

Newsletter

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NA Leaders visit provinces

As we are aware, the second ordinary session of the National Assembly (NA) (Sixth Legislature) officially closed with good results on 27 December, Vientiane Capital. After closing the session, the campaign for dissemination of the session results commenced.

In the middle of January Mr Thongsing Thammavong, NA President and his entourage visited the northern provinces of Sayaboury, Xieng Khouang and Houaphanh, where the local authorities, constituencies, officials, military and police officers and people of all ethnic groups warmly welcomed them.



In Sayaboury the NA President heard the report of Dr. Lien Thikeyo, Sayaboury Governor on the implementation of the VIII Party Congress resolutions, 11 main programmes of the Government and resolutions of the 4th Provincial Party Conference.

The Governor said Sayaboury province has made efforts in the implementation of the Directive of the Political Party Central Committee No 20 on Building Political Grassroots and Comprehensive Rural Development and Order of the Political Party Central Committee No 9 on Building Villages and Village Development Clusters. He highlighted that the security stability in the provinces is maintained and the socio-economic development and poverty alleviation is carried out effectively. In the fiscal year of 2005-2006 the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reached 1,528 billion kip.

In Xieng Khouang province, Mr Viengthamone Phommachanh, Vice Governor of Xieng Khouang province reported the progress of the socio-economic development, security and law enforcement.

In Houaphanh province, the NA President heard report of Mr Khamphanh Viphavanh, Governor of Houaphanh province. The Governor informed of the implementation of resolutions of the provincial party conference, highlighting the socio-economic development, building political grassroots, villages and village development clusters and poverty reduction.

Taking an opportunity, the NA President talked the provincial authorities and people, expressing appreciations for achievements gained from all fields, particularly the implementation of the two strategic tasks: national defence and construction. He informed them of the results of the NA second ordinary session.

The NA President also visited the socio-economic establishments in these three provinces: Phakeo Palai village development cluster in Paklai district, Sayaboury province, Mee and Hou villages in Pek district, Xieng Khouang province and Nongkhang village development cluster in Samneua district, Houaphanh province, where he handed over 100 sets of clothes to needy people.

In the middle of February Ms Pany Yathotu and her entourage visited Phongsaly, Oudomxay and Luang Prabang provinces, where they heard reports on implementation of the socio-economic development and budgetary plan in the previous year and the progress of implementation of the socio-economic development plan in the first half of 2007-2008.



In the talk to the three provincial authorities, the NA Vice President informed of results of the second ordinary session of the NA and expressed appreciation to both authorities and people for the achievements gained during the implementation of poverty reduction programme and plan for stopping slash-and-burn cultivation. She urged the provincial authorities and people to function within bonds of the Constitution and laws and disseminate particularly new and amended laws adopted by the NA second ordinary session such as Law on Commercial Banks, Law on Protection of Children's Rights and Interests and Law on Value-added Tax and amended Law on State Budget, Law on Labour and Law on Court's Fees.

Taking an opportunity, The NA Vice President and her delegation met with NA representatives in constituency 2 (Phongsaly), constituency 4 (Oudomxay) and constituency 6 (Luang Prabang), encouraging these constituencies to implement functions of the NA as the body of representatives of the rights of the multiethnic people to be the masters, the body of the State apparatus with power to make decisions on the fundamental issues of the country. She urged NA representatives in these localities to pay a role in overseeing the activities of the executive and judicial bodies.

The NA Vice President also met with provincial bodies dealing with economic, social, cultural and judicial issues and provincial fronts for national construction. It aims to find out social ills and people's complaints, which will be forwarded to consider in the third ordinary session of the NA, which is scheduled to be held in the middle of this year.

The NA Vice President also visited the socio-cultural and economic establishments, particularly village development clusters and handed over aid items to needy people.

In the beginning of January, Dr. Xaysomphone Phomvihane, NA Vice President and his delegation visited Phueng district of Vientiane province and Phonsay district of



Luang Prabang province, where they were warmly welcomed by NA members in the 10th constituency (Vientiane province) and the sixth constituency (Luang Prabang province), district leaders and people.

