

## Khammuan confiscates large illegal timber haul

Yommalath district authorities in Khammuan province this week seized illegally harvested timber which was hidden inside a shipping container and buried underground at a sawmill in Donpeuay village.

The incident was outlined by local media after provincial Forest Inspection Division officials teamed up with local authorities to inspect the target area.

A Khammuan province Forest Inspection Division official told Vientiane Times yesterday the team found 2,570 pieces (both small and large) of illegally harvested timber including mai dou (*Pterocarpus macrocarpus*) and mai tae khar (*Sindora cochinchinensis*) varieties.

Near the target area, the officials also unearthed pieces of mai kha young (rosewood) buried and covered with plastic.

Officers believe a gang of timber traders was responsible for collecting the illegal shipment and were preparing to transport it to neighbouring countries.

Police said the provincial inspection unit could not say where the wood came from as they had yet to conclude their investigations.

Meanwhile, officials at Namphao-Chalo border crossing between Khammuan province and Vietnam recently found over 400 pieces of illegally harvested timber hidden inside a water tanker as it was preparing to enter Vietnam.

Namphao international checkpoint officials reported their haul included 242 pieces of mai dou and 168 pieces of timber known locally as mai moon, which is also a valuable species.

Provincial officials also destroyed a large quantity of chainsaws that were thought to be used for illegal logging, demonstrating government efforts to ramp up management and inspection of the unlawful activity.

Provincial police and authorities confiscated almost 1,000 chainsaws from villagers in Thakhaek district, and more from Khounkham and Xaybuathong districts.

According to initial data from a taskforce committee, more than 55,421 cubic metres of illegally felled wood has been impounded since a Prime Ministerial order was issued last year.

Also confiscated were a number of vehicles and equipment used for illegal logging, including 11 snigging trucks, a bulldozer, a log crane vehicle, and a Toyota Fortuner.

Khammuan is one of many provinces across the country in which illegal logging poses a challenge for officials.

To address the issue, authorities are making an extra effort to clamp down on illegal logging following the order issued by Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith in May last year, which banned the export of unfinished wood products.

By Times Reporters  
(Latest Update February 17, 2017)

## Huge haul of illegally felled wood seized at Vietnam border crossing

Officials at the Napao-Chalo border crossing between Khammuan province and Vietnam on Tuesday found 410 pieces of illegally harvested timber hidden inside a water tanker as it was preparing to enter Vietnam.

Head of the Napao international checkpoint, Mr Phoumeuang Keochanla, told Vientiane Times that their haul included 242 pieces of mai dou (macrocarpus) and 168 pieces of timber known locally as mai moon , which is also a valuable wood species.

Three Lao nationals were hired to transport the wood to Vietnam across the border, he said. It is believed a group of Vietnamese hired labourers who were repairing a road at the border crossing to transport the wood and they obtained the water tanker to carry the timber into Vietnam.

Based on social media reports, the wood was confiscated by border authorities at 2:20pm on Tuesday. The provincial inspection unit could not say where the wood came from as they had yet to receive a report about the incident.

This is not the first time that authorities have seized timber being transported illegally across this border, Mr Phoumeuang said.

The authorities are making an extra effort to clamp down on illegal logging following the order issued by Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith in May, which banned the export of unfinished wood products.

Last month Khammuan province destroyed chainsaws that were thought to be used for illegal logging, demonstrating that the government is ramping up the management and inspection of logging.

The police and authorities confiscated almost 1,000 chainsaws from villagers in Thakhaek district, and more from Khounkham and Xaybuathong districts.

According to initial data from a taskforce committee, more than 55,421 cubic metres of illegally felled wood has been impounded since the order was issued.

Also confiscated were a number of vehicles and equipment used for illegal logging, including 11 snigging trucks, a bulldozer, a log crane vehicle, and a Toyota Fortuner.

By Khonesavanh Latsaphao  
(Latest Update January 05, 2017)

## Ministry reveals plan to end forest encroachment

Laos is planning to put a complete stop to unregulated logging and forest encroachment by restoring forests through the replanting of trees and forest protection.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry explained the plan at its annual meeting held in Vientiane last week.

As a step in this direction, the ministry has vowed to enforce the implementation of Prime Minister's Order No.15, along with related laws, regulations, and conventions.

Prime Minister ThonglounSisoulith issued the order in May to strengthen the management and inspection of logging and businesses involved in the transport of wood and associated activities.

The order has so far successfully curbed harmful practices in the forestry sector and timber industry, while restoring public trust in the Party and government.

Over the next four years the ministry plans to complete the demarcation and allocation of some 4.7 million hectares of national protected areas and protected areas in provinces, districts and villages, and 8.2 million hectares of protection forests.

Meanwhile, the ministry is aiming to plant trees on 80,000 hectares on the way to achieving forest cover of 500,000 hectares by 2020.

Speaking at the meeting, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry MrThongphathVongmany said "Getting tough about carrying out the Prime Minister's order, related laws and regulations, and international conventions, is our first step in attaining the planned targets.

He said the dissemination of the Party direction and state law on forestry was an important part of this plan along with strengthening laws and regulations so that they comply with the current circumstances.

Other measures to achieve the ministry's goals are formulating concrete policy with regard to the growth of the wood processing industry, the participation of communities and businesses in tree planting, forest restoration, and forest management and protection.

The ministry suggested that to finance these measures, they would consider reasonable taxation on land used for tree planting, and recognition of the right to use forested land, to be approved by the government.

Other suggested policies include the use or processing of planted trees instead of natural trees, closer cooperation between the government and the parties involvement in forest management, restoration and protection, and policy on environmental service payment by developers who use forests or impact on forests, such as hydropower dams, mining projects, and nature-based tourism.

The promotion of ecotourism, participation in the carbon trade, and incentives for forest protection officials to work with local communities were also included in the ministry's proposal to realise the government's policy on forest restoration.

By SomxaySengdara  
(Latest Update January 4, 2017)

## Japanese project furthers wood processing in Laos

A project for developing human resources in the wood processing industry has achieved success, helping to improve the quality of wood products and provide new marketing tools for Laos.

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce's Industry and Handicrafts Department and the Okawa Chamber of Commerce and Industry yesterday organised a final workshop to summarise the project, which ran over a period of two years.

The cooperation project was funded by Okawa City in Japan through the Okawa Chamber of Commerce and Industry at a cost of US\$600,000.

The project began in 2015 and will end next year, aiming to develop human resources in the wood processing industry.

Human resource development was important in all areas of work as it was key to development, and especially this project, officials noted, which was enabling the efficient use of raw materials and improved production standards. The government considers human resource development as an important issue especially in the wood processing industry and forest management.

It is in line with Prime Ministerial Order No. 15, which aims to ensure the effective management and use of timber through the processing and adding of value to products before their export.

The project has provided wood processing training on eight occasions and furniture processing training on seven occasions.

Those to undergo the training included Lao carpenters and teachers from different furniture manufacturers, sawmills and vocational schools, under the supervision of Japanese carpenters, according to the press release.

The project also held wood and furniture processing training in Japan, especially in Okawa City, and selected two carpenters to participate in the Asean labour contest in Malaysia.

The course helped improve participants' skills and increased their labour knowledge in the wood and furniture processing industry to add more value to the projects produced.

Participants also increased their understanding about how to maintain and use wood machines, wood and furniture processing techniques, colour painting, transportation and exhibitions.

Despite the project period being short, it still helped develop Lao skills in the furniture and wood processing industry according to Industry and Handicrafts Department Director General, Mr Manohak Rasachack.

The workshop was co-chaired by the Director of the Okawa Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mr Yuichiro Tsumura.

By Times Reporters  
(Latest Update December 13, 2016)

## 28 wood processing factories ordered to shut down

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce has ordered the closure of 28 wood processing factories located near and inside forest areas by next month.

The ministry yesterday issued a notification requiring the immediate removal or closure of 28 wood processing factories located close to or within preserved forests, protected forests, prohibited forests and planted forests, as they violate the regulations.

Provincial departments of industry and commerce in Oudomxay, Borikhamxay, Xaysomboun, Savannakhet, Saravan and Champassak, where the factories are located, have been assigned to coordinate with provincial agencies to remove or close the factories.

The authorities have been instructed to notify the factory owners and request their acknowledgement and co-operation in carrying out the order in line with the government's decision.

The provincial departments are required to report on the progress made in shutting down or removing the factories to the ministry every Friday.

