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Champassak eyes economic boom

(By Somsack Pongkhao)

Champassak provincial authorities are hopeful of an economic upswing following the establishment of a new Specific Economic Zone (SEZ) in Phonthong district at the Vangtao-Chongmek checkpoint on the Thai border. The government has granted permission for a Lao company to develop the zone to accelerate economic growth in this remote region of the province.



Dr Bounthong Divixay (left) signs an SEZ agreement with Mr Oudone Keouangdi in Vientiane on Thursday, in the presence of Deputy PM Dr Sonexay Siphandone and other officials.

The developer - Duangdi Construction Company Limited - has agreed to invest US\$250 million in the project to commercialise the border crossing. Once complete, the project will feature a shopping centre, duty free shops, a market, hotels, allocated villas, warehouse, banks and other financial facilities, and factories to produce goods for export. The project agreement was signed in Vientiane on Thursday between the government (holding a 30 percent share) and the developer (with a 70 percent share). Located near the Thai border, the project covers an area of 253 hectares and has a concession period of 99 years which can be extended. Governor of Champassak province Dr Bounthong Divixay represented the government in signing the agreement with the President of the Duangdi Construction Company, Mr Oudone Keouangdi. The signing

ceremony was also attended by Deputy Prime Minister Dr Sonexay Siphandone and other high-ranking officials. Dr Bounthong told *Vientiane Times* yesterday the Specific Economic Zone is part of the government's efforts to speed up development in Champassak province to bring it in line with provinces in neighbouring countries. "Our aim in establishing this zone is to attract more foreign investment and the transfer of new technology to Laos while creating job opportunities for Lao people," he said. Dr Bounthong said that since the establishment of other SEZs last year, in particular the Pakxe-Japan Specific Economic Zone, many Lao nationals who were previously working in Thailand have found jobs in SEZs in Laos. The governor also said the development of SEZs contributed to infrastructure improvement, notably roads, and also to socio-economic development in the provinces. Last week, the government authorised the setting up of two SEZs in Champassak. The other was the Champa Nakhone Specific Economic Zone in Pakxe district, with a total investment of US\$80 million. Under SEZ policy, the developer will build the necessary infrastructure including roads, electricity, water and drainage systems and other facilities to attract other businesses, and can benefit from tax breaks. Laos began setting up SEZs in 2003 and there are currently 15 SEZs around the country including the latest one at the Vangtao-Chongmek border crossing. According to a report from the Lao National Committee for Special Economic Zones, over 260 companies are now investing in SEZs in Laos with total registered capital of US\$6.4 billion. Of this figure, more than US\$1.27 billion has been spent on development activities in these zones.

(Vientiane Times 14 May 2016)

Govt to address compensation issues at Saysettha development zone

(By Times Reporters)

The government is on track with its plan for the 1,149-hectare Saysettha Development Zone in Vientiane, which will contribute to the country's economic growth, but some issues still need to be ironed out. The main issue is that families living on 404 hectares of land allocated for the zone have not yet been paid compensation for the land or property they will lose because the government does not have the resources to pay them at present.



Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith and his delegation tour the Saysettha Development Zone at km 21 on Road No. 13 North in Vientiane.

Families living on about 570 hectares that will be incorporated into the zone have already been compensated by the government at a total cost of more than 100 billion kip, a senior official from the National Committee for Special Economic Zones (NCSEZ) said. Deputy Minister and Vice President of the NCSEZ, Ms Bouatha Khatthiya, highlighted the issue when welcoming Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith and his delegation to the site last week. She said the NCSEZ has reaffirmed its commitment to work closely with the developers to identify the best way to compensate people who will have to leave their homes. Despite the compensation issues, much progress has been made and companies are investing in the zone after realising the great potential it has in relation to regional integration. Some 30 local and foreign companies are now invest-