The NA Vice President heard reports on progress of the socio-economic development, defence and security and law enforcement and proposals from

district chiefs and people. He informed of the results of the NA second ordinary session, highlighting the important issues such as solidarity, education, public health and poverty reduction, which the local authorities and people should pay attention to.

The NA Vice President encouraged both local authorities and people to enhance the political ideology and consolidate solidarity. The strength of the political ideology started from the spirit of patriotism and allegiance to the new regime, the solidarity among people of all ethnic groups, the confidence of people in the local authorities and the Government. He considered the basic education as important that the organisation concerned must pay attention to. The aim is to help school-age children have an opportunity to go to school. Besides the education, he highlighted the public health, encouraging people to pay attention hygiene, based on hygienic principles. Healthcare concerns everyone so it should be on focus to help people be healthy and stay away from diseases and illnesses, he said.

The NA Vice President also touched upon the poverty reduction, highlighting the rural development and poverty reduction plan presented by a representative of the Government in the previous NA session. In the previous year the Government translated the policy into plans and projects, setting up villages and village development clusters and combining villages with the aim of helping the local people access education, healthcare, water supply, electricity and other facilities. A shift from subsistence production to goods production is on focus to increase productivity and generate more incomes. Like others, the local authorities and people should actively participate in the plan implementation to improve living conditions of people of all ethnic groups and help the country graduate from the less developed status by 2020.

He encouraged the local organisation concerned to disseminate and publicize the Constitution and promulgated laws, particularly six laws adopted by the NA second ordinary session. He urged to enhance law enforcement and awareness of the Constitution and laws among people.

During the visit to the two provinces, the NA Vice President handed over aid items to Mr Khamsing Chitabouy, acting chief of Phuang district, Vientiane province and Mr Khamthien Soudetsansay, chief of Phonsay district, Luang Prabang province, through whom the aid will be passed to the needy people.

He also presented aid items to the office of the sixth constituency (Luang Prabang province) to send to the ethnic school in Luang Prabang province. The aid items include 30 cartons of clothes and educational equipment worth 66 million kip. Taking an opportunity, he visited the mountainous agro-forestry research project under the Lao-Swedish cooperation in Phonsay district. Apart from NA leaders, NA representatives from all constituencies also disseminate results of the second ordinary session of the NA, talking to local authorities and people and hearing proposals and complaints from them.

Vice President of the National Assembly visits Singapore

Dr. Xaysomphone Phomvihane, Vice President of the National Assembly (NA), Chairperson of the NA Foreign Affairs Committee visited Singapore on 5-9 February, in response to the invitation of Singapore International Foundation (SIF), which hosted a schedule to bring high-ranking officials from Southeast Asian countries to visit Singapore under Eminent South East Asians Programme.”

The NA Vice President was warmly welcomed by SIF Executive Board and administrators, met with Dr. Balaji Sadasivan, Deputy Foreign Minister of Singapore and paid a courtesy visit to Mr Abdullah Tarmugi, Speaker of Parliament of Singapore.

At the talk, the guest and the host expressed satisfaction with the relations, cooperation and assistance between the two countries, which are further developed. The NA Vice President expressed gratitude to the Government and people of Singapore for assistance and support, which is constantly extended to Laos, particularly in training Lao officials for Integration of the Lao PDR into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The host expressed pleasure that the Lao PDR shoulder to shoulder with ASEAN member countries and the world is stepping forward. The Singaporean side expressed continuous support to the Lao PDR, based on the needs of the Lao PDR and ability of Singapore. Both sides agreed to promote the relations through business, trade, investment and tourism.

