

Action pledged on environmental impact claim

Souksakhone Vaenkeo

Officials in charge have pledged to take action and inspect what a member of the public has claimed, that the Daokham Concrete manufacturing plant has released waste water into his fish pond killing his fish stock.

Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Mr Chansone Senebouttalath made the commitment at a press conference held recently at the National Assembly (NA) in response to a question raised through the hotline during the



Mr Chansone Senebouttalath.

recent NA ordinary session. A resident of Saphanthongtai village, Sisattanak district, Vientiane, who called the hotline, claimed that the plant had released waste water into his fish pond. The resident said that he submitted a petition letter to the relevant authorities a month ago calling for an inspection and a solution but there had been no progress.

The deputy minister said his officials have already received the petition letter. But he admitted that the officials

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Khonphapheng waterfall approved as new special economic zone

Times Reporters

The government has approved the establishment of Khonphapheng waterfall and the surrounding area in Khong district of Champassak province as a new special economic zone (SEZ) in Laos.

Senior officials in charge of the project gave confirmation of the approval recently.

Governor of Champassak province Dr Bounthong Divixay told *Vientiane Times* on Friday that the next step is to seek developers and establish the management board of the zone.

“Our government has signed for the establishment of the zone which will pave the way for the next stage of the project development,” Dr Bounthong said.

Entrepreneurs have strongly expressed investment interest in this zone for years pending the government’s decision to approve the establishment of

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Khonphapheng is the biggest waterfall in South East Asia, attracting thousands of tourists to the area every year.

Laos, neighbouring countries to fight cross-border drug trafficking

Times Reporters

Laos will join further efforts with China, Myanmar and Thailand to tighten up goods inspections on vessels travelling to major ports in a bid to crack down on transnational drug trafficking.

The authorities from Laos and the other three countries on the upper Mekong River will work together to hunt for drug runners, who are rampant in the northern Mekong River region.

The decision by the relevant authorities to further strengthen river security comes after years

of crime and drug seizures on the Mekong, according to a senior official from the Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision (LCDC).

Between January 12 and February 18, the Safe Mekong Coordination Centre, initiated by the four countries made 1,289 arrests in 1,117 raids that took place in Laos, China, Myanmar and Thailand.

The raids netted 9.4 million methamphetamine pills, about three tonnes of crystal methamphetamine, 180 kilogrammes of heroin, and 59

kilogrammes of opium.

The authorities also seized 20,000 kilogrammes of methylene chloride, 8,150 kilogrammes of caffeine and 293 kilogrammes of pseudoephedrine-precursor chemicals that could be used to make up to 300 million methamphetamine tablets.

However, the LCDC’s Chairman Mr Kou Chansina told *Vientiane Times* on Friday that despite the authorities putting their best efforts into the fight against drug trafficking across the borders, the flow of drugs, particularly

methamphetamines, into Laos continues to be a widespread problem.

Mr Kou mentioned that the Lao authorities will further cooperate not only with China, Myanmar and Thailand, but also pursue further work with other neighbouring countries, including Cambodia and Vietnam.

The commitment to work with neighbouring countries to fight border drug trafficking came after months of crime and drugs seizures in Vientiane, the provinces of Attapeu, Borikhamxay and Oudomxay

as well as other parts of the country.

Lao and Vietnamese authorities seized around 4.5 metric tonnes of drugs in Laos’ Borikhamxay province in their latest joint action to combat trans-national drug trafficking.

Eleven suspects, including 10 Lao nationals and one from Thailand, were caught in the raid on July 23 in Pakxan district of Borikhamxay province.

More than 4 tonnes of precursor chemicals and dried cannabis were confiscated,

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Minimum wage remains unpaid for many workers

Souksakhone Vaenkeo

A worker has complained that his employer has not increased the minimum wage despite the fact that the government decision to raise the monthly minimum wage from 626,000 kip to 900,000 kip came into force on April 1.

The worker made a phone call through the hotline of the National Assembly (NA) during its 9th ordinary session that closed recently. He complained that he still receives only 626,000 kip per month, calling for the relevant sector to take action to enforce the increased wage policy.

Director General of the Department of Social Security under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare Dr Yangkou Yangluesai said teams of officials have been entrusted to inspect the situation in the provinces in a move to push for the implementation of the decision.

