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HOME INVASION

RUSSIAN MMA FIGHTER AND HIS TWIN BROTHER ARRESTED OVER KIDNAP, TORTURE, EXTORTION IN PHUKET



The Italian man still bound and gagged when resort staff found him. Photo: Supplied

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Well-known MMA fighter Khusein Askhabov and his twin brother Khasan have been arrested in connection with three Kazakh nationals forcing their way into an Italian man's villa at a resort in Cherng Talay and holding him bound and gagged while beating him for information in an hours-long ordeal that ended with the three men flying out of Phuket to Dubai after robbing the Italian man of more than B12 million in personal belongings.

The arrests were confirmed by a report of the incident by Cherng Talay Police Superintendent Pol Col Chalermchai Hersawat on Sept 5.

The report was recorded on a form marked "Form for reporting serious and shocking incidents and reasons that must be reported urgently" that was addressed to deputy national police chief Pol Gen Torsak Sukwimol, and all the senior ranking officers down the chain of command to Region 8 Police, Phuket Provincial Police and even the Phuket Governor and Thalang District Chief.

At time of press, no police – or

any other officials – in Phuket have yet to publicly recognise the incident, despite a press conference last Friday (Sept 8) that was held specifically to assure the public that law-enforcement in Phuket was dealing with any aspects of criminal activity by Russians in Phuket.

The press conference was held in response to a report by Al Jazeera, reporting already long well known problems of Russians working illegally, and the arrival of violent crime by Russian nationals on the island, including the threat of gangland violence rearing its head on the streets, such

as when a Kazakh national opened fire four times in broad daylight on 44-year-old Russian businessman Dmitry Aleynikov outside a cafe in Boat Avenue on June 7.

The report issued by Cherng Talay Police Chief Pol Col Chalermchai confirmed the arrests of 28-year-old Russian twin brothers Khasan Askhabov and Khusein Askhabpov (the report used the different spelling of the brothers' family name, but clearly marked the brothers as "twins").

Born in Grozny, Chechnya, Khusein Askhabov is well known as...

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PHUKET'S QUALITY TILE BOUTIQUE

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...MMA fighter 'Nohcho'. Although ESPN still lists Khusein as fighting out of Tiger Muay Thai in Chalong, he is now understood to be training at a Muay Thai camp in Cherng Talay.

Khusein and his brother Khasan were arrested on Sept 5, Col Chalermchai confirmed. The report did not mark where the twins were arrested, but noted they were taken into custody under arrest warrants No. 479/2566 and No 480/2566, issued by Phuket Provincial Court on Sept 4.

The report confirmed the arrests were made with the intent of prosecuting the brothers with "the act of robbery done with cruelty to the extent that others receive it and endangering the body or mind through torture", charges which fall under the Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act B.E. 2565 (2022), which covers three significant offences including torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or



LEFT: The Italian was scorched on the shoulder. RIGHT: The man makes his escape.

punishment as well as enforced disappearance.

The report marked that the arrests followed an investigation launched after a formal complaint of the incident was received on Sept 4. The report did not mark details of the ordeal, but did confirm the theft of: one Rolex 'Daytona' watch valued at

about B2,476,500; one Patek Philippe 'Nautilus' watch valued at about B3,805,250; one GRAFF watch valued at about B1,600,200; one MacBook, a new iPhone 13 and a new iPhone 14, and a pair of sunglasses.

Also listed as stolen were the Italian man's passport, his ADIB bank (Abu Dhabi

Islamic Bank) debit card as well as passwords for accessing his telephones, safe and computers.

The *Phuket News* was told that the three men also stole 40,000 euros in cash (about B1,523mn) from the safe plus 16,000 euros (about B609,578) was stolen in Dubai by use of the stolen debit card, which

was known only after the incident had been reported to police.

A source close to the Italian man told *The Phuket News* that the ordeal began when three men entered the Italian man's villa at the well-known resort through a side door and grabbed him while he was still asleep in the bedroom at about 11pm on Sept 3.

The three, which the Italian man said he had never seen before, dragged him out of the bedroom then bound, gagged and blindfolded him.

His assailants then received a phone call from a person orchestrating the attack, through which the three men asked for information, including the location of a drive containing a ledger of cryptocurrency, which the Italian men denied he had.

The first beating began, lasting some 30 minutes, which ended with another phone call to the three attackers, relaying further instructions.

The ordeal continued

through the night, with the Italian man suffering multiple contusions to his face and body from the beatings.

The three men eventually fled the villa, leaving the Italian man bound and gagged.

CCTV security footage from the resort showed the Italian man finally making his escape, rolling down a pathway – still bound and gagged but no long blindfolded – towards the resort's motorbike parking area at 4:48pm the next day (Monday, Sept 4).

The three attackers were later identified and confirmed as clearing Immigration at Phuket International Airport at 6:58am last Monday (Sept 4). The three men boarded Flight EK397 from Phuket to Dubai, and are now believed to have returned to Kazakhstan.

The Italian man said he had first met the Askhabov brothers at a beach cafe in Cherng Talay about a year ago. They had become acquaintances over the past year. However, he had never seen the three Kazakh attackers before the ordeal.

Phuket not being overtaken by Russians, officials assure

AUTHORITIES HELD a press conference on Sept 8 to deny reports that surfaced in foreign media only days earlier stating that the island had effectively been overtaken by Russians, including members of the Russian mafia.

The report in Al Jazeera on Sept 6 stated there is an increasing backlash from local residents who are concerned Russian tourists are taking jobs typically reserved for Thais, operating illegal businesses and inflating real estate prices, making it increasingly difficult to rent property on the island.

Official statistics state that there have been more than 400,000 Russians arrive in Phuket between January and July this year, double the number of visitors from the country before Russia's war against Ukraine, which started in February 2022.

Phuket has emerged as a safe haven for many Russians fleeing the fallout

of the war in Ukraine, especially as many other countries around the world effectively introduced bans on Russian visitors.

Many have set up business on the island, buying properties and securing long stay-visas, while Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, officially opened the Consulate-General of the Russian Federation in Phuket at Royal Phuket Marina on July 15 (despite the office there already being in operation for years).

There have been a spate of Russian-only businesses emerging using Russian-only language and instances of illegal workers being detected, such as the bust Phuket Immigration carried out on July 18 in Cherng Talay when they arrested three Russian women for working illegally at a beauty salon.

"We're affected by these Russians who came to run the whole tourism business," Prayut Thongmusik, the president of the Phuket van drivers'



Maj Gen Sermphan meets the press. Photo: PR Phuket

club, which represents 200 tourist minibus operators, told Al Jazeera.

"They drive personal vehicles that have not been registered with the Thai transport department as service vehicles, picking up tourists who book them through a Russian app, offering nearly 20 percent cheaper fees than us. They make sure all the rubles stay with the Russians."

The influx of Russian nationals only looks set to increase, with no signs of the war in Ukraine abating and a recent Phuket tourism roadshow held in Moscow attracting representatives from

more than 80 travel agencies.

Of greater concern to the island's residents is the threat of gangland violence rearing its head on the streets, such as when a Kazakh national opened fire four times in broad daylight on 44-year-old Russian businessman Dmitry Aleynikov outside a cafe in Boat Avenue on June 7.

However, authorities sought to clarify the report and allay any fears at the official press conference held at the Phuket Immigration Office on Sept 8, overseen by Phuket Provincial Police Commander Pol Maj Gen Sermphan Sirikong and Phuket

Immigration Chief Pol Col Thanet Sukchai, who were joined by representatives from the tourism industry.

Gen Sermphan explained that in the past five years there have only been three crimes involving Russians citizens where police have arrested the offenders in question, adding that most disputes were business related and no suggestion of a mafia presence has ever been detected.

Gen Sermphan also said that the number of long-term Russian tourists is very small and has not had an impact on inflating the island's real estate prices, while confirming that regular checks are made by police on taxi operators and none have been found to be operated illegally by Russians.

However, Col Thanet explained that checks would become more stringent in the coming months to ensure no foreigners are staying illegally on the island, particularly after new Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin on Sept 4 confirmed

a free-visa travel privilege for Chinese visitors in efforts to further boost the country's economy, which is expected to come into effect on Oct 1.

Col Thanet stressed the importance of the notification of residence according to the Immigration Act 1979 to be able to verify the address of people renting properties. A total of 401 foreigners were checked for overstay during the month of August, according to Phuket Immigration, 94 of them were Russian.

Gen Sermphan concluded the press conference by stating that the authorities were aware of the people's concerns and would continue to work with them to address any major issues.

He also added that complaints of such a nature can be directed via the Traffy fondue application or by contacting the Phuket Provincial Immigration hotline number, 087-9115850.

The Phuket News

MaAnn cited in corruption probe

The Phuket News
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MaAnn Samran, the former Chief of the Cherg Talay Tambon Administration Organisation (OrBorTor), has been named guilty of corruption charges in an investigation by the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC).

MaAnn along with three other officials stand accused by the NACC of providing illegal and forged documents for the construction of the New Nordic Phuket Water World project in Bang Tao.

The NACC in its announcement said that New Nordic Development Co Ltd had been spared of any criminal charges as the NACC had not found any evidence of criminal activity by the company, but an order had been issued for all structures built on the site to be demolished, reported Isra News.

