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Govt approves three laws for NA debate

By Somsack Pongkhao

The government's monthly meeting has approved in principle three amended laws concerning investment promotion, media, and government, aiming to better serve the country's development needs. However the August meeting instructed the relevant sectors to make further revisions based on recommendations from cabinet members before submitting the amendments for debate at the National Assembly later this year. The amendments to the three laws took place in the wake of the country's revenue shortfall over the past 10 months, to ensure that all laws facilitate government efforts to boost economic growth and generate more income for local people. The two-day government meeting which ended on Friday was chaired by Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith and attended by other cabinet members. Concerning a new law related to special and specific economic zones, cabinet members were asked to give inputs and discuss the law at another meeting to be held between the PM and Deputy PM at a later date. The government also approved a report regarding the implementation of the national socio-economic development plan, as well as the status of the financial and budgetary plans for this 2015-16 fiscal year, and discussed plans for 2017. The government acknowledged that international circumstances had changed in complex ways that affected the development of Laos. The national economy grew by 6.9 percent this year while per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) income is expected to reach US\$2,026. These figures are below the government's target and much more needs to be

done to sustain economic growth. According to the government's report, the economy is projected to grow by 7-7.3 percent, lower than the rate of 7.5 percent annually set in the eighth five-year socio-economic development plan for 2016-20. Meeting participants also discussed land use policy before asking the sectors responsible to refine it and make it more comprehensive and easier to implement. Those present expressed their sympathy for people affected by recent flooding and locust invasions in the northern provinces. At the close of the meeting, Mr Thongloun urged all government sectors to enhance their responsibility in fulfilling the two strategic tasks of national defence and development. The most significant task in the coming days is to maintain security when Laos hosts the 28th and 29th Asean Summits in Vientiane from September 6-8. The sectors responsible have been asked to calculate the cost of flood damage in various parts of the country and to bolster rehabilitation efforts to ensure the situation returns to normal as soon as possible. Apart from repairing infrastructure such as roads and irrigation systems, the Prime Minister urged the sectors involved to provide seeds for farmers so they can grow more crops to ensure food security throughout the country. The Ministry of Education and Sports was asked to prepare for the opening of the new school year next month and to further improve the education system to meet the country's development needs.

(Vientiane Times 29 August 2016)

Spectacular cave discovered in Khammuan

By Times Reporters

A new cave boasting stunning natural stalactite formations has been discovered in Khounkham district, Khammuan province. The new Khounkeo Cave was discovered by villagers over two months ago but is not open for visitors, according to the district Information, Culture and Tourism Office. District authorities recently visited the cave and collected information in order to make a proposal to provincial authorities to open the cave for visitors, said a technical official from the office. Khounkeo Cave boasts a stunning natural landscape of stalactites inside which is similar to Konglor Cave, according to the authorities' exploration. The technical official said they are now waiting for provincial authorities to collect information and conduct a feasibility study for the new tourism destination and attraction. Currently we don't allow visitors to enter the cave as the path is steep and dangerous, the official added. We have just received information from district authorities. However, we firstly have to make a proposal to provincial authorities to ask for permission and seek budget funding before going to collect

information and conducting a feasibility study for the new tourism destination, said Mr Somkiet Phineth from the provincial Information, Culture and Tourism Department. We are now coordinating with district authorities to collect more information on the cave at first, he added. Mr Somkiet said if this cave is opened for visitors, they believed that it will be able to attract more visitors to the district as well as the province and help generate income for local people. Khounkham is one of ten districts in Khammuan province, which has well-known tourist sites in terms of natural beauty and culture. Currently the number of visitors to the district is about 5-6,000 people per year. Other highlights in the province are Konglor Cave, which is an amazing 7.5 km-long limestone cave formed by the Hinboun River which flows through the cave year-round; and Tad Nam Sanam waterfall, which is a large twin waterfall cascading off the sandstone massif of Phou Phaman mountain. It flows all year round and is surrounded by a Provincial Protected Area with pristine tropical forest.

(Vientiane Times 29 August 2016)

Lao-French bank receives UN support for female-run businesses

By Advertorial Desk

Banque Franco Lao Ltd (BFL) has been awarded a grant by UNCDF's SHIFT Challenge Fund's Second Window for Women's Financial Inclusion, funded by the Australian Government. The UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) is the UN's capital investment agency for the world's 48 least developed countries.



Participants pose at a signing ceremony in Vientiane on Friday to award BFL a grant from UNCDF's SHIFT Challenge Fund to expand businesses through Digital Financial Services.

