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# BILLION DRIVE

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin in Phuket last Friday (Apr 19). Photo: ThaiGov

## SRETTA VOWS 'HUNDREDS OF BILLIONS' TO BE SPENT ON INFRASTRUCTURE

The Phuket News  
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket people are grateful for the B5.325 billion the government is spending on four projects to fix the island's eternal traffic problems, local government sources said amid the visit by Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin to Phuket last Friday (Apr 19).

One post by the Phuket branch of the Public Relations Department (PR Phuket) actually named PM Srettha as the person to thank for the budget spending on the decades-in-coming road construction mega-projects.

PM Srettha arrived at Phuket International Airport at 9:30am and joined a meeting where he was briefed on several of the key traffic mega-projects underway on the island.

He then visited a marquee set up to feature displays explaining the four main projects already in process.

Yet PM Srettha himself pointed out that the government was now looking at spending some B16bn on Phuket development projects, including resolving the recurring threats of water shortages by having water piped in from Surat Thani.

"Relevant agencies have been given directions to bring water from Cheow Lan Reservoir to be used in Krabi, Phang Nga and Phuket. In the future, Phuket residents will not lack water to use," PM Srettha assured.

"Regarding wastewater and garbage management, I would like to strictly enforce the law. Do not allow waste to be released into the sea. and public water sources. We strive to make Phuket a livable city. It is a

destination that people from every corner of the world want to move to live and visit, but if the environment is not good they won't want to," he added.

"These are policies in which the government has invested hundreds of billions [sic]. This is because the government has pressed the button to promote tourism, to improve the economy. We have come a long way in the past seven months. People have more money in their pockets, giving the opportunity for the creation of wealth. However, this wealth will not last without stability," PM Srettha said.

"Phuket as a tourist city and an important city for the economy. Transportation in the area is a top priority," he said.

"I have asked the Ministry of Transport to expedite construction for

the projects that have been approved to be completed as soon as possible by integrating with various agencies in the area and asking them to make plans to deal with traffic problems during construction in order to have as little impact as possible on local residents.

"In summary, we must save everyone's time, money and lives. The Yingluck government planned projects that at that time would have used a budget of B8bn, but for 10 years the projects have been stagnant.

"Today we have to use a budget that is almost B16bn, or double the original amount. We have wasted enough time and opportunities. Today we have come not only to 'create', but also to 'care' about the entire dimension of society. and culture of Phuket people and come to make the...

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# News



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## Mega-projects given green light

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...lives of the people better as well," PM Srettha said.

### ROADS

The focus of PM's visit last Friday was firmly on the road mega-projects. Joining PM Srettha for his visit from Bangkok were Minister of Transport Suriya Jungrungrangkit and Pol Gen Kittirat Phanphet, who is currently Acting Commissioner of the Royal Thai Police (see page 3).

"The Prime Minister ordered all units to speed up the project to solve traffic problems in Phuket province... Ready to upgrade the island to be a model island for world-class tourist cities," explained one official report of the visit.

PM Srettha, who while serving as Prime Minister also serves as the Minister of Finance, ordered officials to focus their efforts and expedite all road projects to alleviate traffic between Phuket Town and the airport, namely traffic on Thepkasattri Rd.

"Do not allow work to cause distress to people using the route or minimise the impact [of the projects] and have all projects expedited to be



PM Srettha at the Heroines Monument last Friday (Apr 19). Photo: ThaiGov

completed within the specified time period," PM Srettha said.

To that end, PM Srettha called for concession contracts that imposed heavy fines on contractors for failing to complete projects to specifications or on time.

The Prime Minister was briefed on the elevated road project to be built at Muang Mai, to allow traffic to continue from Route 4027 (through Pa Khlok) to the airport.

The project includes a three-way intersection and construction of a new

four-lane road between Maung Mai and the airport. The "interchange" to be an "elevated bridge", or "flyover". The project length is 1.95km and has been designated a construction budget of B1.3bn, official reports explained.

The design was completed in 2020. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report has been approved by the "Supervisory Committee", and the project is awaiting special dispensation by the Cabinet for the construction to pass

through mangroves, as is required by law, official reports noted.

The Department of Highways and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment have inspected the condition of the mangroves to be affected and will propose to set a construction budget for 2025. Although the main project was scheduled to be completed in 2027, construction is now to start in November and the new roads are hoped to be opened to traffic in 2027.

In contrast to preceding promotional events highlighting the government's efforts to alleviate Phuket's traffic woes, this visit made no mention of the billions to be spent on the so-called 'light rail' project or the Patong Tunnel.

After his briefings at the northern end of the island, PM Srettha travelled south to the Heroines Monument for further briefings there on construction of the underpass proposed to be built under the famed monument – which is also the focal point of continually heavy traffic tailbacks.

Mr Srettha was welcomed to the site, the car park at the

Robinson Lifestyle Thalang mall, by Srisoonthorn Mayor Chalernpol Kerdap and a host of other VIPs in the area.

Construction of the underpass is to cost about B2.38 billion. The Phuket branch of the Provincial Electricity Authority (PEA Phuket) on Monday (Apr 22) started moving the power lines along Thepkasattri Rd from Thai Watsadu in Thalang all the way to the Heroines Monument in order to allow work on the underpass to proceed. The moving of the power lines, and power poles is scheduled to continue through to June 30.

Of note, although official reports marked that PM Srettha was briefed on the "New Sarasin Bridge Construction Project to support [the] Andaman Airport", no government reports on the PM's visit released any details of the project, or proposal.

Further, despite Mr Chai also announcing before the PM's visit that PM Srettha was to travel south of the Heroines Monument to see firsthand the U-turns and perpetual traffic tailback at the Koh Kaew intersection, that did not happen.

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## Russian Consul-General bids farewell to Phuket Governor

RUSSIAN CONSUL GENERAL VLADIMIR Sosnov has held a farewell meeting with Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat as he prepares to leave his post.

Although the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not officially announced the end of Mr Sosnov's tenure, a statement from the Phuket office of the Public Relations Department (PR Phuket) explicitly stated his imminent departure.

The meeting took place at Phuket Provincial Hall on Apr 18 with PR Phuket posting the report later that same day. No further details have been released since then.

"Governor Sophon Suwannarat welcomed Consul General Vladimir Sosnov of the Russian Federation for a farewell courtesy visit before he departs from his role at the Consulate-General of the Russian Federation in Phuket.

"Over the past years, the bilateral relations between Phuket and Russia have significantly enhanced. This partnership extends back over 125 years," PR Phuket reported.

Mr Sosnov has served as the Russian Consul General in Phuket since 2020, marking a full four-year tenure. Mr Sosnov was at the helm of the diplomatic mission well ahead of its official opening in July 2023.

The Russian government ratified the establishment of the consulate on July 31, 2018, under order number 1571-R signed by then-Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev.

The official announcement of Mr Sosnov assuming the role of Consul-General was published in the Thai Royal Gazette on April 1, 2020.



Russian Consul-General Vladimir Sosnov had a farewell meeting with Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat on Apr 18. Photo: PR Phuket

Mr Sosnov's inaugural meeting with then-Governor Phakaphong Thawipatana took place on May 25, 2020.

Although the consulate was already operational, its official inauguration was held later, on July 15, 2023, with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in attendance.

The Russian Consulate General is located in the Royal Phuket Marina complex on Thepkasattri Rd, midway between Phuket Town and Cherng Talay.

The Consulate-General serves a broad region, including the provinces of Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi, Ranong, Trang, Satun, Chumphon, Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Narathiwat, Phatthalung, Songkhla and Yala.

Despite Facebook being outlawed by the Russian Government and effectively banned in Russia, the Russian Consulate-General in Phuket maintains a Facebook page for posting news updates and statements from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As of last Saturday (Apr 20), the page had not posted any updates on Mr Sosnov's status as Consul-General in Phuket. *The Phuket News*



# Police ordered to ramp up safety

The Phuket News  
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Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin last Friday (Apr 19) ordered police to crack down on crime and ramp up measures to improve tourists' safety, and the next day the national Tourist Police Chief was leading checks on car and motorbike rental operators in Patong.

Lt Gen Saksira Phueakam, Commander of Tourist Police, embarked on a tour around Patong at 11am last Saturday, following the meeting with PM Srettha, which was joined by Royal Thai Police Acting Commissioner Gen Kittirat Phanphet.

Accompanying Lt Gen Saksira were top-ranking officers from the Tourist Police Region 3 Command, including Col Yutthaphum Panlainak, Col Phisit Sawattaworn, Lt Col Wachirapisak Na Songkhla and Lt Col Channarong Rodthongdee.

According to a press release by the Phuket Tourist Police, Lt Gen Saksira and fellow officers "went out to inspect vehicle rental shops to build public relations and distribute stickers with information on regulations and laws regarding renting out vehicles to foreigners."

Patong rental business operators were instructed to comply with the laws for the safety of tourists, Phuket Tourist Police added.

Photos from the inspection show



Photo: PR Phuket

some rental shop operators placing Tourist Police stickers on their premises in the presence of Lt Gen Saksira and his entourage.

