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Govt, partners review poverty environment initiative

(By Times Reporters)

The Ministry of Planning and Investment partnered with international organisations to discuss the Poverty Environment Initiative Programme on Friday. The 2015 annual review meeting in Vientiane was attended by Minister of Planning and Investment Dr Bounthavy Sisouphanthong, Deputy Director of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation Mr Martin Hasler, and UNDP expert Ms Azusa Kubota. Since 2001, the Lao government has relied heavily on natural resources to boost investment and economic growth. As a result, investment from neighbouring countries and other regions has focused on extractive industries, chiefly mining, hydropower and agro-forestry plantations. This rapid investment in and increase of Laos' extractive industries over recent years has boosted economic growth. Striking the right balance between economic growth and environmental sustainability requires careful management to safeguard Laos' interests. The government has been working to promote quality investment under the framework and support of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Poverty Environment Initiative since 2009. The PEI Programme is important as it has undertaken a large amount of work to assist the Ministry of Planning and Investment and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to improve its management, regulatory mechanisms, and monitoring tools relating to financial, social and environmental compliance for quality investment. The programme has successfully included Poverty and Environment (PE) into the national plan, the creation of investment management tools, building the knowledge and capacity of government institutions and individual staff to better understand the quality aspects of FDI and having systematic tools to screen and monitor

them. Building on the design and success of the project's first phase, PEI Phase II aimed to strengthen the capacity of the government to manage investment more systematically and increase the number of quality investments across the country. The PEI approach supports country-led efforts to mainstream poverty-environment linkages into the existing national development planning processes, from policymaking to budgeting, from implementation to monitoring. PEI first addressed the conditions for accepting FDI into Laos, followed by strengthening the government's institutional capacities in terms of systems, tools and strategies to properly select, regulate, manage, monitor, and evaluate non-compliance aspects of FDI investments against terms and conditions in the concession agreement, relevant domestic laws and regulations. Upon completion of PEI Phase II in December 2015, it was found that the programme had been successfully implemented and achieved its objectives. To name a few, the main achievements include the development of the seventh and eighth National Socio-economic Development Plan indicators handbook, annual development plan guideline 2014/2015, public participation manual, green growth guideline, investment approval process information guidebook (one-stop-service guidebook), investment tracking tool-process, cost of doing business handbook, investment promotion website and video, and general and specific technical guideline to write, review and monitor environmental and social aspects. In addition, to generate awareness on Initial Environmental Examination (IEE)/ Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) and contract farming works, videos and policy briefs/information sheets on public involvement in IEE/ESIA process as well as contract farming have been developed and disseminated to wider stakehold-

ers. Furthermore, financial and accounting management manual and software have been developed to support and manage investment and environmental works. With the help of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Poverty Environment Facility, the Poverty Environment Initiative,

originally due to end in December 2015, has been extended for one year, placing more emphasis on building the knowledge of government authorities to effectively use the environmental planning and management tools developed by the project to advance sustainable inclusive growth in Laos.

(Vientiane Times 18 January 2016)

10th Party Congress defines national development path

(By Times Reporters)

The 10th Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) began yesterday in Vientiane to review Party leadership, discuss and approve the next five-year roadmap, and review all-round national development and protection under the leadership of the Party over the past five years.



Party Secretary General Choummaly Sayasone delivers his opening remarks at the 10th Party Congress with members of the Politburo and Party Central Committee, former Party leaders, Party members, and invited guests in attendance.

The five-day congress is set to elect a new Party Central Committee, Party Secretary General, and Politburo members. In his opening remarks, Party Secretary General and Lao President Choummaly Sayasone said “The 10th Party Congress is very significant politically, and a historic milestone in determining the direction and tasks towards our nation's development as we move closer to achieving the set goals.” More than 1,000 people including 680 delegates (of whom 83 are women) and more than 400 invited guests are attending the congress. Nationwide there are more than 268,000 Party members working in various sectors of gov-

