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CLV ministers agree on triangle development direction

(By Somxay Sengdara)

Pakxe district, Champassak province: Ministers from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (CLV) have agreed to continue implementing the CLV Development Triangle Area Master Plan focusing on economic infrastructure development, trade and investment promotion, human resource development and environmental protection. Ministers and members of the CLV Development Triangle Area Joint Coordination Committee, including Lao Minister of Planning and Investment, Mr Somdy Duangdy; Cambodian Minister of Commerce, Mr Sun Chanthol; and Vietnamese Minister of Planning and Investment, Mr Bui Quang Vinh met in Pakxe district, Champassak province yesterday to discuss the future direction of cooperation.



(From left) Mr Sun Chanthol, Mr Somdy Duangdy, and Mr Bui Quang Vinh display signed minutes of the CLV JCC meeting.

They discussed the progress made in implementing the decisions made at the 8th CLV Summit in Vientiane, the Memorandum of Understanding between CLV towards establishment of special preferential policies, implementation of the revised master plan, implementation of CLV and development partners' cooperation, and the direction of future cooperation. In their remarks at the meeting, the ministers said they highly valued the progress of the CLV cooperation framework that has seen the traditional friendship of the

three neighbouring countries protected, thereby contributing to peace and stability, and facilitating socio-economic development in the CLV triangle area. Minister Somdy made mention of public and private investment in the area, which he said had been on the rise, especially Vietnamese investment in the four southern provinces of Laos, which had reached US\$2 billion. He said the Lao government had participated actively in implementing the master plan by improving and developing road connectivity between villages, districts and provinces, power transmission lines, telecommunications and banking systems, and other facilities. The pending challenges to development were the slow implementation of some projects and trade activities which had not yet improved local people's livelihoods. The ministers defined the direction of future cooperation by continuing implementation of the CLV Development Triangle Area Master Plan 2010-2020 with related working groups having to report their progress to the Joint Coordination Committee every year. They noted the need to reprioritise development projects, accelerate the formulation of new projects needing continued assistance from Japan and other development partners, and propose measures to more effectively carry out projects. Road connectivity was a central focus of the discussions, as this is essential to connect all provinces in the triangle area. The removal of landmines and disposal of unexploded ordnance was also raised at the meeting, aiming to ensure safety for investors and local people. The topics of environmental protection, sustainable natural resources management and preparedness for possible natural disasters, which support the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, were also on the agenda.

(Vientiane Times 12 December 2015)

EU celebrates Human Rights Day in Vientiane

(By Times Reporters)

The European Union held a press conference in Vientiane on Thursday to mark the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations. Speaking on the occasion, Chargé d'Affaires of the European Union Mr Michel Goffin said "Today, we start celebrating the 50th anniversary of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). "These two treaties set out the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights that belong to all human beings from their birth and throughout their life. Laos signed them in 2000, before ratifying them in 2007 (ICESCR) and 2009 (ICCPR)." Laos can be proud of the significant achievements of the last 15 years. The ratification of several core treaties, the adoption of several domestic laws and the establishment of several human rights mechanisms, such as the National Steering Committee on Human Rights in 2012, laid down the necessary legal and institutional framework to design, implement and monitor sound policies on human rights. Now is the time to deliver more on human rights. Laos and the EU held their 6th Bilateral Human Rights Dialogue in Vientiane last month, where discussions focused on effective implementation of Laos' international obligations and commitments. The EU insisted on the relevance of human rights for stability and on the importance of fully integrating human rights into domestic legislation and policies. Governance, the rule of law and human rights is one of three priority sectors of the EU development cooperation in Laos for the programming period (2014-2020) with a total allocation of Euro 207 million. The EU believes that im-

plementation can only be sustainable with genuine partnerships. The EU will continue to advocate and promote the benefits for national development of a vibrant civil society. CSOs remain important partners in delivering EU assistance to Laos. 2016 will be Laos' Asean moment. "How better to achieve a rule-based, people-oriented and people-centred Asean than through human rights?" said Mr Goffin. Under Laos' Chairmanship, the EU is looking forward to the next EU – Asean Policy Dialogue on Human Rights and to continue providing substantial assistance to Asean Human Rights bodies, including to the Asean Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. On this Human Rights Day, the United Nations invites the world to reflect on the meaning of freedom, as they were set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the two covenants, and in particular on: freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom of speech and freedom of thought and religion. Freedom is the ideal that underpins international human rights laws. They apply to everyone, everywhere, and traditional practices or cultural norms cannot justify taking them away. The press conference was also attended by British Ambassador Mr Hugh Evans, French Ambassador Mrs Claudine Ledoux, and Mr Michael Zinn, representing the German Embassy. The event marks the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. The Declaration is a landmark expression of global commitment to provide all people with universal rights and freedoms.

(Vientiane Times 12 December 2015)

Railway essential for development, Parliament told

(By Souksakhone Vaenkeo)

The development of an efficient railway system is essential to boost investment and spur socio-economic development of landlocked Laos, the Deputy Prime Minister told the National Assembly (NA) on Friday.



Mr Somsavat Lengsavat addresses the National Assembly session on Friday.

