

## INDIA-LAO PDR BILATERAL RELATIONS

India and Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) have historical and civilizational links reflected in common heritage of Buddhism and Ramakien (Ramayana). According to a legend, emissaries of King Asoka brought a relic of the Buddha to Laos, which are believed to have been placed underneath Pha That Luang, Laos' national monument, in Vientiane. UNESCO World Heritage Site of Vat Phou revered by Buddhists and others alike is an ancient Khmer Hindu temple complex in Southern Laos which was known as ancient Shiva temple of Bhadreswara. Ramayana (local version is called Ramakien or the Story of Phra Lak Phra Ram) is popular and revered in Laos and is performed on auspicious occasions.

India played a key role as the Chairman of the International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICSC) for Laos which was established following the Geneva Agreements of July 1954 for cessation of hostilities in Indo-China and withdrawal of French colonial power.

Bilateral relations with Laos have been long-standing, friendly and mutually supportive since diplomatic relations were established in 1956.

Institutional consultative mechanisms include Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) and Joint Commission Meeting (JCM). The 3rd FOC was held in Vientiane on 27 July 2023. The 9<sup>th</sup> JCM was held on 23 November 2018 in Vientiane.

Visits of Presidents of India to Lao PDR have been of Dr. Rajendra Prasad (March 1959) and Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil (September 2010). Vice President Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari paid an official visit in September 2015 (Official visit). From Laos, Presidential visits have been of Prince Souphanouvong, commonly known as the Red Prince – 1975 (Before Lao Revolution in which Lao People's Revolutionary Party took control of the country) and of Mr. Choummaly Sayasone – 26-30 August 2008 (State visit).

Prime Ministerial visits from India have been of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru (1954), Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee (November 2002, Official visit), Dr. Manmohan Singh – (November 2004, ASEAN-India Summit) and Shri Narendra Modi (September 2016, ASEAN-India Summit). Lao Prime Ministers visit to India have been of Mr Bounnhang Vorachit (June 15-22, 2003, State visit); Mr. Thongsing Thammavong (December 2012, ASEAN India Commemorative Summit); Dr. Thongloun Sisoulith (January 2018, ASEAN India Commemorative Summit).

**Voice of the Global South Summits:** For VOGSS3 held virtually on August 17, 2024, Lao PM Sonexay Siphandone joined PM Modi for the inaugural Leaders' session. In EAM-I session, Lao Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Thongphane Savanphet and in Health session, Lao Deputy Health Minister Dr. Snong Thongsna participated. For VOGSS2 held on 17 November 2023, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister (DPM&FM) Saleumxay Kommasith participated in Foreign Ministers' Session. Associate Professor Phout Simmalavong, Minister of Education and Sports participated in Education Ministers' Session of VOGSS2. He also participated in Education Ministers' session of VOGSS1 in January 2023.

**Cooperation during COVID-19 Pandemic:** On 12 June 2020, PM Modi spoke on phone with Dr. Thongloun Sisoulith, the then Prime Minister of Lao PDR. The two leaders exchanged views on the health and economic challenges posed by the global COVID-19 pandemic. On 04 August 2020, a consignment of medicines and medical supplies gifted by India to Lao PDR was handed over to Minister of Health of Lao PDR to support fight against COVID-19 pandemic. On 02 March 2023, 50,000 doses of Covovax vaccines were gifted to Lao PDR.

**Flood relief emergency assistance:** India sent emergency flood relief assistance to help Lao PDR in dealing with the floods after typhoon Yagi that have caused widespread damage and affected a large number of people. Flood relief supplies worth about USD 100,000 such as water purification tablets, blankets, mosquito nets, disinfectants, sleeping bags and a 30 KV genset were sent on-board a special aircraft of Indian Air Force on 15 September 2024 and handed over to Leepao Yang, Vice Minister of Labour and Social Welfare.

