

## Laos National Day

## 40 years of strong development and progress

Khenthong Nuanthasing  
AMBASSADOR OF LAOS

Today is the 40th anniversary of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). On this auspicious occasion, please allow me to convey warm greetings and best wishes for good health, happiness and prosperity from H.E. Choummaly Sayasone, president of the Lao PDR, to Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, and members of the Imperial family.



The proclamation of the establishment of the Lao PDR on Dec. 2, 1975, opened a new era for the Lao people to build their nation as an independent and sovereign state in which they have enjoyed human rights, fundamental freedoms and social justice. For the past 40 years, the Lao people of 49 ethnic groups, under the leadership of the Lao People's

Revolutionary Party, have made satisfactory achievements in the course of national defense and construction. They have been living in peace and harmony in their homeland, which has maintained political stability, peace and social order, as well as relations of good neighborliness, friendship and cooperation with all countries around the world.

In order to transform a country that had just emerged from war into a civilized state and ruled by laws, the most important task of the Lao PDR was to build a legal system. Therefore, the National Assembly of the Lao PDR adopted the First Constitution of the Lao PDR in 1991, which marked the significant achievements of over 60 years of struggle for national liberation and reconstruction. It laid down the legal foundation of the country that guaranteed all rights for the Lao people. Today, with a full legal system in place, the Lao PDR has been able to maintain peace, political stability and economic growth for the past four decades.

The development path of the Lao PDR at the beginning was very hard and rocky, because the starting point of development was very low, the long war had destroyed all infrastructures, and 90 percent of the population were farmers and illiterate, there were no comprehensive economic mechanisms and so on. Despite those difficulties, the Lao PDR successfully implemented the first and second Five-Year Plan for Socioeconomic Development of the Lao PDR from 1975-1985, which focused on reconstruction after the war, bringing order to society and providing sufficient food for the Lao people.

Since 1986 the Lao government has been pursuing a new economic policy of renovation, shifting from a centralized economy to a market-oriented economy, implementing new market mechanisms, and inviting foreign investors and international development partners to participate in the socioeconomic development of the Lao PDR. As a result of the correct

economic policy of the party and government, the Lao PDR has been able to achieve significant progress in economic growth and the living standard of the Lao people was raised gradually.

Looking back to 40 years ago, we can see that the Lao PDR overcame mountains of difficulties and was able to stand on the path of development with sustainable economic growth for over two decades. Gross domestic product was increased from 4.8 percent in the period 1986-1990 to 7.8 percent in fiscal 2013-2014. Per capita GDP was increased from \$114 in 1985 to \$1,692 in 2013-2014. Rice production was increased from 660,938 tons in 1976 to 4,002,425 tons in 2014. The number of hydropower plants was increased from one in 1975 to 30 plants in 2015, with electricity generation of 5,205 MW and 89 percent of the country's households using electricity. Mining production such as gold, copper, coal, zinc, etc., has been increased by 15 percent to 20 percent annually. The number of industrial plants was increased from 100 in 1975 to 39,872 factories in 2013. Domestic trade was well developed and there were 677 markets in the country in 2013. In the transport sector, in 1976, Laos had 11,504 km of automobile roads, it now has 51,597.64 km, with 2,016 bridges, including eight Mekong River bridges. The Wattai International airport was improved to international level, and provincial airports such as Luang Prabang and Pakse are used as regional airports. In posts and telecommunications, there are 119 post offices and 4,219,455 telephone numbers, including 441,113 mobile phone numbers.

The key factors for economic growth are domestic and foreign investment in all economic sectors, particularly in the mining and hydroenergy sectors. To facilitate further eco-

economic growth, the government has established 10 special and specific economic zones throughout the country and one Pakse-Japan SME Industrial Park, in which a favorable climate and benefits for local and foreign business operation are provided.

Parallel with economic development, the Lao government has attached great importance to sociocultural development. One of the priority tasks of the government is to improve education both in quantity and quality. The number of primary schools has been increased from 4,444 schools in 1976 to 8,927 in 2014, while the number of lower and upper

secondary schools has risen from 83 in 1976 to 1,494 schools. And now there are 133 technical colleges and four universities in the country. To achieve the U.N. Millennium Development Goals, Laos has set the task for the poverty eradication of Lao people by 2020. The national poverty ratio has been decreased over the past 20 years from 45 percent in 1992 to 20.5 percent in 2013, and by the end of this year it is expected to remain at about 17 percent. While the number of poor families across the country went down from 22.2 percent of the population in 2008 to 16 percent in 2013.

