

Thai News Update: 31 March 2020

1. Thailand Earmarks Further \$15 Billion for Coronavirus Crisis

Source: New York Times ([Link](#))

Thailand's new stimulus package to alleviate the impact of the coronavirus crisis will be worth more than 500 billion baht (\$15.3 billion), its finance minister said on 30 March. It has already introduced two packages, the first to inject 400 billion baht into the economy and the second, worth 117 billion baht, to include cash handouts. The latest is being worked on by the finance ministry, the central bank and relevant agencies, Uttama Savanayana said. "We can't tell the size yet as we are working on it. But it should be bigger than earlier two packages combined," he told a news conference, adding: "We will try to do it quickly."

2. Industry Ministry to suspend small firms' debts

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

The Industry Ministry plans to roll out rescue measures by suspending debt payments for 6-12 months for small community enterprises for several industries affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. The measure covers businesses in food, drinks, herbs, jewellery, souvenirs and clothing. Local producers can apply for debt suspension in April. The Industrial Promotion Department under the Industry Ministry has extended loans to 2,500 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and community enterprises through a revolving fund for household industries and handicrafts. The fund covers 77 provinces with a total credit limit of 370 million baht and a 200,000-baht limit per person.

3. 90% cut in travel targeted

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

The government has come up with a goal to cut public journeys by as much as 90% in order to "flatten the curve" of new coronavirus infections. The plan was proposed by army chief Gen Apirat Kongsompong at 30 March meeting of the Centre for Covid-19 Situation Administration (CCSA), according to CCSA spokesman Taweessin Visanuyothin. Compared to March 21, the number of journeys made by the public one week later on Saturday had decreased by 46% after the government began implementing measures to encourage members of the public not to take unnecessary trips, Dr Taweessin told media at Government House after the CCSA meeting. Personal car use fell by 41% while the number of electric train passengers had fallen by 59% during the same period, he said.

4. Thailand distributes medical supplies donated by Jack Ma Foundation

Source: Pattay Mail ([Link](#))

Deputy Prime Minister and Public Health Minister, Anutin Charnvirakul handed over the protective gear for medical staff at the Chakri Naruebodindra Medical Institute (CNMI) in Samut Prakan. The institute is equipped with negative pressure rooms, which can accommodate about 80 Covid-19 patients. Besides the CNMI, the operation center, set up by the government for distribution of Covid-19 medical supplies has dispatched protective suits and masks from the foundations to King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital and Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok. Each hospital initially receives 10,000 protective suits and 10,000 protective masks. The rest of medical supplies will be sent to main hospitals in three southern border provinces – Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat.

5. Phuket, Yala, Narathiwat placed on lockdown

Source: Thai PBS World ([Link](#))

Land traffic in an out of these provinces are banned while Phuket airport will be closed starting April 10. The lockdown will take effect till the end of April. Starting midnight of 30 March the only land route linking the island of Phuket with the mainland at Tha Chatchai has been closed to traffic. All vehicles, except trucks carrying consumer products, LPG, fuel, construction materials, medical supplies, rescue vehicles, ambulances, government vehicles and those with permission, are forbidden from crossing into or out of the province.

6. Baht strengthens in line with stock markets

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

The baht on March 31 opened at Bt32.63 to the US dollar, strengthening from the last close of Bt32.66 on March 30. SCB Securities senior market strategist Jitipol Puksamatanan predicted that the baht would move between Bt32.50 and Bt32.75 per US dollar on Tuesday. On 30 March night, the S&P 500 and Euro Stoxx 50 rose by 3.4 per cent and 1.3 per cent, respectively. Meanwhile, the bear market rally caused the US 10-Year Treasury to rise to 0.72 per cent, although the price of WTI crude oil fell by 6 per cent, since its production this time has not been stored.

7. Thailand Post to deliver 2.3m face masks

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

Thailand Post will deliver 2.3 million face masks nationwide, starting this evening, said Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam on 31 March after a meeting at the Covid-19 Situation Administration Centre. He added that the 11 manufacturers can now produce 2.3 million masks

a day. Of the total, 1.3 million will be given to the Public Health Ministry for healthcare workers while the Interior Ministry will take the balance of 1 million for distribution to village health volunteers and officials providing services to the public. The distribution of face masks will gradually expand to cover the general public while exports will be banned without permission.

8. Govt won't let THAI go under: Somkid

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

Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak on Monday said the government will not allow ailing flag-carrier Thai Airways International Plc (THAI) to collapse and dismissed rumours of impending lay-offs as a result of the coronavirus crisis. Mr Somkid said the government is ready to help the national airline, which was already beset with financial difficulties even before the pandemic began. While he insisted that THAI won't lay off any employees, the deputy premier urged the THAI board to come up with a business plan which proves that the company can still grow and expand after the crisis. "All rumours [about a lay-off] aren't true. News involving THAI that didn't come from the Finance Ministry should be considered false," he said. THAI employs about 20,000 staff, while its sister company Wingspan, which offers aviation-related services, has about 4,900 workers on its payroll.

9. Ministry launches online service for small retailers

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

The Commerce Ministry has kicked off applications that allow customers to buy goods online and enjoy delivery services from smart traditional retail shops, another effort to deal with the impact of Covid-19. Commerce Minister Jurin Laksanawisit said the new online platform for traditional small retail shops is at the ministry's website, while the Digital Government Development Agency has a chatbot line (@dgachatbot). Customers in Bangkok can buy online and have delivery from 136 smart traditional retail shops. "The virus has changed consumer behaviour and decreased supply of consumer goods. This new platform will help consumers search for traditional retail shops close to their home that provide delivery services," he said. "We hope it will help not only small shops, but also consumers to survive during this crisis."

10. Finance Ministry readies phase 3 of virus welfare

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

The Finance Ministry is preparing the third phase of the government's Covid-19 relief package to support people, small-and-medium enterprises and financial institutions as the country grapples with the virus crisis. Finance Minister Uttama Savanayana said on Monday the third-

phase package will be larger than the first- and second-phase packages combined to cushion the fallout from the coronavirus outbreak. Mr Uttama said the latest package will support SMEs and make credit more affordable and available. Once the crisis is over the country will emerge intact and move forward, he said.