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➤ **Vientiane Times:**

- [Govt to calculate debts before considering new investments](#)
- [Climate change and its impacts on health](#)
- [Australia supports business reform in Laos](#)
- [Canada eyes economic cooperation potential](#)
- [EU announces continued support in education sector](#)
- [Asean-Canada strengthen dialogue, supporting trade, investment](#)
- [Asean, East Asia exchange views on regional economics](#)
- [Prof. Hidetoshi Nishimura.](#)
- [Laos to take measures to control locust outbreak](#)
- [Laos prepares cooperation documents for Asean leaders](#)
- [Experts discuss IT systems in urban transport](#)
- [Vientiane soon to be in global spotlight](#)
- [Laos reconfirms continued cooperation on Missing in Action persons](#)
- [Asean, HKC support AHKFTA implementation](#)
- [No dengue outbreak, officials say](#)
- [Switzerland to further the country's development engagement](#)

Govt to calculate debts before considering new investments

By Somsack Pongkhao

The Ministry of Planning and Investment has been instructed to calculate the country's debts owed to development projects and then report on its results to the government. The calculation of debt will serve as fundamental information for the government to consider and approve new State investment plans for 2017. Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment Dr Kikeo Chanthabouly told Vientiane Times on Tuesday that his ministry will work closely with other government sectors in Vientiane and the provinces to calculate the debts promptly. "Every year, the government will allocate budget expenditure for various sectors and provinces, which those sectors will need to prioritise. For instance how much of the budget should be disbursed for debts and how much should be used for new development projects," Dr Kikeo said. The Deputy Minister said the government sectors basically allocate about 30 percent of their budget to paying debts, saying that the situation of debts in Laos is still manageable. Debts have been divided into several categories. These consist of debt for 100 percent completed projects, debts from unapproved projects, debts from bond issues, debts from prior private investment projects, debts from mega projects that the government is unable to repay completely and debts from disaster recovery relief projects. As of October last year, 20 central state organisations, four provinces and the capital of Vientiane accumulated debts totalling 29,107 billion kip. This figure was unveiled during a meeting held between the cabinet

members, Vientiane mayor and provincial governors in Vientiane last year. However it was still unclear how many state organisations in total actually owe debts, and there was no official report about the country's debt after that date. Laos has suffered a chronic debt situation due to the fact that the budget was limited, while the investment requirements, especially for infrastructure development projects by both central and local authorities, were huge. The revenue shortfall over the past three years further worsened the situation. However the government has placed greater priority on collecting revenue to pay debts and fund new development projects. The government says future state investments must be based on the state's financial capacity in order to avoid accumulating more debt. In April this year, the government presented a budgetary report to the National Assembly which defined the figures regarding revenue collection and expenditure over the past six months of 2015-16. According to the report, revenue collection over the past six months of 2015-16 accomplished only 8 trillion kip, equal to 30.6 percent of the yearly plan. Of the total figure, domestic revenue attained 7.4 trillion kip, equal to 31.4 percent of the yearly plan. In the meantime, budget expenditure reached 11.59 trillion kip, equal to 36 percent of the yearly plan. Of the total figures, 1.19 trillion was disbursed for domestic debts, equal to 43 percent of the yearly plan; and 876 billion kip was spent for external debts, equal to 25 percent of the yearly plan.

(Vientiane Times 06 August 2016)

Climate change and its impacts on health

By Feature Desk

In recent years, there are more reports from major publications with gripping headlines of extreme high temperature, like The Economist reporting that Basra's temperature reach 53.9 degree Celsius or Sana's capital set to run out of water by 2019. Water wells have dried during the dry season. Or how El Nino is sweeping across the Asia Pacific region resulting in more droughts and flooding and this will certainly raise concerns for policymakers on how the global climate change will impact Laos. The Ministry of Health together with the Ministry of Nature Resources and Environment and the Ministry of Public Works and Transport reviewed a vulnerability assessment on climate change and health. The assessment examines climate sensitive diseases like water-borne diseases, food-borne diseases, vector borne diseases brought about by flooding and drought. The ministries agreed on the need for a multi-sectoral approach to address the impact on the health systems, and to look into ways to engage the communities to minimise the health effects of climate change in the country. In 2015, the WHO Executive Board endorsed a new work plan on climate change and health focusing on partnerships with other UN agencies to support countries in capacity building to reduce health vulnerabilities, and to coordinate scientific evidence on the links between climate change and health so as to raise awareness of this global issue. In Laos, the mean annual temperature is projected to rise by 4.6 degree Celsius on average from 1990 to 2100 under a high emission scenario; and this could also result in an increased number of days with heavy precipitation increasing the risk of floods. The longest dry spell could also increase by about seven days on average, from about 55 days in 1990, so we could go for months without rainfall. Laos has already experienced longer dry seasons and shorter,

