



Mekong Connection

Newsletter of the Mekong Institute

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Lao, Thai Prime Ministers Confer on Bilateral Relations

BANGKOK, Dec 18 - Visiting Lao Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh on Monday met with his Thai counterpart Gen. Surayud Chulanont to discuss several issues aimed at strengthening relations between the two neighbouring countries.

Mr. Bouasone, now making his first official visit to Thailand, reportedly discussed the development of telecommunication networks between the two countries with Gen. Surayud. The discussions also included plans to build two more bridges across the Mekong river from the Thai border provinces of Nakhon Phanom and Chiang Rai.

The two leaders are scheduled to attend the opening of the second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge this Wednesday. The bridge links Thailand's Mukdahan province with Savannakhet in Laos. From there, road connections lead to the Vietnamese city of Hue and port of Danang in central Vietnam, and all other points in the country.

Other major issues expected to be discussed are a joint survey on demarcation, problem of Hmong hilltribes who enter Thailand illegally and the signing of a memorandum of understanding regarding Thailand's agreeing to increase its purchase of electricity from Laos to 5,000 megawatts from the current 3,000 megawatts by 2015.

Another MoU expected to be signed is in relation to Thai assistance to help Laos finance the Nam Theun 2 hydroelectric project in which bonds worth not exceeding Bt1.5 billion will be issued in conjunction with Thai loans of not more than Bt1 billion to fund the project.

After signing the agreements, Gen. Surayud will host a lunch for the visiting Lao prime minister.

Mr. Bouasone is scheduled to have an audience with His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej at Chitrlada Palace on Monday evening. (TNA)

Source: <http://etna.moct.net/query.php?id=26647>

MI Council Meeting Held in Cambodia



The Mekong Institute (MI) Council members on December 9, 2006 attended the meeting in Siem Reap Province, Cambodia. Shown in the photo are the MI Council Chairman H.E. Mr Tej Bunnag, seated center, Council members and MI staff after a successful meeting.

New MI Director Appointed



Dr Suchat Katima

The Mekong Institute is pleased to welcome Dr Suchat Katima, previously Capacity Building Consultant of the Mekong River Commission, as our new Director, taking up the position at MI from February 1, 2007.

Dr. Suchat's training background includes a non-formal education training certificate from Chombung Village Institute, Thailand, a Bachelor Degree in Political Sciences from Fergusson

College, India, a Master Degree in International Development Administration from School in International Training, USA and a Doctorate of Education Management from Silliman University, the Philippines.

Dr. Suchat Katima worked mostly with international development organizations for over 25 years in Thailand, Sudan, the Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam and Lao PDR respectively.

Change in MI Personnel

In December, the Administration Department reported a number of changes in personnel at MI. Ms La Thi Nga, from Vietnam, has been appointed as Program Assistant, effective from December 2006, while Dr Jharendu Pant from Nepal has been appointed to the position of Program Manager, effective from December 2006.

Meanwhile, Finance Manager Pricha Ratanothayanon, from Thailand, retired on December 31, 2006.



Ms Nga



Dr Jharendu



Mr Pricha

Announcement

MI Learning Courses to Be Launched in 2007

The Mekong Institute has announced the learning programs to be offered in the 2007 Professional Development Series (PDS) and custom courses, aimed towards preparing managers from the public and private sectors for today's challenges in the GMS;

Management

'Managing Health Systems in the GMS'
January 8 - February 2, 2007

The program explores managerial and institutional approaches of GMS Health Systems in response to international targets such as the Millennium Development Goals, that ensure accessibility for people and are prompted by ongoing attempts for greater efficiency in the health system, both from country and sub-regional perspectives.

Within this program, the concepts and paradigms of public health systems will be presented. Situational analysis of existing systems will be carried out, followed by external pressures and global trends within this sector. Case studies and field visits will be arranged for participants to see best practice for themselves, and learn valuable lessons. Finally, the course will encourage active discussion on the future potential of GMS health system cooperation in order to achieve desired results with limited resources and difficult contexts.



Anti-Human Trafficking

'Combating Human Trafficking' (in partnership with UNIAP)
January 15-26, 2007, June 19-27, 2007
August 20-28, 2007, November 12-20, 2007

Entry Point: The course is designed for those already employed with ministries or agencies responsible in whole or in part for counter trafficking measures. However, the course also recognizes the relatively recent emergence of human trafficking as a priority for governments and civil society. It therefore does not exclude those with little or no counter-trafficking experience, being designed as an entry-level or 'gateway' program for those ministries or agencies needing to improve policy and practice in the area. Prior to acceptance on the course, prospective participants will

need to complete a letter of application, approved and signed by their line managers. Their line managers should also undertake assessment and support of each participant with a 'Learning Implementation Plan' developed during the course and implemented upon return to their workplace. Prior to arrival participants will also need to provide or prepare an initial assessment of human trafficking in their own countries.