The announcement by the NACC was made on Sept 6, with the agency pointing out that MaAnn and three other officials – Kreethayut Phiboon, Rongrit Chaihanam and Atthawit Kumchaphon – had failed to take any action



MaAnn Samran, the former Chief of Cherg Talay OrBorTor. Photo: The Phuket News / file

to remove buildings for the condo project in Soi Cherg Talay 14, which were built without permission.

The NACC reported that their investigation had discovered that on May 3, 2017, Banguna Gardens Co Ltd submitted an application for permission to construct steel buildings for the main condo project and a small structure to serve as a temporary office.

A permit for the temporary office was approved and issued three days later, on May 16, 2017, but MaAnn, Kreethayut and Rongrit later jointly forged documents by “by editing and adding additional text from the original” permit for the temporary office so that the permit now allowed the construction of the main buildings, the report said.

MaAnn Samran had com-

mitted criminal offences under the Criminal Code, specifically Section 157, Section 161, Section 264, Section 265 and Section 266 (1) and Section 123/1 of the Organic Act on Counter Corruption BE 2542 (1999), the NACC noted.

There were also grounds for charges under Section 172 of the Prevention and Suppression of Corruption Act and under Section 92 of

the amended version of the Tambon Council and Tambon Administrative Organisation Act 1994, the NACC explained.

Kreethayut and Rongrit also stand accused of criminal offences under the same sections of the Criminal Code and the Organic Act on Prevention and Suppression of Corruption as well as the Prevention and Suppression of Corruption Act, the NACC added.

Atthawit stood accused of all the same criminal activities listed above, as well as breach of Section 86 of the Criminal Code.

The NACC dismissed the allegations against Bunsai Somsak, Siriporn Panan, Banguna Gardens Co Ltd, Namfon Wongsuwan and Woraphong Kwanseng and cleared them of any wrongdoing.

Building permit 037/2017 had been revoked as an illegal document, said the report.

Cherg Talay OrBorTor officials were now instructed to take corrective action. An order to demolish the buildings and structures constructed using the now revoked permit has been issued, the NACC confirmed.

The corruption findings by

the NACC did not elaborate whether the investigation was related to the New Nordic development in Phetchaburi, which is under investigation by the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) for swindling foreigners to invest in the B3.4 billion ‘Phetchaburi Park Project’.

The ‘New Nordic Phuket Water World Hotel and Resort’ was promoted as only 150 metres from Bang Tao Beach.

The project, located 23 rai, was to feature five seven-storey buildings housing 605 units, priced from just over B3 million for a 24-square-metre unit to over B13.7mn for an 86sqm penthouse condo.

The project was also to include a bar, 2,500sqm swimming pool, playgrounds, a minimart and a range of retail shops.

Many of the units were promoted as to provide guaranteed returns for the first five years.

Meanwhile, investors in the Phuket project are scrambling to find ways of recovering their money, with the most common solution presented being to file a formal complaint with the DSI.

Patong tuk-tuk shooter arrested

THE TUK-TUK DRIVER wanted for shooting a rival tuk-tuk driver in Patong early on Sept 3 has been arrested.

Kosit Phromphiwat, 36, registered as living on Mae Luan Rd in Phuket Town, was tracked down by officers and arrested in Patong at about 1:40pm on Sept 5, Phuket Provincial Police reported.

Kosit claimed that he had been attacked by a group of individuals who had previously assaulted him, leading him to resort to “self-defense”, officers noted.

Kosit was taken into custody by officers led by Patong Police Deputy Chief Pol Lt Col Sutthachai Chumphasang.

Kosit was already wanted for the shooting on an arrest warrant issued by the Phuket Provincial Court on Sept 4.

The warrant included a list of charges against Mr Kosit, including attempted murder, illegal possession of a firearm and ammunition, carrying a firearm in a public area without reasonable cause and discharging a firearm in a public area.

At Patong Police Station,



Photo: Patong Police

Kosit maintained that he had resorted to using his weapon in self-defense after being assaulted by several men.

However, the initial cause of the altercation remains unexplained, despite police returning Kosit to the scene of the shooting, on Rath-U-Thit 200 Pi Rd about 50 metres north of Bangla Rd, on Sept 5 to explain to police his version of events leading to the shooting.

Kosit also led police to Patong Hill, where it is believed he disposed of the weapon.

Police arrived at the scene of the shooting at about 12:45am on Sept 3 to

find a red tuk-tuk with bullet holes in the windshield and the driver's side window. Officers recovered three .38-calibre bullet casings and one .38-calibre bullet.

The tuk-tuk driver shot by Kosit, Phongsak Pengporu, 42, is still receiving medical treatment at Patong Hospital. He had been shot once in the right side of his abdomen and once in his left thigh.

At last report, Kosit was being held at the Patong Police Station while officers continued their investigation and proceeded to charge him in accordance with the warrant. *Eakkapop Thongtub*

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Two dead as small fishing boat sinks

TWO MEN ON A fishing trip drowned after the small boat they were in became swamped by large waves off Koh Aew, south of Cape Panwa, last weekend.

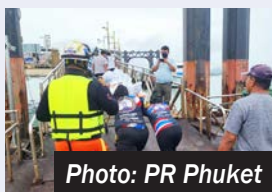


Photo: PR Phuket

Search efforts were launched at 2pm last Sunday (Sept 10), with agencies coordinating at Chalong Pier. Taking part in the search were the Phuket Fisheries Office, a patrol boat from the Royal Thai Navy Third Area Command at Cape Panwa and the Tourist Assistance Center.

A Chalong Hospital ambulance arrived to stand by to provide emergency medical care for any people brought ashore, while Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation (PPAO) President Rewat Areerob, Rawai Mayor Aroon Soros and Pol Lt Col Jaruwat Phonrat arrived to coordinate efforts.

The search teams recovered the boat's two crew members, who survived by swimming to shore. They were brought back to Chalong Pier and rushed to Chalong Hospital.

Of the other two people on the boat, the search teams last Sunday recovered the body of Witthaya 'Aod' Maliwan, while the search continued for Wisit Songkun, 44, a resident of Moo 1, Chalong.

The body of Mr Wisit was found when the search resumed Monday morning (Sept 11).

Abidin Tummali, 46, one of the survivors, said that the four departed Palai Pier in Chalong on a small three-seat fiberglass boat at 10am last Sunday to go fishing.

At that time it was raining but the waves were not big, Mr Abidin said.

However, the waves grew in size and came at the boat from overlapping directions. The boat started taking on water, and sank, he said.

Eakkapong Thongtub

Patong Police 'most moral, transparent' on the island

The Phuket News
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Patong Police Station has been rated the 'most moral, transparent' police station in Phuket, and is the only police station in Phuket to receive a 'Pass' mark in the annual 'Integrity and Transparency Assessment' (ITA) conducted by the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC).

NACC chairman Pol Gen Watcharapol Prasarnrajkit announced the results of this year's review on Sept 5, noting the police stations across the country were of particular concern, with 86% of police stations throughout the country failing to pass their reviews.

The review rates all 1,484 police stations throughout the country, as well as all 878 District Offices providing government services.

As explained on Sept 5, each agency must receive a minimum ITA score of 85 to pass, while a score of 95 and over is considered 'Excellent'.

Police stations in Phuket received an overall score of 65.25% in the review, with the remark, "Must improve urgently".

While Patong Police received a 'Pass' mark with a score of 88.33%, Karon Police Station fared the worst, with a score of only 53.70%, and also with the



Patong Police Station operates with more integrity and transparency than any other police station in Phuket, says the NACC. Photo: Eakkapong Thongtub / file

remark, "Must improve urgently".

The results for the police stations in Phuket were listed as follows:

- Kamala Police Station - 56.42% - Must improve urgently
- Patong Police Station - 88.33% - Pass
- Karon Police Station - 53.70% - Must improve urgently
- Chalong Police Station - 64.92% - Must improve urgently
- Cherng Talay Police Station - 55.39% - Must improve urgently
- Thalang Police Station - 72.53% - Must improve
- Tha Chatchai Police Station - 61.06% - Must improve urgently
- Kathu Police Station - 69.92% - Must improve urgently
- Muang Phuket Police Station (Phuket City Police) - 69.88% - Must improve urgently

• Wichit Police Station - 60.74% - Must improve urgently

• Sakhu Police Station - 64.85% - Must improve urgently

In terms of government offices providing services to the public, Phuket received an 'Excellent' rating with an overall score 95.40%, an improvement of 4.94% from the previous review.

