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THUGGED

BANG TAO TAXI THUGS STRIKE AGAIN

Victim Jakkree Thummee, a fully legal taxi driver, points to damage on his car.
Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

Eakkapop Thongtub
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Two more incidents involving Phuket taxi drivers has spurred more outrage over the violent nature and behaviour of the island's "public transport drivers", as officials refer to them, following taxi drivers near the Maya Beach Club in Soi Cherng Talay 14 having yet another police complaint filed against them, this time for stopping and threatening a fully legal Grab taxi driver for waiting to pick up passengers in front of the club.

Jakkree Thummee, 42, originally from Bangkok, filed the formal com-

plaint with Pol Lt Col Kittiphong Noupeng of the Cherng Talay Police at about 8pm last Saturday (Feb 17).

Mr Chakkri explained in his complaint that he had just dropped off passengers in Cherng Talay when at about 2:30am that day he received an order through the Grab app to pick up new passengers from in front of the club.

When he arrived the passengers had yet to exit the club, so he parked and waited for them. His car is a fully legal taxi bearing green licence plates and the stickers as mandated by the Phuket Land Transport Office (PLTO).

However, as a green plate taxi, it does not feature the stickers also

mandated by the PLTO expressly identifying the car as a legally registered taxi app vehicle.

The PLTO has never clarified whether or not legally registered green-plate taxis using taxi apps to provide services are supposed to carry both sets of stickers. So far the PLTO has considered such taxi vehicles as mutually exclusive.

Regardless, while Mr Jakkree was waiting in his taxi, a tuk-tuk arrived and blocked his exit while a group of four men approached the vehicle. One of the four men, described as a large man, knocked on the driver's window and threatened Mr Jakkree and invited him to, "Come outside

and clear things up with me."

While the men continued to threaten him, Mr Jakkree became afraid for his safety and called 191 to report the incident, but by the time police had arrived the group of men had fled the scene.

Mr Jakkree returned home to think about what had just happened. Despite his fear of reprisal against him, he decided to file a complaint with police.

Police have accepted the case and at last report said they were investigating the incident.

HISTORY OF VIOLENCE
Last Saturday's incident in Bang Tao...

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Lion cub in care, owner faces charges



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Globetrotter Todd Miller goes to Uganda



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Kamala Bowls pairs comp sees record numbers



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Campaign to get hearts pumping > p5

Taxi violence continues

Continued from page 1
...followed taxi queue drivers near the front of the Maya Beach Club beating a fully legal Grab taxi driver in December.

Grab taxi driver Teerajet Chukaew, 25, was legally trying to pick up tourists near the club who had ordered a Grab taxi late on Dec 2 when he was attacked by the two men, who both worked as taxi drivers at the queue nearby.

Mr Teerajet suffered multiple bruises and a punctured lung in the attack, during which he was beaten with a piece of wood. In fear of his safety, after filing the complaint with police, Mr Teerajet returned to his home province of Trang to recover from his injuries in hospital.

Two men later 'surrendered' to police for the attack, only after Cherng Talay Police had arrived to question drivers at the queue. However, the two men who surrendered – Kamjorn Kanyacharee, 48, and Bamrung Thipkonglat, 46 – were later confirmed by police to have not been the actual two people who carried out the attack.

Kamjorn and Bumrung were never confirmed as facing any charges for presenting false information to an official conducting an investigation.

The two men actually



Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

charged for the attack were Udomchai Pengsut, 49, and Wutthidet Phromthong, 37. Both were arrested and charged with "joining together to cause physical harm to others until it causes serious harm to the victim."

The attack in Bang Tao in December came just one day after Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin visited Phuket to witness tourism safety demonstrations in Patong, at which the prime minister said tourism safety was vital for Phuket's tourism image.

VAN DRIVER FIGHT Meanwhile, at time of press, police had yet to respond to action taken against two passenger van drivers involved in a physical fight at the exit of Ratsada Pier after a video clip of the fight was shared widely on social media last Sunday (Feb 18).

The video clip showed the fight breaking out, with punches exchanged and one of the drivers being kicked while he was still on the ground before other drivers moved in to separate the two.

Cafe lion cub 'Nong Kiwi' in care, owner charged

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A lion cub used to attract tourists to a cafe north of Phuket Town has been taken into care and the Chinese woman identified as its owner is to face charges under the Wild Animal Preservation and Protection Act.

The hunt for the lion cub, now known to be a female cub called "Nong Kiwi", and its owner began on Feb 12. Chintep Kanghae, head of the Khao Phra Thaew Non-Hunting Area in Thalang, which serves as the office responsible for wildlife animals in Phuket, led an inspection of the cafe, The Glass House Cafe and Space on Ratsada-Anusorn Rd, in Moo 2, Ratsada.

Pol Col Arun Wachirasrisukanya, Deputy Commander of Natural Resources and Environmental Crime Suppression Division, along with Pol Col Apisan Chairat, Superintendent of Region 5, Natural Resources and Environmental Crime Suppression Division, led the investigation joined by Phuket City Police and wildlife conservation officers

While the inspection of the cafe failed to find Nong Kiwi or its owner, it was learned that Nong Kiwi was brought to the cafe for two to



Photo: Phuket Tourist Police

three hours a day, then taken back to a hotel in Chalong.

Officers tracked down the owner, now confirmed to be a Chinese woman, whose name so far has been withheld by officials.

A document has been released in connection with the case that names the buyer of a female lion cub as Cheung Min. The document shows Cheung Min bought a female lion cub from Fuanglada Siyangnok in Bangkok on Jan 9 for the amount of B250,000.

However, officials have confirmed that there has been no registered change of own-

ership for Nong Kiwi, and the microchip number presented on the document does not match the microchip in Nong Kiwi – simply because Nong Kiwi has no microchip.

This led officials to believe that the name on the document is not the same person caught with Nong Kiwi in Phuket. In a confusing move, police have not clarified whether or not the document was presented to police by the Chinese woman arrested, or whether the Chinese woman's name is Cheung Min.

Regardless, the Chinese woman arrested in Phuket has

been taken to Phuket City Police Station and charged under the Wild Animal Preservation and Protection Act for "failing to notify the possession of wild animals and moving a protected wild animal without permission", officials have confirmed.

Officials found that where Nong Kiwi was being kept did not meet the criteria under the Act, deemed that it was not appropriate to issue the owner a license to raise a lion cub.

Nong Kiwi was confiscated and handed over to the "relevant department" to raise and care for, officials said.

Phuket Town comes alive for Chinese New Year

THE STREETS OF PHUKET Old Town came alive on Feb 15 with the grand opening of 'Phuket Festival 2024', held as part of Phuket's Chinese New Year festivities.

The festival, which continued through last Saturday night (Feb 17), was aimed at promoting tourism in the Phuket Old Town and stimulating the local economy, and celebrating the cultural heritage and traditional way of life of ethnic Chinese in Phuket Town.

Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat led the opening ceremony, joined by Phuket Town Mayor Saroj

Angkhanapilas and a host of other leading provincial figures.

Governor Sophon emphasised the significance of the event in bolstering Phuket's tourism sector, renowned globally for its marine attractions and diverse cultural identity. He praised the efforts of organisers and partners in creating an event that he said not only showcases Phuket's rich heritage but also generates opportunities for local businesses and residents.

Phuket Town Mayor Mr Saroj echoed Governor Sophon's sentiments, emphasising the collaborative effort

behind the festival and the importance of leveraging Phuket's cultural capital to create sustainable economic benefits for the local community.

Under the theme of 'Phuket Festival 2024: Happiness in All Dimensions', the festival features a variety of activities aimed at engaging residents and tourists alike, from traditional stage performances to interactive art installations for local residents and visitors alike to enjoy.

One of the highlights of the festival is the 'Dragon Lantern Tunnel', an illuminated display stretching over 40 metres

along Phuket Rd. Additionally, visitors can participate in scavenger hunts, craft activities and culinary experiences showcasing Phuket's diverse food culture.

As part of the festivities, participants also have the opportunity to take part in the symbolic 'Lighting Red Candles' ceremony, believed to bring good fortune and prosperity. The event encapsulates the spirit of community and celebration, fostering a sense of pride and belonging among Phuket residents, said an official report of the festival launch.

"With its blend of tradition,



Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

culture, and commerce, the 'Chinese New Year Phuket 2024' festival promises to be a memorable experience for all who attend, reinforcing

Phuket's position as a premier destination for cultural exploration and economic vitality," the report added.

The Phuket News

Combustible materials blamed for landfill fire

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Officials have called for local residents to separate trash, and especially to remove flammable liquids, after a landfill fire near the Phuket City Municipality Incinerator last weekend.

Firefighters were called to the landfill site, on the edge of Phuket Town in Saphan Hin, at about 1am last Saturday (Feb 17) after a security guard heard an explosion and confirmed that a section of the 'Pond 4' of the landfill was ablaze.

Firefighters and water trucks from Phuket City Municipality and other local administration organisations, including the Phuket Provincial Administration Organisation (PPAO), arrived and soon had the fire under control, officials reported.

However, photos taken well into the morning showed parts of the landfill still smouldering.

Meanwhile, residents in Phuket Town were warned of heightened air pollution.

