A taxi driver was let off with a token fine and three hours of politeness training for unloading a tirade of verbal abuse on a tourist couple this week as Phuket taxi operators continued to dictate to Phuket officials and local businesses which taxis can pick up tourists from where, and the fares tourists are charged.

Blanked by officials in their response to the incident is the fear Phuket taxi cartels exert over other taxi drivers, namely Grab and Bolt drivers, in picking up customers.

The decades-long practice reared its ugly head in front of Cafe del Mar last Friday (Jan 8), when Kevin Phol, son of online celebrity “SuperdocYo”, was told the fare from Kamala to Patong was B600, and that he had no choice but to take the taxi offered – a 10-seater VIP minivan – because that vehicle was next in the queue.

Mr Phol disputed the high price, and booked a taxi through a Grab/Bolt app for the same journey, for which he was quoted a fare of only B165. However, the Grab driver in the end refused to pick up the couple, citing fear of reprisal by the taxi drivers in front of the club.

An argument ensued, with taxi driver Jetsada “Bang Num” Kahapana becoming enraged when he was called a cheat for offering such a high price for the fare.

Mr Phol posted online long and detailed accounts of the incident. In the videos posted online, Jetsada can be seen pointing in Mr Phol’s face in an intimidating manner, and shouting while repeatedly pointing his finger at close range in the face of Mr Phol’s girlfriend, who was recording the incident.

During the argument, Jetsada’s spit was landing on Mr Phol’s face as he shouted. Jetsada was not wearing a face mask, despite repeated warnings of legal action by Phuket officials.

Of note, while Jetsada was unloading his tirade at Mr Phol, security at the club politely intervened to prevent the incident from escalating.

Jetsada was not bothered by Mr Phol threatening to call the police. “I’m a Phuket taxi,” he said. Mr Phol called 191. Police arrived and escorted Mr Phol to Kamala Police Station, not Jetsada. Mr Phol was questioned by police, and then filed a formal complaint.

The Grab driver who declined to pick the couple up told Mr Phol that the taxi rank near Cafe del Mar was not the only location where Grab/Bolt drivers were afraid to pick up tourists, Mr Phol noted. “It seems to be like this at many places,” he wrote.

Jetsada defended his actions, saying B600 from Kamala to Patong in his VIP van was not expensive. Mr Jetsada said he approached the couple, Mr Phol and his girlfriend, as they were walking out of the club as the club was closing. “I asked him if he wanted to take a taxi or not, but they did not answer me and walked past me. They talked with a tuk-tuk driver for a while and then walked...
Powerless to take action

Phuket Land Transportation Office (PLTO) Chief Jaturong Kaewkasi has gone public to obscurely defend the fares charged by tuk-tuk and taxi drivers in Phuket.

Under the theme that he was “explaining” the fares charged by tuk-tuks and taxis in Phuket, Mr Jaturong this week announced that his office will investigate the incident in Kamala last Friday that has since gone viral online, and take any action deemed necessary (see page 1).

However, Mr Jaturong’s explanation obliterated that under the current arrangement between the island’s taxi cartels and provincial officials, his office is powerless to do anything.

“For people on social media have widely criticized the incident. Many people who have traveled to Phuket have posted many comments about what may have been called different fares [sic],” Mr Jaturong said.

“For taxi fares, whether it is a taxi or van, that are in the system of expensive fares [sic],” Mr Jaturong said.

“...by which the fares set that the passenger shall pay shall be considered [sic] as the highest rate for no more than four passengers and the price can be negotiated between the passenger and the driver,” he said.

“The fare for Kamala Beach to Patong Beach is B400, which if the customer does not like the price, the customer can refuse,” Mr Jaturong explained.

Mr Jaturong did not elaborate on any other options available for passengers, and made no mention of Grab or Bolt taxi services. He did not even mention metered taxis.

Of note, the Oct 29 order Mr Jaturong referred to did not mark any new agreed fares to be charged by Phuket taxi drivers. The only order given by Phuket Governor Narong Woowiniew on that day was for tuk-tok and taxi drivers to follow the rules already laid down.

Governor Narong in July last year year ordered an investigation into the fares charged by taxi drivers at Phuket Airport after yet another tourist went public about being overcharged.

That investigation went nowhere, despite “talks” involving Tanee Sueberrek, Deputy-Director of the Department of Land Transport.

Airport taxi operators “agreed” to charge “20% off” the set fares as long as the COVID crisis continues.

In the probe, the taxi drivers cited that they used to charge B1,000 for travelling from the airport to Kata, a distance they said was “about 40km”, but their drivers were now charging only B800.

Again, of note, Mr Jetsada in Kamala last Friday quoted B600 as the fare from Kamala to Patong, a distance of about 12km.

Mr Jaturong neglected to explain that the “set rates” he referred to were made by agreement only between the island’s taxi cartels and provincial officials.

The rates were set in 2013 after the Royal Thai Police, backed by the Royal Thai Army, conducted a sweep of the island to “tidy up” the tuk-tuk and taxi industries, especially following violent attacks on tourists and the rising number of complaints clearly exposing attempts to extort money from visitors.

The number of complaints have continued to rise in recent months, with one tourist complaining in July last year that he was quoted the equivalent of B200 a kilometre for a taxi ride in Phuket Town. Another incident saw Phuket Tourist Police post a notice listing the “set fares” from Phuket airport, also in July last year.

Phuket officials last attempted to lower the set fares in 2016. Phuket’s taxi cartels said, “No.”
Hospitels come under fire

Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew has ordered officials to prepare how to treat tourists appropriately if they test positive for COVID-19, or are designated high-risk contacts, after landing on the island.

Governor Narong warned officials to ensure that quarantine facilities were appropriate and adequate, and that hospitals were prepared to provide treatment to tourists who test positive to the level expected.

“We need to take lessons in how to provide services to COVID-19 infected tourists in the form of hospitels,” Governor Narong said.

“There is a lot of feedback from tourists which the relevant sectors have jointly discussed and formulated guidelines for raising standards,” he added.

The order followed the heavily critical report published last week by the Sunday Times, written by respected journalist Jonathan Miller, exposing the experience tourists are subjected to after being warned to quarantine in a “hospitel”.

