

## Thai News Update: 9 March 2020

### 1. 5G smart robots take care of coronavirus patients

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

Chulalongkorn University has joined forces with Advanced Info Service (AIS) to develop smart robots with 5G tech to monitor and take care of coronavirus patients and those under monitoring for the first time in Thailand. "We leveraged our 5G network in business districts for the use of smart robots to fight Covid-19," said Wasit Wattanasap, head of nationwide operations and support for AIS, using the technical jargon for the illness. The robots were assembled by the engineering and medicine faculties of Chulalongkorn University.

### 2. Qatar bans arrivals from Thailand, 13 other countries over virus fears

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

Qatar has temporarily barred travellers from 14 countries, including Thailand, from 9 March as a precaution against the rapidly spreading coronavirus, the government announced on 8 March. The ban covers China, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria and Thailand. Qatar Airways had already suspended flights to and from Italy. Qatar reported three more cases of the virus on 8 March, bringing the total there to 15.

### 3. BJC earmarks B8-10bn for expansion this year

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

Despite the coronavirus epidemic, Berli Jucker Plc (BJC), the trading company and operator of Big C Supercenter, plans to allocate 8-10 billion baht this year as planned to expand business, citing recovering consumer spending power. Rami Piirainen, vice-president for investor relations, said about 70% of the budget will be used to expand the business of Big C Supercenter this year, with the remainder allocated to other businesses. The company plans to open three Big C branches in Thailand, including one in Samut Sakhon scheduled to open in the fourth quarter. Information on the other two branches was not disclosed.

#### **4. The path to National Telecom**

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

The merger of TOT and CAT into a new company, called National Telecom (NT), is believed to be the government's final push to provide a lifeline to the two state telecom enterprises. Over the past two years, the government has tried to set up a new subsidiary to operate under each of the two telecoms, but the plan failed to get off the ground. The Digital Economy and Society (DES) Ministry deems a merger the best solution because of strong support from low-ranking employees, especially labour union members, at the two enterprises.

#### **5. Thailand heading towards recession as Covid-19 ravages world economy**

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

Thailand will fall into an economic recession in the first half of this year and the middle- and lower-income groups will be hard hit, an economist has warned. The Thai economy has been largely impacted by slower growth as the coronavirus has spread globally. The Thai economy in the first quarter -- from January to March -- is expected to contract by 2 per cent year on year. The second quarter will also see negative growth, he warned. The Thai economy last year grew 2.4 per cent for the full year. Middle-income and lower-income groups are expected to be hit hard as tourism and small business are severely impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak, he said.

#### **6. Thailand's Govt. opens COVID-19 info center, hotline 1111**

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

The government opens its information center on the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) to gather information and complaints related to the disease outbreak. The center would also receive public complaints related to the disease including the prices of face masks and hand sanitizer and coordinate legal action with concerned agencies, the deputy prime minister said. Mr Wissanu said that the new center would not duplicate with a COVID-19 emergency medical center of the Public Health Ministry. The health center shared only medical information, he said.

#### **7. Tesco to consider Thai bids for Asian assets on Sunday: sources**

**Source: Reuters ([Link](#))**

British retailer Tesco (TSCO.L) is set to assess bids by Thai billionaires for its Asian business on Sunday, a potential deal which could be worth just over \$10 billion, four banking sources with knowledge of the matter said. A final decision by Tesco could mark the end of a three-way tussle

for control of the company's Thai operations, which comprise some 2,000 stores, said the sources, who declined to be identified as the information is confidential. Sources have said Tesco is also selling 74 outlets in Malaysia. The bidding is shaping up as a battle between Dhanin Chearavanont's Charoen Pokphand (CP) Group, Central Group, controlled by the Chirathivat family, and beer-and-property magnate Charoen Sirivadhanabhakdi's TCC Group, sources said.