

GMS Discusses Impacts of Economic Corridors

Khon Kaen _ Mr Somchith Inthamith, Director-General of the Department of Economic Affairs, Laos and Mr Manoth Suksabjarern, Acting Director of Mekong Institute (MI), on September 18, jointly presided over the opening ceremony of the Second Regional Policy Formulation Meeting held at MI conference room in Khon Kaen University, Thailand.

About 50 representatives from the six GMS countries and beyond, attended the 3-day-meeting organized from September 18 -20 to discuss the 'Social and Environmental Impacts of Economic Corridors,' supported by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Attending the meeting were representatives from Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and some non-GMS countries. Participants were mostly senior level government officials from the GMS, academics, NGO representatives, development partners and other professionals who have expertise particularly regarding the impact of road on trans-border issues.

The objectives were to promote a better understanding among GMS governments regarding 'Economic Corridors' and their impacts on the GMS, as well as to demonstrate the need for implementing regional and bilateral policies to better manage social and environmental impacts.

According to the Program Coordinator, Ms Keoamphone Souvannaphoum, this issue was chosen as little analysis



Mr Somchith, standing in front, third from left, and Mr Manoth, standing far left, were among meeting participants during the opening ceremony, held at the Mekong Institute on Sept 18, 2006.

Six Mekong countries join to training program to combat human trafficking



Pictured here, seated in front, from left to right are: Joana Merlin-Scholtes, UN Resident Coordinator in Thailand, Zhang Wanhai, Minister Counselor and Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China to UNESCAP, H.E. Nguyen Duy Hung, the Ambassador of Vietnam, Souvanna Phouyavong, Minister-Counselor of Lao PDR, Deputy Permanent Representative to UNESCAP, Myint Soe Minister Counselor of Myanmar, and Rarintip Sirorat, Director of Bureau of Policy and Strategy, National Operation Center on Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking (NOCHT).



Speaking on behalf of the GMS embassies, the Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, His Excellency Nguyen Duy Hung, expressed satisfaction on the progress currently made in the region to combat human trafficking.

Ms. Joana Merlin-Scholtes, UN Resident Coordinator in Thailand, is seen delivering her keynote speech to the participants from the six GMS countries at the Mekong Institute in Khon Kaen, Thailand.

tematically."

Speaking on behalf of the GMS embassies, the Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, His Excellency Mr. Nguyen Duy Hung expressed satisfaction on the progress currently made in the region to combat human trafficking but emphasised the need to do much more to make a difference. A key feature of the programme is the opportunity for participants to meet colleagues from neighbouring countries, to share information and to build trust and relationships that will become important in fighting the crime of human trafficking in the region.

The official launch ceremony of the Regional Training Programme to Combat Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) was held at the Mekong Institute (MI) on the campus of Khon Kaen University on 28 August 2006.

The Regional Training Programme is the first project under the COMMIT (Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking) Sub-regional Plan of Action organised by the UN-Inter Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (UNIAP), who was appointed by the GMS governments as the Secretariat, and the MI.

Ambassadors and senior officials from the Embassy of Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam, senior officials of the Royal Thai Government, UN representatives, development partners from the Embassy of Sweden and the CIDA-funded SEARCH project were present on the occasion to commemorate the official launch of the highly regarded Regional Training Programme.

In her keynote speech, Ms. Joana Merlin-Scholtes, UN Resident Coordinator in Thailand, highlighted that the Regional Training Course "...reflects a recognition among all parties to the COMMIT process of the need to come together and learn, to review existing assumptions, to share best practices, and to fight this crime of human trafficking sys-

Altogether 29 middle to senior level government officials and International Non-government Organisations (INGOs) personnel from all six GMS countries attended this fourth training session from 28 August to 6 September 2006.

Changes in MI Administration

Appointment

The Mekong Institute is pleased to welcome Mr Pakpoom Teranantana to be as the new MI Administration Director, effectively from October 16, 2006.

Prior to joining with MI, Mr. Pakpoom's last position was the deputy executive director (administration) of the International Institute for Trade and Development (ITD) (public organization).



*Mr Pakpoom Teranantana,
new MI Administration Director*

Meanwhile, Acting MI Director Manoth Suksabjareern recently confirmed during the MI staff meeting that a program manager, Clemens M. Grunbuhel had submitted a resignation letter which will be effective from December 15, 2006.

