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# PREMIUM



Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra is welcomed by local residents. Photo: PR Phuket

## PRIME MINISTER LOOKS TO MAKING PHUKET 'PREMIUM TOURIST' DESTINATION

The Phuket News  
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Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra in Phuket last week said her administration aimed to address critical issues in Phuket and set the stage for the island's growth as a 'Premium Tourism' destination.

The ideal was announced at a high-level meeting held at the Phuket International Airport on Jan 9, attended by key stakeholders such as Tourism and Sports Minister Surawong Thienthong and Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat.

PM Paetongtarn was briefed on issues affecting the island and strategies to counter the ill effects of what many residents describe as critical infrastructure failure as the result of decades of poor planning and administration.

The agenda focused on Phuket's economic reliance on tourism, which constitutes 92.9% of revenue generated on the island.

In 2024, the province generated more than B481.4 billion from tourism, reflecting a 24% increase from 2023, said an official report of the meeting.

Tourist arrivals also surged by 14.14%, with 12.9 million visitors

landing on the island. The province is well-connected, with direct flights from 21 countries covering over 53 cities, averaging 368 flights daily, the report added.

Phuket's infrastructure boasts a deep-sea port accommodating large cruise ships and five marinas catering to world-class yachts. Together, these facilities support a combined 15 weekly trips, underscoring Phuket's appeal to luxury travellers, the report said.

The Prime Minister underscored the importance of elevating Phuket's status to a premium destination, emphasising higher spending per tourist to boost local

business prosperity. Several initiatives were outlined:

### INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS:

- Construction on the province's primary road, Route 402 (Thepkasattri Rd), is to be expedited to meet increasing travel demands.

- Plans for 'Boat Taxis' at major ports were proposed to enhance connectivity and attract private sector investment.

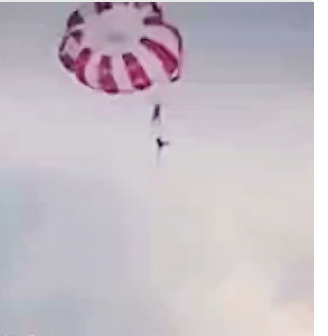
### TOURISM ENHANCEMENT:

- Organising large-scale tourism events under the government's...

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PHUKET'S QUALITY TILE BOUTIQUE

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# News



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## Phuket airport defends high prices charged

THE PHUKET BRANCH of Airports of Thailand (AoT Phuket), which operates Phuket International Airport, has defended prices charged by the Subway out at the International Terminal in response to posts and comments online.

The statement in full reads:

“At Phuket International Airport (HKT), we deeply value the trust and feedback of our passengers and remain steadfast in our commitment to ensuring a transparent, fair, and enjoyable travel experience.

“In response to recent social media discussions concerning food and beverage prices at the Subway store in the departure lounge on the 3rd floor of the International Terminal, we would like to offer the following clarification:

“Following a thorough review, we confirm that the Subway store displays its pricing clearly and operates in compliance with the terms outlined in its concession contract. The specific case in question involved a customer’s order that included additional customizations such as extra meat



Image: AoT Phuket

and cheese, as well as cookies and beverages, which increased the total price beyond that of standard menu offerings.

“To maintain fairness and transparency for all passengers, HKT routinely inspects pricing across all food and beverage outlets. Additionally, we have reinforced to all concessionaires the importance of adhering to their contract terms while ensuring transparent pricing practices.

“Phuket International Airport remains dedicated to providing world-class service to every passenger. By emphasizing fairness, convenience, and safety, we continue to strive toward making your travel experience seamless and enjoyable.

“Thank you for your ongoing trust and support as we work together to enhance the journey of all who pass through our airport.” *The Phuket News*

## Kata Noi beach chair crush finally eased

The Phuket News  
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Local residents have confirmed that the ‘sand grab’ by beach chair vendors at Kata Noi Beach has been eased, with more space now available for beachgoers.

“I just returned from a morning of snorkeling at Kata Noi and it looks to me that the situation has been fixed! There are now 4 or 5 ‘beach chairs free zones,’ one local resident told *The Phuket News*.

“It also looks like they moved the chairs further away from the high water mark so there is plenty of room for beach towels in front of the chairs. And where there are chairs there are clear access paths between them,” he said.

“Somebody at the city [sic] has thought this through and executed it nicely,” the resident added.

Local officials were previously stumped with what to do about a sprawl of beach chair operators that spread, occupying more huge areas along Kata and



Photo: Supplied

Kata Noi beaches.

At Kata Noi, the usually quiet beach just south of Kata main beach, had beach chairs along the entire length of the sand.

Karon Mayor Jadet Wicharasorn last month told *The Phuket News* that he was aware of the surge in the number of beach chair operators now operating on the sands in his jurisdiction.

He also insisted that all the new operators setting up on the beach have never received permission from Karon Municipality.

“The 10% rule remains in effect, and I am fully

aware of its guidelines. However, only 10% of the original businesses remain in the area, while the new businesses operating now have not received proper permission from Karon Municipality,” Mayor Jadet said.

“The 10% beach management rule limits vendors to using only 10% of the beach for businesses,” he confirmed.

“I’ve seen a lot of them myself. There are so many new businesses [operators] that have opened [on the beaches] that I can’t even give an exact number,”

Mayor Jadet added.

Mayor Jadet assured that he was taking action, but also that he had no authority to take action himself, even as the local mayor. “I have already told all of them [the operators], and informed the Phuket Governor,” he said.

Since the ‘beach management rules’ were brought into effect in 2015, local municipalities no longer had the authority to regulate businesses on the beaches in Phuket. That responsibility was taken over by the Phuket office of the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), the political arm of the Royal Thai Military, Mayor Jadet explained.

“Currently, all we [Karon Municipality] can do is wait for the Phuket ISOC to come and take action. Phuket ISOC, including the Navy, has not yet issued an order to proceed. Until we receive this order, we cannot do anything. Once the official order comes, we will be able to enforce the proposed plan,” Mayor Jadet added.

## PM eyes ‘critical issues’ in bid to lure more high-spending tourists

Continued from page 1

...‘Soft Power’ policy to draw international attention.

- Overhauling the Tourist Police system to ensure visitor safety and improve efficiency.

### PUBLIC SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT:

- Strict enforcement of laws against influential figures to promote public safety.

- A province-wide campaign to promote garbage separation to tackle waste management issues.

To show her support for developing luxury tourism, Prime Minister Paetongtarn on Jan 9 inaugurated the Thailand International Boat Show 2025 at Phuket Yacht Haven Marina.

The luxury lifestyle event aligns with the government’s vision of promoting high-end tourism, said an official report

of the PM’s visit. The four-day event, open from Jan 9-12, was expected to attract over 6,000 global visitors and generate B1 billion in revenue for the marine tourism sector.

“Phuket’s vibrant boat tourism industry is a testament to Thailand’s luxury tourism potential,” the Prime Minister stated, urging global publicity for the province’s unique offerings.

### FLOOD PREVENTION AND WATER MANAGEMENT

Later in the day, PM Paetongtarn visited Bang Neow Dam Reservoir to assess flood prevention measures. The reservoir, built during the tenure of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, was designed to address water shortages but now faces sediment buildup that limits its capacity, noted one report.

Efforts to dredge Bang Wad Reservoir, which could increase



Photo: Ing Shinawatra / Facebook

water retention by 150,000 cubic metres in its first phase, had been “prioritised”, the report said.

The PM urged swift action, emphasising the importance of alleviating residents’ struggles with water supply.

### TUNA HUB

Meanwhile, Deputy Agriculture and Cooperatives Minister Akara Prompao visited the Phuket Fishing Pier in Ratsada. The pier, a key hub for Taiwanese tuna imports, processed nearly 12 million kilogrammes of tuna between 2012-2021.

Plans to develop Phuket as Asia’s tuna transport hub were announced, focusing on sustainable practices, quality-of-life improvements for fishermen, and promoting Thai cuisine globally. The project will enhance the Phuket International Fishing Port’s role in importing and exporting seafood, the report concluded.

### NATIONAL TOURISM RAMPS UP

Ahead of PM Paetongtarn’s arrival in Phuket, local government news agencies posted a report touting Thailand’s tourism growth throughout 2024.

The report cited Deputy Government Spokesperson Sasikarn Wattanachan delivering the news on Jan 8, one day before the Prime Minister’s visit.

Ms Sasikarn reported that Thai tourism in 2024 (Jan 1-Dec 31) attracted 35.54 million

foreign tourists, marking a 26.27% increase from the previous year.

The influx generated B1.67 trillion in international tourism revenue, a 34% growth fueled by government initiatives and collaboration between public and private sectors, she said.

Ms Sasikarn emphasised that 2024’s tourism growth reflected the ‘effectiveness of government measures’ such as visa exemptions and simplified entry procedures for land checkpoints.

The introduction of new flight routes and increased airline frequencies also played a significant role, she said. The top three foreign tourist markets in 2024 were China, Malaysia and India.

Domestic tourism also experienced growth, with 198.69mn trips made by Thai travelers, a 7.02% increase. Domestic tourism contributed B950 billion in revenue.

# Parasail staffer dies in 200-foot fall

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Parasail staffers accompanying tourists on rides must be clipped on with a safety harness in order to legally operate, Phuket Marine Chief Natchapong Pranit has confirmed.

Mr Natchapong confirmed the safety protocol, which he said was already a standard requirement for years, following the death of 31-year-old parasail staffer Pathompong Sukduang at Karon Beach on Jan 5.

However, the news spread widely across local social media channels only after a video of Mr Pathompong plunging to his death was posted on Instagram by '@PHUKETINSTA' last Friday (Jan 10).

Local news platforms quickly shared the video, often branding the video with their own logos and imagery.

Mr Natchapong told *The Phuket News* it is estimated that Mr Pathompong fell "about 200 feet" before hitting the water, in plain view of tourists on the beach.