more intense rainy seasons. The health risks resulting from climate change may worsen with more severe disease outbreaks from dengue, typhoid fever, malaria, dysentery, neglected tropical diseases like schistosomiasis and cholera and diarrhoea; these diseases are well associated with temperature, rainfall and humidity. This may be aggravated by water shortages during the dry seasons where safe drinking water may be in short supply; and sanitation and hygiene may become a serious problem. Since 2010, Laos has had a national climate change strategy and a health system review in 2014 concluded that there is strong political support for climate change, as Laos signed the Paris Agreement on climate change. Many existing policies and programmes are in place for 2016-2020 for the Greater Mekong sub-region and Asean that focused on gender, vulnerable communities, infectious diseases including re-emerging zoonotic diseases and cross-cutting issues on climate change and its effects on health, and it was agreed to take a multi-sectoral approach to tackle the challenges. The WHO will support the Ministry of Health to implement the National Environmental Health Strategic Plan; with support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) fund which was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems. The project will include a health national action plan that is focused on the impacts of climate change, more ownership from the ministry to look at the long-term sustainability of the project, better information sharing with other ministries, improving the resilience of the existing health systems to deal with climate sensitive outcomes and risks. It will also look at climate sensitive health management and response plans and conducting regular vulnerability assessments on climate sensitive health

risks, vulnerabilities of communities and the effectiveness of health sector adaptation while raising awareness of these issues for the prevention and control of diseases. Climate change is real. To quote President Obama who said “No challenge poses a

greater threat to future generations than climate change,” we need to get into the habit of thinking about climate change in every project so as to see results that positively impact health in the long term.

(Vientiane Times 06 August 2016)

Australia supports business reform in Laos

By Times Reporters

Australia's Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Mr Steven Ciobo has announced an additional AUD\$4.1 million (almost 25 billion kip) of Australian assistance to help improve the business environment in Laos. Australian support will help Laos open up important sectors of the economy, reduce non-tariff measures, streamline business registration processes and strengthen private sector dialogue with the government, including through a revitalised Lao Business Forum, Mr Ciobo said. “It is no accident Australia and Laos have worked closely together on trade policy over the last decade. Our domestic markets are too small to sustain the growth to which we aspire - we both need to access the wealth of capital, partners, customers, goods and services beyond our borders,” he said. Mr Ciobo said further reforms would make it easier for quality Australian companies to invest, trade and grow their operations in Laos. “An improved business environment is not only good for business; it is good for development, and good for people. The Australian government is also investing directly in people through our education and scholarships work in Laos - ultimately that's what growth and development is all about,” he said. “Australia and Laos have much to offer one another, in a region that promises so much for our future pros-

perity. Both our countries are working for a better connected, more prosperous Mekong and Asean region, and a strong, open, rules-based global trading system.” Mr Ciobo made the announcement during a keynote address to a business dinner in Vientiane, hosted by the Australian Chamber of Commerce in Laos (AustCham Lao) on Thursday. It brought together 100 local and international business people to hear Mr Ciobo's speech and to participate in a question and answer session with the Minister on regional and global trade issues. Mr Ciobo was in Vientiane last week for meetings with his ASEAN counterparts, to attend the Asean Economic Ministers Consultations with the Ministers of Australia and New Zealand and the East Asia Summit Economic Ministers' Meeting, and to progress negotiations towards the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement. It is hoped that RCEP, an agreement that will cover almost half the world's population and more than 30 percent of global GDP, will complement efforts through the Asean Economic Community to simplify commerce and reduce trading costs in the Asia-Pacific region. “For Australia and Laos, what this all means is increased opportunities for our businesses, large and small, to find niches in global value chains,” Mr Ciobo said.

(Vientiane Times 08 August 2016)

Canada eyes economic cooperation potential

By Somxay Sengdara

Mining, energy, agriculture and forestry, as well as aerospace have been among the sectors that Canada has expressed cooperation interest in, seeking to boost ties and trade with Laos. Canadian Minister of International Trade, Chrystia Freeland revealed the Canadian intention in her exclusive interview with Vientiane Times and Lao National Television on Thursday during her visit to Laos and her attendance in the outgoing 48th Asean Economic Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane. "There are real opportunities in mining in Laos, which is an area of real expertise for Canadian companies. Laos is very involved in the energy sector where Canada also has a lot of expertise," Ms Freeland said. There is a lot of focus on infrastructure where Canada has expertise, in particular public and private partnerships in that space, according to the minister, who said aerospace is another possibility for cooperation as well as information technology. Mentioning agriculture and forestry, the Canadian minister said that cooperation with her country would provide an opportunity for building high value-added agriculture as Canada has strength in this field. She also made mention about forestry as an important sector for both Laos and Canada. Laos and Canada established diplomatic relations in 1974. Canada opened its first resident diplomatic presence last September, through which until recently, relations were handled by the Canadian Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand. Since opening a diplomatic office space in Laos, the Canadian Ambassador to Thailand remains accredited to Laos, and the Lao Embassy in Washington, D.C., is responsible for relations with Canada. Laos and Canada are partners in La Francophonie and also cooperate through Asean and the security oriented Asean Regional Forum. Approximately 25,000 persons of Lao origin live in Canada. Ms Freeland said she was very ex-

