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The Patong beach road after the tsunami struck and the waters receded on Dec 26, 2004. Photo: AFP

PHUKET MARKS TWO DECADES SINCE DEVASATING TSUNAMI

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People along the Andaman coast, including Phuket, marked 20 years since the devastating Indian Ocean Tsunami, also often called the ‘Boxing Day Tsunami’, yesterday (Dec 26) with remembrance events to honour those lost to the waves that fateful day.

The Thai government dedicated Dec 26 as National Disaster Prevention Day after the tsunami in 2004. The Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation was also established in the aftermath of the disaster.

Official government estimates mark 5,078 people killed by the tsunami, with a further 8,457

injured and 3,716 missing, presumed dead. While confirmed deaths in Phuket were only 259, another 700 people remained listed as missing.

Phang Nga, however, bore the brunt of the tsunami, with 4,163 people confirmed dead and another 2,113 recorded as missing. Records show that of those killed in Phang Nga by the tsunami 2,213 were foreigners – mostly tourists.

At Bang Niang Beach, Khao Lak, which is backed by flat land, bodies were found as far as two kilometres inland. The waves also lifted and carried the 24.6-metre Marine Police patrol boat Tor 813, the *Buretpadungkit*, 800 metres inland.

The 2004 Asian Tsunami claimed an estimated 230,000 to

280,000 lives – in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, the Maldives, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia and even Somalia – with millions more directly and indirectly affected by the waves.

MEMORIES

Weerawit Kruesombat, the well-known President of the Patong Entertainment Association (PEBA), told *The Phuket News* this week, “Patong was severely affected that day. The water was as high as a three-story building.

“The shock was overwhelming, and many were unprepared for what was happening. We did not even know the word ‘tsunami’ at the time because, as far as I can remember, such an event had never happened [in Phuket] before,” he said.

“The destruction was unimaginable. Luckily, my house on higher ground escaped, but the streets below were devastated,” Mr Weerawit recalled.

Patong Mayor Chalernsak Maneesri explained to *The Phuket News* how he narrowly escaped the waves, which struck Patong at about 10:40am.

Mr Chalernsak was drinking coffee at Kalim Beach when the sea suddenly retreated. Sensing danger, he quickly fled on his motorcycle, racing away from the beachfront. He reached the safety of higher ground and was able to check on his family.

“The devastation I saw later was beyond words, overturned cars, scattered debris and so many lives lost,” Mr Chalernsak said...

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Remembering the tsunami

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...Khun Bo, who still sells drinks and snacks along the Patong beachfront, recounted his experience that day.

"That morning, my wife heard strange sounds and vibrations near our house, but we thought it was just construction. I dropped her off in the city and headed to work," he said, remembering the shimmy the island felt at about 8:30am.

"When I arrived, I saw the sea recede so far back that the beach was completely dry. There were fish, crabs and even lobsters stranded on the sand. Locals rushed to collect them in baskets," Khun Bo remembered.

"Minutes later, the water returned, slowly at first, but then it surged with incredible force. I managed to survive the first wave, grabbing onto something for support. But the second wave was stronger and faster. I climbed a tree, clinging to it for half a day," he said.

By most eyewitness accounts, there were three main waves that struck Patong.

While Khun Bo survived, the disaster took everything from him. "I lost my business, my jet-ski, everything. The compensation from the government was small, but private charities helped



White roses for remembrance are laid at a tsunami memorial altar in Patong. Photo: The Phuket News / file

me through. Still, the help wasn't enough to cover the losses," Khun Bo noted.

ARE WE READY?

Mayor Chalerm Sak is confident in the tsunami-warning measures in place, with 13 tsunami-warning towers along Phuket's west coast, and more elsewhere on the island, and Thailand connected to a tsunami-detection array of buoys in the Bay of Bengal, with one more just 340km northwest of Phuket.

The Patong area alone has three warning towers spread

along the beachfront, Mayor Chalerm Sak explained. "One is in front of the police box [at the beach end of Bangla Rd], the second one is in front of the Phuket Graceland Resort and Spa and the third is at Baan Kalim School," he said.

"These towers provide announcements in multiple languages, including Thai, English, German, Japanese and Chinese, to ensure all visitors and locals can respond accordingly," he added.

Mr Weerawit noted that the Department of Disaster Pre-

vention and Mitigation tests the warning tower sirens every Wednesday. "They play the national anthem at 8am to ensure the sirens are functioning," he said.

"Additionally, Thailand's two tsunami-warning buoys are strategically located, one over 1,000km and another 300km away. These provide critical warnings, allowing 2.5 hours to evacuate if detected by the first buoy and 45 minutes by the second," Mr Weerawit explained.

"Evacuation drills are held twice a year, with a strong focus on educating students and schools. Each year, we actively train and prepare for tsunami scenarios to ensure readiness," he added.

While acknowledging these measures, Mr Weerawit emphasised the importance of community collaboration. "Back in 2004, there was little awareness of what a tsunami was. Now, schools teach children evacuation protocols and residents participate in drills," he said.

Mayor Chalerm Sak also noted, "Today, the area boasts well-trained rescue teams equipped with the latest developments in technology, including tsunami buoys and towers designed to warn residents and tourists alike."

DOUBTS

However, Khun Bo, who spends most of his time on the frontline along the shore, expressed mixed feelings.

"Phuket is still not fully prepared. Sometimes the tsunami buoys work, other times they don't. We need more warning systems, especially inland. Better evacuation plans are essential to prevent overcrowding and confusion," he said, recalling the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami.

"The local government should engage more with locals to improve their plans," Khun Bo added.

Khun Tun, now a security guard at Kalim Beach, was a teenager enjoying a day at the beach when the tsunami struck. "I saw the water rushing back to shore and I ran to the Graceland resort, which was still under construction at the time, and climbed to the higher floors to escape.

"There were so many lives lost. It was devastating. But I've seen improvements in Patong's disaster prevention since then. The warning speakers are tested every Wednesday, and they're loud and clear," he said.

"I think Patong is safer now than before," Khun Tun added.

Road safety campaign begins

IN AN EFFORT TO HELP limit the number of accidents, injuries and deaths in Phuket over the New Year, officials have announced that the decades-old 'Seven Days of Danger' campaign this year will be extended to 10 days, starting today (Dec 27) and concluding on Jan 5.

Confirmation of the extended "intensive period" for the annual road safety campaign came at the meeting of the Phuket Road Safety Operations Center Committee at Phuket Provincial Hall last week.

The meeting saw heads of key departments and agencies present, along with scores of representatives for government offices across the island.

The meeting reviewed the province's road safety situation, focusing on the enforcement of key traffic laws targeting the 10 main causes of accidents. Specifically identified were speeding, drunk driving, motorbike riders not wearing helmets, noted one official report of the meeting.

Of note, people caught driving without a valid driver's licence was not mentioned.



Photo: PR Phuket

While Phuket officials in recent years have stopped announcing the number of arrests during 'Seven Days' safety campaigns, for decades previously more people were stopped and fined for driving without a licence than all the others combined.

Regardless, at last week's meeting, specific attention was given to addressing high-risk areas, particularly along Thepkasattri Rd (Route 402) and its vicinity.

Preparations for the period include setting up integrated checkpoints across Phuket and establishing an efficient performance reporting system, the report said.

Measures to enhance the safety of public buses and rental cars were also discussed, aiming to protect both locals and tourists

traveling within the province, said another official report of the meeting.

