



## Comité de Coopération avec le Laos

Boîte postale 4791, Vientiane, Laos

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

Email : [cclvientiane@ccl-laos.org](mailto:cclvientiane@ccl-laos.org)

Site : [www.ccl-laos.org](http://www.ccl-laos.org)

**Revue de presse du 25 au 29 July 2016**



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## Laos in need of massive capital injection to drive economic growth

By Somsack Pongkhao

Economists warn that Laos will need to take a proactive approach to attract foreign direct investment if the country is to sustain economic growth of 7.5 percent annually over the next five years. According to a recent government report, Laos will need about 223 trillion kip (US\$27 billion), equal to 30 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), over the period 2016-20 in order to spur economic growth.



Laos will need US\$27 billion to spur economic growth over the period 2016-20.

Of this amount, at least 54 percent will be sourced from both domestic and foreign investment, notably in the area of hydropower, development of special and specific economic zones, the processing industry, and tourism. About 9-11 percent of investment funding will come from the state, mainly for infrastructure development such as the construction of roads, schools, irrigation and water supply. The rest will be sourced from Official Development Assistance and the banking sector. A senior economist at the National Economic Research Institute, Dr Leeber Leebouapao, told *Vientiane Times* on Thursday “Our country has set an ambitious

goal to source US\$27 billion to boost economic growth and alleviate poverty.” “This figure is a huge amount of capital but if construction of the Laos-China railway gets underway soon, this goal could be realised. Another significant thing is that we need to take a proactive approach in attracting investment into the country,” he added. Laos has been affected by the global economic slowdown. Declining demand around the world has driven down the price of commodities like mining ores and rubber, key exports that generate important income for Laos. Worse still, most rubber farmers are struggling to survive because of the slump in the price of rubber on the world market. Laos mainly exports rubber to China but it currently sells for just 5,000 kip per kilogramme, down from 9,000 kip in 2012 and 17,000 kip in 2008. The value of the investment sector has also declined in recent years so further improvement of the investment climate is required to entice foreign companies to Laos. The economy is projected to grow at a rate of 6.9 percent this year, lower than the government's target of 7.5 percent annually from 2016 to 2020. But, Dr Leeber said, because Laos is part of the Asean Economic Community, many investors will increasingly be interested in doing businesses here and exporting to the rest of the region. “The sectors involved will need to work harder to facilitate business taking into account the needs of entrepreneurs,” he said. Critics say one of the most important things is to reduce the time taken to approve investment projects. Over the past 10 years, Laos has been among countries in the region

that have witnessed fast economic growth driven mainly by the inflow of foreign investment in the resource sector. Between 2001 and 2010, economic growth was rec-

orded at an average of 7.1 percent annually, rising to 8.2 percent annually from 2011 and 2013 before declining to 7.5 percent more recently.

*(Vientiane Times 23 July 2016)*

## **Govt approves legislation to serve development needs**

*By Somsack Pongkhao*

The government has in principle approved four laws, two decrees and other policies to streamline its administrative system and boost socio-economic development. The endorsement was reached at the government's July monthly meeting, with two days of talks wrapping up on Friday.



*Dr Chaleun Yiapaoher.*

The meeting, which centered on the enactment of legislation, was chaired by Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith and attended by cabinet members and other invited guests. Minister to the Prime Minister's Office and Government Spokesman, Dr Chaleun Yiapaoher, held a press conference shortly after the meeting, in which he highlighted the significance of the legislation in strengthening the rule of law and serving as a legal reference to facilitate national development. The four laws include the newly drafted penal code and three draft amended laws concerning lawyers, veterinary practice, and plant protection. The relevant sectors were advised to further revise the laws based on the recommendations of cabinet members before submitting them to the National Assembly for debate. The penal code is

