

BLACK WASTEWATER RETURNS TO BANG TAO, KAMALA > PAGE 3

RAY OF HOPE

A rare juvenile longtail butterfly ray (*Gymnura poecilura*) was sighted in Kata Bay only last month. Photo: Kata Beach Shore Diving

RARE RAY SIGHTING ADDS TO CALL FOR PROTECTED MARINE NURSERY AT KATA

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

A long-term expat with more than 30 years' diving experience is hoping officials will heed the call to help preserve the overlooked abundance of special marine life in Kata Bay.

Kata Beach is well known as a popular beach for tourists and is popular as an anchorage for yachts, but very little is known – or appreciated – of the role Kata Bay plays as a nursery for marine life in the area, explains Stuart Childs, who has dived the bay more than 1,000 times over the past eight years.

"I have been diving for 30 years and have dived in South Africa, Sri

Lanka, the Red Sea, Maldives, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and of course Thailand," Stuart notes.

"I started shore diving at Kata Beach in the high season of 2016 and have continued to do so every high season from November to April every year since. What started as casual dives up and down the reef at the north end of Kata Beach progressed to exploring the whole Kata Beach bay area."

It became evident very quickly that as vibrant and varied the marine life on Kata reef was, with sea turtles, barracuda, colourful reef fish and Moray eels regularly seen, much rarer and interesting marine life was to be found living off the reef out in the sand areas, Stuart noted.

"As the months and years have gone by, I have found rare species of marine life that are rarely associated with Thailand and of which divers around the world travel vast distances to the Philippines and Indonesia paying to dive and photograph," he says.

Examples of the variety of marine life that Stuart has seen – and photographed – include mimic octopus, bobtail squid, simplex shrimp, crocodile snake eel, shaggy frogfish and brackish water frogfish, as well as thorny seahorses, snake blenny, electric torpedo rays and a varied array of rare nudibranch including Stiliger and Cerberilla affinis.

"Most recently an incredibly rarely seen longtail butterfly ray was found

resting in the sand," Stuart pointed out.

To promote knowledge and understanding of marine life in Kata Bay, Stuart in November 2017 launched the fully non-commercial 'Kata Beach Shore Diving' Facebook page to post photos of his wondrous discoveries.

His photographed sighting of the longtail butterfly ray was hailed as a very rare discovery, and very surprising among many very experienced divers to be discovered in underwater sands off Kata Beach.

The confirmed sighting of the ray also prompted many of the experienced divers to ask what measures were being taken to protect the marine life off Kata. The answer remains: none.

"Unfortunately all of this wonderful...

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News



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Move Forward eyes PPAO presidency

The Phuket News

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Pita Limjaroenrat in Phuket has announced former Vachira Hospital Director Dr Lersak Leenanithikul as the Move Forward Party's candidate for President in the next Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation (PPAO, or Or-BorJor) election.

Mr Pita, who serves as Chairman and Advisor to the Party Leader of the Move Forward Party, and Phuket's three Move Forward MPs were at Sri Phuwannarat Park, located along Pattana Thongthin Rd in Wichit, last Saturday (Feb 24) to make the announcement.

Dr Lersak gained his reputation in Phuket as a respected brain surgeon, and then served as Head of the Emergency Department at Vachira Phuket Hospital before becoming the hospital's director.

Vachira Phuket Hospital is the lead government hospital on the island. The facility usually takes the lead



Photo: Pita Limjaroenrat / Facebook

in implementing national health policies in Phuket, and although Vachira is technically under the administration of the Phuket Provincial Public Health Office, the hospital tends to maintain its own identity.

"I am pleased to inform you that the Move forward Party has announced Dr Lersak Leenanithikul, or 'Dr Oh', as a candidate for PPAO President," Mr Pita confirmed

through a post online.

"Many of you may be wondering how important is the election of an OrBorJor president. The election of an OrBorJor president is very important because it is the selection of representatives to perform administrative duties in the area, and the OrBorJor president is directly elected by the people.

"And if you do good work for two terms or eight years,

you can continuously solve problems. This is different from provincial governors who are appointed [by the central government] and have an average tenure of service in that province of only 1.5 years. The problems are not solved at all and [the governor] has gone away," Mr Pita explained.

"The second thing is that the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation receives

a budget of more than B1.2 billion per year, with almost half of the budget related to public health," he added.

"In the past Dr Oh has shown that he is fully qualified to be able to take care of the budget for Phuket people, and his management policy is to expand the potential of Subdistrict Health Promoting Hospitals to be a refuge for the community and make them open 24 hours, and increase their potential to screen for a wider variety of diseases," Mr Pita continued.

"This is just the beginning. I would like to invite everyone to follow the various policies that Dr Oh has prepared and to take part in examining and recommending additional policies, including supporting the mission to complete the 'last piece of the jigsaw' for Phuket province," he wrote.

"Through the work of [Move Forward] MPs in all three districts and with a Move Forward President of the PPAO, the MPs and the PPAO President will be able

to to work together seamlessly. They will be able to connect to a complete system and make Phuket a paradise for both local residents and tourists," he added.

Mr Pita noted that Phuket is just the first province where the Move Forward will contest the seat of OrBorJor President.

"Candidates for OrBorJor President will be sent to compete for positions in every region of the country because the Move Forward Party stands firmly in the fight for decentralization," Mr Pita wrote.

"We believe that only those on site can see the daily lives of the local people, and understand the problems of the local people.

"And we believe that decentralisation builds democracy at the grassroots level. People get to choose their own administrators, keep a close eye on corruption and participate in creating the area in which one is born or one makes a living," Mr Pita concluded.

Abundance of marine life at Kata spurs call for protection

Continued from page 1

...marine life is in serious danger as every year hundreds of visiting sail and motorised boats drop anchor in Kata Bay, destroying the habitat of rare and important marine life," Stuart explains.

"My fear is that if the practice of dropping anchor in Kata Bay does not stop then eventually this marine life will cease to inhabit the area and Kata bay will become barren of its rare marine life."

Stuart is very aware of how Kata Bay is used for marine tourism, and understands how boats will still need to use parts of the bay.

"I sincerely believe that the way to protect Kata Bay's rare marine life is to make it illegal to drop anchor and install dedicated mooring lines/points for visiting boats. After all they have them for the longtail boats," he says.

"It should be noted that when an anchor is dropped it hits the seabed and then drags along the seabed until



Photo: Kata Beach Shore Diving



it eventually embeds in the sand. The destruction this causes is severe with countless animals and marine plants being destroyed."

CORALS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Admiral Adung Phan-iam, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Navy, was in Phuket only last week to officiate the launch of a project to repair and install mooring buoys to help protect coral reefs.

The official launch of the project took place at the Marine and Coastal Resources Research Center (Upper Andaman Sea) at Cape Panwa on Feb 20.

Adm Adung presided over the event alongside key digni-

ties including Pinsak Suraswadi, Director-General of the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR).

The initiative is in response to the royal mandate championed by Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, explained an official report of the launch.

The initiative is part of the Chulabhorn 36 Underwater Park Project, which has been active since 1993 under the auspices of HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and Princess Chulabhorn Walailak. The ongoing project, initiated on the occasion of His Majesty the King's 36th birthday, aims to conserve, restore, and prevent the destruction of natural resources in the Andaman Sea region

The project aims to launch a concerted effort to preserve the delicate ecosystems of the Andaman Sea by the conservation and restoration of natural resources in the region. However, the project is focussed particularly on protecting coral reefs, not marine life born out of sandy seabeds, which much marine life develops.

Regardless, Adm Adung sai at the launch, "The overall goal of the initiative is to raise awareness and foster public participation in the protection of marine resources, ultimately ensuring that tourist attractions and dive sites, such as Racha Yai Island, remain pristine, beautiful, and safe for all visitors.

"By undertaking such proactive measures, Royal Thai

Navy Third Area Command and its partners are taking significant strides towards safeguarding the rich biodiversity and ecological balance of the Andaman Sea, marking a pivotal moment in the ongoing efforts to preserve our planet's precious natural resources," he added.

VITAL SAND

"Kata beach is not simply just Kata reef, but it consists of large seagrass areas, algae areas, pink sponge finger areas and huge sand areas where so much important marine life is living," Stuart countered.

"In addition to boats anchors, every year snorkelers ignore the signs and are seen regularly standing on the top of Kata reef resting.

"The damage this is doing to Kata reef is irreversible as coral can take hundreds of years to grow. Why is no one ever policing and enforcing the rule of no standing on the reef?" he posed.

"I believe that protecting Kata Bay is extremely important not only from an

ecological perspective, but also for Thailand from the dive tourism revenue that can be gained and the jobs created from visiting divers who want to macro/muck dive in Thailand. The opportunity is huge," Stuart pointed out.

"People never associate Thailand with macro diving but yet here it is at Kata.

Protect it as an investment for future dive tourism if not for ecological conservation reasons," Stuart concluded.

For more information about the marine life to be found in Kata Bay, visit Kata Beach Shore Diving Facebook page, which Stuart launched with "the aim of highlighting the significant importance of the area by photographing its marine life in the hope that the Thai government may eventually see and protect it for the jewel that it is, similar to how they regard Maya bay and the Similan islands – and make it a protected area".