The first sticker was a reminder of penalties for driving a vehicle without a driving license and allowing another person to drive your vehicle without them having a driving license:

The owner or driver of a motor vehicle who lets anyone without a proper driver's license drive the vehicle shall be fined up to B2,000.

A person driving the vehicle without a valid driver's license shall be imprisoned for a term not exceeding one month or fined up to B1,000, or both.

The second sticker explained which driving licenses are recognised in Thailand, besides the Thai driving

license issued by the Department of Land Transport (DLT):

- Foreign driving licenses issued by the relevant authorities of ASEAN countries, namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia.

- International Driving Permits (IDPs) issued by foreign states under the Geneva Convention on Road Traffic of 1949 (101 signatory countries, the IDP is valid for 1 year) or the Vienna Convention on Road Traffic of 1968 (84 signatory countries, the IDP is valid for 3 years).

Holding any other document, including a US, UK, Russian, or Australian driving license without an accompanying IDP, effectively

means not having a valid driving license in Thailand. The IDP is valid only when accompanied by an original foreign driving license.

## SAFETY FIRST

"Phuket must be safe and crime must be eliminated," PM Srettha said at a meeting at Region 8 Police headquarters, located at Tha Chatchai, at the northern end of the island last Friday,

"What I value most is protecting the lives and property of everyone in Phuket, both local residents and tourists. We must create the 'Phuket Model' in tourism, coupled with safety and strict enforcement of laws," he said.

"We must prevent road, water and fire accidents. Drivers must have licenses, and foreigners are prohibited from driving without a driver's license. In addition, Patong, and Bangla, which is a tourist hotspot, must not have drugs and fights," the PM continued.

To that end, PM Srettha asked Pol Gen Kittirat to urgently improve Patong Police Station and the facilities and resources at the Bangla Police Box.

"There cannot be exploitation of tourists. There must be no such thing as illegal taxis, ghost guides and charging unfair prices," PM Srettha ordered.

"I ask every sector to help take

good care of tourists. We have invested a lot. I don't want this to be just a drop of honey [sic], and later allowed to become a problem that will cause damage, because this is one of the key factors in the development of Phuket," he said.

"As for the illegal hotel business operation, I sympathise with the department that has to solve the problem of licenses, which is a downstream matter. We request that all parties strictly follow the law. The first important issue for the hotel is safety, such as fire escapes and alarm systems," he added.

PM Srettha explained that he had invited the heads of government agencies in Phuket, the consuls and honorary consuls of 12 countries, along with all police officers to a meeting to discuss measures to prevent and suppress crimes committed by foreigners and setting measures to enhance safety for tourists.

"Phuket was the first province that I traveled to after assuming the position of Prime Minister. From that day, I have believed that the development of Phuket has made much concrete progress, but we can still do more," he said.

"I ask that we not only look at the money that will go into the pockets of the businesses, but let us adhere to national security as our primary concern," PM Srettha concluded.

## One death in 'Seven Days' Songkran safety campaign

A 40-YEAR-OLD RUSSIAN man was the sole death in a road accident in Phuket during the 'Seven Days' safety campaign for Songkran 2024, which concluded at midnight on Apr 17.

In total, 48 people were hospitalised for injuries in 49 accidents recognised by local officials during the seven days, according to the report prepared by the Phuket branch of the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM Phuket).

Of the 48 people admitted to hospital for road-accident injuries, 28 were Thai nationals, 13 were Myanmar nationals and seven were marked as "foreigners" in the DDPM Phuket report.

The seven "foreigners" were given as two Russians, one British and one each from Turkey, the Philippines, Bangladesh and China.

The one road death in Phuket during the 'Seven Days' was that of Pavel Uriadov, a 40-year-old Russian national.

Mr Uriadov was killed when his motorbike plunged into a roadside ditch along a



Rescue workers at the scene of the accident that claimed Mr Uriadov's life. Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

curve on Patak Rd in Karon at about 5:50am on Apr 17, explained Karon Police Chief Pol Col Khunnadet Na Nongkhai.

His wife Anna Uriadov, 41, who was riding pillion on the motorbike, escaped with minor injuries as she had jumped off the motorbike before it plunged into the ditch.

The couple were travelling from their hotel in Karon to the Big Buddha viewpoint when the accident happened, Pol Col Khunnadet said.

Phuket last year concluded the Seven Days safety campaign for Songkran with five people killed and 51 people admitted to hospital for injuries sustained in road accidents.

However, as of Monday (Apr 22), two more people had died in accidents in Phuket.

A 29-year-old man died after the Ducati motorbike he was riding struck a concrete roadside barrier on the coastal road in Kalim, north of Patong, early on Apr 18.

A 57-year-old Thai man died when the Honda Click motorbike he was riding veered off the road and crashed into a power pole in front of Baan Chalongschool on Chao Fa West Rd, Chalong, around 12.45am last Sunday (Apr 21).

Despite the accident occurring at a busy and dangerous intersection, Chalong Police noted that there were no active CCTV cameras in the immediate area.

A motorcycle helmet was found at the scene, but it was unclear whether the 57-year-old man was wearing it while riding.

As of Tuesday (Apr 23) ThaiRSC reported 59 deaths and 8,651 people injured in road accidents in Phuket so far since Jan 1 this year.

Additional reporting by  
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The Phuket News



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## PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

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WED MAY 1



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Wind 4 m/s

THU MAY 2



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## Vachira demands decent behaviour

The Phuket News  
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Vachira Phuket Hospital has issued a stern plea to the Russian community in Phuket, urging its members to adhere to hospital regulations and conduct themselves appropriately in accordance with Thai laws.

The appeal came in response to a recent surge in incidents involving Russian nationals, including a case where a man refused to pay his bills and a woman wielded a baseball bat in a threatening manner.

The letter, addressed specifically to the Russian community, was signed by Methavee Maneesri, Head of the International Department at Vachira Phuket Hospital.

"Dear Russian Community in Phuket," it began, "Please find the attached information from the police daily record regarding an incident [that occurred at Vachira Phuket Hospital]. It is imperative to note that the behavior described in the report is unacceptable to us. I want to emphasize that I am ready to assist and cooperate with anyone involved in medical cases, [only] provided they adhere to standard procedures and respect public laws and regulations."

Ms Methavee emphasised



the importance of everyone's cooperation for the peaceful living of all local residents and expats in Phuket.

"Healthcare services are not provided free of charge. I encourage everyone to have medical or work insurance and to strictly adhere to the waiting queue, just like Thai nationals do," she stated. "I promise to serve and provide help and advice whenever it increases your benefit in a medical case, as many patients have experienced. Yet, I urge everyone to comply with regulations to ensure a harmonious community environment."

The letter, dated last Saturday (Apr 20), was sent to *The Phuket News* with a request to share the information in *The Phuket*

*News'* Russian-language sister-newspaper Novosti Phuket.

Attached to the letter was a copy of a Phuket City Police report confirming Ms Methavee's complaint about a threatening incident involving a Russian patient.

According to the report and Ms Methavee's personal account of the events, the Russian patient Sergey Chent, 48, received his treatment on Apr 17 and left without paying his bill totaling B8,380.

On Apr 19, Mr Chent returned to Vachira Phuket Hospital to see the doctors again and was asked by Ms Methavee and other hospital staff to pay the outstanding bill.

The man refused and threatened the personnel,



A Russian man was apprehended for threatening Vachira Phuket Hospital staff and refusing to pay his bill on Apr 19. Photo: Methavee Maneesri

boasting acquaintance with high-ranking police officers, personal influence, and wealth.

Accompanying Mr Chent was a woman wielding a baseball bat, referred to as "Mr Chent's girlfriend" in the police report.

"They also brought weapons, a baseball bat, into the hospital. He displayed threatening behavior towards the officers and showed that he knew the police and caused chaos within the hospital," the police report said.

The situation was brought to order by police officers arriving from Phuket City Police Station, located some 700 metres away.

Mr Chent was taken to Phuket City Police Station where he agreed to pay the bill. It was not confirmed

whether he or his female companion faced any charges.

Ms Methavee, in her personal police complaint, demanded Phuket City Police take legal action following Mr Chent's and the woman's behavior at Vachira Phuket Hospital.

Ms Methavee told *The Phuket News* that the incident was no misunderstanding, as the Russian man "wanted to scare her, behaved like mafia, claimed to have many businesses in Phuket and know big people."

"I simply want to inform the Russian community that its members should not behave like this man. Please, stay in Phuket in peace and maintain good relationships. That is the message I want to convey," Ms Methavee said.

## Transgender woman swept off rocks, drowns at Kalim

POLICE HAVE CONFIRMED the identity of a woman who drowned after being swept off rocks in Kalim, north of Patong, last Friday evening (Apr 19).

Police were informed of the incident, near the Diamond Cliff Resort, at 6:10pm.

The body of the woman, later identified as 23-year-old transgender woman Chananchida Wisetwongsa, from Roi Et, had been recovered and taken to Patong Hospital.

Ms Chananchida had walked down onto the rocks to take selfies with a friend. She posed too close to the edge of the large rock she was standing on and was swept into the water by a large wave,



Lifeguards on jet-skis rush to recover Ms Chananchida off Kalim Beach. Photo: Patong Surf Life Saving

police officials explained.

