

AUSSIE MP 'CAUTIOUS' OVER PHUKET MODEL OF GANJA ROLLOUT > P2

SURF SURVIVAL



Rescue workers recover the body of 22-year-old Senegal national Cheikhouna Ba, who drowned off Freedom Beach last weekend. Photo: Kusoldharm Patong via Eakkapop Thongtub

AUSSIES LIFEGUARDS ARRIVE TO HELP HOTELS RAMP UP WATER SAFETY

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

A team from Life Saving Victoria in Australia are on the island to provide essential training to hotel staff at the tourist-popular beaches along Phuket's west coast in the hope of preventing more drowning deaths during the island's notorious southwest monsoon.

The very experienced lifeguards arrived after Australian Ambassador to Thailand Dr Angela Macdonald joined a 'Collaboration in Water Safety' event in Patong on July 25 to mark World Drowning Prevention Day.

World Drowning Prevention Day is marked each year on July 25 to increase awareness about preventative and safety measures, as well as highlight the tragic and profound impact of drowning on families and communities.

"Australia is a proud supporter of World Drowning Prevention Day in Phuket. Since our Consulate-General in Phuket was established in 2016, we have focused on supporting water safety measures on the island and will continue to do so. Thailand and Australia face common challenges and together we can share experiences and learn from each other to decrease

drownings in both countries," said Ambassador Macdonald.

Joining her as the on-the-ground support for the project was Matthew Barclay, the Australian Consul-General for Phuket.

The seminar panel discussed key issues relating to water safety, and one popular proposal was to support the new committee recently established by the Governor to implement and oversee beach safety standards. The audience consisted of hotel general managers, consular representatives, local government officials, swimming and lifesaving groups and non-profit organisations.

At the forefront of the water safety drive is Jayne MacDougall, Executive Director of the Phuket Hotels Association, who has organised water safety and lifeguard training in Phuket for more than 20 years.

"The impact of drowning on a family, a community and a destination are profound. Investing time and effort in training those at the frontline will prevent drowning and make Phuket a safer place for all. In 2023, the World Health Organisation is encouraging us all to 'Do One Thing' to save lives and prevent drowning. By taking simple steps, such as installing barriers near water, providing safe places for...

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News



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Marijuana rollout questioned

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

A Member of Parliament of the Australian state of Victoria has voiced his concerns over lack of awareness regarding the laws regulating the use of cannabis and how the availability of marijuana on the island may land tourists, especially Australians, in trouble.

Wayne Farnham, State Member for Narracan and also Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition in Victoria John Pesutto, is in Phuket to observe the state of the island's cannabis industry, and its effects.

"The Victorian Parliament looks like it is going to introduce a bill to legalise the consumption of cannabis in Victoria, a bill that will be put forward by the Cannabis Party," Mr Farnham explained.

Mr Farnham made his position clear on decriminalising marijuana: "On a personal level I am against the blanket legalisation of cannabis in Victoria. I am not against cannabis use prescribed by medical officials."

"I have been coming to



Wayne Farnham, State Member for Narracan in the Victorian Parliament in Australia, meets with local officials and police in Patong to discuss the cannabis situation in Phuket and its impact on tourists. Photo: The Phuket News

Phuket since 2009 and in this time I have seen many changes to the Island, but I was very curious as to why the change of heart on the consumption of drugs in Thailand, when [previously] it was such a very strict country when it came to the consumption of drugs in this country," Mr Farnham told *The Phuket News*.

"I was also curious to see how it has affected the

tourism industry in Phuket and the general attitude of the tourists in the country to the legalisation of cannabis," he added.

Since his arrival in Phuket, Mr Farnham has met with the Australian Consul-General Matthew Barclay, police officials and health officials. "I have also spoken with many tourists on the island and have received some very interesting

feedback," he said.

"It is clear to me that from the start the legalisation of cannabis was more intended for medicinal use only, a tradition that health officials told me was around 100 years ago and that it was a forgotten practice, a practice that could really help those suffering from pain with terminal illness.

"In conversations with the local police it seems as

though the laws around cannabis have not been finalised yet, although there are laws around the consumption of cannabis (basically only in your own home) and the selling of cannabis. It seems at the moment they seem like guidelines rather than the law," he noted.

The ubiquity of cannabis stores and cafes across the island and the casual attitude by tourists who think smoking marijuana in public areas is legal are two key concerns.

"I have not noticed on any store a sign that states, 'Do not consume cannabis in the street' and I have witnessed many tourists smoking as they are walking around. I feel more education for tourists needs to happen so they understand it is not a Wild West of consumption," Mr Farnham said.

"In my conversations with tourists they say things like, 'How good is this... We can smoke weed on the street.' But when I tell them that it is illegal to do that, they are genuinely shocked and often comment, 'No, it's legal here. It's okay.'

"I feel more education of

tourists needs to happen before someone lands themselves in jail and then has the nightmare of getting out," Mr Farnham urged.

Mr Farnham noted that in his conversation with cannabis vendors and local Thai residents, "It is very clear to me that the average person is not really in favour of the practice [smoking marijuana], but nearly all agree on the use of cannabis for medicinal purposes.

"I feel it is too early to tell if the addiction to cannabis has had an impact on the local community and I will be watching the data carefully on that," he added.

"I really hope that they get the laws sorted out sooner than later because my real fear for the island is that it may get out of control and spoil what is so great about Thailand and Phuket in particular," Mr Farnham said.

"I will be watching the data in the future, but if I have to make a decision based on this visit, it will not be something I will be supporting in the Victorian Parliament unless it is only for medicinal use only," Mr Farnham concluded.

Hotels ramp up efforts to bolster water safety, prevent drownings

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...children, teaching swimming and water safety, and training hotel staff in first aid, we can save many lives," Ms MacDougall said.

Phuket Vice Governor Danai Sunantarod, who officiated the opening ceremony of the event, held at the Holiday Inn Resort Phuket in Patong, noted, "Tourism in Thailand is coming back to recover, so the risk of tourists drowning is also increasing. Phuket and its charm of the sea is attracting both domestic and international tourists, and the number of tourists coming is more than last year.

"However, during the rainy season, or the 'monsoon season' on the Andaman coast, there are unpredictable dangers that may arise from the sea... We still hear about deaths of tourists in popular beach



Hotel staff 'rescue' a participant from the surf as part of the training held this past week. Photo: Jayne MacDougall / Phuket Water Safety Academy

areas, with tourists swept off rocks or swept out to sea by strong currents. This is a problem that must be taken seriously," he said.

Vice Governor Danai's warning of the dangers of Phuket's surf at this time of year was echoed in the drowning death of a Senegalese man at Freedom Beach, south of

Patong, just four days later.

Cheikhouna Ba, 22, was swimming with friends when he was pulled out to sea by a strong current last Friday (July 28). A search for Mr Ba was launched as soon as his friends reported him missing, but his body was not found until it washed ashore at Freedom Beach last Sunday

morning (July 30).

Red 'no swimming' flags were clearly posted at the beach, as they had been at many of Phuket's key beaches for days while a weather warning was in effect over last weekend.

The weather warning, extended from July 30 through Aug 2, specifically urged tourists to respect red flags at the beaches. Patong Surf Life Saving last Friday (July 28) posted a video showing yet another tourist being escorted out of the treacherous surf, along with a heartfelt plea for all tourists to heed the warnings of lifeguards.

Lifeguards and regular beach-goers for years have spoken out about tourists endangering themselves by ignoring red flags posted at the beach, marking where it is too dangerous to enter the water.

The latest project to train

hotel staff is hoped to prevent more deaths at Phuket's key beaches. Spearheaded by Phuket Hotels Association and led by professional trainers from Life Saving Victoria, the two-week series of intensive training sessions will be offered to hotel staff who work near swimming pools or beaches. Before the training even began, more than 50 hotel team members had signed up so far to join the three courses, including security guards, waiters, sports staff and kids' club supervisors.

"Following classroom sessions, the participants will train in the swimming pool and the sea to teach them exactly what to do in the event of an emergency. This will include water rescue, resuscitation and first aid techniques, with specific sessions on how to deal with incidents such as injured limbs, sunstroke, cuts and bleeding, choking, and

heart attacks. Trainees will also be instructed how to check the sea conditions and look for potential hazards, such as strong currents," Phuket Hotels Association explained in its announcement of the project.

"Two professional life-saving trainers from LSV [Life Saving Victoria], both with extensive lifesaving experience in Australian pools and beaches, Peter Gibney and Jack Kennedy, have travelled to Phuket to conduct these intensive courses. They are being ably supported by two Phuket-based lifesaving trainers. This marks the latest example of Phuket Hotels Association's strategy to improve health and safety at the island's hotels and resorts, with properties regularly undertaking lifesaving and first aid training," the association added.

Airport to allow 'all taxi' area

The Phuket News
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Phuket International Airport is to have an 'all taxi' area where all legally registered, legally operating taxis can pick up tourists at the island's key tourism portal.