The grant will be used to implement a payment digitisation initiative involving small female-run retail businesses in Laos in partnership with Lao companies who have retailers in their supply chains. BFL plans to promote access to Digital Financial Services for 7,000 retailers, mainly comprising small female-run businesses. BFL will be moving distribution chain finance to electronic money in the future and will then use it as a launch pad for a Digital Financial Services offer available on mobile phones. A signing ceremony for the award to BFL by the UNCDF SHIFT Challenge Fund to expand financial businesses through Digital Financial Services took place in Vientiane on Friday between UNCDF Regional Coordinator (Asia) Mr Feisal Hussain and BFL Managing Director Mr Guillaume Perdon. The ceremony was also attended by the Australian Ambassador to Laos, Mr John Williams. The initiative will enable clients and non-clients to access an account and various financial

services such as fund transfers, bill payment and cash-in/cash-out. These activities are being launched in line with BFL's strategic initiative to better address the female entrepreneur market. This BFL project will be supported by UNCDF's SHIFT Challenge Fund's second window, titled Fostering Innovative Business Models for Women's Financial Inclusion, to expand financial access by the Lao population through Digital Financial Services. The grant has been awarded to BFL for a two-year project estimated to cost US\$750,000, of which BFL will invest US\$46,000 with UNCDF SHIFT to provide the remaining amount as a grant. The project aims to pilot and establish digital financing to distribution chains and women's businesses, benefitting over 20,600 users in Vientiane and in the main provinces of Laos by 2018. It complements the Bank of the Lao PDR's active promotion of Digital Financial Services to widen access to financial services by rural and poor people. The financing agreement will support BFL's social development impact by targeting not only its core market segments - corporate, small and medium enterprises and individual clients - but also micro and very small businesses owned or managed by women that are currently underserved or excluded from the formal financial system. Banque Franco Lao Ltd is co-owned by the BRED Group, the largest commercial bank within the BPCE Group in France, and BCEL, the main Lao public bank, and opened for business in Laos in 2010. Today, BFL owns a network of 22 service units, with 12 in Vientiane, 10 in key towns outside the capital and 43 ATMs across the country. BFL offers a wide range of loan, deposit and debit card products to more than 22,000 retail and business customers. BFL's ambition is to provide innovative banking solutions and to support the people of Laos in building a sustainable fu-

ture. UNCDF offers "last mile" finance models that unlock public and private resources, especially at the domestic level, to reduce poverty and support local economic development. The agency's finance models work through financial inclusion that expands the opportunities for individuals, households, and small businesses to participate in the local economy, providing them with the tools they need to climb out of pov-

erty and manage their financial lives. UNCDF expands financial inclusion in Laos through its joint programme Making Access to Finance more Inclusive for Poor People, through the Bank of the Lao PDR and its Asean-wide programme Shaping Inclusive Finance Transformations, both with generous contributions from the Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

(Vientiane Times 29 August 2016)

Asean cultural ministers support Vientiane Declaration on cultural heritage

By Times Reporters

The recent 7th Meeting of Asean Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts in Banda Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam has endorsed the Vientiane Declaration on Reinforcing Cultural Heritage Cooperation in Asean, said Deputy Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, Mr Savankhone Razmouny, head of the Lao delegation to this meeting. The Vientiane Declaration, advanced by the Lao PDR, was first considered and endorsed at the 15th Asean Socio-Cultural Community Council (ASCC) meeting in Luang Prabang last June. Mr Savankhone said yesterday that after having been endorsed by the sectoral body's meeting the Vientiane Declaration will be forwarded back to the 16th ASCC in Vientiane from August 30-31 before submission to Asean leaders for adoption at the 28th Asean Summit to be held in our country early next month. The declaration aims to reaffirm the AMS's Commitment to previous culture-related declarations that highlight the important role culture plays in building a coherent and harmonious Asean Community and to reflect concerns over increasing threats to tangible cultural heritage as a re-

sult of illicit trafficking in cultural property, natural disasters, climate change, unsustainable tourism, including threats emanating from poverty and marginalisation. The declaration underscores actions including the protection of cultural heritage, preservation of cultural heritage, promotion of cultural heritage and strengthening of intangible cultural heritage cooperation. The Vientiane Declaration is aligned with the Strategic Plan for Culture and Arts 2016-2025. Besides this, the Asean culture and arts ministers' meeting also endorsed the Bandar Seri Begawan Declaration on Culture and Arts to Promote Asean's Identity Towards a Dynamic and Harmonious Asean Community, which will be submitted through the 16th ASCC meeting to the 28th Asean summit for adoption. Mr Savankhone, on behalf of the Lao government, sincerely thanked the Asean ministers responsible for culture and arts and their delegations for supporting the said Vientiane declaration. He also expressed thanks to the government and people of Brunei Darussalam, in particular the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, as host and chair of the 7th AMCA Meeting, for their full

support of the Lao initiative. Taking this opportunity Mr Savankhone extended invitations to the ASCC ministers and delegations

to attend the 16th ASCC in Vientiane this week.

