

CHILD BEATING AT PATONG KINDERGARTEN > PAGE 2

DON'T BE DUPED

SCAM CALLS COST PHUKET B413MN IN ONE YEAR

Photo: Natnaree Likidwatanasakun

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More than 5,500 people in Phuket fell victim to scam calls and online fraud last year, with reported losses soaring to B413 million, Pol Col Kritsada Manawongsakun, Director of Technology Crime Suppression Division (TCSD) Region 5 branch, has confirmed.

The trend has been increasing since 2022, Pol Col Kritsada said, but the impact of scam calls and online fraud took a huge leap last year.

"In 2022, 1,365 victims in Phuket reported losses amounting to B10.9mn. By 2023, this number

had increased to 3,538 victims, with damages reaching B18.8mn," he told *The Phuket News*.

"But in 2024, a staggering 5,510 people fell victim to scam calls, with reported losses soaring to B413mn," he added.

The jump in the number of victims, and the baht amount in losses, has prompted the TCSD to issue a fresh round of public warnings about scams, and issue guidelines on how to protect oneself from such criminals, Pol Col Kritsada said.

NATIONAL THREAT

The TCSD operates under the better-known Cyber Crime Investigation Bureau (CCIB),

which was established by Royal Decree in September 2020 after cyber crime and online fraud was specifically deemed to be a threat to national security.

As Director of the TCSD Region 5 branch, Pol Col Kritsada oversees operations to fight cyber crime in all 14 provinces in Southern Thailand, including Phuket.

Pol Col Kritsada pointed out that In January 2025 alone, Thailand recorded 31,165 cases of technology-related fraud, averaging 1,005 cases per day.

"Among these, fraudulent online sales accounted for 55.88% of incidents, with victims losing over B145mn," he told *The Phuket News*.

Other common scams included job offer fraud, prize claim fraud, call centre scams, loan fraud and investment scams, with total damages surpassing B2 billion – again, in just the first month of this year.

In response, police during January froze 10,410 bank accounts linked to fraudulent activities, seizing assets worth approximately B448mn, Pol Col Kritsada said.

Just last week, the CCIB confirmed that it received more than 200,000 online fraud complaints with total losses of about B29 billion over the last 11 months.

Citing a report by the Thai Journalists Association, CCIB...

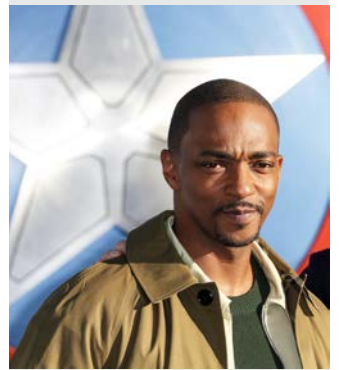
NEWS PAGE 3

Patong Police crack down on reckless tourists



LIFE PAGE 9

A new chapter for Mackie as Capt America



SPORT PAGE 16

Miss Landgraf continues her impressive rise



CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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PHUKET'S QUALITY TILE BOUTIQUE

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News



Valentine's Day
sees hundreds
marry > p5

Action forced over Kamala wastewater

A TOP ENVIRONMENTAL official has called for urgent action to address garbage and wastewater issues affecting Kamala's marine environment, warning that cooperation from all sectors is essential to solving the problem.

Samran Sinthong, Secretary General of the Conservation Foundation and Advisor to the Senate Subcommittee on Natural Resources, visited Kamala on Feb 10 to inspect the ongoing waste management "challenges", as one official report called it.

Days earlier, Preeyaporn Suwannaket, Director-General of the Pollution Control Department (PCD), on Feb 7 ordered an 'urgent investigation' into black wastewater yet again flowing across Kamala Beach and emptying into water where tourists and other beachgoers swim.

Ms Preeyaporn confirmed that the investigation was ordered by Chalermchai Sri-on, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment after he was made aware of the beach wastewater at Kamala.

During Mr Samran's



Photo: PR Phuket

visit last week, he stressed the need for collaboration between businesses, local authorities and the public, urging stricter law enforcement and a greater sense of social responsibility.

Santhat Khummit, Deputy Mayor and currently Acting Mayor of Kamala Tambon Administrative Organisation (OrBorTor) while Jutta Dumlak fights off corruption charges, highlighted the issue of untreated wastewater from hotels and businesses.

In response, Kamala's local government has implemented new regulations requiring businesses to submit monthly reports on their wastewater treatment processes, Mr Santhat said.

Officials have again intensified inspections to ensure compliance and prevent untreated water from polluting public water sources. *The Phuket News*

Officials investigate kindergarten beating

The Phuket News
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Local officials have launched an investigation into reports of student injuries at Patong Kindergarten following concerns raised on social media. A high-level meeting was held last week to discuss the case, with officials pledging a thorough and fair inquiry.

Attendees at the meeting, held on Feb 10, included Phuket Vice Governor Ronnarong Thipsiri, Patong Mayor Chalerm Sak Maneesri, his sister Patong Deputy Mayor Lalita Maneesri; Phuket MP Chalermpong Saengdee; senior police officers from Patong Police; representatives from the Department of Social Development and Human Security; and concerned parents.

Vice Governor Ronnarong stated that the Phuket Governor had ordered a fact-finding investigation, which will be conducted by a working group over the following two weeks.



Photo: Patong Municipality

Patong Police was also pursuing legal action where necessary, and psychological officers had been assigned to speak with the affected children to ensure fairness to all parties involved.

The investigation was launched after posts on social media showed a young boy with bruises to his face. He also suffered a serious injury to his wrist. Some posts online showed serious welts on the child's back.

The parents were told that the boy was involved in a fight with another child at the kindergarten, a claim they now dispute.

Patong Mayor Chalerm Sak assured that Patong Municipality has been proactive in addressing the issue and is committed to finding a resolution.

Deputy Mayor Ms Lalita reinforced that the municipality has prioritised the case since the incident was first reported.

"We have taken this issue seriously and are working to ensure justice for all parties. We urge everyone to wait for the evidence to be properly assessed," she said.

Investigators are working to determine the cause of the injuries and to establish the full details of

the incident. Pol Lt Col Wichet Suwanno of the Patong Police urged all involved to provide truthful accounts, stating that authorities will ensure an impartial investigation.

Meanwhile, the parents of the injured child expressed concerns about their child's safety at school. They have opted to keep the child at home for now and are considering transferring to a different school.

The parents of the child accused of assault also called for a thorough investigation, stating they want to establish the truth behind the incident. They noted that they had provided B4,000 to the family of the injured boy as a gesture of responsibility.

However, the parents did say that if it were found their child did not inflict the injuries, they wanted the money back.

Patong Municipality has since announced plans to install additional CCTV cameras in all 13 classrooms at the kindergarten.

Cyber Police battle 'national threat' of scam calls, online fraud

Continued from page 1

...Cyber Support Unit inspector Pol Lt Col Thanatat Kangruambut said the fraud operations had cost people at least B100mn per day.

Officers have managed to recover just 10% of the victims' money, he said.

SCAM EVOLUTION

Meanwhile, scam tactics targeting people in Phuket have evolved, targeting victims through fraudulent buying and selling, fake job opportunities and financial fraud, Pol Col Kritsada noted.

"In 2022, scams mainly involved fake sales calls and misleading work-from-home offers. By 2023, online financial fraud became more sophisticated, and fake sales increased," he said.

"In 2024, scammers shifted towards fraudulent lending schemes and deceptive invest-

ment offers, while fake sales of products and services remained the most common," he added.

The scam calls have evolved significantly, with fraudsters now using personal phone numbers. "They also impersonate government agencies to instill fear," Pol Col Kritsada said.

"Common tactics include requesting ID card details, credit card details, important documents or money transfers under the pretense of expediting a case," he explained.

"I think what all people should know is that official notifications from government agencies are delivered as physical letters, not phone calls or Line messages," he noted.

Pol Col Kritsada strongly pointed out that the CCIB, and hence the TCSD, both emphasise that they do not accept reports through Line and warned against scammers posing as officers to extract personal information.



CCIB chief Pol Lt Gen Trairong Phiwhphan shows a scam call text. Photo: CCIB

Pol Col Kritsada also advised individuals to verify the legitimacy of a suspicious call by hanging up and blocking the number.

"Scammers typically use disposable 'Sim Box' numbers that cannot receive incoming calls," he said.

"I recommend using caller ID applications like Whoscall, Call Blocker, and TrueCaller to identify potential scam calls and block suspicious numbers," Pol Col Kritsada suggested.

Fraudsters often obtain victims' personal data through

various means, including data breaches, leaked databases and untrustworthy telecom agents selling customer information, he added.

"They can get our information from job applications, online surveys and investment schemes are also common tactics used to collect personal details," he warned.

In some cases, insiders at financial institutions have been found selling customer data to criminal networks, he said.

REPORT THEM

"If you become a victim, report it to the local police. They will assess the damage and work with 'cyber police' [CCIB and TCSD] to investigate further," Pol Col Kritsada urged.

"If foreigners or Thais receive scam calls and fall victim, the first step is to report the case at any local police station or contact 1441 to freeze the bank account," Phuket Provincial

Police Commander Pol Maj Gen Sinlert Sukhum told *The Phuket News*.

