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TAXI BLOC

OFFICIALS BAN NEW APP TAXI REGISTRATIONS



PLTO Chief Adcha Buachan. Photo: PR Phuket

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Ride-hailing platforms and app-based taxi drivers have formally appealed to Phuket Governor Nirat Phong-sittithaworn to lift the ban on registering new public vehicles, warning the ongoing freeze is choking legal transport supply as tourism demand continues to rise.

The appeal comes as provincial authorities intensify enforcement against unlicensed “black plate” vehicles operating through ride-hailing apps, ordering platforms to block illegal vehicles and tightening controls across the island.

Platforms say they are in limbo, with the Phuket Land Transport

Office (PLTO) and the Governor’s Office yet to announce whether R.Y.18 public vehicle registration will be reopened, despite ongoing talks with provincial officials and national regulators.

A representative of one major ride-hailing platform told *The Phuket News* that operators remain ready to comply but have received no formal guidance following recent meetings with the province.

“At this stage, the Phuket Transport Office and governor still keep R.Y.18 registration closed. The platform is waiting for clarity from the government regarding related measures,” she said.

Without a decision, platforms say they cannot plan future operations or onboard new drivers legally – even as enforcement

against illegal vehicles is stepped up.

Provincial officials this month called ride-hailing platforms in for talks at Phuket Provincial Hall, chaired by Governor Nirat and attended by Vice Governor Rungruang Thimabut, PLTO Chief Adcha Buachan and representatives of relevant agencies.

Authorities ordered platforms to remove unregistered vehicles from their systems and to ensure that only legally registered public transport vehicles are permitted to accept jobs in Phuket, in line with Department of Land Transport (DLT) regulations and guidelines issued by the Electronic Transactions Development Agency (ETDA) governing digital platform businesses.

ETDA has instructed platforms to block private cars and motorcycles not registered for public transport use, and to prohibit vehicles registered in other provinces from operating through apps in Phuket. Platforms have also been ordered to submit monthly reports on job allocation and service usage in Phuket from January 2026 to support ongoing monitoring.

Officials say the measures are intended to restore order to the transport sector, protect lawful operators and ensure passenger safety as tourism demand continues to rise.

However, platforms warn Phuket is enforcing stricter conditions than other provinces, creating additional barriers for...

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...drivers trying to comply with the law.

In particular, restrictions preventing private or 'black plate' vehicles from converting to legal ride-hailing vehicles are sharply limiting the pool of drivers able to operate legally.

The platform representative said many ride-hailing drivers in Phuket work full-time and rely on app-based transport as their primary source of income.

"If stricter screening or limitations continue, a large number of drivers will be directly affected," she said. "This is especially critical in tourism provinces like Phuket, where demand for transport remains high."

Several ride-hailing platforms have jointly submitted formal requests for government cooperation to temporarily reopen R.Y.18 public vehicle registration to allow drivers to transition into legal operation.

Platforms say discussions are continuing with multiple agencies, including the Digital Economy Promotion Agency (depa), but acknowledge the issue spans several authorities, including the DLT and the Ministry of Transport, making coordination slow.

Regarding drivers currently unable to register, the platform said internal discussions on support measures are ongoing but



Taxi app drivers submit their appeal at Provincial Hall. Photo: Supplied

no concrete assistance has yet been finalised.

"While no conclusion has been reached, we confirm that support measures for drivers will be implemented in the future," she said. "We are urging the government to recognise the importance of ride-hailing to Phuket's economy and to adjust regulations to reflect current usage and demand."

The dispute follows a major island-wide crackdown on illegal taxi operations last month, during which 162 illegal taxi drivers were arrested in a four-day enforcement operation between Jan 13-16.

The operation saw 11 checkpoints set up across Phuket, including in Phuket Old Town, Patong, Kathu, Chalong, Wichit, Kamala, Tha Chatchai, Karon, Sakhu, Thalung and Cherng Talay, with a major checkpoint also established at Phuket International Airport under Sakhu Police.

Officials have also banned taxis and ride-hailing vehicles

registered outside Phuket from operating in the province, as part of efforts to suppress illegal transport services and reduce conflict between traditional taxi operators and app-based drivers.

Provincial officials have yet to announce any timeline for reopening R.Y.18 registration or detail what support measures will be offered to drivers currently locked out of legal operation.

With tourism demand rising and enforcement tightening, app-based drivers warn the continued registration freeze is shrinking the supply of legal vehicles – even as authorities move to eliminate illegal ones – raising the risk of transport shortages, longer wait times and higher fares for passengers across Phuket.

CHEQUERED PAST

This is not the first time Phuket officials – led by the Phuket Land Transport Office (PLTO) under chief Adcha Buachan – have moved to block new taxi drivers from operating in the province, or

restricted legally registered vehicles from working in Phuket, without clearly setting out the legal basis for doing so.

In early 2023, the PLTO moved to bar 'green plate' taxis registered in other provinces from operating in Phuket, with affected drivers publicly challenging the office to explain which law they had breached. At the time, drivers said PLTO officers were unable to clearly identify the specific legal provision being enforced.

That enforcement drive led to months of arrests and fines against drivers who were legally registered elsewhere in Thailand. The campaign later faded out without any formal public explanation as to why enforcement eased.

A similar pattern emerged in December 2023, when the PLTO abruptly suspended the registration of private vehicles for use as taxi-app services following protests by traditional taxi groups at Phuket Provincial Hall. The suspension was announced on the same day as the protest, with officials stating there were already "sufficient" vehicles to meet demand.

The registration freeze was later lifted in mid-2024 after intervention by national-level politicians, with the PLTO publicly acknowledging that people have a constitutional right to pursue an occupation and that blanket restrictions on new

registrations were not legally sustainable.

However, the PLTO has never publicly clarified when or under what legal authority the original bans and registration suspensions were imposed, nor why enforcement was later relaxed or reversed.

Critics and driver groups have repeatedly accused officials of inconsistent and selective enforcement, arguing that sudden bans and crackdowns have tended to follow pressure from entrenched local taxi interests, while long-term regulatory solutions and transparent policy frameworks have failed to materialise.

DOWN THE ROAD

As Phuket's tourism high season drives on, the island is facing a growing contradiction: authorities are moving aggressively to wipe out illegal ride-hailing vehicles, while the legal pipeline for new drivers remains closed.

Without a clear decision on reopening R.Y.18 registration – and without a transparent, province-wide framework that balances safety, fairness and real-world demand – drivers warn enforcement alone will not fix Phuket's transport bottleneck.

For passengers, the outcome is already being felt: fewer legal cars on the road, longer waits, higher fares – and a transport system once again caught between regulation and reality.

Expressway inches towards bidding stage

THE EXPRESSWAY Authority of Thailand (EXAT) has confirmed it is moving ahead with the Phuket Expressway project, a major infrastructure development aimed at easing chronic traffic congestion and supporting the island's long-term economic and tourism growth.

Phuket Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn met with EXAT executives on Jan 27 to receive a progress briefing on the project, which is being developed in two phases and is expected to significantly improve transport efficiency across the province.

The meeting was led by EXAT Deputy Gov-

ernor for Engineering and Maintenance Chatri Tansiri, who presented an overview of the expressway network and outlined the next steps for implementation.

EXAT confirmed that preparations are now underway to enter the procurement process for construction contractors for Phase 1 of the project, which covers the Kathu-Patong section and involves the construction of an elevated expressway combined with the Patong Tunnel. The section will span 3.98 kilometres and has already received Cabinet approval, EXAT noted.

Phase 2, which will extend over 30.62 kilometres and connect Muang



Photo: PR Phuket

Mai, Koh Kaew and Kathu, is currently undergoing detailed design, with EXAT officials noting that planning is being carried out with careful consideration of land use, area suitability and future urban development.

EXAT in its report of the meeting stated that the expressway network is intended to support Phuket's expanding city structure, growing tourism sector and increasing economic activity, while also reducing

travel times and congestion on existing roads.

The authority stressed that engineering standards, safety and environmental considerations remain a priority throughout all stages of the project. EXAT said the design and construction process will focus on building an efficient and safe expressway capable of handling appropriate traffic volumes, while minimising impacts on surrounding communities and the environment.

Officials also emphasised that the project will be implemented with transparency and close coordination between EXAT, Phuket Province and other relevant agencies.

Governor Nirat said the expressway project represents an important step toward strengthening Phuket's transport infrastructure and improving the quality of life for residents, while ensuring the island remains competitive as a world-class tourism destination.

EXAT reiterated its commitment to proceeding with caution and accountability, describing the Phuket Expressway as a long-term investment that will enhance mobility, support sustainable economic growth and provide lasting benefits for both residents and visitors.

The Phuket News

Phuket readies for election

The Phuket News

editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket officials have urged voters to turn out in large numbers for the national election and referendum on Sunday (Feb 8), as advance voting on the island recorded a strong 83.49% turnout and major political parties stepped up last-minute campaigning across all three constituencies.

Of 41,609 registered advance voters in Phuket, 34,746 cast ballots last Sunday (Feb 1), with polling stations reporting a steady flow of voters from the 7:30am opening. The highest number of advance voters was in Constituency 1 (18,114), followed by Constituency 3 (13,297) and Constituency 2 (10,112), with a further 86 voters registered as people with disabilities.

Phuket Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn cast his advance vote at 8am at the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation office in Constituency 1, saying turnout reflected strong interest among residents whose registered addresses

are in other provinces but who live and work in Phuket.

