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Laos, Vietnam plan highway linking their two capitals

(By KhonesavanhLatsap)

Laos and Vietnam have undertaken a preliminary feasibility study for a highway linking Vientiane to Hanoi, to forge a closer connection between the two capitals. As part of the study, Laos' Ministry of Public Works and Transport has conducted preliminary surveys of two possible routes for the proposed highway.



Part of the existing road link to Vietnam from Savannakhet province.

Director General of the ministry's Planning and Cooperation Department, Mr Olay Phaduangdeth, told *Vientiane Times* on Friday the first route to be surveyed ran from Vientiane on Road No. 13 South via the upgraded road in Borikhamxay province and on to Viengthong district where it would link to highways in Vietnam. The other route uses Road No. 13 North to Vietnam through Xiengkhuang and Huaphan provinces. No cost has been suggested as the precise route has yet to be decided on. Other questions such as which country would pay for which section of the highway have also yet to be considered, according to the Ministry of Public Works and Transport. "We still don't know when the project might begin, but we hope that the Vientiane-Hanoi highway will soon materialise after a decision has been

made," Mr Olay said. Most people driving from Vientiane to Hanoi use the road that crosses the Namphao-Cau Treo border between Laos and Vietnam in Borikhamxay province. The two governments are conducting the feasibility study with a view to making the road link shorter and more comfortable. Information on the surveys appears on the ThanhNien News' website on December 24. The manager of the highway project estimates the cost of the 707-kilometre route at US\$4.52 billion. In its latest plan submitted to the transport ministry, the project manager of Unit 85 said the six-lane highway would pass through Vietnam's central province of Nghe An, allowing vehicles to travel at 80-120 kilometres per hour. Another option would see the highway pass through the central province of Ha Tinh, with a total distance of 720 kilometres and a cost estimate of US\$7.1 billion. Unit 85, run by the ministry, dismissed the option as costly, even though it would connect more Vietnamese and Lao localities. The project is one of three transport schemes that the Vietnamese and Lao governments are working on, and would eventually create a link between the capital cities of Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. In October the transport ministry announced it would work with the Korea International Cooperation Agency to study the feasibility of a 550-kilometre railway between Ha Tinh's Vung Ang Port and Vientiane. Together with Thailand, Laos and Vietnam are also looking at introducing a bus service to connect Ha Tinh, Khammuan province in central Laos, and Nakhon Phanom province in the northeast of Thailand

(*Vientiane Times* 26 December 2015)

Oudomxay closing in on development targets

(By MeuangkhamNoradeth)

The government is rolling out a raft of projects in a bid to hasten the development process, which is spreading change nationwide as 2020, the year targeted for poverty eradication, moves ever closer.



The Party's Three Builds directive is driving development in remote areas.

The village of Sybounheuang in Houn district, Oudomxay province, is one of many areas where living standards are changing for the better and the community will soon become a small township as a result of its growth. Houn district officials are implementing many activities to develop the community based on the Party's Three Builds (Sam Sang) directive. This was introduced three years ago in an attempt to accelerate development and spur change at the local level, with more input from local administrations and communities. The Sam Sang directive spells out how provinces are to be built up as strategic units, districts as comprehensively strengthened units, and villages as development units. The initiative allows for the delivery of better administration and services and has been piloted in 109 villages of 52 districts since 2012, according to a report from the Minister of Home Affairs. Over the past few years, 943 state socioeconomic development projects worth 248 billion kip have been carried out. Additionally, Nayoby Bank has released more than 338.6 billion kip, while the Agriculture