Lifeguards were informed of Ms Chananchida's predicament and rushed to recover her, but were too late to save her, police noted.

Ms Chananchida was pronounced dead at Patong Hospital.

Relatives were contacted in order to make funeral arrangements.

Eakkapop Thongtub

## Teen arrested for stabbing at Patong OTOP market

A 17-YEAR-OLD HAS BEEN arrested for stabbing a 20-year-old in the abdomen during an altercation between two groups of local youths at OTOP Market in Patong.

The incident occurred just after 1am last Friday (Apr 19). The injured man, identified by Patong Police as Ariyath Kaewnao, 20, was initially taken to Patong Hospital and later transferred to Vachira Phuket Hospital. There have been no updates on his condition since then.

The suspect was tracked down with the help of his friend, Jittipat 'Jim' Srisuphan, an 18-year-old resident of Wichit. Confronted by police at his home, Jittipat confessed to his involvement in the incident and agreed to contact the 17-year-old assailant, known as 'Lek'.



The 17-year-old man was arrested after the stabbing at the OTOP Market in Patong on Apr 19. Photo: Patong Police

Jittipat and Lek communicated via messenger and agreed to meet at a convenience store near Phuket Deep Sea Port on Cape Panwa in Wichit, where Lek was subsequently arrested. The teenager will now face charges.

Eakkapop Thongtub



# Free EV bus service to launch in Phuket Town

The Phuket News  
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Local consortium of Phuket companies PKCD with the Sustainable Tourism Development Foundation together will launch a free air-conditioned electric bus service in Phuket Town, starting May 9.

The new service, operated by a 22-seat 'Smart Bus EV', was announced at a press launch on Apr 18, led by Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat.

Joining the event in support of the new initiative were Rewat Areerob, President of the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation (PPAO); Phuket Town Mayor Saroj Angkhanapilas; Lertchai Wangtrakuldee, Director of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Phuket office; and Thaneth Tantipiriyakij, President of the Phuket Tourist Association.

The service, free for all local residents and tourists, will initially operate every day as a trial period. Buses



Photo: PR Phuket

will operate along a circular route every 30 minutes, from 11am to 10pm.

The bus route features 16 stops, as follows:

- Opposite Limelight Phuket
- CIMB (CIMB Bank)
- Phuket Terminal 1 (the old bus terminal)
- Royal Phuket City Hotel
- Opposite Pearl Hotel
- Kaset Market (Fresh Market)
- Office Mate
- Ko-Ang Seafood
- Opposite Red Plaza
- Coffee talk (next to SCB Bank)
- Opposite Krungthai Bank

- Islamic Bank
- Phuket Thaihua Museum
- Dibuk Rd
- Wat Mongkolnimit
- Limelight Phuket

Buses will be parked on Luang Por Rd as their terminus.

Phuket Smart Bus has provided four electric buses to provide the service. Phuket Smart Bus operates a service from Phuket International Airport to Patong to Rawai. The operator has 14 buses in total, which will all be changed to be EV buses, it was explained during the launch.

"The policy of the Phuket Provincial Development

Plan places importance on developing the city to be livable and environmentally friendly," said Nippon Ekwanich, Chief Advisor to the PKCD Executive Board.

"The requires the use of clean energy to reduce pollution and enhance the lifestyle of local residents and sustainable tourism," he added.

Bhumikitti Ruktaengam, Chairman of the Sustainable Tourism Development Foundation, noted that the project was the result of "the problem of traffic congestion and the problem of insufficient parking in Phuket Town".

"The project provides a travel option for tourists and local residents, and helps them choose to use public transportation, especially by using a clean energy vehicle.

"This project will use electric buses to reduce air pollution. This will help reduce the problem of carbon dioxide that is caused by air pollution as well and promote and support exchanges and connections between government agencies and the private sector, and related sectors," he said.



Photo: PR Phuket

## HRH Sirindhorn opens 'Library of Wisdom'

HER ROYAL HIGHNESS Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn on Apr 17 arrived in Phuket to officiate the opening of the 'Library of Wisdom' at Phuket Provincial Prison, created as part of a Department of Corrections initiative launched with royal support.

The project aims to increase literacy among inmates so they have a better chance of a successful life after their release.

The 'Library of Wisdom' at Phuket Prison features more than 10,000 titles, and has been designed to replicate the ambience of Phuket Old Town, so that it reflects a multicultural society with people living together, including Thai Muslims, Sikhs and Peranakan, officials explained.

The library also includes royal writings and books, general knowledge books, reference books, novels, journals

and magazines, and features an electronic media corner for 'E-Learning'. In addition, the library already holds activities to promote reading, telling stories from royal writings and the availability of audio books which have received royal permission to produce royal writings in multimedia format so prisoners can listen to them in their dormitories.

As a result, the number of inmates interested in borrowing books has increased by more than 30%, noted an official report.

Phuket Provincial Prison is home to 3,795 inmates, comprising 3,276 men and 519 women, with 94 undergoing non-formal education lessons, 203 in primary education, 142 in middle school, 138 studying high-school lessons, and eight studying for bachelor's degrees, with 62 graduating in the academic year 2023.

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# 'Special Admin' tops requests

The Phuket News  
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**W**irintra Paphakityotphat, head of the Tourism Council of Thailand (TCT) Region 11 branch, which represents Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi, has presented a list of four formal requests to Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin – the first of which is to permit Phuket become a 'Special Administrative Zone'.

The formal requests were presented to PM Srettha during his visit to Phuket last Friday (Apr 19). The requests, presented to PM Srettha while he was at the Heroines Monument for a briefing on the underpass to be built at the site, were aimed at elevating Phuket to internationally recognised tourism standards, Ms Wirintra said.

Top of the list was to establish a 'special economic zone' for the tourism industry in Phuket. The request was for Phuket to receive a budget allocation of not less than 1-5% of the revenue generated by Phuket's service and tourism sector that is currently handed over to the central government.

The Department of Tourism, under the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, would be responsible for ensuring any requirements were complied with, Ms Wirintra noted.

According to the Ministry



Ms Wirintra submits the formal requests to PM Srettha last Friday (Apr 19). Photo: PR Phuket

of Tourism and Sports, Phuket welcomed 11.3mn visitors in 2023, marking a significant increase since the end of the pandemic. Most visitors were foreign (75%), contributing to a tourism income of at least B388 billion, Ms Wirintra noted.

In January and February this year, Phuket welcomed some 2.4mn tourists, demonstrating a year-on-year growth of 38%, she added.

Before his visit to Phuket, PM Srettha in Bangkok on Apr 18 told the press that he had not received a formal request from Phuket City Municipality asking for the government to consider making Phuket a 'special administrative

zone' – despite previous reports.

"If I receive a letter from Phuket City Municipality, it will be taken into consideration and we will gather opinions from all sectors first," the PM said.

"Currently, the government gives importance to Phuket province because it is a large province in terms of driving the economy," he added.

Regarding Phuket's potential as a special economic zone, the Prime Minister emphasised the need to "assess its suitability", considering whether it aligns with tourism objectives and specific business types suitable for a tourism area.

"It would be necessary to

consider whether it is needed, and exactly what would be meant by a 'special economic zone'?" Mr Srettha said.

"Maybe it's inappropriate... We want to stimulate tourism, but we must consider its suitability and we must request specific details first," he added.

"But if it is appropriate in terms of the type of business that goes along with a tourism destination, we would be happy to take it into consideration," PM Srettha said.

"There are both short-term and long-term plans to support the management of the province. We are confident that the government's

tourism policy will make Phuket and the lives of the people of Phuket, better," he concluded.

## MORE REQUESTS

The second request presented by Ms Wirintra was for building a community marina or marine transportation service around Phuket, involving 10 piers with a budget of B300 million.

The initiative aimed to expand transportation options, ease congestion on land and boost income for local residents, Ms Wirintra explained.

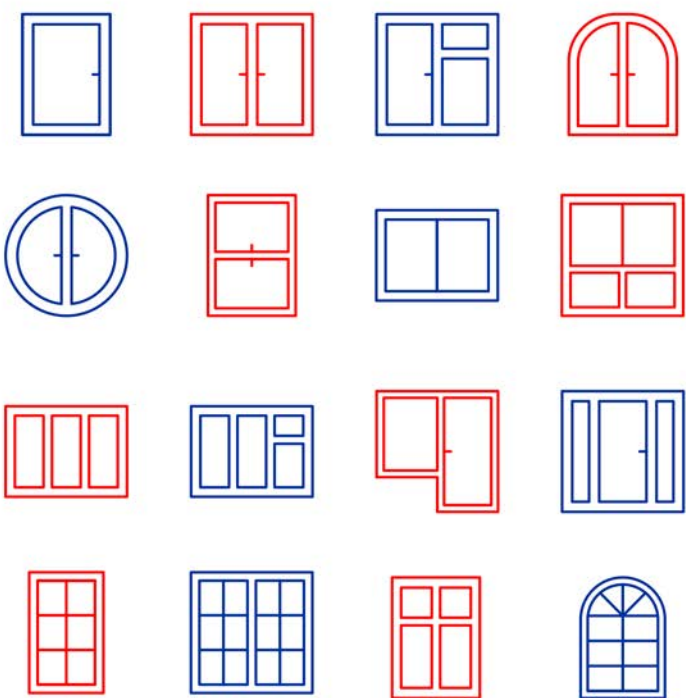
"Additionally, there are plans to develop a large cruise ship terminal under the responsibility of the Marine Department," she said.

