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MERCI!



Photo: PR Phuket

FRENCH CONSULS VOICE SUPPORT FOR CRACKDOWN ON MOTORBIKE 'HOONS'

Nattha Thepbamrung
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French Consul of Thailand Christophe Hemmings along with the French Honorary Consul for Phuket Alain Faudot have publicly voiced their support for the action taken by Phuket police and other officials on the island in cracking down on French tourists disturbing the peace with wanton disregard and dangerous driving on motorbikes.

During their visit to Phuket last week, the consuls openly voiced their support for the 'yellow' (warning) and 'red' (deportation) card system introduced early this month for dealing with such undesirables.

The consuls arrived on the island on Mar 9 to first meet with leading police officers, including Phuket Provincial Police Chief Pol Maj Gen Sermpan Sirikong, Patong Police Chief Sujin Nilabadee, Chalong Police Chief Ekkarat Plaidouang and Phuket Tourist Police Chief Lt Col Ekachai Siri and Patong Police Deputy Superintendent Lt Col Teerasak Boonsang.

They later met with provincial officials, including Phuket Vice Governor Anupap Rodkwan Yodrambam, who was joined by several key Phuket officials, including Adcha Buachan, Chief of the Phuket Land Transport Office (PLTO).

Mr Hemmings said that 40 French troublemakers causing a public nuisance had received 'yellow' warning cards from Phuket Immigration.

He also said that those warned were the minority of French people in Thailand. "There are 40,000 French people living in Thailand, of which 4,000 are living in Phuket. The 40 troublemakers are only a minority and I do not want them to spoil the whole reputation of all French people," said Mr Hemmings.

"I fully agree with the yellow and red card system and would like to support Phuket authorities to concretely enforce the law to the French people who cause trouble here."

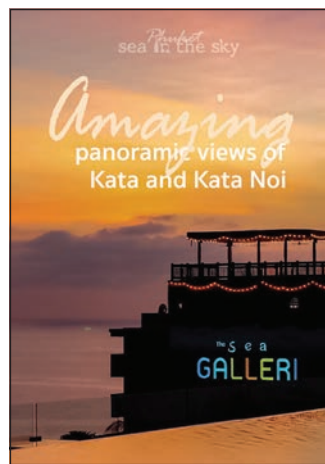
In a report of the visit to Phuket, the French Embassy in Bangkok noted that the consuls were "worried that

they [local police and authorities] have to deal with a multitude of crimes, incivility and acts of inappropriate behavior on a daily basis involving French short-stay visa holders, especially in Patong".

"The French Consul was able to listen at length with the head of the immigration office, Col Thanet Sukchai, and the Phuket Public Prosecutors Wichet Sriwiset and Supot Ruangroj," the report said.

Mr Hemmings urged local authorities to be strict to French tourists who would not respect Thai laws. "France strongly supports the stricter enforcement of the law, especially for those who don't respect traffic rules in Phuket," he said.

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News

French support for 'red' cards

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The embassy listed real examples of the behaviour that police had acted on, including riding without a helmet; driving large-cylinder motorcycles without the relevant driver's license; and dangerous driving: fast acceleration, zig-zag between cars, speeding in the city, driving on the rear wheel.

More serious offences listed included: refusal to comply with the arrest order of police officers during a check; blocking traffic; hit-and-run after an accident; traffic code violations; driving under the influence of alcohol and/or marijuana; disrespect and aggression towards police officers; and fights with Thais and other foreign tourists.

"The Phuket Police thus count more than a dozen incidents a day and five or six accidents in daily traffic, attributed to our French nationals passing by!" the embassy noted.

Another meeting with authorities in Phuket was expected to be held soon "to discuss the legal framework under which crackdown actions against those responsible for such behaviour and offenses could be dealt with (fine, imprisonment, vehicle detention, revocation of visa)..."

"This meeting will discuss the implementation of deportation and banning procedures for tourists who fail to comply with local regulations," the embassy warned.

Mr Hemmings also requested the names



The French consuls meet with top Phuket Police brass. Photo: Nattha Thepbamrung

and details of the French nationals who break such laws while on holiday in Phuket. "French people that cause issues outside the country [outside France] are also listed under probation in France," he said.

Phuket Provincial Police Chief Maj Gen Sermphan welcomed the visit, and the support, from the French consuls.

"Thank you for understanding and I am glad to hear that the French government understands the situation. There are people from around the world visiting and living in Phuket so we have to create measures to ensure everyone keeps living in peace together," he said.

"The foreigners caught for the first offense will be under probation, and if there is a second offense, their visas will be revoked," Maj Gen Sermphan warned.

Local elections bring sale of alcohol bans

A ban on the sale of alcohol will be in effect in Tambon Kathu from 6pm Saturday (Mar 18) through to 6pm Sunday (Mar 19) as residents there go to the polls to elect a new mayor.

The election was called after years-long incumbent Chai-anan Suthikul was summarily dismissed from office by Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew following an investigation into allowing a private operator to pump water from a lagoon at the Tin Mine Museum in Kathu.

The two candidates in the Kathu mayoral election are Prasert Khaokitpaisarn of the Palang Kathu ('Power of Kathu') party and Wanyut Suthikul, representing the Rak Kathu ('Love Kathu') party.

The Election Commission of Thailand Phuket office (ECT Phuket) has confirmed there will be 25 polling stations open throughout Kathu on election day. The polls will be open from 8:30am to 4:30pm.

In accordance with election law, there will be a ban on the sale of alcohol in the Tambon Kathu voting district (which does not include Patong) from 6pm the night before the election through to 6pm on the day of the election (Mar 19).

No alcohol can be purchased, sold or distributed during that 24-hour window. Those who violate the law may face up to six months in prison, a fine of up to B10,000, or both.

Election campaigning is also prohibited from 6pm Saturday through to 5pm Sunday.



Wanyut Suthikul with supporters as he registers to contest the election for Kathu Mayor. Photo: Rak Kathu / Facebook

PPAO BY-ELECTIONS

Local elections will be held in selected areas in Thepkasattri, Sakhu and Cherg Talay next month as residents in the subdistricts elect new representatives for the Phuket Provincial Administration Organisation (PPAO) council.

Recently installed ECT Phuket Director Orapin Acheivasuk explained that the elections were necessary as Channarong Prateep Na Thalang, representing PPAO Constituency 5, and Wiwat Chindaphon, representing PPAO Constituency 6, resigning their positions as councilors on Feb 17 and Feb 23, respectively.

Mr Channarong and Mr Wiwat both resigned their positions so they could contest Phuket seats in the national election on May 7, with Mr Channarong representing the Ruam Thai Sang Chart party in Phuket and Mr Wiwat representing Bhumjaithai Phuket.

The PPAO by-elections will be held in the two constituencies 5 and 6 on Sunday, April 9.

Constituency 5 comprises

Thepkasattri Moo 3; Sakhu Moo 2, 3, 4, 8 and 11; and Cherg Talay Moo 6.

Constituency 6 comprises all of Tambon Mai Khao as well as Thepkasattri Moo 5, 6, 9 and 10.

Candidates had until Mar 11 to register to contest the elections. At time of press ECT Phuket had confirmed that only two candidates had registered to contest the elections.

On the opening day of candidate registrations on Mar 4, Pongsakorn Panyawai registered to contest Constituency 5 while Andaman Kruepanich registered to contest Constituency 6, Ms Orapin explained.

Both candidates were accompanied by cheering supporters, she noted.

Ms Orapin said the target was 60% voter turnout in each constituency.

The polling stations will be open 8am to 5pm on election day (April 9), Ms Orapin added.

A ban on the sale of alcohol in the two constituencies will be in effect from 6pm on April 8 through to 6pm April 9.

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Police dodge corruption probe

The Phuket News
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According to Chalong Police, as there is no record of a German tourist being fined for illegally riding a motorbike through the Chalong underpass, there is no action to take over the accusation by the tourist that the policeman who stopped him illegally extorted B2,000 from him by the side of the road.

Pol Lt Col Jeerasit Noopayan, Chief of Chalong Traffic Police, told *The Phuket News* that the incident had been investigated and that he had called the German tourist who made the allegation through a video posted online late last month.

The German man in his public explanation of the incident said he was stopped by a policeman immediately after he exited the underpass as he was riding to visit the Big Buddha viewpoint on Feb 20.

The officer explained that it was illegal to ride a motorbike through the underpass. The officer ignored the German tourist's protests that he saw no traffic sign informing motorists that it was illegal



Chalong Police Station. Photo: The Phuket News / file

to ride a motorbike through the tunnel.

The officer then asked the tourist to pay B5,000 as the fine.

The German explained that he did not have that much money on him at the time. The officer then asked for B2,000 instead, which could be paid there by the side of the road. The German man agreed.

"We have already asked the German man about this case. The German man ad-

mitted that he was riding through the underpass and the police stopped him," said Lt Col Jeerasit.

"He did not come to the police station. It was just a phone call. He did not mention the arrest and fine," he added.

According to Lt Col Jeerasit, when he spoke with the German man, the tourist was only concerned with the lack of signage warning people that it is illegal to ride a motorbike through the underpass.

Lt Col Jeerasit was so adamant on this point that he repeated four times when speaking with *The Phuket News* on Mar 8.

"He did not mention the arrest. His concern was only about the prohibition sign that cannot be seen anywhere near the underpass," Lt Col Jeerasit kept repeating.

