

Phuket Gazette

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OPENING MARRED BY DELAYS, LONG LINES, LACK OF EQUIPMENT

ALL MAXED OUT

■ Transport Minister flies in to new terminal following barrage of passenger complaints

By Kongleaphy Keam

AIRPORT authorities are dealing with backlash from disgruntled passengers, following the opening of the new terminal at Phuket International Airport on September 16.

A stream of harsh complaints prompted a visit to the new terminal by Thailand's Transport Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith on September 24.

Long lines, delays, lack of essential equipment, insufficient and confused personnel, and angry passengers all marred the opening days of the new facility.

Mr Arkhom acknowledged that airport staff were dealing with shortages and 'unexpected problems', but assured the public and the press that steps were already being taken to resolve the issues.

Following complaints about long queues and slow service at the new terminal's immigration counters, 30 more immigration officers arrived on September 23 and their computers are scheduled to be installed on October 3, confirmed the minister.

"We have asked for help from the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) for the extra computers," he said.

"At least 36,000 people pass through immigration service every day – departures and arrivals. There are fewer problems with arrivals than departures, which are at a peak between 8pm and 9pm, with many tour groups departing at about the same time," said Mr Arkhom, adding that while there were 34 immigration counters in the departure area, only 13 of those counters even



Long lines, delays, lack of essential equipment, insufficient personnel, and angry passengers all marred the opening days of the new facility. Photo: Kongleaphy Keam

had a computer.

"On average there will be 15 immigration officers on duty at any one time, working in 6-hour shifts, which should be enough," he said.

Mr Arkhom said that he was pleased with the overall readiness of the new terminal, despite the initial teething problems and failure to meet the promised opening date.

"The check-in space is large, signs are in multiple languages, the baggage system is working well and the waiting area

is expansive with the addition of the new gates," he added.

Phuket airport officials admitted that the new terminal's immigration systems were not working properly, even after test flights from China and the terminal's official opening by Prime Minister Gen Prayuth Chan-ochaduring his one-day visit to the province.

An Immigration officer who spoke to the *Gazette* on condition of anonymity confirmed that...

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Phuket bound flight skids off runway

Officials reported "poor weather" conditions as a flight from Bangkok skidded off the runway while landing at Phuket airport on September 21.

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New luxury travel venture launches new transport options for travel niche.

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PROPERTY



Development of a public transport system will increase land values.

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LIFE&STYLE



Phuket's marine industry needs to look beyond 'Brand Phuket'.

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LOCAL NEWS

Briefly

Teen bike rider shoots at six-wheel truck

A TEENAGE motorcyclist was arrested on the evening of September 24 for shooting at a 6-wheel truck in Phuket Town.

The 18-year old reportedly shot at one of the truck's wheels in anger after the vehicle nearly ran him over.

Police checked CCTV footage taken in the area and quickly identified the culprit.

The boy was arrested at 7pm the same day in Rassada, police confirmed.

Police confiscated from the boy a homemade gun, one bullet and the motorbike he had been riding at the time of the incident.

He was charged with unlawful possession of a firearm.

The boy reportedly confessed that he'd aimed for the truck's tyre but had missed and hit the wheel well, which was only slightly damaged by the single shot.

— *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Woman flips vehicle to save J-walking dog

A WOMAN was charged with reckless driving after she

Speeding driver loses control, rear ends pole



A Phang Nga man lost control of his Toyota Yaris while speeding along Thepkrasattri Road on the morning of September 23. Rescue workers had to cut through the car's front windscreen to free the driver, identified as 26-year-old Pujukom Rattakai, before taking him to Thalang Hospital. Photo: Winai Sarot

smashed into an electric pole on Chao Fa West Road, trying to avoid a jay-walking dog on September 24.

"The 24-year-old driver was on her way from the Land & Houses apartment complex to Phuket Town at about noon, when she saw the dog crossing the street and swerved left to avoid ramming into it," said Capt Somkiet Sarasit of Chalong Police.

"She smashed into a power pole, causing her vehicle to flip and land on its right side."

The driver luckily managed to escape the vehicle with

only minor injuries to her right wrist.

She was, however, charged with reckless driving and causing damage to public property.

— *Winai Sarot*

Serial break-in thief caught in Phuket Town

POLICE arrested a 16-year-old boy on September 23 who they allege is behind a string of car break-ins and robberies in Phuket Town.

On August 27, the suspect reportedly smashed the window of a Chevrolet and stole about 50,000 baht in cash and other belongings from inside the car.

Another car was broken into and 6,000 baht cash was stolen from it on September 18.

Police say that as the suspect is a juvenile his full name will not be released.

"After checking CCTV footage, we identified the suspect – named as only Golf – and his address," said Phuket City Police Lt Naruebadin Pangleesen. "We also found that he had a record of committing several thefts in the Phuket Town area. He confessed to the robberies, saying that he used the money to travel."

— *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Longtail driver rescued after capsizing

A LONGTAIL boat operator was pulled from Phang Nga Bay on September 21, after his boat capsized in the heavy surf.

Sawek Wansadee, 32, left the pier at Hat Noppharat Thara, Phi Phi National Park, at about 9am. He told the *Gazette* that he quickly found his little low-profile longtail taking a beating from waves of about two meters in height.

Mr Sawek says he held onto the sides of his upturned boat while battling for his life, and that he was finally spotted by another longtail that rescued him and towed his boat to shore.

"I was lucky there were no tourists on board," Mr Sawek said. "It'll be a while before my boat is fully repaired."

— *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Russian tourist dies at Karon

A RUSSIAN tourist died on the afternoon of September 24, shortly after being pulled out from the waves by rescue workers at Karon Beach.

"Police received reports about 3:30pm that Urosov Ro-

man, 43, had been pulled from the water near the Naka statue," said Karon Police Captain Weerayuth Thansirisukhaworakul.

Mr Roman's wife, who declined to be named, told police she was lying on the beach while her husband went to swim in the red-yellow flagged area.

"She says she called on lifeguards for help after noticing that her husband had disappeared," said Capt Weerayuth.

Rescue workers rushed the unconscious man to Patong Hospital, where he was pronounced dead on arrival.

"We suspect he had a pre-existing condition that resulted in his death," said Capt Weerayuth.

The couple reportedly arrived in Phuket on September 22 and planned to return on October 3. The Russian Embassy has been informed of the incident.

— *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Blue bottles are back at the beaches

SIRINATH National Park chief Kitiphat Tharapiban said September 26 that 'water activities' have been suspended at Phuket's Nai Thon, Layan and Nai Yang beaches after blooms of Portuguese Man-of-War were spotted in the national park area.

Stings from the Portuguese Man-of-War can be fatal. Officials closed the beaches and posted warning notices.

The venomous siphonophore – also known as the 'blue bottle' or 'floating terror' – are a common occurrence off Phuket during the monsoon season.

Warning notices also went up at nearby Maya Bay and Phi Phi Ley in Hat Noppharat Thara - Mu Ko Phi Phi National Park.

Phuket Lifeguard Club President Prathaiyut Chuayuan said lifeguards have seen blooms of the poisonous marine creatures off several of Phuket's beaches.

"Swimmers must be responsible for their own safety. The blue bottles float on the surface. Swim only in areas where lifeguards are on duty – and where there are no red flags flying," warned Mr Prathaiyut.

— *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

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New British ambassador relays concerns to Phuket's officials

BRITISH Ambassador Brian Davidson made his first official visit to the island on September 23.

The ambassador met with Phuket Vice Governor Chokdee Amornwat at Phuket Provincial Hall. At the meeting with provincial officials, Ambassador Davidson highlighted concerns over public safety in Phuket, raising his worries over the island's jet-ski operators, taxi mafia, the lack of public transportation and the ongoing issues over the legality of real estate purchases.

The ambassador also asked officials if they had any concerns over any policies since he took up his post in June.

Ambassador Davidson's comments echoed those of former British Ambassador Mark Kent, who derided the province's Tuk-tuk and taxi operators as continuing to undermine the progress of Phuket's tourism industry.

In 2013, the British, Canadian and Dutch Ambassadors to Thailand plainly described their chief concerns about the scamming and cheating plaguing the tourism industry.

"My biggest concern is the same as that of other ambassadors here last November," Ambassador Davidson said during the meeting. "A couple of issues they discussed were about Phuket's development, the state of tourism, taxi drivers and jet-skis. I'm really



Ambassador Davidson with V/Gov Chokdee at Phuket Provincial Hall. Photo: Chutharat Plerin

delighted that [the scams] have disappeared from this province to an extent. Thank you very much for working on it."

"We would like to see some of that progress continue – all of the tours and boat operators to be maintained properly in this aspect."

V/Gov Chokkdee said Phuket officials had cracked down on illegal taxis, forced them to come up to compliance and are enforcing metered rates. He also said the provincial government will, of course, push to expand public transpor-

tation on the island.

"Now we only have two bus routes from the airport; one to Phuket Town and the other via Patong to Kata.

"We want to have more public vehicles that people can use in order to help out traffic. We have been meeting about that and hope to see results soon," said V/Gov Chokdee.

Ambassador Davidson also presented the vice governor with information about Thai-UK scholarships, as he wanted to see more students outside of Bangkok get in-

involved. V/Gov Chokdee promised to pass on the information to the Prince of Songkla University and Phuket Rajabhat University.

Ambassador Davidson told V/Gov Chokdee that the embassy is interested in joining in or observing the provincial tsunami drill, which is planned for December.

Ambassador Davidson, along with embassy staff, also toured Phuket International Airport's new terminal with a security expert.

- Chutharat Plerin

Local airlines ban exploding Samsung cells

SEVERAL international and domestic carriers, including Thai Airways, Nok Air, Thai Lion air, Bangkok Airways and Air Asia, have banned the use of Samsung Galaxy Note 7 mobile phones on board their aircraft, following reports of the device 'exploding' surfaced after its launch in August.

Airports of Thailand Plc (AOT), which operates the Kingdom's major airports, including Phuket International Airport, has also urged airline passengers to avoid packing Samsung Galaxy Note 7 phones in their checked-in baggage.

"The recommendation was made for the safety of passengers and aircraft," AOT President Nitinai Sirismattahakann said.

A number of airlines have banned in-flight use of the phone after several devices with defective batteries were reported to have exploded since its launch. Thai Airways International joined the ranks of several American, Japanese, Australian, Abu Dhabi, Singaporean and French airlines in imposing the ban.

These are the latest in ongoing efforts in the airline industry to manage the use of lithium-ion batteries, that are known to combust and are used in many devices such as phones, laptops and toys.

The South Korean electronics giant announced a recall of 2.5 million units already sold.

- The Nation

Three injured in speedboat fire

THREE men were injured when their speedboat caught fire off Yamu Pier in Paklok on the morning of September 24.

One of the men sustained serious injuries, including a broken leg and burns across 40-50 per cent of his body, according to emergency responders.

The three-engine speedboat, registered to CC Blue Marine, reportedly caught fire while the three crew members were preparing it for boarding tourists.

The severely burned man and one of his colleagues were taken to Vachira Phuket Hospital. The third crew member was taken to Thalang Hospital.