"The 1441 hotline is an integrated initiative involving law enforcement, financial institutions and telecom providers. It aims to expedite case processing and provide a one-stop service for victims," he explained.

"The centre assists in freezing scam-related accounts, tracking case progress and increasing the efficiency of arrests and prosecutions," he added.

Pol Col Kritsada assured, "As cybercrime continues to evolve, we remain committed to strengthening enforcement measures, educating the public and dismantling scam networks."

"The fight against online fraud requires ongoing vigilance, cooperation from financial institutions and public awareness to minimize risks and protect individuals from falling victim to cybercriminals," he concluded.

Police target tourists on motorbikes

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Patong Police seized 20 motorbikes and took action against foreign tourists driving recklessly early last Saturday (Feb 15) during a midnight operation aimed at improving road safety.

At 12:30am, officers from Patong Police conducted an inspection in front of Kasikorn Bank on Prachanukroh Rd, at the southern end of Patong.

The crackdown targeted violations such as reckless driving and other traffic offenses that posed risks to public safety, Patong Police reported.

Officers found a group of foreign tourists riding motorbikes without regard for traffic laws or the safety of others. As a result, officers from the patrol, traffic and investigation divisions took immediate action, seizing 20 vehicles found in violation.

Patong Police vowed to continue strict enforcement to maintain order and ensure the safety of both residents and visitors in the popular tourist area.

The operation early last Saturday followed Patong Police launching their campaign to crack down on tourists driving rented motorbikes without a valid licence – namely an International



Photo: Patong Police

Driver's Permit confirming that the rider is permitted to operate a motorbike in their home country.

Following the seizure of the 20 motorbikes early last Saturday, Pol Lt Col Chamnan Sapsin of the Patong Traffic Police told *The Phuket News* that the foreign tourists caught in that operation were fined B1,000 each for operating the vehicles without the correct licence.

Further, more than 10 motorbike rental operators whose motorbikes were seized in the operation were fined for renting motorbikes to tourists without the correct licence.

The motorbike rental operators were fined B2,000 each, Lt Col Chamnan confirmed.

"Right now, the motorbikes are now gradually being returned

to the shop owners. We are contacting vehicle owners to collect their bikes and pay fines," he said.

"Despite the ongoing enforcement, there is currently no order to shut down any rental shops. Instead, Patong Police are only fining rental owners," he added.

The campaign against reckless driving by foreign tourists on motorbikes is continuing. "We [Patong Police] catch at least 10 unlicensed riders per shift, bringing the daily total to more than 20," Lt Col Chamnan said.

The action by Patong Police to crack down on reckless motorbike riding by tourists was highly praised in comments online, with "about time" and "finally" among the most common comments.

The crackdown also followed

local Thai residents yet again blasting the reckless driving by foreign tourists after a compilation video showing the tourists' dangerous antics on Phuket's roads was posted online.

The video, shared by the 'Phuket Newshawk' Facebook page, showed tourists performing wheelies, revving engines and even riding face down on their motorcycles along Phra Barami Rd, near the Patong-Kamala intersection.

The incidents reportedly took place on Feb 11, at different times from the afternoon until late at night.

The clip, which sparked outrage online, led to widespread calls for stricter enforcement against reckless riding.

Social media users expressed frustration over the lack of intervention from authorities, highlighting safety concerns for both tourists and residents.

Many urged officials to take immediate action, with comments such as: "Even with children around, they ride dangerously without a care"; "There should be police stationed on the streets day and night to prevent this"; "Confiscate the motorcycles and impose heavy fines on offenders" and "A tourist city must ensure safety for everyone".

Critics argued that lax

enforcement encouraged such behaviour, with some suggesting that local examples of reckless riding may be influencing foreign visitors.

Others voiced frustration that authorities seem more focused on benefiting from tourism than enforcing the law, warning that the situation was worsening.

Before the Patong crackdown, a bright point on the issue last week was Thalang Police Station taking action against a Spanish man for "driving without regard to the safety or inconvenience of others" after he rode his motorcycle across the median strip on Thepkasattri Rd on Feb 12.

The man, named by police only as 'Mr Hamza', decided to change direction from the northbound side of Thepkasattri Rd to instead head south. Instead of riding to a U-turn point, he rode his motorbike across the central reservation separating the northbound and southbound lanes.

Thalang Police, after seeing a video, deemed the driving as dangerous. Officers tracked down Mr Hamza and the next day (Feb 13) charged him accordingly, police reported.

Additional reporting by Natnaree Likidwatanasakun

Municipal elections for May 11

THE PHUKET BRANCH OF THE Election Commission of Thailand (ECT Phuket) is preparing to redraw municipal election districts to "ensure fairness, transparency and alignment with local conditions" ahead of the upcoming municipal council elections to be held on May 11.

ECT Phuket Director Orapin Achiwasuk announced on Feb 13 that preparations were underway to finalise the election districts for municipal council elections, which will take place as current council members' terms expire on Mar 27, 2025.

Candidate registration is scheduled from Mar 31 to Apr 4, 2025, Ms Orapin said.

The redistricting process aims to comply with relevant regulations while ensuring equitable representation for residents, said an official report of Ms Orapin's announcement.

The review will cover 11 municipalities, including Phuket City Municipality, Kathu Town Municipality, Patong Town Municipality and several subdistrict (tambon) municipalities such as Wichit, Ratsada, Chalong, Rawai, Karon, Srisoonthorn, Pa Khlok and Thepkasattri.

To achieve a fair and effective redistricting plan, the ECT Phuket office is working closely with relevant agencies to gather recommendations and ensure the process adheres to national election guidelines, Ms Orapin said.

"The commission emphasises the importance of transparency and fairness in establishing election districts that best serve the people of Phuket," she added.

Ms Orapin also outlined the following regulations:



ECT Phuket Director Orapin Achiwasuk. Photo: PR Phuket

- Campaign Expense Limits: Candidates' campaign expenses will be calculated starting from 180 days before the end of the current term, beginning on Sept 28, 2024, and continuing until election day. This is in accordance with Section 61 (1) of the Local Government Election Act.

- Campaign Period: Candidates may begin campaigning from Sept 28, 2024 until 6pm on the day before the election, as per Section 64 (1) of the same act.

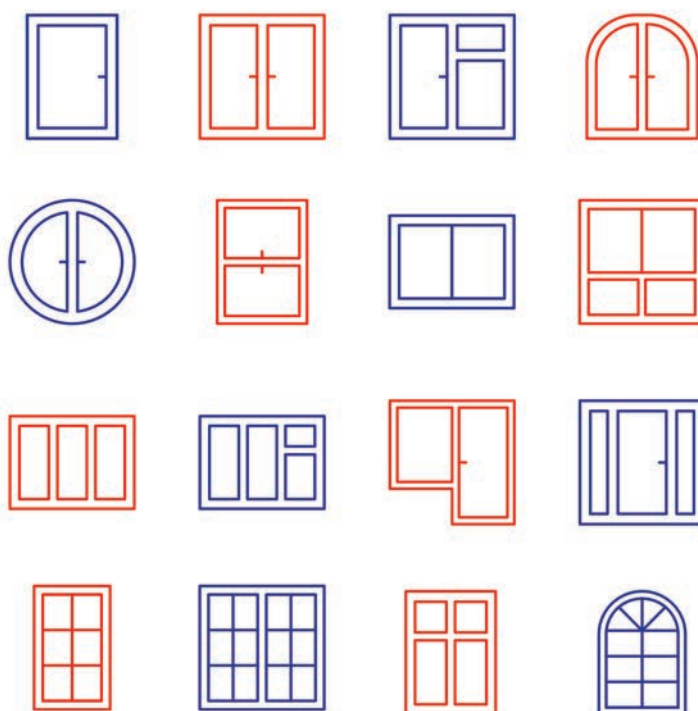
- Campaign Conduct Regulations: All election campaigns must comply with Section 65 of the Local Government Election Act and related Election Commission regulations, which prohibit certain actions and ensure fair competition.

The Election Commission emphasised that these regulations aim to prevent the misuse of official positions for electoral advantage and to uphold fairness in the electoral process. Candidates are urged to adhere strictly to these guidelines.

In accordance with election law, the municipal elections will invoke a 24-hour ban on the sale of alcohol from 6pm the day before the election through to 6pm on the day of the election. *The Phuket News*



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Foreign tourists in wild street brawl

A VIDEO SHOWING foreign tourists brawling in front of Cafe del Mar in Kamala has drawn widespread criticism online about the quality of tourists Phuket is now attracting.

A 1-minute, 37-second video of the incident was shared on Feb 14 by the 'Phuket Hod Jang' Facebook page. The footage shows a heated fight between the tourists, allegedly intoxicated, as onlookers watched.

The brawl started in front of the nightlife cafe, then spilled out onto the street. One man attempted to smash a bottle over the head of one of his adversaries, while fights between other groups continued.

Several onlookers, including two women, tried to intervene to stop the fight, which still continued, with one man repeatedly kicked while he was still on the ground. The page captioned the post with, "It's famous again. Free visa, quality tourists – drunk and fighting in Kamala, Phuket, causing trouble and damaging the island's image again."