Incredibly, Lt Col Jeerasit pointed out that although the German man was recorded in the video posted online, the

German man did not post the video online himself, and did not give a translation of his own words recounting the incident, which the German explained in German.

"The person who recorded the video used Google Translate to communicate with him, which can cause some misunderstanding," Lt Col Jeerasit said, without acknowledging that he himself had spoken to the German man.

"He was not the one who

recorded the video and he did not intend to say that the police practiced against the law. He just wants to say that there was no sign prohibiting motorcycles from going through the underpass. The man was not even the person who posted the video," Lt Col Jeerasit said.

Lt Col Jeerasit did not mention whether or not he actually spoke with the officer involved in the incident.

"We have already checked and there is no record of the arrest of the German man on that day... He did not say where exactly the incident happened [on the phone]. He said he went through an underpass and he did not say which underpass. He only said he was going to the Big Buddha Temple. It is possible that it was the Chalong Underpass, but he did not confirm," Lt Col Jeerasit told *The Phuket News*.

Lt Col Jeerasit noted that the offence of going through an underpass with a prohibited vehicle such as a motorcycle incurs a fine of B500.

The Phuket News reminds all motorists that it is illegal to ride a motorbike through any of the five underpasses on the island.

Body of missing Romanian expat diver believed found

OFFICIALS BELIEVE that a body found floating off Koh Kaew Nok and delivered to Phuket last Friday (Mar 10) is that of 46-year-old Romanian diver Sebastian Emil Somesan, who disappeared on Jan 8.

The identity was preliminarily confirmed by Mr Somesan's wife, but officials need to conduct a DNA test to be 100% sure.

Mr Somesan was reported missing on Jan 8. The expat was on a diving trip at Koh Kaew Nok with another Romanian man and a Thai woman. When the trio went to leave the area, they became aware that the boat anchor had caught on a rock on the seabed and Mr Somesan dived down to free the anchor. He failed to resurface.

Mobilised to join the search efforts were officers from Rawai Municipality, Marine Police, Tourist Police, Chalong Police, Tourist Assistance Center, Kusoldharm Foundation rescue workers, disaster officials



The body found last Friday (Mar 10) is believed to have been that of Romanian diver Sebastian Emil Somesan, who disappeared during a diving incident on Jan 8. Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

and personnel from the Royal Thai Navy. After nine days the operation was suspended without any results.

At around 12.30pm last Friday, Chalong Police were notified by an unnamed local boat captain that he found a legless body in the water some 11 nautical miles from Koh Kaew, where Mr Somesan went missing two months ago.

The corpse was recovered and taken to Chalong Pier. Police then contacted

Mr Somesan's wife (named in the report as Ms Saengrawee) who came to the pier and confirmed that the body could be that of her husband. Mr Somesan had a similar wetsuit with him on Jan 8, she said.

The body was taken to Vachira Phuket Hospital for autopsy. Police are now waiting for Mr Somesan's son to provide a DNA test to confirm whether the dead man is actually the missing diver. *Eakkapop Thongtub*

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Man charged over shot fired at Vachira

Eakkapop Thongtub
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A man has been charged for attempted murder after he fired his gun at another man in the car park of Vachira Phuket Hospital in Phuket Town, after his temper flared over not being given enough space to reverse his pickup into a parking space.

Police were called to the hospital, the main government hospital on the island, after the incident was reported at 9:30am on Mar 7.

Phuket City Police Chief Col Pratuang Pholmana arrived along with other high-ranking Phuket City Police officers to find the suspect, Thanakorn Thongek, 30, still carrying his handgun, a CZ 2075 RAMI semi-automatic pistol, on his right hip. Thanakorn was also still carrying 13 bullets.

Officers chained and locked the wheels of his pickup, an Isuzu D-Max four-door pickup truck, to ensure that it would remain in custody as evidence.

Thanakorn was taken to Phuket City Police Station, where he was held while a man named by police only as "Mr Natthapat" related his



Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

version of events to police.

Mr Natthapat said he was following behind Thanakorn's pickup through the car park since they entered the building on the ground floor. Mr Natthapat's mother was in the car as he was taking her for her scheduled appointment.

The incident happened on the fifth floor, where Thanakorn drove past an empty parking space then stopped, intending to reverse into it.

However, Mr Natthapat was too close behind, and at first gave a short honk on his horn to warn that he was behind the pickup. He then gave

another, long, honk.

In response, Thanakorn then exited his pickup to tell Mr Natthapat that he wanted to back into the parking space. The exact words used remain in dispute.

Mr Natthapat said that when he realised what Thanakorn wanted to do, he reversed his car to give the pickup enough space. After Thanakorn had parked his pickup, Mr Natthapat drove by.

However, after Mr Natthapat's car was already some distance away, Thanakorn pulled his handgun out from the pickup cab, walked several

paces to get a clear shot from in front of his pickup, and fired at his new-found adversary's car.

The bullet missed its mark. Forensics officers later confirmed that the bullet struck the front bumper of a parked Honda car and lodged in the car's engine bay.

Footage from security CCTV cameras in the car park seem to uphold Mr Natthapat's version of events. However, officers were still continuing their investigation, police said.

One of Thanakorn's uncles came to his defence, saying Thanakorn had suffered mental and emotional trauma since his father had passed away. Thanakorn reportedly had seen doctors over his depression.

Thanakorn started playing with guns two years ago, and regularly practiced at Phuket Shooting Range, the uncle said.

The uncle also accused Mr Natthapat and his mother for their part in Thanakorn's response to the situation.

Regardless, police have now filed against Thanakorn preliminary charges of attempted murder along with carrying and discharging a firearm in a public place while they continue their investigation.

Thalang Police officer succumbs to motorbike accident injuries

THALANG POLICE CONFIRMED last week that an officer involved in a road accident on Thepkasatri Rd on Mar 3 had lost his life.

Capt Tianchai Kobkua, a 56-year-old deputy inspector at Thalang Police Station, succumbed to brain injuries sustained in the accident, having undergone emergency brain surgery at Vachira Phuket Hospital.

The incident occurred around 7:30am on Mar 3 at a U-turn point near the Karn Keha housing estate on the northbound section of the busy road in Srisoonthorn when a motorcycle being ridden by the police officer collided with an Isuzu pickup truck.

Upon receiving notification of the incident, rescue workers and police rushed to the scene where they discovered Mr Tianchai lying in the road unconscious. The emergency workers administered urgent first aid before rushing the injured man to Thalang Hospital.

Following initial diagnosis there from a resident doctor, it was determined Mr Tianchai needed to be transferred to Vachira Hospital Phuket as he needed to undergo



Photo: Srisoonthorn Municipality

emergency brain surgery to treat his injuries.

Despite their efforts, doctors were unable to save Mr Tianchai and he was confirmed officially deceased on Mar 8, with Thalang Police Chief Col Pisit Chuenpetch announcing the news publicly the next day.

Mr Tianchai's body was transferred from the hospital to Wat Srisoonthorn at around 8am on Mar 9. His funeral service was held at the temple at 3pm that day.

Police did not confirm details on the truck involved in the crash or whether the driver stands to face any formal charges. They also did not reveal whether investigations into the case were ongoing.

The Phuket News

Police probe death of Belgian tourist in tuk-tuk argument 'fall'

PATONG POLICE ARE TRYING to unravel what led to the death of a 31-year-old Belgian tourist who allegedly slipped and fell while coming to the assistance of his friend who was in the middle of an argument with a tuk-tuk driver.

Police were informed of the Belgian man's death by staff at Patong Hospital at 5am on Mar 8.

Police were informed that the man, identified by police as Michele Filippo Taormina, 31, from Brussels, had died as a result of an assault that occurred at Thammarat Apartment off Nanai Rd.

Mr Taormina had been rushed to Patong Hospital, but later succumbed to his injuries.

However, according to Capt Nattawut Saraithong of the Patong Police, who questioned four witnesses to the incident, Mr Taormina had slipped and hit his head on the ground.

Mr Taormina was with a friend who was arguing with a tuk-tuk driver over a fare of B300. He tried to intervene, but slipped and fell, and hit the back of his head on the ground, the "witnesses" told Capt Nattawut.

Another tuk-tuk driver, who happened to be at the scene – but not confirmed by Capt Nattawut as a party to the argument – rushed Mr



Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

Taormina to hospital.

The argument was loud enough to wake people in the area, who came out to investigate what was going on, Capt Nattawut said.

Forensic officers and Tourist Police are now involved in the investigation, Capt Nattawut said.

Officers will check any CCTV camera footage available in the area, he added.

