

Laos national day

Laos heads toward sustainable development

Sithog Chitnhothinh
AMBASSADOR OF LAOS

This Dec. 2 marks the 35th anniversary of the foundation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and the entire Lao multiethnic people are happy to celebrate the national day. On this very auspicious occasion, I would like, on behalf of President Choummaly Sayasone of the Lao PDR, to convey my most respectful greetings and best wishes of good health and prosperity to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, all members of the Imperial Family, Prime Minister Naoto Kan, the government and the people of Japan.



This year is of great significance for the Lao PDR. The Lao PDR has completed the implementation of the sixth Five-year Socioeconomic Development Plan. Over the past years, our socioeconomic development has been steadily progressing. Many targets of socioeconomic development have been achieved. The economy has grown at an average rate of over 7 percent annually, the macro economy is basically stable and the livelihood of the Lao multiethnic people has been gradually improved.

The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita income has increased to \$986 this year. The development in culture, education and health, and poverty reduction have seen sound progress. All this success has been due to the right policy and the timely measures undertaken by the Lao government, the ef-

forts of the Lao people, the decisive factors creating an environment for socioeconomic development in the Lao PDR and the generous support from friendly countries including Japan and international organizations.

The seventh Five-year Socioeconomic Development Plan for 2011-2015 has been prepared. The development targets of the government of the Lao PDR over the next five years aim at achieving an annual economic growth rate of 8 percent; stabilizing the macro economy; ensuring the development projects are implemented on a sustainable manner; enhancing rural development and reducing the poverty rate from 26 percent to 15 percent, hence achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015; furthering public administration reform and ensuring the strengthening of institutions and human resources as well as the integration into ASEAN and international communities. The government will implement more practical policy on promoting the participation of both domestic and foreign business communities as well as the society to participate in the materialization of the development targets of the country over the next five years.

In terms of the investment from Japan to the Lao PDR, after the entry into force of the Agreement between Japan and the Lao People's Democratic Republic for the Liberalization, Promotion, and Protection of Investment in 2008, Japan ranks sixth among 39 countries in approved foreign investment in the Lao PDR from 2001 to September 2010, with a total value of investment of \$437.33

million, according to statistics by the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

The Lao PDR becomes a land-linked country among the Mekong region countries and the Southeast Asia region with the East-West and North-South Economic Corridor. The Lao PDR is in its final preparations for joining the World Trade Organization.

This October, the Lao Securities Exchange was officially launched and its full business operation of the Securities Exchange will start from Jan. 11, 2011. Currently, nine, well-known, local companies and enterprises have been registered on the Lao Securities Exchange. Foreign investors are also welcome to the stock exchange market.

In tourism, the Lao PDR has around 1,500 tourist sites including two UNESCO World Heritage sites. The Lao PDR is a country of an ancient civilization of diverse culture and plentiful historical heritage with the charm of untouched nature. More than 70 percent of the country is comprised of highland areas, offering opportunities for a variety of outdoor adventures. The Lao PDR is one of the world's exciting and known destinations for bird and wildlife observation. Over 800 bird species and more than 100 large mammal species have been identified. Tropical monsoon forests, ecologically precious wetlands and limestone formations are worth seeing.

From 2007, the government of the Lao PDR has exempted 15-day visas for Japanese tourists and businesspeople, and since then the number of Japanese people visiting the Lao PDR has increased more than before. This year, the number

of Japanese people visiting the Lao PDR from January to June was approximately 16,000. More than 2.8 million foreign tourists visited the Lao PDR last year.

The strong relationship and mutual trust between Japan and the Lao PDR fostered throughout the course of more than five decades of diplomatic relations and cooperation are common and irreplaceable assets for the two countries. Japan has always played a significant role in the social and economic development of the Lao PDR. Japan continues to be the leading donor of foreign assistance to the Lao PDR. Since 1996, Japan's ODA to the Lao PDR averages between \$80 million to \$120 million per year.

This year in particular has been marked by many momentous events. The Lao PDR and Japan celebrate the 55th anniversary of the establishment of Laos-Japan diplomatic relations. Many celebrative events and commemorative activities are organized in the Lao PDR as well as in Japan.

Early this March, President Sayasone and his spouse paid an official visit to Japan and they made a State Call on Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko. The president held a summit meeting with then

Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama and met with other distinguished figures including political and business leaders. At the summit meeting, both sides exchanged views on a wide range of issues related to bilateral relations and cooperation as well as regional and international issues of common interest. The Joint Statement on Strengthening Comprehensive Partnership toward Enduring Friendship and Regional Prosperity was concluded on this occasion. Later that month, His Imperial Highness Prince Akishino and Her Imperial Highness Princess Mako paid a visit to the Lao PDR.

This April, former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda attended the 26th Asian Parliamentarians' Meeting on Population and Development in Vientiane and he paid a courtesy call on President Sayasone. This May, Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh also attended the Nikkei International Conference on the Future of Asia and held a summit meeting with his counterpart in Tokyo. National Assembly President Thongsing Thammavong and his spouse paid an official visit to Japan as a guest of the House of Councilors.

