

# A trusted partner

Thailand has emerged as a strategic link between China and the ASEAN community.

COMPETITIVE, resource rich, hospitable and progressive, Thailand is one of the most successful countries in Asia for attracting foreign direct investment and ranks 17th on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business 2012 study.

Strategically placed at the heart of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and its second-largest economy, Thai officials are proud to be hosting the 21st World Economic Forum on South Asia in Bangkok this week.

As decision makers from ASEAN's 10 member countries and beyond debate this year's theme: "Shaping the Region's Future through Connectivity," Thailand is showcasing its resilience, strong economy and impressive business openings to the world.

The beautiful and diverse country may have encountered various challenges in the past five years, from serious flooding in 2011, to political unrest, but it is now keen to win back investor confidence. It remains committed to its role as the production base for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) planned for 2015, through key sector like automotives, electronics, food, alternative energy and creative industries.

As Yongyuth Wichaidit, Thailand's deputy prime minister and minister of the Interior says: "The government will do its utmost to rebuild confidence in Thailand from the international community. We have approved 350 billion baht (US\$11 billion) for a master plan for sustainable water management, and 2.27 trillion baht for the development of new infrastructure for the country in order to provide both immediate and long-term disaster relief and mitigation."

This year, the combined ASEAN economy is expected to grow by 5 percent. Greater regional connectivity will be vital in the growth. A comprehensive economic blueprint has been drawn up, laying out concrete targets to form a single market and production base by 2015.

Thailand was the first ASEAN country to sign a Plan of Action for the 21st century with China to establish mutually beneficial cooperative relations. It also signed a zero tariff agreement on the trade of fruit and vegetables under the framework of a China-ASEAN free-trade area.

While the two countries already share

cultural similarities and a long and fruitful friendship, Thailand and China have agreed to extend ties by increasing investment by 15 percent over the next five years.

During a three-day visit to China in April, Thailand's first female Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, who was elected to power last summer, discussed bilateral trade and investment cooperation with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and urged Chinese business people to invest more in her country. Both parties agreed to increase the bilateral trade target by 20 percent annually, and the number of tourists by 20 percent within five years.

Prime Minister Shinawatra applauded China for its role in the opening of the R3A highway, which links Kunming in Yunnan Province to Chiang Khong in northern Thailand, via Laos, and urged them to accelerate building the Fourth Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge across the Mekong River. The bridge will contribute to the link-up of the ASEAN community in the near future.

The two sides also agreed to develop the Dawei deepwater port and industrial estate project in Myanmar, and to strengthen the ASEAN region as a whole.

## The Chinese advantage

As Minister of Foreign Affairs Surapong Tovichakchaikul explains, China is an important market and investment source for Thailand. Chinese investors regard Thailand as an attractive investment destination, while China's "Go Global" policy has encouraged more Chinese

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Surapong Tovichakchaikul, Minister of Foreign Affairs

companies to invest abroad, especially in the ASEAN community.

"Since the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement came into force in 2010, the trade volume between the two countries has increased every year. In 2011, our trade volume reached nearly US\$58 billion, which is a 26.8 percent increase from 2010. Trade with China now accounts for 12.7 percent of Thailand's total foreign trade.

"More broadly, Thailand sees China as an engine of growth that can help spur the development of the entire region."



Looking forward: Thailand's Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and China's Premier Wen Jiabao.

Chatrith Sophonpanich of the Bangkok Bank, which has a strong presence in China, says the FTA is a great incentives for companies to relocate to Thailand.

With Thailand's geo-strategic positioning between India and China, Thai policy-makers and the business community are also looking into creating connections at ASEAN+3 (ASEAN nations, plus China, Japan and Democratic People's Republic of Korea) level. Thailand's Minister of Industry, M.R. Pongsvas Svasti, notes how the flooding catastrophe created a "unique momentum of cohesion at national level," and that the national mind-set is now dedicated to the "rescue, restore and rebuild" ethos.

The first priority in implementing the new administration's policies is to rebuild international confidence, he says, the second is to ensure a thorough prevention program is in place in time for

compared to our neighbors, is far superior," Pongsvas Svasti explains. "Thailand's geo-strategic location means we can easily connect with other countries such as China, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. We can connect the West to South East Asia, and that makes us stand out."

Regional integration is also of vital importance for the IRPC Public Company Ltd as it sets its sights on becoming one of the largest petrochemical companies in Asia by 2014. With the largest private seaport and a substantial amount of land available, IRPC has the potential to break into global markets in a big way.

Together with its subsidiaries, IRPC operates throughout Southeast Asia producing refined oil, comprising gasoline, high-speed diesel and LPG, lube base oil, naphtha and asphalt. It is also involved in asset management.

Currently, 95 percent of the company's revenues come from 60 percent of its total assets. With this in mind, the enterprising company set up the Phoenix Project, which facilitates communications between employees and stakeholders, on 20 initiatives, which is designed to increase productivity.

"This year we are focusing on the domestic economy. There has been an increase in demand for certain products to reconstruct the country after the floods," says Atikom Terbsiri, president of IRPC.

"We need to keep a close eye on the EU's economy, as they are one of China's prime trade partners," says Terbsiri. "By 2015, I think the petrochemical industry will pick up and our revenues will increase by about 15 percent from last year, which is very encouraging."

this year's monsoon season.

"Thirdly," he says, "we have to deal with the Asian economic community regarding the ways in which we can attract more FDI and how to make sure those investors come with green industries."

## Connecting regional markets

Thailand is also the world's premier producer of natural and synthetic rubber and hard disk drives, as well as an exporter of huge amounts of rice and sugar.