Doctors at Patong Hospital will perform a post-mortem examination in the hope of confirming the cause of death, Capt Nattawut said.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Urgent aid needed for expat mum

The Phuket News
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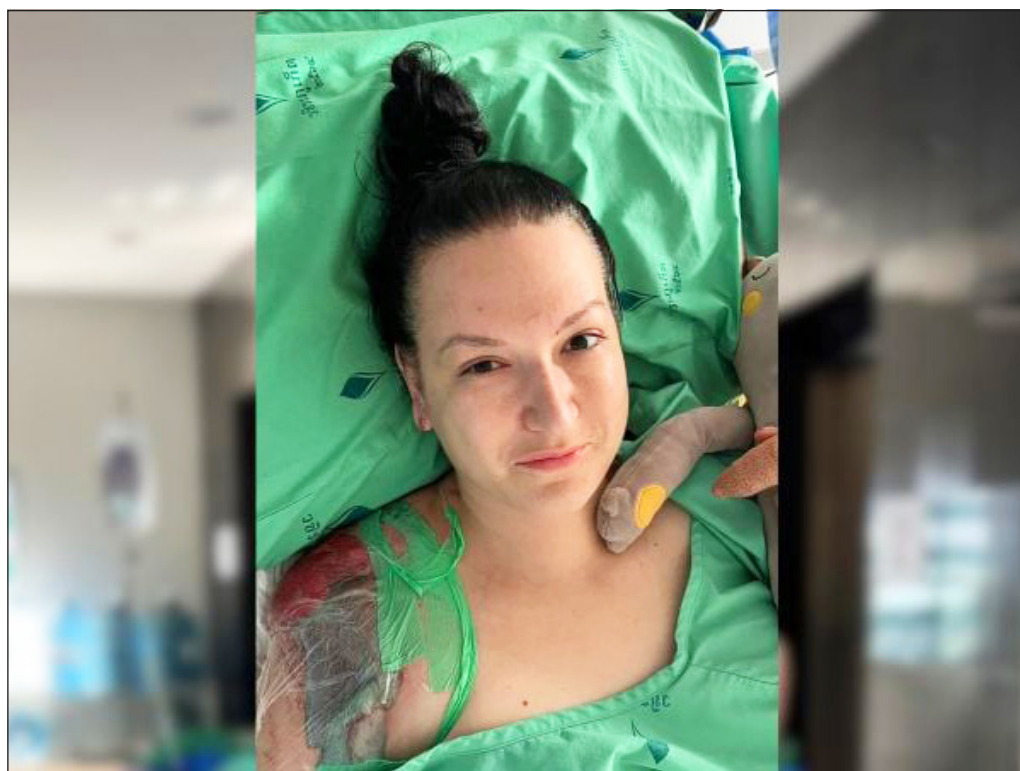
A fundraising campaign has been launched to help Alisa Leonova, a Phuket expat who was seriously injured in a road accident earlier this month.

The accident left Ms Leonova in critical condition and urgently needing O-positive blood for transfusion as well as money to pay extensive medical and related bills that will not be covered by her insurance.

Ms Leonova has been living in Phuket for 12 years and gained love and respect both in the local Russian-speaking community and beyond. Known for good nature and readiness to help others, she has also been a gifted artist spending time creating beautiful paintings. This all dramatically changed when her car flipped on Mar 5.

As the accident has not been recognised by Phuket officials, it is yet to be known how Ms Leonova's car overturned leaving her with a badly injured right arm.

When delivered to Vachira Phuket Hospital, Ms Leonova was told by doctors that they would have to amputate her



Alisa Leonova was seriously injured in a road accident on Mar 5. Her ordeal became known to the community only on Mar 9. Photo: Supplied

right arm from the shoulder blade, but then the medical team managed to miraculously save her limb. Yet, making Ms Leonova's arm functional again will require a lot of money as the task requires treatment abroad.

The accident and Ms Leonova's ordeal came to light only when the first appeal for blood donations was posted on

Mar 9. Within hours the blood was provided by donors and the further appeal for money supported by dozens of local residents, including those who did not know her.

"She is a Human with a capital H, always ready to lend a helping hand even to people she doesn't know personally. Now she is the one requiring help. On Mar

5, Alisa was injured in a terrific road accident in Phuket and had her arm injured very badly. Initially doctors were considering amputation, but managed to avoid it (luckily, this has been settled). Yet Alisa's shoulder joint and part of her shoulder blade are completely gone", said one of Ms Leonova's friends in a Facebook post.

"Alisa's current medical condition is stable, she has undergone two surgeries, but more procedures are to follow including a CT. The results will be sent to Russian, Israeli and Chinese clinics as local doctors do not dare to perform such a difficult main surgery. This means that the current hospital bills will be further increased by medevac to one of the aforementioned countries and the most important treatment there. Any donation counts. Do not be embarrassed if you can spare only a little sum," the woman continued.

A different campaigner for Ms Leonova emphasised that her family and friends were ready to do everything they could so she can recover and return to painting.

"She is a nail artist and a painter, this is the only craft she loves. And sadly, this is the thing one, probably, would never be able to do again. But we are fighting. We are fighting for her to stay alive, to be able to do what she loves most, to raise her son," said another friend, posting an X-Ray image of Ms Leonova's arm "sewn as is" to the body.

The need for O-positive blood is now longer included

in the appeals, which continue to multiply online. Yet the Phuket blood crisis is ongoing, thus people are always welcome to donate at Vachira's Blood Bank with an option to mention that they would want the blood to be used for Alisa Leonova's treatment if she needs more transfusions.

Money, the most important thing for Ms Leonova's further recovery, can be donated via an interbank transfer into the woman's personal account in Thailand:

Bank name: Krungsri Bank
Swift: AYUDTHBK

Account number: 1391689578
Account name: ALISA LEONOVA

Those willing to donate from a Russian bank account can use Tinkoff Bank's fundraising service via the following link: <https://www.tinkoff.ru/cf/NZ1WVUXZEB>.

Kind contributors are advised to specify in transfer notes that the donation is for Alisa Leonova's medical treatment. Thus the transfers should not raise any questions from relevant authorities.

A GoFundMe campaign for those willing to donate from abroad has not been launched yet. *The Phuket News*

Navy helps clear beach umbrellas at Koh Racha

PERSONNEL FROM THE Royal Thai Navy Third Area Command, based at Cape Panwa, have assisted Rawai Municipality officials in clearing beach umbrellas and mats from a popular beach at Koh Racha Yai, south of Phuket.

Navy patrol boat Tor 233 arrived at Ao Batok on Mar 7 with personnel led by Rear Admiral Suchart Premprasert, Deputy Commander of the Third Area Command, to conduct its mission.

Officials from Rawai Municipality were also on board to oversee the operation, branded as "to inspect tourist services that encroach on the beach area."

The officers "found" 24 sets of mats and beach umbrellas set up at the northern end of the beach, which serves as the main landing point for the island.

The beach mats and umbrellas were seized and removed, and one person, not named in the report of the operation, was found



Photo: Royal Thai Navy

responsible for the encroachment onto the public beach area.

The beach mats and umbrellas and the person found responsible were brought to Phuket and taken to Chalong Police Station to face legal

action, the report said.

The officers noted that if action were not taken over the encroachment onto the beach area, the problem would spread and become much more difficult to contain. *The Phuket News*



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Bookings deliver occupancy boost

The Phuket News
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Advance bookings are holding the average occupancy at tourist accommodations in Phuket in March at about 80%, according to Suksit Suwanditkul, President of the Thai Hotels Association (THA) Southern Thailand chapter.

“Hotel businesses especially in Phuket have had very high occupancy rates due to advance bookings since the beginning of the year,” Mr Suksit said.

“During March, more than 70-80% of the bookings have been made in advance due to the high season,” he added.

“April is expected to see the occupancy rate close to 60-70%, as advance bookings for next month are already at 20-30%, which is considered a good result from Phase 5 of the government-sponsored ‘We Travel Together’ project,” Mr Suksit added.

“The ‘We travel Together’ subsidised domestic tourism campaign has helped to stimulate tourism and provided business operators with income, causing the economy to grow exponentially,” Mr



Suksit Suwanditkul, President of the Thai Hotels Association (THA) Southern Thailand chapter. Photo: Radio Thailand Phuket

Suksit continued.

More than 50 hotels in Phuket are taking part in Phase 5 of the campaign, which began on Mar 7, he noted.

“It is expected to generate a lot of money in Phuket during the project’s rollout,” Mr Suksit said.

“It is expected that tourism businesses during March and April will surely have more than double the revenue than last year,” he added.

DOMESTIC RUSH

People rushed to book hotels during the first day of the latest phase of the hotel subsidy programme, with 112,876

room nights reserved out of 560,000 available under the scheme within six hours, reported the *Bangkok Post*.

Tourism Authority of Thailand Governor Yuthasak Supasorn said the value of transactions during the first six hours of availability on Tuesday reached B443 million from 112,876 room nights.

Of the total amount, B273mn (60%) was paid by the purchaser and B170mn (40%) came from the government subsidy, he said.

The rate of bookings was faster than predicted, reaching an average of 300 bookings per minute, Mr Yuthasak noted.

The volume of bookings confirmed there is pent-up demand for the next one to two months as well as strong purchasing power, said Mr Yuthasak.

The strong demand was partially because of an easing in COVID-19 infections, which encouraged locals to plan leisure trips or visit their hometown during the Songkran holiday in April.

The 500 hotels added for the fifth phase of the scheme provides travellers with greater choice while the short duration (ending in April) and limited number of privileges, at less than a million, accelerated

people’s purchases, he said.

BROADENING PUSH

After returning from a road show trip to Saudi Arabia, Thanet Tantipiriyakit, President of Phuket Tourist Association, last week said expectations were high that a recent flurry of road shows promoting Phuket as a tourist destination to source market countries abroad would boost the island’s tourism industry during the upcoming rainy season.

Key markets where the road shows were held included Saudi Arabia, India and Europe, Mr Thanet said.

The road shows were organised with the support of the Phuket Provincial Administration Organisation (PPAO), Mr Thanet pointed out.

