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PIPE DREAM



Anutin Charnvirakul inspects Bang Neow Dum Reservoir in 2024. Photo: PWA

B26BN 'DREAM' WATER-SUPPLY PIPELINE STILL YEARS AWAY

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After decades of planning and promises, the long-awaited water supply pipeline from Surat Thani remains a pipe dream, with the project undergoing yet another feasibility study and carrying a projected cost of B26 billion – and construction unlikely to begin for years.

The proposal to pipe raw water from Ratchaphrpha Dam to Phuket has long been touted by politicians and senior bureaucrats as the definitive solution to the island's recurring drought fears.

The scheme is intended to prevent a repeat of the severe

shortages experienced during extended dry seasons, most notably in 2019, when reservoir levels hit record lows and parts of the island saw water pressure “reduced” to the point of effectively shutting off mains supply.

At the height of that crisis, resorts were forced to truck in water by tanker as emergency deliveries were sent to communities where taps had simply run dry. Residents in a government-built housing estate in Ratsada, constructed for low-income families, staged a protest after being forced to spend what little money they had buying water from private suppliers for months – because supply to their neighbour-

hood had been cut before similar restrictions were imposed elsewhere.

Since then, drought warnings have become an almost annual feature, with officials repeatedly urging residents and businesses to conserve water during delayed monsoon periods. As recently as 2023, local authorities warned that late rains could trigger mass outages in key areas across the island.

With Phuket now welcoming about 14 million visitors annually, tourism accounts for a significant share of total water consumption, adding further strain to reservoirs and groundwater sources.

Against this backdrop, the B26bn mega-project is being

positioned as a long-term answer to the island's growing demand – but it remains firmly on the drawing board.

That is despite a direct order issued during a high-profile visit to Phuket in 2024 by then Deputy Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul – who as of last Friday (Feb 27) has become Thailand's 32nd Prime Minister.

During an inspection at Bang Neow Dum Reservoir in Srisoonthorn, now-PM Anutin instructed the Provincial Waterworks Authority (PWA) Phuket branch to expedite key water supply projects to alleviate recurring dry-season shortages and outages...

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Water supply on drip feed

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He specifically ordered the PWA to accelerate the long-discussed pipeline project to Phuket to ensure long-term water security for consumption.

“The Provincial Waterworks Authority (PWA) should urgently study and coordinate with relevant agencies to expedite implementation. This will ensure sufficient water for consumption in the Andaman provinces, meet the needs of the population, promote tourism, support economic growth, and generate income for the local population,” he said at the time.

The PWA was instructed to submit the study results – the first report – to the Cabinet for information by September 2024. That did not happen.

DAM LINK

Nuchanapa Pinthong, Manager of the PWA Phuket Branch, last week outlined progress on a 20-year plan to supply treated water from Surat Thani to Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi.

She said the project stems from a Cabinet resolution dated Apr 9, 2024, directing the PWA to review water production plans and expand transmission networks to support economic growth in Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi and Surat Thani. The review also includes examining whether the scheme could proceed under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model under the 2019 PPP Act.

According to the PWA’s website, the feasibility study was commissioned to TEAM Consulting Engineering and Management Plc at a cost of B49.2mn. The



Bang Neow Dum reservoir starts running low in 2024. Photo: PWA

study began on July 10, 2024 and is due to run until Feb 24, 2027.

The scope includes updating demand forecasts, assessing raw water sources, designing transmission and treatment systems, evaluating environmental impacts and preparing documentation required for PPP approval and private-sector selection.

Preliminary proposals identify Khlong Phum Duang in Ban Ta Khun District, Surat Thani, as the raw water source. Plans include constructing a weir, a pumping station and a treatment plant with a total capacity of 14,000 cubic metres per hour.

Actual delivery of water, however, is years away. The project is divided into two phases: Phase 1 (2031-2040) with production of 7,000 cubic metres per hour, and Phase 2 (2041-2050) adding another 7,000 cubic metres per hour.

A 300.7-kilometre transmission pipeline would run from Surat Thani through Krabi and Phang Nga before reaching Phuket, supplying six PWA branches along the route.

Total investment is projected at more than B26bn.

Demand forecasts for the six branches and 21 local administrative organisations along the route project peak tap-water demand of 61.55mn cubic metres per year between 2031 and 2040. Between 2041 and 2050, demand is forecast to rise to 123.18mn cubic metres annually. Raw water requirements would increase from 67.71mn to 135.51mn cubic metres per year across the two phases.

Ms Nuchanapa described the dam link as a “strategic backbone” project to secure long-term water resources as tourism and investment continue to expand.

However, environmental assessments and PPP analysis remain underway, and no construction timeline has been announced. Participants at recent consultation meetings have suggested expanding coverage to Khao Lak in Takua Pa District, Phang Nga, another tourism hub facing similar supply pressures.

For now, the B26bn dam link remains a long-term vision rather

than an imminent solution.

PHANG NGA PLAN

Closer to implementation is the Phase 1 Phang Nga–Phuket waterworks expansion project, with a budget of B3.49bn.

The project covers Muang and Takua Thung districts in Phang Nga and Thalung District in Phuket, and includes construction and improvement of transmission and distribution systems and installation of new pipelines.

The Environmental Impact Assessment has been approved, and construction progress stands at about 2.5%, with completion expected in 2028. That is despite earlier instructions in 2024 under the previous administration calling for completion by 2027.

PWA Phuket acknowledged that land acquisition for pumping stations and pipeline routes remains under negotiation.

At the same time, pressure-management measures are under way in Chalong, Rawai, Karon, Patong, Kamala and Wichit to address complaints of low pressure and discoloured water. Measures include booster pumps, dividing supply zones, leak detection and repair, flushing sediment, replacing ageing steel pipes, expanding the Kamala network, increasing pressure in Laem Panwa and installing a reserve tank near Ao Nam Bor School in Wichit.

The Khu Muang Water Supply Station is scheduled to begin operations on Mar 1 and is expected to improve pressure in parts of Phuket Town, including Soi King Kaew and Khuan Din Daeng.

RESERVOIRS

‘MANAGEABLE’ FOR NOW

Amid long-term infrastructure discussions, officials say the current situation remains under control.

Thanit Yuthong, chief of the Phuket branch of the Royal Irrigation Department, said main reservoirs are about 69-70% full and not at a critical stage.

Citing Meteorological Department data, he said rainfall in March and April is expected to be relatively low, but May rainfall could exceed 300 millimetres, significantly replenishing storage.

“Based on current water volumes, Phuket would be able to cope with drought conditions for approximately three months,” he said, adding that Songkran water use is not expected to pose a risk.

Plans are in place to dredge Bang Wad Reservoir to increase capacity. The Kaem Ling (‘monkey cheeks’) project, overseen by the Medium-Sized Irrigation Construction Region 15 Office, remains in the study and design phase.

Yet Mr Thanit still admitted that no large-scale irrigation construction projects have commenced this year, either within Phuket or for inter-provincial transfer schemes. All major projects remain at planning or feasibility stages.

For an island that has repeatedly flirted with water shortages, the message is cautiously reassuring in the short term. But until major infrastructure moves beyond studies and into construction, Phuket’s long-term water security remains dependent on rainfall – and hope.

Phuket Town calls for water-saving measures rolls out drought plan as dry season begins

THE MAYOR OF PHUKET Town mayor has urged residents to start water-saving measures as Phuket City Municipality has launched a comprehensive management plan for the 2026 dry season, warning that water pressure reductions may be imposed if raw water supplies do not improve.

Mayor Suppachoke Laongphet called on residents to use water sparingly, check for leaks and report any pipe breakages to the municip-

ality’s Water Supply Division, following the Meteorological Department’s announcement marking the start of the dry season.

The municipality currently serves 21,772 registered users, including 18,588 within the municipal area and 3,184 outside it.

Raw water reserves stand at about 80% of total reservoir capacity. As of Feb 25, key reserves include 6.97 million cubic metres at Bang Wad Reservoir, 811,686 cubic metres at the municipal reservoir and



Photo: Phuket City Municipality

230,426 cubic metres at the Suan Luang Park reservoirs. Additional supplies are held at Vachira Phuket Hospital,

Soi Pha-niang and Aquaflo Co Ltd., with about 700,000 cubic metres in support from the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organization and the Thai Village reservoir.

The municipal system – comprising a mine water treatment facility, several small-scale plants and the Suan Luang Park (King Rama IX Park) plant – has a combined production capacity of about 30,000 cubic metres per day and can interconnect supplies if required.

However, if raw water levels do not rise, tap water production may be reduced by lowering pressure across the system, potentially causing weak or no supply in some areas from 10am–4pm and 10pm–4am.

Water distribution points and 2,000-litre tanks have been prepared for drought-hit communities. Residents can seek assistance or report leaks by calling 076-212196 ext 0, 24 hours a day. *The Phuket News*

Oil spill on the beaches

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Oil slicks from the sunken cargo vessel SEALLOYD ARC remained under close watch across Phuket's southern islands this week, with maritime authorities confirming thin surface films persist while underwater surveys have located at least six containers near the wreck site.

