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INBOUND



A Sichuan Airlines Airbus 321 arrives at Phuket airport last Friday (Jan 20). Photo: AOTGA

TOURISM INDUSTRY TOLD TO READY FOR INFLUX OF CHINESE TOUR GROUPS

The Phuket News
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Tourism operators have been urged to ready their businesses ahead of the expected influx of Chinese tourists from Feb 6, when mainland Chinese will be allowed to travel abroad on package tours.

The private sector should be able to adjust workflow to accommodate a new wave of Chinese tour groups, Bhummikitti Ruktaengam, Advisory Chairman of the Phuket Tourist Association, said.

However, he urged the government to immediately work on resolving “bottleneck issues” such as the slow approval of flight slots and the shortfall of ground handling services,

which caused delays at the airport, Mr Bhummikitti told the *Bangkok Post*. Border immigration offices must be ready in terms of staff and counters, as well as digitising TM6 immigration cards to save time at entry points, Mr Bhummikitti said.

As airfares remain expensive, most independent Chinese tourists this year will be those with high purchasing power, he said.

When tour groups are allowed to venture out, increasing flights will lead to more affordable prices, which could match tour demand, he added.

Suksit Suvunditkul, President of the Thai Hotels Association (THA) Southern Region chapter, noted, “Some 20% of hotels in Phuket that were closed because of the lack of

Chinese tour groups will eventually reopen.”

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) estimates 5 million Chinese visitors will come to Thailand this year. Mr Suksit predicts 1.5mn of those will visit Phuket.

FLIGHTS

Thailand is among the first destinations approved for outbound tour groups, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) confirmed last Friday (Jan 20), noting that Chinese groups are allowed to visit Thailand and 19 other nations from Feb 6.

Sisdivachr Cheewarattanaporn, President of the Association of Thai Travel Agents, said travel agents in Thailand and China were already

prepared to start group sales before the official announcement from Beijing.

However, he said it would take time for airlines to increase flights between Thailand and large cities in China to allow a large number of Chinese tour groups, likely in the second quarter. The government already expects 300,000 tourists from mainland China in the first quarter of this year, with TAT Governor Yuthasak Supasorn expecting 17% of those arrivals to come to Phuket.

Tourism operators have to urgently hire more staff, especially Chinese speakers to accommodate not only Chinese tourists, but also those from Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Taiwan, Mr Sisdivachr said.

However, inbound direct flights...

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News



Thanakorn
praises policy
for success > p5



Photo: PR Phuket

Staff urged to get COVID booster jabs

THE PHUKET COMMUNICABLE DISEASE COMMITTEE has issued a statement urging all business operators to get their staff to have booster vaccinations to protect them from COVID-19.

The call came at the first meeting of the committee for the year, held at Phuket Provincial Hall on Jan 16, and chaired by Phuket Vice Governor Danai Sunantarod.

Vice Governor Danai said that the meeting was held to monitor the situation of COVID-19 in Phuket and the level and preventive vaccination across the island.

"It has been found that at this time the number of infection sites is very small, but the agencies under the Ministry of Public Health have been continually monitoring the situation," he said.

"At this time Phuket has a number of tourists who are now starting to travel more, and especially at the end of this month during the Chinese New Year we will have more tourists coming into the province," Vice Governor Danai said.

"Therefore we have to

put in place various measures to support [sic]," he added, without making any specific mention of the anticipated influx of visitors from Mainland China.

"For the part of the public, we ask for their cooperation in getting booster vaccinations by visiting any government hospitals for injections, where in the past few people have received booster vaccinations," he said.

"In addition, we also ask for cooperation from various [business] establishments to promote employees to get booster vaccination to prevent disease," V/Gov Danai noted.

Booster vaccination injections are available every day at Vachira Phuket Hospital (at the Luang Por Chaem building), on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Patong Hospital, and on Tuesdays at Thalang and Chalong Hospitals.

"We therefore invite people who have not yet received a booster vaccination to get one at a hospital near their homes," V/Gov Danai said. *The Phuket News*

Chinese package tourists set to return from Feb 6

Continued from page 1

...from China have already found themselves launching services to Phuket, with Shanghai Airlines and Sichuan Airlines launching their new flight services to the island last Friday (Jan 20). China Eastern Airlines have also relaunched direct flights to Phuket. More airlines are expected to launch direct flights in the coming weeks.

Aerothai President Noppasit Chakpitak last Friday said that Transport Minister Saksayam Chidchob has instructed all related agencies to ensure they were prepared to handle the influx of Chinese tourists during the Chinese New Year period from Jan 19-25.

Of the total 240 scheduled flights, or 34 per day on average, during the period, 75 landed at Suvarnabhumi Airport, 52 at Don Mueang Airport, 78 at Phuket Airport and 35 at Chiang Mai Airport.

The number of flights from China for this month is expected to reach 1,160, which is lower than the pre-pandemic level in January 2019 of 12,209.

However, in light of China's reopening, the number of flights from the country is expected to rapidly rise to 36,896 this year, an increase of 227.6% from 2022, Mr Noppasit said.

ON THE GROUND

Wasuchet Sophonsathien, President of the Thai Transportation Operators Association, told the *Bangkok Post* there are 10,000-15,000 buses for tour groups, but with Chinese groups expected to return, demand is expected to increase to 40,000, a similar level as in 2019.

He said bus operators still have insufficient budget for maintenance and face a shortage of drivers.

The association earlier proposed to the Finance Ministry a subsidy scheme to help partly absorb the B500,000 in



Tourists on Patong Beach last Friday (Jan 20). Photo: Patong Surf life Saving

maintenance costs per bus. It also asked the Labour Ministry for a scheme to help hire at least 3,000 drivers for six months.

Marisa Sukosol Nunbhakdi, THA president, urged the government to regulate accommodations without hotel licences, as well as work to prevent unfavourable impacts from mass tourism, such as limiting the carrying capacity at tourist attractions. (See page 6.)

In the long term, the country should focus on high-spending travellers by promoting medical and wellness tourism as well as the MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions) segment, said Ms Marisa.

The site Trip.com reported searches from China for tour packages during the Lunar New Year surged six-fold, with Thailand one of the most-searched destinations, said Boon Sian Chai, managing director and vice-president, international markets at Trip.com Group.

Accommodation and attractions bookings by Chinese tourists also soared by 447% and 10 times year-on-year.

80 MILLION BY 2027

The Ministry of Tourism and Sports has said it hopes to drive up the number of international visitors to Thailand to 80

million over the next five years.

This would mean doubling the number of international visitors from pre-pandemic figures, exceeding the kingdom's current population of around 70 million, reports NNT.

Tourism and Sports Minister Pipat Ratchakitprakarn said this target, once achieved, could raise the country's tourism revenue from B1.93 trillion baht in 2019 to B5trn.

He also said the target calls for an upgrade to tourism safety standards in order to accommodate the influx of visitors.

Since the pandemic, the Thai government has initiated plans for collecting an arrival fee from international visitors. The B300 per person fee is expected to be implemented starting June 1 this year.

The National Tourism Policy Committee held a meeting on Tuesday (Jan 24) to finalise the details of the fee, which will be applicable to arriving foreign passport holders. At time of press no finalised details had been announced.

The fee will not be applicable to foreigners entering the country using border passes, local public servants in border areas, or those holding a valid work permit in Thailand.

Suspicious raised over 'Marco Polo' incident

MARCO CEFERIN, OWNER of the yacht 'Marco Polo', has clarified many details of the recovery of his yacht after it disappeared from Nai Harn on Dec 28, including that his yacht was returned to him from the Similan Islands, north of Phuket, not from near Indonesian waters to the south as previously reported.

Mr Ceferin reported the Marco Polo, a 40-foot Fountain Pajot catamaran, missing to Chalong Police immediately after discovering that the yacht had disappeared.

An eye witness told Mr Ceferin that he had seen three people board the boat around 8:30am before taking off to sea.

"The boat was anchored safely by 45 metres of anchor chain in water with a depth of only 11m," Mr Ceferin told *The Phuket News*.

"We also checked that the anchor was secure by testing its hold under engine power. We did this check two times," he said.

"The boat did not 'drift' on anchor," he added.

The Marco Polo was later reported to have been found near Indonesian waters. The sighting, and confirmation that it was the Marco Polo, was reported by MGR Online, citing the Phuket Fisheries Office.

However, Mr Ceferin on Monday (Jan 23) confirmed

that after making the appeal to the Phuket Fisheries Office he was informed that the Marco Polo had been seen at the Similan Islands.

By the afternoon of Jan 13, Mr Ceferin had the boat back in his possession after it was handed over at Koh Bon, near the Similan Islands, north of Phuket.

The quick discovery and return of his yacht came less than 24 hours after he had made an appeal through the Phuket Provincial Fisheries Office for any boats in Phuket's commercial fishing fleet to keep an eye out for the missing yacht.

He also offered a reward

for information that directly led to the return of his yacht.

"We made a big report to the main fishermen's office in Phuket Town on Jan 12, and directly after that, the next morning, we got a call saying that my boat was in the area of the Similan Islands," Mr Ceferin said.

"I believe that different fishing boats took my boat and pulled it step by step until it was in the Similan Islands area," he added.

"Many things had been stolen, including the anchor and anchor chain. In my opinion, the fishermen [who took the boat] were scared of the whole situation after the fish-



The 'Marco Polo' under tow back to Phuket. Image: Supplied

eries office report and gave it back," he said.

Mr Ceferin estimated that the items stolen, including the chain and anchor, were altogether worth about B225,000.

"I also gave B100,000 to the finder and B70,000 to pay for their fuel," Mr Ceferin said.

"The most important thing is that I got my boat back. I have now already installed

a new bigger Rocna anchor which my boat can support and a high quality GPS tracker on board. This case was enough pain for me. Thanks a lot to all the guys who helped in this bad time," he said.