Besides, the NA Vice President visited the headquarters of the People's Action Party, which has been the ruling party of Singapore since Singapore gained independence. He also visited and shared experiences with the Trade Development Board of Singapore, Singapore's Central Bank, Finance Ministry, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Singapore's Parliament, agency for receiving proposals from people and government servant training centre of Singapore. He joined members of Singapore's Parliament to meet people under their weekly meeting schedule to learn matters concerning people and help them solve these issues.

SIF is a not-for-profit organisation established on 1 August 1991 to help Singapore's globalisation efforts. It is incorporated as a public company limited by guarantee, with a Board of Governors. Since its establishment, SIF has been playing a unique role in actively engaging Singaporeans in international volunteerism, forging people-to-people links, helping to shape the national identity and forging a sense of what it means to be Singaporean in a borderless world. About 80% of SIF budget comes from the Government and the rest is funded by contributions from the public and private sector. Its programmes are also not-for-profit such as promotion of knowledge and understanding between Singapore and foreign countries, education and health assistance projects, training and other necessary social issues. It provides funds and dispatches experts and volunteers to support its projects.

NA Vice President backs from the 15th APPF Meeting

Dr. Xaysomphone Phomvehane, Vice President of the National Assembly (NA) and his delegation successfully participated in the 15th Annual Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF) held on 21-26 January in Moscow, Russia. Participants from 23 member parliaments and one observer country joined the event.

The meeting discussed various issues, including politic and security, economic and trade, social and cultural and cooperation matters in the Asia-Pacific countries and the future cooperative direction of the Asia-Pacific Parliament.

The most outstanding issues of meeting comprised of peace and stability in the Asia Pacific countries. Besides, globalization enhanced the role of economic interaction between countries and joint solution of very serious problems connected with the fight against organized crimes, international terrorism, illicit drug trafficking, widespread of infectious diseases (pandemic diseases/Avian Influenza) and energy security. The meeting was to enhance peace movement and the cooperation of East Asia, the movement of peace in Middle East and the United Nations reform. The economic cooperation based on the joint communiqué of the 14th APEC in Hanoi. The meeting agreed to reverse the negotiation of Doha round of the World Trade Organization.

The meeting approved a joint communiqué and 20 resolutions and the delegates unanimously accepted the kind invitation of the Parliament of New Zealand to host the 16th Annual Meeting in January 2008, with the venue to be confirmed at a later date.

Taking an opportunity in the event, Dr. Xaysomphone and his delegation met with many important officials from State Duma, including Vice President of the Lower House of the Federal Assembly of Russia Mr A. Toshin, Deputy President of the Upper House of Federation Council of Russia Mr U.N. Volkov, Vice-chair of the Foreign Relation of State Duma Mr Kvisinsky and a coordinator of State Duma with the Parliament of Southeast Asian countries.

The meeting was aimed at enhancing relationships and cooperation between the Lao PDR and Russian Federation, particularly between the National Assembly of the Lao PDR and the Federal Assembly of Russia. Dr. Xaysomphone presented invitations from NA President Thongsing Thammavong to the Presidents of the Federal Assembly Lower House and Upper House of the Federation Council of Russia to visit the Lao PDR.

The NA Vice President also met with leaders and members of the Russian-Lao Friendship Association. They touched upon long-history relations and cooperation between Laos and Russia as well as Laos and former Soviet Union.

Two sides agreed to extend relationships and cooperation in exchanging visits between two countries and lessons of trade and investment promotion. The Lao side

proposed Russia to mobilize their business people to invest in Laos and cooperate with Laos in education, culture, tourism and other fields.

The Asia - Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF) is a group of parliamentarians from the Asia-Pacific region who wish to discuss matters that affect their region with their government counterparts around the world. The group was founded in 1993. It is a branch of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC).

The Lao PDR has been a member of the Asia - Pacific Parliamentary Forum since 1996.

Capacity building significant to NA

A capacity building project supported by the European Union and the UN Development Program for the Lao National Assembly (NA) saw a number of achievements in the past year, including the training of female candidates who run for election, support for the finance committee on macroeconomic management and the government budget, and a workshop on how to better access and review draft laws, said Mr Thongteun Xayasene, NA Office Head at a project review and planning meeting held here late last month in Vientiane Capital.