cited about the Canadian relationship with Laos, as the two countries are now making a big push to grow and develop that relationship. "We now have a diplomatic office here with resident Canadian diplomats, which is a first and an important foundation for developing the relationship going forward," she said. Bilateral trade between Laos and Canada amounted to US\$29 million last year, an increase of four percent over the previous year. Canadian exports to Laos amounted to US\$5.8 million, a decrease of 55 percent, primarily in machinery and mechanical appliances. Meanwhile, imports from Laos were valued at US\$23.7 million in the same year, an increase of 43.6 percent over the previous year. Chemical compounds such as silicon, apparel and clothing accessories make up 90 percent of merchandise imports from Laos. The Canadian minister was impressed with Canadian investors here in Laos such as Celestica Laos, which she said employed 600 Lao workers. Other Canadian companies include SN Plus and Hatfield Consulting, who are bringing investment and expertise to help promote economic growth. Companies like Joma Café, not only operate successfully in Laos, but they demonstrate a strong ethic of social responsibility and a commitment to giving back to the country. On the same day, Canadian Minister of International Trade, Chrystia Freeland presided over a ceremony announcing US\$13 million in support to progressive trade in Southeast Asia, aiming to help the most vulnerable workers in the region become more successful in business. In partnership with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Canada will support research, training and capacity building to help the governments of Asean members put small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) friendly policies and programmes in place and help to identify oppor-

tunities to integrate SMEs into global value

chains.

(Vientiane Times 08 August 2016)

EU announces continued support in education sector

By Phetphoxay Sengpaseuth

The European Union (EU) has committed to continue to support the country's education sector from 2016-2020 as Laos looks to improve the sector's overall quality "The EU is one of Laos' biggest development partners in terms of grant aid for development cooperation and humanitarian resource assistance, and is also an important trade partner," Deputy Minister of Education and Sports, Assoc. Prof. Dr Kongsy Sengmany says. For several years, the EU has played a significant role in supporting the development of the education sector which, by consensus, has met with success. Under those education projects supported by the EU, education has been made more accessible seeing gradual improvements while the education gap between urban and rural areas has also seen a reduction, officials confirmed. Assoc. Prof. Dr Kongsy told Vientiane Times last week at the handover of a certificate of achievement to EU representatives, that he wanted to thank the EU's assistance and the commended the growing ties between Laos and the EU including those in the education sector. He said that Mr Michel Coffin, the out-going EU Chargé d' Affaires to Laos, was one of the key figures who has been mobilizing resources from the EU as well as from various development partners contributing to the development of the education sector of the Lao PDR. Since 2014 the EU has committed 1 million euro in providing technical support to the areas of planning and budgeting in the development of the Education Sector Development Plan with the Ministry of Education and Sports. "Under the scheme, 3 experts

were recruited for the three year course of project life," Assoc. Prof. Dr Kongsy said. The EU also committed 11.5 million euro to co-finance the Basic Education and Education Quality and Access in Lao PDR (BEQUAL) project and has provided approximately 3.5 million euro to improve education quality including improving the planning and budgeting areas at the district, provincial and central levels while also supporting the training of School Based Management to school principals. According to the EU, their 207 million euro 2014-2020 programme focuses on the sectors of nutrition, education and governance while also tackling horizontal issues such as UXO decontamination, gender equality and climate change. Starting from 2016, European partners (the EU, EU Member States and Switzerland) are combining their development cooperation through joint programming. The EU and its Member States have set out a common vision, priorities, approach, division of labour and indicative financial allocations. Taken together, the EU and EU Member States are among the largest development donors in Laos, committing around 70 million euro annually. Regarding economic relations, the 'Everything but Arms' initiative extends import quotas and duty-free access for Lao exports to the EU market which has opened the door to the biggest single market in the world. EU Member States also maintain their bilateral economic relations with Laos and, combined, are the fourth largest investors in the country.

(Vientiane Times 08 August 2016)

Asean-Canada strengthen dialogue, supporting trade, investment

By Times Reporters

ASEAN-Canada bilateral trade has grown significantly with investment amounting to billions of US dollars in 2015 and positive performance benefiting both Canada and Asean. Canadian statistics note that two-way merchandise trade between Asean-Canada has grown significantly; up 13.8 percent to approximately CAD\$21.4 billion (US\$16.24 billion) in 2015. Ministers and officials from the 10 Asean member states and Canada link hands at the 5th Asean Economic Ministers-Canada Consultations. As a group, Asean ranked as Canada's sixth largest merchandise trading partner, according to a joint media statement released at the 5th Asean Economic Ministers-Canada Consultations on Thursday in Vientiane. The stock of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from Canada to Asean amounted to over CAD\$10 billion at the end of 2015 while the stock of FDI from Asean into Canada exceeded CAD\$1 billion, the statement also noted. For Laos, the Ministry of Planning and Investment reported recently that investment from Canada had a value of over US\$65.79 million from 1989-2015. The Ministry of Industry and Commerce also reported that Lao exports to Canada were about US\$11.65 million in 2013-2014 and over US\$15 million in 2014-2015. Economic ministers from Asean and Canada met at the 5th AEM-Canada Consultations that were co-chaired by Ms Khemmani Pholsena, Laos' Minister of Industry and Commerce and Chrystia Freeland, the Canadian Minister of International Trade. The meeting welcomed the establishment of Canada's Mission to Asean in Jakarta and the appointment of Canada's first dedicated Ambassador to Asean in January 2016 and the opening of Canadian diplomatic offices in both Laos and Cambodia. The ministers welcomed the progress of the 2016-2020 Work Plan to Implement the Asean-Canada Joint Declaration on Trade and Investment

