

Mekong-Japan Summit Special

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A view of the Mekong, one of the longest rivers in the world, which passes through Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. ANDREW LEE

Deepening partnership with Mekong region

Yoshihiko Noda
PRIME MINISTER

The Mekong Basin is a region that carries a huge potential for development, with the blessing of rich and diverse nature along the big river. For years, Japan has made steady efforts to cooperate with countries in the area through basic infrastructure and human resources development.

The Mekong-Japan cooperation framework is solid evidence of this long-standing relationship, and there is no other forum of regular dialogue between top leaders of the nations of the Mekong region and a country outside the area. Following the last conference held in the fall of 2011 in Bali, Indonesia, it is our great honor to invite the leaders from the region to Tokyo this time for the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit.

Our nation is ready to help in various ways the efforts of countries along the Mekong River to tackle challenges such as strengthening the region's "connectivity" to facilitate the flow of people and goods, as well as protection of local residents and the environment in the development process. We face a number of



common challenges in how we live with and cope with the threat of nature. In the upcoming conference, we would like to focus on these and other issues as we talk about the direction of our cooperation through 2015, so that we can deepen our long-standing partnership with the Mekong region into the future.



JAPAN TIMES GRAPHIC

Japan's interest in Mekong area moves beyond economic

Masami Ito
STAFF WRITER

"A Connected Mekong for a Better World" is the official motto of the fourth annual Mekong-Japan Summit to be held April 21 in Tokyo.

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda has invited the leaders of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam to attend the event in which he is set to reaffirm Japan's commitment to the development of these countries in the Mekong River region.

"Relations between Japan and the Mekong countries have developed significantly since the first summit meeting (in 2009), and at the upcoming meeting it is expected that the leaders will formulate new pillars for cooperation through 2015, as a means of ensuring the steady implementation of Mekong-Japan cooperation," said Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura.

Government officials and experts agree that Myanmar's recent democratic progress is likely to have a major impact on the multilateral cooperation framework to strengthen the Mekong region.

Takayuki Ogasawara, a professor of international politics at Yamanashi Gakuin University who is an expert on Southeast Asia, pointed out that the unstable situation in Myanmar and the delayed democratic movement had been the biggest

obstacle for Mekong-Japan relations. But all of that is about to change.

Earlier this month, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced the U.S. government's decision to ease the ban on exports of financial services and investment to Myanmar. Foreign Minister Koichiro Genba also indicated that Japan would review its aid policy toward Myanmar, suggesting the possibility of resuming the yen-loan program to the country,

"The Mekong region is often referred to as the last frontier, and for Japan, it is a very important area economically, but I think that the Mekong-Japan relationship will develop into a broader one to include political and security issues."

TAKAYUKI OGASAWARA, YAMANASHI GAKUIN UNIVERSITY

which has been suspended since the Myanmar government's 1988 suppression of democracy movements.

It is "important for the people of Myanmar to realize that the progress of democratization and national reconciliation will make Myanmar an affluent country, so I would like to provide firm support to this end," Genba said during a news conference.

"I have given instructions for a review of our aid policies," Genba added.

The Mekong region is known to be rich in natural resources including minerals, natural gas,

petroleum and coal, and hydro-powers. But all of that is about to change. Earlier this month, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced the U.S. government's decision to ease the ban on exports of financial services and investment to Myanmar. Foreign Minister Koichiro Genba also indicated that Japan would review its aid policy toward Myanmar, suggesting the possibility of resuming the yen-loan program to the country,

"In just the past three years alone, the number of Japanese companies that expanded their business and Japanese investment to the Mekong region has increased significantly. It is clear that the next investment target will be the Mekong region, including Myanmar," said a senior Foreign Ministry official.

"The Mekong region is often referred to as the last frontier, and for Japan, it is a very important area economically, but I think that the Mekong-Japan relationship will develop into a broader one to include political and security issues."

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The Mekong region is known to be rich in natural resources including minerals, natural gas,

continued to expand over the years and now consists of 10 countries, including the Mekong region nations. ASEAN is Japan's second largest trade partner after China as well as one of the most important investment destinations along with the U.S. and China.

At the same time, however, ASEAN's expansion triggered economic and social disparities among the nations, negatively affecting its plan for the economic integration of ASEAN by 2015. Therefore, it is ASEAN's top priority to advance development in the Mekong area and reduce the disparities, said Ogasawara.

"Disparity makes ASEAN unstable in many ways and it blocks the goal to strengthen ASEAN's unity. But more importantly, it may not become as strong as the European Union but it wants to implement economic integration to be on the same ground as China and India, for example, who are ASEAN partners as well as rivals," Ogasawara said.

The first Mekong-Japan Summit was held in November 2009, when the leaders agreed on various agendas, including a comprehensive development of the region, an initiative to achieve a Green Mekong, and an effort to promote tourism to the region, which is home to 14 World Heritage sites including Cambodia's Angkor Wat.

As a show of dedication to



A computer graphic shows Cambodia's Neak Loeng Bridge, which will be the longest across the Mekong River when it is completed in 2015 with Japan's aid. ROYAL EMBASSY OF CAMBODIA

the development of the Mekong region, Japan also promised to provide more than ¥500 billion in official development assistance (ODA) between 2010 and 2012. According to the Foreign Ministry's 2010 white paper on ODA, the four Mekong region countries, excluding Thailand, were in the top 30 recipients, with Vietnam ranking first.

"The Mekong region is of-

ten referred to as the last frontier, and for Japan, it is a very important area economically," Ogasawara said. "Japan values diplomatic relations with the Southeast Asian nations and it is also in Japan's interest for ASEAN to expand and grow stronger."

But economic cooperation is not the only aspect of Mekong-Japan relations.

The geographical location of the five countries between China and the island nations of Southeast Asia makes them strategically important to Japan politically and from a security viewpoint.

"As China grows stronger, it is better for Japan if the Mekong region is further integrated in the ASEAN group," Ogasawara said. Southeast Asian countries,

including Vietnam and the Philippines, have been engaged in territorial disputes with China over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. China's assertiveness in the South China Sea, an important sea lane, has also triggered strong international concern from countries including the U.S. and Japan.

Ogasawara, however, points out that these ASEAN countries are reluctant to engage in a head-on collision with China, the world's second largest economy.

"Like the U.S. and Japan, ASEAN countries have a lot to gain through business with China and they don't want to lose that — rather, they want to deepen economic ties," Ogasawara said. "ASEAN's basic position is to be on good terms with everyone — China, the U.S., Japan, India or Russia. It is all about balance. They want to keep all of the relationships pretty much even."

Mekong-Japan relations are currently focused mainly on economic cooperation, but Ogasawara said that, in time, they may begin discussing more sensitive topics like security.

"I think that the Mekong-Japan relationship will develop into a broader cooperation to include political and security issues," Ogasawara said. "And ultimately, this relationship will become the key to reducing disparity and to the integration of ASEAN."

Cambodian prime minister's visit

Japan's strategic role helps Mekong region, ASEAN

Hun Sen
PRIME MINISTER OF THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA

Dear Japanese people:

I am happy to return to Japan, where I have been given a second name, to make contributions, with four other colleagues of the Mekong region, to the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit, which will begin on April 21.

It is my expectation that, with strategic and committed efforts of the Japanese people and government, the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit will bolster ties to help realize the development of a new cooperation plan through to 2015 for a common purpose of bringing prosperity to the Mekong region with a focus on peoples' well-being.

Cambodia, as chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations this year — together with the leaders from Japan, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam — will make sure that the summit invigorates a common trust and cooperation to achieve the existing agenda for the reduction of the development gap through enhanced competitiveness and ensured regional identity.

Speaking on behalf of Cambodians, I wholeheartedly thank the people and government of Japan for the construction assistance of Cambodia's Neak Loeung Bridge, after the Kizuna and Chroy Changvar bridges, which will serve as an important part of the ASEAN highway that links up the whole southern economic corridor. In this trend

of achievement, Japan's increasingly strategic role will help realize the ASEAN connectivity to the benefit not only of ASEAN, but also the Mekong countries.

Sharing grief with the Japanese people for the loss of life and socioeconomic livelihood by the deadly and costliest triple disasters in human history, I am honored to bow in respect to the brave Japanese people's committed recovery efforts to make it through and to rise above obstacles and disappointments to forge ahead the rebuilding of their altered lives and country's prestigious status. The Cambodians proudly learn from your endeavors and remember always your benevolent assistance for the recent Cambodian flood disaster situation.



Profile of Hun Sen, the prime minister of Cambodia

Prime Minister Hun Sen was born on Aug. 5, 1952 (officially on April 4, 1951) in Kampong Cham Province. Upon completion of his local primary schooling in 1965, Hun Sen came to Phnom Penh to continue his secondary education.