The third request was to approve a budget of B397.524mn for an integrated project to increase the efficiency of traffic management in Phuket through an AI system, with the Phuket Provincial Office being responsible for the project.

The fourth, and final – and often repeated – request was for the central government to provide assistance to small hotels, pending follow-up and approval, concerning the determination of areas and environmental protection measures within Phuket by the end of April, as per a draft announcement from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.



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## Wage hike to B400 takes effect

WHILE THE NATION WAS BUSY ENGAGING in water fights and celebrating the Songkran festival on Apr 13, the second daily minimum wage hike for this year came into effect.

The increase saw the minimum wage raised to B400 a day in 10 tourism-driven provinces, including Phuket. The increase was specifically for the hotel industry, focusing on four-star hotels.

Meanwhile, a 10% increase in state officials' salaries will be implemented on May 1, said deputy government spokesman Karom Polpornklang, reported the *Bangkok Post*.

Mr Karom said the latest wage increase applied to employees at upscale hotels and resorts with at least 50 staff in the provinces of Bangkok, Krabi, Chon Buri, Chiang Mai, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Phang Nga, Phuket, Rayong, Songkhla and Surat Thani.

Employees eligible for the new wage are advised to file complaints with the Labour Ministry if their employers fail to adjust their wage, a move that was approved on Mar 26, he said.

The latest increase drew harsh criticism from two labour rights groups, saying it marked the worst change to the country's wage system.

The Thai Labour Solidarity Confederation (TLSC) and State Enterprises Workers' Relations Confederation (SEWRC) said in joint remarks that the decision to implement the minimum wage hike in only some areas rather than uniformly is unfair, reports the *Bangkok Post*.

The groups said disparities in wages among workers in the same province despite the fact that the prices of goods and services such as water, electricity and internet were the same



Labour Ministry Permanent Secretary Pairon Chotikasathien chairs the wage committee meeting to review the new minimum wage rates for the 10 tourism-driven provinces on Mar 26. Photo: MCOT

would create inequities.

They called on the government and the Labour Ministry to stop creating disparities in wages and reiterated their demand for a daily minimum wage of B492, or no less than B400.

They also insisted that the daily minimum wage rise must be implemented uniformly.

"This adjustment marks the worst change to the country's wage system," their statement said.

The groups proposed the daily minimum wage should be only the entry-level wage and that every business be required to create a wage structure to give incentives to workers. They said they would consider further action if their demands were not met.

Meanwhile, Sitthipong Sitthipatprapa, chairman of hotel operators in Songkhla's Hat Yai district, said the new wage increase would have a negative impact on businesses in the area.

Mr Sitthipong criticised the tripartite wage committee's decision, saying it was not right because room prices and service charges in the 10 provinces affected by the wage increase differ. *The Phuket News*



# 'Big Joke' suspended

## BANGKOK

### Bangkok Police

Deputy national police chief Surachate Hakparn accused Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin on Monday (Apr 22) of malfeasance in having him suspended and said that as a result he was blocked from becoming the next national police chief.

Pol Gen Surachate, known as Big Joke, filed his written complaint at the Office of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) on Monday, addressed to NACC secretary-general Niwatchai Kasemmongkol. Pol Gen Surachate also held a press conference at the NACC offices.

He told reporters that the prime minister had earlier transferred him to the PM's Office pending a 60-day investigation. He was referring to an investigation into his alleged involvement in money-laundering in relation to the BNK Master gambling website.

Pol Gen Surachate, once touted as a possible national police chief, is accused of colluding in money laundering and using his position as a state official to facilitate the crime, in violation of sections 5, 9 and 10 of the Anti-Money Laundering Act.

Four of his subordinates, Pol Col Kittichai Sangkhathaworn, Pol Lt Col Karit Pariyaket, Pol Sgt Natthawut Wadwaew and Pol Sgt Natthan Chuchak, were also suspended.



Pol Gen Surachate 'Big Joke' Hakparn. Photo: Bangkok Post

There was then an order to move Pol Gen Surachate back to the Royal Thai Police Office. Subsequently, he was suspended from duty on Apr 18, and the following day police interrogators sent his case to the NACC, Pol Gen Surachate said.

If the case had been sent to the NACC in the first place, he would have been considered innocent pending the NACC's finding and by law he could not have been transferred out of the police force, Pol Gen Surachate said.

There appeared to be an organised movement to persecute him, and as he was already suspended he had time to launch lawsuits against his opponents. "Please be prepared," Pol Gen Surachate said.

On Monday Pol Gen Surachate also asked the NACC to investigate possible malfeasance by the police interrogators who brought the online gambling case

against him.

He said that interrogators had handled the case in the first place, instead of the NACC, because there was a movement to prevent him being the next national police chief.

Pol Gen Surachate said he was the most senior of the candidates who could succeed Pol Gen Torsak Sukvimol, the incumbent, when he retires at the end of September.

Prime Minister Srettha said later at Government House that the Royal Thai Police Office had proposed the suspension of Pol Gen Surachate and he would have been accused of malfeasance if he had blocked it. The case complied with the law and was free of prejudice, Mr Srettha said.

Pol Gen Surachate has the right to appeal and testify under the Royal Thai Police Act.

# COVID cases surge following Songkran

## BANGKOK

THE NUMBER OF COVID-19 inpatient cases has increased as expected after Songkran celebrations as the JN.1 strain remains dominant in the country, the Department of Disease Control (DDC) said last Sunday (Apr 21).

DDC director-general Thongchai Keeratihattayakorn said there were 1,004 new reported COVID-19 inpatients, a daily average of 143 new cases, and three deaths in the week ending Apr 20. The deceased were in the risk group covering elderly people, those with chronic diseases and pregnant women.

Besides many parties and gatherings during Songkran festivities, Dr Thongchai said COVID inpatient cases rose because patients mostly showed mild symptoms similar to flu and were unaware of their infection, and therefore did not isolate themselves.

The JN.1 subvariant of COVID-19's Omicron variant is still the dominant strain in Thailand.

Since the first case of the JN.1 strain was confirmed in Thailand late last year,



Songkran fun in Bangkok on Apr 15. Photo: Bangkok Post

there are no indicators that it will cause more severe symptoms than the Omicron variant, Dr. Thongchai said, citing Department of Medical Sciences data.

Those infected with the JN.1 strain will have symptoms similar to those of ordinary respiratory illnesses, such as fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches and a runny nose, the DDC head added.

Meanwhile, Interior Minister Anutin Charnvirakul confirmed that there were 287 fatalities and 2,060 injuries from 2,044 traffic accidents nationwide during the government's seven day road safety campaign between Apr 11-17.

Speeding, cutting in front of other vehicles and drink-driving were the biggest causes, Anutin said on Apr 18. Bangkok Post

# Border security stepped up as Myanmar fighting rages

## MAE SOT

THE THAI MILITARY and authorities are intensifying efforts to protect civilians along the Thai-Myanmar border, aiming to help Myanmar nationals seeking humanitarian aid while also preventing the spillover of violence into Thailand.

Fighting raged near Myawaddy on the border across from Mae Sot in Tak province last Saturday (Apr 20), forcing nearly 1,700 civilians to flee as rebels pressed to flush out junta troops holed up for days at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge.

Thai broadcaster NBT reported that resistance forces used 40mm machine guns and dropped 20 bombs from drones to target an estimated 200 junta soldiers who had retreated from a coordinated rebel assault on army posts since Apr 5.

Thai military forces responsible for border security are working closely



A family from Myanmar seeking shelter in Mae Sot. Photo: Bangkok Post

with police and narcotics officers to enhance control over crossings between Mae Sot and Myanmar, particularly in light of the escalating conflict.

The intensified fighting has prompted civilians in Myanmar to seek refuge by crossing into Tak, underscoring the need for stricter border control and processing of border-crossers, authorities said.

The Ministry of Public Health said 1,686 people had crossed the border to seek temporary refuge in Mae Sot on Apr 20, with one person injured by shrapnel. It said nearly half of the arrivals were children and elderly people.

Skirmishes between junta forces and Karen rebels have started to affect Thai citizens, as evidenced by a stray bullet that penetrated the window of a house. While the window sustained damage, no one in the residence was harmed.

Sunai Phasuk from Human Rights Watch Asia posted a message on X last Saturday saying that more than 1,600 people from Myawaddy had crossed into Thailand after the Myanmar military used MiG-29 jet fighters and helicopter gunships to attack Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) troops earlier.

The activist also shared posts from Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin and Foreign Affairs Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukura, saying the government is closely monitoring the situation in Myanmar.

At time of press, PM Srettha was due to visit Mae Sot on Tuesday (Apr 23) to get a first-hand look at the situation.