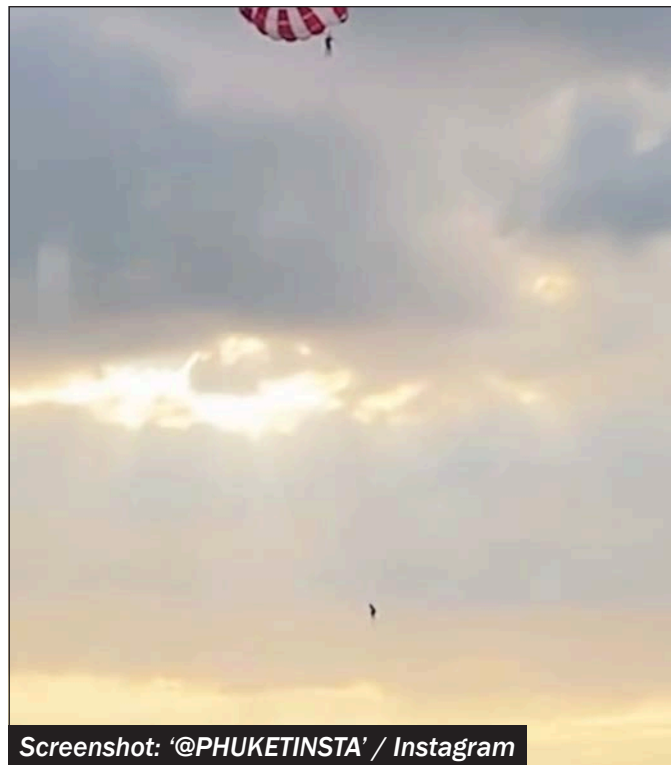
The video shows the rope to the parasail, which was still carrying the tourist, being cut immediately after Mr Pathompong hit the water. The speedboat then head off quickly to assist the tourist, who was safely recovered.

The parasail operator, who Mr Natchapong named only as 'Mr Tone', was suspended from operating immediately after Mr Pathompong's death, and his boat, 'Pleng Pleng', was also suspended from providing any tourist services, he added.

The suspension will remain in place until a full investigation of the incident has been completed, Mr Natchapong assured.

"When I visited the scene [last Sunday, Jan 12], I observed that the issue in this incident was having only one person operating the parasail. According to the law, there must be two licensed operators managing it," Mr Natchapong said.

"The boat must have a team of three people: one for driving and two for managing the parasail. By law, this offense is punish-



able with up to six months of imprisonment under criminal law," he added.

"However, Karon Police suspects drug use may have been a factor, which is why they are requesting evidence to determine if Mr Pathompong had consumed drugs," Mr Natchapong also noted.

"They are also conducting checks on everyone who was aboard the boat and involved in controlling the parasail," he said.

An urgent meeting was held on Monday (Jan 13) to address safety issues and review the circumstances that led to Mr Pathompong's death.

The meeting included representatives from Karon Police, Phuket Tourist Police, the Phuket Provincial Public Health Office, the Phuket Provincial Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Office and Karon Municipality, with the

Phuket Marine Office serving as the primary host, Mr Natchapong explained.

Local officials and law enforcement started reviewing both short-term and long-term plans to enhance safety for parasailing, jet-skiing and other beach activities on Tuesday (Jan 14), he added.

"Our short-term plan is to hold a seminar and provide training for all operators on safety protocols, parasailing safety measures and the prohibition of drug use among workers. This will also verify license holders and offer additional training," he said.

"For the long-term plan, the focus will be on inspecting and upgrading boats to meet safety standards, including ensuring that all safety equipment is in place. Additionally, all operators will undergo rehearsals and training to ensure proficiency before offering services," Mr Natchapong concluded.

## CHARGES

Karon Police Chief Pol Col Khundet Na Nongkhai told *The Phuket News* that the

parasail operator at this stage is facing a charge of negligence causing death.

"The incident occurred at about 5:30pm. Mr Pathompong was holding on with his hands and used his legs to hook onto the tourist, which is a position that requires a lot of force.

"Then Mr Pathompong lost his grip and fell into the sea. The boat driver recovered him from the water and he was rushed to Patong Hospital, where he was pronounced dead," he added.

While police are still waiting for the results of drug tests on Mr Pathompong's remains before formally pressing charges, the medical examiner confirmed that Mr Pathompong died on impact with the water, Pol Col Na Nongkhai said.

"I have assigned a team to investigate the incident. Now we are collecting more evidence and waiting for the medical report to be issued.

"Charges will be filed against the business owner involved. The main charge that we are considering at this time is negligence causing death," he assured.

## Tourist catamaran sinks, all safe

A CATAMARAN CARRYING 38 people, including 33 Chinese tourists, two tour guides and three crew members, sank off the coast of Phuket on Monday afternoon (Jan 13).

The vessel, en route to Koh Racha Yai on a one-day trip, encountered trouble approximately 1.6 nautical miles north of Racha Island when water entered the boat. Despite the alarming situation, all passengers and crew members were safely rescued.

The incident occurred at around 1:10pm. The local rescue center immediately coordinated efforts with officials, patrol boats and nearby speedboats from other tour operators to ensure a swift response. Thanks to their combined efforts, everyone on board was safely evacuated, with all passengers wearing life jackets at the time of the incident.

The Phuket Tourist Police confirmed they had quickly mobilised with local agencies to provide assistance, and a team of volunteer interpreters were brought to Chalong Pier to assist the rescued tourists.

An investigation into the legitimacy of the tour company and tour guides involved is underway, and the Chinese Consulate has been informed of the incident. Tourist Police confirmed.

According to police, Ameray 888, a registered catamaran valued at B16 million, has a valid license set to expire on April 24, 2025.

The boat reportedly began to sink at around 12:30pm while traveling from Racha Yai Island to Koh Hei.



Witnesses stated that a glass panel on the starboard side fell off, allowing water to flood the boat. Combined with strong winds and waves, the vessel tilted and sank within 20 minutes.

Fortunately, nearby vessels, including the Rhapsody and the fishing boat 'Maliwan', responded quickly, rescuing passengers who were floating near the sinking catamaran.

The rescued individuals were transported to Koh Racha Yai, Koh Hei and other safe locations before being taken to Chalong Pier by boats from Nikorn Marine and other operators. Seven passengers sustained minor injuries, mainly abrasions, and were treated on-site.

The boat's manager, named by police only as 'Mr F', confirmed that everyone was rescued safely. He attributed the incident to the glass panel falling off, which allowed water to enter the boat rapidly. Efforts are ongoing to determine the exact circumstances leading to the accident.

The Phuket Marine Office has assigned officers to assist the victims and launched a detailed investigation into the cause of the incident, police reported.

Eakkapop Thongtub

## Cancer clinic hits PM's agenda

PRIME MINISTER PAETONGTARN Shinawatra discussed healthcare as a major issue facing Phuket residents at a meeting held at Phuket International Airport during her visit to Phuket on Jan 9.

Healthcare was one of six issues on the agenda for the meeting, said an official report of the meeting.

The issue of healthcare "requires upgrading state hospitals, namely Vachira Phuket Hospital, to be ready to treat all diseases, especially cancer, which is currently found to have an increasing number of patients", said the official report.

Public healthcare on the PM's agenda during her visit to Phuket comes while the community is rallying to raise donations to fund a cancer clinic at Vachira Phuket Hospital, the main government hospital on the island.

As of late last week, fundraising efforts had amassed over B170 million in donations from private individuals, including tens of millions of baht donated by key business figures, prominent Phuket families and members, local businesses with smaller donations by members of the public. Further private donations of more than B11mn poured in over last weekend alone, with Vachira Phuket Hospital confirming on Monday that more than B180mn had been raised.

Even popular Thai rock singer Artiwar Kongmalai, better known as



'Toon Bodyslam', will headline a charity concert at Saphan Hin Phuket in March to help raise the B290 million needed to build a cancer-treatment centre at Vachira Phuket Hospital.

Regardless, despite Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat announcing a major fundraising effort to be held early next month, and major support by local government agencies calling donations for from the public to build a government healthcare facility, no officials have given any explanation why the Ministry of Public Health is not providing any funds to advance health treatments at a government hospital in Phuket.

Of note, government officials are touring the donation-funded cancer clinic at Vachira Phuket Hospital as the first government cancer-treatment centre in the six provinces along the Andaman coast, comprising: Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi, Ranong, Trang and Satun.

However, Bangkok Hospital Siriroj, on the bypass road, opened its B300mn cancer-treatment centre on Oct 1.

The Phuket News

The Phuket News

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## PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

www.foreca.com

FRI JANUARY 17

High: +36°  
Low: +29°  
Wind 11 m/s

SAT JANUARY 18

High: +36°  
Low: +28°  
Wind 11 m/s

SUN JANUARY 19

High: +35°  
Low: +28°  
Wind 11 m/s

MON JANUARY 20

High: +35°  
Low: +27°  
Wind 4 m/s

TUE JANUARY 21

High: +35°  
Low: +28°  
Wind 4 m/s

WED JANUARY 22

High: +37°  
Low: +28°  
Wind 4 m/s

THU JANUARY 23

High: +36°  
Low: +27°  
Wind 4 m/s

## Belarusian apologises for drunken incident

A BELARUSIAN TOURIST has formally apologised to local police for his drunken and disorderly behaviour at a hotel in Karon last month.

Siarhei Asychuk, 39, accompanied by his lawyer, presented a gift basket as a gesture of contrition to officers at Karon Police Station on Jan 7.

The apology was received by Karon Police Chief Pol Col Khundet Na Nongkhai and Pol Lt Col Wiwat Chamnankit, Deputy Superintendent of Investigation at Karon Police.

The incident in question occurred at about 3:10am on Dec 11, when Mr Asychuk's drunken episode saw him assault officers and damage property.

After more than 20 minutes, the officers managed to bring him to the police station to defuse the situation. He was charged with drunken disorder, obstructing an officer and property damage, and later granted bail by the Phuket Provincial Court.

