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Revue de presse du 30 Mai au 03 Juin 2016



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Savannakhet women receiving better health services

(By PhetphoxaySengpaseuth)

About 50 percent of women, including pregnant women in the 15-45 age group in target districts of Savannakhet province, can now access more health services at hospitals and dispensaries. The province's Health Department had set a target for about 70 percent of women and pregnant women to access more health services at hospitals and dispensaries in the districts of Xepon, Nong and Thapangthong, the department's Deputy Director DrChandoneManiphousay said. But many pregnant women and children in the target group are still not accessing health services because they are poor and because local health workers are not sufficiently informed about reproductive health issues that are relevant to young people, DrChandone said. Young people are often unable to make use of health services because of communication problems, as they often only speak the language of their ethnic group. Since the launch of a new reproductive health scheme in the province in 2012, health officials and village volunteers have been collecting information from villages about issues that seriously affect the safety and quality of care given to mothers and newborns. As a result, pregnant women have been given access to more health services. DrChandone told the media last week that community-based distributors of reproductive health kits, like Agnod, are now working across the prov-

ince. Each one covers several villages, so they reach the most remote areas. She said these distributors help to reduce maternal and child deaths and other health risks related to unwanted pregnancies. They also encourage adequate spacing between births so that women can fully recover. Better family planning also helps families to escape from poverty. "Just a few years ago, there were no midwives or midwifery teachers in the province, which obviously had a serious impact on the safety and quality of care given to mothers and newborns," she added. "The United Nations Population Fund helps the Ministry of Health to educate midwives in line with international standards. This way we're working to help ensure that people all across the province get safe, quality care from a competent midwife." This work is vital in helping to prevent early pregnancies, including unwanted pregnancies, and to reduce the mortality rate of mothers and children. A senior official from the Ministry of Health said the ministry was trying to improve standards of care. "We're looking at improving assistance for deliveries in a comprehensive way, so we're boosting standards of healthcare and improving the services offered by doctors and nurses at hospitals and dispensaries at both the central and district levels."

(Vientiane Times 31 May 2016)

Lao children not receiving adequate nutrition

(By Times Reporters)

Overall Laos isn't lacking in food but many children aren't getting enough nutrients because of poor eating habits and attitudes, according to a leading official. While some countries in Africa suffer from inadequate nutrition caused by a lack of food, that's not the case in Laos where there is sufficient. Deputy Director of the Nutrition Centre under the Ministry of Health, Dr Latthiphone Oula, told *Vientiane Times* on Monday that children were not receiving proper nutrition because parents were choosing the wrong sorts of food to feed them. "As a result some children are below international standards when it comes to height and weight," she said. Statistics for Lao children on the whole show they fall below international standards alongside other regional nations like Timor Leste and Cambodia, while in other countries like Vietnam and Thailand children's growth rates are improving. Based on the centre's figures, 44 percent of children in Laos do not receive sufficient nutrients and 27 percent are underweight by international standards. However, these statistics were compiled three years ago and up-to-date data are not available until next year's survey, which is undertaken every four years. The Ministry of Health will work with four or five other ministries in carrying out the survey. Dr Latthiphone expects the results will show a reduction in the number

of Lao children who are underweight and below international standards for height as many parents are becoming more aware and teaching their children to eat healthy food following the ministry's health advice. It is not only children in remote areas that are malnourished. Some children in more developed urban areas are also below average for height and weight because their parents don't feed them nutritious meals. Some children are given money to buy a healthy meal at school but that's not always the case, with parents not checking if their child is spending the money wisely. The Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Sports, and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and international agencies are now working hard to provide adequate nutrition to people living in remote areas. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is also helping people living in rural areas with crop planting, animal husbandry and fish breeding in order to improve nutrition. The US Embassy to Laos announced at the end of last year the start of a US government-funded US\$6 million (over 48 billion kip) programme to improve the health of women and children in Laos. Over the next three years, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Nurture initiative will help to reduce child nutritional stunting and improve household nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene practices.

