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CANNABIS CONTROL ZONES STILL UP IN THE AIR > PAGE 2

BIENNALE BAHT



Photo: PR Phuket

B59MN POURED INTO BIENNALE AS PHUKET AIMS FOR ARTS HUB

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket's hosting of the Thailand Biennale 2025 will cost taxpayers nearly B59 million, according to official budget documents, as the island launched the five-month contemporary arts festival last Saturday (Nov 29).

Government leaders have hailed the event as a major step towards establishing Phuket as a global art tourism hub, with the event expected to generate more than B30 billion for the local economy.

The budget spending presented in documents to *The Phuket News* - totalling precisely B58,996,070.77 - covers a wide range of spending items across logistics, installations, staffing, public relations, production design and community engagement programmes.

Key allocations include B7.99mn for art installations at the Indoor Stadium at Saphan Hin and B6.72mn for the Saphan Hin Expo zone, one of the festival's largest and most prominent public venues.

Another B6.4mn has been allocated to event management,

stage construction and professional staffing, while more than B4.6mn is earmarked for design and production costs associated with artist coordination, exhibition planning and venue development.

Art handling and installation work at Saphan Hin alone carries a budget of B3.47mn, reflecting the Biennale's extensive use of outdoor public spaces.

Public-facing promotional activities represent another significant portion of the spending. More than B4.2mn is allocated to media production and advertising, including a cinematic feature video

costing B869,500 and national-level PR campaigns. An additional B3.4mn is directed towards community relations, accessibility projects and cultural communication activities around the island.

Other notable costs include: B3.75mn for lighting equipment procurement; B2.74mn for a tourism campaign promoting "creative experiences"; B2.07mn for international art exchanges; B2mn for media strategy and marketing at Phuket Town venues; B1.99mn to support foreign artists' participation and logistics; B1.5mn for PR coordination; and B1.06mn for...

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

NEWS PAGE 3

Phuket flood relief arrives in the South



LIFE PAGE 8

Soi Dog launch flood relief aid for cats, dogs



SPORT PAGE 16

Laguna Phuket Triathlon sees big turnout



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@thepuketnews

LIVE 89.5 NEWS TV

exeditor@classactmedia.co.th

News



Police remove U-turn barriers in Koh Kaew > p5

Phuket pushes for the 'art baht'

Continued from page 1

...installation and decoration at the 'Phuket Creativity Center'

So-called 'minor' expenses include B757,000 for promotional photography, B615,000 for art direction at the main sites, B594,000 for a "youth-focused art participation" project, B589,400 for digital content production and social-media outreach and B520,000 for printed materials and exhibition catalogues.

The budget documents outline dozens of separate projects, ranging from venue-specific setups – including Old Town buildings, heritage sites and the former Pearl Cinema – to island-wide mobile exhibitions, educational programmes and cultural mapping initiatives.

The government has defended the spending, saying the Biennale is expected to deliver long-term cultural value and immediate economic returns. Officials project the festival will attract more than 3 million visitors between Nov 29, 2025 and Apr 30, 2026, bringing an estimated B30bn into the Andaman economy through tourism, hospitality, retail and local creative industries.

GRAND OPENING

The festival launched in full at Saphan Hin last Saturday evening (Nov 29), led by Culture Minister Sabida Thaiset, who presided over the opening ceremony before an audience of senior officials, diplomats, curators and artists from Thailand and abroad.

Among the high-level attendees were Deputy Interior Minister Sasithorn Kittithornkul, Culture Ministry Permanent



Photo: PR Phuket

Secretary Prasop Riangngen and Office of Contemporary Art and Culture (OCAC) Director Kesorn Kamnerdpetch.

Also present were Phuket Governor Nirat Phongsithaworn, Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation (PPAO) President Rewat Areerob, and Phuket Art Association President Anchalee Vanich Thepbutr.

Minister Sabida said the Biennale reflects government policy to strengthen the role of contemporary art in Thailand's cultural diplomacy and to widen public access to creative spaces.

"The Thailand Biennale demonstrates our commitment to elevating Thai contemporary art on the world stage," she said. "It expands cultural spaces in communities and strengthens the 'Thai Thai' identity while deepening international exchange."

ON SHOW

The 2025 edition marks the fourth Thailand Biennale and the first

time it has been hosted in Phuket. Held under the theme 'Eternity | Kalpa', the festival invites audiences to explore ideas of time, technological evolution, permanence, impermanence and humanity's relationship with nature.

A total of 65 artists and collectives from 25 countries have been selected to exhibit their works throughout Phuket, including: the Pearl Theatre and former Pearl Cinema; Baan Phra Aram; the Phuket Contemporary Art Gallery; the 4,000-seat Indoor Stadium; DC Phuket Town; the Saphan Hin mangrove area; Laem Phromthep; and Kathu Shrine.

In addition, 13 'pavilion projects' led by Thai and international art organisations are spread across Phuket Old Town, major beaches and key attractions. Among them are the 'Isan Ok Lay Pavilion', 'Yong Won Pavilion', 'Andaman Pavilion', 'Lanna Pavilion' and 'Instant Kal Pavilion', each designed to integrate contempor-

ary artworks directly into community spaces.

Ms Sabida emphasised that the Biennale embraces Phuket's already-built environment – including old cinemas, historical buildings and natural areas – to "turn the island's infrastructure limitations into creative opportunities".

EARLY BIRDS

Ahead of the opening, a special ceremony was held at 4pm to present 'Bian Fu', the official Thailand Biennale mascot, to major sponsors. Ten figurines and accompanying artworks by leading Thai artists – valued at more than B5mn in total – were handed over by President Anchalee and PPAO President Rewat.

'Bian Fu', meaning "lucky bat", symbolises good fortune and cultural harmony. Only 19 limited-edition figurines have been produced, and nine remain available through the Phuket Art Association.

Initially unveiled as 'Fufu – the bat of happiness' in July, the mascot was designed by Asst Prof Dr Phanuwat Sengiam of Phuket Rajabhat University. It draws inspiration from the Chinese concept of 'Wu Fu', or the five happinesses, reflecting Phuket's multicultural heritage. Funds raised through sponsorships will support art activities, cultural communication and contemporary artists.

Ms Anchalee praised the sponsors, saying: "Bian Fu figurines are not just sculptures, but symbols of collaboration and belief in the value of art that truly impacts society."

CULTURAL VALUE

With more than B58.9mn invested and tens of thousands of visitors expected at its peak periods, officials say the Biennale will leave a lasting legacy by positioning Phuket as a long-term centre for contemporary arts, cultural tourism and international creative exchange.

The government maintains that the spending – while substantial – is justified by the projected B30bn economic benefit and the opportunity to expand Phuket's reputation beyond sun-sand-sea tourism into culture-driven global markets – a position supported even by key local figures.

Phuket MP Chalermpong Saengdee plainly voiced his support for the festival. "Over the course of five months, from November 29, 2025, to April 30, 2026, international art will be displayed across three districts of Phuket, providing a platform for artists from around the world to share their ideas, inspire, and connect cultures internationally," he said.

"This is not just art, it's an economic opportunity for the community, it's the creative power of the new generation, and it's a new image for Phuket on the world stage," he noted.

"I invite all citizens to be a part of this important history. Come and see, support, and be proud of Thai and international artists who will bring vibrant color to our country throughout these five months.

"Art drives the city, culture drives the economy, and the people are at the heart of development," MP Chalermpong concluded.

Dithering prevents cannabis control zones from becoming reality

PHUKET'S LONG-DISCUSSED cannabis control zone remains stalled, with officials providing no updates or decisions despite repeated meetings with both government and private sectors. Meanwhile, the private sector continues pushing for stricter national-level regulation to protect tourism and public safety.

Phuket Tourist Association President Thaneth Tantipiriyakit told *The Phuket News* that the province is still waiting for movement on the zoning plan, while the private sector continues pushing for

cannabis to be reinstated as a Category 5 narcotic.

He explained that reclassification would not affect licensed growers or medical users but would allow authorities to impose narcotics-level penalties on illegal sellers, including arrest and asset seizure – measures he says are needed to curb recreational use and public smoking.

Mr Thaneth warned that current laws give public health officials only limited enforcement tools, such as warnings, small fines and temporary suspensions. He also noted that Phuket's growing image as a "can-



Photo: Patong Municipality

nabis capital" is still harming family tourism.

He added that the push for reclassification has been ongoing since former Phuket Governor Sophon Suwannarat and is supported by the Joint Public-Private Consultative Committee. The final decision rests with the full Narcotics Committee, he said.

Despite discussions, the cannabis zoning plan, a key issue for Phuket, saw no progress. Officials said provincial regulations are "being considered", with no timeline or draft guidelines provided.

Phuket MP Chalermpong Saengdee, who is also Secretary of the House of Representatives Tourism Committee, stressed that the goal remains a balanced, practical framework that ensures public safety, protects tourism and allows legal medical access, keeping Phuket a safe and internationally recognised destination.

He noted that the private sector is pushing for stricter measures because current laws have loopholes and remain unclear, making enforcement difficult – particularly in public, tourist-heavy and high-density areas. Improper use, he said, could harm Phuket's image and reputation among families and high-spending visitors.

"The meeting with provincial agencies was an important step, demonstrating cooperation between Phuket's legislative and executive branches to develop a comprehensive cannabis control frame-

work," he said.

MP Chalermpong added that the Tourism Committee will carefully review all feedback and coordinate with relevant provincial and national agencies to implement practical solutions that support sustainable tourism growth while safeguarding Phuket's image.

The meeting chaired by MP Chalermpong with provincial agencies at Phuket Provincial Hall on Nov 23 was held to discuss the impact of cannabis use on tourism and explore sustainable control measures.

