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Revue de presse du 25 au 29 Mai 2015



Vous trouverez ci-joint un choix d'articles publiés au Laos en anglais dans le quotidien "Vientiane Times" et en français dans l'hebdomadaire le "Rénovateur".

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Final draft of US\$52m parks project reviewed

(By Khonesavanh Latsaphao)

The final draft of the Greater Mekong Sub-region Corridor Towns Development Project was put forward in Vientiane on Friday, with plans to build a culture park in Luang Namtha province and an ecology park in Bokeo province. The US\$52 million project will be funded through a low-interest loan of US\$45 million from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and government funding of US\$7.1 million.



Speaking at a workshop to discuss the draft, ADB's Lead Urban Development Specialist, Mr Rudolf Frauendorfer, said most of the government's contribution to the project would be used to compensate local people for the loss of their land and other property. Displaced villagers will be provided with new plots of land after they move from their homes in Bokeo's provincial capital Houayxai to make way for the ecology park. One of the concerns expressed at the workshop was adequate maintenance of these parks, which could be affected by budget constraints and a lack of suitable staff for park management. "We advise the provincial authorities to allocate a larger budget for park management if the money collected from local people for park services is inadequate," Mr Frauendorfer said.

Some workshop participants said they would like an equal amount of money to be allocated to the construction of the two parks. Mr Frauendorfer said this would be rather difficult but it might be possible further down the road when the project designs are known in more detail. A further workshop on the Greater Mekong Sub-region Corridor Towns Development Project will soon be held to summarise the final draft plan. The temperature in the northern provinces is currently very high, with temperatures hovering around 38 degrees Celsius, so the parks will offer a welcome respite from the heat in the years to come. The parks will be a valuable addition to the urban environment and provide people with a pleasant space for recreational purposes. The Greater Mekong Sub-region Corridor Towns Development Project aims to boost trade, investment and tourism among countries in the region. Bokeo province is part of the Greater Mekong Sub-Region North-South Economic Corridor, which links Chiang Rai province in Thailand to Yunnan province in China. Bokeo is linked to Chiang Rai which is further connected to Kunming in China via Road R3, which forms a vital link in the North-South Economic Corridor and facilitates trade and transportation between Laos, Thailand and China. Luang Namtha province is linked to National Road No. 17E in Laos and National Road No. 4 in Myanmar. The project is expected to benefit neighbouring countries such as Vietnam and China, and also extend benefits to India and Bangladesh. Residents of Luang Namtha province directly benefit from the provision of services and border trade between Myanmar, Vietnam, China and Thailand.

(Vientiane Times 23 May 2015)

Borikhamxay seeks to entice visitors with 25 new attractions

(By Times Reporters)

Borikhamxay province has laid out a grand vision for its strategy plan for 2015-20, aiming to become a tourism link between the south of Laos and the region, and is seeking concession-holders to develop 25 tourist sites. Director of the provincial Department of Information, Culture and Tourism, Mr Lamsamay Vorasane, told *Vientiane Times* on Thursday the provincial governor had approved development of the 25 proposed sites which it is hoped will bring more visitors to the province.



“We are now seeking concession-holders to help us develop these sites so that Borikhamxay will become a centre for tourism. But we're only interested in investors who have a sincere interest in the project. We don't want them to be awarded concessions and then not do anything,” Mr Lamsamay said. A company in Vientiane has submitted a proposal to develop Nongya Lake, he added. They planned to build a park, accommodation and other facilities so that the lake can be used as a rest stop by visitors. “We are now considering the company's project

and the possibility of awarding a concession,” Mr Lamsamay said. The area under consideration is about 100 hectares in size and is only about 10km from the provincial capital. The site is located in Kuay village and is close to the planned Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge between Borikhamxay province and Thailand's Bueng Kan province. The project would involve creating various attractions and facilities at Nongya Lake. These would include building a Yaphor Khamdeng shrine in the middle of the lake where visitors could worship, along with a pathway to access the shrine. The company also plans to provide fishing facilities, plant rose bushes, build a road around the lake where people could exercise, and set up gift shops, a resort or guesthouse, and picnic areas. Also featuring in the proposal are an organic vegetable farm, boat rides on the lake, and visits to local ethnic communities to see them at work in their rice fields. “We are also planning to submit the Vat Prabathpholsan (a temple containing a footprint of Buddha) for inclusion on the province's list of heritage sites,” Mr Lamsamay said. Statistics for 2014 from the Tourism Development Department show that Borikhamxay has 108 hotels and guesthouses with 2,011 rooms, which puts the province in seventh place in terms of accommodation rankings in Laos. The province has two travel agents, 70 officially designated sites of natural beauty, 11 sites of cultural interest and three historical sites. The province is 150km from Vientiane and can be reached by Road No. 13 South.