the collection of criminal procedures and provisions that aims to ensure that all the content concerning criminals is in consensus and readily enforceable. The penal code has links with several sectors and international conventions so further revision is needed based on the recommendations of cabinet members, especially the articles relating to human rights. The law on lawyers is a significant piece of legislation that defines the role of lawyers and the Lao Bar Association. Cabinet members mainly focused on essential qualifications for lawyers, saying they must hold at least a bachelor degree and be able to speak a foreign language such as English. Meanwhile the amendment of the veterinary law encourages investment in animal husbandry. The meeting advised the relevant sectors to clarify the various articles so that implementation would be straightforward. Concerning the plant protection law, those present at the meeting asked the relevant sector to re-inspect the import and use of chemicals in agricultural production. This was aimed at ensuring that herbicides did not harm the environment or people's health. The meeting also approved two decrees on the management of information and information centres, and education for monks and novices. The meeting also heard a report from the Ministry of Home Affairs on the restructuring of government bodies, which said all bodies under the Prime Minister's Office should be merged with existing ministries to avoid duplication among state departments. At the close of the meeting, Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith called on the

relevant sectors to maintain security at the various Asean meetings and do more to boost agricultural production, as well as prepare for the start of the new academic year in September. The Ministry of Finance was instructed to be more diligent in collecting

revenue while the Ministry of Planning and Investment was asked to calculate the full amount of debt owed to state investment projects. This information was seen to be critical for the government to formulate new development plans.

*(Vientiane Times 25 July 2016)*

## **Asean members, development partners assess progress**

*By Times Reporters*

The Senior Officials' Meeting of Mekong Countries and Development Partners Cooperation took place in Vientiane on Saturday to review the progress made in the implementation of projects and programmes under each cooperation framework over the previous year. Senior Officials and delegates from the Mekong countries of Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and development partners comprising Japan, Republic of Korea, India and the United States of America attended the meeting. The objective was to evaluate the implementation of the action plans and co-chairs' statements and joint statement of the ministers' meeting that were adopted in 2015. Another purpose of the meeting was to give senior officials the opportunity to discuss their cooperation in preparing for the 7th Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Ministerial Meeting and the 6th Mekong-Republic of Korea Ministers' Meeting. Other issues concerning the 9th Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting, also to be held this month, were debated. On the same day, the Asean Foreign Ministers' Interface with Representatives of the Asean Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) was launched and chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao PDR Mr Saleumxay Kommasith. A senior official from the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported on the progress of AICHR's activities over the past year including those relat-

ing to the environment, workshops on human rights in relation climate change, the rights of persons with disabilities, and human trafficking. Several issues were discussed between Asean agencies and sectoral bodies, dialogue parties and other external parties, including civil society organisations, and the dissemination and implementation of the Asean Human Rights Declaration, among others. The ministers commended the good progress made in the work of the AICHR over the past year, which has contributed to the promotion and protection of human rights in Asean, including the promotion of human rights awareness, thereby contributing to the Asean Community building process. The ministers encouraged the Commission to continue their efforts in effectively implementing priority programmes and activities for 2017 in line with their existing mandate and functions. Mr Saleumxay also chaired the Meeting of the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Commission, with the participation of Asean Foreign Ministers, the Secretary-General of Asean, and delegates. The meeting reviewed the progress in implementing the Plan of Action to Strengthen the Implementation of the SEANWFZ Treaty (2013-2017) and emphasised the importance of effective implementation of the Plan of Action including through accession to and ratification of international agreements relating to disarmament.

ment and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Officials agreed to task the SEANWFZ Excom and its working group to continue discussions in line with the ongoing efforts of state parties to the SEANWFZ Treaty and Nuclear Weapon States to resolve all outstanding issues per-

taining to the signing and ratifying of the Protocol to the SEANWFZ Treaty. The Asean Senior Officials' Meeting Plus Three was also held. These meetings were held on the sidelines of the 49th Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting which took place yesterday.

*(Vientiane Times 25 July 2016)*

## **Vientiane province pursues development of Nam Ngum as visitor attraction**

*By Somxay Sengdara*

Authorities in Vientiane province are going ahead with their plan to develop the Nam Ngum 1 dam reservoir as a tourist destination, while still seeking funding for the project. Deputy Director of the provincial Information, Culture and Tourism Department, Mr Bualy Milattanapheng, confirmed the province's intention to pursue the plan when talking to *Vientiane Times* on Friday. The authorities have set the development in motion as part of the province's socio-economic development plan for 2011-2015, which states that upstream areas near the dam wall should be developed for tourism to link up with the popular tourist hotspot of Vangvieng. They plan to develop a 10 hectare site upstream of the Nam Ngum 1 dam wall. Envisaged facilities include a three-star hotel, restaurants, and parking lots alongside those already in place, as well as passenger and tourist boats. Activities to be provided include boat trips to the islands, fishing,

