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SPECIAL

GOVERNOR VOICES SUPPORT FOR PHUKET 'SPECIAL ADMIN' STATUS

Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat explains Phuket's situation to Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin during a meeting at Phuket airport on Apr 19. Photo: PR Phuket

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat has voiced his support for Phuket to be given 'special administrative status', marking a milestone for the decades-long call by the island's leading figures for Phuket to have more autonomy in order to address the island's most pressing issues, including traffic, water supply, wastewater and overdevelopment.

Governor Sophon announced his support for the move during an address delivered at the 2024 Annual General Meeting of the Phuket Chamber of Commerce (PCC) held at the Phuket Merlin Hotel on Apr 25.

He outlined his vision for the future governance of the province, expressing his support for transition-

ing Phuket's governance model to a special administrative status, like that in effect in Pattaya and Bangkok.

The event, attended by key figures including PCC President Kongsak Koophongsakorn, Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation (PPAO) President Rewat Areerob and other prominent local leaders, marked a significant moment in Phuket's political landscape. As Governor of Phuket, Mr Sophon is a Bangkok-appointed official.

Governor Sophon praised the PCC as a pivotal force in fostering collaboration between the private sector and government agencies. He emphasised the chamber's vital role in driving economic and social development in the province, highlighting its success in tackling various challenges alongside governmental initiatives.

BUDGETS

In advocating for a shift in governance, Governor Sophon highlighted the pressing need for Phuket to access greater fiscal autonomy. Currently constrained by a limited budget, he argued that the province's development potential is stifled. Drawing parallels with the administrative structures of Pattaya and Bangkok, he proposed a reformed model whereby Phuket could assume greater control over taxation and budget allocation.

Under the proposed framework, Governor Sophon suggested the establishment of an elected provincial governor, empowered to oversee strategic management while also advocating for a revised system of budget allocation. He proposed a new mechanism by which a portion of provincial GDP and tax revenues

would be reinvested locally, fostering healthy competition among provinces to drive economic growth.

The Governor also announced significant infrastructure projects aimed at addressing pressing challenges facing Phuket.

These included the construction of four additional traffic routes, as reviewed by Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin one week earlier, on Apr 19, as well as initiatives to expand traffic lanes and improve water infrastructure, including tapping into water resources from the Cheow Lan Lake in Surat Thani to mitigate long-standing water shortages.

Following his visit to Phuket last month, PM Srettha announced with a blanket statement that Phuket in the future will be supplied water from the Cheow Lan Lake in Surat Thani.

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Van driver threatens taxi driver with knife



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Patrick looks at pretty oddballs in his garden



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Laguna Phuket Marathon set for big turnout




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News



**New Aussie
Consul-General
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Srettha pushes for 'Phuket Model'

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PM Srettha pointed out that the government was now looking at spending some B16bn on Phuket development projects, including resolving the recurring threats of water shortages by having water piped in from Cheow Lan.

"Relevant agencies have been given directions to bring water from Cheow Lan Reservoir to be used in Krabi, Phang Nga and Phuket. In the future, Phuket residents will not lack water to use," PM Srettha assured.

However, no further details of how and when water supply from Cheow Lan were provided.

"Regarding wastewater and garbage management, I would like to strictly enforce the law. Do not allow waste to be released into the sea, and public water sources. We strive to make Phuket a livable city. It is a destination that people from every corner of the world

want to move to live and visit, but if the environment is not good they won't want to," PM Srettha added.

ECONOMIC FORCE

The proposal to transition Phuket to a special administrative status represents a paradigm shift in the province's governance structure, with potential implications for its economic growth and development trajectory.

While PM Srettha was in Phuket, Wirintra Paphakityotphat, head of the Tourism Council of Thailand (TCT) Region 11 branch, which represents Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi, presented a list of four formal requests to the Prime Minister – the first of which was to permit Phuket become a 'Special Administrative Zone'.

The request was for Phuket to receive a budget of not less than 1-5% of the revenue generated by Phuket's service and tourism sector that is



PM Srettha with acting national police chief Pol Gen Kittirat Panphet at the meeting with Phuket consuls. Photo: PR Phuket

currently handed over to the central government.

The Department of Tourism, under the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, would be responsible for ensuring any requirements were complied with, Ms Wirintra noted.

According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Phuket welcomed 11.3mn visitors in 2023, marking a significant increase since the end of the pandemic. Most visitors were

foreign (75%), contributing to a tourism income of at least B38bn, Ms Wirintra noted.

In response, PM Srettha noted, "It would be necessary to consider whether it is needed, and exactly what would be meant by a 'special economic zone'?... Maybe it's inappropriate... We want to stimulate tourism, but we must consider its suitability and we must request specific details first."

'PHUKET MODEL'

During his visit to Phuket PM Settha, joined by Acting Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Police Pol Gen Kittirat Panphet, met with local consuls in Phuket to explain the 'Phuket Model' of law enforcement.

In a bid to enhance safety and law enforcement for tourists, Prime Minister Settha Thavisin has directed the Royal Thai Police to develop a comprehensive strategy known as the 'Phuket Model', said an official report of the meeting issued late on Apr 23.

The initiative, initially announced on Apr 21 during a meeting at the Banyan Tree Phuket hotel in Cherng Talay, aims to address illegal activities and ensure the well-being of visitors in popular tourist destinations, the report noted.

The meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Thavisin, saw the participation of key figures including Phuket Vice

Governor Norasak Suksomboon, and other high-ranking police officials, as well as consuls from 12 countries and representatives from various governmental and private agencies.

Pol Gen Kittirat outlined the measures to prevent illegal activities by foreign visitors in Phuket, including the establishment of a comprehensive database to inform tourists of prohibited actions, collaboration with relevant authorities to combat foreign criminal organisations and strict enforcement of laws governing foreign car rental operators.

The "holistic approach", known as the "Phuket Model", aims to elevate tourism standards and ensure the safety of visitors, Pol Gen Kittirat said.

Acknowledging the importance of law enforcement in maintaining stability and fostering economic growth, PM Srettha urged cooperation from all stakeholders.

B500mn in illegal cigarettes, alcohol seized in DOPA raids

MORE THAN B500 MILLION IN UN-taxed cigarettes and alcohol, and illegal e-cigarettes, were seized in raids across Phuket by a Department of Provincial Administration (DOPA) Special Operations Team last week.

The raids were announced by Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat at a press conference at Phuket Provincial Hall on Apr 24.

Joining Governor Sophon for the announcement was DOPA Inspector General Ronarong Thipsiri.

Describing the raids as a significant victory in the fight against organised crime, Governor Sophon explained that the arrests and seizure of illegal goods targetted a specific network of operators.

The operation was initiated following orders from Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Anutin Charnvirakul, who had directed DOPA Director-General Orasit Samphantharat and Governor Sophon to "address social organisation issues in Phuket province", said an official report of the press conference.

The Special Operations Team was issued six search warrants from the Phuket Provincial Court to investigate warehouses and shops suspected of illegal activities in Mueang Phuket District and Kathu District.

During the raids, it was discovered that three out of the six targeted shops had registered as limited partnerships that were registered as operating as animal feed businesses.

However, the operations were found to be fronts for the illegal sale of cigarettes, electronic cigarettes and alcohol. Some of the shops were



Photo: DOPA

located as close as 50 metres from schools, while others operated in busy market areas.

According to a police report, the raids were carried out between 1pm and 4pm on Apr 24.

The report marked only five locations raided: a house on Yaowarat Rd in Phuket Town; a house on Ranong Rd in Phuket Town; an alcohol vendor on Tilok Uthit Rd, in Phuket Town; an animal feed store on Kuku Rd in Ratsada; and an unregistered building on Kuku Rd in Ratsada.

The report noted that three suspects were arrested during the raids. At two locations no people were present.

However, no significant arrests of those who supplied the outlets were announced.

Mr Ronarong said that Thailand suffers substantial losses, amounting to at least B7 billion each year, due to smuggling activities.

All confiscated items from the operation were taken to Phuket City Police Station and Kathu Police Station for further legal proceedings, he added.

DOPA urged people to report any suspicious activities via the hotline 1567 to combat illicit trade and, for some reason, public safety.

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Phuket to host event on sustainable tourism

The Phuket News
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Phuket has been selected to host a globally renowned conference focused on sustainable tourism that organisers claim can contribute significantly to the island's reputation as a leading tourism and business hub.

The Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) announced on Apr 25 that the Global Sustainable Tourism Council had selected Phuket to host the next Global Sustainable Tourism Conference (GSTC) in 2026.