Through his lawyer, Mr Asychuk expressed deep regret for his actions, stating that his behaviour was



Photo: PR Phuket

influenced by alcohol and that he had no intention of harming the officers.

He acknowledged the negative impact his actions had on Phuket's tourism image. "I am ready to comply with any orders the court issues to contribute to society," he said.

Mr Asychuk emphasised his love for Phuket, citing the warmth and smiles of its people as a source of happiness. He also confirmed his intention to return to the island, promising that such behaviour would not happen again.

The Karon Police acknowledged the apology, highlighting the importance of maintaining a positive image for tourism in Phuket.

Officers noted that the incident served as a reminder of the consequences of disruptive behaviour and the significance of accountability.

The Phuket News

## Russian arrested for violent hotel robbery

**Eakkapop Thongtub**  
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Police have arrested one Russian man wanted for his role in the violent robbery of another Russian man in an alleged cryptocurrency dispute at a hotel in Karon last Sunday (Jan 5).

Andrei Veselov, 37, has been taken into custody, Karon Police confirmed. No details of his location or time of his arrest were reported.

Taking an active role in the investigation Pol Lt Col Saranu Chamnanrat, Deputy Commander of Region 8 Police traveled to Karon Police Station to personally interrogate him.

However, it was reported that police were not able to extract much information because Veselov could not communicate in English and wanted to wait for his personal lawyer.

Veselov was identified as the man who orchestrated the attack on Russian national Zelimkhan Iusupov, 31, at a hotel near the Karon Night Market last Sunday night.



Photo: Karon Police

His accomplice, identified as Russian national Dmitrii Kuznetsov, 36, forcibly entered Mr Iusupov's room and assaulted Mr Iusupov, and restrained him using tape and electrical wire.

Kuznetsov demanded the return of a substantial cryptocurrency sum, threatening Mr Iusupov's life if he failed to comply.

During the attack, Kuznetsov placed a call to Veselov, with whom Mr Iusupov had a prior cryptocurrency-related dispute in Russia.

Veselov allegedly demanded the transfer of US\$120,000 in cryptocurrency and instructed the attacker to coerce the victim into revealing his wallet passcode.

Despite Mr Iusupov's refusal, Kuznetsov searched Mr Iusupov's belongings, stealing approximately 50-70 \$100 bills. The ordeal escalated as Kuznetsov was tied to a bathroom door rail and reportedly beaten unconscious.

After regaining consciousness, Mr Iusupov managed to free himself and reported the incident to Karon Police.

Kuznetsov, 36, entered Thailand on Sunday (Jan 5), just hours before the attack, and fled to Dubai on Monday (Jan 6) at 2:50am.

Karon Police have confirmed they are seeking an Interpol Red Notice to secure Kuznetsov's arrest.

Meanwhile, Mr Iusupov has since moved on to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, police said.

## Man struggling with mental issues found dead in Patong

POLICE IN PATONG ARE treating as suicide the death of a 29-year-old man found in his home on Pisit Gorani Rd early last Friday (Jan 10).

Officers were called to the scene at about 7:30am.

The victim, identified as Ritthakiat Petchploy, registered as living at the home, was discovered lying shirtless on a bed with an electric wire wrapped around his neck.

According to investigators, there were no signs of a struggle or forced entry at the scene.

Authorities were alerted to the incident by the victim's mother, Saithip Samnam. She reported that she had left the house around 6am to buy breakfast for her son and returned about an hour and a half later.



Photo: Patong Police

Unable to enter the bedroom, Ms Saithip peered through the window and found her son unresponsive.

Ms Saithip told police that her son had a history of mental health struggles and had attempted suicide on two prior occasions.

Family members expressed no suspicions regarding the cause of death, which police are treating as a suicide based on the evidence collected.

Local authorities urge those experiencing emotional distress or mental health issues to seek support. *Eakkapop Thongtub*

## Nigerian man on motorbike runs red light, killed as struck by van

A NIGERIAN MAN WAS killed when he ran a red light and was struck by a passenger van at the Samkong Intersection on Monday (Jan 13).

The accident occurred at 3:10pm, when a van traveling at high speed from Kathu collided with the motorbike driven by the Nigerian, reported by Bangkok Hospital Siriroj to have been a tourist.

Dashcam footage shared by Facebook user Chawalit Mueaibut captured the incident. The motorbike, heading northbound along the bypass road, ran a red light before being struck by the van. The force of the collision threw the tourist off the bike and left him severely injured.

Eyewitness accounts and dashcam footage show that, immediately after the accident, a foreign motorcyclist passing by



Photo: Phuket City Police

stopped to assist the injured tourist. The van driver also got out of the vehicle to check on the victim.

The incident quickly went viral on social media. Netizens criticised reckless driving and the prevalence of red-light violations in the province. However, the foreign motorcyclist who stopped to assist received widespread praise.

CCTV footage later confirmed that the van had a green light at the time of the collision, while the motorbike ran a red light.

After viewing the footage, police noted that the driver of the passenger van had no time to avoid the collision. *Eakkapop Thongtub*

# Governor honours 'Outstanding Youth'

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Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat held a special ceremony at Phuket Provincial Hall last Friday (Jan 10) to present certificates to the 'Outstanding Youth of 2024' and 'Outstanding Children of Phuket Province for 2025'.

The event celebrated 29 young individuals recognised for their exceptional achievements, moral character and contributions to society.

The awards, organised by the Phuket Youth and Children Selection Committee, spotlighted 11 youth honorees for 2024 and 18 children for 2025. The recipients were selected through a rigorous process, emphasising their exemplary morality, ethics, knowledge, skills and social impact.

During the ceremony, Governor Sophon congratulated the awardees, commending their determination and exceptional abilities.

"These awards reflect your dedication and the positive example you set for others in our society," he said.

He also encouraged the honorees to continue their personal development and to inspire their peers.

The ceremony saw attendance from school directors, teachers, parents and



Photo: Cherng Talay Municipality rescue team

students, who gathered to celebrate the achievements of the honorees and offer their heartfelt congratulations.

Governor Sophon expressed hope that the awardees would continue to excel and contribute to the betterment of their communities and the nation.

## LIFE-SAVER

The issuing of awards to outstanding students last Friday followed a secondary school student from Cherng Talay Witthaya School being hailed as a hero after performing life-saving CPR on a man who suffered cardiac arrest while riding his 'samlor' (motorbike with sidecar) near Cherng Talay Shrine on Srisoonthorn Rd about 2pm on Jan 6.

Rescue workers arrived to find an elderly man unconscious on his samlor with no detectable heartbeat.

As the rescue team worked to revive him using CPR, an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) and other emergency measures, they sought assistance from bystanders. Among the onlookers was Benchawan 'Nong Rinda' Kanpai, a secondary school student in her uniform.

Without hesitation, Nong Rinda stepped forward and offered to help. Displaying remarkable composure and skill, she administered CPR and used the AED to deliver two shocks, helping the rescue workers to stabilise the man before he was transported to the hospital.

# Cyber Police arrest scam gang mule

POLICE HAVE ARRESTED a man in Phuket accused of creating mule accounts for a scam gang that defrauded victims out of B22 million by one of the gang members claiming to be a well-known politician.



Photo: CCIB

The gang operated by impersonating a renowned politician to gain victims' trust and persuade them to invest in cryptocurrency through a fake trading platform, reported the Cyber Crime Investigation Bureau (CCIB).

The scammers' deception led to significant financial losses for the victims. Investigations revealed that 'Mr Prachya', a key member of the gang responsible for creating mule bank accounts, was operating in Phuket.

Cyber police apprehended Prachya in Koh Kaew on Jan 9 on an arrest warrant issued by the Thanyaburi Provincial Court. Subsequent investigations uncovered additional warrants linked to him from Saem Dam and Pathum Thani City Police Stations, CCIB noted in their report.

During interrogation, Prachya admitted to previously serving prison time and struggling to find employment after his release. He confessed to being recruited to open bank accounts for an online gambling syndicate, earning B800 per account. He admitted to opening seven accounts, which were later used for fraudulent activities.

Prachya was taken into custody and now faces multiple charges, including: public fraud through false information; importing forged or misleading computer data; and facilitating illegal use of deposit accounts or electronic cards.

The CCIB said they were continuing their investigation and were committed to prosecuting the gang members to the fullest extent of the law.

The Phuket News

# Plans afoot to build tourism centre in protected forest

PHUKET GOVERNOR SOPHON Suwannarat recently visited the site of the 'City Pillar Shrine Tourist Service Center', to be built in the Bang Khanun Protected Forest Area, to assess the development project's progress.

Accompanied by heads of government agencies, local administrative organisations and other stakeholders, Governor Sophon highlighted the initiative's significance in enhancing tourism while preserving the province's cultural identity, said an official report of the visit.

The ambitious project aims to establish a new landmark in Phuket, promoting its reputation as a world-class tourist destination and generating sustainable benefits for local communities, the report added.

However, the new development will be in the Bang Khanun Protected Forest Area, and Governor Sophon last Saturday (Jan 11) reviewed the plans at the Royal Forest Department's outpost for the Bang Khanun Protected Forest Area.

The development will feature several key components, explained the official report of the meeting.

An OTOP Plaza will consist of two buildings designed in a Sino-European architectural style, each covering an area of 430 square metres. Parking facilities will provide space for 30 cars and three buses. The project will also include 12 kiosks and six shop buildings, with each shop building spanning 24sqm.

In addition, there will be six tradition



Photo: PR Phuket

and activity buildings, each measuring 35sqm, as well as two multipurpose areas for various uses.

"Visitor-friendly infrastructure" will include 10-metre-wide roads and walkways to facilitate access, while forest parks covering approximately 15 rai will provide opportunities for relaxation and environmental restoration, the report noted.

The report did not confirm how much budget is to be spent on the new facility in the protected forest area.

