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## FED UP



A police officer tires on traffic duty in Cherng Talay. Photo: Cherng Talay Police

## LOCAL MAYOR, RESIDENTS VENT OVER BANG TAO TRAFFIC WOES

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**M**anoch Panchalad, Chief of the Cherng Talay Tambon Administration Organisation (OrBorTor), just like his local residents, has expressed his frustration with the never-ending lines of traffic tailbacks that now plague the popular beach area.

“Observing traffic daily, I see a surge in private cars, along with persistent traffic violations,” he told *The Phuket News*.

“Some drivers recklessly cut across lanes, blocking turn lanes and causing unnecessary congestion. Drivers refuse to wait for the next green light, forming long queues that trap other vehicles,” he added.

For local residents, the blame lies squarely on the rapid influx of people moving into the area and the increase in the number of visitors now staying in newly built tourist accommodation developments, along with worsening road conditions, traffic mismanagement and the increasing presence of construction trucks in narrow streets.

“The area has seen a huge influx of newcomers, both Thais and foreigners, some of whom plainly disregard traffic laws. It's not just the people moving here – tourists also contribute to the increasing number of cars and motorbikes rented,” said Ko Eak, a resident of Cherng Talay.

Fellow resident Khun Gam pointed out that rapid development,

a growing workforce and limited road infrastructure have worsened traffic conditions.

“The roads and traffic lights remain the same, but the number of people has increased. You can't keep things as they are – police need to monitor traffic signals at key points and Cherng Talay OrBorTor should expand roads where necessary,” she said.

Local resident Khun Gift believes that large vehicles, particularly trucks, are a significant cause of congestion. “For example, when there's a red light on a secondary road and it turns green, the large size of trucks blocks the main road, causing congestion and preventing motorcycles from passing. I see this happen every morning and evening,” she explained.

Khun Gam also highlighted the problem of road construction. “The rapid development in Cherng Talay has led to an increase in truck traffic, and road construction work often takes place during peak hours, causing severe blockages.

“It's frustrating that fixing the roads, like those in Soi Laguna and from Boat Avenue 1 to Cherng Talay 16, has taken a long time,” she said.

Additionally, roads in areas like Cherng Talay 14 and in front of Cherng Talay Wittaya School are in poor condition, she noted. “The lane markings are nearly gone, and the roads are not properly paved,” Khun Gam said.

One local foreign resident, “Sebastien”, noted, “Sometimes, we can't solely blame tourists for...

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## News



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# Traffic jams start taking their toll

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...not following the rules. Traffic police also need to strictly enforce regulations and always be present when needed, like I see many illegal parking along streets, particularly parking on red and white lines.

"I think local authorities should experience long hours stuck in traffic by themselves, which is not pleasant. From what I can see obviously that construction projects take too long to complete," he added.

"There should be police officers monitoring traffic from 7am to 7pm and stricter enforcement of parking rules to keep traffic flowing," Ko Eak agreed.

Some residents criticised the local authorities' traffic management decisions, with many believing that certain measures have only worsened the problem.

"For example, closing the roundabout at Heroines Monument before entering Cherng Talay has made traffic even worse. It's a sloppy solution," Khun Na said.

Many locals feel that the growing number of tourists is overwhelming the island's infrastructure. Khun Som summarized the issue, saying: "Traffic is very heavy because there are more tourists than the infrastructure can handle."

## SUGGESTIONS FROM THE STREET

"Public transportation can be helped by expanding bus routes



Monster traffic jams have become the usual in the heart of Cherng Talay. Photo: Nicole Phumara

across the island that could help tourists to reduce reliance on private vehicles, easing congestion," Khun Na suggested.

"If there were more buses, people might not need to rent cars or motorbikes as much," Khun Som said.

Khun Som also urged for time restrictions for trucks. "I think Cherng Talay should apply similar to the policy in Patong, specific time slots for large trucks and buses could be implemented to avoid peak traffic hours," she said.

Khun Gift pointed out that the improved road maintenance and infrastructure are essential to addressing the traffic issues in Phuket. "Cherng Talay OrBorTor and Cherng Talay Municipality

must prioritise the timely completion of ongoing road construction projects to minimise disruptions and prevent prolonged congestion," she said.

For Khun Som, a big part of the problem was that it seemed local officials were ignoring how much traffic was affecting their daily lives.

"Listen to the local concerns and address the problems more strategically. Cherng Talay can be a tourist city, but traffic management needs to improve. Adding more routes and improving policies could help," she said.

For Khun Na, the critical point was: "The number of tourists is too high and local authorities can't manage it effectively. Limit the number of visitors or introdu-

cing better measures to handle them," she urged.

## EXASPERATION

The Phuket News presented the local residents' opinions and suggestions to Mr Manoch, who in response made no attempt to disguise the exasperation in his voice.

For Mr Manoch, the number of taxis now operating in the area and the huge increase in illegal parking beside the road, blocking traffic, were two key issues.

"Most of the violations involve taxis. It's hard to control because people keep doing it. Some drivers cut into the lane in front of Lotus's shopping centre, causing severe traffic jams. We need the public's help to report these violations. The police are trying, but it requires cooperation from everyone," he said.

Regarding construction trucks, he said, "For me, if construction trucks run at night, it will cause noise problems... But I can't halt construction. Buildings need to be completed and other local residents also rely on cement mixer trucks [for their buildings]. Finding a fair solution is difficult," he added.

Traffic Police in Cherng Talay also told The Phuket News that they were doing the best they could.

"When someone reports it, we rush to respond," traffic officer Pol Sgt Piyawut said. "We deploy officers, including OrBorTor staff, to manage traffic in Cherng Talay, especially during rush hours when

schools are let out.

"To ease congestion, traffic police have placed cones along the road to prevent illegal turns and enforce a straight flow of traffic," he added.

Pol Sgt Piyawut agreed that illegal parking, especially by taxis, is a major issue. "Most cars stop only shortly, but it happens so often that it becomes a constant problem," he said.

"We lock wheels every day, but some drivers take off before we can get there. Also, many drivers return daily to retrieve their keys after their cars are chained [and the drivers fined], but it seems to be having little effect," Pol Sgt Piyawut said.

## BIGGER SUPPORT

Mr Manoch openly called for more help in resolving the traffic woes in the area, from more government departments and agencies, especially those "higher up" that have more authority to intervene and the resources to carry it out.

He stressed the importance of collaboration between various sectors, including Cherng Talay Police, district officials, highway authorities and the Ministry of interior to analyse the problem from multiple perspectives.

Mr Manoch highlighted while immediate traffic issues are being tackled daily, a broader long-term strategy is needed.

"This issue cannot be solved by the OrBorTor alone, it requires cooperation from multiple sectors," he said..

# Six role models selected for 'Good Citizen Honours'

THE PHUKET PROVINCIAL Good Citizen Promotion and Welfare Fund Committee has selected six individuals as role models for their outstanding acts of kindness and public service.

The selection took place during a meeting held at Phuket Provincial Hall earlier this week, chaired by Phuket Vice Governor Samawit Suphanphai and attended by representatives from government agencies and the private sector.

The initiative aligns with the Ministry of Interior's designation of Apr 1 as the 'Day to Honour Good Citizens'. Each year, the province selects individuals who have demonstrated exemplary service to the

community, with their names submitted to the Ministry of Interior for further recognition, explained an official report of the meeting.

Nominees must have performed their good deeds between Jan 1 and Dec 30, 2024, and have their contributions verified before the deadline on Jan 31.

Following a review of eight candidates, the committee approved six individuals who met the ministry's criteria:

- Mr Tharathip Thamrong – Provided aid to an injured motorcyclist in Mueang Phuket District on June 4, 2024.

- Ms. Suwannee Sinto – Assisted a 50-year-old man struck by a pickup truck,



Wanphen Maitrichit and Kittithat Maitrichit, both nurses at Vachira Phuket Hospital, are being commended for helping an unconscious passenger on Flight PG278 from Phuket to Suvarnabhumi on Dec 13. Photos: Supplied

providing first aid and coordinating transport to Thalang Hospital on Dec 12, 2024.

- Mr Kittithat Maitrichit – A nurse at Vachira Phuket hospital, helped an uncon-

scious passenger at the entrance of flight PG278 from Phuket to Suvarnabhumi on Dec 13, 2024.

- Ms Wanphen Maitrichit – Also a nurse at Vachira Phuket Hospital, assisted the

same unconscious passenger on flight PG278.

- Rattakorn Paenduang, a Public Health Officer with the Communicable Disease Control and Epidemiology at Vachira Phuket Hospital (but still using his rank 2nd Lt) – Aided multiple individuals, including a pregnant woman in a road accident at the Yee Teng traffic light intersection (Feb 1, 2024) and a victim of a pickup truck accident (Mar 28, 2024), and assisted in the recovery of the body of a tourist who drowned at Karon Beach (May 15, 2024).

- Ms Runnapa Phromphiban – Assisted an unconscious man hit by a

pickup truck, providing first aid and ensuring transport to Thalang Hospital on Dec 12, 2024.

The selected individuals will have their names submitted to the Ministry of Interior for further recognition.

Additionally, Phuket Provincial Office plans to honour all eight nominated citizens with certificates to promote and encourage community service and goodwill, said the report.

The initiative aims to underscore Phuket's commitment to fostering a culture of altruism and public service, inspiring residents to contribute positively to society, the report added.

The Phuket News

# Rewat wins re-election, targets traffic headache

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Following his re-election as President of the Phuket Provincial Administration Organisation (PPAO) election last Saturday (Feb 1), Rewat Areerob says he is “ready to move forward to serve Phuket”.

Mr Rewat secured an overwhelming victory in the election last Saturday Representing the Phuket Yat Dai Party, Mr Rewat, received 86,616 votes, outpacing his closest rival, Lersak Leenanitikul of the Prachachon Party (People's Party), who garnered 44,602 votes. Independent candidate Srithep Udomlap received 2,228 votes.

A total of 144,978 voters took part in the election, representing 46% of eligible voters. Additionally, 7,282 voters (5%) chose the “no vote” option, while 4,250 ballots (3%) were deemed invalid, confirmed the Phuket branch of the



Rewat Areerob marks his victory speech at the Royal Phuket City Hotel. Photo: Phuket Yat Dai

Election commission of Thailand (ECT Phuket).

Mr Rewat's Phuket Yat Dai Party swept the board in the election, winning 21 of the 24 seats on the PPAO Council. Phuket Yat Dai won 12 of the 14 seats in Muang Phuket District, six of seven seats in Thalang District and all three seats in Kathu District,

Speaking at his campaign headquarters at Royal Phuket City Hotel in Phuket Town last Sunday (Feb 2, Mr Rewat delivered a speech reaffirming his commitment to addressing Phuket's most

pressing concerns, starting with the island's growing traffic issues.