“The atmosphere has been lively and encouraging. Many people who work in Phuket but are registered elsewhere have come out to vote,” Mr Nirat said, adding that turnout on election day is expected to be even higher.

He urged voters to make independent choices based on the public interest. “Think for yourself, choose for yourself, decide for yourself. Prioritise the best interests of Phuket and the nation,” he said.

Authorities confirmed campaigning on the island has remained within legal limits, with the Election Commission and security agencies continuing to monitor activity ahead of Sunday’s vote. Voters were also urged to familiarise themselves with ballot formats to avoid invalid votes.

In Constituency 3, Thalang District Chief Siwat Rawangkul, who chairs the local Election Commission, inspected polling stations with senior



Phuket Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn casts his ballot in the advance voting. Photo: PR Phuket

police officers, reporting orderly voting and instructing officials to closely monitor any potential violations of election law.

Phuket will again be a tightly watched battleground, with all three incumbent People’s Party MPs seeking re-election: Somchart Techathaworn-charoen in Constituency 1, Chalermpong Saengdee in Constituency 2, and Thitikan Thitiphrutikul in Constituency 3.

They face crowded fields across the island. In Constituency 1, challengers include candidates from the

Economic Party, Kla Tham Party, Pheu Thai, Democrat Party and Bhumjaithai Party. Constituency 2 will see contests between the People’s Party, Setthakit Party, Bhumjaithai, Democrats and Pheu Thai, while Constituency 3 features candidates from Pheu Thai, Setthakit, Bhumjaithai, Kla Tham, Democrats and Thaipakdee.

CAMPAIGN BLITZ HITS PHUKET

With polling day looming, national parties have intensified campaigning in the South, using Phuket as a

key platform.

The Democrat Party launched a southern campaign tour through Krabi, Phang Nga and Phuket, promoting clean politics, anti-corruption measures and tougher action against drug networks and “grey businesses”, which party leaders say are undermining tourism confidence. Party leader and prime ministerial candidate Abhisit Vejjajiva linked economic hardship, falling farm prices and drug problems to entrenched corruption, calling for a restoration of political integrity to rebuild confidence.

The Economic Party also drew attention this week after leader Gen Rangsi Kitiyansap confirmed he is ranked 10th on the party list, saying the party follows a decentralised leadership model to avoid internal splits.

Bhumjaithai Party figures also campaigned in Phuket, with senior representatives backing candidates in all three constituencies at a rally in Saphan Hin on Jan 28. The party promoted propo-

sals including designating Phuket a Special Economic Zone, accelerating stalled infrastructure projects, cracking down on illegal businesses and nominee companies, and reviving consumer support schemes to ease living costs. Traffic congestion, water shortages and waste management were highlighted as urgent local issues.

ALCOHOL BAN IN FORCE

Authorities reminded residents and businesses that a nationwide alcohol sales ban will be enforced from 6pm on Saturday (Feb 7) until 6pm on Sunday (Feb 8) under the Election Act. Selling, serving or distributing alcohol during the restricted period is punishable by up to six months in prison, a fine of up to B10,000, or both.

With strong advance turnout, crowded fields in all three constituencies and heavy late campaigning by major parties, officials say Phuket is set for a closely watched vote as the island heads into election day on Sunday.

Traffic campaign hits unlicensed foreigners

MORE THAN 20,000 foreign nationals were fined in Phuket last year for driving without a valid licence, as police intensified traffic enforcement and tightened scrutiny of car and motorbike rental businesses.



Photo: Wichit Police

Phuket Provincial Police Commander Pol Maj Gen Sinlert Sukhum announced the 2025 results on Jan 29, saying the crackdown followed the Phuket Governor’s policy to strengthen public safety, prevent crime and enforce the law more strictly, particularly in cases involving foreigners and rental vehicles.

Police recorded 30,551 traffic violations in 2025. The most common offence was driving without a licence, with 26,515 cases, followed by illegal parking in red-and-white no-parking zones (1,805) and riding motorcycles without helmets (1,003).

Of the total violations,

4,437 cases involved rented vehicles. Police issued 3,727 fines and seized 1,737 cars and motorbikes for inspection and legal proceedings.

In cases involving rental vehicles and unlicensed driving, police recorded 23,646 offenders, including 20,901 foreign nationals and 2,745 Thais. Russian nationals accounted for the largest number of foreign offenders (11,855 cases), followed by Chinese (1,841), British (1,491), French (1,442), Indian (1,134) and Myanmar nationals (825).

“In enforcing the law against foreigners, police have intensified efforts to

apprehend offenders, especially those driving without licences, while also prosecuting rental operators that allow violations to occur,” Maj Gen Sinlert said.

He added that provincial agencies have been instructed to work with the Revenue Department to inspect car and motorbike rental companies, targeting repeat offenders and ensuring compliance with legal and tax requirements.

Police said road safety over the New Year holiday period showed improvement compared with previous years. Five road fatalities were recorded, involving Thai nationals and foreign workers, with no tourist deaths reported.

Maj Gen Sinlert said police will continue strict monitoring of illegal migrant workers and unlawful employment to prevent long-term social and security problems in Phuket. *The Phuket News*

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PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

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Wind 4 m/s

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Low: +26°

Wind 4 m/s

THU FEBRUARY 12

High: +33°
Low: +26°

Wind 7 m/s



Patong Police Station. Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

Police investigate alleged rape of Swedish tourist

PATONG POLICE ARE investigating the alleged rape of a 26-year-old Swedish tourist in Patong in the early hours of last Saturday morning (Jan 31).

Pol Lt Col Surachat Thongyai, an investigating officer at Patong Police Station, confirmed that officers received a complaint from the victim at about 6pm last Sunday (Feb 1).

According to police, the woman reported that at about 5am last Saturday she met a Swedish man, appearing to be of Arab Muslim descent, in front of a convenience store on Soi Khlong Bang Wat. After speaking briefly, the two went to the man's hotel room. At time of press, police still had yet to confirm the exact location.

The woman alleged that once inside the room,

the man sexually assaulted her. She reported attempting to escape but was threatened, before eventually managing to flee and return to her accommodation.

Police said the victim later sought help and filed a formal complaint. Officers arranged for her to undergo a medical examination at Patong Hospital as part of the investigation process.

Patong Police confirmed that the incident has been officially recorded and that investigators are working to identify and locate the suspect in order to take legal action.

At last report officers were also reviewing CCTV footage from the area and coordinating with nearby hotels as part of their enquiries.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Untaxed cigarettes seized at post office

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Officials seized nearly 300,000 untaxed cigarettes during a raid at Rawai Post Office last week, uncovering what authorities believe is part of a wider smuggling network using the postal system to move contraband into Phuket.

The seizure was announced at a press conference on Jan 27 led by Phuket Vice Governor Adul Chuthong and Phuket Provincial Police Commander Pol Maj Gen Sinlert Sukhum

Officials said the investigation began after a tip-off reported that untaxed cigarettes were being smuggled from Songkhla and Pattani provinces and sent via Thai Post to Rawai Post Office. Following the report, provincial administrative officers, assistant provincial defence officers and members of the Volunteer Defence Corps (OrSor) were ordered to investigate the allegation.

According to the Phuket Provincial Administration, inquiries in the targeted area linked the suspected shipments to previous arrests involving shops selling untaxed cigarettes in Phuket, in line with the enforcement policy set by Phuket Governor Nirat



Photo: PR Phuket

Pongsithaworn. Authorities reported their findings directly to the governor, who ordered inspections of suspicious parcels at the Rawai Post Office.

During the inspection, officers confirmed the parcels contained untaxed cigarettes. A total of 50 boxes were seized, containing 1,475 cartons or about 14,750 packs – equivalent to approximately 295,000 cigarettes. Officials estimated the loss to the state from unpaid taxes at more than B2 million.

Mr Rungruang said officers are preparing formal seizure and investigation reports and have begun expanding the probe to

identify and prosecute everyone involved in the smuggling operation.

“This operation shows that smugglers are attempting to exploit the postal system to evade inspection and taxes,” he said. “We will pursue this case thoroughly to ensure that everyone connected to this illegal activity is brought to justice.”

Pol Maj Gen Sinlert added that police will work closely with administrative authorities and postal officials to prevent similar cases, warning that cigarette smuggling not only deprives the state of revenue but also fuels other forms of organised crime.

Two women killed in Kamala wipeout

TWO THAI WOMEN WERE killed and several others injured when a pickup truck allegedly driven by a man who fell asleep at the wheel ploughed into vehicles at a busy intersection in central Kamala last Sunday (Feb 1).

Kamala Police were called to the Hua Khuan intersection at about 9:30am. A grey Yamaha NMAX motorbike was found overturned. One rider, Janyaporn Kaopattanakit, 45, died at the scene, while the second, Chantra Siriyamon, 33, later died in hospital.

Police said the pickup,



Photo: Kamala Police

travelling from Thalang, swerved to avoid a van stopped at a red light before slamming into the motorbike and other vehicles. Alcohol tests on all drivers were negative. CCTV was being reviewed as the investigation continued. *Eakkapop Thongtub*

Patong bars raided as unlicensed venues

DISTRICT OFFICIALS arrested operators of three entertainment venues in Patong for operating without licences during late-night inspections on Jan 29. The operation began at 11:30pm and was led by Kathu Deputy District Chiefs Jirawat Namat and Anurak Poolsak with members of the Kathu District Volunteer Defence Corps.