"Our national competitiveness is based on having well-established infrastructure and a logistical system, which,

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# Back on track

With a World Expo 2020 campaign under way, Thailand is determined to shine.

IN line with the Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra administration's focus on strengthening regional relations — and showing the country's determination to get things done — Minister of Foreign Affairs Surapong Tovichakchaikul flags up the many constructive developments in bilateral relations between Thailand and its neighbors.

Actions include prime ministerial visits to Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Malaysia, the upgrading of border checks with Myanmar and Laos and a new international point of entry at the Thailand and Cambodia border. The country has also made significant progress in legalizing the several hundred thousand illegal workers that have poured in from the region.

The foreign minister is committed to maximizing Thailand's close ties with China and the US. "Thailand has been very fortunate that its relationships with both China and the US have long been very strong, broad-based and deep. The ties are not just between government and business sectors, but also deeply rooted between our peoples," he says.

"As a good friend of both the US and China, together with our geographical location, as well as our close ties with countries within and beyond ASEAN, I believe Thailand is well placed to bridge the interests of all parties involved.

"In July this year, Thailand will take up the role of country coordinator of ASEAN-China ties between 2012 and 2015. We very much look forward to taking up this role because it will give us a lot of opportunities to make a difference both within and beyond the ASEAN community."

Thailand is certainly on a mission to open up to the world. In February this year, the Thai Cabinet reaffirmed Thailand's bid to host the World Expo 2020.

The theme, "Redefine Globalization: Balanced Life, Sustainable Living" is, according to officials, "based on a philosophy of living that highlights Thailand and its cultural wisdom, and emphasizes the harmony between people, culture, technologies and the natural environment as the main interest in managing the positive growth of all nations."

## Believe in Thailand

As well as Thailand's many attractions, a successful bid would bring immense benefits to the South Asian country, putting it under the world spotlight and attracting millions of visitors as the World Expo Shanghai did in 2010.

For this reason, the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) initiated the Believe in Thailand campaign, aimed at restoring Thailand's

image as Asia's preferred destination, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The campaign, which is competing with the likes of Rio de Janeiro and Dubai, will focus on three major advantages, namely: countless business opportunities, renowned hospitality and a great variety of tourist attractions.

"We want to show business travelers, MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions) operators and organizers that Thailand is back to normal and back on track. With top quality service, professionalism and our infamous hospitality, I believe Thailand will successfully restore the fading confidence among our target groups. The launch of this campaign will maximize Thailand's well deserved status as a preferred MICE destination," Akapol Sorasuchart, president of TCEB, says.

If Thailand's bid is successful, the organizers have agreed to situate the World Expo 2020 in the historical province of Ayutthaya, the beautiful former capital that lies less than an hour from Bangkok.

As well as being home to some of the country's largest industrial estates and fertile land, Ayutthaya is a World Heritage site, a popular tourist attraction and a strong contributor to Thailand's economy. Officials have planned extensive

transportation infrastructures linking Ayutthaya to Bangkok and beyond through high-speed trains and the mass transit system.

The world-class event will be in good hands. TCEB is trusted in the industry as it strives to ensure that every experience its clients have in Thailand is unique, with more choices now and the most choices for the future.

Its professional team offers every event the special, personalized service it requires, while the incredible diversity available allows an unforgettable bespoke package. No detail is too small, and this year, TCEB is proud to offer more services, more opportunities and more value. It has also made it easier for clients to design their own plan within the options.

Thailand's reputation for hospitality is unsurpassed and when combined with professional services, sophisticated infrastructure and facilities, varieties of meeting destinations and countless business opportunities it will come as no surprise that visitors will want to come back again and again.

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## 15 Years of Success of JW Marriott Bangkok

JW Marriott Bangkok's opening in 1997 with the black Griffin logo caused a sensation, as the brand was new in Thailand and not among the best known of the Marriott Group.

General Manager for over 10 years, Peter Caprez is nowadays recognized as the backbone of the success of the property and the brand. "Our success is based on three key factors: first, service and taking care of our guests; second, the Marriott Rewards loyalty program; and third, the hotel's convenient location on Sukhumvit Road," he says.

"Bangkok traffic cannot be hidden and the BTS Skytrain plays a big part for customers making a booking. Our location within walking distance to the BTS Ploenchit Station is our top asset."

On new developments this year, he says: "The hotel has finished renovating the Deluxe Premium rooms. In May 2012, we will have the new lifestyle meeting room, Manhattan Studio, an ideal venue for executive meetings, with an open kitchen for private and fresh coffee breaks.

"It has a newly appointed bar, managed by our renowned New York Steakhouse, called the Manhattan Bar, where the original Martini meets New York cuisine flair."

Recently listed in "The World's 500 Best Hotels" by Travel + Leisure, the 441-room JW Marriott Bangkok on Sukhumvit Road offers convenience for business and leisure travelers, including shopping lovers.

JW Marriott Bangkok shares ownership with the 316-room Courtyard by Marriott Bangkok, located in the heart of the city and the Renaissance Koh Samui Resort & Spa on Lamai Beach and Caprez also holds the Cluster General Manager role for these three Marriott properties, owned by The Erawan Group.

The Business Lounge at the Courtyard by Marriott Bangkok recently opened on the hotel's top floor, together with 47 new Business Rooms. "Due to popular demand from our fast-growing business clientele, the Business Lounge is a great addition to our excellent business facilities," Caprez says.

The Business Lounge offers excellent views of the city's skyline together with complimentary breakfast, all day refreshments and evening drinks.

"Meanwhile, Renaissance Koh Samui has launched its new Pool Villas, which are so perfect for a delightful tropical hideaway and honeymoon in privacy," Caprez concludes.

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