Goal: To provide a thorough grounding in the subject of human trafficking in order to equip participants with the required knowledge, it requires understanding and skills to influence and enhance policy and practice in countering human trafficking in the GMS

Methodology: The course will be participative and adopt learner-centered approaches in order to achieve its course objectives. Modules will normally be delivered by a Trainer and Subject Trainer, suited to the particular module. The Trainer will take responsibility for the coordination of the learning process, the assessment of the learning and the evaluation of the program, while each Subject Trainer will be responsible for the content of their respective modules.

Training Assumptions: This course is intended to be delivered by those with expertise in training and knowledge of human trafficking, or a combination of both, within the delivery team. Module descriptions and training plans therefore assume prior knowledge and expertise in a range of training delivery methods and modes within the team, and do not offer a step-by-step approach to methods such as small group work, case studies and role-plays, for example (although an overview of each method will be included in the glossary).

Target Group: The course is initially aimed at mid-level government officials with English proficiency and educated to degree level, and working in the GMS. This may later be extended to other relevant target groups and levels.

Reform

'Education Decentralization in the Context of Public Sector Management Reform'
February 12 - March 2, 2007

This program views education as an essential factor in (GMS) development. As such, GMS governments have implemented a variety of educational reforms to assist young people. The course also advocates effective leadership as essential in ensuring education reforms are implemented and sustained. The course therefore emphasizes two interdependent capacities:

1. knowledge acquisition of frameworks for GMS education sector reform
2. professional skill development to lead the change process

To provide realistic and applicable delivery,

the course curriculum follows the role of a leader through four stages of education reform process:

1. understanding the need to change; education sector reform issues
2. meeting resistance to change
3. implementing and sequencing reforms
4. managing and sustaining institutional change



Project Management

'Project Feasibility and Design' (in partnership with PPP, ADB)
March 12 - 23, 2007

The learning program 'Project Feasibility and Design' is a two-week intensive course designed to enhance the competence of participants in the identification and design of development projects. It emphasizes project identification, preparation of a project concept, design of a project, and assessment of project feasibility. The faculty is drawn from a pool of project management experts in academia and from the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

'Project Feasibility and Design' aims to familiarize participants with key processes (and concepts) of project planning so that they can better understand a project's background and are sufficiently empowered to guide/monitor projects in their respective work areas.

The objectives of the program are

- to provide opportunities for participants to better understand the process and concepts in project identification and design
- to allow participants to share experience in and exchange ideas on project identification and design
- to expose participants to emerging issues and trends in project development management, with particular focus on identification and design
- to familiarize participants with key concepts and processes in project identification and design
- to help foster a network of project management professionals in the GMS

The program deals with activities during the first two stages of a project cycle: project identification and preparation (design). It illustrates the project design process and related concepts, and addresses cross-cutting issues in project

Continued from page 2 >>

identification and design. It consists of four modules:

- ▶ Project Identification
- ▶ Project Concept
- ▶ Project Design
- ▶ Establishing Project Feasibility



MIRAC Meeting

The Second Meeting of the Mekong Institute Research Advisory Committee (MIRAC)

April 10-11, 2007.

After completing 'MI Research Consortium 2006-07' in March 2007, MI Research Department will hold a second MIRAC meeting in April 2007 together with round-table discussion to validate and disseminate research findings. The MIRAC meeting will also decide the MI Small Research Grant winners for the six GMS - country researchers. MIRAC members from six GMS countries, three international advisors, MI staff together with the stakeholders of the research fields from the GMS, will participate in the meeting.

Project Management

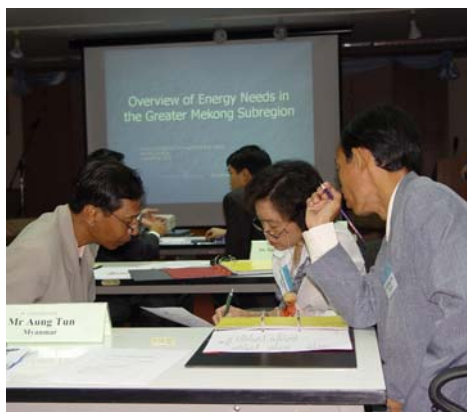
'Project Monitoring and Evaluation' (in partnership with TICA)

April 23 - May 11, 2007

This learning program is based on the understanding that evaluation means different things to different people and takes place in different contexts. However, it does not accept that effective evaluation merely states that a project is 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' without considering the impact to project stakeholders. Rather, it is a tool that not only measures, but also contributes to, the success of a project. This proposed curriculum therefore focuses on participatory elements of formative and summative project evaluation.

