

CALL CENTRE OPENS FOR STRANDED RUSISANS, UKRAINIANS > PAGE 3

HARD TRUTHS

PHUKET TOURISM SUFFERING UNDER SLEW OF CRISES

Patong Beach has yet to see large numbers of tourists. Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

The Phuket News
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Phuket's tourism industry is unlikely to achieve the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) target of 10 million visitors by year's end as it struggles to move forward while coping with delays in reopening the country to tourism under COVID, fallout from the Russia-Ukraine conflict and long-term problems that were "inevitable".

Bill Barnett, Managing Director of hospitality consultancy C9 Hotelworks, delivered the news via an interview broadcast by state news agency NBT World last week, following the Thailand Tourism Forum 2022, held earlier this month.

"We have learned from the past

two years. We have learned from the Phuket Sandbox. We have learned from how the public and private sectors can work together. I have been in Thailand for 20 years and it's the first time I have seen that level of cooperation," Mr Barnett noted.

"What we have also seen is that we need to see the communities engage. That's really important because going through this pandemic there has been no roadmap, and having the community feel safe to have tourists come back and also be able to work. They are the ones providing the workforce in the hotels, so you are going to have partnerships everywhere, and you have to work with your own neighbours. That's very important," he added.

Mr Barnett gave a double-edged

appraisal of the island's tourism sector, which has been battered by meagre tourism figures during the past two years.

"Thailand has great infrastructure for the service economy. They are skilled, they have experience, they have capacity – but something they don't have, especially in terms of the past few years, is that they lack leadership and innovation," he said.

"That is something Bill Heinecke [CEO of Minor Group] mentioned at the conference [TTF 2022] as well. There has to be that edge with innovation. Business is changing."

"What happened during the pandemic was a trend that was going to happen anyway. The rising cost of labour, the lack of skilled labour for hospitality and [the lack of] innovative

style of operating hotels as you would see in the West," Mr Barnett noted.

"We have to be leaner and meaner with the approach to hospitality. We can no longer just throw endless people at it anymore. We have to make careers in hospitality and train people better and innovate our systems as well.

"Sustainable growth, not just double-digit growth every year and posting new numbers every year – and that comes down to planning," Mr Barnett explained.

"That comes down to having a master plan. Too often when we are looking at the P's we are talking about promotion, not master planning, and that's something still lacking in the government very much.

"I come from Phuket and Phuket doesn't really have a tourism master...

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Tourism players look to bypass Russia sanctions



LIFE PAGE 8

Andy Tong Dee marks one year of rocking it live



SPORT PAGE 16

Good winds for PYC's fifth Sailor's Regatta



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PHUKET'S QUALITY TILE BOUTIQUE



Navy rescues Thais after 13 months at sea > p4

Entry rules targetted first to go

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...plan. We know how to promote, but we don't know what is going to happen in the next five to 10 years," he pointed out.

"I think more important is the government's ability to mobilise infrastructure projects for tourism going forward and to invest in these projects. You can't just take from tourism and say we want more tourists, we want to have more, more, more... without re-investing.

"There has to be investment, not only on the eastern seaboard, but other sectors as well. The government has to invest back into its tourism industry to regain and stabilise it," he said.

Phuket Sandbox is no longer a model to recapture tourists, Mr Barnett said.

"Right now we are losing ground to other places. Over the past month we have incredibly lost ground to places like Bali. Today Bali is opening up without quarantine. We see the Maldives, we see other countries around the world embrace and get over the pandemic and try to keep moving on with their tourism profiles.

"Test & Go has to be Test & Gone. That's number 1. To be able to be competitive we have to raise the bar and do what other countries in similar positions are doing," he said.



TAT Governor Yuthasak Supasorn will appeal to the CCSA to ease the COVID entry rules for tourists. Photo: TAT News

Tourism recovery will now likely take years, Mr Barnett noted.

"We are at the beginning of a new cycle. and I think we are in uncharted territory. People keep asking what is the new norm? There is no new norm because the world is upside down right now. This is like a tourism cold war right now in terms of what we're having. In terms of fuel prices, in terms of the war in Ukraine, the political instability we're seeing certainly is causing a lot of issues

"Practically speaking, our projections for the longer term really go back to 2024. It is going to take time. When you're in a new cycle you

Thailand Pass, marking a milestone for the industry.

The agency has to start working on new protocols over the next four months, he added.

However, an RT-PCR COVID test result from tourists remains essential for the time being as the country is struggling with an overwhelming daily caseload, Mr Yuthasak said.

The TAT plans to propose further easing of travel regulations at the next Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) meeting today (Mar 18).

The agency wants to closely monitor the Russia-Ukraine conflict as it has triggered soaring oil prices, which directly affect airline costs. The TAT will wait until the end of this month before providing a new tourism forecast for this year, he said.

"Tourism is still a key engine to revive our economy, even though revenue was stymied by negative factors," he said.

The tourism revenue goal is B1.28 trillion this year, of which B626 billion is to come from 10 million international tourists. Another B656bn is to come from 160mn domestic trips.

CASUALTY OF WAR

The latest study by the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce

(UTCC) has indicated that the Russia-Ukraine conflict is estimated to inflict B244.7 billion worth of damage to the Thai economy, dragging GDP growth to only 2-3% this year, if it is extended for the entire year.

"The Thai economy is highly likely to grow at a rate of 2-3%, with inflation staying at 5% this year if the Russia-Ukraine conflict is prolonged throughout this year," said Thanavath Phonvichai, president of the UTCC. "This scenario will lead Thailand to enter technical stagflation in 2022."

Stagflation is a combination of stagnation and inflation, reports the *Bangkok Post*. It describes an economic condition characterised by slow growth and high unemployment (economic stagnation) mixed with rising prices (inflation).

Stagflation in the 1970s saw many developed economies suffer rapid inflation and high unemployment as a result of the oil crisis.

However, Mr Thanavath insisted, "Nevertheless, it's too early to make such a dreadful scenario, as the situation is still full of high uncertainties... The university is still maintaining the Thai economic growth forecast at the rate it made in November last year, but will wait some time before making a new revision, possibly in April."

Phuket officials deny hotels refusing Russian credit cards

THE PHUKET OFFICE OF the Public Relations Department (PR Phuket) has reported that the claims of Russians having their credit cards refused for making payments in Phuket or Krabi is fake news.

Russians having their credit cards refused is because the credit card system has deemed the transactions "invalid", PR Phuket reported on Mar 9.

Of note, PR Phuket cited a report posted by the national Anti-Fake News Center (AFNC).

Meanwhile, the national Anti-Fake News Center reported that the investigation into the issue was carried out by PR Phuket.

Also of note, the report shared by PR Phuket, sourced to the Anti-Fake News Center, made no mention that any credit cards presented Russian tourists were being refused because the hotel or other business had refused to accept it or because of the international sanctions against major Russian banks in effect in response to the invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine.

"According to the news published on the issue of hotels in Krabi and Phuket refraining from accepting credit cards from Russian tourists,

the Anti-Fake News Center conducted a fact check by the Phuket Public Relations Office and found that such issues is misinformation," said the report.

"If there is news indicating that hotels in Krabi and Phuket are not accepting credit cards from Russian tourists because of the unrest [sic] that has resulted in complicated international financial transactions, the Phuket Provincial Public Relations Office has examined and clarified the aforementioned issue that at present there is no refraining from accepting credit cards from foreign tourists.

"Instead, it is due to the problem of the tourist credit card system, which cannot be used. The operator [sic] therefore offered to pay the expenses in cash instead of using a credit payment system to reduce the risk," the report claimed.

"So information and images are posted and continue to share now therefore it is distorted information. Therefore asking people to cooperate,



The notice issued by the Anti-Fake News Center.

do not share, do not forward such news in order to prevent potential impacts," the report added.

The report made no mention that Chattan Kunjara Na Ayudhya, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Deputy Governor for Marketing for Europe, Americas and the Middle East, had confirmed the reports.

