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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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Dams open to provide water for drought-stricken south

(By Phaisythong Chandara)

The government has authorised four of the country's largest dams to release water to ease the drought conditions affecting the south of Laos and other Asean countries. The dams are on the Nam Ou, Nam Khan, Nam Ngum and Nam Theun rivers. They began releasing about 1,136 cubic metres of water per second on March 21.



The Nam Ngum dam in Vientiane province is releasing water to alleviate the dry conditions in the south of Laos. (File photo)

The water is expected to reach Pakxe district, Champassak province, on April 2 and would be sufficient for use until the beginning of June, according to the Ministry of Energy and Mines. The water will be channelled through the Mekong to reach Cambodia and Vietnam as well. Thai dams are also releasing 220 cubic metres of water per second and a dam in China is pumping out 2,250 cubic metres per second. Speaking at a press conference in Vientiane this week, Minister of Energy and Mines Dr Khammany Inthirath said “Asean countries are facing the worst drought conditions in about 20 years, affecting Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia.” Dr Khamma-

nysaid Laos was one of many Asean countries to have been affected by water shortages and, although the situation was not extreme, people should use water sparingly. Forecasts by the Meteorology and Hydrology Department indicate that the dry season will continue until June, but Laos' natural resources mean that the dams that store water in the rainy season to prevent flooding can now provide water when the country is dry. The dry conditions are mainly affecting farmers who engage in rain-fed rice production and lack access to irrigation. The farmers rely on the monsoon rains which typically arrive in May. The Saravan provincial Agriculture and Forestry Department reported that some parts of the province are unusually dry and farmers are unable to obtain water to grow crops as usual. A department official said they plan to work closely with local authorities to look into the possibility of emergency assistance for farmers. Elsewhere, Vietnam has been affected by unusually dry conditions and a shortage of rainfall since the end of 2015. This is attributed to the El Niño weather phenomenon, and the drought in the country's coastal areas has been compounded by saltwater intrusion. The current conditions have resulted in significant damage to crops, and threatened livelihoods and access to water by local populations. The most affected regions are in the southern central and central highlands of Vietnam, as well as the Mekong Delta.

(Vientiane Times 26 March 2016)

Thai immigration ruling to affect Lao citizens

(By SomsackPongkhao)

The Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has noted that the Thai Ministry of Interior's order regarding classes of aliens ineligible for admission to Thailand will affect Lao nationals who are in the country illegally. The ministry's Consular Department sent a notice to the Press Department this week concerning the Thai authorities' request for cooperation from Laos in informing Lao citizens about the order. The notice aimed to caution Lao nationals who are living in or travelling to Thailand and to be aware of this issue. The Thai Ministry of Interior's order came into force on March 20. Thailand noted that a number of aliens who have permission to stay in the Kingdom temporarily have overstayed beyond the permitted date, putting the safety of people and national security at risk. Under the order, Thailand's Prime Minister and Minister of Interior can exercise their power under Section 16 of the Immigration Act and refuse classes of aliens ineligible for admission to Thailand under certain conditions and specific periods of time as shown in the details below. In cases where an alien surrenders to the Thai authorities: An alien who overstays more than 90 days beyond his/her permitted date will be barred from re-entering the country for 1 year, starting from the departure date. An alien who overstays more than 1 year beyond his/her permitted date will be barred from re-entering the country for 3 years, starting from the depar-

ture date. An alien who overstays more than 3 years beyond his/her permitted date will be barred from re-entering the country for 5 years, starting from the departure date. An alien who overstays more than 5 years beyond his/her permitted date will be barred from re-entering the country for 10 years, starting from the departure date. In cases where an alien is arrested and prosecuted by Thai authorities: An alien who is caught overstaying less than 1 year beyond his/her permitted date will be barred from re-entering the country for 5 years. However, an alien who is caught overstaying more than 1 year beyond his/her permitted date will be barred from re-entering Thailand for 10 years. These rules are not applicable to an alien who departs the country before the age of 18 and an alien who departs the country before this order entered into force. Before the order came into force, Thai authorities announced that aliens who overstayed were required to surrender to authorities and pay a fine of 500 baht (130,000 kip) per day, the highest fine being 20,000 baht (4.6 million kip) before they could be repatriated. According to the Lao Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, more than 277,000 Lao nationals are working in Thailand legally, but the ministry did not know the number of illegal workers. Thai authorities reported early last year that more than 200,000 Lao nationals were required to register to prove their nationality.

(Vientiane Times 26 March 2016)

Asian leaders call for closer development ties at Boao Forum

(By Times Reporters)

Leaders from 11 Asian countries have pushed for greater cooperation at the 2016 Boao Forum held in China's Hainan province from March 22-25, in a bid to spur regional development.