(JDTI), which aims to stimulate increased trade and investment through strengthening dialogue and supporting private sector initiatives. They agreed to establish an annual Asean-Canada Trade Policy Dialogue that will cover trade policy areas of mutual interest, and further agreed to task senior officials to prepare the draft terms of reference of a feasibility study on a potential Asean-Canada Free Trade Agreement. They also expressed appreciation for Canada's continued support of Asean's post-2015 agenda. In particular, they noted the launch of new Canadian programming to foster progressive trade in Asean, valued at CAD\$13.6 million. These projects will focus on small and medium enterprise (SMEs) growth and more inclusive and equitable global value chains in the region. Additional ongoing Canadian programming in support of the Asean Economic Community is valued at CAD\$11 million in the areas of infrastructure, SMEs, agriculture and financial regulation. The ministers also noted the priority that the new government of Canada has placed on clean economic growth and climate change. During the dialogue with the Canada-Asean Business Council (CABC), they commended the council for its contribution to promoting Asean-Canada trade and investment, and noted that the 3rd Canada-Asean Business Forum under the theme of "Partnering for Growth in Asean" will be held in September 2016 in Indonesia. The ministers encouraged the CABC to continue its active role in promoting Canadian business engagement in the region. As 2017 marks the 40th anniversary of Asean-Canada Dialogue relations, they agreed to utilise the momentum to elevate the partnership to new heights by strengthening their engagement, expanding economic partnership, and identifying new areas of potential cooperation.

(Vientiane Times 08 August 2016)

Asean, East Asia exchange views on regional economics

By Times Reporters

The ministers and delegates from Asean and participating countries noted the combined GDP of East Asia Summit (EAS) stood at US\$41.67 trillion last year, a slight decline from US\$42.02 trillion in 2014. Asean's total trade with the other eight EAS countries amounted to US\$1.05 trillion in 2015 compared to US\$1.11 trillion in 2014, according to a joint media statement released at the 4th East Asia Summit (EAS) Economic Ministers Meeting on Friday in Vientiane. Economic ministers from Asean, Australia, China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Russian Federation and the United States met at the meeting, chaired by Mrs Khemmani Pholsena, Industry and Commerce Minister of Laos. Asean's trade with the other EAS countries accounted for 46.3 percent of Asean's total trade, the statement noted. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows from the other EAS countries was recorded at US\$52.1 billion in 2015, representing 43.4 percent of Asean's total FDI inflows. On trade and investment relations as well as global economic developments, the ministers noted that downside risks remained. Global economic growth is projected to moderate at 3.1 percent in 2016 before picking up to 3.4 percent in 2017. Growth in advanced economies is expected to expand to 1.8 percent in 2016 while in the emerging and developing countries, growth prospects are forecast to reach 4.1 percent in 2016 from 4.0 percent in 2015 on grounds of continued moderation in China, robust growth in India and the rest of emerging Asia. The ministers also noted that slower-than-expected recovery of the advanced economies, combined with tighter global financial conditions, might pose adverse challenges to regional growth. They noted the outcome of the UK's EU Referen-

dum adds to the uncertainty in the global economy, and underscored the role of open trade policies and a strong and secure global trading system in promoting inclusive global economic growth. They reaffirmed their efforts to enhance regional economic integration in the East Asia region and noted the signing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement and continued progress in negotiations towards the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement. They welcomed the outcomes of the Tenth-WTO Ministerial Conference in Kenya, December 2015 and the adoption of the "Nairobi Ministerial Declaration", including ministerial decisions on agriculture, cotton, and issues related to least-developed countries. The ministers highlighted that the "Nairobi Package" is one of the most significant outcomes on agriculture reached by WTO members, which will bring great benefits to all WTO members. They noted the importance of interaction between ERIA (Economic Research Institute for Asean and East Asia) and the policy makers of EAS countries and, to this end, welcomed the convening of the Roundtable Discussion between EAS Senior Economic Officials and ERIA Researchers, which was held last month. They were also pleased to note the updates on ERIA's on-going and future research activities, including studies on Non-Tariff Measures (NTM) and Good Regulatory Practices (GRP). They welcomed the report of the 9th ERIA Governing Board Meeting held in June, and noted the governing board had endorsed the renewed commitments of ERIA to the East Asia Region as described in its medium term work plan, which includes establishing a policy design department, setting up formal bridging mechanisms to enhance interactions with policy

makers in the region, and various measures to further enhance ERIA's research and capacity building. They also encouraged ERIA to develop possible next steps drawing upon the outcomes of their research activities and thanked ERIA for its continuous support and

looked forward to its continued contribution to the region's integration efforts. The ministers also encouraged EAS participating countries to continue extending their support to ERIA.

(Vientiane Times 08 August 2016)

Prof. Hidetoshi Nishimura.

