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Laos, Japan enhance cooperation

□ VIENTIANE TIMES

THE foreign ministers of Laos and Japan expressed their satisfaction on the progress of relations between the two countries over the past 50 years.

The official meeting between a Lao delegation led by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Somsavat Lengsavad and his counterpart, Senior Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Mr Ichiro Aisawa, was held on June 13 in Nagoya city, Japan.

The talks coincided with Laos' participation in World Expo 2005 at Aichi, Japan.

During the meeting the two ministers reviewed the relationship and cooperation of Laos and Japan; they also were pleased that the two countries were celebrating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Somsavat reaffirmed the unwavering support of the Lao PDR to Japan's bid for permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

He said that the objective of Lao participation in the World Expo is to further deepen the understanding of the Japanese people and other



Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Somsavat Lengsavad (left) presents a gift to Japan's Senior Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Ichiro Aisawa.

nations about Lao government's policies that emphasise the participation of its people in protection of the environment, and the optimum use of already scarce natural resources.

He added that taking part in the World Expo to share Lao culture and lifestyle with other people from friendly countries would contribute significantly to the strengthening of the

friendly ties and enhancement of cooperation in economy, trade, investment and promotion of tourism between Laos and Japan.

Laos would also use the platform to interact with other countries around the world for the cause of peace and the preservation of an everlasting sound environment and the sustainable development of mankind, he said.

Deputy Prime Minister, Somsavat representing the Lao government and its people also expressed thanks to the Japanese government and its people, in particular to the Organisation Committee of the 2005 World Expo Aichi, Tenrikyo Temple in Nagoya city, Tahara city officials, Nomura Company, Lieu Tou company and others, for their kind support and assistance and for facilitating Lao participation in the World Expo as well as the excellent arrangements made for celebration of Lao Day.

Mr Ichiro also expressed his thanks to the Lao government and Lao people for supporting Japan's bid for her permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

He also reaffirmed that the Japanese government would do its best to enlarge the good relations with Laos and will support its economic development effort and help the country graduate from 'least developed' status.

Lao language computer platform imminent

□ SOULIVAN VONGMANY

LAO computer users will be able to use their own Lao Language software platform soon, Science Technology and Environment Agency IT centre Director Phonpasith Phitssamay said last week at the meeting to review the Lao localisation project in Vientiane.

Mr Phonpasith introduced the newly developed platform to the forum, an achievement of STEA's research project on "Lao localisation", prior to sending it to Microsoft Company to publish with its new Windows version.

STEA's Lao Language software platform is comprehensive, and includes several functionalities such as line breaking, sorting, lexical, Lao-English-Lao dictionary, spell check, find and replace functions, conversion of fonts and editor.

Today's global society has been connected via the Internet. Individuals are connected with each other and other organisations in every part of the world through e-mail. We also gather global information through the Internet. Under these conditions, native culture and language is important to bridge the 'digital divide' of non-English people.

Since Microsoft has not released a standard version of Microsoft Windows for use with Lao language, a number of other partial solutions were created to allow the use of Lao with Windows applications. These were the result of small individual initiatives taken by local authorities, developers, linguistics and users.

However, there was lack of coordination and the most critical problem was low technical competence and lack of funds for producing inside the country.

Therefore, previously, most
CONTINUED PAGE 3

New fine arts library

□ THIPPHAPHONE BANPHET

THE National Institute of Fine Arts opened a new campus library last Friday in Vientiane.

The Ministry of Information and Culture's Office Chief, Mr Houmpheng Sinpaseuth, National Library Director, Mrs Kongdeuane Nettavong, First Secretary of the Singapore Embassy, Mr Scott Loh, Director of Centre de Langue Francaise, Mr Gille Laine and Director General of the National Institute of Fine Arts, Bounthieng Siripaphanh, attended the opening.

Design Alliance President, Mr William
CONTINUED PAGE 2



From left Praseuth Banchongphakdy, Scott Loh, Viengxay Chounlamany and Bounthieng Siripaphanh at the opening.

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Japanese funds for Luang Namtha

□ KHONESAVANH LATSAPHAO

THE government of Japan provided funds worth US\$1.5 million to the Lao PDR last Friday, through the Asia Development Bank, to improve agriculture in Luang Namtha province.

