

Foreign Minister MOTEGI Highlights Japan-Laos Cooperation

Message by Mr. MOTEGI Toshimitsu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan prior to his official visit to the Lao P.D.R. from 22 to 24 August 2020



Japanese Foreign Minister Mr. MOTEGI attended the meeting as chairman of the 13th Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers' Meeting on July 9, 2020

This trip marks my first visit to the Lao People's Democratic Republic since assuming my duties as Foreign Minister. I visited Laos last time in April 2014, as Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry. I am very pleased to come back to Laos for the first time in 6 years, an extremely attractive country with diverse culture, peaceful people, and rich nature as represented by the Mekong River.

This year marks the 65th anniversary since Japan and Laos established diplomatic relations. During these years, many Japanese people including myself have been attracted to your beautiful country and people while two countries have nurtured the bilateral relationship. Our two countries upgraded this relationship to the "Strategic Partnership" five years ago, based on our long history of friendly and cooperative relations. Since then, we have been expanding and deepening our relationship in broad areas including regional and international cooperation.

In order to support the sustainable development of Laos, to date, Japan has provided support for enhanced connectivity by constructing high quality infrastructure and promoted cooperation in the areas of agriculture, education, health, removal of unexploded ordnance, legal system development, and development of human resources. To give an example, with the assistance of Japan, the Wattay International Airport was constructed and National Road No.9 was improved. This may, the first Civil Code of Laos came into force under the close cooperation between legal experts of both countries. In order to support the next Five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan being under development, Japan continues to make contributions to the areas such as financial stability, strengthening the medical system, and disaster-prevention measures. We would like to provide the maximum support and cooperation for the Lao people to unleash the vast potential the country has and to enjoy the fruits of own efforts.

-Beyond 65th Anniversary-



When I visited Laos in 2014, the JETRO office in Vientiane was established. Since then, the number of Japanese companies operating in Laos has steadily continued to grow from 108 to over 160 today. I expect that the investment environment including logistics system in Laos be improved to promote investments of Japanese companies, thus further invigorating economic exchange between the two countries. I also believe that the tie between Japan and Laos as well as regional economy will be further deepened through the First Protocol to Amend the Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Partnership among Japan and Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (AJCEP) which came into force with Laos on August 1 as well as early signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

The exchanges between Japan and Laos are not limited to economic ones. In addition to visits by high-level government officials, parliament members, political parties and defense exchanges, youth and sports exchanges are very active. In particular, Laos was the first country to which Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers were dispatched in 1965. In the fifty five years since, over a thousand Japanese have volunteered in Laos in fields such as education, sports, health, agriculture, and agricultural development in cities and in rural areas. At the same time, around fifty young Lao people come to Japan each year to study with the support of Japanese government's scholarships. Moreover, many Japanese local communities and students interact with the people in Laos through prefectural friendship associations and NGOs across Japan. These multi-layered connections among people make

the cooperation and trust between our countries further stronger.

These people-to-people exchanges which lay a foundation for our bilateral relations have now hit a plateau due to the COVID-19. I would like to pay respect to the fact that the infection has been under control in Laos thanks to the people's solidarity and the strong leadership of the party and the government. In today's globalized world where the movement of people and goods is expanding, the infection is an enormous threat to the economies and societies of every country including Japan. We all must face this challenge together in order to avoid halting our peoples' lives toward the future.

Japan has been at the forefront of the international community to support medical and health systems in each country with an aim to control the spread of

COVID-19 at the earliest possible date. For Laos, Japan has provided technical assistance and medical materials through international organizations worth approximately 4 million US dollars, as well as grant assistance for medical devices including ambulances valued around 13.6 million US dollars. Japan and Laos will hold talks to resume travels of business people in need between the two countries, while maintaining preventive measures against the spread of infections. To that end, Japan will deepen our cooperation with Laos in order to overcome the unprecedented crisis of COVID-19 and to resume the travels between the two countries that people are waiting for.

During my visit in Laos, I am looking forward to having a fruitful exchange of opinions with the leaders of Lao PDR to ensure robust advancement of the "Strategic Partnership".



Left: Vientiane International Airport Terminal Expansion Project (June 2018)

Right: The JDS 20th Anniversary (The Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship)

Mr. MOTEGI Toshimitsu Minister for Foreign Affairs

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Member of the House of Representatives

Born in October 1955
December 2012 :
Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry
October 2018 :
Minister of State for Economic and Fiscal Policy
Minister in charge of Social Security Reform
Minister in charge of TPP and Japan-U.S. Trade Negotiations
September 2019 - Present
Minister for Foreign Affairs