

Ministry confirms strict entrance measures for medical school

Somxay Sengdara

The Ministry of Health has confirmed strict measures have been implemented in processing university and college medical entrance selections, with punishment meted out against staff accepting bribes.

Deputy Minister of Health Assoc Prof. Dr Bounkong Shavong made the confirmation recently when responding to a public complaint raised through the National Assembly (NA) hotline during this year's July session.

A resident from Oudomxay province complained that some staff of Luang Prabang Health College had told him that if students intended to take the bachelor course in medicine, the students had to pay 27 million kip each to join the course without other requirements.

Additionally, 20 million kip each would have to be paid by students intending to enrol in the dentistry bachelor course, according to the caller, who said he raised the matter with the relevant authority to inspect the case. He said the misconduct would prevent poor students from attending the courses.

In his response, Assoc Prof. Dr Bounkong pointed out the national medical education network with the Health Sciences University in Vientiane, Health Colleges in Luang Prabang and Champassak provinces, and other schools in numerous provinces and the capital also training healthcare

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Nam Ngiep 2 begins operations

Times Reporters

The hydropower investment project between Laos and China, Nam Ngiep 2 in Xieng Khuang province officially opened last Friday after over four years of construction.

The project cost about 2.81 trillion kip (US\$345 million), with Electricite du Laos (EDL) holding 10 percent and China International Water & Electric Corp (CWE) holding the other 90 percent. CWE is the subsidiary company of the China Three Gorges Corporation.

The new plant has an installed capacity of 180 megawatts (MW) and the generated electricity will contribute to the national power grid for local supply.

The developers signed a project development agreement on Nam Ngiep 2 with the government in August 2010 and a concession agreement with the government a year later, August 2011.

The power purchase agreement was signed between Nam Ngiep 2 and EDL in October, 2011 and construction



Deputy Prime Minister Mr Somsavat Lengsavad (centre) cuts a ribbon at the opening ceremony of the Nam Ngiep 2 in Xieng Khuang province last Friday.

work started in November of the same year.

The project also has added expenditure for resettlement, environment and social support including infrastructure construction and relocation and compensation worth about 51 billion kip (US\$6.25 million),

livelihood development over US\$390,000, compensation for temporary impact above US\$250,000, social support of around US\$100,000 and environmental monitoring (biomass clearance and water quality analysis) of more than US\$660,000.

During the opening ceremony, Minister of Energy and Mines Dr Khammany Inthirath said Nam Ngiep 2 project was part of the country's 2016 electricity system development plan in line with improving industry and modernising the nation.

"We are so grateful for the completion of this project because it's very important to help us with basic socioeconomic development, especially commercialising agriculture to allow people in rural areas to reduce poverty", he said.

The opening ceremony took place in Xieng Khuang province and was attended by Deputy Prime Minister Mr Somsavat Lengsavad, Minister of Energy and Mines Dr Khammany Inthirath, Deputy Governor of Xieng Khuang province, Dr Bouasone Sinuanthong, President of the China Three Gorges Corporation Mr Wang Lin, and other participants.

The government has to date signed memorandums of understanding (MoU) or is undertaking research studies on more than 70 hydropower projects. Some of these are either operational or under construction.

Laos has also signed a MoU to provide 7,000MW of energy after 2015 to Thailand, and 3,000MW of electricity from

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Four international airports need to be built

Times Reporters

Laos will need to build four new international airports as the existing four of Wattay, Luang Prabang, Savan and Pakse will be unable to accommodate growing air transport in the coming decades, a minister told the cabinet.

Minister of Public Works and Transport Dr Bounchanh Sinthavong told the recent meeting between the government cabinet, Vientiane Mayor and provincial

governors when he presented a strategic plan on airport development.

The planned expansion of the passenger terminal at Wattay International Airport would enable the airport to accommodate about three million passengers a year, which would make it capable of handling growing air transport until 2028, the minister said.

The airport which now has an apron that can accommodate 48 parked aircraft and can land as large as 350-seat airplanes

has no more space available for further expansion being located near the city centre.

Therefore, the government needs to build a new larger international airport to handle the growing air transport industry.

"A new international airport must be built outside the city. Construction of the new airport is expected to begin in 2025 and complete before 2030," he told the meeting, referring to the strategic plan.

"It is expected that a new

international airport will be in use by 2030."

The new airport will be built to accommodate as large as Boeing 747, Airbus 330 or equivalent airplanes.

In addition, the minister stated that a new larger international airport in southern Champassak province also needed to be constructed with capacity to land 250-seat aircraft to meet the growing needs of air transport in the southern region.

He explained the current

international airport, which could only land 150-seat aircraft, had limited space for further expansion as it was located near the city centre and a mountain.

But the minister did not explain when construction of the new airport should start or when it is expected to be in use.