ing in the zone with total registered capital of US\$350 million. They have set up businesses on 73 hectares of land in the fields of construction, agriculture, energy, and logistics. Ms Bouatha said the NCSEZ will continue to assist the zone to upgrade its one-stop administrative service and electronic management system to attract more investors. "This zone will become the main driver of growth in the industrial and service sectors in Laos, laying the foundation for diversifying the nation's economy," she said. "The zone is part of the government's policy to boost economic growth and generate job opportunities for local people through modernisation and industrialisation." Ms Bouatha said the project will include a large residential area, a public park and green spaces, a lake, roads and drainage, tourist sites and other facilities. During their visit, Mr Thongloun and his delegation toured some factories, including one producing animal feed, after hearing about the progress of the zone. The Saysettha Development Zone is being managed by the Laos-China Joint Venture Investment Company, which was established by the Yunnan Provincial Overseas Investment Company and the Vientiane Municipality Government in 2010. The Saysettha Development Zone is located 17km to the northeast of Vientiane's central business district. It is one of 12 zones to be established under the government's policy's to develop special and specific economic zones. The 12 SEZs are located in Vientiane and the provinces of Savannakhet, Khammuan, Champassak, Luang Prabang, Bokeo and Luang Namtha, covering a total area of 19,499 hectares. Many companies in the region have opened factories in Laos which has generated thousands of jobs for local people as well as revenue for the government.

(Vientiane Times 16 May 2016)

Phongsaly farmers say no to rubber

(By Somsack Pongkhao)

Many villagers in Phongsaly province have declined to plant rubber trees on their land following the continuing slump in the price of rubber on the world market. A forestry expert from Phongsaly province, Mr Thongsavan Thammavong, told *Vientiane Times* yesterday that villagers quickly lost interest when they learnt what the sale price of rubber was. "Many people here have wasted their time and lost opportunities by growing rubber as they can earn more by growing other crops," Mr Thongsavan said. Thousands of farmers in the province switched to planting cardamom after earning a good income from this crop, which they sold to Chinese traders. Mr Paeng Phongsone, 56, from Mokyon village in Phongsaly province's Samphan district said people there detest rubber. "Rubber makes our lives very difficult," he said. "Many people in this district are starting to grow cardamom instead. Some families have earned as much as 40 million kip a year from growing cardamom, enabling them to send their children to school and to build new houses." Phongsaly provincial authorities announced a halt to rubber plantations in 2012 following the government's decision to suspend investment in mining, rubber and eucalyptus plantations. The slowdown has given the government time to review its policies and assess the effectiveness of existing projects and make sure that Laos can maximise its bene-

fits from these sectors. Despite the government's decision to halt rubber plantations, many people continued to plant rubber until last year, hoping to profit from the crop. Mr Thongsavan said Phongsaly province planned to plant only 18,000 hectares of rubber but the real figure has risen to 23,000 hectares as many villagers thought they would earn a decent income. "Now nobody wants to plant rubber because its sale price is too low," he said. Rubber currently sells for 3,000-4,000 kip per kilogramme, down from 9,000 kip per kg in 2012 and 17,000 kip in 2008. A researcher at the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NA-FRI), Dr Palikone Thalongsengchanh, said rubber not only destroyed the environment and ecosystem but also saw villagers lose opportunities to earn more money in other ways. At present, villagers in Phongsaly are enjoying the high price of cardamom but many are very concerned about fluctuations in the market price, particularly when more people start growing the crop, as the price might go down. A painful lesson has been learnt by farmers in many provinces who grew rubber and then lost out when the price slumped. Some farmers even resorted to pulling up their trees so they could grow other crops instead. Critics say it's vital for the authorities to help farmers diversify, ensuring that they grow crops in line with market demand and reasonable prices.

(*Vientiane Times* 17 May 2016)

More than 785 billion kip vanishes in “ghost” projects

(By Times Reporters)

More than 785.8 billion kip has been found to have been spent on 60 so-called ghost projects – schemes for which money has been budgeted but do not actually exist. The findings were uncovered following inspections into state investment projects carried out by the Ministry of Finance for the 2015-16 fiscal year, the latest report from the ministry's Inspection Department revealed. Of the total, 29 such projects were discovered in Luang Namtha province, 26 projects were in Oudomxay province, three projects were in Xekong province and two others in Attapeu province. As of August 14, 2015, authorities in charge were able to recover more than 246.5 billion kip, according to the report presented at the annual nationwide inspection meeting held in Vientiane last week. Director General of the Inspection Department, Mr Phoxay Manphilaphanh, told the meeting, which reviewed the inspection mission for 2015-16, that officials in charge are recovering the rest of the money. Officials inspected 1,446 state investment projects across the country valued at more than 11,076 billion kip. Of this amount, more than 4,910 billion kip has been budgeted through government bonds and the rest has been financed by cash. Statistics from the Inspection Committee of the Party Central