“Living like a prisoner who pays for himself,” wrote Mr Miller, famous for being the first foreign correspondent to interview King Vajiralongkorn after he was crowned King of Thailand.

Impromptu parties were organised at the three-star hotel, which Mr Miller said had long been closed before being hastily reopened to serve as a quarantine facility.

None of the tourists at the hospital wore masks, Mr Miller reported.

He also gave a critical report on the quality of care provided at the hospital where he stayed after he contracted COVID-19 while staying at the hospital.

Even under the supervision of the Phuket Provincial Hospital and the Thai Ministry of Public Health, the standard of health care and quality of life of those infected who were quarantined is quite poor, he wrote.

Mr Miller tested negative for COVID-19 on landing in Phuket, arriving for the New Year holidays, but was declared a high-risk contact after his female partner tested positive.

The hotel he chose presented his “least-bad option”.

“Back then I wasn’t to know that I was stepping out of the blinding Siamese sunshine into a Kafkaesque parallel universe,” he wrote.

THE REACTION

In response, Governor Narong on Jan 26 led a press conference broadcast live online to assure tourists that “all the bugs in the hotel quarantine system” had been resolved and that Phuket was ready to welcome tourists.

The announcement came just six days before the Test & Go scheme resumed on Feb 1.

Governor Narong was joined by Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Phuket Office Director Nanthasiri Ronnaris, Bhummikitti Ruktaengam, President of the Phuket Tourist Association, and Dr Weera Suk Lorthongkhiam, Director of Vachira Phuket Hospital.

Of note, the press conference was held in Thai.

After learning of “negative news” about the treatment of foreign tourists at hospitals and hospitels, a team of officials was dispatched to investigate the claims, Governor Narong said.

“The aim was to use the ‘crisis as an opportunity’,” he said.

“We are ready to improve and correct the defects. At the same time, if any information is incorrect it has been clarified for the public to be informed by the province itself.

“I am ready to do everything better in the part of Phuket,” he said.

With registration under the Test & Go entry scheme resuming on Feb 1, the number of tourists arriving is expected to increase with each passing day, Governor Narong noted.

“We guarantee that tourists can have confidence in the management of Phuket,” he said.

ALLOWED OUT

TAT Phuket Director Ms Nanthasiri noted that tourists who test positive but are designated ‘Green’ patients will still have to observe quarantine at a hospital or hospitel.

“Green group asymptomatic tourists do not need to be hospitalised. They are able to choose to be treated at a hospital, which will take care of tourists in a relaxed manner,” she added.

Tourists at hospitals will no longer be required to remain confined to their rooms, she said.

“They can come out of the room to walk, exercise or go to eat. This is considered a relaxing activity under the measures set by the Ministry of Public Health,” she said.

“The Tourism Authority of Thailand, together with the Phuket Provincial Public Health Office, contracted hospitals and related agencies will pay closer attention to the measures being enforced and lay down strict guidelines for tourists and the hospital operators to follow,” she added.

“From now on, more measures will be put in place to take better care of tourists, to have the same practice in terms of defining activities and duration of activities,” Ms Nanthasiri said.
Greek tourist is offering a €1,000 reward for the full return of €4,900 (about B12,400) stolen from his rental car in Kata. If the money is returned in part, the tourist is willing to return 20% of the amount returned.

Alexandros Alexiadis left the car on Jan 26, but as of last Sunday (Jan 31) he had received no updates on whether any action has been taken to recover this stolen money.

Alexandros, or just “Alex”, arrived in Phuket on Dec 26 with his wife Lelia and their three children: 14-year-old son Ilias; 11-year-old daughter Liza; and their youngest, 5-year-old daughter Vasiliki.

The family arrived in Phuket from Greece under the Test & Go entry scheme and checked in to stay at the Kata Ocean View Residence condo project. The family is set to fly home on Feb 25.

“Some ladies who work for the Condo helped me by translating, but it was limited. I called my embassy in Bangkok, they told me they will also contact the police tomorrow,” he said.

The money was in the car as staff said he was unable to place the money in the safe in the residence he is renting as staff said they were unable to open it. The option of placing the money in the management office was not suggested, leaving Alex not to know they had one.

And it was not left in the room due to cleaning staff concerns. “Big irony, isn’t it?” Alex admits.

“What bothers me the most is that the parking area [in front of the condo building] has some CCTV coverage. The entrance is visible from the car but the car was parked in a blind spot,” he said.

“Some people thought this is a good option but distance is a big concern. And it was not left in the room due to cleaning staff concerns. ‘Big irony, isn’t it?’ Alex admits.

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A long-term Phuket resident endured a horrific ordeal on Jan 22 when his family’s beloved pet dog was shot dead by a local farm worker while on a walk in the countryside just east of Baan Manik, Thalang.

Colin Mackay, the author of the book “A History of Phuket and the Surrounding Region”, was walking with two friends and his dog Harley on an orchard trail near the Bang Neow Dum reservoir when the incident occurred. It was the first time Harley had been for a walk since giving birth to a litter of nine puppies only three weeks earlier.

Whereas Mr Mackay confirmed the trail does pass through private land, it is one that he and many other trekkers regularly take without any prior concerns with.

With Harley happily walking about 15 metres ahead, the three men neared a pair of local wooden worker’s houses when they suddenly heard a gunshot and yelps of agony from Harley, who was clearly seriously distressed, spinning in crazed circles.

Startled, Mr Mackay ran to his stricken dog’s aide. Harley struggled for life for a few agonising moments before she collapsed and died as her owner tried desperately to comfort her.

Mr Mackay said it appeared the gun had been fired at Harley’s face and the bullet had lodged itself inside her body, causing irreparable damage. 

Mr Mackay’s colleagues identified that the gunshot had come from one of the wooden houses on their left and the three men subsequently approached it to attempt to understand what had just happened.

A Thai man left the house and walked towards them as Mr Mackay asked why he had just shot the dog for no apparent reason, adding that Harley was walking harmlessly along the trail as she and they had done many, many times previously, as had many other dog walkers.

The man denied he had been the one who shot the dog, jumped on his motorcycle and drove off, although Mr Mackay did manage to note the plate number.

