

Phuket Gazette

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'NOT EVERYONE AGAINST THE FLYOVERS WAS AT THE LATEST HEARING'

STALLED AGAIN

U-turn flyovers delayed once more as locals demand alternatives

By Kongleaphy Keam

PROTESTS by locals afraid of being adversely affected by the construction of flyovers along Phuket's main artery, Thepkrasatri Road, have once again stalled the final two projects in a 3.5 billion baht infrastructure upgrade for the province that was launched last July.

The building of the flyovers was set to begin in earnest this month, after the all-clear was given following a public hearing in January, but local business owners in the areas where the flyovers are planned came out in protest earlier this week, demanding that planners offer alternatives to the flyovers.

Among those raising concerns over the plans was Suwit Sagneamkun, representing Kee Hin Electric Phuket Ltd., which owns land close to one of the proposed u-turn bridges.

"Actually, it's fine that the Highways Office wants to build something to improve the traffic flow, but we are asking them to come up with alternative options," said Mr Suwit. "Why not an underpass instead of an overpass?"

"I am happy to sell the land to the government but a flyover would negatively affect the feng shui of the area. It will block the entrance to our premises and make doing business there difficult," said Mr Suwit

Jaran Kaewnoi, a representative of Methee Phuket cashew nut factory, raised similar concerns, saying that a flyover was not the answer.

"I did suggest in the first public hearing that they should construct an underpass and



Ombudsman Office Secretary-General Raksagecha Chaechai (left) met with local town planning and highways officers and protesters to discuss the demands and seek a way forward to free up congestion on Thepkrasatri Road. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

widen the road, rather than building a flyover," said Mr Jaran.

Mr Jaran added that he too would be happy for the government to expropriate his land, but was insistent that alternatives first be offered. "I don't know why it always ends with a flyover. The budget is huge and it affects a lot of people so please review the project once more," he demanded.

Mr Jaran told the *Gazette* he was aware that the two flyovers had already been 'approved' after a second public hearing earlier in the year at which no one had protested.

"Somehow those who were against the flyovers and made their voices heard at the first public hearing did not participate in the latest hearing, but there are several more who are still opposed to building the flyovers," claimed Mr Jaran.

A 200 million-baht budget was set aside last year for the Highways Department to build the two u-turn flyovers; one at the first set of traffic lights just north of Thalang Town and another at the Baan Koh Kaew Tha Ruea u-turn in front of Baan Jee Teng shrine, just south of...

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Phuket's new governor welcomed to the island

THE province greeted Dr Chokchai Dejamornthan from Chachoengsao Province as the new Phuket Governor on October 1.

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BUSINESS

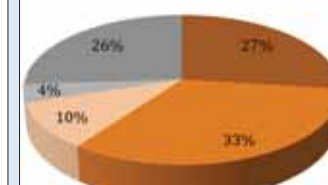


Winning design for official Phuket Smart City insignia revealed.

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C9 Hotelworks releases the latest real estate trend analysis.

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LIFE & STYLE



Spirits, swords, blessings, firewalks and more mark annual Veg Fest.

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LOCAL NEWS

Briefly

Man-of-War at Patong Beach stings swimmer

LIFEGUARDS at Patong Beach helped a swimmer last week who had been stung on one of her legs by a Portuguese Man-of-War.

The swimmer, who wished to remain anonymous, said the sting was small but painful.

The lifeguards said 'blue bottles' were rare in Patong and that they were usually found at Layan, Naithon, Nai Yang, Mai Khao and Sai Kaew beaches.

Beach-goers were warned to look out for venomous creatures at the end of last month, when blooms were spotted at the Nai Thon, Layan and Nai Yang beaches.

"Swimmers must be responsible for their own safety. The blue bottles float on the surface. Make sure you are not at risk of getting stung. Swim only in areas where lifeguards are on duty and where there are no red flags flying," Phuket Lifeguard Club President Prathaiyut Chuayuan said in a statement.

– Winai Sarot

Airport road to get landslide repair/treatment

A PLAN to prevent landslides along a road parallel to the runway at Phuket International Airport is expected to be completed by the end of this month.

The need for a plan came about when continuous rains on August 31 loosened the earth on the 141-meter-tall hill (Khao Bo Sai), and caused a landslide that spilled onto the road. It has yet to be rectified.

"We held meetings regarding the matter on September 1, 7 and 14 with relevant authorities to figure out an appropriate solution," said Somsak Pakdeerak, deputy director of Phuket International Airport. "The Phuket Highways Office is responsible for the design, which is expected to be completed by October 20."

Mr Somsak added that his

Local protests potholes



A Krabi local 'bathed' in a pothole on the morning of October 4, as an act of protest against road conditions. The man, who calls himself 'Rosemary', is 53-year-old Payong Noosiri. Several surprised locals watched as Mr Payong took pictures of himself bathing in a pothole in Krabi's Baan Lamthap village. Lamthap Tambon Administration Organization representatives said they had already requested a budget to fix the road, but were told they would have to wait until next year. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

own office, as well as the Aeronautical Radio of Thailand and Phuket Highways Offices, will be handling the finances for the project.

"We want to inform the public that we are not taking the matter lightly, and plan on repairing the road as soon as possible. Meanwhile, we apologize for any inconvenience caused," he said.

– Chutharat Plerin

Police catch teenage racers

TRAFFIC police nabbed two teen motorbike riders on October 2, who were allegedly racing with about 30 other riders along a stretch of road in Saphan Hin.

Police received complaints at about 5:30pm that a group of more than 30 teenagers were racing motorbikes near the Vegetarian Festival celebrations. Responding officers were only able to catch the two teens. The rest shot off on their bikes when police arrived.

The gang had reportedly blocked off the road from Saphan Hin to Klong Koh Pee so they could race along the strip.

"We are contacting the parents of the teens that were involved and inviting them to the station. The parents of one of the racers have already come forward. They were given a verbal warning," said Capt Komalat.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Officials board boats to visit flooded village

VILLAGERS in Ao Luek district have been using boats to get to and from their houses after torrential flooding left their neighborhood under water for the past month.

Following complaints filed with the Ao Luek Administration Organization (*OrBorTor*), Ao Luek District chief Chaiwut Buathong examined the site last week.

Approximately 300 meters of roadway have been flooded in the Ao Luek Noi sub-district.

Kallayanee Na Nakorn, 35, filed a complaint that her house and two other neighboring houses had been affected by flooding for more than a month. Ms Kallayanee also said that 50

rai of her fruit plantation sustained irreparable damage in the flooding.

"The Ao Luek *OrBorTor* gave us a boat, but that doesn't help us very much. We want a permanent solution, not a boat," said Ms Kallayanee.

"Some people claimed that the flooding was caused by our pipe installation project, but that isn't true," said Mr Chaiwut.

– Winai Sarot

Russian breaks arm while in red-flag zone

A RUSSIAN man broke his arm on October 4 when he was dashed against rocks by strong waves off Karon Beach, after ignoring red flags warning beach goers not to swim in the dangerous surf.

Viktor Sizouenko, 32, was rescued by lifeguards and given first aid by medics at the beach before being taken to Patong Hospital.

Eye witnesses said Mr Victor ignored the red flags on the beach and was slammed into a rock by the big waves.

"He was lucky not to have been more seriously injured," said Kata-Karon chief lifeguard Uten Singsom on October 4, who advised beach visitors to be extra careful with monsoon wind and rain now battering Phuket's shores.

Mr Uten said the monsoon season would clear up by the end of next month. In the meantime, he warned the public not to ignore the red flags put on the beaches for their safety.

– Winai Sarot

Samkong underpass nearly done officials assure

OFFICIALS told the *Gazette* that they believe construction will be completed on the long-delayed Samkong Underpass by the end of the month.

"The underpass is expected to be finished by October 31. We still have some work to finish, such as painting the lines on the roads," he added.

Starting from January 22 this year, the construction company Wiwat Construction Co Ltd has been fined 2 million baht per day for every day that the project is delayed.

The company last announced that the project would be completed by the end of August, following several previous delays in April, June, July and mid-August.

– Kongleaphy Keam

Tourist rescued

A CHINESE tourist was lucky a Royal Thai Navy rescue team was on hand after she nearly drowned in the Andaman Sea on October 1.

Xiaochang Lai, 23, along with five other tourists, was touring the bay on a longtail boat and had stopped to snorkel around the coral reef at Koh Gai.

Ms Lai lost consciousness while in the water and was separated from her group. The other tourists alerted the boat crew, who searched for approximately 10 minutes before finding her unconscious in the water. They then radioed for help, which arrived in the form of a team of Navy rescue officers from Lanta Noi Naval Station.

Rescuers performed CPR until Ms Lai regained consciousness and her heart resumed beating.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

TAT: Vegetarian Festival brings economic windfall

THE Phuket Vegetarian Festival is expected to generate 3.4 billion baht in revenue for the local economy, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) claimed on October 4.

According to the TAT, during the closing days of the festival, hotel occupancy along the parade routes was up to 90 per cent. Additionally, officials said occupancy of beach hotels also increased during the festival.

The director of the TAT's Phuket Office, Anoma Wongyai, told the *Gazette* that tourists from China, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Russia, India and the Middle East have visited Phuket so far in this year's festival.

"During the Vegetarian Festival, that is, between October 1-9, about 270,000 tourists visit the island," Ms Anoma said. "The many Thais and foreigners that visit are making Phuket hotel occupancies increase 72 per cent on average, or about 38,000 of Phuket's 53,000 rooms. And it's likely we'll see an increase this month due to long holidays, school breaks and National Day of the People's Republic of China."

"After decreasing over the past two months, the Chinese tourist situation is looking 'better' at the moment," Ms Anoma noted.



An emergency responder dons a respirator and helmet during a festival parade. Photo: Chutharat Plerin

She added that the number of Chinese tourists, many of them with their families staying both in Phuket Town hotels and beach resorts, will help buoy the profitability of the festival. She also said the number of higher-end independent travellers who stay at pool villas and beach hotels was increasing.

Bhuritt Maswongssa, president of Tourism Council of Phuket, said that flights to Phuket increased from 230 to 262 during this year's festival.

"What is bringing more tourists to Phuket this year is the overlap with the Chinese national holiday," Mr Bhuritt said. "Also, the heat in the Middle East and India this time

of year helps drive Phuket tourism."