The confirmation came via a statement issued by Phuket International Airport on July 25, released by Phuket MP Somchart Techathavorncharoen, the successful Move Forward Party candidate for Phuket District 1.

The three-page statement, marked as a "clarification" and addressed to Mr Somchart, was signed by Monchai Tanode, General Manager of Phuket International Airport under the Phuket branch of Airports of Thailand (AoT).

The statement appeared to be a response to the slew of issues raised in a formal complaint submitted by Mr Somchart in May.

In response to complaints that tourists were forced to walk through the rain to access the bus stop at the airport, Mr Monchai said that the parking area for the bus has now been moved to a covered area.



Tourists exit Phuket airport. Photo: AoT Phuket / file

Regarding complaints that there should also be a bus stop at the international terminal, Mr Monchai responded that a covered walkway has now been installed and tourists can walk the 200 metres required while protected from the rain.

Regarding tourists walking out to wait for a taxi outside the airport, spotlights and signposts have been installed and the airport plans to build a "public transport centre" in the Phuket airport area in 2024.

"As for the area for all

types of taxis to pick up tourists, currently it is in the process of finding a solution to the problem with the relevant department," Mr Monchai wrote.

Mr Monchai made special mention that the airport could not allow taxis that were not fully legal to operate on airport grounds.

He said that the airport was in no way involved with limousines or other vehicles operating at the airport under concessions taking tourists

to tour shops without their permission. The airport is to create a channel to receive complaints of such behaviour by airport drivers and would be able to check the vehicle's GPS system, he said.

Mr Monchai confirmed there are two companies operating at the airport under concessions: Phuket Business Car Service Cooperative Co Ltd and Phuket Mai Khao Sakhu Co Ltd.

Regarding the complaint that there were no signs even

pointing tourists to the areas where metered taxis at the airport must wait for passengers, or where the bus stood waiting for them, the airport has now installed signs directing people to those areas, Mr Monchai said.

Regarding complaints that the entrance gate to the domestic terminal has a "180-degree curve", Mr Monchai responded that the airport is looking into the problem in order to come up with a safe solution.

Mr Monchai's response to the complaints included photos evidencing where action had already been taken.

Of note, while the "response" was posted publicly by MP Somchart and the Phuket Info Center, at time of press AoT Phuket still had yet to post the response itself.

After submitting his formal request in May, Mr Somchart explained on his Facebook page, "I have sent complaints and suggestions from people in Phuket about tourists dragging their luggage in the rain to get a taxi through an electronic system outside Phuket Airport."

The formal request was addressed to Suthipong Kongpool, Director General of

the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand (CAAT), with a copy addressed to the Minister of Transport. The letter was also copied to Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew and Phuket airport General Manager Monchai Tanode.

Mr Somchart explained in the letter that had received complaints of tourists dragging their luggage through the rain to reach the main road in front of the airport just so they could use a taxi ordered by an app.

Not expressly noted in the letter, but commonly understood, is that such tourists would rather choose the inconvenience in plain refusal to use the taxi cooperative cartel drivers operating at the airport.

"Airports in Thailand should provide convenience and safety for tourists to access their legally hired cars by providing a parking for pickup point with signs for tourists inside the airport, as is done in foreign countries such as Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, India, etc," Mr Somchart wrote.

"In my opinion, inconvenience to tourists is one of the obstacles in the Phuket tourism industry," he added.

Israeli man, 19, on antidepressants taken into protective care after romp

A 19-YEAR-OLD MAN learning Muay Thai at a training camp in Bang Tao was taken into protective care last week after he was found naked and bleeding from a serious cut to his hand at a petrol station in Cherg Talay.

Officers from the Cherg Talay Police were called to the Caltex petrol station in Baan Pasak at 10:30pm on July 25.

Cherg Talay Police Deputy Chief Pol Lt Col Sutham Rattanasawangwong and fellow officers, along with rescue workers from Cherg Talay Tambon Administrative Organisation (OrBorTor), arrived to find the man with a towel wrapped around him that was provided by a petrol station staffer.

The man appeared to be suffering hallucinations and was bleeding heavily from a large wound on his right hand. The man was administered first aid, and took a long time to be convinced to be taken to hospital for stitches.



Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

Police reported that the man was an Israeli national staying at an apartment nearby. He was enrolled to learn Muay Thai at a boxing camp in the Bang Tao Beach area.

Officers went to the man's apartment, to bring him fresh clothes, his wallet and mobile phone, and found blood in the stairwell leading to the man's apartment on the fourth floor.

Inside the apartment officers found belongings strewn across the room. The glass door to the balcony had

been shattered, and officers found antidepressants issued by a private hospital.

At last report the man was still in protective care while officers continue their investigation.

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



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PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

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SUN AUGUST 6



High: +31°

Low: +27°

Wind 11 m/s

MON AUGUST 7



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Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s

TUE AUGUST 8



High: +32°

Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s

WED AUGUST 9



High: +30°

Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s

THU AUGUST 10



High: +30°

Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s



Photo: Wichit Police

Women caught with 40k meth pills, 2kg of ice

POLICE HAVE ARRESTED TWO WOMEN in Wichit found with 40,000 methamphetamine pills (ya bah) and two kilogrammes of crystal meth (ya ice).

Wichit Police announced that the two women were arrested in front of a parcel delivery company in Moo 4, Wichit, last Saturday (July 29).

The women – named by police only as “Ms Wan”, 31, from Phatthalung, and “Ms Ya”, 21, from Prachuap Khiri Khan (not their real names) – were in a black, Phuket-registered Toyota Vios that was stopped and searched by officers.

Wichit Police explained that they had been informed that the two women would arrive at the parcel delivery office to collect a large box containing drugs.

Officers moved in and stopped and searched the car after the women had collected the parcel.

Inside the box officers found four packs containing a total of 40,000 ya bah pills and two packs containing a total of two kilogrammes of ya ice.

Officers also seized two mobile phones from the women.

The pair were taken to Wichit Police Station, where the women told police that they did not sell the drugs directly. They were paid to deliver them for others to sell.

The women said they were not paid much for transporting the drugs, and usually were paid in drugs, not cash.

Both women were charged with joint possession of a Category 1 narcotic for sale, while police continue their investigation into the drug operation. *Eakkapop Thongtub*

Low-cost housing among projects to help the poor

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Two projects currently underway in Phuket have been created with special focus on helping the poor, including affordable housing and a market to provide household essentials at discounted prices.

Rangsan Chayanthamaphun of the National Housing Authority Phuket office (Keha Phuket) is calling for people to book units in the new Community Housing and Community Services Project in Phuket (Thalang), Phase 2, in Srisoonthorn.

The project of three-storey condominium buildings features a total of 853 units. Only 112 units have been reserved by the public with 741 units remaining available, Mr Rangsan explained.

The one-bedroom, one-bathroom units cover a standard area size of 33 square metres. The units feature a dining area and balcony, with a starting price of B620,000, Mr Rangsan noted.

“For those interested, the booking deposit is B1,000, and there is currently a promotion with a 5% discount (about B31,000).

“In the case of hire-purchase from the NHA, interest is 4% (per annum), and free common area fee for six months, as well as free air conditioning or mosquito screens worth no more than B20,000,” he added.



Image: National Housing Authority, Phuket

“The project is located on Thepkasattri Rd, about 16 kilometres from the centre of Phuket. It is near Phuket International Airport and the project has complete facilities,” Mr Rangsan said.

Mr Rangsan advised people with inquiries about the project to call 09-69357528 or 09-10471280, or the Phuket Provincial Housing Office at 076-617246-9.

Established in 1973, the NHA's prime objective is to provide housing for low and middle income earners and to provide financial assistance to those who need to have their own housing.

The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) last year launched a low-cost rental housing scheme to help low-income earners that will see 100,000 homes built nationwide in four years. The housing is offered to people who

do not earn more than B30,000 a month.

MARKET FORCES

Meanwhile, the Phuket Provincial Commerce Office will hold a special market during the first week of each month from August through December to help poor residents cope with high prices of household essentials.

The market will be held in front of the old Provincial Hall on Narisorn Rd in Phuket Town.

Phuket Provincial Administration Organisation (PPAO) Deputy President Tiwat Seedokbuab explained on July 27 that the special ‘Blue Flag’ market will be held to help “reduce the cost of living in Phuket”.

“The price of consumer goods has increased. As a result, the cost of living for people is also higher,” said Pathumporn Yamkerd of the Phuket Commerce Office.

Egyptian girl dies at Phang Nga waterfall

A 6-YEAR-OLD EGYPTIAN girl travelling with her parents was found dead at the Song Phraek Waterfall in Phang Nga after she slipped and fell into the fast-moving water last week.

Officers at Mueang Phang Nga Police were informed of the incident by Kaman (sub-district chief) of Song Phraek at around 1:20pm on July 26.

The girl had fallen into the water at Ton Song Phraek Waterfall, in Moo 3, Song Phraek, at about 12:40pm.

A search was launched immediately with locals residents and officers joining the efforts. The girl's body was found trapped under a rock about 100 metres away about



Photo: PR Phang Nga

an hour later.