The post also stated that police are actively working



Screenshot: Courtesy of Phuket Hod Jang Facebook page

to identify and prosecute those involved.

The video quickly sparked heated reactions from netizens, with some expressing frustration over Phuket's growing issues with rowdy tourists. Comments included: "Phuket is a beautiful place, but incidents like this ruin its reputation"; "Report them to their embassy and send them home!"; and "Enough with the free visa policy – it's bringing in too many troublemakers."

Others argued that tourist behaviour isn't necessarily linked to visa policies, saying that such incidents can happen anywhere.

Police have not yet released further details, but have confirmed they are reviewing the video and taking legal action against those responsible.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Child rescued after dramatic car chase

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A dramatic series of crashes and a high-speed chase through Thalang last week went viral on social media after a woman suffering from mental health issues rammed her pickup truck into multiple vehicles before fleeing the scene.

The incident began in front of a fresh market in Thepkrasatri, where municipal officers witnessed a pickup truck colliding with several vehicles and motorcycles.

The driver, later identified as 33-year-old Nira Chusen, first hit a car near Lotus's Express Thalang before striking a motorcycle ridden by a foreign female tourist in front of Big C in Baan Bang Jo, Srisoonthorn.

As the chaos unfolded, a municipal officer pursued the pickup truck on a motorcycle and attempted to break its window to rescue a 3-year-old boy inside.

Despite his efforts, the vehicle continued for another 100 metres, colliding with yet another motorcycle before heading toward Bang Jo



Photo: Srisoonthorn Municipality

Prison and eventually stopping near the Bang Maruan pond due to a flat tyre.

Local residents quickly intervened, safely rescuing the young boy from the vehicle. Amid the confusion, the female driver managed to escape and at last report remained at large.

Baramée Khum-muangthong, 34, who was in the back of the pickup truck at the time, identified himself as Ms Nira's husband. He revealed that the incident stemmed from a domestic dispute over household expenses earlier this morning.

"I had just dropped off our older child at school when my wife became upset. She drove off, and I jumped onto the back of the truck because our younger son was

inside," Mr Baramée recounted. "I tried everything to stop the car, but she kept driving."

Police confirmed that Ms Nira has been undergoing treatment for depression for the past two years. Her current whereabouts remain unknown, as she has not been in contact since the incident.

Meanwhile, Mr Baramée expressed remorse for the ordeal, stating, "I want to apologise to everyone affected. I never wanted this to happen."

Phuket police are investigating the case, with efforts underway to locate Ms Nira and assess any legal consequences arising from the reckless driving spree.

The rescued child was reportedly safe but remained in shock from the incident.

Motorbike taxi driver dispute ends in stabbing at hospital

A DISPUTE BETWEEN TWO motorcycle taxi drivers turned violent on Feb 13 when one of the drivers stabbed the other in front of Vachira Phuket Hospital, causing serious injury.

The incident occurred around 9pm. Pol Capt Pawinut Kongsut, Deputy Chief of Investigation at Phuket City Police Station, received a report of the stabbing and dispatched officers to the scene.

Upon arrival, police found 56-year-old Chit Saengsuwan with multiple stab wounds and receiving emergency treatment at the hospital.

Another man, Nikhom Yukong, 45, also had injuries, though he was reportedly hurt from a fall.

According to witness Thawan Saisamut, 50, the two men had



Photo: Phuket City Police

ongoing tensions related to their work in the same motorcycle taxi queue.

The altercation escalated into a heated argument over passenger pickups before Nikhom allegedly stabbed Chit "four to five times".

Officers arrested Nikhom and took him to Phuket City Police Station for further questioning and legal proceedings, police confirmed.

Police reported they were continuing to investigate the incident. Eakkapop Thongtub

Turkish Interpol fugitive arrested

PHUKET IMMIGRATION HAS revoked the visa of a 32-year-old Turkish national, named only as 'Mr Taskin' (surname withheld), who was found to be the subject of an Interpol 'Red Notice'.

The arrest warrant, issued by the Republic of Turkey cited offenses related to illegal firearms possession and unauthorised dissemination of personal information.

Taskin's stay in Thailand was temporarily revoked due to the cancellation of his passport and his classification as a dangerous person, Phuket Immigration explained.

The investigation team, led by Phuket Immigration Deputy Chief Pol Lt Col Wisarut Lad-ong, took action following instructions from the Immigration Bureau.

Officers located Taskin at about 3:30pm on Feb 11. Upon verifying his details in the Immigration Bureau's information system, officers confirmed that he was the subject of a Red Notice issued by



Photo: Phuket Immigration

the Turkish government.

The warrant, dated Oct 10, 2024, accused him of purchasing, carrying or possessing firearms and ammunition without permission, as well as unlawfully obtaining or disseminating personal information.

Phuket Immigration officers notified Taskin of the revocation of his visa and took him into custody.

He was then detained at Phuket Immigration in Phuket Town while officers prepared for his deportation and further legal proceedings.

At last report, officials were coordinating with relevant agencies to ensure his return to Turkey in accordance with international protocols. Eakkapop Thongtub

Rewat vows to complete Nai Harn makeover soon

Natnaree Likidwatanasakun
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Rewat Areerob, the recently re-elected President of the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation (PPAO), has promised to resolve the long-delayed Nai Harn park renovation project as soon as he is re-installed to office.

The B66 million landscaping and bike path project at Nai Harn Lake was set for completion by early February.

The project, in total 1,973 meters long, will see parking spaces made available alongside the park beside the lake as well as a bike lane and the installation of solar-powered street lights.

The B66.6 million contract with developer Sasivarai Construction was initially agreed to on May 7 last year, with 515 days allowed to complete the works.

However, due to delays in the official bidding process, the completion date was pushed back to Feb 10, 2025, Mr Rewat told *The Phuket News* just before Christmas.

"If the project is not completed by the new deadline, daily penalties will apply," Mr Rewat assured.

Mr Rewat who was re-elected to PPAO President in the Feb 1 PPAO elections, told *The Phuket News* that



Photo: Supplied

he expects the Election Commission to officially certify his re-election on Feb 21.

"Before the end of this month, once I receive the official announcement, I will quickly deal with the Nai Harn renovation issue," he said.

Despite winning the election, Mr Rewat emphasised that he currently has no authority to take action. "Right now, I can't give any orders, even though I won. I still need to wait for the official process," he explained.

Mr Rewat also addressed concerns about the contractor responsible for the project. He revealed that the company was selected through the government's E-bidding system, which prioritises the lowest bid.

"The problem is that government officials choose the cheapest option.

This company won the bid by undercutting others by B6mn, but after construction began they ran out of budget and they couldn't continue, leading to a complete halt in progress," he said.

Mr Rewat assured the public that once he officially takes office, he will immediately take action to resolve the issue.

"I promise I will get it done right away. The current contractor will face penalties for failing to complete the work. If necessary, their contract will be canceled, and a new contractor will be hired," he said.

"I am sure I will replace the contractor and make Nai Harn beautiful as planned. It won't take long," he promised.



Photo: PR Phuket

Firefighters contain forest blaze in Thalang

A SWIFT RESPONSE from multiple agencies contained a forest fire that broke out in Moo 8, Thepkasattri, in central Phuket, last week.

Firefighters and local residents worked together to contain the blaze on Feb 13. The fire spread across about 6 rai, 7 ngan at Khao Kluay, in Baan Pak Pli before being brought under control.

The Thepkasattri Tambon Administration Organisation (OrBorTor) first reported the fire, which started as a grass fire.

Due to difficult terrain, water trucks could not access the area, so officials from the Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Division at Thepkasattri OrBorTor led efforts to suppress the flames.

Thepkasattri OrBorTor Chief Sithichai Chantawat

coordinated the response with support from Thalang District officials, the Phuket Provincial Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Office (DDPM Phuket) and several other agencies, including the Royal Thai Navy Third Area Command and the Phuket Forest Fire Control Station.

Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat ordered an aerial survey to assess the fire's spread, while Srisoonthorn Municipality deployed drones for further inspection, said an official report of the response.

After about four hours, firefighters successfully extinguished the fire. No injuries or fatalities were reported.

At last report, officials are continuing to monitor the affected area and investigate the cause of the fire.

The Phuket News

Valentine's Day sees over 100 couples tie the knot

MORE THAN 100 couples gathered at the Muang District Office in Phuket Town last week to register their marriages in celebration of Valentine's Day (Feb 14).

The event, filled with joy and romance, saw couples of all backgrounds – including LGBTQIA+ partners – taking their vows in a special ceremony.

Phuket District Chief Pairoj Srilamul led the festivities, organising a traditional 'long drum' procession to welcome the couples.

At the auspicious hour, the newlyweds walked through a flower arch before officially registering their marriages. The district chief and officials witnessed the unions, offering blessings for lasting love and happiness.

"This is a meaningful step in creating stability in married life," said Mr



Photo: NBT Phuket

Pairoj. "Regardless of gender, every couple has the right to express their love and commitment equally."

Among the newlyweds were Duangkamol and Pornchai, the first couple to register their marriage. After eight years together, they chose to mark the occasion as a symbolic gift to each other.

