

**DUTCHMAN ARRESTED FOR 'SHOPPING MALL' APP SCAM > PAGE 3**



Staff from 5 Star Marine and Sutai Muay Thai deliver essential food parcels to residents in the Khumnamnorrahas Community in Phuket Town. Photo: Photo: 5 Star Marine / One Phuket

## 'ONE PHUKET' LAUNCHED TO UNITE EFFORTS TO COUNTER COVID POVERTY, FAILING FOOD SECURITY

**The Phuket News**  
editor@classactmedia.co.th

A small group of local residents have banded together to coalesce efforts to help those in dire need of assistance as the COVID economic crisis continues to batter Phuket.

The group, numbering just over

a handful, held their inaugural meeting on Feb 9 and now launched their 'One Phuket' initiative in the hope of gaining support, and momentum, from more members joining.

"With no definitive date for an end to this global pandemic, which is having a major impact on economies around the globe, our beautiful island of Phuket continues to see many peo-

ple struggling to survive," explained Andrea Edwards, an active member of the group.

"We have witnessed our community rising to meet the challenge and we have many heroes and heroines doing so much to help those in need. But as the months turn into a year, funds are running dry, communities are left without help, people do not

have enough food to eat, jobs are not coming back, and those on the ground, doing the work to help those most impacted, are getting exhausted," she added.

"A small group of people gathered today [Feb 9] to discuss the on-going crisis and its impact on people all over Phuket. This group consisted of charities and businesses who have...

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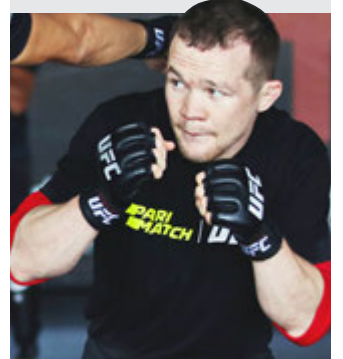
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# News



**No more snakes to be released in Phuket > p5**

## Move to unite relief efforts

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...not stopped working to help those in need get through this pandemic and its disastrous economic impact on our local economy," reported Andrea.

"But the question we were seeking to answer is: are we doing enough? Are we reaching everyone? Can we make it through to the end of this crisis as we are? It became apparent that no, we cannot. It also became very apparent that those working hardest to help are running out of funds and/or getting exhausted," she added.

"We will share more information on our plans soon, but our first job is making sure everyone who needs to be fed is being fed. We hope to share the number of people in need – on Phuket and the surrounding islands – by next week.

"We will also be looking at other opportunities that result in job creation and hopefully, a more sustainable future for our beautiful corner of the world. There is already so much going on, and our goal is to bring us all together so we can be more successful," Andrea added.

Phuket expat Gary Crause of Legend Music Recording Studio in Koh Kaew noted, "The meeting on Tuesday went well as a starting meeting. It was attended by representatives of Class Act Media (Donna Toon), Prince of Songkla University, the Good Shepherd, Phuket Has Been Good To Us, Lean On Me and 5 Star Marine. It was chaired by a former UWCT board member.

"The discussion revolved around quite a few of the current challenging situations facing the island, the largest being the unemployment problem leading to poverty and starvation," Gary explained.

Other topics covered briefly were the litter problems, mental health issues, sexual abuse of Burmese children in the worker camps and feeding the animals, namely soi



A 5 Star Marine volunteer ensures COVID protection measures are upheld. Photo: 5 Star Marine / One Phuket

dogs and elephants, he added.

"The group has been broken into a few subgroups to focus on specific areas, with an urgency to put a map together to see if all areas are being covered and to ensure relief organisations are not feeding the same areas. A Facebook group ['One Phuket'] has been set up for people to join to offer volunteer services and to stay up to date with what is happening," Gary said.

### CALL TO HELP

Andrea urged people of all walks of life to contact the group so the work to help those in need can continue.

"For me personally, the commitment and dedication of people on this island is incredible. Truly incredible and I won't name them here, because they are not doing it for glory, they are doing it to help. Heroes and heroines all. Thank you.

"To succeed and make One Phuket a meaningful community that makes a difference, we must work across multiple communities in Phuket, and our team will be working to bring everyone together," she explained.

"For now we ask you to join our community and together, we'll work out how to get through this crisis and make sure no one is left behind. Share your knowledge and insights too? Everyone is in a different part of the island and knows what is going on locally. Let's get the whole picture together.

"We can do this, but we can't do it without you. Join One Phuket, and let's get to work to bring our beautiful Island home through this crisis, and out the other side, better than ever," Andrea added.

For more information or to join the group, visit the One Phuket Facebook page.

### COME TOGETHER

Meanwhile, Gary Crause is spearheading another relief effort through music with a local release of the Phil Collins' classic 'Another Day In Paradise'.

Gary was one of the driving forces behind Phuket artists coming together in June last year to produce their own version of 'Lean on Me' to boost food security efforts driven by the Help Phuket Today campaign, also created to help people in Phuket suffering without any form of income during the ongoing crisis.

A follow-up relief project by the 'Lean on Me' artists saw a recording of 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' performed by students and teachers from the Phuket Academy of Performing Arts, with more than 70 people involved in the effort, released late last year. (See video on Facebook and on YouTube.)

"On Sunday the 21<sup>st</sup> of February at 10am at Blue Tree Phuket, we will be filming and recording part of a music video for a remake of the Phil Collins hit 'Another Day In Paradise'," Gary told *The Phuket News*.

"We would like to get as many people together as possible to be part of the filming. The song and video will be used to drive awareness and fundraising for the continued food-donation programs on the island.

"Please show support by coming along on the day and singing along to the choruses of 'Another Day In Paradise'," Gary urged.

"Also, if you could share and invite and bring people along, that would be so awesome!" he added.

"We are recording and filming Another Day In Paradise to maintain our focus on the poverty situation in Phuket. We have invited as many people as we know from all areas of Phuket, to come along and be part of the filming. The more people that turn up, the wider the net is cast in highlighting the problem and the possible support/donation base should expand vastly," Gary explained.

The song was actually recorded last Saturday (Feb 13) by a team of musicians and music students to have a track ready for use for the masses to sing along to, Gary confirmed.

Gary is also in discussion with Blue Tree about hosting the 'Lean On Me Live Fest', to be held at the Blue Tree Arena on March 20, from 3pm.

"Lean On Me Live Fest will feature between 10 and 14 local bands. The concert is free and we will rely on donations from the patrons to raise money for the food charity drives," Gary explained.

"A Facebook Event has been set up for this, but we will only start focusing on promoting the event after the Another Day In Paradise project has been filmed," he added.

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## Officials ordered to prepare for Royal visit

OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN instructed to prepare for an official visit by HRH Princess Ubolratana, who will visit the island on Mar 26.

Princess Ubolratana will be in Phuket to officiate a To be Number One event at Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus, in Kathu, Phuket Vice Governor Phichet Panapong explained on Feb 11.

Princess Ubolratana launched the To Be Number One Foundation in 2002 to combat drug use by young



HRH Princess Ubolratana will be in Phuket on Mar 26, Vice Governor Phichet announced. Photo: PR Phuket

people. The project encourages young people to strive to excel in whatever field they enjoy the most, be it academic studies, sports, the arts or even singing and dancing.