“We [Phuket Yat Dai] will use every minute from now on to take care of people, fix the problems and create new things for our hometown of Phuket,” Mr Rewat said.

Expressing gratitude for the public's trust, Mr Rewat acknowledged the numerous unresolved issues affecting the province.

“There are so many problems. Today, I have received an opportunity from the people,” he added.

Mr Rewat prioritised the urgency of tackling traffic congestion, noting that it has increasingly mirrored the challenges faced in Bangkok.

“I know that the people of Phuket are suffering from traffic problems, and they are worsening by the day. Therefore, solving traffic problems must come first,” he confirmed.

Beyond traffic concerns, Mr Rewat emphasised his dedication to community engagement. “I will continue to listen to every voice from everyone, no matter how small,” he added.

He also outlined additional priorities, particularly waste management and economic development.

“I will combine all my strengths to solve both traffic and garbage problems for the people of Phuket. The grassroots economy from the community of our brothers and sisters will move and improve,” he concluded.



Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

## Nine injured as tour bus veers off road

AUTHORITIES WERE left investigating the cause of a tourist bus accident that sent the vehicle plunging into a 15-metre-deep ravine in Kata last Saturday (Feb 1).

The crash left nine people injured. Thankfully no people were killed in the incident.

The accident occurred at about 1:15pm near the Le Méridien Phuket Beach Resort south of Patong.

Karon Police Station along with emergency rescue teams from the Phuket Kusoldharm Foundation and Karon Municipality rushed to the scene.

The bus, operated by OS Tour, had been transporting tourists when the driver lost

control, struck a roadside barrier, and veered off the road.

The injured comprised four Chinese tourists, two Russians, one German, a Thai woman and the driver, identified as 49-year-old Wira Ritthijom.

They were transported to Patong Hospital for treatment, with most sustaining minor injuries.

Karon Police Chief Pol Col Khundet Na Nongkhai stated that preliminary reports suggested the driver may have lost control due to slippery road conditions.

At last report investigators were working to examine the scene and determine the exact cause of the crash.

Eakkapop Thongtub

## Phuket kicks off PM2.5 campaign

PHUKET PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS have launched a public awareness campaign aimed at preventing and addressing forest fires, haze and PM2.5 dust pollution, aligning with the national government's instructions to combat rising air pollution levels.

The campaign kicked off at Phuket Provincial Hall on Monday (Feb 3), with Phuket Vice Governor Adul Chuthong presiding over the opening ceremony.

The initiative, led by the Phuket Provincial Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Office (DDPM Phuket), focuses on reducing harmful dust particles that pose health and environmental risks, particularly during the dry season when pollution levels tend to spike.

DDPM Phuket Chief Sapon Thongsai, who is now also serving as the secretary of the ‘Phuket Provincial Command Center on PM2.5 Pollution’, emphasised the importance of public cooperation in curbing pollution.

The campaign, themed ‘Stop Burning, Stop Dust, For You, For Us,’ aims to raise awareness through direct community engagement and collaboration with local authorities, volunteers and residents.

Authorities are enforcing stricter measures to curb dust emissions from open burning, transportation, industrial activities and construction projects, Mr Sapon said.

Residents are urged to avoid open burning and stay informed about air quality updates through official government channels, he added.

The campaign launch followed the Air Pollution Real-time Air Quality Index



Photo: PR Phuket

(AQI) recording a PM2.5 spike of 124 for the south side of Phuket Town last Sunday (Feb 2), with lower readings across the island.

The PM2.5 reading of 124 put Phuket in the ‘Orange’ Zone, which is described as “Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups”.

“Members of sensitive groups may experience health effects. The general public is not likely to be affected. Active children and adults, and people with respiratory disease, such as asthma, should limit prolonged outdoor exertion,” notes the Air Quality Index scale as defined by the US-EPA 2016 standard.

The campaign launch also followed Vice Governor Adul issuing a provincial ban on all agricultural burning on Jan 24, following a national order issued by Deputy Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul.

Under the ban, any necessary burning for agricultural purposes must have prior permission from the local kamnan (subdistrict chief) or village headman.

Under Section 220 of the Criminal Code, anyone who causes a fire that endangers others or their property, even if unintentional, may be sentenced to up to seven years in prison and fined up to B40,000, Vice Governor Adul pointed out.

The Phuket News

## Phuket Town celebrates Chinese New Year

PHUKET CITY MUNICIPALITY held the official grand opening of its ‘Phuket Chinese New Year Festival 2025’ festivities with a fireworks show over Phuket Town on Monday night (Feb 3).

The grand celebration, showcasing the charm of local culture to boost tourism and generate income for local residents. The festival, which continued through to Wednesday night (Feb 5), was expected to significantly contribute to the city's economy.

The opening ceremony took place at the Chartered Bank Intersection, a central landmark in Phuket City. The event was presided over by Phuket Vice Governor Samawit Suphanphai alongside Phuket Town Mayor Saroj Angkanapilas.

The ceremony saw participation from municipal executives, council members, government officials, private sector representatives, local leaders and a large number of Thai and foreign visitors.

Mayor Saroj emphasised the festival's importance in stimulating the local economy and enhancing Phuket's tourism appeal. He noted that the event reflects Phuket Town's cultural diversity, bringing together different races and religions in a celebration that attracts visitors from around the world.

Through proactive tourism policies under the ‘Discover Phuket’ initiative, Phuket City Municipality aims to integrate traditional culture into its



Photo: Phuket City Municipality

tourism strategy while preserving local customs for future generations, he said.

The festivities on Monday began with a grand parade, highlighting Phuket's rich cultural heritage and featuring over 300 participants of all ages.

For the 2025 celebration, Phuket City has been adorned with festive decorations, including a stunning dragon lantern tunnel featuring three illuminated dragons in red, pink and blue, symbolising good fortune. The historic Old Town area has also been enhanced with vibrant displays, including ‘Nong Noey’, the giant inflatable teddy bear, dressed in a red Chinese outfit.

Each night during the three-day festival visitors were treated to light and sound shows at six different locations, with over 460 stalls offering local food and products.

Five main roads through the heart of Phuket Town – Thalang Rd, Krabi Rd, Phang Nga Rd, Phuket Rd and Thepkasattri Rd – were closed to traffic each afternoon and evening while the festival was underway. *The Phuket News*

The Phuket News

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## PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

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FRI FEBRUARY 7

High: +36°  
Low: +29°

Wind 11 m/s

SAT FEBRUARY 8

High: +36°  
Low: +28°

Wind 11 m/s

SUN FEBRUARY 9

High: +35°  
Low: +28°

Wind 11 m/s

MON FEBRUARY 10

High: +35°  
Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s

TUE FEBRUARY 11

High: +35°  
Low: +28°

Wind 4 m/s

WED FEBRUARY 12

High: +37°  
Low: +28°

Wind 4 m/s

THU FEBRUARY 13

High: +36°  
Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s

## Foreign tourist pinched for urinating at Phuket Airport

A VIDEO CLIP OF A foreign tourist urinating inside Phuket International Airport has sparked outrage on social media, with many netizens criticising the apparent lack of consequences for his actions.

The 13-second clip, shared by the 'Phuket Province Hod Jang' Facebook page, showed the tourist relieving himself in a public area of the airport, indifferent to onlookers.

Following the video's release, social media users expressed frustration and anger, questioning why authorities did not take immediate action.

The incident also reignited debates over Thailand's visa policies and how the country handles disruptive foreign visitors.

Airports of Thailand (AoT), which operates Phuket airport, later issued a statement to clarify how the incident happened and what action was taken against the tourist, which AoT named as Saudi Arabian national Almalki Majed Mohammed.

Mr Almalki was to board Indigo Air flight 6E1072 from Phuket to Mumbai, but was refused boarding due to his state of intoxication.



Screenshot: Courtesy of 'Phuket Province Hod Jang' Facebook page

Security officers "took control of the passenger and immediately asked him to leave the waiting area", AoT said in its statement.

"While they were taking control of the passenger, he got up and walked to stand to urinate on the wall in the arrivals hall, in the international passenger terminal, which is an inappropriate action and may cause inconvenience [sic] to other passengers.

"The security officers took the passenger to the Joint Security Center to sit and rest until he had recovered from his intoxication... As the passenger was still intoxicated and unable to communicate, the Tourist Assistance Center and Tourist Police were contacted to take further action," the AoT statement concluded.

Eakkapop Thongtub

## More than 650 drug cases in three months

The Phuket News  
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Officials have ramped up efforts to combat drug-related crimes, with more than 650 drug cases recorded in Phuket in the past three months.

The number of drug-related cases was confirmed at a meeting of the Phuket Provincial Narcotics Prevention and Suppression Committee at Phuket Provincial Hall late last week. Attendees included senior officials from the Phuket Provincial Police, the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), the Royal Thai Navy and other relevant agencies.

The meeting addressed strategies to prevent, suppress, and treat drug addiction while reviewing the results of enforcement actions from October to December 2024.

According to reports, 231 drug-related arrests were made in October, 225 in November, and 194 in December. Methamphetamine recorded the highest number of drug-related arrests, followed by crystal meth, cocaine and heroin.



Image: Region 8 Police

Mueang Phuket District reported the most meth-related arrests, while crystal meth cases were primarily concentrated in Kathu District.

To curb the drug trade, officials have intensified inspections at major ports, natural ports and small boat docking areas, said an official report of the meeting.

Authorities are also enforcing strict measures in service establishments and educational institutions.

In a separate initiative, Region 8 Police launched an anti-crime campaign from Feb 22-28 to enhance security ahead of the elections last Saturday (Feb 1).

Although based in Phuket, Region 8 Police

oversee law enforcement across seven southern provinces, including Ranong, Chumphon, Surat Thani, Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Krabi, Phang Nga and Phuket.

The operation led to the arrest of 209 individuals in connection with 197 cases, including drug offenses, firearm violations, illegal gambling and breaches of the Immigration Act.

Officers also confiscated 33,467 meth pills, 233.08 grammes of crystal meth, 5,000g of heroin and 93.15g of cocaine.

Additional seized items included firearms, ammunition and assets such as a van valued at B1 million, cash totaling B62,900 and a gold necklace worth B45,000.

## Uzbekistan man charged for just six days' overstay

A 21-YEAR-OLD MAN from Uzbekistan was arrested at Phuket International Airport for overstaying his visa by six days, authorities have confirmed.

The arrest took place on the morning of Wednesday, Jan 29 at approximately 10:30am. The Phuket Airport Immigration Investigation Team, in coordination with officers from Sakhu Police Station, carried out the operation under the direction of Pol Col Atisak Panya, Superintendent of the Immigration Division 2.

Leading the arrest was Pol Lt Col. Akkaraphon Kaewkiattiyot, along with officers from the Suppression Investigation Unit



Photo: Phuket Airport Immigration

(ChP.3), noted a brief report posted online by airport immigration.

