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Asean reviews political and security affairs

(By Times Reporters)

The ten Asean member countries yesterday reviewed political and security affairs, and Asean coordination affairs in two Asean meetings ahead of the Asean Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs ThonglounSisoulith led a Lao delegation attending the 13th Asean Political-Security Community's Council Meeting and the 17th Asean Coordination Council Meeting held in the Malaysian capital yesterday.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs ThonglounSisoulith(sixth right) and other Asean officials link hands during a meeting.

The 13th meeting of the Asean Political-Security Community's Council reviewed the implementation of various work activities defined in the master plan of the Asean Political-Security Community, the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a press release. The meeting noted that 94 percent of the planned activities had been carried out. The 17th Meeting of the Asean Coordination Council discussed agendas for the 27th Asean Summit scheduled to take place today and tomorrow in the Malaysian capital. Participants also reviewed the implementation of agreements made by Asean leaders at the 26th Asean Summit and other related issues. Yesterday's meeting also adopted a report of the permanent representative committee to

Asean on the Initiative for Asean Integration (IAI), and a report on Asean connectivity. Reports on the amended organisational structure of the Asean Secretariat and 2016 budget for the secretariat administration were also endorsed. At the meeting, MrThongloun pressed on the need to intensify cooperation to narrow the development gap among Asean members and accelerate Asean connectivity. The Lao minister called for the meeting to push relevant bodies of their respective countries to accelerate formulating the third action plan of the IAI as well as the post 2015 Asean connectivity agendas so that the third action plan and the agendas can be adopted in 2016 during Laos' Asean chair. MrThongloun praised the relevant Asean officials for their contribution to regional affairs striving to fully realise the Asean community by December 31 this year. He also praised the relevant sectors for formulating the Asean vision until 2025 and the master plans of Asean's three pillars - Asean Political-Security Community, Asean Economic Community and Asean Socio-Cultural Community. MrThongloun highly valued Asean's accomplishments gained over the past year under the chairmanship of Malaysia. He took this opportunity to invite his Asean counterparts and delegations to participate in Asean and related meetings to be held in Laos in 2016 when the nation chairs the regional bloc. During the visit to Malaysia, the Lao foreign minister held a bilateral meeting with the new Minister of Foreign Affairs of Singapore, Mr Vivian Balakrishnan and discussed cooperation between the two countries and through Asean frameworks. Malaysia is expected to handover the Asean Chair to Laos during the 27th Asean Summit in Kuala Lumpur.

(Vientiane Times 21Novembre2015)

Laos launches its first satellite

(By SomsackPongkhao)

Laos' first telecommunications satellite (Lao Sat-1) was launched into orbit from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in Sichuan province at 00:07 local time on Saturday. Lao Sat-1 successfully separated from the rocket upper stage and deployed its solar panels after it had blasted off. The satellite was designed, developed and delivered on-orbit by China with the total project amounting to US\$259 million.



A rocket carrying the LaoSat-1 satellite blasts off from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in Xichang, southwest China's Sichuan province on November 21. -- Photo Xinhua

The scientists also noted that out of 193 United Nations member countries in the world, less than half still did not have their own satellites. The launching ceremony was attended by Vice President of the Lao PDR MrBounnhangVorachit, ministers and other senior government officials from Laos and China. MrBounnhang said Laos was proud to have its own satellite which was considered a landmark in Lao history. He said the launch of the satellite would contribute to further enhancing relations and the comprehensive strategic partnership between Laos and China. The satellite is designed to provide communication links for government

work, television transmissions and a range of telecommunication applications in Laos. The satellite will also be used for other purposes, including education, health, defence, security and so on. Xichang is one of the only three satellite launch centres in China with many satellites having blasted off onboard rockets here. China's rocket to explore the moon was also launched at this centre. Lao Sat-1 was developed through a venture between the Lao government and three Chinese developers. A shareholders' agreement for the Lao Sat-1 Joint Venture Company was signed in Vientiane on October 30 between all sides. The Lao government holds a 45 percent stake in the Lao Sat-1 Joint Venture Company, while APMT has a 35 percent shareholding, SSTC has 15 percent, and APST has a 5 percent stake. Minister of Posts and Telecommunications MrHiem-Phommachanh said "The launch of the satellite by China is a special gift to Laos to mark the 40th anniversary of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on December 2." Work on the satellite project began in 2006 when Laos expressed interest in seeking an orbital slot. When Laos found the 128.5 degrees East orbital slot available in 2009, the Lao government applied for use of the slot. But one of the most important issues for this project was funding as it required large sums of capital investment. It was also in 2009 when the government decided to seek out a loan in order to move the project forwards, but it was delayed while funding was procured. Then in 2012, the Lao government signed a US\$259 million loan agreement with the Export-Import Bank of China.