The "fake news" claim also failed to identify that the Phuket Info Center, operated by the Phuket office of the Ministry of Interior – which operates under the Phuket Governor's Office – had also shared the news on its own official webpage on Mar 4.

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Governor Yuthasak Supasorn had already openly recognised the issue of transactions via Russian banks and credit cards being blocked.

Visa and Mastercard themselves have suspended their operations in Russia. Mastercard cards issued by Russian banks are no longer to be supported by the company's network abroad. Visa similarly said that cards issued in Russia would no longer work outside Russia.

The *Phuket News* received independent confirmation on Mar 4 that certain credit cards issued by banks in Russia were already being refused.

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Looking to bypass sanctions

The Phuket News
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The President of the Phuket Tourist Association has proposed several solutions to assist Russians currently in Phuket navigate the challenges they are facing with their payment options.

Many Russian commercial banks are cut off from the SWIFT system and card payment giants Visa and Mastercard announced on Mar 5 they were suspending their operations in Russia amidst the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This meant thousands of Russian tourists in Thailand would no longer be able to use their Visa and Mastercard cards while abroad, often their preferred method of payment.

PTA President Bhummikitti Ruktaengam said on Mar 11 there are currently around 3,000 Russian tourists stranded in Phuket and unable to secure flights to return to their homeland, largely due to the fact they are unable to access financial funds.

Mr Bhummikitti proposed three possible solutions to the Tourism Association of Thailand (TAT) and the Bank of Thailand (BoT) to overcome this issue, despite them seemingly ignoring the global sanctions imposed:

1) Allow Thai commercial banks to support Russia's Mir payments



Phuket Tourist Association President Bhummikitti Ruktaengam. Photo: PR Phuket / file

system which provides electronic fund transfers.

2) Allow the usage of Chinese supporting payment systems such as UnionPay

3) Permit cryptocurrencies to be utilised as a way of payment

"Right now, there are probably about 3,000 Russian tourists stranded in Phuket," Mr Bhummikitti said.

"The majority would have arrived here in late February or early March but are now experiencing problems with accessing funds. This three-pronged proposal to TAT and BoT would offer a solution to this problem," he added.

He further explained that some Russian tourists are unable to return on their previously booked flights

due to widespread suspension of flights in and out of Russia.

"The direct flight from and to Moscow to Phuket has been discontinued," he said. "This is true for Russian tourists on both eastern and western sides of Moscow. If they want to return to Russia then they will need to book fresh flights to alternative locations who may have a possible connection, or else travel over land. This can be very costly and availability is limited."

A call centre was established in Phuket on Mar 9 to help tourists from Ukraine and Russia unable to return home because of flight cancellations and economic sanctions imposed. The call centre will be open from 8:30am-7pm until Mar 22.

Mr Bhummikitti added that the numbers of Russian tourists arriving has dropped more than 75% recently due to Russia's suspension of flights. He added that if the Russian invasion of Ukraine is prolonged then it will inevitably have an adverse effect on global tourism and travel expenses will increase significantly.

"We have already seen a significant rise in oil prices globally which will hinder the spending power of tourists everywhere," he said, adding that Thailand may have to focus on new tourist markets in future such as Australia, India and the Middle East to ensure its tourism industry stays afloat.

Mr Bhummikitti said he thought economic sanctions imposed by Europe on Russia would eventually backfire. As a result, there would be even fewer tourists from Europe to Phuket.

STRANDED

State news agency NNT on Monday (Mar 14) recognised that thousands of Russian tourists in Thailand were reportedly struggling to find a way home, as international sanctions imposed over the Russia-Ukraine crisis hit holidaymakers.

"Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, a slew of international sanctions was imposed on businesses and banks, with some Russian airlines cancelling flights and global payment firms suspend-

ing services. Russian tourists have been among the largest groups of visitors returning to Thailand's beach resorts since pandemic restrictions were lifted, but many are now stranded without a return ticket," NNT reported.

Chattan Kunjara Na Ayudhya, deputy governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), reported that 3,100 Russians remain stranded in Phuket, with 2,000 in Samui and smaller numbers in Krabi, Phang Nga and Bangkok.

"While Thailand has not prohibited Russian flights, international airspace restrictions have caused some companies, including Russia's flagship Aeroflot, to cancel services, forcing tourists to seek alternative routes, such as through the Middle East with different carriers," the report said.

Many tourists have also been impacted by the suspension of Visa and Mastercard operations, it added.

Pandemic travel restrictions have affected the Kingdom's tourism-dominated economy, but restrictions were eased in 2022, resulting in a surge of visitors.

According to the TAT, approximately 23,000 Russians visited Thailand in January of this year. Russian tourists previously accounted for the seventh-largest share of visitors to the kingdom, with approximately 1.5 million visiting Thailand in 2019.

Call centre opens to help Russians, Ukrainians

A TOURIST CALL CENTRE LAUNCHED to provide assistance to Russians and Ukrainians stuck in Phuket due to cancelled flights or unable to pay for hotel or other accommodation due to sanctions against Russia for the invasion of Ukraine has already helped more than a dozen people, Phuket officials have announced.

The centre helped 15 people on its first day of operations on Mar 9, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Phuket office Director Nanthasiri Ronnasiri said last week.

In announcing the opening of the call centre, Phuket Vice Governor Pichet Panapong said that the number of Russians and Ukrainians stuck in Phuket due to the invasion totalled about 5,000 people.

The call centre has Russian speakers available to provide assistance, Ms Nanthasiri said.

"Most tourists have asked for help with airlines, flights, visas, credit cards and the cost of accommodation and return travel expenses to their home country," she said.

Ms Nanthasiri noted that not only tourists in Phuket and neighboring provinces had contacted the call centre, but also tourists in Bangkok, "because the call center in Phuket was the first to launch to assist stranded tourists", she said.

"We will compile a list of all travelers who request assistance and separate them into two groups: travelers wishing to return to their home country; and those who want



The Russian Consulate in Phuket has called for all Russians who arrived on Ural Airlines flights, which are now cancelled, to contact the embassy for help. Photo: via Russian Consulate in Phuket

to stay but are unable to access funds to pay for services," she said.

"The list will be presented to the Governor of the TAT to expedite further assistance to the tourists," Ms Nanthasiri added.

Somwong Pruksalamats, a Russian-speaking guide now working at the call centre, said he had fielded calls from both Russians and Ukrainians.

"For visa issues, we coordinate with Phuket Immigration to assist," he said.

Mr Somwong added that most tourists are very happy with the assistance provided.

"They felt that they were not abandoned," he said.

The call centre can be contacted at 093-9372086 or 094-8191124, or by email to hktasst@gmail.com

The centre is open from 8:30am to 7pm each day.

The centre is currently expected to remain open until at least Mar 22. *The Phuket News*



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Navy rescues labour-trapped crew

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

A n LPG tanker was brought to Phuket under escort by a Royal Thai Navy patrol ship last week after five crew on board requested help. One of the five crewmen said he had not been ashore for 13 months.

The Thai Maritime Enforcement Command Centre Area 3 (THAI-MECC 3), a major operations unit at the Royal Thai Navy Third Area Command based at Cape Panwa, reported that it had received a request for help from the ship, the Schumi 7, at 5:30pm on Mar 7.

The crewman who made contact was Noppadol Boonmee, who said he and other crewmen wanted to be brought ashore.

Mr Noppadol said that he had signed a nine-month contract to work on board the vessel, but that it had been 13 months since the ship last made port in Phuket. The claim was verified by the Phuket port officials of the Marine Department.

The Schumi 7, a Thai-registered LPG tanker weighing 4,961 gross

tonnes, was about seven nautical miles offshore from Thap Lamu in Phang Nga when Mr Noppadol contacted the Navy. The ship was en route to deliver LPG to Bangladesh.