Dr Clemens joined with MI's Academic Affairs Bureau in June last year. After serving the institute for more than one year, he had decided to leave MI on December 15.



*Dr Clemens M. Grunbuhel,
the outgoing MI program
manager*



*Ms. Rattanaporn Pongpathana,
the outgoing Program Assistant
manager*

MI International Status

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE MEKONG INSTITUTE

Mekong Institute Steering Committee member, Mr Piamsak Millintachinada, a representative from Thailand, said at the recent SC meeting that regarding the International Status of MI the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported submitting the proposal to the Cabinet of the Royal Thai government.

Though this was done in January 2006, the Cabinet did not approve it straight away. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs referred it to a Cabinet Subcommittee on Laws Agreements and Privileges of International Organizations. The first reading took place and there was consultation with the Bank of Thailand on the exemptions from Thailand's financial regulations. The second reading is scheduled to be held soon, according to Mr Piamsak.

Social Gathering of MI Alumni in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam

On August 8, in Hanoi, Vietnam, about 40 Alumni, met MI staff from Mekong Institute when new members of the MI Academic Team, Clemens Grunbuhel (Program Manager) and Trinh Khanh Chi (Program Administrator) visited Hanoi.

The MI Team met with previous participants of MI courses and were updated regarding MI activities and planned courses and life and work experiences. A brief presentation by the MI team also was given at Hoa Binh Hotel, 44 Ly Thuong Kiet, Hanoi

The other similar "Social Gathering of MI Alumni" was also held in Laos and Cambodia. In Lao PDR, MI staff led by Dr Clemens Grunbuhel, Ms Cholthicha Ruamsillapa and Ms Nissarawan Phaiboonpornpong were present there and also met with Mr. Latsamy Keomany, MI Steering Committee Member together with over 35 alumni and other distinguished officials from different ministries such as Ministry of Health, Board of Investment etc.

In Cambodia, Ms Cholthicha and Ms Trinh Thi Khanh Chi were present and met with about 32 alumni since 1999, as well as, Mr. Min Chandynavuth, MI Steering Committee Member from Cambodia, who also gave a short speech there.



The gathering took place on July 4, 2006 at Setta Palace, Vientiane, Lao PDR



The gathering was held on September 7, 2006 at Sunway Hotel, Phnom Penh, Cambodia



Gathering in Hanoi, Vietnam

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Mr. Somchith Inthamith, left, Director-General of the Department of Economic Affairs, Laos and **Mr. Manoth Suksabjareern**, Acting Director of Mekong Institute (MI), on September 18, jointly presided over the opening ceremony of the Second Regional Policy Formulation Meeting held at the MI in Khon Kaen University, Thailand.



Dr. Ramon Sevilla, standing right, Academic Director of MI, is seen presenting a GMS Map of the 'Economic Corridors'.

has been given to the current and potential impacts of the corridors. It is a relatively new concept and few people in the GMS are even aware of such development due to the incompleteness of infrastructure projects and/or delays in the expansion of existing roads. It is expected impacts will unfold at varying levels with the intensity and complexity increasing over the next few years.

"The GMS Economic Corridors will likely strengthen physical connectivity and economic integration in the GMS. All these will bring unexpected and great effects to the GMS. These include impacts on communities and ethnic minorities, increased migration, threats to biodiversity, uneven economic growth, spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, human trafficking and other unforeseen problems," Keoamphone said.

On the goal to increase regional cooperation and integration that is projected by the ADB who is funding these infrastructure projects in the GMS, Ms Keoamphone stated, "the said problems would not simply affect one nation, but will impact the whole region, as it becomes more and more interconnected by the increased economic and social traffic along the Economic Corridors."

Related story

Khon Kaen _ The 'Social and Environmental Impacts of Economic Corridors' was the topic at a regional meeting at the Mekong Institute, Khon Kaen, from 18 to 20 September, 2006. A wide range of stakeholders, such as the GMS governments, civil society, academic institutions, and donor agencies, participated in panel and small group discussions, exchanging lessons learned and priorities in mitigating the current and potential impacts of economic corridors in the GMS.

The development of Economic Corridors will increase market access for people along the corridors. Lesson have been drawn indicating the need to improve marketing and information dissemination on economic corridors, specifically programs regarding associated business opportunities. Negative social impacts were discussed, including the loss of culture and social cohesion of communities, particularly those displaced by infrastructure development of the economic corridors. Other social impacts include the loss of livelihoods of displaced communities. Needs considering the impacts on displaced elderly should be assessed.

