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Nation lowers economic growth target

By Somsack Pongkhao

The government has decided to lower its economic growth target from 7.5 percent to 7-7.3 percent next year in the aftermath of the country's revenue shortfall and global economic slowdown. The economic slowdown in China, falling commodity prices on the world market and slowdown in the country's exports and investment have all impacted on the Lao economy. A senior economist from the National Economic Research Institute Dr Leeber Leebouapao told *Vientiane Times* on Wednesday that not many new mega projects have been proposed in Laos in recent months. The decline in investment value, which previously served as the main driver for growth, has directly impacted on our economy, Dr Leeber said. What we hope now is the start of the almost-US\$7-billion railway project linking Vientiane to Laos-China border will contribute to sustainable economic growth in the country. China is considered a key partner of Laos for trade and investment. Consequently, the Chinese economic slowdown has resulted in China importing smaller quantities of agricultural products from Laos. China's GDP growth was 6.9 percent in 2015, the slowest in 25 years, but it contributed significantly to the growth of the world economy, according to a *China Daily* report. In the first half of 2016, it registered even lower GDP growth of 6.7 percent. Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund forecast in July that China's GDP growth this year would be only 6.6 percent. From 2011 to 2015, China's average

GDP growth was 7.3 percent while the global average was only 2.4 percent, with the United States, Japan and Germany registering 2.4 percent, minus 0.1 percent and 1.6 percent growth respectively, *China Daily* reported. The Lao economy is projected to grow at a rate of only 6.9 percent this year which is lower than the government's target set at 7.5 percent annually for 2016 to 2020. The government's August meeting held in Vientiane recently agreed to further lower economic growth targets due to both internal and external factors. Declining demand around the world has driven down prices of products, particularly commodities like mining ores and rubber, key exports which generate important income for Laos. Worse still, most Lao rubber farmers are struggling to survive with its declining price on the world market. Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith told a nation-wide budgetary and treasury meeting held in Vientiane in August that government sectors should not rely too much on GDP growth but instead concentrate on addressing poverty and livelihood improvement for local people. The PM's advice came after the country's economic growth relied too much on foreign investment in the resource sector which is considered unsustainable and exhaustible. The value of Gross Domestic Product has reached 102,320 billion kip (US\$12.8 billion) with GDP per capita climbing to 15.8 million kip (US\$1,970).

(*Vientiane Times* 05 September 2016)

UN chief to visit Laos for Asean Summits

By Times Reporters

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is scheduled to land in Laos on September 6 to hold bilateral meetings with heads of state and participate in the Asean-UN Summit, as well as to address the East Asia Summit.



UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. --Photo courtesy UNDP

Mr Ban is also taking part in a series of field visits and side events to the 28th and 29th Asean Summits before leaving Vientiane on September 8, according to a statement from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Office to Laos yesterday. On September 6, Mr Ban Ki-moon will visit the In-Tech Apparel Int., Ltd garment factory at Phonpapao village in Sisattanak district to observe a mobile clinic outreach session on adolescent sexual reproductive health and services coordinated by United Nations Population Fund via the Vientiane Youth Centre. On the same day, he is scheduled to visit Sisattanak district Hospital to discuss youth drug use, treatment approaches and hospital care in Laos coordinated by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime/World Health Organisation. On September 7, Mr Ban Ki-moon will take part in the launch ceremony of national Sustainable Development Goal 18 on Lives safe from UXO, which will be held at the National Convention Centre in the presence of Lao Prime Minister Mr Thongloun Sisoulith, Minister

of Foreign Affairs Mr Saleumxay Kommasith and Minister of Labour and Social Welfare Dr Khampheng Saysompheng. Mr Ban Ki-moon will also join the signing Ceremony of the Laos UN Partnership Framework 2017-2021 at the National Convention Centre in the presence of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Mr Somdy Duangdy and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Saleumxay Kommasith. In the afternoon, Mr Ban Ki-moon will visit the UXO Lao Training Centre in Elay Village, Naxaithong district for an introduction to UXO contamination and clearance in Laos coordinated by UNDP. Ban Ki-moon is the eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations. His priorities have been to mobilise world leaders around a set of new global challenges, from climate change and economic upheaval to pandemics and increasing pressures involving food, energy and water. He has sought to be a bridge-builder, to give voice to the world's poorest and most vulnerable people, and to strengthen the organisation itself. I grew up in war, the Secretary-General has said, and saw the United Nations help my country to recover and rebuild. That experience was a big part of what led me to pursue a career in public service. As Secretary-General, I am determined to see this organisation deliver tangible, meaningful results that advance peace, development and human rights. Mr Ban took office on January 1 in 2007. On June 21 in 2011, he was unanimously re-elected by the General Assembly and will continue to serve until December 31 in 2016. Highlights of his tenure include promoting sustainable development, empowering women, supporting countries facing crisis or instability and other important related issues.

(Vientiane Times 05 September 2016)

Asean officials finalise documents for summits

By Times Reporters

Asean officials on the weekend finalised draft documents for the 28th and 29th Asean Summits and related summits scheduled to take place back-to-back from September 6-8 in Vientiane.



Permanent representatives of the 10 Asean member countries link hands during Saturday's meeting.

On Saturday, permanent representatives of the 10 Asean member countries met at their 14th meeting with discussion focused on finalising drafted outcome documents of the Asean Senior Officials' Meeting, Asean Coordinating Council Meeting and the 28th and 29th Asean Summits and related summits. Yesterday, the Asean officials also met for drafting the summits' outcome documents. Today, the Asean Senior Officials' Preparatory Meeting will also be convened to finalise arrangements for the summits. Minister to the Prime Minister's Office and Asean Senior Officials' Meeting Leader of Laos, Mr Alounkeo Kittikhoun announced on Friday that Laos was ready to play the role of Asean chair and host the 28th and 29th Asean Summits and related summits. He confirmed that preparations including arrangements for security, ac-

commodation, food and transport, and all other facilities were well organised. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Asean Department Director General Mr Phongsavanh Sisoulath told *Vientiane Times* recently that around 5,000 people were expected to come to Laos during the Summits. These were leaders, official delegates, media personnel and business leaders. During the 3-day summits, Prime Minister Thongloun as the chair of Lao Asean Chairmanship this year, will host and chair at least 11 summits. The 28th Asean Summit will discuss Asean Community building efforts especially the implementation of the Asean Community Vision 2025 and the way forward, while the 29th Asean Summit will focus discussion on Asean's external relations and future direction as well as exchange views on regional and international issues of common interest and concern. The Asean+1 Summits will review cooperation, discuss future directions and exchange views on regional and international issues. The 19th Asean Plus Three (China-Japan-Republic of Korea) Summit and the 11th East Asia Summit, a forum of Leaders from 18 countries (10 Asean Member States, China, Japan, India, the Republic of Korea, Russia, Australia, New Zealand and United States) will review and discuss the future direction of cooperation with Asean as well as exchange views on regional and international issues. Over 1,000 foreign media personnel from 256 international media organisations have registered to cover the summits, officials in charge have confirmed.

