



PRIME MINISTER

143/93

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP VISIT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF LAOS

I am pleased to announce that the Prime Minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, His Excellency Mr Khamtay Siphandone, and Mrs Thongvanh Siphandone will make a State visit to Australia, as guests of the Australian Government, from 14 to 19 December.

Prime Minister Khamtay will be accompanied by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Industry and Handicraft, as well as senior Lao officials. The Prime Minister will have talks in Canberra before attending a privately organised trade and investment forum in Sydney entitled 'Indochina and Beyond: A New Regional Focus'.

Australia is developing its links with Laos and there is good potential for further expanding commercial ties. Two way trade is increasing and Australian companies are involved in major infrastructure projects. In 1992 Australian exports to Laos totalled \$20.4 million with strong sales of gold, silver and platinum. Transfield recently concluded a development agreement with the Government of Laos for a hydro-electric power station at Nam Theun. The billion dollar project is the largest and most important ever negotiated by the Lao Government. This is a tribute to the professionalism of Australian business and the experience which Australia can bring to such substantial infrastructure projects.

Australia is a significant aid donor to Laos, with a program of development cooperation activities valued at \$9.5 million in 1993-94. The Mekong friendship bridge - designed, constructed and funded by Australia - is a symbol of our commitment to Laos's development. I look forward to attending the opening of the bridge in April next year.

Prime Minister Khamtay's visit provides an opportunity to strengthen government-to-government links between our two countries and to discuss how we might build on the solid foundation we have established for economic relations.

**CANBERRA
DECEMBER 11, 1993**