home-stays and trekking. Mr Bualy said four companies had expressed their intention to participate in the project, with about US\$5 million to be needed for each type of facility, such as accommodation. The Lao Young Business Entrepreneurs Association is in the process of analysing the scheme and creating designs, he added. He revealed that the Asian Development Bank had agreed to fund infrastructure development for the site, especially roads, with a survey to take place later this year. The Nam Ngum dam reservoir is a scenic area that is dotted with a large number of islands. Some 30,000-35,000 people visit the reservoir each year. During the Lao New Year holiday this year, about 6,000 people visited the site, of whom 10 percent were foreigners. Mr Bualy said the authorities would scrutinise all investors who applied to undertake the project, to ensure their interest was genuine and they were committed to long term involvement.

*(Vientiane Times 25 July 2016)*

## 49th AMM, related meetings close after fruitful discussions

By Times Reporters

The 49th Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) and Related Meetings hosted by Laos officially ended yesterday after comprehensive, candid and fruitful discussions between Asean members and their dialogue partners that began on July 21.



Foreign ministers from Asean and dialogue partners pose for a group photo at the close of the 49th AMM meeting in Vientiane yesterday. --Photo Khamphan

During the meetings, Asean and its dialogue partners as well as other external parties also had fruitful deliberations on important political, security and development cooperation issues. This was the key message of a statement delivered by Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Saleumxay Kommasith during a press conference on the outcome of the 49th AMM and related meetings. Mr Saleumxay noted that Laos had chaired the 49th AMM and related meetings for four days from July 23-26, when 22 ministerial meetings took place. These included three meetings between Asean Foreign Ministers relating to specific regions. There were also 14 meetings with external partners under Asean-led mechanisms, namely AseanPlus One, Asean Plus Three, the East Asia Summit, Asean Regional Forum, and five Sub-Regional Ministerial Meetings. Laos also hosted many bilateral meetings with development partners, which all produced wide-ranging, candid and successful discussions. Ministers reviewed the progress made in cooperation

between Asean and individual dialogue partners over the past years and charted future directions to strengthen ties in all areas of cooperation such as trade, investment, connectivity, tourism and people-to-people exchanges. Ministers also reiterated their commitment to enhancing AseanPlus Three as the main vehicle towards building the East Asia Economic Community in the long run. "We met with our Plus Three partners under the AseanPlus Three framework. We discussed activities to commemorate the 20th anniversary of AseanPlus Three cooperation in 2017," Mr Saleumxay said. He emphasised that as the chair of Asean and AseanPlus Three, Laos had proposed a Draft Statement on Promoting Sustainable Development Cooperation, to be adopted by leaders at the 19th Asean Plus Three Summit in September. This initiative received broad support from the AseanPlus Three countries. At the 17th East Asia Summit (EAS) Foreign Ministers Meeting, ministers reaffirmed the importance of strengthening the EAS as a leaders-led forum for dialogue on broad strategic, political and economic issues of common interest and concern with a view to promoting peace, stability and economic prosperity in East Asia. They discussed ways to effectively implement the six priority areas of the EAS. In this regard, the meeting expressed comprehensive support for the draft Vientiane Declaration on Promoting Infrastructure Development Cooperation in East Asia proposed by Laos for adoption by leaders at the 11th East Asia Summit in September. This declaration is aimed at regional efforts to support infrastructure development projects towards enhancing connectivity, thus contributing to the promotion of sustainable regional development, economic growth, and regional integration as well as peace, stability and prosperity in the region. At the end of the

press conference, MrSaleumxay sincerely thanked all the foreign ministers for their excellent cooperation, active contribution and constructive discussions that led to the success of the 49th AMM and related meetings. Their talks had laid a firm foundation

for the successful convening of the 28th and 29th Asean Summits and related meetings, which will take place in Vientiane from September 6-8. MrSaleumxay urged the media to cover the meetings in depth.