(Vientiane Times 30 August 2016)

Two articles of Govt law revised to handle changes

By Somsack Pongkhao

The Law on Government requires amendments to two articles that are set to reflect in law changes to the administrative structure and further codify some senior official roles, Minister to the Prime Minister's Office and Government Spokesman has revealed. The Law on Government is among the three amended laws approved in principle at the government's monthly meeting that concluded Friday. The two amended articles in the Law on Government relate to the roles and duties of the Prime Minister's Office and the roles and duties of ministers to the PM's Office, Minister to the Prime Minister's Office and Government Spokesman Dr Chaleun Yiapaoher told Vientiane Times on Monday. ♦ The name of the Government Office has recently been changed to the Prime Minister's Office so our law needed to be revised, ♦ he said. Amendments to laws on investment promotion and media were also approved by the two-day government meeting. The cabinet resolved to instruct the relevant sectors to make further revisions based on recommendations from cabinet members before submitting the amendments for debate at the National Assembly later this year following the government's August meeting. The meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith and attended by other cabinet members. According to proposed amended Law on Government, the Prime Minister's Office will serve as a secretariat for the prime minister in all fields as well as collaborating with ministries and local authorities while facilitating the activi-

ties of the PM, Deputy PM and Ministers to the PM Office. Additionally, the roles and duties of the Ministers to the Prime Minister's Office have been spelled out in the draft amended Law on Government, but the law does not include the names of the ministers to the PM's Office. Dr Chaleun previously spoke at a press conference in Vientiane in June, detailing the different roles delegated to various ministers to the PM's Office. Dr Phet Phomphiphak is Minister and Head of the Prime Minister's Office. Minister to the Prime Minister's Office Dr Chaleun Yiapaoher serves as the Government Spokesman and assists the prime minister to pursue, monitor and push for the enactment and amendment of laws and regulations relating to administration, justice, the people's courts, prosecution, national defence and public security, and mass organisations. This role also evaluates the implementation of the government's orders in these fields and collaborates with the People's Supreme Court and People's Supreme Prosecutor on issues relating to the government. Minister to the Prime Minister's Office Dr Souvanpheng Bouphanouvong acts as a collaborator between the government and the National Assembly and pushes for the enactment of laws in areas relating to the economy and socio-cultural affairs while assessing the implementation of regulations in these areas. His colleague, Minister to the Prime Minister's Office Mr Bounkeuth Sangsomsak, is in charge of assisting the Prime Minister in matters that relate to Francophonie, border

affairs and international laws. Meanwhile, Minister to the Prime Minister's Office Mr Alounkeo Kittikhoun assists the prime min-

ister with foreign affairs and collaborates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

(Vientiane Times 30 August 2016)

ASCC chair to push priorities for endorsement

By Times Reporters

The 16th meeting of Asean Social-Cultural Community (ASCC) Ministers opened this morning following the 21st ASCC Senior Officials meeting which concluded yesterday.



The Asean Senior Officials for ASCC link hands in a chain at the 21th SOCA meeting yesterday in Vientiane.

The ministers of the ASCC Council are convening their 16th meeting in Vientiane today to continue discussion and endorsement of the remaining priorities related to the Asean Community pillar, after they have already endorsed some of the documents at their 15th meeting held in LuangPrabang provincial capital town in June. At that meeting in LuangPrabang, the ministers endorsed the Vientiane Declaration on Transition from Informal Employment to Formal Employment towards Decent Work Promotion in Asean; the Asean Declaration on One Asean One Response: Asean Responding to Disaster as One in the Region and Outside the Region; and the Asean Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out-Of School Children and Youth. Lao officials are hopeful