"Australian tourists are confident in our public safety standards, so that area is doing well. During the rest of the monsoon season, we'll see about 75 per cent hotel occupancy on average," Mr Bhuritt added.

- *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

New V/Govs appointed

THE Interior Ministry announced Phuket's three new vice governors on October 5, who will be taking their posts on October 10.

The vice governors were named as: Sanit Sriwihok, previously the Surat Thani Provincial Chief Administrative Officer (Palad); Theera Anantasereewittaya, previously the Department of Local Administration inspector in Bangkok; and Siwaporn Chuasawat, previously the Department of Lands inspector in Bangkok.

V/Gov Siwaporn is only the second female vice governor of Phuket.

V/Gov Prajiad Aksornthammakul retired on September 30, while V/Gov Chokdee Amornwat has been transferred to a similar position in Surin, and Vice Governor Kajornkiet Rakpanit-manee was transferred to the vice governorship of Nakorn Sri Thammarat province, where former Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada took his new post earlier this month.

Former Phuket Gov Chamroen was moved after one year at his post, at the beginning of the government's new fiscal year.

Meanwhile, Phuket's new Governor Chokchai Dejamornthan has arrived on the island and begun to carry out his position as Phuket's Governor, meeting with members of the community involved in the annual Phuket Vegetarian Festival.

- *Chutharat Plerin*

Children throwing fireworks ignite Bang Tao blaze

POLICE said they believe a fire that spread inside Bang Tao's Supercheap store on October 4 was ignited by children's firecrackers.

Firefighters and personnel from the Cherngtalay Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM) office raced to the scene in mid-afternoon. Firefighters reportedly battled the blaze for 20 minutes before it was extinguished.

Goods inside of the store were destroyed by the blaze, reportedly set off by children who had been handling merchandise.

Shop workers said the children ignited fireworks, which are ubiquitous throughout the



Firefighters reportedly battled the fire for 20 minutes. Photo: Winai Sarot

island during Phuket's annual Vegetarian Festival, before running out of the store.

"According to the store staff, the fire burst out in the store and spread fast," said Colonel Rassada Kluengwong of the Cherngtalay Police.

"Staff tried to put out the

fire, but couldn't handle it on their own, so they called us," Col Rassada said.

As of press time, there was no estimation of the damage the fire had caused. Police said they were checking CCTV footage of the incident.

- *Winai Sarot*

Phuket officials push blind massage parlors to register

THE Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB) organized an informational seminar at the Bhukitta Hotel & Spa on September 27, in order to boost the standard of blind massage parlors and tweak their registration process.

The event was chaired by Phuket Vice Governor Chokdee Amornwat, who was joined by deputy director of the TAB, Surat Puengsiriwathana, and Petrat Techatracha, head of The Blind Vocational Promotion Association.

About 90 blind masseurs from the southern region attended the event.

“We have always given importance to blind people’s careers,” said Mr Surat. “More than 7,000 blind masseurs received an education from our association, after which most either went into a job or opened their own massage business.”



Blind masseurs across the country are facing stricter registration oversight. Masseurs listen to V/Gov Chokdee. Photo: Phuket PR

According to the new Healthcare Venue Act, strict rules have been implemented regarding the legalization of all massage businesses.

Parlors must register as of-

icial venues and refrain from illegal activities.

Similar seminars were organized in Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Pattaya.

– *Kongleaphy Keam*

U-turn trouble



An artist’s impression of the proposed 100mn baht u-turn flyovers to be built to ease traffic congestion on Thepkrasattri Road. Image: Phuket Highways Office

...From page 1

Heroine’s Monument.

Protesters delayed the building of the flyovers after the July 2015 announcement of the plans by then-governor Nisit Jansomwong.

The Highways Department was awarded a total of 1.75 billion baht to improve the island’s infrastructure through four projects. First was the 550-million-baht underpass currently underway at Chalong Circle, construction of which was scheduled to begin that month and be completed within 780 days.

Second, was the 600mn-baht underpass currently under construction at the Bang Ku intersection, connecting Bypass Road and Thepkrasattri Road.

The third and final phase of the multi-billion baht project was the proposed u-turns on the island’s main thoroughfare, each valued at 100 million baht with the aim of reducing traffic congestion.

However, about 65 per cent of the 180 attendants at public hearing on August 10 last year rejected the flyover plans.

Phuket Highways Office Director Samak Luedwonghad said at the time that most of those against the flyover plans were local land owners who would be directly affected by the construction of the u-turn bridges.

“We have never faced this problem before. Normally, locals agree with our projects, as they are supposed to help reduce traffic congestion. However, it will come down to the Highways Department to see if they want to hold another

vote or scrap the idea,” Mr Samak said last August.

The flyover plans were revised and tabled again for public consensus in January of this year, while Chamroen Tipayaongtada was still in the governor’s chair.

“I think the idea was crushed in the first public hearing due to misunderstandings and the lack of necessary information for the local people,” said Gov Chamroen.

The latest protests prompted a visit to the province by the country’s highest-ranking ombudsman, Secretary-General Raksagecha Chaechai, who met with local town planning and highways officers on September 28 to discuss the protesters’ demands and seek a way forward.

“We’ve received a complaint on the proposed flyover at Koh Kaew – the one near the entrance of Honda Marine,” said the secretary general.

“Locals complained that the road is used to deliver speedboats and marine equipment. They are concerned about the danger and inconvenience those movers may pose after the flyover is completed. They also said that a flyover would block scenic views in that area,” said Secretary-General Raksagecha. “Therefore, we have called upon all relevant officers to quickly review the plan and decide whether or not there’s a possibility of limiting the effect to locals.”

Secretary-General Raksagecha promised planners would brainstorm possible solutions to be presented at another meeting to be held in about three weeks time.

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Cockfight draws historic purse

TWO veteran roosters in Samui's cockfighting ring drew the largest bets in Thailand's history on September 29.

Cockfighters from Chumporn, Ranong, Surat Thani, Nakhon Si Thammarat and Samui circled around the Baan Lipa Yai ring yesterday afternoon, cheering and placing more than 2 million baht in bets.

The headlining fight, between an eight-month-old gamecock from Chumporn named *Hua Pok*, and a two-year-old cock from Samui named *Sor Kanitsorn*, were slated to fight through two twenty-minute periods. Both experienced animals had successfully fought every previous opponent, ratcheting up the gamblers' excitement for the bloody sport.

However, within a minute, *Sor Kanitsorn* had torn *Hua Pok* to pieces, and was declared the winner.

The organizer of the fights, Sayos Himthong, said the event serves to conserve "Southern Thailand's rich cockfighting culture" and helps to buoy Samui tourism.

Mr Sayos handed *Sor Kanitsorn's* owner, Kanitsorn Kietsahakul, the 2.2 million baht purse after the fight. Other prizes of 220,000, 110,000 and 55,000 baht were awarded to other cock owners.

- Suchat Hankij



Spectators and illegal gamblers watched the two prize roosters tear each other apart. Photo: Suchat Hankij



After about a minute, Sor Kanitsorn (white) had violently defeated Hua Pok (right). Photo: Suchat Hankij

Airport staff welcomes Vegetarian Festival flights

PHUKET International Airport celebrated the Phuket Vegetarian Festival by giving souvenirs to the passengers of several flights on the afternoon of October 5.

At about 3pm, Phuket International Airport Director Monrudee Gettuphan, together with the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Phuket Office staff were waiting at the domestic arrival terminal to give away souvenirs to three flights, including Air Asia flight FD 3162, Bangkok Airways flight PG 3273 and Thai Airways flight TG 215.

"There were in total about 640 passengers from the three flights," said Ms Monrudee. "We are very delighted to welcome them to Phuket's unique Vegetarian Festival."

Besides the celebratory welcome to the island's Vegetarian Festival, Ms Monrudee said the airport hosted a similar celebration of China's 'Golden Week', also known as China's National Day.

Airport staff and directors also welcomed passengers of Shenzhen Airlines flight ZH 9037 with souvenirs later that same evening.

- Kongleaphy Keam

Gambling den raided

A JOINT task force arrested 66 suspected gamblers and confiscated over half a million baht worth of gambling paraphernalia during a raid of a local gambling den in Krabi on September 29.

More than 30 officials from Nua Khlong Police, along with 16 military personnel, marched into the middle of a rice field at Pakasai sub-district of Nua Khlong District, where a local 'casino' had been set up.

"The place was in operation for about five days. We quickly set up a task force to prevent anyone from escaping," said Col Manop Kositaman of Nua Khlong Police.

"Two tents had been set up in the middle of the field, where the gamblers were participating in local games called Kung Pla (shrimp and fish) and Pai Pong (a game of chips)."

Officials also arrested Vichean Kertrak, the man reportedly running the casino,



A soldier inspects tickets at the site. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

and seized more than 190 chips worth about 546,000 baht.

"Locals believe the casino belongs to a powerful politician in the area, and we plan to question Mr Vichean regarding the matter," added Col Manop.

All those apprehended were taken to Nua Khlong Police station for further questioning and charged with illegal gambling.

- Kritsada Mueanhawong

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Artists protest coal-fired plant

TWENTY artists gathered at Krabi Provincial Hall to stage a peaceful protest on the morning of September 29, against a coal power plant slated to be built in the Nua Khlong District.

Vasan Sitthiket, an artist and activist who is part of the group, painted landscapes depicting how locals in the area would be affected by the plant.

"We went to the area that will be a coal plant and painted 26 pictures of people's lives in Baan Laemhin," he said. "We showed those paintings to the government so they can at least see how beautiful it is and realize how the coal plant construction will impact it."

"We strongly believe that once the plant is built, the area will lose its natural beauty and locals' lives will be negatively affected," he added.

Some of the paintings were given to locals, while some are to be taken to Bangkok to showcase at exhibitions.

Greenpeace representatives have staged similar protests in the past.

In October 2014, hundreds of Krabi residents stood together against a proposed coal-fired power plant at a public hearing. The protesters



The group of artists gathered in front of Krabi Provincial Hall with their paintings. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

claimed that the meetings were setups and locals were not being heard.

In November 2014, local fishermen in Krabi joined the fight against an 870-megawatt coal-fired power plant to be built in Nua Khlong District.