Police and other officials arrived to begin their own investigations into the girl's death.

The girl's body was taken to Phang Nga Hospital as officials continue their investigation into the incident.

Eakkapop Thongtub

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By Stephff

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Phuket marks His Majesty's birthday

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew led a series of ceremonies to pay homage to His Majesty King Vachiralongkorn to honour the monarch on his 71st birthday last Friday (July 28).

The official events to honour the Royal birthday began at Phuket Provincial Hall at 7:30am with a mass blessing ceremony led by the abbot of Wat Thepwanaram (Wat Manik), followed by the giving of alms to 50 monks to make merit for His Majesty.

At 8:30am, Governor Narong led officials in a ceremony at the Phuket Auditorium, located at the Phuket Provincial Administration Center on Tha Kraeng Rd in Phuket Town, to pledge an oath of allegiance and vow "to be good civil servants of the land for the year 2023", said an official report of the events.

The event included the playing of the royal anthem and anthem of the King, with all present singing in unison.

At 5pm there were a blessings ceremony and a candle-lighting ceremony at the Auditorium to offer blessings to His Majesty the King.

Phuket officials held a series of special events in the days leading up to last Friday to honour the 71st birthday of his Majesty King Vajiralongkorn.



Photo: PR Phuket

In Baan Kuku, Ratsada, Phuket Vice Governor Danai Sunantarod on July 25 led community development volunteers and members of community groups, organisations and networks as well as general local residents in a series of activities to honour the royal birthday.

Vice Governor Danai paid respects to an image of His Majesty The King before declaring the activities officially underway.

The group planted tree saplings and along Soi Mae Klin, at

the entrance to the Baan Kuku Community Development Volunteer Leadership Center, in Moo 3, Ratsada, and held a general cleanup around the Khao To Chae Monastery.

The group also together took the pledge, "We do good deeds with our hearts", as is traditional with activities held as in association with royal commemorations.

At Klong Mudong, in Moo 6, Wichit, Vice Governor Danai led another event to release aquatic

animals as part of the activities held to commemorate His Majesty's birthday.

Present for the event was Sitthipol Muangsong of the Phuket Fisheries Office, along with Muang Phuket District Chief Pairote Srilamoon, Wichit Mayor Kreetha Chotiwitpipat and other officials, along with students and members of the public.

In addition to paying homage to His Majesty, the release of aquatic animals also helped local marine

life to recover from depleted fish stocks, which brought benefit to everyone, Mr Sitthipol said.

The aquatic animals released today comprised fry, shrimplets and fingerlings of plum shrimp, red snapper, sea bass and gold snapper.

Mr Sitthipol noted that the area where the release was held was originally called 'Hua Tha', meaning 'entrance to the canal'.

The area has long been known for fishing, with fishing supporting local villagers.

"It is a tourist attraction in terms of the local community's way of life. There is an area to sit and relax. There are canoeing activities, and a monkey-watching spot and a fish-raising area in the fishermen's cages," he said.

"Klong Mudong is considered a mangrove forest and is a nursery for aquatic animals. It is a source of food and growth, and it is an important ecological system in terms of useful resources, for the forest, the marine life and the livelihood of the villagers.

"Therefore, this aquatic animal release activity will help the aquatic resources to be restored. It will help the populations of natural aquatic animals to recover in the coastal area around Wichit. Coastal fishermen in this area will be able to continue to make a living by fishing and generate income for their families," he added.

Leatherback returns to lay eggs on Karon Beach

A LARGE LEATHERBACK sea turtle, first spotted on Karon Beach last week, later returned to the same part of Phuket's western coast to lay eggs.

Marine life experts from the Phuket Marine Biological Center (PMBC) were called to Karon Beach on the evening of July 27 after the return of the leatherback turtle, which was first seen near Centara Grand Beach Resort on July 25.

Officials from the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) carefully excavated the sand to find a nest of 129 turtle eggs, Rawai Mayor Aroon Solos confirmed.

Mr Aroon did not elaborate on how many eggs were considered fertile by the specialists. According to the Phuket Info Center, the nest contained 92 eggs viable of producing hatchlings.

As the turtle nest was below the high tide line, the eggs were then transferred to a safe place at the PMBC facilities at Cape Panwa.



A leatherback turtle returned and a nest with 92 healthy eggs was found on Karon Beach on July 27. Photo: DMCR via Aroon Solos

Normally, it takes 50-60 days for young leatherback turtles to hatch.

After the first visit of 'Karon mum', as the Phuket Info Center referred to the mother turtle, officials conducted thorough checks on Karon Beach, but there was no confirmation of any other eggs found. It is now believed that early reports of the turtle laying eggs during her first visit were incorrect.

The initial reports also claimed that the leatherback was the first turtle to return to lay eggs at Karon Beach in 20 years.

In their comments following previous turtle nest

discoveries, the DMCR experts explained that it is not unusual for a leatherback turtle to visit a certain location multiple times and make several nests during the egg-laying season.

During the main egg-laying period, from November through March, three leatherback turtle nests were found in Phuket. The first nest was discovered on Mai Khao Beach on Dec 11. The second nest was found near Amanpuri resort on Feb 27. The third discovery was made on Mar 1 at a location named in the reports as Sakhu Bay.

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Ready for medical tourism boom

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Bumrungrad International Hospital (BIH) is spending B4.3 billion on a 150-bed boutique hospital in Mai Khao in anticipation of Phuket's much-expected success in its developing medical tourism sector.

The 16.3-rai site has already been acquired opposite Blue Canyon Country Club in Phuket, and was located just three kilometers from the Phuket International Airport, David Boucher, BIH's Chief Partnerships Officer, told the large gathering of about 80 attendees at the British Chamber of Commerce Thailand (BCCT) Multi-Chamber Phuket Evening on Medical Tourism held at the Courtyard by Marriott Phuket Town earlier this month.

The first phase of the Bumrungrad campus in Phuket will include the 150-bed boutique hospital and an advanced diagnostic and anti-ageing center.

Once complete, services offered at the new Phuket facilities will include VitalLife Wellness and Anti-Aging, Family & Internal Medicine, Cardiology, Orthopedic & Spine Surgery, Cosmetic Surgery, Gender Affirmation and Urology, among others.

"It's not a secret... It's incredibly bullish. I can feel the optimism just



Photo: Fabrice Bruneau

by driving around the island," Mr Boucher said during his presentation, 'Medical Value Travel'.

"Bumrungrad has had demand for a clinical presence in Phuket for many years. Phuket is an ideal market to supplement Thailand's worldwide leading destination for medical travelers," he later told *The Phuket News*.

"There is an increasing demand worldwide for travelers to seek care abroad. Multiple drivers are fueling this growth, including the search for safe, quality care, excellent service and financial savings," he added.

"Phuket offers a compelling healthcare opportunity, with 425,000

permanent residents, 5.4 million visitors in pre-COVID 2019, about 1,800 hotels, excellent restaurants, hundreds of tour guides and countless vistas and adventures to discover," he added.

Regarding the resident population on the island, Mr Boucher notes, "This is important because like with Bumrungrad in Bangkok, our first and most immediate focus is with local Thai and expat patients.

"Secondly, Phuket received approximately 5.4 million visitors in pre-COVID 2019 and almost half of the world's population can reach Phuket within a six-hour flight."

Mr Boucher himself was on his

sixth visit to Phuket, and expects to move to Phuket within the coming months.

"Post-COVID, a lot more people are crossing borders for elective procedures and for medications," Mr Boucher explained.

Many people were exploring options outside their home countries due to the volume of procedures delayed by the pandemic, causing huge backlogs, he said.

The UK National Health Service (NHS) waiting list is a backlog of about 10.4 million procedures. In the US alone the number of procedures for cataracts that are waiting to be performed is about 26 million, he added.

"In Ontario, there is a backlog of about 1 million elective surgeries, and that's just that one province in Canada," Mr Boucher said.

"There are a number of countries around the world that have been working aggressively over the last seven to 10 years to improve their in-country care, such as Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE... Outside of the US, the UAE has more Drake-commission accredited hospitals (Drake & Scull International) than any other country on the planet," he noted.

Regardless, Phuket was well placed to benefit from the expected surge in the medical tourism industry, Mr Boucher said.

Phuket, with an estimated 1,800 hotels, could accommodate its share of what is globally expected to be a huge volume of medical tourists, he noted.

"And there are 39 airlines operating direct flights to Phuket. Do you have any idea how many other destinations would kill for this? That is a huge number," he added.

Mr Boucher explained that the initial construction underway at Mai Khao is for just Phase I of the boutique hospital. "We are planning to build another 100 beds in a separate, but connected, building. We are working with architects [on this] now," he said.

NUMBERS

The number of visitors coming to Phuket continues to rise, noted Bhumikitti Ruktaengam, Advisor to the Phuket Chamber of Commerce.

"This year from Jan 1 to June 30 we had about 1.8 million international visitors arriving by direct flights into the country. But how many come to Phuket?" he posed.

