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TRAFFICKED

PATONG BAR RAID UNCOVERS CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING NETWORK

Officers speak to several of the girls used as sex workers. Photo: DOPA

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

A raid on a bar in Patong has uncovered a child sex trafficking network linked to other major tourist destinations in the country. Police have identified three key suspects wanted for leading the network, deputy national police chief Pol Gen Surchate Hakparn revealed last Friday (Mar 18).

Gen Surachate arrived in Phuket after a special operations team from the Department of Provincial Administration (DOPA) raided the 'Velvet bar' on Soi Sea Dragon, off

Bangla Rd, on Mar 15.

The raid was ordered by DOPA Director-General Manrat Rattanasukhon after he received a tip-off from Operation Underground Railroad, a United States-based nonprofit organisation involved in the rescue of human trafficking and sex trafficking victims, with a special focus on children.

The tip-off explained that the bar was operating as a general bar for tourists, but was offering underage girls as prostitutes to foreign customers. The raid began at 8pm after an undercover officer posing as a customer entered the bar and

confirmed that the bar was providing underage girls for sex.

Taksakorn 'Nam' Supakaraphokin was confirmed to be the bar manager while Watcharaporn 'Yuki' Thongmak was identified as the 'broker' who recruited children to sell sex. The two women were placed under arrest and later charged with human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation of children. The two women were also deemed to be operating a brothel, and charged for that also.

While the two women were being taken into custody, other officers entered a hotel nearby where prostitutes working for the bar were waiting for

customers. Six of the sex workers were underage. The youngest was just 15 years old. All six were taken into protective care.

POLICE TRANSFERRED

Patong Police were not part of the raid. The day after the raid, five senior officers at Patong Police Station, including Patong Police Chief Col Sujin Nilabadee, were removed from duty.

Phuket Provincial Police Commander Maj Gen Sermphan Sirikong ordered the transfers on Mar 16, through Phuket Provincial Police Order No. 110/2566. The transfers were...

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Bar raid lifts lid on sex trafficking

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...effective immediately. The order marked that the transfers had been ordered in accordance with Sections 68, 205(4) and 179 of the Royal Thai Police Act B.E 2020.

The Patong Police officers removed from duty were listed as: Pol Col Sujin Nilabadee, Superintendent; Pol Lt Col Somporn Surin, Deputy Superintendent, Head of Crime Suppression; Pol Lt Col Naruebodin Pangleesen, Deputy Superintendent, Head of Investigation; Pol Lt Col Wutthiwat Leangboonchinda, Inspector, Crime Suppression; and Pol Lt Col Suchart Chumphusang, Inspector, Investigation.

Through a separate order, Order No. 111/2566, the following officers were ordered to report to Patong Police Station to assume the following positions: Pol Col Peerapong Chairun, Deputy Commander of Phuket Provincial Police, to serve as Acting Superintendent of Patong Police Station; Pol Lt Col Pongpichan Chayanonpiriya, Deputy Superintendent, Head of Crime Suppression, at Kamala Police Station, to serve as Acting Deputy Superintendent, Head of Crime Suppression, at Patong Police Station; and Pol Lt Col Sathit Nurit, Deputy Superintendent, Head of Investigation, at Cherng Talay Police Station, to serve as Acting Deputy Superintendent, Head of Investigation, at Patong Police Station.

The officers are to continue to serve their new positions at Patong



Pol Gen Surachate explains the ongoing investigation to the press. Photo: PR Phuket

Police Station until further notice.

Phuket Provincial Police Commander Maj Gen Sermphan Sirikong on Mar 16 made no mention of any legal action against the five Patong officers.

The transfer orders came one day after Maj Gen Wasan Techaakasem, Deputy Commissioner of Provincial Police Region 8, inspected the bar, and visited Patong Police Station, where he spoke with now-former Patong Police Chief Col Sujin and other senior officers.

Maj Gen Wasan told reporters that he was following up on the case in accordance with an order issued by the Commissioner of the Royal Thai Police, Pol Gen Damrongsak Kittiprapas, in order to be able to expand the investigation to track

down all involved parties.

EXTENSIVE

Gen Surachate told the press last Friday that the expanded investigation into the child sex trafficking network had identified seven more underage girls being used by the network. Two of them had been taken into protective care.

The key suspect, named by police only as "Mr Rolly", had fled Bangkok to Laos, Gen Surachate said.

Police are searching for two other key suspects believed to still be in the country, he added.

Gen Surachate explained that police were also investigating Thai nationals used as nominees to allow foreign nationals to operate the nightlife businesses now under

investigation for being part of the child sex trafficking network.

The network is extensive, Gen Surachate said.

"There are many branches in tourist province areas," he said.

"The child victims traveled from many provinces in the North, North-eastern and Central regions, most of them claiming to have family problems and going to live with relatives," he added.

"Child sexual exploitation is a form of human trafficking that should not happen and should not exist in the area. Such offenses may occur from the negligence of both administrative and police officials," Gen Surachate said.

"In such cases, there must be a final prosecution," he added.

"Human trafficking is a national problem," said DPOA Inspector-General Ronnarong Thipsiri following the raid.

"This may affect the economy and image of Thailand, including the well-being of the people. Therefore, it is a problem that must be jointly solved."

FALLOUT

Night entertainment operators in Patong said their businesses had lost about B100 million in the week following the raid.

Weerawit Kreuasombat, chairman of Patong Entertainment Business Association, last Sunday (Mar 19) met nightlife venue operators in the Bangla area to come up with measures to prevent venues from becoming involved in illegal activities including drugs and procuring minors to provide sex.

Mr Weerawit said the incident prompted authorities to order all entertainment venues in the area to close at 1am, which had led to a loss of earnings in the sector of at least B100mn.

He also urged everyone to act as the eyes and ears of the authorities to prevent further incidents.

The same owners also run four restaurants. Authorities have ordered them to shut, but the association will call on the landowner to cancel the leases following accusations of underage sex services being offered, he added.

Additional reporting by Eakkapop Thongtub

Cabinet approves B3bn to open PSU Hospital by 2027

THE CABINET HAS approved a budget of B3.14 billion for the construction of the 'PSU Hospital Phuket' as part of the 'International Andaman Health Center' which is set to be built at Mai Khao.

Assoc Prof Dr Phan Thongchumnum, Deputy Dean of Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Phuket Campus, confirmed the news, saying the hospital is now expected to be complete by 2027.

Project organisers have already found a contractor and are reviewing the design, which is expected to be completed within eight months, Dr Phan said.

"If everything goes as planned; the construction will start within the next



Image: PSU Phuket

budget year [starting Oct 1, 2023]. The construction is expected to be completed in 2027," he added.

Initially, the hospital was planned with 300 beds, but with the budget received the

hospital will now be expanded to 500 beds, Dr Phan noted.

According to a recommendation by Cabinet, the hospital will accept only patients with complicated

diseases who are transferred from government hospitals.

"There are patients with complicated diseases in the Andaman provinces of Phuket, Krabi and Phang Nga being transferred from Vachira Phuket Hospital, the main government hospital in the area, to the PSU Hospital in Hat Yai for treatment," Dr Phan said.

Recent figures recorded 13,500 patient transfers from Vachira, accounting for 9,000 patients, in just the past year, he said.

"This means there are some patients who were repeatedly transferred [from Vachira to Hat Yai]. This shows that we need to have a hospital capable of supporting these people," Dr Phan explained.

The hospital is to be built as part of the International Andaman Health Center, which Cabinet last year approved a total budget of B5.116bn to complete, with the budget allocated to be spent from 2023-2027.

"The International Health College will help to create medical manpower, and will include PSU Phuket Hospital, which will accept patients with complicated diseases, as well as the Digital Dental Center, a Thai traditional medicine and a Medical Science Center, which will be the health checkup and screening lab, as well as a centre providing health advice to people to international standards," Dr Phan explained.

"The centre will build confidence in medical care

among locals and tourists visiting Thailand and provinces in the Andaman region," he said.

He noted that PSU Phuket is preparing for the upcoming hospital by opening the international program of the Faculty of Medicine, of which one class has graduated already. The second class is currently underway.

The PSU Phuket campus is also providing an international program under the Faculty of Nursing as well, which also has already produced graduates. In addition, the PSU Phuket campus offers 25 programs for qualifying in specific specialised areas of medical expertise.

Kritsada Mueanhawong

Prayut visit plugs Expo bid, mangrove eco-tourism plan

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha in Phuket last Sunday (Mar 19) visited the Soi King Kaew area in Ratsada, one of the poorest neighbourhoods on the island, to promote the 'Ratsada Green in the City' mangrove tourism project.

On landing at Phuket International Airport, PM Prayut and his team, including Interior Minister Gen Anupong Paochinda and Minister of Labour Suchat Chomklin, were welcomed to the island by Phuket Governor Narong amid the usual high security.

He was escorted to the main meeting room at Phuket airport, where he led a meeting to be updated on the policies currently being acted on by Phuket officials and their efforts to promote Phuket's bid to host Expo 2028.

PM Prayut and his team then travelled to the nearby 141 rai site in Mai Khao that is to become home of the 'Andaman International Health Center' and to serve as the base for Expo 2028, if Thailand wins



Photo: PR Phuket

its bid. Cabinet in October last year approved B5.11 billion to develop the entire site.

Joining PM Prayut at Soi King Kaew was Apichai Ekwanaikul, Acting Director-General of the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE).

Prayut and his entourage met with local residents to explain the project, and explain that in order for such projects to go ahead special permission was required by Cabinet following a Cabinet resolution on Dec 15, 1987 to protect mangroves throughout

the country.

Present to welcome PM Prayut was Pricha Jaiart, advisor to Ratsada Mayor Nakarin Yosangrat, and a host of local officials, including Governor Narong.