(*Vientiane Times* 31 May 2016)

Nam Ngiep 1 dam construction phase sets high milestone

(By Times Reporters)

The Nam Ngiep 1 Hydropower Project (NNP1) has begun the construction phase for the highest Roller Compacted Concrete (RCC) gravity dam in Laos and highest ever constructed by a Japanese company. The dam is being built across the Nam Ngiep River in Borikhan district, Borikhamxay province and when complete, it will be 167 metres in height with a crest length of 530 metres, according to press release from the project. The official ceremony to mark the start of RCC placement in the dam was held yesterday at the dam site in Borikhan district, Borikhamxay province, and was attended by Deputy Minister of Energy and Mines Dr Sinava Souphanouvong, Deputy Minister of Finance Ms Thippakone Chanthavongsa, Borikhamxay provincial Governor Dr Kongkeo Xaysongkham, Xaysomboun provincial Governor Major General Dr Thongloy Silivong, other high-ranking government officials, shareholder representatives, contractors and local communities. "We are very excited to have reached the start of RCC placement to construct the highest RCC dam in Laos. The company would like to thank the Lao government, shareholders, lenders, our staff and contractors, and local communities for their support," Managing Director of the Nam Ngiep 1 Power Company Mr Yoshihiro Yamabayashi said. RCC is a concrete mix consisting of cement and fly ash, locally quarried aggregates and water. It is a workable mix and more economical to place than conventional concrete. To attain its design characteristics, the RCC needs to be maintained at a temperature of no more than 24 degrees Celsius during delivery and placement to avoid thermal cracking during hydration as the concrete dries and gains strength. "The total

concrete volume will be 2,300,000 cubic metres and this quantity will be placed by the fastest means currently available in the world in keeping with maintaining the high standards of quality," Mr Yamabayashi added. At the NNP1 project, RCC is transported from the mixing plant along a 2km long belt conveyor to the dam, loaded into a truck, and dumped at the designated location. It is then spread by a bulldozer to create a 30cm thickness, and finally compacted by a 15 tonne vibration roller which passes over it four times until the design density is obtained. This process will be carried out 24 hours a day, seven days a week until completion of the dam, which is scheduled for May 2018. Nam Ngiep 1 is a 290-megawatt installed capacity hydropower project under construction in Borikhamxay and Xaysomboun provinces. The project consists of the construction of two dams and two powerhouses along the Nam Ngiep River. Since construction started in late 2014, the project has made good progress, with about 40 percent of work completed at the end of April. The project is being built and will be operated by the Nam Ngiep 1 Power Company, whose shareholders are Kansai Electric of Japan with 45 percent, EGAT International of Thailand with 30 percent, and Lao Holding State Enterprise of Laos with 25 percent. The project will start generating electricity in January 2019 of which around 95 percent will be sold to Thailand with the remainder used for domestic consumption. The project expects to generate more than US\$600 million in direct revenue and other indirect benefits to the government during the 27-year concession period, after which ownership will be transferred to the government.

(Vientiane Times 31 May 2016)

PM calls for better development, protection of children

(By Times Reporters)

Prime Minister ThonglounSisoulith has called for all sectors of society to work harder for the better development and protection of children.



Prime Minister ThonglounSisoulith says the Party and government have attached great importance to the comprehensive development and protection of children.

He made the statement in a message delivered to mark this year's International Children's Day today (June 1). Laos has seen a number of achievements and made progress in better protecting and assisting children under the age of 18. However, challenges remain, which all sectors need to collectively address, he said. More work especially needs to be done to improve nutrition given that some children are underweight and are stunted. Greater effort is also required to reduce maternal and child mortality, while ensuring that more school-aged children enrol in local schools. MrThongloun pointed out that many villagers still do not have clean water or lavatories. Drug abuse and violence continue to threaten the wellbeing of Lao children. Illegal migration to seek unlawful employment has resulted in many children falling victim to child trafficking, the child sex trade, and child labour exploitation. The premier, representing the government, called on all Party and state organisations, the Lao Front for National Construction, mass organisations, state and private businesses, and parents to shoulder more responsibility in collectively implementing Laos' international obligations in this re-

