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This issue covers the following topics:

Thailand

**UPDATE ON THAILAND'S DRAFT DECREE TO
REGULATE DIGITAL PLATFORM SERVICES****Chatpong Sunthorn-opas
/Nopparak Yangiam**

Singapore

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO ALLOW
CONDITIONAL FEE ARRANGEMENTS IN SINGAPORE****Claire Chong/
Kara Quek**

Myanmar

**OVERVIEW OF THE RECENT LEGAL UPDATES IN
MYANMAR****Win Shwe Yi Htun**

Thailand

UPDATE ON THAILAND'S DRAFT DECREE TO REGULATE DIGITAL PLATFORM SERVICES

2021 年 10 月に、デジタルプラットフォームサービス事業を規制する規制の原案が閣議において承認された。デジタルプラットフォームのユーザー（プラットフォームを通じて商品又はサービスを提供する事業者及び当該商品又はサービスを利用する消費者）の保護等を目的としており、一定の電子取引事業を届出、登録又は許可制とすること、タイ国外の事業者がタイ国内に代表者を置かなければならないこと等の規制が設けられている。今後、当該規制案は、Council of State の審査及び閣議における最終承認を経た上で、制定・施行されることとなる。

Introduction

Digital technology has become a significant tool in the daily lives of people and has eased the life of many. Nowadays, we have a range of digital platforms to choose from, such as online marketplaces, electronic commerce, food or goods delivery services, and ride hailing services, all of which contribute to the country's economy and improve market access for customers. Due to growth of these digital platforms, the necessity to regulate the service operators of digital platform is becoming more imminent in many jurisdictions, including Thailand.

In response to the growth of digital platforms, the Electronic Transactions Development Agency of Thailand ("ETDA") under the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society ("MDES") which is responsible for the regulation of services related to electronic transactions in Thailand had introduced the Draft Royal Decree on Supervision of Digital Platform Service Business Subject to Prior Notification (the "Draft Royal Decree on Digital Platform Service" or "Draft Royal Decree") and arranged public hearing with relevant government authorities and general public. Subsequently, on 25 October 2021, the Draft Royal Decree was approved in principle by the Cabinet.

Key Provisions of the Royal Decree on Digital Platform Service

The Draft Royal Decree is issued under the Electronic Transactions Act of 2001 (the "Electronic Transactions Act"), the main law which regulates electronic transactions in Thailand in general. Under Section 32 of the Electronic Transactions Act, a Royal Decree may be enacted to impose duties to notify, register or obtain licenses for the operation of particular electronic transaction businesses in Thailand.

According to the information published by ETDA, the main purposes of the Draft Royal Decree are to (i) standardize the operation of digital platform services in Thailand, (ii) provide transparency to service users which include, (a) individuals and juristic persons who are general business operators and offer products or services for sales via the platforms, and (b) ordinary customers who are end-customers for products/services

sold or provided by business operators in (a). The key provisions of the Draft Royal Decree are as follows:

1. **Requirement of notification to ETDA**

Under Section 7 of the Draft Royal Decree, any business operator who provides “digital platform services” shall have the duty to notify ETDA. The rules, requirements, and the notification form thereof will be further prescribed by the Electronic Transactions Committee in accordance with the Electronic Transaction Act. It must be noted that, to be subject to this duty, such business operators who provide digital platform services (the “**Service Provider**”) must have the following characteristics:

- (a) the Service Provider must provide “digital platform services” as defined in Section 3 of the Draft Royal Decree i.e. a platform which functions as a medium for general business operators and consumers to connect by using computer network such as online marketplaces, food delivery platforms or online search engines, etc. According to this definition, digital platforms in which such services are provided by one-way communication and do not require interaction from users (i.e. general business operators and consumers) such as entertainment or game streaming services will not fall within the scope of the “Service Provider”, and are thus not required to comply with the provisions in the Draft Royal Decree; and
- (b) the Service Provider must provide services to customers in Thailand regardless of whether it is located within or outside Thailand. It should be noted that according to Section 9 of the Draft Royal Decree, the Service Provider who is located outside of Thailand may be deemed as “providing service to customers in Thailand” if its website or the contents of its services have certain manners of connection with Thailand, such as the display of its services whether in part or in whole is in Thai language, the domain name of websites contains indication of Thailand such as “.th” or if users may choose to make payment by using Thai currency.

