

THAI NEWS UPDATE: 21 FEBRUARY 2022

1. GDP up 1.8% in Q4 of 2021, stronger than expected

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

Thailand's economy returned to growth in the final quarter of 2021, official data showed on 21 February, as exports increased and domestic activity improved following an easing of coronavirus curbs and reopening to tourists. Southeast Asia's second-largest economy expanded a seasonally adjusted 1.8% in the December quarter from the previous three months, data from the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) showed, outstripping a forecast 1.4% increase in a Reuters poll, and after a revised seasonally adjusted 0.9% contraction in the third quarter.

2. Govt expects 200,000 Saudi visitors this year

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

About 200,000 people are expected to visit Thailand from Saudi Arabia this year with the resumption of direct flights and mutual tourism promotions, the government spokesman said on 21 February. Spokesman Thanakorn Wangboonkongchana said Saudi Arabian Airlines would start operating direct flights between the two countries next Monday and the Tourism and Sports Ministry planned to take tourism representatives to Saudi Arabia late next month to present their products and services. That should bring about 200,000 visitors from Saudi Arabia this year, and about 20 billion baht in tourism-related income, the spokesman said.

3. Malaysian PM's visit to Thailand a positive sign on reopening of land border

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

Malaysian Ambassador to Thailand Datuk Jojie Samuel said Ismail Sabri's three-day visit, the first since he was appointed prime minister last August, was at the invitation of Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha. This was also the first visit by a Malaysian prime minister to the Kingdom since the start of the global Covid-19 pandemic two years ago. Jojie said matters to be discussed during the visit included the reopening of land borders, bilateral cooperation and exploring trade and investment opportunities post Covid-19. "There will be some good news (on the reopening of land borders). There are a few proposals on the table.

4. Fifth Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge rising fast as Mekong network takes shape

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

Thailand expects its new, Bt3.65-billion border point with Laos to be completed ahead of schedule next year before opening to boost Mekong region trade in early 2024. The Beung Kan-Bolikhamsai Bridge will become the country's fifth major border bridge across the

Mekong River, connecting Thailand with Bolikhamsai province in Laos. The bridge is now 32 per cent complete, said Bueng Kan authorities on Sunday, with construction progressing faster than expected and the opening date set for January 2024. Building work on the bridge began in June 2020. The Bt3.65-billion project covers construction of roads, a customs checkpoint, a concrete bridge, and a multi-purpose area under the bridge. The project is part of the Ayeyarwady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) to create a comprehensive transportation network connecting the Greater Mekong subregion.

5. Saudia Airlines launching direct flights to Thailand this month

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

Saudia Airlines will launch direct flights to Thailand on February 28, Saudi Arabia's national carrier announced via Facebook on 19 February. Thai tourism authorities are targeting Bt20 billion in revenue from an expected 200,000 Saudi visitors this year. "Bangkok is closer than ever. Our first direct flight will take to the skies on February 28 with prices starting from 1499 SAR [about Bt12,850] only," Saudia said. The move follows the normalisation of diplomatic ties between Thailand and Saudi Arabia after a 30-year freeze due to the so-called Blue Diamond Affair. The 1989 theft of jewels from a Saudi palace by a Thai cleaner triggered a trail of murders and suspected police corruption in Thailand. Ties were restored last month when Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha led a state visit to the desert kingdom for talks with Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, the first leader-level talks between the two governments in 30 years.