(Vientiane Times 23 Novembre2015)

WHO and partners continue health sector support

(By PhetphoxaySengpaseuth)

The World Health Organisation (WHO), the European Union (EU) and Luxembourg have expressed their commitment to extend their support to the development of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in Laos. The initiative aims to support the policy dialogue on national health policies, strategies and plans, with the overall objective of improving health sector outcomes in the country in the next five years. The signing ceremony to extend the support took place in Vientiane last week, between WHO representative to Laos, Dr. Juliet Fleischl and Minister of Health, Prof. DrEksavangVongvichit. The WHO first entered into a collaborative agreement in October 2011 with the EU to support the policy dialogue on national health policies, strategies and plans as well as universal health coverage in fourteen selected countries, officials confirmed. Dr. Juliet Fleischl said the agreement was further cemented in 2012, when Luxembourg, in line with the internal European harmonisation of health aid, entered into a similar partnership with the WHO. She said from August 2015, the Lao PDR became another key country to benefit from the partnership supported by Luxembourg. These benefits are expected to continue for the next five years of the partnership towards meeting the overall objective of improving health sector outcomes in the country. Prof. DrEksavangVongvichit said the health reform strategy has set the Lao PDR to attain Universal Health Coverage by 2025. He said the UHC is the only tool to ensure all people can

access health care services. This will lead to improved health and prevent people from suffering from catastrophic health conditions. “I am grateful to Luxembourg and the European Union for funding this programme through the WHO and providing valuable support and assistance to the Ministry of Health when it comes to identifying the policy gaps and developing the platforms and mechanism towards universal health coverage,” he said. Prof. DrEksavang expressed his gratitude to the WHO in Laos, Luxembourg and the EU, as strong development partners in the health sector in the Lao PDR. According to the Ministry of Health, the proposed 2016 - 2018 work plan for the UHC Partnership Programme and the identified key strategic areas embraces the UHC. “I want to thank the ministry for supporting the general direction of the work plan and the strategic areas identified,” Prof. DrEksavang said. The WHO and the identified departments will then identify the key activities to be undertaken under each of the assigned strategic areas. From 2016, funds will be disbursed to the ministry through the usual agreed ministry and WHO planning and funding process to support these identified activities. Through this partnership programme, the WHO looks forward to continuing its support to the MoH towards the achievement of the goals and vision of the Health Sector Reform Plan, which is the Lao PDR's Roadmap towards achievement of Universal Health Coverage by 2025.

(Vientiane Times 23 Novembre 2015)

Laos accepts Asean chairmanship

(By Times Reporters)

Laos has officially assumed its chairmanship of Asean for the next year, joining other member states in turning the vision into reality and building a dynamic regional community. The assumption of the gavel took part at the closing ceremony of the 27th Asean Summit on Sunday in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.



Prime Minister Najib Razak (left) hands a gavel, the symbol of the Asean chairmanship to Prime Minister Thong Sing Thammavong.

Prime Minister Thong Sing Thammavong took the opportunity to thank his Malaysian counterpart Datuk Seri Najib Razak as well as the Malaysian government and people for the successful 27th Summit and other related summits as well as this year's successful Asean chairmanship of Malaysia. Mr Thong Sing said Malaysia's chairmanship has led to new achievements, especially the building of the Asean Community, which will be officially announced on December 31, and the Asean Vision for the next ten years. He made mention about the priority for Asean's chairmanship of Laos, which will focus on the realisation of the Asean Vision 2025, and the blueprint on the three Asean pillars of the Political-Security, Economic, and Social-Cultural Communities, as well as efforts in narrowing the development gaps among Asean members. Mr Thong Sing said it was a great honour for Laos to assume Asean chairmanship for the second time in