The decision to select Phuket was made and announced at the recent GSTC 2024 Global Conference in Stockholm, Sweden, which ran from Apr 23-26.

Themed "Regenerative Tourism", GSTC 2026 is scheduled to take place in April 2026, with specific dates yet to be announced. The event is expected to attract over 700 attendees from more than 60 countries and to generate over B50 million in revenue. Attendees



Photo: PR Phuket

will typically be from state authorities, hotels, tourism companies, online travel agencies, educational institutions, development organisations, non-governmental organisations and other sectors.

TCEB President Chiruit Isarangkun Na Ayuthaya shared his delight at the decision, explaining that the event can further demonstrate the island's standing as an international hub of sustainable tourism and Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE).

Furthermore, the event can boost the profile of the Andaman economic corridor, comprising the neighbouring

provinces of Krabi, Phang Nga, Ranong, Trang and Satun.

Mr Chiruit added that TCEB has been collaborating closely with public sector departments in Phuket Province, in addition to the Sustainable Tourism Development Foundation (STDF), Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA).

Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat thanked all organisations involved in supporting Phuket's bid to host the event, adding that it is an occasion that can help put Phuket on the global stage.

It also contributes positively to the province's goal of achieving sustainable tourism standards by 2027 which focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions through effective waste management and carbon dioxide policies, Governor Sophon added.

"Phuket Province is ready to be the host of GSTC 2026," Governor Sophon said.

"With our current available infrastructure including airport, hotels and other global standard facilities, and our unique local culture identity, we are ready to welcome GSTC members and attendees from around the world to Phuket," he added.

Thapanee Kiatphaibool further explained that hosting GSTC 2026 will demonstrate to the world that Thailand is a strong advocate of environmental conservation and protection, which will install confidence in visitors to the country and appeal particularly to "high quality tourists" from Europe, America, Australia and the quality groups from Asia, the main target groups for TAT.



Photo: AoT Phuket

Aircraft stuck on runway causes flight delays

INBOUND AND OUTBOUND flights at Phuket International Airport were delayed on Apr 23 as a malfunctioning aircraft was unable to move off the runway.

Phuket Air Control Tower relayed the issue to airport ground crews at 10:32am, said Phuket Airport in a notice recognising the incident.

The aircraft in question was unable to move off the runway due to a failure in its hydraulic steering system, necessitating the use of a push-back tractor to clear the way.

The situation prompted the declaration of an Aircraft-On-Ground (AOG) situation, requiring immediate maintenance attention.

The malfunction resulted in a spillage of hydraulic oil onto the runway, posing a safety hazard for incoming and outgoing flights.

In response, Phuket Air-

port issued a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) alerting pilots to the closure of Runway 09/27 for cleanup operations.

Authorities also conducted evaluations of the runway's surface friction to ensure compliance with safety standards. Normal runway operations resumed at 11:37am.

A total of 15 flights were affected by the situation, confirmed the notice. Five inbound flights were diverted to alternate airports, while five other inbound flights were "unable to land". Five outbound flights were delayed due to the runway closure.

As investigations into the aircraft malfunction continue, authorities are working to prevent similar incidents in the future and maintain the safety and efficiency of operations at Phuket Airport, said the notice.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Van driver threatens taxi driver with knife in road rage incident

POLICE HAVE APPREHENDED A hot-headed van driver who pulled a knife and threatened a taxi driver in the middle of one of the island's busiest roads last Saturday (Apr 27).

The incident happened near the Darasamut Intersection on the bypass road southbound and was very quickly posted on social media by witnesses who snapped footage of the agitated driver confronting the taxi driver.

Officials at the Phuket Land Transport Office (PLTO) were informed of the incident, who contacted Wichit Police to deal with the matter.

Wichit Police Chief Pol Col Chatri Chukaew ordered a team to investigate the matter. The officers were very quickly able to identify the driver of the white Toyota van via the vehicle's license plates before tracking him down to an address in Thalang.

The offender was subsequently identified as 57-year-old Thanongsak Maenman, of Moo 1, Thepkasattri.

Police took the man to Wichit Police Station, where blood and urine tests were conducted to determine any traces of alcohol or drugs – both tests returned negative, police confirmed.

In relaying his version of the incident to police, Mr Thanongsak claimed the driver of the yellow-plated, Phuket-registered taxi was driving extremely slowly in the right lane. Angered at the slow pace, Mr Thanongsak



Photo: Supplied

sounded his horn before pulling alongside the taxi as traffic slowed. He then proceeded to exit his vehicle and advance to the driver's side of the taxi where a heated argument ensued. Mr Thanongsak then pulled a fruit knife and threatened the driver before the latter managed to drive away.

The taxi driver subsequently lodged an official complaint with Wichit Police who then charged Mr Thanongsak, once he had been apprehended.

He was charged with "taking a weapon (knife) into a city, village or public way openly or without reasonable cause [and] causing others to be afraid or frightened by threatening behaviour." Legal action and formal charges will follow in due course, police confirmed. *The Phuket News*

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Patong policeman struck down by drunk driver

A POLICE OFFICER heading out on patrol on his motorbike was struck down by a drunk driver in Patong in the early hours of Apr 23.

Officers at Patong Police Station were informed of the incident at about 4:30am.

Officers arrived at the scene, in front of Patong Hospital at the intersection of Phra Mettha Rd and Sai Nam Yen Rd, to find Amornlak Bunsiri, 21, from Satun, with minor injuries from the collision.

Pol Sgt Maj Teerayut Samran, a Phuket native, had also suffered a minor injury in the collision, to his right ankle.

Rescue workers from the Kusoldharm Foundation provided first aid to Pol Sgt Maj Teerayut then assisted him into the hospital.

Ms Amornlak told police she was driving her Honda Wave 125 motorcycle north-bound along Phra Mettha Rd and ran the red light in order to turn onto Sai Nam Yen Rd.

However, Pol Sgt Maj Teerayut was leaving Patong Police Station to start his patrol on his Yamaha NMAX police motorbike



Photo: Patong Police

when she collided into him.

Ms Amornlak was taken to Patong Police Station and tested for alcohol, testing positive with a reading of 114mg per decilitre (a BAC of 0.114)

Ms Amornlak was charged with drunk driving causing injury to others, police confirmed.

Earlier, police had arrested a 21-year-old French national for drunk driving on Phra Mettha Rd.

French national Mehdi Ghandi was stopped and tested for alcohol between 12:30am and 2:30am, police reported.

He tested positive for alcohol with a reading of 63mg per decilitre (a BAC of 0.063).

Mr Ghandi was charged with "driving while intoxicated", police confirmed.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Child rape fugitive hunted from Bangkok to Phuket

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

A tattoo artist who raped a 13-year-old girl in Bangkok has been arrested in Phuket. The girl was later forced to undergo a hysterectomy as the result of the physical harm done during the assault.

The tattoo artist, named by Metropolitan Police from Bangkok only as "Wasin" or "Game", 25, was arrested at a rented room on Mae Luan Rd in Phuket Town under an arrest warrant issued by the Thonburi Criminal Court on Apr 11, said Metropolitan Police in an announcement issued late on Apr 25.

Detectives from Metropolitan Police, referring to Wasin by his online name "Game So What", said that Wasin was a well-known tattoo artist in the Rama 2 area in Bangkok with 7,000 followers online.

He had contacted the 13-year-old girl via Facebook and convinced her into getting a small tattoo for B400, but once he had her in the shop, he raped her.

After being informed of the incident, investigating officers issued a summons for Wasin to present himself. Instead, he fled to Phuket.



Photo: Metropolitan Police

He now faces charges of taking a child under 15 years old for indecent purposes.

The statement issued by Metropolitan Police noted that Wasin had previously been prosecuted for "taking away minors" at Thakham Police Station in Bangkok in 2016. That case was settled with payment of B70,000 compensation.

"In this case, he chose to flee to Phuket because he heard that the money was good here and it was easy to escape because there were a lot of tourists," Pol Maj Gen Teeradej Thammasutee, commander of the Metropolitan

Police Bureau's Investigation Division, said in the announcement.

Wasin was taken to Thakham Police Station for investigation to be prosecuted according to law, Pol Gen Teeradej confirmed

"I would like to tell all parents, please be more attentive to your children. Don't trust [anyone] and lose sight [of them], even with people who are close [to them]," Pol Gen Teeradej said.

Pol Gen Teeradej urged people to report any crimes to police. "We have officers available 24 hours a day," he said.