The Thai Maritime Enforcement Command Centre Region 3 (Thai MECC 3) last Sunday (Mar 1) said Incident Commander Vice Admiral Veerudom Muangchin had ordered continuous monitoring of the slick's movement, particularly around major tourist areas.

The vessel sank just a few kilometres southwest of Phuket on Feb 7. Oil washed ashore across parts of the Racha Islands and southern Phuket late last week, prompting shoreline clean-ups and a multi-agency containment response.

Thai MECC 3 said air and sea patrols continue to track and mitigate the slick. Assets deployed include a DO-228 reconnaissance aircraft, drones, HTMS Mannok, HTMS Punyee and Patrol Boat 114, supported by the Royal Thai Navy Hydro-



Photo: Thai Mecc 3

graphic Department, the Department of Pollution Control and other agencies.

Officials said patrols are focusing on beaches and island coastlines where oil is forecast to spread. Shoreline clean-up teams remain on standby and will be deployed immediately if further landfall is detected.

The latest assessment identified two main slick areas: an oil film surrounding Koh Kaew Yai, believed to be older residue redistributed by wind and currents, and a long, thin film extending from the wreck site measuring about 50 metres wide. Authorities reported no heavy sediment, strong odour or thick crude accumulation, describing the pollution as a thin surface film.

Island checks found no oil slick at Koh Racha Yai or Koh Racha Noi. A thin film was reported south of Koh Hei and Koh Aew, while Koh Kaew Noi had light surface oil spreading with currents. Oil presence at Koh Kaew Phisadan was reported to have decreased.

Naval vessels have been agitating thin surface films to encourage natural dispersion.

LEAK SEALING, SEABED SURVEY

On Feb 27, the Incident Command Center ordered urgent action to seal leaks from underwater oil pipelines on the wreck, identified as the primary source of the spill.

Divers and remotely operated vehicles (ROVs) inspected vent

pipes on the hull. Authorities reported that a leak on the starboard side was successfully sealed. However, assessments indicated a possible additional leak on the port side, with further inspections planned.

Operations expanded on Feb 28 to include a structured underwater seabed survey around the wreck.

HTMS Hua Hin deployed with special operations personnel, divers and medical support to assist a Netherlands-based survey team using an ROV. Five dives were conducted across a 500×500-metre grid.

The survey identified four to five containers in one sector of the search area, with one container located in each of two additional sectors.

Authorities said the search area would be expanded to 1,000×1,000 metres, with side-scan sonar surveys and further ROV dives planned to photograph and record container identification numbers.

FULL REMOVAL ORDERED

In a high-level meeting with the vessel owner and its insurer on Feb 27, the Incident Command Center formally directed that the final objective must be the

complete removal of oil, containers – including any dangerous goods – and the wreck itself from Thai waters.

The ship owner was instructed to expedite oil spill clean-up, pump remaining oil from the vessel for disposal outside Thailand, salvage all containers, remove the wreck and bear all associated operational, environmental and economic costs.

Officials also required submission of a revised salvage plan with a clear timeline and safeguards to prevent further leakage during recovery operations.

ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING CONTINUES

The Department of Marine and Coastal Resources has warned that even thin oil films can threaten coral reefs and marine ecosystems if toxins enter the food chain.

Research teams continue to monitor reef systems around the Racha Islands and affected southern Phuket areas.

Thai MECC 3 said monitoring of slick movement remains ongoing. Members of the public who detect oil slicks or maritime hazards have been advised to report them via the 24-hour hotline 1465.

14mn tourists 'is enough'

WASTE MANAGEMENT MUST BE Phuket's top priority, and the island should not welcome more than 14 million tourists a year, Governor Nirat Pongsithaworn has said.

In an exclusive interview, Governor Nirat stressed that while tourism remains Phuket's economic engine, future growth must be balanced with environmental responsibility and sustainability.

He noted that Feb 14 marked a new peak in passenger traffic at Phuket International Airport, with congestion on some days potentially exceeding that of Suvarnabhumi and Don Mueang airports.

The surge reflects years of coordinated promotion by agencies including the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, working with local businesses and residents, he said.

"Phuket is not a cheap city. We don't sell cheap products – we sell quality," he said. "Tourists invest in coming here. What they receive is a beautiful city, white sandy beaches, clear blue waters, clean air and international-standard cuisine."

Despite record arrivals, the governor said Phuket does not need more than 14 million visitors annually.

"Fourteen million is enough," he said. "What we need is for them to stay longer – from three nights to five, seven or even longer. If visitors stay longer and spend more, we reduce pressure on the airport and infrastructure while increasing income."



Kata Beach last week. Photo: MCOT

He added that tourism growth must go hand in hand with safety, order and effective administration.

However, Governor Nirat described waste as the island's most urgent challenge. Phuket, covering more than 500 square kilometres, is grappling with what he called a "mountain of waste", unacceptable for a world-class destination.

"If waste affects the environment – through smell, wastewater or leakage into the sea – it damages Phuket's image and its future," he said.

He outlined a three-point strategy: reduce waste generation, improve separation and recycling, and require local disposal of organic waste, which accounts for up to 70% of Phuket's waste stream.

"Tourism has brought us success," he said. "Now we must ensure that Phuket remains clean, sustainable and liveable."

Eakkapop Thongtub

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PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

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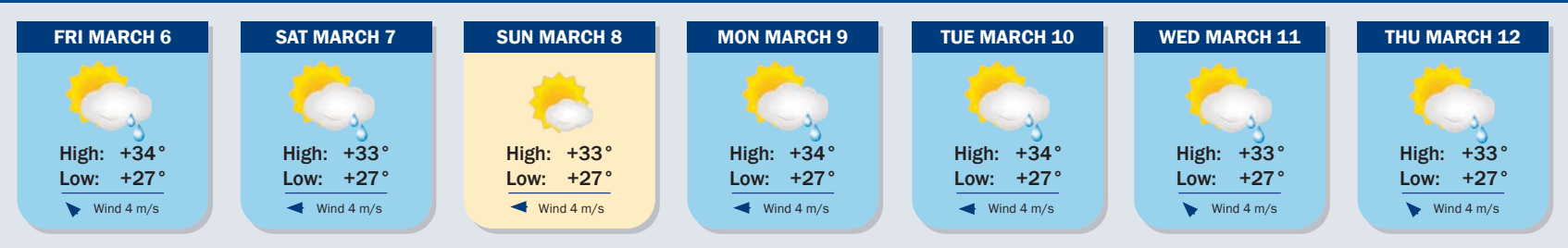


Photo: Sirinat National Park

Beach chairs removed from Nai Thon Beach

THALANG DISTRICT officials have ordered all unauthorised beach umbrellas and chairs removed from Nai Thon Beach, following an inspection carried out hours after a fire destroyed more than 60 items in the early hours of Feb 24.

The inspection was led by Thalang District Chief Siwat Rawangkul, joined by the Deputy District Chief for Security Affairs, Volunteer Defence Corps (OrSor) members, the head of Sirinat National Park, the deputy chief of the Sakhu Tambon Administrative Organisation (OrBorTor) and the Moo 4 village headman.

Officials found umbrellas and chairs placed without permission within national park boundaries, along with goods being sold on the public road. Operators were ordered to clear all items by Feb 28.

Warning signs were installed and public an-

nouncements issued prohibiting beach furniture in the national park and other public areas.

Thalang District Office confirmed that a joint follow-up inspection with Sirinat National Park was to be held later and warned that legal action will follow if violations continue.

The order comes as police investigate a blaze that broke out at about 1am on Nai Thon Beach, destroying around 40 canvas cushions and 20 plastic chairs.

Sakhu Police Chief Pol Col Salan Santisanasakul said officers are reviewing CCTV footage and questioning witnesses to determine the cause. Forensic officers have examined the scene.

He stressed the removal order is separate from the criminal investigation, which remains ongoing, with no motive ruled out.

The Phuket News

Man charged over fatal slap in Patong

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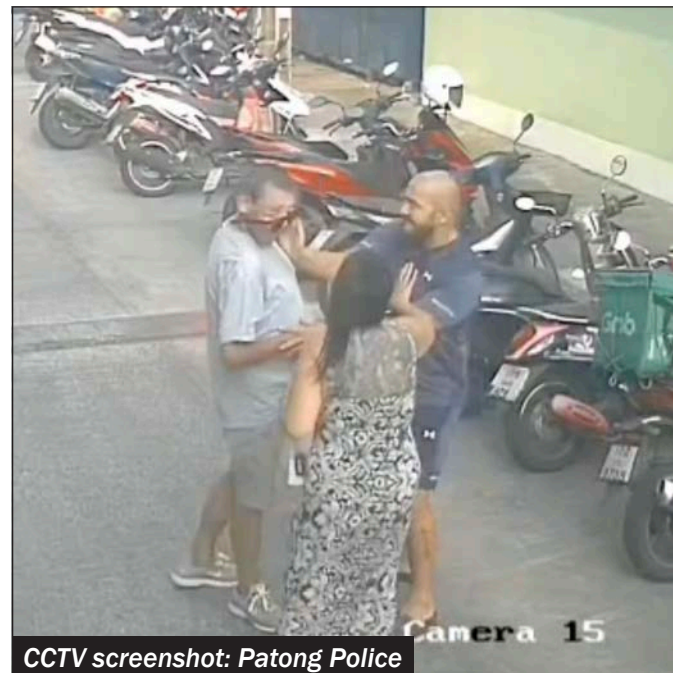
A 29-year-old dual Swedish-Turkish national has been formally charged with assault causing death after allegedly slapping an Australian man during an argument in Patong, causing him to fall and suffer fatal head injuries.