*(Vientiane Times 27 July 2016)*

## **Japan to further support Mekong region**

*By Times Reporters*

Japan has reaffirmed its commitment to provide US\$200 billion to further support infrastructure development in the Mekong region. The newly announced 'Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure' from the government of Japan will facilitate the Mekong-Japan Connectivity Initiative to implement infrastructure connectivity, as was outlined during the 9th Mekong Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Vientiane on July 25. The meeting was co-chaired by Lao Minister of Foreign Affairs MrSaleumxay-Kommasith, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Fumio Kishida, and attended by foreign ministers from other Mekong countries. The ministers said they highly valued the progress made in the execution of the Mekong-Japan framework cooperation, particularly the implementation of the Mekong-Japan Action Plan for Realisation of the New Tokyo Strategy 2015 which encompasses four priority pillars. These are industrial infrastructure development, industrial human resource sustainable development, and coordination with various stakeholders. The meeting also discussed the future direction of Mekong-Japan cooperation, with Japan to continue to support and assist in the implementation of programmes and projects for Mekong countries. In particular, Laos and Japan are currently implementing the Vientiane International Airport Terminal Expan-

sion Project, the Southern Region Power System Development Project, the Project for Construction of the Xekong Bridge, and the Project for Acceleration of UXO Clearance in Laos. Speaking at the event, MrSaleumxay affirmed Laos' commitment to Mekong-Japan Cooperation, saying "More focus should be put on environmental protection, green growth, adaption to climate change, and the sustainable use and management of water resources." The ministers all emphasised the importance of human resource development, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaption, and the sustainable management of water resources. They agreed to strengthen collaboration between the Mekong-Japan Cooperation and the Mekong River Commission for sustainable development towards a green Mekong. Other development projects for the Mekong region supported by Japan include human resource development, particularly in the field of industry, health and disaster relief, as well as women's empowerment in economic sectors. Ministers also adopted the Co-Chairs' Statement of the 9th Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting as a reference for the implementation of Mekong-Japan Cooperation. The 10th Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting will be held in the Republic of the Philippines in 2017.

*(Vientiane Times 27 July 2016)*



## **New Zealand gives boost to foot-and-mouth disease control**

*By Times Reporters*

The New Zealand Aid Programme, through the New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, has provided US\$3.1 million to the Lao government to carry out a foot and mouth disease control programme. The Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) control programme, called the “OIE-DLF FMD Control project” was launched in Vientiane yesterday by Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Dr Lien Thiako, New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr Murray McCully, New Zealand Ambassador to Laos Ben King, and President of the OIE Sub-Commission for the Control of FMD in South-East Asia and China, Dr Gardner Murray. Also present on the occasion were other officials from Laos and New Zealand. The project will be co-managed by the Department of Livestock and Fisheries under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the World Organisation for Animal Health (also known as the Office International des Epizooties-OIE). The project will be rolled out in Savannakhet, Champassak and Xiengkhuang provinces over the next four years from March this year to May 2020. Some 60,000 farming households in the project area are expected to benefit by increasing their livestock herds through the prevention of losses from FMD outbreaks and improved market access. The project will enable farmers to improve their livelihoods, safeguard their food security, and contribute to economic growth, Dr Lien said. This project is very important to enhancing Laos' efforts to control FMD as part of the National Foot and Mouth Disease Control Plan for 2015-2018. It will also support the regional roadmap of the SEACFMD programme with the goal of achieving FMD freedom in South-East Asia by 2020, he added. Foot and

mouth disease is one of the main trade barriers for Laos when it comes to exporting live animals and animal products to neighbouring countries. Critical to facilitating the development of this regional trade is the control and eventual eradication of FMD in the region. Meanwhile aligning disease control with the OIE Progressive Control Pathway Strategy is encouraged and the development of a National FMD Control plan is an important initiative. The livestock sector will play an important role in supporting the government's strategic goals in both poverty reduction and food security, Dr Lien noted. The sustainability of livestock development can be achieved and maintained through an ongoing disease control programme, along with research for extension and development activities. In the past, Laos has been at the forefront of and will continue to contribute towards the long term goal of SEACFMD in the development of an FMD free zone with associated vaccination programmes in the Upper Mekong Sub-region. Other activities under the project involve the management of animal movement, education about FMD dangers, and publicising the rules and principles on livestock and other relevant regulations. This is one of the major new agricultural initiatives with Asean, which was declared by New Zealand's Prime Minister during the 40th Asean-New Zealand anniversary relationship celebrations in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, last year. One of the four main objectives under New Zealand's agricultural development support plan is to expand knowledge and experience in agriculture through the country's own accumulated technical expertise and experience.

