

TAXI DRIVERS WARNED FOR INTIMIDATION > PAGE 5

DARK WATER



A stream of black wastewater from the rancid canal through Kamala empties across Kamala Beach. Photo: Phuket Sun

PATONG SLUDGE CALLED 'NATURAL', KAMALA WASTEWATER CANAL CHOKES

The Phuket News
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Sittipol Muangsong, Chief of the Phuket Fisheries Office, has called the dark water that plagued Patong Beach a “natural phenomenon”, blaming the colouration of the water the result of “whale excrement or plankton bloom”.

Mr Sittipol visited Patong Beach on Mar 28 to inspect the phenomenon, and to “verify the facts”, said an of-

ficial report of his inspection.

Patches of dark water at Patong had raised concerns among many people, worried it was the result of “human actions”, the report said.

The dark water also comes while large patches of dark water were affecting other main beaches popular with tourists, Plub Pla Bay on Racha Yai Island south of Phuket and at Kamala Beach, the official report admitted.

The dark water at Plub Pla Bay on Koh Racha Yai had already been

attributed to “whale excrement or plankton bloom”, while the dark water at Kamala Beach has already been confirmed to originate from wastewater in the canal that streams across the beach.

With the dark water being confirmed as a natural phenomenon, officials were confident that it would not affect tourism, the report said.

Of note, not mentioned in the report was “seaweed” that had washed ashore at the southern end of the

Patong Beach, where large patches of dark water continued to meet the shore.

Also of note, at time of press Patong Municipality still had yet to publicly recognise the issue.

The dark water at Patong heavily affected the beach just north of where the Pak Bang Canal empties into Patong Bay. Aerial photos posted online by environmental group “Monsoon Garbage” showed the water in the canal to be black, and affecting...

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

NEWS PAGE 3

**Foreigners
hunted in sex
trafficking raids**



LIFE PAGE 9

**Food festival
puts local Soft
Power on show**



SPORT PAGE 15

**Foxes manager
Rodgers sacked
by Thai owners**



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News



More direct flights arrive from China > p6

Patong beach water turns brown

Continued from page 1

...the water in the area immediately surrounding where the canal empties into the bay.

The Pak Bang Canal has long been used for having wastewater dumped into it from all throughout Patong, as it meanders from the northern end to the southern end of the town, where it empties into Patong Bay. Only on very rare occasions have officials finally admitted that wastewater has caused such “plankton blooms”.

Regardless, the official report of Mr Sittipol’s inspection said, “This is a natural phenomenon that turns the seawater to brown, red, green or muddy black, caused by the multiplication of single-celled algae in the sea, causing to see the sea in a different colour than before.”

“This phenomenon will occur in the summer and as a result of the combination of the rise and fall of the tides, and the wind. It will happen for a short time only,” Mr Suttiphol said, according to the report.

“In addition, villagers in the area of Patong Beach and local boat rental operators confirm that this is a natural



The water at the southern end of Patong Beach turned a sincere brown. Photo: PR Phuket

phenomenon that occurs every year. Most tourists know that it’s natural, and is only present at the end of the beach,” he said.

“Plankton blooms are a natural phenomenon that happen every year. They can be harmful to fish and other marine life,” he added.

Like all other reports of the spate of “plankton blooms” in Phuket, Mr Suttiphol did not mention any health effects the water might have had on tourists visiting the beach.

“Marine biologists from the Marine Resources Research Center at Cape Panwa will take samples of the water to determine the exact cause of the phenomenon and to reduce concerns among the public so they understand that this is a natural phenomenon. It does not affect the tourism sector in any way,” Mr Suttiphol said.

Yet again, however, at time press some six days later, the marine biologists still had yet to publicly report their findings.

KAMALA

Local officials last week said they would move to urgently have a channel dredged deeper across the Kamala Beach so that black wastewater could flow quicker across the beach and into the sea.

The decision was made on Mar 28 during an inspection of the beach by Kathu District Chief Thitiwat Boonkij and Kamala Tambon Administration Organisation (OrBorTor) President Jutha Doomluck.

The couple inspected the

beach following a ‘red tide’ of what officials like to call a “plankton bloom” washing up onto the beach in recent days.

A cleanup of the red “seaweed” was conducted to make the beach picturesque once again. However, the black wastewater in the Pak Bang Canal, which runs through Kamala and streams across the beach, remained unresolved.

Kathu District Chief Thitiwat last week admitted that the water had turned black due to the accumulation of wastewater being dumped into the canal by local sources.

He also blamed ‘neap tides’ for not reaching high enough up the beach to help wash away the pollution that streams into the bay, which is home to one of Phuket’s most popular tourist beaches.

“During the dry season, there is often a problem like this,” Mr Thitiwat said.

“Kamala OrBorTor will pump out the water from the canal and we will send a team to remove the sand ridge that narrows down the waterway to the sea tonight,” he explained.

Also, an aerator will be installed to generate oxygen in the water in the canal, he added.

“In addition, the water-

treatment machine in the canal is broken,” Mr Thitiwat told *The Phuket News*.

However, Kamala OrBorTor Chief Mr Jutha has yet to publicly recognise any faults with wastewater treatment equipment installed to clean the water in the canal.

Over the years Kamala Beach has been plagued by recurring incidents of black wastewater flowing across the sand.

In 2020, in an attempt to avoid further recurring incidents, a wastewater-treatment plant costing B58 million was installed to treat the water in the Pak Bang Canal.

Kamala OrBorTor will make a public announcement asking for cooperation from everyone in the area not to throw the trash into the water, Chief Thitiwat said.

Residents will be asked to separate trash before disposing of it properly, and to ensure wastewater is treated before releasing it into the drains, he said.

“In the long term, the canal will be dredged to remove the accumulated sediment under a project organised by the Wastewater Management Authority,” Mr Thitiwat said.

Army check spurs clearing of Illegal beach operators

A BEACH OPERATOR renting out sunbeds and umbrellas was removed from Freedom Beach just one day after an inspection by Lt Gen Santi Sakuntanark, Commander of the 4th Army Region, based in Nakhon Sri Thammarat, on Mar 28.

Following Lt Gen Santi’s visit, Wattanapong Suk-sai, Chief of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Phuket office (MNRE Phuket), also inspected the beach, joined by officers from the Phuket Marine Office, the Phuket Provincial Office and Karon Municipality.

Freedom Beach has been designated a “protected beach” and as such it is illegal to have chairs and umbrellas provided for rent to tourists on the beach, explained an official report of the action by officials.

Mr Wattanapong said



A sunbed operator was forcibly removed from Freedom Beach. Photo: PR Phuket

that the recent visit by Lt Gen Santhi was the general’s second inspection of Freedom Beach. The first time saw an illegal restaurant being ordered to be demolished. This time, a sunbed and umbrella operator had been caught.

The operator had already been caught before, and was ordered to cease his operations on the beach. After four to five days, the operator quietly returned, and was caught, and warned again, he said.

This time, the operator’s equipment had been seized,

Mr Wattanapong noted.

“This beach area must be maintained without any operators. It is a recreational forest area for both Thais and foreigners to come and relax. We must keep it a beach without bed umbrellas and be maintained as purely natural,” Mr Wattanapong said.

Mr Wattanapong recognised private parties charging a fee to access the beach.

“There are other routes to the beach that are free to use as they cross forest land,” he said.

Efforts will be made to help ensure garbage is collected from the beach, Mr Wattanapong said.

People coming to the beach must take their trash with them when they leave, he added.

LEYPANG

Two days later, officials ordered three operators, including a restaurant, on Leybang Beach to vacate their sites after they were deemed to be on public land.

Officers arrived on Mar 30 to have tables, chairs, sun loungers and umbrellas removed. Officers also served a notice for the restaurant to be demolished.

More than 20 officers were present for the raid, led by Thalang District Chief Bancha Thanu-in.

Among those present as enforcers were a representative from the Royal Thai Navy, which has its Third Area

Command at Cape Panwa, on the east coast of Phuket, along with three representatives of the ISOC Region 4 branch. As the Internal Security Operations Command, ISOC is the political arm of the Royal Thai Military.

Also present were Cherng Talay Police along with officers from the Phuket Marine Office, Sirinat National Park, the Thalang branch of the Phuket Provincial Land Office, the Cherng Talay Tambon Administration Organisation (OrBorTor) and local village headmen (Phu Yai Baan).

The land is registered as ‘NorSorLor’ government property, Mr Bancha explained.

“Some parts of this area are for the public. We are to tidy this area so the public can make use of this space, as well as restore the beach to be beautiful, natural and sustainable,” Mr Bancha said.

Officers needed to explain

to the operators where the boundaries were for the government land, he added.

Officers will continue to check the area to prevent future instances of encroachment, Mr Bancha said.

Rapin Suwannasin, Chief Administration Office (Palad) of Cherng Talay OrBorTor, noted that the road used to access the beach was also public land.