The Government recognizes that there are certain constraints facing the NA and in recent years steps have been taken to surmount these difficulties. Significant among these has been the implementation of a capacity building project supported by UNDP and the EU. This project aims to narrow the gap between what the NA is expected to do and what it is able to do.

Thanks to the project, NA members now have a clearer understanding of their Constitutional mandate, a more in-depth appreciation of socio-economic development issues and a greater capacity to analyze macro-economic policy and national budgetary processes. The project received expert advice from several UN agencies, including ILO, UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO and from the World Bank and the IMF.

The project has also helped introduce NA members to international best practice in parliamentary affairs. Members of Parliament from Sri Lanka and the Netherlands have visited Laos to advise the NA, and several international exchange visits have also been organized to provide NA members with first hand experience of parliament in other developing countries. The project has also provided support to NA female Members. In the last elections, held in April 2006, more women gained seats in the NA than ever before, bringing the total proportion to 25 percent. It may be no small coincidence that the project arranged for a senior Australian Senator to train all female candidates in campaign methods and public relations. Indeed, proportionally more female candidates were elected than men.

In April last year, the citizens of the Lao PDR convened to early elections, to elect their 115 members in the NA. Out of 175 candidates in total, 29 women have been

successful, thus increasing over one point the female representation in it, up to over 25 percent. The interest of the constituents for the previous elections, their active participation in local campaigning meeting, has shown the increasing interest of the people of Lao PDR in the development of the NA being their representative body.

The project is now entering its final year after it started three years ago, but that longer-term support will be required. The NA develops a medium-term institutional development plan in order to clearly identify support needs and to assist in co-ordinating donor contributions. This multi-donor framework would serve to increase national ownership, in line with the conclusions of the Round Table Meeting held in Vientiane last November.

Together with the commitment of the Government to remove the Laos from the list of the Least Developed Countries by 2020, the further reinforcement of the rule of law is essential to sustain a sturdy yet sustainable development and to promote domestic and foreign investment. “To achieve these objectives, we need to enhance the capacity of the NA, as the highest representative institution of the people. Together by promoting its role in passing legislation, striving to reality of more effective accountability of the executive before the legislation, and also promoting the representation capacity of each and every NA member,” said Mr. Thongteun.

Factors such as the integration into ASEAN (Association of Southern Asian Nations), robust economic growth around the region and globalization called for improvements in the implementation of the rule of law, he added. As the need is seen, “in the future, the UNDP will continue to support the NA to enable it to effectively discharge its mandates and duties as stipulated in the constitution,” said Ms Sonam Yangchen Rana, UNDP resident representative in Laos. She encouraged the NA leadership to ensure timely discussing and appropriate follow up on some of the key findings and recommendations made by independent experts as part of the project’s regular activity.

More efforts needed to raise awareness of laws and justice

In general, awareness and knowledge of laws are needed to be upgraded to fit the prevailing socio-economic development. In some localities the understanding and knowledge of laws is low. For instance, “during 20 years of the renovation policy implementation, Vientiane province has been developed comprehensively, however, it is noticed that knowledge and understanding of laws is not wide in the province,” said Somphet Thipmala, Governor of Vientiane province.

The social awareness of laws in Vientiane province is not high, being a factor for increasing law violation among both officials and people. The organization that protects and enforces the laws works ineffectively. Investigation and court procedure is slow and some cases were handled without following the laws. This has created causes of people’s complaints, Governor of Vientiane province added.

As the need was seen, the National Assembly (NA) in collaboration with Asia Foundation organised a seminar on upgrading knowledge and justice in the beginning of January in Vientiane province. Mr. Keyoun Nhotsayviboun, Member of the NA Standing Committee, Chairperson of the NA Law Committee, Mr. Davone Vangvichit, Deputy Chairperson of the NA Law Committee and Dr. Ounkeo Vouthilath, Deputy Chairperson of the NA Law Committee addressed the legal papers at the event.