He confirmed that the Marco Polo is currently valued at about US\$220,000 (just over B7.1 million).

The Phuket News

Tourism recovery spurs demand for more jumbos

The Phuket News
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Six new elephants are on their way to a camp in Phuket to meet demand from returning Chinese tourists, Wittaya Taweeros, owner of Pang Chang Kamala Elephant Camp, confirmed last Friday (Jan 20).

Mr Wittaya said he had experienced a significant increase in the number of tourists registering to visit the park after Chinese New Year.

He added that the elephants had been brought in to meet demand while also being used to welcome visitors to the park.

Available activities for visitors to undertake with the elephants at the Pang Chang camp include bareback riding, jungle trekking, feeding sessions and showering with the mammals. Additionally, there is the option to partake in elephant shows, conduct model and wedding photography sessions and engage the mammals in ceremonies and events.

Mr Wittaya also confirmed that the park has introduced a series of new programmes,



Photo: The Phuket News / file

including one called 'Elephant Care' which allows participants to learn "how to be 'An Elephant Keeper'".

The six new additions to the camp brings the total number of elephants there to 25 overall, Mr Wittaya said, meaning the capacity for tourists can increase from 200 to 300 a day.

Mr Wittaya said he hopes that number can increase further in time as more tourists arrive on the island, predominantly from China which recently reopened its borders and has confirmed tour groups will be resuming as of Feb 6.

Mr Wittaya added that his company is using the same

travel agent service to facilitate bookings from the China market as was used before the COVID-19 pandemic bringing an abrupt halt to tourism in early 2020.

The welfare of elephants in captivity in Phuket came acutely under the microscope during the pandemic as reports surfaced of them struggling to survive due to the drop off in tourist numbers, with many camps across the island relying on donations. Many owners faced no income and had run out of savings to buy food for their elephants, resulting in international registered charity organisers stepping in to help.

There has always been a

strong backlash from critics who argue that the conditions in elephant camps are unacceptable and the way many of the elephants are treated is inhumane (although, it must be noted, no such complaints have officially been made against Pang Chang Camp in Kamala). In March 2020 the Phuket office of the Department of Livestock Development (DLD) issued a formal warning to an elephant camp in Rawai following photo evidence surfacing over the elephant being overly restrained by chains while in its infancy.

This followed a three-year-old baby elephant at Phuket Zoo dying from a digestive tract infection in May 2019 despite an international campaign calling for him to be taken into care for better protection.

Many had hoped that the disruption brought about by COVID-19 would offer a chance for pause, reflection and a possible reassessment on how these majestic creatures are used and treated when in captivity in the hope that any exploitation would be reduced, if not eliminated altogether.



Photo: PR Phuket

Uzbek woman caught with 2.23kg of cocaine

A WOMAN FROM Uzbekistan was found in possession of 2.23kg of cocaine at Phuket International Airport on Jan 20.

The woman, named as 41-year-old Shoila Rachmonova, was found to be carrying the drug in a total of eight plastic bags that had been concealed in a specially modified laptop bag and three mobile phones.

Officials confirmed the woman was travelling alone and had arrived in Phuket around 7:40am on a Qatar Airways flight from Doha.

Police had been tipped off that a "suspicious person" was aboard the flight and managed to apprehend Ms Rachmonova after a

search by customs and immigration officials.

The arrest was led by Phuket Provincial Police Chief Maj Gen Sermphan Sirikong, who was joined by Sakhu Police Superintendent Col Kantchawit and Sakhu Police Deputy Superintendents Lt Col Salaan Tantisankul and Lt Col Supap Sae-Lim.

Following the detailed search of Ms Rachmonova's luggage, officials confirmed they discovered the eight bags hidden in the laptop bag and three mobile phones.

Ms Rachmonova was taken to Sakhu Police Station to be charged with the illegal importation of cocaine into the country.

The Phuket News

Patong taxi driver outburst over parking

A TAXI DRIVER IN PATONG HAS been charged for causing damage to private property after he kicked a parked motorbike over in a fit of rage, despite the motorbike being legally parked in front of the motorbike owner's shop.

A video recording of the incident was posted online last Sunday (Jan 22), spurring harsh criticism and accusations that police were ignoring the incident.

In response, Patong Police last Sunday reported that the offender, named by police only as "Mr Sit", 45, had been brought to Patong Police Station for questioning.

Mr Sit was also tested for drug use, police reported. He tested negative.

Mr Sit, who drives a taxi fitted with green licence plates, indicating that the vehicle may legally operate as a privately hired taxi, said he had parked on Phra Metta Rd (reported by its pre-formal name 'Phang Muang Sai Kor Rd').

He went to leave and found the motorbike parked in front of his vehicle, preventing him from pulling out. This alone spurred his rage that ended with him kicking the motorbike over.

He apologised for the incident.

The owner of the motorbike, Peaow Prachumsawat, 38, said he had parked the motorbike directly in front of his shop while he went inside to install a fan.

He said knew he had parked in front of the taxi, but had left enough room for the taxi to leave easily.

"I heard the sound of the motorbike falling over and came out to find him [Mr



Photo: Patong Police

Sit] picking it back up. There wasn't much damage and I thought he had accidentally bumped the bike with his car.

"He just said, Sorry, sorry', then got in his car and drove away. But after looking at the CCTV I saw that he had got out of his car and kicked the motorcycle until it fell over," Mr Peaow said.

"This parking area is public. Any kind of car can come in front of our shop and park here - I don't care," he added.

"I want to ask him to be reasonable about where he parks and who he meets. It's a bad habit. If he meets someone who is also hot-headed, he doesn't know how the event will end," Mr Peaow said.

"I'd like to ask him to control his emotions too," he added.

"As for the police, they will take the motorbike to assess the cost of repairs so he can have them done," Mr Peaow concluded. *Eakkapop Thongtub*



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PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

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Low: +27°
Wind 11 m/s

SAT JANUARY 28

High: +31°
Low: +27°
Wind 11 m/s

SUN JANUARY 29

High: +31°
Low: +27°
Wind 11 m/s

MON JANUARY 30

High: +31°
Low: +27°
Wind 4 m/s

TUE JANUARY 31

High: +32°
Low: +27°
Wind 4 m/s

WED FEBRUARY 1

High: +30°
Low: +27°
Wind 4 m/s

THU FEBRUARY 2

High: +30°
Low: +27°
Wind 4 m/s

Illegal excavation ordered to stop – again

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Illegal excavation of a hill in Kathu that ended up with a landslide across the Kathu-Koh Kaew Rd last October has again been ordered to stop following a raid by Phuket officers of the Royal Forest Department (RFD) accompanied by Phuket Provincial Police.

A local resident expat whose house was nearly directly affected by the landslide in October told *The Phuket News* that work on the hill began again “like crazy” about three weeks ago.

The local resident reported the illegal excavation to Kathu Municipality, but to no avail.

“There was a whole new team of officials this time. All the other officials from last time were no longer there,” the local resident said.

The official the local resident spoke to said that Kathu Municipality had ordered the work to stop, and “invited” the company conducting the excavation to present themselves to Kathu Municipality in order to correctly apply for a permit to do so.

That never happened, but the



The landslide from the hill last October. Photo: The Phuket News / file

excavation of the hill continued.

Acting on advice from a friend, the local resident filed a complaint through the Department of Environmental Quality Promotion (DEQP), under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) in Bangkok on Jan 10. The raid on the site occurred at 4:30pm the next day (Jan 11).

By Jan 12, the local resident had received written confirmation from the Phuket MNRE office that action had been taken.

“According to the complaint above, the Phuket Provincial Police joined an inspection of the area, on Kathu-Koh

Kaew Rd. The Governor of Phuket had ordered the Kathu District Office, Phuket Forestry Center, Kathu Municipality and the Phuket Provincial Police to inspect the site, which was done on January 11, 2023 at 4:30pm,” a Phuket MNRE official reported to the DEQP.

Of note, the confirmation of action came less than 24 hours after the complaint was received.

The officers conducting the raid arrested the perpetrators and had all machinery removed from the area, the Phuket MNRE officer confirmed.

“The aforementioned case violated the land excavation and landfilling

ban order of Kathu Municipality. Currently, Kathu Municipality has ordered to stop the operation and has issued a fine of B30,000,” the official said.

“Kathu Municipality can advise the landowners about how to act according to the law, because it is a steep hillside area,” the officer noted.

“It is within the scope of needing to have a preliminary environmental impact report in accordance with the announcement of the Phuket Environmental Protected Areas.

“The Kathu District Office has now informed the Governor of Phuket of the infringement,” the officer said.

No Phuket government offices have publicly acknowledged that the raid, ban on excavation and fine were exercised.

However, just two days after the raid, the Phuket MNRE office issued a notice and a flowchart of how to comply with Environment Impact Assessment requirements.

Under Section 51/5 paragraph one of the Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act (No. 2), B.E., offenders may be liable to a fine of up to B1 million, the notice explained.



Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

Man holds wife hostage at knifepoint

POLICE SAFELY TOOK a man into custody after he reportedly held his wife hostage at knifepoint at their home in Kathu on Jan 18.

Kathu Police were informed of the situation by the 191 emergency call centre at 9:15am.

The call centre reported that they had been informed that a man was using a knife to force his wife to remain inside the house, in Soi Ketho Soi 6, Kathu.

Kathu Police Chief Pol Col Rungrit Ratanaphakdee ordered officers to respond.

In total 15 officers arrived at the home, including officers from Kathu Police Station, patrol officers, members of the Royal Volunteer Spirit 904 group and officials from Kathu Municipality.

Officers armed with long-handled prongs called for the man Worawut Thongsuek, 37, originally from Surat Thani, to come out of the house peacefully.

His wife opened the door, availing police to rush inside and take Mr Worawut under arrest.