"Before COVID it was about 30%, but now about half of the total number [of international tourists] arriving [in Thailand] come to Phuket," he said.

"We expect about 8mn tourists this year, which is pretty much already a very good recovery," Mr Bhumikitti added.



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TAT adopts cautious approach to visa fee waiver scheme

THE TOURISM Authority of Thailand is taking a cautious approach toward implementing a visa fee waiver scheme to attract more foreign tourists.

In response to tourism operators urging the government to offer a visa fee waiver scheme to stimulate the market, TAT Governor Yuthasak Supasorn stated that it may not be the best strategy, given that the main issue is currently the lengthy waiting period during the visa application process.

He noted that the strategy previously faced problems regarding how tour package prices would be cut to benefit tourists since the TAT offered the scheme during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it was denied by the relevant authorities in charge of the issue.

Tourism has been gradually picking up, but experts predict that the market will only achieve less than 50% of the level seen in 2019, which reached a peak of around 10 million visitors.

Mr Yuthasak said that in



Photo: NNT

addition to the slow recovery of the Chinese economy, flight shortages due to airlines facing shortages on the supply side such as aircraft and maintenance play an important factor in slowing its recovery.

There is, however, hope for a boost in visitor numbers in October during China's 'Golden Week' holiday, as airlines are scheduled to increase their services to handle the increase in passengers during that period.

Meanwhile, In an effort to revitalise tourism, Thai Lion Air is set to open six new routes to Guangzhou, Chengdu, Hangzhou, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Xi'an from Aug 15. These

new routes will use Boeing 737-800 and Boeing 737-900ER aircraft. Currently, Thai Lion Air operates 15 aircraft in its fleet, consisting of 13 B737-800s and two B737-900ERs.

Thai AirAsia has also shown promising signs with an average load factor of 80% on Chinese routes during the first half of the year, with 13 operational routes to 12 destinations in China.

The airline said that it will gradually resume its routes to southern China and hopes to fully recover by the end of this year, both in terms of destinations and frequencies.

National News Bureau
of Thailand

MFP calm amid rejig buzz

BANGKOK
Bangkok Post

The Move Forward Party (MFP) has dismissed speculation it will be excluded from a new government led by the Pheu Thai Party, insisting that unity among the eight prospective coalition parties remains intact.

According to sources, the latest possible configuration of a new government has emerged, still comprising the original coalition allies but with the Bhumjaithai and Chartthaipattana parties also invited to join. The Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP) and the United Thai Nation Party (UTN) would remain excluded.

In this scenario, Srettha Thavisin, a PM candidate of Pheu Thai, would be nominated for the upcoming vote in parliament today (Aug 4).

With the support of 71 MPs from Bhumjaithai and 10 from Chartthaipattana as well as the 312 MPs from the original eight-party bloc, Mr Srettha would get 393 votes which would be more than enough to see him become the next prime minister.

Under the constitution, a PM candidate needs the support of at least half of the 750 members of both the lower and upper chambers of parliament, or 376 votes in total.

However, observers believe that if Bhumjaithai, which is at odds with the MFP, joined the coalition, the MFP would decide to break away from the bloc and become the opposition but would still vote



for the PM candidate from Pheu Thai.

The MFP has previously filed complaints against Cabinet ministers from Bhumjaithai, accusing them in a no-confidence debate of corruption, while Bhumjaithai has made it clear it will not join a government if the MFP is part of it, citing the MFP's bid to amend the lese majeste law.

However, if the MFP pulls out of the coalition, Pheu Thai may again invite the PPRP, as well as the Democrat Party and the UTN to join the coalition.

That said, Rangsiman Rome, MFP list MP and spokesman, downplayed a report that Pheu Thai would let Bhumjaithai take charge of forming a government without the MFP but with the UTN and PPRP asked to take part.

Mr Rangsiman said Bhumjaithai did not win the most seats in parliament and lacked the legitimacy to form a government.

"If Bhumjaithai can form a government, this will deviate from normal circumstances... If we discussed politics on the basis of the people's wishes, Bhumjaithai would not have a chance [of forming a government]," he said.

Whether the new vote for a prime minister takes place on Aug 4 depended on a decision by the Constitutional Court that was due to take place on Aug 3.

The court will announce if it is to accept a petition regarding the rejected renomination of MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat as prime minister. If accepted, the vote will not occur until the court's ruling.



Warehouse reviews set after fatal blast

NARATHIWAT

SECURITY OFFICIALS have been ordered to examine 52 other warehouses in Narathiwat after a huge fireworks explosion at a godown in Sungai Kolok district last Saturday (July 29) left 12 people dead, 121 injured and nearly 300 houses damaged, about 50 of them totally destroyed.

Lt Gen Santi spoke last Sunday after visiting a relief centre set up on the sports field of the Muno tambon administration organisation in Sungai Kolok, where he was briefed on the explosion.

He said some 52 other warehouses in the province must be examined to see whether they were built with valid permission and had been properly used to prevent a recurrence of the devastating incident last Saturday.

Explosive ordnance disposal teams should thoroughly scan the site of the explosion to determine the quantity of fireworks stored illegally in the warehouse. It was initially believed at least five tonnes of fireworks had been kept there, judging from the two deep holes left at the site by the powerful blast, Lt Gen Santi said.

Pol Maj Gen Anurut Im-ab, the Narathiwat police chief, said the owner of the godown would be charged with recklessness causing deaths and injuries under the Criminal Code and the laws on arms, ammunition and explosives.

Pending further investigation, the warehouse owner, who has been summoned to report to police, may also be charged for violating the Factory Act of 1992 and the Labour Protection Act of 1998.

Bangkok Post

Preparations underway for Thaksin return plan

BANGKOK

FORMER PREMIER THAKSIN Shinawatra's intention to return to the country after 17 years in self-imposed exile has not changed, according to sources in the Pheu Thai Party and the Royal Thai Police (RTP).

The Pheu Thai Party has been running a series of video clips on its Facebook page chronicling the trials and tribulations associated with Thaksin's long political career, from his rise to the premiership in 2001 to the ouster of the Pheu Thai Party-led administration by a military coup engineered by the National Council for Peace and Order in 2014.

The clips were uploaded apparently to coincide with Thaksin's youngest daughter and Pheu Thai Party prime ministerial candidate Pae-tongtarn Shinawatra's announcement of her father's homecoming. He is scheduled to arrive at Don Mueang airport at 10:30am on Aug 10.

Linthiporn Warinwatchara-roj, a party list MP and acting



party spokeswoman, said the clips were meant to educate the public about Thaksin's political life, help clarify the facts and tackle disinformation about the controversial businessman and politician.

Linthiporn denied the clips were an attempt to divert public attention away from the party's struggle to lead the formation of the new government, maintaining there was no change of heart among the eight parties, led by the Move Forward Party (MFP), which has given the Pheu Thai Party the task of putting together a new administration.

An RTP source, meanwhile, said Thaksin's family had notified police of his imminent comeback and preparations were underway on the

necessary security measures to handle his arrival.

However, the RTP will be closely monitoring events leading up to Aug 10, including yesterday's (Aug 3) Constitutional Court announcement of whether it will consider reviewing its earlier decision to bar MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat from inclusion in a third parliamentary vote for a new prime minister.

If the court drops the petition, parliament can convene a joint sitting today (Aug 4) to co-elect a new prime minister.

Should a Pheu Thai Party candidate win and lead the successful formation of a government, Thaksin will feel confident about returning home, observers declared.

Bangkok Post

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A celebration of satire

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Stéphane Peray, better known as 'Stephff', is a French cartoonist based in Bangkok. He is renowned throughout the region as one of the best satirical cartoonists in Asia.

Before starting his career as a press cartoonist 25 years ago Stephff was a photojournalist. He has worked for many international newspapers. Currently, he collaborates for Al Quds al arabi, Kuwait Times, China Daily and Korea Times, Expresso and Courrier international.

His impact has reached far and wide. In 2005, he met Kofi Annan who asked him for an original drawing. In Thailand, Stephff became a household name among long-term expats for his biting satire as the official cartoonist for the English-language newspaper *The Nation* for more than a decade through his 'Farang Affairs' series of daily cartoons.

Regular readers of *The Phuket News* will have noticed the introduction of Stephff's cartoons on the News pages in the hardcopy, print-version of the newspaper. The cartoons are featured only in print, and not online.

Here, Stephff takes a look back at his spellbinding career and explains his momentum moving forward with his new book, 'Farang Affairs 2', and his



inspiration for his latest collection.

What inspired you to make the transition from photojournalist to professional cartoonist?

Being unsuccessful at photojournalism 5555. I am only half-joking. After 10 years as a photo-reporter, I was still barely making a living and simultaneously I started to have good connections with newspapers and magazines. So I humbly proposed my services as a cartoonist and illustrator. To my surprise,

it did work very quickly – not necessarily because I had talent, but because I was among the first to use the Internet and Photoshop to distribute my cartoons and illustrations to the media. Editors are often more focused on getting cartoons on time than getting real pieces of art.

Why publish your new collection in a book, but not online?