2016. He said it will have the theme "Turning Vision into Reality for a Dynamic Asean Community." "We will continue to work closely with our Asean family members and external partners with the objective of further advancing the community building process for a dynamic Asean community," he added. A short video about socio-economic development and the potential of Laos was screened during the ceremony. Prime Minister Thong Sing concluded his speech by inviting leaders and delegates from Asean dialogue partners and other partners to attend the Asean meetings during Laos' chairmanship next year. On the same day, Mr Thong Sing also attended a series of Asean summits with development partners. At the Asean-New Zealand 40th Anniversary Commemorative Summit, the leaders from Asean and New Zealand highly valued the cooperation between Asean and New Zealand in the past 40 years with achievements made, especially in trade and investment, education, and visits of the peoples of the two regions. The leaders agreed on upgrading the Asean-New Zealand relationship to that of a strategic partnership, and adopted the related joint statement, which is the Asean high cooperation level with dialogue partners. During the summit, New Zealand Prime Minister John Key announced initiatives on promoting the visits and prosperity among the nations of Asean and New Zealand. The 10th East Asia Summit (EAS) highly valued its achievements in the past ten years, especially its role of being a stage for leaders to exchange strategic issues related to politics and economics of common interest and concerns, and the six areas of cooperation: including finance, energy and environment, education, health and disease outbreaks, disaster response, and connectivity. The 18th Asean Japan Summit highly valued the cooperation between

Asean and Japan, especially the successful implementation of the declaration on Asean-Japan friendship and cooperation, in trade and investment, and the visits between people of the two regions through youth exchange programmes. Japan has reconfirmed its commitment to support Asean connectivity and narrowing the development gap through the implementation of the master plan on Asean connectivity, and the work plan on Asean integration, including the new initiative of Japan: a 'Partnership for Quality Infrastructure' which will help fund infrastructure development in the region. The 17th Asean-Republic of Korea (ROK) Summit was pleased with the adoption of the new Asean-ROK action plan 2016-2020, which has defined priority sectors of cooperation for the next five years. The leaders reaffirmed their desire to enhance the economic

cooperation through benefiting from the Asean-ROK Free Trade Area, and enhancing the cooperation among businesses of the two sides, targeting US\$200 billion in trade by 2020. Meanwhile, the 7th Asean-United Nations Summit praised the success of the 70th Session UN General Assembly, which adopted the agenda on post-2015 sustainable development. The summit was also pleased with the results of cooperation between Asean and the UN. During his stay in Malaysia, Prime Minister Thongsing also met with the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, where both sides highly valued the cooperation between Laos and the UN, especially the UN assistance to Laos in implementing the Millennium Development Goals, which has significantly contributed to socio-economic development and poverty reduction in the country.

(Vientiane Times 24 Novembre 2015)

New national forum charts action on under-nutrition

(By Times Reporters)

The new National Nutrition Forum met in Vientiane for the first time last Friday to lay the foundations for joint action against under-nutrition and forge key messages on nutrition for the upcoming 12th High Level Round Table Meeting. Over 100 participants from the Lao government, embassies, the United Nations and civil society partners took part in the meeting that also officially launched the new National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan to run from 2016 – 2020. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education and Sports Mr Phankham Viphavanh said: "The Lao Government is committed to improving health and nutrition, particularly for women and children. Today we approved the new National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan [that runs from 2016 – 2020]. It aims to end hunger, improve nutrition and [promote] sustainable agriculture." "Our work takes into account

recent mapping exercises on nutrition and is linked to the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan. We'll work to address the root causes of under-nutrition," he said. The latest Lao Social Indicator Survey states that nearly 2 million Lao citizens, mainly women and children, suffer from some form of under-nutrition. Stunting remains high at 44 percent, and affects around 385,000 children under the age of five. According to a 2013 report by the Ministry of Planning and Investment and UNICEF, malnutrition has a huge economic cost for the country. Iron deficiency anemia and stunting in young children alone brings a loss of US\$99 million per year, and the country loses US\$194 billion annually through under-nutrition. The New National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan aims to mainstream nutrition into overall national development aims and will work across three sectors: agriculture, education

and health as well as water and sanitation. Targets include bringing down the infant mortality rate from 68 deaths from 1000 births in 2012 to 20 per 1000 births by 2025 and bringing down the maternal mortality rate from 220 deaths per 100,000 births in 2012 to 100 deaths for every 100,000 by 2025. The European Union's Charge D'Affaires in Laos Mr Michel Goffin called for urgent action on what he called the 'silent emergency' of under-nutrition: "Massively improving maternal, infant and young child nutrition should not be seen as a cost, but as an investment in the future of Laos. The

economic returns of investing in nutrition may not be immediate, but are extremely high in the medium term," he said. "The Lao PDR has made incredible progress in terms of improving the political environment for nutrition at the central level. It's now time, however, to call for action and massively scale up these efforts at the community level," he added. Sustainable Agriculture and Food and Nutrition Security' is one of three focal sectors for EU cooperation in Laos, accounting for a significant part of the funds available under the ongoing country strategy.