The legal papers, which were learnt in the seminar, are the Constitution of the Lao PDR, Law on the National Assembly, Law on Oversight by the National Assembly, Law on People's Complaints, Contract Law, Civil Procedure Law, Criminal Law and Law on Criminal Procedure.

This seminar helped in Vientiane province raise the social awareness of laws and justice and upgrade knowledge of laws in the state and justice fields. It contributes to the law education and training for party members, government servants and people with the aim of preventing law violation in Vientiane province. Police, the provincial Office of Prosecutor, People's Court and Service of Justice will base on the knowledge gained from the seminar to carry out their tasks.

The NA and Asia Foundation organised other seminars of the same nature in other places with the aim of raising the social awareness of laws and justice and upgrading knowledge of laws.

On 8-9 February they organised a seminar titled "Enhance knowledge of laws in the field of governance and economics" in the NA small conference room, Vientiane Capital, presided over by Mr Keyoun Nhotsayviboun, Member of the NA Standing Committee, Chairperson of the NA Law Committee. Over 50 participants from line ministries and relevant organisations in Vientiane Capital attended the event.

The Constitution of the Lao PDR, Law on Government of the Lao PDR, Law on Oversight by the National Assembly, Contract Law, Secured Transactions Law and Law on Resolution of Economic Disputes were learnt in this seminar. These legal papers are very significant to the state, economic and social management and meet the need in running businesses.

The participants paid attention to the seminar, sharing opinions and lessons. Thanks to organisation and participation of organizers and participants, the seminar yielded good success.

The purpose of the seminar is to enhance knowledge of laws regarding economics and governance for officials working in both state and private sector, who are carrying out their tasks in this field.

On 15-16 February the NA in cooperation with Asia Foundation also organised the seminar of the same nature at Latsavong Hotel, Vientiane capital. Dr. Xaysomphone Phomvihane, NA Vice President and Chairperson of the NA Foreign Affairs Committee

honourably attended its opening ceremony. Over 50 people from relevant ministries and organisations participated in the event.

NA President receives foreign Ambassadors

In the beginning of February, H.E. Mr Lui Yong Xing, Chinese Ambassador bid farewell to H.E. Mr Thongsing Thammavong, President of the National Assembly (NA) in Vientiane Capital, on the occasion, when he ended his over-three-year mission in the Lao PDR.

NA President highly valued the Chinese Ambassador's mission, which contributes to strengthening long-history relations and cooperation between the two Parties, Governments and Peoples of Laos and China. He expressed appreciations to the Chinese government for assistance worth over 1,246.4 Yuan (Chinese currency), which has been extended to carry out 34 projects in the Lao PDR. Out of the mentioned projects, 24 were accomplished, including Patouxay park improvement and supplies to the 10th ASEAN Summit hosted by the Lao PDR in the end of 2004.

The outgoing Ambassador expressed thanks to the NA President as well as the Party and Government of the Lao PDR for support to his mission in the Lao PDR. Thanks to this, the mission was successfully accomplished and it contributes to further the friendships and cooperation between the two Parties, Governments and Peoples of China and Laos, he said.

Since the two countries established diplomatic relations on 25 April 1961, Lao-Chinese friendship has been developing smoothly. The two countries have made great achievements in all-round cooperative relations, including the legislative field.

In the same month, NA President also received a courtesy visit from a new ambassador of Cambodia to Laos H.E. Mr Yi Dan after he presented a credential to President of the Lao PDR Choummaly Sayasone.

NA President and the new Cambodian Ambassador discussed many issues concerning mutual assistance, investment, human resources development and education as well as legislative cooperation between the two countries, Laos and Cambodia.

The new Cambodian Ambassador informed the NA President of the achievements gained from the implementation of cooperation plan between Laos and Cambodia and he will do his utmost to carry out his mission with the aim of enhancing the friendship relation and cooperation between the two countries.