LGBTQIA+ couples also embraced the opportunity, with one pair expressing that after a year

of living together, they wanted to formalise their love in a way that reflected their commitment and the growing acceptance of diverse relationships.

To commemorate the day, newlyweds received special amulets for good fortune and were entered into a lucky draw for a luxury honeymoon stay. The atmosphere remained festive, with family, friends and other visitors joining in the celebrations.

The Phuket News



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Thailand cracks down on nominee businesses

AUTHORITIES HAVE prosecuted 820 cases of nominee businesses that caused nearly B12.5 billion in damages, and identified over 200,000 mule accounts nationwide.

Deputy government spokeswoman Sasikan Wattanachan said on Wednesday, Feb 12 the government has coordinated efforts across multiple agencies to crack down on nominee businesses, particularly those involving Thai citizens holding shares on behalf of foreigners to bypass the Foreign Business Act, as well as the trade of substandard imported goods across the country.

Among the agencies working together are the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), the Immigration Bureau, the Customs Department, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Consumer Protection Board (OCPB) and the Royal Thai Police (RTP).

Ms Sasikan said that since September last year, there have been 820 cases involving nominee businesses, with damages amounting to B12.49bn.



Deputy government spokeswoman Sasikan Wattanachan. Photo: Bangkok Post

She said they operate in the tourism industry and related sectors in Bangkok, Phuket and Prachuap Khiri Khan.

Other affected industries include online marketplaces, construction material suppliers, accounting firms, land transport companies and real estate businesses.

Regarding mule accounts held by legal entities, the Anti-Online Crime Operation Center (AOC) of the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society has submitted the 'HR-03' list to the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB), the Anti-Money Laundering Office (Amlo), and the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) for further action, Ms Sasikan said. *Bangkok Post*

Foreign arrivals poised to grow 5% this month

Bangkok Post

Thailand is expected to welcome 3.5 million foreign tourist arrivals in February, a 5% increase year-on-year, with all major markets surging between 2% and 20%, except the Chinese market, which is on course to plummet by 7% due to safety concerns, according to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

TAT Governor Thapanee Kiatphaibool said Germany and Japan are projected to secure the strongest growth of 20% and 18%, respectively, compared to the corresponding period last year.

It is estimated that about 124,000 German tourists will visit Thailand in February, behind Russia, the largest long-haul market, which is expected to record moderate growth of 3% to 211,000.

For Japan, the positive momentum continues from the final quarter of 2024. The number of Japanese



The number of foreign arrivals in February is expected to reach 3.5 million, according to TAT. Photo: Somchai Poomlard / Bangkok Post

visitors should reach 123,000 in February, said Ms Thapanee.

Despite a 7% contraction, arrivals from China will remain the largest inbound market with 630,000 arrivals this month. Other short-haul markets in the top five include Malaysia (513,000), South Korea (198,000), and India (170,000).

Under this scenario, the overall number of tourists in the first two months should reach 6.9mn.

Ms Thapanee said the resumption of flights was attributed to the growth of inbound markets as ticket bookings this month surged

14%, aligning with a 15% increase in seat capacity to 4.3mn seats. However, this still lagged the 5mn seats recorded in February 2019.

She said the upcoming White Lotus Season 3 TV series filmed in Thailand should help stimulate the market over the next few months.

The factor to watch for over the coming months would continue to be the Chinese market situation. Even though this market continued to grow at a rate of 30% during the Chinese New Year holiday, it fell below expectations as the TAT previously forecast growth of between 60-70%.

In terms of the domestic market, Ms Thapanee said there should be at least 33.9mn trips in the first two months of 2025, up 2%, generating B169 billion, an 8% increase.

Thienprasit Chaiyapattaranun, president of the Thai Hotels Association, said the average occupancy rate of Thai hotels nationwide stood at 74% in January and is expected to fall to 68% this month.

He said most hotels earned more revenue from all markets in January, except the Chinese market, which was the only market that remained unchanged.

Mr Thienprasit said 70% of hotels are expected to increase their room rates in the first quarter.

About 40% of them aim to raise their room rates by 5%, while 13% would like to increase their rates by between 6-10%. Some 16% of hotels wish to increase their rates by more than 10%, the majority of which are four-star properties or above.

Restaurants back easing booze laws

EATERIES SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT'S review of the ban on alcohol sales in the afternoon as it could benefit restaurants and convenience stores, says the Thai Restaurant Association.

Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra last week ordered a study of the prohibition on the sale of alcoholic beverages from 2pm to 5pm, as well as the ban on Buddhist holy days, to see how they affect tourism.

Thaniwan Kulmongkol, president of the Thai Restaurant Association, is in favour of relaxing alcohol sale laws.

Thailand's economy relies heavily on tourism and collaboration across all sectors is essential to strike a balance between alcohol sales and minimising any adverse effects, she said.

"A relaxation of alcohol regulations is what eateries, especially those in tourist areas, have long supported," said Ms Thaniwan.

She said lifting the restrictions on alcohol sales during designated hours and Buddhist holy days would benefit restaurants, convenience stores and department stores.

Restaurateurs face challenges when some entertainment venues close on significant Buddhist holy days because of restrictions on alcohol sales, said Ms Thaniwan.

She said she doubts the ban effectively curbs alcohol consumption.

Customers often bring their own alcohol to restaurants even when sales



Tourists waded through the throng at Yaowarat. Photo: Apichart Jinakul / Bangkok Post

are prohibited, complicating efforts by restaurants to regulate consumption.

Furthermore, customers frequently place orders for alcohol just before the restrictions come into effect, continuing to drink afterward.

Ms Thaniwan said the ban on alcohol sales from 2-5pm affects daytime restaurants, convenience store chains and mall shops.

She said Thailand already has regulations governing alcohol sales, such as the 2008 Alcoholic Beverage Control Act that prohibits sales at gas stations, and there are also laws against drinking and driving.

Kawee Sakawee, chairman of the Thai Alcohol Beverage Business Association, said the current ban on alcohol sales during certain hours diminishes the experience for tourists who may not be aware of these regulations. Lifting the ban could benefit the alcoholic beverage industry and bolster tourism, he said. *Bangkok Post*

IMAGE asia, Class Act Media bestowed 'APAC Insider' award

IMAGE ASIA / CLASS ACT MEDIA has been voted 'Best Printed & Online Media Company 2024 - Southern Thailand' and 'APAC Insider Community News Excellence Award 2024' in the annual UK-based 'APAC Business Awards'.

"Now in its ninth consecutive year, our APAC Business Awards is here to inform and inspire others as we showcase a range of businesses and individuals who are positively impacting the trajectory of their industries across the APAC region," APAC Insider said in announcing the awards.

"Furthermore, influencing the rest of the world, our winners continue to put their best foot forward while staying ahead of trends and setting the bar high for those to come after them. From home improvements to AI-powered innovations, digital marketing solutions to communications design, and more, our winners are elevating and enriching a diverse mix of sectors, and we're delighted to highlight their excellence," the group added.

Awards Co-ordinator Kaven Cooper commented, "I want to wish our awardees all the best for the future to come as they dedicate their time and resources to their clients, customers, products, and services. This year has been a progressive time for them and I'm sure their success will continue to flourish."

"Yet again I'm deeply honoured to receive this recognition from the APAC Business Awards," said Class Act Media & IMAGE asia General Manager Jason Beavan.



"Fantastic recognition of the hard work and dedication from our wonderful teams, at *The Phuket News*, *Khao Phuket*, *Novosti Phuket* newspapers, *Live 89.5 FM* radio, *Phuket News TV*, *Window on Phuket* and *Where to Eat in Phuket* magazines, on keeping the people who visit and live here updated on all the good, bad and interesting happenings in Phuket.

"Without our team, advertisers, readers and suppliers for their past and future support we would not be able to deliver quality coverage on all things Phuket. It's our island, and we are your local media company," he said.

Last year, Class Act Media and IMAGE asia were bestowed the award 'Most Comprehensive Print & Online Regional New Media Company 2023 - Thailand' at the UK-based APAC Insider Business Awards 2023.

In the previous awards for 2022, Class Act Media and IMAGEasia were bestowed two accolades. Image Asia/Class Act Media was bestowed 'Most Outstanding News & Information Business - Phuket' while *The Phuket News* was awarded 'Leading Provider of Digital News & Information - Southern Thailand'. *The Phuket News*

Tough casino entry rules for Thai nationals mooted

BANGKOK

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Thai nationals wishing to enter casinos across the country will face tough requirements, new draft regulation released on Monday (Feb 17) has revealed.

The draft, issued by the Office of the Council of State, which provides advice to the government on legal, policy and appointments issues, relates to proposed developments in the major gaming industry, of which casinos would be a major component.

Thais over the age of 20 will require at least B50 million in fixed deposits for a minimum six month period in order to enter casinos, with an additional capped entry fee per visit of B5,000, the draft explained.

Such conditions will limit access to much of the population and favour more wealthier Thais, critics have said, adding that the proposed model could ultimately emulate foreigner-



Protesters in Bangkok on Sept 19, 2024 opposing the draft law to legalise casinos in Thailand. Photo: Bangkok Post

mately emulate foreigner-only regimes, such as is the case in South Korea.