Three venues on Rat U-Thit 200 Pi Rd – Hippy House Bar and Restaurant, Funny Bar and Restaurant, and Siri Sasi Bar and Restaurant – were found operating as entertainment venues without permission. Operators were detained and taken to Patong Police Station for legal action



Photo: Kathu District Office

under the Entertainment Venue Act.

The arrests followed an inspection on Jan 27 at Soho Restaurant & Lounge on Bangla Rd, where officials issued a noise warning and order not to open until proper authorisation is obtained.

The Phuket News

Big Buddha to reopen to visitors

Natnaree Likidwatanasakun
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The Big Buddha viewpoint on the hills between Chalong and Kata is expected to reopen to visitors this month, according to the abbot of Wat Kittisangkham, though an exact reopening date has yet to be confirmed.

The update was provided by Phra Khru Wisutkityaphon, abbot of Wat Kittisangkham (Wat Kata), who said the temple intends to reopen the site once a short period of renovation and cleaning has been completed.

“Wat Kata intends to open the Big Buddha to the public in February, but we cannot specify the exact date yet,” the abbot said.

He confirmed that the temple has already received a permit from the Phuket branch of the Royal Forest Department, adding that preparations are now focused on improving site conditions after a prolonged closure.

“We have already received permission from the Phuket Forestry Office. We just need a short period for improvements and cleaning, then we will open the site to visitors in February,” he said.

Addressing ongoing legal proceedings linked to the deadly landslide in August 2024, the

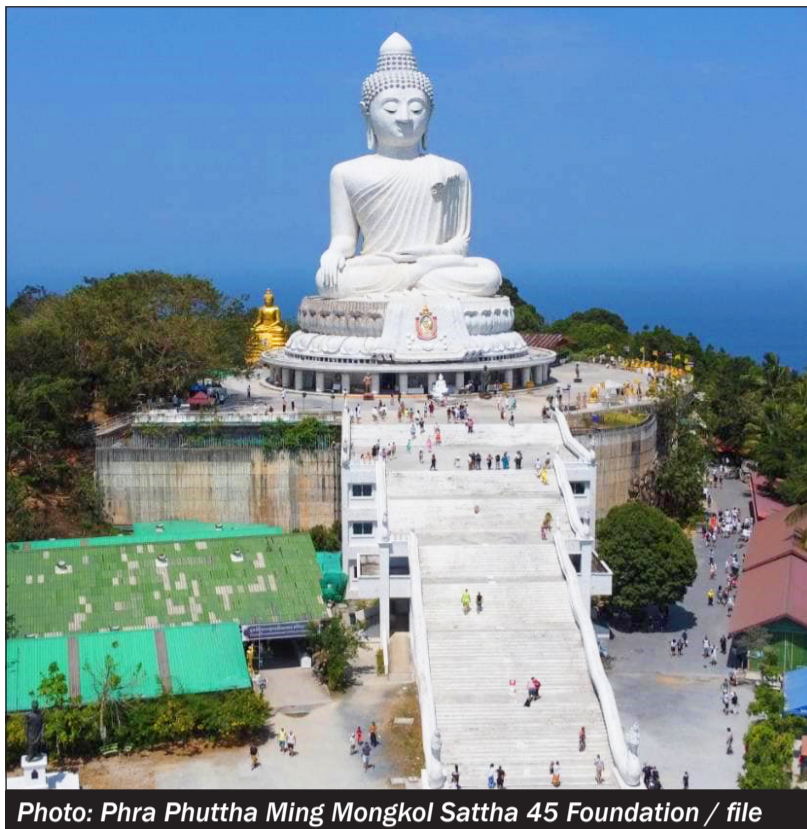


Photo: Phra Phuttha Ming Mongkol Sattha 45 Foundation / file

abbot stressed that Wat Kata is not involved in the court case or compensation process.

Regarding responsibility for the case and affected victims, he explained that the Phra Phuttha Ming Mongkol Sattha 45 Foundation, no longer oversees operations at the Big Buddha site.

Operational control has now been assumed directly by Wat Kata. The foundation will not be involved until court proceedings

and compensation matters have been concluded, Phra Khru Wisutkityaphon explained.

“At this stage, Wat Kata is only taking care of matters related to the Big Buddha itself,” he said.

“The foundation will not be involved with the Big Buddha until the court case and compensation process are completed, and Wat Kata has no involvement in the legal case,” Phra Khru Wisutkityaphon repeated. He

declined to comment further on the matter.

As previously reported by *The Phuket News*, the Big Buddha viewpoint has remained closed since a landslide triggered by heavy rain in the early hours of Aug 23, 2024, killed 13 people, injured 19 others and damaged dozens of homes in Kata.

The landslide sent soil cascading down the hillside into residential areas of Soi Patak 2, prompting affected residents to file a class action lawsuit against the Phra Phuttha Ming Mongkol Sattha 45 Foundation.

The class action came after a report by the Department of Mineral Resources investigation listed the new parking lot and nearby restroom constructed at the Big Buddha Viewpoint as factors that contributed to the cause of the deadly landslide.

The class action also followed Suporn Wanichkul, chairman of the Phra Phuttha Ming Mongkol Sattha 45 Foundation, being charged with illegal encroachment and clearing of protected forest land – but after nine months of investigating, Karon police dropped the charge.

In November last year, the Phuket Provincial Court accepted the case as Civil Case No. 520/2568. Compensation negotiations have taken place, but

no settlement has yet been reached, and the court has not scheduled a judgement date.

At a meeting between the local residents and victims families late last year, Rattanawangso Panrak, representing Wat Kata, at the time said plainly, “The Big Buddha viewpoint will remain closed until compensation is paid to affected residents and the court case is concluded.”

Obviously, that is no longer the case.

The Big Buddha viewpoint was temporarily reopened to visitors from Dec 31 to Jan 3. Phra Khru Wisutkityaphon said that the site was opened to allow people to make merit during the New Year period. The site closed again on Jan 4 due to unresolved legal and administrative requirements, as well as site deterioration.

Meanwhile, Phuket MPs Chalermpong Saengdee and Thitikan Thitipruethikul publicly called for the Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO) to investigate the financial dealings of the Phra Phuttha Ming Mongkol Sattha 45 Foundation. Yet, those requests have been met with silence.

The February reopening, if it proceeds as planned, would mark the first full reopening of the Big Buddha site since the deadly landslide more than a year ago.

600kg of debris cleared in underwater cleanup

NEARLY 600 KILOGRAMMES of abandoned fishing gear and anchors have been removed from the seabed off Kata Beach as the Third Naval Area Command led a major underwater cleanup operation aimed at protecting Phuket’s marine ecosystems.

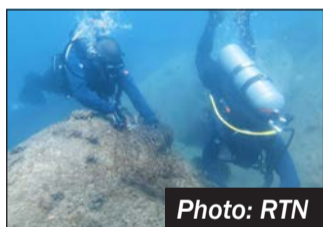


Photo: RTN

The operation, held on Jan 25, resulted in the recovery of 480kg of discarded fishing nets and 92kg of old anchors, items identified as posing ongoing risks to coral reefs and marine life.

The activity was organised by the Third Naval Area Command in collaboration with the Maritime Security Command Region 3 and Royal Thai Navy Task Force 642, with support from the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, the Phuket Association, PTT LNT Plc, the Marine Foundation and volunteer divers.

Vice Admiral Veerudom Muangchin, Commander of the Third Naval Area Com-

mand and Director of the Thai Maritime Enforcement Command Centre Region 3 (Thai-MECC 3), presided over the opening ceremony alongside Sarisa Muangchin, President of the Third Naval Area Command Wives’ Association.

Officials noted that abandoned fishing gear and submerged debris remain a “silent threat” to marine ecosystems, capable of damaging coral reefs and entangling or injuring marine animals. The removal of the debris at Kata Beach was reported to have significantly reduced environmental risks in the area.

The underwater cleanup was carried out as part of a broader marine conservation and training programme held in honour of Her Royal Highness

Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya.

As part of the programme, an educational activity was also held at the Phuket Aquarium for students from Baan Laem Panwa School. The session aimed to raise awareness of the importance of marine resources and promote environmental stewardship among young people.

Organisers said the combined underwater cleanup, educational outreach and community participation were intended to strengthen cooperation between government agencies, private sector partners and local communities.

The Third Naval Area Command said the initiative was designed to promote long-term conservation, restoration and sustainable protection of Thailand’s marine resources, in line with Her Royal Highness Princess Sirivannavari Nariratana Rajakanya’s vision of preserving the nation’s seas for future generations.

The Phuket News




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Chinese goods 'bigger threat than tariffs'

Bangkok Post

The influx of low-priced goods from China has a far more severe impact than US tariffs on Thai products, says Somkiat Tangkitvanich, President of the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI).

Speaking at a seminar on tariffs hosted by the Stock Exchange of Thailand on Jan 28, Mr Somkiat said a TDRI study found the impact of US tariffs on Southeast Asia and on Thailand in particular has not been especially severe.

ASEAN's exports, including those from Thailand, to the US increased last year.

This rise was not solely due to front-loading, or rushed shipments ahead of tariff changes, he said. Even after the tariffs were imposed, exports continued to grow.

From August to November last year, Thai exports to the US expanded by as much as 30%, with growth across multiple product categories in line with market demand, such as computers and computer parts, which the US imported in large volumes for data centre construction.

"The impact of President Donald Trump's tariffs has not been particularly bad. In terms of



Photo: Bangkok Post

direct effects, it can almost be ignored," said Mr Somkiat.

