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DAILY NEWS

Phuket, Thailand: Saturday, January 17, 2009

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Friday, October 12, 2007

Wind shear probable cause of OG269 crash

BANGKOK (*The Nation*): Transport Permanent Secretary Chaisawat Kittipornpaiboon today announced that decoding of the One-Two-Go flight OG029 "black box" flight recorder revealed that the plane skidded off the runway and crashed into an escarpment due to bad weather.

As chairman of the air-crash investigation committee, K. Chaisawat said that the flight suffered from wind shear and the captain could not land as planned.

Black box evidence and a review of voice recordings indicate that the captain tried unsuccessfully to pull the plane up before the landing, he said.

The preliminary conclusion was reached after the return of the decoding results of the black box. The decision was also based on witnesses' accounts.

Ninety passengers were killed but 40 people survived the accident after passengers on one side of the plane managed to open an emergency door and scramble to safety before the fuselage became engulfed in smoke and flames.

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Phuket, Thailand
18:24 local time (GMT +7)

Friday, January 16, 2009

MPs pay respects at Phuket funeral



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Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thuagsuban (center) pays his respects at the funeral of Viroj Areerob, the father of Democrat MP Rewat Areerob (right).

PHUKET: Dignitaries and VIPs from around the nation, including Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thuagsuban, gathered at Chalong Temple on January 14 to pay their respects during the funeral of Viroj Areerob, father of Phuket Democrat Member of Parliament Rewat Areerob.

The cremation ceremony took place at about 12.30 pm.

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Phuket, Thailand
12:42 local time (GMT +7)

Friday, January 16, 2009

Phuket Airpark ready for grand opening



Seen here on arrival at the new Airpark is Eduardo Loigorri with his stunning new single-engine Tecnam. At right is Airpark Managing Partner Robert Suchard. The opening festivities run through Sunday afternoon.

PHUKET (PA KHLOK): Phuket's first-ever Fly-in starts tomorrow with ten aircraft scheduled to take part in a weekend of celebrations, games, contests and aerial stunts to mark the grand opening of Phuket Airpark. About 50 pilots from at least a score of nations are expected to be on hand, among them world-renowned American bush pilot Tom Claytor who flew in earlier this week.

The Airpark is situated on a 100 rai plot of grazing land in Pa Khlok. Its 500-meter grass strip shares the beautiful tree-lined pasture with a herd of buffalo, a happy partnership which has led Airpark founder Robert Suchard to honor his new baby with the nickname *Toong Kwai Bin* – southern Thai for 'Flying Buffalo Field'.

The Airpark is open to the public from 8am tomorrow through Sunday afternoon. The day starts with Muslim and Buddhist blessing ceremonies, followed by spot landing and 'flour bombing' contests, hot air balloon rides, a paramotor flying show, and a traction kiting exhibition by a team of ten aficionados. (An extreme sport, traction kiting is defined by its devotees as "kite surfing on land".)

To find all of this action, simply drive to the Heroines Monument, take highway 4027 east (toward Cape Yamu) for 6.3 kilometers, and turn right into the airport. Be alert for low flying aircraft... and buffalo.

The Fly-In has been organized by the Airpark's management and is sponsored by the Absolute property group, Kingfisher beer, and the *Phuket Gazette*. There will be plenty of photo opportunities and a planeload of prizes for the winners and runners-up in the many contests throughout the weekend.

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Friday, January 16, 2009

Pro-Thaksin TV channel available in Phuket

BANGKOK / PHUKET (The Nation): Politicians linked to ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra will on Monday launch the DTV satellite television station, with the goal, they say, of advancing democracy and opposing coups.

Banned Thai Rak Thai Party executive Adisorn Piangket said yesterday that the station would be managed by D Station, with himself as chairman. It is being co-founded by anti-coup activists linked to the pro-Thaksin camp, he said, insisting that Thaksin was not involved in establishing or financing the station. Rather, the founders raised funds from friends and family to start the venture.

