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HEAVY LOAD



Assistant Minister of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) Naraphat Kaewthong inspects the Pak Bang Canal in Kamala before joining the 'Andaman Sustainable Tourism Forum'. Photo: PR Phuket

13MN TOURISTS A YEAR IS 'JUST RIGHT', SAYS GOVERNOR

The Phuket News
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Phuket officials have set their sights on generating a half a trillion baht from tourism this year, raising serious concerns about the impact on the island's already overloaded infrastructure.

According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), at least 13.14 million tourists visited, generating a minimum of B497bn in revenue. For this year, Governor Sophon Suwannarat said that the goal has been set at B500bn.

"Of the 35.5mn international arrivals [to Thailand] last year,

more than 13mn were in Phuket, making the island a very important destination for generating income for the country, and second only to Bangkok," he told the *Bangkok Post*.

"Phuket does not need too many tourists. About 13mn visitors a year is considered just right. What we want is for tourists to stay longer and spend more here," he added.

As Phuket will host the World Sustainable Tourism Council conference next year, the island will implement projects and measures to address the impact of tourism – including inappropriate behaviour by tourists and the increasing levels of rubbish and water pollution – in

order to demonstrate its commitment to sustainable tourism initiatives, he said.

He also urged all tourists to respect local laws and culture. He cited an example from last year when a drunk Russian visitor walked into the Phuket Governor's office and stole a pair of shoes; the visitor was imprisoned for nine months and had his visa revoked.

In the same year, immigration officers invalidated the visas of almost 400 foreign tourists.

UP THE CREEK

Regarding waste management, Governor Sophon noted that

Phuket is currently able to treat 85,862 cubic metres of wastewater per day, although this does not cover the entire province – tacitly admitting that untreated wastewater flows into the waters around Phuket.

Consequently, the province has collaborated with the China Water Environment Group (CWEG) on a feasibility study for installing additional wastewater treatment systems at 10 locations on the island – repeating on the national stage news already confirmed last year, but with work still yet to actually start.

These projects aim to support...

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Vagabonds' dad honoured with win in Krabi



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News



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Police dodge failure to arrest taxi thugs

CHERNG TALAY Police say they have identified two men who threatened a metered taxi driver for picking up two foreigners at Boat Avenue earlier this month, but have yet to confirm any legal action against the two aggressors.

Phudit Sa-atphan, a legally registered metered taxi driver, has since posted online calls for police to step up their efforts after he filed a complaint with Cherg Talay Police on Feb 8.

The incident occurred at Boat Avenue at about 10:30pm, Mr Phudit said in his Feb 8 complaint.

He was driving by when two foreigners inside the Boat Avenue area waved him to come and pick them up. He did so, and they asked him to drop them off in the Laguna area.

However, as he tried to exit the Boat Avenue area, two men from a nearby taxi queue approached him on motorbikes and questioned why – and what right he had – to pick up passengers at



Photos: Supplied

Boat Avenue. The threats ensued, and were recorded on video, which were later posted online.

Fearing for his safety, Mr Phudit immediately reported the incident at Cherg Talay Police Station.

In his post calling for justice, said he had not been informed of any progress in the case.

Responding to heavy criticism online, Cherg Talay Police Chief Pol Col Wiraphong Rakkhito last Sunday (Feb 23) said the two suspects had been identified as Preecha 'Kim' Leo-in and Somsak 'Games' Taveesin.

Officers are now working to locate the pair and bring them in for questioning as part of the ongoing legal proceedings, Pol Col Wiraphong said.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Policeman in armed robbery, kidnapping

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Three suspects, including a police sergeant, have been arrested in connection with an armed robbery and kidnapping in the early hours of last Saturday (Feb 22).

The suspects held two Vietnamese nationals at gunpoint, forcing them to transfer money before police intervened, explained a formal report issued by Phuket City Police Chief Pol Col Pratuang Pholmana.

The three suspects were identified as Sgt Thongchai Somjai, 43, a resident of Lat Phrao in Bangkok; Chat Mongkol Puangkam, 36, from Lampang Province; and Ghasemi Afshin, 35, an Iranian national.

Of note, while the report of the "serious and shocking crime" gave Sgt Thongchai's Thai government ID number, the report did not confirm at which police station Sgt Thongchai was stationed at the time of his arrest.



Photo: Phuket City Police

They were apprehended at the scene along with a Volkswagen van, registered in Ayutthaya.

The crime began last Friday night (Feb 21), when police were informed that an unidentified group had detained two Vietnamese men inside a van with firearms.

In response, law enforcement officers coordinated efforts to track down the vehicle. By 12:30am on Saturday (Feb 22), officers located the van parked at a hotel on Khaw Sim Bee Rd, which leads from Mae Luan Rd up to the top of Khao Rang.

On arrival, officers from the Phuket City Police and the Phuket Provincial Police confronted the suspects, ordering those outside the van to surrender.

A search of the vehicle led to the discovery of three firearms and ammunition: a Smith & Wesson .22-calibre revolver with six rounds of ammunition; a modified revolver with four rounds; and a modified semi-automatic firearm with four rounds of .38-calibre ammunition.

Sgt Thongchai admitted ownership of the first firearm, but the suspects denied possession of the

other two weapons. The three men were immediately taken into custody.

Preliminary investigations suggest that the two Vietnamese victims were engaged in the cannabis trade in Phatthalung, Pol Col Pratuang said.

They had met the suspects at the hotel on Feb 20 and, after striking up a business relationship, agreed to discuss a potential deal further.

The next day (Feb 21), the victims accompanied the suspects to a condominium in Chalong. However, once inside the van, the suspects allegedly brandished a firearm and demanded a transfer of B350,000.

After negotiations, the victims managed to reduce the demand to B150,000, which they arranged to be transferred through a third party.

The transfer was set to take place at the Khao Rang Place hotel parking lot, but before the money exchange could be completed, police arrived on the scene and arrested the suspects.

Volume of tourists deemed 'acceptable' in maintaining sustainability

Continued from page 1

...urban growth and address environmental issues that hinder the development of world-class tourism cities, Governor Sophon noted.

"In March, we will sign an MoU with CWEG in China for the wastewater management project," he said.

Phuket generates roughly 1,100 tonnes of solid refuse per day, of which 700 tonnes are processed, Governor Sophon added.

A second incinerator is to be built at the Phuket City Municipality [Phuket Solid Waste Disposal Centre and landfill site at Saphan Hin], with a capacity of around 500 tonnes per day. As a result, Phuket will have a total capacity to manage up to 1,200 tonnes of garbage per day.

However, more will be needed, and the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation has been asked to build an additional incinerator capable of processing

another 500 tonnes a day to support waste management for another ten years, he said.

Phuket will also continue to invest in infrastructure and public services, as well as improve safety and the quality of life for its residents and visitors.

"We hope these projects will help Phuket become a liveable city and efficiently welcome tourists from around the world," he said.

KNEE-JERK

Governor Sophon's comments about Phuket's sustainability came as the Assistant Minister of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE), Naraphat Kaewthong, during his visit to Phuket last week saw firsthand the black water flowing in the main canal in Kamala, which empties out across Kamala beach and into the sea.

Accompanied by Kathu District Chief Akkarapol Suttirak Chittsuphap, Phuket Provincial



Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat at the 'Andaman Sustainable Tourism Forum'.
Photo: PR Phuket

Natural Resources and Environment Office Director Surasak Anusorn and other government officials, Mr Naraphat on Feb 20 inspected operations aimed at tackling wastewater pollution at popular tourist destination Kamala Beach.

During the visit, Mr Naraphat stated that the inspection was conducted under the directive of the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, who has apparently prioritised continuous monitoring of wastewater management in Phuket.

While progress has been made, Mr Naraphat acknow-

ledged that further measures are necessary due to the "prolonged nature of the problem", said an official report of Mr Naraphat's visit.

Exactly what progress had been made was not explained in the report.

Local agencies assured that a wastewater treatment system would be completed within one month, promising a long-term solution, the official report assured.

However, officials observed that significant sediment remained in the area, which continued to mix with water being discharged into the sea. Mr Naraphat emphasised that the ministry would coordinate with relevant agencies to urgently address this issue.

In the long term, local authorities, including district chiefs and the Phuket Governor, have committed to sustained efforts in monitoring and resolving the wastewater problem, Mr Naraphat was told.

LOOKING GOOD

Mr Naraphat was in Phuket to join the Andaman Sustainable Tourism Forum 2025 held at the Phuket Merlin Hotel in Phuket Town, also on Feb 20.

The event was described as marking a significant step in promoting eco-friendly tourism, with the signing of the 'Green Hotel Plus Phuket Sandbox' agreement to enhance environmental standards in the region's tourism sector.

Komes Phutthasorn, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Climate Change and Environment, signed the agreement alongside representatives from nine major agencies. The initiative aims to establish Phuket as a Green Destination in ASEAN by improving the environmental standards of hotels and tourism operations, explained an official report of the event.

Governor Sophon welcomed key stakeholders, including Bhumikitti Ruktaengam.

Freedom change to allow vendors

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Businesses and small vendors will be allowed to operate on an area of more than 41 rai at Freedom Beach that has been reclassified by the Royal Forest Department as 'Recreational Forest'.

Deputy Director-General Bannarak Sermthong confirmed to *The Phuket News* that the reclassification of the area was announced by public notice on Jan 31, and came into effect on publication in the Royal Gazette on Feb 19.

According to Mr Bannarak, the designation aims to protect and manage the national reserve forest while allowing for public recreational use.

"The area remains a reserve forest under the law, but it is now a service zone for ecotourism," Mr Bannarak explained.

"Facilities like a service centre and toilets can now be made available at the site, and entrance fees to the area can be collected under Royal Forest Department regulations, similar to national parks," he added.

Mr Bannarak played down the impact allowing business operations in a protected forest area would have.