Cherng Talay OrBorTor was moving to prosecute people who had encroached on the area, he said.

Some of the claimants had presented SorKor 1 land use documents as evidence for their right to use the land they were occupying, he noted.

Cherng Talay OrBorTor had checked the land in question and confirmed it is public land, he said.

The Phuket News

Foreigners hunted in sex raids

The Phuket News
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Police have arrested three foreigners for paying for sex with a minor following further investigations into a child sex trafficking ring exposed when a bar in Patong was raided last month.

Deputy national police chief Pol Maj Gen Surachate Hakparn announced the news at a meeting held at Region 8 Police headquarters, at the northern end of Phuket, on Mar 30.

The three arrested and charged for the offence were named as Paul Herbert Corbett, 67, from Australia; Max Rigobert Ramasamy, 68, from France; and Mutu Pan, 44, from China.

Three other suspects wanted for the same offence had already fled the country, Maj Gen Surachate said.

The suspects were named as Jeffrey Lynn Amman, 50, and Jesse James Demian, 49, both from the US; and Ahmed Saleh Balobead, 40, from Saudi Arabia.

Arrest warrants had been issued and police are pursuing their arrests, he said.

Officers had found that



Tourists enjoy relaxing at a bar on Bangla Rd, Patong. Photo: PR Phuket

the Velvet bar, located in Soi Sea Dragon off Bangla Rd, and raided on Mar 15, was registered as operating under the company Aurum Bualuang Co Ltd.

The company operated three more bars in Patong as part of the child sex trafficking network, Maj Gen Surachate added. The bars were named as Model, Bangla Beach and Strip Phuket Bar.

Arrested warrants had been issued for five company

directors. Police had arrested four of them, including Benjamaporn Krajadkaew and Supaporn Lions, he said.

Ronnie Peterhitch, a foreigner named as a company director, had already fled the country. Efforts were underway to have Interpol issue a 'Red Notice' for his arrest, he added.

The charges against the directors include breach of the Foreign Business Act for using nominees, he noted.

The raid on the Velvet bar in Patong had led to 36 raids in 10 provinces across Thailand, Maj Gen Surachate explained.

"We served search warrants at 36 locations in 10 provinces, including Bangkok, Nonthaburi, Chonburi, Prachinburi, Nakhon Sawan, Nakhon Ratchasima, Surin, Ratchaburi, Petchaburi and Phuket.

"We have seized 52 bank accounts which had a turnover of B100 million," he said.

The Anti-Money Launder-

ing Office, Department of Business Development and Ministry of Commerce had all assisted with the police operation, Maj Gen Surachate noted.

Police had seized assets worth in total B22mn, including two townhouses together worth B7mn, a condo worth B5mn, four plots of land worth B10mn and four motorbikes worth B500,000, he said.

Six girls had been rescued and taken into care following the raid on the Velvet bar and the further investigations, Maj Gen Surachate confirmed.

Police had identified 109 customers who had paid for sex with minors. Most of them were foreigners, paying B10,000 a time, he said.

Since the investigation had been expanded, another four victims had been found and taken into care, bringing the total number of girls rescued from the child sex trafficking network to 10, he added.

"Police will continue to look for more people involved in child trafficking and seize their assets to stop them from repeating the same business. The seized assets will be spent on helping the victims once the case is closed," Maj Gen

Surachate said.

Not mentioned in the official reports of the meeting chaired by Maj Gen Surachate was that five top-ranking officers at Patong Police Station, including Patong Police Chief Col Sujin Nilabadee, had been transferred immediately pending further investigation into the child sex trafficking ring operating in the Patong Police area.

No updates have been provided since the five officers were transferred on Mar 16.

Weerawit Kreuasombat, President of the Patong Entertainment Business Association (PEBA), late last month called a special meeting of bar and nightlife venue operators in Patong to urge them to actively keep an eye out for and to report any suspected activities that might indicate child sex trafficking in the area.

The PEBA had singled out the operators of the four related bars to be banned from opening new venues, Mr Weerawit added.

"We will ask the landlord to not rent out the space, because if they are allowed to operate again, we are afraid that they will use children for sex trafficking again," he said.

Corruption probe launched into Patong B4.5mn 'sculpture' circle

PATONG MUNICIPALITY has been called to explain why it cost B4.5 million to build the roundabout at the intersection of Nanai Rd, Sirirat Rd and Phra Metta Rd at the southern end of the town.

The Phuket branch of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC Phuket) launched its investigation following posts on social media saying that the sculpture cost millions of baht to build.

Officers from NACC Phuket inspected the sculpture and the roundabout itself on Mar 30, and questioned Patong Municipality officials about the budget approved.

NACC Phuket reported that the circle was constructed through a Patong Municipality budget of B4.5mn under the municipality's budget for fiscal 2019.

The 'average price' calculated on Mar 19, 2019 was B4,521,508.03, based on including three parts of construction: B1,310,801.88 for the roundabout itself; B282,534 for the demolition of public utilities such as



Photo: NACC Phuket

high-voltage power poles, traffic lights and water pipes; and B2,928,172.15 for the road works, including road surface adjustment with asphalt/concrete, traffic signs, manhole covers and lamp posts.

The 'average price' was based on the Comptroller General's Department's regulations on price estimation, it was confirmed.

The municipality used the raw material pricing data from Phuket Provincial Commercial Office.

For the sculpture itself, there is no regulation for calculating an 'average price', so Patong Municipality

sourced quotes from three different suppliers and used the lowest one, the NACC Phuket officers were told.

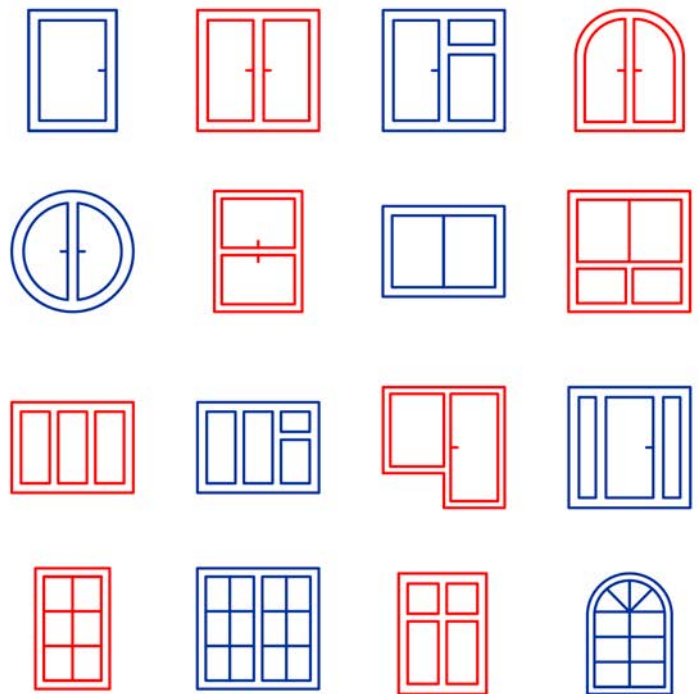
The procurement was carried out by electronic bidding. There were seven qualified bidders. The lowest bid was B3,443,000, which was B1,074,508.03 lower than the 'average price' as determined using official guidelines.

Patong Municipality has been asked to clarify the facts and submit relevant documents to Phuket NACC Office, said NACC Phuket's report of its ongoing investigation.

The Phuket News



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Photo: Kamala Police

Tourists injured as van flips in Kamala

TWO FRENCH TOURISTS suffered injuries when the minivan they were travelling in flipped on the road past Laem Singha, Kamala, on Mar 29.

Kamala Police were informed of the accident, on Kamala Hill, at about 3pm.

A rescue team soon arrived at the scene, and rushed Sandra Lopez, 50, and Frederic Antoine Sanchez, 50, to Patong Hospital.

Ms Lopez had suffered a broken left wrist and cuts in the accident. Mr Sanchez had suffered scratches to his body. Both tourists also described pain in their necks.

The pair were scheduled to check at The Chick Hotel Patong Phuket that day, police noted.

The van was carrying eight passengers when the accident happened. No other

passengers suffered injuries, police confirmed.

The van driver, not named in reports, said that the cause of the accident was brake failure.

The accident was the second within a week on Kamala Hill.

Two vans collided head-on on a sharp curve near Kalim Bay on Thursday, Mar 23.

Five people, two men and three women, were injured. One of the injured was the driver. The other four were tourists. All five were rushed to Patong Hospital.

One of the van drivers explained that his right front tyre burst, causing him to lose control of the van, and crash head-on into the other, oncoming, van.

Additional reporting
by Eakkapop Thongtub

Som tam shop owner faces rape allegation

Eakkapop Thongtub
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Police are investigating the owner of a well known som tam shop in Phuket Town for the alleged rape of a 25-year-old woman.

Yosthawe Krainara, the lawyer representing the woman, told reporters last Sunday (Apr 2) that he met with Lt Col Panukorn Wankaew, of the Phuket City Police on Saturday to file the formal complaint.