"On this occasion, all departments are asked to perform their duties carefully, to focus on providing maximum security," V/Gov Phichet said.

"And we ask all local government organisations to give importance to the maintenance of cleanliness in all areas, and to decorate their areas with the Royal Standard [of Princess Ubolratana] so that it will be neat, beautiful and honorable along the route that she will pass along," he added.

*The Phuket News*



# 'Shopping Mall' scam closed

## Dutchman from Kathu arrested while trying to flee the country

The Phuket News  
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Police are calling for all people who fell prey to the scam rolled out through the 'Shopping Mall' app to file reports of how much money they lost to the scheme. Police believe that more than 1,000 people in Phuket and on Koh Samui were duped out of money through the scam.

The call for victims to file reports of how much money they lost came on Monday (Feb 15) as police announced the arrest of a Dutch national for operating the scam.

The Dutchman, named by police only as "Mr Wesley", was taken into custody at Suvarnabhumi International Airport in Bangkok late on Feb 11, said Lt Gen Kanchai Khlaikhleung of the Cyber Crime Investigation Bureau (CCIB).

'Mr Wesley' was with his Finnish wife and daughter when he was arrested, Lt Gen Kanchai explained to a press conference held at the Royal Thai Police headquarters in Bangkok.

"The Shopping Mall scheme had 30 'groups' called 'All Star' with about 500 members in each group. Each member had to invest at least B1,000. Some people had



The arrest of the Dutchman, who had been staying in Kathu, was announced in Bangkok on Monday (Feb 15). Photo: CCIB

invested about B200,000," Lt Gen Kanchai said.

"At this stage, about 1,000 people have identified themselves as victims. Many of them came with tears on their faces, as they had spent all of their savings on this investment," he added.

"Most of the victims are living in Phuket and on Koh Samui. Some of them understood well how the scheme worked, some just wanted to try it, some had no idea that it was a ponzi scheme," he said.

"Every day, there was some trading through the app, and everyone

got some interest and thought that this was an investment," Lt Gen Kanchai explained.

"Mr Wesley monitored the app every day at about 11am and invited people to join the scheme. Applications to join the scheme opened in October last year," he said.

"All of the money invested in the scheme had been transferred into 44 accounts in four banks in a neighbouring country," he added.

The Phuket Provincial Court issued a warrant of arrest for 'Mr Wesley' on Feb 11, Lt Gen Kanchai said.

"The man, his wife and child were about to flee the country. If they could get out of the country, about B100 million would have gone with them, as they had already transferred it to banks in a neighbouring country," Lt Gen Kanchai noted.

"We cooperated with immigration officers to keep an eye on them after they took a flight from Phuket to Bangkok," Lt Gen Kanchai explained.

"They were waiting to get on a flight by KLM. The man knew well that he was being observed, so he let his wife and child check-in for

the flight first," he added.

"As the wife and child were on the immigration watchlist, when they checked-in, officers immediately knew that they were fleeing the country, then immigration officers eventually moved in and arrested him," Lt Gen Kanchai said.

Another officer at the press conference explained the Dutchman was living in Kathu, in Phuket, before attempting to flee the country.

"Then he and his Finnish wife and daughter flew to Bangkok on Feb 9," the officer said.

"They came to Suvarnabhumi airport on Feb 11 in order to take a KLM flight that was scheduled to fly to the Netherlands at 30 minutes past midnight," he added.

"We checked the flight info and then moved in to arrest him. Then we took him back to Phuket to be prosecuted by Phuket City Police," the officer explained.

The Dutchman arrested is just the tip of the iceberg, the officer noted.

"The Dutchman was the main admin [for the 'Shopping Mall' app], while there were about 40 other admins in total," he said.

Police were now tracking down the remaining administrators, he added.

## Registrations of candidates close for municipal elections

A TOTAL OF 25 CANDIDATES have registered to contest the position of mayor at Phuket's 12 municipalities in the upcoming municipal election on Mar 28, the Phuket office of the Election Commission of Thailand (PEC) has confirmed.

A further 377 people have registered to contest the 168 seats available as municipal councilors, the PEC has also confirmed.

Registration for candidates opened at each municipality across Phuket last Monday, and drew to a close at 4:30pm last Friday (Feb 12).

Among the last to enter the race for election was Thanaporn Ongsantiphap, who registered at Chalong Municipality on Friday to contest the seat of Chalong Mayor. Ms Thanaporn, representing the Ruam Pattana Chalong Party (Chalong Development Together Party), was designated No 3 on the ballot.

PEC chief Passakon Siripakayapon has been unavailable for comment, but *The*



Thanaporn Ongsantiphap receives a garland after registering to contest the seat as Chalong Mayor. Photo: PR Phuket

*Phuket News* has been told that the full official list of accepted candidates will be released today (Feb 19) as officers at the PEC have yet to vet and approve each candidate's registration.

Some municipalities have released details of who have registered to contest the positions of mayor and municipal councilors.

However, other local municipalities contacted by *The Phuket News* declined to reveal the names and exact numbers of candidates registered, saying that the full list of accepted registered candidates will be made

available by the PEC.

One officer explained, "We cannot reveal any information about the candidates as we are still checking their qualifications. The Phuket office of the Election Commission of Thailand will allow us to reveal and confirm the candidates on Feb 19."

Of note, only on Feb 9, the second day of candidate registrations, the PEC published a notice warning those who registered as a candidate for mayor or councilor while knowing that he or she does not have required qualifications or is currently serving a ban on contesting elections will face prosecution.

Such people "must face the punishment under the Section 120 of Act on Election of Local Councilors or Local Administrators B.E. 2562," the PEC noted in its warning.

"They must face 1-10 years imprisonment and a B20,000-200,000 fine and have their right to vote revoked for a period of 20 years," the PEC also noted.

*The Phuket News*

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## PPAO Chief Rewat takes office

**Eakkapop Thongtub**  
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Rewat Areerob was inaugurated into his new position of President of the Phuket Provincial Administration Organisation (PPAO, or *Or Bor Jor*) with a special event at Phuket Provincial Hall marking his first day in office on Monday (Feb 15).

Joining the event to welcome Mr Rewat back to the provincial halls of power were Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew, PPAO councilors, and a host of other officials.

Mr Rewat gave a speech outlining his promises and policies.

Mr Rewat explained that his announcement this morning was to inform all PPAO councilors about the policies and framework for administering the island.

"All our policies came from the problems [that need



Rewat Areerob was welcomed to his new position as PPAO President at a special event at Phuket Provincial Hall on Monday (Feb 15). Photo: PR Phuket

fixing] and the needs of the local people,' he said.

Mr Rewat also promised to do his best as PPAO President and to make the PPAO 'an organization with good service as priority'.

"We will work and brainstorm with other officials to improve people's lives," he said.

"I will work with the high moral principles and goals

needed to develop the island's infrastructure, people, and the whole province. I will also adopt the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy to develop Phuket under the slogan 'Phuket is safe, and modern, with a creative economy,'" he said.

The PPAO will focus on nine main issues to develop the island, he said: local administration, tourism and economic development, public

health, education, quality of life, infrastructure, information technology, natural resources and protection from corruption.

The nine issues are based on the policy framework under the Provincial Administrative Organization Act B.E. 2540 and other relevant laws, Mr Rewat explained.

"All the works will be conducted with honesty and will be transparent in order to be easily examined, in order to provide the highest benefit to Phuket people," he said.