According to official reports of PM Prayut's visit, Ratsada Municipality was to submit its request for the budget to build its 'Ratsada Green in the City' project. However, so far no official reports have revealed exactly how much will be requested to build the project.

Ahead of the prime minister's visit, Ratsada Mayor Mr Nakarin last Friday (Mar

17) conducted an "inspection" of the site to explain details of the project to local media.

The project area is to cover 678 rai throughout Moo Baan 1-4 of Tambon Ratsada. The area is a protected national forest along Klong Bang Chee Lao - Klong Tha Chin (pronounced "tah jeen", as in "Chinese Pier"). The greater area of the protected mangrove forest covers more than 1,234 rai of unspoilt mangroves.

The Ratsada Green in the City initiative was floated in June last year, and approved in principle by Cabinet on Aug 22 last year. The aim of the project is to create a learning centre and elevated walkways through the mangroves for people to learn about and appreciate their natural beauty, Mr Nakarin said.

Meanwhile, PM Prayut and his entourage last Sunday provided a free banquet of Thai food for the local residents in Soi King Kaew.

PM Prayut then attended the "Andaman is Ready" presentation at Phuket Rajabhat University in Ratsada, before returning to Bangkok.

The Phuket News

Kathu election halted pending court verdict

THE ELECTION FOR A new Kathu Mayor that was scheduled to be held last Sunday (Mar 19) was suspended by court order just days before the election was to be held.

The announcement was made by Dechakorn Kaenmuang, Election Director at Kathu Municipality, last Friday (Mar 17).

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

In his notice issued on Friday, Mr Dechakorn explained that the Phuket Administrative Court in its hearing of Black Case No. 17/2566 on Wednesday (Mar 15) had deemed that the office of Kathu Mayor was not vacant until the court had completed its proceedings.

"The enforcement of Phuket Provincial Order No. 439/2560 dated January 20, 2023 and and Phuket Provincial Order No. 440/2560 dated January 20, 2023 have been temporarily rescinded, there-



The Kathu election scheduled to be held last Sunday (Mar 19) was suspended by court order at the last minute. Image: Kathu Municipality

fore resulting in the Phuket Provincial Orders temporarily ceasing to be in force pending the proceedings of the Phuket Administrative Court and the post of Mayor of Kathu is considered to not yet be vacant," Mr Dechakorn wrote.

"Therefore, I would like to announce the suspension of the election on Sunday, March 19, 2023 temporarily until the court orders otherwise," Mr Dechakorn added.

The matter will be raised with the Phuket office of the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT Phuket) to determine guidelines and to ensure compliance with legal regulations, Mr Dechakorn noted. The Phuket News

Anti-corruption cops join probe into Cherg Talay playground

THE ANTI-CORRUPTION DIVISION (ACD) of the Royal Thai Police has now joined the investigation into possible corruption by officers at Cherg Talay Municipality in the purchase of the children's playground equipment installed at the Cherg Talay Municipality Sport Center.

Pol Col Dr Somsak Niamlek, Superintendent of ACD Region 5 branch, led officers on an inspection of the playground equipment on Mar 14.

The purchase of the playground equipment is already under investigation by the Phuket branch of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC). The investigation was launched last month after corruption watchdog 'STRONG Anti-Corruption Thailand Club' reported that the six small 'bouncy rides' at the playground cost B65,000 each.

The NACC Phuket office later reported that Cherg Talay Municipality in 2014 paid Genius Kids Co Ltd B1.193 million to install a pair of slides and a set of adventure swings, priced at B870,500.

A year later, in 2015, Cherg Talay Municipality contracted Genius Kids Co Ltd again, this time to install children's playground equipment for B1.95mn.

Before the inspection, Col Somsak and accompanying officers questioned Cherg Talay Mayor Suniran Ratchatapruek over the playground equipment purchase.

The officers reviewed the purchasing process, competitive pricing analysis, selec-



Photo: PR Phuket

tion of suppliers, terms of auctioning, and the overall value of the items, said an official report of the visit.

The official report noted that the equipment was purchased before the Public Procurement and Supplies Administration Act, B.E.2560 (2017) came into effect. However, the report did not explain what relevance this had on the investigation.

According to the report, posted by the Phuket office of the Public Relations Department (PR Phuket), the ACD officers will now work with the NACC and the Office of Public Sector Anti-Corruption Commission to investigate the purchases.

The investigators will question the officials involved such as those responsible for price determination and auditing the purchase, as well as the producers and distributors of the equipment and the staff at the Cherg Talay Children's Development Centre, the report noted.

The Phuket News

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CONTACT US

editor@classactmedia.co.th 076 612 550

PURIYA BEAVAN
EditorCHRIS HUSTED
Executive Editor
084 307 7408
execeditor@classactmedia.co.thBEN TIREBUCK
News / Sport Editor
061 806 8132
editor3@classactmedia.co.thCHUTHARAT 'UM' PLERIN
Thai Editor
088 766 1615
thai@classactmedia.co.thJASON BEAVAN
General Manager
086 479 7471
gm@classactmedia.co.thSIRIPORN (NOK) SEANGMAS
Sales Support
086 479 7470
sales@classactmedia.co.thNIRAVIT 'MOS' VORAVANITCHA
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PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

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THU MARCH 30



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Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

Pickup speedster sends woman into temple wall

A WOMAN ESCAPED SERIOUS injury after she was cut off by a passing pickup truck, causing her to swerve and drive straight into a temple wall.

The incident occurred at about 6am on Mar 16, reported Capt Kornpompot Pongpaiboon of the Thalang Police.

Police were notified of the accident by Srisoonthorn Municipality rescue workers, Capt Kornpompot said.

Officers arrived at the scene to find a Phuket-registered Toyota Yaris with heavy damage to its front after colliding into the roadside boundary of Wat Srisoonthorn (also called Wat Lipon) on Thepkasattri Rd northbound.

The driver, Maliwan Kwansri, 41, suffered only minor injuries in the impact as the steering wheel airbag had deployed. Regardless, she was taken to Mission Hospital Phuket as a precaution and for treatment.

Ms Maliwan told police that a pickup truck had cut sharply across in front of her, causing her to swerve to avoid a collision, sending her into the temple wall.

Her car was taken to Thalang Police Station while police searched for the pickup driver, Capt Kornpompot said. *Eakkapop Thongtub*



Photo: NACC Phuket

Phuket corruption fighters get new B59.5mn home

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Pol Gen Watcharaphon Prasarnrajkit, Chairman of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC), was in Phuket last Friday (Mar 17) to lead proceedings officially declaring the new NACC Phuket offices open.

Phuket Provincial NACC Office open new building to be a place to support anti-fraud services to government agencies, the private sector, as well as facilitating people who come to contact the government to receive



more convenient services.

Present for the occasion were NACC Phuket chief Suksan Prasara-ae along with NACC Phuket officers and heads of local government agencies. The official opening also included the

traditional blessing ceremony by monks.

The new NACC Phuket office is located on four rai 54 wah of land located near the new Phuket Provincial Administration Center,

and includes residential accommodation for officers as well as the official office buildings.

Construction began on April 20, 2020 and took 780 days – that is two years and two months – to complete, with the construction formally concluding on June 13, 2022.

Construction cost B59.5 million.

The new offices are to serve as a location for providing services to the public in combating fraud and to conduct investigations into formal complaints of corruption on the island.

Shooting range blaze spurs fire warning

OFFICIALS HAVE ISSUED another fire warning following an outside area of a shooting range in Sakhu, near Phuket International Airport, catching fire on Mar 16.

Trin Panyawai, President of the Sakhu Tambon Administration Organisation (OrBorTor), said he was notified of the fire, at the Asian Shooting Range, at 6pm.

Three fire trucks dispatched from Sakhu OrBorTor and Thepkasattri OrBorTor arrived at the scene, halfway between Thepkasattri Rd and Nai Yang Beach on Route 4031, and took one hour to douse the flames.

Officers at the scene believe the fire was started by a discarded cigarette butt.

A key concern was that the outdoor area of the shooting range that had caught on fire bordered



Photo: Sakhu OrBorTor

on a protected forest area that forms part of Sirinat National Park.

Firefighters at the scene urged people to be mindful that Phuket is currently in its 'dry season', making wildfires much more likely, and more dangerous.

People were urged to report any wildfires in the area to Disaster Prevention and Mitigation officers at Sakhu OrBorTor at 076-328146.

Additional reporting by Eakkapop Thongtub

Thief arrested for dangerous bag snatch

POLICE HAVE TRACKED DOWN and arrested a 27-year-old man in Chergn Talay after he committed a dangerous bag snatch from a German man who was on the road while the thief sped off on his motorbike.

Officers arrested Nissan Islam, 27, at a house in Moo 5, Chergn Talay on Mar 16, police confirmed.

The dangerous bag snatch occurred in Soi Chergn Talay 14, officers noted.

German man Fred Haugg, 56, was riding along when Nissan approached him from behind on a black Phuket-registered Yamaha Mio.

While both were still in motion on their motorbikes, Nissan grabbed Mr Haugg's brown shoulder bag, which had his red Samsung S20 mobile phone inside, and sped off.

The bag snatch saw Mr Haugg fall onto the road. Luckily, he suffered only minor injuries and was taken to hospital for treatment, police explained.

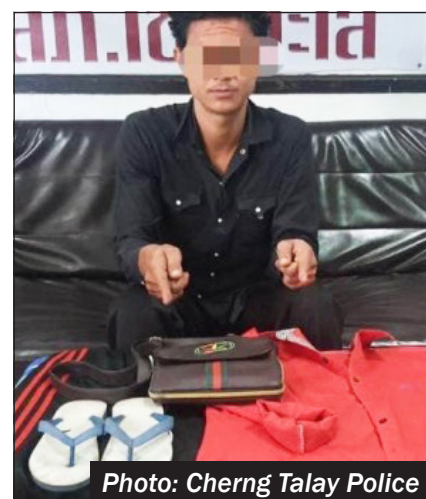


Photo: Chergn Talay Police

Officers tracked Nissan through CCTV to the home in Moo 5, Chergn Talay, where he was placed under arrest.