The Third Area Command, which has a naval base at Thap Lamu, dispatched the HMTS Laem Sing and patrol boat Tor 229 with labour officials

on board. The Navy intercepted the Schumi 7 at about 8pm.

There were 18 crewmen on the tanker, under the command of Captain Suthichai Duangdara. Five of them, including Mr Boonmee, confirmed they wanted to leave the vessel.

The tanker was then escorted back to Ao Makham, on Phuket's east coast.

All of the crewmen were tested for COVID-19 by ATK before being allowed to disembark the ship. All of them tested negative.

At last report officials were examining the employment contracts and investigating the employment conditions on the ship to determine whether legal action were to be taken.



Photo: Royal Thai Navy / Third Area Command

Victims of house fire receive a helping hand

PHUKET OFFICIALS have reached out to help a poor family of a father and his three young children after a house fire destroyed most of their belongings earlier this week.

Firefighters were called to the modest home, a rented room in Moo 3 Pa Khlok, at about 3pm on Mar 9.

The occupants, Suchart Wangdee, 53, and his three young children, suffered no injuries in the fire, but much of their belongings were destroyed by the smoke and flames, including the children's school supplies.

Firefighters were able to contain the fire before it spread to any of the adjoining rooms.

An electrical short circuit is believed to have caused the fire.

Phuket Vice Governor Anuphap Rodkwan Yodrabum arrived at the home on Mar 10 to deliver a bag of rice and a some money to help alleviate the "initial



Photo: PR Phuket

suffering", said a report by the Phuket office of the Public Relations Department (PR Phuket).

Joining Vice Governor Anuphap was Thalang District Chief Mr Bancha Thanu-in and officials from relevant government agencies.

After hearing of the fire, Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew ordered the relevant agencies to help the victims, along with coordinating with the landlord to arrange an empty room for victims to stay temporarily, the report by PR Phuket said.

The Phuket News

ISOC leads Phuket fire preparedness training

THE PHUKET BRANCH of the Internal Security Operations Command (Isoc), which serves as the political arm of the Thai military, led a fire preparedness training exercise at Nai Harn last week attended by 45 community leaders and local residents

"Communities are the first line to face disasters," Rear Admiral Kanokpol Pimthong, Deputy Chief of the Phuket ISOC branch, said at the event on Mar 10.

"If the community or locality is prepared to face the situation and can be initially self-reliant to respond to the situation, it will help reduce the loss of both life and property," he added.

The disaster-preparedness training was held at Nai Harn Lake public area. All participants were trained in fire suppression and water rescue training.

Leading the training were training officers from the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM) Region 18 office, based in Phuket.

The activities aimed to enable community leaders and citizens to learn and understand disaster management

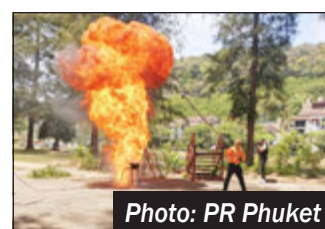


Photo: PR Phuket

practices, explained Capt Ekomsan Deeprasert, Phuket ISOC's Head of Policy and Planning.

"So that they are ready to participate in disaster risk reduction and support disaster prevention and mitigation activities," he added.

"At present, disasters, both natural and human-caused, have tended to become more severe and unable to be stopped," R/Adm Kanokpol said.

"Therefore, supporting the community to have knowledge and understanding and participating in disaster response and management both before and after disasters is extremely important," he said.

"By doing so, they will be able to reduce the risks and impacts of disasters and increase safety," he added.

The training exercise on Mar 10 followed a large wildfire razing some 50 rai of hillside land at Laem Krathing,

just north of Nai Harn Beach, last month.

Some 16 tourists stranded on rocks at Laem Krathing were rescued by Navy personnel after it was realised they had no safe means of escaping the fire by land.

Fire teams doused the smaller continuing brush fires to contain any further spread, with special attention given to preventing the fire from getting any closer to a nearby resort. A small fire break was created to protect some local houses.

Firefighters remained on watch throughout the next day as small wildfires continued to burn through the night as the fire burned itself out.

Dry grass and strong winds had helped the fire to spread quickly, Rawai Mayor Aroon Soros noted.

"During this period in Phuket, it rarely rains, causing dry grass to become more fuel for fire," Mayor Aroon said.

"As for what started the fire, there are only two possible causes. One is the hot weather and dry grass leading to the fire starting naturally. The other is a discarded cigarette butt," he said.

The Phuket News

Phuket slated to become country's 'Metaverse City'

The Phuket News
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The Minister of Tourism and Sports and Minister of Digital Economy and Society was in Phuket last week to lead discussions on the vision of establishing Phuket as a "Metaverse City".

Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn was the keynote speaker at an event hosted at Boat Lagoon on Mar 11 focused on "Transforming Thai tourism using technology" and creating Thailand's first Metaverse City in Phuket.

Vice Governor Pichet Panapong opened the event, describing the further tourism potential and aspirations of Phuket as a leading destination.

He was then joined on stage by Wichai Thongtang, Chairman of Bitkub World Tech Co Ltd, and Jirayut Sub Sri Sopha, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Bitkub Capital Group Holdings Co Ltd.

Further discussions involving officials and industry experts centred around promoting tourism and wellness with digital technology and how by applying technology tools



Tourism Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn at the launch event. Photo: Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn / Facebook

of the future such as artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), Phuket can become a leader in the field.

Phuket has been chosen as the pilot area to become the nation's first Metaverse City because of its reputation as a leading tourism province, the audience was told.

According to the xrtoday website, "The notion of the metaverse – recently propelled into the mainstream by Facebook's rebranding as Meta – will transform how we inhabit the world around us... the metaverse can be defined as a

simulated digital environment that uses augmented reality, virtual reality, and blockchain, along with concepts from social media, to create spaces for rich user interaction mimicking the real world."

Seoul announced last year that it aimed to become the first city to enter the Metaverse where, according to Euronews, it "intends to create a virtual communication ecosystem for all areas of its municipal administration. This would include economic, cultural, tourism, educational and civic service, in three stages.

"If this project becomes

a reality, Seoul citizens will soon be able to put on their VR headsets to meet city officials for virtual consultations. They will even be able to attend mass events."

Given the right levels of development support and promotion it is believed Phuket has the potential and ability to harness digital innovation methods to follow a similar path to its South Korean counterpart and continue to advance as a leading tourism destination.

No financial figures or cost projections were mentioned although Seoul has reportedly invested KRW 3.9 billion (B101bn) into its efforts already, so significant funding would be required to even get the project off the ground.

Earlier on Mar 11, Mr Phiphat visited the area in the north of the island that has been designated for the construction of the Andaman International Sports Complex and Training Center.

Mr Phiphat was joined by Dr Kongsak Yodmanee, Governor of the Sports Authority of Thailand, as they surveyed the area by boat.

Police checkpoint on bypass road nets two offenders

POLICE SET UP A CHECKPOINT on the bypass road on Mar 8 to observe and enforce safe and correct road safety procedures among drivers which netted a grand total of two offences.

Despite being on the lookout for offences such as speeding, dangerous overtaking, driving while using a mobile phone and driving a motorcycle without a helmet during a three-hour timespan, there were only two cases of violation attributed to driving with an invalid licence, police confirmed.

The checkpoint was set up on Chalerm Phrakiat Ror IX Rd in Rassada and was operational from 8:30am to 11:30am under the direction of Phuket Town Police Chief Col Sarawut Chuprasit and Deputy Superintendent Lt Col Satit Nurit.

There were a total of eight officers at the site overseeing the campaign, police confirmed.

They reported stopping a total of two motorcycles and eight vehicles (cars, trucks, vans) during the three hours and the only offences uncovered were two people driving without a valid licence,



Photo: Phuket Police

who were duly reprimanded.

