



Comité de Coopération avec le Laos

Boîte postale 4791, Vientiane, Laos

Tél : (856-21) 25 40 39 - Télécopie : (856-21) 21 69 25

Email : cclvientiane@ccl-laos.org

Site : www.ccl-laos.org

Revue de presse du 09 au 13 Mai 2016



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

Bonne réception et bonne lecture,
Cordialement,
Bureau du CCL à Vientia

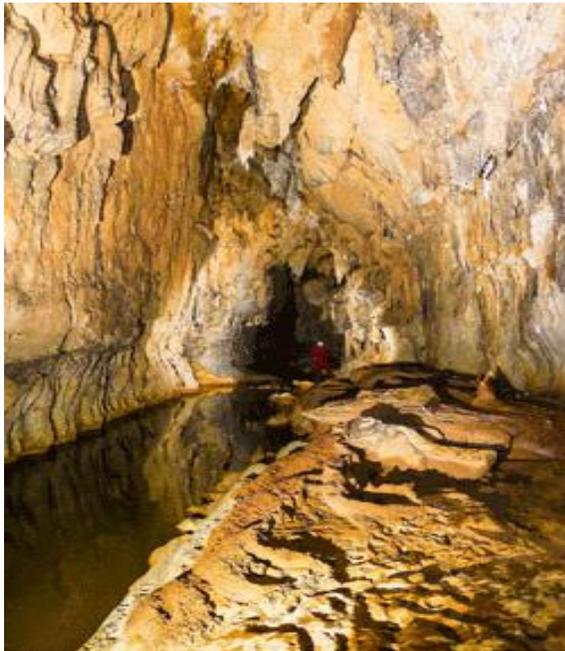
➤ **Vientiane Times:**

- [Oudomxay, the heart of tourism in northern Laos](#)
- [EU praises closer cooperative relations with Laos](#)
- [Lao firms ink deal to build Nam Neun 1 and 3 hydro plants](#)
- [New software gives blind people access to the internet](#)
- [LuangPrabang takes new path in sustainable tourism](#)
- [Officials, experts mull agricultural research priorities](#)
- [Laos in need of stronger tourism campaign: officials](#)
- [Govt approves development of ChampaNakhone SEZ](#)
- [WHO extends support for health sector refor](#)
- [Northern provinces take action to prevent reprise of locust invasion](#)
- [Wildfires spread in LuangNamtha conservation area](#)
- [LuangPrabang is top destination in Laos for overseas visitors: survey](#)
- [Laos reports progress on population and development](#)

Oudomxay, the heart of tourism in northern Laos

(By Sisay Vilaysack)

Oudomxay province is becoming an increasingly popular tourist destination in northern Laos with hundreds of thousands of people visiting the province every year. Statistics from the province's Information, Culture and Tourism Department show that in 2014 some 187,240 people visited Oudomxay including 102,050 from overseas. Last year's total of 215,448 visitors included 127,065 from overseas. Revenue earned from tourism amounted to more than US\$12 million in 2015, compared to just US\$3.7 million earned in 2005.



Spectacular views inside Chom Ong cave which has become a popular tourist attraction in Xay district, Oudomxay province. -- Photo Oudomxay Tourism website

The provincial authorities have continued to develop infrastructure and facilities at tourist sites, hoping to provide better services. The province has 106 tourist sites including 54 of natural beauty. Another 85 sites are waiting to be surveyed while only 21 sites have been completely surveyed. A total of 33 sites are already offering full services to visitors. According to the Oudomxay Tourist Information Centre, the provincial authori-