In 1970, Cambodia was plunged into war. Responding to the appeal of Prince Sihanouk to Cambodians to join the war against the imperialists, at the age of 18, Hun Sen joined the struggle movement, which liberated the country on April 17, 1975.

Witnessing the Pol Pot regime's policy of genocide, in 1977, Hun Sen left lead a movement aimed at liberating Cambodia and its people from the genocidal regime. In 1978, Hun Sen became a founding member of the United Front for the National Salvation of Kampuchea (UFNSK), which overthrew the Pol Pot regime in 1979, with the support of Vietnamese volunteer forces.

From 1979 to 1993, Hun Sen held various positions in Cambodian administrations — the People's Republic of Kampuchea and then the State of Cambodia. As foreign minister in 1979, as deputy prime minister and foreign minister from 1981 to 1985.

Then as prime minister and foreign minister

from 1985 to 1991, Hun Sen was a key figure of the Paris peace talks, which helped to broker peace in Cambodia with the Paris Peace Agreement.

As a result of the implementation of the agreement and the 1993 national elections, from 1993 to 1998, Hun Sen served as the co-premier and then the second prime minister of the first coalition government between the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and Funcinpec, the two major parties.

In July 1998, Hun Sen became the sole prime minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia. Under his leadership, Cambodia became the 10th member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

In July 2004, the National Assembly re-elected him as prime minister and ratified the third-term coalition government.

After winning the general elections of July 2008, in which the CPP won 90 of the 123 seats in the National Assembly, Hun Sen was re-elected by the fourth legislature of the National Assembly and approved by King Norodom Sihamoni as prime minister for the next five-year term (2008-2013).

Hun Sen is married to Bun Rany and is the father of six children.

As 2012 chair of ASEAN, Cambodia pushes for regional unity

Hor Monirath
AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA

On this gracious occasion, I have the great honor to extend my warmest greetings and warmest welcome to Samdech Akka



Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, prime minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, and the Cambodian delegation to the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit in Tokyo on April 20-21.

This year, Cambodia has the great honor and responsibility for the second time in the history of the Association of Southeast Asian Nation to hold the rotating chairmanship of ASEAN in the context of an evolving, interconnected world, in a fast changing region, and in a remarkably moving Cambodia.

While ASEAN is commemorating its 45th anniversary, this year also marks the 10th anniversary of the kingdom's first turn as ASEAN chair.

It is worthwhile to recall that Cambodia's admission into ASEAN in April 1999 reflected that the region turned its diversities — politically, economically and culturally — to the peoples' advantage and advanced their common interest in strengthening peace, stability, development and shared prosperity in the region. It was a truly historical moment fulfilling the vision of ASEAN founding fathers to unite all nations in Southeast Asia under the ASEAN roof. The realization of ASEAN-10 has not only a symbolic significance, but also immense implications for the cause of the regional unity and solidarity.

The return of full peace and domestic stability thanks to the Royal Government's pursuance of the win-win policy

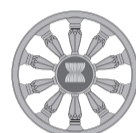
of national reconciliation initiated by Samdech Techo Hun Sen, strengthening of the rule of law and good governance, respect for human rights and the development of a matured democratic process in Cambodia have contributed significantly to the stability, peace and security in the region and enhanced the kingdom's image in the international arena.

The economic integration of Cambodia into the region is also a critical part to our success. Cambodia was considered the most successful post-conflict nation in terms of development. The World Bank placed Cambodia among the top 10 developing countries with the highest economic growth, around 10 percent annually from 1998 to 2007. After the setback of the global financial crisis and economic downturn of 2008-2009, the kingdom has made a strong and sustained recovery from the

crisis, with a return to annual gross domestic product growth of 7 percent in 2011. The future outlook for Cambodia is very positive while the economy is projected to grow between 6 percent and 7 percent annually over the medium term. The remarkable achievement of the country's economic development over the past 15 years is reflected in an impressive record in poverty reduction, more than 1 percent annually from 45 percent in 1994 to approximately 25 percent in 2011, and expected to achieve the country's U.N. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of reducing poverty to 19.5 percent by 2015. The MDG Awards Committee in New York also presented the MDG Award 2010 to Cambodia, recognizing the outstanding achievements of the Royal Government's endeavors in making the most absolute progress on MDGs. Furthermore, an encouraging

study conducted by the United Nations Development Program last year on "Youth civic participation in Cambodia" found that 95 percent of youths ages between 15 and 24 said the kingdom has been moving in the right direction with respect to their valuation of history, cultural heritage, democracy and political leadership.

While assuming this year's chair of ASEAN, the 20th ASEAN Summit and related meetings in Phnom Penh just concluded successfully earlier this month. It has been noted with satisfaction that the outcomes of the summit and related meetings underlined significant progress in our concerted efforts toward realizing the ASEAN Community by 2015. The ASEAN leaders adopted the Phnom Penh Declaration on ASEAN: One Community, One Destiny, reflecting the will of the ASEAN peoples to



ASEAN: One Community, One Destiny.

Cambodia 2012



Leaders of the 10 member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations join hands at the 20th ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on April 3. ROYAL EMBASSY OF CAMBODIA



Respectfully greeted from:

- H.E. Mr. Hor Monirath, Ambassador of Cambodia to Japan, and Madame Mr. Hideo Yamada, Honorary Consul of Cambodia in Osaka, and Spouse
- Mr. Seiki Takada, Honorary Consul of Cambodia in Nagoya, and Spouse
- Mr. Seiroku Takizawa, Honorary Consul of Cambodia in Sapporo, and Spouse
- Dr. Haruhisa Handa, Honorary Consul of Cambodia in Fukuoka

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Our warm and sincerest welcome to

Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo

Hun Sen

**Prime Minister
of the Kingdom of Cambodia
and the Delegation**

**On the occasion of
the 4th Mekong-Japan Summit
in Tokyo on 20-21 April 2012**

Cambodian prime minister's visit

ASEAN Community by 2015

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B2

continue working together to build the ASEAN Community with the vision of "One Destiny" for all peoples in the spirit of unity and solidarity of ASEAN peoples. In making our theme of ASEAN: One Community, One Destiny a reality, we must ensure that the peoples of ASEAN, especially its younger generation, understand and appreciate the value of our unique approach to regionalism and regional integration, and the beneficial strength it brings us as an influential regional voice in a challenging global environment.

In conjunction with the Phnom Penh Declaration, the leaders also adopted the Phnom Penh Agenda for ASEAN Community Building, reiterating their firm commitments and in-

tensified efforts to ensure Cambodia's chairmanship in 2012 a great success that contributes to the ultimate goals in achieving the ASEAN Community by 2015.

Furthermore, success in realizing the ASEAN Community by 2015 requires not only the concerted efforts of all ASEAN Member States, but also the support of ASEAN's friends to improve ASEAN peoples' quality of life by narrowing the economic development gaps between member states aiming to accelerate ASEAN integration, particularly by enabling Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam to be fully integrated into the ASEAN Community by 2015 and beyond. In this connection, abundant resources of the Mekong region countries, including among others natu-



Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen waves a gavel after taking over the ASEAN chairmanship from Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono at the closing session of the ASEAN Summit on Nov. 19, 2011, in Bali, Indonesia.
ROYAL EMBASSY OF CAMBODIA

ral resources, human power, culture and tourism potentials, are key factors for Mekong-

Japan cooperation. Especially, the Mekong region is assumed as a dynamic growth center of Southeast Asia, where Cambodia's location in an increas-

ingly integrated and connected Greater Mekong Subregion provides a strategic importance to the region. In view of the significance, the Mekong-Japan cooperation framework was initiated once the Japanese government announced a Japan-Mekong Region Partnership Program in 2007, aiming to boost the economic development and cooperation in the Mekong region, particularly to contribute to accelerating ASEAN's integration, narrowing development gaps among the old and new members of ASEAN toward the ultimate goal to build the ASEAN Community by 2015.

Since the first Mekong-Japan Summit, held on Dec. 6-7, 2009, in Tokyo, progress in cooperation has been made with satisfaction for a comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development of the Mekong region over the last three years, particularly to

the economic development and poverty reduction of the region. A number of programs and projects have been substantially implemented, such as among others the Mekong-Japan Action Plan 63, Action Plan of Mekong-Japan Economic and Industrial Cooperation Initiative and Action Plan on a Decade Toward the Green Mekong. People-to-people exchange programs have also been carried out from the grassroots to the most senior levels in broad areas of politics, security, economy, culture, tourism, environment and disaster management, which have benefited Cambodia and other Mekong countries.

Moreover, at the third Mekong-Japan Summit in Bali, Indonesia, in 2011, the leaders of Japan and the Mekong countries reaffirmed the importance of further synergy between Mekong-Japan cooperation and other efforts to enhance ASEAN con-

nectivity, particularly the implementation of a plan of action on ASEAN connectivity.