"It must be assessed from a

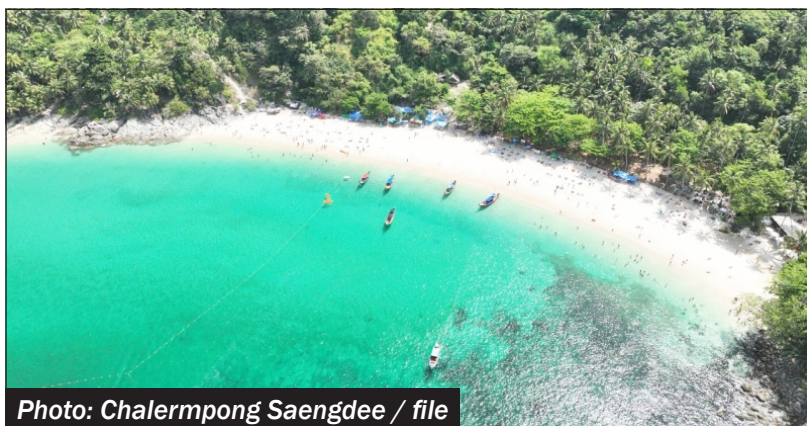


Photo: Chalermpong Saengdee / file

business welfare perspective and follow the Treasury Department's regulations and criteria," he said.

Freedom Beach, which has grown increasingly popular with visitors over the years, has already made headlines with several incidents of vendors at the beach being investigated for encroachment onto national forest

EARLY DAYS

Sorasak Rananan, Director of the Royal Forest Department's Phuket Forestry Centre, confirmed that the area now declared 'recreational forest' covers 41 rai, 1 ngan and 45 square wa.

"It will be marked on-site to indicate the designated recreational sections," he said.

"The Forest Resource Management Office 12 has measured the area, and while we just an-

nounced the finalisation of the decree, marking the land on-site is still in progress," he added.

"Similar to other areas in Phuket designated 'recreational forests', such as in Bang Khanun protected forest area and at Toh Sae Hill, this designation currently does not include any fee collection. Discussions about potential fees are still ongoing," Mr Sorasak said.

Regarding business operations within the forest, Mr Bannarak stated that no businesses have been granted permission yet, as discussions on regulations and zoning are still in progress.

"Business activities must stay in service zones and avoid unnecessary deforestation," Mr Bannarak said.

Asked whether trees or plants could be cleared for business

development, Mr Bannarak emphasised that businesses "must comply with environmental regulations".

"Tree cutting should be avoided unless absolutely necessary," he said, without elaborating.

While the area is now officially recognised as a recreational forest, many specifics remain undecided. Phuket Forestry Chief Mr Sorasak also confirmed.

"With the decree now in effect, the next steps involve finalising service fee structures, marking the designated areas and holding further discussions on potential business operations," he said.

"For now, Freedom Beach remains open to the public, but its management and future development will continue to evolve under the new regulations," he concluded.

KARON CLARITY

Karon Mayor Jadet Wicharasorn confirmed that Karon Municipality has no direct authority over Freedom Beach, as it remains under the supervision of the Royal Forest Department.

"I have already been informed of this announcement, but the municipality has no authority on Freedom Beach, which is still under the supervision of the

Royal Forest Department. Freedom Beach is still a conservation beach," he said.

He also addressed concerns about the screening process for businesses operating on other beaches under municipal jurisdiction.

"Many people have contacted us to do business [on the beaches]. We have to screen the rights of who apply first," he explained.

"The main ones to get priority must be people who are registered as living in Karon Subdistrict, meaning they are locals and poor people who hold a 'Kon Jon' card. When these qualifications are screened and verified, only a few will be left," he added.

"We give these rights because we want people to come and earn income from tourism and to distribute income from tourism throughout the community.

"However, we still consider it as temporary permission that can be cancelled at any time... It is an arrangement by Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) to promote business and organise matters so that the beaches are not damaged and the beauty is maintained," he noted.

"All of the above applies only to Karon Beach, Kata Noi Beach and Kata Yai Beach," he said.

Waste separation urgent as lone incinerator shut down

PHUKET CITY MUNICIPALITY, which operates the Phuket Solid Waste Disposal Centre and landfill site at Saphan Hin, has called for people across the island to ramp up efforts to separate their trash as the island's sole incinerator shuts down for maintenance.

The call aims to reduce the amount of hazardous waste, organic waste and recyclable waste sent for disposal at the waste disposal centre, said Phuket City Deputy Mayor Suphot La-onghet.

Deputy Mayor Mr Suphot visited the waste disposal centre on Feb 17 to discuss waste management with officials from the Phuket City Municipality Engineering Office and PJT Technology Co Ltd, which operates and maintains the incinerator at the centre.

Phuket City Municipality in November last year inked a deal to pay more than B511 million for PJT Technology to keep operating the island's only working public incinerator for the next 15 years.



Photo: Phuket City Municipality

The discussion last week focused on handling waste at landfill Pit 4 and Pit 5 while PJT Technology Co Ltd. temporarily shuts down its incinerator for renovations from Feb 18 through to Mar 19.

During this period, the incinerator can process only 300 tons of waste per day, while the city generates about 900 tons a day. As a result, the excess waste will be sent to the landfill, Mr Suphot explained.

To manage the overflow, officials are using heavy machinery to spread and distribute the waste, creating more space, he said.

The process of moving large mounds of trash will exacerbate the foul odour coming from the site, Mr Suphot noted, and apologised for the inconvenience.

The incinerator was to be shut down for maintenance from Dec 20 last year through to Jan 20 this year. However, the move to delay the shut down has kept the incinerator operating during Phuket's peak tourism season, when there is the most number of people on the island.

Mr Suphot last week also inspected machines brought in by Thaipaboon Equipment (TPB) under a B40mn contract to carry out waste separation in order to reduce the growing volume of trash accumulating at the landfill.

Mr Suphot also called on people to take greater care in disposing of dangerous items, as they will likely end up being dumped at the landfill.

Workers at the landfill have been urged to remain vigilant for the outbreak of fire after a section of the landfill site caught ablaze on Feb 16. The fire was believed to have been started by lighters or car batteries dumped in the trash. *The Phuket News*

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The Phuket News

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PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

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Wind 11 m/s

SAT MARCH 1



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Wind 11 m/s

SUN MARCH 2



High: +35°
Low: +28°

Wind 11 m/s

MON MARCH 3



High: +35°
Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s

TUE MARCH 4



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Low: +28°

Wind 4 m/s

WED MARCH 5



High: +37°
Low: +28°

Wind 4 m/s

THU MARCH 6



High: +36°
Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s



Photo: Phuket Airport Immigration

American caught at airport with 4.3kg of crystal meth

IMMIGRATION OFFICERS at Phuket International Airport have arrested a 64-year-old American woman found with 4.3 kilogrammes of crystal meth in her luggage.

The woman, identified by Immigration officers as Melba Geraldine Sharp from California, was to board Scoot Airways flight TR653 to South Korea via Singapore 8:30pm last Sunday night (Feb 23), Phuket airport immigration said in a brief report online.

According to officials, the arrest followed a tip-off about possible drug smuggling through the airport.

While screening passengers, officers flagged Ms Sharp as a high-risk traveller. As she proceeded to check in, her luggage was subjected to a detailed inspection.

Inside her suitcase, authorities found clothing, bed sheets and other personal items.

However, upon closer examination, a set of bed sheets was found to be unusually heavy. Further inspection revealed four rectangular packages wrapped in brown tape, carbon paper and plastic.

When tested, the contents were confirmed to be crystal meth (ya ice).

Sharp was immediately taken into custody and handed over to Sakhu police Station, where she was charged with attempting to smuggle a Category 1 narcotic out of the country and illegal possession of methamphetamine.

She is now facing 'further legal proceedings', airport immigration officers confirmed.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Aussies arrested for Rawai bag snatches

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Chalong Police have arrested two Australian tourists for snatching belongings from other foreign tourists in Rawai.

The suspects, named by police only as 'Mr Sam B', 25, and 'Ms Susan A', 36, were arrested at their residence after the court issued an arrest warrant, Chalong Police announced late last Friday (Feb 21).

Under the direction of Chalong Police Chief Pol Col Ekkarat Plaiduang, officers from Chalong Police, Phuket Immigration and Phuket Tourist Police carried out the operation, leading to the arrest of the suspects.

According to the report by Chalong Police, at about 9:30pm on Wednesday (Feb 19), two foreign victims were robbed of their handbags by two individuals on a white and red Honda PCX motorcycle near a 7-Eleven at the entrance of Soi Samakkee 4 in the Saiyuan area.

Later that night, around 10:29pm, another victim



Photo: Chalong Police

was targeted in front of a Thai massage shop on the Rawai beach road, where their mobile phone was snatched by the same perpetrators.

Police reviewed CCTV footage from both crime scenes and identified the suspects using the same motorcycle.

Further investigation revealed that the vehicle had been rented by 'Mr Sam B'.

Officers gathered sufficient evidence to request an arrest warrant from the Phuket Provincial Court, and at about 9:30am last Friday, officers arrested the couple at their residence, the location of which was not reported.

Seized as key items of evidence was the Phuket-registered white-and-red Honda PCX motorbike used in the crimes, and the clothing worn by the suspects on the day of the incidents.

Both suspects have been charged with 'jointly snatching property using a vehicle to facilitate the crime, escape, or evade arrest', Chalong Police confirmed.

Chalong Police urged tourists to remain cautious and safeguard their belongings while in public areas. Anyone witnessing suspicious behaviour is encouraged to report it to Chalong Police Station at 076-381247.

'Off-duty' police hurt in crash

TWO KAMALA POLICE officers were injured after losing control of their motorbike and crashing into a power pole in Thalang early on Feb 21.

Thalang Police were informed of the accident, in front of Ko Beng Market in Ban Pon, Srisoonthorn, at 3:56am.

Officers and rescue workers arrived to find Pol Sgt Arunop Mankan, 25, with a fractured skull and a severe leg injury, while Pol Sgt Phasakon Thongthung, 30, suffered a broken arm.

