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Revue de presse du 18 au 22 July 2016



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Laos to negotiate sale of electricity to neighbours

By Somsack Pongkhao

With Laos' electricity generation set to reach 10,000MW by 2020, the country is continuing to negotiate with neighbouring countries to increase the volume of electricity exports. According to the Ministry of Energy and Mines on Friday, Laos will hold talks with Myanmar on electricity cooperation during the Asean Summit to be held in Vientiane in September. Office Head of the Ministry of Energy and Mines Dr Daovong Phonekeo told *Vientiane Times* "We will raise the issue of selling electricity to Myanmar, notably to provinces that share borders with Laos." "Initially, we expect to sell about 200-300 MW to Myanmar but, in the long run, we plan to do it in the form of electricity exchange given that Myanmar also has strong potential for hydropower development." The Ministry of Energy and Mines is studying the details of the project including the installation of power lines to transmit electricity to Myanmar, and initial electricity exports to Myanmar will begin this year. Concerning Laos-Cambodia energy cooperation, the Ministry of Energy and Mines has entrusted Electricite du Laos (EDL) to negotiate with its Cambodian counterpart to determine how much electricity Cambodia requires from Laos. Laos currently sells electricity to Cambodia at two locations, mainly in border areas, but the volume is small. Thailand has now agreed to buy 9,000 MW of electricity from Laos, ac-

ording to Dr Daovong. Thailand is the biggest buyer of Laos' electricity. Laos will have four more hydropower plants in the southern provinces by 2017 including the Xekaman 4 and Xekong 3 plants. This will put Laos in a strong position to sell electricity to neighbouring countries, including Vietnam, to meet its energy demand for socio-economic development. Laos also plans to sell electricity to Malaysia and Singapore in the future. Minister of Energy and Mines Dr Khammany Inthirath said recently that as of 2015, Laos had built 38 power plants at a cost of more than 81.7 trillion kip (US\$10 billion), with a total installed capacity of 6,265MW. They can generate 33,315 million kWh of electricity a year. Some 20.4 percent of the power generated is consumed in Laos while 79.6 percent is exported. Over the next five years, a number of hydropower projects will be completed and begin commercial production including the Xayaboury project which should generate further revenue for Laos. But one of the most important things for Laos is to protect its forestry resources, particularly those in catchment areas, to ensure the long term sustainability of hydropower development, which promotes economic growth and poverty reduction. According to the Ministry of Energy and Mines' strategic plan, Laos has the potential to produce about 20,000MW by 2030.

(*Vientiane Times* 18 July 2016)

Cement suppliers all set for Laos-China railway

By Khonesavanh Latsaphao

Senior officials have advised the Lao Vangvieng Cement Plant to produce sufficient supplies of cement in preparation for construction of the Laos-China railway.



A worker at Plant No. 3 fills bags with cement.

However, officials said there was no guarantee the megaproject would actually select all cement producers to be suppliers. Vangvieng Cement Plant Deputy Director, Mr Chanthay Vongnakhone, told the press on Saturday that their three plants at Vangvieng were quite capable of supplying enough cement for construction of the railway. The plant has already increased output in terms of quality and quantity, hoping to receive an order from the soon-to-commence rail project. The amount of cement produced daily has grown from 1,200 to 4,900 tonnes since the completion of Lao Vangvieng Cement Plant No. 3. "If all three cement plants are not chosen for the Laos-China rail project, the plants will not operate at full capacity, especially the new No. 3 plant," he said. This plant can

produce 3,500 tonnes of cement a day, but currently only about 500 or 800 tonnes a day is being sold. This means the plant is currently producing cement only one day a week. Mr Chanthay said he was still awaiting more detailed information on the Laos-China rail project and whether they would use cement from the Vangvieng plants or not. An official from Plant No. 3, Mr Sisomphou Kongpalun, told *Vientiane Times* the plant uses the latest technology from China, so the quality and quantity of the cement is sufficient for large projects such as the Laos-China railway. There are 15 cement plants across the country, but the new Lao Vangvieng Cement Plant No. 3 is the biggest at present. Officials estimate that the total number of workers needed for the Laos-China railway throughout its five years of construction will be as many as 100,000 people. The US\$6.04 billion project has several different components and requires workers with varying skills. The Lao and Chinese governments took part in a groundbreaking ceremony on December 2 last year in Vientiane to symbolise the start of construction of the 427-km railway, which will connect the Lao capital to the Chinese border in the northern part of the country. Construction of the Laos-China joint venture, which is split in a 30-70 share, is expected to take five years to complete.