Mr Worawut worked as security at the Pruksa Ville Kathu housing estate in Soi Bang Thong, Kathu, police reported.

He admitted that was stressed and in a state of anxiety, and had previously used methamphetamines (ya bah) and crystal meth (ya ice), officers said.

Mr Worawut was taken for drug testing, police confirmed.

At last report police had yet to confirm what charges Mr Worawut will face.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Large-scale area search for missing Romanian expat draws to a close

THE COMMAND CENTRE COORDINATING the search for missing 46-year-old Romanian national Sebastian Emil Somesan has been closed with all active search efforts to locate him suspended.

Rawai Mayor Aroon Solos announced the end of the search efforts at the command centre at Ya Nui Beach on Jan 17.

The announcement came after nine days of intensive search efforts involving divers, local rescue workers and Navy boats and a search-rescue helicopter scouring the waters across the southern end of Phuket.

The search was launched after Mr Somesan was reported missing on Jan 8. He was on a diving trip with a Romanian and a Thai friend. When the trio went to leave the area, they became aware that the boat anchor had caught on a rock on the seabed and Mr Somesan dived down to free the anchor. He failed to resurface.

Immediate search efforts focused on the waters around Koh Kaew Noi island, just over two kilometres south of Promthep Cape. Failing to find Mr Somesan, search teams then expanded their search area to include the southwest coast of Phuket and then areas immediately south of Nai Harn.

Mobilised to join the search efforts were officers from Rawai Municipality, Marine Police, Tourist Police, Chalong Police, Tourist Assistance Center, Kusoldharm Foundation rescue workers, disaster officials and personnel from the



Photo: Rawai Municipality

Royal Thai Navy Third Area Command based at Cape Panwa.

Local foreign divers have also joined the search efforts to locate Mr Somesan, who as a local expat lived in Phuket with his wife and daughter.

Mayor Aroon said the relevant agencies, including Phuket's commercial fishing fleet, had been asked to continue to keep watch for any sign of Mr Somesan or his body.

The closing of the command centre was marked by a lunch conducted in the form of merit making under the theme ‘Together We Share’ to express gratitude to all those who took part in the search. Phuket Vice Governor Anupap Rodkwan Yodrabam was present to mark the occasion.

The Phuket News

thephuketnews

Thanakorn hails policy success

The Phuket News
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Thanakorn Wangboonkongchana, Minister to the Prime Minister Office, was in Phuket last Friday (Jan 20) to promote government projects and the money allocated to be spent on alleviating flooding across the island.

Mr Thanakorn also spoke with local people as part of his promotion of what he called the government's policy of "two-way communication" with the people and toured Phuket Town reportedly to observe the tourism recovery firsthand.

Mr Thanakorn's visit was heavily promoted through local government public relations channels, all under the banner of "caring for the people".

Joining Mr Thanakorn's visit to the flood-risk areas of Phuket Old Town and Soi Paniang in Moo 5, Ratsada, were recently installed Phuket Vice Governor Danai Sunantarod and Lt Gen Sansern Kaewkamnerd, Director-General of the Public Relations Department (PRD).

During his visit, Mr Thanakorn received a report



Mr Thanakorn (left) in Phuket Town last Friday (Jan 20). Photo: PR Phuket

from Suwit Phansengiam of the Public Works and Town Planning Phuket Province about how floods of October 2022 had affected the communities and what action was being taken to "remedy" the situation.

He also heard from Ratsada Mayor Nakarin Yosaengrat how the floods had affected the resident's livelihoods and affected tourism to the areas.

"Mr Thanakorn said that the government under the leadership of Gen Prayut emphasises solving flood problems that affect people's livelihoods. and has assigned the Department of Public Works

and Town & Country Planning and related agencies to deliver sustainable solutions to Phuket's flood problems," said a report by the Phuket branch of the PRD (PR Phuket).

"Coming today made him [Mr Thanakorn] aware of the suffering and the government was ready to relieve the suffering of the people as soon as possible," the report added.

"In the past, the government has supported many projects to solve problems that arise. For example, the main drainage system project to alleviate flooding in the Phuket community area, Phase 2, in the fiscal year

2021-2023, with a budget of 296,850,000 baht, which is currently under construction. It will help solve the suffering of the people and alleviate the flooding problem in the Phuket community area effectively," the report continued.

Mr Thanakorn also gave an interview to the local media at Phuket Provincial Hall during which he emphasised that "in the case of investment and gray businesses, the prime minister has enjoined that this matter should be dealt with seriously".

"The Prime Minister is very serious about this matter. which has instructed all parties involved to act properly and

fairly," Mr Thanakorn said.

During his tour of Thalang Rd in the Phuket Old Town area, Mr Thanakorn noted, "Although it [Phuket Town] has been affected by COVID-19 in the past, government policies under the leadership of Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha have driven the creation of renovations, as well as improving the landscape to be beautiful."

He also noted, "The tourism sector is an important mechanism to drive the country's economy. Today it's nice to see tourists walking the streets, thanks to the government's economic stimulus and tourism boom that has blossomed to this day.

"Coming to Phuket today I see tourism recovering. Tourists have begun to flow in from all corners of the world. The economy is moving. With the Prime Minister's policy, it emphasises that Thailand is on the right track.

"As China allowed tourists to travel more, Thailand was the first country that Chinese tourists travelled to. It reflects that Chinese people and people from all over the world are confident in welcoming tourists to Thailand," Mr Thanakorn said.

Mr Thanakorn's visit to Phuket came one day after he announced that he had resigned as a member and list-MP of the Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP) to join the United Thai Nation (UTN) party supporting Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.

Mr Thanakorn had served earlier as government spokesman from August 2021 to August 2022. He became a list MP of PPRP in August last year replacing Watanya Bunnag, who resigned to join the Democrat Party and head its Bangkok election campaign team. He was appointed Prime Minister's Office minister in November, reports the Bangkok Post.

Mr Thanakorn made it clear last Thursday (Jan 19) that he would join the UTN, a party set up expressly to back Gen Prayut in his bid to retain the prime minister's position after the coming election.

He thanked Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan, the PPRP leader, as well as Justice Minister Somsak Theputhin and Industry Minister Suriya Jungrungreangkit, two core members of the party, for their support for him in his political career.

Conscripts considered for tourism labour

BOONCHOB SUTTHAMANASWONG, Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Labour, will discuss with the Directorate of Joint Civil Affairs of Royal Thai Army allowing conscripts who have completed the first six months of training to work part-time as additional workers in tourism companies suffering labour shortages.

Mr Boonchob revealed the alternative strategy at a meeting with the Thai Hotels Association (THA), the Tourism Council of Phuket, the Association of Thai Travel Agents (ATTA) and the Thai Spa Association on Jan 18 to discuss the labour shortage throughout the combined industries.

Concerns were raised about the capacity to serve customers during the Chinese New Year holidays, reports state news agency NNT.

Efforts will be increased to secure more workers from within provinces most heavily affected first, while efforts were heightened to lure more workers from Thailand's Northeast, Mr Boonchob said.

"The tourism and service sector is facing a labour shortage. We have coordinated with relevant agencies to organise job markets to meet workers in the tourist provinces in order to attract workers from provinces across the country to meet the demand for labour," he said.

Mr Boonchob noted that the Ministry of Labour had conducted a recent survey of the demand for workers in key tourist areas.

"It was found that there were about 10,000 people in demand, most of them in Phuket, Surat Thani, Songkhla, Chiang Mai, Phang Nga and Chonburi, especially in the hotel business," he said.

The demand for staff was wide ranging, he noted, citing receptionists, wait staff, cleaning



Ministry of Labour Permanent Secretary Boonchob Sutthamamaswong. Photo: NNT file

staff, general office staff, accounting and various administrative staff as examples where many vacancies remained.

However, Mr Boonchob said great progress had been made in the past month in resolving the labour shortage crisis.

Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew revealed on Dec 8 that more than 17,000 job vacancies in Phuket were waiting to be filled at more than 1,400 businesses on the island.

On Wednesday, Mr Boonchob reported that the top five provinces where workers in the tourism sector were in high demand were Phuket (3,648 workers in demand), Chiang Mai (858), Chon Buri (594), Phang Nga (410) and Surat Thani (349).

Regardless, a dire labour shortage remained in the Thai massage industry, he said.

"There is a shortage of thousands of massage workers in the spa industry," Mr Boonchob said.

"The Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Labour therefore will work together to arrange for business operators to meet Thai massage workers who have already completed the appropriate training," he said.

The Phuket News

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ASIA'S SPONSORSHIP INDUSTRY REBOUNDS

Sponsorship market intelligence firm relocates to Phuket

ADVERTORIAL

Asia's sponsorship industry is experiencing a resurgence post-pandemic, and nobody is better placed to capitalise on that trend than The Sponsorship Experts, Paul Poole (South East Asia) Co., Ltd. (PP(SEA)CL).

Paul and his team connect events with sponsors and brands with events – and steer them through the whole process of sponsorship towards a successful outcome for both.

A key PP(SEA)CL objective is to increase the commercial value of the properties they represent by developing professional sponsorship packages, by sourcing 'best brand name/fit' commercial sponsors and by ensuring ROI and ROO for their clients, sponsors and partners.

Furthermore, Paul strongly believes that – by effectively leveraging the power of sponsorship – rights holders and brands can organise and host better quality and more sustainable events, and engage with the local community in a more meaningful way.

Fundamental to PP(SEA)CL's ability to offer expert advice is Paul's commitment to evidence-based decision-making, proper evaluation of sponsorship 'assets', media and sponsorship benchmarking and use of market intelligence on the latest trends shaping the industry. PP(SEA)CL is a member of the Asian Sponsorship Association and includes PerforMind® – a scientific approach to selecting sponsorship



criteria and sourcing a sponsorship that is best for each client's needs – in its professional 'tool kit'.

