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A foreigner waits to be processed at the Phuket Check Point onto the mainland. Photo: PR Phuket

GOVERNOR ASSURES PHUKET SANDBOX WILL CONTINUE DESPITE RISING INFECTIONS

The Phuket News
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Phuket Governor this week ramped up COVID protection measures across the island as the number of local infections started spiralling upward, but made no changes to the requirements for domestic travellers to enter Phuket and confirmed that the Phuket Sandbox scheme will continue.

The assurance came on Monday (July 26) as the island marked 114 local infections within the seven days – easily exceeding the “90

infections in one week” limit set by the the Centre of COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) in Bangkok late last month as reason enough to start reviewing whether or not the Phuket Sandbox scheme should be halted.

“The Phuket Sandbox is still continuing. The situation right now has not disturbed the opening [of Phuket to receiving fully vaccinated tourists without quarantine],” Governor Narong said during a live broadcast on Tuesday (July 27).

“We think that the measures to be enforced will be able to control the

outbreak,” he added, referring to a raft of new COVID prevention measures introduced in a new provincial order issued on Monday.

Under the order, effective Tuesday (July 27) through Aug 2, all schools are to remain closed until Aug 16, all markets must restrict the number of visitors, all football and futsal venues were closed, and the Central Phuket shopping mall was closed for seven days to undergo intensive cleaning while officers from the Phuket Provincial Public Health Office (PPHO) conduct rapid antigen tests on all staff to determine whether they are

infected with COVID-19 after confirmed cases of infection were linked with the mall.

Concerns quickly shifted to whether the rising number of infections would affect the Phuket Sandbox scheme as some Thai news reported that Central Phuket cluster involved more than 100 high-risk contacts.

Phuket Provincial Public Health Office (PPHO) Chief Dr Kusak Kukiattikoon on Monday night repeated the criteria set out for revising the Phuket Sandbox scheme as announced by Natapanu Nopakun, Deputy Director-General of the Department of...

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News



PPAO looks to buy Moderna vaccine > p5

Officials ramp up COVID measures

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...Information and Deputy Spokesman of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, in English on June 22 as part of the CCSA's national COVID-situation briefing.

More than 90 persons infected per week in Phuket constituted the main criteria for reconsideration of the Phuket Sandbox scheme, "or for any adjustments", Mr Natapanu explained.

All three districts in Phuket affected, and in that more than six villages are affected, or if there were COVID cases and no linkages found and no contact tracing was possible were other criteria, he said.

"Also, if the hospital bed capacity exceeds 80%, that would be another criteria," he added.

"If the situation becomes worse in Phuket after the opening of the province on the 1st of July with these par-



A woman has a swab sample taken at Saphan Hin as part of the ongoing 'proactive screening' for COVID-19 across Phuket. Photo: PPAO

ticular criteria, then it [the box scheme] would be reconsidered," Mr Natapanu warned.

"Some of the reconsideration of the Phuket Sandbox

scheme would be possibly to decrease the level of business activity or to conduct 'Sealed Route' travel, and also to have more hotel quarantine,"

he added.

"Also as a worst-case scenario, they would have to halt the [Sandbox] scheme in Phuket," Mr Natapanu said.

Dr Kusak said on Monday, "If the situation meets all five criteria, we will start enforcing strict measures respectively as follows: 1. allowing them to travel only in the sealed routes; 2. cancelling the sealed routes and allowing them to stay only in hotel areas; 3. Allowing them to stay only in their rooms; and 4. Cancelling the sandbox scheme,"

"If we have 90 new cases in a week, but we are still able to handle the cases, we will just consider following the plan. We need to keep a balance between controlling the disease and economic recovery," he added.

Governor Narong noted, "The situation outside of the island is getting worse, so we need to take care and control our people to be safe."

However, he gave no indication that the requirements to enter Phuket will face further revisions after a slew of new measures tightening control over who may enter Phuket were rolled out last week.

Asked whether the measures to close the selected venues, all schools and Central Phuket shopping mall, among others, will reduce the number of new infections, Governor Narong said, "I would say this is not the first time for a situation like this. The number of cases goes up and down. We have learned from the past that closing places and

locking down can reduce the number of cases, and right now we also have strict entry requirements.

"We have strict entry requirements for new arrivals which we think helps a lot for screening and protecting our people from infection from outside the province," he added.

"For inside the island, we have clear measures. If we find any areas having many new cases of infection, we immediately send our medical staff to conduct proactive screening and take high-risk people into the local quarantine," he said.

"This is necessary because we need to keep Phuket Sandbox going. We have reopened the island [to tourists] for only a little while and already received very good signs in terms of economic recovery," he added.

"Today, we discussed disease control measures that may affect some businesses. I need to ask operators and local people for understanding and cooperation. We need to protect the benefits of the overall people on the island," Governor Narong said.

INFECTION SITUATION

PPHO Chief Dr Kusak said that the number of new infections was expected to remain high for the immediate future.

"In the coming week, I expect that the number of new cases will remain at 20-plus because one infected case can at the minimum infect five high-risk people. Right now, more than 440 high risk contacts are in local quarantine [LQ]," he said.

"We need to work quickly to have new infected cases entered into treatment and take high risk contacts into the local quarantine," Dr Kusak continued.

"Right now, we have 450 rooms at LQ venues, and we are looking for about 150-200 more rooms for future high-risk contacts," he added.

'BOOSTER JABS'

Dr Kusak said that his office is pushing to further protect the public from infection through third vaccination injections to help boost immunity to the virus.

"For the third booster vaccines [sic], the PPHO and Vachira Phuket Hospital have

already filed a request to the Ministry of Public Health to ask for the doses of vaccine. We need to prioritise groups of people to receive the third injection as we have done before," he said.

Dr Chalermpong Sukontapol, Director of Vachira Phuket Hospital, added, "We already provided a third dose of vaccine to medical staff last week. Next, [third] vaccine injections will be provided to frontline staff, including those who work in disease control and have contact with Sandbox arrivals.

"These groups of people will receive their third injection in early August. The general public will receive the [third injection] vaccine later," he said.

HOSPITAL BEDS

Dr Chalermpong said that the number of beds available in intensive-care units (ICUs) currently looked relatively healthy.

"Right now, we have 17 ICU rooms, and the number of beds occupied is not very high because our people have been vaccinated and have very low potential to become red-zone patients [sic]," he said.

Some 90% of the people in Phuket currently receiving treatment for COVID-19 infection were what Dr Chalermpong called "green-zone patients".

"About 3-4% of patients are considered to be red-zone patients," he added, without giving any specific figures for either category.

"At Vachira Phuket Hospital, we will increase the number of ICU rooms to 27. If combined with other hospitals, we will have about 50 ICU rooms on the island," Dr Chalermpong said.

"We have about 200 normal rooms for isolation and group-patient rooms, and we can add an extra 100 rooms. At the field hospital at PSU [Prince of Songkla University Phuket campus in Kathu], we have 170 beds. Of those, 75 beds are occupied," he continued.

"However, right now we have a lot of green-zone patients, so we need to prepare the PRU [Phuket Rajabhat University in Rassada] as another field hospital with 70 beds in the first phase and a total of 195 beds in the second phase," Dr Chalermpong said.

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'Car Mob' protest hits streets

Crowd calls for PM Prayut to resign, better vaccines for everybody

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A "Car Mob" demonstration calling for Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's resignation from office, budget cuts and better quality mRNA COVID-19 vaccines took place at Saphan Hin last Saturday (July 24).

The rally, organised by the Phuket People's Party - Phuket Liberation Group (Khana Ratsadon), saw hundreds of cars and motorcycles gather around 3pm then proceed onto Phuket City Hall where a letter stating their demands was delivered to Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew.

Around 150 protesters initially congregated at Saphan Hin Park in Wichit where they were met by another group requesting the group cease their protests, displaying signs with slogans such as "Save Phuket" and "Phuket Wants Peace".

The two groups clashed, resulting in police intervention from the Department of Provincial Administration,



Photo: PR Phuket

with around 150 officers both in uniform and undercover stepping in. The officials reminded protesters that the gathering was illegal in that it contravened the conditions of the existing emergency decree on serious communicable diseases and asked the groups to separate.

According to police sources, the protesters from Khana Ratsadon refused to comply unless their letter outlining their demands was delivered to Governor Narong.

They then took to their vehicles and headed towards Phuket City Hall, honking horns as they went and waving

banners stating their demands.

