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➤ **Vientiane Times** :

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Laos records rapid growth in air traffic

(By Times Reporters)

The number of flights passing through Lao airspace has steadily increased in recent years, earning more revenue for the state budget. Over-flight numbers have been growing since 2010-2011, when about 118,315 flights used the country's airspace and the number increased to 135,670 the following year.



A Thai Airways plane lands at Wattay International Airport in Vientiane.

In 2012-2013 there were 171,407 flights which increased to 186,110 flights in 2013-2014. The dramatic four year growth was highlighted in records from Air Traffic Management under the Civil Aviation Department. The number of flights in Lao airspace was projected to increase in 2014-2015, with the first seven months of air traffic services having already generated US\$53.5 million in state revenue, well above the plan of US\$45 million. According to a survey conducted by the International Civil Aviation Organisation, the number of flights in the Asia-Pacific region would increase more than in Europe from 2010 to 2030,

which would lead to air traffic congestion. Proof of the survey results was currently appearing in this region as many countries purchased more airplanes for their commercial fleets and transport services, the department's Mr Bounteng Simoun said. The growth in traffic volume has required the government to invest a significant amount of money to upgrade and modernise air traffic control technology over the past decade. Since 2005, the government has sought assistance from international aviation authorities and invested its own money in the aviation sector. It has also purchased new equipment and employed overseas technical staff to repair and maintain air traffic control service systems, along with developing the knowledge and skills of local staff. Mr Bounteng said the department had improved communications, navigation, and surveillance systems for air traffic management to ensure effective implementation of the applicable International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) standard. The ministry recently signed with an aviation equipment supplier to continue the maintenance and improvement project on air traffic control and communication systems. "Improvement of these systems is essential to respond to the increasing number of flights utilising the airport as more people travel throughout the region, which will create air traffic congestion. In addition, it aims to ensure quality and completion ahead of the arrival of the Asean Economic Community at the end of this year," he said.

(Vientiane Times 15Aout 2015)

Floods damage Vientiane ricecrop

(By KhonesavanhLatsaphao)

Farmers in two districts of Vientiane are unable to replant their rice after seedlings in thousands of low-lying plots recently disappeared under floodwater.



A thriving rice field in Vientiane. (File photo)

Parts of Sangthong and Naxaithong districts were inundated following torrential rain earlier this month and farmers are dismayed because they say it is too late to replant the crop. A Vientiane official, who asked not to be named, told *Vientiane Times* on Friday the exact area of rice fields affected by the floods was still unknown and the authorities were carrying out a survey to determine the extent of the losses. A preliminary report from farmers in the two districts said that almost all the rice seedlings they were planting vanished under the water. Farmers told Vientiane authorities this year's rains were late and many of them waited until the end of June to start planting rice seedlings. Farmers usually start planting rice at the beginning of May, with the seedlings need-

ing to be grown for 25 or 30 days before being transferred to other plots of land. Unfortunately this year's seedlings were only in the rice paddies for a few weeks before being swamped by flooding. Vientiane authorities now fear that rice supplies may not be adequate for the capital and are eyeing a sharp price increase in November. Rice in Vientiane markets is currently selling in three grades with the best quality costing 100,000 kip for a 12 kg bag and the other grades costing 80,000 kip and 60,000 kip. Vientiane's rice fields were not the only ones damaged by flooding. The worst hit were in the provinces of Bokeo, Luang Namtha, Xaysomboun, Borikhamxay, Vientiane, Xayaboury, Khammuan and Xiengkhuang. Over 3,120 households in 57 villages of six districts in Borikhamxay - Borikhan, Pakxan, Pakkading, Thaphabath, Viengthong and Khamkeuth - have been affected, with 4,200 hectares of recently planted rice seedlings underwater. Borikhan district was the worst affected with more than 1,870 houses inundated. In Xaysomboun province a man was reported to have drowned in a swollen river this week, while 10 hectares of rice were flooded. In Khammuan province many hectares of farmland were inundated on August 8, affecting 426 families in 13 villages of Xebangfay district. Officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry met with district authorities to discuss the distribution of rice seeds to farmers so they could plant the dry season crop once the water recedes.