Considering environmental impacts, the issue of biodiversity degradation, changing ecological systems and deforestation in the GMS, have been discussed. Mitigation measures regarding social and environmental impacts should be tackled at all stages of pre and post project planning and implementation.

Participants agreed that the negative impacts of road improvement should be thoroughly studied in advance. Affected communities' must receive information on the projects. Policy exists but implementation must be closely examined and monitored. Social and environmental impact assessments should be conducted and include detailed action plans.

The exchanging of ideas and information at the meeting enabled GMS countries assess the impact of projects, priorities, and mitigation plans. While policies for projects exist, implementation and follow up should be strictly and properly undertaken by governments and donors.

The regional meeting on "Social and Environmental Impacts of Economic Corridors" was the second regional policy meeting organized by the Mekong Institute. With the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Mekong Institute plans to organize a series of six Regional Policy Meetings over the period of two years. The third Regional Policy Meeting will be subject to priority issues within the GMS. The Mekong Institute will consult with several counterparts, as well as conduct a research studies, in order to propose priority subject areas for the third regional meeting.



Some participants at a meeting session

MI Research Corner

MI Research Consortium 2006-07

The Mekong Institute Research Advisory Committee (MIRAC), with the help of research team members from all GMS countries, has implemented the MI Research Consortium 2006-07. MIRAC has identified two research themes for the consortium. "Tourism" is the research theme for Myanmar and "Economic Corridors of the GMS" is the research theme for the other 5 countries of the GMS. In the case of "Economic Corridors of the GMS", individual country case studies will be integrated and synthesized according to their significance as economic corridors in the GMS. The research consortium is a ten month project, which started in June 2006 and will end by March 2007.

Listed below are research questions and priorities for each country for the MI Research Consortium 2006-07:

Cambodia

Title: The Facts and Implications of GMS Southern Economic Corridors (SEC) in Cambodia

Team Leader and Members: Mr. Kov Phyrum, Economic Institute of Cambodia (4 members)

Research Area: Local Competitiveness, Cross-Border Trade and Investment, Tourism, Environment, Community Displacement

The research questions are:

- How have stakeholders been involved in the development of SEC in Cambodia?
- How are the private sectors involved?
- What are the initiatives proposed with respect to this economic cooperation?
- What are the expectations of Cambodian people, local authorities and government from SEC?
- What kinds of investments are needed for Cambodia to optimize the benefits from SEC?
- What are the potential impacts of SEC on economic, natural, and social environments in Cambodia?

Lao PDR

Title: Impact of Economic Corridor on Tertiary Business and Social Development in Savannakhet Province of Lao PDR

Team Leader and Members: Dr. Bounpong Keorodorm, National University of Laos (4 members)

The research questions are:

- What are the main issues of tertiary business?
- How do the tertiary businesses benefit from the EW Economic Corridor?
- How does the EW Economic Corridor affect the social development and living conditions of local people?

The research will analyze the characteristics and issues of tertiary business, assess the impacts of EW Economic Corridor on tertiary business, analyze the capacity and benefit of tertiary business and recommend strategies of government to support tertiary business.

Thailand

Title: Contested Meanings and Expectations of the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) in Thailand

Team Leader and Members: Dr. Yaowalak Apichatvullop, The Center for Research on Plurality in the Mekong Region, Khon Kaen University (3 members)

The main objectives are to identify stakeholders, their expectations of the EWEC, and the local capacity for coping with changes due to the EWEC.

Vietnam

Title: Development of the Kunming-Laocai-Hanoi-Haiphong (NSEC) and East West Economic Corridor (EWEC): potential, constraints and possible impacts

Team Leader and Members: Dr. Bui Quang Tuan, Institute of World Economics and Politics (3 members)

Research Area: NSEC: Kunming-Laocai-Hanoi-Haiphong

EWEC: Lao Bao- Hue- Da Nang

The objectives of the research are to analyze the current situation of development in the area of Kunming-Laocai-Hanoi-Haiphong economic corridor and EWEC; to assess the potential for development of the economic corridor; to analyze constraints of corridor development; and to analyze the socio-economic impacts of the economic corridor and provide policy recommendations.