Mr Yosthawe explained that the woman went to an entertainment venue with a group of friends at about 2am on Mar 30. The owner of the som tam shop was among the group.

At about 4am the restaurant owner persuaded the woman to join him and continue drinking at his som tam restaurant. Joining them at the restaurant were two friends, a man and a woman, of the som tam shop owner. They group kept drinking until about 5am, Mr Yosthawe said.

The 25-year-old woman became very drunk. All she remembers about leaving the som tam shop was getting into the owner's car, a black sedan, he said.

The woman then woke to find herself in a room at a hotel



Yosthawe Krainara, the lawyer representing the woman, holds up the watch to show reporters. Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

on Surin Rd Soi 1 at 10am. Her clothes had been torn and she had "found traces of abuse", Mr Yosthawe said.

The woman called her friends, who came to pick her up from the room.

At about midday (on Mar 31), the restaurant owner called the woman to ask if she was still at the hotel room, and whether his 'Guess' brand watch was there, as he had forgotten it when he left, Mr Yosthawe said.

The woman told him that she had his watch. The restaurant owner asked her to hold on to the watch for now, or to drop it off at his som tam shop. Mr Yosthawe last Sunday presented the watch to reporters as evidence.

Mr Yosthawe said that

after the incident the woman had been unable to accept what had happened. She had drunk toilet cleaner in a suicide attempt, but she was found vomiting in her bathroom and rushed to hospital in time to save her life, he said.

"The victim's state of mind is now very poor and she has an appointment to see a psychiatrist," he said.

"Regarding whether she was drugged or not, she has now undergone a physical examination at Vachira Phuket Hospital and we are awaiting results from doctors," Mr Yosthawe added.

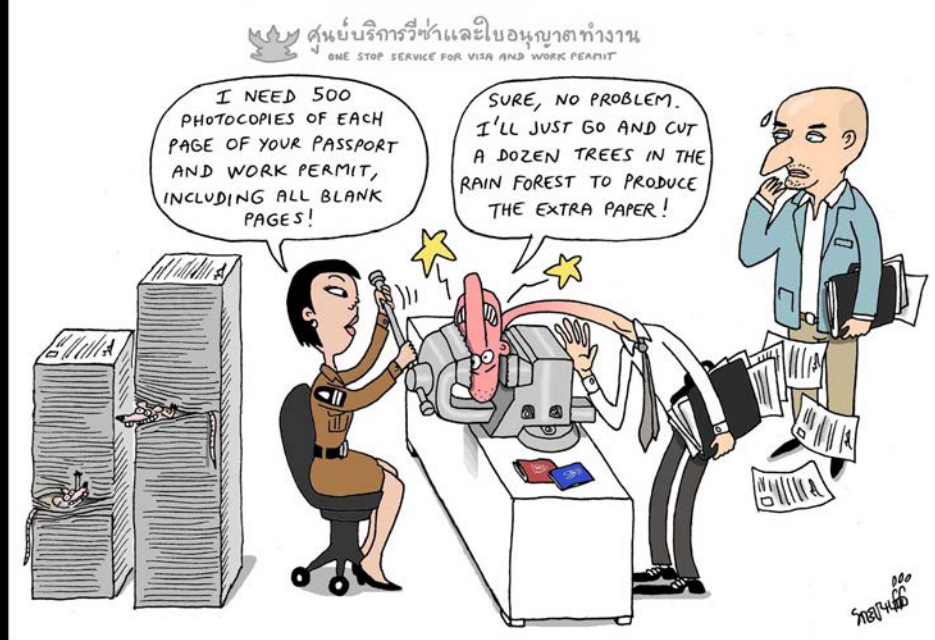
"As for the prosecution, it must be taken step by step, and we must look at the readiness of the victim's mind as well," he concluded.

FARANG AFFAIRS

By Stephff

https://farangaffairs.com

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Bee sting kills Brit expat

LONG-TERM EXPAT Stephen Prince, 68, died after developing a severe allergic reaction to a bee sting sustained while riding home on his motorbike in Rawai.

Rescue workers from Rawai Municipality were called to a house on Soi Kitprasarn 1 at about 11:50am on Mar 30, where they found Mr Prince unconscious, with no pulse and not breathing.

Rescue workers immediately proceeded to perform CPR and requested an EMS Advance Unit from Chalong Hospital, which then rushed Mr Prince to hospital. Despite their efforts, medics could not save the expat's life.

Mr Prince's Thai wife explained later that her husband was known to be allergic to insect bites and other allergens.



Phuket expat Stephen Prince died after a severe allergic reaction to a bee sting.

He had once lost consciousness after eating honey. In another incident he had fallen unconscious after a bee sting.

In this incident, the wife administered antihistamines, but Mr Prince's condition did not improve. The Thai woman called 1669 when he lost consciousness.

Rescue workers remarked that they had never seen such a dire allergic reaction to a bee sting, or even to a jellyfish sting. Eakkapop Thongtub

Taxis warned for intimidation

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Taxi drivers based at Central Festival Phuket shopping mall on the bypass road have been told to not approach any drivers they suspect to be working illegally after yet another incident, this time one of their drivers verbally abusing an independent taxi driver with a passenger still in her car.

Yet again, police and officials have taken action only after a video of the incident, which occurred in front of the Central Festival mall at 9:50pm on Mar 27, was posted online.

The driver seen in the video did not present himself at Wichit Police Station on Mar 28. Instead, Somphon Nuklai, head of the Andaman Phuket Car Taxi Service Cooperative Limited, arrived to “discuss the matter”.

Wichit Police made no mention of whether they requested that the driver involved present himself in person.

The independent taxi-app driver involved, Nathsirin Wongcharoen, admitted to police that she used the inDriver app to coordinate picking up



A PLTO officer speaks with the leader of taxi drivers at Central Festival Phuket. Photo: PR Phuket

passengers. She was fined B1,000 for doing so, Wichit Police Chief Col Chatree Chookaew confirmed.

Only on Mar 27 did Phuket officials inform local residents that Bolt and InDriver were both still considered illegal in Thailand, as they have not yet been approved by the Department of Land Transport. Bolt launched in Thailand in 2020. InDriver launched in Thailand in 2021. Both taxi apps first launched in Bangkok. *The Phuket News* is not aware of law enforcement action against

Bolt and inDriver taxi drivers anywhere else in the country.

Speaking to reporters at Wichit Police Station, Ms Nathsirin explained that police action came only after she filed a formal complaint at Wichit Police Station to report the driver's behaviour.

Ms Nathsirin explained that the incident began long before she started recording the video that was later posted online.

“The taxi driver cut in front of my car and drove backward. He was very close

already, so I beeped my horn. He then got out of his car, then everyone can see what he says in the video,” Ms Nathsirin said.

“I was very frightened as I knew there was an incident similar to this at Central. During this incident, there was a customer in my car and the man also reproached her. She was also scared and asked why he did so. This is bad for overall Phuket's image as a tourism destination,” she said.

Ms Nathsirin admitted that she used the inDriver app

to pick up the passenger at Central Festival, but pointed out that her red Toyota Yaris is a properly registered with the Phuket Land Transport Office (PLTO) to be used as a taxi with other taxi apps that she uses to pick up passengers.

OFFICIAL RESPONSE

PLTO Chief Adcha Buachan and a team of officers visited the taxi drivers at Central Festival on Mar 28.

“To prevent a fight, we have sent letters to more than 100 taxi drivers that are legal app-based taxis to have a sticker to show that they are registered legally,” Mr Adcha said.

“People who want to operate a taxi must use a registered car [and legally approved apps], and those who are driving taxis legally should also be careful with their behaviour when checking illegal taxis by themselves,” he said.

Mr Adcha said that the PLTO has many channels for reporting illegal taxis, such as the PLTO Facebook page and an official Line group, through which legal taxis can file a complaint when they spot a suspected illegal driver.

“We have issued a letter

asking more than 100 illegal taxis to come to the [PLTO] office. There are also about 20 illegal taxis that we have already fined and seized their driver's licenses. The PLTO and the police from every area are monitoring illegal taxis and suppressing them,” Mr Adcha warned.

Of note, Mr Adcha gave no admonishment of the taxi driver's behaviour for verbally abusing Ms Nathsirin.

Mr Somphon, head of the Andaman Phuket Car Taxi Service Cooperative Limited, said he, too, had told all the drivers at the group stationed at Central Festival to only take a photo if they see a suspected illegal taxi driver – and to not get too close to the car.

“To avoid any [future] problems, I told my group not to get too close and only to take a photo because some app-based taxis are looking to incite our anger in order to make a video and put it on social media, making it big news,” Mr Somphon said.

Mr Sophon specifically made no apology for the driver's behaviour in the incident involving Ms Nathsirin.