"The tariff rates imposed on Thailand are not significantly different from those applied to other countries, and Thailand even has a slight advantage compared with Vietnam."

He said when Thailand's average US tariff rate of 19% is weighted against certain products – such as hard disk drives, which face a 0% US tariff – the effective tariff rate for Thailand declined from 19% to 16.5% as of August 2025.

However, after Trump introduced specific tariffs on some sectors, such as aluminium and steel, Thailand's overall

effective tariff rate increased to 17.6%, though this was still not considered severe.

According to Mr Somkiat, the direct impact of US tariffs on Thailand is estimated to result in a GDP reduction of 0.3 percentage points.

However, this impact is spread out over multiple years. For example, if the full effect materialises over three years, the negative impact would be 0.1 percentage points GDP dip per year, which does not constitute a major economic setback, he said.

Mr Somkiat said the more damaging factor for Thailand is the influx of Chinese goods into the domestic market, which was a

problem before tariffs were introduced.

TDRI conducted simulations showing if Thai products are unable to compete in both global and domestic markets due to low-priced Chinese imports, the impact on Thai GDP could reach 0.8–0.9 percentage points.

He also warned Thailand must monitor transshipment, or the falsification of country-of-origin claims for goods exported to the US.

Thailand must ensure the US does not view it as a transit base for Chinese goods destined for the American market, said Mr Somkiat.

He noted Trump's tariff policies should serve as a turning point for Thailand, sparking efforts to finalise a free trade agreement (FTA) with the European Union and to pursue membership in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Without adaptation, such as amending laws that pose structural obstacles, Thailand's economy will be unable to recover, said Mr Somkiat.

"When the rules change but the mindset and policies do not, we will end up worse off than before," he said.

Arada Fuangtong, director-general of the Department of

Foreign Trade, said technical negotiations with the US on tariffs are ongoing, particularly for rules of origin.

Under US rules, imported raw materials used in Thailand can be counted as local content only if they undergo a substantial transformation, including a change in the Harmonized System code.

In the future, the US may consider using regional value content instead, but the US definition of "region" refers more to an alliance region, meaning certain countries excluded by the US cannot be counted.

She also urged listed companies to make greater use of FTAs Thailand has signed with other countries. There are 930 Thai-listed companies, of which 354 are exporters.

However, only 193 companies utilise FTA privileges across Thailand's agreements with 18 countries, with the total value of goods using FTA benefits amounting to just US\$11 billion.

Soraphol Tulayathien, senior executive vice-president of the SET, said one reason listed companies make limited use of FTAs may be the complexity of FTA conditions, particularly in calculating rules of origin, as well as the substantial resources required for companies to manage compliance.

Small business support to deliver B260bn boost

GOVERNMENT MEASURES TO support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are expected to help increase monetary circulation in the economy by at least B260 billion this year, says the chief of Thai Credit Guarantee Corporation (TCG).

According to TCG president Sittikorn Direksoonthorn, ongoing government stimulus packages aimed at enhancing liquidity for SMEs comprise three main programmes, reports the Bangkok Post.

First, the 'TCG Quick Big Win' credit guarantee scheme, with a guarantee limit of B50bn, is expected to help 54,300 SMEs gain access to financing, generate economic benefits worth more than B208bn, while creating B60bn in new credit in the system.

The highlights of the credit guarantee scheme include: a waiver of guarantee fees for the first three years to ease SMEs' financial burden; a low guarantee fee of 1% per year on the outstanding balance from the fourth year; risk-based pricing using TCG's credit scoring system; and a high non-performing loan compensation rate (maximum claim).

The 'SMEs Credit Boost' credit guarantee mechanism is implemented in collaboration with the Finance Ministry, the Bank of Thailand and commercial banks, expected to result in around B100bn in additional new lending over



Photo: Bangkok Post

one to two years.

Finally, the low-interest soft loan programme 'GSB Revitalising Thai Businesses' by Government Savings Bank has a total credit line of B100bn and is expected to be rolled out soon.

As for TCG's credit guarantees last year, the company said the top three sectors receiving guarantees were services (32.6%), food and beverages (10.6%) and agriculture (8.2%), accounting for a combined 51% of the total guaranteed amount of roughly B48bn.

As of Dec 31, the debt resolution programme 'TCG Ready to Help' had successfully assisted SMEs in resolving debt issues, totalling 24,324 cases and outstanding debt worth B16.2bn since the launch of the debt restructuring measures in 2022.

Regarding the TCG 'Quick Big Win' scheme, as of mid-January applications for credit guarantees had reached B5bn. Applications were expected to rise to B10bn by the end of the month.

Bangkok Post

TAT pushes regional marine tourism

IMT-GT COOPERATION TOOK CENTRE stage at the Thailand Boat Festival 2026 as tourism authorities and private-sector operators from Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia gathered in Phuket to advance cross-border marine tourism development across the Andaman subregion.

The four-day festival, held at Phuket Boat Lagoon from Jan 15-18 and supported by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), was positioned as a strategic platform to strengthen international tourism cooperation under the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) framework. TAT Deputy Governor for Tourism Products and Business Nat Kruthasoot attended the event to meet partners and tour the exhibition.

The festival aimed to position Thailand's marine tourism sector as a regional hub by connecting public and private stakeholders across yacht tourism, marinas, charter services and related industries. It also sought to expand high-value niche markets by showcasing world-class tourism products and services, including shore excursions and premium travel experiences.

TAT brought together tourism authorities under the IMT-GT framework and the Centre for Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (CIMT) to promote seamless cross-border marine tourism connectivity. Panel discussions focused on policy alignment, business cooperation and long-term planning.

On Jan 16, the session 'Unlocking Thailand's Potential as a Leading Marine Tourism Destination in Southeast Asia'



Photo: Bangkok Post

featured senior government and industry representatives discussing workforce readiness, tourism standards and regional connectivity. Speakers included Wajanan Silpawornwiwat of TAT's Southern Region Department, Siwaphon Thamwapi of the Department of Tourism and Wattana Choksuvanich of the Thai Cruises Business Association.

Ms Wajanan said Phuket, Krabi and Satun were well positioned to serve as strategic gateways linking cruise, yacht and ferry travel with Indonesia and Malaysia, stressing the need for skilled personnel, quality tourism products and benefits for local communities and the environment. Ms Siwaphon said efforts were underway to raise standards and align regulations with international best practices to support seamless regional travel.

A Jan 17 panel examined the subregion's readiness to position IMT-GT as a premium yachting destination. TAT said the festival would strengthen Thailand's role as a regional marine tourism hub while supporting sustainable growth across the IMT-GT subregion.

The Phuket News

Anutin says BJT confident of general election victory

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

Bhumjaithai Party (BJT) leader, Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, expressed confidence on Monday (Feb 2) that his party is well placed to secure the most seats in the upcoming general election.



Anutin during a vote campaign in Suphan Buri on Monday (Feb 2). Photo: Bangkok Post

Anutin told the Kammakorn Khao news programme he has set his sights on finishing first, or at least leading its political bloc, because those who finish second are quickly forgotten.

“Our target is number one. Even if we are not the first nationwide, we must be first within our bloc,” he said.

Anutin said that BJT does not view the People’s Party (PP) as an opposing camp, noting that while PP leader Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut has said he would not support him as prime minister, he has never ruled out cooperation with BJT.

Asked about seat

projections of up to 180 seats, Anutin said he deliberately avoided giving a precise figure as it could be seen as exaggeration.

He said the party is fully prepared for the polls, whether it is policy brainstorming, mobilisation of human resources, or assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of its candidates contesting the constituency system nationwide.

“The chances of winning more than 100 seats are greater than the chances of securing fewer than 100,” he said.

LANDSLIDE

The BJT leader also

admitted that he was surprised by the then-Move Forward Party’s landslide victory in Bangkok, where it won all but one seat.

Anutin said he had expected the PP’s predecessor to capture around 20 seats. Pheu Thai won one seat in Bangkok in the previous election.

However, he said that BJT is fully aware it will struggle in many urban constituencies.

He praised the performance of younger politicians, saying he had admired them since the days of the Future Forward Party.

“They may have entered politics without experience, but they proved themselves

in parliament. They are not ‘kids from yesterday’, they are children of the future,” he said.

Anutin said his party now has many capable members of similar age and perspectives, allowing the party to formulate policies that resonate across generations.

On coalition formation, Anutin said all scenarios have been considered, from the best-case of 200 seats to a fair case of 160-170 seats to the worst-case scenario of around 130.

Meanwhile, at time of press, Thailand’s overseas voting process was about 64% complete, according to the Overseas Voting Monitoring System, a real-time tracker run by the Department of Consular Affairs.

Ballots cast at 95 Thai embassies, consulates and trade offices worldwide will be sent to their respective constituencies to ensure they arrive in time for vote counting on Feb 8, the Foreign Affairs Ministry confirmed Monday.

Royal Thai Air Force to recruit female pilots

BANGKOK



Photo: RTAF

THE ROYAL THAI AIR FORCE (RTAF) has started taking applications for female pilots, marking a major step towards greater gender inclusion within the military.

The shift is part of a wider campaign called “Next Generation Air Power - Women Can Be Pilots”, which is aimed at increasing the number of female recruits in the RTAF’s pilot training programmes.

RTAF chief ACM Seksan Kantha said the decision was taken to help the air force achieve its ultimate objective of operational readiness, vital to safeguarding national sovereignty and the armed forces’ ability to defend the country against external threats when necessary.