Yunnan, China

Title: Meaning of the "GMS Economic Corridors" for Yunnan Province of China

Team Leader and Members: Prof. Wang Shilu, Yunnan Academy for Social Sciences (six members)

The objectives of the research are to raise awareness about the importance of the NSECs; to identify the positive and negative impacts of the Corridors to Yunnan; to identify the exiting issues of the Economic Corridors; to evaluate the prospects of the Economic Corridors; to provide information to other countries of the NSECs; to create academic networks for exchanges and cooperation between and among institutions concerning GMS studies in the region; and to provide updating information about the corridors to government agencies and private sectors as well.

Myanmar

Title: Development of GMS Tourism with Special Reference to Myanmar

Team Leader and Members: Professor U Myat Thein, Former Rector of Yangon Institute of Economics (4 members)

Research Area: Environment and cultural heritage, infrastructure, facilitation in travel/hotel, restaurants, job opportunities, environmental and social impacts, potential and challenges of tourism in the GMS, ecotourism, sustainable tourism (protection of ethnic minorities who will be affected), marketing and cooperation among the GMS, Thai model of mass tourism, alternatives to mass tourism and improving the backward linkages of tourism. It will also identify the actual needs and feedback of the market and identify appropriate measures to improve Myanmar tourism sector.



Map: Showing Economic Corridors and Its Development in the GMS
Source: Asian Development Bank

The research will highlight the following:

- how to improve cooperation among GMS countries in strengthening GMS tourism,
- measures to be taken to make such cooperation more effective, and
- how to bridge the Myanmar tourism sector with GMS tourism and the ways to improve the national tourism sector, in line with other GMS countries.

For more information please email to research@mekonginstitute.org

Photos :

MI Learning Courses

Closing Ceremony for 'Tourism'



Mekong Institute Academic Director Dr Ramon Sevilla, seated fourth from left, presided over the graduation ceremony for 'Tourism: A Regional Approach to Development,' a learning course organized at the MI from July 24 to August 18, 2006.

Opening Ceremony for 'Leadership'



Representatives from the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) countries, are seen watching the Mekong Institute Video Presentation after listening to the welcoming and opening speech delivered by MI Academic Director Dr Ramon Sevilla. All 12 participants from the six GMS countries attended the opening ceremony of the learning course 'Leadership for Competitive Enterprises,' which was organized at the MI from September 11- October 6, 2006.

Touring the old temple



On September 16, the group of 11 participants from the six GMS countries attending the learning course entitled "Leadership for Competitive Enterprises" spent their leisure time visiting 'Prasart Puey Noi', the Khmer ruins which was constructed in the 16 th - 17 th Century in the Baphuon and Ankor Khmer (Cambodian) style as a Hindu temple in Ban Phai District south of Khon Kaen city.

Graduation Day for 'Rural Development'



On September 15, closing day for the learning course entitled 'Rural Development', a Graduation Ceremony was held for the 12 participants from GMS countries; the course was organized by the Mekong Institute management team from August 21 - September 15, 2006.

Touring Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge



Participants of the course 'Tourism: A Regional Approach to Development' are seen here posing for a group photo in front of the Mekong River in Nongkhai, one of the most famous tourist spots in Nongkhai province (in the background is the river border of Laos). The group tour took place on Saturday, August 5, and included visits to a Hindu temple and the province's Thasadech Indo-China shopping center.

Visiting a Buddhist Temple



In September, the group of 11 participants attending the learning course entitled 'Rural Development' spent their holiday on Saturday visiting Wat Phra Buddha Bhat Kham Sri, a Buddhist temple near Ubolratana Dam, Ubolratana District, Khon Kaen province

Thais visiting VN increased by 50 %

The number of Thai travelers flocking to Vietnam in August this year alone has increased by 50 percent when compared to the same period last year.

During the first 8 months of the year, the number of foreign visitors to Vietnam totaled 2.5 million, an increase of 10.5 % when compared to the same period last year.

In August 2006, the number of foreign tourists to Vietnam was up by 310,000, compared to August last year, this resulted an increase of 8 %.

Most travelers were from Asia, Europe, and the USA, an increase from 11 - 50 % , with Thai tourists increased by 50 % , Korean tourists by 32 % , Malaysian visitors by 27 % , Dennis tourists by 26 % , Japanese by 23 % and Russian tourists also by 23 %.

