

Phuket Gazette

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‘THE MOTIVE BEHIND THE KILLING COULD HAVE BEEN PERSONAL’

TUK-TUK TAKEDOWN

Hunt for suspects is on after Patong tuk-tuk club leader found shot to death in his cab

By **Kritsada Mueanhawong**

POLICE are hunting for at least two suspects for the murder of the president of the Patong tuk-tuk drivers' club at 3am on October 25.

Sakol Srisompoch, 57, was found shot dead inside his tuk-tuk, which was parked in the middle of the road in front of King Kong Party Club on Phra Phuket Kaew Road.

“Mr Sakol was on his way home after work when he was apparently ambushed by gunmen. There were four wounds on his left arm, one in his back and another in his chest. There were also several bullet holes in the window and windshield of his tuk-tuk,” said Capt Wattanathorn Bamroongthin of Kathu Police.

Kathu Police Deputy Superintendent Ampholwat Saengruang confirmed that police are collecting evidence to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Police initially said they had yet to learn how many suspects were involved, but a subsequent review of CCTV footage showed that at least two other men were at the scene at the time.

“The motive behind the killing could have been a personal conflict, but that remains to be confirmed,” said Col Ampholwat.

Mr Sakol was actively involved in leading protests by tuk-tuk drivers in the past. In June 2013, he led a protest of about a hundred tuk-tuk drivers that won them a crackdown on illegal taxis, which the tuk-tuk clan said were stealing their jobs.

“We do not have enough money to pay the monthly installments on our tuk-tuks and to cover living costs. Our incomes



The victim, who was the president of the Patong tuk-tuk driver's club, was found dead in his own vehicle, which police found riddled with bullet holes in the middle of the road. Photo: Kathu Police

have fallen because many illegal taxis are stealing work from us,” Mr Sakol said at the time. “They are stealing our passengers in Patong, Kata and Karon. Almost all of them work only at nighttime.”

The protesters also marched to Provincial Hall to hand a letter to then-Governor Maitri Inthasut, with a list of names of allegedly illegal taxi drivers in Patong that the tuk-tuk drivers wanted arrested.

In March 2014, he led a 200-strong tuk-tuk driver blockade, which ended when Phuket's top cop agreed to meet the driv-

ers' demands, which included having the Patong Police Superintendent transferred.

Concerns over the Patong tuk-tuk business have been expressed by several consuls over the years, including Mark Kent, the ex-British Ambassador to Thailand.

“Some of the behavior we've seen from the tuk-tuk or taxi drivers has led to a fall in confidence and a drop in the number of tourists because they're a little bit scared about what is happening [with public transport],” Amb Kent told the *Gazette* in November last year.

Police arrest first suspect in Phuket bombings

THE first suspect implicated in the Phuket Mother's Day bombings was flown to the island by helicopter on October 20, where an eye witness confirmed his identity.

Full story Page 6

BUSINESS



Trade department to investigate over-charging of Chinese tourists.

Page 11

PROPERTY



Tips and tricks to help property renters get the best experience.

Page 18

LIFE&STYLE



Asia Superyacht Rendezvous set to welcome the world's top crafts.

Page 15



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LOCAL NEWS

Briefly

Mai Khao woman killed in collision

A MAI KHAO pedestrian was killed after being hit by a car on Thepkrasattri Road in Thalang on the morning of October 21.

"The body of 53-year-old Malee Chailek lay on the road in front of the Baan Mak Prok 7-Eleven," said Lt Col Watcharin Jirattikanwivat of the Tah Chat Chai Police.

"A slightly damaged Toyota sedan was also parked nearby," he added.

Witnesses at the scene reported to police that Ms Malee was not paying attention when crossing the road. They also added that the car was speeding.

The driver, named Piset Srisuwann, 53, was taken to Tai Chat Chai Police Station and charged with reckless driving causing death.

Ms Malee's body was taken to Thalang Hospital for an autopsy.

– Winai Sarot

Mosque donation box thief at large

POLICE are searching for a thief who broke into a mosque's donation box in Koh Kaew and stole about 10,000 baht on the night of October 18.

Capt Udom Petcharat of Phuket City Police arrived at the scene after he received the complaint at about 8:30am on October 19.

"People were gathered around a broken donation box – a tyre iron lay nearby," said Capt Udom. "According to staff, the mosque was locked the night before and no one was inside."

"When they arrived the next morning, they saw that a latch on the back door lock had been cut and the donation box had been emptied."

There is no CCTV system installed at the mosque, so police are checking CCTV footage from around the area to locate the suspect.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Young Russian found dead in jeep wreckage



A young Russian diving instructor was found dead on October 23, after his NGV-powered jeep crashed and burst into flames in Wichit. The fire kept back locals who ran to help the driver, while it took rescue workers about 20 minutes to douse the blaze, revealing a completely gutted jeep. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

Consuls mourn HM the King at provincial hall

FOURTEEN Consuls gathered at Phuket Provincial Hall on October 17 to express their condolences for the passing of HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej two weeks ago.

The Consuls, including French, Austrian, Brazilian, English, Chilean, Chinese, Czech, Finnish, German, Irish, Dutch, Russian, Swiss and Danish, were dressed in black to express their sorrow for the passing of His Majesty.

The gathering was hosted by Phuket Vice Governors Theera Anantasereewittaya and Siwaporn Chuasawat.

Consul representatives expressed their deep condolences to the Thai people and wished them strength and courage during their mourning period.

– Sukawin Tanthavanich

Merit-making ceremony held by Phuket Gov

HUNDREDS of Phuketians stepped out early morning of October 20 to take part in a merit-making ceremony with 89 Buddhist monks at Phuket Provincial

Hall, to mark the 7th day of mourning since the passing away of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej on October 13.

Phuket Governor Chokchai Dejamornthan led provincial officials and the public in making alms offerings to the monks from 6:30am to 7:30am.

The previous evening, Gov Chokchai led a Buddhist prayer vigil in honor of the departed King, attended by thousands of mourners, at Wat Wichit Sangkharam in Phuket Town. Buddhist temples throughout Phuket are holding daily prayer vigils from 3:52pm – the time announced of the King's passing – until November 12.

A ceremony to mark the 50th day of mourning will also be held on December 1 at Wat Thepwanaram in Srisoonthon, Thalang.

A ceremony is also planned to take place at Wat Tah Rua, near the Heroines' Monument to mark the 100th day of mourning on January 20, 2017.

– Chutharat Plerin

Russian throws bricks at cars, charged

A RUSSIAN woman was arrested and charged on October 25 after flying into a rage and throwing bricks at vehicles out-

side a hotel in Karon about 4am.

Ms Bravova, 45, (full name withheld), cracked the windshield of a Honda Jazz and damaged the back of a minivan during her tirade, reportedly shouting about something she had lost in front of the Hilton Arcadia Resort & Spa in Karon. However, Ms Bravova was not a guest at that resort.

Witnesses said it wasn't entirely clear what the woman was upset about, but she did appear to be intoxicated.

The vehicle owners filed charges of criminal damage with Karon Police. Lt Suwisit Srirak said Ms Bravova confessed and was willing to cover the costs of the damage to the vehicles.

She was charged with causing damage to property.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

NFE offers free clothes dyeing service

THE Phuket Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education (NFE) is providing a free clothes-dyeing service to turn colored garments black so they can be used as mourning attire following the passing of HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Using tubs of dye heated over

charcoal burners, NFE staff began offering the free service on October 19 from 9am to 3pm daily, for 30 days, outside the NFE building on Damrong Road near the Phuket Municipality Office in Talat Yai.

"We are using our own money to purchase the black dye. We just wanted to do something to help people who may not be able to afford new clothes during this period of national mourning for the King," said NFE Phuket Director Rarinthip Supapruek.

News of the free service spread quickly, resulting in long queues.

"We welcome everyone but respectfully request that people bring a few garments at a time to be dyed, otherwise we can not keep up with demand and it means that others will have to wait in line longer," said Ms Rarinthip.

– Kongleaphy Keam

French national jumps off 16th floor in Patong

A FRENCH man jumped to his death from the 16th floor of a hotel in Patong around 6:30am on October 21.

A horrified electrician working on the same floor of the hotel spotted the man as he prepared to jump. Seeing that the man was acting strangely, the electrician tried unsuccessfully to persuade him to come away from the edge.

Police said that Nicholas Gilbert Claude Cesar, 47, was a French national and that he appears to have deliberately jumped from the Andaman Beach Suites hotel.

The electrician, Kittisak Duangniras, 37, used his mobile phone to capture video of the man as he blindfolded himself with a piece of cloth before jumping to his death, landing in the hotel's car park, police told the *Gazette*.

Investigations revealed that the deceased had been staying at Saria Mansion, located near the hotel, since September 29.

A search of the man's room turned up cash, a suitcase and a note with the telephone number of a relative in France. The note also asked for someone to pay for a motorcycle he had rented, said Patong Police Captain Yingyong Chuaykij.

"He appears he was living alone and acted alone," said Capt Yingyong.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Police pounce on dealer with B2mn drug parcel



The man was getting ready to leave when the Region 8 Police swooped in. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

A RANONG man was arrested in Phuket on the night of October 23 with more than 11,000 methamphetamine (*ya bah*) pills estimated to have a street value of two million baht.

Region 8 Police led by Lt Col Prawit Engchuan of Ao Nang Police arrested Somchok Thanomjit, 36, when he showed up to receive the package at a private transportation company in Rassada.

“We were tipped off by our men that a parcel containing the drugs would be sent by someone named Piyamas Petchrak,

so we went there to make sure it arrived and monitor who came to pick it up,” said Col Prawit.

“He signed for the package under the name ‘Bao’ and was about to leave when we presented ourselves and asked to search the contents,” he added.

Mr Somchok was taken to Phuket City Police Station for further questioning.

“The suspect knew what was in the package, but denied owning them. He confessed that he used to do drugs, but said he had been

clean for two years and had never before been involved in selling narcotics,” said Col Prawit.

Mr Somchok told police that earlier the same day, he received a call from a man named Bang Sod to pick up the package and he accepted since he knew the man well.

“Though Mr Somchok denied ownership of the drugs, he was charged with possession of a category 1 drug with intent to sell,” said Col Prawit.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Six arrested in narcotics raids



Four men and two women were detained in separate raids. Photo: Winai Sarot

PHUKET Provincial Police announced on October 24 the arrests of four men and two women for narcotics offences, in the latest crackdown in the province.

Yuttana Sulsabai, 48, was caught at his house in Tah Chat Chai in possession of 35 methamphetamine (*ya bah*) pills on October 18. Police charged him with possession and intent to sell the illicit drugs.

Three men were arrested in the Chalong area on October 20, including a 24-year-old man previously indicted for possession of category 1 drugs in January 2014. This time he was caught with less than half a gram (0.48g) of crystal methamphetamine (*ya ice*).

