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Party reaffirms determination to fight corruption

(By Somsack Pongkhao)

Taking a tougher stance in the battle against corruption and inappropriate bureaucracy was one of the most important decisions taken this week at the Third Session of the 10th Party Central Committee (PCC). PCC members agreed to strengthen their efforts after learning that corruption and burdensome bureaucracy were occurring in different forms and different levels throughout state sectors. The persistence of these harmful practices is creating challenges for the Party and government in dealing with them and enhancing the role of the Party in leading the nation. The PCC agreed to put in place stronger measures to address undesirable practices within Party and government bodies and to improve the effectiveness of state management and law enforcement. The two-day meeting was chaired by Party Secretary General and President of Laos Mr Bounnhang Vorachit and highlighted the need for the government to further improve its operations. Since the new government, led by Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith, assumed its role in April, the Prime Minister has announced that he will fight corruption, which has been a chronic problem in Lao society for decades. Since then, a number of issues have been addressed, notably in relation to inflated electricity bills, illegal logging, and fuel tariff exemptions. The new government began by transferring state bodies formerly under the Prime Minister's Office to existing ministries in a bid to simplify administration and avoid duplication

among state departments. But the government continues to encounter huge challenges in collecting revenue to meet the target set for the rest of this year and using the budget in the most effective way. At the meeting, participants agreed to build the Party with transparency, encouraging Party members to use their position of high responsibility in the service of the nation and to devote themselves wholeheartedly to this cause. Addressing a nationwide meeting on personnel-organisation affairs in August this year, Mr Bounnhang said immoral members must be removed from the Party and stressed the importance of instilling revolutionary morality in them. Over the past five years, more than 1,800 Party members have failed to follow Party discipline, ranging from minor infringements to major acts of wrongdoing. Some people only joined the Party for their own benefit while others gave bribes in both direct and indirect ways so they could become Party members. The growth in Party membership over the past five years has been partly due to nepotism and, although the number of Party members has increased, the quality is not as high as anticipated. There are currently over 281,000 Party members nationwide, an increase of 27.7 percent compared to 2011. Of this number, 63,748 are women. Members aged between 18 and 39 represent 43 percent of the total figure; those aged between 40 and 49 make up 31 percent; and those aged 51 or more account for 26 percent.

(Vientiane Times 24 September 2016)

Nutrition surveys reveal lower level of child stunting

(By TimesReporters)

The results of two nutrition surveys released in Vientiane this week revealed steady progress in some areas, and remaining challenges to be addressed, according to a UNICEF report delivered on Tuesday. The government and development partners made public the key findings of the 2015 Sub-National Food and Nutrition Security Survey and the National Lao Child Anthropometric Assessment Report. The two surveys were conducted in 2015 by the Ministry of Health and the Lao Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Planning and Investment, with support from UNICEF, World Food Programme, the EU and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Speaking at Tuesday's meeting, Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment Dr Samaychanh Boupha said the Sub-National Food and Nutrition Security survey was designed to provide information on food and nutrition security at the household level, and for women of reproductive age and children under five years of age. The survey serves as a baseline for the National Plan of Action on Nutrition which was adopted and disseminated this year. Among the key findings, the government and development partners highlighted improvements in child stunting. Also addressing the meeting, Deputy Minister of Health Associate Professor Dr Phouthone Moungpak said that among the key findings the Lao Child Anthropometric Assessment had shown a reduction in stunting (height for age) from 44 percent in 2011 to 36 percent in 2015 among children under the age of five. This is good news, suggesting that the national target of reducing stunting to 34 percent by 2015 has nearly been reached. However, the national average masks significant disparities between provinces. The level of stunting ranges from 16 percent in Vientiane to as