Notwithstanding the above, the notification requirement under the Draft Royal Decree, however, will not apply to certain types of digital platform services which are already supervised by other authorities or digital platform services as prescribed by the Electronic Transactions Committee. Details and characteristics of the exempted Service Providers will be further prescribed in the sub-regulations to be issued under the Draft Royal Decree once it is enacted.

Information such as the name and status of the Service Provider who has already notified its business to ETDA will be displayed to the public. In addition, if any Service Provider wishes to cease their business operations in Thailand, such person must notify ETDA in advance by online channel not less than 60 days before the ceasing date.

2. **Requirement of appoint a representative in Thailand**

Under Section 10 of the Draft Royal Decree, the Service Provider who is located outside Thailand must appoint a local representative in writing. Such representative must be in Thailand and be authorized to act on behalf of the Service Provider without any limitations on liabilities relating to the provision of digital platform services. The representative shall be responsible for the compliance of duties stipulated under Chapter II of the Draft Royal Decree, such as filing reports to ETDA and disclosing information regarding conditions of the services to users.

According to the explanation of the Draft Royal Decree published by ETDA, the purpose of this requirement is to enable the authorities and service users to be able to communicate in the event of queries and claims against the Service Provider.

3. **Other duties of the Service Provider**

In addition to the notification duty as mentioned in 1., the Service Provider must submit a notification letter regarding business size on a yearly basis within 30 days from the last day of the fiscal year. In addition, all Service Providers must cooperate upon receiving a legal order or a court order to comply

with the Draft Royal Decree. Furthermore, they may be required to comply with other ETDA's notifications issued under the Draft Royal Decree on Digital Platform Service, provided that they fall within the specific categories prescribed by ETDA.

4. Enforcement & penalty

The Draft Royal Decree grants a wide range of authorities to ETDA. One of the most important authority of ETDA under the Draft Royal Decree is that ETDA has the power to issue the order to prohibit the Service Provider who violates or fails to comply with the requirements under the Draft Royal Decree from providing digital platform service in Thailand until they have fully complied therewith. Moreover, ETDA, with the approval of the Electronic Transactions Committee, may request cooperation from other authorities to undertake any action for the benefit of the enforcement of the Draft Royal Decree, such as the authority of MDES to block illegal digital platforms.

In addition to the above enforcement measures, any Service Provider who fails to notify ETDA, fails to comply with ETDA officer's orders or operates digital platform service after its notification has been revoked is subject to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year or to a fine not exceeding 100,000 THB, or to both, under the Electronic Transactions Act.

Conclusion

This Draft Royal Decree on Digital Platform Service is expected to help to ensure transparent and fair operations, build trust in providing services, protect platform users such as customers as well as operators, and promote best practice or self-supervision mechanism to protect and benefit financial security and commerce, as well as protect the public from damages.

Currently, the Draft Royal Decree on Digital Platform Service is being reviewed by the Council of State, and may be subject to further amendments before being forwarded to the Cabinet for final consideration. We will closely monitor the status and keep our readers updated of any developments.

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Singapore

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO ALLOW CONDITIONAL FEE ARRANGEMENTS IN SINGAPORE

英国法をその起源とするシンガポール法では、伝統的に成功報酬型の弁護士報酬体系は法律で禁止されていたが、今般、国際仲裁など一部の分野に関して成功報酬型の報酬体系を許容する弁護士法の改正案が国会に上程された。成功報酬型の報酬体系が導入されることで、当事者の視点からはより司法へのアクセスがしやすくなることが期待される。

Introduction

On 1 November 2021, a bill to amend the Legal Profession Act (“LPA”) to allow conditional fee arrangements (“CFAs”) in Singapore, was introduced in Parliament and read for the first time. In CFAs, commonly known as “no win, no pay” agreements, lawyers’ fees are paid when certain pre-agreed conditions are met, such as success in a case.