Officers confirmed that they were specifically on the lookout for the following offence categories:

1. Driving without a licence
2. Driving without wearing a helmet
3. Driving with "accessories"
4. Driving without wearing seat belts
5. Using a mobile phone while driving
6. Traffic light violations
7. Overtaking in a dangerous place
8. Speeding
9. Driving while intoxicated

There was no mention at all of the CCTV cameras that had supposedly been introduced last year to police traffic violations, let alone whether they were functional and being utilised. *The Phuket News*



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Phuket eyes cannabis cash crops

The Phuket News
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Dr Yongyot Tham-mawut, Director-General of the Department of Thai Traditional Medicine, was in Phuket last week to promote the development of medical marijuana as a key industry to help the country's economy back onto the road to recovery.

Dr Yongyot on Mar 7 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus, to promote, support and develop research studies on technology and innovations for health tourism.

"The current expansion of the herbal market is in line with the country's clear policy to promote the herbal industry," Dr Yongyot said.

The goal is to "develop the stability, prosperity and sustainability of the country by establishing guidelines for promoting the development of Thai herbs under the National Herbal Action Plan," he said.

The key goal is becoming a leading exporter of quality medicinal raw materials and herbal products in the



Photo: PR Phuket

ASEAN region, and increasing the value of medicinal raw materials and herbal products in the country, he added.

"It also supports the government's policy on building competitiveness," he said.

Dr Yongyot also visited the "Herbal Health Tourism Community Enterprise

Phuket Province" in Soi Dechanarong, in Phuket Town.

Enterprise President Wandee Petchchu explained that the community enterprise project grows cannabis for medical and scientific benefit.

"Its purpose is to promote and develop medical and scientific cannabis cultivation,

to deliver quality cannabis inflorescences to the cannabis raw materials warehouse of the Department of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine," she said.

The raw foliage supplied is to be used to produce Thai traditional medicines that contain cannabis extract, Ms Wandee added.

The community enterprise is rearing its first seedlings, Ms Wandee said.

The plan is to rear 1,608 seedlings a year, or 804 seedlings per production cycle, she said.

The seeds are provided by the Department of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine, she added.

"There is a lot of research showing that cannabis can be used to make medicines for many diseases, such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Tourette's, psoriasis, etc., as well as many diseases that modern medicine can't cure," Ms Wandee said.

"It can also be used to make a wide variety of products including food and cosmetics. Cannabis has become an economic crop that could make a lot of money," she added.

"Recognising the medical and economic importance of marijuana, the Thai government has now legalised marijuana for medicinal uses. The roots, leaves, stems and branches of cannabis are no longer classified as a Category 5 drug, so people and agencies have the idea of using cannabis in food business, lots of cosmetics and medicines.

"Therefore, there must be systematic quality control. Growing cannabis for long-term results requires knowledge and research support, which requires personnel with knowledge of agriculture, as well as funds and time, including having real intentions to achieve goals," Ms Wandee added.

WANT TO TALK TO PHUKET?

The Phuket News

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Phuket NEWS TV

Contact: gm@classactmedia.co.th

First yacht tourists to Phuket under new Test & Go arrive

THE FIRST GROUP OF TOURISTS TO arrive in Phuket under the latest revision of the Test & Go entry measures docked at Ao Po Pier, on Phuket's east coast, last week.

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Phuket office director Nanthasiri Ronnasiri confirmed that four Indonesian nationals arrived from Singapore on the private yacht 'The Maggie', which dropped anchor at Ao Por on Mar 8.

The four were the first to enter Phuket under new Test & Go measures that came into effect on Mar 1, she said.

In accordance with the revised measures for arriving by sea, the four were fully vaccinated and were required to be tested by RT-PCR on arrival. The four were required to remain aboard the yacht until their results were released.

Ms Nanthasiri said the easing of the entry measures would be good for stimulating tourism to Phuket.

"Tourists who prefer to travel by yachts and cruise ships are another group of tourists with high spending potential," she said.

"This group will travel mainly from European and Mediterranean countries. They may travel to Phuket by plane then charter a boat to travel in Phuket and nearby waters, and then come back to Phuket to travel home.

"Others might arrive on a boat from a neighbouring country to relax on Phuket," she added.



Photo: PR Phuket

"There are many boats requesting to travel to Phuket under Test & Go," Ms Nanthasiri said.

In 2021, 91 boats with a total of 323 people on board arrived in Phuket. In January-February this year, 27 yachts arrived with 92 passengers, she noted.

"Phuket is ready to welcome tourists on yachts. This includes ports that can accommodate boats of various sizes, facilities for boat repairs as well as tour excursions, accommodation, spas and shopping, all of which cater very well to the lifestyle of this group of tourists," Ms Nanthasiri said.

Phuket has one deep seat port for large vessels as well as 30 government and privately operated piers to welcome arriving yachts, she said.

Ms Nanthasiri noted that the return of tourists arriving by sea was much welcomed.

"It is another tourism business that has been suffering heavily during the COVID-19 epidemic for more than two years," she said.

The Phuket News

Thailand affirms neutral stance on Russia-Ukraine

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

Thailand has confirmed its neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, saying it remains committed to a balanced foreign policy that is in the country's best interests.

Government spokesman Thanakorn Wangboonkongchana clarified the government's stance on the Russia-Ukraine situation last Thursday (Mar 10), saying that since the start of the conflict, Prime Minister and Defence Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha had laid down a policy of supporting dialogue to find a peaceful resolution in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter.

As a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), Thailand has also made its position clear via a statement by the bloc's foreign ministers calling on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and make the utmost effort to pursue dialogue through all channels to de-escalate tension.

Given the threat posed by



An apartment building hit by Russian shelling in the Obolon district of Kyiv on Monday (Mar 14). Photo: AFP

COVID-19, Thailand does not want to see any international conflict and tension to compound the public health crisis, and strongly believes a solution to the conflict can be achieved through peaceful means, Thanakorn said.

Tanee Sangrat, spokesman of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, said the ministry has approved B2 million for humanitarian aid to Ukraine, after it received a request for help from the Ukrainian embassy in Bangkok.

The money will be used to buy daily necessities for people in Ukraine affected by

the fighting. The items will be handed out via the Ukrainian Red Cross Society or other international organisations, he said.

Meanwhile, an opinion survey by Suan Dusit Rajabhat University, or Suan Dusit Poll, shows that a large majority of Thai people are worried by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, saying it would have a considerable impact, particularly on fuel prices and the cost of living.

The poll was conducted online between Mar 7-10 on 1,143 people throughout the country.

Of the respondents, 52.4% were fairly interested in and follow the news on the war, 30.71% said they paid a great deal of attention to the news, while 13.04% had little interest in it and 3.85% no interest at all.

Asked on which media they followed the Russia-Ukraine war news, 84/89% mentioned social media such as LINE, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube; 59.4% watched television news programmes; and 34.36% read news agency websites.

A large majority, 75.15%, were worried by the news – 53.81% moderately and 21.34% highly. Of the rest, 19.95% weren't particularly worried and 4.9% not worried at all.

Asked what they thought about Thailand joining 140 other countries to vote for a UN resolution demanding the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine, 56.59% said Thailand wanted to see a quick end to the war; 51.46% said the move was appropriate, based on humanitarian principles; and 50.4% said Thailand had played an appropriate role in the world forum.



Water blessing ceremonies are being discouraged this year. Photo: NNT

Thais urged to celebrate Songkran minus 'Water Blessing' ceremony

BANGKOK

THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC Health is advising the public not to participate in the Songkran holiday's "water blessing" ceremony, known as 'Rod Nam Dam Hua', claiming that pouring water on other people's hands, particularly elderly relatives, increases their risk of contracting COVID-19.

Dr Somsak Akkasilp, director-general of the Department of Medical Services, has urged people who plan to return to their hometowns during the upcoming Thai New Year holiday to abstain from participating in the tradition in order to reduce the risk of infection among elderly family members.