Brake failure blamed as truck rams shop, downs traffic lights

BRAKE FAILURE HAS BEEN blamed for a 10-wheeled truck taking out a traffic lights pole before slamming into a car care shop in Ratsada last week

Police were informed of the accident at 11:27am on Apr 24, with officers arriving at the scene, opposite the dCondo Campus Resort on Ruampattana Rd, in Moo 3, Ratsada, to find the truck with damage to its front after ramming into the car care shop.

The driver of the truck, belonging to transport company Laem Thong Co Ltd, was not injured in the accident. Thankfully no other people hurt in the incident, too, police reported.

The driver told police that the brakes on the truck had failed,



Photo: Phuket City Police

resulting in the accident, police noted.

Police are continuing their investigation into the accident.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Jackson Wang gets his B2.3mn 'Buzz Lightyear' gem leg back

A LEG FROM A BUZZ LIGHTYEAR doll encrusted with diamonds and other gems has been found and returned to its owner, Chinese K-pop singer Jackson Wang, after it was "lost" at his birthday party in Cherng Talay, police have reported.

The doll's leg went missing at a birthday party for Wang at a beach club in Cherng Talay on Mar 27, when the gem-encrusted Buzz Lightyear pendant was worn on a necklace, Cherng Talay Police reported.

Hong Kong-born Wang, who was a teenage heartthrob of the Asian boy band 'Got7' nine years ago, turned 30 years old on Mar 28.

Designed by high-end men's jewellery brand Trice, the Buzz Lightyear pendant is decorated with real diamonds, amethysts and other gems estimated to be worth B2.3 million, police noted.



Photo: Cherng Talay Police

It was later learned that someone had brought the leg to several shops to ask what it was worth, which prompted Wang's fans to call for police action in posts online.

Wang's fans demanded that the person return the leg, and warned any people who bought it of being charged with receiving stolen property.

In response, Cherng Talay Police Chief Pol Col Weerapong Rakkhito began investigating the lost leg, leading to the leg being handed in to Cherng Talay Police on Apr 22.

Eakkapop Thongtub

New Aussie Consul-General for Phuket finally announced

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Kirsten Fletcher has been confirmed as the new Australian Consul-General for Phuket and nearby provinces following an announcement by Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong on Apr 23.

"Australia and Thailand share a longstanding relationship based on trade and investment links and close people-to-people connections. As strategic partners, we collaborate across a wide range of areas, including defence, law enforcement, education and the green economy," said Ms Wong.

"Thailand is Australia's eleventh largest trading partner with two-way trade valued at approximately \$30.8 billion (more than B739.9 bn) in 2022-23. Currently, there are 21,000 Thai students in Australia, making Thailand our seventh largest source of international students," she added.

The Consulate-General in Phuket, located on the bypass road, was officially opened in August 2017, reflecting the strength of the bilateral relationship and the number of Australians travelling to, and residing in, Phuket, Minister Wong noted.

"Ms Fletcher is a career officer with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, most recently in the Consular Emergency Centre, and has previously



Kirsten Fletcher (3rd from left) at a sustainability and tourism event in Phuket last month to hear how locals reduce plastic waste in Phuket. Photo: Angela Macdonald (Australian Ambassador to Thailand) / X

served overseas in Bangkok," she noted.

"I thank former Consul-General Matt Barclay for his contributions to consular services and advancing Australia's interests in Phuket since 2019," she added.

BIOMETRIC SERVICES

Thai applicants for Australian visas are able to provide biometrics and access other services in Phuket through a new service that started on Monday (Apr 29).

Australian Ambassador to Thailand Dr Angela Macdonald announced the new service in a statement issued on Apr 22.

"The Australian Biometric Collection Centre in Phuket makes it easier and more convenient for visa applicants," Amb Macdonald explained. "Previously,

people needed to travel to Bangkok or Chiang Mai to provide biometrics, so this is excellent news," she said.

The Australian Biometric Collection Centre in Phuket, located at the office of the Australian Consulate-General in Phuket, is operated by VFS Global. To make an appointment at the centre, visit the VFS Global website.

At the 2024 ASEAN-Australia Special Summit last month, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced a AUS\$1.1 million package to improve visa access to Australia. For Thai travellers, Business Visitor visa validity has been extended to up to five years. Later this year, the Frequent Traveller stream will also include Thailand.



Photo: HKT Immigration Checkpoint Facebook

Syrians arrested with fake passports

OFFICIALS FROM THE Immigration Bureau have arrested three Syrian nationals for possessing fake passports.

The first suspect was apprehended at Phuket International Airport as he allegedly attempted to depart Thailand for another country using a counterfeit UAE passport. The two other suspects were arrested later on the island.

The first arrest occurred on Apr 22 at the International Departures Hall of Phuket International Airport. The two other suspects were arrested on Apr 24 at a hotel in Patong. By this time, officers from

the Phuket Immigration Office and the Region 6 Immigration Office had joined the investigation.

Authorities have not disclosed the identities of the detained Syrians or provided details on how the suspects obtained the fake UAE passports.

It is known though, that the two men arrested on April 24 had traveled to Phuket from Songkhla province and had stayed in at least two different hotels in Patong before their arrest.

All three Syrians were charged with possession and/or use of a counterfeit passport. *The Phuket News*

Power lines moved in preparation for Heroines Underpass project

THE THALANG BRANCH of the Provincial Electricity Authority (PEA Thalang) has begun moving power lines and supporting poles along Thepkrasattri Rd in preparation for construction of the underpass to be built at the Heroines Monument.

Both sides of Thepkrasattri Rd (Route 402) are to be affected from in front of Wat Tha Reua, located south of the Heroines Monument, all the way to the Thai Watsadu outlet near Thalang Town, PEA Thalang explained in a notice issued late on Apr 22, one day after the work had started..

The work will continue through to June 30, PEA Thalang noted.

The work is required to allow the Phuket Highways office to proceed with the construction of the underpass to be built at the Heroines Monument, the notice explained.

"In this regard, the Provincial Electricity Authority Thalang branch apologises for the inconvenience," the



Work has begun on moving the power lines so construction of the underpass at the Heroines Monument can proceed. Photo: PEA Thalang / file

notice read.

Areas adjacent to where the power lines are being moved have already started experiencing power outages while the work is being carried out.

The low-voltage power system at Redwood House in Noo 2, Srisoonthorn, was affected from 9am to 4:30pm on Apr 23.

The high-voltage power network supplying the Supalai Essence and Supalai

Hill housing estates – both located west of the Heroines Monument in Moo 3, Srisoonthorn – were affected from 9am to 4:30pm on Apr 24.

People living or working in any areas near where the work is being carried out along Thepkrasattri Rd are advised to check the PEA Thalang official Facebook page daily for any late announcements of power outages. *The Phuket News*



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Photo: Phuket Tourist Association

Roadshow hoped to lure 1mn Chinese

PHUKET IS PREPARING for an extra 1 million tourists from China this year, expected after a tourism promotion in three Chinese cities.

Anupab Vejwanichsanong, Vice President of the Phuket Provincial Administration Organisation (PPAO), said Apr 22 the organisers of the roadshow hoped it would attract an additional 1 million holidaymakers from China to the resort island by the end of this year.

It was expected the additional arrivals would inject about B40 billion in tourism-related revenue into the local economy, he said.

The 'Amazing Phuket Roadshow to China 2024' was coordinated by the PPAO with the Phuket Tourist Association, led

by President Thaneth Tanpiriyakit.

The roadshow saw 35 Phuket tourism operators promote Phuket as a tourist destination in Guangzhou, Greater Shanghai and Chengdu from April 8-12, covering the target group of more than 70% of all Chinese tourists, said a report by the Phuket Tourist Association.

Last year the island province had about 1.7mn visitors from China, far behind the 3.1mn a year before the COVID pandemic disrupted global travel, noted the Bangkok Post.

The Phuket Tourist Association hopes the number of Chinese visitors will return to the pre-COVID levels next year.

The Phuket News

Long Songkran delivers B140bn tourism boost

Bangkok Post

The three weeks of this year's Songkran festival generated about B140 billion in tourism income, with 1.9 million foreign tourists visiting the country during the celebration, according to the Tourism and Sports Ministry.

The 21-day long festival from April 1-21 generated B140.335bn in revenue, above the projected figure of B132bn, Tourism and Sports Minister Sudawan Wangsupakitsol said on Apr 24, citing figures compiled by the ministry's economics tourism and sports division.