On arrival, their letter was received by Vice Governor Vikrom Jakthee who confirmed he would deliver it to Governor Narong.

The protesters explained the three main objectives of the letter to the V/G Vikrom:

ditional resignation of Prayut Chan-o-cha

2. Budget cuts for the monarchy and the army with funds reallocated to combat COVID-19

3. Replace the Sinovac vaccine with a better quality mRNA vaccine.

One of the representatives of the protest group added that the government had initiated the Phuket Sandbox project to stimulate the economy yet any income received thus far has not been distributed fairly or evenly and instead only finds its way back to the same group of "capitalists".

Once the letter had been delivered, the group dispersed and headed home. Police reported a number of small skirmishes en route with other groups although nothing serious of note was confirmed.

Later in the evening, Khana Ratsadon posted a copy of a letter they had distributed to all foreign consulates in Phuket on their Facebook page explaining their actions.

"We are aware of the importance of international relations," the letter said.

"We would like to send this letter to you and the citizens under your care, including tourists who are deciding to come to Phuket in accordance with Phuket sandbox measures, to know that our activities are not intended to cause chaos and cause your citizens to lack confidence in making a decision to travel in Phuket or affect the lifestyle in Phuket.

"We just want to send a distress signal and request of the people of Phuket to send it to the Thai government with 3 demands from the people as follows:

1. Immediate and unconditional resignation of Prayut Chan-o-cha

2. Budget cuts for the monarchy and the army to combat COVID-19

3. Stop purchasing Sinovac vaccines and bring in mRNA vaccines. People will strongly remain defiant.

"We will continue to expand and progress. Because of knowing that if we ignore politics, we will end up with an abusive government that will lead us to failure and disaster," the letter concluded.

Sandbox arrival to face charges for fleeing 14-day stay in Phuket

AN 18-YEAR-OLD THAI WOMAN who arrived under the Phuket Sandbox scheme but left the island early to travel to Chonburi is to be prosecuted, Phuket Provincial Health Office (PPHO) Chief Dr Kusak Kukiattikoon has confirmed.

Dr Kusak last week confirmed that the woman left Phuket on July 20 having only spent nine days on the island instead of the mandated 14 days.

Phuket health officials were alerted to the incident by the manager of a SHA+ registered hotel, Dr Kusak said.

"After the hotel manager informed the Phuket Sandbox command center, officers contacted the person only to be told they were already in Bangkok and on the way to Chonburi.

"All arrivals must follow the outlined conditions of the Phuket Sandbox scheme. However, this person left before the required 14-day window had passed," Dr Kusak added.

"The person must be prosecuted under the relevant law for breaking the conditions of the scheme."

Dr Kusak added that he had contacted the Chonburi Public Health Office who confirmed they had managed to locate the person and place them into an alternative local quarantine (ALQ) venue.

"In regards to the matter of any legal punishment, police and administrative officers will work on that at a later stage," he said.



PPHO Chief Dr Kusak. Photo: PR Dept

Governor Narong explained that the manager at the SHA+ hotel confirmed the person had tested negative twice for COVID-19 during the nine day period spent there. The manager added that the person had not officially checked out from the hotel and when staff attempted to locate the person they were unable to.

"Our officers contacted the person only to discover that they already left the island," Governor Narong said.

"We have to punish this person as it sets a bad example and may encourage similar cases in future.

"Previously there have been cases where people requested to leave the island before completing their 14-day stay, citing reasons such as being required to attend a funeral, for example," Governor Narong added.

"However, we cannot allow them to leave because they already agreed to adhere to the conditions and rules of the sandbox prior to coming. If they do not follow the requirements we need to file a complaint to police to pursue prosecution."

The Phuket News

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Surf warning as foreigners rescued

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Lifeguards at Nai Harn Beach are urging all beachgoers to swim only between the red-yellow flags following a spate of foreigners needing rescue, with an Irishman rescued from rocks on Monday (July 26), a Polish man rescued last week, and a South African man rescued at Bang Tao last Saturday (July 24).

The initial warning came after an Irishman was rescued from being dashed on rocks, and an exhausted Polish man was in need of oxygen after being pulled back onshore from a dangerous rip current at Nai Harn.

Lifeguards were first alerted to 30-year-old Polish man at about 11:30am on July 21 after he went to swim where red 'no swimming' flags were posted, explained Nai Harn lifeguard Narongdet Senajutti.

"The man was caught in a rip current which took him away from shore. We brought him back to the beach and gave him oxygen," Mr Narong said.

"The man told us that he went to boxing training before coming to swim. He must have been exhausted from that," he said.



The Polish man rescued at Nai Harn is given oxygen to help him recover. Photo: Phuket Naiharn Surf Lifesaving Club

"On Monday, we helped a 34-year-old Irishman, who asked us to just call him Paul, who jumped to swim from a rock near the hotel where he was staying.

"The area is marked as a dangerous area to swim. He was caught in a vortex which pushed him onto the rocks," Mr Narong explained.

A lifeguard on a rescue board paddled out close to the rocks so that the Irishman could swim just a handful of metres and clamber on board, and be brought safely back to the beach.

"He was brought ashore safely but he suffered some scratches along his body," Mr Narong said.

Fellow lifeguard Nara Ratthanarak explained that there are three lifeguard stations now posted along Nai Harn Beach to keep watch on swimmers during the current dangerous swim conditions.

"To all beachgoers, if we set flag areas [marking where it is safe to swim], please swim only in the areas marked and follow lifeguards' suggestions, as we have rescued

eight people already this month," Mr Nara said.

"Two years ago we had two people die after being caught in the area where the vortex forms. I always warn foreign visitors to stay away from that area and we always post red flags to prevent people from swimming there," he said.

"For those who come to the beach with children, do not let them swim alone. Take care of your children, don't just relax and eat, keep an eye on them," he said.

Thieves nabbed stealing underpass cables

TWO MEN HAVE BEEN ARRESTED for attempting to steal electrical cables from a power control room that controls the power system in the Sam Kong Underpass.

The men were caught cutting cables from the power control room, located near the underpass, on the night of July 20, explained Phuket Highways Office Chief Samak Luedwonghad

Two police officers on motorbike patrol saw one of the suspects sitting near the control room. The officers then made another pass close to the room and saw the men cutting electrical cables from the power system inside.

The two men arrested were named as Meechai Sopol, 37, originally from Sakon Nakhon, and Prompong Pattaya, 30, whose province of origin was not revealed.

The men were found with 39 lengths of cut electrical cable, each about 50 centimetres long.

Police also seized two pairs of wire cutters, a motorbike with sidecar, and a Honda Click motorbike.

Meechai and Prompong were taken to Phuket City Police Station and charged with committing theft



Phuket Highways Office Chief Mr Samak (right) inspects the power control room. Photo: PR Phuket

in the nighttime while using a vehicle to flee the scene and with causing damage to government property.

Mr Samak revealed that the damage caused by the two suspects was estimated at about B500,000.

"The control box is very important for the lighting and electrical system in the underpass. Most of the cut cables were connected to a generator that starts whenever there is any problem," he said.

"At this stage, we are in the rainy season. If there is heavy rain and the system has no power, there will be a problem with the water-drainage system in the underpass," Mr Samak explained.

"We will install CCTV cameras to cover all power control boxes at every underpass to protect against any further attempts to steal the cables," he added. *The Phuket News*

Tour guide drowns after denied entry

THE BODY OF A PHUKET TOUR guide who slipped and fell into the water beside the Sarasin Bridge after he was denied entry to the island was found in Mai Khao two days later.

Sutep Sae Man, 42, was originally from Chiang Mai but had been working in Phuket as a tour guide. He had been denied entry to the island on July 22 and fell into the water beside the bridge shortly afterwards.

His body was discovered early last Saturday morning (July 24) by local fisherman Cherd Suphap, 60, who explained that while he was fixing his crab net in his shack near the shore in Moo 5, Mai Khao, he saw something resembling a ball floating in the sea.

He walked over to get a clearer look which is when he realised it was the body of a man. He alerted police immediately.

Capt Thanom Thongpaen of the Tha Chatchai Police arrived at the scene around 7:30am.

Police called Mr Sutep's wife and daughter who came to the scene and identified the body as Mr Sutep.

Mr Sutep had been denied entry at the Phuket Check Point because he had a Chiang Mai address listed on his ID card.