Phuket's three District Offices received the following scores:

- Muang Phuket - 92.70% - Pass (+2.14%)
- Kathu - 98.39% - Excellent (+13.17%)
- Thalang - 95.11% - Excellent (-0.50%)

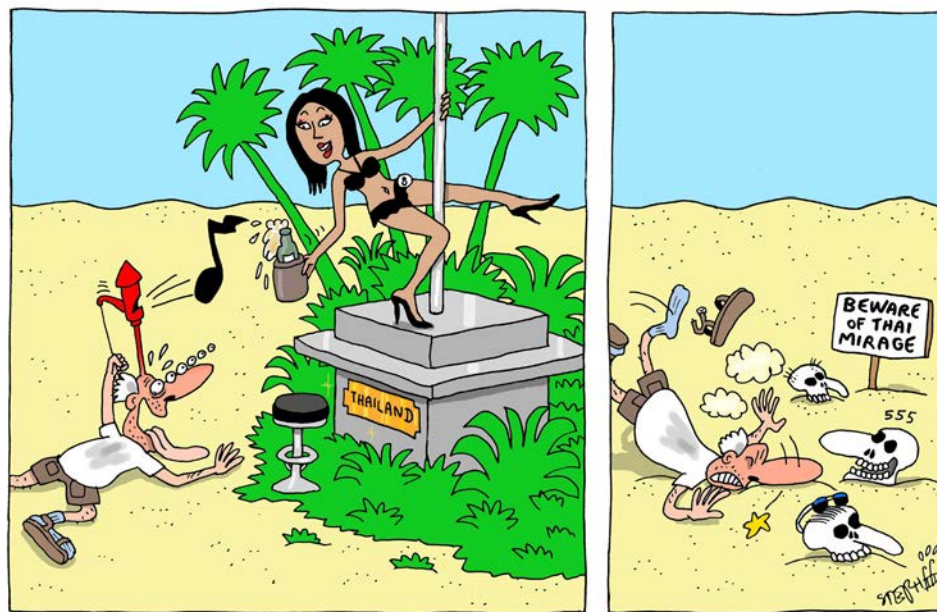
At time of press, Phuket officials and police had yet to comment on the ratings, and comments, designated by the NACC in its annual review.

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Bangla nightclub raided

PATONG POLICE HAVE raided another venue for using children under 20 years old as staff, this time the Grand Tarboosh nightclub on Bangla Rd.

The venue was raided at about 00.30am on Sept 5, Patong Police reported.

The licensee, not named in the report, was charged with allowing children under 20 years old to work in a service establishment during unlawful hours, the report said.

The post of the report on the Patong Police official Facebook page featured a photo showing young women in the nightclub. The women's faces were obscured for privacy reasons.

The crackdown on minors working in entertainment

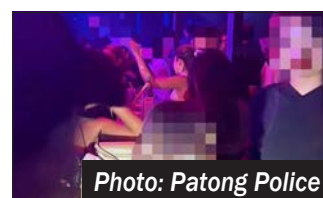


Photo: Patong Police

venues and massage parlours in Patong was launched last month by Patong Police Chief Col Sujin Nilabadee.

Patong Police reported raiding at least four venues last month, including a bar in the OTOP complex at the southern end of Patong.

In reporting a previous raid, Patong Police plainly stated that the crackdown on these types of venues was enforced "in order to prevent prostitution at workplaces among other unlawful acts."

The Phuket News

the Phuket news

Airport taxis losing income

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Airport taxi drivers who for decades have had a stranglehold on serving passengers at Phuket International Airport filed a formal complaint claiming loss of income less than one week after drivers from the taxi app Grab became allowed to pick up passengers at the airport on Sept 1.

Chukiat Panyawai, President of the Phuket Business Car Service Cooperative Limited, submitted the formal complaint to Rewat Areerob, President of the Phuket Provincial Administration Organisation (PPAO), on Sept 6.

Present to receive the letter was the PPAO Executive board, including Chanjira Srisongkram, head of the PPAO legal department. Also present was Worrawit Srisakukammeet, Village Chief (Phu Yai Baan) of Moo 6 in Mai Khao, as a representative of local taxi drivers at the airport.

Mr Chukiat said his cooperative represented 181 drivers who were now suffering from loss of income since Grab became allowed to serve passengers at the airport. The co-op operates on the basis of one driver, one car.

The cooperative must pay high concession fees each year to the airport for the rights to have taxi drivers at the airport ready to serve



Photo: PPAO

passengers arriving on the island. Now drivers are not making enough trips to support their families, he said.

During the COVID pandemic, when tourism to Phuket was shut down, and then slowly recovering, Phuket Airport, operated by the Phuket branch of Airports of Thailand (AoT Phuket), reduced the fees to only 15% of the agreed to in the concession contract.

With the number of tourists arriving on Phuket increasing, the concession fees collected by AoT are now close to the original fees

in the contract, he said.

"In the past, cooperatives had to bear the losses, but now there is more market share. Travelers request a car through an app rather than a car at the airport, even if they have to drag their bags and walk outside [the airport] to the car. And now the problems have increased a lot, as Phuket Airport has allowed the taxi-app cars to pick up passengers at the airport," he added.

"Some days we don't receive even a single passenger. Drivers used to make at least three trips a day.

These people are working as public transport drivers. When there are no people using the service, there is a lack of income," Mr Chukiat said.

"Therefore, I want the Minister of Transport to come to help villagers who are working as a public service driver as their main occupation – not just help the taxi app drivers.

"Initially, I would like to help coordinate with the Phuket Airport authority (AoT Phuket) over the matter of concession renewal," Mr Chukiat continued.

At the launch of the Grab service

at the airport on Sept 1, Phuket Airport General Manager Monchai Tanode confirmed that the concessions for taxi drivers to operate at the airport had expired in June. The co-operatives that continue to serve the airport are currently doing so under temporary four-month extensions that expire next month.

"We would ask for concessions to be extended automatically without bidding, and ask to reduce the concession fee to the same rate as the taxi app drivers that pick up passengers at the airport," Mr Chukiat said.

"Right now, the local residents [who rely on income from exclusive rights to serve passengers at the airport] are suffering hard. As for Phuket Airport allowing taxi app cars to pick up passengers, the cooperative does not interfere and is willing to allow everyone to have a career and earn an income, but I would like to help the local residents as well," Mr Chukiat said.

At the launch of the Grab service at Phuket airport on Sept 1, Airports of Thailand (AoT) President Dr Kerati Kijmanawat confirmed that Grab was just the first taxi app service to be approved to pick up passengers at Phuket airport.

More taxi app services have applied for permission to serve passengers at the airport. Those applications are still under review, he said.

Governor returns to make merit

THE PHUKET GOVERNOR was one of 15 monks that received alms as part of a merit-making walk in Old Phuket Town early last Sunday (Sept 10).

Governor Narong Wo-onciew entered a 15-day ordainment as a monk at Wat Pa Phutthaphot Hariphunchai in Lamphun province on Aug 26 to make merit ahead of his official retirement as Governor of Phuket on Sept 30, where he was bestowed with the name Phra Nathaplo.

Last Sunday he joined 15 other monks, including Phra Ajahn Ariyawangso, the abbot of Wat Pa Phutthapoj Hariphunchai, to take the 2.5-kilometre route during which people offered alms as a way of showing respect and making merit to enhance prosperity for themselves and their families.

The walk started just after 6am in front of Wat Mongkol Nimit on Dibuk Rd, opposite Soi Rommanee, in the Phuket Old Town area, before passing along Luang Phor Chuan Rd and Surin Rd, concluding at the Governor's Residence



Photo: PR Phuket

on the corner of Krabi Rd and Satun Rd around 8am.

Joining well wishers along the route were Phuket Vice Governors Amnuay Pinsuwan and Anupap Rodkwan Yodram, as well as heads of government agencies, representatives from the private sector and citizens, who offered gifts including food to the monks.

PR Phuket reported the atmosphere throughout the walk as being very amiable as the monks passed by many landmarks in the Old

Phuket Town area, although the number of people in attendance throughout was not specified.

Governor Narong arrived in Phuket in June 2020 to replace Phakaphong Tavipatana, having previously served as Governor of Chaiyaphum province.

So far, there have been no official announcements detailing who will succeed Mr Narong as Governor of Phuket when he leaves his post at the end of the month.

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Ready to open 'boutique legal'

'Road to Hotel License' unveiled to local small hotel operators

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket officials held a seminar last week to explain how small guest accommodation venues across the island can register and – if they comply with the requirements – be approved to register as a small hotel legally recognised by the law.

Phuket Vice Governor Danai Sunantarod chaired the event, held on Sept 7 at The Pogo Design Hotel in Phuket Town, joined by Sinit Bunsit, Director of the Building Control and Inspection Office under the Department of Public Works and Town & Country Planning.

The event marked five years of small guest accommodation venues, including boutique hotels and resorts, in Phuket appealing for the right to register as hotels, a fight that finally saw the 'Ministerial Regulations Prescribing Other Types of Buildings for Hotel Business Operations (No. 4) 2023' signed as approved by caretaker Minister of Interior Gen Anupong Phaochinda on June 7, and the new ministerial regulation coming into effect with its promulgation in the Government Gazette on June 20.

However, small hotel operators have continued to wait while a



Photo: PR Phuket

third and final article of legislation comes into effect, allowing local administrations, namely provincial governments, to create a system for accepting applications and issuing approvals for small hotels to be legally registered. That third and piece of final legislation came into effect on Aug 30.

Chinnawat Udomniyom, Presi-

dent of the Phuket Boutique Accommodation Consortium (BAC Phuket), pointed out that 80% of tourist accommodation operations in Phuket were small hotels not legally recognised by the Thai government.

"To be able to enter the system to receive a license from the hotel registrar correctly will allow operators to receive cooperation from banks

under government supervision, such as the SME Bank," he said.

"After obtaining a valid license, it will result in Phuket having a supply side in terms of accommodation that grows to accommodate the increasing number of tourists, and we are about to enter the high season in October," he added.

Wirintra Paphakityotphat, head

of the Tourism Council of Thailand (TCT) Region 11 branch, which represents Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi, was also present for the event last week.