The move follows Prime Minister's Order No. 15 which was issued recently to tighten the rules on the management and inspection of logging, timber movement and the wood industry, which also bans the export of unfinished wood products.

To implement the order, the relevant sectors have been inspecting over-quota amounts of timber exploitation, the felling of trees without permission, the cutting of wood in preserved and protected forests, and businesses and people involved in the illegal felling of wood, the ministry said.

Following an inspection by a taskforce committee, 28 factories were found to be violating the regulations. The inspection also found that 1,154 family-run furniture workshops across the country were operating without licences and would be subject to closure, the government spokesman Prof. Dr Chaleun Yiapaoher told local media recently.

Director General of the Industry and Handicraft Department under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Mr Manolack Rasachak, told Vientiane Times yesterday that action to address the illegal operations of family-run furniture workshops would be the next step.

We will also take action to regulate more than 1,000 licensed wood processing and furniture plants, to ensure their operations meet the required standards, he said.

Initial data reported recently by the taskforce committee show that more than 55,421 cubic metres of illegal timber has been seized. A number of vehicles and equipment used for illegal logging including 11 snigging trucks, a bulldozer, a log crane, and a Toyota Fortuner were also confiscated. Some 1,253 chainsaws were also seized and destroyed.

The ministry warned that strict measures would be taken without exception and that business registration would be withdrawn for operations found to be in violation of the regulations.

By Souksakhone Vaenkeo  
(Latest Update November 29, 2016)

## Govt aims to restore forest cover to 70 percent by 2020

The government has developed a strategy to restore forest cover to 70 percent of the country's terrain by 2020, meaning trees will need to be planted on about 8.2 million hectares of land.

Deforestation and forest degradation have denuded large areas of Laos since the 1940s when forests covered over 70 percent of the country's land area. But cover dramatically decreased to less than 40 percent in the 1990s and there has been no change in this trend.

The situation was outlined on Friday at the Inception Meeting on Promoting Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) in Laos.

In line with government strategy, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) has initiated support to promote the implementation of forest and landscape restoration in Laos. This work will be implemented through the FAO Technical Cooperation Programme project Promoting Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) in Selected Southeast Asian Countries.

The new project will build on progress made in an earlier regional Technical Cooperation Programme project Applying assisted natural regeneration for restoring forest ecosystem services in Southeast Asia, which was completed in September 2015.

The present project aims to promote the use of a FLR approach in the region through the development of practical methods, related awareness raising, capacity building, and implementation of pilot activities.

Friday's meeting sought to raise awareness of FLR principles as a means to restore forests for policy makers, practitioners, researchers and other relevant forestry stakeholders in Laos and to introduce the FAO-Lao project for Forest and Landscape Restoration.

During the meeting, government officials from line ministries concerned, technical officials from provincial and district agriculture offices in the targeted areas, and international and local NGOs heard an overview of the regional project to restore forest cover, and an outline of the Lao government policy concerning forest landscape restoration and other related issues.

Participants were keen to learn the main global, regional and national FLR initiatives and better understand the forest landscape restoration approach and why it is being piloted in Laos.

The meeting was attended by the Deputy Director General of the Department of Forestry under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Mr Boualy Phameuang, FAO Representative in Laos Dr Stephen Rudgard, and other guests from line ministries and international and local NGOs.

By Times Reporters  
(Latest Update November 22, 2016)

## Saravan fails to auction wood as agreed

Saravan provincial authorities have found that 82 lots of wood whose purchase and sale had been approved were not sold at auction.

In their third meeting on timber industry inspection in Saravan, the authorities reported that the provincial Commerce and Industry Department put wood up for auction 115 times from 2011-2014, but only 33 lots of wood were sold.

An official from the provincial Agriculture and Forestry Department, who asked not to be named, confirmed on Friday that 82 lots of wood were not auctioned and said provincial authorities were correct in their assessment.

Eighty-two lots of wood were not put up for auction because they had the same price as the 33 lots already auctioned, so we didn't attempt to sell them, the official said.

The meeting agreed that more auctions should be held in the future.

The 82 lots of wood that were not auctioned comprised 17,675 cubic metres of timber valued at about US\$8.3 million (about 67.6 billion kip).

An anonymous official from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry said that if the wood was not auctioned, this contravened the regulations. He said it was possible that this quantity of wood was not auctioned because it was harvested from inappropriate forest areas.

Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith issued Order No. 15 in May this year banning the export of unfinished wood products.

In August, over 600 unlawful chainsaws were handed over by residents of Saravan villages to provincial authorities while officials confiscated others in forests and along roadsides.

According to the third inspection meeting in Saravan last week, the authorities confiscated 115,144 pieces of illegal timber in nine months of the last fiscal year.

In addition, 50 provincial officials in Saravan were investigated by the authorities and found to have been receiving bribes over the past five years. Many billions of kip were lost as a result.

The 50 officials were found guilty of embezzlement after nine locations were checked.

The inspection authorities estimate that the state has lost more than 5 billion kip due to the payment of bribes to these officials, with provincial authorities only able to recoup 67 million kip.

Based on a report tabled at the meeting, the provincial inspection authorities found that the 50 officials had been involved in the illegal felling, purchase and sale of timber, with about 9,000 cubic metres of timber thought to have been illegally removed.

According to a report presented at the 3rd Congress of the Inspection Committee of the Party Central Committee held in Vientiane recently, more than 4,807 billion kip has been lost to corruption over the past five years and 734 targets were involved, a top anti-corruption body reported.

By Khonesavanh Latsaphao  
(Latest Update November 12, 2016)



## Laos, Vietnam extend partnership to combat illegal logging, poaching

Laos and Vietnam are furthering their cooperation with regard to tackling illegal logging and poaching, which continue to occur along their shared border.

Director General of the Department of Forest Inspection under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Mr Khamphout Phandanouvong, told Vientiane Times on Wednesday that the Lao and Vietnamese governments had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on forest protection that encompasses both illegal logging and illicit products made from wild animals.

The MoU will be ratified by Lao and Vietnamese provinces that share a border. The memorandum runs for three years, from 2017 to 2020.

So far, Huaphan, Borikhamxay, Khammuan and Attapeu provinces have signed the agreement with their respective Vietnamese neighbours to guard against the export of illegally procured timber and animal life, Mr Khamphout said.

Xekong and Saravan provinces have yet to sign the memorandum.

Laos and Vietnam are still implementing the previous memorandum which was signed in 2012 and ends in 2017.

Mr Khamphout said much progress had been made against illegal operations in the border area since the ratification of the memorandum in 2012.

In the past, the two countries did not directly cooperate with each other on the issue of illegal timber and wildlife exports.

A drop in the export of products illegally sourced from forests resulted from the cooperation of the two countries after the signing of the first memorandum.

Attapeu province in Laos and Kon Tum province in Vietnam signed the second MoU in Vietnam on October 19. The two provinces will cooperate closely on exchanging information and intelligence related to the prevention and elimination of illegal logging and poaching in their border area.

Each party also agreed to intensify strict monitoring of the import and export of timber and wildlife along their border.

The new MoU includes several provisions that improve upon the previous one. A cooperative awareness-raising campaign will be carried out to educate people living in the border area about the importance of protecting natural resources and conserving biodiversity.

The awareness campaign targets these groups because they often either participate in illegal activities or have valuable intelligence concerning perpetrators.

The increased cooperation will also include additional training for military personnel, police and customs officers along the border in addition to direct cooperation on handling cases.

By Times Reporters  
(Latest Update November 10, 2016)



## PM discourages timber use on farms

The prime minister has advised dragon fruit grower Hoang Anh Gia Lai Group, which operates a plantation in Attapeu province, not to use timber including dead wood as supports in the cultivation of the crop.

Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith gave the advice to the company while visiting the dragon fruit farm in Attapeu from October 15-16.

Mr Thongloun also met with crop growers, livestock and fishery breeders, and businesspeople to promote commercial agriculture production, and discussed operations at Attapeu International Airport with relevant officials.

An anonymous provincial official told Vientiane Times on Tuesday the province will advise the Hoang Anh Gia Lai Group to use concrete posts to grow its dragon fruit after the prime minister advised them not to use wood.

The company began planting the fruit on a 500 hectare site in the middle of this year.

We instructed each of the province's districts to use concrete posts on dragon fruit farms after the prime minister issued Order No. 15 on May 13 banning the export of unfinished wood products, the official said.

