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Photo: Thalang Traffic Police

ROAD SAFETY MEASURES RAMPED UP FOR NEW YEAR

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

With Phuket already recording 122 deaths and more than 26,000 injuries in road accidents this year, provincial authorities have now pledged stronger, better-coordinated action to reduce losses over the upcoming New Year holiday period.

Phuket recorded 74 road accidents resulting in 70 injuries and five deaths during last year's extended New Year safety campaign, while the province suffered a total of 147 road deaths and

25,968 injuries across 2024.

The pledge to aim for a reduced road death and injury toll over the New Year holidays came at a meeting of the Phuket Provincial Road Safety Command Center Committee held at Phuket Provincial Hall last week. The meeting was chaired by Vice Governor Adul Chuthong and attended by senior police and disaster prevention officials, along with representatives from key agencies.

The committee reviewed the latest road safety situation and noted that from Jan 1 to Dec 15, 2025, Phuket recorded fewer road

fatalities than the previous year. However, officers warned the total still exceeds the province's safety target and remains a serious concern, said an official report of the meeting.

Statistics show accident impacts are uneven through the year and do not clearly align with the tourist high season. Most fatalities fall within the working-age group of 25-45 years old.

Motorcycles remain the deadliest risk, accounting for over 80% of fatalities, with more than 85% of victims not wearing helmets. The most dangerous periods continue to be the morning

rush between 6-9am and the evening peak between 3-6pm.

However, the report of the meeting did not clearly give any figures on the actual number of road fatalities so far this year.

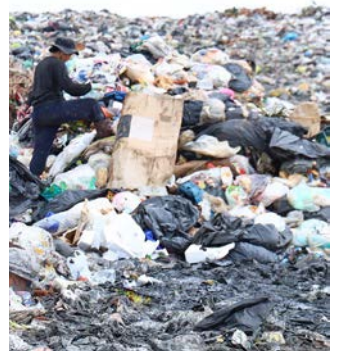
According to the Phuket branch of the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM Phuket), as of last Friday (Dec 19), 122 people had died and a further 26,274 people had been injured in road accidents in Phuket so far this year.

A total of 85% of accidents in which people were killed or injured have involved motorbikes, DDPM Phuket also noted...

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News



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New Year road carnage ahead

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Meanwhile, at the meeting police reported ongoing enforcement of 10 priority traffic offences, particularly helmet non-use, drunk driving and speeding. Phuket Police confirmed they are preparing to expand the use of technology and speed cameras to improve enforcement efficiency and strengthen traffic discipline among both residents and tourists.

The meeting approved in principle the draft action plan to prevent and reduce road and maritime accidents during the 2026 New Year holiday period. It also endorsed the establishment of a Road and Maritime Accident Prevention and Reduction Operations Center and amendments to working group structures to improve data management, cause analysis, monitoring and evaluation.

Vice Governor Adul stressed the need for close integration across all agencies, highlighting law enforcement, infrastructure improvement, accident-prone area management, traffic control and public participation as key priorities.

He called on all sectors to work together to reduce losses from road accidents and develop sustainable safety standards for Phuket.

NEW YEAR SECURITY

Meanwhile, Region 8 Police has launched a large-scale crime prevention and traffic management operation across Phuket and



Police take the road safety message to the streets. Photo: Wichit Police

neighbouring provinces ahead of the Christmas and New Year 2026 holiday period, deploying more than 350 officers from multiple agencies to ensure public safety.

The operation was officially launched during a ceremony held in front of Phuket Provincial Police Station on Dec 17. The event was presided over by Region 8 Police Commander Pol Lt Gen Sittichai Lokanphai and attended by Phuket Vice Governor Teeraphong Chuaychoo, along with police, military personnel, administrative officials and civilian volunteers.

Pol Col Kitipong Klaikaew, Deputy Commander of Phuket Provincial Police, said the deployment forms part of nationwide measures ordered by the Royal Thai Police to strengthen crime suppression, maintain peace and order and

facilitate traffic during the peak holiday travel period.

“The primary objective is to ensure the safety of life and property for residents and tourists, while preventing criminal activity during the Christmas and New Year holidays, when large numbers of people travel and take part in celebrations,” Pol Col Kitipong said.

The integrated operation brings together officers from Phuket Provincial Police and Phang Nga Provincial Police, the Investigation Division of Police Region 8, Tourist Police Divisions 2 and 3, Phuket Immigration, the Phuket Airport Immigration Checkpoint, Marine Police Division 8, Border Patrol Police Division 42, Highway Police Division 7 and the Phuket Forensic Science Division. Military units, local administrative

officials, civilian volunteers and representatives from rescue foundations are also involved.

In total, about 350 personnel have been assigned to the operation, which will focus on crime prevention and suppression, strict law enforcement, traffic control and public assistance throughout the holiday period.

During the ceremony, Pol Lt Gen Surapong Thanomjit addressed officers, urging them to carry out their duties with discipline, dedication and fairness in order to build public confidence.

He stressed the importance of strict adherence to police tactics, appropriate use-of-force guidelines and standard operating procedures, noting that effective cooperation among all agencies is essential to maintaining peace and order during the festive season.

“Security measures must be intensified to ensure safety for both Thai and foreign tourists, particularly during New Year celebrations,” he said.

Pol Lt Gen Sittichai later said that Christmas and New Year are major holiday periods marked by increased travel, large public gatherings and festive activities across Phuket, attracting significant numbers of domestic and international tourists each year.

As a result, Region 8 Police and Phuket Provincial Police have organised a focused crime suppression operation running from Dec 17-25, in line with government and Royal Thai Police policy.

At the provincial level, the Phuket Governor has instructed all relevant agencies to prioritise safety both on land and at sea. Strict checkpoints and roadblocks have been set up across key routes, while maritime safety is being overseen by the Marine Department, Vice Governor Teeraphong said.

Local administrative organisations have been tasked with fire prevention and safety measures, with police coordinating overall crime prevention and enforcement efforts.

Vice Governor Teeraphong added that the integrated approach is aimed at reducing accidents, preventing crime and ensuring that residents and visitors can celebrate the holiday season safely across Phuket.

Jewish community feels ‘safe’ in Phuket

PHUKET PROVINCIAL Police Deputy Commander Pol Col Phasakorn Sonthikul has assured that the island remains safe for Israelis and the Jewish community.

His assurances follow the mass shooting targeting a Hanukkah celebration on Sydney’s Bondi Beach on Dec 14. At least 15 people died in the attack, which has fueled criticism that Australian authorities are not doing enough to combat a surge in antisemitic crimes.

Pol Col Phasakorn said police continue proactive security meas-

ures across the island, particularly in areas with Jewish communities and Chabad groups.

“Officers regularly monitor gatherings, provide security during religious events, and engage with the community,” he said.

“This is done monthly or whenever events are held, with Patong and Chalong police stations tasked to maintain close oversight.”

Pol Col Phasakorn said police step in early when concerns arise. “If there are objections, such as to a Hanukkah celebration, officers talk with organisers and local residents. The goal is coexistence. There

must be no resistance within the community,” he said.

Police also monitor long-term visitors, he said. “About 400 Israelis are staying in Phuket on long-term visas, with each police station assigned to meet and engage with them,” he added.

Patcharee Channatho, a Thai national working with Chabad House Phuket, said the Jewish community feels secure.

“Security in Phuket is quite good. It remains a safe place for the Jewish community,” she said.

She noted Phuket’s diversity, with Jewish and Muslim visitors living

alongside many other nationalities.

Ms Patcharee added that Thailand’s neutral foreign policy helps reduce security risks. “Thailand is seen as a safe country because the government takes a balanced and unbiased stance,” she said.

She also expressed confidence in Thai authorities, citing effective intelligence and enforcement. “The arrest of suspects attempting to smuggle explosives at Tha Chatchai checkpoint earlier this year shows strong security capability,” she said.

Ms Patcharee said Israeli security agencies also play a



The Jewish community celebrates Hanukkah at Chabad House Phuket in Patong. Screenshot: Chabad House Phuket

role. “Israel has strong intelligence and protection measures for its citizens, especially during events. This adds another layer of

confidence, alongside Thai authorities,” she said.

