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New focus required

At a talk forum, calls grow for better representation of the disabled in Thai films

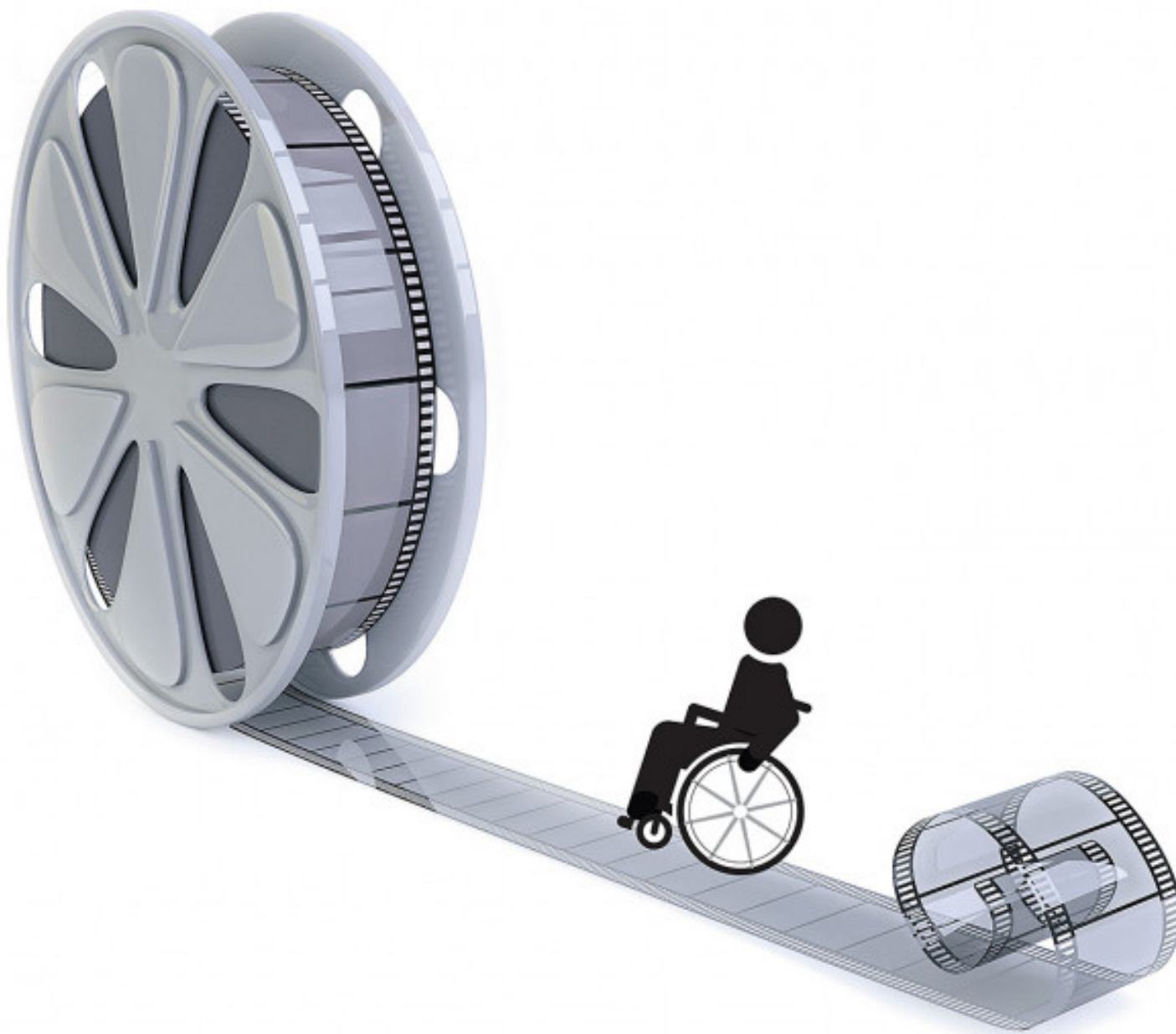
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In Thailand's film industry, there are few movies where the main character has a disability as the protagonist is usually in perfect health. In the real world, Thai actors who are disabled are extremely rare, so when actors have to play a disabled role, they cannot portray it realistically.

In order to help aspiring filmmakers have the right mindset about people with disabilities, the Institute of Asian Studies (IAS) and Chulalongkorn University (CU) recently organised the talk forum "Disabilities In Film" at the Faculty of Communication Arts. The forum was hosted by Luxsnai Songsiengchai, of the executive committee of Asian studies at IAS. The speakers included Sapon Tubklong, a visually impaired actor, Thippawan Pollongchang, a physically

or moviezgeter at Nongkhai, and Manopon Endowment, a lecturer at the Department of Motion Pictures and Still Photography at CU.