Nissan confessed to the bag snatch, officers reported. He has now been charged with the offence.

Mr Haugg's bag, and phone, were returned to him, police confirmed.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Songkran water play gets green light in Phuket Town

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Rewat Areerob, President of the Phuket Provincial Administration Organisation (PPAO), has confirmed that for the first time in three years water play at official Songkran celebrations will be held on the street in Phuket Town.

The event announced by Mr Rewat will be held on Dibuk Rd in front of the Limelight Avenue shopping mall, which is holding the event under the banner 'Songkran No Al', meaning 'no alcohol'.

There will be water play in the designed play zone, Mr Rewat confirmed.

The zone is to be controlled as an alcohol and drug-free zone, he said.

The PPAO is working with the organisers with the aim of prevention and reduction of accidents risks during the Songkran Festival, he added.

Supporting the Limelight festivities are the PPAO together with the the Tourism Authority of Thailand Phuket Office (TAT Phuket), Phuket City Municipality, the Phuket



Mr Rewat was happy to deliver the good news. Photo: PPAO

Tourism & Sports Office and the 'Stop Drink' organisation under the Thai Health Promotion Foundation ('Thai Health'), Mr Rewat explained.

The event zone will be in operation from 5pm to 10pm, Mr Rewat noted.

"The Songkran No Al event had previously been held for nine consecutive years. It is the only Songkran festival in Phuket that has both Thai

tourists and foreigners as participants, mostly aged 15-35," Mr Rewat said.

"Not less than 25,000 people are expected to join the event," he added.

"The activities also include and maintain Songkran traditions, such as pouring water on elders' hands and the bathing of Buddha images. People are also encouraged to dress in traditional costumes for the

day," he continued.

"The event will also include performances by local bands and famous bands from Bangkok," Mr Rewat concluded.

The approval of water play at the officially supported event is now expected to open the gate for many more events across the island to also receive approval to create water play zones in their own areas.

Tourists exempt in jet-ski licence crackdown

TOURISTS ARE NOT REQUIRED to have the correct licence in order to operate a rental jet-ski, Phuket Marine Police Chief Lt Col Jeerayut Niyomdet has confirmed.

The confirmation follows Phuket Marine Police issuing a warning that people caught operating a jet-ski without the correct licence, technically a Helmsman Class II licence, faced a fine of B1,000-10,000 or up to six months' imprisonment.

The warning also cautioned that any person caught operating an unregistered jet-ski faced a fine of up to B10,000.

"If the jet-ski is rented from an operator, the client does not need to have a driver's licence," Lt Col Jeerayut told *The Phuket News*.

"The client will not be arrested as they had rented it. The person who must hold the driver's licence is the [rental] operator of the jet-ski," he continued.

However, people who own and ride their jet-skis are not exempt. They must have the correct licence in order to operate the jet-ski and the jet-ski must be registered, Lt Col Jeerayut said.

"Privately-owned jet skis



Photo: Phuket Marine Police

can be registered at the Phuket Marine Office and the [driver's] licence can be done at the same office," he said.

The warning was issued on Friday (Mar 17) after jet-ski rental operators at Bang Tao Beach were caught renting out jet-skis with expired registrations.

The jet-ski operators now face a fine of up to B10,000.

Lt Col Jeerayut said Marine Police officers have stepped up their inspections of jet-skis in tourist areas.

"A team of officers has conducted inspections at several beaches already, on Mar 16-17," he said.

"Patong Beach, Naka Island, Siray Bay and Bang Tao Beaches were all inspected, and they arrested six jet-ski operators for both not having the correct licence to operate jet-skis and for having licences that had expired," Lt Col Jeerayut confirmed.

The Phuket News

Turtle eggs laid near Nai Yang

TURTLE EGGS WERE laid on the beach at Ao Sai Khu, near Nai Yang Beach, early on Mar 13. Officers at Sirinat National Park received a call from local resident Kriangkrai Dejom, from Srisoonthorn, at 6am, informing them that he had just witnessed a turtle laying eggs on the beach, located in Moo 2 Sakhu.

National Park officers arrived to have Mr Kriangkrai direct them to the turtle nest.

Mr Kriangkrai said he first saw the turtle make its way up the beach at about 5am. The turtle laid the eggs, covered the nest, then made its way back into the sea.

Mr Kriangkrai was unable to identify which species of turtle had laid the eggs, and was unable to describe the turtle in sufficient detail for park officers to make an educated guess.

Park officers noted that the tracks left in the sand indicated that the turtle measured some 70 centimetres across with a fin-span of 1.06 metres.

The eggs were left in the nest some 50-70cm deep in the sand, officers noted.



Photo: DMCR

There were 107 turtle eggs in total, with all of them appearing to be capable of producing offspring, officers said.

As the nest was at risk of being flooded during high tide, the officers carefully removed the eggs and transported them to a safe site on Nai Yang Beach near the national park's visitor's centre.

The eggs will be protected at the safe site and monitored by park officers until they hatch and the baby turtles make their way to the sea, officers said.

However, at time of press, the officers were unable to confirm exactly which type of turtle the eggs would produce.

Sai Khu Beach is already known as a location for turtles to lay their eggs. In 2020, a leatherback turtle laid 123 eggs at the beach, which were also taken into care until they hatched.

The report of the nest found did not mention whether or not a reward was still being offered for reporting any turtle nests discovered.

At last report in 2021, two people who reported a leatherback nest and a ridley turtle nest on Mai Khao Beach each received B20,000 for reporting the nests. The money was handed over at a small ceremony led by Thalang District Chief Suwit Suriyawong.

The Phuket News

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Chinese arrivals to ramp up

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

The number of Chinese tourist arrivals to Thailand is expected to exceed 300,000 in April, Chinese Ambassador to Thailand Han Zhiqiang told the Phuket Governor during his visit to Phuket last Saturday (Mar 18).

Ambassador Han paid a courtesy call to Governor Narong Woonciew at Phuket Provincial Hall, during which Gov Narong gave an update on moves to set up sister cities with China, the Sino-Thai tourism outlook, and Thailand's plans to chair the Specialised Expo 2028.

Phuket has established links with Yantai, Hainan, Ningxia Hui, Guilin, Yanjiang, Xiamen and the Macau special administrative region, with Xi'an next on the list, he said.

The number of Chinese tourists has been increasing rapidly this year. The ambassador was bullish over continuing growth prospects in the future.

Mr Han also enlivened hopes that China might back the Thai bid to host one of the prestigious world expos under the name Phuket Expo 2028. He also told the provincial governor that the Chinese government is considering backing Phuket as chair of the event.

HELPFUL SIGNS

Joining the official visit to welcome



Chinese tourists disembark a Shenzhen Airlines flight at Phuket airport on Mar 15. Shenzhen Airlines is now operating three flights a week from Shenzhen using A320 airliners. Photo: AOT Phuket

Ambassador Han and his delegation from the Chinese embassy in Bangkok were heads of local government agencies and representatives from private industry, including Tunyaratt and Pramook Achariyachai and Bhummitkitti Raktaengam.

Following talks with Governor Narong, Ambassador Han joined a meeting to discuss the Chinese tourism situation in Phuket in more depth.

"During this period, there are more Chinese tourists traveling to Phuket," Governor Narong said after the meeting.

"The Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Thailand

thanked Phuket and the nearby provinces for welcoming and taking good care of Chinese tourists, especially in terms of various security measures," he added, according to an official report.

However, he continued, "Ambassador Han asked relevant agencies to have more Chinese-language public signs at various tourist attractions, which the province [provincial government] will let the relevant agencies take further action on."

Thanet Tantipiriyakit, President of the Phuket Tourist Association, said the visit of the Chinese ambassador will benefit the tourism sector

on the island. As of now, an average of 20,000 Chinese tourists visit a day, on 20 flights.

Plans are afoot for the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation (PPAO) to support the private sector in launching a roadshow in Shanghai, Chengdu and Nanning, he said.

MORE FLIGHTS

Three more Chinese airlines have added Phuket to their lists of destinations since Mar 10 and one more is expected to follow suit nearer to the end of the month.

New flights from the Mainland China to Phuket have been confirmed in a series of publications by AOT Ground Aviation Services (AOTGA), an Airports of Thailand (AOT) and SAL Group joint venture, providing ground handling services at Phuket International Airport and other airports operated by AOT.

The flights had been previously announced by AOT itself when the company posted Phuket Airport's flight schedule for March. They include:

West Airlines, a Chinese low-cost carrier based in China's New North Zone, started flying from Chongqing from Mar 10. The company currently provides four Phuket flights per week using A320 airliners. Starting from Mar 26 daily flights will be available.

Nine Air (9 Air), a budget car-

rier operating from Guangzhou in Central China, sent its first Boeing 737-800 from Guiyang to Phuket on Mar 14. Three flights per week are available currently.

Shenzhen Airlines resumed flights to Phuket from Shenzhen on Mar 15. Three flights per week are provided using A320 airliners.

According to Phuket International Airport's schedule posted by AOT, from Mar 26 flights from Kunming to Phuket will be resumed by Kunming Airlines. The company will immediately provide daily flights.

ON THE ROAD

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) hosted a roadshow in China in late February to lure more Chinese travellers. Speaking at the event, TAT Governor Yuthasak Supasorn said that even though average airfares had decreased since last year, prices for March and April for every Chinese city are still higher than before the pandemic.