Black wastewater returns

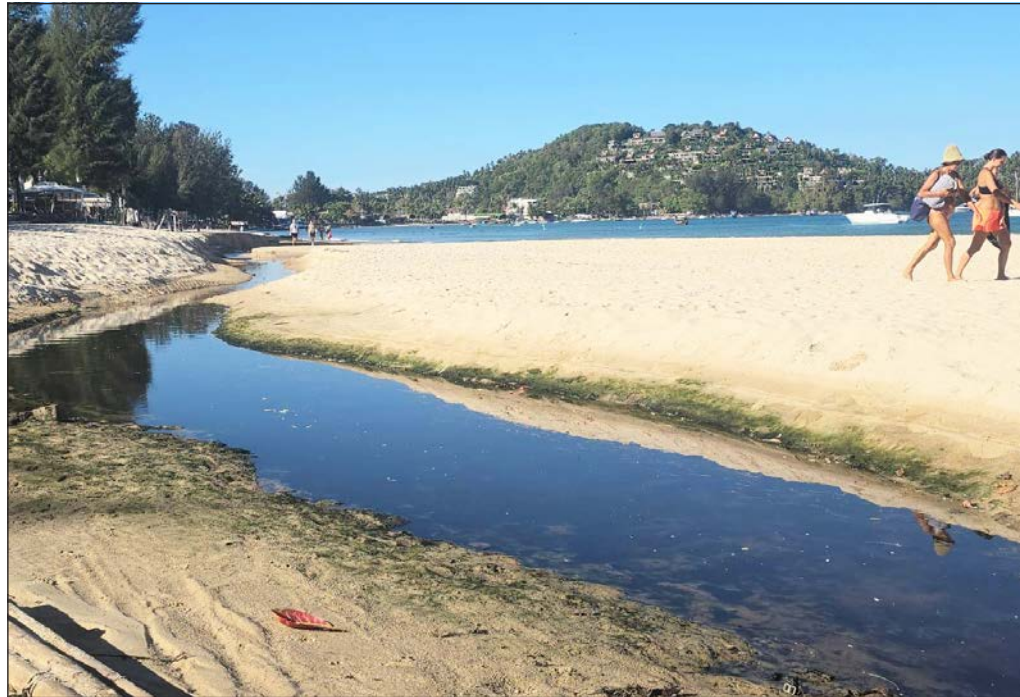
The Phuket News
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Black wastewater returned to both Bang Tao Beach in Cherng Talay and Kamala Beach last week, with local residents at Bang Tao last Friday (Feb 23) demanding action from authorities to remedy the situation.

A post appeared on the Monsoon Garbage Thailand Facebook page explaining that black wastewater was accumulating at the Bang Tao canal at the beach before being released into the sea despite numerous and ongoing calls from local residents to address the problem to better manage what appears to be polluted water.

“According to the locals, the water in the area is black and smelly and has flowed into the sea many times, despite complaints to the concerned authorities, but the problem is not permanently resolved,” the post explained.

The situation “has affected the citizens, local fishermen and tourists visiting the area have suffered a lot of trouble as well as clearly affecting the image and ruining the image



Black wastewater at Bang Tao Beach last Friday (Feb 23). Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

of the beautiful tourist town of Phuket province,” the post added.

The post prompted Dr Jaturong Kongkaew, Deputy Dean for Administration and Human Resources at the Faculty of Technology and Environment of Prince of Songkla University Phuket Campus, to visit the scene and inspect the situation.

Following inspection, Dr Jaturong claimed the wastewater being released from the

local treatment plant in Bang Tao was being impacted by algae accumulating in the canal which had caused the water to appear darker than usual.

Dr Jaturong admitted that from afar the algae appeared to give the impression that the water in the canal was tainted due to enhanced concentration of the moss but when inspected at close hand it was clear.

He also confirmed that the water is clear by the time

it flows from the canal to the sea in the area where many foreign tourists swim and that it was also odourless.

Dr Jaturong further explained that during the dry season there is far less natural water around and that there is often an increase in moss and algae at this time.

A possible solution to the situation, he suggested, would be to install an additional water turbine which would in turn add oxygen to the water

before its release from the treatment plant.

Dr Jaturong also advised further inspection at the Bang Tao water treatment plant to ensure there were no faults with equipment and that the water was flowing at the correct speed.

He concluded by saying that he would submit his inspection report to the Cherng Talay Mayor for him and officials to discuss and explore further.

The wastewater treatment plant at Bang Tao was built between 2007 and 2017 by private sector companies at a cost of B355 million.

KAMALA

Wastewater was also blamed for turning the water in the main canal through Kamala black and emitting a foul odour. The water from the canal flows across Kamala Beach and into the water where tourists swim.

Tourists who *The Phuket News* spoke with last week shook their heads at the polluted water flowing into the sea. One tourist questioned by the local government did not do anything about it.

Local business operators

said the same. “It’s been a problem for a long time, but no agency has come forward to solve the problem with a long-term solution,” one operator at the beach said.

“Each year after receiving a complaint, officials come to inspect the water quality, then they disappear,” the operator added.

“This has been allowed for a long time. Wastewater in the canal gives off a bad smell. It’s annoying to tourists and damages the image of Kamala Beach, which is a famous beach in Phuket,” the operator said.

Many of the foreign tourists at Kamala Beach still played in the water, but many tried to avoid going near the black water flowing into the sea.

While Kamala Tambon Administrative Organisation (OrBorTor) has yet to publicly recognise the black water in the canal emptying across the beach this year, Kamala Mayor Jutha Dumlak only days earlier led an event with a local hotel group to announce the launch of the ‘Go Zero Waste: Save Our Ocean’ project. The launch event was held on Kamala Beach.

Sex assault on German tourist

POLICE TOOK JUST HOURS ON MONDAY (Feb 26) to track down and arrest a motorbike taxi driver in Phuket Town wanted for sexually assaulting a German tourist.

Officers from the Tourist Police and Phuket City Police began their hunt for the suspect after the German woman filed a complaint at Phuket City Police Station at 4:26am Monday.

The woman, 37, had ventured out to enjoy the Walking Street markets in the Phuket Old Town area last Sunday night. At about 00:45am (Monday) she hailed a motorbike taxi to take her back to her hotel on Koh Siray, in Moo 1, Ratsada, for B150.

Along the way, the motorbike taxi driver turned to her and asked her name. He then kissed her on the cheek then grabbed her hand and forced her to touch his penis.

When the woman pulled her hand away, the motorbike taxi driver grabbed her hand and repeated the action. He then used his hand to grab her genitals, the woman told police.

Afraid of what might happen next, the woman tourist jumped off the motorbike and suffered a minor injury in the fall.

The motorbike taxi driver stopped and was approaching her, but by that time a “good citizen” was already coming to her aid. The motorbike taxi driver turned and fled the scene.

Officers checked CCTV to find out in which direction the motorbike taxi driver fled. Officers also tracked down the mobile phone number that was used by the motorbike taxi driver to call the hotel on Koh Siray to confirm the hotel’s address.

The investigation led officers to a rented house in Surin Soi 2 on the east side of Phuket Town, where they arrested Phongphat Klaithongkam, 18, still registered as a resi-



Photo: Tourist Police

dent of Nakhon Sri Thammarat, on Monday afternoon.

The mobile phone number Phongphat used to call the hotel was registered to Phongphat’s stepmother, police explained.

Phongphat denied that the foreign woman was sexually harassed but was soon positively identified by the German tourist, police added.

While waiting to identify Phongphat, the German woman was in clear distress and unable to stop crying. Staff from the hotel, police and friends of the victim were present to offer support.

After regaining her composure, the German woman showed police where Phongphat had picked her up, at the Chartered Bank Intersection in the Phuket Old Town area, and identified what happened where along the route.

Police said they were continuing to gather evidence against Phongphat in order to press charges against him. Already seized as evidence are the clothes he wore at the time and the motorbike used during the incident, as confirmed by CCTV.

Phongphat was taken to Phuket City Police Station “to proceed with legal proceedings”, police confirmed. *Eakkapop Thongtub*

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TUE MARCH 5



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Wind 4 m/s

WED MARCH 6



High: +36°

Low: +28°

Wind 4 m/s

THU MARCH 7



High: +36°

Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s

Police officer stabbed by wife

Eakkapop Thongtub
editor@classactmedia.co.th

A cyber crime police officer was rushed to hospital after suffering multiple knife wounds in a domestic dispute at the home he and his wife share in Tambon Thepkasattri last Saturday (Feb 24).

Pol Lt Col Patthi Yotkwan, Deputy Superintendent of the Thalang Police, was informed of the incident about 9pm.

Officers soon arrived at the house along with an ambulance to find the police officer, 32 years old*, bleeding on the patio in front of the home.

The officer had suffered two wounds to the right collarbone and two more wounds from a sharp object on the cheek. He was rushed to Thalang Hospital, then later transferred to Vachira Phuket Hospital.

His wife, 31, was still at the home, wearing a blood-stained pink T-shirt and blue jeans. She had bruises to her right arm and right shoulder. The left arm had scratches and her neck and both knees had bruises.



Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

Officers found a long kitchen knife, used in the incident, on the floor in front of the house.

Police returned to the house last Sunday (Feb 25) to continue their investigation.

Officers learned that the couple had been together for about three years, and had one child together, aged a little over one year.

Friction had long been high at the household, police were told. The police officer had never been happy with his wife's mother, who is in

her 70s, living with them, although she had moved in to help look after their child.

Earlier last Saturday the wife's mother had moved her husband's laptop bag from the hallway, which had evoked an angry reaction from her husband and for which he scolded her.

Then the wife's father came home and learned about what had happened. He told them both to respect each other.