Smaller pieces of timber, particularly dead or salvaged wood, is often collected by villagers from woods near rice fields to build fences, with scrap wood also used as fuel for cooking and heating.

The company sought permission from the provincial Administration Office to use this kind of wood to make supports for the cultivation of dragon fruit and has been buying dead wood from local people.

In its proposal to the provincial Administration Office, the company pointed out that locally collected wood was much cheaper than using concrete posts.

According to the Forestry Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the government has prohibited the logging of dead trees in forest areas for several years to prevent timber from being illegally harvested.

Many trees die each year, some due to old age, in forests, or on riversides and by the sides of reservoirs.

In the past, scores of logging trucks could be seen on roads every day in some parts of the country, prompting concerns that Laos' forests may soon be stripped of all big trees. But now many trucks seem to have disappeared from the roads.

The government planned to increase forest cover nationwide to 65 percent of the land surface area by 2015 and to 70 percent by 2020.

By Khonesavanh Latsaphao  
(Latest Update October 19, 2016)

## Update on wooden product exports allowed and prohibited

An updated list of wooden products allowed for and prohibited from export has been released in a move to regulate timber businesses, while closing loopholes for illegal logging.

The government spokesman DrChaleunYiapaoher issued a press statement yesterday disclosing the new list. Of which, 12 categories of wooden products are allowed for export and another 12 categories are prohibited from export.

Wooden products prohibited from export are columns; columns and laminated beams; large tables, chairs made from a piece of timber and cutting boards having a large size.

Planted timber having a large size; other black charcoals; S2S, S4S E4E decking; moulded timber products, truck body joinery; coffins; balustrades and stair rails, as well as laminated stair rails are also prohibited.

Wooden products allowed for export included wooden briquettes, pellets; white charcoal and sawdust charcoal; wooden parquet, interior flooring; plywood; wooden handle products, builders' joinery, wooden carpentry and other articles of wood.

Wooden furniture; bamboo and rattan products; split poles; piles, pickets, wooden stakes and sawn wood; wood shaving, sawdust and wood chips are also permitted for export.

Those 12 main categories listed for export also comprise many more sub-categories. However, permission for their export also depends on their size and thickness meaning that those products bigger or thicker than the allocated size are prohibited from being exported.

DrChaleun said the Ministry of Industry and Commerce issued its decision early this month detailing the sub-categories and the size.

The ministry warned businesses not to export any timber products which are not in the permitted list.

The move had been made in line with the outcomes of the recent meeting between Prime Minister ThonglounSoulith and his deputies, the spokesman said.

The government had instructed the ministry to pay great attention to implementing the measures explained above and report the outcome to the government on a monthly basis, DrChaleun said.

By Times Reporters  
(Latest Update October 12, 2016)

## Thousands of cubic metres veneer legitimate for export

More than 12,456 cubic metres of veneer exports have been permitted despite the government prohibiting the export of all types of unfinished wooden products.

The government granted permission recently and instructed the Ministry of Industry and Commerce to collect information about the amount of veneer that should be legitimately granted export permission.

Latest information collected by the ministry showed that more than 12,456 cubic metres manufactured by factories in six provinces were legitimate for export.

The six provinces that produced the veneers are Saravan, Borikhamxay, Khammuan, Savannakhet, Champasak and Attapeu.

So far, about 700 cubic metres of the veneer had been exported, while the rest will continue to be exported, Director General of the Industry and Handicraft Department, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Mr-ManolackRasachak told Vientiane Times yesterday.

The government spokesman DrChaleunYiapaohar said recently that among unfinished wooden products, only veneer is permitted for export.

The permission came after the government had considered that veneer, which is wood that has been rolled into sheets that are usually 0.1-0.3 millimetres thick, 120 cm wide and 250 cm long, would easily deteriorate if left unprocessed into finished products.

But domestic businesses are unable to process the veneer into the finished products.

However, DrChaleun confirmed the government would permit the export of only the 12,456 cubic metres by manufacturers who had signed contracts with foreign buyers.

This means the government prohibits domestic factories from carrying out any further manufacturing of the veneer, which is part of the government's measures to close loopholes for illegal logging.

“The government will not grant further permission for a business to export veneer in excess of the amount stated in the contract they have made with the buyer,” he said.

Other timber including partially processed timber was strictly prohibited from export regardless if contracts with foreign buyers were made unless the wood was processed into finished products, DrChaleun stated.

He also informed that the government had instructed relevant ministries to work with local authorities to study appropriate policy if timbers harvested from plantations should be allowed for export or not.

The move came after the government issued, on May 13, Prime Ministerial Order No.15 that bans the export of unfinished wooden products, which are made from logs originating from natural forests.

With the Prime Ministerial Order not mentioning if timber harvested from plantations was prohibited from export or not, local authorities were confused with some provinces reportedly permitting exports while some did not. Thus the government later ordered the suspension of exports for plantation trees, but asking the ministries to work out a policy to regulate the issue.

By SouksakhoneVaenkeo  
(Latest Update August 18, 2016)

## Authorities seize illegal timber in Savannakhet province

A huge quantity of contraband timber has been seized in Savannakhet province over the past three months since Prime Minister ThonglounSisoulith issued an order to clamp down on illegal logging.

Authorities inspect a load of timber at Dansavan-Lao Bao international border checkpoint in Savannakhet province recently.

Authorities recently seized illegal timber at Dansavan-Lao Bao international border checkpoint in Savannakhet province as a result of two separate inspections on trucks attempting to cross the border to Vietnam, according to a report from the PM's office on Thursday.

The first confiscation of illegal timber took place on July 29 when authorities inspected trucks carrying wood products for an exhibition in Da Nang of Vietnam.

Authorities not only inspected freight documents but also ordered traders to unload their cargo for scrutiny before finding 9.1 cubic metres of undocumented timber hidden in the trucks. This excluded additional undocumented wooden flower vases and other illegal processed timber with a total weight of 396 kg.

On August 2, authorities seized 34 pieces of undocumented rosewood with a total weight of 450 kg at Dansavan-Lao Bao international border checkpoint which was hidden on a bus heading to Vietnam.

According to the report, authorities not only confiscated all the undocumented timber but also aimed to prosecute traders attempting to export the contraband to other countries.

Director of Savannakhet Provincial Department of Agriculture and Forestry MrKhamluayYarttivong told Vientiane Times yesterday that illegal logging was continuing in his province despite the government's best efforts to address the issue.

“We have often seized illegal timber which is hidden on buses and private vehicles, not only at the border checkpoints but also at a number of places on their way to the border,” he said.

“However, the quantity seized each time isn't a lot as traders don't risk hiding large volumes of illegal timber for export.”

MrKhamluay said a taskforce has been established in the province to inspect illegal logging activities in the aftermath of the Prime Minister's Order No 15 which was issued on May 13.

The order aimed to close loopholes in illegal logging and the cross-border trade of logs by banning the export of all types of unprocessed wood products including logs and timber.

Additionally, the government told local authorities that all logs and timber were not allowed to be removed from forests and urged local authorities to inspect all wood/timber-related business activities.

MrKhamluay said many hundreds of cubic metres of illegal timber had been seized since the issuing of the PM's order. He thanked the government for its strong show of force in cracking down on illegal logging.

“Currently we employ an X-ray system to scan illegal logs and therefore I don't think undocumented timber can pass through our inspection processes,” he said.

Over the past three months, several provinces have seized illegal timber/logs after enforcing the PM's order. For instance, more than 9,000 cubic metres of illegal timber has been seized in Attapeu province.

## Laos, Thailand continue cooperation

Lao and Thai officials met in Bangkok to continue their cooperation in development, investment and combatting illegal trafficking between the two nations.

In response to an invitation by Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand Mr Don Pramudwunai, Lao Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Saleumxay Kommasith made a two-day official visit to Thailand from August 9-10.

During the bilateral discussions, Laos and Thailand approved cooperation against the movement of wrongdoers that are trafficking in illicit goods, engaged in the illegal drug trade, illegal logging, human trafficking or creating insecurity along the borders of the two countries.

The Lao and Thai ministers also discussed border marker installation, with border demarcation remaining in 14 localities which is supposed to be finished this year, as well as water border marker installation, which is scheduled to be completed in 2018.

In 2014, the trade between Laos and Thailand was about US\$5.6 million, but as of last year, the value of commerce had increased to more than US\$2,105 million.

Because of that they will continue seeking further cooperation in economics, trade and investment.

Besides that, the transportation of goods crossing the borders must be improved for faster goods delivery, especially for the goods services from Laos sent to third countries via Thailand.

