

(Unofficial translation from Thai)

MoFA 0704/454

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Sri Ayuddhata Rd. Bangkok 10400

24 April 2019

Subject: The International Navigation on the Lancang-Mekong River Project

Dear Mr. Niwat Roikaew, on behalf of the Network of Thai People in Eight Mekong Provinces

With reference to letter from the Network of Thai People in Eight Mekong Provinces dated 20 March 2019.

Attachments: A copy of newsletter from the Ministry of Transportation's Marine Department

With reference to the letter of the Network of Thai People in Eight Mekong Provinces concerning the demand to have the rapids blasting halted;

I would like to respond as follows:

1. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs places importance on and closely monitors the progress of the International Navigation on the Lancang-Mekong River Project. As of now, the project is at its feasibility study phase to review the environmental and social impacts, which may affect people living by the Mekong River, including as result of the engineering scheme to improve navigation.
2. In my capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs, I have raised such concerns from Thai people regarding this project when meeting with the State Councilor and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, HE Mr. Wang Yi, since the Chinese agencies commenced their field operation survey as part of the International Navigation Project in 2017. Consultations have also been undertaken with the Foreign Ministers of member countries in the Mekong Basin to explore a common understanding on this matter. The latest meeting between Mr. Wang Yi and myself took place on 16 February 2019 in Chiang Mai, during which I emphasized the concerns among Thai people about the International Navigation Project. In response, Mr. Wang Yi stated that the Chinese government is ready to cooperate and to bring an end to this project as proposed by Thai groups.
3. On 28 March 2019, I had a meeting with the Secretary of Yunnan Provincial Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman of the Standing Committee of Yunnan Provincial People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, H.E. Mr. Chen Hao, in Bangkok during his formal visit to Thailand. Again, emphasis was placed on the importance of the Mekong River as a river that breeds and nourishes lives and the livelihoods of riparian peoples and that It is not a commercial river. I took the opportunity to thank the Chinese Government for not allowing any activities that may affect lives of the people who live by the Mekong River within Thailand and neighboring countries. I expressed my appreciation for the Chinese Government's offer to suspend the International Navigation on the Lancang-Mekong River Project. I hereby send you the latest updates of the International Navigation Project, as per the attached document.

Please be informed.

Yours sincerely,

Don Pramudwinai
Minister of Foreign Affairs

[Attachment – Unofficial Translation from Thai]

Marine Department - Executive Update
17th JCCCN Meeting in Chonburi (28 March 2019)

The Marine Department has hosted the 17th meeting of the Joint Committee on Coordination of Commercial Navigation on the Lancang-Mekong River among China, Laos and Thailand (JCCCN) from 26-28 March 2019 at the Le Bali Resort and Spa, Pattaya, Chonburi. The meeting was chaired by the Deputy Director-General, Mr. Kritchpetch Chaichuay, while the Deputy Director-General, Mr. Somchai Sumanushajonkul, acted as Head of the Thai delegation. The Summary of Record has been signed as a result of the meeting and the meeting can be summarized as follows;

1. During the Preliminary Work and the implementation of the Commercial Navigation on the Lancang-Mekong River, the final report on 'Technical, ESIA, Public Participation' (*sic*) has been completed by China and shall be furnished to member countries for their information. According to the Chinese delegation, there shall be no further action before an approval has been obtained from member countries. The Thai delegation has informed the meeting that the Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs had already asked the Chinese authorities to bring the project to a halt.

2. The second four-way-joint-inspection led by Thailand took place during 21-26 October 2018, along the route of Jin Hong to Luang Prabang. It aimed to review compliance among member countries with rules and regulations regarding safety of the boats, navigation channels, boatswains, port development, fee collection, etc. An emphasis was made to urge among member countries to help monitor and address any flaws to ensure compliances with the mutually agreed standards.

It was agreed during the meeting that Thailand will coordinate the third joint-inspection in October 2019 and will host 'SAR Table Top Exercise' among member countries on 29 May 2019.

3. As to obstacles to the navigation at Ho Lin rapids, Myanmar and Laos have asked China to design and estimate costs for a project to make possible commercial navigation at the site and an effort shall be further made to secure funding through diplomatic channels.

4. The meeting was informed about the progress of the establishment of an International Navigation Committee for the Mekong River. China is compiling information from member countries to supplement its study.

5. Regarding the installation of navigation safety equipment, China is importing AIS equipment and VHF communication devices for installation in Laos and Myanmar. The Thai delegation has asked China to help connect its AIS system at Chiang Saen Port with the Chinese system for exchange of information without having to install the Chinese communication device in Thailand.

6. Updates have been presented about the coordination, preparation and training of officers and boatswains of member countries, the review of rules, regulations, criteria and agreements regarding navigation, the development of JCCCN website, awareness raising about law enforcement and environmental impacts as a result of the oil spills often detected in the Mekong River. China agreed to host the 18th JCCCN meeting in 2020.