high as 54 percent in Oudomxay province, Dr Phouthone added. In addition, the findings indicate improvements in the incidence of child anaemia, early initiation of breastfeeding, antenatal care, and water and sanitation. But the reports also showed alarming levels of child wasting (weight for height) in some provinces, particularly Saravan, Savannakhet and Khammuan. Congratulating the government on the results of the two surveys, UNICEF Representative Ms Hongwei Gao said UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Health and other partners to address the remaining challenges, particularly the high levels of acute malnutrition in some provinces. We are strengthening the supply chain management for nutrition commodities and the development of Interim Guidance on the Management of Acute Malnutrition. We are taking action based on data - this is why up-to-date nutrition data are so important for policy and programme response, she said. Related development partners are also supporting the government to upgrade legislation on the marketing of baby foods, as experts say the country needs a stronger legal environment to control the promotion of formula milk and the marketing of junk foods. Health partners are also tackling the declining coverage of Vitamin A supplementation and deworming of young children, and the low coverage of iron folic supplementation of pregnant and lactating women. All speakers emphasised the importance of continuing to invest in data generation to check if the nutritional status of women and children is taking place and to adjust policies and programmes if needed. Participants also stressed the need to make sure that the surveys are now made available, in various formats, to all nutrition partners.

(Vientiane Times 24 September 2016)

Sustainable Development Goals spur progress in Laos

(By Times Reporters)

The government has further pursued the national development policy and mainstreamed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into its 8th five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016-2020), the Development Strategy 2025, and Vision 2030. Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith outlined the government's stance on the SDGs at the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly held in New York on September 23.



Mr Thongloun Sisoulith.

We regard implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals as our international obligation, which will not only contribute to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but will also bring development benefits to Laos, he said. The government must focus on meeting the goals set in its 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan, Development Strategy 2025, and Vision 2030. These include green growth and sustainable development, maintaining steady economic growth, achieving constant reduction of poverty and graduating from Least Developed Country status. In addition to the 17 SDGs, the Lao government has adopted an additional goal (SDG 18): Lives Safe from UXO. I myself together with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon formally launched the SDG 18 on September 7 in Vientiane, Mr Thongloun said. The targets of this particular SDG are to ensure that by 2030 residual UXO activities are undertaken and all known UXO contamination in high

priority areas and all villages defined as poor' are cleared; that annual casualties from UXO accidents are eliminated to the extent possible; and that all identified UXO survivors and victims have their needs met. Laos is a least developed and landlocked country that continues to face many challenges and impediments in the development of infrastructure and quality human resources, thus requiring continued support and assistance from the international community. I am confident that with the strong determination of the Lao government coupled with the continued cooperation and assistance of the international community, we will be able to achieve those goals, Mr Thongloun said. He went on to refer to the government's support for the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. I very much hope that the Paris Agreement will enter into force by the end of this year and will be effectively implemented. For its part, the government has submitted its Nationally Determined Contributions and integrated climate change, natural disaster risk reduction and management into the National Socio-Economic Development Plan, the prime minister said. Laos continues to hope that the issue of Palestine be resolved by peaceful means by the parties concerned with a view to creating the two independent states of Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace. Laos welcomed the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States of America and the Republic of Cuba, and expressed strong hope that such relations will be further enhanced, leading to the lifting of the embargo on the Republic of Cuba in the near future. I would like to stress that the United Nations must be further strengthened especially in terms of its effectiveness in addressing important global issues. All Member States of the United Nations should extend full support and cooperation and fulfill their interna-

tional obligations in order to address these enormous global challenges, and in particular to implement the SDGs in a timely and effective manner, the prime minister added. Laos reiterates its firm commitment and determination to continue to work closely with the international community to build a more secure, peaceful, just and prosperous world. Laos is proud and honoured to assume the Asean chairmanship in 2016, the first year of the Asean Community. In this spirit, we introduced the theme: Turning Vision into Reality for a Dynamic Asean Community with the aim of realising the Asean Community Vision 2025, Mr Thongloun said. The Asean summits and related summits that were held earlier this month adopted many important documents relating to cooperation within Asean and between Asean and its external partners. All this has contributed

significantly to the common cause of maintaining and promoting peace, stability and cooperation in the region and the world at large, as well as the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. 2016 is the first year of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, including the Sustainable Development Goals. I commend Mr President for choosing the theme 'The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world' for this Session, which is responsive to the real situation, Mr Thongloun added. It is my view that we need to deepen understanding of the SDGs at the national, regional and international levels in order to integrate these goals into our respective national development plans, and to mobilise sufficient resources for the effective implementation of this Agenda, he added.