Both officers were conscious and able to communicate. They were provided first aid then transported to Thalang Hospital.

Police reported that the officers were not on duty at the time of the accident. The two officers were returning from an assignment outside their



Photo: Thalang Police

jurisdiction when the crash occurred.

They were riding a grey and black Honda ADV160 with a red license plate, with Pol Sgt Arunop driving and Pol Sgt Phasakon as the passenger. Despite reports that both men were wearing helmets, the two officers suffered significant injuries when Pol Sgt Arunop lost control of the motorbike on a curve along the Baan Khao Lan - Bang Jo road.

Police noted that they had recorded the incident and will proceed with insurance procedures for medical treatment.

Eakkapop Thongtub

King cobra attempts to flee

A DRAMATIC MOMENT unfolded in Kamala last Saturday night (Feb 22) when rescue workers were transferring a captured king cobra to a new holding container, only for the large snake to slip free, sparking a frantic effort to contain it.

The king cobra was caught at a hotel in Kamala earlier in the day.

The Phuket Kusoldharm Foundation shared online a 17-second clip showing the tense situation with the cobra slipping free.

The video was posted with the caption reading, "A thrilling moment at night. We were about to change the snake tank and were chased after by a large group of people after catching it from a hotel in Kamala."

Rescue workers from the Kusoldharm Phuket's Kuan Yang rescue unit had captured the snake from the hotel and were transporting it to the Phuket Kusoldharm Foundation's Kuan Yang station in Patong.



Photo: Kusoldharm Foundation Phuket

The plan was to hold the snake until officers from Khao Phra Thaeo Wildlife Sanctuary could retrieve it and release it back into the wild.

However, during the transfer, the snake managed to escape, prompting rescuers to scramble to recapture it.

After the video was posted online, netizens flooded the comments with reactions ranging from fear to amusement. Some wrote, "Very scary," while others joked about lottery numbers, saying, "The number must come".

The king cobra was eventually secured, and wildlife officials later took custody of the reptile to release it safely back into its natural habitat.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Phuket to host youths from the troubled Deep South

The Phuket News
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Phuket officials are making preparations to host youths from the Deep South so the youngsters can experience life on the Andaman coast.

The 'San Jai Thai Su Jai Tai' project aims to support disadvantaged youths from Thailand's five southern border provinces, Phuket Provincial Chief Administrative Officer (Palad) Thiraphong Chuaychu explained at a meeting held at Phuket Provincial Hall last week.

The meeting, on Feb 19, was attended by the project's steering committee and representatives from relevant government agencies.

The 'San Jai Thai Su Jai Tai' project, organised by the San Jai Thai Su Jai Tai Foundation, will take place in April 2025 across Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi.

The initiative will provide 120 youths from Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun and Songkhla who face economic hardship, loss of family, educational disadvantages or are affected by regional unrest an opportunity to learn and exchange experiences in the Andaman coast provinces.

Participants, aged 15-19 and enrolled in public or private



Photo: PR Phuket

educational institutions, will stay with 20 host families in Phuket for 15 days, with two youths per family, Mr Thiraphong explained.

The Phuket Provincial Office has established a steering committee to oversee the project, with a Vice Governor serving as chairman and the Palad, Mr Thiraphong as a member.

Their responsibilities include guiding the project, monitoring its progress, and ensuring the selection of suitable host families across the province.

Mr Thiraphong explained that the selection process covers three districts: Mueang Phuket (seven families and one reserve), Thalang (seven families and one reserve) and Kathu (six families and one reserve).

Attendees at the meeting also addressed plans for educational visits

in Phuket, including trips to the Phuket Old Town community, the iconic Chinpracha House museum and the Thai Hua Museum.

"These activities aim to provide the youth with a deeper understanding of Phuket's cultural and historical heritage," Mr Thiraphong said.

"The 'San Jai Thai Su Jai Tai' project plays a crucial role in fostering understanding and strengthening relationships between youth from the southern border region and other parts of the country.

"By providing educational opportunities and cultural exchanges, the initiative aims to equip young people with the skills and experiences needed to contribute positively to their communities and the nation," Mr Thiraphong concluded.

Laem Krathing blaze razes popular hillside

FIREFIGHTERS AND emergency response teams were called on to battle a wildfire that broke out at Laem Krathing in Rawai throughout the night on Feb 20.

By the next morning, the fire, which spread over about five rai, was partially under control, with officials maintaining 24-hour surveillance to prevent further outbreaks.

According to officials, the fire broke out at about 8:20pm, quickly spreading across 500 metres of hillside land at the tourist-popular cape.

Due to the terrain, fire trucks and large machinery could not access the area, forcing responders to fight the blaze on foot using fire batons and by creating firebreaks to contain the flames.

Phuket Vice Governor Ronnarong Thipsiri directed the Phuket Provincial Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Office (DDPM Phuket) to coordinate with the Phuket Forest Fire Control Station and the Third Naval Area Command to manage the situation.



Photo: PR Phuket

Initial assessments confirm that no tourists or residents were stranded in the affected area on the hillside.

Officials reported that high humidity in the area has helped slow the fire's spread. Winds also worked against the flames, preventing further expansion.

Firefighting teams last Friday (Feb 21) continued to reinforce firebreaks, spray water and use air blowers to control the situation.

Officials determined that an evacuation of tourists was not currently necessary, as the fire remained at a safe distance from nearby hotels. However, hotel staff and management were instructed to remain on alert, with an evacuation plan ready should conditions change.

The Phuket News

Rotary gifts B1.9mn X-ray machine to Thalang Hospital

ROTARY CLUB OF Meuang Rae Phuket, known by its Rotary designation as District 3330, in collaboration with its partners, has donated a B1.9 million X-ray machine to Thalang Hospital to enhance its medical capabilities.

The handover ceremony took place on Feb 20, with Phuket Governor Sophon Suwanarat presiding over the event.

The donation, a 630 mA ceiling-mounted X-ray machine, aims to improve the hospital's diagnostic efficiency to accommodate the increasing number of patients, said an official report of the handover.

The project was supported by the Rotary Meuang Rae Phuket, with Chanya Tonsakul, President of the Club, and Lim Jae Su, Representative of the Rotary Club of Seongnam District 3600, South Korea, playing key roles in the procurement.

Dr Banphot Pankluea, Director of Thalang Hospital, formally accepted the equipment on behalf of the institution.



Photo: PR Phuket

Governor Sophon commended the collaboration between the government, private sector and "civil society" in strengthening Phuket's public health infrastructure.

He highlighted the importance of this donation in enhancing Thalang Hospital's ability to provide quality medical services, particularly as patient numbers – including tourists – continue to rise.

Thalang Hospital, a 60-bed facility, serves an average of 17,000 inpatients and 160,000 outpatients annually, including around 12,000 foreign tourists.

To further extend healthcare services, the hospital has donated its two original ceiling-mounted X-ray machines to Phuket Provincial Prison for medical screening of

inmates. Currently, the hospital provides screening services at the prison twice a week.

The X-ray machine and the renovation of the X-ray room were funded under the 'Global Grant' project, supported by the Rotary Club of Phuket Mines in collaboration with the Rotary Club of Seongnam District 3600 (South Korea), the Rotary Club of Jungceylon Phuket and Big Island.

Additional funding came from the charity concert 'Queens Return The Legends Concert', featuring Christina Aguilera and Marsha Wattanapanich on May 18, 2024.

Looking ahead, the Rotary Club of Meuang Rae Phuket and its partners are organising another charity concert on May 9, 2025, featuring renowned artists Mai Charoenpura and Am Saowalak. The event aims to raise funds to support public health, education and community development projects in the coming year.

The Phuket News

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Insurance industry forecast to increase

THAILAND'S INSURANCE industry is projected to grow by 2-3% this year, driven by increasing public awareness of rising medical inflation, an ageing society and the extension of the health insurance coverage age to 80, says the Thai Life Assurance Association (TLAA).

Medical treatment costs in Thailand have averaged 8-10% increases per year, with some years reaching 15%, much higher than general consumer inflation.

The transition to an aged society further drives the growth of health and critical illness insurance, said TLAA President Nusara Banyatpiyaphod.

However, the growth rate for this year is expected to be lower than in 2024, when total premiums increased 3.23% to B654 billion, she said.

New business premiums totalled B184bn, up 3.28%, while renewal premiums gained 3.21% to B470bn, while the policy retention rate was 83%.

First-year premiums totalled B120bn, up 6.81%, while single-year premiums



Photo: Bangkok Post

amounted to B64.3bn, down 2.71%.

“Economic and social factors along with the growing health-conscious trend were drivers of life insurance business growth. This is particularly evident in rising demand for health and critical illness insurance,” said Ms Nusara, also chief executive of Ocean Life Insurance.

Health and critical illness insurance premiums soared 13.7% last year to B125bn, representing 19.1% of total premiums. Life insurance premiums increased 8.93% to B111bn, accounting for 16.9%, while endowment insurance edged up 0.76% to B282bn, representing 43.2%.

Agency sales grew 2.32% to B347bn, a 53% share, followed by bancassurance at B246bn, making up 37.5%, a gain of 2.67%.

Bangkok Post

Thai firms to roll out own GenAI this year

Bangkok Post

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) will reach the deployment stage for business value this year, transitioning from use in pilot projects in 2024, according to Amazon Web Services (AWS) Thailand.

GenAI will move towards agentic AI, referring to the use of multiple models and multi-modal applications in text, video and images, with AI policies and standards, says the local operating unit of the global cloud service provider.

Last month the company launched the AWS Asia-Pacific (Thailand) Region, its new Thai data centre region, as part of its long-term investment of more than US\$5 billion (more than B168.232bn) in the country.

AWS Thailand said customers are cautiously spending their IT budget in a weak economy, measuring their return on investment to



Mr Vatsun says the GenAI trend is linked to agentic AI, which is an autonomous system. Image: via Bangkok Post

increase productivity, according to country manager Vatsun Thirapatarapong.

