



Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong joins worshippers to make merit on the last day of Buddhist Lent at Ongteu temple in Vientiane. --Photo Khamphan

Buddhists make merit to mark the end of Lent

Times Reporters

A bright, sunny morning yesterday brought Lao people across the country out to present their offerings to monks to make merit on the last day of Buddhist Lent.

Lao Buddhists mark *Ork Phansa* as an especially auspicious day to take their bowls with offerings to their local temples, and devotees could be seen flocking in large numbers despite the fact that it was a working day.

Government leaders and state officials also joined worshippers to carry snacks and yellow plastic pails filled with items needed by the monks and novices in their everyday life.

As the end of Lent comes, it also signifies the beginning

of the wedding season - no one marries during the Lenten period as couples believe that if they do, their marriage will end in divorce.

The *Ork Phansa* festival is an annual tradition which marks the end of the three month period during which monks and novices reaffirm their commitment to Buddhism.

During the festival's early morning almsgiving, believers raise their offerings above their head to ask for blessings from the monks and Buddha, hoping for a healthy and successful life.

Buddhists believe their offerings will be passed on to the spirits of their deceased relatives.

At 7pm yesterday evening, each temple held a candlelit procession where monks

and believers walked three times around the main hall of worship, aiming to show their respect and pray to Buddha.

Temples also displayed longboats assembled by monks, and set up flickering candles around the temple grounds to provide a colourful end to Lent.

At the Mekong River

in Vientiane, there were thousands of colourful boats hand made from banana leaves and bearing flowers, incense, and candles in keeping with the longstanding tradition known as *Lai Heua Fai*.

This special festival aims to pay homage to the river spirits

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Korea signs US\$80.8 million loan for hydropower project

Times Reporters

The Korean Economic Development Cooperation Fund from the Republic of Korea has signed a loan agreement for US\$80.8 million (about 658 billion kip) with the Lao government.

The funds will be used for the development of the Xepian-Xenamnoy hydropower plant in Champassak province.

The loan agreement was signed by the Minister of Finance Dr Lien Thikeo, on behalf of the Lao government, and the Executive Director of the Korean Economic Development Cooperation Fund Group (EDCF) Mr Seong-hyeong Yim.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Dr Lien said the Xepian-Xenamnoy hydropower project will play a significant role in the socio-economic development of Laos, especially in the energy sector.

"While the situation of the world economy is variable, many countries have also been affected by these unstable circumstances. However the Lao government will pay special attention to the effective use of the loans for the development of the project," he said.

He also added that the cooperation between the Lao government and EDCF will also play a crucial role in contributing to the implementation of the 8th National Socio Economic Development Plan and enable Laos' ambition to graduate from the UN list of Least Developed Countries by 2020.

Meanwhile the Executive Director of the EDCF Mr Seong-hyeong Yim also praised the Lao government for prioritising the development of the Xepian-Xenamnoy hydropower project as it will contribute to socio-economic

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35 percent of budget for debt repayment

Souksakhone Vaeneko

The government has instructed central and local state organisations to use up to 35 percent of the annual total budget allocated to them to repay debt they have accumulated.

The instruction was part of debt payment measures resolved by the annual government meeting where the cabinet members, Vientiane Mayor and provincial governors met in Vientiane recently, according to the

resolution of the meeting.

A report presented at the meeting showed 20 central state organisations, four provinces and the capital of Vientiane accumulated debt of 29,107 billion kip. However, many organisations have not yet reported about their debts.

The national committee in charge of addressing debt has instructed all state departments to conclude and report their debt by October 30, 2015 in a move to explore further measures for the payment.

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Vendors moved on at boat racing festival

Times Reporters

Many vendors are annoyed their stalls have been taken down on the orders of the Vientiane Boat Racing Festival committee even though they have already paid their rent.

Festival organisers have ignored calls from vendors to stay at their regular locations citing the low level of the Mekong as the reason the race start and finish lines have to be moved and therefore the vendors have to make way. Stallholders have been removed along the river between Sithaneua and Oumoung villages in Sikhottabong district.

Vendors claimed when they asked where to move to those officials told them to find a new location anywhere. The stallholders feel especially aggrieved as they paid a premium for the riverside location only to be expelled.

The vendors want to be compensated for the money they paid for the old location from the festival committee because they need it to pay for rental at new locations.

One expelled vendor from Vientiane province, Mr Viensack Bouddy told *Vientiane Times* yesterday the committee did not



Vendors' stalls are taken down along the Mekong riverbank on the orders of festival officials.

explain properly to vendors why they were being expelled and had not refunded their rent.

"This is not the first time that vendors have been treated poorly. It seems to be becoming normal. It is very sad they took down so many stalls," he said.

He said vendors made representations to the committee but they didn't have any answers saying they hadn't refunded money because they were acting under the instructions of the Vientiane authority.

According to the festival committee every year the boat race is held in front of Vat Chan

temple but the finishing line this year has been moved upstream two times. At first it was moved upstream one kilometre from the Vat Chan temple and then a further 300 m due to low water levels.

Last year there were a total of 27 sports boats, 12 traditional boats and six modified boats plus many others crews from Vientiane and Luang Prabang provinces taking part. This year new teams from Vientiane, Xayaboury, Borikhamxay and Luang Prabang provinces have registered with the organising committee.

Fair offers education opportunities in Japan

Times Reporters

The Study in Japan Fair opened yesterday to provide the opportunity for Lao teachers, officials and students to increase their understanding of education and culture in Japan.

The National University of Laos (NUOL) in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Sports and the Lao-Japan Human Resource Development Institute yesterday organised the Study in Japan Fair 2015 at the National University of Laos, Vientiane, the seventh time the fair has been held in Laos.

