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# LESSONS



Photo: PR Phuket

## INFRASTRUCTURE STRAIN THE BIGGEST THREAT TO ISLAND'S TOURISM FUTURE

The Phuket News  
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Looking back at 2025, five of Phuket's most important people in influencing policy all have identified different issues as the most important for the island to tackle in 2026.

Thaneth Tantipiriyakij, President of the Phuket Tourist Association, said most of Phuket's internal problems stem from long-standing failures in adequate infrastructure.

Phuket International Airport, the island's main tourism portal, continues to face major limitations, he noted.

"The airport operates with only one runway, restricting take-offs and landings to around 20 flights per hour, despite handling approximately 18 million passengers annually – far exceeding its designed capacity of 12 million," he said.

"Beyond the airport, land transport remains a structural failure. Chronic traffic congestion and the lack of effective public transport were cited as major problems, resulting in taxi fares comparable to global cities while pushing residents and tourists to rely heavily on private vehicles and car rentals," he added.

Mr Thaneth said Phuket's

carrying capacity is being stretched across multiple areas, particularly waste and wastewater management, which remains insufficient to support current tourism levels.

He also warned that the clean water supply is increasingly unbalanced with demand, especially as consumption continues to rise.

"Rapid construction has placed further strain on infrastructure. Nearly 20,000 new residential units were built last year, along with more than 5,400 unlicensed accommodation units, compared with only about 900-1,000 licensed hotels," he noted.

"This growth has significantly

increased pressure on utilities, transport networks and public services," he added.

Mr Thaneth said traffic congestion is now the most urgent issue, calling for stronger road management, restrictions on roadside parking, trials to close selected traffic-light intersections, the creation of additional U-turn points, expanded interconnecting roads and faster implementation of delayed infrastructure projects.

"Local life must be good before anything else," Mr Thaneth said, warning that their research shows Phuket residents are becoming less welcoming as infrastructure fails to keep pace with growth – a trend...

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Five killed in New Year road safety efforts



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Thai SEA Games stars receive big cash bonus



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# News



Drug arrests surge by 30% > page 4

## Facing up to tourism pressures

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...that could ultimately harm tourism if people on the island are unhappy.

“If we can improve conditions to ensure local satisfaction, that is what sustainable development truly means,” he said.

### WASTE

Phuket Governor Nirat Pongsittithaworn said solid waste management has become one of the island’s most urgent challenges.

“Phuket currently generates around 1,200 tonnes of waste per day, while the incinerator can process no more than 500 tonnes. The remaining waste is sent to landfill, which already holds about 1.25 million tonnes and could reach 2mn tonnes within three years if no action is taken,” he added.

As an immediate step, the governor has instructed all municipalities and tambon administrative organisations (OrBorTor) to manage organic ‘wet’ waste locally instead of transporting it to the landfill at Saphan Hin.

“Organic waste accounts for around 60% of total daily refuse,” Governor Nirat said. “Managing it at source would significantly reduce landfill pressure and cut up to 360 garbage truck trips per day, which would also help ease traffic congestion.”

He also called for stronger cooperation from businesses – particularly hotels, restaurants and

schools – to take responsibility for managing their own waste.

“My job is to push what is already clear forward – quickly,” he emphasised to push all urgent issues that need to be fixed to try to make it happen as quickly as possible for people on the island.

“I will ensure Phuket remains livable for its people and welcoming to the world,” the governor added. “That is the only way forward – a true win-win.”

### SECURITY

Kongsak Khoopongsakorn, President of the Phuket Chamber of Commerce, said personal safety remains the most serious threat to the island, citing last year’s bombing scare across the Andaman region, including Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi.

“The most alarming security issue was the incident last year when ill-intentioned groups created a bombing situation in the Andaman provinces,” Mr Kongsak said, warning that such threats directly undermine tourism confidence and livelihoods.

He said Phuket faces increasing challenges due to its diverse population and limited personnel, contributing to petty crime and allowing some foreigners to enter illegally to work or operate scams.

Mr Kongsak acknowledged that preventing



Unsightly dumping is adding to the mess. Photo: PR Phuket

premeditated attacks is extremely difficult, particularly when perpetrators evade intelligence screening, but said police response capability remains strong.

“Police are confident they can control serious incidents within 15 to 20 minutes and apprehend the perpetrators,” he said, noting that authorities resolved last year’s incident swiftly.

