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Behind The Scene of The 28th IYPT 2015 at Suranaree University of Technology, Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand

Introduction

When I received an email from Prof. Yung-Yuan Hsu from Department of Physics, National Taiwan Normal University, who also serves as the IYPT Magazine Chief Editor, asking me to write about the IYPT 2015 for the IYPT Magazine, I promised him that I would write about behind the scenes of the 28th IYPT.

The aim of this article is to share with those who are interested in the International Young Physicists' Tournament (IYPT) about our experiences with the organizing of the IYPT 2015 from 27th June to 4th July 2015, at Suranaree University of Technology, Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand. Some history that Thailand has been participated in the IYPT has been written in my message in the booklet of the IYPT 2015. There are only four photos that were not taken from my own mobile phone. Hopefully most pictures in this article have not been seen by majority of the participants of the IYPT 2015. We have put all the photos, hundreds of photos, about the IYPT 2015 on the website of the IYPT 2015. The information about the IYPT and its history can be found on the IYPT central website.

Fact

Suranaree University of Technology (SUT) was selected to host the 28th IYPT in 2015 at the 25th IYPT during the IOC meeting at Bad Saugua, Germany in 2012.

The 28th IYPT was hosted by, and held at Suranaree University of Technology, Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand, from 27th June to 4th July, 2015. The Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology (IPST) and the Basic Education Commission of Thailand (OBEC) are the co-hosts of this IYPT. We got sponsors from many organizations to support the tournament both in kind and in cash. Without their generous support, the tournament could not be run smoothly.

Twenty seven teams participated in this tournament made up of over 250 participants involved

with the competition.

Local organization committee was composed of about two hundred personnel within, firstly, a steering committee made up of high level administrators of the host and co-hosts, and secondly an organizing committee with ten subcommittee. Furthermore, there were about two hundred volunteer students. There were more people helping to organize the 28th IYPT than the participants of the IYPT and the budget spent was more than the collected fee. I think it was worth it and made the 28th IYPT another memorable tournament.

■ Before the Tournament: Some Worrying ■

Firstly, in May 2014, Thailand military coup occurred and I got a few emails from the IYPT community asking if the preparation of the IYPT2015 was affected by the coup, or whether SUT was still able to host the IYPT 2015. My immediate answer to the emails was “no problem, please do not worry”. At the beginning, right after the coup, the news, which appeared in the foreign news, might sound or look terrible, but after several months past, there was no news about the coup in Thailand. During the closing ceremony of the 27th IYPT in Shrewsbury, England, 2014, I spoke to the audients, after receiving the IYPT flag, that “I have been in England for two weeks and trying to find news about Thailand concerning with the coup, but I couldn’t find any news. That means “no news is a good news”, so I accept the challenge to organize the 28th IYPT in Thailand”. It is amazing that the preparation was not really affected by the coup. Things went on like normal.

Secondly, just a couple weeks before the tournament, Thailand had confirmed its first case of MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome). A man was diagnosed with MERS after he traveled to Thailand from a Middle Eastern country on June 15th. He had been treated in a private hospital in Bangkok where his condition was said to be stable. For precaution and guarding against the



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infection, we were working with medical doctors and staffs at Suranaree University of Technology hospital and the Disease Control Department in case there was something happening during the IYPT 2015. That was to ensure that the 28th IYPT would run as smoothly as possible without being interrupted by the new infectious disease, MERS. The protocol to prevent the case of MERS would go like these.

1. Every morning, a team of staffs from SUT hospital, with hand-held thermometers, would observe all participants before they entered into the building for the physics fights at SUT. Fortunately, this did not take long or delay the physics fights.
2. Surgical masks and alcohol gel were available at the physics fight building for those who would want or need them.
3. If they found someone fit the criteria which would place them in a risk group, they would be further examined in an isolation room at SUT hospital. The medical team overseeing the risk group would not look after other patients.
4. To an extreme case, if they found that, after several tests, the result was positive for MERS, the patient would be transferred to the main hospital in Nakhon Ratchasima and stayed in a room with separate air filtration system from the remaining hospital buildings. Furthermore, all participants of the IYPT would be restricted to stay in SUT, at a student dormitory and would be observed for the symptom by a team of medical doctors. Everyone would be provided with all facilities needed, food, drink, etc.

It sounded terrible, but fortunately there was no MERS case during the tournament.

During the Tournament

After a long preparation, meetings after meetings took place to make everything ready for the tournament. Finally, the time had come, volunteer students were sent to the airport in Bangkok to welcome each team. Two students were assigned to guide and take care of each team from their arrival until they went back.

After observing all participants before they entered into the building, a couple of nurses and an ambulance always stood by at the physics fight building.





Staffs and volunteer students who knew their duties were always around and ready to take action when times came. Dr.Khanchai Kosonthongkee was the leader to assess the situations those happened or might happen and decided how to deal with them, just in case.