Prime Minister ThongsingThammavong(*fifth right*) stands with other leaders from 11 Asian countries at the 2016 Boao Forum in Hainan province, China.

Prime Minister ThongsingThammavong led a Lao delegation to the annual forum, which was chaired by Chinese premier Li Keqiang. Some 2,000 participants including business leaders, investors, and researchers attended the conference, according to a press release from the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This year's Boao Forum pushed for greater and more effective cooperation mechanisms among countries in various fields, particularly in political security, economics, and sustainable cooperation. These aim to promote peace, independence, and safety in the region. In his opening speech, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang highlighted the improvements in people's living conditions in areas such as employment, education, medical care, old-age care and housing, according to Xinhua. Development achievements should be manifested in the improvement of livelihoods, which in turn fuels consumption and economic growth, Li said. In his remarks, Prime Minister Thongsing T hamma-

vong told the forum that Laos, as the Chair of Asean for 2016, is prioritising cooperation with other Asean member countries and Asean dialogue partners to nourish and strengthen the Asean community. Cooperation will be based on eight priority areas including the Asean trade facilitation framework, Asean regulatory framework for food safety, institutional framework on access to finance, creating an SME-enabling environment, business registration processes, and guidelines for special economic zones. Prime Minister Thongsing told the forum that Laos has been striving to improve land connectivity with neighbouring countries in an effort to convert Laos from a landlocked country into a transit hub in the region to facilitate the transport of goods and people-to-people visits. He thanked the Chinese government for its decision to release water from Mekong upstream dams to mitigate the drought conditions faced by downstream countries. The Lao prime minister also informed participants that Laos has decided to release about 1,100 cubic metres of water per second from dams on tributaries of the Mekong to further assist downstream nations. The Boao Forum for Asia hosts high-level forums for leaders from government, business and academia in Asia and other continents to share their vision on the most pressing issues in this region. It is modelled on the World Economic Forum held annually in Davos, Switzerland. It has its fixed address in Bo'ao, Hainan province, China, which has been the permanent venue for its annual conference since 2002.

(Vientiane Times 28 March 2016)

More women gain seats in National Assembly

(By Times Reporters)

The number of women voted in as members of the National Assembly (NA)'s Eighth Legislature has increased but still lags behind the target of 30 percent, with female members now comprising 27.5 percent of the legislative body. National Election Commission (NEC) Spokesman DrKoukeoAkkhamoungy revealed yesterday that of the 149 elected members, 41 are women. Of the total 149 members, 26.1 percent have retained their seats from the Seventh Legislature. The National Election Commission announced the details of the new membership yesterday following the March 20 nationwide election. Of the 210 candidates who contested the election, 61 were from government agencies at the central level and 48 were members of the National Assembly's previous legislature. Four of the candidates worked for state enterprises, and nine for private companies. Two of the four candidates from state enterprises and six of the nine candidates from private companies gained seats in the National Assembly. Fifty-five of the elected candidates hold positions in central government, while 39 were members of the previous legislature. Analysed by

ethnic group, 119 of the newly elected members belong to the Lao-Tai group, 20 are Mone-Khmer, six are Hmong-Ioumien, and four are Chinese-Tibetan. The majority of members are in the 46-60 age range, while the oldest member is 74 and the youngest is 36. With regard to education, three of the elected candidates completed lower secondary school and the rest finished upper secondary school. Forty-seven hold bachelor degrees, 48 have a master's degree, and 26 have a doctorate. On Election Day, polling stations opened at 7am and closed at 5pm simultaneously throughout the country. A total of 3,657,026 people (97.9 percent of all eligible voters) cast votes at more than 7,000 polling stations. DrKoukeo said the election of National Assembly members enabled Lao citizens to exercise their political democratic right to elect candidates through criteria outlined in the Election Law and it was the right of Lao people of all ethnicities to sit in the National Assembly. A list of the successful candidates will be published in the following issues, in order of those who received the most votes.

(Vientiane Times 29 March 2016)

Banana plantation study in Laos shows negative impacts

(By Times Reporters)



Banana plantation farms in the northern provinces.