Mr Somsavat Lengsavat made the comment when speaking about the railway that will link Vientiane to the Chinese border following a groundbreaking ceremony earlier this month for the 38.7 billion yuan (US\$6.04 billion) project. Mr Somsavat, who is in charge of production and goods circulation, said investors have been asking him if Laos plans to build a railway network as companies want to cut costs by using cheaper rail transportation. "The cost of transporting goods by road is high, making it difficult [for businesses] to compete with their [rivals] in other countries in the region," he told lawmakers as he explained why the government had decided to go ahead with the costly project. Studies showed the railway could yield economic benefit of more than 30 percent, Mr Somsavat said, adding that if a project was able to yield economic benefit of 15 to 16 percent it would be profitable and worth investing in. On December 2, the day that Laos celebrated the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Lao PDR,

Laos and Chinese officials broke ground in Vientiane for the start of construction of the 427.2 km railway. China will be responsible for 70 percent of the total investment, while Laos will be responsible for the remainder. The two governments are required to contribute 40 percent each of the total amount needed to form a joint venture company to operate the project. Laos will need to secure a loan of about US\$480 million from China to pay its share of the investment. China has now agreed to reduce the annual interest rate on the loan from the 3 percent offered previously to 2.3 percent. Mr Somsavat said Laos' five potash mines should provide sufficient revenue to enable Laos to repay the loan and interest within five years. Construction of the single-track railway will take about five years to complete. The railway will have 21 sidings to enable trains to pass, as well as 11 passenger stations and one container station. Mr Somsavat said construction of the railway would be costly because of the many tunnels and bridges that would have to be built to traverse the mountainous terrain in the north of the country. The railway will have 170 bridges of 69 kilometres in length, equating to 16 percent of the total length. There will be 72 tunnels over a distance of 183 kilometres, comprising 43 percent of the total length. The electricity-powered passenger train is set to travel at 160 km per hour, while the freight train will run at 120 km per hour. However, the passenger train can travel at up to 200 kilometres per hour on flat terrain between Vangvieng and Vientiane. Fifty metres of land along each side of the railway will be kept clear to ensure safety. Responding to questions raised by NA members, Mr Somsavat said appropriate compensation would be paid to people displaced by the railway, within a reasonable

timeHe assured lawmakers that officials had been assigned to deal with unexploded ordnance if devices were uncovered during construction of the railway. The track will form part of the regional rail link known as the

Kunming-Singapore rail network over a distance of more than 3,000km. The railway will link China's Kunming all the way down to Singapore, passing through Laos, Thailand and Malaysia.

(Vientiane Times 14 December 2015)

Malnutrition persists across Laos

(By Times Reporters)

Laos continues to face a significant development challenge to reduce the high levels of malnutrition that prevail across the country. Chronic malnutrition remains a big problem in Laos and the malnutrition rates of children under the age of five are among the highest in the South East Asian region, with over 40 percent of Lao children being chronically undernourished or stunted. This was the essence of a keynote speech delivered by Deputy Minister of Health Associate Prof. Dr Phouthone Meuangpak on Friday at a dissemination workshop on the National Nutrition Strategic Plan 2025 and Plan of Action for 2016-2020 and the preliminary findings of a food and nutrition security survey. Some 100 participants from the line ministries concerned and provincial health departments took part in the meeting. Dr Phouthone said the government is committed to improving health and nutrition, particularly for women and children. "Recently, we approved the new National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan. They aim to end hunger and improve nutrition and sustainable agriculture." "Our work takes into account recent mapping exercises on nutrition and is linked to the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan. We will work to address the root causes of under-nutrition." The latest Lao Social Indicator Survey states that nearly 2 million

Lao citizens, mainly women and children, suffer some form of under-nutrition. Stunting is 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 anaemia and stunting in young children alone brings a loss of US\$99 million per year, and the country loses up to US\$197 million annually. The New National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan aims to mainstream nutrition into overall national development, and will work across three sectors: agriculture, education and health, and water and sanitation. Targets include bringing down infant mortality from 68 deaths per 1,000 in 2012 to 20 per 1,000 in 2025 and bringing down the maternal mortality rate from 220 deaths per 100,000 in 2012 to 100 deaths from every 100,000 by 2025. Laos signed up to the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, agreeing to expand efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. One of the measurable indicators under this goal was to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. Almost 62 percent of the world's undernourished people live in Asia and the Pacific, according to the report.

(Vientiane Times 14 December 2015)

Revenue from Hongsa power plant set to spur development

(By Times Reporters)

The government will receive over US\$2.3 billion in taxes from the Hongsa Power Company Limited under the 25 year concession agreement running from 2016-2041 for the newly built Hongsa Mine Mouth Power Plant.



The Hongsa Mine Mouth Power Project begins electricity generation.