The rise in number of tourists visiting Vietnam has resulted in 80 % more hotel bookings and guest house rooms, while four and five-star hotels room are fully reserved, especially those located in major cities like Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh or Nha Trang, and Khanh Hoa, which is the future meeting place for the Asia and Pacific Economic Cooperation or APEC forums to be held in November of this year.

Meanwhile, business-related tourism associations of Vietnam have been preparing to welcome more guest and visitors, as well as, planning to help upgrade or develop quality of tourism and service industries through hotels, restaurants, food shops meeting hygiene standards, such as clean food, good taste and safe public health.

With the influx of tourists into Vietnam, the government has reserved hotel rooms for APEC members and participants, especially among first class hotels and luxurious apartment rooms in the bigger cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh Cities. They have been refurbished among the 4 star- hotel rooms, so as to welcome guests of honor during the time of the APEC meeting.

The shortage of luxurious hotel rooms in Vietnam has become an incentive for foreign investment projects and business-related tourism this year. It was reported that more than 10 luxurious hotels have been developed, and within next few years, they more businesses will expand to the northern, central and southern regions of Vietnam.

According to statistics of the Vietnamese government, there were a total of 3,467,757 foreign tourists who visited Vietnam last year (2005) - this figure has increased by 18.4 % when compared to 2004. Out of this number, 752,576 were Chinese tourists, 333,566 American, 320,605 Japanese, 317,213 South Korean and 84,100 Thai visitors (an increase of 56.7 % when compared to the number recorded in 2004).

Land transport and links to be promoted in the Indo-China countries

Ubon Ratchathani Chamber of Commerce boasts it will promote its border province by expanding road projects, linking it with other Indo-China country destinations.

Ubon Ratchathani Chamber of Commerce president Chawalit Ongkhawanich disclosed that a roads survey has been conducted between Thailand and neighboring countries and the found that each road cut in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia has completed construction and been linked with each other.

After a field survey has been conducted by the chamber for road links and communications between Ubon Ratchathani province and other neighboring towns and cities scattered in the Indo-Chinese countries of Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia, the chamber plans to use 10 transportation routes linking trade and investment.

The strategy is expected to be in line with the framework of the promotion of economic cooperation with neighboring countries, raising international travel as a top priority.

He noted that as the roads in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia are ready to be linked, the public will benefit through greater convenience in travel and transport.

Chavalit added that the land route links are such as Ubon Ratchathani (Thailand) - Hue (Vietnam), Ubon Ratchathani (Thailand) - Danang (Vietnam), Ubon Ratchathani - Rattanakhiri, Ubon Ratchathani (Thailand) - Kampong Cham (Cambodia) - Phnom Penh (Cambodia), Ubon Ratchathani (Thailand) - Kampong Cham (Cambodia) - Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam), Ubon Ratchathani (Thailand) - Phnom Penh, (Cambodia) - Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam), and Ubon Ratchathani (Thailand) - Siem Reap- Chong Sanga- Ubon Ratchathani (Thailand).

'Three-Nation-Tour' gets full support

The 'Three-Nation-Tour' program promotion gets full support from Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. Mudahan, a northeastern province, has sought close cooperation in boosting the tourism industry among the three countries.

A meeting was recently hosted for officials, considered a 'working group' of the province, to help prepare and welcome the tourism boom in the region.

The meeting, chaired by Mudahan Governor Mr Boonsom Pirinyuang, was attended by representatives from Mukdahan (Thailand), Savannakhet (Laos), and Guang Tri (Vietnam) at the Mukdahan Grand Hotel, from 4-6 September, 2006.

The meeting was aimed towards establishing guidelines in tourism promotion and the systematic development of the tourism industry towards enhancing international relations. The 32 member Thai delegation was composed of persons from public and private sectors, the mass media led by Mudahan deputy governor Arkaradej Bunnag.

The 28 member Lao team was led by Dr Suphan Keomeexai, the deputy governor of Savannakhet province, and the 24 member Vietnamese delegation was led by Mr La Huu Thung, the vice chairman of the People Committee of Guang Tri province.

Discussed was opportunities for cooperation in sharing facilities and expanding the tourism sectors, as well as providing more conveniences to travelers along the route through tour programs, tourist information, tourist brochures and leaflets.