The cooperation of energy, labour, education and the development of infrastructure was also discussed while Minister Saleumxay visited.

The dredging of sand and gravel along the Mekong River between Laos and Thailand was also mentioned during the meetings.

By Times Reporters  
(Latest Update August 11, 2016)

## Illegal chainsaws remain hidden in Saravan

Forest officials in Saravan province will continue encouraging villagers to hand in their illegal chainsaws with authorities suspecting that many are still concealed.

Last week, over 600 unlawful chainsaws were handed over by people in villages to provincial authorities while officials confiscated others in forests and along roadsides.

An official from the provincial Agriculture and Forestry Department, who asked not to be named, told Vientiane Times on Wednesday they were aware that some people were still hiding their chainsaws in their homes and rice fields.

“The people hiding their unauthorised chainsaws from authorities are believed to be using them to cut trees for household firewood,” he revealed.

The department didn't have figures for the exact number of trees cut down in the lead up to the crackdown on illegal chainsaws. Saravan provincial authorities' efforts follow Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith issuing Order No. 15 on May 13 banning the export of unfinished wood products.

Another official Mr Hinkeo Prasansack mentioned that most of chainsaws destroyed recently were from villagers in the five districts of Saravan, Lao-ngam, Vapy, Toumlan and Lakhonpheng because authorities encouraged locals to hand over their unlawful items.

Some chainsaws were seized in forests but illegal loggers weren't caught because they fled the scene just leaving their equipment behind which meant authorities couldn't bring them to justice.

Most illegal items destroyed had come from people in villages. He also said they were buying them from Chinese vendors; however, this was the responsibility of the provincial Commerce and Industry Department.

Mr Hinkeo added that lawful chainsaws were registered with the provincial Agriculture and Forestry Department mostly used at sawmills, and each year they needed to be reregistered.

Since the prime minister instructed that all types of forest be closed to logging by June 1, all parties have been prohibited from collecting or removing logs from forest collection yards known locally as Sanam I.

So far, only Xekong province has prosecuted illegal loggers who cut down 70 Long leng trees in forests along the Laos-Vietnam border at the end of last month.

By Khonesavanh Latsaphao  
(Latest Update August 11, 2016)

## Furniture makers will have plenty of wood, PM assures

Lao wood processing businesses making furniture and other wood products for domestic supply and export will have sufficient raw materials, Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith has confirmed.

Speaking at the 40th Lao Business Awards in Vientiane last week after the new government strictly implemented forestry management plans for green development and sustainability by banning logging and timber exports, Mr. Thongloun said large quantities of logs and timber have been seized.

Timber exports have stopped since a government clampdown involving regular inspections. The numbers in relation to illegal logging are not yet clear but the Prime Minister believed that illegally felled wood that had been impounded could be passed on to furniture makers for the next seven to eight years.

But ensuring the prevention of illegal logging and forestry protection will require strong support from every sector of government and privately owned businesses, Mr. Thongloun stressed.

The government will direct the relevant sectors to crack down on wrongdoers, he added.

Some businesses have received export quotas from local authorities but this permission has not been scrutinised by the central government.

“If we declare that we have banned logging and timber exports until the country secures the highest benefits, then we should uphold this ban,” Mr. Thongloun said.

He stressed that no logs or trees that have been felled should be removed from forests or other land after they have been cut up for sale.

The move has been welcomed by furniture makers, who were worried about a lack of raw materials, but after the recent confiscations they are confident they will have plenty of wood to work with for some time to come.

The confiscated wood is expected to be put up for bidding by the government.

Every piece of wood should be turned into finished products such as furniture or wood carvings to maximise their value for the benefit of Laos, Mr. Thongloun said.

In previous years, the government collected only about US\$20 million in taxes from timber exports but Laos has actually sold wood products to neighbouring countries worth hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

The issue caused the government to lose large amounts of revenue, which has impacted on socio-economic development.

The new government believes that encouraging the manufacture of furniture products and wood carvings will bring in more revenue and create more employment opportunities. The Lao Furniture Association has asked for 30 percent of the government's annual wood quota to sustain its members' operations but this has yet to be approved.

By Times Reporters  
(Latest Update August 1, 2016)



## Sufficient wood despite end to logging quota: furniture association

Laos will still have sufficient wood, perhaps even an excess, to meet the needs of the processing industry, even though the government has put a stop to its annual logging quota, the Lao Furniture Association (LFA) has said.

The government agreed at a meeting held in Vientiane last week between the cabinet, Vientiane Mayor and provincial governors to stop allocating an annual logging quota in an attempt to close loopholes for illegal logging.

This means that wood needed for processing purposes will be sourced from commercial plantations and trees that must be felled to make way for development projects such as roads, hydropower plants and mining operations.

The move is one of the measures the government has employed in an attempt to combat illegal logging – a chronic issue that has caused the loss of billions of kip over the years.

Earlier, the government ordered that logging be banned in all forests starting on June 1. On May 13, Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith issued an order that banned the export of all types of unfinished wood products.

President of the LFA Khamphay Somsana told Vientiane Times yesterday that the association welcomed the government's move in this matter.

He suggested that domestic processing would not suffer in the absence of quota allocations, saying that the quantity of wood from other sources – plantations and development projects – was large enough to satisfy demand.

“The amount of wood that can be obtained from trees felled to clear land for development projects is enormous – more than enough to meet domestic processing needs,” he said, adding that this was the case only if the harvested trees were not exported.

Previously, the government permitted about 200,000 cubic metres of wood to be cut annually on average, including wood to be used for domestic processing.

But statistics provided by Vietnamese and Chinese authorities suggest that more than one million cubic metres of wood is exported to these countries across border checkpoints in a single year.

Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Thongphat Vongmany said recently that in past decades Laos has failed to promote the wood processing industry because larger trees were exported rather than processed domestically.

He said value had not been added to Laos' timber resources, the wood processing industry had not been developed to create jobs, the skills of Lao craftsmen had not been improved and, worse, Laos had lost more than it gained from the exploitation of its forests. Mr Khamphay said the LFA, which has about 80 members, had not directly benefited much from the previously allocated logging quota, even though the government had agreed to give the association about 30 percent of the annual overall quota.

“In reality, we got much less than the promised 30 percent as the quota was mostly given to logging businesses and we had to buy our wood from them,” he said.

Mr Khamphay was optimistic that if the government's ban on the export of unprocessed wood, including trees harvested from plantations, is fully realised, it will be a significant boost to the domestic processing industry.

Businesses would bring in modern equipment and technologies to process the wood into finished products for both domestic sale and export, he added.

Despite the government's decision to end the annual logging quota, observers warned authorities to carry out inspections to make sure that trees are felled only in areas needed by development projects.

Previous reports suggest that project developers cut down trees on a far larger area than was necessary.

By Souksakhone Vaenkeo  
(Latest Update July 5, 2016)

## Revenue gain not equal to forestry losses: Govt

Even though more than US\$100 million has been generated in national revenue from the timber industry over the past 10 years, this is insufficient to compensate for the loss of the country's forestry resources.

Large numbers of big trees have been felled across the country but the revenue earned from the sale of timber falls far short of the true value of forestry loss.

Minister to the Prime Minister's Office and Government Spokesman, Dr Chaleun Yiapaoher, expressed regret over what the country had lost over the past decade when speaking to the media recently.

“When I studied in Vietnam in 2005 I noted that the value of Vietnam's exports of wood products to China, Japan and other countries was US\$5 billion annually,” Dr Chaleun said.

“But the amount that Laos earned from felling trees over the past 10 years that actually reached the government's budget was between US\$100 million and US\$200 million.”

Forestry officials said losses in revenue from the timber industry were triggered by several factors including past timber exports mainly being in the form of raw timber or partially processed logs, meaning value had not been added through processing the wood. Another factor was corruption on the part of officials and illegal logging, which resulted in a decline in forestry over the past years.

Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Dr Lien Thikeyo told a forestry meeting recently that the management of forests and the timber industry in recent years had been complicated and financial leaks had also been reported.

“One of the main reasons for the decline of our forests over the past 10 years is our management mechanisms. We have a policy to give timber quotas to veterans, retired officials and those who made sacrifices for the nation,” he said.

But this wood was sold on to businesspeople, who eventually cut down trees far in excess of the quotas granted by the government.

Enforcement of Prime Minister's Order No. 15 issued on May 13 was one of the main topics raised for discussion at a two-day meeting held between the government cabinet and provincial governors in Vientiane late last month.