By Times Reporters

Senior editors of Asean share views for vision's Asean community More than 30 senior editors from 10 member Asean countries and four Asean dialogue partners shared their views on the theme "Turning Vision into Reality for a Dynamic Asean Community" at an editor's roundtable yesterday in Vientiane. The discussions were held at the 5th Economic Research Institute For Asean and East Asia (ERIA) Editors' Roundtable, which was co-organised by ERIA, the Lao Journalists' Association and Vientiane Times yesterday at Lao Plaza Hotel. Deputy Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism and President of the Lao Journalists' Association Mr Savankhone Razmouny spoke to open the event "I highly value the contributions and endless efforts of the ERIA to help Laos, not only in the economic sector but also in other areas, which has provided active participation in developing Laos, especially in narrowing the development gap between the old and new Asean member states." The roundtable was one of the important meetings in which leading editors and senior journalists from the 10 Asean member states and Asean dialogue partners including China, Japan, New Zealand and Russia would share their views on the theme: "Turning Vision into Reality for a Dynamic Asean Community," Mr Savankhone said. He added this theme was aimed at realising the Asean Community Vision 2025 and the new blueprints of the Asean Political Security Com-

munity, Asean Economic Community and Asean Socio-Cultural Community that were officially adopted by Asean leaders in Malaysia last year. "This year, our country has been entrusted to chair Asean for the second time. It is an important and meaningful year as it is the first year when Asean becomes a community and the first year for the implementation of the Asean Vision 2025 and its blueprints for the three community pillars," he noted. He added that as chair, Laos aims to ensure that the priorities of Laos support the deep and strong integration of Asean, particularly by leading the Asean people to live in peace, enjoy economic stability and reduced poverty, and strengthening efforts in connectivity and narrowing the development gap as well as people-oriented and people-centered, socially responsible solidarity and unity among the peoples of the Asean Community, where people enjoy a better quality of life and the benefits of community building. The roundtable was very significant as it took place in coincidence with the 49th founding day of Asean yesterday, Mr Savankhone noted. "As we know, journalists play an important role in development and peace as well as promoting culture and tourism. They are socially responsible with a view to achieving enduring solidarity and unity among peoples of different beliefs, nationalities, ethnicities and races." Minister of Industry and Commerce Mrs Khemmani Pholsena also delivered a speech during the

opening roundtable, noting that the Asean Economic Community Vision 2025 would guide Asean in taking on a more proactive leadership role in defining the region's architecture, enabling Asean to respond more effectively to existing and emerging challenges and realising a people-oriented and people-centred Asean. The Blueprint 2025 would also provide Asean with great opportunities not only to make Asean a highly integrated and cohesive economy with enhanced connectivity, and a competitive, innovative and dynamic region but also to enhance capacity of Asean SMEs to be able to catch up in global supply chains and support narrowing the development gaps among and within Asean countries, she added. Mrs Khemmani noted "As key sources of information for our peoples, journalists are well positioned to explain, encourage discussions and clarify misconceptions to bring to the people the awareness and understanding of the community." "We are building, not only its opportunities to seize but also its challenges to overcome as this will, in turn, encourage them to engage and participate in our mutual efforts." "In doing so, you have the support of the Asean member states and relevant Asean sectoral bodies. In line with the AEC Blueprint 2025 on a people-oriented, people-centred Asean community, Asean has been undertaking various initiatives to bring Asean closer to the peoples among other through mass media, interviews and publication. President of ERIA Prof Hidetoshi Nishimura said "There are so many challenges and difficulties. At the morning sessions, we will discuss the prospects of the Asean community and energy outlook in this region. In the afternoon session, let us frankly, but seriously have a dia-

logue with the Secretary General of Asean to catch the Asean vision and the reality of the present Asean situation. ERIA completed the long term development vision named, "The Lao PDR at the crossroads: industrial development strategies 2016-2030," in cooperation with the Lao government and research institutes. Laos would shift from landlocked country to a land-linked country, he stressed. Prof Hidetoshi added that as the chair of this year's Asean and related summits, showing the concrete proposal by this report to this year's summit theme, "from Vision to Reality," Laos has demonstrated its future direction and great potentiality to the stakeholders all over the world, which was not only for Laos's future prosperity, but also inevitably significant for the successful achievement of "Asean connectivity" as a whole. Laos at the crossroads was sure to change the reality of the Mekong region, supplementing AEC Blueprint 2025 as a long-term vision. The Lao PDR has the great potential to be the centre of Greater Mekong Sub-region. In the ten years since ERIA was established in 2007 at the third East Asia Summit, ERIA re-inspected its missions and reformed its organisational structure by creating its medium term Work Plan. Pertaining to Connectivity, ERIA was formally invited to the ASEM Summit. ERIA has also launched the new research book "Asia-Europe Connectivity Vision 2025," which reflects the key elements of the Master Plan of Asean Connectivity, including physical, institutional and people-to-people aspects. Deputy Minister of Energy and Mines Mr Viraphonh Viravong also attended as one of the speakers on the outlook in regards to Asean energy challenges.

