

Daily Thai News Summary: 30 September 2015

1. ICT ministry announces 15 flagship projects

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

The Information and Communications Technology Ministry yesterday announced 15 flagship projects for the three-month first phase of the "digital economy" policy. ICT Minister Uttama Savayana said the projects included a CAT Telecom innovation park, TOT's aim to have 2 million broadband users, electronic-trade facilitation focusing on rice and sugar traders, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, and Web services such as Thailand Post's Postmart.com for logistics operations.

The projects fall into five categories: telecom infrastructure, government information, electronic services for SMEs, smart cities, and cyber-security. Both TOT and CAT will need to discuss implementing some of the projects together, including international submarine cable projects and nationwide underground cables. Uttama had ordered 10 ICT state agencies to propose flagship projects. Each agency proposed two projects, but the ministry selected only 15.

2. DASTA joins forces with Mekong Institute to advance tourism in GMS

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

The Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA) has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Mekong Institute to strengthen sustainable tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).

The Mekong Institute (MI), an intergovernmental organisation in Khon Kaen, promotes regional cooperation through capacity-building programmes for the countries of the GMS, namely Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, as a GMS-based knowledge centre for policy research and recommendation services on economic integration and development disparities.

Nalakitbhag Sangsrit, director-general of DASTA, said the agency had firmed up this collaborative initiative with MI. He said this partnership was an ideal platform from which DASTA, as a regional leader on sustainable tourism, would join with MI to advance tourism growth in the region.

MI director Watcharas Leelawath said: *"The signing of this document and partnering with an important player in the tourism sector like DASTA is a significant step forward to promote tourism as a driving force for social and economic development."* The MoU provides a

framework of cooperation with a view to promoting DASTA's successful performance on sustainable tourism, particularly community-based tourism, in the GMS.

3. Gulf of Thailand gas blocks get third party evaluation

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

The Department of Mineral Fuels (DMF) has begun the evaluation process of Chevron Thailand Exploration and Production's Erawan gas block and PTT Exploration and Production's Bongkok block in the Gulf of Thailand. DMF director-general Puangthip Silpasart said the evaluation process must be completed before the two concessions expire in 2022 and 2023 (for Erawan and Bongkok respectively).

The 30-year first-round concessions had expired but were extended by 10 years. With the amendment of the Petroleum Act, all underground gas resources and assets related to the blocks will be evaluated before a new round of concessions takes place. The evaluations are being done by a third party out of fairness to new investors who may be interested in bidding on the blocks in the coming round. The new concessions for the two blocks will be awarded under a new system of production sharing contracts, replacing the existing concession fee system.

4. Malls add to retail space

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

Shopping-mall developers are spending Bt150 billion from this year to 2017 to expand their retail space from 18 million square metres to 21 million square metres in three years. Some of the 10 members of the Thai Shopping Centre Association will spend Bt103 billion to grow their shopping-mall space from 12 million square metres this year to 14 million square metres by 2017, said spokeswoman Wallaya Chirathivat.

Among the mega retail development projects are EmQuartier by The Mall Group on Sukhumvit Road in Bangkok and CentraPlaza Westgate in Nonthaburi. Both were opened this year. Another is the IconSiam project being developed by Siam Piwat and Charoen Pokphand Group. Slated to be opened by the end of this year are CentralFestival EastVille and Crystal Park's Phase 3, both on Praditmanutham Road, and Zpell@Future Park by Rangsit Plaza in Rangsit. In major cities outside Bangkok, Central Group is developing a Central shopping mall in Phuket, while The Mall Group has its Blu Pearl project there.

5. Emerging markets adopting “digital wallet” for payments

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

The digital wallet is driving payment innovation in emerging markets including Thailand, according to MasterCard. And the Asia-Pacific region has been named among the world's top shopping destinations for Muslim travellers.

Ann Cairns, president for international markets, said yesterday that innovative payments and online transactions could be seen in some of the biggest emerging countries such as India, China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Nigeria, as well as the United Arab Emirates. Thailand is one of the key markets driving the growth of online payments, as 100 per cent of Thais now own a mobile phone but only 30 per cent use a smartphone, so there's room to grow.

By Harsha Hazarika