The second Laos Festival was held in Tokyo and its open-



Amicable relations: President of Laos Choummaly Sayasone and his wife meet with Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko in March in Tokyo. EMBASSY OF LAOS

ing ceremony was attended by Prince Akishino and Prime Minister Bouphavanh and Lao and Japanese dignitaries. Over 120,000 people visited the two-day festival, a showcase of Lao culture, tradition, food, products and tourism. The event also featured music and dance performances by well-known Lao and Japanese artists. The festival significantly contributed to promoting cultural exchange, mutual understanding and friendship between our two countries.

This July, then Foreign Affairs Minister Katsuya Okada paid a visit to the Lao PDR and had a successful bilateral meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Af-

fairs Dr. Thongloun Sisoulith in Vientiane. Okada also paid a courtesy call on President Sayasone in Vientiane.

This October, the Second Joint Committee Meeting under the Agreement between the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Japan for the Liberalization, Promotion and Protection of Investment was held in Vientiane. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged frank opinions on the implementation and operation status of each of the articles.

On this meaningful day, on behalf of the government and the people of the Lao PDR, I avail myself of this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to the government

and the people of Japan for their valuable assistance, cooperation and solidarity, which proves the excellent relations and lasting friendship that so happily exist between our two peoples and countries. In my capacity as ambassador of the Lao PDR to Japan, I should like to reiterate my commitment to contribute to further strengthening and enhancing the ties of friendship and cooperation between the Lao PDR and Japan.

In conclusion, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks and appreciations to all generous sponsors of the special supplement for giving me the opportunity to address the distinguished readers of The Japan Times.

Voluntary organizations forge amicable relations

Yoshinori Miyamoto
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-LAOS ASSOCIATION

On the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, I would like to express, on behalf of all members of the Japan-Laos Association, my heartfelt congratulations to the government and the people of the Lao PDR. I am happy to note that the bilateral relations and cooperation of our countries are constantly expanding and getting closer and closer.

And this year might have special meaning for us because the official visit to Japan of the



Laotian head of state H.E. Choummaly Sayasone, president of the Lao PDR, was realized in March this year, for the first time through the long history of the two nations.

According to the Joint Statement expressed by the leaders of the two governments, it is clearly mentioned that people-to-people exchange is crucial in bringing the bilateral relationship to a new height, and they reaffirmed their intention to further promote this exchange and cooperation at various levels and in various fields.

Nowadays, numerous voluntary friendship and goodwill organizations vis-a-vis Laos have been established in many districts in Japan, and their promoters are mainly the

people who have visited Laos and who were enchanted by Laos and the Laotian people.

Commemorating the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Laos, various events have taken place in Japan as well as in Laos throughout this year, and it is those organizations and bodies that have stepped up to hold these valuable events and programs.

In a sense, it may be said that they are really the important foundation stones of promoting friendship between the two countries.

I hope these voluntary organizations, including my association, might make more contributions to enhance the amicable and cordial atmosphere in both countries.

In search of common prosperity through Japan-Laos friendship

Nobuhiko Suto
CHAIRMAN, THE JAPAN-LAOS PARLIAMENTARIANS' FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES MEMBER

On behalf of the Japan-Laos Parliamentarians' Friendship League (JLPF) of Japan, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations Dec. 2 on the occasion of the anniversary of the foundation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The year 2010 will be remembered as a remarkable time for both countries commemorating our 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, materialized by the first official visit of H.E. Choummaly Sayasone, president of the Lao PDR, in March.

Since then, we had the honor of welcoming H.E. Bouasone Bouphavanh, prime minister of the Lao PDR, H.E. Thongsing Thammavong, president of the National Assembly of the Lao PDR, and a number of ministers and parliamentarians. On each occasion, my fellow members of the JLPF and I could deepen our knowledge of the contemporary Lao PDR and renewed our friendship by talking about ways of supporting and promoting governmental and private relationships in the future. To my surprise, many of my colleagues already have rich experience and knowledge of the Lao PDR during their stay in cities such as Luang Phabang and the countryside as tourists and through various

NGO activities.

I personally visited Vientiane in April in order to announce my appointment as the chair of the JLPF in Japan and to resume the exchange of parliamentarians of both countries. I paid a courtesy call on H.E. Thongloun Sisoulith, deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, and discussed ideas on enhancing our partnership. Then I managed to visit Japanese Official Development Assistance sites, such as a hydroelectric power station, a water supply facility, a human resource cooperation center, etc., making the best use of the short stay. The visit to our ODA sites was very fruitful and I could convince our taxpayers that their contributions are really benefiting the development and welfare of the people of the Lao PDR.

The Japan-Laos relationship will have its most promising prospects in Southeast Asia, since we have a number of common grounds such as Buddhism, culture, collective efforts for Mekong Region Development, and grassroots activities of NGOs for peace-building and development.

I sincerely hope that the cooperation between Japan and the Lao PDR in the varied fields of government, industry and culture, will be strengthened and flourishing more next year. It is here that we the friendship league of parliamentarians of both countries should contribute, support and enhance such activities, leading to the comprehensive partnership in the future.



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and the 55th Anniversary
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