Bangkok Post

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# Will the Russians stay or go?

## STEP BY STEP

Simon Causton

Phuket has long been a magnet for expatriates seeking paradise. More recently, though, a new wave has washed ashore – Russians seeking refuge from the war in Ukraine. You can't miss them; visit a beach, shopping centre or restaurant and you will be inundated with white linen shirt-wearing giants with strong jawlines and stern expressions.

Phuket's Facebook pages are quick to lament their existence, claiming the island is not what it used to be when it was engulfed with Brits or Antipodeans. But whatever your point of view, this influx has significantly impacted the island, with a surge in property purchases, the creation of Russian-speaking businesses and a noticeable shift in the cultural landscape. Delving further ahead with a hypothetical time machine, it is worth pondering: when the war ends, will this newfound Russian community in Phuket become permanent?

History offers valuable clues when considering the long-term implications of war-driven migration. The Korean War, for instance, triggered a significant diaspora of Koreans. Fleeing the violence and political instability, an estimated 2 million Koreans resettled in the United States and Europe, establishing vibrant



communities that continue to contribute to their adopted nations today. Similarly, World War II led to a mass exodus from Europe, with millions seeking new lives in countries like the United States, Canada and Australia. These historical examples demonstrate how war can act as a powerful catalyst for permanent resettlement.

Phuket's situation presents both opportunities and challenges. The economic boost from Russian investment is undeniable. Businesses catering to Russian tourists have flourished, while property values have skyrocketed due to increased demand. Local entrepreneurs have embraced the opportunity, with many learning basic Russian phrases and adapting menus to cater to new tastes. However, a sudden departure of this community could leave a significant void. Businesses built on the expectation of a long-term Russian presence could face financial hard-

ship, and the island's overall economy might suffer a downturn. With the rest of Thailand experiencing a major property downturn, Phuket's market has held up remarkably, mostly due to our friends from the motherland. (N.B. There are signs in the last month that even Phuket's property market is significantly shifting.)

Finding the answer to whether the Russians will stay or go lies mostly likely in the war's resolution.

## CONTINUED UNCERTAINTY

If the conflict ends with a fragile peace or a return to a climate of unease in Russia, many Russians in Phuket might choose to remain. The prospect of an uncertain future back home, coupled with the comfort of a familiar community and a thriving business they've built in Phuket, could incentivize them to stay. Additionally, children who have started attending local schools and families who have established social circles might find it difficult to uproot themselves again.

For Phuket, this scenario presents the challenge of adapting to a potentially long-term Russian presence. Investing in Russian-language classes for tourism and hospitality workers could be a strategic move. Encouraging cultural exchange programs and events showcasing both Thai and Russian traditions could foster a sense of community and belonging for both residents and tourists.

## SWIFT RESOLUTION

A swift and decisive end to the war, with a return to pre-war stability in Russia, could lead to a mass exodus of Russians from Phuket. The allure of returning home to rebuild their lives and careers close to their families and friends could outweigh the comfort of their newfound haven. This scenario would pose a significant challenge to Phuket's economy, potentially leaving a gap in tourism revenue and a surplus of vacant properties. If even a small percentage of them tried to sell properties bought during their time here, it could lead to a crash in the property market, of which we have not seen for some time.

However, Phuket's resilience and adaptability are well-documented. The island has successfully navigated economic downturns and fluctuations in tourism trends in the past. By focusing on attracting tourists from other regions, such as Southeast Asia, Europe and the Middle East, Phuket could bridge the economic gap left by a potential Russian departure, but the property market would take significant time to recover and would likely see developers who are currently investing like never before on the island suffering severely.

## LOCAL VOICES

Various Russian friends and confidants have given great insight into what lies ahead. The Russian community here is very divided in their opinions on the war and what the future holds for them. Many are young men either alone or with their families who have 'dodged the draft' and moved to Thailand as it is a welcoming place with a relatively cheap lifestyle. These immigrants fear for their return to Russia and potential ramifications they may face for fleeing military service. Major regime change at the end of the war may negate this and allow amnesty for them. Many of the people we spoke to highlighted the fact that many Russians who could not deal with life on the island have already left, either to return to Russia or to try life elsewhere.

The general consensus is that Russians here fall into two groups. The first are those who are renting, just trying to survive and waiting for the day they can return to Russia. This group is smaller and finds life in Phuket harder; as mentioned, a lot have already departed as they could not assimilate with life here.

The second group is larger and has formed a vibrant expatriate community among themselves. They have either bought or rented long-term properties. Many work remotely, commute to other Asian hubs for business and have bought and invested in local businesses (both legally and not). Their children attend international schools across the island, and they now see this as their home. Many are unsure about the political and economic viability of a Russian economy post-conflict and would rather chance their future here.

## THE OTHER CATALYST

The major topic that many of the people we spoke to though was the cost of living in Phuket. Whilst Thailand is often painted as a cheap and cost-saving place to live, people were shocked about the cost of rent, lifestyle and basic groceries and how much they had gone up in the past 12 months. These rises are often blamed by many in the wider expatriate community on Russians, but it seems they are not immune to them, and if prices did continue to rise, many on lower incomes may be forced to look elsewhere for alternative places to live.

## THE ROAD AHEAD

The war in Ukraine has cast a long shadow over Phuket, bringing an influx of Russians seeking refuge. While the war's end remains uncertain, one thing is clear: Phuket stands at a crossroads. By analysing historical trends, considering potential future scenarios, and listening to local voices, Phuket can prepare for either outcome, with evidence suggesting that a majority will stay. Whether the rest of the island inhabitants like it or not and whether the Russians stay or go, the island's future prosperity hinges on its ability to adapt, innovate, and leverage its natural resources and cultural richness to attract visitors and immigrants from all corners of the globe.

*Simon Causton is a long-time Phuket resident, founder of Citadel Phuket and author of 'The Phuket Periodical' newsletter. X (Twitter): @SimonCauston*



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# Hidden wildlife in plain sight

## NATURAL PHUKET

Simon Lomas

Here in Phuket we have a few large birds of prey that are fairly common even in a busy place like Patong. I do mean the avian type with wings and feathers and not the nocturnal type as seen more commonly down Bangla Rd. The most common is the Brahminy Kite. It looks a bit like the bald Eagle with its brown body and white head. You can see it often just cruising up and down Patong Beach.

This bird lives in the trees above Patong to the north and south, gliding effortlessly up and down the beach looking for prey. The Brahminy Kite is a medium-sized raptor around 44cm from head to claw, with a wingspan of 1.2 metres.

They are known scavengers, but here in Phuket they do very well on fish, crab and other shellfish, with the occasional mouse, rat or other small mammals they can find. They nest in high isolated trees and return to the same nesting site each year. They are all found all over Southeast Asia and not in any way endangered.

Next we have the Oriental Honey Buzzard, which is slightly larger than the Brahminy Kite but quite easy to identify by the very distinctive stripes on the tail.



The Brahminy Kite. Photo: Simon Lomas

Again, it can be seen often over the small bay to the south of Patong Beach where the small estuary enters the sea. The Oriental Honey buzzard is around 60cm tall with a wing span of 1.5-1.7m. They live in the hills above Patong, Tri Trang and Freedom Beach. As the name suggests, it lives on bee and wasp larvae and loves the honeycomb too. Like the Brahminy Kite, it is not an endangered bird and quite easy to spot.

Then we come to the largest bird of prey in Thailand: the White Bellied Sea Eagle.

This large eagle grows to 90cm in length and has a massive wing span of over two metres. As you can see, it is easy to identify as there are not many birds of this size and colour around.

It not only feeds on fish, turtles, sea

snakes and smaller sea birds, but also on carrion (dead animals) and it hunts mammals as well. When these birds mate, they mate for life and are very territorial.

Like the other two they nest in the hills above Patong in the Tri Trang, Freedom Beach area. The White Bellied Sea Eagle is not listed as endangered BUT its numbers are decreasing and in some areas in the world it is quite rare now. But in Thailand they are still healthy and quite easy to see.

Next is the Grey-faced Buzzard. This smallish bird is around 44cm long and has a wingspan of up to 1.1m. It has a grey head and neck, brown-and white-striped breast and fainter stripes on the underside of the tail.

These birds feed on frogs, crabs, liz-

ards, insects and small rodents. They migrate and breed in Korea and Japan and then winter in Southeast Asia. Listed as vulnerable in 2006, this bird is one to look out for.

Last is a bird quite rarely seen in Phuket compared with the others: the Booted Eagle. To be fair I know little about this bird except what I can find out on the internet. It is a migrating bird in many areas in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, India and just touching Southeast Asia. They grow to 40cm in length and have a wingspan of up to 1.3m. There seem to be two main colour variations: a lighter and darker variation, with the darker one being a lot more rare.

The Booted Eagle hunts small mammals, reptiles and birds. Not much more is known about them and in South Africa they were only discovered in the 1980s due to the remote nesting sites. Due to them being overlooked and then being a migratory bird, no one knows their numbers or if they are under threat.

In Phuket there seems to be very few recorded sightings. In other areas of Thailand they are listed as birds you can see in various national parks, but they are a stunning bird to see in a busy place like Phuket.