*(Vientiane Times 27 July 2016)*

## Commission says violence against women still a major concern

*By Times Reporters*

Violence against women and especially domestic violence remains an issue in Laos, a recent study undertaken by the National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAW) has revealed. The NCAW and several ministries outlined the findings of “The National Study on Violence against Women” at a consultation meeting held in Vientiane yesterday, chaired by the Director General of the NCAW Secretariat, MsChansoda Phonethip. The report noted that there are difficulties in addressing violence against women which are largely based on society's poor understanding of gender equality. According to the NCAW Secretariat committee, this kind of violence is rooted in tradition and is very difficult to eradicate. The study found that nearly half of the women and men interviewed in a survey thought that violence against women was acceptable. Obviously this attitude must change and points to the greater need for communities to be educated about gender equality. The NCAW Secretariat also reported that the study revealed that most women experienced violence at the hands of their husband and that this behaviour had a direct effect on their wellbeing. Women were often too embarrassed to speak out about their experience and were also concerned about not tarnishing their family's reputation so they were reluctant to tell anyone about their

suffering. MsChansoda said that in the past two years the NCAW Secretariat and its partners had made progress on a framework for the protection and eradication of violence against women and had improved legislation to match women's rights. The Secretariat has published handbooks for the public with the aim of deepening understanding by educating people about violence against women and the issues that surround it. “The NCAW Secretariat has also strengthened the understanding of government bodies on the protection of women, hoping to curb violence against women and children in Laos,” MsChansoda said. Meeting participants discussed plans to further protect against and hopefully eradicate violence against women in 2016-2017. They also highlighted a framework they will be following in the near future, including the promotion of gender equality in local communities, an anti-violence workshop, and the creation of support centres for local communities to make it easier to reach target groups. The NCAW says it will work to counteract cultural traditions and try to stamp out actions that uphold divisions between men and women, especially with regard to violence, and the Commission will do more to protect Lao women and girls from all forms of harmful behaviour, both physical and mental.

*(Vientiane Times 27 July 2016)*

## Canada opens diplomatic office in Vientiane

*By Times Reporters*

Canada has opened a diplomatic office in Vientiane in an effort to boost economic and political ties with Laos. Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs Stéphane Dion led the opening ceremony held on Monday at the Australian Embassy, which will be the home of the Canadian office. "The opening of the office marks a new stage in Canadian-Lao relations but Laos-Canada connections go back a long way," said a statement in a document commemorating Canada's participation in the 1954 Geneva Accords that ended the first Indochina war. Canadians were also members of the International Control Commission and were stationed in Vientiane. In his remarks at the opening ceremony Minister Dion said "I want to officially open this diplomatic office of the government of Canada that will prove that Canada is in Laos and will stay in Laos to reinforce the friendship between Canada and Laos. Canada will remain in Laos!" "This office that we are opening, this presence that we are inaugurating today is the beginning of something, the beginning of a deeper, stronger relationship between Canada and Laos in order to create jobs, opportunities, and investments," he added. Laos and Canada established diplomatic relations on June 15, 1974, with the Canadian Embassy to Laos based in Bangkok, Thailand. The connections made in those early years sparked the growth in ties, especially through an active scholarship pro-

gramme that saw many Lao students study in Canadian universities and return to Laos to contribute to the development of the country. Canadian assistance to Laos, including clinics and medical centres in remote villages, has helped to improve the health of many Lao people and has helped to reduce infant mortality. Canada has also contributed to the clearing of UXO, UXO education and the rehabilitation of people injured by unexploded devices, as well as supporting research into key sectors of the economy, including agriculture and SME support. Talking to *Vientiane Times* at the opening ceremony, Minister Dion said Canada enjoys its relationship with Laos and wants to improve on that friendship. "This is really the will of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who wants to show that Canada and Laos will be working together," he said. When asked about possible areas of cooperation the Minister mentioned electricity, mining, communications, environment, clean technologies, and clean sources of energy, which he said Canada was all very fond of and that it would do its best to pursue through the new diplomatic office. With regard to Laos' membership in Asean, Mr Dion noted Canada's willingness to be a part of the East Asia Summit, which he said would help Canada to have a stronger presence in the region by supporting better conditions for partnerships with all Asean members, including Laos.

