

## UXO Lao adds more UXO clearance teams

### Times Reporters

The Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme (UXO Lao) has added another 15 UXO clearance teams after the programme increased the scope of its clearance plan.

The new teams will include five in Khammuan, five in Savannakhet and five in Attapeu provinces as clearance demand is higher in these provinces, Director of the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) for the UXO/Mine Action Sector, Mr Phoukhieo Chanthasomboun reported at a meeting last week.

Last year, the programme cleared a total of 2,500 hectares and this year plans to increase that figure to more than 3,200 hectares or a 28 percent increase, Mr Phoukhieo said.

Luang Prabang plans to clear 130 hectares, while 161 hectares are targeted for clearance in Huaphan, 600 hectares in Xieng Khuang, 413 hectares in Khammuan, 710 hectares in Savannakhet, 402 hectares in Saravan, 220 hectares in Xekong, 170 hectares in Champassak and 440 hectares in Attapeu.

Most of the UXO clearance

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The town of Luang Prabang has received an award under the Mekong Tourism Award scheme organised by the Asean-Japan Centre.

--Photo Phoonsab Thevongsa

## Laos, Vietnam speed up plans for Vientiane-Hanoi expressway

### Souksakhone Vaenkeo

Laos and Vietnam have agreed to take the next steps to start construction of an expressway linking the capitals of Vientiane and Hanoi this year.

The agreement was reached at a bilateral meeting held in Hanoi on Tuesday between Laos' Ministry of Public Works and Transport and Vietnam's Ministry of Transport, the Voice of Vietnam (VOV) reported, citing the Vietnam News Agency.

Lao Minister of Public Works and Transport Dr Bounchanh Sinthavong led the Lao delegation attending the

meeting.

The ministries agreed to seek investment and support, firstly to carry out a feasibility study for the expressway.

A senior official at the Lao ministry's Road and Bridge Department told *Vientiane Times* yesterday that a primary study had already been carried out.

Citing the primary study, Vietnam's Thanh Nien News Agency reported previously that the cost of the six-lane 707-kilometre route was estimated at more than US\$4.5 billion.

During last week's meeting,

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## Luang Prabang honoured in regional awards scheme

### Souknilundon Southivongnorath

The Unique Tour offered to visitors to Luang Prabang was awarded a special prize on Wednesday by the Asean-Japan Centre at a ceremony held in Japan.

An official at the centre, Ms Junko Nukiyama, reported yesterday via social media that Laos was one of the winners chosen from among Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam to receive the award under the Mekong Tourism Award 2016, arranged by the Asean-Japan Centre.

She said the centre had selected five outstanding tour products offered in the four

countries as the winners of the Mekong Tourism Award 2016.

The categories comprised New Destination, Ecotourism, Unique Tour, Exchange Programme and Jury's Special Award, aiming to highlight the Visit ASEAN@50 that commemorates the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Asean and to promote tourism in the region in 2017.

The five tour products were chosen by the centre's judging committee, which was composed of members of the Japan Association of Travel Agents, Overseas Tour Operators Association of Japan, and Asean-Japan Centre.

The Unique Tour award was given for a seven-day tour of Lao

traditional textile centres and the World Heritage City of Luang Prabang.

The award presentation ceremony took place in Tokyo on March 8 and was attended by travel agencies that entered the award competition, Vice Commissioner of the Japan Tourism Agency Mr Kawarabayashi, and embassy representatives from the four countries.

This year, among the five awards, two New Destination Awards, one Unique Tour Award and one Exchange Programme Award and one Jury's Special Award were selected. No ecotourism award was given.

Luang Prabang is considered the top tourist destination in

Laos, with 83 percent of visitors citing it as their first choice, followed by Vientiane.

Tourists generally visit temples, admire the architecture, make trips to waterfalls and caves, and observe the lifestyle of local people while enjoying a wide range of local and international cuisines.

The province has regularly been voted as 'Best City' by readers of the UK's Wanderlust travel magazine. Luang Prabang has received the award on seven occasions, in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2015.

The Mekong Tourism Award 2015 also selected Laos' world heritage sites of Luang Prabang and Vat Phou Champassak as award winners last year.



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