that the ministers will adopt the Vientiane Declaration on Reinforcing Cultural Heritage Cooperation in Asean at today's meeting, as it is one of the priorities prepared by Laos as this year's chair of Asean. The Vientiane Declaration on Reinforcing Cultural Heritage Cooperation in Asean, along with the Declaration on Transition from Informal Employment to Formal Employment towards Decent Work Promotion in Asean are among Laos' top priorities as Asean chair, which it aims for Asean leaders to adopt at the upcoming summits. During the 21th meeting of the Senior Officials Committee for the ASCC (SOCA) held yesterday, the Department of Mass Media's Director General and Lao Senior Officials for the Asean Committee on Culture and Information, Mr Pinprathana Phanthamaly said the meeting was to emphasise the follow-up outcomes of the ASCC Council meeting and the SOCA meeting held in LuangPrabang in June. The Asean senior officials furthered their discussions on the issues related to the implementation of the ASCC Blueprint 2025 and considered the document that would be submitted to the 16th meeting of the ASCC Council for endorsement and to be submitted to Asean leaders for adoption. Asean Socio-Cultural Community has in its heart the commitment to lift the quality of life of its peoples through cooperative activities that are people-oriented, people-centred, environmentally friendly, and geared towards the promotion of sustainable development.

(Vientiane Times 31 August 2016)

China, Vietnam and Laos boost cooperation to dismantle wildlife trafficking networks

By Times Reporters

Enforcement agencies from China, Laos and Vietnam have agreed on urgent measures to tackle wildlife trafficking networks operating across their countries. Officers from police, customs, border security and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) of the three countries convened for two days last week in China to strengthen working relationships through face-to-face meetings and agree upon priority actions to strengthen law enforcement cooperation and enable greater impact at a criminal network level. The officers heard that rapid economic growth, increased regional trade, connected transport or communications infrastructure and the removal of trade barriers all pose increased challenges to law enforcement agencies tackling transnational wildlife trafficking. Vietnamese, Chinese and Lao wildlife criminals co-operate internationally, without the same limitations of official protocols, geo-politics, and limited resources faced by many government agencies. Therefore, it was crucial to strengthen the multilateral law enforcement communication between the three countries, Deputy Division Chief from Guangdong Anti-Smuggling Office, Mr Wang Hao said. Communications can build trust among law enforcement agencies for sharing intelligence and immediate information on specific trafficking cases. Consequently, transnational organised smuggling groups can be tackled from both sides. Also, communication can improve the understanding among government and wildlife management agencies in this region for updating the latest policy change, which will enable the agencies to identify false certification during the inspection of declarations, he said. Meeting par-

ticipants identified a number of priority actions that they will promote back in their home countries. For example, participants agreed that wildlife trafficking enforcement cooperation should be integrated into existing joint-government meetings and cooperation mechanisms that are effective in addressing other transnational issues. Wildlife trafficking is a transnational organised crime and has grown in recent years. Greater cooperation between Vietnam and its counterpart agencies in Laos and China is critical to dismantling criminal networks, Senior Lieutenant-Colonel Do Van Phung from the Standing Office of the Viet Nam Central Committee 389 on Combating Smuggling, Commercial Fraud and Counterfeit Goods of Vietnam said. We will recommend that an official relationship be established between the Office for Anti-Smuggling of China and Steering Committee 389 of Vietnam at provincial levels to support this in the coming years, he said. Participants proposed the establishment of a joint-agency international task force on wildlife trafficking that would lead the planning and implementation of law enforcement strategies between the three countries. The Lao PDR is committed to continuing cooperation at this level and developing practical means to take joint actions on wildlife trafficking with our colleagues in China and Vietnam, Deputy Director General of the Department of Forest Inspection of the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Mr Linthong Douangphachanh said. The meeting was provided technical support by the Wildlife Conservation Society in partnership with the Chinese Wildlife Conservation Association (CWCA) and the Blue Moon Fund.

(Vientiane Times 31 August 2016)

VAT to be levied at border crossings, effective immediately

By Times Reporters

All people who enter Laos bringing with them goods items valued at over US\$50 will have to pay 10 percent of the goods value to the government as Value-Added-Tax(VAT), with the decision already in force. This is in line with an order by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Mr.SomdyDuangdy dated August 30, 2016, which comes into force from the date of its issuance. Through this decision, the minister has tasked the customs sector to implement the levy on all Lao and foreign passengers entering the country via border crossing points and international airports, while all citizens are required to declare their luggage to customs officials. The decision clarifies that the exemption up to US\$50 valued goods will be realised for those who make not more than two cross border trips per month, bringing non-commercial purpose items or goods for daily household consumption. An official from the Taxation Department explained that if a traveler had a TV set valued at US\$150 with him entering the country, he would have to pay US\$10 (ten percent of the US\$100 in excess of the US\$50 exemption) as VAT. However, this policy will not be offered for frequent cross-border travelers and they will have to pay ten percent of the total value of their goods with no exemptions, according to the decision. This decision also clarified that the