At the same time, the average spending per Chinese traveller increased as the more expensive travel costs prompted them to consider longer stays of five to 10 days, according to Dragon Trail research.

Mr Yuthasak said the structure of post-pandemic Chinese travel will see individual trips dominate the market, outpacing mass tour groups, which have yet to resume.

Russians still top Phuket arrivals

AFTER A TWO-MONTH hiatus, Phuket Immigration has released statistics of the number of international arrivals landing in Phuket, with Russian nationals still holding the top spot for the first two weeks of March.

According to the report, released last Friday (Mar 17), 184,762 foreigners entered the country via Phuket airport from Mar 1-15.

Of those 47,525 were Russian nationals, with a further 21,414 arriving from China. Indian nationals placed third with 14,320 arrivals, followed by arrivals from Kazakhstan (9,703) and Germany (9,602).

Of note, the most recent previous daily report by Phuket Immigration marked that 117,595 Russian nationals had arrived in Phuket from Dec 1-18. Arrivals from India held the second spot on the Top 5, with 49,669 arrivals.

For the first time included in Phuket Immigration arrival reports was that 214,528 foreigners were registered as staying at an accommodation venue.

The report carried the

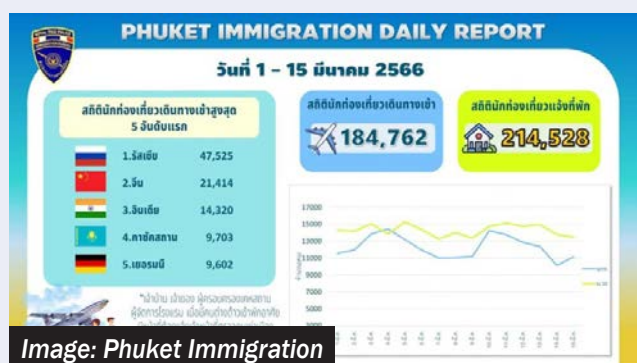


Image: Phuket Immigration

warning: "The host, the owner, the occupier of the dwelling, the hotel manager, when a foreigner stays, has a duty to inform the immigration officer within 24 hours. Violation is punishable under Section 38 of the Immigration Act B.E. 2522."

MARINE TRAFFIC

Also newly released was a report of foreigners arriving in Phuket by sea, with a total of 16,035 foreigners cleared to enter Thailand via Phuket from Mar 1-15.

There were eight cruise liners and 31 private yachts arriving in Phuket during the period, along with eight cargo ships but no new fishing boats registered as officially entering the area.

The top 5 nationalities of

marine traffic entries were Indonesia (4,146), Malaysia (3,636), United States (2,283), United Kingdom (952) and Singapore (804).

KEEPING SCORE

Another new addition released was a notice of how many foreigners had been given warnings or deported under the new system of 'red' and 'yellow' cards, launched earlier this month.

Four foreigners had been issued 'yellow' cards: Two French citizens, one Ukrainian and one Swedish national. A second yellow card may now see them deported from Thailand. A Swedish national and a French national had received 'red cards', meaning deportation.

The Phuket News

As tourism recovers, all eyes are on China

ACCORDING TO C9 Hotelworks' new Phuket Hotel Market Update 2023, the resort island's tourism recovery has accelerated over the past six months. With the removal of Thailand's pandemic travel restrictions in 2022, airlift quickly ramped up as India and Malaysia were key early source markets.

Over the current winter season aside from the return of the traditional 'snowbird' market from Northern Europe and Scandinavia, an influx of Eastern European travelers including those from Russia has spiked demand. Room rates have soared and average stay (ALOS) increased, reported Bill Barnett, Managing Director, C9 Hotelworks.

"Looking ahead at the remainder of 2023, we are looking at a balanced recovery led by the Chinese market. For China, July and August along with National Day holidays in October look to play into a methodical build-up of traffic as airlift returns," he said.

"We expect a return to 2019 trading by the year-end of this year and the start of a new tourism cycle in 2024," Mr Barnett added.

Robust numbers in Q4 last year set the stage for tourism

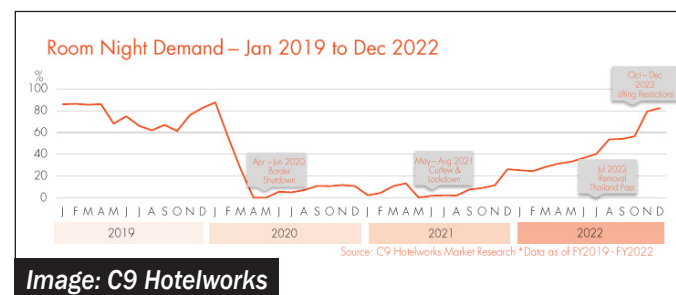


Image: C9 Hotelworks

ism recovery by the end of 2023 and island flight arrivals FY2022 have ramped up by 210% year-on year [y-o-y], he added.

"Phuket has experienced a profound tourism surge since COVID entry restrictions were lifted on October 1, 2022. Passenger arrivals elevated to 3.9 million in 2022, up from 1 million in 2021 and .5 million in 2020," Mr Barnett said.

"Although 2022 figures were lower-than-expected due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and closed borders in China, C9's analysis of passenger arrival trends over the past 10 years points to a return to cyclical upward growth, which is widely demonstrated in ongoing room night demand in 2023," Mr Barnett explained.

Rising international flight arrivals consistently grew as island-wide hotel occupancy averaged 48% in FY2022, he noted in C9 Hotelworks'

Phuket Hotel Market Update 2023 released late last week.

"This is compared to 8% in FY2021, when there was a sole reliance on the domestic sector. Last year the market-wide average rate pushed up by 80% y-o-y, to B3,942," he said.

"Conversion and rebranding activity highlights an active trend by hotel owners with many opting to transition from hotel management agreements to franchise models," he noted.

"Looking forward, we expect that leisure demand from the FIT and Group segments will continue to be strong. As the resort island moves out of its seasonal winter peak, all eyes are on China.

"The industry recovery outlook can best be summed up as it's not a matter of will it happen, but how long will it take to regain critical mass," Mr Barnett concluded.

The Phuket News

Parliament dissolved, general election called

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

The House of Representatives has been dissolved to pave the way for a general election, with the Election Commission (EC) expected to announce the election date today (Mar 24).

A royal decree announcing the dissolution was published in the Royal Gazette on Monday (Mar 20). It was countersigned by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and came into effect immediately.

The Election Commission (EC) will organise the polls within 45-60 days, and the government led by Gen Prayut will now assume a caretaker role.

"I thank you all, particularly the House, for working together over the past four years," said Prayut. "Sometimes we succeeded, but other times we did not. But I still have to thank you because all of you work for the country's best interests."

"I also want to emphasise that I am not in conflict with



Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha greets reporters at Government House on Monday (Mar 20). Photo: Bangkok Post

anyone," he added.

Asked whether he was satisfied with the government's performance during the past four years, Prayut said, "I can't give you an answer. You must ask the people whether they are satisfied or not."

Quizzed on what he was most proud of during his time as prime minister, Prayut said he was thankful for the collaboration of all coalition parties.

"Several [projects] started

out as policy proposals from different parties. We have had to work together and reach resolutions," he said.

"I am also happy that at least I have initiated projects that will provide the country with a steady income, such as the Eastern Economic Corridor."

Asked what he has learned from politics so far, Prayut said, "It is undeniable that I am now also a politician."

The EC's announcement today will also include the dates for MP candidacy applications while confirming that the election must be held within 45-60 days.

The EC is expected to accept MP candidacy applications from April 3-7, and the election is likely to be held on May 14.

When asked whether the election is likely to be called on May 7 or May 14, EC secretary-general Sawaeng Boonmee said the polls could be held on any date, as long as it is held within 45-60 days of the House dissolution. What's sure, he added, the vote would be held on a holiday.

Asked whether petitions filed by political parties that disagreed with the EC's redrawn constituency map would delay the election, Mr Sawaeng said he would rather not speculate on this matter.

If there were to be an emergency hearing, the EC would have to wait for the Administrative Court's ruling, but the time frame stipulated by the constitution must be followed, he said.

Former TOT chief gets 20 years for 2008 deal

BANGKOK

FORMER TELEPHONE Organisation of Thailand (TOT) president Varut Suwakorn has been sentenced to 20 years in prison and ordered to pay about B1 billion to the state agency for an unauthorised deal with Samart I-Mobile in 2008.

The Central Criminal Court for Corruption and Misconduct Cases handed down its ruling on Mar 16 in the case filed by the Office of the Attorney-General.

Mr Varut was accused of approving a compensation payment of B1.48bn to Samart I-Mobile Plc during negotiations in 2008 to settle a dispute with the company over expenses incurred while providing services for Thai Mobile.

The wholly owned subsidiary of Samart Corporation handled the call centres, customer service and marketing for the mobile business owned by TOT and its sibling state enterprise CAT Telecom. The two have since been merged into a single state enterprise, National Telecom.

The payment approved by



Varut. Photo: Bangkok Post

Varut exceeded his authority, a breach of the Offences of Officials in State Organisations or Agencies Act, the court ruled.

After examining evidence, the court ruled that the Varut's testimony carried no weight to refute the plaintiff's evidence. The court found the defendant guilty of abusing his authority and dereliction of duty that caused damage to the state telecom agency.

The court sentenced Varut to 20 years in jail and ordered him to pay compensation totalling B1.06bn, with interest at 5% per year on the principal amount of B525.37mn, from Dec 15, 2022, to TOT or National Telecom, which filed the suit. Bangkok Post

Police chief orders full siege probe

BANGKOK

THE NATIONAL POLICE chief has ordered a full investigation into the 27-hour siege at a house in Bangkok's Sai Mai district, where a mentally disturbed police officer fired his weapon more than 50 times before being overpowered by a Swat team.