ernment around the country. The congress is taking place in an atmosphere of pride on the part of the entire multiethnic population as they look back on 40 years of achievements in the mission of national protection and development. Mr Choummaly reminded the audience of the time when the new democratic regime was proclaimed more than 40 years ago, and the implementation of the renovation policy, which has been in effect for 30 years. He said there are a number of issues the Party has to review and evaluate objectively and in depth to ensure positive outcomes and address shortcomings. There is an 18.7 percent increase in the number of Party members attending the 10th Congress compared to the previous congress. Of the 685 Party members attending the ongoing congress, 49 are members of the Party Central Committee, 412 are from Party organs in the provinces and the capital, and 224 are from ministries and other government agencies. Secretary General Choummaly said preparations for the 10th Party Congress had been outstanding and reflected improvements in the Party as measured in political life nationwide and in many facets. “We have taken new steps, in which our Party has improved in terms of political ideology and organisation,” Mr Choummaly said. The congress, which continues until Friday, will review the implementation of the resolution of the 9th Party Congress, Draft Vision 2030, the draft of the 8th Five-Year National

Socio-Economic Development Plan, the Draft Socio-Economic Development Strategy for the next 10 years (2016-2025), and consider approval of the amendment to the Party statute. One of the most important items on the agenda is the election of the new Party leadership which will take place on January 21, with the results to be announced on the same day. In addition, representatives from ministries, the provinces and the capital, National Assembly, Government Office and judiciary bodies will recount their success in implementing the resolution of the 9th Party Congress. The congress paid its respects to the country's beloved leader Pres-

ident Kaysone Phomvihane, who initiated and guided the renovation policy, while participants also expressed gratitude to deceased staff and Party members who had dedicated their lives to the nation. The change in the Party leadership precedes the change in the state and government leadership which will take place in the coming months. The National Assembly (NA) is scheduled to hold its next general election to elect NA members in March. Subsequently, parliament will convene its first ordinary session to elect the country's president, and approve a new prime minister and cabinet members.

(Vientiane Times 19 January 2016)

Govt approves new SEZ in Luang Prabang

(By Times Reporters)

The government has given the green light for a Lao company to set up a special economic zone (SEZ) in Luang Prabang province, bringing the total number of SEZs nationwide to 13. The development is part of plans to create a new town in the suburbs of the provincial capital, while ensuring the town's cultural integrity is preserved. The Phousy Group expects to spend US\$1.2 billion to develop the zone on an area of 4,850 hectares with a concession period of 99 years. The zone will be located about 10km outside Luang Prabang town centre with another site in Chomphet district on the other side of the Mekong River. The developer will build a bridge across the river along with infrastructure such as roads, electricity, water supply and other amenities to attract businesses to the area. An agreement to build the zone was signed in Vientiane on Sunday between government representatives and the President of the Phousy Group, Mr Sithong Phommachit. Representing the government at the signing were Luang Prabang provincial Governor Mr Khamkhan Chanthavisouk, Deputy Minister and Vice President of the Lao National Committee for Special Economic Zones (NCSEZ), Ms Bouatha Khat-

tiya, and representatives of other sectors. The event was also attended by Deputy Prime Minister Somsavat Lengsavad, who supervises economic affairs, and other high-ranking officials. Designed as a new town, the zone will feature a 23-storey building, schools, hospitals, shopping centre, bank, hotels, restaurants, and residences for older people. Areas for organic vegetable gardens are also planned. A one-stop operating service will be introduced for businesses in the zone to ensure transparency and accountability and to facilitate development. The government believes the new zone will help to boost economic growth in the province and generate job opportunities for local people. People in the area currently use ferries to cross the Mekong River between the town of Luang Prabang and Chomphet district for the purposes of travel and business. Once a bridge is built across the river, it will facilitate tourism, trade and investment in the province. Luang Prabang is home to Laos' first World Heritage Site and is considered a magnet for regional and international tourists. The zone will not only serve as a driver of economic growth, but will also spur development in other areas. Other Spe-

cial and Specific Economic Zones in Laos are the That Luang Marsh SEZ in Vientiane, the Savan-Seno SEZ in Savannakhet province, the Golden Triangle SEZ in Bokeo province, the Boten Dankham SEZ in Luang

Namtha province, the Vientiane Long Thanh Golf Course in Vientiane, the Phoukhiew SEZ in Khammuan province, and the Pakxe-Japan Specific Economic Zone in Champasak province.