The NA President wished the new Cambodian Ambassador success in his mission in Laos.

National People's Congress of China helps the National Assembly of Laos

Equipment worth 126,582.62 USD as aid from the National Assembly of the People's Republic of China was presented to the National Assembly of the Lao PDR.



Chinese Ambassador H.E. Mr Lui Yong Xing to the Lao PDR on behalf of the National People's Congress of China on 5 February presented this equipment to H.E. Mr Thongteun Sayasene, Head of the National Assembly Office, on behalf of the National Assembly of the Lao PDR, witnessed by H.E. Ms. Pany Yathotu, Vice President of the Lao National Assembly and officials concerned from both sides.

The equipment includes a black and white digital copy machine, a facsimile machine, two television sets, three projectors, two minibuses, six portable computer sets, three clocks, five stereo systems, 16 fast printing machines and an audio stereo set.

The equipment will be used to improve facilities in the National Assembly (the sixth legislature).

Rights and interests of children needed to protect

Children are the future and hope of mankind. The future of a nation depends on the next generation, a child today is an adult tomorrow and children are the source of human resources, being a sprout and the future of the country. "How we treat children and they will treat the society as we did. A country that wants to be prosperous must pay attention to human resources development, beginning with children", said

representatives of the National Assembly (NA) (sixth legislature) at the NA second ordinary session held here recently in Vientiane Capital.

There are many reasons for the NA to adopt the Law on Protection of Children's Rights and Interests, including an increase in children's number, some child-related problems and inadequate legal papers.

The Party and Government, with an earnest and responsible attitude, always show great concern for children's survival, protection and development. They made efforts to help children to obtain and exercise their rights, providing education and health services for them and protecting against child abuse and exploitation and ensuring the views of the child are sufficiently taken into account, especially within the family, the school, the care and justice systems.

The Lao PDR has striven to protect legitimate rights and interests of children. The Constitution of the Lao PDR, particularly Article 22 specifies: "The State attends to developing education and implements compulsory primary education in order to build good citizens with revolutionary competence, knowledge and abilities. The State and society attend to developing high quality national education, to create opportunities and [favourable] conditions in education for all people throughout the country, especially people in remote areas, ethnic groups, women and disadvantaged children. The State promotes private sector investment in the development of national education in accordance with the laws." The Article 29 also stipulates: "The State, society and families attend to implementing development policies and supporting the progress of women and to protecting the legitimate rights and benefits of women and children."

The Lao judicial procedure attaches great importance to the protection of juveniles' legal rights and interests, on which there are many important laws containing special provisions. For instance, the Article 1,5, 23, 24, 29-46 of the Family Law, the Article 29, 30, 36, 37, 47, 119, 120 and 123 of the Criminal Law, the Article 38 and 41 of the Labour Law and the Article 24, 29, 35 and 37 of the Law on Development and Protection of Women.

The National Commission for Mothers and Children was established in 1992 with networks at both central and local levels to deal with mothers and children matters. Its chairperson is a Deputy Prime Minister.

The resolutions of the V, VI, VII and VIII Party Congress paid importance to the human resources development, aiming at educating the Lao people to become good citizens, educated, knowledgeable, proficient as well as creative and enthusiastic about the national development and self-development. They should also be healthy and possess a pure attitude in order to respond to the development needs.

The Lao government together with the world community participated in and adopted the resolutions of the World Summit regarding obligation for survival, protection

and development of children. The National Assembly signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and on 7 June 1991 the Lao PDR became a party to this convention.

The Lao PDR has cooperated with friendly countries and international organisations to deal with the child issue. UNICEF, for instance, has provided assistance to Laos since 1952. The cooperation projects between Laos and UNICEF began in 1973 when it opened its office in Vientiane. Previously, UNICEF's aid projects were small schemes focusing on children's survival and development. The first cooperation development plan was put in place in 1992-1996 and was worth US\$25.4 million; US\$24.7 million for 1998-2002; and more than US\$28.6 million for 2002-2006. UNICEF has granted more than US\$39 million for the Country Programme Action Plan for 2007-2011.