“In January we held tourism marketing road shows in Dammam, Riyadh and Jeddah, and we expect to see more ‘Premium’ and ‘Extra’ visitors during the ‘green season’ [May-Oct],” Mr Thanet said.

“During the period from July to September is when Saudis travel abroad. This gives Phuket an opportunity to grow its tourism industry during the green season,” he said.

India is also expected to play an increasing role in the ongoing recovery of Phuket’s tourism industry, Mr Thanet said.

Visitors from India to Phuket were second only to Russians, Mr Thanet said.

“And last year there were about 230,000 tourists visiting Phuket. This year, at least 800,000 Indian tourists are expected to visit Phuket. This will definitely generate good revolving income,” he noted.

Other markets expected to deliver promising returns were Belgium, France, Germany and Australia, where the Phuket Tourist Association has held road shows, all supported by the PPAO, Mr Thanet added.

“I am confident that the tourism market among European and Indian tourists will definitely come back to make Phuket and Thailand bustling again,” he said.

Mr Thanet noted that the road shows also provided a good opportunity to present Phuket to potential visitors and key corporate clients, and promote the island and garner support for Phuket’s bid to host Expo 2028, Mr Thanet concluded.



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Students to ease labour shortage

A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MoU) was signed in Phuket last Sunday (Mar 12) that aims to have vocational education students gain experience in the tourism industry during their college holidays, with special focus on helping to ease the labour shortage in Phuket’s hospitality sector.

The MoU was signed at Phuket Provincial Hall, with Office of the Vocational Education (OVEC) Deputy Secretary-General Somporn Pandam leading the proceedings.

Present for the occasion was Phuket Governor Narong Woonciw and Rewat Areerob, President of the Phuket Provincial Administration Organisation (PPAO), along with Witthaya Ketchu, Director of Phuket Vocational College, and Sueksit Suwanditkul, President of the Thai Hotels Association Southern chapter.

Mr Witthaya explained that more than 3,000 businesses had joined the initiative, including major hotel chains such as Accor and Minor Group, as 48 institutions nationwide operating under OVEC.

The agreement would see vocational students gain experience in the hospitality sector and help them earn extra money during college holidays, he said.

Mr Witthaya said the MoU would help fill some 30,000 positions vacant in the tourism industry.

Official reports maintained that the initiative would help ease Phuket’s labour shortage. However, Kongsak Khoopongsakorn of the Phuket Chamber of Commerce last month revealed that the situation in



Photo: PR Phuket

Phuket had eased considerably, with only about 3,000-4,000 positions vacant remaining to be filled.

The discrepancy was not explained in the official reports marking the MoU signing last Sunday.

According to the *Bangkok Post*, Mr Suksit said that Phuket’s rapid recovery had resulted in the hospitality labour shortage on the island.

Hotel occupancy rose from 40% in mid-2022 to 70% in late 2022, with average occupancy rate in January-March 2023 rising to 88%, compared with 86% before COVID-19, he said.

He hoped the agreement would be an answer to the problem, the *Bangkok Post* reported.

Governor Narong said that resolving the labour shortage would help the provincial government’s preparations to host Expo 2028 and “to push for Thailand and Phuket to be an international medical hub in five years”. *The Phuket News*

Push for legalisation of sex work, benefits

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

Women's rights groups in Bangkok have called for the decriminalisation of sex work in the country, along with a range of broader measures supporting women.

Making sex work legal would help ensure those working in the trade would be protected by labour rights, said the groups, which gathered near Government House to mark International Women's Day on Mar 8.

The groups also called for a doubling of maternity leave to 180 days, and a period leave for workers when they suffer menstrual pains.

They also sought financial assistance of B3,000 a month for each month of pregnancy, safe and free abortion services, and that Mar 8 is recognised as a public holiday.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha conveyed his best wishes to Thai women and women development advocates via Radio Thailand when he observed International Women's Day.

Thailand joined the United Nations' celebration of the special day by recognising women's value and integrity, Prayut said. The world body had raised awareness on gender parity and encouraging progress for women's development in



Bar girls work to lure customers into a bar on Soi Cowboy in the red-light district of Bangkok. Photo: AFP

various areas, he said.

A 48-year-old woman, identified only as Pla, took part in the Mar 8 gathering near Government House.

Ms Pla said she has worked in an auto parts factory in Chon Buri for more than 20 years and earns around B20,000 a month. She once earned B10,000 extra per month from overtime, but that had fallen off since New Year. Ms Pla said she has been forced to tighten her belt to survive.

Several parties took the opportunity to discuss their policies on women for the coming election.

Paetongtarn Shinawatra, Pheu Thai Party's chief adviser on public participation and innovation, said the party aims to upgrade the Thai Women Empower-

ment Funds to boost women's access to economic opportunities, work skill development, funding sources and women rights protection.

Watanya Bunnag, chief of the Democrat Party's working group on political innovations, said the party aims to introduce policies and laws to ensure people of all groups are accepted equally.

Khunying Sudarat Keyuraphan, Thai Sang Thai Party leader, said her party will set up a women's capacity building centre called Woman Care in all 878 districts across the country to help women improve skills and create jobs.

Narumon Pinyosinwat, the treasurer of the Palang Pracharath Party, said the party is currently tackling social disparities that women face.



Bangkok's smoggy skyline. Photo: Bangkok Post

Home work urged as air quality suffers

BANGKOK

THE PUBLIC HEALTH Ministry is asking private companies to allow their employees to work from home, after an estimated 1.4 million people were reportedly made ill by the recent drop in air quality.

After opening an operation centre to monitor air quality across the country on Monday (Mar 13), Public Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul urged everyone who has to leave their homes to wear a mask to protect themselves from the smog.

"If private sector workers can work from home, less exhaust fumes would be emitted," he said, before adding the Transport Ministry is ramping up the rollout of electric buses to help reduce pollution in the capital.

According to Bangkok Medical Service Department, between Jan 1 and Mar 10, 31,695 people sought medical

help for medical problems exacerbated by the haze.

Some 2,252 patients had chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, 8,692 had eczema, 8,309 had a stroke, while 4,800 reported conjunctivitis or pink eye. 1,770 people sought help with pneumonia, 1,107 with bronchitis, 1,830 with pharyngitis, 672 with nasal cryotherapy, 129 with asthma, 114 with influenza, 89 with ischemic heart disease and 1,877 with lung cancer.

The Meteorological Department urged the public to stay indoors, avoid seeking shelter under trees during a thunderstorm, and steer clear of unsteady road signs and structures.

According to the Air Quality and Noise Management Division, PM2.5 levels will continue to rise until Mar 20. However, as of Monday (Mar 13), a southerly wind was to blow the smog away from the Bangkok area. Bangkok Post

Government continues to woo wealthy, capable foreigners

BANGKOK

NEARLY 3,000 FOREIGNERS HAVE applied for long-term resident (LTR) visas in the four months since Thailand fully reopened on Nov 1, 2022, deputy government spokeswoman Traisuree Taisaranakul said last Friday (Mar 10).

According to Ms Traisuree, a total of 2,920 foreigners applied for LTR visas from Nov 1 last year to Feb 28. European applicants, 940, formed the biggest group of LTR visa applicants, followed by 517 Americans and 325 Chinese.

The applicants included 195 highly wealthy people, 1,011 wealthy retirees, 771 foreigners who want to work from Thailand, 390 specialists and 553 followers of those applicants. It was not specified how many of those applications had been approved.

In a separate development, the Board of Investment (BOI) had already offered promotional privileges to about 500 projects of foreign companies to build their regional headquarters in Thailand, with a combined investment of B13 billion.

Most of the companies were from Japan, the United States, Singapore, Hong Kong and France. Well-known companies included Agoda, Huawei Technologies, Arçelik Hitachi, Ajinomoto, Nissin Foods, Alstom, Toyota Motor and Nippon Steel.

From their planned regional hubs in Thailand, the companies would supervise



Thailand Privilege Card promotional staff. Photo: Bangkok Post

and support the operations of their subsidiaries in countries in the same region.

The government wanted to attract such regional headquarters as well as wealthy and capable foreigners to the country so that they would transfer knowledge and innovations to Thai people working with them, the spokeswoman said.

The LTR visa program, which provides tax breaks and other financial incentives, was introduced in 2022, with the government aiming to attract 1 million applicants over the next five years. This presumes an average of 16,666 applications per month which Thailand is yet to come close to.

To achieve the target, the BOI is looking to enlist private firms to promote the new 10-year visas.

"Collaborating with private firms to promote the program locally and globally is an excellent opportunity for Thailand to increase its foreign investment and attract skilled professionals and high-net-worth individuals," a government spokesperson said. Bangkok Post



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Foreigners urged to join blood drive

The Phuket News
life@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket Immigration is supporting a Phuket Red Cross blood-donation drive focussing on foreigners, particularly those with Rh-negative blood, to be held at Central Festival Phuket later this month.

Rh-negative blood remains in short supply on the island, Phuket Immigration Chief Col Thanet Sukchai told *The Phuket News*.

"Rh-negative blood type is rare in Thailand, and the blood bank is now facing an Rh-negative shortage crisis," he said.

"Foreigners from Western countries are more likely to have this blood type, about 15% more than Thai people, so we have launched this campaign," he added.

The donation drive will be held at Lan Lom (the outdoor area) on the first floor of Central Festival Phuket from 11am to 4pm on Mar 27.