The negative impacts from banana plantations in Laos could be outweighing the benefits, the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute reported at the workshop in Vientiane yesterday. Despite the fact that banana plantation investments have created job opportunities for local people, reduced labour migration, contributed to social organizations and improved infrastructure they are also having negative impacts on people's health and the environment. The findings were outlined in a study undertaken by the institute in cooperation with the National University of Laos. The study was focused on five provinces, those being Phongsaly, Oudomxay, LuangNamtha, Borikhamxay and Saravan. Many issues relate to the use of chemicals throughout the production process, with chemicals applied around 40 times in a production season, including herbicides, fertilizers, nutrients, insecticides and additives. It is estimated that anywhere between 105-140 chemical substances are used on many banana plantations. Different chemical substances are mixed and sprayed together, increasing the degree of harm. Most farmers still have little knowledge about how these substances should be handled and used; they rarely follow the instructions regarding the use of protective equipment when spraying or how to spray (against the wind), while there is no proper management

of chemical boxes or containers after usage. Negative impacts on the economy include lost opportunities in regards to land use for other crops, suitable land for agriculture production expansion or other investments, and no added value for Lao products through processing. These type of investments involve high production costs, especially for infrastructure (roads, water systems), organization and intensive water consumption. There are also negative impacts on society, including on farmers' health. About eight percent of banana farmers in the north have reported becoming sick over the past six months. The average frequency and duration of sickness is four times and four days each time but they still continue to work. Most of the farmers who have been sick are in the northern provinces, with the main symptoms being dizziness and headaches. Some workers treated themselves by purchasing medicines while others received treatment at local hospitals. Large numbers of banana farmers and workers agreed that there were increased levels of water contamination, decreased fish numbers in surrounding areas and an increase in soil contamination. Negative impacts on the environment include the strong smells of some chemical fertilizers, which create negative externalities for those who live within 200-300m of the plantations. After planting bananas, the land cannot be used for other crops without soil improvements and the heavy use of water on the banana plantations might reduce water levels in nearby streams and rivers. The research team estimated that the potentially high health and environmental costs (which are difficult to measure) from banana plantations may outweigh their benefits, such as income generation and employment opportunities. Economic returns from land lease fees are higher than those of long term concessions but although there are laws

and regulations which exist the level of enforcement is low. Last year, the total volume of exports reached 216,861 tonnes with a value of US\$39 million, of which 88 percent was exported to China and 12 percent to Thailand. The workshop was chaired by NAFRI Director General, Dr Bounthong Boua-

hom and saw more than 100 participants from provincial authorities, concerned departments, ministries and agencies, development partners, civil society organizations and private sector representatives taking part.

(Vientiane Times 01 April 2016)

Govt, partners discuss farmers' indebtedness

(By Times Reporters)

Many Lao smallholder farmers have gained benefits by producing for the market and improved their livelihoods while some are exposed to several risks and challenges, especially the loss of natural resources and indebtedness. For example, some pig farmers in Vientiane were in debt to an amount of 500 million kip to a bank while sugarcane farmers in Savannakhet province ended up earning nothing but had over 100 million kip of debts to a company. Some farmers' quotes for the study on indebtedness included: "We are in debt. We cannot eat together as we can't afford the food. I wish a representative of both ministries would come to visit and see our situation." "I sent my crop to market and got 80 million kip. I was happy until I got the bill for 91 million kip. How could this happen?" "Before we were poor but we were comfortable. Now we are still poor but we have burdens." The causes of indebtedness are actually complicated, demonstrated the study, caused by a combination of more than one factor e.g. lower yields, lower prices, wrong calculations of the area and booking of investments, farmer's capacity to payback and others. This information was part of many topics discussed during the Sector Working Group meeting on Agriculture and Rural Development (SWG-ARD), held recently in Vientiane. The SWG – ARD meeting was chaired by Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Dr Phouangparisack Pravongviengkham, Ambassador of France Ms Claudine Ledoux and the Country Pro-

gramme Manager of the International Fund for Agricultural Development Mr Benoit Thierry. The meeting's objective was to provide a forum for dialogue and coordination between the government, development partners and other stakeholders on development issues specific to the agriculture and rural development sector. All issues addressed through this forum are subsequently reported and considered by the government's highest representatives through the Round Table Process. A lot of attention was paid to the SWG-ARD structure and the various possible mechanisms to address topics that are increasingly important to the sector such as nutrition-sensitive agriculture, clean agriculture or upland development. At the meeting, the representative of the Lao Farmers' Network (LFN) also gave some feedback on a workshop organised in November 2015 by the Sub Sector Working Group on Farmers and Agribusiness (SSWG-FAB) entitled: "Reducing Risks of Farmer's Indebtedness". This workshop was organised following "A Short and Anecdotal Study of Indebtedness in Selected Farming Villages" that analysed causes of farmers' indebtedness and found that being in debt has profound significance for social and psychological well-being, community cohesion and food security. The study reviewed the situation of Lao farmers, in transition from subsistence farming to commercial farming, producing more cash crops for the market. Improvements in infrastructure, integration with domestic,

regional and global markets and the government policies have promoted commercial production. By the end of the meeting, Dr Phouangparisack approved the establishment

of light and efficient coordination and cooperation mechanisms, such as task forces, to better address these topics within the SWG-ARD.

(Vientiane Times 01 April 2016)