Instead he requested on Monday (Mar 14) that holiday revellers practice social distancing and bowing to one

another in order to reduce their chances of contracting the coronavirus.

Thailand will be celebrating Songkran this year, from Apr 13-17, and many people are expected to travel to their home provinces to celebrate with their families.

The government has stated that it will not impose a travel ban this year. Instead, from Mar 21-31, it will launch a nationwide campaign to provide a vaccine booster to 70% of the nation's 12 million senior citizens in order to better protect them from the virus.

According to ministry data, only 4mn Thais – roughly 32% of the total senior population aged 60 and over – have received a booster shot.

Out of the 66 COVID-related deaths reported on Monday, 83% were senior citizens. NNT

Ministry reports cases of Hong Kong COVID strain

BANGKOK

THE PUBLIC HEALTH MINISTRY reported four cases of coronavirus infections on Monday (Mar 14) which it suspects may be caused by a new mutant strain responsible for the worrying COVID-19 outbreak in Hong Kong, but assured that so far, authorities see no reason to be concerned.

Supakit Sirilak, director-general of the Department of Medical Sciences, said the majority of the cases found in Thailand in the current outbreak were caused by the BA.2 subvariant of the Omicron strain.

Out of the more than 2,000 samples that were sent for genomic sequencing last week, 99.7% were found to be the Omicron variant, with BA.2 sub-variant increasing from 52% to 68% and BA.1 sub-variant accounting for 32%, he said. Four, however, were suspected to be the BA.2.2 sub-variant.

The findings, he said, have been submitted to Gisaaid, an international genomic database, which will confirm its genetic make-up.

The patients – three Thais and a foreigner – had mild symptoms, but have since fully recovered, the DMS director-general said.

"There is no need to panic as there are no worrying signs. But we have to be vigilant and answer three questions – does it spread more quickly? Will it cause more deaths and can it evade our efforts to boost immunity?" Dr Supakit said.

Addressing the latest flare-up of COVID-19 in Hong Kong, which now has one of the



The Omicron wave has left some hospitals in Hong Kong overwhelmed. Photo: Peter Parks / AFP

world's highest fatality rates from the virus, Dr Supakit said it is premature to say at this stage if the new mutation is solely to blame.

"The Omicron strain is highly transmissible, so when the public health system is unable to cope with the surge, it may result in more deaths," he said.

Banlang Uppapong, deputy director-general of the DMS, said other factors will have to be taken into account when discussing the spike in COVID-19 infections and deaths in Hong Kong, such as the age of patients and city's relatively low vaccination rates.

Separately, the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) may further ease disease control measures in its Friday meeting today (Mar 18), as authorities believe the country's public health system is capable of handling a surge in infections. Bangkok Post

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Hitting the right note



PHUKET MUSIC SCENE

Andy Tong Dee

It is now a year since I first had an article published in *The Phuket News* about live music venues in Phuket Town. Such venues had been shut for over six months because of COVID and my musician friends had suffered very badly during that time. Some had to sell instruments to buy food, others left Phuket to return home, a few waited patiently for better times. I knew too that live music venue owners were very upset about having to fire Thai staff and reduce pay for any they kept on. We should not forget it has been a terrible time for them and their staff too.

I felt I needed to do something however small to help. I used to write for newspapers and magazines many years ago, and I wondered if I could get performers and venues some free publicity when restrictions ended. Such venues would be unlikely to have any

funds left for marketing after being shut for so long.

I recall writing my first 500-word article and sending it off in hope to Chris Husted, the Executive Editor of *The Phuket News*, asking if he was interested. He kindly said he would print it if I promised him at least two more, and the Phuket Music Scene column was born.

I have continued to contribute since then during which time life for Phuket's remaining musicians has proved very frustrating. They and venue owners have had to endure a series of ups and downs as restrictions were re-imposed and then lifted. Finally, last October, live music was allowed again, hopefully for good. Happy days were here again!

However, shortly before this in August, with the high season coming and any online information for visitors well out of date, a web-designer friend thought a website providing up-to-date information about live music would help musicians further. The website was set up just before live music started again in October. Once up and running, a Facebook group Phuket Gigs Tonight!



Andy rocking on, helping to lift the spirits of local musicians and live music venue operators.

was added so those interested could find out what live music was on over the next couple of days. Once again, this provides free publicity online to help kickstart a long-awaited revival in Phuket's live music scene and help musicians. It should be pointed out that this is all run as a charitable community enterprise with not one baht of income.

Maybe Phuket hasn't been overwhelmed by tourists just yet, and maybe we are a long way from getting back to normal, but things are at least now ready for when visitors return in force. Reliable information about live music in Phuket is now easily available online.

I am assured that all of this has made a difference, particularly in raising professional musicians' battered morale. As we all know, everyone loves seeing their photo and name in the newspaper or online, so thank you *The Phuket News* for that!

So let's hear it for Phuket's long suffering musos and venue owners. There seems to be light now at the end of the tunnel and I hope Phuket Music Scene and *The Phuket News* working together has helped bring it a little closer!

Andy Tong Dee is a local expat, musician and live music enthusiast. You can read his blog at www.phuketmusicscene.com

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Joanna Matlub

LWP Foundation

Living Waters Phuket was set up to build brighter futures for communities in need. This Foundation provides financial grants to projects around essential relief areas including emergency food supplies, education, renewable energy and environmental solutions. It was established to help registered charities, foundations, private companies and government organisations, by funding projects around Phuket and Thailand.

Taken For Granted

Grants are awarded to those who find solutions to the aforementioned challenges in Phuket and beyond. The independent board of advisors reviews each application objectively, fairly and impartially. With financial grants being awarded every week, LWP has been busy completing projects to help communities in need.

A Busy Year

So far in 2022 alone, the LWP Foundation has completed a number of community projects across Thailand including:

The Red Cross Phuket - This wheelchair assistance project saw funding from LWP to purchase 1,800 wheelchairs for use in hospitals, clinics and vaccination centres across Thailand to assist those with mobility issues.



Tambon Phunai Koh Yao Yai Orphan Education Funding -

Funding school supplies for parentless children from this Orphanage for a whole school year, LWP-donated funds allowed these children to continue gaining an education.

The Good Shepherd BanYa Literacy and Learning Centre -

A record speed project, funding ATK test kits for over 400 children in order to allow the school to reopen. This project was achieved in under a week from application to completion, making it a rapid and successful project for everyone involved.

Koh Samui Life Bags - Funds were raised to purchase food, pack Life Bags and distribute to communities in need on Koh Samui. These Life Bags contained staple food and household products including rice,

oil, canned foods, soaps, etc.

Life Home Project - Funding was provided for educational opportunities, financially supporting children currently living in the project. This charity provides education for HIV positive Thai children.

Phuket Has Been Good To Us - Two funded projects were completed, allowing 500 disadvantaged students access to a new computer lab, and providing new IT equipment to be able to deliver their English classes more effectively.

LWP Foundation - Building Brighter Futures

"Phuket continues to see a lull in tourism and rising case numbers, so the need for community help has never been more salient. We focus our funding on communities most in need; those in community isolation, getting children back to school, providing clean water and other education and environmental issues."
(Shaun Stenning, CEO and Founder of 5 Star Marine)

Donations

You can donate to the Foundation's Weebon page to help fund more sustainable, community projects where you will also find weekly updates on initiatives. Please go to weebon.com and search for 'Living Waters Phuket'

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POP QUIZ

- 1. What was Al Capone's nickname?
- 2. In the NATO phonetic alphabet, which word denotes the letter "U"?
- 3. What is the scientific name for the llama?
- 4. What does the "L" stand for in Samuel L. Jackson?
- 5. How tall is the Eiffel Tower?

