

Thai News Update: 16 December 2019

1. Asean paves path towards better FTAs

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

Thailand looks poised to improve free trade agreements (FTAs) under the Asean framework next year, aiming to extend tariff cuts to cover more products, particularly sensitive items. The Trade Negotiations Department also wants to upgrade agreements so they are in line with changing economic conditions. Auramon Supthaweethum, director-general of the department, said the focus of negotiations will be the Asean FTAs with China, India, South Korea and a joint pact with Australia and New Zealand. "The review for the Asean-China FTA, for instance, will focus on improvements in market access to allow more products to receive tariff cuts," Mrs Auramon said.

2. MRTA set to splurge on electric rail, new tollways

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

The government is committed to spend about 640 billion baht next year on major public transport projects, including new electric rail routes in Bangkok, Phuket, Chiang Mai and Nakhon Ratchasima, says the Mass Rapid Transit Authority of Thailand (MRTA). MRTA governor, Pakapong Sirikantaramas, said that out of the 640 billion baht earmarked for the projects, some 422 billion baht will go towards funding six electric rail routes. "The construction of the MRT's Orange Line between Thailand Cultural Centre and Bang Khun Non will require about 200 billion baht, while the Purple Line extension from Tao Poon to Rat Burana will cost about 100 billion baht," he said. "Additionally, the section of the Brown Line between Khae Rai and Lam Sali will cost about 50 billion baht to build."

3. Startup launches 'Airbnb of fitness'

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

A Bangkok-based startup has launched an app that lets users get daily gym access at discount prices, aiming to tap the health-conscious business travellers and tourists visiting the city. Fitripper gives users access to 40-45 gyms around Thailand and Bali on a "pay as you go

model" for daily, monthly or yearly gym passes, usually at a price cheaper than the walk-in rate. "We are basically the Airbnb or Agoda of fitness," said Rob Krieger, co-founder of Fittripper and an American living in Bangkok. "We want to look at those models used in the accommodation space and do it for fitness." He said his company will start by targeting expat and digital nomad areas such as Chiang Mai, Bali and Bangkok, then spread out into other Southeast Asian countries like Cambodia. He eventually wants to turn the focus towards local Thais, and he's translating a Thai version of the app.

4. Pathum Thani sets target to be Asean-wide food hub

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

Pathum Thani province near Bangkok has set itself a goal to become a hub for fresh markets in the region. Pinit Boonlert, the provincial governor, told the Bangkok Post that the province has sufficient resources to become a major distribution channel for food exports. The province, he said, has a conducive location, being near the capital and Don Mueang airport, and an extensive network of highways connecting with the north and northeastern regions of the country. "Such logistics help to strengthen our province's position as a location for food distribution. We even have the vision to upscale to a cutting-edge market 4.0 model," he said.

5. Thailand plans to promote "home lodge" places for foreign visitors next year

Source: Xinhuanet ([Link](#))

Thailand plans to promote the so-called "home lodge" places for foreign visitors to stay and feel the community-based ways of life of the locals. Tourism and Sports Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn confirmed on 14 December his agency plans to promote some 1,500 "home lodge" places in all regions of the country next year. An estimated 10,000 foreign visitors, particularly including free, independent travelers, are expected on yearly basis to check in at those "home lodge" places where they can view and learn the locals' ways of life, art and culture and buy their indigenously-manufactured goods, Phipat said. Authorities will see to it that all the "home lodge" places will be convenient, clean and safe for visitors and environmentally friendly, he said.

6. Shrimp projected to bounce back with growth

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

Somsak Paneetatyasai, president of the Thai Shrimp Association, said higher production efficiency and efforts to tackle shrimp diseases should lead to shrimp production of 350,000-400,000 tonnes in 2020, up from 290,000 tonnes this year. Next year's shrimp exports are forecast to grow to 192,000 tonnes from this year's 160,000 tonnes, which would be a 5% dip from 2018. Mr Somsak said the value of exports is also likely to grow by 20% next year from 50-55 billion baht fetched this year. This year's export value fell 11% from 2018, due to continued baht strength and shrimp diseases.

7. Thailand expects 20-pct growth in shrimp exports for 2020

Source: Vietnam Plus ([Link](#))

Thailand is hoping for a recovery in shrimp exports which are forecast to grow 20 percent in 2020 thanks to increased production. Somsak Paneetatyasai, President of the Thai Shrimp Association, said higher production efficiency and efforts to tackle shrimp diseases should lead to an output of 350,000-400,000 tonnes in 2020, up from 290,000 tonnes this year. Next year's shrimp exports are forecast to grow to 192,000 tonnes from 160,000 tonnes in 2019, which would be a 5-percent dip from 2018. Somsak said the value of exports is also likely to grow by 20 percent next year from 50-55 billion THB (1.65 – 1.82 billion USD) in 2019. The figure this year fell 11 percent from 2018 due to continued baht appreciation and shrimp diseases. The association reported that for the first 10 months, Thailand shipped 135,249 tonnes of shrimp abroad, with export value down 11.8 percent to 40.2 billion THB. Key export markets include the US, Japan, China, Australia and the EU.