#### **Engagements during Lao ASEAN Chair term for 2024:**

EAM visited Vientiane on 25-27 July 2024 to participate in Foreign Ministers' Meetings under the ASEAN framework. EAM paid a courtesy call on PM Sonexay Siphandone and had bilateral meeting with DPM&FM Saleumxay Kommasith. Both ministers witnessed exchange of MoUs on 10 Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) for Laos under MGC and an MoU for 'Cooperation in the field of sharing successful digital solutions implemented at population scale for Digital Transformation. They also launched a special stamp set celebrating shared cultural heritage of Ramayana and Buddhism. EAM also interacted with Lao PDR Ministers of Home Affairs; of Industry and Commerce; Chairman, Foreign Affairs Committee of National Assembly; and Special Envoy on Myanmar. EAM also interacted with ICCR scholars from Lao PDR, and launched Common Yoga Protocol in Lao language.

Secretary (East) visited Lao PDR on June 6-9, 2024 for EAS and ARF SOM and then from 21-23 August 2024 to attend EAS Prep-SOM. On both occasions, he also had bilateral meeting with Lao PDR Deputy Foreign Minister and SOM leader Thongphan Savanphet.

**Media-Exchange:** Under ASEAN-India media exchange programme, a media delegation visited Laos on 01-03 July 2024 for interactions with ASEAN & Press Departments, Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs & at Ministry of Information, Culture & Tourism and also visited Vat Phou World Heritage Site.

**Human Resource Development:** Government of India has been providing scholarships annually to Lao nationals under various schemes. Under ITEC, Govt. of India provides short-term and a few long-term training courses in various areas to Lao nationals (government officials/nominees); so far about 1500 Lao nationals have been trained under ITEC. 18 scholarships to Lao students for pursuing undergraduate, postgraduate and Ph.D degrees are also awarded under ICCR/MGC. 5 students received ASEAN scholarship to study Master's program at Nalanda University for the academic batch 2022-24. 15 Lao PDR diplomats attended 2nd Special Course for diplomats at Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service (SSIFS), New Delhi from 27 March - 05 April 2024.

**Grant Assistance:** LIEDC (Lao-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre) set up in November 2004, trains Lao entrepreneurs for setting up small and medium scale business. It has so far trained more than 15,000 individuals. Centre for Excellence in Software Development and Training (CESDT) set up under ASEAN-India cooperation was inaugurated in Vientiane in November, 2018. So far, CESDT has imparted training to around 400 participants in different courses from different organizations of Lao PDR including government officials.

**Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) :** An umbrella agreement for Indian Grant Assistance for QIPs was signed between India and Lao PDR on 18 September, 2015 valid for 5 years, then extended for another five years in 2020. So far, MOUs for 26 QIPs have been signed, including for 10 QIPs during EAM visit in July 2024. Of earlier 16 projects, 11 projects have been completed/handed over to Lao side and 5 QIPs signed in July 2023 are under advanced stage of implementation.

**Heritage Conservation:** An MOU was signed with the Ministry of Information and Culture in May 2007 for the restoration of the UNESCO world heritage site at Vat Phu an ancient Shiva Temple. The work on the project began in June 2009. Eight seasons of restoration work in Phase I were completed in May 2017. Restoration project is currently in its second phase which commenced in November 2018 and would continue till 2028. A four-member team is presently undertaking season-IV of Phase II. Late Mr. Bounlap Keokangna who was the Deputy Director of World Heritage Management Office, Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, Champasak Province, was awarded Padma Sri in 2018 for his contribution to the restoration project being undertaken by ASI.

**Lines of Credit:** LoCs worth USD 236.23 million have been extended/offered to Laos for irrigation schemes, power transmission and distribution, and solar and hydroelectric projects. Projects completed under GoI LoCs include 115 KV Transmission Line from

Ban-Na in Champassak Province to Attapeu; Equipment for rural electrification; Pakson-Jaingxai- Bangyo Transmission Line and Nam Song 7.5 MW Hydropower Project; Irrigation schemes in Champassak Province comprising 3 components: (a) Conversion of diesel to electric driven pump sets & improvement of 3 pumping stations, (b) installation of ten large pump sets and (c) six large irrigation schemes; A 230 KV Double Circuit Transmission Line from Nabong to Thabok and substations; conversion and commissioning of diesel driven pumps into electric pumps have been completed.