Because it would cannibalise the books. I decided from the beginning to make very good quality books. I want them to be coffee table books with hardcovers – something you display proudly on your... coffee table. I used one of the top printers in Bangkok, a British guy who is specialised in high-quality books printed in small quantities. Not cheap, but zero bad surprises.

Which cartoons in 'Farang Affairs 2' stand out for you? Why?

Those that speak about social issues such as poverty, social injustice, racism, xenophobia, the ultra-vertical system and of course the plague-like corruption. It is important to me because making jokes about lighter issues is also an opportunity to deliver a few strong and serious messages as well. That's the real reason why I am a cartoonist: to bring a smile to readers (hopefully some big laughs, too) and at the same time bringing some more serious stuff to the table. But it's not just me, it's basically what all editorial cartoonists do: make you laugh and make you think at the same time.

Your reputation stands for itself: impressive, sometimes scathing, satire in presenting situational observations of foreigners living in Thailand. However, they are often misunderstood by newcomers to the Kingdom as a criticism of living in Thailand. How do you see the advent of 'Woke' and the impact it plays in misunderstanding, misrepresenting and criticising the ideas and concepts presented in your cartoons?

The way I see it is there will always be haters, it was already like this before the age of the Internet when grumpy and bitter people would write to the editor a letter of complaint. Most of the time these people simply needed attention or to express jealousy. After all, the

cartoonist who gets paid to make fun of society inevitably generates jealousy with people who don't have an enjoyable life. Well, if those people knew how little we are paid, maybe they would get less jealous 5555.

Anyway, the era of social media has given power (too much power) to all people who need attention so we, cartoonists, are drowning under their attacks – attacks which are most of the time totally insincere.

The sad thing is that editors are now afraid of all these people who pretend to be outraged at every occasion. So a lot of cartoonists have lost their jobs because of this this past decade. Remember the NYT [*New York Times*] stopped publishing cartoons in 2019 after a complaint about one single cartoon! I agree with plenty of claims that make sense in the original moderate Woke movement, but also I believe that the Woke movement – and specifically the extremist part of the Woke movement – is losing itself by being too excessive.

Going after humour is a good example of the excess of Wokism. They go after racism, sexism, homophobia, the wrongdoings in history such as colonialism, slavery, etc... and that is perfectly legitimate. The only problem is that some of them have decided that we can't laugh at any of these issues anymore and I see it as a kind of extremism. And Woke people have now become a pain in the a... for humorists in general. Remember *The Name of the Rose* with Sean Connery? Forbidding people to laugh is extremely dangerous. Bad jokes when there are no ill-intentions behind them are pure salvation. They help us to live together, they help us to look at our minds full of prejudices. This is totally sane. But putting limits on humour is insane. Mankind needs humour, and humour helps to heal our stupidity...

What can we expect to see from Stephff in the future?

More political incorrectness 55555. I am working on 'Farang Affairs 3', so you can expect this one. Something maybe more poetic, something maybe entirely in Thai language, because there is demand among the Thai public for my cartoons. This surprised me at first, but Thais can laugh at themselves a lot. Look at Thai comedies and it's obvious. And they are not yet too infected with excessive political correctness!

I am also working on a project of spiritual cartoons in a book, something you would offer to a friend who is facing a crisis, perhaps a period of depression or self-questioning his life. It's a very important project for me.

Another project is a graphic novel with the topic of the environment and the possible extinction of life on Earth. And finally, working on two different movie scripts: one of the two stories happens in the Isan countryside. So you can already conclude that I have zero intention to retire anytime.

Farang Affairs 2 is available only in a hard-cover print run of 2,000 copies. To order, contact stephff.artist@gmail.com. 'Farang Affairs 2', by Stéphane Peray, 160pp (hard cover only), B1,400.



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Taking a tour of the green



GREEN THOUGHTS

Patrick Campbell

Last year, I visited friends near Kalasin. Deep in the heart of Isan. Driving north past interminable paddy fields was a dispiriting experience. Barely – and the adverb conveys a literal truth – a tree in sight. Tight-fisted husbandry had meant their remorseless eradication, either because they siphoned up too much precious water, or because the space was needed for the main subsistence crop: rice. Over 7 million hectares, half of Thailand's arable land, supports the cultivation of rice. These neat rectangles of level terrain parceled into allotments and divided by the occasional 'klong', were stark reminders of the dominance of *oryza sativa* – and the slide-rule mentality of those who must live and die by it.

Driving south to Trang recently was a very different experience. Phang Nga, awash in monsoon rains, was a verdant revelation. One passed deciduous and evergreen rain forests with endless vistas of trees. Massive jungle giants – rain trees, dipterocarps and tectonas – silhouetted above an endless, waving canopy of green where the smaller evergreens – dalbergias, elaeocarpaceae and syzygiums – were draped in lush

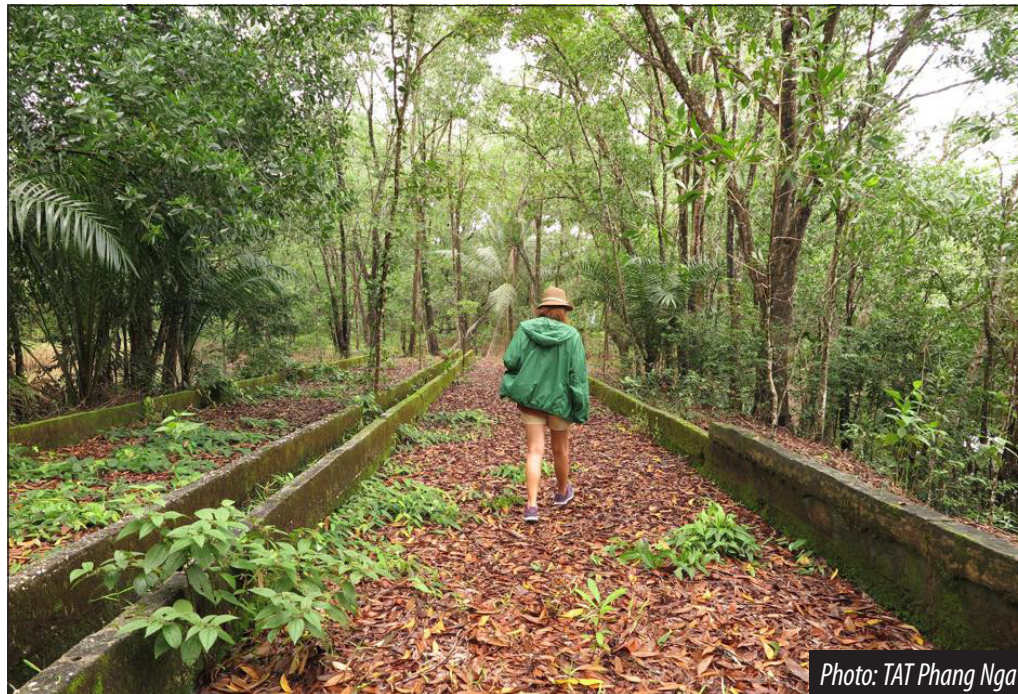


Photo: TAT Phang Nga

liana vines. Hardly a bare patch of land in sight.

True, much was secondary growth where nature had only recently re-colonised barren tracts left by homo sapiens. And much, like the rice fields of the north, revealed the massive transmutation wrought by man's heavy hand: huge pale green stands of slim-boled rubber trees (*hevea brasiliensis*), now locked in competition for their very commercial existence with invading battalions of oil palms (*elaeis guineensis*), their stout ferny trunks

topped by massive dark green fronds. A formidable adversary. In fact, both are upstarts: rubber trees are native to Brazil; oil palms to West Africa. But in Southern Thailand they thrive better than in their native habitats.

And at least these relatively new kids on the block were trees, exhaling precious oxygen and offering some sort of haven for native wildlife. Even a section of road was a pleasure to drive along – a stately avenue lined with towering dipterocarps, tectonas and alstonias – serried ranks all standing

rigidly to attention as we passed. Further south were roadside plantings of crape myrtles, their crinkly deep pink flowers just coming into bloom. Not for nothing is the *lagerstroemia*, known locally as 'tree trang'.

Glimpsed dramatically through roadside clearings and towering above the seaside mangroves, were the karsts, calcium monoliths for which both Phang Nga and Krabi are famous: huge, precipitous slabs of limestone rising from the ultramarine sea and carved into fantastic shapes by salt and rain; their summits crowned with exotic orchids, perched precariously atop these unassailable monuments to nature.

Of course these impressions – and they are only fleeting 'farang' impressions – are all too black and white. Or to dispense with the cliché and use the actual colours of these contrasting landscapes, all too grey or green. Nonetheless, my abiding memory is of two worlds – one grey-brown and featureless, the other green and vibrant.

Of such contrasts is amazing Thailand made...

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: 076-61227 or 085-7827551).



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POP QUIZ

1. What nickname was given to the Shinkansen high-speed trains of Japan because of their appearance and speed?
2. Who is the current German Chancellor?
3. Which is greater in size, New York City or Bangkok?
4. Do monitor lizards eat snakes?
5. What was the common name given to the burial grounds of gunfighters in the Wild West?