(Vientiane Times 05 September 2016)

Asean leaders push for prosperous community

By Times Reporters

The Asean Summits opened yesterday in Vientiane with regional leaders pushing forward the realisation of the Asean Community Vision 2025 to build a prosperous community. Delivering his opening remarks, President Bounnhang Vorachit called for Asean member countries to work together to enhance regional economic integration and expand relations with regional and international partners.



President Bounnhang Vorachit (sixth left) and other Asean leaders link hands at the opening of the Summits. --Photo Phoosab

We should work together towards further advancing the vibrant, sustained and highly integrated economies, enhancing Asean connectivity, the president told the opening ceremony at the National Convention Centre. Leaders from the 10 Asean member states, the Asean Secretary General and delegates attended the opening ceremony of the 28th and 29th Asean Summits and related summits. The president called for support for efforts to narrow the development gap within Asean through various mechanisms, including the Initiative for Asean Integration (IAI). He said Asean should further strengthen external cooperation in various forms and modalities as appropriate, corresponding to the growing number of countries and regional and international organisations that ex-

press interest in engaging with Asean to ensure maximum benefits to Asean, taking into account the existing potential.

Asean established its community in December last year to form a single market and production base, becoming the world's sixth largest economy, and an integral and central part of the evolving regional architecture, the president said. In 2015, the region's combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reached US\$2.43 trillion. Asean's economy is projected to grow at an annual rate of 7 percent. The president described Asean as a region of opportunity given its economic potential and growth prospects, combined with its uniqueness, characterised by varying political systems, diverse cultures, religions and languages, and said it enjoys peaceful coexistence, harmony and cooperation under the Asean Community through one identity and one vision. I am of the view that the Asean Community is a community of opportunities not only for the over 620 million people of Asean but also for countries outside the region, he added. President Bounnhang noted that regional and international environments have undergone challenges in recent years including security challenges, terrorism, extremism, natural disasters, climate change, migration crisis, trafficking in persons, territorial disputes and armed conflicts among others. There is a need for Asean to closely follow these developments and continue to enhance Asean cooperation and collaboration with the international community to respond to and address the challenges in a timely manner. The Lao president suggested that Asean must continue adhering to Asean's principles in promoting the relevance and enhancing the centrality of Asean in its relations with external partners based on the Asean Way and

in accordance with the particularity and reality of the Asean region, moving towards a dynamic, rules-based, people-oriented, and people-centered Asean Community. He told the guests that Asean has become an important component in the Lao PDR's foreign policy based on the principle of peace, independence, friendship and cooperation. Since joining Asean in 1997, the Lao PDR has actively participated in the cooperation frameworks within Asean and between Asean and external partners. President Bounnhang said Laos has witnessed sustained economic growth over the past five years and recently adopted the next five-year national socio-economic development plan as well as the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2025 and the Vision 2030. These aim at further advancing national socio-economic development while contributing to the implementation of the Asean Community Vision 2025 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. The president expressed his profound thanks and appreciation to all countries and regional and international organisations for their valuable

support and assistance accorded to the Lao PDR during its Asean Chairmanship 2016. In his welcoming remarks, Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith as the Chair of the Summits stressed the need for Asean to effectively implement the Asean Community Vision 2025 and the three community blueprints to advance the Asean Community. In this spirit, the Lao PDR has adopted the theme: Turning Vision into Reality for a Dynamic Asean Community for its 2016 Asean Chairmanship and identified eight priorities covering the three pillars of the Asean Community in order to realise it. A number of related meetings were also convened yesterday including the 14th Asean Political-Security Community Council Meeting, and the 18th Asean Coordinating Council (ACC) Meeting. The Prime Minister of the Lao PDR chaired the Asean Leaders' Interface with Representatives of the Asean Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA). Asean leaders also signed the Asean Declaration on One Asean, One Response: Asean Responding to Disasters as One in the Region and Outside the Region.

(Vientiane Times 07 September 2016)

Laos, US unveil comprehensive partnership

By SomsackPongkhao

Laos and the United States have unveiled a comprehensive partnership aimed at starting a fresh era of bilateral relations based on mutual respect and benefits.



President BounnhangVorachit accompanies US President Barack Obama to inspect a guard of honour in Vientiane yesterday. --Photo Khamphan

The new partnership was revealed during talks held in Vientiane yesterday between President BounnhangVorachit and US President Barack Obama. The new comprehensive partnership will lay the foundations for the two nations to cooperate in the future, particularly in areas relating to political and diplomatic relations, trade and economic ties, education and training, environment and health, fighting drug trafficking, UXO clearance, human rights, culture, sports and tourism. Mr Obama arrived in Laos on Monday in response to an invitation from President Bounnhang. He is the first US president to visit Laos. An official ceremony to welcome Mr Obama took place yesterday morning before the bilateral meeting took place. The two sides issued a joint statement which outlined frameworks for enhancing their cooperative relations based on mutual respect for each other's political system, as well as respect for one another's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, which will contribute to peace, stability and cooperation in the region and the world. The US will pro-

vide an additional US\$90 million for Laos' Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) sector over the next three years and US\$27 million for the school meals programme over the next five years, according to the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The US will also provide US\$6 million for a three-year community hygiene and food programme for mothers and children. The two sides on Monday signed a Memorandum of Understanding to build and operate the Lao-American Nutrition Institute (LANI) in Vientiane between the Ministry of Health, the US government and Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU). During the bilateral meeting, the two sides reviewed their past cooperation and discussed future cooperation, notably in areas related to UXO clearance, US Missing in Action personnel, efforts to combat drug trafficking, trade, investment, education, health and social culture. They also touched on cooperation in areas related to the Mekong sub-region. Laos and the US resumed normal trade relations in 2004 and since then the value of trade between the two countries has increased five-fold. In 2005, the value of two-way trade was US\$14 million but rose to US\$84.9 million in 2011 before declining to US\$69.7 million in 2015. Concerning the investment outlook, the US Ambassador told Lao media recently that in general major or multinational US companies based in Japan, the United States and Europe are looking at Laos not as an isolated market (6.5 million people) but as part of the Asean Economic Community (a 10 nation bloc and a market of over 600 million people). As such, Laos becomes a much more attractive investment proposition for multinational companies. For instance, Coca Cola, which opened a plant in Laos last year, is not only manufacturing products for Laos but also for Thailand and other countries.