This only made her husband even angrier, turning his verbal abuse to her father. He



pushed her father in the chest and appeared to reach for his gun when the wife went to intervene. Her father then left the house to go home.

Her husband then went to take their daughter from the house, and the couple fought over the child. While she was trying to stop him, her husband struck her several times and at one time placed his hand on her neck and squeezed.

The wife managed to grab a kitchen knife and inflict several wounds on him.

Police have yet to confirm

charges against either the husband or the wife as they are continuing their investigation.

*The names of those involved in the domestic dispute have been withheld in the hope of avoiding identifying the child.

If you or anyone you know is in need of emotional support and counseling, please contact the Samaritans of Thailand at their 24-hour hotline at 02-113-6789 (English & Thai), or the Thai Mental Health Hotline at 1323 (Thai).

Swede arrested in Patong for passing fake euros

PATONG POLICE ON Monday (Feb 26) arrested a Swedish man for passing counterfeit €200 banknotes.

Officers were called to the Violet Money Exchange 2 in Soi Saensabai at about 1:40pm following a call to the 191 police hotline reporting a foreigner attempting to pass fake €200 banknotes, explained a post on the official Patong Police Facebook page.

Pol Lt Somchai Nimchana and Petty Officer 1st Class Tanusorn Jaiyaeng responded to the call and soon arrived with officers from the Patong Police Investigation Division.

The Swedish man was placed under arrest and taken to Patong Police Station for further questioning.

Neither the name and age of the Swedish man or the number of fake banknotes he had tried to pass off to the currency exchange were reported.

"The investigative team is



Photo: Patong Police

continuing its investigation," the brief post concluded.

The arrest of the Swedish man follows the arrest of British tourist Tobias Drew, 33, early last month after he was found passing off counterfeit €200 banknotes.

At the time of his arrest, Drew was found with 89 fake €200 banknotes still in his possession.

Drew maintained his innocence, claiming that he received the fake banknotes through a private exchange of currency with fellow Brit Ozeias Da Silva, 45, who had promptly left the country before authorities could track him down. *The Phuket News*

Brit knifed in fight with Patong ladyboys

A 23-YEAR-OLD BRITISH TOURIST suffered a knife injury amid a fight with three Patong ladyboys over money at a condo in Karon early on Feb 22.

Pol Lt Surasak Sudmuang of the Karon Police was informed of the incident at 4am, and soon arrived at the condo, near the base of Kata Hill, with other officers to investigate.

Officers were told that the British man had contacted three ladyboys, or katoey in Thai, from Patong to come to his condo. The ladyboys had agreed for B4,000 each.

However, when the three arrived at about 3am, the British man gave only one of them B2,000 and told the other two to go away.

That's when the fight started, along with a struggle for the British man's wallet.

According to one version of events, the British man started hitting the three ladyboys, despite confirmation that the ladyboys had started throwing things around the room, and breaking them.

During the melee, one of the ladyboys grabbed a kitchen knife "for self defense", and the British man suffered a knife injury, police



Photo: Karon Police

confirmed.

Two others who were reported to have suffered minor injuries in the fight were taken to Dibuk Hospital.

One person suffered a head injury and required stitches to a wound on his/her arm and was taken to Chalong Hospital, police also confirmed.

Two of the four involved in the fight were taken to Karon Police Station.

At last report Karon Police were continuing their investigation into the incident with the intent of pressing charges. *Eakkapop Thongtub*

Fresh start for rescued lion cub 'Nong Kiwi'

The Phuket News
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The lion cub used to attract tourists to a cafe north of Phuket Town by a Chinese national has found a new home, a new playmate and a new name.

The female cub known as "Nong Kiwi" was being displayed at a cafe north of Phuket Town before officials intervened and rescued her on Feb 14.

Anant Sriphutphong, head of the Bueng Chawak Non-Hunting Area, confirmed that Nong Kiwi on Feb 20 had been delivered by a team of veterinarians from the Conservation Area Administration Office No. 5 in Nakhon Sri Thammarat to the Bueng Chawak Wildlife Management Development Center in Suphanburi Province, where she will remain in care.

Nong Kiwi is two to three months old and weighs 7.3 kilogrammes. She has been renamed, Mr Anant confirmed, and is now known as 'Khanun' ('jackfruit').

She will also have a new friend to socialise with at her



Photo: Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation

new home after a female cub of a similar age known as Khanom (snack or dessert) was rescued from a cafe in Bangkok recently and placed into care at the same facility.

Mr Anant confirmed that both Khanun and Khanom are still receiving special milk formulas every two to three hours every day, but that meat is slowly being introduced to their diet in the form of finely chopped beef once a day.

Khanun, then known as Nong Kiwi, was being displayed at the Glass House Cafe and Space on Ratsada-Anusorn Rd, in Moo 2, Ratsada for around three hours per day before being taken back to a

hotel in Chalong.

Officials from the Khao Phra Thaew Non-Hunting Area in Thalang inspected the venue on Feb 12 and managed to track down the cub and her female owner, a Chinese national, two days later. The cub was taken into care and the woman held to face charges.

A document was released at the time in connection with the case that names the buyer of a female lion cub as Cheung Min. The document shows Cheung Min bought a female lion cub from Fuanglada Siyangnok in Bangkok on Jan 9 for the amount of B250,000.

However, officials confirmed that there was no reg-

istered change of ownership for Nong Kiwi, and the microchip number presented on the document does not match the microchip in Nong Kiwi – simply because Nong Kiwi has no microchip.

This led officials to believe that the name on the document is not the same person caught with Nong Kiwi in Phuket. In a confusing move, police have not clarified whether or not the document was presented to police by the Chinese woman arrested, or whether the Chinese woman's name is Cheung Min.

Regardless, the Chinese woman arrested in Phuket was taken to Phuket City Police Station and charged under the Wild Animal Preservation and Protection Act for "failing to notify the possession of wild animals and moving a protected wild animal without permission", officials confirmed.

Officials found that where Nong Kiwi was being kept did not meet the criteria under the Act, deemed that it was not appropriate to issue the owner a license to raise a lion cub.

7-Eleven staff join Patong 'volunteers'

PERSONNEL FROM 7-Eleven convenience stores in Patong have joined nightlife venue security staff in their training as 'volunteer guards' to help bolster security on Bangla Rd.

The training and the use of 'volunteer guards', specifically nightlife venue security staff, come under the Strong Tourism Community (STC) project, rolled out in December last year by Tourist Police Commander Lt Gen Saksira Phueakam.

The second round of training for 'volunteer guards' was held at Patong Beach Resort on Feb 20, the Phuket office of the Public Relations Department (PR Phuket) reported.

Phuket Provincial Police Commander Maj Gen Sinlert Sukhum presided over the ceremony to launch the second round of training and certification. Joining him at the event were Patong Police Commander Col Chalermchai Hirsawat and Lt Col Eakkachai from the Tourist Police Bureau.

Representatives from Patong Municipality, the



Phuket has certified 93 new 'volunteer guards' as part of the STC security project. Photo: PR Phuket

Phuket provincial office of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS), and tourism-related businesses were present as well.

The 93 new 'volunteer guards' received training in being good hosts for tourists; first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR); and criminal intent recognition and professional safety supervision. Certificates were awarded to all volunteers who passed the training.

The new 'volunteer guards' also received invitations to join a Line chat group serving as a coordination network for incident-response activities.

The Phuket News

Chinese restaurants at Naka raided for hiring illegal labour

A TASK FORCE COMPRISING OFFICIALS from 15 government agencies inspected six Chinese restaurants in the Naka Market area in Wichit last week, and found three "cases" of laws being broken, including one restaurant operating illegally.

The inspections, on Feb 19, began at 6pm, noted an official report of the raids, which were explained as targeting "high-risk groups to prevent and solve human trafficking problems and to encourage business operators and foreign workers to be aware of strictly following the laws of Phuket Province".

The raids were led by Phuket Vice Governor Abdul Chuthong, joined by officials from Phuket Immigration, the Phuket Provincial Employment Office, the Phuket Provincial Office of Labor Protection and Welfare, the Phuket Land Transport Office (PLTO), Phuket Provincial Commerce Office, Phuket Provincial Police, the Phuket Provincial Administration, the Excise Department and the Phuket branch of the Internal Security Operations Command (Isoc), which serves as the political arm of the Thai military.

The raids were organised as a way of "solving the problem of human trafficking in labour, to prevent exploitation, Illegal work without a work permit or working outside of the remit of a work permit or committing any other wrongdoing", the official report explained.

"This is because Phuket is the province that is the second most affected by foreign investors investing in tourism-related businesses after Bangkok," the report said.



"There were complaints about foreign workers doing the wrong type of work and competing for many Thai people's jobs," the report added.

The task force found Chinese restaurants in the Naka area in breach of the law, the report noted.

Among the transgressions were operating a restaurant business without a license or without a valid certificate, not having a liquor and tobacco sales license and not having the required permit to hire foreign workers, the report said.

The report did not confirm which restaurants were found in breach of which laws.

The report did confirm that there were "three cases of fines" – again, with no further clarification.

"The offender admitted guilt and agreed to pay a fine at the rate specified by law," the report said.

The raids, which began at 6pm, followed a meeting at Phuket Provincial Hall earlier on Feb 19 held to discuss strategies to respond to growing complaints of foreigners working illegally and "taking jobs away from Thais".