To enhance the understanding and capacity of participants in project planning and the use of monitoring and evaluation tools, in order to assess how well a project has been achieved, the course emphasizes interdependent capacity to

- ▶ improve knowledge about concepts of project planning and evaluation tools used in development projects
- ▶ enhance skills to implement evaluation tools for development projects
- ▶ improve knowledge on how to prepare an evaluation report
- ▶ promote communication, understanding, trust and cooperation among participants



Research Training

'Assessing Sustainable Development in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS)' (The Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research (APN) - CAPaBLE)

May 21 - June 1, 2007

This project trains young researchers and professionals on methods and tools for analyzing issues related to global change, in an integrated and participatory way. The activities include (1) an intensive training course, (2) policy dialogue (participatory support for problem structuring and awareness-raising), and (3) dissemination (transfer of scientific knowledge to the policy sector and the general public). Training is conducted by internationally renowned experts in the fields of integrated analysis, participatory research and sustainability research. Participants will be trained to engage in global change research by applying practical, problem oriented and policy-relevant approaches. The issues dealt with in the project are concerned with aspects of global change, including land use and land cover change, food and water security and agricultural practices. There is an emphasis on the socio-economic drivers of global change and on intervention in social systems for sustainable development. Participants will be able to conduct and do sustainability research independently and identify the relevant national sustainability issues while suggesting research strategies to tackle these issues.

Regional Course 'Proposal Writing and Research Methodology' (Asia - Pacific Network for Global Change Research)

July 1 - July 14, 2007

This is an advanced level regional course titled 'Proposal Writing and Research Methodology', designed for mid-level researchers from the GMS. The course is intended primarily for university students, members of research institutes and government agency officials working in the field. The purpose of this course is to improve participants' competence on the key issues and concepts of the research process and final proposal preparation: problem identification, objective setting, hypothesis formulation, literature review, conceptual/theoretical modeling, budgeting, data collection, field management, data

analysis, data interpretation, report writing and so on.

Poverty Reduction

'Income Generation and Poverty Reduction' (in partnership with TICA)

July 24 - August 11, 2007

The Greater Mekong Sub-region is undergoing one of the fastest economic growth rates in the world. Despite this rapid growth, poverty remains a critical issue for millions. Furthermore, there is growing understanding by the public, private and civil society sectors that poverty reduction strategies and intervention projects must be based on the interdependencies of economic, social, cultural and environmental factors - not limited to reliance on economic expansion. As a result, there has been an increasing emphasis for development projects to adopt 'pro-poor' strategies that meet Millennium Development Goals. The expansion of such projects requires qualified managers and personnel who are able to analyze, implement, and evaluate poverty reduction strategies and interventions.

To meet the above challenges, Thailand International Development Cooperation Agency (TICA), in cooperation with the Colombo Plan Secretariat, has requested the Mekong Institute conduct a learning program to develop both knowledge and skills for successful poverty reduction strategies and interventions. The course provides a venue for professionals and practitioners from beyond the GMS to share experiences and practices on interventions that create lasting impact and advance stakeholders' quality of life. Professional development for participants is therefore emphasized, to ensure all are able to implement knowledge and skills on return to their workplace. This includes development of data and case analysis, and presentation and computer literacy, all conducted in English. As with all MI courses, both interpersonal and professional networks are built among participants and presenters.

This course responds to the needs of public, private and civil society sector officials for a learning programme in poverty reduction strategy and intervention. Specifically the curriculum focuses on

- Poverty Analysis
- Strategies and Interventions for Poverty Reduction
- Planning and Implementing Strategy and Intervention
- Monitoring and Evaluation of Strategy and Intervention



Research News Corner

Regional Short Course: "Advanced Level Research Methodology"

Mekong Institute conducted a regional short course titled "Advanced Level Research Methodology" from 18 to 29 December 2006 in Khon Kaen, Thailand. The course was organized by MI Research Department as part of its capacity-building strategy for GMS researchers to help them address problems in priority areas of research. Altogether, 17 researchers from the GMS member countries participated in the short course: two each from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar; three each from Thailand and Vietnam; and five from Yunnan, China. Upon completion of the two-week course, all participants were expected to be able to improve and revise their research proposal individually for application to MI Small Research Grant Program Intake 2007/08, and to other donor agencies in the GMS (the list of researchers and their research proposal titles is given below).

The purpose of this workshop is to improve participants' competence on the key issues and concepts of a research process and final proposal preparation: problem identification, objective setting, hypothesis formulation, literature review, conceptual/theoretical modeling, budgeting, data collection, field management, data analysis, data interpretation and report writing.