Promotion Bank has released more than 44.7 billion kip, the minister said. Fully 93 of the 109 targeted villages have been certified as developed villages, while 28,452 families have been declared to be developed out of a total of 30,995 families. In addition, 72 villages have been certified as model villages, along with 544 model families, 144 individual business operation models, and 614 development models. In the fiscal year 2012-13, the first year the directive was carried out, some 70 of the 109 villages were certified as hygienic villages, an increase from the 59 villages so designated before the directive came into effect. Sybounheuang village has the potential to become a small town after implementing the Three Builds directive because basic infrastructure in the community has improved step by step. It now has many offices, electricity, a market, a school, a dispensary, an agricultural centre, a gravity-fed water system, and Road No. 2W passes through the village linking Oudomxay to Xayaboury and Nan province in Thailand, said village Head Mr Vanhnikhone Mingboupha. The community has set up a production group to manage the cultivation of rice, raise animals, organise weavers, provide services and trade, and a group to buy and export crops. Besides this, the community has set up a village development fund that now has 28 million kip, a women's development fund that contains more than 55 million kip, and the Nayoby Bank has issued 1.60 billion kip in loans. Mr Vanhnikhone said village officials will continue to develop the community and encourage local people to grow more crops for sale. Other development projects include a better water supply, improving and asphaltting roads, installing street lighting, and building an agriculture and forestry centre. The people of this community have been growing rice, weaving, and growing crops and raising animals for

centuries but now new farming methods are important so they can produce more and better crops and animals. With support from everyone involved, village officials will step up their efforts to help local people to grow more crops and raise more animals for sale

so they can earn more money and propel the village towards prosperity. *The Lao government defines poverty as not having enough food, lacking adequate clothing, not having permanent housing or lacking access to health, education or transportation services.*

(Vientiane Times 26 December 2015)

NA ends final session with approval of national plans

(By SomxaySengdara)

The National Assembly (NA) has closed its final ordinary session after a five year term that saw the legislative body act in the public interest and for the benefit of the state. The session, which ran from December 8 to 26, approved the amendment of the national constitution, or Constitution 2015, which was promulgated by President Choummaly-Sayasone on December 15.



Ms PanyYathotou delivers her closing remarks at the final session of the NA's Seventh Legislature.

The amended constitution states that the National Assembly is the highest state power, apart from the two other state powers - the executive and judicial bodies. In her closing remarks, NA President Ms PanyYathotou said the Assembly's approval of the constitution created a master law that would facilitate the continued development and improvement of state powers at every level. "The constitution more clearly defines the position, mission, role, rights and obligations of each state body and government agency, and outlines methods for their coordination and mutual oversight. This will provide for a stronger right of public ownership in the

process of creating a people's democratic state," she said. The session also approved newly created laws - the Law on Provincial People's Assembly, Law on Anti-human Trafficking, Law on National Defence, and the Law on Civil Servants and Government Employees. Amendments were made to existing laws - the Law on National Assembly, Law on Election of National Assembly and Provincial People's Assembly, Law on Government, Law on Local Administration, Law on Taxation, Law on Government Investment, and the Law on State Budget. The session urged the National Assembly, government, Office of Supreme People's Prosecutor, Supreme People's Court, State Audit Organisation (SAO), and local administrations to implement and enforce the constitution and related laws in accordance with their responsibility. The final session also approved a report on the legislature's activities over the past five year term, and sounded out Assembly members' opinions on the draft of a National Assembly vision from now until 2030, a strategy for NA development over the next 10 years, and the NA's plan for the coming five years. The National Assembly approved the audit of a final report on the implementation of the state budget for 2013-2014, and the implementation of NA Resolution No. 3 dated July 15, 2014, on addressing financial violations on the part of some budget sectors. The report showed such violations had not decreased and the session asked the government to guide ministries and equivalent bodies at central and local levels, other budge-

tary units and state enterprises that had been audited to assume more responsibility for their deficiencies in line with SAO instructions, and to more strictly comply with the law. The session also approved a report on the pilot development programme rolled out under the Sam Sang (Three Builds) directive, and praised government efforts to guide the initiative in 109 target villages in 52 districts. The closing session initiated discussions on the vision for 2030 and the strategy on socio-economic development for the next 10 years, as well as the Eighth National Socio-Economic Development Plan and State Budget Plan for the next five years. Reports on the Lao Satellite Project and Laos-China Railway Project were delivered at the session. The Ministry of Industry and Com-

merce, Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Public Security, and the Bank of the Lao PDR reported on their work to address various public concerns. These included the protection of domestic production when Laos joins the Asean Economic Community, management of entertainment venues, crime, drugs, racketeering, and the lowering of the interest rate. Finally, the closing session of the current legislature heard a plan on preparations for the election of the NA's Eighth Legislature and the formation of provincial people's assemblies. The session called on all ministries, ministry-equivalent bodies, and local administrations at all levels to do their utmost to ensure the election was a success.