The proposed amendments would permit law firms and lawyers in Singapore to enter into CFAs for international arbitrations and related court proceedings, among others. If passed, this would mark the first time that outcome-dependent fee structures are permitted in Singapore.

Background to CFAs in Singapore

At present, lawyers in Singapore are not permitted to charge any type of outcome-dependent fee for the work rendered. The statutory prohibition against outcome-dependent fees has its roots in English common law. While in England the prohibition against CFAs was removed in 1990, thus far the prohibition has remained in Singapore law. However, recent changes in Singapore law and the commercial litigation landscape have prompted the Ministry of Law to re-look at this prohibition.

In 2017, the Civil Law Act was amended to permit third-party funding arrangements in certain prescribed contentious proceedings, including domestic and international arbitration proceedings and related court and mediation proceedings. More recently and in response to the growing interest in alternative funding arrangements for commercial claims, the Ministry of Law announced in late 2019 that it would undertake a public consultation on the possibility of allowing CFAs for certain legal proceedings. This exercise has reportedly received positive feedback from the legal profession and users of dispute resolution services alike.

Key features of the proposed amendments to allow CFAs

The amendments to the LPA concerning CFAs are set out in proposed new sections 115A to 115F of the LPA. These include the following.

- A CFA is defined as an agreement on lawyers’ remuneration and costs for contentious proceedings. Under such agreement, the remuneration / costs are payable by the client only when a specified occurrence or condition takes place. (See Section 115A(1) of the proposed amendments)
- The amount agreed under a CFA may also include an “*uplift fee*”. An uplift fee is where the conditional fee payable under specified circumstances is higher than the fee that would have been payable if there had been no CFA in place. (See Section 115A(1) of the proposed amendments)
- Singapore-qualified lawyers and law practices, and registered foreign lawyers and law practices, are able to enter into a CFA with their clients for certain prescribed proceedings. (See Sections 115B(1), 115A(2)(b) and 115A(2)(c) of the proposed amendments)
- CFAs are currently contemplated to be available for domestic / international arbitrations, certain proceedings in the Singapore International Commercial Court, and related court / mediation proceedings. The Ministry of Law may expand this initial list to include more types of eligible proceedings in the future.

- A CFA must be concluded in writing and signed by the client in order to be valid. (See Section 115B(4)(a) of the proposed amendments)
- CFAs, as defined in the LPA, are distinct from contingency fee arrangements. A contingency fee arrangement is where lawyers receive a share in the monies recovered by clients in the event of a successful claim or settlement. Contingency fee arrangements continue to be disallowed in Singapore. (See Section 115B(4)(b) of the proposed amendments.)
- CFAs may cover work done by legal practitioners even if legal proceedings are not eventually commenced. Among others, the scope of work that may be covered under a CFA includes preliminary advice given for, and before, the commencement of legal proceedings; and negotiations for the settlement of a claim / dispute for the purposes of any contemplated proceedings. (See Section 115B(6) of the proposed amendments)

Safeguards for litigants

CFAs will be regulated through the implementation of safeguards to protect litigants' interests. This will be done through subsidiary legislation / further regulations, and would include the following (see Section 115B(7) of the proposed amendments):

- A standard form, and required terms and conditions, for a CFA.
- Maximum limits on costs that can be agreed under a CFA (including the uplift fee).
- Information about the CFA that must be provided to the client prior to entering into the CFA. This will allow clients to make informed decisions on CFAs.

Safeguards such as these are important as the implementation of a CFA may raise concerns about potential conflicts between the legal practitioner / law practice's interests and those of their clients.

Fees agreed under a CFA will also be subject to the existing professional conduct rules in Singapore against overcharging by legal practitioners / law practices.