(Vientiane Times 19 January 2016)

Laos strives for upper middle income country status by 2030

(By Souksakhone Vaenkeo)

Laos will aim to become an upper middle income country by 2030 with Gross National Income (GNI) per capita envisioned to increase to US\$7,351 – almost five times the GNI in 2015, the government has told the ongoing 10th Party Congress. Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong presented a draft of the 15-year Vision (2016-2030) and 10-year Strategy (2016-2025) on socio-economic development to the 10th Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, which opened yesterday in Vientiane. Countries with GNI per capita of US\$6,500–US\$20,100 are categorised as upper middle income nations, according to international assessments. Prime Minister Thongsing, who is also a Politburo member, told the five-day congress that Laos will strive to graduate from least developed country status by 2020 and then strive for the next level on the development rung. Laos is pursuing development under the theme ‘Striving to graduate from least developed country status by 2020 towards becoming a developing upper middle income country alongside green and sustainable development by 2030.’ By 2025, Laos aims to enjoy firm political stability while continuing to nurture and strengthen the people's demo-

cratic regime under the leadership of the Party. Over the next 10 years until 2025, the government will strive to achieve annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth of at least 7.5 percent. Average GDP per capita is set to increase to more than twice the 2015 figure. In addition, the government will strive to reduce the poverty rate to not more than 5 percent of the entire population by 2025. The poverty rate is set to fall to less than 10 percent of the total population by 2020. Prime Minister Thongsing told the congress that Laos will also aim to raise average life expectancy to 73 years by 2025 through improved healthcare services. The government will work to ensure that all school-aged children complete lower secondary school while paying more attention to the development of human resources to meet the growing need for a skilled workforce. Laos will also continue to protect its forests with the aim of achieving forest cover over at least 70 percent of the country. In addition, the government will work to ensure that Laos has many international friends and can integrate economically with the region and the world.

(Vientiane Times 19 January 2016)

Theme park not to be called 'Disney Laos': project developers

(By Times Reporters)

Lao and foreign investors plan to invest billions of dollars to build an Asian style and standard 'Theme Park' in Laos within the next seven to ten years, according to the project developers. The park is one of the projects planned in the three phases of Thakhaek Dream World City at the Thakhaek Specific Economic Zone in Khammuan province. Initially, the project developers named the park 'Disney Laos' but decided to drop the title and replace it with the name 'Theme Park' in keeping with its character as a local style fun park and end any public confusion. The park will be part of Phase III of the Thakhaek Dream World City project that will cost investors a projected US\$12 billion with registered capital of US\$1.5 billion in Laos and will feature shows from other countries in the region," Mr Somjith said. Investors come from four different companies; one is from Laos and the other three are from Malaysia. The first phase of the project will construct the Thakhaek Ehsan International Financial Centre and other buildings. Land is now being levelled prior to the start of construction, on a concession

billion, operating under the Akane Development Lao Co., Ltd. Akane Farm Sole Co., Ltd. Chairman Somjith Aliyaphaphone told *Vientiane Times* reporters on Monday that his company and its foreign joint-venture partners have decided on the title 'Theme Park' instead of 'Disney Laos' as was recently published in the newspaper and social media. "We decided to pick a new name for the park, to avoid any further misunderstanding by members of the public but construction plans for the park remain unchanged," Mr Somjith said. He explained that the concept of the park was designed around the theme of Laos' beautiful scenery and its variety of ethnic groups. "Our plan for the park is to highlight the many ethnic groups area of 7 hectares. Four buildings have already been approved by the government including serviced apartments, a hotel, finance centre, and shopping mall. In addition, the developer plans to expand the land concession to 1,500 hectares to carry out its planned 28 construction projects with total investment for the three phases estimated at US\$12 billion.

(*Vientiane Times* 20 January 2016)

New Party Central Committee elected

(By Somsack Pongkhao)



Party Secretary General Choummaly Sayasone (*far right*) and other 10th Party Congress delegates yesterday vote for members of the Party Central Committee.