Governor Narong said, "The Phuket Provincial Government congratulates Mr Rewat and all councilors for being elected. We are ready to work with and support each other to develop the 18 subdistricts [on the island].

"All officials will all work together and move forward to make this island great again," he said.

The Election Commission

of Thailand (ECT) earlier this month dismissed a complaint filed against Mr Rewat and confirmed him to be the new PPAO President after he secured victory in the PPAO election held on Dec 21.

The Phuket office of the Election Commission of Thailand (PEC) initially declared Mr Rewat the winner of the election, confirming that he had secured 83,144 votes.

Mr Rewat had bested second-placed contender Jirayut Songyot, who secured 50,914 votes, the PEC reported at the time.

Representing the Phuket Yatdai Party ("Phuket Trustworthy Party"), Mr Rewat is already nearly a household name across Phuket. He has already served the island as a Member of Parliament for the Democrat Party and throughout the COVID-19 crisis has served as assistant secretary to Deputy Public Health Minister Sathit Pitutecha.

## Police officer faces probe for fleeing accident scene drunk

A PHUKET POLICE OFFICER is under investigation for alleged drunk driving when his car hit another car on Thepkasattri Rd late last Saturday night (Feb 13), causing the car he hit to plough into the back of another car waiting in front of it.

The driver, Lt Nikorn Songkhao of the Thalang Police, allegedly attempted to flee the scene.

Phuket Provincial Police Chief Maj Gen Pornsak Nuannoo confirmed to *The Phuket News* on Monday (Feb 15) that he had ordered Thalang Police Chief Lt Col Phisit Chuenphet to investigate the incident.

The investigation follows a video being posted online showing Lt Nikorn and his heavily damaged Toyota Vios stopped on Thepkasattri Rd just south of the turn-off intersection that leads to Phuket International Airport.

The video showed Lt Nikorn had stopped in the right-hand lane on the southern side of the intersection. On the north side of the intersection was a Suzuki Swift with heavy damage to its rear.

In front of the Suzuki Swift was a white pickup truck with minor damage to its rear bumper, from



Photo: Pit Ti Wai Jai / Facebook

where the Suzuki Swift had struck it.

The video showed Lt Nikorn's Toyota Vios had sustained heavy damage from the impact, and a long line of fluid had spilled from under his car, trailing all the way to where his car came to a halt. The video also clearly showed Lt Nikorn who initially remained sitting in the car, and his police identification hanging from the rear-view mirror.

Lt Nikorn appeared to be drunk in the video.

"Thalang Police Chief Lt Col Phisit Chuenphet has set up a team to investigate the incident," Maj Gen Pornsak said on Monday.

"The team is in the process of collecting evidence, including video clips and obtaining statements from witnesses at the scene.

"If it is found that a law enforcement officer actually committed a crime, the officer will face disciplinary and criminal penalties," he assured. *Eakkapop Thongtub*

## Phuket marks a special COVID Valentine's Day

A TOTAL OF 46 COUPLES WERE married at special events held in Phuket last Sunday (Feb 14) to commemorate Valentine's Day.

The Muang District Office held its special mass wedding event at Promthep Cape, with its iconic views of the Andaman Sea.

A total of 32 couples were married at the event, which was overseen by Phuket Vice Governors Vikrom Jakthee and Piyaphong Chuwong, joined by Khenjutha Suwanjinda, Chief Judge of the Phuket Juvenile and Family Court.

Muang District Chief Somprat Prabsongkram noted, "The Phuket Muang District Office understands the importance of Valentine's Day and agreed to hold a special marriage registration event under the theme '2021 Valentine's Day Love Happiness at Laem Promthep'.

The event was held so that couples could register their marriage on the day of love, and realise the importance of their rights and duties to each other as husband and wife, Mr Somprat said.

"It was held to also promote tourism to Phuket," he added.

The event included a traditional Thai wedding 'Khan Maak' procession with two elephants leading the parade of the bride and groom and their wellwishers.



Thirty-two couples married at a special event at Promthep Cape last Sunday (Feb 14). Photo: PR Phuket

The Muang District Office, as is tradition, offered simple gifts to the newlyweds for them to use in starting their new lives together, and provided a professional photographer.

Meanwhile, 14 couples were married at a special Valentine's Day event held at the Thalang District Office.

Of the couples, 12 were Thai, one couple were an Italian and a Thai, and another couple were one French national and a native of Madagascar, an officer at the Thalang District Office told *The Phuket News* on Monday (Feb 15).

"The special wedding event and all activities were held only at the Thalang District Office, where all COVID-19 preventive measures were followed. There was a flower arch for the newlyweds to have their photo taken under and gifts were handed to the couples as well," the officer said.

Unlike previous years, the Kathu District Office this year did not hold any special event to mark people marrying on Valentine's Day. *The Phuket News*



# No more snakes released in Phuket

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Amid fears that large king cobras caught in or near houses over the past month will be released back into the wild in Phuket, Pongchart Chouehorm, Director of the Khao Phra Thaew Natural and Wildlife Education Centre in Thalang has announced that all snakes caught in homes in Phuket are to be taken off-island.

Mr Pongchart told the press on Feb 11 that every wild animal in Phuket can be considered to be in one of two groups: those living in protected natural reserves, and those that have found their way into unprotected wilds.

"Nowadays, there are many animals getting lost in areas of Phuket. Some of them are also injured. If we find injured animals like lorises or monkeys, we always take them to receive medical treatment by veterinarians. After that, we release them to the place where we found them," Mr Pongchart said.

"After receiving medical treatment, the released animals do not have problems finding food by themselves, as they grew up in the forest and know how to survive, unlike animals that have been raised as pets," he explained.

However, snakes caught in Phuket receive special treatment. They are handed over to a wildlife



Kusoldharm rescue workers wrangle one of the two large king cobras caught in a house in Pa Khlok last week. Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

reserve in Phang Nga.

"I admit that a lot of snakes have intruded into and disturbed local homes," Mr Pongchart said.

"We have found a lot of snakes in homes recently because it is their mating season. Additionally, it is dry and we are entering the hot season, they need water to drink," he explained.

"As you can see, a couple of king cobras were caught in Baan Pakrong Cheep [in Pa khlok]. We will take them to Phang Nga tomorrow [Feb 12]," Mr Pongchart added.

The two king cobras caught in Baan Pakrong Cheep were found curled up under a rack used to hold children's toys. One king cobra was a male about four metres long

weighing around seven kilograms, while the other was a female about 3.5m long and weighing about 5kg.

The two cobras were just the latest among a clutch of large cobras caught in the area, spurring Kusoldharm rescue workers to warn people in Moo 2 Pa Khlok to beware king cobras near their houses. Four large king cobras had been caught

in the area in the past month.

"We have now partnered with the Phang Nga Wildlife Nursery Station and the Klong Saeng Wildlife Research Station in Surat Thani in order to manage and solve the problem with snakes together," he said last week.

The Khao Phra Thaew Natural and Wildlife Education Centre in Thalang has been dispatching caught snakes off-island for some time, Mr Pongchart noted.

"From July to September last year, we found 109 pythons and took them all to the Phang Nga Wildlife Nursery Station because of their aggressiveness," Mr Pongchart explained.

"We also take cobras and king cobras to Phang Nga, as the nursery station is mainly responsible for taking care of lost animals," he added.

