

Larry & Dee Woodson

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To: "Worthington, Linda" [REDACTED] "Wille-Axelson, Pawn"
 [REDACTED] "Wilder, Bernie & Shirley" [REDACTED] "Van Nest, Robert"
 [REDACTED] "Thompson, MacAlan" [REDACTED] "Sauer, Ron"
 [REDACTED] "O'Conner, B. J." [REDACTED] "Nelson, Elizabeth"
 [REDACTED] "Mills, Carol J." [REDACTED] "Manning, Frank"
 [REDACTED] "Lewin, Howard" [REDACTED] "Johnson, EJ & Yoshi"
 [REDACTED] "Inversin, Allen" [REDACTED]
 "International Voluntary Service" [REDACTED] "Holmes, Henry" [REDACTED]
 "Grover, Bob & Jane" [REDACTED]; "Floyd Jr., Samuel P." [REDACTED]
 "Flipse, Joe" [REDACTED] "Flanagan, Michael A." [REDACTED] "Brady, Roger"
 [REDACTED] "Best, Allan" [REDACTED] "Benson, Fred"
 [REDACTED] "Beery, Galen" [REDACTED] "Basler, Lucy & Pat"
 [REDACTED] "Bryson, John" [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, February 25, 2002 2:50 PM
Subject: Fw: [asv] CNN- Communist Laos goes to the polls -full text

----- Original Message -----

From: Dr.KEV
To: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, February 25, 2002 10:57 AM
Subject: [asv] CNN- Communist Laos goes to the polls -full text

Communist Laos goes to the polls

VIENTIANE, Laos --Voters in Laos have flocked to polling stations for five-yearly elections as the ageing leadership of one of the world's last communist regimes vowed to inject new blood while maintaining its grip on power.

Results will not be in for several days but it is likely that the Lao People's Revolutionary Party will make a near-clean sweep in Sunday's parliamentary elections. All but one of the 166 candidates belong to that faction -- the communist country's only legal party.

No international observers are present as Laotians vote for the 109 National Assembly members. An election committee spokesman has said none are needed, as the vote is "free and fair".

The polls feature a younger, better-educated team of legislators and more women but changes to the lineup will make little difference to state policies in the country or to the secretive ruling party, in power since it overthrew a pro-Western constitutional monarchy 26 years ago.

President Khamtay Siphandone, 77, chairman of the ruling party, pledged continuity as he joined early voters at a polling station in the capital.

"In the party apparatus there won't be any change, because the past National Assembly (dissolved last year) has made all the necessary changes," he told Reuters reporters.

Laos has some 2.5 million eligible voters over the age of 18. Polling will close at 5.00 pm (1000 GMT) in Vientiane, but in some remote areas may last longer.

Security in the Laotian capital of Vientiane was not as tight as during the seventh party congress last March, but nightclubs and bars were closed on the eve of the polls.

New blood

The ruling party said the new legislative body will help achieve its plan to reduce poverty by half by 2005. More women have been included on the ballot and more candidates have post-graduate degrees. The average age is 51, about 10 years younger than the previous crop.

"We hope this will bring more foreign investment into the country," said Deputy Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith, who heads the State Planning Committee.

He said the party was "working very hard to make the country peaceful, safe and provide necessary facilities for investors."

The new assembly will replace a 99-member chamber dissolved four years into its term.

The elections come just a few months after a group of international political activists, led by a European Union parliamentarian, were deported for protesting and demanding the release of Laotian political prisoners.

And last year a spate of mystery bombings in the capital killed at least one person and injured dozens, sparking fears over damage to the country's nascent tourism industry.

Most of Laos' 5.4 million people live well below the World Bank's poverty line of one dollar a day.

The Southeast Asian country was hit hard by the 1997/98 Asian economic crisis and is heavily dependent on trade with neighboring Thailand, which is only recovering slowly.

Find this article at:

<http://www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/02/24/laos.polls/index.html>

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