(*Vientiane Times* 19 July 2016)

Asean nations agree to partner in agri-food development

By Phaisythong Chandara

Asean agriculture experts plan to work together towards the sustainable development of the food and agriculture sectors after holding talks on the issue. The production of high quality, safe and tradable agri-food products is an essential component for the realisation of a single market in Asean, which will allow the free flow of goods, services, investment and skilled labour, and the free movement of capital across the region. This was the statement delivered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's Director General of the Agriculture Department, Mr Vilaysouk Khennavong, during the 18th Meeting of the Experts Working Group on Harmonisation of Phytosanitary Measures in Asean, held in Vientiane from July 18-19. "The sustainable development of the food and agriculture sectors is a top priority for Asean member countries. To this end, the meeting is part of the cooperation in harmonising quality standards and guidelines, and strengthening inspection and quarantine capacities with dialogue partners," he said. Mr Vilaysouk emphasised that enhancing Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) cooperation between Asean members and project partners is very important in the development of systematic mechanisms and ca-

pacities. The aim of this cooperation is to meet international standards and SPS requirements including quality standards, guidelines, and strengthening inspection and quarantine capacities among Asean member countries. Mr Vilaysouk said it was important to adopt and harmonise phytosanitary measures within Asean in compliance with international standards such as the International Plant Protection Convention, Organisation International des Epizooties, and the Codex Alimentarius Commission, as well as World Trade Organisation regulations. This would help to enhance the quality of agricultural products of Asean member countries, ensuring food safety in international trade, he added. During the meeting, Mr Vilaysouk asked Asean delegates to share their knowledge, information and experiences of pest list development, pest risk analysis for the importation of commodities and planting materials, and harmonisation in quarantine, inspection and sampling procedures. To gain maximum trade benefits from these memberships, Asean and its partners need to prioritise the development of systematic mechanisms and capacities that meet international standards and SPS requirements, he added.

(Vientiane Times 19 July 2016)

Authorities make fresh call for aquatic life protection

By Times Reporters

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's Livestock and Fisheries Department has once again asked fishermen to help preserve protected wildlife and aquatic species in Laos.



A giant ray caught in Champassak province as shown on social media this week.

The warning comes in the wake of an image of a fisherman with a giant Mekong Stingray being posted on Facebook this week. The ray measuring over 2 metres across and estimated at over 70 kg in weight was caught recently by a local fisherman in Donnangloy village, Mounlapamok district, Champassak province, according to a local villager. The department's Deputy Director Mr Bounthong Saphakdy told *Vientiane Times* yesterday that despite concerted efforts by officials to prevent the illegal trade in wildlife and aquatic species through regular inspections in markets, hotels and restaurants around the country, the trade is still flourishing unchecked. While the government is working to preserve aquatic animals and wildlife and protected areas, the sight of wild fauna for sale at markets is a real turnoff for foreign

