Transport DrBounchanhSinthavong told the recent meeting between the government cabinet, Vientiane Mayor and provincial governors when he presented a strategic plan on airport development. The planned expansion of the passenger terminal at Wattay International Airport would enable the airport to accommodate about three million passengers a year, which would make it capable of handling growing air transport until 2028, the minister said. The airport which now has an apron that can accommodate 48 parked aircraft and can land as large as 350-seat airplanes has no more space available for further expansion being located near the city centre. Therefore, the government needs to build a new larger international airport to handle the growing air transport industry. "A new international airport must be built outside the city. Construction of the new airport is expected to begin in 2025 and complete

before 2030," he told the meeting, referring to the strategic plan. "It is expected that a new international airport will be in use by 2030." The new airport will be built to accommodate as large as Boeing 747, Airbus 330 or equivalent airplanes. In addition, the minister stated that a new larger international airport in southern Champassak province also needed to be constructed with capacity to land 250-seat aircraft to meet the growing needs of air transport in the southern region. He explained the current international airport, which could only land 150-seat aircraft, had limited space for further expansion as it was located near the city centre and a mountain. But the minister did not explain when construction of the new airport should start or when it is expected to be in use. Similarly, a new larger international airport in Savannakhet province is set to be built at Seno area to meet growing air transport needs driven by enormous investment in the province's Savan-Seno Special Economic Zone. DrBounchanh said the existing international airport located near the city centre had limited space for expansion. However, the minister did not give details

about a time plan for construction of the new airport. The minister told the meeting the new international airport in LuangPrabang province, which was opened for use in 2013, already experienced crowding at times within the passenger terminal. Despite this the airport's capacity was expected to be capable of accommodating passengers until 2023. He explained the rapid growth of passenger numbers to the world heritage town had made the airport more crowded earlier. He said conditions of the existing location

meant it could not be expanded but the minister did not disclose further details. In addition, the government is also eyeing the development of regional airports in XiengKhuang and Bokeo provinces adding to the regional airport in Attapeu province, which completed construction in April this year. The strategic plan also spells out the need to improve domestic airports in provinces including Oudomxay, LuangNamtha and Xayaboury, while the one in Huaphan is under construction.

(Vientiane Times 05 October 2015)

New hospital boosts healthcare in XiengKhuang, Huaphan

(By Times Reporters)

More than 30,000 people in XiengKhuang and Huaphan provinces will benefit from improved healthcare after the BounthineYeominrak Hospital (Mother-Children Medical Care) opened last week. The hospital, located in Pheingdang village, Kham district, XiengKhuang province, was funded by COMSEED, based in Busan, Republic of Korea, and will serve the people of Kham district in XiengKhuang province and Hiem and Huameuang districts of Huaphan province. The construction cost of US\$30,000 was provided by a donation from the wife of COMSEED's President, Ms Kwon Kum-Sook. COMSEED President Mr Kwon Kyung-up and his wife were present at the hospital's opening and handover ceremony on Saturday. Fourteen members of the organisation in total attended the ceremony. Vice President of the Lao-Korea Parliamentary Friendship Association, Mr VilaysoukPhimmasone, was also present at the event. The building was designed to Ministry of Health standards and is 13 metres wide and 15 metres long. It has six rooms to provide obstetric services, general health checks, X-rays, ultrasound, patient treatment

and a pharmacy. In addition, vehicles and equipment worth about US\$200,000 were donated by COMSEED. Yeominrak Hospital will share in the joys and sorrows of the people it serves, Mr Kwon said. "Laos and the Republic of Korea are development partners, so we will continue together in development," he added. The Republic of Korea accounts for 5 percent of the world economy but Korean people live in 95 percent of the world's countries, he said. The hospital is the second provided by COMSEED for rural healthcare, while the first is in Nepal. Mr Kwon promised that COMSEED would provide more assistance in different ways, which would require cooperation and responsibility on the part of provincial authorities. The next planned assistance will be the provision of medical equipment with a view to long-term sustainability, a better pharmacy, assistance with management, and training on ethical practices to enhance the work done by medical staff. Mr Kwon said COMSEED may invite Lao medical staff to train in Korea or bring Korean experts to provide training in Laos. He hoped the hospital would improve local healthcare services and that

people would be happy with its facilities. The hospital contributes to health sector development in Laos and will cut costs for patients as they will no longer have to travel to provincial or district hospitals. Its services should also help to lower maternal and infant mortality rates. Bounthing is a remote area, far from Huaphan and XiengKhuang provincial capitals, so the hospital will benefit the

people of both provinces. It is also an indication of the cooperation between Laos and Korea through COMSEED. The ceremony was attended by XiengKhuang provincial Deputy Governor, Dr Bouasone Sinouanthong, the governors of Kham, Hiem and Huameuang districts, provincial health sector officials, villagers and COMSEED members.