Vice Governor Adul emphasised the importance of strict law enforcement to combat major risk factors, such as speeding, drunk driving and failure to wear helmets. He also called on agencies to leverage the Road Safety Operations Center's mechanisms to drive these efforts, ensuring the effective coordination of initiatives at all levels, the report added.

In addition to enforcement, the meeting highlighted the need for better data integration to analyse accident trends and develop targeted solutions. Authorities also plan to intensify public awareness campaigns to promote traffic discipline and responsible road use, the report said.

Vice Governor Adul urged immediate action to repair roads affected by flooding or damage, ensuring safe travel conditions. He stressed that these efforts must be completed urgently to reduce accident risks. *The Phuket News*



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Russian in hospital after beating by Bangla guard

A RUSSIAN MAN WAS left hospitalised after being heavily beaten by security guards for his drunken behaviour at a venue on Bangla Rd last week.



Photo: Patong Police

A chaotic scene unfolded at the popular Oscar Bar, where an intoxicated foreign tourist was injured in a confrontation with security guards late on Dec 18, reported Patong Police.

Officers were called to the scene at about 11:50pm.

According to initial reports, a 31-year-old Russian national Evgenii Kozlov was heavily intoxicated and began dancing on stage at the bar.

Security guards – identified by police as Chalermphon Suphannaphon, 30; Thammakach Sukho, 28; and Watcharaphon Laowong, 19 – intervened and removed him from the stage.

The situation escalated when Mr Kozlov reportedly approached other patrons in an unruly manner, leading to dissatisfaction among the customers.

Security guards attempted to escort him out of the bar, but a struggle ensued.

In the altercation, Mr

Kozlov fell to the ground, and a fight broke out between him and the three guards.

Mr Kozlov suffered serious injuries in the beating. The security guards showed police the damage to them, including a torn shirt and bruised knuckles.

Police confirmed that all parties were transported to Patong Hospital: Mr Kozlov for his serious injuries, and the security guards for medical confirmation of any injuries they may have suffered.

Patong Police assured they were continuing their investigation and that they will press charges to any of the parties for their role in the incident.

The incident has drawn attention to the challenges faced by entertainment venues in managing unruly behaviour, especially in areas frequented by tourists – and how their security guards respond to such situations.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Officers face abuse over noise complaint

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People have rallied in support of two police officers in Phuket who were subjected to a tirade of verbal abuse for simply responding to a noise complaint.

A video of the encounter was posted on social media, with 'Madam Moi V+' Facebook page sharing a post and a 3.54-minute video of the incident.

According to the post, officers from the Phuket City Police Station were dispatched to Soi Had Saensuk in Ratsada after receiving complaints from villagers about loud music disrupting the community.

Upon arrival, the officers politely asked the homeowner to lower the volume. However, some attendees at the gathering, who appeared to be intoxicated, responded aggressively.

With the loud music still playing and alcohol plainly seen on tables, the revellers reportedly cursed at the officers, using foul language and demanded that they



Screenshot: Supplied

leave, insisting that it was a residential area.

The confrontation was filmed and shared online, drawing criticism from various corners. Of note, several people of older age at the party were seen in the video appealing to the officers in a gentle manner.

Netizens were quick to voice their opinions. Comments ranged from supportive to critical, with remarks like, "If the police didn't respond, people would complain. Now they're blamed for doing their job."

Another comment said, "It's sad to see residents disrespecting the law."

Others pointed out that such behaviour does not reflect the entire community. One commenter

wrote, "It's not like this in every house. Please don't generalise the whole soi."

But unbeknownst to people posting comments online was that one of the people at the party castigating the officers was the local Assistant Village Headman.

Phuket City Police Chief Pol Col Pratuang Pholmana later contacted the village headman (Phu Yai Baan) over the incident. By last Saturday (Dec 21), the Assistant Village Headman for the area arrived at Phuket City Police Station and apologised to the two police officers in person for his inappropriate behaviour and presented them with a gift basket.

Police did not name the the local Assistant Village Headman.

Patong Police register Bangla 'ladyboys'

PATONG POLICE HAVE started recording personal details of transgenders frequenting Bangla Rd under the banner of improving tourist safety in the key Patong nightlife area.

Patong Police began registering Bangla transgenders, for decades locally called 'ladyboys', last week, and continued their efforts for several days.

The aim is "to prevent incidents in the Soi Bangla area, prevent crimes, and strictly enforce the prohibition of harming tourists and property damage, causing disturbances, and to create a good image for tourists", Patong Police explained in a post online.

Present for the registration of the transgenders was Weerawit Kreuasombat, President of the Patong Entertainment Business Association (PEBA). The



Photo: Patong Police

association represents some 500 local entertainment businesses in Phuket's key tourism town.

Patong Police noted that while at Patong Police Station, the transgenders present were warned against unacceptable behaviour, including brawling and fights.

Patong Police in their posts online have urged people to report any wrongdoing or an emergency by calling Patong Police Station at 076-342769 or the national police hotline 191, or reporting any incidents to officers at the Bangla Police Box, located at the beach end of Bangla Rd.

The Phuket News

Austrian arrested on Phi Phi for Russian jet-ski death in Phuket

POLICE LAST WEEK ARRESTED a 25-year-old Austrian man on Phi Phi Island for riding a jet-ski that struck and killed a Russian man at Karon, in Phuket.

Police on Phi Phi arrested Austrian national David Robert Herbst at night on Dec 19 following an intensive investigation.

Officers presented a warrant for Herbst's arrest, marking that he was wanted for charges of reckless driving causing death.

In a detailed report, police explained that the tragic incident happened on the previous Tuesday evening (Dec 17).

The victim, Russian national Kirill Golovachev, 58, was seen walking along the southern end of the Karon beach road just before 5:30pm, on his way to the beach. His body was later found by a fisherman near rocks in the area.

Through CCTV footage, police

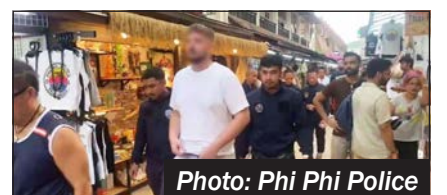


Photo: Phi Phi Police

confirmed that Mr Golovachev was swimming at the southern end of the beach, and confirmed that he was struck by a jet-ski driven by Herbst at 6:17pm.

Herbst continued to operate the jet-ski after the incident, and later left the scene.

Investigators traced the jet-ski driver to Herbst, who had reportedly fled to Koh Phi Phi following the accident.

Police gathered sufficient evidence to secure, and execute, the arrest warrant.

Herbst has denied the charges and was brought back to Karon Police Station in Phuket for further questioning. Eakkapop Thongtub

All silent on landslide deaths

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A major press conference called by Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat last Friday (Dec 20) touted how much the government is doing to prevent future floods and landslides, but made no mention of any investigation into the deaths of the 13 people killed in the landslide in Kata on Aug 23.

Among the dead in the Aug 23 landslide were Thais and Myanmar workers, and two Russian nationals. The landslide also left 19 people injured and caused extensive damage to homes and property at the bottom of the slope.

After three months of not hearing any updates about any investigation into the people killed, local residents filed a formal complaint with the Phuket Damrongtham Centre (Phuket Provincial Ombudsman's Office) on Nov 27, accompanied by Phuket MP Chalermpong Saengdee.

MP Chalermpong in October urged the public and government officials not to let the investigation into the deadly Kata landslide fade away and be forgotten.

Not said by MP Chalermpong was that might be exactly what the operators of the Big Buddha



Viewpoint complex, the Phra Phuttha Ming Mongkol Sattha 45 Foundation, and associated officials are hoping to achieve.