tourists, with Laos' diversity of nature being one of the nation's major drawcards. Mr Bounthong said authorities had asked fishermen and traders to protect wildlife so that unique threatened species did not disappear from the country. "Protecting our natural resources, particularly wildlife and aquatic creatures, is essential to ensuring sustainable food supplies," he said. Mr Bounthong explained that many animal species in Laos face a high risk of extinction, because they are hunted on a daily basis by rural people. These species are regularly sold to individuals and restaurants. "We also put up posters in schools, markets and bus stations to let people know about the harm caused by this illegal trade. We travel to places that we know have a big trade in wildlife," he added. The objective is to raise public awareness about wildlife and aquatic species protection along with the diseases that can be contracted by eating wildlife and aquatic species. The authorities are encouraging restaurants and other places to cooperate with them in enforcing control measures. Recently, the government warned poachers, traders and businesses not to hunt, sell or display prohibited or protected wildlife and aquatic species, including live animals, carcasses, their remains or their organs. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment issued an order that prohibits all parties from involvement in all forms of illegal activity with regard to protected species. The ministry instructed central and local officials to employ necessary measures to prevent all parties from hunting all kinds of fish and animals from May 1 to October 31 - the annual breeding season.

(Vientiane Times 20 July 2016)

Seven injured in UXO-related accidents this year

By Times Reporters

Seven people have been injured in UXO-related accidents so far this year, according to a report from the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) for UXO/Mine Action in the Lao PDR.



Director General of the National Regulatory Authority for the UXO/Mine Action sector in Laos, Mr Phoukhieo Chanthasomboun (right), visits a UXO clearance site in Khammuan province recently.

Delivering a report on the subject, NRA Deputy Director Mr Bounpheng Sisawath said that from January 1 to July 19 there had been three UXO-related accidents in which seven people sustained injuries but no deaths had been reported. Explosions typically occur during the transport, dismantling or burning of UXO, or while villagers are working in their fields. This year the NRA has worked with international organisations to clear UXO from 1,966 hectares of land including 1,554 hectares of agricultural land and 412 hectares of land needed for development purposes. Some 60,960 cluster munitions were cleared in addition to 68 larger bombs, as well as 50,040 bombies, 13 mines, and 10,839 other items. Laos is the most heavily bombed country, per capita, in history. Over 50,000 people have been injured or killed

since 1964 in UXO-related incidents, mostly involving cluster munitions. About 30,000 of these casualties occurred during the second Indochina War up until 1973. The other 20,000 casualties occurred in the post-conflict era from 1973 to 2012, with 99 new casualties being recorded in 2012. In the last decade 40 percent of all casualties have been children. From January 1, 1996 to July 2015, the NRA worked with international organisations to clear UXO on 59,816 hectares of land including 39,795 hectares of agricultural land and 20,021 hectares of land required for development. Some 1,782,682 cluster munitions were cleared in addition to 7,529 larger bombs, 831,915 bombies, 7,154 mines, and 936,074 other devices. The presence of unexploded ordnance slows development, in the fields of agriculture, forestry, mining, tourism, hydro-electric power, transportation, education and health. UXO was partly responsible for preventing Laos from achieving the MDGs in 2015. It helps to perpetuate poverty because it prevents people from making full use of agricultural land. The NRA has set a target to reduce the number of UXO casualties to less than 40 a year and to provide assistance to at least 1,500 victims from 2016-2020. Risk education activities have been conducted in nine provinces and the number of casualties has steadily fallen from 119 in 2010 to 45 people in 2014. In addition, UXO risk education will be included in the school curriculum, especially in primary and secondary schools. Medical rehabilitation and work opportunities will be provided to UXO survivors, targeting 1,500 people by 2020.

(Vientiane Times 20 July 2016)

Laos ready for AMM

By Times Reporters

Laos is ready to host the 49th Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) and other related meetings which will begin from July 21-26 after completing the rehearsal of preparations on Monday. The rehearsal included arrangements for security, accommodation and transport, saying all other facilities are well prepared. Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Saleumxay Kommasith addressed a press conference on preparations for the AMM and sideline events yesterday. "Despite the changing of the current world situation, based on the capacity and experience in hosting many important events over the past years, the government as well as people are ready to be a good host to welcome the foreign delegations and guests," he said. Citing security, the foreign minister emphasised that it must be tight during the meetings and encouraged local residents to maintain order and keep the city clean, especially along main roads and at notable landmarks. With regards to other facilities, Mr Saleumxay encouraged officials in charge of each sectors to do their best in an effort to facilitate the delegations during the meeting. Other sideline meetings include the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Commission Meeting, Post Ministerial Conferences, the 17th Asean Plus Three (APT) Foreign Min-