Similarly, a new larger international airport in Savannakhet province is set to be built at Seno area to meet growing air transport

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ເລື່ອງເຊີນ ເອເຊຍ
REVOLUTION ASIA
Translation & Interpretation
 Tel: 021-262 780 or 020-5679 2563
 Email: info@revolution-translation.com
 www.revolution-translation.com
 Ban Anou, Chanthabouly District, Vientiane, Lao P.D.R. P.O Box. 8837

STB ທະນາຄານ ເອີເອັດີ
ST Bank
 Head Office: 08092 Samsenthai Rd, Ban Anou, Chanthabouly District, Vientiane Lao P.D.R.
 Tel: (+856-21) 241 560 - 62 Fax: (+856-21) 241 564
 Savannakhet Branch: Tel: (+856-41) 252 338 Fax: (+856-41) 252 339
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Main roads across the capital will be repaired after the government released more budget. --Photo Phetphoxay

Government agrees to repair Vientiane's poor roads

Khonesavanh Latsaphao

The government has allocated a large amount of money from its budget to repair and repave deteriorating roads throughout the city.

Vientiane Public Works and Transport Department are now pressing ahead with repairs to around 20 main roads across the capital after the government released over 5.2 billion kip with the work expected to be finished before Laos hosts next year's Asean Summit.

Currently many people in Vientiane are complaining about the many potholes on their way to and from work every day.

A Vientiane road worker, who asked not to be named, told *Vientiane Times* that roads were fixed every year and the repair work to potholes would be started after the rainy season

ended.

Road workers were not neglecting their job but they couldn't rebuild asphalt immediately after the potholes developed because of the rainy season.

A road section from Dongdok traffic lights to Sikeuth village in Vientiane has become a notorious stretch for the last few years because of potholes.

This badly damaged section of road is causing traffic chaos during the morning and evening rush hours as drivers struggle to avoid the deep holes.

The Dongdok traffic lights to Sikeuth village section is one of the 20 earmarked roads to be repaired in Vientiane. Workers will soon pave the road's surface which has suffered from potholes, flash flooding and washouts.

Every year sections of roads around the capital of

Vientiane are damaged after heavy downpours. They also rapidly deteriorate through the frequent passage of heavy vehicles, especially sand and gravel trucks.

Not only main streets in Vientiane are damaged, but also national and provincial roads across the country.

According to the Ministry of Public Works and Transport the ministry was responsible for repairing national roads across the country each year but main roads in the capital were the domain of the Vientiane Public Works Department.

In recent years Laos has extended its road network by about 7.41 percent annually.

Statistics from the Ministry of Public Works and Transport show that in 2013, Laos had a road network of some 43,600 km in total, including about 6,496 km of paved roads.

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professionals in maternal and child health.

He explained that a committee in charge of medical personnel development existed under the guidance of one of the deputy ministers of health.

Therefore students, who wanted to enrol in medical courses at universities, colleges and schools, had to take entrance exams with an electronic system used to examine and score exam papers.

This exam system had also been used in Luang Prabang Health College, the deputy minister confirmed.

Meanwhile, he noted the privilege given to students

from the poorest remote rural areas, Dakcheung district in Xekong province for example, in order to develop medical personnel in regions which had difficulty attracting healthcare professionals. A committee coordinated with the ministry's Personnel Department, Education and Sciences Research Department, to assist the targeted provinces.

Addressing the resident's concern, Assoc Prof. Bounkong said he had contacted the Luang Prabang Health College and the college administration denied the claim.

However, he admitted such cases had occurred in the

past which resulted in some health staff and middle ranking officials being fired.

The deputy minister called on the NA hotline caller or people impacted by misconduct to name the health staff directly involved.

Despite relevant officials denying that students were paying their way into medical schools, some members of public still suspected that bribes have been offered by students to fast track their way through the entrance exam.

Some have suggested that CCTV be installed in the exam rooms to monitor the behaviour of teachers and students to prevent any misconduct.

Nam Ngiep 2 begins... FROM PAGE 1

now until 2020 to Vietnam.

Representatives of the energy sectors in Laos and Cambodia signed a purchase agreement for the supply of about 5MW by the end of 2009. However, to date there is no MoU to officially certify the terms of the sale.

The government intends to use the profits from hydropower sales to fight poverty in the country.

In recent years, the energy sector has played a major part in social development, notably in the fields of education, human resources, healthcare, and job creation.

Twenty-seven power plants are currently operational with installed capacity of about 3,304MW, including 11 plants that have an installed capacity of 405MW which are operated by EDL. The other 16 plants,

which have a combined installed capacity of 2,899MW, are operated by independent power producers.

Laos was aiming for total installed capacity of about 12,000MW by 2025, a Ministry of Energy and Mines' report noted. The abundant resources of the Mekong River and its tributaries give Laos the potential to produce more than 25,000MW of electricity.