(*Vientiane Times* 17 Aout 2015)

Pakxe to become economic, tourism hub

(By Times Reporters)

Champassak provincial authorities are gearing up to transform Pakxe district into an economic and tourism hub in southern Laos after reaching an agreement on consultancy services to achieve the goal. A signing ceremony for consultancy services for the Pakxe Urban Environment Improvement Project took place in the district last week and was signed by representatives from the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, provincial Public Works and Transport Department and other sectors. The ceremony was witnessed by the Deputy Minister of Public Works and Transport Ms Vivaikham Phosalath and the Vice Governor of Champassak province Mr Bouason Vongsongkhon. The project is being financed with a low interest loan of more than US\$31 million from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The objectives of the consultancy services are to help the project management and implementation unit to carry out the project. This requires support in strengthening the capacities of the implementing agencies – the Champassak provincial Department of Public Works and Transport and the Pakxe Urban Development Administration Authority. Speaking at the event, Deputy Director of the Champassak provincial Public Works and Transport Department, Mr Bounnao Fongkhamdaeng, said the project proposal was prepared in

2009 and the feasibility study had already been completed. “We are about to begin implementing the project by focusing on improving garbage management and disposal, improving canals by raising embankments, and building the capacity of local authorities,” he said. Mr Bounnao said the six-year project is expected to improve the living conditions of over one million people living in nearby communities. The impact of the project will be the improved competitiveness of Pakxe as a regional economic and tourism centre in the south of Laos. The outcome will be increased quality, reliability and coverage of urban infrastructure and environmental improvements in the greater Pakxe urban area. By 2018, the project will enhance the urban environment, improve public health, and contribute to improved urban services to about 135,000 residents in the project area. This will be achieved through an integrated programme of investments in priority infrastructure rehabilitation, improvement and extension of urban services, and organisational and capacity development of urban development and management agencies. The signing ceremony was attended by the Director of the Public Works and Transport Department of Champassak province, Mr Soukkaserm Pakdimanivong, and other officials.

(Vientiane Times 17 Aout 2015)

Laos to take part in 11th Asean Skill Competition

(By Times Reporters)

The 11th Asean Skill Competition will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on September 12-19, 2016, it was agreed at a meeting of the Asean Organising Committee held in Penang, Malaysia, in June. The Lao organising committee last week relayed the latest information about the competition at a meeting led by the Deputy Minister of Education and Sports, Associate Prof. Dr Kongsy Sengmany, and Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Ms Baykham Khattiya. Nine Asean countries attended the meeting in Penang, with Brunei Darussalam not represented. A total of 23 skills will be contested at the 11th Asean Skill Competition. Laos will enter 18 competitors, with two competing in each of nine skills including industrial automation and information network cabling. The last Asean Skill Competition was held in Hanoi, Vietnam, last year, when Laos entered 13 skilled tradespeople in the event. They competed in seven occupational skills and one performance skill. The competition was contested by the 10 Asean countries and featured competitions in 23 occupational skills and two performance skills. Laos finished seventh, picking up one silver medal in the electrical installation competition. The objectives of the competition are to promote the development of quality vocational and technical and work values among young people and skilled workers. The competition also aims to foster tech-

nical cooperation in vocational/technical education and training between Asean nations and to encourage close cooperation among government, industries, employers, workers' organisations and vocational training institutes. The regional competition serves as a platform to encourage work excellence and the development of highly skilled workers. It enables Asean nations to work together in terms of skill development, with the goal of achieving international standards. Member countries have specified the rules of the competition and that it will be held every two years with each country to take turns in hosting the event. The 10 countries have agreed to use the latest Test Projects of the most recent World Skills Competition (a biennial competition involving about 50 countries) for the Asean Skill Competition Test Project. The World Skill Test Project was drafted by experts in industrial skills who are leaders in their fields. It reflects the latest technology and skills needed and is amended before every competition. By using the World Skill Test Project as a basis for the Asean Skill Competition Test Project, young tradespeople in Asean nations will be able to keep pace with the rest of the world. Competitors must be no older than 22 years of age. Each country can enter two competitors in each skill area over the three days of the competition.

(Vientiane Times 17 Aout 2015)

World Bank announces additional funding for infrastructure, health

(By Times Reporters)

The Lao government and the World Bank signed agreements for three projects in Vientiane yesterday aiming to improve the electricity network, women's and children's health and boost essential infrastructure.