A witness, 53-year-old Niaw Sae-ong, said she saw Mr Sutep



Photo: Tha Chatchai Police

walk down to the foot of the bridge to do something, but then he slipped and fell into the water. He shouted for help twice, Ms Niaw said, although she was unable to assist him as she could not swim.

"I shouted for anyone to help him and I saw him slowly sink under the water," Ms Niaw said. By the time help came, Mr Sutep had disappeared under the water.

Rescue divers began their search later that afternoon and continued until nightfall made the search too dangerous.

After his body was found last Saturday it was then taken to Vachira Phuket Hospital for examination. Once this has been completed his body will be released to relatives to allow them to make funeral arrangements.

Eakkapop Thongtub

PPAO eyes B98mn for Moderna

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Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation (PPAO) President Rewat Areerob has confirmed Phuket will receive 5,060 doses of the Moderna vaccine from the Thai Red Cross and is looking for more to make available for Phuket residents.

"I sent a letter to the Red Cross to buy 6,326 doses of the vaccine on July 19, but yesterday [July 22] they sent a letter back and explained that they can arrange only 5,060 doses for Phuket," Mr Rewat explained in a press conference last Friday (July 23).

The 5,060 doses of Moderna will be used to vaccinate at-risk people who have not received any vaccination injections, Mr Rewat explained.

The priority list of recipients are: Bedridden patients, disabled people, pregnant women; elders who are more than 70 years old; doctors and medical staff who work in rural areas; teachers in kindergartens, nurseries and schools; and officials who must come in close contact with infected and high risk contacts, and members of the general



PPAO President Rewat Areerob is pushing for vaccines 'that our people desire to receive, and of course not Sinovac'. Photo: PPAO

public who are unable to be vaccinated under the current state-vaccination campaign.

"These people will receive the vaccine injection for free, and we already have a list of people to receive these doses of vaccine," Mr Rewat said.

Mr Rewat also confirmed that the PPAO is looking to secure many more vaccine doses in order to provide third 'booster shots' to medical and

other frontline workers, and to offer the people of Phuket a choice in which vaccine to receive.

"Actually, I have also already explained to the Thai Red Cross that we want a total of 89,329 doses of Moderna vaccine to provide to people as a third injection, but they can give us only the 5,060 doses for now. If they have vaccine doses leftover, they may give

us more in the future," he said.

"Meanwhile, I have also contacted a company that I cannot reveal its name to buy vaccine doses as the third dose for our people," Mr Rewat continued.

"The vaccine will be Moderna or Pfizer. Basically, they will be the vaccines that our people desire to receive, and of course not Sinovac," he said. "The vaccine will be used

as the third dose only, as the central government has provided the first and second doses," he said.

"To receive the future third dose, people will have to register online, through a website like PhuketMustWin.com, but we will create our own new platform for registration," he added.

Meanwhile, the PPAO is continuing its door-to-door efforts to ensure local residents are given the opportunity to be vaccinated, Mr Rewat said.

"We will work with medical staff to knock on doors to provide our people first and second injections vaccinations, especially for those who cannot come to receive the vaccine injection at the vaccination stations. For more information, please call the PPAO's Phuket Provincial Hospital at 1131," Mr Rewat concluded.

Mr Rewat's push to provide extra vaccination doses in Phuket came as Vachira Phuket Hospital last Friday (July 23) embarked on its campaign to administer booster shots of COVID-19 vaccine to its frontline staff.

Dr Chalermpong Sukontapol, Director of Vachira Phuket Hospital, led nurses and

medical personnel to receive their third vaccination in an effort to "enhance immunity and build confidence in serving people".

The start of the booster-shot campaign came after Dr Chalermpong stated two days earlier (July 21) that around 7,000 medical personnel would start receiving their additional jabs by the end of the week. The vaccine being administered was confirmed as AstraZeneca.

The vaccination drive will soon extend to a further nine hospitals across the island including the Public Health Office and the Tambon Health Promoting Hospitals.

Almost 100% of medical personnel in Phuket have received two doses of the Sinovac vaccine since the initial drive began in April but will now start receiving their third shot to boost immunity.

The Ministry of Public Health has confirmed a choice of two vaccines – AstraZeneca, which is available immediately, or mRNA vaccination, such as Moderna or Johnson & Johnson, which the Department of Health has confirmed will be available in late July or early August.

CESA supports 'seven day' Sandbox stays

THE CENTRE FOR ECONOMIC SITUATION Administration (CESA) has "approved in principle" to allow foreign visitors participating in the Phuket Sandbox scheme to visit other approved tourist locations in the country after staying just seven days in Phuket, starting from Aug 1.

The other approved tourist locations are: Koh Samui, Koh Pha-ngan and Koh Tao in Surat Thani; Koh Phi Phi, Koh Ngai and Railay Bay in Krabi; and Khao Lak, Koh Yao Yai and Koh Yao Noi in Phang Nga.

CESA spokesman Thanakorn Wangboonkongchana on July 21 explained that the governors of the three provinces – Surat Thani, Phang Nga and Krabi – are required to work with the private sector and civil services to seek cooperation from people living in those areas.



A sign welcomes tourists at Samui airport during the launch of the Samui Plus travel scheme last week. Photo: Bangkok Post

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is expected to propose additional tourism spots to be reopened later for international tourists, he said. Bangkok Post



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Sealed tours vital for survival

The Phuket News
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Phuket-based dive tour company Seafarer Divers has launched a campaign in the hope of local dive tour businesses being allowed to conduct sealed dive tours to popular national marine parks and dive sites in the area to support local dive operators and safely support Phuket's tourism industry while the current COVID outbreak is expected to spread.

The project, called 'Phuket Diving Seabox', aims to have local dive tour operators conduct sealed dive tour holidays for tourists coming to Phuket, allowing tourists to land on Phuket and be safely escorted direct from the airport to the SHA+ liveaboard dive tour boat that they will enjoy the first week of their holiday on. Under the project, the tourists will observe their quarantine and have their mandatory COVID tests conducted while on board the boat.

"Now we are in contact with several marinas in Phuket and Krabi, and the Thai Yachting association," explained Kevin Lidureau of Seafarer Divers.



Sealed tours are vital to saving Phuket's dive industry. Photo: Seafarer Divers

"We will have an informal meeting with them in the coming days to look at the strategy we will use to present the project to the Thai administration.

"Next week we have an appointment with a vice governor to organise presenting the project to the governor, and after that for the governor to present the project to Bangkok," he added.

"Now the goal is to get

more and more people to accept the project. We need public support for the project and support from government officials. If we don't do it now, the dive industry will be dead after this coming high season, because if we can get government support for the project, we can start getting bookings now," Mr Lidureau told *The Phuket News*.

The liveaboards will operate tours of seven to 10 days

at a time, and will travel to popular dive sites and areas renowned for their natural beauty.

"We are looking to be able to conduct tours to all marine national parks in the Andaman, The Similans and Surin marine parks are more popular for divers, and we also go to Krabi, Koh Lipe and Tarutao national park," Mr Lidureau said.

The project is expected to

bring well-spending tourists to Phuket, and not only serve just the dive industry, but also megayachts based in Phuket.

"We already have a doctor and a lab, a clinic, willing to help us, because we cannot push more onto officials, and we have an insurance team to help find a hospital in case there is a cluster on any megayacht or liveaboard as well," Kevin explained.

The urgency of the project comes as the COVID outbreak that has forced the lockdown of 13 high-risk provinces is expected to spread, but also while Phuket maintains a special place in the country as the one entry point to the country under the Sandbox tourism scheme, Seafarer Divers said in a statement issued last week.

The statement pointed out that the suggested agreement would be:

Welcoming foreign divers to come to Phuket to book liveaboard dive trips in the Marine National Parks in the Andaman Sea.

All dive liveaboard boats will have to be certified under Safety and Health Administration (SHA) and follow the official regulation about

transport boats.

Imperatively, all boat departures and divers disembarking will have to be done from Phuket Province such as Chalong Bay Marina Pier in order that the Thai administration have an easy and full record of all passengers and crews in case of a COVID cluster on any dive liveaboard boat.

All liveaboard dive boats will book and pay DNP [Department of National Parks] before departures with the planning of the dive trips to national parks.

To avoid the eventual spreading of the COVID virus to rangers and people living on the islands, it will be prohibited for the divers and crews to go ashore to visit the islands.

