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Laos PM, wife arrive for three-day visit

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Laotian Prime Minister Sisavath Keobounphanh and his wife Khamla arrived today for a three-day official visit to Malaysia.

Keobounphanh and his 12-member delegation comprising several senior Ministers and officials arrived on board a Royal Thai Airways aircraft at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang at 11.40am.

They were greeted by Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Dr Leo Michael Toyad and Deputy Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Abu Bakar Daud who is the Minister-in-attendance.

An official welcoming ceremony was held at Parliament Square at 3pm where Keobounphanh and his entourage were met by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Cabinet Ministers and members of the diplomatic corps.

Keobounphanh inspected a guard-of-honour mounted by 106 officers and men of the 1st Battalion of the Royal Malay Regiment.

This is the first visit by a Laotian head of Government since it joined Asean in July last year.

Laos and Malaysia are expected to focus discussions on the financial and economic situation in the region and joint efforts to overcome the problems at the delegation's meeting tomorrow.

Laos, a land-locked country in the centre of the Indochinese peninsula, is reported to have been also hit by the regional economic crisis. Both countries are expected to sign agreements on bilateral trade and tourism co-operation.

The Laotian leader and his delegation will also have a luncheon meeting with members of the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah will host a dinner in honour of the Laotian visitors tonight.

Keobounphanh and Khamla are scheduled to have an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar at Istana Negara tomorrow.

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