A new Party Central Committee has been elected to further lead national protection and socio-economic development, especially poverty reduction efforts, to ensure that Laos graduates from least developed country status by 2020. The election of the 10th Party Central Committee members and alternative Party Central Committee members took place at the 10th Party Congress in Vientiane yesterday, with the results announced by Party Politburo member Mr Bounhang Vorachit.

Some 685 Party members elected 69 Party Central Committee members from 77 candidates and 8 alternative Party Central Committee members from 11 candidates. The preliminary session of the new Party Central Committee will take place today. This meeting will elect the Party Politburo members, the Secretary General of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, Party Central Committee Secretariat, Standing Member of the Party Central Committee Secretariat, and the Party Inspection Committee. All 39 members of the 9th Party Central Committee who stood for election this year were elected to the 10th Party Central Committee. At the 9th Party Congress in 2011, 61 members were elected to the Party Central Committee, compared to 69 this year. Members of the 9th Party Central Committee who did not apply this year include Party Secretary General Mr Choummaly Sayasone, Party Politburo member Mr Thongsing Thammavong, Party Politburo member Mr Asang Laoly, and Party Politburo member Mr Somsavat Lengsavad.

A full list of the 10th Party Central Committee members follows below:

1. Mr Bounnhang Vorachit
2. Ms Pany Yathotou
3. Mr Thongloun Sisoulith
4. Dr Bounthong Chitmany
5. Dr Bounpone Bouttanavong
6. Mr Phankham Viphavanh
7. Mr Chansy Phosikham
8. Lt. Gen. Sengnouan Xayalath
9. Dr Xaysomphone Phomvihane
10. Mr Somphanh Phengkhammy
11. Mr Khammanh Sounvileuth
12. Prof. Dr Chaleun Yiapaoher
13. Lt. Gen. Chansamone Chanyalath
14. Mr Khamsane Souvong
15. Dr Sinlavong Khoutphaythoune
16. Dr Khamphanh Phommathat
17. Prof. Dr Somkot Mangnomek
18. Dr Sonexay Siphandone
19. Dr Nam Viyaket
20. Ms Sisay Leudetmounsone
21. Prof. Dr Kikeo Khaykhamphithoune
22. Mr Khambay Damlath
23. Mr Sommad Pholsena
24. Mr Somdy Duangdy
25. Prof. Dr Bosengkham Vongdara
26. Dr Lien Thikey
27. Prof. Dr Eksavang Vongvichit
28. Mr Xaysi Santivong
29. Dr Khampheng Saysompheng
30. Major General Souvone Leuangbounmy
31. Mr Khammeung Phongthady
32. Major General Somkeo Silavong
33. Mr Khamjane Vongphosy
34. Mr Pan Noymany
35. Prof. Dr Soukkongseng Saignaleuth
36. Mr Khamphanh Sittidampha
37. Mr Khampheuy Bouddavieng
38. Dr Sounthone Xayachack
39. Major General Dr Thongloy Silivong
40. Major General Vilay Lakhamfong
41. Dr Khammany Inthirath
42. Mr Oday Soudaphone
43. Dr Kongkeo Xaysongkham
44. Dr Inlavanh Keobounphanh
45. Mr Khamkhanh Chanthavisouk
46. Ms Khemmani Pholsena
47. Prof. Dr Boviengkham Vongdara
48. Dr Viengthong Siphandone
49. Dr Sonethanou Thammavong
50. Mr Saleumxay Kommasith
51. Ms Sengdeuane Lachanthaboun
52. Dr Vilayvong Bouddakham
53. Dr Somphao Phaysith
54. Dr Thansamay Kommasith
55. Assoc. Prof. Dr Thongsalith Mangnomek
56. Dr Bounchanh Sinthavong
57. Mr Sisouvanh Vongchomsy
58. Dr Phet Phomphiphak
59. Mr Phongsavanh Sitthavong
60. Dr Khamphanh Pheuyavong
61. Mr Phetsakhone Luang-aphay
62. Mr Vidong Sayasone
63. Dr Anouphab Tounalom
64. Major General Dr Sinthavong Xayakone
65. Dr Bounthong Divixay
66. Dr Souphanh Keomixay
67. Mr Vanxay Phengxoumma