Ms Thipphakone Chanthavongsa and Mr Ulrich Zachau sign the agreement for three projects in Laos.

Specifically the projects aim to improve the efficiency and reliability of electricity, to improve women's and children's health and nutrition, and to enable the construction of vital infrastructure including schools, health clinics, roads, and drinking water systems for poor communities across Laos. The three projects are supported by US\$68 million in new financing from the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA), which was approved in Washington DC by the World Bank's Executive Directors on June 23 this year. A US\$32.4 million (over 262 billion kip) Power Grid Improvement Project, will help Electricité du Laos (EDL) in Xaythany district, Vientiane, to improve the efficiency and reliability of the electricity distribution network. Xaythany district suffered a distribution loss of about 24 percent in 2014 (higher than the national average of 13 percent). Experience gained from improving the electricity network in this district will be used to scale up improvements to other areas in the future. The Lao Health Governance and Nutrition Development Project, with US\$26.4 million (more

than 214 billion kip) in financing supported by the World Bank, aims to improve the health of women and children through the support of the Lao government's free maternal and child health services. The project will help reduce stunting and wasting by increasing the percentage of infants who are exclusively breastfed. Nutrition is expected to be improved through the development of a national behaviour change communications strategy that will target infant and young child feeding practices. Maternal mortality will be addressed in multiple ways, including by making access to family planning available to more women, as well as access to antenatal care visits, and to increase the number of pregnant women who deliver their children with a skilled birth attendant. A US\$11.6 million (more than 94 billion kip) project, the Poverty Reduction Fund II Project (PRF II), will help to improve access to and utilisation of basic infrastructure and services for poor communities across the country, by enabling the construction of schools, health clinics, roads and drinking water systems for poor communities. An additional US\$2.4 million (more than 19.4 billion kip) is financed by the government of Australia. "These three projects will contribute to the continued strengthening of electricity distribution network, health and nutrition, and poverty reduction in the Lao PDR, all of which are vital components of the Lao Government's National Socio-Economic Development Plan, which aims to enhance the living standards of the Lao people as well as to reduce poverty," said Deputy Minister of Finance Thipphakone Chanthavongsa. "In the past 15 years, Laos has steadily reduced poverty, to just under a quarter of the overall population in 2013. Laos has also succeeded in bringing electricity to the vast majority of Lao communities," said Country Director of the World Bank for Southeast

Asia Ulrich Zachau. “At the same time, the Lao PDR still faces development challenges, and we are pleased to continue our support

for the Government's programme to reduce poverty further.”

(Vientiane Times 18Aout 2015)

Lao Airlines ready for AEC

(By Times Reporters)

National carrier Lao Airlines is ready for the AEC and believes that when it comes into being it will not spark serious competition in air services in the Asean region.



Lao Airlines planes parked at Wattay International Airport in Vientiane.

“We continue to develop our services and operations and I think that the AEC launch will encourage other air operators in Asean to cooperate more closely rather than compete with each other,” Lao Airlines President, Dr Somphone Douangdara, said. “AEC means integration and helping each other. It is not a fight or competition to find the winner,” Dr Somphone said yesterday. “Today is the high technology generation, so it is hard to compete with each other to find a winner.” Lao Airlines constantly upgrades its business operations to ensure fast and safe services. In 2013 the airline had 13 aircraft - four MA60s with 56 seats each, four ATR72-500s and one ATR72-600 with 70 seats each as well as four Airbus 320s with 158 seats each. Vice President of Lao Air-