Mr Mackay laid Harley’s corpse at the side of the track before he walked back four kilometres to retrieve his pickup truck with plans to return and collect her body.

When he returned, however, Harley’s body had disappeared and clear efforts had been made to wash away much of the blood from the trail.

Mr Mackay enquired with other locals in the area as to where his dog had gone but nobody claimed to know anything.

Once he returned home, Mr Mackay’s wife contacted the landowner who was very apologetic and confirmed he had heard about the shooting. Mr Mackay’s wife explained the family merely wanted the workers to return Harley’s body so a proper and respectful farewell could be conducted and their beloved pet could be buried with dignity on their own land. If this request was accepted then the police would be contacted, Mr Mackay’s wife confirmed.

Later that evening the landowner called back to say the person who they believe was responsible for shooting Harley had moved the body and then disappeared. The landowner claimed the man had been working at the property only for a couple of days and he did not now know how to contact him.

Mr Mackay filed a formal report of the incident with the Thalang Police the next day. At time of press he still has not recovered Harley’s body.

“Harley was a very special dog, very intelligent, gentle and kind,” Mr Mackay told The Phuket News. “She slept with my teenage daughter most nights, who absolutely adored her. Harley became a beloved member of our family,” he added.

“What makes the shooting even more senseless, heartbreaking and difficult to come to terms with is that Harley had just given birth to her first litter of nine puppies only three weeks previously and was still in the process of weaning them. The walk on Saturday was our first since she had given birth. “Harley was a very happy girl that day. It is just so heartbreaking that it ended in the way it did,” Mr Mackay lamented.

Mr Mackay also contacted Soi Dog Foundation, renowned for its work in treating and protecting local street dogs and cats and promoting a positive anti-cruelty sentiment to all animals.

“The number of cruel cases and unwarranted killing of dogs in the region has increased drastically in the past 12 months, despite the fact there are now far less stray dogs around than before,” commented John Dalley MBE, co-founder of Soi Dog Foundation.

“Our Community Relations team who investigate and pursue cruelty cases generally have at least one case per day reported. Sadly very few people are willing to report cases to the police because of fear of retaliation.

“It is illegal for anybody other than an authorised vet to kill a dog or a cat except in a life threatening situation. Anybody found guilty of killing or cruelty to animals can be imprisoned for up to two years and fined up to B40,000.

“Research has shown that people who are deliberately violent towards animals are frequently violent to humans as well.

“Whether Mr Mackay’s dog was shot for the perpetrator’s amusement, or whether he planned to eat it is unknown at this stage,” concluded Mr Dalley.
Another permit to sell alcohol

Pubs, bars and other venues in Phuket currently operating as “restaurants” must now register and be issued a new permit in order to be legally sell alcohol that is to be consumed on the premises. Once approved, they may sell alcohol until 11pm.

The new regulation was announced by Phuket Vice Governor Pichet Panapong at Phuket Provincial Hall on Jan 25.

The provincial order enforcing the new regulation was signed into effect by Phuket Governor Narong Woonciew the same day.

Under the new order licensed venues may serve alcohol until 11pm, but only if they comply with SHA++ and Thai Stop COVID 2 Plus standards and are approved by local health officials, V/Gov Pichet said.

Applications for the permits will be received by District Offices, he added.

Phuket has three officially designated districts: Kathu (including Patong), Thalang and Muang (including Phuket Town, Wichit, Kata, Karon, Chalong and Rawai). “Business establishments such as pubs, bars, karaoke venues that wish to change to a restaurant must apply for a permit from the District Disease Control Operations Center,” V/Gov Pichet said.

“Business establishments must comply with the measures that have already been enforced in Phuket for months.”

In short, to be issued a permit the venues must comply with the Ministry of Public Health’s requirements for operating as a public service establishment, service personnel must be fully vaccinated and have an ATK test every seven days, and all service recipients must strictly comply with DMHTTA measures.

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The order was specifically marked to be in effect from Jan 25 until further notice, despite the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) announcing five days earlier that the new requirements were to come into effect on Jan 24, causing much confusion among local venue operators as to which rule was in effect for which operators, especially in Phuket.

Market prices under watch

MINISTRY OF COMMERCE OFFICERS have begun inspecting vendors at markets to ensure customers are not deceived into paying more for the purchases than they should, and inspecting fresh produce retailers and wholesalers to prevent hoarding.

The campaign to ramp up measures against rip-offs and artificially inflated prices came ahead of Chinese New Year on Tuesday (Feb 1) – a time of year when many ethnic Chinese Phuket natives buy fresh fruit to place on altars as offerings and blessings.

Vice Governor Pichet Panapong, along with Commerce Chief Worarat Apharatitworawong, led an inspection of Suksamran Market in Chalong.

“Prices have increased due to Chinese New Year sales being suffered.

Another vendor explained that although many ethnic Chinese Phuket natives buy fresh fruit to place on altars as offerings and blessings.

Vice Governor Pichet Panapong, along with Commerce Chief Worarat Apharatitworawong, led an inspection of Suksamran Market in Chalong.

The products that were checked for pricing and quantity were pork, fresh chicken, vegetables, fruits, consumer products and other items for sale.

“Small traders have to sell at the market price. If we sell at prices any cheaper we lose,” the vendor said.

Another vendor explained that although Chinese New Year is usually an annual boon for sales of fruits and vegetables, this year sales were suffering.

“Prices continuing to increase was blamed on rising production costs combined with insufficient supply to meet demand, the report said.

However, vendors at the market said economic conditions had slowed sales. Where regular customers previously bought two or three items of the same type, they were now more conscious of their spending and buying just one, one vendor explained.

“Because it is a case of urgent necessity, if it is left too late, it will cause damage. Seriously affecting the public or affecting the public interest, therefore, the parties may not exercise their right to object under Section 30 Paragraph 2 (1) of the Administrative Practices Act B.E.,” the order notes.

“Anyone can fail to comply with this order may be subject to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year or a fine not exceeding B100,000, or both,” the order warned.

Offenders may also be punished under Section 16 of the Royal Decree on Public Administration In an Emergency Situation, and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or a fine not exceeding B40,000, or both.