Natnaree Likidwatanasakun

Phuket deploys flood relief

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket has stepped up its emergency response to the worsening flood crisis in the South, deploying convoys of relief supplies, medical teams, volunteers and rescue equipment as authorities across the island continue to mobilise support for affected provinces.

A 16-truck convoy loaded with essential supplies departed Phuket Provincial Hall at 9am last Friday (Nov 28), carrying rice, dried food, drinking water, daily necessities and basic medical items to communities hit hard by severe flooding across the lower southern region. The convoy was launched by Vice Governors Adul Chuthong and Suwit Phansengiam, joined by officials, private-sector partners and local residents.

Vice Governor Adul thanked organisations and individuals for helping gather and load supplies, saying Phuket “stands in solidarity with those suffering from the floods” and



Phuket Kusoldharm volunteers help rescue residents from a rooftop in Hat Yai. Photo: Kusoldharm Phuket

will continue supporting national relief efforts.

The mobilisation followed a formal request for assistance from Hat Yai authorities. Last Thursday morning (Nov 27), Governor Nirat Phongsitthaworn dispatched Volunteer Defence Corps (OrSor) teams to Hat Yai to help with evacuations, rescue operations and transport of flood victims. Personnel will remain on duty until conditions stabilise.

At 10am the same day, Vachira Phuket Hospital deployed its first emergency

medical team of five doctors, pharmacists, nurses and assistants, along with medicines and first-aid kits, to reinforce pressure on local health services. Additional Vachira staff undergoing emergency-medicine training in Bangkok were also sent directly to the district. The hospital has opened a donation point at its Emergency and Cardiac Centre to collect dried food, water and essential goods.

Hospital Director Dr Weerasak Lorthongkam confirmed that Vachira’s mobile medical unit is

prepared to establish a field hospital if required, including water-rescue operations using boats allocated for the mission.

With the Department of Disaster Prevention & Mitigation reporting severe flooding across nine provinces, affecting nearly millions people and leaving many dead, Phuket expanded its support to missions in Songkhla, Narathiwat, Phatthalung, Trang and Satun, deploying 265 personnel, 45 vehicles, 75 watercraft and three high-pressure pumps.

A total of 58 donation centres were opened across the island, though initially only 35 were listed online.

While many of the donation centres scaled down their operations earlier this week, residents were still encouraged to continue to donate essential supplies where possible.

Last Saturday (Nov 29), the Kusoldharm Phuket Foundation announced it will now accept only instant noodles, canned fish, rice and dried snacks after receiving a large volume of donations. However, volunteers were still invited to assist in packing and sending relief bags to southern provinces.

Meanwhile, the Phuket Commerce Office, together with the Phuket Chamber of Commerce networks, have delivered 30,000 eggs to support meal preparation at the 42nd Military Circle Food Distribution Centre in Hat Yai. The eggs will be used to cook meals for flood-affected households in several Songkhla districts.

Phuket’s Medical Emergency Response Team (MERT), dispatched by

Vachira Phuket Hospital, remains in the South to continue 24-hour operations at the field hospital at Prince of Songkla University’s Sports Complex. More than 30 psychologists and health-office staff have also been deployed to support trauma care and emotional recovery for evacuees.

Across Phuket, municipalities, private companies and volunteer teams have launched their own relief convoys and donation drives. Patong Municipality, Thalang District, Phuket City Municipality, Nikorn Marine and numerous community groups have contributed food, drinking water, survival kits, boats, life jackets and jet-skis.

Governor Nirat stressed that the island is “united in helping southern communities facing this ongoing flood crisis”, with more personnel, vehicles and supplies on standby as conditions evolve.

He urged residents to donate only through official channels and to support the relief teams working across flood-affected provinces.

Overstay fines waived for flood-stuck foreigners

PHUKET AIRPORT Immigration has confirmed that foreign tourists stranded by severe flooding across eight southern provinces will be exempt from overstay fines, following an order issued by the Immigration Bureau.

The exemption applies to travellers unable to leave Thailand due to the widespread flooding that has cut off key transport routes – particularly in Hat Yai District – leaving many tourists stuck in their accommodations and unable to reach airports or border checkpoints.

Pol Maj Gen Choen-grorn Rimpadi, Deputy Commissioner and spokesperson for the Immigration Bureau, announced on Nov 28 that Immigration Commissioner Pol Lt Gen Panumas Boonyalug has authorised the temporary waiver in recognition of the situation being a force majeure event.

Under normal circum-



Photo: Phuket Airport Immigration

stances, foreigners who overstay their permitted period are fined B500 per day under the Immigration Act B.E. 2522 (1979).

However, the Bureau confirmed that fines will be waived for those genuinely affected by flooding in the following provinces: Songkhla, Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Phatthalung, Trang, Satun, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat.

The measure covers overstays incurred between Nov 20 and Dec 31, using authority granted under Section 54 of the Act.

Immigration officers at all international points of entry and exit have been instructed to implement the exemption immediately, while still conducting standard security checks, Phuket airport Immigration confirmed.

The Immigration Bureau added that efforts are underway to restore services at provincial immigration offices impacted by the flooding, so operations can resume for the public and foreign nationals as quickly as possible.

The Phuket News



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CONTACT US

editor@classactmedia.co.th 076 612 550

PURIYA BEAVAN
Editor



CHRIS HUSTED
Executive Editor
084 307 7408
execeditor@classactmedia.co.th



BEN TIREBUCK
News / Sport Editor
061 806 8132
editor3@classactmedia.co.th



CHUTHARAT 'UM' PLERIN
Thai Editor
088 766 1615
thai@classactmedia.co.th



NATNAREE 'MILD' LIKIDWANASAKUN
Reporter / Translator
082 295 3244
reporter1@classactmedia.co.th



JASON BEAVAN
General Manager
086 479 7471
gm@classactmedia.co.th



SIRIPORN (NOK) SEANGMAS
Sales Support
086 479 7470
sales@classactmedia.co.th

NIRAVIT 'MOS' VORAVANITCHA
Graphic designer

The Phuket News
@thepuketnews

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99/7 Moo 1 (Billion Plaza),
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PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

FRI DECEMBER 5



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Wind 11 m/s

SUN DECEMBER 7



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Wind 11 m/s

MON DECEMBER 8



High: +35°
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Wind 4 m/s

TUE DECEMBER 9



High: +35°
Low: +28°

Wind 4 m/s

WED DECEMBER 10



High: +37°
Low: +28°

Wind 4 m/s

THU DECEMBER 11



High: +36°
Low: +27°

Wind 4 m/s



Photo: Wichit Police

Chinese woman held over suspected fake banknotes

POLICE HAVE SEIZED 49 suspected counterfeit US\$100 banknotes and temporarily barred a Chinese tourist from leaving Thailand after the bills failed authenticity checks at a money exchange counter at Central Festival Phuket.

Wichit Police confirmed the case over the weekend after officers were called to the Lion Exchange booth in front of which the incident occurred at about 5:30pm on Nov 28.

According to the police report, the shop's manager alerted officers after a customer – Li Yaru, a Chinese national – presented a stack of US\$100 bills for exchange. Staff used an automatic banknote detector, which flagged 49 of the notes as failing the authenticity test.

Police arrived to inspect the scene, and Wisanee Chuthip, who reported the incident, handed over the bills for examination.

During questioning, Ms Li told officers she had obtained the US dollars approximately 10 years ago while gambling at a casino in Macau. She insisted the notes were genuine but agreed to allow police to seize them for forensic investigation.

All 49 bills have now been sent to Forensic Science Division 8 for official verification.

Wichit Police have placed a temporary hold on Ms Li's ability to leave the country pending the outcome of the forensic examination. Police said further action will depend on the results of the analysis.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Russian Ambassador pays visit to Phuket

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket Governor Nirat Phongsittaworn welcomed Russian Ambassador to Thailand Yevgeny Tomikhin last week for talks on strengthening cooperation as the Russian population in the province continues to grow.

The meeting at Phuket Provincial Hall on Nov 27 focused on expanding collaboration between Thailand and Russia in key areas including security, tourism, the economy and education.

Ambassador Tomikhin noted that Phuket has become "a second home for many Russians", with the number of Russian nationals residing on the island steadily rising this year. He said Russians now spend an estimated B100 billion annually in Phuket, underscoring the close economic ties between the two countries.

On safety, the Ambassador said the Russian Embassy will work to improve public communication and raise awareness

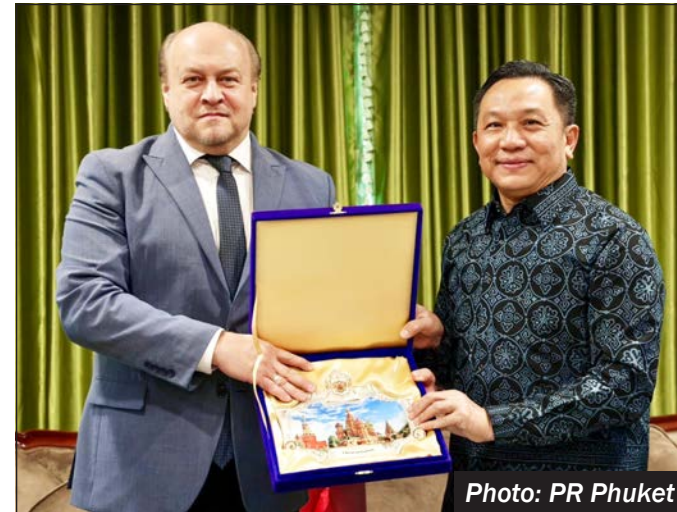


Photo: PR Phuket

among Russian visitors and residents about accident prevention. He also said Russian business operators in Phuket are ready to support projects aimed at improving road safety across the island.

Looking ahead, Ambassador Tomikhin said Russia is committed to enhancing regional-level cooperation with Phuket, given the island's strong reputation among Russian travellers. He noted that multiple airlines already operate direct flights from Russian cities to Phuket, which he said would help stimulate wider economic opportunities.