Additional reporting by
Eakkapop Thongtub

Officials ramp up app-taxi crackdown

CHECKPOINTS WILL BE SET UP AS police and transport officials continue their crackdown on illegal taxis, a meeting joined by Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew announced last week.

At the meeting, on Mar 31, it was announced that officials will take action on the issue of illegal taxis and to “strictly enforce the law against offenders strictly, promptly and continuously”.

Present for the announcement were Pol Col Jirasak Siemsak, Deputy Commander of the Phuket Provincial Police and Adcha Buachan, Chief of the Phuket Land Transport Office (PLTO).

Also present was Pol Col Chatri Chukaew, Chief of Wichit Police Station, which has been involved in the recent episodes of behaviour by the legally registered ‘green plate’ taxi drivers against independent taxi drivers picking up passengers at the Central Festival Phuket shopping mall.

Mr Adcha gave a four-point explanation of the PLTO's “guidelines” regarding the what he called the “problem of public taxis in Phuket province”:

- Public car hire operators can work and live together happily under the legal framework.
- People or tourists receive good services.
- Government officials join together in preventing and resolving problems within the framework of the law through the participation of all sectors.
- Strict law enforcement action against perpetrators, timely and continuously.

Mr Adcha repeated that currently only two taxi apps are legal in Phuket: Hello Phuket and Grab.

The two taxi-hailing apps have a total of



PLTO Chief Adcha Buachan.
Photo: PR Phuket

365 drivers registered to provide taxi services, Mr Adcha said.

Hello Phuket has 228 drivers registered, Grab has 111 drivers registered and 26 drivers are registered with both apps, he said.

Mr Adcha also repeated that the PLTO had created stickers for private cars to use so they could be easily identified. The stickers are to indicate that the taxi has been registered through a legal application and has been certified by the PLTO.

Provincial Police Deputy Commander Col Jirasak said that the police officers “will work with all agencies to enforce the law”.

He asked any persons who see a taxi suspected of being illegal “not to cause quarrels”.

“This will affect the tourism image of Phuket. Please report complaints through the Traffy Fondue application or the relevant authorities in the area,” Col Jirasak said.

Wichit Police Chief Col Chatri said that from his own officers' investigations that most of the vehicles they have found provided services through taxi apps that had not yet been given. *The Phuket News*



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PM punts Phuket Expo bid

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has raised the idea of creating a new road from Bangkok to Southern Thailand as an additional route to support road transportation to the Andaman coast provinces and southern provinces on the Gulf of Thailand.

The route would make road transportation to the South more convenient, and would help support tourism in the South of Thailand, both on the Andaman coast and the Gulf of Thailand, to be a seaside tourist area in the style of the 'Riviera', PM Prayut said at press conference held at Government House on Mar 29.

The Prime Minister led the press conference as part of the continuing drive for support in Thailand's bid for Phuket to host the World Specialised Expo as "Phuket Expo 2028".

The press conference was held after a high profile meeting of key figures involved in the bid, including Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Health Anutin Charnvirakul, Deputy Minister



Photo: PR Phuket

of Commerce Sinit Lertkrai, Deputy Minister of Interior Songsak Thongsri, Assistant Minister attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Wichawat Isaraphakdee and Phuket Governor Narong Woonciw.

Also present for the meeting were Chattan Kunchorn Na Ayudhya, Deputy Governor for Marketing Communications at the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Chiruit Isarangkun Na Ayut-thaya, Director of the Thailand

Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) and Sanan Angubolkul, Chairman of the Board of the Thai Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade of Thailand.

The Prime Minister thanked all agencies for their joint support, fully pushing for the bid to host Expo 2028 Phuket Thailand, Anucha Burapachaisri, Deputy Secretary-General to the Prime Minister for Political Affairs Acting as spokesman for the Office of the Prime Minister,

explained after the meeting.

"Thank you for raising awareness, and we ask all sectors to work together for the success of the country," he said.

"Thailand is confident that this event will be used as a platform to drive action to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals under the main idea 'Future of Life : Living in Harmony, Sharing Prosperity' [the theme of the Phuket Expo bid]," Mr Anucha continued.

Each of the more than 30 representatives from government agencies and the country's leading private business organisations at the meeting all reported good progress in developing support for the bid.

Phuket Governor Narong emphasised the readiness of all sectors in the province, Mr Anucha noted.

Campaigns to raise awareness of the Expo bid had been successful, and preparations were underway to prepare the island to host the event, he said.

Mr Anucha marked the key support among the private sector in Thailand's bid, with the official report of the meeting specifically naming Krung Thai Bank, Kasikornbank, Bank of Ayudhya, PTT, Siam Co. Piwat Co Ltd, King Power International Group, Thai Beverage PCL, Airports of Thailand, Siam Cement PCL, and hotel groups such as Minor International.

"I know this is not an easy task, but I believe that with the cooperation of all sectors, the state, the private sector and the public, it can be achieved. All sectors are requested to follow the movements of member countries closely as information for adjusting Thailand's

strategy in bidding to host the event," PM Prayut said.

"I invite everyone to join hands in making changes, see progress order and presenting the readiness to be a good host with 'Yim Siam' ['Thai smile']", he said.

Thailand's bid aims to see Phuket host the Specialised Expo 2027/2028 from March 20 to June 17, 2028.

Phuket is competing against four other cities to host the event: Minnesota, in the United States; Belgrade, in Serbia; Malaga, in Spain; and San Carlos de Bariloche, in Argentina.

The host country will be elected by representatives of the 170 Member States of the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) on the principle of one country, one vote at the BIE General Assembly to be held in June.

If Thailand's bid is successful, the event is hoped to attract at least more than 5 million visitors, generate more than B49 billion for the economy and provide about 100,000 jobs during the runup and duration of the expo.

The bid to host the event has already received B5.11bn from the government budget.

More direct flights from China arrive

CHONGQING AIRLINES became the latest airline flying direct from mainland China to Phuket with the arrival of Flight OQ2093 from Chongqing landing at Phuket International Airport on Apr 2.

The Airbus A320neo touched down at 5:58pm with 128 tourists on board, reported the Special Affairs and Public Relations Division at the Phuket International Airport Administration Department (AoT Phuket).

On hand to welcome the arrivals were AoT staff led by administrative officer Wiwattana Tamjoy, handing out souvenir gifts as the tourists disembarked via Gate 15 at the International Passenger Terminal.

The new service (CKG-HKT) will operate four times a week throughout April, ramping up to daily flights throughout May, reported the Airports of Thailand Co Ltd ground service company AOTGA.

The launch of the new flight service marked Chongqing Airlines becoming the 61st airline currently operat-



Photo: AoT Phuket

ing flights to Phuket International Airport, AOTGA also reported.

Chongqing, with an estimated urban population of 16.34 million as of 2020, is the fourth largest city in China by population, after Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen.

The return of Chongqing Airlines' direct flights to Phuket followed Kunming Airlines inaugurating its direct flight to Phuket (KMG-HKT), KY8365 at Phuket International Airport on Mar 26, also with a warm welcome from Phuket International Airport staff.

Pairat Sawaengsup, the

duty manager from Airports of Thailand, Phuket (AOT Phuket), led his team to welcome the first group of 156 arrivals at gate number 15 of the international terminal.

The representatives of Phuket International Airport also gave away souvenirs to all the KY8365 passengers upon arrival.

Kunming Airlines is a Chinese airline based in Kunming, Yunnan, which was established in 2005. Its international routes focus on Thailand with four different destinations, including Bangkok, Hat Yai, Pattaya and Phuket.

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Husband of Thai actress linked to gambling site

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

Police say they have found evidence showing the husband of a Thai actress has operated a gambling website with its server in Cambodia and more than B3 billion in circulation over the past year.

Pol Maj Gen Wiwat Khamchamna, deputy commissioner of the Cyber Crime Investigation Bureau (CCIB), said last Friday (Mar 31) that investigators had examined the money trail of bank accounts of people hired to open them. The money, he said, had been transferred from those accounts to the bank accounts of businessman Rama "Mek Rama" Rassameerama, 36, who is married to actress Yardthip Rajpal.

Pol Maj Gen Wiwat elaborated at a briefing held to update details about the Mar 30 raid on 17 locations with suspected links to online gambling. Mr Rama and eight accomplices were arrested during the raids in Bangkok



Police inspect one of the luxury cars seized from businessman Rama Rassameerama. Photo: Bangkok Post

and other provinces.

Seized from him were luxury cars, expensive watches, houses and more than 100 land title deeds in Phuket and Bangkok, Buddha amulets, some cash and other items worth over B1bn in total.

All nine suspects were charged with colluding in operating gambling or persuading people either directly or indirectly to bet.

CCIB investigators will now work with the Anti-Money Laundering Office to examine the seized assets. Some might also be linked to the Forex-3D Ponzi scheme that the Department of Special

Investigation (DSI) has been handling.

Last month, the DSI confiscated a B220 million penthouse belonging to Mr Rama for alleged involvement in Forex-3D.