(Vientiane Times 06 October 2015)

Laos prepares to host 12th High-Level Round Table Meeting

(By Times Reporters)

The Lao government and the United Nations will co-host the 12th High-Level Round Table Meeting in Vientiane on November 27, to debate Laos' progress towards graduating from Least Developed Country status by 2020.



Dr Kikeo Chanhaboury speaks at a press conference in Vientiane yesterday.

More than 300 delegates from the government and development partners, donor governments, non-profit organisations, national non-profit associations and the private sector are expected to attend. The meeting will be held under the theme of "Enhanced Partnership for Effective Implementation of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) – Achieving the Least Developed Country graduation criteria by 2020." The meeting will be opened by Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong and will be held at the National Convention Centre. Administra-

tor of the United Nations Development Programme and Chair of the UN Development Group, Ms Helen Clark, will deliver the keynote speech at the forum, which will also consider the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Speaking at a press conference about the meeting yesterday, Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment Dr Kikeo Chanhaboury said the priority would be discussions between the government and development partners and an explanation of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan. "The 12th High Level Roundtable Meeting takes place at a critical moment in the transition to the new development agenda both domestically and globally, as the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan for 2016 to 2020 has now been finalised," Dr Kikeo said. "Many essential issues have already been put on the agenda, such as the revision of the achievements of the 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan as well as seeking solutions together towards unsolved problems," he added. The new socio-economic development plan is vital in ensuring that Laos graduates from least developed country status by 2020, he said. The sustainable protection of natural resources will also be discussed. The Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Co-

operation will also be launched at the meeting. The declaration updates an existing document drawn up in 2006, expanding the concept of 'aid effectiveness' to 'effective development cooperation'. This places a greater emphasis on new sources of development financing alongside Official Development Assistance (ODA). United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative, Ms Kaarina Immonen, said she was confident that development partners would sign the Vientiane Declaration on enhancing partnership for effective development cooperation. "We are delighted to have supported the process since the beginning and to continue assisting the Lao government in this vital meeting that should secure further support for the five year Socio-Economic Development Plan and the new Sustainable

Development Goals," she said. High-Level Round Table Meetings take place every three to five years, synchronising with the NSEDP cycle. They are an integral part of the Round Table Process that was launched by the government in 2000. With support from UNDP, the process aims to strengthen the partnership between the government and its development partners to boost efficiency and results. During the meeting, a field visit to Borikhamxay province will be arranged for delegates, so they can observe local development projects. In addition, a Development Cooperation Exhibition will be launched on November 26, featuring the achievements and projects of the 10 Government-led Sector Working Groups and other related agencies.

(Vientiane Times 07 October 2015)

Honorary consul impressed by Xayaboury dam

(By Times Reporters)

Laos's Honorary Consul to Switzerland Dr Guido Kappeli said he was impressed by his visit to the Xayaboury run-of-river hydropower plant this week, where he was briefed on the advanced technology being used in the construction of the dam. The project developer, Xayaboury Power Company Limited (XPCL), informed Dr Kappeli and his associates, who were on a working trip to Laos, that the technology used would mini-



Construction of Xayaboury run-of-river hydropower plant is about 50 percent completed.

mise the environmental impacts of the dam.

Deputy Managing Director of XPCL's Operation and Maintenance, Mr Anuparp Wonglakorn, told the overseas delegation that nutrient sediment required by fish could pass freely through the spillways and turbines. The project's lead engineer Prat Nantasesen said about 97 percent of the total sediment flow would continue to pass downstream as normal. Project designers also developed a system to monitor sediment accumulated on the riverbed in front of the dam, which would be flushed downstream through sediment-flushing outlets when needed. A video presentation demonstrated how fish migration multi-system facilities work, and Mr Anuparp said these would enable fish to migrate up and downstream. The system, which combines a fish ladder and a fish lock, has been used in the United States, he said. "We did a lot of experiments. We set up an on-site laboratory to carry out experiments

and find out how many kinds of fish there are and their ability to swim against the flow...," he told the Swiss guests, adding that all of this information contributed to the development of the fish migration facilities. In addition, the developer incorporated a specialised fish-friendly turbine that offers high-survival rates of fish migrating through the turbine. After learning that a slower turbine speed increased the fish survival rate, the developer decided to reduce the speed from more than 100 rpm to 83.3 rpm. A navigation lock has been developed to enable the passage of cargo vessels weighing up to 500 tonnes both up and downstream, MrAnuparp told the visitors. DrKappeli told local media during his tour of the dam that he was impressed by what he had seen. "You can see that everything is very clean [here at the construction site] and safety is really a priority here." He said the project was making an important contribution to the development of Laos and creating jobs for local people. When the 29-year concession period ends in 2048, Laos will take full ownership

of the 1,285MW dam. Asked about his thoughts on the Lao government's plan to build other hydropower plants on the Mekong, DrKappeli said it was normal and good for a country to make use of its potential to drive development. "Every country in the world uses and profits from its capacity. Laos has a big capacity and resource in water and it is good and normal that these capacities are used," he said. He added that the revenue generated by dams could be invested in initiatives to fight poverty. During the 29-year concession period, the power generated and sold by the dam is expected to earn almost US\$4 billion for the Lao government. After beginning in 2012, construction of the US\$3.5 billion dam is now about 50 percent complete. When it becomes operational in 2019, about 95 percent of the electricity produced will be sold to Thailand. World-class consulting firm Pöyry Energy Ltd and France's CompagnieNationale du Rhone were hired to oversee the design and construction of the dam.