The general objectives of the regional short course are to strengthen GMS researcher interest in particular research fields, help researchers conduct relevant and efficient literature searches, familiarize researchers with some of the statistical techniques of data analysis and interpretation, assist them in report-writing techniques, and introduce them to potential links (and networks) between studies, identifying donors for research grants and facilitating the exchange of valuable research resources (information).

The main resource personnel for the regional short course comprised Dr. Christopher Gan, Associate Professor in Economics for the Commerce Division at Lincoln University in New Zealand, Dr Ramon C. Sevilla, Academic Director of Mekong Institute, Dr Soparth Pongquan, Associate Professor at the Asian Institute of Technology in Thailand, and Dr Bernadette Resurreccion, Assistant Professor also at the Asian Institute of Technology.

Participant List and Project Titles

A. Cambodia

1. Cross Border Migration in Cambodia in the GMS Southern Economic Corridor: *Kheang Seang Horn*
2. Constraints of Small and Medium Scale Enterprise Development in Cambodia: *Ratha Chhim*



Call for Proposal for MI Small Research Grant Program 2007/08

Mekong Institute (MI) invites research proposals for the priority areas identified by Mekong Institute Research Advisory Committee (MIRAC) for GMS development issues. Research theme areas consist of small and medium scale enterprise (SME) development/management, micro-finance management, public health issues, cross border issues, migration, agricultural trade, and other emerging issues in GMS development.

Format for Proposals (proposals greater than ten pages in length will not be entertained)

Please use the following format

A. Cover Sheet (1 page)

1. Research title
2. Name of team leader, full contact details (address, telephone number, e-mail and fax number)
3. Name of research team member(s) (if any)
4. Institutional affiliation and country

B. Lao PDR

1. The Quality and Employability of National University of Laos Graduates: *Sivilai Butphomivhane*
2. Environmental Impacts of Rubber Tree Plantation in Lao PDR: A Case Study of Luang Numtha Province: *Bouphavanh Keomixay*

C. Myanmar

1. Clustering and Supply Chain Strategy for Myanmar Small and Medium Manufacturing Industry Development: *Aye Aye Kyuu*
2. Declining Mangroves and Its Impacts on Rural People in the Delta Region in Myanmar: *Aung Kyaw Oo*

D. Thailand

1. The Management of Social and Environmental Risk and Vulnerability in the Thai-Lao Border Area : The Case of Nong Khai Province, Thailand: *Panadda Pucharoensilp*
2. Potentiality of Community-Based Tourism in the Northern Economic Corridor of the Greater Mekong Sub-region: Cases from Chiang Kong District in Thailand and Luang Nam Tha District in Lao PDR: *Bussaba Sitikarn*
3. Instructional Design Model to Enhance Knowledge-Sharing Competencies at Nim See Seng Transport 1988 Co. Ltd: *Chitrlada Burapharat*

E. Vietnam

1. An Analysis of the Constraints and Opportunities of the Investment Environment in Bac Giang Province of Vietnam: *Nguyen Thi Mai Anh*
2. The Economic Roles of Laocai and Kunming Communities in the North-South (Kunming-Laocai - Hanoi-Haiphong) Economic Corridor: *Pham Hong Yen*
3. Impacts of the East-West Economic Corridor on Socio-economic Development in Vietnam: *Lai Lam Anh*

F. Yunnan, China

1. The Potentials of the Kunming-Bangkok Highway on Tourism Development in Yunnan Province: *Guo Na*
2. Impacts of New Immigrants from China in Lao PDR: *Fang Yun*
3. An Assessment of the Kunming Sunshine Homeland Project in HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care: *Mei Li*
4. Facilitation of Cooperation of Kunming-Bangkok Economic Corridors: *Li Wen*
5. An Assessment of the Impacts of the Kunming-Bangkok Economic Corridor on Small Towns in Yunnan: *Yu Haiqiu*

- needs to follow on from and be related to the identified research objectives, questions and hypotheses
2. Budget. Provide your best possible estimate and include field management costs, honorarium and supplies
3. Conclusions: including expected outcomes, potential policy reforms/implications and dissemination strategy for research output

D. Appendices (1-2 pages)

1. Timetable of project
2. CVs of team leader and members

Important Dates for Research Projects

Proposal Submission:	January - March 2007
Decision on Grant Award:	April 2007
Duration of Research:	May 2007 - March 2008
Budget Ceiling:	USD 1,500 - 5,000

Upon completion of the research project, the team leader of each research team is required to present the findings in a round-table discussion at Mekong Institute, with the presence of stakeholders and experts from across the GMS.

Please send an electronic copy of your proposal and CV to research@mekonginstitute.org or bhojrajkhana@yahoo.com. The deadline for proposal submission is 31 March 2007. Please visit MI website or use the e-mail addresses above for further details and information on the proposal format, and all other queries.

