



Comité de Coopération avec le Laos

Boîte postale 4791, Vientiane, Laos

Tél : (856-21) 25 40 39 - Télécopie : (856-21) 21 69 25

Email : cclvientiane@ccl-laos.org

Site : www.ccl-laos.org

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➤ **Vientiane Times** :

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- Revenue from SEZs reaches US\$11 million
- Govt approves measures for socio-economic development plan
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Phongsaly ponders plummeting green tea price

(By KeoviengkhoneBounviseth)

The Industry and Commerce Department in Phongsaly province is looking for ways to help farmers who are out of pocket following a slump in the sale price of green tea, which has dropped from 8,000 kip per kg last year to just 3,000 kip this year. The province's main market, China, has also cut its orders for green and dried tea grown in Phongsaly. Director of the province's Industry and Commerce Department, MrThongsavanhThammavong, told *Vientiane Times* that department officials had recently visited farmers in Phongsaly district where most of the green tea is grown. Some 29 households in Phongsaly province are now in financial difficulty following the drop in price and will call a halt to their plans to expand their plantations. In the meantime they will continue to farm their existing plots to produce the amount of tea required. MrThongsavanh said local officials are recommending that growers improve their farming methods to improve the quality of the crop. They have also asked the authorities to try to raise the market price of green tea and adjust export taxes so the situation is fair and balanced for both farmers and local and foreign business operators. Phongsaly province has over 2,600 hectares of green tea under cultivation.

Most of the green and dried tea produced is sold to markets in China while some goes to markets in Phongsaly province and Vientiane. "Authorities in China have not only decreased tea imports from Laos. China has announced it will stop growing green tea in some parts of the country because Chinese farmers use too many chemicals," MrThongsavanh said. He added that Lao farmers have been growing green tea organically for export for a long time. Authorities in China are encouraging their farmers to grow more organic green tea as a health product, which is one reason why China has cut its orders for tea grown in Laos. In 2013-2014, the market price of small leaf green tea was 5,000-8,000 kip a kilogramme. Small leaf dried tea fetched 35,000-40,000 kip a kilogramme, while full-size green tea sold for 25,000-35,000 kip a kilogramme and full-size dried tea fetched 100,000-200,000 kip a kilogramme. MrThongsavanh said that last year 100 tonnes of tea was sold to China, for about 200 million kip per tonne. This year, 75 tonnes were exported to China for 59 million kip per tonne. Thirty tonnes have been sold in Phongsaly province and Vientiane this year for a total of 100 million kip.

(*Vientiane Times* 22 Aout 2015)

Revenue from SEZs reaches US\$11 million

(By Times Reporters)

Revenue generated from the development of special and specific economic zones (SEZs) in Laos has so far reached over US\$11 million, according to a recent government report. The revenue was mainly sourced from shareholdings, value-added taxes and land concession fees. The rest came from profit taxes and other fees but this did not amount to much. An official in charge, who asked not to be named, told *Vientiane Times* that revenue from this sector was still relatively small because SEZs have been developed over the past decade. The concept of SEZs was first established in 2003 but the development of the sector has not progressed as anticipated. Zone development has largely taken shape since 2010 when the Lao National Committee for Special Economic Zones (NCSEZ) was established to oversee the sector. In addition, various pieces of legislation were enacted to facilitate the development of SEZs and the government is satisfied with the progress made in developing the zones so far. Development of the US\$1.6 billion That Luang Marsh Specific Economic Zone (SEZ) in Vientiane has seen a lot of progress and the government wanted to build this zone as a model for all SEZ developments in Laos. Over US\$180 million has been spent so far on building infrastructure and condos at the That Luang Marsh SEZ.

Twelve condominium blocks 19 floors in height have seen a lot of progress and are slated to be finished in October 2016. If completed, the project will not only boost economic growth, but also generate job opportunities for Lao people and more income for the government. The government's strategic plan aims to establish 25 SEZs in Laos by 2020, but all of this will depend on the feasibility and economic studies as to whether those projects are beneficial to the nation and local people. Local authorities in all provinces of Laos have issued proposals to the government for considering and approving SEZ developments in their provinces as they believe SEZs can drive rapid growth in their areas. Laos currently has 11 SEZs and some 213 companies are now investing in those zones with a total registered capital of US\$4.2 billion in addition to future investment plans of US\$17.39 billion. Of the total figure, more than US\$1.19 billion has already been spent on development activities at the zones, generating employment for over 11,320 people, of whom 4,229 are Lao and the rest foreign nationals. Over the past decade, SEZs in Laos have been developing continuously, helping to urbanise remote regions of Laos and boosting economic growth.