Later that day, 25-year-old Charin Innoom was caught with 1.08 grams of *ya ice* and

110 *ya bah* pills stashed at his residence. He was charged with possession of a category 1 drug with intent to sell.

By about 11pm, police arrested Tirawat Thongkerd, 21, at his home in possession of 507.45 grams of *ya ice* and 7,000 *ya bah* pills. He was also charged for possession of category 1 narcotics with intent to sell.

On October 21, Phuket City Police arrested an 18-year-old female who had two *ya bah* pills on her. She was charged with possession of category 1 drugs.

Another suspect named Prakai-kaew Tantai, 30, who was already wanted for previous category 1 drug offences, was arrested at 10pm that evening.

– Winai Sarot

Married to the Mob: woman implicated in spouse’s death

POLICE have arrested the wife of a van driver and three accomplices for allegedly arranging to have her husband killed in a shooting outside his house in Kathu.

The victim, Chamnong Kaewprot, was shot in the back by a masked gunman as he made his way to his home, after parking his van outside his house at about 11pm on October 8.

He died later that night, after being taken to hospital by his wife.

Investigations led police to believe that the wife, namely

Paiboon Kaewprot, was instrumental in setting up the crime after it was revealed that the victim had several girlfriends.

Kathu Police Lt Col Ampolwat Sangruang said on October 21 that Mrs Paiboon was arrested on October 20 along with three others – two men and a woman – after investigations turned up CCTV footage that identified the suspects as well as the home-made gun used in the shooting, and clothes worn by the suspects at the time of the crime.

“It appears that Mrs

Paiboon hired a man, identified as Wittayanon Churat, who conspired with two of his relatives to murder Mr Chamnong.

“We believe the wife had a personal vendetta against her husband and arranged to have him murdered – although she denies doing so.

“Only Mr Wittayanon has confessed to the crime. His two relatives deny any involvement,” said Col Ampolwat.

The four are to go on trial for conspiracy to murder.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong



Phuket bombing suspect identified



Mr Muhi was flown into Phuket by helicopter in order to take part in the identity parade. Photo: Kongleaphy Keam

AN EYEWITNESS on October 20 confirmed the identity of a suspect implicated in the Mother's Day bombings in Phuket on August 12.

The suspect, named by police as Muhammad Muhi, was arrested in the deep south by the military in September and has been held in an undisclosed location since then. He was flown by helicopter into Phuket to take part in the identity parade.

"We now have confirmation from CCTV footage and an eye witnesses that Muhammad Muhi was involved in the Phuket

bombings. However, he denies any involvement," said Deputy National Police Commissioner Srivara Ransibhramanaku.

"He is one of two suspects in the Phuket bombings for whom arrests warrants have been issued. The other is Ahama Lengha," said the deputy commissioner.

Mr Muhi will now go on trial in military court while police continue investigations. The first suspect to be apprehended in relation to the bombings was captured on September 5.

— *Kongleaphy Keam*

Bikers honor HM the King



Phuket Municipality officials led a mourning ceremony for His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej in Saphan Hin on October 25. The ceremony featured lighting of candles and was presided over by Phuket City Deputy Mayor Kawee Tansukatanon. Additionally, 200 bikers from within Phuket, as well as from neighboring provinces, arrived at the event and parked their big bikes in an orderly fashion to spell out the word 'KING' as well as 'Rama IX' to honor the memory and legacy of His Majesty. Photo: Phuket PR

11-year old girl drowns

AN 11-year-old Korean girl was ripped from the arms of her father and swept out to sea by strong waves during a day trip to Koh Racha on October 24.

Tour boat staff later found her unconscious body floating in the water some distance from the beach at Ao Patok on Racha Island, where she had been swimming with her father before they were separated.

Paramedics called to respond administered CPR as the girl and her father were taken to the mainland by boat, but they were unable to revive her. She was rushed to Chalong Hospital, where she was pronounced dead on arrival.

The child, named Ma Eun Park, was holidaying in Phuket with her parents, who are both Korean Nationals.

"The family arrived in Phuket on October 22 and were staying in Patong," said Chalong Police chief Thada Sodarak. "They were due to leave Phuket on October 28,"

"It is a tragic loss of life. We are deeply sorry for the family," said Maj Thada.

— *Winai Sarot*

Ladyboy stabs friend to death in Patong

A LADYBOY was arrested on October 21 for the murder of his friend in a Patong apartment, after the two had a falling out about money early in the morning.

Capt Yingyong Chuoykij of Patong Police arrived at the scene at about 3:30am.

"The apartment door was locked and when no one answered the door, we had to break it down," he told the *Gazette*.

"Inside, we found the 22-year-old suspect, named Prangtawat Sitthikarn, looking dazed and afraid. The body of the victim, named Parinya Ratchasan, lay in the bathroom with stab wounds to the chest."

Mr Prangtawat confessed to killing Mr Parinya and admitted that the two were friends.

Mr Parinya had reportedly asked Mr Prangtawat for money to return home to Khon Kaen. Mr Prangtawat said he refused, as he had already loaned him 2,000 baht two weeks ago.

"This led to a heated argument between the two, during which Mr Prangtawat used an eight-inch knife to stab Mr Parinya twice," confirmed Capt Yingyong.

"We believe he was under the influence of *ya ice* (crystal methamphetamine), which was also found in the room."

Police said that a second ladyboy, named Chawalit Chomkunthot, was asleep in the room during the incident, and woke up to see Mr Prangtawat holding the bloody knife.

"Mr Chawalit said that he ran out of the room and



Police found drug paraphernalia as well as the murder weapon – an eight-inch knife. Photo: Patong Police

shouted for help," said Capt Yingyong.

Officers confiscated the knife and drug paraphernalia from the room as evidence.

Mr Prangtawat was charged with murder and taken to Patong Police Station for processing.

— *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Chinese man drowns

A 31-year-old Chinese man on holiday in Phuket with his wife drowned at Patong Beach on the afternoon of October 25.

The deceased, Gang Liu, was pulled from the surf about 4:30pm and rushed to Patong Hospital, where he was pronounced dead fifteen minutes later.

Patong Police chief Lt Col Weerapong Rakhito said that after questioning Mr Liu's wife, it was clear that the man ran into difficulties while swimming and drowned as a result.

Representatives from The Phuket Consular Office of The Consulate General of The People's Republic of China in Songkhla are assisting with repatriation of his body.

— *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Bag thief caught Russian bikers in brawl with Phuket taxi drivers



A still of the CCTV footage from the tour booth. Photo: Patong Police

A RAWAI local was arrested at his residence on October 25 after CCTV footage showed him stealing a bag at a tour booth in Patong on October 21.

A 34-year-old tour operator named Warrathaya Kamklin filed a complaint with Patong Police alleging that the suspect Tuanaroon Chokkua, 26, had stolen a bag from the tour booth counter he worked at.

Police asked the court to issue an arrest warrant after reviewing CCTV footage in which Mr Tuanaroon's activi-

ties could be seen.

Additionally, Mr Warrathaya had followed the suspect and memorized his vehicle's plate number on the day of the incident.

"At Mr Tuanaroon's house, we recovered the stolen bag with 3,000 baht in cash, an ATM card, some other cards and documents," said Lt Col Somsak Thongkliang of Patong Police.

As at press time, Mr Tuanaroon had not confessed to any of the charges.

- *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

A RUSSIAN tourist was charged with assault after a fight broke out between him and a group of Karon taxi drivers on the afternoon of October 23.

The incident went viral on social media after it was captured on video by an onlooker.

The four injured taxi drivers, who insisted that the tourist started the fight, filed a complaint with the Karon Police.

"The drivers told us that a group of tourists were riding very fast on big bikes and making a lot of noise – they called out to them to slow down so they wouldn't hurt others on the road," said Karon Police captain Nipon Temsung. "That's when they said the tourists made their way back toward them."

One of the injured taxi drivers, Sa-nguan Sae-Ng, 36, said he was waiting for a fare with his colleagues at the central Kata taxi stand when the fight broke out.

"The tourists drove about a



The Russian delivered a right hook in response to being slapped by a local. Photo: Phuket Information Line group

hundred meters past us before turning around and coming back. One of them came over and started swearing. I walked over to him just to talk, but he pushed me and knocked me to the ground," said Mr Sa-nguan. "My colleagues tried to stop him, but he kept on being physical."

One of the drivers, who suffered a head injury from a brick, is still under medical care at Patong Hospital, while

the others have been discharged.

"We have filed our complaint and hope we can get justice," said Mr Sa-nguan.

Police have yet to reveal the name of the tourist who was charged. They are investigating further before concluding the case.

"We are gathering more evidence in order to be fair to both sides," said Capt Nipon.

- *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

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Masses sing royal anthem



Hundreds of thousands of Thais from all over the country gathered at Sanam Luang in Bangkok on October 22 for a historical live recording of the Royal Anthem of Thailand (*Sansoen Phra Barami*) in honor of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who passed away on October 13. Photo: The Nation

Aussie extends visa to walk for King

AUSTRALIAN tourist David Hammill hopes to reach Bangkok on foot before his visa runs out, after setting off on October 20 from Surat Thani armed with a 28-day visa extension so he can make the 650km journey as a tribute to the His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Walking with a portrait of HM the King in hand, the 46-year-old plans to join mourners at Suan Luang and the Grand Palace in the capital to pay his respects to the Late Monarch.

Surat Thani Governor Uaychai Innak met Mr Hammill while he was taking a breather at a small cottage in the province's Kanchanadit District. "His right foot was sore after walking about 50 kilometers already but otherwise he was in good health," said Governor Uaychai.

The generous governor and



David Hammill was greeted by Surat Thani provincial officials about 50km into his 650km walk from Surat Thani to Bangkok. Photo: Suchat Hankij

provincial officials even reached into their own pockets to help Mr Hammill along the way with a 4,000 baht donation.

Kanchanadit Highway Police also offered Mr Hammill accommodation for the night, which he refused and went on

his way.

Governor Uaychai confirmed that Mr Hammill's visa initially allowed him to stay until October 19 but he was granted an extension of stay until November 16.

– Suchat Hankij

Warnings issued throughout Krabi for floods, landslides

OFFICIALS have issued warning for Krabi residents to beware of floods and landslides in the area, after downpours affected at least 50 people last week.

On October 24, Klonghin OrBorTor President Sila Saiyid inspected the area where about 20 houses have been flooded at Baan Tung Kor, in addition to 400-500 rai of palm and rubber plantations.

"The heavy rain on October 23 caused excess water to collect in the area," said Mr Sila. We have temporarily brought boats for locals to commute in, but our long-term plan is to dig a canal.

The road leading into the area was cut off, and some houses were inundated with meter-high floodwater.

An area in Kaokram sub-district was also badly affected by the floods. Officials made sure to visit the site and calculate the damages caused by the flood.