lines, Mr Sengpraseuth Mathouchanh, said on Friday “Now we have 15 aircraft including seven ATRs.” The company is expanding its fleet because it wants to grow its service network on both local and international routes. There will be an increasing number of tourists visiting Laos, which will help to promote Laos and attract more investment in the country and this will contribute to economic development, said an airline official. The network includes international routes to Bangkok and Chiang Mai in Thailand; Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam; Kunming, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Jinghong in China; Siem Reap in Cambodia, and Singapore, as well as Seoul and Busan in the Republic of Korea. Now the airline has added direct flights from Vientiane to Changzhou in Jiangsu province, China, which began earlier this year. This is the fifth route to China being flown by Lao Airlines. Its future international routes include Chinese Taipei and Nanning in China, Yangon in Myanmar, and Jakarta in Indonesia. The number of passengers being carried by Lao Airlines was some 750,887 people in 2014, of which Chinese passengers made up a total of 103,400. The airline recorded some 530,000 passengers in 2011 and more than 600,000 in 2012. It expects there will be almost 1 million this year. Lao Airlines attributes the increasing number of passengers to improved services. A report shows there were 411,000 passengers in 2010 and 275,000 in 2006. Currently Lao Airlines has codeshare agreements with more than 30 other airlines. Under a codeshare agreement two airlines can sell seats on the same flight, but under different flight numbers or codes.

Codeshare agreements let customers book flights through one airline that are actually operated by another, allowing both companies to expand their reach without actually offering any more flights. The national carrier now has more than 70 ticketing agents in Vientiane and the provinces as well as more than 400 overseas. Lao Airlines has agreements with Thai Airways, Vietnam Airlines,

Bangkok Airways, China Eastern Airlines, Qantas Airways, Silk Air, China Airlines, Korean Airlines and Eva Airways, along with interline agreements with Hahn Air, Aeroflot Russian Airlines, and Heli Air Monaco. Its domestic flights service the provinces of LuangPrabang, Champassak, Savannakhet, Xiengkhuang, Oudomxay, Bokeo, Huaphan, Attapeu and LuangNamtha.

(Vientiane Times 18 Aout 2015)

Oudomxay improves environmental measures for banana plantations

(By Times Reporters)

Oudomxay provincial authorities are improving their environmental control measures relating to investments in banana growing after they became concerned over the potential for long term impact.



A banana farm in the North invested in by a Chinese company.

Investment by Chinese companies in banana growing in the province over a number of years raised the concern of many sectors which feared impacts to the environment through garbage issues and the extensive use of herbicides according to the provincial environment sector. But no sector can confirm what these impacts might be as there have been no studies carried out according to the provincial agriculture section head, MrKhamphaoBoundala in a discussion he had with *Vientiane Times* yesterday. Under the new agreement every owner is required to collect their garbage, especially plastic banana bunch covers, herbicide bottles,

packing boxes and banana branches on their farm, to dispose of in a safe place to avoid any environmental impact, he said. A lack of inspections and poor management by the authorities over the contracts signed by these investors with the farmers resulted in the garbage problem because the waste materials were simply being left on the land or thrown away on roadsides and in other areas, MrKhamphao said. The issue caused many people to complain and become concerned about what it would do to the soil and water which might affect people's health and certainly made the area look very dirty, he commented. MrKhamphao explained that to resolve the issue and encourage investors to follow the new measures, it required the close cooperation of all concerned sectors. The provincial investment promotion section acting head, MrKhamchanhLaocheubeng, said the provincial authorities also planned to check and collect information on the companies and find out who was operating legally and who was not. He believed that some companies had made a contract directly with the farmers without the approval of the provincial authorities, while there were more than 10 companies that had already signed contracts with government officials. From now on every company is required to strictly follow the new measures of the province and assume total responsibility for environmental protection, said MrKhamchanh. If companies or investors don't act in accor-

dance with the agreement or do not contract with the government or provincial authorities they will be liable to have their contract cancelled. MrKhamphao expressed confidence that the new measures would reduce the risk of long term impact to the environment and soil quality. “We will also suggest that investors try to use bio-fertilizers on their farms and reduce using chemical fertilizers as much as possible,” he said. According to a feasibility study, the companies need to use about 1.3 tonnes per hectare of chemical fertilizers and herbicides. Banana investment within the province still lacks government involvement on environmental impact so the provincial governor has ordered a

stop to any more concessions to review the current situation. There are more than 600 hectares of banana plantations within the province, most of the crop being exported to China, while LuangNamtha and Bokeo provinces are also affected by the same problem. Last year, Laos exported over 260,000 tonnes of bananas and received payment of about US\$45 million according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. China offers a large market for the northern provinces so provincial authorities have agreed to allow Chinese companies to invest in various crops for sale to China, including cassava, watermelons, pumpkins and chillies.