ties are now gearing up to improve the road link from the town centre to Chom Ong cave and also the facilities around the site. The improvement project is being funded by the Asian Development Bank at a cost of more than US\$14 million and is slated for completion in 2019. The hidden gem of Chom Ong cave is a recently rediscovered natural attraction located about 45km from Xay district centre near a Khmu village called Chom Ong. An official from the Oudomxay provincial tourism promotion unit, Mr Vilaiphet Ounaphone, told *Vientiane Times* on Friday "Chom Ong cave is recognised as being one of the largest caves in Southeast Asia. It is nearly 16km long and is ranked at the sixth longest in the world. The longest cave in the world is 44km, according to a European survey team." "Near the cave is a home-stay for visitors that can accommodate about 20 people. If there are more they can stay with people in Chom Ong village. Besides exploring the cave, visitors can enjoy trekking, swimming in the river by the cave, and take part in the traditional dances and lifestyle of the Khmu ethnic group," he said. The Oudomxay tourism website reports that the cave system stretches along a 4km long mountain ridge and has a parallel running and interconnecting fossil and river passage. It's been explored to a length of 15,827km (preliminary) with several wide open side passages remaining. The exploration was done by the Lao-European Cave project. Oudomxay province now has 19 hotels, 68 guesthouses, four resorts and 188 restaurants. **How to get Chom Ong cave:** You can book a tour at the Tourist Information Centre in Oudomxay province or if you want to do it on your own, a car or motorbike can be rented in Xay town. There are two ways to get to the cave, either from the south or the north. The south route starts from Nasao village (on the way to Lua-

ngPrabang) and runs for about 45km, while the northern approach is on the way to LuangNamtha province. When you get to the Km24 marker at Nambortakai village, take the road on the left which is just after the

village and signed “18 Km from the main road to the cave”. The whole distance of the north direction is 42km while the south is 48km.

(Vientiane Times 09 May 2016)

EU praises closer cooperative relations with Laos

(By SomsackPongkhao)

The European Union has highlighted its cooperative relations with Laos while marking the 66th anniversary of the European Union Foundation Day or Europe Day on May 9. Speaking at a press conference in Vientiane on Friday, EU Chargé d’Affaires Mr Michel Goffin said the EU has long enjoyed a close relationship and good cooperation with Laos. “Our relationship covers a multitude of areas and also includes political dialogue, development cooperation, trade as well as a regular dialogue on human rights and good governance. Collaboration also takes place on the regional and international stage through fora such as Asean and ASEM,” added Mr Goffin. European development partners, the EU and its member states together are one of the first providers of development assistance in Laos, with more than half a billion euro (4.5 trillion kip) over the period of 2016-2020, according to the EU Delegation in Vientiane. The funding provided by the EU to Laos through its bilateral cooperation over the period 2007-2013 amounted to more than 69 million euros. The current programming period of 2014-2020 has witnessed a substantial increase of funds with a total amount of 207 million euros. This period was divided into two phases. Based on the strategic objectives of EU-Laos cooperation and a thorough analysis of its development priorities, the EU decided to support the implementation of the 7th NSEDP in 2014-2015. The allocation for this first phase is 45 million euros and focuses on three key sectors including education (15 million euros or 33.3 percent); sus-

tainable agriculture and food and nutrition security including the UXO sector (24 million euros or 53.3 percent); governance, rule of law and human rights (12.2 million euros or 12.2 percent) and technical support (0.5 million euros or 1 percent). The EU assistance for the second phase 2016-2020 would be aligned with the government's new development plan (8th NSEDP) and to align with member states in a fully-fledged joint programming mode. In addition to the EU's bilateral assistance, Laos continues benefiting from many EU specific thematic programmes in the field of rural development, health, food and nutrition security, climate change resilience and governance and human rights with the total assistance valued at almost 20 million euros. Laos is also eligible under regional programmes, notably those implemented through Asean and the Mekong River Commission. Laos is also a regular recipient of the EU's humanitarian assistance for both response for natural disasters and disaster preparedness actions. “I will end my term this summer, and will leave a country with a new Cabinet, a new National Assembly, a new judiciary and even a new Constitution. This is very encouraging and I am optimistic about the future of this country, with a population that will gradually reap the fruits of both economic growth and effective governance,” said Mr Goffin. EU-Laos trade stood at 362 million euros for 2015, while the EU's trade deficit with Laos is 115 million euros. Textiles and clothing, coffee and sugar are three key exports to the EU market.