"More than one hundred meters of road was submerged in the area. We have installed warning signs for drivers of small vehicles," confirmed



Villagers in Krabi are regularly affected by flooding and are demanding a permanent solution. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

Thalerngsak Phuwayanpong from the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation in Krabi.

Mr Thalerngsak added that residents in all eight districts of Krabi Province have been issued warnings in addition to Phanom Bencha mountain, for landslides, flash floods and

fallen trees.

Last month, villagers in Ao Luek District were inundated with floods that submerged over 300 meters of roads in the area. Officials have supplied boats for locals to use and have promised to build a dam as a long-term solution.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

Regional quota set for Palace visitors

THE Government is preparing to implement a quota system to accommodate the influx of mourners once the Grand Palace opens the Dusit Maha Prasat Throne Hall for people to pay respects to the late King's Royal urn starting October 29.

Members of the public will be allowed inside the throne hall from 8am to 9pm daily, except on days when royal ceremonies must be held at the site.

With a huge turnout expected, the Interior Ministry, for instance, has tentatively set a quota for 750 mourners from each region to enter the hall per day to ensure that everybody travelling from the provinces has a chance to pay respects.

"If we don't come up with a plan, a large number people may show up at the palace at the same time and not everybody will get a chance to pay homage to the Royal urn," Interior Minister General Anupong Paochinda explained on October 25.

Since His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej passed away on October 13, massive crowds have been showing up

at the Grand Palace every day to pay their respects.

Under the Interior Ministry's plan, local leaders such as district chiefs, kamnans, village heads or top executives from local administrative bodies should join mourners heading from their areas, so they can supervise and facilitate the trip.

"We will try to provide convenience and guidelines, including information about the dress code," Anupong said.

Assistant government spokeswoman Colonel Thaksada Sungkajan said Prime Minister General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, who also heads the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), has instructed all government agencies to offer convenience to people coming to pay homage.

Colonel Sirichan Ngathong, deputy spokeswoman of the NCPO, said the council has already told the joint-safety operation centre to make preparations for the turnout.

"The center will deliver both convenience and safety," she added.

– The Nation

Committee set up to solve south unrest

THE Front Command Cabinet tasked with tackling unrest in the deep South announced that it is ready to work towards peace restoration in the region.

A spokesman for the command's committee to mobilize policy and strategy to solve problems in the Southern border provinces, Samphan Musordee, said a 13-strong team, led by Deputy Defence Minister General Udomdej Sitabutr, started work on October 12.

Mr Samphan said the committee's seven working plans included security and peace-promotion plans.

The operation is located in the Somdet Phra Suriyothai Military Camp in Pattani's Nong Chik District.

Samphan said the team had met with the Sheikh ul Islam of Thailand to discuss guidelines for peace restoration.

Two major drug gangs busted

POLICE have busted two major drug gangs and jointly netted 600,000 methamphetamine (*ya ba*) pills and two kilograms of crystal meth, or '*ya ice*'.

"Sing Buri resident Anurak Naksanit, 39, and his 42-year-old partner Urai Kaewthawee were arrested and 400,000 *ya ba* pills seized at a checkpoint in Nakhon Sawan's Banphot Pisai District at 4am on October 24," said Highway Police chief Maj-General Somchai Kaosamran.

Gen Somchai said Mr Anurak confessed that he had been asked by a friend to transport drugs from Sing Buri to customers in the Samrong area of Samut Prakan and was about to deliver another batch to Uttaradit Province using the friend's car.

Mr Anurak, whom police said had been arrested twice before for drug use, said Urai had been unaware he was carrying drugs. He was charged with possessing illicit drugs with the intent to sell.

In the second case, a former member of the Tambon Pongsa Administration Organization in Mae Hong Song's Pai District was arrested – and 200,000 *ya ba* pills and 2kg of crystal meth seized – in a police sting operation in Chiang Mai's Muang District on October 22.



Adhering to strict dress code for events

THE upcoming Loy Krathong Festival and various other events from Christmas to Songkran can take place, although they must adhere to a strict dress code and express mourning over the late Monarch.

"People should put on a black ribbon while attending the festivals," Deputy PM General Tanasak Patimapragorn said on October 21.

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej passed away peacefully at the age of 89 on October 13, throwing his people into deep grief. Thailand is now a sea of black and white as Thais grieve over the demise of their much-revered monarch. Gen Tanasak convened a meeting of the National Culture Commission to determine guidelines for the celebrations of key festivals such as Loy Krathong, Christmas, New Year, the Chinese New Year and Songkran.

After the meeting, he said the celebrations could be held in line with local traditions and context. "Fireworks and firecrackers can be lit at appropriate venues and with permission from authorities," he said.

However, he urged organizers of the Loy Krathong Festival to refrain from holding beauty contests and concerts.

He said entertainment content should be removed from any merit-making ceremonies. There will be two types – events arranged by members of the public and Royal ceremonies.



Punters nabbed, 5 officers to be transferred

THE First Army Region's special task force joined with police to round up 119 punters in an alleged gambling den in Bangkok's Bang Khen District.

On the afternoon of October 25, the 52-strong operation also arrested alleged bookie Thawatchai Larplua, and seized 138,500 baht, along with gambling equipment.

Team leader Colonel Noppasit Sithipongsopon said the raid stemmed from a written complaint about the alleged gambling den and a subsequent probe to confirm the alleged illegal activities there.

The illegal operation was allegedly financed by a former politician, known as 'Nor', and his business partner 'Tee Ram', said an informant. Following the operation, acting Metropolitan Police Area 2 chief Colonel Panumas Boonyalak said a fact-finding committee would be set up to probe the five most senior police officers at the Khok Kham Police Station, which has jurisdiction of the area where the alleged gambling den operated.

He said the probe would determine if the officers were negligent in performing their duties. They will be transferred to inactive posts pending results.

NCPO issues warning over fake golden bank notes

THE National Council for Peace and Order on October 23 warned members of the public not to buy 'gold-colored' commemorative bank notes, insisting that the government has not issued them.

Colonel Piyapong Klinphan, spokesman of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), said the authorities had learned that the commemorative notes were made in China by some opportunists to cash in on the sorrow of Thais.

The notes were printed in a gold color and were being sold

at 1,000 baht each.

"People must not buy the notes. They're trying to take advantage of Thais," the spokesman said, adding that the notes had been circulated in Chiang Mai and that the NCPO had instructed concerned agencies to take action against those behind their distribution.

PM thanks world leaders for condolences

PRIME Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha last Friday said he wished to thank all the leaders of foreign nations who have sent messages of condolence following the death of HM King Bhumibol.

Many countries joined the mourning in various ways such as sending messages of condolence, flying flags at half-mast and hosting exhibitions about the late monarch.

"The prime minister wishes to thank those who sent condolences to pay respects and mourned the King's passing. The Foreign Ministry will officially thank them later," Government Spokesman Lt-General Sansern Kaewkammer said on October 21.

"This clearly reflects the greatness of the King, as he is praised and honored by the international community, and demonstrates the good relationships foreign countries have with Thailand," he said.

Sansern quoted the premier as being appreciative of the loyalty and respect shown by Thais living abroad who joined in mourning activities, initiated either by themselves or by Thai embassies where they live.

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Phuket Gazette

Battling carnage on the roads

AS PHUKET'S tourism industry prepares to welcome an influx of international arrivals for the upcoming peak season at the end of the year, the island's image has once again been tainted by violence in the public transportation sector.

Turf wars among the island's tuk-tuk drivers is one of the lines of inquiry Phuket police are looking into following the shooting murder of the president of the Patong tuk-tuk drivers' consortium on October 25 [see page 1]. Sakol Srisompoch was a long-time activist for tuk-tuk drivers' rights, leading more than 100 tuk-tuk drivers in protests against illegal (black-plated) taxis in June 2013 and again in March 2014. So far though, the reason for the shooting remains a mystery and at this stage, one can only speculate about why he was ambushed and riddled with bullets in the early hours of the morning.

The week has also been marred by viral videos of violence between taxi drivers and tourists, with an altercation between a Russian biker and a taxi driver in Karon [see page 5], which was shared on social media around the world. The tit-for-tat exchange of blows was captured on the mobile phones of bystanders. Thankfully, the fight ended when the pair were separated and dragged away from each other. While it was unclear exactly what sparked the brawl, a clash of cultures and possibly a language barrier was most likely at the root of the altercation.

Unfortunately, Russian tourists in trouble on the roads seems to have dominated the news this week [see page 2], following the death of a 20-year-old Russian diving instructor whose body was pulled from the burnt-out wreckage of an NGV-powered jeep he'd crashed on a slippery road in Wichit. The next day, a Russian woman on holiday here was charged with criminal damage after throwing bricks at vehicles in Karon at 4am. Also in the news this week was the death of two Russians on October 21, when their car slid off the road at high speed and piled into an electricity pole along the bypass road.

While it is the *Gazette's* long-standing policy not to publish graphic images of dismembered and disfigured bodies, one does wonder if revealing the gruesome results of fatal traffic accidents, that our news editors see almost daily, could somehow make people think twice and possibly help save a few lives.



Increasing rate of murders

Re: Tuk-tuk drivers' club leader murdered in Phuket, Oct 25

So how many murders do we have on the island, average per week? In recent weeks it seems it's a suburb of Chicago.

It has become quite normal to shoot dead your opponent in a business dispute, an unfaithful lover, or your drinking buddy if he says something to make you lose your drunken face. Absolutely appalling.

*Mike
Gazette forum*

Whatever the weekly stats might be, I think it will surely be something far less than we have per capita in western countries. Here, a murder is very newsworthy; in the west, it's usually not covered by the press at all unless multiple killings are racked up in a single incident. Think Orlando, Munich, any major city in Texas, Paris, Nice and so on.

*Daryl Wilkinson
Gazette forum*

Waste of resources

I've noticed an increase in check-points which I'm ok with because when checking for drunk drivers, weapons, drugs etc they are helping to keep the island safe.

However, I was disappointed to be stopped at a check-point near Rawai by an Australian Tourist Police volunteer who checked my license and fined me because it wasn't a specific motor bike license. The queue to pay the fine was

Letters to the Editor

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

10 people deep (all tourists) and he fined pretty much every scooter rider who pulled up.

Is this extortion? Is this the best way foreign tourist police volunteers can utilize their time?

*Blake Ellison
Letter to the editor*

Respect for the Monarchy

Re: Crowds fill Sanam Luang for live recording of Royal Anthem, Oct 22

Don't realize how much reigning monarchs are revered till you see and hear what is happening in Thailand.

*Facebook
Carl Mitchell*

Thailand was lucky to have had HM

Re: His Majesty through foreign eyes, Oct 25

I have seen documentaries on His Majesty. He was a people's man and he loved his country. He worked for the people, travelling all over the country to take supplies and talk to those who adored him. Thailand was lucky to have

a King who truly loved his people and country.