Rh-negative blood reserves collected through the drive will be shared with other provinces nearby, as they also are suffering the same crisis, Col Thanet said.

The ongoing RH-negative crisis saw an urgent appeal made just last week for Philipp Vorontsov, who was struck by a car driven by an Australian man. Mr Vorontsov suffered serious injuries to one of his legs in the impact. He is at Vachira Phuket Hospital.

People with O- or B- blood were asked to present themselves at the blood bank at Vachira Phuket Hospital and explain that the donation is for Mr Vorontsov. Prospective donors can call 098-5126093 or WhatsApp +79163801384 for assistance.

WIDESPREAD SHORTAGE

The shortage of Rh-negative blood reserves is widespread throughout the country. Rh-Negative blood reserves in Thailand are alarmingly low, as only 0.3% of the Thai population have this blood type, compared to around 15% of Westerners, academics warned late last month.



A foreigner donates blood at the previous Rh-negative blood-donation drive in December. Photo: PR Phuket

Speaking at a Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand (FCCT) discussion titled "Death without Donors: Rh-Negative Blood Rarity in Thailand" on Feb 22, Dr Issarang Nuchprayoon, adviser to the Thai Red Cross National Blood Center, urged the international community in Thailand to donate blood, as the scarcity of Rh-Negative blood could cause delays in providing assistance to western tourists in emergencies.

Dr Issarang emphasised the need for Westerners with Rh-Negative blood to join the effort, as donations from Thai donors alone would not be enough to support the needs of foreign visitors.

"This disparity in numbers may provide challenges for Western tourists with this blood type, as in emergencies that require blood transfusions, a scarcity in Thailand's Rh-Negative type blood pool may cause assistance to be delayed," Dr Issarang said.

Col Thanet is hoping the event on Mar 27 will be as successful as the previous blood-donation drive held in December, and alleviate the RH-negative blood shortage.

"The previous donation drive was held before the New Year, and fortunately there were a lot of donors with Rh-negative," he said.

"We were lucky that there was a lot of Rh-negative

blood donated last time, so we could even share our reserves with Chiang Mai," he added.

Phuket Immigration will be handing out special passport covers to donors as a souvenir of their generosity, Col Thanet noted.

"Foreigners who donate blood on the day will receive a specially designed passport cover with the Immigration Bureau logo and the logo of the Rh-Negative Club of Phuket. When they use their passports at Immigration offices, officers will acknowledge that they did good things in Phuket," Col Thanet said.

DONATION DRIVE

The Phuket Red Cross outreach campaign schedule for blood donations in March was released on Feb 24, two days after the alarming announcement of the widespread shortage. Dozens of locations will be available for donors to donate blood without having to go to Phuket Town, where the office of the Phuket chapter of the Red Cross is located.

The dates, times and locations for the Phuket Red Cross mobile blood donation centres for the rest of March are as follows:

Mar 17 – noon-6pm – Lotus's Thalang;
Mar 17 – noon-6pm – Lotus's Bypass;
Mar 20 – noon-6pm – Lotus's Thalang;
Mar 20 – noon-6pm – Lotus's Bypass;
Mar 21 – 9am-3pm – Rawai Park;
Mar 21 – 10am-3pm – Cherrng Talay OrBorTor;
Mar 22 – 10am-3pm – Banyan Tree Phuket;
Mar 22 – 1pm-4pm – Bangkok Hospital Siriroj;
Mar 23 – noon-6pm – Lotus's Thalang;
Mar 23 – noon-6pm – Lotus's Bypass;
Mar 24 – noon-6pm – Robinson Lifestyle Thalang;
Mar 24 – 2pm-6pm – Porto de Phuket;
Mar 25 – noon-6pm – Lotus's Bypass;
Mar 27 – 11am-4pm – Central Festival;
Mar 29 – 1pm-4pm – Diamond Cliff Resort & Spa;
Mar 29 – 1pm-4pm – Blue Tree Phuket;
Mar 31 – 10am-15.30pm – Phuket FantaSea.

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March/April 2023 issue

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'Scream' takes on the 'Big Apple'

David Griffiths

It is hard to imagine that the film that filmmaker Kevin Williamson made back in 1996 aimed at lightly mocking the slasher horror genre turned into what we now know as the 'Scream' franchise – a franchise that has just released its sixth film and had a spin-off television series. Williamson's involvement with the series is now limited but his characters live on and have created a passionate group of fans that keep asking for bloody adventures of Woodsboro to keep coming back to the big screen.

Directors Matt Bettinelli-Olpin (*Ready or Not*) and Tyler Gillett (*V/H/S*) do shake things up a little though with *Scream VI* by moving the action from Woodsboro to New York – a move that in theory should open up the film's universe a little.

The reason for this dramatic change is that Tara Carpenter (Jenna Ortega – *Wednesday*) is now attending college in New York. Her friends, Mindy Meeks-Martin (Jasmin Savoy Brown – *Yellowjackets*) and Chad Meeks-Martin (Mason Gooding – *Fall*), have also made the move to the big city – as has her sister Sam (Melissa Barrera – *In The Heights*). The latter though is something that Tara is not happy about as she feels she is being smothered by Sam who won't let her live her life. In fairness though Sam has never fully re-



This time the youngsters from Woodsboro are fighting for their lives in New York. Image: IMDb

covered from the events of the last film.

While Tara says that they are in no danger in New York, her theory soon proves wrong when the group's film lecturer is found murdered in an alleyway and Detective Bailey (Dermot Mulroney – *My Best Friend's Wedding*) soon discovers that there is a direct link between this fresh murder and the Ghostface murders. Soon, once again Tara, Sam and their friends find themselves fighting for their lives.

Six films into a franchise you could probably forgive *Scream VI* for being light on for new ideas but to its credit the first half of the film holds its own. Moving to New York does breathe some new life into the storyline and allows for some new characters to be introduced, which of course widens up the pool of potential suspects and victims as well. The fact that most of the

characters are likable also adds to the suspense of the film.

Early on it does feel like this is going to be a pretty decent film. The first murder seen on screen is inventive and draws the audience in, especially when it is revealed that not all is what it seems. That suspense is further heightened through the tension between Tara and Sam, pushing the narrative that not all characters in modern day horror films have to be one-dimensional.

Sadly though things start to fall away and become completely unbelievable as the film goes on. While the story itself seems to hold up there are times when people are savagely stabbed and then only a few moments later are seen on screen working around as if nothing has happened to them – that might wash if you've got regenerative characters like Deadpool or Wolverine

around but certainly doesn't work with the characters here.

What saves the film from a complete write-off is that the directors and screenwriters are at times creative. The scenes of Tara and Sam fighting for their lives in a convenience store and the suspenseful sequence on the underground train hold their own and show that there is still life left in the franchise when filmmakers are willing to be creative.

Credit does need to be paid to Jenna Ortega and Melissa Barrera, who are great throughout the film, while Jasmin Savoy Brown is also one of the film's saviours. The way she plays film geek Mindy is one of the highlights of the film and her payoff is that she gets to deliver some of the most memorable lines.

Scream VI certainly isn't the best film in the franchise but it does have some moments that will be enjoyed by horror fans. The fact that the film does get a little gory and has some creative sequences saves it, but there are too many unbelievable things happening for this to be considered a good film.

Scream VI is currently screening in Phuket and is rated 18.

2.5/5 Stars

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



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POP QUIZ

- 1. What is the official colour for Phuket Province?
- 2. In which year was Hollywood classic 'The Wizard of Oz' released?
- 3. Besides Thailand, which two countries have coasts on the Gulf of Thailand?
- 4. Which company owns the trademarks and products of Parker Brothers and Milton Bradley?
- 5. Clyde Chestnut Barrow and Bonnie Elizabeth Parker were better known as who?

Answers below, centre

SUDOKU

Hard

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

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across

 - 1. Peephole
 - 7. Put back
 - 11. Hoo-ha
 - 14. Managed
 - 15. Wheeling's river
 - 16. Thimblorig prop
 - 17. Coerced ceremonies
 - 20. Choice
 - 21. Beef, e.g.
 - 22. Word with bar or arm
 - 25. Cybercafe patron
 - 27. Make the grade?
 - 28. Abnormal protuberance
 - 29. Support provider
 - 30. Schuss
 - 32. Masked man?
 - 33. Pond swimmer
 - 34. Put out
 - 38. Be in charge
 - 42. Use a prie-dieu
 - 43. Brain part
 - 44. Clear
 - 45. Predecessor of rock steady
 - 47. Boolean logic operator
 - 48. Some transfusions
 - 49. Auspices
- Down

 - 1. Germany's Dortmund-___ Canal
 - 2. Derisive cry
 - 3. Nigerian state
 - 4. Don't hold back
 - 5. Writers' award
 - 6. ___ bus
 - 7. Promulgate
 - 8. Somewhere else
 - 9. Somateria
 - 10. Pitt play character
 - 11. Sleep ___
 - 12. A founder of impressionism
 - 13. Hops driers
- 18. Kind of network
 - 19. Grin descriptive
 - 22. Express disapproval
 - 23. Compassionate
 - 24. Copious
 - 26. Desert basin
 - 29. E.U. member
 - 31. Brush against
 - 33. Pillow ___
 - 35. Judicious
 - 36. Reversal
 - 37. Time piece?
 - 39. Boarder, e.g.
 - 40. Mistake type
 - 41. Denouement
 - 46. Angled structure
 - 48. State bordering Arizona
 - 49. Gourmand
 - 50. Like some accents
 - 51. Beset
 - 53. Harsh
 - 54. Great Lakes salmon
 - 56. Rush order?
 - 58. Theories
 - 60. Metallica's first hit
 - 61. Check
 - 62. Schooner's cargo
 - 63. Clarinetist Lewis

Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

(1) Pink; (2) 1939; (3) Cambodia and Vietnam; (4) Hasbro; (5) Bonnie and Clyde

1	2	3	4	5	6		7	8	9	10		11	12	13
14							15					16		
17							18					19		
				20					21					
22	23	24				25	26				27			
28					29				30	31				
32				33					34		35	36	37	
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49	50	51			52	53				54				
55					56				57	58				
59							60					61	62	63
64				65					66					
67				68					69					

Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

S	C	A	B		H	A	R	S	H		U	S	E	D
N	A	G	A		O	R	A	T	E		R	A	N	I
O	R	A	L		R	E	N	A	L		P	A	N	O
B	E	R	M		U	D	A	T	R		A	N	G	L
					T	E	L				P	L	Y	
A	B	I	D		E	S		S	P	O	I	L	A	G
E	R	N	E		B	L	U	R	B		S	E	A	
R	O	U	N		D	T	R	I	P	T	I	C	K	E
I	N	S		A	R	O	M	A		P	E	S	O	
E	X	E	R		C	I	S	E		D	E	A	D	E
					A	H	A			P	U	S		
T	R	A	F		A	L	G	A	R	S	O	U	A	R
H	A	L	T		R	O	B	O	T		R	E	A	R
U	R	G	E		U	T	I	L	E		E	R	G	O
G	E	A	R		N	O	T	E	D		A	Y	E	S

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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

1

out of 10 married adults in the US say that they typically sleep alone.

85

percent of those who have attempted to break the water speed record since 1940 have died while trying.

7,000

US dollars a day is how much an email spambot can earn.

300,000

US dollars in research and three months is what it took for scientists to create a lab-grown burger patty.

92 quadrillion

US dollars is how much PayPal once accidentally credited to one man's account.

Source: Uberfacts

ISLAND VIEW



Soi Palai sunrise. Photo by Sutharat Khaodee

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

This week in history

March 17, 1963

Mount Agung erupts on Bali killing more than 1,100 people.

March 18, 1241

First Mongol invasion of Poland: Mongols overwhelm Polish armies in Kraków in the Battle of Chmielnik and plunder the city.

March 19, 1932

The Sydney Harbour Bridge opens.

March 20, 2003

Invasion of Iraq: In the early hours of the morning, the United States and three other countries (the UK, Australia and Poland) begin military operations in Iraq.

March 21, 2006

The social media site Twitter is founded.



US President George W. Bush announces the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom on March 19, 2003.

March 22, 1906

The first England vs France

rugby union match ("Le Crunch") is played at Parc des Princes in Paris. England wins 8-35.

March 23, 1801

Tsar Paul I of Russia is struck with a sword, then strangled, and finally trampled to death inside his bedroom at St Michael's Castle.

Source: Wikipedia

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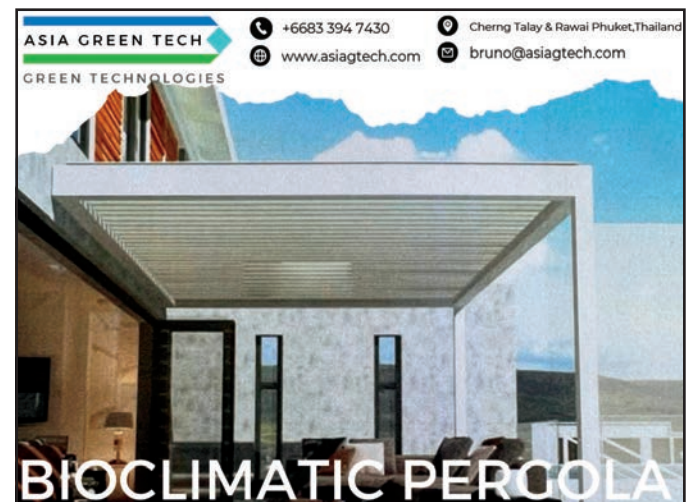
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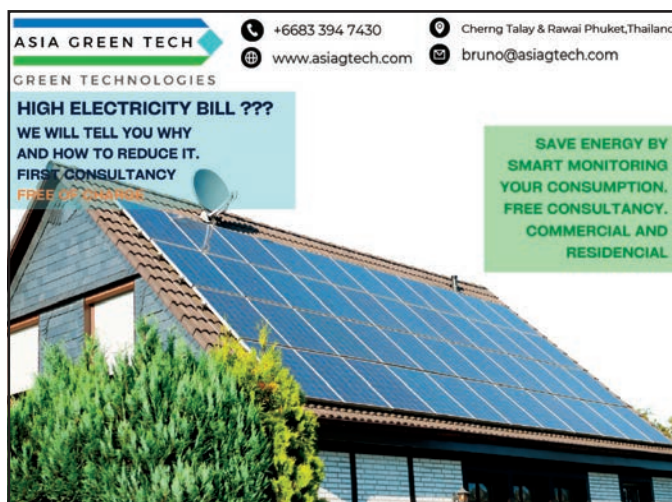
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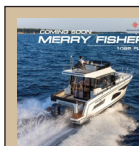
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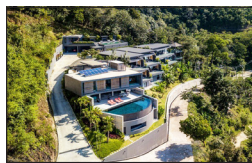
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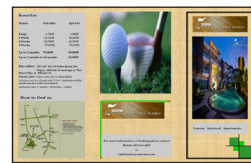
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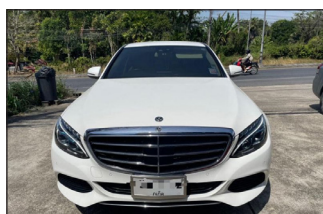


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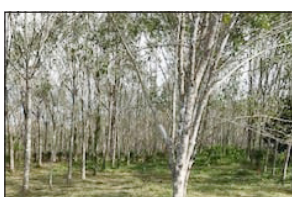
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Can Red Bull be caught in Saudi?

FORMULA ONE

Michael Lamonato
michael@boxofneutrals.com

Red Bull Racing took a commanding victory at the season-opening race in Bahrain, but there's reason not to buy into the pessimism of a whitewash – yet.

George Russell cut a disconsolate figure after the chequered flag fell on the Bahrain Grand Prix.

Max Verstappen took the flag a comfortable victor. His margin over teammate Sergio Perez was 12 seconds, and he was fully 38 seconds ahead of everyone else in a formidable demonstration of his Red Bull Racing car's performance.

"Red Bull have got this championship sewn up," Russell said. "I don't think anyone will be fighting with them this year. They should win every single race this year, is my bet. When it comes to race pace, they're in a very strong position."

The Mercedes driver had more reason than most to feel particularly disappointed. The German team had expected to close the gap, at least a little bit, but instead Russell and teammate Lewis Hamilton finished almost a minute off the pace.

Mercedes reacted swiftly by declaring it would throw its brand-new 2023 car in the bin and start with a clean slate. It's unlikely to



Max Verstappen dominated the season's opening race in Bahrain on Mar 5. Photo: AFP

be a title contender this year.

But the season doesn't hinge on the Silver Arrows.

Ahead of the formerly dominant team finished an Aston Martin and a Ferrari, and there's optimism both teams might be able to make a fight of this season.

The Italian team, a title challenger last year before engine problems derailed its campaign, showed heartening qualifying pace before rampant tyre wear meant speed evaporated completely on race day.

'JUST THE START'

Aston Martin, meanwhile, is the surprise package of the season after making a monumental development step between seasons. An aggressive hiring spree and a cashed-up infrastructure program set up by billionaire owner Lawrence Stroll has started paying early dividends by promoting it into the frontrunning pack ahead of schedule.

The AMR23 was the second-best car in Bahrain, and while the gap to RBR is still large, it has significantly

more development allowance than the reigning champion.

Formula 1 has implemented a sliding scale of development time as an equalisation measure to try to close the field and make the sport more broadly competitive.

Aston Martin, which finished seventh in last year's championship, will have almost 60% more time in the wind tunnel than Red Bull Racing until the end of June, having enjoyed even more than that in the last six months of 2022.

"This is just the start," Fernando Alonso said after finishing third. "This car will change dramatically during the season. That's the plan."

"I heard from the team that two-thirds from this car will change during the season."

"We want to have a good baseline, a good platform to develop the car during 2023 and maybe fight for something bigger next year. But step by step."

Even if Aston Martin can't challenge for an unlikely title this year, taking points off Red Bull Racing might at least prevent the leading team from running away with things, keeping the fight alive long enough for any twists to take hold later in the year. At a minimum it can keep things interesting.

This weekend's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix (Mar 17-19) also takes place on a substantially different circuit type to Bahrain. Much faster, more flowing and with a less abrasive surface, we're unlikely to see the same performance profile between the teams, giving hope in particular to Ferrari and its tyre problems.

Red Bull Racing is still the clear favourite for the title, but it's too early to say the season will disappear in a whitewash or even that the team can't be caught.

It'll just take its title rivals stepping up before it's too late.

