

## **Laos PM Accorded Official Welcome**

PUTRAJAYA, May 9 (Bernama) --Laos Prime Minister Dr Thongloun Sisoulith was accorded an official welcome at Perdana Putra here Tuesday in conjunction with his two-day official visit to Malaysia.

He was greeted on arrival by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

After the national anthems of Malaysia and Laos were played, the visiting prime minister inspected a guard-of-honour mounted by 106 officers and men of the 1st Battalion Royal Malay Regiment.

Dr Thongloun, accompanied by Najib, was introduced to the cabinet ministers, senior government officials and foreign diplomats present.

Later, Najib held a four-eyed meeting with Sisoulith and then proceeded to delegation meetings to discuss and exchange views on strengthening bilateral relations.

Malaysia's Foreign Ministry (Wisma Putra) in a statement said Dr Thongloun's official visit emphasised the importance that Laos attached to its relationship with Malaysia, and provided an excellent opportunity for the leaders to review the progress of the existing bilateral relations.

It said Malaysia and Laos leaders would focus on expanding economic cooperation as well as on regional and international issues of common interest.

The trade value between Malaysia and Laos has increased where in 2016, Malaysia's total trade with Laos amounted to US\$30.96 million compared to US\$17.7 million in 2015.

The ministry said Malaysia was also Laos' fifth largest foreign investor with approximately US\$1 billion worth of investment in the country in 2016.

The statement also added that Malaysia recorded 31,061 Laotian tourist arrival in 2016 compared to 24,228 in 2015.

"In this context, it is hoped that the visit will provide further impetus to the bilateral relation between the two countries and provide a platform for both leaders to renew personal contact and build closer rapport and understanding," Wisma Putra said.

The visit, at the invitation of Najib, is Dr Thongloun's first to Malaysia since assuming office in April 2016.

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