Education was high-

lighted as a key area for further cooperation, with the Ambassador expressing interest in deepening collaboration between Russian universities and Prince of Songkla University Phuket Campus in fields such as language, medicine, business and other programmes.

Governor Nirat welcomed Russia's continued engagement and emphasised the long-standing positive relations between the two countries. He also invited the Ambassador to try Phuket's "Thai seafood sauce", joking that he hoped the Ambassador would help promote the local flavour on his next trip to Russia.

British tourist drowns at Freedom

A 37-YEAR-OLD BRITISH tourist drowned while swimming at Freedom Beach last Saturday (Nov 29), Patong Police have confirmed.

Police were notified of the incident at 12:30pm after guards at the beach attempted but were unable to revive the man, identified as Jason Mark Lambert, who had been holidaying in Phuket with his family since Nov 19. Mr Lambert had been staying at the Nipa Hotel in Patong.

According to the police report, Mr Lambert had entered the water with his wife at about 10am. Shortly afterwards, beach guards noticed he appeared to be in difficulty. They brought him ashore and administered first aid, but he was later pronounced dead.

Mr Lambert's body was taken to Patong Hospital, where



Photo: Kusoldharm Phuket Foundation

Dr Punthanika Chaithianthong conducted an autopsy in accordance with standard procedures, Patong Police reported.

Police noted that the family raised no concerns over the cause of death, and the body has been released to them for funeral arrangements.

No foul play is suspected. Officers have recorded the matter and will proceed with the standard administrative steps, the report by Patong Police concluded.

Eakkapop Thongtub

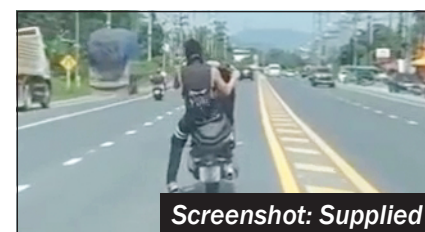
Wheelie stunt ends with charges

A 22-YEAR-OLD MUAY THAI trainer has been charged after performing a high-speed wheelie along Sakdidet Rd, with officers acting swiftly after video of the stunt spread on social media.

Wichit Police Chief Pol Col Somsak Thongkliang ordered an immediate investigation after the clip surfaced, showing a young man in a black shirt and trousers lifting the front wheel of his motorbike while riding westbound through the Baan Borrae area.

The rider maintained the wheelie for several hundred metres, prompting officers to deem the act dangerous driving.

Police traced the registration of the black Honda Click 160 used in the stunt and reviewed CCTV footage along the route. The motorbike was found to be registered to the father of Kitisak 'Jack Khiaowan' Dieth, 22, of Moo 7, Wichit. Officers contacted the father and requested that he



Screenshot: Supplied

bring both the bike and the person seen in the clip to Wichit Police Station.

Kitisak later arrived at the station around 11:30pm on Nov 27 and voluntarily surrendered himself and the motorbike. Officers seized the vehicle for evidence.

Investigators charged Kitisak with reckless driving potentially endangering people or property, and driving without regard for the safety or distress of others.

Police noted that other videos posted online showed Kitisak performing similar wheelies in public areas, including on Sakdidet Rd and the bypass road, which had been posted online. Eakkapop Thongtub

Gov briefed on traffic, waste woes

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Governor Nirat Pongsittithaworn has been finally briefed on two of Phuket's critical problems – traffic congestion around the Heroines Monument and mounting pressure at the Saphan Hin waste-management centre – during a series of meetings with local administrators.

Gov Nirat visited the Heroines Monument to discuss traffic and lighting concerns with Srisoonthorn Mayor Chalermphon Kerdsap, who described the visit as an introductory briefing rather than a formal inspection.

“The Governor’s visit was brief. He came to pay respects at the monument and asked about ongoing problems, but no detailed solutions or formal plans were discussed,” Mayor Chalermphon said.

The Mayor highlighted two urgent issues: a lack of lighting around the monument due to the preliminary work done ahead of what was at the time planned construction of an under-



Photo: Srisoonthorn Municipality

pass under the busy roundabout, plans that have now been abandoned; and persistent congestion caused by traffic entering from Cherng Talay. The outage has left the rear of the monument poorly lit, he said, but the municipality cannot repair it because the area falls under the Highways Department.

Traffic jams in the area continue to worsen, Mayor Chalermphon noted. “Tourists following GPS routes often make sudden

U-turns. Even a brief slowdown can create backups stretching all the way to Koh Kaew,” he said.

Preliminary ideas raised included closing U-turns in front of Thai Watsadu to redirect vehicles to a safer turning point near the power plant, or establishing a controlled intersection with a detour via Kajonkiet Thalang School. However, Mayor Chalermphon stressed that these were early suggestions only.

“No formal decisions

were made. Detailed plans will be presented later, as the governor told me,” he said.

Gov Nirat later posted on Facebook, emphasising the need for agencies to work together to improve safety and traffic flow.

“Local authorities must work collaboratively to regulate traffic, address hazardous areas, and develop road-management systems to ensure smooth travel, particularly during rush hours and the tourist

season,” he wrote. Phuket would continue to pursue traffic improvements “with straightforward, 100% dedication,” he added.

ISLAND WASTE

Gov Nirat has also been briefed on the growing strain at the Phuket Solid Waste Disposal Centre at Saphan Hin, where refuse levels continue to exceed processing capacity and odour complaints persist in nearby communities.

Phuket Town Mayor Supachok La-ongphet met the Governor on Nov 24 to outline the worsening situation. The facility, managed by Phuket City Municipality, processes around 500 tonnes of waste daily through its incinerator, but a further 700-800 tonnes must be diverted to the landfill.

Only Landfills 4 and 5 remain open, after Landfills 1-3 were closed due to their proximity to housing. Phuket’s total daily waste volume now averages 1,150-1,200 tonnes, rising to 1,300 tonnes during large events or peak tourism periods, Mayor Supachok said.

A second incinerator is currently under construction and expected to be completed in late 2026 or early 2027, adding another 500 tonnes of processing capacity per day.

Mayor Supachok said the persistent odour affecting surrounding communities is caused mainly by organic waste decomposing in the landfill, not the incinerator. Municipal workers spray microorganisms daily over the waste surface to reduce the smell.

Gov Nirat said he would coordinate closely with Phuket City Municipality to identify further measures to improve operations at the site. He acknowledged the burden placed on the municipality, which must manage waste from 19 local administrative bodies and multiple government agencies island-wide.

“We understand the challenges faced by Phuket City Municipality, which must manage waste from across the island within limited resources,” Gov Nirat said. “I will be personally inspecting the situation soon so that we can move toward practical solutions.”

U-turn barriers removed to ease traffic flow, say police

PHUKET CITY POLICE WILL KEEP the traffic barriers removed from the forever overlaid Koh Kaew U-turn in the name of safety and, they say, to help ease severe congestion on the southbound lanes toward Phuket Town.

“The barriers had narrowed the southbound traffic to a single lane, forcing traffic to bottleneck and backing up as far as Heroines Monument,” Phuket City Police Chief Pol Col Chatree Chukaew told *The Phuket News*.

Pol Col Chatree explained that the initiative to have the barriers installed was a collaborative effort between Phuket City Police Station and the Phuket office of the Highways Department, and served as a preparation for the peak season.

“We began a trial and removed the barriers on July 1 and tested it for 14 days. The result was that traffic flow was opened to two lanes in both directions,” Pol Col Chatree said.

“The results showed significantly improved traffic flow, with motorists now able to travel from Phuket Town via the Koh Kaew Intersection to Phuket International Airport in about 20 minutes, up from over an hour previously,” he added.

Asked about the danger of increased accidents at the U-turn – which was the primary reason for having them installed



Photo: Phuket City Police

in the first place – Pol Col Chatree said, “With relatively fewer vehicles using the U-turn compared to other U-turns along the route [on Thepkrasattri Rd], the Phuket branch of the Highways Department decided to take the barriers out to restore smoother flow and improve safety.”

He noted that he had not received any complaints regarding the change, which at this stage is still considered “temporary” while traffic conditions continue to be monitored.

“Effective traffic management practices not only help reduce road congestion but also enhance Phuket’s image as an international tourist destination that prioritises convenience and safety for its citizens and tourists,” Pol Col Chatree said.

Natnaree Likidwatanasakun




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Flood losses could reach B25bn

Bangkok Post

Floods in Southern Thailand have caused significant disruptions across several sectors, with projected losses reaching up to B25 billion if the situation continues for a month.

Kasikorn Research Center (K-Research) reports that the losses would result from disruptions of economic activities in the service sector, including hotels, restaurants, retail and transport, as well as in agricultural and food processing industries.

Thanavath Phonvichai, president of the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, estimates a loss of B1-1.5bn per day due to flooding in economic and tourism areas across 10 southern provinces. If the floods persist for a month, he said the loss will reach B10-15bn.

Songpon Changsirivathanathamrong, president of the Songkhla Chamber of Commerce, said flooding in Hat Yai district affected 80-90% of the area. The district's business sector is reliant on retail and wholesale trade, tourism, hotels and restaurants.

Songkhla has a total GDP of about B250bn, with Hat Yai accounting for 40-50%, he said.

Most factories are located in Sadao and Singha Nakhon districts, along with some parts of



Photo: Kusoldharm Patong

Mueang district, where operations continue without reported machinery damage.

Salil Tohtubtiang, vice-chairman of the Thai chamber and chair of the Southern Regional Chamber of Commerce, said it is difficult to assess the economic damage from the floods because they are spreading beyond Hat Yai and Songkhla to Phatthalung, Satun, Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Pattani and Yala.

The economic impact spans all sectors including agriculture, services, hotels and manufacturing. Some factories have suspended operations because workers cannot travel, and raw materials cannot be transported to factories.

