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Vous trouverez ci-joint un choix d'articles publiés au Laos en anglais dans le quotidien "Vientiane Times"

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➤ **Vientiane Times**

- US considers increasing aid for UXO clearance
- Vat Phou ranked top tourist destination by Chinese website
- Laos to export electricity to Myanmar, more for Vietnam
- Lao children report more interest in reading
- Laos cuts import tariffs after AEC integration
- Asean discusses human rights

## US considers increasing aid for UXO clearance

(By Times Reporters)



A clearance worker searches for UXO in Luang Prabang province. --Photo Phoonsab

The United States is considering increasing financial aid to Laos to help the country clear unexploded ordnance (UXO), visiting Secretary of State John Kerry told reporters this week. Mr Kerry was in Laos from January 24-25 at the invitation of his Lao counterpart Thongloun Sisoulith. From 1964-1973, when the Lao population numbered about three million people, US warplanes dropped more than two million tonnes of bombs on Lao territory, making Laos the world's most heavily bombed country per capita. About 30 percent of the bombs dropped failed to detonate and have since then have maimed and claimed the lives of tens of thousands of civilians. Lao authorities welcomed the possible increase in aid by the US as a massive amount of funding is still needed to finance the clearance of UXO that contaminates large swathes of land across 14 provinces. Last year, Laos received about US\$30 million in international aid for UXO clearance. UXO Lao Director Thippasone Soukhamthammavong said officials could not say when UXO would be completely cleared, especially given the funding shortage. It is thought that up to 37 percent of the country's total land area, about 87,000 km<sup>2</sup>, may have been contaminated with various types of UXO. From 1996 until last year only about 55,000 hectares had been cleared of UXO, according to the National Regulatory Authority. Mr Kerry told reporters at the end of

his visit that discussions are under way about the possibility of more funding, although no final figure has been determined, according to the *Washington Post*. The top US diplomat said he expected a final aid package to be completed by the time President Obama comes to Laos this summer to attend a meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean). The United States has been helping to locate and clear UXO for more than half a decade, starting with US\$5 million a year and gradually raising the amount to US\$15 million last year and US\$19.5 million this year. In recent years, the number of victims maimed and killed by UXO in Laos has declined from the previous figure of 300 casualties annually. "We're now down to about 50 a year," Mr Kerry was quoted as saying by the *Washington Post*, adding, "And 50 a year is still too many." Mr Kerry said the United States will continue or set up a number of programmes, including one focusing on child nutrition and another to strengthen dams along the Mekong River, according to the *Washington Post*. The US is launching a US\$6 million programme to help provide meals in schools across Laos to combat the effects of hunger, which has stunted children's growth, according to the Voice of America. The US has provided financial aid to Laos amounting to more than US\$45 million a year, according to the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Secretary Kerry came to Vientiane to lay the groundwork for the US-Asean Summit, which is scheduled to be held next month in California. Laos is the chair of the 10-member regional bloc this year. President Obama's attendance at the summer meeting in Vientiane will mark the first visit by a US president to the landlocked country. The Lao ministry said Mr Kerry's visit also prepared for President Obama's visit to Laos, when he will attend the Asean-US Summit.

## Vat Phou ranked top tourist destination by Chinese website

(By Times Reporters)

Champassak provincial authorities have announced that the Vat Phou temple complex has been ranked as a “top choice” tourist destination for two consecutive years by a Chinese website. Due to its popularity, the second world heritage site in Laos has been voted as “Top Choice 2015 and 2016” after receiving positive reviews by Chinese website judges and Asian visitors.



The majestic Vat Phou temple ruins attract more visitors each year.

Head of the Vat Phou World Heritage Office, Mr Oudomsy Keosaksith, told *Vientiane Times* on Friday “The website has congratulated us on Vat Phou temple having been voted as the ‘Top Choice’ destination.” Communications Manager for the website [www.lianorg.com](http://www.lianorg.com) Ms Rita Chen said “The top choice ranking system includes four independent evaluations: tourist attractions, restaurants, hotels and stores.” “A special medal is designed for each category and is awarded once a year. Every year all qualified medalists already selected in the previous year are re-evaluated, and are added to the new qualified candidates of this year.” [www.lianorg.com](http://www.lianorg.com) is an authentic and professional tourist information website that provides overall travel information, published in Chinese. On the website, each tourist attraction enjoys an individual webpage,