The signing ceremony for the grant assistance was held at the Ministry of Finance last week in Vientiane.

Deputy Finance Minister Mr Somdy Douangdy said that this money would be used to improve the country's agriculture system, and to make forests sustainable. It would also help improve living conditions in the province. The project is expected to start this month

after the signing.

The Lao Sustainable Agro-forest System for Livelihood Enhancement of Rural Poor Project aims to develop people in nine villages in the two districts of Luang Namtha and Viengphoukha districts, said Luang Namtha Deputy Governor Mr Singkham Phanthavong.

According to a project survey conducted over three years, many people living in these areas were found to be among the province's poorest.

"Most of them hunt animals for their daily meal and engage in slash and burn cultivation," said Mr Singkham.

Currently, the forest conservation land near the two

districts is threatened due to slash and burn cultivation. As a first step to prevent this, the project is constructing a road access for the people in the two districts where the target groups are located inside the forest.

If the road is completed, it will help many project staff to work in coordination with the local people. The workers will educate locals about the dangers of slash and burn cultivation, and raise awareness about how to save the forest in the area before telling them to stop slash and burn cultivation.

Fifty percent of the population in these villages is poor. People in these areas have been waiting for government

assistance to improve their living conditions for many years, Mr Singkham said.

Over 90 percent of people living in these areas belong to the Lao Thueng ethnic group, and rely on slash and burn cultivation because there is no other work for them in the province.

Mr Singkham said that the project would spend four years to reduce poverty in these villages. It will provide permanent jobs to villagers after they stop slash and burn cultivation.

When people have finally stopped slash and burn cultivation, the project will work to improve the soil in the areas that were cultivated, and rehabilitate the forest.



From right Mr Phonpasith Phitssamay, Dr Maydom Chanthanasinh and Mr Nadir, an IT expert from Pakistan.

Lao language...

FROM PAGE 1

research work on Lao localisation was done outside the country by people with negligible linguistic skills; the applications were based on roman technology. In addition, all the developments had commercial orientation with low interest for local users.

To design the new platform, STEA's Information Technology Centre (ITC) established a National Language Processing Group, comprising systems architects, programmers and linguistic experts.

The project was supported by Canada's International Development Research Centre and National University of Science of Pakistan.

Pan Localisation Project is a regional initiative to develop local language computing capacity in Asia supported by International Development Research Programme, Canada, through its Pan Asia Networking (PAN) programme, with the objective to develop sustainable human resource capacity in the Asian region for R&D in local language technology.

It also aims to raise current levels of technological support for Asian languages and to advance policy for local language content creation and access across Asia for development.

STEA Vice President, Dr Maydom Chanthanasinh

presided over the meeting attended by 17 representatives from various organisations.

"This is a computer century so we need to introduce our own language into the computer system," said Dr Maydom.

"Using computers is very important because it can help every sector of society. Currently many Lao people use computers daily, however, the available computer platforms are all in English and other languages" he said.

"The absence of a Lao language platform is an inconvenience for Lao people who can not read and write in other languages."

A student at the Faculty of Education, National University of Laos, said that this is a great achievement by Lao researchers, and affords a great opportunity for many Lao users who do not understand foreign languages.

Phonpasith added that anyone, from Lao or abroad, wanting to see or use the new Lao language platform, should contact the IT centre, or visit their website and download it for use at www.laol10n.info.la.

If users have any information or comments they are required to inform the development team at 217706, extension 108, as early as possible; the Lao platform is expected to be sent to the Microsoft Company within the next few months and any amendment will be difficult to effect after its dispatch.



Members of the Laos-France Association present medical equipment to Mr Champheng at Mahosot Hospital.

Donations to help newborns

□ VIENTIANE TIMES

A REPRESENTATIVE of the Laos-France Association, Mme Marie Luangkhot, handed over medical equipment on Thursday to the director of Mahosot Hospital, Mr Chanpheng Thammavong.

The equipment is to be used in the care of newborns in order to reduce fatalities by helping babies to such survive such conditions as jaundice.