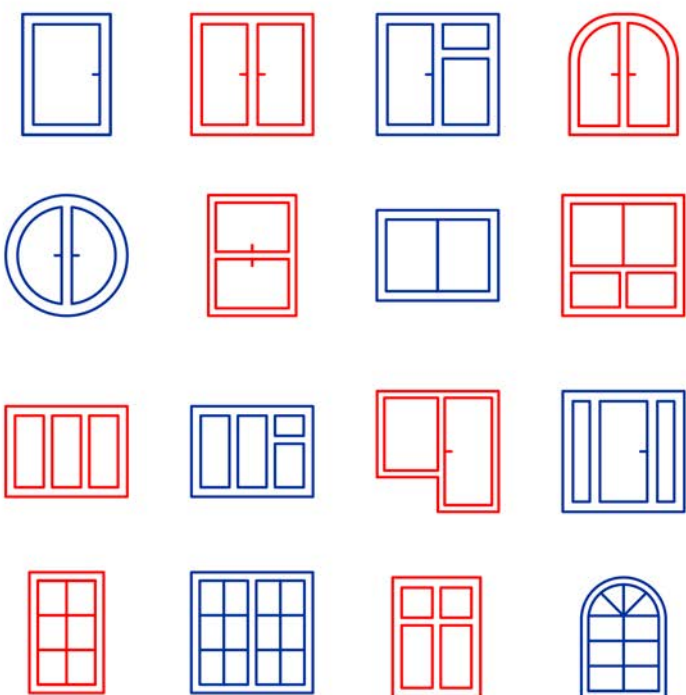
Ms Wirintra has been instrumental in spearheading the need to broaden the legal definition of hotels so that smaller venues may serve tourists legally. She led the charge by making a special appeal in person to then Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha in January.

Ms Wirintra pointed out, "There will be more than 25-30 million tourists entering Thailand by the end of this year. Small hotels in Phuket have the opportunity to resume business after obtaining a license. Then Phuket will be able to welcome more than 10,000 tourists per day, or 2.19 million people per year, generating more than B16.202 million per year in Phuket.

"Small hotels will earn only 10% of their room revenue from tourists, while the other 90% will circulate to other supply chains throughout the province, more than 2,500 places, altogether worth more than B14.585bn per year, creating more work for 25,000 people in all tourism industries in Phuket, who all benefit from unlocking the law this time," Ms Wirintra added.



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Airlines to clarify reasons for high fares

THAI AIRLINES ARE PREPARING TO clarify the situation in response to accusations of expensive tickets, noting that the aviation industry is poised to face another surge in jet fuel prices due to soaring crude oil prices.

The Airlines Association of Thailand (AAT) is to hold a seminar to elaborate on the airfare structure and price regulations under the control of the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand (CAAT), after consumers cried foul over expensive airfares post-pandemic.

Wutthiphum Jurangkool, chief executive of Nok Air, said the significant increase was seen only during long holidays, when the prices were raised based on growing demand.

The price of last-minute bookings usually surge higher than average.

However, he said average prices were not excessively raised in order to make more profit as airlines still had to adjust their prices to cope with surging operating costs, mainly attributed to the cost of jet fuel.

He said the fuel price has been on an upward trend over recent weeks as it surged to US\$119 per barrel (on Sept 7), higher than the yearly average of \$98.5 per barrel that the International Air Transport Association (IATA) estimated for 2023.

Mr Wutthiphum said amid reduced demand in the low season, it would be difficult for airlines to absorb this cost as they have to avoid incurring losses on each flight.

"Airlines cannot get a strong load factor except during long holidays. With no holiday in September, domestic demand significantly dropped, with the average load factor lower than 80% for Nok Air, while the average price for domestic routes was lower than B1,000 per flight," said Mr Wutthiphum.



Aircraft operated by Thai AirAsia and Thai Lion Air at Don Mueang airport in Bangkok. Photo: Pattarapong Chatpattarasill / Bangkok Post

He said the ceiling price for domestic routes regulated by the CAAT is too static as it cannot be adjusted to fluctuating operating costs and passenger demand.

Nuntaporn Komonsittivate, head of commercial operations at Thai Lion Air, said the average load factor for its domestic flights dropped to 75%. It is expected to return to 85% in the high season.

She said the airline is monitoring demand from the Chinese market which is expected to help fill up available seats in October as passengers from the mainland have made advanced bookings for the National Day long holiday, with the load factor of its 10 routes to China reaching 70%.

Despite negative perceptions of Thailand among netizens in China, Thai Lion Air is preparing to resume all 17 routes it operated prior to the pandemic as there is still demand from this market.

Mr Wutthiphum added that Nok Air will fly to eight more cities in China and reintroduce new direct routes from Phuket and Chiang Mai to China, which were cancelled during the pandemic. Bangkok Post

Nation 'like a sick person', says PM in policy statement

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

In his first policy statement to parliament on Monday (Sept 11), Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin likened the country to a "sick person", for which the government needs to prescribe cures such as the B10,000 digital cash handout and reduced energy prices.

He said Thailand's longstanding economic, social and political problems have been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the nation has yet to fully recover from its effects.

Poverty and inequality are not only keeping the country from realising its full potential, but they have also caused a crisis in public confidence, and it is the government's aim to address these issues and lay the foundation for the country to move forward, he said.

Mr Srettha also said the country's economy has also been affected by the changing geopolitical situation, as well as the rivalry between the world's superpowers. As such, Thailand must strategically position itself to protect its interests.

With household debt exceeding 90% of the nation's gross domestic product, while public debt standing at 61% of GDP this year, the nation's economy is particularly fragile, the PM added.

To boost growth, the premier said the government has prepared immediate and



Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin warned there is the risk of economic recession. Photo: Bangkok Post

short-term economic stimuli, including the B10,000 digital money handout and other measures meant to solve farmers' and small- and medium-enterprises debt burden.

He assured the measures would neither breach the nation's financial discipline nor ruin the government's ability to repay its dues.

In his speech, he defended the government's plan to temporarily waive visa requirements for Chinese citizens and fast-track visa applications of individuals hoping to take part in international events, saying the tourism industry is key to creating jobs and generating income.

"Thailand is like a sick person... Tourism and spending are recovering so slowly that there is the risk of economic recession," Mr Srettha said.

He also pledged to bring down the

price of oil, cooking gas and electricity, and find alternative sources of energy.

Mr Srettha also said another one of his government's key policies is to protect the institution of monarchy and chapters related to the institution would not be revised in its charter amendment bid.

He insisted that public input will be sought in the process to ensure the charter is democratic and acceptable to all sides.

In response, Move Forward Party (MFP) deputy leader Sirikanya Tansakul said the government's policies lacked clarity and have vague objectives which implied a lack of confidence to successfully implement them.

She questioned the source of funds for the digital wallet scheme, saying the government's revenue stream is unlikely to be adequate so the government might need to borrow to offset the deficit.



Popular Thai dish 'tom kha gai' came out on top in the TasteAtlas survey. Photo: Bangkok Post

Thai dish Tom kha gai rated world's best chicken soup

BANGKOK

THAILAND'S TOM KHA gai, chicken in galangal-infused coconut cream soup, has won first place among the 10 Best Rated Chicken Soups in the World, as ranked on the TasteAtlas global food mapping site, it was announced last Sunday (Sept 10).

TasteAtlas ranked tom kha gai top of the list, awarding the dish 4.7 out of five stars. There were a total of 1,376 entries from all over the world considered for the ranking, it confirmed.

Tom kha gai is a chicken coconut soup prepared with a variety of fresh herbs including galangal, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, shallots, bird's

eye chillies, and mushrooms.

This comforting dish is characterised mainly by the sour flavour from lime juice and the salty flavour provided by fish sauce, accentuated by tamarind juice, and palm sugar and garnished with fried chillies.

The popular Thai dish is commonly served and eaten with steamed rice.

Ciorba radauteana from Romania was ranked second, followed by zeama from Moldova and Algeria's chorba beida.

Next was supă (de pui) cu taieței, also from Romania, bela corba from Serbia, El Salvador's sopa de gallina india, Peru's inchicapi, Poland's rosół z kury, and chikhirtma from Georgia. Bangkok Post

Anutin confident Chada can root out nationwide mafia links

BANGKOK

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND Interior Minister Anutin Charnvirakul has expressed confidence in the ability of his deputy, Chada Thaiset, to succeed in a new attempt to tackle mafia-style gangs and curb their influence on local administrative organisations nationwide.

The minister last week assigned Mr Chada to lead a nationwide screening of all influential local leaders suspected of involvement with mafia-like gangs and have them blacklisted if links are uncovered.

The assignment was made in response to a violent incident in which one highway patrol officer was gunned down and another injured during an incident at a dinner party at the home of an influential local leader in Nakhon Pathom's Muang district on Sept 6.

The shooting drew huge national interest and sparked new debate over graft in the public service.

When asked if he had also imposed a timeframe for Mr Chada to wrap up this assignment, Anutin said on Monday (Sept 11) that wouldn't be necessary because such corruption is an ongoing problem that requires constant vigilance from all parties involved.

At Monday's parliamentary debate on the government's policy statement, Senator Prasit Pathummarak expressed his gratitude to the new government for its commitment to stamping out mafia-style criminal gangs



Chada: Chief of mafia sweep. Photo: Bangkok Post

and the influential figures that enable their illicit drug trade.

In another development, the Anti-Corruption Organisation of Thailand (ACT) called on the government to take its vow to suppress corruption and bribery in the promotion of state officials more seriously than it has been in the past.