Pol Lt Col Chanan Mekchai, the investigating officer at Patong Police Station, identified the suspect as Pektas Tuguy Tayyar, who holds both Swedish and Turkish passports.

"He entered Thailand using his Swedish passport, though he was born in Turkey," Pol Lt Col Chanan said.

The incident occurred at about 5pm on Feb 25 at the entrance to Soi Siriland off Prachanukhro Rd in Patong.

According to police, the altercation began when Mr Tayyar was riding a black Honda X-ADV 750 motorbike along Soi Siriland and allegedly honked and shouted at 57-year-old Australian Alan Roger Jolliffe to move aside. The Australian reportedly shouted back, prompting Mr Tayyar to stop.



CCTV screenshot: Patong Police

"Both of them argued before Mr Tayyar slapped the Australian man once in the face. The victim fell to the ground and sustained a serious head injury," Pol Lt Col Chanan said.

Mr Jolliffe was taken to Patong Hospital and later transferred to Vachira Phuket Hospital due to the severity of his condition. He was pronounced dead at 10:23pm.

Hospital officials re-ported no underlying medical conditions, stating that he sustained a head injury after falling backwards and hitting his head on the street.

Police were notified at about 11pm that a foreign tourist had died at Patong Hospital. Officers examined the scene in front of Building 21 on Prachanukhro Rd and reviewed CCTV footage, which recorded the incident.

Investigators tracked down and arrested Mr Tayyar at a condominium in Kathu. According to police, he admitted striking the victim once during the argument.

He has been formally charged and brought before the Phuket Provincial Court for pre-trial detention as legal proceedings continue.

Campaign targets cannabis shops

PHUKET OFFICIALS HAVE intensified inspections of both licensed and unlicensed cannabis shops as part of a provincial crackdown on drug trafficking and use.

Of 553 targeted cannabis outlets across the province, 115 have been inspected so far, representing 20.8% of the total. The inspections are being led by the Phuket Provincial Public Health Office in coordination with administrative officials, provincial police and other relevant agencies. Authorities said checks will continue to ensure full compliance with regulations.

The update was delivered at the fourth meeting of the Phuket

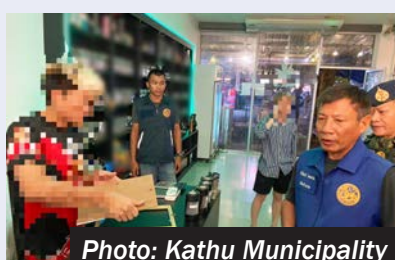


Photo: Kathu Municipality

Provincial Anti-Drug Centre Committee for fiscal year 2026, held at Phuket Provincial Hall on Feb 27 and chaired by Vice Governor Rungruang Thimabutr.

Officials said the ongoing inspections are aimed at tightening control over cannabis sales and preventing misuse, with further action to be taken against any operators found violating the law.

The Phuket News

Motorcyclist killed in Patong Hill crash

A 35-YEAR-OLD MOTORCYCLIST has died following a head-on collision with a car on Patong Hill early last Friday (Feb 27).

The crash occurred on Phra Baramee Rd near the "landslide curve" at about 5:30am, Patong Police said. Pol Lt Col Chanan Mekchai received a report at 5:39am that a motorcycle had collided with a car on the downhill stretch of the road. Emergency responders transported the injured rider to Patong Hospital.

At the scene, officers found a Honda Wave registered in Phuket lying in the lane towards Patong. A black Honda sedan registered in Phatthalung was stopped in the opposite lane with front-end damage.

Police identified the rider as Suksan Thayaeng, 35, of Maha

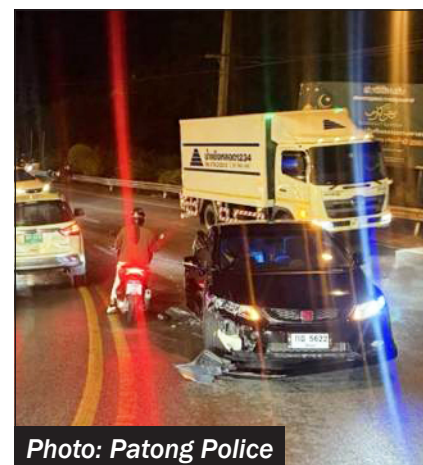


Photo: Patong Police

Sarakham. He was pronounced dead at 7:13am. The driver, Chanwit Thongmisuk, 36, tested negative for alcohol.

Police believe the motorcycle veered into the oncoming lane. The investigation continues.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Mayors cleared in corruption probes

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Two mayors are among officials cleared of criminal wrongdoing after investigations by the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) Phuket office into four separate cases involving land use, coastal encroachment and public procurement, while disciplinary reviews will still proceed.

Suwat Saowaran, Chief of the NACC Phuket Office, at a press conference on Feb 24 confirmed that although irregularities were identified in some cases, none met the threshold for criminal prosecution.

In the first case, Karun Sriden, former Mayor of Kamala, was accused of allowing construction of the Layi-Nakalay road in a protected forest area and permitting building works without authorisation from the Phuket branch of the Royal Forest Department.

Mr Suwat said the investigation found the road was located within a land agricultural reform area and that funding for the project

had been provided by a contractor, not the Kamala Tambon Administrative Organisation (OrBorTor).

Regarding the building construction, he said officials issued an order suspending the work after becoming aware of the issue and proceeded under the Building Control Act.

“The NACC ruled that no criminal offence had been committed,” Mr Suwat said. However, disciplinary action was initiated under Section 64 of the 2018 Organic Act on Anti-Corruption.

He added that all relevant authorities must strictly prevent further construction or encroachment in forestry zones, stressing that no development is permitted without proper authorisation.

In a second case, Veera Kerdsirimongkol, former Thalang District Chief, and Panya Samphaorat, currently serving a second term as Mayor of Pa Khlok Municipality, were accused of allowing construction of the Pa Khlok Sufficiency Economy Centre on public land (NorSorLor 6068) without formally requesting



NACC Phuket Chief Suwat Saowaran. Photo: NACC Phuket

a change or revocation of land status.

Mr Suwat said the project had been implemented under an urgent government policy allocating B5 million per subdistrict and was intended for public benefit.

“While proper land procedures were not completed, investigators found no criminal intent,” he said.

“The commission ruled there was no basis for crim-

inal liability. However, the matter was forwarded to the relevant commanding officer for action under Section 64 of the 2018 Organic Act on Anti-Corruption,” he added.

In both the Kamala and Pa Khlok cases, Mr Suwat did not explain why the matters were referred to superior officers for consideration of disciplinary action if no criminal wrongdoing had been found.

BANG WAD WATER PUMPS

In a third case involving water pumps at Bang Wad Reservoir, five defendants were accused of corruption in the inspection and acceptance of water pumps, equipment and control cabinets under a project valued at B9,298,300.

Those accused were Thawatchai Thongmang, former Deputy Mayor of Phuket City Municipality and chairman of the procurement committee; procurement committee member Noppawut Sae-na; NP Trading Supply Co Ltd; and contractors Chuda Phiu-pueak and Piya Charoenlap.

Mr Suwat said the allegation centred on claims that the installation did not comply with contract specifications requiring .6/1 KV-CV 185 Sqmm cable.

“The contract did not state that the cable had to be copper or aluminium. The contractor installed copper cable for one circuit and aluminium cable for three circuits,” he explained.

“The NACC Phuket concluded that the materials used complied with the stated specifications and

found no evidence of criminal wrongdoing. The allegations were dismissed,” he added.

CAT RELOCATION PROJECTS

In the fourth case explained, three individuals were investigated over three site relocation projects carried out in 2019 for CAT Telecom Public Company Limited.

CAT Telecom was later merged with TOT to form national telecoms provider National Telecom Public Company Limited (NT).

The accused were Prasert Weeworn, Pongsak Suthadol and contractor Narongchai Inseechuen. Officials were alleged to have received payments of B8,000 and B4,000 from the contractor.

Mr Suwat said the work had been urgent, carried out to resolve internet network problems and performed outside official working hours.