Any suggestions from dive boat operators were welcomed. People can contact Kevin Lidureau, Marketing Director at Seafarer Divers Co., Ltd at (Mobile/Line/WhatsApp): 081-9794911. Seafarer Divers can be contacted through their website Seafarer-divers.com or through their Facebook page: Seafarer Divers Phuket Thailand - Scuba & Kayaking

Sandbox tourists not scared off, says Vice Governor

PHUKET VICE GOVERNOR Piyapong Choowong has refuted claims that almost a third of tourists who arrived in Phuket under the Sandbox scheme have returned home due to escalating COVID-19 figures.

V/Gov Piyapong explained last Sunday (July 25) that an article on the BTimes website reported that 3,000 Sandbox tourists had decided to go home due to a combination of newly infected cases rising and stricter land border entry conditions implemented to contain the virus.

"Between the opening of the Sandbox scheme on July 1 through to yesterday [July 22], a total of 10,849 people have arrived," V/Gov Piyapong said.

"Approximately 3,000 have returned to their home countries as they had completed their holidays before or at the 14-day mark.

"I want to clarify that these tourists left Phuket as per their original plans and not because of the higher number of infected cases."

V/Gov Piyapong added that of the total 10,849 arrivals since the Sandbox launched, 4,692 remain on the island,



Phuket Vice Governor Piyapong Choowong. Photo: PR Phuket

of which 4,568 have already completed their 14 day mandatory stay, meaning 3,157 had left the island to destinations elsewhere in the country. Of the 4,692 remaining, some will stay in Phuket, some will head elsewhere in Thailand and some will return home, he said.

V/Gov Piyapong's announcement came just one day after Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Phuket Office Director Nanthasiri Ronnasiri issued a reminder to any visitors under the Phuket Sandbox scheme to have the correct insurance policy to cover them in case of they become infected with COVID-19 while on the island.

Ms Nanthasiri raised the issue after it was confirmed that a British tourist at that time had become the latest to

test positive for COVID-19.

"The problem we have found with some of the tourists who have entered Phuket under the Sandbox scheme and tested positive so far is that the insurance policies they have do not cover COVID-19 treatment," Director Nanthasiri said. She did not specify how many of the Sandbox tourists did not have the correct insurance.

"Before applying for a COE [Certificate of Entry], tourists must have an insurance policy that covers COVID-19 treatment to ensure they do not need to pay for any treatment themselves. We urge all tourists wishing to visit Phuket to ensure this is in place," Director Nanthasiri continued.

"The TAT Phuket office has contacted relevant officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Office of Insurance Commission to clarify this condition and ensure we work together to find the best solution," she added.

No additional information was provided on how COEs had been issued without an applicant having the correct insurance cover in place.

The Phuket News

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PCR result not needed for treatment, says CCSA

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

COVID-19 patients who have undergone antigen tests while in community isolation venues can seek medical treatment under the kingdom's healthcare system without first having disease confirmation from RT-PCR testing.

The decision was made by the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) to speed up the coronavirus treatment process for patients in community isolation waiting for medical care, said Apisamai Srirangson, assistant spokeswoman for the CCSA.

Generally, antigen tests are used to screen people suspected of contracting COVID-19. Those who test positive must then undergo an RT-PCR test to confirm the results before being admitted to the kingdom's isolation programme.

Asked whether the RT-PCR testing method should be scrapped completely, Dr Apisamai said the Public Health Ministry is still concerned



A woman receives a COVID-19 test in Huai Khwang, Bangkok, May, 2021. Photo: Nutthawat Wicheanbut

about the issue because antigen tests can provide quick results, though they may not always be accurate.

Of note, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the US has now encouraged laboratories to consider adoption of a multiplexed method that can facilitate detection and differentiation of COVID and influenza viruses in an effort to save time and resources and provide accurate testing.

However, training sessions may be held for communities so people can learn how to conduct antigen testing for more

accurate results, Dr Apisamai said, adding the government will provide 8.5 million antigen test kits (ATK) to the public.

Somsak Akksilp, director-general of the Department of Medical Services (DMS), said a total of 30,036 COVID-19 patients in Bangkok have volunteered to self-isolate at home.

Of them, 28,785 have been covered by the medical care system set up by the National Health Security Office (NHSO), with the rest by the DMS, Dr Somsak said.

The Public Health Ministry previously allowed the public to purchase ATKs from phar-

macies so they could conduct self-tests at home.

Dr Somsak said City Hall's COVID-19 situation administration centre has instructed more than 60 public health service centres and private clinics in the capital to take care of asymptomatic patients and those with mild symptoms who self-isolate at home.

Attaporn Limpanyalert, deputy secretary-general of the NHSO, said 80% of COVID-19 patients are asymptomatic and can receive home medical care.

Patients under home isolation receive three meals per day, medication to treat their symptoms and basic equipment to monitor their condition, he said, adding a doctor will check in once per day using a video call.

Infected people can register for home isolation services by contacting NHSO hotline 1330 or scan its QR code online via <http://crmdci.nhso.go.th/>.

Mr Attaporn said the NHSO has set up a testing centre at its head office located on Chaeng Watthana Road. Those who test positive are asked to register for home isolation, he said.



Daughter dumps COVID infected father at temple

NAKHON RATCHASIMA

A WOMAN HAS COME under fire after she dumped her COVID-infected 80-year-old father at a temple in Bua Lai district last Sunday (July 25) before driving off.

Luang Phor Sithichai, abbot of Wat Pa Suan Thamma Sawaddee, said that a woman and her husband brought the 80-year-old man to the temple claiming that he knew the monk and wanted to stay with him at the temple.

The couple then left the man and his cloth bag at the temple, and quickly drove away in their car.

Ban Nong Waeng village head Thongsuk Thaeatham learned from the old man that his daughter had brought him from Lop Buri province and left him at the temple.

On Tuesday morning (July 27), the old man wandered away from the temple and was later found lying in the rain on a nearby trail. Local health workers took him for a COVID-19 test, which returned positive.

The man was taken to a hospital in Khon Kaen as he is a native of the province.

Monks at the temple, health workers and rescuers who were in close contact with the old man were placed in 14-day quarantine.

The village head said the daughter should not have treated her father that way and that she had put others at risk of catching the virus through her actions.

Pictures went viral on social media and the daughter was condemned for her maltreatment of her old father.

Bangkok Post

CCSA under pressure to reveal vaccine deal

BANGKOK

SIGNATURES HAVE BEEN AMASSED calling for full disclosure of terms relating to the state's vaccine procurement contracts and policy.

A total of 333 academics, members of the press and individuals have backed the push to see details of vaccine procurement and distribution made public under the open-data principle.

A joint statement released by the network organising the campaign on Monday (July 26) said the COVID-19 pandemic could be resolved more effectively with the unhindered dissemination of information.

The statement said the crisis has caused a loss of lives, damaged the economy, strained the public health system and shaken public faith in the government like never before.

Efficient management and fair distribution of vaccines holds the key to tackling the crisis. It insisted making data accessible to people would dispel any myths and counter fake news, the statement added.

Also, it would speak of the government's sincere intention to manage the vaccine procurement and distribution with accountability by letting people know what relevant action plans and policies it has put in place.

The statement said the disclosure of information would bring about cooperation from the people and act as a source of reliable data.

According to the statement, the petition-



The CCSA is coming under increasing pressure over the national vaccine policy. Photo: Chanat Katanyu

ers want to exercise their rights under the Official Information Act of 1997 to seek the disclosure of contracts and policy surrounding vaccine procurement and distribution.

They demanded that the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) divulge details of the processes involved in proposing, approving and signing vaccine procurement contracts in the past and for similar contracts in the future.

Important conditions associated with securing orders with vaccine manufacturers must be made public, as must crucial details including the number of doses ordered, the length of purchase contracts, deadlines for vaccine delivery, penalties for late delivery and any waivers of liability for manufacturers which miss delivery deadlines.

The petitioners also said plans need to be disclosed about what the government intends to do should there be further vaccine shortages. Bangkok Post

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BLAZING SADDLES

Baz Daniel
baz_gunner2000@yahoo.com

“Dam!” I thought, “they’ve actually got it right.” It was early on a sodden Sunday morning in June and that very weekend the Meteorological Department had said with all-knowing solemnity that the day would mark the start of Phuket’s “Rainy Season”.

