



Mr Takeshi Hikihara (right) shakes hands with Prof. Takashi Miyata at a grant signing ceremony in Vientiane yesterday. --Photo Vientiane Mai

Japan fills hole in Laos' oral health services

Viengdavanh Banphahaksa

The Japanese government has provided grant assistance worth more than 2.7 billion kip (US\$320,997) to improve oral and dental health services in Vientiane and in Borikhamxay, Khammuan, and Savannakhet provinces.

The grant contract was signed yesterday by the Ambassador of Japan to Laos, Mr Takeshi Hikihara, and the President of the Organisation of International Support for Dental Education (OISDE), Prof. Takashi Miyata.

The signing was witnessed by the Deputy Minister of Health, Associate Prof. Dr Phouthone Muongpak, and representatives of line ministries and other key organisations.

Mr Hikihara said the project is building a foundation for oral health services and treatment that

will lessen the severity and occurrence of tooth and gum disease in Laos.

One year's funding for the three year project has been approved so far, according to the Japanese Embassy.

The project, which is called "Establishing an educational base in dental health promotion to build preventative systems", aims to establish dental health services that will provide professional development training for nurses and other professionals working in the field.

In the longer term it is hoped the number of serious cases of infectious gum disease will be significantly reduced.

OISDE has approval to establish a base delivering integrated dental and oral health education in Vientiane.

This facility will educate nurses from across the country. It will also provide

transport and conduct practical training seminars in Borikhamxay, Khammuan and Savannakhet provinces throughout the year.

It is hoped that the professional development component of the programme will be successful in improving the quality of the dental care provided in the targeted areas.

Laos is the only country in South East Asia that does not have an established training and education system for dental nurses. The lack of qualified nurses means that sometimes service standards are below par. OISDE is a Japanese non-profit organisation that has been delivering oral health service programmes in Laos since 2002.

It implemented a technical cooperation project on oral and dental health in Vientiane, Khammuan and Savannakhet provinces from 2012 to 2018.

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Progress has been made in implementing the Order with the Ministry of Home Affairs completing a survey in eight ministries and submitting the findings to the government to seek guidance.

The survey found that the number of civil servants in many state departments was excessive, while some had too few.

Overall, the number of civil servants was found to be far in excess of requirements.

Prime Minister Thongloun said these unwarranted employees added a heavy burden to state expenditure on salaries and supporting allowances.

In light of this matter, the government has reduced the number of new civil servants recruited each year from more than 10,000 people previously

to just 3,000 last year and to 1,500 people this year.

"We need to make effective use of personnel. One person can do several jobs," he told the meeting.

He added that the presence of too many officials did not necessarily mean that public services would be delivered more quickly. On the contrary they have been slow and inefficient over past years.

The cut in the quota of new civil servants has reduced the number of new recruits to less than the number retiring, meaning the government is able to reduce the overall number of civil servants. Almost 4,000 officials retired in 2018.

With the introduction of a smaller civil servant quota, Mr Thongloun told state departments to recruit new officials based

on their competence and qualifications, through a careful selection process. This would ensure the state was served by qualified employees who would provide efficient public service.

The limited quota means that many volunteers and officials currently working on a contract basis, who are employed at many state departments, will not be accepted as civil servants. One reason is that their age could exceed the upper limit of 35 stipulated for new recruits.

"It is impossible to recruit all contract staff and volunteers," Mr Thongloun said. He raised the possibility of state bodies training and encouraging contract staff and volunteers to work with private companies or projects or even to run their own business.

PM to visit Brunei to strengthen bilateral cooperation

Sisay Vilaysack

Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith will lead government officials on an official visit to Brunei from February 16-17.

The two-day visit by Mr Thongloun and his delegation is in response to an invitation from His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah.