where tourists can find useful practical information including GPS maps and photos. The Vat Phou temple complex is located in Champassak province and was listed as Laos' second World Heritage Site in 2001. According to a UNESCO report, the Vat Phou temple is a remarkably well-preserved planned landscape more than 1,000 years old. It was shaped to express the Hindu vision of the relationship between nature and humanity, using an axis from hilltop to riverbank to lay out a geometric pattern of temples. Vat Phou bears exceptional testimony to the cultures of South-East Asia, in particular the Khmer Empire. Mr Oudomsy said over 60,000 tourists visited Vat Phou in 2015, an increase of 10 percent compared to the previous year. However, Chinese tourists represented only 10 percent of the total figure. “I'm optimistic that more Chinese will visit Vat Phou in the near future because this site is being promoted through the Chinese website,” he said. “Tourists can enjoy a number of facilities while visiting Vat Phou including coffee and souvenir shops, a museum and tour buses.” Champassak provincial authorities are preparing to mark the 15th anniversary of Vat Phou being declared Laos' second World Heritage Site. An official ceremony will take place from February 20-22. Other related activities such as a trade fair will take place from February 16. The grand event will feature a number of activities including parades, sports and cultural performances. A cultural performance group from India has confirmed its participation. Performance troupes from neighbouring countries including Vietnam and Thailand have been invited to attend but have yet to confirm their presence.

## Laos to export electricity to Myanmar, more for Vietnam

(By Times Reporters)

Myanmar hopes to import electricity from Laos at an installed capacity of about 300 megawatts (MW) in the near future while the exports to Vietnam may be increased in the next few months.



A high voltage transmission line that is used for electricity exports to a neighbouring country. (File photo)

“The Myanmar government proposed this project to Laos about two months ago,” Deputy Minister of Energy and Mines Mr Viraphonh Viravong told *Vientiane Times* yesterday. “Currently we are studying the greater detail of the project, including the transmission lines and where the electricity will be used,” Mr Viraphonh said. Speaking at the 10th Party Congress recently, Party Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Mines Dr Khammany Inthirath reported that Laos will begin initial electricity exports to Myanmar this year. Mr Viraphonh explained that the initial exports will be only a small quantity for use in a few villages in Myanmar that are close to Luang Namtha province of Laos. For the electricity exports to Vietnam, Director General of Ministry of Energy and Mines' Energy Policy and Planning De-

partment, Dr Daovong Phonekeo, said that Laos will begin the exports with a newly built power plant, Xekaman 1, this year in Attapeu province in the southern part of Laos. “According to the plan, the plant, that has three energy generators, will start running the first generator next month; then the second generator will run in the following three months and the third generator another three months after that,” Dr Daovong said. The southern region of Laos will have four more hydropower plants in 2017: Xekaman 4, Xekaman Sanxay, Xekong 3 and Xekong 3 Ha. Importing electricity from neighbouring countries, including Laos, is one of several measures being adopted to help Vietnam meet the electricity demand for socio-economic development, according to a VNS report. These projects are expected to help partially address the urgent requirement for electricity plants for the period ending in 2020. Dr Khammany said that as of 2015, Laos has built 38 power plants at a total cost of more than 81.7 trillion kip (US\$10 billion), with a total installed capacity of 6,265 MW. They can generate 33,315 million kWh of electricity a year; and some 20.4 percent of the power generated is consumed in Laos while 79.6 percent is exported. Viraphonh said the exports shall be mainly to Thailand while the rest will go to Vietnam and Cambodia. Under current arrangements the generated energy is for both local supply and export to Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia. The sector also has the potential development of an electricity grid linking Laos and Singapore and trading in electricity is possible as Thailand and Malaysia would also benefit from the project. Laos will push for the acceleration of energy integration under the Asean Power Grid (APG) to address the imbalance in the distribution of power-generating resources in the region. APG aims to connect countries

with surplus power generation capacity to those who face a deficit. The intention is to link up power lines in the 10 Asean nations by 2020. Laos can help Asean countries to

reduce their use of fossil fuels, which are the main source of greenhouse gas emissions, and importantly can also help Asean to stabilise its power supply.

*(Vientiane Times 03February 2016)*

## **Lao children report more interest in reading**

*(By Times Reporters)*

Assessment results have shown that at schools where libraries have been established by Room to Read Laos, the number of children who enjoy reading has increased to about 60 percent, compared to 37 percent in non-project schools. Room to Read Laos has noted the impacts from Room to Read Laos' projects, with local children improving their reading skills and fluency by threefold compared to non-project schools. In collaboration with the Research Institution for Education Science, Room to Read Laos develops and pilots the new Grades 1 and 2 Lao language supplementary student books for primary schools in Laos. Currently, 220 girls graduated from upper secondary schools and 139 girls or 63 percent of these graduates will continue their study at medium or higher education institutes including at bachelor level. Room to Read Laos has received various awards from the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism for its efforts in encouraging children to read, including in 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2013. Room to Read Laos has also organised literacy programmes and girls' education programmes, teacher training and support as well as providing reading materials and learning spaces for communities in Laos. These programmes are currently running in the provinces of Oudomxay, Xayaboury, Vientiane province, Savannakhet, Champassak and Saravan. They just enlarged the literacy programme to the districts of Pakxe and Phonthong in