Police said smoking or an electrical short ignited the blaze.

- Winai Sarot



No tourists were aboard the boat when it caught fire. Photo: Winai Sarot



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Phuket-bound flight skids off runway

A FLIGHT from Bangkok skidded off the runway while landing at Phuket International Airport on the evening of September 21.

Thai Airways flight TG 221 departed from Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi International Airport at 6:15pm, bound to arrive in Phuket at 7:35pm.

An official statement issued by Thai Airways says that "poor weather" conditions and visibility were reported at the time of the flight's arrival but the crew was given the green light to land. The statement also read that Thai Airways officials suspect that a gust of wind blew the plane off the runway during the landing.

None of the 138 passengers or 14 crew members were injured, it was reported.

A passenger named Mongkunkit Phongnarisorn gave a personal account of the incident to the *Gazette*. The Phuket-based businessman was

returning from Bangkok aboard flight TG221.

"Everything seemed to be going perfectly normally," Mr Mongkunkit said.

Mr Mongkunkit said he began to feel uneasy and felt like the plane was descending much faster than usual.

"We hit the runway hard," Mr Mongkunkit said. "Since I was on the left side of the plane, I could see that we had moved off of the runway, but you couldn't really feel the difference."

The plane sustained damage to its left-rear landing gear, which was dragged through the grass berm off the runway.

Mr Mongkunkit said nobody on board seemed particularly panicked that the plane had skidded off the runway until the oxygen masks began dropping.

"A few of the masks deployed and people started to worry about what was going



Grass and debris stuck to the damaged left-rear landing gear of flight TG 221, sustained after landing in Phuket. Photo: Ronnakorn Puttaraksa

on," he said.

Mr Mongkunkit said no announcement was made to the passengers by either the pilots or the flight attendants, even after the masks dropped into view. Once at the gate, passengers disembarked the plane in a normal fashion, he said.

"I was one of the last people off the plane. On my way home, a friend called me to ask if I was alright," Mr Mongkunkit said. "He told me he had heard that a plane had broken some landing gear on the runway. I'm just glad the pilots could handle it," he concluded.

Airport director Monrudee Gettuphan said that damage caused to the runway in the incident has already been repaired.

Ms Monrudee added that officers from the Department of Civil Aviation inspected the plane on September 22.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*



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Swedish man found hanging

STAFF at the Kamala Regent Resort found the body of a Swedish guest hanging by the neck in the bathroom of his hotel room on the afternoon of September 26.

The 47-year-old Swede was wearing only a hotel bathrobe and found in a kneeling position, leaning forward, with a taut rope around his neck that was strung up on a part of the shower stall.

Police have already identified the body and informed the deceased's embassy.

The *Gazette* is withholding the man's identity until it can be confirmed that his relatives have been informed of the death.

Kamala Police Captain Channarong Prakong-Uea told the *Gazette* on the morning of September 27 that the reason for the man's death was a mystery. There were no signs of a struggle in the hotel room and there was no evidence to suspect that the room had been ransacked.

Police believe the man died at least three hours before his body was found. The body was taken to Patong Hospital for further examination.

According to hotel staff, the man had spent about a week at the hotel.

– *Winai Sarot*

Rider killed in hit-and-run



The crash site. Photo: Winai Sarot

A TEENAGER was killed and another man injured in a 'double' hit-and-run collision at about 1am on September 27 on Thepkrasattri Road.

The victim, Noppadol Yaprajan, 19, was riding pillion with his friend Sirichai Witsuma, 20, when the accident occurred.

"Mr Sirichai told us that an 18-wheeled truck hit their motorbike in front of the Democratic Party Office, causing Mr Noppadol to be thrown onto the road, where he was fatally hit by another car," said Lt Chatree Chuwichian of Thalang Police.

"He added that both the truck and car fled before he could note the color of the vehicles or their licence plate numbers."

Mr Noppadol's body was taken to Thalang Hospital. Police say they are trying to track down both drivers.

– *Winai Sarot*

Airport in chaos



Transport Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith, joined by Phuket Airport Director Monrudee Gettuphan. Photo: Phuket International Airport

From Page 1

...three of the computers are reserved for use by VIPs; crew members, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation personnel and the disabled.

“The computer and internet systems aren’t stable either,” the official said. “That has caused huge delays in our traveller processing times.”

Screens detailing departure and arrival information were offline as of September 22. Many passengers in the international terminal’s departure section – delayed by long immigration lines – were confused, often receiving no warning of flight gate changes.

“We would like to apologize for any inconvenience. We are not ignoring the problems,” the official added.

Mr Somsak declined to comment further. Airport director Monrudee Gettuphan could not be reached for comment.

While the new international

terminal will increase the airport’s capacity to handle 12.5 million passengers a year, the airport is already dealing with close to that number, and it won’t be until completion of phase three that the airport will be ready to handle more, Airports of Thailand Plc President Nitinai Sirismatthakarn told the *Gazette* in an exclusive interview.

Phase three of the expansion is the renovation of the existing terminal to become a fully-operational domestic terminal.

“We will need to partially close the domestic terminal for the renovation while continuing to be fully operational,” said Mr Nitinai.

“Once phase three is complete and the domestic terminal is fully operational, the airport will be able to handle up to 18 million passengers a year.”

– Additional reporting by Chutharat Plerin.

Arrest warrants issued for Russians in ATM scams

POLICE issued two more arrest warrants on September 26 for Russian suspects wanted in connection with the nationwide ATM fraud that ripped off over 12 million baht from Government Savings Bank (GSB) ATMs.

The group of foreigners travelled around the country, using specially-engineered credit cards to get around safety precautions and empty ATMs in Phuket, Phang Nga, Surat Thani, Petcha Buri, and Bangkok provinces back in August.

Five GSB ATMs in Phuket were hacked and more than 1 million baht was stolen. In Phuket’s Wichit area alone, an estimated 201,000 baht was scammed from ATMs.

GSB officials released information about the mass scam to authorities nearly a month af-



Authorities investigate one of the hacked ATMS. Photo: Gazette file

ter the rip-offs began. On August 30, authorities identified one of the suspects as Russian national Rustam Shambasov.

Lt Col Peerapan Meemak of the Wichit Police submitted two more arrest warrants for Russian nationals on Septem-

ber 26 to judicial courts. Vitalii Dvoretckii and Aleksandr Grigorev are wanted for theft, fraud and using a vehicle to flee the scene of a crime. Both are thought to have fled back to Russia.

– Kongleaphy Keam



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Yala bombing kills 3, maims 2

THREE police officers were killed and two other officers seriously wounded in a roadside bomb attack in Yala's Krong Pinang district on September 23.

Police suspect that a group of insurgents, led by Hubaideela Rommeulee, was behind the attack, as the area where the attack took place is reportedly their turf.

Yala police chief Maj-Gen Itthipol Atcharyapradit ordered police teams to inspect target areas in the hunt for the culprits.

The attack happened around 10am while seven policemen were travelling on two pickup trucks on a road in Ban Benya Moo 1 ville in Tambon Purong. They were gathering intelligence in the area about insurgents as well as a drug-trafficking ring.

Police said the home-made bomb directly hit one truck, hurling it into the air and break-

ing it in two.

Corporal Natthapong Chatdam, 28, Lance Corporal Suriya Noonim, 32, and Lance Corporal Atthapol Luathep died at the scene. Corporal Siriwat Yotha, 30, and Lance Corporal Nareubet Meunnoi, 25, were seriously wounded.

Following the explosion, a group of at least seven insurgents opened fire at the two police officers in the other truck as other insurgents stole three M16 rifles and three pistols from the slain officers before fleeing.

The blast crater was about four meters wide and one meter deep. The bomb was encased in a 15kg cooking cylinder, with an electronic circuit panel and 100 metres of electrical wire was found at the scene.

It is estimated the bomb weighed 80 kilograms and was planted in a water pipe under the road.

– *The Nation*

Deep South's likely ministers named

PRIME Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha was expected to appoint forward ministers to rein in unrest in the Deep South last week.

Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister General Prawit Wongsuwan confirmed September 26 that the appointments would be made last week, but refused to reveal who would get the important posts by press time.

Unrest has plagued Thailand's southern provinces for more than 10 years. Despite its efforts and ongoing peace talks in neighboring Myanmar, the government has been unable to end the violence.

The appointment of 'forward ministers' aims to address the insurgency, Gen Prawit said.

An informed source disclosed that Deputy Education Minister General Surachet Chaiwong and Deputy Defence Minister General Udomdej

Sitabutr stood good chances of becoming the forward ministers for the Deep South, which includes Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat provinces.

The source noted that Mr Surachet has long been active in the South, engaging in both educational work and cultivating relationships.

"Locals trust him," the source said.

According to this source, Gen Udomdej is also a solid candidate, but concerns linger as to whether he will be able to work well with Lt Gen Piyawat Nakwanich, younger brother of current Army chief Teerachai Nakwanich. Gen Udomdej and Gen Teerachai are reportedly not on good terms.

Starting October 1, Gen Piyawat will serve as the chief of the Fourth Army Area, which oversees the south.

"Both PM Prayuth and Gen Prawit have emphasized that

forward ministers must be able to coordinate efficiently with agencies in the deep South," the source said.

When asked about his possible appointment as a forward minister, Gen Udomdej said he did not know whether he was chosen for the post but he was ready to respond to Gen Prawit's order.

Asked whether the forward ministers were some Cabinet ministers now handling national security issues, Gen Prawit said all Cabinet members had helped with security affairs.

Meanwhile, Army spokesman Colonel Winthai Suvaree urged security officials and people in the deep South to watch out for bombs put in coconut shells. "We have had warnings that perpetrators of violence are turning to coconut bombs," he said.

– *The Nation*

Cop draws gun at Samui bar brawl

TWO PEOPLE died and five were injured, including fellow officers, after a policeman allegedly opened fire with his pistol during a brawl at a Koh Samui beer bar during the early morning hours of September 23.

Double homicide suspect Corporal Narongsak Khamjai of Bo Phud Police Station, was dismissed from the civil service following the incident, according to deputy police spokesman Colonel Krisana Pattanacharoen. Five other officers were transferred to inactive posts pending an internal investigation.

Cpl Narongsak's friend, Corporal Jaresak Soisangwal, and bar security guard Kraisor Mingsakul both died in hospital from gunshot wounds.

Initial police investigations found that the officers went out for a meal at the bar and were dancing in front of the stage when they got into a fight with some young tourists at about 2am. Bar security guards then intervened and told them to leave.

When Cpl Jaresak allegedly pulled out his pistol, the bar

manager fought for the gun, resulting in a melee during which Cpl Narongsak allegedly opened fire with his Glock 19 pistol, hitting guards, fellow police officers and patrons.

Police investigators collected six spent bullet casings from the scene.

The five wounded were Corporals Sitthisak Ngamkhom and Krissana Boonyin, bar security guard Worawit Yim-yong, bar manager Thepthinnakorn Thongphetch, and waiter Weerapong Jarusathien.