Natnaree Likidwatanasakun

Organic waste eyed to ease crisis

The Phuket News
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Phuket authorities have ordered all local administrative organisations to urgently manage organic waste at the source after daily rubbish volumes rose beyond the capacity of the province's only integrated waste disposal centre.

The directive was issued at a provincial waste management meeting chaired by Phuket Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn at the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation (PPAO) office on Dec 16, following warnings that waste volumes are already exceeding 1,200 tonnes per day and could climb to as much as 1,500 tonnes per day by year's end.

Governor Nirat said all waste from across Phuket is currently being sent to the Phuket City Municipality-run disposal centre, which is nearing its operational limits due to population growth and increasing tourist numbers.

"With a population and residents exceeding 1.2 million people, the volume of waste continues to rise every year," he said. "If organic waste is properly separated and managed at the source, the amount requiring incineration can be reduced to about 480 tonnes per day."

Officials were told that



Photo: Phuket City Municipality

organic or "wet" waste accounts for up to 60% of all rubbish generated on the island and must be prioritised for local disposal within each municipality and subdistrict this year, with results to be closely monitored.

The meeting was attended by PPAO President Rewat Areerob, Phuket City Mayor Suppachoke Laongphet, provincial and municipal officials, and representatives from all 18 local administrative organisations in Phuket.

Phuket City Municipality reported that the province's incinerator can handle only 500 tonnes of

waste per day, with excess rubbish sent to landfill areas. Officials estimate that more than 1.2 million tonnes of accumulated waste remain in the main landfill site after decades of operation.

Mayor Suppachoke said the expected increase in organic waste is making disposal increasingly difficult.

"Separating organic waste at the source, particularly dry and wet waste, will help reduce odours, moisture and wastewater, lessen the impact on nearby communities, and reduce the risk of accidents," he said.

Governor Nirat acknowledged that Phuket City Municipality is bearing the burden of managing waste for the entire province and stressed that all local authorities must share responsibility.

"All local administrative organisations must manage waste within their own areas, especially organic waste," he said. "This is the fastest and most concrete way to reduce pressure on the provincial disposal centre."

For the remaining non-hazardous waste, estimated at around 40% of total daily volumes, Phuket City Municipality will

continue to manage disposal. However, local authorities were encouraged to consider establishing small-scale waste treatment systems or joint facilities within their areas to reduce long-term reliance on the provincial centre.

As part of longer-term planning, Mr Rewat confirmed that the PPAO is pursuing the development of a second large-scale integrated waste disposal centre to support Phuket's future growth. The PAO plans to request the use of more than 80 rai of land, with construction estimated to take between two and

four years, pending legal and regulatory approvals.

Phuket City officials also reported progress on pilot projects in Cherg Thalay and Phuket City to purchase organic waste disposal equipment, allowing wet waste to be treated locally rather than transported for incineration or landfill.

The meeting further endorsed stricter waste separation at the source, the processing of organic waste into compost, bio-fermented liquid or animal feed, and closer cooperation with hotels, businesses, shops and households to prevent organic waste from being mixed with general rubbish.

Authorities also agreed to promote community-level waste banks, environmental volunteer programmes and small-scale innovative waste technologies, including temporary sorting and storage areas, to reduce the amount of waste entering the provincial system.

Progress review meetings will be held every three months in each locality.

Provincial officials said the measures form part of a broader strategy to manage waste systematically from source to final disposal, reduce environmental impacts and support Phuket's long-term sustainability as a major tourist destination.

Council engineer arrested for forging building permits

THE NATIONAL ANTI-Corruption Commission (NACC) has arrested a former municipal engineer in Kathu, accused of forging official building permits and deceiving the public.

The arrest was made on Dec 16, following an investigation ordered by Acting Secretary-General Surapong Intarathaworn. The operation was led by NACC Region 8 Deputy Secretary-General Suchart Kruaykitanon, together with senior investigation officials from the centre NACC.

The suspect, identified as Suriya Nuanchan, a resident of Kathu, was arrested under an arrest warrant issued by the Criminal Court for Corruption and Misconduct Cases Region 8 (Warrant No. 53/2568, dated Nov 24, 2025).

Suriya faces multiple charges, including misconduct by a public official, abuse of



Photo: NACC Region 8

official authority, forgery of official documents, and the use of forged documents in a manner likely to cause damage to others or the public, reported NACC Region 8.

The charges fall under Sections 157, 265 and 268 of the Criminal Code, as well as Section

172 of the Act on Prevention and Suppression of Corruption B.E. 2561, in conjunction with Sections 90 and 91 of the Criminal Code.

According to the NACC, at the time of the offences Suriya was employed as a draftsman at Kathu Municipality, with

responsibilities related to permitting, supervising and inspecting buildings under the Building Control Act B.E. 2522 (1979).

NACC investigators allege that he forged five official permits, including building construction, modification or demolition permits (Form A.1),

permits for amusement ride construction, demolition or relocation (Form A.K.1), and building construction, modification or relocation permits (Form A.6).

The forged permits were allegedly distributed to several individuals, enabling them to construct, renovate or operate buildings and amusement rides without knowing that the local authority had not legally issued the permits.

Suriya was arrested at a Caltex petrol station on Chao Fa West Rd in Chalong. He was subsequently handed over to the NACC Region 8 for prosecution at the Criminal Court for Corruption and Misconduct Cases Region 8.

The NACC report emphasised that all suspects or defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty by a final court judgment – and did not mention any of the persons, companies or building projects that benefitted from the corrupt scheme. *The Phuket News*

The Phuket News

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PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

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Low: +29°

Wind 11 m/s

SAT DECEMBER 27

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Wind 11 m/s

SUN DECEMBER 28

High: +35°
Low: +28°

Wind 11 m/s

MON DECEMBER 29

High: +35°
Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s

TUE DECEMBER 30

High: +35°
Low: +28°

Wind 4 m/s

WED DECEMBER 31

High: +37°
Low: +28°

Wind 4 m/s

THU JANUARY 1

High: +36°
Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s

Customers claim B3.7mn beauty clinic credit scam

MORE THAN 20 people have come forward to complain that they were left with unexpectedly high financial debts – estimated at more than B3.7 million in total – after signing up for beauty treatment packages with a clinic in Phuket.

The group gathered on Dec 18 to lodge a collective complaint, saying their financial obligations were far higher than what had been explained before they agreed to undergo treatment.

Many believed they were paying tens of thousands of baht for cosmetic procedures, but later discovered they were tied to instalment plans or credit arrangements worth hundreds of thousands of baht.

Coordinator Worapong Yurahman, who helped bring the victims together, said several people believed they had only agreed to promotional packages or benefit exchanges offered by the clinic. However, they later found what appeared to be loan or finance



Photo: PR Phuket

agreements linked to their names.

One victim said that during the procedure, actions were taken using their mobile phone and they later discovered documents resembling loan contracts that were never clearly explained. Some also claimed they did not receive any notification messages at the time, leaving them unaware of the debt until later.

Several victims said attempts to contact the clinic for clarification or refunds were unsuccessful, prompting them to unite, collect evidence and seek legal advice.

Mr Worapong confirmed the group is still compiling information and, as of now, has not yet formally filed a police complaint. Lawyers are being consulted to determine the next steps.

The Phuket News

Mother held for knife attack on children

Eakkapop Thongtub
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Chalong Police are investigating a violent assault at a house in Rawai early last Saturday morning (Dec 20) in which two Canadian children were injured, reportedly by their mother, before the woman was later found with self-inflicted wounds.

Police said the incident occurred at a house in Soi Saiyuan 11, Moo 7, Rawai, at about 12:30am. Officers responded after being alerted by a neighbour, who reported that a teenage boy had sustained injuries after being attacked inside the home.

When officers arrived, they found a girl, aged 6, injured inside the house. Officers coordinated with emergency responders to transfer her for medical treatment.

A neighbour, who reported the incident, told police that the girl's brother, 13, had been taken to Dibuk Hospital for treatment of injuries to his torso. The neighbour told police that the children had been assaulted by their mother, a



Photo: Chalong Police

Canadian national.

Soon after the initial report, Chalong Police received a second notification from a good Samaritan that a woman had been found with abdominal injuries and exhibiting incoherent behaviour.

Patrol officers located the woman, who was confirmed to be the mother, and she was taken into custody and transported to Chalong Hospital under police guard. Officers and forensic investigators from Phuket Provincial Police conducted an examination of the house and reported finding significant bloodstains throughout the property, particularly in a downstairs bathroom where the younger child is believed to have taken refuge.