As a measure of its impact, PP(SEA)CL delivers over one billion Thai baht in sponsorship across, on average, 58 properties each year. Clients include luxury water-based lifestyle events such as Kata Rocks Superyacht Rendezvous, Kata Rocks Poker Run and Thailand International Boat Show – events that bring valuable revenue to Thai tourism, support local communities and promote a healthier, more active, lifestyle.

For individual athletes, they use Sportskred to create unique sponsorship and influencer marketing campaigns. Sportskred combines

social media accounts of athletes and brand ambassadors to create a highly valuable private network for marketing and sponsorship needs. By tapping into several social media accounts at once, the network aggregates following and engagement and has the potential to reach far more people in an engaging manner.

At government level, PP(SEA)CL are special advisors to – and have developed benchmarking tools and conducted bespoke training workshops for – the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT).

On the future, Paul says, "We intend to continue our pre-pandemic trajectory to double in size through acquisition and our own growth."

True to his word, September saw PP(SEA)CL acquire Singapore-based Asia Sponsorship News (ASN) – the leading market intelligence service for Asia's sponsorship industry – and relocate its base to Phuket.

Although a subsidiary of PP(SEA)CL, ASN will be run independently under the direction of Managing Director (former Business Development Director) James Hamshire, who said, "This acquisition comes at a time when the sponsorship industry is resurging in Asia. We are confident of the continued success of ASN as an utterly independent provider of intelligence for those in the sports, media, and entertainment space in Asia."

Founded in Singapore in 2007 by Ben Heyhoe Flint, ASN operates on a subscription-based model where subscribers gain access to the latest news, analytics, and insights from the biggest players in the sponsorship industry. Over the years ASN has worked with the leading names in sports, media and entertainment across the buy-side, agency, and sell-side.

"ASN has been a monumental force in the sponsorship industry in Asia in the past 15 years, providing invaluable insights to all of us working in this space. We are committed to continuing that important work and to remaining an important independent player in an ever-changing industry," said Paul.

According to Ben, ASN was created by media professionals with collectively decades of experience who were frustrated that there was a black hole of data and insight relating to this poorly understood but fast-growing \$10 billion channel. "We are extremely excited to start this new chapter under the ownership of PP(SEA)CL. Paul has demonstrated a lifelong commitment to the sponsorship industry and we could not have found a better path forward," he said.



www.paulpoole.co.th
info@paulpoole.co.th
www.asiasponsorshipnews.com
info@asiasponsorshipnews.com

Andaman tourism leader spearheads appeal to PM for support

A DELEGATION FROM the Tourism Council of Thailand (TCT), spearheaded by the TCT representative for Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi, has made a direct appeal to Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha for support to help the region's tourism industry to recover.

The appeal, under the theme 'Supply Side Restart', urged a raft of measures to help facilitate the tourism industry's ability to serve the expected influx of international tourists as well as the rising volume in domestic tourists.

Presenting the appeal to PM Prayut on Jan 18 was Chamnan Srisawat, who was elected TCT President only on Jan 3.

However, openly credited as leading the delegation was Wirintra Paphakityotphat of the TCT Region 11 branch, representing Phuket,



Photo: PR Phuket

Phang Nga and Krabi.

The first key initiative proposed was to waive the fees for training and issuance of tour guide licences.

The second initiative was for the national government to rescind or modify by law the Interior Ministerial regulation enforced by the Department of Provincial Administration that mandates that accommodation venues with no more than 10

rooms and the capacity to accommodate no more than 30 guests does not meet the legal definition of a hotel.

To make this change possible, a further change to the 'Ministerial Regulations on Characteristics and Safety Systems of Buildings Used for Hotel Business Operations B.E', enforced by the Department of Public Works and Town & Country Planning,

was needed so that buildings operated as accommodation venues by SMEs would fall under the definition of hotels.

The third initiative requested was for the criteria for being approved financial support through credit facilities to be eased so that SMEs would finally have access to much-needed funds in order to restart their businesses.

After meeting with PM

Prayut, Ms Wirintra explained that discussions on helping business operators in various sectors had begun to see concrete action on many issues, especially in terms of access to funds.

The Office of SMEs Promotion (OSMEP) had approved special conditions as requested by the chairman of the OSMEP on Jan 4 to unlock access for tourism operators to loans via credit bureaus.

Suraphon Opasathien, General Manager of the National Credit Information Co Ltd, said that the government will relax the opportunity to access loan sources for tourism operators who were able to make loan repayments up until the end of the year 2019, and which experienced liquidity problems during the COVID-19 crisis during the years 2020-2022.

Such businesses will be able to have the right to borrow money, in order to increase

liquidity and have the opportunity to restart the businesses, he said.

Mr Suraphon also noted that a budget of B968 million had been approved through the Thai Credit Guarantee Corporation (TCG, or ทคก) to help tour operators who lack collateral so that loans could be provided by guaranteeing credit of more than B3.5 billion.

"I will push on issues that members have problems with, whether it is applying for a small hotel operator's license and other issues that are 'stuck' so that government agencies can help business operators to be able to do business with stability in order to promote tourism in the provinces along the Andaman coast, and throughout of the next country," Ms Wirintra said.

The Phuket News

Cops under fire after VVIP escort of Chinese tourist

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

Police say another non-commissioned officer was involved in offering an unsanctioned police escort service through a tour operator to a Chinese tourist, who revealed the illicit VVIP service via social media.

Pol Maj Gen Atchayon Kraithong, spokesman for the Royal Thai Police Office, said on Monday (Jan 23) a police senior sergeant major proposed a bespoke police escort service to a tour firm, offering to whisk Chinese visitors directly from their plane to their hotel.

The police senior sergeant major proposed the service to a tour operator he met at an event last November, Pol Maj Gen Atchayon said, without elaborating on the non-commissioned policeman.

To enact the controversial escort service, the police senior sergeant major had a tourist police captain meet the Chinese tourist at Suvarnabhumi airport. After picking up her luggage, the captain then ushered her through an immigration fast lane.

Once outside the airport, the police senior sergeant major had two traffic police sergeants escort the Chinese tourist in a motorcade from the airport to her hotel in Pattaya.

The two traffic policemen were charged with violating the Land Traffic



A clip from the viral video posted by a Chinese tourist of the police escort. Image: via Bangkok Post

Act and the Official Symbols Act.

A motorcycle and a car used in the motorcade were private vehicles but they were attached with sirens and the logos of the Royal Thai Police Office without permission, Pol Maj Gen Atchayon said.

Police would question the tour operator and the female Chinese tourist to support their investigation into the case.

Police would also verify statements she made in her video clip and the claim that the policemen in the motorcade received B7,000 plus a B200 tip.

Additionally, investigators would find out how long the group of policemen had provided the escort service and whether they should be prosecuted for wearing police uniforms while doing so.

The police spokesman said police officers were not permitted to offer such escort services to individual tourists. Police escort service must be approved by a traffic police commander in Bangkok or a highway police commander in other provinces and performed only for groups of people in convoys.

Deputy Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said on Monday no law permitted police to operate such a sideline and the officers in question had therefore broken the law and police regulations.

“We did not advertise any escort service for visitors,” he said.

“Those who did this must be prosecuted and punished.”

State PCs plagued by online gambling links

BANGKOK

AUTHORITIES ARE FACING a huge challenge as they try to clean up the computer systems of government organisations after finding millions of links to online gambling websites.

The problem is the worst at public hospitals, most of which outsource website hosting and maintenance, although inconsistent website maintenance leaves many organisations vulnerable to hacks and other cyber threats.

About 8 million scripts linked to online gambling were found on web pages of organisations under the Ministry of Public Health.

About 30mn URLs of gambling websites had been uncovered in about 1,000 public-sector websites. Most belonged to the Ministry of Public Health, followed by those of the Ministry of Commerce.

The health ministry was the main target because it had many hospitals that are required by the Public Sector Development Commission to have their own websites.

“Most hospitals, especially



Photo: Bangkok Post / File

small ones, neither develop their own websites nor have their own servers,” said AVM Amorn Chomchoey, secretary-general of the National Cyber Security Agency.

“They depend on web hosting. This is their weak point because they cannot upgrade their security.

“Links to gambling websites are being removed. The tasks are 50% complete but the problem will recur.”

A long-term solution, he said, would be to authorise the Digital Government Development Agency (DGA) to manage the websites of the government sector.

The DGA has ready-made and standardised websites for government organisations to use and could manage and monitor their security, he added. *Bangkok Post*

Graft probe of ex-DNP chief now complete, handed over to NACC

BANGKOK

THE GRAFT PROBE AGAINST THE former director-general of the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP), Rutchada Suriyakul Na Ayutya, has concluded, the police announced on Monday (Jan 23).

Anti-Corruption Division commander, Pol Maj Gen Jaroonkiat Pankaew, said the results of the probe have been handed over to the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC).

He said authorities are considering setting up a joint committee comprising police and officers from the NACC and the Public Sector Anti-Corruption Commission to further investigate Mr Rutchada, who has been charged with demanding bribes and malfeasance in office.

As the police have solid evidence against Rutchada, Pol Maj Gen Jaroonkiat said he was confident that the former DNP chief would be indicted and found guilty.

Rutchada was arrested at his office in Chatuchak district on Dec 27 on suspicion of demanding or taking bribes from his subordinates. An envelope containing B98,000 was found during his arrest, while envelopes containing a total of B4.9 million with the names of his subordinates were found in Rutchada's safe.

According to police, a total of 36 witnesses have been questioned, including 14 people whose names appeared on the envelopes.

The arrest followed a complaint by Chaiwat Limlikit-aksorn, former head of Kaeng Krachan National Park in Phetchaburi, who



Rutchada (left) being taken to the CCD last month. Photo: Bangkok Post

accused the department chief of abusing his authority by transferring officials who refused to pay him B500,000.