*Terry Chandler
Facebook*

Sometimes it seems to be the easiest way

Re: French man jumps to his death from Patong hotel, Oct 21

Sometimes it's easier to stay in paradise than return to the real world. He clearly thought it out. Rest in peace.

*Tenille Williams
Facebook*

Taxi drivers 'never' to blame

Re: Russian bikers in brawl with Phuket taxi drivers, Oct 25

We all know Phuket taxi drivers are like Mother Teresa on four wheels. Always open to reason, never shy to compromise and absolutely repulsed by violence and intimidation.

I hope they will live through their ordeal without psychological scars.

*Sacha Albarda
Facebook*

Well done to the police officers

Re: Another drug bust nets B2mn worth of drugs, Oct 24

Well done to the Phuket Police and officials.

*Sarah Johnson
Facebook*

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Safety always a priority

FIRST PERSON

OUR office is in charge of looking after animal hunting in the Khao Phra Thaeo forest. The area is about 13,925 rai and was officially designated as a non-hunting area on June 30, 1998. It has two waterfalls, which are the Bang Pae and Ton Sai waterfalls. The Gibbon Rehabilitation Project is also located at the Bang Pae waterfall.

We have also established a center for natural studies at Ton Sai waterfall, where we hold activities and camping for students or others interested in studying nature. However, as this area is officially under our jurisdiction, we advise people to communicate with us beforehand, rather than simply showing up and setting up a camp site.

There is also a trekking trail from Ton Sai to Bang Pae waterfall, about four kilometers long. Locals and tourists are welcome to the area. We have set up signs to guide people about where to go for hiking and observing nature. The signs are in both English and Thai, with universally recognized symbols that everyone can understand.

However, some people still don't follow official instructions. In some places, we have signs saying 'No Entry', but people choose to ignore them and get lost as a result. Although we do have staff and rescue workers standing by in case of emergencies, we prefer to be proactive and prevent such cases from occurring entirely.

Sometimes, tourists misunderstand when they see tracks marked out for gibbons. Please



from Kasetsart University.

Piyawat Sukhon, 52, took up his position as the chief of the Khao Phra Thaeo Non Hunting Zone in Phuket last June. He is originally from Nakhon Sri Thammarat and graduated with a Bachelor's Degree from the Forestry School in Phrae Province and a Master Degree in forestry

While working for the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP), he had a chance to fly over Phuket by helicopter for forest inspection. Here, he talks about what can be done to enhance visitor safety in the area.

understand that these are only for officials to use when checking on gibbons. We have also placed signs saying 'Officials Only' in order to prevent any confusion for visitors.

We have especially marked out the tracks that are meant for visitors. On the tracks, we have signs to inform visitors which station they are at. There are 13 stations at the moment, which serve as markers in case visitors get lost or need help. They can simply say which stations they are close to and we will be able to locate them.

If you come in a group, we can also provide staff to help and guide you. Although this is not our main job and we do not have many officers, we prefer to help visitors when they arrive, rather than spending time and resources searching for them later, especially after dark.

If you would still prefer to do it alone, we recommend that you at least let us know of your plans to hike, even if only for our records. If you don't inform us, we would assume that you have come for the waterfall.

There are many interesting

stories about several spots in the Khao Phra Thaeo area that even Phuket natives may not know about. I have gained a lot of precious knowledge about the area by talking to wise, local people.

Tourists are free to visit and we do not wish to stop anyone from coming into the non-hunting zone, except for some designated areas. We are deliberating making a map so that visitors can use it while they are walking in the forest.

We want to make the area more remarkable, but we cannot do much because the main purpose is a non-hunting area, not a tourist attraction.

We try to offer whatever convenience we can, and hope that tourists understand our role and will follow our instructions. Please help us maintain the forest in all its natural glory and do not do anything to harm nature.

Last, but not the least, safety must always be a top priority. We will look out for you to the best of our abilities, but on your part, please try not to put yourselves at risk to begin with.



Rescue workers at the site of the crash which claimed the lives of two Russian nationals last week. Photo: Winai Sarot

Take time to ponder

Island View

By Sahar Aftab Paliwala

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

WHETHER you live in Phuket, Philadelphia or the Philippines, one topic you cannot avoid hearing about is the upcoming presidential elections in the United States. It would not be an understatement to say that not only Americans, but the whole world is waiting to see how this plays out.

While I'm generally not interested in politics, and certainly not in politicians, I can't help but throw my hands up in despair at some of the things that have been said and done during this year of campaigning. Perhaps one of the worst repercussions of this election – and possibly the furthest reaching one – has been the normalizing of racism, hate speech and discrimination on a global scale.

Sure, racism existed before the elections came along, and will continue to exist after it's over. But the culture of being allowed – even encouraged – to spew out whatever poisonous, ill-informed opinion that

comes to your head will have dangerous, long-lasting consequences.

If a country considers itself a 'superpower', it must learn to take that responsibility seriously, for indeed, it is a responsibility. But, we must not lay the entire blame on politicians. After all, they're only speaking to those who listen. What we can and should do, however, is check ourselves before we find ourselves going down the same path.

Case in point: a news story about two Russians who died in a car crash in Phuket last week. As is standard procedure in such cases, police said they would conduct a blood alcohol level test to check whether the driver was under the influence. However, I was shocked at how it garnered the most insensitive, judgmental comments from some people about how the men had 'obviously' been drinking and why they 'deserved' to die.

Until such evidence is actually obtained, there is no grounds to say that they had been under the influence, and even if they were, name calling and blaming two people whose lives have just come to a tragic end seems a pointless and unnecessarily hostile waste of time.

Words from the Wise

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”

– John Quincy Adams

“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.”

– John F Kennedy

“If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door.”

– Milton Berle

Issues & Answers

Any advice on how to educate my children?

I AM a foreigner married to a Thai woman. We have children born here in Phuket who need to go to school. However, since we don't own a house here, the children are not registered as Phuket residents and the local state-run schools will not accept them.

The only option appears to be private education at a bi-lingual or international school, which is frankly beyond our budget. Can someone at the local Ministry of Education office offer any advice on how to get

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

Submit your issue at:

www.PhuketGazette.net/IssuesAnswers

Ms Sukhon Maneekwan, Officer of Phuket Primary Educational Service Area Office replies:

You may have to seek accommodation in Phuket to register the children as Phuket residents. Then, for example, if your children are in Chalong, it is automatically prioritized for them to study at schools in Chalong.

For further information, feel free to contact the Phuket Primary Educational Service Area Office 076-211591.

our Thai kids educated in the Thai education system?

David R Mattison
Phuket

Profiting from periods of panic

Finance

By David Mayes

THERE is a good lesson in handling panic that can be learned from recent events in Thailand.

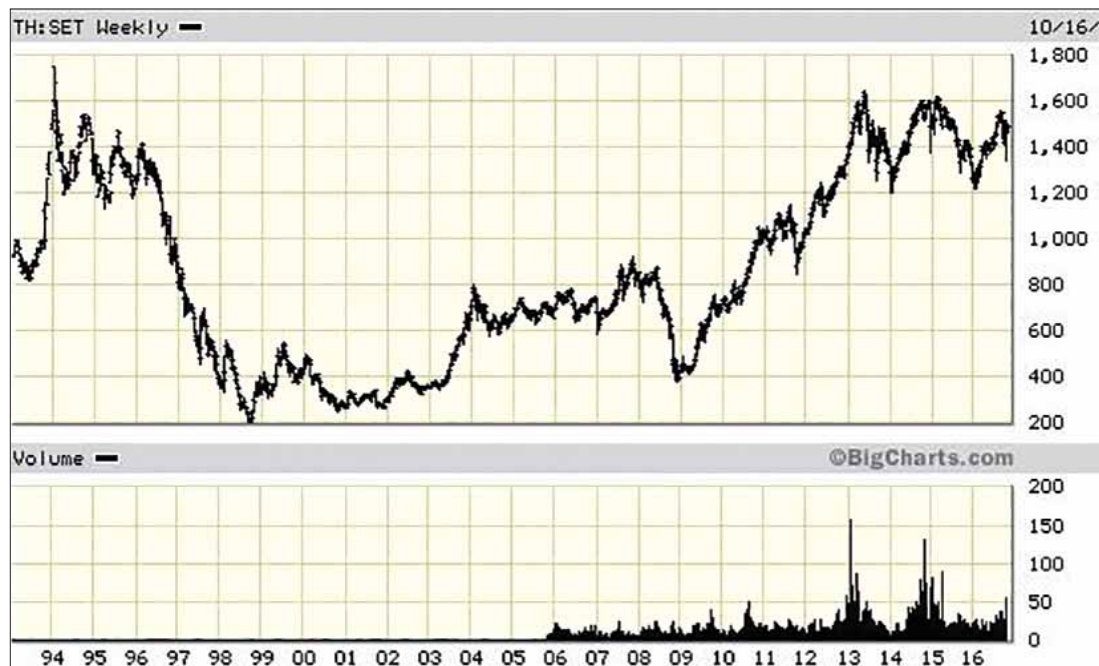
The SET index, which is a broad measure of the Thai stock market, went on a pretty wild ride in response to the news regarding the monarchy. If you are not aware of what happened, the chart (right) shows the massive sell-off, only to have the market rebound back to pre-panic levels over the following week.

Now, the market had already made a pretty sharp correction in the beginning of September, and then did the standard 50 per cent retracement before consolidating around the 1,500 level.

When a breakout to the upside failed, the Thai market was primed for a move to the downside already. Thus this panic was not solely related to the news, but technically, we were already lined up for a big move one way or the other.

With the news, of course, the direction became very clear.

What is interesting is that the market has already recovered back to the 1,500 level, at least temporarily. I am not making



This chart shows the massive sell-off, only to have the market rebound back to pre-panic levels over the following week. Image: SET

any predictions here, but in the short term panic is almost never the correct thing to do regardless of whether you are a speculator or an investor.

If you did hold a view that the recent events in Thailand had a negative implication for the future direction of the stock market, you would be able to exit at a much better price than you would have mid-panic.

Now I am not advocating sitting through an entire down market if you think one is coming. My opinion is that if there

is one coming, it has nothing to do with events inside Thailand, but rather the entire region of Asia.

Even more specifically, global consumption dropping off could hit China very hard and be a catalyst for a long overdue drop in stock prices throughout Asia.

If you look at the last major crisis in the region, it had quite a long recovery period.

You can see that in the few years before 1997, the Thai stock market traded from 1,200

to 1,400 mostly. If you zoomed in to view the break down, you could have easily gotten out on a rebound somewhere in the 1,000 to 1,200 region without selling mid-panic.

Normally bear markets come hard and fast and then retrace 50 per cent before settling into a new range, as I mentioned above.