(*Vientiane Times* 23 May 2015)

Four nations agree on single-stop inspections at border crossings

(By Times Reporters)

Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam agreed last week to deploy a “single stop inspection” system at border crossings to boost economic connectivity and cooperation along the East-West Economic Corridor, Thai media reported. Deputy foreign ministers from the four countries reached the agreement on the initiative on Wednesday at the Third Vice Foreign Ministers' Meeting on East-West Economic Corridor Development in Bangkok, Thailand, according to the *Bangkok Post*. The nations will standardise rules and inspections at border checkpoints and create uniform regulations as well as implement a “single stop inspection” system at border gates. The initiative would simplify and harmonise border-crossing formalities and procedures to facilitate trade, investment and tourism, according to the media report citing Thailand's Foreign Ministry. The agreed initiative came after Laos and Vietnam recently launched single-stop inspections at the Dansavan-Lao Bao border crossing. The single-stop inspection model aims to minimise the number of offices that transporters must visit, as well as the amount of paperwork required at borders. The system allows trading partners to declare imports/exports when transiting to and from their countries at a single service point.

Governments of countries in the region have pushed for the introduction of the system in a bid to expedite the shipment of goods. At the 6th Cambodia-Laos-Myanmar-Vietnam (CLMV) Summit held in Vientiane in March 2013, leaders agreed that single-stop inspections should be set up at feasible border crossings to enhance connectivity and facilitate trade, investment, tourism and transportation between the four countries. Last week's meeting in Bangkok also proposed cross-border economic zones to hasten the transformation of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations into a single production base as envisaged in the blueprint for the Asean Economic Community. It would also create supply-chain and value-chain linkages among Southeast Asian countries. The East-West Economic Corridor, which extends for 1,320 kilometres as a continuous land route between the South China Sea and Andaman Sea, is an initiative aimed at bolstering development and integration between Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam. It is one of the economic corridors included in the Asian Development Bank-assisted Greater Mekong Subregion programme, which has been under way since 1992 involving the same four countries plus Cambodia and China.

(Vientiane Times 25 May 2015)

Buddha Cave remains under threat from looters

(By Times Reporters)

More than 6,000 Buddha images at the Tham Ting Buddha Cave in Luang Prabang province will remain under threat if stronger protective measures are not put in place, officials have warned.



The cave houses 6,574 images of different sizes, mostly made from clay, wood and stone. Even though all the images have been registered, local authorities have expressed concerns over security at the cave, fearing that more images will disappear. The cave by the river is quite safe but the upper cave is the one officials worry about because it is dark and security is not tight enough, Head of the Pak-ou district Information, Culture and Tourism Office, Mr Sengchan Vila-panya, said. Located on the riverbank at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Ou rivers in Chomphet district, Tham Ting still has no electricity or any regulations that prohibit tourists from carrying their bags inside. “Right now, we still allow tourists to bring their bags into the cave so we can’t guarantee that some people won’t take some small images away,” he said. Mr Sengchan, who is in charge of Tham Ting Buddha Cave management, admitted that some of the small images in the upper cave could easily be stolen because there is no security to monitor tourists in that area. He believes the Buddha images are still largely safe because the au-

thorities conduct regular inspections every three months, with the most recent one taking place in March. The authorities are aware, however, that the images are at risk after an Austrian man recently returned two Buddha images to Laos, saying he believed they had been taken from Tham Ting. The returned images have not yet been put back in the cave. When they do arrive, the authorities will inspect them again to see if they did indeed come from that cave and if they were previously registered. Mr Sengchan said it was possible the two wooden statues had been taken from the cave when it was leased to the private sector in the 1990s. He claimed that before his office took over from the private sector in 2000, security was inadequate and there was no security guard on duty at night. Now, 24 local families have been given authority over the caves and take turns looking after the area both day and night. Local villagers are required to contribute about 1 billion kip a year to the state budget after collecting entrance fees from tourists and they will be held responsible if any statues are stolen. Tham Ting has been maintained and well-respected by local people since the time of King Fa Ngum. To protect the cave, the authorities will soon install electricity and set new regulations prohibiting tourists from carrying their bags inside. The theft of Buddha images is an ongoing issue in Laos, not only at the Tham Ting cave but also at temples throughout the country. An archeologist from the National Heritage Office told *Vientiane Times* that so long as there is a demand for these images the illegal trade will continue. He said that nowadays the illegal trading network is more open and many people buy and sell looted Buddha images on online forums where their identities are difficult to track.