Cpl Narongsak, who was arrested after being identified on CCTV footage, faces charges of murder, attempted murder, carrying a gun without sound reason, and carrying a gun in an establishment.

Surat Thani police chief General Apichat Boonsriroj also transferred five police colleagues involved in the incident – Sitthisak, Krissana, Pol Lance Corporals Wongsathorn Rattanachote and Prawit Reungpat, and Corporal Narongdech Inthawong – to inactive posts pending a police panel probe.

– *The Nation*

Bridge to Lanta approved

CONSTRUCTION of a bridge linking Koh Lanta with the mainland in Krabi has been approved by the central government, it was announced last week.

The new 1.5km bridge is to stretch from Ban Hua Hin Pier on the mainland to Ban Klong Maak Pier on Lanta Noi.

The crossing will facilitate the approximately five million tourists visiting the island annually, who currently have to rely on ferry boat services operating between the two points.

"The PM has approved the construction of the new Lanta bridge," said Krabi Governor Pinit Boonlert.

"Initial designs are estimated to cost 20 million baht and construction of the bridge is estimated at about 800 million baht," he added.

The project, managed in joint cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and Sports and the Ministry of Transportation, is expected to be completed by 2023.

The first bridge between Lanta Noi and Lanta Yai officially opened in April. Thousands of members of the public turned out to make the



Krabi Governor Pinit Boonlert points to where the proposed bridge would connect the island to Krabi. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

first crossing on foot between Lanta Noi and Lanta Yai islands.

Krabi Governor Pinit Boonlert chaired the opening ceremony of the first 400-million-baht bridge, in an event promoted as 'Starry Night Over Lanta Bridge'.

"It was the dream of Lanta locals to have this bridge, and now the government has given it to them," said Krabi Gover-

nor Pinit at the event. "It is the first bridge in Thailand's history to be constructed between two islands."

Before the bridge was built, the only way across the water between the two islands was on a car ferry, which was inconvenient during the high season when influxes of tourists drove up waiting times, said Mr Pinit.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Foreign trio found with dismembered body in fridge

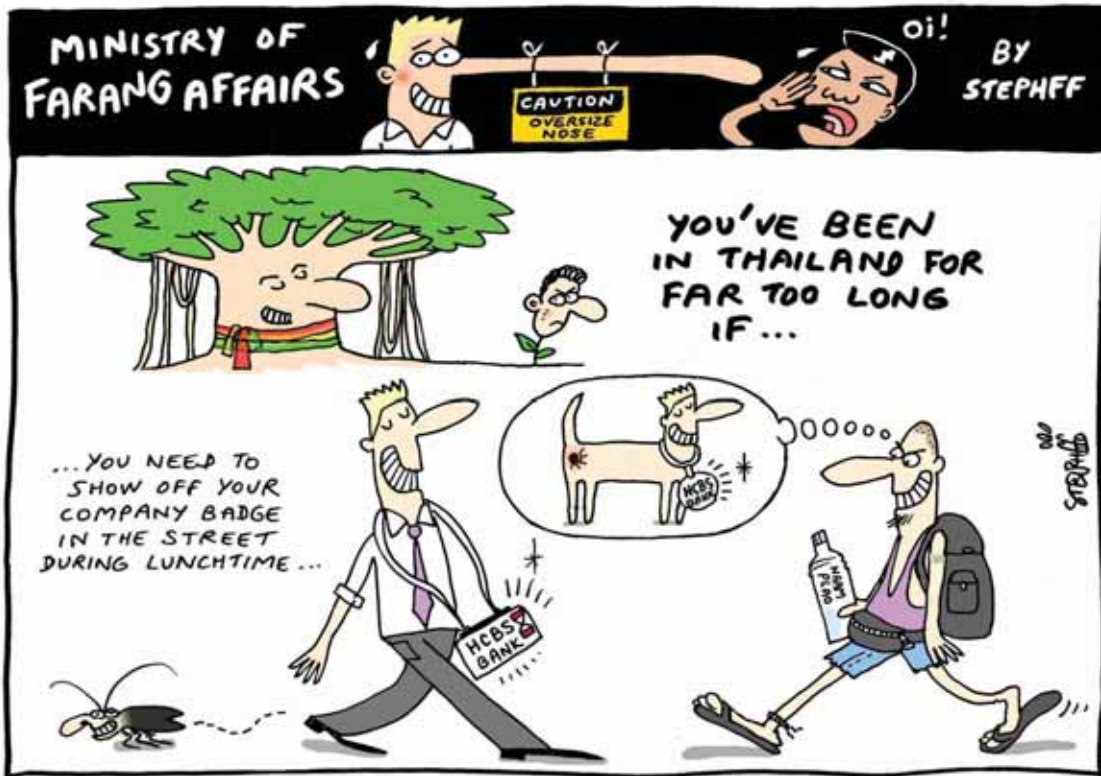
THREE foreigners were charged with several serious criminal offences, as police await the autopsy results on a dismembered body of another foreign man found in a fridge during a raid on a building in Sukhumvit Soi 56 in Bangkok on September 23.

They were charged with having guns and ammunition in their possession without permission, forging state-issued documents, possessing drugs and hiding a dead body to conceal a crime.

British national Peter Andrew Colter, who allegedly shot a policeman during the raid on the building, has also been charged with obstructing police in the performance of their duty and the attempted murder of an on-duty police officer.

A scan on the body parts found suggests it was an elderly European man who was dismembered by an electric saw, said Dr Udomsak Hoonwichit, of Chulalongkorn University's faculty of medicine.

Police brought two American suspects – Gabel Aaron Thomas and James Douglas Eger – to appear before the Criminal Court for the detention order and objected to them being released on bail as they pose a flight risk.



Tourist nabbed for killing two

A RUSSIAN tourist was arrested on September 24 for allegedly killing a Thai woman and her five-month-old daughter in a road accident in Chon Buri's Bang Lamung District.

Konstantin Volk was arrested in Soi Kasetpan while he was allegedly trying to flee in a Honda Civic after the accident.

Police suspect he was drunk and speeding when he crashed into two motorcycles that had stopped at a traffic light in



South Pattaya at about 3:40am.

Amphai Inwan died at the scene. Her five-month-old daughter died at Bangkok Hospital Pattaya. Ms Amphai's husband, a two-year-old girl and a taxi motorcyclist were severely injured.

Police conducted a blood alcohol test on Mr Volk to determine if he would also be charged with drunk driving.

Popular Thai star's parents burnt alive

A COUPLE was killed when a fire engulfed a small tofu factory in Ratchaburi's Photharam District on September 26.

Police said Somchai Jittaleela, 66, along with his wife, Piyawan Jittaleela, 65, were trapped on the second floor when the fire started on the floor at about 2:30am.

Mr Somchai and Ms Piyawan were staying at the

factory at the time and their charred bodies were found after the fire was put out.

It took six fire engines over two hours to control the blaze.

They were parents of popular teenage actress Suppanart Jittaleela who appeared in the movie 'Yes or No - Love Me If You Want To'. She has since been receiving condolences from her fans and loved ones.

Monitor lizards bagged in Lumpini Park

THE Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) started an operation on September 20 to capture monitor lizards at downtown Lumpini Park.

The reptiles were sent to Khao Son Wildlife Nursery Station in Ratchaburi, a 1,000-rai (160-hectare) nature station with a fertile ecosystem. Suwanna Jungrungrueng, director-general of the BMA's Environment Department, led 12 officials in catching at least 40 monitor lizards. An army of TV and print journalists, including from foreign agencies, as well as concerned onlookers observed the operation.

The city workers were armed with long sticks with a noose at the end and catfish that was used as bait. They managed to catch about 40 monitor lizards by the afternoon.



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Phuket Gazette

Airport chaos

CONFUSION among passengers following the recent opening of the International Terminal at Phuket Airport demonstrates a disappointing lack of readiness on the part of Airports of Thailand (AoT), Phuket Immigration and other related agencies.

While it would have been naive to expect that such major changes to airport operations could come off without a hitch, the lack of manpower and basic equipment, including even computers, comes as a major embarrassment for Phuket – especially coming as it did after all the pomp, circumstance and expense associated with the elaborate opening ceremony on September 16.

We also question the suitability of the date chosen for the official opening. September 16 marked the ninth anniversary of the crash of One-Two-GO Airlines Flight 269, which had a final death toll of 90 passengers and crew.

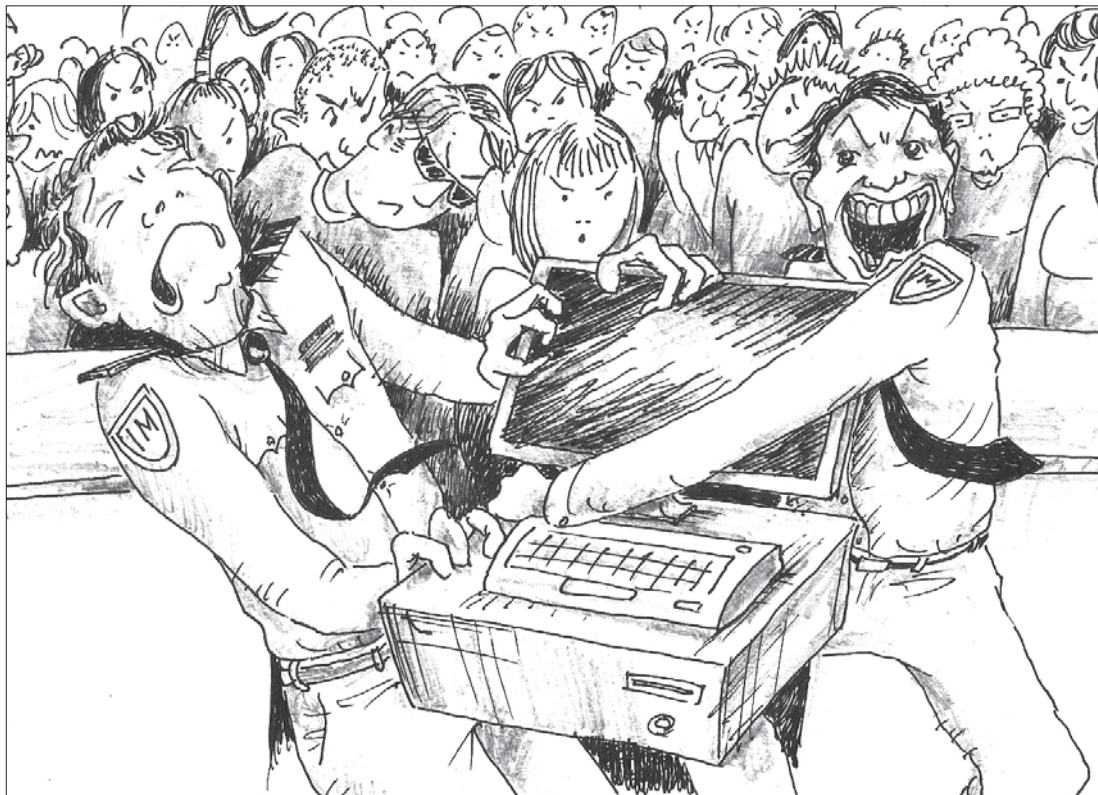
Having chosen the September 16 date anyway, more should have been done to remember those who lost their lives in the crash and also to encourage all operational staff to dwell on the causes of the crash to help prevent a recurrence. It will be interesting to see what kind of memorial will be organized when the tenth anniversary arrives a year from now.