Current Activities of Research Department

- A small research grant program that focuses on GMS development issues, such as SME development and management, micro-credit management, cross border issues, agricultural trade and public health issues, is currently in progress
- Training on basic and advanced level research methods and proposal writing for young GMS researchers
- Networking with research institutions and MI Alumni for research information sharing
- Information dissemination through publications (MI Journal, MI Working Paper Series and MI Newsletter: Mekong Connection) and website

MI Appoints Jan Tahir Babar as Visiting Scholar

Mekong Institute has appointed Mr Jan Tahir Babar to the position of Visiting Scholar, working in the MI Research Department from January 2007. Mr Babar will be working with the MI research and academic teams for one year. His work as a Visiting Scholar is related to his research activities on the link between environmental education and community-based ecotourism in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. Tahir is familiar with development in the sub-region, as he has worked formerly as Development Advisor for Forum Syd (a Swedish NGO) in Cambodia, and as a legal consultant for UNHCR in Vietnam.



Mr Jan Tahir Babar

Tahir was also previously affiliated with Sweden's Uppsala University, working as a researcher on environmental education and community-based development for the Centre for Environment and Development Studies there. In addition, he has been involved with the South East Education Development program. The Centre for Environment and Development Studies in Uppsala is a forum for students, researchers and lecturers with an interest in the environment, development and other global issues to gather and give interdisciplinary courses and seminars, and to stimulate contact between students, researchers and society.

5. Date of proposal
6. Budget request and duration of project

B. Project Description (please include the following) 3-4 pages

1. Background
2. Research problem: provide a clear and concise description of your research problem
3. Objectives. Identify overall study goals and specific research objectives
4. Hypotheses/research questions to be tested (if any)
5. Literature review. Please restrict your review to literature most pertinent to the study
6. Description of the study site (if any)
7. Policy context: describe how your research will inform specific policy reform/implications in your country or in the GMS

C. Research Methods (3-4 pages)

1. Methods for data collection and analyses. This section

Photos :

MI Learning Courses

Managing Health Systems in the GMS



Some of the participants of the learning course entitled "Managing Health Systems in the GMS" shown recently at the opening ceremony. This was the first time a Health course was being offered at MI. A total of 13 participants from GMS countries attended this course.

Future Management of GMS Health Sectors



MI Acting Director Manoth Subsjarearn, (seated third from right) presided over the opening ceremony of the three-day MI research seminar 'Future Management of GMS Health Sectors', organized from November 24-26, 2006, and held at the MI Facility for participants from the GMS.

Project Management



Dr Clemens M. Grunbuhel (facing camera, in white), Program Manager of MI, led the introduction session for the learning course 'Project Management' on November 21, 2006. Course participants from the six GMS countries also introduced themselves after the opening ceremony.

Chinese Group on Site Visit at Lao PDR Dam



On November 1, 2006, China's Yunnan Power Grid Corporation (YNPG) group at the Theun Hin Boun Dam in Laos during their site visit for the Regional Energy Planning and Project Management course. The group led by MI Academic Director Dr Ramon Sevilla (in hat) was briefed by Mr Rota, Plant Manager (middle, in black). They were also accompanied by Mr Khamso Kouphokham, Deputy Chief Electricity Management Division, Department of Electricity at the Ministry of Energy and Mines (standing to the left of Dr Ramon).

Regional Energy Planning & Project Management



The first presentation for the Yunnan Power Grid Corporation course was presented on October 9, 2006 at the Mekong Institute by Dr Mithhulanathan Nadarajah, on traditional and distributed generation after the official opening ceremony for 'Regional Energy Planning and Project Management'.

Leadership for Competitive Enterprises



The closing day and graduation ceremony for the learning course "Leadership for Competitive Enterprises" was held for 12 participants from the GMS countries on October 6, 2006. The course was organized by the Mekong Institute from September 11 to October 6, 2006.

MI activities in pictures



The Austrian Ambassador to Thailand, H.E. Mr Arno Riedel, second from left, paid an official visit to the Mekong Institute on December 12, 2006 for half a day as guest of MI Acting Director Manoth Suksabjareern, far left. On this occasion, the Ambassador also gave a special talk on the 'European Union Project' to participants attending the 'Project Management' course.



Chairman of Mekong Institute Steering Committee Dr Narongchai Akrasanee, seated center, chaired the MI Steering Committee (SC) meeting at Le Meridien Angkor Hotel, Siem Reap, Cambodia on December 8, 2006.



Regional Operation Center (ROC) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Deputy Chief Somrudee Poopornanake of the Passport Office at Khon Kaen City Hall, far right, accompanied two general administration officers from Khon Kaen University's Regional Operation Center (ROC) recently paid an official visit to Mekong Institute to meet with MI Administration Director Pakpoom Teranantana, middle, and MI Academic Director Dr Ramon Sevilla, left.