Mr Chaiwat urged the NACC to conclude the investigation within 30 days as he claimed several witnesses had been intimidated by people close to the suspect.

He also said witnesses were also concerned about the impartiality of the disciplinary panel because some members have been closely linked to Rutchada.

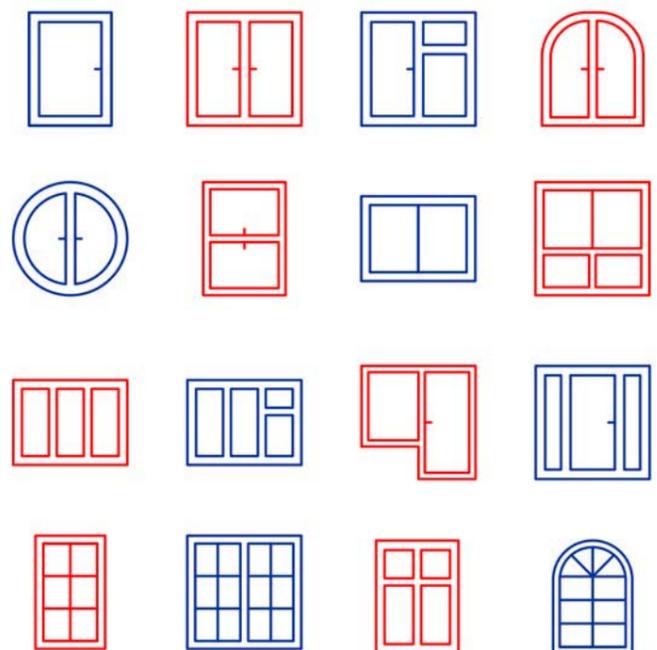
Sornchai Chuwichian, assistant to the NACC's secretary-general, said the agency would set up a panel to examine the case, and whether or not it will summon witnesses for questioning will depend on the evidence police had gathered.

Niwatchai Kasemmongkol, the NACC secretary-general, said the NACC's inquiry is likely to be concluded in one year if all witnesses agree to cooperate, warning officials involved in the case to tell the truth or face charges of colluding to commit malfeasance.

Bangkok Post



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Local schools 8th cheapest in Asia

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket is cheaper than the average city in Asia for international schools, ranking eighth cheapest out of 24 cities, according to the latest research released by International Schools Database (ISD).

International schools on the island also remain cheaper than their counterparts in Bangkok and Pattaya, ISD has reported.

China ranked the most expensive country in Asia for international education, with four Chinese cities in the top 10 most expensive locations across the continent, said a release announcing ISD's analysis for 2022.

The database, launched in 2019, allows parents to find, research and compare international schools around the world. The latest release uses all price data available to the organisation as of Dec 31, 2022. "There may be additional schools and prices not included in each city, because they do not make their price data available or it is unknown to us," ISD noted in its release.

Phuket was included in the analysis of international schools in 24 cities in 13 Asian countries, in graph and table forms.

"Similar to last year, China continues to dominate as the most expensive country in Asia for international schools. The top four most expensive cities are all located in China – Beijing,

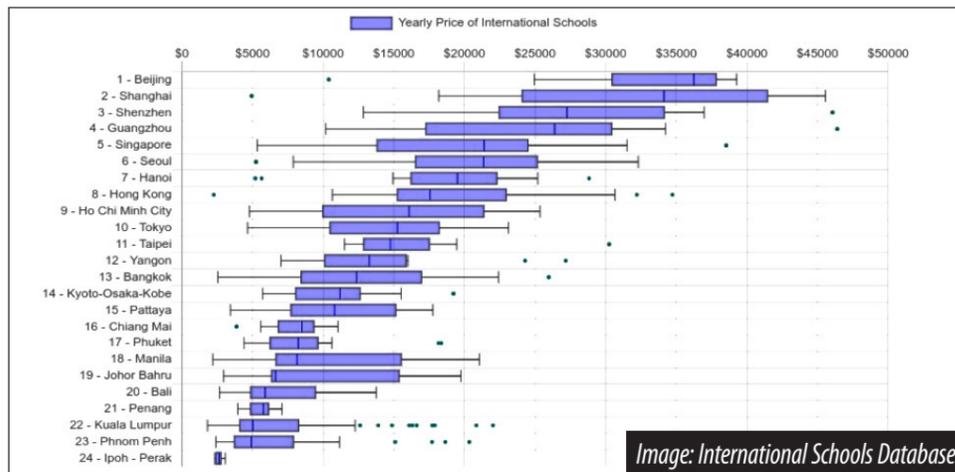


Image: International Schools Database

Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou. This order also remains the same since last year, however, median prices have increased in all four cities (although only slightly in Shenzhen)," the release noted.

Ipoh, in Perak, Malaysia, is a new city included in the research this year and has taken the title of the least expensive location in Asia for international schooling. Following it is Phnom Penh, which was 2021's least expensive city.

"Prices in Ipoh range from US\$2,316 to \$3,065 per year, which is a stark contrast to Asia's most expensive city, Beijing. Prices in this Chinese metropolis range from above \$10,000 to almost \$40,000 per year, ISD reported.

Despite the high prices seen in China, elsewhere in Asia median prices were more affordable than most people might think.

"Of the 24 cities included in our analysis of Asia, 14 had median prices of under \$15,000 per year. These were Taipei, Yangon, Bangkok, Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe, Pattaya, Chiang Mai, Phuket, Manila, Johor Bahru, Bali, Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Phnom Penh and Ipoh – Perak," ISD explained.

Malaysia and Thailand are the most affordable countries in Asia when it comes to the cost of international education, while Pattaya, Chiang Mai and Phuket along with four Malaysian cities (Johor Bahru, Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh) are included in the 10 least expensive locations in the continent. Other countries include Indonesia (Bali), Philippines (Manila), and Cambodia (Phnom Penh).

"This year we have added Bali to our analysis for the first time, and it is the fifth least expensive destination overall

in Asia. This should be good news for many people, since the Indonesian island is becoming increasingly popular as an expat destination," explained ISD Co-Founder Andrea Robledillo.

Of note, Phuket ranked fifth cheapest international school in Asia in the study in 2020.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation and currency value fluctuations across the region, Ms Robledillo offered different reasons for Phuket's slide down to eighth place.

"The main reason why it moved from the fifth cheapest in Asia for international education to the eighth cheapest is because this year we were able to extend our research to include two new cities/areas in Asia that are cheaper than Phuket: Bali and Ipoh - Perak. This made Phuket move up two positions in the ranking," Ms Robledillo explained.

"Additionally, Phuket also moved up one position because this year Manila's median international school price became slightly cheaper than Phuket, instead of slightly more expensive as it was in 2021," she added.

A breakdown of exact prices for each Asian city in the study, and comparable price data for other regions and cities around the world as well as additional research at International-schools-database.com. Each school's listing includes full contact details, school policies, nationality information, extra-curricular activities, and more.

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The March/April 2023

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The need for saving lives

The Phuket News
 editor@classactmedia.co.th

The name Vincent Modell has become synonymous with helping people in need, especially foreigners – expats and tourists alike – injured in road accidents involving motorbikes in Phuket, and as one of the island's leading snake-catchers. Here Vincent explains how he came to be the first responder making headlines and as the 'Snake Guy in Phuket' and what he sees as most important for people to know regarding helping to save lives.

You have been associated with one of the Phuket-based rescue organisations as a first responder for more than eight years. Can you tell us how you came to be a predominant figure in the community?

It all started 10 years ago when I arrived in Thailand to become a scuba diving instructor. I had a motorbike accident and slid on gasoline on the road. The bike slid away and I rolled many times down the hill. I was wearing a full-face helmet but I was cut up pretty badly. I got up and immediately

thought: 'If I were in real trouble, is there anyone to help me? If an ambulance came, would they speak English? Would they help me?'

After completing my scuba instructor training and starting work, I joined the Region 8 Police in Patong to assist tourists and such like.

After two years, I decided I wanted to help people in a more direct way. I found and reached out to the largest rescue foundation in Phuket. I explained as part of the scuba diving training I had become a first aid instructor and wanted to help. They reluctantly accepted me and I am still with them now. I started with the call sign 1007, a temporary number, then on to 8149 and was reassigned 8102 due to the dedication and time spent with the foundation.

What do you actually do?

I am one of the front-line responders who will attend most calls from minor to major accidents, to illness or 'Category 1' calls, which are 'life-threatening' situations. This includes CPR calls. On the medical side, I am normally called to attend when there is a foreign national involved.



Photo: Vincent Modell

After those, I attend to anything from catching snakes in people's homes to assisting with the road collapse at Patong Hill. We also deal with collecting dead bodies that are found in Patong and the surrounding areas.

As you have probably seen, I drive a very distinctive vehicle with emergency lights and sirens for emergency calls. In the car I carry an AED (automated external defibrillator) medical bag, emergency oxygen and various equipment such as vacuum splints.

I was very fortunate to have a local businessman and Rotary Club member purchase the AED for me. The remaining equipment was paid for personally, including refilling the medical kit. This can cost as much as B1,000 per week, depending on the amount of calls I attend.

Are you paid?

I am 100% a volunteer. I am not paid or receive any financial compensation for

what I do. I actually also work as well as a volunteer with the rescue foundation, and I offer first-aid training to charity organisations such as the Good Shepherd school in Phuket Town. This is supported by my company 'Basic Life Support Phuket', which helps fund our charity work. As a leading First Aid Training Provider, we are able to use our experience and knowledge to help our community become safer.

Can people help you?

Yes, we are always looking for donations, this can be done through our Facebook page "Rescue Team Volunteers Phuket", or our company Facebook page "Basic Life Support Services Phuket". We sell first aid / medical bags along with first aid courses where we donate a percentage to our charity work.