RELIEF MEASURES

Thaniwan Kulmongkol, president of the Thai Restaurant Association, said many restaurants in the South, especially in the city

centre of Hat Yai, are submerged. Restoration is anticipated to take months, she said.

The flooding is occurring during the tourism high season, which could decrease confidence among travellers, taking time to regain their trust, said Mrs Thaniwan.

Kamol Meechaipattanakit, a member of the southern subcommittee of the Restaurant and Goods Product Association, told the Bangkok Post floods have severely affected its members as many are unable to operate their businesses.

He said the news has deterred some travellers from visiting southern Thailand, affecting destinations that are not inundated as consumers are hesitant to dine out.

Mr Kamol said the government must launch a relief package for both the public and business operators because their recovery is interconnected.

"The government should introduce soft loans for restaurant operators with relaxed terms, making them accessible for everyone," he said.

Mr Kamol urged the banking regulator and commercial banks to ease borrowing conditions for those affected by this disaster.

Mr Songpon said the immediate priority is to provide food to people stranded in flooded

areas, utilising organised communication and resource allocation to enhance efficiency and mitigate redundancy.

Mr Salil said the restoration measures must include efficient management of waste and mud, which will be difficult to remove once dried. Authorities should also decide about special loans for property repair or debt payment extensions, he said.

In the long term, a comprehensive plan is needed as flooding is likely to happen again and relocating residents from these areas would be extremely challenging, said Mr Salil.

Commerce Minister Suphajeer Suthumpun said the Department of Internal Trade (DIT) rolled out four urgent measures to assist flood victims.

The DIT is coordinating with shelters to ensure adequate cooking supplies, and reached out to modern trade operators and the Layer Farmers Association to supply consumer goods to areas in need and experiencing transport obstacles.

The department is preparing to distribute survival kits to victims in areas where floodwaters are receding, aiming for a swift recovery. Another tactic is organising Blue Flag events, offering essential items at discounted prices to help reduce living costs.

Air France launches Paris-Phuket service

PHUKET'S TOURISM sector received a significant boost with the arrival of Air France's inaugural Paris-Phuket flight last Friday (Nov 28), part of the Tourism Authority of Thailand's (TAT) Airline Focus strategy to expand long-haul connectivity and attract higher-spending European visitors.

Flight AF156, operated with a Boeing 777-200 carrying up to 328 passengers, touched down at 9:25am at Phuket International Airport, where senior Thai and French officials joined tourism partners for a welcome ceremony.

Attendees included French Ambassador Jean-Claude Poimboeuf, TAT Europe Regional Director Suladda Sarutilawan, Phuket Airport Director Monchai Tanode, Air France SEA & Oceania General Manager Femke Kroese and TAT Phuket Office Director Siriwan Siharat.

Ms Suladda said the new service reinforces TAT's strategy of expand-



Photo: AoT Phuket

ing airline partnerships to boost Thailand's long-haul segments, particularly the French market, which consistently ranks among Thailand's top five revenue-generating European source markets.

"The Paris-Phuket route supports our aim to grow high-value, quality tourism," she said. "Phuket's luxury products – from wellness and spas to yachting and world-class marine attractions – align closely with the preferences of French travellers. This direct service will increase arrivals while reinforcing Thailand's reputation for sustainable, high-standard tourism experiences."

According to TAT, French travellers are among the most valuable long-haul visitors. Between Jan 1 and Nov 23, Thailand recorded

710,968 French arrivals, up 13.8% year-on-year. Most were first-time, independent travellers with high average spending of B58,611 per person per trip and long stays averaging 17.22 days. Popular destinations include Bangkok, Phuket, Krabi and Surat Thani. TAT forecasts 846,000 French arrivals by the end of 2025.

Ms Kroese said the new Phuket service marks "an important step" in strengthening connectivity for French visitors seeking direct access to southern Thailand.

"Phuket is Air France's second Thai destination on our winter schedule," she said.

Air France already operates two daily year-round Paris-Bangkok flights. The new Paris-Phuket service will run three times a week until the end of March 2026, departing Paris on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays, with return flights from Phuket on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays.

Phuket launches 'Next Chapter' drive

GOVERNMENT LEADERS, tourism operators, academics and community representatives gathered in Phuket last week for the launch of 'Phuket Next Chapter', a major initiative aimed at shaping the island into a high-quality, sustainable global tourism destination.

The seminar, titled 'Phuket Next Chapter: Developing a Quality Tourist City on the Path to Sustainability', was opened by Phuket Governor Nirat Phongsitthaworn at the Dara Hotel on Nov 24. Also attending were Phuket MP Chalermpong Sangdee and representatives from the public and private sectors, as well as specialists and students.

Gov Nirat said the 'Next Chapter' concept reflects broad agreement to move Phuket forward without conflict, using the island's strengths in tourism, urban development and management to produce real, measurable outcomes. Phuket welcomed more than 14.5 million tourists in 2024, generating over B571 billion, and has already recorded 11.4mn arrivals



Photo: Chalermpong Saengdee / Facebook

from January to October this year, with further growth expected.

He highlighted the island's strong infrastructure, including an international airport handling more than 368 direct flights a day from 21 countries, and five world-class marinas cementing Phuket's role as a key marine-tourism hub. However, he stressed that future development must be guided by local residents. "Developing a quality tourist city means listening to the people of Phuket—what we should continue, delay, or discontinue," he said.

The Governor emphasised sustainable city management, reducing environmental and social impacts, and strengthening human resources across government, business, education

and communities to support Phuket's ambition of becoming an international centre for tourism, education and service innovation.

Speakers included Bhumikitti Ruktaengam, President of the Phuket Sustainable Tourism Development Foundation, who focused on private-sector leadership; Thaneth Tantipiriyakit, President of the Phuket Tourism Business Association, who discussed raising Phuket to global sustainability standards; and senior Tourist Police officers addressing safety and tourist confidence.

Other presentations covered boutique-hotel development, future workforce needs, and the growing impact of the climate crisis, with experts stressing environmental protection as central to long-term planning.

The event concluded with the formal announcement of the 'Phuket Next Chapter' programme, which participants described as a major step toward defining Phuket's long-term, sustainable future.

The Phuket News

Flood deaths number queried

HAT YAI

Bangkok Post

Growing discrepancies between the official flood death toll and claims from rescue volunteers have intensified public concern over the true scale of the recent Hat Yai disaster.

The Public Health Ministry confirmed on Monday Dec 1 that the death toll from flooding in eight southern provinces had reached 170, with the highest number of 140 deaths recorded in Songkhla.

Deputy permanent secretary Dr Sakda Alapach said the figure was expected to "increase only slightly" as residents returned to their homes. All bodies recovered in the district were being processed at Songklanagarind Hospital.

But volunteer rescue teams working on the ground insist the real number could be far higher. Anyawuth Phoamphai, a senior Ruamkatanyu Foundation volunteer, said on Facebook that officials had obstructed efforts to retrieve



A man transports a woman through flood waters in Hat Yai on Nov 26. Photo: AFP

bodies from inundated zones.

"They don't want to tell the truth," he wrote, suggesting authorities feared heightened criticism of the government's disaster response. His comments were widely shared, fuelling further suspicion and anger among flood-affected communities.

Former deputy police chief Pol Gen Surachate Hakparn, a Songkhla native, claimed that the death toll might reach 1,000.

"I was told that fatalities in Songkhla were 500-1,000 deaths," he said, citing accounts from local residents and rescue personnel involved in body recovery operations.

He believed the actual death toll was higher than the Public Health Ministry figures. Pol Gen Surachate accused the government of concealing the real number of victims amid heavy criticism of its flood response.

He expressed concern over how hospital-declared deaths would be classified, noting that some people may have died indirectly because floodwater prevented them from seeking medical care. In such cases, he warned, the authorities might not count them as flood victims.

'FACTS'

Dr Sakda rejected claims of a cover-up, saying multiple

agencies were jointly operating in the disaster area. "No one can hide the facts," he said, noting that the hospital had already prepared additional cold-storage facilities should more victims be found.

Senate Deputy Speaker Gen Kriangkrai Srirak urged the media to scrutinise all claims and verify information amid a surge of unsubstantiated reports online.

He warned against sharing inflated death tolls without evidence, saying misinformation risked deepening public distress and undermining trust in official emergency warnings.

"If it's not true, those who spread such claims should be held accountable," he said, adding that confusion may also arise from miscommunication.

This came as activist and lawyer Ronnarong Kaewpetch urged flood victims to pursue legal action against the state over delayed warnings, mismanagement and infrastructure failures, saying the government should be held responsible for the floods.

Prince Chulcherm passes away aged 78

BANGKOK

MAJ GEN MC CHULCHERM Yugala, widely known as "Than Chai Mai", a former Royal Household military officer, passed away peacefully at his residence in Mae Rim district of Chiang Mai on Nov 27. He was 78.

MC Chulcherm was the son of Prince Anusorn Mongkolkarn and Mom Ubol Yugala Na Ayudhya. His grandfather was Prince Yugala Dighambara, the Prince of Lopburi and a son of King Chulalongkorn. He was the younger brother of MC Chatrichalerm Yugala, the renowned filmmaker.

A staunch royalist, MC Chulcherm was active on social media, expressing opinions on a variety of subjects, sometimes to the discomfort of politicians and other public figures.

The prince began his military career as a second lieutenant with the 1st Special Warfare Regiment at Vachiralongkorn Camp in Lop Buri province.

He held several military positions including as an



Photo: Bangkok Post

officer in the Royal Guard of HRH Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn (at the time). As a field service officer, he was tasked with counter-communist operations in Khao Kho, Phetchabun, in 1975.

Other positions included postings with the Army Intelligence Department and the Internal Security Operations Command, special royal guard to HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana, and assistant director of the Policy and Planning Office, Royal Guard Command.