Usually leaving any money you don't intend to spend in the next decade to ride through a cycle is not considered too risky. In this instance it took

more than 15 years to get back to levels seen before the crisis.

I am not really trying to make any predictions in this other than to show the long term picture and remind you that when markets move fast, panic is usually the worst thing to do.

Of course looking back over the past 20 years on the above chart, you can see that we are still near the top of the range of where this market has traded.

The SET has not been able to make new highs above where it topped out back in 1994. Imagine buying during the hysteria and 20 years later still being underwater on the position.

Panic can be on the upside as well as when things are crashing. You should never chase a market up either. There will always be another opportunity to buy at reasonable levels.

David Mayes, MBA, resides in Phuket and provides wealth management services to expatriates around the globe, focusing on UK pension transfers. He can be reached at lifeisamazingthailand@gmail.com or 085-335 8573. Faramond UK is regulated by the FCA and provides advice on pensions and taxation.

Social innovation firm helps S&P donate waste food

DO IN THAI, a social innovation company, has inked a contract with S&P Syndicate to help the major food and bakery chain donate its waste food to needy people. Using its software application FoodGiving, Do in Thai saves good food destined to be thrown out and sends it to charities and community groups, who transform it into meals for vulnerable people.

Suthat Ronglong, 29, the founder and chief executive of Do in Thai, said his firm had started working with S&P about two months ago and will start a full-scale operation for that company next month.

"Our goal is to create a platform to help small and large businesses manage their waste food. We want them to become aware of and handle their waste better. It is not our objective to increase the volume of waste,"

he said.

FoodGiving has been designed to tackle many 'pain points' of potential food donors. Many organizations would like to donate their waste food but aren't confident it would really go to people who need it, and some fear damage to their brand's image.

To tackle these issues, Do in Thai has developed a traceable logistics system and has chosen to deal only with reputable and committed charity organizations and community groups. To prevent the foods being resold or to avoid damaging the brand image of the donors, Do in Thai repackages all of the donated food and labels it under the FoodGiving name. Under the agreement, S&P has agreed to provide a fixed [undisclosed] monthly payment to Do in Thai.

— *The Nation*

Business registrations on the rise

ALTHOUGH NEW business registrations declined year on year last month, new company registrations in the first nine months rose by 4 per cent to 48,987 firms.

The new registrations are ensuring that this year the number of new companies will surge by 60,000-65,000, according to the Commerce Ministry.

Banjongjitt Angsusingh, who is the director-general of the Business Development Department, said more investors were expected to start new companies in the remaining months of this year as a result of the government's investment-promotion measures and strong tourism growth.

"Thailand will maintain the momentum of promoting investment under a strategy to develop the local economy and increase employment. The plan

to encourage the setting up of start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises will help increase investment," she said.

The department expects most of the new companies will be in the construction, property-development, restaurant, consultancy, and machinery businesses. The number of new business registrations in September declined by 2 per cent to 6,076 companies, while initial investment capital was down 51 per cent year on year to 22,429 firms.

The department claims that its measures to facilitate new enterprises have also resulted in the establishment of more new businesses.

These include the Transaction Security Act and the one-person-company legislation.

The Commerce Ministry expects gross domestic product to grow by 3.2-3.5 per cent this year, which will encourage strong business expansion, with the department expecting about 60,000-65,000 new registrations this year. However, Ms Banjongjitt said some risks remained that could affect enterprises' decisions to expand their businesses, including the sluggish export sector and fluctuating oil prices, as these factors could affect spending power.

The department also reported that 11,835 companies closed in the first nine months, down by 0.2 per cent year on year.

A total of 639,907 companies are actively operating in the country, of which 1,149 are public companies.

— *The Nation*

Central Wage Committee proposes 10 baht raise on Phuket's minimum wage

By Sukawin Tanthavanich

A PROPOSAL to raise the minimum wage in Phuket by 10 baht a day is to be presented to the Cabinet by the Central Wage Committee.

During a meeting held on October 19, an overall increase of 5-10 baht was proposed for 69 provinces, whereas the eight remaining provinces, including Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Trang and Yala, would stay at the current nationwide level of 300 baht a day.

If approved, the new wages will take effect on January 1, 2017.



Only seven provinces will see a 10-baht raise Photo: Numista

"We have proposed a 5 baht a day rise for 49 provinces, including Ratchaburi, Surin and Udon Thani. Additionally, 13 provinces, including Surat Thani, Chiang Mai and Krabi, are proposed

to have an increase of 8 baht a day," said ML Puntrik Samiti, chair of the Central Wage Committee.

Seven provinces, including Phuket and Bangkok, are proposed to have a 10 baht a day increase.

ML Puntrik stated that 10 factors are taken into account in order to calculate the proposed wage hike.

These include the current wage, cost of living, inflation rate, standard of living, cost of production, prices of goods and services, business competitiveness, labor productivity, GDP as well as social and economic conditions.

Asean to gobble up 10% of world's tourism investment dollars: study

ONE in 10 of all tourism investment dollars is forecast to go into Asean countries over the next decade, according to new research by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC).

The council said investment spending would be dominated (95 per cent) by five major destinations – Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia – which together accounted for over 80 per cent of Asean's international arrivals and tourism contribution to gross domestic product.

The study, 'Travel & Tourism Investment in Asean', looked at the years 2016 to 2026.

Travel and tourism investment in Asean over the next decade is forecast to total US\$782 billion (27.4 trillion baht), or 7.4 per cent of all investment in the region. This represents growth of 6.3 per cent per year, nearly 2 percentage points faster than the global average, WTTC said.

Some countries may fall short of investment in infrastructure, the report warned.

However it said that given the strong demand for travel to this region, some countries were still at risk of not investing enough to ensure infrastructure meets the needs of the forecast tourism growth.

The report highlights the investment needed in Asean to support the region's forecast travel and tourism growth over the next decade.

Asean is one of the world's most tourism-dependent regions. The industry contributes 12.4 per cent of GDP, nearly 4 per cent above most other world regions. However, according to the report, Asean's tourism infrastructure currently only ranks ahead of Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa.

As such the outlook across the 10 constituent countries of Asean is mixed. Myanmar, Cambodia and the Philippines are classified as 'infrastructure-constrained'.

Forecast investment is not deemed to be sufficient to ensure that poor existing infrastructure can be improved to meet the needs of future tourism demand and to maintain competitiveness.

Vietnam and Laos are identified as having 'improving infrastructure and growth prospects' although future investment will need to be channelled effectively and targeted at priority areas.

Thailand is the only country classified as 'future focus critical', where relatively strong existing infrastructure and future demand growth need to be

supported by a continued investment focus.

Malaysia and Brunei are expected to balance future infrastructure investment needs with forecast demand growth.

Singapore and Indonesia are classified as 'having high levels of infrastructure spending and forecast growth that should allow them to sustain projected levels of demand'.

David Scowsill, president and chief executive officer of the WTTC, said: "Our research shows that investment in infrastructure is critical to the future sustainability of travel and tourism. As one of the fastest-growing tourism markets, public and private sector leaders across Asean must prioritize tourism investment and channel it effectively to ensure the region's infrastructure can meet this increasing demand."

WTTC said Singapore and Indonesia were leading the way in terms of their infrastructure development but across Asean much more was required.

For some countries this might mean expanding capacity through increasing visitor accommodation, airport capacity and tourist facilities while others need to maintain and enhance their current infrastructure, it said.

– The Nation

Trade Dept to look into overcharging of Chinese tourists



Wang Huijuan (left), Vice Consul General and Head of The Phuket Consular Office in Songkhla, and Phuket Governor Chokchai Dejamorthan on October 19. Photo: Phuket PR

By Sukawin Tanthavanich

THE GOVERNOR of Phuket has promised to crack down on restaurants in Patong allegedly overcharging Chinese tourists.

Phuket Governor Chokchai Dejamorthan promised to have the Department of Internal Trade investigate restaurants in the tourist hotspot in a meeting with Wang Huijuan, Vice Consul General and Head of The Phuket Consular Office in Songkhla, on October 19.

Ms Wang brought up several complaints made by Chinese tourists to the island of restaurants in Patong that do not show prices and overcharge for food, said Governor Chokchai.

In the 'relationship strengthening meeting, the pair discussed progress in dealing with 'zero-dollar tourism' a practice whereby China-based tour agencies pre-sell vouchers to Chinese tourists coming to Phuket to purchase items at the tourist venues they are bussed to, meaning little or no income for local businesses that would otherwise benefit from tourism revenue as well as bringing back quality tourists to the province.

"Although the recent clampdown on zero-dollar tourism has resulted in a decline in the number of Chinese tourists visiting Phuket, I am confident that Ms Wang and the Chinese Consular Office's commitment to bringing back quality tourists in the near future," said the governor.

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Amari Phuket awarded 'Best Beach Resort in Asia-Pacific 2016' by TTG

Amari Phuket was the proud recipient of the 'Best Beach Resort in Asia-Pacific 2016' award at the 27th Annual TTG Travel Awards 2016, held on October 6. Situated on a secluded spot at the southern end of Patong Beach, the 380-room Amari Phuket was recognized as the region's top beachfront hotel for its panoramic views of the Andaman Sea with warm and friendly service.



Pierre-Andre Pelletier (center), Vice President and Area General Manager, South Thailand, ONYX Hospitality Group holds the award presented to him by Michael Chow (left), Group Publisher of TTG Travel Trade Publishing and Pierre Quek (right), Online Publisher of TTG Travel Trade Publishing.

One for all: Hyatt Regency Resort introduces The Three Marketeers

Members of the Hyatt Regency Phuket Resort's new Marcom team popped in to the *Phuket Gazette* offices on October 20 with a box of treats from the hotel's bakery.



The *Phuket Gazette*'s Assistant Sales Manager Supanan Supawong (2nd left) greets the Hyatt Regency Phuket Resort's new marketing trio – Marketing Communications Manager Sirithorn Viravat (left); Assistant Director of Sales and Leisure, Thanawan Anansetsiri (2nd right) and Marketing Communications Coordinator Pattarawadee Sukolrat (right).



Thai Restaurant



Pool Villa



Hot spring pools



Cold water pool

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Events in Paradise

Dessert delights at Limelight Avenue Sweets Fest

More than 30 confectionery vendors put their edible wares on display at Limelight Avenue multi-purpose mall in Phuket Town for the 'Sweets Festival', held October 23-25. The celebration of traditional and contemporary desserts is on again October 31-November 1.



Phuket City Deputy Mayor Dr Kosol Teangutai (center) was the guest of honor for the opening of the Sweets Festival.



Local food connoisseur and TV presenter DJ Man (right) and Khun Prew salivate over the smorgasbord of desserts.