*(Vientiane Times 27 July 2016)*

## **US Secretary of State lays groundwork for future cooperation**

*By SomsackPongkhao*

US Secretary of State John Kerry has highlighted key areas of cooperation with Laos ahead of President Barack Obama's historic visit to Laos in September. Mr Kerry was in Vientiane from July 25-26 to attend a number of meetings including the Asean-US Ministerial Meeting, East Asia Summit (EAS) Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the Asean Regional Forum. Speaking at a press conference in Vientiane yesterday, the Secretary of State said the US was keen to work with Laos in a number of fields to strengthen the bilateral relationship. "Some of the areas we are looking at are education, healthcare, development, infrastructure, sustainability in climate and energy," he said. "Those are the things we think we could work together on. The United States could help show how some of the things we have learned through the years could be applied so that Laos doesn't make the same mistakes as we might have in some ways. We can share thoughts about how to do things – agriculture for instance." Mr Kerry also briefed the media about the outcome of the bilateral talks held between himself and his Lao counterpart Mr Saleumxay Kommasith on Monday. "President Obama will be the first US president to visit Laos. We have a great deal

of work to do now to think about the things that we can do to make that visit really productive," he said. During their talks, Mr Kerry and his Lao counterpart also talked about regional security issues and the need to be very alert and proactive with respect to preventing violent extremism from being able to move into the region. The breadth of the above shows how substantive the discussions have been and how important the US president's visit to Laos will be. "What we hope is that it will be an extremely productive and historic visit by the US president. That's what I and Laos agreed on," Mr Kerry said. Mr Kerry stressed the significance of working together to identify the needs and areas of cooperation. "I think both countries can learn from each other all the time. It's important, however, for us to work together and find ways to cooperate," he said. "Obviously Laos is in a very different place from the United States in terms of the development of an economy. We are trying to help Laos, not to do what we think we want it to do, but with what Laos wants to do." The relationship between Laos and the US has been strengthening in recent years, especially after the two nations resumed normal trade relations in 2004.

*(Vientiane Times 27 July 2016)*

## **Women lack understanding of gender equality: project report**

*By Phetphoxay Sengpaseuth*

The Vientiane Commission for the Advancement of Women and Mother and Child Affairs needs to create greater understanding of gender equality among women in target districts of a project that aims to promote

and create capacity development towards equality between women and men. It is also noted that the rate of poverty reduction and progress made in gender equality differs considerably between urban and rural are-

as. This was the view of participants at the National Sharing and Exchanging Meeting held yesterday as part of the Capacity Development for Citizen-led Inclusive Development project, an initiative funded by the European Union. Among those present at the meeting was the Vice Mayor of Vientiane, Mr Syhoun Sitthileuxay. Mr

Phon Savanh Sethanapaisanh of the European Union Delegation to Laos thanked Oxfam for its contribution to this partnership, along with civil society organisations such as Oxfam's partners MHP, PADETC, and LDA. Also speaking at the meeting, Head of the Secretariat of the Vientiane Commission for the Advancement of Women and Mother and Child Affairs, Ms Souphone Voravong, said the project aimed to build women's understanding of ways to improve their livelihoods and how to play a greater role in planning and decision making in their local communities, promote gender equality and greater opportunities for women, and contribute to poverty reduction initiatives. She said the project had provided information on the importance of gender equality to local communities in Sangthong district but had struggled to make progress. Many of the ethnic groups in these villages are poor, especially in Napor, Nasa and other villages. Associate Country Director Oxfam Laos, Mr Antonino Faibene, said Oxfam's participation is the essence of the Citizen-led Inclu-