isters' Meeting, the 6th East Asia Summit (EAS) Foreign Ministers' Meeting, and the 23rd Asean Regional Forum (ARF), which will be held from July 21-26. At the 49th AMM, participants will discuss follow-up issues to the Asean Foreign Ministers' Retreat held in Vientiane in February and deliberate on how to strengthen the Asean Community, including the implementation of the Asean Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025, discuss the work of the Asean Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights for the year 2016, and make preparations for the related meetings. In addition, Asean foreign ministers will meet with their counterparts from Asean dialogue partner countries and external partners to review and chart future directions for their respective cooperation. Laos became a member of Asean in 1997 and first chaired the regional bloc in 2004 when it hosted the 10th Asean Summit and its related meetings. Since the beginning of this year, Laos has hosted a number of Asean meetings including the Asean Foreign Ministers' Retreat in Vientiane, the 20th Senior Officials' Committee for the Asean Socio-Cultural Community and the 15th Asean Socio-Cultural Community Council in Luang Prabang, and the Asean Ecotourism Forum in Champassak province.

(Vientiane Times 20 July 2016)

Hydro projects' tourism potential untapped: officials

By SomsackPongkhao

While Laos benefits from the energy produced by hydropower projects, their potential as important tourist drawcards remains largely undeveloped, senior officials say.



Boat trips are popular on the Nam Ngum Dam reservoir. -- Photo Phoonsab

The Nam Ngum Dam, for instance, has become one of the most popular tourist attractions in Laos where many people spend weekends enjoying leisure activities such as boat trips and water skiing. Office Head of the Ministry of Energy and Mines, DrDaovongPhonekeo, told *Vientiane Times* yesterday that the Nam Ngum 1 Dam, the largest reservoir in Laos, could be a model for hydropower development in association with tourism. Every year, thousands of tourists visit this site where guesthouses, restaurants and other facilities are available. "I think we still have not made full use of hydropower development in attempting to deliver as many benefits to the nation as possible," DrDaovong said. The relevant sectors need to work more closely to ensure that hydropower development extends to tourism, fishery, irrigation and agriculture, to more fully benefit the nation and local communities. This year, more than 2,000 fish were added to the Nam Ngum Dam to replenish fish stocks and provide a food source

for people living in the area. The water from this dam is also used in the cultivation of sweetcorn, rice and other crops. "There is huge potential to develop other activities at dams and make use of reservoirs like we've done on the Nam Ngum," DrDaovong said. A senior official from the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, MrOunthuangKhaophanh, said many hydropower projects in Laos were suitable for development as tourist attractions. But there had been poor collaboration between government departments in recent years in identifying what activities could be carried out when a hydropower project was initiated. "I agree that leisure activities could be included in hydropower projects just as they are in other countries," MrOunthuang said. "We have to sit down and discuss how we can maximise the potential of hydropower development so that Laos benefits as much as possible." As of 2015, Laos had 38 power plants costing more than 81.7 trillion kip (US\$10 billion), with a total installed capacity of 6,265MW. According to the Ministry of Energy and Mines' strategic plan, Laos has the potential to produce about 10,000MW of electricity by 2020 and 20,000MW by 2030. However, only a few dams have been developed as tourist attractions, where people go to visit and eat fresh fish from the reservoirs. Last year the number of tourist arrivals in Laos climbed to more than 4.6 million, an increase of 13 percent compared to the previous year, generating over US\$700 million in revenue. The Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism predicts there will be 9 million foreign visitors to Laos in 2025, generating about US\$1.4 billion for government coffers.