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Laos to take measures to control locust outbreak

By Khonesvanh Latsaphao

Plant protection authorities are planning to put all possible protection measures in place next year to kill locusts following an outbreak of the pests which is spreading in northern parts of the country. 2014 saw the first locust outbreak in Laos which affected two districts of Phongthong and Viengkham in Luang Prabang province. So far this year, millions of the pests have spread into 15 districts of the three northern provinces of Luang Prabang, Phongsaly and Huaphan. Head of the Plant Protection Centre under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Mr Siriphonh Phithaksoun told Vientiane Times on Monday that next year the plan for suppressing the pests will be implemented much more rigorously. Right now authorities use four-wheel drive cars and walk to spray pesticides to kill locusts in these outbreak zones. "Next year we may add aircraft for large-scale fields to spray pesticides and destroy the swarms of pests," Mr Siriphonh said. Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith ordered relevant officials to make draft plans for preventing locust outbreaks in the country after he surveyed the damage caused by the pests in Luang Prabang province's Viengkham district last Friday, where swarms of locusts have been destroying crops for the past three years. Mr Siriphonh explained that the locusts have yet to be eradicated because the authorities could not get to the eggs deep in the forest. Last year

authorities identified their eggs in 140 locations but indeed there are estimated to be 450 points of eggs in the forests. The assigned teams of sprayers struggled to kill them even with pesticides and it is expected that about 70 percent of locusts from 450 locations were eliminated. The species found in this area is the yellow-spined bamboo locust, *Ceracris kiangustsai*. This species was first found damaging crops in southern China. These insects typically eat bamboo leaves in hillside forests but upland rice farmers have been felling scores of bamboo trees over the last few years to clear the land for rice cultivation so their crops have also become targets. Authorities say that they are not currently spraying the insects as they are now flying around in swarms while they breed so they are moving from location to location and difficult to target. Mr Siriphonh explained that the locusts that are flying around currently will die in November after they have laid eggs on the ground. The authorities will then survey the locations where they laid eggs and work to spray and kill the eggs. Authorities in Luang Prabang province reported in June last year that crops were destroyed by locusts in parts of Phongthong, Ngoy and Viengkham districts. Over 7,000 hectares of upland rice, sweet corn and other crops were affected, with losses estimated at 800 million kip.

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Laos prepares cooperation documents for Asean leaders

By Somsack Pongkhao

Laos is finalising significant documents which will be signed and adopted by Asean leaders during the 28th and 29th Asean Summits in Vientiane from September 6-8. These documents are linked to the eight priority areas under Laos' Asean chairmanship this year, officials in charge reported in Vientiane on Monday. These officials briefly informed members of the diplomatic corps, international organisations and media about the progress made in Laos' preparation for the Asean summits so they can report back to their home countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Asean Department Director General Mr Phongsavanh Sisoulath said in terms of the eight priority areas under the Lao chairmanship this year, good progress had been made particularly in the finalisation of documents which would be adopted by Asean leaders during the summits. These documents included declarations regarding Asean's response to natural disasters, transitioning from informal to formal employment towards decent work promotion in Asean, along with the Initiative for Asean Integration work plan and master plan on Asean connectivity for 2025. They also address cultural heritage, trade facilitation, promoting sustainable development and infrastructure development in the region. "During the three-day summits, Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulath as chair of the Lao Asean Chairmanship this year will host a total 11 of summits in Vientiane," Mr Phongsavanh said. "The 28th and 29th Asean Summits will have a total of 42 outcome documents. September is an important month for Laos as we will host these summits which will be organised at the National Convention Centre." The

28th Asean Summit will be convened in a plenary session format and Asean leaders will focus their discussion on Asean community building, especially the implementation of the Asean community vision 2025 and the three community blueprints and the ways forwards. Meanwhile at the 29th Asean Summit, Asean leaders will focus their discussion on Asean external relations and its future directions as well as exchange views on regional and international issues of common interest and concern. Over the past 7 months of Laos' chairmanship, the country has hosted and chaired a number of Asean meetings at different levels covering the three Asean pillars namely: Political-security, economic and socio-cultural. These included the Asean Foreign Ministers' Retreat, Asean Defence Ministers Meeting, Asean Labour Ministers Meeting, 49th Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the 48th Asean Economic Ministers' Meeting. The 8 priority areas under Laos' chairmanship this year include implementation of the Asean community vision 2025, narrowing the development gap, trade facilitation, SME development, tourism development, connectivity, transitioning from informal to formal employment towards decent work promotion in Asean and reinforcing cultural heritage cooperation. During the meeting, officials in charge highlighted the country's readiness in various fields particularly arrangements concerning the airport, security, protocols, healthcare, hotels and media facilities. Asean, established in 1967, groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

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Experts discuss IT systems in urban transport

By Times Reporters

Lao and Japanese experts have recently been discussing a concept to improve urban transport using information technology. The IT system will enable motorists to be more aware of traffic information in Vientiane allowing commuters to avoid using roads in which traffic congestion is reported. Experts believe that through the use of the IT system, traffic jams in the capital could be minimised. The move comes after the Japan Research Institute for Social Systems Co. Ltd had introduced a bus location tracking system and a transportation observation system like Wi-Fi packet sensors with the aid of JICA. Director of the Vientiane Traffic Police Department, Lieutenant Colonel Youtaphong Souvannasing told *Vientiane Times* yesterday, "We are still in the initial

stages of discussions around an IT system in urban transportation and we will be discussing more on how to apply the system to improve traffic." Currently Vientiane has a population of 850,000 people but the number of the vehicles in the capital has risen to 740,000. During a seminar on the future of urban transportation using IT in Vientiane yesterday, Japanese experts held discussions with Lao officials, IT companies and the education sector. Over 70 people attended the seminar which was organised by Faculty of Engineering at the National University of Laos and the Japan Research Institute for Social Systems Co. Ltd. The experts aimed to make Vientiane a model case for advanced urban transportation solutions, leading other Asean member countries.