So if you want a day away from the beach, why not take the camera up into the hills and see what you can find? There are so many other types of birds and wildlife, too.



THANKS



### A Heartfelt Note of Gratitude from The Rotary Club of Patong Beach

In the wake of the resplendent Help the Children Charity Gala held on the 5th of April, the air is still abuzz with the spirit of generosity and communal joy that characterized the evening. The Rotary Club of Patong Beach extends its warmest and most sincere thanks to each individual who partook in this remarkable event, making it an unforgettable night of celebration.

The gala was a beacon of hope and charity that brought us together in the most beautiful way. The exceptional quality of food and beverages served was a delight. The legendary Blues and Rock music was world-class. Our appreciation goes out to the supremely talented artists and the unparalleled production team whose efforts created a spectacular concert.

A special note of gratitude is reserved for our esteemed sponsors, whose generosity knows no bounds. Your contributions were pivotal in the auction that night, enabling the Rotary Club to bolster and expand its myriad of community service projects. Programs like Lenses for Learning, Save a Child Swim Safety, and our various scholarship initiatives stand to benefit immensely from your kindness, directly impacting the lives of many within our community.

"Thank you" seems an insufficient expression to convey the depth of our gratitude to our sponsors. We urge our community to continue supporting these benevolent businesses and individuals, as their actions and contributions exemplify the spirit of giving and community service.

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Anantara Layan Phuket Resort  
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Bocconcino Restaurant  
Bumrungrad Hospital  
Cape Sienna Phuket  
Captains Bar  
Carpe Diem Beach Club – Phuket  
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Clean & Green Cleaning  
Crislu  
Delta 55 Fitness  
Development Management Group  
DoubleTree Phuket Banthai Resort  
Elephant Parade

Hyatt Regency Phuket Resort  
International Law Office ILO Phuket  
Junkyard Theatre  
Keemala  
Lady Pie  
Laguna Golf Club  
Legend Music  
Life Balance Phuket  
Luca Cini  
Maya Beach Club Phuket  
Miss Diamond DJ  
Original Sin Restaurant – Singapore  
Physio X House  
Public House Bangkok  
Pullman Phuket Arcadia Naithon Beach  
PJAE Stanley Music  
Rosewood Phuket  
Suay  
The Boathouse Phuket  
The Siam Supper Club  
The Slate Phuket  
Treehouse Villas Koh Yao  
Underwood Art Factory  
WOO Phuket



### POP QUIZ

- How old was famous explorer Marco Polo when he set out for Asia?
- Which is the largest salt flat in the world, which also contains half the world's supply of lithium?
- What is Nicolas Cage's real name?
- Which company owns the trademarks and products of boardgame makers Parker Brothers and Milton Bradley?
- Which famous bridge crosses the River Thames between Blackfriars Bridge and Hungerford Bridge?

Answers below, centre

## SUDOKU

Easy

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

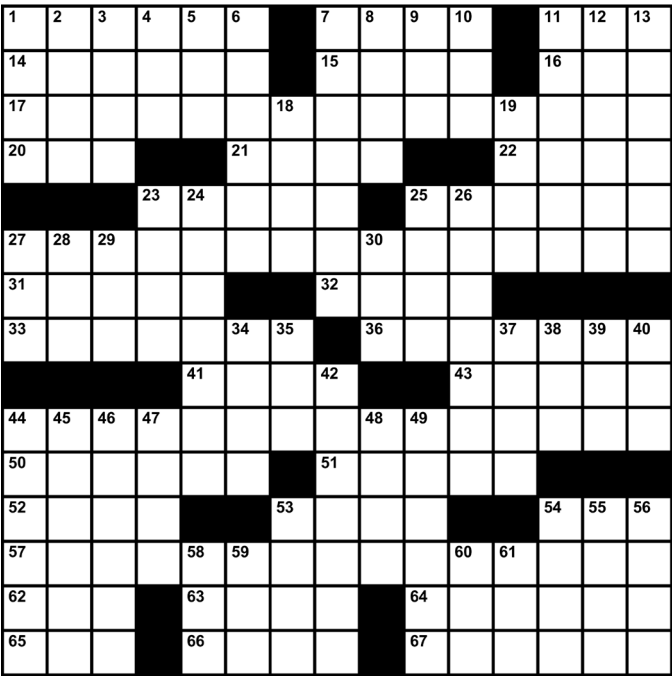
Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across

  - Sea cow
  - Alexander, e.g.
  - French vineyard
  - Raise
  - Include
  - French flower
  - Autobiography
  - Dress (up)
  - Cautious
  - Kind of column
  - Panna \_\_\_ (dessert)
  - Buttonhole
  - Revive
  - Like some gases
  - Proof word
  - Strangle
  - Wraps
  - Some London teens, in the '60s
  - Chills
  - Have many secrets
  - Gofer's job
  - Kind of pain
  - Kuwaiti leader
  - Wrinkly fruit
  - Farm cry
  - Put everything on the line
  - Needle point?
- Down

  - \_\_\_ Bowl
  - Engaged in
  - Hot drink
  - Across, in verse
  - Thumbs down
  - Expansion
  - Some hymns
  - Madcap
  - Hello or goodbye
  - Legal matter
  - Tie type
  - Most abundant
  - Comfortable with
  - Destiny
  - Centers of activity
  - Author John Dickson \_\_\_
  - Place to put the feet up
  - Not many
  - Whale family
27. Famous

  - Biochemistry abbr.
  - Always, in verse
  - "\_\_\_ alive!"
  - Mary in the White House
  - West African people
  - Ring
  - \_\_\_ Polloi
  - Lord of the Rings character
  - Wind dir.
  - Medical procedure
  - Looked lecherously
  - Fine fur
  - Come to light
  - Dismal
  - Gaucha's weapon
  - Fabrications
  - Area 51 conveyances?
  - Actor O'Shea
  - Fail to mention
  - Heed
  - Cut (off)
  - Rite answer?
  - Get into
  - Asian language



Visit: [www.ilovecrosswords.com](http://www.ilovecrosswords.com)

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

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

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

Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:  
Francis Ford Coppola is his uncle; (4) Hasbro; (5) Waterloo  
(1) 17; (2) Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia; (3) Nicolas Coppola (famed director

## GOT YOUR NUMBER

**10**

adults are reported to police as missing in Las Vegas every day. The majority are found or voluntarily return home within 48-72 hours after being reported.

**18**

percent of mothers in the UK regret the names they picked for their children, according to a UK survey.

**600**

minutes is the minimum length of time obese people generally sit for each day.

**14,000**

years ago, cave lions roamed the forests in England and Scotland. Today, Scottish wildcats are the only species of wild felines in the British Isles.

**43 billion**

US dollars is how much the 'Harry Potter' franchise is estimated to be worth.

Source: *Uberfacts*

## ISLAND VIEW

The tranquility of Mai Khao. Photo by Tina Olitakič

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

## This week in history

**April 26, 1564**  
Playwright William Shakespeare is baptised in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England. His actual date of birth remains unknown.

**April 27, 1667**  
John Milton, blind and impoverished, sells the copyright of 'Paradise Lost' for £10.

**April 28, 1986**  
High levels of radiation resulting from the Chernobyl disaster are detected at a nuclear power plant in Sweden, leading Soviet authorities to publicly announce the accident. In response to international reports, the city is evacuated six days later.

**April 29, 1992**  
Riots in Los Angeles follow the acquittal of police officers charged with excessive force in the beating of Rodney King. Over the next three days 63 people are killed and hundreds of buildings are destroyed.

**April 30, 1975**  
Fall of Saigon: Communist forces gain control of Saigon.

**May 1, 1776**  
The Illuminati is established in Ingolstadt, Upper Bavaria, by Jesuit-taught Adam Weishaupt.

**May 2, 2008**  
Cyclone Nargis makes land-fall in Myanmar, killing over 138,000 and leaving millions homeless. Source: *Wikipedia*

A screenshot of Rodney King being beaten by LA police, sparking riots that saw the city burn for days.