The Phuket News



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Panel weighs new minimum wage hike

THE TRIPARTITE WAGE committee is considering the factors used to calculate the daily minimum wage, following the government proposal to increase the rate for a second time this year, says the Employers' Confederation of Thai Trade and Industry (EconThai).

The latest wage increase of 2.37% on average, or B2-16 a day, took effect on Jan 1. But a new wage rise is possible because, according to Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, the current rate is too low for workers, especially those working in the southern provinces.

The minimum wage is expected to increase and take effect in May this year, said Tanit Sorat, vice-chairman of EconThai.

The tripartite wage committee, which consists of representatives from the government, employers and employees, set up two sub-panels to look into the wage calculation.

"It is still unclear what the new wage will be. The sub-panels are considering it and will send a proposal to the tripartite wage committee as soon as possible," said



Construction workers eat at a motorway project site in Nonthaburi province in April last year. Photo: Apichart Jinakul / Bangkok Post

Mr Tanit.

The wage calculation is usually based on factors such as inflation, GDP and labour productivity. Last year, inflation rose by 1.23% from 2022, within the target range set by the Commerce Ministry.

The National Economic and Social Development Council recently decided to downgrade its GDP growth target for 2023 and its outlook for 2024 to 1.9% and 2.7%, respectively. Based on these factors, the new wage for some workers may be less than B400 a day, but workers in certain careers and provinces may see the minimum wage increase to B400 a day, according to EconThai. The Pheu Thai Party earlier proposed a minimum wage of B600 a day by 2027, starting with a hike to B400 this year. *Bangkok Post*

Tourism push sees taxes slashed for booze, pubs

Bangkok Post

The Excise Department has cut tax rates for alcohol and nightlife venues, effective as of last Friday (Feb 23), in a bid to boost tourism and domestic spending.

Department director-general Ekniti Nitithanprapas said that the new tax rates are in line with measures approved by the Cabinet on Jan 2, which are intended to promote Thailand to become a tourism hub.

"The government hopes to create an atmosphere fitting for a tourist destination, make Thailand a centre for restaurants and eateries, presenting an alternative to consumers and bolstering its pricing strategy, in order to encourage more tourist spending and attract more high-quality foreign visitors," Mr Ekniti said.

The ad valorem tax rate for grape wine and sparkling grape wine has now been reduced from 10% to 5%, while the tax rate based on quantity (baht per litre per



Tourists visit Khao San Rd, one of the most popular destinations in Bangkok. Photo: Pornprom Satrabhaya

100 proof alcohol) for them has been reduced from B1,500 to B1,000.

To take a real-world example, if a 750ml bottle of wine has a declared price of B1,000 and alcohol content of 12%, the tax based on alcohol content would be B135 (0.75x12x1500/100) at the B1,500 rate.

The excise tax applied on top of that (10% of B1,135) would be B113, bringing the total price to B1,248. Under the new calculation, based on the B1,000 and 5% rates, the

price would be B1,145.

The ad valorem tax rate and the tax rate based on quantity for fruit wines have been reduced from 10% to 0% and B900, respectively.

The ad valorem tax rate and the tax rate based on quantity for local liquors (less than 7 proof alcohol) have been reduced from 10% to 0% and B150, respectively, while the ad valorem tax rate and the tax rate based on quantity for fermented liquor mixed with distilled spirits (over 7 proof alcohol) are 10% and

B255 respectively.

The ad valorem tax rate for night-time entertainment venues, including nightclubs, pubs and bars, is reduced from 10% to 5% until Dec 31.

Mr Ekniti said the new tax rates would lead to cheaper prices for alcoholic beverages and boost tourism and spending, as alcohol prices are being used as stimulus measures to encourage foreign visitors to choose Thailand as their travel destination.

The tax cuts for nightlife venues are short-term measures, effective until the end of this year, to help operators affected by the COVID-19 pandemic get back on their feet as well as boost domestic employment, he said.

However, Thanakorn Kuptajitti, adviser to the Thai Alcohol Beverage Business Association, said that the new tax cuts will benefit only a limited number of producers of alcoholic beverages. The government should lift the ban on alcohol sales between 2pm and 5pm instead, as this would do more to help boost tourism and spending, he said.

Europeans drive up room rates in the South

LONGER STAYS FROM European guests helped drive room revenue in the first quarter in southern provinces, as room rates set a new record despite a small number of Chinese tourists.

"The first quarter of this year will likely be the best high season in five years," said Pongsakorn Ketprapakorn, former president of the Tourism Council of Phang Nga.

Mr Pongsakorn said many hotels in the province, especially in Khao Lak, can charge higher room rates of between B6,000-10,000 per night, exceeding the average of B5,000 in 2019, which was a peak tourism year for Thailand.

The majority of tourists are Germans, Scandinavians and Russians, who opted for the province's serene nature experience and stayed for weeks to a month.

So far, hotels have been recording more than a 90% occupancy rate, or are even fully booked, while guests are also spending more on food and other services in the hotels.

Although the Chinese market recorded the largest number of arrivals in Thailand, with over 987,000 of 5.2 mil-



Tourists take in the view at Talay Waek ('Separated Sea') in Krabi province. Photo: Bangkok Post / file

lion tourists, Phang Nga rarely gained this market, said Mr Pongsakorn.

Many Chinese tourists opt for more lively and urban experiences, such as Phuket and Bangkok, instead of a nature-oriented destination like Phang Nga. The Chinese contributed only 5-10% of the foreign tourist market for the province, he said.

This year, Phang Nga will also host the tourism trade show Thailand Travel Mart Plus, an annual trade event organised by the Tourism Authority of Thailand between June 5-7.

Charintip Tiayaphorn, owner of Pimalai Resort and Spa at Koh Lanta of Krabi, said that during this high season, its villa room type, covering 200 square metres, has sold faster

than deluxe rooms, sized 48 sq m, showing a strong demand from high-end tourists from Europe and the US.

Ms Charintip said this helped to push its average room rate in January across all room types above B9,000, exceeding the 2019 level, while the occupancy rate stood at over 90%.

Long-haul guests tend to stay seven to 10 days at the resort, and are spending more at bars and dining at resorts' outlets or joining local activities on the island.

Ms Charintip said the resort did not see many Chinese guests, even during the Chinese New Year holiday, since it was fully occupied by long-haul guests for 150-180 days ahead, while Chinese and other Asian markets tend to book with a shorter lead time.

Sasithorn Kittidhrakul, president of the Krabi Tourism Association, said Krabi still lacks direct flights from China, which previously had services from five to six Chinese cities before the pandemic. However, the province now has charter flights from Stockholm, Warsaw and Prague, with regular flights from major markets including Dubai, Singapore and Malaysia. *Bangkok Post*



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Srettha scoffs at 'triple PM' scenario

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin has shrugged off concerns of a possible "triple prime ministers" situation, insisting that he is the country's one and only prime minister despite the prevailing public opinion.

Mr Srettha said on Monday (Feb 26) that while he does not have the power to change people's opinions, he was confident it wouldn't have any impact on his ability to perform as the head of government and meet his responsibilities as prime minister.

Since former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra was released on parole two weeks ago, observers have been saying that he would soon return to politics and exert his influence, resulting in a situation that they are calling a "dual prime minister" situation.

With Thaksin's youngest daughter Paetongtarn herself holding prominent positions within the Pheu Thai Party,



Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin at Government House on Feb 22. Photo: Bangkok Post

which Thaksin is widely considered the de facto leader of, some pundits are warning the situation might further devolve into a "triple prime minister" scenario, with Ms Paetongtarn playing the role of a backroom premier.

"The 'double' or 'triple prime minister' phenomenon is just a phrase. Everyone wants the country to move forward regardless of their political affiliations," the PM said.

Mr Srettha said that he is open to any advice from former prime ministers, including Thaksin, but that he himself would decide if their advice is actually practical.

He said he did not mind if his Cabinet ministers paid Thaksin a visit because they had known each other for a long time.

When asked if he and Thaksin discussed a Cabinet reshuffle during their private meeting last Saturday (Feb 24), he chose to sidestep the question.

"When the time comes, you'll know. And I'll be the one to forward the matter [reshuffle] for royal approval," he said.

The PM's comments came after the deputy chief of the Probation Department confirmed last Friday that Thaksin

is allowed to take positions in politics and offer advice during his parole period.

Pol Col Montri Boonyayothin said the department does not prohibit Thaksin from taking on roles such as a board member or a political advisor of an organisation, which aligns with the department's policy to encourage former inmates to reintegrate into society.

However, Thaksin must meet the qualifications set by any organisation intending to appoint him, the official said.

Meanwhile, Ms Paetongtarn said her father's mental and physical health has improved since he was released from the hospital.

He would be glad to receive visitors, especially from his long-time supporters, when he is ready, she said, while brushing off questions about the double prime minister scenario.

When prodded about it, she let out a big sigh and said: "Why don't we drop this issue and let Mr Srettha work in peace?"

Chiang Mai forests ravaged by wildfires

CHIANG MAI

Photo: NNT



FIRES HAVE DEVASTATED approximately 30,000 rai (4,800 hectares) of forest across three districts in Chiang Mai province, local officials confirmed on Monday (Feb 26).

The blazes, which began about a week ago, erupting almost simultaneously in Hot, Chomg Thong, and Mae Cham districts, continue to burn uncontrolled and have primarily affected the Ob Luang National Park.

The fires have been especially visible at night, lighting the sky red, while during the day white smoke covers the areas, indicating the consumption of dry foliage by the flames.