"Thaksin is floating in the ocean right now. He has almost nothing left, not even land to live on. We don't dare bother him," Adisorn said.

Viewers who can receive ASTV and/or provincial cable television will be able to view DTV without charge. Phuket's two major provincial cable operators are Phuket Cable and KPP, where the Nation Channel and the Phuket Gazette's PGTV are aired daily.

Key supporters of the new station are Jatuporn Prompan, Veera Musigapong, Natthawut Saikua, Noppadon Pattama, Sunai Jullapongsathorn and Wichit Plangsriskul.

Programing is varied, but all shows will follow a theme of "promoting democracy"; for example, a "Truth Today" talk show by Veera, Natthawut and Jatuporn; a "Talk to Adisorn", hosted by Adisorn; and "Democracy Station" with former government spokesman Suparat Nakhbunnam.

Phra Phayom Kallayano, the popular abbot of Suan Kaew Temple, will air his daily morning dharma talk on the station.

Even though Thaksin was not involved in opening the station, he is welcome to phone in to any of these programmes whenever he wants, the new station says.

Dismissing concerns about possible government intervention, PM's Office Minister Satit Wongnongtaey said the new DTV station was free to broadcast. He said that even if the deposed premier were to call in from abroad during shows, there should be no problems since Thaksin has a right to do so. But he reminded media outlets to exercise professional judgment when reporting news that seemed to sow divisiveness.

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Phuket, Thailand
 09:34 local time (GMT +7)

Friday, January 16, 2009

Phuket's luxury villa market holding despite global conditions

PHUKET: The upscale luxury villa segment has outperformed the broader Phuket property market for Q4 2008 in spite of the worsening global financial downturn and recent political issues in Bangkok, according to the *Phuket Luxury Villa Market Report* recently released by the island's widely respected consulting firm C9 Hotelworks.

C9's Managing Director Bill Barnett said that "while take-up rates are expected to soften for 2009 with the 'wait and see' attitude of buyers, supply and demand still remains favorable."

Key fundamentals at play in the market are the absence of purchaser debt which has stabilised capital values, a slowdown in new product launches that will build marketplace traction while the availability of premium land continues to shrink, thus creating substantial barriers to entry. One emerging benefit of the crisis is the sharp

reduction in construction costs in the region by 20-30%, although this is being offset by limited availability of developer debt in the Thai financial markets."

According to C9's report, a total of 304 properties priced from 65 million baht (USD 2 million) and above, and located within estate developments, were for sale at the close of 2008 with projected increases to see this number rise to 367 moving into 2009 and beyond.

"Given the limited market size, re-sales of existing units will become more predominant as buyers shy away from taking development risk on off-plan purchases," Mr Barnett added.

Geographical diversification is another key trend. Limited prime oceanfront land within the traditional West Coast areas is pushing development into southern Phang Nga province (just over the Sarasin bridge), Phang Nga Bay, and into the East Coast of Phuket Island. Hotel developments in these areas are rapidly influencing buyer sentiment on the back of international brands such as Jumeirah, Taj and the design team of Philippe Starck/Jean Michel Gathy's luxury development 'The Yamu'.

Based on overall pricing parity comparisons, Barnett, who is also a widely read *Phuket Gazette* columnist, says the resort island's East Coast has now edged ahead with an average of 128.2 million baht, versus the West Coast at 127.1 million baht, for units currently on sale.

For a map of Phuket's new luxury villa projects, click [here](#).

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Phuket, Thailand
 08:40 local time (GMT +7)

Thursday, January 15, 2009

OrBorJor, Nation Group organize free cram sessions



Attending cram sessions to score high on university entrance exams is standard among Thai students wanting seats at prestigious universities.

PHUKET: In implicit recognition that the mainstream education system is not sufficiently preparing students for entry into higher education, the Phuket Provincial Administration Organization (OrBorJor) has joined with the Phuket Educational Service Office and the Nation Multimedia Group, (of which the *Phuket Gazette* is a part), to hold the 1st Educational Skills Improvement Seminar at Phuket Rajabhat University.