Answers below, centre

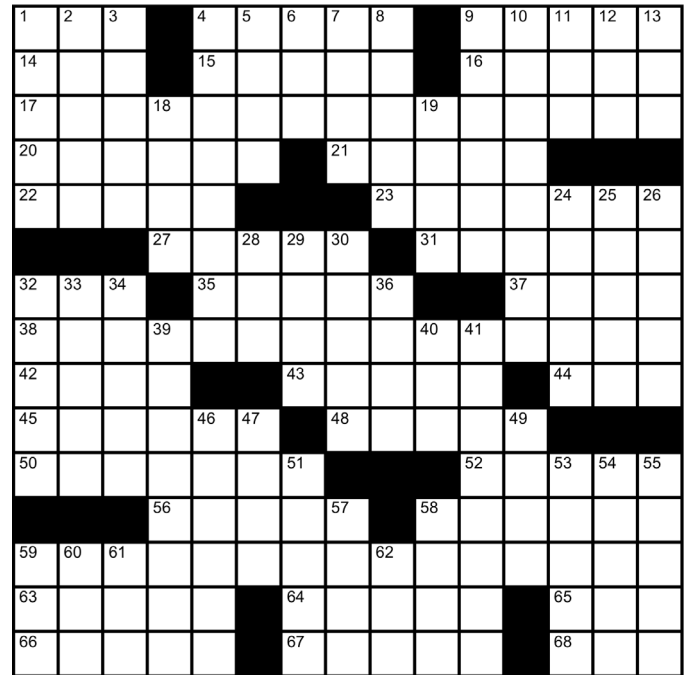
SUDOKU

Easy

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

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across**
1. Code word
 4. Prevention measure?
 9. Olfactory perception
 14. Farm female
 15. Hound's trail
 16. Student getting one-on-one help
 17. Bailed out
 20. Ancestry
 21. Eyes
 22. Circulating enzyme
 23. Serving trolley
 27. House of the Seven Gables site
 31. More loved
 32. First-class
 35. Burdens
 37. When repeated, like some shows
 38. Get out of trouble
 42. Nine inches
 43. Small part
 44. Congeal
 45. Noted traitor
 48. Didn't participate
 50. Interpreted incorrectly
 52. Profit
 56. Craze
 58. Relating to the abdominal cavity
- Down**
1. Designer's concern
 2. Informed
 3. Restrict
 4. Repeated musical phrase
 5. At the time of
 6. "___ a chance"
 7. Small salmon
 8. At attention
 9. Funeral slabs
 10. Some plays or films
 11. Abbr. after a comma
 12. Moldovan moolah
 13. Attorney F. ___ Bailey
 18. Auspices
 19. Felt bad about
 24. Strong liquors, var.
 25. Adjust, as laces
 26. 1545 council site
 28. PC linkup
 29. Prez, e.g.
 30. Tablelands
 32. Indian state
 33. Bay of Naples isle
 34. Olympic swimmer Janet
 36. "Brave New World" drug
 39. Vastness
 40. Dewy
 41. Titled peer
 46. One who goes
 47. Hamlet, e.g.
 49. Christmas season
 51. Theoretical physicist
 53. Catlike critter
 54. New Delhi salad
 55. Pomp
 57. Bushy do
 58. Construction site sight
 59. John ___ Passos
 60. Generation
 61. Midback muscle, for short
 62. Minister: Abbr.



Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

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

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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

1

second of activity in the most accurate simulation of the human brain ever created took one of the world's largest supercomputers 40 minutes to calculate.

2

rats will stop playing with each other if the bigger rat doesn't let the smaller one win at least 30% of the time.

4

times more likely is an air rage incident in economy class if the plane also has a first class.

8

percent of guys who own televisions don't watch any sports at all, according to Nielsen data.

17

percent of Brits admit they would be willing to have sex with an android, and 11% are willing to raise a robot baby.

5,840

people in the United States have a last name that ends with their first name, with Donald MacDonald being the most common.

Source: *Urbefacts*

ISLAND VIEW



Kamala Beach sunset. Photo by Alena Plotnikova

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

This week in history

August 4, 1693

Date traditionally ascribed to Dom Perignon's invention of Champagne; it is not clear whether he actually invented Champagne, however, he has been credited as an innovator who developed the techniques used to perfect sparkling wine.

August 5, 1926

Harry Houdini performs his greatest feat, spending 91 minutes underwater in a

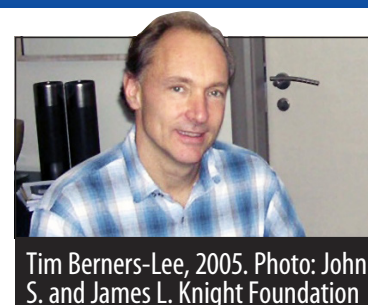
sealed tank before escaping.

August 6, 1991

Tim Berners-Lee releases files describing his idea for the World Wide Web, which later debuts as a publicly available service on the Internet. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 2004 for his pioneering work.

August 7, 1970

Ivory Coast becomes inde-



Tim Berners-Lee, 2005. Photo: John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

pendent from France.

August 8, 1908

Wilbur Wright makes his first

flight at Le Mans, France. It is the Wright Brothers' first public flight.

August 9, 1173

Construction of the Leaning Tower of Pisa begins; it will take two centuries to complete.

August 10, 1519

Ferdinand Magellan's five ships set sail from Seville to circumnavigate the globe.

Source: *Wikipedia*

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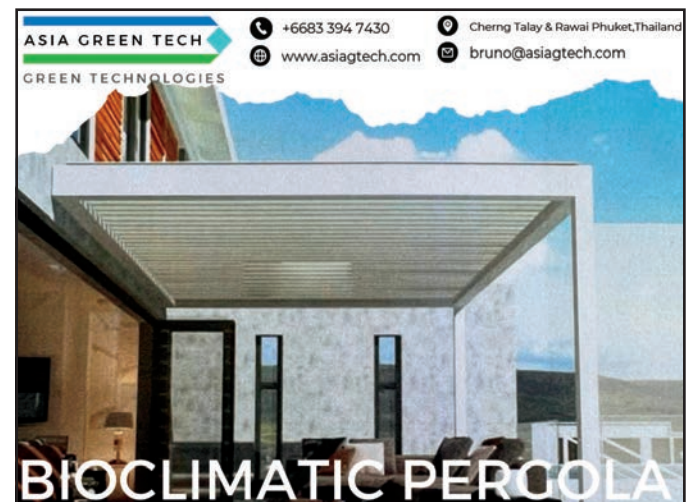
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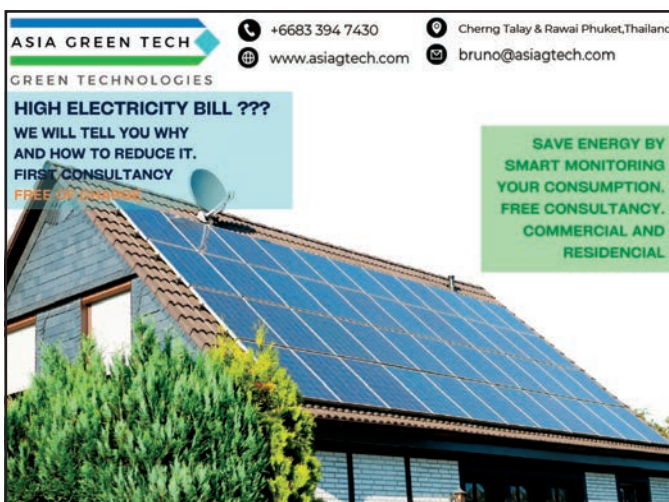