"Our good partner on the island is the Kusoldharm Phuket Foundation. Their rescue workers are ready to catch snakes anywhere and anytime," Mr Pongchart noted.

"So, my sisters and brothers [sic] can be confident that all kinds of snakes caught in Phuket are to be taken off the island," he confirmed.

"Most importantly, to every person, please keep both inside and outside of your places clean because it is a simple way to make your place safe from snakes," he concluded.

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# Phuket fights for jab rights

## Business leaders appeal ban on independent sourcing of COVID vaccine

The Phuket News  
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Key leaders of Phuket business associations have filed a joint request addressed to Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha to reconsider the ban on local administrations and private businesses from buying Thai-government-approved vaccinations for COVID-19.

Phuket Chamber of Commerce President Thanusak Phungdet and Phuket Tourist Association President Bhumikitti Ruktaengam together handed the formal request to Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew on Feb 10.

Present to witness the handing over of the formal request were representatives of 12 other business and trade associations, representing the Thailand Hotels Association Southern chapter, the Phuket Real Estate Association, the Patong Hotel Association, the Kata-Karon Hotel Association, Phuket City Development Co Ltd (PKCD), the Phuket Boutique Hotel Association, the Health & Wellness Phuket Spa Association, Andaman Guide Association, the Private Educational Association of Phuket and the Phuket Travel Agents Association.

Also present on behalf of the



Phuket Chamber of Commerce President Thanusak Phungdet speaks to the press after submitting the formal request on Feb 10. Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

Phuket Provincial Government to receive the formal request were Phuket Vice Governors Phichet Panaphong and Piyaphong Chuwong.

Governor Narong said the formal request would be forwarded to the Office of the Ombudsman.

The request was filed after the Department of Local Administration

issued an order on Feb 8 to clarify that local administrations and private-sector organisations cannot currently purchase or distribute COVID-19 vaccines by themselves.

"In the first stage, only the central government can purchase, manage and distribute the vaccines under the vaccine management plan, in order

to distribute to the targeted group of people and be able to follow up on their symptoms after being injected," the order stated.

"Consequently, at this stage, we do not permit private sector and local administrations to directly purchase the vaccine from the producers," it added.

"We want them to reconsider and allow Phuket local administrative organisations [municipalities and *OrBorTor*] and the private sector to be able to directly purchase COVID-19 vaccine from producers," Mr Thanusak said.

"So that our tourism and economic situation will recover this year, as we plan to welcome foreign tourists in October under the project #PhuketFirstOctober," he added.

Patong Municipality, Phuket City Municipality and Chalong Municipality last month all confirmed their intent to independently source COVID-19 vaccinations in order to vaccinate all people registered as living in their areas.

Leading representatives of key Phuket industry and trade organisations have together pushed for reopening Phuket to foreign tourists come Oct 1 as a way to help restart the island's economy, which is heavily dependent on tourism.

The plan relies on at least 70% of the island's population being vaccinated for COVID-19.

Without any form of restarting the island's economy, many more people are expected to see their incomes plunge below the poverty line.

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## Quiet start to Chinese New Year

CHINESE NEW YEAR GOT off to a quiet start last Friday (Feb 12), with the streets quiet for the special public holiday declared in the hope of boosting domestic tourism, and only local residents attending Chinese shrines across the island instead of the bustling crowds of tourists seen in years past.

Thai-Chinese living in the heart of the Phuket Old Town area, especially along Thalang Rd and Phang Nga Rd, decorated their homes in honour of the festive occasion, yet even then the number of houses adorned with the traditional decorations seem to be fewer than in previous years, noted the Phuket office of the Public Relations Department (PR Phuket) in their own report.

Meanwhile, few people turned out at the Pud Cho Shrine on Soi Phuthon, off Ranong Rd, to observe annual blessing ceremonies and to make merit, PR Phuket also noted.

Most of the attendees at the shrine were not wearing red clothes, red being an auspicious colour in Chinese culture.



Very few people turned out at Chinese shrines in Phuket Town to celebrate Chinese New Year. Photo: PR Phuket

On being asked, some attendees explained that they had not bought new red clothes for the new year in order to save money.

Some said that due to the effects of COVID-19 this year, family members were not able to return to their traditional family homes to celebrate the new year together.

Instead, the attendees were observing simple rituals that must be performed by paying homage to ancestors, at home.

Those still with jobs took time off to pay homage at the shrine and set off some firecrackers, then went back to work.

Elsewhere throughout Phuket Town was "quite lonely", PR Phuket noted.

Very few people are turn-

ing out to worship the gods, or set off firecrackers, both core key aspects of Chinese New Year in Phuket Town in the past.

"Most of them have only a small ritual, and give red envelopes [ang pao] to the children in the family," PR Phuket reported.

Meanwhile, people were invited to join the Annual Worship Festival 2021 as part of the Chinese New Year celebrations. The event will be held at the Phuket Thai Hua Museum on Krabi Rd, Phuket Town, tonight (Feb 19) from 10:30pm.

Those interested in attending the event were asked to contact the Tourism Development and Promotion Division at Phuket City Municipality at 076-214306.

The Phuket News



# Sinovac COVID-19 shots available by end of month

Mongkol Bangprapa

The first COVID-19 vaccine shots in Thailand will begin by the end of this month as the first 200,000 doses of China's Sinovac vaccine are scheduled to arrive on Feb 24, the government said on Monday (Feb 15).

At most, three days will be required for the final inspection of the imported vaccines before vaccinations actually begin, it added.

China's Sinovac Biotech had confirmed that production of 200,000 doses for Thailand with the vaccines ready for shipment on Feb 20, said Deputy Prime Minister and Public Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul on Monday.

The Department of Medical Sciences will then inspect the vaccines one last time to ensure the delivered product meets standards and are as effective as declared to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), he added.

"The inoculation programme will begin right away after the department confirms the vaccine is good to go," he said.



Made in China: The Sinovac vaccine will be available in Thailand by the end of the month. Photo: AFP

Department of Disease Control general-director Opas Karnkawinpong said the final inspection of the imported vaccine, termed as lot release, will take two to three days at most.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha said after the first lot of vaccine arrives and is administered to at-risk groups, the second batch of 800,000 doses and the third batch of one million doses will follow.

These batches will be administered as the second shot for people who have already received their first jab and as the first shot for others, he said.

Migrant workers will be another group to be given

priority in the vaccination programme, other than frontline healthcare workers and the people with underlying health conditions, he said.

As there still won't be enough jabs for everyone, social distancing and mask wearing will continue to be important COVID-prevention measures, he said.

Twenty-six million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine by AstraZeneca will arrive some time between May and June and another 35 million doses will then follow, said the premier.

While a similar COVID-19 vaccine by Johnson & Johnson is still pending FDA registra-

tion for emergency use in Thailand, the government is also in talks with Moderna Inc and Pfizer over the registration of their vaccines for use here, said Gen Prayut.

FDA secretary-general Paisarn Dunkum confirmed the registration of the Sinovac shot will be done on time.

Johnson & Johnson was supplying more documentation to support its request for the registration of its COVID-19 vaccine, while Moderna had enquired about the vaccination registration process, said Dr Paisarn.

From this month until around May, the COVID-19 vaccine will be administered to healthcare workers and at-risk groups in areas where the outbreak situation is rated as critical, said Dr Apisamai Srirangson, assistant spokeswoman for the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA).