Royal Thai Police spokesman, Pol Maj Gen Archayon Kraithong, said on Monday (Mar 20) that the national police chief Pol Gen Damrongsak Kittiprapas has expressed regret about the tragedy and has ordered a new investigation committee to provide a full public report into the incident.

"Pol Gen Damrongsak insisted on transparency from all agencies involved in the investigation to ensure justice for all sides in this case," Pol Maj Gen Archayon said.

The family of Pol Lt Col Kittikarn Saengbun has also filed a letter requesting an investigation.

Kittikarn was wounded at the end of the 27-hour, Mar 14-15 siege and later



Police surround the townhouse in Bangkok where the 27-hour siege took place. Photo: Bangkok Post

died in hospital

However, the late policeman's family believe that police commandos might have used unnecessary firepower, which caused the injuries that led to the fatal "seizure" he suffered later in hospital.

According to crime scene investigators, there were bullet holes in the back wall next to the window Pol Lt Col Kittikarn had been seen at and more all over the house.

The family has speculated that there was more gunfire than previously thought.

Meanwhile, it was confirmed last Friday (Mar 17) that police officers across

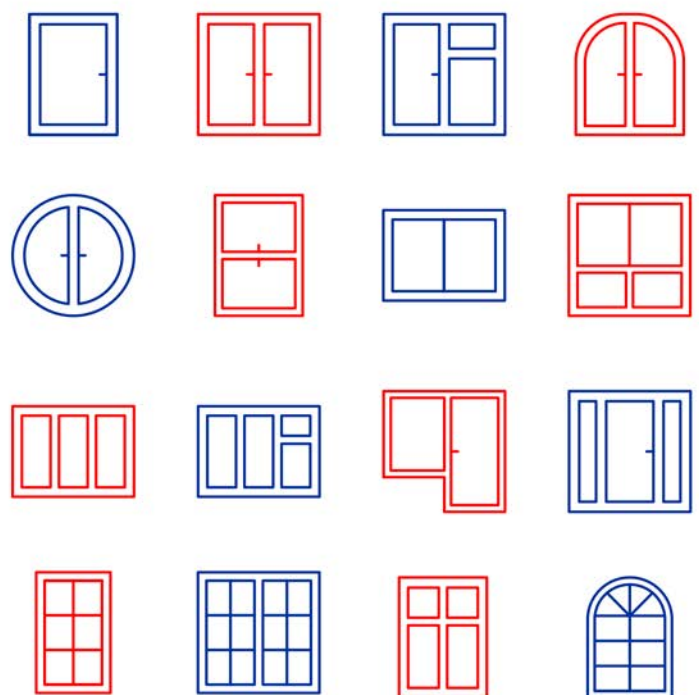
the country will undergo mental health screening in an attempt to prevent a recurrence of the siege incident.

Pol Lt Gen Waratchai Srirattanawut, head of the Office of Inspector General (OIG), said he has assigned medical teams to conduct random health checks on officers of the Metropolitan Police Bureau and provincial police stations, to ensure public safety and increase work efficiency.

People can lodge complaints with the Jaray Complaint Management System (JCoMs) if they come across officers who appear to be mentally disturbed, he added. Bangkok Post



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Medical supplies worth over US\$1.1 million donated

Nationwide emergency medical response strengthened with donation of 14,000 spinal boards

ADVERTORIAL

A donation of medical supplies worth over US\$1.1 million consisting of 14,000 spinal boards has been donated to the Thai Ministry of Public Health and National Emergency Medicine Foundation. The gifting of critical emergency medical equipment will be used to support healthcare initiatives across Thailand, and was a joint effort by Living Waters Phuket Foundation, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and St Joseph Foundation.

Medical spinal boards are used by emergency responders and healthcare providers, and can make a significant difference in saving lives and preventing long-term disabilities. They are mainly used to immobilise the spine and provide support during transportation after a traumatic injury, accident or during evacuation efforts. In these types of situations, a spinal injury risk is present due to the forceful impact on the body. If the spinal cord is damaged it can lead to permanent paralysis or even death, therefore keeping the body immobilised is paramount.

The team handling the delivery efforts of the 14,000 donated spinal boards included Dr Opas Karkawinphong (Permanent Secretary of the



Photo: LWPF

Ministry of Public Health) together with Dr Pornthep Siriwana Rangsan (Chairman of the Board of National Emergency Medicine Foundation) and Dr Somkuan Harn Phatthanachaikul (Secretary of the National Emergency Medicine Foundation).

These spinal boards will support operating units in the emergency medical system nationwide, and the Ministry of Public Health has committed to accelerating delivery to health units across Thailand with an emphasis on areas with the greatest need first. Some of the initial rural provinces to receive these medical supplies will be across

the Isan region of Northeastern Thailand, including Surin.

Living Waters Phuket Foundation, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and St Joseph Foundation expressed that this joint donation would directly help those in need of post trauma equipment across Thailand during emergencies or accidents. These boards were donated to specifically help those in rural provinces to get the level of medical care consistent with better-equipped regions.

Shaun Stenning, who founded Living Waters Phuket Foundation in November 2021, continues to put disad-

vantaged and vulnerable communities at the top of his agenda: "Having witnessed multiple accidents during my time in Thailand, I realised firsthand the need for emergency evacuation and safe transportation."

Shaun elaborated further, "This is a natural extension of other medical supply and mobility work this Foundation has helped fund, including over 2,500 wheelchairs which have been supplied across Thailand."

Living Waters Phuket Foundation works to unite the efforts of registered charities, foundations, private companies and government organisations with the aim of providing strategic and credible aid by issuing financial grants for projects in fields requiring essential relief, including sustainable food security, education, healthcare, renewable energy and environmental issues, in order to build brighter futures for communities in need across Thailand.



LIVING WATERS

Further Information on Living Waters Phuket:

Shaun Stenning

+66 (0)937206221

Living Waters Phuket

@livingwatersphuket

Living Waters Phuket

@livingwaters_th



Where to eat in PHUKET

March/April 2023 issue

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Contrasting Favourites: Heliconia and Hibiscus



GREEN THOUGHTS

Patrick Campbell

Following our previous article on 'Sun Gods and Sun Worshipers', despite the name, the *heliconia*'s connection with the sun is less obvious than that of the sunflower.

Maybe it's because of the shape of the floral clusters, one common variety, 'Golden Torch', much used by florists, has chrome yellow spikes. But whatever the reason, the *heliconia*, a tall reed-like plant with large, oval, spear-like leaves that thrives best in marshy terrain, is a favourite here in Phuket. In fact, the species has, like the canna lily, become naturalised around 'klongs' (canals) in parts of the island. Colloquially known as the 'lobster claw' or 'false bird of paradise', its numerous exotic cultivars bear showy, waxy flowers that consist of brightly coloured and oddly shaped bracts. Many retain water and become home to tiny insect larvae.

These clusters of bracts may be erect or pendulous, and while they are predominantly red and yellow, they do come in other hues. There is such a range of new strains, owing to the intense activity of hybridists, that the plant now has its own club (Heliconia Society International). These new forms vary enormously in size and shape, with 'stricta' strains producing rigid upright bracts. Among them are 'Golden Torch' and 'psittacorum', which have a wider palette of colours including orange, red, yellow and green. The even more dramatic, hanging 'rostrata' varieties, sometimes known as fishtail heliconias, produce substantial pendant blooms, often in contrasting hues of red and yellow.

But do remember that if you want heliconias to thrive in your garden, they will need rich soil, heavy feeding and plenty of water. My heliconias are next to



Hibiscus sinensis - Yellow hybrid.

the outdoor shower; this location ensures they get a daily dousing. They thrive accordingly. Without such artificial aids, dormant heliconias will still come into their own in the wet season. So, while they abhor droughts and cold weather, perversely, and despite their name, they do not need an excess of tropical sun. And remember that each stem flowers but once, so cut back old growth: this practice will encourage new underground activity and healthy rhizomes. Clumps of rhizomes can be divided to establish new colonies.

Meanwhile, the hibiscus is the first flower most people think of when tropical gardens are on the agenda. And unlike the *heliconia*, it flourishes in full sunshine. *H. sinensis* (the Chinese hibiscus), the best known species, is not easily upstaged. Its familiar, showy, trumpet-shaped flowers, often with prominent stamens, come in almost every colour under the sun. Visit your local garden centre and you will find small plants already displaying spectacular blooms in luminous shades of red, yellow, magenta, orange and white up to six or seven inches across (up to 17cm). Many

consider the hibiscus to be the tropical flower *par excellence*, noting that its red blooms are traditionally worn in the hair by eligible Tahitian maidens.

H. sinensis is sometimes employed in Phuket as a hedge, since it is a woody shrub, robust enough to form a barrier up to 15 feet tall (about 4.5 metres). And its propensity to flower most of the year round gives it an artistic advantage over most of its rivals. If it has a disadvantage as a candidate for hedging, it is because the ovate or toothed leaves are somewhat sparse: a hibiscus screen is not always very dense. One variegated variety which has leaves in shades of pink, white and green is often preferred for this purpose. It has a more compact habit, prunes readily and has smaller but vibrant red flowers. 'Snowqueen' has cream foliage when young: it turns either crimson or pale green when mature.

But there are downsides. The flowers are ephemeral – they last only a day – and the plant itself will need plenty of TLC during the initial stages of growth. It is essential to provide excellent drainage and a regime of fertiliser application, especially with young plants. If you experiment with the hybrids available in nurseries, you may well find them difficult to establish here: the strains have often been developed in Florida or Hawaii (with names such as 'Blue Bayou' or 'Hula Girl') and are not quite right for this climate. Maybe they would do better as carefully tended container specimens. Disease, moreover, can be a problem. Ailing plants are very susceptible to attacks by aphids, leading to outbreaks of mould and fungus, so ensure all your hibiscus have plenty of water and nutrients. Then the rewards can be truly spectacular.