(Vientiane Times 09 May 2016)

Lao firms ink deal to build Nam Neun 1 and 3 hydro plants

(By Times Reporters)

Two Lao companies - Vangsup Development and Investment Co., Ltd. and THB Group Sole Co., Ltd. - on Friday signed an agreement to build the Nam Neun 1 and 3 hydropower plants in Xiengkhuang and Huaphan provinces. The agreement was signed by the President of Vangsup Development and Investment Co., Ltd. Ms Viengvanh-Phommary and the President of THB Group Sole Co., Ltd. Mr Tong Homsombath. The signing was witnessed by representatives from both companies along with Deputy Minister of Finance Mr Sila Viengkeo, senior government officials and company staff. The Nam Neun 1 dam will be built in Xiengkhuang province and will have an installed capacity of 124MW and a production capacity of 575 GWh a year. Construction is expected to cost more than US\$300 million. The electricity generated will be carried via a 115kV transmission line 51 km in length from a substation in Kham district. The Nam Neun 3 dam will be built in Huaphan province and will have an installed capacity of 60MW and a production capacity of 250 GWh per year. The price tag is ex-

pected to be over US\$140 million. The water catchment area will be 1,400 square kilometres while the reservoir will be 12 square kilometres. Altogether the two plants will have a total installed capacity of 164MW and a generation capacity of 825 GWh per year. The companies expect the plants to start generating electricity by 2022 according to the project owner, the Vangsup Development and Investment Co., Ltd. The project will also help to create job opportunities for local people and provide infrastructure such as roads, schools, clean water, a hospital and electricity. It will also generate more revenue for government coffers for use in the country's social and economic development. The two companies will try to complete the plants on schedule and carry out the work to high standards as well as strictly follow government guidelines and policies. The companies say they are well equipped to undertake the project and have sufficient financial backing, advanced technologies and experienced technicians at their disposal.

(Vientiane Times 09 May 2016)

New software gives blind people access to the internet

(By Souknilundon Southivongnorat)



The government has teamed up with international organisations to help blind people in Laos gain easier access to information and communication technology through new software. The Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications partnered with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and Thailand's National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre (NECTC) to develop the Lao Text to Speech Synthetic Software. It is intended for use by visually impaired people to enable them to use computers to search for information on the Internet, use Microsoft Office and other applica-

tions. At the launch ceremony in Vientiane yesterday it was acknowledged that technology is a path to life so countries around the world are developing software that meets the needs of people with disabilities. The Text to Speech software has been developed in several languages but was not previously available in Lao. So the ministry and the Lao Association for the Blind teamed up with the ITU and NECTC to convert the software into Lao, funded by US\$40,000 provided by the US Embassy to Laos and the ITU. The software enables blind people to hear spoken Lao on a personal computer. It will read every line on the screen whenever the mouse passes over it. One blind man at the National Rehabilitation Centre in Vientiane said the new software was a huge improvement because by listening he and others would be able to know where they were on the computer. "For example, we can drag the mouse to each icon and it will tell us what it is. It's like having a person with eyes standing beside me to tell what's there." When a blind person types on Microsoft Office or an internet browser the system will tell them what letter of the alphabet they are typing. This is something new for Laos even though many other countries already use the software on computers and mobile devices. Director General of the ministry's E-Government Centre, MrPhonpasitPhissamay, said that while there are not many blind people in Laos they should be given the opportunity to work

alongside ordinary people. "It may be difficult for them to learn how to use the software but most will persevere. So we, as government officials in cooperation with international bodies, wanted to provide this software for them," he added. MrPhonpasith said research into the system began in Laos in 2008 when the E-Government Centre sent an engineer, MsChitaphoneChansirilath, to work at the NECTC in Thailand. She wrote down her ideas and sent a sample of the system to the centre but the voice-over was too different to be recognisable and her participation discontinued as officials were concerned that no one would be able to use it. In 2014, the Centre again discussed the matter with the Lao Association for the Blind. It was recognised that most blind people could use such a system so they decided to have another go at rewriting the software. "We are now working on converting Lao Text to Speech for use on Android systems to make it easier for blind people to use mobile phones," MrPhonpasith said. Today, some visually impaired people have mobile phones that use Thai Text to Speech software while some also use Voice Search to find applications on their phone. A blind man attending the launch ceremony said he had used Lao Text to Speech on his computer and found it very convenient. He and his friends are now waiting for it to be compatible with the Android system so they can enjoy using their mobile phones.