Committee, and the Government Inspection Authority showed that almost 242 billion kip had been used corruptly, with 95 officials involved. Those responsible were disciplined following investigations carried out in 2015. In addition, Mr Phoxay told last week's inspection meeting that his officials joined the Government Inspection Authority in reviewing the construction costs for a new national treasury office in Borikhamxay province. The joint mission also inspected various development funds operated in Laos among inspections into other bodies. He added that his department had launched a number of inspections into the management of revenue collection and expenditure as well as debt management. With billions of kip having been reported as lost to corruption and fraud in previous years, the country's new leaders have pledged to take tougher action to address the issues. Shortly after being elected by the National Assembly last month, Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith announced he would escalate the fight against corruption. In his first talks to give guidance to the new government at the inaugural monthly meeting of the cabinet recently, newly-elected President Bounnhang Vorachit told the government to take action to address corruption as one of the priorities.

(Vientiane Times 17 May 2016)

Govt widens ban on timber exports, tightens wood business

(By Times Reporters)

The government has announced a new ban on the export of various tree species, timber products and ornamental plants in a move to take ownership of and maximise the benefits of Laos' natural resources. Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith issued an order last week imposing the ban on many timber products and plants and prohibiting their export. The listed items are logs, timber, partially-processed wood, tree roots, root balls, tree branches, dried trees and ornamental plants. The prohibition also covers the cutting quota approved by the government previously, meaning that all forms of logs and timber must be fully processed and converted into finished products before being exported. Previously, the government prohibited the export of logs, requiring businesses to make finished products for export. The latest prime ministerial order also prohibits the import of wood and non-timber forest products into Laos for export to third countries. The prime minister has ordered the continuation of a suspension on logging in production forests but asked officials in charge to accelerate the drawing up of an allocation plan for production forests and submit it to the government for consideration. The relevant sectors were asked to carry out proper surveys on trees that will be felled within development projects such as areas where new roads will be cut through, water catchment areas for new hydropower plants, and areas where new mining projects will be developed. The survey will be made use of when the government draws up an annual logging quota to submit to the National As-

sembly for approval. Mr Thongloun has entrusted the relevant sectors to follow up the order closely and ensure that any logging already carried out has been done in approved areas. Any excess to the approved logging quota and logging in non-approved areas will result in the logs being seized and those involved will be fined and penalised. Mr Thongloun said the relevant government bodies must be responsible for carrying out logging to make way for infrastructure development, but project developers and contractors are not allowed to fell trees. Logging can only be done with the government's approval. He told authorities not to use timber to finance infrastructure development. The prime minister has instructed the Ministry of Industry and Commerce in collaboration with the relevant sectors to accelerate the improvement of operations at wood processing plants to meet acceptable standards. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry was asked to work with the Ministry of National Defence and other sectors to patrol border areas as well as inspect sawmills and furniture and wood processing plants to prevent illegal logging and the transport and trading of logs. Mr Thongloun told the authorities to use tough measures to penalise those found guilty of illegal logging, trading and other related activities. He instructed the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce to work with the relevant sectors to follow up the implementation of the order and report on its progress to the government regularly.

(Vientiane Times 18 May 2016)

Programme helps reduce school dropout rates

(By Times Reporters)