A forecast by global IT research house IDC found Thai organisations are expected to spend US\$2bn on cloud systems this year, representing 12% of their total IT spending.

A 2024 Frost & Sullivan report projected cloud spending in Thailand will grow by almost 20% annually, reaching US\$4.6bn by 2029.

This shows there is room for growth in cloud services, said Mr Vatsun.

AWS Thailand will continue to drive adoption of its cloud service, which can help customers reduce the costs of adoption by 10-15% compared with using the company's own cloud service in Singapore.

A Thailand-based cloud presence is important to businesses in the country as it ensures data remains secure and complies with domestic regulations, Mr Vatsun noted.

He said this year firms are using GenAI for business value with tangible results, a shift from use in

pilot projects last year and proof of concept in 2023.

GenAI can automate, augment and accelerate tasks across the value chain, driving significant profit and cost optimisation, according to AWS.

For example, in software engineering it helps achieve 6-20% production cost reduction, and increases developer productivity by 50-55% in the R&D domain.

In supply chain management, GenAI can help attain up to 10% procurement cost savings.

According to Statista, Thailand's GenAI market is projected to reach US\$312 million in 2025 and expand at a compound annual growth rate of 41.5% until 2030, resulting in a market volume of US\$1.8bn by that year.

Mr Vatsun said the GenAI trend is linked to agentic AI – an autonomous intelligent system performing specific tasks without human intervention.

WINDOW ON PHUKET

The April-May 2025
hard copy issue goes to print very soon

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Local bank loans contraction plunges to 15-year-old record

THE BANKING INDUSTRY RECORDED its highest level of loan contraction in 15 years in 2024, driven by tighter loan approvals amid borrowers' weaker debt repayment ability, according to an executive at the Bank of Thailand.

In 2024, total loans in the banking sector contracted by 0.4% year-on-year, marking a second year of decline following a 0.3% contraction in 2023, according to central bank data.

Suwannee Jatsadasak, assistant governor of the central bank's supervision group, said last year's loan contraction was primarily driven by declines in small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) loans and retail loans.

SME loans shrank by 5%, while auto leasing loans fell by 9.9% and credit card loans dipped 2.3%.

Personal loan growth slowed to 1.3% in 2024, down from 3.7% the previous year, while mortgage growth edged up marginally to 0.3%.

Corporate loans gained 3.4% year-on-year in 2024.

Ms Suwannee attributed the loan contraction to banks' heightened caution in approving new loans due to rising credit risk among borrowers, as well as ongoing debt deleveraging.

The central bank will continue monitoring loan expansion in the banking industry this year, though it does not anticipate significant loan growth, she said.

Despite the overall contraction, the sector's non-performing loan (NPL) ratio



People seek consultations about how to settle their debts at an event in January last year. Photo: Apichart Jinakul / Bangkok Post

improved, declining to 2.78% last year from 2.97% in 2023.

The uptick was attributed to debt restructuring measures under the Bank of Thailand's responsible lending approach.

The recent debt relief initiative dubbed 'You Fight, We Help' is expected to further mitigate bad debt, said Ms Suwannee. As of Jan 30, about 630,000 borrowers had registered for the programme, but only 38% were deemed eligible, roughly 240,000.

She said the central bank is monitoring registration after the deadline was extended from Feb 28 to April 30. “We expect the number of eligible registrants to increase. The programme supports debt repayment for vulnerable borrowers and should ease the country's household debt-to-GDP ratio in the coming period,” said Ms Suwannee.

She said home loan borrowers represent a key segment of the initiative, and mortgage NPLs are expected to continue declining after rising to 3.88% in the fourth quarter of last year, up from 3.82% in the previous quarter,” *Bangkok Post*

Thaksin apologies for 'Tak Bai'

NARATHIWAT

AFP

Former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra apologised last Sunday (Feb 23) over the deaths of scores of Muslim protesters who suffocated in army trucks two decades ago in the country's south.

The apology is believed to be the first he has made in public over the incident known as the "Tak Bai massacre" and comes nearly four months after the statute of limitations expired and murder charges against seven suspects were dropped.

The massacre has long stood as an emblem of state impunity in Thailand's Muslim-majority southernmost provinces, where an insurgency has rumbled for years between government forces and separatists seeking greater autonomy for a region that is culturally and religiously distinct from the Buddhist-majority country.

Thaksin, who was premier at the time of the massacre, said he wanted to apologise for any actions that may have made people "feel uneasy".

"When I was a prime minister, I had a strong intention to care for local people," he said, when asked about the massacre during his first visit to the area known as the "deep south" in 19 years.

"If there was any mistake or any discontent caused by me, I would like to apologise."



Thaksin arrives at Narathiwat airport on Feb 22. Photo: supplied

Anchana Heemmina, co-founder of Thai rights group Duay Jai, said it was the first time Thaksin had apologised.

"If he is sincere (about the apology), he should (also) say sorry to the families... face to face," she said.

On Oct 25, 2004, security forces opened fire on a crowd protesting outside a police station in the town of Tak Bai in Narathiwat province, close to the Malaysian border, killing seven people.

Subsequently, 78 people suffocated after they were arrested and stacked on top of each other in the back of Thai military trucks, face down and with their hands tied behind their backs.

In August last year, a provincial court accepted a criminal case filed by victims' families against seven officials, including a former army commander elected to parliament for

the Shinawatras' Pheu Thai party in 2023.

But the officials avoided appearing in court, preventing the case from progressing, and in October Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra – Thaksin's daughter – said it was not possible to extend the statute of limitations.

The case has become synonymous with a lack of accountability in a region governed by emergency laws and flooded with army and police units.

No member of the Thai security forces has ever been jailed for extrajudicial killings or torture in the "deep south", despite years of allegations of abuses across the region.

The conflict has seen more than 7,000 people killed since January 2004.

Cabinet 'unlikely' to back casino entry rule

BANGKOK

THE LATEST ENTRY requirement for Thai nationals to enter casinos, as proposed by the Council of State (CoS), is unlikely to gain approval by the Cabinet, Interior Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said on Feb 20.

Anutin was referring to a proposed requirement for Thais to have at least B50 million in fixed deposit accounts for a minimum six months before being permitted to enter a casino entertainment complex.

Pakorn Nilrapunt, secretary-general of the CoS, previously said that the requirement would limit gambling to those with financial means, adding the draft's contents are subject to further review based on feedback received.

The CoS official suggested that officials should be on track to present the revised draft to the Cabinet within 50 days of the conclusion of the feedback period of Mar 1.

Mr Pakorn said the Entertainment Complex Bill



Police raid a gambling den in Nakhon Nayok. Photo: Supplied

focuses on foreign tourism, with strict measures proposed to exclude most Thais from being patrons of the complex due to gambling concerns.

Deputy Finance Minister Julapun Amornvivat previously explained that the bill aims to tackle illegal gambling, attract foreign investment and boost the economy.

If the proposed requirement becomes effective, that would mean the majority of Thais would be unable to enter a legal local casino, prompting them to continue visiting illegal gambling dens or casinos in neighbouring countries, he said. *Bangkok Post*

Thai Immigration biometric system no longer functioning

BANGKOK

THE IMMIGRATION BUREAU failed to collect the biometric data of about 17 million travellers who entered and exited Thailand last year after the system reached its maximum capacity, according to People's Party deputy leader Rangsiman Rome.

"Thailand currently does not utilise the biometric system for border control security. This lack of data collection poses a significant risk of criminals re-entering the country," Mr Rangsiman, who chairs the House Committee on National Security, Border Affairs, National Strategy and Reform, said on Feb 21.

"Throughout the entire year of 2024 and up to today, there has been no actual collection of biometric data. What is being collected are merely photographs of facial images and fingerprint photos, not true biometrics," he added.

Since the previous licence for the system expired, about 17mn people have arrived in and departed Thailand without their biometric details being recorded. It could take up to 29 months for the Immigration Bureau to get a new system up and running as the procurement process has not even begun, he said.

Mr Rangsiman stressed that many people, including immigration officers, are unaware of the issue. He also revealed that the bureau had discussed the issue on seven occasions with the National Security



Photo: Bangkok Post

Committee. However, higher authorities have not taken action, he noted.

"This is a complete failure of police organisation," Mr Rangsiman said. "This loophole likely explains why so many transnational criminal groups continue to operate freely in Thailand. It is also difficult to remove them due to the inefficiency of state agencies."


Pol Col Neti Khanboon, head of the database division at the bureau's IT centre, admitted the system had reached full capacity.

He said the current biometric system can store personal identity data for 50mn people. Purchasing an unlimited licence would require a budget of B500 million, he said, adding that a new personal identity collection system was being developed with a budget of B3 billion.

In 2024, 17mn people entered and left the country without biometric records, he confirmed.

"The limited capacity of the biometric system is a weakness," he conceded.

Bangkok Post



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Thailand celebrates with Pride

LGBTQIA+

Josh O'Neill

Celebrated by the UK in February each year, Pride History Month is a time to reflect on the struggles, victories and ongoing journey of the LGBTQ+ community. While many associate Pride with parades and celebrations, Thailand's LGBTQ+ history runs much deeper – shaped by cultural, political, and social movements that have gradually paved the way for greater acceptance and legal recognition.

Thailand has long been seen as relatively accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals, yet true equality has been an ongoing fight, and the journey toward full recognition – especially in legal rights – has been marked by both progress and setbacks.

Thailand's reputation as one of the most LGBTQ+ friendly countries in Asia is rooted in its cultural openness. Buddhist beliefs, which emphasise personal karma over strict moral judgment, have allowed gender and sexual diversity to be more visible in society. Transgender women, now called 'Phuying' (Thai word for 'women') have long been part of Thai culture.

For decades, same-sex couples have had no legal recognition and LGBTQ+ individuals have struggled with issues such as limited access to healthcare tailored to their needs, lack of anti-discrimination protections in employment and challenges in obtaining gender recognition for transgender individuals.

On Jan 23 this year Thailand marked a historic milestone and officially become the first country in Southeast Asia to legalise same-sex marriage. This landmark decision represents not just a legal win, but a broader shift in public attitudes and government commitment to equality.