Firefighters remained on site to ensure the fire did not start up again. They used a backhoe to break open mounds and soak them with water and doused the boundary of the land fill site to ensure the surrounding dry vegetation did not catch fire, officials noted.

The fire spread quickly because of strong winds, explained Phuket Town



Photo: Phuket City Municipality

Deputy Mayor Supachoke La-ongphet.

'Pond 4' is the largest of the five landfill areas at the landfill dump near the incinerator. The entire landfill contains some 400,000 tonnes of waste, he added.

Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat later arrived at the scene to oversee operations and be briefed on the containment of the fire.

Firefighters were still on watch for any further outbreaks of fire at the landfill, Governor Sophon was assured.

Governor Sophon urged local residents and tourists to separate their trash before disposing of it.

"This is a good thing, which will prevent waste from ending up in landfills, which adds to the volume of waste at the landfill," he said.

"I would like to ask Phuket residents

and tourists to help by separating garbage before throwing it away, including wet garbage that can be used to make compost," Governor Sophon said.

"And most importantly, please separate hazardous waste, such as spray bottles, perfume bottles and any gas canisters that are still not completely empty, because if these bottles are thrown in together with regular trash, when heated they can explode and cause fires," he added.

"The PPAO has a process for disposal of hazardous waste," Governor Sophon noted.

"Meanwhile, to solve the long-term problem, Phuket City Municipality is constructing another incinerator, which will take 18 months, instead of the original three years, Governor Sophon said.

Heat stroke warning

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN URGED to beware signs of heat stroke following temperatures across the island consistently reaching above 35°C, far above the 30-year average.

The warning was issued by Phuket officials on Monday (Feb 19), when the temperature in Phuket hit 37.5°C for the second consecutive day.

The heatwave began last week with Phuket Town on Feb 13 recording 37.6°C, then 36.5°C on Feb 14 and 38.5°C on Feb 15. The heat continued last Friday (Feb 16), when temperatures in Phuket Town rose to 37.4°C, then hit 37.9°C last Saturday (Feb 17), 37.5°C last Sunday (Feb 18) and 37.5°C on Monday. Temperatures at the airport have been a few degrees cooler, but hitting 35°C consistently.

"When the body temperature exceeds 40°C, it affects the circulatory system and brain system," said the heat-stroke warning.

Mild symptoms were listed as high body temperature, a red face, no sweat despite the hot weather and being thirsty.

More serious signs included dizziness, rapid breathing, shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting, and fainting.

People were also urged to



render immediate assistance to any person believed to be suffering from heatstroke:

- Move them into the shade and keep people surrounding the patient away so that the air can circulate more easily
- Lie them down with their head flat and raise both legs high. Find something to place under their feet so that blood flows to the heart better.
- Loosen any tight clothing and belts, and remove shoes and socks.
- Remove unnecessary jewelry.
- Use a cloth moistened with cold or room temperature water to wipe the face, body, nape of the neck and crook of the neck.
- Use ice to compress the neck, groin and armpits.

Any person suffering serious signs of heat stroke were urged to seek immediate medical assistance at a hospital.

The Phuket News

Phuket airport taxi checks as Maxim becomes legal

OFFICERS FROM THE Phuket Land Transport Office (PLTO) last week began inspecting taxi operators at Phuket International Airport, before the PLTO had announced that three new taxi app operators, including Maxim, were now deemed legal in Thailand.

The checks were conducted at Phuket airport from 4pm to 6pm on Feb 15.

According to a post online by the PLTO, the checks were conducted in collaboration with the Phuket branch of Airports of Thailand (AoT Phuket), the Phuket Tourist Police and the Sakhu Police.

The aim of the checks was to jointly investigate the illegal use of private cars to transport passengers, which the PLTO called "black plate" operators.

Specifically, the officials were looking for people using private cars as taxis, in breach of the Motor Vehicle Act and the Road Traffic Act.

The officers caught two people at the airport illegally using private cars to provide



Photo: PLTO

taxi services, reported the PLTO.

The officers also marked 21 charges levied for infringements of the Motor Vehicle Act.

The checks came before the PLTO shared a public notice issued by the Department of Land Transport (DLT) quietly announcing that three more taxi app operators were now deemed legal in Thailand.

The DLT posted its notice on Feb 14. The PLTO shared the same notice at 7:15pm on Feb 15, more than an hour after the checks at Phuket airport had ceased.

The DLT notice was issued in order to recommend that people use taxi services through electronic systems that are legal, "for safety in traveling Including also receiving services and fair prices".

The notice included three new taxi app services now approved by the DLT, bringing to 11 the total number of taxi app services now deemed legal in Thailand: Hello Phuket, Bonku, Asia Cab, Bolt, Grab, Robinhood, AirAsia Super App, InDrive, TADA, Maxim and Lineman.

The Phuket News

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Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s

WED FEBRUARY 28



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Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s

THU FEBRUARY 29



High: +30°

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Wind 4 m/s

Weed shops face new focus

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket Provincial Police are ramping up their efforts to crack down on illegal marijuana traders on the island following complaints of foreigners illegally importing cannabis flowers, peddling cannabis and randomly organising parties.

Phuket Provincial Police Commander Pol Maj Gen Sinlert Sukhum called a meeting with the Phuket Cannabis Association earlier this week to discuss measures to monitor and inspect marijuana shops.

Officers will go out and inspect shops selling marijuana and cannabis products with the intent of enforcing the Protection and Promotion of Traditional Thai Medical Knowledge Act B.E. 2542 as amended in 2019, Maj Gen Sinlert said.

The aim of the ramped up campaign is to take care of tourists' safety, he said.

"Officers will go out to inspect illegal marijuana shops and continue to enforce the law and order that the law be complied with correctly. Any shops found breaching the act will have their licenses suspended," Maj Gen Sinlert warned.



Photo: Phuket Provincial Police

At the meeting, held at the Phuket Provincial Police headquarters, were Phuket Provincial Police Deputy Commander Pol Col Theerawat Liam-suwan and other officials, including officers from the Phuket Provincial Public Health Office (PPHO).

Leading the consortium of cannabis operators was Poonwarit 'Thames' Wangpatravanich, President of the

Phuket Cannabis Association.

Mr Poonwarit has already expressed his support for greater regulatory enforcement regarding the cannabis industry, while still allowing medical cannabis products readily available.

"What it will be is a more structured, more regulated industry, which is good for the industry as a

whole. It will be more sustainable because want anything too much or too little – there needs to be a balance," he said in May last year, when the central government was first considering making cannabis fully illegal again.

"For us to be more regulated would be the best thing that can happen to us," Mr Poonwarit noted.



Photo: PR Phuket

Hookah raid in Cherng Talay

A TEAM COMPRISING NO less than 10 Thalang District officials have raided a hookah bar in Cherng Talay and charged the venue operator.

The raid was carried out at a venue in Moo 1 Cherng Talay at 11:09pm last Friday (Feb 16) as part of the ongoing crackdown on the illegal sale of hookah products, said an official report of the raid.

Foreign customers were in the bar when the raid was carried out.

Among the items seized in the raid were four sets of ready-to-use

hookahs, cash bills and various flavours of hookah tobacco weighing approximately 7,079 grams.

Officials arrested the venue owner, identified only as "Mr A", who was taken to Cherng Talay Police Station.

Mr A was charged with illegally selling a tobacco product in violation of the Tobacco Act, and involvement in the illegal importation and distribution of hookah and electric hookah products, in breach of the Customs Act B.E. 2017 and Ministry of Commerce regulations issued in 2014, the report confirmed. *The Phuket News*

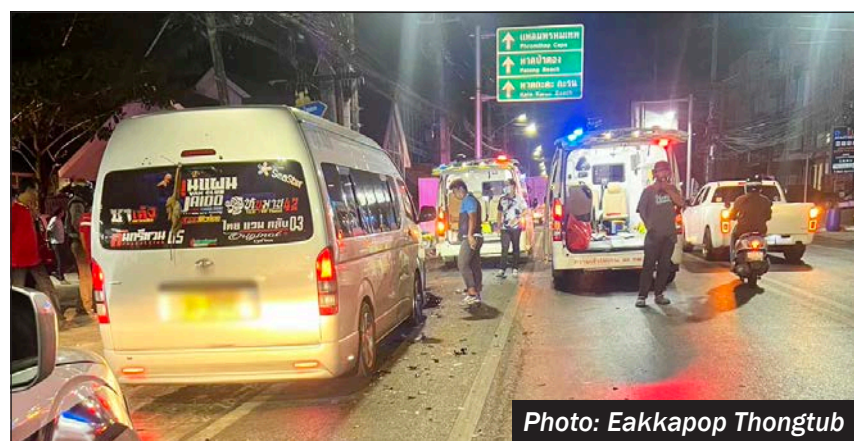


Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

British man killed in motorcycle accident

A 34-YEAR-OLD BRITISH MAN was killed following an accident involving three vehicles in Rawai in the early hours of Feb 15.

Pol Lt Col Somrak from Chalong Police Station was informed of the incident, outside the Patak Rd branch of 7-Eleven around 5:10am.

