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WET POWER



Revellers enjoy water fights at the alcohol-free 'No L' zone on Dibuk Rd, Phuket Town last year. Photo: PR Phuket / file

SONGKRAN 'SOFT POWER' EVENTS TOUTED TO BOOST TOURISM

The Phuket News
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As this week's issue of *The Phuket News* hits the streets, so does the water, as Phuket joins the nation in celebrating Songkran 2024, marking the start of the Thai New Year.

As is tradition, Patong starts the celebrations early with its three days of official activities starting today (Apr 12), and a live concert on Patong Beach tonight.

This year the Patong celebrations are being held under the banner 'Songkran Music Festival On The Beach 2024', to be held Apr 12-14. The festivities are expected to attract crowds of people not only locally, but

throughout Thailand and the rest of the world.

While Patong tends to be more enthusiastic with its Songkran celebrations, much focus this year has been placed on the 'Thai Soft Power' aspect of the annual event, namely the traditional ceremonies.

"With the cooperation of localities and various sectors Songkran activities will be held throughout Phuket to promote tourism during Songkran 2024 to preserve Thai culture and traditions, and stimulate the tourism sector of the economy and reflect Thai Soft Power to become more well known," Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat said earlier this month.

Official celebrations in Phuket will be held to promote Thai culture

and traditions, "reflecting the identity of Thai Soft Power", Governor Sophon said.

"We therefore invite citizens and tourists [sic] to participate in dressing in traditional Thai clothes to bathe Buddha images, pour water over your head, and splash happiness and fun at the Phuket Songkran Festival, which is expected to generate income of billions of baht for Phuket during the Songkran festival," he added.

The move to focus on traditional Songkran festivities follows the national government's plan to boost tourism by celebrating the 'Maha Songkran World Water Festival' with a series of cultural extravaganzas over three weeks, starting in Chiang Mai on Apr 1 and concluding in Chonburi

on Apr 21. The central government has spent B105 million on the campaign.

SOFT PUSH

The 'Songkran No L Phuket 2024' festivities get underway on Dibuk Rd in Phuket Town from 4pm to 10pm tomorrow (Apr 13). The event will include live music concerts by popular Thai bands such as Paradox, as well as DJs playing music into the night and a host of other attractions.

The 'No L' celebrations on Dibuk Rd have been selected by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation as one of 15 locations in the country to promote safe enjoyment of celebrating the Thai New Year.

Thai Health Promotion Foundation, often better known by its...

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NEWS PAGE 3

Police target illegal businesses



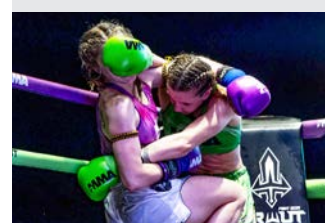
LIFE PAGE 8

Time to zag when everyone zigs



SPORT PAGE 16

Phuket bow for MMA promoter



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News



Srettha looks to 'Ignite Tourism Thailand' > p6



Screenshot: Patong Surf Life Saving

'Electra dolphin' rescued at Patong

TOURISTS AT PATONG Beach were abuzz with excitement last week as lifeguards rushed to rescue a melon-headed whale, less commonly called the 'electra dolphin', that had washed ashore.

Scores of onlookers crowded around and cheered lifeguards on as they recovered the small whale, no more than two metres in length, and used a large beach towel to carry it up the beach on Apr 3.

The lifeguards used a jet-ski to release the small whale in deeper waters in Patong Bay, and are keeping watch in case it returns.

The melon-headed whale (Peponocephala

electra) is also known less commonly as the electra dolphin, little killer whale, or many-toothed blackfish.

The small marine mammal is a toothed whale of the oceanic dolphin family. The common name is derived from the distinguishable head shape.

A protected marine animal in Thailand, the melon-headed whale is rarely found in Phuket. One was last reported being spotted in local waters on June 10, 2021.

Melon-headed whales are more commonly found in Chonburi and Songkhla provinces, where they have also been reported found stranded on beaches.

The Phuket News

Phuket Court reopens 'tourist case division'

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After four years, the Phuket Provincial Court has reopened its special division assigned specifically to hear cases involving tourists.

Kriangsak Rodphanchu, Chief Judge of Wiang Sa Provincial Court in Surat Thani, currently also serving as Acting Chief Judge of Phuket Provincial Court, announced the move on Apr 2.

The Phuket Provincial Court 'Tourist Case' division first opened on Sept 24, 2017 and continued operating until the outbreak of COVID-19, when the section was suspended, until now, noted an official report of the meeting.

"There are many people, both Thai and foreign tourists, traveling to visit Phuket nowadays. This results in an increase in disputes and criminal cases where the tourist is the victim or even the accused or defendant," Judge Kriangsak said.

"Many cases appear in the news and in many media [channels], causing a lack of confidence in the safety of life and property. This may affect the tourism sector of the province and Thailand,"



Photo: PR Phuket

Judge Kriangsak added.

"Therefore, the processing of tourist cases in court is to provide justice to tourists when there are disputes, both criminal and civil, and with agencies involved in helping tourists to have their legal rights protected and the perpetrators punished strictly.

"This is considered a move to build confidence among tourists and create a good image for Phuket Province and tourism in Thailand as a whole," Judge Kriangsak said.

The duties and responsibilities of the Tourist Case Division of the Phuket Pro-

vincial Court also include providing advice and assistance to tourists in preparing complaints in the case of consumer cases, Judge Kriangsak pointed out.

"The court can set appointments so cases can be resolved through mediation within 24 hours [of the complaint being filed] and [the mediation] can proceed continuously until the case is resolved," he said.

By coordinating with representatives of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports and the Attorney-General's Office, the court can follow up on cases

involving business operators being sued in order to bring such cases to court as soon as possible, he added.

The court also coordinates with police and local embassy representatives to have witness statements taken from tourists who need to return home from their holiday, and have legal representatives act on behalf of tourists who need to return home before the case has been completed, he said.

"The court also coordinates with interpreters or mediators who must be on duty outside of business hours," Judge Kriangsak said.

National campaign aims to put traditions on show for Songkran

Continued from page 1

...Thai initials สสส (SorSorSor), selected the 15 locations for its campaign 'Songkran the Thai Way: Fun, Safe, No Violence'.

At the Bangkok press announcement of the 15 locations selected, Narong Phromjit from the Limelight Phuket shopping centre, which is the organiser of the 'Songkran No L Phuket 2024' event, pointed out that this was the 10th year that the 'No L' event was being held.

However, this year will have a special focus on Thai 'Soft Power', in line with the national government's policy, and because the Songkran festival had been designated by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, Mr Narong said.

"Last year about 30,000 people



Phuket dancers put 'soft power' on show in Bangkok. Photo: PR Phuket

came to the Songkran No L event," he said. "The goal of the event is for people to have fun and to provide a safe place for youngsters, citizens and tourists, and to continuing Thai traditions while campaigning for the target group to refrain from drinking alcohol during the festival in order to reduce injury statistics

and deaths from accidents resulting from drunk driving during the Songkran holidays."

Mr Narong noted that the 'Songkran No L Phuket 2024' event has four rules of participation: 1. No alcohol, kratom or drunk people; 2. No cigarettes, e-cigarettes or marijuana; 3. No powder or paint; and

4. No weapons or fighting allowed.

"We invite people to join the festivities, which includes wearing traditional Thai costumes and pouring water on Buddha images, pouring water blessings over your head, and splashing as the utmost fun," he added.

As with Patong and Phuket Town, every other major community centre on the island will be holding their own Songkran festivities, with all official celebrations ramping up the 'soft power' promotion.

BIG BUSINESS

Lertchai Wangtrakuldee, Director of the Phuket office of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT Phuket), earlier this month predicted that Phuket will see an estimated 264,350 visitors travel to Phuket during the Songkran festival.

The tourists are expected to spend an average of B6,625 per day, generating B7.04bn for Phuket, Mr Lertchai said.

However, Phuket Airport General Manager Monchai Tanode told the press only last week that the revised number now stood at a total of at least 328,567 people entering and exiting through Phuket airport from Apr 11-17, giving an average of 46,938 people per day.

Of those, 198,508 are expected to be international passengers, with the remaining 130,059 being domestic passengers.