Throughout Thailand's LGBTQ+ history, several individuals have played significant roles in shaping policy, increasing visibility and advocating for equal rights. Here are some of the most notable figures:

Professor Vitit Muntarbhorn

A well-respected human rights advocate and law professor, Vitit Muntarbhorn was appointed the United Nations' first Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) in 2016. His work has been instrumental in advancing international LGBTQ+ rights and ensuring that sexual orientation and gender identity are recognised as human rights issues.

Khun Nok (Natee Teerarojjanapongs)

A long-time LGBTQ+ activist, Natee has been one of the driving forces behind Thailand's LGBTQ+ advocacy movement since the early 1980s. Natee has worked tirelessly to challenge discrimination, promote education and push for marriage equality.

Pauline Ngarmpring

In 2019, Pauline Ngarmpring made history as Thailand's first openly transgender candidate for Prime Minister. While she did not win, her campaign sent a powerful message about the potential for transgender

individuals to hold leadership positions and advocate for LGBTQ+ rights.

Tunyawaj Kamolwongwat

As a Member of Parliament from the Move Forward Party, Tunyawaj has been a vocal advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, including the push for marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws.

Thailand has long been a safe haven for LGBTQ+ individuals from neighbouring countries where discrimination and persecution remain severe. Bangkok and Phuket have become hubs for LGBTQ+ tourism, and events like Bangkok Pride, Phuket Pride and LGBTQ+ film festivals have become platforms for raising awareness and celebrating diversity.

Thailand has also gained recognition for its thriving gender-affirming healthcare industry, making it a leading destination for transgender individuals seeking gender confirmation surgery.

With the new marriage equality law, the next challenge for Thailand's LGBTQ+ movement is securing broader protections against discrimination, improving gender recognition laws and ensuring true inclusivity in every aspect of society – from education to the workplace.

As Thailand celebrates Pride History Month, it's a time to honour the pioneers who have paved the way, recognise the progress that has been made and continue advocating for an even more inclusive future. Whether through legal battles, cultural representation, or community activism, Thailand's LGBTQ+ history is a testament to resilience, courage and the ongoing fight for equality.

Josh, a dedicated LGBTQ+ advocate and community leader, leverages his expertise in cross-cultural communication and engagement to spotlight Phuket's current affairs and vibrant community life. Contact PFAM International: +66 (0) 999989274. Email: support@pfaminternational.com



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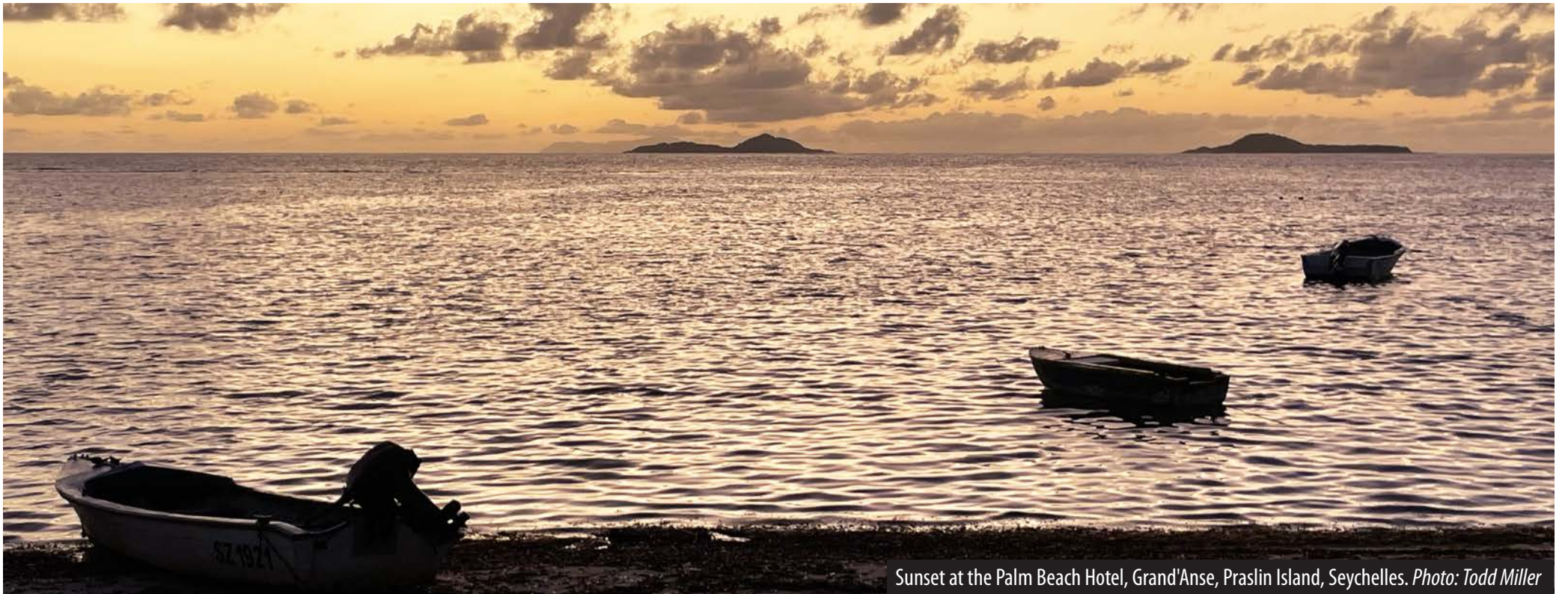
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Sunset at the Palm Beach Hotel, Grand'Anse, Praslin Island, Seychelles. Photo: Todd Miller

Exploring the Indian Ocean isles



GLOBETROTTER

Todd Miller

Living in the paradise that is Phuket, it takes a lot to get us packing for another island. We set off on two back-to-back journeys to explore other islands – in the Seychelles, Mauritius and the Maldives – scattered across the Indian Ocean.

Our goal? To investigate whether the turquoise waters are, indeed, more turquoise on the other side of the sea. What we found might surprise you.

Seychelles

We concentrated our time not on the main island of Mahe, but on Praslin Island, an hour's ferry ride away. Praslin, we found, is like that effortlessly cool friend who just naturally has it all – breathtaking beaches, lush jungles and an air of easygoing charm. As the second-largest island in the archipelago, Praslin is often considered the heart of the Seychelles.

Anse Lazio has a reputation as one of the world's most beautiful beaches. We enjoyed Anse Lazio's powdery white sand and crystal-clear waters, punctuated by perfectly positioned granite boulders. It is beautiful. But it is also busy.

In travel, when others zig, it often pays to zag. The beach we most prefer – so much that we paid an encore visit – is Anse Boudin, located on the road toward Anse Lazio. We had the beach and its boulders, fine white sands and uninterrupted views of Curieuse Island to ourselves during our repeat visit.

Praslin is not just about the beaches; it is also home to lush forest. Most travellers head to Vallée de Mai, a UNESCO World Heritage Palm Forest. Again, we zagged. Upon the advice of our hotel, we explored the less frequented Fond Ferdinand Nature Reserve which has the same flora, including rare Coco de Mer palms. Fond Ferdinand offers a bonus: the ability to hike to the top of a peak for stunning vistas of the island and surrounding waters. That panorama is worth the sweat to get there.



The Globetrotter, Todd Miller, at Praslin's Anse Lazio in the Seychelles. Photo: Todd Miller



The island reef of Horubadhu, in the UNESCO biosphere reserve of Baa Atoll, the Maldives. Photo: Todd Miller



A hawksbill turtle on the house reef at Royal Island Resort, Horubadhu Island, the Maldives. Photo: Todd Miller



Snorkelling in Baa Atoll, the Maldives, among thousands of frenetic fish in tropical technicolour. Photo: Todd Miller

The verdict: Over the course of three days, we travelled by car along narrow and often scenic roads to every corner of laid-back Praslin. It's unquestionably photogenic, and we might return some day. But among the three islands it is not our favourite.

Mauritius

Like its Indian Ocean neighbours, this mountainous volcanic island has its share of white sand beaches and crystal-clear waters – plus air-conditioned shopping malls and well-paved four lane roads.

Coming from the Seychelles, we had our fill of beautiful beaches, so we focused on Mauritius' unique qualities. This included visiting the seven-coloured earth of Chamarel, a unique geological formation where the earth appears in distinct stripes of different colours, a phenomenon found in very few places. It massively disappointed us.

Mauritius played a significant role in the international slave trade, and twice we attempted to visit the International Slave Route Monument at the base of La Morne mountain which served as a refuge for runaway slaves. This UNESCO-honoured site has limited hours each day and we were

disappointed we could only pay our respects from outside the locked gate.

We hired a car to explore all corners of this compact island, which can be driven from top to bottom in roughly two hours on the primary roads. Our most striking encounter happens to be the most ephemeral: a radiant, perfectly arched rainbow. This arch of dazzling colour created a spectrum that felt both ethereal and magical, especially against a lush green mountainous backdrop at dusk.

The verdict: Everything is relative. We enjoyed our time in Mauritius but once is enough.

Maldives

We landed on Baa Atoll, a UNESCO biosphere reserve. Getting to Baa Atoll takes some effort, but once you arrive you might ask the same question we promptly asked: can we stay longer?

After settling into our beachfront bungalow on the tiny island of Horubadhu, one of 75 in Baa Atoll, I grabbed my mask and snorkel and headed straight into the azure water. Within a few minutes I was immersed in thousands of frenetic fish in tropical technicolour. I didn't expect this house reef to be so good – and the snorkelling

so effortless. On this reef I encountered at least one black tip reef shark every time I donned mask and snorkel and enjoyed serene moments with a pair of juvenile eagle rays and a hawksbill turtle.

Although our January visit was out of season for manta rays, the hotel surprised us with the possibility to visit neighboring Raa Atoll, about 35 minutes away by boat. There mantas thrive this time of year. We spent an unforgettable morning gliding in the waters with these friendly, gentle giants of the ocean.