A pointed knife, believed to have been used

in the attack, was recovered from the scene as evidence.

Police said all injured persons are now receiving medical treatment while officers continue to gather statements and forensic evidence. The motive for the attack remains under investigation.

Chalong Police Chief Col Surasak Jaidee confirmed the case is being handled as a serious violent incident involving minors, with ongoing legal proceedings to follow pending the results of the investigation.

If you or someone you know is experiencing emotional distress or needs support, help is available. Contact the Samaritans of Thailand at 02-113-6789 (English & Thai) or the Mental Health Hotline at 1323 (Thai).

Drunken husband beats wife to death

A 51-YEAR-OLD WOMAN has died after being brutally assaulted at her home in Ratsada, with her husband arrested after allegedly admitting to beating her while drunk.

Phuket City Police were notified at 11:42am on Dec 17 that the woman had died after being brought to Mission Hospital Phuket. Pol Lt Col Yutthaphol Phromdaw said he informed his superiors before leading senior officers to the hospital to investigate.

Doctors confirmed the victim, named as Kai Sriputhorn, 51, suffered extensive bruising to her face and body consistent with severe assault.

Police then went to the couple's home in Soi Kingkaew, Soi 9, Ratsada, where they met her husband, Somnuk Wiset, 54, who appeared intoxicated. During questioning Somnuk



Photo: Phuket City Police

allegedly confessed that he and his wife had been drinking shortly after midnight when an argument escalated and he attacked her, striking her with a broom handle and physically assaulting her.

Police said Somnuk later noticed his wife remained unconscious and badly bruised. He called emergency services via 1669 before leaving for work. Ms Kai was taken to Mission Hospital, where she was later pronounced dead.

A search of the bedroom uncovered a broom with a broken handle, which Somnuk identified as the weapon. He was taken to Phuket City Police Station and charged. Eakkapop Thongtub

Kazakh arrested on 'Red Notice' for fraud

PHUKET IMMIGRATION LAST week finally announced that they have arrested a Kazakhstani man wanted on an international 'Red Notice' for fraud after tracking him down in Phuket.

The suspect, identified by officials on Dec 16 only as 'Adilet', is accused by Kazakhstani authorities of defrauding a victim of a large sum of money by falsely claiming he could help secure government land for the construction of a shop building. He then allegedly embezzled the funds and fled the country, prompting the international alert.

Immigration officials said the Foreign Affairs Division coordinated with Phuket Immigration Police to investigate the case and locate the suspect in Thailand. Following intelligence gathering, officers learned that Adilet was residing in Mueang Phuket district.

On Nov 15, at about 5:30pm, officers from the Phuket Immigration Investigation Unit moved to



Photo: Phuket Immigration

detain him. Rather than making an immediate arrest at his residence, officers arranged for the suspect to present himself for questioning. Upon meeting him, officials informed Adilet that his permission to stay in the Kingdom had been revoked, and he was taken into custody without incident.

Phuket Immigration said they have since confirmed they have coordinated with the Kazakhstan Embassy to begin deportation proceedings so the suspect can face legal action in Kazakhstan.

Immigration officials stressed that the arrest supports Royal Thai Police policy targeting transnational crime and foreign nationals who pose a risk to public safety.

Eakkapop Thongtub



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Thailand's Nominee Crackdown: Why Phuket Businesses Must Act Now

ADVERTORIAL

If your business involves foreign partners whether in hospitality, property, wellness, F&B or investment, this is important. Thailand's nationwide investigation into nominee structures has reached a critical phase, and Phuket businesses are squarely in the spotlight.

The numbers tell the story that approximately 46,000 companies under investigation nationwide, 820 entities already in legal proceedings, and B12.4 billion in damages claimed. But here's what's changed. Authorities are now scrutinising any foreign shareholding between 0.01% and 49.99% even in legitimately operating businesses. Your company structure alone could trigger an investigation, regardless of how clean your operations are.

This heightened scrutiny puts certain sectors at particular risk. If you operate in hospitality and tourism, real estate and



Your Defense Strategy: The Three Lines Model.

property development, wellness and spa services, restaurants and F&B, or investment vehicles, you're in the high-risk zone. Even

compliant businesses face disruption simply from ownership structures or third-party connections that raise red flags.

THE KEY RISKS RELATED TO NOMINEE CASES

Understanding the potential impact is crucial. Legal and

compliance exposure from weak AML/KYC controls or risky third-party relationships can sink you fast. Beyond legal issues, operational chaos from sudden government inspections means frozen operations, stalled projects, and revenue loss. The damage doesn't stop their reputation from being publicly linked to a nominee investigation destroys investor and customer trust, even if cleared later. Finally, financial impact through frozen accounts, withheld payments, and skyrocketing legal costs drain resources quickly.

There's a recognised framework to protect your business. This globally recognised model isn't just theory, it's your practical shield against nominee risk. Your frontline operations team must vet every partner, shareholder, and counterparty while running KYC/AML checks before any transaction. Your compliance and risk watchdog should create clear policies aligned with current regulations and train staff to

spot red flags. Meanwhile, your internal audit team must regularly audit processes, report vulnerabilities immediately, and recommend fixes before authorities identify the gaps.

Enforcement is accelerating. The question isn't if scrutiny will reach your business, it's when. Businesses that implement the 'Three Lines of Defence' now will demonstrate integrity during investigations, maintain investor confidence, and protect operations from costly disruptions. The risk is not limited to the business only; it often has implications on the individual stakeholders which could extend to criminal fines and penalties.

BDO Thailand's Phuket office specialises in helping businesses navigate these exact challenges. Boosting protection & efficiency across your organisation, The 'Three Lines of Defence' within risk management - BDO.

For more information, contact: infophuket@bdo.th

TAT seeks 6.7mn Chinese arrivals

THE TOURISM AUTHORITY OF Thailand (TAT) aims to restore Chinese arrivals to 6.7 million in 2026, following a sharp decline this year. TAT Governor Thapanee Kiatphaibool said Chinese arrivals are forecast at 4.5-4.6 mn in 2025, significantly down from 6.7mn in 2024, as negative sentiment weakened demand. Factors affecting travel confidence included the high-profile kidnapping of Chinese actor Wang Xing, who was taken to a scam centre in Myanmar, as well as natural disasters in the latter half of the year.

From Jan 1 to Nov 30, Thailand recorded 4.1mn Chinese visitors, a 33.8% year-on-year drop, according to the Tourism and Sports Ministry. To rebuild confidence, the TAT launched its 'Trusted Thailand' campaign and has pushed for more charter flights and restored airline seat capacity. Ms Thapanee said the agency targets a 40% rebound next year, returning arrivals to around 6.7mn, noting that high-spending Chinese travellers are still travelling internationally. The challenge, she said, is ensuring Thailand remains perceived as strong value for money.

To accelerate momentum, the TAT signed Letters of Intent (LoIs) with the Haikou Municipal Bureau of Tourism, Culture, Radio, Television and Sports and leading online travel platform Tongcheng Travel. The Haikou agreement focuses on joint tourism promotion, two-way travel development,



Photo: Bangkok Post

marketing activities, trade participation and opinion-leader exchanges. Cooperation with Tongcheng will support tourism intelligence sharing, communications and development of better-connected routes between Thailand and China.

Haikou, located on Hainan's northern coast, has more than 3mn residents and is positioning itself as an international tourism and innovation hub. Many Chinese tourists already travel to Haikou and Sanya, and the TAT plans to introduce a 'Two Countries, One Destination' programme allowing visitors to combine Hainan and Thailand in a single trip, with travel time of around two hours.

Looking ahead, the TAT plans to launch the 'Zhong Tai Yi Jia Qin - China and Thailand Are One Family' campaign in 2026, promoting cultural exchanges, festivals and expanded air connectivity, including discussions on future charter flights linking Haikou with Phuket and Chiang Mai. *Bangkok Post*

Kazakh arrivals targeted for growth

DESPITE A SLOWDOWN in Kazakh tourist arrivals, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) still expects at least 5% growth next year, supported by strong long-haul travel which surpassed a record 10 million arrivals this year.