(Vientiane Times 28 December 2015)

Ministries discuss climate change, reproductive health

(By Times Reporters)

Laos still has one of the highest maternal mortality ratios (MMRs) in the region, at 220 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, according to the Lao Statistics Bureau and Ministry of Health. The main ministries and postgraduate committee of the University of Health Sciences jointly held a meeting in Vientiane on Friday to discuss the linking of climate change and sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the implications for public health policy approach in Laos. President of the University of Health Sciences, Associate Prof Dr Somchith Boupha, chaired the meeting which heard the government was cooperating with international organisations in the region to create strong partnerships to address the MMR and various sexual and reproductive health and rights issues linked to climate change. Lao ministries including Ministry of Health have been focusing on reproductive health and the rights of mothers and children as part of achieving the Millennium Development

Goals. In the meeting, senior officials discussed the need for authorities to learn more about climate change effects on the country while seeking to protect women and children in rural areas and together developing sexual and reproductive health and rights. The participants noted that women, children and the elderly are the most vulnerable to climate change. In particular, marginalised women and girls are more likely to experience the greatest impacts of climate change. Climate change in Laos will disproportionately have many effects on food security, diseases and healthcare systems which will lead to other problems such as babies having lower weights at birth, while death rates may increase. To minimise negative health outcomes resulting from climate change it is crucial for all relevant ministries and authorities to discuss and address climate change issues to avoid future burdens to reduce mortality rates among reproductive age and pregnant women.

(Vientiane Times 28 December 2015)

Japan backs Wattay International Airport extension

(By Times Reporters)



High-ranking officials from Laos and Japan take part in a ground-breaking ceremony to officially launch the Wattay International Airport Terminal Extension Project in Vientiane yesterday.

Japan has approved a concessional loan of about 9.2 billion Japanese yen (US\$77 million) for the Wattay International Airport Terminal Extension Project, according to a press release from the Embassy of Japan to Laos. The airport is being expanded to cope with the rapid increase in the number of domestic and international passengers, with completion expected by May 2018. A groundbreaking ceremony for the project took place at the airport yesterday on the sidelines of a working visit to Laos by Japan's Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Mr Keiichi Ishi, and his delegation from December 27-28. Prior to the ceremony, high-ranking officials from Laos and Japan met at the Ministry of Public Works and Transport to discuss the memorandums of cooperation signed by the two parties in recent years. The Japanese delegation, led by Mr Ishi, visited some of the cooperation projects underway in Vientiane. Speaking at the ceremony, Mr Ishi said Also.

the launch of the airport extension project had great meaning for the long-standing relationship between Japan and Laos and throughout the region. "Japan will boost its contribution to the development of infrastructure in Laos and improvements to regional connectivity through a partnership in quality infrastructure," he said. Mr Ishi also stressed that Japan would like to share its construction know-how without disturbing operations during the expansion project using Japanese "quality infrastructure" technology, which is easy to use, environmentally friendly, and safe. "Laos will be the Chair of Asean next year and the Asean Summit will be held in Laos after the establishment of the Asean Economic Community this month. It is my sincere wish that the renovated Wattay International Airport will be a renewed gateway for the auspicious future of this country," he added. According to a report from the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, the number of passengers passing through the airport has increased every year. In 2011, there were 520,000 passengers but this year the number stood at over 1 million passengers. It is expected that the number will rise further to more than 2.8 million people by 2028. The groundbreaking ceremony was attended by Minister of Public Works and Transport Dr Bounchanh Sinthavong, Deputy Minister of Public Works and Transport Mr Lattanamong Khounnivong, Ambassador-Designate of Japan to Laos Mr Takeshi Hikihara, Chief Representative of the JICA Laos Office Mr Yusuke Murakami, and other senior offici

(Vientiane Times 29 December 2015)