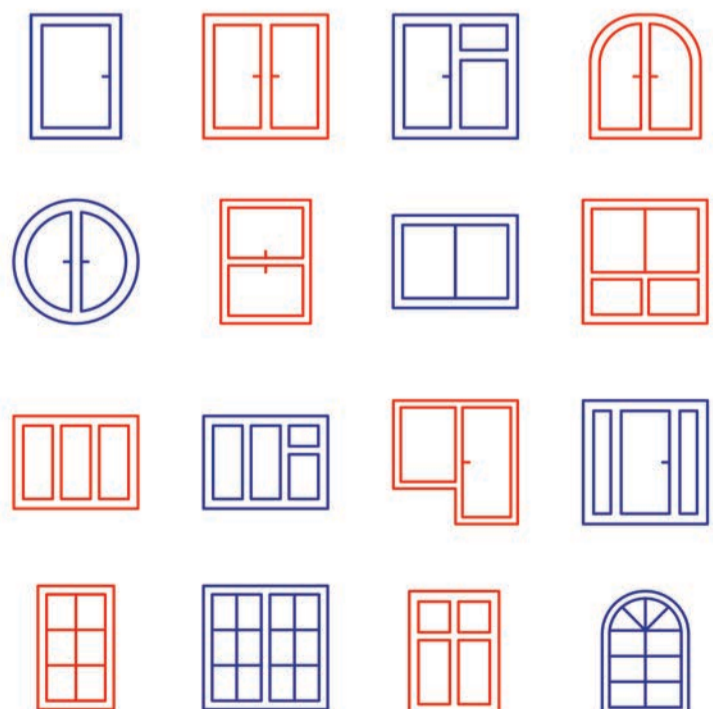
The development covers a total area of about 15 rai and is designed to serve as a hub for cultural, recreational and commercial activities, the report noted.

Governor Sophon emphasised that the project aligns with Phuket's vision of becoming a premier global tourist city, while fostering economic growth and opportunities for local residents, the report added.

The 'Lak Mueang' is a 'city pillar shrine', a traditional structure used by cities and towns throughout Thailand to serve as the symbolic "centre of the soul" of the community. *The Phuket News*



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# Transforming Phuket's Landscape

## PRESS RELEASE

In the heart of Phuket, a story of inspiration and resilience is unfolding. Layan Green Park is more than a development project – it's a vision of harmony between modern living and nature. As a beacon of sustainable construction, it's reshaping how we perceive urban development on the island.

The brainchild of Ukrainian entrepreneur Vadym Bukhkalov and his Australian partner, Dr Paul Crosio, Layan Green Park emerged with a bold mission: to create a space where nature, comfort and innovation thrive together. The project is the first in Phuket to achieve EDGE Advanced certification, an internationally recognised energy efficiency and sustainability standard. This milestone underscores its commitment to reducing environmental impact while providing modern, luxurious living spaces.

### A VISIONARY ENTREPRENEUR'S COMMITMENT

"Phuket has become my home, and I feel deeply responsible for contributing to its growth," says Vadym Bukhkalov. "Layan Green Park is not just a project – it's my life's work, a goal that represents



Photo: Layan Green Park

my dedication to this beautiful island and its people."

With a total investment exceeding 5 billion baht, Vadym's contributions to Phuket's economy are profound. Beyond the financial injection, his vision emphasises environmental stewardship and community engagement, earning him recognition as a leader in sustainable development.

Vadym's leadership goes beyond business acumen. His unwavering commitment to Phuket's well-being has made him a respected figure on the island. From championing green initiatives to fostering community relationships, Vadym embodies the spirit of innovation and compassion.

A recent initiative saw him and his team supporting elderly residents at the Phuket Social Welfare Development Centre, exemplifying his belief in giving back to the community. His

family-centric values and deep respect for Thai culture further solidify his connection to the island.

"Although I have had to defend my project and my business against people who want grab a part of this success, our high standards of governance, led by Paul Crosio, a well-known Australian lawyer, banker and veteran company Director, has meant we can straightforwardly show investors how we are managing their money and how we provide a fantastic vehicle for those wanting to invest in Phuket."

"As part of our program of continuous improvement, we recently commissioned BDO Thailand to audit our investor's funds to ensure even higher standards of transparency."

### A GREEN HAVEN IN PHUKET

Over 26,613 square meters, Layan Green Park comprises 10 state-of-the-art buildings, includ-

ing two hotels and eight premium condominiums. Phase 1, completed in 2024, delivered 350 apartments and 102 hotel rooms. The hotel, La Green, has already established itself as a preferred destination, boasting an average occupancy rate of 95% and a stellar 8.9 rating on Booking.com.

Phase 2, slated for completion by 2026, is even more ambitious, with 386 apartments and exclusive penthouses designed to elevate the living experience. The project's careful planning and execution have driven up property values, making it an attractive investment for locals and international buyers.

### ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

Layan Green Park sets a new benchmark for sustainable construction. Integrating EDGE Advanced-certified practices ensures energy efficiency and reduced carbon footprints. This commitment resonates with Phuket's growing reputation as a hub for green innovation.

Beyond its eco-friendly design, the project is a significant economic driver. It has generated jobs, boosted local businesses, and attracted high-value tourism. The ripple effect of its success extends across the island, benefiting residents and visitors alike.

### OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

The journey to success wasn't without hurdles. From the global pandemic to logistical challenges, the team behind Layan Green Park faced numerous obstacles. Yet, their resilience and determination transformed setbacks into stepping stones, proving that perseverance can turn dreams into reality.

### A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR PHUKET

As Phase 2 of Layan Green Park progresses, the project continues to inspire with its blend of luxury, sustainability and community focus. It is a testament to what can be achieved when innovation meets purpose.

Layan Green Park is more than a property – it's a movement, a symbol of what Phuket can become. Under Vadym Bukhkalov's visionary leadership, this green haven is poised to leave a lasting legacy, transforming Phuket into a global exemplar of sustainable living.

Layan Green Park reaffirms Phuket's position as a thriving, forward-thinking destination by embracing innovation and upholding environmental principles. It's not just a success story – it's a celebration of hope, progress, and the promise of a greener tomorrow.

## Informal loans see household debt climb to 104% of GDP

THAILAND'S HOUSEHOLD debt including informal loans has reached 104% of gross domestic product (GDP), which is expected to pressure economic growth, according to a report released by a private sector panel.

The study carried out by Chulalongkorn University, commissioned by the Joint Standing Committee for Commerce, Industry and Banking (JSCCIB), indicates the household debt-to-GDP ratio reached 104% in the fourth quarter of 2024.

The calculation included informal loans, which are not counted in official statistics released by the Bank of Thailand. The latter show household debt to be around 90% of GDP.

On average, informal debt per household amounted to B98,538.

Notably 40% of Thailand's households have informal debt, either as creditors or borrowers,



Photo: Bangkok Post

said Kobsak Duangdee, Secretary-General of the Thai Bankers' Association.

According to Mr Kobsak, high household debt levels pose a challenge to Thai economic growth. However, informal debt is vital in supporting the liquidity of households, serving as a funding source for both daily living expenses and business activities, helping households manage financial emergencies.

Roughly 30% of the country's households that derive income from the formal economy also rely on informal debt to manage their liquidity, according to the study.

In this context, mitigating informal debt requires

appropriate measures, and digital technology could address the issue, said Mr Kobsak.

"For example, establishing a database of borrowers that includes both individuals and small and medium-sized enterprises [SMEs] would create greater opportunities for these segments to access funding sources more effectively," noted the study.

"This would help households and SMEs manage debt more effectively, contributing to the long-term sustainability of the country's economic growth."

Sanan Angubolkul, Chairman of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, said the JSCCIB predicts Thai GDP growth of 2.4% to 2.9% this year, compared with projected growth of 2.8% in 2024.

Growth in 2025 will primarily be driven by the tourism sector.

Bangkok Post

## Minimum wage hike starts to impact hotels

THE MINIMUM WAGE hike amid a labour shortage is prompting hotels in Chiang Mai to increase staff responsibility instead of hiring more permanent workers, while small hotels in Chon Buri with cheaper rooms could be affected the most by rising costs, according to hotel associations.

The Cabinet approved a nationwide daily minimum wage hike from Jan 1, ranging from B337 to B400. Several tourism destinations were assigned the highest rate of B400, including Chon Buri and Phuket, while the rate in Chiang Mai's Muang district is set at B380.

Paisarn Sukjarean, President of the Thai Hotels Association's northern upper chapter, said rising minimum wages should not significantly affect hoteliers in Chiang Mai.

Many hotels already pay their employees a higher rate than the minimum, plus service charges of up to 10% of room revenue, for total earnings of B500-600 per day, he said.

While hiking the daily minimum wage to B380



Photo: Bangkok Post / file

could mean 3-5% higher costs for hotels, robust tourism this year should help to ease the situation, Mr Paisarn added.

Mr Paisarn said tourism had improved tremendously, especially during this high season. Though the low season arrives in a few months, robust income accumulated during the high season should help to compensate for the less busy period, he said.

Given the industry-wide labour shortage as manpower costs rise, he said hotels will not increase their employment, but instead allocate more responsibility to staff, assigning them more work than the typical staff-to-room ratio of 1:1.5 or 1:2 in Chiang Mai.

Some hotels will consider employing more casual staff to avoid incurring higher fixed costs on welfare, which is mandated

for permanent staff. This allows them to hire more people for the high season and cut expenses during the low season, he said.

The government should also help by maintaining costs, such as electricity and fuel prices, to help operators, he added.

Thanet Supornsahasrungsri, President of the Association of Chonburi Tourism Federation, said tourism businesses that survived the pandemic already pay employees more than B400 daily to maintain staff levels amid a labour shortage.

However, he said the higher minimum wage could impact small and medium-sized hotels, which account for 20% of the total in Chon Buri, as their room rates are low and they stick to the minimum threshold.

