

Daily Thai News Summary: 7 July 2016

1. Thai Myanmar JTC to meet on raising 2 way trade

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

Thailand and Myanmar aim to increase bilateral trade to between US\$10 billion and \$12 billion next year, from \$7.74 billion in 2015, under closer cooperation through the Joint Trade Commission (JTC) and Asean integration. Commerce Minister Apiradi Tantraporn said yesterday that the two neighbouring countries would strengthen ties in trade, investment and other forms of cooperation. The proposals for enhanced cooperation will be discussed during the seventh meeting of the JTC, to be held in Nay Pyi Taw for two days beginning tomorrow. Apiradi will lead the Thai delegation, while Myanmar's trade minister will chair the meeting. The trade goal was set after the recent meeting between Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.

At the JTC meeting, the ministers will discuss cooperation on Mae Sot-Myawaddy border trade and the setting up of a CLMVT (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand) Business Council led by the private sector to solve trade-related problems. Under the JTC, Thailand and Myanmar will also support the use of local currencies in special economic zones (SEZs) and other areas, while seeking ways to facilitate investment from both countries. Moreover, Thailand will encourage a bilateral agreement on Thailand-Myanmar transport to facilitate logistics growth between the two sides, as well as support the upgrading of border checkpoints. The JTC will also discuss tourism promotion, transportation for two countries people, support for the Dawei SEZ project, job creation for Myanmar nationals, and promoting Thai and Myanmar woven fabrics.

According to Commerce Ministry data, Myanmar is Thailand's eight-largest trading partner in Asean, and its 15th-largest globally. During the past five years, bilateral trade has been worth \$7.37 billion on average. In 2015, trade was valued \$7.74 billion (Bt272 billion), with exports from Thailand worth \$4.17 billion. Border trade accounted for 80 per cent or \$6.23 billion.

2. Transport Minister updates Cabinet on Progress of railway projects

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

The Bt224.42 billion first phase of the Thai-Japanese high-speed railway project for Bangkok-Phitsanulok is expected to kick off with design work next year before construction begins in either 2018 or 2019, Transport Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith said. The project is part of the Bangkok-Chiang Mai railway project being built under a Thailand-Japan bilateral deal. Arkhom said Thailand was waiting for an interim report on the project's feasibility study undertaken by Japan. The report was to be submitted on June 30. The minister was reporting to the Cabinet yesterday on progress made in the country's railway system development plan focusing on high-speed trains, metro lines and an intercity dual-track railway network.

Apart from the Thai-Japanese project, Arkhom said the Thai-Chinese railway project was being considered by the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning and expected to commence construction this quarter. The project will start with building the first phase of the 250km Bangkok-Kaeng Khoi route with an investment of between Bt170 billion and Bt190 billion. Meanwhile, the high-speed railway project for the 193km Bangkok-Rayong and 165km Bangkok-Hua Hin routes will be put forward for the Public Private Partnership Committee's consideration in the last quarter of this year. The Bangkok-Rayong railway project is expected to cost Bt153.53 billion, while the Bangkok-Hua Hin requires Bt224.42 billion.

3. Govt upbeat on export growth

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

With changes in target industries, the Commerce Ministry admits that export expansion will be slight in the short run, while seeing brighter prospects in the long run under the government's "Industry 4.0" model to focus on 10 industrial clusters. *"Exports could face slowing growth for a while, since many industries have shifted their expansion overseas because of cheap labour and tariff privileges. However, exports could expand in the long term after the government turns to focusing on 10 high-tech sophisticated industries, which will add value to exports,"* Malee Choklumlerd, director-general of the International Trade Department, said yesterday. Thailand needs to face small export growth or even a decline in the short term since the country no longer focuses on labour-intensive industries and is encouraging some industries to relocate to neighbouring countries.

The 10 "S-curve industries" are next-generation automobiles, smart electronics, affluent medical and wellness tourism, agriculture and biotechnology, food for the future, robotics, aviation and logistics, biofuels and biochemicals, and establishing digital and medical hubs. The industries with local and foreign investors already moving abroad, mainly to neighbouring countries, are textiles and garments, agro-industry, electronics, and hospitality and medical

services. After the promotion of the S-curve industries, exports should grow more strongly in the future, as those industries will create value-added products. In cooperation with the Japan External Trade Organisation, the department has adopted Jetro's information on 50 focus cities for drawing up export-promotion plans.