(*Vientiane Times* 21 July 2016)

Rubber growers to form association

By SomxaySengdara

Rubber growers around the country will soon have an association to enable them to be strong commercial tree plantation entrepreneurs as is the case in other countries, according to a leading official. Former Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Mr Vilayvanh Phomkhe told *Vientiane Times* yesterday about preparations to establish the association. Mr Vilayvanh, who is leading efforts to set up the association, said the Ministry of Home Affairs has already approved the proposal in principle. At present, the government has assigned the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to undertake the supervision of all tree plantation industries aside from the management of all kinds of forests. The former minister said the initiative had been raised a few years ago following the increasing number of growers, at around 1,000, and the country having around 500,000 ha of rubber. He said disruption of the rubber market and prices had posed a major challenge for rubber growers with some resorting to removing their trees in desperation. Mr Vilayvanh explained that the rubber latex price was 18,000 kip per kilogramme in 2011 but dropped rapidly to

3,000 kip per kg before recovering slightly to 5,000 kip per kg. He pointed to access to credit as a major challenge for growers who have plantations of 500 ha and over, saying the association would help address the issue of getting bank loans. Association members would also benefit from being represented when coordinating with the public sector, he said. Mr Vilayvanh outlined other benefits from being a member of the association, referring to the drafted statute of the future association, saying rubber growers would have a strong organisation to bargain with related bodies on rubber. Members would be regularly provided information about rubber plantations and rubber prices in Asean and around the world. The members will also have opportunity to undertake training, learn about various subjects related to the rubber industry so they can be internationally integrated. The coming association will record information from growers that will lead to the establishment of processing factories in other regions of the country for producing rubber for export apart from the existing factories in Oudomxay and Champassak provinces.

(*Vientiane Times* 21 July 2016)

President demands harsh penalties for lack of discipline

By Times Reporters

Party Chief and President Bounnhang Vorachit has instructed the top anti-corruption body to appropriately punish those officials found violating the regulations in a bid to stamp out malpractice and lax discipline.



President Bounnhang Vorachit.

The president also endorsed the creation of measures that would enable members of the public to participate in inspection work. Mr Bounnhang, Secretary General of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and state President, gave the instructions at the three-day third nationwide inspection meeting that ended on Wednesday. The findings or results of the inspection must be strictly resolved in a correct, transparent and just manner, Mr Bounnhang stressed to anti-corruption authorities. "If left without action to resolve the issues uncovered, the findings of the inspections are meaningless," he said. He told the authorities to be decisive and determined in taking appropriate measures to penalise those found guilty of misconduct or poor discipline. "Inspections must be carried out systematically within the Party's organisational structure and state organisations," he told the meeting. Politburo member and Chairman of the Inspection Committee under the Party Central Committee, Dr Bounthong Chitmany, was among 300 officials

attending the meeting held at the Party Central Committee Office. Mr Bounnhang stressed the need for inspection authorities to improve their organisational structures, upgrade their inspectors' knowledge and skills, and improve working methods to ensure better professional performance. "These factors will directly determine the effectiveness of inspections," he told the meeting. The president also instructed Party committees at all levels to work with and uphold the role of the Lao Front for National Construction and mass organisations to enable them to participate more in inspection work. "This must be considered an important mechanism to enable the public to participate in inspections," the president said. State organisations were asked to carry out regular inspections of their staff's work, while the inspection authorities were recommended to carry out inspections into all targets. President Bounnhang told leading officials of all organisations at all levels to act as role models in implementing the Party's inspection principles. Leading officials were advised to properly follow up their subordinates' performance and guide their work in order to train them and ensure that they do not violate expected rules of discipline. President Bounnhang also praised the inspection authorities for their achievements and the progress they have made over the past five years. However, there is a growing need for the inspection authorities to work harder after the new Party and state leadership, which took office in April, announced a crackdown on corruption. In his first talks to give guidance to the new government in April, President Bounnhang told the new cabinet to take action to address corruption among other major issues as a priority

(Vientiane Times 22 July 2016)

Govt gets tough on occupational health and safety

By Times Reporters

The government is close to putting concrete measures in place to maintain and promote health and safety in workplaces with a new decree being finalised by domestic and international experts.