Angry villagers congregated at the Baan Klong Ruo pier in Nua Khlong, wielding large signs that read: "Protect Krabi from coal-power plant" and waving green flags picturing a dugong calling for "No coal".

Krabi Vice Governor

Somkuan Khanngern met with the artists and said that he would bring the matter to the attention of Krabi Governor Pinit Boonlert. The artists then left provincial hall without incident.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Cobra crawls into Krabi car

SNAKE catchers in Krabi pulled a large king cobra from a car on October 2.

The deadly three-meter-long snake had hidden behind the headlight of the car after falling onto the vehicle from a tree.

Suchayanmak Sukapan, 42, had parked her car under a tree in front a house in Din Udom sub-district, Lamthap District, when she happened upon the snake.

"I was getting in to my car when I heard something fall on the hood. A big cobra had fallen out of the tree and then crawled underneath the hood of my car so I called in the local snake catchers," said Ms Suchayanmak.

A crowd gathered to watch the volunteer snake catchers, who spent about 30 minutes trying to lure the snake out from inside the housing of the front-left headlamp. They eventually removed the housing and used a snare on a long stick to catch the cobra.

"I was so shocked and scared. It's lucky I saw it before I drove off," said Ms Suchayanmak.

The snake catchers warned the public to be extra vigilant for snakes, especially in wooded areas, and advised always keeping windows and doors shut.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Krabi vet cares for baby elephant

A VETERINARIAN in Krabi is appealing the public to help fund milk supplies for a newborn male elephant who was rejected by his mother and needs up to 20 liters of infant formula a day.

The baby elephant was born on September 7 to a 20-year-old elephant named 'Pang Rampai'. However, the mother is refusing to feed the young pachyderm so veterinarian and elephant keeper Kajornpat Boonprasert has moved the baby to an elephant hospital in Klongthom District.

"The baby elephant's mother rejected him and tried to harm him. We tried to keep him close to his mother, but she can't produce enough milk. This had stunted the baby's growth and he has dry skin as a result," said Mr Kajornpat.

"We started feeding him powdered milk for babies but he consumes 10-20 liters a day, which costs about 1,000 baht daily, but that is more than we



Mr Kajornpat feeds his new calf. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

can afford."

Mr Kajornpat confirmed that the month-old baby elephant's condition improved considerably after he was hospitalized. However, he still needs to be

closely monitored.

"As it is the end of the year, we don't have enough money left in our budget to provide for him," said Mr Kajornpat.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Burmese man succumbs to anal wounds in Samui

A MYANMAR man died on the afternoon of September 28 in Koh Samui, nine days after he was admitted to hospital with a torn anus, anal inflammation and a blood infection from a torn intestine.

Capt Issaret Saneangwan of Samui Police received reports regarding the deceased from Samui Hospital.

"Thirty-year-old Mueang Santoo had passed away about an hour before we arrived at the hospital," said Capt Issaret. "Hospital staff confirmed that he was admitted on September 19 with a high fever."

Hospital staff told police that several men – who claimed to be his 'friends' – brought him to the hospital, but then disappeared after he was admitted.

"The staff don't know who the men were or where they work," added Capt Issaret.

"For now, we only have the deceased's name, but we are



The victim spent nine days in hospital. Photo: Suchat Hankij

trying to get the other men's identities as well as the whereabouts of the victim's relatives."

As of press time, police had still not contacted the victim's relatives, nor had they found the men who brought him in.

– Suchat Hankij

Mother faces human trafficking charges

A 42-year-old woman is facing human trafficking charges after she allegedly forced her underage daughter to sleep with an elderly man for money and who eventually became pregnant.

Police believe the girl was 13 at the time of the first incident in Trang's Kan Tang District.

The girl's grandmother is alleged to have continued the arrangement after her mother left. The now 15-year-old girl gave birth to a child in March. Both she and the baby are now under the care of Songkhla Home for Children.

"The girl's mother now faces charges for human trafficking and procuring a girl under 15 for prostitution," Trang Police deputy chief Colonel Triwit Sriprapa said on September 30.

The 66-year-old grandmother and the 72-year-old customer were arrested and charged on September 27.

"The girl's mother denies that she took her daughter to the elderly man for sex and demanded money," Col Triwit said.

The woman is now living in another province with a new husband.

DSI official's death probe to end soon

INVESTIGATORS from Thung Song Hong Police Station in Bangkok summoned a former colleague of deceased land official Tawatchai Anukul on October 3, to testify in a bid to find clues to the cause of his mysterious death.

Mr Tawatchai, a suspect in the case of an illegal land-deed registration, died while in the custody of the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) on August 30. The autopsy found that his death stemmed from a ruptured liver, bleeding in the stomach due to blunt force trauma and suffocation – while the DSI had earlier claimed he hanged himself with a pair of socks.

The Land Department's litigation expert Thawatchai Boonkaewwan testified to police about Mr Tawatchai's work and his alleged abuse of authority in signing rights documents for land encroaching on national parks in Phuket and Phang Nga provinces.



Thung Song Hong superintendent Col Mana Pohchuay said police should be able to conclude the case as soon as witness interviews and forensic test results were complete.

Central provinces warned to brace for storm

The central provinces of Chai Nat, Ayutthaya and Ang Thong should prepare for floods while Bangkok must install more pumps and dredge drainage ditches, the Interior Ministry permanent secretary said on September 30.

Kritsada Boonrat said flooding in the three central provinces was worrying, but not as severe as 2011 because major dams such as Bhumibol and Sirikit could take in 30 to 40 per cent more water.

Many areas are facing floods and residents are panicking. Flooding is a natural disaster caused by water volumes from the North and pouring rains flowing into the Chao Phraya River. He said ineffective drainage was to blame for floods in Bangkok.

Mr Kritsada said Interior Minister Gen Anupong Paochinda has ordered the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) to install more pumps and dredge drainage pipes for more effective water management.

"Please do not demolish flood barriers because it would cause trouble to all people," he added.

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

Alleged forgery ring members interrogated

INVESTIGATORS interrogated two American suspects on October 3, now in Bangkok Remand Prison, for alleged passport forgery.

After a two-hour meeting with investigators at Phra Khanong Police Station, Lt Gen Sanit Mahathaworn, head of police in Bangkok, said investigators had made headway but details could not be revealed.

Police were still waiting for confirmation from Interpol on the identity of alleged gang leader Herbert Craig La Fon, whose photograph appeared on seven passports with different names, while two passports under his name had a photo of someone else.

Gen Sanit said police were looking into how Charles Edward Ditlefsen, a US citizen of Hungarian descent, was linked to this gang and what he was doing in Thailand. Mr Ditlefsen's body was found butchered and stuffed in a freezer in a building on Sukhumvit Soi 56 that was raided on September 23.

Elephant killed, bus driver's legs fractured

A WILD elephant was killed in a collision in Lampang Province on September 30, after being hit by a bus travelling from Bangkok to Chiang Mai on September 30, leaving the driver with broken legs.

None of the 25 passengers aboard the bus were hurt.

It is believed the male elephant died instantly, while the bus driver, Narit Jitthrong, was transferred to a hospital.

The daily duty officer of Hang Chat Police Station, Cap-

tain Wiroj Saeng-eiam, who reported the accident on Chiang Mai-Lampang Road, said the elephant had escaped from the Doi Phamueang Wildlife Sanctuary.

The driver has since been charged with reckless driving.

Zika threat to be monitored in 16 provinces

ALL PREGNANT women living in 16 provinces where Zika outbreak has been detected will be tested for the virus, Public Health Minister Piyasakol Sakolsatayadorn said on October 3, as two babies from infected mothers were born with severe birth defects.

The newborns were diagnosed on September 30 with microcephaly linked to the virus and had abnormally small heads, although that problem can be caused by many factors.

These babies were the first in Southeast Asia linked to this severe impact from the mosquito-borne virus.

The Zika virus has so far been found in parts of 16 provinces, the minister said, so testing is planned for the continuous public safety.

"The ministry will provide information on taking care of affected mothers and babies."

Dr Piyasakol presided over a meeting with officials to discuss Zika and design more measures to combat it.

He said the ministry had been monitoring and controlling Zika, eradicating Aedes mosquitoes and having pregnant women tested to see if they had contracted the virus.



Phuket Gazette

Welcome 47th Governor

The *Phuket Gazette* is pleased to welcome new Governor Chokchai Dejamornthan to the island and also to thank him for taking the time to outline his objectives to the Phuket community through our monthly 'Governor's Letter' [see facing page].

Dr Chokchai, the island's 47th governor dating back over a century and the 11th since the year 2000, clearly understands that his new position will present a host of challenges far different from any he has faced in his previous positions.

While Phuket may be the country's smallest province, history has shown that it can hold big-time problems for incoming governors unfamiliar with the local powers-that-be, and all the problems associated with governing a province with a tourism-based economy and a huge migrant workforce – both legal and illegal.

While two other large Thai metropolitan jurisdictions, Bangkok and Pattaya, enjoy special administrative status that allows residents to elect their own governors, Phuket's top bureaucrat continues to be directly appointed by the Interior Minister.