On arriving at the scene, he discovered three vehicles had been involved in a collision: a Bangkok-registered Isuzu pickup driven by Hakam Yuso, 27, that had heavy damage to the front right bumper and windshield; a Phuket-registered Toyota minivan driven by Suradet Sawangsri, 49, with damage to its front bumper; and a Honda motorbike driven by British man.

The British man died at the scene,

police confirmed.

Initial investigations into the accident from local CCTV footage showed that the British man, later identified as Aaron Rory Butcher from London, was travelling from Kata Beach and was heading towards the Chalong circle when he cut lanes and collided with the oncoming vehicle of Mr Yuso.

Following the collision, Mr Butcher and his bike slid and crashed into the Toyota van, which was parked in a designated zone outside the convenience stall.

An emergency crew arrived shortly afterwards and confirmed that Mr Butcher died at the scene and prior to his body being taken to Vachira Hospital for post-mortem examination.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Officials set sights on community CPR training

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket officials have stated their intention to have 10% of the Phuket population proficient in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and the use of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) within one year.

The announcement came at the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) among more than 70 government and private organisations at Bangkok Hospital Phuket on Feb 14.

Among the key signatories was the BDMS hospital group. BDMS operates three hospitals in Phuket: Bangkok Hospital Phuket, Bangkok Hospital Siriroj and Dibuk Hospital.

The MoU signing, held at Bangkok Phuket Hospital, also marked the launch of the 'Heart to Heart' project, aiming to provide CPR training and promote the use of AEDs within local communities.

After the press conference, a demonstration in CPR and the use of AEDs involving 30 people was held.



Photo: NBT Phuket

"The Thai government recognises the importance of ensuring effective emergency response and boosting the confidence of global tourists visiting our beautiful island," Phuket Vice Governor Adul Chuthong said.

"Thailand is pursuing a policy of becoming a medical and wellness destination of the Asean region. This is an outstanding point that has been accepted by many countries and is another policy that will help revive the Thai economy," he added.

"Phuket is a destination that tourists all over the world are interested in and want to visit. Therefore, the Heart

To Heart project is part of making tourists confident in their safety and having a good experience," he noted.

Dr Lalita Kongsuha, Director of Bangkok Hospital Phuket, noted that approximately 37,000 people in Thailand die from heart failure each year, averaging two deaths per hour.

People suffering from acute ischemic heart disease in Thailand have a death rate approximately four to six times higher than other places, she noted.

"CPR as a first aid method increases the chance of survival. It helps reduce injuries, disabilities and loss of life,"

Dr Lalita said.

"The helper must have knowledge, understanding and skills, and must be confident and act appropriately. This will make the assistance successful," she continued.

"The importance of CPR depends on the heart pumping being done correctly and in time. Because if the brain is deprived of oxygen for more than four minutes, it can be damaged.

"And every minute that passes without CPR and defibrillation will reduce the chance of survival of a patient in cardiac arrest by 7-10%," Dr Lalita said.

In August last year an Australian tourist happened to be present when a British man suffered a heart incident and collapsed on the street in Patong.

The Australian, who had already learned CPR as part of his job training in Australia, immediately provided assistance, and continued to provide assistance until an EMS team arrived. The British man survived because of the Australian man's efforts.



Photo: DNP

Leatherback lays eggs at Sirinat

OFFICIALS AT SIRINAT National Park have confirmed the first visit of a leatherback turtle to Phuket's shores since the beginning of this turtle nesting season. After a three-month wait, a leatherback turtle nest was discovered in Mai Khao on Valentine's Day (Feb 14).

Staff at Anantara Mai Khao Phuket Villas informed Sirinat National Park at about 5.36pm that they had found turtle tracks on the sand of Mai Khao beach.

Local officials from the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) rushed to the scene and promptly confirmed the traces were left by a leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), the largest of all living turtles and the heaviest non-crocodilian reptile in the world.

The tracks on the sand

indicated that the turtle's shell was 110cm wide and the flipper span reached 200cm. Remaining unnoticed, the turtle made her way up the beach, laid eggs, and returned to the sea.

As the nest was beyond the high tide mark, DNP officials considered the location safe and decided not to relocate the eggs. Not wanting to create unnecessary disturbance, they refrained from counting the eggs, limiting their interaction with the nest, some 73cm deep in the sand.

"Leatherback turtle eggs will take approximately 55-60 days to hatch, which is expected to happen around Apr 9-14. Sirinat National Park officials have organised a close watch of the nest to provide 24-hour care and ensure safe incubation," the national park said in a notice.

The Phuket News

Long weekend brings booze ban

THE MAIN PHUKET IMMIGRATION Office in Phuket Town, has announced that it, along with all other government offices, will be closed for the Makha Bucha national Buddhist holiday next Monday (Feb 26), which brings a nationwide 24-hour ban on the sale of alcohol.

In its notice, Phuket Immigration marked that it will be closed on Saturday and Sunday (Feb 24-25), as is usual, but also closed on Monday for national holiday.

Makha Bucha takes place annually on the night of the full moon during the third lunar month of the year. The event marks the anniversary of the Buddha's first major sermon.

On the full moon of the third lunar month, seven months after the lord Buddha began his teachings when 1,250 monks came together, with no prior arrangement to hear Buddha preach, Buddha ordained these monks and passed to them the basic principles of Buddhism: To eschew all evil, to do only what is good, and to cleanse the mind, along with other teachings which marked a key event in the development of the religion.

Many Thais will start the day making merit by giving alms to monks in the morning. In the evening, devotees will fill the temples to listen to sermons and partake in the candlelight ceremony known as wien tien, where they walk clockwise three times around the temple holding flowers, incense and a lit candle.

Popular temples to visit on Makha Bucha are Wat Chalong, Wat Phra Thong, Wat Khao Rang, Phuket Big Buddha, Wat Mai Luang Pu Supha and Wat Srisoonthorn.

By law, the sale of alcohol will be prohib-



The National Office of Buddhism invites people to observe ceremonies for Makha Bucha online. Image: National Office of Buddhism

ited for the 24 hours of Monday – from midnight Sunday night to midnight Monday night.

Phuket police traditionally enforce the ban on the sale of alcohol, and often patrol areas to ensure that the ban is upheld.

The ban on the sale of alcohol has been instituted by law, introduced under an announcement by the Prime Minister's Office, only since January 22, 2015.

Under the order, the sale of alcohol is prohibited on five specific religious days: Makha Bucha, Visakha Bucha, Asarnha Bucha Day, Khao Pansa and Wan Org Pansa.

Anyone caught breaking the ban faces a prison sentence of up to six months, a B10,000 fine or both.

Government offices including Immigration, District Offices and the local Department of Land Transportation office will all be closed on Monday.

Main branches of banks will be closed, but some bank branches in shopping malls will remain open.

Thailand Post branches and kiosks in shopping will remain open as normal, while hospitals will provide emergency and ongoing regular treatments only. The Phuket News

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Pricey airfares take their toll

Bangkok Post

Social media was awash with comments this week from local travellers bemoaning the high price of airfares to Phuket.

One contributor revealed that airfares offered by low-cost carriers from Bangkok to the Andaman island spiked to around B14,000 per trip two to three days before the planned departure date, while others said they paid B5,000 for a one-way trip to the island despite booking weeks ahead of their scheduled date of travel.

Suksit Suvunditkul, President of the southern chapter of the Thai Hotels Association (THA), said the average prices of airfares and hotels in Phuket have both been consistently increasing since the end of the pandemic.

The price increases have aligned with demand, which surged during the current high season, mainly driven by foreign tourists.

"International tourists were unfazed by high prices as their trips were planned and booked in advance. The airfares are normally combined in the form of connecting



Phuket airport is illuminated at night. Officials say higher prices align with increased demand. Photo: via Bangkok Post

flights from Bangkok, so they wouldn't notice how the prices had adjusted on domestic routes," Mr Suksit said.

He said the affected groups were not local leisure tourists, but mainly local business travellers or other people who need to travel domestically.

So far this month, 90% of all travellers to Phuket have been foreign tourists with domestic travellers accounting for just 10%.

The Chinese New Year festivities helped the Chinese market surpass the Russian market for the first time this year, with 66,775 Chinese

tourists and 54,908 Russian tourists travelling to Phuket during the period Feb 1-14.

Mr Suksit said the high season in Phuket typically runs from November to March, with a peak period between December and February which would usually see a spike in airfares and room rates as the festivities would spur tourists to quickly book their tickets and rooms.

However, the average price tends to automatically drop after April when demand among both foreign tourists and locals vanishes during the Songkran festival.

According to a provincial tourism report for January, hotels in Phuket had an average occupancy rate of 89.2%, with an average length of stay of 3.66 days per guest. The survey polled 30% of 2,069 hotels, accounting for 111,427 rooms in total.

In the first month of this year alone, tourism in Phuket secured revenue of B64.5 billion from around 2mn tourists, both from the domestic and international markets.

INFLATED PRICES

According to the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand

(CAAT), the regulated ceiling price for the 698-kilometre one-way trip from Bangkok to Phuket is set at B6,561 for low-cost carriers, and B9,074 for full-service carriers.

Thaneth Tantipiriyakij, President of the Phuket Tourist Association, said the tourism sector has been monitoring airfares, but has yet to find any airlines selling their tickets at prices above the ceiling price.