4. Two Thai cities voted into world's Top 15

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

Chiang Mai and Bangkok have been rated by readers of US magazine *Travel + Leisure* in the top 15 World's Best Cities for 2016. Northern city Chiang Mai ranked second with a score of 91.25 and Bangkok sat at 14th, scoring 88.96. Last year Bangkok ranked sixth out of a top 10 on which Chiang Mai did not feature. The winner was US city Charleston, South Carolina, with a score of 91.66, up from second last year and taking over from Japan's Kyoto (89.75), winner in 2014 and 2015.

Newcomer Luang Prabang in Laos sits at fifth (89.85) and Cambodia's temple town Siem Reap at 13th (88.961), down from third last year. Other cities on the list include Italy's Rome (11th) and Florence (4th), South Africa's Cape Town (10th), Spain's Barcelona (8th) and Mexico's San Miguel de Allende (3rd). *Travel + Leisure* online says its "readers ranked cities on their sights and landmarks, culture, cuisine, friendliness, shopping, and overall value". The city rankings are part of their annual World's Best Awards, which also includes islands, spas, airlines, and cruise lines. Chiang Mai also topped the list of their 10 Best Cities in Asia rankings, followed by Luang Prabang, Kyoto, Siem Reap, Bangkok, Vietnam's Hoi An, Bali's Ubud, India's Udaipur, Tokyo, and Tibet's Lhasa.

5. Ascend Commerce launches "WeMall" online market place

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

ASCEND Commerce Company has launched an online marketplace called "WeMall". Ascend Commerce has spent more than Bt300 million on developing WeMall, which it hopes will feature more than 1,000 brands next year, with the number of visitors expected to rise threefold, said Ascend general manager Seubsakol Sakolsatayadorn. Punnamas Vichitkulwongsa, chief executive officer of Bangkok-based Ascend Group, said the Asean e-commerce industry had outpaced the global growth rate, mainly because international players have jumped into the scene in recognition of this region's solid potential.

At present, Asean's online retail market is worth US\$15 billion (Bt528 billion). In Thailand, the value of this market is around \$2 billion. In terms of e-commerce, Thailand ranks No 4 in Asean behind Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia, Punnamas said. Seubsakol said the global online-shopping industry had been growing by 1 per cent every month while Asean's was growing at double that rate. In Thailand, online shopping now accounts for 2.3 per cent of the total retail-market value. However, the online-shopping growth rate for developed nations ranges between 10 and 12 per cent, signifying that Thailand's online market has tremendous opportunities.

6. BRT approved for service to Phaholyothin transport

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

The Bus Rapid Transit system has been approved to service the Phaholyothin Transportation Hub Area project on 2,325 rai (372 hectares), according to the Office of Transport and Traffic Policy (OTP). During the third public hearing on the BRT project's environmental impact assessment held in Bangkok yesterday, Wijit Nimitrwanich, a transport technical adviser from the OTP, presented the final report on the BRT project to about 200 participants from the private and public sectors. The 10-kilometre BRT route providing public transport to the hub covers 16 stations, beginning at Bang Sue Central Railway Station, crossing a group of railroad tracks with an elevated road at Kamphaeng Phet Sixth Road before passing several streets and turning to where it began in the project's compound.

The BRT route is two-way except for the lanes surrounding Bang Sue Central Railway Station, which will be one-way. Each BRT lane will be separated from private-car lanes. However, the BRT's operation that was proposed by the OTP was based on Mo Chit 2 Bus Terminal, which occupies 16 rai , moving out of the project area. With the project's design, there would be only the sub-terminal left provided with minibuses from Bangkok to any destination no more than 300km outside Bangkok. The BRT will have a Bt1.8-billion maintenance depot on 7 rai. The appropriate investment model will depend on the State Enterprise Policy Office, but the private sector seems to be interested only in operating the BRT.

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