Answers below, centre

SUDOKU

Hard

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

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across

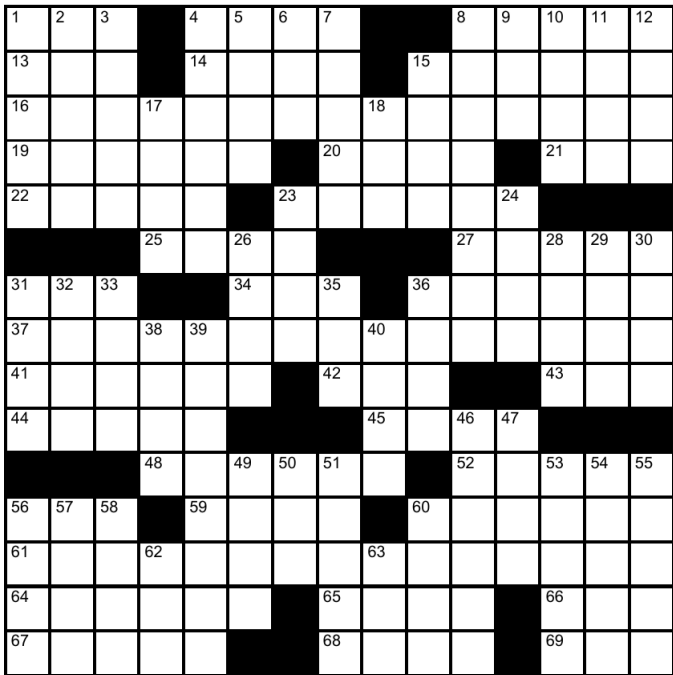
 - 1. Pretense
 - 4. Chips ____
 - 8. Like some kitchens
 - 13. Vamp's accessory
 - 14. Narthex neighbor
 - 15. Unite
 - 16. They were introduced by Sohmer & Co. in 1884
 - 19. Out
 - 20. Cousin of a canvasback
 - 21. Big bang producer
 - 22. Appropriate
 - 23. Computer instructions
 - 25. Web page
 - 27. Money transferring systems
 - 31. Uneven
 - 34. Stumblebum
 - 36. Most immense
 - 37. In a pompous style
 - 41. Pull back
 - 42. Heater
 - 43. Kind of skin
 - 44. Some painted vessels
 - 45. New couple
 - 48. Frilly hat of long ago
 - 52. Itinerant, British
- Down

 - 1. Old Jewish scholars
 - 2. Go downhill, maybe
 - 3. Put off, as a motion
 - 4. "Measure for Measure" villain
 - 5. Dwell
 - 6. Female gametes
 - 7. "Fiddler on the Roof" role
 - 8. Afterword
 - 9. C.S.A. state
 - 10. TV control
 - 11. Desktop feature
 - 12. Birth place
 - 15. Debate (with)
 - 17. "Sure"
- var.

 - 56. Fox competitor
 - 59. Expression of pride?
 - 60. Baroque
 - 61. Military approaches
 - 64. Hindu wives
 - 65. They may be wild
 - 66. Consult
 - 67. Fur capitalist
 - 68. ____ Who
 - 69. Much spam
- 18. Datebook abbr.
 - 23. Kind of ticket
 - 24. Omen
 - 26. Drudge
 - 28. No longer working: Abbr.
 - 29. Cold capital
 - 30. Eye problem
 - 31. Brute
 - 32. Didn't stand pat
 - 33. Freshwater fish
 - 35. Radiohead tune
 - 36. Stalk
 - 38. Cliff's pal on "Cheers"
 - 39. Chaos
 - 40. Bon mot
 - 46. Means of escape
 - 47. Like some vases
 - 49. Big cheese
 - 50. Dude
 - 51. Pointer
 - 53. Bangladesh dough
 - 54. Charger
 - 55. Toadies' replies
 - 56. Old Mogul capital
 - 57. Support group?
 - 58. Jargon
 - 60. Camp Swampy dog
 - 62. Liberal leader?
 - 63. Spa sound

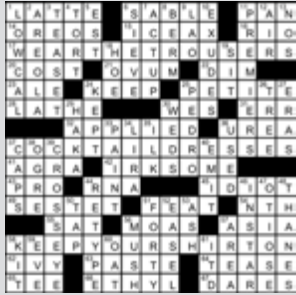
Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

1) Lama llama; 2) Uniform; 3) 300 metres (324m to tip)



Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:



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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

3

months in jail is what you risk for cheating on your spouse in the state of New York, where the act is a Class B misdemeanor.

40

percent of women like spending time with their best friends more than their husbands/boyfriends, according to a survey.

2,618

baht (US\$79) is what the Night's Watch cloaks seen in 'Game of Thrones' cost. They are made from IKEA rugs.

15,152

different forms of life have been found in the New York City subway system.

216

million

is how many steps the average person will take in their lifetime.

Source: Uberfacts

ISLAND VIEW



Rainbow lightning at Ao Por. Screenshot by Sherri Drolet.

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

This week in history

Mar 18, 1241

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

Mar 19, 1932

The Sydney Harbour Bridge is officially opened.

Mar 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 under 'Operation Iraqi Freedom'.

Mar 21, 1980

US President Jimmy Carter announces a United States boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow to protest the Soviet-Afghan War.



HMAS Canberra sails into Sydney in 1930. Photo: Australian War Memorial

Mar 22, 1630

The Massachusetts Bay Colony outlaws the possession of cards, dice and gaming tables.

Mar 23, 1541

Waltham Abbey is surrendered to King Henry VIII of England; the last religious community to be closed during the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

Mar 24, 1989

In Prince William Sound in Alaska, the Exxon Valdez spills 240,000 barrels (38,000 cubic metres) of crude oil after running aground.

Source: Wikipedia

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Grow Boating Networking Evening - April 2022

The next Grow Boating Networking Evening will be held at the Boardwalk Bistro and Bar, at the Phuket Boat Lagoon on Friday the 1st of April from 5pm. Drinks sponsorship for the evening is available from 10,000 baht and includes a generous media package from our media partners The Phuket News and Live 89.5 FM Radio. There will be a delicious free burger for all attendees and as always all of your favourite beverages will be available from the bar. Come and join in the fun, everyone is welcome and there is no entry fee. We hope to see you there and if you know anyone you think would be interested in coming please invite them along. To join our mailing list please send an email to growboatingphuket@gmail.com Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/growboatingphuket Grow Boating is kindly supported by our media partner The Phuket News, Live 89.5 radio and Phuket News TV. See www.thephuketnews.com

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AUSTCHAM (RESCHEDULED) AUSTRALIA DAY PHUKET SUNDOWNERS - MARCH 2022

AustCham Thailand, in collaboration with Australian Alumni, American Chamber of Commerce in Thailand (AMCHAM), British Chamber of Commerce Thailand (BCCT), Belgian-Luxembourg/Thai Chamber of Commerce, CanCham Thailand, Franco-Thai Chamber of Commerce (FTCC), German-Thai Chamber of Commerce (GTCC) and the Netherlands-Thai Chamber of Commerce (NTCC), held "Australia Day Phuket Sundowners" at JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa, on Friday 11 March 2022.

A celebration of all things Australian, your favourite Australian food & beverages, and welcome in the New Year as the first business networking event in Phuket of 2022!



Triple joy at German Open for Thai shuttlers

BADMINTON

THAI STARS DECHAPOL Puavaranukroh and Sapsiree Taerattanachai claimed their first title of the year and their 13th overall after winning the US\$180,000 (B6 million) German Open on Sunday (Mar 13).

Shortly afterwards, Thailand's Kunlavut Vitidsarn defeated India's Lakshya Sen 21-18, 21-15 in the men's singles final of the same competition.

Dechapol and Sapsiree, the world No.1 and top-seeded pair, overpowered unseeded Chinese duo Ou Xuan and Huang Yaqiong 21-11, 21-9 in just 35 minutes in the mixed doubles final of the BWF World Tour Super 300 event at Westenergie Sporthalle in Muelheim an der Ruhr.

The final victory brought the pair their sixth straight title since November last year. The duo's remarkable run began with a win at the Hilo Open, which was also held in Germany, before they made a clean sweep of three season-ending tournaments in Indonesia.