However, if other fees and taxes were included in the calculation, the price may exceed the regulated rate, in which case the airline would not have broken the rules in terms of the ceiling prices as the ceiling rate does not include additional expenses, he said.

"I still believe that local airlines don't want to get into trouble with CAAT by selling more expensive tickets than the designated rate as it's not worth being penalised," Mr Thaneth noted.

He said the prices are particularly high for two reasons, namely the high season and the short lead-time of bookings for one to two weeks before departure.

For those who wish to travel in the next three to four

weeks, the average airfare is still affordable and would gradually decrease following the end of the high season, he added.

He said more local travellers from Phuket had opted to drive to Krabi or Surat Thani to catch flights from there to Bangkok during the peak season, as the average prices of airfares in these provinces were much lower than those for flights departing Phuket.

SUBPAR EXPERIENCE

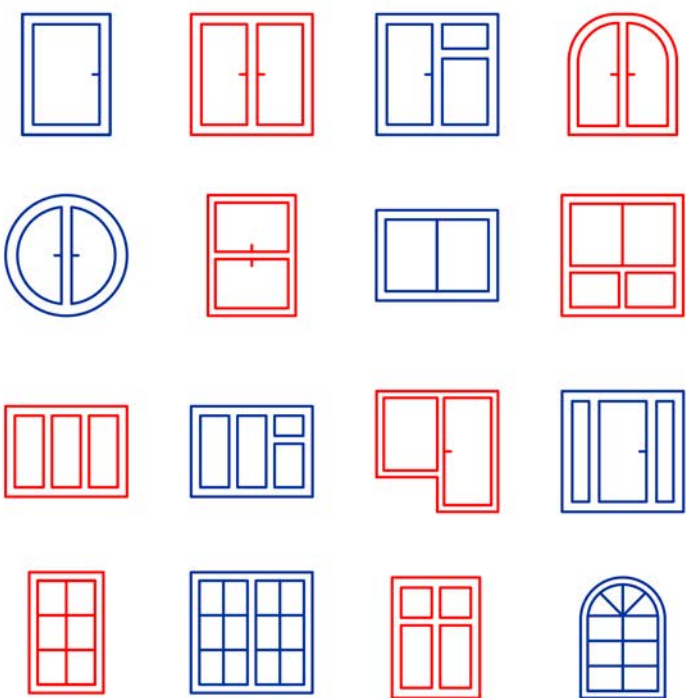
Mr Thaneth said the most worrisome problem in the private sector in Phuket is whether the quality of goods and services provided matches the increase in prices.

"There are cases where hotels have overcharged guests by four times compared to their rack rate during a high-demand period. Our concern is that if guests are not treated with good quality services and products, they might not return to Phuket," he said.

He said poor experiences with public infrastructure would also discourage tourists, if they felt that such services are not providing value for money.



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EA, FTI Phuket commit to 'Green Island Low Carbon City' goal

ENERGY ABSOLUTE PUBLIC CO LTD (EA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Federation of Thai Industries Phuket (FTI Phuket) to jointly support the transformation of Phuket into a low-carbon green city.

EA CEO Somphote Ahunai announced the collaboration across all sectors, aiming to position Phuket as a world-class eco-tourism destination. The initiative includes Phuket joining other provinces in the application of the Green Business Platform, in line with Thailand's goal of achieving carbon neutrality.

Mr Somphote revealed that EA has partnered with FTI Phuket to support the initiative "Phuket as a Green Island; Low Carbon City." The collaboration aims to promote the expansion and growth of tourism and all other industries in Phuket.

Phuket has been chosen as the first province to receive support from EA in promoting carbon neutrality comprehensively.

To achieve the vision of Phuket as a Green Island; Low Carbon City, EA will work with the public sector, private sector and FTI Phuket to invest in Green Logistics and Green Electricity on the island. This includes:

- Reducing carbon dioxide emissions at Phuket International Airport through the use of Green Electricity, generated from hybrid solar and battery systems, converting airport vehicles to electric vehicles (EVs), and installing EV charging stations in collaboration with Airports of Thailand Public Company Limited through a joint venture, Airports Energy Absolute Co., Ltd.

- Promoting the sale and use of EVs for



Photo: PR Phuket

commercial and public purposes in Phuket via local private companies through Nex Point PCL.

- Installing EA Anywhere electric vehicle charging stations, both AC and DC systems, at key transportation points in Phuket.

- Encouraging water tourism with E-Ferry services in collaboration with local private sectors for inter-island transportation and tourism.

- Investing in a high-efficiency waste-to-energy power plant with a capacity of 9.9MW to manage solid waste using an incinerator system capable of processing at least 500 tons per day at the Phuket Municipality Waste Disposal Center.

- Consulting on and investing in Smart City developments, new cities, or large mixed-use communities, promoting Green Logistics and Green Electricity.

EA plans to launch multiple Carbon Neutral projects within the year, with the support of Phuket's public and private sectors, to foster a positive environmental impact. The initiative aims to achieve the goal of Green Traveling on a Green Island, and extend the Green Business Platform developed in Phuket to other provinces. *The Phuket News*

Thaksin released on parole

BANGKOK

AFP

Former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra was released on parole last Sunday (Feb 18), just six months after he was arrested following a dramatic return to the kingdom from 15 years of self-imposed exile.

The controversial billionaire, twice elected premier and ousted in a 2006 military coup, was jailed for eight years on graft and abuse-of-power charges upon his return in August.

But his sentence was cut to one year by King Maha Vajiralongkorn within days of his return and the government said last week the 74-year-old was eligible for early release because of his age and health.

Thaksin may be subject to monitoring – possibly with an ankle tag – and restrictions on his right to travel.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin suggested last Sunday that Thaksin would not involve himself in politics but said, if and when he is ready to give advice, “everyone in the government is ready to listen”.

Thaksin’s daughter Paetongtarn last Sunday posted a picture on Instagram of him sitting in front of a swimming pool at his home, his arm in a sling.

“After no fresh air and sunlight for 180 days and 17 years away from home, Dad sits outside for a long time,” she wrote.

The former Manchester City owner’s arrival back in Thailand came on the same day his Pheu Thai party returned to



Thaksin Shinawatra at home following his release on parole last Sunday (Feb 18). Photo: Paetongtarn Shinawatra Instagram via Bangkok Post

government in alliance with pro-military parties, leading many to conclude that a backroom deal had been struck to cut his jail time.

The rumours grew stronger when he was transferred to a police hospital within hours of being sentenced because of his poor health.

He was reportedly suffering from chest tightness and high blood pressure when he was admitted to hospital and his family has said he underwent two operations in the following months.

The government has denied any deal and Srettha, of the Pheu Thai party, has insisted “he already served his jail time” – although it is not clear that Thaksin has spent any time in a prison cell.

The Move Forward Party said Thak-

sin’s release raised questions about whether he had received special treatment.

“Thailand needs a democratic system where the rule of law and justice system is applied in the same way for everyone, without double standards... for privileged people,” the party said in a statement Sunday.

Meanwhile, Attorney-General Amnat Chetcharoenrak on Monday morning ordered additional investigation in the lese majeste case against Thaksin who is alleged to have defamed the monarchy in comments made in Seoul, South Korea, on May 21, 2015.

Thaksin has been ordered to return to the Office of the Attorney General at 9am on Apr 10 to hear the decision in the case.

Tourist medical aid scheme confirmed

BANGKOK

THE GOVERNMENT HAS launched an Assistance Scheme for Foreign Tourist Injury and Casualty, offering compensation to tourists affected by accidents or losses during their stay in Thailand.

To be eligible for compensation, tourists must be foreign nationals holding valid passports with tourist visas and visiting Thailand from Jan 1 to Aug 31, 2024.

The scheme covers various incidents not resulting from the tourists’ negligence, including offenses against the body and life, accidents, bodily harm or death due to theft, rape, and public endangerment, among others.

Compensation details include up to B1 million per person for death or dismemberment, B300,000 for permanent disability, eyesight loss, or total disability preventing any occupational duties, and up to B500,000 for medical and domestic transportation expenses within Thailand.

Tourists with existing insurance coverage can request the difference up to the specified limits. Claims must



Photo: NNT

be submitted with requisite documentation within 15 days from the incident or diagnosis, including passport copies, medical reports, police reports, and legal heir documentation in the case of death.

Compensation claims related to incidents occurring from Jan 1, 2024, must be submitted within 15 days following this announcement, with Sept 15, 2024, as the final deadline for requests.

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports will have final discretion over eligibility and authorisation of payments.

Applications for compensation can be submitted to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, provincial Tourism and Sports Offices, and Tourist Assistance Centers at Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang International Airports via email or by post.

NNT

Afternoon alcohol sales ban remains to protect public health and safety

BANGKOK

A GOVERNMENT PANEL has rejected a proposal to scrap the long-standing ban on sales of alcoholic beverages between 2pm and 5pm, citing the risk to public health and safety.

The Thai Alcohol Beverage Business Association had requested the change, saying it would be consistent with the government’s plan to promote tourism.