The ACT cited the Nakhon Pathom incident as evidence of rampant interference with public agencies' reshuffles of officials and the connection between shady businesses and the unlawful benefits offered to state officials responsible for suppressing the activities of these businesses.

The ACT also urged Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin to honour the commitment he made on Sept 6 to mark Thailand's Anti-Corruption Day that the buying and selling of important positions in state organisations, along with unfair reshuffles, would be brought to an end under his government.

Mr Srettha also vowed to pursue sweeping curbs on corruption under his administration. Bangkok Post

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Celebrating 27 years of excellence

British
International School, Phuket

EDUCATIONAL CORNER

British International School Phuket (BISP) recently celebrated its 27th anniversary of the school's founding. Founded by Thai educators Prasit Ourairat and Dr Arthit Ourairat, the world-class institution has come a long way since its inception in 1996, which all began with a vision to create a high-quality international day and boarding school on the picturesque island of Phuket. Today, BISP is proud to be part of the Arthit Ourairat Institution along with Satit Bilingual School of Rangsit University (SBS Bangkok) and Satit International Bilingual School of Rangsit University Chiang Mai (SIBS Chiangmai).

From its humble beginnings with just 59 students, it has grown into a vibrant community of over 1,000 day and boarding students representing over 60 different nationalities. The school's commitment to excellence in education has seen it not only focus on academic excellence but has also fostered holistic growth through scholarships and a strong emphasis on arts and sports. Today, BISP stands as a renowned international school and a premier sports competition venue in the region.

Prior to the start of the academic year, on Friday, Aug 11, staff members gathered together on campus for BISP's 27th Anniversary event, which was a time for both reflection and celebration. The day's festivities commenced with a series of ceremonies, including a Brahma ceremony, an Islamic ceremony and a Buddhist ceremony, reflecting the diverse cultural influences at BISP. These events were followed by a heartwarming act of generosity, where alms and



Dr Arthit speaks at the grand opening of the school 27 years ago.

merit-making were offered to nine monks. Thereafter staff enjoyed sharing memories and cheerful moments as well as a variety of food and drinks.

As he welcomed the community back to school, BISP Headmaster Simon Meredith highlighted that the start of a new school year marks a time of renewed energy, fresh opportunities and exciting challenges.

"The British International School, Phuket, with its 27-year history of excellence, remains committed to providing outstanding results and abundant opportunities in the arts and sports. As we enter a new phase of upgrades and facility enhancements, we are excited to further elevate the learning experience for our students," he said.

The summer holidays were spent on major upgrades and renovations across various areas of the school. These enhancements include a covered pitch with new change rooms, a complete overhaul of the second floor in the Main Teaching Building (MTB), and the installation of a new lift for improved accessibility.

Additional projects included sound insulation for the Refectory and Music rooms, renovations and upgrades for improved layout, enhancements to the Primary Garden and fun new equipment in the various playgrounds. Furthermore, interior and exterior renovations were delivered in the boarding facilities and outdoor sala. Finally, improvements were made to furniture and fixtures throughout the school, ensuring a welcoming and comfortable environment for students and staff alike.

Going forward, BISP plans to continue enhancing its facilities and services to provide an even better learning environment for its students. Some of the upcoming projects on the horizon include acquiring more new school buses to improve transportation services for the community. An exciting addition will be the establishment of an Innovation Centre to foster creativity and technological advancement. The school also has plans to redevelop its auditorium staging area to accommodate various events and performances. Additionally, a new dedicated Medical Centre will be set up to ensure the health and well-being of students and staff. A larger fitness Gym will be introduced to further promote physical fitness and wellness in the school community.

Furthermore, BISP will continue its renovation efforts with a focus on infrastructure for improved facilities. Also, a Drama Hub will be established to support and encourage the creative arts within the school, providing a space for drama and theatre-related activities. These exciting projects reflect BISP's commitment to providing a well-resourced and enriching educational experience for all its students.

While the 27th year of BISP marks the beginning of a new academic journey, the school looks forward to not just marking another year but continuing to strive for a legacy of learning, wellbeing and passion that shapes the future of its students and the international education landscape.



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Photos: Thomas Brack / Baan Kalim School

Hope, health and happiness in Kalim

Baz Daniel

baz_gunner2000@yahoo.com

Phuket's Kalim region sits over a small hill to the immediate north of Patong, the world-famous epicentre of hedonism and decadence on the island. Although it is so close to the immense cash flow of Patong's buzzing cash registers, Kalim is a rather down-at-heel suburb populated by many impoverished families... fisherfolk, odd-jobbers and the unemployed.

Now however, there is a simply wonderful initiative of hope and future happiness growing and developing in the midst of this community, right beside the bustling road leading north through Kalim, in the evolving form of the new Chicorée Foundation project at Baan Kalim School.

This wonderful initiative is being completely funded by a wealthy Swiss family with strong connections to Phuket working hand-in-hand with well-known local Swiss expat, Thomas Brack.

The original school on this site was built some 20 years ago by the Thai government, but had always struggled with funding until the Phuket Has Been Good to Us Foundation stepped in and started to help run and financially support the children there from 2006. Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly hit the foundation's finances and so they had to concentrate on their main school in the Kamala Beach area, to the detriment of the Kalim School, which was closed and started to fall into disrepair and ruin.

How the amazing initiative to rebuild and relaunch this important community resource through a Chicorée Foundation project at the school came about is a classic example of good fortune and chance working to produce a wonderful benefit for Phuket people and their highly-deserving young children.

Thomas Brack came to Phuket some 20 years ago after a successful career in the Swiss fashion industry. He settled in the Kalim area and soon became the manager of the highly-successful and award-winning 9th Floor Restaurant, which was situated in a rather run-down building in the heart of Patong.

The Sky Inn Condotel towered over a car park just off Rat-U-Thit 200 Pi Rd and was as unlikely a place to find one of Phuket's most successful fine dining restaurants as you can imagine. As you entered the well-worn elevator taking you up to the eponymous 9th Floor Restaurant and Bar, you'd be forgiven for thinking; "This can't be the right place," as many others have done

before you. But when the elevator doors slid apart, you found yourself entering a parallel universe of elegance, style, wonderful views over Patong, fabulous cuisine and beautiful black-clad waitresses welcoming you with an inviting 'wai' of Thai greeting.

Overseeing all this elegance was Thomas Brack, who for many years managed what became a world-famous 'must do' venue for high-rollers when visiting Phuket. The world's wealthy and famous came to party at the 9th Floor and one such potential customer was Jörg Weber, who had built the Chicorée fashion empire in Switzerland since opening his first store in 1985.

Thomas Brack takes up the story; "I'd known Jörg Weber for 40 years through my work in Swiss fashion in 1982. We'd had no contact for over 20 years, until 2007 when, on the recommendation of a regular guest, he and his family came to the 9th Floor Restaurant for dinner. I couldn't remember him and of course I didn't expect to see him in Phuket either. The funny thing is that I didn't have a free table and we were having a jokey conversation about this, when we realised that we knew each other. They came back a couple of hours later to eat and we had a great catch-up talking about old times and acquaintances.

"In the years that followed, the family came to Phuket every year for vacations and this is how my friendship with the whole family developed. On my visits to Switzerland, I always met them and we had started talking about a social assistance project, possibly a school, for the past few years.

"In January this year, the family and I decided to support a school with poor infrastructure in an area with poorer families for a five- or six-year period, or longer, if we felt the initiative was a success with the whole school, director, teachers, community and children's families all taking part."

Thomas spent the next three months learning about the school system in Thailand and driving all over Phuket looking for schools in bad shape. He realised that there were many such schools that urgently needed help and finally decided on the Kalim school.

Thomas continues: "I'd known the Kalim school for over 20 years as I'd always lived in the area and drove past it daily. I contacted the school administration and from the first visit I knew that this was the right school. I shared my impressions and the choice with the Weber family and briefed them with photos, etc.

"In May Jörg and his wife Marianne came to Phuket and were rather shocked by the state of the school, but

we had good discussions with the school administration and then agreed the project could begin."

The plan is to renovate the whole building including the outside areas and outfit it throughout with new furniture, learning materials and even TVs in every classroom. There will be specialist classrooms for computer studies, English language and science; a new kitchen fully stocked with utensils, plus new bathrooms and children's playground.

From November 2023, when the renovations are complete, the school will initiate English lessons for all classes, including kindergarten with the teachers and tutorials trained by the Phuket Has Been Good to Us Foundation, who have been working closely with Thomas. There will also be computer and science lessons, not to mention a healthy dietary programme with food, all-day drinking

water, morning and afternoon snack breaks and a nutritious lunch.

Thomas explains, "Children who have food shortages at home will be able to take a food box with them in the evening, plus we will supply uniforms and backpacks. We want the children to stay at the Chicorée Kalim School from kindergarten through to the sixth grade, which rarely happens in local schools because the learning infrastructure isn't available. We plan to change that by giving children a very good standard of education and support so that they actually enjoy going to school."

This really is a superb and much-needed initiative for Kalim and Phuket and the Weber family with their Chicorée brand and Thomas Brack are to be thanked from the bottom of hearts for bringing Hope, Health and Happiness to the heart of Kalim!w



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POP QUIZ

1. Which NFL team did Dwayne Johnson play for before he became a WWF wrestling star?
2. Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known as 'Doctor Seuss', was of which nationality?
3. What are the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse?
4. Which month is named after the Roman goddess of love and marriage?
5. What day of the week was New Year's Day (Jan 1), 2023?