Deputy PM urges all sectors to prepare for railway project

By Times Reporters

Deputy Prime Minister Somsavat Lensavat has urged the concerned sectors and authorities to effectively realise the tasks required concerning the implementation of the Laos-China railway project. Mr Somsavat stressed the point to the relevant sectors and authorities last week, saying they need to be prepared for the project's sixth section passing through the capital and Vientiane province. He said all sectors should coordinate with the local authorities in the capital and Vientiane province in building public understanding about the project to ensure cooperation. He also noted that the installation of railway line markers should meet the target plan. He advised on close coordination with the Chinese side in clarifying the work to be undertaken by sub-contractors as well as organising training and consolidating the Lao companies undertaking the work. The deputy minister pointed out certain aspects

of the joint venture, including budgetary work and the method of payment as essential aspects of project implementation. Mr Somsavat noted the need to be prepared in terms of food supply for project workers, calling on local authorities to discuss the need for food with the Chinese side so that food sources and production were planned from the outset. The agreement on the project between the Lao and Chinese governments was reached last month and a groundbreaking ceremony took place on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Lao PDR. The Laos-China railway will link Vientiane and Boten over a distance of 421 kilometres as part of the rail link between Kunming in China and Singapore. Construction of the 38.7 billion yuan (US\$6.04 billion) project through Laos will take about five years to complete.

(Vientiane Times 29 December 2015)

Visitor numbers slump in Huayxai district

(By Khonesavanh Latsaphao)

Hotel, guesthouse and restaurant owners are complaining that there are not many overseas visitors in Bokeo province these days since the Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge opened two years ago. The bridge links the formerly popular tourist spot of Huayxay district to Thailand across the Mekong River. Tourists typically arrive here after leaving Thailand and then take a boat down to Luang Prabang province. An official from the province's Information, Culture and Tourism Department, who asked not to be named, told *Vientiane Times* on Tuesday that overseas visitors are still coming to Laos across the bridge. "But these days many people arrive in Bokeo without spending any time in the province because there aren't many tourist attractions here. They just sit at restaurants along the Me-

kong riverbank," she said. Before the Lao-Thai bridge opened in 2013, scores of foreign travellers spent several days exploring Huayxai district and other areas before moving on. The town was abuzz with a mix of visitors from a wide range of countries. In the first six months of 2013, upwards of 200,000 tourists visited Bokeo province, while in the whole of 2012 more than 300,000 people came to the area. These days there are foreigners to be found in Huayxai district, but many people have never been there and the atmosphere is different to what it was previously. Some food vendors have even given up cooking and moved to another line of work, the official added. Before the bridge was built, visitors took a ferry between Laos and Thailand, with boats departing from the riverbank in

central Huayxai district. Now the border crossing has moved and the bridge is about 9 kilometres from the centre of Huayxay. The bridge links Bokeo province with Thailand's Chiang Rai province and carries goods as well as people. Goods transport across the Mekong River at this point is continual from 6am to 10pm. Since the bridge opened in December 2013, a long line of trucks waits to cross the bridge from the Lao side. Services at hotels, guesthouses, beverage outlets and entertainment venues is of a high standard as Bokeo provincial officials make regular inspections to ensure standards don't slip. Bokeo officials

have checked out nine hotels, 11 guesthouses, 27 restaurants, one garden restaurant, 40 restaurant and function halls, and 23 karaoke clubs in Huayxai district. Officials also check the standard of service in terms of staff, cooking equipment, kitchens, and room cleaning. According to the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, tourist arrivals in Laos are predicted to reach 4.3 million by the end of this year, representing an increase of 4 percent over last year. Foreign tourist arrivals increased from 2.7 million people in 2011 to 4.1 million last year.

(Vientiane Times 30 December 2015)

Laos-Japan economic zone to benefit local community

(By Somxaysengdara)

The new specific economic zone (SEZ) being developed through cooperation between Laos and Japan should bring economic and other benefits to the government, local administrations and people by being a model on transparency of investment.



Mr Khamphon Nuansengsy.