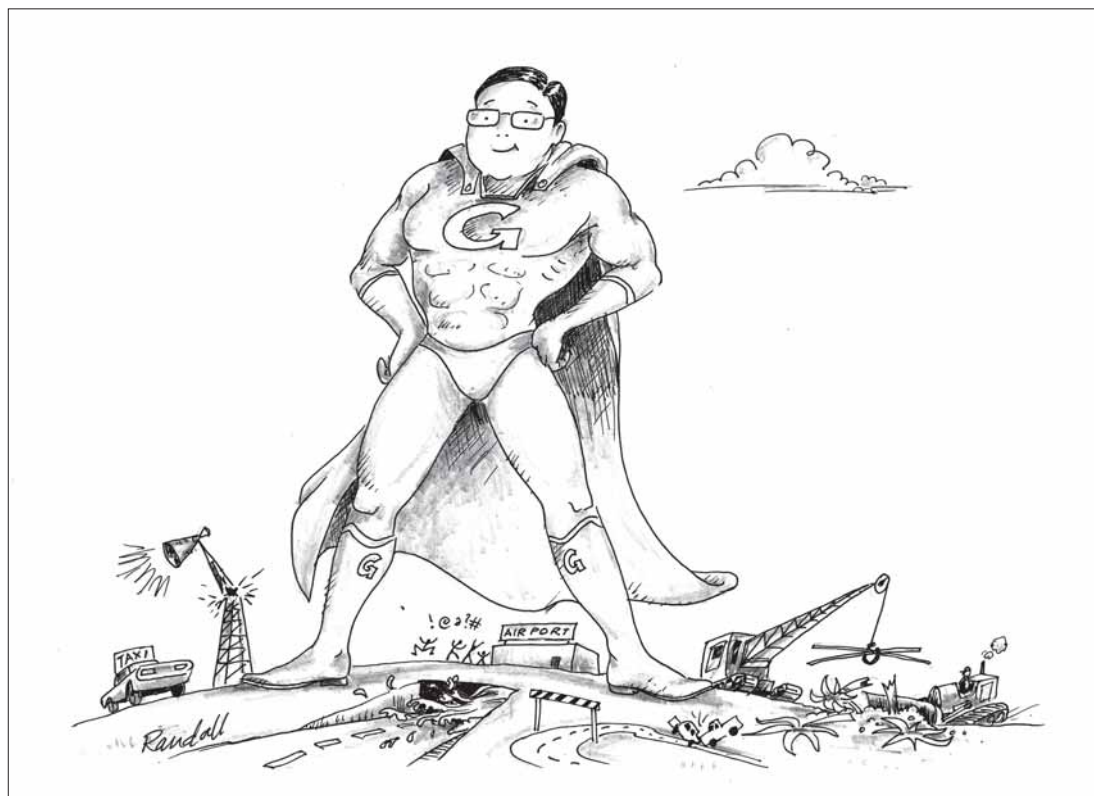
In the past, this has led to conflicts of interest with elected local leaders, especially with ministers appointed by the once-powerful Shinawatra clan and their allies.

One former governor with little previous knowledge of the island, the affable Preecha Ruengchan, was quietly transferred out of the province not long after taking up office in 2008.

Given Phuket's status as a world-class tourist destination, Dr Chokchai's naming as governor has to be seen as a show of support by the current military government. This is likely because he has developed a reputation as a fair, but no-nonsense graft buster during his tenure in the Thai civil service. If ever a province needed a leader with such a resume, it is Phuket; there is still plenty of graft waiting to be busted here.

The government of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-O-Cha deserves credit for tackling long-standing issues of corruption in the province dating back decades, and on both sides of the national political divide. We hope that the appointment of a true 'outsider' reflects the government's commitment to keep up this fight, even if it is necessarily selective and far from comprehensive.

The *Gazette* also takes this opportunity to welcome Dr Chokchai's wife Rawewan, who will serve as chair of the Phuket Provincial Red Cross Committee.



Show surf safety videos on flights

Re: Russian swimmer dashed against rocks at Karon Beach, Oct 4

I saved a Chinese man from drowning in Patong Bay two days ago.

He had a bodyboard but could not lie on it to save himself. Dragged him into the surfboard I hired and took him to safety.

Maybe show some surf safety videos on all flights coming from these places to highlight the dangers in the ocean at this time of the year.

Clinton Shelley
Facebook

Ruining reputation of honest people

Re: Island View: Tourism industry needs a rehaul, Oct 4

So many people have had similar experiences, it is disgraceful.

You just have to work out which 'smile' you are getting, as they rip you off and knife you in the back. Sad for the honest ones.

Julie Stafford
Facebook

Barbaric and uncivilized practice

Re: Cockfighting purse largest in Thai history, Sep 30

Yes. It's barbaric and tends to define Thailand as 'third world'. Any civilized person seeing it would be shocked and totally disgusted – not too smart

Letters to the Editor

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

for a country wishing to attract more foreign tourists. Shame, shame, shame on it.

Richard Aitkin
Gazette forum

No scenic views left in Phuket

Re: U-turn flyovers delayed again after local protests, Oct 3

Scenic views? They must be talking about the mass of power lines or all of the unkempt buildings.

Phil Phelan
Facebook

Sounds more like a rape case

Re: Burmese dies from anal injuries, Sep 30

I seriously hope he wasn't raped, but it sounds like it. RIP, young man.

Tina Maria
Gazette forum

Three hours for a simple process

Re: Opinion: Confusion at new airport terminal, Oct 2

I almost missed my flight

since I had to check-in at the old terminal then take a bus to the new terminal to go through immigration.

We were the last ones on the flight.

If Bangkok airways are flying internationally then do it all out of the international terminal.

You need 3 hours to go through this simple process.

Scott Alan Pontillo
Facebook

True spirit of the vegetarian festival

Re: Opinion: Phuket Shrines Association chief explains spirit of Veg fest, Oct 3

What an interesting article. It certainly answered a few of my questions about the festival.

Chas
Gazette forum

The fiance has a responsibility too

Re: Law, Life and Society: Understanding the Thai concept of dowry, Sep 30

"This could have been avoided if he had learned about Thai traditions before deciding to get married."

That's very one-sided. I think to be fair, the Thai girl should also have made the effort to explain to her boyfriend what was expected too.

Ewart
Gazette forum

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Gov Chokchai takes command



Governor's Letter
By Dr Chokchai Dejamornthan

I'VE always wanted to come to Phuket. I think it's my good luck to eventually have the chance to work here. Phuket is totally different from Maha Sarakham. I moved from the countryside to the city, from a place with far fewer entertainment venues, but also much fewer conflicts.

On my first day here, I saw several bad drivers. I want to see Phuket people obeying traffic laws. We are all aware of the law, but sometimes we ignore it or breach it. Following regulations is very important and this is something I want to ensure during my time here.

There are many issues which only exist because someone is profiting from the situation. However, I believe that every problem has a solution. Problems can always be fixed if we follow the right procedure and talk to the right people. I have faced many challenges so far in my career and I don't believe that any problems in Phuket are too big to handle. I was handling countrywide issues as the deputy director of the Department of Local Administration, so I believe I am up to the task. I intend to have a hands-on approach, joining in as many events and initiatives as possible.

As I said, Phuket is very different from Maha Sarakham. Back there, I had to work hard to draw attention to the province, as earning a sufficient income was difficult for the locals. Phuket is already well known, but the problems in



On his first day as new Phuket Governor on October 1, **Dr Chockchai Dejamornthan** promised to deal with bad driving in the province and strategize Phuket's path to smart city status. Originally from Chachoengsao, he holds a doctorate in philosophy

from the Christian University of Thailand, a master's in Social Development from the National Institute of Development Administration, and a bachelor's degree in Law from Thammasat University.

Here he outlines his plans for the province during his tenure.



Gov Chokchai says he is sometimes known as 'kind uncle Chok' because of his friendly and relaxed nature. Photo: Chutharat Plerin

Phuket are more complicated, to my knowledge. However, there is also immense potential and outstanding ability to go with it.

The main issues on the agenda are improving the traffic situation, getting rid of corruption, boosting tourism and working on the smart city initiative. These are all listed in the national agenda and I

consider them top priority issues.

I have a campaign in mind, known as the 'Recover Phuket campaign; reconciliation, cooperation and vision'. I haven't chalked out all the details yet, but I believe it will be a win-win situation for all. I aim to focus on projects that benefit the majority, not just a particular

group or a select few individuals. The general public, private sector and public sector must cooperate with each other to drive Phuket forward.

I will not change any of the policies implemented by the provincial government, because I believe the authorities are capable enough and have put much thought and effort into formulating these strategies. They only want what's best for us and I respect that. I will, however, work toward making this vision more practical and achievable. The hardest part is coming down to the grassroots level and planning out every detail to make these strategies as practical as possible. I will study all these plans as soon as possible.

Phuket already has a great reputation for beautiful scenery and local products. We just have to work toward adding more value to it. We are already on our way to being a smart city, but I want to add something more to it – I want it to be a city of happiness.

One major area to focus on is the speed of government service. I believe it is necessary for government departments to provide fast and efficient solutions to the public. We have to come up with a system to make sure our work is quick and accurate.

As I am new to the province, I am still trying to prioritize the problems that I will deal with first. We must take it step by step and talk things through first. I am an honest person – I believe in following the rules and playing by the system. If anyone has any problems, we can hash them out together. We may disagree with each other on some points, but once a fi-

nal decision is made, everyone has to abide by it and accept it. There should be no hard feelings.

I promise to use my knowledge and experience to do what's best for Phuket. I am not unduly worried as I have worked with Phuket government officials before, so my experience will come in handy. My superiors have decided that it's best for me to work here, so I accept their decision and will do my best. If I am not satisfied with the results, I will reevaluate myself and my strategy. My main goal is always to get the best results.

I came here with a low profile and have nothing to lose. Once I decide to do something, I dig my heels into it and give it my best. I believe in being above board and transparent in all my endeavors, so if I do something, my superiors will always know about it. People sometimes call me "kind uncle Chok" and I agree with that. I am a relaxed and friendly person and that's the kind of environment I like to work in, without any formality or external pressures. That is why I'm happy to be here on this island with beautiful sea views.

I was not born or raised in Phuket and I don't know how long I'll be here. However, that will not stop me from putting my foremost efforts into doing everything possible for the benefit of Phuket and its people. There is no point in conflict and rivalry. Let's all work together, cooperate with each other, maintain a productive and friendly environment and strive to do what's best for Phuket.

Words from the Wise

"Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life."

– Confucius

"Have patience with all things, But, first of all with yourself."

– Saint Francis de Sales

"You're only given a little spark of madness. You mustn't lose it."

– Robin Williams

Issues & Answers

Which hotels serve vegetarian food?

I AM a vegetarian and my family and I wish to go to Phuket during the Vegetarian Festival.

Are there any suggestions for hotels which provide vegetarian food in Phuket?

Kanda Bangkok

Ms Wandee PanPeng, Chief of Thai Hotel Association Southern Chapter replies:

Hotels in Phuket Town, such as

Pearl Hotel, are the most appropriate holiday destinations for vegetarians.

This is because there are lots of Chinese-Thais in the area serving traditional vegetarian food.

Many other hotels in and around Phuket Town also serve vegetarian food, so you are sure to find something that suits your needs.

We look forward to welcoming you to the Vegetarian Festival and hope you and your family have a memorable stay in Phuket.

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

Submit your issue at:

www.PhuketGazette.net/IssuesAnswers

Leading tech stocks emerge



AS OF mid September, the overall market appeared to be in a volatile choppy transition phase. Some individual stocks are doing well while others are continuing to be punished. Certain indices such as the S&P 500 aren't exactly performing that well either.