levy on imported goods items is calculated based on their price in the country where they were purchased, with any VAT tax paid in that country excluded from their value. The decision noted that customs officials are given the right to assess the value of goods if their owner does not have all receipts in place, if the value is unclear or if there are no documents at all. According to the decision, the duty is given to the Customs Department to prioritise border customs checkpoints in regards to the implementation of the decision, as well as issue technical instructions in detail on the procedures, methods, design declaration forms, and the tax hand-over mechanisms. The department is also given the duty to disseminate the decision and instruction to civil servants, customs officials, individuals, legal entities or organisations, as well as manage, inspect and report to the minister about the decision's implementation. The decision has been issued pursuant the Law on Customs promulgated since 2011 and the amendment of some articles in the law in 2014, the Law on Value-Added Tax 2014, the Prime Minister's Decree No.80 dated February 28, 2007 on the Ministry of Finance's organisation and activities, and the agreement of the government's economic team at its meeting held last month on this matter.

(Vientiane Times 01 September 2016)

Poor household prevalence drops as poverty reduction push persists

By Times Reporters

The extent of poor families in Laos has continued to decrease after the government and partners mobilised significant funding and efforts to infrastructure development for poverty reduction in priority districts. In the nine months of the year, the National Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (NCRDPE) has helped harness enhanced development and expansion in focus areas in fields of social and cultural affairs, education and health for poverty reduction. Vientiane capital recorded just two families remaining in poverty from the 13 families noted in the beginning of the year, Head of Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Office Mr Kongkeo Vongpaseuth revealed at a meeting held on Monday. This figure represents just 0.001 percent of the capital's total families according to the metrics utilised. The province of Xiengkhuang was able to witness 67 families graduate from poverty, with some 911 families or 2.20 percent of total provincial families are still considered poor according to the definition. Vientiane province was able to see some 178 poor families escape deprivation while 1,033 poor families or 1.29 percent of total provincial families remain so disadvantaged. Meanwhile, Borikhamxay province could note poverty alleviated among some 93 families, with a remaining 2,163 poor families or 4.63 percent of total provincial families still facing a lack of necessary resources. The committee also revealed results

of efforts including allocation of residential and cultivation areas, promotion of agricultural products for food security and nutrition, tourism and cultural promotion, skills development, clean water supply and development village declarations. He said these implementations saw close collaboration by different concerned agencies from central and local authorities as well as support via funding by the government, international agencies and development partners. The committee this year aims to reduce the extent of poverty nationwide from 76,604 families to 71,025 families, a reduction of at least 5,579 or 0.48 percent. To achieve the target, the committee will continue to undertake priority works and improve implementation of rules on rural development and poverty eradication to be in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's direction. The committee should boost cooperation and coordination with different agencies to achieve better development outcomes, he said. He said there are many rural areas including historic areas and districts known for their revolutionary heroism still requiring improvements but the government has limited funding to undertake necessary developments there. As such, efforts from different sectors including government agencies, private sector operators, international organisations and development partners were still needed, he said.

(Vientiane Times 01 September 2016)

US President prepares first-ever visit to Laos

By Times Reporters

US President Barack Obama will pay an official state visit to Laos from September 5-7 in response to an invitation from Lao President Mr Bounnhang Vorachit, the Presidential Office has announced. US President Barack Obama. Mr Obama will become the first US president to visit Laos which is expected to further enhance the relationship and cooperation between Laos and the United States of America. He will also attend the 4th Asean-US Summit and 11th East Asia Summit which will be hosted by Laos in the capital next week. Mr Obama is the 44th president of the United States. According to his State Department supplied biography, the President's is the American story; values from the heartland, a middle-class upbringing in a strong family, hard work and education as the means of getting ahead, and the conviction that a life so blessed should be lived in service to others. With a father from Kenya and a mother from Kansas, President Obama was born in Hawaii on August 4, 1961. He was raised with help from his grandfather, who served in Patton's army, and his grandmother, who worked her way up from the secretarial pool to middle management at a bank. After working his way through college with the help of scholarships and student loans, the president moved to