And later from June until December, the vaccination programme will cover more groups of people, especially those living in popular tourist destinations, she said.

Bangkok Post

## Record low birth rate worries officials

THE COUNTRY HAS recorded its lowest ever total fertility rate (TFR), prompting concern amongst health officials.

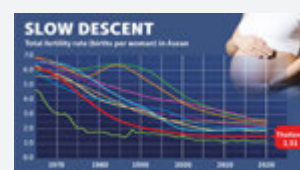
The TFR is the average number of children born to a woman over her lifetime.

Thailand's birth rate dropped below 600,000 for the first time last year and took the country's TFR down to 1.51, which is "extremely low", said Dr Kamthorn Pruksanawong, chairman of a sub-committee on reproductive medicine at the Royal Thai College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

The World Health Organization and World Bank have said that if a country's TFR goes under 2.1, its proportion of elderly will surge and problems associated with migrant workers will rise.

These two problems are now clearly evident in Thailand, he said.

"Thailand's TFR used to be 5.1 and it has declined all the way down to 1.5. Worse still, the country has still not done anything about it and,



Graphics: Bangkok Post

without any intervention, the rate is forecast to fall further to 1.3 in less than a decade."

Aside from the alarmingly low birth rate, the number of health problems experienced by babies born to older-than-usual mothers, such as Down Syndrome, is also rising, said Prof Kamthorn.

In Japan and Europe, for instance, the average rate of women seeking medical assistance for infertility problems is 32, while in Thailand the average age of women when they first consult doctors about suspected infertility problems is 38, he said.

By that age it is rather late to start having babies and the risk of a baby being born with Down Syndrome is high, said Prof Kamthorn.

Bangkok Post

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# Sea Life Safari

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### ADVERTORIAL

By Joanna Matlub

Thailand's local wildlife has been given a much-needed chance to recover since the disappearance of tourists flooding in. Islands and national parks have seen sea and wildlife populations start to return, making right now a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get out and explore on the new Sea Life Safari.

The two idyllic Racha Islands – Koh Racha Yai and Koh Racha Noi – provide the ideal destination to enjoy nature; with some of the best snorkelling reefs in Thailand, tropical white powdery beaches and crystal-clear turquoise waters. Most visitors explore only Koh Racha Yai (situated just 20km south of Phuket, and a mere 45-minute speedboat ride away); however, to experience the plethora of marine life on offer, you need to venture a little further to its smaller twin, Koh Racha Noi – an uninhabited rocky island, with plenty of fantastic snorkelling bays.

With only February and March providing the accessible window to experience aquatic life around Koh Racha Noi, this Sea Safari has been put together to enjoy the abundance of marine animals over 2 days and 1 night (although day trips are also welcomed).

With deserted beaches and an abundance of nature to explore, let's look at some of the wildlife you could encounter on your private speedboat trip (for up to 18 friends and family):

1. Dolphins – Get the opportunity to experience a pod of these inquisitively playful creatures up close and personal. As intensely social animals, you might be lucky enough to have them play near the boat's wake, around Koh Racha Noi or Koh Maithon.

2. Turtles – The most common varieties you could get a glimpse of whilst snorkelling are the Green or Hawksbill turtles. The latter were named due to their hawk-like beaks, and are found around Koh Racha Yai. These beautiful creatures are a fundamental link in marine ecosystems as they help maintain the health of coral reefs.

3. Hornbills – These unusual birds are characterized by their long, down-curved bill with a bright yellow casque (or horn as we all refer to it) on top. Coral Island is the perfect spotting ground for these birds, which are often seen in the trees above Banana Beach, an ideal stop-off on your way to or from Racha.

4. Sea Otters – The smooth coated otter can be surprisingly amiable, and they have even been known to try to get aboard some of the 5 Star Marine speedboats! You might just get lucky enough to see them frolicking near the beach around Naka Yai, or even trying to climb on board.



See dolphins up close on your Sea Life Safari.

5. Dragons – Well, OK not exactly. However, Thailand's Monitor Lizards can grow up to a staggering 2 metres long, so dragon might not be too far-fetched. Get the chance to witness these huge creatures swimming up and down the waterways in the early morning, or go for a dragon-spotting ramble on Koh Racha Yai, where you are sure to spot at least one around the beach or island roads.

6. Marine Life – The stunning coral reefs around these twin islands are just teeming with aquatic life, and make for excellent snorkelling. At Koh Racha Noi, both Pirates Beach and Banana Bay provide opportunities to see the abundance of fish where you might sight giant starfish, pufferfish or sea turtles. Reef fish like Parrot fish,

snapper and angelfish can be found in the shallow waters just steps from the beach at Koh Racha Yai, where you have your pick of snorkelling spots including Batok, Ter, Siam and Kon Kare Bays.

Although sightings of these creatures cannot be guaranteed, one thing is for sure; February and March are the only months you can safely experience Koh Racha Noi, and when tourists do return, spotting some of these animals will again become a rarer opportunity.

5 Star Marine offers a 2 day / 1 night Sea Life Safari itinerary - Please contact Shaun on 093 720 6221 to book. Quote 'The Phuket News' to receive FREE round-trip private minibus transfers to and from Boat Lagoon.

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# Is Sustainable Capitalism the future?



## SUSTAINABLY YOURS

Palmer Owyong

To paraphrase comedian George Carlin, life is all about getting more stuff and wanting to have better stuff than other people's stuff, but do you ever notice that their stuff is crap and your crap is stuff?

Our current system of capitalism is unnecessarily wasteful; we throw away 50% of food produced in the world; 66% of the energy from uranium, oil, coal and natural gas is lost as it's converted into electricity. A car loses 70-80% of its energy in heat exhaust, and it will spend 90% of its life parked. The average person buys 60% more clothes than they did in 2000 and according to the World Bank on average they only wear 20% of them regularly.

### The Future is Sustainable

So what can we do to become more sustainable? According to futurist and entrepreneur Peter Diamandis, from his book *The Future Is Faster Than You Think*, we are at the beginning of a convergence in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, material science, 5G, robotics, 3D printing, synthetic biology, augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR). Because these technologies progress exponentially, we will see more change in the next two decades than we have in the past 1,000 years.

By leveraging new technology, intelligent product design, material science and improving on the existing inefficiencies, we can make capitalism sustainable without having to sacrifice too many conveniences. So, what could the future look like?

### Energy

We will 3D print solar panels into a thin layer of film with an inexpensive material named perovskite, which increases their efficiency from 23-30% over a conventional silicon one. Since we can integrate the material into paint, we can put it onto buildings, cars and clothes, and since they don't require glass to make, they will be a lot lighter and take up less space. To solve the intermittency problem, we will make batteries from graphene,



The Thai government is pushing to have more electric cars on the road. Photo: EGAT

which last eight times as long as lithium batteries and can be made from agricultural waste such as hemp.

### Transportation

Despite all the hype surrounding fully self-driving cars, we are probably at least one to two decades away from them being widely available. However electric and hybrid electric vehicles will grow in popularity and JP Morgan expects them to capture almost 40% of the market share by 2025. This will reduce our carbon footprint and help to reduce air pollution.

