

Japan, Laos enjoy friendly relations

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Laos and Japan recently celebrated the 60th anniversary of their diplomatic ties, with the relationship continuing from 1955 to the present. Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is currently attending the 28th and 29th Asean Summits and related meetings in Vientiane. *Vientiane Times* took this opportunity to interview him.

Q: How do you view the current state of and outlook for Japan-Laos relations?

A: Sabaidee (hello). In 1957, my grandfather Nobusuke Kishi became the first Japanese Prime Minister to visit Laos. Now, I am very happy to be able to come here again after visiting as Prime Minister in November 2013.

Laos has a rich natural environment, as symbolised by the Mekong River, with a long history and an excellent food culture. The wonderful flavour of Lao sticky rice indeed allured me during my last visit to Laos.

I am pleased to say that Japan and Laos enjoy very friendly relations. Last year, we had the opportunity to hold three Japan-Laos Summit Meetings. In May 2016, immediately following his appointment as Prime Minister, Mr Thongloun Sisoulith came to Japan to attend the G7 Ise-Shima Summit Outreach Meeting. In his role as the chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), Prime Minister Thongloun contributed greatly to the success of the G7 Summit.

Japan's international cooperation has progressed alongside Laos. More than 50 years ago in

1965, Laos was the first country to receive Japanese overseas cooperation volunteers. The Vientiane No. 1 Road, built with Japan's support, now symbolises quality infrastructure that has not deteriorated even after a decade.

As the top foreign aid donor to Laos, Japan has undertaken a broad range of development cooperation that places a high priority on improving the lives of each and every individual. This cooperation ranges from major infrastructure development programmes to grassroots level projects in regional communities.

During this visit, I hope to have a fruitful discussion with Prime Minister Thongloun on how Laos can realise its vision for the future. Our cooperation will focus on areas where Japan can make the strongest contribution, such as in high-quality, environmentally-friendly, long-lasting infrastructure and human resources development.

I am pleased to note that exchanges between our two countries are moving steadily ahead in a broad range of fields. At the recent Rio Olympics, Laos' Soukphaxay Sithisane, who learned judo from a Japanese overseas cooperation volunteer, became the first Lao judoka to compete at the Olympic Games. I am already looking forward to seeing Mr Sithisane and other Lao athletes



Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

competing vigorously at the 2020 Tokyo Games. Japan will continue to be a good friend of Laos and advance cooperation in a broad range of areas.

Q: What is the significance of your attendance at the Asean-related Summit Meetings and what outcomes

are you hoping for?

A: To begin with, I would like to congratulate Laos on its important role as the Chair for this milestone year representing the first year for the Asean Community.

Japan strongly supports the process in which Asean

plans and moves toward the realisation of its vision for the future. Japan is committed to providing robust support for the Asean Community Vision 2025.

I believe the priorities will be put on prosperity and peace. As a genuine partner that fulfils its commitments, Japan has been working together with Asean to ensure prosperity in a way that leaves no one behind. At this meeting, Japan intends to express its support for Asean to advance economic integration and achieve sustainable growth that enables each citizen to feel the benefits.

Another priority is peace. Peace and security underpin prosperity, and maintaining a stable international order based on the rule of law is essential to this end. In the field of social stability, Japan will further deepen cooperation with Asean.

Japan will continue to encourage Asean to deepen its integration while sharing with us the values of the rule of law and democracy. We will also support Asean to firmly deal with the problems facing the regional and international communities and to play a leading role in regional stability and prosperity, based on the rule of law.

At the Asean-related Summit Meetings, I look forward to working with Laos, the host and chair country, to lead the meetings to success.