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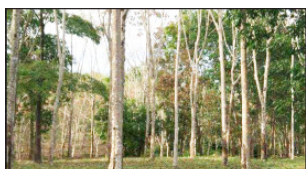

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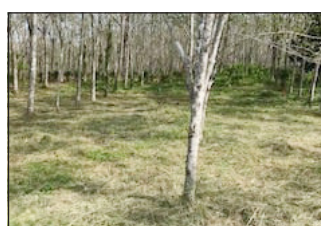
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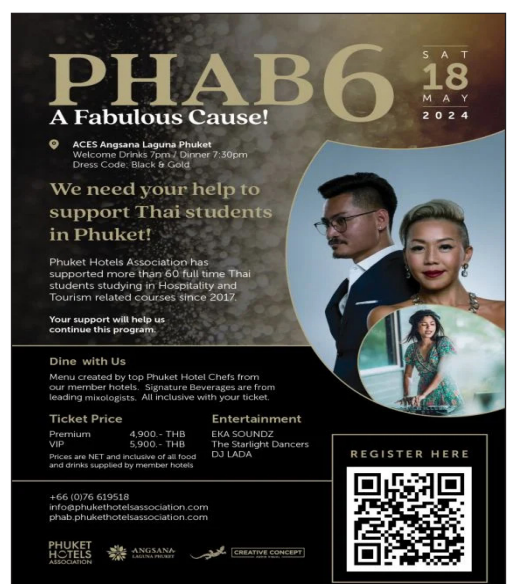
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## SKÅL INTERNATIONAL PHUKET DINNER - APRIL

An amazing evening at Pizza on Fire, inside canal village, Laguna Shopping, on Thursday, Apr 18 with Skal International Phuket. Over 40 current and past members and guests were treated to a fantastic night of networking, food and drinks. To find out more visit - [facebook.com/SkalPhuket](https://facebook.com/SkalPhuket)



## TOURISTS FLOCK TO 28<sup>TH</sup> PHUKET BIKE WEEK

Phuket Bike Week 2024 drew to a close with much fanfare last Saturday night (Apr 20) with an official ceremony overseen by Patong Mayor Chalernsak Maneesri and Phuket Vice Governor Adul Chuthong. Centred on Loma Park, near the Patong beachfront, with more than 300 big bikes on show, the two-day event kicked off with a motorbike convoy from the Phuket Check Point at Tha Chatchai, the northernmost point on Phuket, and a heavy promotion of road safety under the banner 'Helmets on heads; lights on bikes'. Bike Week participants also joined a '100% Helmet' motorcade through Phuket Town to help promote young people riding motorbikes to wear a helmet, complete with chin strap fastened, at all times while riding a motorbike. This year marked the 28<sup>th</sup> edition of Phuket Bike, with some 50,000 people expected to have joined the event, together bringing some 5,000 vehicles to the island, including classic motorbikes and cars in pristine condition. The highlights of this year's event included a motorcycle exhibition feathering high-speed electric motorbikes, a blend of power and eco-innovation from various leading brands, and the traditional 'Ride for Peace' by bikers from around the world. Other activities included a Custom Bike contest, the famous Miss Phuket Bike Week contest, live entertainments and more.



# Max wins F1's China comeback

## FORMULA ONE

Michael Lamonato  
michael@boxofneutrals.com

Max Verstappen thumped the opposition at Formula 1's first Chinese Grand Prix in five years to take his fourth victory of the season in Shanghai last Sunday (Apr 21).

Verstappen aced his getaway from pole and gapped the field by around a second a lap in the opening six laps to put his victory bid beyond doubt.

His only challenge came shortly before half distance during a series of closely linked safety car interruptions that forced him to change strategy.

The first safety car was deployed on lap 23 to collect Valtteri Bottas's stopped Sauber, which had ground to a halt at turn 11 and was stuck in gear.

The prospect of a cheap pit stop enticed half the grid back into pit lane for fresh rubber in the hope the hard compound could be massaged to the end of the race on lap 56, and Red Bull Racing was forced to follow suit.

What little jeopardy there was in the long final stint evaporated shortly before the race got back underway on lap 27 when Lance Stroll clouted into the back of Daniel Ricciardo's RB car at the final hairpin.

The field had been bunching up



Max Verstappen celebrates his win at the Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai last Sunday (Apr 21). Photo: AFP

behind Verstappen as the Dutchman readied himself to resume the race. Stroll, apparently paying insufficient attention to the concertinaing pack, ploughed so hard into the back of Ricciardo's car that it sent the Australian momentarily airborne, clattering into compatriot Oscar Piastri as he landed.

Piastri's car was damaged but able to continue, Ricciardo was forced to retire, while Stroll had to pit for repairs and was penalised 10

seconds for the crash.

It was a dreadful half-minute for the RB team, with Yuki Tsunoda being taken out of the race by an overly ambitious Kevin Magnussen, who dived down the inside of turn 6 but made heavy contact with the rival car.

The carnage forced the race back behind the safety car until lap 32, by which time the chequered flag was comfortably within range of the hard tyre, allowing Verstappen

to cruise to the finish line with an easy 13.7-second advantage.

### 'ON RAILS'

"It felt amazing," Verstappen said. "All weekend I think we were incredibly quick. You had a car that was basically on rails, and I could do whatever I wanted to with it."

Lando Norris impressed for McLaren with a strong second place, lapping quickly enough to keep Sergio Pérez in the sister Red

Bull Racing car at bay for the entire second half of the race.

Norris had got lucky with the timing of Bottas's stoppage, which was initially dealt with by a virtual safety car. He took the opportunity to make a cheap stop, and when the rest of the leaders pitted behind the safety car, he found himself elevated into podium contention.

But luck was only half the task, with Norris finding a sublime rhythm around the Shanghai circuit to earn McLaren's best finish of the season and defy expectations.

Pérez had a less straightforward race than Verstappen, having to recapture second place off the line from a fast-starting Fernando Alonso and then losing two places behind the safety car.

While Charles Leclerc was easy enough for him to deal with, he had no pace to run with Norris.

Leclerc finished fourth with teammate Carlos Sainz a place behind him in fifth.

George Russell was sixth as he managed to fend off Alonso in the final laps despite the Spaniard being forced to make three stops by the timing of the safety car.

Oscar Piastri limped to the flag in eighth ahead of Lewis Hamilton, who was up from 18<sup>th</sup> thanks in part to a second pit stop that pre-empted the safety car, while Nico Hülkenberg scored the final point of the race for Haas in 10<sup>th</sup>.



Munyo (left) and Jephchirchir. Photo: AFP

## Double Kenyan delight at London marathon

### MARATHON

OLYMPIC CHAMPION Peres Jephchirchir set a women's world record as she won the London marathon last Sunday (Apr 21) while Alexander Mutiso Munyao's victory in the men's race made it a Kenyan double.

The field for the women's race was considered one of the best ever assembled with three of the four fastest women in history competing as Jephchirchir laid down a marker ahead of her defence of her title at the Paris Olympics.

The 30-year-old Kenyan came home in front of world record holder Tigst Assefa in a time of 2 hours 16 minutes 16 seconds, smashing the previous women's course record of 2h 17m 1s set by compatriot Mary

Keitany in 2017.

"I was not expecting to run a world record," said Jephchirchir. "I knew it might be beat but I did not expect it to be me. I am so happy to qualify for the Olympics and I feel grateful."

Munyao got the better of Ethiopian legend Kenenisa Bekele to take the men's race in 2h 4m 1s.

A three-time Olympic gold medallist on the track, Bekele was on course for his first win on the streets of London aged 41 but Munyao proved too strong in the closing kilometres to pull clear up London's famous landmark The Mall towards the finish line.

A record number of people ran the 26.2-mile (42 kilometre) route through the British capital with over 50,000 participants taking part. AFP

## Olympic chief heralds AI potential

### OLYMPICS

INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach said artificial intelligence (AI) can help identify talented athletes "in every corner of the world" as he unveiled the Olympic AI Agenda in London on Apr 19.

Bach, speaking at Olympic Park, which hosted the 2012 Games, said the Olympic movement needs to lead change as the global AI revolution gathers pace.

"Today we are making another step to ensure the uniqueness of the Olympic Games and the relevance of sport, and to do this, we have to be leaders of change, and not the object of change," he said.

The former fencing gold medallist said it was vital to have a "holistic" approach to create an "overall strategy for AI and sport".

Bach, speaking less than 100 days before the start of the Paris Olympics, said "unlike other sectors of society, we in sport are not confronted with the existential question of whether AI will replace human beings".

"In sport, the performances will always have to be delivered by the athletes," he said. "The 100 metres will always have to be run by an athlete – a human being. Therefore, we can concentrate on the potential of AI to support the athletes.

"AI can help to identify athletes



Bach at the Olympic AI Agenda event in London on Apr 19. Photo: AFP

and talent in every corner of the world. AI can provide more athletes with access to personalised training methods, superior sports equipment and more individualised programmes to stay fit and healthy."

Bach said other advantages of AI included fairer judging, better safeguarding and improved spectator experience.

The Olympic AI Agenda comes from the IOC AI working group – a high-level panel of global experts including AI pioneers and athletes, set up last year.

When asked about the potential negatives of AI, Bach was keen to emphasise the importance of free choice in sport.

"He and she, or the parents, must still have the free choice," said the German. "So a guy who is then maybe

identified as a great athlete in wrestling must still have the chance to play tennis and cannot be sorted out from these sports."

Former Olympic skiing champion Lindsey Vonn, who also spoke at the London event, said AI would be a vital tool for talent identification, particularly in nations without the resources to scout talent.

"You can give them access to AI through a cell phone and you do a series of tests and they can identify 'OK this athlete would be a great, a 40-metre dash sprinter, or this athlete would potentially be an amazing high jumper,'" she said.

"You have the ability then to find the talent and give them resources through things they already have like a cell phone."

AFP



# Title fight remains tight

## FOOTBALL

AFP

Arsenal shrugged off the disappointment of their Champions League exit to move back to the top of the Premier League with a 2-0 win at Wolves last Saturday (Apr 20).

Arsenal's season was in danger of coming completely off the rails after a three-game winless run.