Chiravadee Khunsub, TAT deputy governor for Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the Americas, said competition in the region has intensified, particularly from Vietnam, which is drawing travellers with competitive pricing and appealing tourism products. She acknowledged that the Thai tourism industry remains volatile due to geopolitical tensions and regional instability.

As of Dec 14, Thailand recorded 152,783 Kazakh arrivals this year, down 15% year-on-year, following a reduction in charter flights and the discontinuation of direct services to Surat Thani. The Kazakh market had previously surged following Thailand's 2023 visa-free scheme, rising from about 50,000-60,000 pre-pandemic arrivals to 172,489 that year, and peaking at 195,089 in 2024.



Photo: Bangkok Post

Kazakh tourists typically spend B50,000-60,000 per trip, with families forming the main visitor segment. Popular attractions include beaches, natural sites and historical destinations. Thailand continues to compete with destinations such as Vietnam, China, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Georgia, Turkey, Egypt, the UAE and Qatar.

TAT plans to work with airlines to increase scheduled flights and revive charter services, aiming for 5% market growth in line with overall long-haul targets. Chiravadee stressed that Thailand should focus on value-added experiences rather than competing on heavy discounts.

This week Thailand welcomed SCAT Airlines' inaugural Shymkent-Bangkok service, operating twice weekly. Shymkent,

Kazakhstan's third-largest city, offers strong market potential, while SCAT plans further network expansion and possible interline partnerships with Thai carriers to distribute passengers to other destinations in Thailand. Currently more than 70% of passengers on the route are Kazakh, with Europeans also using the connection.

SCAT plans to launch 10 more new routes next year, including Tel Aviv, Prague and St Petersburg, which could expand Thailand's connectivity via Shymkent. The airline is also considering increasing Bangkok flights to four weekly in winter 2026, and currently operates winter charter flights to Phuket from Almaty and Astana, with frequencies expected to double in January.

Bangkok Post

Thai-Cambodia border conflict rumbles on

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

Fighting along the Thai-Cambodian border showed no sign of easing as it entered its 15th day on Monday (Dec 22), as fresh clashes claimed the life of another Thai soldier – bringing Thailand's total fatalities in the conflict to 22.

The Royal Thai Army said Sgt Kampanat Thongsang, of the 1st Infantry Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, King's Guard, was killed in action in Ban Khlong Phang, in Sa Kaeo's Ta Phraya district.

The First Army Region expressed its deepest condolences to his family, adding that full honours and benefits will be provided.

Heavy fighting broke out around 5am along the Sa Kaeo border, particularly in the Ta Phraya-Bueng Ta Kwan area, with intense exchanges of gunfire lasting until about 6:30am.

The Royal Thai Air



Buildings in Poipet, Cambodia, smoulder after strikes on Monday by the Thai military, which said the site was used by snipers. Photo: Army Military Force Facebook

Force deployed F-16 jets to drop four bombs on Cambodian military positions in Ta Phraya and Bueng Ta Kwan, while Cambodian forces continued rocket attacks using BM-21 multiple rocket launchers.

Tensions remained high in Sa Kaeo on Monday, prompting evacuation warnings in Aranyaprathet district. The First Army Region advised residents in Ta Phraya, Khok Sung, Aranyaprathet, and Khlong Hat districts to remain in designated safe zones until the situation improves.

In Ta Phraya, Cambodian forces reinforced their positions, deployed tanks,

and fired artillery and mortars at Thai positions. Similar heavy weapons, including RPGs, were used in Khok Sung district, while artillery fire was also reported in nearby villages.

In a message posted on Facebook Monday morning, the army said: "Day 15 of counter-operations to defend sovereignty. We remain fully committed. Please be confident."

This came ahead of a special ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on Monday that failed to reach an agreement to halt hostilities during more than two hours of discussions,

Thailand's Foreign Affairs Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow confirmed.

Mr Sihasak said that while Cambodia had spoken publicly about a ceasefire with all parties it had never discussed the matter directly with Thailand. Thailand, therefore, proposed that military representatives from both sides engage in direct talks at the earliest opportunity, adding that Cambodia was free to put forward its own proposals.

Mr Sihasak said both sides ultimately agreed to convene a meeting of the General Border Committee on Wednesday (Dec 24) to consider, in light of the evolving situation, how a ceasefire might be implemented, what measures would be required and who would be responsible for monitoring compliance.

He reiterated that Thailand's position is that negotiations must take place first and that any ceasefire must be accompanied by concrete actions.



Photo: Bangkok Post

Mekong arsenic levels 'safe'

BUENG KAN

RECENT WATER QUALITY tests have confirmed the Mekong River is safe, with arsenic levels within acceptable standards, a senior local environmental official said last Saturday (Dec 20).

Saichon Laophakdee, director for environment at the provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment, said tests of water samples collected between Nov 12 and 17 in Loei, Nong Khai, Bueng Kan and Nakhon Phanom found arsenic levels below 0.010 milligramme per litre (mg/L) at monitoring stations.

The tests followed an August report by Regional Environmental Office 9 in Udon Thani, which found arsenic levels at one monitoring point in Bueng Kan had

reached 0.019 mg/L, exceeding the safety threshold.

After the finding, state agencies warned residents and stepped up surveillance along the river. A test in September showed arsenic levels had fallen below standard limits.

Mr Saichon said an additional test was conducted last month, when riverside communities cultivate vegetables along the Mekong's banks, to ensure the safety of farmers and consumers.

He said Bueng Kan has no industrial plants or mining concessions that use arsenic in their production processes. While the source of the earlier contamination remains unclear, media reports have pointed to mining activities in Myanmar's Shan State.

Bangkok Post

EC rules out postponing election

BANGKOK

THE ELECTION COMMISSION (EC) has ruled out postponing the general election planned for Feb 8, next year, despite clashes along the Thai-Cambodian border, saying it has contingency plans in place to ensure voting can proceed as scheduled.

Even though the border situation has inevitably affected the lives of displaced residents, eligible voters and election officials in those provinces, it would not necessarily disrupt the election process, EC secretary-general Sawang Boonmee said on Dec 17.

"We want the election to take place on the scheduled date. We have management plans in place and will rely on cooperation from voters," Mr Sawang said.

He added that fighting along the border would not hinder the poll, although the declaration of martial law there could require further assessment depending on its scope and substance.

Asked whether polling stations could be set up at evacuation centres, Mr Sawang said the EC was still evaluating options. Arrangements could include transporting voters to polling units or sending mobile polling stations to displaced voters.

'CONFIDENT'

Mr Sawang dismissed speculation that the election could be delayed if violence escalated on Polling Day.

"Once the election has been announced officially, it means we are confident it can be held.



Contingency plans are in place, say officials. Photo: Bangkok Post

"Even if unforeseen incidents occur, they will not affect the process, as we are operating under special-area and special-situation management frameworks permitted by law," he said.

In fact, he said, three major political events are scheduled early next year: local administrative organisation elections on Jan 11, the general election on Feb 8, and a national referendum on drafting a new constitution. Planning was underway for each.

The referendum date will depend on a formal Cabinet decision, which the prime minister must announce within 15 days, he said, adding the referendum could be held on the same day as the general election.

Meanwhile, the EC disclosed the five parties receiving the biggest annual state subsidies for 2026 out of 71 registered parties.

The People's Party will receive the largest allocation at B96.78 million, followed by the United Thai Nation Party with B13.11mn, the Pheu Thai Party with B12.20mn, the Democrat Party with B10.03mn, and the Thai Sang Thai Party with B3.93mn. Bangkok Post

Former minister launches the New Opportunity Party

BANGKOK

FORMER COMMERCE minister Jatuporn Buruspat launched a new political outfit called the New Opportunity Party last Sunday (Dec 21), which he said will focus on tackling the nation's debt problem and economic inequality.

The party will also work towards creating a welfare state and protecting the nation's royal institutions, he said.

The launch was attended by several of the party's key figures, including deputy party leader and Bangkok campaign chief Anusree Tubsuwan; former State Railway of Thailand governor Prapat Chongsanguan; former Pheu Thai MP for Uttaradit Saranwut Saranket and his daughter Rosarin, who is expected to be an MP candidate for Uttaradit.

Mr Jatuporn said the



Jatuporn: Words into action. Photo: Bangkok Post

party does not seek to gain power or secure important positions, but genuinely solve the nation's problems.