(Vientiane Times 10 August 2016)

Vientiane soon to be in global spotlight

By SomsackPongkhao

Vientiane is set to be in a significant global spotlight as thousands of foreign delegates and media personnel are scheduled to arrive in the country for the Asean Summits next month. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Asean Department Director General Mr Phongsavanh Sisoulath told *Vientiane Times* on Tuesday that around 5,000 people are expected to come to Laos during the meetings. "I think that official delegates will be as high as 3,000 and the rest will be media personnel and business leaders," Mr Phongsavanh said. The 28th and 29th Asean Summits have been set to be held back-to-back in Vientiane on September 6-8. The event will start with a number of Asean senior officials' meetings on September 4 that will continue until September 5. The ministerial-level meetings will take place in the morning of September 6 before the opening ceremony of the summits occurs in the afternoon of the same day. During the 3-day summits Prime Minister Thongloun-Sisoulith, as chair of the Lao Asean Chairmanship this year, will host a total 11 of summits in Vientiane. These will include the 19th Asean-China Summit, 19th Asean-Japan Summit, 18th Asean-Republic of Korea Summit, 19th Asean Plus Three Summit, Asean-Australia Summit, 8th Asean-UN Summit, 8th Mekong-Japan Summit, 4th Asean-United States of America Summit and

11th East Asia Summit and so on. This year's Asean Summits will also see the attendance of global leaders including President Barack Obama, who will be the first US president to visit the country. The summits will not only help to further strengthen regional cooperation but also enhance the profile of Laos in the international arena. The Lao government has attached great importance to hosting these events by improving roads, hotels and other facilities to accommodate the summits. Additionally, a number of workshops and seminars have been held to train the functionaries and staff to be deployed during the summits. On Tuesday, officials held a conference in Vientiane to briefly inform members of the diplomatic corps, international organisations and media about the progress made in Laos' preparation for the Asean Summits. During the conference, officials highlighted the country's readiness in various fields particularly in arrangements concerning the airport, security, protocols, transportation, healthcare, hotels and media facilities. Laos gained Asean membership in 1997 and first chaired Asean in 2004 when it hosted the 10th Asean Summit and its related meetings. Asean, established in 1967, groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

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Laos reconfirms continued cooperation on Missing in Action persons

By Times Reporters

Laos has reconfirmed their commitment to continue cooperation with the United States on casualty classifications assigned to combatants, military chaplains, combat medics, and prisoners of war who are reported missing during wartime (MIA). Officials representing the Lao government made the reconfirmation at the annual technical meeting on MIA between Laos and the United States held last week in Hawaii. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of Europe and America Director General Mr Khuanta Phaly led the Lao side while Second Deputy Director of the Defence POW/MIA Accounting Agency Brigadier General Mark Spindler led the US at the meeting. During the meeting the two sides reviewed the implementation of a cooperation plan over the past year which surveyed and searched for the trace or remains of American soldiers missing during the wartime in Huaphanh, Xiengkhuang, Borikhamxay, Khammuan, Saravan, Xekong, and Attapeu provinces, and discussed the plan for the coming year. The two sides have agreed on enhancing the cooperation framework of searching for information and surveying before digging. They also agreed on the cooperation of a trilateral Laos-Vietnam-US framework at a technical level that increases the effectiveness and

quickness of implementation, including humanitarian assistance to local communities, where surveys and searches take place. The Lao side reconfirmed to continue the cooperation in accordance with humanitarian policy and their capacity while the US said it valued the assistance of the Lao government and people and thanked them for their participation, including local authorities for their humanitarian cooperation. The US side also reminded Laos of the importance of the cooperation between the two countries, especially concerning MIA persons, which they said was in part to enhance the ties between the two countries over the past 30 years, confirming the continuation of provisions of humanitarian assistance to local people as well as the Lao government that will contribute to strengthening the cooperation in future. The cooperation between the Lao government and the US on MIA persons began in 1982, with 272 of the total 573 cases completed and the two sides committed to continuing the search for the rest. "This initiative shows the cooperation that the Lao government and people have for the government and people of the United States," A press release from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated.