At the time of his passing, MC Chulcherm served as a senior special military officer with the Royal Security Command under the Royal Guard unit.

Bangkok Post

Chinese caught sneaking into Thailand injured by landmine

SA KAEO

A CHINESE MAN LOST HIS LEG after stepping on a landmine while sneaking into Thailand in a contested border area at Ban Nong Chan in Sa Kaeo province last Saturday Nov 29.

Border patrol officials heard an explosion from a forested area about 90 metres away from Sri Phen Road along the Thai-Cambodian border around 5:50am before deploying a drone to assess the situation. They discovered a man injured by a landmine and calling for help in English.

The Humanitarian Mine Action unit was dispatched to the scene, providing assistance with the support of patrol personnel.

The man was later identified by a passport found on him as Shi Jingui, 26, from Yunnan province in China. He was believed to have crossed the border into Thailand illegally, according to the First Army Area.

The incident took place in an area that has been a major flashpoint in the border dispute that led to five days of armed conflict in July. It is currently the object of mine clearance operations by Thai authorities, the army said.

The man was receiving treatment at Khoksung Hospital in the eastern border province and his condition was stable,



Photo: First Army Area

the Chinese embassy in Bangkok said in a statement.

The army said the case would be further investigated by the Sa Kaeo Immigration Police, as the victim might have been linked to illegal cyber-scam networks.

Maj Gen Winthai Suvaree, the Royal Thai Army spokesman, said the incident highlighted the persistent risks from landmines planted by Cambodian troops along the border.

Eighteen Thai soldiers have been injured by landmines, with seven losing limbs, since mid-July.

The mine involved in the latest incident is being examined to determine if it was newly planted, Maj Gen Winthai said.

Though a signatory to the Ottawa Convention, Cambodia failed to cooperate with Thailand on joint clearance efforts along the border, with interference reported in many areas, he said. Bangkok Post

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Dogs affected by the floods. Photo: Soi Dog Foundation



Aunt Sao and her pets. Photo: Soi Dog Foundation

Soi Dog campaign supports flood-affected animals

Soi Dog Foundation

The Soi Dog Foundation has launched an urgent relief operation to assist dogs and cats affected by recent severe flooding, with emergency teams deployed from Ayutthaya to Hat Yai. The foundation has mobilised veterinarians, rescue officers, pet food supplies and essential medical aid to ensure immediate and sustained support for both pets and stray animals in crisis.

The operation began in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province, where communities endured months of pro-

longed flooding, and this past week expanded to Hat Yai District in Songkhla Province as heavy rains triggered widespread inundation. Both areas have suffered significant impact on community animals and owned pets.

During the peak of the flooding, Soi Dog Foundation – supported by Nestlé (Thai) Ltd, Food Innova Trading and Service Co Ltd, and Mars Petcare (Thailand) Co Ltd – distributed emergency pet food to affected communities. As waters recede, veterinary teams are entering impacted zones to provide health assessments, vaccinations, medical supplies and food to aid in the long-term recovery of affected animals.

Sakdapol Thongjan, Social Change Programme Manager at the Soi Dog Foundation, said the organisation moved quickly to extend its assistance to Hat Yai as soon as flood reports emerged. “We immediately deployed the team from our mobile sterilisation units in Songkhla and Satun – temporarily suspending routine services – to support flood-response efforts. Our priority is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of animals left vulnerable during this crisis,” he said.

The foundation’s rescue efforts include relocating animals to safe areas, retrieving stranded dogs and cats from rooftops and trees, delivering food to caregivers and pet owners and providing on-site medical treatment.

Soi Dog veterinarians are also supporting animals staying with their owners in evacuation centres and continue to respond promptly to emergency requests from the public. Evacuation centre occupants were also advised by Soi Dog rescue workers to leash their pets on-site so as to avoid pet loss. Essential vaccinations – including combo vaccines and rabies vaccines – are being administered to help prevent disease outbreaks commonly associated with flood conditions.

STRANDED

One of the most critical rescue cases so far involved a local resident called Aunt Sao. The elderly woman had been stranded on her rooftop for several days with her 69 dogs and cats. Although, unfortunately, many of Aunt Sao’s pets perished in the flooding, Soi Dog has taken care of 17 cats and nine dogs, all of whom were severely exhausted and malnourished.

“I almost lost hope that anyone would reach us,” said Aunt Sao, choking back tears as she described the traumatic situation.

Soi Dog, together with volunteers, safely evacuated the animals and provided immediate food, veterinary care and vaccinations. Temporary shelter has been arranged for the animals while floodwaters begin to recede and while repairs are made to Aunt Sao’s home.

In addition to responding to reported cases, Soi Dog Foundation teams are actively searching for distressed animals throughout flood-affected communities. The organisation is also working closely with the Hat Yai District Livestock Office and the Faculty of Veterinary Science, Prince of Songkla



Photo: Soi Dog Foundation



Photo: Soi Dog Foundation



Photo: Soi Dog Foundation

University, to coordinate ongoing relief and medical support.

Relief operations focus on three key areas:

- Coordination with government agencies, private sector partners, and local communities to assist flood-affected pets and stray animals
- Continuous assessment of needs in affected areas to ensure sufficient distribution of food and medical supplies
- Maintaining staff presence in flood zones until conditions stabilise, with plans for long-term recovery support

How to support the effort

Individuals or organisations wishing to support Soi Dog Foundation’s emergency flood-relief efforts – or report areas in need of animal food – can contact:

Phone: 076-681-029 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm). Email: ble@soidog.org

Where to eat in PHUKET

The January/February 2026 hard copy issue goes to print very soon

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Zootopia 2 a sequel worth watching

David Griffiths

A decade ago one animated film surprised everybody. At the time Disney's animation arm had watched as Pixar and Dreamworks had shot past it and were creating hit after hit. Then Disney dropped *Zootopia* – a film that people seemed to expect very little from but ended up getting rave reviews. The film was a box office success and was lapped up by its target audience.

It may have been a surprise – but yes, somehow a story about a city of animals and a little bunny that dreamed about becoming a Police Officer became a hit.

Now nine years later Judy Hoops (voiced by Ginnifer Goodwin – *Once Upon A Time*), that determined bunny, once again teams up with her street-wise fox friend Nick Wilde (Jason Bateman – *Game Night*) for another adventure, and once again audiences are for an absolute trip.

This time around Judy and Nick find themselves wanted by the law when they try to impress their boss, Chief Bogo (Idris Elba – *Thor: Ragnarok*), by making a major bust. Instead, the bust ends badly but during it Judy claims to have seen a snake – something that was expelled from Zootopia after a random attack that left an innocent person dead 100 years earlier.

Convinced of what she has seen Judy talks Nick into sneaking into a upper-class ball with her. Here she meets the rich Lynxly family led by – Milton Lynxly (David Strathairn – *Lincoln*) – whose power came from the fact that their family created the unique 'weather wall' system that keeps Zootopia's residents alive.

However, during the ball Gary De'Snake (Ke Huy Quan – *Everything Everywhere All At Once*) attacks, not only stealing a valuable artifact but creating a situation where Judy and Nick are framed for almost killing Chief Bogo.



Nick Wilde (voiced by Jason Bateman) and Judy Hoops (voiced by Ginnifer Goodwin) in *Zootopia 2*. Photo: IMDb

But with the law now after them the pair soon learn that the only animals that can help them are Gary De'Snake, the ambitious Pawbert Lynxly (Andy Samberg – *Hotel Transylvania*) and the seemingly crazy conspiracy theorist Nibbles Maplestick (Fortune Feimster – *Office Christmas Part*).

Thought-provoking

Like the first film, *Zootopia 2* isn't afraid to be a little darker than your average family animation. It safely lands in the same boat as *The Bad Guys* franchise in that while the storyline may not exactly be good for younger children it does more than enough to entertain those a little older. Characters like Mr Big (Maurice LaMarche – *The Simpsons*) are clearly aimed at an older audience as their 'Mafia' influence is not exactly hidden at all – but to be honest it is that kind of edgy things that make *Zootopia* such a great franchise to watch.

Much of the genius of *Zootopia 2* comes from its screenwriters (who are also coincidentally co-directors), Jared Bush (*Encanto*) and Byron Howard (*Tangled*), who manage to take what is a simply

buddy cop movie and give it creativity, humour, heart and a thought-provoking storyline.

Creativity is the key here. The audience will see an expansion of the Zootopia world here with an introduction to the area where the water creatures and reptiles call home and as you watch these scenes every single space on the screen is filled with something new and different. You do get a genuine feeling while watching the film that these guys have thought of everything single little thing as it all comes together.

Then there is the heart here. Whether it be the friendship between Judy or Nick or the fact that this film teaches people of all ages to not judge but care about the people around us. The screenwriters here even find a way to touch on a important cause like human displacement but do it without politicising the film – something rare in film these days.

And the best thing about all that is that Bush and Howard cram all that into the film without ever letting it get in the way of the actual story at hand. Yes, this is a crime story at the heart and that plays out exceptionally well while even the humour hits every mark as well.

Zootopia 2 is a well-written and funny film that is bound to entertain audiences of all ages. All the characters you know and love are back and like the original film this is a movie that can be watched over and over without ever getting stale.

Zootopia 2 is currently screening in Phuket and is rated 'G'.

3.5/5 stars.

David Griffiths has been working as a film journalist for over 25 years. That time has seen him work in radio, television and in print. He currently hosts a film podcast called The Popcorn Conspiracy. He is also a Rotten Tomatoes accredited reviewer and is an alternate judge for the Golden Globes Awards. You can follow him at Facebook: SubcultureEntertainmentAus.