(Vientiane Times 10 May 2016)

LuangPrabang takes new path in sustainable tourism

(By Times Reporters)

The LuangPrabang-Handle with Care project has now started and was celebrated with an official opening ceremony yesterday. The project is backed by funding of 1.8 million euro, of which more than 1.6 million euro is provided by the European Union. It is a multi-stakeholder initiative led by the German project Regional Economic Integration of Laos into Asean, Trade and Entrepreneur-

ship Development implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. The project comes under the auspices of and is funded by the EU SWITCH ASIA II Programme which has a 3-year commitment from May 2016 to April 2019 to address the challenges brought about by the ascending growth of tourism in LuangPrabang, according to the GIZ Laos of-

face. The project works in close partnership with sequa GmbH from Germany, the Lao Association of Travel Agents, and the Lao Hotel and Restaurant Association. It targets the increased provision and consumption of sustainable tourism products to preserve the destination with regard to the assurance of private sector uptake and benefit, the responsible utilisation of natural resources and the protection of cultural heritage, minorities and inclusive economic participation. The project aims to increase local capacities to implement responsible activities related to socio-cultural, environmental and economic sustainability. It assists the private tourism sector in LuangPrabang to develop and apply new sustainable tourism products. The adaptation of Asean sustainable tourism standards to local conditions and their application is another field of the initiative. Finally, the project improves the awareness of sustainable practices, strengthens their use by tourists and promotes LuangPrabang as a sustainable tourism destination. The project opening ceremony yesterday was attended by the EU Chargé d'Affaires, Mr Michel Goffin, local authorities and more than 100 relevant stakeholders of the project. The

project partners Lao Association of Travel Agents and the Lao Hotel and Restaurant Association have presented the necessity for a more sustainable tourism promotion in LuangPrabang, and have committed to adhere to making LuangPrabang a destination that ensures sustainable tourism development. A further highlight of the event was the nomination of the ambassadors for sustainable tourism, namely MsAlichithPhengsavanh, the learning manager for Hotel MaisonSouvannaphoum, and MsBidalackSyackhaphom, the local tourism personality who will be promoting and increasing the awareness of sustainable practices in LuangPrabang in the context of the project. LuangPrabang was declared a world heritage site by UNESCO in 1995 and has become the main tourist destination in Laos. According to the LuangPrabang Tourist Office, over 400,000 tourists of all nationalities came to the province last year. They hope to boost the number to 700,000 tourists by 2020. LuangPrabang was awarded a gold medal after being voted World Top City by readers of the British magazine Wanderlust in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2015.

(Vientiane Times 10 May 2016)

Officials, experts mull agricultural research priorities

(By Times Reporters)

Lao officials and international researchers met in Vientiane yesterday to discuss how agricultural research can best be aligned with the priorities laid out in key government documents. Officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and researchers from the Consultative Group for International Agriculture Research (CGIAR) centres discussed the way forward. According to a document released at the meeting, the ministry's strategic direction targets food and nutrition security, commercial production, sustainable production, clean agriculture, and organic production. Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry DrPhouangparisakPra-

vongviengkham said the CGIAR should contribute to the ministry's strategic direction with a focus on the major goals. DrPhouangparisak said the government recognised the important role that various CGIAR centres and programmes played in contributing to the development of Lao research in agriculture, strengthening human resources, and increasing agricultural productivity. He mentioned the International Rice Research Institute, which he said had worked to develop improved rice varieties and the capacity of Lao researchers and had collected an incredible diversity of rice varieties in Laos. DrPhouangparisak also spoke about the