Answers below, centre

SUDOKU

Medium

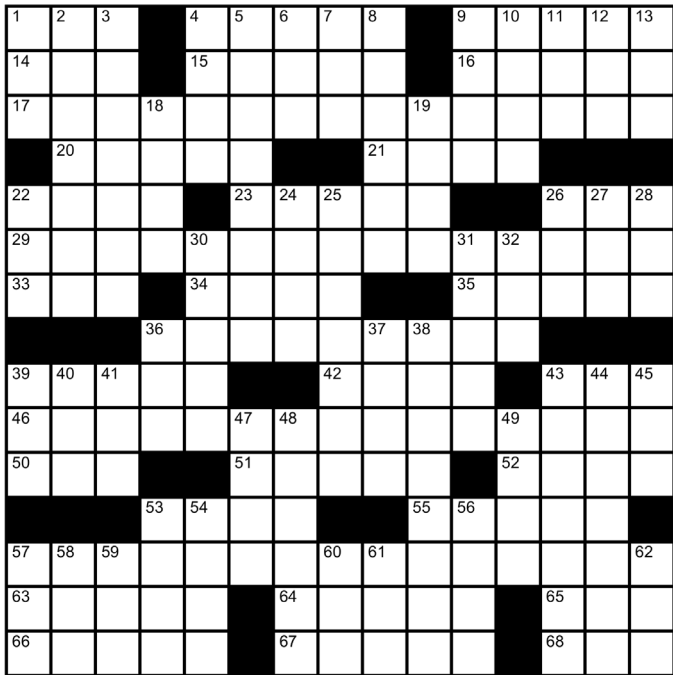
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	6	3			9		4	
			2	4			7	3
	8		3		5	2		
		6				5		
		2	6		1		8	
3	2			8	6			
	5		1			7	6	
						3		

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across
1. Bird-to-be
 4. Supports, in a way
 9. Bluenose
 14. Grazing ground
 15. Being deficient in moisture
 16. Moves like honey
 17. Not getting it
 20. Refine, as metal
 21. Coffee choice
 22. Burn
 23. Skirt sound
 26. Kind of fingerprint
 29. Possesses a perspective
 33. "Don't ___!"
 34. Certain apartment
 35. Mike holder
 36. Don Juan
 39. Very, in music
 42. Crowd sound
 43. Health resort
 46. Place where turning back is impossible
 50. Drop
 51. "It ___ All Velvet" (Mel Tormé autobiography)
 52. Got gray
 53. Traveler
 55. Scintillas
 57. Blames
 63. Depth charge target
 64. Defiant one
- Down
1. "Slippery" tree
 2. Japanese entertainers
 3. Respirator
 4. Angle
 5. Shaped furniture material
 6. A little bit of work
 7. Small bird
 8. Metamorphic rock
 9. Bishop of Rome
 10. Cross
 11. Arm of Israel
 12. Cubby hole?
 13. Best guess: Abbr.
 18. Word repeated after "Que"
 19. Close imitation
 22. When doubled, a dance
 24. Old 45 player
 25. "ER" extras
 26. Decline
 27. Known formerly as
 28. Carpentry tool
 30. Braid
 31. Danger signal
32. Delivery vehicle
36. PC linkup
37. Sometime today, say
38. Strict disciplinarian
39. King Kong, e.g.
40. Cry loudly
41. Bro, for one
43. Sweetened
44. Foreshadow
45. "Go on"
47. Has a tab
48. Electrical units
49. "Soap" family name
53. Buzzing pest
54. "How to Make an American Quilt" author Whitney
56. Cruel person
57. Part of a litter
58. Japanese sash
59. Charge carrier
60. Lucrative
61. Bank offering, for short
62. Kind of truck

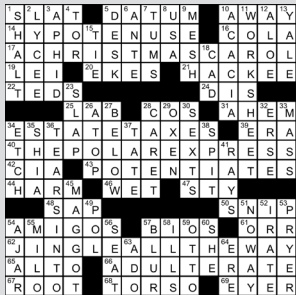
Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

- 1) Miami; 2) American; 3) Pestilence, Famine, War and Death; 4) June (after Juno); 5) Sunday



Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:



5	7	6	1	4	9	3	2	8
1	3	9	2	5	8	6	7	4
2	8	4	3	6	7	5	1	9
6	9	5	8	7	1	4	3	2
4	1	8	6	3	2	9	5	7
7	2	3	4	9	5	1	8	6
9	4	2	7	1	3	8	6	5
3	6	7	5	8	4	2	9	1
8	5	1	9	2	6	7	4	3

GOT YOUR NUMBER

4

times only in their lives, on average, do Europeans move residence.

45

Ironman triathlons has Madonna 'Iron Nun' Buder done, among her 325 triathlons completed. She ran her first Ironman at the age of 65, and is 93 years old today.

71.4

years is the average global life expectancy of someone born in 2015.

433

pillars per resident is how many prescription opiates drug firms shipped to the US state of West Virginia alone from 2007-2012.

189,819

letters the longest word in the world contains and takes about 3.5 hours to say.

30.9 trillion

kilometres is one parsec.

Source: Uberfacts

ISLAND VIEW



A visitor to Yanui Beach. Photo by Brian Constable

Got an unusual or particularly beautiful picture of Phuket? Email it to execeditor@classactmedia.co.th

This week in history

Sept 15, 1616

The first non-aristocratic, free public school in Europe opens in Frascati, Italy.

Sept 16, 2007

One-Two-GO Airlines Flight 269 carrying 128 crew and passengers crashes at Phuket International Airport, killing 89 people.

Sept 17, 1983

Vanessa Williams becomes the first black Miss America.

Sept 18, 1988

End of pro-democracy uprisings in Myanmar after a bloody military coup by the State Law and Order Restoration Council. Thousands, mostly monks and civilians (primarily students), are killed by the Tatmadaw.

Sept 19, 2010

The leaking oil well in the Deepwater Horizon oil spill is sealed after discharging an estimated 4.9 million barrels



Photo: NTSB

(about 794.93mn litres) of oil into the Gulf of Mexico.

Sept 20, 1498

The 1498 Nankai earthquake generates a tsunami that washes away the building housing

the statue of the Great Buddha at Kōtoku-in in Kamakura, Kanagawa, Japan. Since then the Buddha has sat in the open air.

Sept 21, 1934

The classic novel 'The Hobbit' by J. R. R. Tolkien, the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, is published. The initial print run of 1,500 copies sells out by December.

Source: Wikipedia

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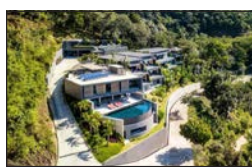
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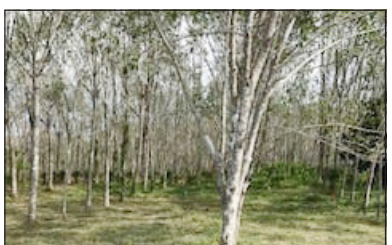
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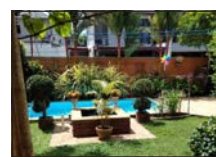
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PHIST6 - PHUKET HOTELS ISLAND SUSTAINING TOURISM

The sixth annual, Asian leading sustainability-focused learning event, PHIST6, took place on Monday, Sept 4 at SAii Laguna Phuket. Fantastic turn out with over 1,000 delegates, over 60 speakers, and over 35 exhibitors. PHIST6 is an ongoing special event collaboration between the Phuket Hotels Association, Greenview and C9 Hotelworks, with support from the American Chamber of Commerce Thailand (AMCHAM), QUO, Creative Concept AV and Delivering Asia Communications.



LA CHAÎNE DES RÔTISSEURS PHUKET DINNER - SEPTEMBER 2023

Dîner Savoyard - An evening of food from south-western France stretching from Lake Geneva to the French Riviera paired with beverages from the region, held at Cosmo Restaurant, located at The Nai Harn Phuket, on Thursday, Sept 7. An amazing menu, with paired drinks, was created specifically by Chef Mark Jones for the La Chaîne des Rôtisseurs Phuket Dinner.

Festival of rugby underway

RUGBY

AFP

France made an impressive start to their attempt to win a first Rugby World Cup as the host nation beat New Zealand 27-13 in a hot and humid tournament opener last Friday (Sept 8).

Roared on by a capacity crowd at the Stade de France in Paris, Thomas Ramos nervelessly kicked 17 points and Damian Penaud and Melvyn Jaminet scored a try each.

Mark Telea touched down twice for the All Blacks and it was only after Ramos' 74th minute penalty that the home fans could celebrate before the rampant white-shirted French scored a final try as Jaminet grabbed Maxime Lucu's chip.

France fought hard to prove that their tag as one of the favourites on home soil is well-deserved. However, it was the first time the All Blacks had lost a World Cup pool match.

"In the past we've won all our pool games and not won the tournament," said New Zealand coach Ian Foster. "Our goal is to win this tournament."



France's hooker Peato Mauvaka breaks free from the New Zealand defence in the opening game of the 2023 Rugby World Cup last Friday (Sept 8). Photo: AFP

England overcame a potentially dangerous opener against Argentina in Pool D the following day thanks to the prolific boot of fly-half George Ford.

England had recorded just four wins in 13 matches heading into the clash in Marseille and Argentina had stunned them last November.