It was considering to be lucky for the tournament which was organized during the monsoon season in the northeast area. There was no rain interrupting, especially during excursions. For example, if it was raining when the teams went to Prasat Hin Phimai, the atmosphere of light and sound and cultural show, in which the ancient temple itself was used as the stage and the background for the show, would have been different since we had to move everything to a school's hall nearby.

Some Highlights

1. The EC Meeting before the Tournament

The executive committee (EC) meeting before the tournament was set in November 2015, coincided with the commencement day of Suranaree University of Technology on 17th November 2015, in which Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn came to preside over the ceremony. HRH Princess also had lunch at the hotel in the university. Unfortunately, there were not enough seats for every EC member to luncheon with the HRH Princess. Only Alan Allinson and Martin Plesch, who were the president and the secretary general of the IYPT respectively, were invited. It was great to see HRH Princess having a conversation with Allan when the rector of SUT, Prof. Prasat Suebka, introduced him to HRH Princess after lunch.



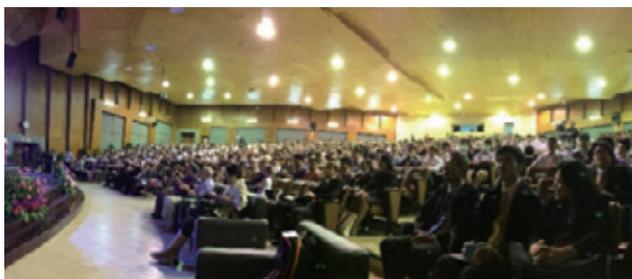
From left to right are the author (in a formal uniform), Martin and Allan respectively.

2. Students and Teachers Observing the Tournament

The IYPT by itself is very interesting and challenging for those who know or have been participated in the IYPT tournament. Another highlight of the IYPT 2015 was that we did financially support students and physics teachers from 207 high schools all over Thailand to observe the IYPT 2015. What we did not realize was that the IYPT 2015 attracted many students and teachers all over Thailand. Many students and teachers supporting themselves came from the very north and south of Thailand. These gave the IYPT 2015 a bit more colorful. As a result, the 1500 seat auditorium was not large enough to accommodate the students. We had to put them in the nearby 300 seat rooms, based on first come first served, with the CCTV from the main auditorium during the opening ceremony. There were always students wearing their school uniforms attending every physics fight room from day one to the final fight. My colleague, Dr. Khanchai Kosolthongki, who had experiences with the past IYPT, had designed a course for training the high school teachers in parallel with the IYPT 2015 tournament, so they could go back to their schools and form a team to represent their schools to fight in the national level.



Photos of the main hall just a day before the opening ceremony, preparing and practicing.



The opening ceremony of the 28th IYPT 2015 and the first round of Physics fight.



The final fight and the closing of the 28th IYPT 2015.



A long caravan to Khao Yai National Park.

3. A Long Caravan

Another highlight of the tournament was that every time we went for excursion, there was a police car leading in front of the caravan and an ambulance following the last. Imagine that there were thirty vans in between, each van for each team. It was quite an impressive picture and gave some troubles to other faster vehicles whose drivers wanted to take over the caravan while going to a smaller road. A few participants told me that “I feel like a princess. Never have a police car leading in the front and an ambulance following in the back of my car before.” Great feeling, isn’t it? It needed a lot of preparation and cooperation in order to do that for the participants.

Finally, the cleaner of the hotel, the best hotel in our city where we used for accommodating each team, was shock when entering to a hotel room the day every team departed. After celebrating, maybe all night, the room was left dirty and some cloth items were damaged. Only the team who did it, the hotel staffs, and the host, of course, who paid for the fine to the hotel, knew well about this. It was fortunate that only a few people had problems with their stomach during the tournament, after enjoying so much food or drink from tap water, not the water we provided. None were serious.

4. The IOC meeting

Only the IOC members and those who attended the IOC meeting, after the tournament, could enjoy Ayutthaya historical park and the boat trip along Chaophraya River during dinner. It was a wonderful evening with nice weather and beautiful scenic view of the historical places along both sides of the river with a live guide telling many stories in English. A couple foreign friends said to



me that they thought at the beginning that we just went to have dinner on the boat, and the boat would stay still on the river bank, not moving out. It was good to have a small surprise.

Is the 28th IYPT Successful?

I would say we did our best to organize the 28th IYPT 2015. I would like to express my gratitude to Suranaree University of Technology and the two co-hosts namely, the Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology and the Basic Education Commission of Thailand, and to our sponsors for their generous support.

I would like to thank and appreciate the local organizing committees, the volunteers, who have been working hard to put everything together, who have spared no effort to ensure that the organization of this tournament would be successful. A name deserved to be mentioned here is Dr.Khanchai Kosonthongkee, whose name was in every local organizing subcommittee, who was around to deal with all things and got people to work to make sure everything went well since the preparation process until the organizing of the 28th IYPT 2015 project was closed.

We hope all participants enjoyed not only the tournament itself but also the food, the culture of the Thai people, and the natural resort as we provided or showed during the excursion or reception while you were there. We strongly hope that the 28th IYPT would be another memorable tournament.