Luxsnai Songsiengchai of the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University. Institute of Asian Studies

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Sopon, an actor at the Blind Theatre, said characters ir
misrepresent people with visual impairment.

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"In the movie world, people with visual impairments are always portrayed wearing sunglasses. This caused some people to question if I was really visually impaired since I did not wear sunglasses. To prove myself, I had to show them my disability ID. In the past, comedians pretended to be disabled to add humour to their shows, but currently, there is less of this because everyone, including disabled people, can access the media more than in the past. Moreover, some people do not recognise a white cane. I was asked if I was a drummer when people saw my folded white cane and mistook it for a drumstick," said Sopon.

agreed with Sopon that there are many unrealistic scenes about the disabled in the media.

"I was surprised to see a viral video where an actor in a wheelchair floated high in the air after rolling his wheelchair on a road full of speed bumps, and grabbed a gun to fire at others. The story is not meant to be fantasy, and the video does not look realistic at all. Thai scriptwriters should do more research. At least, they should sit on a wheelchair to learn what it is like to move about and control it or they should interview people in wheelchairs," said Thippawan.



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Thanapol Chaowanich, a lecturer at the Department of Motion Pictures and Still Photography at CU. The Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University

"The Korean TV series Extraordinary Attorney Woo which portrays an autistic spectrum lawyer was successful because they did a lot of research about the disorder. The American TV series The Good Doctor, which is a remake of the Korean TV series with the same title, is about surgeon Dr Shaun Murphy who has autism. It portrays many aspects of his life as an autistic person, including work life, social, and sexual and romantic relationships. Many non-disabled

compared to the past, Hollywood movies provide more varied content featuring people with disabilities. However, there are still some stereotypes.

"Hollywood movies present various roles of people with disabilities. However, at one point in time, people with disabilities were stereotyped as objects of pity or inspirational heroes. Inspirational hero characters in thriller or horror movies fight for their lives even though their disabilities make it difficult for them to survive. These kinds of movies use disabilities to inspire non-disabled people," said Thanapol.

"Hollywood movies present disabled characters no differently from non-disabled characters. However, in the movie Me Before You, the main character Will Traynor, a young millionaire who became paralysed due to an accident, decides to undergo euthanasia. The movie was criticised by disabled communities for portraying the underlying message that it is better to be dead than disabled, which is a distorted attitude."

Luxsnai from IAS who has researched Korean movies over the past 20 years discovered that characters with disabilities in Korean movies are varied. Some stereotypes of characters with disabilities include those that are pure, naïve or endearing, as well as those that have sporting or musical talents.

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Thipphawan Pollongchang, lecturer at Srinakharinwirot University. The Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University

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"I discovered that Korean movies do not present only c
Inseparable Bros, there is a bond between a physically
mentally disabled man who met in an orphanage where they were young.
Another movie, Oasis, is a story of a disabled cerebral palsy woman who falls in
love with a mentally disabled man. Their relationship is discriminated against
by others. Korean disabled characters are different from disabled characters in
Thai movies. In Thai movies, disabled characters are portrayed as very good
people with high moral standards. They do not engage in any sexual activities.
In contrast, disabled Korean characters portray various personalities and
behaviours just like real non-disabled people," said Luxsnai.