(Vientiane Times 07 September 2016)

Chile, Egypt, Morocco become parties to amity treaty in Southeast Asia

By Times Reporters

Chile, Egypt and Morocco have officially become parties of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), bringing the signatories to 35 countries. A signing ceremony for the accession to the treaty by the three countries took place yesterday in Vientiane, following the Asean agreement made at the 49th Asean Foreign Ministers Meeting held in the capital in July. The TAC entered into force in 1976, with Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines as founders of Asean, the initial signatories of the TAC. The purpose of this treaty is to promote perpetual peace, everlasting amity and cooperation among the signatory countries' peoples which would contribute to their strength, solidarity and closer relationships. Furthermore, the treaty provides for enhancing cooperation in economic, trade, social, technical and scientific fields as well as the acceleration of economic growth in the region by promoting greater utilisation of the agriculture and industries of the nations in Southeast Asia, the expansion of their

trade and the improvement of their economic infrastructure. All ten Asean member states are parties to the TAC. Other signatories are non-Asean member countries, including China, Russia, the United States, Papua New Guinea, India, Japan, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Mongolia, Australia, France, Timor, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Turkey, Canada, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Brazil. The accession to the TAC by Chile, Egypt, and Morocco brings the signatories of the treaty to 35 and reflects the importance of the TAC as a code of conduct governing relations between states as well as the contributions of the TAC to promoting regional and international peace and stability over the past 40 years and beyond, a press release from yesterday's signing ceremony read. In this regard, Asean agreed to consider new applications to be parties to the TAC in accordance with the guidelines on the accession to the TAC.

(Vientiane Times 07 September 2016)

New institute to improve nutrition in Laos

By Times Reporters

The Ministry of Health, the US government and Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU) on Monday signed two Memorandums of Understanding to build and operate the Lao-American Nutrition Institute (LANI) in Vientiane. The institute will help prevent malnutrition and promote health and well-being throughout Laos. This three-year project worth about US\$3.7 million will provide training to nutrition managers and clinical dietitians over the next five years. OHSU

will train dietitians at the institute and help Lao experts to respond to the core drivers behind malnutrition throughout the country. When completed, the institute will have classrooms, a lecture hall, outpatient and inpatient clinical assessment and intervention areas, and a clinical laboratory. It will also include a teaching/demonstration kitchen and café featuring innovative food products and to display the research efforts being studied; outdoor training facilities to simu-

late typical rural home environments to evaluate innovative and adaptive food preparation techniques and storage methods; and a community-based demonstration garden to display and test garden-to-family' sustainable agriculture methods, hygienic animal husbandry practices, and health-promoting environmental initiatives. Speaking at the signing ceremony, Minister of Health Associate Prof. Dr Bounkong Syhavong said the nutrition training provided by LANI will improve community nutritionists' skills. They will then return to practice their acquired new knowledge and skills in the community and help to combat malnutrition. I believe that this nutrition partnership will help prevent malnutrition and promote health and well-being among Lao people and successive generations, he added. The new institute is expected to be built in Dongphosy village, Hadxaifong district. This landmark achievement represents the culmination of three years of planning and cooperation between the US and Lao governments. As technical advisers and teachers, OHSU and other regional partners will offer over 85 years of experience training registered dietitians. Graduates of LANI's clinical

dietetics and community nutrition management programme will work at national, provincial and community hospitals and with community leaders throughout Laos to address malnutrition, a top health priority in Laos. Although significant advancements have been made to reduce malnutrition in recent years, the overall rates of stunting and wasting remain at 35.6 percent and 9.6 percent respectively, among children under the age of five. In addition, the US assistance will also support national strategy on nutrition until 2025 and the Ministry of Health's plan for 2016-2020. So far, the United States has provided funding to buy iron-folic acid and deworming tablets, therapeutic food supplements, seasonal influenza and polio vaccines, and is also providing technical support to the communicable disease control programme for neglected tropical diseases, field epidemiological training, and epidemiological laboratory equipment. Associate Prof. Dr Bounkong, US Ambassador to Laos Mr Daniel Clune and a representative of Oregon Health and Science University, Dr Sara Schwanke Khilji, signed the Memorandums of Understanding, witnessed by other personnel involved.

(Vientiane Times 07 September 2016)

UN Secretary-General visits drug rehab centre

By Times Reporters

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon yesterday visited a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts at Sisattanak District Hospital in Vientiane to observe the treatment and counselling services provided for drug users. Opened in January 2015, the treatment centre has served as a pilot initiative for Laos, offering community-based treatment and counselling services to drug users and

their families from the surrounding area. Like other parts of Laos, Sisattanak district has been badly impacted over recent years by a steadily increasing supply of inexpensive methamphetamine. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) country programme that supports the treatment centre has started implementing similar community-based treatment programmes in sev-

en additional district hospitals, with plans to expand to five more. As part of the programme, medical staff have received training on drug treatment and counselling approaches, and have visited other hospitals to learn from the experience of other medical practitioners. The Sisattanak treatment centre and others supported by the UNODC programme are also provided with equipment and medicines needed for their work. During his visit, Mr Ban met with patients and their families, as well as doctors, nurses and outpatient counsellors, to discuss the community-based treatment approach, and the importance of having a treatment centre in the community close to where patients live. Director of Sisattanak District Hospital Dr Khone Savanh Thephavong said that about 170 drug users had received treatment at the centre, with most coming from Vientiane and the provinces of Borikhamxay and Savannakhet. The Secretary-General commended the Lao government for embracing the programme, saying Having a treatment centre in the community close to young people and families impacted by methamphetamine is a positive step. While it is very concerning that the drug problem has continued to deteriorate here in Laos and in the region generally, it is good to see that UNODC as-

sistance through the community-based treatment model is making a difference in people's lives. As he left the clinic, Mr Ban spoke to staff and praised the excellent work being done to promote a comprehensive package of drug use prevention, treatment and care interventions that is based on evidence. I am impressed by the dedication of the staff, but I am even more impressed by the young people and families who had the courage to discuss how drug use has impacted their lives. They need support, and this is the kind of programme the United Nations can, and should, expand. He also said the United Nations would work with the Lao government to provide alternatives to incarceration for drug users who are victims of the drug trade and who are often stigmatised. He emphasised that efforts need to be intensified quickly in both the country and the region to help develop drug use prevention, care and treatment programmes within communities and with family support, with a focus on vulnerable young people. Today Mr Ban will attend a launch ceremony for the national Sustainable Development Goal 18 on Live safe from UXO, a signing ceremony of the Lao PDR-UN Partnership Framework 2017-2021, and visit the UXO Lao Training Centre.

(Vientiane Times 07 September 2016)

Laos launches SDG 18 to make lives safe from UXO

By Times Reporters

Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon yesterday inaugurated the Lao PDR's own national Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on unexploded ordnance (UXO) during the ongoing Asean Summits. The SDGs have been drawn up by the United Nations as targets for developing countries. Goal No. 18, which relates specifically to Laos, is Lives safe from UXO; remove the UXO obstacle to national development.



Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith (right) and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon unveil a plaque depicting the UN Sustainable Development Goal 18 bearing the slogan Lives Safe from UXO. -- Photo Khamphan

The logo shows, on a red background, a disabled person walking away from cluster munitions on a crutch, towards an empowered, self-reliant future. At the SDG 18 launch yesterday, which was attended by high-ranking Lao officials and the UN Resident Coordinator, representatives of UN agencies and donor representatives, a renewed commitment was expressed for a future safe from UXO in the Lao PDR, and for dignified lives for all UXO survivors, many of whom have life-long needs. Speaking at the event, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said More than half of the casualties caused by UXO in the Lao PDR in recent years have been children, most often young boys. With SDG 18, we aim to put an end to this horri-

ble trend, once and for all. The socio-economic impact of UXO contamination means that people lack confidence in the safety of their land, which in turn has negative impacts on the income of rural farmers and their families and inhibits the development of the whole country. I welcome the government's commitment to free its people from UXO, with a powerful tool like a national SDG which will make sure efforts are coordinated for full impact, he said. Ban Ki-moon added that with the implementation of the SDGs, the United Nations is delivering on its promise to leave no one behind. He acknowledged the support of national institutions, development partners and civil society organisations, which are all crucial for the implementation of the SDGs in the Lao PDR. Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith stressed the ambitious targets that come with SDG18, saying Our government, through SDG 18, will make sure that UXO is cleared to the extent possible by 2030, in high-risk areas, which are often the poorest areas of the country. We will also focus on ensuring that all survivors receive the support they need to lead dignified lives. For us to be successful we rely on a joint effort, he added. As a first step in implementing SDG 18, the Lao government is planning to carry out a comprehensive national survey of UXO contamination, which will help to target clearance work in high-risk areas and reduce the number of casualties. SDG 18 is the newest addition to a set of 17 globally agreed goals which form the core of a new sustainable development agenda that came into effect at the beginning of the year, according to press release from the United Nations in the Lao PDR. The Lao PDR, together with all other 192 UN member states, endorsed the SDGs at the General Assembly in New York in September 2015 and has since made inroads in incorporating them into national

plans and policies. The SDGs aim to end poverty, fight injustice and inequality and tackle climate change by 2030, thus advancing the globe onto a sustainable development path. The Lao PDR decided to further address its legacy from the Indochina War (1964-1973) by creating its own SDG on UXO, whose targets aim to reduce casualties, address the needs of victims and clear the country in a way that most benefits the

poorest parts of the population, the UN press release reported. The Lao PDR has also been a leading advocate for the Convention on Cluster Munitions, an international agreement which entered into force in 2010, obliging State Parties to clear contaminated areas, destroy stockpiles and provide assistance to victims of cluster munitions accidents.

(Vientiane Times 08 September 2016)

Asean adopts integration work plan to enhance competitiveness

By Times Reporters

Asean leaders adopted a five-year integration work plan on Tuesday in Vientiane, aiming to narrow the development gap, enhance the region's competitiveness and support the implementation of the three Community Blueprints. The third Work Plan of the Initiative for Asean Integration (IAI Work Plan III), which is an integral part of the Asean 2025: Forging Ahead Together, was adopted at the 28th Asean Summit opened on the day in the Lao capital. Built upon the first IAI Work Plan that was launched in 2000, the IAI Work Plan III continues to provide technical assistance to Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV), which joined Asean between 1995 and 1999, to enhance their capacity in implementing their regional commitments, according to the Asean Secretariat. The work plan focuses on five strategic areas including food and agriculture; trade facilitation; micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs); education; as well as health and well-being. The IAI Work Plan III affirms Asean's continued efforts to assist CLMV countries to meet Asean-wide targets and commitments towards realising the goals of the Asean Community. New features in the work plan include greater involvement of

CLMV officials in developing, coordinating and monitoring of activities as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress and measure outcomes. Since the start of the first IAI Work Plan, more than 600 projects and activities worth over US\$102 million have been implemented. The development gap has been narrowed due to the income and trade growth of CLMV countries in the past decade (2006-2015). The average GDP growth rate of each of these countries was between 6 percent and 8.7 percent, compared to the region's average of 5.2 percent. Within the same period, the merchandise trade of CLMV leapt upwards by between 2.5 and 5.8 fold. CLMV countries also played an increasing role in regional trade, contributing 16.9 percent of Asean's total merchandise trade of US\$2.28 trillion in 2015, an increase from only 6.4 percent in 2006. Despite the economic growth, CLMV countries, however, have the lowest incomes among Asean member states three of them are categorised as least-developed countries by the United Nations. Meanwhile, the scale and complexity of Asean's commitments and agreements have grown substantially as regional integration gathers pace.

(Vientiane Times 08 September 2016)

US President recognises Laos' struggle against UXO

By Somsack Pongkhao

US President Barack Obama has acknowledged the ongoing struggle that everyday Lao people still face coping with unexploded ordnance (UXO) across the developing Southeast Asian nation. The US President made the remarks while visiting the Cooperative Orthotic & Prosthetic Enterprise (COPE) Centre in Vientiane yesterday and meeting people who had been injured in UXO-related accidents. We have to force ourselves to remember that war is not just about words written in books, or the names of famous men and battles. War is about the countless millions who suffer in the shadows of war - the innocents who die, and the bombs that remain unexploded in fields decades after, Mr Obama said. For the United States, one of the wars from our history is the conflict called the Vietnam War. It's a long and complicated conflict that took the lives of many brave young Americans. But we also know that despite its American name, what we call it, this war was not contained to Vietnam. It included many years of fighting and bombing in Cambodia and here in Laos. Obama said that in the 1960s and 70s, America's intervention in Laos was a secret to the American people. However for the people of Laos, obviously, this war was no secret. Over the course of roughly a decade, the United States dropped more bombs on Laos than on Germany and Japan during World War II. For the people of Laos, the war did not end when the bombs stopped falling. Eighty million cluster munitions did not explode. They were spread across farmlands, jungles, villages, rivers, he said. As

President of the United States, I believe that we have a profound moral and humanitarian obligation to support this work. We're a nation that was founded on the belief in the dignity of every human being. On Tuesday, the US President announced that America would double its assistance to Laos for UXO clearance, from US\$15 million last year to US\$30 million in the coming year. The assistance, which totals US\$90 million over the next three years, would support a national survey to locate UXO, clearance, risk education and assistance for victims, according to the US Embassy. The COPE Centre is located in central Vientiane and receives US government funding to provide people with disabilities, including UXO survivors, with access to prosthetic and rehabilitation services. At the centre, the US President met a UXO survivor, Thoumy Silamphan, who was injured as a boy when a device exploded in Xieng Khuang province. We see the determination in the survivors of UXO accidents. Some of you heard me talking to Thoumy Silamphan, who joins us here today. When he was just a young child, he was badly wounded by a UXO explosion and lost his left hand. But rather than losing hope, he's dedicated his life to providing hope for others. Through his organisation, the Quality of Life Association, Thoumy has helped survivors get medical care, find work, and rebuild their lives with a sense of dignity, Obama said. Since 1993 the US government has provided over US\$100 million for UXO-related assistance in Laos.