Mikel Arteta's men lost 2-0 at home to Aston Villa on Apr 14, their first Premier League defeat in 2024, in between a Champions League quarter-final elimination by Bayern Munich.

However, goals from Leandro Trossard and Martin Odegaard saw them bounce back and regain top spot in the table.

"Massive win for us," said Arsenal captain Odegaard.

"Still a long way to go, still tight in the race, so today was all about getting back to business."

Liverpool are level with the Gunners on 74 points after they beat Fulham 3-1 last Sunday, although they occupy second place based on goal difference.

Jurgen Klopp's side had also endured a tough time of late, crashing out of the Europa League quarter-finals against Atalanta and suffering a damaging Premier League defeat at home to Crystal Palace the previous weekend.

However, goals from Trent Alexander-Arnold, Diogo Jota and Ryan Gravenberch, his first in the Premier League



Leandro Trossard (No.19) opens the scoring for Arsenal. Photo: AFP

for the club, saw the Reds' title chase regain momentum.

Manchester City are one point behind Arsenal and Liverpool but with a game in hand.

Aston Villa tightened their grip on Champions League football next season with a 3-1 win over Bournemouth, only days after they booked their place in the Europa Conference League semi-finals with a win against Lille.

Victory takes Villa six points clear of fifth-placed Tottenham. Spurs have two games in hand but still have to play all of the title challengers, Manchester City, Arsenal and Liverpool.

David Moyes' future as West Ham manager looks more uncertain after they were thrashed 5-2 at Crystal Palace, while Luton's hopes of survival suffered a major setback as they were hammered

5-1 at home by Brentford.

The Hatters are in 18<sup>th</sup> place on 25 points, one point adrift of Nottingham Forest who lost 2-0 at Everton in a highly controversial clash.

The official Nottingham Forest account on social media platform X called into question the Premier League's integrity by claiming the VAR official is a fan of relegation rivals Luton.

"We warned the PGMOL (referees' governing body) that the VAR is a Luton fan before the game but they didn't change him," Forest said in a statement said.

"Our patience has been tested multiple times. NFFC will now consider its options."

Burnley are now within two points of Luton and three of survival after cruising to a 4-1 victory at rock bottom Sheffield United.



Hojlund. Photo: AFP

## FA Cup Final an all Manchester affair

### FOOTBALL

THIS SEASON'S FA CUP Final will be an all Manchester affair after City and United both won their respective semi-finals last weekend.

City managed to bounce back from their Champions League quarter-final exit to Real Madrid as Bernardo Silva's late goal sunk Chelsea at Wembley.

The winning goal served as redemption for Portuguese playmaker Silva after his missed penalty played a key part in City's shoot out loss to Real only three days prior.

However, Pep Guardiola's men rode their luck in a game that saw Chelsea striker Nicolas Jackson miss a host of chances for the London club.

It means the Premier League and FA Cup double is still on the cards for Guardiola

in what will be a repeat of last year's final against bitter rivals United.

Erik Ten Hag's team needed a penalty shoot out to scrape past Championship side Coventry City in what was a modern-day classic semi-final clash.

United had cruised to a 3-0 lead with only 20 minutes remaining before the Sky Blues mounted their impressive comeback to level the scores at full time.

It could have been far worse for United as Victor Torp's effort in injury time of extra time was ruled out for offside by video assistant referee Peter Banks.

Coventry captain Ben Sheaf missed his spot kick, allowing Rasmus Hojlund to win it for United and set up the final showdown with neighbours City on May 25.

The Phuket News



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# Sport



**Manchester FA Cup final clash > p15**

## DUAL POWER

### Two comps at once no probs for team Dojo

The team celebrate their victory on the podium at the Thailand National Jiu Jitsu Championships. Photo: Supplied



#### MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

**Ben Tirebuck**

editor3@classactmedia.co.th

The much-heralded team of young athletes from the Dojo at Blue Tree Phuket have outdone themselves once again by triumphing in two separate national tournaments that were held at the same time.

Led by head instructor Alexis Plantard, the team competed in both the Thailand National Judo and National Jiu Jitsu Championships on the weekend of Apr 5-7 in Bangkok and managed to secure a staggering 56-medal haul overall.

The judo competition was held in the morning of each day with 13 athletes from the Dojo team competing against over 600 fighters from more than 100 other clubs around the country.

A superb collective performance across both days of competition saw the team not only win 4 gold medals, 3 silvers and 4 bronze, but also maintain their position as top-ranked team nationally in the under-12 age classification, an honour the team won last year in Nakhon Sri Thammarat.

Not content with their impressive feat, and demonstrating their outstanding stamina and commitment, the 13-member team then raced across the capital on both days to join 12 other colleagues from the Dojo to compete as one team in the National Jiu Jitsu Championships at Rangsit University.

There the Dojo team performed outstandingly well to secure a fourth place finish overall across all age and divisions against 84 clubs and 1,400 athletes, securing 11 gold medals, 13 silver and 21 bronze in the process.

Of note was young student Lea

who won three gold medals and a special trophy for best athlete in her age group. Lead instructor Alexis also won three gold medals and a special trophy for best adult athlete.

#### 'NEXT GENERATION'

Understandably, coach Alexis was very proud of his students, especially with them taking on two tournaments effectively at the same time.

"We are the only club that did both events," he told *The Phuket News*.

"The judo and jiu jitsu federations are separate, competing entities altogether. It is why the tournaments were on the same weekend, to effectively force clubs and athletes to choose one of the two sports.

"To compete in both was a logistical challenge for our team, absolutely," he explained. "The two venues were 40km apart in Bangkok. When the team won in the judo they

did not even get chance to take to the podium to collect their medals or celebrate as they had to jump straight into a taxi and head across town to compete in the jiu jitsu competition!

"Fortunately my assistant coach was able to base himself at the jiu jitsu venue and oversee the team before I and the others were able to join him later in the day."

Alexis also explained that typically students will select one or the other when it comes to the different disciplines. "Usually judo students do not compete in jiu jitsu and vice versa, mainly due to the different intricacies of each sport. However, I purposefully encourage my students to step out of their comfort zone, to test themselves."

It is an admirable tactic and one that is clearly paying dividends. In addition to their sparkling displays in judo and jiu jitsu, the Dojo team also claimed the top titles in the

12-14 age groups at the Thailand Kurash Wrestling Championships in Phitsanulok province in May last year.

What the team have achieved with just 25 athletes in a small 170 square metre gym tucked away in a corner of the Blue Tree complex is hugely impressive. Alexis ensures nobody rests on their laurels and is continually looking to improve. Next up five of the Dojo team head to the French National Judo Championships in May before seven of the team compete in the US Judo Open Championships in July.

"The Dojo will produce the next generation of world and Olympic champions, I am sure of that," Alexis says. "It is time to make history."

*Everyone is welcome at the Dojo to learn judo, jujitsu, wrestling and self-defence. All levels and all ages. For more info visit: [dojo@bluetree.fun](mailto:dojo@bluetree.fun)*

## Phuket to offer internationally accredited swimming scholarship programs

#### SWIMMING

THE SPORTS AUTHORITY of Thailand (SAT) has confirmed it is partnering with Phuket-based Thanyapura Sports & Health Resort to develop and offer an international swimming scholarship program accredited by the World Aquatics Federation.

The official Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed at the Thanyapura campus in Thalung on Apr 11 in an official ceremony overseen by SAT Governor Dr Kongsak Yodmanee, who was joined by: Yaowareet Khanpakdee, Chief

Executive Officer of Thanyapura Phuket; Marisa Yenbamrung, Executive Director of Thanyapura Phuket; Norasak Suksomboon, Phuket Vice Governor; Surasak Kerdchantuek, Deputy Governor for Sports Excellence and Sports Science; and Sittichai Chantawat, President of Thepkasattri Subdistrict Administrative Organisation.

Ms Yenbamrung, explained how Thanyapura Phuket is honoured to be able to offer a program that is endorsed by such a renowned sports organisation as the World Aquatics Federation, which is itself officially certified by the International Olympic Committee.

She added that the Thanyapura



Photo: SAT

campus will offer the perfect facilities to serve as a training centre for international swimmers who receive training scholarships from the World Aquatics-endorsed scholarship program, which will also be certified by the Swimming Association of Thailand and the SAT.

Athletes who receive such training scholarships will have passed strict selection protocols laid down by the World Aquatics Federation committee, which aims to develop athletes to represent their respective countries at world-class sports events such as the Olympic Games and World Aquatics Championships.

The program also further demonstrates Thailand and Phuket's reputation as a world leader in the provision of comprehensive sports development training and as a leading example of sports and health tourism for the general public, Ms Yenbamrung added.

Dr Kongsak echoed these

sentiments, pointing to the fact the program will further strengthen Thailand and Phuket's reputation as a leading destination for sports tourism.

He added that the program can help aspiring athletes reach their potential which can then inspire others across the country to follow their sporting dreams.

Dr Kongsak further explained that the swimming scholarship program is also an excellent opportunity for a wide range of organisations from the public and private sectors to collaborate to ensure the outcome is a successful one that can benefit all involved.

*The Phuket News*