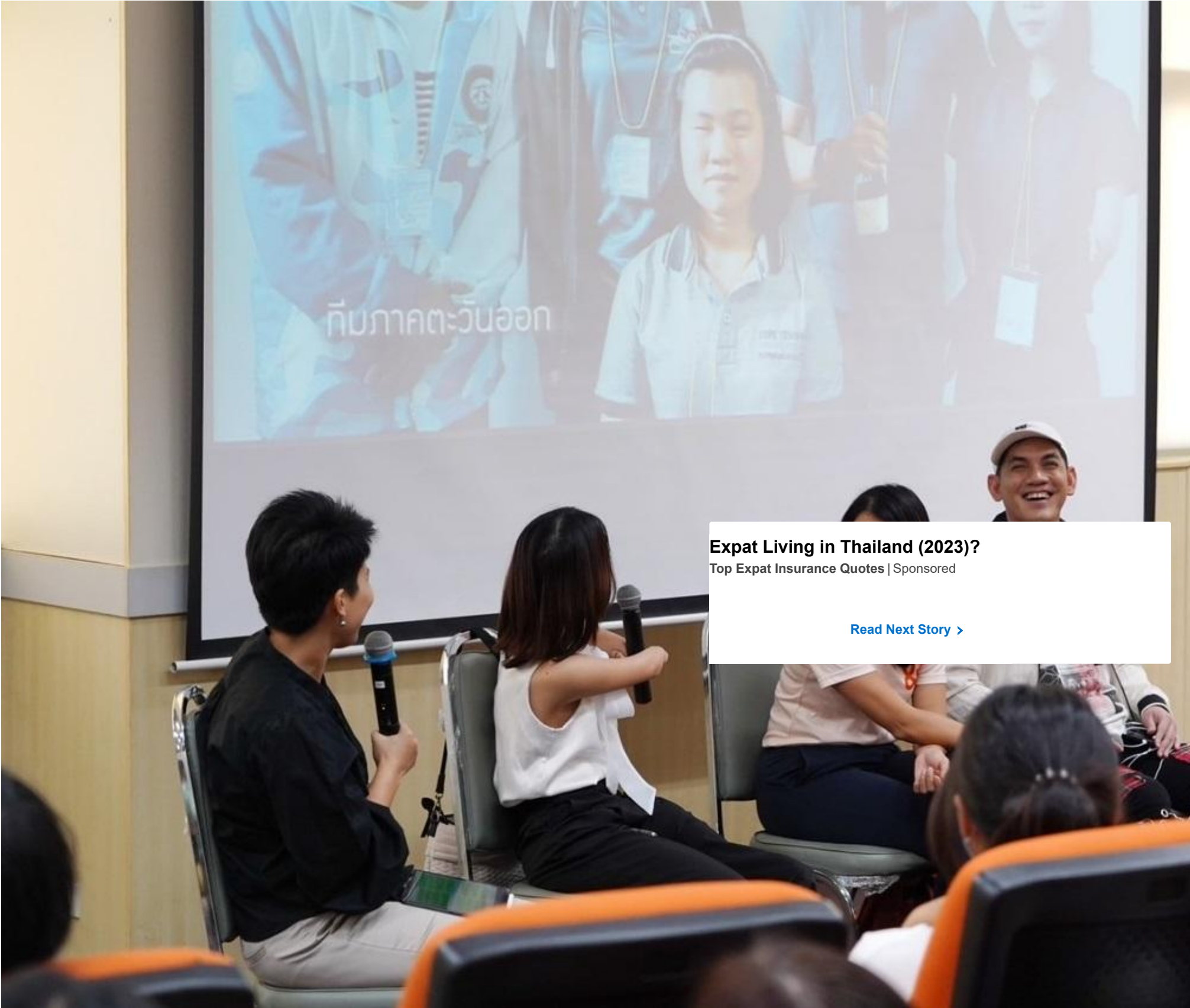
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In today's digital age, disabled people can access movies easily due to
streaming services. Visually impaired people in Thailand can enjoy movies
which have audio descriptions available or a narration of visual elements. To
help the visually impaired understand movies, Klongdinsor launched the audio
description app Pannana which can be downloaded from iOS and Android

...and while playing a movie. Unfortunately, due to copyright, Thai language audio descriptions are available only for Thai movies.

To increase the number of audio descriptions, Klongdinsor recently launched a platform, vohan.org, where people can create audio descriptions for videos by themselves. The platform also allows other creators to post their own videos with audio descriptions.

In Thai movies and TV dramas, viewers rarely see actors with disabilities, even as extras. Thanapol explained that movie and TV crew may experience difficulty communicating with actors with disabilities.



From right, Sapon Tubklong, actor at the Blind Theatre, and Piyawan Ongsuwan, manager of Movie2gether at Klongdinsor. The Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University

"It takes more time to communicate with actors with disabilities. The crew may have to work longer. Also, when viewers see a disabled extra in a movie or a TV

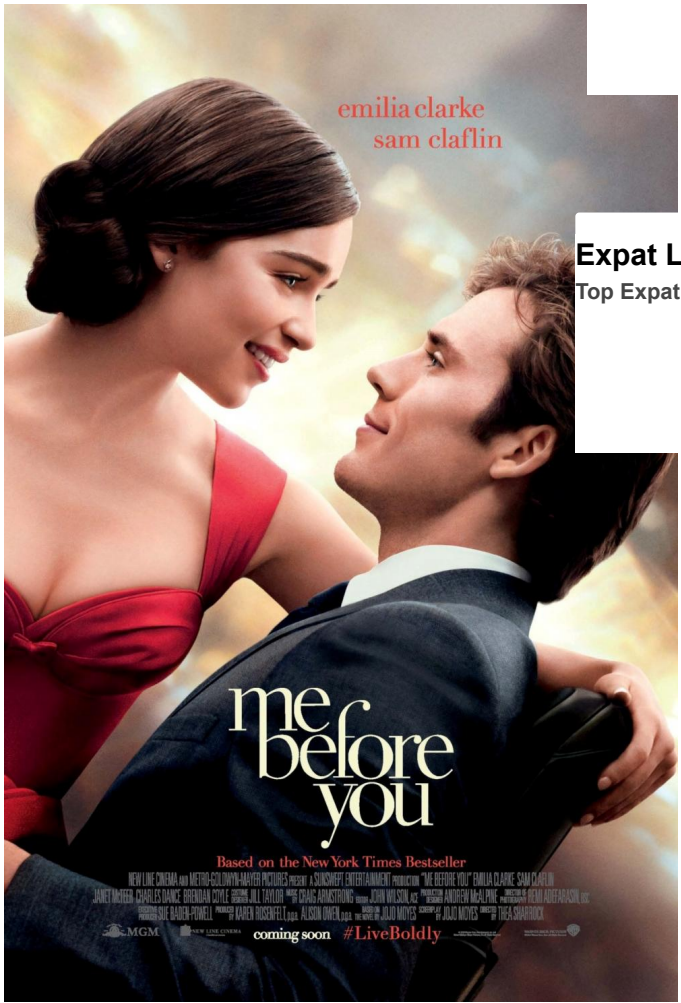
manapon.