Patrick Campbell's book 'The Tropic Gardener', described in one Bangkok review as the best book on Thai gardening for 50 years, is available for B500 (half price) to personal callers from 59/84 Soi Saiyuan 13 in Rawai (Tel: 076-61227 or 085-7827551).



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POP QUIZ

1. Triton is a moon of which planet?
2. The Australian film 'Crocodile Dundee' was released in which year?
3. Which name did Karl Marx give to all four of his daughters?
4. In the northern hemisphere, moss mostly grows on which side of trees – north, south, east or west?
5. Which cathedral contains the world's oldest working clock and the best surviving copy of the four original Magna Cartas?

Answers below, centre

SUDOKU

Easy

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

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across**
1. Passage
 5. Tropical starchy root
 9. Jerk
 14. Prefix for scoliosis
 15. Kind of number
 16. Like some fiction?
 17. Accepts with aplomb
 20. Watch word?
 21. Waterproof fabric
 22. Trattoria order
 25. Not only that but also
 26. Synthetic fiber
 28. City on the Yamuna River
 32. Support beam
 37. Composer Albéniz
 38. Wins out in the end
 41. Table-top design
 42. Murder, e.g.
 43. Christian name
 44. Manufactured fiber
 46. Criticize harshly
 47. 1976 satirical film
 53. Brunch order
 58. Atlas, e.g.
 59. Tune from "Bye, Bye Birdie"
- Down**
1. Star in Perseus
 2. Skin layer
 3. Penn and others
 4. South Seas kingdom
 5. Chapter in history
 6. Kind of mother
 7. Carpenter's groove
 8. White rat, e.g.
 9. Stupefied
 10. Ripple, as water
 11. Therewithal
 12. Kind of curl
 13. Ragnarok, e.g.
 18. Wilt
 19. Valley in Wales
 23. Bill
 24. Husk
 27. Like spinach salad
 28. Chop-chop
 29. French person
- Across**
30. Indian music
 31. In need of a massage
 32. Scolded
 33. Punjabi princess
 34. Home of Vigeland Park
 35. Principal
 36. Lacking
 37. Down
 39. Directly
 40. Adjust a violin
 44. Figure in Maori mythology
 45. Hymn of praise
 46. Tubular pasta
 48. Your, once
 49. Fabric threads
 50. Siouan language
 51. Snake genus
 52. Injured, in a way
 53. Work
 54. Speechless
 55. Needle holder
 56. Desolate
 57. Mollify
 60. Dance bit
 61. Hindu month

Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

1) Neptune; 2) 1986; 3) Jenny (after his wife); 4) North; 5) Salisbury Cathedral

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12	13
14					15					16				
17					18					19				
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22					23	24		25						
					26		27				28	29	30	31
32	33	34	35	36						37				
38									39	40				
41								42						
43						44	45							
					46				47		48	49	50	51
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:

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

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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

9.3

percent of adults worldwide currently have diabetes – that rate was 4.7% in 1980.

14

minutes is how long it took Sia to write Rihanna's song 'Diamonds'.

40

bottles of sunscreen were used by the cast of 'Baywatch' each month to keep them free from sunburn.

1,000

emojis is what students at China's University of Electronic Science and Technology are forced to write out every time they are late to class.

101 million

US dollars was stolen from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York account belonging to Bangladesh Bank, the central bank of Bangladesh, by hackers in 2016 due to the bank's use of \$10 computer network switches and no firewalls. US\$63mn transferred to four personal accounts in the Philippines still remains to be recovered.

Source: Uberfacts

ISLAND VIEW



Phuket viewpoint, north of Patong. Photo by Colin Rowntree

Got an unusual or particularly beautiful picture of Phuket?
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This week in history

March 24, 1989

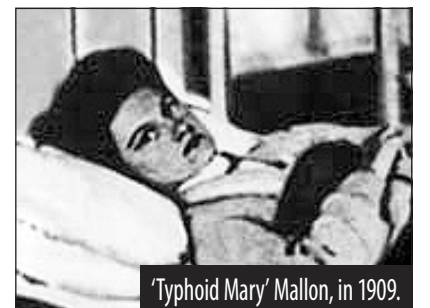
In Prince William Sound in Alaska, the Exxon Valdez spills 240,000 barrels (38,000 cubic metres) of crude oil after running aground.

March 25, 1306

Robert the Bruce becomes King of Scots (Scotland).

March 26, 1169

Saladin, a Sunni Muslim of Kurdish ethnicity, becomes the first sultan of Egypt and the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty.



'Typhoid Mary' Mallon, in 1909.

March 27, 1915

'Typhoid Mary' Mallon, the first healthy carrier of the disease ever identified in the United States, is put in quarantine, where she would remain for the rest of her life.

March 28, 1979

A coolant leak at the Three Mile Island's Unit 2 nuclear reactor outside Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in the US, leads to the core overheating and a partial meltdown.

March 29, 1973

Vietnam War: The last United States combat soldiers leave South Vietnam.

March 30, 1842

Ether anesthesia is used for the first time, in an operation by American surgeon Dr Crawford Long.

Source: Wikipedia

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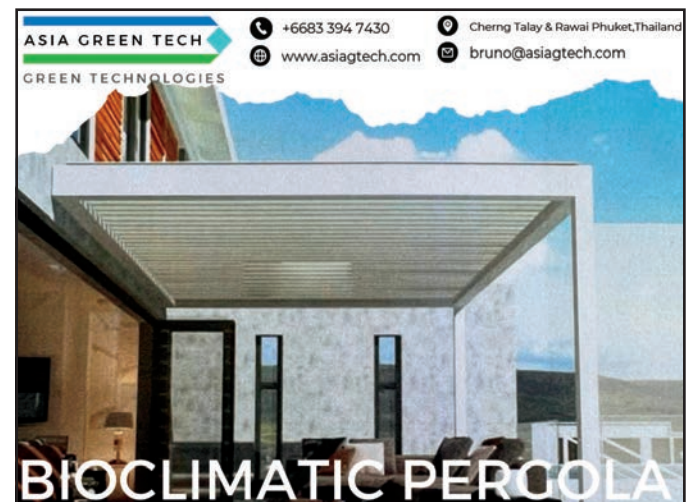
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Pipe Inspection

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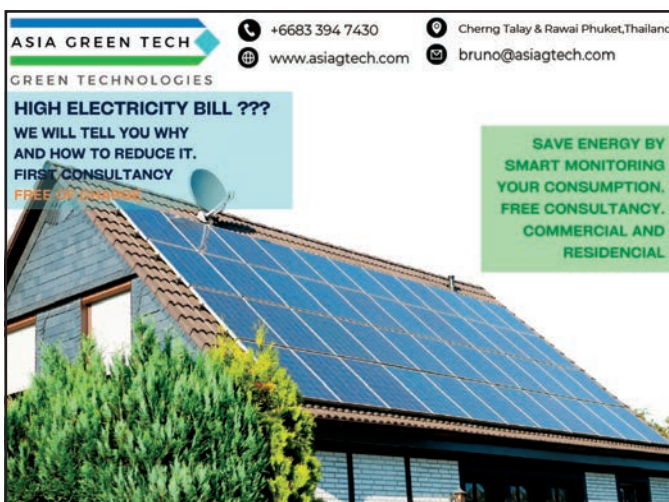
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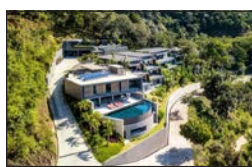
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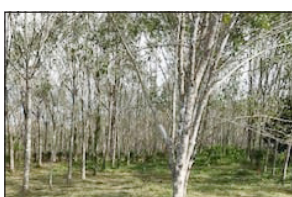
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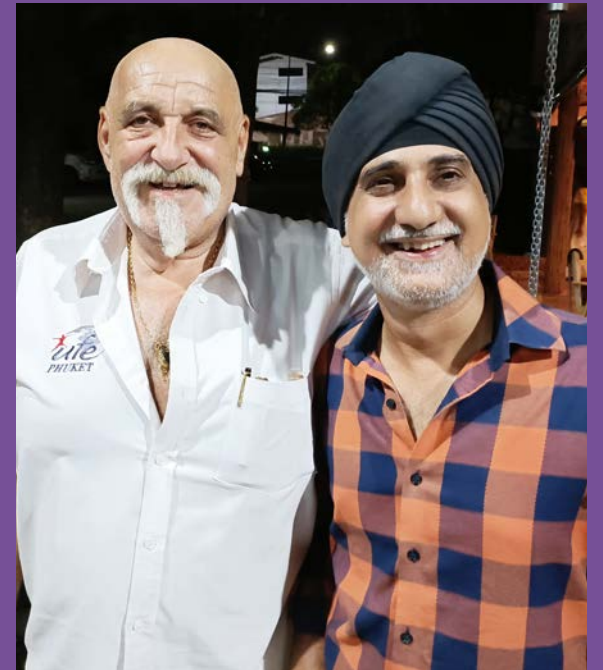
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UFE PHUKET MONTHLY NETWORKING - MARCH

Another great evening arranged by the French community - UFE Phuket at Pickleball Phuket Club in Kathu on Tuesday, March 14. Over 50 local business owners gathered for a few drinks, light snacks and great conversation. Looking forward to the next one on April 11. For more details follow them on Facebook - UFE Phuket.



SKAL INTERNATIONAL PHUKET - MARCH NETWORKING EVENT

Host Bart Callens, Skalleague and GM of SAii Laguna Resort Phuket, organised the ultimate shared dining experience: a multi-course Lebanese Mezza meal at the Miss Olive Oyl Mediterranean restaurant at SAii Laguna Resort Phuket on Thursday, March 16. From the hummus and tabouleh to the chargrilled lamb kofta and shish kebab, and everything in between, this had Skalleagues and guests seriously enjoying themselves. Thank you to all that joined for a great evening.