The verdict: the playful moments with the manta rays made our trip to the Maldives. Although Baa Atoll was the most expensive and hard-to-get-to of the destinations we visited in the Indian Ocean, it is by far our favourite, with unforgettable marine life in addition to picturesque beaches and turquoise waters.

Adventurer and author Todd Miller has explored more than 115 countries. He authored the Amazon bestseller *ENRICH: Create Wealth in Time, Money, and Meaning*. His writing has featured in *CNBC*, *Fast Company* and *Newsweek*. www.enrich101.com

POP QUIZ

1. What is the official colour for Phuket Province?
2. In which year was Hollywood classic 'The Wizard of Oz' released?
3. Besides Thailand, which two countries have coasts on the Gulf of Thailand?
4. Which company owns the trademarks and products of Parker Brothers and Milton Bradley?
5. Clyde Chestnut Barrow and Bonnie Elizabeth Parker were better known as who?

Answers below, centre

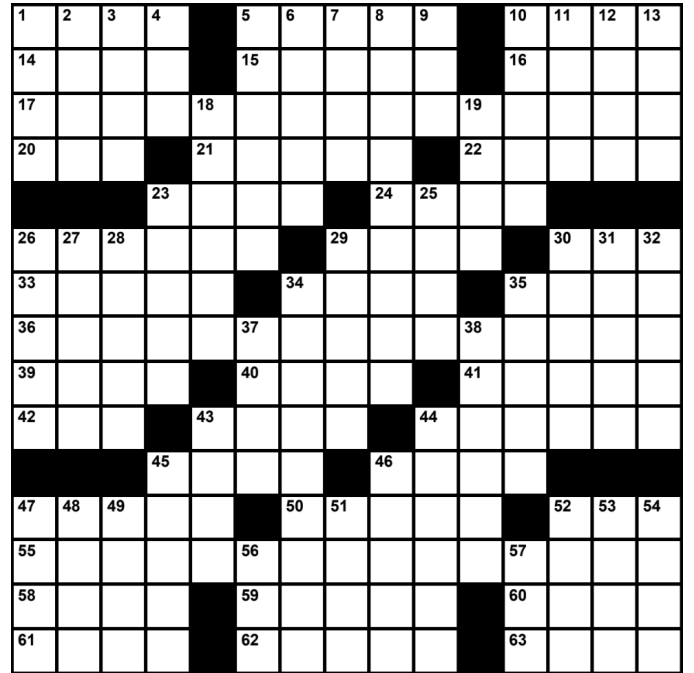
SUDOKU

Hard

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

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across
1. Certain sandwich
 5. Broodish
 10. Sky box?
 14. Celestial
 15. City in Rio de Janeiro
 16. It gets pumped
 17. Classic film
 20. Lt.'s inferior, in the Navy
 21. Carry away, in a way
 22. Floppies, e.g.
 23. Ticket info, maybe
 24. Floor items
 26. Stephen King title
 29. Threat word
 30. Drink from a dish
 33. Group of eight
 34. Horned mammal
 35. Old Italian bread
 36. Classic film
 39. Bolted
 40. Lions' prey (pl.)
 41. Great success
 42. Load from a lode
 43. Arctic sight
 44. Underline
 45. "Go ahead!"
 46. Swaddle
 47. "M*A*S*H" extra
 50. Garlicky mayonnaise
 52. Car accessory
 55. Classic film
- Down
1. "Lord of War" star
 2. Old Spanish kingdom
 3. Garden decorations
 4. Departure announcement
 5. Happy face
 6. Turkic language
 7. Real
 8. Crushing defeats
 9. Hong Kong actress, Sally
 10. Fuzzy fruits
 11. Pupil's place
 12. Honky ending
 13. Aims
 18. Creep
 19. Periphery
 23. Bait
 25. Military acronym
 26. "All for one and one for all," e.g.
 27. Greek god liquid
28. Cubic measurement
29. Provide, as with a quality
30. Fine thread
31. Met expectations?
32. Agreements
34. With footnotes, e.g.
35. Ill-gotten gain
37. Unappealing fruit?
38. Kind of unit
43. Central points
44. Electrical transformer
45. Dreary song
46. Omnivorous mammal
47. Physics calculation
48. Canyon sound
49. East Indian lentil sauce
51. Mosque prayer leader
52. Braveheart hillside
53. Civil rights icon, to friends
54. Apple spray
56. Place for sweaters?
57. Unspecified number



Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

SUDS	PULP	ARCH
TREE	ANO	ANELE
ISLE	PIER	DADOS
RAIN	CATS	AND DOGS
	LYES	ATE
SERBIA		BIOMASS
PROOF	SLUR	THE
END OF	THE	RAINBOW
LIE	AEON	REAVE
LEOPOLD		SAWYER
	ILO	SECT
SING IN	IN THE	RAIN
OVOLO	SOUL	UNDO
CAGES	MODE	SOLD
KNOT	STEP	KNEE

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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

1

out of 10 married adults in the US say that they typically sleep alone.

85

percent of those who have attempted to break the water speed record since 1940 have died while trying.

7,000

US dollars a day is how much an email spambot can earn.

300,000

US dollars in research and three months is what it took for scientists to create a lab-grown burger patty.

92

quadrillion US dollars is how much PayPal once accidentally credited to one man's account.

Source: *Uberfacts*

ISLAND VIEW



Beautiful Palai Sunrise. Photo by Sutharat Khaodee

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

This week in history

Feb 28, 1986

Olof Palme, 26th Prime Minister of Sweden, is assassinated in Stockholm.

Feb 28, 1993

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) agents raid the Branch Davidian church in Waco, Texas with a warrant to arrest the group's leader David Koresh, starting a 51-day standoff.

Mar 1, 1692

Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne and Tituba are brought before local magistrates in Salem Village, Massachusetts, beginning what would become known as the Salem witch trials.

Mar 2, 1797

The Bank of England issues the first one-pound and two-pound banknotes.



David Koresh.

Mar 3, 1845

Florida is admitted as the 27th U.S. state.

Mar 5, 1946

Winston Churchill coins the

phrase "Iron Curtain" in his speech at Westminster College, Missouri.

Mar 6, 1836

Battle of the Alamo: After a 13-day siege by an army of 3,000 Mexican troops, the 187 Texas volunteers defending the Alamo, including frontiersman Davy Crockett and Colonel Jim Bowie, are killed and the fort is captured. *Source: Wikipedia*

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FRI

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FEB



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SUN

2
MAR



Sunday Roast

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MON

3
MAR



Monday BBQ Night

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WED

5
MAR



Wednesday BBQ Night

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FRI

7
MAR



Grow Boating Evening - March 2025

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FRI

7
MAR



International Women's Day Lunch

Join us for lunch on Friday 7th March 2025, 11:30 for welcome drinks with a 12:00 start at the Courtyard by Marriott Phuket Town to celebrate International Women's Day. To book your seat contact Tina@phukethasbeengoodtous.org While enjoying lunch, we will hear from inspirational speakers and discuss how we can all contribute to accelerating action on women's equality. This is a thought-provoking fundraising event with wonderful prizes to bid on.



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SAT

8
MAR



Special Cheese Night

15th Special Cheese Night Saturday, March 8, from 6.30 PM Infuse Restaurant by Diamond Resort invites you to an unforgettable evening celebrating the art of cheese. Discover a selection of over 20 exquisite cheeses, ranging from young and creamy to aged and bold, sourced from renowned cheese-making regions like France, Switzerland and Italy. Immerse yourself in an exquisite atmosphere and indulge in over 20 varieties of cheese from around the world, from beloved classics to rare specialties, perfectly paired with fine wines. Complementing the evening is a superb selection of cold cuts for every taste, along with delicious pâtés. Don't miss our signature dish from the Auvergne region – Aligot, served with flavourful pan-fried Toulouse sausage. It's the perfect opportunity to discover unique flavours, socialise and enjoy a night to remember. Come hungry for cheese, cold cuts and an unforgettable experience! Live music will brighten the night up, so make a reservation and pre-payment. (food buffet only, exclude beverage) Don't miss this one-of-a-kind culinary journey. Reserve your table now for an evening of gourmet delights. Price 1,395 THB* *drinks not included Pre-booking and pre-payment only Contact us: +66 62 245 5704 WhatsApp, LINE and Phone calls infuse@diamondresortphuket.com www.restaurantinfuse.com. 106 Soi Cherngtalay 14, Tambon Choeng Thale, Thalang District, Phuket 83110, infuse@diamondresortphuket.com, 062 245 5704

FRI

14
MAR




Phuket Business Networking - March 2025

Make sure to bring lots of business cards, as getting to know each other is what PBN is all about. A small entry fee, THB 500 per person, that includes the first 3 drinks and a light buffet. Location - Oasis Bar, Koh Kaew, starting 5pm. Register your attendance here - facebook.com/phuketbusinessnetworking or call Jason - 086 479 7471.

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SKAL PHUKET FEBRUARY DINNER - A COZY EVENING AT INFUSE

The hosts of the month of February Jo De Hondt, GM Raphael and the team at Infuse Restaurant at Diamond Resort Bangtao welcomed a sell-out gathering, over 50 Skalleagues and guests, for a fantastic evening of networking. Chef Rieno and the food and beverage team created for an evening designed to capture the warmth and relaxation of a 'perfect Sunday'. Stay up to date on next month's meeting - facebook.com/skalphuket



Angel wins Thai LPGA by one shot

GOLF

AMERICAN ANGEL Yin matched the all-time low LPGA tournament record last Saturday (Feb 22) to win the Honda Thailand Open with a score of 28-under-par, one shot ahead of Japan's Akie Iwai.

The 26-year-old Californian began the day with 5-shot lead at the Siam Country Club in Pattaya, but held off a determined charge from Iwai to win by a single shot.

Coming into the final day, Yin said she hadn't taken anything for granted.

"I've never played the final round with a five-shot lead. I knew I wasn't super comfortable. It's not a tournament or golf course where five shots is a lot," she said.