Hundreds of students and teachers from the NUOL, colleges, educational institutes and high schools along with officials and representatives from the Embassy of Japan to Laos, Japanese International Cooperation Agency, Japan Student Services Organisation and Japanese universities participated in the event.

The fair offers an opportunity for students and teachers to meet representatives from eight famous Japanese universities, Osaka University, International University of Japan, Nagasaki University School of Tropical Medicine and Global Health, Nagoya University, Yokohama National University, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University and University



Students seek information at the fair in Vientiane.

of the Ryukyus to find out about studying in Japan.

The fair also provides information about education in Japan and strengthens relations between educational institutions in Laos and Japan," NUOL President Professor Dr Soukkongseng Saingaleuth said.

"The government and people of Laos have received extensive support from the Japanese government, which has broadened the cooperation between the two countries in all sectors including education, especially in terms of technical skills and scholarships," he said.

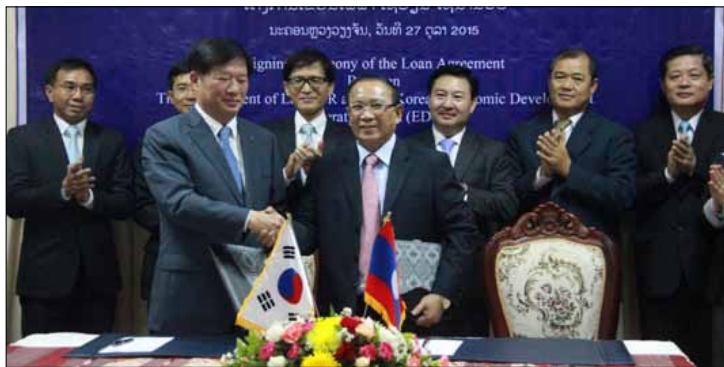
NUOL has built a collaborative relationship

with different universities and institutions in Japan through education, research and teacher and cultural exchanges, said Dr Soukkongseng.

The fair will benefit participants through the information provided and discussions with representatives of Japanese universities. Students could discuss their aspirations and identify potential areas of cooperation in education, he believed.

Laos will integrate with the Asean Economic Community by the end of this year, so education is an important sector for development and competition.

Korea signs US\$80.8 million... FROM PAGE 1



Dr Lien Thikoe (right) shakes hands with Mr Seong-hyeong Yim after signing the loan agreement in Vientiane yesterday.

development in Laos in the future.

The dam will have an installed capacity of 410MW, with 40MW for local consumption and 370MW for export.

There will be a 110km double circuit 230kV transmission line from the powerhouse to the Pakxe substation in Champassak, and a 60km 500kV double circuit transmission line from the Pakxe substation to the delivery point in Thailand.

Once complete, the project is expected to supply about 1,823GWh of electricity per annum, providing revenue to

Laos through taxes, royalties and dividends.

The project will generate over 1 trillion kip (US\$135 million) in earnings per annum over its projected 27 years of operation.

The project is slated for completion at the end of 2018 and commercial operation is set to commence in February 2019.

The entire project has an investment budget of about 8.16 trillion kip (US\$1.02 billion) with the work being carried out by the Xepian Xenamnoy Power Company (PNPC).

PNPC is a joint venture

between SK Engineering & Construction Co Ltd (SKEC), Korea Western Power Co Ltd (KOWEPO), Rachaburi Electricity Generating Holding PCL (RATCH) of Thailand and LHSE.

LHSE holds a 24 percent stake in the venture, RATCH has a 25 percent shareholding, SKEC holds 26 percent, and KOWEPO 25 percent.

Deputy Minister of Energy and Mines Dr Sinava Souphanouvong, Korean Ambassador to Laos, Mr Kim Soo-Gwon and other senior officials from both sides witnessed the signing ceremony.

Traffic police promote festival road safety

Times Reporters

The Vientiane Traffic Police Department is working with the Department of Public Works and Transport, sponsored by private companies, to inform festival goers about the traffic regulations.

Traffic police are manning a booth at the festival, with the opening ceremony attended by the Head of Office of the Vientiane Public Security Headquarters, Lieutenant Colonel Soukphachan Bouddakham.

The aim of the initiative is to make as many festival goers as possible aware of the traffic regulations and safety, especially young people, who are more likely to engage in risk taking behaviour.

Deputy Chief of the Vientiane Traffic Police Department, Major Sangkhom Phommalath, told the media on Monday the booth will be open from 8am to 8pm during the festival period.

The booth has many features

to highlight road safety issues, including video footage of actual traffic accidents, accident photos, and information and awareness booklets. Officers on duty at the booth will also offer question and answer sessions.

They are giving away prizes to people who visit the traffic safety booth, including shirts, stickers, jackets, umbrellas, caps and helmets to those who can correctly answer questions about the traffic regulations.

This year 20 volunteers from the National University of Laos are assisting in the awareness campaign.

Major Sangkhom said this year's traffic situation around the festival site is worse than last year, because of the presence of more people and vehicles. He calls on people travelling to the festival to pay attention to the traffic regulations and obey the instructions of police officers.

According to the Traffic Police Department, from October 19-25 there were 101 accidents nationwide, including



Major Sangkhom Phommalath speaks at the Boat Racing Festival in Vientiane.

20 fatalities. In those incidents, 170 people were injured and 194 vehicles were damaged. Almost two billion kip of damage was reported.

Vientiane alone had 29 road accidents during this week, resulting in two fatalities.

The previous week saw fewer accidents nationwide with 87 recorded, and 11 fatalities.

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