Thai teen Eila makes her mark at Singapore Amateur Championship

GOLF

EILA GALITSKY WON the fifth Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific (WAAP) Championship last Sunday (Mar 12) to become the second Thai player to triumph in the region's pre-eminent amateur championship.

Eila, who holds dual nationality of Thailand and Canada, shot a four-under-par 68 in the final round at the Singapore Island Country Club, giving her a four-day aggregate of 14-under 274 and a five-shot win over South Korea's Kim Min-Sol (70).

The 16-year-old from Chiang Mai follows in the footsteps of Athaya Thitikul, who won the inaugural WAAP championship in 2018 in Singapore and rose to No.1 in the world rankings last year.

Eila, 193rd in the world amateur rankings coming into the week, closed with three birdies in her last four holes, with the result never in doubt as she remained rock-



Eila Galitsky with the trophy. Photo: Bangkok Post

solid throughout the day.

"I did not expect this to happen at the beginning of the week," said Eila. "I played my first practice round here and lost five balls that day. At that point, I was thinking making the cut would be a good result."

As the 2023 WAAP champion, Eila earns dream starts in three major cham-

pionships – the Women's British Open, the Evian Championship and the Chevron Championship – as well as the Hana Financial Group Championship, Australian Open, the 120th Women's Amateur Championship and an invitation to play in the Augusta National Women's Amateur (ANWA) later this month. *Bangkok Post*

Ding wins 6-red world title

SNOOKER

DING JUNHUI OF CHINA edged Thai star Thepchaiya Un-nooh 8-6 in a riveting showdown for the Pathum Thani 6-red World Championship title last Saturday (Mar 11).

This was the second 6-red world crown for the Chinese star who has slipped to No.24 in the current world rankings.

Thepchaiya was also seeking a second victory in the tournament, which was sanctioned by the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association, after his triumph in 2015.

Ding received the prestigious winner's trophy graciously donated by His Majesty the King and B4.2 million in prize money for his victory at the Convention Centre of Thammasat University's Rangsit campus in Pathum Thani. Thepchaiya collected a sum of B1.35mn for finishing runner-up.

Ding admitted after the match that luck was on his side in the final.

"There were many Thepchaiya fans at the venue and that put me under a lot pressure in the beginning," said Ding, a three-time winner of the UK



Ding Junhui lifts the trophy. Photo: Bangkok Post

Championship.

"However, the balls favoured me most of the time so I relaxed, hoping that my luck would see me through."

"I was also lucky that Thepchaiya missed the black in the 14th frame otherwise it would have been 7-7 and the match could have gone either way after that."

The Thai world No.45, who entered the final after a thrilling 7-6 come-from-behind win over Iran's Hossein Vafaei on Friday, was never able to get into the rhythm in the best-of-15 frames final.

Thepchaiya threatened to kick-start a rally and overtake Ding several times during the course of the clash but the Chinese was able to wrest back the upper hand on every occasion.

The only time Thepchaiya was able to get level with Ding was at 2-2 and that was after

the Chinese had produced breaks of 72 and 71 in the first two frames.

Ding then pinched three frames in a row to open a 5-2 gap and eventually Thepchaiya, a 37-year-old from Nakhon Nayok, was able to narrow the deficit to 7-6.

He could have evened the frame score but missed a crucial black, allowing Ding to steal the frame and the title.

A total of eight Thai players took part in the B11mn tournament with four of them – 2022 women's world champion Nucharat Wongharuethai, Poramin Danjirakul, Kritsanut Lertsattayathorn and Akani Songsermsawad – failing to make it past the first stage.

Wattana Phu-Ob-Orm, Noppon Saengkham and Dechawat Poomjaeng were eliminated in the last-16 stage which ended on Mar 9.

Bangkok Post

Gunners stroll at the Cottage

FOOTBALL

AFP

Arsenal powered five points clear at the top of the Premier League with a stylish 3-0 win at Fulham last Sunday (Mar 12) to keep their title chase firmly on track.

Mikel Arteta's side had seen second-placed Manchester City close the gap with a 1-0 victory at Crystal Palace on Saturday but the Gunners responded with the kind of composed display at Craven Cottage that has been the hallmark of their unexpected title charge.

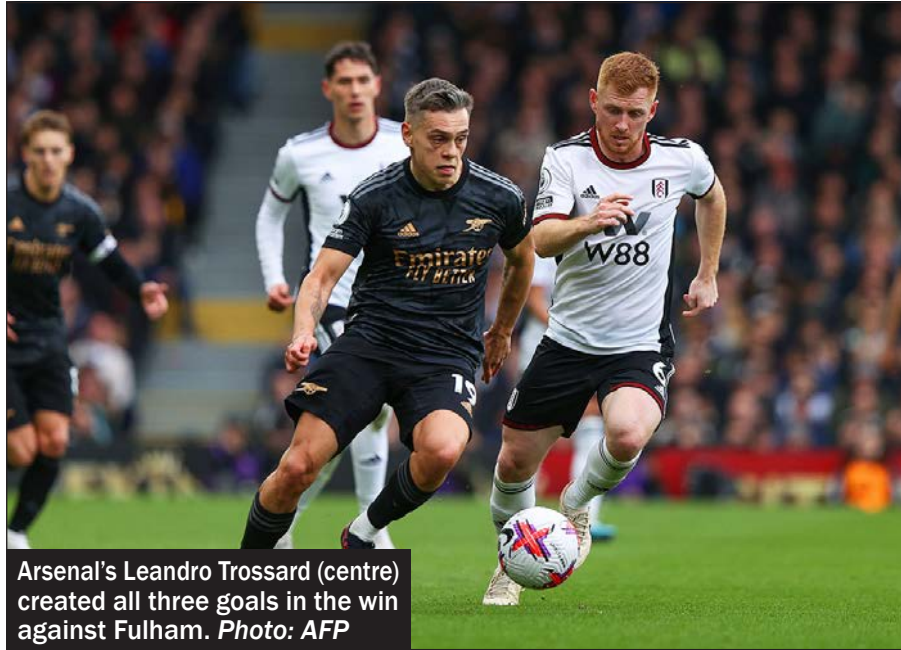
First-half goals from Gabriel Magalhães, Gabriel Martinelli and Martin Odegaard – all set up by Leandro Trossard – ensured a fifth consecutive league win and, with 11 league games left, the north Londoners have the title in their sights.

It was Arsenal's 11th victory from 14 away league matches this season, underlining the durability and maturity that has them in position to win the title for the first time since Arsene Wenger's 'Invincibles' in 2004.

"We scored beautiful goals. I'm really happy to win away from home, especially with a clean sheet," Arteta said.

Elsewhere, despite dominating for almost the entire 94 minutes at a sodden Selhurst Park, Pep Guardiola's men had to rely on an Erling Haaland penalty 12 minutes from time to see off Palace.

After Ilkay Gundogan was chopped down inside the box by Michael Olise, Haaland kept his cool to roll home his 34th goal of the season from the spot.



Arsenal's Leandro Trossard (centre) created all three goals in the win against Fulham. Photo: AFP

Earlier Saturday, Liverpool were brought back to earth with a bang after inflicting Manchester United's record-equalling defeat in a 7-0 win the previous weekend.

Philip Billing scored the only goal for Bournemouth to lift the Cherries out of the bottom three as Mohamed Salah fired a second half penalty wide.

At Old Trafford, Brazilian midfielder Casemiro was sent off as third-placed Manchester United had to settle for a drab stalemate against bottom of the table Southampton.

"This game was influenced by the referee," complained United manager Erik ten Hag.

"Casemiro played over 500 games in Europe and never once got a red card.

Now he has two in the Premier League. It is inconsistent," he lamented.

Meanwhile, Newcastle United climbed above Liverpool into fifth place with a 2-1 win against Wolves at St James' Park and Tottenham overcame Nottingham Forest 3-1, thanks to a brace from captain Harry Kane.

Chelsea maintained their mini resurgence with a 3-1 win at Leicester City while Brighton fought out a hugely entertaining 2-2 draw with Leeds United.

Everton moved out of the bottom three and up to 15th thanks to a third 1-0 win in four home games under Sean Dyche while West Ham were booed off despite moving out of the relegation zone with a 1-1 draw against Aston Villa at the London Stadium.

Thailand to host Asian Athletics Champs

ATHLETICS

THAILAND WILL HOST the 25th edition of the Asian Athletics Championships later this year, it has been confirmed.

It will be the first time Thailand has hosted the occasion since its inception in 1973 and by far the largest athletics event ever organised and held in the country.

Pol Gen Sun Sarutanont, President of the Athletics Association of Thailand, confirmed the news on Mar 8, adding that it was a great honour for the country to be selected to host the auspicious occasion.

"Thailand is honoured to be selected by the Asian Athletics Federation (AAA) to host the 25th Asian Athletics Championships," Pol Gen Sun commented.

"It is a privilege for the country to host the event for the first time ever, something made extra special considering this year marks the official 50th anniversary of the AAA, a landmark



Photo: Sports Authority of Thailand

occasion," he added.

The Championships will be held on July 12-16 at Supachalasai Stadium National Stadium in Pattaya and will serve as the qualification stage for athletes hoping to participate at the 2023 World Athletics Championships in Budapest, Hungary, on Aug 19-27.

It will also serve as an important pre-cursor to athletes who are striving to secure national team qualification and participation at the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, France next year.