Given the hilarious mismanagement, U-Turns, contradictions and general mayhem surrounding the handling of the pandemic, I hardly expected that the “Showers that Pee” would get something as notoriously unpredictable as Phuket’s weather 100% correct. Yet, it was as though God, Buddha or whoever’s in charge up there had received instructions direct from City Hall and turned on a Celestial Garden Hose exactly as ordered.

It had poured most of the night and at 7am, it was one of those gloriously verdant, sodden, Phuket mornings when the world seemed stunned into an adoring silence at the sheer life-en-

hancing power of the night’s torrential abundance. I decided a mountain-bike ride at Bang Wad Dam adjacent to the Loch Palms Golf Course in Kathu would be just the ticket to welcome in this new season of fruity mellowness and so creakily fell out of bed to get kitted up!

Cycling during Phuket’s wet season sees a veritable landslide of slippery leaf-mulch on the tree-covered six-kilometre loop road around Bang Wad Dam, plus plenty of muddy puddles, drenched and sleeping soi dogs and the occasional fallen branch, hence my tough, mud-bespattered mountain bike was summarily hoist out of the shed where it had been slumbering for the past drier months, during which my Italian road bike had been my chosen instrument of genital torture. A quick grease up and my fat-tired friend was fit to go as I lifted it onto the car’s bike-rack.

I parked below the dam wall itself, mounted my trusty steed and was on my way as a self-conscious morning sun cast dappled pools of light between the branches of the vaulting Casuarina trees that surround the reservoir.

Walkers, joggers and other cyclists were soon out in abundance this morning, perhaps seeking a way of escaping the clutches of the viral depression by embracing the natural wonders of Phuket’s great outdoors with enthusiasm. These happy hordes were being well-managed by the authorities, with loud-speaker vans blaring out advice about the niceties of socially-distanced exercising and the importance of mask-wearing.

So, a new Shakespearean dilemma of “to mask or not to mask” became the topical question. Clearly mask wearing is rather counter-productive to healthy and enjoyable exercising, yet cyclists and runners alike seemed to have read the same scientific studies as I and were keeping their distance from each other, as is now recommended.

Air flows emanating from the lungs of panting athletes of various kinds have been shown to project viruses far further than when people are stationary. You can find various studies attempting to quantify exactly what is now the safe distance to maintain from another cyclist or jogger, and this depends on a number of complex variables including relative speeds of the athletes, wind and air perturbation, temperature, air density etc. A rule of thumb is to allow for at least a separa-



tion of 20 metres from other cyclists when riding in these viral times, and of course riding in another cyclists’ slipstream is now a very bad idea!

As I looped the mainly flat, verdant, cycling corridor with the turbid waters of the lake on my right, I couldn’t help but muse about the gloomy virally-challenging times which our society has unleashed upon itself. Yet, equally I was struck by the collective spirit of human optimism on display, as families, couples and ardent young athletes in-the-making, ran, pedalled, strolled and laughed around the reservoir, or set up picnic tables by the lakeside.

I cycled for nearly two hours, looping the lake and building in some hill descents and climbs at either end of the dam wall, generating a good appetite for a fresh coconut and some chicken skewers sitting in the grassy picnic area by the lakeside, while watching the happy scenes around me. It was good to see so many enterprising stalls and mobile eating stations doing a thriving business and such a general feeling of pleasant sociability in these stressful times.

We may well be in one of the darkest periods of our island’s long and varied history, yet the indomitable spirit of Phuket and its people was on abundant display here and I thought, “What a dam fine way to deal with a pandemic!”

“Bicycling” Baz Daniel has been penning his *Blazing Saddles* column, chronicling his cycling adventures in Phuket and beyond, since 2013

Young artist rises in Patong

Bruce Stanley

Recently I decided to drive over to Patong Beach to see what excitement was happening with the opening of the island to the international visitors. I hoped restaurants and shops were open welcoming guests for the first time in well over a year.

It was a stormy day with monsoon rains preventing anyone, if there was anyone, from leaving their hotel room. Restaurants and shops were still closed and the streets were empty as though some great disaster had occurred and indeed it had, a pandemic.

So I fondly drove around looking for remnants of places I had once enjoyed reviewing for restaurant guides. Very few still exist. Sad to see that one of Patong's best boutique restaurants and bars, the White Red near the beach at the Dolphin roundabout was gone. It was perhaps the most artful corner in the area with outside panels of corrugated metal with bright red and white signs and interiors with furniture made from repurposed wood with local art on the walls. This was all made better by some of the best Thai cuisine at the beach.

I stopped to explore if anyone was still on the premises and found Noi Malison moving what was left of his restaurant into storage. Khun Noi originally came from deepest Isan, Si



Proud parents Bo Sungkong (left), Burke and Noi Malison. Photo: Bruce Stanley

Sa Ket, to work as a laborer 24 years ago as a teenager and had managed to save enough money over the years to build his own restaurant. With his wife, Bo Sungkong, who directed kitchen operations, they managed a popular bistro popular with many foreigners who vacationed on the island.

That was before the arrival of COVID, which saw their business falter like so many others. Their restaurant had to close and they lost the benefit of many years of work that was to provide them with a secure future.

Noi had to sell White Red restaurant and now he and his wife and daughter live upstairs in his former workshop

which he has transformed into an artist studio for his 10-year-old daughter, Burke, whose paintings once graced the walls of their restaurant.

Now that the restaurant is gone, sold to provide some income for the hard working family, attention has focused on developing Burke's many talents as an artist and musician.

"Burke started with clay at just four years old and moved to watercolors, acrylics and pastel crayons since then. She has had several art teachers who have shown her how to use the materials, but she has her own ideas about what to create by combining materials," says her mother.

Most of her paintings are figurative images she gets from searching the internet. She checks out well known artists and painters with a web presence and then combines images. She loves colour and her vibrant creations are reminiscent of floating people and symbols common to the works of Marc Chagall and Salvador Dali.

Many of her paintings are of artist models or children at play. They are genuinely surprising as she uses varied playful images common to children but finished with a remarkably adept and competent touch. She has an impressive body of work of varied styles, some with her own handmade frames and many where she has applied found objects to give a painting added character.

Burke has also studied the piano and continues to take lessons even as the family's income has dwindled. Competent with playing familiar classical pieces, her music really comes alive when she plays her own compositions that again, are interpreted from what she has learned.

She is happy to sell her work to help her family get through tough times. Burke can be contacted at bo815974356@gmail.com for more details about her art.

Noi and Bo do not have a clear idea about their life on Phuket now that their business is gone. They are waiting for better times and a return to sharing their cuisine and art with their guests.

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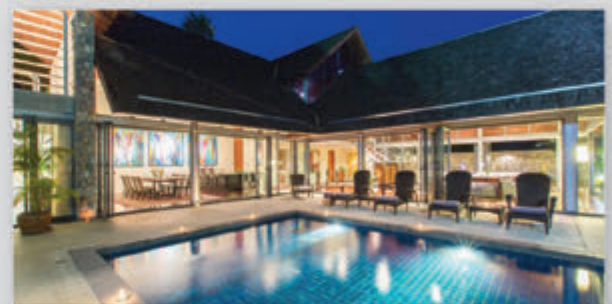
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Reduced to 135 Million THB

POP QUIZ

1. The Bayeux Tapestry of the 1070s depicts a man installing a rooster weathervane on which building?
2. What was the common name given to the burial grounds of gunfighters?
3. What does it mean when a wine is said to be 'hot'?
4. Why are the Dartmouth, Beaver and Eleanor historically famous?
5. Which zodiac sign runs from November 22 to December 21?