Relevant officials made the comments about the project recently on the sidelines of the official establishment of the company responsible for the Pakxe-Japan SME Specific Economic Zone development. President of Champassak province Special Economic Zone (CSEZ) Mr Khamphon Nuansengsy said the establishment of the Pakxe-Japan SEZ is in

compliance with the province's development strategy and should serve the needs of poverty reduction. "It is very important that the project will help in terms of creating jobs for local people," he said. The government approved the establishment of the Pakxe-Japan SME Specific Economic Zone in Champassak province in August and the establishment of Pakxe-Japan SME SEZ Development Co., Ltd this month. This will set in motion the development of some 195 ha land in the province's Pathoumphon and Bachiengcha-leunsouk districts. Eight Japanese and Lao-Japanese companies have registered for operation in the SEZ with combined registration fees of about US\$5 million, and have already created 690 jobs for Lao citizens. Mr Khamphon also commented about the flow of local young people seeking jobs in a neighbouring country, saying many of them would return to work in their hometown as the investors in the SEZ would provide better welfare than others. "I am confident that the clear policy regarding social welfare for workers will be attractive for job seekers," he said. He also noted the specific character-

ristics of the project, which he said would ensure transparency through clear methods of distribution of revenue from the project. The rules of the zone will see 50 percent of revenue go to the state budget, 20 percent to the provincial authorities, 15 percent to the districts where the zone is located, 10 percent to CSEZ administrative expenses, and the rest to an environmental fund. He spoke about Japanese companies as reliable partners who have good credit and Japanese people as being very disciplined, which he said would accompany the project's success. The CSEZ

president also spoke about rules of the zone development, which he said would not impact local residents who have the ownership of the land the project covers as they will receive appropriate compensation. The land owners can also become shareholders of the project by handing their land to the development, and participate in the project as employees and workers, according to Mr Khamphon. The SEZ will allow local people to use their land until the development is ready, while SEZ administration is looking for land nearby the project to compensate them.

(Vientiane Times 30 December 2015)

Asean set to become a dynamic community

(By Times Reporters)

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) has become an official community with a single market and production base from today onwards, with a population of 622 million people and combined GDP of almost US\$2.6 trillion. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Thongloun Sisoulith presided over a ceremony held yesterday in Vientiane to celebrate the 10 nations in the region finally becoming a united community. Speaking at the event in his capacity as representative of the Political-Security Community pillar, Mr Thongloun reminded the audience about the journey of the regional association so far and the road it has travelled over the past nearly five decades. Also present to represent the community's other two pillars were Prof Dr Bosengkham Vongdara, representing the Social-Cultural Community, and Ms Khemmani Pholsena, representing the Economic Community. The leaders of the 10 Asean countries opened up a new chapter in the history of Asean at the Asean Summit held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, last month by declaring the establishment of the Asean Community on December

31, 2015. "This key milestone is a result of the strong political commitment and close cooperation within Asean, and between Asean and other external partners throughout almost five decades, through the implementation of various initiatives, blueprints and work plans," he said. Mr Thongloun noted that the region is the seventh largest world economy and is made up of diverse cultures, religions and languages, but is a caring and sharing community. "Asean has also become a unique example of 10 diverse nations that have come together under the Asean Community. The Lao PDR is very proud to be a part of this Community of Asean," Mr Thongloun said. Looking ahead to next year, he said 2016 was very important and meaningful as Laos had been entrusted to chair Asean for the second time as the regional association became a community, and the first year of the implementation of the Asean Community Vision 2025 and its blueprints for the three community pillars. He also spoke about the theme of the country's Asean chairmanship - "Turning Vision into Reality for a Dynamic Asean Community" -

aimed at building upon the achievements made to maintain and promote a peaceful, stable and outward-looking Asean region, with a highly integrated and cohesive regional economy, enhanced connectivity, and strengthened efforts in narrowing the development gap. The deputy prime minister revealed the focal areas of cooperation that the 10 nations would concentrate on,

such as tourism development, trade facilitation, Small and Medium Sized Enterprise development, employment creation, and cultural preservation. The finalisation of the Initiative on Asean Integration Work Plan 3 and the Post-2015 Agenda for Asean Connectivity as an integral part of the Asean Community Vision 2025 will also be the focus of Asean next year.

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