**Bilateral Trade:** Current bilateral trade (for 2023-24) is USD 112.6 million USD with India's imports being USD 99.7 million and India's exports being USD 12.9 million. Following decline during Covid-19, bilateral trade registered growth of 23.4% in 2023-24 over the previous year. India's exports are primarily pharmaceutical products, vehicles, machinery and mechanical appliances while imports are of precious metals and articles thereof and wood and articles of wood. India has accorded Duty Free Tariff Preference Scheme (DFTP) to Lao PDR. The Scheme grants Laos duty free access to a large majority of India's total tariff lines.

**India-Laos Business Forum:** Embassy in collaboration with the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) and ASEAN India Business Council (AIBC) organised India-Laos Business Forum on 12 February 2024 in Vientiane. Forum was launched by Malaythong Kommasith, Minister of Industry and Commerce. Forum saw participation of more than 170 business leaders representing more than 100 companies. An MoU was signed between Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) as also between ICC and AIBC to promote business linkages.

**Launch of special stamp set:** A special commemorative postage stamp set by Lao PDR on the theme of "Celebrating shared cultural heritage of Lao PDR and India" was unveiled jointly by EAM and Lao DPM&FM in Vientiane on 27 July 2024.

**International Day of Yoga :** As a part of celebrations of 10<sup>th</sup> International Day of Yoga (IDY), the Embassy organized flagship event in Vientiane on 22 June 2024 along with Lao Ministry of Health and Sports. Assoc. Prof. Phouth Simmalavong, Minister of Education and Sports, was the Chief Guest for this event. More than 800 participants attended the event. 10<sup>th</sup> IDY events were held in ten locations in four cities of Lao PDR.

**7th India International Ramayana Mela :** 14 artists from prestigious and acclaimed Royal Ballet Theater, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR visited India from 15-31 Jan 2024 to participate in the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of 'India International Ramayana Mela' from 18-21 January 2024 at Purana Qila, New Delhi, and performances in Ayodhya and Lucknow organised by ICCR.

**Youth Exchange Programme:** A nine-member youth delegation from various universities and academic institutions of Lao PDR and four representatives of Ministry

of Education and Sports of Lao PDR visited India to attend the National Cadet Corps - Youth Exchange Programme from 15-29 January 2024 and Republic Day Functions.

**ASEAN:** Lao PDR is chair of ASEAN for 2024. As part of India's support to Lao ASEAN Chairmanship, India has provided IT equipment of USD 14072/- to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lao PDR, and 15 Lao diplomats attended a special course at SSIFS from 27<sup>th</sup> March to 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2024. The course was also focused on Protocol related training and activities.

**Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC):** MGC region is an important element of India's Act East Policy as well as PM Modi's vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR). The 12<sup>th</sup> MGC Foreign Ministers' Meeting Co-chaired by Laos and India was held in Bangkok on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2023. Lao PDR extended support as a Country Coordinator. The Quick Impact Projects under MGC (26 so far) are delivering grass-root development. Under MGC framework, more than 30 officials attended training in various fields in India during the past year.

**Indians duped into cyber-scam centres:** Recent months have seen a number of Indian youth duped by fake job offers into cyber-scam centres operating from Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone (GTSEZ) and illegal work e.g. in mines in Laos. So far 667 Indians have been safely rescued by the Embassy and repatriated to India. A group of 47 Indian youth was rescued after recent action by Lao authorities on criminal syndicates operating such cyber scams centres from GTSEZ. Matter has been taken up with Lao side at highest levels, including by EAM with Lao PM during his visit to Vientiane in July 2024. At the Indian end, action has been taken by Indian authorities on agents on the basis of actionable information provided by the Embassy, including arrests by NIA, and wide dissemination of detailed advisories by the Embassy, MEA and other authorities.

**Indian community:** About 500-strong Indian community is largely engaged in jewellery trade, the restaurant and hotel industry, manufacturing, garments, mining, plantations and agar wood. A few members work for international organizations, multinationals, consulting organizations and private businesses.

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**15 September 2024**