The Cabinet forwarded the proposal to the alcoholic beverage control committee at the Ministry of Public Health, which held a wide-ranging discussion on Feb 15, said Dr Thongchai Keeratihattayakorn, chief of the Department of Disease Control, who is also the committee secretary.

All participants – including representatives from the ministries of Public Health, Tourism, Interior, Finance, and Social Development and Human Security – and other experts were unanimous that the afternoon sales ban should stay in place, he said.

The committee’s resolution will be forwarded to the National Alcoholic Beverage



Protesters rally against the extension of alcohol sales hours at the Public Health Ministry in Bangkok on Feb 15. Photo: Bangkok Post

Policy Committee, which will have the final say when it next meets, said Dr Thongchai.

“If it agrees (to extend sales hours), it needs to amend the related laws,” he said. “However, the ministry has affirmed its stance to protect people’s health.”

Dr Thongchai said his committee seriously discussed the pros and cons of extending selling hours for liquor, wine and beer, but participants expressed concern about a possible increase in alcohol-related accidents.

Over the recent New Year holiday period, he noted, about 3,000 road accidents, or 25% of the total, were caused by alcohol consumption.

Preliminary evidence also indicates a rise in social

impacts and alcohol-related criminal activity since authorities agreed to extend hours for serving alcohol in selected locations to spur tourism, said Dr Thongchai.

A pilot project approved by the National Alcoholic Beverage Policy Committee took effect on Dec 15 which allows pubs and restaurants to stay open until 4am in Phuket, Chiang Mai, Chon Buri, Bangkok and Koh Samui. The committee has said that more locales could be added if the initial phase proves successful.

On Monday it was confirmed that the National Alcoholic Beverage Policy Committee is to set up a panel to further study the proposal to extend alcohol sales hours.

Bangkok Post

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Upended in Uganda



GLOBETROTTER

Todd Miller

I sensed this would be a different journey before I got off the plane in Uganda. The first bottleneck occurred while deplaning at Entebbe airport, a process that abruptly jammed without explanation. Military people were milling on the ground, more than seemed justified for a routine flight from Dubai. Something was happening outside.

Stuck onboard somewhere between rows 12 and 15, thoughts turned to 1976 and how the Ugandan government abetted a hijacked Air France flight that ended in a spectacular siege by Israeli commandos.

Eventually I got off that plane and realised I had the fortune, or misfortune, of arriving in Uganda while the nation hosted the Non-Aligned Movement and G77 +China global conferences. This was a rare spotlight for Uganda on the international stage. For a country with a complicated military history, the security presence at the airport and in the city was highly visible. It would take me days to habituate to the ubiquitous sight of young boys, seemingly teenagers,



Mother of all traffic jams, between Entebbe and Kampala. Photo: Todd Miller

brandishing AK-47s.

The second jam occurred about an hour later, on the way into Kampala. The main expressway linking Entebbe and the capital was closed to everyone but conference delegates. All the other traffic, and by now we were in rush hour, squeezed into a local two-lane road. Five lanes – all going in the same direction – quickly formed the mother of all traffic messes. Every vehicle blocked every other vehicle. It was pure chaos, even by Ugandan standards. ‘Where are the police now?’ I wondered

as my car entangled in an ever-expanding colossal mash of vehicles. And the most excruciating part of the experience: I desperately had to pee but was advised to stay inside the car for safety reasons.

Somehow the jam miraculously unravelled, vehicle by vehicle, until the traffic flowed. First by a trickle, then a surge. We were rolling again and managed to enter a quiet stretch of highway. Dusk was on the horizon as we sped toward the city, and I fantasised about getting to the hotel bathroom. The serenity didn’t last long.

‘Fuel! Fuel!’ my frantic driver burst out, puncturing the quiet. The car slowed and sputtered to the shoulder. We were not just out of gas; we had exhausted the fumes. I noticed the now-conspicuous yellow gas light on the dashboard. This was a Definitely-Not-Good-Situation situation. The traffic jam, apparently, had consumed more fuel than the driver precisely calculated when he gassed up for the airport run.

We were in the middle of nowhere. And I still had to pee.

‘I’m thinking, I’m thinking,’ was all my rattled driver could offer as we sat and stared at each other in the idle car. Fortunately, a truck driver stopped on the shoulder not far from us. The truck didn’t stop to help us, but that didn’t deter me from seizing the moment. I asked the truck driver to give a lift to the nearest gas station, and he generously agreed. My driver then hopped into the truck with two empty plastic water bottles, while I remained locked in the car, alone, at sunset, questioning how a car hire from the Hilton could go so horribly wrong. I felt like a juicy target, a sitting duck.

Meanwhile in the distance, two soldiers on foot patrol, naturally with AK-47s, were slowly coming into focus. Were the soldiers friend or foe?

I’ll never know, because my driver returned some 40 minutes later, just as the military patrol arrived.

‘I hear Hawaii is nice this time of year,’ a friend suggested after learning about my eventful journey from Entebbe airport. Perhaps the most striking thing about this airport transfer is that it’s not even my most extreme airport trip that has gone off the rails. There’s Hong Kong in 2019, during the protests. Mumbai in 1992, during the nationwide Ayodhya riots. And Hanoi

1989, when I arrived in the city well ahead of Lonely Planet.

Essential information: I self-organised my brief visit to Kampala. Emirates offers an efficient, one-stop connection between Phuket and Kampala, and many nationalities visiting any combination of Uganda, Rwanda and/or Kenya can enter on a single East Africa visa.

In Kampala, I stayed at the Hilton Garden Inn, which opened just before the pandemic. While the hotel is modern, I would not recommend this property, as the service is polite but indifferent, and the hotel discourages walking in the immediate environs at night.

Although Kampala does not project an image as a walkable city, I booked a Kampala Half Day Walking Tour with a Female Guide on Tripadvisor and my impression of the city shifted favourably after this tour. I’m glad I invested the time to spend a day in Kampala to get a better sense of place and the city’s ‘organised chaos,’ in the endearing words of my guide Tajiri. After Kampala, I embarked on a 12-day private, guided overland journey to Kigali, Rwanda via six national parks orchestrated by Ovaco Adventures.

MEET TODD

I’m a hard-core traveler addicted to adventure. Perhaps I’m a magnet for mishap, but I find that even when plans go into a pickle, in retrospect the experience often creates a vivid, indelible highlight of a journey. And I’m all for the journey.

There’s a profound difference between taking a trip and embarking on a journey. A trip emphasises the endpoint, getting to a place. A journey, on the other hand, conjures ambition and immersion. A journey advances toward a goal through a process that might be uncertain, unpredictable, and unforgiving.

This article launches a new column for The Phuket News. This Globetrotter column highlights the journeys of one Phuket-area resident who passionately believes that travel is one of life’s most enriching pursuits. Globetrotter will explore some of the world’s most fascinating places, peoples, and happenings. Primate trekking in East Africa, pedalling from Siem Reap to Saigon, witnessing tribal rituals in the South Pacific, and observing a different kind of ritual at the Olympics, are all in the immediate plan.

You should expect lots of adventure, and probably a few misadventures, from this column. You shouldn’t expect vanilla travel tales like visiting Hawaii – although I hear Hawaii is rather nice this time of year. Please join me on the journey.

Adventurer and author Todd Miller has cycled across two continents and visited all seven. He authored the Amazon best-seller ‘ENRICH: Create Wealth in Time, Money, and Meaning’, lauded by Forbes, USA Today, Entrepreneur and other global media. Todd has contributed to Fast Company, Newsweek and dozens of podcasts on work-life topics, and resides at Natai Beach.

WINDOW ON PHUKET

February/March 2024 issue



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New web of origins for Spider-Man

David Griffiths

The idea of a film centring around the character of *Madame Web* is certainly a surprising move from Marvel. In the comics the character is an older woman, which obviously isn't the case here, and after watching the film you quickly realise this film perhaps unintentionally changes the Spider-Man lore that has been set up in the Tom Holland Spider-Man movies.

Sure, *Madame Web* is an ambitious film because despite what some of the publicity around the film has stated this is pretty much the origin story of four characters, not one – but whether or not the film works or not is going to come down to whether or not you are a comic book lover or not.

Directed by first-time feature film director S.J. Clarkson, *Madame Web* begins with Constance (Kerry Bishe – *Argo*) deep in the rainforests of Peru searching for a rare spider that has the ability to heal humans by giving them super-human strength. Shortly after finding the spider she is shot by one of her companions, Ezekiel Sims (Tahar Rahim – *A Prophet*), who wants the spider's power for his own greedy needs.

As she lay dying, Constance is helped by a local tribe and she gives birth to a baby daughter before passing away. Before she passes though one of the tribesmen, named Santiago (Jose Maria Yazpik – *Beverly Hills Chihuahua*) promises to help her daughter should she ever return to Peru looking for answers.

The story then jumps to 2003 when her daughter, Cassandra Webb (Dakota Johnson – *Fifty Shades of Grey*), is working as a paramedic alongside her good friend Ben Parker (Adam Scott – *Parks and Recreation*). She is great at her job, but after an accident sees her nearly drown she suddenly finds herself having strange premonitions of the future – including seeing a work colleague die – which begin to affect her mentally.