Not one official asked by *The Phuket News* in past weeks has been willing to talk about any investigation into the 13 deaths.

In contrast, officials were willing to speak at great length about how justice was being served by the charges being pressed the Phra Phuttha Ming Mongkol Sattha 45 Foundation, and its figurehead Suporn Wanichkul, for encroaching on protected forest land at the top of the hill where the landslide began.

Of note, even though the charges against the foundation and Suporn were widely reported in the media, and by government agencies, so far the case of

encroachment has not even been brought to court.

The Phuket Provincial Prosecutor's Office told *The Phuket News* this past week that they are in the process of considering whether to submit to the court or not.

Pol Col Khundet Na-Nongkhai, Superintendent of Karon Police Station, declined to confirm whether the landslide was caused by construction, citing the need for sufficient evidence to establish a criminal case.

He also said, "Phuket Province [usually meaning Phuket provincial officials] need to work closely with the RFD [Royal Forest Department] to gather evidence."

"And if a criminal offense is identified, a formal complaint will

be filed," he said, marking a very odd interpretation of the police's role for investigating 13 deaths in his area of jurisdiction.

ASSURANCES

Bannarak Sermthong, Deputy Director-General of the Royal Forest Department, in October assured *The Phuket News* that the investigation into the cause of the landslide was still underway, but nearing completion.

"While the Phra Phuttha Ming Mongkol Sattha 45 Foundation is currently under investigation by Karon Police [for illegally encroaching on protected forest area], the investigation into the cause of the landslide is overseen by Forest Protection Unit 2 (Phuket)," Mr Bannarak said at the time.

Sorasak Rananan, Director of the Phuket Forestry Centre, in October also gave assurances that the foundation would be held responsible for the 13 deaths.

"Since the construction contributed to the landslide, the Phra Phuttha Ming Mongkol Sattha 45 Foundation will be held accountable for the 13 deaths," he said.

"Since I believe the construction was a part of the factor, I will be heading to Karon Police to provide additional information

gathered from our observations and investigation related to the project.

"The parking lot construction on the hill was found to be built over a canal, posing a high risk of further collapse," Mr Sorasak noted.

"I can't provide details about the investigation or present the evidence we have, but I've done my part by charging Suporn Wanichkul, President of the Phra Phuttha Ming Mongkol Sattha 45 Foundation, for encroaching on five rai of land. That's what we clearly can tell you so far," he added.

This past week Mr Suporn declined to answer any questions about any investigation into the 13 deaths. Instead, he told *The Phuket News* to wait for the major press conference held last Friday.

Monchai Sae-Lao, Director of the Phuket Provincial Ombudsman's Office, confirmed that just days after the landslide, on Aug 26, Governor Sophon submitted a formal request to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) to conduct an investigation into the cause of the landslide.

Mr Monchai also confirmed, "But there has been no response to the formal request sent by the Governor on Aug 26."

Phuket to hold flood, mudslide disaster response exercise

PHUKET OFFICIALS WILL HOLD an integrated disaster prevention and mitigation exercise (CPX) Jan 16 to boost the island's readiness for potential flood and mudslide emergencies.

A key planning meeting for the exercise was held at the Phuket Provincial Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Office (DDPM Phuket) on Dec 17. Phuket Vice Governor Adul Chuthong chaired the session, joined by DDPM Phuket Chief Sophon Thongsai and representatives from government agencies, private sectors and local organisations.

Vice Governor Adul highlighted the directive from the Royal Volunteer Command Center Region 4, which mandates all regions to be prepared for disaster situations.

As part of this initiative, Phuket Province will conduct its CPX exercise on Jan 16, 2025, with a focus on simulated flood and mudslide scenarios, said an official report of the meeting.

The exercise aims to address several key objectives:

- **Seasonal Readiness:** Test disaster response and relief plans in preparation for storms, floods, and landslides during the rainy season.
- **Operational Assessment:** Evaluate the efficiency of government agencies, foundations, and volunteers in disaster scenarios.



- **Capacity Building:** Enhance the skills and knowledge of personnel to boost their operational efficiency.
- **Gap Analysis:** Identify and address weaknesses in work plans and inter-agency coordination.
- **Role Clarity:** Ensure clear responsibilities for all personnel involved in disaster management.

The large-scale exercise is expected to improve coordination and adaptability in disaster response, fostering confidence among agencies and stakeholders, said the report.

"It will ultimately ensure effective disaster management, safeguarding the well-being of Phuket residents and the wider southern region of Thailand," the report noted. *The Phuket News*

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The precipice of a major AI boom

Bangkok Post

The availability of small-language models (SLMs) and open-source AI models, as well as a greater number of skilled workers, are expected to make generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) more accessible to organisations.

Data intelligence platform Statista estimated that the Thai GenAI market is projected to reach US\$180 million in 2024, with annual growth of 46.5% from 2024-2030, resulting in a market volume of \$1.77 billion by 2030.

According to the Digital Economy Promotion Agency's 'Thailand Digital Technology Foresight 2035' report, by 2030 Thailand's AI market size is expected to be B114bn.

GenAI is a type of AI technology that can generate various types of content, ranging from text, imagery, audio and synthetic data.

OPEN-SOURCE MODELS

Juhi McClelland, managing partner for IBM Consulting in Asia-Pacific, said that while general-purpose large-language models (LLMs) have their advantages, this one-size-fits-all approach is not the best AI solution for every company,



Image: via Bangkok Post

particularly those in specialised industries.

SLMs can help to reduce computing costs compared with LLMs, she said.

LLMs refer to models trained on immense amounts of data, making them capable of understanding and generating natural language and other types of content to perform a wide range of tasks.

Ms McClelland said scaling GenAI will require businesses to choose the right models for each use case, considering not just AI performance but also cost efficiency and trust.

Anothai Wettayakorn, country general manager at IBM Thailand, said the larger the model, the more computational resources are needed, leading to delays, higher

costs, increased energy consumption, and a greater environmental impact.

As a result, many organisations are now exploring smaller, more efficient models that are customisable, reliable, and trained on business-specific data. These models address the unique needs and requirements of each organisation without incurring additional costs.

Ms McClelland said there are four key factors which will drive AI adoption in Thailand: open-source AI models which are gaining momentum due to their transparency, flexibility, cost efficiency and customisation options.

These models reduce vendor lock-in, foster community-driven innovation and support trust-

worthy AI strategies, Ms McClelland said.

The AI ecosystem integrations will drive the success of open-source AI models in 2025. Application platforms must seamlessly integrate with various models to ensure greater interoperability and adaptability to new AI developments, she said.

Mr Anothai said IBM will accelerate organisations' adoption of GenAI by promoting four critical factors, including the open-source AI models.

He estimates 5-6% of organisations in Thailand this year adopted GenAI. IBM wants to help increase adoption to 15-20% next year to improve Thai competitiveness.

MORE SKILLED WORKFORCE

Vatsun Thirapatarapong, country manager of Amazon Web Services (AWS) Thailand, said GenAI is still relatively new and many projects in 2024 have been exploratory proof-of-concepts.

Organisations are using these early projects to learn best practices, assess value and build experience before scaling to full production, he added. While a proof-of-concept approach may limit larger-scale deployments in 2025, the enthusiasm and openness to experimentation lay

the groundwork for greater innovation in the future, he said.

"Underpinning the technology are the skills required to make innovation happen. This continues to be a bottleneck in GenAI adoption," he said.