A police investigation found that some of 72 land title deeds in Phuket had been acquired since 2020.

The CCIB chief denied reports that certain officers had been lobbying investigators not to move against Mr Rama and the other suspects.

During the search of the businessman's home in Bangkok, police believed some valuables and other assets

might have been moved to other places before the raid.

The initial examination of the money trail of the nine suspects has so far showed no links to other people, said Pol Lt Gen Worawat Watanakhornbancha, the CCIB commissioner.

The investigation is continuing and he vowed to take action against all people involved. At this stage, Ms Yardthip has not been implicated.

The eight other suspects – all men – are Navaprin Thongnoi, 31; Naruephon Luenam, 29; Ratthasart Wongcheewasut, 32; Chukiart Uangram, 28; Chakhorn Supamaneewitsiri 33; Phapakorn Ruengpakdee, 38; Sanaret Manomai-ngamlert, 31; and Kittithat Uppaphong, 30.

During questioning, only Mr Nareuphong confessed to the charges.

Police took the suspects to the Criminal Court on Mar 31 and opposed bail, saying they posed a flight risk. The court agreed and all nine were taken to the Bangkok Remand Prison.



Thick smog in Chiang Mai. Photo: Chiang Mai University Faculty of Medicine

Pollution issues choke Chiang Mai hospitals

BANGKOK

AIR POLLUTION IN CHIANG MAI has reached hazardous levels, with people suffering from respiratory issues filling up local hospitals, the Chiang Mai University Faculty of Medicine reports.

Consistently high PM2.5 levels in the northern province have led to many residents seeking medical attention for respiratory illnesses, including asthma and inflammation.

A total of 12,671 patients sought treatment for respiratory problems between Jan 1 and Mar 31, the 1,400-bed Maharaj Nakorn Chiang Mai Hospital reported last Saturday (Apr 1).

The facility said it has not been able to treat a significant number of people due to congestion of its inpatient wing.

Nationwide, the number

of patients with air pollution-related diseases in hospitals totalled 1.73 million between Jan 1 and Mar 19, figures from the Ministry of Public Health showed earlier.

So far, provincial officials have acknowledged that air pollution and forest fires remain a major concern, as many areas have been shrouded in smog for weeks and a distinct odour of smoke has persisted.

Although efforts are continuing to quell forest fires in Doi Suthep-Pui National Park, authorities reported that hot spots have continued to expand in recent days.

According to IQAir.com, Chiang Mai was reported to have an air quality index (AQI) of 216 on Saturday afternoon and remained the world's most polluted city, followed by Guangzhou in China and Hanoi in Vietnam.

Bangkok Post

Chinese kidnappers flee after murdering female student

NONTHABURI

POLICE HAVE OBTAINED COURT warrants for the arrest of three fugitive Chinese men in the kidnap and murder of a Chinese university student whose body was found in a ditch in Nonthaburi province last Saturday (Apr 1).

National police chief Pol Gen Damrongsak Kittipras said on Monday (Apr 3) that investigators had identified all suspects in the case and warrants had already been approved by the court.

The body of Jin Can, a 22-year-old Chinese music student at Bangkok Thonburi University, was found in a ditch at a planation in Bang Yai district of Nonthaburi on Saturday afternoon.

Her body was in a sack and had five stab wounds. A towel was tied around her neck, reports the *Bangkok Post*.

Surveillance camera footage showed three Chinese men abducted her from the university on Mar 28 before detaining her at a rented house.

The gang then used the WeChat app to demand a ransom of 500,000 yuan, about B2.5 million, from her father in China. The father received the ransom demand together with a picture of his daughter with her wrists and ankles tied. Police said the unpaid ransom and a love affair were thought to be factors in her murder.

"The investigators found that the suspects



A rescue worker points to where the body of 22-year-old Chinese student Jin Can was found. Screenshot: Thai PBS

have fled abroad. Interpol will be asked to issue a Red Notice and Chinese police will be asked to help bring them to task," Pol Gen Damrongsak said.

He added there had been a considerable number of Chinese nationals committing crimes in Thailand and the two countries were working closely to deal with crime involving such Chinese nationals.

Thailand's issuing of visas on arrival had proved convenient for them and made it easier for criminals to enter the country, the national police chief said. Suitable measures had to be drawn up to promote tourism and at the same time keep out criminals.

Police searched the suspects' rented house in Bang Yai district again on Monday, looking for additional evidence. It is believed the young woman was murdered there. *Bangkok Post*

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'Dungeons & Dragons' mix it up

David Griffiths

Any film lover will perfectly understand that filmmakers John Francis Daley (*Vacation*) and Jonathan Goldstein (*Game Night*) were under extreme pressure when they took on the task of creating a film based on the popular *Dungeons & Dragons* tabletop game – a game that has been intensely loved by players since 1974.

Even worse was the fact that playing on their mind would have been that there have been three *Dungeons & Dragons* feature films made over the years and all have been considered sub-par by both fans and critics alike.

The first thing that many will notice about *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* (2023) is that the characters at hand are very similar to what they would experience in the game. The film's plot revolves a bard and former Harper named Edgin Darvis (Chris Pine – *Wonder Woman*) and a Barbarian called Holga Kilgore (Michelle Rodriguez – *The Fast & The Furious*).

After a heist goes wrong they find themselves in prison and on their release they discover that their former ally, Forge Fitzwilliam (Hugh Grant – *Operation Fortune*), has risen to power and also brainwashed Edgin's daughter Kira (Chloe Coleman – 65) into turning against her father.

With a plan in place to find a magi-



Michelle Rodriguez, Chris Pine, Regé-Jean Page, Sophia Lillis, and Justice Smith in *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* (2023). Image: IMDb

cal device that would be able to bring Kira's mother back from the dead, Edgin and Holga now also find that they must work with a sorcerer named Simon, (Justice Smith – *Pokemon: Detective Pikachu*) who has no faith in his abilities, and a gifted but reluctant young tiefling druid called Doric (Sophia Lillis – *It*) in order to see their plans work out.

However, they soon realise just how difficult defeating Forge will be when they discover that he has teamed up with a powerful Red Wizard (Daisy Head – *Wrong Turn*). In order to counteract her magic they find that they have to seek advice from a paladin named Xenk Yedar (Rege-Jean Page – *Bridgerton*) which in turn makes Edgin have to face the ghosts of his past.

What makes this film work is perhaps the most interesting thing. Most would have expected that perhaps Daley and Goldstein may have made this a darker film that might of taken on a similar tone to that of the *Harry Potter* franchise, but instead the filmmaking duo have decided to mix action, fantasy and comedy all together in a way that is perhaps most reminiscent of the Heath Ledger film *A Knight's Tale*.

It may feel like a weird mix, but somehow it works. The well developed characters also allow the actors to deliver some great performances. Very few actors can mix action and humour the way that Chris Pine does and his performance here is well supported by the likes of Michelle Rodriguez, who seems to enjoy playing a character that has

an emotional side, while Justice Smith once again reminds audiences why he is one of the most talented young actors in Hollywood at the moment.

The actor who seems to have the most fun here though is Hugh Grant. Grant has already shown earlier this year, with *Operation Fortune*, that he can play one hell of a villain and he repeats that here again – cruel and devious, but making the character memorable by throwing in some moments of humour, and the result is some great cinematic magic. The other enjoyable element of *Dungeons And Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* are the epic action sequences.

There are very few cinema lovers out there that would have expected for *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* to end up as good as it has. With just the right mix of action, fantasy and humour delivered by characters that are impossible not to fall in love with, it is easy to see why many cinema lovers will be calling for a sequel to be made as soon as possible.

Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves is currently screening in Phuket and is rated '13'.

4/5 Stars

David Griffiths has been working as a film and music reviewer for over 20 years. That time has seen him work in radio, television and in print. You can follow him at www.facebook.com/subcultureentertainmentaus

WINDOW ON PHUKET

April/May 2023 issue

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Food festival puts 'Soft Power' on show

The Phuket News
life@classactmedia.co.th

The Phuket Food Festival held at Saphan Hin last week saw more than 200 food vendors serving up a host of treats, ranging from Thai staples such as pad Thai and pad krapao to culinary signature dishes by renowned restaurants.

The festival began quietly on the Tuesday night (Mar 28), with the grand opening ceremony led by Phuket Town Mayor Saroj Angkhanapilas and Phuket Vice Governor Anupap Rodkwan Yodrabambam held at the event site at 7pm on the Wednesday night.

The annual event, this year marking the 25th edition of the food festival, is held each year to stimulate the local economy and distribute income among food vendors in town, and to promote tourism to the area, Phuket Town Deputy Mayor Prasit Sinsawapak explained in the run-up to the festival last week.

Panachai Wasanarungruangsuk, President of Phuket City Municipality Food Traders Club, confirmed that this year the festival is hosting more food outlets "than ever before".

A large variety of dishes is available at the festival, including sweet, savoury, beverages and seafood, Mr Panachai said.