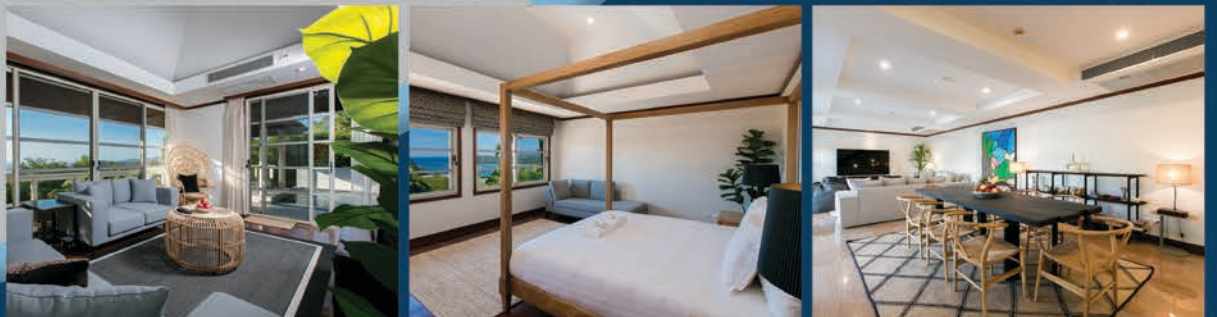
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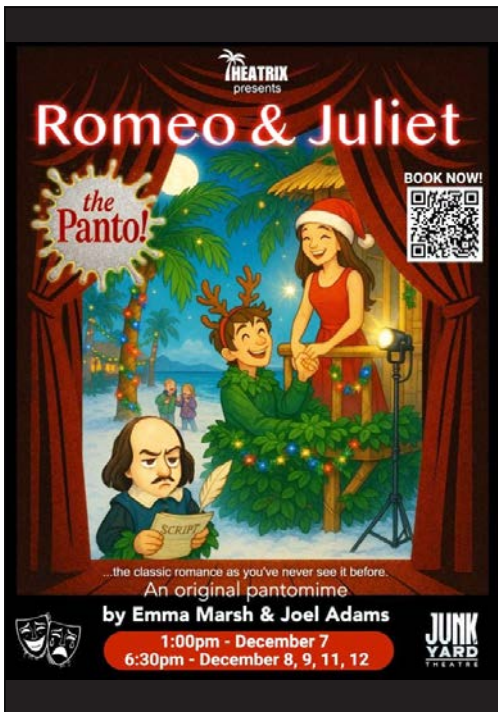
FRI 5 DEC



Grow Boating Phuket Evening - Dec 2025

We look forward to seeing you at the Grow Boating Evening at the Boardwalk Bistro and Bar at the Phuket Boat Lagoon from 5pm. Our drinks sponsor for the evening will be Paul Poole (South East Asia) Co., Ltd. an independent marketing consultancy based in Bangkok, Thailand specializing in commercial sponsorship. For more details see www.paulpoole.co.th There will be a delicious selection of canapes served and sponsored by the Boardwalk Bistro and Bar for all attendees. Come and join in the fun, everyone is welcome and there is no entry fee Find out more - facebook.com/GrowBoatingPhuket

SUN 7 DEC



Romeo & Juliet - The Panto

OH NO IT ISN'T! Get Ready to Shout, Sing, and Cheer! Forget the tragedy! Theatrix proudly presents Romeo and Juliet: The Panto, which takes Shakespeare's classic star-crossed lovers and transforms their tale into a hilarious, loud, and incredibly interactive family comedy. Expect dazzling songs, slapstick routines, terrible jokes, and plenty of opportunities to cheer for the heroes and boo the villains! This is Phuket's must-see holiday show for all ages. WHERE: Junkyard Theatre (Bypass Road - next to IKEA) DATES & TIMES: Sunday, Dec. 7th. (Matinee) - 1:00pm Monday 8th - 6:30pm Tuesday 9th - 6:30pm Thursday 11th - 6:30pm Friday 12th - 6:30pm TICKETS: Book Now! <https://www.junkyardtheatre.com/copy-of-shows> (Select the date and reserve now) All Ages: 850.00 THB Ages 2 and under enter FREE! Get in Early for Phuket's biggest, funniest family night out!

THU 11 DEC



Skál Phuket December Dinner

Join us for our final Skál dinner of the year as we come together to celebrate the festive season in true Phuket style. This special evening will be hosted by Julian Lowry at the iconic Le Méridien Phuket Beach Resort, set on its own private cove between Karon and Patong. The evening begins with networking drinks at 6pm followed by dinner from 7:30pm. Members B1200 - Non-Members B1600. Bookings - contact@skalphuket.org

WED 24 DEC



Christmas Beach Market

Celebrate Christmas Eve in tropical style at our Christmas Beach Market. Join us at XANA Beach Lawn on 24 December 2025 for an enchanting evening by Bang Tao Beach. Stroll beneath the stars and discover festive delicacies, tropical Thai favourites, artisanal gifts and sparkling drinks. Enjoy live music, DJ beats and timeless carols carried by the Andaman breeze. Share the moment to your families with fun-filled activities including face painting, balloon artistry, wish-writing to Santa and a cozy Christmas movie corner. Capture joyful memories at the Santa meet-and-greet and take part in exciting lucky draws for luxurious prizes. Wednesday, 24 December 2025 | 18:00 - 00:00 hrs. At Xana Beach Lawn Free Entrance for all. A selection of free-flow food and drinks will also be available for your enjoyment.

SAT 6 DEC



2nd Asian Kettlebell Pentathlon Championship

The 2nd Asian Kettlebell Pentathlon Championship Is Coming To Bangtao! REGISTRATION NOW OPEN HERE. Win 10,000THB in cash as well as an ALL Inclusive Membership at Bangtao Muay Thai for the 3 best competitors (male and female).The competition is 5-exercises (with timed rests) and will be held at the Bang Tao Muay Thai & MMA gym. Sign up is \$95 USD and includes: Welcome package upon arrival & after show party. Also, \$30USD from each sign will go toward the Sati Foundation, a grassroots nonprofit that aims to improve healthcare and education for at-risk and underserved youth in Thailand. See you December 6!

TUE 9 DEC



Rotary Club of Patong Beach

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Living in Phuket 2025

Living in Phuket 2025, an event to help make life easier for expats, is returning to the Marriott Courtyard Phuket Town. This annual free event focuses on introducing people to social and voluntary opportunities, lifestyle, travel and hospitality services, education, networking and more. From 10 till 6pm, Find out more at livinginphuket.org

THU 25 DEC



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Royal gold at Asian equestrian competition

DRESSAGE

HER ROYAL HIGHNESS Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya was in fine form as she led a team of Thai equestrian athletes to the gold medal in dressage, as the FEI Asian Championships Pattaya 2025 got underway last week.

The dressage competition was the first team event on the opening day of the tournament on Nov 25, hosted by the Thailand Equestrian Association at the iconic Thai Polo & Equestrian Club in Pattaya.

Other members of Princess Sirivannavari's team included Nareerat Rajakanya, Chanchanok Clara Rukcare, Neer Phutthisombat and Phakjira Thongphak.

The Thai team earned a total score of 205.85, to claim the top prize, while India secured second place with a total score of 205.05, and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China came in third with a total score of 203.23.

Dr Kongsak Yodmanee,

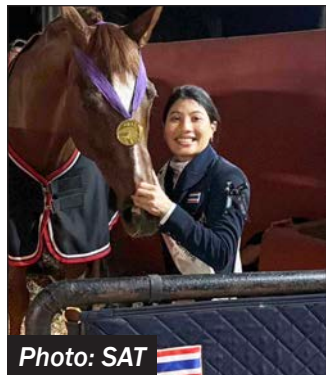


Photo: SAT

Governor of the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT), and Meechai Inwood, Deputy Governor of the SAT for Administration, both delivered speeches and offered encouragement and congratulations to the participating athletes at the awards ceremony afterwards.

The FEI Asian Championships Pattaya 2025 sees over 90 elite equestrian athletes from over 13 countries across Asia competing in five categories: Jumping, Dressage, Eventing, Endurance and Para Dressage.

It is the second edition of the competition following the inaugural event in 2019 and runs until Sunday (Dec 7).

The Phuket News

F1 season goes to the wire

FORMULA ONE

AFP

Max Verstappen boosted his late bid for a fifth successive drivers' world championship last Sunday (Nov 30) when he took full advantage of a McLaren strategic blunder to complete a sensational hat-trick of victories at the Qatar Grand Prix.

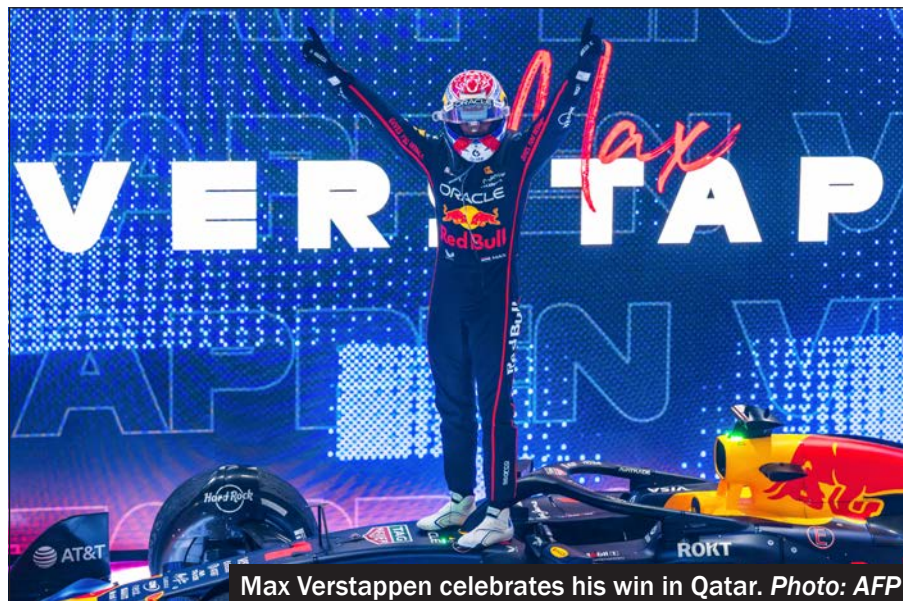
The Red Bull driver made an immediate pit-stop during an early safety car intervention, when McLaren duo Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris stayed out, and he capitalised by driving with cool precision to triumph in convincing style.