The accommodation sector benefited from B42.06bn, food and beverage B33.06bn, merchandise and souvenirs B26.83bn, travel B15.50bn, entertainment B14.75bn, tourism services B5.86bn and other outlays B2.23bn, Ms Sudawan said.

The atmosphere during the festival was lively with activities held across the country enjoyed by foreign tourists and the many Thais who



People celebrate Songkran on Dibuk Rd in Phuket Town. Photo: PR Phuket

also travelled and celebrated Songkran.

During the 21 days, a total of 1,926,443 foreign tourists visited the country, an increase of 37.54% on the same period last year, the minister said.

Ms Sudawan attributed the increase in foreign arrivals to the government's measures to make travel easier, such as visa waivers and the cancellation of TM6 immigration forms, and the holding of major activities to celebrate the festival.

The surge in foreign travellers came from both nearby

and distant markets, the tourism minister said.

The 10 countries providing the most tourists were: China 395,830 (+89.16% from last year); Malaysia 298,263 (+41.62%); India 114,330 (+27.53%); Russia 104,538 (+19.61%); South Korea 84,539 (+36.02%); Laos 66,396 (+43.59%); United Kingdom 60,495 (+11.31%); Taiwan 60,153 (+58.74%); United States 56,068 (+10.43%); and Indonesia 55,969 (+64.52%).

Ms Sudawan said a total of 13,897,988 Thais travelled, generating B50.12bn. From

April 12-16 alone, the major period of the festival, 461,509 foreign tourists visited the country, generating B21.54bn, while 4,337,848 Thai tourists generated B16.48bn – about B38bn in total.

"The Maha Songkran World Water Festival 2024, held at Sanam Luang, was a grand success, drawing huge crowds of people. This event featured the stunning background of the majestic Grand Palace and was showcased globally. This was a magnet for foreign tourists," the tourism minister said.

Rising expenses add to hotels' woes

HOTEL OPERATORS ANTICIPATE high expenses from power bills, food prices and labour wages as the low season arrives amid scorching temperatures.

Thienprasit Chaiyapatranun, President of the Thai Hotels Association (THA), said during the hot season, electricity expenses could rise to 20% of total costs, compared with 10% in the cool season, reports the Bangkok Post.

The Energy Regulatory Commission is maintaining the tariff rate at B4.18 per kilowatt-hour from May to August.

Along with rising fuel costs, which affect food prices, and the minimum wage hike to B400, these factors pose a challenge for hotels, said Mr Thienprasit.

He said hotels may not be able to pass on these costs to guests, particularly small hotels recovering at a slower pace than upper-tier hotels, which still rely on price competition during the low season.

Only large hotels can maintain high daily room rates as they have sufficient funds for renovation and upgrading their services, said Mr Thienprasit.

He said the occupancy rate in May this year should be similar to May of 2023, at roughly 50%.

The government should urgently disburse this year's fiscal budget scheduled for May, as well as support hotels through government meeting and incentive budgets, said Mr Thienprasit.

Udom Srimahachota, Vice President of the THA's western chapter, said the government should consider offering a low



Tourists relax on a beach on Koh Tao in Surat Thani. Photo: Supapong Chaolan / Bangkok Post

interest rate of 2-3% for small and independent hotels that want to invest in clean energy or install energy-saving equipment such as solar cells or energy-efficient air conditioning.

This would help hotels reduce energy costs and aligns with global net-zero campaigns, said Mr Udom.

The government would also collect more tax from these transactions, he said.

Mr Udom, also chairman of environmental policy at THA, said most hotels cannot access loans as they are still reeling from the pandemic, unlike large operators that can raise more capital.

Purchasing new energy-saving air conditioners and compressors for 35-room hotels could cost up to B10 million, he said.

Mr Udom said hotels in Hua Hin, Phuket and Krabi also face water shortages during the hot season, requiring a larger budget to reserve water supply for their operations.

Bangkok Post

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New Finance Minister after Cabinet reshuffle

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

Former energy executive Pichai Chunhavajira was named finance minister last Sunday (Apr 28) as part of the Cabinet reshuffle.

Mr Pichai took over as finance minister from Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, who held both positions previously, and immediately vowed to revive the country's battered economy by tackling factors hindering economic stimulation efforts, including high interest rates.

Sanan Angubolkul, chairman of Thai Chamber of Commerce, welcomed the appointment of Mr Pichai, saying the appointment came at the right time. Mr Pichai, 76, will help the prime minister oversee the disbursement of the 2024 budget which is due to begin next month and needs to be accelerated for the sake of economic stimulation and tourism promotion.

"Mr Pichai has a proven track record in finance and



Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara resigned from his Cabinet post of Foreign Affairs Minister following the reshuffle. Photo: Bangkok Post

economics and he understands the private sector's needs, which now makes him the sector's new hope to see improvement in the country's economic situation," said Mr Sanan.

In addition to his business sector connections and experience Mr Pichai is also known to have a close alignment with the ruling political camp.

Meanwhile, Foreign Affairs Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara resigned from his Cabinet post after the reshuffle saw him lose his seat as deputy prime minister.

Mr Parnpree had served

as a deputy prime minister and the foreign minister but was assigned only the foreign affairs portfolio in the new line-up.

He explained that holding just the foreign ministerial post could hinder his work in international affairs and that there were other qualified candidates to assume the role.

Asked if he would continue working with the ruling Pheu Thai Party, Mr Parnpree said he would decide on his political career in due course.

Four Cabinet ministers have lost their jobs in the shake-up: Public Health Min-

ister Cholnan Srikaew; Deputy Agriculture and Cooperatives Minister Chaia Promma; Prime Minister's Office Minister Puangpet Chunlaiad; and Deputy Agriculture and Cooperatives Minister Anucha Nakasai.

A controversial appointment was that of Pichit Chuenban, an adviser to the prime minister and Thaksin Sinawatra's former lawyer, as a new Prime Minister's Office Minister.

Democrat Party spokesman Rames Rattanachaweng said the move was problematic, explaining Mr Pichit could be deemed unfit to be appointed to the Cabinet under Section 160 of the constitution which stipulates moral and ethical standards of a Cabinet minister.

Mr Pichit was sentenced by the Supreme Court to six months in prison for contempt of court for offering a sealed box containing about B2 million in cash to a senior administrative officer of the Supreme Court's Criminal Division for Holders of Political Positions in 2008.

Visa-free scheme for Russians extended

BANGKOK

THE CABINET APPROVED a 60-day visa exemption for Russian visitors on Apr 23 to replace the 90-day visa-free programme that expired at the end of April.

The new 60-day visa exemption scheme took effect on Wednesday (May 1) and runs until July 31, officials confirmed.

The revised exemption scheme is intended to increase tourism-related revenue and stimulate the economy, government spokesman Chai Wacharonke said of the proposal made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Previously the government had approved a maximum visa-free stay of 90 days to attract Russian tourists during the recent high season.

In March the Thai government introduced a permanent visa-free scheme for visitors from Mainland China and similarly approved the permanent waiver of visas for visi-



Russian tourists arrive in Phuket. Photo: Bangkok Post

tors from Kazakhstan last month.

In addition, the Cabinet has also approved a 30-day visa exemption for Bangladeshi visitors with official passports, Mr Chai said.

This came after Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin met with his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina last Friday (Apr 26) to sign a letter of intent relating to a free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries.

From Jan 1 to Apr 7, the country received 9.98 million foreign visitors who spent B484 billion, according to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports.

The top source markets were China with 1.88mn visitors, Malaysia (1.24mn), Russia (660,953), South Korea (588,759) and India (510,879). Bangkok Post

Thailand proposes peace plan

BANGKOK

THAILAND HAS PROPOSED THREE or more ASEAN member countries working in unison to engage with Myanmar's military junta to ease the crisis and bring about peace in the conflict-torn nation while remaining firm on its stance on humanitarian assistance and promoting peace.

Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesman Nikorndej Balankura, said on Apr 24 Thailand has coordinated with current ASEAN chair Laos to hold what it calls ASEAN "Troika" and "Troika plus" meetings to restore peace.

The ASEAN Troika is a community body made up of foreign ministers of the previous, present and future chair countries of the bloc [Indonesia, Laos and Malaysia, respectively]. The "plus" refers to other ASEAN members interested in facilitating peace or concerned about the crisis.

Mr Nikorndej said it is likely the proposed meetings will be held in Thailand and reiterated the country's readiness to broker negotiations between Myanmar's junta and resistance groups.