Villagers' practices of searching for edible foods and the burning of farm remnants are believed to be the cause of these fires, officials said.

Deputy Chiang Mai Governor Thossapol Puanudom said that he is actively involved in managing efforts to extinguish the fires.

The challenging terrain of the high mountain areas, coupled with the current dry and hot weather, has made firefighting efforts particularly difficult, he explained.

In response to the crisis, the fire command center in Hot district has requested aerial support from the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry, which in turn is seeking assistance from the Third Army Area for aircraft to aid in combating the fires.

Additionally, the Chiang Mai PM2.5 monitoring centre has identified 69 hotspots in the region as of Monday, with the majority located in Hot district.

Other affected areas include the districts of Mae Cham, Doi Tao, Chomg Thong, Mae Taeng, San Sai, Prao, Mae Kwang and Chiang Dao. NNT

Many cops in serious debt

BANGKOK

MANY POLICE HAVE FALLEN INTO debt totalling some B300 billion and most are on the verge of bankruptcy, national police chief Pol Gen Torsak Sukvimol said on Feb 21.

He was commenting in response to questions posed by the House committee reviewing the 2024 annual budget expenditure bill.

The national police chief was called to answer the panel's queries over the budget allocated to the Royal Thai Police (RTP) worth B117bn.

In "opening up" to the committee, Pol Gen Torsak said many officers were in bad shape financially, having accrued some B300bn in debt, and are in danger of being declared bankrupt. They were struggling to even own a house, he said.

"Regarding welfare housing, I am asking for a budget to build central flats for officers. If their living conditions improve, they will feel more motivated to serve and protect the people," said Pol Gen Torsak.

"Senior officers urge junior police to be more spirited in their work maintaining peace and order. However, officers' quality of life must also meet certain standards.

"Every project undertaken by the RTP is accountable and transparent. If there is something suspicious, I will not sign it," said Pol Gen Torsak.

He also pointed to a manpower shortage due to the COVID-19 pandemic in



National police chief Pol Gen Torsak Sukvimol. Photo: Bangkok Post

the past three years. A police station near Bangkok has space for up to 200 officers, for example. However, only half of the positions are currently filled.

The station, meanwhile, had to serve around 400,000 people in the communities under its jurisdiction, including the unregistered population.

Also, Pol Gen Torsak told the media that he has various units seeking ways to resolve the shortage of police investigators. He attributed the problem partly to other state agencies having borrowed police investigators to work for them.

He said replacements in several positions were needed to prevent the shortage worsening.

But until the shortage is resolved, police stations have had to reassign some staff and send others to work elsewhere to stations running critically short of staff.

Bangkok Post

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Turning over a new leaf



GREEN THOUGHTS

Patrick Campbell

As anyone who lives here can testify, green leaves are as crucial to Thai cuisine as lettuce is to a Western salad or mint to English roast lamb. Among the most widely used are coriander leaves: the herb grows more readily in Thailand than in the temperate climes of Europe where the crushed, dried seeds are commoner ingredients in recipes.

Buy some seeds (sold as a spice) and unless they have been adulterated, they will sprout easily in pots. And don't ignore the root. Crushed with garlic and chili, it makes the most widely used seasoning in Thai food.

Similar looking Chinese celery (*ken chai*) also boasts foliage that looks a bit like European parsley (one of the names for coriander is Chinese parsley). Like coriander, it is often grown in containers, a good choice for apartment dwellers with a part-shaded balcony. As with coriander, use a cut-and-come-again approach, picking stalks as needed. Because of its strong flavour – not remotely like conventional celery – it is normally added sparingly to cooked dishes.

Basil is, along with coriander, the most used leaf herb in Asia. It is also the most widely grown, partly on account of its tendency to germinate like a weed. In our household, we have no need to buy basil; it appears in the garden in the most unlikely places. *Ocimum basilicum*, or *bai horapa* in Thai, is the commonest variety, similar to the sweet basil so beloved of Italians that they venerate it as the 'royal herb'. In Italy, it is the key ingredient in pesto sauce.

The dark green leaves sprout from reddish stems



Mint. Photo: Patrick Campbell

and produce purple flower heads, and are sometimes picked and eaten raw. But the thin leaves are tough: hence they are usually macerated, along with other herbs, and added to curry pastes. Chopped and liberally included in meat dishes, their distinctive aroma permeates the food. My Thai partner dislikes the smell and carefully picks out the offending leaves and puts them on my plate. *Mai pen rai*.

Two other less common varieties are lemon basil and the so-called 'holy' basil. Lemon basil also flourishes everywhere, a smaller leaved and bright green version of sweet basil. Known as *bai manglak*, it has a lemony scent and its soaked seeds are used in a dessert made with coconut milk. Holy basil, so-named because it is a sacred Hindu herb, has narrow leaves and is rarely eaten raw.

On the other hand, mint (*mentha arvensis*, or *bai saranae*) is eaten fresh, often in salads or green platters. The variety cultivated is mostly spearmint (shades of Wrigley's chewing gum) and like its cousins, peppermint and apple mint, it needs plenty of water and some shade, commodities not always

consistently available in Phuket's gardens. Once established, it is an extremely vigorous herb; it grew like a weed in my London patch. Packets of seed are available, so it is worth a stab, especially if sown in a container with rich soil that gets regular watering. As most *farang* know, mint sauce, made with chopped mint leaves, vinegar and sugar, is a natural accompaniment to roast lamb.

Fennel (*foeniculum vulgare*) is another herb more associated with temperate climes and especially the Mediterranean where its attractive leaves, delicately feathery like those of dill, are used to flavour sausages and fish dishes. Italians love the bulbous root of Florentine fennel, using it in pastas and stews. However, in Southeast Asia, only the seeds, which have a mild, aniseedy tang, are used as a spice; a key ingredient in Indian garam masala dishes and in some Thai curry pastes.

Finally, the kaffir lime (*citrus hystrix*). A small tree rather than a herbaceous perennial, it is known in Thailand as *bai magrut* and grown principally not for its fruit but for its bright green leaves which have a distinctive double lobed appearance. Unlike limes, this variety has a darker green, warty skin, but little juice; it is the perfumed leaf which is a staple of Thai cuisine. Like the equally tough bay leaf, it is usually left uneaten after being added whole to provide a distinctive lemony edge to soups, especially tom yam.

So all of these herbs can be cultivated, even if you have only a patio. And surely that is good news... A moveable herbarium. Both useful and decorative.

Patrick Campbell's book 'The Tropic Gardener', described in one Bangkok review as the best book on Thai gardening for 50 years, is available for B500 (half price) to personal callers from 59/84 Soi Saiyuan 13 in Rawai (Tel: 076-613227 or 085-7827551).






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Landing the Doomsday fish

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

A rare 'Naga fish' caught in the waters west of Phuket has been sent to the National Science Museum to be studied and its carcass will be put on display during an exhibition after the research is complete.

The fish, officially called an 'oarfish', was caught by the fishing boat Pamasaya Namchok 4. The Namchok 4 was bringing its haul on board while trawling with another fishing boat. The discovery was made while both boats were recovering their nets.

The fish was landed at about midday on Feb 15, while the boats were trawling some 15 nautical miles (about 27km) from the coast off Patong Beach, explained Phuket Fisheries Chief Sittiphon Muangsong.

Supamas Isarabhakdi, Minister of Education, Science, Research and Innovation, later reported the catch to be landed only seven to eight nautical miles (about 13-15km) off the Patong coast.

Mr Sittiphon and officials from the Phuket Marine Fisheries Research and Development Center were present to examine the specimen when it was brought ashore at the Phuket Fishing Port in Rat-sada the next morning.

The specimen had been handed over to a different fishing boat to bring it back to Phuket, Mr Sittiphon explained.

The fish was the first oarfish caught by fishing boats operating out of Phuket, Mr Sittiphon noted. The specimen measured 2.85 metres long and weighed 8.6 kilograms.

The deep sea fish is believed to have been lured to the surface by the changing of the tides, he said.



RARE FINDS

Although specimens of oarfish have been found nearly the world over, they are a rare find in surface waters. More rare is that the fish caught off Phuket is the second oarfish to be caught in Thai waters this year, with another oarfish caught off the coast of Satun, south of Phuket, on Jan 4.

Both specimens have been sent to the National Science Museum (NSM) to be studied. Minister Supamas noted that the Phuket specimen was in good condition – aside from a slight, but fatal, wound to its head.

Ms Supamas said she had ordered NSM president Rawin Raviwongse to study the oarfish remains. The species is very rare, and Thailand needs to study the carcasses to find out more about the fish, she added.

The study will provide groundbreaking knowledge that can be beneficial in the future, and the remains will be displayed during an exhibition to give Thais an opportunity to learn about the rare fish, she told the *Bangkok Post*.

Asst Prof Rawin said that after the study, the two oarfish remains will be preserved by the National Science Museum using the most appropriate method as they are regarded as national treasures.

Thais will be able to see them in the flesh, he added.

Scientists say they know very little about the oarfish and its giant cousin, but do know they tend to inhabit waters of up to 1,000m deep, and very rarely venture above depths of 250m.

Described as a pelagic lampiform fish belonging to the small family Regalecidae, they are found in areas spanning from temperate ocean zones to tropical ones, yet are rarely seen.

They traverse vertical columns of water in search of food, mainly zooplankton, selectively straining tiny euphausiids, shrimp, and other crustaceans from the water. Small fish, jellyfish, and squid are also taken.