Mr Thanet said staff expenses typically make up 35% of hotel operational costs. Setting the minimum wage at B373 for some high-end hotels in Bangkok made no sense when the hotels have more expensive room rates than those in the tourism provinces, he noted.

Bangkok Post

# Campaign aims to restore Chinese tourists' confidence

## BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

Plans for an intensified tourism campaign while also stepping up security measures to restore flagging Chinese confidence in Thailand were unveiled by the government on Monday (Jan 13).

Government spokesman Jirayu Huangsub said Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra ordered the Ministry of Tourism and Sports to launch campaigns to boost tourist confidence after a Chinese actor was recently lured to a lawless area of Myanmar after arriving in the kingdom.

The premier also instructed the police chief to ensure enough tourist police are on duty and that close monitoring is conducted in at-risk areas to address the operations of influential gangs.

"The prime minister said that although the Chinese actor who went missing in Myanmar had been found, this incident affected



Chinese tour groups visiting Thailand this Lunar New Year are expected to fall by 20-30%. Photo: Bangkok Post

Chinese tourists' confidence," Mr Jirayu said.

The spokesman was referring to Chinese actor Wang Xing, aka Xingxing, who went missing for several days after flying into Bangkok and travelling to the Thai-Myanmar border.

The PM also ordered the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society to tackle fake news reports and cooperate closely with Chinese authorities to restore the confidence of Chinese tourists.

On Sunday, police inspector-general Pol Gen Thatchai Pitaneelabut met with representatives from the Chinese embassy in Bangkok. They discussed setting up a centre for Thai

and Chinese police to coordinate searches for people lured to neighbouring countries and exchanged information on transnational crime, including call scams.

Authorities would also make serious efforts to tackle illegal border crossings.

Muk Sulaiman, secretary to the House speaker, said representatives from other countries, including Kenya, had informed the speaker that scam gangs had kidnapped their citizens during visits to Thailand.

Chinese actor Wang, 31, went missing after arriving at Suvarnabhumi airport from Shanghai on Jan 3 and was last seen in Tak's Mae Sot district near the border,

before all contact with him was lost.

Wang was located in Myanmar on Jan 5 and returned to Thai soil the next day before returning to China.

Two other Chinese nationals were also recently reported as missing in similar situations as Wang, but they have not yet been found.

According to a source, such cases have made many Chinese people lose trust in Thailand, leading to a decline in Chinese tour groups this Lunar New Year by 20-30%.

Hong Kong singer Eason Chan also announced the sudden cancellation of his concert at Impact Arena on Feb 22 because of safety concerns for his Chinese fans.

Adding to the situation was the sinking of a catamaran carrying 38 people, including 33 Chinese tourists, en route to Koh Racha Yai off the coast of Phuket on Monday. All were rescued safely.

- Additional reporting by  
The Phuket News

## Bangkok ramps up plans to combat air pollution

### BANGKOK



Bangkok's skyline. Photo: Bangkok Post

A NEW WORK-FROM-home policy was announced by Bangkok governor Chadchart Sittipunt on Monday (Jan 13), as part of plans to safeguard the city from the chronic PM2.5 fine dust pollution.

Plans to simplify work-from-home measures are to encourage voluntary participation, which will also reduce traffic congestion, one factor driving up PM2.5 levels, Mr Chadchart explained.

"If the PM2.5 level reaches a critical level that threatens public health, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) will seek cooperation from the private and public sectors to work from home," he said.

In addition, BMA will close schools and prohibit lorries with six wheels or more from entering inner Bangkok.

The BMA also highlighted its work with various organisations, including the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth), the Public Health Ministry's Department of Health and Fulfill Social Enterprise Limited Partner-

ship which aim to educate students on the health risks of air pollution.

The initiative involves 32 BMA schools initially and will later expand to 437 schools. As part of the programme, 405 air quality monitors will be provided to schools by the Fulfill Social Enterprise Limited Partnership.

The BMA's Department of Education also plans to create dust-free classrooms for kindergarten students in 429 schools this year, covering 1,996 classrooms. Upgrades include air-conditioning, ventilation systems and carbon dioxide monitors.

There are also plans to introduce solar panels in schools in partnership with the Metropolitan Electricity Authority as it promotes smart city development, renewable energy and environmental sustainability. Bangkok Post

## Uyghurs detained in Thailand fear forced return to China

### BANGKOK

A GROUP OF UYGHUR MEN WHO have been detained in Thailand for more than a decade allege that the Thai government is preparing to deport them to China, where they would be at risk of abuse and torture, say activists.

Senator Angkhana Neelapajit, a former head of the National Human Rights Commission, called on Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra last Saturday (Jan 11) to clarify whether the government has such a plan.

The Associated Press news agency said it had obtained a letter in which 43 Uyghur men held at the Suan Phlu immigration detention centre in Bangkok made a public appeal to halt what they called an imminent threat of deportation.

A decade ago, Thailand became part of a popular route for Uyghurs fleeing intensifying repression in China and seeking to reach Turkey, which has historically supported Uyghur asylum seekers.

Most of the group detained in Bangkok were part of a larger group of around 350 who were arrested by immigration authorities near the border with Malaysia in March 2014.

In July 2015, around 170 women and children from the group were released to Turkey. About a week later, 109 - mostly men - were deported to China. Their whereabouts now are unknown. The rest



The Uyghur refugees arrested at the Malaysia border in 2014. Photo: AFP

were kept in immigration detention in Thailand. At least a dozen have escaped, and five have died in detention, including two children.

Five of the asylum seekers are serving prison sentences related to a 2020 escape attempt, while the remaining 43 are being held without charge in the Suan Phlu detention centre, amid sweltering, foul-smelling, cramped conditions. They are barred from communicating with their families, lawyers, or even other detainees.

Under Thai law, the Uyghurs' detention is categorised as a national security matter. This places them under the purview of the National Security Council, rather than immigration authorities. It also bars them from accessing the country's National Screening Mechanism, designed to allow refugees to live in the country and access public services.

Immigration police have said they have been trying to take care of the detainees as best as they could. Bangkok Post

## Thaksin slammed for racist comments

### BANGKOK

THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS Commission (NHRC) has criticised former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra for a racist jibe he made in a speech during a campaign rally in Chiang Rai, saying his comments were inappropriate and discriminatory.

It also urged the government to commit to policies that abolish all forms of racial discrimination and promote understanding among people of different races.

During the rally last Friday (Jan 10), organised to help garner support for Pheu Thai candidate Salakjit Tiypairat who is running in the Chiang Rai provincial administration organisation elections, Thaksin delivered a speech to encourage more Thais to find opportunities in the entertainment industry.

However, he made disparaging comments about models from Africa in his speech, which were widely seen as racist.

"African people, who have black skin and flat noses that make it difficult to breathe, are hired for millions of baht to be models. Thai people look much better. There's no need for [our people to get] nose, jaw or breast augmentation," Thaksin said.

NHRC commissioner Wasan Paileeklee said his organisation expressed concern over such comments



Photo: Bangkok Post

as they could undermine the fundamental principles of international human rights treaties, particularly the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), to which Thailand is a member and the government is obligated to comply.

According to the NHRC, a remark by an influential political figure which degrades and discriminates against other ethnic groups is deemed inappropriate, even if it is just a personal opinion.

The mindset of one race being superior to another can easily lead to discrimination and is a major obstacle to international relations and peace, Mr Wasan said.

The NHRC believes that, as Thailand is part of the CERD, the government must establish policies and practices that eliminate all forms of racial discrimination and promote mutual understanding among all nationalities.

Mr Wasan noted that this is particularly important as Thailand has recently been selected to serve an important role as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council for the 2025-2027 term. Bangkok Post

# Thoughts on water gardens



## GREEN THOUGHTS

Patrick Campbell

All Asians prize water in their gardens – from the humble pot in the front yard, with its mandatory water lily and darting sword-tails, to the fibreglass fish pond, usually painted blue and with a row of pebbles embedded in its rim. If you are lucky, you may have a natural pond or 'klong' within the bounds of your property. Unarguably, water adds another dimension, both as an eye-catching feature, and because it allows the cultivation of plants that would otherwise be off-bounds.

The simplest water feature is a large pot, usually set on a matching ceramic pedestal. It must be glazed: natural terra cotta is porous, and all the water will seep away. Not good for fish. Though it was formerly difficult to find containers without drainage holes, manufacturers have now wised up to the demand for watertight versions.

Another alternative is perhaps the most attractive option, a do-it-yourself pond. Select your spot (next to a wall is good) and make a level, rectangular area. It can be a shallow trench or at ground level. Build a surround of large, flattish brickettes to create a wall about 12 to 15 inches high (about 30-49cm), add a light layer of sand to the bottom to ensure there are no sharp protruding stones, and then line the entire construction, including the bricks, with a sheet of heavy-duty, black PVC.

Place a final row of bricks on top of the plastic liner to hold it in place, and then trim off the surplus. Add a ceramic vase – some of them are real works of art – with a projecting metal nozzle to the middle of your new feature. Connect the metal tube at the base



Lotus. Photo: Patrick Campbell

of the vase to a pump – preferably a submersible one – and, hey presto! You have a fountain with water cascading down the sides of the vase. The whole process is well illustrated in a compact disc obtainable from bookshops under the title of 'Bali Garden'.

Having a small pump to oxygenate the water is especially desirable if you want small fish to keep the plants company. Submersible pumps are the best, but there are cheaper alternatives. The hardiest fish are guppies and swordtails. There are many others, but these are good starters. They are pretty, lively and will certainly breed. But let everything in your new pond settle down for a few days before introducing them to their new home.

As for plants, the list is extensive. Everyone's favourite is the water lily, which has perhaps the widest

colour range of any garden plant and now available in hybrids so exotic they are not yet featured in books. At a recent plant market, there were huge double blooms on sale in deep Prussian blue, some with golden centres. Beautiful.