As passengers are the lifeblood of any airport, it is essential that they be well-informed in advance of any major changes. However, the English-language section of the passenger guide page of the official Phuket International Airport website makes no reference to the opening of the new terminal, or how that event would affect departures or arrivals.

This led to confusion among many passengers, including those who had transited there several times in the past. And some took to social media just to confirm which terminal they should use for checking in for a flight from here to Bangkok with a connection to an international flight from there.

It is remarkable that the new terminal opened with inadequate computer and internet facilities given that the AoT had years and a multi-billion baht budget to get everything ready.

Hopefully the AoT, Immigration and other agencies can all work together now to reduce further damage to Phuket's image by getting the new terminal running smoothly and efficiently as soon as possible. Surely its customers expect no less.



Need to solve airport issues

Re: New Phuket Air Terminal: Transport Minister acknowledges barrage of angry complaints, Sep 26

I came in September 25 with a small number of flight arrivals – it took over an hour to get through immigration.

The rest of the airport was empty.

Part of the problem was that there were three immigration officers sitting at the VIP and crew desks doing nothing except watching the long queues of those flying cattle class.

*Ken Sheerman
Facebook*

Every local has a story to tell

Re: Profile: Sirirat Rattanasuanjig – it's all on the cards, Sep 27

This is the best article I've seen here in ages. Interesting and informative. Could have interviewed a client or two to get their perspective as well.

Do more articles on local people as everyone has a story to be told.

*DC Chris
Facebook*

Only accident with no one to blame

Re: Woman flips car to save jay-walking dog, Sep 26

This is a real accident unlike the thousand others you see everyday.

Letters to the Editor

*Do you have an opinion to voice?
Email Editor@PhuketGazette.net*

She was not at fault, her car was safe and no one else was to blame (unless you count the dog).

This is about the only real accident where no one was to blame that I can remember for this year.

*Simon Lomas
Facebook*

Takes 7.5 hours to reach Lanta Yai

Re: New bridge to Koh Lanta approved, Sep 24

I travel frequently to Koh Lanta by car. In Jan 2015 it took me 7.5 hours to get from the mainland to Lanta Yai. Imagine the same wait having just flown half way around the world.

*Ady Hughes
Facebook*

Lifeguards need to be more alert

Re: Russian tourist dies at Karon, Sep 26

When will the so-called lifeguards actually watch what is happening and try to prevent needless loss of life?

Every day, I walk at Kamala Beach to see most of those

swimming doing so in the red flag area, while the so-called life guards sit with their backs to the water talking, playing with their phones, or playing ball games.

These deaths will never be reduced until those paid to do so actually watch what people are doing.

*frustrated
Gazette forum*

Embassy outreach needed in Phuket

Re: New British Ambassador makes first visit to Phuket, Sep 23

It's a shame he wasn't able to bring an outreach team like other embassies.

It's ridiculous having to make two trips to Bangkok to renew a passport. Just the usual dog and pony show, unfortunately.

*Mister Ree
Gazette forum*

Driver going way too fast

Re: Pole position for speeding Phuket driver, Sep 23

How he hit the pole rear-end-first is beyond me.

It means that even after spinning through about 180 degrees, he was still going like a rocket.

The pictures assure us of that.

*Einstein
Gazette forum*

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It's a tradition, not a festival

FIRST PERSON



Prasert Fakhongphol, 68, is the founder and president of the Phuket Shrines Association. He was born and raised in Phuket and has a vocational certificate in business studies from Dusit Commercial College in Bangkok. He has been the president of the association

since 2001 and also owns a transportation company. Here, he talks about the real purpose and tradition behind the Phuket Vegetarian Festival.

THE vegetarian 'festival' is not really a festival at all, but rather meant to be a tradition. The main purpose behind it is taking a break from killing and bringing trouble to others' lives. Above all, it helps you keep yourself out of trouble.

This is specifically a Phuket tradition, not a common Thai tradition. We have been carrying on this tradition for thousands of years. It does not differentiate between people, so it does not matter who you are or where you are from. Anyone who would like to join is welcome to participate.

In Phuket, we call it 'Jia Chai' but it's not wrong to use the word 'Jeh' either. The important thing is to avoid eating animal flesh. Some people participate so they can have delicious food, while others hold cooking competitions, but that is not the real purpose of this tradition.

It started in Phuket more than 200 years ago. China discontinued it when they moved towards communism. They prohibited the use of candles and incense because it was considered a 'wasteful' practice. So that's how the tradition disappeared from China.

Jia Chai principles are described in detail, but nobody is forced to do anything. It depends solely on the individual and how strictly they want to observe it. If you choose to forgo animal flesh, then you may. However, if you are willing to do more, it will help you.

The principles dictate that you must stay calm at all times. This entails not speaking unnecessarily while the nine-day

tradition is being observed. You must also keep your body clean and your mind at peace.

To have your mind at peace, you must take a break from the physical aspects of life – taste, smell and sound. This is why you must only consume boiled vegetables, as the purpose of the tradition is not to have delicious food.

You can pray no matter what language you speak. It does not matter what religion you practice, as this tradition transcends religion.

We do not receive any support from the government and work purely on the basis of donations. The Office of the Auditor General (OAG) keeps eye on local governments to make sure they do not give money to shrines.

The government does not support this tradition because it is not considered a part of Thai culture. However, we are Thai and we do practice it. I was born here and I love Thailand. Our ancestors are from China, but that does not mean we belong there. This is the culture of our ancestors that we are carrying on.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand promotes us, but does not provide us with any

other support. We have been practicing this tradition for 200 years. It is not a festival that you may stop it anytime you want. It is a Phuket tradition, yet the government is not supporting us.

Local governments are trying to help us but their hands are tied, as they have to follow the policies laid out by the central government.

We are only allowed to use the weapons described in legend, as each God has their own weapons. If anyone uses modern weapons, we would prefer not to have them join the parade. We don't want guns and advertising signs. We understand that teenagers want to show off, but we try our best to keep an eye on such activities.

We cannot control anybody's behavior, but people who really want to practice during these nine days will always find a way to do it right. There are hundreds of vendors participating and we cannot keep an eye on all of them. They are allowed to sell whatever they please, but I can only hope that they sell the right food so people who come to Phuket can learn what the vegetarian festival is really about.



After a tumultuous boat ride in stormy weather, we reached Railay, only to be confronted with more rain. Photo: Moeed Aftab Qureshi

Tourism needs a rehaul

Island View

By Zohaib Sikander

Do you have an opinion to voice? Email Editor@PhuketGazette.net

DURING a day trip to Krabi with some friends last weekend, I planned a short rendezvous to Railay Island. After a heavy lunch, we walked to the pier and were surprised to find that a return ticket via long tail boat cost 200 baht per person. That's not too much, I thought. There is probably a catch there. As it turned out later, there was.

The back of a truck 'taxi ride' to the pier didn't cost anything, and a few minutes later, we were at the pier. Dirty, discarded life vests lay on the boat floor – the boat operator didn't even pretend to be concerned with safety. The weather was stormy and the boat ride tumultuous at best. By the time we reached our destination, there wasn't a dry seat in the house.

It was still pouring wet when we reached the shore, which was unfortunate, since incessant rain was the reason we had made our 'escape' from Phuket. Nevertheless, at the end of a fruitless hour waiting for the rain to stop, I went back

to the boat operator to ask if he was willing to head back to Ao Nang.

At this point the boat operator said something in Thai, which I didn't catch. That's when another one chimed in and said the return trip would cost 3,000 baht per person. Wait...what?

I stared at him in disbelief and he flashed his best 'land of smiles' grin back at me. It wasn't until I produced my ticket stub (which he thought I'd lost) that he gave an embarrassed shrug and motioned us to take a seat.

Sadly, his 'embarrassment' didn't last very long. Next thing I knew, he was asking a Chinese tourist to pay 200 baht because his ticket was damp and half torn. Welcome to Thailand 'my friend'.

During the ride back, I couldn't help but think of how many tourists have been fooled by these boat operators. We don't need smart cities and startup ventures to improve Thailand. We need to haul out these villains who prey on unfortunate visitors and ruin the reputation of the country and other honest, hardworking citizens. Real, grassroots level change is needed if Phuket, and Thailand in general, has any real chance of being a 'tourism hub'.

Words from the Wise

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

– Maya Angelou

"I believe that the rights of women and girls are the unfinished business of the 21st century."

– Hillary Clinton

Issues & Answers

Can I get an update on Paul restaurant?

YOU previously reported on the demolition of Tony's restaurant in your superb piece on April 28. Can you please advise on any news about Paul's restaurant, which is about 100m up the beach?

Paul's is a small shack with a few tables but the food is lovely and I really like the people. I'm hoping the size of Paul's will have made the authorities turn their attention elsewhere.

We are returning to Phuket

Send us your queries and we'll ask the right people to respond to them.

Submit your issue at:

www.PhuketGazette.net/IssuesAnswers

in March next year and our visits to Paul's restaurant are always lovely.

I'd appreciate any news you

have on the matter.

Paul Sloman
Facebook

Cherng Talay Chief Administrative Officer (Palad) Wachira Sakunchit replies:

There is no concern with businesses who are following the rules. We have only cleared out the vendors or buildings built on public areas.

If the restaurant doesn't have any legal issues, it will not have been affected.

Central Group changes management for growth

RETAIL giant Central Group announced on September 21 management changes to move the group forward as a 'world-class' organization, aiming to increase sales by 20 per cent as they expand to neighboring countries.

The group sees big investment opportunities in neighboring countries, especially Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam – the CLMV group – as well as in the Asean Economic Community, said Central Group's Executive Chairman and CEO Tos Chirathivat.

"Moreover, with internet and online technology, retail market boundaries are global," said the CEO, adding that Central Group planned to 'step up and ride this digital trend with e-commerce, omni-channel and marketplace strategies to provide a better customer experience'.

To support the growth plans, the group has strengthened its top management team by adding 'outstanding professionals' in various key positions, he said.

The former Unilever executive and president of Siam Commercial Bank, Yol Phokasub, became the new president of Central Group on October 1.

Other changes in key top



Former Unilever executive and president of Siam Commercial Bank, Yol Phokasub, became the new president of Central Group. Photo: The Nation

management posts include former managing partner of McKinsey & Company Nicolo Galante, who has been appointed as Central Group's new CEO. Former executive vice president of the Stock Exchange of Thailand, Chanitr Charncharonng, is now the group's Executive Vice President of Corporate Development.

Meanwhile, Stewart Stemple, previously global director of talent and development for The

Coca-Cola Company, together with Wimolmart Kuekomoldej, formerly the chief financial officer for Central Hardlines Group and a prior head of HR for Central Retail Corp, have been appointed co-heads of Central Group Corporate Human Resources. Prasarn Trairatvorakul, the former governor of the Bank of Thailand, joined as a senior adviser to Central Group in July this year.