It is our strong hope that the fourth Japan-Mekong Summit being held in Tokyo will certainly demonstrate firm commitments of our leaders to pursue close cooperation and common trust to achieve the existing agenda for the reduction of development gaps through enhanced

competitiveness and ensured regional identity.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to extend my sincerest appreciation to the government and people of Japan for their continuing support of Cambodia's economic development that have contributed to the Royal Government's endeavors for the prosperity of the Cambodian people.

Our Warm and Sincerest Welcome

to
Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen,
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia,
and the Delegation on the Occasion of
the Fourth Mekong-Japan Summit



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Respectful greetings from:

Japan-Cambodia Friendship Association

Mr. Tetsuo Kitamura, *Chief Executive Officer*

Mr. Tadasu Kikuchi, *Acting President*

Toyama-Cambodia Friendship Association

Mr. Junichi Takata, *Chairman*

Mr. Yoshiki Takai, *Vice Chairman*

Mr. Kazuo Takagishi, *Vice Chairman*

Mr. Toyohiko Ise, *Vice Chairman*

The Saitama-Cambodia Friendship Association

Mr. Masao Ichimura, *Chairman*

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Lao prime minister's visit

Highly valuing cooperation

Thongsing Thammavong
PRIME MINISTER OF THE LAO PDR

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the government of Japan on the hosting of the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit to be held on April 21 in Tokyo.

The government and people of the Lao PDR are pleased to note that since the establishment of the Mekong-Japan cooperation framework, cooperation between the Mekong region countries and Japan has seen significant progress. In particular, the effective implementation of work plans and measures under the Mekong-Japan Action Plan 63 of the Tokyo Declaration has greatly contributed to the strengthening of Mekong-Japan relations, the development of the Mekong region countries, including infrastructure development, human resource development, facilitation

of trade and investment, and movements of people within the region, thus contributing to the narrowing of development gap within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and ASEAN Community building in 2015.

The Lao PDR highly values the contribution of the Mekong-Japan cooperation projects to the socioeconomic strength, including the creation of a favorable environment for investment and business operation in the country, and has actively implemented cooperation projects supported by Japan under various cooperation frameworks. We have completed the implementation of assistance projects under the Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam Development Triangle Area, projects for the improvement of transportation and logistics under the Cambodia-Laos-Myanmar-Vietnam

framework and East-West Economic Corridor as well as priority projects under the Mekong-Japan Economic and Industrial Development Initiatives and A Decade for the Green Mekong.

I strongly believe that the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit in Tokyo will be another milestone for the enhancement of cooperation between Mekong region countries, including the Lao PDR and Japan. The summit will provide an opportunity for the leaders to discuss and agree on cooperation strategy, future direction and measures for the strengthening of Mekong-Japan cooperation for 2013-2015, which will contribute to the development of the Mekong region as well as to the acceleration of the narrowing of the development gap within ASEAN and ASEAN Community building.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the government and people of Japan for the valuable support extended to the Lao PDR and highly appreciate the active participation of Japan in the realization of the Mekong-Japan action plan, which has contributed to the socioeconomic progress as well as the implementation of the seventh five-year National Socio-Economic Plan (2011-2015) of the Lao PDR.

I would like to reaffirm that the Lao PDR will continue its active participation in the effective and concrete realization of the work plans and projects under the Mekong-Japan cooperation framework. I strongly believe that the success of the implementation of the new strategy will significantly contribute to the establishing of new cooperation partners for a prosperous future between the Mekong region countries and Japan, for peace and prosperity of the region, as well as for the promotion of better understanding between the people of the Mekong region countries and Japan.



Profile of Prime Minister Thongsing

Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong was born on April 12, 1944, in Houaphanh Province in eastern Laos.

In 1959, Thongsing joined the revolutionary movement led by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) while also working as a teacher.

From 1963 to 1982, he was involved in education administration. Meanwhile, the Lao People's Democratic Republic was established in 1975.

In 1983, Thongsing was appointed cultural minister of the Cabinet of Kaysone Phomvihane, the first prime minister of the Lao PDR.

In 1986, Thongsing was elected as a member of the Central Committee of the LPRP. In 1989, he was elected as the vice president of the Supreme People's Assembly, and also engaged in drawing up a new constitution.

In 1991, Thongsing was elected as a member of the LPRP Politburo at the fifth Party Congress and re-elected at the sixth Party Congress in 1996 and the seventh Party Congress in 2001. From 2002 to 2006, he served as the mayor of the capital Vientiane as well as a secretary of the Party Committee of Vientiane.

In 2006, he was re-elected as a Politburo member at the eighth Party Congress.

He was the president of the National Assembly from 2006 to 2010.

Following the resignation of Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh on Dec. 23, 2010, Thongsing was appointed prime minister on that date.

Thongsing visited Japan for the first time as prime minister of the Lao PDR on March 14-18 this year.

Material, technical assistance from Japan aid Laos' social development

Khenthong Nuanthasing
AMBASSADOR OF THE LAO PDR

I am very pleased to note that the friendly relations between the Lao PDR and Japan in both bilateral and multilateral frameworks, including in the Mekong-Japan cooperation framework, have further developed and contributed to the strengthening and expanding of cooperation.

The government and the people of Lao PDR highly appreciate the concrete progress made in the implementation of the Mekong-Japan cooperation plan and projects during the past few years, especially the Plan of Action 63 of the Tokyo Declaration adopted in 2009. The cooperation projects covering infrastructure development, human resource development, trade and investment facilitation and others have significantly contributed to the socioeconomic development of the Lao PDR as well as the implementation of the seventh five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2011-2015).

On bilateral ties, the Lao PDR and Japan jointly celebrated the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 2010. The government and people of the Lao PDR are very pleased with the expansion of friendly relations and cooperation between the two countries. On this occasion, I would like to sincerely express my appreciation to the government and people of Japan for the continued assistance to the Lao PDR, which has contributed to the socioeconomic development and raising of people's living standards, as well as economic integration of the Lao PDR with the region and

with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and to the effort of the Lao government to take the country out of the least developed countries status by 2020. I hope that the Government and people of Japan will continue their valuable assistance to the Lao PDR in the future.

I strongly believe that the success of the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit will lay a strong foundation for the enhancement of cooperation between the Mekong region countries and Japan in the years to come. A new strategy and cooperation measures to be adopted will provide a great potential for the economic development of the Mekong region countries so as to raise their competitiveness and promote economic integration with the region and the world, as well as to narrow the development gap in the Mekong region. Furthermore, the implementation of the Mekong-Japan priority cooperation projects, in particular infrastructure projects, will also assist the connectivity of the Mekong region countries as well as the implementation of the ASEAN connectivity master plan to facilitate trade, investment, tourism and increase people-to-people contact in the region.

As for the Lao PDR, the government is determined to transform the country from the landlocked into a land-link by focusing on the construction and improvement of road connections and better land transport services in order to become a crossroad of the East-West Economic Corridor as well as of the subregion and the region. Furthermore, the Lao government has also actively implemented cooperation projects with Japan in both bilateral and multilateral frameworks, such as the Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam Development Triangle Area, Cambodia-Laos-Myanmar-Vietnam, Greater Mekong Subregion and others.

To be able to develop and sustain economic growth, the Lao government has paid attention to the promotion of private sector participation in the development of the country, including investment in agriculture and other sectors aiming at transforming the country into a modern industry in the future. The government has also attached great importance to the improvement of the business and investment climate and legal structures in the Lao PDR, such as the adoption and implementation of the new Law on Investment Promotion, the establishment of a single window service for investors, the improved regulation on the special and specialized economic zones from 2011 to 2020, and based on each provincial potential, special and specialized economic zones will be established throughout the country. Up till now, five special economic zones have been established, five more zones are in the last stage of preparation, 12 zones are at a study stage and 23 more zones are in the process of identifying prospective joint developers. Taking this opportunity, I would like to invite the Japanese business community and investors to increase their business and investment presence in the Lao PDR.

Social development is another important sector for raising the people's living standards, including preparedness to address the impact of natural disasters, which have occurred more frequently, the well-being and protection of mothers and newborn infants, the prevention of infectious diseases and food security. The material and technical assistance provided by Japan to the Mekong region countries including to the Lao PDR in the mentioned areas have significantly contributed to social development and the raising of people's living standards and well-being, and to efforts to achieve the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals by 2015.



Covered in gold leaf, the Pha That Luang stupa stands in the center of the capital Vientiane. EMBASSY OF THE LAO PDR

Heartiest Welcome
to His Excellency Thongsing Thammavong,
Prime Minister of
the Lao People's Democratic Republic

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Warmest Welcome
to H.E. Thongsing Thammavong,
Prime Minister of the Lao PDR

We wish great success to
the Fourth Mekong-Japan Summit
and further development of
the Lao PDR.