Nymphaeas are sold either in plastic pots which you can submerge straightaway in the water, or as trimmed roots. Whatever the style, ensure that the old leaves are removed, and if you buy a root remember to purchase bags of the special mud that is required for water lilies and lotuses. And give the pot a sunny position. It should have a wide shape to allow the leaves to spread.

The other majestic water plant is the lotus. Like the water lily, it needs to be immersed in glutinous mud, with its roots completely submerged. It looks best in a narrow container such as a vase, since, unlike nymphaeas, both leaves and flowers grow elegantly upwards rather than outwards. The colour range is much narrower too – pink or white are the dominant hues – but the huge blooms are staggeringly beautiful.

Many water gardens, especially those based on Japanese models, have little in the way of colour. The preference is for sculptural plants which have attractive foliage such as papyrus, water canna or reed mace. Some submersible plants, such as elodea or Canadian pond weed barely feature as visible attractions at all, but are excellent as oxygenators for fish, especially if you have no pump. And they provide cover for adult fish as well as havens for spawn.

Every plant has its purpose...

Patrick Campbell's book 'The Tropic Gardener', described in one Bangkok review as the best book on Thai gardening for 50 years, is available for B500 (half price) to personal callers from 59/84 Soi Saiyuan 13 in Rawai (Tel: 076-613227 or 085-7827551).

## The March/April 2025 hard copy issue goes to print very soon

Distributed in resorts/hotels lobbies, in a high number of restaurants and coffee shops, plus inserted in one issue of *The Phuket News* each month, it is a great way to Talk to Phuket about your F & B outlet

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# Education, Awareness and Acceptance

## LGBTQIA+

Joshua O'Neill

Education is one of the most powerful tools for shaping a society. It not only equips individuals with knowledge but also moulds their attitudes, beliefs and values. In Thailand, where the new Marriage Equality Law is set to take effect on Wednesday (Jan 22), education has the potential to be a cornerstone for fostering understanding and acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community.

However, for this vision to become a reality, we must address the gaps in how diversity and inclusion are taught in schools and beyond.

Thailand is often praised for its culture of tolerance. The world sees a nation that celebrates diversity in its art, media and public life, yet tolerance does not always equate to acceptance. Beneath the surface, many LGBTQIA+ individuals still face challenges, including stigma, discrimination and a lack of representation in mainstream narratives.

This duality is especially evident in the education system. While some Thai schools have taken steps to promote inclusivity, there is still a long way to go. LGBTQIA+ students often lack visible role models, and discussions around sexual orientation and gender identity are either absent or treated as taboo.

Education is where biases can be dismantled before they take root. It is in classrooms that children learn not only math and science but also empathy, respect and the value of diversity. By incorporating LGBTQIA+ awareness into curriculums, schools can play a pivotal role in normalising these conversations and creating an environment where all students feel seen and valued.

When children grow up learning about different

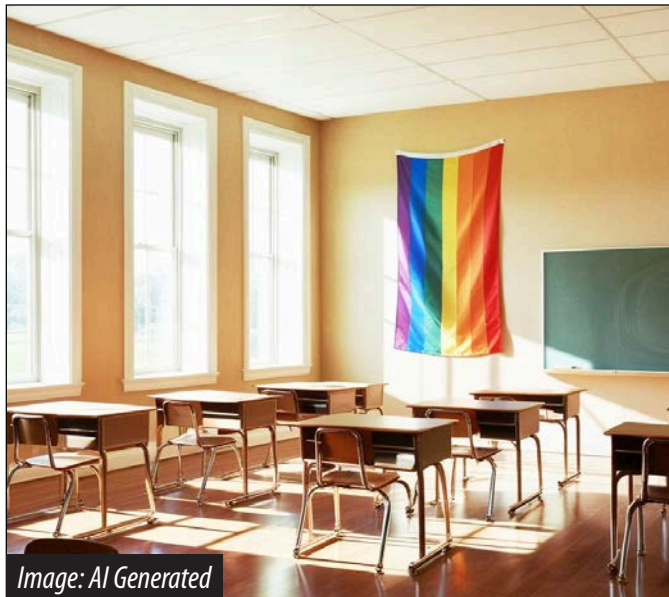


Image: AI Generated

identities and orientations, they are less likely to develop prejudice. Inclusive education helps LGBTQIA+ students feel less isolated while teaching their peers to be allies. This creates a ripple effect, extending beyond the classroom and into families, workplaces and communities.

Teachers are on the frontlines of shaping young minds. Equipping them with the knowledge and confidence to discuss LGBTQIA+ topics sensitively and accurately is essential. Schools can explore the introduction of lessons that address diversity, inclusion and LGBTQIA+ topics in an age-appropriate way. They can implement policies against bullying, particularly on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, and create safe spaces, such as clubs or counseling services, where LGBTQIA+ students can feel supported.

Events like 'Pride Month' or 'Diversity Week' can be integrated into school activities. These celebrations

not only raise awareness but also send a clear message that diversity is something to be valued, not hidden. When students are taught to embrace differences, they become better problem-solvers, communicators and leaders.

Incorporating LGBTQIA+ awareness into education also aligns with Thailand's broader goals of becoming a leader in diversity and inclusion. As the country moves forward with progressive laws like the Marriage Equality Law, a supportive and informed society will be vital to ensuring these policies succeed in practice.

One of the most important steps we can take is simply to start the conversation. When topics like LGBTQIA+ identities remain unspoken, they become shrouded in stigma. Education has the power to break that silence, to normalise what has long been marginalised, and to ensure that the next generation grows up understanding that love and identity are not "issues" but fundamental parts of being human.

As Thailand embraces this new era of equality, let us not stop at legal victories. True acceptance begins in the hearts and minds of people, and education is the key to opening those doors. Schools, parents, policymakers and communities must work together to ensure that every student feels seen, supported and celebrated. The new Marriage Equality Law is a significant step forward, but it is only the beginning. By investing in inclusive education today, we can create a future where diversity is not just tolerated, but celebrated – a Thailand where everyone can be themselves and feel truly at home.

*Josh O'Neill, a dedicated LGBTQIA+ advocate and community leader, leverages his expertise in DEI, events and cultural engagement to spotlight Phuket's current affairs and vibrant community life. Contact at PFAM International: Phone / WhatsApp 099-9989274. Email: support@pfaminternational.com*



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## POP QUIZ

1. What is the legal age to vote in Thailand?
2. Who was the first wife of King Henry VIII?
3. Who is the godmother to Elton John and David Furnish's two children?
4. What Italian word for 'Scratched Drawing' can be found on walls all over the world?
5. Which boxer was nicknamed 'The Dark Destroyer'?

Answers below, centre

## SUDOKU

Hard

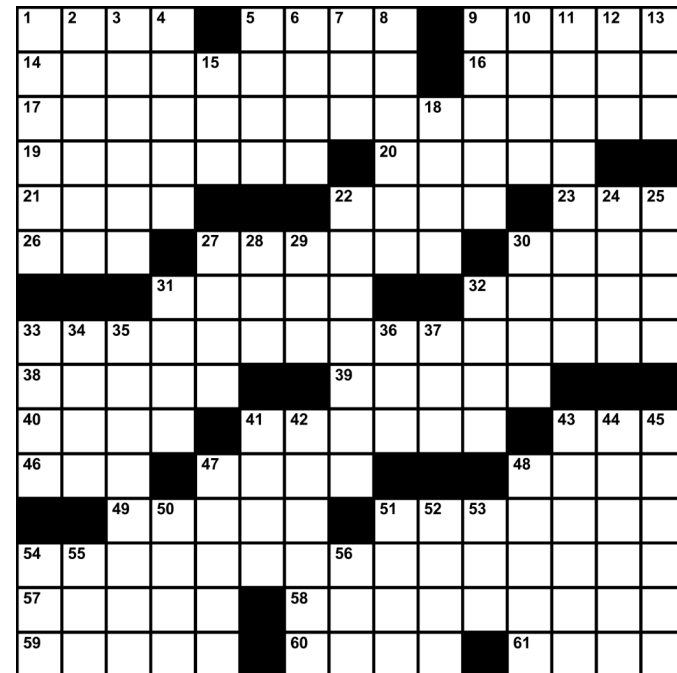
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| 5 |   |   |   | 8 |   |   | 7 |
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|   |   | 8 |   |   |   | 9 |   |
| 3 |   |   | 5 |   |   |   | 7 |
|   | 4 | 9 |   | 2 |   | 6 |   |
|   |   |   |   |   | 3 |   | 9 |
| 7 |   |   | 6 |   |   |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

## Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across**
1. Wound
  5. Trot or canter
  9. Billiards shot
  14. Capable of burning
  16. Gray
  17. Tolkien collection, with "The"
  19. Accord
  20. Baloney
  21. "Darn it all!"
  22. Long stretch
  23. Big mouth
  26. Cunning
  27. Actor Snipes
  30. Missile housing
  31. Woody plant
  32. Smooth
  33. Chaucer classic, with "The"
  38. Give or take
  39. Cat's cry
  40. Hop, skip or jump
  41. Bad mark
  43. Fond du \_\_\_, Wisconsin
  46. Slippery \_\_
  47. Withdraw gradually
  48. Rot
  49. Deck out
  51. Folder type
  54. Dickens novel, with
- Down**
1. Hecklers
  2. Relating to great pain
  3. Uppish
  4. Snaps
  5. Knack
  6. Experienced
  7. U.N. working-conditions agcy.
  8. Guinea pig
  9. Morning service
  10. P.D.Q.
  11. Bungler
  12. Bishop's jurisdiction
  13. U.S.N.A. grad
  15. Elephant's weight, maybe
  18. City on the Hudson
  22. Water-soluble protein
  24. Nautical heading
  25. Pans
- Across**
27. Stimulate
  28. Goof
  29. Relief
  30. Picnic dish
  31. Short end
  32. Greek portico
  33. Natural hideout
  34. Brother of Cain
  35. Averageness
  36. 18-wheeler
  37. Thanksgiving serving
  41. Drudge
  42. Hindu religious book
  43. Nabokov title
  44. Not alert
  45. Gliding dance step
  47. Beau
  48. Hyperion, for one
  50. Remove from a manuscript
  51. Night light
  52. Highest point
  53. Game with matchsticks
  54. Jerk
  55. Literary olio
  56. Court

## Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

1) 18 years of age; 2) Catherine of Aragon; 3) Lady Gaga; 4) Graffiti; 5) Nigel Benn



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

## Solutions to last week's puzzles:



## GOT YOUR NUMBER

7

photos a day is the average a cat owner takes of their pet every day.