Responding to critics who called the party "a graveyard where former civil servants come to gather", he said the party features many knowledgeable people who can help Thailand.

He said the party's members are experienced professionals who will focus on creating a comprehensive welfare system covering citizens from birth to death, protecting royal institutions and giving a firm response to

any threat to Thailand's sovereignty.

Mr Jatuporn suggested a debt moratorium as the first step to fix the economy. He said Thailand must focus on its tourism sector and reform the education sector to boost growth.

He also stressed decentralisation, land reform and narrowing socioeconomic inequality, insisting that the wealthy must help support the less fortunate.

"Give us a chance," he said. "We will turn words into action and crises into opportunities."

Bangkok Post

The Talented Mr Johnson

Dwayne Johnson (right) and Mark Kerr at a screening of 'The Smashing Machine' at the 2025 Toronto Film Festival. Photo: IMDb



David Griffiths

As we rapidly approach the Hollywood Awards we thought here at *The Phuket News* it might be nice to sit down with some of the actors, actresses and filmmakers that might be in the running for some award wins.

The first cab off the rank is a man that for more than a decade was known as The Rock. A man who started his career as a successful wrestler before venturing into the film world with a role in the hit action film *The Scorpion King*.

Nowadays he is known as Dwayne Johnson and has appeared in some of the highest grossing movies and fran-

chises of recent times including – *Jumanji* and *The Fast & The Furious*. He has also appeared in both the DC and Marvel universes.

This year we saw Johnson appear in a much smaller movie – smaller, but a film closer to his heart. With director Benny Safdie at the helm of *The Smashing Machine*, Dwayne Johnson was transformed from action hero to a damaged man in the form of professional fighter Mark Kerr – someone who eventually found himself in a constant battle against his inner demons.

Johnson's performance was like none we had ever seen him deliver before and now his name is being mentioned in Awards circles – recently we were lucky enough to be able to sit down with Johnson and talk to him about the role.

Affected

As he was asked about whether the fact that he got to play a 'fallen' wrestler and fighter in Mark Kerr it soon became obvious just how personally affected Johnson was by this role.

"What filming *The Smashing Machine* really allowed me to do was not only explore things that I wasn't willing to explore in the past in terms of pain and struggle," says Johnson after thinking for a moment. "But also the truth is, from day one, when I stepped on set with Benny and with Emily (Blunt – his co-star) and I got into Mark's skin, it all came flooding back. And I will share this with you, the thing that came flooding back first was that I had a lot of my friends in the world of pro wrestling and in the world of combat, and so many of them have lost their lives to mental health.

"Some of them also lost their lives to addiction," he continues. "And there was a run there, unfortunately, where I had a lot of my friends were passing away. So that came flooding back and this idea that how lucky and fortunate I was to be able to play Mark Kerr, who was one of the fortunate ones who didn't succumb to addiction. So all that came flooding back. when I made the movie, and that was one of the things that I really wasn't willing to explore until I took the role and then took the part."

As the discussion goes on Johnson also admits that while playing the role of Mark alongside Emily Blunt, who plays Mark's parter Dawn Staples, he realised that just how much sacrifice comes with careers like this.

"On top of everything else, you know, you realise that with these guys and these girls who are fighters they put their lives on the line when they step into the cage or they step into the ring," he says. "But you quickly realise a few other things. Number one is while they sacrifice everything, they're not the only ones that sacrifice. It is the wives, it's the girlfriends, husbands, the boyfriends, it's the kids, it's the team around them. Everybody sacrifices something.

"And I think the final big lesson I learned is that sometimes the thing you're chasing most, especially maybe in that world as an athlete or a singer or whoever, whatever it is you do, sometimes the thing you chase most, whatever that North Star is that you want most, sometimes it's the best thing that never happened. Because in this case, in Mark's case, he, he chased the big one in Japan and \$200,000 was a life changing amount of money for

him and his family at that time. And as we know, he didn't win, but it wound up being the best thing for him because it really opened his eyes to really what's important in life."

Challenge

Johnson is also quick to admit that taking on this role in *The Smashing Machine* was a challenge for himself. For once he was stepping away from the world of action blockbusters and taking on a role in a movie that many would call 'arthouse'.

"One of the anchoring reasons why I wanted to take this part and why I wanted to tell this story is because I wanted to challenge myself in ways that I had not been challenged before," he says smiling. "I wanted to do something that was scary, and I also wanted to do something that I didn't know if I would be able to do. I wanted to crack myself open.

"And for me I knew right away that this is going to be a film that perhaps not a billion people are going to go see," he continues. "And that's okay, because I wanted to show a different side of myself that I had not shown before, but also a different side of myself that I had not explored. And I wanted that. I wanted to explore this and I really wanted to challenge myself again in ways that I, that I had not been challenged. And I felt like really, this was, this was that opportunity.

"There was this idea of being scared to do something and I had not been scared to do something and nervous about it in quite some time. The other movies are big, they're fun, they take a lot of hard work, and as you know there a lot of people involved in movies like that. But there was something about this, about being able to face fears. For me, that was really exciting, being able to disappear and transform that was exciting for me. And that's the thing that whenever I get that opportunity again, I'm going to run to it."

The Smashing Machine is currently available in Phuket on a number of streaming platforms.

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

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Getting into good habits

WELLTHWISE

Libby Heath

A New Year, a new you, right? January has a way of bringing out the idealist in all of us. We make resolutions and declare that this is the year we will finally “get it together”. There is a certain thrill in imagining a future self with impeccable habits and steady discipline. But as the weeks unfold, enthusiasm wanes, routines disintegrate and those shiny intentions start to feel less like a plan and more like a passing mood. The issue is not a lack of resolve – it is misunderstanding how habits are built in the first place.

Part of the struggle is the belief that change should follow a predictable, tidy timeline. We want progress to feel linear – put in effort for a few weeks, and the new behaviour should stick. That is the appeal of the 21-day myth: it gives us a finish line. But the brain does not follow calendars or countdowns. It follows circuitry, shaped through repetition, emotional relevance and small, dependable actions.

The popular “21-day rule” began not in behavioural science but in cosmetic surgery. In the 1950s, surgeon Dr Maxwell Maltz noticed that his patients needed about three weeks to adjust to a change in their appearance – recognising a new nose in the mirror, getting used to a corrected scar, or adapting to altered facial contours. He also noted that other shifts in self-image seemed to require a similar minimum adjustment period. In his 1960 book *Psycho-Cybernetics*, he wrote that it takes “a minimum of about 21 days” for a new self-image to settle.

Over time, the nuance was lost. “A minimum” morphed into “exactly”. An observation about self-image adaptation was turned into a universal rule about habit formation.



Photo: Supplied

Habit circuits

Modern research paints a different picture. A 2009 study at University College London found that new habits take an average of 66 days to become automatic – with enormous variation. Some people integrated new behaviours in a few weeks; others needed months. The point is not the number. It is that habit formation is highly individual and depends on the behaviour, the environment and the brain’s internal reward system.

This brings us to habit circuits, the neurological pathways that reinforce and automate our daily routines. Each time you repeat a behaviour – a morning walk, a glass of water before coffee, five minutes of stretching – you strengthen the pathway that supports it. At first, it requires conscious effort and intention. Over time, the brain shifts control to the basal ganglia, the region that manages ingrained patterns. What begins as effort becomes routine. As an example, when was the last time you had to make yourself brush your teeth? Age 7?

Repetition by itself is not enough. The brain’s reward chemistry plays a crucial role. A small win-

completing a workout, making a healthier choice, sticking to a boundary – triggers a pulse of dopamine, reinforcing the behaviour. It is the brain’s way of tagging the action as worth repeating. These small successes might look minor from the outside, but neurologically they are the building blocks of a durable habit.

This is why micro-changes outperform dramatic overhauls. Big transformations demand too much energy at once and are easy to abandon. Smaller adjustments slip past resistance. They stack. They compound. And, eventually, they change how you see yourself.

Behaviour scientist BJ Fogg calls this “identity through evidence”. When you consistently behave like someone who prioritises health – even in simple ways – your brain updates the internal narrative: this is who I am now. And once identity shifts, habits follow with far less friction.