Producing a combat-ready pilot requires at least five years of training and costs hundreds of millions of baht per individual.

ACM Seksan also pointed to changes in modern warfare and aviation technology, saying

some operational roles in the air force are particularly well suited to women. He cited the example of female unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) pilots working at RTAF Wing 3 as proof that women can perform effectively alongside male pilots.

Applications are open until the end of February, with candidate selection scheduled for March and flight training beginning on June 4.

The selection process includes academic and physical fitness tests based on the same standards applied to male pilots.

The programme accepts up to four candidates per year over a three-year period, with selection based strictly on individual capability and operational requirements.

Bangkok Post

Ceremonies mark 100 days since Queen Mother’s death

BANGKOK

PRIME MINISTER ANUTIN CHARNVIRAKUL led Cabinet members last Saturday (Jan 31) in a merit-making ceremony at Government House to mark the 100-day memorial of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit the Queen Mother.



Photo: Bangkok Post

The 100-day royal merit-making took place at the Dusit Maha Prasat Throne Hall in the Grand Palace on Saturday, the 100th day since Her Majesty’s passing, and Sunday, said The Royal Gazette.

Anutin presided over the ceremony at Government House, accompanied by his spouse, Thananon Niramit.

Also in attendance were Cabinet members, heads of government agencies under the Prime Minister’s Office and the Interior Ministry, their spouses, as well as civil servants and officials.

The religious ceremony was conducted by Somdet Phra Buddhachan, the Great Ecclesiastical Governor of the Eastern Region, a member of the Sangha Supreme Council and abbot of Wat Traimit Withayaram, together with senior monks who led the chanting of Buddhist prayers.

The caretaker prime minister lit incense and candles in worship of the Triple Gem and paid royal homage before the royal portrait of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit the Queen Mother.

Ten senior monks then administered the precepts and chanted prayers. Anutin presented monetary offerings and ceremonial items, offered monks’ robes, poured dedicatory water and led an alms-giving ceremony for 93 monks, dedicating the merit to Her Majesty.


Anutin then led Cabinet members, civil servants, religious leaders and members of the public in a “Gathering of Loyalty” activity on the lawn in front of the Thai Khu Fah Building.

The Royal Thai Army held a separate 100-day merit-making ceremony at its headquarters on Ratchadamnoen Nok Road.






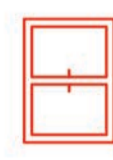
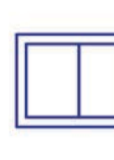
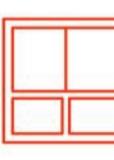








The event was presided over by Gen Chitsanupong Rodsiri, the army’s deputy commander-in-chief, together with senior commanders and personnel.

The army conducted an alms-giving ceremony for 93 monks at the plaza in front of the equestrian statue of King Chulalongkorn, followed by a chanting ceremony led by monks from Wat Bowonniwet Vihara.

Bangkok Post



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The real investment: Food first, always



Photo: Supplied

WELLTHWISE

Libby Heath

Walk into any pharmacy or scroll Instagram for five minutes and you will be convinced the answer to vitality, longevity and inner peace comes from attractively packaged capsules. Magnesium for sleep. Vitamin D for mood. Zinc for immunity. Ashwagandha for... everything, apparently.

But here is the inconvenient truth: supplements are not inherently good,

bad, or magical. They are tools. And like any tool, they work best when you know exactly what you are fixing.

The human body is not a one-size-fits-all system. Yet many people supplement as if it were – adding vitamins and minerals “just in case”, stacking products based on trends rather than data and assuming more is better. This approach is not only inefficient – it can be counterproductive.

Before you click “buy”, pause. The smartest rule in supplementation is not trendy, it is timeless: Test, Don’t Guess. A simple blood-based micronutrient assessment reveals what your body truly needs – and just as importantly, what it does not. This matters because both de-

ficiencies and excesses can impair health, particularly with fat-soluble vitamins like A, D, E and K, the accumulations of which are easy to miss until damage is done.

In short: guessing can lead to expensive urine at best, and unintended consequences at worst.

Supplements are called supplements for a reason – they are meant to fill gaps, not replace food. When nutrients come from whole foods, they arrive packaged with fibre, fats, enzymes and phytonutrients that enhance absorption and utilisation.

Research consistently shows that nutrients consumed from food are associated with better health outcomes than the same nutrients taken in isolation. Translation: a spinach salad still beats a green pill.

Label claims

Supplement labels love big numbers. A tablet boasting 1,000mg of vitamin C or 5,000 IU of vitamin D sounds impressive – but the body does not absorb nutrients based on label claims. It absorbs them based on biology.

When you swallow a supplement, it does not take a direct route to your cells. Instead, it moves through a series of digestive and metabolic steps collectively known as first-pass metabolism. After absorption in the gut, nutrients travel via the portal vein to the liver, where they may be metabolised, stored, converted to less active forms or eliminated before reaching systemic circulation.

This is a safety mechanism, not a flaw – but it means the amount you ingest is never the amount your body actually absorbs, and also the reason many supplements simply become expensive urine.

First-pass metabolism helps explain why absorption is not linear. As doses increase, the percentage absorbed decreases. Vitamin C absorption drops sharply at higher doses. Calcium is best absorbed in amounts under 500mg at a time. Magnesium absorption declines as intake rises.

While food delivers smaller quantities, it often results in higher proportional absorption. A modest dose absorbed at 50% can outperform a megadose absorbed at 5%. More milligrams do not mean more nutrition, just more for the liver to manage.

The body absorbs nutrients most efficiently when they arrive as part of whole foods, accompanied by their natural cofactors. For example, Iron +

Vitamin C: Plant-based iron is absorbed far more efficiently with vitamin C. Think lentils with bell peppers, spinach with citrus dressing, black beans with fresh salsa, or oats topped with berries.

Calcium + Vitamin D + Magnesium: Vitamin D facilitates calcium transport and magnesium activates vitamin D – remove either, and calcium utilisation drops. Effective combinations include sardines or salmon with leafy greens, Greek yogurt with nuts or seeds, and tofu with broccoli.

When you do need a supplement, remember that fat-soluble vitamins need fat! Vitamins A, D, E and K require dietary fat. Taking vitamin D with orange juice (all carbs, no fat) significantly reduces absorption compared to taking it with foods containing fats, such as eggs, avocado, or olive oil.

Regulated

Unfortunately, supplements are not regulated like pharmaceuticals. Random testing of well-known brands has found products with incorrect dosages, contaminants or ingredients that do not match the label. Only purchase supplements that have undergone independent third-party testing by groups such as USP, NSF International or ConsumerLab. Products sold on hype rather than evidence are where mislabeling, contamination and ineffective dosing most often hide.

Here is what no supplement company wants you to know: your money is often better spent on nutrient-dense food. Whole foods like vegetables, legumes, eggs, oily fish, quality proteins, nuts, seeds and grains deliver nutrients in the form your body recognises best and knows how to metabolise.

Supplements can be useful – and sometimes essential – when deficiencies are confirmed or absorption is compromised. But they are not shortcuts around poor dietary habits.

Test, Don’t Guess. Supplement selectively. Pair intelligently. And remember – the most effective nutrient delivery system ever designed still comes from food.

Mother Nature remains undefeated.

Libby Heath recently became the first Mayo Clinic certified wellness coach in Asia. She shares her insights and advice through her column ‘Wellthwise’ here in The Phuket News. Please note that if you have a condition that requires medical treatment, consult your doctor. Contact Libby at: BeWellthwise@gmail.com.

Building Brighter Futures: HeadStart Unites for Phuket Sunshine Village Foundation



A school is more than just a place of learning; it is a community with the power to change lives. That strength was on full display last term as the HeadStart International School community united to support Phuket Sunshine Village (PSV) - a foundation dedicated to providing a loving home for over 100 local children in need.

This collective effort, which raised a remarkable 650,038 baht, culminated in a vibrant celebration when HeadStart's Primary Student Councils visited PSV to host a high-energy Sports Day. Taking the lead, the students organised relay

races, obstacle courses, and team games for the children. The highlight, however, was seeing the smiles as everyone played on the newly installed playground equipment - a tangible result of the term's fundraising campaign.

Reaching this milestone required a massive team effort from the school community. Demonstrating leadership and character, Primary students organised and ran fundraising activities ranging from a penalty shootout and a Dance-a-thon to a whole-school 'Dress for Sunshine' day. The Secondary 'Kindness Fair' was a standout highlight, bringing students together for carnival-style games, and the much-loved (perhaps too much loved!) 'Pie the Teacher' stall. Crucially, it was not just the students who stepped up; HeadStart families played a vital role, donating generously to help reach this ambitious target.