(Vientiane Times 08 September 2016)

Asean adopts master plan on connectivity 2025

By Times Reporters

Leaders meeting at the 28th Asean Summit in Vientiane on Tuesday adopted the Master Plan on Asean Connectivity 2025 (MPAC 2025). Lao Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Saleumxay Kommasith, who is Chair of the Asean Coordinating Council that oversees connectivity matters for the regional body, said the Master Plan on Asean Connectivity 2025 was ambitious but practical. We have designed strong implementation mechanisms to ensure that effective coordination takes place among the various agencies and we can see real change happen over the next 10 years, he said. The MPAC 2025, which succeeds the Master Plan on Asean Connectivity 2010, focuses on five strategic areas: sustainable infrastructure, digital innovation, seamless logistics, regulatory excellence, and population mobility. The master plan was developed in consultation with the relevant Asean Sectoral Bodies and other stakeholders. The remaining initiatives from MPAC 2010 were evaluated and incorporated into the 2025 master plan. Asean needs at least US\$110 billion of infrastructure investment each year to support future growth. MPAC 2025 aims to help investors seize opportunities in sustainable infrastructure by improving project preparation, enhancing infrastructure productivity, and supporting cities in adopting sustainable practices. Digital technologies in Asean could potentially be worth up to US\$625 billion by 2030, and may be derived from increased efficiency and new products and services. Capturing digital innovation requires the establishment

of regulatory frameworks for the delivery of new digital services; support for the sharing of best practices on open data; and equipping micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) with the capabilities to access these new technologies. Improving logistics competitiveness will ease the movement of goods within the Asean community, increasing business opportunities for Asean citizens. MPAC 2025 aims to support this by identifying and addressing key bottlenecks on important trade routes in Asean. Asean Member States have reduced tariffs significantly, benefiting consumers in the region. The new master plan focuses on standards harmonisation, mutual recognition and technical regulations, as well as trade-distorting non-tariff measures in order to achieve regulatory excellence. The number of tourists from outside Asean could reach 150 million by 2025. The MPAC 2025 will focus on providing comprehensive information on travel options and simplifying visa application processes. It will also develop high-quality qualification frameworks in critical vocational occupations, which Asean Member States can implement according to their national circumstances, and encourage greater mobility of intra-Asean university students. With a young population, a strategic location and a range of technologies it can leverage, if implemented effectively, the MPAC 2025 will deliver more economic and educational opportunities for the peoples of Asean and prove that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

(Vientiane Times 08 September 2016)

Japan to develop local human resources for logistics hubs in Laos

By Times Reporters

Through cooperation with the National University of Laos and Savannakhet University, next spring Japan will launch courses in which local students will learn about the logistics employed by Japanese companies. We are steadily fulfilling this pledge in Laos. Laos is like a land bridge that connects different countries, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said yesterday on the occasion of the Asean-BIS in Vientiane. But we want this to go beyond simply acquiring the know-how behind meticulous logistics, he told members of the business community who are driving the economies of Laos and Asean. Instead, by thinking together, we want students to become equipped with the power of building up kaizen in their respective workplaces. That is the wish behind these courses. We would like the people who have studied here to use their experience to immediate effect in Japanese companies that have logistics hubs in Laos. We hope they will come to manage local subsidiaries in the future. Moreover, we wish them to become leaders in driving Laos' industrial development. He said Laos can not only develop through the coming and going of neighbouring countries' goods but can also take a further leap forward by increasing value-added and exporting goods which are made in Laos. 'Let us consider Laos' ancient capital, Luang Prabang - a World Cultural Heritage Site, which a large number of tourists visit every year, Abe said. The morning market in Phousi boasts arrays of freshly picked vegetables and fruit sourced from right nearby. Is there no way to deliver this produce, fresh, across the Asean market, with its 600 million people? he asked. Japan aims at cooperation through which the people of Asean can lead more prosperous daily lives. Let us walk together towards a future when, across Asean, fresh produce from Laos and all its other members comes and goes freely with-

out question, he said. What will bring this about, in addition to human resources, is transportation infrastructure connecting producing regions with markets, along with enhanced transparency and facilitation of trade procedures. Here, there are great hopes for the AEC, he said. In addition to eliminating tariffs, progress is underway in transitioning to a single window' for customs clearance procedures. Abe also recalled December 1965, when five members of the very first corps of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) headed to Laos. One of the members, Ms Masako Hoshino, taught the Japanese language here. Her students were highly aspirational, with broad personal networks and opportunities for interaction. The members of her Lao host family supported each other equally, regardless of gender. She felt very keenly that Japan also had many things to learn from Laos, Abe said. Even after finishing her mission as a member of the volunteers, she remained in Laos for some time. More than 50 years have passed since then, and Japan has now dispatched some 40 thousand JOCVs to 88 countries around the world. At this very moment, there are Japanese all around the world living amongst local communities and putting their heads together with local people as they continue to carry forward this cooperation. For more than 55 years, Japan has been cultivating human resources for industry all throughout the world, centered on Asean. We have fostered 380,000 such workers in total, of which half have been in the countries of Asean, he said. Japan will also push forward resolutely with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership as well, to achieve a high-quality agreement. Japan has learned many things in the course of its history of cooperation with Asean, leading to its current form. It is now looking forward to when investment from

Japan and across the world increases even further, and Asean continues its economic

development.

(Vientiane Times 08 September 2016)

Thailand signs up for more Lao power

By Times Reporters

Thailand has increased its purchase of electricity from 7,000 to 9,000 megawatts from Laos this year to ensure sufficient supply and meet rising demand. A power purchasing agreement was signed on Tuesday, during Prime Minister of Thailand General Prayuth Chan-ocha's visit to Prime Minister of Laos Mr Thongloun Sisoulith, while attending the 28th and 29th Asean Summits and related meetings from September 6-8 in Vientiane. The Lao Prime Minister highly appreciated and valued the attendance of the Thai Prime Minister and his delegation at the Asean Summits and thanked the Thai government for providing regular assistance to Laos, especially basic infrastructure development and Asean chairmanship and the 49th Asean Foreign Ministers Meeting and related meetings last July. The two parties will continue to support relevant sectors of the two countries in escalating Thai trade and investment in Laos, in terms of quality and quantity, and in accordance with the potential and capacity of the countries. In addition, the parties will together resolve obstacles on border trade and cross border transport between the countries, solve the drugs trade and contraband goods, and maintain security along border areas. On this occasion, Lao Minister of Energy and Mines

Dr Khammany Inthirath on behalf of the Lao government and Thai Minister of Energy General Anantaporn Kanjanarat signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on power cooperation, witnessed by the Prime Ministers of the two countries. Thailand currently buys 7,000 megawatts of electricity from Laos annually according to a MoU signed in 2007 between the two countries, which expired last year. Of the total 9,000MW of power, most would be generated from hydropower, which is more cost-effective than fossil fuels, *Bangkok Post* reported in July. A source said that under the previous MoU, Thailand agreed to buy 5,421MW of power, 3,578MW of which came from five hydropower plants and one coal-fired power plant. The remaining 1,843MW of power was to come from hydropower plants, which are scheduled to be completed and start commercial operations in 2019. They are the 354MW Xe Pien Xe Namnoy hydropower project, Xayabury Dam (1,220MW) and the Nam Ngiep project (269MW). There are two more hydropower plants in Laos that are set to supply another 1,418MW of power to Thailand. The power purchasing agreements for these plants are still being negotiated.