The director, who was assigned to respond to the issue at a press conference held recently at the NA, said many businesses

have already observed the increased wage policy.

However, he admitted that some businesses have not increased the wage, which they justified by saying the decision was brought down in the third quarter of the financial year. This means the businesses have not set a budget for such additional spending.

He was optimistic that the increased wage policy should be fully implemented by the beginning of next fiscal year.

The director said the government has attached great importance into proper enforcement of the increased wage policy, adding that the increase will enable low-income earners to adjust to rising living costs.

Asked if those businesses that have not increased the wage will have to compensate for the increase since the date the policy came into force, the director said further talks with the relevant sectors will be needed on the matter.

But observers warned that, in this case, the businesses need to compensate for the unpaid wages as it is a legitimate right of the workers to claim for the increase in line with the rule of law.

They [the observers] also warned that officials in charge must properly investigate the issue, noting that the reluctance by businesses to increase the wage could only be a tactic to cut spending.

Vice President of the Lao Federation of Trade Unions Simoun Ounlasy, who is also an NA member for Savannakhet province, told the recent session that many businesses have refused to increase the minimum wage.

Violation of the minimum wage policy has been repeatedly occurring. In 2012, the government agreed to increase the monthly minimum wage from 348,000 kip to 626,000 kip, but many businesses were reported to be in breach of the policy even a year after the wage increase came into force.

Officials review irregular migration and human trafficking project

Times Reporters

Officials from the Department of Labour and Social Welfare under the ministry of the same name met with related sectors last Friday to discuss and review the implementation of a project preventing irregular migration and human trafficking issues.

The meeting was held at the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, seeking to review Phases 3-5 of the 'Capacity Building, Preventing Irregular Migration, Human Trafficking and Providing assistance to Returnees' project.

The anti-trafficking project runs from 2013-2015, funded by the International Organisation for Migration and Human Rights along with the Labour Bureau of the US Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Deputy Director of the Department of Labour and Social Welfare, Mr Khamkeng Keovongsy said that the government of Laos has played an important role in preventing irregular migration and human trafficking issues.

It has worked in cooperation with local, regional and international organisations, especially the International Organisation for Migration to implement this project since 2002 until today, which is approaching the end of the fifth



Deputy Director of the Department of Labour and Social Welfare, Mr Khamkeng Keovongsy (right) and Chief of Mission of the International Organisation for Migration, Mr Douglas Foskett.

phase of the initiative

Chief of Mission of the International Organisation for Migration, Mr Douglas Foskett, said that the project is aimed at assisting the return of victims of trafficking, building capacity in government institutions and supporting bilateral and regional cooperation in the fight against trafficking in people.

It is also aimed at raising awareness about human trafficking among the Lao people, in particular the most vulnerable young people in the villages and rural districts. The International Organisation for Migration's Regional Return and Reintegration programme was started in the year 2000.

The programme was extended to Laos in 2002 and among its earliest activities were supporting the Ministry

of Labour and Social Welfare in renovating its own building to serve as a Transit Centre for receiving returning Lao victims of trafficking.

It was also provided with assistance with developing the capacity of social welfare officials to provide reception assistance and related services.

The International Organisation for Migration also supported the Lao government in its efforts to build regional cooperation in the counter-trafficking activities which led to the signature of the regional COMMIT MOU on trafficking in 2004.

It also led to the signing of a related bilateral MOU on trafficking with Thailand in 2005 and commencement of the drafting of a National Plan of Action to combat trafficking.



Mr Saleumxay Kommasith and Ms Kaarina Immonen inspect diffused UXO remains and information on achievements by clearance companies in Laos.

Concerted effort needed to address UXO threats

Somxay Sengdara

A steady concerted effort by the international community is needed in addressing the threats from unexploded ordnance (UXO).

Lao and international officials made the recommendation in their address at a ceremony held in Vientiane on Friday to commemorate the 5th anniversary of the coming into force of the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) on August 1.

The text of the final draft of the CCM was adopted on May 30, 2008 by 107 countries, including 7 of the 14 countries that used cluster bombs and 17 of 34 countries that produced them.

As an international treaty that prohibits all use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions, the convention entered into force on August 1, 2010.