They said they would give helping hands on developing tourism and will follow up this tourism route, which was recently (May 25-31, 2006) explored and surveyed by Mudahan provincial officials - the route passing through the three nations.

The meeting was also expected to strengthen international relationships among neighboring countries. Mudahan is regarded as a "Gateway" to Indo - China in the East, which is a so-called "East -West Economic Corridor". Mukdahan is now preparing to welcome the tourism boom, which should follow the expected finish date in December of the second Thai-Lao friendship bridge.

MI activities in pictures



H.E. Mr Tej Bunnag, centre, Advisor to the Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary and Mekong Institute (MI) Council Chairman on July 18, 2006 chaired the MI Council Meeting held at the MI Facility, Khon Kaen University, Thailand. With him are Dr Narongchai Akrasanee, Chairman of the MI Steering Committee, seated right, and Mr Manoth Suksabjareem, MI Acting Director.



Dr Narongchai Akrasanee, seated second from left, Chairman of the Mekong Institute Steering Committee, presided over the opening ceremony of the MI Steering Committee Meeting, which took place at Royal Princess Hotel in Bangkok on September 22, 2006. With the Chairman are MISC members.



Mekong Institute (MI) Acting Director Manoth Suksabjareem is seen cutting a ribbon marking the Opening Ceremony for the MI's new Learning Resource Center (MI Library) on August 10, 2006. This newly-opened LRC is located on the fourth floor of MI Building. Seen with Mr Suksabjareem are Ms Siriluck Champasri, second from right, the Acting Manager of LRC, and 'Tourism' course participants' guests of honor.



H.E. Mr Tej Bunnag, seated sixth from right, Advisor to the Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary and the Mekong Institute Foundation (MIF) Committee Chairman, presided over the opening ceremony of Mekong Institute Foundation (MIF) Committee Meeting, which took place at the Institute on July 18, 2006. With the Chairman are Dr Narongchai Akrasanee, seated fifth from right, Chairman of the MI Steering Committee, and other MIF committee members.



Mekong Institute Academic Director Dr Ramon Sevilla, second from right, is seen presenting a basket of flowers to congratulate Assoc Prof Nawarat Wara-asawapati-Charoen, left, the Assistant President of Khon Kaen University, who acts as the first Director of the Confucius Institute, at the opening ceremony held for the Institute on the 6th floor of Technology Faculty Building on August 3, 2006. With Dr Ramon, at right, is Ms Siriluck Champasri, MI Acting Learning Resources Center Manager.



A group of about 30 students from the College of Asian Scholars in Khon Kaen visited Mekong Institute (MI) on September 8, 2006. Pictured above, MI Academic Director Dr Ramon Sevilla, standing right, is seen posing for a group photo with them after leading the introduction to MI activities and GMS Learning Resources Center (LRC) for the visitors.

BANGKOK, Sept 14 _Customs' heads from the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) countries met in Bangkok September 14-15.

The director-generals from the six Mekong countries were pursuing closer cooperation to streamline cross-border trade and to strengthen, update and coordinate the capacity building of customs practices among members as they become more standardised world class customs administrations.

Dr. Sathit Limpongpan, Director-General of Thailand's Customs Department said that the special meeting is a result of efforts by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Customs Organization Asia/Pacific Regional Office for Capacity Building (WCO/ROCB) and Royal Thai Customs in organising the meeting as hosts and co-hosts. It is the first meeting of the leaders of GMS Customs since the GMS Sub-regional Economic Cooperation Programme was initiated in 1992.

The meeting was open to the six GMS states, namely Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, to discuss, exchange views and share experiences on challenges faced by customs' departments, including capacity building and closer cooperation to facilitate trade, investment and social development within the sub-region and at the international levels under the guidelines of the Revised Kyoto Convention.

The Convention is an international instrument for the harmonisation of customs techniques covering all aspects of customs' legislation and was established in Kyoto, Japan, on May 18, 1973 and entered into force in 1974.

The meeting was focusing on four primary areas: an overview of customs cooperation in the GMS, the Revised Kyoto Convention, the Framework of Standards (FOS) to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade and capacity building of GMS countries.