Chicago, where he worked with a group of churches to help rebuild communities devastated by the closure of local steel plants. He went on to attend law school, where he became the first African-American president of the Harvard Law Review. Upon graduation, he returned to Chicago to help lead a voter registration drive, teach constitutional law at the University of Chicago, and remain active in his community. President Obama's years of public service are based around his unwavering belief in the ability to unite people around a politics of purpose. In Illinois State Senate, he passed the first major ethics reform in 25 years, cut taxes for working families, and expanded healthcare for children and their parents. As a United States senator, he reached across the aisle to pass groundbreaking lobbying reform, lock up the world's most dangerous weapons, and bring transparency to government by putting federal spending online. He was elected the 44th President of the United States on November 4, 2008, and sworn in on January 20, 2009. After being re-elected in 2012, the president is currently serving his second and final term, which will end in January 2017. President Obama and his wife, Michelle are the proud parents of two daughters, Malia and Sasha.

(Vientiane Times 02 September 2016)

East Asia- Latin America coordinator role for Laos

By Times Reporters

Laos has been assumed by the members of the Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation (Fealac) as next year's coordinator on cooperation ties between the two regions. The assumption was made at the 17th Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) held in Guatemala from August 24-25. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Economic Department Director General Mr Songkan Luangmouninhone, who is the Lao SOM leader, was in attendance together with senior officials from 36 countries in East Asia and Latin America. At the meeting, the senior officials discussed the improvement of working systems, Fealac enhancement, reviewed the progress of the projects and initiated activities of Fealac for 2015-2016. These include Fealac's socio-political affairs, sustainable development, trade, investment, tourism and micro SMEs, cultural, youth, gender and sports issues, as well as science, technology,

innovation and education working groups. The officials also discussed Fealac's participation in the United Nations' Agenda on Sustainable Development towards 2030, Troika System building, Fealac fund establishment, the possibility of organising a Fealac Summit, and preparations for Fealac's 8th Foreign Ministers Meeting to be held next year in the Republic of Korea. The Fealac Senior Officials meeting has endorsed the Fealac action plan, proposals on monitoring Fealac cooperation projects, as well as proposals for a new country-coordinator, and co-chair, with Laos elected as the coordinator for the cooperation mechanism between the two regions next year, which is also the 20th anniversary of Fealac. The Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation is the only body exclusively meant to enhance dialogue and cooperation between the countries of the two regions.

(Vientiane Times 02 September 2016)

No zika cases detected in Laos

By Times Reporters

Health officials are keeping a close eye on the potential for Zika virus to spread to Laos after a number of cases have been reported in some Asean countries, including Singapore and neighbouring Thailand. A health official in Vientiane told Vientiane Times on Thursday that so far this year Laos has yet to find any persons infected with Zika virus. ♦ But there is a risk of infection if people travel to visit the places overseas where some cases of this disease have been recorded, with the spread of Zika virus, ♦ he said. Zika virus is the cause of microcephaly

or infants born with abnormally small heads but so far no such cases have been recorded. However Zika has the potential to spread in Laos because this disease can be transmitted from people already infected with Zika virus via the bite of the same species of mosquito which carries dengue, of which there are many such mosquitoes in Laos. Laos is taking the same measures to prevent Zika virus as it takes to control dengue, meaning the elimination of the insect's breeding sites to reduce the amount of mosquitoes as much as possible. Recently, one

woman in Vientiane gave birth to a baby with a small head but after health officials travelled to check on the woman and her baby at her home they discovered that the most likely cause of the baby having a small head was that her mother was an amphetamine user. Last month, there were two cases of Zika virus infections in PhonPhisai district of Nongkai province in Thailand, which shares a border with Vientiane, the capital of Laos. Based on the Straits Times in Singapore, mosquito control efforts were in full force on Thursday (September 1) morning, a day after it was revealed that the Zika virus might have spread outside the initial Aljunied-Sims Drive cluster. The Ministry of Health (MOH) said on Wednesday night that a new potential cluster had emerged in Bedok North Avenue 3, where three previously reported cases live. At around 8.30am

on Thursday, fumigation operations were carried out around housing blocks in the area and chemicals were sprayed into drains to prevent mosquitos breeding. According to The Nation in Thailand, the number of detected Zika infections in Thailand has jumped significantly this year compared to recent years. Between 2012 and 2015, an average of just five people were recorded as infected with the Zika virus each year. But in the first six months of this year, at least 97 people in Thailand have been diagnosed with the disease. And over the past week, new infections have been detected in Chiang Mai, Chanthaburi, Phetchabun and Beung Khan provinces. In Laos, a total of 18 cases with Zika virus were discovered in laboratory screenings from 2013 to 2015, but there have been no more cases so far.

(Vientiane Times 02 September 2016)