AWS aims to provide AI training to 100,000 people in Thailand by 2026 in order to meet employer demand for AI talent.

Mr Vatsun said government initiatives like the cloud-first strategy and prioritising Thailand as a digital economy hub are driving demand for cloud and GenAI across industries.

GenAI's potential to enhance productivity through automation makes it an attractive solution for businesses seeking operational efficiency by reducing repetitive tasks. Key areas for GenAI adoption include banking/financial services, healthcare, and manufacturing/supply chains.

"As Thai talent gains more training in AI skills and organisations grow their experience, deployment and innovation will accelerate," Mr Vatsun said.

Dhanawat Suthumpun, Managing Director of Microsoft Thailand, said that to accelerate the adoption of GenAI, the government should define policy guidelines for both public and private sectors and set best practices.

Holidays to see 18,000-plus flights

AIRPORTS NATIONWIDE, INCLUDING Phuket International Airport, are expected to cater to more than 18,000 flights during the upcoming New Year holiday as the country's aviation industry continues on a path to stronger growth next year, according to the Transport Ministry.

Airports nationwide are expected to cater to more than 18,000 flights during the upcoming New Year holiday as the country's aviation industry continues on a path to stronger growth next year, according to the Transport Ministry.

From Dec 27-Jan 2, a total of 18,280 flights, or 2,211 flights per day, will operate at airports nationwide, up from 14% when compared with the same period last year, Deputy Transport Minister Manaporn Charoensri says.

The figures were compiled by the Aeronautical Radio of Thailand Ltd (Aerothai).

The surge in domestic air travel is attributed to solid demand by people returning home for the holidays and tourists making trips to the provinces to celebrate the New Year, according to the deputy transport minister.

The aviation industry is expected to continue to perform strongly next year. At least a million flights are estimated to serve airports nationwide next year, up from 981,270 flights when compared with figures from this whole year.

Ms Manaporn added that airports' facilities and technology will be upgraded to accommodate growing traffic attributed to the steadily recovering tourism sector.

The deputy minister said she had



Photo: Varuth Hirunyatheb / Bangkok Post file

instructed Aerothai and related agencies to prepare for the exodus of New Year travellers and adopt the I-Smart approach in handling the spike in flights.

I-Smart (inclusive, safe, security and sustainable, approachable, reasonable price and timely and technology) is the heart of providing convenience and ease of travel for passengers, she said.

At the same time, airports aim to prevent flight delays and lessen overcrowding at flight check-ins.

Aerothai president Nopasit Chakpitak said Aerothai is ramping up High Intensity Runway Operations (Hiros) during the holiday period to stretch the flight handling capacity of runways.

Hiros involve reducing each aircraft's Runway Occupancy Time so more aircraft can land and take off from airports.

In addition, preferred-exit taxiways will be opened to relieve congestion on the runways.

Mr Nopasit said Hiros could increase Suvarnabhumi airport's flight handling capacity to 94 flights per hour, up from the current 68. It can also increase the capacity at Don Mueang airport to 57-60 flights per hour from 52. *Bangkok Post*

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German biker gets death penalty for gang murder

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

A member of the Outlaws Motorcycle Club has been sentenced to death and two others given life imprisonment for the gruesome murder of a German property broker whose dismembered body was found in a freezer in Pattaya last year.

The Pattaya Provincial Court initially handed down death sentences last Friday (Dec 20) to all three defendants involved in the murder of Hans Peter Mack, 62, in July last year, a slaying that shocked the public and hit international headlines.

As two of them confessed, the court commuted their sentences to life imprisonment.

The dismembered body of Mack was found in a freezer at a house in tambon Nong Prue of Bang Lamung district on July 10 last year by detectives who had been following up



The house in Pattaya where Hans Peter Mack's body was found in a freezer in July 2023. Photo: Bangkok Post

leads based on security camera video. He had not been seen by his family since July 4.

Investigators subsequently arrested two German nationals – Olaf Thorsten, 52, and Petra Christl Grundgreif, 54 – and a Pakistani man holding Thai nationality, Zahrouk Kareem Uddin, 27. They were charged with colluding in theft and murder.

According to police, the trio had abducted Mack and murdered him before transferring B3.35 million from the victim's bank account.

During questioning, the three denied any involvement. But police handling the case confirmed they had

obtained sufficient evidence to indict them.

Prosecutors indicted them for premeditated murder and concealing a body after receiving the police report.

During the trial, Brinkmann and Ms Grundgreif, the first and second defendants, confessed to the crimes. As their confessions were useful, the court commuted their sentences to life imprisonment. Uddin maintained his innocence.

In a related case, the court sentenced another German suspect, identified only as Enrico, to six years in prison for money laundering and receiving stolen property after he accepted

money transfers connected to the crime from Brinkmann.

SEVERE PUNISHMENT

The ruling came just three days after the Cabinet rejected a proposal by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) seeking to abolish capital punishment in Thailand.

Deputy government spokesman Kharom Polpornklang said the Cabinet acknowledged the NHRC's proposal but agreed with the opinions of the courts of justice, which argued that the death penalty remained necessary due to the nature of certain crimes.

He said the NHCR suggested the abolition of the death penalty because it was a severe punishment that had been axed in many countries.

The NHCR proposal called for the review of laws that include the death penalty in a way that is disproportionate to the crime with the aim of removing the death penalty from all laws altogether.

Activist lawyer's jail time increases to 18 years

BANGKOK

HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER Arnon Nampa has been sentenced to another two years and eight months in prison for lese-majeste and sedition in connection with a speech he gave at a protest in 2020 demanding reform of the monarchy.

The sentence passed on Dec 19 by the Criminal Court brings to 18 years, 10 months and 20 days the total time Arnon has to serve, according to Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR).

The ruling in the case – the sixth of 14 the activist is facing – will be appealed, his lawyers said. His other five convictions are also still at the appeal stage and no case has been finalised yet.

The case heard on Dec 19 arose from a complaint filed with police about remarks Arnon made at a Harry Potter-themed rally held near Democracy Monu-



Arnon. Photo: Bangkok Post

ment in Bangkok on Aug 3, 2020.

The court found the defendant guilty under Section 112 of the Criminal Code, the royal defamation law, as well as Section 116, which covers sedition.

"The defendant's actions were a single act that violated multiple laws. The court therefore sentenced him to 4 years in prison under Section 116," according to TLHR.

Because he gave testimony that was useful to the trial, the sentence was reduced by a third to two years and eight months.

Arnon has been held in detention since Sept 26, 2023 pending appeals against all his convictions and has been denied bail 31 times, according to his lawyers. Bangkok Post

Bail denied for suspects in Prachin Buri shooting case

PRACHIN BURI

SOONTHORN VILAWAN, THE 85-year-old patriarch of Prachin Buri's most powerful political family and one of the seven suspects in a fatal shooting, is not eligible for a jail term suspension, Justice Minister Tawee Sodsong confirmed last Saturday (Dec 21).

Justice Minister Tawee said the 85-year-old suspect can seek medical treatment outside prison during detention, but neither Mr Soonthorn nor his six associates can receive any suspension, as they are still just suspects, not convicted criminals.

Mr Soonthorn, a member of the Bhumjaithai Party and father of former deputy education minister Kanokwan Vilawan, has been in custody in connection with the Dec 11 shooting of Chaimet Sitsanitpong, a provincial council member.

Mr Soonthorn, a veteran politician whose family has dominated Prachin Buri politics for decades, is the current chairman of the Prachin Buri Provincial Administration Organisation (PAO).