The project, opened by OrBorJor President Paiboon Upatising at 8.30 am on January 11, is aimed at preparing students in the last three years of secondary school for university admissions exams and informing them about new exams due to be set from 2010.

Mr Paiboon was joined at the opening by Nation Broadcasting Corporation director Kwanruan Taworntaweewong, senior vice-president of sales Benjawan Srisoottisa-ard

and Nation Multimedia Group sales manager Wisut Tipbanpot.

The program will see 650 students from 11 Phuket schools study Thai, English, mathematics, social studies and science from January 11 through the 17th, in preparation for the university entrance PRE O-NET and A-NET examinations that will take place January 30 through February 1.

"The OrBorJor has a policy of supporting educational quality for students at all levels in Phuket to ensure the students have the educational ability to compete with others around Thailand. This is a good opportunity to begin co-operation between houses, schools and communities," Mr Paiboon said.

"Preparation for further education is a necessity. Revision followed by testing is the number one way for students to excel. From the number of students who have entered the program, as well as the parents supporting them, we can see this program is a good thing. The OrBorJor is ready to support students to meet their needs as much as possible. In the next school year we will make additional changes to the educational system as appropriate," he added.

Tanad Kuannimid, director of the Phuket Education Service area office, said "The project will help the students to get ready and revise the main subjects. This will show them where they stand and boost their skills and confidence for the real exams at the end of February. Moreover, the project will help the students' parents understand the university education system."

Dr Weerawit Saritthipan, chairman of Phuket Wittayalai School's parents' network, said, "This project is great because education within the system isn't sufficient to prepare students for higher learning. The kids still need a lot more support and development."

Many school directors told parents that they had to send their kids to cram schools or they couldn't be confident that they would get into university. Given the situation, this program is particularly useful, he said.

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Phuket, Thailand
17:22 local time (GMT +7)

Thursday, January 15, 2009

Killer of volunteer cop still at large

PHUKET CITY: A volunteer police officer was shot in the forehead and died in a pool of blood in Phuket City in the early hours of January 11. His alleged killer remains at large.

Police believe Teeradet "Boy" Rakwong, 28, was killed by suspect Piyawat "Bang Hem" Pleeta, a member of a rival group, following a fight over a woman.

Phuket City Police Inspector Pitakpon Sompong told the *Gazette* that Mr Teeradet and his group of friends bumped into the rival group at Saphan Hin. A fight soon broke out, allegedly because the girlfriend of a member of Mr Teeradet's group had formerly been in a relationship with one of the other group.

The groups dispersed on motorbikes at around 3 am, but as Mr Teeradet reached the Phuket Provincial Electricity Authority substation on Thepkrasattri Rd he was shot in the forehead by Piyawat, who was on the back of a motorcycle, Pol Maj Pitakpon said.

Piyawat and the driver of his bike, Pattana Poesri, fled following the incident.

Pattana is now in police custody but Piyawat remains at large, he told the *Gazette* yesterday.

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Phuket, Thailand
16:30 local time (GMT +7)

Thursday, January 15, 2009

Help sought for tourism sector



Despite January being in the middle of the traditional 'high season' for tourism, there are still plenty of empty beach chairs at Nai Harn Beach these days.

BANGKOK (The Nation): The Tourism and Sports Ministry has submitted 13 tourism recovery measures for government approval that include waiving visa fees, cutting air fares and reducing airport charges.

Minister Chumpol Silapa-Archa said the measures, compiled from private-sector proposals, were handed to the government's economic team yesterday.

The tourism industry is suffering from the global economic crisis and the after-effects of the eight-day closure of Bangkok's two commercial airports late last year.

The ministry will urge Thai Airways International and other carriers to cut fares 50% to increase advance bookings.

It will also seek to waive visa fees for tourists from all countries for six months, with a possible extension of a further six months.

