

## Thai News Update: 15 March 2018

### **1. Things to Note for the Smart Visa Programme**

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

Effective February 1, 2018, qualifying foreign experts, executives, entrepreneurs, and investors working or investing in the science and technology industries in Thailand may be eligible for a Smart visa. This is a welcome incentive that could help reduce administrative burdens and costs for those qualifying for the Smart visa and their employers. There are also important benefits for accompanying family members. The Smart visa is offered to those above individuals who wish to work or to invest in Thailand in the 10 targeted S-Curve industries. Qualifying applicants must submit a Smart visa application along with supporting documents to the Smart Visa Unit, a newly established department under the Board of Investment. The Smart Visa Unit will process applications, including assessing technical qualifications, identifying and sorting through immigration issues, confirming whether the applied occupations are not legally prohibited by various designated agencies, and obtaining verification and endorsement from relevant government agencies that employer companies and start-up companies are in the targeted S-Curve industries. These processes will be completed before the Smart Visa Unit issued a qualification endorsement letter for applicant to use in applying for the Smart visa at either the Thai Embassies or Consulates (those outside Thailand) or the Immigration Bureau at the One-Stop Center (those in Thailand).

### **2. Govt to Ease Transport Woes with Neighbouring Nations**

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

The Government will build more roads and rail lines linking neighbouring countries with Thailand in the Mekong sub-region in order to ease traffic congestions at major border points, said Transport Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisit. Delivering his keynote speech at the seminar on “The GMS 25th Anniversary : Achievement, Lessons Learned, and the Way Forward” hosted by Asian Development Bank, Arkhom said yesterday that as Thailand has been doing more trade and investments with countries along the Mekong River, it has led to traffic congestions at major border points. Over the past 25 years, the six countries (Thailand, Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Laos, and

Vietnam) participating in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) development project have been successful in developing their economies and close co-operations in the GMS sub-region, said Arkhom. He said the government will build more roads and bridges at Mae Sot district in Tak province in the north to ease the congestion of cargo trucks waiting in a long queue on the bridge crossing into Myanmar. New bridges will be built in order to separate the transport of cargoes and people, he said. The railway connection with Cambodia currently under construction is expected to open for service later this year, It will connect Sa Kaeo with Sisophon in Cambodia before extending to Poipet later, he said

### **3. Finland 'Happiest Country', Thailand Less Joyous Than Ever**

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

The *World Happiness Report* published on March 14 put Finland at the top among 156 countries ranked by happiness levels, based on factors such as life expectancy, social support and corruption. Thailand ranked No.46 World Happiness Report released on March 14. Last year's UN World Happiness Report ranked Thailand as No.32 most happy, so it has been a major drop of 14 places in happiness for the country. Last year, Thailand scored 6.424) on the happiness index. That fell to 6.072 for the report issued on March 14. All this UN happiness measurement flew in the face of another survey just a month ago. The Bloomberg Misery Index showed Thais were literally the world's least miserable people. So, it's least miserable but 46th happiest. That won't impress the military regime, whose official motto at the time of the May, 2014, coup was "Returning Happiness to the People". Finland has emerged as the happiest place to live even though little sun and low temperatures are often blamed for high rates of depression.

### **4. Economic Growth Exceeds Expectations, Says Bot Chief**

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

The momentum of Thailand's economic growth has exceeded expectations and its recovery has become more broad-based, but monetary policy needs to remain accommodative, the central bank governor said on March 14. Veerathai Santiprabhob told Reuters in an interview that benign inflation is allowing the country to keep interest rates near record lows despite a rising trend in global rates. The most recent central bank growth forecast, made in December, was for 3.9% in

2018, the same pace as achieved in 2017. "The momentum since we announced the last forecast has exceeded our expectations," Mr Veerathai said. He said a rise in import numbers was more exciting than rising exports because it pointed to new private capital investment. But he said that in looking at its forecasts, the central bank would also have to take global risks into account. The Bank of Thailand (BoT) has left its policy interest rate unchanged at 1.50%, near record lows, since April 2015, as Southeast Asia's second-largest economy has struggled to gain traction.

### **5. Cabinet Changes Rules for Airport Operating Licences**

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

The cabinet has approved amending a draft ministerial regulation on the issuance of a licence to set up airports as proposed by the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand (CAAT), Transport Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith says. Speaking after the cabinet meeting on March 13, he said under the new ministerial regulation, the qualifications of operators entitled to receive a licence are specific and will vary according to the type of airport. For a public airport, operators must be registered as a limited company or public limited company under Thai law with their headquarters in Thailand, he said. The minister also said Airports of Thailand Plc (AoT) is gearing up for two airport projects in Chiang Mai and Phuket provinces. While both airports will serve as second airports to the existing provincial ones they will be among the first to fall under the new regulations.