Champassak province this year. Room to Read Laos recently completed projects in Phongsaly, Borikhamxay and Khammuan provinces at the end of last year. According to the five year plan from 2016-2020, they will expand new projects in Champassak province and Vientiane. Room to Read provides much more than a space for storing books. Room to Read's literacy programme transforms primary schools into a child-friendly learning environment that enables children to develop the skill and habit of reading throughout primary school and become life-long, independent readers. Room to Read provides much more than material support to girls. Room to Read's girls' education programme ensures that girls complete secondary school and have skills to negotiate key life decisions. The programme reinforces girls' commitment to their own education, works with girls to develop essential life skills and increases support for girls' education among their parents, school staff and communities. According to Room to Read Laos, in the period from 2005 to 2015 more than 2,300 girls benefitted from the girls' education programme. Room to Read Laos organised more than 1,100 school libraries, constructed 84 reading rooms, and published 184 children books and distributed books to more than 1.7 million children. It also provided instruction in reading and writing to students in Grades 1 and 2 at 70 schools in Laos.

*(Vientiane Times 03February 2016)*

## Laos cuts import tariffs after AEC integration

(By Times Reporters)

Laos has abolished more than 8,000 commodity items out of a total of 9,558 under the Asean Harmonised Tariffs Nomenclature (AHTN) after the country integrated with the Asean Economic Community (AEC) at the end of last year. The more than 8000 product items include seafoods, animal insides and some processed agricultural products, according to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. About 697 goods items such as vehicles, petrol, drinking products and spare parts will be postponed to see tariffs removed in 2018, while 265 items including unprocessed agricultural products will be reduced to between 0-5 percent after 2018. The ministry's Foreign Trade Policy Department official told *Vientiane Times* this week that this policy is used only for Asean member states or for goods imported using 'D forms' but imported goods from other countries will be subject to old rules or use other forms depending on cooperation. The country is currently still collecting about 5-40 percent tariffs for the remaining import goods from Asean member states for which tariff removal has been postponed. Despite the country combining with the AEC Laos is not ready to cut all import tariffs from Asean member states as some of the postponed products represent main sources of revenue for socio-economic development. However the country will abolish these remaining

items when the end date for full compliance with integration comes. The AEC presents new opportunities for Laos but it also underlines significant challenges. The establishment of the Asean Community, in particular the AEC introduces a free flow of goods, services, investment and skilled labour, and a freer movement of capital across the region. As a result, many businesses in Asean nations have expanded their operations to Laos but only a small number of Lao businesses have set up shop in other Asean countries. The AEC will mean there will be no protection for local products. It's like playing a sport - those who are stronger will emerge as the winners, according to a Lao economist. They have to acknowledge that some Lao businesses may not survive and others may struggle just to survive in this era of economic competition. He thinks the most important point is product quality, while prices must be low to enable us to be competitive. He agreed that the enthusiasm and capability of some of our entrepreneurs must be enhanced to catch up with others in the region. Asean is a market of more than 600 million people which will attract more trade, investment and tourism to the region. The AEC also offers an opportunity for intra-Asean trade and allows member states to refocus their trade efforts with one another.

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## Asean discusses human rights

(By Times Reporters)

The Asean Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) is convening its 20th meeting in Vientiane to discuss the implementation of AICHR priority programmes 2015-2016, and the action plan for the next five years. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs's Department of Treaties and Law Director General Mr Phoukhong Siluanglath,

who is the representative of Laos and the current chair of AICHR, is chairing the meeting, which continues today. At the meeting, the representatives and delegates from Asean member states and the Asean Secretariat discussed various topics concerning the work of AICHR, including the implementation of the AICHR Priority Programmes

2015-2016. The priority programmes of AICHR is an initiative of Asean members, especially about regional seminars on human rights, thematic studies on the right to education, the right to life, child justice, human rights and anti-human trafficking in Asean. It also focuses on the social responsibilities of businesses and the media. The meeting has discussed the preparation for submission of the annual report of AICHR 2016 and AICHR Priority Programmes 2017 to the Asean Foreign Ministers in July. Furthermore, the participants have discussed the Five-Year Work Plan from now to 2020, which aims to realise the aspirations of the people of Asean on human rights, strengthening the AICHR, promoting, and protecting human rights in Asean, and en-

hancing cooperation with external partners as well as implementing AICHR's overarching mandate on human rights. The AICHR was established in 2009 in accordance with the Asean Charter. Asean members appoint their representatives to the commission for a three-year term, who may be reappointed for another three year consecutive term. Back to back with the meeting, the AICHR organised a workshop on Wednesday on Transitions between AICHR Representatives 2013-2015 and the Representatives 2016-2018 with a view to ensuring a smooth transition and the continuity of AICHR. External relations such as the Asean-EU Policy Dialogue on Human Rights and engagement with stakeholders were also discussed at the meeting.

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