Mekong Institute, in association with the India's Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDI) and generously supported by the Global Issues and Sustainable Development (GISD) Division of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) conducted the workshop 'Unleashing Entrepreneurship for Development and Trade', at the Royal Princess Hotel, Larn Luang, Bangkok from November 15 - 17, 2006.



This New Year's party for MI staff was held on December 16, 2006 at MI conference room. It was an opportunity for staff to enjoy food with fun and games together with their families.



A warm welcome party was held on December 18, 2006 by the MI Research Department for the group attending the regional short course "Advanced Level Research Methodology" at a restaurant near Bungkaennakhon Lake in Khon Kaen.

NEW THAI-LAO BRIDGE TO BOOST MEKONG TOURISM



Travel and tourism to and within the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) is to get a significant boost with the opening of the second Friendship Bridge between Thailand and Lao PDR on 20 December.

The bridge, which started construction in March 2004, was officially inaugurated by HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand and Lao Vice President Bounngang Vorachit in the presence of the Prime Ministers of the two countries as well as members of the diplomatic corps.

Linking the Lao province of Savannakhet with northeastern Thailand's Mukdahan province, the second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge is a key component of a major economic and infrastructure development plan to facilitate transportation, trade, investment, and tourism in the Mekong Sub-region.

Thai Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont said the bridge would foster intra-regional trade and investment, facilitate travel to Myanmar and Vietnam and "in the future help to extend the corridor to China, Korea, India and Bangladesh".

Lao Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh said the bridge was important to a landlocked country such as Lao PDR., and would enable it to boost the potentiality for transport services and expand trade and tourism with its neighbours.

Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung also attended the ceremony.

A member of ASEAN since 1997, Lao PDR. is working hard to attain a three-fold improvement in national living standards by 2020.

Development of the Mekong basin has been actively promoted since the first half of the 1990s after the restoration of peace in Cambodia and in the Indochina Peninsula, and with the transition to a market economy among socialist states in the post-Cold war era.

The first Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge over the Mekong linking the Thai province of Nong Khai and the Lao PDR. capital of Vientiane was opened in 1994 with Australian funding.

The second 1.6-kilometre, two-lane bridge was funded by loans from the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) to the tune of 4,011 million yen to Lao PDR and 4,079 million yen to Thailand. It was JBIC's first Overseas Development Assistance loan for a cross-border infrastructure development embracing two countries.

The bridge will play a major part in giving landlocked Lao PDR. access to ports in Thailand and Vietnam.

It is part of the East-West Corridor route which originates from central Vietnam's Da Nang port, a centre of maritime transportation, and runs north along Vietnam's National Highway No. 1 to Dong Ha. The route then connects Vietnam and Lao PDR. via National Highway No. 9, and further connects Laos and Thailand via the new bridge.

The route connecting Vietnam and Savannakhet has been improved in the past through assistance from multilateral agencies and Japan. In Thailand, JBIC has financed improvement work on existing national highways that are part of the East-West Corridor. The new bridge will connect all these routes.

Although the bridge has international border control checkpoints, visitor flows will only begin after the relevant agreements are finalised between Thailand and Lao PDR. Cars travelling across the bridge will be charged 50 baht each and larger trucks, 350 baht.

The two provinces that will certainly benefit on both sides of the river are Savannakhet and Mukdahan, where the people share a lot of cultural, historical and ethnic heritage.

Home to an interesting mixture of cultures from various tribes since ancient times, Mukdahan is a land of fantastic natural rock formations and also renowned for its sweet tamarind fruit. Further information about Mukdahan province: <http://www.tatnews.org/emagazine/1603.asp>

Savannakhet can be easily explored by foot and has a number of interesting temples and architectural landmarks dating back to the colonial French

days. There are 11 ethnic minorities.

Ho Tay Pidok Library houses a collection of 200-year-old palm leaf manuscripts written in the ancient Khom-Pali and Lao alphabets. Fossilized dinosaur bones discovered in Honbuly District in 1930 are housed in

the Dinosaur Exhibition Hall in Khanthabouly, the provincial capital.

During January-March 2006, overland Lao PDR. arrivals to Thailand totalled 38,269, up 45.27% over the same period of 2005. (www. TATnews.org. Photo: Mukdahan PR Office).

Sources: http://www.tatnews.org/tat_release/detail.asp?id=3224
<http://www.chiangmai-mail.com/216/news.shtml#hd11>

ROAD TRANSPORT / LINKS WITH LAOS

Third bridge to be built across the Mekong

A third bridge will be built over the Mekong river, this time linking Chiang Rai with Huaysay in Laos, with China agreeing to share the cost equally with Thailand. The estimated price is US\$31 million (1.085 billion baht).