The order was specifically marked to be in effect from Jan 25 until further notice, despite the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) announcing five days earlier that the new requirements were to come into effect on Jan 24, causing much confusion among local venue operators as to which rule was in effect for which operators, especially in Phuket.
**Oil spill causes devastation**

**RAYONG**

The Royal Thai Navy is scrambling to clean up the spill from a pipeline that leaked at least 66 tonnes of crude oil 20 kilometres off the coast of Rayong province on Jan 24. Authorities have declared Mae Ram Phueng Beach a disaster area and closed it to swimmers as crews in yellow plastic protective suits began the clean-up.

Rayong resorts and seafood restaurants say the spill is a “nail in the coffin” for their businesses after the tourism industry’s continued pandemic downturn.

For long-time fishermen who have been asked to halt their catches for at least a month in exchange for emergency payments, there is a feeling of deja vu.

They recall the long road to environmental and economic recovery after another pipeline leak in the same area in 2013.

Initial compensation for that accident was around US$900 (B30,000) but fisherman Tuem 46, says it is no substitute for regular work. “I want a healthy sea that I can work in for my livelihood,” he said.

“The sea can give us money every day. The sea was good in the past few years. I do not know how many years before it becomes good again.”

Tuem usually makes around US$30 a day from a seven-to-10-kilogramme haul but he says now he will struggle to cover the cost of petrol to retrieve his fishing nets, adding that a recent haul amounted to about 10% of his usual catch and many fish were dead.

Burapha University marine scientist Thanomsak Boonphakdee, who was taking water samples at the beach over the weekend, says it will take a long time to fully assess environmental damage from the disaster.

“Crabs, small fish and shrimp are the (creatures) that will be affected most,” he said, adding that marine life took at least five years to recover from the 2013 incident.

A dozen ships are spraying dispersant chemicals and so far more than 80,000 litres has been doused over the affected area.

There are also fears a pipeline leak will affect area.

Established a committee to evaluate the environmental damage caused with chief Atthapol Charoenchansa saying it will calculate how much compensation Star Petroleum Refining Plc is required to pay for the clean-up.

The operator of the pipeline and whose major shareholder is US giant Chevron, said it was trying to minimise the slick’s ecological impact using booms.

But satellite imagery shows the slick had already spread to an area of 51 square kilometres on Sunday, local media reported.

On Monday, the Pollution Control Department established a committee to evaluate the environmental damage caused with chief Atthapol Chaoenchansa saying it will calculate how much compensation Star Petroleum Refining Plc is required to pay for the clean-up.

Refining Plc is required to pay damage compensation Star Petroleum Refining Plc is required to pay damage

**Children aged 3-17 to get Sinovac jab**

A public health ministry sub-committee on immunization promotion has approved the use of China’s Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine on minors over the age of three, it was announced on Monday (Jan 31).

The director-general of the Department of Disease Control, Opas Kankawinpong, said parental consent will be required for the children between the ages of three and 17 to receive a shot.

Dr Opas said the decision was taken as a number of studies have shown the Sinovac vaccine is effective and safe for children and adolescents.

While the sub-committee has approved the use of Sinovac jabs for minors, Dr Opas said the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will still have to certify that the vaccine is safe to be used on the age group.

Once the FDA approves it, the vaccine can be provided to minors in this age group right away, he said.

In December last year, the FDA approved the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children between the age of five and 11.

Deputy Prime Minister and Public Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul praised the move, saying parents now have more vaccine choices for their children.

Anutin said now that the country has procured various types of COVID-19 vaccine for people from all walks of life, the public should get vaccinated as soon as possible.

“Vaccination could reduce the severity of the illness if a person catches the virus,” he said. Bangkok Post
Year of the disappearing tiger

By Dr Theresa Mundita S. Lim
Executive Director, Asean Centre for Biodiversity

The 2022 Lunar New Year, which began on Tuesday (Feb 1), marked new beginnings for many citizens throughout the Asean region, celebrating this holiday as we welcome the Year of the Tiger.

Lunar traditions and celebrations welcoming the Year of the Tiger bear more significance for the Asean region, being home to three out of the six existing subspecies of Tigers: the Indochinese Tiger, which has been recorded in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam; the Sumatran Tiger in Indonesia; and the Malayan Tiger in Peninsular Malaysia and Southern Thailand.

Tigers (Panthera tigris), the largest member of the cat family (Felidae), are mostly solitary and highly adaptable. They prey on large animals like deer, wild boar and even elephant calves, and require large contiguous areas approximately between 70 and 600 square kilometres to thrive.

These powerful apex predators continue to be pivotal players in ensuring the health of our ecosystems, and consequently the wellbeing of humanity. Yet, throughout their range, wild tiger populations are declining due to various threats resulting from human activities.

In Malaysia, the dwindling population of the Malayan Tigers, considered as one of the country’s iconic species, is a major concern. Based on the latest figures from the survey that the Malaysian government is conducting, fewer than 150 tigers remain in the wild.

In Thailand, a group of 18 tigers has been recorded from June 2016 to February 2017 in the Dong Phayayen and Khao Yai forest complex, based on a survey conducted by the country’s Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, Freeland Foundation and Panthera Foundation.

In Myanmar, tigers have been rarely spotted in the region and have been considered “extirpated” (“rooted out and destroyed completely”), according to the country’s 6th National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

We laud the efforts of the Asean Member States in addressing the decline of wild tigers and their prey. The Asean Centre for Biodiversity is currently supporting transboundary efforts between Malaysia and Thailand in protecting the important tiger and elephant landscape at the border of these countries.

In Malaysia, routine patrolling is supplemented by the all-year-round anti-snare programmes and the recently established National Tiger Conservation Task Force chaired by the Prime Minister. In Indonesia, ex-situ wildlife conservation (“off-site conservation”) efforts have succeeded in breeding several endangered animals, including the Sumatran tiger (Panthera tigris sumatrae).

The Asean Centre for Biodiversity congratulates the government of Malaysia and the Global Tiger Forum for successfully hosting the 4th Asia Ministerial Conference on Tiger Conservation from January 19-21, 2022 and adopting the Kuala Lumpur Joint Statement on Tiger Conservation.