"The highlight of this year's event is that restaurants joining in the event will be serving new creative dishes



Photo: Phuket City Municipality

that are unique to Phuket in order to strengthen Phuket's reputation as a City of Gastronomy," he said.

Nattaya Prepas, secretary of the club, added that vendors at the festival, like all members of the club, will use environmentally friendly containers to serve food. Plastic and Styrofoam boxes will be banned in order to preserve the environment and reduce pollution, she said.

The Phuket Food Festival, open to visitors from 4pm to 11pm each day, continued through to Monday night (Apr 3).

SOFT POWER

The grand opening of the '25th Phuket Food Festival 2023' coincided with the

launch of a campaign led by Chanthana Sitthiphan, Director of the Phuket Provincial Cultural Office, under the Ministry of Culture, to promote Phuket's 'Soft Power'.

In line with the Phuket Food Festival underway, Ms Chanthana and the Phuket Culture Office is supporting a campaign to promote tourism, the local culture and way of life, and promoting local Phuket food as "Roy Phuket", whereby "Roy" is the Southern Thai truncation of the Central Thai word "aroy", meaning "tasty" or "delicious".

The campaign launch was held in front of the Phuket Provincial Cultural Office in Phuket Town, and joined by Phuket Vice Governor Amnuay Pinsu-

wan and a host of other senior officials.

Ms Chanthana explained that the Phuket Cultural Office, under guidelines set out by the Ministry of Culture, is focussing on building international competitiveness and creating a new 'BCG' (Bio-Circular-Green) economic model through promoting the "soft power of Thainess to be known internationally".

"This will increase the value of the '5F creative economy', namely food (Food), movies (Film), Thai fabrics and designs (Fashion), Muay Thai (Fighting), and the preservation of festivals while presenting them to the world (Festival)," she said.

Ms Chanthana highlighted Phuket Town being recognised as a 'City of Gastronomy' by UNESCO in 2015, at the time becoming the first city in Thailand, and Asean, to join 18 cities in the world recognised with the distinction.

"Phuket is renowned for its food, and unique and beautiful traditional costumes," Ms Chanthana said.

In terms of culture, we can publish and exchange knowledge about our customs, which helps to instil a sense of pride in our valuable cultural heritage, which in turn attracts both Thai and foreign tourists," she added.

To help spread the word about Phuket's iconic culture, a host of representatives from the media were taken on a familiarisation tour of the island on Mar 30, Ms Chanthana said.

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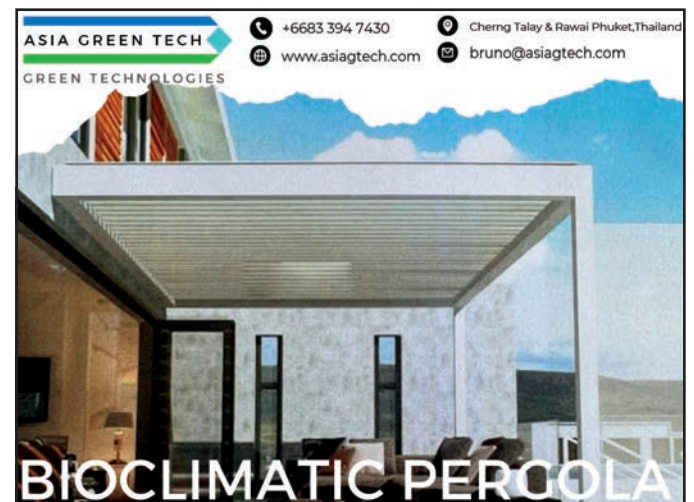
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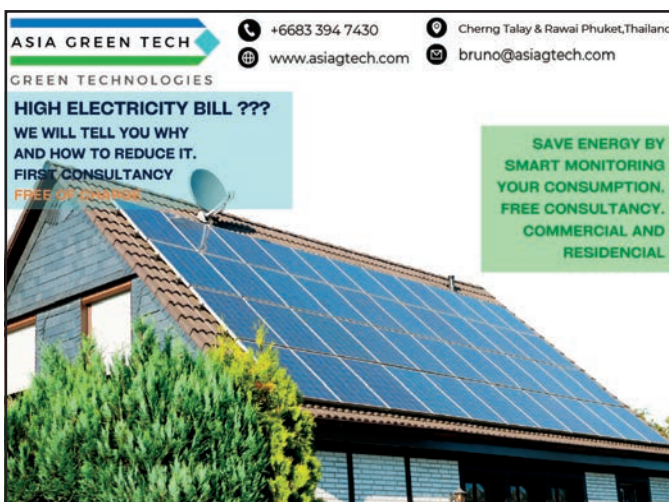
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FRI 7 APR



Grow Boating Evening

We look forward to seeing you at the Grow Boating Evening at the Boardwalk Bistro and Bar at the Phuket Boat Lagoon from 5pm on Friday the 7th of April. We are delighted to announce that our drinks sponsor for the evening will be Simpson Yacht Charter who specialize in bareboat, luxury crewed yacht and superyacht charter across Asia. See www.simpsonyachtcharter.com There will be a delicious finger food buffet sponsored by the Boardwalk Bistro & Bar for all attendees and if you are still hungry then there will be burgers for just 100 baht. As always, all your favourite beverages will be available from the bar. Come and join in the fun, everyone is welcome and there is no entry fee and if you know anyone you think would be interested in coming, please invite them along. A special thanks to our Media Partners The Phuket News and Live 89.5 Radio. growboatingphuket@gmail.com

SAT 8 APR



The 10th OB Open

The Rotary Club of Patong beach present the 10th edition of the OB Open. A legendary night with Gala dinner, Music and charity. The party will be held at JUNKYARD THEATRE (Underwood's on Bypass Road) from 7:30 – 11:30pm. Pre- purchase at 5,000 THB per Person (10% discount for 6+). Welcome drink, scrumptious food and free flow well-chosen beverages. More info - rotarylegendarynight@gmail.com

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Monday BBQ Night

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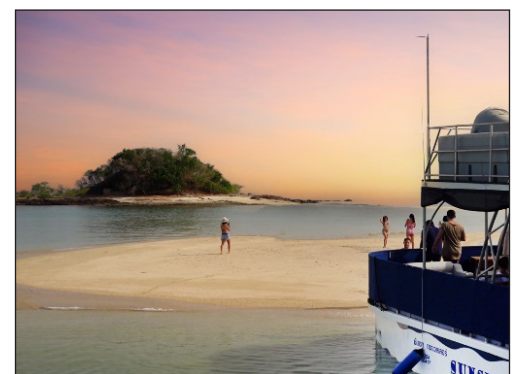
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Skål International Phuket Dinner at RPM

Get aboard the 40 ft catamaran Sunset Traveler for a sunset cruise on the Andaman Sea. With a tasting from Blackbird Group and Italian dinner on the boardwalk at Isola Ristorante at Royal Phuket Marina. The date is Friday, April 21. Max capacity for 26 people on board the catamaran and in the restaurant. Dress: smart casual. Registration - 1645-1715, Sundowner cruise on the Sunset Traveler - 1715-1845, Tasting and Italian dinner from 1845. Visit - facebook.com/SkalPhuket

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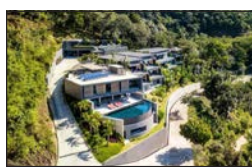
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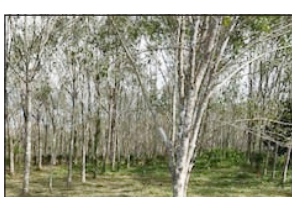
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CHAINE DES ROTISSEURS PHUKET CELEBRATES 20 YEARS

A celebration Chapitre, the 20 year Anniversary of Phuket Bailliage, was held over the weekend March 3-5. Starting with a welcome to Thailand dinner at Eden Grill at Boat Avenue on Friday, Mar 3, followed by the Chapitre and gala dinner on Saturday, Mar 4 at the Pullman Phuket Arcadia Naithon Beach and ending with a Sunday brunch at Anantara Layan. To find out more about Chaîne des Rotisseurs Phuket visit chaînephuket.com



Joshua regretful despite points win

BOXING

BRITAIN'S ANTHONY Joshua said he should have knocked out Jermaine Franklin after the former world heavyweight champion returned to winning ways with a unanimous, if laboured, points-decision victory in London last Saturday (Apr 1).

After 12 rounds, Joshua, fighting in front of a home crowd at the O2 Arena, was given the win by 118-111, 117-111, 117-111 on the scorecards of the three judges in this non-title fight.

This was the 33-year-old Joshua's first win since 2020 after successive defeats by Oleksandr Usyk saw the former Olympic champion lose, and then fail to regain his global titles.

"It was important to win," Joshua said after a bout where another loss could have ended his career.

"I should have knocked him out but it is done. On to the next."