(Vientiane Times 26 September 2016)

World Bank funds environmental protection projects

(By Times Reporters)

The Environment Protection Fund and the World Bank recently provided funding for the second phase of four environmental and social protection sub-projects in Laos at a cost of more than US\$4 million.



Mr Khampadith Khammounheuang (*right*) exchanges agreements with Deputy Director General of the Pollution Control Department Dr Phengkhamla Phonvisai on Friday.

The first sub-project named Capacity Building for Pollution Control, Waste and Hazardous Chemicals Management will cost US\$699,773 (about 5 billion kip). The project has been signed off by the Executive Director of the Environment Protection Fund under the Ministry of Natural Resources and

Environment, Mr Khampadith Khammounheuang, and Deputy Director General of the Pollution Control Department, Dr Phengkhamla Phonvisai. The second sub-project, named Institutional strengthening on air and noise quality monitoring and the improvement of resources efficiency and transfer appropriate technology for waste management in SMEs aims to build capacity in the natural resources and environment sector to analyse weather quality at a cost of US\$829,000 (over 6 billion kip). The third project, Capacity building for enforcement of environmental and social impact legislation is pegged at US\$1,879,229 or over 15 billion kip. This project looks at the contribution of environmental and social obligations on investment projects focusing on the hydropower, mining, and bridge-road construction sectors. The fourth and final project called General capacity building for scaling up ISP and SEA will cost US\$799,115 (over 6 billion kip). This project looks at environ-

mental planning and management. All sub-projects have been funded by the World Bank through the Environment Protection Fund under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and will run from 2016 to 2020. Friday's signing ceremony was attended by Director General of the Department of Planning and Cooperation of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Dr Saynakhone Inthavong, and World Bank representatives. In June this year the World Bank and the Environment Protection Fund also provided more than US\$2 million

for four sub-projects to strengthen environmental protection in Laos. The projects were titled Enhancing MONRE's DPC Capacity for Natural Resources and Environment Sector Planning and Coordination; Institutional Capacity Building for Protected Areas and Protection Forest Management and Wildlife Conservation; Capacity Building on Social Safeguard Education for the Faculty of Social Sciences at the National University of Laos; and Provincial Huay Ngua Protected Area Management Project.

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Funds allocated for railway compensation awards

(By Somsack Pongkhao)

The government has allocated almost 5 billion kip for authorities to finance work in the payment of compensation to those who will lose land when the Laos-China railway is built. However, the actual payments will be carried out by the joint venture company that is building the railway, from a project budget of almost US\$6 billion.



The railway network in China. (File photo)

The compensation awards and demarcation of the railway route must be completed as soon as possible to enable the start of construction of the historic railroad in December. Detailed demarcation of the project corridor through railway stations in Vangvieng district, Luang Prabang district and Oudomxay province is also essential before construction can begin. Once complete, the railway will link Vientiane with the Chinese border over a distance of 427 km. Government bodies are currently holding seminars to inform officials of the significance and

economic benefits of the railway for Laos. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a seminar in Vientiane last week, presented by Deputy Foreign Minister Mr Sengphet Hounbounnuang. Mr Sengphet said the railway was a vital part of efforts to transform Laos from a 'landlocked' to a 'land-link' nation in order to boost socio-economic development. The rail link would help to cut transport costs and spur the production of goods for export. Director of the Laos-China Railway construction project and Director of the Lao National Railway Company, Dr Koung Souk-Aloun, told *Vientiane Times* recently that the railway will be built by Chinese companies using advanced technology. Lao companies will also benefit, with 20 being selected as sub-contractors for construction work. President of the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mr Oudet Souvannavong, told *Vientiane Times* it was still unclear which construction jobs would be allocated to local companies and to what extent labourers and foodstuff would be provided by Laos. We have not been informed about these issues. Of course we are preparing ourselves to take part in and support this project, Mr Oudet said. Progress has already been made in preparing for construction. During an official visit to