The suspect, not named in the report, was detained at the international passenger terminal before being transferred to Sakhu Police Station for further legal proceedings, the report concluded.

The Phuket News

## Police investigate body of tour boat crewman found off Pa Khlok

POLICE ARE INVESTIGATING THE death of a 31-year-old Thai crewman who was last seen staying overnight on the local tour boat on which he worked.

The man's body was discovered floating in the sea near Ao Por, Pa Khlok, on Jan 29.

Local residents reported seeing the body offshore at around midday. Officers, along with forensic experts from Vachira Phuket Hospital, soon arrived at the scene.

Police soon identified the deceased as Thanyawit Thahanthai.

According to initial reports, Mr Thanyawit had been staying on the boat with the boat captain and a mechanic the night before. The crew had dinner together before retiring separately.

The following morning, the captain noticed Mr Thanyawit was missing while preparing to clean the boat. Before he could report the disappearance, authorities were informed that a body had been found, police noted in their report.



Photo: Thalang Police

The body of Mr Thanyawit was discovered floating face down in the water, unclothed, with no visible injuries or signs of struggle. His relatives, who were traveling from Trang Province, have been notified, police said.

A preliminary examination conducted by forensic experts found no signs of foul play. However, the body was taken to Vachira Phuket Hospital for a detailed post-mortem examination to determine the exact cause of death.

Eakkapop Thongtub

# Big push for Vachira donations

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People making donations to the construction of the cancer care centre at Vachira Phuket Hospital will not only receive the value of their donation as a tax deduction, but instead will receive twice the value of their donation as a tax deduction, but only for deductions within the one tax year, the Phuket Area Revenue Office has confirmed.

"Donations to government hospitals qualify for a double deduction, for example, a B2,000 donation will count as B4,000 for tax purposes," the office's public relations liaison, who asked not to be named, told The Phuket News.

"However, the total deductible amount must not exceed 10% of your remaining taxable income after other deductions. For instance, if your taxable income is B200,000, you can deduct B4,000 from a B2,000 donation, reducing the amount subject to tax," she explained.

"This incentive encourages more charitable giving while easing taxpayers' financial burden," the officer added.

The confirmation comes as donations as of Monday (Feb 3) reached B239,700,346, or 82.65% of the target B290 million required.



Photo: PR Phuket

Regardless, the push for more donations continues, with Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat calling on government agencies, businesses and the public to support fundraising initiatives to build the radiation therapy building.

The proposed six-story building will house a radiotherapy department, nuclear medicine department, chemotherapy room and inpatient facilities, covering approximately 9,000 square metres. The building will be located on a donated five-rai plot on Pracha Uthit Road, Ratsada, about four kilometres from Vachira Phuket Hospital.

## THE NEED

"Vachira Phuket Hospital currently serves around 1,000 new cancer patients each year

from Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi," Rawiphen Kingkaew, Deputy Director of Vachira Phuket Hospital, explained at a fundraising publicity event last week.

"About 500 of these patients require radiation therapy, but the hospital currently lacks the facilities to provide it. Vachira Phuket Hospital currently offers chemotherapy and surgery for cancer patients but does not have radiation therapy facilities. Instead, patients must travel to Surat Thani, Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Songkhla or Bangkok for care.

"While treatment costs can be covered through various health-care funds, patients and their families must bear the expenses for travel, accommodation and food," she said.

"For those facing financial difficulties, these additional costs can be overwhelming, often forcing them to forgo radiation therapy – reducing their chances of recovery and relief from the disease," she added.

"While the Ministry of Public Health has allocated a budget for essential medical equipment, including a 4D high-energy particle accelerator radiation therapy machine worth B120mn and a treatment simulation and planning machine worth B32mn, a specialised building must be constructed to house them," Ms Rawiphen said.

The hospital must complete the first phase of construction by June 2026, and was required to raise B150mn February 2025 to begin construction, she explained.

Failure to complete the facility in time would mean the hospital would have to return the allocated government budget for the radiation equipment, leaving cancer patients without essential treatment options, she noted.

## BIG PUSH

To help bridge the remaining funding gap, a 'Pha Pa Chai Saeng' fundraising event will be held at the Mahisorn Phakdi Auditorium, located at the Phuket Provincial Government Center,

this Friday and Saturday (Feb 7-8).

The robe-offering ceremony will be held from 6pm to 9pm on Friday and from 7:30am to midday on Saturday, Ms Rawiphen said.

Boon Yongsakul, the well-known and much respected local businessman, has also announced that a charity concert titled 'Light of Hope' will be held at the 4,000-seat Indoor Gymnasium at Saphan Hin on Mar 8.

"In order for the fundraising to be effective, cover all target groups, and make full use of the production that the team has prepared, the 'Light of Hope' concert will be held on Mar 8, at 6pm. Artists include Charas Fuangarom, Pan Paiboon Kiatkheawkaew, Sao Sao Sao, and Bert and Heart," he said.

Tickets are sold through Allticket (online) and at 7-Eleven stores. Prices start at B1,000 to B3,500. VIP tickets can be bought at Vachira Phuket Hospital, he added.

Mr Boon is also the main organiser of the 'Saeng Rack' (First Light) charity concert by 'Toon Bodyslam' to be held at the indoor arena from 6pm on Mar 9, while a 'Pre-Concert Event' with entertainment, food and donor showcases will be held at the parking lot of the Indoor Gymnasium from Mar 7-9.

## Cabinet approves budget of B3.14bn for 'PSU Hospital'

THE THAI CABINET HAS APPROVED a budget of B3.14 billion to fund the construction of Songklanagarind Hospital Phuket, a major healthcare initiative under Prince of Songkla University (PSU).

The project, set to be implemented between 2026 and 2029, aims to enhance healthcare services in Phuket and the Andaman region.

The approved budget will be distributed over four fiscal years: B749.50 million (2026); B1,031.89mn (2027); B938.92mn (2028); and B420mn (2029).

Additionally, PSU has been directed to submit a budget request for 2026 in accordance with Section 26 of the Budget Procedure Act B.E. 2561 for items exceeding B1bn to the Budget Bureau.

PSU has outlined the hospital as a crucial step in addressing public health system challenges in Phuket and the surrounding Andaman region, the Cabinet minutes noted.

The province currently faces a shortage of qualified medical personnel capable of treating complex diseases, along with insufficient workforce development in health sciences and public health. The gaps are particularly critical given Phuket's role in high-value tourism and the growing demand for medical tourism services, the Cabinet admitted.

To bridge these gaps, PSU plans to enhance medical education and workforce development in the region. This includes training new graduates, upskilling existing professionals and developing specialised



Image: PSU Phuket

skills to support both public and private healthcare sectors.

The initiative aligns with Thailand's long-term strategy to position itself as a global leader in medical tourism, the Cabinet said.

The Songklanagarind Hospital Phuket project will establish a 300-bed specialised medical centre offering advanced tertiary care, precision medicine and telemedicine services. It aims to complement existing Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) hospitals in the region by providing treatment for complex diseases and enhancing the overall healthcare system.

Further, the hospital will play a key role in the 'Phuket Health Sandbox' project, which seeks to integrate public health advancements with economic development. With a focus on research, innovation and sustainability, PSU envisions the facility as a cornerstone in strengthening Thailand's position as a leading medical tourism hub.

In April 2023, the new 500-bed 'Songklanagarind Phuket Hospital', as it was promoted at the time, was forecast to generate B1.6bn a year in revenue from foreign visitors. *The Phuket News*



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## Bright start for arrivals for Chinese New Year

THE TOURISM AUTHORITY of Thailand (TAT) is working towards increasing charter flights from secondary cities in China, while preparing to launch the first phase of the domestic 'We Travel Together' subsidy, offering 1 million privileges in June.

Chuwit Sirivejkul, TAT regional director of marketing for East Asia, said Thailand had so far welcomed 22,000-24,000 Chinese tourists per day on average in January, reports the Bangkok Post.

On Jan 28, arrivals tallied nearly 30,000, marking a good start to the holiday period, he said.

The TAT earlier said more than 10,000 Chinese tourists, mostly tour groups from second-tier cities, had cancelled trips to Thailand due to safety concerns regarding human trafficking. However, scheduled flights still operated as usual with a typical number of independent tourists.

To address the issue of stagnant tour group arrivals, Mr Chuwit said the agency is discussing solutions with tour operators, which could



Ms Thapanee (right) and Mr Sorawong (centre) welcome Chinese tourists arriving at Suvarnabhumi airport. Photo: Bangkok Post

lead to more charter flights after the Chinese New Year holiday period, targeting potential segments such as meeting and incentive groups.

Chinese companies are willing to save their budgets for overseas trips for use during other periods, rather than the long holiday, he said.

The TAT estimates arrivals from mainland China during the Chinese New Year period from Jan 24 to Feb 2 should reach 287,000 and generate more than B8.8 billion in revenue, representing an increase of 7% and 9% year-on-year, respectively.

This year the TAT is targeting 7.2-7.5mn Chinese tourist arrivals.

Bangkok Post

# Southern hotels boom amid tourist influx

Bangkok Post

Robust tourism should help hotels in the South enjoy surging room rates and service charges for both high and low seasons, as many five-star beach resorts have already announced a new round of service charges, with the highest rate reaching B92,924 in January.

Suksit Suvunditkul, president of the southern chapter of the Thai Hotels Association, said many hotels in Phuket have been focusing more on driving room rates than occupancy, as well as utilising a dynamic pricing strategy rather than binding themselves with fixed contract rates, as in the past.

These business directions resulted in higher service charges for their employees, which typically account for 10% of room revenue, said Mr Suksit.

Hotel service charge announcements nationwide for January went viral on social media because of their



Tourists on Patong Beach. Photo: DMCR

enormous amounts, such as B92,924 baht for JW Marriott Phuket, B65,854 for Anantara Golden Triangle, and B43,244 for Four Seasons Bangkok.

For December and January, Phuket hotels typically earned the highest income during the high season, Mr Suksit said.

Three- and four-star hotels were estimated to increase their average daily rate by 10-20%, while the room price for five-star resorts should increase at a slower rate as they already charge a much higher level.

The dynamic pricing strategy has seen many hotels keep a portion of rooms for last-minute sales

at maximum prices, said Mr Suksit.

For instance, during the Electric Daisy Carnival Thailand 2025 music festival in Phuket last week, many four-star hotels sold rooms for B12,000 per night, with strong demand from foreign tourists to continue this strategy.

Even though more workers are employed, they could still earn higher revenue from service charges due to a spike in room rates, unlike the early years after the pandemic, when the high service charges were attributed to lower numbers of staff amid labour shortages.

Mr Suksit said hotel service charges during low

season should be 50% of the high season rate as tourists in Phuket would fall during that period, but it is still acceptable as there are more consistent flows of arrivals from Russia, the Middle East, China and India for the whole year.