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Asean, HKC support AHKFTA implementation

By Times Reporters

Economic ministers from the ten Asean member states have expressed their appreciation to their Hong Kong China (HKC) dialogue partner for its commitment to cooperation with Asean. This includes Hong Kong China's commitment to undertake an economic and technical cooperation programme to support the implementation of the Asean-HKC Free Trade Agreement (AHKFTA) upon its entry into force. The ministers and the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development of HKC met in Vientiane last week for the first Asean Economic Ministers-HKC Consultations, which was co-chaired by Lao Minister of Industry and Commerce, Ms Khemmani Pholsena and Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development of HKC Mr Gregory So Kam-Leung. Secretary-General of Asean Mr Le Luong Minh also attended the event. HKC commended the establishment of the Asean Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 as a major milestone in progressing the region's integration and bringing this to greater heights, and considered the prospective conclusion of the AHKFTA to be another major development in the same direction. The ministers welcomed the new AEC Blueprint 2025, which envisages an AEC by 2025 that is highly integrated and cohesive; competitive, innovative and dynamic; with enhanced

connectivity and sectoral cooperation; a more resilient, inclusive, and people-oriented, people-centred community; alongside integration with the global economy, according to a joint media statement from the meeting. The ministers were pleased to note the performance of Asean-HKC bilateral trade and investment in 2015. According to Asean statistics, total merchandise trade between Asean and HKC reached US\$90 billion, and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows from HKC amounted to US\$3.4 billion. The ministers noted that a free trade agreement between Asean and HKC would strengthen the close economic ties between the two sides. They also expressed their appreciation to their Hong Kong, China (HKC) dialogue partner for its commitment to undertake an economic and technical cooperation programme to support the implementation of the Asean-HKC Free Trade Agreement (AHKFTA) upon its entry into force. The Ministers welcomed the steady progress of the negotiations and looked forward to the timely conclusion of a mutually beneficial Asean-HKC Free Trade Agreement by 2016. With broader liberalisation and deeper integration, the AHKFTA will help generate more business opportunities and stimulate further economic growth in the region.

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No dengue outbreak, officials say

By KhonesavanhLatsaphao

Photos circulating on social media showing people in hospital which purport to be of a current dengue outbreak in Vientiane are in fact misrepresenting the situation as Vientiane health officials insist there is no current dengue outbreak. A health official from Vientiane Health Department DrPhonepaseuth Ounaphom told *Vientiane Times* on Thursday that members of the public get scared about dengue infections when they see many people sleeping together in hospital. "But that picture on Facebook was taken in 2013 and right now we have almost no one sick with dengue," he said. Only six cases of dengue fever were reported in Vientiane last week but someone on social media posted a photo dating back to the serious dengue outbreak three years ago, which in no way represents the situation today. DrPhonepaseuth explained that if dengue infections were in fact in outbreak, many people sick with dengue from the village or district in question would now be being treated in hospital. From January this year to earlier this week there had been 140

confirmed cases of dengue fever in Vientiane. In recent years, the most virulent outbreaks of dengue have been in the months of June and July however so far this year Vientiane has been free of outbreaks as there hasn't been that much rain as yet. Typically, dengue is contracted in the months from January to September or October, which marks the end of the rainy season. DrPhonepaseuth added that Vientiane Health Department officials have recorded numbers of dengue cases in the months from October to December only very occasionally. The reason is that dengue larvae can continue to survive in water containers, broken jars and coconuts. This year more than 2,000 cases of dengue fever have been recorded around the country, and of that figure eight people have reportedly died. Last year there were a total of 1,950 dengue cases nationwide but no deaths recorded. So far this year six deaths have been recorded in Champassak province, one in Saravan province and one in Borikhamxay.

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Switzerland to further the country's development engagement

By Times Reporters

Agricultural development for food security, education and training, and citizen empowerment for participation in government decisions will all be included in future developmental support given to Laos by Switzerland. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) Mekong Director Mr Tim Enderlin affirmed the Swiss assistance to the country in his remarks on the occasion of 725th anniversary of the National Day of Swiss Confederation, which falls on August 1. The Swiss Cooperation Office

in Laos hosted a reception in Vientiane on Wednesday to mark the national anniversary, which also marked the 10th anniversary of the opening of the office in the capital. Having started bilateral projects in the mid 1990s, the Swiss government opened the Swiss Cooperation Office in Laos with the objective to systematically work with the government to reduce poverty, empower citizens to participate in government decisions, improve public services, increase food security, and improve access to land, accord-

ing to a press release from the office. The Swiss cooperation also aims to prepare the young and growing workforce for the country's upcoming integration into the Asean Economic Community. As a long term development partner, Switzerland has contributed more than US\$100 million to the country's efforts to graduate from LDC (Least Developed Country) status. In talking to Lao National Television and *Vientiane Times* at the reception, SDC's Mekong Director Mr Tim Enderlin said even though the cooperation plan has changed year to year, the concentrated focus remained on the same pillars of agriculture, food security, local authority and citizen participation, as well as education and training. "These are the sectors that we will continue to work within and we want to stay a committed partner to the Lao government," he said. Today, the Swiss Cooperation Office in Laos also acts as the

Mekong Regional Office, from which it manages and coordinates the Swiss governmental support to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Switzerland established diplomatic relations with Laos on September 3, 1957 and has its Embassy to Laos based in Bangkok, Thailand. Mr Enderlin said that despite the fact his country is yet to have an embassy office in Laos, he could assure Laos that the Swiss ambassador to Thailand, who was also accredited to Laos, was very active and a frequent visitor well acquainted with Lao society, culture, and politics and was committed to not just improving cooperation but the bilateral ties that the two countries have. Switzerland was also recently elected a member of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and was granted the status of sectorial dialogue partner by Asean Foreign Ministers in July.

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