Answers below, centre

SUDOKU

Hard

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

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

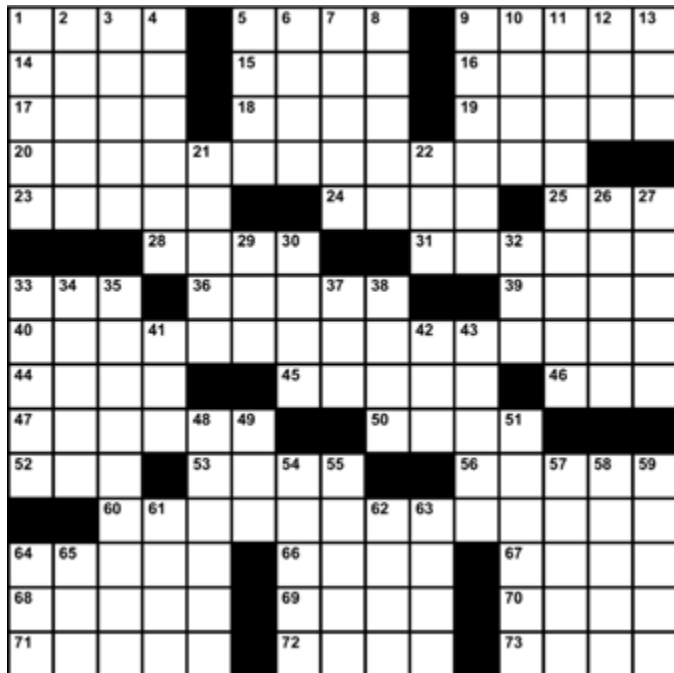
Across

1. Omar of "Love & Basketball"
5. Neighbor of Minn.
9. Made eyes at
14. Hero of Disney's "Atlantis"
15. Native American tent
16. Mazda model
17. Patron saint of Norway
18. Concerning
19. Cousins of ospreys
20. Upbeat Christmas carol
23. Birthplace of the Renaissance
24. Whole slew
25. A Cadillac
28. Fashion designer Saint Laurent
31. Bathroom tap
33. Checkup sounds
36. Early anesthetic
39. Sound from a nursery
40. Refrain from Pharrell
44. Dairy-free spread
45. Outdated copier, for short
46. Space invaders, for short
47. Egg hodgepodge
50. Except for

Down

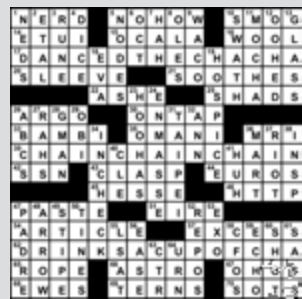
2. Smiley face, for one
3. Kitchen light
4. Beach, in Barcelona
5. "P.D.Q., doc!"
6. Satellite receiver
7. More fitting
8. Plains tribe
9. Mario Puzo best seller
10. Demoiselle
11. Scene
12. Berlioz's "Les nuits d'___"
13. Prosecutors, for short

21. Words of dismay
22. Mistaken
26. Beguile
27. Doesn't leave
29. Biblical suffix
30. Pillow covering
32. First name in the "Pulp Fiction" cast
33. "What ___!"
34. Board game
35. Repeated 100 mph trips.....
37. Prefix with dermis
38. Tach readings
41. Neighbor of Ger.
42. One voting for
43. Shack
48. Trimming tools
49. "It's not over ___ it's over!"
51. Brought forth
54. Chili con ___
55. Pronouncement
57. 1996 Madonna role
58. Like lace
59. Low Hold 'em pair
61. Lament's sound
62. Where Bhutan is
63. Marked down
64. Civil War inits.
65. Hung. neighbor



Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

Solutions to last week's puzzles:



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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

6

percent of all US households, accounting for more than 14 million people, do not have a bank account.

46

percent more often do speakers laugh more than their audience – other than at standup comedy – a recent study revealed.

100

toxic gases are released by lithium batteries found in products such as smartphones and tablets when they get too hot.

45,379

people in the United States have a last name that starts with their first name – more than 25% of those are John Johnson.

500,000

feral and stray cats are estimated to be roaming New York City.

Source: *Uberfacts*

ISLAND VIEW



Slow exposure at Rawai Beach. Photo by Charlotte Rapids

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

This week in history

July 30, 1975

Jimmy Hoffa disappears from the parking lot of the Machus Red Fox restaurant in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, at about 2:30pm. He is never seen or heard from again.

July 31, 1948

USS *Nevada* is sunk by an aerial torpedo after surviving hits from two atomic bombs (as part of post-war tests) and being used for target practice by three other ships.

August 1, 1981

MTV begins broadcasting and airs its first video, 'Video Killed the Radio Star' by The Buggles.

August 2, 1610

Henry Hudson discovers what is now known as Hudson Bay.

August 3, 1492

Christopher Columbus sets sail from Palos de la Frontera, Spain, in the hope of reaching the East Indies (South and



Harry Houdini in Boston, 1908.

Southeast Asia) by sailing westward.

August 4, 1693

Date traditionally ascribed

to Dom Perignon's invention of Champagne; it is not clear whether he actually invented Champagne, however, he has been credited as an innovator who developed the techniques used to perfect sparkling wine.

August 5, 1926

Harry Houdini performs his greatest feat, spending 91 minutes underwater in a sealed tank before escaping.

Source: *Wikipedia*

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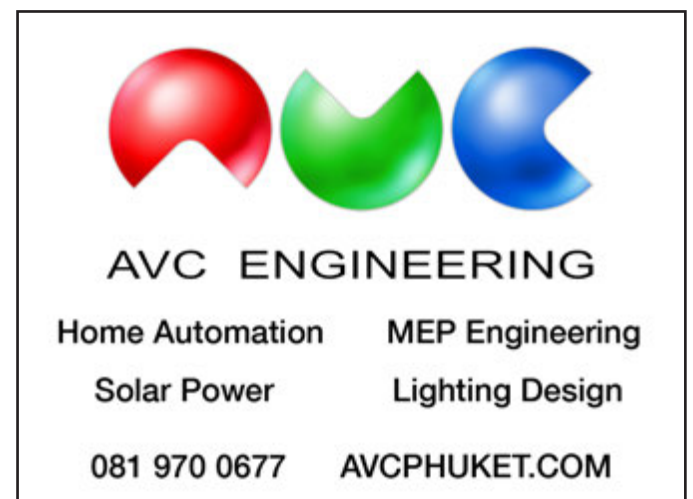
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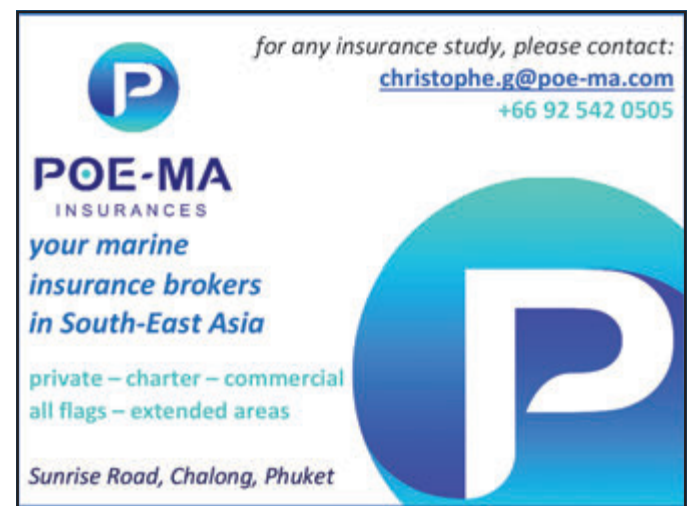
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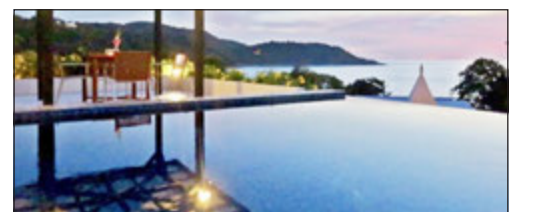
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Jason Beavan

Majestic Morgan electrifies ACG

CRICKET

Neil Quail

The Patong Penguins pulled off a dramatic last over victory against the Thalang Cows on Sunday (July 25), with Craig Morgan grabbing the headlines and a deserved man of the match award for his unbeaten 88 not out in one of the more exhilarating games witnessed at the ACG this year.

While Morgan's innings will long be remembered as an exhibition of sublime timing and power hitting that included seven 6s and four 4s off just 53 deliveries faced, it was in stark contrast to a personal fielding display the Penguin batting hero will undoubtedly wish to quickly forget.

Boasting full strength squads and introducing a 'super-sub' element to the competition, this first of a five game series was set to be a good test for both teams, but as the game entered the second innings, the likely outcome was very much in the Cows' favour.

Cows' captain Joe Ninan partnered Michael Flowers at bat to prepare the stage, but it



The Patong Penguins' Craig Morgan and Nishant Grover after their match winning partnership to defeat the Cows at the ACG last Sunday (July 25). Photo: Anthony Van Blerk

was exit stage left for Flowers in just the third over, bowled by Imtiyaz Mushtaq. Ninan followed in the very next over off the bowling of Sajal Gaur.

