

Don Sahong dam issue goes to governments for decision

Times Reporters

The four member countries of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) - Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam - have agreed that a decision on prior consultation concerning the proposed Don Sahong Hydropower Project be taken to government level, the MRC said on its website.

The decision will be referred to the countries' governments because the MRC Council could not reach agreement on how to proceed with the proposed dam, which would be built on the Mekong River.

The issue had already been referred to the MRC Council after a special session on January 28, 2015, when the MRC Joint Committee could not reach agreement. The MRC Council is the highest governing body of the Commission and comprises the four member countries' water and environment ministers.

After further deliberations the MRC Council announced that there were still differing views among the countries on whether the prior consultation process should come to an end, but the matter will now

be referred to their respective governments for resolution.

Article 35 of the 1995 Mekong Agreement stipulates that in the event that the Commission is unable to resolve a difference or dispute, the issue shall be referred to the governments "to take cognizance of the matter for resolution by negotiation through their diplomatic channels ...". If they find it necessary or beneficial, the governments can resort to mediation by mutual agreement according to the principles of international law.

The six-month prior consultation officially started on July 25, 2014. Over the course of the process the member countries discussed and evaluated the risks and benefits of the dam, which would generate 260MW of electricity and be located in one of the channels in the Mekong River's Siphandone area in southern Laos.

The notified member countries have expressed a range of concerns on the proposed project and have requested an extension of the prior consultation to have more time to collect additional data,

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CLMV foreign ministers and the Asean Secretary General link hands after the CLMV Ministerial Meeting.

CLMV, ACMECS summits kick off in Myanmar

Times Reporters

The 7th Summit of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) and the 6th Summit of the Ayeyawaddy-Chao Phraya Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) kicked off yesterday in Nay Pyi Taw, the capital of Myanmar.

Leaders at the two-day summits are expected to exchange views on economic cooperation, trade and investment cooperation and development plans as well as ways to mobilise financial assistance to carry out various

projects, according to a press release from the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ahead of the summits, foreign ministers of the CLMV and CLMV member countries met and discussed a number of issues for heads of states and government leaders to discuss at the summits.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Thongloun Sisoulith headed the Lao delegation at the CLMV and CLMV's ministerial meetings. Asean Secretary General Le Luong Minh also

attended the meetings.

The ministers reviewed the progress made in implementing their cooperation projects in the areas of trade, investment, infrastructure development, connectivity, tourism and education among other issues under the CLMV and ACMECS frameworks, according to the press release.

They also shared views on ways to overcome challenges including seeking financing to carry out various projects.

The ministers endorsed the draft joint declaration

of the 7th CLMV and draft joint declaration of the 6th ACMECS which outline future cooperation plans for the CLMV and ACMECS member countries. ACMECS' draft Action Plan for 2016-2018 was also approved.

The draft documents will be submitted to heads of state and government leaders at the summits for consideration and approval.

The CLMV summit is held biannually and the two summits have combined since they were held in Vietnam in 2008.

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A mark of true design

World Blood Donor Day targets new, youthful donors



Professor Dr Eksavang Vongvichit speaks at the event.

Sisouphan Amphonephong

To commemorate World Blood Donor Day which falls annually on June 14, the World Health Organisation in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Lao Red Cross National Blood Transfusion Centre last week organised a series of events to publicise blood donation.

These included social media activities, blood collection activities and a concert featuring performances by several Lao artists, aimed at young and healthy blood donors, with some events taking place in Vientiane's Chao Anouvong Park.

In a speech to mark World Blood Door Day, WHO Representative to Laos Dr Juliet Fleischl said "We hope to honour all voluntary blood donors. This gift of life saves the lives of mothers, babies and patients who face life-threatening conditions and whose lives depend on a blood transfusion to survive. At the same time, we encourage everyone, especially young people who have never donated blood, to give blood voluntarily and regularly so that we can build a pool of regular blood donors."

"Blood transfusion is a unique technology in that its collection, processing and

use are scientifically based, but its availability depends on the extraordinary generosity of people who donate it as the most precious of gifts—the gift of life," she added.

Young people especially make a difference: the age profile of blood donors shows that more young people between 18-24 donate blood and they are also the safest group of donor as the prevalence of blood-borne infections is the lowest among this group.

Up to 65 per cent of blood transfusions in Laos are given to children under five years of age who are suffering from severe anaemia or malnutrition, women with obstetric emergencies, and trauma victims.

A shortfall in blood supplies has a particular impact on women, children and road accident victims, with many relying on family donors or paid donors in times of emergency.

In Laos, the Lao Red Cross National Blood Transfusion Centre is responsible for providing safe, adequate and timely blood supplies to the health system. The Centre holds regular blood donation activities to collect blood from voluntary donors, and performs related activities such as testing, processing, storage and distribution of blood products.

Also speaking to mark the day, Minister of Health Professor Dr Eksavang Vongvichit said "Laos needs a well-organised, nationally-coordinated blood transfusion service that can provide adequate and timely supplies of safe blood for all patients in need. I would like the Lao Red Cross to continue their coordination of the blood transfusion service and ensure the quality of donor care. The health of our donors is important to ensure that we maintain

regular blood collections, and we encourage everyone to give blood at least twice a year, especially our young people."

Many patients do not have access to blood when they need it. This is because many countries do not collect enough blood from voluntary unpaid donors. Losing a family member simply because blood is unavailable is unacceptable, so it is essential to advocate and raise awareness of voluntary blood donation.