Deputy Government Spokesman Nattawat Suttiyotin said Thailand will be responsible for construction on the Thai side and Beijing will be responsible for the Lao side of the bridge.

He could not say when the construction would begin. Further talks between Thai and Chinese officials were needed.

The cabinet passed a resolution on the cost-sharing budget for construction of the bridge on Dec 19 and directed the Commerce Ministry to propose the idea to China.

Beijing recently informed Thailand in a letter that it agreed with the idea, he said.

The cost-sharing approach to the bridge's construction was under the Greater Mekong Subregion scheme.

The bridge will start in Chiang Khong district of Chiang Rai, crossing to Huaysay town in the northern Lao province of Bokeo. It will be 630 metres long and 16.7 metres wide.

The bridge will serve a road linking Thailand and China through Bokeo and Luang Namtha and boost trade in the subregion.

Source : ANUCHA CHAROENPO, Bangkok Post
<http://www.bangkokpost.com>

New Tourist Spot in E-san Region



It is open everyday from 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. Among the many attractions and facilities provided for visitors are banana boat rides, 'donut' rafting, hammocks and umbrellas in seating areas, and a plethora of restaurants.

For more information, please contact Tourism Authority of Thailand, Northeastern Office: Region 3 or Call 043-731178-9

Sources: <http://recmert.kku.ac.th/>
<http://www.tourismthailand.org/>,
<http://www.tat.or.th/>

Wang Ko Beach is another site of relaxation for visitors to Kosum Phisai, situated in Tha Duea village in Nong Bon district, Mahasarakham Province.

GMS NEWS

ADB to assist Lao PDR with \$100m in loans and grants for 2007-2009

VIENTIANE, Nov 28 - ADB's new assistance strategy for the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) during 2007-2011 follows the Government's Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan and will focus on core priorities in the country, including agriculture, health, education and infrastructure, according to a press release from ADB.

The strategy addresses critical constraints to pro-poor growth and social development by concentrating ADB support on basic education and preventative health services, small holder agriculture diversification and commercialization, and improving the business climate for small and medium-scale enterprises.

This will be combined with a major effort to improve public sector financial management.

During the first three years of the strategy, ADB will offer \$60m in loans and grants directly to the Lao PDR government, and another \$40m to the country under the Greater Mekong Sub-region program.

Five technical assistance grants, totaling around \$10m, are also expected.

In addition, ADB continues to work closely with other international organizations and the government on the Nam Theun 2 Hydropower Project.

ADB's focus on the huge undertaking has been to monitor the safeguard provisions and assist in strengthening the country's ability to manage public funds generated by the project.

Lao PDR is one of the poorest countries in the Asia Pacific region. Per capita gross domestic product is \$490, one third of the population is in poverty, and one third is illiterate.

According to the ADB strategy, prospects for economic and social development are promising, despite the challenges. The economy has grown and diversified in the last five years, and this trend is expected to continue. (KPL)

Vietnam to import 25m doses of H5N1 vaccine

HANOI, Dec 30 - Vietnam plans to import 25 million doses of the H5N1 vaccine and 4.5 million doses of the H5N9 vaccine to conduct additional inoculation for waterfowl amid bird flu outbreaks, an animal health agency has said.

A working group representing the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning and Investment and Ministry of Science and Technology have met and reached agreements on vaccine import with Merial company and the Harbin Veterinary Research Institute of China, the Veterinary Department under MARD stated.

The veterinary department reported bird flu outbreaks on December 28 in Long My district, Hau Giang province in the Mekong Delta, bringing the total number of affected localities to three, including the southernmost province of Ca Mau and the Mekong Delta province of Bac Lieu. It also reported that this year's second round of vaccinations against the virus have been completed.

The MARD recently decided to include geese in the list of poultry subject to vaccination in an effort to contain and eliminate the highly pathogenic avian influenza. The veterinary department has asked localities to commit to inoculating geese with the H5N9 vaccine.

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Mekong Institute. Mekong Connection is a publication prepared by the Mekong Institute with the purpose of promoting understanding and cooperation among the Greater Mekong Subregion Countries. For further information, please contact the Mekong Institute. Tel: 66-4320-2411-2 Fax: 66-4334-3131 E-mail: information@mekonginstitute.org www.mekonginstitute.org

The MARD has instructed affected localities to conduct additional vaccination for poultry, particularly waterfowl, during January and February 2007 and promptly cull all poultry at households that have not conducted vaccinations in line with regulations. (VNA)

Chulalongkorn study says new Thai-Lao bridge to create problems

BANGKOK, Dec 24 - A number of social problems will arise for Thailand from the second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge, officially opened last Wednesday, according to a study conducted by Chulalongkorn University's Asian Studies Centre.