Laos by China's Prime Minister Li Keqiang on September 8-9, some 20 cooperation documents were signed by the two nations. One of those documents concerned development plans for the Laos-China railway. The planned 1.435-metre standard-gauge single track railway will have 33 stations, of which 21 will be operational initially, according to the Ministry of Public Works and

Govt to establish municipalities, cities

(By Souksakhone Vaenkeo)

The government has instructed ministries and provinces to work towards establishing municipalities and cities so as to systemise and modernise the cities and their administration and make them financially self-sufficient. Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith issued an order recently asking ministries and provinces to form committees to study and prepare for the establishment of municipalities and cities.



View of Pakxe district in Champassak province, which looks set to meet the criteria for upgrade to a city.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has issued an instruction to translate the Prime Ministerial Order, Director General of the ministry's Local Administration Department Mr Bounphak Sombandith told *Vientiane Times* yesterday. Towns or districts must meet certain criteria before they can be upgraded to municipalities or cities. These criteria relate to population density, public amenities, and services. Provinces are expected to submit to the government the names of towns or districts that are likely to meet the criteria by

Transport. There will be 72 tunnels with a total length of 183.9 km, representing 43 percent of the line's total length. The railway will also have 170 bridges measuring a combined 69.2 km, accounting for 15.8 percent of the total length. Passenger trains will travel at a maximum speed of 160 km per hour, while the maximum speed for rail freight will be 120 km per hour.

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the end of this year or early next year. Once the names of the proposed towns are submitted, a central committee will carry out inspections. It is expected that municipalities and cities could be established by 2017, Mr Bounphak said. Vientiane's four main districts Chanthabouly, Sikhottabong, Xaysettha and Sisattanak - as well as Champassak's Pakxe, Savannakhet's Kaysone Phomvihane, Luang Prabang district in Luang Prabang province, and Khammuan's Thakhaek district are likely to meet the criteria, the director said. In his order, Prime Minister Thongloun told ministries and ministry-equivalent organisations to revise the mandates of their local line departments by defining clear mandates and responsibilities for districts, municipalities, and cities. In this regard, he suggested that provinces and the capital Vientiane streamline the administrations of municipalities and cities once they are established to ensure they are efficient. The Ministry of Finance was told to draw up financial legislation for the municipalities' and cities' administrations to enable these bodies to become self-sufficient in terms of their administration budget and even save some surplus for their further development. Mr Bounphak said the lessons learnt by many countries suggested it was advisable for special financial legislation to be introduced for municipalities and cities to enable them to become financially self-sufficient, with clear responsibilities outlined. The establishment

of municipalities and cities is in line with the amended Law on Local Administration that was passed by the National Assembly last year. Under the law's Articles 45 and 62, a municipality or a city can be established upon the approval of the government following a request made by provincial authorities after they are given the green light by their local assembly or parliament. Six criteria have been outlined for a district or municipality to meet in order to be upgraded to a city. A district must have a population of at least 60,000 people and a density of at least

Govt announces Three Build targets

(By Times Reporters)

The government has announced targets to build five to 10 provinces as strategic units with each province to create two to five comprehensively strengthened districts by 2020. Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith recently issued an order detailing the targets after the government learnt that progress had been slow in building provinces as strategic units and districts as comprehensively strengthened units. Since 2011, the government has been implementing the Resolution adopted by the 9th Party Congress, which included the Three Builds devolution directive. The directive seeks to build provinces as strategic units, districts as comprehensively strengthened units, and villages as development units. However, work carried out in recent years has been undertaken only at the village level in 109 villages selected to pilot the directive, the prime minister stated in the order. He noted that this work had not been earnestly carried out in provinces and districts. Mr Thongloun has instructed Vientiane and the provinces to draw up five-year, 10-year and 15-year measures to build the capital and the provinces as strategic units and define clear work responsibilities and benefits for districts, to create conditions that enable districts to become comprehensively strengthened units. Seven strategic goals

900 people per square kilometre in urban areas, with proper public facilities. The number of people living in urban areas working as farmers must not exceed 25 percent of all urban residents, according to the law. Five criteria are set for a district to be upgraded to a municipality. A district must have a population of at least 40,000 people and a density of 450 people per square kilometre in urban areas, with certain public facilities. The number of people living in urban areas and working as farmers must not exceed 30 percent of the total urban population.

