

## National Assembly refills govt's pockets

The government has received additional funding of 50 billion kip for miscellaneous expenditure after disbursing the money allocated for this fiscal year.

The Lao National Assembly yesterday approved a government request to inject an additional 50 billion kip for miscellaneous expenditure after learning this fiscal year's allocation had already been spent on assistance for the provinces affected by tropical storm Ketsana.

The cash injection will give the government the funds its needs for various initiatives and projects planned for the remaining 11 months of the current fiscal year.

The assembly had previously approved a budget of only 50 billion kip for miscellaneous expenses this fiscal year.

The additional budget allocation will come from the government's reserve fund, which currently stands at 160 billion kip. The decision to tap into the reserve fund is intended to avoid inroads into the budget for state investment projects this fiscal year, which the assembly has already approved.

During yesterday's session the assembly also approved another government request for 100 billion kip to be taken from the reserve fund for recovery efforts in the flood-affected southern provinces of Attapeu, Saravan and Xekong.

The budget reshuffle will reduce the government's reserve fund from 160 billion kip to just 10 billion kip for the remainder of this fiscal year.

The government plans to spend the 100 billion kip to repair basic infrastructure including roads, schools, hospitals, and public utilities in the flood-affected areas.

Eighty-four of 90 assembly members attending the 8th Session of the 6th Legislature of the Lao National Assembly in Vientiane yesterday voted to approve the government's request for extra funds.

Only one member voted against the request and the rest abstained.

Minister of Finance Somdy Duangdy represented the government in asking the assembly to approve the additional funding for the government's miscellaneous budget.

Mr Somdy explained that this budget had been drained after unexpected disbursements for recovery efforts in the flood-affected provinces.

He said tropical storm Ketsana struck Attapeu, Saravan and Xekong provinces in September, causing extensive damage to roads, irrigation networks, schools, hospitals and government offices. Damage was estimated at 800 billion kip.

A number of National Assembly members said the assembly's total budget for repairs in the area was insufficient, because of the extent of the damage sustained.

Government members said they would continue to solicit donations from local and international bodies to help these provinces, saying many organisations had expressed interest in helping Laos to restore life to normal in this area.

Donors are keen to help Laos because they want to see the government succeed in its efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

**By Ekaphone Phouthonesy**

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