68. Mr Phetthavone Philavanh
69. Mr Santiphab Phomvihane

A list of the 10th alternative Party Central Committee members follows:

1. Ms Buakham Vorachit
2. Dr Buakhong Nammavong
3. Mr Sonexay Sitphaxay
4. Ms Baykham Khattiya

5. Mr Alounxay Sounnalath
6. Ms Suansavanh Viyaket
7. Mr Phoxay Sayasone
8. Mr Laopaoxong Navongxay

(Vientiane Times 22 January 2016)

Govt approves conversion of BM Plaza into SEZ

(By Times Reporters)

The government has agreed in principle to convert the BM Plaza shopping centre into a specific economic zone (SEZ) so the investor can take advantage of business incentives. BM Plaza is located in Dongphosy village, Hadxaifong district near the Thai border, next to the Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge connecting Thailand's Nong Khai province to Vientiane. The government set up a management committee for the zone at the end of last year, but they are now waiting for an official signing ceremony between the government and the developer to establish the zone, an official from the Lao National Committee for Special Economic Zones (NCSEZ) Secretariat said. The new specific economic zone will bring the total number of SEZs nationwide to 13, including three SEZs and 10 specific economic zones. The three SEZs are Savan-Seno SEZ in Savannakhet province, Golden Triangle SEZ in Bokeo province, and Phousy SEZ in Luang Prabang. Specific economic zones include Boten Beautiful Land in Luang Namtha province, Pakxe-Japan SME in Champassak province, Thakhaek and the Phoukhiew SEZ in Khammuan province. Other specific economic zones in Vientiane are That Luang Marsh, Vientiane Industry and Trade Area (VITA Park), Vientiane Long Thanh Golf Course in Xaysettha district, and Dongphousy 1 and 2. The BM Group was well positioned by the

first Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge in a strategic location with thousands of people passing through each day, making the area suitable for trade, service and tourism complex development, according to the developer. The BM Group has been granted a 50 year concession on nine hectares for investment and the group plans to expand this to 28 hectares after receiving approval from the government to convert it into a SEZ. According to the Group the objective of converting the plaza into a SEZ is to develop the area into a modern trade and service complex, ready for the development of basic infrastructure. The SEZ will enjoy a special policy on tax, customs and administration in accordance with the single window service to facilitate investment and business operations. In addition, the zone will help to reduce costs for consumers, reduce the outflow of foreign currency and lower the trade deficit as well as help with Asean economic integration. The BM Group plans to build a trade centre on 5 hectares of land, a hotel on 3 hectares, a restaurant, a theme park on 7 hectares, warehouse on 5 hectares, financial institution on 3 hectares, a parking lot on 2 hectares, and a wastewater and refuse treatment facility on 1 hectare. Total investment in the development is estimated at about US\$100 million, with the BM Group holding 80 percent of shares, the government 15 per-

cent and the other 5 percent held by a local businesswoman. The development is divided into three phases over three years. Conversion of BM Plaza into a SEZ is

expected to develop basic infrastructure, create jobs and income for local people, and provide a stable income source for Vientiane as well as contribute to the national budget.

(Vientiane Times 22 January 2016)

Vientiane residents call for more parking spaces

(By Times Reporters)

Footpaths in Vientiane are still being used for car parking, which is inconvenient for pedestrians and makes the capital look untidy in the eyes of visitors. One pedestrian named Ms Chanthanom complained that footpaths should be for pedestrians only and should not be used as parking spaces. "I have seen this problem for several years but drivers still park on footpaths. The authorities don't pay any attention to this issue and people frequently end up walking on the roads," she said. Vientiane has now reached a state of crisis in terms of parking as so many companies, shops, restaurants and government offices are located in the city centre but there are no plans to build any car parks, she added. She hoped the authorities would soon issue a regulation to remedy the situation and show some respect for pedestrians, particularly as vehicle numbers continue to increase. The number of vehicle purchases in Vientiane has skyrocketed in the first two

months of this year, with more than 10,000 new vehicles being registered, according to the Driving Management Unit. The number of vehicles in Vientiane has now reached 770,000, almost half the total nationwide, with an average annual increase of 15-20 percent. Recently, the Pakpasak canal between Vat Chan village and Sihom village, Chanthabouly district, was modified by a private company to provide extra parking space, and can accommodate up to 200 cars. The company is also building a seven-storey car park in Hatsady village, near the Talat Sao Mall. The building will be in the Hongthong area, occupying a total of 2,546 square metres. Construction is expected to be complete within the next five years. Vientiane residents hope the authorities have detailed plans to create more parking spaces and ensure that all new buildings provide adequate parking facilities for customers and guests.