This revenue will be a huge boost to socio-economic development, especially infrastructure development, and will enable the expansion of trade, services and investment. The Hongsa Mine Mouth Power Project in Hongsa district, Xayaboury province, is the biggest thermal power plant in the country. The investment cost totals US\$3.7 billion and the plant has a total installed capacity of 1,878 MW. The project will substantially increase electricity exports and enhance Laos' reputation as a major energy producer in Asean, Minister of Energy and Mines DrKhammanyInthirath said last week when addressing the official opening ceremony of commercial operation of the coal-fired plant. The plant would contribute to the local economy and hasten the progress of the gov-

ernment's policy implementation and rural development strategy, especially village development. Spin-offs from the plant would strengthen village groups and help to reduce poverty, improve people's living conditions and be a catalyst for new development, DrKhammanysaid. After construction of the plant began in 2011, it created job opportunities for local people especially youth, enabling them to earn more money and have long-term jobs, DrKhammanysaid. The company had provided new houses for the 450 families who had to relocate to make way for the project and had helped to develop infrastructure and provide health care. The company also built roads, a school, a temple, a market, a dispensary and installed clean water and electricity supplies. The Ministry of Energy and Mines would continue to develop the country's hydropower and thermal energy resources to boost energy exports and supply sufficient electricity for Laos. This would also bring in more revenue for the government's development budget. Under the government and Party's guidelines, the production of electricity had continually developed and expanded, DrKhammanysaid. Laos currently has 38 hydropower and thermal energy plants with an installed capacity of 6,264MW able to produce 33,315 million GWh a year. Compared to 1975 this was a 200-fold increase. Today, 89 percent of families across the country have access to electricity, he added.

(Vientiane Times 14 December 2015)

Parliament passes law on NA elections

(By Times Reporters)

The National Assembly (NA) yesterday passed an amended law on the election of members of the NA and provincial assemblies (PA). The passing of the law came after the parliament passed a new Law on Provincial Assemblies last week. At yesterday's debate prior to its passing, many NA members agreed that Lao citizens of all ethnic groups aged 18 years or above regardless of their gender, social status, profession and religion were eligible for election as NA and PA members. Those aged 21 or above with sufficient qualifications as indicated in Article 12 of this law are eligible to apply to be NA and PA candidates. However, people with a mental illness and those with a criminal record are not eligible to be elected to parliament or apply to be NA and PA candidates. Some NA members queried whether married men or women younger than 18 should be eligible to be elected as members of parliament. Clarifying the question, a member of the law drafting committee, Dr Daovone Vangvichit, said in fact it was against the Law on Family for a man or woman younger than 18 to get married, despite such illegal marriages being practiced in some rural communities. According to the law, one NA and PA member will be elected to represent every 50,000 people. Five NA

members will be elected in a province that has 250,000 people or less. A bigger province with a larger population may have no more than 19 NA members. A provincial assembly must have at least 15 members. A small district of 150,000 people or less is allowed to have three PA members. The new law encourages representatives from all ethnic groups, social strata and genders to apply to be NA candidates. The new law allows a NA or PA candidate to organise an election campaign in line with the relevant regulations, but he or she is not allowed to criticise other candidates to his or her favour. Yesterday's debate also focused on how to ensure that all Lao nationals exercise their voting rights, especially facilitating Lao students in foreign countries to have the opportunity to vote. An NA member for Luang Namtha province, Mr Kongphet Keobua-pha, said Lao students in foreign countries had no chance to vote for NA candidates in the last election, citing himself as an example. Dr Daovone admitted that arrangements had not been made in some foreign countries to enable Lao students to vote. The Assembly also passed the Amended Law on Local Administration yesterday. On Friday, the parliament passed a new Law on National Defence.

(Vientiane Times 15 December 2015)

Health sector debates finance, budgeting

(By PhetphoxaySengpaseuth)

Representatives from development partners, Ministry of Health and the provinces met yesterday in Vientiane to discuss the 'Health Sector Governance and Nutrition Programme' in relation to improved financial planning and budgeting. The programme aims to increase access to better quality health services for mothers and their children, provide health funding for the poor, and improve the quality of human resources in the health sector. In his opening remarks Director General of the ministry's Department of Planning and International Cooperation, DrPasongsithBoupha, said the meeting aimed to ensure the programme allocated its budget in a way that was more effective. Without it poor mothers and their children would not be able to access better quality health services. The Asian Development Bank and the World Bank have funded the programme with about US\$51 million and are helping the ministry to implement the five-year health sector development plan (2016-2020) and efforts to overcome challenges to meet the health-related Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets. DrPasongsith said the meeting helped to strengthen financial management planning and budgeting in local systems, and the

building and training of quality health officials, especially village physicians, midwives, specialists and health facilities. The Health Sector Governance and Nutrition Programme is the first development programme in the sector funded by the ADB, including policy reforms, to improve the quality of services and investment in infrastructure and capacity development. DrPasongsith said that also under the programme, capacity development and technical assistance were financed to improve the capacity for financial management planning and budgeting among health sector personnel in the provinces. The project will be implemented in the provinces of Phongsaly, LuangNamtha, Bokeo, Xayaboury, LuangPrabang, Oudomxay, Huaphan, Xiengkhuang, Xekong, Xaysomboun, Champassak, Attapeu, Saravan and Savannakhet. The ADB was pleased to learn of the programme's successful progress which was helping the ministry to improve the planning process, strengthen human resources for health, increase financing for health equity funds for the poor, enhance the quality of health services especially maternal and child health, and boost health facility development.