27

seconds is all it takes for a person to make a first impression.

70

percent of the Earth's oxygen comes from marine plants in the ocean.

-89.2

degrees Celsius is the coldest temperature ever recorded on Earth.

1,431.2 billion

cubic kilometres is the volume of Jupiter, about 1,321 times that of Earth.

Source: Uberfacts

## ISLAND VIEW



Kamala Beach through the trees. Photo by Sutharat Khaodee

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

## This week in history

Jan 17, 1981

President of the Philippines Ferdinand Marcos – his regime notorious for corruption, extravagance and brutality – lifts martial law eight years and five months after declaring it.

Jan 18, 1591

King Naresuan of Siam kills Crown Prince Mingyi Swa of Burma in single combat, for which this date is now observed as Royal Thai Armed Forces day.

Jan 19, 1986

The first IBM PC computer virus is released. A boot sector virus dubbed (c)Brain, it was created by the Farooq Alvi Brothers in Lahore, Pakistan, reportedly to deter copying of software they had written.

Jan 20, 1265

The first English parliament to include not only Lords but also representatives of the major towns holds its first meeting in the Palace of



Mount Lamington.

Westminster, now commonly called the 'Houses of Parliament'.

Jan 21, 1951

The catastrophic eruption of Mount Lamington in Papua

New Guinea claims 2,942 lives.

Jan 22, 1957

The New York City 'Mad Bomber', George P. Metesky, is arrested in Waterbury, Connecticut, and charged with planting more than 30 bombs.

Jan 23, 1556

The deadliest earthquake in history, the Shaanxi earthquake in China. The death toll may have been as high as 830,000. Source: Wikipedia

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 The map of PHUKET English 中文 Русский

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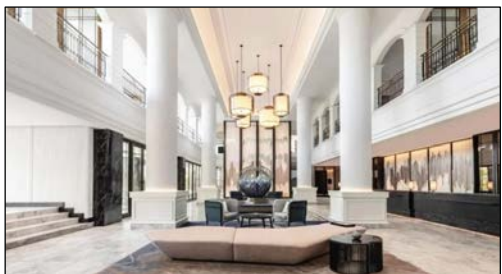
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THU

23 JAN



### Skal January Dinner - Japanese Delight

Our host of the month of January, Pamela Ong, extends a warm invitation (again) to all Skalleagues for our January monthly networking dinner at the Courtyard Phuket Town by Marriott. Welcome drinks at the Ko Lae Pool Bar from 6pm. Members B1,200 - Non-Members B1,600. Bookings - contact@skalphuket.org

FRI

24 JAN



### AustCham Joint Chambers Phuket Sundowners

AustCham Thailand, in collaboration with Australian Alumni, AMCHAM, BCCT, Belgian-Luxembourg/Thai Chamber, CanCham Thailand, FTCC, GTCC, NTCC, Phuket Chamber of Commerce and Thai-Swedish Chamber, will host the Joint Chambers Phuket Sundowners from 18.00 - 21.00 hrs, at Renaissance Phuket Resort & Spa. Join us for a wonderful night of making new connections and catching up with familiar faces in the Australian-Thai business community in Phuket. To book contact - office@austchamthailand.com

FRI

7 FEB



### Grow Boating Evening - February 2025

We look forward to seeing you at the Boardwalk Bistro and Bar at the Phuket Boat Lagoon from 5pm. Our drinks sponsor for the evening will be ASAP Marine Trading. Established in 2008, ASAP Marine Trading Co., Ltd. has been a reliable supplier of Yacht products for many years. See https://asap-marine.com/en/ There will be a delicious buffet sponsored by the Boardwalk Bistro and Bar. Come and join in the fun, everyone is welcome and there is no entry fee. Find us at facebook.com/GrowBoatingPhuket

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## HOORAY FOR CHILDREN'S DAY!

Phuket marked National Children's Day 2025 last Saturday (Jan 11) with vibrant celebrations across the island, bringing together officials, parents and children for a day of joy and inspiration.

The main event at the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation Office (PPAO) was presided over by Minister of Industry Ekkanat Promphan, who shared the Prime Minister's message: "Every opportunity is learning, ready to adapt to the future you choose."

Governor Sophon Suwannarat emphasised the importance of developing youth potential. Highlights included youth performances, academic exhibitions and over 80 food stalls supported by local organisations.

In Patong, Mayor Chalernsak Maneesri launched celebrations at Loma Park. Activities included scholarship presentations, a lucky draw and booths encouraging creativity and self-expression among children.

Phuket Town's event at Rama X Public Park, led by Vice Governor Samawit Suphanphai, featured performances from local child development centers,

a lucky draw and certificates for 250 outstanding students. Schools showcased entertaining and educational performances.

Kathu Municipality hosted its celebration at Prince of Songkla University's Phuket Campus, led by Mayor Wannayut Suttikul. The event focused on creative and physical development, offering games, gifts and food.

Wichit Subdistrict's Sri Phuwanarat Park was filled with activities, including a zipline station, zoo zone and game booths. Phuket's one and only Senator Nipon Ekwanich presided over the event, which featured stage performances and generous giveaways.

Other events included Koh Kaew Subdistrict's celebration at Baan Sapam Mongkol Wittaya School, with performances and activities, and Sakhu Subdistrict's event at Wat Mongkol Wararam School, featuring skill-building activities, over 200 scholarships and 150 bicycles.

Phuket's National Children's Day celebrations showcased the province's dedication to fostering young talent and providing joyful experiences, leaving lasting memories for children and their families.



# Colonials rule in Kamala

## BOWLS

Robert Knight

The 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the “Pryder Cup” was held at Kamala Lawn Bowls Club last Friday (Jan 10), pitting defending champions The Colonials against a Rest of the World (ROW) collective.

Strong favourites to defend their crown, The Colonials had many of the touring Kamala Koalas team in their ranks and were further boosted by the surprising and somewhat controversial selection/defection/recruitment to their side of Thai star and reigning club champion Sireeton “Wan” Sirimuangjan.

The ROW team, on the other hand, were somewhat depleted as two of their seasoned regulars were unable to play due to injuries, with late replacements drafted in to cover.

Emphasising the international flavour of the event, there were nine separate countries represented by bowlers on the day, with 12 players from each team competing in triples, doubles and singles matches.

Respective captains Dean Lambert and Peter Kuschel chose the playing order and lane allocation ahead of play and with a total



The victorious Colonials team. Photo: Robert Knight

of 21 points available, The Colonials needed 11 points to retain the trophy whilst the ROW needed a clear victory to win back the cup they had not held for over four years.

Most agreed, it seemed like an uphill battle for the ROW was on the cards and after the first round of triples this proved to be true as The Colonials stormed into a commanding 3-1 lead.

The only success for the ROW was the all German triple team of Frank Born and brothers Peter and Jürgen Kuschel beating Carl “The Mesh” Mesham, Joe and Bill.

It meant the ROW needed a change in fortunes to come back into the match as the tournament moved onto the round of six doubles matches.

Unfortunately, fortune did not favour the ROW team as they slumped to a 2-8 loss, consistent with many of the pundits’ predictions prior to play.

### TURNAROUND

Things did improve in the singles round of the contest, however, as the ROW performed a remarkable turnaround in the early rounds with some shock results, winning three of the first four matches; Tony Fyfield scored a narrow victory over Dean Lambert 5-4, Frank Born managed to overcome club champion Wan and Melanie Fyfield hammered Greg “Hollywood” Holman 10-5, resulting in The Colonials holding an overall match score of 9-6.

The ROW’s fine form in singles play continued as Catherine Smith caused another upset by beating “Dunking” Duncan Kennedy 10-5, “Policeman” Paul Eddon thrashed Alison Ostrom Duvarney 12-2 and Per Alm drew his match with Joe.

The only slight blip for the ROW in the singles contests was a last end defeat for captain Peter Kuschel against veteran George Sasanow.

It meant the score was now 10.5 to 7.5 in favour of The Colonials ahead of the final four singles games. From seemingly coasting to victory, the nerves of The Colonials were becoming increasingly frayed, something that was accentuated when Dean Simmonds beat Bill to close the

deficit to just 2 points with just three matches remaining.

Unfortunately rookies Mark Delaney and Jürgen Kuschel were unable to repeat the previous heroics of their underdog colleagues and pull off shock wins as both “The Mesh” and Paul McIlreavy eased to victories to seal the trophy for a much relieved Colonials side.

The final score was The Colonials 13.5 and the ROW 8.5, with the latter no doubt rueing their slow cooker start to the match!

Of note, and perhaps crucial to the outcome, was that three of the Colonial team, George Sasanow, Nobby Dublin and Paul McIlreavy, recorded perfect 3-0 records on the day whilst two of the ROW team (names withheld for obvious reasons!) failed to register a point.

The next major tournament is the prestigious Kamala Open Singles Championship on Feb 7 when a bumper entry is expected.

*Kamala Lawn Bowls Club is open six days a week and all equipment is provided. Group bookings available for private tournaments, company or social events. For further information contact the club on 094 898 7476.*

## Cycling tour to take in Unseen Thailand route

### CYCLING

THE TOUR OF THAILAND 2025 will be raced along the Unseen Thailand route in Sa Kaeo with six stages for the men’s event and three stages for the women’s event.

