

Thai News Update: 20 April 2020

1. Former WHO chief in Thailand calls for new virus testing strategy

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

Thailand faces a call for a different testing approach to help guide decisions about reopening its economy following a drop in daily coronavirus infections. The nation has conducted more than 100,000 tests and ramped up daily testing capacity to about 20,000, focused on those with suspect symptoms or contact with infected people. This approach is good for clinical purposes, but less so for population surveillance, according to William Aldis, formerly the World Health Organization's representative in Thailand. The country needs to pick representative groups, ideally province-by-province, and test them recurringly to get a sense of the incidence of the virus within the population over time, said Mr Aldis. This is a "paradigm shift" to so-called sentinel surveillance from the current approach of "more or less what we call opportunistic sampling," he added.

2. Minister calls on experts to brainstorm on reviving economy

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

Energy Minister Sontirat Sontijirawong and University, Science, Research and Innovations Minister Suwit Mesinee met recently to discuss plans to revive the country's economy once the Covid-19 outbreak comes to an end. Sontirat has also invited scholars and economists to join him in launching an online forum this month to brainstorm on reviving the economy. He said he has taken on this job in his capacity as secretary of Palang Pracharat Party, while Suwit will lead the project.

3. Thai Lion Air ready to fly domestic routes in May

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

Thai Lion Air is ready to reopen domestic routes by May 1 and assured it had no intention to go out of business. The airline said that the unemployment letters previously publicised were not for all 4,000 employees but only for 120 who had not worked for at least one year. Those employees already had discussions with Thai Lion Air before being laid off. The airline is likely to give an opportunity for employees to go on leave without pay or voluntarily quit in May, as the company has to cut cost due to the impact of the pandemic, the company said.

4. SCB, subsidiaries see Bt9.3-billion net profit

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

Siam Commercial Bank and its subsidiaries reported net profit (based on unreviewed consolidated financial statements) of Bt9.3 billion, up 1 per cent year on year (yoy), in the first quarter of 2020. Higher net profit was driven by “top-line growth” of 9 per cent yoy and lower operating expenses compared to the same period last year, despite higher provisions against the current economic uncertainty, the bank said.

5. AirAsia set to resume domestic flights in Thailand on May 1

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

AirAsia is set to resume domestic flights in various Asian countries, commencing with Malaysia on April 29, followed by Thailand (May 1), the Philippines (May 1), India (May 4) and Indonesia (May 7), subject to government approval. The resumption of services will initially start with key selected domestic routes, which will increase gradually to include international destinations once the situation improves and governments lift border and travel restrictions.

6. TAT expects 16m international tourists

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

Thailand is likely to close this year with only 16 million international tourists and 60 million domestic trips, far below the pre-coronavirus targets of 40 million and 172 million respectively, according to Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). The estimates have the country losing almost 24 million tourists and 1.9 trillion baht in revenue compared with last year, which saw arrivals soar to 39.8 million and revenue climb to 1.93 trillion baht. "This revised forecast assumes tourism activities can resume in May, with the outbreak in Thailand levelling off while overseas infections subside," said TAT governor Yuthasak Supasorn. "The industry needs to watch the situation closely before commencing business."

7. Thailand's Covid-19 mortality rate among lowest in the world

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

The Covid-19 mortality rate in Thailand is at 1.7 per cent, which is almost four times lower than the global average, while the recovery rate is at 62.5 per cent, the Ministry of Public Health said. Dr Sophon Iamsirithaworn, director of the Division of Communicable Disease, said on Friday (April 17) that the Covid-19 situation in Thailand is improving as the number of new cases has declined with no new imported cases due to limitation on flights to the Kingdom since early April.

8. Thailand adjusts fruit distribution plan as exports suffer from COVID-19

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

Thai Ministry of Commerce is putting more emphasis on domestic markets for fruit sales this year, as the export sector is suffering from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. The Ministry wants to see more fruit sold from grocery trucks that deliver items right to a customers' home. A caravan of Blue Flag grocery trucks has been dispatched from Talaad Thai, a supersized wholesale market for groceries, to sell grocery items to villagers where they live, and communities in Bangkok and neighbouring provinces. These 350 grocery trucks will be selling fruit and vegetables, as well as essential items such as eggs, instant noodles, palm oil, and hand sanitizers.

9. 91 branches for merged bank

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

TMB-Thanachart Bank, the consolidation of two banks, plans to launch 91 co-location branches this year, paving the way for the banks to complete their integration processes. Of the total, 58 branches are to be in Bangkok and 33 in provincial areas, said Praphan Anupongongarch, president of TMB-Thanachart Bank. Ten co-location branches were open at the end of March, with 13 more set to be unveiled this month and next, he said. TMB and Thanachart Bank are undergoing consolidation, expected to be completed by June 2021. The merger marks the industry's largest such deal, with considerations worth 156 billion baht.