For the next decade we will fuel airplanes using cleaner-burning bio-diesel and other synthetically made fuels. These will reduce, but not eliminate CO2 emissions. Between 2030 and 2035 hydrogen fuel cell technology will be mature enough that airplanes can begin using them. Since they don't release any harmful emissions, it will make flying guilt free.

### Housing

Modular buildings and 3D-printed homes are already being built from recycled materials, and agricultural waste such as rice. They require less labour, cost 30-40% less, and once the house reaches the end of its useful lifespan, we can compost it.

### Food/Water

Over the next decade, water scarcity

will become a serious issue as climate change makes droughts more severe. We will need to modernise the farming system using technology like vertical farming, which uses 70-90% less water. In addition, we will make meat using synthetic biology as the current factory farming practices are far too resource intensive. Lab-grown or "clean meats" have the same taste and nutritional value of the real thing while using 99% less land, 80-90% less water, and emit

80- 95% fewer greenhouse gases.

### Consumer Goods

GoodOnYou.Eco is a website and app that rates the sustainability of fashion brands. It reflects how consumer demands are changing toward sustainable products, which will lead to higher quality, longer-lasting goods over the 'buy and throw away' society that we are living in today. Things like appliances will become modular, making them easier to recycle, repair or upgrade rather than having to replace. Websites and apps like ShareMyToolBox and GlamCorner already enable customers to share tools, luxury goods and accessories, thus lowering their carbon footprint and the amount of resources required for their production. Terracycle is already reducing waste in 21 countries by helping consumers to get their favourite products in reusable packaging you can send back to the manufacturer once you are done using it. Indonesia-based AvaniEco makes bags and containers out of cassava and plant starches that are both biodegradable and compostable.

Using the latest in material science and technology sustainable capitalism can bridge the gap between convenience and being environmentally responsible.

Palmer Owyong is an environmental activist working with the Kamala Green Club and the Global Sustainability Hub.



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## POP QUIZ

- Who was the wife (and sister) of Zeus?
- Which is the largest island in the world?
- What is the name for a dog created by crossing a Labrador Retriever and a Poodle?
- Which famous American musician was fatally shot by his father on April 1, 1984?
- In Norse mythology, Yggdrasil is an immense mythical tree – what type of tree is it?

Answers below, centre

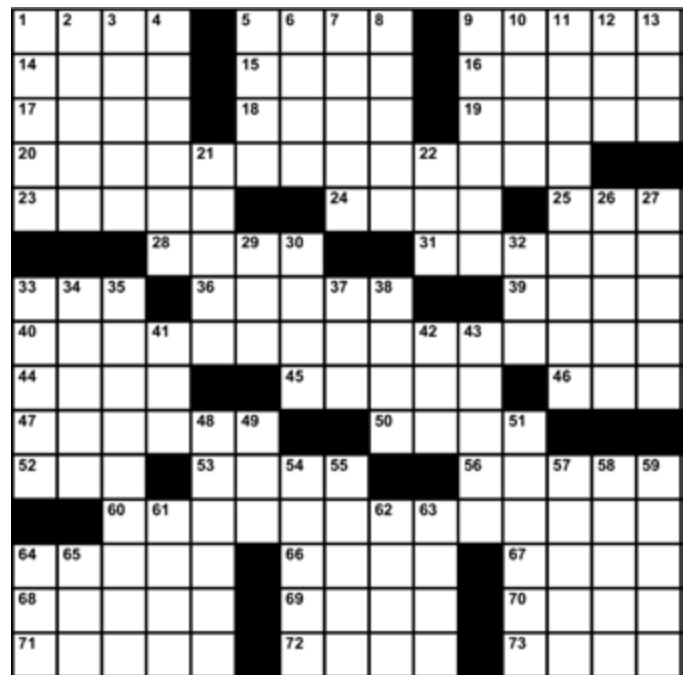
## SUDOKU

Easy

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

## Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

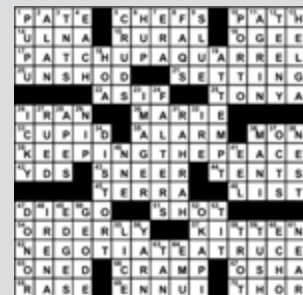
- Across
- Darned thing
  - Declines
  - Links together
  - Skilled
  - Wrongful act
  - Election news
  - Legal claim
  - Insurer for soldiers
  - Year-end mark-downs
  - “\_\_\_\_\_ shadow of love” lyric
  - Flower with a yellow disk in the middle
  - Cubism pioneer Juan
  - Musical literary piece
  - Record
  - Shoe
  - “What a relief!”
  - DEA agent, in slang
  - Marvel superheroes
  - “It’s easy to trace the \_\_\_\_\_” lyric
  - Right of inheritance
  - Nast the publisher
  - Trawler’s equipment
  - Charge
  - Systems
  - Basic version, abbr.
  - Rolled items
  - Prefix with dollars
- Down
- Spicy dance
  - Newspaper notices
  - Gridiron gripper
  - Knew
  - Small handbag
  - Cap’n’s mate
  - Confederate general who won at Chickamauga
  - Part of a flight
  - The right way
  - Large, brilliantly colored food fish
  - Irish Sea spot
  - Known as
  - A Cadillac
  - Imbibe
22. Zero
26. Combine giant
27. Dadaist Max
29. British special forces, for short
30. Relative of a gator
32. Hacker
33. Dumas character
34. ‘-- you the clever one!’
35. Salon appliance
37. Corp. bigwig
38. All, in combinations
41. Vineyard in France
42. N.F.L. stat
43. Rhythm
48. Mellow
49. Computer in “2001”
51. New York county
54. Stuffed bear
55. Tally
57. Winter Palace residents
58. Some wines
59. A lot
61. Salinger heroine
62. Mega\_\_\_\_\_
63. Little devils
64. Whitney and others, abbr.
65. Yellowfin tuna



## Answers to this week’s Pop Quiz:

1) Hera; 2) Greenland (Australia is a continent); 3) Labradoodle or labrapoodle; 4) Marvin Gaye; 5) Ash tree

## Solutions to last week’s puzzles:



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

## GOT YOUR NUMBER

2

beats per minute is how slow an alligator can lower its heart rate to while resting.

84

seconds into a conversation is how long it takes before questions arise asking for clarification, like “Who? What?”

450

people die falling out of beds in the United States each year.

1,000

bibles printed in 1631 left the “not” out of “Thou shall not commit adultery” – most were burned, but a handful still exist.

500,000

US dollars a year is how much Uberfacts founder/creator makes from his Uberfacts Tweets.

61 million

paggers were in use in 1994.

Source: Uberfacts

## ISLAND VIEW



Early morning cat at Wat Chalong. Photo: Jeffrey Ephreim Villanueva Villegas

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

## This week in history

### Feb 19, 356 AD

Emperor Constantius II issues a decree closing all pagan temples in the Roman Empire.

### Feb 20, 1913

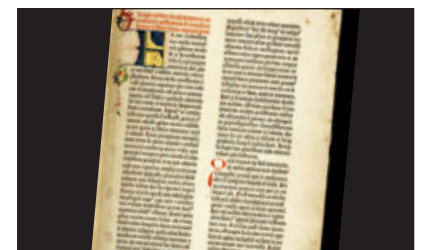
King O’Malley drives in the first survey peg to mark commencement of work on the construction of the Australian capital Canberra.