"Considering that Akie shot Thursday 10-under, I knew she was able and capable of shooting a low score," she added.



Angel with the trophy. Photo: AFP

"I knew I just needed to keep playing how I was playing."

The organisers of the tournament said her 28-under-par was the lowest four-round total since Lydia Ko at the 2021 LOTTE Championship, who recorded the same score.

Thailand's Jeeno Atthikul finished in third place with a fourth-round 66, finishing at 267.

Compatriot Patty Tavatanakit, the defending champion, tied for fourth place with Moriya Jutanugarn at 269.

The Pattaya tournament kicks off an Asian swing for the LPGA that also takes in Singapore next week and China from Mar 6-9. AFP

Weili makes UFC history

MMA

Catherine Ly

Zhang Weili, the first-ever Chinese UFC world champion, proved once again why she is among the sport's elite fighters by successfully retaining her strawweight title in the co-main event of UFC 312 at Qudos Bank Arena in Sydney, Australia, on Feb 9.

At 35, Weili's victory over undefeated challenger Tatiana Suarez cemented her place in UFC history, dominating in all aspects of the fight and retaining her belt with a performance that left fans in awe.

Leading up to the fight, Weili's camp was focused and meticulous. Training at Bangtao Muay Thai and MMA in Phuket, Thailand – a place she's come to consider her "second home" – the Chinese champion fine-tuned her skills alongside top-level coaches.

Under the guidance of Head Wrestling Coach Frank Hickman, UFC lightweight fighter and Kickboxing Coach Brad Riddell and BJJ Coach Josh Hinger, Weili prepared for Suarez's renowned grappling and wrestling.

Despite Suarez's undefeated record and reputation for dominating with her wrestling, Weili entered the fight as an underdog, which surprised many, including UFC president Dana White.

"I bet the casino's got murdered



Zhang with the belt post-match. Photo: Supplied

tonight because a lot of people threw money on Tatiana, but when you look at Weili, she's one of the greatest of all time," White said at the post-fight press conference.

"She's the best female fighter in the sport right now. She actually out-wrestled Tatiana tonight."

The fight was a showcase of Weili's versatility as an athlete and mixed martial artist, as she skillfully neutralised Suarez's grappling, out-wrestling the challenger in a way few expected. While Suarez's strength lies in her ground game, Weili's ability to adapt and dominate all areas of the fight made her an overwhelming presence.

Her victory was not just a testament to her striking but also to her improved wrestling, an area that was previously considered a potential weakness.

The win raised questions about Weili's future in the UFC. Fans are eager to see her face off against UFC flyweight champion Valentina Shevchenko in a super fight. Moving up to the flyweight division could be a new challenge, but one many believe Weili is ready for. "It's a possibility," is all White would offer.

"She is such a huge, huge star in China for us," White added said, noting how Weili's success continues to inspire the growth of MMA in the country.

Weili's triumph at UFC 312 solidified her legacy as one of the greatest female fighters in MMA history and her future looks incredibly bright, whether defending her strawweight title or venturing into new challenges.



England's Ollie Lawrence (left) offloads. Photo: AFP

England edge Scotland in Six Nations thriller

RUGBY

ENGLAND DID JUST enough to end a run of four straight defeats by Scotland with a 16-15 win at Twickenham last Saturday (Feb 22) as they maintained their Six Nations title hopes.

Scotland outscored England three tries to one but Finn Russell was off target with all three conversions as the hosts prevailed by a point for the second match in a row following their 26-25 win over France.

Scotland led 10-7 at half-time before Tommy Freeman's lone converted score, two Marcus

Smith penalties and a long-range effort from Finn Smith put England 16-10 up with 10 minutes to play.

The visitors might still have won the game, with Duhan Van der Merwe sprinting in for what was his seventh try against England, only for Russell to skew the conversion.

In regaining the Calcutta Cup, England made it two wins from three championship matches this season as they stayed in touch with unbeaten Ireland, who maintained their bid for an unprecedented third successive Six Nations title by beating Wales earlier Saturday. AFP

Lewis confident of Ferrari glory

FORMULA ONE

LEWIS HAMILTON IS convinced that this season could be Ferrari's year after he drove the Formula One team's car for the upcoming season for the first time, with a record eighth world title in his sights.

Hamilton delighted hopeful fans by putting the new SF-25 car through its paces at Ferrari's own track in Fiorano Modenese in northern Italy on Feb 19 before stopping to salute spectators who are hoping he can end the Italian team's long world championship drought.

Ferrari haven't won the constructors title since 2008 and Kimi Raikkonen was the last man to claim the driver's title with them the year before, but asked whether he thought the 'Scuderia' were ready to win the world championship, Hamilton simply said "yes".

"I've worked with two world championship winning teams before, I know what a winning team looks and feels like," Hamilton told reporters.

"The passion here is like nothing you've ever seen. They've got absolutely every ingredient they need to win a world championship and it's just about putting all the pieces together.



Hamilton tests the new F1 Ferrari SF-25 on Feb 19 in Fiorano Modenese. Photo: AFP

"Everyone just has a really calm and good approach. No one's like we're perfect in every single area. Everyone's like we need to elevate everywhere and they're leaving no stone unturned to try and do that."

At 40 years old Hamilton isn't just F1's biggest star, he's also one the sport's elder statesmen, but he is full of youthful enthusiasm for a new challenge at Ferrari after falling way behind Red Bull's Max Verstappen in his final three seasons at Mercedes.

Since losing the 2021 drivers' title to Verstappen in controversial circumstances in the final GP, Hamilton has finished sixth, third and then seventh in 2024, some 214 points behind his Dutch rival who has won the last four championships.

Hamilton said that he thought

"nothing was ever going to be new again" and he is clearly surprised at the new lease of life he is experiencing.

"When I was much younger I definitely didn't think in my 19th season or 19th year, whatever it is, that I would be this excited," said Hamilton.

"I never thought at this point in my career I would have so much excitement. Wanting to be at work early, wanting to put in even extra levels of work to achieve the dream... I've just felt this new wave of life and energy.

"For me it's the first. Winning a championship with Ferrari is the first. That's what I'm working towards. I don't think about the number eight. I'm thinking about the first championship that the team's won for some time."

AFP

Slot wary despite 'big' win

FOOTBALL

AFP

Liverpool boss Arne Slot said the depth of quality in the Premier League means his side can take nothing for granted despite opening up an 11-point lead with a 2-0 win at Manchester City last Sunday (Feb 23).

Slot's men took a giant stride towards a record-equalling 20th English top flight title thanks to their first league win at the Etihad Stadium for a decade, with goals from Mohamed Salah and Dominik Szoboszlai.

City have dominated English football during Pep Guardiola's time in charge, including an unprecedented run of four consecutive titles in the past four seasons.

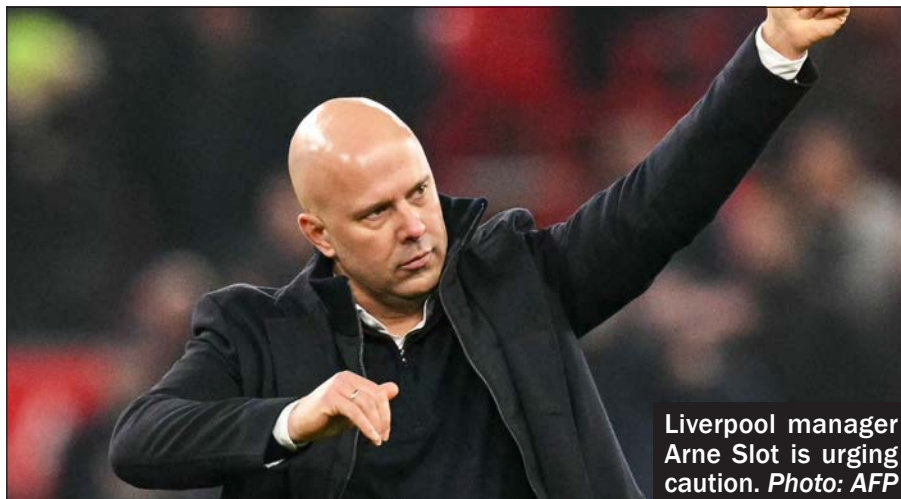
However, they have been a diminished force this season and now find themselves 20 points behind Liverpool down in fourth.

"If you play away at the Etihad, if you win there, it's always a big win, no matter what the league table looks like," said Slot.

"We know as a team how hard we have to work for every single win," he added.

"So in every other league, having a lead like this would be very comfortable, except for this one, because this league, every single game gives you a lot of challenges."

Second-placed Arsenal have a game in hand on the leaders but



Liverpool manager Arne Slot is urging caution. Photo: AFP

suffered a huge blow as West Ham earned a shock 1-0 win over the 10-man Gunners at the Emirates Stadium.

Mikel Arteta's side stumbled to a first loss in 16 league games as Jarrod Bowen netted West Ham's first half winner before the Gunners had Myles Lewis-Skelly sent off after the interval.

In Saturday's early kick off at Goodison Park, troubled Manchester United rallied from two goals down to 2-2 draw with Everton.

United were headed for a ninth defeat in their last 13 league games as goals from Beto and Abdoulaye Doucoure put Everton two up inside 33 minutes.

Bruno Fernandes' free-kick pulled a goal back 18 minutes from time before Manuel Ugarte's equaliser salvaged a point.

Newcastle United edged a pulsating game 4-3 against Nottingham Forest to keep their European hopes for next season alive, while Tottenham eased the pressure on boss Ange Postecoglou with a 4-1 win at third-bottom Ipswich.

Wolves boosted their survival bid with a priceless 1-0 win at 10-man Bournemouth courtesy of Matheus Cunha's first half strike, meaning Vitor Pereira's team are now five points clear of the relegation zone as fifth-placed Bournemouth's top four hopes suffered a setback.