Chaimet, 48, widely known as "Sor Jor Tong", was found dead with several gunshot wounds at Mr Soonthorn's house, with more than 10 spent bullets found scattered nearby.

Pol Maj Gen Phumin Sinhasut, chief of Prachin Buri police, said several guns including a 9mm pistol and a shotgun were seized at the scene.



Soonthorn Vilawan. Photo: Bangkok Post

Two of the suspects admitted to shooting Chaimet following a heated argument, while Mr Soonthorn claimed he was resting in his room when the shooting occurred.

The shooting is said to have stemmed from a political conflict, as Chaimet supported his wife, Napaphat Anchasanichamon, in her bid to run for president of the Prachin Buri PAO under the Pheu Thai Party banner.

The suspects, who are being held in Nakhon Nayok prison, face charges of premeditated murder and illegal firearm possession.

The Prachin Buri Provincial Court denied them bail due to the severity of the charges.

Crime Suppression Division (CSD) police plan to ask the court to transfer the suspects from Nakhon Nayok to Bangkok Remand Prison once the case is transferred from the police to the CSD, said Pol Col Anek Taosupap, the CSD deputy commander.

National police chief Kittharath Punpetch decried the attack as a challenge to the law and an outrageous act. Bangkok Post

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'Mufasa' returns to Lion King's origins

Mads Mikkelsen plays 'Kiros' in 'Mufasa: The Lion King' (2024). Image: IMDb

David Griffiths

The original *'The Lion King'* animation is considered a film classic. Not only was it a film loved by families right around the world but it gave us all a spectacular soundtrack led by the classic tracks *'Can You Feel The Love Tonight?'* and *'The Circle of Life'* so beautifully recorded by Elton John.

Then came the re-imagining of the story from director Jon Favreau in 2019 – a film that lifted CGI animation to a whole new level. Even watching the film years later it still feels like you are watching real animals and not something created by a computer.

Now director Barry Jenkins (*Moonlight*) continues that legacy with *Mufasa: The Lion King*. The film begins with Simba (voiced by Donald Glover – *Solo: A*

Star Wars Story) and Nala (Beyonce – *Dreamgirls*) leaving their daughter Kiara (newcomer Blue Ivy Carter) in the care of Pumbaa (Seth Rogen – *The Super Bros. Movie*), Timon (Billy Eichner – *The Angry Birds Movie*) and Rafiki (John Kani – *Black Panther*).

With a storm approaching and Kiara terrified, Rafiki decides to tell the young lion the story of her grandfather. The story begins with a young Mufasa (Aaron Pierre – *Rebel Ridge*) becoming separated from his parents during a flood.

He is rescued by another young lion named Taka (Kelvin Harrison Jr. – *It Comes at Night*) and his mother, Eshe (Thandie Newton – *Crash*). However, when they try to bring Mufasa into their pride he is rejected by its leader Obasi (Lennie James – *The Walking Dead*).

So Eshe decides to raise Mufasa as her own during which time he becomes a lethal hunter – skills that come to the fore when the pride is attacked by Kiros (Mads Mikkelsen – *Doctor Strange*) and his pride.

Sensing defeat, Eshe orders Taka and Mufasa to leave to protect Taka's father's legacy. However, they soon realise that they are being hunted by Kiros and as their journey continues they are joined by Rafiki, a young lioness named Sarabi (Tiffany Boone – *The Following*) and the cheeky Zazu (Preston Nyman – *Crooked House*).

While a masterpiece itself, the story of the original *The Lion King* did leave true fans with a lot of questions, especially around the relationship between Scar (whom Taka becomes in this film) and Mufasa. There are some hints there but nothing is truly explained, so that is where *Mufasa: The Lion King* comes into its own.

The plot, which comes from the pen of screenwriter Jeff Nathanson (*Catch Me If You Can*), answers all of those questions and in fairness to Scar as a character it probably should also be pointed out that this is as much his origins story as it is Mufasa's. The way Nathanson tells that story while also capturing how the friendship between Mufasa, Rafiki, Sarabi and Zazu began is kind of genius.

What does let the plot down a little though are some of the clichés. While Kiros is a great villain, and a great analogy for what the 'white' invaders did to Africa, he is a walking cliché. While the

notion of him wanting to rule over all animals is believable there are still a lot of questions to be asked including where this pride of White Lions suddenly came from.

The framing element that Nathanson uses for this story is also likely to divide audiences as well. While some fans will be impressed that he has managed to find a way to bring Pumbaa and Timon into what is largely a story that occurred before their time, others will realise that at times it is brought in just when the 'flashback' is getting interesting and interrupts the story being told.

Still the positives here well and truly outweigh the negatives. The characterisation in the screenplay is top notch, even making me like Rafiki a little more after learning his backstory, and that is further enhanced again by this spectacular CGI that makes you feel like you are right there on the savannah with these amazing animals. Even the way the animal's mouths move when they speak is a testament to just how stunning the animation is here.

The other big talking point here is the music. While there are no tracks here that will ever become as iconic as *Can You Feel The Love Tonight*, *The Circle of Life*, *I Just Can't Wait to Be King* or *Hakuna Matata*, there are some catchy numbers here that are guaranteed to become earworms as you watch the film a number of times.

Mufasa: The Lion King is definitely a film for lovers of the franchise. Newcomers will understand what is happening plotwise, but certainly will not get as much out of that as those who live and breathe the characters and relationships of the original films. This is a film that can be enjoyed by the whole family just be aware that it does have some darker themes and moments.

Mufasa: The Lion King is now showing in Phuket and is rated 'G'
3.5/5 Stars

David Griffiths has been working as a film journalist for over 25 years. That time has seen him work in radio, television and in print. He currently hosts a film podcast called *The Popcorn Conspiracy*. He is also a Rotten Tomatoes accredited reviewer and is an alternate judge for the Golden Globes Awards. You can follow him at Facebook: [SubcultureEntertainmentAus](#)

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House of Tin Baron A Regal Experience

Joanna Matlub

The highly anticipated House of Tin Baron officially opened its doors on December 1st in Phuket Old Town, setting a new standard of luxury in Phuket. Housed in a beautifully restored Sino-Portuguese building, the venue showcases historical charm with modern elegance.

A Luxurious Welcome

Pulling into the gracious driveway, we were captivated by the building's stunning façade before being welcomed by attentive staff as we stepped into the world's first Louis Roederer Cristal Room.

The sophistication was immediately evident, with neutral linens and beige and gold accents combined with dark woods. An impressive chandelier cascades from the ceiling, illuminating the space while the upper balcony wraps around the room. We took a stroll upstairs, finding ourselves at the perfect vantage point to take in the view below.

Subtle yet classic touches adorn the lounge, with the piano and saxophone music softly playing timeless covers, adding a soulful backdrop. The highly trained team, led by the operations manager, Deepak Desh, set the tone as they served delicate canapés including foie gras and caviar-topped blinis whilst introducing us to the intricate craftsmanship behind the handmade ceramics, glassware and plates; all sourced from Belgium and testament to the venue's commitment to the finest details.

The Cristal Room is an exquisite introduction to the House of Tin Baron, as well as being a destination in itself. Though we could have stayed soaking up the thoughtfully restored décor, it was time to move into the dining room, and begin the next chapter of our evening.

A Journey into Terra

Dinner is served in Terra, whose name means "Earth" or "Ground" in Italian,

which we thought fitting for a restaurant rooted in natural elements. The central olive tree claimed our immediate attention, but we were also struck by whimsical touches, such as stemless glasses laying on the tables, and this feeling carried on throughout our evening.