Phuket airport is expected to serve 2,068 flights during the period, an average of 295 flights per day. Of those 1,085 are expected to be international flights, bolstered by 983 domestic flights, Mr Monchai said.

'Fake company' network hit

Eakkapop Thongtub
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Police have raided eight locations in Phuket as part of an investigation into a suspected money-laundering network of no less than 38 fake companies which were discovered during investigation into a Russian man for scamming a victim out of B500,000.

Officers from the Crime Suppression Division (CSD) raided the offices after a search warrant was issued on Apr 1.

CSD Commander Pol Maj Gen Montree Theskhon explained that the raids were launched in response to officials' discovery of suspicious financial transactions involving a Russian man, who police have not named.

A criminal posing as an official from the Provincial Electricity Authority (PEA) had scammed a victim into installing an app that allowed the scammer to transfer B500,000 from the victim's bank account to the Russian's account.

The funds were transferred to a Phuket-registered bank account in the Russian man's name, Pol Maj Montree explained.



Photo: CSD

plained.

It was later discovered that the Russian man had withdrawn cash from his account through a bank in Phuket continually over a period of time.

The Russian man also accepted transfers of cryptocurrency coins from an unverified digital wallet, or 'non-custodial wallet'. The coins were then sold in large

quantities by transferring the money to the Thai bank account and the cash immediately withdrawn as cash.

From July 7 to Nov 19 last year, the Russian man had withdrawn a total of about B186 million through bank counters and ATMs from three bank accounts, Pol Maj Gen noted.

The suspiciously large amounts were believed to be

a form of money laundering.

From examining the evidence presented in order to open the bank account, it was found that the Russian man had presented a work permit confirming that he is an employee of a company in Phuket.

Further investigation by police confirmed that no such company actually existed. It is believed that the company

was registered to be used to create false documents to obtain work permits and to providing supporting documents for visa (or permit to stay) applications.

The directors and shareholders of the company were two Thai women and one Russian woman. The same three were also listed as shareholders and directors of 37 other companies, police noted in their report of the raids.

The three women now face charges presenting false documents to officials and providing assistance or supporting business operations of foreigners in breach of the Foreign Business Act, namely by acting as nominee shareholders, but also by their other actions.

Officials executing the search warrant raided eight locations in Phuket which were listed as registered places of business for 17 of the 38 companies suspected of being part of the money-laundering network.

The two Thai women admitted to having set up a company that registers companies, processes work permit applications and processes visa applications for

foreigners, and applies for various licenses on behalf of foreigners.

The actual work involved setting up a company that had no actual operations and that was used to create false documents to apply for various permissions to foreigners, the women confessed.

At one of the locations raided, on the second floor of an office building, officers found equipment set up to resemble an actual office, so photos could be taken as false evidence that it was a place of actual business.

Such photos are a standard requirement for applications for work permits and for permits to stay submitted to Phuket Immigration.

Of note, no Phuket Immigration officers were cited in the CSD report of the raids as part of the operation.

At the second-floor 'fake office' location, CSD officers seized: two computers that were used to create false documents and store foreign customer data; stamps for more than 50 companies; and some 500 pages of documents to be examined thoroughly for supporting evidence in the investigation.

Five arrests in Octopus restaurant 'nominee' raid

POLICE HAVE RAIDED THE RUSSIAN-owned Octopus restaurant in Chong Talay and arrested five suspects, including three Russian nationals, for illegally operating a business through a nominee shareholder.

Region 8 Police Deputy Commander Pol Maj Gen Saranyu Chamnanrat and Phuket Provincial Police Deputy Commander Pol Col Akanit Danpitaksat led a raid at the popular venue, on the Baan Don - Chong Talay Rd, on Apr 4.

In total, five locations were raided, including private residences. The raids were conducted by officers from six government and law-enforcement agencies.

The raids, performed under search warrants, followed a tip-off that foreigners regularly gathered at the Octopus restaurant in order to operate a business that was formed illegally through the use of a nominee, Region 8 Police Commander Pol Lt Gen Suraphong Thanomchit explained at a press conference on Apr 4.

The Octopus restaurant was owned and operated by the company VVG Alliance Co Ltd, which had an operating capital of B80 million, he said.

The company directors were Thai national Punyanuch Thongkrob and Russian national Vladislav Zinakov.

The company shareholders were: Ms Punyanuch Thongkrob, 20,400 shares (51%); Mr Vladislav Zinakov, 9,800 shares (24.5%); and 3 Mr Valerii Volkodov, 9,800 shares (24.5%).

Mr Pavel Shapovalov was found to perform administrative duties and take care of finances and had a power of attorney to make decisions



Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

on behalf of Zinakov, Pol Lt Gen Suraphong explained.

All five were arrested for breaches of the Foreign Business Act and the Alien Work Act, he confirmed.

The inspection also found that foreigners were involved in buying, selling and exchanging various digital currencies in breach of the Digital Asset Business Operations Act 2018, he added.

Zinakov was found to be the real owner of the business, Pol Lt Gen Suraphong said.

Punyanuch, although an authorised company director and majority shareholder, was a nominee of the foreign capital group and did not have any authority in the company at all, he said.

Financial evidence showed that funds from the Octopus tour and travel operations were transferred to Zinakov's account, he noted.

Documents were seized as evidence in making the arrests, Pol Lt Gen Suraphong confirmed.

"These must be reviewed in order to expand the investigation as it is believed that the case is connected to a number of other people," he said.

Additional reporting by Eakkapop Thongtub

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Austrian charged for throttling taxi driver

AN AUSTRIAN MAN last week faced a charge of assault after he started choking his taxi driver for being told not to smoke in the taxi, causing the taxi driver to rear-end a car in front of him.

Thalang Police confirmed the charge against Austrian national Gernot Kuhberger, 58, through a statement on Apr 3.

Wuttiorn Chaimongkhon, 62, had picked up the tourist at Phuket International Airport with his Toyota Camry taxi and was taking him to Chalong when the incident happened, said Pol Lt Col Yuthaphon Watthasate of the Thalang Police.

When they reached Baan Muang Mai, in Thalang, Kuhberger started smoking a cigarette inside the car. Mr Wuttiorn told him to stop, as there was no smoking in his taxi. Not happy, Kuhberger reached over from the back seat and placed both hands around Mr Wuttiorn's neck, and started choking him.

Mr Wuttiorn was unable to control the vehicle, which hit the back of a red



Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

MG car waiting at a red light in front of the Thepkrasatri Municipality offices on Thepkrasattri Rd.

The location of the collision was just some 30 metres from Thalang Police Station, he noted.

The driver of the MG car, Thanongsak Sonpat, 40, told reporters that he exited his car and saw Kuhberger choking Mr Wuttiorn and rushed to help. Another "good citizen" also arrived to provide assistance, and together pulled Kuhberger's hands off Mr Wuttiorn.

Mr Thanongsak said that he felt that the Austrian man seemed to be drunk.

Police soon arrived and took all three men to the police station for questioning.

Thalang Police Chief Pol Col Nikorn Chuthong confirmed that Kuhberger had agreed to pay for damages to both cars from the collision. *Eakkapop Thongtub*

Ukrainian charged for taxi knife threat

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A Ukrainian woman travelling on a Portuguese passport was charged for threatening a woman taxi driver with a knife amid a dispute over a taxi fare last week.

After videos of the incident circulated widely on popular local social media channels, the taxi driver, Ladda Saengthong, 35, told reporters that she had picked up the woman from Phuket International Airport on the evening of Apr 1, and was asked to take her to a villa in Baan Pakrongcheep, Tambon Thepkrasattri.

However, from there the woman asked to be taken to Rawai. Ms Ladda explained that would cost an extra B1,500, to which the woman agreed.

The woman was later identified by her Portuguese passport as Nadiya Serhiivana Varshava, 30, a Portuguese national born in Ukraine,

Varshava asked to stop by Patong along the way, which was also agreed would cost extra. Along the way the woman asked to smoke marijuana in the taxi, and offered to pay extra. Ms Ladda agreed.

After Varshava exited the taxi and walked around for a



Screenshot: Supplied

while in Patong, she got back into the taxi to continue the journey to Rawai.