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Myanmar president's visit

Globalization, economic integration open doors

Thein Sein
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE
UNION OF MYANMAR

On behalf of the government and people of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, I wish to convey my warmest greetings and best wishes to the government and the people of Japan.

It is indeed a great honor and pleasure for me to attend the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit in the enchanting city of Tokyo. I would like to congratulate the government of Japan for hosting this important summit, which will further strengthen the mutually beneficial cooperation between the member countries of the Mekong region and Japan.

The Mekong region is blessed with abundant natural resources, sources of energy and home to rich cultural heritages. The Mekong subregion is now enjoying peace, stability and rapid economic growth. It is vital for us to strive for sustainable development.

Today, the globalization process and the growing trend of regional economic integration have opened windows of opportunities for the Mekong region to become an area generating benefits for all countries, including donors and investors outside the region like Japan.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank Japan for its important contributions toward the socioeconomic develop-

ment of the countries of the Mekong region.

I firmly believe that development of the countries in the Mekong region will contribute not only to the socioeconomic growth and stability of the region, but also to the narrowing of the development gap among the Association of Southeast Asian Nation countries and toward the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015.

I would like to conclude this message by extending my best wishes to the government and the people of Japan for the continued progress and prosperity and for the further strengthening of the existing friendly relations between Myanmar and Japan.



Profile of Myanmar's president

President U Thein Sein was born on April 20, 1945, in Ngaputaw Township in the Irrawaddy region, southwestern Myanmar.

He joined the army in 1963 and graduated from Defense Services Academy with a bachelor's degree in 1967. He served in various capacities up to the rank of brigadier general from 1967 to 1995.

From 1996 to 2000, he served as commander, triangle region command with the rank of major general. From 2001 to 2006, he served as adjutant general with the rank of lieutenant general. In 2007, he served in the office of the commander-in-chief (army) with the rank of general.

U Thein Sein also served as chairman of the Kalay District Peace and Development Council in 1988 and in 1997 as a member of the State Peace and Development Council, for which he served as secretary (2) in 2003 and secretary (1) in 2004.

In 2008, he was appointed as acting prime minister. In October 2008, he became prime minister and served until March 2011.

In 2010, he retired from the army and became chairman of the Union Solidarity and Development Party. At the general election held on Nov. 7, 2010, he was a candidate of the Zabuthiri Township constituency in Naypyitaw and was elected as a representative of the Pyithu Hluttaw, the lower house of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, the bicameral legislature of Myanmar.

In February 2011, U Thein Sein was elected president of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar by the Presidential Electoral College of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and sworn in on March 30.

He was awarded the Decorations and Medals of the Myanmar Military Service.

He is married to Daw Khin Khin Win with three daughters.

Trade, foreign direct investment are keys to Myanmar's dynamic growth

Khin Maung Tin
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF
THE UNION OF MYANMAR

It gives me great pleasure to address the esteemed readers of The Japan Times on the occasion of the opening of the Mekong-Japan Summit and to make special welcoming remarks in a special supplement. I do hope that this supplement will contribute to promoting mutual understanding and good will between Japan and the Mekong region countries through the establishment of firm and friendly ties in the areas of trade, culture, tourism, people-to-people exchanges, etc.

Today, the Mekong region is one of the fastest-growing regions in the world, and its stable and high economic growth has been attracting foreign direct investment. Even after the global economic crisis in 2009, the Mekong region quickly recovered and returned to the growth track, showing the remarkable resilience of their economies.

However, the countries in this region are at different stages of development. Hence, one of the important agendas of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is to narrow the development gap among ASEAN countries to achieve its economic integration.

The economic development of the Mekong region is also vital for ASEAN integration. The key to dynamic economic growth and sustainable poverty reduction in this region is to expand the volume of international trade and draw more foreign direct investment in order to supplement insufficient domestic capital and technology.

Recent significant progress of the Mekong region countries to attract more investment will help

expedite the process of regional integration. The ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and FTAs between ASEAN and other partner/dialogue countries such as Japan, China, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand, are promoting trade and investment. These FTAs and closer connectivity allow private investors to establish their production and supply chains not only on a country basis, but also on a regional basis.

I am very encouraged to note Japan's commitment to the development of the countries in the Mekong region and the progress made in the implementation of the Tokyo Declaration and Action Plan 63, which were adopted at the first Mekong-Japan Summit in 2009. Japan has been providing substantial assistance to the countries in the Mekong region through official development assistance (ODA) and in partnership with non-governmental organizations. The three main economic corridors — East-West, North-South and Southern — are thus being

implemented, as assistance to promote the economic growth of the region as a whole and to enhance our connectivity in the region. It is of my view that the Greater Mekong Subregion Southern Economic Corridor alignment (Ho Chi Minh City-Phnom Penh-Bangkok) which is further extended to Dawei, Myanmar, will be able to provide an alternative sea route to connect India and the Southeast Asian region, reducing the congestion in the Malacca Strait.

Japan and the Mekong region countries are coordinating to promote cooperation between public and private sectors that contributes to the effective implementation of cooperation projects in various areas, such as infrastructure and natural resources development, the improvement of logistics networks and the implementation of the master plan on ASEAN connectivity. The cooperation and coordination with related regional and international institutions, **CONTINUED ON PAGE B6**



The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw complex in Myanmar's new capital, Naypyitaw, is the seat of the legislative body established by the 2008 constitution. MYANMAR EMBASSY



Bagan, once the capital of several ancient kingdoms, is home to some 2,000 pagodas and temples. MYANMAR EMBASSY

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Myanmar president's visit

Myanmar seeks investment, environment protection

Located in Tokyo, the ASEAN-Japan Centre, established in 1981 by the governments of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Japan, is also known as the ASEAN Promotion Centre on Trade, Investment and Tourism. The following excerpts are from the ASEAN-Japan Centre's observations on Myanmar at the time of the visits to the country.

Investment mission

1. Project name
Outward Investment Promotion Mission to Myanmar

2. Implementation venue, period
Yangon and Naypyitaw, Sept. 4-10, 2011

3. Organizers
ASEAN-Japan Centre, Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in Japan

4. Observations and reports
The objective of this investment mission is to update information of the current economic situation and investment environment, to explore business opportunities in labor-intensive industries such as garment, food and information technology (IT) in Myanmar.

After the inauguration of the new civil government, the government is comprehensively reviewing their policy related

to financial, commercial and investment areas. The current investment law is now under review so as to promote foreign investment. The two Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Laws were established in January 2011, and one-stop service of investment-related procedures by the Myanmar government has started. There was an announcement that the dual exchange rate system would be resolved in consultation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). [Myanmar has begun a managed float of its currency from April 2012.] Foreign direct investment concentrates in the energy and resources sector. The priority area of investment is resource-based heavy investment; resource-based, export-oriented, value-added projects; and labor-intensive, export-oriented projects. They expect establishment of joint ventures with Japanese companies to introduce new technologies to make their product more competitive.

According to the manufacturers, the sharp appreciation of the kyat hit their business. But after some tax reduction plans were implemented for six months to promote trading, it seems that they mitigated the impacts in

businesses such as the cutting, making and packing (CMP) business in the garment sector.

Myanmar makes steady progress toward democracy and a market economy. Even though the sharp appreciation of the kyat hits the economy in Myanmar, it seems to be acceleration in economic growth. The electric power supply is improving by new hydro and gas power plants. In September 2011, economic sanctions still remain. But after the election, many Western countries' companies have already intensified their efforts to seek their new business opportunities in Myanmar. While the lifting of the economic sanctions is one of the important issues in business, the business actions from foreign investors have already started. There is a big potential and attractiveness for investors such as lower cost and a 60 million pro-Japan market. The further expansion of business cooperation between Japan and Myanmar will be highly expected.

Recycle system project

1. Project name
Myanmar Recycle System Project
2. Implementation venue, period
Yangon, March 4-9, 2012



Revelers celebrate Thingyan, the annual water festival that marks the New Year in Myanmar, in Yangon on April 14. AP

3. Organizers
ASEAN-Japan Centre, Embassy of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in Japan

4. Observations and reports
The objective of this mission was to assist reinforcement of environment improvement works in Myanmar, to provide support for the recycle system in Yangon.

Yangon is the largest commercial city with a population

of about 6 million. The Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) intends to develop as a "Green City," an ecologically friendly city in Myanmar.

YCDC plans to conduct the new segregated waste collection system for recycling in April 2012. The Myanmar Plastic Industries Association (MPIA) under the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) donated trash boxes to support the new recycling system in Yangon.

Household waste is divided into two types. Dry waste such as plastic bags is planned to be recycled and wet waste is planned to be reused for energy. There are some recycling operators already in Myanmar: bins, cans, paper, plastic bottles and metals are sold to them. Plastic bottles are cut into flakes and sold in China.

