

Thai News Update: 22 February 2018

1. Somkid Warns of Digital Stall

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

Digital transformation in Thailand should be complete by 2021 or the economy will face falling GDP growth and fail to become a digital economy, says Somkid Jatusripitak, the Deputy Prime Minister. Strong collaboration is needed between the public and private sectors, especially large enterprises and telecom operators, he said. Speaking at "Digital Intelligent Nation 2018", a seminar held by Advanced Info services (IAS). Mr. Somkid said that the three major factors to drive the digital transformation are: a digital-for-all initiative, a digital-driven economy, and digital warriors who create innovative technologies.

2. Thailand Moves up in Russia's Sights

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

Russia sees Thailand as a key focus for the country in Asia as part of its strategy to boost trade and other ties with Southeast nations, said Alexei Gruzdev, Deputy Minister of Economic Development. "We started this precise project-oriented development from Thailand and we hope to get a positive experience here and then multiply the benefits for the region," Gruzdev said. "We have started to learn how to work here with partners and we see that, in certain sectors. Thailand may be considered a hub in ASEAN. There are a lot of fields to explore and that's why we were here," said Gruzdev, who led a trade mission to Thailand. In regards to the country's Eastern Economic Corridor, Gruzdev said that Russia was ready to take part in infrastructure development, including for a high speed railway, port development and air traffic control system for U-Tapao airport.

3. \$15 Bn in Frame for Bilateral Trade with Cambodia

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

Thailand and Cambodia are working towards the goal of trade flows between the neighbours reaching US\$15 billion in 2020, a jump of almost 10 per cent from the US\$6.16 billion booked in 2017, a senior Thai trade official said on the eve of the sixth meeting of the Joint Trade Committee

(JTC) on Feb 22. Trade between Thailand and Cambodia in 2017 jumped 9.9 per cent from the prior year to US\$6.16 billion. The neighbours aim for an annual trade value of US\$15 billion in 2020. Thailand would encourage domestic investors to expand their investments across the border, especially in innovative businesses, information technology, organic food, restaurants and other hospitality ventures. Cambodia needed more of these kinds of investments to develop the country's capabilities, especially in information technology, software and digital services, Jirawuth Suwanna-Aat, minister counsellor (commercial) at the Commerce Ministry said.

4. Pico-Finance's Loans Reach Bt219 Million

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

The value of pico-finance loans stood at Bt218.97 million at the end of 2017, with the finance extended as part of the government's efforts to tackle underground debt in communities, the Fiscal Policy Office (FPO) said. The non-performing loan (NPL) ratio stood at 2.04 per cent of total outstanding pico-finance loans at the end of last year, the agency said. Pornchai Thiraveja, deputy director-general at FPO and finance spokesman, said that total accumulative pico-finance loans have been provided to 8,561 accounts, at Bt25,577.85 per account. Pico-finance is similar to the better-known microfinance system but provides smaller loans needed primarily by households and individuals and is among the government initiatives to address the country's underground debt problems.

5. Japanese Dad of 13 'Wanted 100-1000 Children'

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

A Japanese businessman who won legal custody of his 13 children born from surrogates in Thailand is virtually anonymous in his home country. Mitsutoki Shigeta, who was granted sole custody by a Thai court on Feb 21, is the son of the founder of Japanese telecom and insurance company Hikari Tsushin. As a major shareholder, he earns millions of dollars a year in dividends. But in Japan, he keeps an extremely low profile. Aggressive tabloid reports after the babies were discovered in a Bangkok condominium in 2014 quickly faded, allegedly after defamation lawsuits

and pressure were applied by his father's company. Japanese-language media refer to him now as an anonymous 28-year-old man.

6. Small Comfort in New Graft Rank

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

Thailand is doing a little better in the fight against graft, falling to 96th place in the latest Corruption Perception Index from 101st place a year ago. The country scored 37 in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2017 released last night by independent watchdog Transparency International (TI), compared to 35 in 2016. New Zealand tops the ranking with a score of 89, followed by Denmark which gets 88 and Finland with 85, the same as Norway and Switzerland. Singapore ranks 6th globally and top in Asia with a score of 84, the same score as Sweden. Tipatrai Saelawong, a Thailand Development Research Institute researcher who studies corruption, said he looks more at the score than the ranking.

7. Suvarnabhumi to Get Low-Price Food Corner Next Month

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

Suvarnabhumi Airport will open a new low-price food corner in the airport compound next month, a deputy director of the airport said on Feb 22. Dalad Asavet, deputy director of Suvarnabhumi Airport, said the new corner will be an in addition to the operation of low-price shops at the Magic Food Point inside the passenger building. She said the new food corner will be outside the passenger building and will be located on the eastern side next to a park, over 100 to 120 square metres. The new corner will have small shops selling food priced at Bt30 and above per dish and drinking water will be sold at Bt30 per bottle. Passengers will have to walk out of the passenger building and towards Suvarnabhumi Police Station. She said the new corner could cater to about 150 to 200 passengers at the same time, adding it would be ready in March.

8. Banking Agents Pegged to Lift Finance Access

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

Banking agents will increase consumer access to financial services by 34%, with more than 200,000 of them potentially setting up shop nationwide, says the central bank's think tank. Some 55% of villages nationwide cannot access financial services from the formal sector within a radius

of five kilometres. But consumers can access potential banking agents, said Sommarat Chantararat, head of financial system research at the Bank of Thailand's Puey Ungphakorn Institute for Economic Research (Pier). The institution surveyed 236,758 financial service points across the country, of which 35,410 were in the formal financial sector, 9,682 were in the semi-formal financial sector, 3,113 were in the informal financial sector, 29,878 were potential banking agents and 158,675 were electronic data capture (EDC) terminals.