However, he highlighted serious equipment shortages, especially the lack of K-9 bomb-sniffing units during the incident.

“At that time, Phuket did not have K-9 units, which are essential for search operations,” he said.

He said coordination is now underway with the Border Patrol Police and Phuket Provincial Police to deploy five to six K-9 units permanently in Phuket.

Mr Kongsak also stressed the importance of stricter screening at the Tha Chatchai checkpoint, calling it a critical control point for

preventing crime and security threats from entering the island.

On public health, he said Phuket should be upgraded with a comprehensive disease prevention unit, as the island receives visitors from hundreds of nationalities.

“As an island province, we are exposed to diseases from around the world,” he said, adding that previous attempts to establish such a unit faced resistance.

Mr Kongsak also raised concerns about Phuket’s budget shortfall, saying government funding does not reflect the island’s true population.

He said encouraging residents and workers to officially register their addresses could increase Phuket’s population count by 20–30% by 2026, generating an additional B2–3 billion in funding. This could support projects such as expanding entry gates at Tha Chatchai or installing AI systems to

monitor vehicles and individuals entering the province.

“Security, infrastructure and capacity are the foundations of tourism and daily life,” he said.

“If we fail to address these issues seriously, the impact will be felt across the entire province.”

### TOURISTS

Chalermpong Saengdee of the People’s Party, who is running for re-election as a Phuket MP, said residents have long felt like second-class citizens due to what he described as the government’s careless approach to tourism policy.

“For many years, Phuket people have felt like second-class citizens because of the government’s haphazard tourism management,” he said.

He criticised the visa-free policy, saying it allowed groups of foreigners with bad intentions to settle in Phuket and behave aggressively toward locals.

“The free visa policy opened the door for people who act as if they are above the law,” Mr Chalermpong said.

He also targeted the unregulated cannabis policy, citing the lack of zoning or enforcement.

“Without clear regulation, cannabis has made Phuket – once a premium global destination – appear unsafe in the eyes of the international community,” he said.

He warned that such policies attract irresponsible visitors who create problems and form influential networks on the island.

Mr Chalermpong said he repeatedly raised concerns about foreign criminal influence in parliament while serving in the opposition, but stressed that only structural change can bring lasting solutions.

“A sustainable solution requires policy-level mechanisms that truly allow the state to enforce the law,” he said.

### PATONG

Patong Mayor Lalita Manesri said waste management is the most serious challenge facing the municipality, driven by a large transient population and constant tourist inflows.

“The most serious problem right now is waste,” Mayor Lalita said. “Patong generates enormous volumes because of tourism and a population that is difficult to control.”

She said waste volume fluctuates sharply by season, from about 120 tonnes per day in low season to more than 200 tonnes in high season.

Mayor Lalita also raised concerns about visa-free tourists, saying reduced spending power and behavioural issues have become more visible. “There are problems with reckless motorbike riding, alcohol abuse, intoxication and fighting,” she said.

## Phuket records five deaths in ‘Seven Days of Danger’

PHUKET RECORDED 55 road accidents, 58 injuries and five fatalities during the ‘Seven Days of Danger’ New Year road safety campaign, provincial officials confirmed on Tuesday (Jan 6) as the province formally closed its New Year 2026 accident prevention operations centre.

The figures cover the intensive safety control period from Dec 30 to Jan 5 during which authorities implemented heightened road and maritime safety measures across the province.

The announcement was made during a meeting and press conference held at Phuket Provincial Hall, chaired by Vice Governor Adul Chuthong. The meeting marked the closure of the Phuket Province Road and Maritime Accident Prevention and Reduction Operations Centre for the New Year festival.

Of the five fatalities recorded during the campaign period, officials reported that four were Myanmar men and one was a Thai man.

A total of 58 people



Photo: Rescue Team Volunteers Phuket

were injured, including two seriously injured patients. Of those injured, 48.28% were Thai nationals residing in Phuket, 8.62% were Thai nationals from outside the province, and 43.10% were foreign nationals or migrant workers.

On the seventh and final day of the campaign on

Monday (Jan 5), Phuket recorded five road accidents, resulting in five injuries and no fatalities.

Four of the accidents occurred in Mueang Phuket District, with one reported in Kathu District. No accidents were reported in Thalang District on the final day.