These developments reflect the strong commitment of the tiger range states to protecting the region’s majestic felines. The Asean Centre for Biodiversity is ready to support further collaborations and dialogues to address the main threats to the tiger populations, including contributing to actions outlined in the Joint Statement.

Amid the challenges of biodiversity loss, the Asean Centre for Biodiversity urges everyone to take part in the shared responsibility of protecting tigers, their prey and their habitats. This endeavour can only be possible through stronger partnerships and effective strategies on the ground to address threats, such as wildlife trafficking and habitat loss.

May the citizens of Asean draw inspiration from the magnificent wild tigers of our region in wielding the opportunities that the Lunar New Year has to offer. Just like how tigers are, may we be key figures in maintaining the harmony and balance in ecosystems, because #WeAreASEANBiodiversity.

Dr Theresa Mundita S. Lim is the Executive Director of the Asean Centre for Biodiversity.
After outperforming thousands of other contenders, Phuket teenager Tangton “TT” Pratransanit last month made it to the final 18 of the LAZICON (“Lazada Icon”) national talent quest to identify five young men to launch Thailand’s latest “boy band”. Here, TT, just 18 years old, talks with The Phuket News about what it took to make it through such a contest, and what his plans are for chasing his dream of being a star.

Where did you grow up?
I was born in Bangkok, however, I moved to Phuket when I was really young and grew up here. I went to Kajonkiet English Program from kindergarten to primary 6. After I graduated primary school, I moved to Headstart and have been here since.

What inspired you to enter the contest?
To be honest I was really demotivated when I had to make the decision. I was in another show prior to LAZICON but didn’t make it through. I felt disappointed and I didn’t want to do anything. However, I quickly realised that I couldn’t be like this and needed to get up and do something. It was a tough decision to make, I had very little time to make the decision.

I think what truly inspired me was the drive to improve myself. I felt like I’d been stuck in my comfort zone for too long – just sitting in my room watching series and live performances of artists – and I needed a push. I realised that if I wanted to perform like them I can’t just be sitting like that so I took the opportunity and chased my dream.

What talents were you already confident in?
I grew up dancing, so dancing had to be what I’m most confident in. However, after being on stage for a few times I quickly realised that the most important talent was confidence. Luckily I’m fairly self confident so that paid out and helped me a lot on stage. Being confident on stage will help you deliver what you are trying to convey to the audience more effectively; making you a great performer.

What was it like to be in the final round?
I did feel a lot of pressure. If you kept up with the show you would know that only 15 people got into the finals from voting and I wasn’t one of them. However, there was a resurrection stage and I was one of the 15 people who got another shot at coming back. Out of the 15 they chose three to join the other 15 who were already in the finals, making it a final 18. I was the last person to get the final “ticket” from the judges. There was definitely a lot of pressure performing the final stage since I felt like this was another chance for me to prove myself and show what I can do.

What is the most challenging part of the contest?
Prior to the show itself it was adapting to a completely new environment. I had to live in Bangkok for five to six months meeting completely new people. That wasn’t a problem since everyone was very friendly and welcoming. What I faced and found most challenging was delivering the message to the audience. When performing you want the audience to feel what you are trying to deliver but I felt like I didn’t do a good job at that in the first few stages but luckily I improved later on.

Now the contest is over, what are your plans for the future?
Right now I really want to improve on my skills, whether that’s singing, dancing, acting, etc, so when the time comes when I’m offered a new opportunity I’m ready for it.

I’m fairly new to the industry and have a lot more to learn. LAZICON opened me up to various new opportunities and I want to take them and do my best at it.

Do you have any messages for your supporters here in Phuket? 
I want to say thank you. I can’t express enough how thankful I am. Thank you for the votes and the support and I hope to have your support for my future work as well. It’s an honour to be here and I really hope that my story will inspire others to follow their passion.
Got an unusual or particularly beautiful picture of Phuket? Email it to execeditor@classactmedia.co.th

This week in history

Feb 4, 2004
Facebook is founded by Mark Zuckerberg.

Feb 5, 1958
A hydrogen bomb known as the Tybee Bomb is lost by the US Air Force off the coast of Savannah, Georgia, never to be recovered.

Feb 6, 1988
Michael Jordan makes his signature slam dunk from the free throw line inspiring Air Jordan and the Jumpman logo.

Feb 7, 1900
A Chinese immigrant in San Francisco falls ill to bubonic plague in the first plague epidemic in continental US.

Feb 8, 1879
Sandford Fleming first proposes adoption of Universal Standard Time at a meeting of the Royal Canadian Institute.

Feb 9, 1895
William G. Morgan creates a game called Mintonette, which soon comes to be referred to as volleyball.

Feb 10, 1306
In front of the high altar of Greyfriars Church in Dumfries, Robert the Bruce murders John Comyn sparking the revolution in the Wars of Scottish Independence. Source: Wikipedia

Got Your Number

1 hour of exercise a week can prevent depression.

60 percent of people can’t go 10 minutes without telling at least one lie, according to a study published in the Journal of Basic and Applied Social Psychology.

73 percent of respondents to a recent survey said they were annoyed by people who shared pictures of their vacations on social media.

114,260 dollars is how much Joey owed Chandler by the end of the TV show “Friends.”

2.2 billion grilled cheese sandwiches are eaten by Americans collectively each year.

Source: Uberfacts

Sudoku

9 | 4 | 2 | 1
+-----+-----+-----+-----+
3 | 7 | 9 | 4
+-----+-----+-----+-----+
2 | 1 | 3
+-----+-----+-----+-----+
8 | 1 | 3
+-----+-----+-----+-----+
4 | 2 | 1 | 2

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

Across
1. Twosome
5. P.D.Q.
9. Finance magazine
14. Kashmir clan
15. Chronicle
16. Madison Square Garden, e.g.
17. Fill to excess
18. Property conveyor
20. To a loving person
22. Days ______
23. Orinoco, e.g.
24. Ridiculously incongruous
28. French game
33. Capital city
34. Central points
35. In the preceding month: abbr.
36. Ready for battle
40. Whisper sweet nothings
41. Wild about
42. “___ So Vain”
43. Indirect implication
46. ___ algebra
47. Degree in math?
48. Mont Blanc, e.g.
49. Cooperate closely
58. Issuances
59. Department
60. Industrial city in France
61. Quote
63. Condition
64. Sensory letters
65. “___, tooted!”