The meeting agreed that the export of all types of unfinished or unprocessed timber should be banned, no matter where the logs originated from and regardless of whether they came from commercial plantations.

The move aimed to boost productivity and ensure that all wood or logs were processed before being exported as a way to add value to the timber industry.

The government said wood products would be more expensive in Laos, but this should be acceptable because the country would gain a reputation as being environmentally friendly.

The government also agreed it would no longer approve an annual timber quota of 200,000 cubic metres for felling, as was granted in previous years.

By Somsack Pongkhao  
(Latest Update July 2, 2016)

## Khammuan to check all vehicles for illegal timber

Khammuan provincial authorities have announced that they will inspect all vehicles for illegal wood before they are allowed to cross borders, except those belonging to embassies and international organisations.

The move comes after an enormous amount of illegally felled wood has been found hidden in buses, vans and private vehicles which have been modified to carry the load across borders into neighbouring countries.

Khammuan provincial governor MrOdaySoudaphone delivered the message at a press conference held on the sidelines of a two-day meeting of the government cabinet, Vientiane Mayor and provincial governors in Vientiane last week.

“From now on we will inspect every vehicle except those belonging to embassies and international organisations. We apologise to vehicle owners in advance for any inconvenience they may face during these inspections,” he said.

As part of the province's efforts to enforce the Prime Minister's Order No. 15 issued on May 13, MrOday said authorities are considering setting up a committee to examine trucks carrying timber at the final point before allowing them to cross borders.

Khammuan has become notorious for illegal logging since an explosion on a bus in the province last month, which killed 10 people. The bus was heavily loaded with an illegal shipment of timber and was travelling from Thakhaek district en route for Vietnam. The incident took place in Bualapha district, just eight kilometres from the Naphao-Chaulor border checkpoint.

The prime minister's order bans the export of all types of unfinished wood products including timber and logs. This is considered a significant move in the battle to clamp down on the illicit trade in wood.

MrOday believes that if all parties strictly comply with the order, sawmills and wood processing factories will improve their operations.

Khammuan is now circulating the order among officials and businesses to ensure they understand and comply with it. The province has also set up a taskforce committee to inspect timber activities.

“More importantly, we will order factories that are located near forests to move. Small furniture workshops that have been found to lack proper licences will be ordered to close,” the governor said.

“We have delegated the responsibility for the management of our forests to the relevant authorities, because the prime minister's order is intended to benefit the nation and the people.”

Khammuan provincial authorities are now registering timber and logs that have been left in forests and factories in an attempt to identify illegal activities. The registration process is expected to be completed in August.

The state and private sectors as well as local residents have been called on to work harder in tackling illegal logging, which will help to enforce the prime minister's order and fight deforestation.

By SomsackPongkhao  
(Latest Update July 1, 2016)

## Prohibited rosewood seized en route to China

Police in Oudomxay province last week seized more than 2,500 kilogrammes of rosewood timber loaded in a truck reportedly being transported from Vientiane en route to China, a provincial police official said yesterday.

Police inspect a shipment of rosewood concealed within a container truck.

The expensive rosewood is prohibited from being logged in Laos and the government has also prohibited the export of all types of unfinished wood products.

The provincial police in charge told Vientiane Times yesterday that the investigative report has been submitted to the provincial Police Headquarters.

They have not yet contacted their counterparts in Vientiane, where the wood was being transported from, about the issue. "We are waiting for the headquarters to give guidance as to the next steps," said the police.

The seizure took place after the provincial police were informed that the transport of the timber would take place via the province, according to a report from the provincial Police Headquarters. On June 21, the police arranged a checkpoint on Road Number 13 North near the border of Oudomxay and Luang Prabang provinces. They stopped the suspected six-wheeled truck which had been modified into a container truck so that the timber could be hidden.

Some 47 rosewood timbers and 25 partially-processed rosewoods weighing 2,534 kilogrammes in total were found inside the container-like truck, which carried a Vientiane number plate.

The truck driver, Mr Vachaxong, 20, who is a Lao national, told police he was paid 1.5 million kip by a Chinese businessman who is based in Vientiane, to transport the wood from the capital towards the Chinese border.

Mr. Vachaxong, a resident of Houaytong village in Xay district of Oudomxay province, confessed that the Chinese businessman, nick-named Arming, 40, contacted him to transport the wood from a factory called Arjack in Nongthaneau village, Chanthabouly district of Vientiane to Oudomxay province. The wood would later be transported further to China by Chinese nationals, Mr Vachaxong told the police, according to the report from the provincial Police Headquarters.

The driver said he departed Vientiane on June 20 and spent one night in Kasy district, Vientiane province. The next day he was stopped and detained at the checkpoint.

Reports have reported that illegal loggers and timber traders have been trying to export timber they cut illegally after the Lao government has taken tough action in an effort to suppress illegal logging.

On June 2, a passenger bus loaded with timber and 14 Vietnamese nationals en route to Vietnam exploded in central Khammuan province killing at least 10 people onboard.

On May 13, Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith issued an order that bans the export of all types of unfinished wooden products and prohibits all parties from collecting or removing logs from the forests.

The officials also instructed sawmills, wood processing plants and other businesses that utilise timber in a move to address illegal logging.

By Souksakhone Vaenkeo  
(Latest Update June 30, 2016)

## Attapeu seizes 9,000 cubic metres of illegal lumber

More than 9,000 cubic metres of illegal timber has been seized in southern Attapeu province since late last year, according to a report by the provincial authorities.

A truck loaded with logs that have already been measured and quantified at a log collection point. There are fears that such collection points will be used to legalise illegally cut timber from the nation's forests. (File photo)

Timber traders have reportedly been attempting to export timber through the province, despite an export ban imposed by the government, according to a report by the provincial Agriculture and Forestry Department.

Provincial authorities have placed greater attention on addressing illegal logging in a move to enforce a Prime Ministerial Order that prohibits the export of unprocessed timber and bans the removal or collection of timber from the forest.

The government has also ordered all forests closed to logging since June 1 with action being taken to inspect all businesses that utilise timber in a move to address illegal logging and timber trading – a long-standing issue that has seen Laos lose many billions of kip in potential revenue every year.

Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith, who toured the province last week, instructed the provincial authorities to take thorough action to enforce the government's latest measures to fight illegal logging.

Noting that a number of measures issued previously were poorly enforced, the PM asked for collective action to realise the latest measures and put an end to the illegal logging and timber trading.

“Local people who have protected the forests for generations have expressed their trauma in seeing many huge trees cut,” he said during the talks with the provincial authorities, which were televised by Lao National Television.

“Our officials, especially the retired officials who have devoted their time to rescuing our nation, said they were moved to tears when seeing trucks loaded with enormous logs emerging from the forest,” Prime Minister Thongloun said.

The PM warned that huge impacts will become inevitable if illegal logging continues, saying farmers will suffer from drought and that the hydropower plants Laos has developed and the many more in the planning stages will have a lack of water to generate power.

He instructed the provincial authorities in charge to carry out regular inspections and take harsh measures to punish those found guilty.

The PM said the Prime Ministerial Order he issued on May 13 stated clearly that unprocessed timber is prohibited from being exported and all parties are prohibited from collecting or removing logs from forests known as Sanam I in a move to close loopholes which allow illegal logging.

Reports showed that illegal loggers and traders have attempted to export quantities of timber while officials in charge are preparing to enforce the measures.

Early this month, 10 trucks loaded with timber – six from southern Champassak and four from southern Xekong province tried to export timber via Saravan province to a neighbouring country. Fortunately, Saravan province officials blocked the export.

On June 2, a bus loaded with timber and 14 Vietnamese workers en route to Vietnam exploded in central Khammuan province killing at least 10 people on board.

There are also growing fear that illegal loggers will seek to legalise timber they cut illegally through domestic channels.

Prime Minister Thongloun warned Attapeu to take action preventing the illegal loggers from removing logs from Sanam I to Sanam II – log collection yards outside forests where they could make the illegally-cut timber legal.

By Souksakhone Vaenkeo  
(Latest Update June 22, 2016)



## Govt tightens illegal timber inspections at border

Government sectors will need to strengthen their cooperation to effectively inspect wood products before export against the backdrop of the illegal log trade, a senior official has stated.

Deputy Minister of Finance Mr Bounchom Ubonpaseuth told Vientiane Times yesterday that some businesses are attempting a number of approaches to ensure their undocumented logs are able to cross the border.