(Vientiane Times 15 December 2015)

Law amended to improve government performance

(By Times Reporters)

The amended Law on Government, which was passed by the National Assembly (NA) yesterday, aims to improve the government's performance through more transparent and frugal practices.



NA members debate the amended law.

Amendments to Article 4 on the performance principles to be followed by government stipulate that its performance or affairs must be transparent and carried out in a way that can be inspected. In addition, the government is required to exercise frugal practices to combat extravagance, corruption and other undesirable practices, while ensuring that economic growth and environmental protection continue in a sustainable manner. Amendments to Article 5 on the rights and duties of the government enable the government to grant Lao citizenship to qualified applicants and revoke Lao citizenship, as well as granting honorary Lao citizenship to foreigners. The amendments also stipulate that it is the duty of the government to regulate Lao people across the country, and define and take steps to protect the rights and interests of Lao citizens. The prime minister has the right to request the National Assembly to ask that Laos no longer be a state party to international conventions if they are deemed to be unsuitable, and to revoke conventions that Laos has made with other countries. These provisions have been made through amendments to Article 6 on the rights and duties of the prime minister.

The prime minister may also ask the NA Standing Committee to ratify international conventions or conventions that Laos has made with foreign countries.

The prime minister may be elected to or dismissed from office by the NA in accordance with proposals made by the Lao president. The amended law also stipulates that cabinet members shall not hold office for more than two consecutive terms. Meetings between the government cabinet, Vientiane Mayor and provincial governors must take place at least once a year instead of twice a year as previously. Other amendments instruct the government to attempt to resolve issues that violate the regulations, laws, rights and interests of the people. Prior to the approval of the law, debate focused on the performance standards and rights and duties of the government as well as the rights and duties of the prime minister, ministers and heads of ministry-equivalent organisations. National Assembly member for Vientiane, Dr Souvanpheng Bouphanouvong,

asked the law-drafting sub-committee to consider adding another performance principle to be followed by the government: that of serving the people, especially by addressing people's petitions. Member for Savannakhet province, Mr Simoun Ounlasy, asked the sub-committee to consider adding that it was the government's duty to protect the rights and interests of Lao people in foreign countries, including Lao workers and students. The sub-committee said consideration and revisions would be made as appropriate to the final version of the law in line with the comments made by law makers. Presenting the draft of the amended law to the Assembly, Minister and Head of the Government Office Dr Sonxay Siphandone said the amendments had been made to reflect current work requirements. The Law on Government was first promulgated in 1995 and

was first amended in 2003. The 2003 version comprised eight chapters and 38 articles, while the latest amended law has eight chap-

ters and 36 articles. The NA yesterday also passed an Amended Law on State Investment.

(Vientiane Times 16 December 2015)

Laos frees half a million people from poverty

(By Times Reporters)

Laos has achieved a major success in poverty reduction in line with the Millennium Development Goals, according to a newly released publication. The World Bank Group sponsored publication, which was released to the public recently, shows that Laos has met the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target of halving extreme poverty after putting this UN resolution into practice a decade ago. Poverty in Laos declined from 33.5 percent to 23.2 percent in the last decade, which lifts half a million Lao people out of poverty, the publication, which was also supported by Australian Aid and the Lao Statistics Bureau, highlights in its key findings. According to the Lao government, 6.59 percent of all families now live below the poverty line. The publication also stated that improvements in welfare were evident. One of the invisible examples is that the ownership of televisions has increased while access to electricity has doubled over the past decade. Also of significance is that the number of families living in houses built with bricks or concrete has nearly tripled, while the proportion of those without a toilet has been halved. Net secondary school enrollment increased from 27 percent in 2002/03 to 50 percent in 2012/13, which shows significant improvements in the education sector. The big drop in poverty in Laos has been possible due to improved skills, knowledge and increased access to

land. The increase in the number of non-farm jobs is also considered to be a main driver of poverty reduction. But despite these achievements, Laos still faces a number of challenges in the implementation of its poverty reduction programme. According to the publication, many people who have risen above poverty remain close to or have slipped to the poverty line, while about half of those who were classified as poor in 2013 were not poor in 2008. Apart from that, in 2013 about 80 percent of the population lived on less than US\$2.5 a day and face a 10 percent chance of falling back into poverty. Agriculture and health shocks are the main drivers of household vulnerability. Farming households are twice as likely to fall back into poverty compared to non-farming households, the publication says. To address the challenges, the author recommends that Laos creates more jobs, increases productivity, and improves the quality of jobs in the non-farm sector. This will provide a pathway for reducing poverty. Improving the business environment will be necessary to attract investment to create non-farm jobs and raise wages without hurting competitiveness, the publication says. In addition, increasing investment in education is needed to provide people with the necessary skills to obtain good jobs outside agriculture and also improve the productivity of farmers.