– *The Nation*

Calling all wedding planners to Phuket



Ms Kobkarn said she hopes to expand source-markets. Photo: Gazette file

WEDDING planners from across the world will descend on Phuket for a global conference this Spring, the Minister of Tourism and Sports announced on September 20.

The Destination Wedding Planners Congress (DWPC) is hosted by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and is scheduled to be held at the Laguna Golf Phuket in May 2017.

Destination-themed weddings are a big business, Minister Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul told the *Gazette*.

"We want to see Thailand become a global wedding hub for couples of every nationality," Ms Kobkarn said. "It's

vital for us to enhance our expertise if we want to be the world's best wedding destination."

Ms Kobkarn said the 2017 event would make Thailand the first Asian nation to host the DWPC.

"Thailand is known as a top-ranked wedding destination, especially by Indian and Hong Kong couples. More than 400 Indian weddings have taken place here alone," she added.

The minister said that the TAT is hoping to expand source-markets for weddings to Europe, the United States, and Latin America.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

Tech firms, internet taxes to be pursued

THAILAND is studying plans to toughen tax collection rules for internet and technology firms like Alphabet Inc's Google, the head of the Revenue Department said, as the tax affairs of these firms comes under growing scrutiny in Southeast Asia.

"The plans would also cover the mobile transfers and internet payment sector," said Prasong Poontaneat, director general of Thailand's Revenue Department.

Thailand is focused on changing existing regulations, Mr Prasong said, adding that a working committee had been set up to find solutions on tax collection for companies such as Google.

"The idea is to seek solutions which could involve an amend-

ment in some regulations because current laws are outdated and have been used for more than 50 years," said Mr Prasong, adding that he expects the committee to come up with solutions by this year's end.

Indonesia is pursuing Alphabet Inc's Google for five years of back taxes, which could face a bill of more than US\$400 million for 2015 alone if it is found to have avoided payments, a senior tax official stated.

Singapore's low-tax regime and its generous tax incentive programs make it a big draw for multinationals like Apple Inc, Microsoft, Google and also from other sectors, to employ regional teams there.

– *The Nation*

Commercial banks selective about giving loans to employees

SEVERAL commercial banks are playing it safe with personal loans amid the current economic uncertainty by moving to employees of private companies whose payrolls they handle, as they consider that they can check their credit backgrounds more easily than with other segments.

Banks have highlighted low interest rates, maximum credit limits of 1.5 million baht and loan repayment of five years for people who earn regular monthly salaries of at least 15,000 baht.

Krungthai Bank (KTB) is promoting a minimum retail rate plus 7 per cent or 14 per cent per annum to payroll clients of private companies.

Jirarack Kulsingh, first vice president of KTB, said the bank



Banks have started playing it safe. Photo: NY

had found that many payroll clients were not accessing personal loans, as they are low-risk customers.

Currently about 70 companies have signed a memoranda of understanding (MoU) with KTB on participating in the program, with a few others expressing an interest in such MoUs.

Companies must comply

with the bank's conditions, such as healthy annual financial performance, and their workforce should not be less than 300.

Even though KTB has put more effort into offering personal-loan products to holders of payroll accounts, it has targeted new lending this year at only 16.3 billion baht, lower than last year's 20bn baht, because the current economic circumstances are not conducive to a high target, Ms Jirarack said.

Kasikornbank is the latest bank to offer a personal-loan for salaried employees, offering a special monthly interest rate of 0.76 per cent and installment plans of up to five years.

– *The Nation*

New venture fills luxury travel niche

By Nick Davies

GETTING from the airport to a hotel in Phuket is probably one of the biggest headaches facing any visitor fresh off a plane.

Public transport is limited and taxis are notoriously treacherous territory to negotiate so there was a gap in the market just waiting to be filled – offering tourists and executives the option to travel in hassle-free comfort and style.

Earlier this year, Phuket Luxury Transfers Co was established as an offshoot of Phuket-based destination management company Exotic Voyage to fill that gap, and is currently operating as an independent transportation supplier for other travel companies.

Owned by Sathirapong Na Takuatoong, the president of the Phuket Tourist Association, and Olga Na Takuatoong, also Vice Managing Director of Exotic Voyage, Phuket Luxury Transfers offers high-end transport options for travellers used to a certain level of comfort with a fleet of luxury vans and limousines.

Project Manager for Phuket Luxury Transfers, Vyacheslav Zavrin, says the fleet of Toyota Alphard minivans along with Mercedes-Benz sedans have been a hit with international tourists.

Mr Vyacheslav – who previously held positions at Exotic Voyage as tour coordinator, hotel reservations manager & chief of the airport transfer department – says there was a distinct lack of high-quality transport options for international tourists and executives visiting the island, especially during high and peak seasons. Thus, Phuket Luxury Transfers was conceived and established



Phuket Luxury Transfers' fleet of Toyota Alphard minivans along with Mercedes-Benz sedans are a hit with international tourists demanding a particular level of comfort and convenience. Photo: Phuket Luxury Transfers

in April this year.

Mr Vyacheslav also let on that government officials and royalty from neighboring countries have already used Phuket Luxury Transfer's services.

The company itself has 11 employees, including English-speaking drivers and a sales manager specifically for Chinese clients. Based on preliminary market figures, Mr Vyacheslav estimates that the company's clients comprise 80 per cent holiday makers and 20 per cent travelling executives.

"Our Asian clients are familiar with the Alphard minivans

and for us as a business the luxury Toyota brand is reasonably priced while offering a very high level of comfort. Americans and Europeans are more familiar with the Mercedes Benz Viano, but for us this would be a risky investment considering the much higher price of these vehicles in Thailand," says Mr Vyacheslav.

"We may expand the fleet in the next few months depending on demand. The new E-class coming in 2017 and the new Vito minivan from Benz are attractive options.

For now though we are waiting for delivery of a new Ford Ranger with a Carryboy box, which will be used as a luggage car.

"Our rates are higher than those of hotels offering limousine services but we often work with 5-star hotels to offer their guests extra transport options, especially during the high seasons, when hotels do not have enough of their own vehicles or drivers to cope with demand," says Mr Vyacheslav.

"Many opportunities lie ahead with the ongoing expansion of Phuket as a

world-class tourist destination. These are dynamic times for the island's hospitality industry and we are confident that Phuket Luxury Transfers is primed to continue offering top-grade transport services in the coming years.

"We are keen to work with other travel organizations and hospitality specialists with the aim of providing the next generation of international travellers with memorable, hassle-free experiences – whether for business, leisure or pleasure," concluded Mr Vyacheslav.

Russians to return to the Kingdom

RUSSIA is expected to bounce back with a million arrivals this year, thanks to the strong revival of its economy, according to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

As the Russian economy began to stabilize along with the value of the ruble, visits to Thailand began to rise in February and have been growing steadily ever since. At the start of 2016, Russian arrivals totalled 599,141, up by 18.39 per cent over the same period in 2015.

Visanu Jaroensilp, TAT's

deputy governor for tourism products and business, said 12 Thai tourism businesses including hotels, tour operators and travel-related agencies participated in 'Otdykh-Leisure 2016', an event held in Russia.

The government's vision to drive the country out of the 'middle-income trap' through the an innovation-driven economy has taken shape as an incremental investment trend is being observed, especially in target industries, according to the Board of Investment.

Investment projects in digital businesses increased from 2.38 billion baht in January to 3.68bn baht in July, while investment in science, technology and innovation services increased from 16.97bn baht in January to 43.44bn baht in June.

Renewable energy also saw investment increase from 4.74bn baht in January to 44.29bn baht in June. Logistics-development projects also enjoyed a growing trend with the 1.23bn baht in investments in January.

– The Nation



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Creative Amari florists awarded for in Andaman Hotelier 2016

Two florists from the Amari Phuket resort were the proud recipients of the top prize in the Andaman Hotelier 2016 'Ceremonial Flower Creation' award, held at Limelight Avenue on September 19. The award was presented to the pair by the president of the Housekeeping Management Club Phuket and Andaman, Wutti Choobal.



Housekeeping Management Club Phuket and Andaman president Wutti Choobal (left) hands the Ceremonial Flower Creation award to Amari Phuket florists Sawaeng Yiti and Chansupa Suanya.

The Last Brunch held at Angsana Bodega & Grill

Angsana Laguna Phuket's Bodega & Grill put on its last 12-course Sunday brunch by the pool of the year on September 25.



Brunch guest Cassia Phuket General Manager, Ilias Vamvakas, and Angsana Laguna Phuket Hotel Manager Figen Bulut.



Thai Restaurant



Pool Villa



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Events in Paradise

The Cleat wins Best Residential Development

The Cleat Condominium at Krabi Boat Lagoon was awarded 'Best Residential Development for Phang Nga / Krabi' in the Thailand Property Awards at the awards ceremony held at Plaza Athene hotel in Bangkok on September 22.



Krabi Boat Lagoon's Deputy Managing Director Sriya Yongsakul and Managing Director Sornkom Kitprasan with their award at the Thailand Property Awards gala dinner.

Sansiri, SCB support Veg Fest

For the fourth year in a row, representatives of residential developer Sansiri PCL and the Siam Commercial Bank announced their joint support for the Phuket Vegetarian Festival from October 1 to 9 with a press conference and merit-making ceremony presided over by former Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada.



SCB Executive Vice President, Mortgage Business Division, Kanokwan Jaisri (2nd left); Former Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada (center) and Sansiri PCL CEO Apichart Chutrakul (2nd right) with Phuket shrine representatives.



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Vegetarian fest schedule announced

By Chutharat Plerin

THE Phuket Vegetarian Festival, one of the most widely-celebrated events in Phuket each year, is being held from October 1-9 at various shrines and locations throughout the island. Held in the ninth month of the lunar calendar, the festival features a host of events and draws large crowds to Phuket each year.

The Vegetarian Festival, or 'jia chai' as it is known in local Hokkien Chinese, began in 1825. Praya Jerm, the governor of Thalang at the time, moved the island's principal town from Tah Rua in Thalang District to Get-Hoe in Kathu District, where there were many tin mines and Chinese miners.

Kathu at that time was still covered in jungle and fever was rife. It happened that a travelling opera company (called *ngiu* in Thai or *pua-hee* in the Hokkien dialect) came from China to perform for the miners.

When the whole company fell sick from an unnamed malady, they kept a vegetarian fast to honor two of the emperor gods, Kiew Ong Tai Teh and Yok Ong Sone Teh. The sickness afflicting the opera troupe then disappeared.

This greatly interested the people of Kathu, who asked how it was done. The answer



Attendees are requested to wear white during all performances and processions at the vegetarian festival. Photo: Gazette file

was that ritual vegetarianism, with its attendant ceremonies, had been the remedy, and as a result, people embraced the faith enthusiastically.

As the sun sets on the first night, all Chinese shrines tak-

ing part in the annual Vegetarian Festival will raise their go-teng poles so that the jade emperor, among the nine emperor gods, can descend from the heavens, heralding the beginning of this year's event.