### Feb 21, 1952

The British government, under Winston Churchill, abolishes identity cards in the UK to “set the people free”.

### Feb 22, 1632

Galileo’s Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems is published.



The first page of full text in an original Gutenberg Bible. Photo: University of Texas

### Feb 23, 1455

Traditional date for the publication of the Gutenberg Bible, the first Western book printed with movable type.

### Feb 24, 1989

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issues a fatwa and offers a US\$3 million bounty for the death of Salman Rushdie, author of *The Satanic Verses*.

### Feb 25, 1932

After seven years stateless, Adolf Hitler obtains German citizenship by naturalization, which allows him to run in the 1932 election for Reichspräsident.

Source: Wikipedia



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Dave, Steve & Khun Ott Pro



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Steve & Jason



Steve & Matt

## IVA POOL PARTY & BBQ

Sunday, Feb 7 saw the first of what is hoped will be many events run by the International Veterans Association here on Phuket, for Association members and their families. The BBQ and pool party was held at the Par Hotel on Phukets Country Club golf course. During the event, IVA President, Steve Pearce, presented awards to two of the Veterans Association's Ambassadors for their excellent support. Veterans of the armed forces and the emergency services are welcome to join us. For more enquiries drop us a line on [contact.us@phuketveteran.com](mailto:contact.us@phuketveteran.com)



## POOL FAMILY DAY AT PATONG BAY HILL

Every Sunday at Patong Bay Hill, locals and members of the Persona group enjoy an array of Thai dishes and free flow soft drinks, all for only THB 100 per person. Over 100 people enjoyed the fantastic weather and pool side dining on Feb 07, 2021, kids splashing in the pool, great music, a fun time was had by everyone.





## Ricciardo aiming for podium with McLaren

### FORMULA ONE

MCLAREN ARE AIMING to “close the gap” to Mercedes when the new Formula One season begins with new driver Daniel Ricciardo looking to get back on the podium, the team announced at its 2021 presentation on Monday (Feb 15).

The Australian, 31, who has joined the outfit from Renault, will line up alongside 21-year-old Briton Lando Norris who scored a third-placed finish in last season’s Austrian Grand Prix which helped McLaren to finish third in the constructors’ championship.

“As I see it, most teams have a chance for a podium,” said Ricciardo at the digital launch. “I certainly have ambition to be on the podium.”

McLaren, entering their 54<sup>th</sup> season in Formula One, finished last season well be-

hind Mercedes but hope that their new engines, supplied by Mercedes, will help them to fight for the titles.

The switch from the Renault engines, which they used for three years, to Mercedes came in a bid to add to their 20 world championships – 12 drivers’ titles and eight constructors’ championships.

Apart from the engine and new driver line-up, McLaren also unveiled the MCL35M, the team’s 2021 race car, which is an “evolution” of the 2020 model and “benefits from aerodynamic and chassis developments” that the team implemented during the off-season.

The team said the new car would maintain the “iconic McLaren papaya orange and blue”, first carried by the team in the 1960s with team founder, Bruce McLaren, at the wheel. *AFP*

# Luna Rossa out front in America’s Cup challenger

### SAILING

AFP

“Super happy” Luna Rossa moved into a strong position to challenge Team New Zealand for the coveted America’s Cup by taking a 4-0 lead in the challenger series final in Auckland last Sunday (Feb 14).

However, at time of press it was unclear when the next races in the best-of-13 series would be held, after Auckland was placed in lockdown late Sunday following a fresh coronavirus outbreak.

“As a result of the government announcement of a level three lockdown in Auckland, initially for 72 hours, the next scheduled race day on Wednesday has been postponed,” organisers said in a statement.

They added that there would be a meeting with authorities in the next few days to work out the ramifications.

After winning the first two races against Ineos Team UK on Saturday in light winds which favoured the Italian



INEOS Team UK competes against Luna Rossa Prada Pirelli on day two, race three of the 2021 America’s Cup challenger final in Auckland on Feb 14. *Photo: AFP*

boat, Luna Rossa dominated races three and four in stronger winds when gifted the start by critical errors from Ineos skipper, the acclaimed British yachtsman Ben Ainslie.

Once in front, the outcome was never in doubt as Luna Rossa helmsman Jimmy Spithill covered every move by Ineos to hold the lead through to the end.

It leaves Luna Rossa, owned by Prada fashion house boss Patrizio Bertelli, needing only three more wins to take the series with Ineos yet to get on the board.

At stake for the winner in the best-of-13 challenger final is the right to race holders Team New Zealand for the America’s Cup, professional sport’s oldest trophy and yachting’s Holy Grail.

“We are super happy. We’re very happy for the team, we’re very happy for Italy,” Luna Rossa’s co-helmsman Francesco Bruni said, unable to contain his delight at their domination in stark contrast to the mood on Ineos.

“It was a tough day, we’re not happy with it. We can sail a hell of a lot better than that,

and we need to,” Ainslie said.

Ainslie fluffed the start of race three when he drew the favoured port entry into the starting box and was outmanoeuvred by Spithill, who crossed the finish line 13 seconds ahead.

In a pre-start manoeuvre 30 seconds before race four began, the British lost control of Ineos which reared up before falling back into the water.

Although they were back on their foils by the time they crossed the start line, Luna Rossa had the advantage and sailed away to win by 41 seconds.

## For the love of the game

### TENNIS

LOVE WAS IN THE AIR FOR TENNIS aficionados last Sunday (Feb 14) with players from all over the island coming together as Thanyapura Sports and Health Resort hosted their Valentine’s Day Tennis Tournament.

Certain teams elected to embrace the Valentine’s Day occasion by dressing in red attire and the courts were donned with red and white balloons to enhance the mood.

Twelve couples competed in two categories all vying for the coveted title and the games were evenly fought throughout the day in a friendly but competitive spirit.

Winning honours went to Andrei Kapitonov and Ekaterina Elantseva who won the final



One of the competing couples Napon and Dorothy. *Photo: Donna Toon*

6-3 against newly paired Dorothy MacPherson and Napon Worasaktayan.

Well done to all the players who competed and coaches Tom and Mike who organised a great occasion. *The Phuket News*

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# Silky Ilkay the unlikely hero

## Humble Gundogan overcomes adversity to lead City's title charge

### FOOTBALL

Ben Tirebuck

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When Manchester City's captain and talisman Kevin de Bruyne was injured against Aston Villa last month it was feared that any Premier League title aspirations the club had could be derailed.

The Belgian was considered the creative fulcrum of the team, its beating heart who single-handedly orchestrated games. Surely without him they would falter and lose further ground on cross-city rivals United and reigning champions Liverpool?

Step forward Ilkay Gundogan. The mild-mannered, quiet German had never been one to hog the headlines but now he is creating them, such has been his form of late.

Despite missing the opening month of the season after he tested positive for COVID-19, 30-year-old Gundogan has scored 13 goals in 25 appearances so far to help lead City to the top of the table amid a 16-game record-breaking winning run. His two-goal haul against Spurs at the weekend followed an identical return against Liverpool in the previous game. He has scored more goals than any other player across Europe's top five leagues since the turn of the calendar year, netting nine goals in nine league games. He was voted January's Premier League player of the month last Friday (Feb 12) in recognition of his outstanding contributions.