Joshua, who had lost



Joshua. Photo: AFP

three of his last five bouts, repeatedly landed with his left jab and caught Franklin with several powerful rights, but the American refused to yield and went the distance.

There was a bizarre finish when the 12th and final round appeared to end eight seconds early, with Joshua pushing his head into Franklin, which drew an angry reaction from the American's corner.

But soon afterwards Joshua's hand was raised in victory, his 25th win in 28 professional fights, to maintain hopes of a "Battle of Britain" clash with WBC heavyweight champion Tyson Fury. *AFP*

New Zealand dominate at Hong Kong Sevens

RUGBY

AFP

New Zealand topped Fiji in the Hong Kong rugby sevens final last Sunday (Apr 2) to seal a remarkable double gold with their women's team and extend their lead atop the men's series standings.

The All Blacks scored the game's first three tries and held the Pacific islanders at bay from there to finish 24-17 winners, claim their third gold of the 11-stop tour and extend their lead over second-placed Argentina.

Cody Vai, Sione Molia, Leroy Carter and Ngarohi McGarvey-Black were the New Zealanders who scored the decisive tries in the white-wash.

This year's tour also serves as Olympic qualifying, with the top four teams automatically heading to Paris 2024.

The series heads to Singapore next, before Toulouse and the finale in London in May.

In the lesser finals on the Sunday, the bronze medal



New Zealand's women in action against Fiji. Photo: AFP

went to France, who beat Great Britain 19-17, while Argentina claimed fifth place, Ireland sealed ninth, and hosts Hong Kong finished 13th.

The men's final victory came less than an hour after New Zealand's women secured their own gold medal by beating Australia 26-17 in the final to get one hand on the overall series trophy with one round to go.

The Black Ferns had cruised their way through

the weekend, swatting away early opponents and looking mostly untroubled by Fiji in the semi-final, which they won 31-5.

But in Australia, they found their most credible opposition, and both southern-hemisphere giants were in the game for most of it.

Stacey Waaka's second try of the match in the 14th minute made sure of the win, as well as making her the weekend's second-top scorer, after Aus-

sie star Charlotte Caslick.

The 27-year-old Waaka, who has 25 tries in the series so far, added that she hoped her country's win – at the first-ever stop for the women's series in Hong Kong – would resonate with younger women players.

"We're talking about paving a path for future generations," she said. "Hopefully there's many more years to come and hopefully the girls watching at home in New Zealand can be here one day."

Olympic berths are also up for grabs during this series, with the top four teams automatically heading to Paris 2024, along with hosts France.

New Zealand are 16 points clear of Australia in the series standing, and almost certain to secure the title in the final round of the women's series in Toulouse in May.

In the lesser finals on Sunday, the bronze medal went to Great Britain, France claimed fifth place and the USA finished seventh.

Hosts Hong Kong lost the 11th place playoff to Brazil a day earlier.

IOC backs return of Russian, Belarusian athletes as individuals

OLYMPICS

OLYMPIC CHIEFS RECOMMENDED the return to competition of Russian and Belarusian athletes as individual neutrals on Mar 28, but refused to give a timeline on their potential participation at next year's Paris Olympics.

International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach said the body's Executive Board had recommended to international federations and international sports event organisers that "athletes with a Russian or a Belarusian passport must compete only as Individual Neutral Athletes".

German Sports Minister Nancy Faeser called the recommendation for Russians and Belarusians to return as neutrals a "slap in the face" for Ukrainian athletes, who she said "deserve the solidarity of international sport".

"International sport must condemn Russia's brutal war of aggression in no uncertain terms. This can only be done with the complete exclusion of Russian and Belarusian athletes."

Poland's Deputy Foreign Minister Piotr Wawrzyk said it



IOC president Thomas Bach. Photo: AFP

was a "day of shame for the IOC" after the "daily bombings of civilian sites".

But Moscow said forcing Russians to compete under a neutral flag would amount to "discrimination".

"The announced criteria for the return to international competitions are unacceptable. This is discrimination on the basis of nationality," Stanislav Pozdnyakov, the head of the Russian Olympic Committee, said as quoted by Russian news agencies.

Among other IOC recommendations, which Bach said were agreed unanimously, the IOC said "teams of athletes with a Russian or Belarusian passport cannot be considered".

Also missing out will be "ath-

letes who actively support the war" as well as "athletes who are contracted to the Russian or Belarusian military or national security agencies".

Bach reiterated that the sanctions against "those responsible for the war, the Russian and Belarusian states and governments", must remain in place, having first been introduced after Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

That means Russia and Belarus are unable to organise international sports events on their territory.

Additionally, "no flag, anthem, colours or any other identifications whatsoever of these countries displayed at any sports event or meeting, including the entire venue" and

"no Russian and Belarusian government or state official can be invited to or accredited for any international sports event or meeting".

Bach said a decision on athletes from Russia and Belarus taking part in Paris 2024 and the 2026 Winter Olympics, however, would be taken "at the appropriate time".

"We want to monitor the implementation of these recommendations as long as possible... to be enabled to take an informed decision," he said. "No one knows what's happening tomorrow or in nine months."

WIMBLEDON LIFTS BAN

Meanwhile, Ukraine has condemned the "immoral" decision to allow Russian and Belarusian tennis players to compete at Wimbledon this year after tournament organisers announced they were lifting a ban imposed in 2022.

Competitors from the two nations will be able to enter the Grand Slam, which starts on July 3, if they are "neutral" athletes and comply with certain conditions.

Players will be prohibited from expressing support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine and those who receive funding from the Russian or Belarusian states, including sponsorship from state-operated or state-controlled companies,

will be barred.

The All England Club, which runs Wimbledon, said the decision was made after talks with the UK government, Britain's governing Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and international tennis bodies.

"We continue to condemn totally Russia's illegal invasion and our wholehearted support remains with the people of Ukraine," said Ian Hewitt, chairman of the All England Club.

"This was an incredibly difficult decision, not taken lightly or without a great deal of consideration for those who will be impacted."

"It is our view that, considering all factors, these are the most appropriate arrangements for the championships for this year."

But Ukraine's foreign minister blasted the decision, urging Britain to bar entry to participants from the two countries.

"Wimbledon's decision to permit the participation of Russian and Belarusian players is immoral," Dmytro Kuleba said on social media.

"Has Russia ceased its aggression or atrocities? No, it's just that Wimbledon decided to accommodate two accomplices in crime. I call on the UK government to deny visas to their players." *AFP*

Potter sacked by Chelsea

FOOTBALL

AFP

Graham Potter paid the price for Chelsea's poor form as the Englishman was sacked last Sunday (Apr 2) after just seven months in the job.

The Blues had slipped to 11th in the Premier League table after a 0-2 home defeat to Aston Villa on Saturday despite spending over £500 million (B21 billion) on new signings this season.

Chelsea have won just three games in their last 11 but have progressed to the quarter-finals of the Champions League where they face defending champions Real Madrid.

The 47-year-old Potter won just 12 of his 31 matches in charge and was widely booed by the Chelsea support after defeat to Villa at the weekend.

"We have the highest degree of respect for Graham as a coach and as a person. He has always conducted himself with professionalism and integrity and we are all disappointed in this outcome," co-owners Todd Boehly and Behdad Eghbali said in an official statement.

"We have 10 Premier League games remaining and a Champions League quarter-final ahead. We will put every effort and commitment



Graham Potter was in the hot seat at Stamford Bridge for just seven months. Photo: AFP

into every one of those games so that we can end the season on a high."

Potter becomes the second manager sacked by the consortium led by LA Dodgers co-owner Boehly and private equity firm Clearlake Capital in their first season in charge after Thomas Tuchel was dismissed last September.

Former Brighton defender Bruno Saltor has been placed in interim charge, the club confirmed.

Potter's sacking came on the same day Leicester City parted company with manager Brendan Rodgers after a 1-2 loss against

Crystal Palace on Saturday saw the Foxes slip into the relegation zone.

In the role for four years, Rodgers delivered two top-five finishes in the Premier League and the club's first ever FA Cup win in 2021.

However, the club's Thai owners decided to pull the trigger and dismiss the Northern Irishman, saying in an official statement: "Performances and results during the current season have been below our shared expectations... and, with 10 games of the season remaining, the board is compelled to take alternative action to protect our Premier League status."

SOBERING DEFEAT

Elsewhere, Arsenal maintained their title charge with an impressive 4-1 win against Leeds on Saturday, only hours after second-placed Manchester City had thrashed Liverpool by the same scoreline.

A brace from Gabriel Jesus and further strikes from Granit Xhaka and Ben White ensured the Gunners preserved their eight-point lead at the top of the table, as they made it seven consecutive league wins for the first time under manager Mikel Arteta.

The early clash between City

and Liverpool, the two sides that have dominated English football over the past five years, saw Pep Guardiola's side ease to a comfortable win, despite the absence of star striker Erling Haaland due to injury.