Mme Luangkhot said the association would try to ensure that every hospital in the country had better equipment to care for

newborns. She hoped that this donation would improve the quality of paediatric care and would prove useful in the future.

"We are trying to help as many hospitals as possible, including those in Luang Prabang, Huaphan, Pakxe and Oudomxay provinces," she said.

Mr Chanpheng expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Laos-France Association for their assistance. He the gift would help to improve nursing care and knowledge and would give newborns a better chance of survival.

Bus passengers complain

□ KHONESAVANH LATSAPHAO

"I DON't care about complaints from people travelling to the south because they will travel with us anyway," said Mr Phone, a bus driver at the bus station in the Savannakhet province.

In general, bus drivers are responsible for their passengers and try to keep them safe.

Yet many people do not like to take buses from Savannakhet bus station to Khammuan and Borikhamxay provinces because the bus station is far out of the city centre and they have to pay extra to get a tuk tuk or jumbo to get there.

A further complaint, about the bus service between Savannakhet and Vientiane, is the large number of people who live along the main road and want to get on the bus at many stops, adding time to the bus journey.

People who have purchased tickets claim the time spent travelling this route can range from 3 hours to 12 hours in some cases.

A resident of Chomphet village in Khanthabouly district in Savannakhet province, Mrs Lae, said she

got very bored when visiting her sister in Vientiane. She claimed the bus stopped too many times and picked up people along the road who should not have been travelling on the bus.

"It was very disrupting. I got a headache from the bus constantly stopping to pick up and drop off passengers from this village to that village," complained Mrs Lae.

Drivers are not supposed to take passengers on board when the seats are full, but they always do and let them to stand where they can. On this route the bus stops every 30 minutes. Drivers are required to have over 25 passengers on the bus to receive a wage from the bus company. The price of a ticket from Savannakhet to Vientiane is 45,000 kip.

One driver on the Savannakhet to Vientiane route, Mr Keo, said he would continue to pick up as many people as possible. "We are a bus service so we cannot turn people away when they need our service," he said.

Some buses have air-conditioning, but in most cases, it is not used because it increases the amount of money spent on fuel.

Checkpoint to boost Lao-Viet trade

□ VIENTIANE TIMES

LAOS and Vietnam on last week opened a temporary terrestrial checkpoint between their respective provinces of Xekong and Kontum.

Xekong Governor Bualeui Chanlangkham said that the checkpoint will catalyse relations and comprehensive cooperation between the provinces.

It will lead to the adoption of the implementation of the renovation guideline of the two countries, aimed at national defence and security, according to him.

The checkpoint will be a potential to boost socio-economic development of the two provinces and will

facilitate easy trade between people living on both sides of the border, in order to achieve the targets set by the two Parties, states and nations.

He said the opening of the checkpoint is an excellent gift to commemorate the 115th birth anniversary of Ho Chi Minh and the 85th birth anniversary of Kaysone Phomvihane. It will also act as a symbol helping to strengthen the friendship and special cooperation between Laos and Vietnam, in particular, between the respective local authorities and ethnic populations of the two provinces.

People can now use the checkpoint in keeping with border regulations and laws of the two countries.

Thanks

In recognition of all blood donors, whose invaluable contribution have helped save people's lives, the Blood Donation Center and the National Blood Transfusion Centre (NBTC) organised some activities on the occasion of World Blood Donor Day last June 14. The NBTC held promotions, a walk for health, and set up blood donation centres all over Vientiane. Blood donations came from 52 people belonging to various sectors, including government ministries, schools, villages, the Lao Red Cross Centre, the a World Health Organisation and even the Indonesian Embassy. Generous groups also donated cash and materials. The breakdown of donations is as follows:

Cash:	
Lao Brewery Company	3,000,000 kip
Lao Telecom Company	1,000,000 kip
Lao Post Office	200,000 kip
Kind:	
Mellicom Lao Company	200 T-shirts
	50 keychains
Nestle Company	1,200,000 worth of drinks

The NBTC and the Lao Red Cross Centre would like to thank all donors, especially the companies that donated blood and supported this celebration.

Best wishes to everyone, and we hope you are all successful in your endeavors.

From the Lao Red Cross Centre

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