“Investigators determined there was no fraudulent intent and ruled that there were no grounds for criminal liability,” he said.

Phuket MPs confirmed

PHUKET'S THREE MEMBERS OF Parliament have been officially confirmed following the Feb 8 general election, with all three already moving to address pressing local issues.

The Phuket office of the Public Relations Department (PR Phuket), under the Prime Minister's Office, announced the endorsements late on Feb 25. At the time, the Phuket branch of the Election Commission of Thailand had yet to issue its own public confirmation. Nationwide, 396 constituency MPs have been endorsed, giving Phuket its full complement of three representatives in the House of Representatives.

In Constituency 2, Chalermpong ‘Coach Sam’ Saengdee of the People's Party was confirmed as re-elected. After acknowledging the formal certification, he highlighted concerns over the sinking of the cargo vessel SEALLOYD ARC southwest of Phuket on Feb 7. Fuel oil from the wreck had washed ashore at Koh Hei, raising fears for coral reefs, seagrass beds in Rawai Bay and beaches including Nai Harn, Rawai and Kata. He urged authorities to contain the spill, disclose information transparently and prepare restoration plans.

Mr Chalermpong also inspected newly installed traffic lights at the Hua Khuan Nuea intersection in Kamala, expected to reduce accidents after what he described as a 20-year wait. He further followed up on drainage works



near Phuket FantaSea to ease flooding ahead of the rainy season.

In Constituency 1, Somchart Techathaworncharoen, also of the People's Party, was confirmed as re-elected. He pointed to his office's “Gold Medal” ranking on the Traffy Fondue complaint platform and encouraged residents to report issues such as clogged drains, potholes and water supply problems.

In Constituency 3, Orathai Kerdsap of the KLa Tham Party was confirmed as the winner. Thanking voters, she urged residents experiencing power outages to call the Provincial Electricity Authority hotline 1129 and clearly state their location to speed repairs.

The Phuket News



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Thailand eyes oil reserves

Bangkok Post

The Ministry of Energy said on Sunday (Mar 1) that Thailand has a two-month oil reserve and it will search out alternative sources to ensure energy security if the Iran war escalates to other countries in the Mideast.

Deputy permanent secretary Veerapat Kiatfuengfoo said that as of Feb 23 Thailand had an in-country reserve of 4.92 billion litres of crude and refined oil, and this could meet demand for 38 days.

In addition, 1.75bn litres of Thailand-bound crude were already enroute from and outside the Strait of Hormuz, and another 1.12bn litres from other sources were also being delivered to Thailand. This could meet demand in Thailand for an additional 23 days.

In total, Thai reserves could meet demand for 61 days, Mr Veerapat said.

Apart from crude oil, four ships were transporting liquefied natural gas to Thailand and two of them had already passed through



Photo: Bangkok Post

the Strait of Hormuz. If the Iran war was prolonged, or escalated, the Ministry of Energy would take action to stabilise energy reserves and prevent an oil shortage, he said.

If the Strait of Hormuz were closed, that would affect 20% of global oil demand. At this stage, there was no impact on the reserve or on prices in

Thailand, Mr Veerapat said. He was sure there would be enough oil, cooking gas and liquefied natural gas to meet local demand.

Meanwhile, the Labour and Foreign Affairs ministries have agreed to suspend the provision of Thai workers to risk areas in the Middle East.

At present, 77,495 Thai

workers are under the supervision of Thai labour offices in Tel Aviv, Abu Dhabi and Riyadh, Labour Minister Treenuch Thienthong said.

SHIPS AVOID HORMUZ

Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz remains largely suspended as regional tensions escalate and Iran

steps up threats against vessels transiting the vital chokepoint.

Last Sunday (Mar 1), only a small number of ships were seen exiting the waterway, with none appearing to enter, according to ship-tracking data. A small oil tanker off Oman's northern coast was reportedly targeted in an attack, though responsibility was unclear.

Mohsen Rezaei of Iran's Expediency Discernment Council said on state television that "no American ship is allowed to enter the Persian Gulf." Several vessels reported radio broadcasts said to be from the Iranian navy claiming transit through Hormuz was banned, though no formal notice was issued.

The Strait of Hormuz handles about a fifth of the world's seaborne oil and liquefied natural gas each day, making it one of the most critical energy routes globally. While some ships are still passing through, volumes are far below normal.

Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency described

the strait as effectively closed, citing warnings from the Revolutionary Guard that transit was unsafe. Germany's Hapag-Lloyd said it was suspending Hormuz sailings due to what it called an "official closure", while France's CMA CGM told vessels in the Gulf to take shelter and halted Suez Canal transits.

The US advised ships to remain at least 30 nautical miles from its military assets in the region. Japan's Nippon Yusen and Greece's shipping ministry also told fleets to avoid or reassess passage, with warnings of possible electronic interference to navigation systems.

A prolonged shutdown would severely disrupt global energy trade. Retail trading indicated US crude prices were about 9% higher on Sunday. Qatar, the world's second-largest LNG exporter, relies on Hormuz for exports to Asia and Europe.

Shipbrokers said some owners are considering cancelling voyages under war-risk clauses, potentially tightening vessel supply and driving freight rates higher.

British International School, Phuket to Offer BTEC International Level 3 Business (Extended Diploma) from August 2026

ADVERTORIAL

BRITISH INTERNATIONAL School, Phuket (BISP) is pleased to announce the introduction of the BTEC International Level 3 in Business (Extended Diploma), available to students from August 2026. This new qualification further strengthens BISP's commitment to providing a broad, inclusive, and future-ready senior school curriculum that empowers students to excel through pathways that match their strengths, aspirations, and learning styles.

Designed for students in Years 12 and 13, the BTEC Business Extended Diploma is a two-year, full-time programme with a strong emphasis on practical, real-world learning. The qualification is internationally recognised and provides clear progression routes to universities worldwide, as well as to employment, apprenticeships, and work-based pathways.

At BISP, the BTEC Business programme sits firmly within the school's Triple Helix philosophy of Learning, Wellbeing, and

Passion. Students are encouraged not only to develop strong academic foundations, but also to grow as confident, independent learners with the professional skills required for success beyond school.

"As an Arthit Ourairat Institution (AOI) school, we believe students thrive when they have clear options in how they prepare for university and careers," said Jason Perkins, AOI Chief Education Officer.

"The introduction of the BTEC International Level 3 in Business at BISP strengthens our pathways to graduation by offering a challenging, rigorous programme that develops adaptable, real-world skills. It supports students who succeed through applied, skills-based learning, while maintaining the academic standards and global recognition that families expect from BISP."

Learning Business Through Real-World Application

Unlike traditional exam-heavy programmes, the BTEC Business qualification uses a modular, coursework-based assessment model. Students are assessed through projects, assignments, and case studies that mirror how success is achieved in the modern



Photo: BTEC Level 3 Business

workplace – through planning, collaboration, problem solving, and meeting professional deadlines over time.

Core units cover essential business concepts such as Marketing, Finance, Management, Decision-Making, and Organisational Operations. These foundations are comparable in scope and academic rigour to other established pre-university business qualifications.

The BTEC International Level 3 in Business is distinguished by its applied approach to learning. Students move beyond theoretical study to plan marketing campaigns, analyse financial performance, manage events, and make strategic decisions based on realistic business scenarios. Optional units may include work experience, digital marketing, sales and pitching, and career planning, often developed in collaboration with local businesses in Phuket, thus providing students with valuable profes-

sional exposure and real-world context.

"The BTEC Business programme at BISP reflects our belief that education should be relevant, engaging, and connected to life beyond the classroom," said Tim Pearson, BISP Secondary Principal.

"This qualification develops not only business knowledge, but also the transferable skills of communication, self-management, and critical thinking. Skills that universities and employers value highly."

A Holistic Pathway to University and Beyond

The BTEC International Level 3 in Business is globally recognised and supports progression to a wide range of pathways, including Business, Management, Marketing, Finance, Human Resources, and Entrepreneurship degrees. The qualification is accepted by:

- UK universities via UCAS
- Thai universities via TCAS
- Universities across Australia, Canada, the USA, and Hong Kong

Beyond academic outcomes, the programme places strong emphasis on holistic student development. Through collaborative projects and independent

coursework, students build interpersonal skills, professional communication, resilience, and self-discipline, key attributes for success in university and the workplace.

Expanding Choice, Empowering Students

The introduction of the BTEC Business Extended Diploma, in addition to offering the IB Diploma Programme and BTEC Level 3 in Sport, reflects BISP's ongoing investment in a diverse and inclusive senior school curriculum, ensuring that every student can follow a pathway that allows them to flourish academically, personally, and professionally.

With its strong focus on applied learning, global recognition, and holistic development, the BTEC International Level 3 in Business offers students another powerful route to success, aligned with BISP's mission to Inspire Learning, Nurture Wellbeing and Ignite Passion, preparing students for life beyond school.

Families interested in the BTEC International Level 3 in Business at BISP can find full programme information on the BTEC Business webpage and submit applications via the school's Apply Now page.