As the two disposal sites in Yangon will be full in the near future, YCDC is seeking new disposal sites. Also planned to be established is an electricity

generating plant using the heat produced by waste disposal in cooperation with Japan's New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization (NEDO).

Since the growth rate of the economy and population is accelerating, it is necessary to solve the problem fundamentally by the three Rs: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

Rapid action is required against the issues of waste treatment management. Some foreign investors seem to decide their investment destination due to lack of effective regulations related to environment protection. Cooperate activities should respect the environment and beautiful development of the city.

The ASEAN-Japan Centre would promote investment to Myanmar as well as support of the new recycling system.

For more information on the ASEAN-Japan Centre, visit www.asean.or.jp/en.



Myanmar has a variety of natural environments, from hilly terrain to bodies of water such as Lake Inle. MYANMAR EMBASSY



Democratization process, reconsolidation in effect

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B5
particularly the Mekong River Commission, are required to be strengthened in order to promote the sustainable development, utilization, conservation and management of water and water related resources of the Mekong River.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to brief readers on economic developments taking place in Myanmar. While making efforts for the industrialization of the nation, the Myanmar Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Law was enacted in January 2011 aiming at attracting more foreign investment to boost the country's economy. The amendment to the Foreign Investment

Law (1988) has been through the consultation process in the Pyithu Hluttaw (House of Representatives). The government has designated three special economic zones, namely, Thilawa, Dawei and Kyaukphyu, with the enactment of the SEZ law. These bring about tremendous investment opportunities in Myanmar and potential local and foreign investment is highly anticipated.

The government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is striving for reforms, nation building tasks and promoting the better livelihood of its people at the moment. While it is implementing tasks for prevalence of peace and stability and economic recovery, the Myanmar delegation led by President U Thein Sein paid a state visit to three Mekong region countries — Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos — in March, during which the delegation observed infrastructure development and several business sectors, including tourism and information and telecommunications.

On April 1, a by-election was conducted successfully in a free, fair and transparent manner. The government of Myanmar invited to the by-elections a large number of election observers from ASEAN and its dialogue partners as well as from other regional and international organizations.

Responding to the process of democratization and national

reconsolidation taking place in Myanmar, ASEAN leaders at the 20th ASEAN Summit, held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on April 3-4, called in unison for the lifting of all sanctions on Myanmar by certain countries so as to make a constructive contribution to the democratic process and economic development in Myanmar.

In this emerging "Century of Asia," we believe that the synergy between Mekong-Japan cooperation and other efforts to enhance ASEAN connectivity is a driving force for the expeditious building of the ASEAN Community by 2015.

It is my hope that the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit will be a success in realizing comprehensive development of the Mekong region and construction of a society that values human dignity through enhanced cooperation between Mekong countries and Japan. Drawing strength from our shared values, further consultations and additional efforts will contribute not only to promoting trade and investment between Mekong region countries and Japan, but also to ensuring the continued peace and prosperity of the people in the region.

In conclusion, I would like to express, once again, my appreciation and sincere thanks to The Japan Times for giving me this good opportunity to greet its esteemed readers.

Heartiest Welcome
to His Excellency U Thein Sein,
President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar,
on the Occasion of the Fourth Mekong-Japan Summit

Japan Myanmar Cross Link Association

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Chronology of major events related to Mekong-Japan cooperation

The following is a chronology with some details of the major events related to recent Mekong-Japan cooperation.

January 2007 — The Japan-Mekong Region Partnership Program was announced during the Japan-CLV (Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam) Foreign Ministers' meeting in Cebu, the Philippines.

January 2008 — The first Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in Tokyo.

2009 — The entire year was celebrated as the Mekong-Japan Exchange Year to promote exchange events in various fields (politics, economy, culture, youth exchange, tourism) between Japan and Mekong region countries.

October 2009 — The second Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting was convened in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

November 2009 — The Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting — the first-ever meeting between the heads of the governments of Japan and the Mekong region countries — was held in Tokyo. Attending the summit were Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama (chair), Prime Minister Hun Sen of the Kingdom of Cambodia, Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Prime Minister Gen. Thein Sein of the Union of Myanmar, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva of the Kingdom of Thailand and Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The leaders adopted the Tokyo Declaration and the Mekong-Japan Action Plan 63.

Japan and the Mekong region countries were determined to give priority to the following areas:

1. Comprehensive development in the Mekong region.
2. Construction of a society that values human dignity, comprised of environment and climate change (the launch of the A Decade toward the Green Mekong initiative), and overcoming vulnerability.

3. Expanding cooperation and exchanges.
They also determined to establish "a new partnership for the common flourishing future" between Japan and the Mekong region countries.

Regarding the Mekong region as a prioritized area, Prime Minister Hatoyama committed that Japan will continue the policy to expand its official development assistance (ODA) to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, as well as to the Mekong region as a whole, committing more than ¥500 billion of ODA in the next three years for the Mekong region.

The leaders determined to regularize Mekong-Japan related meetings in order to move Mekong-Japan cooperation forward. The Mekong-Japan Summit meeting is to be held in Japan every three years, and on the occasion of multilateral meetings in other years. The Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting is to be held regularly, hosted by a Mekong region country if it is the ASEAN chair, and by Japan in other cases; the Mekong-Japan Economic Ministers' Meeting will be held regularly.

Prime Minister Hatoyama emphasized that the Mekong region is a key area for the concept of the open and transparent East Asian Community, with regard to narrowing the existing development gaps.

Prime Minister Hatoyama also had bilateral meetings with each country.

July 2010 — The third Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in Hanoi, Vietnam.

October 2010 — The second Mekong-Japan Summit meeting was held in Hanoi, chaired by Prime Minister Dung of Vietnam and participated by Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia, Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh of the Lao PDR, Prime Minister Gen. Thein Sein of Myanmar, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva of Thailand and Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

The leaders welcomed the significant progress of the implementation of the Tokyo Declaration and Mekong-Japan Action Plan 63 and other initiatives proposed by the Mekong region countries since the first Mekong-Japan Summit and determined to enhance the cooperation.

The leaders welcomed A Decade toward the Green Mekong initiative and adopted its action plan and expressed strong expectation that Mekong-Japan cooperation on environment conservation would be enhanced in order for the Mekong region to achieve a Green Mekong with lush greenery, rich biodiversity and resilience to natural disasters through various effective measures including reforestation.

July 2011 — The fourth Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in Bali, Indonesia.

November 2011 — The third Mekong-Japan Summit was held in Bali, Indonesia. Attending the summit were Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda (chair), Prime Minister Dung of Vietnam, Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia, Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra of Thailand, President Thein Sein of the Union of the Republic of Myanmar and Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong of the Lao PDR.

1. At the outset, Prime Minister Noda extended his sympathy and condolences on damage caused by floods in the Mekong region. He also said to the effect that Japan had pushed forward with Mekong-Japan cooperation based on the Mekong-Japan Action Plan 63 adopted at the first Mekong-Japan Summit in 2009.

2. Subsequently, discussions were held about Mekong-Japan cooperation in the Mekong region. Prime Minister Noda said Japan had decided to carry out feasibility studies on the development of Dawei, Myanmar, from the perspective of enhancing connectivity in this region, focusing on the development such as the connectivity of Dawei, Myanmar and a special economic zone. He also spoke of the importance of public-private cooperation as well as the importance of assistance in the areas of the environment and climate change; maternal, newborn and child health and infectious diseases; and food security and safety.

3. In reply, the Mekong region countries expressed their gratitude to Japan for continuing various forms of cooperation despite difficulties after the Great East Japan Earthquake. Specifically, for example, they referred to the importance of the water resource management of the Mekong River. Moreover, they expressed their expectations for Japan's continued assistance to the CLV Development Triangle Area.

4. The leaders of Japan and the Mekong region countries concurred in the perception that the 2012 Mekong-Japan Summit would be held in Japan and that they would map out new themes of cooperation, building on the Mekong-Japan Action Plan 63.

5. The leaders adopted a joint statement (see Page B9) in which they took note that Mekong-Japan cooperation had developed substantially and reaffirmed that they would further promote cooperation through the framework of Mekong-Japan cooperation.

6. Finally, Prime Minister Noda concluded the meeting by noting that, following the Great East Japan Earthquake, Japan had received assistance from all over the world, including the Mekong region countries, and that this showed what Japan had been doing was not wrong and that Japan would continue to provide necessary assistance without becoming inward-looking.

The information in this article is taken from the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Thai prime minister's visit

Connectivity a key catalyst for development in region

Yingluck Shinawatra
PRIME MINISTER OF THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND

I am delighted to return to Japan, after my recent official visit on March 6-9, in order to participate in the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit on April 21. As a friend and partner of the Mekong region, Japan initiated this forum in 2009, to which Thailand has consistently given its support, as a strategic partner of Japan and of the Mekong region.