His win lifted him into second place in the title race with 396 points, 12 behind series leader Norris who finished fourth on a disappointing evening for him and the Woking-based team who were stunned by the outcome.

Pole-sitter Piastri slipped to third, but trimmed his deficit to Norris to 18 points with one race remaining in Abu Dhabi on Sunday (Dec 7) where Verstappen has won four times in the last five years.

"It's all possible," said Verstappen.

The Dutch ace came home 7.995 seconds ahead of Piastri with Carlos Sainz third for Williams, 14.670 seconds adrift, ahead of Norris and the Mercedes pair Kiimi Antonelli and George Russell.



Max Verstappen celebrates his win in Qatar. Photo: AFP

Fernando Alonso came in 7th ahead of Charles Leclerc, with Liam Lawson and Yuki Tsunoda rounding out the top ten points scorers.

It was Verstappen's seventh win of the season, his third in succession in Qatar and the 70th of his career.

"That was an incredible race for us," said Verstappen, who had written off his title hopes at the end of August before embarking on a sequence of results that turned a 104-point deficit to Piastri into a four-point advantage.

"We made the right call as a team to box under the safety car and it was scrappy, but we got there in the end. A strong race for us on a weekend that was tough."

Red Bull's race strategist Hannah Schmitz joined Verstappen on the

podium to mark her part in his success.

Piastri, who had a potential win taken from him by poor decisions, said: "I'm speechless. I have no words. Clearly, we didn't get it right tonight. I drove the best race I could and there was nothing left out there."

"In hindsight, it's pretty obvious what we should have done, but we'll discuss it as a team... It's obviously tough to swallow."

This was a race McLaren should have won as both drivers had started the race with a front row lockout and had the fastest cars throughout. However, they threw it away with a basic strategy error that ensured the drivers' title race will be decided in Abu Dhabi this weekend.

Songkhla SEA Games events moved to Bangkok

SEA GAMES

EVENTS SCHEDULED in Songkhla as part of the SEA Games next month will be relocated to Bangkok because of the flooding and concerns over the condition of the venues once the water recedes.

The decision was made at a meeting on Nov 26 attended by chairman of 33rd SEA Games committee Chaiyapak Siriwat, Tourism Minister Atthakorn Sirilaththayakorn and representatives from each country taking part.

All 10 sports with 109 gold medals at stake originally scheduled in the disaster-struck southern province would now be relocated to venues in Bangkok – boxing, pencak silat, football, chess, judo, kabaddi, karate, wrestling, petong and wushu.

In addition to concerns whether the flood water would recede in time, the



The Thailand SEA Games torch relay on Nov 16 in Bangkok. Photo: Varuth Hirunyatheb

likely condition of the previously designated venues was of major concern, Chalitrat Chantarubeksa, deputy secretary-general of the National Olympic Committee of Thailand (NOCT), said.

Some countries were also worried about the possible spread of flood-related disease.

Each sports association was now looking to select a new venue in the capital for the affected events.

As host country, Thailand would also consider how to compensate the participating nations, as some competitors had already booked flights and accommodation in Songkhla, Mr Chalitrat said.

Following the announcement, Cambodia confirmed

it had officially withdrawn from eight of the 21 sports it had earlier confirmed to compete in, citing "significant security concerns."

In a letter signed by National Olympic Committee of Cambodia secretary-general Vath Chamrouen, Thai organisers were informed that the country was withdrawing from eight sports – judo, karate, pencak silat, wrestling, wushu, petanque, football and sepak takraw.

However, the Cambodian NOC confirmed that the country will still compete in swimming, athletics, e-sports, fencing, gymnastics, jiu-jitsu, kickboxing, taekwondo, equestrian, jet ski, teqball, triathlon and volleyball.

With Songkhla now out of the running, the 33rd SEA Games Thailand 2025 will take place from Dec 9-20 at venues in Bangkok and Chonburi.

Bangkok Post

ONE Championship extends deal with Army at Lumpinee Stadium

MMA

ONE CHAMPIONSHIP WILL CONTINUE staging weekly events at Lumpinee Stadium for at least two more years after extending its partnership with the Royal Thai Army.

The organisation's initial three-year agreement was due to expire next month after ONE Friday Fights 137 on Dec 19. But ONE confirmed on Nov 24 the deal had been renewed, keeping its flagship Muay Thai series in Bangkok until the end of 2027.

In a statement translated from Thai, the promotion said the expanded partnership aims to "develop the Muay Thai ecosystem and elevate the sport globally in a sustainable way".

ONE Friday Fights – known domestically as ONE Lumpinee – launched on Jan 20, 2023, and quickly became one of the most-watched shows in Thailand during its Friday evening timeslot on Channel 7.

The series has since become a key pillar of the promotion's schedule, providing a pipeline for Thai and international athletes to secure full-time ONE Championship contracts.

The renewed agreement covers several event categories hosted at Lumpinee Stadium, with approximately 45 Friday-night "ONE Lumpinee" shows per year – including four major tentpole events – as well as 12 monthly Saturday-morning "ONE Fight Night" cards, broadcast live in US primetime.



ONE Friday nights action at Lumpinee Stadium. Photo: Bangkok Post

ONE said broadcasts from Lumpinee now reach 190 countries through its international distribution network, and cited the venue's continued presence as central to its push to promote Muay Thai as part of Thailand's soft-power ambitions.

The promotion also reiterated its economic impact per a 2025 Nielsen study, saying it generates "approximately USD 470 million (over B16 billion) annually" across tourism, local industries and global visibility.

Lumpinee Stadium, historically under military supervision, has undergone significant modernisation in recent years, with ONE's weekly events bringing new global visibility to the iconic venue.

The extended deal ensures the historic arena will remain ONE Championship's primary base for Muay Thai, kickboxing, MMA and submission grappling through 2027, as the company continues its international expansion, with cards in Japan, the United States and the Middle East all in the works for next year.

Bangkok Post

Battling Gunners rescue point

FOOTBALL

AFP

Mikel Merino rescued Arsenal as the Premier League leaders battled to a 1-1 draw against 10-man Chelsea in a heavy-weight title clash last Sunday (Nov 30).

Chelsea midfielder Moises Caicedo was sent off in the 38th minute at Stamford Bridge for a crude foul on Merino that caught the midfielder on his ankle.

Despite Caicedo's dismissal, Trevoh Chalobah headed Chelsea from Reece James' corner into the lead in the 48th minute.

But Merino's close-range header from Bukayo Saka's cross in the 59th minute ensured Arsenal emerged unscathed from a bruising encounter between the title rivals.

The Gunners are five points clear of second-placed Manchester City and sit six points above third-placed Chelsea and remain the favourites to win their first Premier League crown since 2004.

On Saturday, Phil Foden spared Manchester City's blushes after they blew a two-goal lead in a dramatic 3-2 victory over Leeds.

Foden and Josko Gvardiol put Pep Guardiola's side two up, but third-bottom Leeds hit back through Dominic Calvert-Lewin and Lukas Nmecha before Foden scored the late winner.



Arsenal's Mikel Merino heads the equaliser against Chelsea. Photo: AFP

Elsewhere, Alexander Isak finally scored his first top-flight goal for troubled Liverpool in a 2-0 win at West Ham.

Isak had failed to score in his five top-flight appearances since making a British record £125 million (B5.3 billion) move from Newcastle in September.

The Sweden forward banished that drought, with Cody Gakpo scoring the second.

Joshua Zirkzee scored his first Premier League goal for nearly a year before Mason Mount grabbed the winner as Manchester United came from behind to beat Crystal Palace 2-1, while Aston Villa beat bottom of the table Wolves 1-0 to move into fourth place.

At the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, Thomas Frank's men were booed off at half-time as Fulham took a 2-0 lead through Kenny Tete and Harry Wilson.

Mohammed Kudus pulled one back after the interval but there were more jeers at the final whistle and with only three wins in their last 13 games in all competitions, Tottenham have slumped to 10th place.

Frank was critical of the fans, saying: "I'm fine with them booing after the match, no problem, but not during. That is unacceptable in my opinion."

Newcastle celebrated boss Eddie Howe's 48th birthday with a 4-1 rout of Everton at the Hill Dickinson Stadium, their first away league win since Apr 7, while Brentford striker Igor Thiago reached 11 league goals this season as his double fuelled a 3-1 win against second-bottom Burnley in west London.

Sunderland climbed to fourth place after fighting back from two goals down to beat Bournemouth 3-2 at the Stadium of Light and Brighton won 2-0 at Nottingham Forest.



Photo: AFP

Pele brand acquired by Neymar Jr. family business

FOOTBALL

ICONIC FOOTBALLER Pele's brand is now under the ownership of another prominent Brazilian athlete, Neymar Santos Jr, after the company owned by his father bought the rights to use it.

Neymar Santos Sr., owner of NR Sports, announced the news on Nov 27 at the Pele Museum in Santos, the coastal Brazilian city made famous by the legendary player who died in December 2022.

"We are proud to reach this milestone," Santos Sr said, adding that "I think it's a very strong brand. We want to enhance its identity and bring it into the present."

The terms of the purchase were not disclosed due to confidentiality

agreements with the previous owner, US-based Sport 10, but Brazilian media reports said the deal was worth US\$18 million (B580mn).