Some companies hide timber/partially processed logs in containers or under finished wood products for export and consequently more thorough inspections from relevant authorities are required.

Mr Bounchom was speaking at a meeting in Vientiane last week to disseminate the Prime Minister's Order No 15 issued on May 13 in a move to address illegal logging.

The order bans the export of all types of unfinished wood products including timber and logs.

However, authorities at border checkpoints appeared to be encountering a number of issues implementing the order, notably unclear paperwork for finished wooden production which caused enormous delays in the export process.

Mr Bounchom recommended that relevant authorities set up dedicated inspection points to uncover any unfinished timber products as vehicles approached the border crossings.

The move would single out trucks that tried to smuggle the illegal cargo out the country such as covering it with finished timber products or other exports.

“We will start to inspect finished wooden products when they're being loaded onto trucks at factories. When the trucks approach border checkpoints relevant authorities will scrutinise them again concentrating on inspecting the paperwork if no report of illegal logs in particular trucks has been submitted to our authorities,” Mr Bounchom said.

“Currently long queues of trucks line up along border checkpoints which are ready to cross the border, but the implementation process is quite slow.”

President of the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) Mr Sisavath Thiravong said the implementation of the PM's Order had directly impacted the business sector due to the inspection delay at border checkpoints.

He called for state and private sectors to work harder in cooperation to address the problem, ensuring the strict inspection under the PM's Order contributed to facilitating legal timber products.

The issuing of the PM's Order No 15 is a significant move in the battle to clamp down on the notorious trade of logs in Laos which has been reported for decades. Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith has travelled to a number of provinces in the middle and southern parts of Laos to instruct local authorities to implement Order No15.

Meanwhile different government sectors in Vientiane and provinces are working to disseminate the order to ensure more officials and local people understand and pursue it. Members of the public lauded the PM for issuing the order to manage the country's forests and wood businesses but they are also curious to see the outcome of the order's implementation.

By Somsack Pongkhao  
(Latest Update June 22, 2016)

## Savannakhet illegal logging declines after tougher action: governor

Illegal logging has declined in Savannakhet province following provincial authorities' tough action to address the issue in accordance with the government's latest measures, the provincial governor told a task force committee this week.

The task force committee, set up by the government to enforce the Prime Minister's Order No. 15 issued on May 13 with measures to address illegal logging, is on tour to the central province as part of efforts to implement the order.

The measures include prohibiting the export of unfinished wooden products, banning the removal or collection of timber from forests along with launching inspections into wood processing plants to suppress illegal logging.

Savannakhet provincial governor SantiphabPhomvihane told the task force committee that his province had formed a committee in charge to take action and enforce the government's measures, according to Lao Economic Daily newspaper.

“The committee has taken action and carried out inspections regularly to prevent log movements and transport along border areas,” he told the task force committee.

He added the provincial authorities had also paid greater attention to the management of forests, wood businesses, wood processing and timber trade within the province.

Savannakhet had also ordered a stop in exports of all kinds of wood including those having documents, the governor said.

“We have put in place strict inspections into every vehicle coming and going through any border checkpoint,” he said.

He stated that wood-related issues, especially illegal logging had declined after relevant departments and districts in the province joined forces in the fight against illegal logging.

The governor promised that his province would exert the utmost effort to realise the Prime Ministerial Order.

The government's Task Force Committee, chaired by Vice Chairman of the Government Inspection Authorities and Deputy Head of the Anti-Corruption Authority MrXaikhambounmixay, said it had been working with provinces and districts to realise the Prime Ministerial Order.

Vice Chairman of the Task Force Committee, MrThongphatVongmany, who is also Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry told Vientiane Times the task force committee would also be working with wood-related businesses and officials stationed at border checkpoints so that they observed the measures.

The government is actively attempting to address illegal logging. On Monday, Prime Minister ThonglounSisoulith travelled to central Khammuan province and instructed provincial authorities to take thorough action to crack down on illegal logging and better protect the forests.

By Times Reporters  
(Latest Update June 17, 2016)

## Log removal ban to address illegal logging: Deputy Minister

Enforcement of prohibitions on the removal or collection of logs from forests known as Sanam I are being strengthened to address illegal logging after it was revealed some businesses hired local villagers to fell large volumes of trees in forests illegally, a senior government official has said.

“If we continue to allow removing or collecting of logs from Sanam I, it will just leave loopholes for further illegal logging,” Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry ThongphatVongmany told Vientiane Times on Friday.

He made the comment during a one-day meeting held at the ministry where representatives from Vientiane and provincial Agriculture and Forestry Departments gathered to discuss enforcement of the Prime Ministerial Order issued last month that details measures to prevent and address cases of illegal logging.

The measures completely ban the removal or collection of the logs from so-called Sanam I areas as well as prohibiting the export of unfinished wooden products including logs and timbers in an attempt to close loopholes for illegal logging.

Sanam I refers to the forest fields where trees are felled and cut into log beams that have not been yet collected. Logs in the Sanam I areas have not been measured or documented, MrThongphat explained.

The Deputy Minister said authorities will inspect and locate those logs felled illegally in the Sanam I areas which will then be seized. It is believed that great numbers of logs still remain in Sanam I areas in some localities, he said.

Officials have called for members of the public to help keep their eyes open for the movements of illegal loggers who might seek to remove logs from the Sanam I and pass them off as legal for domestic use or export.

A passenger bus loaded with illegal timber and ferrying 14 Vietnamese persons en route for Vietnam exploded in flames in the central Lao province of Khammuan on June 2, killing 10 people.

The incident also triggered concerns that illegal timber traders are attempting to surreptitiously export contraband in the short and rapidly closing window as authorities prepare coordinated actions to implement the Prime Ministerial Order.

Since the government announced its battle to fight illegal logging, members of the public have seen participating actively in the fight.

Pictures showing a number of trucks carrying logs have been posted online through social media with suspicions raised the logs may well be illegally harvested.

Officials said removal of logs from Sanam II – denoting a yard where logs are collected after being removed from Sanam I - to sawmills or so-called Sanam III is permitted.

Logs from Sanam II will have numbers stamped on the logs with measures and documentation unlike those from Sanam I that do not have these features, MrThongphat explained.

In a move to prevent possible loopholes for illegal logging, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has instructed provincial officials to closely inspect logging fields in the forests, log transport routes, log collecting yards, sawmills, wood processing and furniture plants, timber warehouses and other places that utilise wood.

By SouksakhoneVaenkeo  
(Latest Update June 15, 2016)

## PM directs crackdown on illegal logging in Khammuan

Prime Minister ThonglounSisoulith travelled to Khammuan province on Monday to direct local authorities to strengthen their efforts to clamp down on illegal logging and better protect forests for future generations.

His visit to the province took place following an incident involving an exploding bus in Bualapha district which killed 10 Vietnamese people.

Earlier this month the bus loaded with an illegal shipment of timber exploded after fireworks stowed in the baggage compartment ignited just eight kilometres from the Naphao-Chaulor border checkpoint.

The bus incident occurred while relevant authorities are enforcing the Prime Minister's Order No 15 issued on May 13 aiming to close loopholes in illegal logging and the cross-border trade of logs.

During the visit, PM Thongloun told Khammuan authorities at a meeting attended by over 500 officials to strictly follow the PM's Order which also banned the export of all types of unprocessed wood products including logs and timber.

He stressed that all logs and timber were not allowed to be removed from forests and urged local authorities to inspect all wood/timber-related business activities.

The government has established a taskforce to inspect illegal logging activities in cooperation with local authorities, citing that all illegal timber will be confiscated and those involved will face legal action.

The Prime Minister also called for all Lao people to be the eyes and ears for the government to ensure security and social order as the country prepares to host the Asean Summit in September.

At the onset, the PM instructed provincial leaders to concentrate on disseminating the order to officials at different departments and districts so that they can continue to distribute it to village authorities and communities. The move is aimed to ensure a majority of people understand the order clearly and contribute to the implementation of the order.

Meanwhile the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry summoned forestry officials across the country for a meeting in Vientiane on Friday to discuss how to enforce the PM's Order more effectively .

Forestry officials from all provinces briefed the meeting about the overall picture of forest management in their provinces as well as issues related to deforestation and identified the amount of logs/timber left in their provinces before reporting to the government.

Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Dr Lien Thikeyo was very concerned about forestry decline in the country and stressed the need to improve mechanisms in regards to managing forests.