(Vientiane Times 16 December 2015)

Singapore supports public healthcare, nutrition

(By PhetphoxaySengpaseuth)

The Singapore government has agreed to provide grant assistance of US\$160,000 (1.3 billion kip) for the Lao government to strengthen public healthcare and improve nutrition in rural communities. Laos' Ministry of Health and Singapore's Temasek Polytechnic and the Temasek Foundation have teamed up to initiate the three-year Public Healthcare and Nutrition Intervention Programme to assist capacity building and training from 2015 to 2017. A grant agreement for the project was signed on Monday by the Director of the School of Applied Science at Temasek Polytechnic, Dr Lee Chee Wee, and Head of Office of the Ministry of Health, Dr Nao Boutta. Also present were Singapore Ambassador to Laos Mr Dominic Goh, Chief Executive Officer of the Temasek Foundation Mr Benedict Cheong, and Laos' Minister of Health Prof. Dr Eksavang-Vongvichit. Training will be conducted both in Singapore and Laos starting in Vientiane from December 14 to 18, followed by two weeks of training in Singapore in March next year. To extend the impact to the programme to the wider community, the 100 participants will also share their knowledge with another 200 of their peers, Dr Naosa- id. The Temasek Foundation and trainers from Temasek Polytechnic will teach nutrition intervention methods to 100 public health and nutrition officials from schools,

hospitals and health centres across Laos. Speaking at the signing ceremony, Dr Nao said the Temasek training would allow community nutritionists to practice their newly acquired knowledge and skills in their communities to combat malnutrition. "I am grateful that the Temasek Foundation and Temasek Polytechnic have come together to partner with us in making this a sustainable community development project to help develop local capability to improve the nutritional status of women and children in Laos," he said. Mr Dominic Goh said that over the next two years, 100 public health and nutrition officials would learn about meal planning, healthier meal preparation, health education and illness prevention. This would enable them to train health educators and school teachers on ways to design healthier and more nutritious meals in schools. He said the participants would also learn about nutrition assessment skills, which would enable them to carry out basic nutrition assessment to monitor the health status of target groups, identified by the Lao Ministry of Health. "Enhancing capabilities in healthcare in communities is a key priority for the Temasek Foundation. With continuous training, healthcare professionals will be able to meet the needs of their respective communities," Mr Goh added.

(Vientiane Times 16 December 2015)

Asean countries learn about palm leaf manuscript preservation

(By Times Reporters)

Delegates from Asean member states have learned practical lessons on how to preserve antique palm leaf manuscripts for future generations. The participants are attending the “Palm Leaf Manuscripts in Asean Countries Workshop”, which opened yesterday in Vientiane and runs until December 17. The workshop offers an opportunity for Asean librarians from different cultural backgrounds to share their experiences and skills in the preservation of palm leaf manuscripts and ancient books. Today the participants are visiting the palm leaf manuscript centre in Naxon village, Pakngum district, Vientiane. The workshop is run by the Asean Committee on Culture and Information (ASEAN COCI) and funded by the Asean Cultural Fund. Deputy Permanent Secretary and Chair of the Sub-Committee on Culture at the Lao Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, MrThongbayPhothisane, said “In the case of Laos, manuscripts are scattered throughout the country in more than a thousand temples. They contain our richest sources of literature, grammar, lexicography, traditional law, history, rituals and other matters.” “It is very important to keep these valuable assets for the next generations.” “This workshop will be most productive as it includes Asean librarians along

with professional speakers both local and international.” “They have an opportunity to discuss, share and exchange common views, ideas, as well as best practices to seek better ways to improve the preservation of palm leaf manuscripts and ancient books,” MrThongbayadded. Deputy Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, MrBuangeunXaphouvong, addressed the opening of the event, saying “The workshop coincides with the 40th anniversary of the Lao PDR and the 95th birthday of President Kaysone-Phomvihane. It also anticipates the establishment of the Asean Economic Community (AEC) at the end of this year.” “As you may know, palm leaf manuscripts are highly essential documents. They contain the richest and most valuable information, both general and specific, pertaining to religious quotes, and taught and written texts. They contain the knowledge and wisdom of our ancestors in past centuries, reflected through different types of antique texts,” MrBuangeunsaidth. “In years gone by, palm leaf manuscripts were provided for people and believers to study, read and worship at temples. Then later they became a traditional practice and have been used continuously in Laos since then,” he added.

(Vientiane Times 16 December 2015)

Lao wood product makers eye better access to EU markets

(By Times Reporters)

Lao wooden product companies will be able to gain easier access to other markets throughout Asean, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Japan in the near future due to cooperation with international organisations and trade partners. Currently, Laos is embarking on preparations for the negotiation of a Voluntary Partnership Agreement with the European Union in 2016, within the

framework of the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT), through a three day technical meeting from December 15-17. The “Technical Session on FLEGT in the Lao PDR” is being jointly organised by the Department of Forest Inspection, EU Delegation to Laos, and EU FLEGT Facility. It is hosted by the European Forest Institute (EFI), the GIZ project