Widely considered to be the best footballer of all time, Pele, born Edson Arantes do Nascimento, helped lead his home country of Brazil to three World Cup victories in 1958, 1962 and 1970.

"There are no words to describe the emotion of bringing back a brand that is the soul, humanity, love. It's priceless...as his daughter, I feel honored and happy," said Pele's daughter Flavia.

In a statement, NR Sports called the acquisition "a decisive step towards the preservation, expansion, and enrichment of the legacy of the King of Football." AFP

'Amazing' maiden win for Poosit

GOLF

THAILAND'S POOSIT Supupramai made a brilliant birdie on the par-four 18th hole to win the inaugural Bharath Classic 2025 Gujarat last Sunday (Nov 30), breathing a huge sigh of relief after recording his maiden victory on the Asian Tour.

A powerful 9-iron to 10 feet, from where he duly converted for a three to close with a three-under-par 69 and a tournament total of 18-under 270, saw him win by one from South Korea's Cho Woo-Young, who returned a 65.

Thailand's Jazz Janewattanond (72) and Panuphol Pittarayat (69), both paired with Poosit on another shotgun start day, fellow Thai Ekpharit Wu (67) and Indian Sachin Baisoya (62) tied for third another two shots backs.

The US\$500,000 (B16 million) event was held at Kensville Golf Resort, just outside of Ahmedabad city, and was joint-san-



Poosit with the trophy. Photo: Asian Tour

tioned with the newly-launched Indian Golf Premier League.

Poosit and Jazz, chasing his eighth win on the Asian Tour, started day locked in a share of the lead but the former edged it after brave performance.

He started the event, the penultimate tournament of the year on the Asian Tour, 81st on the Asian Tour Order of Merit, hoping to move closer to finishing in the top 65 to keep his card.

The 32-year-old went far and beyond that moving into 29th position on the list while the win has

handed him a one-year exemption on the Tour.

"Amazing, I can't believe it," said Poosit, whose previous best result on the Asian Tour was joint third at last year's Macao Open.

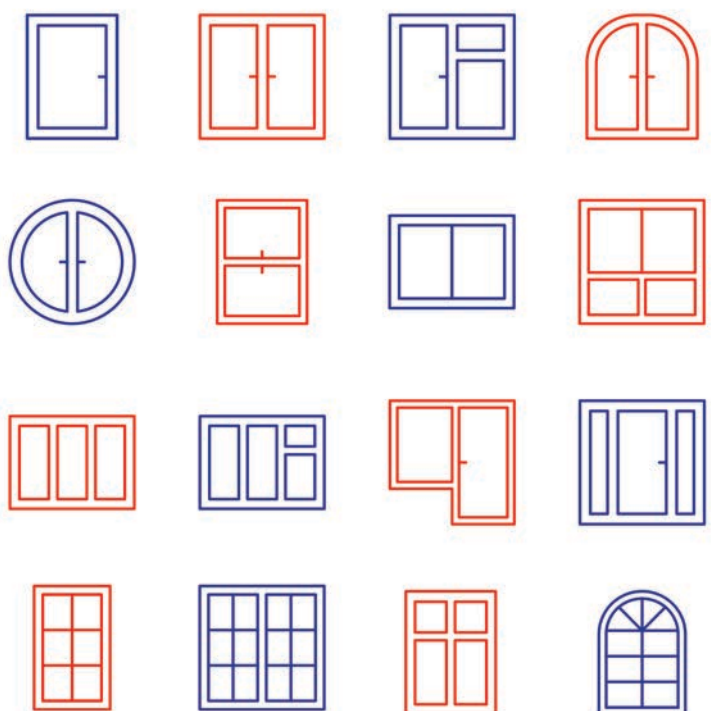
"I was struggling on the front nine, I was not playing well. It was all about mindset - that got me through.

"I came here to try and improve my ranking on the Merit list. It was on my mind, not winning. But to secure my card this week with the win, it's beyond my dreams."

Asian Tour



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Sport



Royal gold at equestrian comp > p14



TRI HARD TRIUMPH

Laguna Phuket Triathlon sees over 1,000 turnout

The winners take to the podium. Photo: Laguna Phuket Triathlon

TRIATHLON

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Over 1,000 triathletes took part in the 31st edition of the Laguna Phuket Triathlon at Laguna Grove on Sunday, Nov 23, with Tayler Reid retaining the men's title and Georgia Taylor-Brown coming out on top in the women's race.

Over 3,000 enthusiastic spectators cheered on the athletes from around the globe who converged to "Race the Legend" at Asia's longest-running and most legendary triathlon, delivering a day of high-octane action and fierce rivalry as competitors navigated a demanding three-stage course.

Participants and spectators alike descended on the start line at Bang Tao Beach for the 6:30am start as a highly competitive field of elite pros and age-groupers tackled the unique 1.8-kilometre swim across the Andaman Sea and lagoon, followed by a

gruelling 50km bike ride through Phuket's scenic but challenging routes, and an epic 12km run.

The Men's Elite division witnessed a historic showdown among international heavyweights, with Tayler Reid from New Zealand surging to victory in a time of 2 hours 12 minutes and 39 seconds.

The victory not only saw the 2024 Paris Olympics silver medalist retain his title but simultaneously smash his victorious time from last year of 02:19:03.

However, the competition was fierce and the race featured a rare and electrifying photo finish scenario, with Reid barely holding off runner-up Josh Ferris of Australia, who finished just seconds behind at 02:12:53. The two athletes traded the lead throughout the gruelling course before Reid's final burst of energy and resolve secured the win at the death. Rostyslav Pevtsov of Ukraine rounded out the podium in third place with a time of 02:19:07.

MASTERCLASS

The Women's Elite field delivered equally heated competition. Georgia Taylor-Brown from the United Kingdom put on a masterclass performance, displaying superior form to cross the finish line first and claim the championship title with an impressive time of 02:27:57.

She was followed by Nicole van der Kaay of New Zealand in second place with a time of 02:35:26, while France's Justine Guérard took third place with a time of 02:38:45.

Thai National Champion and local legend Jaray Jearanai defended his reputation and national Thai pride, finishing as the top Thai athlete with an impressive time of 02:47:55, once again proving his dominance on home soil.

The excitement kicked off earlier on the Saturday (Nov 22) with the "Open Water Swim presented by TriHub". The 5km challenge served as the perfect warm-up, with Rodina Liudmila claiming the women's victory in a

blistering 00:52:55, and Alexander Taraskin taking the men's title with a time of 01:23:46.

EXPANSION

"Congratulations to the winners and over 1,000 athletes who helped create history in this 31st edition," said Paul Wilson, Managing Director of Laguna Phuket, summarising the event's success and future vision afterwards.

"Today's success confirms that Laguna Phuket is evolving beyond being just the 'Home of Triathlon.' We are moving toward becoming Asia's premier fully integrated Sports Destination, ready to host diverse world-class events ranging from beach volleyball to multi-sport championships and professional training camps," he added.

"Looking ahead, 2026 will mark a major turning point with the launch of over 2,000 new room keys. This expansion elevates us into a massive Sports Hospitality Hub capable of welcoming global athletes and

fans. We are committed to blending sport with nature and relaxation, perfectly answering the growing trend of Wellness and Sustainable Sport Tourism."

Celebrating its 31st anniversary, the Laguna Phuket Triathlon remains Southeast Asia's longest-standing international triathlon. Known for its challenging course and breathtaking views, the event continues to attract elite athletes and amateur competitors from around the world.

The 31st Laguna Phuket Triathlon was organised in collaboration with Phuket Province, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT), the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thai Airways, and other key public and private partners.

For full results visit www.lagunaphukettri.com. For more information visit www.lagunaphukettri.com or follow the Facebook page: Laguna Phuket Triathlon Thailand.

Fast times as 48,000 join Bangkok marathon festival

MARATHON

THE 2025 AMAZING Thailand Marathon Bangkok took place last Sunday morning (Nov 30), with more than 48,000 participants racing through the streets of the capital.

Her Majesty the Queen Suthida flagged off runners and later joined the half-marathon event at the 8th annual edition of the hugely-popular race which saw top runners from

Ethiopia and Kenya secure overall victories.

Her Majesty the Queen presided over the starting ceremony for the 42.195km marathon at the MBK Center in Pathumwan district at 2am, with the finish line set at Sanam Luang.

Among those attending were Deputy Prime Minister Thamanat Prompow, Tourism and Sports Minister Atthakorn Sirilattthayakorn, Tourism Authority of Thailand Governor Thapanee



Photo: Amazing Thailand Marathon Bangkok

Kiatphaibool, Bangkok Governor Chadchart Sittipunt, Sports Authority of Thailand Governor Gongsak Yodmani, race director Kobkiat Sangvanich, Muay

Thai icon Buakaw Ban-chamek and Kenyan marathon legend Eliud Kipchoge.

Her Majesty the Queen later joined the 21.1km half marathon, running alongside two-time Olympic gold medallist Kipchoge and completing the course in 2 hours, 13 minutes, and 40 seconds.

The marathon winner was Bekele Agunafir of Ethiopia, who crossed the line in 2:14:00.

The men's half-marathon champion was Itsuki

Yumoto of Japan, finishing in 1:05:00, while Thai runner Piyanuch Sukchat was the first woman to complete the half-marathon, with a time of 1:25:00.

ADMIRATION

The event drew participants from over 80 nationalities and Her Majesty the Queen's presence was met with widespread admiration, with many runners praising her as a powerful symbol of dedication and a compelling advocate for health, fitness

and inspiration among the public and emerging athletes.

Many runners achieved new personal bests, thanks in part to the crisp morning temperature of 15°C – perfect conditions for the race. Spectators lined the route with enthusiastic cheers, creating an electric atmosphere from start to finish.

Her Majesty also officiated at the start of the 10km race and presented awards across all three distances. *Bangkok Post*