The funds raised will go towards essential daily needs, including food, uniforms, and educational supplies, ensuring the children at PSV grow up in a safe environment where they can truly thrive. HeadStart has a long history of supporting PSV, having raised over two million baht since the initiative began in 2021. However, the recent Sports Day proved that the most valuable contribution is time and care. While the funds provide security, it is the laughter and genuine connection shared in these moments that truly ensures the children of PSV have the childhood they deserve. Sincere thanks to everyone who contributed; to learn more about how you can support the foundation, please visit the Phuket Sunshine Village website: <https://www.phuketsunshinevillage.org/>



For more information about HeadStart
 www.headstartphuket.com
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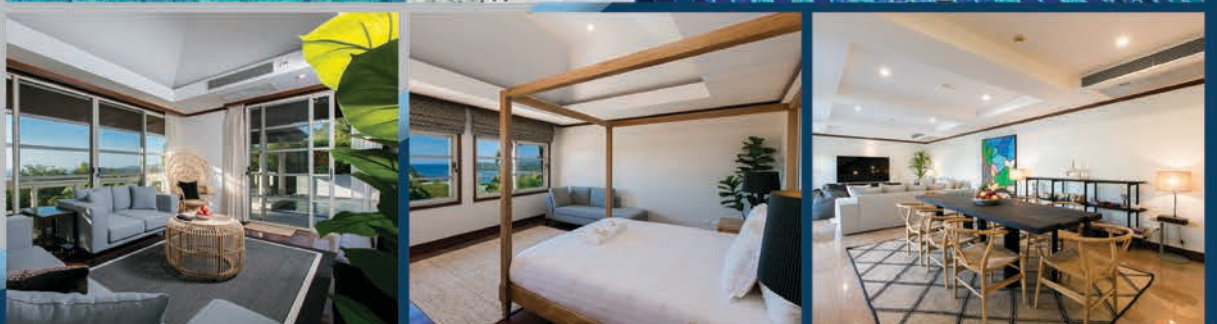


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FRI 6 FEB



Grow Boating Phuket Evening - Feb 2026

We look forward to seeing you at the Grow Boating Evening at the Boardwalk Bistro and Bar at the Phuket Boat Lagoon from 5pm. We are delighted to announce that our sponsor for both the drinks and burgers will be the Malaysia International Boat Show (MYBOS) 2026. Building on the tremendous success of MYBOS 2025, the Malaysia International Boat Show 2026 will once again be held at the prestigious Royal Langkawi Yacht Club to celebrate Malaysia's growing prominence in the global yachting and marine industry. See mybos.my. There will be a delicious buffet sponsored by the Boardwalk Bistro and Bar for all attendees and as always, all your favourite beverages will be available from the bar. Come and join in the fun, everyone is welcome and there is no entry fee. If you know anyone you think would be interested in coming, please invite them along. Find us on Facebook at facebook.com/GrowBoatingPhuket

SAT 7 FEB



Carnival Cookout Market Phuket

Carnival Cookout is a new outdoor weekend market event in Phuket that brings together food, music, culture, and a lively open-air atmosphere aimed at locals and visitors. It's described as a monthly weekend market with good vibes, live music, diverse food vendors and cultural experiences in a social setting. Food & Drink: A variety of food stalls and cookout-style offerings – likely including street-food favourites, barbecue, local eats and more creative food vendors. Music & Entertainment: Live music and performances are part of the weekend market vibe. Community & Culture: A social outdoor gathering space that blends local culture with casual festival energy – essentially a lively food + music + social market event. From 3 - 9pm at Royal Phuket Marina.

TUE 10 FEB



Rotary Club of Patong Beach

The only English-speaking Rotary Club in Phuket, we welcome Rotarians from around the world! With members from 18 nationalities, we are a diverse, dynamic, and well-known club in Thailand. 1st Tue each month - Fellowship dinner at different locations in Phuket, 3rd Tue each month - dinner meeting at Four Points by Sheraton Phuket Patong. Join us! if you are passionate about making a difference. More info - www.facebook.com/RCoPB

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SAT 14 FEB



Azzurra Amore al Mare

This Valentine's Day, let love unfold by the sea at Azzurra Amore al Mare, a romantic beachfront Italian dinner on Bang Tao Beach. Azzurra Restaurant invites couples to an intimate evening where refined Italian cuisine, live music and the ocean breeze create a memorable celebration of love. Begin the evening with two glasses of chilled bubbly per couple on arrival, followed by a premium three-course Italian set menu thoughtfully curated to ignite the senses. Throughout the night, enjoy live Opera performances followed by soulful Jazz and timeless love songs, setting the perfect rhythm for romance. The evening concludes with a signature after-dinner booster, a warm Italian-style farewell to end the night. THB 3,800++ per couple Includes a premium 3-course Italian set menu, two glasses of bubbly on arrival and an after-dinner booster. Saturday, 14 February 2025 | 18:00 - 22:00 hrs.

MON 16 FEB



Feast of Fortune: Chinese New Year All-You-Can-Eat

Celebrate Chinese New Year by the sea with Feast of Fortune at Seafood Market Restaurant, Bang Tao Beach. This festive all-you-can-eat dinner brings together authentic Thai-Chinese flavours, cultural performances and a rare live whole suckling pig carving ceremony in an intimate beachfront setting. Guests can enjoy unlimited highlights including whole crispy roasted suckling pig carved tableside, classic Peking duck with bao, Thai pomelo salad with shrimp, live seafood stations featuring prawns and daily catch, rotating regional specialties and mango sticky rice with desserts. Dine freely and revisit the buffet at your own pace throughout the evening. The celebration is elevated with vibrant Chinese New Year Lion Dance performances, symbolising good fortune, prosperity and auspicious beginnings for the year ahead. THB 1,290++ per guest Children 6-12 years enjoy 50% off Children 0-6 years dine free with a paying adult | 18:00 - 22:00 hrs Seafood Market Restaurant, Bang Tao Beach Book now: https://www.taste.angsana.com/book-seafood-market-feast-of-fortune Limited seating available. Advance reservations are recommended. Seafood Market Restaurant, 10 Moo 4, Srisoonthorn Road, Cherg Talay, Amphur Thalang, Phuket 83110 Tel. 076 358 500, marketing-lagunaphuket@angsana.com

THU 26 FEB



Skål Phuket - February Dinner

Our host of the month of February, Vincent Delsol, extends a warm invitation to all Skalleagues and friends of Skål for a great evening at Phuket Pullman Panwa Beach Resort. The night starts at 6pm with networking drinks at the Junction Bar, overlooking the breathtaking Panwa Bay, followed by a 'Street food Style' dinner at Aqua Restaurant. Members B1,300 - Non-Members B1,700. Bookings - contact@skalphuket.org, more info at facebook.com/SkalPhuket

FRI 6 MAR

International Women's Day Lunch 2026
#GiveToGain
Courtyard by Marriott Phuket Town
Friday 6 March
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By donation of 2,000 baht NET
Book now: tina@phukethasbeengoodtous.org or WhatsApp

International Women's Day Lunch 2026

Join us for the 2026 International Women's Day Lunch at the Courtyard by Marriott Phuket Town. Come together to celebrate women's achievements and hear from inspirational speakers exploring this year's theme: Give to Gain. Give to Gain reflects the belief that when we support women, we strengthen communities, grow better leaders, and accelerate progress toward a more gender-equal world. Giving takes many forms, from fundraising to volunteering, mentorship and helping raise visibility. Women and men are warmly invited to attend by donation of 2,000 Baht per person. To book contact: Tina@phukethasbeengoodtous.org With special thanks to the Courtyard by Marriott Phuket Town and the Australian Consulate-General. We look forward to celebrating with you.

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WINDOW ON PHUKET
February/March 2026 issue

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LAKU BEACH CLUB LAUNCHES SATURDAYS

On Saturday, January 31, Barceló Coconut Island Phuket resort held a soft launch of their new weekly event Saturdays at LAKU Beach Club. Located just five minutes' boat ride from Laem Hin, your afternoon starts with valet parking, welcome drink while waiting for the free boat transfer, leaving every 15 mins. Attentive staff escort you to your table, where shared family Mediterranean treats await. Sample from the buffet of high-quality favourites from stations scattered around the pool. This is sure to be the place to escape the hustle of Phuket on a Saturday. Look out for details of their next event - facebook.com/lakubeachclub



AUSTCHAM JOINT CHAMBERS AUSTRALIA DAY PHUKET SUNDOWNERS

AustCham Thailand, in collaboration with Australian Alumni, AMCHAM, BCCT, CanCham Thailand, GTCC, NTCC, Phuket Chamber of Commerce, and SATCC, held the Joint Chambers Australia Day Phuket Sundowners. The event was held on Friday, January 30, at Bangkok Bob's Restaurant Phuket. It was an enjoyable evening of networking with members of the Australian–Thai business community at the newly opened Bangkok Bob's Restaurant Phuket, and supported by The Australian Consulate-General Phuket. For information about AustCham Thailand visit austchamthailand.com

Panitchaphon suffers Masters heartbreak

BADMINTON

PANITCHAPHON TEER-aratsakul suffered heartbreak after he narrowly lost in the men's singles final of the BWF Princess Sirivannavari Thailand Masters last Sunday (Feb 1).

Bidding to become the first Thai shuttler to win the men's singles title at the tournament, Panitchaphon put on an inspired performance against Moh Zaki Ubaidillah but the Indonesian proved too tough to handle, prevailing 21-19, 20-22, 21-19.

Panitchaphon won the first two meetings between them at the 2024 International Challenge and the 2025 Kumamoto Masters Japan but failed to make it three in a row at Nimibutr Stadium.

Panitchaphon was left to rue another missed opportunity as he finished runner-up for the second successive week, following his run to the final at the Indonesia Masters a week prior.

World No.63 Devika Sihag of India won the women's singles title after



Panitchaphon. Photo: Supplied

her Malaysian opponent Goh Jin Wei retired with an injury in the second game.

Indonesian players dominated the doubles competition, as top seeds Leo Rolly Carnando and Bagas Maulana defeated compatriots Raymond Indra and Nikolaus Joaquin 21-10, 21-17 in the men's doubles final, while Amallia Cahya Pratiwi and Siti Fadia Silva Ramadhanti beat Bao Li Jing and Li Yi Jing of China 15-21, 21-15, 21-18 in the women's doubles.