BAD OMEN

The oarfish is called the 'Naga fish' in Thailand due to its likeness to the 'Naga' sea serpents of Thai folklore, often depicted by statues and sculptures at Buddhist temples throughout the country.

However, witnessing the presence of an oarfish is considered by many cultures to be an omen of impending disaster, giving the fish another nickname: the Doomsday fish.

A spate of oarfish sightings from December 2009 to March 2010 appeared in the waters and on the beaches of Japan, revitalising the superstition that such sightings were bad omens. The appearance of oarfish, known in Japanese folklore as the 'Messenger from the Sea God's Palace', is said to be a warning of impending earthquakes.

After the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami which killed over 20,000 people, some reports highlighted many Japanese residents referring to the oarfish sightings from 2009–2010 as precursors to the disaster.

Back here in Phuket, some people suggested that the oarfish caught off the coast of Patong was scared to surface by an underwater earthquake. Others suggested that it was more likely in a state of confusion or desperation as it was already about to die.


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POP QUIZ

1. How many zeros are in one Googol?

2. Who was the first person to be crucified upside down?

3. What was US President John F. Kennedy's middle name?

4. Which explorer was the first European to reach India by sea?

5. What is the vitamin riboflavin also known as?

Answers below, centre

SUDOKU

Medium

					8	2		1
		7			5			
4			2	3		7	8	
						9		4
3			7		9			5
1		8						
	6	5		2	1			7
			6			5		
9		3	5					

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

Across

1. Wedding words

5. Brute

10. Thickening agent

14. Pavarotti piece

15. Computer acronym

16. Dig

17. Reprimand

20. Below

21. Gun

22. Discrimination

23. Bio stat

24. "Eureka!"

26. N.Y. minutes?

28. Beside

30. Panhandle site

35. M.I.T. part: abbr.

38. Med. island

46. Set down

47. Utah lilies

49. Hot temper

51. Get in a pool

52. Increases

55. Eye opener?

59. Entrepreneur's

deg.

61. It's debatable

63. Admonish

66. Like hand-me-downs

67. Abzug first name

68. Lifeless

69. Listening devices

70. Colgate rival

71. Assembly sites

Down

1. Voids

2. Zoo critter

3. Oscar last name

4. Post-Christmas event

5. Block

6. Put off

7. Advil target

8. It won't hold water

9. Idiosyncrasy

10. Taj Mahal city

11. Cons

12. Support, in a way

13. Anatomical networker

18. Kind of surgeon

19. Potsdam

Conference attendee

25. More raspy

27. Yard type

28. Clueless

29. Short pants

31. Lots of lots

32. Leave in

33. ___ nut

34. Organic radical

35. It's clicked on a computer

36. "I, Claudius" role

37. Foul mood

41. Last month

42. Looks over

48. Suffix with psych-

50. OPEC V.I.P.

52. Bad loan

53. Jewish festival

54. Top competitors, often

55. Flu symptom

56. Actress Kudrow

57. Affirm

58. Cincinnati nine

60. Bundle

62. Deer sir

64. "The Office" network

65. Pack away

Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

1) One hundred zeroes (1 Googol = 10100)

2) St Peter

3) Fitzgerald

4) Vasco da Gama

5) B2

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14					15						16			
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55	56	57	58			59	60				61	62		
63					64				65					
66					67						68			
69					70							71		

Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

H	A	I	L	S	Q	U	A	R	T	A	B	C
A	G	R	E	E	U	R	I	A	H	T	A	R
M	A	K	E	A	S	A	N	D	C	A	S	T
S	K	I	N	E	E	L	L	I	K	E		
E	A	T	A	N	T	I	E	A	R	E	D	
G	R	I	L	H	A	M	B	U	R	G	E	R
G	E	E	S	E	M	I	S	S				
S	A	R	D	S	M	O	T	E	S	A	I	D
R	O	A	R									
U	S	E	S	U	N	T	A	N	L	O	T	I
S	T	R	O	P								
U	R	O	L	I	T	H	M	A	K	O		
R	I	D	E	A	W	A	T	E	R	S	L	I
E	V	E	H	I	K	E	R					
R	E	D	S	T	A	G	S	Y	O	K	E	S

4	6	3	8	2	1	7	9	5
1	9	5	6	7	4	3	8	2
7	2	8	9	5	3	4	6	1
8	7	1	3	4	6	5	2	9
9	5	4	1	8	2	6	7	3
6	3	2	5	9	7	1	4	8
2	8	6	4	3	5	9	1	7
5	4	7	2	1	9	8	3	6
3	1	9	7	6	8	2	5	4

GOT YOUR NUMBER

4

in 10 Americans are afraid of walking alone at night within a mile of their home.

80

percent of genetic information found in humans is identical to that found in cows.

741

consecutive weeks is how long Pink Floyd's 'Dark Side of the Moon' album was on the Billboard charts from 1973 to 1988.

11,000


amendments to the US Constitution have been proposed during its 229-year history, only 27 have been ratified.

20 million

years is how long it has been since tapirs, the most primitive large mammals in the world, evolved substantially.

Source: Uberfacts

ISLAND VIEW



Stairway to heaven. Photo by Brian Constable

Got an unusual or particularly beautiful picture of Phuket? Email it to exeditor@classactmedia.co.th

This week in history

Mar 1, 1692

Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne and Tituba are brought before local magistrates in Salem Village, Massachusetts, beginning what would become known as the Salem witch trials.

Mar 2, 1962

In Burma (now named Myanmar), the army led by General Ne Win (b.1911-d.2002) seizes power in a coup d'état.

Mar 3, 1938

Oil is discovered in Saudi Arabia.

Mar 4, 1899

Cyclone Mahina sweeps in north of Cooktown, Queensland, with a 12-metre (39ft) wave that reaches up to 5 kilometres (3.1 mi) inland, killing over 300.

Mar 5, 1872

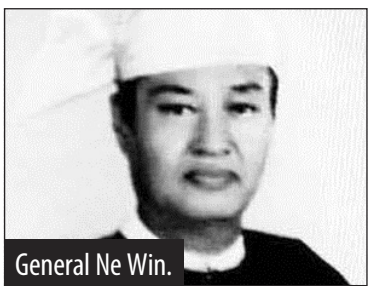
George Westinghouse patents the air brake.

Mar 6, 1836

Battle of the Alamo – After a 13-day siege by an army of 3,000 Mexican troops, the 187 Texas volunteers, including frontiersman Davy Crockett and Colonel Jim Bowie, defending the Alamo are killed and the fort is captured.

Mar 7, 321 AD

Emperor Constantine I decrees that the Dies Solis Invicti (Sunday) is the day of rest in the Roman Empire.



General Ne Win.

Source: Wikipedia

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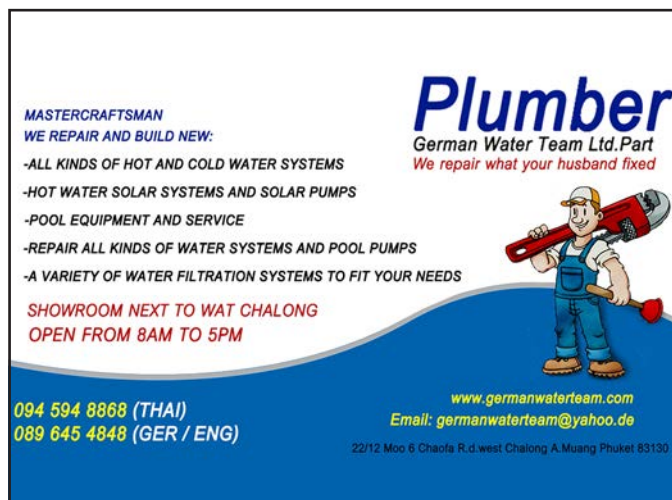
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International Women's Day Lunch

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FRI 5 APR



Help the Children Charity Gala

Help the Children Charity Gala on 5 April 2024, 7:00 pm, at the Junkyard Theatre. This gala is supporting the Rotary Club of Patong Beach charity efforts. Delicious Food, Extraordinary Music, Great Fun. The music will feature the vocals of Pjoe and Rannze. Tickets are 5,550 THB each or a table of 6 for 33,000 THB. The dress code is colourful. Tickets are available by contacting us at rotaryhelpthechildren@gmail.com rotaryhelpthechildren@gmail.com

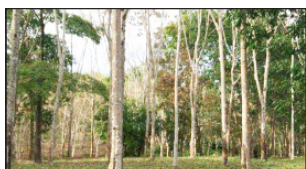
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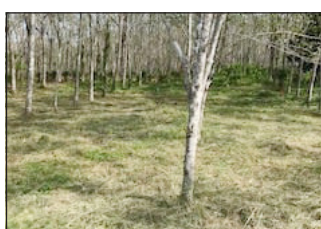
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Photo: PR Phuket

Phuket hosts leading senior tennis comp

TENNIS

PHUKET GOVERNOR Sophon Suwannarat officially welcomed players from all over the world as he opened the 12th International Senior Tennis Cup last Saturday (Feb 24).

The tournament was held at both the Oceanic Sportel Hotel Stadium and the tennis facility at Thanyapura Sports and Health Resort, starting on Saturday and ending on Sunday (Feb 25).

The event saw a truly cosmopolitan mix of senior players from all over the world, with a total of 277 participants from England, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, Korea, Russia, Spain, the Philippines, Indonesia and the United States all taking part.