Dakota Johnson in Madame Web (2024). Image: IMDb

These premonitions, and perhaps a little bit of fate, soon bring her face-to-face with three teenagers – Julia Cornwall (Sydney Sweeney – *Euphoria*), Anya Corazon (Isabela Merced – *Dora and the Lost City of Gold*) and Mattie Franklin (Celeste O'Connor – *Ghostbusters: Afterlife*) – whom she realises are being hunted down by Ezekiel.

Now you may have noticed the name Ben Parker there, and that is where *Madame Web* becomes interesting for fans of the Spider-Man universe. If you are expecting Tom Holland, Tobey Maguire or Andrew Garfield to show up as Spider-Man, then you are in for a surprise – given that the film is set in 2003 they are a no show. However Spider-Man exists here... kind of.

Adam Scott's Ben Parker is certainly Peter Parker's Uncle Ben and it is safe to presume that the nameless woman he goes on the date with is the future Aunt May. Also we see in the film that his sister, Mary Parker (Emma Roberts – *We're The Millers*), is pregnant with a baby, which is easy to work out is in fact Peter.

The way that the team of screenwriters have incorporated the Peter Parker storyline into the film is pretty ingenious, but it also leads to a big problem

with the film as well... if the teenagers here end up becoming the first Spider-Women (as seen in Ezekiel's premonition), then why are outlets like the Daily Bugle so surprised when Spider-Man shows up later on? Surely J. Jonah Jameson would have been all over it?

To be honest though, a slip-up in the universe like that is the least of *Madame Web*'s issues. This film will divide audiences because of other reasons. On one hand it has great characterisation allowing its four female leads to really explore their characters, but on the other hand the fact that the director's only previous experience comes from television is blatantly obvious when you are watching the film.

The film lacks those huge action set-pieces that made people fall in love with the early Marvel movies like *The Avengers*. The frustrating part is those dramatic and suspenseful moments are there in the screenplay, but just aren't brought to the screen in a way that will have audience members sitting on the edge of their seat. Instead, the audience is left feeling like they are watching the latest Marvel TV series where the action sequences are toned down to save money.

As a standalone film *Madame Web* works. Dakota Johnson is strong in her role, but with a lot of the action feeling like it was written for television don't expect this to be a film that will be enjoyed by anyone that is not a hardcore comic book fan. What we can all look forward to though is when Sony decides to bring Kraven, Madame Web, Morbius, Venom and Spider-Man together for one hell of a film.

Madame Web is currently screening in Phuket and is rated 'G'

2.5/5 Stars

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





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POP QUIZ

1. Which is the largest island in the world?

2. Which animal has nine brains and three hearts?

3. What is the name for a dog created by crossing a Labrador Retriever and a Poodle?

4. Which famous American musician was fatally shot by his father on April 1, 1984?

5. Which tree is featured on the Lebanon flag?

Answers below, centre

SUDOKU

Easy

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

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

Across

1. Greetings

6. Milk purchase

11. Agatha Christie's "The ___ Murders"

14. Be in harmony

15. Dickens's ___ Heep

16. Driveway material

17. Build at the beach

20. Scrape, as the knee

21. Thin and slippery

22. Bother, with "at"

25. Not behind

27. Kind of seal

28. Cook at the beach

32. Fliers in V's

33. Fail to see

34. Reddish-brown gem

35. Struck hard

37. Expressed

41. React angrily

42. Going on and on

43. Prepare to bask on the beach

49. Barber's strap

50. Burrow

51. Draft pick

52. Unwanted stone

55. Ocean menace

57. Slip down a tube at the beach

Down

1. Son of Noah

2. Palindromic title

3. Be a pain

4. Noted Virginia family members

5. Scurvy grass

6. Amounts

7. Samovar

8. Capitol Hill worker

9. Gallop

10. Old German coins: var.

11. Duds

12. Noncompliant one

13. Gospels

18. Abbreviation for hyperbolic sine

19. Waste

22. Sponge cake ingredient

23. Locality

24. Bleacher feature

Across

26. Base

29. Pounds, shillings and pence, abbr.

30. Took the bait

31. Draw upon

35. Junior, e.g.

36. Welcome ___

37. Boozier

38. Horne solo

39. Hero

40. Fraction of a newton

41. Indonesian coins

42. Lazy

43. Certain shark

44. Endeavor

45. Like many shorelines

46. Exclusive

47. Parents, usually

48. Cry in a mudslinging contest

53. Blockhead

54. Maori war dance

56. Mix

58. Two-year-old sheep

59. Variety

60. Expected

61. Dash lengths

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
14					15					16			
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49						50					51		
52				53	54		55			56			
57						58					59	60	61
62				63						64			
65				66						67			

Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

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

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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

4.9

to one is the sheep-to-people ratio in New Zealand. The ration has been falling in recent years.

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.

4.8 billion

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

Source: Uberfacts

ISLAND VIEW

Heading to Sea at Layan. Photo by Cynthia Tomaszewski

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

This week in history

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.

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 27, 2015

Russian politician Boris Nemtsov, opposed to the government of Vladimir Putin, is gunned down from behind on the Bolshoy Moskvoretsky Bridge in Moscow, hours after appealing to the public to support a march against Russia's war in Ukraine.

Boris Nemtsov (2014).

Feb 28, 202 BC

Liu Bang is enthroned as the Emperor of China, beginning four centuries of rule by the Han dynasty.

Feb 29, 1940

For her performance as Mammy in 'Gone with the Wind', Hattie McDaniel becomes the first African American to win an Academy Award.

Source: Wikipedia

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Monday BBQ Night

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Wednesday BBQ Night

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FRI 8 MAR

Women's Day Lunch

International Women's Day Lunch

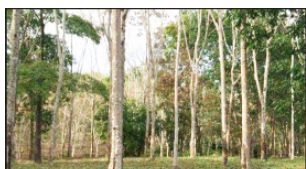
Join us for lunch at the Courtyard by Marriott Phuket Town to celebrate International Women's Day - Everyone Everywhere can Inspire Inclusion. Engage with a community of individuals who share your commitment to fostering an inclusive environment. Draw inspiration from our speakers, share your own experiences, and exchange ideas that highlight the importance of women's inclusion. Together, we can forge a movement that emphasizes understanding, values diversity, and promotes the empowerment of women. The IWD 2024 #InspireInclusion campaign is dedicated to creating a world where women feel a profound sense of belonging and empowerment, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive society for all. Let's unite to inspire change and make inclusion a reality for women everywhere.

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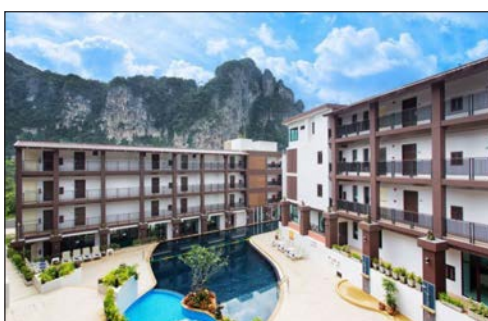
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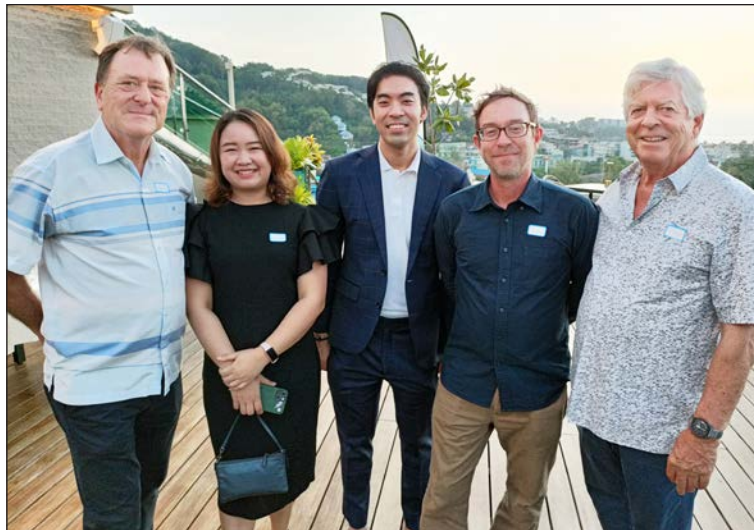
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SKÅL INTERNATIONAL PHUKET DINNER - FEBRUARY

A Moonlit Feast was held on Feb 15 at Metadee Concept Hotel Kata's Moon Terrace restaurant hosted by Marek Przeorski and his team. Guests indulged their senses with Mediterranean-inspired tapas in a setting that is as beautiful as it was delicious. As the sun set, networking and catching up with fellow members and guests began, while surrounded by stunning art deco and abstract elements, creating an unforgettable dining experience. Follow Skål International Phuket on FB for details of the upcoming March event.



LOVE IS LOVE

Congratulations to all those who made Valentine's Day (Feb 14) their special day this year by getting married at a range of special events across the island. From the 'Love is Love' event at Patong Beach, which saw same-sex couples tie the knot, to the 'Baba' (Peranakan, Straits Chinese style) event at the Old Brewery in Kathu, to the beachside traditional and contemporary style weddings at Layan Beach... Congrats to all the newlyweds. We wish you a loving, happy, prosperous future together!