'Support to the Lao EU-FLEGT Process' (ProFLEGT) and the World Wide Fund for Nature. This is part of the government initiative to ensure improved forest governance and sustainable forest management in Laos. In his opening remarks, Director General of the Department of Forest Inspection under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Mr Khamphout Phandanouvong, said Laos is working towards strengthening forest governance. "The FLEGT VPA is a main avenue contributing to this. Good governance of the forest sector will allow us to maintain our forests for future generations, further develop opportunities for wood processing in the country, add value to our products, create employment opportunities in the forest sector and open a wider range of export markets," he said. He also added that once the FLEGT VPA is fully operational, timber products from Laos will be in full compliance with the EU Timber Regulations which promote the placement of legal timber on the EU market and those of its trading partners. Over the past years, the EU and Laos have engaged in a constructive collaboration and dialogue on the FLEGT Action Plan and the EU and its member states have been providing the government and other stakeholders representing the private sector and civil society with information and technical assistance to prepare for Voluntary Partnership Agreement negotiations. During the technical meeting, the Lao delegation will share progress related to the FLEGT VPA in Laos, particularly in relation to the political and technical level structures, involvement of stakeholders in the process

including at both the central and provincial level, development of a definition of timber legality, apart from the process and steps involved in launching the Voluntary Partnership Agreement negotiations. As part of the Action Plan on Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade to combat illegal logging globally, the European Union is concluding Voluntary Partnership Agreements with timber producing countries. These are international trade agreements to reduce illegal wood harvesting and promote legal timber trade. Laos has started to negotiate such an agreement with the EU, with assistance from the GIZ project Support to the Lao EU-FLEGT process (ProFLEGT). ProFLEGT is a joint initiative of the Lao government and German Development Cooperation. It is working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (through the FLEGT Standing Office under the supervision of the Department of Forest Inspection), Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, as well as other government agencies, civil society organisations, academia and the timber processing industry. In Laos, the World Wide Fund for Nature is working with the Department of Forest Inspection to implement its FLEGT project in support of the Lao EU-FLEGT process in the two pilot provinces of Khammuan and Attapeu. World Wide Fund for Nature takes a solutions-oriented, integrated and local-to-global approach that seeks synergies with relevant stakeholders to influence drivers of deforestation and degradation.

(Vientiane Times 16 December 2015)

Local budget management causes NA concern

(By Times Reporters)

The responsibilities of provincial assemblies in approving budget plans and granting rights to provincial administrations to use money they have collected in excess of the target plan has raised concerns among some National Assembly (NA) members. The concerns were raised by National Assembly (NA) members yesterday when debating the amendments to the Law on the State Budget at the ongoing ordinary session.



Dr Lien Thikeo introduces the draft amendment to the law.

Minister of Finance Dr Lien Thikeo introduced the draft amendment to their session on Tuesday. The newly created Article No.28 in the draft amendment to the Law on the State Budget, which stipulates the responsibilities of provincial people's assemblies, says the assemblies have to take responsibility for the consideration and approval of revenue collection and expenditure plans, according to proposals by the provincial governors and the capital mayor. Speaking at the debate, an NA member for Savannakhet province Mr Bounpone Sisoulath, was concerned that the stipulation would be a loophole for authorities in the provinces and capital to propose revenue collection plans as they pleased. "The stipulation could con-

tradict another regulation, which defines that other agencies and authorities cannot amend, adjust or change the rates of taxation and other fees," he said. Moreover, Mr Bounpone said, this would open channels for local authorities to set their plans capriciously, which would affect people's interests in the form of various expenses. He mentioned about the current practices of village authorities who demand various fee payments from residents as an example. Regarding granting rights to provincial administrations on using the money they collected as a surplus over the set target for local development in the following year, NA members pointed out both positive and negative aspects in this regard. They said on the one hand the policy would promote proactiveness by authorities in terms of revenue collection. However they wanted accurate consideration about the amendment in order to prevent the unregulated use of budget funds. Mr Bounpone said once the responsibilities in relation to revenue collection and expenditure were handed to local administrations, the Ministry of Finance and other agencies and authorities had to respond by making annual reports on their budget activities. The Ministry of Finance's Budget Department Director General Dr Bounleua, representing the amendment sub-committee, explained the difference between being over balance and being over the target plan. He said that Vientiane, for example, earned more money than its expenses, so it had to hand the additional amount to the state budget. However, he said, if a province earned more than the target set by the ministry, the additional money will be included into the expenditure of the province in the following year.

(Vientiane Times 17 December 2015)

Research development forum focusing on AEC readiness

(By Times Reporters)

The 2nd National Research for Development Forum - "Getting Ready for Asean Economic Community" running from December 16-17 in Vientiane was launched yesterday at the National University of Laos (NUOL). The purpose of the forum is to create one platform, allowing Lao researchers and their partners to present and discuss research findings with relevance to Lao agriculture, natural resource management and rural development efforts. This forum expects to feed into discussions about the Laos Socio-Economic Development Plan, as well as ongoing policy development on agriculture, food security, poverty alleviation, plus land, water and other natural resources. During the forum, senior officials are holding presentations focusing on social, economic and environmental outcomes related to various themes including Innovation in Science and Technology, Health, Nutrition and Food Security, and Gender and De-

centralisation. The Innovation in Science and Technology session is covering crop production, soil, livestock and environmental biodiversity technology. The Health, Nutrition and Food Security session is tackling the needs of rural communities while Gender and Decentralisation is focused on gender, ethnic livelihood and poverty reduction issues at local community level. Deputy Prime Minister Somsavat Lengsavad chaired the forum yesterday, with participants including Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and the Ministry of Science and Technology as well as provincial decision-makers, donors, NGOs and members of the private sector. The forum has been organised by the National University of Laos (NUOL), National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) and National Economic Research Institute (NERI).