The draft regulation also stipulated that casinos could take up no more than 10% of such proposed integrated complexes with hotels, restaurants and entertainment facilities constituting the majority of floor space.

The latest draft regulation came after China's President Xi Jinping warned the Thai government that its touted casino-entertainment complex project could cause a spike in criminal activity.

Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra discussed the controversial issue with Xi during her

recent trip to China where he cautioned that legalising casinos could lead to a number of social problems.

Gambling is illegal in China and there are strict laws governing it in Thailand and although state-controlled horse racing, the lottery and certain sports, such as boxing, are permitted.

The Pheu Thai-led government argues that instead of criminalising gambling and its associated activities and driving them underground, the government should regulate them and collect revenue from them.

"We have to admit that some illegal gambling dens

are still operating in the country. The money changing hands in those gambling dens does not benefit the country. If they are legalised, revenue can be collected from them and used for national development projects," Ms Paetongtarn said on Feb 12.

On Jan 13, the Cabinet approved in principle a bill that would pave the way for the establishment of such casino-entertainment complexes. The Council of State, the government's legal arm, has been given 50 days to review the bill before forwarding it to the House for deliberation.

However, an opinion poll conducted by the National Institute of Development Administration on Jan 25 revealed that almost 60% of 1,350 Thais polled oppose the casino plan, while opposition political parties fear establishing a gambling industry would exacerbate social problems.

- Additional reporting by Bangkok Post

Thailand's corruption score slips, overall rank improves

BANGKOK

THAILAND'S SCORE has in the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) declined to 34 from 35 the year before, though its global ranking improved one place to 107th, according to Transparency International (TI).

The latest TI survey covered 180 countries worldwide, with Denmark topping the list of cleanest countries, with 90 points out of 100.

Thailand's global ranking was on par with Algeria, Brazil, Malawi, Nepal and Niger and ranked fifth in ASEAN, with Singapore the highest and Myanmar the lowest at 168th with a score of 16.

In the past decade, the best CPI score Thailand has achieved was 38, in both 2014 and 2015.

Rankings can vary more widely depending on the performance of other countries. In 2022 Thailand jumped nine



Photo: Bangkok Post

places to 101st even though its score rose just one point to 36. The following year the score declined to 35 but the ranking fell to 108th.

Berlin-based TI said the global average score was unchanged from the year before at 43, with two-thirds of the countries surveyed scoring below 50.

The survey ranks countries and territories according to the levels of public-sector corruption perceived by experts and businesspeople. It relies on 13 independent data sources, among them the World Economic Forum.

In its latest report, TI said that two of the biggest challenges humanity faces are strongly intertwined: corruption and the climate crisis. Bangkok Post

Thailand suspends issuance of gun carrying permits

BANGKOK

THAILAND HAS SUSPENDED THE issuance of new firearm carrying permits for one year as part of a government effort to curb crime.

The order, signed on Feb 12 by Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra and Interior Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, came into effect last Friday (Feb 14).

Traisuree Taisaranakul, spokeswoman for the Ministry of Interior, said the order was issued because many people in Thailand carry firearms in public places without a sound reason and some display their firearms in public to intimidate others.

Such habits could lead to crime and danger to people's lives, properties and morale, she said.

Guns are expensive and - on paper at least - hard to obtain in Thailand. However there were 6.2 million registered firearms in the country as of 2023, according to interior ministry figures. Another 4mn unregistered weapons, often sourced from strife-torn countries or smuggled in, were also estimated to be in circulation.

Data from the World Population Review in 2022 indicated Thailand was ranked 15th globally in gun deaths with 2,804 people killed, for a rate of 3.9 per 100,000 population.

Crimes involving guns are frequent, with some cases attracting national attention and prompting debates about gun control.



Photo: Bangkok Post

Anutin also suspended the issuance of gun carrying permits in November 2023, after a female schoolteacher was killed in the crossfire of a gunfight between rival student gangs in Klong Toey district of Bangkok.

A month earlier, police seized more than 2,000 illegal guns and arrested 1,593 suspects in a three-day nationwide crackdown following a deadly shooting at the Siam Paragon shopping mall in Bangkok. A 14-year-old boy was arrested at the scene where two people died, and a third succumbed to injuries a week later.

After the Paragon shooting, Anutin suspended the issuance of permits for importing and trading firearms, as one of seven short-term measures to tighten gun control. In the longer term, he said, authorities would look at amending the country's 76-year-old firearms law to close loopholes. Bangkok Post

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Making AI Sing



THE AI EDGE

Joe Smith

How should you talk to AI? Back in 2023, we learned there was a magic formula for instructing thinking machines. The 'Perfect Prompt' included not just the task, but also the context of your request, the persona the AI should adopt, your desired output format, its intended audience and an example.

This was Prompt Engineering, hailed by *Time* as the job of the future, in which expert AI whisperers were pulling down \$250k per year. Today that whole industry is dead, and your approach should be exactly the opposite.

ChatGPT's maker OpenAI now says its latest intuitive "reasoning" models are so good at predicting your intent that meticulously structured prompts are unnecessary.

They're not just a waste of time, in fact, but actively impede your progress towards AI expertise. How so? Because your competence with a model is a function not, as some experts suggest, of how much time you spend with it, but of the number of interactions you have.

Think of your sessions with AI as dialogues in which you are both learning about each other. Every time you read a model's response to a request, you understand a little more about its

powers and limitations, and what it assumes about your purposes.

For the AI, there's a parallel dynamic – but with a twist. It already has a rich picture of your likely goals from its training data and from information gleaned from your sessions together. Crucially, it only improves on its schema of you when you give it a nugget of novel, original information it does not already assume.

This being so, the optimal way to engage with a model is to have many fast, spontaneous exchanges with it, in which you iteratively refine a rough initial request.

Approach prompting less like composition and more like free association. Say what you want in the fewest words, read the response, then pivot, supplying whatever further context you judge will take you towards the best answer. The more back-and-forths you have with your machine, the more perfect your response will be.

This approach – called 'Lean Prompting' – makes the most effective use of both parties' resources.

Not only that, it unlocks the power of serendipity and is more fun too. Think back and you'll remember that the best responses you got from AI were usually not the result of some laboriously crafted prompt, but of a more playful request that coaxed from the machine a surprising, pleasing synthesis of ideas.

Here are two further concrete steps you can take to immediately improve

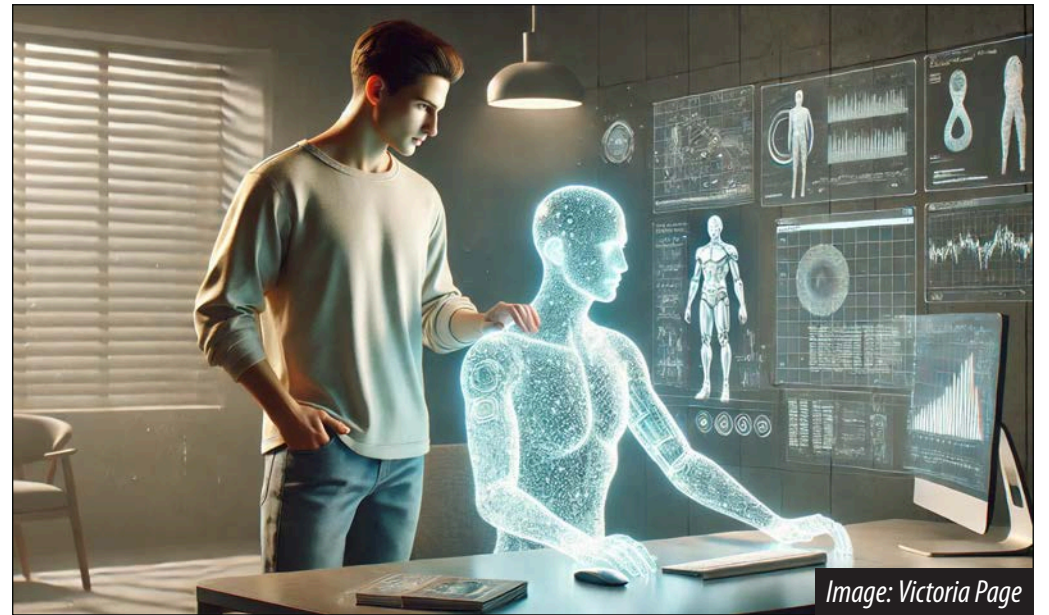


Image: Victoria Page

the usefulness of AI in your day-to-day tasks.

First, pony up for the paid-for versions. The subscription models of ChatGPT and Gemini are twice as good as the free.

They remember your conversations from previous sessions. This means you can have ongoing dialogues over months. The models get exponentially more useful at helping you further your projects the more they know about them. Is it scary that your machine builds up this intimate knowledge about what you're up to? Sure, it's scary.

With Gemini Advanced, you can also query your Gmail and Drive archives in natural language, transforming how you manage and access information.

Second, stop Googling. Use AI for search. Again, this only works with the paid-for versions. You will naturally

start asking for – and getting – responses far more specific and relevant to your real needs.

Once you see how much better AI is than traditional search engines at answering questions about travel planning or shopping, you'll naturally start challenging it with an ever-widening range of tasks.