Anutin orders Thai evacuations

Government issues heatstroke warning

BANGKOK

AFP

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul has ordered an urgent, round-the-clock operation to evacuate Thais from the war-torn Middle East, with the priority to bring citizens home from Iran, amid fears the conflict could widen.

Anutin confirmed plans last Sunday (Mar 1) for citizens from the Middle East to be evacuated by military or charter flights, after the United States and Israel attacked Iran – which answered with its own missile strikes.

The government “co-ordinated with the Royal Thai Air Force to prepare aircraft to evacuate Thai citizens, prioritising those in Iran”, Anutin told reporters in Bangkok, adding that charter flights were also under consideration.

“We have to check the closure of airspace, whether we need to evacuate them to the third country first,” he said.

“The Thai government will do everything to bring Thai citizens back safely. If they want to return, we will take them back.”



Anutin has ordered an urgent, round-the-clock evacuation operation for Thai citizens from the war-torn Middle East. Photo: AFP

The Foreign Ministry has established a day-to-day operations centre to monitor developments, consolidate information, assess risks and draw up systematic evacuation plans., while security agencies are providing continuous, 24-hour updates.

About 110,000 Thais were living in the region, including around 65,000 in Israel and about 250 in Iran, Thai foreign ministry spokesman Panidone Pachimsawat told a press briefing Sunday evening.

About 29 Thai nationals

in Iran and 20 in Israel have registered their wish to return to Thailand with the government, Panidone said.

Evacuation plans “have been prepared should the need arise, and may involve coordination with other countries or international organisations that are likewise preparing their own evacuation arrangements”, he said.

More than 20,000 Thais resided in the United Arab Emirates, with thousands more in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and other

Gulf nations, according to the ministry.

Nearly 59,000 Thais were registered with Thailand’s labour office in Israel, and more than 11,000 were registered with Thailand’s labour office in Abu Dhabi – which covers the UAE, Qatar, Oman and Iran, according to the labour ministry.

The United States and Israel began launching waves of strikes against Iran last Saturday (Feb 28), sparking swift retaliation by the Islamic republic.

US President Donald Trump has vowed to continue striking Iran until its government falls.

Iranian state television confirmed the death of Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Sunday, after Trump said he had been killed.

Fresh explosions were heard in Doha, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Riyadh and Manama on Sunday.

Amid the bombardments, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, the UAE and Israel all have closed their airspaces to civilian traffic, at least in part, and multiple airlines have cancelled flights to and from the region.

BANGKOK

THE GOVERNMENT sounded an official warning last Sunday (Mar 1) for the public to take precautions against heatstroke as temperatures continue to soar in parts of the country.

People, particularly vulnerable groups, those with chronic illnesses and outdoor workers, are being urged to be cautious, as temperatures are forecast to rise above last year’s levels.

Ayrin Phanrit, deputy government spokeswoman, said temperatures could reach 42-43°C in high-risk areas, including the provinces of Mae Hong Son, Lampang and Tak, so the public should avoid prolonged stays outdoors.

People are advised to limit outdoor activities between 11am and 3pm, drink water frequently and wear “comfort clothing” to reduce the risk of heat stroke, which can be fatal.

High-risk groups include the elderly, infants and young children, people with chronic diseases, such as heart disease, lung disease



Photo: Bangkok Post

and obesity, and those working outdoors. Heat stroke occurs when the body overheats and affects vital systems.

“Avoid staying out in the heat for a prolonged period of time. Also, avoid consuming alcohol and do not leave anyone in the car [unattended], especially small children,” said Ms Ayrin.

Meanwhile, the Meteorological Department said storms were forecast from Tuesday (Mar 2) until today (Mar 6), beginning in the Northeast before affecting the East, Central Plains, Bangkok and surrounding areas, and the North.

Air pollution levels remain low to moderate due to moderate ventilation and expected rainfall, the department said.

Bangkok Post

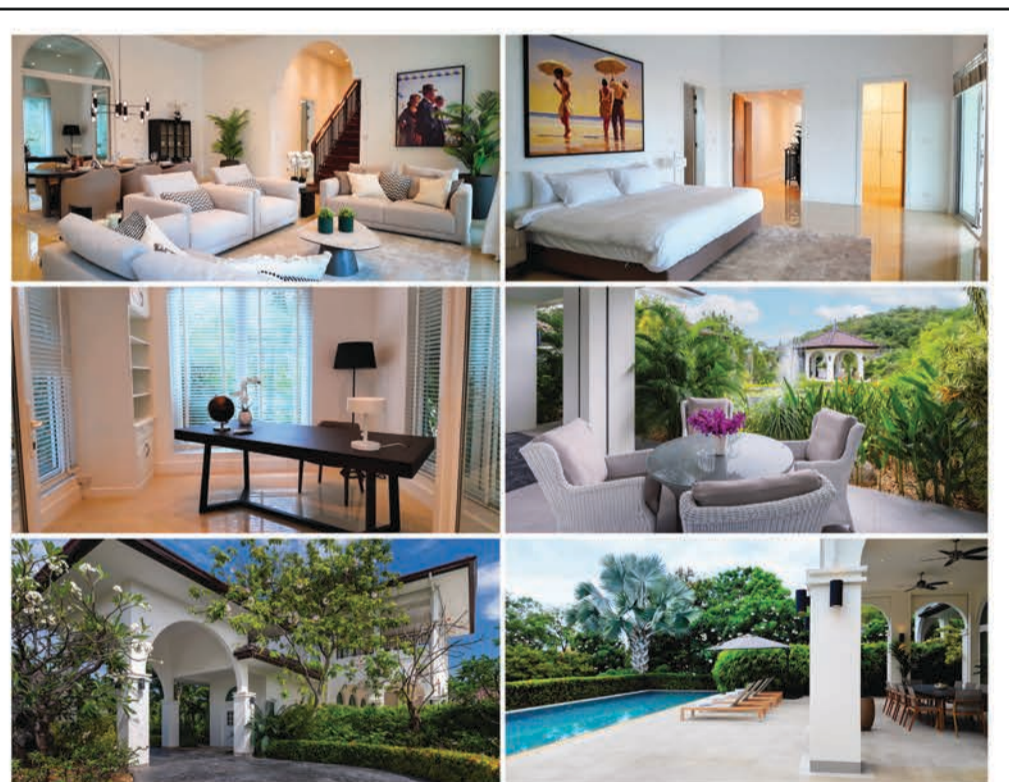


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Recognition for outstanding BISP students and teachers



Photo: BISP

Muchanga Zebron, BISP

At the British International School, Phuket (BISP) excellence is not defined by a single achievement but by a sustained commitment to learning, creativity and contribution. That commitment was recently recognised at provincial and national level, with both students and teachers honoured for their outstanding efforts, highlighting the strength of Phuket’s educational community.

Among those recognised were Year 6 students Paula and Pauline Patchimnunt, who were named recipients of the

Outstanding Children of Phuket Province Award 2026, alongside BISP teachers who received the Excellent Teacher of Phuket Award 2568 (ครูดีศรีภูเก็ต).

Together, these awards tell a wider story: one of dedicated educators nurturing confident, capable young people who are already making their mark well beyond the classroom.

Recognising Excellence in Teaching

The Excellent Teacher of Phuket Award is presented to educators who demonstrate professional integrity, dedication to students, high-quality teaching practice and a positive contribution to the wider educational community.

This year, two BISP teachers were honoured under this category.

For Kru Charupat Kongthongkham (คุณครูจารุภัทร์ คงทองคำ), the award reflects a deep sense of responsibility to her students. “I am deeply honoured to receive this award and remain committed to nurturing students with knowledge, integrity, and positive values,” she shared.

Similarly, Kru Patcharin Onbutr (คุณครูพัชรินทร์ อ้นบุตร) emphasised gratitude and purpose in her response. “I am honoured to receive the Excellent Teacher of Phuket Award 2568 and grateful for the opportunity to contribute to student learning and development,” she said.

Their recognition reinforces the critical role teachers play in shaping not only academic success, but also confidence, character and aspiration in young learners.

Outstanding Children of Phuket Province 2026

The spotlight then turns to Paula and Pauline Patchimnunt, sisters whose achievements across music, academics and community engagement led to their selection as Outstanding Children of Phuket Province 2026.

The award recognises students who demonstrate all-round excellence – academically, creatively and socially – and Paula and Pauline’s year has been marked by success across each of these areas.

Earlier in 2025, the sisters achieved national recognition after winning First Prize (National Level) in the Safe and Creative Media Contest 2025, organised by the Thai Ministry of Culture as part of National Thai Language Day. Their original song, “Kerd Pen Thai” (“Born to Be Thai”), was selected as the top entry from 124 submissions nationwide and officially honoured at the Thailand Cultural Centre.