Gundogan's red-hot run of form has predominantly been down to de Bruyne's injury as it meant he was



Ilkay Gundogan has scored more goals than any other player across Europe's top five leagues since the turn of the calendar year. Photo: AFP

pushed forward by manager Pep Guardiola from a previously more defensive midfield role to operate at the forefront of the attack. The results speak for themselves.

However, it could have been so different for Gundogan after enduring several serious injuries that threatened to curtail his career.

### 'FORGET TO FORGET EVERYTHING'

Born to Turkish parents in the industrial German town of Gelsenkirchen, Gundogan starred for Borussia Dortmund under Jurgen Klopp, pivotal

in the club's run to the Champions League final in 2013 in which he scored despite his team eventually losing to Bayern Munich.

In the same year he scored his first international goal as Germany beat Kazakhstan 4-1 in a 2014 World Cup qualifying match. Cruelly, a back injury then kept him out of action for a year meaning he missed the tournament finals, which Germany went on to win.

Four months into his City career, after becoming Guardiola's first signing at the club, he tore cruciate ligaments in his right knee in a game

against Watford which forced him to miss the remainder of the season.

During his recuperation time Gundogan had to dig deep. Long days of physiotherapy took their toll but it was the mental strain that punished him the most. Recovering alone, in the gym, in the pool, adrift and separate from the group, wondering whether it would all pay off and whether he would be able to regain his place even if the rehabilitation efforts worked.

"The general feeling is of loneliness," Gundogan told the *New York Times*.

"That is the most difficult thing: to feel that you are useless, not worth as much as before, not worth as much as the others."

His fitness coach Arthur Jankowski, a strong advocate of the benefits of fresh air and the great outdoors on physical and mental health, encouraged Gundogan to get outside as much as possible in an effort to distract himself; Gundogan walked parks, scoured the sweeping beauty of the Peak District and climbed Scafell Pike, the highest peak in England.

"Arthur taught me to enjoy the nature, the fresh air, just being outside," Gundogan said. "We all have so much stuff to do now: the work, the phone. We forget to forget everything."

Gundogan's mental and physical resolve had been severely tested, but he managed to return to action 276 days after the injury occurred, ironically, against Watford.

"Maybe it had to be that way," he reflected philosophically.

He hasn't looked back since, winning the Premier League twice, the FA Cup once and the League Cup three times. They still have all three of these competitions on the radar this season. Plus the Champions League. It's a good time to be a Manchester City fan.

"It is an important win but it is February," Gundogan told *Sky Sports* after City demolished Liverpool 4-1 on Feb 7. "The title is not ours yet. We need to stay humble."

There's no doubt Gundogan possesses this trait in bundles and it would be a fitting story of triumph over adversity should he be rightfully acclaimed for his efforts come season's end.



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# Sport



**Luna Rossa takes strong lead > p14**



Alexander 'The Great' Volkanovski honing his skills at Tiger Muay Thai & MMA Training Camp in Chalong. Photo: Hip Panakom Santayanon.

## VETS MOUNT UFC DEFENCE

### MMA

**JP Mestanza**  
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March is going to be a massive month for two Phuket-based veterans, each of whom are UFC champions.

Russian phenom and current UFC Bantamweight champion Petr 'No Mercy' Yan (15 wins, 1 loss) is set to defend his title for the first time on March 6 against rising contender Aljamain Sterling at UFC 259 in Las Vegas.

The 28-year-old hasn't

lost in the Octagon since he came into the organization in 2018, just three years ago. In that time, he's put together a string of brilliant wins over world class fighters, including UFC legends Urijah Faber and Jose Aldo. In fact, the only loss on Yan's record – a 2016 decision that went to Magomed Magomedov at ACB 32 – he avenged with a win over Magomedov just a year later.

Likewise, Alexander 'The Great' Volkanovski (23 wins, 1 loss), is set to defend his UFC Featherweight title, albeit for the second time,

after winning the belt against Max Holloway in December 2019, and then solidifying his championship status with another victory in the rematch in July last year.

The 32-year-old Australian will defend his title against a very dangerous Brian 'T-City' Ortega on March 27 in the UFC 260 co-main event in Las Vegas.

### 'MORE FOCUSED THAN EVER'

Phuket will be cheering hard for both fighters, given that each has spent their early years honing their craft on

the mats of Tiger Muay Thai & MMA Training Camp in Chalong.

Volkanovski earned a spot on the MMA team during the 2014 TMT Tryouts. Yan joined the team later that year, with just one fight under his belt, and was a talented boxer at the time looking to add more weapons to his striking arsenal.

For Yan, many are looking to see how the 27-year-old will respond as a champ, with the promotion now throwing the best fighters that the division has to offer his way. Last month, 'No Mercy' went

straight to American Top Team in Florida to prepare for the fight, given COVID restrictions and the fact that his fight was going to be scheduled on American soil.

"Change of scenery is good," Yan told the 'What the Heck' podcast. "It's good to get ready here and [then] kick some ass after."

His rivalry with Sterling has been buoyed by constant social media chatter on both sides, although Yan says he's more focused than ever.

"My goal right now is to defend this title multiple times and I'm completely focused

on that. Aljamain is just the next step in achieving my goal," Yan said.

Volkanovski, meanwhile, will defend his title against an opponent other than Holloway, for the first time. Ortega has improved his striking over the last two years, but 'The Great' is looking to break 'T-City' before the night is done.

"I'm putting on a pace that no one can deal with," he told MMA Junkie, "That's truly what I believe, and that's what I'm seeing. I'm just going to go out there and do my thing, and I'm expecting a mid-rounds finish."

## Phuket Vagabonds announce youth rugby day

### RUGBY

FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS of their first open clinic in November last year, the Phuket Vagabonds Rugby Club are excited to invite eager young rugby players to another open day of rugby development.

Join coaches from the Phuket Vagabonds as they provide training for young boys and girls of all age groups in core rugby skills. The complimentary open clinic will be held on Saturday Feb 27, at the ACG Cricket Ground in Thalang.

The club will be utilising this event to introduce their all-new Phuket Rugby Academy, an organisation dedicated to the growth and development of rugby in Phuket.

The academy provides coaching and development for players of all ages, gender and experience levels in a safe and welcoming environment and will be providing regular scheduled training sessions commencing in March.

The inaugural rugby clinic last November was an outstanding success, attracting over 80 children who participated under the

supervision of 17 coaches and staff.

"The coaches did a great job grouping the kids into the right brackets and adapting the training zones to the level or ability of the kids, so that everyone could enjoy the experience," commented Dan Ashburn, captain of the Vagabonds.

"It was fantastic to see such ability and enthusiasm in all the kids and thus only makes us want to drive rugby through the Phuket community even more," he added.

Over the years, Phuket Vagabonds have been heavily involved in rugby and the sport's youth

development programs, with particular assistance provided to the Asia Center Foundation (ACF) and Patong Municipality School.

"By pushing rugby we hope that we can build a mini and juniors Phuket rugby team to compete with neighbouring and nationwide provinces in the near future," said Ashburn.

"With rugby on the rise in Thailand and more and more enjoying the game over its many provinces we want Phuket to join the party and become a competitive team within the Thailand rugby union set up."



Photo: Urupong (King) Natalang

Those interested in attending the complimentary rugby clinic on Feb 27 can register via the academy's facebook page: [www.facebook.com/phuketrugbyacademy](https://www.facebook.com/phuketrugbyacademy).

The Phuket News