

PM Thongloun recalls days spent at Nanyang Poly; meets former teachers

Laos Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith yesterday took a walk down memory lane, as he visited Nanyang Polytechnic.

It was where he did a three-month English language and communication course from November 1998. He was then chairman of the Lao National Assembly's Commission of Foreign Affairs.

Dr Thongloun, who is in Singapore on an official visit, told polytechnic officials that he requested to visit the poly, saying: "I wanted to meet my friends and teachers."

"And Ang Mo Kio I know very well," he added to laughter. The poly is in Ang Mo Kio Avenue 8.

He attended the course under the Singapore Cooperation Programme, which was set up in 1992 to share Singapore's development experience with others.

Yesterday, Dr Thongloun was updated about Nanyang Polytechnic and toured its School of Engineering. He also shared memo-

ries of his time in Singapore, from singing along to songs like *Island In The Sun* at a lecturer's wedding to making jaunts to Orchard Road: "We took the MRT, went to the market. All very freely. No security."

He also had a brief reunion with four of his former teachers, among them Mr Lim Kok Hua, 59, who last saw him in 2004 on a trip to Laos.

Dr Thongloun, who was by then deputy prime minister, invited Mr Lim to his home in Vientiane.

Mr Lim said: "We were all really touched when we heard he asked to visit us again. He's so high up now but he still remembers us and the programme so well."

He noted that Dr Thongloun was a down-to-earth student who read extensively, enjoyed the arts and philosophy, and improved his English by leaps and bounds in just three months.

Despite having classes six days a week from 9am to 5.30pm, Dr

Thongloun and his five other classmates would often ask to extend their lessons, Mr Lim added.

Yesterday, the Laos PM said he has turned to Mr Lee Kuan Yew's 2000 memoir, *From Third World To First*, to brush up on his English. He reads both the original English text and its Laotian translation which was launched in January.

Dr Thongloun also recalled his meeting with the late president SR Nathan in the early 2000s.

"I had an interpreter with me but I tried to speak as much English as possible. I told him, 'I studied at Nanyang Polytechnic. I had the opportunity to learn English in Singapore so I want to speak it,'" he said.

"I asked him if I made any mistakes. He told me: 'No, I understood everything. I should give Nanyang Polytechnic a gold medal!'"

Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh



Laos Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith (centre) with four of his former teachers, (from left) Ms Sakunthalai Suppiah, Ms Angeline de Roza, Mr Lim Kok Hua and Ms Stephanie Chia, at Nanyang Polytechnic yesterday. PHOTOLIANHEZAOLBAO