Their success was not limited to the arts. In the National English Proficiency Assessment (NEPA) – a nationwide competition designed to promote sustainable English language development – both students excelled at the Upper Primary level. Pauline earned a Gold Medal and Paula a Silver Medal in the first round, before both advanced to the finals and received Second Honours (Second Class Honours).

Reflecting on their recognition, Khun Kru Phatcharaporn Ongansuorn (คุณครูพัชรารัตน์ อ่องอนุสรณ์) highlighted

the significance of their achievement: “I am proud to congratulate both students on this honorable achievement. I commend your hard work and encourage you to continue your journey with confidence as you pursue even greater aspirations.”

Voices of the Students

For Paula, the award represents more than a single moment of success.

“I feel extremely proud and honored to receive the Outstanding Children of Phuket Province Award,” she said. “This award reflects my effort to learn, especially in English, Mathematics, Music, Science and Robotics, as well as my participation in school and community activities.”

She also acknowledged the support around her. “I would like to thank my teachers, parents and friends for their encouragement. I am grateful to the British International School of Phuket for providing valuable learning. This award motivates me to continue improving myself and contributing positively to my school and community.”

Pauline echoed similar sentiments, focusing on growth and opportunity. “I feel incredibly honoured and grateful to receive the Outstanding Children of Phuket Province Award. This recognition highlights my commitment to learning in subjects like English, mathematics, science, music and robotics, as well as my engagement in school and community activities.

“I am especially grateful to BISP for providing valuable learning opportunities. This award motivates me to continue learning and to contribute positively to my school and community,” she added.

Paula and Pauline’s journey is far from over. The sisters are set to represent their talents internationally at an upcoming competition in Hong Kong, and they continue to perform together as part of their band, balancing academic ambition with creative expression.

Together with the recognition of outstanding teachers, their achievements reflect a shared educational ecosystem in Phuket, one where committed educators and motivated students work in partnership to achieve meaningful success.

For BISP and the wider Phuket community, these awards serve as a reminder that excellence is built day by day, through passion, perseverance and purpose.

WINDOW ON PHUKET

The April/May 2026 hard copy issue goes to print very soon

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

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Cycling with Downward Facing Dogs



BLAZING SADDLES

Baz Daniel
baz_gunner2000@yahoo.com

The first thing you learn about a road trip with a bicycle, two Jack Russell terriers and a yoga mat is that your dignity must be packed very lightly. My car space was already at a premium – add to this, yoga kit, dog beds, chewy toys, spare inner tubes and a faint but persistent smell of wet fur and my car became less a mode of transport than a rolling menagerie.

We set off at dawn, before the island had fully cleared its throat. Phuket at this hour is all soft edges: fishermen rinsing decks, monks walking the roadside, the sea holding its breath. The dogs – Basil and Polly – stood on the back seat, noses twitching, convinced that every passing motorbike carried smelly food treats specifically for them. As I drove, my battered mountain bike rattled reassuringly on its rack, and the Andaman coast ahead beckoned like an unfolding dream.

Driving in Phuket is an exercise in concentration which borders on the yogic. You breathe deeply, you anticipate, you accept impermanence – particularly of lane markings and codes of safe behaviour! Motorbikes appear from nowhere, then disappear just as quickly, often transporting entire families, white goods or improbable lengths of piping. The dogs regarded all this with a keen professional interest. Jack Russells are nothing if not connoisseurs of chaos.

I intended to stop often wherever there was a beguiling biking or yoga spot. That's the luxury of having no real destination beyond "somewhere pleasant to cycle and breath deeply."

Once north of the airport, our first such locale was Micky Monkey Beach at Mai Khao. I walked the dog-



Baz adopts the downward facing dog pose with his two Jack Russells Basil and Polly in close attendance. Photo: Olivia Daniel

gies, then tethered them to a shady palm, unloaded my bike and set off to loop the quiet lake keeping to as much shade as possible. Cycling here was an intimate act: legs turning, breath syncing with the smell of hot tarmac and sea air. The Andaman was always nearby, flashing silver traces through the palms like an encouraging mistress.

The dogs don't cycle, obviously. They supervise. From the shade. Loudly. Jack Russells have strong views on everything and feel compelled to share them with passing cows, chickens, and occasionally monks. When the ride was done – shorter than planned, heat being the ultimate authority – we reconvened at the car for copious rehydration, doggie treats then some yogic stretches by the beach under the palm fronds.

I rolled out my mat, dropped into the 'downward facing dog' pose and immediately found myself accompanied by two actual dogs who believed the pose was an invitation rather than a metaphor. Polly attempted to lick my ear in encouragement, while Basil sat sedately on my mat radiating the serene confidence of a being who knows he has a deep connection to the cosmos!

Stunning vista

As evening beckoned, we drove across the Sarasin Bridge and north along the Andaman coast. The scenery shifted subtly, as Phuket's maniacal frenzy faded into Phang Nga's quieter latitudes. We took the quieter road which hugs Natai Beach along the coast, occasionally glimpsing lovely sea vistas. At dusk we arrived at Thai Mueang's glorious beach and the dogs suddenly became quiet. Even Jack Russells recognised a stunning vista.

Life on the road with dogs imposes a certain rhythm. You don't rush. You have to be flexible and you learn the location of shady cafés tolerant of muddy paws. You measure days not in kilometres, but in swims, rides, yogic stretches and naps. Cycling keeps you honest. Yoga keeps you flexible. The dogs keep you laughing, usually at yourself.

Two days later when we looped back into Phuket, the car was dustier, the dogs leaner and my hamstrings marginally more cooperative. The island welcomed us back with traffic and the familiar chaos of home. I parked, unloaded and sat for a moment with the engine off, listening to the ticking silence.

Travel, I've learned, doesn't need grand gestures. Sometimes it's enough to drive slowly, cycle often, stretch where you can, and share the road with two ebullient doggies who believe that every journey is improved by barking at it.

Up the Andaman coast, with the endless silver sea, my two Jackies and my yoga mat, that was more than enough for me.

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WINDOW ON PHUKET

The map of PHUKET Карта Пхукета 普吉岛地图
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Where to eat in PHUKET

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FRI 6 MAR



Grow Boating Phuket Evening - Mar 2026

We look forward to seeing you at the Grow Boating Evening at the RPM Members' Lounge at the Royal Phuket Marina from 5pm. We are delighted to announce that our drinks sponsor for the evening will be Royal Phuket Marina, a distinguished world-class destination that combines luxury waterfront living with an award-winning, state-of-the-art marina. There will be a delicious buffet sponsored by Royal Phuket Marina for all attendees. Come and join in the fun, everyone is welcome and there is no entry fee. Find us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/GrowBoatingPhuket>

TUE 10 MAR



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

FRI 20 MAR



Official qualifier for THCH 2026

For the first time in Phuket — an official qualifier for THCH 2026. Jumping Phuket – Pony Q#3 proudly marks the first-ever THCH 2026 Pony Jumping Qualifier to be held at Niran Equestrian Center, officially recognised by the Thailand Equestrian Federation (TEF). Spectators welcome in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. Food & beverages available on site. We look forward to welcoming riders, trainers, parents, and equestrian enthusiasts to Jumping Phuket for an exciting and memorable weekend at Niran Equestrian Center. 20.3 from 4pm, 21.3 from 8am to 6pm, 22.3 from 8am to 3pm. Facebook.com/NiranFarmPhuket

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SKÅL PHUKET - FEBRUARY DINNER

A wonderful evening with Skalleagues and guests at the Phuket Pullman Panwa Beach Resort, was held on Thursday, February 26. The host of the month, Vincent Delsol, and his team welcomed everyone for networking drinks at The Junction bar, with outstanding canapes and ocean views. All guests were welcomed by Bas van Straten, President Skål International Phuket, ending with the Skål Toast. Dinner followed at the Aqua Restaurant, where guests enjoyed an array of Thai and Western 'Street food Style' buffet. Looking forward to the next dinner on March 26 at The Kee Resort Patong. For more info visit facebook.com/SkalPhuket



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March-April 2026 issue

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Bezzecchi wins MotoGP opener

MOTO GP

MARCO BEZZECCHI won the MotoGP season-opening grand prix in Thailand from pole position last Sunday (Mar 1) as defending world champion Marc Marquez retired late with a buckled wheel.

Aprilia's Bezzecchi led from start to finish to top the podium in Buriram, with KTM's Pedro Acosta second and Trackhouse's Raul Fernandez third.

Ducati's Marquez is chasing a record-equalling eighth world title this season but he exited the race in dramatic fashion while in fourth place with five laps to go.

The Spaniard, who started from second on the grid, took a corner wide and the jolt to his bike dislodged the rear tyre and badly damaged his wheel.

Bezzecchi returned to

winning form after crashing out of Saturday's sprint race on the second lap.

Bezzecchi was fastest in all three practice sessions in Thailand and set a new track record in qualifying.

It was also his third straight grand prix win stretching back to last season.

"It's just the first race so we must stay calm, we must stay focused, keep our head down and try to work always in the best way possible," said Bezzecchi.

