

# Co-creating an Indo-Pacific future based on mutual trust

## Advertorial Desk

**A**s Prime Minister of Japan, I would like to express my warm greetings to the people of Laos. 2023 marks the historic 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation. In the half century since Japan initiated dialogue with ASEAN, ahead of the rest of the world, the organisation has expanded, integrated, and developed dramatically. Laos joined ASEAN in 1997, has chaired two ASEAN-related summit meetings and will chair ASEAN again for a third time next year. Japan will vigorously support Laos to achieve tremendous success as the 2024 ASEAN chair country.

Japan has walked alongside ASEAN countries, including Laos, on their path of progress and integration in the organisation. Our country has supported the evolution of the ASEAN

region through development cooperation in various fields. Japan and ASEAN are each other's major trading partners, and Japan is the second largest direct investor in ASEAN after the United States. In recent years, Japan has made an average direct investment of approximately 2.8 trillion yen in ASEAN countries every year. Japanese companies have around 15,000 business establishments in ASEAN, bringing the vitality of the fast-growing ASEAN region into the Japanese economy. These firms also create products, services, and employment in ASEAN countries, thus contributing to their economic growth. In Laos, some 160 Japanese companies are doing business and contributing to the advancement of Lao industry and the creation of jobs through human resource development and technology transfer.

The relationship between Japan and ASEAN, together with Laos, goes beyond

business. The foundation of Japan-ASEAN relations as true friends is a relationship of mutual trust with heart-to-heart connections. It has been nurtured over the years through people-to-people exchanges in a wide range of fields.

Both public and private sectors have continued to implement exchange programs, such as JENESYS and other youth exchange programs. For example, the Government of Japan has sponsored some 40,000 international students from ASEAN countries. In addition, Laos was the first country in the world where JICA sent the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) in 1965, and more than 1,000 JOCV members have been involved in supporting the social development of Laos to date. The Japan Foundation has dispatched about 3,000 NIHONGO (Japanese-language) Partners to educational institutions in Asia under its WA Project. Many other exchange programs have been implemented by the

private sector over the years and Japan will expand people-to-people exchange through investment and tourism.

In addition, Japan and ASEAN have reached out to each other and have been trusted partners through many challenges, such as the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami, the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, and the COVID-19 pandemic from 2019. In a survey of public opinion in ASEAN countries by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, a prominent Southeast Asian research center, Japan has been voted the most trusted major power for ASEAN countries for five consecutive years.

The international community is now at a turning point in history, and the free and open international order based on the rule of law is under serious threat. We also face increasingly complex challenges, such as climate change, inequality, public



Japanese Prime Minister Mr Kishida Fumio.

health crises, digitalisation, and AI governance.

The economic prosperity of ASEAN, the world's growth engine, can only be achieved if the peace and stability of the region is protected. And the stability and prosperity of ASEAN is directly linked to the peace and prosperity of the world.

I look forward to working more closely than ever before with the people of ASEAN on the basis of strong trust to co-create a peaceful and stable world where everyone can live in dignity and enjoy a sustainable and prosperous future.

At the conclusion of this 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, I would like to summarise the past half century of ASEAN-Japan relations, and to set out a new vision and concrete cooperation for the future at the Commemorative Summit that will welcome the leaders of ASEAN countries, including Laos, to Tokyo on 16-18 December 2023.

In particular, Japan would like to propose a comprehensive people-to-people exchange program to connect and strengthen heart-to-heart partnerships for the next generation. This includes new initiatives

to jointly create solutions to the challenges shared by our economies and societies, efforts to combat climate change, such as further promotion of the Asian Zero Emission Community concept, and cooperation in industrial aspects. To this end, I would like to make this historic Commemorative Summit a Golden Opportunity to carry our Golden Friendship into the next generation.

Recently, the Government of Japan approved the Project for the Reconstruction of Chao Anouvong Stadium, funded by its ODA. We hope that the renewed stadium will be loved and widely used by Lao people and serve as a symbol of the friendship between our two countries, just like the Lao elephants in Japan and the Japanese cherry blossoms in Laos.

On the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Japan and Laos in 2025, I welcome the opportunity to exchange views with Prime Minister, Mr Sonexay Siphandone on deepening and expanding the medium- to long-term strategic partnership between our countries. And I sincerely hope that Japan-Laos relations will grow ever stronger in the years to come.



Lao President Thongloun Sisoulith and Japanese Prime Minister Mr Kishida Fumio had a summit meeting in Tokyo on May 25, 2023. --Photo Cabinet Public Affairs Office