It is the first time the Asian Athletics Championships has been held since 2019 after the COVID-19 pandemic forced cancellation of the 2021 event in Hangzhou, China.

The Phuket News

Cricket bonanza at Blue Tree

CRICKET

Continued from page 16

Accepting the award for The Bell Ends, the effervescent Emma Webster praised the tournament, while calling for more female participation in Phuket cricket. The Diplomats also endured an early departure, but proudly having all the established sides applauding their involvement and hoping for their – and The Bell Ends' – introduction to regular cricket competition on the island.

Seeking to retain their title, Andaman A battled Patong Warriors in the first semi-final, and a low-scoring yet exciting encounter ended with the confirmation that Andaman skipper, Rishi Sadaranghani, would relinquish his hold on the trophy, mainly due to the exploits in the field of Warriors' Ahmed Mughal and Adeel Ali, with the former claiming a hat-trick in the process to cap an outstanding all-round performance.

Fading light encouraged a quick return to action with KCC putting an end to the Island Boys' adventure, before immediately returning to face Patong Warriors in the tournament grand final.

Concern for players' safety due to limited light motivated umpire Drew to reduce the number of balls per over before Warriors set a very competitive 73 from their five overs.

A brave effort in reply from Warriors, and especially Shad Wahid, was ultimately not enough, with 11 runs required off the last delivery met with a dot ball and ecstatic



Photo: Bandit Namprasit

celebrations from the Warriors.

Speaking prior to the presentation, Blue Tree's deputy managing director Paolo Randone and general manager Bo Johan Wallen both praised their team's efforts in promoting and hosting the event under the guidance of former professional cricket player and Blue Tree sports coach, Ashan Fonseka.

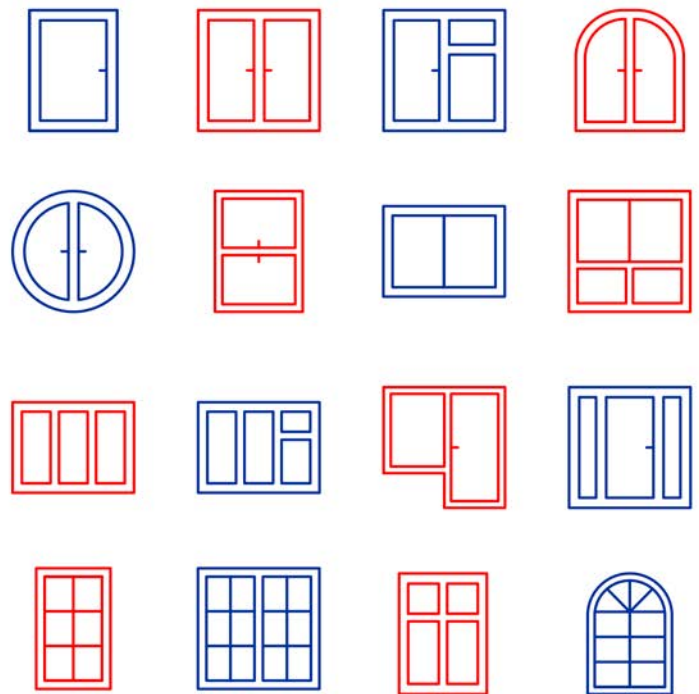
Tournament awards were presented to Mughal for both player of the final and player of the series, with best batter going to KCC's Iqbal Malik and best bowler to Anddaman's Anoop, while Penguins were Plate winners.

A very special mention and gratitude must go to Seemant Raju and Adam Drew for their commitment to the day's proceeding, maintaining scoring, schedule and discipline with utmost composure.

Cricket continues this weekend with the Phuket T20 league final being contested between Patong Warriors and Andaman CC at the ACG starting at 1:30 pm. Neil Quail



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Asia Athletics event heads to Thailand > p15

IN A LEAGUE OF HER OWN

Aon makes history at Kamala Bowls Club



Tournament winner Aon Sampert (centre) is joined by Sammy Sampert (left) and Dean Simmonds, who she managed to overcome in the final. Photo: Robert Knight

BOWLS

Robert Knight

Competition history was made on March 6 at Kamala Bowls Club as Aon Sampert became both the first female player and first ever Thai competitor to be crowned Phuket Singles Open Champion.

Aon bowled superbly throughout to rightfully claim the title. Not only did she re-write the record books, but it was also fitting that a female competitor won the tournament during the week when International Women's Day was celebrated.

The "Blue Riband" Phuket Open Singles Championship is one of the most prestigious, popular and keenly-contested competitions hosted at the club, evident this year with

a record-breaking 28 bowlers representing nine countries turning out.

With such a large number of entries, a full eight rounds of games were needed to be played out in the searing heat, with the winner required to play and win five matches before declared the champion.

With last year's champion and serial winner "The Special Ron" Blackwood having decamped elsewhere and the experienced competition so well matched, the ability to predict the winner was almost impossible. Not one person in the field could be considered a rookie player and everyone would have to be on their mettle to avoid elimination. There were even several competitors sporting their winners shirts from previous years in the hope of grabbing another this time around.

In the preliminary round and last 16, with such a finely balanced field it was no surprise that many games were only decided on the final end, whilst four of the games needed an extra end to decide the winners.

Managing to successfully navigate their passage to the quarter-finals were Duncan Kennedy, Dean Simmonds, Glenn Collins, Sammy "The President" Sampert, Nobby Dublin and Peter "Da Kaiser" Kuschel, while the final quarter-finals contest was to be an all-female affair between Dot Barker and Aon Sunnee Sampert.

All the matches were nail-biting contests that went right down to the wire with Dean, Sammy, Aon and Nobby all winning their games to advance to the semi-finals.

Nerves could have played

a part as both Nobby and Sammy were making their first ever semi-final appearances, but, given how close the contests generally had been all day, it was perhaps somewhat surprising that Dean and Aon made such light work of their games to progress to the final.

GASPS OF DISBELIEF

Both Dean and Aon had tasted success and gained invaluable experience previously in pairs finals, with Aon winning the 12th Phuket Open Pairs Championship only last month, but this was the first time that either of them were in a singles final.

The early stages of the final were extremely close with Dean bowling some great deliveries and often holding 2 or 3 shots, only to be thwarted as Aon produced some stunning deliveries

herself; one in particular was a world class bowl, drawing gasps of disbelief from the watching crowd.

After five of the 10 ends, and helped by a pivotal score of 3 on end 5, Aon had stretched her lead to 7-1. It was a scoreline which did not necessarily reflect the quality of bowls that Dean was producing, which would usually have been sufficient to win any contest. However, Aon was in a league of her own, delivering some stunning bowls that left the onlooking crowd aghast in admiration.

An uphill but not impossible task now faced Dean and the pressure and fatigue soon started to show as his length started to suffer, leaving Aon chance to capitalise and claim the title with a comprehensive victory.

Dean's consolation in

defeat was the award of the "Canadian" medal to mark his role as the tournament's most consistent bowler.

In the "plate" final for those who were knocked out in the first round, Carl Mesham picked up his second plate of the year when he beat the recently returned Rupert Maunder 9-5.

Overall it was a truly fantastic tournament played in the greatest of spirits by all, with extra kudos to Aon for triumphing in the biggest turn out of players ever witnessed at the club.

Kamala Lawn Bowls Club is open six days a week. All equipment is provided and large parties can be gladly catered for. For further information please contact the club on 0948987476 or 0991307255.

Warriors light up Blue Tree Cricket sixes

CRICKET

PHUKET CRICKET STAMPED another step in its ever-increasing popularity with the second Blue Tree Sixes held last Sunday (Mar 12) where Patong Warriors secured their claim as one of the island's top teams to etch their name on the 2023 trophy.

A purpose-built wicket for the tournament ensured the capacity eight-team schedule was swiftly filled with several established Phuket teams, but more excitingly having a

number of newly formed sides participating and acquitting themselves wonderfully, both on and off the pitch.

Matches got underway at 9am following a formal flag raising and anthem ceremony, with the 2022 champions Andaman A easing past Island Boys in Group 1, before Patong Warriors marked their intentions with a comfortable win over Andaman B in the Group 2 opener.

Putting a side together for this tournament, Rupert Scott captained The Diplomats for their inaugural match, playing against the Patong Penguins in Group 1. Although a first

win was not to be, Diplomat players impressed with classy all-round performances with bat and ball.

Entertainment was delivered in droves with the introduction of another new team, The Bell Ends, captivating the growing crowd with their energy and enthusiasm in taking on one of the tournament favorites, Kashmir CC in the second Group 2 game. Unfortunately, the Bell End buzz was no match for the laser-focused determination of KCC, who offered no respite to overwhelm the new kids on the block.

As group matches progressed, the

main title contenders soon emerged with results generally going to form, while one of the day's most enthralling games ended in a controversial tie between old rivals, Andaman A and Patong Penguins, when a single run off the last ball would have secured maximum points for Andaman. Whipping past Penguins' Sunny Bowry, tournament head umpire and technical official Adam Drew deemed a legal delivery, as urgent appeals erupted for a wide ball brought an end to the match, but the beginning of a day-long talking point.



Photo: Bandit Namprasit

Group games concluded by mid-afternoon, seeing the exit of four teams, but not before the Fair Play trophy was awarded by Bom Witcha Thothammachart, Blue Tree's sport and entertainment manager, to the Bell Ends for their zeal and positivity throughout the day.

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