International Centre for Tropical Agriculture, which has worked for many years on innovative technologies related to livestock and crops, as well as marketing systems, and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) that has supported the ministry and government in improving water management strategies and exploring ways to derive multiple benefits from hydropower potential. The deputy minister said there were a number of priority research areas that needed assistance from CGIAR partners, such as resilience, productivity, sustaining biological heritage and the natural resource base, and human and institutional capacity development. IWMI Deputy Director General Peter G. McCornick promised that under the Consultative Group for International Agriculture Research's ambitious 2030

goals, the Group had been going through a process to reorient its research. It looked forward to working with the government and other stakeholders to ensure CGIAR's research activities align with national strategies and plans as well as support the Sustainable Development Goals. The CGIAR is the only worldwide research partnership addressing agricultural research for development. Its work contributes to global efforts to tackle poverty, food and nutrition insecurity, and environmental degradation. It has 15 independent research centres and 16 programmes. The CGIAR programmes with a strong presence include water, land and ecosystems, climate change, agriculture and food security, Humidtropics, roots, tubers and bananas, and the Global Rice Science Partnership.

(Vientiane Times 11 May 2016)

Laos in need of stronger tourism campaign: officials

(By Times Reporters)

Laos needs to develop a more dynamic information campaign to attract more tourists and generate more income for local people, a senior government official has said. Speaking at a meeting in Vientiane on Tuesday, Deputy Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, Mr Bouangeun Xaphouvong, called for tourism officials and the media to work hand in hand to ensure information about the Lao tourism industry and the country's special attractions was circulated to the wider world. "Our strategy is to ensure that the number of tourists visiting the country increases to 5 million people by 2020. We also require high-end tourists to stay longer and generate income for local people to alleviate their poverty," he said. In 2015, the number of foreign visitors to Laos reached 4.3 million, representing an annual increase of 4 percent compared to the previous year. However, most people agreed that a lot more needed to be done in terms of providing information so that many more foreign tourists know about Laos and its amazing

sights and experiences. Many government officials say they are still being asked by foreigners "where is Laos?" when they attend meetings overseas. This shows that the country's publicity campaign is weak. An official from the Tourism Promotion and Marketing Department, Ms Sengsoda Vanthanouvong, said stronger cooperation is needed between the relevant sectors to ensure that tourist attractions are adequately promoted and that tourism-related services are properly delivered to visitors. "We have tried to promote our attractions by attending a number of tourism fairs overseas and linking our website to those of other Asean nations," she said. Ms Sengsoda said Laos will host a regional-level community tourism meeting in Champassak province next month to further enhance tourism cooperation and promote the industry within the region. Laos has partnered with Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam to jointly market themselves as "Five Countries, One Destination" in a move to bring more tourists to the

region and integrate their tourism industries. The initiative will help to bolster Laos' tourism campaign and allow international tourists to know more about Laos through a united marketing campaign. Tourism officials are optimistic that many more people will get to know about Laos when the country hosts the Asean Summit later this year, which will be attended by leaders from countries around the world including US

President Barack Obama. Laos has become a top destination for international visitors due to its intriguing tourist attractions including the two UNESCO World Heritage Sites - the ancient city of Luang Prabang and the pre-Angkor Vat Phou temple complex. Laos is now conveniently connected to many other cities by air and land transport which makes it easy for people to visit the country.

