

**Yingluck Defends New Thai Minister On U.S. Blacklist**  
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BANGKOK, Jan 19 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra today defended the appointment of a new minister who was on the United States' blacklist for her alleged business connections with Zimbabwe.

Yingluck said Nalinee Taveesin, who was made Thailand's trade representative last year prior to her latest appointment as the Prime Minister's Office Minister, had passed all the background checks.

"She also met the requirements of all Thai laws to become a minister," Yingluck said.

Nalinee's name was blacklisted by the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control in November 2008 as she, who was then a businesswoman, had allegedly facilitated financial, real estate and gems business on behalf of Grace Mugabe, wife of Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe.

Zimbabwe was sanctioned by the United States in 2003 for its alleged undemocratic practices and the sanction expanded to those who had business deals with the family of the Zimbabwean leader.

Nalinee denied all the allegations, saying she was not involved in any business deals with the family of the Zimbabwean leader and claimed that the allegation came about due to some misunderstanding over the issue.

She told local media that the U.S. ruling was "inconsequential" to her role as a Thai minister.

Nalinee said she has no assets in the United States, thus the blacklist has no impact on her financial status.

Assets of blacklisted people in the United States will be frozen and they will be barred from conducting financial or business transactions with American citizens.

Yingluck also defended the inclusion of a Red Shirt co-leader, Nattawut Saikua, as a deputy agriculture minister in yesterday's cabinet reshuffle.

Nattawut had led the anti-government protesters against the then-Abhisit Vejjajiva government in 2010.

The prime minister said Nattawut was qualified and is capable of handling the new job.

Nalinee and Nattawut are among 10 new faces in the new cabinet line-up following the reshuffle in the five-month old Yingluck administration.

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