(Vientiane Times 24 Novembre 2015)

US President highlights accomplishments of Lao youth leader

(By Times Reporters)

President of the United States, Barack Obama highlighted the accomplishments of MsChindavoneSanlath from Phongsaly province, who is working to improve forest management in Laos. President Obama's comments were made during a town hall meeting on November 20 with emerging leaders from Asean countries participating in the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) Summit in Kuala Lumpur, according to the press release from US Embassy in Vientiane. MsChindavone stated, "I was born in one of the most remote parts of Laos. And my father passed away before I was born. Because of my background, I never thought that one day I would be able to help my community... Because of YSEALI, now my thoughts [have] changed." She went on to explain, "Being a part of YSEALI expanded my thinking and enabled me to see the challenges facing my communities, and empowered me to be a part of the solution". "I'm now working with a project called forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade, which aims to promote legal timber trade and sustainable forest management. I have already been able to apply the lessons

I learned in Montana to help improve forest management in Laos," she said. During the meeting President Obama highlighted the important role of young leaders, "I am absolutely confident that young people like you - with your passion and drive and commitment - you can make a difference. And I know you will. You already are". Approximately 30 participants from Laos attended the three-day summit from November 19 to 22 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The event was the largest gathering of alumni from the YSEALI programme, which provides exchange programmes, grants, and regional workshops to build the leadership capabilities of youth in the region. The programme strengthens ties between the United States and Southeast Asia and nurtures the Asean community. During the summit participants discussed challenges facing Southeast Asia and how young people can work across national borders to develop solutions. The YSEALI Summit included workshops and interactive sessions to help participants explore social, economic, environmental and educational trends in Southeast Asia. Participants also received practical training to ex-

pand their leadership and professional skills on topics such as leading a diverse workforce, effective public speaking, and becoming a social entrepreneur. While attending the Asean Summit, President Obama also

stated during a speech at the Asean Business and Investment Summit that he looked forward to becoming the first US President to visit Laos when it hosts Asean next year.

(Vientiane Times 25 Novembre 2015)

Govt approves laws for further debate at NA

(By Times Reporters)

Cabinet members have discussed and approved various laws at the government's monthly meeting before submitting these pieces of legislation to the upcoming session of the National Assembly for debate. The meeting held on November 24 was chaired by Prime Minister ThongsingThammavong and attended by other cabinet members.



Prime Minister ThongsingThammavong.

During the proceedings, four draft amended laws were endorsed in regards to the state investment, state budget, taxation and the government. But the cabinet members did not approve the draft amended Law on Local Administration because it was still unclear and not comprehensive enough to reflect the reality of the nation in the new era. The Law on Local Administration was promulgated in 2003, but the government thought that it was necessary to amend it in order to better define the roles, structures and styles of working by local authorities to strengthen local administration while ensuring transparency and the continued growth of the country's economy. The amendment of the State In-

vestment Law aimed to oversee the investment of state development projects to ensure the efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of the projects while responding to socio-economic development and the improvement of the livelihoods of local people. Meanwhile the amendment of the Law on the State Budget is aimed to ensure the proper collection of national revenue while the expenditure of the budget must be made in a transparent and effective fashion. The taxation law aims to oversee business operation and push for the business sector to further grow and pay its proper tax obligations to the government. The law on the Government of the Lao PDR aims to better define the roles and working styles of the government to manage the state and socio-economic development while protecting the environment. This law was promulgated in 1995 and used it as a tool for overseeing socio-economic development in Laos. The government meeting asked the relevant sectors to further amend the above draft amended laws based on the recommendations from cabinet members to ensure that the draft amendment of the laws are comprehensive before submitting them to the NA session for debate. During the meeting, PM Thongsing called for the relevant sectors to prepare for various significant events to be held in December. These include the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the foundation of the Lao PDR, a high-level roundtable meeting and the National Assembly session. The preparations for the event are now fully-fledged as

the date for the official celebration draws closer. All sectors are urged to contribute to keep the city clean and maintain order and security for the celebration. Concerning parades and performing programmes for the

celebration of National Day, all sectors have concentrated on practising their parades and programmes so that they will be ready before the event.