As the ASEAN Community will be established by the end of this month, Laos has prepared itself to join the regional body and to make contributions in ASEAN connectivity among the ASEAN countries as well as between ASEAN and China. For that purpose, Laos has invested heavily in transport infrastructure building, particularly automobile roads from the north to the south and from the east to the west, which provide connectivity services in the region.

Now, the Lao PDR has all-season automobile road No. 13 connecting the north at the Laos-China border to the south at the Laos-Cambodia border and via Cambodia connecting to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. Laos has also several roads running from the east at the Laos-Vietnam border to the west at the Laos-Thailand border, such as road No. 9, which runs across



Lao Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong (left) and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe hold a press conference on the Laos-Japan Summit Meeting on March 6 in Tokyo. EMBASSY OF LAOS

the Lao central province of Savannakhet from Densavanh-Laobao (Lao-Vietnam border) to Savannakhet-Mukdahan (Lao-Thai border), the site of the Mekong Laos-Japan Friendship bridge, which is called the ASEAN East-West Economic Corridor; and road No. 12 connecting Thakhek-Nakhone Phanome (Lao-Thai border), the site of the 3rd Lao-Thai Mekong bridge to Namphao-Kaocheo (Lao-Vietnam border). And another road is No. R3A linking Kunming in China's Yunnan province to the city of Chiang Rai in northern Thailand via the northern provinces of Laos to the 4th Lao-Thai Mekong bridge in the Lao province of Bokeo, connecting further to Bangkok and Singapore, which is called the Kunming-Singapore road.

To implement the Cross-Border Transport Agreement (CBTA) and promote trade, investment and development of the ASEAN East-West Economic Corridor connecting Vietnam and Thailand through Laos, on Feb. 26, 2015, Laos and Vietnam officially opened the Single Stop Inspection (SSI) and Single Window Inspection (SWI) at the International Border Checking Point between the two countries, Densavanh on the Lao side and Lao Bao on the

Vietnamese side. In this regard, discussions between Laos and Thailand on SSI and SWI at the Sannakhet-Mukdahan International Border Checking Point are also going on. The Lao PDR has opened 27 International Border Checking Points with five neighboring countries.

Furthermore, Laos and China concluded an agreement on the construction of a high-speed railway linking Vientiane, the capital of Laos, to Kunming in China's Yunnan province Nov. 13, 2015. The 418-km railway is expected to be completed and start operation by the year 2020. The railway will serve as a significant route linking ASEAN to China through Laos.

On telecommunications, Laos launched successfully its first telecommunications satellite (Lao Sat-1) into orbit Nov. 21, 2015, a landmark in Lao history, which will definitely make important contributions to the development of Laos, as well as providing Lao and foreign customers with satellite communications information and technology services.

On diplomatic relations, the Lao PDR has made significant achievements in implementing a foreign policy of peace, independence, friendship and cooperation by expanding bilateral and multilateral

frameworks in various forms of multidirectional, multilateral and multidimensional cooperation. The outstanding achievement in this field is that the Lao PDR was able to complete the country's border demarcation with Vietnam, China and Myanmar, and a few points will be completed with Cambodia and Thailand.

Today, Laos has established diplomatic relations with 138 countries. It also has 38 diplomatic missions overseas, of which 26 are embassies, three are permanent representative missions and eight are general consulates. The Lao government and people were entrusted and have had the honor to host a number of regional and international conferences in past years, namely the 10th ASEAN Summit in 2004 and its surrounding summits; the 38th ASEAN Foreign Ministerial Meeting in 2005; the 23rd Francophonie Ministerial Meeting in 2007, with the attendance of 57 foreign ministers; the 17th Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Assembly and the 25th SEA games in 2009; the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions in 2010; and the 9th Asia-Europe Summit in 2012, with the attendance of 51 heads of state/government, including the 7th Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting, the 9th Asia-Europe People's Forum and the 13th Asia-Europe Business Forum.

The Lao PDR has been entrusted to assume ASEAN Chairmanship for the second time next year. The year will be an important milestone for the ASEAN as it will be the first year of the ASEAN Community as well as the first year for implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and its Blueprints. Therefore, Lao PDR has introduced the theme for the ASEAN Chairmanship 2016 as follows: "Turning Vision into Reality for Dynamic ASEAN Community," with an aim of maintaining and promoting a peaceful, stable and

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That Luang Stupa in Vientiane is a symbol of Laos, built on an ancient stupa in the 16th century by King Setthathiragh. EMBASSY OF LAOS

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and the 60th Anniversary of  
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## Long-lasting friendship and cooperation

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outward-looking ASEAN region, with highly integrated and cohesive regional economy, enhanced connectivity and strengthened efforts in narrowing the development gap.