The purpose of the visit is to further strengthen the friendly relations and cooperation between the Lao PDR and Brunei Darussalam, according to an announcement from the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the second meeting of the Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation between the Lao PDR and Brunei Darussalam held in Luang Prabang last year, which was attended by

Lao Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Saleumxay Kommasith, and Second Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Brunei, Dato Erywan Pehin Yusof, the two countries agreed to further strengthen bilateral relations, including in the fields of human resource development, air transport, drug control, labour, cultural exchange, and women's development.

In addition, the meeting encouraged the chambers of commerce and industry of the Lao PDR and Brunei to sign a Memorandum of Understanding and hold a meeting of the economics sector when Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith paid an official visit to Brunei.

Since Laos and Brunei established diplomatic relations on July 27, 1993,

friendly relations and close cooperation have continued to flourish in the areas of education, sports and trade.

Brunei has an embassy in Vientiane, and Laos has an embassy in Bandar Seri Begawan.

The two countries praised the extension of the visa waiver agreement for Lao and Brunei citizens holding diplomatic, official and regular passports from 14 to 30 days.

In previous years, the government of Brunei supported Laos' hosting of the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM-9) Summit in 2012 and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Summits in Vientiane in 2004 and 2016, as well as human resource development, building of schools, and sports development.

Visit Laos-China Year programme announced

Siladda Souliyong

The main activities planned for Visit Laos-China Year 2019 were announced on Tuesday during a meeting of Laos' information, culture and tourism divisions in Vientiane.

Deputy Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, Mr Buangeun Xaphouvong, outlined eight main activities that will take place in Laos and China to promote tourism.

Lao authorities are hoping to attract 4.5 million visitors this year, generating more than US\$700 million.

The programme kicked off last month with the launch of Visit Laos-China Year 2019 at the National Culture Hall.

In April a Chinese cultural week will be organised in Vientiane to mark 58 years of Laos-China diplomatic relations, including a performing arts event staged by

Chinese artists. This will be followed by a workshop on tourism management in Laos and China, to be held in Champassak province in June and July.

In September there will be a Mid-Autumn Festival and Chinese cultural performances in Luang Prabang province and Vientiane.

There will also be events in China when Lao leaders visit the country to attend a performing arts show by Lao and Chinese troupes. At the same time, the two countries will sign an agreement on cooperation in culture and tourism, Mr Buangeun said.

In addition, a cultural show, Lao food festival, tourism product exhibition and a workshop on Lao and Chinese tourism will be the highlights of a Lao culture week in Hunan province, China. There will also be a Lao culture week in Szechuan province.

The closing ceremony

of Visit Laos-China Year 2019 will take place in Beijing, China, at the end of this year.

Provinces in Laos are also preparing special activities and improving services for visitors such as providing Chinese language guidebooks and signage at popular tourist sites, while restaurants will be giving their menus a Chinese twist.

On Monday this week the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism officially brought an end to Visit Laos Year 2018, which was declared a success.

Throughout the year, more than 4.1 million visitors came to Laos, an increase of 8.2 percent compared to 2017. More than 800,000 people came from China, an increase of 26 percent on 2017, while total revenue generated from tourism exceeded US\$755 million, according to the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism.

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One such incident reportedly occurred in Vientiane province.

Worse, no receipts are given for charges and fines imposed on tour groups or individuals.

Prof. Dr Bosengkham also underlined the need for the government to explore measures to slow the rise in prices, which has also been blamed for the decline in foreign tourist arrivals in recent years.

A previous report suggested that the cost of food staples in Laos was 10-20 percent higher than in Thailand and Vietnam.

The minister called for the government to consider reducing or waiving visa fees for nationals of certain countries, but did not specify which regions.

Speaking on Tuesday at the 2019 meeting of the information, culture and tourism sector, Deputy

Prime Minister Dr Sonexay Siphandone said the government was pleased to bring issues that were beyond the capacity of the ministry to tackle for general discussion, so that solutions could be proposed.

Dr Sonexay said the government attaches great importance to the tourism industry and considers it to be 'one of the core drivers of economic growth'.