(Vientiane Times 09 October 2015)

Rural Oudomxay villagers get free health checks

(By Times Reporters)

Over 4,500 people in remote areas of Namor district in Oudomxay province recently received free dental, ear, nose and throat (ENT) and eye examinations, along with general health checks. An ophthalmologist from the provincial hospital's eye unit said the services were provided by a team of doctors from Oudomxay provincial and district hospitals. The check-ups took place at a healthcare centre in Khouang village from September 30-October 3 with the support of the United States' Lao Rehabilitation Foundation (LRF) and the Fred Hollows Foundation of Australia at a cost of about

US\$12,000 (over 95 million kip). The aim of the project is to prevent dental cavities and deafness, help prevent unnecessary deaths of mothers and infants, improve health education in oral hygiene and ENT care, and provide information for expectant mothers. Despite the doctors' work, there are still many people with oral, ear, nose, throat and eye ailments in remote areas of Laos who are in need of assistance, the ophthalmologist DrPhetsamoneIndara told *Vientiane Times* this week. "Many of these conditions are easily preventable and can be treated if education and the right equipment are avail-

able in each district," he said. The main causes of infant mortality are breech and transverse presentations in pregnancy, which should be followed up at the provincial hospital. However, for the majority of people limited funds and lack of awareness are the main obstacles to accessing healthcare, but distance, limited access to hospitals and the fact that many people cannot afford to travel to provincial hospitals remain major challenges. Cavities and deafness are pressing public health problems and the healthcare of expectant mothers and children is a priority for the Ministry of Health. Unfortunately, many other people in remote areas are still waiting for better healthcare services,

Dr Phetsamone said. To help the people of Oudomxay province, the Lao Rehabilitation Foundation also provided medicine and medical equipment, including a nebuliser, ultrasonic doppler scanner, small surgery set, delivery set, autoclave, otoscope, sphygmomanometers and other items for the dispensary to use and improve community healthcare. The programme began in 2008 and so far more than 30,000 people from the northern provinces have received health checks. The mission operates without discrimination regarding gender, age, ethnicity or religion. Similar health services will be also provided to people in other areas in the near future, according to the eye unit.

(Vientiane Times 09 October 2015)

EU campaigns to end capital punishment

(By Times Reporters)

The European Union is campaigning in countries around the world to end capital punishment which is still imposed in one third of the global community of nations. Every year on October 10, people in many countries around the world join forces as part of the global movement to end capital punishment. In Vientiane, the European Union Delegation together with the EU member states' embassies to Laos showed their solidarity with the world by marking European and World Day against the Death Penalty. A press conference was held in Vientiane on Thursday which was attended by EU Chargé d'Affaires Michel Goffin, United Kingdom Ambassador Hugh Evans and French Chargé d'Affaires Marie Keller. The EU reaffirms its strong opposition to capital punishment. The death penalty is explicitly and unconditionally prohibited in the territory of the European Union, in all of its member states. Abolition is a precondition to accession for candidate countries. The worldwide abolition of the death penalty is one of the main objectives of the EU external policy. "Where the death penalty still exists, the EU calls for its use to be progressively restricted and insists that it be carried out according to international minimum standards," said Mr Goffin. In Laos, despite the fact that capital punishment is imposed, there is a de facto moratorium on the implementation of the death penal-

ty. As Laos is a largely Buddhist country, no executions have been carried out here since 1989. From 2005-2010, the death penalty was handed down in only four to five cases each year, mostly for drug trafficking. However, from 2010-2015 the figure rose to about 20 death sentences each year, with most again centering around the drug trade, but the total number of all death penalties handed down has yet to be reported. According to advocates against the imposition of the death penalty, countries where capital punishment is still sanctioned by their respective legal systems include the majority of countries in South East Asia as well as a number of countries in South Asia and the Middle East. China and America are the only superpowers that still impose the death penalty. "While the country is in the process of reviewing its Penal Code, Laos has the opportunity, if the death penalty is maintained, to ensure that it is only applied for the most serious crimes," said the EU Chargé d'Affaires. The EU welcomes the Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty, adopted on December 18, 2014. With an increasing number of votes in favour of this resolution, almost two thirds of countries in the world have abolished the death penalty either in law or in practice.

(Vientiane Times 09 October 2015)