"Because we know that we will struggle at some point."

Jorge Martin, the 2024 world champion, finished fourth, Trackhouse's Ai Ogura was fifth, followed by VR46's Fabio Di Giannantonio and KTM's Brad Binder.

Francesco Bagnaia, the 2022 and 2023 world champion, finished ninth after starting from 13th on the grid. *AFP*

F1 revs up for 2026 season

FORMULA ONE

AFP

The start of any F1 season is a game of smoke and mirrors: this one, which gets underway in Melbourne this weekend, has the added intrigue of sweeping changes that could shake up the established order.

For all the pre-season testing, the finger-pointing, the accusations of 'sandbagging' and loopholes in the new regulations, the guessing games have left us nowhere closer to predicting how the 24-race 2026 season will pan out.

Beyond the obvious, of course: the champion will come from one of four teams, the usual suspects of McLaren, Mercedes, Red Bull and Ferrari.

And that is no disrespect to the other seven teams including newcomers Cadillac and Audi.

The major overhaul to chassis and power units, designed to create more overtaking opportunities and improve the sport's eco-sustainability, have dominated the pre-season testing.

So the smoke will only begin to lift on the true force of each car when they take to the track at Albert Park on Sunday (Mar 8).

Only then will we get an idea of whether McLaren's Lando Norris will be in pole position to retain the world title he won so dramatically from Max Verstappen last season.



McLaren's Lando Norris will be aiming to retain the world title. *Photo: AFP*

The pit lane talk has been hanging the favourite's tag around the neck of George Russell as Mercedes are rumoured to have made the best of the rule changes.

That may depend, however, on whether they have indeed exploited a loophole in the new rules, as many are claiming, which could give them as much as 0.3 seconds per lap over their rivals.

In sport of fine margins, that is a gaping chasm.

Questions remain about the efficiency and reliability of the new Red Bull engine which is the first that the team has developed and built itself, with some input from Ford.

Russell and Verstappen will also face stiff competition from their young teammates, 19-year-old Kimi Antonelli and 21-year-old Isack Hadjar.

If the Mercedes engine has capitalised on a loophole, which will be closed mid-season, then it should also assist Norris and his teammate Oscar Piastri whose McLarens use the same power units.

Ferrari are the last of the Big Four and after some pretty thin years they will be looking to Charles Leclerc and Lewis Hamilton to do more than make up the numbers.

Hamilton is 41 now and suffered a miserable debut season with the Italians last year when he failed to make a single Grand Prix podium.

His body language suggested he might be on the verge of quitting but the the new regulations appear to have given him a new energy to chase that record eighth world championship title once more.

Laguna Sunset Beach Run set for Songkran

RUNNING

SONGKRAN CELEBRATIONS this year will carry extra cheer in the Bang Tao area of the island after the Laguna Phuket Sunset Beach Run 2026 was confirmed recently.

Described by organisers as "a hip beach run combining health, fun, and a beach party" the Apr 11 beach festival event will take place at XANA Beach Club, Angsana Laguna Phuket.

Starting at 5:30pm the race will incorporate two separate distances for male and female athletes: a 3-kilometre Fun Run and a 6km Super Fun Run.

An energetic warm-up set to upbeat music will prepare participants ahead of the race before runners take off along the beach while taking in the breathtaking golden hour sunset.

Trophies will be distributed to the top three finishers in each race category for male and female runners, while a special



Photo: PR Phuket

"Best Sunset Beach Style" award will be given to the runner with the most outstanding attire, be it bikinis, colourful running outfits, or creative beach looks.

After crossing the finish line, participants can relax with muscle-relieving massages from Angsana Spa's professional therapists, while a variety of games and lucky draw events offer the chance to win a range of luxurious prizes from Laguna Phuket hotels.

Registration fee is B500, which includes a commemorative shirt, bib number, participant medal and snacks.

Registration is open at: <https://soft.events/run/laguna-beach-run-2026>.

The Phuket News

ONE Championship goes big in Japan

MMA

ONE CHAMPIONSHIP HAS announced a new five-year commitment to Japan with the launch of "ONE Samurai", a monthly event series beginning on Apr 29 at Ariake Arena in Tokyo.

The date had originally been earmarked for the promotion's numbered event ONE 175. In its place, ONE Samurai 1 will serve as the start of the organisation's renewed push into the Japanese market.

CEO Chatri Sityodtong framed the initiative as both a commercial investment and a cultural mission.

"During the time of PRIDE and K-1, martial arts content was number one," Chatri said on Feb 25. "I feel sad that after 30 years, we lost our fans and the level has fallen to this level. I really want to inspire Japan."

"ONE Samurai will hold monthly tournaments. I want to properly invest in Japan. I want to create a new future for the athletes and the fans. I want to convey Japanese culture – Bushido, the samurai spirit, the Yamato spirit, and the history of martial arts culture. I want to create a new Japanese hero."

Japanese fighters will be the main focus of the series, with each event featuring either a title fight or a main event showcasing top domestic talent.



Ariake Arena in Tokyo will host the inaugural event on Apr 29. *Photo: Bangkok Post*

Fighters on ONE Samurai can earn performance bonuses of ¥1.5 million (B300,000), ¥7.5mn and ¥15mn.

Shuntaro Tanaka, newly appointed CEO of ONE Championship Japan, outlined plans for 12 events annually – eight at venues of around 5,000 capacity and four in larger 10,000-seat arenas.

"Japan has many fascinating martial arts organisations," Tanaka said. "I respect them and want to contribute to the industry together. I want ONE to be a platform for champions from various organisations to challenge the world."

Several leading Japanese fighters in ONE Championship were present to endorse the project.

Flyweight MMA champion Yuya Wakamatsu said he hoped to "embody my dream of becoming a modern-day samurai" and defend his title on home soil.

Atomweight Muay Thai champ Nadaka Yoshinari declared he remains "the best in the world" and intends to continue defending his belt under the new banner.

Veteran flyweight kickboxing superstar Takeru Segawa, who confirmed his next bout will be his retirement fight, said he hopes to "conclude the inaugural ONE Samurai tournament in the best possible way".

And bantamweight kickboxing contender Yuki Yoza added: "Takeru is retiring, so I want to become the ace of ONE Samurai."

The full card for the Apr 29 debut event will be announced at the end of March.

For ONE, the message was clear: Japan is no longer an occasional stop on the calendar – it is a long-term project.

Bangkok Post

Gunners overcome the Blues

FOOTBALL

AFP

Arsenal reestablished a five-point lead at the top of the Premier League as the Gunners overcame 10-man Chelsea 2-1 last Sunday (Mar 1).

Defenders William Saliba and Jurrien Timber scored Arsenal's goals as Chelsea's ill-discipline saw them lose ground in the battle for a place in next season's Champions League after Pedro Neto was sent off 20 minutes from time.

The Blues could not cope with Arsenal's prowess from corners as Mikel Arteta's men edged closer to a first league title in 22 years. Saliba forced home the opening goal on 21 minutes and Timber's winner just after the hour mark was the 16th goal the Gunners have scored from a corner in the Premier League this season – equalling the competition record.

Second-placed Manchester City shrugged off the absence of Erling Haaland to beat Leeds 1-0 on Saturday to ensure they remain five points behind the leaders.

Without the Norwegian, City were far from their best but ground out a vital three points against a Leeds side that had lost just twice in their previous 16 games.

Antoine Semenyo instead proved to be the match-winner with his sixth goal in 11 games since joining City last month.



Arsenal captain Bukayo Saka (left). Photo: AFP

City still have a game in hand on Arsenal and home advantage when the sides meet in the league next month.

Benjamin Sesko fired Manchester United up to third and closer to a return to the Champions League with a 2-1 win over Crystal Palace.

Palace had taken an early lead at Old Trafford through Maxence Lacroix before a Bruno Fernandes penalty and Sesko's late winner ensured United remain unbeaten under caretaker boss Michael Carrick.

Aston Villa fell to a 2-0 defeat at Wolves, while Liverpool strolled past struggling West Ham 5-2 at Anfield to move three points clear of sixth-placed Chelsea.

Tottenham remain perilously poised just four points above the relegation zone as interim boss Igor

Tudor again failed to halt their alarming slide after a 2-1 defeat at Fulham, with Harry Wilson and Alex Iwobi on target for the home side.

The one crumb of comfort for Spurs was defeat for relegation rivals Nottingham Forest, 2-1 at Brighton.

Burnley's slim chances of survival took another body blow in an agonising 4-3 defeat at home to Brentford, with Mikkel Damsgaard netting the winner for the Bees deep into stoppage time.

Everton notched another excellent away win to maintain their hope of European football next season with a 3-2 victory at Newcastle, as Bournemouth stretched their unbeaten league run to eight games after coming from behind to rescue a 1-1 draw at home to Sunderland.



MetLife Stadium. Photo: AFP

Political upheaval clouds World Cup countdown

FOOTBALL

THE 100-DAY COUNTDOWN to the biggest World Cup in history began on Tuesday (Mar 3) against a chaotic backdrop of global unrest.