However, after arriving at the One World One Home Naiharn Hotel, Varshava got out of the taxi and walked into the hotel without paying. Ms Ladda walked into the reception to demand the woman pay the taxi fare. Varshava refused.

Amid the dispute, and as shown in the videos posted online, Varshava walked over to a small kitchen area in the reception and picked up two knives.

She walked back to Ms Ladda and while holding the knives behind her back said, "A hundred metres from here, what did I say? What did I say?"

Ms Ladda says "Okay, we go."

Varshava is seen walking

away, then the video stops.

However, other videos posted online showed Varshava arriving at the hotel apparently in a good mood. She arrives with her luggage, plays with a small dog in the reception and even changes her clothes while in the reception.

Then she can be seen engaged in what soon became an argument with Ms Ladda while Ms Ladda is making a phone call.

Police were called and Varshava was taken to Chalong Police Station.

A video has later posted online showing Varshava placing joss sticks in the spirit house in front of the hotel, though she seemed to show a lack of understanding of such importance of the practice to Thais.

Axe-wielding German arrested

CHALONG POLICE ENTERED a house in Soi Naya, Rawai, last week and subdued by force a 64-year-old German man who threatened neighbours with an axe.

Police were called to the home last Friday (Apr 5) by local residents who said they were concerned the man's behaviour had recently become increasingly erratic and aggressive. He brandished knives and axes to threaten neighbours.

A task force soon assembled at the home, comprising officers from Chalong Police, Phuket Provincial Police Office, Tourist Police and Phuket Immigration.

Confronted by the officers, who had a warrant to enter the home, the man (name withheld) ran back inside the house and locked the door. He shouted that if anyone tried to enter the house he would fight them "until his death".

Officers managed to gain access to the property before successfully



Photo: Phuket Info Center

managing to placate the German man and disarm him. He was then taken to Chalong Police Station to face charges, although police did not immediately specify what the charges would be.

Police said the outcome was a very satisfactory one, as the man had become a constant nuisance and danger. Many people, concerned with his aggressive outbursts, had attempted to reason with him but to no avail.

Further checks by police confirmed that the man had overstayed his visa by 500 days.

Police urged anyone encountering any similar behaviour to contact police to deal with the situation in the correct manner. *The Phuket News*

Thai fined for 'beach hooning'

A THAI MAN ON HOLIDAY with his family has been fined B1,000 for driving on Kamala Beach.

Kamala Police Chief Pol Col Somsak Thongklian confirmed that the Thai tourist, whom he named only as 'Mr Prasopchok', 39, had been charged with reckless driving and fined for the incident, on Apr 1.

Prasopchok owned a convenience store in Bangkok and was holidaying in Phuket with his family, Pol Col Somsak said.

Mr Prasopchok told police that he thought driving on the beach was allowed. He had come to Phuket with his two children and wanted them to get a close-up view of the sea at Kamala Beach.

Some reports said Mr Prasopchok claimed that he saw a truck taking jet-skis onto the beach and thought it was permitted to drive along it. So he did, noted the *Bangkok Post*.

A 30-second video of the incident circulated online, prompting a slew of negative comments and



Screenshot: Bangja Jor Jahn Chai Dai

criticisms online. The video showed the car, a black sedan, being driven on the sand and even onto the wet sand near the water.

A lifeguard approached and signalled for the driver to leave the area, but was ignored.

The comments posted online criticised the dangerous behaviour, with some pointing out that a local resident would not do this with his/her own car due to the damage the saltwater would do to the vehicle, hence the driver must have been a tourist in a rental car, commenters deduced.

Early last month, a driver left a Jeep stranded in wet sand at Kamala. Officials recovered the Jeep recovered before the high tide arrived. *The Phuket News*

Expat faces sex crime charges

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The arrest of Richard Burrows, better known in Phuket as Peter Smith, for paedophile charges as he landed in the UK earlier this month stunned many of those who knew him, as he had lived on the island in plain sight for decades.

Burrows, a former Scoutmaster in the UK, was arrested at Heathrow airport on Mar 28 as he disembarked a flight from Thailand.

The 80-year-old had been wanted by Cheshire Police since December 1997 when he failed to attend Chester Crown Court where he was due to stand trial for two counts of buggery and 11 counts of indecent assault, Cheshire Constabulary noted in their announcement.

The charges relate to the sexual abuse of children which is alleged to have occurred between 1969 and 1971. Some of the offences are reported to have occurred at a children's home in Congleton, Cheshire, while others took place in the West Midlands.

"The charges related to alleged historic abuse of boys at a care home in the 1980s. But he disappeared before his trial was due to take place at Chester Crown Court later that same year," police said.

Cheshire Police gave themselves



Richard Burrows, better known in Phuket as 'Peter Smith'. Photo: The Phuket News

and National Crime Agency (NCA) International great credit for the arrest

Detective Inspector Eleanor Atkinson said, "Our determination to locate Burrows has not faltered over the past 27-years and his arrest marks a significant step forward in

this case and the beginning of closure for all those involved.

"I would like to thank the public for the information that they have provided over the years during our search for Burrows and I hope that his arrest provides some reassurance.

"I also hope that his arrest acts

as a warning to any other wanted suspects – demonstrating that no matter how long you hide, we will find you and you will be arrested."

Duncan Burrage, NCA International Liaison Officer in Thailand, said, "Utilising our international network and working closely with Cheshire Police colleagues, we have been able to track down a fugitive wanted in connection to extremely serious allegations.

"This arrest demonstrates law enforcement's unwavering commitment to hunt down those who await justice in the UK."

Yet here he was living in plain sight in Phuket, apparently unknown to authorities both here in Thailand and in the UK. Even last year UK police told the press that he had never been located despite "extensive enquiries".

Burrows arrived in Phuket in 1997 and had lived on the island under the name Peter Smith, complete with a passport.

He had set up his own company and taught English at schools from time to time. His face was all over government documents, including visa and permit-to stay renewals through Phuket Immigration.

Somehow during his time in Phuket, Burrows went unidentified despite renewing his British passport several times – all without raising a red flag to British crimefighters

and despite the advent of biometric passports.

Although Burrows for years worked in advertising/sales for well-known Phuket publisher IMAGE asia, and other publications, he did so through his own company.

"Nobody who knew 'Peter' here would have guessed he was wanted for such dreadful crimes. He was a very well-liked Phuket expat with a wide circle of friends," said well-known Phuket expat Grenville Fordham, founder of IMAGE asia.

His health failing and out of finances – he had spent more than the past year living in a shipping container fitted out to be a residence – Burrows chose to go back to the UK on his own volition.

So well liked was he that a collection was gathered at his 'retirement' party to help him pay for the flight home.

"Shocked by the news, nothing 'Peter' did or said in the years I have known him raised any flags. Hope this helps with closure for everyone involved," said Class Act Media & IMAGE asia General Manager Jason Beavan.

Burrows was arraigned in court in the UK on Tuesday, Apr 2. According to reports in the UK media, he is to remain in custody until a hearing scheduled for June 21, with a provisional trial date set for Jan 13 next year.



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Srettha set to 'Ignite Tourism'

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Prime Minister and Finance Minister Srettha Thavisin has outlined his vision to 'Ignite Tourism Thailand' in 2025 with a multifaceted approach to establish the country as a tourism hub.

PM Srettha reiterated the government's commitment to boosting Thailand as a tourism hub to drive the economy and bring prosperity to the country, reports the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

"The goal is to establish Thailand as a leading destination for tourists from around the world," PM Srettha said at an event on Apr 3.

He stated that the government's target of B3.5 trillion in tourism revenue this year, with an aim to earn much more in the coming years, would be achieved through five strategies.

Conceptualised at the "Ignite Thailand's Tourism Workshop" held in Bangkok on Mar 15 with participation from public and private agencies, the strategies include elevating the tourist experience, promoting must-do activities, raising awareness of hidden-gem destinations, developing intra-regional travel linkage with neighbouring countries, and hosting more world-class events.

Tourism and Sports Minister Sudawan Wangsuphakijkosol said



Photo: TAT

the five strategies aligned with the government's policy to make Thailand a global aviation hub, handling more than 150 million air travellers annually by 2030.

"In 2025, Thailand's tourism is set to experience growth on an unprecedented scale. The new 'Up Level, Add Story, Create Value' concept will enhance every step of the tourist journey across all touch-points," Minister Sudawan said.