Connectivity has been a priority area of our cooperation since it is a key catalyst for development in this region, whether in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or the Mekong region. Without continuing support from Japan, transport linkages within the Mekong region along the East-West and Southern economic corridors could not have been realized. I am therefore pleased that Thailand and Japan co-hosted the Mekong-Japan

International Conference on the EWEC and SEC Corridors under the theme "Completing Connectivity, Creating the Economic Prosperity" in 2010. We should continue to draw the lessons learned from this conference as we map out the connectivity strategy for the Mekong region.

Last year, both countries experienced unprecedented natural disasters that affected the livelihood of a large number of people as well as some industrial and agricultural sites. Yet, these unfortunate incidents helped bring our peoples even closer together. Once again, I thank Japanese investors for their continuing commitment to remain a part of Thailand's economic future, as they have been for decades. As I said the last time I was here, Thailand continues to be a safe and productive place for Japanese investment.

I am also delighted that the Mekong-Japan forum has attached importance to environ-

ment conservation, climate change and disaster risk reduction. These are all issues that should be taken into account as we pursue comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development of the Mekong region. Thailand stands ready to undertake any activities relating to disaster management with Japan, as a follow-up to the Green Mekong Forum co-hosted by Thailand and Japan in 2011.

In sum, Thailand considers Japan's support for the development of the Mekong region as contributing to the closing of development gaps and ultimately to the building of an ASEAN Community. We look forward to having fruitful discussions during the forthcoming Mekong-Japan Summit. I am confident that close cooperation between the Mekong countries and Japan will lead to the attainment of development goals in the region and complement the realization of the ASEAN Community by 2015.



Profile of the Thai prime minister

Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra was born on June 21, 1967, in Chiang Mai in northern Thailand. She is the youngest of nine children and a sister of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Yingluck received her bachelor's degree in political science at Chiang Mai University and earned a master's degree in public administration in 1990 from Kentucky State University in the United States.

Yingluck started her business career in the 1990s and worked for the companies founded by Thaksin for many years. She was an executive of the following companies: Shinawatra Directories Co., a telephone directory business (1997-1999); chairperson of Advanced Info Service PCL, Thailand's largest mobile phone operator (1999-2006); and chairperson of SC Asset Corp. PCL (2006-2011), a property development business.

In May 2011, the Pheu Thai Party nominated Yingluck as their candidate for prime minister in the 2011 general election. Yingluck's main campaign theme was reconciliation following the extended political crisis from 2008 to 2010. She also campaigned on a vision for the elimination of poverty and promised to reduce the corporate income tax.

A general election took place in Thailand on July 3, 2011. The Pheu Thai Party won a landslide victory, winning 265 of the 500 seats in the House of Representatives. In August, Yingluck became Thailand's first female prime minister and the youngest prime minister of Thailand in over 60 years.

Yingluck is married and has a son.

She was in Japan on an official visit from March 6 to 9 this year.

Thailand works closely with Japan to support Mekong region nations

Virasakdi Futrakul
AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND

On April 21, H.E. Yingluck Shinawatra, prime minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, will attend the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit in Tokyo to discuss with Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and leaders of Mekong region countries new areas of cooperation to develop the Mekong region for 2013-2015. Thailand is a co-donor with Japan in contributing to transform the Mekong region into the Green Mekong and to construct a society in the region that values human dignity.

To support the development of the Mekong region, during the last decade, Thailand has invested nearly 1.5 billion baht or \$300 million for infrastructure projects connecting Thailand with neighboring countries through the East-West Economic Corridor, which connects the Indian Ocean with the Pacific Ocean from Myanmar through Thailand and Laos to Vietnam. Also, on the Southern Economic Corridor (Myanmar-Thailand-Cambodia-Vietnam), Thailand will be working with Japan to fill the missing transportation links between the Indian and the Pacific oceans. These two economic corridors will facilitate and increase the flow of goods and people between East Asia and South Asia and beyond, thereby becoming the new "Silk Road" of the 21st century.

One of the important areas of cooperation between Japan and the Mekong region countries is natural disaster management, which is becoming more and more important in view of the increasingly frequent natural disasters in the region. Last year,

both Japan and the Mekong region countries were affected by unprecedented natural disasters. While Japan suffered from the Great East Japan Earthquake, the flooding in the Mekong region led to major disruptions of the region's production and supply chain. During and after these calamities, the peoples and governments of Japan and the Mekong region countries provided assistance to each other, thereby reaffirming the close friendship and "kizuna" (bonds) between us. The Tokyo summit is expected to strengthen further the cooperation on natural disaster management between Japan and the Mekong region countries, resulting in greater human security for our peoples.

The flood crisis attests to the economic interdependence between the Mekong region and other regions of the world, including Japan, because the disruption of the supply chain in the Mekong region affected the industrial production throughout the entire world, reflecting the increasing importance of the Mekong region for global manufacturing. The flood crisis also has prompted the Mekong region countries to pay greater attention to comprehensive water management and look to learn from Japan's experience and technology in order to ensure the sustainability of the Mekong River, which is vital for the peace and prosperity of the region.

The Mekong region countries are also working closely with Japan on building hard and soft infrastructure connectivity, linking the Mekong region countries together to South Asia, East Asia, the Middle East and beyond, thereby facilitating the growth of trade, investment and tourism among these regions. The connectivity projects in the Mekong region, which are part of the ASEAN Master Connectivity Plan linking all 10 Southeast Asian countries, will require vast investment and provide great opportunities for economic cooperation between Japan and the ASEAN countries.

Japan has been a long-standing and cherished partner of the countries in the Mekong region. Recognizing Japan's invaluable contribution to the promotion of peace, development and prosperity in the region, the countries of the Mekong region look forward to enhancing their cooperation with Japan to further develop the region for the mutual benefits of our peoples.

Thailand reaffirms our commitment to enhance cooperation among Mekong region countries and to work closely with Japan to realize the common goals of the Green Mekong and to create a society in the region valuing human dignity, contributing to peace and prosperity in the Asian region and realizing the Asian Century.

Thai flood relief, recovery: strategies for development

The floods that hit Thailand during the last three months of 2011 temporarily interrupted the production and supply chain in key industrial sectors. Since then, the industrial estates that were affected by the floods have resumed operations and are on their way toward strong industrial productivity. Thailand's economic foundations remain solid, and because of the vibrant private consumption, public investment, high global demand for Thai exports, as well as revived inflow of foreign direct investment and foreign tourism since the floods, the Thai economy in 2012 is expected to grow by 5.5 percent to 6.5 percent.

Since the recovery stage began after the floods, the Royal Thai Government has formulated a flood prevention plan for industries of all sizes. The government allocated 382 billion baht (\$12.6 billion) for soft loans to help manufacturers in flooded industrial estates, small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs), as well as independent business operators to resume their business as soon as possible. For industrial estates, the low-interest loans (0.01 percent) are for seven years. The Board of Investment has also provided various incentives for industrial estates affected. Moreover, the government has subsidized two-thirds of the costs for the construction of flood prevention dykes in the seven industrial estates affected by the floods, which has begun earlier this year and is expected to be completed by August.

One of the Royal Thai Government's top priorities is the implementation of the Reconstruction and Future Development Strategy Framework. The overall target is to build investors' confidence, especially in manufacturing and service sectors, as well as a long-term, competitive and resilient economy through effective disaster prevention and management systems and upgraded infrastructure. In this strategy

framework, the government will focus on:

1. Economic restructuring
 - Support for businesses to build up disaster prevention and responsiveness, including supply chain management
 - Electronics, automotive sector, agro-business, services and tourism are target areas for competitiveness improvement
 - Development of eco-industry and industrial clusters
 - Technology and innovation as a key factor
2. Development of new economic zones
 - More efficient use of land through adequate regulation
 - Development along the East-West, North-South and Southern Economic Corridors and in the Greater Mekong Subregion as a regional production base for industry, agriculture and tourism
 - Forging economic development of border areas through trans-frontier development strategy integration
3. Infrastructure development
 - Emphasis given to transportation networks, telecommunications and energy security
4. Disaster insurance system development
 - Awareness-raising for the necessity of disaster insurance
 - Setting up of standards for the protection of the insured
 - Improvement of laws and regulations
 - Establishment of a 50 billion baht (\$1.6 billion) Disaster Insurance Fund with participation of private insurance companies

Moreover, from 2012-2016, the government plans to invest in many large-scale infrastructure projects worth over \$72 billion, ranking first among Association of Southeast Asian Nations countries in terms of project value. Thailand welcomes the active participation of foreign companies in future public-private partnership (PPP) projects.