However, there are leadership stocks forming, consolidating and blasting higher, with technology stocks doing particularly well.

For example, Apple Inc (NASDAQ: AAPL) added nearly US\$80 billion in market cap in just one mid-September week and I (along with my clients) have been taking positions in the stock for several weeks now for a few key reasons.

In 2009, at the bottom of the financial crisis, Apple was at the US\$15-20 level, before blasting higher, until a 2013 correction that ended in a further lift-off.

As with the S&P 500, Apple had been in correction mode, or just in a volatile downtrend, since around 2014. However, that downtrend line on the technical charts was broken about six weeks ago – a clear sign to get back into shares.



On the Watch List: Tech company Gigamon provides active visibility into physical and virtual network traffic, allowing for stronger security and superior performance. Photo: Gigamon

Secondly, Apple has also broken through a ceiling or 'neckline' on its technical chart, formed by a couple of recent highs with shares now heading back towards a second neckline formed by a previous all-time high. If shares can reach that second neckline, a healthy base will form on the technical chart with shares having the potential to move much higher.

Thirdly, recent Apple trading volume has been huge, with big institutional investors stepping back in to buy up more shares.

Overall, Apple has a very healthy and bullish looking technical chart right now, and

we should give the shares some room to run even higher.

On the other hand, Apple falling back to break through the US\$110 level would serve as a warning sign to investors that shares could plunge even further. Should Apple shares fall below the US\$103-104 level for a 10 per cent decline, investors will probably start cashing out of their positions to prevent more serious losses.

Another tech stock I have been watching for some time is small cap Gigamon Inc (NYSE: GIMO). The company provides active visibility into physical and virtual network

traffic, allowing for stronger security and superior performance. Understanding what it does is not so important for investors right now though as its technical chart tells us almost everything we need to know.

Gigamon's chart from 2013 until earlier this year shows one giant bottoming formation, before shares began blasting off from the US\$30 level at the beginning of summer to a new high around the US\$34 mark – and then a second high at around the US\$37 level.

I recently took a position at the US\$48 level, because shares still have the potential to

move up to the \$60 level. Likewise, there is always the chance for shares to fluctuate and consolidate sideways for the next few months, especially if the entire market takes a hit. If shares pull back to below the US\$44 level, I will probably be forced to exit my position to avoid the risk of more losses.

Despite the considerable uncertainty surrounding the US presidential elections, the fallout from Brexit and the threat of terrorism, the goal for investors should be to identify and hold shares in strong leadership stocks such as Apple and Gigamon and keep them for months or years to come; as long as their price action supports holding on to them. The old buy-and-hold tactic has not been easy lately, due to the recent volatility, but I am watching more individual stocks slowly starting to hold onto their gains.

Don Freeman, BSME is president of Freeman Capital Management, a Registered Investment Advisor with the US Securities Exchange Commission (SEC), based in Phuket. He has over 15 years of experience working with expatriates, specializing in portfolio management, US tax preparation, and financial planning. Call for a free portfolio review. Don can be reached at 089-970 5795 or email: freemancapital@gmail.com.

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Biz leaders make French connection



Phuket tourism businesses are targeting French tourists for the upcoming high season. Photo: Phuket Reporter Club

By Chutharat Plerin

PHUKET'S tourism industry leaders are banking on boosting the number of foreign visitors to the province by about 20 per cent during the year-end high season by attracting more French tourists.

Local hoteliers, tour operators and agencies are hopeful of a new influx of French nationals after a string of successful roadshows in Nice, Lyon and Paris from September 26-30 to promote tourism in the province. The 'fact-finding tour' was jointly organized by the Phuket Tourist Association (PTA) and the Phuket Provincial Administration Organization (*OrBorJor*) with the aim of targeting a broad spectrum of potential visitors for the upcoming new year – from young travellers to 'quality tourists' seeking secluded and luxurious holiday accommodation.

"We joined the event in September on the advice of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). Many French travel to warmer places during their winter," said PTA President Sathirapong Na Takuatoong.

"We've had a lot of positive feedback from tourism representatives in the three cities we visited. Each year Phuket gets about 300,000 visitors from Paris; 80,000 from Lyon and 60,000 from Nice," Mr Sathirapong said, adding that most other segments of Phuket's tourism market were doing well, except for the Chinese market, which had been slightly impacted by negative news about zero-dollar tours in Phuket by China-based tour operators.

TAT Paris Director Areerat Chunpranusorn said Phuket received a lot of attention at the expo compared to an Indonesian tourism roadshow being held in the French capital the same day.

"We had significant interest from prominent businesses at the Paris roadshow – proof that Phuket offers outstanding potential compared to neighboring competitors," said Ms Areerat, adding that more flights with special deals between Phuket and the three French cities were helping to attract more international visitors.

Phuket Tourist Association Vice President Bhumikitti Ruktaengam said the France visit was also an opportunity to build business relations and spread news about the new international terminal at Phuket Airport as well as Phuket's status as a 'City of Gastronomy' awarded by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), plus Phuket's drive to become a smart city.

TAT Marketing executive Prakrit Saiporn said thousands more French tourists were choosing Phuket as a holiday destination with Thailand welcoming about eight per cent more French visitors than last year.

"Tourist trends are changing. We used to get mostly middle-aged tourists visiting northern Thailand for its cultural attractions, but now we are seeing more young French tourists coming to Phuket for the beach life," said Mr Prakrit.

OrBorJor council member Somkid Supap said seeing how things were being done in the French tourist cities was good for gathering concepts that could be applied to Phuket.

Next, the PTA is off to the ITB Asia travel and trade expo from October 19-21 in Singapore and then the ITB Berlin in Germany, March 9-12 next year. Meanwhile the PTA plans to push for more Chinese tourists in February and more Middle Eastern travellers from the UAE, Iran and Qatar visiting in April.

Smart city insignia revealed

By Sukawin Tanthavanich

THE Phuket Chamber of Commerce launched Phuket's official 'Smart City' logo at an awards ceremony on September 23.

The colorful contemporary design of a Sino-Portuguese style archway was designed by Ekkachai Jingjai, who was awarded 10,000 baht by Phuket Chamber of Commerce President Surachai Chaiwat for his intricately thought out illustration symbolizing Phuket's past, present and future.

Mr Ekkachai's logo was one of three shortlisted designs as part of a contest held to determine the official emblem for Thailand's pilot smart-city province. About 31 designs were submitted, of which one was chosen as the official emblem and two others were chosen as runners up, receiving 5,000 baht each.

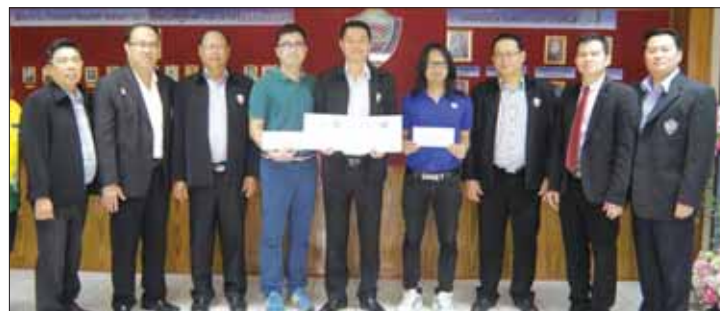
The winning design comprises five unique dimensions of Phuket, explained Mr Ekkachai.

"The archway refers to Phuket's Sino-Portuguese identity in the architecture of Phuket Town. The pattern of dots joined by lines represents connectivity and the ease of sharing information managed by advanced technology.

"The doorway is an entrance into a 'smart living economy' in a city with good management



This design of a Sino-Portuguese archway by Ekkachai Jingjai was the winning entry in a contest to design Phuket's smart city insignia.



Mr Ekkachai (4th right) with other contestants and officials at the award ceremony. Photo: Phuket Chamber of Commerce

backed by technology. The Keyhole represents unlocking the potential of a 'smart economy' in a digital hub of creativity.

Finally, the water under the arch is symbolic of sustainable tourism that will bring happiness to all – locals, investors

and tourists alike."

Mr Surachai said the multi-colored archway was a reflection of a multicultural society growing with modern technology, adding that Mr Ekkachai's design would be used as the official logo at smart-city events.



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Bangkok Airways named 'Best Regional Airline 2016'

Bangkok Airways PCL received the 'Best Regional Airline 2016' award at the 27th Annual TTG Travel Awards 2016 held on September 30. The awards ceremony and gala dinner were hosted at the World Ballroom, Centara Grand at Central World. The award was presented by Michael Chow, Group Publisher of the Travel group of TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd and Pierre Quek, online publisher of TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd. Organized annually by TTG Asia, the awards honor the best of the best in the Asia-Pacific travel trade and recognizes exemplary organizations that raise the bar of travel excellence.



Puttipong Prasartong-Osoth, president of Bangkok Airways PLC (center) with Michael Chow, group publisher of Travel group of TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd (2nd left) and Pierre Quek, online publisher of TTG Asia Media Pte Ltd (2nd right).

Triathletes shine at Andaman Triathlon 2016

Poloton Bike Fit and Adrenaline sports shop organized the Andaman Triathlon 2016 at Saphan Hin Park on Sept 25. About 180 racers competed for the top spots in three events – sprint, triathlon and duathlon.



Darunee Amstel (right), winner of the women's duathlon 40-49 years age group, receives her trophy from Dr Prasert Theplaong, founder of the Phuket Dental Center, who also participated in the event.



Nash Tantivit, winner of men's triathlon, 20-29 years age group, celebrates at the finish line.

Events in Paradise

Illuzion launches bistro in the heart of Patong

Bistro Illuzion by Chef Daniel Isberg held its grand opening on Sept 18. Located in the heart of Patong nightlife, the bistro specializes in Mexican food, as well as healthy and organic food.



Chef Daniel Isberg (center) at the grand opening event.

Homestay Fair 2016 held at Limelight Ave

Phuket Tourism and Sports Office hosted the IMT-GT (Indonesia Malaysia Thailand – Growth Triangle) Homestay Fair 2016 at Limelight Avenue from September 20-22. The event was sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports and aimed to promote local community and cultural tourism, as well as to exchange cultural tourism ideas between IMT countries. Local tourism entrepreneurs from 14 southern provinces displayed their products at the event and attended a homestay seminar organized by the ministry.