Pongsakorn Ketprapakorn, executive director of Khaolak Emerald Beach Resort and Spa, said hotels in Phang Nga typically offer lower service charges than the same tiers in Phuket due to fewer tourists, although some hotels were performing even better than pre-pandemic levels.

Since Phang Nga has four months of low season with monsoon, discouraging tourists from visiting, it can be solved by encouraging investment in man-made attractions, such as water parks or malls, to accommodate tourists throughout the year.

Tourism operators also hope the new Andaman Airport in Phang Nga will help them gain more tourists in the future.

## 'Andaman Trade Fair' on its way

THE PHUKET PROVINCIAL Commerce Office has invited the public, tourists and business operators to attend the 'Andaman Trade Fair @Phuket' from Feb 12-16.

The event, open each day from 10am to 10pm at the Central Phuket Floresta shopping mall, is aimed at promoting trade and economic growth in the Andaman region, explained Woranit Aphiratjirawong, Chief of the Phuket office of Ministry of Commerce

Speaking at a press launch to announce the event last Sunday (Feb 2), Ms Woranit said the trade fair will provide a platform for quality product shopping and business networking while contributing to the sustainable economic development of the area.

More than 300 exhibitors will take part in the event in an air-conditioned dome in the outside area of the mall, showcasing a wide range of products. The event will also feature business matching activities, providing local enterprises with the opportunity to connect with major domestic and international companies, she said.

Among the notable attendees at the press launch were Peerakan Krottyotha, Director of the Community Development Promotion Group; Sempong Promlee from the Phuket Provincial Industry Office; Charan Sangsan of the Phuket Chamber of Commerce; Montawee Hongyok of Anuphas Vividhkan Co Ltd who is currently serving as chairman of



Photo: PR Phuket

the Phuket branch of the Federation of Thai Industries (FTI Phuket); and Pracha Atsawathira from the Digital Economy Promotion Agency (DEPA).

The event is designed to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and community businesses by expanding their market reach, Ms Woranit said.

Attendees will have the chance to network and negotiate with more than 10 major corporations, including Central Food Retail, CP All, Siam Makro, The Mall Group, PTT Oil and Retail and IchiBan Enterprises.

The fair will highlight products from the six Andaman provinces – Phuket, Ranong, Phang Nga, Krabi, Trang and Satun – ranging from agricultural goods and local cuisine to innovative products.

Business negotiations will take place both onsite and online, enabling entrepreneurs to explore new market channels, Ms Woranit added.

Visitors can also enjoy a range of entertainment activities, including performances from well-known artists such as Dome Jaruvath, Renisara, Kant Tossan and Ae Jirakorn. *The Phuket News*

## Resident employment rate hits 99.15%

THE EMPLOYMENT RATE AMONG registered Phuket residents stands at 99.15%, the Phuket Subcommittee on Labour Development and Provincial Vocational Training Coordination (SVTC) has revealed.

The figure was confirmed at a meeting of the subcommittee, chaired by Deputy Governor Ronnarong Thipsiri, held at the Phuket Skill Development Institute 21 offices in Phuket Town on Jan 29.

The aim of the meeting was to assess Phuket's labour situation and outline career development strategies for the year ahead, said an official report of the meeting.

The meeting included representatives from various agencies who reviewed labour statistics presented by the National Statistics Office.

According to the data, Phuket's population stands at 619,978, with 500,422 individuals of working age (15 and older), making up 80.73% of the total population.

Of the 355,350 people in the labour force, 352,288 (99.15%) are employed, while 3,062 (0.86%) are unemployed.

Officials also discussed labour demand based on figures from the Phuket Provincial Employment Office.

Between Sept 26 and Dec 25, 2024, businesses in the province sought to fill 1,335 positions across 14 occupations, the report noted.

As of Jan 23, 2025, there remains a demand for just 876 workers, with the top five most in-demand positions being store sales staff, food and beverage service workers, customer service staff, building cleaners and general labourers.



Applicants try their luck at a Phuket job fair last August. Photo: NNT / file

To address labour needs and enhance workforce skills, provincial officials have developed a labour training plan aligned with 12 economic and social principles, the report said.

The project includes training programs in four key industries: tourism and health tourism (targeting 345 trainees), food processing (20 trainees) and digital and other industries (635 trainees).

Additionally, the Phuket Skill Development Institute 21 has launched a labour training initiative for the tourism and service sectors, backed by a budget of B3.466 million, the report said.

The programme aims to train 800 individuals through 40 classes, with five classes completed so far, covering 110 people and using B368,600 of the budget.

The meeting also reviewed the proposed Independent Labour Promotion and Protection Act, which has been submitted to the Cabinet by the Ministry of Labour.

The draft legislation aims to provide independent workers with enhanced protections, including occupational safety, fair income, social security benefits and the ability to form associations for rights advocacy. The law is expected to take effect within 2025. *The Phuket News*

# Poll wins a boon for BJT

## BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

The Bhumjaithai Party's (BJT) positive performance in last Saturday's (Feb 1) local polls indicates their growing popularity and suggests leader Anutin Charnvirakul now has a better chance of becoming Thailand's next prime minister in the next election, according to political analysts.

The party performed better than expected in the elections, as the ruling Pheu Thai Party and its de facto leader, Thaksin Shinawatra, appeared to have lost their grip on several constituencies in the North and Northeast, which were once party strongholds.

Pheu Thai and its networks secured the leadership of 16 provincial administrative organisations (PAO), followed by its coalition partner BJT, which took 14 seats.

The opposition party, the People's Party (PP), won only one seat in the PAO election, despite fielding candidates in 17 provinces. Independent candidates won three seats, while Democrat picks also won three seats.

The Chartthaipattana and Prachachat parties won two seats each, while the Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP) took one seat. The United Thai Nation (UTN) Party won four, while the Kla Dharma Party took one seat.



Bhumjaithai Party leader Anutin Charnvirakul. Photo: Bangkok Post

The election was held in 47 out of 77 provinces across the country on Saturday, and the unofficial results came out last Sunday (Feb 2).

Wanwichit Boonprong, a political science expert at Rangsit University, said the results gave Bhumjaithai more negotiating power ahead of the next general election.

As such, it may opt for a different coalition partner in the next election, even if Pheu Thai manage to secure the highest number of House seats.

The party might even opt to go with the PP, if it manages to win a significant number of House seats in the next election, he said.

"In the event Bhumjaithai wins the election with the highest number of House seats in hand, Pheu Thai will have to contend with being a mere coalition partner and supporting Mr Anutin as the new prime minister," he said.

Olarn Thinbangtiao, a political science lecturer at Burapha University, shared a similar view, saying now that BJT has a firm grip on the Senate and the PAO in many provinces, Anutin's chances of becoming the prime minister are high.

As the next general election is likely to be a close contest between Pheu Thai, BJT and the PP, Anutin's chances will be boosted even further if it comes first, or at least second, in the upcoming election, he said.

That is because while Pheu Thai is willing to form a new coalition together with either Bhumjaithai or the PP, the chance that BJT will form an alliance with the PP is rather low, he said.

As for Thaksin, Mr Wanwichit said the former Prime Minister must rethink his role with the Pheu Thai Party due to the party's mediocre poll performance.

# Senator's proposal for 'live executions' panned

## BANGKOK

SENATOR ANGKHANA Neelapaijit has condemned a suggestion by a colleague to broadcast live the executions of convicts as a way to combat the drug problem.

Ms Angkhana, a former head of the National Human Rights Commission, was among many who were taken aback by the remarks of Sen Amat Ayukhen on Jan 29, who suggested harsher penalties against drug dealers including more death sentences.

Mr Amat proposed creating a special court to handle drug-related cases to ensure rulings are handed down within three months. He suggested the death penalty be imposed more regularly and executions be broadcast live as a deterrent to drug crime.

Ms Angkhana said the proposals by Sen Amat would not serve as a deterrent but would instead undermine human dignity and condone violence. She said such broadcasts could expose people, especially the young, to violence, adding it would also violate



Senator Angkhana. Photo: Bangkok Post

the law against torture and enforced disappearances.

Tackling the drug problem effectively requires a systematic approach that includes a crackdown on major offenders, she said. She backed the government's tough stance on drugs but noted that while the government must strictly enforce the law, it must also uphold human rights.

Though dozens of prisoners have been sentenced to death for various offences, Thailand has not carried out an execution since June 2018, when a murderer was given a lethal injection. Prior to adopting lethal injection in 2003, Thailand used shooting as the method of execution.

Bangkok Post

# Thai officials in Israel to bring released hostages back home

## BANGKOK

FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTER Maris Sangiampongsa arrived in Israel last Saturday (Feb 2) to oversee the expected repatriation of five Thai nationals recently released after being held hostage by Hamas for 15 months.

After arriving in Tel Aviv Mr Maris and Chief of Defence Forces Gen Songwit Noonpakdee visited the five Thais at Al-Shamir Medical Centre, where a Zoom conference was held with Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra.

Ms Paetongtarn wrote later in a post on X that the government has assigned the Thai Embassy in Tel Aviv to follow up on the compensation the freed hostages will receive from both Israel and Thailand.

She said compensation from the Israel National Insurance Institute would include 1,000 shekels a month (B10,000) until age 67, with additional sums paid yearly after that.

Mr Maris also met with his Israeli counterpart, Gideon Sa'ar, to discuss the process of repatriating the five Thais to Thailand.

A military medical team currently in Israel played a key role in coordinating the men's release and will continue working to facilitate their return as soon as possible.

Before departing for Israel on Friday night, Mr Maris said that as far as he was aware, the hostages who were freed the previous day were in good physical health.



Maris Sangiampongsa greets the freed Thai hostages. Photo: @ingshin X account

However, he noted that their prolonged captivity may have significantly impacted their mental health.

"It will likely take eight to ten days for them to undergo thorough physical and mental health examinations, as well as an assessment to determine their fitness to fly home," he said.

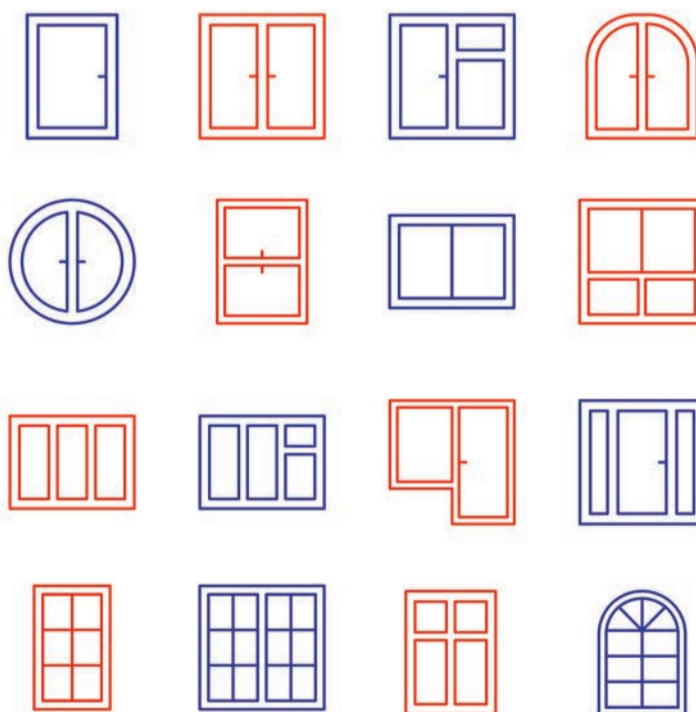
"Of course, we want them to reunite with their families as soon as possible," he added. "Being back with their loved ones should also aid in their mental recovery."