(Vientiane Times 26 Novembre 2015)

E-passports to be operational next year

(By Somxay Sengdara)

Laos will begin using E-passports next year thanks to cooperation between the Lao and Russian governments, and Russian company International Book-Security.



Mr Thongloun Sisoulith watches a presentation about the E-passport project at the reception.

The project, which began in 2012, was revealed on Wednesday at a reception in Vientiane to mark the 50th anniversary of Lao-Russian and Russian-Lao Friendship Associations. According to the project plan, the use of E-passports for diplomats would begin on January 15 with E-passports for government officials and ordinary citizens set for the middle of next year. All equipment and infrastructure for production of the passports is in place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs office in Vientiane, while the control gate for travellers holding the passports has also been installed at Wattay International Airport. At the reception, Russian Ambassador to Laos Mr Mikhail Baranov, representing the Russian government, pinned a Friendship Medal on Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Thon-

gloun Sisoulith, which was awarded for his efforts in reinforcing and developing mutual beneficial cooperation between Laos and Russia. Mr Thongloun said at the awarding ceremony, "This medal is especially valued by me because it has been awarded in the year significant for all Lao people, - the 40th anniversary of the Lao PDR, the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Lao-Russian Friendship Association, and the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our countries". Since becoming the independent state of Laos, the Soviet Union and then Russia have provided assistance to Lao people across all sectors. As the country prepares to celebrate the historic date, Mr Thongloun reminded the audience about Lao people's heroic struggle for national liberation and sovereignty and that the people could now define their own destiny. "Overall, on the way we felt fraternal assistance from the Soviet Union and Russian Federation," he said. Under the active participation of Soviet specialists, industry in Laos was founded, the defensive potential of the country was strengthened and the political system of society was formed. Under technical collaboration from Russia, tens of transport infrastructure projects such as roads and bridges, industrial and agriculture enterprises, schools and hospitals have been built in Laos. The Soviet Union and Russia have played an important role in building a modern collective Lao intellect as thousands of citizens received their education from the Soviet Union and Russia. Speaking at the

ceremony, Mr Baranov made mention of the friendly relations between the two countries, which he said had been tightened at every

stage with cooperation at all levels, including cooperation in the cultural sector and the conserving of Russian language in Laos.

(Vientiane Times 27 Novembre2015)

Nation lacking paediatric surgeons

(By PhetphoxaySengpaseuth)

Laos needs more young people to study as paediatric surgeons so they can contribute to developing the health sector and help the lives of children across the country. This was the message delivered at the 10th Congress of Asean Society of Paediatric Surgeons (ASPS), in Vientiane from November 25-26 attended by Deputy Minister of Health, Assoc. Prof. DrSomOckKingsada and paediatric experts from 10 Asean countries. Laos had only 5 paediatric surgery departments nationwide, officials confirmed. Speaking at the conference on Wednesday, Chief of Paediatric Surgery Department of the Children's Hospital, DrChayphachanhSithamolada said that young people were not showing enough interest in paediatric surgery with student enrolments dropping in the challenging field. Meanwhile, DrChayphachanh highlighted the primary mission of paediatric health providers was to provide quality medical services with an emphasis on delivering clinical excellence and outstanding customer service in a warm and welcoming family-friendly environment. He

also stressed the importance of the regional body in assisting paediatric medicine. "ASPS is a good model of regional cooperation in our medical field. This conference is the best chance for our young paediatric surgeons to get lessons shared by experienced teachers," he said. The conference was also important for exchanging expertise in paediatric health within Asean and with French and British surgeons and he looked forward to them assisting Laos. Assoc. Prof. DrSomOck concurred on the positive role played by the conference in the region. "We are proud to be together as one community and of course we will have more and more cooperation in the near future in order to improve and develop our medical field along with the development of our region," he said. According to Laos Paediatrics Association, last year, surgery was able to significantly help 900 children's lives while they also conducted over 12,000 health checks. In the first six months of this year there were only 500 health checks with 70 percent of children treated with surgery.

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