It started badly for the 2003 champions after Tom Curry was red-carded for a

clumsy clash of heads with Argentine full-back Juan Cruz Mallia in just the third minute, becoming the first England player in history to be sent off at a World Cup.

But Ford stepped up to take a scrappy game by the scruff of the neck, kicking every single one of England's points, including three drop-goals and six penalties, in a 27-10 victory to lift the pre-tournament tension in

the Red Rose camp.

INSPIRATION

Ireland, the world's number one ranked side, were able to select Johnny Sexton – so often their inspiration – for the first time following a six-month injury absence as they took on minnows Romania in the Pool B curtain-raiser.

Sexton's errant kick handed Gabriel Rupanu the first try for Romania, but Ireland then

flattened them with 12 tries in response to romp home 82-8 in Bordeaux.

Sexton grabbed 24 points, including two tries, to become Ireland's record World Cup points scorer.

"I'm delighted just to get some minutes under my belt," Sexton said.

"We know there's a much tougher task coming on Saturday against Tonga," he added.

Like England, Australia have had a rocky build-up to the tournament but coach Eddie Jones earned his first win in six games with a 35-15 bonus-point victory over battling Georgia.

Full-back Ben Donaldson scored 25 points in just his fourth Test appearance to leave former England and Japan coach Jones hailing a "perfect" start for the two-time champions.

In the other game on day two of the marathon seven-week tournament, Italy romped to a 52-8 win against Namibia in host nation France's Pool A.

CLINICAL

South Africa began their search for a record fourth Webb Ellis trophy in clinical fashion in the Marseille heat last Sunday, beating Scotland

18-3, with fly-half Manie Libbok the stand out performer.

The Springboks' next major test to reach the quarter-finals will be against Ireland on Sept 23, six days after facing Romania.

Wales began their campaign by overcoming Fiji 32-26 in Bordeaux, avoiding defeat to the highest ranked side in Pool C.

Winger Josh Adams claimed one of four tries for Wales as experienced fly-half Dan Biggar crossed the 100-point mark for his country at World Cups, surpassing Neil Jenkins' 98-point record.

Fiji will now have to target Sunday's (Sept 17) game with Australia if they are to keep alive their hopes of a first quarter-final spot in 16 years.

Japan beat debutants Chile 42-12 despite conceding a try after just six minutes in Toulouse in Pool D.

An extra positive for Japan is captain Kazuki Himeno is set to return from a calf injury in time for this Sunday's encounter with England.

Around 2.5 million rugby fans are expected to attend World Cup fixtures across nine venues in France, including 600,000 from abroad.

'Surftival' set for Kata Beach

SURFING

FANS OF SURFING HAVE another competition to look forward to with the "Phuket Surftival" event taking place tomorrow (Sept 16) at Kata Beach in the southwest of the island.

The Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation (PPAO) confirmed the event via social media channels last Saturday (Sept 9), declaring it will harness the potential of the local community by combining the sport of surfing with a variety of community-based activities.

The focus of the event is on raising awareness of global warming and emphasising the benefit of sustainability, with the four main drivers being community, creative economics, sustainability and collaboration, the PPAO explained.

The local Surfer's Friend Community will unite to set up a series of stalls and booths to showcase unique products created by the art and crafts community in Kata, as well as an exhibition



Photo: Phuket Info Center

illustrating surfing's connection to the local community, the PPAO said.

Other stalls offering locally made food and beverages will also be on show, as well as live musical acts and DJs providing entertainment to visitors.

The event has received extensive support from both public and private sector organisations, including the Tourism Authority of Thailand and Karon Subdistrict

Municipality.

Further support comes in the form of leading clothing and beach equipment providers in Thailand, including Boardriders, Quiksilver, Roxy and Billabong, while Serif Sports will host an exhibition booth.

The event takes place from 10am until 12 midnight tomorrow (Sept 16) at Kata Beach and all are welcome to attend.

The Phuket News

Djokovic, Gauff win US Open titles

TENNIS

NOVAK DJOKOVIC DEFEATED DANIIL Medvedev in straight sets last Sunday (Sept 10) to win his fourth US Open and a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam singles title, cementing his claim as the greatest tennis player in history.

Meanwhile, last Saturday, American teenager Coco Gauff came from behind to win the women's singles title, clinching her first Grand Slam with a battling win over Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus.

The 36-year-old Djokovic won 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 to become the oldest men's champion in New York in the Open era and match Margaret Court's all-time mark for most Grand Slam victories.

"I don't know where to start. It obviously means the world to me," said Djokovic.

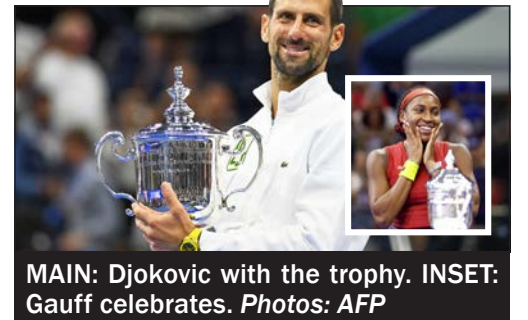
"It's hard to describe. I'm really living my childhood dream to compete at the highest level in this sport."

The Serbian is the first man to win three Grand Slam events in the same season four times, crowning his impending return to world number one in the most fitting of ways inside Arthur Ashe Stadium.

The victory added to his wins at the Australian and French Opens earlier this year, with the only blemish his five-set defeat to Carlos Alcaraz in the final of Wimbledon in July.

"You know, some people who are born, he's a genius. He's one of kind. Not too many people in this world like him in sport-wise," said Djokovic's coach, Goran Ivanisevic.

Medvedev defeated Djokovic in straight sets in the 2021 final to prevent the Serbian from becoming the first man to win all four Grand Slams in the same year since Rod Laver in 1969.



MAIN: Djokovic with the trophy. INSET: Gauff celebrates. Photos: AFP

Djokovic admitted to feeling overwhelmed on that occasion, but there was little evidence of nerves as he quickly took command of Sunday's championship match, playing with supreme confidence to secure a historic triumph.

GUTSY

Gauff, 19, produced a gutsy performance to win 2-6, 6-3, 6-2 and complete a fairytale transformation in her season's fortunes.

The sixth seed from Florida had gone into the final as the underdog against the hard-hitting second seed Sabalenka, but held her nerve when it mattered to seal a deserved victory in front of a star-studded record crowd of 28,143.

The win completed a remarkable turnaround for Gauff, who was left distraught after a first round exit at Wimbledon in July.

However she bounced back to win titles in Washington and Cincinnati and has now landed the biggest win of her career. In doing so she became the third American teenager to win the US Open after Tracy Austin and Serena Williams

"It means so much to me," an elated Gauff said afterwards. "I feel like I'm a little bit in shock."

"This moment is even sweeter than I could imagine," she added. AFP

Relief as Saudi League transfer window closes

FOOTBALL

AFP

Clubs in Europe could breathe a collective sigh of relief following the closure of the transfer window in the Saudi Pro League on Sept 7, whose huge spending over the summer was topped only by the English Premier League.

As the Saudi window shut six days after the market closed in Europe's leading leagues, it meant Liverpool's Mohamed Salah stayed put at Anfield despite reports that Jeddah club Al-Ittihad had offered £150 million (B6.6 billion) for the Egyptian superstar.

However, Liverpool will surely have to brace themselves for further approaches from Saudi Arabia in the next window for the 31-year-old, whose current contract runs until 2025.

The last three months have seen reigning Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema, Brazilian superstar Neymar, Riyad Mahrez, Fabinho, N'Golo Kante, Sadio Mane, Ruben Neves and



Mohamed Salah (left) was still a Liverpool player after the Saudi Pro League window closed on Sept 7. Photo: AFP

Jordan Henderson all leave major European leagues to go to Saudi Arabia.

They have followed Cristiano Ronaldo, who moved at the turn of the year to sign for Al-Nassr.

That list is far from exhaustive, with analysis by Deloitte's Sports Business Group saying 37 players moved to Saudi Arabia from either England, Spain, Italy, Germany or France.

Deloitte said Saudi clubs had splashed US\$957mn (B34bn) in the window, ahead of any other league apart from

the Premier League, whose spending reached almost \$2bn according to a FIFA report.

The Pro League has been buying players in a revamp as part of the country's ambitious economic diversification plan.

The spending has mostly been fuelled by four teams now owned by the Saudi government's oil-funded Public Investment Fund.

Those are Al-Hilal and Al-Nassr from Riyadh, reigning champions Al-Ittihad and their Jeddah rivals Al-Ahli.

The fees and wages being offered could have a serious

impact for previously all-powerful teams in Europe who will not be able to compete.

Sources close to Neymar's deal at Al-Hilal said his salary would be around 90mn euros (B3.4bn) per season, far beyond what any club in Europe would realistically offer.

It is not just older players either, with 21-year-old Spain prospect Gabri Veiga leaving Celta Vigo for Al-Ahli.

"It is clear that European football is losing out," said Manchester City and Spain midfielder Rodri. "We need to somehow stop the exodus of talent."

Many more players, particularly those over 30, will not be able to resist the sums on offer.

Indeed, Neymar believes the Saudi league might already have overtaken at least one of Europe's major players.

"Football there is the same. The ball is round, there are goalposts, and looking at the names of players who have gone to the Saudi league, I don't know if it might be better than the French league," he said while on duty with Brazil last week.