(Vientiane Times 17 December 2015)

FAO, ministry mark International Year of Soils

(By Times Reporters)

The Department of Agricultural Land Management joined with the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation on Monday for a workshop to mark the International Year of Soils 2015. The purpose of the International Year of Soils is to raise awareness worldwide of the importance of soils for food security and agriculture as well as in the mitigation of climate change, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development. Monday's workshop was chaired by Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Dr Phouangparisack Pravongviengkham and FAO Representative to Laos, Dr Stephen Rudgard. Also in attendance were agricultural officials, experts, technicians, students and entrepreneurs, and staff from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and internation-

al organisations. Participants shared their experiences and exchanged information about soil and its importance, land surveys in Laos, land management, agricultural land development, and land issues and solutions. The government, through the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, has allocated more land for agriculture but this has yet to yield results as the process has encountered various obstacles, Dr Phouangparisack said. However, the ministry hopes to meet its target to allocate 4.5 million hectares of agricultural land as quickly as possible to guarantee sustainable production and improve yields. Laos has strong potential for agricultural production due to its rich natural resources, while most Lao people are still dependent on agriculture, Dr Phouangpari-

sacksaid.“We are aware of the urgent need to allocate a certain number of hectares for livestock breeding, rice cultivation and commercial crops,” he added.“After allocating land for these purposes, we need to create effective measures to regulate its management and development for sustainable long-term benefits.”Laos also has the potential to grow organic vegetables and other crops for sale and export as the soil in many areas is uncontaminated.But the land

in other places needs to be improved as about 60 percent of agricultural land in Laos is not very fertile, according to the ministry.This will required close cooperation from the relevant sectors, entrepreneurs and experts to seek suitable measures that will improve soil health. The International Year of Soils was declared by the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly on December 20, 2013 after recognising or December 5 as World Soil Day.

(Vientiane Times 17December 2015)

Energy developer to supply electricity for domestic use

(By Advertorial Desk)

Electricite du Laos (EDL) and Rasita Power Co Ltd have signed a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) for the Nam Hinboun Downstream Hydropower Project (NHDHP), with the agreement concluded yesterday in Vientiane.



(From left) MrSomphoneOudone shakes hands with MrSisavathThiravong after signing the agreement.

The agreement was signed by Rasita Power Co Ltd General Manager, MrSomphoneOudone, and EDL Managing Director, MrSisavathThiravong.The agreement is to sell the generated electricity of NHDHP to EDL once the project development meets the commercial operation date in 2019, an EDL official said.NHDHP is a small-scale overflow hydropower scheme with a planned installed capacity of 15 megawatts (MW), proposed on the lower reaches of Nam Hinboun mainstream in Hinboun district,

Khammuan province in central Laos. The proponent of this project development is Rasita Power Co Ltd.“The project construction work will start next with an investment cost of about 299.94 billion kip (US\$36.7 million),” MrSomphoneOudone said yesterday.The proposed dam location is approximately 50km north of the Khammuan provincial capital. It will take a Build-Own-Operate-Transfer approach (BOOT) for a period of 50 years. Construction is expected to take 2.5 years to complete.A handout from Rasita Power Co Ltd noted that Development of the NHDHP aims to achieve two immediate objectives which are power production for domestic supply and enhancement of local irrigation potential in the surrounding area of the Nam Hinbounplain.Thus, once it is constructed, the NHDHP is expected to generate 79GWh of electricity per year which will be sold to EDL via the local power grid for domestic use.This power will benefit the national economy as a whole and is also in line with the socio-economic development policy of Khammuanprovince.As for the second objective, the NHDHP will provide benefits to local farmers through enhanced irrigation water pumping to the supply paddy lands, which are currently irrigated with several individual electric pumps to lift the water from the Nam Hinboun.In many instances,

pumping is very costly for farmers due to the receded water levels of several metres during the dry season. With the NHDHP, it is expected that pumping of water will be done more efficiently and be less costly in terms of electricity payment thanks to the elevated water level. It is estimated that this way the dam will enable an increase of irrigation

capacity of paddy area by 500 hectares, while providing sufficient water for an additional 2,000 hectares of new cultivable land. In the long term, the developer intends to construct large pipes from which water will be drawn and distributed to individual farmers at a much lower cost.