Even though the Party and Government have paid more attention to the child issue, some child-related problems still exist. The Lao PDR has laws and regulations regarding children, however these legal papers are not comprehensive and clear. This constrains the law enforcement, being a reason for social ills to occur such as child prostitution, street children, drug abuse and other activities, which violate the laws. Some groups of people use these loopholes to seek profits from children such as child trafficking, child labour abuse and so on.

Today, the Lao PDR has 2,217,279 children aged below 15 years, 39.40% of a country's population (5,621,981). This figure will increase yearly (about over 159,000) and it is estimated that the number of children of this group will reach over 2,402,300.

In 2006-2007, 588,634 school-age children went to school. Other problems are found such as child labour migration, street children, child beggars, and prostitution.

The mortality and morbidity rates among children are high, particularly in rural areas, compared with ASEAN countries. In particular, in rural and remote areas the figure is higher than this one. There is limited access to prenatal and maternity care, and the generally limited access to public health care and to medicines. Children are victims caused by unexploded ordnance left by the war for more than 30 years. According to data collected in 1998, the percentage of child victims is on the rise. Forty per cent of UXO victims are killed outright. Fourteen of Laos' provinces are affected by UXO, and 25% of the country's villages remain severely contaminated.

As the problems were seen, the Ministry of Justice cooperated with the National Assembly and relevant organisations drafted the Law on Protection of Children's Rights and Interests. The draft law was revised and sent to the NA ordinary session for consideration and adoption. Eventually, this law was adopted by the second ordinary session of the Nation Assembly (sixth legislature) held recently in Vientiane Capital.

Laos follows (CEPT) Scheme for AFTA

The Standing Committee of the National Assembly (NA) organised here on 1-2 February a monthly meeting in Vientiane capital, presided over by Mr Thongsing Thammavong, NA President. Members of the NA Standing Committee, chairmen and deputy chairmen of NA committees, department directors and deputy directors and technical officials concerned reported attending the event.

The implementation of agreement on the Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT) Scheme for the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) topped the agenda of the event. The meeting has agreed to adopt some product items in different lists.

Therefore, on 16 February the Standing

Committee of the National Assembly (NA) issued its Decree No 027/ NA SC to adopt portion 5 (435 product items) in the Temporary Exclusion List (TEL). The implementation of tariff reduction for the above mentioned items kicked off on 1 January 2005 and it is projected to finish on 31 December 2008.

Products in the Temporary Exclusion List can be shielded from trade liberalisation only for a temporary period of time. However, all these products would have to be transferred into the Inclusion List and begin a process of tariff reduction so that tariffs would come down to 0-5%. Starting on 1 January 1996, annual installments of products from the TEL have been transferred into the Inclusion List. By the year 2000, there would remain 9,674 tariff lines in the TEL representing about 15.04% of all tariff lines in ASEAN.

In addition, the Standing Committee of the National Assembly (NA) issued the Decree No 026, date 16 February, to adopt 1,247 product items in the Inclusion List (IL) and portion 1 (426 product items), portion 2 (425 product items), portion 3 (437 product items) and portion 4 (432 product items) in the Temporary Exclusion List (TEL). Both Decrees have come into effect since they were signed until 31 December 2008. Products in the Inclusion List are those that have to undergo immediate liberalisation through reduction in intra-regional (CEPT) tariff rates, removal of quantitative restrictions and other non-tariff barriers. Tariffs on these products should be down to a maximum of 20% by the year 1998 and to 0-5% by the year 2002. The new Members of ASEAN have up to 2006 (Viet Nam), 2008 (Laos and Myanmar) and 2010 (Cambodia) to meet this deadline. By the year 2000, there would be 53,294 tariff lines in the Inclusion List representing 82.78% of all tariff lines in ASEAN.