The minister expressed gratitude to Israel for its continued efforts in securing the release of the hostages, as well as to the Thai military team that worked for nearly a month to facilitate their freedom.

He also extended Thailand's appreciation to Qatar, Egypt, Iran and Turkey for their assistance. Bangkok Post



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# Swan song from a giant



## GREEN THOUGHTS

Patrick Campbell

**F**riends, now within touching distance of my 90<sup>th</sup> milestone, I have taken the decision, after careful consideration, to stop writing for *The Phuket News*. Thanks are due to all of you out there who have taken the trouble to peruse my columns over the years, and especially to those readers who have actively shared their love of our magical natural world. Reaching out to a sympathetic audience has been a privilege, a learning process, and a journey that I have savoured every step of the way. I have made a lot of life-long friends.

To sound another elegiac note: our gardens are rapidly becoming the last havens not just for the flora, but also for much of the fauna of the planet. I take it as symbolic of the bigger picture that my own garden, which began life as a bare, rubble-infested plot nearly 20 years ago, is an oasis of green in an area now besieged by concrete condominiums. If it is nowadays more jungle than manicured plot, it is at least home to birds, butterflies and bees.

My foray into local journalism began in 2009 with this newspaper's predecessor, *The Phuket Gazette*, when I tentatively submitted my first effort. It

## Birds of a feather

I am enjoying a sun-downer by the swimming pool. Overhead, in the gathering dusk, a flight of 20 or so white birds wing their way eastwards. I would call it a 'skein', but that collective noun applies to geese. These birds, though impressive, are different.

In fact, they are Cattle Egrets (*bubulcus ibis*), long necks retracted into hunched shoulders, legs stiffly astern in the manner of their relative, the heron. I can set my watch by them. It is 6.30. Every day at this time of year, they make their noiseless pass over the garden en route from feeding ground to nighttime roost.

We are lucky to have these elegant birds in Phuket. Many of their number, especially the Great Egret, were endangered by nineteenth cen-

birds may take the odd fish doesn't help their cause.

But Cattle Egrets are not primarily waders, and are useful to farmers as bio-control agents. In Nai Harn there is an expanse of scrubland and grass. Once, I suspect, proper wetland, it is still traversed by a slow-moving stream.

Here you can see egrets perched on the backs of cows and buffalo, pecking at ticks, or following the grazing cattle as they disturb grasshoppers, frogs and the odd lizard. They forage alongside white-vented mynahs, a scruffy bird distinguished from its common cousin of beach and garden by its jet black plumage and tufted crest. Unlikely lunch companions...

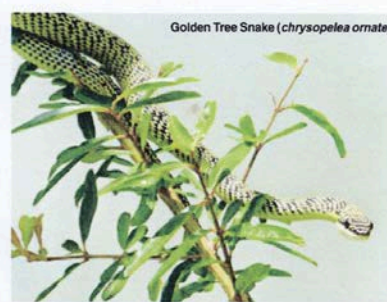
**Lizard for lunch?**

In fact, Phuket's lizards provide

photo) was wrapped around my papaya tree. The tail of a skink was protruding from its mouth; the rest had already disappeared down a serpentine gullet. This visitor normally moves like quicksilver; now, in his post-prandial state, he had as much get-up-and-go as a Victorian gentleman after a 10-course meal.

Some months earlier, the other lizards in the garden, fencepost agamids, had narrowly avoided a similar fate. They were at risk due to the national habit – often borne of necessity – of supplementing a monotonous rice diet with animal protein.

Long before the garden had taken shape, I was having a well sunk in my newly acquired plot. It was never finished as it happens, since the diggers encountered a stratum of grey granite – it is below the surface in much of Phuket – that defied all attempts to mine it with dynamite. A hazardous business, since the explosives were not only temperamental, but illegal. So before each big bang, the diggers ran into the jungle and hid, only emerging after the explo-



was written under the heading of 'Nature and Nurture', and entitled 'Birds of a Feather'. At the time, I figured I had enough material, if required, for maybe a dozen articles. Little did I imagine that that initial salvo would lead to several hundred pieces on gardening, the environment and natural history, and a guide entitled 'The Tropic Gardener'. Throughout this marathon, I have been fortunate to have benefited from the co-operative endeavours of a number of editors, of whom Chris Husted, the present and longest-serving incumbent, has been a rock of reliability and good humour.

In a valedictory gesture, and perhaps spurred by a sense of nostalgia, I have revisited that flight of the egrets by printing the original text below.

### Birds of a Feather

I am enjoying a sun-downer by the swimming pool. Overhead, in the gathering dusk, a flight of 20 or so white birds wing their way eastwards. I would call it a 'skein', but that collective noun applies to geese. These birds, though impressive, are different.

In fact, they are Cattle Egrets (*bubulcus ibis*), long necks retracted into hunched shoulders, legs stiffly astern in the manner of their relative, the heron. I can set my watch by them. It is 6.30. Every day at this time of year, they make their noiseless pass over the garden en route from feeding ground to nighttime roost.

We are lucky to have these elegant birds in Phuket. Many of their number, especially the Great Egret, were endangered by 19th century ladies' insatiable desire for hat plumes. Indeed, their name comes from the French aigrette, meaning 'feather'.

We are doubly lucky to have them when you consider the Thai propensity for putting more or less anything that moves on their dinner plates. That these birds may take the odd fish doesn't help their cause.

But Cattle Egrets are not primarily waders, and are useful to farmers as biocontrol agents. In Nai Harn there is an expanse of scrubland and grass. Once, I suspect, proper wetland, it is still traversed by a slow-moving stream.

Here you can see egrets perched on the backs of cows and buffalo, pecking at ticks, or following the grazing cattle as they disturb grasshoppers, frogs and the odd lizard. They forage alongside white-vented mynahs, a scruffy bird distinguished from its common cousin of beach and garden by its jet-black plumage and tufted crest. Unlikely lunch companions...

### Lizard for lunch?

In fact, Phuket's lizards provide a tasty morsel for some unlikely gourmets. Recently, I was at a loss to explain why the sun skinks (*mabuia multifasciata*) were putting in fewer and fewer appearances in their favourite flower borders. One day I discovered why. A golden tree snake (*chrysopelea ornata*) was wrapped around my papaya tree. The tail of a skink was protruding from

its mouth; the rest had already disappeared down a serpentine gullet. This visitor normally moves like quicksilver; now, in his post-prandial state, he had as much get-up-and-go as a Victorian gentleman after a 10-course meal.

Some months earlier, the other lizards in the garden, fencepost agamids, had narrowly avoided a similar fate. They were at risk due to the national habit – often borne of necessity – of supplementing a monotonous rice diet with animal protein.

Long before the garden had taken shape, I was having a well sunk in my newly acquired plot. It was never finished as it happens, since the diggers encountered a stratum of grey granite – it is below the surface in much of Phuket – that defied all attempts to mine it with dynamite. A hazardous business, since the explosives were not only temperamental, but illegal. So before each big bang, the diggers ran into the jungle and hid, only emerging after the explosion had sent a hail of rocky fragments flying in all directions.

Every day, the chief bombardier spent his lunch break catching these absurdly long-tailed fence lizards (*calotes versicolor*), reptiles so named after the adult male's habit of displaying on walls.

I thought his snaring method ingenious at the time, but have since watched migrant workers use the same technique. He followed the paths through the head-high, secondary growth beyond the plot, armed with a long stick like a fishing rod. It had a fine nylon noose at the business end. Our friend knew, as every Thai schoolboy knows, that these lizards can change color to match their surroundings. They rely on this natural camouflage when disturbed by making an initial dash and then merging with their natural surroundings in reptilian stillness.

Once the creature had frozen, the hunter then dangled the lasso over its head, carefully lowered it and then quickly pulled it tight in the manner of a rabbit wire. Writhing and struggling like a hooked fish, the victim was unceremoniously dumped in a large plastic bottle.

Once work was over for the day, the lizard was spit-barbecued along with a dozen or so of his unfortunate fellows over an impromptu fire. There was precious little flesh, but the tiny, pathetic cadavers were consumed with relish. Let's hope that Agamid lizards are not an endangered species. (They are not – Ed.)

One possible crumb of comfort for green-minded readers. My Thai partner assures me that Phuket natives do not eat such things, that this is a barbarism indulged by people from Isarn or Myanmar or Vietnam, by non-southerners who think nothing of eating disgusting stuff such as fermented fish soup or fried beetles. And in truth, our lizard catcher did come from Udon Thani. But I still worry about the lizards...

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).

# WINDOW ON PHUKET

February/March 2025 issue

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# Phuket's 'Caveman' turns 80



## BLAZING SADDLES

**Baz Daniel**  
baz\_gunner2000@yahoo.com

**J**ohn Gray is one of the Andaman's most iconic and internationally famous characters who reached his 80th birthday just a few weeks ago. What better way to celebrate the life of this extraordinary man than to take a nostalgic peak at John's unique trajectory, both through his life and through this amazing part of the world which he calls home.

John Gray is literally a giant of a man, both in reputation and in personal stature. He's often affectionately known as 'Caveman' for his pioneering work bringing the sport of sea kayaking to the caves, lagoons and 'hongs' (sea caves) of Phang Nga Bay.

Alternatively, you'll hear him described as the 'Ling Yai' – literally 'big monkey' in Thai. In his prime, he was certainly big (close to two metres tall and over 110 kilos and also rather hairy like a monkey and blessed with incredible strength and dexterity, so the monkey moniker is pretty appropriate.

Many documentaries and films have been made about John's adventurous exploits and passionate stance on environmental protection. The Discovery Channel, Animal Planet and *National Geographic* magazine have all come calling at Caveman's door to promote his larger-than-life personality, amazing kayaking adventures and passionate environmentalism.