For the ‘Seven Days’ campaign last New Year, Phuket officials recognised 74 accidents resulting in 70 people injured and five deaths.

Of note, for Phuket officials to recognise a person as injured in a road

accident during a ‘Seven Days’ campaign, the injured must be admitted to hospital for treatment.

Further, as of Tuesday, national road safety agency ThaiRSC had already recognised five people killed and 450 people injured in road accidents in Phuket since Jan 1.

### MOTORCYCLES, RISKY BEHAVIOUR

Motorcycles were involved in 91.38% of all accidents, reinforcing ongoing concerns about motorcycle safety on Phuket’s roads.

The main causes of

accidents remained speeding, drunk driving and sudden lane changes, officials said.

Authorities noted that Phuket’s curved, narrow and steep road conditions further increase accident risks, particularly at known high-risk intersections.

The meeting also reviewed enforcement efforts by police targeting 10 major traffic offences, as well as communication and safety measures, including improved safety messaging to the public and inspections of high-risk locations.

The Phuket News

# People's Party trio seek re-election

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Phuket's three incumbent People's Party MPs – Somchart Techathaworncharoen, Thitikan Thitiphrukul and Chalermpong Saengdee – have formally registered to defend their seats in the national election scheduled for Feb 8.

The three representatives, first elected by large margins under the Move Forward Party banner in May 2023, registered on the opening day of constituency candidate registration on Dec 27 at Phuket Provincial Hall. Phuket has three constituencies, each returning one member of parliament.

The first morning of registrations saw a lively atmosphere, with candidates from several parties arriving early alongside campaign teams and supporters. Registration opened at 8:30am, with flowers, placards, party colours and cheering creating a festive election-day mood.

Following his registration, Mr Chalermpong continued campaigning with a visit to Wat Thepnimit Market in Wichit, where he spoke with vendors and residents about economic pressures, rising living costs and livelihood concerns.



Phuket's three People's Party representatives are running for re-election. Photo: Chalermpong Saengdee / Facebook

"Politics must begin with listening to the people," Mr Chalermpong said. "The problems of people trying to make a living must be addressed seriously, not only during election campaigns."

Also among those registering was Worapong Yurahman, widely known as 'Yao Hod Jang Phuket', founder of the popular Facebook page 'Hod Jung Phuket' ('So Cruel Phuket'). He registered as a Palang Pracharath Party candidate and drew party number seven.

Mr Worapong pledged to promote policies he said would deliver concrete benefits for Phuket residents, citing cost-of-living support measures, elderly allowances and new local initiatives. He also vowed to resign if he failed to produce tangible results within two years.

## CANDIDATE EXPELLED

Meanwhile, the Ruam Thai Sang Chart Party has confirmed the expulsion of lawyer Anandrak Petchhin from party membership, even as the Phuket office of the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT Phuket) continues to list him as a candidate contesting Constituency 1.

The dispute centres on developments during the final days of candidate registration on Dec 30-31.

On Dec 30, the Ruam Thai Sang Chart Party announced that Anandrak had been expelled from party membership with immediate effect. Party membership is a legal requirement for candidates contesting seats under a party banner.

Despite this, Anandrak registered as a candidate for

Phuket Constituency 1 on the morning of Dec 31, declaring affiliation with the Ruam Thai Sang Chart Party. He subsequently drew ballot number eight.

Earlier the same morning, the party issued a clarification stating that Anandrak had ceased to be a party member as of Dec 30 and was therefore not eligible to register under the party's name. The party reiterated this position later that day via its official Facebook page.

"Attorney Anandrak Petchhin is no longer a member of the Ruam Thai Sang Chart Party as of December 30, 2025, and therefore cannot register as a candidate for Member of Parliament in Phuket under the party's banner," the statement read.

In response, Anandrak posted on social media that he was preparing legal action against the Registrar of Political Parties. He alleged that his registration time had been falsified and that his name had been removed from party records after official working hours.

"Preparing to sue the Registrar of Political Parties for falsifying registration times and secretly deleting my name from the registration list after working hours," he wrote, adding that he had evidence and would file a

police complaint.

Anandrak's Facebook page, which has more than 50,000 followers, still lists his residence as Thung Song District in Nakhon Sri Thammarat Province, although he has lived and worked in Phuket for several years through his role with the Lawyers Council of Thailand.