(Vientiane Times 19 Aout 2015)

Lao, Viet, Thai provinces join forces against human trafficking

(By SouknilundonSouthivongnorath)

Savannakhet Women's Union reported yesterday that speaking out about human trafficking was the best way to prevent vulnerable people from becoming trapped in situations from which they could not escape. Head of the union's vocational development section, MsViengsamonePhaphithak, told *Vientiane Times* by telephone yesterday that Savannakhet and Saravan provinces in Laos, Mukdahan province in Thailand and Quang Tri province in Vietnam had agreed to join forces in spreading the message about the risks of human trafficking to as many people as possible. “We will campaign among local communities to make sure people understand the risks they run and the dangers they can encounter. We will explain the deceptions used by people who suggest that children or adults can get attractive-sounding jobs in other countries,” MsViengsamone said. Members of the Savannakhet Women's Union recently attended a conference in Vietnam on human trafficking where they reported on problems in Laos and heard about similar incidents experienced in Thailand and Vietnam. After the meeting they signed a memorandum of understanding on anti-

human trafficking with Thailand and Vietnam. Reporting on the situation in Savannakhet province, the union said there was not only a lot of women but also men who were being tricked into taking up jobs in Thailand after being trafficked to that country. “At first they are employed as housekeepers or factory workers and given a decent wage but then many of them are sold to other people and forced to work hard for very little money. Some women are forced to work as prostitutes in Thailand and other countries in the region,” MsViengsamone said. She added that most of the victims come from impoverished backgrounds and are poorly educated, making them more vulnerable to the guile of traffickers. A Lao woman working as a housekeeper in Bangkok using the assumed name Ms Phone, originally from Outhomphone district in Savannakhet province, spoke to *Vientiane Times* recently about her experiences when she came back to Laos for a holiday. She said she was lucky because her employer took good care of her but she had lost contact with two of her friends who went with her to Bangkok. She was unable to track

them down there and had not been able to find them when she returned home to Savannakhet a few years later. The Savannakhet Women's Union said they had been unable to obtain records of human trafficking cases from the provincial Labour and Social Welfare Department. But Thailand's Mukdahan province had recorded about 70,000 cases of human trafficking in three years. The Women's Union said they did their best to get the message out to local communities through their provincial radio programme, but it was difficult to make personal visits to

at-risk communities because of funding constraints. Ms Viengsamone said they didn't have a budget to run the campaign to the extent they would like and radio was the best option at present. Whenever they meet up with women working in the area they take the opportunity to educate them about human trafficking. They also try to circulate information through district and village women's unions. The union recently teamed up with Savannakhet police headquarters to bring home 10 victims of human trafficking from Indonesia last week.

(Vientiane Times 20 Aout 2015)

Vangvieng visitors, income growing

(By Times Reporters)

The recent flooding has not affected revenue earning from tourism in the Vangvieng district of Vientiane province, while the number of tourists has continued to go up. The restaurants, guesthouses and bungalows along the Nam Xong River have seen very little loss and they are now able to go all out again. Well-known activities such as tubing, kayaking and boat tours on the Nam Xong have now returned to normal service. Vangvieng has seen a steady rise in income of 7-8 percent while the number of visitors has risen by 8 percent in the first seven months of the year compared to the same period last year. Head of the Vangvieng Tourism Department Mr Bounmy Phommasa explained that the district's tourism sector can thank the growing number of tour groups from Asia for the increase, with more Koreans, Chinese, and Thai visitors coming to the town. Korean tourist numbers especially have in-

creased, up by 60 percent in 2014 compared to 30 percent in 2013. European visitors were also up 45 percent and those from other countries 10 percent, which shows the town's tourism industry is springing back to life. Vangvieng is expecting to welcome around 180,000 people by the end of this year. Mr Bounmy said the department would work to improve services and tourist attractions, as well as allow more restaurants to open along the Nam Xong River. The department is also planning to open a zip-line at Tham Lom cave, to go along with other adventure activities such as tubing, kayaking, climbing, cycling, trekking, boat riding and quad bike riding. These activities will increase the number of attractions on offer, helping to draw even more tourists to Vangvieng and boost business and its income in the years ahead.

(Vientiane Times 20 Aout 2015)