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The history of Chulalongkorn Day

OCTOBER 23 marked 'King Chulalongkorn Day' or 'Wan Piyamaharaj'. It is the memorial day of the passing away of King Chulalongkorn, otherwise known as King Rama V. The fifth monarch of Thailand under the House of Chakri, he was the son of King Mongkut and the grandfather of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Many Thais show their respects for the great monarch by placing wreaths at the Equestrian Statue in the Royal Plaza in Bangkok on this public holiday. Much of this part of Bangkok was originally built during the reign of King Chulalongkorn and bears the architectural mix of Thai and European styles characteristic of the era.

King Chulalongkorn the Great was the son of King Rama IV or King Chomklao and Queen Thepsirinthara. He was born on September 20, 1853 and was first coronated on November 11, 1868.

He studied various branches of arts and sciences, such as royal tradition, public administration, archaeology, Pali, English, military science, wrestling, weaponry, and engineering. Moreover, he paid state visits to Singapore and Java twice and India once. These were educational tours to observe the political and ad-



Many Thais show their respects for the great monarch by placing wreaths at the foot of statues of Rama V, like the one pictured here at Phuket Provincial Hall. Photo: Gazette file

ministration systems of the European Imperialists who came to govern the colonies in South and Southeast Asia. He brought back new knowledge and technology to apply back home. Royal traditions, such as royal and military uniforms and haircuts were adapted to a western style.

He was ordained as a Buddhist monk for a short time in 1873 and was then coronated again to announce absolute

kingship to the people of Thailand and the world.

King Chulalongkorn is considered one of the greatest kings of Thailand. His reign from 1868 to 1910 was characterized by extensive social and economic development, including the abolition of slavery and corvee (state labor service).

He is also famed for his ardent Thai nationalism, and for his skill in fending off the threat of European colonialism, de-

spite the fact that large tracts of Siam were ceded to the Europeans during the period. He managed to prevent Thailand from being colonized by extending friendship and travelling extensively to western countries like America, Great Britain, France and Russia. Because of this, Thailand remains the only country in Southeast Asia to have never been colonized.

King Chulalongkorn was the

first Thai King to send a Royal Princes to be educated in Europe. He was perhaps best known for his abolition of slavery via the 1900 Employment Act, which stated that all workers should be paid.

His Majesty led several major reforms in Thailand, for example in the areas of Thai educational system, military affairs and the State Railway. He also modernized government and streamlined the administration of the country by dividing it into provinces and districts. He also reformed the administrative system into various Ministries, Departments, Divisions and Sections respectively, and replaced the traditional lunar calendar with the Western calendar.

While Thailand is a predominantly Buddhist country, he made it clear that other religions should have the freedom to practice without fear of persecution. Communications in the country were improved greatly with the introduction of postal services, the telegraph and the construction of Thailand's first railway (from Bangkok to Ayutthaya).

His Majesty passed away on October 23, 1910 at the age of 57. He had ruled what was then Siam, for 42 years.

— *Phuket Gazette*

Laguna Triathlon back on track

ORGANIZERS of the Laguna Phuket Triathlon 2016 confirmed on October 22 that the annual international race is to go ahead as planned on Sunday, November 20.

The Laguna Phuket Triathlon Race Office tentatively announced on October 20 that the race would be cancelled due to the country being in a period of mourning. However, Phuket Governor Chokchai Dejamornthan, the Phuket Provincial Office, and the Ministry of Tourism and Sports said that the Triathlon should go ahead.

"The Laguna Phuket Triathlon 2016 will now be reinstated as planned in November, although some adjustments will be made to the race and respective events for appropriateness," read a statement from the race organizers.

"The Laguna Phuket Triathlon Race Office is hereby recalling the cancella-



The Laguna Phuket Triathlon Race Office rescinded the tentative cancellation they had announced earlier. Photo: Gazette file

tion announcement issued on October 20, accordingly.

"The Race Office would like to thank the Phuket Governor, Phuket Provincial Office and the Ministry of Tourism and Sports for their kind support in the organization of the Laguna Phuket

Triathlon 2016," the statement read.

The *Phuket Gazette* has been a sponsor of this event since its inception in 1993, and is proud to be able to continue in that role again this year.

— *Phuket Gazette*

Runners honor HM



The runners covered distances of 9.99 and 19.99km over routes shaped like the number nine in Thai. Photo: Gazette file

MORE than a hundred runners gathered at Suanluang Rama IX Park in Phuket on October 23 to honor His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Covering distances of 9.99 and 19.99km, over a route

shaped like the number nine in Thai, runners donned black clothes to signify mourning.

Despite intermittent rain, all participants finished their respective courses.

— *Phuket Gazette*

Elite weigh anchor for rendezvous

THE Asia Superyacht Rendezvous (ASR) has welcomed many of the world's finest uber-luxurious craft to Phuket over the past 15 years and this year's event is no exception.

The Phuket ASR 2016 is a custom-designed gathering specially for superyacht owners and captains, and the organizers are very excited about some of the new vessels streaming in for the show of elegance on the water. As well as the traditional sailing races, a host of off-water events are also planned for the upcoming Phuket ASR.

"The elite gathering, held December 16-18 every year, consistently attracts superior sail and power vessels from among the world's stunning superyachts", announced ASR organizers Gordon Fernandes and Captain (Champagne) Charlie Dwyer.

"For the first time, the two days of Superyacht Racing will culminate in an 'Asia Superyacht Rendezvous Cup' award. Our guests may choose to race, or simply enjoy the pleasure of being out on the water during the races, cheering on their favorites," said Mr Fernandes.

Owners attending ASR are elated by their experience, said Gordon, sharing remarks from one of last year's registrants: "You can forget the Med and the Caribbean. As a relatively new owner of a superyacht, I am keen to learn more about cruising in the region, even on to Myanmar, and further into Asia. The Superyacht Rendez-



The elite gathering, held December 16-18 every year, consistently attracts superior sail and power vessels from among the world's most stunning superyachts. Photo: Asia Superyacht Rendezvous

vous provides a unique opportunity at which to do so, while learning from other owners' experiences."

Johnny Warrillow, owner of superyacht *Maverick II*, said: "We attended because it is a very friendly gathering in Phuket of yacht owners. The region has an exciting future as a base in Asia, and it's fun to be part of it from the start. The relaxed and informal opening party sets the tone for the rest of the event, where friendships are forged over shared experiences."

Following the opening welcome and race course outline by Captain Andy Dowden,

guests will be whisked away by tenders to celebrate aboard the unique and beautiful Phinisi-style *Dania Baru* for the opening night's cocktail party. The following day offers opportunities for relaxed socializing and spectacular superyacht sailing races.

In the evening, it's party time with racing and yacht crew teams taking part in the wild and festive model boat-building contest, the Benetti Challenge, held at the SALA Phuket Resort & Spa.

Joining the 2016 Rendezvous are an outstanding group of ASR sponsors and media partners led by Co-Sponsors

Benetti Yachts and Benetti Hong Kong, Asia Pacific Superyachts, and host hotel SALA Resort & Spa Phuket. Major media partners include Lux Media Group and Heart Media, *YACHTStyle* and *Palace* magazines along with longtime ASR media partner, the *Phuket Gazette* and *The Nation* newspapers.

Also on board for the ASR 2016 are *STC Magazine* (Shanghai Travelers' Club) media group out of New York and Hong Kong and other international yachting and lifestyle publications.

An elite superyacht gathering on land and water, the Rendez-

vous is a wonderful way for superyacht owners and captains to meet others and compare notes in a relaxed social setting without distractions.

Held in an exclusive, non-commercial environment, the event provides owners, captains and crews with thrilling superyacht racing and the option to join in or view on the water. To learn more visit asia-superyacht-rendezvous.com Invitations are extended to yachts 25m and longer. Email: gordon@asia-superyacht-rendezvous.com or charlie@asia-superyacht-rendezvous.com.

- *Phuket Gazette*

A gadget for all weathers



For the sailor who has everything, here is a useful device that can fit in your pocket and attach to your smart phone: the Weatherflow Windmeter. Priced at around US\$40, the device plugs into your phone or can connect over Bluetooth for real-time wind, temperature, humidity and pressure readings displayed directly in the Wind Meter app. Photo: Weatherflow

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Mangroves: a vital eco-system component



CORAL reefs attract far more publicity than mangrove swamps. After all, coral is spectacularly beautiful, and affords protection to some of the world's most spectacular fishes – clown fish, parrot fish, wrasse and literally hundreds of other species.

From the air, mangrove swamps also look appealing, but close up are muddy and turbid with unsightly roots and often have a rank smell. Forget the aesthetics though. They are even more crucial to our marine environment than coral.

Consider this. Shrimps are big business in Thailand: the country is the third largest exporter of seafood. Since the 1970s, the Thai government has promoted intensive shrimp production, especially in coastal areas. When descending to Phuket Airport, one passes over many shrimp farms. These rectangular ponds created in part by obliterating the stands of mangroves which once fringed the island's eastern shoreline.

This rapid expansion has come at the cost of thousands of hectares of mangroves, a complex and fecund ecosystem with a uniquely rich bio-diversity, which embraces other trees, marine plants and animals, and key micro-organisms. In global



A volunteer plants a young mangrove to replenish a mangrove forest along the coast of Phuket, providing a natural filter to purify water as well as essential nutrients to marine life. Photo: Gazette file

terms, and according to figures released by the World Resources Institute, the world lost between 9,000 and 25,000 hectares of mangroves between 2001 and 2012. Shrimp aquaculture is probably the biggest single contributor. One estimate suggests that 38 per cent of this depletion is attributable to shrimp farm development.

So these farms, economically so important, have come at a huge cost to the marine environment, especially in Phuket and South Thailand. Noppadol Tawee is a shrimp farmer in Surat Thani. His ponds occupy the site of an-

cient mangrove swamps. For some years he made lots of money; other years, none at all. Why? Because his shrimps fell sick and died. They died because they lived in de-oxygenated water polluted by artificial additives, an environment which made them prone to mortal disease.

It was not only the shrimp which were affected. The antibiotics, fertilizers, disinfectants and pesticides which were indiscriminately used, found their way into canals, rivers and seas without being treated. This toxic wastewater resulted in massive fish depopulation.

"The fishermen couldn't catch anything, and we couldn't grow oysters anymore," says Preecha Danchulchai, the owner of an off-shore oyster farm in the area.