gard. He also urged all sectors to observe the country's laws, regulations, national strategies and action plans concerning mothers and children to ensure the survival, protection, participation and development of children so that they enjoy happiness, good health, and care by their parents and society as they develop. It is important that children grow up to be responsible, knowledgeable and competent human beings to inherit and carry out the country's two strategic tasks of national protection and development on the road to becoming a modernised and industrialised nation. "To achieve these goals, we must uphold cohesive solidarity within the entire Party, state and society under the leadership of the Party and achieve breakthroughs to gain victory," he said. The prime minister called on all parents to join with the government to continue improving the institution of family, educate, and create an environment that is conducive for the comprehensive development of children. He urged all children to pay attention to their studies and training so they could better themselves and be good children of their parents and society, and be good and smart citizens of the country. He called on everyone to cease violence against children in all forms. The premier stated that the Party and government have attached great importance to the management, development and promotion of mother and child affairs by promoting health and protecting the rights and interests of mothers and children while offering comprehensive education and development opportunities for children. MrThongloun said Laos has also attached great importance to implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, focusing on four rights – the right to survive, the right to education and physical sport development, the right to child protection, and the right to child participation. He added that a number of laws and

regulations had been enacted to serve as tools for the development and protection of children. On the occasion of June 1, which is also National Arbor Day, the prime minister

called on all sectors to participate in tree planting in an effort to increase forest cover and preserve the environment for the younger generation.

(Vientiane Times 01 June 2016)

World Bank provides US\$30m for fight against poverty

(By Somsack Pongkhao)

The World Bank has agreed to provide a low interest loan of US\$30 million (more than 243.2 billion kip) to fight poverty in Laos, a government source has said. World Bank Country Manager for Laos Ms Sally Burningham told the government last week that the bank had approved the long-term loan, according to the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF), the government's main poverty fighting body. Ms Burningham called on Deputy Minister and Vice Chairman of the National Leading Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (NLCRDPE), Mr Somsanith Souvannalath, at the Prime Minister's Office to inform him of the bank's decision to provide the loan. Representatives from the Poverty Reduction Fund, which is overseen by the NLCRDPE, also attended the meeting. Earlier, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) agreed to provide a grant of US\$16 million (more than 129.7 billion kip) to fight poverty in Laos. The Lao government will contribute another US\$6 million (more than 48.6 billion kip) bringing total funding from the three sources to US\$52 million. This amount will be used to finance the PRF's Phase III from 2017-2020. Mr Somsanith thanked the bank and other partners for their financial support to eradicate poverty in Laos. He informed Ms Burningham that the government has decided to merge the NLCRDPE with

the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. A new entity called the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Poverty Eradication is set to be established in the near future. The merge was decided on after the new government took office at the end of April. The support by the World Bank and the SDC for Phase III has been provided thanks to the significant achievements of the Poverty Reduction Fund during Phase II from 2012-2016, which was largely supported by the Bank and the SDC. From 2012-2015, more than 683,000 people in more than 1,300 villages across the country benefited from the Fund's activities. Some 1,426 projects costing more than 300 billion kip were implemented. Of the beneficiaries, 50 percent were female, according to the Fund. Projects included the construction and repair of 225 roads in rural communities over a distance of 1,228 km. Some 45 bridges were built and 18 small-scale electricity networks were installed, while 386 schools were built or repaired. In addition, 711 clean water systems were constructed or repaired. Some 63 irrigation systems and reservoirs were built or repaired along with the construction of 10 community markets. Ms Burningham spoke highly of the Lao government's support in implementing the PRF's activities to bring about these achievements, according to the PRF.