Sustainable change does not come from force. It comes from shaping conditions that make the healthier choice the easier one – reducing friction, designing routines that match your lifestyle and building proof points your brain can trust.

So instead of chasing a dramatic reinvention, build new circuits one small action at a time. Choose what feels doable, not heroic. Let consistency be your leverage. Let small wins do the heavy lifting.

You do not need to change who you are or be perfectly disciplined. Lasting progress comes from consistent small steps your brain cannot dismiss. Small steps stick. And what sticks is what transforms you.

Libby Heath recently became the first Mayo Clinic certified wellness coach in Asia. She shares her insights and advice through her column ‘Wellthwise’ here in The Phuket News. Please note that if you have a condition that requires medical treatment, consult your doctor. Contact Libby at: BeWellthwise@gmail.com.

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Swimming Competition: New Year Starts with Jumanji Swim

The BangBang Aquatics swimming pool (Chalong) will host the open swimming competition "New Year Starts with Jumanji Swim Center", organised by Jumanji Swim Center. Children born 2018-2020, juniors born 2008-2017, and adult categories including Masters are invited to participate. The competition aims to develop physical fitness, strength, endurance, and to promote a healthy lifestyle. Participants will compete in individual races over 25m and 50m in all swimming styles. The event program includes an opening ceremony, medals, certificates, sweet gifts, and prizes from sponsors. Age Categories: — 2020 (Special) — 2019-2018 — 2017-2016 — 2015-2014 — 2013-2012 — 2011-2010 — 2009-2008 — Adults I (18-28) — Adults II (29-38) — Masters (39+) The 2020 category participates without ranking or prize places. All other categories receive awards for 1st-3rd places. Application deadline: December 20, 2025 Late applications will not be accepted. Venue: BangBang Aquatics, 9/134 Luang Pho Chaem Road, Chalong, Phuket. Time: 9:00-13:00. WhatsApp: +66 965 187 358. Email: jumanjiswimcenter.manager@gmail.com. JUMANJI SWIM CENTER, jumanjiswimcenter.manager@gmail.com, +66 965 187 358

TUE 30 DEC



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The only English-speaking Rotary Club in Phuket, we welcome Rotarians from around the world! With members from 18 nationalities, we are a diverse, dynamic, and well-known club in Thailand. 1st Tue each month - Fellowship dinner at different locations in Phuket, 3rd Tue each month - dinner meeting at Four Points by Sheraton Phuket Patong. Join us! if you are passionate about making a difference. More info - www.facebook.com/RCoPB

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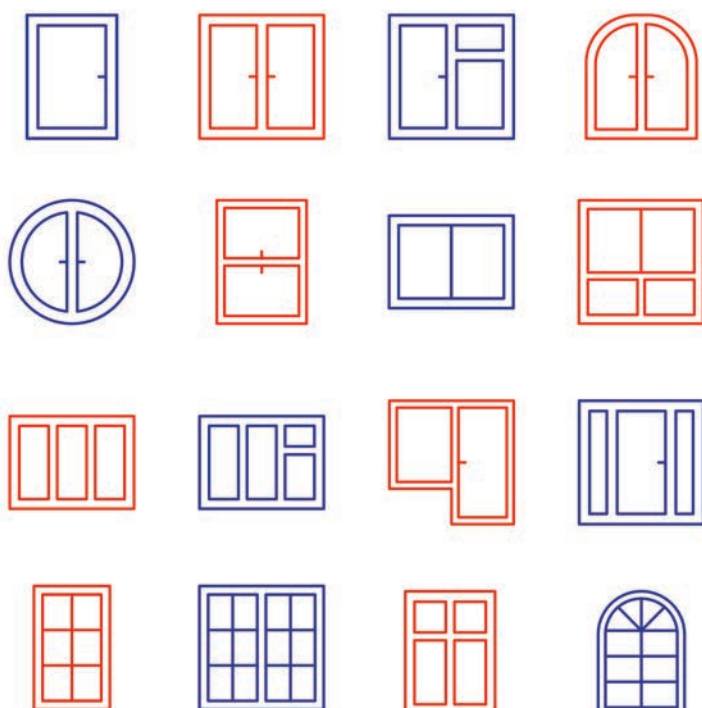


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LA FESTA DI PHUKET

An Italo-Australo-British End of Year Networking Soirée. As 2025 comes to a close, a select group of industry leaders, entrepreneurs and professionals gathered for an evening where meaningful connections meet a relaxed and festive atmosphere. Hosted by TICC, AustCham and BCCT, this exclusive event was held on Friday, Dec 19 at the Overgrown Bar, Le Green Hotel, Cherng Talay and was an unforgettable night under the Phuket stars. For more information about the Thai-Italian Chamber of Commerce visit <https://thaitech.org>



Golden hosts reign supreme

SEA GAMES

Bangkok Post

The curtain fell on the 33rd Southeast Asian (SEA) Games with a colourful closing ceremony last Saturday night (Dec 20) at Bangkok's Rajamangala National Stadium, attended by athletes and officials from ASEAN nations – minus Cambodia.

Before handing over the Games flag to 2027 hosts Malaysia, Thailand capped their campaign by winning the women's sepak takraw title, lifting their record gold medal haul to 233. They also claimed 154 silver and 112 bronze medals for a staggering total of 499.

Indonesia finished a distant second with 91 golds, while Vietnam were third with 87.

The achievement underscored Thailand's dominance across a wide spectrum of sports, with boxing, tennis, cycling, winter disciplines and emerging team events all contributing to a historic tally.

Thailand's women's sepak takraw team delivered the final gold medal as they



The Thai men's volleyball squad celebrate their gold medal success. Photo: AFP

swept fierce rivals Vietnam 2-0, avenging the men's team's earlier defeat to the same opponents.

In total, the takraw squad claimed six golds – four from the women's side (hoop, team regu, quadrant, regu), one from the men's hoop, and one from mixed quadrant – plus three silvers and two bronzes.

There was a golden double in indoor volleyball after the Thai men's team captured their first SEA Games title since 2017 by defeating three-time

defending champions Indonesia in a 3-2 thriller, joining their women's counterparts as champions.

As SEA Games winners, Thailand also booked a place at the 2026 Asian Volleyball Championship.

Elsewhere, the Thai women's ice hockey team made history by winning SEA Games gold in the event's debut appearance as they crushed the Philippines 13-4 in the final.

Her Majesty the Queen, herself a gold medallist in keelboat sailing earlier on

Dec 18, attended the match and presented medals to all participants – a gesture that underscored the significance of the occasion.

STANDOUT

In tennis Maximus Jones Parapol ended Thailand's decade-long wait for a SEA Games men's singles gold as the Thai-Australian star overcame compatriot Kasidit Samrej in three sets, while table tennis ace Suthasini Sawettabut completed a golden treble after clinching the women's

singles title to add to her team and doubles titles.

The Thai boxing team dominated to finish with 14 golds, two silvers and one bronze, while there was double gold in rowing, with Siripong Chaiwichitchonkul and Parisa Chaempudsa winning the men's and women's solo events respectively.

Thai cyclists won 10 gold medals overall, while the short track speed skating team delivered a standout performance, capturing five golds and one silver to underline the nation's growing strength in winter sports.

Thai women once again asserted their supremacy in regional cricket by winning gold in the T20 final against Malaysia and also claimed women's indoor hockey gold with a 4-3 win over the same opponents, while in 6-red snooker Siripaporn Nuanthakhamjan edged world No.1 Nutcharut Wongharuthai 3-2 in an all-Thai final to claim gold.

The athletics programme concluded with a flourish as Joshua Robert Atkinson led Thailand's quartet to gold in

the men's 4x400 metre relay, breaking a 30-year SEA Games record of 3 minutes and 5 seconds set by Thailand in Chiang Mai in 1995 in the process.

Middle-distance runner Kieran Tuntivate landed a hat-trick of gold medals as he won the men's 10,000m, the 1,500m and 5,000m, as 19-year-old Puripol Boonson completed a sprint title treble in the men's 100, 200m and 4x100m relay.

Thailand's swimmers finished with five golds, seven silvers and nine bronzes, while the artistic swimming squad contributed two golds, one silver and one bronze.

The Thai petanque teams delivered a clean sweep, securing both the men's and women's triples gold medals, while Atsawin Uarareejit and Natcha Supaworaset claimed gold in the men's and women's boulder climbing finals respectively.