Conclusion

The proposed amendments to the LPA to introduce CFAs are a promising step forward for the Singapore legal market to remain competitive and responsive to litigants' needs.

The introduction of CFAs could benefit litigants in the following ways. First, CFAs may facilitate access to justice. As lawyers' fees due under a CFA are outcome-dependent, such arrangements would enable businesses or individuals with meritorious claims to explore alternative funding options. CFAs may also facilitate the efficient resolution of disputes by encouraging legal practitioners to be more cost-conscious or effective in managing cases. With CFAs in place, there would be less incentive for lawyers to pursue weak or frivolous claims.

Singapore presently ranks among the world's preferred places for arbitration. As CFAs are being considered for arbitration and related court proceedings, this development would further strengthen Singapore's stature as a major international center for dispute resolution.

Commercial parties and legal practitioners in Singapore are sure to be keeping a close eye on these developments, and will be looking forward with interest to further debate and discussion on the bill when the Second Reading is announced.

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Myanmar

OVERVIEW OF THE RECENT LEGAL UPDATES IN MYANMAR

新型コロナウイルスの感染拡大と軍事クーデターに端を発する非常事態宣言が継続するミャンマーでは混乱した政治情勢が続いており、事業環境にも大きな影響を与えている。他方で、暫定新政権下においては、商業省や投資委員会、ミャンマー中央銀行等から外国投資に関連する新たな告示や規則の改正がなされており、すぐに新規の投資が再開できるような事業環境にはないものの、引き続き状況を注視する必要がある。

Background

The political events that followed the declaration of State of Emergency and COVID-19 pandemic in Myanmar have significantly impacted businesses. In response to this, the State Administration Council and authorities have introduced several legislative changes and instructions in recent weeks.

This article provides a summary of the recent legal framework introduced by the Ministry of Commerce (“**MOC**”), the Directorate of Investment and Companies Administration (“**DICA**”), Myanmar Investment Commission (“**MIC**”) and the Central Bank of Myanmar (“**CBM**”).

1. Announcement by the Myanmar Investment Commission on priority sectors

On 25 November 2021, MIC announced eight industry sectors that will be given priority for investment by foreign and Myanmar citizen investors during the MIC proposal application process. The announcement stipulates that MIC, the government of respective states and regions and ministries will provide necessary assistance to the investors submitting proposal in these sectors under the Myanmar Investment Law 2016. However, it is not clear from the announcement that what kind of necessary assistance or priority will be provided to the investors.

The eight priority sectors that MIC will prioritize under the announcement are the following:

- (i) Fertilizer production;
- (ii) Cement manufacturing;
- (iii) Iron and Steel Manufacturing;
- (iv) Agriculture, livestock farming and related industries;
- (v) Value-added foodstuff manufacturing;
- (vi) Electric vehicle manufacturing;
- (vii) Pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturing; and
- (viii) Public transportation services

2. Instruction by the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration for opening of corporate bank account

On 22 November 2021, DICA issued the Directive 136/2021 (“**Directive 136/2021**”), which instructs companies and organizations to open separate corporate bank account for financial transactions in the name of the registered company or organization in accordance with Section 5 (a) of the Myanmar Companies Law (“**MCL**”). The Directive 136/2021 provides that some companies and organizations formed under the MCL have been using bank account which were opened under the names of their directors to carry financial transactions rather than opening a separate corporate bank account under their name. Section 5(a) of the MCL provides that a company is a legal entity in its own right separate from its members, having full rights, powers and privileges. The Directive 136/2021 further clarifies that this Directive 136/2021 is applicable to all companies and organizations registered with DICA under the MCL.

3. Amendment by the Ministry of Commerce to the list of commodities allowed for wholesale and retail trading

On 12 November 2021, MOC issued the Newsletter 19/2021 (“**Newsletter 19/2021**”), specifying the amendment lists of prioritized commodities group which are allowed to be sold through wholesale and retail by foreign companies and companies established as a joint venture between Myanmar citizen and foreigner (“**JV**”), which may be reviewed and amended from time to time according to the needs of the Union of Myanmar. With the issuance of this Newsletter 19/2021, the Newsletter 3/2021 dated 26 July 2018 which contains a list of prioritized commodities which were allowed to be sold through wholesale and retail by foreign companies and JV companies was repealed.

