

Daily Thai News Updates: 14 March 2017

1. Thailand, Cambodia to forge 16 partnership deals

Source: Bangkok Post ([Link](#))

Thailand is set to sign 16 partnership deals with Cambodia during this week's trade delegation visit led by Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak. Commerce Minister Apiradi Tantraporn said five of the deals will be signed by government-to-government units and the remaining 11 will be between private-sector bodies. She said the Commerce Ministry's International Trade Promotion Department would sign three memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with the Cambodia Trade Promotion Department to foster trade and investment, jointly develop startups and small and medium-sized enterprises to be more innovative and strengthen border trade. The two sides aim to triple two-way trade to US\$5 billion (530 billion baht) by 2020.

2. Asean members reaffirm 90% tariff cuts under RCEP

Source: Bangkok Post ([Link](#))

Asean members are holding to their vow to cut import tariffs on 90% of products, amounting to 5,000-6,000 items under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), over the next 15 years. They also plan to push for the conclusion of negotiations this year. According to Commerce Minister Apiradi Tantraporn, who just returned from the 23rd Asean Economic Ministers Retreat in Manila, bloc members will raise the issue of further discussions with six dialogue partners later this month, so that the pact can be signed at the Asean Summit in November. The RCEP was launched in November 2012 with the aim of establishing deeper economic cooperation among the 10 Asean members and six trading partners: China, India, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. The member countries represent 29% of global trade. The 16 countries have missed the deadline for concluding negotiations twice, in 2015 and 2016.

3. Business registration ticks upward

Source: Bangkok Post ([Link](#))

New business registrations rose 3% in February, driven by the economic recovery, state stimulus measures and higher private investment. According to Banjongjitt Angsusingh, director-general of the Business Development Department, the number of new business registration totalled 5,700, with combined registered capital of 26.98 billion baht. "Higher registration came in line with the country's economic recovery alongside economic stimulus measures, while private investment prospects look positive due to the government extending a tax measure promoting domestic investment for another year and domestic tourism continues to grow," she said. The cabinet in January approved a Finance Ministry proposal to extend a tax measure promoting domestic investment for another year, until Dec 31, 2017.

4. World Bank urges education reform

Source: Bangkok Post ([Link](#))

Education reform is needed to put Thailand back on track towards its potential growth and becoming a high-income country, says the World Bank. Ulrich Zachau, the World Bank's country director for Southeast Asia, said the current government has been active in tackling obstacles to doing business in Thailand, but while plenty of discussion has occurred regarding reform of the education system, concrete policies haven't emerged. "Implementation has yet to begin, and this is something I want to highlight as it is critically important to do to improve the skills of young people," Mr Zachau said. He said key reforms of the education system include changes in curriculum and an integration of schools to ensure qualified teachers in each school. "From our experience, no country has advanced to high-income status without investing hugely, and Thailand will have to do the same in its education system," Mr Zachau said.

5. U-tapao, high-speed rail top lost

Source: The Nation ([Link](#))

The Government will move first with two transport projects – the upgrade of U-tapao International Airport and the construction of a high-speed railway – out of the five mega-projects under the Eastern Economic Corridor master plan. The three other projects are port development, investment in targeted industries and development of a new city. The rail module includes a double-track railway. Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak said after the meeting yesterday of the EEC steering committee to follow up on the five projects that the action plan would be expedited for completion in three months. U-tapao will be the cornerstone of the drive towards establishing an aviation hub in the Eastern region with 6,500 rai (1,040 hectares) of land and the first special economic zone in the EEC. It is expected to play a complementary role to the Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang international gateways in Bangkok. The terms of reference for the extension of U-tapao's second runway are expected to be finalised by the middle of this year with the private sector submitting bids late this year.