Service in Terra is nothing short of excellent. Each member of the team, from attentive waiting staff to expertly trained sommeliers, have seemingly been hand-selected from across the globe. Every detail, each dish, glass and even handmade artisan plates (no two are exactly alike) seems to have been thoughtfully sourced to make the experience even more exclusive.

Serving Art

The five-course degustation menu sounded incredible, so we were excited for this culinary indulgence. To begin, a delicate amuse-bouche arrived as a single oyster on a medley of finely diced vegetables, topped with caviar. Paired with freshly baked sourdough served alongside Tuscan olive oil, Mediterranean salt and Modena vinegar, it was a sophisticated start.

Meeting Deepak Ohri, the founder, during our visit added a personal storytelling element to our evening. Ohri passionately shared how the House of Tin Baron draws inspiration from iconic films. Casino Royale for the entrance, Dangerous Liaisons for the Cristal Room and The Godfather for the dining area, (though rest assured no violence was served!) An interesting narrative that highlights the restaurant's cinematic elegance.

A parade of dishes, or should I say edible art, followed creating the perfect link from story to experience:

- **Bluefin Tuna Tartare:** Tender and delicate, elevated by a zesty mustard yuzu dressing and pickled beetroot, adding colour and a vibrant finish.

- **Langoustine with Shellfish Emulsion:** A whimsical creation featuring striking black-and-white striped homemade pasta, delicate langoustine and a rich shellfish emulsion with an earthy depth brought about with the quenelle of chestnut.

- **Ravioli with Morel Mushroom:** My personal favourite of the evening, although a difficult call. For me this embodied rustic Italian flavours with stunning presentation.

- **Sole Fish & Sea Urchin / Kiwami Wagyu Beef Tenderloin:** An option was given for this course, from tender fish with a lemon beurre blanc and caviar which I thoroughly enjoyed as my partner opted for the perfectly cooked Wagyu which had delicate marble, buttery texture and bold rich jus.

Again, an additional course was added to the degustation menu, a palate-cleansing lime granita with tangy passion fruit, a surprising Campari bitterness and edible tarragon flowers providing a refreshing reset.

The main dessert, 'Questo Non È Un Mango' was an absolute showstopper. More than an Instagram-worthy Amalfi Coast-inspired interpretation of mango, adorned with edible gold. Our coffee arrived with a further menu addition; the passion fruit caramel bonbon, a bite-sized treat of sweet, bitter and sour.



An Evening to Remember

What began as a five-course degustation evolved into an extravagant eight-courses, each dish a testament to House of Tin Baron's ambition to excel. From the stunning visuals to the bold flavours, this was a fine dining experience that engaged all our senses. The multinational team of chefs, with backgrounds spanning Turkey, Belgium and Italy clearly come together to bring their vision to life.

Adding a final thoughtful touch, the musicians in the Cristal Room played my childhood favourite song as we

made our exit—a gesture I had mentioned earlier in the evening, but one they remembered. It was the perfect, personal note to end a special night.

The Verdict

House of Tin Baron is a masterclass in luxury dining, offering an experience that feels bespoke and unforgettable. From the carefully restored architecture to the exceptional cuisine, every detail ensures a thoughtfully crafted journey that will stay with you long after the final course.



Where to eat in PHUKET

January/February 2025 issue



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POP QUIZ

- Which island nation is the first to celebrate New Year, each year?
- Up until 1752, when the new Gregorian calendar was adopted, on which day was New Year's Day celebrated in England?
- The ball that drops in Times Square, New York, to mark the New Year is covered with which valuable material?
- The lyrics to 'Auld Lang Syne' were originally from a poem written by which famed Scottish poet?
- The first traveller's cheques were issued on Jan 1 of which year?

Answers below, centre

SUDOKU

Hard

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

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

Across

1. Safe, on board

5. Money

11. Crude

14. Big blow

15. Fantastic

16. Ryan's "Love Story" co-star

17. They have leaves all year long

20. Lose oomph

21. Roughly

22. Bring in the sheaves

23. Early pulpit

25. Achievers

28. Capital on the Red River

30. Sacred scrolls

32. Fascinated by

33. Charioteer

34. Sash

37. Hunting dog

40. Mudder's fodder

41. Sales lure

42. Watered-down

43. Music consisting of a single vocal part

44. Range rovers

45. Masters

48. Wren or hen

49. Provide a top to

50. Rigging support

52. Gym unit

55. Car parts

60. Apple picker

61. Go on permanent vacation

62. Marvel Comics character

63. Mermaid's home

64. Experts

65. Fails to be

26. High wave

27. Spicy cuisine

28. Lofty

29. Asian wild animal

30. Some engines

31. Mountain nymph

33. With regard to

34. Wear a gown to a picnic, perhaps

35. Bit of sweat

36. Bothers

38. Asteroid discovered in 1898

39. Still-life piece

43. Gentle

44. Contract

45. Has a yen

46. Plunder

47. Skin problem

48. Horse packages

50. Pass over

51. Smart

53. "___ go bragh!"

54. "Looky here!"

56. Car accessory

57. Heart color

58. Sat down at Wendy's

59. Seven, in ancient Rome

Down

1. Seasons

2. Etna output

3. With grace

4. One engaged in, suffix

5. Pack animal

6. People

7. Creme-filled snack

8. Easy chair site

9. Drink from a dish

10. Pipe joint

11. Rajah's wife

12. Place to exchange rings

13. Strands

18. Mongolian expanse

19. These may be fine

24. State of mind

25. Coarse

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9	10		11	12	13	
14					15							16			
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55					56	57	58					59			
60					61							62			
63					64							65			

Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

E	L	U	L		A	B	A	C	K		F	A	R	O		
V	A	S	E		M	U	R	R	E		E	L	A	N		
E	M	P	E	R	O	R	P	E	N	G	U	I	N	S		
N	A	S	S	A	U					W	O	R	D	A	G	E
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S	A	R	I		H	I	S		T	A	E	T	H	E	R	
K	I	N	G		F	I	S	H	E	R		D	A	I	S	Y
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Q	U	E	E	N		A	N	N	E	S		L	A	C	E	S
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E	A	S	T			A	P	T	L	Y		P	O	N	Y	

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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

1

year is how much the average man will spend of his life simply staring at women.

22

percent of Americans will be asleep before midnight on New Year's Eve.

32,256

LEDs light up the ball that drops at Times Square New York to mark the New Year.

340,733

to 1 is the chance of dying from a fireworks incident.

859 billion

US dollars is expected to be spent by Americans on gifts, decor, travel and more during this holiday season.

Source: Uberfacts

ISLAND VIEW

Cape Panwa evening. Photo by Marco Capriz

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

This week in history

Dec 27, 1845
Ether anesthetic is used for childbirth for the first time by Dr Crawford Long in Jefferson, Georgia. His wife, Caroline nee Swain, was the grateful recipient.

Dec 28, 1768
King Taksin's coronation is achieved through conquest as King of Siam and Thonburi established as the capital.

Dec 29, 1911
Mongolia gains indepen-

dence from the Qing dynasty, enthroning the 9th Jebtsundamba Khutughtu as Khagan of Mongolia.

Dec 30, 1916
Grigori Yefimovich Rasputin, Russian mystic and advisor to the Tsar, is murdered by a loyalist group led by Prince Felix Yusupov. His frozen, partially-trussed body was discovered in a Moscow river three days later.

Grigori Yefimovich Rasputin.