Dechapol and Sapsiree then made history by becoming



Kunlavut Vitidsarn celebrates on the podium after winning the German Open. Photo: Bangkok Post

ing the first Thai players to win the mixed doubles world championship crown in Spain in December.

For Kunlavut, it was the 20-year-old Thai's first BWF World Tour title, having previously already lost in finals three times in 2020-21 against top-ranked Viktor Axelsen of Denmark.

The Thai, who defeated All England Open champion Lee Zii Jia of Malaysia in the semi-finals, received US\$13,500 (approx B445,500) for his victory in Germany.

Thai badminton chief Patama Leeswadtrakul said world No.20 Kunlavut could crack into the top 10 this year thanks to his technique, skill, discipline, hard work and determination.

Bangkok Post

Cows take series lead after nail-biting comeback victory

CRICKET

Michael Flowers

The Thalang Cows pulled off a remarkable 1-run victory at the ACG on Sunday (Mar 13) to bowl out the Patong Penguins for 195 in the final over of 25 after the Penguins sailed to 104-1 inside 10 overs.

Opening the batting for the Cows, Ashan Fonseka and Michael Flowers were troubled early on by the bowling of Jason Robertson and Anoop Kotwale before the latter claimed the big wicket of Fonseka 4 (12).

Flowers 13 (20) didn't last much longer as he was caught by Shivam Sachdeva, leaving Cows captain Joe Ninan and inform Mayur Deuskar in the middle.

The pair did a terrific job to add 103 runs before Ninan 73 (57) was caught and bowled by Robertson.

Sameer Kahn 18 (13) joined Deuskar 66 (47) as the Cows finished the innings on 196-5 with Seemant Raju picking up the late wickets of Deuskar and Kahn.

Despite posting a competitive score, the Cows faced a near impossible task of defending the runs after only eight Cows had arrived to play.

However, Anthony Van Blerk 5 (6) soon fell to Sami Pir, bringing the Sadarangani cousins to the crease who put together an 89-run partnership in no



Penguins' Kotwale is run out on the penultimate ball of the match. Photo: Michael Flowers

time, thanks largely in part to a diabolical Flowers over which went for 26 and included 7 wides and a no-ball.

This prompted Ninan to make an inspired change, installing Flowers as wicket keeper as Rishi goaded with "are you ready?" before being caught by Pir at long off.

Manish 20 (29) fell to Fonseka in the very next ball, bringing Craig 'Pancake' Morgan to the crease who, despite hitting a 6 off his first ball, was soon bowled by Kahn for 6 (3).

Shilash Sharma 14 (24) and Raju posted a partnership of 28 and Livermore joined Raju for 37-run partnership before a peach of a delivery from Fonseka dismissed him.

After 8 runs from the penultimate

over, the Penguins needed just 3 to win from the final over. A single from the first ball of the Deuskar over to Kotwale 2 (7) brought Raju 35* (39) on strike with 2 runs required to win from 5 balls.

Raju hit the ball to Kahn at cover with Kotwale at the non-strikers end setting off for the run only to be sent back to watch Deuskar remove the bails for the most unlikely, thrilling, 1-run victory going to the Cows!

Cows Captain Ninan was judged to be the MVP by the scoring application for his batting performance slightly ahead of an equally worthy Deuskar. Fonseka's incredible fast bowling performance was also highly notable.

The result means the Cows now lead the 6-game PenCow Cup 2-1.

Phuket annual fishing competition confirmed, proceeds to go to charity

FISHING

PHUKET MUNICIPALITY IN COL-laboration with the Phuket Fishing Sport Club have announced the 2022 Phuket Fishing Tournament will take place on Mar 25-27.

The 13th edition of tournament will take place at Chalerm Phrakiat Rama 10 Park in Saphan Hin and aims to promote marine tourism while stimulating the local economy.

All proceeds from the competition and an associated fresh fish auction will go towards supporting Phuket Municipality to purchase medical equipment and supplies, to help the handicapped, the elderly, the underprivileged and the Soi Dog Foundation.

There will be three categories of boats permitted to enter the competition – speed boats, motor boats and long tail boats. Entry fees are set at B1,000 per person in the first two categories and B500 per person for the latter. Teams must not exceed more than five people per boat (excluding captains and children on motor boats).

Entrants must provide their own boat. In the event this is not possible then they are urged to contact the organisers prior to the event who may be able to either find a boat for rent or allocate a place on a team already registered.

The fishing gear permitted is standard duck rod and unlimited reel – hand line is not permitted. The rules of the international fishing association will be implemented and adhered to, the organisers confirmed. The competition is open to amateurs and professionals alike.



In the 2018 competition this 75kg seer fish was said to be the biggest ever caught in Thailand and the third biggest in Asia. Photo: Tee Noi Team

The game fish permitted includes wahoo fish, barracuda, monk fish, snakehead fish, rainbow fish, snapper fish, tuna, grouper and all kinds of sea bass except broadmouth fish. Additionally there are three types of special prize fish: Char Grouper, Golden Fish and Amber Jack.

Organisers confirmed there is over B120,000 in prize money up for grabs which will be split across four judging categories determined by the fish species and weight.

People interested in participating in the fishing competition can apply at Phuket Fishing Club, Kanyok Shop, 7 Seas Pro Shop, Chow Dow Shop, Ocean Sports Shop, SEA Jay Shop, Nanai Fishing Shop, and ABU Fishing Shop (Koh Kaew). For more information call 076 214306 ext. 312.

The Phuket News

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English Premier League Predictions

thephuketnews.com/predictions.php

Ron the record breaker

FOOTBALL

AFP

Cristiano Ronaldo rolled back the years last Saturday (Mar 12) with a hat-trick to beat Tottenham 3-2 and keep Manchester United's chances of playing in the Champions League next season alive.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner had scored just once in his previous 10 games, but three fantastic finishes took him clear as the highest scorer in professional men's football history, according to FIFA's records, with 807 goals for club and country, surpassing Austria-Czech striker Josef Bican.

Saturday's hat-trick was the 59th of 37-year-old Ronaldo's career and took his overall tally for the season to a respectable 18 although, surprisingly, it was only his second treble in a United shirt. His first Premier League hat trick was in Manchester United's 6-0 win over Newcastle United in Jan 2008 – the longest wait between hat tricks in Premier League history.

Ronaldo's performance impressed the watching Tom Brady as the seven-time Super Bowl winner told his fellow superstar to "keep playing" as they embraced on the Old Trafford pitch after the game.

Whether Ronaldo stays for the second year of his contract at United will depend heavily on if the Red Devils make it into the Champions League next season. Into the twilight years of his career, he can



Ronaldo's 807 goals for club and country is the highest total in the men's professional game, according to FIFA records. Photo: AFP

ill afford a season off the biggest stage where he shines brightest.

Ronaldo had come under heavy criticism lately for seemingly being unable or unwilling to adapt to the high-energy, pressing style of play employed by United interim manager Ralf Rangnick.

The Portuguese has also been pointed at as the source for stories of dressing room disquiet that seem to leak out after every poor result.

Amid reports he was set to be dropped for the Manchester derby on Mar 6, Ronaldo jetted back to his homeland to rehab a hip injury that was given as the official reason for missing a 4-1 thrashing at the Etihad.

Rangnick joked that maybe he should sanction that trip more regularly after

Ronaldo returned to Manchester in scintillating form to put Spurs to the sword.

But he also did not hold back in his assessment of Ronaldo's work off the ball in recent weeks.

"Today he showed for sure that he is physically capable of doing that," Rangnick said of Ronaldo's defensive contribution.

"We also have to admit that it has not always been like that in the past weeks and months. Today showed exactly that he is still in physical shape to perform at that level."

At time of press, Manchester United were in fifth place in the Premier League table on 50 points from 29 games. They trail Arsenal in fourth spot by a single point although the North London club have played three games less.