(Vientiane Times 08 September 2016)

Investment opportunities abound in Laos

By Times Reporters

Vientiane Times has been producing several interesting articles from August 24 in the lead up to the 28th and 29th Asean Summits from September 6-8. These articles are highlighting policies on investment, commercial cooperation, foreigners living in Laos, well-known tourist sites, entertainment venues and shopping sites, as well as where to buy souvenirs from Laos for family members and friends prior to returning home.



An aerial view across Vientiane's thriving downtown.

In terms of investment, Laos is known as 'The Land of Ample Opportunities and Success'. This slogan aptly sums up the country as an investment destination and lets investors know that doing business in Laos has a lot of advantages for both local and foreign companies. By doing business in Laos, investors stand to benefit from a wide range of opportunities, according to the Ministry of Planning and Investment. The ministry notes that, with regard to integration both regionally and internationally, Laos is a member of several international trading bodies and enjoys General Special Preference privileges with 42 countries, Normal Trade Relations with the USA, bilateral investment treaties with 27 countries and is also a member of the World Trade Organisation. This should convince foreign investors of the country's commitment to the international arena. The Lao National Chamber of Com-

merce and Industry (LNCCI) says that as a member of the Asean Economic Community, Laos is open to trade and investment by the other Asean Member States and trading partners in the Asia-Pacific region and around the globe. The LNCCI reports that Laos is an emerging investment destination and welcomes foreign investors and companies. With GDP growth rates on average 6-8 percent in the past decade, Laos is moving towards middle-income economy status and pursuing its unique way of modernising the economy while maintaining its cultural heritage. The Ministry of Planning and Investment says that in terms of comparative advantages, Laos has plentiful natural resources with unexploited, clean energy, large areas of fertile agricultural land, attractive tourist sites, and virtually no harmful natural disasters. Also in its favour, Laos is one of the most politically stable countries in the region. It enjoys socio-economic and financial stability, strong security and a low crime rate, and liberal laws and regulations that create a favourable business and investment climate. Under the Investment Promotion Law, the country strongly encourages investment in agriculture, industry, handicrafts and services. The details of these investment activities are determined by the government and classified on three different levels based on government priorities. They relate to poverty reduction, the improvement of people's living conditions, construction of infrastructure, human resource development, and job creation. The government provides incentives for all foreign investors. Overseas companies may bring in foreign nationals to conduct feasibility studies as well as to work as technicians, experts, and managers if qualified Lao nationals are not available. It smoothes the way for the provision of entry and exit visas and work permits for expatriate personnel, and guarantees against nation-

alisation, expropriation or requisition of the company's assets without compensation. The government's vision is to transform Laos from a land-locked country to one that is land-linked. At present, there are several routes connecting Asean to China. Road No. 3 connects Thailand, Laos and China (also called the North-South Corridor), while central Laos contains the East-West Corridor or Road No. 9, which connects Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. Investors may also choose to set up business in an economic zone. Laos has over 10 special economic zones and specific economic zones (SEZ), located in Vientiane and the provinces of Khammuan, Savannakhet, Luang Namtha and Bokeo. Investment in an SEZ may be either through general investment or promotional investment. General investment enables developers and investors to invest in any SEZ sector, excluding activities prohibited by the government. These include the trading of arms, drugs and poisonous chemicals, activities that destroy the environment or people's lives and property, services that contravene the country's laws, or any activity that harms the country's peace and orderliness, or its culture. Promotional investment is mainly undertaken in the electronics industry, scientific and technological research for use in production, the manufacture of modern con-

struction equipment, tourism infrastructure, the production and processing of hygienic agricultural products, organic products, production for export, forestation, schools, hospitals, public parks and other investment activities considered appropriate and supported by SEZs. Concerning the lease or concession of government land, the ministry notes that at the local level, each project may operate on degraded forestland of not more than 150 hectares, with a maximum lease or concession period not exceeding 30 years with the option to extend. Alternatively, a project may operate on barren forestland of not more than 500 hectares in size, with a maximum lease or concession period not exceeding 30 years with the option to extend, to be decided on a case by case basis. At the central level, a project may operate on degraded forestland of 150-15,000 hectares in size, with a maximum lease or concession period of between 30 and 40 years, with an extension to be allowed and determined on a case by case basis. Alternatively, a project may operate on barren forestland of 500-30,000 hectares, with a maximum lease or concession period of 40 to 60 years, and a possible extension to be decided on a case by case basis.

Asean summits wrap up to great acclaim

By Somsack Pongkhao

The Lao government has expressed its satisfaction with its great accomplishment in hosting the 28th and 29th Asean Summits and related summits, which wrapped up in Vientiane yesterday. Speaking at a press conference held shortly after the summits ended, Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith said During all the meetings we had very comprehensive, candid and fruitful discussions.



Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith (centre) addresses a press conference after the Asean summits yesterday. --Photo Khamphan

At least 12 summits took place over the past three days, of which nine involved Asean and its dialogue partners under the Asean Plus One, Asean Plus Three, and East Asia Summit cooperation framework. The summits brought several thousand people to Laos including top leaders, businesspeople and media, putting the landlocked Southeast Asian nation in the global spotlight. More than 1,030 personnel from 256 foreign media organisations came to Laos to cover the summits. The three days of meetings, which began on Tuesday, resulted in the adoption of many joint statements and other important documents. These included declarations on Asean's response to natural disasters, transitioning from informal to formal employment towards decent work promotion in Asean, and the Initiative for Asean Integration work

plan and master plan on Asean Connectivity for 2025. These documents are linked to the eight priority areas under Laos' Asean chairmanship this year and will serve as guidelines for cooperation within Asean and between Asean and its dialogue and external partners. At the 28th Asean Summit in Vientiane on Tuesday, leaders adopted the Master Plan on Asean Connectivity 2025 (MPAC 2025) which stated that Asean needs at least US\$110 billion of infrastructure investment each year to support future growth. MPAC 2025 aims to help investors seize opportunities in sustainable infrastructure by improving project preparation, enhancing infrastructure productivity, and supporting cities in adopting sustainable practices. The number of tourists from outside Asean could reach 150 million by 2025. The MPAC 2025 will focus on providing comprehensive information on travel options and simplifying visa application processes. Also on Tuesday, Asean leaders adopted the third Work Plan of the Initiative for Asean Integration (IAI Work Plan III) aiming to narrow the development gap and enhance the region's competitiveness. Since the start of the first IAI Work Plan, more than 600 projects and activities worth over US\$102 million have been implemented. Asean also accepted the accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia by Chile, Egypt and Morocco. With external partners, Asean leaders held summits with dialogue partners China, Japan, Republic of Korea, India, United States, Australia and the United Nations. Leaders agreed to enhance cooperation in all areas to ensure more efficiency and effectiveness, particularly cooperation in trade, investment, connectivity, tourism and people-to-people exchanges, based on mutual benefits. During the three days of meetings, Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith, representing Laos as the Chair of Asean this

year, hosted several summits including 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. At the closing ceremony, Laos handed over the Chairmanship of Asean to the Philippines but will continue to carry out the role of Asean Chair until December 31, 2016.