(From L-R) Samroeng Raket, president of Khoyao Home Stay Club, Uthit Limsakul, deputy director of the Tourism Authority of Thailand Phuket office, Srirawee Waloh, director of Phuket Tourism and Sport Office, Phuket Vice Governor Prajiad Aksornthammakul, Bhuritt Maswongsa, vice president of the Phuket Tourism Association and Art Seehaumpai, a guest at the event.



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Vegetarian Festival processions awaken spirits in Phuket Town



Devotees of the Sino-Thai Vegetarian Festival, clad in white, parade down the streets of Phuket Town during the first week of October. Photo: Chutharat Plerin



Revelers carry a traditional Chinese dragon puppet through the street. Photo: Wes Martin

SPIRIT possession, axe-wielding self-flagellation and processions of bodies pierced with spears and other sharp objects, drew crowds to Phuket Town during the island's annual Vegetarian Festival this week.

Chinese shrines throughout Phuket held ceremonies and processions to mark the week of meat-fasting by devotees dressed in white as a sign of purity and submission.

- *Phuket Gazette*



(Left) A woman dressed as a spirit blesses congregants. (Center) A child dressed as Hanuman. (Right) Devotees lay out a banquet table filled with offerings for the spirits. Photos: Chutharat Plerin



A man, with his cheeks, an orange and an apple skewered, stands on the back of a pick-up truck during a procession to the shrine at Saphan Hin. 'Spirit mediums' often pierce themselves to demonstrate their devotion to the nine Emperor Gods. Photo: Wes Martin



Members of a Phuket Town procession light poles of firecrackers over a mobile shrine. Photo: Wes Martin

Conflict and crisis at the Front Palace

Looking Back

By Anand Singh

TOWARD the end of 1874, Siam was heading towards a crisis that threatened to plunge the kingdom into civil war. The roots of this dated back several years when King Chulalongkorn's father, King Mongkut, proclaimed his brother as 'second king', with rank and title equal to that of his own. King Mongkut's brother became known as King Pinklao and headed the Front Palace, a house normally reserved for the 'Uparaj' or vice-king of Siam.

King Pinklao's Front Palace was given an unprecedented amount of power, prestige and autonomy. It was allowed to maintain an army and even collect taxes. When King Mongkut suddenly passed away in the year 1868, Prince Chulalongkorn, his eldest son and heir, was still too young to rule. The court appointed Chao Phraya Srisuriyawongse as the young king's regent.

In Siamese tradition, when a new king is crowned, he will pick an Uparaj or vice-king to help him rule the kingdom. But when Mongkut was crowned king, he did something unprecedented. Instead of appointing his brother as Uparaj, the king proclaimed his brother as his equal, a second king in his own right.

After King Mongkut's death, a council of princes and nobles led by Chao Phraya Srisuriyawongse unanimously agreed



The Front Palace has now been converted to the Bangkok National Museum. Photo: Supanut Arunoprayote

to support Chulalongkorn as king. Due to King Mongkut's decree, the Front Palace was declared autonomous and was slated to have its own succession line. Srisuriyawongse argued that the next holder of the title of 'second-king' should be King Pinklao's son, Prince Vichaichan. The council argued, but eventually caved in to Srisuriyawongse's decision. Prince Vichaichan was named as 'second-king', succeeding his father as head of the Front Palace.

When King Chulalongkorn came of age in 1873, tension began to rise between him and the second king, as King Chulalongkorn's reforms threatened the Front Palace's status quo.

In December of 1874, Vichaichan received an anonymous letter that threatened his

life. In response, he mobilized his troops and brought them into the Front Palace. This made King Chulalongkorn uneasy. Vichaichan's army actually outnumbered the king's royal guards. The mobilization of the Front Palace guards was seen as a threat and the king immediately responded by mobilizing his own royal troops.

Things got worse when a few days later, a fire broke out inside the Grand Palace, the residence of the king and the royal family. The Front Palace was sworn to protect the king in any situation, so Vichaichan's troops quickly rushed to the scene to help extinguish the fire. But the royal guards, suspicious that the Front Palace troops might use this as an opportunity to enter the grand palace and

arrest the king, did not allow them to enter.

Fortunately the fire was put out quickly. After the incident, rumors circulated that the Front Palace may have had something to do with the fire in the Grand Palace. Vichaichan was also accused of neglecting his duties as head of the Front Palace because he did not personally lead the Front Palace troops to come to the king's aid. Using this as a pretext, King Chulalongkorn ordered his troops to surround the Front Palace.

Fearing for his life, Vichaichan escaped from the Front Palace in the early hours of January 2, 1875. He fled to the British Consulate to seek protection, which further outraged the Siamese royal court as the act was seen as undermin-

ing national sovereignty.

The king was willing to grant Vichaichan amnesty as long as he relinquished his title of second king. Knowing that he had the support of the British and the French, Vichaichan refused.

On January 5, Sir Andrew Clarke, the governor of the British Strait Settlements was invited to Bangkok to mediate the conflict. The governor was very impressed by the young king's enthusiasm for reform. He immediately assured King Chulalongkorn that he would resolve the crisis and make Vichaichan accept his terms.

The British Consulate began to withdraw their support for Vichaichan, forcing the second king to negotiate. The final agreement stripped Vichaichan of the title of second king. In return he was granted amnesty against any persecution. He was allowed to retain his position as head of the Front Palace and maintain a small army and some weaponry, but his role in state affairs drastically diminished.

After Vichaichan's death in 1885, King Chulalongkorn abolished the centuries old position of Front Palace head, instead creating the title of 'Siam Mongkut Ratchakuman', or Crown Prince of Siam, modeling along the lines of western monarchies.

He named his son, Prince Maha Vajirunhis, as the first Crown Prince of Siam in the year 1886. The Front Palace compound itself was partly demolished. Today, the parts that remain have been converted into the Bangkok National Museum.

BDMS raises accident insurance awareness



The BDMS Southern Group is raising awareness about accident insurance claims in Phuket. Holders of mandatory Phor Ror Bor insurance may present their Thai ID cards or passports to claim accident insurance up to 30,000 baht at Phuket International Hospital, Dibuk Hospital and Bangkok Hospital Phuket.

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The bias against electric bikes



LIKE many cycling enthusiasts, I have long held a prejudice against electric bicycles. Somehow the whole idea of adding a motor of any kind into the primal equation of man, muscle and machine seemed just plain wrong and indeed a bit akin to cheating. Surely the whole concept of the bicycle is of a wonderful enhancement of man's ability to move about under his own power and not a means of usurping that power through the addition of outside sources of propulsion. Or so I thought.

I recently had an experience that turned my prejudice against e-bikes on its head.

I was in Rome a few weeks ago and wanted to take another look at the fabulous historical, cultural and architectural abundance of that perplexing city. Rome's key architectural treasures are, of course, well spread out, often hidden within and under the fabric of today's dirty, clamorous and traffic-choked city.

In addition, it was hot and polluted and Rome's drivers are not known for their tolerance and kindness towards cyclists.

We had decided to book a guided bike tour with Top Bike Rentals (topbikerental.com)



Cyclists with their rented e-bikes get a pep talk before embarking on a city tour. Photo: Baz Daniel

and they suggested an e-bike option as a means of coping with hills, heat and horrendous traffic. Having enjoyed a sumptuous pasta lunch, accompanied by a couple of glasses of vino at a restaurant overlooking the Colosseum, we thought 'why not?' And so began my first e-bike experience.

Electric bicycles, also known as booster bikes, are bicycles with an integrated electric mo-

tor, which can be used for propulsion. There are a great variety of e-bikes available, from those that only have a small motor to assist the rider's pedal-power (pedelecs), to somewhat more powerful e-bikes which are closer to moped-style functionality.

All however retain the ability to be pedaled by the rider and are therefore not electric motorcycles. E-bikes use rechargeable batteries, and the lighter varieties

can travel up to 30km per hour, depending on the laws of the country in which they are sold, while the more high-powered varieties can often go in excess of 45km per hour.

Depending on local laws, as is the case in Italy, many pedelecs are legally classified as bicycles rather than mopeds or motorcycles, so they are not subject to the more stringent laws regarding their operation.

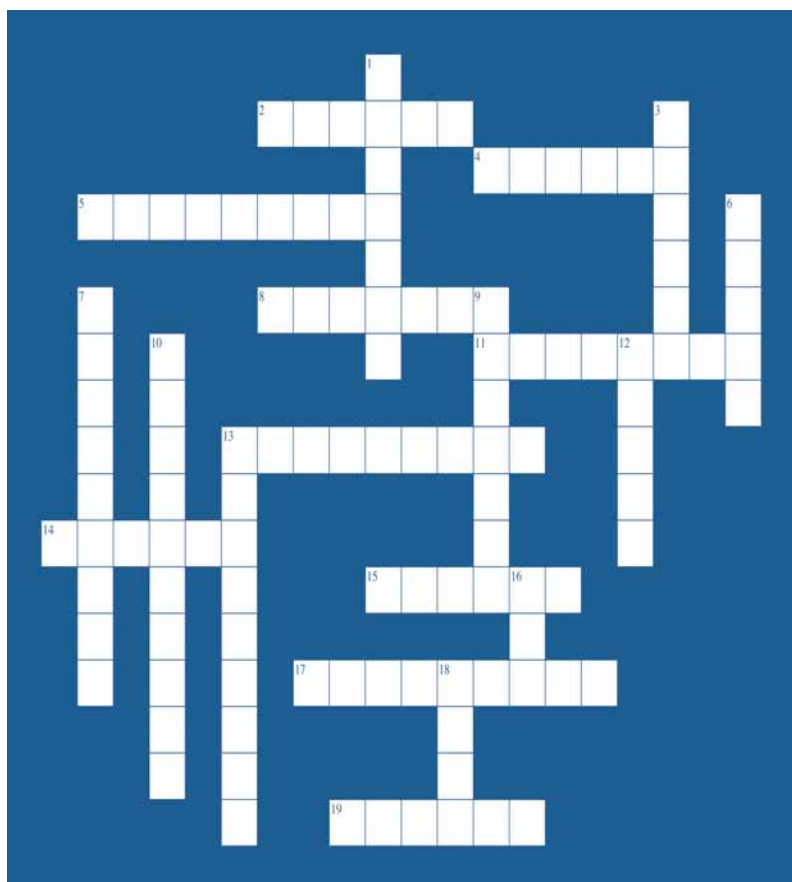
In Rome they can enter areas from which normal vehicular traffic is excluded. This works out great, as it means that as a cyclist, you get a chance to be up close and personal with many of the fabulous ancient treasures and hidden spots.