The outlines for the five strategies are:

1. ELEVATING TOURIST EXPERIENCE

Steps will be taken to promote Thailand's tourism information and promotion to allow tourists to plan

an informed trip to the country.

Existing measures will be strictly enforced to ensure tourist safety and convenience, including accessible 'Tourism for All', one-stop Tourist Police Hotline 1155, and universal coverage for emergency patients.

Travel facilitation will be further enhanced in the next three months. This includes improving queue management in airports, raising hotel standards, extending visa-free entry to more countries, enhancing tourist safety and security measures, and ensuring good maintenance and hygiene in public restrooms.

In the next six months, the government plans to push for the amendment of related tourism laws, including hotel regulations, alcohol

restrictions, import duties on mega-event equipment, and VAT refund requirements.

2. FIVE 'MUST-DO' ACTIVITIES

Must Beat (Muay Thai) highlights four unique styles of ancient Thai boxing and presents the sport as a form of cardio exercise.

Must Eat (Thai food) promotes Thai kitchen to the world with 77 local dishes and 77 local desserts.

Must Seek (Thai culture) tells the story of a faith-based journey, cultural superstitions, and folklore culture.

Must Buy (Thai fabric) partners with world-renowned designers to turn Thai fabrics into fashion items.

Must See (Thai shows) showcases impressive traditional and contemporary performances.

3. TRAVEL LINKAGE BETWEEN MAJOR AND 'HIDDEN-GEM' DESTINATIONS

Promotion of travel linkage between well-established cities and hidden gems in lesser-known destinations is set to better balance the distribution of tourist arrivals and tourism income between urban and rural areas.

Recommended routes include Lanna Culture (Chiang Mai – Lamphun – Lampang), UNESCO Heritage Trail (Sukhothai – Kamphaeng

Phet – Nakhon Ratchasima), NAGA Legacy (Nakhon Phanom – Sakon Nakhon – Bueng Kan), Paradise Islands (Trang – Satun), and The Wonder of Deep South (Pattani – Yala – Narathiwat).

4. HUB OF ASEAN

Plans include promoting intra-region travel and helping to enhance the development and promotion of ASEAN as a single tourism destination, introducing the ASEAN Pass in partnership with airlines, and raising awareness of cross-border QR payment.

5. WORD CLASS EVENT HUB

Incentives will be launched to attract major festivals, concerts, and events to Thailand, thus establishing the country as a centre of world-class events.

Upcoming world-class events include Summer Sonic Bangkok 2024, KAWS Arts, Moto GP, and Volleyball World Championship.

Minister Sudawan said, "These five strategies are planned to ignite Thailand to a tourism hub status to attract more tourists to the country and spending more time and budget, further boosting Thailand as the number one tourist destination."

From Jan 1 to Apr 1, 2024, Thailand recorded 9.4 million visitor arrivals, representing a 42% increase over the same period in 2023.

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No regrets as Pita braces for political uncertainty

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

Pita Limjaroenrat admits his political career may be over if the Move Forward Party (MFP) is dissolved but says he will have no regrets over his time in opposition as the party has been working hard for the people.

Speaking at the end of a two-day general debate in the House last Friday (Apr 5), the former MFP leader said the role of the opposition is important to the democratic system, as a party in opposition can work for everyone, regardless of their political affiliation.

"A healthy democracy is gauged not only by how much absolute power the government has but also how persistent and effective the opposition is on behalf of the people," he said.

Mr Pita, currently party chief adviser, said he felt no sorrow that last week's debate might be the end of his political journey. The current parliamentary session concluded on Tuesday (Apr 9).

"As everyone knows, my political career is hanging by a thread, but I am ready to leave like a winner," he said.

He said he felt even more confident about the future after hearing the arguments of his MP colleagues during the debate.

"Despite the possibility of dissolu-



Pita Limjaroenrat says he has no regrets. Photo: Bangkok Post

tion, I could see that our journey towards changes in Thailand will continue. The more often our party is dissolved, the faster we can go to achieve our goal," he said.

However, he expressed regret that the country might be wasting time and opportunities, judging from the government's responses during the debate to the issues the opposition raised.

"This government lacks a clear direction or agenda. It also failed to accomplish what it promised during the election campaign," he said.

The seven months since it took office have been a waste of time, he added.

Mr Pita also suggested a Cabinet reshuffle to place the right people in the right jobs and urged the prime minister to come up with his own road map.

Despite winning the most votes and the most seats in the election last May, Mr Pita and MFP were unable to form a government because of opposition by the unelected Senate to the party's proposal to amend Section 112 of the Criminal Code, the lese-majeste law.

The Constitutional Court accepted a petition by the Election Commission (EC) to consider the dissolution of the MFP on Apr 3, accusing MFP of wanting to overthrow the democratic system of the government with the King as head of state.

It has been speculated that as many as 44 senior figures in MFP, Mr Pita among them, could face lengthy bans from politics if the party is dissolved as they had put their names to the campaign platform that included amending Section 112.

No injuries following Koh Tao ferry fire

SURAT THANI

ALMOST 100 THAI and foreign passengers aboard a night ferry that caught fire off Koh Tao in Surat Thani on Apr 4 escaped unharmed, police have confirmed.

The fire broke out around 6:30am as the ferry neared Ko Jaroen 2 ferry, which operates on the Surat Thani-Koh Tao route, about two to three nautical miles off the island in Koh Pha-ngan district, said Pol Col Chokchai Sutthimek, chief of Koh Tao police station.

The sleeper boat, carrying 97 Thai and foreign passengers, 11 crew members and goods, left Surat Thani about 11pm on Apr 3 en route to Koh Tao. As the vessel approached Koh Tao pier, a fire broke out in the engine room.

Marine Department chief Kritphet Chaichuai said officials were notified of the fire at 6:40am when the ferry was about two nautical miles off the shore



The fire-stricken ferry on Apr 4. Photo: Supplied

near Chalok Ban Kao bay in tambon Koh Tao.

Rescue boats were dispatched immediately and all aboard the stricken vessel were brought to shore.

While no serious injuries were reported, some passengers suffered minor levels of suffocation, police said. The fire was successfully brought under control by 8:20am, officials added.

Mr Kritphet said the fire-gutted boat reportedly carried 90 passengers and eight crew members, although police claimed there were 97 passengers and 11 crew members.

A fact-finding panel was set up to investigate the incident, said the department chief. Bangkok Post

Songkran confusion leaves tourism promoters red-faced

BANGKOK

THE GOVERNMENT was forced to clarify its Songkran plans last Friday (Apr 5) after a bewildered Chinese tourist posted a video of himself outside a Bangkok mall ready for water-splashing fun a day earlier, only to find no one else was celebrating.

The Ministry of Tourism and Sports and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) announced on Mar 12 that the three-week Maha Songkran World Water Festival 2024 would begin on Apr 1 in the northern province of Chiang Mai and wrap up on Apr 21 in Chonburi and Samut Prakan.

This caused confusion between local residents and tourists alike with the Chinese man in full Songkran regalia – floral shirt and water gun – taking to Chinese video-sharing site Douyin.

"Who should I celebrate with?" he asks, while standing outside Terminal 21 mall. "They say it's being



The confused Chinese man in Bangkok on Apr 4. Photo: Bangkok Post

held from April 1-21, but why has it not turned out as expected? I hope there's an explanation."

SleeplessBKK, an account on the X platform, shared the video, tagged Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin and Pheu Thai leader Paetongtarn Shinawatra, and said it was an embarrassment.

Ms Paetongtarn, in her role as the country's "soft power" tsarina, was one of the prime movers behind the three-week Songkran idea.

Government spokesman Chai Watcharonke said that while the festival lasts from Apr 1-21 across the country, activities are not being held

simultaneously in every province.

He said the TAT has a calendar outlining the celebrations nationwide that will be extended across 21 days, but with the main celebrations being held from Apr 13-15 as usual in almost every province.

Authorities will improve their communication work and ensure that visitors are provided with accurate information to prevent misunderstandings, he added.

Tourism and Sports Minister Sudawan Wangsuphakijkosol admitted there had been some misunderstanding about the three-week-long Songkran festival. She said the ministry and responsible agencies would improve public relations and provide a more accurate explanation to foreign tourists who intend to visit the country for the water-splashing festival.