Southampton slipped closer to relegation after a 4-0 defeat against south-coast rivals Brighton at St Mary's, in form Crystal Palace won 2-0 at Fulham and Aston Villa defeated Chelsea 2-1 thanks to two goals from January signing Marco Asensio.



Thailand's Thanakrit Chotmuangpak (left) fires in a shot. Photo: Bangkok Post

Thai youngsters crash out after Korea rout

FOOTBALL

THAILAND EXITED THE AFC U20 Asian Cup in the group stage following a 4-1 loss to South Korea in Shenzhen, China, on Feb 17.

While it was 12-time champions South Korea who started the brighter but it was Thailand who opened the scoring in the 23rd minute through Yotsakon Burapha.

The Koreans were unperturbed, however, with Yoon Do-Yong equalising 10 minutes later, before further goals from Kim Tae-Won (59, 86) and Park Seung-Soo (89) decided the outcome.

Thailand U20 coach Emerson Pereira admitted his side lost power and focus after the break.

"We had a good opening

half with our first goal and we had many chances to score," he said.

"But in the second half, we lost power, made mistakes, and allowed them to score three times.

"We need to analyse our game against South Korea, fix the problems and focus 100% because it's 95 minutes of football until the referee blows the whistle."

South Korea coach Lee Chang-Won said after the match: "Our physique is superior to the Thais, so we tried to use that advantage in our set pieces and it worked well.

"In the second half, we brought in fast players and that strategy worked to our benefit as well."

The defeat eliminated Thailand, who lost 3-0 to Japan in their first match.

Bangkok Post

Big changes kick in at PAFC

FOOTBALL

Continued from page 16

Faced with a deepening crisis, PAFC acted swiftly to appoint Coach M. An AFC A licensed coach with a wealth of experience at clubs like Krabi FC, Songkhla FC, and Nakhon Si United, Coach M arrived with a mandate to steer the Lobsters away from relegation. His background, which includes a Master's degree in Education from the National Institute of Sports and a stint with Phatthalung FC, suggests he has the credentials to take on this challenge.

The match against Yala was a tense and cagey affair, with both teams understandably nervous given the high stakes. Phuket lined up in a 4-3-3 formation, with the right-back pushing into midfield to provide additional support in the centre of the park. While this tactic offered some benefits in terms of controlling possession, it also left the team vulnerable to counter-attacks, a vulnerability that Yala City occasionally threatened to exploit.



Coach Tum. Photo: Supplied

While neither team will be overly delighted with the result, the draw arguably favours PAFC, who remain just above the relegation zone.

The clean sheet, the first in several games, will be particularly pleasing for Coach M. It suggests that he is beginning to instill some defensive solidity in a team that has been plagued by inconsistency and individual errors in recent weeks.

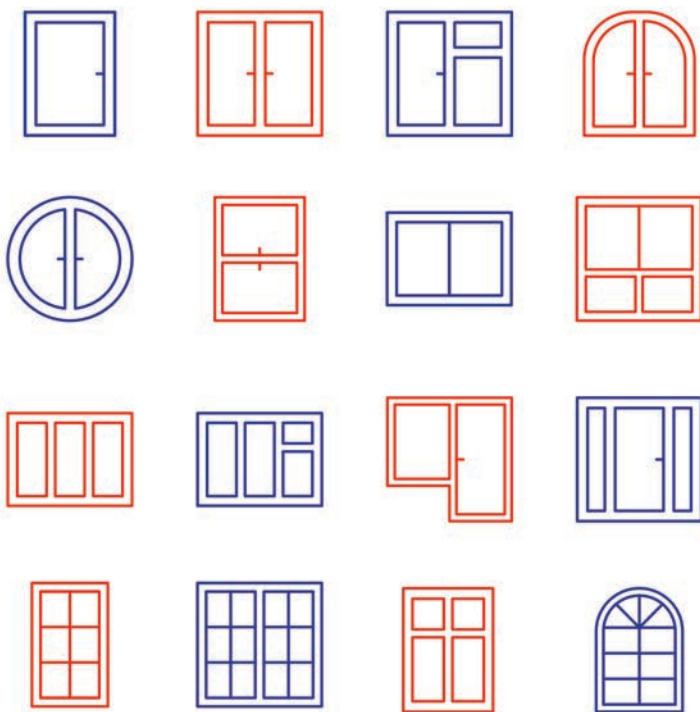
This defensive resilience, coupled with the fighting spirit shown by the players, offers some encouragement for the future. Perhaps these are the "green shoots" of recovery that the Lobsters faithful have been yearning for.

The Lobsters' remaining five fixtures are now absolutely crucial. Sandwiched between games against the league's top two, Songkhla and Yala FC, are three matches against Krabi, Ranong and PSU. These three games are now pivotal, and a win in any of them would significantly boost the Lobsters' chances of survival.

Despite the draw against Yala City offering a glimmer of hope, the challenges remain significant and the battle for survival is far from over. The coming weeks will be crucial in determining whether the Lobsters can escape the clutches of relegation and secure their place in T3 for next season.



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Underdog to champ for Weili > p14



Phuket Vagabonds squad ahead of their clash with Krabi RFC, a match that was in memoriam of Bob Foose. Photo: Supplied

RUGBY

Tom Kilvington

The local rugby community came together last weekend in solidarity to show collective respects to the father of one of the Phuket Vagabonds' players who sadly passed away recently.

In a match dominated by the visiting side, the Vagabonds overwhelmed their understrength Krabi hosts last Saturday (Feb 22) at Ao Leuk Stadium. While the game itself was played with great competitive spirit, it was somewhat overshadowed by the passing of Bob Foose, father to a beloved Vagabonds member, Zac Foose. In a show of solidarity for their teammate, Vagabonds played in honour, and dedicated their victory, to Zac's father and to the Foose family during this difficult time.

The Vagabonds started the match erratically, struggling to

find their rhythm and playing too much one-man rugby. However, debutant Cillian O'Neill made an immediate impact, breaking through two defenders with strong hand-offs and scoring his first try for the club.

The momentum continued with Brendan O'Donoghue taking centre stage. First, he powered into Krabi's 22, stepping past three defenders and bulldozing through contact to score. Moments later, after a dominant 5-metre scrum, he picked and went, crashing over for his second.

Paul Rothwell slotted two conversions, while Krabi managed to get on the scoreboard with a well-taken penalty, leaving the halftime score at 19-3 in favour of Vagabonds.

With Vagabonds lending Krabi several players for the second half, the match remained competitive. However, the away side continued to rely on indi-

vidual efforts rather than structured team play.

Dan Ashburn extended the lead, powering over after another dominant scrum before Krabi responded with Harry Layard running a superb line to glide through the defence and score under the posts.

Moments later, Harvey Neville showcased his agility and footwork after switching to the Krabi 15 for the second half, breaking inside the 22 and rounding the fullback to finish a brilliant solo effort.

However, Brendan O'Donoghue wasn't done yet for the Vagabonds. Another explosive break saw him charge through contact once again. After some debate with the referee, his hat-trick was confirmed.

To put the finishing touch on the victory, Mikhail Makeev picked and went from a ruck after a powerful carry from Brendan at number 8. Paul Rothwell added

the final conversion, sealing a 36-17 win for the Vagabonds.

WRECKING BALL

Several players made their first appearance for Vagabonds: Cillian O'Neill, Harvey Neville, Harry Layard, Brendan O'Donoghue, Sam Scholefield, Glenn Beer, Alexey Kapalin and Mikhail Makeev – all made an immediate impact despite the team's lack of cohesion.

The player of the match was Brendan O'Donoghue, a wrecking ball throughout the match, breaking tackles at will and finishing with a hat trick. His ability to identify weak shoulders and dominate in contact made him the standout performer of the day.

Honourable mentions go to Cillian O'Neill, who led from the front in the forward pack, excelling in carries, offloads and lineouts, setting the tone early with his opening try and was a clear leader among the forwards.

Similarly, Harvey Neville was a constant attacking threat, regularly breaking the line and finishing with a try – ironically while playing for Krabi in the second half.

Despite the win, Vagabonds will be frustrated with their performance. They failed to implement structured play, often forcing the extra pass instead of maintaining composure. Against a young, inexperienced Krabi side, the match should have been more one-sided, but poor fluency and discipline kept their opponents competitive.

While individual performances stood out, the team will need to sharpen up before their next match, focusing on cohesion and decision-making on the training field.

This Vagabonds' victory is dedicated to Bob Foose and a reminder that rugby is much more than just a game, it's family that care for each other on and off the pitch.

New coach at Phuket Andaman FC, survival the remit

FOOTBALL

Simon Causton

PHUKET ANDAMAN FC (PAFC) battled to a hard-fought 0-0 draw against Yala City last Saturday (Feb 22), a result that offers a glimmer of hope and perhaps some much-needed respite in their fight against relegation from Thai League 3.

While not a victory, the clean sheet and the point gained under

new manager Akarat 'M' Naunla-ong will be seen as a positive first step after a turbulent few weeks for the club.

This newfound resilience comes on the heels of a period of significant upheaval for the Lobsters.

On Feb 19 the club parted ways with Coach Tum, Phuanart Saengsri, after a string of disappointing results. While the club officially stated that he resigned, the coach

himself has suggested he was asked to step down, highlighting the lack of transparency and communication that has plagued the club this season.

Regardless of the circumstances, Coach Tum's departure marked the second managerial casualty of the season, following the earlier dismissal of the popular Coach Go. This instability in the dugout has undoubtedly contributed to the team's struggles on the pitch.

Coach Tum's reign was further hampered by the ongoing financial turmoil surrounding the club's ownership. Since Higher Sports Phuket took over last August, the club has been mired in financial uncertainty, with staff going unpaid for two months at one point.

These off-field issues have cast a long shadow over the team and hindered their ability to compete effectively. Furthermore, the club has been forced



Akarat Naunla-ong. Photo: Supplied

to play its home games off the island in Phang Nga due to renovations at their usual home ground, the Surakul Stadium. This enforced exile has further disrupted the team's preparations and connection with their fanbase.

Continued on page 15