The Girls' Education Programme run by Room to Read Laos works to ensure that girls complete secondary school and have the skills needed to negotiate key life decisions. The programme supports various school activities aimed at lowering the dropout rate of girls in rural communities. It is currently being implemented in the provinces of Oudomxay, Xayaboury and Saravan, and is preparing to expand to Champassak province. Room to Read Laos coordinator Ms Manyone Philathivong said high dropout rates are a crucial issue among girls in secondary schools. Programme staff work to reinforce girls' commitment to their own education, work with girls to develop essential life skills, and increase support for girls' education among their parents, school staff and communities. "Key to our programme are the social mobilisers - local women who are hired as mentors and work with girls and their families to ensure that girls stay in school, participate in activities, and navigate the challenges of adolescence with the ability to make their own life choices, both personally and professionally," Ms Manyone said. Besides support from Room to Read, coordination is encouraged between teachers, principals, and village communities to take ownership of keeping girls at school. The programme began 10 years ago. The girls currently being supported by the scheme number 2,396, of whom 220 have finished upper secondary school. Some 139 (63 percent) of these girls continued their

studies, with some taking bachelor degrees. When the programme started, it was nine years before all the girls completed secondary school. Room to Read Laos is currently supporting 931 girls in nine schools in Xay and Baeng districts, Oudomxay province. A new parent engagement concept was launched this year. It was a one-day meet-up and classroom visit, which gave parents the opportunity to leave their farms for a day to learn and play with their children at school. This activity attempts to present the talent and potential of the children and allows parents to see them from a different angle, as more mature, confident, or anxious, in ways they might not see at home. A father in Bor village, Xay district, stood up on the stage to express his pride at seeing his daughter raise her hand to solve a difficult maths problem, which he did not know how to solve, in front of everyone in the classroom. He said the school should arrange meet-up events like this every year. Oudomxay provincial Education and Sports Department recently issued the latest information on the dropout and enrolment rates of girls in the province. According to 2015 statistics, the enrolment rate for girls in lower secondary schools was 81 percent while it was 43 percent in upper secondary schools. Meanwhile, the school dropout rate in lower secondary schools was 6.7 percent and 4.7 percent in upper secondary schools, while the gender parity index stood at 0.85 percent.

(Vientiane Times 18 May 2016)

Home affairs ministry outlines vision for better governance

(By Times Reporters)

The Ministry of Home Affairs has outlined its Vision 2030, which seeks to strengthen and enhance government management, the stability of its organisational structure, the skill and capacity of civil servants, public service mechanisms, and people's satisfaction with government services. The ministry kicked off a three-day meeting yesterday to explain its Vision 2030, Ten-Year Development Strategy (2016-2025) and Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) for the home affairs sector and legislation relating to government administration. The meeting was attended by ministry officials at the central and provincial levels and chaired by Minister of Home Affairs Mr Khammanh Sounvileuth. In addition to the above-mentioned plans, participants learnt about the amended Constitution, amended Law on Government, Law on Local Administration, Law on Civil Servants, responsibility for population management work between the Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Public Security, responsibility for religion and ethnic groups between the ministry and Lao Front for National Construction, and responsibility for civil servant management between the ministry and the Party Central Committee. Mr Khammanh said the overall Vision 2030 covered "Strengthening government management, organisational structure stability, skill and capacity of civil servants, consistent government service mechanisms, and people's satisfaction with government services." The ministry needs to pay attention to certain issues to ensure the vision is translated effectively and concretely, he add-

ed. Mr Khammanh said that, firstly, the ministry would try to improve its government organisation structure, and administrative regulations and legislation, by revising and improving the government organisation structure at all levels in line with conditions in the next 10 to 15 years. The governing structure should be strong, active and stable, and able to coordinate and integrate with the regional community. In addition, the ministry would investigate legislation to manage government and society to ensure that governing bodies and systems at all levels have security and order. Secondly, the ministry will work to improve civil servants as they are an essential workforce for the country. It will also pay more attention to publicising and carrying out Party and state policies, and enhance and develop the skills and capacity of civil servants so they are able to serve the people efficiently. Thirdly, the ministry will improve methods of government to make systems more efficient. The ministry considers document and copy management as an important way to preserve data on political, economic, social and cultural issues for use as reference. Finally, the ministry will improve its service mechanisms and system of governance with the aim of creating a state that is of the people, by the people, and for the benefit of the people. Above all, the ministry would attempt to improve its public service delivery. Mr Khammanh said the home affairs sector needs to translate this vision into a strategy and clear plan and programme for implementation.