Ashan Fonseka fell next, edging a Gaur delivery to wicket keeper Anthony Van Blerk, leaving the Cows three wickets down in the first four overs on a score of just 20.

A smash and grab innings from Ali Khan ensued as he hit 46 off 28 deliveries with Sameer Khan working a supporting role before he too found the waiting gloves of Van Blerk for 18, thus ending a 69-run partnership.

Stuart Hamilton joined Khan at the crease to forge a 48-run partnership, before the

latter was caught by Mushtaq off the bowling of Saju Abraham to finish on 68 off 40 including a barrage of six 6s and three fours.

Hamilton and Bhanu Pratap cooked up a partnership in excess of 40 runs before the former was caught by Rishi Sadaranghani.

Cows could only add a

further 16 runs to the total to finish on 190 in the 24th over with Michael Thomas left aggrieved in being run out by Paddy Ledebor, whose throw from deep long on was certainly missing the stumps, but somehow deviated obscurely to beat Thomas' outstretched bat.

VOCIFEROUS

Seenant Raju and Mushtaq opened the run chase for the Penguins, reaching 56 before they were both back in the clubhouse by the 11th over.

Debutante Nishant Grover and Morgan settled in supported by vociferous team mates on the side-lines, and by the 15th over drinks' break the pair helped post a score of 95, leaving them still 22 runs short of where the Cows were at the same stage.

Both batsmen on 23 runs were evenly matched as they emerged for the last 10 overs, but it was to become the Morgan show as he pulled out a repertoire of rasping drives and hostile hook shots to destroy hopes of a Cows' win.

Indeed, the game should have ended sooner had a brace of Morgan's efforts that were boundary bound not clattered into the overhead power lines

that traverse the ACG causing umpire Adam Drew to signal dead balls on each occasion. With Morgan also unable to take a catch earlier in the game for the same reason, it was an historic note to an exceptional game with the cables being hit three times in one day.

By the 23rd over and the score on 172 for 2 and 8 wickets remaining, the game still hung in the balance, but two more 6s from Morgan put the result in no doubt as the game entered the penultimate over.

Fittingly, a boundary from Morgan ended the game, with Grover narrowly missing out on a maiden half century to end his first game for the Penguins on 41 off 46.

Such an enthralling end to a game played with great competitiveness and in good spirits bodes well for the rest of the series, with Morgan of course claiming man of the match.

Special mentions must also go to Abraham for his 4-38 off 4, Ali Khan for his 68 off 40, and Hamilton for scrapping his way to 41 off 30.

The second game of the series is scheduled for this Sunday (August 1), COVID restrictions permitting.

Thai MotoGP cancellation confirmed

MOTO GP

IT HAS BEEN CONFIRMED THAT THE Thailand Moto Grand Prix has been cancelled due to concerns around the increasing spread of COVID-19 in the country.

Initially scheduled for the weekend of October 15-17 at the Chang International Circuit, this is the second year it has fallen foul of the pandemic.

"Despite the best efforts of all parties involved, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and resulting restrictions have obliged the cancellation of the event," MotoGP said in a statement issued last Wednesday (July 21).

MotoGP added that it is working on a replacement race for what would have been



Photo: AFP

the 16th race of the season.

Further MotoGP cancellations due to COVID-19 have been witnessed in Japan, Australia and Finland. The Styrian Grand Prix, scheduled for August 8, has replaced the Finnish race. Ben Tirebuck

Lions beat Springboks in first test

RUGBY

BRITISH AND IRISH Lions coach Warren Gatland said a change of tactics helped his team beat the Springboks 22-17 in the first Test in Cape Town last Saturday (July 24).

Gatland said he was not concerned about his team trailing 12-3 at half-time. He felt the half had been evenly contested and could have been closer if two penalty kicks had been goaled.

"I just told the players, let's be patient and keep our composure, the opportunities will come," he said.

Crucially, he advised them only to kick at goal from a penalty if it was "an easy three points".

Otherwise, he said, "Kick for touch and put them under pressure in their 22".

It was precisely that which led to the Lions' only try four minutes after the break, with hooker Luke Cowan-Dickie going over after a drive from a lineout.

"The try from the maul



British and Irish Lions lock Maro Itoje wins a lineout during the first Test against South Africa. Photo: AFP

was pretty important, then the scrums started to stabilise and we got a bit of dominance there," said Gatland.

"Once we started to take it through some phases, particularly when we got on the front foot, they conceded a number of penalties."

Gatland acknowledged that "It was a really tough, tight Test match. The bounce of the ball and a couple of tight calls might have affected the result."

But he thought the Lions were the better team in the second half. "We got stronger and stronger," he said. "I thought the last few minutes were excellent."

Springboks coach Jacques Nienaber said a change of

dominance in the kicking game in the second half was a crucial factor.

"We got the rewards in the first half and in the second half I thought they dominated the air. That gave them territory and broken play and we struggled from that."

Gatland and Lions captain Alun Wyn Jones agreed that the second Test at the same venue tomorrow (July 31) would be another major challenge.

"To beat the world champions in their own backyard is very special," said Gatland. "Next week is going to be even tighter and tougher." AFP

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Tokyo Olympics opens without fans in low-key ceremony

OLYMPICS

AFP

The Tokyo Olympics were declared open in an eerily empty stadium last Friday (July 23) after defying a year's pandemic delay and lingering coronavirus threats that will make them perhaps the most unusual Games in history.

Japan's Emperor Naruhito made the announcement against the backdrop of thousands of vacant seats at Tokyo's 68,000-capacity Olympic Stadium, after COVID-19 forced organisers to ban spectators at all but a handful of venues.

"I declare open the Games of Tokyo," said the monarch, wearing a white surgical mask.

The stripped-down ceremony, simplified to reduce coronavirus risks, unfolded in front of fewer than 1,000 VIPs and several thousand athletes.

In one visual highlight, nearly 2,000 synchronised drones formed a revolving globe over the stadium, to a cover version of John Lennon's "Imagine".



The Tokyo 2020 opening ceremony. Photo: AFP

A reduced parade of about 5,700 athletes, far lower than the usual numbers, filed into the stadium, not all of them socially distanced but all wearing masks.

International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach acknowledged the Games would be "very different from what all of us had imagined."

But "today is a moment of hope", he said in an address.

The 16-day Games, with 339 gold medals across 33 sports, have a surreal air after the pandemic compelled organisers to make this the first Games with virtually no spectators.

Athletes are tested daily but they are performing on the biggest stage under the constant risk that a positive test could wreck their Olympic dreams.

NEW ERA STARTS

Fears the global gathering of 11,000 athletes could become a super-spreader event have made the Games deeply unpopular in Japan, where polls have shown opposition for months.

But hundreds of people gathered outside the stadium cheering and applauding as the fireworks exploded overhead.

Tokyo resident Mako

Fukuhara arrived six hours early to grab a spot.

"Until now it didn't feel like the Olympics, but now we are by the stadium, it feels like the Olympics," she told AFP.

Japan has spent nearly \$15 billion (B527bn) on the Games, including \$2.6bn in extra costs after they became the first to be postponed in modern Olympic history in March 2020.

Tokyo is also battling a surge in virus cases, and is under emergency measures though they fall short of a strict lockdown.

The pandemic has not been the only hiccup, with scandals ranging from corruption during the bidding process to plagiarism allegations over the design of the Tokyo 2020 logo.

The controversies kept coming right up to the eve of the Games, with the opening ceremony's director sacked on July 22 for making a joke referencing the Holocaust in a video from 1998.

Insiders estimate the IOC would have been on the hook for around \$1.5bn in lost broadcasting revenues if the Games had been cancelled.

Muay Thai edges closer to Olympics

MUAY THAI

THE NATIONAL SPORT of Muay Thai and its global governing body have been fully recognised by the International Olympic Committee, IOC member Patama Leeswadtrakul confirmed on July 20.

The acceptance of the Thailand's traditional martial art and the International Federation of Muaythai Associations (Ifma) came at the 138th IOC session in Tokyo, Khunying Patama said.

"This is the beginning of the possibility of Muay Thai to become an Olympic sport," said Patama, who attended the meeting.

Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan, who is also president of the National Olympic Committee of Thailand, said the government would give Ifma its full backing.

"I can assure you that the Thai government will promote Muay Thai and support Ifma," said Prawit. "We all have a common goal – pushing Muay Thai to become an Olympic sport in the near future."