Use Lean Prompts, get the paid-for versions, and start using AI for search. These three interventions will speed you on your way to AI mastery.

Joe Smith is Founder of the AI consultancy 2Sigma Consultants. He studied AI at Imperial College Business School and is researching AI's effects on cognition at Lancaster University. He is author of 'The Optimized Marketer', a book on how to use AI to promote your business and yourself. Contact joe@2Sigmaconsultants.com



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Entering a Brave New World

David Griffith

Over recent years we have seen a few batons passed on in the Marvel universe. Jeremy Renner passed the Hawkeye baton to Hailee Steinfeld while Florence Pugh inherited the Black Widow mantle from Scarlett Johansson.

In the finale of *Avengers: Endgame* we saw Steve Rogers (Chris Evans) hand his Captain America shield to Sam Wilson (Anthony Mackie). However, the move wasn't as smooth as it had been for other characters. As explored in the *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* television series, Wilson didn't feel comfortable taking on the role of Captain America and wanted to continue as The Falcon.

Now big screen fans of Marvel get to see where the inner turmoil of Wilson ended up as he finally takes the title of Captain America in *Captain America: Brave New World*. Recently I was able to sit down with Anthony Mackie to hear his thoughts on this latest chapter in the Marvel Universe.

The interview started with the question we all expected – what was it like for Mackie to finally take control of the role?

"The biggest thing for me, our first day on set, all these people I had known for over a decade now, and everybody just came up and said congratulations," he says with a humbling tone.

"You know, it's weird. Like Bob Moore, who was my dresser, was my dresser on *Captain America: Winter Soldier*. And you know, Russell Bobbitt, who did props on every movie I've been on. You know, the Bobbitts did the props for *Captain America: Brave New World*. So, it was just like that family thing, where you see this character grow into fruition and get his moment to shine. So, I'm glad that, you know, I was able to do it with a host of stars and friends that I started with."

Of course Sam and Steve are different characters so how did Mackie see his character evolve in the film?

"Well, this movie establishes Sam as his own being, his own entity or incarnation of Captain America," he explains. "And the fact that he's never taken the serum, the fact that he's every man's Captain America, I think that'll have an effect and will pay off greatly in the future of the franchise, because he can give the perspective of the regular guy,

as opposed to the super guy. And I think that's something with the character that's unique and rare and that people, you know, can gravitate to and acknowledge and see themselves in."

So does he see Sam and Steve as similar Captain Americas?

"I think Sam and Steve are similar in a lot of ways," he says after thinking for a moment. "I think that's why Steve chose Sam to give the shield to, because of his distinct integrity and humanity. But you know, with Sam, there's a certain level of compassion and understanding that comes into Sam Wilson because, remember when we met him, he was a counselor. He was a veteran. He was just an open book of intentions and goodwill. So, I think with that, you know, that informs who he is as Captain America and, you know, who he is as a human being. It takes a very compassionate person to be a listener and a counselor."

"And, you know, Julius (the film's director) and I have talked about that from the beginning," he continues. "How do we get that understanding, that compassion, and that caring into an action movie of this magnitude, to display how beautiful of a human being Sam Wilson is, as opposed to a brute, a brute, a force of nature?"

To finish the interview Mackie is hit with the big question. What does he hope people will take away from the film where he becomes one of the most important pieces of the Avengers?

"I remember one day. Weirdly, we were on set and Kevin (Feige – Marvel Executive Producer) came and we were talking," Mackie answers. "Kevin was like, you know, it's gonna take some time. We were on set of *Endgame*. And Kevin said just honestly, it's gonna take some time for people to get over *Endgame*. It's gonna take us time to get over, as, you know, the cast and the crew. It's gonna take us time to get over *Endgame*, because it was such a crescendo of emotion."

"It was such an unbelievable storm that we witnessed of just film excellence, culminating to that moment," he continues. "And I think of *Captain America: The First Avenger*, which started all this. And it was a foundation. It was a building block that, you know, the MCU built and built and built to that amazing moment of Steve Rogers standing on that peak, looking out at Thanos's army and all of us standing there with him, knowing that this was the end, you know? Like, the movie was

called *Endgame* for a reason. It was the end game, you know?"

"And I feel like this movie, *Brave New World*, just like *Captain America: The First Avenger*, is that foundation, that building block to build to that next crescendo, a massive moment in the MCU universe. And I just, I'm proud that we're here at the beginning. Like, I'm proud to say that we're that footprint that is at the beginning of that walk."

"And I feel like Marvel gave me the best crew, the best script, the best cast, the best opportunity possible for us to make the best movie we could," he says finishing off. "And I'm just, I'm proud of

it. Looking at all the stuff that they have done before, and this being now, I'm just, I'm really proud of it."

Captain America: Brave New World opened in Phuket cinemas on Feb 12 and is rated '13'.

David Griffiths has been working as a film journalist for over 25 years. That time has seen him work in radio, television and in print. He currently hosts a film podcast called *The Popcorn Conspiracy*. He is also a Rotten Tomatoes accredited reviewer and is an alternate judge for the Golden Globes Awards. You can follow him at Facebook: *SubcultureEntertainmentAus*

WINDOW ON PHUKET

February/March 2025 issue



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POP QUIZ

1. 'Area 51' of Edwards Air Force Base, central to much conjecture over UFOs, is in which US state?

2. Which scholar supposedly exclaimed 'Eureka!'?

3. By what name is singer Alecia Moore better known by?

4. Gymnophobia is the fear of what?

5. What was the name of Bruce Lee's final film?

Answers below, centre

SUDOKU

Medium

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

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

Across

1. Brewski

5. Orange juice factor

9. Bow

13. Certain surgeon's "patient"

14. Celebes beast

15. Anoint

16. Romantic setting

17. Dock

18. Carpentry grooves

19. Come down hard

22. Cleaning cabinet supplies

23. Absorbed, as a cost

24. Yugoslavia, now

28. Plant fuel

32. 86 is a high one

33. Aspersion

35. Not just "a"

36. Pot of gold site?

40. Golf term

41. Quite a stretch (var.)

42. Seize forcibly (old word)

43. Indiana town

46. Finn's friend

47. 1969 Peace Prize grp.

48. The Amish, e.g.

Down

1. Ado

2. "Major" animal

3. Kosher ____

4. Caught in the act

5. Yellow fruit

6. Bind

7. Fertile soil

8. Legal prefix

9. Wreath for the head

10. Completely fix

11. Blockage

12. Pianist, Dame Myra

15. Build on

20. Precipice

21. Lagos currency

24. Hex

25. "It's a Wonderful Life" role

26. Isuzu model

27. "You stink!"

28. Make, as a CD

29. Cornered

30. Treat rudely, in a way

31. Ratty place

33. Abandon

34. "Seinfeld" uncle

37. Claw

38. About to explode

39. "What's ____?"

44. Pooh's pal

45. Hodgepodes

46. Drag

48. Condescending one

49. Chopin piece

50. Hit

51. "Terrible" czar

52. Canceled

53. Doctrines

54. Dry biscuit

55. Soon, to a bard

56. Doing nothing

57. Central point

Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

1) Nevada; 2) Archimedes; 3) Pink; 4) Nudity; 5) Enter The Dragon

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

Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

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

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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

5.6

to one is the sheep-to-people ratio in New Zealand.

25

percent of all mattress sales in the US in 1987 were waterbeds.

48

years after the invention of canned food, the 'can opener' was created.

29,525

feet above sea level is the highest altitude bees have been recorded as flying – higher than Mt Everest.

5 billion

billion people will be nearsighted by the year 2050, and up to one in 10 people may be at risk of blindness.

Source: Uberfacts

ISLAND VIEW

Panwa mangroves at sunset. Photo by Marco Capriz

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

This week in history

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.

Feb 23, 1903
Cuba leases Guantánamo

Bay to the United States "in perpetuity".

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

A Ming dynasty portrait of Liu-bang.

Feb 26, 1993
A truck bomb parked under the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City explodes, killing six people and injuring over 1,000.

Feb 28, 202 BC
Liu Bang is enthroned as the Emperor of China, beginning four centuries of rule by the Han dynasty. Source: Wikipedia

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Chao Fah West, inside Shell Gas Station

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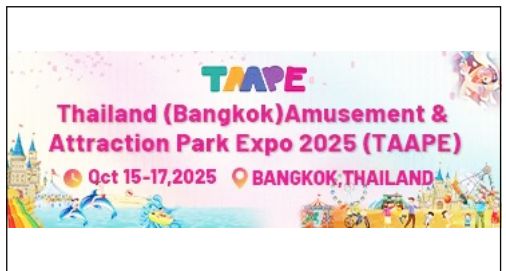
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'The Mesh' retains his Kamala Bowls singles title

BOWLS

IT WAS ALL SMILES for defending champion Carl "The Mesh" Mesham who managed to fend off a tough field of opposition and retain his title at the Phuket Lawn Bowls Singles Championship on Friday, Feb 7.

Due to a large number of participants in this year's competition the format, excellently overseen by Dean Simmonds, saw three players make it to the Round Robin Finals.

Defending champion The Mesh was one, as was previous finalist Dot Barker, with the evergreen Rocky "Dr Rock" Chalmers completing the trio.