He said the ongoing conflict is not between Thailand and Myanmar and the country's stance on the crisis is clear in that the Thai government will provide humanitarian assistance to all groups affected by the fighting on the principles of national security, international relations and human rights.

"Thailand is an advocate for peace,



Refugees from Myanmar at the Thai town of Mae Sot. Photo: Bangkok Post

so it is important for us to emphasise our position as an active promoter of peace. This can be seen from our readiness to broker negotiations among parties in the Myanmar conflict. If they agree, we're ready to," he said.

According to Mr Nikorndej the situation is assessed as not being highly critical and the effects on Thailand remain limited and mostly affect border trade, which is expected to be temporary.

Meanwhile, the last group of 658 Myanmar people who recently took refuge in Mae Sot voluntarily agreed to return on Apr 27 after the situation in Myawaddy improved, according to local authorities.

A spokesman for the Karen National Union (KNU) said the "temporary retreat" from Myawaddy came after the return of junta soldiers to the vital strategic area that is a conduit for annual foreign trade of more than US\$1 billion (B36bn). Bangkok Post



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The Coccoloba, or seagrape. Photo: Forest & Kim Starr



Couroubata tree in bloom. Photo: Alan Platt



The pong pong tree. Photo: Vengolis

A troupe of oddballs



GREEN THOUGHTS

Patrick Campbell

Twice recently friends have excitedly described an encounter with a tree they had never seen before. An understandable response. After all, the cannonball [*couroupita guianensis*] in full flower is a truly spectacular sight. A denizen of dense jungles with large elliptical leaves up to twenty inches long shed twice a year, the tree has arrived in Thailand relatively recently from Central America.

What makes it so distinctive are two peculiarities: one, pink, waxy, flowers borne not on conventional branches, but sprouting directly from the trunk below the crown; and secondly, large globose fruit that look like huge rusty cannonballs as they dangle on long stems from leafless branches, objects that can remain on the tree for many months.

The heavily scented flowers, especially fragrant at dawn and dusk, are arranged in profuse racemes which are so close together that they can carpet entire sections of the trunk. Each six-petalled flower, in brilliant shades of pink and red, carries a dense yellow mass of stamens at its centre. The blooms are especially attractive to bees,

which visit the flowers for pollen rather than nectar.

The spherical fruits, which can contain hundreds of seeds, are large, even by tropical standards – up to 10 inches (25cm) across – and with a tough, woody shell. Seed dispersal is usually by animals. Not for the small plot, the cannonball tree is more likely to be found in a private park or botanic garden than in your neighbour's patch. But what a sensational addition to your tropical estate. And in the right conditions, the seeds should germinate readily.

You don't expect to encounter the cannonball on a regular basis – I know of only three specimens in Phuket – but other trees with bizarre labels such as the pong-pong and sausage tree, are more widely distributed around the island. Of these, the one you are most likely to encounter is the pong-pong, or *cerbera odollam*. A hardy native of Malaysia, this member of the *apocynaceae* genus grows to a height of about 10 metres and is cultivated in tropical gardens on account of its glossy leaves and continuous display of fragrant clusters of white flowers with yellow centres which open at branch tips. I know several resorts on the island where the pong-pong has been planted at the edges of car parks or other open spaces. There are several, probably self-sown, decorating the road from Chalong as it snakes upwards towards Kata.

But its real appeal for many gardeners lies in its large globose fruit – glossy, green spheres that look most attractive on the tree. If you are contemplating a shady presence, this is definitely one to consider, since the dense crown has layered, evergreen foliage. Moreover, it can be propagated from seed or cuttings and begins flowering after a couple of years. Just remember that in common with most members of the family, the fruits and milky sap are both poisonous. Another species, *C. manghas* grows in the wild and may be easier to cultivate. A smaller tree, it crops up in coastal swaps and thickets behind beaches, though, like the mangrove, it is a much diminished presence.

There it may keep company with the seagrape, or *coccoloba*. Not an Asian native, the seagrape can now be found growing wild along Phuket's shoreline, or employed in gardens as a salt-resistant ornamental tree. Tough and drought proof, it has stiff, prominently veined leaves which are sap green in



The pong pong tree. Photo: Mokie

colour. Almost round, they look very attractive. Hence, one popular name of platter leaf tree.

The flowers are fragrant and appear in racemes up to eight inches long, but it is the long bunches of small, berry-like fruit – reminiscent of peppers – that steal the show. Used locally for making jellies, these green to red clusters give the tree its common name of seagrape. A robust tree and ideal for windy, saline conditions, it is being used more and more by knowledgeable landscapers around the island. Give it full sun and well-drained conditions. A useful shade tree, it is suitable for sizeable gardens.

If you think the seagrape and pong-pong are odd, how much more bizarre is the sausage tree (*kigelia pinnata*). Grown less for its visual appeal than for its novelty value, it is a medium-sized tree from the jungles of west Africa and bears dark red flowers. Unfortunately, they are malodorous and possess a pungent smell.

But again it is the inedible fruit that is the main attraction: in this case, not spherical fruit but sausage shaped monsters that may be more than a foot long and weigh several kilograms. A rival to other behemoths such as *durian* and *jackfruit*, I have not seen the tree in Phuket, but would be delighted to hear of any sightings...

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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Thai trans people push to be 'truly' accepted

AFP

Stethoscope over her white coat, Thai doctor Kachisarah Sridakhot walks hospital corridors hoping to beat a path for other trans women to be fully accepted in the kingdom.

LGBTQ activists won a major victory in March when Thai lawmakers passed a bill that should see same-sex marriages become legal later this year – a first in Southeast Asia.

Now campaigners are hoping to push the government to allow trans men and women to have their gender recognised in official paperwork.

Kachisarah knows the problem all too well – despite identifying as a woman, she is still identified by the government as a man.

"This is discrimination," she told AFP.

The 26-year-old said she has fought for years to be able to express her true gender.

"At medical school, they didn't allow me to dress how I wanted to based on my gender, so I had to wear the male outfit," she said.

"The reason they gave me was that 'patients couldn't accept it', but in fact, [patients] just wanted to get better and they respected us for who we are."

It is not currently possible for a person to change their gender on documents such as ID cards and passports.

This can make even routine tasks like visiting the bank or passing through airport immigration a challenging or humiliating experience for transgender people.

'FEEL LIKE THEY REALLY EXIST'

Thailand has long enjoyed a reputation for tolerance

of the LGBTQ community, hosting yearly pride events attended by locals and visitors from around the world.

But advocates have worked for decades to ensure LGBTQ rights become enshrined in law, struggling against traditional attitudes in a largely conservative Buddhist society.

A 2021 Human Rights Watch report found Thailand provides limited legal protection to trans people, who face harassment, discrimination and stigma.

A growing number of countries around the world allow people to change their legal gender on official documents and Thai activists are keen to enact similar changes in the country.

A first attempt to pass a gender recognition bill, submitted by the progressive Move Forward Party (MFP), was voted down by parliament in February.

Activists say they are eager to push another draft – this time from scholars and campaigners themselves.

The proposed bill would allow individuals the right to declare their gender, rather than be made to be identified by the gender assigned at birth.

Crucially, such a law would also allow trans people easier and safer access to vital medical care.

"People can say if they are male, female or non-binary," Nachale Boonyapisompan, a trans activist who worked on the draft bill, told AFP.

More than 10,000 people – the minimum legal requirement – have signed a petition in support, and the bill is set to be submitted to parliament later this year for consideration.

MFP lawmaker and LGBTQ activist Tunyawaj Kamolwongwat said it would be a monumental step for Thailand.



Thailand has long enjoyed a reputation for tolerance of the LGBTQ community, hosting yearly pride events attended by locals and visitors from around the world. Photo: Lillian Suwanrumpha / AFP

"It will make LGBTQ people feel like they really exist in the society," he told AFP.

'NO SEX STIGMA'

It is an issue that is especially close to Kachisarah's heart.

Hailing from Ubon Ratchathani province, the heartland of Thailand's rural rice-growing northeast, Kachisarah says she was a shy child whose parents were uncomfortable with her self-expression.

She attended medical school – beginning her transition at 17 – eventually becoming a doctor specialising in sexual health.

"I tried to prove myself to be accepted by the majority of society," she explained.

Now, she uses her platform – a TikTok account called 'No Sex Stigma' – to try to counter a dearth of medical knowledge among the LGBTQ community in the kingdom.