There are 25 types of commodity lists under the Newsletter 19/2021 which are set out below:

- (i) Consumer goods (including clothes, watches, and cosmetics);
- (ii) Food products (including agricultural products except restricted products, marine products, animal products, ready-made foods, various types of beverage, domestically manufactured liquors, and raw material for food production);
- (iii) Household goods (including ceramics, earthenware, and glassware);
- (iv) Kitchen products;
- (v) Medicine, medical devices and hospital equipment;
- (vi) Animal feed and veterinary medicines;
- (vii) Stationary;
- (viii) Furniture;
- (ix) Sport accessories;
- (x) Communication products (including cameras and phones);
- (xi) Electronics;
- (xii) Construction materials and equipment;
- (xiii) Electrical goods;
- (xiv) Chemicals for industrial manufacturing;
- (xv) Materials used in industrial production and raw material for industrial production;
- (xvi) Seeds, inputs for agriculture, and materials for agricultural use;
- (xvii) Agricultural machineries;
- (xviii) Machines and related equipment;
- (xix) Bicycles;
- (xx) Motorcycles and related equipment;
- (xxi) Motor, vehicle spare parts and machinery spare parts;
- (xxii) Toys;

- (xxiii) Home decoration materials (including flowers and plants);
- (xxiv) Souvenirs and hand-made goods; and
- (xxv) Works of arts, musical instruments and related equipment, (not including antiques).

4. Amendment by the Ministry of Commerce to the lists of commodities requiring import license

On 9 November 2021, MOC issued Newsletter No.18/2021 (“**Newsletter 18/2021**”), providing the lists of commodities requiring import licenses to import into Myanmar. MOC previously provided 3,931 types of commodities requiring licenses by Notification 68/2020 dated 22 October 2020 of the MOC.

Under the Newsletter 18/2021, 3,070 types of commodities in relation to food products, pharmaceutical products, cosmetics, fertilizers, plastic products, consumer products, electronic, paper products and construction materials has been included in the list of commodities requiring import licenses. The requirement to apply import license for the 3,070 types of commodities under the Newsletter 18/2021 will be effective from 1 January 2022. As such, a total of 7,001 types of commodities will require to apply import licenses in order to be imported into Myanmar from 1 January 2022.

The Newsletter 18/2021 provides that the lists of commodities requiring import licenses in order to import into Myanmar will be further increased by the MOC in the future.

5. Amendment by the Central Bank of Myanmar on the Foreign Exchange Management Regulations

CBM issued the Notification 64/2021 on 10 November 2021 which amends Section 35 of the Foreign Exchange Management Regulations (2014) to stipulate that the holder of a foreign currency trading license shall inspect whether the exporter received export earnings within three months from the date of shipment of the goods according to the evidence of the actual exports.

The previous Section 35 before this amendment required the licensee of the foreign currency trading to verify whether exporters received the export earning into their bank accounts in Myanmar within six months from the date of shipment of goods.

6. Announcement by the Directorate of Investment and Companies Administration on visa application

DICA announced on 30 September 2021 that companies holding MIC Permit or MIC Endorsement can apply for stay permits, work permits and entry visas for foreign employees and their family members online from 11 October 2021 through the website: <http://movas.dica.gov.mm>. It is further mentioned that such applications, can only be processed online from 1 November 2021.

The detailed information on the application was updated on the above mentioned website and the required documents for the application are the same as the previous paper application.

Conclusion

It is difficult to predict what will happen in the short to medium term since the situation in Myanmar is fluid at the moment. In the view of that, businesses and investors should carefully continue to monitor the investment, developments, risks and operational challenges in the country in order to comply with the legal requirements and to avoid being exposed to penalties.

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