Street processions:

Oct 2: Choor Su Gong Naka Shrine
 Oct 3: Sapam Shrine, Bang Ku Shrine
 Oct 4: Samkong Shrine
 Oct 5: Ban Tha Rue Shrine, Jeng Ong Shrine
 Oct 6: Bang Neow Shrine
 Oct 7: Jui Tui Shrine
 Oct 8: Kathu Shrine, Yokkekeng Shrine
 Oct 9: Sui Boon Tong Shrine

Fire-walking:

Oct 6:
 8:00pm: Jeng Ong Shrine, Jui Tui Shrine, Ban Tha Rua Shrine, Sapam Shrine, Yokkekeng Shrine
 9:00pm: Tae Gun Shrine, Hai Yian Geng Shrine
 Oct 7:
 8:45pm: Tai Houd Tong
 9:00pm: Bu Seng Tong
 Oct 8:
 2:00pm: Ban Don
 8:00pm: Bang Niao, Pasak, Samkong, Ton Sai Waterfall, Ban Muang Mai, Cherng Talay, Chalong
 Oct 9:
 3:00pm: Kathu Shrine
 7:30pm: BangKu Shrine

Bladed ladder climbing:

Oct 7: Samkong and Bang Niao shrines

Ten rules for the vegetarian festival:

01. Maintain personal cleanliness
02. Use separate, clean kitchen utensils and do not share with others not participating
03. Wear white
04. Maintain polite behavior
05. Abstain from eating meat or other animal-based products
06. Abstain from sexual activities
07. Abstain from consuming alcohol
08. People in mourning should not take part
09. Pregnant women must refrain from watching festival rituals
10. Menstruating women should not attend festival rituals.

Australian educators lure Phuket's Thai students

THE Australian Education Assessment Services (AEAS) and CETA Worldwide Education are hosting 'Australian Boarding and Day Schools Exhibition 2016' at The Westin Siray Bay Resort & Spa on October 2.

The exhibition will showcase at least six Australian schools, including Avalon College, Billanook College, St Catherine's School, St Leonard's College, Trinity Grammar School and Wesley College.

The event begins with an introductory seminar at noon titled 'Kick start your entry to school study in Australia - Why Australia is a great choice for your child's secondary school education'.

The seminar is expected to outline what students as well as parents can expect from pursuing studies in Australia.



Prospective students have the opportunity to meet Australian school representatives face to face at the Westin Siray Bay Resort & Spa to make all kinds of inquiries. Photo: Gazette file

Professional educators from the six schools will be on hand from 12pm to 4:30pm to give details about each institution and the benefits of studying in Australia.

Prospective local students and

their parents can meet directly with the schools' representatives and counsellors from CETA Worldwide Education to discuss education options.

"CETA is Thailand's only

Australian secondary school specialist and has connected parents and students with Australian secondary schools in the past. Events like these are the best way for students to under-

stand the range of education options available in the country," said Andrew Gray, Managing Director of CETA Worldwide Education.

"Research conducted by AEAS shows that Thai parents choose Australia for their children because it offers quality education, a safe studying environment and has a multicultural society" said Tracey O'Halloran, Managing Director of AEAS.

Over a million baht worth of scholarships, study trials, and fee reductions are also being offered by the participating schools.

Admission to the event is free of charge, and attendees are requested to preregister for the event at ceta.co.th/registration. Appointments to discuss Australian education can be made any time by contacting CETA Worldwide Education on 095-873 6807.

- *Phuket Gazette*

New look for Laguna Triathlon

By Phuket Gazette

THIS year's Laguna Phuket Triathlon has a new look and a new bike course for the international athletes heading to the island to compete in a 1.8-km swim, 50-km bike ride and 12-km run at the Laguna Phuket resort on Sunday, November 20.

The organizers celebrated the triathlon's 23rd anniversary by unveiling its fresh new look for participating athletes on September 24 at Vertigo TOO, Banyan Tree Hotel in Bangkok.

The baby elephant mascot 'Laguna' is the race's new ambassador, sporting a redesigned race logo. There's also a new bike course and tips to conquer the course, previously recognized as one of the most challenging bike courses in Asia.

The 2016 Laguna Phuket Triathlon features total prize money of US\$20,000 (694,790 baht).

Wowing the crowd even before the conference started was Thailand's number one rock star Athiwara Khongmalai, better known as 'Toon Bodyslam', who has been an avid fan of Laguna Phuket Triathlon since 2012.

Presiding over the Bangkok conference was Promchote Traivate, Inspector General Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and Sports; Kajornkiet Rakpanitmanee, Vice Governor of Phuket; Ravi Chandran, Managing Director of Laguna Phuket and sponsor representatives; Soodrak Chanyavongs,



From L-R: Wasna Jirasuradej, Cocomax; Promchote Traivate, Ministry of Tourism and Sports; Kajornkiet Rakpanitmanee, Vice Governor of Phuket; rockstar 'Toon Bodyslam'; Ravi Chandran, Laguna Phuket; and Soodrak Chanyavongs, Manager, Thai Airways PLC Laguna Phuket Triathlon's new race mascot. Photo: Gazette file

Manager, Promotions Department from Thai Airways PLC and Wasna Jirasuradej, Marketing Manager, Cocomax.

"The Ministry of Tourism and Sports has been working on developing a framework for the future of Thailand's sport tourism, a segment in which Thailand has a high potential to continue growing, both in its quantity and quality," said Mr Promchote.

"Laguna Phuket Triathlon,

being hosted and organized locally in Phuket with full collaboration between the government, local communities and private sectors, exemplifies a strategic sport tourism combination that promotes both the destination and healthy lifestyle with international appeal."

"The enduring appeal of Laguna Phuket attracts entries from leading international pro athlete personalities, as well as

age groupers worldwide. This year we once again expect to see a field of more than 1,000 triathletes, representing more than 50 countries around the world, at our resort on Sunday 20 November," said Laguna's Ravi Chandran.

"As the organizer of Asia's longest standing triathlon race, it is a delight to see the popularity of triathlon proliferate new races in Thailand and the region while Laguna Phuket

Triathlon, with its longevity and worldwide appeal, is being recognized internationally. This year in particular, it is an honor that Laguna Phuket Triathlon is shortlisted as a finalist in 'Best Amateur Sports Event of the Year in Thailand' category at Sports Industry Awards (SPIA) Asia 2016," said Mr Ravi.

While sport tourism is key to Laguna Phuket Triathlon's success, sustainability has also been an integral focus of the race.

Athletes booking their slots in Laguna Phuket Triathlon can help to raise funds through donations and sponsorships for the resort's long established 'Laguna Phuket Foundation' to operate its various charitable programs.

"Not many years had passed before the triathletes felt a deep connection with our race and the communities surrounding it, and started asking how they can give back to the race," said Mr Ravi.

"Over the years, millions of baht have been raised through Laguna Phuket Foundation to fund initiatives as local school renovation, survival swim teaching, Community Learning Center, Seedlings Phuket and the Mobile Learning Center for children."

Registration is open now until November 13. For more information and registration, visit www.lagunaphukettri.com or Facebook/LagunaPhuketTri.

The *Phuket Gazette* and *The Nation* are proud national media partners for the event.

Banyan Tree chimes in on vegetable fest



Banyan Tree Phuket is getting into the spirit of the vegetarian festival by introducing a vegetarian dinner set throughout the nine-day festival up until October 15, along with a tour of the island revolving around the festival events. The 1,500 baht dinner set is available at the resort's Thai restaurant 'Saffron'. For a price of 3,500 baht, guests can enjoy dinner, a tour of the festivities around the island by a certified Laguna Tour guide as well as a commemorative white Banyan Tree T-shirt.

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Thinking bigger and better

On Deck
By Duncan Worthington

NO, I'M not writing about boat size, as the title of this article may at first suggest. I am referring to space; specifically Phuket and its surrounds.

Phuket has the name, the fame – some may say infamy – and that caché and recognition is powerful for Phuket's marine industry.

This 'Brand Phuket' has been built on the back of the island's tourism industry, the engine that drives most other industries on the island.

Phuket's marine industry, however, needs to look beyond 'Brand Phuket' and to define its own direction.

The Andaman Triangle of Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi are together the draw card for marine tourism. Any boat travelling to Phuket from overseas rarely stays only in Phuket. They explore the surrounding islands, bays and coves, the most well known and stunning of which are in Phang Nga Bay and Krabi – Phi Phi, the Hong Group of islands, Railay and others.

Together, the three provinces of Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi hold the allure to visiting yachts and also to charter guests and local boat owners. They are the calling card.



Together, the three provinces of Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi hold the allure to visiting yachts, charter guests and local boat owners. Photo: Kallerma

While Phuket is more often than not the jumping off point, an average seven-day boat charter itinerary will likely take in all three provinces (and perhaps more), so why aren't we talking more about the three provinces?

The Andaman Triangle to anyone who lives in Phuket is an obvious concept, and to most charter and tour operators it is already promoted to guests, but for the industry at large its importance needs to be underscored.

Going beyond the Andaman

Triangle, the Andaman region (north and south of Phuket) has such marine tourism potential but once a boat is away from Phuket and Krabi, there are limited onshore facilities.

Phuket is home to four world-class marinas, Krabi two, but head south and where is the next stop for a boat looking to berth securely? For a charter group or a private boat owner looking to cruise for an extended period of time, where do they go next? A few overnight stops on anchor – stunning as they are – and then it's the Ma-

laysian border and Langkawi Island – Malaysia's rival to Phuket.

It's time for Phuket's marine industry to boldly go... To think big and go long. With the sole attention on Phuket, industry growth will stagnate (some may say it already has), but to take a bigger view, to co-operate with surrounding areas and to jointly promote the Andaman Triangle both offshore and onshore, will reap benefits for all.

In addition to private sector support, there is an opportunity

for the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) here. Having produced a rather pretentious 'Amazing Thailand Luxury: Where Life Rules Everything' video last year that shows cigars, alcohol (advertising of which is banned/ restricted within country), and much more (including some luxury boating snippets), perhaps the TAT could direct some finances to promoting yachting as a whole and the Andaman Triangle in particular.

It's a product worthy of promotion – not just the cruising grounds but the onshore facilities too. It already has strong appeal and recognition that could be helped further with some public sector marketing support.

Showcasing the great cruising grounds accessible from Phuket and supporting further growth of onshore facilities in Phang Nga, Krabi and beyond – be it onshore services, shoreside support, charter operations or marina development – will reinvigorate the industry and produce tangible results for all.