(Vientiane Times 18 May 2016)

Northern district plans to reveal hidden gems

(By Times Reporters)

Realising the tourism potential of the many scenic attractions on their doorstep, authorities in Xamtay district, Huaphan province, are hoping that an investor will add the necessary facilities and conveniences to entice more visitors. Xamtay district Governor MrHinthongHeuangchansouk told *Vientiane Times* recently that the district has a wealth of scenic beauty, cultural interest and historic sites. “Our district has considerable potential for tourism and our waterfalls are of particular interest. For example, Phavang waterfall is a key part of our tourism development plan,” he said. Phavang waterfall is about 30 km from the centre of Xamtay district, in PaoNeua village. The water cascades over a 700-metre drop and has 21 levels. “We opened the waterfall to the public last month. Hundreds of local residents came to the opening ceremony but we don’t have an accurate record of the number of visitors coming here,” MrHinthong said. Xamtay district borders on Viengxay district and has a road link with Vietnam to the east. “We want to promote the potential benefits of our tourist attractions in the hope of teaming up

with Vietnam in the years to come,” he said. MrHinthong explained that the key to their tourism development plan was infrastructure development, especially roads, so that people can access the main tourist attractions in the district. “The development of tourism in Xamtay district will focus on sustainability and avoid negative impacts on the environment, biodiversity and wildlife,” he said. According to MrHinthong, Xamtay district has more than 15 waterfalls but they are not easily accessible. “We are now hoping that investors will build facilities at the most outstanding visitor attractions but they will have to submit the necessary paperwork to the provincial and district authorities,” he added. Xamtay officially became a district two decades ago and infrastructure is still limited because of the difficult terrain. But hidden gems lie deep in the forest, and caves and waterfalls await discovery by intrepid adventurers. Xamtay district is 5 to 6 hours by car from Xamneua district, the capital of Huaphan province. The road is paved and passes through some dramatic scenery, with tree-covered mountains and deep ravines.

(*Vientiane Times* 18 May 2016)

Vientiane People's Council elects new leaders

(By Somxay Sengdara)



(From left) Dr Sinlavong Khoutphaythoun speaks while Mr Oudone Xaymounty and Ms Khamfong Phoumvongxay oversee the inaugural session of the Vientiane People's Council.

The Vientiane People's Council has elected Dr Sinlavong Khoutphaythoun as the capital's Mayor, with the new appointee vowing to battle undesirable conduct and corruption.

With 28 members, the Vientiane People's Council began its inaugural session yesterday and approved the proposals of candidates to the highest posts in the local administration. Dr Sinlavong previously held the post of Mayor before becoming Minister of Planning and Investment. He was then appointed Minister to the Government Office before again being appointed Mayor of Vientiane in July 2014. Dr Sinlavong is a member of the Politburo. In his acceptance speech, he promised to continue his revolutionary endeavours to the best of his intellect, knowledge and ability, and to do his best to implement the tasks assigned under

the constitution and laws. He said he would earnestly tackle undesirable social conduct, corruption, and other disruptive behaviour. The Vientiane People's Council also approved Mr Keophilavanh Aphaylath and Mr Sihoun Sithileuxay as Vice Mayors of the capital, after their candidacy was proposed by the mayor. Former Vice Mayor of Vientiane Dr Anouphab Tounalom, who was elected as a member of the National Assembly's current Legislature, was elected as President of the people's council. He told the gathering he would be united with council members in upholding endeavours and political responsibilities for the implementation, translation and realisation of Party directives related to the roles and responsibilities of the council. In particular he would support efforts to enhance the role of the council in being a representative body of the people. The people's council approved the new administrative structure, which includes 17 departments, the Vientiane Administration Office, Defence Office, Public Security Office, and Vientiane Urban Management and Service Office (formerly the Vientiane Ur-

ban Development and Administration Authority). All 28 members of the council supported the appointment of Mr Oudone Xaymounty and Ms Khamfong Phoumvongxay as Vice Presidents of the council. The local people's representative body has three committees and a secretariat: Committee of Justice, National Defence and Security; Committee of Economics, Planning and Finance; Committee of Socio-Cultural Affairs and Ethnicity; and the Vientiane People's Council Secretariat. The inaugural session of the Vientiane People's Council also approved the appointment of the Head of the Vientiane Office, People's Prosecutor, and President of the Vientiane People's Court. The agenda of the inaugural session, which will continue tomorrow, includes consideration of the capital's vision until 2030, the strategy until 2025, the socio-economic development and budget plans for the next five years, the council's five year plan, drafting of laws and sub-laws of the capital administration, and approval of the resolution of the inaugural session.