Workers carry sacks of cement onto a truck.(File photo)

Experts from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, World Health Organisation (WHO), International Labour Organisation (ILO) and other stakeholders are meeting in Vientiane from July 21-22 to finalise the new decree entitled “Management of Occupational Safety and Health”.As Laos has taken a new approach to development under a market-based economy, competition amongst entrepreneurs and other businesses focused on profit has taken attention away from the health and safety of workers.This lack of attention heightens the risk of accidents and injuries in the workplace, occupational disease, and physical and mental illnesses which may have long term affects on families and the country.In her remarks at a meeting to finalise the decree yesterday, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare Ms Baykham Khatthiya referred to the ILO which estimates that globally around 5,000 people die every day, or about 2 million people every year, from labour acci-

idents and occupational diseases.A business survey conducted in Laos in 2006 showed that 611 people fell victim to workplace accidents at 355 enterprises in the country, of whom six died and three became disabled.A survey carried out two years later showed 531 people were victims of workplace accidents occurring at 383 enterprises, where six people also died and three were disabled.Ms Baykham said these statistics were collected from a small number of businesses, adding that the number of accidents may be even higher if the data were collected from all 200,000 registered enterprises nationwide.She said the majority of workers in Laos came from rural areas, were employed in agriculture and were poorly educated in health and safety issues.Even though the Labour Law stipulates occupational safety and health in its 13 articles, the stipulations were too general, she added.The new decree has 10 sections, divided into articles, which address the responsibilities of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and other ministries, hazardous factor protection and control, occupational safety and health management in the workplace and improvement of working environments, among others.Also speaking at the meeting, WHO Representative to Laos Dr Juliet Fleischel said workplace management required an acting regulation, adoption of a basic set of occupational health and safety standards, appropriate law enforcement, strengthening of workplace inspections and health surveillance, as well as building collaboration between ministries and other institutions.

(Vientiane Times 22 July 2016)

Meeting strengthens Asean regulations on clean agriculture

By Times Reporters

Asean agriculture officials are spending two days at the 23rd meeting of the Asean Sectoral Working Group on Crops in Vientiane to discuss agricultural regulation improvements. The meeting is taking place from July 21-22 and will focus on the supply of high-quality and safe food which meets international standards. The Agriculture Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has issued clean agriculture regulations, the Agriculture Department's Deputy Director General, Mr Chantha Thipphavongphanh, told local media. This would enable Laos to supply a source of commodities to meet international and local market demand, particularly organically grown crops and Good Agriculture Practice products such as sticky rice, tea, coffee and some vegetables. Other crops would require further development before achieving international acceptance, he said. He believed that collaboration between Asean member countries would help Laos to develop agri-food more quickly on an international level. "Sustainable development of the agriculture sector is a top priority for Asean," Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Dr Bounkhouang Khambounheuang said at the meeting. The production of high quality, safe and tradable agri-food products is an essential component of the realisation of a single market in Asean. In addition, enhancing cooperation in sanitary and phyto-

sanitary (SPS) measures between Asean and its trade partners is very important in the development of systematic mechanisms and capacities to meet international standards and SPS requirements among Asean member countries, he added. The meeting also provides an invaluable opportunity for networking between countries. Laos is focusing on increasing clean and green agri-food production through the development of a strategy for the crop sector from the present until 2030, said Dr Bounkhouang. In recent years, the crop sector has played an important role in agriculture due to its contribution to food production as a source of raw material for agri-food processing and animal feed industries, he added. About 78 percent of the Lao population is dependent on agriculture and about 25 percent of gross national product comes from the crop sector. Today's multifaceted crop sector and fast changing world calls for a close partnership between countries, particularly Asean members, he said. "Globalisation presents many challenges to our region, so we should cooperate with the aim of achieving mutual benefits," Dr Bounkhouang added. He hoped that the meeting would highlight possible avenues for cooperation between countries and generate cutting-edge solutions which will positively impact the crop sector in Asean member countries.

(Vientiane Times 22 July 2016)