

## Laos national day

## Laos-Japan ties further strengthened in 2013

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AMBASSADOR OF LAOS

Dec. 2, 2013, marks the 38th anniversary of the National Day of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). On this auspicious occasion, I would like to avail myself of this opportunity, on behalf of the president, government and people of the Lao PDR, to convey our most sincere greetings and best wishes for good health, happiness and prosperity to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, and other members of the Imperial family.

It is my great honor to extend the warmest greetings to the government of Japan, and to take this opportunity to address the Japanese people and friends about the Lao PDR, and the updated Laos-Japan relations for the past year.

Laos-Japan relations have been strengthened and expanded year by year for 58 years since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1955. The year 2013 has been continuously marked by significant developments with exchange visits of high-level delegations of the governments and peoples of the two countries.

The most recent official visit to Laos by H.E. Shinzo Abe, prime minister of Japan, took place Nov. 17. The visit was very successful. The two governments agreed to further strengthen their "Comprehensive Partnership" by advancing cooperation in many areas, such as political and security, economic relations and development cooperation, people-to-people and cultural exchanges, as well as regional and international cooperation.

Upon the invitation of Prime Minister Abe, H.E. Thongsing Thammavong, prime minister of the Lao PDR will visit Japan and attend the 40th ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit, which will be held in Tokyo on Dec. 13 to 16.

This year has seen many other high-level exchanges, such as the visit in May by Dr. Thongloun Sisoulith, deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, to attend the 19th International Conference on "The Future of Asia"; the visit to Japan in October by Deputy Prime Minister Somsavat Lengsavad and other visits by Lao ministers. During their visits they had meetings and paid courtesy calls on their Japanese counterparts, and government and business leaders.

Laos and Japan have enjoyed good relations and cooperation on bilateral, regional as well as international issues. Japan has remained Laos' No. 1 ODA donor for many years. The Japanese assistance mainly focuses on infrastructure, education, human resource development, improving health and sanitation, and building schools. The Japanese assistance is in response to



Stronger ties: (Right) H.E. Shinzo Abe, prime minister of Japan, pays a courtesy call on H.E. Choummaly Sayasone (seated right), president of Laos, on Nov. 17 in Vientiane. (Above) Laos Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong (left) welcomes Prime Minister Abe at an official ceremony the same day. EMBASSY OF LAOS

the needs of the Lao government and people, particularly, in poverty reduction, which is in line with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the Lao government's policy to lead the country out of poverty by 2020.

Laos and Japan reached an Agreement on Liberalization, Promotion and Protection of Investment in 2008. Since then Japanese investments in Laos have increased and Japan has become one of the top 10 foreign countries investing in the Lao PDR. There are more than 100 Japanese companies doing business and investing in Laos, with investment values of \$579 million. The investments by Japanese companies are mainly in the agro-forestry, manufacturing, banking, transport, hydro-power and services sectors.

Famous for its tourist destinations, such as cultural, historical and ecotourism sites, Laos was selected as the World's Best Tourism Destination for 2013 by the European Council on Tourism and Trade. The New York Times named Laos as the World's Top Tourist Destination in 2008 and the UNESCO World Heritage site of Luang Prabang has continuously received the Top City Gold Award from Wanderlust, a U.K. travel magazine, from 2006 to 2008, and again from 2010 to 2012. For those reasons, the number of Japanese tourists visiting Laos has gradually increased each year, reaching more than 42,000 people in 2012.

The Lao government has attached great importance to tourism from Japan. Therefore, it has appointed four Lao honorary consuls in Japan, namely, in Nagoya, Fukuoka, Kyoto

and Okinawa, with the task of strengthening the friendship and cooperation between the Lao and Japanese peoples, including tourist exchanges.