No guarantees Chelsea can complete season, says Cech

FOOTBALL

CHELSEA'S TECHNICAL and performance advisor Petr Cech said the club are having to live "day-by-day" in the wake of sweeping economic sanctions placed on owner Roman Abramovich by the UK government following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Chelsea have been given a special licence to continue operating, but there are fears they will quickly run out of money unless the terms of that agreement are eased.

As it stands the Blues are unable to sign players, renew contracts, sell tickets to matches or merchandise, with limits also on the amount of money they are allowed to spend on travel to away games.

Cech is the most senior Chelsea official to speak publicly since the sanctions were announced and could offer no guarantees the club could survive until the end of the season.

"We have to admit that we go day-by-day because we don't have this in our



Petr Cech. Photo: AFP

hands," Cech told Sky Sports.

Chelsea said in a statement that they would seek more negotiations with the government over amending the licence "to allow the club to operate as normal as possible."

Cech added: "The conversations are going on so that we can actually operate in the way that we can finish the season."

"I believe that for us to be able to, to carry on to finish the season would obviously help everybody involved in the Premier League."

Chelsea sit third in the Premier League table and are also still involved in the knockout stages of the Champions League and FA Cup. AFP

New cars, old rivals: Verstappen and Hamilton renew battle in 2022

FORMULA ONE

THE MEMORIES OF THE controversial 2021 title-deciding Abu Dhabi Grand Prix have barely faded, but this weekend new world champion Max Verstappen and the ousted Lewis Hamilton will renew their rivalry for a much-anticipated sequel.

After an off-season away from the spotlight, during which he reportedly considered his future, Hamilton returned with a new resolve to claim a record-breaking eighth title.

And he'll need to find a new level of performance, because there's no doubt Verstappen will already be up there to meet him.

Verstappen's maiden title campaign was almost faultless, and now in his eighth season but still only 24 years old, he's not simply the current generation of the sport but also its future.

Growing in power year by year and clearly comfortable at the top of the sport, the newly minted champion



Verstappen and Hamilton are ready to renew their era-defining rivalry for a second season. Photo: AFP

will present a sterner test than last year.

However, new rules for 2022 are adding an unpredictable twist in proceedings.

The all-new generation of car is set to improve the spectacle by enabling closer racing, but while Red Bull Racing has a handle on its new machine – Verstappen set the preseason's fastest time – Mercedes is still struggling.

"I don't think we'll be competing for wins," Hamilton lamented, estimating a one-month time frame before his car will be competitive.

Ferrari is poised to take Mercedes's place. Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz completed the most laps of any partnership during the preseason and were always

near the top of the order, teasing a long-awaited Ferrari resurgence.

McLaren must be considered a dark horse too. The papaya orange car was consistently quick during early testing in Spain, but overheating brakes in Bahrain meant it couldn't push the package.

A four-team title fight would be the stuff of F1 dreams. But as the sport proved last year in what may come to be regarded as its best-ever season, you really only need two drivers to create a classic.

Max Verstappen and Lewis Hamilton won't need any other rivals, and they're ready to renew their era-defining rivalry for a second season. Michael Lamonato



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High drama at ACG as Cows sneak win > p14

CHARITY LINEOUT



Vagabonds Junior Academy ACF players, and coaches. Photo: ACF

RUGBY

Neil Quail

Phuket Vagabonds RFC will tomorrow (Mar 19) split ranks and lock horns for a charity rugby match in order to celebrate the Asia Center Foundation's (ACF) 20th anniversary and to raise vital funds for 11-year-old Nawin Kaotha, a dutiful young man who deservingly benefits from the ACF's Scholarship Program.

Following a recent victory against Chiang Mai Cobras

RFC, the Phuket club will divide to form a Vagabonds select side and an ACF Barbarians side as challengers, pitting friends and family against each other for a tempestuous 10s encounter on their home turf. The occasion will also mark Phuket's first live rugby match of 2022, with a 4pm kick-off at the Alan Cooke Ground (ACG).

Phuket Vagabonds RFC has been an admirable and dedicated supporter of the ACF since the foundation's 2002 inception and, while the prospect of a blistering battle

tomorrow is eagerly anticipated by players and supporters alike, generating financial support for the ACF and young Nawin is paramount to the Vagabonds on this occasion.

Vagabonds' coach and club liaison to the ACF Dave Walker is keen to showcase his charges in action as several important tournaments approach over the coming months (including the preeminent Aussie Bar Phuket International 10s on May 13-15), while hoping tomorrow's rugby spectacle will further benefit the outstanding efforts being made by the ACF team.

"We are proud to continue to support the wonderful work the ACF does and the long relationship the club and the charity have. We hope everyone gives generously on the day and helps to support a fantastic charity and make a positive difference to young people's lives in our community," said Dave.

As a curtain-raiser for the main event, a new era of the Phuket Vagabonds Women's team will host its first training, starting at 2:30pm, with an open invitation for anyone keen on playing full contact

rugby to join the session.

Shortly after, Vagabonds Junior Academy players will display their developing skills in a touch rugby match, which will include a number of ACF youngsters, scheduled for a 3pm start. The junior academy players have all benefited from expert guidance from the senior Vagabonds players at the club's successful junior rugby academy held every Saturday morning at the ACG.

And in a further addition to activities, Rush Sports Academy are inviting anyone visiting the ACG tomorrow to

take part in a 'pick-up' game of American Flag Football scheduled to take place shortly after the main rugby match concludes (approximately 5:30pm).

Entry fee on the day is B100 per adult (free for children under 16 years), with proceeds going to the ACF. Cold drinks and tasty bites will be available at the bar all day.

For more information, please visit the ACG or Vagabond Facebook pages. For Women's rugby, please contact Alicia Niemand via email: aniemand@headstart.com

Tight finish at the 2022 Phuket Yacht Club Sailor's Regatta

SAILING

HIGH SPIRITED COMPETITION and better than expected wind conditions made for a hugely successful 5th Sailor's Regatta last weekend (Mar 11-13), with this year's 3-day event, organised by the Phuket Yacht Club (PYC), seeing extremely tight racing take place around Chalong Bay and the surrounding islands to the south of Phuket.

"This was a great regatta, and we were lucky enough to get some good winds this year which was

more than expected and forecast", commented Warwick Downes, Race Director. "There was close racing amongst the boats with very narrow winning margins in some fleets."

Matt McGrath was the Principal Race Officer who, along with the race organisers, was more than content with the exciting racing witnessed this year, with increased competition seen especially in the Multihull OMR and Firefly 850 Class. Whereas these two classes were combined last year, this year saw them split, resulting in heightened competitive spirit.

The Multihull OMR category saw focused sailing and tactics with Bonza and Saffron enjoying a good tussle. Despite Bonza having to loop back after being over the start line on the final race day, they still managed to recover their position and come out on top to win their category.

The competition was extremely close, as expected, with Twin Sharks and Voodoo's ongoing battle in the Firefly 850 class. After switching 1st and 2nd race placements throughout the three days, Voodoo ultimately moved forward to victory as Twin Sharks were

unable to hold onto their winning result from last year.

Among the Monohulls, Jessandra II and Phoenix held their top spots and Kinnon did well despite their heavy weight.

FINAL RANKINGS:

Multihull OMR: Bonza skippered by Warwick Downes
Firefly 850 Class: Voodoo skippered by Hans Rahmann
Monohull IRC: Phoenix skippered by Niels Degenkolw
Monohull PHS: Jessandra II skippered by Andrew McDermott

This Regatta saw focused boat



The yachts ready at the start line. Photo: Dave Campbell

handling, a range of sailing skills, strategy and tactics and PYC is already gearing up for their next event, a rally from Ao Chalong to Koh Phi Phi and back, planned to take place over Songkran.

For more information on upcoming sailing racing and regattas from the PYC, please visit their racing programme page. *Joanna Matlub*