The ministry has also asked the government to reduce value-added tax on hotel room rates for one year, and Airports of Thailand to reduce landing and parking fees at the country's international airports in a bid to persuade more airlines to restore their Thai operations.

Other measures would require government organizations to adjust their budgets for outside meetings and seminars so as to boost domestic tourism, plus a proposal to double tax refunds for meetings and conferences held by private companies.

Moreover, hotel operators have asked for an exemption from the annual fee of 80 baht per room that they have to pay to the Revenue Department.

Banks, meanwhile, will be encouraged to extend debt-repayment periods for operators in the tourism sector for three years.

The ministry also plans to promote Phuket, Krabi and Phang Nga for local tourism by reducing airport taxes and surcharges. In addition, all national parks should play their part by waiving entrance fees for three years.

The government has also been urged to help workers in the tourism sector, which faces a high risk of increased job losses.

The Cabinet on Tuesday approved 1 billion baht to help tourism and related businesses, but more funding is needed to support the recovery effort, Mr Chumpol said.

Prakit Chinamourphong, president of the Thai Hotels Association, said three- and

four-star hotels planned to discount room rates by 50% for people visiting the country in February and March.

Among the main target markets are China, India, the Middle East, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan.

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Phuket, Thailand
12:08 local time (GMT +7)

Wednesday, January 14, 2009

Giant Clam population in danger



The shell of a *Tridacna gigas* giant clam on display in a Spanish museum. The species has not been seen in Thai waters for about 100 years.

CAPE PANWA, PHUKET: With the colorful shell of the giant clam highly prized by aquarium owners, the lucrative but illegal trade in the species is causing the population of this marine mollusk to decrease dramatically and experts fear it may become extinct in its natural habitat.

Out of the eight known species of giant clam in the world, five species were once found in Thai waters but two of these are thought to already be extinct, according to researchers at the Phuket Marine Biological Center.

Numbers in the wild have been greatly reduced by extensive over-harvesting for food as well as the aquarium trade. In Thailand, the population of the *T. Squamosa* species has dramatically decreased with numbers now thought to be less than 1% of the other two species found in Thai waters.

PMBC biologist Kongkiat Kittiwattanawong said giant clam shells are also used as decorative accessories, tableware and even sinks if large enough.

According to Thailand's Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act, giant clams have been declared a protected wildlife species, with no harvesting, possession or trade allowed.

Giant clams are also listed as an endangered species in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora or CITES.

The Giant Clam Rehabilitation Project now underway in Andaman coastal areas is working to preserve and spawn more giant clams, which have both male and female organs present in the same animal.

Yet while the illegal trade in the species continues, it is questionable how far releasing farmed clams into the wild will go to alleviating the problem.

Source: MCOT

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Phuket, Thailand
10:55 local time (GMT +7)

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Gazette Online smashes visitor records

PHUKET: With 82,882 visitors to its news pages in the 24 hours ending at midnight yesterday, the Gazette Online set a record for single-day traffic since the site was launched in September 1997. The statistics are prepared independently and published daily on the home page of the newspaper's website.

In yesterday's record-breaking log, the leading contributors to the site's traffic were the United States, with 32,152 visitors; Thailand, with 24,511; France with 9,072; Sweden with 3,669; and Russia with 3,540. These relative country contribution positions conform to the site's medians over the past 3 months.

Of particular interest in the rankings is Sweden, which, with a population of only nine million people, continues to show an astounding level of interest in Phuket.

Contributing to the rising traffic on the website are the Gazette's robust rankings in Google under all Phuket news-related search terms; the continuing top-four ranking of the site under the term "Phuket" alone; a surge in the Gazette's presence in the Google Alerts, with 1-3 stories picked up and announced to the world almost every day; and an editorial policy adjustment in which crime, though not swept under the carpet, is now given a lesser weighting in the newspaper's content mix, with recreation, sports, and business assuming a greater role.

To view the Gazette Online's daily traffic statistics, and to know how many people are on the site with you at any given moment, click [here](#).