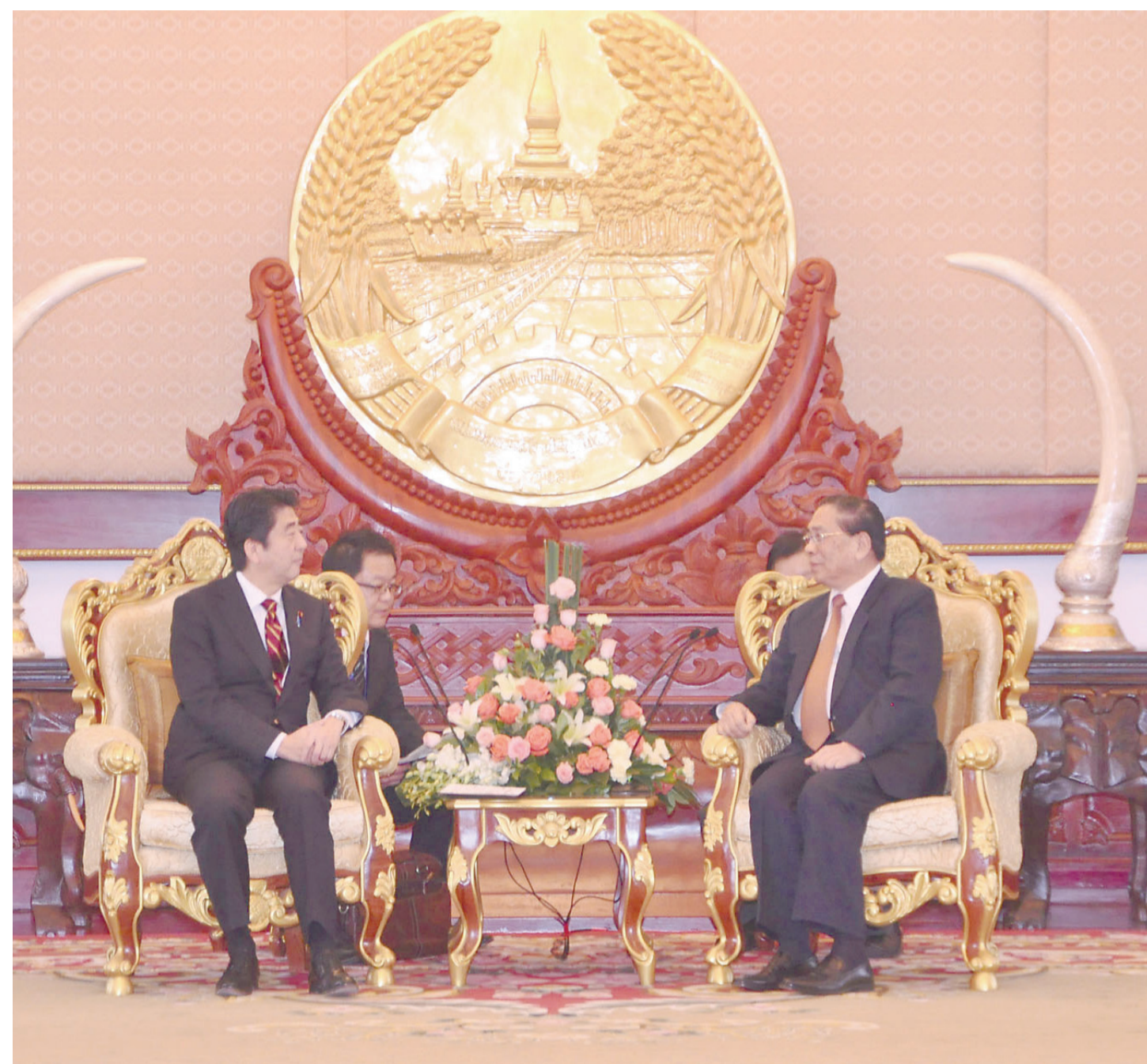
Since 2007, Laos has put in practice a unilateral visa exemption for Japanese citizens who hold ordinary passports, visiting Laos for a duration of 15 days.

An additional effort was made during Prime Minister Abe's Nov. 17 visit to Laos, when Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong announced an additional unilateral measure to exempt entry visas for Japanese officials visiting Laos. At the same time, Prime Minister Abe announced that the Japanese government has adopted a measure to relax entry visa requirements for Lao citizens visiting Japan by granting a multiple entry visa for those

who hold an ordinary passport. In addition, the two leaders have agreed to promote direct flights between Vientiane and Tokyo. Such new steps aim to facilitate people-to-people relations between Laos and Japan.

Since its location is in the economic hub of Southeast Asia, surrounded by five major countries — Thailand, Vietnam, China, Myanmar and Cambodia — Laos is inviting foreign investors, particularly Japanese investors, to be a part of its economic development.

The country is an attractive destination for many reasons, including its political stability, natural beauty, culture, traditions and natural resources, such as fertile land, minerals, water and forests, providing development potential in agriculture, mining and hydro-



**CONGRATULATIONS**  
to the Lao People's Democratic Republic  
on the 38th Anniversary of  
Their National Day

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Top attraction: Located in north-central Laos on the Mekong River, Luang Prabang, once the capital of the Lan Xang Kingdom from the 14th to 16th centuries, has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1995. EMBASSY OF LAOS

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