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have been set for provinces. These include becoming strategic units in Party and personnel building, developing state administration and governance systems that are strictly ruled by law, and becoming strategy planners to drive national socio-economic development. Five strengths are set for a district to achieve, including being comprehensively strengthened in Party and personnel building, having state administration and governance that is strictly ruled by law, and ensuring the effective protection, utilisation and management of natural resources and the environment. At least five to 10 provinces must be built as strategic units by 2020 and each province must be able to create two to five districts that are comprehensively strengthened units by that year. The prime minister instructed districts to ensure that two thirds of the villages in each district are upgraded and certified as developed villages by 2020. He told the relevant authorities to re-evaluate the status of villages that were previously certified as developed to ensure they still meet the set criteria. The authorities were asked to continue to merge small scattered villages into large ones and to group large villages into small towns, based on their potential. Mr Thongloun said that by 2020 each district must strive to build one or

two small towns by merging large villages to create at least 213 small new towns nationwide. These targets are seen as constituting the most concrete agenda ever outlined for the authorities to attain. Mr Thongloun in-

EU recognises Laos' growing regional role

(By Somsack Pongkhao)

The European Union has upgraded its Delegation to become a fully-fledged Diplomatic Mission in recognition of the growing ties between Laos and the EU. Mr Leo Faber now serves as the new Ambassador of the EU Delegation to Lao PDR after presenting his credentials to Lao President Mr Bounnhang Vorachit in Vientiane on Tuesday. He replaces the outgoing EU Chargé d'Affaires Mr Michel Goffin. The upgrade of the EU Mission to Laos is an excellent opportunity to renew the EU's commitment to engage further with Laos on all aspects of modern diplomacy, including political dialogue, development cooperation, trade, environment, culture as well as global and multilateral issues. Speaking to *Vientiane Times* shortly after presenting his credentials to the Lao President, Mr Faber said the EU and the Member States had long been engaged in development cooperation with Laos and would continue to do so in order to achieve development that was sustainable, equitable, and respectful of human rights. We will maintain a regular and constructive dialogue on political, economic and social issues with the government because we believe that exchanges of views on areas of our mutual interest can create mutual understanding, said Mr Faber. I'm honoured to be the first ambassador of the European Union to Laos. We hope that we can strengthen our relations, he said. You know our relations are now mainly based on development cooperation. What I expressed to the President this

structured ministries, provinces and Vientiane to translate the Prime Ministerial Order and the Politburo's Resolution on the Three Builds into a detailed work plan that could be effectively realised.

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morning is that we hope that we can enlarge and strengthen the relations beyond that. The ambassador said the EU lauded Laos' efforts in successfully hosting the recent Asean summits and appreciated the way Laos negotiated with other countries. The EU recognised that Laos is transforming itself from a small land-locked to a land-linked country and the union hoped to see Laos graduate from least developed country status by 2020. The EU Delegation to Laos was opened in Vientiane in 2003 and since then relations between the two sides have improved covering many areas reaching a new era this month. The EU is a major donor of Laos, providing grant aid to fund a number of development projects in the country. The EU 2014-2020 programme for Laos (207 million euros) focuses on nutrition, education and governance, while also tackling issues such as UXO decontamination, gender equality and climate change. Mr Faber said areas of cooperation between Laos and EU would not change until 2020 given that these areas had been defined with the government in line with Laos' socio-economic development plans. Mr Faber is originally from the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs in Luxembourg where he served as Deputy Secretary General. He has been posted previously as a Luxembourg Diplomat to the Permanent Mission to the UN in New-York, to Beijing and to Hanoi as Chargé d'Affaires where he was in charge of development cooperation in Vietnam and Laos.

(Vientiane Times 29 September 2016)