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Phuket, Thailand
18:59 local time (GMT +7)

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Light-fingered Aussie couple nabbed in Patong



Mr Clintjames and his wife in custody at Kathu Police Station in Patong. Photo courtesy of Siangtai.

PATONG, PHUKET: An Australian man and his wife were arrested yesterday afternoon for shoplifting gold and diamond jewelry from shops in Patong and other parts of the island.

Pol Lt Col Sakhon Bandisak of the Kathu Police identified the couple as 32-year-old Kimberley Clintjames and his wife Tran Anhchi Thi, age 34.

The pair were arrested at 4 pm as Mrs Thi was attempting to sell off a stolen gold necklace at the Yaowarat Gold Shop on Sainamyen Rd in Patong.

Mr Clintjames, who was waiting outside the shop, tried to run away but was caught by police.

Seized as evidence were four diamond rings, two gold necklaces and other merchandise including hats, a T-shirt and sunglasses stolen from a shop in Patong's Jungceylon shopping plaza.

A search of the couple's room at the Patong Premier Resort uncovered several other stolen items.

The pair confessed to charges of shoplifting, saying they stole the jewelry and sold it to pay for daily expenses during their vacation.

They told police that they had also stolen items from shops at Central Festival before they were arrested.

The pair had sold a 3-bahtweight gold necklace to the same (Yaowarat) gold shop last Thursday.

The investigation followed a number of complaints made by shop owners, four of whom have already positively identified the couple.

Following the arrest, Kathu Police Superintendent Grissak Songmoonark urged goldshops to heighten security by installing closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance cameras.

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Phuket, Thailand
18:00 local time (GMT +7)

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

Phuket man confesses to Koh Pha Ngan tourist murder



Ms Schachmer's murder brings tourist security on Koh Phangan back into the spotlight, especially during the island's infamous Full Moon Parties.

PHUKET: A Phuket man has confessed to the strangling murder of a female German tourist on Koh Phangan on the night of the island's famous Full Moon Party, local police said.

Tattoo artist Tiwat "Ood" Kasemchoke, 29, yesterday confessed that he strangled Astrid Al-Assaad Schachmer on Koh Phangan and disposed of her body in the water at Baan Naiwok Beach, not far from the Songserm Company pier.

His victim, 45-year-old Ms Schachmer, was found dead on Sunday with bruises around her neck and her body topless.

A native of tambon Wichit in Phuket, Tiwat was one of three suspects questioned by police after an investigation revealed he was the last person seen with the victim on Saturday night.

Tiwat confessed to the premeditated murder of Ms Schachmer during police questioning that began late Sunday night.

"She had humiliated me. She often told other foreigners that I fell for her and tried to rape her several times, which is not true," he claimed, "It was she who fell in love with me and wanted to be in a relationship".

"I'd planned to kill her. So, I invited her to a party at a shop where I've been working. Then, I suggested that we walked to a beach together. That's where I punched and strangled her," he said.

An initial examination of the body revealed no signs the victim had been raped, police said.

The German tourist had stayed on Koh Phangan since December 10 last year. In 2007, she also spent her four-month vacation on the island.

The murder once again puts the safety of foreign tourists in the region into the spotlight.

Janchote Piriyasathit, head of the Koh Phangan Hotel Business Association, said the murder was the first of its kind in 10 years on the island.

Islanders, knowing tourism is the cornerstone of the economy, actively watched out for the safety of tourists; the arrest of Tiwat might help alleviate safety concerns, but better security is still needed, he said.

Mr Anek Noorak, president of the Surat Thani Tourism Business Association, said he feared news of the killing would further harm the local tourism industry at a time when it was already sluggish.

He called for a fast investigation and trial as a way of restoring tourist confidence, and better security during the island's infamous Full Moon Parties.

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Phuket, Thailand
14:26 local time (GMT +7)

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The Phuket Gazette Co Ltd
367/2-3 Yaowarat Road, Amphur Muang, Phuket 83000, Thailand
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