Meanwhile, Indonesia's Adnan Maulana and Indah Cahya Sari Jamil won the mixed doubles after defeating compatriots Bobby Setiabudi and Melati Daeva Oktavianti 18-21, 21-19, 21-17.

Bangkok Post

Classy Carlos makes history

TENNIS

AFP

Carlos Alcaraz swept past Novak Djokovic to win his first Australian Open last Sunday (Feb 1) and become the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam, denying the Serbian great an unprecedented 25th major.

The Spaniard was imperious after a slow start in dismissing the 38-year-old, 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-5 on Rod Laver Arena to claim a seventh Slam title and cement himself as undisputed world number one.

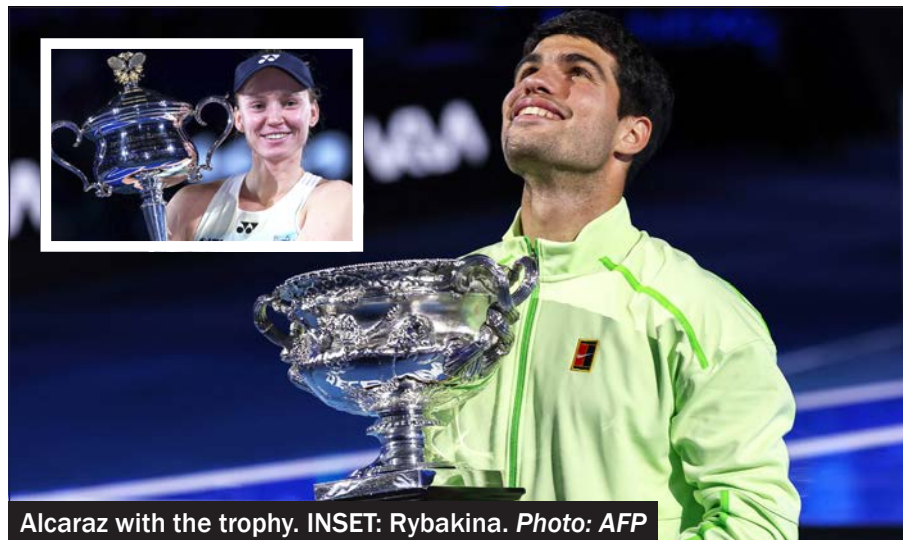
He becomes the youngest man in the Open era to win all four majors, adding to his two titles each from Wimbledon and the French and US Opens.

At 22, he surpassed legendary countryman Rafael Nadal – in the crowd to witness the feat – who was 24 when he did the same.

A seventh Slam put him alongside John McEnroe and Mats Wilander and one behind Andre Agassi, Jimmy Connors and Ivan Lendl.

“Lifting the trophy for the first time in Australia was crazy,” Alcaraz said, before writing on a TV camera lens: “Job finished. Four out of four complete.”

It was a first defeat for Djokovic in a Melbourne final, having won all 10 previously, leaving him still searching for a landmark 25th major to better



Alcaraz with the trophy. INSET: Rybakina. Photo: AFP

Australia's Margaret Court, who was also watching on centre court.

Djokovic, striving to become the oldest man to lift a Grand Slam singles trophy, last won one at the US Open in 2023. Since then Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner have dominated.

He hinted this could be his last time at Melbourne Park, saying: “God knows what happens tomorrow, let alone in six months or 12 months.”

He also joked with Nadal in the stands, saying: “There are too many Spanish legends. I feel like I was one against two tonight. It's not fair.”

PAYBACK

Meanwhile, on Saturday Elena Rybakina defeated world number one Aryna Sabalenka to win the women's singles for her second Grand Slam title.

The big-serving Kazakh fifth seed fought back from 0-3 in the deciding set to triumph 6-4, 4-6, 6-4.

It was payback after the Belarusian Sabalenka won the 2023 final between two of the hardest hitters in women's tennis.

Rybakina, 26, was born in Moscow but switched to play under the Kazakh flag in 2018 when she was a little-known 19-year-old, citing financial reasons.

Sabalenka came into the final as favourite but Rybakina has been one of the form players on the women's tour in recent months, beating second seed Iga Swiatek in the quarter-finals and sixth seed Jessica Pegula in the last four in Melbourne.

Her final victory adds the Melbourne title to her Wimbledon singles final triumph in 2022.

Fury confirms comeback fight

BOXING

FORMER HEAVYWEIGHT world champion Tyson Fury has confirmed he will face Arslanbek Makhmudov in his comeback fight in April, weeks after saying he would come out of retirement.

The bout between the Briton and Canada-based Russian Makhmudov will take place in the UK on Apr 11, with no venue yet announced, and will be broadcast on Netflix.

Fury quit boxing in January last year after suffering a second straight defeat to Oleksandr Usyk – the latest in a string of retirements.

The 37-year-old “Gypsy King” said last month he would return to the sport in 2026 and has been training in Thailand.

“Well it's official, I'm back doing what I love to do,” he posted on Instagram.

“I've brought the biggest network along with me @netflix @netflixuk this is



Fury. Photo: AFP

going to be astronomical. Blessed by God.”

Fury has a record of 34 wins, two defeats and one draw.

“I am thrilled about the opportunity,” said 36-year-old Makhmudov, who has won 21 of his 23 fights.

“I'm coming to deliver a war. Tyson Fury has been a big champion. I will be more ready than ever to leave with a massive W.”

Fury had been expected to build towards a long-awaited fight against fellow British former heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua, but Joshua's future is uncertain after a car crash in December, in Nigeria, in which two of his close friends were killed. AFP

Rodrigues, Phetjeeja showdown on

MMA

ONE CHAMPIONSHIP ATOM-weight Muay Thai champion Allycia Hellen Rodrigues will defend her title against Phetjeeja Lookjaoporongtom on Mar 14 at Lumpinee Stadium.

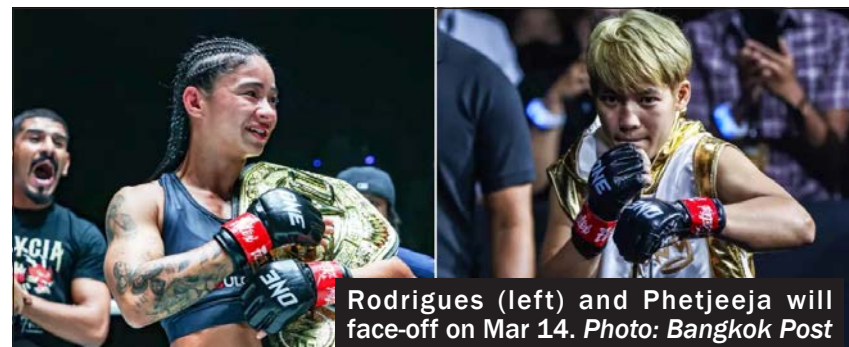
The bout will headline ONE Fight Night 41 at Lumpinee Stadium in Bangkok to coincide with International Women's Day and will be streamed live on Amazon Prime Video in the United States.

Rodrigues, 27, has become a fixture of ONE's annual International Women's Day showcases. She outpointed Cristina Morales in March 2024 before stopping Marie McManamon via fourth-round doctor's stoppage last year to retain her belt on both occasions.

The Brazilian will be seeking a fifth successful defence. Her only defeat in ONE Championship came when she moved up in weight to challenge then-strawweight champion Smilla Sundell.

This time, however, Rodrigues may face her most formidable challenge yet.

Phetjeeja, 24, has been unbeaten under the ONE Championship banner since debuting on the ONE Friday Fights series in 2023, recording five finishes in eight appearances. Nicknamed “The Queen”, the Thai standout captured



Rodrigues (left) and Phetjeeja will face-off on Mar 14. Photo: Bangkok Post

the interim atomweight kickboxing title with a decision win over Anissa Meksen in December 2023, before unifying the belts against Janet Todd on ONE's all-female International Women's Day card in March 2024.

She successfully defended the unified kickboxing title against Kana Morimoto at ONE 172 in Japan last March, before finally returning to Muay Thai later in the year. That comeback also marked her reunion with coach Mehdi Zatout at Venum Training Camp, where she stopped Martyna Kierczynska to re-establish herself in the Muay Thai title picture.

Notably, Phetjeeja has never lost a professional bout in Muay Thai, kickboxing or boxing.

The matchup has been years in the making. Rodrigues and Phetjeeja have long been viewed as inevitable rivals in ONE's atomweight Muay Thai division, but previous attempts to finalise the

bout fell through amid scheduling issues, weight-class detours and mutual accusations of ducking.

“I want to fight with her. I have waited for her for three years,” Phetjeeja said last December. “Five fights, five wins in Muay Thai in ONE. I want to fight with Allycia. I need the belt.”

Rodrigues confirmed after her July knockout of Johanna Persson that she had already signed to face Phetjeeja, with the Thai later explaining that delays on her side prevented the fight from being finalised at the time. The pair were again pencilled in to meet in December, but Rodrigues' pre-booked seminar tour ultimately ruled that out.

With those obstacles now cleared, ONE Championship appears set to finally deliver one of the most anticipated women's Muay Thai matchups in the sport – on one of its biggest annual stages.

Bangkok Post

Gunners fire as rivals slip

FOOTBALL

AFP

Arsenal moved a step closer to ending a 22-year wait to win the Premier League title after a dream weekend for the Gunners extended their lead to six points.