We spent almost seven hours exploring the beauty of the Eternal City and the e-bikes proved to be liberating, freeing us up to enjoy the visual bounty all around. In addition, they easily conquered Rome's many hills, defying the heat, and were handy when needing acceleration to escape traffic snarls and the abundant crazy drivers around us.

From the Colosseum to the top of Fagatal Hill, passing by the Imperial Forums and many more of Rome's breathtaking ancient spots and hidden treasures, we cycled through small alleys with amazing Renaissance and Baroque palaces and churches, then across hidden squares with their monumental fountains guided by our intrepid local guide.

I had the revelation that e-bikes, in the right location and circumstances, most certainly have their place in the cycling Pantheon.

In fact, it struck me that such guided e-bike trips around Phuket would be a major tourist draw for our island.



Gazette Crossword

Test your local knowledge and word power

Across

- 02. Musical work
- 04. Savory pastry
- 05. The devil's weapon of choice
- 08. Triathlon to be held in Phuket next month
- 11. Coalition
- 13. Krabi temple with 'footprint of the Buddha'
- 14. Spanish title for women
- 15. Cause to be loved
- 17. Ancient Roman arena
- 19. Frozen wasteland

Down

- 01. Phuket's long delayed underpass
- 03. Keep
- 06. Discussion group
- 07. Test of one's abilities
- 09. Lack of experience
- 10. Deadly marine creature, sometimes found on Phuket's shores
- 12. Oahu greeting
- 13. Temporary, fleeting
- 16. Mimic another's actions
- 18. Arctic transport

Solution on opposite page.

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Troubleshooting 'blocked pipes'

Excuse Buster
By Craig Burton

"DON'T put paper down the toilet or the pipes will get blocked and it will get messy and costly." This was one of the first messages from our first landlord upon arrival in Thailand. Not a good situation for the body either – also messy and costly on our health.

So how often should you have a number 2?

This is controversial. While the definition of constipation is 'less than three bowel movements per week', I think that number is way too low. In my experience, clients who didn't have a bowel movement each and every day were healthier in general than those who skipped days. I personally see many clients who have a once-a-day or less bowel movement moved to more frequent toilet visits when they cleaned up their diet, and added more movement; many moving to 2-3 healthy stools – think earthy sausages – per day after meals.

DANGERS OF A TOXIC BUILDUP

Obviously the stool is waste product, and like garbage, if it's not removed it can produce toxins related to the fermentation and rotting of our undigested matter. This can lead to an increase in the amount of pathogens, including parasites and harmful bacteria affecting the immune system who thrive in



Eating vegetables and fruits helps keep fiber moving within your system. Photo: pexels

this environment. The end game can result in the creation of a state of disease not only in the colon, but also moving to other organs and systems in the body through the recirculation of toxins from the colon into the blood stream.

CONSTIPATION TROUBLESHOOTING

1. Eat a fat at each meal. Eating fat stimulates intestinal motility (contraction of muscles in the gastrointestinal tract) more than any other factor. "Motility is influenced by

the energy content and composition of the meal, but not by its volume or pH. Energy-rich meals with a high fat content increase motility; carbohydrates and proteins have no effect" (R.F. Schmidt, G. Thews. Colonic Motility. Human Physiology, 2nd edition. 29.7:730.)

2. Drink lots of water – this is an obvious one, but see that your urine is clear soon after waking from plenty of rehydrating – herbal teas like lemongrass and peppermint are great choices for this.

3. Eat plenty of vegetables

and some fruits daily – fiber keeps them moving with water and fat. The trifecta of healthy bowels – as said carbohydrates and protein have no effect, high protein diets are often suspects for constipation. Aim for over 30 grams per day of fiber, mostly from vegetables.

4. Move your body daily – start with 30 minutes of walking, yoga, or other light movement, which will help stimulate intestinal activity and relax your body as well, which is the critical next point.

5. Eat in a relaxed state and

be as relaxed as possible. When you are stressed, you are in what is called a sympathetic state of 'fight or flight'. While some people may accidentally pass stool when scared (which is not so healthy) most people clench their gut. The act of being in this state sends blood from your gut to your periphery for action.

6. Before reaching for herbal laxatives such as Senna, try increasing your magnesium intake. An old remedy was milk of magnesia (magnesium hydroxide), which is found at many chemists throughout Phuket.

I make my clients start with a tablespoon of milk of magnesia in 500 mls of soda/ carbonated water (not tonic) and drink it throughout the day.

When magnesium hydroxide mixes with carbonated water you make magnesium bicarbonate – a great, inexpensive way to also increase a bio-available magnesium (especially for those doing physical training or are stressed).

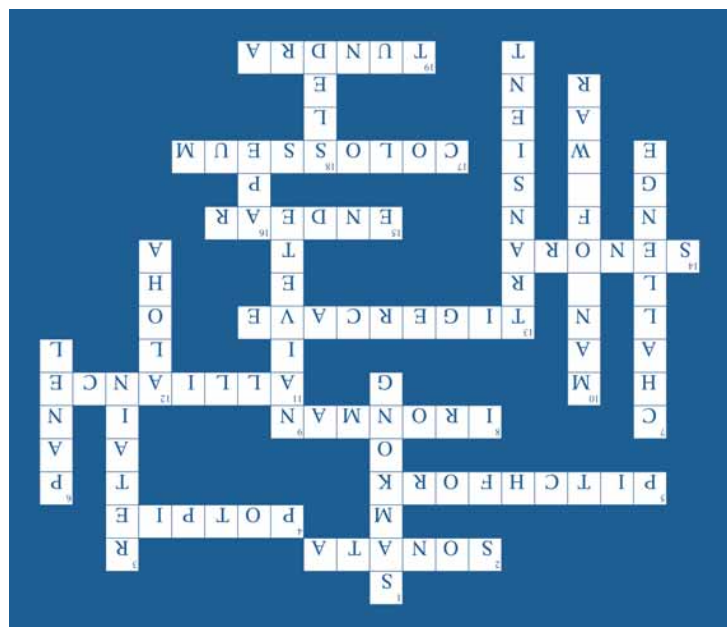
It also helps to potentially reduce excess acid in the blood (I use TCO2 to measure acidity in blood).

So keep the pipes flowing and the good times rolling.

Craig Burton is a Certified Sports Nutritionist (CISSN) with a Bachelor of Science degree (Sports Science) and a National Academy of Sports Medicine (PES) certification.

Crossword Solution

Turn the page upside down to read the answers.



In the departure lounge to Damascus



Across the Land

By Amy Koh

ON THE 16th of September, Phuket officially opened the much anticipated and delayed new Phuket International terminal. The new terminal is expected to accommodate up to 5 million international passengers a year while the old terminal will accommodate 7.5 million domestic passengers.

Firsthand experience arriving at the new international terminal two days after the official opening left me a little disappointed.

First impressions are of a bright, swanky and welcoming terminal, but as I approached the queue at the arrival immigration booths, I was flooded with a familiar feeling of disappointment, upon seeing the same old long queues – if not even longer.

Unbelievably, the immigration queue was as long as in the old terminal and the wait was a good 40 to 60 minutes, with flights continuing to arrive and queues lengthening by the minute. The arrival lounge in the new terminal has two rows of im-



First impressions are of a bright, swanky and welcoming new terminal. Photo: Zohaib Sikander

migration booths with a capacity of at least 38 booths, but only 12 were open.

The departure lounge, which has capacity for 34 immigration booths, was reportedly suffering from similarly long queues. Passengers had been warned to arrive at the airport at least an hour earlier than normal in anticipation of the extra time needed to get through.

Customer reviews on Skytrax

of the new Phuket international terminal highlighted the departure immigration booths among others as 'pure mayhem', 'absolute carnage' and 'a very bad experience'. Travellers were warned to arrive way in advance for their flight in anticipation of delays at the departure lounge. Skytrax is an international air transport rating organization, evaluating and advising upon quality standards provided by

airlines and airports across the world. Given that the terminal has just opened and initial teething problems exist, the projection of additional computer terminals and extra immigration officers to man the booths should have been top of the list.

The high season is around the corner and the anticipation that Russian tourists will return means increased chartered flights from Russia on top of

the high-season crowd.

The new Phuket terminal needs to take a page or two from Singapore. Skytrax has just announced the world's top airports for 2015 and for the fourth year in a row, Singapore's Changi Airport has been voted as the best airport in the world. Seven of the top 10 airports are actually in Asia.

We need to add value to all passengers coming or going through the new terminal. The terminal is the start or end to a great and memorable holiday in Phuket. That's what we want them to remember; not the 40-minute wait to get passports stamped.

According to Airports of Thailand, from January to July there were 8.9 million inbound tourists through Phuket International airport, which is a 19.7 per cent increase from last year. The second half of 2016 will surely be a 'real-time' test for the Phuket terminal. For the sake of all businesses in Phuket, we just have to nail it.

Amy Koh is the sales manager of Engel & Voelkers Phuket. To contact Amy or for more information, visit www.engelvoelkers.com/en/phuket

Samkong Underpass delayed again, this time to October end

THE Department of Highways announced an October 31 completion date for the Samkong Underpass, following an overnight closure of the underpass for electrical maintenance and installation work on September 30.

Motorists were only allowed to use the road above the underpass during this time slot.

"We have installed signs at the junction to notify motorists," said Chalernpol Wongkiattikun, the project engineer from the Department of Highways. "We still have some work to finish, such as painting the lines on the roads."

The construction company Wiwat Construction Co Ltd was initially given a December 21, 2015 completion date for the more than 800-million-baht project before a per diem fine of 2 million baht was to be levied. However, due to mandatory closure during the Songkran and New Year holidays, a 30-day grace period was



Deadlines have been given to the company several times this year, but were repeatedly pushed back. Photo: Highways Dept

granted, further pushing the date to January 22.