Duncan Worthington is a long time Phuket resident and through Infinity Communications (infinity-comms.com) consults to leading consumer brands, hospitality and marine clients in Thailand. In his 'spare time' he runs the marine portal MarineScene.asia. #OnDeckPhuket

Gazette Crossword

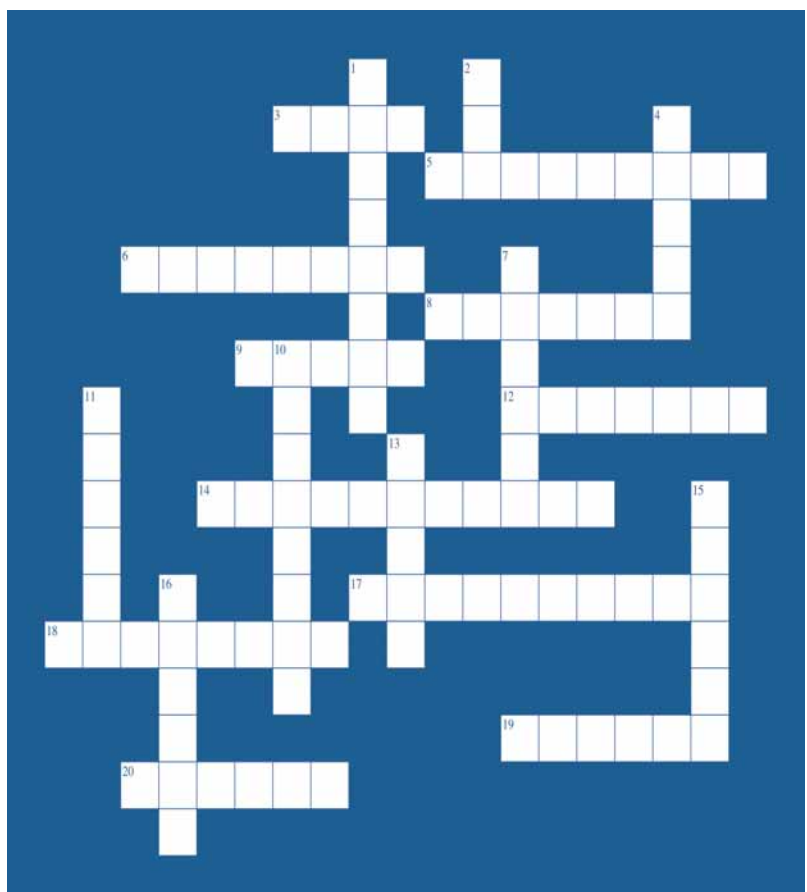
Test your local knowledge and word power.

Across

- 03. Prophetic sign
- 05. Lifesaver at Phuket beaches
- 06. Round table knight
- 08. Of the sea shore
- 09. Alternative to electric power
- 12. Served with ice cream
- 14. Risky entertainment during vegetarian festival
- 17. Planned Surin Beach park
- 18. To start, especially something new
- 19. Pole raised to initiate vegetarian festival
- 20. Breakfast food

Down

- 01. Private (especially belongings)
- 02. Land measure, equivalent to 1,600 square meters
- 04. Jacket part
- 07. Deli offering
- 10. Musical comedy
- 11. Seoul Native
- 13. Local name for methamphetamine
- 15. Foundation working to save animals in Phuket
- 16. Sound system



Solution on opposite page.



Family Law/Custody /Divorce/Will

Child Adoption

Notary Public

Litigation (Civil & Criminal Cases)

Company Setup

Business Contracts Property Law/Due Diligence

Visa & Work Permit

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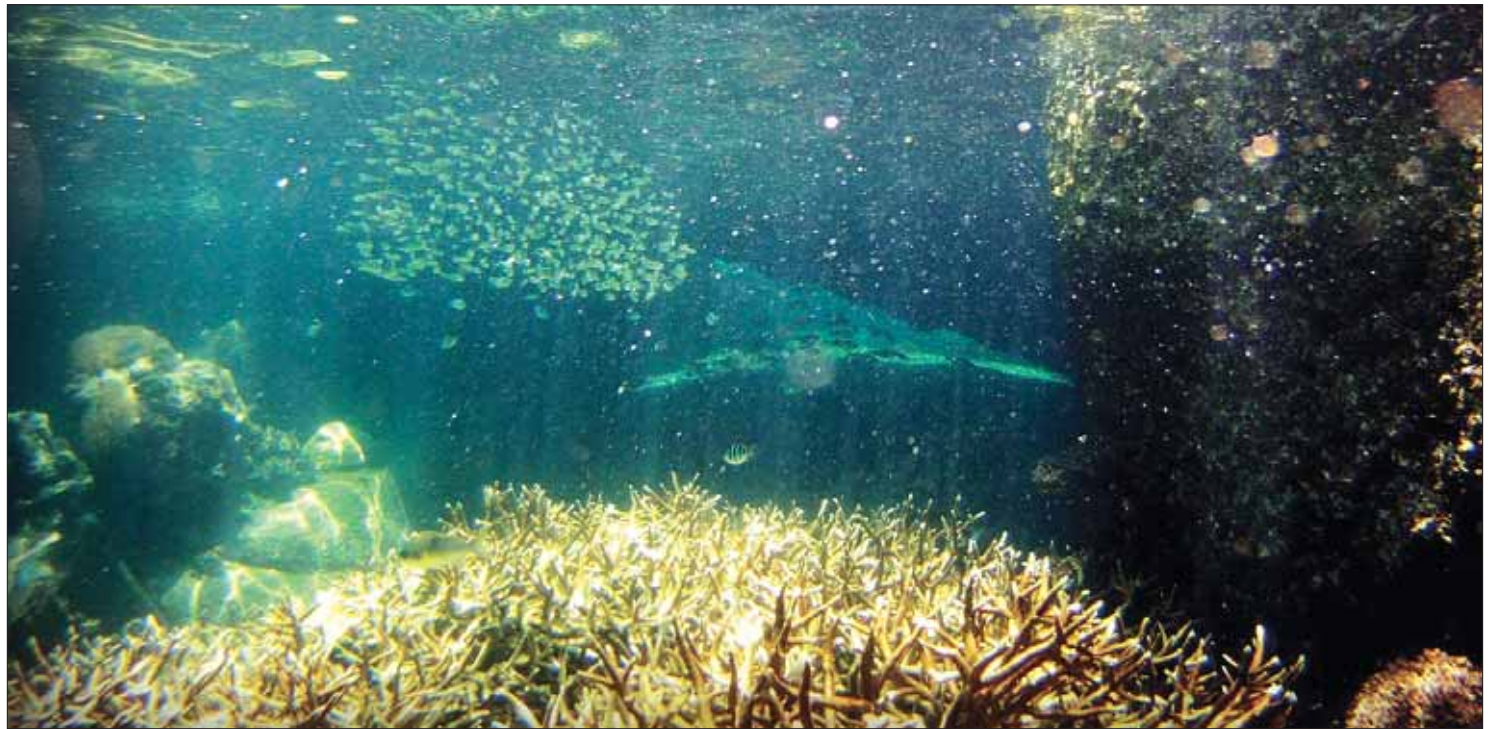
Implications of climate change



THE world's two most powerful countries, the United States and China, have just formally agreed to ratify the Paris climate agreement. This landmark commitment, sealed last December after two weeks of intense negotiations, needs to be ratified by 55 countries, representing 55 per cent of global emissions, in order for it to come into effect. According to a Xinhua report, ratifying the agreement would "further advance China's green, low-carbon development and safeguard environmental security".

Not easy to fulfill. Under the terms of the Paris agreement, China, the world's leading pollutant, would need to cut carbon emissions by 60-65 per cent per unit of GDP (gross domestic product) by 2030, and boost its use of non-fossil fuels so that they account for at least 20 per cent of its energy consumption.

The agreement is vital for the world's most-at-risk nations. Significantly, small island states were the first 14 countries to ratify the agreement. Thus the Maldives, like Phuket, profoundly affected by global warming and pollution, and which has suffered from the bleaching of much of its coral, was one of the first signatories. Coral reefs are a key attraction for visitors to the Maldives and one of the key



Coral bleaching is alarming for islands such as Phuket and Maldives, where reefs are a key attraction for visitors. Photo: Eco cafe' Phuket

drivers of the local economy. The government had already expressed fear that people will stop coming if the reefs are in danger. Phuket must consistently adopt the same stance.

Australia, more powerful and more ecologically aware than Thailand, possesses the Great Barrier Reef, the largest colony of coral in the world. But even there, global events such as abnormally warm ocean temperatures are beyond its control. There have been three mass bleaching on the Australian reef – all since 1998. Things have been, to some extent, exacerbated in this part of the globe by *El*

Nino, a pulse of warm water flowing around the Pacific Ocean. A national aerial survey had, by April, covered 991 individual reefs along the 2,300-km structure. Only 68 had escaped bleaching entirely and more than half had experienced severe damage. Divers are now in the process of confirming the findings.

If powerful nations such as Australia, the United States and China can do little in the short term to contain global climate change, then we in Phuket should be doing more to control things where we can. Thankfully, some key initiatives have been started in relation to the

precious marine environment. On Koh Phi Phi, local officials have linked up with tour and dive operators to rope off a coral zone (Hat Nopparat Thara - Mu Koh) with 1.6km of rope and 800 floats. The aim is to block all boats – especially speedboats, the worst offenders – from entering environmentally important areas where reefs, as well as swimmers, are crying out for protection. In addition, several islands overrun with tourist-laden boats, have been closed entirely – notably Koh Yoong and Koh Ta Chai.

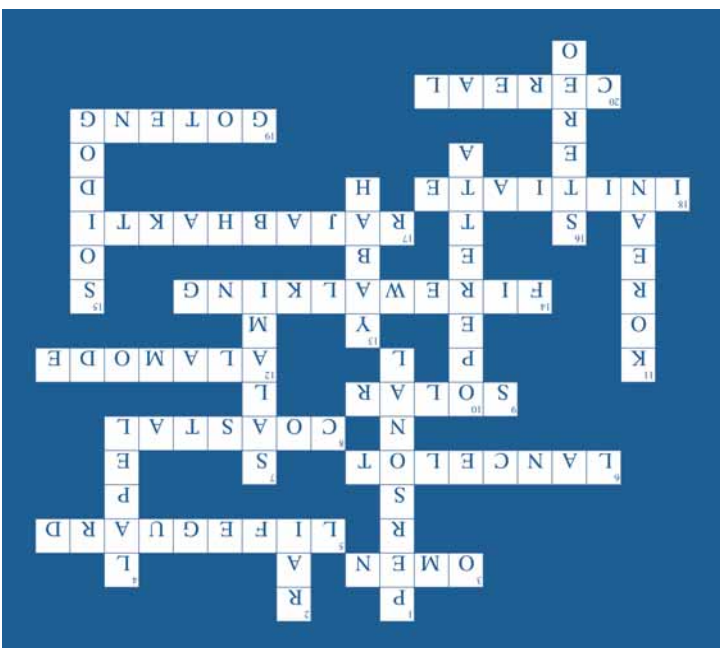
There are still major concerns. These steps should have been taken years ago. And protection

orders should be applied to all coral reefs, both those hugging Phuket's shoreline and those fringing the other islands in the Andaman Sea. These irreplaceable treasures are facing two enemies: rising sea temperatures and the calamitous impact of mass tourism and development. Once gone, these colonies will be lost forever. Maybe, just maybe, the tourists will go too.