WCO deputy secretary-general Kunio Mikuriya opened the meeting with a keynote speech on "Challenges towards a new Customs environment," and served as lead discussant on the Revised Kyoto Convention and the framework of standards. (TNA)

Laos, Vietnam To Boost Integrated Transport Cooperation

VIENTIANE, Sept 8 _ Laos and Vietnam have vowed to boost cooperation in aviation, overland transport and transit transport, according to the Vietnam News Agency.

This agreement was the main outcome of the meeting between Lao Minister of Communications, Transport, Posts and Construction Sommath Pholsena and his Vietnamese counterpart Ho Nghia Dung in Hanoi, Vietnam, on 6 September.

The two parties also agreed to promote exchanges of experiences in quality assessments for transport construction sites, road safety and personnel training.

GMS Customs' Heads Meet to Foster Cooperation

They committed to effective coordination in implementing sub-regional and regional projects, including a triangle development scheme and cooperative transport projects in the framework of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS).

The two ministers reviewed the development of transport cooperation between the two countries in the past and expressed their pleasure at the effective implementation of these cooperation projects. They cited the completion of the construction of Road 18B from Laos' southern Attapeu province to the Vietnam-Laos border, and the on-schedule implementation of feasibility studies on upgrading the number of roads in Laos with the help of Vietnamese consultants.

The two parties also pledged to create favourable conditions for contractors and consultants in implementing Laos-based projects. From September 6-11, a delegation from the Lao Ministry of Communications, Transport, Posts and Construction, headed by Minister Sommath, will visit a number of transport construction sites in Vietnam and discuss with relevant agencies further possibilities of cooperation between the two countries in the coming years.

On the same day, Mr Sommath paid a courtesy visit to the Permanent Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Sinh Hung, who expressed satisfaction with the effectiveness of cooperation between Vietnam and Laos in transport and communications.

Deputy PM Hung stressed that Vietnam and Laos have always enjoyed traditional friendly relations and cooperation has been most productive, especially between ministries, agencies and local authorities within the two countries.

Transport projects built in Laos with Vietnam's assistance, including the east-west roads, have facilitated the transport of Laos' imports and exports through Vietnamese sea ports, Deputy PM Hung noted. He said he hoped that the Vietnam-Laos cooperation would continue to develop, along with their traditional friendship.

Mr Sommath expressed his thanks to the Vietnamese Party, Government and people for their assistance to Laos, especially in the transport and communications sector.

He said he hoped that Laos would continue to receive assistance from Vietnam for its transport projects. (KPL-TNA)

Mekong Sub-region Countries Increase Cooperation In HIV/AIDS Prevention

VIENTIANE, Sept 7 - The Mekong Sub-Region countries, including Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, have organised a workshop

on HIV/AIDS prevention among young people.

At the workshop, held in Vientiane, Laos, on September 5, delegates were informed of the HIV/AIDS situation in the world, and the transmission of HIV/AIDS amongst young people in the four countries. Practical results gained from information on HIV/AIDS control and prevention measures in sexual relations were presented at the workshop.

The delegates also discussed measures to raise young people's awareness of HIV/AIDS, especially safety in sexual relations, with the hopes that they will become more aware of the risks of the disease and know how to prevent it. (VNA-TNA)

Thailand, Laos to open added border crossings

LAOS, Aug 26 - Thailand and the neighbouring Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) have agreed to cooperatively tighten security along their common border and to upgrade a temporary border crossing point into Thailand's northern Uttaradit Province to permanent status, as well as to open two temporary border points in the country's northeastern region, a bid to boost bilateral tourism.

The agreement was made at a two-day meeting in Laos, which ended on Friday, between Thailand's Former Interior Minister Air Chief Marshal Kongsak Wanthana and his counterpart the Lao Minister of Public Security Thongbanh Sengaphone.

Under the agreement, both sides will upgrade the temporary border crossing in Uttaradit's Baan Kok District to permanent status.

Two more border crossing points in the northeastern provinces of Nakhon Phanom and Amnat Charoen will also be opened.

The two ministers said they believe that opening more crossing points could boost bilateral trade and tourism.

Simultaneously, the 6th meeting of provincial governors of the two countries agreed to tighten security along the common border and to increase their cooperation in jointly fighting drug trafficking by launching more patrols along the Mekong River and to establish eight additional narcotics control coordination centres.

Both sides agreed to survey a new border demarcation, especially along the Mekong River.

The two countries fought a bloody battle following a dispute over three border villages during the 1980s. (TNA)