

Daily Thai News Updates: 24 May 2017

1. Section 44 to fire up EEC development

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

The government agreed yesterday to invoke the powerful Section 44 of the interim charter to speed up investment in the much-touted Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), unlocking limits and streamlining procedures regarding environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and the public-private partnership (PPP) model. Sansern Kaewkamnerd, a government spokesman, said using Section 44 to facilitate EEC investment was approved by the National Council for Peace and Order and acknowledged by the cabinet yesterday. Mr Sansern said Section 44 will be applied over the next few days to shorten the EIA process for key investment projects at the EEC from two years to one, while the PPP process will be cut from 15-20 months. The National Environment Commission will be tasked with setting up a working committee which includes both foreign and domestic experts to vet the EIA report. Regarding the PPP process, Mr Sansern said Section 44 will only be applicable to urgent development projects like the 200-billion-baht U-tapao airport expansion; the 158-billion-baht Bangkok-Rayong high-speed train; the 88-billion-baht third phase of the Laem Chabang deep-sea port; and the 64.3-billion-baht double-track rail link between the three deep-sea ports of Bangkok, Laem Chabang and Map Ta Phut. He said via Section 44, the government will also allow foreigners to hold more than a 50% share in an aviation maintenance centre covering 6,500 rai at U-tapao airport.

2. Somkid in Laos to boost trade ties

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

Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak will meet Laos' Deputy PM and Finance Minister Somdee Duangdee in Vientiane on Wednesday to discuss trade and investment between the countries. Meanwhile, Thailand's private sector will be joining the Thailand-Laos Business Forum on Wednesday to explore investment opportunities in Laos. The neighbouring country is one of the fastest-growing in Asean, clocking up 7.6 per cent economic growth a year for the last five years. Bilateral trade was worth Bt206.64 billion in 2016. Thai exports to Laos were worth Bt104.07 billion, while imports were worth Bt66.57 billion. Up to 98 per cent of total trade value was recorded through border trade.

3. Academic support plan to allow foreign universities in SEZs

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

Several Thai academics have expressed support for the government's plan to allow foreigners to set up universities in special economic zones (SEZs) to address skill shortages, although they have urged certain criteria and conditions to ensure good quality and few negative impacts to Thai institutes. As the plan – which has been approved by the Cabinet and the junta – requires Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha to invoke his power under Article 44 of the interim constitution because of the required exemption of some normal rules, the Education Ministry has been waiting for two junta orders about the plan to be published in the Royal Gazette before implementation, said Education Minister Teerakiat Jareonsettasin. Once they are published, the ministry will have them translated into English and other languages and start talking with ambassadors of various countries. Many such as Japan, the United States and the United Kingdom have already shown interest, he said. Teerakiat said foreign educational institutions located primarily in SEZs would be allowed to teach only courses in fields not available in Thailand, such as those involving certain high technologies. The idea is to drive the country's economy with innovation as per the "Thailand 4.0" policy and to support the SEZs' economic and trade expansion, he said. "People shouldn't be worried that they will steal students from Thai universities, because the courses will be for different target groups and wouldn't be redundant with the available ones," he said...Since many Thai universities collaborate with foreign institutes, they should make use of such cooperation as the way forward would now be wide open, he said, adding that all must be carefully done and in line with certain criteria and conditions.

4. Thai love affairs with social media endures

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

Thailand remains in the top 10 worldwide for social media statistics on network usage and consumer adoption growth in 2017, says a Bangkok-based social media analytics developer. Social networking has had a tremendous impact on users and brands in Thailand, said Kla Tangsuwan, chief executive of Thoth Zocial. "Social media has increasingly become an important tool for business marketing and for business success," he said. As of May 1, social media users in Thailand on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were up an average of 20% year-on-year, rising to 47 million, 11 million and 9 million respectively. Thailand has moved down slightly in the rankings in terms

of Facebook users, to ninth in 2017 from eighth last year. Bangkok also remains the world's biggest city for Facebook users in 2017 with 27 million users. The number of Instagram users in Thailand totalled 11 million as of May, up 41% year-on-year, putting the country at 13th by user numbers. Twitter's active users in Thailand numbered 9 million, a 70% surge from 3.1 million a year earlier. Mr Kla said social media users here are not only numerous, but they are also advanced users. Banks, telecoms, consumer goods makers and electronics firms, as well as the government, are active social media users, he said.

5. Khon Kaen sees hub with MICE centre

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

Khon Kaen is getting closer to becoming the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (Mice) hub for the Northeast of Thailand and neighbouring countries after the opening of a new convention centre by SET-listed CP Land Plc later this year. Phuriwat Limthavornrat, president of the Association of Domestic Travel (ADT) and managing director of P. Incentive Tour Event Co, which specialises in Mice and business familiarisation trips, said Khon Kaen's huge population and high economic growth give it the potential to become the Mice hub in the Northeastern region. Many giant companies and organisations have entered Khon Kaen to establish their regional offices such as Bank of Thailand and Thai Life Insurance. Sripatum University plans to expand its campus to the Northern Province and leading real estate companies have launched condominium projects in the area. CP Land, a real estate company under Charoen Pokphand Group, will open its Khon Kaen International Convention and Exhibition Center (Kice) on Dec 1...According to the company's study, Khon Kaen comprises 2 million population and has the highest annual income per head in the region with 76,055 baht. Out of total 22 million people living in the Northeast, 14 million of them (the population of Bangkok and its outskirts) can drive to Khon Kaen in under two hours. Five major airlines operate in Khon Kaen, with a total of 38 flights a day...Thailand Convention and Exhibition Center (TCEB) has been promoting Khon Kaen as a Mice city, along with Phuket in the South, Chiang Mai in the North and Pattaya on the Eastern Seaboard.