The Mesh took on Dot in the first of the finals and, after a hard fought battle that swang in favour between the two throughout, it was the former who triumphed on the very last bowl.

Dot then faced Dr Rock in another very



'The Mesh' with the trophy. Photo: Supplied

close contest, with Dot coming through this time winning by the odd point.

The final game between The Mesh and Dr Rock saw the latter start off brightly by winning a superb couple of ends. However, a long, hot day finally took its toll on the veteran and The Mesh managed to win the next six ends to triumph and retain the title he won last year.

Overall a great day out with some high quality bowls on show leaving all players eagerly looking forward to the Phuket Pairs Tournament next month.

The Phuket News

CRICKET

Continued from page 16

After two days of relaxed, inclusive cricket, Sunday's (Feb 9) Cup Match provided a sharp shift in intensity as both teams turned up the heat in a competitive T20 battle.

Winning the toss, the Penguins opted to bat, looking to set a challenging total. Andrew McMillan (31 off 32, 2 fours, 1 six) played a steady knock at the top, Shivam Sachdeva (34 off 24, 2 fours, 2 sixes) injected some firepower, striking at 141.67, while Michael Flowers (24 off 19, 4 fours, not out) and Jagsir Brar (9 off 5, 1 six, not out) provided crucial late-order hitting.

HKCC's bowlers made key breakthroughs with Andy Tse (4-0-9-2) delivering a brilliant spell, keeping things tight in the early stages while removing Penguin lynchpin Craig Morgan. Alvina Tam (3-0-38-2) also picked up important wickets, including Andrew McMillan and Ajay Sampige, to leave the Penguins on 160/7, a challenging but achievable target for HKCC.

Chasing 161 for victory, HKCC suffered early setbacks at 18/2, including the dismissal of power player Raymond Chan, who fell to an unplayable, 'TaylorMade' Jagsir Brar delivery for a Plucka duck.

Michael Chung (57 off 56, 7 fours) played a determined knock, holding the



The full HKCC squad. Photo: Supplied

innings together as wickets fell around him and Adrian Lai (35 off 19, 5 fours, not out) provided the late acceleration, forming a crucial partnership with Chung, bringing HKCC within striking distance in the final overs.

Michael Flowers (4-0-11-2) was at his miserly best in the middle overs, removing Chi Lee (3) and Henry Pau (7) and helping to ensure that HKCC felt the pressure of a rising required rate, while a well rested Sunny Bowry (4-0-29-1) held his nerve in the final over.

The Penguins' victory in the Cup Match wrapped up a hugely successful weekend, where the spirit of cricket was at its finest. From the friendly opening games to Sunday's competit-

ive thriller, the weekend highlighted the growth of Cantonese-speaking cricket, the development of young talent, and the bonds being built between HKCC and Phuket cricket.

Tour manager Nitesh Hemlani, a regular visitor for the Phuket Cricket Sixes, played a huge role not only in scoring and managing but also in adding to the atmosphere behind the mic during the Cup Final.

The efforts of Adrian Lai, playing for his former HKCC teammates despite also being a Patong Penguin, helped bring people together and made the event a success with both teams already looking forward to the next edition, this was a weekend to remember.

Local Half Marathon sees healthy turnout

MARATHON

THE SECOND ANNUAL Sri Soonthorn Half Marathon has been declared an overwhelming success as an enthusiastic crowd of over 1,200 runners laced up their running shoes and entered the event on Sunday, Feb 9.

The course, which was split into four separate race categories of a 3.5 kilometre 'walk for health', a 5km fun run, a 10km mini marathon, and the 21km half marathon, took participants around Ban Bang Neow Dam and the surrounding areas in Thalang.

Phuket Vice Governor Samawit Suphanphai presided over the opening ceremony at the start line and was joined by: Chalermopol Koettraphon, Sri Soonthorn Mayor; Siwat Rawangkun, District Chief of Thalang; David Thomas Boucher, CEO of Bumrungrad International Hospital Phuket; in addition to a selection of local government executives and members of the public.

Mr Chalermopol Koettraphon



Photo: PR Phuket

explained the race was organised to encourage people to use their spare time more productively by pursuing a healthier lifestyle in which exercise plays a crucial part. It also helped boost tourism and promote the local area as many runners from overseas were involved in the event, he added.

Trophies and cash prizes were distributed for the top three finishers in each distance, which were split into age specific divisions of under-19 years old, 20-29 years old, 30-39 years old, 40-49 years old, 50-59 years old, and 60 years and above.

The Phuket News

Confident Norris targeting F1 title

FORMULA ONE

LANDO NORRIS HAS WARNED Max Verstappen he will get his "elbows out" as the McLaren driver fights to dethrone the Formula One world champion.

Norris, 25, fell short in his quest to take his maiden crown last season after Red Bull's Verstappen kept him at bay to land his fourth title in a row.

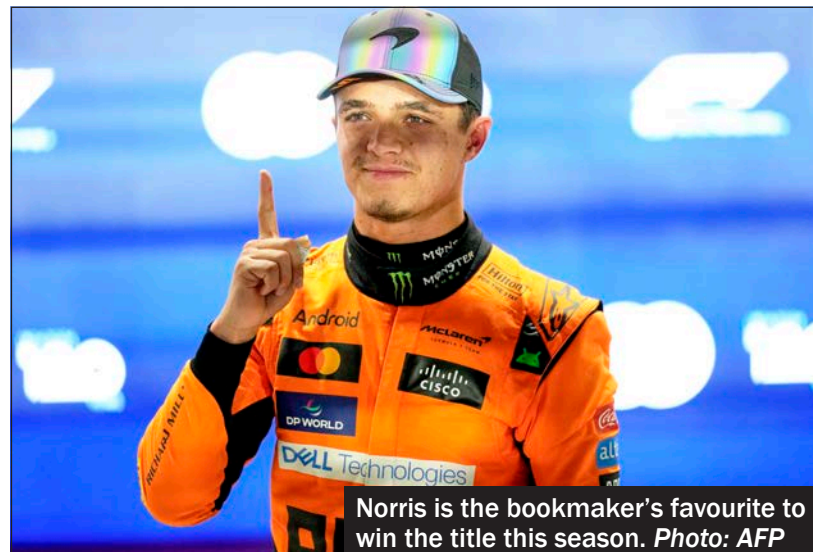
Norris and Verstappen clashed on track on multiple occasions as the Dutch driver guarded the championship lead he established after winning seven of the opening 10 races.

But speaking at the Feb 13 launch of the MCL39 at Silverstone, which he hopes will propel him to title glory, the British driver pledged to toughen up.

"I need to get my elbows out (against Verstappen) and show I am not willing to give him any positions," he said. "I also have to be a smart driver. You have to be smart to go up against Max."

"It is always a lot harder when you are in the car, rather than when you rewatch it, and when I saw some of the things I did last year, I was like, 'what the hell have I done that for? And what an idiot'."

Norris's McLaren team started last season slowly before an



Norris is the bookmaker's favourite to win the title this season. Photo: AFP

upgrade at the sixth round in Miami radically boosted their fortunes and allowed the Briton to take his first win. But that still left him 53 points behind Verstappen.

Norris attempted to claw back the deficit as Red Bull's supremacy was eroded but his title bid ran out of steam following mistakes by both driver and team.

FAVOURITE

Despite missing out on the drivers' crown, Norris and team-mate Oscar Piastri steered McLaren to their first constructors' title since 1998.

Norris has been installed by bookmakers as the favourite to win the title ahead of the first race of the season, the Australian

Grand Prix in Melbourne on Mar 16.

"I like that I have that pressure on my back but I am not feeling it," said Norris. "I hope I can go out and make them some money."

McLaren Racing chief executive Zak Brown said it was too soon to know how their new MCL39 car would measure up against rival teams, though he was optimistic.

"We believe we have made further steps forward since the championship-winning MCL38 but we won't know where we sit in the standings until we get into qualifying in Australia," he said.

Pre-season testing takes place in Bahrain from Feb 26-28.

AFP

Liverpool tame Wolves

FOOTBALL

AFP

Arne Slot hailed Liverpool's fighting spirit as the "fatigued" Premier League leaders survived a tense 2-1 win against Wolves last Sunday (Feb 16).

Slot's side moved seven points clear of second-placed Arsenal thanks to Luis Diaz's early opener and a Mohamed Salah penalty before the interval at Anfield, his 50th successful career spot kick for the club.

It wasn't easy for Liverpool despite that strong start as fourth-bottom Wolves hit back impressively. Matheus Cunha's blast reduced the deficit and Liverpool had to hold on in the closing stages before they could celebrate a first win in three games in all competitions.

Indebted to Alisson Becker for some crucial saves, Liverpool boss Slot said: "This one is big. We needed to fight and we needed Alisson."

"Wolves took a lot of risks. In a season where you want to achieve something, you need to have wins like this as well."

On Saturday, Arsenal ignored their injury woes as Mikel Merino, sent on by manager Mikel Arteta to act as a makeshift striker in the closing stages, inspired a 2-0 win against Leicester.

It proved an inspired move as Merino netted twice in the last nine minutes to extend Arsenal's unbeaten



Mohamed Salah (right) scored his 50th career penalty for Liverpool in the 2-1 win against Wolves. Photo: AFP

run in the league to 15 games.