On bilateral relations, Laos and Japan have been enjoying a long friendship and cooperation for the past six decades, and leaders of the two countries have exchanged visits regularly. A historic visit to Japan was made by H.E. Kaisone Phomvihane, former prime minister and president of the Lao PDR in 1989, which laid down the essential foundation for Laos-Japan relations in the new era. On the Japanese side, Their Imperial Highnesses Prince Akishino and Princess Akiko paid their first visit to Laos in 1999, paving the way for strengthening ties of friendship and cooperation between the two countries. In order to further deepen bilateral relations, His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Naruhito also made an official visit to Laos in 2012.

Lao Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong visited Japan last March to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Lao PDR and Japan. On that occasion, Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe signed the Declaration on the Establishment of the Strategic Partnership between the two countries, which laid down the guidelines for strengthening future relations of friendship and cooperation between the Lao PDR and Japan.

Another significant visit to Japan was made by H.E. Pany Yathotou, president of the National Assembly of the Lao PDR, to participate in the World Assembly for Women held in Tokyo last August, and hold discussions with H.E. Masaaki Yamazaki, president of the House Councilors, and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.



Their Imperial Highnesses Prince Akishino (third from left) and Princess Kiko (second from left) and Lao Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong (center) celebrate the 60th anniversary of Laos-Japan diplomatic relations at the Embassy of Laos in Tokyo on March 5. EMBASSY OF LAOS

Other consultations and exchanges at ministerial level were also held this year such as visits to Japan by Deputy Prime Minister Asang Laoly in March, Minister of Justice Bounkeut Sangsomsak in September, Minister of Planning and Investment Somdy Douangdy in October and Gov. of Vientiane Dr. Sinlavong Khouthphaythoune in October, as well as President of the Laos-Japan Parliamentary Friendship Association Dr. Somphou Duangsavanh in October 2015. On the Japanese side, Kayuzuki Nakane, parliamentary vice minister for foreign affairs, paid visits to Laos twice in January and October, and Parliamentary Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Masakazu Hamachi visited Laos in November. These exchanges were held in celebration of the 60th anniversary of Laos-Japan diplomatic relations and their discussions were about how to further enhance the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

On economic ties, Japanese investment in Laos has gradually grown since the Laos-Japan agreement on liberalization, promotion and protection of investment was concluded in 2008. In 2012 there were 20 projects with a value of \$27 million and in 2014 Japanese investment projects increased to 102 projects with an investment value of \$438 million, making Japan the sixth-largest foreign

investor in Laos.

Japanese companies have invested in the hydro-power, processing and service industries in the special and specific economic zones. To further facilitate and encourage Japanese investment in Laos, the government established the Pakse-Japan Small and Medium Enterprise Specific Economic Zone in Champassak province in August 2015, in which investors will receive favorable conditions and benefits for doing business.

Japan has remained a big ODA donor for Laos for many years. The assistance mainly goes to support infrastructure development, transportation, areas of health and medical care, and primary education, including the construction of elementary schools, and human resource development. The assistance has responded to the needs of the Lao government and people, particularly in poverty reduction in line with

implementation of the U.N. Millennium Development Goals and the Lao government's policy to lead the country out of least developed country status by 2020.

In celebration of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Laos and Japan, an official reception was held by the Lao Embassy in Tokyo, which was attended by Lao Prime Minister H.E. Thongsing Thammavong and Their Imperial Highnesses Prince Akishino and Princess Kiko. A Laos Festival was held in Yoyogi Park, Tokyo, and attracted over 200,000 people. The number of Japanese tourist arrivals to Laos has been increasing gradually in recent years from 28,081 in 2009 to 48,644 in 2013. To further promote people-to-people and economic exchanges in years to come, an agreement for air services between Laos and Japan was signed in January 2015 in Vientiane, establishing a legal framework to open a direct airline route between the two countries. Direct flights are expected to begin soon.

On this auspicious occasion, I would like to convey my wholehearted thanks and appreciation to the government and people of Japan, Lao compatriots and all friends of Laos in Japan, for the unwavering support and assistance rendered to the Lao PDR as well as the Embassy of the Lao PDR in Tokyo, and wish all happiness and prosperity on the National Day of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.



The Kuang Si Waterfall in Luang Prabang, a UNESCO World Heritage site EMBASSY OF LAOS

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Toyota Tsusho Corporation Vientiane Liaison Representative Office  
Premier Building Room No.402,  
Setthathirath Road, Phouai Village Sissattanak District,  
Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic  
Tel: 856-21-226099 Fax: 856-21-226099