In rugby Thailand swept to victory in both the men's and women's finals, ending an 18-year wait for gold in the men's event.

Thai duo backed for 2026 Formula 2 and 3

MOTORSPORTS

SINGHA CORPORATION has announced its support for Thai drivers Nandhavud Bhirombhakdi and Tasanapol Intharaphuvasak in their international campaigns next year, marking a historic step for Thai motorsport.

The two rising stars will compete in the FIA Formula 2 and FIA Formula 3 Championships during the 2026 season, the first time Thailand will be represented in both categories in the same year.

"This opportunity for Tasanapol and Nandhavud to race in Formula 2 and Formula 3 is another important step toward the ultimate goal of Formula 1," the company said on Dec 19.

Nandhavud, 19, began his career in the Singha Kart Cup before progressing to Formula 4 UAE and then competing in the Formula Regional European Championship for two seasons. He has now signed with DAMS Lucas Oil to race in Formula 3 next year.



Nandhavud (left) and Tasanapol. Photo: Supplied

Tasanapol, 20, made headlines last season by helping his team win the FIA Formula 3 World Championship, claiming three victories along the way. His success has earned him promotion to Formula 2 with the ART Grand Prix team.

Thailand will now have representation across all three tiers of world formula racing in 2026 – Alex Albon in F1, Tasanapol in F2, and Nandhavud in F3.

Both drivers will make their rookie debuts at the Australian Grand Prix, the season opener at Albert Park Circuit in Melbourne, scheduled for Mar 7-8, 2026. *Bangkok Post*

F1 winners and losers in 2025

FORMULA ONE

THE F1 SEASON CAME TO a thrilling climax in Abu Dhabi on Dec 7 with McLaren's Lando Norris claiming his first ever drivers world championship.

Scrappy at times during the season when many questioned his inner strength, the Brit bounced back to win seven races, muscle past his teammate Oscar Piastri and do enough to hold off a rampaging Max Verstappen.

For McLaren, this was their 13th driver's title and their first since Lewis Hamilton in 2008. They also galloped to the constructors title for the second year running.

Of the six rookies who started the 2025 season, Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli had the most eye-catching year, his sprint pole in Miami making him the youngest ever pole-sitter in F1 history at just 18 years and 251 days old.

Isack Hadjar, who only turned 21 in September, scored 10 top-10 finishes and earned himself promotion from Red Bull's junior team Racing Bulls to a seat alongside Verstappen in the senior team.

Even though he didn't win a fifth successive title, Verstappen enhanced his reputation with a staggering lone battle against the McLarens of Piastri and Norris.



McLaren's Lando Norris was the biggest winner of the year as he collected his maiden world championship title. Photo: AFP

With an inferior car, the Dutchman scrapped and fought and on occasions simply outsmarted his rivals. He wrote himself out of the title race when he trailed by over 100 points and yet he nearly snuck it in Abu Dhabi and ended the season with eight wins, more than either of his rivals.

Losers

While Verstappen has been outstanding, the role of his number two at Red Bull has become an increasingly uncomfortable seat.

Afer Sergio Perez was dispatched, Liam Lawson lasted just two races before being demoted to Racing Bulls, with the more experienced Yuki Tsunoda stepping up.

It should have been a breakthrough moment for the Japanese driver but he posted just seven

top-10 finishes and never threatened the podium, ultimately losing his seat to Hadjar.

Elsewhere, Hamilton's departure from Mercedes and move to Ferrari promised much but delivered little.

The seven-time world champion finished sixth in the title race but for the first time in his career failed to make the podium as the Scuderia finished fourth in the standings without a single win or second-place.

Finally, the sport itself has had a boom year, helped by the Netflix reality series *Drive to Survive* and the release of the Brad Pitt vehicle *F1 The Movie*.

The movie, which Hamilton co-produced, roared on to screens and has already taken over US\$600 million (B19 billion) at the box office, making it the biggest grossing movie of Pitt's stellar career. *AFP*

Gunners top Christmas charts

FOOTBALL

AFP

Arsenal ensured they topped the Premier League at Christmas with a narrow 1-0 over Everton last Saturday (Dec 20), as Manchester City kept the pressure on with a 3-0 win over West Ham.

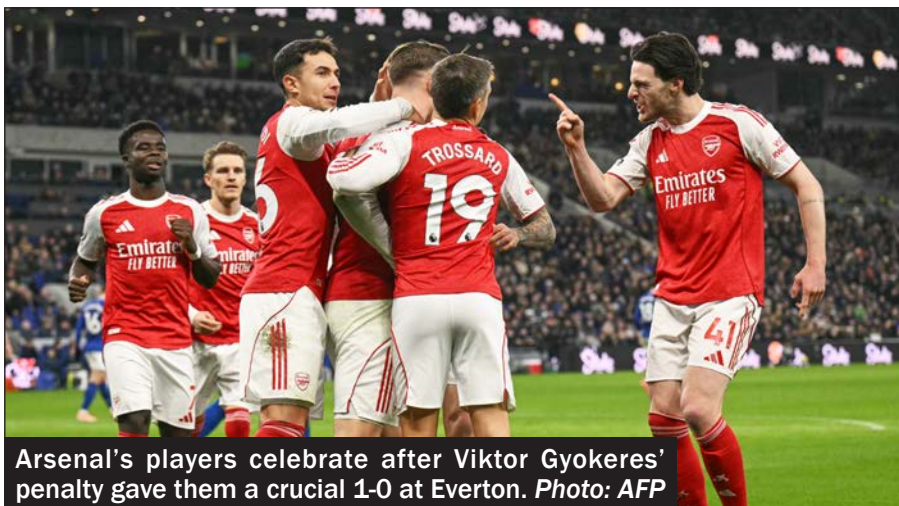
Viktor Gyokeres' penalty was enough to secure the three points for Mikel Arteta's side although they failed to shine in grinding out victory on Merseyside.

Arsenal had strong claims waived away for a foul on Gyokeres seconds before they were awarded a spot-kick for a Jake O'Brien handball, that the Swede converted.

Leandro Trossard and Martin Zubimendi hit the post after the break for the visitors, but Everton were furious that two challenges on Thierno Barry inside the area went unpunished.

City continued to apply pressure to the Gunners with a seventh consecutive win in all competitions thanks to goals from Erling Haaland (2) and Tijani Reijnders.

Yet, Pep Guardiola was still far from satisfied as he demanded improvements if City are to win a seventh Premier League title under his tenure, saying: "I want to be honest. I said to the players, 'Merry Christmas everyone but it will not be enough if we don't improve'."



Arsenal's players celebrate after Viktor Gyokeres' penalty gave them a crucial 1-0 at Everton. Photo: AFP

Aston Villa stepped up their unexpected title challenge as Morgan Rogers' brilliant brace either side of a Matheus Cunha strike sealed a 2-1 win against Manchester United on Sunday.

Unai Emery's third-placed side are just three points adrift of Arsenal and one behind Manchester City as they chase a first English title since 1981.

Liverpool extended their unbeaten run to six games and survived a nervy finale to beat nine-man Tottenham 2-1 to inflict a miserable Christmas on Spurs boss Thomas Frank.

Xavi Simons and captain Cristian Romero both saw red for Spurs, who are rooted down in 13th as Liverpool climbed up to fifth.

Chelsea remain above the Reds in fourth on goal difference as a second-half fightback rescued a 2-2 draw at Newcastle in a hugely-entertaining match.

Nick Woltemade's double put Newcastle 2-0 up in a dominant first half from the Magpies before a brilliant Reece James free-kick brought the Blues back into the game. Joao Pedro then pounced on an error from Malick Thiaw to equalise.

Wolves remain without a league win this season and on course to enter the record books as the worst side in Premier League history after a 2-0 home defeat to Brentford, while Burnley ended their seven-game losing streak as Armando Broja's 90th minute goal snatched a 1-1 draw at Bournemouth.

Leeds moved six points clear of the bottom three as Dominic Calvert-Lewin scored twice in a 4-1 win over Crystal Palace, Sunderland edged up to sixth after a 0-0 draw at Brighton, while Fulham beat Nottingham Forest 1-0 on Monday.