As of today, a total of 117 states have joined the convention. Of these, 93 states have fully ratified the convention while the other 24 have signed.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Saleumxay Kommasith called on other

countries that have yet to join the convention, to consider becoming members.

"I call on the countries that have yet to join the convention, to consider being members to join forces in prohibiting the production and use of cluster munitions because this is the best way of protecting people from their threat," Mr Saleumxay said.

In his remarks Mr Saleumxay, who is also Vice Chairman of the National Regulatory Authority, said he was proud of projects and activities implemented under the Vientiane Action Plan with many countries completing the destruction of their arsenals of cluster munitions.

He also praised the inspection and clearance of the munitions, building awareness on the risk from the munitions, and aid provision to UXO victims that have been steadily progressing in many countries.

He said the parties to the convention would exchange experiences at the first review meeting on the convention implementation, which takes place in Dubrovnik, Croatia next month.

Speaking at the ceremony, the United Nations

Development Programme Resident Representative in Laos, Ms Kaarina Immonen mentioned the continued use of indiscriminate weapons in some conflict hotspots around the world, saying that 90 percent of all recorded cluster munitions casualties worldwide were civilians – mostly farmers and children.

"We in the UN are therefore actively advocating member states to sign both the Convention on Cluster Munitions and Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention," she said.

Around 20,000 people have been victims of UXO in Laos since the end of the Indochina War, with 300 occurring in 2008.

Ms Immonen reminded the audience of the recent increase of casualties from 41 in 2013 to 45 in 2014, while 30 casualties were reported over the past six months of this year.

She said it was alarming if the steady decline that was observed from 2008 up until 2013 had come to an end.

"I am though delighted to hear that the UXO community still believed that with a concerted effort we can stop this negative trend," she said.

Khonphapheng waterfall... FROM PAGE 1

the zone.

The provincial authorities submitted a proposal regarding the establishment of the zone to the government for consideration last year, citing the significance of the project to generate development in the area and provide jobs for local people.

Khonphapheng is the biggest waterfall in South-East Asia, attracting thousands of tourists to the area every year. Officials said the waterfall is a suitable location for SEZ development as it would bring more businesses and tourists to the area.

The waterfall and the surrounding area are designated to be developed as a new town that is focused on tourism. The main business activities will be related to hotels, restaurants, golf courses and other tourism related businesses.

The provincial authorities have allocated 7,000 hectares for the potential development, which will be divided into four zones: Zone A (480 hectares), Zone B (797 hectares), Zone C (2,120 hectares) and Zone D (3,678 hectares).

Each zone is designed to accommodate different business activities.

Laos currently has 10 SEZs, of which two are

special economic zones and eight are specific economic zones.

Among the existing zones are the That Luang Marsh SEZ in Vientiane, the Savan-Seno SEZ in Savannakhet province, the Golden Triangle SEZ in Bokeo province, the Boten Dankham SEZ in Luang Namtha province, the Vientiane Long Thanh Golf Course and the Phoukiew SEZ in Khammuan province.

Special and specific economic zones (SEZs) have become the main driver for growth in the industrial and service sectors in Laos, laying the foundation for diversifying the nation's economy into the future.

The development of SEZ's is part of the government's policies to boost economic growth and generate job opportunities for local people through increased modernisation and industrialisation.

Currently over 10,000 people are employed in the zones, of which 32.4 percent are Lao people and the rest are foreign nationals.

The government is committed to focusing on labour skill development so that more Lao people are employed and benefit from the SEZ developments.

Action pledged on environmental... FROM PAGE 1

have not yet inspected the problem. He pledged to take action as soon as possible.

"We are coordinating with the Vientiane National Resources and Environment Department in order to inspect the site," he told local media.

Explaining measures being imposed to prevent environmental impacts by investment projects, Mr Chansone said in case the claim is found to be true and the situation is serious, the concrete manufacturing plant will be ordered to suspend production in order to improve its operations in line with environmental safety regulations.

In addition, any impact or loss caused by the waste water must be compensated.

"If the claim is found to be true and fish in the pond are dead due to the release of waste water, the manufacturing plant must compensate," he said.

In this case, he added, the compensation cost is calculated by estimating how many kilogrammes of fish can be raised in the pond per cubic metre of water and compensation is made accordingly.

"We confirm that we will work with all relevant sectors to inspect and address the issue," he promised.