(Vientiane Times 01 June 2016)

DPM outlines tougher measures for revenue collection

(By Souksakhone Vaenkeo)

The Ministry of Finance will accelerate the use of modern technology and equipment in revenue collection in an attempt to close loopholes and prevent revenue leaks, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has said. Mr Somdy Duangdy made the comments at a press conference last week while he was attending the government's monthly meeting for May. "We have been talking about this for a long time, but implementation has been slow. We have now held talks to initiate immediate action," he said, referring to the introduction of modern equipment. He pledged to strictly enforce the laws and regulations concerning revenue collection, ensure close management of state enterprises, and follow up the performance of officials in charge of revenue collection in an attempt to prevent the misappropriation of revenue. "All possible loopholes [for revenue leaks] must be closed," Mr Somdy said. He stressed the need to amend regulations that had been found to have hindered revenue collection. The DPM said urgent measures will be taken to ensure the full and accurate collection of revenue for the last three months of this fiscal year until the end of September, and over the next three months until the end of December. These final three months will be a transition period because the government is moving the start of the next fiscal year to January instead of October as previously. "We will

exert every effort to collect sufficient revenue to achieve the target approved by the National Assembly," Mr Somdy promised. The assembly approved the government's proposal to cut the 2015-16 fiscal year budget following lower than expected revenue collection over the past six months. The target has been lowered from 26.159 trillion kip to 23.7 trillion kip, while budget expenditure has been trimmed from 31.946 trillion kip to 31.118 trillion kip. Mr Somdy said his ministry has carried out weekly and monthly reviews and monitoring to oversee revenue collection. The weekly reviews look at revenue collection from major revenue generating sources such as the main border crossings and taxes. The ministry has warned that companies that do not pay their taxes or fail to pay the full amount owed could have their business licenses revoked. Mr Somdy said the ministry will strive to ease the budget tensions Laos has faced since the 2012-13 fiscal year. In addition, the ministry has taken additional measures for proper budget management. These include precautionary measures to prevent ghost projects by strengthening coordinated action among the relevant bodies in carrying out proper inspections before allocating project budgets. The move came after reports that 60 ghost projects had been uncovered in previous years, for which more than 785.8 billion kip had been budgeted by the government.

(Vientiane Times 02 June 2016)

Judicial experts discuss improvement of criminal proceedings

(By Times Reporters)

The government partnered with international organisations yesterday to hold a seminar on the interaction between judicial stakeholders in criminal proceedings. The government is attempting to establish a state governed by the rule of law to support the country's socio-economic transition. Since 2003 the government has declared that it will strive “to develop a coherent, credible and predictable legal framework established in a transparent and participatory manner”. To help achieve this objective, it adopted the Legal Sector Master Plan in September 2009. The master plan establishes the framework for developing effective institutions throughout the legal sector as the foundation for the rule of law. The plan is being developed in accordance with a financial agreement signed on November 5, 2012, between the French and Lao governments and a subsequent agreement signed between the French Embassy and ASF France. The latter was requested to support the Lao Bar Association in reinforcing the role of lawyers in Laos' judicial system. This support includes the organisation of two national seminars that gather lawyers, judges, prosecutors and officials from the Ministry of Public Security to raise awareness of the role of lawyers. The aim is to foster open discussions amongst stakeholders and come up with concrete recommendations to be effectively implemented in order to improve interactions between judicial stakeholders in criminal proceedings. The first seminar was organised by the Lao Bar Association, with the support of the

ASF and the United Nations Development Programme in June 2015. Participants underlined the value of having the opportunity to discuss issues and actively took part in the small group discussions. Amongst the lessons learned were the need to involve judgement enforcement officers, to prioritise focused topics, and to elaborate concrete written recommendations to be disseminated with the purpose of endorsing changes by the highest authorities. Yesterday's seminar took place in Vientiane and was attended by Deputy Minister of Justice Prof. Ket-Kiettisack, Ambassador of France Ms Claudine Ledoux, President of the Lao Bar Association MrKhamSaySoulinthone, and other officials. Participants discussed the need for fair trials in criminal cases, independent tribunals, impartial tribunals, and so on. The main purpose of the seminar was to contribute to Laos' efforts to establish a rule of law state by 2020. Other goals are to raise awareness and promote law implementation in criminal proceedings amongst judicial stakeholders. The process also aims to improve judicial proceedings at all levels with a view to protecting the rights of the defence and enhancing the role of lawyers in criminal proceedings. During the seminar Prof. KetKiettisack asked participants to concentrate on the discussions and to share their knowledge of criminal proceedings. Those in attendance were also asked to use the content of the meeting to carry out their work in the future.