Sopon explained that not every disabled person can act.

"Thailand does not have a lot of actors with disabilities. And people who lack acting training cannot immediately play a role in a movie. With my experience, I still have to practice a few times before I can make it. At a production set, time is important because it relates to expenditure. I trained to act for three to four years before I got a job. If people with disabilities want to be an actor, they must invest their money and time," said Sopon.

At the end of the forum, both disabled speakers, Sopon and Thippawan, told aspiring filmmakers to get to know people with disabilities in person, so they can understand them more. Then, when they create a movie related to disabled people, it will come from the right perspective.

"Disable people have different personalities like non-disabled people. There are both good and bad people. Disabled and non-disabled people do not understand each other much because of a lack of communication. I do not think you will understand disabled people from my talk. If you want to understand someone more, you should get to know them," said Sopon.



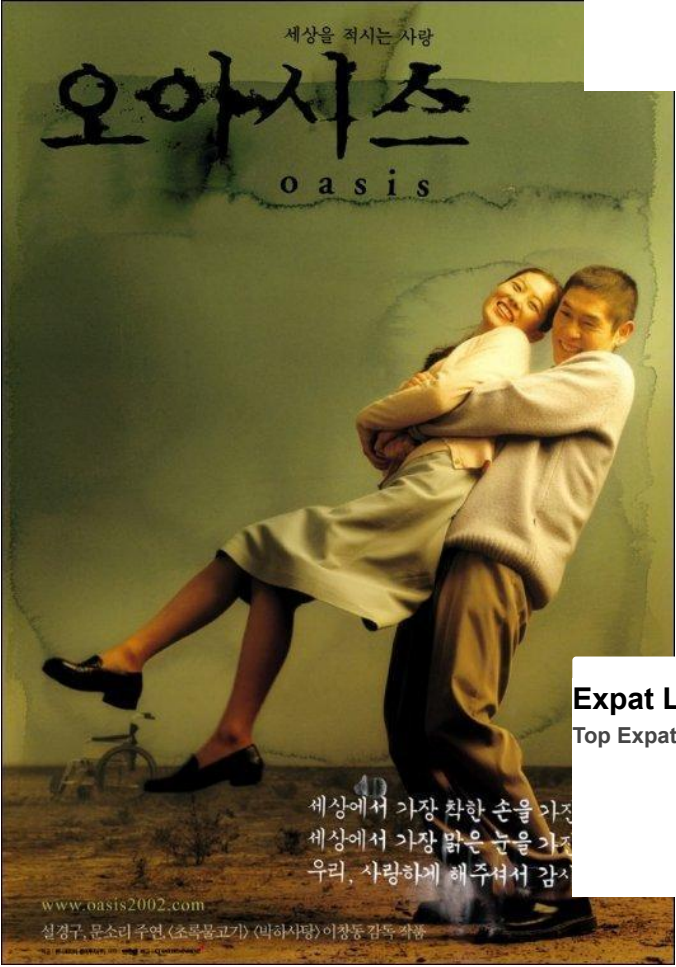
Warner Bros

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Inseparable Bros. Next Entertainment World



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Oasis. CJ Entertainment



Keywords

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- disabled

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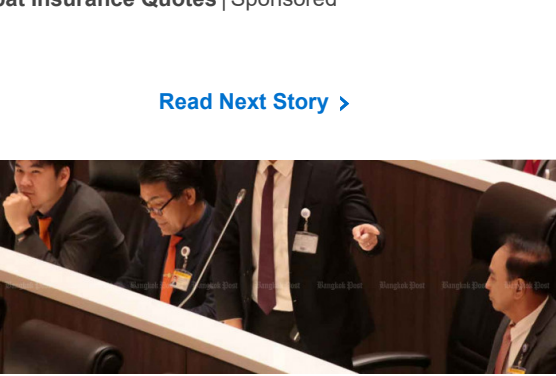
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