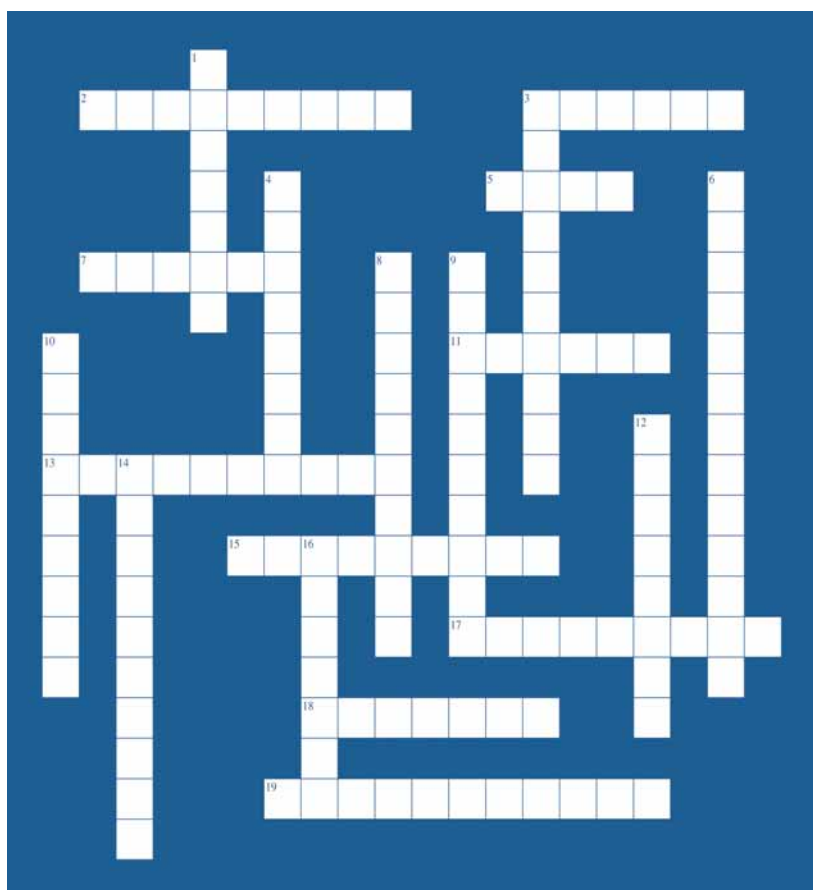
Shrimp farmers were advised to plant mangroves in the middle of their ponds and to discontinue the common practice of administering antibiotics, fertilizers and artificial food. The result? As Noppadol says: "The shrimp have flourished. They get everything they need from the mangroves." In other words, mangroves provided a natural and complete solution to the problem.

It has to be said that replanting mangroves does not always work. In Phuket, there have been laudable communal efforts to replace denuded areas of shoreline with trees. But mangroves are ecosystems which have a complex relationship with the tide: the young seedlings need to be periodically submerged in seawater in order to survive. Moreover, there are about seventy different species of mangrove: the wrong species have often been planted in areas inherently unsuitable for their survival.

Nonetheless, the continued existence of our mangrove swamps is crucial. They are absolutely unique: they not only filter and purify the water, they provide essential nutrients. In addition, they provide breeding conditions for most species of tropical fish, absorb massive amounts of carbon, and pump oxygen into our skies. They even provide a natural barrier to the erosive powers of the ocean.

While man continues to ignore the massive problem of waste water, at least the mangroves are doing their considerable best to help.

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: GreenGardensWordpress.com.



Gazette Crossword

Test your local knowledge and word power.

Across

- 02. Powerful female, especially head of family
- 03. Shame or disgrace
- 05. Pier in Pa Khlok
- 07. Hard felt hat with dome-shaped crown
- 11. Law defining the time citizens must be indoors by
- 13. Characteristic of, or native to, a particular region
- 15. Best form of flattery
- 17. _____ rape: sexual intercourse with a minor
- 18. Group of islands in the Andaman Sea
- 19. Cultural rebirth of Europe

Down

- 01. Side view
- 03. Greatly impressed by celebrities
- 04. Confection made of sugar, honey and almond
- 06. _____ Day, celebrated on October 23 in Thailand
- 08. An indeterminate or undefined place or state
- 09. _____ Anonymous, organization that helps members stay sober
- 10. Stealthy and cunning
- 12. Before birth
- 14. Hilary's party
- 16. Stalemate

Solution on opposite page.



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How a King's passion inspired



IN A recent column, I wrote about a sailing dinghy called "Vega 2", which was built by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej and which in 1967 he raced to gold medal success at the 4th Southeast Asia Peninsular Games (now the SEA Games). Much has changed in Thailand since I wrote that column.

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand passed away peacefully on October 13, 2016 in Bangkok. The soul of the nation and a father to all Thais, he worked tirelessly for the betterment of his people throughout his life. He was also a sportsman and an exceptional sailor, and it is the latter, specifically his boat building prowess, that I would like to cover in this column.

His Majesty came across sailing by accident. In 1963 when he was rowing off Klai Kangwon Palace in Hua Hin he passed HSH Prince Bhisadej Rajani who was sailing along, very slowly. This sparked His Majesty's interest in boats, which then developed into a passion, with His Majesty and the Prince building a number of boats together in a room at the Chitralada Palace in Bangkok, and testing them in the palace's pond.

His Majesty built boats primarily in three classes, the International Enterprise Class, the International OK Dinghy Class and the International Moth



His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej racing in a dinghy off Hua Hin. The late King's passion for the sport has inspired and encouraged many Thais to take up sailing and helped make Phuket become a world-class sailing destination. Photo: Vinit Tinvirat

Class – his first build being an Enterprise Class dinghy which he named *Rajptain* – a two-person dinghy that he sailed often with Prince Bhisadej.

His Majesty also built four OK dinghies – an international class originally from Denmark – *Novarik*, *Vega 1*, *Vega 2* and *Vega 3* – the latter has since been renamed *New*.

However, His Majesty's legacy perhaps lies in his own dinghy designs.

In 1966, His Majesty created his own class of boats – "The Royal Moth Class". These were designed within the parameters of the "International Moth Class" – an established class that allowed for innovation in design within a set of parameters. The parameters were a maximum overall length of 11

feet and a maximum sail area of 75 square feet. There were no restrictions on the width and shape of the boat, nor on the height of the mast or materials of construction. The "International Moth Class" was a development class, akin to a modern box rule in sailing.

Between 1966 and 1967, His Majesty built a number of boats in the class using three of his own designs:

1. Mod: a single masted dinghy, 11 feet in length and 4ft 7 inches wide at the beam, with a sail area of 72 sq ft, the design of which he registered at the Patent Office in Great Britain.
2. Super Mod: a single masted dinghy, 11 feet in length and a fraction wider at 4ft 11 inches.
3. Micro Mod: a single masted dinghy, 7ft 9 inches in length and

3ft 4 inches wide, designed specifically for juniors.

All were designed to be compact and suitable for Thai sailors. They are lightweight and therefore easy to transport and store, and are low maintenance. While reasonably fast, they were also designed to be relatively cheap to build. In fact, with the desire to encourage the promotion of sailing as a popular sport, His Majesty gave royal permission to the Royal Thai Navy Sailing Club to manufacture two models – the Mod and Super Mod – and sell at reasonable prices.

The Super Mod has arguably been the most popular of His Majesty's designs, having been used in international competitions, including numerous editions of the SEA Games. In

addition, a local fleet has built up over the years and while mostly used by sailors from the Royal Thai Navy and the Yacht Racing Association, the Super Mod fleet does compete once a year at the annual Hua Hin Regatta for the Super Mod National Championship trophy.

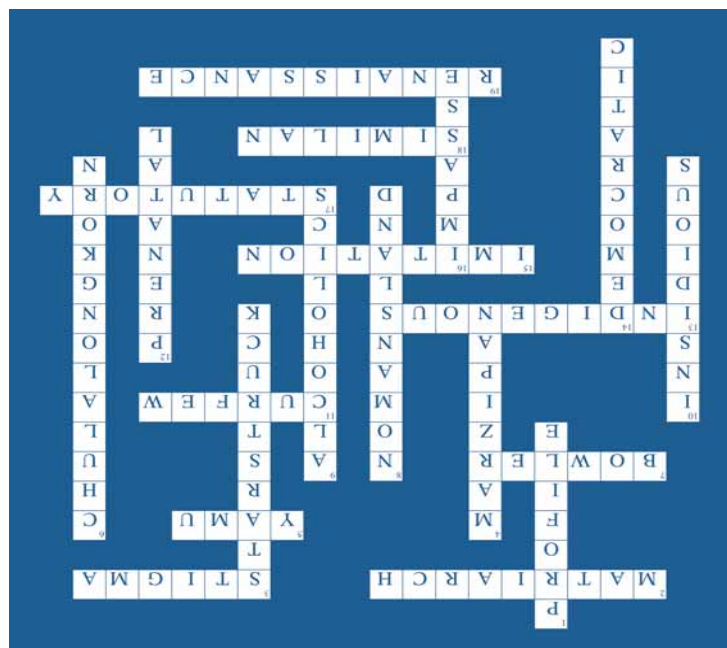
In 2007, while the nation was celebrating His Majesty's 80th birth year up and down the country, the Thai sailing community came together to celebrate it in the best way they knew how. A collective effort of the Royal Thai Navy, Yacht Racing Association of Thailand and PTT saw 80 Super Mods gather at the start line that year for the Hua Hin Regatta, all competing for the national championship – a fitting tribute to the Sailor King.

In recognition of His Majesty's contributions to sports, and in particular his skills as a dinghy sailor, the International Olympic Committee awarded the "Insignia of the Olympic Order" – the only reigning Monarch ever to receive such an honor. This was at the time of his fifth cycle, 60th birthday in December, 1987 – also the occasion of the inaugural Phuket King's Cup Regatta, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this December.

Duncan Worthington is a long time Phuket resident and through Infinity Communications (www.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

Crossword Solution

Turn the page upside down to read the answers.



What to expect when renting



By The Book
Kevin Hodges

RENTING a villa or apartment long term is very popular in Thailand, especially in resort areas such as Phuket, Pattaya, Hua Hin and Koh Samui.

Many would be buyers are deciding to hold off and rent for one year or more while they get to know the area and learn the ways of Thailand without so much risk.

Renting long term is very cheap here compared to locations such as Europe, Singapore or Hong Kong. You can find a two-bedroom pool villa for as little as 35,000 baht (US\$1,000) per month. The majority of rental properties are fully furnished and offer all usual amenities.

USING AN AGENT

It is highly recommended that you use a reputable real estate agent to ensure you get the right advice, property selection, assistance in viewings and negotiating the best rate possible. Going it alone is not advisable.

RENTAL PRICES

Rental prices range from as little as 10,000 baht per month for a studio condo up to over 400,000 baht for luxury high-end villas with stunning ocean views and staff to cook, clean



Renting villas is popular in resort areas such as Phuket and Koh Samui. Photo: Gazette file

and provide first-class service.

The average three-bedroom pool villa (sleeps 6) in a quiet area such as Rawai or Nai Harn, with lots of restaurants, bakeries, bars, shops, and very close to the famous Nai Harn beach, go for 40-60,000 baht per month.

RENTAL TERMS AND UTILITIES

A long term rental is one year, and usually a minimum of six months. This is, however, negotiable with the owner. The rental price includes – in most cases – maid service, pool cleaning and gardener, but utilities such as electric, water,

cable or satellite TV and internet are normally extra. You must check with your agent or owner at the outset to avoid disagreements later on.