Scheffler wins fourth PGA Tour Player of the Year

GOLF

WORLD NUMBER one Scottie Scheffler has been voted PGA Tour Player of the Year for a fourth straight season after a campaign that included two major wins, tour officials announced on Dec 15.

Scheffler, who won six titles in 2025, is just the second player after Tiger Woods to receive the accolade in four or more consecutive seasons.

"Scottie's consistent level of success has been nothing short of spectacular as he continues to chase history on the PGA Tour, and we're excited to see what he will deliver in 2026," said tour chief executive Brian Rolapp.

Scheffler, 29, won his third major with a five-shot victory at the PGA Championship at Quail Hollow in May.

He added a fourth at the British Open at Royal Portrush in July.



Scottie Scheffler. Photo: AFP

Scheffler's career highlights that have cemented his status include becoming World No. 1, winning multiple majors including the Masters, PGA Championship and Open Championship, back-to-back Players Championships in 2023 and 2024, a gold medal at the 2024 Paris Olympics, a FedEx Cup title and numerous PGA Tour wins.

South Africa's Aldrich Potgieter was named the PGA Tour's Rookie of the Year.

The 21-year-old Potgieter was one of five rookies to win on the tour in 2025 and the only one to reach the FedExCup Playoffs. AFP

Australia win third Test to retain Ashes

CRICKET

DOMINANT AUSTRALIA collected the last four wickets they needed last Sunday (Dec 20) to win the third Test and retain the Ashes in just 11 days of cricket, crushing the dreams of a "hurting" England side who finally showed some fight.

England's dogged resistance on day five at Adelaide Oval lasted into the second session before Scott Boland removed Josh Tongue for an 82-run victory to ensure the famous urn remains in Australian hands.

The tourists needed a win to keep the five-match series alive after being crushed by eight wickets at Perth and Brisbane, with two more Tests still to play at Melbourne and Sydney.

But despite showing more grit, they were again outplayed by an Australian team who suffered a setback with spin wizard Nathan Lyon hurting his hamstring and hobbling off.

Chasing 435 was always going to be a huge challenge, with no side ever



Australia's players celebrate. Photo: AFP

reeling in more than 418 to win in Test history, but England at least gave it a crack as they got to 352.

Their demise in just 11 days is the joint second quickest in more than a century since the 1921 series was completed in eight days, with their "Bazball" style of ultra-attacking cricket exposed.

England's capitulation over three Tests is a far cry from the pre-Ashes hype where they were touted as having their best chance in a generation to win a series in Australia.

And it made a mockery of former fast bowler Stuart Broad's claim that the hosts had their weakest side in 15 years, written off by others as a "Dad's Army".

The reality for Stokes's men is that England have now gone 18 Tests since winning in Australia, dating back to their last series victory there in 2010-11.

Their last three trips yielded one-sided scorelines of 5-0, 4-0 and 4-0, with more of the same on the cards unless there is a dramatic shift in their fortunes. AFP

Joshua knocks out Paul to win Netflix boxing bout

BOXING

FORMER WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT champion Anthony Joshua knocked out YouTuber-turned-boxer Jake Paul in their controversial Netflix-backed bout in Miami last Friday (Dec 19).

Britain's two-time world champion Joshua made hard work of defeating his vastly less experienced opponent, an internet personality who has forged a lucrative career through a handful of novelty boxing contests, but finally made his superior size and power count in the later stages of the eight-round fight.

A mediocre contest at the Kaseya Center – with the two men reportedly splitting a mammoth purse of US\$184 million (B\$5.7 billion) – descended into farce at times, with Paul repeatedly dropping to the canvas and grappling at Joshua's legs.

At one stage even referee Christopher Young appeared to be losing patience, warning the fighters in the fourth round: "The fans did not pay to see this crap."

As Paul tired, the 6ft 6in (1.98m) tall Joshua began to land punches with more regularity, and after knocking down the 6ft 1in American twice in the fifth round, the end came swiftly in the sixth.

Joshua backed the 28-year-old into a corner and, after teeing up Paul with a



Photo: AFP

crunching left, delivered the knockout blow with a right to the chin that sent his opponent crashing to the canvas.

"It wasn't the best performance," Joshua, 36, admitted afterwards. "It took a bit longer than expected but the right hand finally found its destination."

Joshua meanwhile praised Paul for lasting into the later rounds.

"I want to give him his props – he got up time and time again," Joshua said. "It was difficult in there for him, but he kept on trying to find a way. It takes a real man to do that."

Joshua always looked the more threatening fighter, landing 48 of 146 punches thrown compared to Paul's meagre total of 16 punches landed.

The American later confirmed in a post on social media, accompanied by an image of a radiograph, that he had suffered a "double broken jaw".

AFP

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Sport



Aussies retain the Ashes in style > p15

Phuket White Collar Boxing: A Transformational Challenge

BOXING

Press Release

Phuket has long been the home of combat sports, fitness and transformational training. But now a new opportunity is emerging for everyday residents to experience the thrill, discipline and empowerment of stepping into the ring – all while raising money for a truly meaningful cause.

Phuket White Collar Boxing invites men and women from across the island to take on a challenge like no other: real boxing training, real personal transformation and a real fight night experience, all in a safe, structured and professionally guided environment.

Whether you've never worn gloves before or you've only briefly dabbled in boxing, this programme is designed especially for beginners. Participants will go from zero experience to confidently stepping into the

spotlight over the course of 12 weeks – and the journey is as rewarding as the final fight itself. This is a chance to build confidence, improve fitness, learn a new skill and become part of something bigger than yourself.

Train Like an Athlete – For Free. One of the standout elements of the Phuket White Collar Boxing programme is the fully sponsored training camp: 12 weeks of professional boxing coaching, completely free of charge, held at the brand-new KhunPon Martial Arts Gym, located next to Blue Tree in Chermg Talay. This state-of-the-art facility offers the ideal environment to learn authentic boxing technique while boosting your strength, conditioning and mental resilience.

Participants are guided by expert coaches who specialise in developing beginners safely and effectively. Every session is designed to push you, support you and help you unlock levels of fitness and confid-



Photo: Supplied

ence you may never have known you had.

As KhunPon, founder of the recently opened KhunPon Gym, explains: "We're happy and proud that Phuket White Collar Boxing has chosen us to be the official site for their event this year. Hosting the athletes in our brand-new facility is a fantastic way to showcase what we're all about – high-level coaching, community, and pushing people beyond what they think they're capable of."

"The transformation of regular people to athletes that are ready to go through the ultimate test of competing in hand-to-hand combat is super exciting. The fact that an event that brings people

together, challenges them, and raises money for great causes picked us as their venue shows our aligned visions and values."

Fight Night – An Unforgettable Experience. After 12 weeks of training, your moment arrives. Saturday, May 9, the fighters step into the ring at the Angsana Exhibition & Convention Space (ACES) in Laguna for a spectacular black-tie fight night attended by more than 400 guests. The event promises professional production, electric atmosphere and a night of entertainment unlike anything else on the island.

Paul Wilson, General Manager of Laguna Phuket – the lead sponsor and host of

the fight night – shares the vision: "We are thrilled to serve as the lead sponsor of what is sure to be an unforgettable evening of entertainment. This event not only allows us to support a dynamic and inspiring initiative but also provides a chance to contribute to a noble cause."

"CFF is a charitable organisation founded by Laguna Phuket to assist groups in Phuket dedicated to caring for orphans, abandoned, and underprivileged children. ACES is the perfect venue for such an event. Guests will enjoy a black-tie, three-course dinner for 400 attendees, reminiscent of a professional fight night."

Every Punch Makes a Difference. Phuket White Collar Boxing proudly supports the Children First Fund (CFF), which provides essential supplies, care and support to seven orphanages across Phuket. Participants aren't just training for themselves – they're helping

to change the lives of local-children who need it most.

A New Take on Phuket's Fighting Spirit. While the island has hosted charitable Muay Thai events in the past, this is a western-style boxing format – offering a completely different experience for both participants and spectators. It brings global white-collar boxing culture to Phuket in a refreshing and accessible way, blending fitness, charity and unforgettable entertainment into one powerful event.

Enter Now – Registration is Now Open. If you've ever wanted a challenge, a transformation, or an experience that pushes you beyond your comfort zone, this is your moment. Scan the QR code or visit www.PhuketBoxing.com to register.

Take the first step – the rest of the journey will change you.



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