

Daily Thai News Updates: 25 July 2017

1. Finance seeks cabinet nod for B40bn in handouts

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

The Finance Ministry will seek cabinet approval in the next week or two for a 40-billion-baht budget to assist people who qualify for the government's welfare and subsidy scheme, says finance permanent secretary Somchai Sujjapongse. The 40 billion baht will be used to fund free rides for the poor on public buses and trains, as well as subsidise utility bills and allow them to buy staple goods from the poor on public buses and trains, as well as subsidise utility bills and allow them to buy staple goods from the Commerce Ministry's Blue Flag shops, while the budget to put money into the pockets of those earning below the poverty line (30,000 baht a year) has yet to be finalised. Earlier, the Finance Ministry planned to spend 50 billion baht on cash handouts to those living below the poverty line, and an additional 30 billion to provide welfare and subsidies of up to 100,000 baht a year for people with earnings below the poverty line. These benefits are expected to cost the government 22 billion baht a year, and the budget will reach 40 billion when credit for buying goods in Blue Flag shops is included, the source said.

2. Migrant registration swings into action

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

Thailand will be free of illegal migrant labourers by next year, Labour Minister Sirichai Distakul vowed Monday after the launch of 101 centres to legalise the status of migrant workers nationwide. He said the centres can handle up to two million unregistered migrant workers, or around 1,500 workers at each centre per day. The 101 centres officially swung into action to give unregistered migrant workers who have been working in Thailand without the required documents, including a work permit and a certificate of identity (CI), legitimate working status. The centres, which will be open until Aug 7, are aimed at getting all illegal migrant labourers registered in compliance with an executive decree which imposes harsh punishments on employers who hire undocumented foreign nationals. The government will upgrade the legal status of workers who can confirm they have valid employment as well as prove their identity. Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha exercised Section 44 as a means to curb wrongdoing, including transnational human trafficking. The 15-day window in which the centres will be open is part of the 180-day grace

period (ending Jan 1) that the government has given employers and workers to get their paperwork in order.

3. Warning over labour act risks

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

An executive decree to regulate the employment of migrant workers and potential delays in the government's big-ticket infrastructure investment could drag on Thailand's economic growth momentum in the the second half, economists caution. "The tighter regulations on migrant labour that were recently announced could pose a threat to the economic recovery in the second half of this year," said Chaleampong Kongcharoen, a lecturer at the Faculty of Economics, Thammasat University. The regulations could affect production in the manufacturing sector in the short-term while its effects on the economic growth will need further assessment, he said. The executive decree on migrant workers, which took effect last month, prompted workers from Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos to return home fearing punishment. Anxious over manpower shortages, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha responded by invoking Section 44 of the interim charter to defer full implementation of the decree until next year.

4. Somkid eyes expansion of NZ trade ties

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

Thailand and New Zealand are set to tighten their economic partnership and expand it beyond the trade of goods to include education, agriculture and tourism. According to Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak who met with New Zealand Trade Minister Todd McClay yesterday in Bangkok, the two nations agreed to broaden the Thailand-New Zealand Closer Economic Partnership. The pact was inked on April 19, 2005 and came into effect on July 1, 2005. The deal cover liberalization of market access for goods, services and investments, as well as cooperation in trade-related areas such as customs procedure, electronic commerce, intellectual property, government procurement and competition policy. New Zealand is currently the 32nd biggest trading partner of Thailand, with two-way trade amounting to US\$2 billion (67 billion baht), roughly 0.5% of Thailand's total trade.

5. Thailand, China to move forward on train, EEC projects

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

Thailand and China have pledged there will be no u-turn on a long-delayed train project and promised cooperation on the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) scheme. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said he hoped the rail project would "elevate" Thailand's status in the region and said that the two countries would overcome differences to bring the rail project to fruition. Thailand and China are set to build the 179-billion-baht train project linking Bangkok and Nakhon Ratchasima after Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha executed Section 44 of the interim constitution to end the delay last month. The route to Nakhon Ratchasima will be extended to Nong Khai in the future. Plans call for it to link with another train line under construction from southern China to Laos. Thailand and China have mooted the train project since 2014 but progress has been slow, hampered by unsettled issues including loans and technological transfer. Mr Wang, who was on a two-day visit to Thailand that ended Monday, said: "China and Thailand are like brothers."

6. Farmers will reap EEC rewards, Uttama says

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

The Industry Ministry will ensure that farmers benefit from the government's flagship Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) project, minister, Uttama Savanayana says. It is part of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's strategy to take care of the agriculture sector, particularly farmers in areas near the EEC, he said. The strategy will be similar to the Thailand 4.0 concept, which aims at developing national sustainable growth that does not leave anyone behind, Mr Uttama said, without giving further details. "The EEC project should help raise value on agricultural products and increase livelihoods for farmers, particularly those in the vicinity of the EEC," said Mr Uttama. The new rail projects, intended to link the EEC to other parts of the country as well as overseas markets via the deep-sea ports and the U-tapao airport, should at least help cut production and logistics costs to allow people in the farming sector make a greater profit, he said.

7. Asean must walk the climate talk

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

ASEAN is going to have the big party it deserves. The golden jubilee celebration will pay tribute to the remarkable journey of a small regional association founded by five foreign ministers from backward countries in a war-torn region...Despite derision from superpowers who predicted the

bloc would become a flop, Asean has survived and, surprisingly, thrived. It is being held up as a beacon of multilateralism and emerging-market potential with the official formation of the Asean Economic Community in late 2015. Its member states have achieved a degree of peace and prosperity that few could have envisioned five decades ago. Singapore has reached developed country status while new members such Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam are emerging production hubs and on the way to exiting poverty...Unlike political issues, terrorism or financial crises, "climate change" is not a regular part of Asean policymakers' vocabulary. The lukewarm attitude toward this problem makes Asean more vulnerable.