Sad Pacquiao accepts his Olympic dream is over

OLYMPICS

A "SADDENED AND disappointed" Manny Pacquiao conceded on Monday (Feb 18) his Olympic boxing dream was over after the ring great was denied a berth at this year's Paris games.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) rejected a special request for Pacquiao to take part, the Philippine Olympic Committee confirmed.

Pacquiao, 45, who hung up his gloves in 2021 before an unsuccessful presidential run, said he respected the decision of the IOC, which has an age limit of 40 for Olympic boxers.

"While I am very saddened and disappointed, I understand and accept the age-limit rules," said Pacquiao, who won world titles at eight different weights during a glittering professional ring career spanning more than a quarter of a century.

The Philippines last year asked the IOC for a "universality place" for



Pacquiao. Photo: AFP

Pacquiao, who has never boxed in the Olympics.

Universality places are usually awarded to athletes from smaller countries who struggle to secure slots in the Olympics through normal qualification.

Philippine Olympic Committee president Abraham Tolentino claimed the IOC decision would deprive the country of a "sure podium or first ever gold" in Olympic boxing.

Pacquiao said he still intends "to bring pride and honour to my country inside the boxing ring in the near future", adding that he will fight Thai kickboxer Buakaw Banchamek in an Apr 20 exhibition match in Bangkok.

The match against Muay Thai great Buakaw will be fought under international boxing rules, he said. *AFP*

Thai shuttlers claim silver

BADMINTON

Bangkok Post

Thailand came up short in their bid to win their maiden Asian women's team title after losing to India in the final of the continental badminton championships in Selangor, Malaysia, last Sunday (Feb 18).

Busanan Ongbamrunphan and doubles pair Benyapa Aimsaard and Nuntakarn Aimsaard claimed points for Thailand while Pusarla V Sindhu, Anmol Kharb and doubles pair Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand won their respective matches to give India a thrilling 3-2 victory.

World No.17 Supanida Katethong went down to world No.11 Sindhu in the opening singles match 12-21, 12-21 at Setia City Convention Centre.

World No.10 doubles pair Jongkolphan Kittitharakul and Rawinda Prajongjai lost to Jolly and Gopichand 16-21, 21-18, 16-21 as India raced to a 2-0 lead.

Busanan revived Thai hopes, outplaying Ashmita Chaliha 21-11, 21-14 in the third match.

Aimsaard sisters then pushed the tie to the deciding fifth match after they registered a 21-11, 21-9 victory over Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra.

Kharb proved too strong for Thai rising star Pornpicha Choeikeewong in the decider, winning 21-14, 21-9 to hand India their first Asian women's crown.

"Although we couldn't beat the Indian team in the final, I have to say the girls did



Thailand players pose with their silver medals at the Asia Team Championships in Selangor, Malaysia, last Sunday (Feb 18). Photo: Bangkok Post

very well in this tournament. They gave it their all today," said Thai badminton chief Khunying Patama Leeswadtrakul.

"It is still a historic achievement for Thailand for making their first appearance in the final at the Asian Team Championships.

"With some young players added to the team such as Pornpicha Choeikeewong and Tidapron Kleebyeeseen, I am confident the team will go on and have more success in future tournaments such as the SEA Games, the Asian Games and the Uber Cup," she added.

Thailand's previous best results at the Asia Team Championships were bronze-medal finishes in 2016 and 2020.

China were crowned the men's team champions after they defeated defending champions and hosts Malaysia 3-0 in the title match.

Thai players will head to Europe next week as the BWF World Tour returns to action, starting with the German Open on Feb 27-Mar 3, followed by the French Open on Mar 5-10, the All England Open on Mar 12-17 and the Swiss Open on Mar 19-24.

F1 urges speedy resolution to Red Bull's Horner inquiry

FORMULA ONE

RED BULL HAVE BEEN asked to resolve their investigation into team principal Christian Horner "at the earliest opportunity" following an accusation of inappropriate and controlling behaviour levelled at him by a female member of staff.

Horner was subjected to an eight-hour quizzing by an external lawyer appointed by Red Bull's parent company, the Austrian drinks giant, to take charge of the inquiry at a secret London location last week, days before one of the most successful team bosses of all time appeared at the 2024 car's launch on Feb 15.

"We have noted Red Bull has instigated an independent investigation into internal allegations at Red Bull Racing," said a statement from F1.

"We hope that the matter will be clarified at the earliest opportunity, after



Horner. Photo: AFP

a fair and thorough process."

When news of the affair surfaced in Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* Red Bull confirmed they had launched an investigation and said they were taking it "extremely seriously".

Horner, who has overseen seven drivers world championships and six constructors titles since joining the team on their arrival in F1 in 2005, categorically denies any accusation of

improper behaviour.

At last week's car launch in Bahrain the 50-year-old Horner insisted it was "business as usual" whilst admitting the investigation was "a distraction".

Red Bull were dominant on the track in 2023, winning 21 of 22 Grands Prix as Max Verstappen romped to a third consecutive drivers' championship. *AFP*

Underdogs have their day in the sun

BOWLS

Continued from page 16

However, the newcomers were unable to get past Dot and Ue in the first semi-final as the latter pair continued their scintillating form to cruise to a 10-4 victory, while Dean Simmonds and Mintie beat Dean Lambert and Glenn 11-6, despite throwing away a 6-1 lead at one point.

The final was therefore set and, once underway, the early exchanges were tight with Dean and Mintie holding a narrow 3-2 lead after four ends.

Realising they probably could not out bowl Dot and Ue, Dean and Mintie decided to adopt a more fiery attacking approach for the next four ends, a decision that seemed to pay off as they advanced to a five shot lead with four ends to go.

However, Dot and Ue showed their class to battle back to level the scores at 7-7 with just two ends to play, before Dean and Mintie scraped a point on end nine, meaning the overall outcome hinged on the very last end to be played.

The drama had the crowd whipped into a frenzy, with excited onlookers becoming



Plate winners Roger and Nidnoi (left) with finalists Frank and David and Cath Simmonds (centre). Photo: Rob Knight

increasingly vociferous and the pressure clearly on the two teams.

The final was decided by the slimmest of margins as Dot's bowl sneaked past Mintie's to leave the perceived underdogs holding the final shot, which they took to secure a 9-7 victory – a gripping and exciting final worthy of any stage!

Congratulations were bestowed upon Dean and Mintie with an understandably ecstatic Cath Simmonds presenting the trophy to the victorious pair. For Dean it meant claiming back the trophy he won two years ago, while Mintie was triumphant in his first ever major final. However, Dot ended up disappointed as the bridesmaid, somewhat inexplicably given her form over recent years.

Last year's overall champion Roger Goodwin and his playing partner Nidnoi beat Frank and David in the plate final – perhaps not the trophy Roger was aiming for but a trophy nevertheless.

All eyes now turn to the 'blue ribbon' event next month when the prestigious Phuket Open Singles Championship will be contested on Mar 14.

Rob Knight

Kamala Lawn Bowls club is open six days a week and all equipment is provided. Members days are Monday and Friday and beginners day Wednesday from 2:45pm onwards. For more information contact: Tel 099-130-7255 or 097-173-0221; email: galations1402@gmail.com or Gordonjenkins1963@gmail.com.

Salah return boosts Liverpool

FOOTBALL

AFP
Mohamed Salah returned with a goal as Premier League leaders Liverpool routed Brentford 4-1 while Manchester City's title defence was damaged by a 1-1 draw against Chelsea last Saturday (Feb 17).

Elsewhere, Arsenal demolished Burnley 5-0 to keep the pressure on Liverpool, who are two points above the second-placed Gunners and four-ahead of third placed City.

Salah came off the bench to replace the injured Diogo Jota in his first Liverpool appearance since their win over Newcastle on New Year's Day.

Having returned from the hamstring injury he sustained on Egypt duty at the Africa Cup of Nations, Salah registered his 19th goal in all competitions this season, to add to goals from Darwin Nunez, Alexis Mac Allister and Cody Gakpo.

Meanwhile, Manchester City's attempt to win an unprecedented fourth successive title is under threat after a disappointing result at the Etihad Stadium.

Chelsea took the lead in the 41st minute through former City winger Raheem Sterling before the hosts finally drew level in the 83rd minute through Rodri.

Pep Guardiola's men, who have a game in hand on Liverpool, preserved their long unbeaten home league run, but failing to win for the first time in 12 games in all competitions was a significant setback.

Arsenal, meanwhile, made it five



Salah came off the bench to score and help Liverpool to a 4-1 win at Brentford last Saturday (Feb 17). *Photo: AFP*

consecutive wins with another display of their goal power at Turf Moor.

Mikel Arteta's side have beaten Liverpool and won 6-0 at West Ham since a revitalising warm-weather training camp in Dubai last month.

And they were too hot for second-bottom Burnley to handle thanks to goals from Martin Odegaard, Bukayo Saka (2), Leandro Trossard and Kai Havertz.

Tottenham's top four bid suffered a blow as Joao Gomes struck twice in Wolves' surprise 2-1 win in north London, meaning Aston Villa climbed into fourth place with a 2-1 win at Fulham thanks to Ollie Watkins' brace.