The Mar 24-Apr 2 cycling race will be held as part of a celebration for HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday on Apr 2.

“The Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn’s Cup Tour of Thailand 2025” supports the government’s Amazing Thailand Grand Tourism Year 2025 project, which aims to promote tourism in a secondary city,” said Gen Decha Hemkrasri, president of the Thai Cycling Association.

According to Gen Decha, the Tour of Thailand 2025 has attracted top cyclists from around the world including Europe, Australia and Asia.

“In the national team category, 20 teams have already confirmed their participation such as St George Continental from Australia, BH-Burgos team from Portugal, Trengganu Cycling team from Malaysia, 7-11 Click team from the



Photo: Bangkok Post

Philippines, Thailand Continental Cycling team, Grand Thornton team, Roojai Insurance team, Malaysian cycling team, Indonesian cycling team, Singapore cycling team, Vietnam cycling team and Thailand U23 national team,” he explained.

The six-stage men’s event will be held on Mar 24-29 with a total distance of 807.42km, while the three-stage women’s event will be held on Mar 31-Apr 2, covering 263.7km.

Participants will race through almost every district in Sa Kaeo, passing through the province’s major landmarks such as Prasat Sdok Kok Thom and Pang Sida National Park. *Bangkok Post*

## Big demand for Thai MotoGP tickets

### MOTO GP

GRANDSTAND TICKETS FOR THE season-opening PT Grand Prix of Thailand 2025 were sold out within minutes after the sale opened on Jan 9 while organisers announced their readiness to host the prestigious MotoGP event in Buriram next month.

All 10,000 tickets were reportedly snapped up in two minutes and 55.24 seconds, breaking last year’s record, with other stands filling up even faster than in previous years.

Thailand will host the MotoGP opening race for the first time, marking Southeast Asia’s first season start in 25 years.

The Thai leg in the MotoGP calendar normally takes place in October but has been rescheduled to be a season opener for the 2025 and 2026 seasons.

Somkiat Chandra, the first Thai rider to represent the nation in MotoGP, will make his debut in the premier class as the event is broadcast across 200 countries to over 800 million viewers.

The pre-season test will take place on Feb 12 and 13, and the main race will be held from Feb 28 to Mar 2 at the Chang International Circuit in Buriram.

“This year marks the sixth time the MotoGP World Championship will be held on Thai soil. This will be the first time the season unfolds in Thailand, and the first time in 25 years for Southeast Asia,” said Krisda Tanterdtit, secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Sports, who presided over the press conference on Jan 9.

“The MotoGP event in Thailand has emerged as a standout example of the sport tourism policy in action, positively impacting key sectors such



The PT Grand Prix of Thailand 2025 will take place from Feb 28-Mar 2. Photo: Bangkok Post

as sports, the economy, tourism, and the country’s global reputation. In 2024, the event attracted a remarkable 205,343 spectators, generating over 4.759 billion baht in revenue.

“This year, Dorna Sports has chosen Thailand to host three of the most eagerly awaited events in the motorsport calendar: the season premiere, the pre-season test, and the main race, which also marks the official start of the year’s racing season. These events not only underscore Thailand’s growing prominence on the international stage but also pave the way for its future as the motorsports hub of Asia,” he added.

Gongsak Yodmani, governor of the Sports Authority of Thailand, stated that, due to a shorter timeframe, organising this year’s MotoGP has presented significant challenges.

However, with extensive experience and full collaboration across all sectors, the organisation is confident that this year’s event will be a grand success, perfectly reflecting Thailand’s role as the season opener.

Fans can purchase PT Grand Prix of Thailand 2025 tickets for the Rider, Brand and Side stands at Counter Service All Ticket locations in all 7-Eleven stores nationwide or online at allticket.com. *Bangkok Post*

# Spurs silence the Lambs

## FOOTBALL

AFP

Tottenham needed extra time before seeing off non-league Tamworth 3-0 in the FA Cup last Sunday (Jan 12) to avoid what would have been a colossal shock.

Tottenham, currently 12<sup>th</sup> in the Premier League, are 96 places above Tamworth, affectionately known as The Lambs, who sit 16<sup>th</sup> in the fifth-tier National League.

The supposed gap in quality was rarely apparent as Tottenham's dismal display took them to the brink of a historic humiliation.

A part-time team whose players work day jobs alongside their football careers, Tamworth matched their highly-paid and supposedly superior opponents for long periods on their sloping artificial pitch.

They should have caused one of the FA Cup's greatest upsets in normal time but their missed chances proved crucial before Spurs managed to get over the line in extra-time.

Elsewhere, 10-man Manchester United beat Arsenal 5-3 on penalties after a dramatic 1-1 draw. Bruno Fernandes' superb strike put the visitors ahead, Gabriel Magalhaes equalised before Arsenal Martin Odegaard's penalty was brilliantly saved by Altay Bayindir.

Manchester City dashed the dreams of Salford's former Manchester



Spurs' Pedro Porro clashes with Tamworth's Kai Williams. Photo: AFP

United star owners with an 8-0 FA Cup rout.

League Two Salford have risen through the non-league ranks since investment from David Beckham, Gary and Phil Neville, Paul Scholes, Ryan Giggs and Nicky Butt began in 2014.

But the gulf in class showed as goals from Jeremy Doku (2), Jack Grealish, youngsters Divin Mubama and Nico O'Reilly and a 20-minute second half hat-trick from James McAtee.

Liverpool cruised into the fourth round with a 4-0 victory over Accrington Stanley. A mammoth 86 league positions behind Liverpool in the 92-team English league system, Stanley held out for nearly half an hour before goals from Diogo Jota, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Jayden Danns and Federico Chiesa ensured there was to be no upset.

Chelsea were among the other big winners with a 5-0 demolition of

Morecambe, while Nottingham Forest continued their excellent season with a comfortable 2-0 win over Luton.

Aston Villa ruined Graham Potter's first game as West Ham manager with a 2-1 win, Brighton beat Norwich 4-0 and Bournemouth came from 1-0 down to hammer West Brom 5-1.

Leicester went one better by hitting QPR for six in an eight-goal thriller at the King Power, while Wolves' beat Bristol City 2-1.

Brentford were the only Premier League side to fall to lower-league opposition as Plymouth, who sit bottom of the Championship, stunned the Bees 1-0 thanks to Morgan Whitaker's late winner.

Elsewhere, Newcastle survived a scare from fourth-tier Bromley in a 3-1, as Crystal Palace beat third-tier Stockport 1-0, Ipswich defeated third-tier Bristol Rovers 3-0 and Southampton beat second-tier Swansea 3-0 at St. Mary's.



Moyes is back. Photo: AFP

## Moyes back in the Everton hot seat

### FOOTBALL

DAVID MOYES HAS returned for a second spell as Everton manager following Sean Dyche's sacking by the struggling Premier League club.

Moyes, 61, made his name during an 11-year stint in charge at Goodison Park from 2002 to 2013, a period that included a fourth place Premier League finish in 2005 and an FA Cup final appearance in 2009.

Dyche was sacked on Jan 9 by the club's new owners, the Friedkin Group, hours before a FA Cup victory over Peterborough, with Everton 16<sup>th</sup> in the Premier League table and just one point above the relegation zone.

Moyes is reported to have agreed a two-and-a-half year contract which will see him lead the club into a new 53,000 capacity

stadium next season.

"It's great to be back. I enjoyed 11 wonderful and successful years at Everton and didn't hesitate when I was offered the opportunity to rejoin this great club," said Moyes.

Moyes' success in his first spell at Everton saw him handed the chance to succeed Alex Ferguson at Manchester United, but he was sacked after less than a season in a troubled time at Old Trafford.

Short stints at Real Sociedad and Sunderland followed, but the Scot rebuilt his reputation during two spells at West Ham, winning the Europa Conference League in 2023.

West Ham also appointed a new manager last week, with former Brighton and Chelsea boss Graham Potter replacing Julen Lopetegui who was sacked on Jan 8.

AFP

# Maher leading the global charge for women's rugby



THE GLOBAL RUGBY COACH

THE RECENT NEWS OF ILONA Maher joining Bristol Bears to compete in the UK's Premiership Women's Rugby league is further evidence of the improvement in quality performance and expansion of the women's game.

American Maher, 28, is the most followed rugby union player in the world on social media, with 4.5 million Instagram followers and 3.2 million followers on TikTok.

The centre won Olympic bronze with the USA rugby 7s team at the Games in Paris last summer and signed a contract to play for Bristol in December, which came into effect this month.

Such was the furore over her acquisition that Bristol's clash with defending champions Gloucester-Hartpury Women on Jan 5 had to be moved to Ashton Gate, the home of men's football team Bristol City FC because the usual home ground of Shaftesbury Park did not have sufficient capacity.

Club officials revealed that almost 8,000 tickets were pre-sold which prompted the relocation of venue. Ultimately, a club record crowd of 9,240 watched Maher make her debut, which ended in a disappointing 40-17 loss.

The popularity and success of Maher and the likes of Harlequin's full-back Ellie Kildunne will only help to encourage



Ilona Maher (left). Photo: AFP

further development in the game, with more female superstars emerging and proving that playing rugby union can be a very lucrative career which can also lead to further modelling and sponsorship opportunities.

One only need look at the USA Women's Rugby 7s team recently securing a US\$4 million (£13.8mn) sponsorship from American businesswoman, philanthropist and investor Michele Kang for their 2028 Olympic preparation.

The future for women's rugby has plenty of promise and the likes of Maher are doing their utmost to ensure that promise is realised with growth and success.

The women's Rugby World Cup takes place from Aug 22 to Sept 27 across eight separate locations and tickets are available now at [www.tickets.rugbyworldcup.com](http://www.tickets.rugbyworldcup.com).

*The Global Rugby Coach, Mike Penistone, is a globally renowned professional rugby coach based in Phuket who is also an ambassador for the Asia Center Foundation, a charity for disadvantaged children.*



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