(Vientiane Times 19 May 2016)

EU bans imports of vegetables grown in Laos

(By Times Reporters)

The European Union (EU) has banned the import of four types of vegetables grown in Laos following its warning that the vegetables failed to meet safety standards, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Following the ban that was imposed earlier this year, the ministry has instructed its provincial departments to work with the relevant sectors to improve the quality of the vegetables. The plants in question are basil (*Ocimum* spp), Mexican coriander (*Eryngium* spp), peppers (*Capsicum* spp) and cha plu (*Piper* spp). The EU has told Laos that the vegetables originating from the country were found to harbour diseases and chemical substances that exceeded the safety level. The EU has issued 130 warnings since 2012

followed by the ban. In light of the problem, the ministry recently issued an order instructing provincial departments and relevant bodies to work together to improve the safety standards of the vegetables. The ministry has told the relevant authorities to stop issuing quality guarantee certificates to companies who were warned by the EU. The suspension will be imposed until the quality of the vegetables is improved to meet the EU's standards. The authorities were told to make sure the quality guarantee certificates were not issued for those vegetables grown outside the country but were claimed to have originated in Laos to enjoy the export quota. District agriculture and forestry offices and planting divisions have been told to dissemi-

nate the EU's conditions and criteria to agribusiness operators and exporters so that exported farm products meet the criteria. The ministry instructed its provincial departments to review the inspection systems of their officials and agribusiness operators towards improving inspection mechanisms and reporting the results to the ministry by next month. Those found guilty of the loose inspection triggering the issue must be penalised in line with the relevant laws and regulations. Officials were told to follow up the implementation and report the progress made in improving the quality of the vegetables to the EU's authorities in charge of the issue. The ministry stressed the need to ad-

dress the issue and improve the quality of Lao farm products and inspection systems so that the agricultural commodities can be exported. If not, the EU could widen the banned items which could affect the revenue generated from exports of farm products. Officials said Laos has exported a number of farm products to many countries including the EU, generating large sums of money. The export of bananas alone increased tenfold from more than 30.8 billion kip (US\$3.8 million) in 2011-12 to more than 324.8 billion kip (US\$40 million) in 2014-15, according to a report from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. The main markets for bananas grown in Laos are China and Thailand.

(Vientiane Times 19 May 2016)

Chinese route to Phongsaly offers shortcut

(By Times Reporters)

A road link to the northern province of Phongsaly through Yunnan province in China offers a shortcut for motorists visiting Phongsaly, but not many people opt to take the route as yet. An official from Phongsaly province, who asked not to be named, told *Vientiane Times* on Wednesday that road users can head to Phongsaly via China after they arrive at the Laos-China border in Luang Namtha province. This route is about 100 kilometres in length from the Laos-China border in Luang Namtha province to the Laos-China border in Phongsaly. "It's quite short to take the road via China but many people don't want to go to there because they don't want to queue up to check in and out at the borders, he said. Moreover, Luang Namtha now has the Laos-Myanmar Friendship Bridge which links the province with Xienglab Township in Thachilek district of Myanmar's Shan State. This is the first bridge linking Laos and Myanmar. It was built to boost trade, investment and tourism in the region, especially between Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand and

China, and it is envisaged that it will open up links to India and Bangladesh in the future. Due to the freight queuing at the Laos-China border in Luang Namtha province, many people prefer to go to Phongsaly via Oudomxay instead. Director of Phongsaly provincial Planning and Investment Department, Mr Khamlek Chayisane, said the roads to the province are quite good and there are also air routes flown by small aircraft. The government plans to enlarge airfields so they can take larger airplanes, to satisfy the demand for growth in the region. Meanwhile, Phongsaly appears to be exchanging the trees and shrubs on its hilltops for coffee and tea plantations. Chinese companies were already growing thousands of tea bushes on the fertile slopes but now they are also planting coffee trees at higher altitudes where it is cooler. According to the provincial Agriculture and Forestry Department, about 2,500 hectares of coffee trees are now being cultivated. Provincial authorities are hoping Chinese growers will plant the crop on 12,000 hectares in total.