Dec 31, 1759
Arthur Guinness signs a 9,000-year lease at £45 per

annum and starts brewing Guinness.

Jan 1, 2009
Sixty-six people die in a fire at the Santika Pub nightclub in Bangkok. Citizens of 13 countries were among the 222 people injured.

Jan 2, 1981
Serial killer Peter Sutcliffe, the "Yorkshire Ripper", is arrested in Sheffield, South Yorkshire. Source: Wikipedia

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NIRAN FARM GRAND OPENING

On December 7 a lively group of locals gathered for the grand opening of Niran Farm, which is the home of the Niran Equestrian Center and the Niran Restaurant. A wonderful location set lake side, with stunning views of the mountains. Guests enjoyed a never ending supply of taste treats all washed down with wonderful drinks. Highlight of the evening was an amazing Cossack performance by Yar. Whether you're fueling up after a riding lesson or just relaxing with a drink as your loved ones bond with their four-legged friends, Niran Farm is the perfect spot to unwind.

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Fury (left) and Usyk. Photo: AFP

Usyk defeats Fury in heavyweight rematch

BOXING

OLEKSANDR USYK WON his heavyweight championship rematch against Tyson Fury by unanimous decision last Saturday (Dec 21) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to stay unbeaten across two divisions and cement his place among the greats.

The Ukrainian, who forced the pace and repeatedly tagged Fury with his accurate left hook, was awarded the fight 116-112 by all three judges, handing Fury his second straight loss after their four-belt unification bout in May.

Usyk's win takes him to 23-0 with 14 knockouts and extends one of the all-time best careers that includes Olympic gold and undisputed champion at cruiserweight.

Only the WBA, WBO and WBC belts were on the line this time after Usyk,

focused on the lucrative rematch, relinquished his IBF title rather than face challenger Daniel Dubois.

By beating Fury in May, "The Cat" had already joined the likes of Muhammad Ali, Joe Louis and Mike Tyson as undisputed heavyweight, and the first of the four-belt era.

"He's a great fighter, it's a great performance," Usyk, 37, said of Fury.

"He's my best friend. I respect this guy because I think he's a really tough opponent."

But the defeat opens up an uncertain future for the 36-year-old Fury, now 34-2-1, who announced his retirement in 2022 only to return to the ring.

"I thought I've won both fights, but then again I've got two losses on my record now, so there's not much I can do about it," said the Briton, who refused to discuss his next steps. *AFP*

SAT names top athletes of 2024

ALL SPORTS

Bangkok Post

Badminton player Kunlavut Vitidsarn and taekwondo star Panipak Wongpattanakit have been named the best male and female amateur athletes of the year by the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT).

Moto2 rider Somkiat Chantra and golfer Jeeno Thitikul were selected as the best male and female professional athletes.

The SAT announced the award recipients at a ceremony during the National Sports Day on Dec 16 at Bangkok's Indoor Stadium presided over by Tourism and Sports Minister Sorawong Thienthong.

Best professional muay thai fighter awards went to Janjira Saensri (Pinpet Morrajabhatkorat) (female) and Thichakorn Sripromma (Khunsueklek Boomdeksien).

The best junior amateur athletes were skateboarder Vareeraya Sukasem and weightlifter Weeraphon Wichuma.

World champion Kunlavut won the country's first-ever badminton medal when he took a silver at the Paris Games.

He beat out competition from weightlifter Theerapong Silachai, who won the men's 61kg silver medal in Paris, and boxer Bunjong Sinsiri.

Panipak also made history after winning her second successive Olympic gold medal in Paris.

She retained the women's 49kg

title after defeating China's Guo Qing 2-1 in the final.

Panipak, who announced her retirement from the sport after Paris, is Thailand's most decorated Olympian, winning three consecutive medals. She also won bronze at the 2016 Olympics.

Panipak beat Olympic boxing silver medallist Janjaem Suwanapheng and weightlifting bronze medallist Surodchana Khambao for the SAT award.

Vareeraya, at 12 years of age, became Thailand's youngest ever Olympian at the Paris Games. She finished 17th in the preliminary round of the women's street event.

Weeraphon won a silver medal in the men's 73kg event at the Paris Olympics.

Wheelchair fencer Saysunee Jana was named the best female disabled athlete. Saysunee won three gold and one silver medals at the Paris Paralympic Games. She was the first

ever fencer to win golds in all three events – foil, epee and sabre.

Wheelchair racer Chaiwat Ratana took the male award. Chaiwat won a gold medal in the men's 100m T34 event and a silver medal in the 800m event.

The best team awards went to the men's futsal team (sports) and the women's Olympic table tennis team (events). The futsal team reached the last 16 of the World Cup, while the women's table tennis team reached the quarter-finals at the Paris Olympics.

The blind football squad won the best disabled team award.

The best coach awards went to Noppadol Wanwang (amateur) of the national weightlifting team and badminton coach Pattapol Ngeonsrisuk (professional).

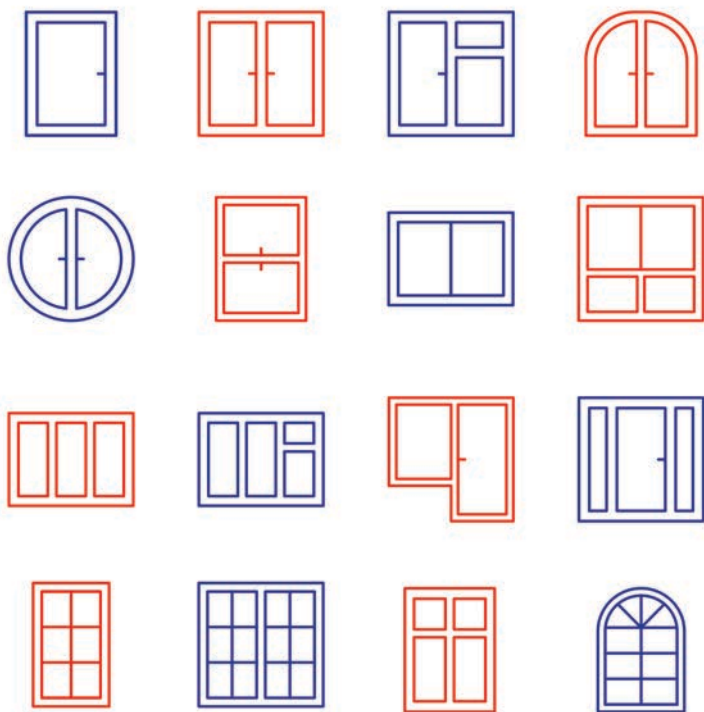
The Taekwondo Association of Thailand won the best sport association award while the Sports Association for the Disabled of Thailand was also honoured.



Panipak at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. Photo: Bangkok Post



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Thailand Serpents shine at AFL Asia Cup

AFL

THE THAILAND SERPENTS MADE history at the inaugural AFL Asia Cup in Ho Chi Minh City on the weekend of Dec 6-8, with the women's team taking down undefeated favourites Cambodia in a thrilling Grand Final to claim the championship title.

The Serpents women's team were nothing short of electric. After an earlier pool-stage loss to Cambodia, they regrouped, reset and came out firing when it mattered most.

Vice Captain Irravadee "Dee" Makris led from the front with a dominant display all over the ground, while the fire-starter, Sojirat "Bee" Pradisom inspired with her infectious energy and drive.

Jirapaporn "Jee" Damhai wowed everyone with her athleticism and sheer determination and Nattanan "Pin" Sangvanloy kept things calm and composed, organising the team and setting up the plays.