(Vientiane Times 22 January 2016)

Champassak reports on GDP growth

(By Times Reporters)



The Pakxe-Phonthong bridge in Champassak province is also a key factor to boost investment projects in the province.

Champassak province expects to achieve 50 percent of the yearly targeted GDP plan over the first six months of the fiscal year 2015-16, according to the province's Planning and Investment Department. As per the current report for the first three months, it states that the rate the province's economy is growing at 5.1 percent, which is some 62 percent of the annual plan. At the same time, the province is set to see growth of 8.1 percent at the end of this year. The agricultural sector will contribute 68 percent, the industry sector 8 percent and the service sector 24 percent to total GDP. Meanwhile the rate of inflation is

under control at 1.14 percent, a decrease of 1.19 percent if compared to the same period in the first three months of last year. In addition, the province also plans to see GDP growth hit 7.44 billion over the next six months, while GDP per capita will be about 9.96 million kip (over US\$1,246) and expenses will be limited to 217.85 billion kip. The inflation rate will be controlled under the rate of economic growth, according to the release of the first six months' plan. In the second quarter of this fiscal year, the province will carry out the implementation of investment projects worth a total of 1,941 billion kip. These investment projects will include government funds of 66.4 billion kip, funds from Official Development Assistance (ODA) of about 381.1 billion kip and funds from domestic and foreign investment projects worth over 1,352 billion kip. At the same time, a total of 93 projects worth over 66.46 billion kip will be carried out under the domestic and foreign investment funds. The province is also set to promote more domestic and foreign investment at 1,352 billion kip by enhancing collaboration and cooperation between various key essential sectors.

(Vientiane Times 22 January 2016)

Xekong eyes surge in export value thanks to hydropower

(By Times Reporters)

Xekong provincial authorities expect the value of exports to increase by at least 150 percent this year following the generation of electricity by recently built dams in the province. In fiscal year 2014-15, the value of exports was US\$13.7 million but this fiscal year the province anticipates earning about US\$34 million from exports, according to a report from the provincial Planning and Investment Department. Most of the export products are electricity along with sweetcorn, coffee, wood, and livestock. The province is focusing on hydropower development and will continue to build dams funded by the government. Provincial authorities have also signed agreements to enlarge electricity stations and expand networks and transmission lines to remote areas, as well as other investments. Development of the electricity sector is the main priority of the province to increase its export value. The province plans to increase the generation of electricity by 18.7 percent each year. Some dams in the province are already generating electricity while others are under construction, including the Xekong 4 dam (600MW), Xekong 5 (400MW), Houay Lamphan (6.5MW), Xekhaman 4 (155MW) and Dak-Emeun (130MW). Xekong has the necessary natural

resources to build dams but has limited funding for construction. However, the province will seek more domestic and foreign investors to develop the sector in order to contribute to local economic development. As well as electricity, Xekong is turning its attention to the processing industry and export of agricultural products. This year, the province plans to increase GDP by 13 percent, with an increase in the contribution of agriculture by 7.5 percent, 15.5 percent from industry, and 16.8 percent from the service sector. The growth of these various sectors is expected to boost average per capita income to about 12.4 million kip this year up from 10.4 million kip last year. The province will also try to reduce the value of imports from US\$27.6 million last year to US\$24 million this year. Most imports comprise vehicles, machinery, electronic goods, construction and medical equipment, food and clothing. In order to increase GDP by 13 percent, the province will need about 736 billion kip in funding for the development of various sectors this year. About 90 billion kip will come from the government, 74 million kip from grants and loans, 296 billion kip from the domestic and foreign private sectors, and 278 billion kip from bank loans.

(Vientiane Times 22 January 2016)