The main event from Apr 12-16, is expected to generate 4.3 million domestic trips and 510,000 foreign tourist visits. Bangkok Post

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Why not zag, when others zig?



GLOBETROTTER

Todd Miller

Leaving before 5am still wasn't enough to beat the crowds. Pedaling through Siem Reap's sleepy streets, it didn't take long to realise that we weren't alone. Tourists using all forms of transport were on a pilgrimage to witness sunrise at Angkor Wat. On this morning, there were easily 10,000 visitors, all jockeying for that perfect position.

Daybreak at Angkor is special at what Guinness classifies as the world's largest religious structure. It's worth getting out of bed for. But with enormous crowds, it's an experience short of magical.

After roaming around Angkor Wat, we hopped on our bikes for a tour of Angkor's other greatest hits – Angkor Thom, Bayon and Ta Prohm (the Tomb Raider temple). By this time the tourists who slept through sunrise were also making the rounds. It was nearly shoulder to shoulder as we trudged our way through the temples. Serene it was not.

Although Angkor Wat's tourism recovery is just 55% of pre-pandemic levels, this annualised measure doesn't reflect seasonality. It's difficult to imagine Angkor Wat any more crowded in the high season than the morning of my fateful visit in mid-February.

After the COVID pandemic, travellers are hell bent on ticking off bucket list journeys and experiences. Globally, 2024 may likely be the year that international travel eclipses pre-COVID heights. Travel is bursting at some seams, especially at iconic destinations such as Angkor Wat. There are about a thousand temples at Angkor, yet a handful attract a vastly disproportionate amount of foot traffic. Whether it's monuments, countries, cities, islands, national parks, restaurants or selfie spots, everyone gravitates to the same places, at the same times.

With so many people zigging in travel, why not zag?

The greatest hits temple tour was the first day of a two-week Siem Reap-to-Saigon cycling trip. I was along for the ride. But I also wanted to zag. I dedicated two days to explore some of Angkor's less visited temples. I had plenty to choose from.



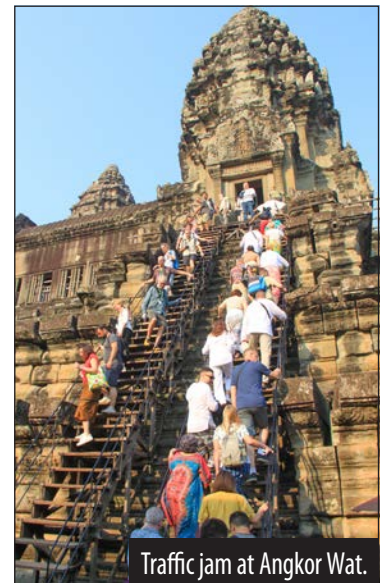
The elevator-shaft-turned helipad at 22 Ly Tu Trong Street, Ho Chi Minh City, in Hubert van Es' iconic photo of Operation Frequent Wind.



Exuberant Cambodian children in the charming countryside.



A survivor of Cambodia's three world wars.



Traffic jam at Angkor Wat.

My first excursion was to the Koh Ker temple complex. This 10th century temple town, second only to Angkor in size and scope, functioned as the Khmer capital for roughly two decades. UNESCO added Koh Ker to its world heritage universe in September 2023, a process that took almost as long as Koh Ker's reign as capital.

Prasat Pram has all the charm of the beloved Tomb Raider temple, with centuries old jungle-covered ruins and massive tree roots fused with sandstone and brick that have survived a millennium of history. During our visit, it was just our small group, the temples and the surrounding jungle. That was magical. Prasat Thom, nearby, is an impressive seven-tiered pyramid. I climbed to the top for great views of the complex.

The following day I visited some impressive but lesser-visited temples closer to Siem Reap. My favourite was Banteay Samre. This 12th century edifice, constructed in the Angkor Wat style, was restored some 80 years ago. A British couple and I enjoyed this magnificent shrine to ourselves during our noon visit.

Bakong Temple is so important to Cambodian history that it features on the country's currency. Indonesia's Borobudur is said to have been the prototype for Bakong, and the two structures share many architectural details. I counted four other visitors while I was there.

Travel zagging applies to more than visiting under-the-radar temples. Upon leaving Siem Reap, our cycling group zagged all the way across Cambodia. We cycled by backroad to the Tonle Sap Lake, then took a one-way chartered boat trip on the Steung Sangke river, a tributary of the Tonle Sap. This boat trip was a journey's highlight, passing floating villages and fishing communities, and witnessing traditional fishing methods and rural life. After four hours on the boat, we disembarked on a shallow riverbank. We were in the countryside with a capital C. This is where life happens. This is also where one can get a genuine sense of place and the possibility to make real connections, however momentary.

We cycled along dusty roads, past pregnant and shimmering rice fields, beyond Buddhist wats, and through small villages as we followed the Steung Sangke on our way to Battambang, to Phnom Penh, then to the coast before crossing into Vietnam.

OBSERVATIONS

There are many young children. Young kids are seemingly everywhere, and account for one-third of Cambodia's population. These kids seem to be equipped with early detection radar in the presence of 'barang', or foreigners. What a visitor will reliably hear, village after village, is a chorus of "H-E-L-L-Os!" from children who come from all directions, running and smiling and waving their hands, to say hi. It's very exuberant, friendly, and welcoming. These cheerful children – this burgeoning new generation – inspire optimism for what might lie ahead.

But it's not all cheerful, of course. Cambodia's history has been violent and complicated since independence from the French in 1953. In the Cambodian view of history, there have been three world wars: the French, the Vietnamese/American conflict, and the Khmer Rouge.

In one village, we stopped for a rest and started a conversation with an 84-year-old woman who was sitting outside, watching the world go by. She's survived it all, I thought, studying the lines in her face, and wondering what they might conceal. She wore a red and white scarf, and that led to an honest conversation about the Khmer Rouge.

This woman explained how she was sent far from home and family during the civil war. Her eyes began to water as she spoke of that period and loved ones lost. No one knows how many people died at the hands of the Khmer Rouge; estimates range from 1.5 to 3 million. That translates to one quarter of Cambodia's population, using a midpoint of that range. The lingering scars afflict nearly every Cambodian family today.

Perhaps through all that zagging across the Cambodian countryside I had stumbled on the country's core promise: to move forward without forgetting the past.

From Cambodia, the zagging continued across the Mekong Delta to Ho Chi Minh City, or HCMC, cycling along canals and past more rice fields and fruit orchards. The route to Saigon involved five ferries, including upper and lower Mekong crossings. The last 10km of cycling into the core city centre were a near-death experience.

ROOFTOP ZAG

In Ho Chi Minh City, I had one more major zag. An iconic photo by Hubert van Es, a UPI photographer, captured the image of an Air America Huey

helicopter atop an elevator shaft on an apartment building roof, with scores of South Vietnamese climbing two packed ladders and scrambling to board. This photo of Operation Frequent Wind became a defining image of the American exit from Saigon in April 1975, and was taken one day before the city fell to the communists.

Today this building, at 22 Ly Tu Trong Street, is still an apartment building. Naturally, I wanted to get up to that rooftop.

I entered the building and quietly gave the security guard on the ground floor 100,000 Dong (approximately US\$4). It was an efficient commercial arrangement. The guard pointed to the elevator and directed me to the 9th floor. From there, I climbed a flight of rusty stairs and stood next to the elevator shaft structure, which loomed much higher than the van Es photo suggests. The perimeter of that shaft is much smaller than I expected, with an area that seems inadequate to land a helicopter. On the right side stood a steep steel ladder.

I zagged up that ladder to the concrete rooftop-turned-helipad, trying to process all that has changed in 50 years.

Essential information: In Siem Reap I stayed at the well-located Central Residences hotel. My day trip to Koh Ker was operated by Siem Reap Shuttle, which I booked on TripAdvisor.

Social Cycles operates the Siem Reap-to-Saigon cycle tour, cycling some 620km over 16 days on flat terrain and mostly quiet roads. It's a 475km straight drive between Siem Reap and Saigon on the highway, but Social Cycles has created a picturesque route that maximises countryside. Some busy or less interesting sections use vehicle transport.