(*Vientiane Times* 26 May 2015)

World Hydropower Congress hears Lao success story

(By Times Reporters)

Delegates from many countries learned about the Lao PDR's experience with developing renewable energy at the World Hydropower Congress in Beijing. "For more than 40 years, the Lao PDR has made steady progress in developing our vast hydropower potential for export, and providing domestic electricity throughout the country," said Deputy Minister of Energy Viraphonh Viravong at a plenary session last week. "Domestic demand has grown at an average of 12 percent annually in the last 10 years. At the end of 2014, we achieved an 87 percent ratio in household electrification. Our total capacity stood at 3,200 MW, of which two-thirds is for export," he told the delegates. He said the country's commitment to sustainable hydropower development began in the 1970s with the Nam Ngum Dam, which has been enlarged and improved over the years, and development has continued through to the world-class Xayaburi Hydropower Project under construction in northern Laos. The world congress is sponsored by the International Hydropower Association. "I am happy to stand before you and tell you

that the Lao PDR will continue to develop mainstream projects on the Mekong River, and we will do this in keeping with IHA standards of sustainability, in the most practical manner." He said Lao PDR will continue to use private investment to "design and develop its hydropower potential – including mainstream projects – as soon as practicable – provided we are certain they are economically, environmentally and socially sustainable." "As you know, hydropower projects take years to develop but benefits begin flowing to the people even before actual construction begins. "We are frequently criticised by NGOs yet they never praise us for building whole new communities, giving thousands of people new houses, new land to farm, clinics, schools, roads and bridges, training, and new economic opportunities. "We are always surprised that NGOs do not applaud the Lao PDR for pursuing a clean, renewable energy programme without going hat-in-hand for grants." At the Beijing conference he was joined by panellists from Malaysia, Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar and the Asian Development Bank.

(Vientiane Times 26 May 2015)

Xieng Khuang striving for US\$2,000 GDP per capita by 2020

(By Times Reporters)

Xieng Khuang provincial authorities have announced an ambitious target to increase Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita from the current 11.3 million kip (US\$1,400) to more than 16 million kip (US\$2,000) by 2020. Addressing the media at a recent government meeting attended by Cabinet members, the Mayor of Vientiane and provincial governors, Xieng Khuang provincial Governor Prof. Dr Somkot Mangnomek said the plan was in place. He said provincial authorities had sourced over-

seas investment to boost business operations in the province, which currently enjoys a high average annual growth rate of 9 percent. One of the main projects is being undertaken by a Japanese investor who has pledged to pour more than 566.8 billion kip (US\$70 million) into a large cattle farm where 6,000 Japanese kobe calves will be raised. To boost the incomes of local families, the province is encouraging people to rear traditional species of cattle for export to Vietnam, where market demand is huge. It

was reported previously that Xieng Khuang exports 30-40 cattle to Vietnam daily, generating considerable income for local farmers. "Cows can be exported to Vietnam at any time," Prof. Dr Somkot told reporters. In addition, the province produces 100,000 tonnes of rice a year, of which 50,000 tonnes is *khao kai noi* rice. A large amount of this rice variety is bought by a Lao brewery. Local farmers are also being encouraged to grow sweetcorn on a commercial basis for export to Vietnam. Currently, Xieng Khuang produces 150,000 tonnes of sweetcorn a year, which the governor said is always welcomed by the Vietnamese market. Sesame, chillies and peanuts are among the 13 crops that farmers are urged to grow on a commercial basis. In addition, the province has potential in the tourism and agriculture processing industries. Provincial authorities also plan to allocate land on which people can grow industrial trees. "By 2020, we will strive to achieve the conditions that will en-

able Xieng Khuang to graduate from least developed status," Prof. Dr Somkot said. He added that the province has made considerable development progress given that GDP per capita jumped from US\$843 as noted in the resolution of the 5th Congress of the provincial Party Committee to the current US\$1,400 stated by the 6th Congress. The governor pointed out the challenges the province must overcome, notably the struggle to clear unexploded ordnance (UXO), saying that one third of the almost three million tonnes of bombs dropped on Laos during the Indochina War fell on Xieng Khuang. Technical officials say it could take as long as 56 years to remove all the UXO, he said. Xieng Khuang must also strive to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in which it is currently off-track, such as the proportion of children completing primary school, gender equality, and the proportion of children shorter than their potential height.