INTERNET

Most villas and apartments have internet available but not always broadband so you should check on the speed available if this is an important criteria.

RENTAL PAYMENT

Typically rent is due on the first of each month in advance and must be paid to the owners account as agreed at the time of

booking. Failure to make payment on the due date or within seven days of the due date is grounds for immediate eviction. Some owners will agree a discount on the monthly rental price if a tenant is willing to pay six months or one year in advance.

SECURITY DEPOSIT

The owner will require a security deposit on booking which is normally two months' rent and is held by the owner until check out. As long as all utilities and other bills have been paid and there is no damage to the property then the deposit

will be returned in full, usually within 21 days of departure. This delay is due to the owner waiting for utility bills to come through.

INVENTORY

On checking in the owner should provide an inventory list for you to check, agree and sign. We strongly recommend you check furniture, take photos and inform the owner of any damage or scratches at the outset, to avoid any disputes at check-out time.

LEASE AGREEMENT

Before you move in the owner should provide a standard lease agreement with the terms which you must agree with the owner prior to occupation. Never move into a rental property without signing a lease agreement with the owner.

For most people, renting here is a positive experience. The cost of living is far lower than the likes of Singapore or Hong Kong and it has a lifestyle which is hard to rival in any location worldwide – a great quality of life and an infrastructure to support a long-term stay.

For more information, contact Kevin Hodges, Siam Real Estate (SRE) at 076-324042, email kevin@siamrealestate.com or visit siamrealestate.com

Foreign investment in Asean property expands

PROPERTY developers from Japan, China, South Korea and Hong Kong are expanding their investment in Asean, thanks mainly to the implementation of the Asean Economic Community (AEC), which has led to massive programs of public investment in infrastructure links between Southeast Asian countries.

Meanwhile, developers from Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand are also expanding their investment in other Asean member countries, after seeing business opportunity in Vietnam, Singapore, Laos and Myanmar, in particular.

For example, Viet Nam News reported that Singaporean investors and realty professionals had attended a recent Sun Group event in Singapore, at which the group

introduced its projects on the southern Vietnamese island of Phu Quoc.

Sam Ong, director of Savills Singapore, compared Phu Quoc with Singapore's Sentosa, saying there were similarities in geography, natural beauty and tourism potential, and adding that Phu Quoc was on the road to becoming Vietnam's Sentosa in the near future.

He suggested Phu Quoc would enjoy similar success to that experienced by Sentosa, with investors changing the island immensely in the future.

Therefore, with Singaporean real-estate investors tending to expand their portfolio outside the traditional markets of Thailand and the Indonesian island of Bali, Phu Quoc is set to be their new destination, he added.



The implementation of the AEC has led to massive programs of public investment in infrastructure. Photo: pexels

Meanwhile, Vietnamese investor Gia Phu decided to buy a condominium in Singapore after attending an event in Ho Chi Minh City held to launch three Singapore projects.

Explaining why he had done so, he said: "My daughter will study in Singapore next year, so I want to buy a condo for

her. Education in Singapore is as good as in the US or Australia. It has a similar culture to Vietnam's and is easy to access with many flights every day."

He is just one of many such buyers. In fact, a new investment trend has begun with Vietnamese pouring money

into buying condos in neighbouring countries, including Singapore and Malaysia.

Astra Land Indonesia – a joint venture between Astra International and Hongkong Land – and Mitra Sindo Makmur, a subsidiary of Modernland Realty, have created a joint venture to acquire 70 hectares of land in Cakung, East Jakarta, worth 3.4 trillion rupiah (9.1 billion baht).

In a collaboration marked under an agreement inked on October 12 in Jakarta, the new entity will develop the land for a project dubbed Jakarta Garden City.

This should provide positive sentiment for Modernland, given the fact that the new partners are well-known firms in Asia.

– The Nation

Thai hospitality chains rising

Local hotel management companies are growing the Thailand brand

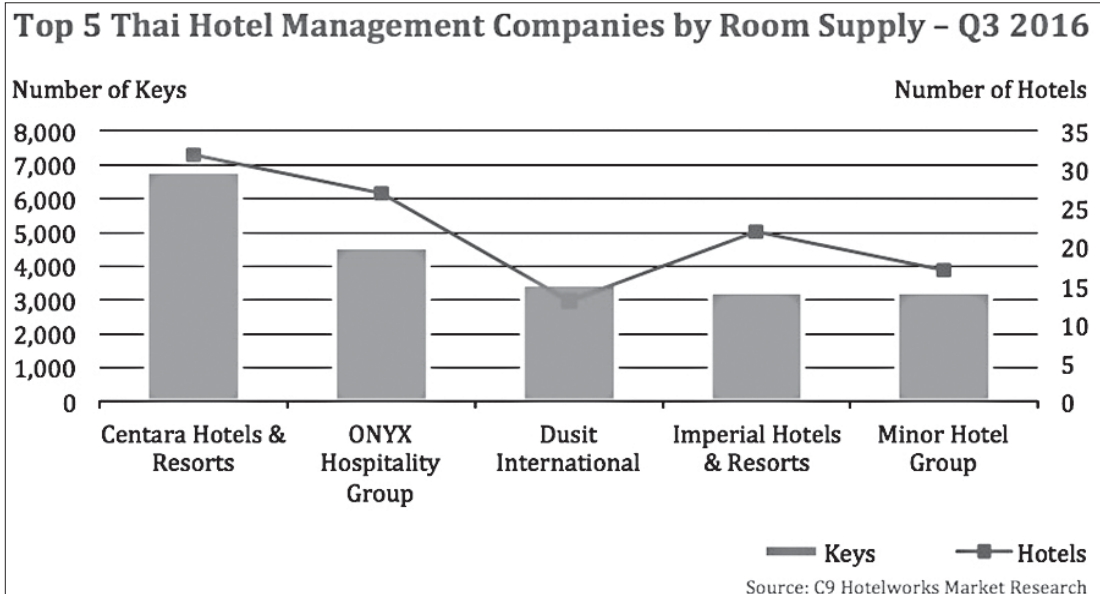
By Bill Barnett

FOR the past decade, Thailand's surging tourism industry has fueled a growing number of Thai hotel management companies (HMCs).

Spurring this trend has been upward demand from a rising domestic and regional consumer class coupled with a virtual explosion in low-cost airline expansion.

This developing storyline is reflected in data from consulting group C9 Hotelworks new Thailand Hotel Management Company Overview. There are currently 643 Thai HMC hotels operating throughout the country with a total inventory of 77,654 keys. To understand the latest proliferation of brands and chains, there are now 83 groups represented across 41 provinces.

Taking view of the Top-five chains, which control 28 per cent of Thai HMC room inventory, Centara Hotels & Resorts head the list, followed by Onyx Hospitality, Dusit Inter-



The Top 5 hotel chains control 28 per cent of Thai HMC room inventory with Centara Hotels & Resorts at the top of the list. Image: c9 Hotelworks

national, Imperial Hotels and Resorts and Minor Hotels Group.

As a by-product of the country's first tourism boom in the 1980s and 90s, local expertise sprang up from the influence of international chains.

This transfer of knowledge, best practices and management ability incubated. Ultimately, the combination of experience and local traditional hospitality have edged into the modern Thai HMC. Looking across Asia, the country ranks as a leader in the hospitality sector.

While C9's report has pinpointed the Top 50 Thai HMCs, going deeper into the research one exciting area of development is in upscale lifestyle-oriented boutique hotels brands. The Sala group, which now operates six properties in various destinations

with over 200 rooms, is quickly becoming a prominent brand that is attracting international recognition.

Summarizing the movement in Thailand's tourism sector, I would like to point out that given the high number of Thai HMCs it's likely that consolidation is inevitable. One only has to look at the merging of global hotel operating entities and brands and realize the local landscape will see a similar effect sooner than later. But for now, the good news is that Thai hospitality entrepreneurship is elevating 'Brand Thailand' both at home and abroad.

C9 Hotelworks is led by founder and Managing Director Bill Barnett, who brings over 30 years' experience in the Asian hospitality and real estate sectors. He promotes industry insight through conference presentations at key events and contributes to numerous publications. For more information visit www.c9hotelworks.com.



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Phuket Gazette

Blessed by a Royal visit

By Chutharat Plerin

Ngeem Damrongkaset is a member of Rawai sea gypsy community. Now in his 70s, he had a chance to meet His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej when he first visited Phuket in 1959.

“I was about 12 years old at the time,” says Mr Ngeem. “I can still picture it clearly. Every person in our community had gathered together and was anxiously waiting to meet him. I remember feeling so blessed on that day – it was the most important day of our lives. He was the Father of the Nation, and he came to see us – poor people, who did not even have a place to call home.”

Mr Ngeem recalls the excitement of that day with a feeling of gratitude.

“Some adults presented His Majesty with marine creatures they had caught. It was the best we could do, as we could not afford anything else. He accepted all the gifts with his own hands. He even drank water which the community members gave him. I do not think this is

something any other King would do,” he says.

“His Majesty and Her Royal Highness Queen Sirikit were graceful and respectful in all the things they did. It really was the best day of my life and I have never felt such joy and veneration in my life,” he adds.

Mr Ngeem says he has been shocked and grieved ever since he heard the news of His Majesty’s passing.

“His Majesty worked tirelessly for the country his whole life. He never stopped or took a day off from his duties. His presence and guidance was a huge blessing for the whole nation,” he says.

Mr Ngeem was born and raised in the Rawai sea gypsy community. He has never been anywhere but the sea, which is the only means of living for his family and community.

He attended a local school called Wat Sawang Arom School, which is located inside a temple close to where he grew up.

“All the kids in my community went to the same school,

as they could not afford to enroll anywhere else and were certain to grow up to be fishermen anyway,” he says.

Mr Ngeem says he and his fellow community members try to follow the example His Majesty set for everyone.

“His Majesty worked hard and never complained about it. He helped poor people and enabled them to be self-sufficient. I will strive to keep on doing good things to honor him and his legacy,” he says.

Although Mr Ngeem is no longer in a leadership position in his community, he says he does what he can to help his community members.

“In my role as an elder of the community, I sometimes see some inappropriate things, and do whatever I can to set things right when it is in my power. The best I can do is give advice and let people know what is right and what is wrong. The rest is up to them,” he says.

Mr Ngeem feels that a lot has changed since others from outside the community have settled in the

area.

“Earlier, we used to be just fishermen, but now the trend of other types of employment has taken hold. We are who we are, but there is nothing I can do if our younger generation doesn’t

want to follow in the same footsteps. It is their future, so they must be the ones to decide,” he says.

“Ultimately, we must follow His Majesty’s advice of doing our duty to the best of our abilities. He will always be in our hearts – our great King, the King of Kings.”



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