(Vientiane Times 03 June 2016)

Govt reveals findings of first survey on violence against children

(By Times Reporters)

Violence against children is common in Laos and one in six children has experienced at least one type of physical violence before the age of 18, a survey has found. Roughly a fifth of children in Laos have experienced emotional violence at home and one in 10 has experienced some form of sexual abuse as a child, according to the survey. The study was carried out by the Lao Statistics Bureau under the lead of the National Commission for Mothers and Children, with technical and financial support from Unicef and the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and funding support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. A meeting to reveal the preliminary findings of Laos' first national "Violence against Children Survey" took place yesterday in Vientiane. Attending the meeting were Acting Chair of the National Commission for Mothers and Children MrLytouBouapao, Head of the Lao Statistics Bureau under the Ministry of Planning and Investment DrSamaychanhBoupha, Unicef Representative to Laos MsHongweiGao, and Australian Ambassador to Laos Mr John Williams. The survey looked at experiences of physical, emotional and sexual violence among children under the age of 18. It provides comprehensive and credible data on the magnitude and nature of violence against children nationwide. In the past, a lack of comprehensive data on the different forms of violence against children and the context in which violence takes place has been one of the major barriers towards effective action to address the issue in Laos. Over 1,900 children and young people aged 13 to 24 across the country were interviewed about their experiences of physical, emotional and sexual violence during childhood. The report revealed that only 15 percent of children

ever receive the support they need to recover from their experiences of sexual abuse. According to the report, parents, guardians and other relatives were found to be the most common perpetrators of physical violence. Likewise, children are most often sexually abused by people they know and trust. Speaking at the meeting, MrLytou said "Violence against children is unacceptable in any form and under any circumstance. All children have the right to live and thrive in an environment free from violence. The government of Laos is strongly committed to ending violence against children, holding perpetrators to account for their actions and making sure there is support available to children who have experienced violence in any shape or form." MsHongweiGao said "Now is the time to prevent and stop violence against children through awareness raising, commitment to policy development and concrete follow-up actions." She emphasised, in particular, the need for effective prevention strategies and quality services to be accessible to all children in Laos, including those in the most hard-to-reach areas. "Unicef will continue to support Laos with this important work," MsGao said. The full survey report, which is expected to be released later this year, will provide more detailed information about the prevalence of physical, emotional and sexual violence against children and the circumstances in which it occurs. The findings and recommendations will pave the way for important prevention and response initiatives to support the implementation of the National Plan of Action on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Violence against Children (2014-2020) that will protect all children in Laos from all forms of violence.

(Vientiane Times 03 June 2016)

Govt, ADB consult on new country partnership strategy

(By Times Reporters)

The Lao government and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have jointly discussed preparations for the new ADB Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) 2017-2021, to align ADB's support with Lao development priorities in its next five year plan. The consultation meeting was held in Vientiane yesterday and was jointly organised by the Lao government and ADB to ensure that ADB's support matches the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP). In his opening remarks, Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment Dr Kikeo Chanthaboury said the current CPS 2012-2016 supports the 7th NSEDP framework. "The ongoing CPS 2012-2016 has been formulated and driven by a series of Country Operations Business Plans and provides financial assistance averaging about US\$100 million annually to support the national development goals of Laos," he said. He said ADB's assistance has directly impacted and resulted in the achievement of core areas of specialisation. Education, water and other municipal infrastructure and services, energy and agriculture had particularly benefited. In addition, natural resources and rural development with public sector management as a cross-cutting sector had also received direct impact from the assistance. "The ADB's Country Partnership Strategy has largely contributed to the social and economic development of Laos during the last five years, particularly in sustaining economic growth at an average of at least 7.5 percent a year," Dr Kikeo said. There had been a significant reduction in the poverty rate, which had de-