(Vientiane Times 27May 2015)

Health officials, development partners hear project outcomes

(By Times Reporters)

Representatives from development partners, line departments of the Ministry of Health and the provinces met yesterday in Vientiane to learn about the outputs of the Health System Development Project-Programme. The programme's closing meeting was co-chaired by Deputy Minister of Health Assoc. Prof. Dr Som-ock Kingsada and Asian Development Bank (ADB) Country Director and Lao PDR Resident Mission Ms Sandra Nicoll. Assoc Prof. Dr Som-ock said the Health System Development Project-Programme was granted by the ADB at a cost of US\$20 million, running from 2009 to 2014. The programme had helped the ministry to implement the 7th five-year health sector development plan (2011-2015) and efforts made to overcome challenges to meet the health-related Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets. The health sector has

continually developed and improved especially in eight northern provinces which have benefitted from this programme. In particular, there has been a strengthening of financial planning and budgeting; increased access to better quality health services for mothers and their children; health equity funds for the poor; and human resource improvements in the health sector. Ms Nicoll said the programme helped to strengthen financial management planning and budgeting in local systems, the building and training of quality health officials, especially village physicians, midwives, specialists and health facilities. The Health System Development Project-Programme is the first sector development programme in the health sector by the ADB, including both policy reforms to improve the quality of services and investment in infrastructure and capacity de-

velopment. It was implemented in the eight northern provinces of Phongsaly, Luang Namtha, Bokeo, Xayaboury, Luang Prabang, Oudomxay, Huaphan, and Xieng Khuang. Also under this programme, capacity development and technical assistance were financed by the Japan Special Fund to establish a programme grant fund flow mechanism and improve the capacity for financial management planning and budgeting among health sector personnel in the provinces, she added. Ms Nicoll said the ADB was pleased

to learn that the programme has been successful and helped the ministry to improve the planning process, strengthen human resources for health, increase financing for health equity funds for the poor, enhance the quality of health services especially maternal and child health, and boost health facility development. She trusted the successful outcomes of the programme will serve as a foundation for further development in the health sector towards the objectives of universal health coverage in the years ahead.

(Vientiane Times 27 May 2015)

28 new species discovered in Laos, WWF reveals

(By Times Reporters)

A soul-sucking 'dementor' wasp, a stealthy wolf snake and the world's second longest insect are among the 139 new species discovered by scientists in the Greater Mekong region in 2014, including 28 species in Laos. The species are described in a new report, "Magical Mekong", released yesterday by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). In total, 90 plants, 23 reptiles, 16 amphibians, nine fish, and one mammal are detailed in the report. The species in Laos include 17 plants, 9 reptiles, one mammal and one fish. According to the report, of particular interest is the discovery of a bent-toed gecko (*Cyrtodactylus vilaphongi*) in Luang Prabang province, the 10,000th reptile species to be officially identified in the world. The gecko was found just 500 metres from a cornfield, indicating how little people know of some species living exceptionally close to us, WWF said. A new walking catfish (*Clarias serniosus*) was also found in a tributary of the Xe Pian River on the Bolaven Plateau in Champassak province, the report said. Another fascinating species known from three locations in both Laos and Vietnam is the long-toothed pipistrelle (*Hypsugo dolichodon*), a species of bat that has extra-large fangs. Scientists believe these impressive canines may have evolved to allow it to prey upon

larger or harder-shelled insects around the karst caves and forests the bat calls home. Within the wider Greater Mekong region, new species include a feathered coral whose nearest relatives live in Africa, four moths named after Thai princesses, a colour-changing thorny frog and two orchids discovered already being illegally traded. This brings the total new species discovered in the Greater Mekong, which includes Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, to 2,216 between 1997 and 2014 - an average of three new species a week. Country Director of WWF-Laos Mr Somphone Bouasavanh said new species are raising their heads in Laos all the time, and there are so many more to find. "Although this is very exciting and showcases the country's special wildlife, intense pressures are pushing some species ever closer to a highly uncertain future," he said. Mr Somphone added that wildlife crime, increasing deforestation and unsustainable natural resource use can have detrimental impacts on the species. WWF believes that in order to meet these challenges, increased capacity and support for rangers is urgently needed in the region's protected areas, along with better law enforcement in markets against criminals in the illegal wildlife and timber trades.