Then there was Singhaphon "Benz" Narkniam, the Thailand Tigers Communities United by Sport (CUBS) program star and tough little goal sneak, who showed exactly why she is the future of Thai AFL.

All five players earned well-deserved spots in the All-Asian team while a special shout-out goes to Wachirapon "Dream" Thanabat who was fearless all



Photo: Supplied

tournament and unlucky to miss All-Asian selection. As coach of the champions, Michael Sanders was also named All Asia Coach.

Meanwhile, the men's team brought their trademark grit and determination, putting in some gutsy performances that showcased their growth and fighting spirit against the best teams in the region.

They might not have come home with silverware, but they certainly left an impression. Taking on some of the region's strongest teams, including eventual champions Japan and runners up Cambodia, the Serpents refused to be pushed around and gave it everything they had.

Captain and coach Mani Narairt Saunders led from the front, Anurak "Deng" Paniphan was a brick wall in defence, while Parinda "Jay" Bonnoy never stopped running, throwing himself into tackles that defined the Serpent spirit.

For Thailand, the AFL Asia Cup was another step forward, proving the success of programs like CUBS, which continue to give underprivileged youth opportunities to thrive on and off the field.

Watch this space – this is just the beginning! *The Phuket News*

Slot machine rolls on

FOOTBALL

AFP

Liverpool swept four points clear at the top of the Premier League as Mohamed Salah's masterclass inspired a memorable 6-3 rout of Tottenham last Saturday (Dec 22).

Salah delivered a sublime performance featuring two goals and a pair of assists as Arne Slot's side ran riot in north London, with further strikes coming from Luis Diaz (2), Alexis Mac Allister and Dominik Szoboszlai.

Salah, 32, is now Liverpool's fourth top scorer ever with 229 goals, with only Ian Rush (346), Roger Hunt (285) and Gordon Hodgson (241) ahead of him.

The rampant Reds have won 21 of their 25 matches in all competitions under Slot and have a game in hand on second place Chelsea to strengthen their lead in the title race.

Punished for Ange Postecoglou's insistence on sticking to his high defensive line, it was the first time since 1997 that Tottenham had conceded six goals in a home league game.

James Maddison, Dejan Kulusevski and Dominic Solanke scored for Tottenham, but an eighth league defeat this season leaves them languishing in 11th place as the pressure mounts on Postecoglou.



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah celebrates. Photo: AFP

Chelsea, meanwhile, laboured to a 0-0 draw at Everton while Arsenal thrashed Crystal Palace 5-1 to retain third place, with Gabriel Jesus scoring twice to add to strikes from Kai Havertz, Gabriel Martinelli and Declan Rice.

Nottingham Forest won their third consecutive league match, condemning Brentford to their first home defeat this season with a 2-1 win which saw Nuno Espirito Santo's in-form team move into fourth place.

Crisis-hit Manchester City slumped to an unthinkable ninth defeat in 12 matches at Aston Villa, with Jhon Duran and Morgan Rogers on target for the impressive home side.

City have now lost six Premier League games in the current campaign, twice as many as they suffered during the whole of last season, when they were crowned champions for a fourth straight season.

They are realistically out of the title race already – nine points behind leaders Liverpool having played two games more, while Villa leapfrogged them into fifth spot.

Manchester United were humbled 3-0 at home by Bournemouth, ensuring United boss Ruben Amorim is set for a miserable Christmas following the worst result of his brief reign which leaves the club languishing in 13th place.

Alexander Isak scored his first hat-trick in the English top flight as Newcastle hammered Ipswich 4-0 while West Ham and Brighton shared the spoils 1-1 at the London Stadium.

Wolves boss Vitor Pereira enjoyed a dream debut as his side won 3-0 at relegation rivals Leicester as bottom-of-the-table Southampton held on for a 0-0 draw at Fulham as new manager Ivan Juric watched from the stands before officially taking charge.

Women's Euro 2025 draw kind for Spain, tough for England

FOOTBALL

WORLD CUP WINNERS Spain will play Italy, Belgium and Portugal in Group B at Women's Euro 2025, while England face a tough path to defending their title at the tournament in Switzerland.

Spain coach Montserrat Tome said she was "very happy" with her team's draw, as the tournament favourites avoided their bigger continental rivals.

Reigning European champions and 2023 World Cup runners-up England were drawn alongside France, the Netherlands and debutants Wales in a challenging Group D of the tournament, which runs from July 2-27.

England boss Sarina Wiegman will take on her native country on July 9, before England conclude their group-stage campaign against local rivals Wales.

France, beaten semi-finalists in the last edition of the Euros and the third place team at the 2023 World Cup, have never won a major tournament in the women's game.

GROUP A	GROUP B
SWITZERLAND	SPAIN
NORWAY	PORTUGAL
ICELAND	BELGIUM
FINLAND	ITALY
GROUP C	GROUP D
GERMANY	FRANCE
POLAND	ENGLAND
DENMARK	WALES
SWEDEN	NETHERLANDS

Image: AFP

Germany, who have won eight of the previous 13 editions, meet 1984 winners Sweden, Denmark and newcomers Poland in Group C.

Hosts Switzerland kick off the tournament against Norway in Group A, which also includes Iceland and Finland.

UEFA announced ahead of the Dec 16 draw that it would award 41 million euros (B1.4 billion) in prize money for the tournament, more than doubling the amount from 2022.

The team that wins the final in Basel will receive up to 5.1mn euros – England pocketed 2.085mn as champions in 2022 – with each of the 16 participating teams receiving 1.8mn euros. AFP

Thais face the Philippines in ASEAN Cup semi-finals

FOOTBALL

THAILAND FACE THE PHILIPPINES in the semi-finals of the ASEAN Mitsubishi Electric Cup 2024 after the War Elephants topped the Group A standings following a rallying 3-2 victory over Cambodia at Rajamangala National Stadium last Friday (Dec 20).

Midfielder Akrapong Pumwisat scored twice as reigning champions Thailand won their fourth and final group stage game of the regional championship, having earlier defeated Timor Leste, Malaysia and Singapore.

With a place in the last four already guaranteed, coach Masatada Ishii made nine changes to the Thailand side that beat Singapore 4-2 on Dec 17 to secure progression with only William Weidersjo and Anan Yodsangwal keeping their places in the starting eleven.

Ishii told a post-match press conference that he was happy with the result.

"It's a good outcome for us because we had very little time to prepare and our players did an excellent job tonight," said the Japanese coach.

"We decided to appoint William Weidersjo as the captain of the team because of his dedication in the past games. Akrapong also helped the team a lot. I picked the players who could control the game and give us stability.



Thai players celebrate against Cambodia. Photo: Bangkok Post

"We now have enough time to rest and adjust our defensive and offensive games. This will also include the open plays and set-pieces.

"We have passed the first stage as the group champions and I am very grateful to the fans, the Football Association of Thailand and various clubs for helping us achieve that."

Singapore became the second team to progress from the group after a goalless draw against Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur on Dec 20. They will face Group B winners Vietnam in their semi-final.

The Philippines booked their spot in the semi-finals thanks to a shock 1-0 win against Indonesia in Surakarta last Saturday (Dec 21).

The semi-finals will be played on home-and-away basis with the Thais playing away at the Rizal Memorial Stadium in Manila this evening (Dec 27) with the return leg set for Rajamangala National Stadium on Monday (Dec 30).

Bangkok Post, with additional reporting by The Phuket News

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