If you have gardening or environmental concerns, contact Patrick at drpaccampbell@gmail.com. Many of his creative and academic publications can be found at his website: [GreenGaloshes Wordpress](http://GreenGaloshes.wordpress.com).

Crossword Solution

Turn the page upside down to read the answers.



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Opportunities abound as island grows



By The Book
Kevin Hodges

ANYONE living in or visiting Phuket will notice the amount of construction work going on around the island. From property development to schools, hospitals, marinas and roads – all types of infrastructure on the Island are undergoing development.

For several years now Phuket's residents have grown used to the traffic diversions around the construction of Phuket's underpasses at Darasamut, Samkong & Bangku but this is just the tip of the iceberg for what is coming next.

With continually growing tourist numbers, population and vehicles on the road, Phuket requires better infrastructure. There are currently plans in place for further projects for new and existing roads, hospitals, schools, tourist attractions, transport systems, hotels and more.

Recently highlighted infrastructure projects in the local and national media have been: the new highway which will be built from Nai Yang to Koh Kaew, the expansion of Central Festival and Phuket's Light



Sukhumvit Road in Central Bangkok. The public transport infrastructure planned for Phuket will open up new property investment opportunities.
Photo: Clay Gilliland

railway which will run from the airport down to Chalong Circle.

The development of a public transport system (Phuket's light railway and new highway) will result in more development along their routes. We will begin to see condos, housing projects, shopping facilities, office space and more development in locations that were previously overlooked. This in turn will increase land values.

A lot of Phuket's planned infrastructure projects are located in the province's central and eastern areas. As can be seen from the land map in SRE's market report, these locations currently have the lowest land values compared to Phuket's west coast and the south.

As infrastructure projects come to fruition the result will be greater increases in land val-

ues in these areas compared to other locations.

Another area of note is the northeast of the island, which continues to develop, all be it at a slower pace than the rest of the island. Plans for the new Sheraton Phuket Grand Bay Resort and Residences, brand new Kung Bay Marina, expansion of the existing Ao Phor Marina and the ever developing Thanyapura (United World

College). We expect to see more development in this area in the future and with land values by far the most reasonable in Phuket, this is a very good opportunity for property investors to buy and hold.

For more information about this article contact Kevin Hodges, Siam Real Estate (SRE) Tel: 076-324042 Email: kevin@siamrealestate.com ; www.siamrealestate.com

Chinese still driving local tourism, spending more

CONTINUING growth in the region's tourism industry is being driven mainly by China, according to the latest CBRE 'Hotel Megatrends' viewpoint report, released in September.

The total number of Chinese outbound tourists rose by 10 per cent year-on-year to 128 million in 2015, while spending grew by 26 per cent over the same period to reach US\$292 billion. China is expected to continue to lead growth, with around 134 million intra-regional trips forecast to be taken by mainland Chinese by 2020, cited the report.

In 2015, China ranked in the top three tourism source markets for ten out of 12 major countries in the region. Chinese arrivals to Japan doubled on a year-on-year basis in 2015, thanks to the rapid depreciation of the yen and more accommodative visa policies.

Thailand remains the top destination for Chinese outbound tourists (excluding Hong Kong) with 71.7 per cent

year-on-year growth in Chinese arrivals to Thailand last year.

However, according to research by the Financial Times, Chinese tourists generally spend the largest portion of their budget on shopping and just a small portion on accommodation.

"In the first half of this year, Chinese arrivals have continued to be Thailand's largest feeder market making up 30 per cent of tourist arrivals to Thailand, and accounted for 38 per cent of total arrivals to Phuket. Hotel performance in both cities has continued to be driven mainly by strong Chinese arrivals with record high occupancy the first half of the year," reported James Pitchon, Head of Research & Consulting, CBRE Thailand.

"China will continue to lead growth in outbound travel and spending. While previously Chinese tourists may have seemed reluctant to spend big on accommodation, there are signs that they are beginning to

take a greater interest in hotel quality and service, and result in the greater appreciation of and spending on accommodation. This is a significant opportunity, but hoteliers need to ensure they provide a service offering that meets the requirements of this increasingly important demographic," commented Robert McIntosh, Executive Director at CBRE Hotels, Asia Pacific.

Research indicates that Chinese tourists are not overly price sensitive towards accommodation. A 2013 survey found that only 10 per cent of respondents selected price as their most important consideration when selecting a place to stay on an overseas trip.

"Chinese tourists are most concerned about the comfort, star rating and facilities offered by hotels, along with the hotel's reputation and recommendations by friends and family or from travel sites. Cultural and language barriers, such as Mandarin speaking staff, signs and



Chinese are more concerned about comfort and star rating than cost.
Photo: Gazette file

literature was also seen as important and Chinese travellers are increasingly demanding that hotels provide them with tailored services that better fit their culture, while helping them to overcome the language barrier," Mr McIntosh added.

Shared Accommodation Poses Major Challenge

While the increase in Chinese outbound tourists will drive demand for accommodation, the rise of shared accommodation poses a major challenge

for the traditional hotel industry.

Advances in technology have made it possible for hosts to offer rooms or apartments for short-term rental via online platforms. Airbnb is the market leader, covering more than 191 countries and offering more than two million rooms or apartments for rent. Other active players include HomeAway, FlipKey, Rommorama and national level operators such as Tujia in China and Homie in Singapore.

– Phuket Gazette

Marriott, Starwood merge into world's largest hotel company

SEVERAL luxury hotels in Phuket joined the ranks of the world's largest hotel company last week with the merging of the Marriott and Starwood hospitality brands.

Marriott International formally completed its acquisition of Starwood Hotels & Resorts on September 23.

Following the US\$13.6 billion cash and stock deal, the merged company now has a combined collection of more than 5,700 properties and 1.1 million rooms across 30 brands in more than 110 countries.

The deal has also doubled Marriott's combined portfolio in Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Among them are four Marriott properties and three Starwood properties in Phuket. Under the Marriott brand are two JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa properties in Mai Khao plus a sister property in Nai Yang and the Courtyard by Marriott Phuket at Patong Beach.

The Phuket properties under

the Starwood brand are: The Naka Island, a Luxury Collection; The Westin Siray Bay Resort & Spa; and Le Meridien Phuket Beach Resort.

"Throughout our nearly 90-year history we have never stopped searching for innovative ways to serve our guests," said JW Marriott Jr, executive chairman of Marriott International. "With the addition of Starwood's strong brands, great properties, and talented people, we have dramatically expanded our ability to provide the best experiences to our customers.

The new conglomerate aims to be a 'good global steward, providing new opportunities for our associates and building the economic strength of the communities we call home,' he added.

The group's brands now cover numerous price points and market segments, from mid-scale options such as Courtyard and Four Points to lifestyle labels like AC Hotels, Moxy and Aloft. It



Starwood property Le Meridien Phuket Beach Resort is now part of the world-wide Marriott chain, following a US\$13.6 billion acquisition. Photo: Le Meridien

now commands three of the biggest upscale brands in the industry, in Marriott Hotels, Sheraton and Westin, and has a strong portfolio in the luxury sector, with Marriott's JW Marriott, Ritz-Carlton and Bulgari brands

complemented by Starwood's W Hotels, Edition and St Regis. There are also three semi-independent 'collections', namely Tribute Portfolio, Luxury Collection and Autograph Collection. Marriott paid US\$3.6bn in

cash to acquire Starwood and expects to incur one-off transaction costs of US\$140 million but are banking on achieving US\$250 million in 'annual cost synergies' along with increased sales.

- *Phuket Gazette*






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TWIN HOUSE FOR SALE

2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, living room, kitchen, laundry room, car parking, garden with covered balcony & BBQ station. Price: 2.8 million baht. Tel: 081-979 9825 (English). Email: stefansgoldbars@gmail.com

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Phuket Gazette

The Phuket Gazette seeks to fill the following position:

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- ▶ Graphic-design skills and knowledge of Adobe Illustrator, PageMaker, Indesign, Photoshop required
- ▶ Freehand drawing and web-design skills a plus
- ▶ Responsible, hard-working, attention to detail
- ▶ Able to work in a fast-paced environment and meet deadlines
- ▶ Good communication skills, team player
- ▶ Thai-English speaker

Qualified candidates are invited to send a CV to Khun Anna (General Manager), by email, fax or post to:

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79/94 Moo 4, Thepkrasattri Rd, T. Koh Keaw, A. Muang Phuket 83000
Tel: 076-273555, ext 102 | Fax: 076-615240
Email: anna@phuketgazette.net

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More than just a wild dream

By Kongleaphy Keam

EDWIN Wiek, 50, is the founder and director of Wildlife Friends Foundation of Thailand (WFFT).

WFFT is based in Petchaburi and Laos, but Edwin has been involved in several animal rescue cases in Phuket. The latest case is that of Milo, an orangutan that was freed from the Phuket zoo and found abandoned in a forest.

In 2008, Edwin and the WFFT were involved in the rescue of 12 orangutans found in a sub-standard zoo on the island. After many months of campaigning, the orangutans disappeared, only to be found in cages on the highway between Phuket and Phang Nga in February 2009.

Edwin is originally from Holland, where he was serving in the military. He first arrived in Thailand in 1989 to work with a fashion accessories company.

"We had about 200 employees and imported fashion accessories into Thailand. Two years later, I quit this job and decided to start my own company by the name of ESA

manufacturing. Things were going well, until I experienced a life-changing incident in 1999," says Edwin.

"In October 1999, I was driving home late one night from a seminar in Chumphon to my house in Cha-Am, Petchaburi Province. I fell asleep at the wheel and crashed into a tree. I wasn't even wearing a seat belt. I was conscious the whole time and could feel that I was bleeding. I just left my car there, caught a ride home and crawled into bed. In the morning, my neighbor asked my wife what happened to me, as he had seen my car 20km from Cha-Am in a ditch. That is when they found me asleep with blood on the bed."

Edwin says that this near-death experience made him reevaluate his life.

"From that moment, I realized that we never know when we're going to die, so we should do what we love. Personally, I've loved animals since I was a child. When I was seven years old, it was a dream of mine to be an animal rescuer, but we all know that in the real world, it's not always possible

to do what you dream of," says Edwin.

In 2000, Edwin decided to sell out his company and use the money to start WFFT. He first started out with two Thai friends by caring for stray animals from temples. Now the foundation has grown considerably, employs more than 124 staff members and operates from two offices – one in Thailand and another in Laos.

WFFT has several different projects including animal rescue, rehabilitation and veterinary assistance to wild animals in Thailand. It also operates a rescue center and wildlife refuge, including an elephant refuge.

"The more I learn about people, the better I like animals. Animals are very much like humans. They have a life, and they want to be free and comfortable. They need to be taken care of when they are sick, just like us. I think what we are doing at the WFFT is beneficial for society," he says.

"WFFT has received a lot of support and funds, both within Thai-

land and from international institutes. I have been traveling around the world to places such as Australia, the US and so on, to inform people of what we are doing at the WFFT. The support has been tremendous so far.

"I will keep do-

ing this until I get old, maybe for another 15 years or so. I have earned enough for myself, so I feel it's important to give something back to society," he says.



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