sive Development project that recognises the fundamental role of active citizens, local governments and civil society organisations in contributing together as equals to the development of communities across Laos. It is indeed the objective of our partnership to contribute to increased citizen-led development and inclusive local governance, he added. To do this, Oxfam imagines local authorities, non-state actors and communities engaging in participatory governance for inclusive local development; increased capacity, trust and cooperation between local authorities, non-state actors and communities leading to improved local governance; and learning good practice on inclusive and participatory development that can influence policy makers. This is why poverty reduction that also tackles disparities within the country is a priority on the national agenda, Mr Faibene said. The 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan integrates the first Sustainable Development Goal to end poverty in all its forms everywhere, he added. This is much needed as poverty is unevenly distributed in Laos as confirmed in a recently released report by the Lao Statistics Bureau, titled: Where Are the Poor? The report highlights that poverty is widespread in mountainous areas along the border with Vietnam, while Savannakhet and Saravan provinces have more poor districts than other provinces.

*(Vientiane Times 27 July 2016)*

## Phongsaly brewing up coffee opportunities

By Times Reporters

Phongsaly, long renowned for its green tea, is set to be the nation's first coffee producer in the north after around 3,000 hectares of coffee trees were planted in the province.



Mr Yin Xinhua (left), Mr Thongsavanh Thammavong (centre) and Mr Xiang Yongdong shake hands after signing the agreement in Vientiane.

Some 7,000 farming families in 140 villages are participating in the project which is being underwritten by the Yunnan Changshengda Investment Co., Ltd. Phongsaly provincial authorities have now entered into an agreement with Yunnan Changshengda Investment Co., Ltd. and the Chongqing Energy Import and Export Co., Ltd. of China on strategic cooperation concerning cultivation of the crop. An agreement was signed in Vientiane on Tuesday by provincial Industry and Commerce Director, Mr Thongsavanh Thammavong, Yunnan Changshengda Investment Co., Ltd. President, Mr Yin Xinhua, and Chongqing Energy Import and Export Co., Ltd. President, Mr Xiang Yongdong. The ceremony was attended by Minister of Industry and Commerce, Ms Khemani Pholsena, Phongsaly provincial Deputy Governor, Mr Khamphoy Vannasane, deputy ministers from the Agriculture and Forestry, Planning and Investment, Natural Resources and Environment ministries, along with Chinese officials in charge of economic and

trading affairs to Laos. The Yunnan Changshengda Investment Co., Ltd. began investing in the province in 2009 and signed an agreement to begin coffee growing trials with Bounneua district authorities in 2011, Mr Khamphoy reported. "Following positive trial results the company signed a contract with the five districts of Phongsaly, Bountay, Samphan, Khua and May in 2012," he said. As those districts have suitable soil and a good climate for coffee growing, most farmers have received additional income from the crop. Some farming families have earned about 20,000 yuan (more than 23 million kip) a year, such as in Phouxar village in Bounneua district.

So far, farmers have received about 6 billion kip in total after selling their coffee crop to the company, Mr Khamphoy said. Under the project, the Yunnan Changshengda Investment Co., Ltd. has encouraged farmers to grow other commercial crops such as sweetcorn and beans along the rows of coffee trees. The company has brought funding, coffee marketing and cultivation techniques to the province to improve crop quality so that it is suitable for export markets including China. The project is part of activities to reduce opium poppy cultivation by creating job opportunities and boosting revenue for local farmers, in a bid to ease their poverty. Mr Khamphoy hoped that cooperation between Yunnan Changshengda Investment Co., Ltd. and Chongqing Energy Import and Export Co., Ltd. would help to boost investment in coffee and other crops grown in the province. Both sides also agreed to build a processing factory capable of producing 10,000 tonnes of coffee a year. Coffee in Laos is currently cultivated almost exclusively on the Bolaven Plateau in Champassak, Saravan and Xekong provinces with total coffee exports in 2014 reaching 26,000 tonnes at an estimated value of US\$60 mil-

lion, which fell slightly to 23,000 tonnes

valued at US\$50 million in 2015.

*(Vientiane Times 28 July 2016)*

## Laos, Singapore vow to enhance cooperation

*By Times Reporters*

Laos and Singapore are pledging to work together to promote trade and investment between the two countries after their trade volume climbed to US\$72.5 million in 2015.