In his openings remarks just after 7am at the Oceanic Sportel Hotel Stadium last Saturday, Governor Sophon explained that the tournament is an excellent way of build-

ing relations between various countries while illustrating how sports can bridge divides, foster friendships and promote understanding among different cultures.

The event is also an excellent way to promote Phuket as a leading sports and tourism destination, able of hosting top class events, Governor Sophon added.

Last but not least, the tournament is an opportunity to promote the importance of exercise, healthy living and the values of sportsmanship, Governor Sophon said.

A marching band from Mueang Phuket Municipal school enhanced the festivities as they played as part of the opening ceremony to welcome guests to the Oceanic Sportel Hotel Stadium following on from Governor Sophon's speech.

No official results from the tournament were available at time of press.

The Phuket News

Verstappen eyes fourth title

FORMULA ONE

AFP

Max Verstappen is looking to win a fourth consecutive drivers' title with Red Bull as the dominant team again this year when the curtain rises on Formula One's longest-ever season in Bahrain this weekend (Feb 1-3).

Whatever the outcome of an independent investigation into allegations of controlling behaviour by team boss Christian Horner, Red Bull have built a crushing level of momentum and a stunning car that oozed potential in pre-season testing.

With stable unchanged regulations and no changes to the driver line-ups, a year of deja vu is in prospect as the F1 circus embarks on a daunting and unprecedented run of 24 race weekends stretching to early December.

After sweeping to a record 21 wins in 22 races last year, with Verstappen claiming a record 19, plus 12 poles and nine fastest laps as he accumulated a staggering total of 575 points, Red Bull have every reason to believe they can stay on top.

In such a demanding calendar, much will depend on the form of Verstappen's Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez, who won twice last year before fading, if the team hope for a clean sweep this time.

After his imperious form in 2023, the 26-year-old Dutchman has every reason to begin this year with a swagger, but he will need help from the Mexican for



Red Bull Racing's Max Verstappen in pre-season testing at the Bahrain International Circuit on Feb 21. Photo: AFP

the team to smash all their own records in an invincible season.

All of their rival teams have improved their cars, clearly evident in pre-season testing, but none with as many updates and revisions as those seen in Red Bull's RB20, a car that marks the team's 20th birthday.

Ferrari, entering a second season under the guidance of Frederic Vasseur as team principal, who has recruited seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton to replace Carlos Sainz in 2025, will be aiming to improve on their one triumph last year.

They believe they have a more reliable car that will transfer qualifying speed into race performance, although lead driver Charles Leclerc still admits

they have some way to go to catch the runaway Red Bulls.

Hamilton's Mercedes team have also improved their car and both he and team-mate George Russell have declared it as more "driveable" and comfortable.

McLaren, similarly, made optimistic noises after testing, but according to Lando Norris remain significantly adrift of Red Bull and Ferrari while of the chasing pack, Aston Martin hold no great hopes.

"I don't have a crystal ball," said two-time champion Fernando Alonso, 42.

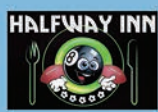
"But Max is world champion and Red Bull are dominating. I think 19 drivers in the paddock now think they won't win. It happens that way for 99% of your career. It's a brutal sport."

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All smiles for Patty in Pattaya

GOLF

ROARED ON BY HER ADORING fans, Patty Tavatanakit made a gutsy final-hole birdie to write her name into Honda LPGA Thailand folklore last Sunday (Feb 25).

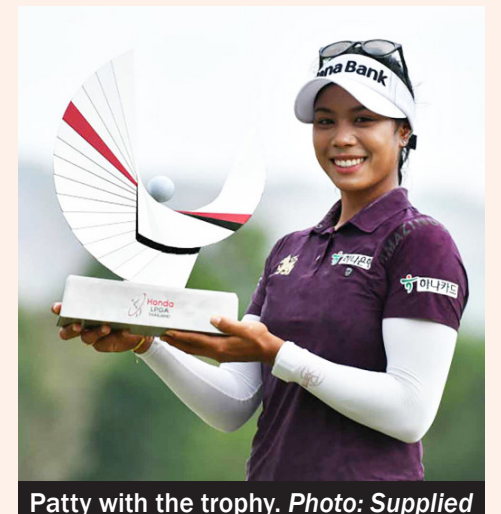
Seven days after claiming her maiden Ladies European Tour title in Saudi Arabia, the 24-year-old eked out a dramatic one-stroke victory in the US\$1.7 million (B61mn) LPGA Tour showcase at Siam Country Club in Pattaya.

Three shots clear of the field at the start of the final round, Patty closed with a five-under-par 67 over the Old Course to become only the second home winner in the Honda LPGA Thailand's 17-year history.

"This is a dream come true, to win in my home country and in front of my parents," said an emotional Patty, after posting a 72-hole total of 21-under 267 – one ahead of Switzerland's Albane Valenzuela, who soared into contention with a best-of-the-week 63.

For most of the day, Patty appeared to be in cruise control. However, the fast-finishing Valenzuela managed a birdie-four on 18 to draw level with Patty at the top of the leaderboard on 20-under, meaning the home favourite needed to conjure a birdie at the final hole to win.

After splitting the fairway with her drive, Patty struck a mid-iron to the elevated green which came up fractionally short of the putting surface, leaving an



Patty with the trophy. Photo: Supplied

uphill chip which she executed perfectly, her ball coming to rest inches from the cup.

After tapping in for the winning birdie, Patty struggled to hold back the tears as her fellow Thai players rushed on to the green and doused her in water.

She recovered her composure sufficiently to speak eloquently at the prize-giving ceremony, thanking her team, friends, family and the galleries before being presented with a cheque for \$255,000 to go with the \$750,000 she collected last week.

Patty is the sixth player from Thailand to earn at least two LPGA Tour victories, following in the footsteps of Pajaree Anannarukarn, Atthaya Thitikul, Moriya Jutanugarn and Jasmine Suwannapura (all two wins) and Ariya Jutanugarn, whose 12 triumphs include the 2021 Honda LPGA Thailand. *Bangkok Post*

Man United left deflated after Iwobi late, late show

FOOTBALL

AFP

Manchester United's recent air of optimism was punctured last Saturday (Feb 24) as Alex Iwobi's 97th minute winner handed Fulham their first win at Old Trafford since 2003.

The completion of Jim Ratcliffe's minority stake in United last week and a spell of good form had brought hope of a fresh start for the Red Devils.

United had won their previous four Premier League games to rekindle hope of qualifying for next season's Champions League, but the 2-1 defeat to Fulham leaves them eight points adrift of Aston Villa.

Ratcliffe has revealed his ambition to topple Manchester City and Liverpool at the top of the English game within three years.

But the work that lies ahead of the British billionaire on and off the field was exposed as Fulham dominated a ragged United for long spells, taking the lead through Calvin Bassey before Iwobi's late, late winner.

"We went for the win but by the end we let them slip away," said an increasingly under pressure Manchester United boss Erik ten Hag afterwards.

United's neighbours Manchester City were once again far from their flowing best but managed a 1-0 win against Bournemouth with in-form Phil Foden scoring.

At the other end, Ederson was re-



A dejected Harry Maguire contemplates ' Manchester United's late loss to Fulham last Saturday (Feb 24). Photo: AFP

quired to save City from dropping two costly points when he kept out Dominic Solanke's header on the line by the finest of margins before Enes Unal's header shaved the post in stoppage-time.

The result means City are now on 59 points, just one point behind leaders Liverpool, having played the same number of games.

Arsenal sit one point behind City in third after they demolished Newcastle 4-1 at the Emirates Stadium thanks to goals from Kai Havertz, Bukayo Saka, Jakub Kiwior and a Sven Botman own goal.

It was a sixth successive league victory for Mikel Arteta's side, who have also registered 15 goals in their last three league matches.

Aston Villa opened up a five-point lead over Tottenham in the battle for a

top-four finish with a 4-2 win over Nottingham Forest, who remain just four points above the relegation zone.

Oliver Glasner got off to a dream start as Crystal Palace manager with a 3-0 win over second bottom Burnley, Wolves beat Sheffield United 1-0, while West Ham defeated Brentford 4-2, with striker Jarrod Bowen scoring a hat-trick.

Everton were denied a huge win in their battle to beat the drop by Lewis Dunk's 95th minute equaliser for Brighton in a 1-1 draw at the Amex.

However, the Toffees received positive news on Monday when it was confirmed that an independent appeal board had reduced the club's penalty for breaching Premier League financial rules from 10 points to six, lifting the team to 15th in the table with 12 games remaining.



Klopp's kids celebrate League Cup triumph

FOOTBALL

LIVERPOOL WON THE League Cup in dramatic fashion last Sunday (Feb 25) as Virgil van Dijk's header late in extra-time sealed a 1-0 win against Chelsea at Wembley.

Jurgen Klopp's injury-hit side finished a gruelling clash with a host of raw youngsters on the pitch, but it was their experienced captain who clinched the club's 10th League Cup triumph.

Van Dijk earlier had a goal controversially disallowed by VAR, but pounced to nod home with just two minutes left.

"The craziest thing is we deserved it," said Klopp, who recently announced he will step down at the end of the season.

"We brought on all the kids! We needed fresh legs. They were very young, but they did the job. I couldn't be

prouder of them."

Klopp has now won seven major trophies in his nine-year Anfield reign.

However, it was another bitter Wembley experience for Chelsea, who lost the 2022 League Cup and FA Cup finals against Liverpool.