Known as 'Dr Bruze' to her 6,000 followers, she shares information about safe sex practices, as well as advice on hormone supplements.

"Some people I know had problems with their liver because they didn't take medication correctly," she said.

Ultimately, she hopes improving education about and for the LGBTQ community will change perceptions.

"If Thai society truly accepts us, we wouldn't have to struggle or prove ourselves."








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POP QUIZ

1. What is the national sport of Pakistan?

2. Who wrote the classic novel 'Little Women'?

3. Who designed the Jolly Roger flag, featuring a skull with crossed swords?

4. Which city served as the capital of Thailand from c.1238-1378 AD?

5. Who is the only honouree with five stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame?

Answers below, centre

SUDOKU

Medium

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

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

Across

1. Blah-blah-blah

4. June honorees

8. Relating to animals

14. "Catch-22" pilot

15. Multivitamin supplement

16. Probable

17. Dating show

20. Gave it a shot

21. Dublin's home

22. Morse Code signal

23. Back

24. Chicken serving

26. Fair

28. Long, dismal cry

32. Biblical verb ending

35. Math term

37. Fish hawk

39. Show in which less is more

42. Old-fashioned women's hood

43. Alliance acronym

44. Jonson work

45. Sledding spot

46. Fast and lively

48. Large lizard

53. Contents of some urns

57. Occurred

Down

1. Barbarians

2. Buddhist who has attained Nirvana

3. Sussex river

4. Medical opinion

5. Chevron competitor

6. Cartoon cry

7. Unkind look

8. Plant life

9. Buenos ____

10. Arthur Godfrey played it

11. Catches

12. Tina Turner, e.g.

13. Strong cleaners

18. Blocks

19. Golfer's concern

24. Bell sound

Across

25. Secretary booboo

27. Suspiration

29. Give or take

30. Garden intruder

31. Stringed instrument

32. Cut

33. Popular cuisine

34. Hot spot

36. Farm layer

37. One of four Holy Roman emperors

38. Propagandist

40. Singaraja is its capital

41. Tale

47. European capital

49. Ninnies

50. Not fulfilled

51. Map abbr.

52. Nature goddess

54. Busy places

55. "The Illinois ____ Bandit" (Zappa song)

56. Emergency supply

57. Entanglements

58. Rod for a hot rod

59. "Enough!"

61. Southern stew

63. Grind

64. Reply to a captain

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

Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

D	U	G	O	N	G	C	Z	A	R	C	R	U		
U	P	R	E	A	R	H	A	V	E	L	I	S		
S	T	O	R	Y	O	F	O	N	E	S	L	I	F	E
T	O	G		W	A	R	Y		P	O	P	E	D	
			C	O	T	T	A		A	C	C	O	S	T
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I	N	E	R	T		S	T	E	T					
G	A	R	R	O	T	E		S	W	A	T	H	E	S
			M	O	D	S			C	O	O	L	S	
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E	N	E		O	D	O	R		G	O	A	L	I	E
D	E	N		P	O	S	Y		S	N	O	T	Y	

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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

1

cremation of a human body requires the same amount of energy as the monthly domestic demands of a single person.

20.1

percent of American workers belonged to a union in 1983. Today, only 11.1% do.

258

fewer hours a year the average European works compared with the average American.

700,000

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6.24 billion

US dollars is how much Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos made in just five minutes on Oct 10, 2017, after Amazon share prices spiked. Last month his net worth was US\$200 billion.

Source: *Uberfacts*

ISLAND VIEW

Moon with a view. Photo by Brian Stamm (taken in Kathu on Apr 17)

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

This week in history

May 3, 1921

The Government of Ireland Act 1920 is passed, dividing Ireland into Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland.

May 4, 1260

Kublai Khan becomes ruler of the Mongol Empire.

May 5, 1980

Operation Nimrod: The British Special Air Service storms the Iranian embassy in London after a six-day siege.

May 6, 1996

The body of former CIA director William Colby is found washed up on a riverbank in southern Maryland, eight days after he disappeared.

May 7, 1946

Tokyo Telecommunications

May 8, 1886

American pharmacist John Pemberton first sells a carbonated beverage named 'Coca-Cola' as a patent medicine.

May 9, 1386

England and Portugal formally ratify their alliance with the signing of the Treaty of Windsor, making it the oldest diplomatic alliance in the world that is still in force. *Source: Wikipedia*

William Colby (centre) with George Bush (left) and US President Ford, 1975.

Engineering (later renamed Sony) is founded with around 20 employees.

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LIVE 89.5 NEWS **TV**

Contact: gm@classactmedia.co.th

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DAILY EVENT UPDATES

ON

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WED 8 MAY



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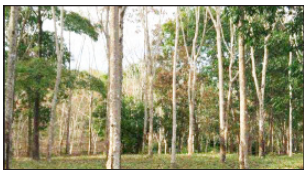


Wednesday BBQ Night

6 PM onwards: All you can eat BBQ buffet cooked to order. Beef, Pork, Chicken, Burgers, Sausages, Fish, Prawns & Squids, salad buffet and veggies, Choice of potatoes, cold and hot sauces, bread, buns & garlic bread. We have a kid's playground zone. Adults: 395 baht P.P. Kids under 12 years old: 195 baht P.P. www.shakersphuket.com www.facebook.com/shakersphuket Oliver, Shakers restaurant 98/18 Vises Road, Rawai 83130, 081 891 4381

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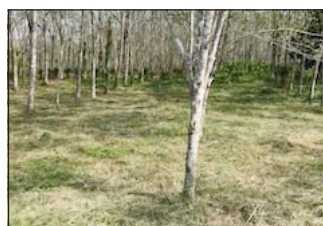
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Photo: Nan Mayura

ANZAC DAWN SERVICE BY PHUKET VETERANS

Anzac Day is a national day of remembrance in Australia and New Zealand that broadly commemorates all Australians and New Zealanders “who served and died in all wars, conflicts, and peacekeeping operations” and “the contribution and suffering of all those who have served”. More recently, the annual event, commemorated at locations around the world, remembers all those who have fallen in military conflict. Over 120 people attended the dawn service on Thursday, Apr 25 on Kamala beach for a very moving remembrance. Lest We Forget.

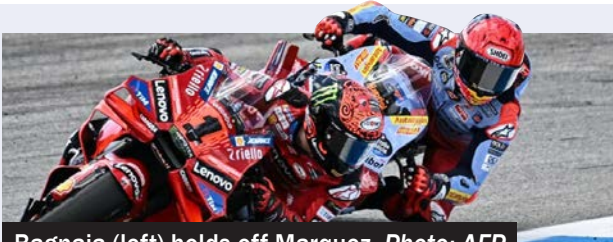


Where to eat in PHUKET

May/June 2024 issue

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Bagnaia (left) holds off Marquez. Photo: AFP

Bagnaia denies home favourite Marquez

MOTO GP

TWO-TIME DEFENDING world champion Francesco Bagnaia won his third successive Spanish MotoGP to deny home favourite Marc Marquez his first win since 2021 in a thrilling race last Sunday (Apr 28).

Bagnaia recorded just his second win of the season on his factory Ducati despite poleman Marquez's gargantuan efforts on his Ducati satellite Gresini bike.

Marquez, whose last pole position was the Portuguese MotoGP in March, 2023, has had several years of fitness and injury problems.

However, the 31-year-old six-time former MotoGP champion laid down a marker that he is back as he recorded his best finish since being runner-up in the Australian MotoGP in

October, 2022.

Marco Bezzecchi took third – his first podium of the season – whilst championship leader Jorge Martin crashed out when leading with 15 laps to go.

Martin, who won Saturday's crash-filled sprint race, retains his lead in the standings, 17 points ahead of Bagnaia.

Despite some bad blood between Marquez and Bagnaia they managed a genuine enough looking hug after they had ridden into the pits following celebratory laps.

"I enjoyed the fight with Marc," said Bagnaia.

"You have to be aggressive with him, I enjoyed it a lot, to see all this crowd, thanks to everyone."

The riders take their show next to the French MotoGP in Le Mans next weekend (May 10-12). *AFP*

Bangkok keen to host Formula One street race

FORMULA ONE

Bangkok Post

Fans of Formula One could soon be treated to the sight of Max Verstappen and Lewis Hamilton roaring around the steamy streets of Bangkok, with Thailand keen to host a race.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin met with Formula One (F1) Group CEO Stefano Domenicali at Government House in Bangkok on Apr 22 to discuss the possibility of staging a Grand Prix on the usually traffic-clogged streets of the Thai capital.