(Vientiane Times 11 May 2016)

Govt approves development of Champa Nakhone SEZ

(By Times Reporters)

The government has granted approval for the development of the Champa Nakhone Specific Economic Zone (SEZ) in Pakxe district within the Special Economic Zone of Champassak province. An agreement on the development of the zone was signed in Champassak province last week by the Lao National Committee for Special Economic Zones (NCSEZ), Champassak provincial Special Economic Zone Authority, and LTV Architecture, Road and Bridge Construction Co., Ltd. The signing ceremony was attended by Deputy Prime Minister Dr Sonexay Siphandone, provincial Governor Dr Bounthong Divixay, Deputy Minister and Vice President of the NCSEZ and Head of the NCSEZ Secretariat, Ms Bouatha Khatthiya, Pakxe district Governor Mr Soulivanh Sahathasin, and Company President Mr Laty Sipsouphanavong. Reporting at the ceremony, Ms Bouatha Khatthiya said the Champa Nakhone SEZ covers an area of 58.3 hectares and is located in Huaypoun and Saphanxay villages of Pakxe district. The company was granted a land concession period of 99 years, which can be extended with the agreement of the government. The project has an expected total investment of US\$80 million (more than 648 billion kip), of which the government will hold a 30 percent share and the company will hold a 70 percent share. According to the company, the objective of the Champa Nakhone SEZ is to de-

velop the area into a hotel and resort, along with a modern trade and service complex. The developer will enjoy a special policy on tax, customs and administration in accordance with the single window service to facilitate investment and business operations. This new specific economic zone will bring the total number of SEZs nationwide to 14, including four SEZs and 10 specific economic zones. The four SEZs are Savan-Seno SEZ in Savannakhet province, Golden Triangle SEZ in Bokeo province, Champassak provincial SEZ, and Phousy SEZ in Luang Prabang. Specific economic zones include Boten Beautiful Land in Luang Namtha province, Pakxe-Japan SME in Champassak province, Thakhaek and the Phoukhiew SEZ in Khammuan province. Specific economic zones in Vientiane are That Luang Marsh, Vientiane Industry and Trade Area (VITA Park) in Xaythany district, Xaysettha Development Area and Vientiane Long Thanh Golf Course in Xaysettha district, and Dongphouy 1 and 2 in Hadxaifong district. The Champa Nakhone SEZ became the second specific economic zone within the Special Economic Zone Champassak province, after the Pakxe-Japan SME was approved as an SEZ in 2015. The zone covers an area of 195 hectares and extends into Pathoumphone and Bachiengchaleunsouk districts.

(Vientiane Times 12 May 2016)

WHO extends support for health sector refo

(By PhetphoxaySengpaseuth)



Associate Prof. DrBounkongSyhavong (right) and Dr Juliet Fleischl shake hands after signing the agreement

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has provided US\$6 million (more than 48 billion kip) to the Lao government to improve the sustainable development of the health sector. The WHO's continuing support for the health sector is in response to the fourth annual funding plan of the Ministry of Health. The agreement was signed in Vientiane yesterday between Minister of Health,

Associate Prof. DrBounkongSyhavong, and the WHO Representative to Laos, Dr Juliet Fleischl. Speaking at the signing ceremony, Associate Prof. DrBounkong said the WHO has increased its annual funding commitment to the ministry by nearly 30 percent compared to last year. Part of the increase will target the response to the polio outbreak. He said this was an opportunity to reaffirm the continuing collaborative relationship between the ministry and the WHO in supporting health care reform in Laos, and their engagement in improving the health and development of the Lao people. Next year will see the renewal of the Country Cooperation Strategy between the WHO and the Ministry of Health for the next five years, he added. This latest support from the WHO bolsters the organisation's technical leadership role in supporting the ministry in five strategic directions: resilient health systems, priority public health programmes, health security, the Vientiane Declaration, and Greater Mekong Sub-regional initiatives. Assoc. Prof. DrBounkong highlighted the importance of the alignment of WHO priorities with the Ministry of Health's eighth programme of work to better support health sector reform and the country's new socio-economic development plan.

(Vientiane Times 12 May 2016)

Northern provinces take action to prevent reprise of locust invasion

(By Times Reporters)



An official sprays a chemical to kill locust eggs in northern Laos.

