Laos-Japan relations

Lao and Japan have enjoyed diplomatic relations for over 60 years and in 2013, the two countries marked the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties. From 1953 onwards, high-ranking officials and ordinary people from the two countries have exchanged visits on a regular basis. Over the past 60 years, the Japanese government and people have assisted the Lao government and people in a wide range of fields. Japan has been the biggest aid provider to Laos for the past 60 years and continues to support Laos' efforts to graduate from Least Developed Country status.

Vientiane Times interviewed Japan's Foreign Affairs Minister Fumio Kishida prior to his visit to Laos on May 4.

Q: How has cooperation between Laos and Japan developed over the past 60 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations?

A: Since 1953, Japan and the Lao PDR have established diplomatic relations on March 5, 1953. When Prime Minister Thongloun Thammavong visited Japan last year, the 60th anniversary of the establishment of Laos-Japan diplomatic relations, the bilateral relationship was upgraded to a "Strategic Partnership" entering a new stage. Coinciding with this, several agreements were signed by the two countries are expected to produce results in the near future. Under these circumstances, I am very pleased to be able to visit the Lao PDR for the first time since assuming office.

Since 1991, when the world's first large-scale cooperative assistance project was launched in the Lao PDR, Japan has consistently contributed to the economic and social development of the Lao PDR. At the Lao PDR's strategic partner, Japan will also cooperate in the future, including helping graduate from Least Developed Countries (LDC) by 2020 and achieve the eight priority areas of the ASEAN-Lao cooperation.

Furthermore, in addition to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Japanese companies have already established businesses in the Lao PDR, and Japanese companies' investment in the Lao PDR is growing rapidly.

In this way, over the last 60 years, Japan and the Lao PDR have established fruitful relations. As Japan's Foreign Minister, during this visit I will personally meet Prime Minister Thongloun Thammavong and Foreign Minister Phnom Sina, who were appointed last month, and also intend to promote friendly relations with the new leadership.

Q: In the past, Japan has provided assistance in the fields of infrastructure, agriculture, education and health. What fields will Japan focus on in the future and why? What value and strategy does Japan have in place concerning assistance for development in the Lao PDR?

A: Last year the ASEAN Community was established at the end of last year, and the course the ASEAN Community takes in the future is attracting the world's attention. The ASEAN Community needs to put into practice the "Partnership for Quality Infrastructure" that it announced in May last year. Along with economic development, Japan will provide assistance for high-quality, environmentally-friendly, disaster-resistant and long-lasting infrastructure, in which Japan is well experienced.

Furthermore, under the Industrial Human Resource Development Cooperation Initiative proposed in November last year, Japan will support human development in the Lao PDR to achieve sustainable growth. Including these supports, in July last year Japan adopted the "New Tokyo Strategy 2015 for Mekong-Lower Mekong Cooperation" (MLM2015) and announced it will provide 1.5 billion yen in ODA to the Mekong region over the next three years.

Japan intends to advance robust support for the Lao PDR through these initiatives.

Q: In your opinion, does the AEC bring opportunities or challenges for the Lao PDR as the Chair of ASEAN?

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