All sectors need to work harder in cooperation to crack down on illegal logging and return the country's forestry cover to 70 percent by 2020.

“We need to implement our Prime Minister's Order strictly so as to address illegal logging,” Dr Lien said. “If we fail to enforce this order, we will never accomplish our strategy of returning forest cover to 70 percent by 2020.”

By SouksakhoneVaenkeo  
(Latest Update June 15, 2016)

## Provinces instructed to inspect log movements to address illegal trade

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry on Friday instructed provinces to take urgent action to inspect all types of logs and their movement to prevent illegal logging.

Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Thongphat Vongmany warned provincial authorities not to conspire and help businesses to hide illegally-felled logs. Those failing to carry out the new instructions will face harsh disciplinary measures.

“The leadership [the country’s top leadership] is determined and has reached common consensus to take decisive action to fight illegal logging,” he told representatives from Vientiane and provinces across the country in a one-day meeting at the ministry.

The meeting was to explain and create common understanding about the Prime Ministerial Order No 15 issued on May 13 to address illegal logging and improve domestic timber business operations. The order bans the export of all types of unfinished wooden products including timber and logs.

Mr Thongphat told the meeting the Prime Ministerial Order was issued in accordance with the guidance made by Party Secretary General [Mr Bounnhang Vorachit] with the 11-member Party politburo also praising the government’s move in issuing the order. This highlighted the country’s top leadership was determined and serious in the fight against illegal logging, a long-standing issue, he said.

The Deputy Minister warned plant quarantine officials at all border checkpoints not to facilitate or certify the export of unprocessed wood through the border gates and those breaching the prime ministerial order would face harsh punishment. The warning came after previous reports emerged suggesting that large amounts of timber had been exported illegally through the border gates.

On average, the government approved only about 200,000 cubic metres of logs to be cut annually, but statistics provided by customs officials of neighbouring countries showed that as high as one million cubic metres of wood was exported from Laos in a year, despite the fact the government had banned the export of logs some years ago, Mr Thongphat said.

There is growing concern that businesses might seek to conspire with undisciplined officials exploring tactics to legalise or export logs they cut illegally during this preparation stage of implementing the prime ministerial order.

On June 2, a bus loaded with timber and 14 Vietnamese passengers en route to Vietnam exploded in Khammuan province killing 10 people, highlighting an incidence of the illegal log trade attempting to export timber.

Some loggers were said to have approached sawmill operators to seek ways to legalise timber they cut illegally. Mr Thongphat said the government was well aware of the issue and was taking urgent action.

Recently, the ministry told provincial officials to inspect logging fields in the forests, log transporting lanes, log collecting yards, sawmills, wood processing and furniture plants, timber warehouses and other places that utilise wood. Those found engaged in illegal logging and its related activities must be investigated and prosecuted.

Provincial officials were instructed to inspect logs gathered in Sanam II - a yard where logs have been collected after being removed from Sanam I, a log collection yard inside the forest. Findings of the inspection must be submitted to the ministry before June 15 so it can be reported to the government.

All parties were prohibited from collecting or removing logs from Sanam I. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has denounced the document previously used for wood removal and those provinces seen using the form to facilitate the removal must take responsibility, Mr Thongphat warned.

He added that seven ministries had been assigned to take collective action in the fight against illegal logging including the Ministry of National Defence and Ministry of Public Security.

Members of the public have expressed their support through social media for the government's latest move in addressing illegal logging. However, some remain cautious on what degree the current attempt will be able to bring about a decline in illegal logging.

Forestry officials from all provinces briefed the meeting about the overall picture of forest management in their provinces as well as issues related to deforestation and identified the amount of logs/timber left in their provinces before reporting to the government.

Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Dr Lien Thikeo was very concerned about forestry decline in the country and stressed the need to improve mechanisms in regards to managing forests.

All sectors need to work harder in cooperation to crack down on illegal logging and return the country's forestry cover to 70 percent by 2020. "We need to implement our Prime Minister's Order strictly so as to address illegal logging," Dr Lien said. "If we fail to enforce this order, we will never accomplish our strategy of returning forest cover to 70 percent by 2020."

By Souksakhone Vaenkeo  
(Latest Update June 15, 2016)



## Nation losing more forests than it gains, minister says

Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Dr Lien Thikeo has described forestry management in Laos over the past 10 years as a failure, further deteriorating the country's forestry resources.

“What we gain is not equal to that of what we have lost in terms of our forestry resources,” Dr Lien told a nationwide forestry meeting in Vientiane on Friday, which was attended by forestry officials from all provinces.

“We observe that localities [provinces] which feature an abundance of forestry resources will gain greater development in their areas,” he noted.

Dr Lien called for all sectors to strictly follow the Prime Minister's Order No 15 issued on May 13 in a move to address illegal logging.

The order bans the export of all types of unfinished wooden products including timber and logs but all sectors need to understand the order properly and strengthen their collaboration to implement the order.

Forestry officials have said that forestry management in Laos over the past years was complicated and financial leaks were also reported in this sector, causing great losses to the national budget.

“One of the main reasons for our forestry decline over the past 10 years was due to our management mechanisms. We have a policy to give timber quotas for veterans, retired officials and those who sacrifice for the nation,” he said.

However they continued to sell to businesspeople who eventually cut trees far in excess of the quotas granted by the government.

Permission to collect dead or poisoned trees is one reason for illegal logging, given that this process has never ended as people continue to poison the trees and use that as an excuse to cut them from the forests.

Worse, timber quotas have been given to people for one province only to be later used as a reference or claim to cut trees in another province.

Dr Lien also highlighted the overall picture of forest decline, which was partially triggered by the expansion of commercial agriculture production areas, hydropower development, mining, roads and other infrastructure projects.

Many officials misunderstood the devolution of responsibility between the central and local levels based on the ‘3-builds’ directive with some villages and districts approving a wood quota for entrepreneurs despite the fact that it was not their role to do so.

Lao forests have declined over the past decades. In 1980, forest cover was 49 percent, declining to 41.5 percent in 2010 before increasing to 47 percent at the current stage.

“Our Prime Minister has made a significant decision to issue this order so we have to help disseminate this order in the entire society and work in cooperation to enforce it so as to address illegal logging,” Dr Lien said.

“If we fail to enforce this order, we will never accomplish our strategy of returning forest cover to 70 percent by 2020.”

By SomsackPongkhao  
(Latest Update June 14, 2016)



## Province, district authorities have no right to approve logging

Provincial and district authorities have no right to approve logging and the export of timber, but many local authorities have reportedly granted permission in the past, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry said last week .

MrThongphatVongmany told a meeting held at the ministry on Friday that the Forest Law's Article 49 only gives the government the right to approve logging. And only the government has the right to approve the export of timber, according to the law.

Officials from Vientiane and provincial agriculture and forestry departments across the country attended the one-day meeting where they received an explanation about Prime Ministerial Order No 15 issued on May 13 that details measures to address illegal logging and improve domestic timber business operations.

Given that many local authorities violated the Forest Law in the past by approving logging and permitting wood exports, MrThongphat highlighted that their actions breached the law.

He added that provincial officials in charge of agriculture and forestry affairs must fulfil their advisory role when the leadership [provincial governors or Vientiane Major] were considering the approval of logging.

“The leadership might not know what the law stipulates, so the officials in charge are required to give recommendations so that they [the leadership] will observe the law,” he told the meeting.

Most of the logging approved by local authorities was in exchange for infrastructure development projects including road construction in which the exchanged trees were used to finance construction. Such schemes were reportedly leaving a loophole for massive illegal loggings.

Reports emerged that many local authorities permitted businesses that funded infrastructure projects under the scheme to carry out logging to make way for a new road for instance, but more trees than needed were reportedly felled.

Worse still, in many cases most of the trees cut down to make way for a new road through a natural forest appeared to be the most expensive trees.

MrThongphat stated it was an unbelievable coincidence that only expensive trees, such as Mai Dou ( *Ptericarpus indicus* ), grew where these new roads were planned, saying the trees grew randomly in natural forest and not a plantation. This indicated it was a tactic applied by logging businesses.

The deputy minister pointed out that businesses were not permitted to carry out logging, but the Forest Law allows only state officials in charge to carry out the logging then sell the lumber through bidding process.

In light of the issue, Prime Minister ThonglounSisoulith on May 13 issued the Prime Ministerial Order No 15 prohibiting all state bodies from exchanging wood with development projects.