Kai Havertz has been ruled out for the season with a hamstring injury, while Gabriel Jesus, Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Martinelli are all also injured, leaving Arteta with a threadbare attack.

HAT-TRICK HERO

Recent Manchester City signing Omar Marmoush scored a 14-minute hat-trick at the Etihad Stadium to seal a comprehensive 4-0 win against Newcastle, with James McAtee's 84th minute volley capping the win.

However, there was a scare for City when Norway striker Erling Haaland was forced off with a potential knee injury in the closing stages.

Third-placed Nottingham Forest slumped to a 2-1 defeat Fulham, while Bournemouth are up to fifth as their

unlikely bid to qualify for the Champions League gathered pace with a 3-1 win at bottom of the table Southampton.

Ten-man Ipswich held on for a 1-1 draw at Aston Villa after defender Axel Tuanzebe was sent off just before half-time. Liam Delap put Ipswich ahead before Ollie Watkins tapped in the equaliser after Marcus Rashford's free-kick hit the bar in the 69th minute.

Elsewhere, Kevin Schade's fourth-minute goal clinched Brentford's 1-0 win at West Ham and Tottenham edged Manchester United 1-0 in a game between two struggling heavyweight teams.

James Maddison scored the decisive goal for Spurs in the 13th minute to move under-fire Ange Postecoglou's team up to 12th place, while Ruben Amorim's side remain in 15th spot on 29 points.



Photo: Bangkok Post

Patama signals readiness for top Thai sports role

OLYMPICS

KHUNYING PATAMA Leeswadtrakul, a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), has said she will be ready to take over the helm of the National Olympic Committee of Thailand if she receives support from sports associations.

So far, only Suchai Pornchaisakudom, president of the Lawn Tennis Association of Thailand, and Pimol Srivakorn, president of the Taekwondo Association of Thailand, have officially announced their intention to run for the position of NOCT president at the elections on Mar 25.

Ms Patama, who is also the president of the Badminton Association of

Thailand, has long been rumoured to be joining the race but has yet to announce her candidacy.

"According to the constitution of the NCOT, it is not required to submit an application to run for the presidency," she said.

"A nomination can be made on the day of the general meeting. Therefore, there is no need to submit an application or announce that you will run for the position," she added.

"If on that day there are members who see that I am the right person for the job and that I will be able to be beneficial to Thai sports and nominate me for the position during the general meeting, then I will be ready to take on the role."

Bangkok Post

Relegation-threatened PAFC face key Yala test

FOOTBALL

LAST SUNDAY'S (FEB 16) 3-1 HOME loss to Muang Trang United FC means tomorrow's (Feb 22) away game in the deep south has taken on an almost unbearable significance for Phuket Andaman FC (PAFC).

The Lobsters face Yala City, the league's bottom side, a team that trails PAFC by a mere two points. A loss would be nothing short of disastrous. The very notion of the island being without a professional football team is unthinkable considering its moniker as the 'Jewel of the Andaman.'

Last Sunday's match offered fleeting glimpses of improvement, moments of dominance, yet PAFC seemed strangely ill-equipped to handle their newfound possession.

Lining up in yet another new formation, a 4-3-2-1 this time, the constant tactical tinkering hardly seems conducive to building consistency, let alone results.

PAFC were behind as early as the first minute when Muang Trang's Felipe scored from a throw in before large swathes of possession eventually resulted in Bank equalising for the home side.

Despite their territorial advantage, however, the home side struggled to translate possession into meaningful chances, with the midfield and attack frequently failing to connect.



Photo: Supplied

Muang Trang then restored their lead in the dying moments of the half after Thitchot conceded a penalty that was successfully dispatched by Diego Pereira.

The second half was a subdued affair, the energy sapped, perhaps, by the midday sun. Muang Trang defended comfortably and effectively put the game beyond doubt in the 80th minute through Pereira.

On the touchline, Coach Tum looked bereft of ideas, his demeanour suggesting he would have liked nothing more than to take matters into his own hands.

The cliché that some clubs are simply "too good to go down" has been bandied about in relation to this PAFC squad. But when a team is so palpably lacking in confidence, relegation becomes a very real possibility.

Yala City, rightly, will go into this weekend's crucial fixture as favourites. For PAFC, the stakes could not be higher.

Simon Causton

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Relegation
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CLASS ABOVE

Louise starts year in style with big wins

Louise after qualifying for the Blue Canyon Ladies Championship. Photo: Supplied



GOLF

Ben Tirebuck
editor3@classactmedia.co.th

Local golfing sensation Louise Landgraf reached another major milestone when she won the international player quota for the Blue Canyon Ladies Championship 2025 at the national qualifying competition at the Blue Canyon Country Club in Phuket on Feb 9.

The national qualifying round saw the top three female golfers in individual classifications selected to compete at the Blue Canyon Ladies Championship 2025 between March 13-16.

The Blue Canyon Ladies Championship 2025 carries a total prize pot of US\$800,000 (B27.65 million) and this year comes with

added prestige as the Korean LPGA (KLPGA) Tour's season opener and an expanded format from three rounds (54 holes) to a four-day, 72-hole contest.

Louise was in red hot form on Feb 9 as she scored 4 under par 68 from 5 birdies and 1 bogey, for a total score of 3 under par 141. This was equal to Saranporn Ketsuwan, a rising professional golfer from Satun Province, who was the leader from the first day.

It meant Louise won the international golfer quota and Saranporn the Thai golfer quota for the March 13-16 event.

"I am very happy and proud of myself for making it, especially having to face a professional golfer with skills from South Korea, which is one of the world's leading women's professional golf tours," a

naturally delighted Louise said afterwards.

"It is a great opportunity to gain experience to further develop myself," she added.

However, despite her qualification for the March event at Blue Canyon, Louise will not be able to participate as she had already accepted to play at the Sage Invitational 20-23 at Sage Valley Golf Club, Graniteville, South Carolina, USA, between March 20-23 where she will go head-to-head with the top 24 female players under the age of 18 in the world.

MASTERCLASS

Dual Thai-French, Louise, who turned 16 years of age in January, competes for France at international level, the country of her father Marc, although she still

lives in Phuket where she is a student at the British International School, Phuket (BIS).

Prior to her recent victory in Phuket she was celebrating success after she won the Portugal Ladies Amateur Golf Championships 2025 at Penina Hotel & Golf Resort on the weekend of Jan 29 to Feb 1.

Louise was imperious once again as she delivered a masterclass final round 67 (-5) to earn a two-shot victory over French teammate, Sara Brentcheneff, to lift the trophy.

It was a fine start to the year that followed on from a stellar 2024 when Louise was ranked number one in the French Girls Under-16 age group, number 10 in European Girls' Open Age and 112th in the World Amateur Golf Ranking.

In 2023 Louise made history by becoming the youngest ever female winner on the professional tour when she triumphed at the Terre Blanche Ladies Open, part of the Ladies European Tour Access Series, at the age of 14 years, 2 months and 18 days.

In doing so she broke the record previously set by young Thai sensation Atthaya Thitikul who won the Ladies European Thailand Open in 2017, aged 14 years, 4 months and 19 days old.

Next up for the rising star is the Spanish Ladies Amateur Championships between Feb 25 and March 2 at Real Club de Golf El Prat in Barcelona before she heads to the US for the Sage Invitational. Outside of that, she has confirmed she will mostly play all the main amateur events across Europe this year.

Cricket, camaraderie and competition in Phuket

CRICKET

Michael Flowers

THE ALAN COOKE GROUND (ACG) in Thalang played host to some fantastic cricket action on the weekend of Feb 7-9 as the Hong Kong Cricket Club (HKCC) embarked on their first-ever Qilin tour, bringing together a mix of competitive, social and developmental players for a series of games against the Patong Penguins and their

Invitational side.

The tour, filled with fun, friendship and fierce competition, culminated in the Sunday Cup Match (Feb 9), where the Patong Penguins defended 160 in a thrilling contest to claim a 9-run victory over HKCC. But beyond the result, the weekend was a celebration of cricket's spirit, bringing players together to strengthen the ties between the two clubs.

The HKCC touring squad, led by HKCC Qilin on their inaugural

tour, was supported by members from HKCC Xuanwu, a feeder side developing emerging players and HKCC Diamonds, the latest addition to HKCC's women's cricket setup, competing in Women's T20 League Division 2, with six players touring under captain Alvina Tam.

While the Sunday Cup Match was the competitive highlight, the first two days set the tone for the weekend with two social fixtures designed to foster camaraderie and inclusion.

Friday's (Feb 7) opening fixture saw the Patong Invitational XI take on HKCC in a relaxed and friendly setting, allowing both teams to get a feel for each other. Many players eased off their competitive nature in favour of an enjoyable, inclusive game, ensuring that everyone had a chance to participate.

Saturday's (Feb 8) match took the social aspect even further, featuring a two-innings format with 15 overs in the first innings and 10 in the second. The day's



Saturday's captains.
Photo: Supplied

real triumph was its inclusivity as six HKCC women's players, two junior boys and several ACG newcomers took part, making it a festival of cricket.

Continued on page 14