"The company chose to continue the job with the fine because they do not want to lose their right to bid on other government projects," Samak Luedwonghad, then-director of the Phuket Highways Office told the *Gazette*.

In February, the Transport Minister gave the company until April 10 to complete the project and they promised to abide by the deadline. However, it has been pushed back at least four times since, in June, July, mid-August and the end of August.

– Kongleaphy Keam

Bangkok's iconic Nai Lert Park calls it a day

SWISSOTEL Nai Lert Park, one of Bangkok's first modern five-star hotels, has succumbed to increasing competition, but will not be the last if other properties focus on pricing instead of management quality.

"Although the tourism and hotel industry continues growing, competition is increasing too. And that is causing some players to close their doors," said Sukanya Janchoo, vice president of the Thai Hotels Association.

She added that every hotel in the capital was facing the same challenges. Pricing is now the name of the game for many hotels, while the quality of customers is a secondary issue.

Her comments followed the decision by Park Nai Lert's owners to shut down the hotel at the end of this year along with other buildings on the 15-rai plot that was once the parking area for the Sompatisiri family's bus company.

In a hand-written message to

employees, Naphaporn Bodiratnangkura, the hotel's managing director and a member of the third generation of the family business, said the hotel had faced a number of tumultuous years.

"The hotel industry is facing fierce competition with new hotels popping up on all roads. The management has endured hard work to cushion the impacts and survive. Nevertheless, changes are inevitable and this will be a major one," said Ms Naphaporn, granddaughter of the late Thanpuying Lursakdi Sompatisiri, who founded the hotel 36 years ago.

According to Ms Naphaporn's note, some employees can apply for jobs with AccorHotels Group, which completed its takeover of the Swissotel brand this month. They are also entitled to legal compensation in addition to extra monies from the Sompatisiri family.

– *The Nation*

The billion dollar behemoth stirs

Property Watch

By Bill Barnett

FOR the most part, the booming tourist high season at the start of 2016 was a challenge for the island's luxury real estate sector, as there was no domino effect. Instead, the villa market went stone cold.

As we edge towards yet another winter peak high season though, the question for the property market is, "what does the future hold?"

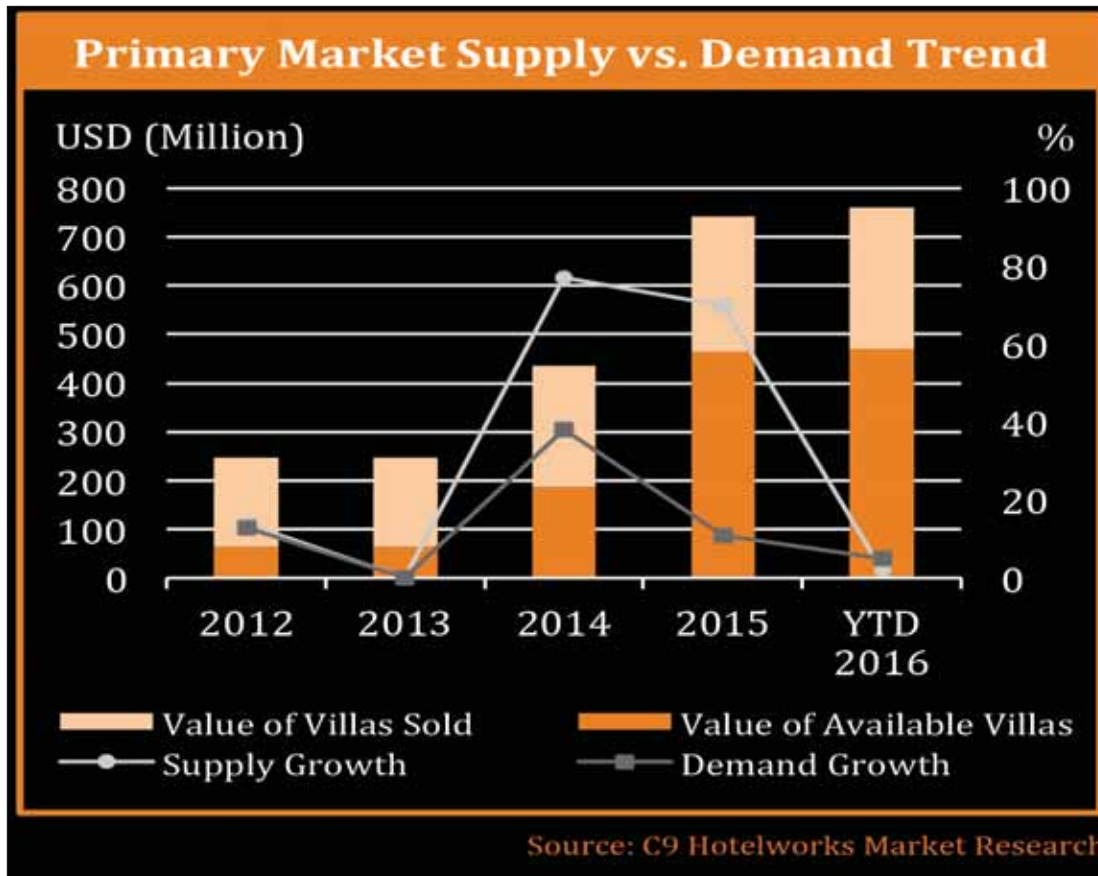
We have just released the new 'C9 Hotelworks Phuket Luxury Villa Market Update' and based on our analysis, the prevailing market has seen a sharp rise of secondary sales against primary market transactions.

At the same time, Bangkok and other Asian central business district offerings are now seeing a surge in overseas buyers at the top end of the market.

Take note of the hotel branded residences on the river such as the Four Seasons and Mandarin Oriental offerings – competition is heating up.

You can also factor in the global economic slowdown and volatile currency.

Yet if we turn back the



The existing real estate market in luxury properties has a total value that is well in excess of US\$1 billion. Image: C9 Hotelworks Market Research

clock and look at Asia's real estate post-global financial crisis, the ultra-luxury segment was one of the first markets to pick up and sustain traction during that time.

Behind the push in Phuket's secondary sales is the reality that many of these

villas are prime properties, so the choice is limited, and there are high entry barriers.

That means some early buyers are exiting as a normal trend in the recurring market cycle, not because of over-supply.

Getting inside the numbers,

I find comfort in knowing that the existing real estate market in luxury properties has a total value that is well in excess of US\$1 billion.

The island's top-end market segment remains the best performer in the region.

Drive around Phuket and

you can do the math if you start adding up the existing values on Kamala's Millionaires Mile, Nai Thon, Bang Tao, Surin, Cape Yamu or Cape Panwa.

Looking forward to the end of 2016 and into 2017, the pick-up of sales at Bill Heinecke's 'The Residences by Anantara' in Layan, signals the start of a new cycle.

There is strong interest at The Estates at MontAzure for its large land plots and signature design by celebrity designers Lek Bunnag and Jaya Ibrahim bodes well.

In the wings is the banner Rosewood resort. Its multi-million-dollar villas currently under development will usher in estate villas into the marketplace.

And it's no accident that Hong Kong's New World Development chose Phuket to locate their luxury brand's Asian flagship.

Again and again, we see the cyclical nature of the island's property market. While our new report spells out current trading challenges, our forecast is that we are about to enter a new cycle that will likely see a renewed interest in the impressive new top-grade products in the island's luxury segment.



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A deeper understanding of hospitality

By Zohaib Sikander

HAILING from Marseille, France, 38-year-old Sebastien Tronchet is the General Manager at the Grand Mercure Phuket Patong. He is no stranger to the land of smiles; he took his chances in Thailand 15 years ago and never looked back. His only regret is that he didn't take the leap 10 years before he did.

With a bachelor's degree in law and accounting, a master's in hotel management and international tourism, as well as an aptitude for learning the Thai language, Sebastien was able to settle into the managerial seat with aplomb.

"Learning to speak Thai has helped me professionally as well as personally. It's good to be able to chat with locals and gain a deeper understanding of the culture here," says Sebastien.

Born and raised amid a multicultural mix of nationalities in Marseille, he recalls that he was not always this easy going.

"As kids fresh out of college, my friends and I just wanted to be directors and managers at some big com-

pany," says Sebastien. "When I came here, however, I noticed that things were done at a much slower pace and that I actually liked it better."

With several high ranking hotels on his hospitality resume – including Sofitel Hua Hin, Sofitel Bangkok, Aka Resort in Hua Hin and Novotel Siam in Bangkok – Sebastien learnt to deal with a multitude of problems, the likes of which he'd never encountered before.

From dealing with four-meter-long snakes in the hotel garden to power outages inconveniencing guests, he mastered the ropes of hospitality and guest management. The Grand Mercure Phuket Patong is, however, his first experience of working in Phuket.

"When I first came to work here, there was a lot of work to be done. I implemented some creative ideas and worked closely with the owners regarding interior design, restaurant and spa concepts, as well as fulfilling the needs of the vast variety of guests that we deal with on a daily basis," says Sebastien.

"We have Indian guests who want vegetarian food, Muslims who want Halal cuisine, Euro-

peans who want a traditional English breakfast and so on. We have to learn to cater to every guest's needs. That is what we are best known for – caring about our guests and going out of our way for them."

There is no room for error in hospitality, Sebastien says.

"Not everyone gives you a second chance if something goes wrong. I brought in young trainees who speak Chinese, Japanese, French and Korean, in order to cater to everyone's needs as swiftly as possible. Communication is key when working in this field," he says.

Sebastien aims to bring back the vibe of the 'good old days' to hospitality.

"When I first started out in hospitality, I noticed that my hotel staff was deeply attached to the guests and had a special bond with each and every one of them. That is the kind of service I wish to provide," he says.

Outside of the office, Sebastien appreciates all that Phuket has to offer.

"I love that you can go from a Nepalese guy selling you a suit to a Lebanese guy making kebab to a Thai

Muslim selling you chicken. We have beaches, mountains, museums and so much else that you may not even get to see it all before leaving the island," he says.

He has a message for anyone who wants to accomplish something in life.

"People will say you're too old or too young –

that's been the story of my life," says Sebastien.

"You need to work hard, of course, but sometimes you need to take a step back and breathe. I had a difficult attitude as a kid, but over time, I have learnt when to speak up and when to hold my tongue. It's that understanding that has helped me get where I am today."



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