

Vientiane Times interview with Prime Minister Abe
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Japanese Prime Minister comments on Laos-Japan relations
Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has provided comments in writing on Laos-Japan relations ahead of his scheduled official visit to Laos tomorrow

Q: How would you describe Laos-Japan relations? And how will bilateral relations develop in the coming years?

A. Many Japanese feel affection for Laos, a country blessed with rich natural and cultural assets, and home to warm and kind people. Moreover, the traditionally friendly relationship that Japan and Laos have built over many years is a common and irreplaceable asset for the two countries.

During my visit to Laos, I would like to materialize cooperation in multiple fields on the basis of past cooperation between Japan and Laos in a wide range of fields, such as politics, economy, culture, and human exchanges.

In particular, as I have been emphasizing youth exchanges in Asia, I am planning to further expand exchanges between the young people of Japan and Laos through JENESYS 2.0, a framework that I have established.

With regard to private sector investment, in recent years there has been a significant interest in Laos exhibited by Japanese enterprises and the number of Japanese companies that have ventured into Laos has roughly doubled to almost 100 in the past five years. I hope that Japanese companies will continue to make high-quality investments in Laos, with a focus on fields such as agriculture and manufacturing, industries in which Laos is very competitive, and contribute to the development of the economy of Laos in the future as well.

2015 marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Laos. Making the necessary preparations, I would like to take this opportunity to further enhance mutual understanding and mutual trust between our two countries, and bring our bilateral relations to a new height.

In addition, the stable and sustainable development of Laos, which is located in a strategic junction of the Mekong region, is also important for integrating ASEAN through improved connectivity and unity. I hope that the Government of Japan will continue to provide support in the future as well based on the principle of “Proactive Contribution to Peace” and that this is connected to the peace and prosperity of the region.

The two countries are expected to work together on regional cooperation, such as the activities of ASEAN, and on solving various issues that are being faced by the international community. Therefore, we would like to strengthen collaboration in such

fields.

Q: While Japan is the biggest aid provider to Laos, Japanese investment in Laos lags behind that of many other countries in the region. What are the potential areas that should be promoted to attract greater investment from Japan in Laos?

A. Japan has supported the economic and social development of Laos for many years and Japan has been the largest aid donor to Laos since 1991. In recent years, when H.E. Dr. Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, visited Japan May, this year, the two countries signed the exchange of notes for the Nam Ngum 1 Hydropower Station Expansion Project (yen loans of up to 5.545 billion yen), the Thakhek Water Supply Development Project (grant aid of up to 1.643 billion yen), and other projects.

The Government of Japan will continue to provide support with a focus on four fields, infrastructure, agriculture, education, and health and welfare, taking care to ensure consistency with the development policies of the Government of Laos.

In particular, the Government of Japan emphasizes human resource development as being key to the social and economic development of Laos. The Government of Japan will proactively support higher education, and technical and vocational education, by utilizing the Laos Japan Center, student exchange programs, and other frameworks, in order to strengthen the private economic sector of Laos.