(Vientiane Times 09 September 2016)

New Zealand announces UXO clearance package

By Times Reporters

New Zealand will provide NZD10 million (US\$7.2 million), one of the biggest single contributions made through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to Laos' UXO sector.



New Zealand Prime Minister John Key speaks at the UXO Lao Training Centre in Elay village, Vientiane.

The funding will include trialling innovative New Zealand technology which destroys unexploded ordnance (UXO) by melting casings without having to dig up or explode each piece, making it safer and easier to clear, particularly in densely populated or built up areas. The funding will allow for long-term planning by UXO Lao in Xieng Khuang province with financing certainty

for the next four years. The announcement was made yesterday by the Prime Minister of New Zealand Mr John Key during a visit to the UXO Lao Training Centre in Elay village, Naxaithong district, Vientiane. Mr Key said New Zealand has a strong legacy of supporting UXO clearance around the world, including for the past 20 years in Laos, and this funding will make a real difference to the safety and economic prospects of the people there. We are proud to stand alongside the people and government of Laos to continue this important work, he said. The government of New Zealand has been a key partner to the Lao government and the UNDP since 2010, in the effort to reduce the impact of UXO in Xieng Khuang, considered the second most-contaminated province in the country. Minister of Labour and Social Welfare Dr Khampheng Saysompheng acknowledged the impact of New Zealand's support for UXO clearance in Xieng Khuang province since 2010. More than 3,000 hectares of land have been cleared for safe use and important development projects. This has made a huge contribution to the socio-economic development of the province and the country, addressing poverty, reducing the number of casualties from UXO and reducing the risks to affected communities. Casualties from UXO in

Xieng Khuang have reduced significantly from 41 in 2010 to 11 in 2015, due to clearance and mine risk education supported by New Zealand among others. UNDP Resident Representative Ms Kaarina Immonen stressed the importance of sustained support for UXO clearance and victim assistance, saying New Zealand has been a valued partner in this effort. The new contribution announced yesterday was comprehensive. It has been designed together with the government and in coordination with other donors. The grant is long-term, which enables UXO Lao to plan its work, with a focus on Xieng Khuang province. Laos is one of the most heavily bombed countries in the world, per capita, following the Indochina War. The dangerous UXO left behind as a tragic legacy of the war continues to be a threat to the lives of rural populations and a hindrance to the use of land for agriculture and development. UNDP works closely with the Lao government to address the UXO problem.

This engagement is through the national clearance operator UXO Lao and the National Regulatory Authority for UXO and Mine Action in the Lao PDR. The much needed funding boost from New Zealand to UXO Lao in Xieng Khuang province will support 12 UXO clearance teams, one mine risk education team, two UXO survey teams and the purchasing of essential equipment. The contribution will also support the process of completing a national survey of known cluster munitions contamination by 2021, which has been planned by the National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action with the support of UNDP. This week, at a side event to the Asean Summits, Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith and United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon inaugurated Laos' own national Sustainable Development Goal 18 on UXO: Lives safe from UXO; remove the UXO obstacle to national development.

(Vientiane Times 09 September 2016)

Leaders adopt statements to strengthen future cooperation

By Somsack Pongkhao

Several important joint statements have been endorsed during the 28th and 29th Asean Summits which came to an end in Vientiane on Thursday. The statements adopted include the Chairman's Statement of the 28th and 29th Asean Summits, Asean Plus Three Leaders' Statement on Promoting Sustainable Development Cooperation, and the Asean Plus Three Statement on Active Ageing. Other statements were the Asean-Australia Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism, Joint Statement of the 19th Asean-China Summit to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Asean-China Dialogue Relations, and the Joint Statement between Asean and China

on production capacity cooperation. As stipulated in the Chairman's Statement, leaders welcomed the positive progress made in Asean Community building and emphasised the importance of the full and effective implementation of this forward-looking roadmap that will continue to provide guidance in charting a path over the next decade. The leaders also reaffirmed their shared commitment to maintaining and promoting peace, security and stability in the region, as well as to the peaceful resolution of disputes, including full respect for legal and diplomatic processes, without resorting to the threat or use of force, in accordance with the universally recognised principles of internation-

al law. Concerning the Asean Plus Three Leaders' Statement, leaders from Asean and the Plus Three countries (China, Japan and the Republic of Korea) reaffirmed their commitment to implementing the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, adopted in New York in September last year. This is intended to reduce poverty and narrow the development gap within and between countries and to promote the sustainable development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises as well as to promote sustainable tourism cooperation. Concerning the Asean Plus Three Statement on Active Ageing, leaders recognised the growing trend of an ageing population in the region and the need to address the challenges in providing adequate care and support and promoting the quality of life and well-being of older people. They agreed to promote age-friendly communities including in rural areas through sustainable and accessible hard and soft infrastructures, as well as the development of healthcare industries that help older people to be self-reliant in their daily life, and provide convenient access to public services. They also agreed to encourage older people to be economically active after retirement, through

part-time employment, self-employment, tax incentives for entrepreneurs, and the improvement of working environments. Regarding the Asean-Australia Joint Declaration, leaders condemned in the strongest terms the recent terrorist attacks around the world resulting in the unacceptable loss of innocent lives and countless injuries. They agreed to strengthen their cooperation to counter the threat from terrorism and violent extremism through various actions including the exchange of information, law enforcement, border management and the development of effective responses to terrorist threats. In the Joint Statement of the 19th Asean-China Summit, the leaders recognised that Asean-China ties are among the most substantial and dynamic, bring mutual benefits, and contribute to regional peace, stability and prosperity. They also reaffirmed the importance of China's support for Asean integration as well as Asean's efforts in realising Asean 2025: Forging Ahead Together, including through narrowing the development gap and enhancing Asean Connectivity, as well as maintaining Asean Centrality in the evolving regional architecture.

(Vientiane Times 09 September 2016)

Mekong countries, Japan mark cooperation milestone

By Somxay Sengdara

Mekong region countries and Japan have expressed appreciation for the continuing cooperation between Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam and the Land of the Rising Sun. Approval was voiced during the 8th Mekong-Japan Summit held in Vientiane on Wednesday, co-chaired by Lao Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, with the leaders of Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam also in attend-

ance. Cooperation between the five Mekong countries and Japan in the past year focused on the implementation of the New Tokyo Strategy 2015's action plan, and the Mekong-Japan vision of industrial development. The leaders of the five Mekong countries praised the Japanese government's efforts to provide assistance for the development of industrial infrastructure in the Mekong region over the past year. Japan has spent more than one third of the total 750

billion yen allocated as Official Development Assistance in implementing various projects under the New Tokyo Strategy 2015. In relation to assistance provided to Laos, work on the Wattay International Airport expansion has begun and is making progress. Other projects in Laos under Japan's assistance include power transmission in the southern provinces, an upgrade of National Road No. 9, and Vientiane industry development. These projects constitute a significant contribution to industrial and connectivity infrastructure between the Mekong countries as well as regional connectivity and connectivity within Asean, a press release from the meeting noted. Mekong-Japan cooperation between the public and private sectors has seen about 1,000 Japanese companies open businesses in the Mekong countries during the past three years. The Pakxe-Japan SME Special Economic Zone was also established, creating further job opportunities for people in the region. At the summit,

leaders from the Mekong countries and Japan discussed the direction of future cooperation with a focus on the priorities, striving for comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development, human security, and a green Mekong. Japan will continue assistance for the development of various economic corridors in the southern Mekong sub-region through the Vientiane-Hanoi Connectivity Study as part of the Mekong region connectivity initiative, aiming to develop a highway and expressway in the future. Under the Japan-Mekong Connectivity Initiative, Japan will further promote infrastructure development in the Mekong region and make efforts to enhance institutional connectivity through the improvement of systems, development of special economic zones and other industrial bases, industrial promotion measures, improvement of customs procedures and people-to-people connectivity, so that the whole region can benefit from growth.