Economic benefits anticipated in the wake of the new Mekong River bridge opening include an influx of Lao workers into Thailand, which could help reduce labour shortage in Thailand and lower production costs.

But problems - including increased crime, narcotics trafficking, smuggling, prostitution and illegal entry - are expected, while the daily lives of Thai northeasterners could be changed, the study says, while recommending that the government increase its readiness to deal with such challenges.

It also said government and concerned agencies should be prepared to cope with anticipated problems like dwindling agricultural areas, excess waste and water pollution, overcrowding, transportation and service strains, mass migration of foreign workers, and problems over public utilities.

The second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge opened on December 20. The bridge is part of efforts to open transport links in Southeast Asia under a scheme sponsored by the Asian Development Bank. By connecting Thailand's northeastern province of Mukdahan with Savannakhet in southern Laos, it provides a direct road link to central Vietnam. (TNA)

Second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge officially opens

BANGKOK, Dec 20 - The second Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge-linking the Lao province of Savannakhet and northeastern Thailand's Mukdahan province-officially opened on Wednesday.

HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand and Lao Vice President Bounnhang Vorachit jointly presided over the opening ceremony on Wednesday morning, witnessed by the Prime Ministers of the two countries and diplomatic corps.

The second Friendship Bridge is aimed at facilitating transportation, trade, investment and tourism activities for countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

Bridge construction began on March 21, 2004. The two governments raised a loan of 2.6 bn baht from the Japan Bank for International Cooperation to finance the construction. Funds spent on building the bridge alone amounted to 1.6 bn baht.

The bridge has two lanes, 12 metres in width and 1.6km long. It is part of the land transport development plan of the East-West Economic Corridor running through Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Myanmar.

The first Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge over the Mekong, linking the Thai province of Nong Khai and Lao capital Vientiane, was opened in 1994. (TNA)

Third China-ASEAN Business, Investment Summit opens in Nanning

NANNING, Oct 31 - Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao made new proposals to boost China's economic cooperation with ASEAN in the opening ceremony of the

Third China-ASEAN Business and Investment Summit here on Tuesday.

Wen remarked that China and ASEAN countries should work for a more enabling environment to facilitate trade, with more efforts committed to expanding trade in high value-added products, such as mechanical, electrical and hi-tech goods.

"China has a trade deficit with ASEAN. But we are still committed to further opening the market and increasing imports from ASEAN," he said. Secondly, the two sides should deepen cooperation in investment, he said.

"China will honor its pledge made last year of providing \$5bn of preferential loans to support Chinese companies in investing and setting up joint ventures in ASEAN countries," Wen stated.

China encourages its companies to participate in the development of ASEAN countries and invest in trade and economic zones with sound infrastructure and production chains, he commented.

Wen said China welcomes more ASEAN investment and greater participation in China's economic development. The Premier also remarked that joint investment projects between two sides could be carried out in diversified forms, such as project contracting, equity holdings and technological cooperation.

"China will encourage Chinese companies to transfer applicable technologies to ASEAN," he said.

He then moved on to the establishment of the China-ASEAN free trade area, where he recommended trade negotiations in services and investment be stepped up to reach agreements at an early date.

Finally, sub-regional economic cooperation could become the new focus in China-ASEAN cooperation, Wen suggested.

The Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle and the Greater Mekong Sub-region Economic Cooperation Program are off to a good start, he said, adding that China will actively explore the feasibility of conducting Pan Beibu Gulf cooperation. (Xinhua)

EXIM Bank, JBIC support Thai bio-fuel investment in Mekong basin

BANGKOK, Oct 5 - The Export-Import Bank of Thailand (EXIM Bank) and Japan's Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) have jointly pledged to support the Thai private sector to invest in bio-fuel and gasohol production in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

The two banks made the announcement during the seminar 'Investment Opportunities in Bio-fuel in the Greater Mekong Sub-region,' which spans Thailand, southern China, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam.

EXIM Bank president Narongchai Akrasanee said the global energy crisis presents an opportunity for Thailand to invest in 'green energy,' and the two banks are particularly keen to support production of bio-fuel and gasohol, which are derived from plants such as cassava and sugarcane.

Laos and Myanmar are especially promising areas, he said, as Thailand lacks the resources in terms of large plots of land and cheap labour to farm the plants needed as raw materials for bio-fuel. This type of investment would also help to promote better relations throughout the GMS member states, he said.

EXIM Bank and JBIC look to support those capable of large-scale operations, requiring intensive capital, technology and advanced management skills. Eligible applicants must be able to cultivate at least 1,000 rai (400 acres) of land, with a 50 year lease commitment. (TNA)