For more information contact Vinnie directly on either Facebook page above or by WhatsApp on 080-8648092.



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POP QUIZ

- 'Generation Alpha' refers to people born from which year?
- Who said "I have the simplest tastes. I am always satisfied with the best"?
- Lemons float but limes sink. True or false?
- 'Rhinorrhea' is the medical term for what condition?
- Who was the centerfold for the first issue of 'Playboy' magazine?

Answers below, centre

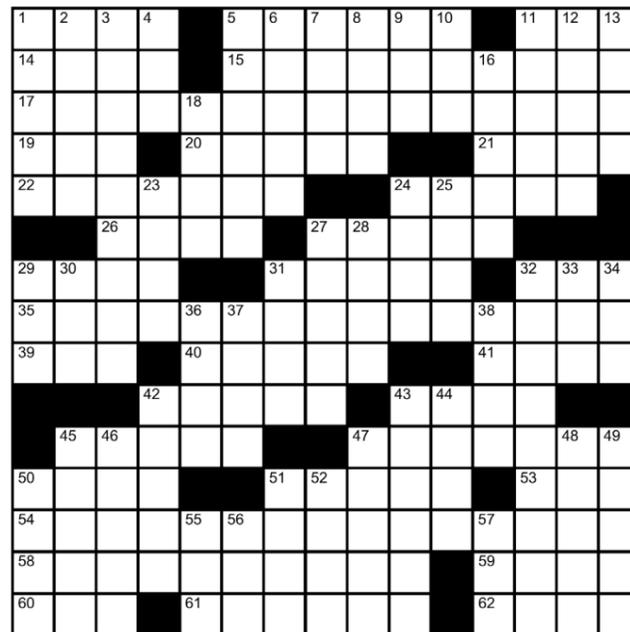
SUDOKU

Medium

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

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across**
- Where Bhutan is
 - Rodent genus
 - ___ deferens
 - Balance parts
 - One who studies animal behavior
 - For one thing
 - Adaptable truck, for short
 - Stunners
 - Gazillions
 - Satire adjective
 - Art able to
 - Furnish
 - Marque
 - Collagist's need
 - Spread
 - "Later!"
 - Not extreme
 - Piece of pipe
 - Lookout point
 - Between Molokai and Kauai
 - Patterned lace
 - Photograph
 - Some wines
 - Home remedy
 - "Later!"
 - Marine tunicate
 - Published
 - Position in line
- Down**
- Celery
 - ___ Tomas de Castilla
 - Entr'acte
 - Furniture wood
 - Give back
 - Not level
 - Kind of traffic
 - Eighty-six
 - Last: Abbr.
 - Pacifier
 - Lab containers
 - Ring around the collar?
 - Leave in, to an editor
 - Renal, for one
 - Enthusiasm
 - Home paper
 - Alternative to plastic
 - White chip, often
 - Comport with
 - Be worthy of
 - Clock std.
- 30. Golf ball position**
- Front
 - Port conveyance
 - Exclamation of impatience
 - College website ending
 - Café additive
 - Sushi supplies
 - Good vantage point
 - Head
 - Beethoven work in E flat
 - Make well
 - Kind of bar
 - Kilns
 - Alignments
 - Drawing support
 - Not sitting well?
 - Dullard
 - Hot pot
 - "Green Gables" girl
 - ___ Paese cheese
 - Tabloid topic
 - Nigerian language



Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

L	A	T	T	I	E	S	S	T	I	N	G	L	E	S
A	B	S	O	L	V	E	P	O	L	E	N	C		
C	O	M	P	L	E	X	S	E	N	T	E	N	C	E
P	U	N	P	A	S	S	E	S	O	N				
S	T	V	E	S	C	A	R							
T	H	E	R	E	T	O								
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D	U	P	L	E	X	A	P	A	R	T	M	E	N	T
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R	E													
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P	L	E	X	I	G	L	A	S	P	A	N	E	L	
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S	E	T	T	E	S									

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

Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

(1) 2010; (2) Oscar Wilde; (3) True; (4) Rhinorrhea; (5) Marilyn Monroe (1953)

GOT YOUR NUMBER

4

out of 10 Americans have never moved from their hometown.

5

minutes is how long the capybara, the world's largest rodent, can stay underwater at a time.

20

pounds (9.07kg) of eggplant contains the same amount of nicotine found in one cigarette.

61

percent is how much a US job applicant's chances can be negatively affected by having a visible tattoo.

111

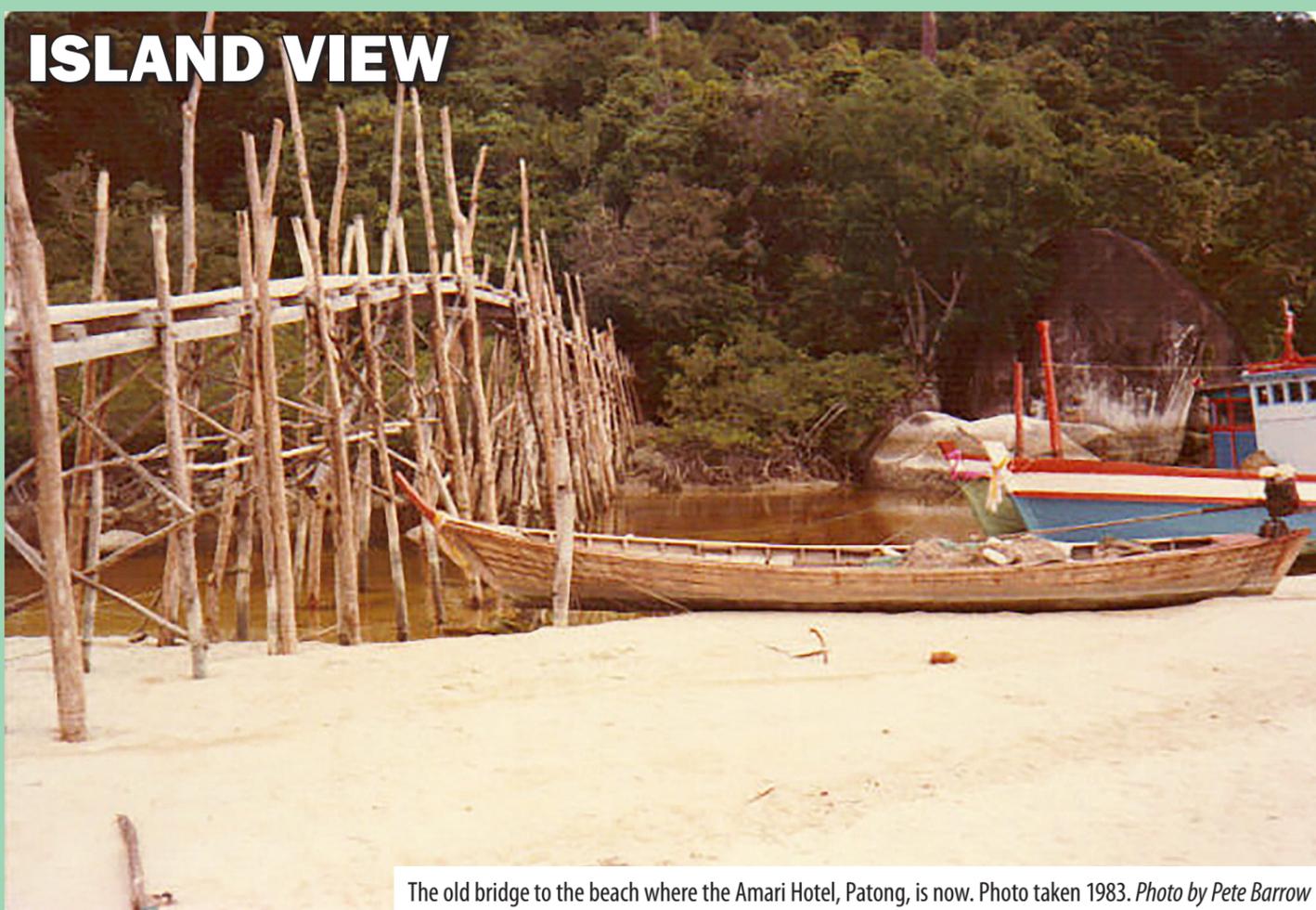
is how many handbags the average woman in the UK will own in her lifetime.

420,000

people die every year from tainted food.

Source: *Uberfacts*

ISLAND VIEW



The old bridge to the beach where the Amari Hotel, Patong, is now. Photo taken 1983. Photo by Pete Barrow

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

This week in history

January 27, 1967
Apollo program: Astronauts Gus Grissom, Ed White and Roger Chaffee are killed in a fire during a test of their Apollo 1 spacecraft at the Kennedy Space Center, Florida.

January 28, 1393
King Charles VI of France is nearly killed when several dancers' costumes catch fire during a masquerade ball.

January 29, 1980
The Rubik's Cube makes its international debut at the Ideal Toy Corp. in Earl's Court, London.

January 30, 1703
The Forty-seven rōnin, under the command of Ōishi Kuranosuke, avenge the death of their master.

January 31, 2012
The Toyota Corolla is known



Roger Federer. Photo: Tatiana

as the best-selling car of all time, selling more than

37.5 million units.

February 1, 1884
The first volume (A to Ant) of the Oxford English Dictionary is published.