Neymar celebrates. Photo: AFP

Neymar breaks Pele's goal record

FOOTBALL

NEYMAR SURPASSED Pele as Brazil's all-time top scorer with two second-half goals in a 5-1 win over Bolivia in South America's 2026 World Cup qualifiers last Friday (Sept 8).

The 31-year-old striker went into the game level with Pele on 77 goals and his moment to enter the history books came in the 61st minute as he pounced on a loose ball inside the box and tucked away his 78th goal in his 125th game for his country, raising his hands and his gaze to the skies in celebration.

Neymar then extended his record tally, connecting with a low ball from Raphinha in stoppage time to complete the victory and a memorable

night for the forward.

The former Barcelona striker recently moved from Paris Saint-Germain to Saudi Arabian club Al Hilal for a fee reported to be worth 90 million euros (B3.4 billion).

Pele, who died last December aged 82, scored 77 goals for Brazil in 92 appearances between 1957 and 1971.

Brazil's new coach Fernando Diniz, who took over from predecessor Tite in the wake of the Selecao's World Cup quarter-final exit last year, paid tribute to Neymar, whose role in the squad has been under scrutiny.

"Many did not know what he would come to do, and he came to do what he did: have fun, score two goals and break the record," Diniz said.

"He is a very big idol, people must recognise him and accept him," he added. AFP

Polking upbeat, eyes World Cup, despite King's Cup final defeat

FOOTBALL

COACH MANO POLKING INSISTED it is not impossible for Thailand to secure a World Cup berth after his men lost to Iraq on penalties in the King's Cup final in Chiang Mai last Sunday night (Sept 10).

The visitors won 5-4 in the shoot-out after a 2-2 draw in 90 minutes at Chiang Mai's 700th Anniversary Stadium.

The Thais cancelled out Iraq's lead twice after the start of the match was delayed by 30 minutes due to a downpour.

Iraq went ahead after six minutes when striker Aymen Hussein found the back of the net from close range, only for the War Elephants to equalise in the 37th minute through Thai-Norwegian defender Nicholas Mickelson.

Iraq found themselves in front once again in the 65th minute before a determined Thailand fought back to equalise through Bordin Phala in the 82nd minute.

The goal came just moments after veteran striker Teerasil Dangda's penalty was saved by Iraq goalkeeper Fahad Talib.

Teerasil was not one of Thailand's first five penalty takers in the shoot-out.

"We played well against Asia's No.7 team," Polking said.

"Our target for the World Cup is not impossible. If we have a full squad, it's all about confidence."

Thailand were without several key players for the 49th King's Cup including



Iraq players celebrate winning the King's Cup. Photo: Bangkok Post

Chanathip Songkrasin, Supachai Chaided, Suphanat Mueanta, Phitiwat Sukjitthammakul and Manuel Tom Bihr.

"Our target is the World Cup. We must have a clear plan and be ready for the task," the German-Brazilian coach said.

Thailand will begin their 2026 World Cup qualifying campaign in November and have never played in the World Cup finals.

The War Elephants last won the King's Cup in 2017 and finished third last year.

Meanwhile, Thailand manager Nualphan Lamsam said Polking would be in charge of the team until at least his current contract expires in 2024.

Reports claimed Polking could be fired and replaced by technical chief Masatada Ishii if he failed to guide the War Elephants to lift the King's Cup.

Nualphan said Polking and Ishii get along well and can work together without any problem. Bangkok Post

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Sport



Rugby World Cup kicks off in style > p14

SPIKERS DELIGHT



Thai women win Asian volleyball title

Thailand players and staff celebrate winning the Asian Women's Volleyball Championship 2023 in Nakhon Ratchasima on Sept 6. Photo: Bangkok Post

VOLLEYBALL

Bangkok Post

Thailand won their first Asian senior women's volleyball championship since 2013 on Sept 6 in a five-set thriller over tournament favourites China in Nakhon Ratchasima.

Playing in front of a raucous crowd of 5,000 at Korat Chatchai Hall, the Thai women won the first set before China, ranked fifth in the world, battled back in the second. The same pattern repeated in the third and fourth sets before the home side finally prevailed, with a final scoreline of 25-21, 25-27, 25-19, 20-25, 16-14.

Thai outside hitter Chatchu-On Moksri led all scorers with 23 points from 21 attacks, one block and one ace, while outside hitter Ajcharaporn

Kongyot and middle blocker Thatdao Nuekjang added another 22 and 16 points respectively.

Cheered on by drum-beating and yelling home fans, Thailand got off to a brilliant start, with Ajcharaporn shredding the Chinese defence with her attacks to put the host side in front 8-6.

After that, Thailand mixed the offensive combinations from devastating attacks of Ajcharaporn, Pimpichaya Kokram and Chatchu-On to extend the lead to 21-17.

However, China held their nerve, attacking relentlessly to narrow the margin 20-22. The home side then found another gear, with a Chatchu-On spike providing the set point.

Holding a 1-0 advantage, Thailand played with more confidence and consistency in the second set. With Pimpichaya and Chatchu-On powerfully hitting cross-court, Thailand

were up 24-18 and needed just one more point. However, China went on to score six points in a row to silence the noisy home crowd.

Their confidence boosted, China intensified their defence in the third set, using their height advantage to block solidly and attack powerfully at the net to jump to a 10-6 lead.

Thailand shuffled their lineup, and when Thanacha Sooksod came in for Pimpichaya she proved to be a game-changer. She was responsible for aces and spikes to level the score at 10-10 before Thailand started to pull away.

In the fourth set, China's determination paid off as they built a 15-11 lead and extended it to 18-14, capitalising on errors by Thailand. The hosts narrowed the gap to 20-23 before Wu Mingjie scored two points to win the set.

The decider saw both sides fight

neck and neck, but a gutsy display by Thailand ultimately made the difference as they fought back to 14-14 and went on to win.

OLYMPIC GOAL

Thailand, ranked 14th in the world, advanced to the final after upsetting five-times champion Japan 3-2 in their semi-final, having lost to their opponents in the previous five encounters.

Thailand had won the Asian championship twice before – in 2009 with a defeat of China in Vietnam, and in 2013 with an upset of Japan when the tournament was also held in Nakhon Ratchasima.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin was quick to offer his congratulations, Tweeting: "Thailand defeated China 3-2 sets to win their third Asian title. I'd like to congratulate the athletes and coaching team. What is more

important is patience, determination and effort of everyone. I am happy with everybody in the team."

The newly-crowned champions will next try to secure a historic Olympic berth, although coach Danai Sriwacharamaytakul said the team needs to improve ahead of the qualifying round which starts tomorrow (Sept 16) in Poland and runs until Sept 24.

The Thais, who are chasing their first ever Olympic berth, are in Pool C and will face hosts Poland, defending Olympic champions the USA, 2022 Nations League winners Italy, Colombia, South Korea, Germany and Slovenia.

The top two teams in each of the three pools earn tickets to Paris and the Thais begin their campaign against Germany tomorrow (Sept 16).

Workpoint TV (23) will show all Thailand matches live.

Phuket youngsters dazzle at national football championships

FOOTBALL

IT WAS DOUBLE DELIGHT for Phuket teams contesting the recent Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) NSDF Thailand Championship 2023 in Chiang Rai, with two divisional winners and a runners-up place secured.

The national tournament took place on Aug 12 and 13 at Chiang Rai Provincial Stadium, with a series of talented sides representing their prospective provinces in style.

Plukpanya Municipal School from Phuket Town did exactly that on Aug 13 as

they won the boys Under-12 championship after demolishing the Football Plus team from Pattani 6-0 in the final.

There was further cause for celebration when students Phupha Lengkul and Phurinat Maneerat received awards for best goalkeeper and outfield player respectively, while Denpong Longthong won the top coach award.

Earlier in the day, the aptly-named Success FC from Phuket triumphed in the boys Under-10 division when they beat TAC Team from Nakhon Pathom 1-0 in the final match.

Further honours were bestowed upon representatives



WINNERS: Success FC. Photo: Supplied

of Success FC as Wachiraphan Makmee received the award for best coach, while students Ammer Layu and Kantapat Wattanajamnon won best player awards for goalkeeper and outfield player respectively.

In the same age group, Plukpanya Municipal School finished a respectable third place when they defeated Chiang Mai Academy 4-0 in the third-fourth play-off game.

Demonstrating their strength across all age groups,

the boys Under-9 team from Plukpanya Municipal School finished runners-up courtesy of a narrow 1-0 loss to Tag Team from Nakhon Pathom.

There were trophies and cash prizes distributed to the finalists by SAT Governor Kongsak Yodmanee, with B30,000 going to each divisional winner, B20,000 to the runners-up, B10,000 to third-placed teams and B5,000 to the fourth-placed team.

Elsewhere, team Republic from Chalong in Phuket competed in the mixed Under-9 division although they came up against tough opposition in their group games, suffering a

3-0 loss to the Sawat Bovorn Academy from Songkhla and a 2-1 deficit against team Ngop Daeng from Kampaeng Phet.

However, coach Manu Alders remained upbeat, declaring the experience as an invaluable one for the students, on and off the pitch.

"The opposition were tough but the boys, and one girl, did not let their heads drop and competed enthusiastically until the final whistle," Manu said proudly.

"They got to make many new friends and explored some fantastic local cultural sites too," he added.

The Phuket News