Mr Srettha said he hoped Mr Domenicali's visit would offer the Formula One Group useful insights and allow the company to seek out a venue to hold a Grand Prix as well as see the country's potential to host such a high-profile event.

"Thailand has the capacity to host Formula One in Bangkok," Mr Srettha posted on X after meeting Domenicali.

"If successful, I'm confident that our country will bring impressive memories to others because we have the right potential, capacity and Thai people's hospitality."

No timeframe or detailed plans have been announced, but Thai officials said they envisage the race being run on a street circuit, possibly around the city's



Thai driver Alex Albon of Williams. Photo: AFP

historic centre.

"Basically, if F1 is going to be held in Thailand, we want it to be held on the roads... we are currently working on the matter," government spokesman Chai Watcharong told local media.

Mr Domenicali said his company was excited to visit Thailand, adding he hoped that both parties could cooperate and successfully achieve their goal.

He further explained that he believed cooperation would result in shared benefits, which would reflect positively on Thailand's economy, communities and youth.

Mr Domenicali also confirmed that F1 is keen to host more street races.

There are a total of eight street races confirmed for this season's F1 to be staged in Saudi Arabia, Australia, Miami, Monaco, Canada, Azerbaijan,

Singapore and Las Vegas.

Playing host to a F1 race in Bangkok is part of the Thai government's policy to create opportunities and boost the country's potential to host international events as part of its "soft power" drive.

The meeting between Mr Srettha and Mr Domenicali followed an online meeting during the prime minister's visit to France last month to discuss a possible race in Thailand.

Alex Albon of Williams is the only Thai currently competing in F1 and only the second driver in history to hail from the kingdom.

The first Thai F1 driver was Prince Bira who took part in 19 World Championship races between 1950 and 1954.

The F1 season resumes this weekend with the Miami Grand Prix.

Additional reporting by AFP

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Greece hands Olympic flame to 2024 Paris Games hosts

OLYMPICS

GREECE HANDED OVER THE OLYMPIC flame of the 2024 Games to Paris organisers last Friday (Apr 26) in a ceremony at the Athens marble stadium where the competition was revived nearly 130 years ago.

Hellenic Olympic Committee chairman Spyros Capralos handed the torch to Paris Olympics chief organiser Tony Estanguet at the Panathenaic Stadium, where the first modern Olympics were held in 1896.

Estanguet said the goal for Paris was to organise "spectacular but also more responsible Games, which will contribute towards a more inclusive society".

Organisers want to ensure "that the biggest event in the world plays an accelerating role in addressing the crucial questions of our time," said Estanguet, a member of France's Athens 2004 Olympics team who won gold in the slalom canoe event.

A duo of French champions, Beijing 2022 ice dance gold medalist Gabriella Papadakis and former swimmer Beatrice Hess, one of the most successful Paralympians in history, carried the flame during the final relay leg into the Panathenaic Stadium.

Nana Mouskouri, the 89-year-old Greek singer with a worldwide following, performed the anthems of France and Greece at the ceremony.

After spending the night at the French



The Olympic torch is lit during the handover ceremony on Apr 26. Photo: AFP

embassy in Athens, the began its journey to France on board the 19th century three-masted barque 'Belem'.

The Belem is set to reach Marseille – a city founded by ancient Greek colonists around 600 BCE – on May 8.

Over 1,000 vessels will accompany its approach to the harbour, local officials have said.

French swimmer Florent Manaudou will be the first torch bearer in Marseille. Ten thousand torchbearers will then carry the flame across 64 French territories.

It will travel through more than 450 towns and cities, and dozens of tourist attractions during its 12,000-kilometre (7,500-mile) journey through mainland France and overseas French territories in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific.

On July 26 it will form the centrepiece of the Paris Olympics opening ceremony.

The torch harks back to the ancient Olympics when a sacred flame burned throughout the duration of the Games. *AFP*

Title now a two-horse race

FOOTBALL

AFP

Manchester City saw off a feisty challenge from Nottingham Forest last Sunday (Apr 28) to keep the heat on Arsenal after Mikel Arteta's men held their nerve to beat Tottenham 3-2 and keep their grip on top spot in the Premier League.

The Gunners silenced the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium with a three-goal blast before half-time thanks to a Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg own goal and further strikes from Bukayo Saka and Kai Havertz.

Cristian Romero and Son Heung-min struck for Tottenham after the interval to set up a nervous finish, but Arsenal clung on by their finger tips.

Shortly afterwards, City battled past profligate Forest 2-0 with goals from Josko Gvardiol and Erling Haaland.

Arsenal are on 80 points with just three matches to go, one point clear of City, but the champions crucially have a game in hand and remain firm favourites.

Pep Guardiola's team will clinch an unprecedented fourth successive English title if they win their last five matches.

Meanwhile, Liverpool's fading title hopes were dealt a near-fatal blow on Saturday as West Ham rescued a 2-2 draw against Jurgen Klopp's men.

Klopp's glittering reign at Anfield appears to be ending on a flat note after they dropped points for the fourth time in five league games.

Liverpool would have moved level



Kai Havertz celebrates his goal in Arsenal's 3-2 win at Spurs. Photo: AFP

on points with leaders Arsenal with a victory at West Ham, at least temporarily, but they failed to make the most of their chances and now find themselves five points behind the Gunners.

Klopp also attempted to play down a touchline spat with Mohamed Salah, who was left out of the starting line-up, but the Egyptian fanned the flames, telling reporters "there's going to be a fire today if I speak."

Elsewhere, Aston Villa's top four challenge was dented by a 2-2 draw against Chelsea, whose furious manager Mauricio Pochettino claimed VAR has "damaged the Premier League" after his side had a late goal controversially disallowed.

Manchester United's push for Europe stalled after a 1-1 draw with Burnley as

Everton secured their top-flight status with a 1-0 home win against Brentford.

However, Sheffield United were officially relegated after a 5-1 defeat at Newcastle, while Wolves deepened Luton's woes with a 2-1 win and Fulham drew 1-1 with Crystal Palace.

Bournemouth beat Brighton 3-0 with goals from Marcos Senesi, Enes Unal and Justin Kluivert to set a new club Premier League points record.

Meanwhile, Leicester City were promoted from the Championship to the Premier League last weekend after rivals Leeds United crashed to a shock 4-0 defeat to Queens Park Rangers.

The result leaves Leicester top of the Championship on 94 points with two games to play while Leeds stay second on 90 but with just one match left.



Thailand's Erawan Garnier. Photo: Bangkok Post

Olympic dream over for War Elephants

FOOTBALL

THAILAND'S DREAM OF making it to the 2024 Paris Olympics ended on Apr 22 when they crashed out of the AFC U23 Asian Cup in Qatar after losing their final Group C game to Tajikistan 1-0.

Tajikistan's first ever victory at the tournament was secured by a late Manuchehr Safarov goal in the final minutes of added time.

Iraq stunned defending champions Saudi Arabia 2-1 in the other group match, meaning both West Asian sides advanced to the quarter-finals from the pool.

The result meant heartbreak for Thailand who were in prime position to book a spot in the next stage prior to kick-off.

Despite the disappointing end for Thailand head coach Issara Sritaro is optimistic about the future.

"It was an unexpected result, but the boys did really well. I am sorry we couldn't do what everyone expected of us," said Issara.

"The problem is the recovery between each game. It was pretty difficult for our players to be in their peak condition physically. We created a lot of chances but couldn't finish them."

Issara added that his young War Elephants side had plenty of potential.

"I would give a big credit to all the boys. They performed better than we expected. There were some outstanding players like Erawan Garnier, Waris Choothong, and both our centre-backs Channaphat Buaphan and Songwut Kraikruan."

The Thais beat Iraq 2-0 in their first game before suffering a heavy 5-0 loss to the Saudis in their second match.

Bangkok Post

PGA Tour vet Steele stays strong to secure maiden LIV Golf title

GOLF

FORMER PGA TOUR STALWART Brendan Steele captured his maiden LIV Golf title last Sunday (Apr 28) in Adelaide.

The 41-year-old American led overnight by one and after an early bogey refocused to reel off five straight birdies on the front nine in a four-under-par 68 to finish 54 holes at the Grange Golf Club at 18-under.

In front of bumper crowds and a carnival atmosphere, South Africa's 11-time European Tour winner and 2010 British Open champion Louis Oosthuizen came second after seven birdies in his 65 with Spanish two-time major winner Jon Rahm among a group of five to finish a further shot back.