Down
1. Narrow margin
2. West Samoan monetary unit
3. Freudian topics
4. Aboriginal tribe
5. Don’t cut
6. See-through wrap
7. Banned apple spray
8. Confined
10. “She flies with her own wings” is its motto
11. Student of Seneca
12. Hydroxyl compound
13. .9144 meter
19. Incursion
21. Engaged
24. Old adders
25. Trace mineral
26. Cowell
27. World govt. in TV’s “Futurama”
28. African primate
29. Lingering trace
30. Braid
31. The “U” of UHF
32. Early anesthetic
33. Like some memories
37. Soldier’s helmet, slangily
38. Drawing
39. Ago
44. Disentangle
45. C2H6
46. Noted caravel
47. Important Indian
48. Butter’s offering
49. Joins
50. Bypass
51. Important Indian
52. “Good shot!”
53. “Go ahead!”
54. Homebuilder’s strip
56. Butcher’s offering
57. Like pie
58. Issuances
59. Department
60. Industrial city in France

Solutions to last week’s puzzles:

1. In which movie did Sylvester Stallone have his first starring role?
2. What was Queen Victoria’s real first name?
3. How many eyes does a spider have?
4. What was Karl Marx’s favourite colour?
5. What are the nicknames of Phuket’s two famed heroines?

Answers below, centre
Friday Mussels night
6 PM onwards: Belgian style mussels served with French Fries. All you can eat. Your choice, Your style. Marinated, White wine, Provençale, Garlic & cream, Creamy curry, Blue cheese or Thai style. We have a kids playground zone. Adults: 325 bath P.P. www.shakersphuket.com www.facebook.com/shakersphuket Oliver, Shakers restaurant 98/18 Vises Road, Rawai 83130, 081 891 4381

Pizza Monday
12 PM till closing: 20% discount on all our pizzas We have a kid’s playground zone. www.shakersphuket.com www.facebook.com/shakersphuket Oliver, Shakers restaurant 98/18 Vises Road, Rawai 83130, 081 891 4381

Skål Phuket Dinner at Blue Tree
Dear Members, Colleagues, & Friends of Skål Phuket
You are invited to join us for the 1st Skål Phuket Dinner of 2022 at Blue Tree Phuket on Thursday 17 Feb from 18:00-22:00. Guest speakers include Daniel Steinke, Managing Director of Blue Tree Phuket & Bart Duykers, Area Director of BB&B Thailand. Become a member and connect with the biggest Travel & Tourism professional network. Being part of Skål Thailand offers you a wide range of benefits. 080 376 7130 , contact@skalphuket.org

Sunday roast
12PM – 9PM: All you can eat Sunday Roast Buffet Beef, Pork, Chicken & Lamb – Cauliflower, Broccoli, Peas, Carrot, Fried mushrooms, Grilled Tomatoes – Yorkshire pudding – Roasted Potatoes, Mash Potato – Apple sauce, Grey, Mushroom sauce, House special, Mint Sauce. We have a kids playground zone. Adults: 395 bath P.P. Kids under 12 years old: 195 bath P.P. www.shakersphuket.com www.facebook.com/shakersphuket Oliver, Shakers restaurant 98/18 Vises Road, Rawai 83130, 081 891 4381

Wednesday BBQ night
6 PM onwards: All you can eat BBQ buffet cooked to order. Beef, Pork, Chicken, Burgers, Riba Sausages, Fish, Prawn & Squids, salad buffet and veggies, Choice of potatoes, cold and hot sauces, Bread, Beer & garlic bread. We have a kids playground zone. Adults: 350 bath P.P. Kids under 12 years old: 195 bath P.P. www.shakersphuket.com www.facebook.com/shakersphuket Oliver, Shakers restaurant 98/18 Vises Road, Rawai 83130, 081 891 4381

Thursday BBQ night
6PM onwards: All you can eat BBQ buffet cooked to order. Beef, Pork, Chicken, Burgers, Riba Sausages, Fish, Prawn & Squids, salad buffet and veggies, Choice of potatoes, cold and hot sauces, Bread, Beer & garlic bread. We have a kids playground zone. Adults: 350 bath P.P. Kids under 12 years old: 195 bath P.P. www.shakersphuket.com www.facebook.com/shakersphuket Oliver, Shakers restaurant 98/18 Vises Road, Rawai 83130, 081 891 4381

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Female/Male Massage Therapist
Urgently looking for a professional massage Therapist to come to work in Dubai for one male fulltime. Visa, health insurance and accommodation included plus other benefits also flight. To be available ASAP. hr@liatris.ae , 042363432

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Where to eat in PHUKET

The March/April 2022 hard copy issue goes to print very soon

Distributed in resorts/hotels lobbies, in a high number of restaurants and coffee shops, plus inserted in one issue of The Phuket News each month, it is a great way to Talk to Phuket about your F & B outlet.

Want to be in it?

CONTACT JASON TODAY – gm@classactmedia.co.th
Aussie Open shines after off-court drama dominates

Continued from page 16

...Spanish warrior’s greatest title victories in his 29th Grand Slam finals as he won his second Australian Open, 13 years after his first in 2009.

“I just wanted to keep believing until the end to give me a chance and that’s what I did,” Nadal said.

“I kept fighting to try and find a solution, there are a lot of moments that can decide a final like this. It means a lot to me and I know it’s a special number 21 and I know what it means, its significance.”

Nadal also became only the fourth man to win each of the four Grand Slams twice and the third oldest man in the Open Era (since 1970) to win a Grand Slam title, behind Ken Rosewall and Federer.

“It’s tough to talk after five hours 30 and losing but I want to congratulate Rafa because what you did today, I was amazed. You are an amazing champion,” Medvedev said.

Long-term rival Federer was quick to congratulate Nadal, posting on Instagram, “To my friend and great rival @RafaelNadal, heartfelt congratulations on becoming the first man to win 21 Grand Slam singles titles.

“A few months ago we were joking about both being on crutches, amazing. Never underestimate a great champion. Your incredible work ethic, dedication and fighting spirit are an inspiration to me and countless others around the world.”