(*Vientiane Times* 25 Aout 2015)

Govt approves measures for socio-economic development plan

(By Times Reporters)

The cabinet has approved a draft governmental decree outlining measures to implement the socio-economic development and budget plans for 2015-2016, with economic growth targeted at 7.5 percent. The approval came at the government's monthly meeting for August, held on Tuesday and chaired by Prime Minister ThongsingThammavong. The draft of the decree will be revised in accordance with the recommendations provided by cabinet members. Recommendations included greater emphasis on state investment, revenue collection and spending, to ensure their effectiveness. In this regard, the cabinet has prohibited state departments from implementing unapproved projects. Departments were advised not to incur any new debts and to pay off existing public debts. To prevent revenue leakage, the cabinet instructed the relevant sectors to make use of computerised systems when collecting revenue. In an attempt to alleviate poverty, the meeting directed the relevant authorities to consider measures that will enable more poor people to access funds so they can finance income-earning activities. The authorities were advised to put in place regulations on the management of various funds to ensure their most effective use, and to do more to attract additional assistance from internal and external sources. The cabinet instructed the sectors in charge to prepare to host the upcoming ninth Meeting of Asean Ministers on Rural Development and Pover-

ty Eradication, to ensure the success of the event. The meeting approved in principle a draft law on anti-human trafficking and asked the relevant sectors to revise the draft in accordance with the recommendations made by cabinet members, while ensuring that the draft is in line with the international laws and treaties to which Laos is a party. Concluding the meeting, Prime Minister Thongsing instructed all sectors to fully prepare events scheduled to mark the 40th anniversary of the Lao People's Democratic Republic at the end of this year. MrThongsing instructed the national defence and public security sectors to maintain social security and order in the coming months to facilitate the celebration of the anniversary and the convening of Party congresses of ministries and provinces. He told the relevant ministries and sectors to be prepared for integration into the Asean Economic Community by the end of this year. The Health Ministry was asked to remain vigilant against seasonal communicable diseases. The Ministry of Public Works and Transport was asked to inspect roads and take urgent action to repair those that had been severely damaged in the rainy season. MrThongsing asked the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to monitor weather forecasts and issue warnings in a timely fashion when storms were forecast, while the relevant sectors were asked to prepare for the possibility of both flooding and drought.

(Vientiane Times 27 Aout 2015)

Phongsaly officials worried that chemicals will affect crop exports

(By Times Reporters)

Phongsaly provincial authorities are concerned that the increasing use of herbicides and chemical fertilisers will have long term impacts on the environment and the export of agricultural products. Since Chinese business operators have encouraged farmers to grow crops such as pumpkins, beans, chillies, sugarcane and bananas for export, the use of herbicides and chemical fertilisers has increased significantly, an official from the province's environment section, Mr SourinhaSengdara, told *Vientiane Times* yesterday. But, he said, it is difficult to regulate the situation due to a lack of funding to oversee and carry out crop-growing projects as efficiently as they would like. "At present all we can do is to provide information about the potential dangers of herbicide and chemical use among local communities by raising awareness and putting up posters," Mr Sourinha said. But many farmers are not concerned about the hazards and harmful effects that lie in wait further down the line. All they are concerned about is the income they can earn today and how they can spend the money to improve their living conditions. In recent years four people in the province are believed to have died after long-term exposure to herbicides and many people are thought to have fallen ill due to the use of chemicals. They spray grass in their fields without using any protective equipment, Mr Sourinha said. The use of herbicides when growing crops such as sugarcane and bananas has also polluted rivers, which has affected villagers living nearby as they are

using unclean water for showers and cooking. Provincial authorities, especially officials from the environment and other sectors concerned, have discussed the problem numerous times with Chinese business operators and farmers. But even though environmental officials have advised farmers to reduce the use of chemicals and explained the dangers to local communities, people have not changed their ways. The industry and commerce sector has banned the import of dangerous chemicals but they are brought into the province illegally, Mr Sourinha said. At the beginning of this month, provincial authorities destroyed many bottles of chemicals that had been imported illegally after confiscating them from local and foreign traders. Most of the chemicals are imported from China. Chinese business operators provide the money for farmers to buy crop seeds and fertiliser and teach local people how to grow the crops, said the Head of the province's agriculture section, Mr Soukxay-Chaleumsouk. "It's very difficult to ban the use of chemicals because the investors are in charge of the situation and provide the markets for the crops. And of course China is just across the border," he added. Phongsaly's soil was chemical free and uncontaminated until recently but with the current heavy use of chemicals Mr Soukxay is concerned that it will affect exports in the future, especially if the Chinese government has strict controls on the presence of chemicals in agricultural products.