(Vientiane Times 28 May 2015)

World Bank provides US\$1.8 m towards wildlife protection

(By Times Reporters)



The World Bank provided grant assistance worth more than US\$1.8 million (over 14 billion kip) to the Lao government in Vientiane yesterday towards the implementation of a project to enhance the enforcement of the wildlife and aquatic law. According to the Department of Forest Resources Management under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, building capacity and ensuring the proper enforcement of the wildlife and aquatic law aims to solve the problem of the illegal wildlife trade. Director of the Department of Forest Inspection under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Mr Khamput Phandanouvong signed documents to receive the funding from Executive Director of the Environment Protection Fund Mr Soukata Vichit, who was the representative of the donor. The project, to be fully financed by the World Bank, will run over a period of six years from 2015 to 2021. The sale and hunting of wild animals appears to be continuing unabated in some areas of the country, despite being against the law. Forest degradation still occurs in some places because most families who live in the area use the forests for their livelihoods. They want to clear trees for slash and burn cultivation, while some fell trees and hunt wildlife which

they sell to traders. The government's budget is insufficient to support the work necessary to protect the forests and their wild animals and pay the salaries of the personnel involved. To improve forestry and environmental protection in Laos, the government is spending several billion kip each year to increase the size of protected forestry areas and save wildlife. The buying and selling of wild animals encourages people to hunt them and if this continues many will soon become extinct. Already many of our wild animal species are on the verge of extinction. People must realise that if they stop buying these animals the threat of extinction will disappear. Earlier this month, the World Bank also funded a project to give a boost to forest management, at a cost of US\$2.6 million (over 21 billion kip). The project aims to assist with building capacity in the management of Laos' National Protected Areas. The project to build capacity in management systems for the maintenance of forests and sustainable conservation of watershed management will run for six years from 2015 to 2021. This funding from the World Bank will help to strengthen capacity in forest management, as well as enforce the regulations, improve people's living conditions and contribute to other aspects of development. The three categories of forest in Laos managed by the government are National Protected Areas, National Protected Forests and National Production Forests. At present, there are 49 National Protection Forests covering 7.5 million hectares but the ministry plans to add thousands more to achieve its goal of 8.2 million hectares of protected forest by 2015.

(Vientiane Times 29 May 2015)

5.0 earthquake shakes landlocked Laos

(By Phonesavanh Sangsomboun)

Despite never having recorded a tragedy on the scale of the recent earthquake in Nepal, Laos is also at risk of earthquakes in the future, according to an earthquake specialist. A technical official from the Aeronautical Meteorology Division of the Meteorology and Hydrology Department said Laos had experienced a quake of 5.0 magnitude at around 1am on Wednesday. The 5.0 magnitude earthquake which shook the area between Borikhamxay and Xiengkhuang provinces was detected but no damage has been reported, officials confirmed. The quake occurred at around 1am and was followed by an aftershock of about 3.2 magnitude at around 2 am. The tremor was felt in the area, especially by villagers in Mokmay district, Xieng Khuang province who reported the ground shaking under their feet. Officials

from Xieng Khuang received information from Mokmay district villagers that the quake had occurred. Mokmay district shares borders with Vietnam and Thathom district in Xaysomboun province. Located in a mountainous area, people in Xieng Khuang were quite frightened as earthquakes are quite a rare occurrence in Laos. Officials urged members of the public to be aware of the potential for earthquakes in Laos. "Laos is also at risk of earthquakes but we do not know when or how strong one might be. All we can do is to be prepared for it," the earthquake specialist said. Lao people who felt the tremor were quite frightened, especially in the wake of the devastating 7.8 quake in Nepal, which claimed the lives of thousands of people and caused hundreds of buildings and other structures to collapse.

(Vientiane Times 29 May 2015)