Radetic, Antoniak win Waterjet Championship

WATERSPORTS

AMERICAN ANTHONY Radetic dominated the men's Class A at the WPG#1 Waterjet Offshore World Championship 2023 last weekend while Russia's Olga Antoniak claimed the women's title.

The competition, using eco-friendly electric jet-skis, took place between Mar 16-19 at Bang Tao Beach in Laguna and saw the two winners claiming prizes of B680,000 respectively.

Competitors had to complete a 120km "lap" of the island from Bang Tao Beach to Prompthep Cape and back again, with several big names participating, including current world champion Jean Bruno Pastorello of France and the Australian duo of Christian Dagostin and Guy Greenland.

However, it was Radetic who turned on the style and capitalised when Pastorello experienced engine problems, with the American cruising to the finish line.

Thailand's Thapatrawat Josannuson finished second with Japan's Jun Icoma in third.

Antoniak was followed



Men's winner Radetic. Photo: PR Phuket

by compatriot Urea Chenuka in second place in the women's class, with Thailand's Suphalak Ninnopparat in third.

Pipat Ratchakitprakarn, Minister of Tourism and Sports, and Kongsak Yodmanee, Governor of the Sports Authority of Thailand, handed out the trophies, declaring the competition a great success that will hopefully see similar themed events taking place in future.

The event also aligned with the Ministry's "Save the World" project, which aims to reduce carbon emissions caused by vehicles involved in water sports.

The event received further live coverage via Eurosport Channel 1, which has a viewing base of over 155 million households in Europe alone.

The Phuket News

Perez dominates in Saudi

FORMULA ONE

Michael Lamonato
michael@boxofneutrals.com

Sergio Perez beat teammate Max Verstappen to victory at the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix last Sunday (Mar 19) in another dominant Red Bull Racing one-two finish.

Perez led all but the first three laps for a well-judged win, with his lead threatened only briefly in the closing stages by Verstappen's ram-paging recovery from 15th on the grid thanks to a failed drive shaft in qualifying.

The Dutchman had risen to second place with half of the 50-lap race remaining and appeared to have the pace to catch and pass the Mexican, but Perez had more than enough pace in hand to manage the gap back to the sister car, maintaining a five-second advantage throughout.

"It turned out to be tougher than I expected," Perez said. "The team did a fantastic job. We will keep pushing hard. The important thing I think is we were the fastest car out there today, so I'm very pleased with that."

Verstappen was unhappy to



Sergio Perez celebrates his win. Photo: AFP

lose a shot at a more sustained victory challenge to his broken drive shaft on Saturday but admitted second was a strong return after starting 15th.

"It wasn't very easy to get to the field," he said. "But once I cleared them one by one we got into a good rhythm."

"Of course very happy to be here on the podium."

Fernando Alonso completed the top three for his 100th F1 podium, but it took four hours and a farcical series of back-flips from the race stewards to confirm him in third place.

Alonso's problems started on the grid when he lined up

slightly to the left of his grid box, incurring a five-second penalty to be served at his pit stop. But as he pulled into his pit box, his rear jack operator appeared to engage the jack before his five-second penalty had been completed.

The stewards were notified in the final laps of the race and ruled that the rules had been broken based on an agreement between the teams that touching the car is not allowed while serving a penalty. Alonso was slapped with a 10-second post-race penalty shortly after climbing down from the podium celebrations.

But Aston Martin was unhappy with the results and appealed. It argued there is no such agreement and that there have been at least seven recent examples of teams touching their cars during while serving a penalty.

The stewards relented, and almost four hours after the race ended, Alonso was reinstated to the podium.

Mercedes teammates George Russell and Lewis Hamilton finished fourth and fifth with Ferrari's Carlos Sainz and Charles Leclerc another five seconds further back in sixth and seventh respectively.

Australian smashes record for world's longest ever surf

SURFING

AUSTRALIAN BLAKE Johnston shredded the world record for the longest surfing session on Mar 17, admitting he felt "pretty cooked" after catching waves for more than 30 exhausting hours.

The 40-year-old former surfing pro broke down in tears after beating South African Josh Enslin's previous record of 30 hours 11 minutes.

In front of hundreds of cheering supporters at Sydney's Cronulla Beach, Johnston braved swarms of jellyfish and pitch-black seas that are home to many species of shark.

"I'm pretty cooked," he said afterwards.

Johnston's attempt started in the early hours of Mar 16, using large spotlights to illuminate the water as he caught the first of more than 500 waves.

With Sydney in the grip of a minor heatwave, the water temperature has been



Johnston in action. Photo: AFP

hovering around a balmy 24°C.

Johnston went after the record to raise more than AUD \$200,000 (B4.5 million) for mental health, marking 10 years since losing his father to suicide.

He had originally planned to raise the money by tackling a 1,000-kilometre run, but settled on surfing when he saw the previous record was "only" 30 hours.

"I thought I could just do it," he said before the attempt.

"I push myself to the limits with my adventures and to prove to myself that I'm worthy and can get through hard times, and that's when my lessons are learnt."

In 2020, he ran 100km along the rugged coastline south of Sydney – covering the vast majority of the trek in bare feet. *AFP*

Dojo team pack a punch in Singapore

JUDO

THE ACCOLADES JUST keep on coming for students from the Dojo at Blue Tree Phuket as another fine team performance saw a raft of medals secured at the recent Singapore International Judo Championships.

The two-day event on the weekend of Mar 11-12 drew more than 100 competitors from over 15 countries for a keenly contested competition and it was one at which the Dojo Blue Tree Phuket team shone.

In the pre-cadet division age groups of under 12 years old and under 10 years old, a total of five medals were won, with four golds going to Oscar, Oliver, Gabin and Danil respectively and a silver medal being claimed by Platon.

Furthermore, Oscar, Platon and Gabin were the winners of the trophy for best team under 12 years old, while Oscar, Platon and Danil won the trophy for best team under 10 years of age.

There was also a first place finish and a further trophy secured in the "Battle Royale" event whereby three players face off against three opponents at the same time. It



The team in Singapore. Photo: Alexis Plantard

was the first time the team of students from Dojo at Blue Tree Phuket had competed in this format but they did not let it show as they defeated every one of the seven teams they faced off against in a truly impressive performance.

Coach Alexis Plantard was proud of his students, saying: "Gabin had to overcome the current national champions of both the Philippines and Uzbekistan on his way to securing gold, which was very impressive."

"Likewise, Platon defeated the national champion of the Philippines, who was in fact from a heavier class, on his way to the final and Oliver beat four extremely strong opponents as part of his success."

"It was a tremendous team effort and I am incredibly proud," Alexis added.

All the cadet team will be involved again in April for the Bangkok Judo Championship (Apr 7-9) and the National Judo Championship at Nakhon Si Thammarat (Apr 20-23).

Prior to these tournaments the students will undergo two martial arts training camps at Dojo at Blue Tree Phuket on Apr 3-7 and Apr 10-14.

The camps are open to anyone between the ages of 5 and 18 who wants to practice martial arts and become the best version of themselves.

More information can be found at dojo@bluetree.fun or by calling 092 805 8527.

Ben Tirebuck

Gunners keep on firing

FOOTBALL

AFP

Arsenal took advantage of Manchester City's weekend off from Premier League action to open up an eight-point lead at the top of the table thanks to a 4-1 thrashing of managerless Crystal Palace last Sunday (Mar 19).

Fatigued and frustrated after their agonising Europa League exit at the hands of Sporting Lisbon in midweek, Arsenal responded with the kind of stylish display that bore all the hallmarks of champions in the making.

Mikel Arteta's side crashed out on penalties against the Portuguese giants on Mar 16 after Gabriel Martinelli missed the crucial spot-kick.

So it was symbolic of Arsenal's new-found resilience that Martinelli was the man to put the Gunners on course for an easy afternoon at the Emirates by scoring the opening goal.

The Brazilian's cool finish laid the foundations for a sixth successive league win before Bukayo Saka struck twice either side of Granit Xhaka scoring Arsenal's third.

Champions City have a game in hand and host Arsenal in April, but Arsenal have control of the title race.

The mood on the other side of north London is very different after Antonio Conte lambasted his Tottenham players for throwing away a 3-1 lead to drop two vital points in their bid for a top-four



Bukayo Saka (left) was the star as Arsenal brushed past Crystal Palace 4-1. Photo: AFP

finish by drawing 3-3 at Southampton.

The former Juventus, Chelsea and Inter Milan boss called his players "selfish", lacking in heart and too used to not playing under pressure or stress.

Spurs still sit fourth, but are only two points ahead of Newcastle, who have two games in hand. The Magpies beat Nottingham Forest 2-1 with a late penalty from Alexander Isak.

Only Leeds, who beat fellow strugglers Wolves 4-2, won from the sides threatened by relegation, meaning the bottom nine are separated by just four points.

The race for European places is also tightening as Aston Villa and Chelsea closed to within four points of the top six.

When Steven Gerrard was sacked in October, only goals scored was keeping

Villa out of the relegation zone. Five months on, they are a club transformed under Unai Emery.

Bournemouth were swept aside with ease 3-0 at Villa Park on Saturday for a third win in four games for Emery's men.

Indeed, only four teams have taken more Premier League points in total since the former Arsenal and Paris Saint-Germain boss was appointed.

Manchester United and City's progress to the FA Cup semi-finals has increased the possibility that seventh could be good enough for European football, which remains well within Villa's reach.

Despite being two goals up at home, Chelsea could only muster a 2-2 draw with Everton last Saturday, while Brentford and Leicester City drew 1-1.