AirAsia and Thai Airways connect Phuket with Siem Reap and HCMC, via Bangkok. Most nationalities will need to apply for a Vietnamese e-visa in advance but can obtain a Cambodian visa on arrival at the airport for US\$30.

Adventurer and author Todd Miller has cycled across two continents and visited all seven. He authored the Amazon bestseller ENRICH: Create Wealth in Time, Money, and Meaning, lauded by Forbes, USA Today, Entrepreneur, and other global media. Todd has contributed to Fast Company, Newsweek, and dozens of podcasts on work-life topics, and resides at Natai Beach. www.enrich101.com



Rivet & Rebar

Ben Tirebuck

editor3@classactmedia.co.th

You know you are in for a special dining experience even before entering the Rivet restaurant at the Slate at Nai Yang Beach. Arriving at the lobby, you are immediately struck by the fantastically unique setting, with quirky but visually stunning sculptures plentiful, all brought to life by perfectly set mood lighting.

It is an impressive introduction and is something that is sustained as you enter Rivet itself and are seated; low lighting, soft music and a wonderfully creative industrial-chic décor set the tone as my partner and I are handed our menus.

For appetizer I opt for the Grilled Asparagus Salad with Burrata, an

exquisitely light, fresh offering punctuated by prosciutto and a delicious romesco sauce. My partner's choice of Watermelon Compress with balsamic vinaigrette, feta and a delightful avocado crema is equally well-received.

With our taste buds already elevated into overdrive, we are both further seduced by the aroma of the open-fired grill and smokehouse, suggesting what is to come for main course.

Going on our waiter Khun Palm's recommendation, we both opt for steak. I select the Australian Grass-Fed Black Angus Tenderloin and my partner The Australian Wagyu 400 Days Grain-Fed Rib Eye. We've both enjoyed some amazing steaks over the years, but this was genuinely on another level altogether and – whereas it is easy to over exaggerate – I can honestly say both were absolutely exquisite taste sensations.

A generous serving of delectable

side dishes, including sweet baby carrots, parmesan infused mash potato and sumptuously cooked broccoli, accompanied the star of the dish, as did an array of delicious sauces. It was an incredibly enjoyable main course that, frankly, neither of us wanted to end!

But alas, end it did, meaning we were onto dessert, often my favourite course. I have to admit I am a bona fide chocoholic so, anytime anything chocolate related is on the menu, I am guaranteed to order it. And, true to form, I did on this occasion, with the Chocolate Lava Cake ordered almost before Palm could ask me! It did not disappoint, a truly decadent molten lava spilling from the moist cake as my spoon cut through it. Delicious! My partner chose the Strawberry Mille-Feuille with Vanilla Bavaois which was a true delight and a perfect end to our meal.

The ambience, excellently atten-

tive staff and, of course, the knock-out food made for an incredible dining experience and one that we both look forward to repeating soon. Highly recommended.

As if that weren't enough, Rivet is also home to a legendary Sunday Brunch held once a month, where guests can revel in a gastronomic extravaganza. This highly anticipated event showcases an impressive spread of delectable dishes.

Rivet & Rebar is located at The Slate resort at Nai Yang Beach, five minutes' drive south from Phuket International Airport. Open daily: 18:00 to 23:00 hrs. Price range: More than B1,200. Best to book a table. Major credit cards accepted. Car park on site. Smoking area. Free WiFi hotspot. Reservations: 076-327006. Website: TheSlatePhuket.com/dining. Facebook: RivetRebar. Instagram: RivetRebar



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POP QUIZ

- 1. How many islands does the provincial area of Phuket include?
- 2. What name is given to a triangle whose sides are of unequal length?
- 3. What was the London address of the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes?
- 4. What is the collective noun for a group of Rhino?
- 5. What did RMS stand for in the ship's name RMS Titanic?

Answers below, centre

SUDOKU

Medium

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

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across

 - 1. Noggin
 - 5. End
 - 10. Fishhook feature
 - 14. Petri dish filler
 - 15. Matter of debate
 - 16. ___ O's (Post cereal)
 - 17. Pioneer planter of note
 - 20. Biscotto flavoring
 - 21. In vain
 - 22. Fireplace feature
 - 24. Albanian coin
 - 25. The Greatest
 - 26. Participant
 - 29. Fishing spot
 - 33. Fish dish
 - 35. Often-missed humor
 - 36. March composer
 - 41. Sight parts
 - 42. Sentences
 - 43. Clique
 - 44. Harbingers
 - 46. Banquet
 - 49. Sean ___ Lennon
 - 50. Sana'a native
 - 53. Inflectional morphology
 - 59. Furze
 - 60. G men leader
 - 62. At another time
 - 63. Fill up
- Down

 - 1. Kind of party
 - 2. Relating to great pain
 - 3. Baba ghanouj ingredient
 - 4. Surrealist Max
 - 5. Home improvement network
 - 6. Brother of Jacob
 - 7. Some slitherers
 - 8. Mississippi city where Elvis was born
 - 9. "Catch 22" author
 - 10. Chief
 - 11. Trojan ally, in the "Iliad"
 - 12. Fishing rod attachment
 - 13. Soul mate
 - 18. Society column abbr.
 - 19. Cry of mock horror
 - 23. Mascara site
 - 27. Phi follower
 - 28. Diacritical mark
- 29. Major-leaguers
 - 30. Promise to pay
 - 31. Printer's widths
 - 32. Carpet, Scandinavian
 - 33. Fly in the ointment
 - 34. Kind of driver
 - 35. Something to believe in
 - 36. Wine container
 - 37. Seeds, in a way
 - 38. Nester
 - 39. Elementary particle
 - 40. Nosegay
 - 44. Anxious
 - 45. Golden Horde member
 - 46. Waitress, for one
 - 47. Invisible
 - 48. Capital on the Missouri
 - 49. Horatian work
 - 51. Bigheadedness
 - 52. Fraternal fellow
 - 53. Like some doors
 - 54. Traffic marker
 - 55. Hack
 - 56. Getaway spots
 - 57. Low-___
 - 58. Thus
 - 61. Chop

Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

- 1) 33 (Including Phuket); 2) Scalene; 3) 221b Baker Street;
- 4) A crash of Rhinos; 5) Royal Mail Ship

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14					15						16			
17					18						19			
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					49					50	51	52		
53	54	55	56					57	58		59			
60										61				
62					63						64			
65					66						67			

Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

1	I	L	K	Y	A	W	A	B	A	B	R	A			
12	M	O	O	R	A	G	E	R	G	E	T	R	E	V	
13	P	L	A	Y	C	A	T	A	N	D	M	O	U	S	E
14	A	L	L	A	H	S	A	L	A	D	S	B	Y		
15	L	E	A	S	T	S	T	A	N	D	S	B	Y		
16	A	D	S	T	I	O	N	E	M	S	E	R	A		
17	W	I	L	D	G	O	O	S	E	C	H	A	S	E	S
18	E	R	I	E	A	P	R	D	D	T	V	E	T		
19	V	A	S	A	I	L	E	D	S	H	R	I	V	E	
20	E	R	R	A	T	A	S	E	O	S	I	N			
21	M	O	N	K	E	Y	I	N	G	A	R	O	U	N	D
22	E	V	E	R	U	N	O	U	T	F	A	C	E		
23	W	A	R	S	P	A	A	G	O	L	E	D			

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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

1.2

miles per hour (1.9km/h) is the average top speed of a mosquito.

17

years is how long the average woman in the UK spends of her life dieting, says one study.

40

when spelled out is the only number whose letters appear in alphabetical order.

5,000

steps per day and sitting for less than 300 minutes is the norm for people who are fit.

265 million

US dollars is what it cost to create the video game 'Grand Theft Auto V', the largest budget of any video game at the time (in 2013). It made US\$1 billion in the first 72 hours of its release.

Source: Uberfacts

ISLAND VIEW



Tri Trang sunset. Photo by Simon Lomas

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

This week in history

April 12, 1606

The Union Flag (better known as the Union Jack) is adopted as the flag of English and Scottish ships.

April 13, 1997

Tiger Woods becomes the youngest golfer to win the Masters Tournament.

April 14, 1912

British passenger liner RMS Titanic hits an iceberg in the

North Atlantic at 23:40, and sinks at 2:20am on April 15. Only 710 of 2,224 passengers and crew on board survive.