February 2, 2004
Swiss tennis player Roger Federer becomes the No. 1 ranked men's singles player, a position he will hold for a record 237 weeks. Source: *Wikipedia*

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FRI 27 JAN



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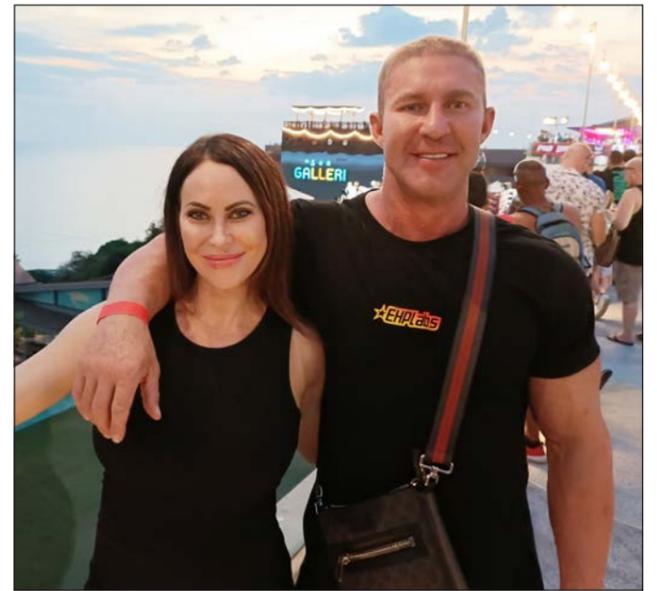
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SKAL INTERNATIONAL PHUKET - JANUARY NETWORKING EVENT

Members of SKAL International and guests enjoyed a wonderful beverage tasting and sunset dinner at Sinae Luxury Hotel, located on the coastline of Siray Bay on January 19. Congratulations to the Sinae Phuket team for hosting a fabulous evening.



BKB 30 - KINGDOM TO KINGDOM

Bare Knuckle Boxing - BKB held an exclusive VIP invitation only event high in the hills overlooking Kata Noi beach at The Sea Galleri by Katathani. Starting at 4pm Thai time on Saturday, January 21, it was broadcast live to the UK via Fitetv.com. Viewers in person and online witnessed a fight card worthy of the views, spectacular.



Photo: Supplied

Star player visit helps grow Phuket's Pickleball scene

PICKLEBALL

FAST BECOMING A POPULAR sport in Phuket, pickleball received a major boost last week with the visit of a renowned player and his coach to help continue the development of the game.

The Pickleball Phuket Club in Kathu welcomed world number seven-ranked player Daniel Moore and his coach Randy for two days of coaching on Jan 15, where the duo passed on tips to eager locals.

American Daniel, considered one of the greats of the game who has won a variety of titles throughout his career, coached a total of 14 players originating from his native homeland and Japan between 9am – 3pm at the Kathu venue.

Staying at the Hyatt Regency Kamala, Daniel and Randy also had ample time

to explore the island and left delighted their stay.

The duo also had praise for the facilities at Pickleball Phuket Club, which offers the first officially approved courts for the sport in Thailand.

Pickleball is racket/paddle sport that was created by combining elements of several other racket sports such as tennis, badminton and table tennis.

It is a widely accessible sport that is quick and easy to pick up. "I don't think there is another sport where you can teach someone for an hour, and they can already jump into playing games," Daniel previously told the official US Pickleball site.

Players of all ages and ability are welcome to join in the fun at the club and can access more information via their website: www.pickleballphuket.com

The Phuket News

Kunlavut claims India Open title by downing World No.1

BADMINTON

Bangkok Post

Kunlavut Vitidsarn claimed his maiden Super 750 title after winning the US\$900,000 (B29 million) BWF India Open in New Delhi last Sunday (Jan 22).

The 21-year-old Kunlavut, a former world junior champion, stunned world No.1 Viktor Axelsen 22-20, 10-21, 21-12 in the 64-minute decider at KD Jadhav Indoor Hall.

Kunlavut, who won his first Super 300 event at the German Open last year, finally got the better of his illustrious opponent after losing all of their six previous meetings, including three finals.

Kunlavut received \$59,500 (approx B1,933,000) while Axelsen got \$28,900 (B939,000).

Olympic and world champion Axelsen, who won the India Open in 2017 and 2019, claimed the season-opening title at the Malaysia Open in Kuala Lumpur last week while Kunlavut made it to the semi-finals.

The women's singles crown



Kunlavut Vitidsarn returns a shot on his way to winning the men's singles title at the BWF India Open against Viktor Axelsen last Sunday (Jan 22). Photo: AFP

at the India Open went to An Se-Young of South Korea.

The Korean second seed claimed a sweet revenge against world champion Akane Yamaguchi of Japan with a come-from-behind victory in the women's singles final.

An rallied from one game down to beat the top seed 15-21, 21-16, 21-12 in 62 minutes.

Yamaguchi beat An in the final in Malaysia a week ago.

It was their sixth career final and 16th face-off overall.

Yamaguchi now leads their head-to-head 10-6.

Liang Weikeng and Wang Chang of China took home the men's doubles title.

The unseeded Chinese pair defeated third seeds Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik 14-21, 21-19, 21-18 in 63 minutes.

Yuta Watanabe and Arisa Higashino won the mixed doubles title without breaking a sweat.

The third-seeded Japanese took the title with a walkover

win over fourth seeds Wang Yilyu and Huang Dongping of China.

Second seeds Nami Matsuyama and Chiharu Shida of Japan were crowned the women's doubles champions after another walkover win against top seeds Chen Qingchen and Jia Yifan of China.

Wang and Chen reported sick due to diarrhoea and withdrew from their respective matches.

Phuket's Kangaroo gym aims to give local Muay Thai a kick

MUAY THAI

THE ACCLAIMED KANGAROO Muay Thai gym has confirmed it is in talks with the Sports Association of Phuket to help promote and develop the sport across the island.

Based in Kathu, Kangaroo Muay Thai is renowned as one of the leading Muay Thai gyms in Phuket, with the likes of fighter Petchadisak KangarooMuayThai on its books.

Kru Petch won the 64kg class at the SuperChamp MuayThai tournament held in Bangkok on Dec 3 last year and was at a meeting on Jan 18 to talk with Thamawatt Wongcharoenyot, President of the Sports Association of Phuket.

Joining Mr Thamawatt and Kru Petch were Petch's trainer Channarong Maneesuk (Kru Saen) and Pasukarn Rerksluam, Manager of Kangaroo Muay Thai gym.

Also present at the meeting were Pakin Rerkswaur, Executive Director of The



Photo: Sports Association of Phuket / Facebook

Par Phuket Hotel, Damrong Chaisena, Director of the Phuket office of the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) and Nichapa Sirinupong, Manager of Tourism and Marketing Operations at Haad Thip Public Company Limited.

The purpose of the meeting was to identify ways to develop the sport so as to make it more accessible and attractive to new comers. Discussions saw an exchange of ideas on the best way to

create guidelines and determine a clear process to help the sport prosper.

In addition to showcasing his belt won at the Bangkok competition last year, Kru Petch also handed out baskets as New Year gifts to all those present at the meeting.

Kangaroo Muay Thai Gym have a series of classes for people interested in the sport, with all ages and abilities welcome. For more information visit their Facebook page. *The Phuket News*

Formula One announces a record 23-race schedule for 2023 season

FORMULA ONE

ORGANISERS HAVE ANNOUNCED that the coming Formula One (F1) season will be the longest ever with a record 23 scheduled races, despite failing to find a replacement for the China Grand Prix.

F1 chiefs had been searching for a stand-in since they announced in December the cancellation of the Chinese Grand Prix for the fourth successive year, citing continuing problems related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Portugal and Turkey had been rumoured as potential replacements as both have previous experience hosting a Grand Prix.

It was also reported by certain sources that China had tried to regain its place due to the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in the country.

However, F1 issued a statement on Jan 17 saying the schedule would remain at 23 races, leaving a large gap between the third race, the Australian Grand Prix on April 2, and the Azerbaijan race, on April 30.

"Formula 1 can confirm



Photo: AFP

the 2023 season will consist of 23 races. All existing race dates on the calendar remain unchanged," the statement said.

Red Bull Racing's Max Verstappen will kick off his bid for a third successive driver's title in Bahrain on March 5.

The full schedule for the 2023 Formula One season is as follows:

March 5: Bahrain, Sakhir; March 19: Saudi Arabia, Jeddah; April 2: Australia, Melbourne; April 30: Azerbaijan, Baku; May 7: Miami, Miami; May 21: Emilia-Romagna, Imola; May 28: Monaco, Mo-

naco; June 4: Spain, Barcelona; June 18: Canada, Montreal; July 2: Austria, Spielberg; July 9: British, Silverstone; July 23: Hungary, Budapest; July 30: Belgium, Spa-Francorchamps; August 27: Netherlands, Zandvoort; September 3: Italy, Monza; September 17: Singapore; September 24: Japan, Suzuka; October 8: Qatar, Losail; October 22: United States, Austin; October 29: Mexico, Mexico City; November 5: Brazil, Sao Paulo; November 19: United States, Las Vegas; November 26: Abu Dhabi, Yas Marina.

AFP

Arsenal silence the doubters

Statement win suggests Gunners have enough to go all the way

FOOTBALL

AFP

Premier League leaders Arsenal have had their title credentials questioned all season but their last-gasp 3-2 win against Manchester United last Sunday (Jan 22) has silenced many of the remaining doubters.

Eddie Nketiah scored the winner in the dying moments of a pulsating match at the Emirates as the home fans were infused with fresh belief that this could be their year.

The game against in-form United was seen as a critical test for the Gunners, especially after Manchester City closed the gap at the top of the table to just two points earlier in the day with a 3-0 win over Wolves.

Arsenal, who have made their best-ever start to an English top-flight season, now have 50 points after 19 games – five clear of defending champions City with a game in hand at the half-way point of the campaign.

Manager Mikel Arteta



Arsenal's Bukayo Saka (right) celebrates after scoring against Manchester United last Sunday (Jan 22) in what is being regarded as a statement win. Photo: AFP

said he hopes the result gives his team the belief that Arsenal can be crowned league champions for the first time since 2004.

But he wants to keep his team's feet on the ground despite a remarkable season in which they have lost just once in the league.