On Sunday Rasmus Hojlund made Premier League history as he became the youngest player to score in six consecutive Premier League games after

netting twice in the first seven minutes in Manchester United's 2-1 win at Luton.

Earlier Sunday, Brighton hammered Sheffield United 5-0 to leave the Blades languishing seven points from safety with 13 games remaining. Their 65 goals conceded after 25 games is the most ever in the competition.

Nottingham Forest beat West Ham 2-0 at the City Ground in a major boost to their survival hopes while Newcastle and Bournemouth drew 2-2.

Everton and Crystal Palace drew 1-1 on Monday, hours after it was announced manager Roy Hodgson was standing down due to ill health.

Palace confirmed prior to the match that the 76-year-old has been replaced by former Eintracht Frankfurt boss Oliver Glasner.



The men's national team at the Asian Cup in Qatar last month. *Photo: Football Association of Thailand*

War Elephants jump 12 places in FIFA rankings

FOOTBALL

THE THAILAND MEN'S football team has moved up an impressive 12 positions in the FIFA global rankings.

The War Elephants rose to 101st from 113th place, the world football governing body said after the latest rankings were released on Feb 15.

The Football Association of Thailand indicated in a Facebook post that the rise reflected the team's strong performances at the recently ended AFC Asian Cup tournament in Qatar.

The team, widely tipped to stay in the basement of the Group stage, surprisingly entered the last 16 as the

second-best side in its group with one win and two losses.

Thailand tops all teams in Southeast Asia, followed by Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Singapore.

Argentina are still the best team in the world, ahead of France, who were the runner-up in the World Cup in Qatar in 2022.

Thailand will face South Korea in World Cup qualifiers in Seoul on Mar 21, with the return leg at Rajamangala National Stadium in Bangkok five days later.

Thailand is currently second in Group C after South Korea, with one win and one loss. China and Singapore are the other teams in the group. *Bangkok Post*

Phuket Governor kicks off public sector football comp

FOOTBALL

PHUKET GOVERNOR SOPHON Suwannarat laced up his football boots and took to the field on Feb 13 as part of a friendly football competition between a variety of government departments.

The 'Local Administrative Organisation Football Competition' is an annual event where various public sector departments field teams as part of an exercise geared to enhance unity and boost relations between the different offices.

Governor Sophon oversaw the opening ceremony of this year's event at the Plai Laem artificial pitch complex in Saphan Hin on the afternoon of Feb 13 before taking to the pitch to showcase his football prowess.

The Governor led his team in a special VIP match that also saw participation from Phuket Vice Governors Adul Chuthong and Norasak Suksomboon, as well as Phuket Town Deputy Mayor Supachoke La-ongphet and selected government officials.

In total 11 teams from various districts are competing in the competition, which is played every Tuesday afternoon at the Plai Laem facility. The tournament officially runs from Feb 13 until Apr 25.

The 11 districts competing are as follows: Sri Soonthorn; Ratsada; Mai Khao; Rawai; Thepkrasattri; Patong; Phuket Town; Karon; Phuket Provincial Administrative



Governor Sophon. *Photo: PR Phuket*

Organisation (PPAO); Wichit; and Kathu.

The objective of the tournament is to promote and create unity between local government organisations based on the values of true sportsmanship, Governor Sophon explained in his opening address ahead of the tournament kicking off.

This includes competing, team work, collaboration, while understanding the merits of how to lose, how to win and how to forgive, Governor Sophon said.

The exercise can help build a more focused and unified public sector that can ultimately lead to the public being served much better in a variety of ways, Governor Sophon added.

Although no official results were posted in the report, the first day of fixtures was as follows: Sri Soonthorn vs Wichit; Ratsada vs PPAO; Kathu vs Karon; Rawai vs Phuket Town; and Thepkrasattri vs Patong.

The Phuket News

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Sport

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War Elephants climb in FIFA rankings > p15

DOUBLE RUN FUN



Green turtle dolls, as displayed here at the Feb 13 press conference to announce the two events, will be given to selected race participants. Photo: PR Phuket

RUNNING

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Two exciting landmark running events are soon to be launched under the banner 'Sport Tourism Phuket Run Series 2024', it has been confirmed.

The first will see runners take on the famed slope leading up to the Big Buddha statue in Karon, while the second challenge will take place on the beautiful sands of Mai Khao Beach.

A press conference to announce the double header was held on Feb 13 at Central Festival shopping mall in

Kathu overseen by Phuket Governor Sophon Suwanarat, who was joined by Ratchadaphon Oin, Director of the Tourism and Sports Phuket office, Thammawat Wongcharoenyot, President of the Phuket Sports Association and selected government officials.

The 'Big Buddha Sky Run' is an early morning event on Saturday, Mar 17, where participants will cover a total distance of 4 kilometres, starting at Tiger Park in Chalong and finishing with the challenge of a 360 metre incline to the top of the slope at Nakkerd Buddhist Park.

Once there, runners can relax at the base of the famous

statue while enjoying the sunrise and beautiful 360-degree views across the island.

The Big Buddha temple is home to Phra Phuttha Ming Mongkhon Ek Nakkhiri, which at 25.45 metres wide and 45m high is the largest Buddha statue in Southeast Asia. The seated statue which is situated on the top of the hill at Nakkerd Buddhist Park was named by His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara, the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand.

GRUELLING

The 'Mai Khao Beach Run' will take place a week later during late afternoon on Saturday, Mar 23 with the option

of three separate distances: 3 kilometres, 6km or 10km.

This is an especially gruelling challenge as beach running can be very taxing on the body, Mr Thammawat explained in his comments at the press conference. However, the picturesque setting at sunset, with beautiful views and areoplanes landing and taking off overhead at the nearby Phuket International Airport, more than compensates and will be long remembered, he added.

There is the option for participants to wear fancy dress costumes in both events, Mr Thammawat said, as both are geared towards having fun and are ideal for family

participation.

Medals will be distributed to all finishers in both races, while turtle dolls will be given as prizes for the top three male and female finishers in each as well as to 100 finishers drawn at random, a gesture to emphasise the province's commitment to safeguarding marine wildlife, nature preservation and environmental sustainability, Mr Thammawat added.

Additionally, there will be a range of food and handicraft stalls at both events where a variety of goods will be on offer to help provide an economic boost to local businesses and entrepreneurs.

Governor Sophon ex-

tended thanks to various public and private sector entities that are collaborating to make the event happen, including: Karon Subdistrict Municipality; Chalong Subdistrict Municipality; Sirinath National Park; Mai Khao Tambon Administrative Organisation; Central Festival shopping mall; Tiger Park Phra Phuttha; Ming Mongkol Saththa Foundation 45; Lotus's Department Store, Chalong; Otsuka Nutraceuticals Thailand; and Run To Paradise.

More information on both the Big Buddha Run and the Mai Khao Beach Run, including how to register, can be found at their respective Facebook pages.

Record turnout at Kamala Bowls Club for pairs comp

BOWLS

A RECORD FIELD OF BOWLERS took to the green last Friday (Feb 16) at Kamala Lawn Bowls club to compete in The Phuket Open Pairs Championship, the fourth of this season's 'majors'.

A total of 30 bowlers, the largest for any previous competition held at the club, were fighting it out for the Simmonds Trophy, kindly donated by Cath and Dean Simmonds.

Unfortunately injury prevented Cath from taking part, leaving previous winner Dean

looking to emerge victorious again to ensure the trophy stayed 'at home!'

Due to the high number of entries, a straightforward knockout competition was employed, with a 'plate' contest for those defeated in the first round.

Newcomers in the guise of husband and wife teams Barry and Katherine Smith, Mark and Rosie Swaffield and Mark and Jayne Delaney joined the other 22 hardened campaigners going into the hat for the traditional random pairs draw conducted by club owner Nid.

Duncan Kennedy was delighted to draw serial winner Sunee 'Aon' Sriraksa as his partner, while the



The four major finalists with Cath Simmonds (centre). Photo: Rob Knight

latter's winning teammate from last year's competition, Roger Goodwin, was paired with reigning singles champion Worada 'Nidnoi' Collins and Dorothy Barker was breathing

a sigh of relief as she was drawn to partner her nemesis of previous singles finals Ulf 'Ue' Egertstad.

Glenn Collins and Dean Lambert were the lucky pair who received the only bye of the first round to be guaranteed of a quarter-final place.

The standard of bowling across the field was of an exceptionally high standard, ensuring a high class and ultra competitive tournament where stamina and guile in the searing heat were paramount.

There were some major shocks after the first round, with Aon and Duncan dispatched by newcomers Rosie and Mark Swaffield, while Nidnoi and Roger were felled by

Rob Knight and Doug Reid and Ken 'Sammy' Sampert and his partner Ray Austin lost out to Derek 'Dr Rock' Chalmers and Carl 'The Mesh' Mesham.

A pulsating contest in the first quarter-final saw Dot and Ue triumph against Rob and Doug, while Glenn and Dean Lambert rode their luck to beat Alec and Franz at the last end. In the other two ties, Dean Simmonds and Ian 'Mintie' Mintern overcame 'The Mesh' and 'Dr Rock' and surprise package Barry and Katherine Smith beat Frank Borni and David Dorsch to make the semi-final in their maiden bow.

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