A record 48 teams and millions of fans are set to descend on the United States, Canada and Mexico for the first ever World Cup shared by three nations, which starts on June 11 in Mexico City and concludes on July 19 at the MetLife Stadium in New York.

However, the biggest challenges faced by the tournament may turn out to be political.

US President Donald Trump's domestic and international policies have triggered concerns about the smooth running of the tournament.

Trade wars which have included co-hosts Canada and Mexico, tensions with

European allies over threats to annex Greenland and an immigration crackdown which may complicate travel to the US for fans of some participating nations have all cast a shadow.

The US-Israeli strikes on Iran have provided the latest flashpoint, with Iran's team due to play its three group games in Los Angeles and Seattle.

The Trump administration's immigration crackdown meanwhile has seen enhanced visa restrictions on dozens of countries including four World Cup qualified nations – Iran, Haiti, Senegal and Ivory Coast.

In Mexico the recent killing of one of the country's most notorious drug lords in a military operation sparked a wave of unrest, although President Claudia Sheinbaum has given assurances that it will not disrupt games taking place in the country. AFP

Thais hailed for Winter Olympic success

WINTER OLYMPICS

THREE ATHLETES THAT REPRESENTED Thailand at the recent 25th Winter Olympic Games in Milan-Cortina have been hailed for their respective achievements.

Karen Chanloung, who was competing at her third consecutive Winter Olympics at the Feb 6-22 event in Italy, managed to secure qualification for the women's 10km interval start cross-country ski event. Starting from 110th place, Karen dug deep to finish in 84th place with a time of 28 minutes 39 seconds. This ensured she was ranked as 7th best performing athlete from Asia, which she claimed exceeded her goals.

Also participating in his third consecutive Winter Olympics, Karen's brother Mark Chanloung finished 71st in the 10+10km cross-country ski event, while registering as the 6th top-placed Asian athlete.

Finally, 17-year-old rising star Fabian Wiest, making his debut at the Winter Olympics, showed impressive form in alpine skiing. In the Giant Slalom event, Fabian finished 60th overall and 6th overall among Asian athletes, an experience that can serve as an important foundation for his future development.

The success of all three highlighted the significant progress of Thai winter sports, thanks to the strong support from the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT),



Photo: SAT

the National Sports Development Fund, the Olympic Committee of Thailand under Royal Patronage, and the Ski and Snowboard Association of Thailand.

The SAT and the National Sports Development Fund continuously allocate budgets for training camps and sending athletes to compete abroad, while the National Olympic Committee of Thailand is crucial in facilitating participation in sporting events, and the Ski and Snowboard Association of Thailand has an ongoing systematic strategic plan for athlete development.

The achievements of Karen, Mark and Fabian in Milan-Cortina is proof that, even though Thailand is a tropical country, Thai athletes have the potential and the strong will to stand and compete against world-class talent in the snowy environment, and are ready to achieve even greater success in the future.

The Phuket News

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Sport



Lights out as new F1 season starts > p14

RAY'S BAY



Roberts' Team Hollywood win Bay Regatta

The victorious Team Hollywood. Photo: Supplied

SAILING

Scott Murray

Ray Roberts' TP52 *Team Hollywood* won its second straight Bay Regatta recently as the team from Down Under dominated the Performance Monohull class, winning all three races in the event, as the final day of racing was abandoned as the wind dropped out during the final passage Race.

Every regatta has its own unique selling point, and for the Bay Regatta it's the stunning karst topography competitors sail through – indeed, it is one of the world's most beautiful regattas.

You have to excuse first-time competitors if they appear gobsmacked as they first head out through the regatta's cruising grounds on their four-day nautical journey. Rarely have they seen such stunning and picturesque scenery.

Held this year from Feb 18-22, the Bay Regatta was a series of passage races – an event format that catches the attention of the region's best sailors. This four-day sailing trek throughout Phang Nga Bay focuses on fun. Attracting the serious, the not-so-serious and the not-at-all-serious "racing" sailors, the regatta appeals to those who enjoy the stunning sailing grounds of the area and a different destination each evening.

In past years, the highlight of the Bay Regatta was sailing in the flat waters off the east coast of

Phuket, towards Koh Phanak, the first island in Phang Nga Bay.

The 2026 regatta returned to that traditional start with a northeasterly beat into Phang Nga Bay. After that, the course turned south to follow a slalom route around a series of islands. The finish was at The Blue Bay Beach Resort on the sheltered west coast of Koh Yao Yai for the second year.

GUSTS

This year, 34 sailboats registered and were spread out over five classes: Performance Monohulls, IRC Racing, Monohull Cruising, OMR Multihulls, & Cruising Multihulls.

Sailing south just off of Ao Po Grand Marina on Phuket's east coast on day one, everyone pursued the same 25-mile course. Starting at 10am, Principal Race Officer (PRO) and regatta organiser Simon James had three starts for the competitors, as he did every day: first off were the performance monohulls, followed by the multihulls (combined OMR and Cruising) and then the combined monohull classes.

The fleet set off from Koh Naka Yai, then rounded mark one to port (approximately four miles to windward). The fleet then rounded Koh Thanan to port, Koh Sup to starboard, Koh Lipe to port before finishing off Ao Lo Paret with the committee boat to starboard.

Day two saw PRO James once again with two starts for the competitors: first off were the multihulls, followed by all the monohulls.

Competitors set sail on a 25-mile course starting off of Blue Bay Resort, which started off Koh Yao Yai with gusts of up to 27 knots as the yachts headed to Krabi, passing Koh Chong Lat Nai to port, through some strong "wind against tide" conditions.

They then passed Leam Hua Lan to port, passing through a gate keeping Hin Mu Sang Neua to starboard before passing between Koh Samet and Koh Daeng, finishing off of Koh Ya Mann.

The third day saw participants sail the 28-mile Krabi Islands course, rounding Koh Ya Man, Koh Dam Khwan, Koh Khom (South), and Koh Ya Wa Sam all to starboard before rounding Koh Man to port and following a 10-mile windward/leeward and finishing back at the committee boat.

Competitors did start the fourth and final race, from Ao Nang back to Ao Chalong, but a lack of wind forced PRO James to abandon the race for all classes after three hours, meaning the final results were based on the first three days of racing.

FRIENDLY RIVALRY

As noted, the elite four-boat Performance Monohull was won by *Team Hollywood*. Peter Cremers' *Shatoosh* edged out Hans Rahmann's *Yasooda* by one point for second spot in the class with Steve McConaghy's *Aftershock*. *Yasooda*, a Judel/Vrolijk 70 and *Shatoosh*, a Warwick 75, are both beautifully

sleek boats and hold a friendly rivalry in many of the region's regattas.

The eight-boat IRC Racing Class was dominated by three yachts that took first, second or third in every race and finished tied for points at the end of the regatta. However, the gold medal went to Matti Sep's *Gern Kard*, who won the final race in the class with Maksim Lisun's *Dynamite* placing second and Craig Nichols' *Alright* coming in third.

The 10-boat Monohull Cruising Class was also very close, with James Duke's *Kimikimi* squeaking out a one-point victory when all was said and done. Next, Sergei Musikhin's *Wind of Change* and Nikiforov Evgenii's *Ganett 2* finished tied on points, but the former was awarded second overall as a result of a better finish in the final race.

Dan Fidock's *Extreme 40 Parabellum* took line honours in every race and won every race to capture the title in the six-boat OMR Multihull class. David Liddell's *Stealth Wow* was second in every race, winning that spot, and John Newnham's *Twin Sharks* placed third. There was a great battle within a battle going on in this division between the two competing Fireflies: *Twin Sharks* and *Blue Noze*, both designed by Mark Pescott and built by Mark Horwood in Phuket, with *Twin Sharks* winning out in the end.

The six-boat Cruising Multihull class was also very

close as Lt Col Brigadier James Baxter (OBE)'s *Zephyrus* outpointed Michael Hähnel's *Liberty V* by two points with Jeff Harris' *Serendipity* just a point behind *Liberty V*. The other three vessels in this class (*Twister 2*, *Saalt* and *Vancouver*) were struck by a variety of equipment failures and missed some of the races.

SPORTS TOURISM

Regattas Asia has done what no one else in this region was able to do: stage a regatta every year throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. That's right, the Bay Regatta didn't miss a beat – this year's version being the 29th straight.

Each evening, the regatta anchors at a different venue and the sailors go ashore. Those staying ashore – the majority of the fleet – book accommodation and either eat in the local restaurants or enjoy the official event functions, which engage with the local community. Most of the expenditure of the regatta goes directly into the local economies of the areas the regatta visits – this has been the case since the regatta was launched, and it will remain so for the future – an excellent example of how sports tourism works to the benefit of communities and local economies.

For more information, visit www.bayregatta.com or www.facebook.com/bayregatta. Detailed courses can be viewed at www.bayregatta.com/courses.