Alongside him tied for third were Charl Schwartzel, Andy Ogletree, Joaquin Niemann and Dean Burmester, who won the previous event in Miami.

It was Steele's first LIV win since joining Phil Mickelson's "Hyflyers" team last year following 12 years on the PGA Tour that garnered three titles.

He credited Mickelson for a breakthrough victory that earned him US\$4 million (B148mn).

"I had a good talk with him yesterday, sat just the two of us for about an hour and he was telling me there is no reason I can't be one of the best players in the world," he said.



Brendan Steele with the trophy. Photo: AFP

"He went through every part of my game and said 'you just need to start believing in it'."

"And I thought okay, if one of the best players ever in the game is telling me that, I better start believing it."

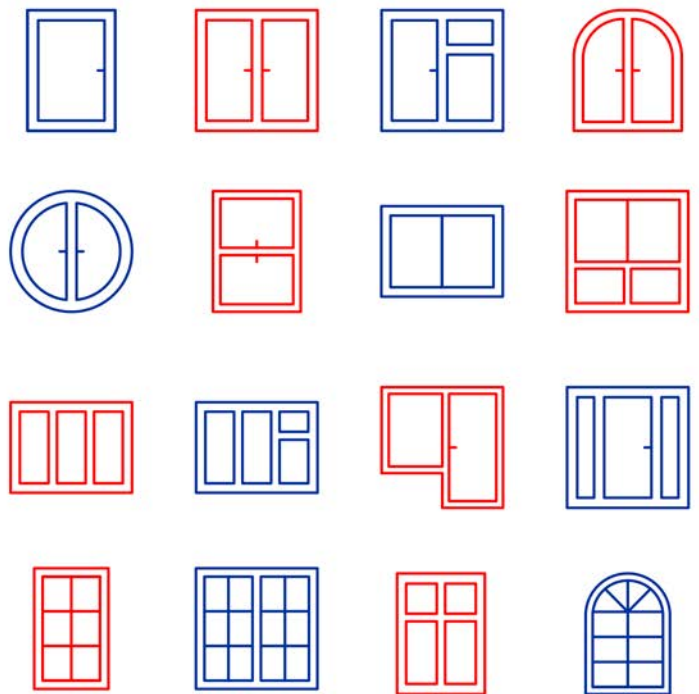
Steele began with a one stroke advantage, but dropped a shot on the third as Oosthuizen picked up three birdies in his opening five holes for a four-way share of the lead.

With the pressure on, Steele holed a clutch putt at the 13th for birdie to again move two clear before a birdie from Oosthuizen at the 17th set up a tense finale.

But Steele lived up to his surname with an approach shot at the 18th to within six feet to secure the par he needed to win. AFP



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Sport



Thailand could host F1 street race > p14

RUN FOR ALL



Phuket gears up for annual Laguna Marathon

Children will get the chance to take on the 2-kilometre kids' run at this year's event. Photo: Supplied

MARATHON

The Phuket News
editor3@classactmedia.co.th

This year's Laguna Phuket Marathon is set to welcome over 10,000 runners and visitors from more than 40 countries to compete in what has become Southeast Asia's favourite destination marathon.

Presented by Supersports and held on the weekend of June 8-9 at Laguna Phuket, the award-winning marathon is one of the longest-running international sports events on Phuket and is driving the island's resurgence as a world-class sports tourism destination.

The picture-postcard course passes the stunning

beaches of Nai Yang, Layan and Bang Tao and also takes runners through local villages and lush tropical landscapes.

The popular two-day format sees the 2-kilometre kids' run, 5km and 10km take place on the Saturday morning (June 8), with the Half Marathon (21.0975km), Marathon Relay (42.195km) and Marathon (42.195km) taking place the following morning.

Expected to contribute hundreds of millions of baht to the island's tourism economy through accommodation bookings, food and beverage spending, and more, the Laguna Phuket Marathon is a showcase of Thailand's soft power, and is seeing a surge in interest amongst international participants.

"Since the very first event 18 years ago, Laguna Phuket Marathon has always appealed to Thai and international runners and this year we are seeing a surge in international interest, especially from Asia-Pacific countries," said Raimund Wellenhofer, Race Director at GAA Events, who organise the marathon.

"Our top five international participating countries for 2024 are Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and the United Kingdom," he added.

"It's also encouraging to see a good mix of new faces and returnees. From children and families to age-groupers and top talent across Thailand and from overseas, the event attracts all demographics and it's great to see many people

staying on in Phuket to vacation afterwards."

'MAKE A DIFFERENCE'

Marathon organisers are inspiring people to exercise and live a healthier lifestyle with this year's event theme, "Awake Your Inner Dragon".

"Laguna Phuket has long seen Phuket's sports tourism potential and through our support of the Laguna Phuket Marathon over the past 18 years, we have contributed to Phuket being today recognised as a world-class sports destination," said Prapa Hemmin, Assistant Vice President, Events and Strategic Partnerships at Laguna Phuket.

"It's equally important to us that the benefits from

events such as the Laguna Phuket Marathon are shared, and each year we work with the local community to ensure this happens. We invite all runners and spectators to make a difference locally this year and support Laguna Phuket Foundation's Children First Fund (CFF) through which we support more than 400 underprivileged children in orphanages on the island."

Nathapat Sukitanon, Director of Activities Promotion Division of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, said, "We are proud to support the Laguna Phuket Marathon by Supersports every year and believe that the event helps to draw both Thai and foreign visitors to Phuket. Sports tourism events like this are

important as they contribute significant revenue to the local economy and local entrepreneurs."

Having set the highest organisational standards for 18 years, Laguna Phuket Marathon is organised by GAA Events and is an internationally-certified and measured run course by World Athletics (WA) and Association of International Marathons and Distance Races (AIMS), and is also a qualifying event for the Boston Marathon.

Registration is open online at www.phuketmarathon.com/registration.

For more information visit: www.phuketmarathon.com; www.facebook.com/phuketmarathon; or @phuketmarathon

Overseas students pass the Phuket Muay Thai test

MUAY THAI

A GROUP OF STUDENTS FROM China who recently visited Phuket to study Muay Thai have been officially presented with certificates denoting they had passed the course.

The 100-strong group took part in the 10-day "TY Training The Trainer @Phuket Thailand" course which ran between Apr 7-17 at the T&Y Muay Thai gym on Soi Ta-ia in Chalong.

The course was organised by local company T&Y Group in collaboration with the Sports Association of Phuket and is part of the government's soft power drive of promoting the national sport to

boost tourism and revenue into the country.

The course had a specific focus on developing the requisite skillset to enable the students to become qualified trainers of the sport themselves, therefore allowing them to teach others when back in their homeland.

This included general combat techniques involving punching, kicking and the correct use of knees and elbows as well as learning the science behind muscle relaxation, a key component in reducing fatigue, stiffness and injury.

Officials certificates were distributed to the students on Apr 17 at a ceremony at Kan Eng restaurant in Chalong overseen by Thammawat Wongcharoenyot, president of the



Photo: Sports Association of Phuket

Sports Association of Phuket. However, it was not confirmed exactly how many of the visiting party were students on the course and therefore had received certificates.

Joining Mr Thammawat were Damrong Chaisena, Director of the Phuket office of the Sports Authority of Thailand; Ratchadaphon Oin, Director of the Phuket Tourism and

Sports office; and Prachan Pachantabutr, Vice President of the Sports Association of Phuket.

Following the official presentation of certificates to students there was a dinner and a live Muay Thai performance by several local athletes.

It has not been confirmed by officials connected to the "TY Training The Trainer @Phuket Thailand" course whether future overseas delegations will visit Phuket to complete similar courses.

However, given Phuket's standing as an internationally renowned centre for training and developing local and international talent, it seems likely that further similar courses will be staged.

There are 43 officially registered

Muay Thai camps across the island, including the famous Tiger Muay Thai and Bangtao Muay Thai & MMA gyms, while the island also boasts two top-class standard boxing stadiums in Patong Beach Boxing Stadium and Bangla Boxing Stadium.

A raft of local and international talent has either been based in Phuket or graced the various Muay Thai gyms here at some stage on their way to starring on the global stage through promotions such as the UFC and ONE Championship; Alexander Volkanovski, Anatoly Malykhin, Loma Lookboonmee, Rafael Fiziev, Petr Yan, Valentina Shevchenko, Celest Hansen and Israel Adesanya are just a handful of such examples.

The Phuket News