*Mr Saleumxay Kommasith (right) greets Dr Vivian Balakrishnan during the bilateral meeting in Vientiane.*

As of 2016, investment from Singapore stood at US\$187 million, ranking the country in eleventh place among all foreign investors in Laos. Investment is mostly in industry and handicrafts, construction, services, hydropower, the wood industry, agriculture, and telecommunications. The information was outlined yesterday at a meeting between Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Saleumxay Kommasith and his Singapore counterpart Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, according to the Lao foreign ministry. The short working visit to Laos by Dr Balakrishnan and his delegation was in response to an invitation from Mr Saleumxay to attend the 49th Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Related Meetings which took place in Vientiane from July 21-26. During yesterday's meeting, the two foreign ministers said they highly valued their cooperation over past years and discussed ways to promote future

collaboration. Relations between the two countries will receive a boost with the introduction of direct flights between Singapore and Vientiane by SilkAir, which will increase tourism exchanges and improve trade relations. Last year Laos received more than 8,200 visitors from Singapore who generated millions of dollars for government coffers, according to the Tourism Development Department. SilkAir will begin direct flights from Singapore to Luang Prabang in October. The airline uses Airbus A320 aircraft, with business and economy class cabins. Subject to approval, SilkAir will offer three weekly flights on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays to the two destinations on a circular routing based on an agreement signed yesterday between representatives of SilkAir Private Limited and Lao Airlines. The signing was witnessed by Mr Saleumxay and Dr Balakrishnan. Flights from Singapore will make a stop in Vientiane and then continue to Luang Prabang, before heading back directly to Singapore. Laos and Singapore have seen many achievements in cooperation towards each other's development, recorded high economic growth, and markedly improved their people's living conditions. The two parties also agreed to strengthen regular exchange visits by leaders and share information on taxation and related issues as well as improve human resources and skilled labour. The two governments will also work together to enhance their cooperation in supporting each other on the regional and international stages. On the same day, Dr Balakrishnan and his delegation paid a courtesy

visit to Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith and other high ranking government officials

before attending a dinner hosted by Mr Saleumxay.

*(Vientiane Times 28 July 2016)*

## **Corruption: Both givers and takers will be punished for corruption, VP warns**

*By Times Reporters*

Vice President Phankham Viphavanh has warned businesses not to conspire with corrupt officials, saying that both the beneficiaries (officials) and providers (businesses) would be subject to punishment if exposed. The Vice President issued the warning after noting that businesses have conspired with undisciplined officials, causing them to be corrupt in relation to the payment of taxes and customs duties. "Businesses are well aware of who is corrupt as they contribute to officials' corruption," he told a meeting of business leaders in Vientiane on Wednesday, organised by the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Without the cooperation of businesses, officials would find it more difficult to be corrupt in this context, said Mr Phankham, who is also Standing Member of the Secretariat Committee of the 10th Party Central Committee. He observed that some businesses had distorted their accounts to avoid paying the full amount of tax they owed, while tax officials conspired in this process for their personal gain. In addition, the Vice President said he was aware that state officials in charge of approving state investment projects negotiated deals with businesses in which approval was granted in exchange for a considerable bribe. "If a bribe is paid and the case is uncovered, both the giver and recipient will be prosecuted," Mr Phankham warned. "Don't misunderstand that the giver won't be guilty." In some cases, state officials from

different departments or ministries work as a corrupt group, which Mr Phankham described as a "benefit-generating group or corrupting mafia." He explained that such groups comprised officials from departments or ministries whose mandate was to oversee the processes involved in awarding contracts to businesses to carry out state investment projects. Their corrupt tactics involved awarding contracts in exchange for a bribe. The vice president stressed the need for all sectors to work together to tackle the issue, saying these problems had been the focus of hostile groups' efforts to tarnish the government's image and persuade people to misunderstand [Party policy]. "But this issue (corruption) is only resorted to by some undisciplined officials, not all officials. It is not part of the ideology or guidelines of the Party," Mr Phankham said. The government has pledged to take action to crack down on corruption after taking office in April. Addressing a nationwide inspection meeting last week, President Bounnhang Vorachit, who is also Secretary General of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, instructed anti-corruption authorities to appropriately punish officials found to be in violation of the regulations, in another attempt to stamp out malpractice and lax discipline. Also in Wednesday's meeting, Mr Phankham gave advice to businesses to ensure their effective operation.

*(Vientiane Times 29 July 2016)*