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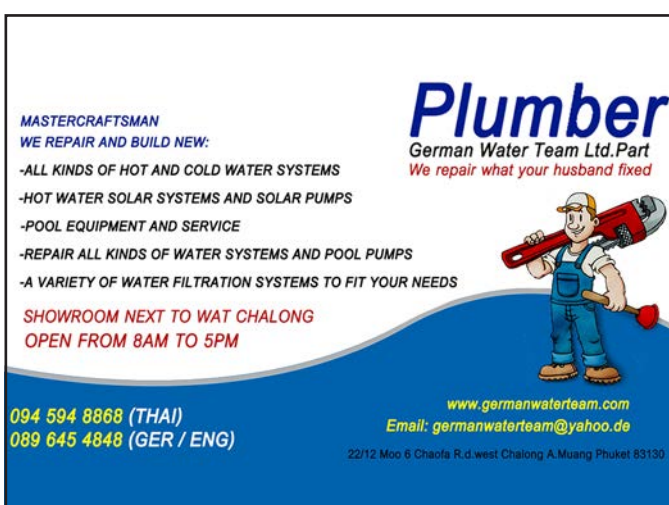
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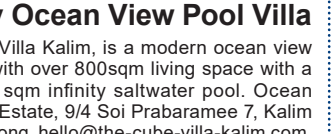
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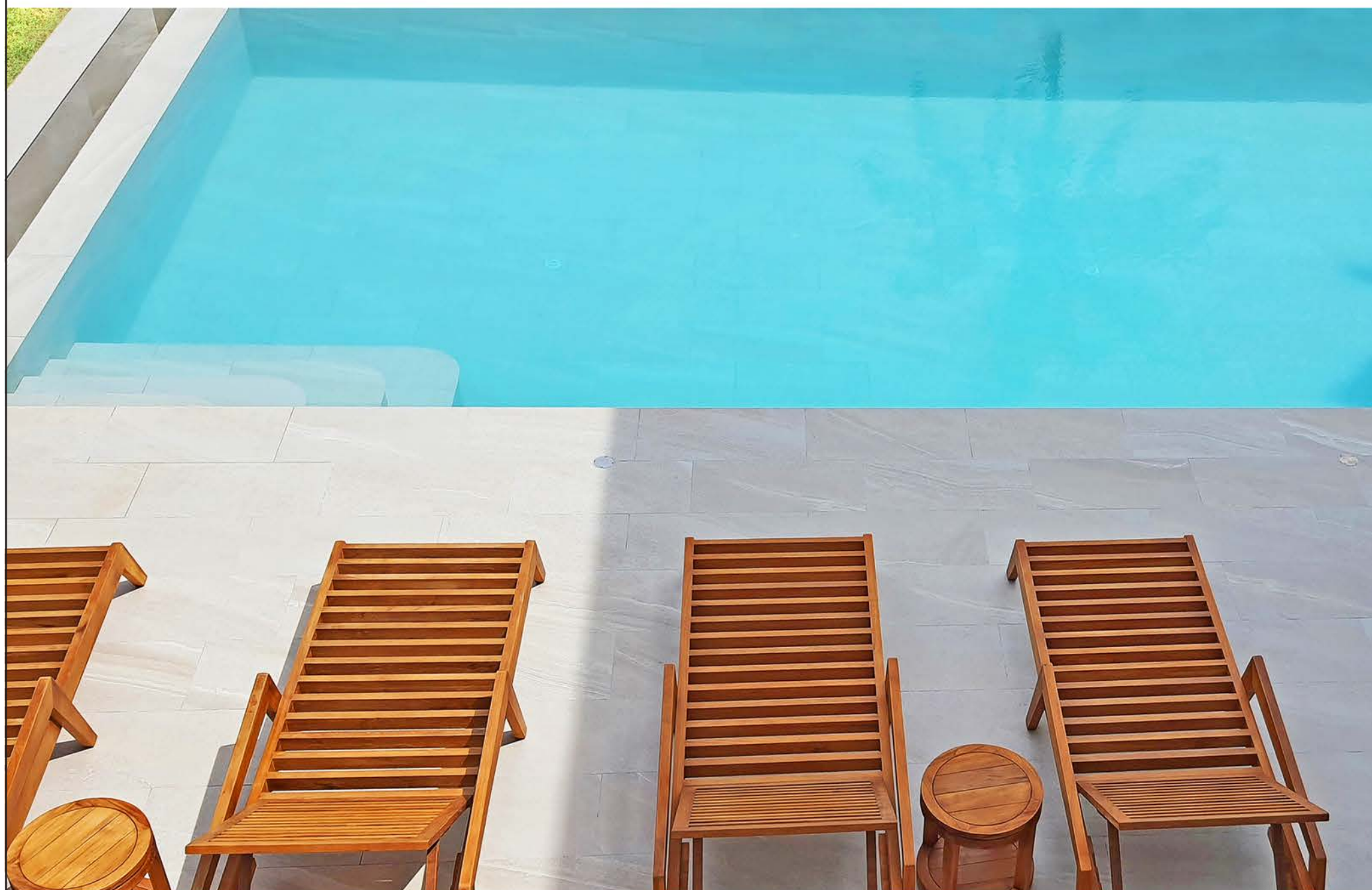
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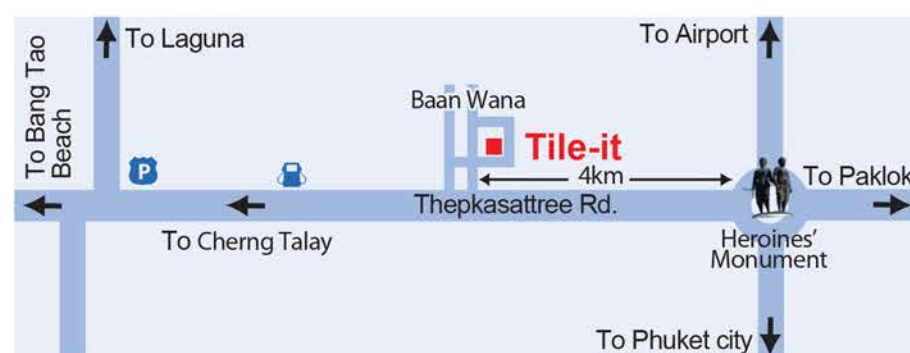
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Vollering wins women's second Tour de France

CYCLING

DEMI VOLLERING of the Netherlands won the second edition of the women's Tour de France in Pau last Sunday (July 30).

The 26-year-old finished second in the final stage time trial behind Marlen Reusser of Switzerland to claim "the most beautiful success" of her career and cement her position as world number one.

The SD Worx team leader finished the eight-stage race over three minutes ahead of Belgian teammate Lotte Kopecky and Poland's Katarzyna Niewiadoma of the Canyon-SRAM team.

It was her 15th victory this year after dominating the spring classics, with a hat-trick in the Ardennes – Fleche Wallonne, Liege and Amstel – that only compatriot Anna van der Breggen had achieved before her.

But the former speed skater's week was not easy.

She admitted being "very tense" in the early



Vollering. Photo: AFP

stages and was furious after being penalised 20 seconds for an extended shelter behind her team's car during the fifth stage which dropped her from overall second to seventh.

On Saturday, Vollering powered through the mountain-top fog to win the most demanding stage and grab the leader's yellow jersey and a 1min 50sec advantage on Niewiadoma heading into the final day.

She extended her lead on Sunday by setting the fastest time of 29min 15secs over the 22-kilometre course in the Pyrenean foothills.

"Of course I worked a lot to achieve this result," said Vollering. "But this success is the result of a good personal balance thanks to a great entourage in particular." AFP

Red Bull set new F1 record

FORMULA ONE

Michael Lamonato

michael@boxofneutrals.com

Max Verstappen cruised to another dominant grand prix victory in Spa, Belgium last Sunday (July 30) despite starting from sixth on the grid with a gearbox penalty.

The victory was the Dutchman's eighth in a row and the team's 12th in succession this season, a new F1 record that sees Red Bull Racing start the midseason break undefeated with 10 rounds to go.

Sergio Pérez finished a distant second to cement Red Bull Racing's first one-two finish since the Miami Grand Prix in May.

Verstappen jumped two places at the start to sit behind pole-getter Charles Leclerc, who was deposed from the lead by Pérez at the start, and Lewis Hamilton.

The battle was deadlocked by the powerful slipstream effect until Verstappen felt confident that his tyres were up to optimum temperature for a lunge on Hamilton into Les Combes on lap six.

His forward momentum was becoming overpowering, and three laps later he picked Leclerc's pocket at the same corner with a gutsy late-braking move around the Ferrari's outside.

The gap to teammate Pérez was stable at around three seconds to the end of the opening stint as the pair conserved their tyres, but a slightly slower stop for the Mexican shrunk the interval to 2.2 seconds after both took their first tyre changes.

Verstappen was immediately onto the



Verstappen celebrates the historic win. Photo: AFP

attack. A blistering lap 16 gave the margin to less than a second, and he made an easy pass for the lead down the Kemmel straight on the following tour.

His lead was never threatened despite a brief rain shower and another round of pit stops, and he cruised to a 22-second victory.

Pérez was a distant second but claimed his best result since the start of May, when he finished runner-up to Verstappen before suffering a long uncompetitive streak that yielded only two podiums before this weekend.

Leclerc said after the race that he was satisfied to have maximised his chances in what became a battle with Hamilton for the final podium places behind the dominant Bulls, successfully

covering a pair of Mercedes undercuts to seal the deal.

Hamilton won the consolation of fastest lap after a late pit stop for fresh tyres propelled him to the bonus point.

Fernando Alonso was a distant fifth in a difficult race of unclear strategies owing to the heavy rain that affected both Friday and Saturday, depriving teams of practice running and representative data.

George Russell in the second Mercedes finished sixth ahead of Lando Norris, with Esteban Ocon, Lance Stroll and an impressive Yuki Tsunoda completing the top 10.

Oscar Piastri and Carlos Sainz were the race's only retirements after a first-lap crash that had the Ferrari pin the McLaren into the wall at the first turn.

Stamp, Ham clash for world title as ONE confirms US plans

MMA

FOUR MASSIVE WOMEN's fights will top ONE Fight Night 14, ONE Championship has announced.