April 15, 1989

A human crush occurs at Hillsborough Stadium, home of Sheffield Wednesday, in the FA Cup Semi-final, resulting in the deaths of 97 Liverpool fans.

April 16, 1457 BC

Likely date of the Battle of



The Leppings Lane end at Hillsborough stadium during the disaster.

Megiddo between Thutmose III and a large Canaanite coalition under the King of Kadesh, recognised by historians as the first battle to have ever

been recorded in relatively reliable detail.

April 17, 1961

A group of Cuban exiles financed and trained by the CIA lands at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba with the aim of ousting Fidel Castro.

April 18, 1930

The BBC announces "there is no news" in their evening report. Source: Wikipedia

Trades & Services



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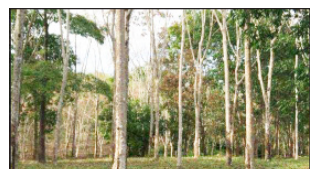
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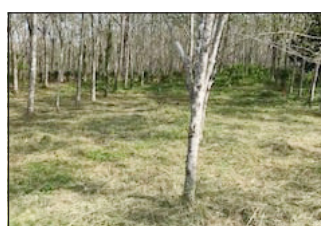
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On a warm Monday evening, April 1, 2024, around 100 invites long-stay guests, partners and suppliers gathered at the Ocean Beach Club - Sand Court to celebrate the 1 year anniversary of operation. Lots of great food and beverages were on hand and added to a fun filled evening.



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Format changes will be tested at select events over the 2024 ATP Tour season. Photo: AFP

Men's tennis to trial new doubles format

TENNIS

NEW RULES DESIGNED to attract more interest in men's doubles tournaments for fans, players and organisers will be trialled starting at this month's Madrid Masters, the ATP announced on Apr 3.

Doubles events have become a financial headache for organisers because they no longer feature the best singles players, prompting the ATP to try and convince them to return.

As a result, the doubles draw in Madrid – which runs from Apr 24-May 5 – will include up to 16 slots reserved for teams entering via their singles ranking, the ATP said in a statement.

The doubles tournament

will also be condensed into five days during the second week and spectators will be free to move around the court.

The players will be subjected to new rules as well to reduce the length of matches.

Instead of having 25 seconds between each point, the server will have just 15 if the previous rally was shorter than four shots. There will also be fewer sit-downs at changeovers.

"Format changes will be tested at select events over the 2024 ATP Tour season, with further details to be communicated in due course," the statement read.

ATP officials did not say how many other tournaments on the men's circuit would be played using the experimental format. *AFP*

Red Bull one-two in Suzuka

FORMULA ONE

Michael Lamonato

michael@boxofneutrals.com

Max Verstappen led teammate Sergio Pérez to an easy Red Bull Racing one-two finish at the Japanese Formula One Grand Prix last Sunday (Apr 7).

Verstappen and Pérez started from the front row of the grid in Suzuka and comfortably led away the field from the line, but the race was quickly suspended when Daniel Ricciardo and Alex Albon tangled at high speed at turn 3, forcing both drivers from the race.

The subsequent delay of more than half an hour had no effect on Verstappen and Pérez's plans for domination, with both executing strong starts at the second time of asking to take the lead of the race.

Verstappen quickly took the race into his own hands, eking out an advantage over his teammate that would never be closed to cruise to 12-second victory and average his failure to finish the previous race in Melbourne.

"It was a very, very good win," he said afterwards. "After the first stint some tiny adjustments were made to the car, and that helped me then to feel even more comfortable. Whenever I needed to go faster, I could. Whenever I needed to look after my tyres, I could."

"That's always a very nice feeling to have once you're driving."

Pérez's first stint undid any potential bid for victory, with the Mexican



Max Verstappen crosses the finish line to win the Japanese Formula One Grand Prix at Suzuka last Sunday (Apr 7). Photo: AFP

uncomfortable on his opening set of medium tyres.

Lando Norris, starting third, seized the opportunity to undercut, making his first pit stop early to gain track position on Pérez when he made his own stop four laps later.

It was only a minor inconvenience. Pérez has been in fine form all weekend, and he made short work of the McLaren with a dive into the chicane to retake second place and complete the team's third one-two from four races so far this season.

Carlos Sainz completed the podium for the third time this year after a strategic duel with Norris and Ferrari teammate Charles Leclerc.

"Very satisfying," Sainz said of

Ferrari's strong start to the year. "We exactly improved the car in the places that we wanted to improve it, and Suzuka proves it."

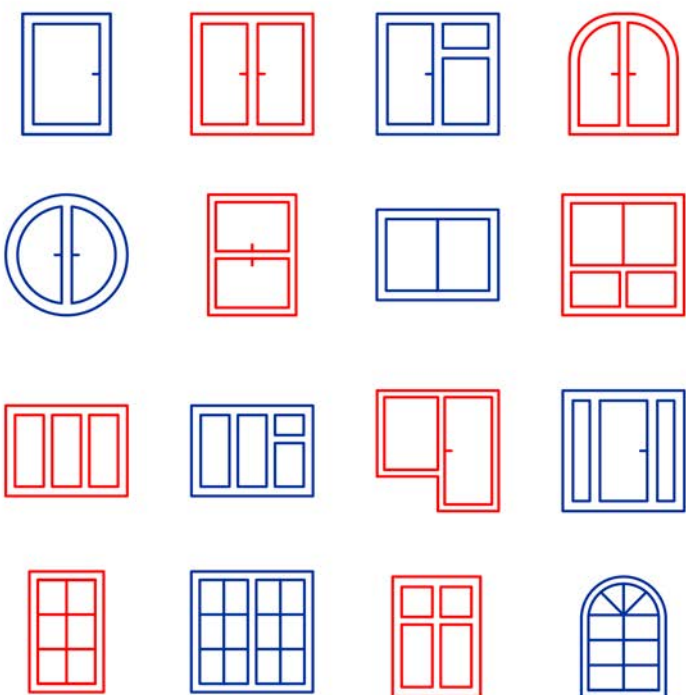
"Still at places like Suzuka we are not as quick as the Red Bull, which is the target, but as soon as we bring a good upgrade to the car that goes in the right direction, hopefully it can get us closer."

Leclerc's improbable one-stop race at the high-degradation circuit secured him fourth ahead of Norris in fifth.

Fernando Alonso was a clever sixth for Aston Martin after fending off late attacks from George Russell and Oscar Piastri, while Lewis Hamilton finished in ninth with Yuki Tsunoda scoring the final point of his home grand prix in 10th.



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New Zealand men, women rule at Hong Kong Sevens

RUGBY SEVENS

IT WAS A DOUBLE CELEBRATION for New Zealand as the men's and women's teams defended their titles at the Hong Kong Sevens tournament last Sunday (Apr 7).

The men beat France 10-7, claiming afterwards they will no doubt now have a target on their backs at this summer's Paris Olympics, while the women thrashed the United States 36-7 in their final showdown.

A cagey men's final, in the most prestigious leg of the World Series, was decided by two quickfire second-half tries by Scott Curry and Cody Vai.

France, winners of the previous leg of the series, in Los Angeles, scored unchallenged at the death through Varian Pasquet, with Rayan Rebbadj nailing the conversion.

But that was the last action and New Zealand's triumphant men and women celebrated at a boisterous 40,000-capacity Hong Kong Stadium by doing the haka.

It was a particularly special occasion for New Zealand's Tone Ng Shiu because he is a quarter Chinese, and also a warning of intent with the Olympics just over three months away.

"Just speechless, unreal, unreal feeling," said Ng Shiu, who is just back from a serious knee injury.

"We know we've got a target on our backs (at the Olympics), but we're trying



New Zealand's men's and women's teams celebrate their wins. Photo: AFP

to take it one tournament at a time.

"We spoke about why we love this game, and at the end of the day, we all came out, prepared well, stuck to the routine and did our job."

There was more frustration for Fiji, the reigning two-time Olympic champions, who were defeated by New Zealand in the last eight.

Argentina, who came to Hong Kong as series leaders after five rounds, failed to get out of the pool stage.

They still top the standings but are now just eight points clear of Ireland, who finished third with a 14-5 win over Australia.