Parents push children to study medicine

Khonesavanh Latsaphao

Many students at the University of Health Sciences are there because that's what their parents want and are taking courses reluctantly because they have no personal interest in the subject.

Parents want their children to study medicine because when they are sick they hope to be treated by their sons or daughters when they are fully fledged doctors.

Deputy Director of the Faculty of Postgraduate Studies at the University of Health Sciences, Associate Professor Dr Mayfong Mayxay, told *Vientiane Times* on Friday that he carried out a survey and found that about 45 percent of students attending medical school were merely following the wishes of their parents.

"Teachers always have to

tell some stories in class to avoid having students who don't like their subject falling asleep," he said.

Students who are in medical school because their parents ordered them to register there often fall asleep during lessons in their first year.

But most of them eventually change their minds and start to enjoy the subject once they get to their fifth or sixth year.

Not too many students drop out of medical school just because they don't like the subject to begin with.

Associate Professor Dr Mayfong said it was difficult to teach medical students because of the wide variety of subjects they had to learn.

Studying medicine also requires learning a lot of foreign words. Students from Vientiane may already know

a little English or French but those from the provinces are highly unlikely to know either.

In an earlier interview with Deputy Minister of Health Associate Professor Dr Som-Ock Kingsada, he mentioned that he had told a workshop that human resource development in the health sector should focus on the training of medical specialists.

Doctors work directly with patients but some students at the University of Health Sciences have been avoiding this part of the course, choosing instead to take subjects that do not involve contact with hospital patients.

Most of the students who don't want to become specialists make their choice because they don't like the idea of cutting someone open, they have an aversion to blood, or they are afraid of dead bodies.

Rescue teams on standby for annual river boat races

Manichanh Pansivongxay

Rescue organisations have prepared teams to help out if need be during this month's traditional boat racing festivals in Vientiane.

District authorities are now preparing for two popular boat races on the Mekong River, based at the Inpeng Ethnic Culture Park and Vat Chanh Temple.

President of the Voluntary Rescue Association of Vientiane, Mr Lamnguen Vongphachanh, told *Vientiane Times* last week the association has two rescue teams ready to deliver emergency assistance in the event of an accident, either on water or land.

The association has arranged for two boats and two vehicles to help the victims of any accidents that may occur. The rescue teams comprise 10 people for assistance on the river and 25 people to help out with accidents on land.

A Lao-Thai boat race will take place on October 10 at the Inpeng Ethnic Culture Park on Thadeua Road near the Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge in Hadxaifong district, but festival events will start a few days before. It is expected that 12 boats will compete in the race, with six from Laos and six from Thailand.

Vientiane's main boat racing festival will take place on October 28 on the Mekong River in front of Vat Chanh Temple on Fa Ngum Road in Chanthabouly district.

This boat race is a highly popular event and attracts many visitors and boats from districts in Vientiane and neighbouring provinces.

The festival runs over many days and people tend to drink a lot, which inevitably leads to a spike in the number of road accidents so rescue teams will be on hand to provide emergency services.

A representative of the Foundation for Assisting the Poor People of Laos, Mr Phaichit Konpathoum, said "We have been assembling rescue teams to help out on the

river and on land since August. We have already attended the boat races in Sithan Tai village in Hadxaifong district."

At the Lao-Thai boat races at the Inpeng Ethnic Culture Park, the foundation will provide 20 people to help the victims of any river accidents.

Another 30-40 people to help with land-based incidents will be stationed at various locations around the festival and on busy roads in Vientiane.

The foundation has also prepared two rescue boats for the festival at the ethnic culture park.

Weather forecast

Xieng Khuang				
Date	Temperature in (C)		Weather	Weather
	Min	Max		
05/10/2015	17	27		Isolated showers
06/10/2015	17	28		Scattered showers
07/10/2015	17	27		Scattered showers
Luang Namtha				
Date	Temperature in (C)		Weather	Weather
	Min	Max		
05/10/2015	21	32		Isolated showers
06/10/2015	21	33		Scattered showers
07/10/2015	20	32		Scattered showers
Luang Prabang				
Date	Temperature in (C)		Weather	Weather
	Min	Max		
05/10/2015	24	34		Isolated showers
06/10/2015	24	34		Scattered showers
07/10/2015	23	33		Isolated showers
Vientiane				
Date	Temperature in (C)		Weather	Weather
	Min	Max		
05/10/2015	24	30		Isolated showers
06/10/2015	24	31		Isolated showers
07/10/2015	25	32		Isolated showers
Savannakhet				
Date	Temperature in (C)		Weather	Weather
	Min	Max		
05/10/2015	25	32		Scattered showers
06/10/2015	25	33		Isolated showers
07/10/2015	26	33		Isolated showers
Pakse				
Date	Temperature in (C)		Weather	Weather
	Min	Max		
05/10/2015	25	31		Scattered showers
06/10/2015	25	32		Isolated showers
07/10/2015	26	33		Isolated showers