Blues boss Mauricio Pochettino has asked Chelsea fans not to judge him on "winning titles" in the midst of a troubled first season in charge.

But Chelsea remain without domestic silverware since the 2018 FA Cup and had only themselves to blame after missing a host of chances in normal time.

"That was the key. We created four, five or six big chances and we didn't score. In a game like this, whoever scores first will have a big advantage," said Pochettino, who is still to win a trophy in English football. AFP

Ireland keep Six Nations Grand-Slam repeat in sight

RUGBY

IRELAND MOVED ONE STEP CLOSER to back-to-back Six Nations Grand Slams by beating Wales 31-7 in Dublin last Saturday (Feb 24).

The host's squad strength was evident as Wales threatened a second-half comeback, forcing coach Andy Farrell to turn to the bench for replacements.

Ryan Baird, on for captain Peter O'Mahony, in particular stood out with a couple of dashing bursts through the Welsh defence.

"It was huge," said Farrell of the initial impact made by his substitutions. "They were always going to come on and add some power when others are a bit tired."

Meanwhile, Scotland managed to come back 30-21 in Edinburgh on Sunday.

Duhan van der Merwe became the first Scotland player to score a hat-trick of tries in a match against England as his side came from 10-0 down to defeat their oldest rivals in front of a raucous Murrayfield crowd.

"The first try was exceptional, the second one was a big momentum-swing and the third one was great to see," said a delighted Scotland coach Gregor Townsend post-match.

Elsewhere, France coach Fabien Galthie admitted his side were in a sticky patch after a remarkable 13-13 draw with Italy,



Ciaran Frawley scores for Ireland against Wales. Photo: AFP

where centre Jonathan Danty was sent off, left them at their lowest point since he took over following the 2019 Rugby World Cup.

Last year's World Cup quarter-final defeat by South Africa on home soil was a huge disappointment and Galthie's bid to get Les Bleus back on track is stuttering.

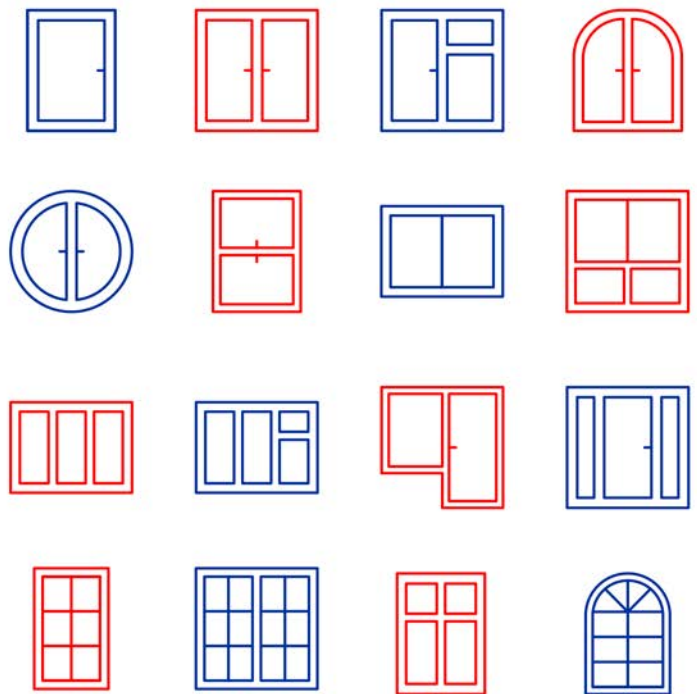
A change of his coaching staff and the absence of key players, including star backs Antoine Dupont and Romain Ntamack will only increase criticism before a Mar 10 match away to Wales.

But Sunday's result in Lille saw Italy return to the top 10 of the world rankings for the first time since 2013.

Strong performances from captain Michele Lamaro and fly-half Paolo Garbisi, who would have won the match had not his injury-time penalty hit the post, put Italy in a good place to target Scotland on Mar 9 or Wales a week later for just their third Six Nations win since 2015. AFP



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Sport



Red Bull and Max ready for F1 start > p14

BIG SWIM

Expat completes charity swim around Phuket

Todd on his way to swimming around Phuket to raise funds for children's charity. Photo: Supplied

SWIMMING

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket resident Todd Blankenship recently successfully completed his ambitious mission to swim around Phuket to raise money and help local children via a Rotary Club of Patong Beach initiative.

The Swim Challenge Phuket saw former US Marine Todd swim the approximately 140-kilometre distance around the island and raise over B400,000 in donations.

All money raised through the initiative will be donated to the Rotary Club of Patong Beach to help local children learn how to swim as part of a drive to minimise and ultimately eradicate drownings among youngsters.

After many months of planning, Todd finally took to the water off

Bang Tao Beach on the morning of Jan 20 to embark on his solo swim. He had set himself a timeframe of 14 days to complete the task although was able to finish a couple of days ahead of schedule by "challenging the island to swim alongside him."

Todd explained to *The Phuket News* that he used the tides and the knowledge of his support crew who are so familiar with the local waters to his advantage to finish ahead of schedule.

"Captain K, who was navigating the safety boat, did such an amazing job that it allowed me to use the current to my favour and therefore make up time," Todd said.

"Safety was always of paramount importance, however," he added. "We had to take a momentary pause due to the waters being full of jellyfish, meaning three days out of the water. This was tough and posed a mental challenge as I thought it wouldn't be possible

to finish the swim in the allocated time. But safety always comes first.

"However, with favourable tides and excellent navigational support, I was able to make the time up and even finish ahead of schedule, which was very pleasing."

'ROCK STAR'

Frank Walbaum from the Rotary Club of Patong Beach undertook much of the planning and supported Todd on his journey.

"Todd had an amazing and ambitious plan, but him being a US Marine I believed that he would do it, no matter what," Frank said.

"As part of fundraising efforts I pitched the story to the Flughafenverein Muenchen in Germany, a non-profit organisation that helps certain charity-based projects all around the world. They confirmed their interest in supporting directly and, as a result, we started the campaign with a very welcome EUR

6,000. This lifted the spirits of all involved and generated significant motivation for the task ahead."

The 'save a child swim program' was an initiative that the Rotary Club of Patong Beach started a few years ago in response to the staggering number of youngsters drowning each year.

"Drowning is apparently the biggest cause of death in Thailand among children below the age of 15," Frank explained. "Many people underestimate the dangers of the ocean which unfortunately results in them losing their lives. Every year more than 1500 people drown in Thailand, with the majority of those being kids.

"This fundraiser allows us to create more awareness as to safety while teaching children how to swim. Since the project launched several years ago over 1,500 children have gone through the swim program to learn to swim and know

both the beauty and the danger of the sea."

Todd's exertions will go a long way to continuing to help the Rotary Club's efforts, something Frank was quick to recognise as Todd completed the challenge.

"As soon as Todd landed back at Bang Tao Beach I told him he was an absolute rock star for completing the task and, of course, for doing so safely," Frank said.

"It was mission accomplished and I was very proud of him as the funds raised will go a long, long way to helping so many children learn how to swim and therefore be able to enjoy the water in a far safer manner."

Donations can still be made at: <https://rotarypatong.org/page/donate>. For more information please contact: Frank Walbaum, Rotary Club of Patong Beach, WhatsApp: +65 9447 3234, Line: jungleman80.

Over 3,000 athletes turnout for dual Phuket running events

RUNNING

TWO HIGH PROFILE RUNNING events recently held in Phuket both saw impressive turnouts as the island continues to develop its position as a leading regional sports tourism destination.

Over 1,500 people turned out for the seventh annual edition of the Rawai Mini Marathon on Feb 18, an event that was split into three separate race categories for both male and female competitors: a 2 kilometre healthy walk, a 4.5km fun run and a 12.7km mini marathon.

All runners who finished each race category received a medal, while those that finished between first and 10th place in each race category also received a trophy and a cash prize for their efforts.

Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat was on hand to officially inaugurate the event and also joined the post-race festivities to distribute prizes and medals.

Aroon Solos, the mayor of Rawai, confirmed that over 1,500 people took part in the three races, made up of local residents and a variety of foreigners either residing in Phuket or who had come to the island specifically for the occasion.



The Rawai Mini Marathon.
Photo: PR Phuket

He added that the event is part of an ongoing drive by not only Rawai but the rest of the island to promote a healthy lifestyle to residents, of which exercise is a key component.

Mr Solos also confirmed that all proceeds from the event were to be donated to the Islamic Ethics

Center at the Noorul Ibadah Mosque in Saiyuan village, Rawai, although no specific amount was mentioned.

Following on from the Rawai event came the "Discover Phuket Night Run" last Sunday (Feb 25), which also attracted over 1,500 competitors.

Held at Chaloem Phra Kiat Park in Phuket Old Town with a 9:30pm start, the event incorporated a 3.6km fun run and a 10.5km mini marathon, with the latter split into male and female age-specific competition categories.

Commemorative shirts and medals were given to everyone who crossed the finish line while trophies

and cash prizes were awarded to the top five finishers in each age category of the fun run and both male and female categories of the mini marathon.

Governor Sophon was once again on hand to officially open the race and help distribute prizes afterwards.

Governor Sophon explained that the event significantly helped promote Phuket as a sports tourism destination of choice, while emphasising the importance of exercise in contributing to a healthier lifestyle.

All proceeds from the event are to be donated to the Nakhon Phuket Care Center fund, Governor Sophon confirmed. *The Phuket News*