The blockbuster event is set to go down at the Singapore Indoor Stadium on Sept 30, and no less than three ONE world titles are on the line.

In the main event, Thai megastar Stamp Fairtex faces surging contender Ham Seo-Hee under MMA rules for the ONE interim atomweight world title.

Stamp challenges for the strap for the second time in her career, having come up short against Angela Lee last year. The former two-sport ONE world champion has won her last two fights under MMA rules, the latest of which was a dominant TKO victory over Alyse Anderson at ONE Fight Night 10, ONE's United States debut in May this year.

Ham is riding a nine-fight win streak, holding a perfect 3-0 mark under the ONE banner.

"Hamzzang" took a



Thai megastar Stamp Fairtex. Photo: Bangkok Post

dominant decision victory over Japanese rival Itsuki Hirata at ONE Fight Night 8 in March to book her place in the interim title showdown.

Teenage Muay Thai prodigy Smilla Sundell defends her ONE strawweight Muay Thai world title in a blockbuster rematch with American challenger Jackie Buntan.

The 18-year-old Sundell was last seen venturing over to the kickboxing ranks to defeat Serbia's Milana Bjelogrić at ONE Friday Fights 18 in May.

Buntan, on the other hand, has rebounded in style from

her world title defeat at the hands of the Swedish divisional queen in April 2022.

The 26-year-old outpointed British striker Amber Kitchen in December, before hitting a highlight-reel knockout punch in the opening round of her contest with Diandra Martin on home soil at ONE Fight Night 10.

The inaugural ONE atomweight submission grappling world title will also be contested at ONE Fight Night 14, as American star Danielle Kelly welcomes Jessa Khan to the global stage.

The highly anticipated matchup has long been mooted, since Khan holds a win over Kelly dating back to February 2021.

While Kelly has remained undefeated in her three appearances in ONE Championship, Khan claimed the 2023 IBJJF gi world title.

The victory poured further fuel to speculation that the Cambodian-American may be the opponent to put an end to Kelly's winning run.

The announcement of a special rules striking contest has also raised eyebrows.

ONE strawweight world champion Xiong Jing Nan is set to face multi-discipline star Nat "Wondergirl" Jaroonsak in a bout where the fighters will don four-ounce gloves while only being allowed to throw punches. All other strikes will be prohibited.

There will be ringside judges if the fight goes the full three rounds. The scoring criteria will mirror ONE's Muay Thai and kickboxing rule sets, which follow the 10-point must system.

US RETURN

Meanwhile, ONE Championship Chairman and CEO Chatri Sityodtong has confirmed the promotion will return to the United States with four global events in 2024.

"I am thrilled to announce that ONE Championship is coming back to the US with four massive events in 2024. When we made our historic US debut with ONE Fight Night 10 on Prime Video in May, I was blown away by the support we received from our fans in the US," Sityodtong said on July 27.

"ONE is home to the

greatest martial artists in the world, and I'm excited to once again showcase our world champions on American soil. Cities and venues for these events will be announced soon, and to our fans that haven't seen a live ONE event, I promise you an experience unlike anything you've ever seen."

ONE Fight Night 10 surpassed even the promotion's expectations when tickets at the 1stBank Center in Colorado were quickly sold out.

The event also proved to be a smash hit with television audiences, racking up huge numbers across the promotion's network of global broadcast partners.

ONE's growing on-ground presence in the US follows the landmark broadcast deal that it sealed with American streaming giant Prime Video back in April 2022.

Since the deal was announced, ONE has staged its biggest shows in American primetime to cater to its rapidly growing fan base in that market.

Bangkok Post

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Sport



Red Bull set new F1 record at Spa > p14

START YOUR ENGINES!



Toyota Gazoo Motorsport Racing returns to Phuket

Photo: Toyota Gazoo Racing Motorsport Thailand

MOTORSPORTS

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Excitement is in the air as Phuket gears up to welcome the return of the Toyota Gazoo Racing Motorsport Thailand event at Saphan Hin Park this weekend (Aug 5-6).

The Phuket event is one of five taking place nationally, with others at the Bangsaen Street Circuit in Chonburi (June 30-July 2), the Chang International Circuit Stadium in Buriram (Sept 1-3), the Chiang Mai 700 Year Stadium in Chiang Mai (Nov 17-19), before returning to Buriram for the final race on Dec 21-23. All five races will be broadcast via live streaming at the Toyota Gazoo Racing Motorsport Thailand Facebook page.

The event is a flat car style race, meaning that vehicles do not travel at maximum speed throughout. Male

and female drivers will be competing in four separate categories, namely:

- The Yaris hatchback ECO car, a new improved version of the popular model with a gasoline engine 1,200cc dual VVT-i, which is ideal for entry-level racers. The winner of this category, will then qualify to test pilot a Yaris E-fuel car as part of a carbon neutral initiative in the popular TV show ‘Dream Racer Season 2’.

- The Hilux REVO car, powered by a GD Super Power 2,400cc common rail diesel engine which delivers the performance of a tough pickup truck, emphasising strength, durability and suspension that grips the road precisely. This class is ideal for diesel racers who like a more fierce and robust race.

- The Corolla ALTIS GR Sport Car, a signature model of quality, durability and unsurpassed reliability powered by a dual VVT-i 1,800cc gasoline engine and a streamline structure that provides balance for

engine performance, suspension, steering and braking systems.

- The Yaris ATIV, which is designed for female racers and which replaces the VIOS One model used in previous years. Powered by a 1,200cc Dual VVT-i petrol engine, it is aimed at racers who crave speed.

E-MOTORSPORTS CHAMPIONSHIP

Running concurrently with the two-day race is the Toyota Gazoo Racing Thailand Academy Campus Tour, which provides the opportunity for youngsters interested in motorsports to learn more about the sport through a series of talks and meet-and-greet sessions with experts and former race winners.

Additionally there will be a series of stalls offering special promotions from car dealers, as well as food and beverage outlets, a Cosplay contest and live musical entertainment from acts including Summer Blue, Daisy and The Rizz Unison.

Furthermore, the Toyota Gazoo Racing GT Cup 2023 e-Motorsports Championship will take place to discover the top player on the famous Play Station racing game Gran Turismo 7. The winner of this competition will get the chance to represent Thailand in future international gaming tournaments, organisers confirmed.

The confirmation of the popular motorsports event was made at an official press conference on July 24 at Phuket Provincial Hall, overseen by Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew.

Joining Governor Narong was Thanapon Kaewbamrung, Manager of Toyota Pearl Company Co Ltd and selected members of private and public sector entities supporting the event.

Mr Thanapon explained that Toyota has been committed to developing motorsports in Thailand since 1986 and the national Gazoo Racing tour is further evidence of how the company strives to provide

engaging platforms for the ongoing development of young drivers in the country who can advance to successful careers in the sport.

He added that Toyota has become established as the leader in this particular style of motorsports and that it tests its cars under the extreme race conditions to take aspects of the vehicle into the consumer market under a project called “from the racetrack to the road”.

Mr Thanapon also extended thanks to the sponsors who support Toyota Gazoo Racing Motorsport Thailand 2023, including the Sports Association of Thailand and the Automobile Association of Thailand. Further supporting sponsors include Yokohama, Modellista International, TCD Asia, Singha Corporation and Lenso Wheels.

More information on the event can be accessed via the Toyota Gazoo Racing Motorsport Thailand and Toyota Motor Thailand Facebook pages.

War Elephants land tough World Cup, Asian Cup draw

FOOTBALL

THAILAND HAS BEEN handed a tough draw for the Preliminary Joint Qualification Round 2 for the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2027 AFC Asian Cup.

Drawn in Group C, the War Elephants will play against Asian giants South Korea and China, with the fourth team in the pool being the winners of a play-off between Singapore or Guam.

The first leg of that play-off is in Singapore on Oct 12, with the return leg in Guam five days later.



Thailand at the 2022 AFF Mitsubishi Electric Cup. Photo: Bangkok Post

Thai team manager Nualphan Lamsam admitted it was a tough draw for the War Elephants as “South Korea and China are among

the top teams in Asia. But we will be trying our best.”

South Korea are captained by superstar striker Son Heung-min who

plays his club football in the Premier League for Tottenham Hotspur.

South Korea is currently ranked 28th in the FIFA World index, China is ranked 79th, while Thailand is currently ranked 113th.

The 36 participating regional countries from Asia were drawn into nine groups of four teams each at the official FIFA draw in Kuala Lumpur on July 27.

The teams will compete against each other in a home-and-away, round-robin format between November 2023 and June 2024, with a total of 10 teams from the phase progressing to Round 1 of the Pre-

liminary Joint Qualification.

Other highly-anticipated games include Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam in round one, a central Asian tie featuring Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and a Southeast Asian affair pitting Vietnam against the Philippines.

As there will be an expanded total of 48 teams at the 2026 World Cup, the first time this many have competed at the tournament, eight and a half slots are on offer to the Asian teams.

The 2026 World Cup is scheduled to take place in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Additional reporting by
The Phuket News