(Vientiane Times 17 December 2015)

New constitution official proclaimed

(By Times Reporters)

President Choummaly Sayasone issued a decree on Tuesday announcing promulgation of the newly amended national constitution, following the National Assembly (NA) approving the draft amendment one week earlier at its ongoing ordinary session. This is the second time the constitution has been taken to amendment since being promulgated in 1991. The first amendment took place in 2003. With many aspects of the 2003 constitution having been revised, NA members said this amendment reflected the reality of Laos' changing circumstances. The 2015 constitution stipulates that Laos is a democratic state with all powers belonging to the people, by the people and in the interests of the people. The National Assembly is ranked as the highest state power, apart from the other two state powers of the executive and judicial bodies in the country. The NA plays a significant role in approving the country's leaders and laws as well as making decisions on all fundamental issues. The newly

amended constitution defines a clearer role for the National Assembly, the president of Laos and the prime minister, with the president permitted to hold office for not more than two consecutive terms. Under the amended constitution, provincial people's assemblies will be established to consider and approve major issues in these localities as well as oversee the performance of local authorities. Provincial people's assemblies will also approve local socio-economic development and budget plans as well as the appointment and removal of provincial governors based on recommendations put forward by the assemblies' standing committees. The amendment of the constitution aims to respond to the Party's renovation policies and the country's development vision until 2030. It also reflects the aspirations of the multi-ethnic Lao people to further develop the country and rise above Least Developed Country status by 2020.

(Vientiane Times 18 December 2015)

NA debates law on human trafficking

(By Times Reporters)

A newly drafted law to combat human trafficking was presented to the National Assembly (NA) yesterday for consideration and approval. Minister of Public Security Major General Somkeo Silavong introduced the new law, saying human trafficking had become a highly profitable business that now ranked third behind the arms trade and drug

trafficking. He cited the statistics for 2012 from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which pointed out that about 27 million people in 127 countries around the world fall victim to human trafficking every year, of whom 70-80 percent are women and children. Maj Gen Somkeo said the existing Law on Women's Advancement and Protec-

tion defined measures against human trafficking, especially the trafficking of women and children, but did not contain any reference to males aged over 18. He also pointed to Article No. 134 of the Criminal Law, which addresses the trafficking of people of both sexes and all ages, and the Law on the Protection of Child Rights and Interests which contains an article on human trafficking. But, he said, these two articles were in disagreement, especially concerning the provision of aid to male victims. It was not clear what the measures actually were and created a loophole for potential traffickers so they could avoid punishment. "Because of these challenges and difficulties, we need a new law, one that focuses exclusively on human trafficking," Maj Gen Somkeo said. The draft law has nine parts divided into 89 articles. It is based on the country's prevailing circumstances concerning human trafficking along

with those in the region and worldwide. It also aims to meet the requirements of international treaties and conventions that Laos is a party to, and the laws of the five countries in the Mekong Basin. Speaking during the debate on the law, NA member for Vientiane Ms Vanpheng Keonakhone said she appreciated the stipulation in Article No. 87 that offenders would be imprisoned for periods from five to 15 years, fined an amount between 10 to 100 million kip, and have their property confiscated. Under the proposed law, those convicted of multiple offences, who committed crimes in groups where the victims were children, trafficked two or more people, whose victims were close relatives of the offender, sustained serious injuries, became disabled or were mentally ill, would receive prison terms of 15 to 20 years, a fine ranging from 100 to 500 million kip, and have their property confiscated.

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German delegations visit Xayaboury hydropower project

(By Times Reporters)

Germany is supporting the Mekong River Commission (MRC) as one of its most important partners in Asia, particularly in regards to sustainable hydropower development. Delegations from the Lao-German cooperation project visited the Xayaboury Hydroelectric Power Project (Xayaboury HPP), which is located on the lower Mekong River in northern Laos. During the field trip, the delegations gained a deeper understanding of the project detail through a presentation from Deputy Managing Director of Operations and Maintenance at Xayaboury Power Company Limited, Mr Anuparp Wonglakorn. He said that the project has been designed using sound engineering concepts and principles and employing engineers and experts who have broad international backgrounds and considerable experience in hydropower. The project was designed using

the best available technologies in hydropower development to prevent, avoid and minimise all environmental and social risks. Considerable focus was placed on fishery resources conservation, sediment flushing, navigation, riverbank erosion and maintenance of natural resources, said Mr Anuparp. With an appropriate project design and suitable impact mitigation measures as stated above, Xayaboury HPP can achieve the necessary balance of economic gain and effective environmental and social safeguards. All the main equipment has been specified to use only proven technology. For example, the gates, turbines, generators, transmission and protection and control systems are to be selected from world-class suppliers. This will provide a strong basis for both the quality and safety of the project. People who have been impacted by

the project now have better livelihoods, especially new houses, sustainable incomes and good jobs. Different villagers have received occupational training on agricultural production and handicrafts, while many youths are working with the power company. Mr Anuparp ensured that these impacts will be able to reduce poverty in line with the Lao government policy. At the beginning, some people were concerned about their new livelihoods after being resettled by the project but they are currently don't want to move back to their original living as they

now enjoy easier access to healthcare and education facilities. After beginning in 2012, construction of the US\$3.5 billion project is now about 52 percent complete. When it becomes operational in 2019, about 95 percent of the electricity produced will be sold to Thailand. The revenue generated by the project could be invested in initiatives to fight poverty. During the 29-year concession period from 2019 to 2048, the power generated and sold by the project is expected to earn almost US\$4 billion for the Lao government

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