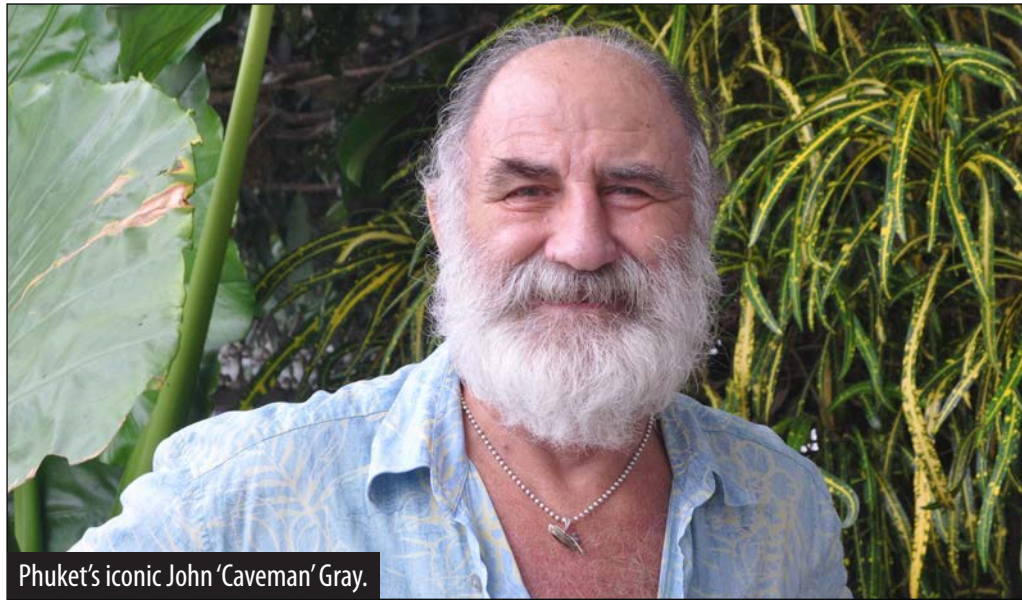
I was fortunate enough to meet John very soon after I made Phuket my home in 2005 and experience several sea kayaking adventures with him and his company John Gray Sea Canoe Adventures. We became firm friends and I have been lucky enough to follow John's fascinating trajectory and experience for the past 20 years, while also experiencing many further adventures together.

John pioneered sea kayaking in the Andaman region, starting his company in 1983, so by 2009 he'd celebrated 25 incredible years pursuing his dual passions of promoting sea kayaking and environmentalism. I set out to use that occasion to write an article not only focusing on his remarkable achievements, but also to try and capture a little of the essence of what made this incredible man tick.

I'd arranged to meet John (always a difficult thing to do as he personifies the word "busy") one Sunday afternoon at Friendship Beach in southeast Phuket. At the appointed hour John arrived and was immediately welcomed by a barrage of greetings and jokes from the assembled expats and locals. Everybody seemed to know the 'ling yai'... yes, he'd certainly earned the sobriquet 'icon'.

In all the years I'd known John, I'd never been able to buy him a beer, so I tried again, but as usual he turned me down. "OK John, that's as good a place to start as any," I said. "How come a hulking ex-rugby player like you doesn't drink beer?"

"I was playing rugby for UCLA when I was studying there on a journalism



Phuket's iconic John 'Caveman' Gray.

scholarship and they wanted to move me from wing-forward to second row, because I was putting on weight. I stopped drinking beer then and there and have never gone back."

This was typical of the man.

Despite his genial, gentle giant persona, John has a will of iron and when he puts his mind to doing something, he gets it done.

John had an amazing childhood being immersed in environmentalism and adventure from an early age. John's parents met on a Sierra Club outing, and like so many remarkable men John has a remarkable woman standing behind him, in this case his beloved mother.

"My mom was the greatest influence on my life and was truly a visionary. We were a sixth-generation Los Angeles family and I remember when I was about five that our house was the local drop-off for the Audubon Society. It was a menagerie full of birds and other abandoned or damaged animals. Ma would lavish tender care on all the animals and teach us about them at the same time. My love of Nature comes directly from her."

John's mother was also a very forward-looking free-thinker with strong egalitarian principles.

"When I was 12, Ma said I was old enough to go 'religion shopping'. She took me around, Sunday after Sunday, to all of the churches in the neighbourhood. She helped me understand what each religion had to offer and believed, and then left it up to me to decide for myself."

So what religion is John Gray now 68 years later? Laughing mischievously, he says, "Oh, a bit of a humanist, with a dash of agnostic and a side sauce of Buddhism."

What drove John's unrelenting passion for environmental education and conservation, I asked.

"I was blessed with an amazing childhood. I was swimming in the ocean at six months old in 1945, camping in the Sierras by 1949, rehabilitating birds, (1950), living in a village in northern Japan (1953-4), specialising in raptor rehabilitation (1957 to the present). I was SCUBA certified in 1957, and conducted six straight Science Fair marine biology projects (1957-62) and became a Red Cross Lifeguard (1960) – all before I'd even finished high school.

"I was raised to appreciate the marvels of Nature, different cultures,

creativity, curiosity, courage and integrity. Selfless service to all living things is everybody's duty, I think. Why are we blessed with intelligence if not to use it to help the world?"

"Thanks to those early years, I remain in awe of our marvellous planet and the miracle of life. Sharing the fruits of my amazing childhood with visitors to Phuket is my great mission, in the hope that we all realise that we are capable of accomplishing anything we want, just as long as we never forget we are nothing but overgrown monkeys."

John's ethos has always been dedicated towards environmental conservation and education, rather

money-making. He pioneered such practices as taking all garbage and waste out of the environments his company was showing to visitors and 'look but don't touch' the wondrous ecosystems he was able to open up to thousands of wide-eyed tourists. Sadly, many of the companies which copied his pioneering sea-kayaking tours were not so diligent and protective of the environment that people had come to see, a source of great sadness and disappointment to John.

I last had the pleasure of spending time with John at my 70th birthday party held in Chalong in 2019. He was his usual hulking and unmissable presence, but sadly he was showing some signs of mental deterioration.

Since then, this incredible man has had to step back from the day-to-day running of his pioneering company, but his wife and his many close friends, staff and business associates now manage the company and the fabulous experiences it offers.

John is indeed a Colossus of a man who points the way in which responsible, sustainable tourism could and should be managed. We have a lot to learn from this giant of a man and you will find no better way to honour his passion and legacy than to take a day trip into Phang Nga Bay with John Gray Sea Canoeing Adventures... I'm sure that like myself, you will find it one of the most transcendent experiences you've ever had.



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**The Phuket News** - Talking to Phuket

# POP QUIZ

1. Which American state shares its name with a former Soviet Republic?
2. YouTube was bought for US\$1.65 billion, in 2006, by which company?
3. Transylvania became part of which country in 1918?
4. How many feet are in a fathom?
5. What was Victoria Beckham's last name before she married football legend David?

Answers below, centre

## SUDOKU

Hard

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

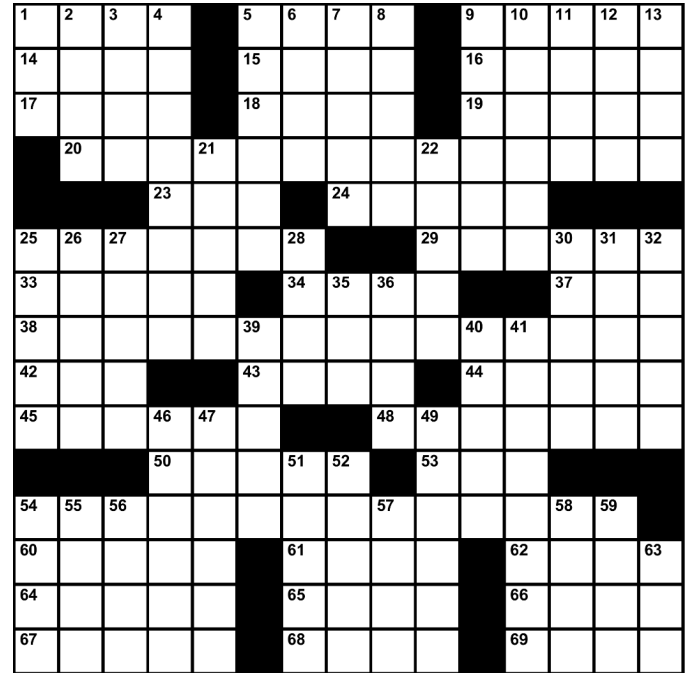
## Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

Across

1. Head
5. Tennis great Lendl
9. Fireplace
14. Aquatic plant
15. Final go-with
16. Taboos
17. Convention group
18. H.S. math
19. Long baths
20. Marple creator
23. Piña colada ingredient
24. Short musical piece
25. Voicelessness
29. Spiritualist
33. Stingless flier
34. Search thoroughly
37. Genetics lab study
38. Jo March creator
42. Place to stay
43. Badger's burrow
44. "It's a Wonderful Life" role
45. Adorn
48. Dulcet
50. Coward and namesakes
53. "\_\_\_ boom bah!"

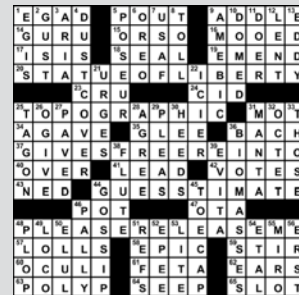
Down

1. Terrific
2. Spicy stew
3. Full of excitement
4. Cheese accompaniment
5. Panama and others
6. Aloe \_\_\_
7. Liturgical vestment
8. Dusk to dawn
9. Deep down
10. Fastened, in a way
11. Swarm member
12. Mischievous god
13. Sum, \_\_\_, fui
21. Airs
22. Cuban dance
25. Go off script
26. Inclined
27. Keep after
28. Meridian
30. Sarcasm
31. Disentangle
32. Matched
35. Muesli morsel
36. Fable
39. Appealed
40. Stalin's predecessor
41. Torches
46. Beat the draft?
47. Howler
49. Willow twigs
51. Fast talk
52. Offshoot
54. Units of work
55. Handle roughly
56. Inspiration
57. Hit, in a way
58. Place for a run
59. Agrippina's slayer
63. On Soc. Sec.



Visit: [www.ilovecrosswords.com](http://www.ilovecrosswords.com)

## Solutions to last week's puzzles:



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

## Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

1. Georgia; 2. Google; 3. Romania; 4. 13; 5. Adams

## GOT YOUR NUMBER

1

in 5 women buy Valentine's gifts for themselves.

38

percent of women in the US have at least one tattoo.

40

percent of the world's land is in just six countries.

6,000

cell phones, 3,500 digital cameras and 18,000 hats are handed in to 'Lost and Found' at Walt Disney World each year.

91,799

drug overdose deaths were recorded in the US in the 12 months ending in May 2020, the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a 12-month period, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

10 billion

doughnuts are consumed by Americans every year.

Source: Uberfacts

## ISLAND VIEW



Panwa flotilla. Photo by Sutharat Khaodee

Got an unusual or particularly beautiful picture of Phuket? Email it to [exeditor@classactmedia.co.th](mailto:exeditor@classactmedia.co.th)

## This week in history

Feb 7, 1951

Korean War: The Sancheong and Hamyang massacre by a unit of the South Korean Army, which slaughters 705 unarmed citizens – 85% of them women, children and elderly people – as suspected communist sympathisers.