(Vientiane Times 09 September 2016)

EAS approves three declarations in Laos

By Times Reporters

Leaders of Asean and its eight dialogue partners adopted three important documents at the 11th East Asia Summit (EAS), which was chaired by the Lao Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith in Vientiane, Laos yesterday. The documents include the Vientiane Declaration on Promoting Infrastructure Development Cooperation in East Asia proposed by Laos, EAS Declaration on Strengthening Responses to Migrants in Crisis and Trafficking in Persons and EAS Statement on Non-proliferation. The Asean leaders and its eight dialogue partners (China, Japan, Republic of Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand, the US and Russia) met in the capital of Laos to review the cooperation over the past years, especially the implemen-

tation of six priority areas of the EAS, namely finance, education, energy and environment, global health and communicable diseases, disaster management and Asean Connectivity as well as the decisions and outcome documents of previous summits, particularly the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the 10th anniversary of the East Asia Summit adopted in 2015. The leaders reiterated the importance of the EAS as a leaders-led forum for dialogue on broad strategic, political, and economic issues of common interest and concern, and reiterated the commitment to enhancing the said mechanism with a view to contributing to the promotion of peace, stability and economic prosperity in East Asia and the world at large. At the 10th

EAS in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on November 22, 2015, leaders reaffirmed Asean's central role in the EAS, and Asean's commitment to work in close partnership with all EAS participating countries to ensure that the EAS would continue to be an integral component of the regional architecture. At the previous summit, leaders also determined priority areas of cooperation such as energy, education, finance, global health including pandemics, environment and disaster management, Asean connectivity, according to Asean's official website www.asean.org. They affirmed the importance of continued efforts towards improved energy access and energy affordabil-

ity, addressing regional energy security and sustainability challenges, promoting high quality energy infrastructure and keeping energy markets transparent and competitive. In this regard, the leaders underscored the importance of clean energy, such as renewable energy, energy efficiency and clean technology applications to meet the rising energy demand of the EAS region, and particularly stressed the usefulness of sharing energy supply and demand outlooks across the EAS region to provide input for energy analysis and policy formulation to better understand potential impacts of supply shocks and disasters, according to the website.

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Asean, dialogue partners agree on future direction

By Times Reporters

The Asean and its dialogue partners China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, together with Australia and participants in the Asean-UN Summit and the Asean Plus Three Summit convened in Vientiane on Wednesday to discuss ways forward in various areas of cooperation. Asean leaders participated in the Asean-China Summit to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Asean-China Dialogue Relations, when leaders reaffirmed their commitment to enhance cooperation aimed at achieving a two-way trade target of US\$1,000 billion in 2020. The leaders adopted four important documents: 1) Joint Statement of the 19th Asean-China Summit to Commemorate the 25th Anniversary of Asean-China Dialogue Relations; 2) Joint Statement between Asean and China on Production Capacity Cooperation; 3) Joint Statement on the Observance of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea in the South

China Sea; and 4) Guidelines for Hotline Communications Among Senior Officials of the Ministries of the Foreign Affairs of Asean Member States and China in Response to Maritime Emergencies in the Implementation of the Declaration on the Code of Parties in the South China Sea. These documents will serve as a fundamental basis for Asean-China cooperation in the future. Asean and China agreed to continue with commemorative activities and agreed to designate 2017 as the year of Asean-China Tourism Cooperation. At the 19th Asean-Japan Summit, Asean leaders thanked Japan for its significant contributions to Asean Community building efforts, particularly Japan's assistance in the area of human resource development, capacity building for Asean SMEs, and implementation of the Master Plan on Asean Connectivity and the Initiative for Asean Integration. Japan renewed its

commitment to support Asean connectivity and narrowing the development gap in Asean through the implementation of the Master Plan on Asean Connectivity 2025 and the Initiative for Asean Integration Work Plan (2016-2020), including Japan's new initiative of Partnership for Quality Infrastructure, which aims to provide funding sources for infrastructure projects in the region. Japan will also provide assistance to Asean for human resource development, health, women's and children's development, education innovation, and other fields. Leaders of Asean and the Republic of Korea agreed to enhance cooperation in SME development, business-to-business linkages, connectivity, tourism and other areas in order to achieve a two-way trade volume of US\$200 billion in 2020. The two sides emphasised the importance of expanding cultural cooperation and agreed to work closely in implementing the Asean-ROK Cultural Exchange Year and to officially launch the Asean Culture House in Busan, Republic of Korea in 2017. Leaders from Asean and Australia convened the First Asean-Australia Biennial Summit following the elevation of Asean-Australia Dialogue Relations and noted with satisfaction the progress of Asean-Australia cooperation over the last four decades. Particularly of note was Australia's assistance and support for education institutional capacity building for the Asean Secretariat, regional integration, connectivity, and narrowing development gaps. Asean and Australia reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening the Asean-Australia Strategic Partnership for mutual benefits. During the meeting, leaders adopted the

Asean-Australia Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism. In the 8th Asean-UN Summit, participants noted the Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership between Asean and the UN (2016-2020) and agreed to foster closer cooperation and coordination between the Asean Secretariat and the UN Secretariat to ensure its effective implementation. Asean leaders and the UN Secretary-General also stressed the need to deepen partnerships in the effort to align the Asean Community Vision 2025 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. During discussions at the 19th Asean Plus Three Summit (APT), the leaders of Asean and the Plus Three countries (China, Japan, ROK) underlined the importance of enhancing cooperation including through strengthening the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation, Asean Plus Three Microeconomic Research Office, the Asian Bond Market Initiative, Credit Guarantee Investment Facility, and the APT Emergency Rice Reserve. The APT leaders also noted the Progress Report on the Status of Action Plans for Recommendations of the East Asia Group and adopted two statements, namely the Asean Plus Three Statement on Promoting Sustainable Development initiated by Laos and the Asean Plus Three Statement on Active Ageing. These two statements will provide strategic platforms for APT countries to further strengthen cooperation in promoting sustainable development and the well-being of people in the region. The leaders also discussed various activities to commemorate the 20th anniversary of APT cooperation in 2017.

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