Mohamed Salah put the Reds ahead before City stormed back with goals from Julien Alvarez, Kevin De Bruyne, Ilkay Gundogan and Jack Grealish.

City still have a game in hand on Arsenal and the two meet in a potential title decider at the Etihad later this month.

The sobering defeat is another blow to Liverpool's hopes of a top-four finish as the Reds slip to eighth in the table.

Elsewhere, Newcastle avenged their League Cup final loss against Manchester United on Sunday with a 2-0 win that lifted the Magpies into third place in the table while Brighton and Brentford shared the points after a thrilling 3-3 draw at the Amex.

West Ham scrambled out of the relegation zone thanks to a crucial 1-0 victory against fellow strugglers Southampton while Bournemouth came from behind to beat Fulham 2-1. Nottingham Forest and Wolves remain outside the bottom three after a 1-1 draw at the City Ground while Spurs and Everton drew 1-1 on Monday.

Bezzecchi claims maiden MotoGP victory in rain-lashed Argentina

MOTO GP

MARCO BEZZECCHI claimed a maiden MotoGP win at the rain-lashed Argentina Grand Prix last Sunday (Apr 2), also delivering a first victory for a Ducati team owned by motorcycling legend and seven-time elite class champion Valentino Rossi.

Italian rider Bezzecchi finished ahead of Frenchman Johann Zarco with Alex Marquez, who started on pole position, rounding out an all-Ducati podium.

"Normally I'm not very good when it rains, but today the sensations were incredible," said the Italian.

Bezzecchi, 24, also took a nine-point lead in the overall standings after world champion Francesco Bagnaia, the winner of last weekend's season-opener in Portugal, crashed off the circuit on lap 17 of the 25-lap race.

He was running in second place at the time before recovering to finish in 16th.



Bezzecchi on his way to winning the Argentina MotoGP. Photo: AFP

However, such a lowly position meant he leaves Argentina without a point.

"This kind of crash is difficult to explain, I was in the same position, I had the same speed, the same angle as the previous lap and I crashed. I was maybe on the limit, I was fighting for the podium," said Bagnaia.

Bezzecchi had started in second place on the grid but swept past Marquez on the opening lap and was rarely troubled to take the chequered flag by 4.085sec.

South African KTM rider Brad Binder, who won the sprint race on Saturday after starting from 15th place on

the grid, was 17th and last on Sunday after a fall on the opening lap.

Zarco who had started from sixth on the grid said he was "quite satisfied" with his performance which moved him up to third in the standings, 15 points behind Bezzecchi.

The top 10 on Sunday was rounded out by Franco Morbidelli, Jorge Martin, Jack Miller, 2022 world champion Fabio Quartararo, Luca Marini, Alex Rins and Fabio Di Giannantonio.

Former world champion Joan Mir missed Sunday's race due to injuries suffered in the sprint. AFP

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**Kiwis boss
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MAGIC MAX

Verstappen keeps cool during late-race chaos

Max Verstappen celebrates victory at the Australian Grand Prix last Sunday (Apr 2). Photo: AFP

FORMULA ONE

Michael Lamonato
michael@boxofneutrals.com

Max Verstappen was declared the winner of the Australian Grand Prix last Sunday (Apr 2) after two farcical failed attempts to restart the race following a late red flag.

Verstappen had been dominating the race after starting from pole position when Haas driver Kevin Magnussen tapped the wall at turn 2 and lost his rear-right tyre, scattering debris across the track.

Race control suspended the race to clean the circuit with just three laps still to run. But when racing got back underway from a standing restart, chaos ensued.

Ferrari's Carlos Sainz tapped Fernando Alonso's

Aston Martin into a spin at the first corner. Teammate Lance Stroll then skated across the gravel at turn 3. Further back, Logan Sargeant clumsily rear-ended Nyck de Vries, sending both cars into the stones and out of the race.

Sergio Perez speared across the gravel trap to cut turn 2 and harmlessly re-joined. Pierre Gasly followed him through but wasn't so lucky, smashing teammate Esteban Ocon against the wall to put both Alpine machines into retirement in a hail of carbon fibre debris.

The race was suspended immediately, this time with only one lap left on the clock.

However, because the lap to the grid counts as a racing lap after a red flag, it was impossible to resume the grand prix competitively. Instead race control directed the cars to complete the final

lap behind the safety car and take the chequered flag in a parade-style formation finish.

But there was considerable deliberation on what order the cars should be allowed take the chequered flag given the previous lap hadn't been fully completed thanks to the crashes. In the end the FIA decided to roll the order back to the previous lap, effectively annulling any passing moves on lap 57, though the crashed cars remained out of the race.

The decision upset Haas after Nico Hulkenberg had climbed to fourth in that botched restart, but the stewards rejected a post-race protest on the grounds that race control has discretion to choose the most appropriate lap to set the grid. Race director Niels Wittich believed the earlier lap was a fairer representation of the race at that point.

DESERVING WINNER

Whatever the case, there was no doubting Verstappen was a deserving winner despite the unusual ending, with the Dutchman having comfortably controlled the race before the dramatic closing laps.

"I'm of course very happy to win the race, but I think the race itself towards the end was a bit of a mess with all the calls," he said. "I don't think we needed that second red flag; I think that could have been done with a virtual safety car or a safety car at worst."

"I think it left a lot of drivers confused."

Lewis Hamilton came home second after briefly leading the race early thanks to a sizzling start. His Mercedes was no match for the rampaging Verstappen, however, who passed him easily with the help of DRS on the

back straight to build a comfortable lead.

But Hamilton was buoyed by his troubled Mercedes was at least able to beat frontrunning rivals Aston Martin and Ferrari to the place.

"It was very unexpected," he said. "It's a huge boost of energy throughout the team."

Fernando Alonso finished third for the third successive race after a race-long pressure campaign on Hamilton failed to bear fruit.

"In terms of pace we were very close to Lewis, also through the race, but every time that I tried to get close he seemed to pick up the pace," he said. "I try to put some pressure but, you know, he had an incredible race, no mistakes at all, as you probably expect from him, a champion."

Carlos Sainz was on track to finish fourth but picked up

a five-second penalty for spinning Alonso at the botched restart, which demoted him all the way to 12th because of the processional finish.

Lance Stroll was promoted to the place in the second Aston Martin ahead of Sergio Perez, who recovered from a pit lane start to finish fifth, albeit with the help of several red flags.

Lando Norris was sixth after bursting past Nico Hulkenberg for the place late in the race. Both drivers scored their first points of the season.

Oscar Piastri scored his maiden points at his home grand prix after the Alpine drivers crashing into each other moved him into the top 10.

Zhou Guanyu was ninth for Alfa Romeo ahead of 10th placed Yuki Tsunoda, who scored AlphaTauri's first points of the year.

Team Nam Naka win the 8th Tekkim Cup

FOOTBALL

THE 8TH EDITION OF THE popular Tekkim Cup concluded last week with team "Nam Naka" emerging as champions after they defeated team "Pak Ranong and Balanon" in the final at Seven Soccer Club Stadium in Wichit.

The final was a tense affair, finishing with a 1-1 scoreline at full-time before Nam Naka triumphed 4-2 in the penalty shootout to claim the title of champions.

Team Nam Naka's players received an overall cash prize of

B120,000 along with a B10,000 gift voucher to be used at 2S Sport. The team also received a trophy to denote their position as overall competition champions.

Team Nam Naka also cleaned up in the individual player awards with captain Choklap Nilsaeng named the tournament's top scorer, Thepphanom Chindafor awarded most valuable player and goalkeeper Yutthasit Chadmuang winning the golden glove award. All three were awarded trophies for their respective achievements.

Defeated finalists Pak Ranong and Balanon received B50,000

for their efforts, with third-placed "Patong United" receiving B30,000 after they defeated team "Farm Nai Tung" 4-1 in the third-place playoff match. Farm Nai Tung were awarded B10,000.

Team "Success Academy" won the Under-10 junior age group tournament after they defeated "M.Den Academy" in the final. Team "PK & Mineral Mine" finished in third place after they defeated "GL Gorilla" in the playoff between the beaten semi-finalists.

The cash prizes and awards were distributed at the official closing ceremony on Mar 30 by Tham-

mawat Wongcharoenyot, head of the Sports Association of Phuket, who was joined by Sommai Plookmaidee, Deputy Mayor of Phru Nai subdistrict in Phang Nga and associated officials.

The seven-a-side tournament ran from Mar 20-30 on the artificial grass fields at Seven Soccer Club Stadium and saw a total of 24 teams from Phuket and the surrounding provinces participating.

Each team was limited to seven players on the field at any one time but with a rolling substitution format meaning players were able to swap at will throughout the games.



Winners Nam Naka. Photo: Sports Association of Phuket

In his closing remarks, Mr Tham-mawat declared the tournament a huge success, adding that it was a great way to help develop players' skills while promoting a healthy lifestyle. Details on next year's edition will be released shortly, he said. *The Phuket News*