Feb 8, 1879

Sandford Fleming first proposes adoption of Universal Standard Time.

Feb 9, 1895

William G. Morgan creates a game called Mintonette, which soon comes to be referred to as volleyball.

Feb 10, 1258

Baghdad falls to the Mongols, and the Abbasid Caliphate is destroyed.

Feb 11, 1990

South African anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela is



De Klerk and Mandela at the World Economic Forum in Davos, 1992.

Feb 12, 1954

British tea maker Lyons's computer 'LEO' (Lyons Electronic Office I) produces a payroll report. It is the first time in history an electronic computer is used in business.

Feb 13, 1981

A series of sewer explosions destroys more than two miles of streets in Louisville, Kentucky.

Source: Wikipedia

released from Victor Verster Prison outside Cape Town, South Africa after 27 years as a political prisoner.

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FRI

7 FEB

SAT

8 FEB

SUN

9 FEB

WED

15 OCT



Grow Boating Evening - February 2025

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Thailand (Bangkok) Amusement & Attraction Parks Expo (TAAPE 2025) will make its appearance in IMPACT Exhibition Centre, Bangkok, Thailand on October 15-17, 2025! The exhibition aims to bring together global amusement equipment manufacturers, theme park operators, amusement service providers and industry experts to discuss the development trend of the amusement industry, display the latest amusement equipment and creative design. The exhibition jointly build a platform for exchange and cooperation, brand promotion and market expansion. Look forward to meeting you in Thailand and start a wonderful amusement trip together!

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## YEAR OF THE SNAKE

Tens of thousands turned out on Monday (Feb 3) for the first day of festivities in Phuket Town to mark the Chinese New Year, this year honouring the Year of the Snake. The festival started with a bang, with a grand parade through the streets of Phuket Town and fireworks show over the iconic buildings in the Phuket Old Town area. Crowds thronged the streets to enjoy the spectacle, and the more than 450 food and local product stalls, serving up authentic traditional local delicacies – both Phuket favourites and specifically traditional Chinese dishes. Elsewhere across the island the festival spirit continues to honour the Year of the Snake, the sixth animal in the 12-year cycle of the Chinese zodiac. The Snake is associated with wisdom, intuition and strategic growth.

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## Sydney to host 2027 Rugby World Cup final

### RUGBY

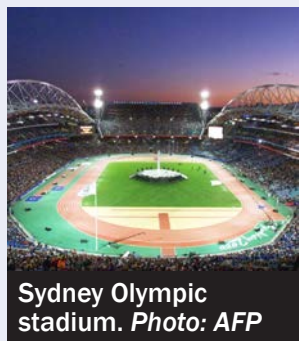
THE 2027 MEN'S Rugby World Cup final will be played in Sydney, World Rugby said on Jan 30 as it released the official draw for the Australia-hosted tournament.

"We are delighted to reach another significant milestone on our journey to Men's Rugby World Cup 2027," World Rugby chair Brett Robinson said in a statement.

Local media reported that the final would be played at the Sydney Olympic stadium, an 80,000-seat venue purpose-built for the 2000 Olympics.

Sydney last hosted the World Cup final in 2003, when Australia lost to England in a gripping clash that went to extra-time.

Rugby Australia chief executive Phil Waugh, who played for the Wallabies in that game, said playing a home final was the "absolute pinnacle" of his career.



Sydney Olympic stadium. Photo: AFP

"I am delighted this generation of Wallabies will have the privilege of experiencing the emotion, excitement and joy of pulling on the gold jersey before our passionate fans at a Men's Rugby World Cup in own backyard."

Sydney will also host two semi-finals, the third-place playoff, and a string of other knockout and pool stage games.

The rest of the schedule is split between Brisbane, Melbourne, Newcastle, Perth, Adelaide and Townsville.

The tournament will run from Oct 1 to Nov 13, according to the World Rugby schedule.

AFP

## Treble glory for Thai shuttlers

### BADMINTON

Bangkok Post

Pornpawee Chochuwong and mixed pair Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Supissara Paewsampran completed a treble for Thailand after their hard-fought victories in the US\$240,000 (B8,160,000) Princess Sirivannavari Thailand Masters at Nimibutr Stadium last Sunday (Feb 2).

Top seed Pornpawee claimed her first title in nearly two years after fighting back to beat Indonesian eighth seed Komang Ayu Cahya Dewi 18-21, 21-16, 21-13 in a thrilling women's singles final of the World Tour Super 300 event.

Pornpawee last won a World Tour title at the 2023 Swiss Open. She was a finalist at the India Open last month.

Earlier, Dechapol and Supissara defeated Dejan Ferdinansyah and Siti Fadia Silva Ramadhanti of Indonesia 19-21, 21-17, 21-13 in an equally exciting decider for their second title of the year and fourth overall.

They pocketed \$18,960 and Dechapol was quick to dedicate the victory to his playing partner.

"Players have their own goals. Some want to be world champions or be in the national team. Fame [Supissara's nickname] told me she wanted to win a home tournament. That stuck in my mind and made me want to win it for her. And today we did!" said Dechapol, who also won the



Dechapol (left) and Supissara celebrate on the podium. Photo: Supplied

title last year, with Sapsiree Taeratanachai.

"I was very tired during the final today, but the support from the crowd kept me going and gave me a lift. I will take some time off after playing four tournaments in a row," he added.

Supissara, who has played competitively with Dechapol for just nine tournaments, said, "I would like to thank Pi Bas [Dechapol's nickname] for this victory. I had never made it this far in a home tournament, and today I finally won the title. This win is for everyone. I hope this makes everyone happy."

Dechapol and Supissara, who won the season-opening Malaysia Open last month, will be back in action at the All England Open from Mar 11-16 and the Swiss Open a week later.

In the women's doubles event, fourth seeds Laksika Kanlaha and

Phataimas Muenwong missed out on a chance to make it three out of three for the Thai contingent, going 21-15, 13-21, 8-21 down to sixth seeds Lanny Tria Mayasari and Siti Fadia Silva Ramadhanti of Indonesia.

The Indonesians also eliminated two-time defending champions Benyapa Aimsaard and Nuntakarn Aimsaard in the semi-finals on Saturday.

Earlier, Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh won the men's singles title after beating China's Wang Zhengxing 21-18, 15-21, 21-19.

In the men's doubles final, Jin Yong and Seo Seung-Jae of South Korea defeated second seeds Muhammad Shohibul Fikri and Daniel Marthin of Indonesia, who beat seventh seeds Dechapol and Kit-tinupong Kedren in the semi-finals, 21-18, 21-17.

## Local Phuket sailors turn on the style at Langkawi regatta

### SAILING

Continued from page 16

Day 2 saw the exposed eastern island course being used where a developed wind chop on a low swell made for bumpy, wet and windy sailing, while Day 3 was again around the buoys inshore with longer legs towards the southern islands.

Day 4 was an around the islands course, all downwind on the east coast and all windward back in Bass Harbour in very windy conditions up to the high 20 knots. One casualty was the TP52 *Vayu* blowing their spinnaker trying to catch the diminutive Firefly cat *Twin Sharks* driven by John Newnham and his international crew, who are all Phuket-based.

Unfortunately, *Boreas* capsized in a gust throwing her crew every which way. A change down to a smaller spinnaker and a full main was not enough sail shed for the conditions reaching towards a southern island gate. Thankfully there was only one casualty who was taken to Langkawi Hospital with a broken collarbone.



Boreas at dock. Photo: Supplied

A combination of regatta safety services, navy crew on the yacht *Uranus* who withdrew from the race to assist, and the Malaysian water police managed to heave the stricken cat back upright.

Zam Bevan also lent his expertise supervising the process to ensure *Boreas* was soon back at the Royal Langkawi Marina a bit worse for wear but with mast intact and not far from being ready for the sail back home to Phuket.

The final day was an easy inshore course in Bass Harbour so as to leave plenty of energy for the evening's prize giving and party.

The event was a big success with the overall 35 entries this year a considerable improvement on last year tally by 10. Dates have not been set yet for the 2026 regatta but will be announced in due course. Bob Mott

## Doris pride as Ireland win

### RUGBY

IRELAND CAPTAIN CAELAN DORIS PRAISED his side's comeback after they began their quest for an unprecedented third successive Six Nations men's title with a 27-22 win over England last Saturday (Feb 1).

The reigning champions endured a stuttering opening 40 minutes in Dublin, with 21-year-old fly-half Sam Prendergast struggling to impose himself as England led 10-5 at half-time.

But an Ireland team full of seasoned campaigners hit back to score 22 unanswered points as Bundee Aki, Tadhg Beirne and Dan Sheehan all crossed England's line to give the hosts a four-try, bonus-point win.

Ireland were in command at 27-10, with late tries from the England duo of Tom Curry and Tommy Freeman flattering the visitors.

"It is definitely satisfying (getting the win)," Doris said. "It's huge in this competition, you can't win it in the first round, but you can lose it or dampen it essentially."

Victory gave interim Ireland coach Simon Easterby a win in his first game in charge while he deputises for Andy Farrell, on secondment to the British and Irish Lions for the combined side's tour of Australia.

"We had to find a way," said Easterby, whose side travel to Edinburgh next weekend to face a Scotland team fresh from a 31-19 win over Italy.

Scotland coach Gregor Townsend, embarking on his eighth Six Nations campaign, praised the mental strength of his side after the win at Murrayfield on Saturday.

The 51-year-old explained he was impressed by how his side pulled themselves together after



Dan Sheehan scores for Ireland. Photo: AFP

the Italians levelled the match at 19-19 with less than 20 minutes to go.

Two quick-fire tries by Huw Jones, who grabbed three in all, saw them home.

"The most important element today was the mental challenge," Townsend said.

"To come together as a team on the field, find solutions and find a way to win, which will be important in the next games."

"We had to defend our line on two or three occasions in that second half so it was a tough opening game but we managed to get the win."

Meanwhile, French captain Antoine Dupont played down France's chances of being crowned Six Nations champions despite thrashing a hapless Wales 43-0 in their opening match last Friday (Jan 31).

Dupont marked his return to Six Nations action after a year's hiatus, a successful gamble on winning Olympic sevens gold in Paris, in impressive style creating three tries in 22 minutes.

"A very good first match gives you no guarantees for the rest of the Six Nations," said Dupont.

"We're satisfied with this win but next week, against England, a team in a different place to Wales, will be something else," the 28-year-old added. AFP

# Wood sets Forest on fire

## FOOTBALL

AFP

Nottingham Forest continued their fairytale season with a comprehensive demolition job on Brighton last Saturday (Feb 1), winning 7-0 at the City Ground.