This year's events at Chao Anouvong Park aimed to raise awareness among young people and students from the University of Health Sciences, who are trained to join the health workforce in passing on important messages concerning blood safety.

But while blood transfusions can be life-saving, many transfusions are given unnecessarily when the availability and use of simpler, less expensive treatments would provide equal or greater benefit.

Unnecessary transfusions and unsafe transfusion practices expose patients to the risk of serious adverse transfusion reactions and also reduce the availability of blood products for patients who are in need.

Aside from booths displaying important messages on blood safety and donation, regular blood donors from the Lao Red Cross were invited to speak about their experiences and tell others why they give blood and what motivates them to become regular donors. A doctor was invited by the ministry's Department of Health Care to deliver a short message on blood transfusion. Blood transfusion services have steadily improved in Laos in recent years and donations have increased from 500 units in 1995 to nearly 35,000 units in 2013.

Locals create a stink about dirty drainage channels

Khonesavanh Latsaphao

Wastewater and pollution problems are gradually increasing in urban areas of Vientiane because of deteriorating water quality in drainage channels.

Motorists queuing at the Phonkheng traffic lights in Xaysettha district, for example, have long been complaining of the bad smell emanating from a section of the Hongsaeng channel.

One driver, Mr Soulideth Keomixay, told *Vientiane Times* on Sunday that people who had to stop at the traffic lights were suffering unduly.

A few years ago the water in this channel gave off an unpleasant smell but now it positively stank, he said.

"I feel like vomiting when I'm unlucky enough to have to stop at the lights. The terrible odour is just like smelling human excrement in a septic

tank," he added.

Mr Soulideth said he sometimes saw people on motorbikes getting very agitated when they had to stop at the lights, as not only were they hot but they were exposed to the full awfulness of the stench from the waterway.

Ms Ampha Sengphachanh, who lives about 100 metres from the traffic lights, said she saw lots of people holding their breath or rubbing their noses while they waited for the lights to change, but said the smell did not reach as far as her house.

The Vientiane Urban Development and Administration Authority (VUDAA) says Vientiane's main drainage channels need to be cleaned annually to allow the water to flow freely and to prevent flooding.

Sediment, waterweeds and grass are currently being removed from drainage channels at Hongsaeng and Khouvieng.

But workers cleaning the Hongsaeng channel have complained of allergic reactions from the water, such as itchy feet or legs, and suggested the VUDAA should use mechanical diggers rather than humans for this task.

Vientiane has 21 major drainage channels and stormwater drains that need cleaning and repairs each year.

Most of the channels need to be cleaned at least once or even twice a year but this doesn't always happen due to funding shortfalls. Local authorities are presently allocating only about half of the four to five billion kip required for the job.

The budget should be sufficient to clean and repair all stormwater drains and channels several times, but in reality certain areas get priority. In some years the budget is sufficient for all the work necessary, but in other years it is not.

Agriculture officials prepare to beef up export standards

Souknilundon Southivongnorath

Agriculture officials are learning about quality standards and readying agricultural and forestry products for export, at a seminar taking place in Vientiane this week.

Officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and other involved sectors are attending the Lao-Australia Fumigation Accreditation Scheme, First Methyl Bromide Fumigation Training from June 22-25.

The training has been organised by the ministry's Department of Agriculture and supported by the Australian government.

The short course aims to enhance participants' basic knowledge of methyl bromide and its correct use as a fumigant against pests in agricultural and forestry production in readiness for exporting.

Speaking at the seminar yesterday, Deputy Director General of the Department of Agriculture, Mr Khamtan Thadavong, said that given Laos' efforts to integrate internationally, particularly through the Asean

Economic Community and the World Trade Organisation, inspection standards and the quality of agriculture and forestry production had to improve to satisfy overseas markets.

"We have to be clear on the use of methyl bromide in agriculture and forestry and whether products are infected by some disease, whether or not from insects. This is because many consumer countries worry about food and product safety," he explained.

Mr Khamtan also stressed that if Laos did not meet quality standards those consumer countries would not purchase Lao products.

Experts from the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry are instructing ministry officials as well as sharing their experiences with participants.

Mr Khamtan said this was the first time Lao officials had learnt about the issue and the training enabled the agriculture sector to build the capacity of officials at the local and central levels.

"Almost 30 attendees here today will pass on their knowledge on methyl bromide



Deputy Director General of the Agriculture Department, Mr Khamtan Thadavong.

to other people in their offices to generate more understanding in their communities," he added.

Assistant Director International Arrangements, Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Mr Gordon Weinert, said the economic prosperity of the region was based on agriculture and forestry.

Having already carried out this training in China, Thailand, Vietnam and other countries, Australian experts had now come to Laos and were here to improve the quality of agricultural and forestry production, Mr Weinert said.

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according to the MRC.

Laos proposed to bring the prior consultation to a close, stating that they had considered and addressed the legitimate concerns of the other member countries in accordance with the stipulated Procedures for Prior Notification, Prior Consultation, and Agreement (PNPCA), under the 1995 Mekong Agreement.

Laos pledged to continue to cooperate with the MRC and committed to ensuring the sustainable development of the project.

After the matter is taken to the countries' governments, they may communicate their decision to the MRC Council for further proceedings, if necessary, to carry out their decision.

The Don Sahong Hydropower Project is the second dam in Laos to undergo the process of prior consultation. In September 2010 and for the first time since its founding in 1995, the MRC carried out a prior consultation for the 1285MW Xayaboury dam located on the Mekong mainstream.

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