Aside from structural improvements, the non-structural improvements in the pipeline in-

clude the integration of a database for water management, including weather forecasting and early warning systems, the promotion of public awareness and participation, the creation of a more efficient mechanism of compensation for households and businesses affected by the planned infrastructure investments.

The recent flood does not change our investment promotion policy direction. We remain focused particularly on potential industries with high value added (e.g., service sectors), environmental friendliness and creativity. Our aim is to make Thailand an even more attractive investment destination, our economy more disaster-resilient and our entrepreneurs more competitive.



A daytime view of an area of Bangkok along the Chao Phraya River, which cuts through the capital. ROYAL THAI EMBASSY

Heartiest Welcome
to Her Excellency Yingluck Shinawatra,
Prime Minister of
the Kingdom of Thailand



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Vietnamese prime minister's visit

Cementing our friendship

Nguyen Tan Dung
PRIME MINISTER OF THE SOCIALIST
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

I am delighted to participate in the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit. This is the first time that the summit is being convened in the spring and, what is more special, in Japan's beautiful season of cherry blossoms.

The meeting marks a successful phase of cooperation between the Mekong countries and Japan, and opens up a new one with more comprehensive, balanced and effective cooperation components. It also indicates the solidarity between the Mekong countries and Japan as well as reaffirms all sides' commitments to prosperity, stability and sustainable development of the Mekong region, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

and East Asia at large.

The Partnership for Common Prosperity established three years ago between the Mekong countries and Japan has made significant contributions to socioeconomic development of the Mekong subregion as well as to the process of building an ASEAN Community by 2015. On the basis of the Tokyo Declaration in 2009 and with Japan's assistance, a number of successful projects have been implemented in the areas of infrastructure development, improvement of the business environment, trade and investment promotion, environment protection and natural disaster management.

The Mekong-Japan mechanism will continue to enhance its role, in the next period of cooperation, through focusing on the areas of strategic significance

aimed at formulating long-term solutions to common issues of the region, realizing the potentials of the region and meeting the development needs of member countries. Immediate priorities are placed in enhanced regional connectivity, sustainable management and use of the Mekong water resources, response to climate change and promotion of trade and investment cooperation. I believe in the increasing role played by the Mekong-Japan cooperation in the dynamic and sustainable development of the region, thus cementing the traditional friendship among the member countries.

On this occasion, I wish to sincerely thank the Japanese government and people for the whole-hearted support in the past years. I strongly believe that the Vietnam-Japan strategic partnership



will continue to witness comprehensive, far-reaching, stable and sustainable growth in the interest

of the two peoples, and that of peace, stability and prosperity of the region and the world.

Profile of Nguyen Tan Dung, Vietnam's prime minister

November 1961 to September 1981: Served in the army as senior lieutenant, chief political commissar of Infantry Battalion 207, captain – political chief of Infantry Regiment 152, defending the southwestern border, major – head of the personnel board of Kien Giang Province's Military Command.

October 1981 to December 1994: Studied at the high-level Nguyen Ai Quoc Party School, member of the Standing Committee of the Kien Giang Provincial Party Committee, deputy head of the provincial Organizational Board, secretary of the Ha Tien District Party Committee, permanent deputy secretary of the Kien Giang provincial Party Committee, chairman of the Kien Giang People's Committee, member of the provincial People's Council, secretary of the Kien Giang Party Committee.

January 1995 to May 1996: deputy minister of public security, member of the Central Police Party Committee.

June 1996 to August 1997: member of the Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee, director of the CPV Central Committee's Economic Commission, in charge of financial affairs of the CPV.

September 1997 to June 2006: permanent deputy prime minister, Politburo member, deputy secretary of the government's Party Committee.

July 2006 to present: prime minister, Politburo member, secretary of the government's Party Committee, vice chairman of the National Defense and Security Council, chairman of the National Council for Emulation and Awards, chairman of the National Council for Education, head of the Government Steering Committee for Administrative Reform, head of the Steering Committee for Military Industry Construction and Development, head of the National Steering Committee for Climate Change Adaptation, head of the subcommittee for drafting socioeconomic development strategy for 2011-2020.

Vietnam-Japan relations amid the Mekong-Japan framework

Doan Xuan Hung
AMBASSADOR OF THE SOCIALIST
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

Lying at the heart of Asia, the Mekong region is well-known as an important connection point of Southeast Asia as well as major sea routes between the Indian and Pacific oceans.



Despite being the less-developed area in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the region itself presents ample opportunities as a market of more than 300 million consumers, a large pool of hardworking labor and a hub of development with fast-growing economies. In addition, the Mekong region, enriched with abundant natural resources, is one of the main producers of major agricultural products. Notably, Vietnam and Thailand have been the

world's largest rice exporters. However, the region is predicted to be among the world's few areas most heavily affected by climate change, especially the rise in sea levels. Thus, the support and engagement of major development partners like Japan is important for the Mekong region to tap into its full potential and overcome challenges.

In this context, Vietnam highly welcomes Japan's deep interest and important role in development cooperation in the region as well as the Japanese government's initiative to establish the Mekong-Japan cooperation mechanism in 2009. We believe that by developing a long-term cooperation plan, Mekong-Japan cooperation can help alleviate poverty and foster sustainable development of the Mekong region countries as well as facilitate tourism, trade and investment flows within and outside the region.

Being a traditional partner of Japan, Vietnam has actively contributed to strengthen Mekong-

Japan cooperation. In particular, H.E. Nguyen Tan Dung, prime minister of Vietnam, has participated in all the Mekong-Japan Summits, in 2009, 2010 and 2011. Several initiatives proposed by the prime minister at the summits, such as the Mekong Training Center and "sustainable and effective management and use of the Mekong water resource," have gained support from Japan and other Mekong region countries.

Within the Mekong-Japan cooperation mechanism, successful cooperation among Vietnam and Japan has been seen in a range of areas such as hard and soft infrastructure, environmental protection, health care and cultural exchange. For example, infrastructure development projects, such as those to upgrade the East-West and Southern economic corridors and Lach Huyen Port (Hai Phong), not only are beneficial for economic activities in Vietnam, but also open up development opportunities for all Mekong region coun-

tries through better connectivity for trade and investment flows. In particular, the improved connectivity with reduced transportation cost and time will benefit businesses operating in the region, including Japanese ones. In addition, as public-private partnerships are being considered the new way of mobilizing resources for development, the port project stands out as a bright example of this model in Mekong-Japan cooperation.

Apart from infrastructure projects, capacity-building projects such as the ongoing establishment of the Mekong Training Center in Vietnam are expected to help improve the human capital for all Mekong region countries. In terms of tourism promotion, in December 2009, Vietnam hosted the Mekong-Japan Tourism and Culture Days in Can Tho Province under the theme "Mekong — The river that connects cultures."

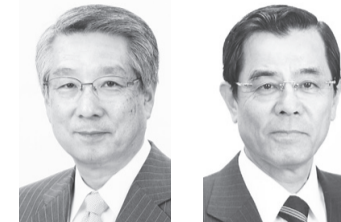
Such successful cooperation is an indication of the importance and solid background of Viet-

nam's bilateral ties with Japan in the past years. The two countries have exchanged regular high-level visits and established a strategic partnership in 2009. Japan is the first country in the Group of Eight (G-8) to recognize the "market economy" status for Vietnam. Although considerable achievements have been made, there is still immense potential in the two countries' relations. In particular, the Vietnamese government has continued to improve the investment environment and always creates favorable conditions for Japanese businesses to invest and conduct business in Vietnam.

The Vietnamese people wish to welcome more Japanese friends to visit our country. More importantly, the bilateral relations are built not only on the mutual interests but also from mutual trust and long-lasting friendship. In this context, I fully believe that the bilateral relations between Vietnam and Japan will continue to strengthen and flourish.

Achieving prosperity in Vietnam, the Mekong region

Susumu Kato and
Kyohei Takahashi
CHAIRMAN AND COCHAIRMAN,
JAPAN-VIETNAM ECONOMIC
COMMITTEE, JAPAN BUSINESS
FEDERATION (KEIDANREN)



Kato Takahashi

The region encompassing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations today is the world's economic growth engine and the countries of the Mekong region in particular are attracting international attention for their growth potential. Standing at the focal point of this attention is Vietnam, which inaugurated a new administration last summer headed by President Truong Tan Sang and Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. The launch of the new administration has given rise to growing expectations for Vietnam.

The economic relations between Japan and Vietnam have never been as strong and as good as they are today. This is thanks to Vietnam's dramatic development that is supported by its outstanding record of economic growth. In the political sphere, bilateral relations are buttressed by a strategic part-

nership and the annual reciprocal visits of the leaders of our two countries. Next year, we will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Vietnam. For all of us working on the front lines of Japan-Vietnam economic relations, we hope that this important milestone will serve to further deepen and strengthen our bilateral ties.