Officials are spraying chemicals to kill locusts and their eggs in the provinces of LuangPrabang, Huaphan and Phongsaly after finding signs of locust habitats in many parts of the region. An official from the Agriculture Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, MrKhansaySomchanh, told *Vientiane Times* on Wednesday that last year 140 places where locusts were likely to lay their eggs were identified and marked. This year, eggs were spotted in 122 locations and 106 places are now being sprayed to kill off the pests. Some 500 people from provincial, district and village authorities are spraying chemicals and hope to have wiped out eggs in all the 140 identi-

fied locations by July. "We must get rid of these eggs immediately because they will soon turn into locusts. They will grow rapidly and will then invade rice fields, maize and other crops being grown by farmers," MrKhansaysaid. According to information from the Agriculture Department, the species found in this area is the yellow-spined bamboo locust, with the scientific name *Ceracriskiangus Tsai*. This species was first found damaging crops in southern China. MrKhansay said these insects typically eat bamboo leaves in hillside forests, but upland rice farmers have been felling scores of bamboo trees over the last few years to clear the land for rice cultivation. The department's website reported this week that in 2014 and 2015 there were locust outbreaks in LuangPrabang, Huaphan and Phongsaly provinces and almost 4,000 hectares of rice were damaged. Last year, flocks of locusts were reported in seven districts of these three provinces, but this year 12 districts have reported finding evidence of the pests. The reason for their spread is thought to be because last year the ministry did not have sufficient stocks of chemical spray, and only two districts in LuangPrabang province were sprayed. LuangPrabang province reported in June last year that crops had been destroyed in parts of Phonthong, Ngoy and Viengkham districts. Over 7,000 hectares of upland rice, sweetcorn and other crops were affected, with losses estimated at 800 million kip.

(Vientiane Times 12May 2016)

Wildfires spread in LuangNamtha conservation area

(By Times Reporters)

Wildfires ravaged 700-800 hectares of woodland in the Namha National Conservation Forest in Sing district, LuangNamtha province, over the weekend and provincial authorities have deployed over 50 officials to help extinguish the flames.



Fire fighters tackle a blaze in the Namha National Conservation Forest in Sing district, LuangNamtha province over the weekend. --Photo Pathetlao

Deputy Head of the Natural Resources and Environment Office in Sing district, MrSommePhompanya, told *Vientiane Times* yesterday that when 200 hectares of woodland in the conservation forest burned last month, some 100 officials, soldiers, police and villagers fought the flames. "But from May 7-10 the fire started burning again

and has now damaged 700-800 hectares of woodland," MrSommeesaid. "About 55 officials from the Natural Resources and Environment Office, the Agriculture and Forestry Office, soldiers, police, villagers and local authorities have been helping to put out the fire and as of May 10 we were able to quell many of the flames," he added. "This year wildfires have occurred on four occasions in the Namha National Conservation Forest, damaging over 2,000 hectares of woodland in total. Fires have been burning about 17km from a village group but residents have not been affected," MrSommeesaid. The authorities believe the fire was probably started by villagers who had set fire to scrub as they hunted for animals. The Namha National Conservation Forest or Namha National Protected Area is the most important wilderness area in Laos. It covers 222,400 hectares of mixed deciduous forest, with a range of mountains, evergreen forest and some grassland. It covers five districts, namely Sing, Long, Namtha, Viengphoukha and Nalae. Elsewhere, 26 houses burned down in Huay Chuang village, Hongsa district, Xayaboury province, last month. Fortunately no one was injured. Authorities suspect the fire was caused by farmers burning shrubs in a rice field when strong winds whipped up the flames which quickly spread to the houses.

(*Vientiane Times* 13May 2016)

LuangPrabang is top destination in Laos for overseas visitors: survey

(By Times Reporters)

Some 83 percent of foreign tourists who visit Laos put the world heritage town of LuangPrabang at the top of their itinerary, according to a survey of 2,800 overseas visitors conducted in 2015 by the Tourism Development Department.