creased from 33.5 percent in 2003 to 23 percent in 2013, and to below 20 percent last year. ADB Country Director Ms Sandra Nicoll said "The gathering today is to get guidance from key government officials on the directions for the new ABD CPS 2017-2021. It is timely that the 8th NSEDP was endorsed by the National Assembly." "We recognise the great importance for ADB to align its new Country Partnership Strategy with the government of Laos and its 8th NSEDP," she added. Ms Nicoll said the previous independent evaluation department on the ongoing CPS 2012-2016 indicated that it is relevant, effective, efficient and likely sustainable. "So, it is already a successful programme and I'd like to congratulate the government on those positive findings. It provides a strong basis for us going forward to the next country partnership strategy for 2017-2021," she said. ADB is considering proposing three strategic priorities under the new CPS, namely income and employment generation, enhanced human development, and sustainable natural resource management and climate resilience. The three strategic priorities have been introduced and discussed at meetings with line ministries, conducted late last month, and the new Country Partnership Strategy will be approved by ADB's board in February next year. "After the consultation meeting with civil society organisations and development partners, we [ADB] hope to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the government by June 15," Ms Nicoll added.

(Vientiane Times 03 June 2016)

ECD supports corporate governance in Laos

(By Times Reporters)

The third meeting of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-Southeast Asia) Corporate Governance Initiative took place in Vientiane this week. The two-day meeting aims to increase awareness of corporate governance, identify policy which will improve corporate governance of enterprises, spur capital market development, and attract foreign investment. The meeting was hosted by the Lao Securities Commission in collaboration with the OECD and supported by the government of Japan. In her opening remarks, Deputy Governor of the Bank of the Lao PDR, Ms Vathana Dalaloy, said corporate governance is an essential aspect of global and regional economic development within Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV). “With the lessons learned from the recent financial crisis, the main problem of financial institutions' bankruptcy is poor corporate governance,” she said. Ms Vathana said a number of well-known companies in America had poor risk management, conflict of interest, and insider trading while some renowned companies in Europe faced financial fraud and bribery. Similar companies in Asia faced financial scandal and problems with risk management as well. “These failures create huge financial losses and damage companies' reputations. In severe cases some companies become bankrupt which affects public confidence and the financial system's stability,” Ms Vathana said. She added that Laos is one of the CLMV countries and corporate governance is an important aspect of its capital market development. GDP growth of 7.90 percent from 2011-2015 was also influenced by the capital market. Meanwhile the Deputy Commissioner for International Affairs from the Financial Service Agency

of Japan, Mr Masato Kanda, said economic growth in Laos was about 7 percent per annum and depends heavily on natural resources, mainly hydropower and mining. “Heavy dependence on natural resources must be mitigated by a more diversified economy. This meeting will cover crucial areas in Laos such as the legal and policy framework needed for investment and development of the capital market,” Mr Kanda said. Senior Policy Analyst, Ms Fianna Jurdant, said OECD's goal is to offer decision makers the opportunity to discuss policy challenges, exchange experiences, identify good practices, and to develop consensus based on international standards. “Our objective is to support better policies for better lives and to promote policies that improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world,” she said. Ms Jurdant said OECD is in Southeast Asia because it is one of the most dynamic economic regions in the world, representing 8.8 percent of the world's population, with a combined GDP of over US\$2.6 billion. “Laos is not only an Asean member country but is already integrated within the region and the world,” she said, adding that the corporate governance initiative aims to support the CLMV countries so they can develop a vibrant capital market and enhance corporate governance standards in the region. Along with local and international experts, meeting participants come from government agencies, state-owned and private enterprises, and international organisations. The Lao government hopes that corporate governance will enhance economic growth when incorporated in the 8th National Socio-economic Development Plan.

(Vientiane Times 03 June 2016)