On Saturday (Jan 29) an imperious Ashleigh Barty became the first Australian to win her home Grand Slam in 44 years, halting the charge of fearless American Danielle Collins in straight sets.

Photo: Getty Images

Seven more years for Singapore GP

IT HAS BEEN CONFIRMED THAT Singapore will continue to host its F1 Grand Prix as part of the FIA F1 World Championship for another seven years.

The extension means the Singapore night race, which debuted in 2008, will now run until 2028, Singapore GP (SGP) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) confirmed last Thursday (Jan 27).

“Even as we deal with the immediate challenges of the pandemic, it is important that we focus on our recovery and long term growth,” commented S Iswaran, Minister for Transport & Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations.

“We will ensure that this year’s and future races, as large scale international sporting events, are COVID-safe, informed by the prevailing pandemic situation and public health assessment.

“We will also work with all stakeholders to ensure the Singapore race is sustainable,” he added.

Starting this year, STB and SGP will work together to reduce the carbon footprint of the Singapore race and foster the transition to more sustainable business models.

Initiatives include switching to renewable energy sources, increasing recycling efforts and switching to sustainable materials.

F1 is also exploring maximum logistics and travel efficiency through process and volume optimisation and by using the least carbon intensive transport available. A full sustainability audit will be undertaken, which will guide the development of other green initiatives that will be implemented for the rest of the new term.

As part of its corporate sustainability efforts, SGP will also continue to engage the local community, and encourage diversity amongst event personnel and volunteers.

About 268,000 spectators attended when it was last held in 2019, affirming the night race with a unique street circuit that runs through the heart of the city as one of the most highly anticipated in the racing calendar.

“I am delighted that F1 will continue to race in Singapore for another seven years,” said Stefano Domenicali, President and CEO of F1.

“Singapore holds a special place on the F1 calendar, and this extension is part of our long-term commitment to continue to grow the sport in Asia.” The Phuket News
Lampard and Eriksen return

FOOTBALL

Ben Tirebuck
editor@classactmedia.co.th

The January sales are over and the Premier League returns to action this weekend, with several clubs bolstered by new additions during the transfer window.

As the window slammed shut on Monday evening (Jan 31), there was a flurry of activity that saw not only playing personnel heading to pastures new as Everton confirmed Frank Lampard as their new manager.

“It is a huge honour for me to represent and manage a club the size and tradition of Everton Football Club,” said Lampard. “I’m very hungry to get started.”

He wasted no time in bringing in fresh talent with Donny Van de Beek joining on loan from Manchester United and Dele Alli arriving on a free transfer from Tottenham.

Amid all the frantic dealings, the most heart warming news was Christian Eriksen signing for Brentford on a short-term deal until the end of the season. The Dane suffered a cardiac arrest on the pitch while playing for his country at Euro 2020 last June and it was feared he would never play again.

The 29-year-old left Inter Milan in December by mutual consent as implantable cardioverter defibrillators are not permitted in Italian football. However, there are no such limitations in the Premier League, allowing Eriksen to return to England, where he previously spent nearly seven years with Tottenham.

“At his best, Christian has the ability to dictate games of football. I expect him to have an impact in the dressing room and at the training ground,” said Brentford boss Thomas Frank, who worked with Eriksen while in charge of Denmark’s Under-17s earlier in their careers.

The busiest club during the window was Newcastle United, no great surprise given that they are now the richest club side in world football but currently find themselves precariously positioned near the relegation trap door.

The long-term plan outlined by the club’s new Saudi owners did not entail life outside of the Premier League, and it is therefore imperative they remain in the top flight.

As such, the acquisitions made by manager Eddie Howe seem sensible and capable of achieving that outcome.

Kieran Tripper is an astute signing, the £15 million (£B67mn) defender a regular in the England squad who won La Liga last season at Atletico Madrid and whose game developed greatly under the wiley tutorage of manager Diego Simeone. Dan Burn and Matt Targett will add further defensive strength.

Brazilian Bruno Guimaraes is the kind of defensive midfielder the club has been crying out for, and, at £40mn from Lyon, he becomes their joint record signing.

Child Wood might not be a head-turning arrival but he has consistently delivered double-digit hauls for Burnley over recent seasons. Also his departure weakens Burnley who also find themselves in relegation trouble.

In response, Burnley signed Dutch international forward Wout Weghorst from VfL Wolfsburg for a reported £12mn fee.

Elsewhere, Spurs completed the double signings of Swedish international forward Dejan Kulusevski and Uruguayan midfielder Rodrigo Bentancur from Juventus after boss Antonio Conte had made it clear in recent weeks that fresh blood was required.

Spurs’ rivals Arsenal had a quiet transfer window with the only notable piece of business seeing striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang complete his free transfer to Barcelona. He had been marginalised from the squad in recent weeks by manager Mikel Arteta after a series of disciplinary issues.

Aston Villa did their business early in the window, bringing in former Liverpool star Philippe Coutinho on loan from Barcelona and former Everton left back Lucas Digne.

Premier League leaders Manchester City signed forward Julian Alvarez for a reported £14mn, but the Argentine will remain with River Plate on loan until at least July.

Liverpoo beat Spurs to the signature of Porto’s Luis Diaz with the Colombian winger arriving at Anfield for £50mn.

“He is an outstanding player and someone we’ve been tracking for a very long time,” said Reds’ manager Jurgen Klopp.

US watchdog warns over athletes’ safety at Beijing Winter Olympics

WINTER OLYMPICS

A US RIGHTS MONITOR sounded the alarm Monday (Jan 31) over athletes’ safety at China’s Winter Olympics, after the host threatened “punishment” for anti-Beijing comments.

The Congressional-Executive Commission on China – a group of Washington lawmakers and White House officials – asked US Olympics authorities for an “urgent effort” to protect their sports stars’ free speech rights at the Games which starts today (Feb 4).

The commission spoke out after Yang Shu, a senior official in the Beijing Games organising committee, told an online briefing on Jan 18 that “any behavior or speech that is against the Olympic spirit, especially against the Chinese laws and regulations, are also subject to certain punishment.”

“Given Yang Shu’s statement and the Chinese government’s documented behavior, we urge the USOPC to be vigilant and prepared to defend any Olympians who speak out,” the commission said.