A typical Buddhist ritual in which both monks and laypeople parade around Xieng Thong temple in LuangPrabang. As usual in this town, tourists are snapping pictures of the scene. --Photo Sem

A recent statistics report for 2015 published by the department under the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism revealed that the survey was conducted at Wattay International Airport, the Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge linking Vientiane to Thailand's NongKhai province, and in LuangPrabang and Champassak provinces. Vientiane came in second place with almost 80 percent of people naming it as a destination, followed by Champassak province with 58 percent. The southern province is home to Laos' second World Heritage Site. In fourth place, Vientiane province, where the popular tourist resort of Vangvieng is located, garnered 33 percent of the vote, while Bokeo and Khammuan provinces were in joint fifth place with 17 percent of people surveyed naming them as intended destinations. Of those surveyed, no one named Xaysomboun province as being somewhere they planned to visit. The survey also revealed that visitors'

main interests were temples and monuments with almost 70 percent of people citing these attractions. Fully 66 percent said they were interested in scenic attractions, 48 percent said food was an interest, while 34 percent said they were keen to visit new destinations. Most visitors said they got information about Laos from the Internet with 63 percent citing this source, while 30 percent said they read guidebooks, 23 percent said they got information from friends, and 16 percent said they contacted travel agencies or tour operators. LuangPrabang took pride of place in the survey because of its many old and beautiful temples and the monks that inhabit them. Most people surveyed said they liked the layout of the town and the fact that it was easy to observe local lifestyles and traditions. Local residents actively preserve their culture and traditions through events such as the Lao New Year, Boat Racing, and End of Buddhist Lent festivals, along with smaller festivals celebrated by ethnic groups, baci ceremonies, almsgiving, and temple rituals. It was these striking features that led UNESCO to list the town as a World Heritage Site in 1995. LuangPrabang is one of 1,007 such sites in 161 countries worldwide. In addition, the town has regularly been voted 'Best City' by the UK's Wanderlust travel magazine. It has received the award on seven occasions from 2006 to 2015 (2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2015). The listing of LuangPrabang as a World Heritage Site has contributed to its economic growth, recording an average of 8.2 percent per year. Average annual per capita income is 11.6 million kip (US\$1,450). The number of tourist arrivals increased from 186,819 visitors in 2007 to 531,327 in 2015. In 2015, the town had 61 hotels and 238 guesthouses offering 5,005 rooms, along with 289 restaurants.

(Vientiane Times 13 May 2016)

Laos reports progress on population and development

(By Times Reporters)

The Lao government has reported its progress on the implementation of population and development works over past years at the recent 49th Session of the UN Commission on Population and Development. The Lao delegation led by Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment DrKhamlienPholsena attended the session under the special theme of “Strengthening the demographic evidence base for the post-2015 development agenda” in New York from May 11-15. The meeting was also attended by representatives from the governments of several countries, international organisations, non-government organisations, and civil society organisations. The session focused on research and discussion on strengthening the use of benefits from changing age population structure in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from now until 2030. Reporting at the session, DrKhamlien emphasised the importance of population and development and work integration in socio-economic development and real practice over previous years. Over the past 20 years Laos has made steady progress towards population work. The mortality rates among mothers has shown a steady decline and the country has already achieved the national Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target in 2015. The life

expectation rate increased from 65.4 percent in 2011 to 68.3 percent in 2015 and the economy continued to grow causing death rates to decline and the lives of people to get better. Besides that, he pointed out the ongoing difficulties and challenges that the government needs to solve such as the education and labour skill levels of the younger population, which are still low. More importantly, DrKhamlien reported on Laos' goal and ambition to graduate from the UN list of Least Developed Countries by 2020 and the government's decision to continue to cooperate with development partners regarding strengthening capacity to collect, use and analyse population data in the effective implementation of the SDGs by 2030. The meeting also debated and agreed on progress monitoring to achieve the SDGs, which would depend on reliable data, information access, and information on population trends in a systematic and timely manner. In the past, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) provided US\$22.5 million from 2012-2015 to assist Laos in the areas of reproductive health, population and development, as well as gender equality. From 2017-2021, the UNFPA will provide an additional US\$20 million in the areas of reproductive health and safe and proper sexuality towards the development of the young population

(Vientiane Times 13 May 2016)