Infantino re-elected as FIFA president until 2027

FOOTBALL

GIANNI INFANTINO has been re-elected as president of FIFA until 2027 after standing unopposed at the congress of world football's governing body on Mar 16.

The 52-year-old Swiss lawyer, who succeeded the disgraced Sepp Blatter in 2016, was waved in for a third term by acclamation, just as he was four years ago, by delegates from the 211 member federations.

While FIFA statutes currently limit a president to a maximum of three four-year terms, Infantino has already prepared the ground to stay until 2031, declaring in December that his first three years at the helm did not count as a full term.

Infantino, who staunchly defended Qatar's hosting of last year's World Cup as the Gulf state's treatment of migrant workers, women and the LGBTQ community came under the spotlight, has overseen the expansion



Infantino. Photo: AFP

of the men's and women's World Cup and huge increases in FIFA revenues.

His re-election followed a long speech in which he triumphantly listed his achievements since taking office, alternating smoothly between English, French, Spanish and German.

"There is a lot to be looking forward to," Infantino said as he turned thoughts to the next four years and declared the 2026 World Cup, the first edition to be enlarged to 48 teams, will be "the most inclusive World Cup ever".

The tournament in North America will feature 104 matches, a huge increase from the 64 at the most recent World Cup, as it will start with 12 groups of four teams. AFP

Ireland seal Grand Slam to give Sexton perfect Six Nations farewell

RUGBY

HOOKEER DAN SHEEHAN scored two tries to help steer Ireland to a 29-16 victory over England last Saturday (Mar 18) for their fourth Five/Six Nations Grand Slam.

Ireland skipper Johnny Sexton became the Six Nations all-time record points scorer after landing a penalty, also going on to convert Sheehan's double and another try by Robbie Henshaw.

It was a dream final Six Nations Test for the talismanic Irish fly-half.

"It's like a dream I don't want to wake up from," said Sexton. "This is what you dream of as a kid. I'm pinching myself."

Ireland head coach Andy Farrell – who was Joe Schmidt's assistant when they won the Grand Slam in 2018 – said it had been at one point "squeaky bum time" but he was delighted it had ended in their favour.

"It means so much to everyone here – to be able to enjoy St Patrick's weekend



Ireland's players celebrate. Photo: AFP

and win a Grand Slam is always going to be special," said the 47-year-old Englishman, father of England fly-half and skipper Owen.

Ireland went into the game knowing a victory or draw would be enough to seal the title, but were made to work by England.

The Irish ended the half not only up on points but also a man to the good after England fullback Freddie Steward was sent off when he turned sideways and connected with Hugo Keenan's head, a collision that saw the Irish player replaced by Jimmy O'Brien.

Following a period of

extensive pressure early in the second-half, Sexton delivered a sublime crossfield kick which led to a try by Henshaw to make it 17-9 with just over 15 minutes remaining.

Soon after Sexton limped off the pitch for a final time in a Six Nations match, receiving a standing ovation from the crowd, but it mattered not as Ireland stood firm for the victory.

At full-time the crowd burst into a rendition of 'Fields of Athenry' as the Irish players celebrated the perfect Six Nations farewell for Sexton in his hometown.

AFP



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Sport



Ireland win Six Nations Grand Slam > p15

ACC WIN SCORCHER!



Andaman CC keep cool to win Phuket T20 title in style

The Andaman Cricket Club team celebrate their victory with the Phuket T20 trophy. Photo: Thanawat Phumipraphat

CRICKET

Neil Quail

Scorching conditions greeted the Phuket T20 finalists last Sunday (Mar 19) at the Alan Cooke Ground (ACG) in Thalang, but it was Rishi Sadaranghani's Andaman Cricket Club (ACC) who proved cooler under pressure with a decisive five-wicket victory over Patong Warriors to claim the first quarterly trophy of 2023.

ACC's good fortune began with the coin-toss going in their favour, allowing Sadaranghani to put Warriors into bat, with Ahmad Mughal and skipper Ahsan Ali taking to the crease.

A solid first over from Ashan Fonseka gave away just six runs, while the second

over worryingly bled 19 runs, but also saw the loss of Ali (10), being clean bowled by Shivam Sachdeva.

Muhammad Yasir's partnership with Mughal would yield 31 runs until umpire Michael Flowers dismissed Yasir (6), who was decisively trapped LBW by Fonseka.

Abubakar Siddique (12) would anchor the Warriors' innings until the 10th over break, helping to bring the score to 92 for 2. The interval however, served only to break the Warriors' momentum, with the spin factor of Lenny Leerdam luring Mughal (72) into attack and smashing two successive boundaries, before his third attempt only found the hands of a focused Manish Sadarangani verging near the rope, ending the Warriors star's innings.

Mughal's replacement, Muhammad Adeel Ali (7), also fell to the temptation of Leerdam's spin, finding Jagsir Brar scouting the boundary in the 13th over.

With the score on 119 for 4, Warriors would disappointingly add only 38 more runs from the remaining seven overs thanks mainly to a spirit-breaking four-over spell by Nishant Grover, who claimed four Warrior scalps for a paltry 20 runs, leaving them on a total of 157 for 9.

TURNING POINT

A confident ACC opening partnership of Rishi Sadaranghani (30) and Joseph Ninan (15) utilised the strategy of tracking the Warriors' run rate with a combination of one dynamic batsman while the other steadied the ship.

Ultimately, the plan worked to perfection before Yasir dismissed both in the same 6th over, the former clean bowled and the latter deemed LBW.

The fleet-felling of two important wickets would momentarily lift the Warriors, but the introduction of an inform Fonseka supported by Manish Sadaranghani soon quelled hopes as both settled into a similar strategic routine, while keeping in touch with the required run-rate.

Seeing the score on 119 for 2, the 14th over proved the game's turning point when Fonseka let loose on Faisal Butt to elevate the run rate by smashing 24 runs, including four 4s and a 6.

Fonseka's innings (62) would falter in the very next over, however, as the Sri

Lankan was slow to return to his crease after backing up a potential single too quickly, with Mughal's accurate throw proving crucial.

Still with five overs remaining, but only eight runs required for the win, Sameer Khan entered the fray when Manish (35) relinquished his wicket to the safe hands of Sharma, this time off Yasir's bowling.

Needing only two runs for victory, Mughal would bring an anticlimactic close to proceedings, as umpire Flowers signaled two wides and a return to the ACG clubhouse for ACC celebrations to begin.

An entertaining game was eventually won by experience and arguably some under par fielding from the Warriors who, having beaten ACC on

three previous occasions, agreed to the better team winning on the day.

Ashan Fonseka's performance earned him the final's MVP award, with Patong Penguins' Craig Morgan claiming batsman of the series, Kashmir's Malik Iqbal awarded best bowler, Ahmad Mughal deservedly taking series MVP and Jagsir Brar securing the best fielder award.

Additionally, players applauded the efforts of all the umpires and scorers and the coordination between Curt Livermore and the ACG to ensure a successful tournament.

A new series will be announced in the coming weeks, while Phuket cricket and the ACG prepare for the return of the Asian Cricket Sixes Tour to be held from Apr 20 –23.

Return of Tour of Phuket declared a huge success

CYCLING

THE TOUR OF PHUKET RETURNED to the island for the first time in three years on Mar 10-12 and was welcomed back with aplomb with over 200 participants taking part.

The hugely popular cycling event had been postponed for two consecutive years due to restrictions enforced by the global COVID-19 pandemic so its return was greeted with extra gusto by athletes and spectators alike.

The 7th edition of the race attracted an array of top-class local and international riders who got the chance to explore the beauty of Phuket and Phang Nga on two wheels while

enjoying the fresh air and breathtaking views along the route.

The race was divided into three separate stages with the first day (Mar 10) seeing the Individual Time Trial race over a flat, winding course that covered a distance of 4.48 kilometres.

The following riders completed the course with the best timing in their respective category: Elite: Tegshbayar Batsaikhan, Roojai Online Insurance, 5 minutes 32 seconds; Masters: Matthew Brittain, Matador Racing, 5m 34s; Supermasters: Markus Uprus, Greyhounds, 5m 37s; Veterans: Chris Reilly, 4T2, 5m 56s; UltraVeterans: Kramer Douglass, 4T2, 6m 30s; Women's Open: Dimity-Lee Duke, 6m 20s.

Stage 2 the following day was the 151km King of the Mountain (KOM) race with Roojai's team of Artasorn Pansaard, Tegshbayar Batsaikhan and Midey Valentin combining to take the win.

Other class winners included: Pichet Puengrang (Masters); Michael Naert (Supermasters); Chris Reilly (Veterans); Kramer Douglass (UltraVeterans) and Dimity-Lee Duke (Women's Open).

The final day of racing on Sunday (Mar 12) consisted of an 11km race with one KOM stage and 2 sprinter points.

Team Roojai once again showed their class to claim the victory with other class winners including: Thomas

Amblard (Masters); Michael Naert (Supermasters); Chris Reilly (Veterans); Kramer Douglass (UltraVeterans) and Dimity-Lee Duke (Women's Open).

The event was organised by Cycosports and Pablo Fitness, a leading sports organisation from Singapore, whose owner Pablo Toribio declared afterwards: "We're thrilled with the success of the Tour of Phuket 2023. It was wonderful to see so many people from around the world come together to enjoy the natural beauty of Phuket and Phang Nga on two wheels.

"Special thanks and appreciation goes to the officials, including the Thai Cycling Association, the



Photo: Cycosports

government offices of Phuket and Phang Nga and the Sports Authority of Thailand, who gave us full support for the event.

"We're already planning the next event and can't wait to welcome even more riders," he added.

Dates for The Tour of Phuket 2024 have already been set as Mar 8-10 and further details will be disclosed in due course, organisers said.

The Phuket News