The United States, Australia, Canada and Britain announced in December that they would not be sending official representatives to Beijing, citing the alleged genocide and crimes against humanity against the Uyghurs and other Turkic communities.

The commission also voiced concerns over Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai, who made sexual assault allegations against a top Communist Party official. Peng was not heard from for nearly three weeks, and there remain concerns about how free she really is.

New York-based HRW awarded China a “gold medal for censorship” last week, in a statement accusing the Asian giant of trying to “sportwash” its “abysmal human rights record.”

Asked whether President Joe Biden supports US athletes making political statements at the Olympics, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters the administration had “conveyed support for freedom of speech of individuals.”

Human Rights Watch (HRW) China director Sophie Richardson calling it a “crucial step toward challenging the Chinese government’s crimes against humanity targeting Uyghurs and other Turkic communities.”

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The Patong Penguins dominated proceedings in sweltering conditions as they renewed their rivalry with the Thalang Cows in a T20’s last-man-stands friendly at the Alan Cooke Ground (ACG) last Sunday (Jan 30).

After winning the toss and electing to bowl, Penguins’ captain Jason Robertson took the new ball and after finding some early swing pinned opener Michael Flowers (0) LBW with just the third ball of the match.

Sami Pir (0) came and went in the same fashion just two balls later, adding yet another duck to his already impressive tally. The aggressive Ali Khan was the next man in for the Cows and he immediately looked to counter-punch against the left-arm off spin of youngster Aneeq Islam.

It would be the bowler who would come out on top however as Khan (0) looked to strike a flighted delivery over the rope only to pick out the bucket hands of Rishi Sadaranagani on the long-on boundary to leave the Cows reeling at three men down for 2 runs after just 2 overs.

The Penguins felt confident in finishing the game and hitting the bar early before Sameer Khan (11) and Mayur Deuskar (61) steadied the ship with a much needed 60-run partnership before the former was knocked over by James Chataway prior to the drinks break.

Following drinks, Deuskar swiftly brought up his retirement, imposing 50 with some crisp striking as the score now read a much healthier 87-4 after 12 overs. Joe Ninan added a run-a-ball 13 to his teams score before the returning Richard Desmond cleaned up the Cows’ captain in an impressive first spell back.

Gudda Manoj (9) was next to go in perhaps the most bizarre dismissal ever witnessed at the ACG. Instead of smashing a boundary, Manoj only managed to smash his bat and could only look on helplessly as the splitter removed the bails from his stumps as Aneeq picked up his 2nd wicket of the match.

Michael Rhyys Thomas (18) struck some much needed runs down the order which included three well-timed boundaries before Robertson found his off-stump at the start of the 18th over to bring last-man specialist Mayur back to the crease. Unable to run singles Mayur managed to add a four and a six to the score before Tony Van Blerk’s glove, shoul-der and helmet all combined together to stump Deuskar in the final over of the innings off the bowling of Seemant Raju, the Cows posting a below par 136 all out.

Following the interval Chataway (31) and Van Blerk (48) combined for a well measured 62 run opening stand before Flowers made the breakthrough in the 8th over. The hard-hitting Rishi (20) looked to completely take the game away with some well struck boundaries before Rhyys-Thomas’ lofted flight tempted the batsman to come down the track only for Flowers to pouce on the stumping opportunity in the 13th over.

Compatriots Morgan (19*) and Van Blerk had all but sealed the win when Rhys- Thomas struck once more in the 17th over to deny Van Blerk his 50 before Morgan put the contest put to bed in the following over, the Penguins finishing with a 6-wicket win with 13 balls remaining.

Man of the Match went to Mayur Deuskar for his resilient 61 (51) which gave the Cows something to defend while Robertson was equally deserving ripping through the Cows’ top order and finishing with the impressive figures of 3/13 from 4 overs.

Other Penguins performances of note included Aneeq’s returns of 2-30 from his 4 overs, Richard Desmonds solid returns of 1-11 from 2 overs on his much-welcomed return to Phuket cricket, whilst Van Blerk’s 48 from 52 balls with the bat ensured a comfortable run chase for his side.

Rhyys-Thomas was the clear stand out performer for Cows with a solid contribution of 18 from 17 with the bat as well as impressive figures of 2-17 from 3 overs with the ball.

This Sunday (Feb 6) sees the conclusion of the Asia v Rest of World Series with the score locked at 2-2. The match is scheduled to start at 10.30am at the ACG.

AN AUSTRALIAN OPEN like no other began in controversy with the deportation of Novak Djokovic but culminated in one of the greatest comebacks in tennis history by Rafael Nadal last Sunday (Jan 30).

Throw in Ashleigh Barty becoming the first home winner for 44 years, and local heroes Nick Kyrgios and Thanasi Kokkinakis winning the men’s doubles, this was a Grand Slam that will live long in the memory for myriad reasons.

After the chaos that preceded the tournament, Tennis Australia couldn’t have dreamt of a happier ending – and it was one they desper-ately needed, after a competition riddled with unfounded errors on the organisations’ parts.

Following the Djokovic saga, Tennis Australia had to make a hasty and embarrassing U-turn after instructing staff to prevent spectators wearing “Where is Peng Shuai?” T-shirts to highlight concern for the Chinese player. They also had to justify a large-ly voluntary COVID-19 testing protocol that came in for criticism from some players, notably world number three Alexander Zverev.

But in the end, the abiding memory will be of Nadal’s monu-mental achievement in winning that unprecedented 21st Grand Slam after a titanic five-set duel with Daniil Medvedev lasting 5hr 24min.

The Spanish great looked dead and buried as the Russian world number two carved out a two-set lead but Nadal surged home for one of his mightiest comeback wins 2-6, 6-7 (57), 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 in 5hr 24min at Rod Laver Arena.

Nadal came out on top in the physical war of attrition to move ahead of “Big Three” rivals Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer on the all-time list of men’s major winners.

It was one of the 35-year-old’s... Continued on page 14

Rafa and Ashleigh make history Down Under

Rafa and Ashleigh pose with the winner’s trophy during a media photo shoot the morning after his Australian Open triumph. Photo: AFP