"We know our reality, we know how much we still have to improve," said the Span-

iard, who was previously Pep Guardiola's assistant at City.

WINNABLE MATCHES

Arsenal face the defending champions in the middle of next month but their upcoming fixtures all look winnable and it is getting increasingly difficult to see where they will slip up.

Leaving the match against

City aside, Arsenal's next opponents in the league are relegation-threatened Everton, Brentford, Aston Villa, Leicester, Bournemouth, Fulham, Crystal Palace and Leeds.

City, with title-winning pedigree, appear to have found their form again after a wobble and the sides at the bottom of the table will fight for their lives as the trap door looms.

But former Arsenal captain

Arteta has transformed his side from also-rans last season into title favourites, through luck and judgement.

Bukayo Saka has gone from strength to strength while Nketiah has stepped up in the absence of new signing Gabriel Jesus, injured while playing for Brazil at the World Cup.

The 23-year-old now has six goals in six games in all competitions since the tournament in Qatar.

When asked to sum up the first half of the season, Arteta said it was "extraordinary" but was again careful to avoid the impression that his team are the finished article.

"I think we deserve the points that we have. We have played well enough to win most of the matches but the reality as well is that we still have a lot of things that we can get much better at."

Asked whether he believes Arsenal are now favourites for the title and on course to win the Premier League for the first time since Arsene Wenger's last triumph nearly two decades ago, Arteta replied: "I don't have an opinion. It can

be a perception. I know my team so well, I know where we are, I know why we are here and I know where we want to be.

"And we are still far from that and I know the level of the other teams, especially one that has won everything in the last five or six years and we are not there yet."

Elsewhere, Harry Kane moved level with Jimmy Greaves as Tottenham Hotspur's record scorer when he scored his 266th goal for the club in a 1-0 win against Fulham on Monday.

The 29-year-old is now one short of becoming the third player to net 200 Premier League goals, after Alan Shearer (260) and Wayne Rooney (208). Greaves' Tottenham record had stood since 1970.

Monday also marked the end of Frank Lampard's tenure as manager of struggling Everton.

The former Chelsea boss was sacked with the team lying 19th in the table, having won only three of their 20 league games this season.

War Elephants target World Cup spot

FOOTBALL

THAILAND AIM TO become a force in Asia and claim their first-ever World Cup berth after retaining the Asean title on Jan 16.

The War Elephants secured their second successive AFF Mitsubishi Electric Cup after defeating Vietnam 3-2 on aggregate over the two-legged final to cement their status as the leading side in Southeast Asian football.

"We wanted to remain as the No.1 team in Asean," Thailand coach Mano Polking said after the win.

"Our next target is the Asian Cup [later this year]. We want to develop the team to be good enough to fight the likes of Japan, South Korea and Saudi Arabia.

"Thailand will next participate in the West Asian Football Federation Championship [in the UAE in March]. It is a great opportunity for Thailand to play with strong teams with higher world rankings."

National team manager Nualphan Lamsam is focused further ahead on qualifying



AFF Cup winners Thailand. Photo: AFP

for the 2026 World Cup, to be held in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Nualphan was previously manager of the Thai women's national side and helped the Chaba Kaew reach the Women's World Cup finals twice in 2015 and 2019.

With 8.5 slots on offer for Asia at the 2026 men's World Cup, which will be the first to have 48 teams, expanded from 32, Nualphan said the quota is attractive.

"Everybody wants to go to the 2026 World Cup," she said.

"I have guided the wom-

en's team to the World Cup and I'd like to take the men's team to the World Cup too."

Nualphan, a member of one of Thailand's richest families, pledged to pay the team a bonus of B20 million out of her own pocket for the AFF Cup success. The champions also received B10mn in official prize money.

"Defending a title is always more difficult than winning it. I'd like to thank the coaching staff, players and fans for their unity which helped us win our seventh title out of 14 tournaments," she said. *Bangkok Post*

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Sport



F1 confirms record race season > p14



MUAY THAI AIMING SKY HIGH

Nong-O Gaiyanghadao retained his ONE Bantamweight Muay Thai world title last Friday (Jan 20) at the first in a series of weekly events at Lumpinee Boxing Stadium called ONE Friday Fights 1. Photo: Bangkok Post

MUAY THAI

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

True to its promise to elevate Muay Thai to unprecedented new heights, ONE Championship has once again raised the stakes in the sport.

The Singapore-based organisation has revealed its most ambitious project to date – an historic Openweight Muay Thai World Grand Prix, where 16 of the best fighters on the planet will collide for a significant grand cash prize.

This means that ONE flyweight Muay Thai world champion Rodtang Jitmuangnon could come up against athletes who are much bigger than him, such as the renowned Thai superstar Sitthichai Sitsongpeenong.

The prize for the victor of this tournament is not only bragging rights, but a huge US\$1 million (B33mn) cash prize.

The tournament is to be open to ONE's finest Muay Thai athletes and those not yet listed on the organisation's roster, but only one will come out on top as the champion of 'the art of eight limbs'.

ONE CEO and chairman Chatri Sityodtong unveiled plans for the massive 16-man openweight tournament at a press conference in Bangkok on Jan 11.

"I promise you, this will blow up the sport all over the world. With our global broadcast, people will be tuning in from all over the world. The very best – the very, very, very best, irrespective of weight class – Muay Thai world champions will be competing. Sixteen of the world's best," he said.

"Fans all over the world, please tell me who you want to see. Do you want to see Superbon? Do you want to see Rodtang? Who do you want to see, because this is an openweight grand prix."

At the same press conference,

Sityodtong announced his company's commitment to helping grow the sport at grassroots level in Thailand by pledging to donate B10mn to help develop small Muay Thai gyms across the country.

"The week of January 28th, myself, our managing director Khun Prem [Busarabavonwongs], Khun Dang (General Suchart Dangprapai) from the Royal Thai Army, Plai [Jitinat], our president from Thailand, and myself, we'll be doing a Thailand tour all over Thailand to donate B10mn to revive all the smaller gyms and smaller camps. And this is just the start. You'll see."

HISTORIC COLLABORATION

ONE Championship kicked off its series of weekly events at the iconic Lumpinee Boxing Stadium in Bangkok last Friday (Jan 20) with ONE Friday Fights 1, headlined by a battle for the ONE bantamweight Muay Thai world title.

The promotion's historic collaboration with Lumpinee Boxing Stadium has come with promises of massive opportunities and investment for both native Thai athletes and fighters from around the world and the iconic venue was packed to the rafters last Friday with an excited crowd who witnessed incredible Muay Thai and MMA action from beginning to end.

In the main event, reigning ONE bantamweight Muay Thai world champion Nong-O Gaiyanghadao retained his title with a scintillating third-round knockout of former ONE bantamweight kickboxing world champion Alaverdi Ramazanov.

Ramazanov came out firing in the first round, pushing Nong-O on the back foot with fast and powerful combinations. The Thai legend picked his spots, as he looked to attack the legs with chopping low kicks. In the second stanza, Ramazanov continued to use his length to keep Nong-O at bay, tag-

ging the defending world champion with sharp push kicks, followed by a series of hooks.

Nong-O found his rhythm in the third round, as the hometown hero put the pressure on Ramazanov with a variety of strikes from mid-range. Sensing that the Russian was fading, Nong-O went on the offensive and punished his challenger with ripping shots to the head and body. An explosive left hook to the liver sent Ramazanov crashing to the canvas, and he could not answer the referee's 10-count.

With the win, Nong-O remained unbeaten in ONE Championship and also took home a US\$50,000 bonus for his performance.

In the co-main event, former ONE strawweight Muay Thai world champion Prajanchai PK Saenchai scored a knockdown in the second round against Kompetch Sitsarawat-suer to win on points.

Additional reporting by Bangkok Post

Free-to-enter Daxio Run helps give back to local community

RUNNING

A FREE-TO-ENTER FUN RUN is being held in Kata and Karon tomorrow (Jan 28) where top-placed finishers stand to win a prize pot of almost B420,000.

The run is part of a Blockchain P2E and Metaverse convention being organised by Daxio, a blockchain gaming company, and will take place between 6am and 3pm.

The Daxio Run is part of a series of charity based initiatives the company undertakes which helps give back to the local community.

The run itself will be limited

to 2,000 participants but is free to enter and is expected to attract both local and foreign runners.

Those who wish to take part can do so on a first come first served basis, with the 2,000 running shirts available between 6am and 8am on the day of the race.

The running route starts at 6am at Karon Lake and ends at Kata Beach in front of the Super Surf House.

There are four different classes for runners to participate in, namely Open Male, Open Female, Walk and Run and Fun Run.

There will be cash prizes for the top 10 finishers in each class, with medals being distributed to

the top three runners in each, and all participants will receive a free Daxio-Run shirt.

The prizes for each class are as follows: 1st place: B50,000 plus a medal; 2nd place: B30,000 plus a medal; 3rd place: B20,000 plus a medal; 4th place: B8,000; 5th place: B6,000; 6th place: B5,000; 7th place: B4,000; 8th place: B3,000; 9th place: B2,000; 10th place: B1,000.

Daxio is a blockchain gaming platform and a metaverse with close to 100,000 players and participants from all over the world.

The company has hosted a variety of events in Kata and Karon during the past five years

which have managed to attract thousands of people from overseas, even during COVID-19. The company has also previously donated and helped elderly members of the community, local schools, life guards, Tessaban and the Kamnan Group as well as helping with charity relief drives for the local Kata and Karon communities during the darkest days of COVID-19 by providing food and essential household items to those most in need.

During their last event in August 2022, Daxio donated 10 Automated External Defibrillators which have since managed to help save the lives of many tourists and locals in Phuket.



Photo: Supplied

Those interested in participating in the Daxio Run should arrive early to ensure they can avail one of the limited 2,000 running shirts between 6am and 8am on Jan 28. *The Phuket News*