

# Laos, Thailand eye closer cooperation

Somsack Pongkhao

Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra arrived in Vientiane yesterday on an official visit to Laos in response to an invitation from her Lao counterpart Mr Thongsing Thammavong.

Laos is the fourth leg of Ms Yingluck's Southeast Asian tour to introduce herself as Thailand's new Prime Minister to Asean nations. She first visited Brunei last Saturday, followed by Indonesia on Monday and Cambodia on Thursday.

During bilateral talks at the Government Office in Vientiane, the two sides discussed issues that aimed to consolidate cooperative relations between Laos and Thailand.

Communications, hydropower, trade, investment, labour and border issues topped yesterday's discussions between the two leaders, according to a press release.

Ms Yingluck reaffirmed her desire to strengthen trade cooperation, investment and tourism links with Laos, and to continue to buy electricity from Laos as agreed by the two governments in previous



Lao PM Thongsing Thammavong and Thai PM Yingluck Shinawatra inspect a guard of honour of the Lao People's Army during the official welcoming ceremony in Vientiane yesterday.

years.

Mr Thongsing said the Lao government will continue to work closely with Thailand

to address issues related to the illegal migration of people to Thailand and to survey and demarcation of the border. After their discussions, Ms Yingluck handed over 2 million baht on behalf of the Thai government to renovate secondary schools in Huaphan province, to help further Lao

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human resource development.

The Lao Prime Minister invited the Thai Prime Minister to attend the 9th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and 5th Ayeyawady, Chao Praya, Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) meeting to be hosted by Laos next year, and Ms Yingluck agreed to attend.

She also handed over another 2.5 million baht for the victims of flooding in Laos caused by tropical storm Nock-Ten last month.

Thailand is among the major foreign investors in Laos. Over the past decade, Thailand has invested in 276 projects worth US\$2.68 billion.

According to statistics from the official website of the Thai Commerce Ministry, bilateral trade between the two countries reached US\$2.1 billion and increased to US\$2.8 billion in 2010.

Thailand is also the main purchaser of electricity generated by Lao hydropower projects. The country has agreed to buy about 7,000MW of electricity from Laos by 2020.

Currently, Laos exports almost 2,000MW to Thailand, accounting for about 80 percent of all hydropower generated in Laos. In addition, several projects are under construction, with a view to further boosting exports to Thailand.

The two nations share similarities in language and culture.

The people of Laos and Thailand increasingly visit each other's country and have gained deeper mutual understanding in recent years.

Laos and Thailand have built bridges across the Mekong River to facilitate tourism, trade and investment between the two countries.

Two friendship bridges currently link the two nations across the Mekong, and two more are under construction.

This academic year, Thailand has offered education scholarships to Laos at various levels, including doctorate programmes for three people, master's degree courses for 40 people, and funding for more than 160 people to take short-term training courses and study tours.

During her one-day visit, Ms Yingluck also called on President Choummaly Sayasone and National Assembly President Ms Pany Yathortou before laying a wreath at the Unknown Soldier Monument and visiting historical and cultural landmarks in Vientiane.

In the evening the Thai premier attended a dinner hosted by Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong before returning to Thailand.