(*Vientiane Times* 27 Aout 2015)

Govt and development partners review performance

(By Times Reporters)

Representatives from the Ministry of Planning and Investment, Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank (WB) and some government agencies met yesterday to jointly review and share thoughts on the overall country portfolio performance. This year the meeting focused on four key priorities, identified through extensive consultations with implementing agencies, including project start-ups, procurement, financial management and taxation, monitoring and evaluation. The 2014 Joint Review of the Country Portfolio between the Lao Government, ADB and WB was held in Vientiane and co-chaired by the Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment Dr Khamlieng Pholsena, ADB Country Director Ms Sandra Nicoll, and WB Country Manager Ms Sally Burningham. Dr Khamlieng said the government of Laos acknowledges the official development assistance from the ADB and the WB in contributing to economic growth, particularly through the 28 projects supported by the ADB for a total amount of about US\$729.2 million and the WB's official development assistance to Laos on 25 projects for a total cost of about US\$449 million. These are considered as key drivers and have made a crucial contribution to stabilising GDP growth at 8 percent in 2014-15 while reducing the incidence of poverty from 20.94 percent in 2013 to 17.16 percent in 2014. Meanwhile the economic and social sectors have improved greatly and, most importantly, the people in remote areas have better access to public services, he added. The Lao portfolios of the ADB and WB are on track and have continued to perform well with improvements in many key indicators due to the regular support and assistance of both institutions as well as commitments and efforts of line agencies at all levels in project implementation. With on-going ADB and WB assistance, the government has put a high em-

phasis on results based monitoring and evaluation, aimed at ensuring that all the projects and programmes achieve their goals and objectives, producing tangible outcomes with positive impacts to all stakeholders at all levels, Dr Khamlieng said. He suggested that in order to support project implementation and follow up as had been agreed, a number of technical meetings among project managers and line agencies concerned at all levels have been held to discuss and review specific project implementation issues and agreed actions, namely implementation arrangements, financial management, project readiness filters and sector result profiles related to any necessary arrangements and advanced actions to be done after project approval in order to bring forward the start-up of projects to avoid any delays and improvements to the timely submission of auditing reports with practical measures. "Specifically, concerning the ADB and WB portfolio performances, even with a number of successes and achievements there are still some issues and constraints affecting our project implementation," Dr Khamlieng said. "This collaboration aims to ensure development effectiveness and results for the intended beneficiaries," Ms Burningham said. WB recognises the important role of the meeting as an annual opportunity for the government and its development partners to discuss the effectiveness of development assistance programmes and devise solutions to systemic and cross-cutting issues, she said. Ms Nicoll said this year's meeting provided them with a constructive forum to candidly review accomplishments and challenges, analyse trends and issues, and identify how they can further improve portfolio performance to help ensure that projects, programmes and technical assistance achieve their intended outcomes. "Equally important is the opportunity this meeting provides to network with

colleagues and update our knowledge on good practices that facilitate project readi-

ness, smooth implementation and quality monitoring and evaluation,” she added

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Capacity building continues to boost Lao-Japanesecooperation

(By Times Reporters)

The Lao-Japan Human Resource Development Institute (JLI) is continuing to develop local capacity building supported by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) with the cooperation of the National University of Laos (NUOL).



DrSaykhongSaynasine(right) addresses the meeting in Vientiane.

The second joint coordination committee for the project for capacity building to support private sector development and Japanese investment in Laos through JLI was held on Wednesday to review implementation of the last seven months and plans for this year. The meeting was chaired by National University of Laos Vice President, Assoc Prof. DrSaykhongSaynasine, who is also project supervisor, and co-chaired by the Chief Representative of JICA Lao office, Mr Yusuke Murakami. The five year project from September 2014 to August 2019 aims to contribute to capacity building promotion and development in the economic sector of Laos especially as the nation integrates with the Aseanregion. The meeting heard in seven months to the end of July this year, the insti-

tute continued to implement its plans, especially business management and culture exchange projects, and joined with Japanese experts in improving some activities of the project. The institute has promoted and sought funding to allow employees to develop themselves in updating their skills within the country and overseas. The institute has also cooperated with JICA on administration and curriculum development which included responding to the demands of business and other organisations. Progress has been made in developing a Japanese language curriculum and the organising of culture exchange with Japanese universities while the institute had recently received its eighth batch of master's degree students. The institute joined with JICA and the Japanese Embassy to Laos to hold the annual Lao-Japan Cultural Festival earlier this year to celebrate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two nations. The institute has also organised seminars on traditional Japanese dress, a Japanese speech competition, cultural exchange for secondary schools, and trained employees in social media marketing. The institute received five scholarships for outstanding students from a Japanese foundation and joined with the Honda foundation under the Y-E-S Awards in selecting students from the NUOL to study in Japan. Cooperation and support from the Japanese government and JICA would help to develop Lao human resources in contributing to socio-economic development, DrSaykhongsaid. He also asked JICA to continue its support and boost cooperation for student development in Laos.

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