Nuno Espirito Santo's men had been beaten 5-0 by Bournemouth last weekend but bounced back in style with Chris Wood netting a hat-trick.

The New Zealander's is Forest's record goal scorer in the Premier League and his latest treble took him to 17 league goals this season.

Morgan Gibbs-White, Neco Williams and Jota Silva were also on target for Forest after Lewis Dunk's own goal opened the floodgates.

"After what happened last week, the answer was good," said Espirito Santo. "You get punched, you get up – fantastic!"

The two-time European champions are on course for a return to the Champions League for the first time since 1980 as they opened up a six-point cushion on fifth-placed Newcastle, who blew the lead to lose 2-1 at home to Fulham.

Mohamed Salah scored twice to take Liverpool nine points clear at the top of the table by beating Bournemouth 2-0.

Salah's double took him above Frank Lampard as the sixth highest goalscorer in Premier League history with 178 goals on another significant



Chris Wood celebrates against Brighton. Photo: AFP

day in the Reds' charge towards a record-equalling 20<sup>th</sup> English top-flight title.

"It feels good to be scoring goals, to be winning, but my main target this season is to win the Premier League with the team so we must keep going," said Salah, whose future at Anfield beyond this season remains unclear.

Arsenal thrashed Manchester City 5-1 on Sunday to move to within six points of Liverpool and keep their Premier League title hopes alive.

Defeat leaves City still in fourth but now 15 points off the top and realistically dethroned after four consecutive seasons as champions.

Manchester United suffered a fifth defeat in their last six home league games as Jean Philippe-Mateta's double secured a 2-0 win for Crystal Palace, while Tottenham eased their

relegation fears with a 2-0 win at Brentford.

Fulham shocked Newcastle at St. James' Park as goals from Raul Jimenez and Rodrigo Muniz secured a 2-1 win that saw Marco Silva's team climb up to ninth and within four points of the top six, while Chelsea staged a stirring fightback to ruin Graham Potter's return to Stamford Bridge and climb to fourth place in the Premier League with a 2-1 win against West Ham on Monday.

Everton's relegation fears in their final season at Goodison Park now appear over after thrashing Leicester 4-0 to move them 10 points clear of the bottom three.

By contrast, Ipswich look doomed after Southampton ended their wait for a league win since November with a 2-1 victory at Portman Road.

# Vichai deadly helicopter crash ruled an accident

## FOOTBALL

THE HELICOPTER CRASH that killed the Thai owner of Premier League football club Leicester City was an accident, an inquest jury ruled on Jan 28.

Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha and four others died when the billionaire's personal helicopter crashed and burst into flames shortly after taking off from the club's King Power Stadium following a match in October 2018.

The inquest at Leicester City Hall examined his death, along with those of the aircraft's pilot, Eric Swaffer, his partner Izabela Lechowicz, and passengers Nusara Suknamai and Kaveporn Punpare.

Senior coroner Catherine Mason told the jury that they should "accept and follow" the findings of the Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) that the crash was accidental.

Mark Jarvis, the principle inspector at AAIB, told the inquest that a duplex bearing on the tail rotor – which contributes to stability – became "seized



Photo: AFP

and locked" before the helicopter crashed and burst into flames.

"Our conclusion was that the pilot had done everything in his power to try to avoid and correct the situation he found himself in," said Jarvis.

"The helicopter was out of control. The only control the pilot had was on the rate of descent of the helicopter during extremely disorientating conditions.

"The pilot did everything possibly expected of him."

Vichai is widely credited and adored by Leicester fans for reviving The Foxes' fortunes and bankrolling their shock Premier League title triumph in 2016 after the club were 5,000/1 rank outsiders to be crowned champions at the start of that season.

AFP

# Lobsters settle for a point

## FOOTBALL

A WEEK IS A LONG TIME IN politics, they say, and even longer in football.

Phuket Andaman FC's opening half-hour against Phatthalung FC in the 1-1 draw last Sunday (Feb 2) offered a tantalising glimpse of the form hinted at towards the end of the season's first leg.

Two factors appear to have contributed to this resurgence. On the pitch, a return to the 3-5-2 formation clearly suited the players better. Off it, and perhaps more crucially, news of secured investment and cleared back wages seems to have lifted the squad.

Phuket started brightly and, while still some way from perfect, the team showed cohesion. The midfield distributed the ball effectively and the strike partnership of Danielsson and Bank caused problems for the visitors' defence.

Following good work on the left in the 10<sup>th</sup> minute, Danielsson controlled the ball and slotted it home for his first Phuket goal. This seemed to galvanise the team, with the towering Swede and Bank both squandering chances to extend the lead.

However, only some fine goalkeeping from Bee prevented the Lobsters from surrendering the lead before the interval.

As is often the case in League 3, the second half descended into a scrappy



Danielsson. Photo: Supplied

affair, resembling a basketball match at times, with both teams trading chances and missed opportunities. Phuket hearts were, as so often this season, broken late on when Phatthalung snatched a point with a set-piece goal in injury time.

Coach Tum deserves credit for the improved performance, but he cannot afford to be complacent. This team is still some way off competing with the league's stronger sides. He needs to address the back three's inability to play wider, which in turn restricts the wing-backs' attacking forays.

Danielsson should be deployed centrally to maximise his considerable talent, and the cultured defender, Kai Boham, surely deserves his debut. All in all, this was a better showing from Phuket and hopefully they can build on it in the coming weeks.

The result leaves Phuket in 10<sup>th</sup> position in the 12 team league. Their next match is on Sunday (Feb 9) away at Pattani FC. Simon Causton

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# Sport



**Thai shuttlers' treble victory delight > p14**



Vagabonds RFC together with the newly established ACF Barbarians in front of the ACG clubhouse. Photo: Supplied

## Rugby community rallies to support local charity

### RUGBY

Tom Kilvington

Phuket Vagabonds players and supporters turned out in force at the Alan Cooke Ground (ACG) in Thalang on Saturday, Jan 25, to witness the first competitive match of the 2025 season and to raise both funds and awareness for the Asia Center Foundation (ACF).

A fun-filled morning preceded the main event, with Family Touch Rugby and the Vagabonds Junior Academy populating the paddock before almost 100 of the Hash House Harriers' Phuket Chapter departed from the ACG on their Australia Day outing.

In a nail-biting encounter filled with incredible performances and unforgettable moments, the Phuket Vagabonds edged out the ACF Barbarians 43-41 in a charity rugby match that ultimately celebrated the spirit of the game while raising funds for a very worthwhile cause.

The match, held to support the ACF and the club's sponsored child Nawin Kaeoytha, brought together players and fans for a day of rugby and an opportunity to assist the underprivileged.

In scorching conditions, the Vagabonds' squad faced off against the newly formed ACF Barbarians, a team comprising players from the Vagabonds, highlighting the depth of talent and camaraderie within the club. Both sides delivered a spectacle, with the game being decided in the final moments.

### DAZZLING FOOTWORK

The ACF Barbarians began the match with flair, thanks to Brad Haygarth's scintillating first-quarter hat-trick. Haygarth's dazzling footwork, strength and ability to beat defenders left the Vagabonds struggling to contain him.

Daniil Komandir added to the Barbarians' tally, with the young Russian throttling down the left

wing, showcasing his blistering pace to score in the corner.

The Vagabonds, however, refused to back down with captain Paul Rothwell leading by example to score an incredible four tries. Rothwell's scoring spree included a last gasp equalising try, before claiming outright victory with his cultured right boot to calmly slot home the conversion, sparking celebrations among the Vagabonds faithful.

Other standout performances for the Vagabonds side included Ivan Ustinov and Geoff Dasse, who both crossed the line with crucial tries.

Ken Sriwichai's solo effort for the Barbarians was another highlight of the match. His agility and composure saw him glide past defenders to score under the posts. Brendan O'Donoghue also powered through the Vagabonds' defensive line, proving his strength and determination.

The game also marked a sig-

nificant milestone for several players making their Phuket rugby debuts. For the Vagabonds, Glenn Beer, Ash Holmes, Robin Prophete, Geoff Dasse, Georgiy Tuzov and Luke Wyszoczanski all made strong contributions. The Barbarians welcomed debutants Brendan O'Donoghue, Brad Haygarth, Alexei Kapalin, Cillian O'Neill and Sam Scholefield, with Kapalin scoring a memorable try.

### GOOD CAUSE

Beyond the thrilling rugby action, the day was about supporting the ACF, a charity that provides vital assistance to disadvantaged children. The funds raised – over B36,000 on the day – from the event will directly benefit the foundation and the club's sponsored child, underscoring the importance of community and sport.

The match was a testament to the Vagabonds' ethos of promoting the game while giving back. Both teams, led by captains

Rothwell (Vagabonds) and Nicolas Bruno (ACF Barbarians), displayed exceptional sportsmanship, making the event a resounding success.

Both captains were eager to thank both Vagabonds and ACG sponsors and everyone that dug deep to make this one of the clubs most successful charity events in recent history. Players from both sides also applauded the efforts and matured control of the game by referee, Jim Layard – ably assisted by his son Harry – to ensure a match void of incident, but packed with crowd-pleasing performances.

The charity match will be remembered not only for being a remarkable advertisement for the game and thrilling conclusion, but also for its purpose. It brought together players and supporters from diverse backgrounds, united by their love of the game and a genuine desire to make a difference and will long remain a memorable day for Phuket rugby.

## Strong Phuket presence at Royal Langkawi International Regatta

### SAILING

A STRONG PHUKET CONTINGENT as always sailed down to compete at the recently held 2025 Royal Langkawi International Regatta.

Winners in their respective classes included Phuket Yacht Club's Niels Degenkolw's *X-Yacht* dominating IRC 2 with five first place finishes, three seconds and

one third, in a strong class of five very competitive yachts with nine races over four days between Jan 20 and Jan 25.

The Multihull class were all Phuket boats, including three Stealths on the water racing and retired husband and wife team Glywn and Irene Rowland's *Twister2* parked in Bass Harbour anchorage off Kuah Town.

The crew of *Twister2* crewed on a Stealth named *Boreas*

(formerly *Java*, and *Saffron*). Joining them were *WOW*, another Stealth that completed a circumnavigation the year before last, and *Haruki*, yet another Stealth with Zam Bevan the manager of Asia Catamarans aboard (builders of the Stealths in Phuket).

Others in the class were *Twin Sharks*, a Mark Pescott Firefly one design also built in Phuket and *Trident*, a Corsair 28 built in

Vietnam that lives in Phuket, all representing Phuket Yacht Club.

Racing was brisk with excellent wind in both speed and direction and consistent in every way, which typically tended to build throughout the day. The first race day was around the buoys in Bass Harbour with windward-leewards.

As usual Simon James' *PRO* pushed for three races in most divisions on the first day to get the



Photo: Supplied

numbers up encase following days became light although they generally transpired to be windier than the first.

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