But Muay Thai still faces a



A Muay Thai bout at the 2019 SEA Games. Photo: Bangkok Post

long road to become an event at the Games.

Muay Thai is a sport at the SEA Games and has been recognised by the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA).

Muay Thai was a demonstration sport at the 1998 Asian Games in Bangkok and received full recognition by the OCA the following year.

However, it has since not yet made its debut as a medal sport at the OCA-organised Asian Games.

It has only been a discipline at the unpopular Asian Beach Games and the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games, both of which are also under the umbrella of the OCA. Bangkok Post

Games serve up plenty of surprises

OLYMPICS

JAPAN'S MOMIJI NISHIYA became one of the youngest individual Olympic champions in history when she won the inaugural women's skateboarding gold at the age of 13 years and 330 days on Monday (July 26).

Nishiya finished ahead of Brazil's Rayssa Leal – who at 13 years and 203 days could have become the youngest ever individual Olympic champion – and Japan's Funa Nakayama, 16.

Nishiya starred in the tricks section to score 15.26 and give the hosts a clean-sweep of the street discipline as skateboarding makes its Olympic debut.

Her performance mirrored that of Japan teammate Yuto Horigome, who won the men's title with a stunning sequence of tricks the previous day.

US diver Marjorie Gestring remains the youngest individual Olympic champion after winning the 3 metre springboard at the 1936 Berlin Games at 13 years and 268 days.

SHOCKS AND UPSETS

Elsewhere, 18-year-old Tu-



Japan's Momiji Nishiya, 13, gave the hosts a clean-sweep of titles in street skateboarding. Photo: AFP

nisian swimmer Ahmed Hafnaoui produced the shock of the Games so far as he won the 400 metres freestyle on Sunday (July 25), overhauling pre-race favourite Jack McLoughlin of Australia.

Hafnaoui only scraped into the final after posting the eighth fastest time in qualifying but he delivered a sizzling last 50m to touch in 3:43.36.

Hafnaoui's gold medal is only the third ever won by Tunisia in Olympic swimming and the country's fifth Olympic gold in all sports.

The upsets continued on Monday (July 26) as the USA's men's basketball team, led by 11-time NBA All-Star Kevin Durant, were shocked by France.

The 83-76 loss was the

first time the American men's basketballers had lost at an Olympics since the 2004 Athens Games, confirming they have a fight on their hands to retain their title.

Elsewhere, Australian world Number 1 and Wimbledon champion Ashleigh Barty crashed out in the first round of the women's tennis singles, losing to Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo.

In a further shock, Japan ended China's overwhelming dominance in table tennis as Jun Mizutani and Mima Ito won gold in the mixed doubles.

China won all four gold medals at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games and the team of Xu Xin and Liu Shiwen was a heavy favourite this time only to crash to defeat. AFP



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Muay Thai to be Olympic sport > p15

GOLDEN GIRL

Taekwondo star Panipak makes history

Olympic champion Panipak Wongpattanakit shows off her gold medal at Phuket airport with national coach Choi Young-Seok (left). Photo: PR Phuket

OLYMPICS

Ben Tirebuck
editor3@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket welcomed Olympic gold medal star Panipak Wongpattanakit on Monday (July 26) as the Taekwondo star returned home from the Tokyo 2020 Games a national hero.

The 23-year-old Surat Thani native, nicknamed "Tennis", became an Olympic champion in dramatic fashion last Saturday (July 24) courtesy of a last-gasp kick in the women's 49kg Taekwondo final against Spanish teenager Adriana Cerezo Iglesias.

In what was a nail-biting conclusion to the contest, Panipak was trailing 10-9 with only five seconds remaining. It was then that she unleashed

her final successful kick that brought her a dramatic 11-10 victory.

Cue ecstatic celebrations for Panipak and her team at the Makuhari Messe center in Chiba prefecture, as she and her coach Choi Young-Seok ran around the venue waving a large Thai flag.

She arrived at Phuket International Airport at 9am on Monday and will stay on the island for 14 days under the Sandbox scheme. She was joined on the flight by Tourism and Sports Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakan, additional staff and fellow athletes.

"I'm really happy to receive such a warm welcome on landing in Phuket," Panipak said.

"It's the happiest moment of my life," she added proudly.

"I eventually managed to win a gold medal, and the

medal is for everyone. Thank you very much."

She was greeted by a bouquet of flowers on her arrival, arranged by Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew at the request of Her Royal Highness Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya.

'COOKIES AND CREPES'

Asked what the first thing she plans to do in Phuket is, Panipak answered: "I want to enjoy the delicious seafood here, as I know it is very famous. I want to eat seafood, grilled meat - and cookies and crepes!"

Asked about her future plans, Panipak explained she intends to compete at the next Olympics in Paris in 2024 "if my body is fit and ready".

"I will take it step by step

but plan to do my best in every competition," she added.

After conducting the relevant COVID test at the airport, Panipak travelled to Phuket Town where she will stay at the Novotel Phuket Phokeethara. She plans to spend her 14 day stay travelling the island and helping promote Phuket as a preferred tourism destination. It was also confirmed there will be a parade on August 5 to allow people to celebrate and extend their congratulations.

Panipak's triumph was only the third discipline that Thailand has won an Olympic gold medal in, having previously accumulated five in weightlifting and four in boxing.

For Panipak it completes a collection of gold medals from major international tourna-

ments including the Youth Olympics, World Championships and Asian Games.

Her latest gold medal triumph was celebrated nationwide by proud fans seeking some joy during these troubled times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Welcome Khun Panipak and congratulations, You make Thailand proud!" commented one fan on the *Phuket News* Facebook page.

"Thank you nong Tennis for bringing happiness to the country again," added another.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha also congratulated Panipak on her success.

"It is a reward for an athlete who trained hard with determination during this difficult time," government spokesman Anucha Burapachaisri quoted Prayut as saying.

"I hope everyone in Thailand is happy with Panipak's win and I hope we manage to win more medals at the Games," commented Tourism and Sports Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakan.

He also confirmed that all athletes and staff returning from Tokyo will come directly to Phuket under the Sandbox scheme.

"I do not think it is a good idea for athletes and associated staff to be restricted to quarantine in a hotel for 14 days after all the work and effort they have put in for the Olympics," he said.

"It is a much better option for them to come to Phuket under the Sandbox scheme where they can relax and unwind. All athletes and staff will come to Phuket whether they win medals or not."

BISP alumni competing at the Tokyo Olympics

OLYMPICS

PHUKET HAS AN INDIRECT representation at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games as two former pupils of British International School, Phuket (BISP) are competing as athletes.

Swimmers Atuhaire Ambala (class of 2020) and Chantal Liew (class of 2017) both take to the pool in the Japanese capital to represent their respective countries, Uganda and Singapore.

Atuhaire swam in the men's 100m freestyle which took place on Tuesday (July 27). The 20-year-old previously represented his country at the 2019 World Aquatics Championships in Gwangju, South Korea, the 2018 African Swimming Championships held in Algiers, Algeria, and the 2019 African Games held in Rabat, Morocco.

Chantal will swim in the women's 10km open water event next Wednesday (August 4) at 8am Tokyo time (6am Phuket time), becoming the first Singaporean to do so.

She won a silver medal at the 2017 SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur, setting a personal best of 2:21:30 in the women's 10km open water swim in the process. She also became the first Singapore woman to win a medal in the event.

Elsewhere, Thai athletes continue to do well at the Games. At time of press, mixed doubles badminton pair Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Sapsiree Taerattanachai secured second place in their group to advance to the quarter-finals.

Women's singles star Ratcha-

nok Intanon opened her campaign with a comfortable win against Hungary's Laura Sarosi and Kantaphon Wangcharoen, making his Olympic debut, beat Kai Schaefer of Germany in the men's singles.

In table tennis, Suthasini Sawettabut became the first Thai to reach the round of 16 after she beat Romania's 15th seeded Elizabeta Samara.

Compatriot Orawan Paranang wasn't so lucky after being stopped in the third round by Japanese fifth-seed Kasumi Ishikawa.



Chantal Liew of Singapore in action. Photo: BISP Media

Boxer Jutamas Jitpong secured an emphatic 5-0 win over Algeria's Roumaysa Boualam in the women's flyweight (51kg) round of 32 last Sunday (July 25) and was due to face Irish Magno of the Philippines yesterday (July 29). Ben Tirebuck