(Vientiane Times 19 May 2016)

Farmers' training boosts food and nutrition security

(By Times Reporters)

More than 30 agricultural staff and farmers in Oudomxay and Xayaboury provinces will help to improve food and nutrition security after completing courses titled Training of Trainers for Future Facilitators of Farmers Field Schools. The training sessions ran from March 28 to May 13 in Xay district, Oudomxay province, as part of the Soum Son Seun Jai (SSSJ) Programme: Community-Based Food Security and Economic Opportunities Programme. The Farmers Field Schools focus on crop production and food and nutrition security. The successful trainees were certified as trainers to organise, implement and facilitate future Farmers Field Schools in 13 initial target villages in Oudomxay and Xayaboury provinces. The Farmers Field Schools interventions focus on securing nutritious food in home gardens for year-round home consumption as well as promote pesticide-free vegetable cropping. The Farmers Field Schools to be implemented will focus on developing capacity in rural communities for the home gardening of vegetables and fruits, particularly in the wet season. These home grown vegetables and fruits will supplement forest-origin foods amid a declining trend in the availability of natural food in recent years. In the courses, trainees studied vegetable production through field-based learning exercises

and the application of better management practices. They learned about the nature and functions of insects and micro-organisms, the production of organic insecticides, the management of compost, the production of various kinds of nutritious vegetables and fruits, and better cooking methods for preparing nutritious vegetables. They also learned about methods of adult education and developed facilitation skills to effectively carry out Farmers Field Schools. Besides the training in Xay district, the trainees practiced carrying out village surveys and running Farmers Field Schools in target villages in Namor district. According to the baseline survey of the SSSJ Programme conducted in May 2011, 63 percent of households in the programme areas experienced at least one hunger season per year which lasted for an average of three months. The most vulnerable people in this situation are children. Some 64 percent of children under five suffer from inadequate nutrition over long periods of time, leading to chronic illness. The improvement of food and nutrition security is an urgent need for malnourished children. Currently the SSSJ programme is targeting 225 poor villages in Xayaboury and Oudomxay provinces from December 2011 to December 2017.

(Vientiane Times 19 May 2016)

Slow bureaucracy blamed for misuse of funds

(By Somxay Sengdara)

The slow authorisation of proposed development projects has led to the misuse of allocated funds because project developers have attempted to use the money for other, previously authorised projects. The misuse of funds was raised by members of the Vientiane People's Council yesterday at their inaugural debate session, which continues today.



Ms Ketmany Bandasak speaks at the inaugural session of the Vientiane People's Council.

The switching of funds allocated for a specific project to another, unapproved project was also highlighted as being a common occurrence, with government departments wanting to spend all the money budgeted to them by using it for other projects. A member of the Vientiane People's Council from Xaythany district, Ms Ketmany Bandasak, called for this issue to be addressed, saying that if the practice persisted, every department would follow suit. She was concerned that this situation would lead more government bodies to create and implement unapproved projects, which would lead to an increase in public debt. In response, Director of the Vientiane Department of Planning and Investment, Mr Phoukhong Bannavong, acknowledged the problem but said it had not reached a serious level. He referred to the Law on State Investment, which he said defined the terms of project funding. "Funds can be redirected from one project to another, but must be done according to the rules,"

he said. "By saying that, I do not mean to promote the misuse of funds," he added. He said the redirection of funds would interfere with project implementation, explaining that drawing up a project without sound preparations, surveys, feasibility studies, and analysis put it on rocky ground. In addition, the lengthy bidding process and other bureaucratic procedures, especially project authorization, meant that planned projects missed their implementation targets. Mr Phoukhong said that if project implementation could not begin within the same fiscal year, the allocated budget would be withdrawn, and had to be used for other projects. He said the money would be used either for other projects or the payment of debts. Good preparation was essential before including any project in annual development plans, he added. He admitted that violation of the planning rules occurred in some sectors, which had contributed to the current problematic situation.

(Vientiane Times 19 May 2016)