A dominant 4-0 win over Leeds last Saturday (Jan 31) quelled talk of Mikel Arteta's men wilting under the pressure of being title favourites, as Manchester City and Aston Villa dropped crucial points.

A first home defeat of the season against Manchester United the previous weekend sparked doubts about Arsenal's ability to get over the line in the title race.

For the past three seasons they have finished second, twice blowing significant leads in the closing weeks of the season.

But this looks set to be their year, aided by the faltering form of the chasing pack.

"We really wanted to show how much we wanted it, and I think we've certainly done that," said Arteta.

City, by contrast, remain a work in progress despite the huge sums spent to refresh Pep Guardiola's side over the past year.

They should have cruised to victory at Tottenham with a 2-0 half-time lead and the home fans in open revolt.

But Dominic Solanke struck twice in the second half to secure a 2-2 draw



Mikel Arteta's Arsenal lead the Premier League by six points. Photo: AFP

that leaves City with just one league win from six games in 2026.

Villa surpassed expectations just to keep pace with the top two into February, but are seven points back after losing 1-0 at home to 10-man Brentford.

Manchester United looked to have blown the chance for a third consecutive win since Michael Carrick took charge as Fulham struck twice in the final five minutes to come from 2-0 down at Old Trafford.

But there was one final twist in a frantic finale as Benjamin Sesko blasted into the top corner to spark wild scenes of celebration, reminiscent of United's glory days under Alex Ferguson when victory was often snatched from the jaws of defeat.

Victory also lifted United back above Chelsea and Liverpool into fourth place, with the top five likely to qualify for the Champions League.

Chelsea overcame a two-goal half-time deficit against West Ham before Enzo Fernández's 92nd minute winner clinched the win.

Elsewhere, Hugo Ekitike's quickfire double helped Liverpool to an impressive 4-1 victory over Newcastle, with fellow big money summer signing Florian Wirtz also on target.

Crystal Palace failed to make the most of a man advantage in a 1-1 draw at Nottingham Forest, while Bournemouth won 2-0 at Wolves, Brighton and Everton drew 1-1 and Sunderland beat Burnley 3-0.



Photo: AFP

Arsenal's women win Champions Cup

FOOTBALL

ARSENAL SCOOPED the biggest financial prize in women's club football history by beating Corinthians 3-2 after extra time to win the inaugural FIFA Women's Champions Cup last Sunday (Feb 1).

The European champions edged out the challenge of the Brazilian underdogs thanks to Caitlin Foord's winner in the 104th minute to collect a US\$2.3 million (B73mn) payout.

That amount is nearly four times the 500,000 euros (B18.7mn) Arsenal received for winning last season's Women's Champions League when they defeated defending champions Barcelona in Lisbon.

The Gunners were heavy favourites to win the FIFA Women's Champions Cup, which pitted the winners of the champions of six contin-

ents together in competition for the first time.

However, Corinthians shocked US champions Gotham FC in their semi-final on Jan 28 and pushed Arsenal all the way in front of over 25,000 at the Emirates Stadium.

Olivia Smith's early opener for Arsenal was quickly cancelled out by Gabi Zanotti.

England defender Lotte Wubben-Moy restored Arsenal's lead and the celebrations were beginning around the Emirates when Corinthians snatched a dramatic equaliser deep into injury time.

Vic Albuquerque stroked home from the penalty spot after Gisela Robledo was tripped inside the area.

Arsenal's greater strength in depth showed in the extra time, though, as Foord sneaked a shot in at the near post to finally break Corinthians' spirit. AFP

Thai golfers focusing on Asian Games glory

GOLF

THAILAND GOLF ASSOCIATION (TGA) president Rangsarit Laksitanont has set ambitious targets for the 20th Asian Games in Nagoya, Japan, between Sept 19-Oct 4.

It came as he praised the country's golfers for capturing 10 major titles in 2025, including a historic haul of four gold medals at the 33rd SEA Games in Thailand.

It was the first time in a decade that Thailand had swept all four categories – men's and women's individual and team events – a feat last accomplished at the 2015 Games in Singapore.

"This has been the most successful year in the history of the TGA, a remarkable achievement," Rangsarit said on Jan 30.

The SEA Games triumph was spearheaded by Pongsapak Laopakdee and Prim Prachayanakorn, who claimed the individual titles. They were supported by Thanawin Lee, Warut Boonrod and Prin Sarnsamut in the men's team, and Pimpisa Rubrong and Kritchaya Kaopattanasakul in the women's team.

Pongsapak also won the Asia-Pacific Major Championship, earning invitations to two of golf's most prestigious events – The Masters and The Open – in 2026.



Photo: Bangkok Post

Prim and Pimpisa, meanwhile, secured scholarships to study in the United States, with Prim also invited to compete in the Augusta National Women's Amateur in April.

The 10 titles collected by Thai golfers last year included victories at the Asian Junior Golf Team Championship in South Korea, the Ciputra Golfpreneur Junior World Championship in Indonesia, the Singapore Junior Golf Championship, and the Malaysian International Junior Open.

On the women's side, triumphs came at the Toyota Junior Golf World Cup in Japan, the APGC Junior Golf Championship in Hong Kong, the Singapore Open Amateur Championship, the Malaysian International Junior Open, and the Vietnam Ladies Amateur Open.

"We are determined to maintain our position as Asia's No.1," Rangsarit said. "At the last Asian Games in Hangzhou, we won two golds and one silver. This year, we will prepare intensively to succeed once again." Bangkok Post



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Sport



Alcaraz makes history Down Under > p14



Directors initiate the 2025 edition of the 24 Hour Race in Phuket. Photo: Supplied

Students' 24 hour run to combat human trafficking

RUNNING

Mika Kamiya

Long after the sun dipped below the horizon, Kevin Wang was still running laps around the track, singing along to Bruno Mars' *Die With a Smile* to stay awake. His teammates stretched on the sidelines, the humid Phuket air thick with sweat and salt from the nearby sea. It was 2am, nine hours into the relay race, with another 15 to go.

Kevin was one of the hundreds participating in the 24 Hour Race in February last year, a student-led, day-long fundraiser for organisations working to prevent trafficking and support survivors. The rules were simple: for 24 hours, teams had to have at least one runner on the track.

"At first, I just saw it as a school event," Kevin said. "But once I learned where the money was going, it felt like what we were doing mattered."

With the 2026 Phuket race taking place later this month and early next (Feb 28 to Mar 1), 60 students across the island's

international schools have gathered to plan the event. The race will be one of dozens ran in 20 countries, ranging from the United States, India, Singapore and Bosnia.

More than 100,000 runners and 8,000 student leaders have participated since 2010, raising approximately US\$2 million (B62mn) for organisations fighting human trafficking.

OUTREACH

One such organisation is Sons & Daughters, which helps women leave Hong Kong's red-light district through outreach and long-term aftercare.

One lady by the name of Exodus, who encountered the organisation through its outreach team, chose to leave the commercial sex industry after learning about Sons & Daughters' 12-month aftercare programme, where she received counseling, case management and vocational training.

Drawing on the resilience and confidence she developed during the programme, Exodus later founded a low-cost school for children unable to afford educa-

tion. With seed funding facilitated through Sons & Daughters, the school has since grown to serve 136 students, as of June 2025.

Organisations like Sons & Daughters and The Freedom Story turn 24 Hour Race donations into support for hundreds of women attempting to escape the commercial sex industry. They have also helped more than 8,000 students – 89% of whom graduate high school – stay in the classroom.

For Nue, a university student from northern Thailand, that support proved critical after her father died from an overdose when she was 14. Earning only B250 a day, Nue's mother relied on Nue's support in caring for her three younger siblings, making Nue vulnerable when her aunt offered a job at a Bangkok massage parlour – work that risked exposing her to coercion, unsafe conditions and exploitation.

No longer able to afford the transportation, uniforms and fees required to stay in school, Nue applied for a scholarship from The Freedom Story. The scholarship enabled Nue to

decline her aunt's offer and continue her education, graduating high school and attending college. Beyond financial support, Nue meets weekly with a mentor who serves as both an advocate and a guide. Through counseling and conversation, her mentor encourages her to imagine a future beyond immediate survival.

'SYMBOLIC REMINDER'

The 24 Hour Race seeks not only to support young women like Exodus and Nue but raise awareness about the millions of victims still trapped in systems of human trafficking. The relay's uninterrupted 24-hour format is a deliberate symbol to keep attention fixed on the fact that many trafficking victims cannot simply stop working.

"The race is not just about endurance," said Kevin, "It's about experiencing, even briefly, what it feels like to have no way out." A symbolic reminder, he added, of the lack of choice victims face.

What distinguishes the 24 Hour Race is that students are responsible not only for running, but deciding where the

money goes. Student organisers coordinate with partner organisations, manage fundraising targets and allocate funds toward prevention and education programs for at-risk youth.

"The reason the race matters to me personally is that it prioritises youth empowerment," said Rhys Caygill, a former director of the 24 Hour Race in Phuket. "I developed skills while contributing to something that had a real impact."

When the final horn sounded, Kevin sat on the edge of the track with his shoes off, rubbing his calves. Around him, the floodlights dimmed and the music cut out, leaving the track quiet for the first time in 24 hours. There was no confetti – only tired smiles, hugs, and the knowledge that the miles run would translate into support for students like Nue.

Kevin stood up, stretched and headed back to his team. The race was over, but the work it funded would continue long after the track emptied.

For more information please visit: <https://www.24hourrace.org/races/phuket>.