As part of such initiatives, a Keidanren mission headed by Chairman Hiromasa Yonekura visited Hanoi from March 4 to 6. We had the privilege of joining this mission. Through these meetings, we were able to engage in an exchange of very detailed and concrete views on ways and means to deepen our bilateral economic relations with sights on the Asian economy after the economic integration of ASEAN in 2015, and paying particular attention to bilateral cooperation in developing a strong business environment in Vietnam.

In the discussion of infrastructure development in Vietnam, Vietnamese leaders explained that priority was being given to the development of electric power, logistics including ports and airports, and energy-saving and environmental technologies, and they emphasized that they expected Japanese companies would contribute to the infrastructure development through their financial resources, wealth of experience and advanced technologies. Furthermore, Vietnamese gov-

ernment officials requested that cooperation between the private and public sectors be strengthened to overcome financial constraints and to encourage the participation of Japanese companies in promoting these developments. Hope was also expressed for Japanese companies to cooperate in training businesspeople needed to support infrastructure development.

Under the leadership of the new administration, Vietnam is working in collaboration with the government of Japan to formulate an industrialization strategy that is aimed at achieving industrialization and modernization by the year 2020. We have been informed that Vietnam would like to incorporate the views of Japanese companies in the strategy formulation process.

This would not be the first time for the private and public sectors of the two nations to work together. The Japan-Vietnam Joint Initiative has already proven the effectiveness of such cooperation in promoting the development of the business environment. We are greatly encouraged to hear that phase four of the joint initiative is expected to achieve 70 percent of its goals in less than six months from its launch. We take this opportunity to express our gratitude to those who have been working so hard in both countries, and we look forward to applying this valuable experience in the implementation of the industrialization strategy.

The economic development of Vietnam is not only important for Vietnam itself, but is also vital for raising the overall level of development in the Mekong Region. In this sense, the development of Japan-Vietnam relations through public-private policy dialogue and economic cooperation can serve as a touchstone for economic development throughout Asia.

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Mekong-Japan joint statement

Text of the joint statement of the 2011 Mekong-Japan Summit

We, the heads of the governments of Japan, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Kingdom of Thailand and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, met in Bali, Indonesia, on Nov. 18, 2011, for the third Mekong-Japan Summit.

We took note with deep satisfaction that the relationship and cooperation between Mekong region countries and Japan have developed substantially. The leaders of the Mekong region countries expressed their deep gratitude to Japan for continuing its contribution to Mekong region countries, even after the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. Japan expressed appreciation for the strong support and solidarity demonstrated by the governments and people of the Mekong region countries, and reiterated its determination to strengthen its ties with the region while conducting reconstruction in an open manner to the world. In this context, Japan emphasized its willingness to engage in further development of the region with its experience and technology in the field of disaster management.

We emphasized the importance of reviewing the implementation and achievement of the Mekong-Japan Action Plan 63 and prioritizing the domains to be strengthened toward the goals to be achieved by 2012, set in Tokyo Declaration and Mekong-Japan Action Plan 63.

We also exchanged views on regional and global issues of common concern. We reinforced our commitment to continue the cooperation for the peace, development and prosperity of the Mekong region as well as of East Asia.

1. Mekong-Japan cooperation for comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development of the Mekong region

We reaffirmed the importance of further synergy between Mekong-Japan cooperation and other efforts to enhance ASEAN connectivity, particularly the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC), in order to support ASEAN's goal to build the ASEAN Community by 2015. We welcomed the progress of agreed projects that sup-



Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda attends the third Mekong-Japan Summit in Bali, Indonesia, on Nov. 18 with (from left) Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong of Laos, Myanmar President Thein Sein, Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung of Vietnam, the same leaders who will be meeting in the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit in Tokyo. CABINET PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE

port hard and soft infrastructure development in the Mekong sub-region and emphasized that the implementation process should be accelerated. The leaders of the Mekong region countries appreciated Japan's contribution to improve connectivity in this region and reaffirmed the importance to fulfill infrastructure-missing links along key economic corridors, particularly the East-West and Southern economic corridors. In this regard, the leaders of the Mekong countries expressed their appreciation for Japan's decision to implement feasibility studies in Myanmar, initiated by the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) with the use of the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF), which will make an important contribution to the enhancement of intra-Mekong and ASEAN connectivity.

We noted the progress made in the implementation of cooperation under the Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam (CLV) framework. In this connection, the leaders of the Mekong region countries highly appreciated Japan's assistance to the development of the CLV Development Triangle Area and expressed their hope that Japan continues the assistance for the development area.

We also noted the necessity to further promote cooperation between public and private sectors that contributes to effective implementation of cooperation projects in various areas of Mekong region countries. In this regard, the Mekong region countries and Japan launched the first forum for the promotion of public-private cooperation in December 2010 and held the second meeting in November 2011, with the participation of the public and private sectors of Japan and the Mekong region countries, which opened wider public and private cooperation. We shared the view to make additional efforts to build logistics and promote trade and investment between Mekong region countries and Japan.

We reaffirmed the importance to strengthen further cooperation for disaster management in the Mekong region, bearing in mind of the recent great flood affecting broad areas of the region, especially in Thailand. In this context the leaders of Mekong region countries highly appreciated Japan's decision to enhance the assistance for disaster management in the region through the Disaster Management Network for the ASEAN Region, which Japan had

proposed on the occasion of the ASEAN-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting in July 2011. The leaders of Mekong region countries appreciated Japan's strong and full support for the establishment of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) toward implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). The Mekong region countries also welcomed the initiative expressed by Thailand and Japan to enhance the collaboration between the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre (ADRC) in Kobe and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) in Thailand to improve the capacity of the region. The leaders of Mekong region countries deeply appreciated Japan's timely assistance to alleviate damage caused by the flood.

We recognized the need to further strengthen the cooperation to tackle issues on the environment and climate change, and promote cooperation on Mekong water management. In this regard, we highly appreciated the achievement of the cooperation in the pursuit of the Action Plan on A Decade



SOURCE: MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
JAPAN TIMES GRAPHIC

toward the Green Mekong Initiative, adopted in the second Mekong-Japan Summit, in 2010. One of its followup mechanisms was the Green Mekong Forum, which was successfully co-hosted by the government of Japan and the government of Thailand, and participated by representatives from the Mekong region countries, the private sector, and the local authorities on June 24, 2011, in Bangkok. We appreciated that this forum opened a wider cooperation among participants. We also emphasized the need to strengthen the cooperation and coordination with related regional and international institutions/organizations, particularly the Mekong River Commission (MRC), in order to promote the sustainable development, utilization, conservation and management of water and related resources of the Mekong River.

We shared the view that human security issues should be one of the most important areas of Mekong-Japan cooperation. We also share the view that food security and safety, as

well as maternal, newborn and child health and infectious diseases are priority issues so as to overcome vulnerability and to achieve the U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals in this region. In this context, the Japa-

nese prime minister expressed Japan's willingness to provide continuous assistance for the human dignity issues. In this regard, the leaders of the Mekong region countries welcomed the efforts of Japan to enhance exchanges among experts from Mekong region countries and Japan in the area of maternal, newborn and child health and infectious diseases, through such measures as providing training courses open to all Mekong region countries and hosting meetings with experts.

We welcomed the fruitful outcome of people-to-people exchanges from the grassroots to the most senior levels in broad areas such as politics, security, economy, culture, tourism, environment, disaster management and youth exchange in 2011. The leaders of the Mekong region countries expressed their appreciation of the steady implementation of the exchange programs to invite 30,000 people, including youths, from the Mekong region countries to Japan in the three years from 2010. The leaders of the Mekong region countries welcome Japan's intention to consider a new youth exchange program.

2. Regional and global issues
We reaffirmed our determination to enhance close cooperation on regional and global issues of common concern, and to deepen and broaden the existing Mekong-Japan cooperation to

ensure peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

We emphasized the importance of enhancing cooperation in the areas of disarmament and nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, combating the illicit transfer and trafficking of WMD-related materials and small arms and light weapons.

We reaffirmed our support for the 2002 ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct (DOC) of Parties in the South China Sea and welcomed the adoption of guidelines for the implementation of the DOC and look forward to the eventual conclusion of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. We reiterated our commitment to universally recognized principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

3. Mekong-Japan cooperation in 2012 and beyond

We decided to establish new pillars of Mekong-Japan cooperation for the next three years (2013-2015), in place of Mekong-Japan Action Plan 63, which reflects the current situation and contributes to establishing the ASEAN Community by 2015.

This article is an edited excerpt from the original text on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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the fourth Mekong-Japan Summit
and welcome all delegates to Tokyo



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The Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge, largely funded by Japan, crosses the Mekong River, connecting Thailand and Laos. The bridge is 1.6 km long and was opened to the public on Jan. 9, 2007. TOURISM AUTHORITY OF THAILAND