The PM also instructed that all businesses are not allowed to carry out logging as it must be done by state officials in charge.

By SouksakhoneVaenkeo  
(Latest Update June 14, 2016)

## Government announces fight against illegal wildlife trade

The government has announced that it will put in place stronger measures to combat illegal hunting and trading of wildlife while returning greenery to the nation.

Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith delivered the message to mark World Environment Day on June 5 in Vientiane where Laos had organised an event to mark the occasion.

The ceremony included tree planting to raise awareness for the environment and contributions to the fight against the illegal wildlife trade and poaching.

Mr Thongloun stressed that the government will also impose measures to fight illegal trading of ivory and elephant-related products as well as further regulate the over 200 species of wildlife reported in Laos.

The PM highlighted the significance of forests to water and wildlife resources and called for all sectors to protect the country's forests and continue the sustainable development of the nation.

Over the past few decades, Lao forests have deteriorated significantly, creating a major threat to Laos' wildlife and the country's environment.

Forest cover in Laos stood at 70 percent in 1940, but it has been declining sharply. Currently, forests covered only roughly 47 percent of the country's land area and the government plans to increase this to 70 percent by 2020.

The relevant sectors have been instructed to enhance their responsibility in inspecting and managing forests while forestry laws will need to be enforced.

Laos is considered home to endangered wildlife as well. About 1.6 percent of the world's wildlife living under threat is reported to be living in Laos.

The theme of the World Environment Day 2016 highlights the fight against the illegal trade in wildlife, which erodes such precious biodiversity and threatens the survival of elephants, rhinos and tigers, as well as many other species.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is calling on everyone to “go wild for life” and take action to help safeguard species under threat for future generations.

UN officials underlined that the effects of the illegal wildlife trade including the destruction of natural habitat in which many nations could build healthy tourism industries around.

In a similar message, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Yury Fedotov, said criminal networks and poachers have scant regard for biodiversity, or the terrible impact their actions have on our fragile environment and vulnerable communities. Every country suffers either as a source, transit or destination for these products. UNODC's World Wildlife Crime Report shows that 7,000 species were found in more than 164,000 seizures affecting 120 countries.

Laos has enacted a number of laws related to the protection of wildlife; however much more needs to be done when it comes to law enforcement.

All sectors will be required to reinforce their efforts to fight illegal trade of wildlife and contribute to the preservation of the country's forests to ensure a sustainable future in Laos.

By Vientiane Times News  
June 7, 2016

## Ministry steps up timber export ban order enforcement

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has instructed its provincial departments not to facilitate or grant permission for the export of all kinds of unfinished wooden products, following the government's export ban on the products.

Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith issued the Prime Ministerial Order No 15 on May 13 that imposes the ban.

In his instruction issued on May 31, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Dr Lien Thikeyo told the provincial officials to inspect logging fields in the forests, log transporting lanes, log collecting yards, sawmills, wood processing and furniture plants, timber warehouses and other places that utilise wood. Those found engaged in illegal logging and its related activities must be investigated and prosecuted.

He asked the provincial authorities to take decisive action to enforce a Prime Ministerial Order issued in 2008 stipulating that all types of forest be closed to logging from June 1-October 31 every year – the annual break to review the implementation of logging quotas before considering the reopening of forests to logging for the coming fiscal year.

During the break, logging under all approved quotas, including trees that are needed for the construction of infrastructure and all types of investment projects must stop.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has prohibited all parties from carrying out logging surveys in areas such as where infrastructure development and mining projects are planned, but the government has yet to approve the operation of the projects.

The minister asked provincial officials to inspect logs gathered in Sanam II collection yards and complete the inspection before submitting their findings to the ministry before June 15.

In their inspections, officials need to identify the amount of the logs currently remaining in Sanam II - a yard where logs have been collected after being removed from Sanam I , a log collection yard inside the forest. The information will also include which logs have been sold and which ones have not.

The move came after the government instructed relevant sectors last month to inspect felled logs collected in Sanam II to ensure that all the wood had been cut in accordance with the government's approved quota. All parties were prohibited from collecting or removing logs from Sanam I .

Authorities were also asked to inspect the import, trade and possession of log cutting machines and equipment with those engaged in these activities without legal permission from relevant authorities to be penalised.

The provincial officials were told to facilitate and cooperate with the government's task force committee in implementing the Prime Ministerial Order No 15.

By Times Reporters  
(Latest Update June 7, 2016)

## Govt takes action to address illegal logging

The government has instructed ministries and provinces to delegate responsibility in implementing measures outlined last month that prohibit the export of timber, unprocessed wood, and non-timber forest products.

In the notice issued on June 1, the government instructed the authorities to resolutely punish, without compromise, those who violate these measures. The measures were detailed in Prime Ministerial Order No. 15 issued on May 13.

Ministries and provinces were told to educate officials about the measures, so that everyone fully understood them and the measures were interpreted correctly and uniformly.

The government instructed the Government Inspection Authority to entrust its officials to work with provincial authorities to carry out inspections and to penalise those found guilty of illegal logging and trade.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry was told to work with central and local bodies to gather information about wood amassed in collecting yards known as Sanam 2 across the country, and report their findings to the government.

The Ministry of Industry and Commerce was told to partner with central and local bodies to take urgent action to inspect sawmills located in national preservation and protection forests, as well as production forests.

Sawmills found to be operating illegally must be shut down and their equipment seized, to become state property, while the operators must be prosecuted in accordance with the law. In the long term, the authorities were asked to regulate and upgrade wood processing plants so that their operations meet acceptable standards.

Ministries and local departments were told to partner with security forces to guard against and prevent illegal logging, especially in forests that are vulnerable to illegal logging, and those found guilty of engaging in illegal activities must be prosecuted, disciplined and penalised.

The government warned border checkpoint officials not to facilitate or permit the export of timber and non-timber forest products without permission from the government. Those who violate the regulations are to be disciplined and punished.

The government has told all central and local departments to assign technical officials to work together to implement these measures and report progress to the government regularly to seek guidance.

Only one day after the notice was issued and a few weeks after the Prime Ministerial Order, a passenger bus loaded with timber and travelling from Khammuan province to Vietnam, came to the attention of the authorities after an explosion killed at least eight Vietnamese nationals on board.

The shipment of timber was clearly destined for export, despite the government's ban on the export of timber and unprocessed wood. Witnesses said the timber was obviously an illegal consignment and a clear infringement of the government's latest measures.

There has been a lot of public discussion recently on this latest move by the government. Everyone has welcomed the measures but there has been a common response, with people questioning how effectively the measures will be implemented and whether they will result in a significant decline in illegal logging, which has been a longstanding concern.

By Times Reporters  
(Latest Update June 6, 2016)

## Large tree species still flourishing: ministry

Laos' forests are still home to large tree species although these are in decline because of the encroachment of infrastructure required for the country's economic development.

A big wild tree in Saravan province. --Photo Ngae

Deputy Director of the Forestry Department under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Mr Boualy Phameuang, told Vientiane Times on Thursday that there are plenty of large trees still to be found in woodlands.

“Although Laos is steadily developing, our forests will not be depleted of large trees because the public would immediately voice concern,” he said.

People are increasingly concerned about the sight of scores of trucks loaded with massive logs that ply the roads in some parts of the country. This gives the impression that Laos' forests may soon be stripped of all big trees.

Adding to the public's concern is the fact that most of the trucks look overloaded and some do not display number plates, leading to suspicions of illegal timber trading.

Mr Boualy said forest management in Laos is improving, but admitted that illegal logging occurs in some remote areas.

Some neighbouring countries such as Vietnam and Thailand have made good progress with forest management, but it is possible that illegal logging is taking place in some regions.

The Forestry Department said that the logs people see being transported may be carrying timber that was harvested between 2011 and 2013. No logs have been felled since then because the government has ordered the closure of production forests in a bid to let woodland areas regenerate.

The department also said these logs could have come from places where trees have been felled to make way for the construction of dams, roads or crop plantations.

Large areas of forestry have been seriously degraded, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The main reasons for deforestation are the conversion of forests into agricultural land for food production, and illegal logging.

The government plans to increase forest cover nationwide to 65 percent by 2015 and to 70 percent by 2020.

The two categories of forest in Laos managed by the government are national protection and national production forests.

At present, there are 49 national protection forests covering 7.5 million hectares but the ministry plans to add thousands more to achieve its goal of 8.2 million hectares of protected forest.

By Times Reporters  
(Latest Update May 6, 2016)