In the women's table, New Zealand – the Olympic champions – are now level on points with rivals Australia at the top.

The next leg of the series is in Singapore on May 3-5. *AFP*

Liverpool suffer title race slip-up

FOOTBALL

AFP

Liverpool's title aspirations were dealt a heavy blow last Sunday (Apr 7) when they were held to a 2-2 draw by Manchester United at Old Trafford.

Despite having numerous chances to score and put the game out of United's reach, Jurgen Klopp's men only had a solitary goal lead at half-time courtesy of Luis Diaz's 23rd minute strike.

Bruno Fernandes scored from just inside the Liverpool half in the 50th minute before Kobbie Mainoo gave the hosts an undeserved lead in the 67th minute.

Mohamed Salah's 84th minute penalty salvaged a point but it felt more like two valuable points dropped for Klopp's team. Liverpool are level with Arsenal on 71 points and one point ahead of third-placed Manchester City, with seven games remaining as they chase a record-equalling 20th English title.

Mikel Arteta's Arsenal are ahead in the table standings thanks to their superior goal difference of nine.

"We should have won the game, that is clear," Klopp said.

"The whole Liverpool community just stay calm. We are where we are and we keep giving it a proper go.

"Do I wish we had 10 points difference? Of course. We are in the race and I'm absolutely fine with it."

Arsenal cruised to a 3-0 win at Brighton on Saturday thanks to goals



Liverpool's Alexis Mac Allister (left) clashes with Manchester United's Casemiro during the 2-2 draw at Old Trafford last Sunday (Apr 7). Photo: AFP

from Bukayo Saka, Kai Havertz and Leandro Trossard, prompting Arteta to hail his team's maturity and cleverness against a side who had not lost at home since August.

"In attack and defence we had big performances individually," he said post-match.

Arteta's side have now won 10 of their past 11 league games and have added steel to style after faltering badly in the home straight last season.

In Saturday's early kick-off, Kevin De Bruyne netted twice and top scorer Erling Haaland hit his 19th league goal of the season to add to Rico Lewis's goal as Manchester City beat Crystal Palace 4-2 win at Selhurst Park.

Tottenham outclassed Nottingham

Forest 3-1 to move into fourth place in the table after Aston Villa faltered to a 3-3 draw with struggling Brentford.

Fourth bottom Forest are outside the relegation zone by the slenderest of margins, above Luton only on goal difference after the Hatters scored an injury time winner to beat Bournemouth 2-1.

Everton also secured a vital win courtesy of Dominic Calvert-Lewin's deflected first-half to leave the Toffees four points above the relegation zone.

Ole McBurnie scored a last-gasp equaliser for bottom club Sheffield United as they drew 2-2 with Chelsea while Newcastle edged past Fulham 1-0 courtesy of a late goal from Bruno Guimaraes and West Ham came from behind to beat Wolves 2-1.



FIFA World Cup excluded from broadcast mandate

FOOTBALL

THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) of Thailand has approved the removal of the FIFA World Cup from its "must-have" rule, which mandates that major sporting events be accessible on free TV channels.

The rule, which has been in place since 2012, also applied to other significant competitions such as the Southeast Asian Games and the Olympic Games, reports state news agency NNT.

The decision, announced on Apr 3, follows a public hearing in 2023 to address uncertainties surrounding the rule's future application to seven major sports competitions.

NBTC Chairman Clinical Professor Sarana Boonbai-chaiyapruk highlighted the

commercial significance of the World Cup, a global event that commands a vast viewership every four years.

The change signals the regulator's openness to revising the conditions of the rule in the future, as the World Cup requires broadcasters to air a minimum of 200 hours of football programming in the copyright holder's country.

The amendment also came after a period of contention involving the distribution of World Cup matches and broadcasting rights, which saw disputes between the NBTC, the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT), True Corporation, and other broadcasting entities.

Despite a prior agreement in principle to remove all conditions of the must-have rule in March 2023, the decision was postponed until after the 2022 World Cup played in Qatar. NNT

Stokes out of England's T20 World Cup title defence

CRICKET

ENGLAND TEST CAPTAIN Ben Stokes has ruled himself out of the team's T20 World Cup title defence, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has confirmed.

The 32-year-old will skip the tournament in the United States and the West Indies to make sure he is fit to be a fully-fledged all-rounder in Test cricket.

"Opting out of the IPL (Indian Premier League) and the (T20) World Cup will hopefully be a sacrifice that allows me to be the all-rounder I want to be for the foreseeable future," Stokes said in an ECB statement on Apr 2.

Stokes' withdrawal was something of a surprise given that, when asked last month if he would participate in the T20 World Cup in June, he said he had "not even thought about that but I'm available".

It is understood Stokes has not suffered any setbacks after briefly returning to



Ben Stokes. Photo: AFP

bowling last month during a Test tour of India, where England lost a five-match series 4-1.

There is no lingering discomfort in his left knee following surgery in November.

But although he has long been one of England's leading multi-format cricketers, Stokes has decided to prioritise his role as Test captain.

He hopes to be able to play a full role with both bat and ball during six Tests – three against the West Indies and three against Sri Lanka – in the upcoming home season.

The first Test against the West Indies at Lord's starts on July 10, less than

two weeks after the June 29 T20 World Cup final in Barbados.

"I'm working hard and focusing on building my bowling fitness back up to fulfil a full role as an all-rounder in all formats of cricket," Stokes said.

"The recent Test tour of India highlighted how far behind I was from a bowling point of view after my knee surgery and nine months without bowling.

"I'm looking forward to playing for Durham in the County Championship before the start of our Test summer."

Stokes was a central figure as England won the 2022 T20 World Cup in Australia. AFP

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Sport

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Gunners get title race boost > p15

M2MMA'S KNOCKOUT DEBUT

MMA

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Marie Heinz starred by winning the World Muaythai Organization (WMO) World Featherweight Title Belt as part of new fight promotion M2MMA's impressive debut in Phuket on Mar 31.

Host venue Sinbi Boxing Stadium in Rawai was packed to the rafters with close to 1,000 enthusiastic fans enjoying eight bouts at the inaugural event 'M2MMA 1'.

The highlight was Luxembourg national Heinz securing an explosive and unanimous decision victory over Phuket-based Scot Judy Humber, a contest that also won the distinction of Fight of the Night.

"It feels so good! I have never been this proud of myself. I think that what made



Marie Heinz (right) is declared the winner of her bout against Judy Humber. Photo: Supplied

me win this fight was my experience and the control I had," Heinz said afterwards.

She also had thanks for her supporters and praise for the promoters. "I'm so amazed by all the kind messages and love I received. Fighting for M2MMA was awesome. The

team was always reachable and helpful before, during and after the fight. I enjoyed fighting for them."

Another highlight was the electrifying match between Canadian James Clarke and US Marine veteran Colton Kielbasa, which ended with

Clarke clinching the victory by unanimous decision and both athletes sharing the Performance of the Night award.

Festivities commenced a week prior to fight night as the M2MMA team embarked on a tour across Phuket to visit various prestigious gyms

where many of the athletes had been training and preparing.

Once the athletes had undergone their respective weigh-ins and hydration tests, a key protocol implemented by M2MMA to further protect its athletes, it was time for fight night to commence.

The event was broadcast live and expertly produced by LUI Muay Thai, receiving impressive figures of over 170,000 views across M2MMA social media platforms YouTube and Facebook and generating over 10,000 comments and interactions on Instagram.

The evening's proceedings were expertly guided by the internationally acclaimed MC Jon Nutt, who received equally expert support from the ring side commentary booth from Andrew Whitelaw and The Phuket News' own JP Mestanza.

In addition to the fights,

fans were entertained by two live performances in between bouts, offering a distinct and captivating entertainment experience.

"M2MMA 1 is just the beginning," commented M2MMA's CEO Victor Lange after the event.

"We are committed to re-defining the future of combat sports, and the overwhelming response from our first event is a testament to the bright future ahead.

"We thank our athletes, fans and partners for making M2MMA 1 an unforgettable experience."

M2MMA stated it very much looks forward to building on this momentum with future events combining high-level competition with innovations in athlete safety and fan engagement. Details on the next event will be disclosed in due course, an M2MMA source confirmed.




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