The controversy unfolded on the final day of MP candidate registration, with the last applicant arriving shortly after 8:30am. This brought the total number of registered candidates across Phuket's three constituencies – still including Anandrak – to 21.

Unofficial figures released on the day showed eight candidates contesting Constituency 1, six in Constituency 2 and seven in Constituency 3.

ECT Phuket Director Orapin Achivasuk said all applicants had passed the initial qualification screening. She noted that registration documents would now be forwarded to relevant agencies for detailed verification, with the official list of eligible candidates to be announced within seven days.

Under election law, a nationwide ban on alcohol sales will be enforced from 6pm on Feb 7 until 6pm on polling day, Feb 8.

Additional reporting by Eakkapop Thongtub

## Phuket readies for OrBorTor elections

PHUKET RESIDENTS ARE BEING reminded to exercise their right to vote in the Tambon Administrative Organisation (OrBorTor) elections to be held this Sunday (Jan 11).

In a video posted online, the Phuket Provincial Office of the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT Phuket) confirmed that, in accordance with election law, an alcohol sales ban will be enforced in the affected areas from 6pm on Saturday (Jan 10) until 6pm on Sunday (Jan 11).

The election and related alcohol sales ban will apply in Koh Kaew; Mai Khao; Thepkrasattri; in the beach areas of Cherng Talay, including Bang Tao; and Kamala.

In the hope of getting the message to reach more people, the video by ECT Phuket featured Thai 'influencer' Krit Boonyarung, better known online as 'Bie The Ska'.

Mr Krit explained that polling stations will be open from 8am to 5pm, and voters are required to cast their ballots at the polling station where their name is officially registered.

He also emphasised that local elections play a direct role in shaping daily community life, as OrBorTor are responsible for key public services including local roads, water supply, playgrounds, and community waste management.

"Politics is closer to our daily lives than many people realise," Mr Krit said in the video, noting that each individual vote has the power to influence development and change at the community level.

The video explained that to vote,




Thai influencer 'Bie The Ska' calls for residents to vote in the OrBorTor elections to be held this Sunday (Jan 11). Image: ECT Phuket

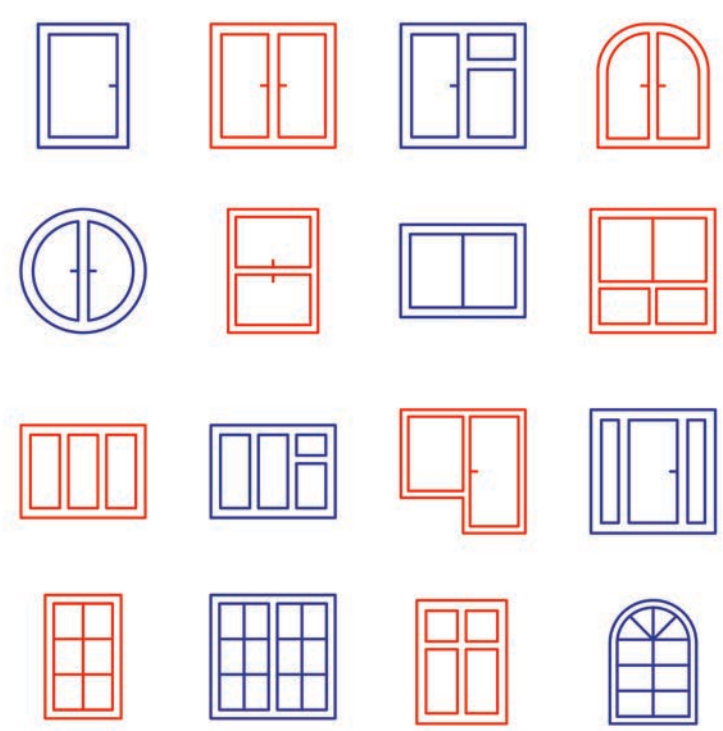
eligible voters must present a national ID card. Other government-issued identification bearing a photograph and national ID number may also be used, such as a driver's license, passport, or government employee ID card. Digital verification is also accepted through applications including DLT QR Lens and the Disability Card application.

ECT Phuket also reminded the public that election-related misconduct can be reported by calling the Election Commission hotline at 1444, or by the 'Smart Vote' app, which allows users to submit images, audio, and video evidence. Informants whose information leads to legal action may be eligible for a reward, and their identities will be kept confidential.

Natnaree Likidwatanasakun



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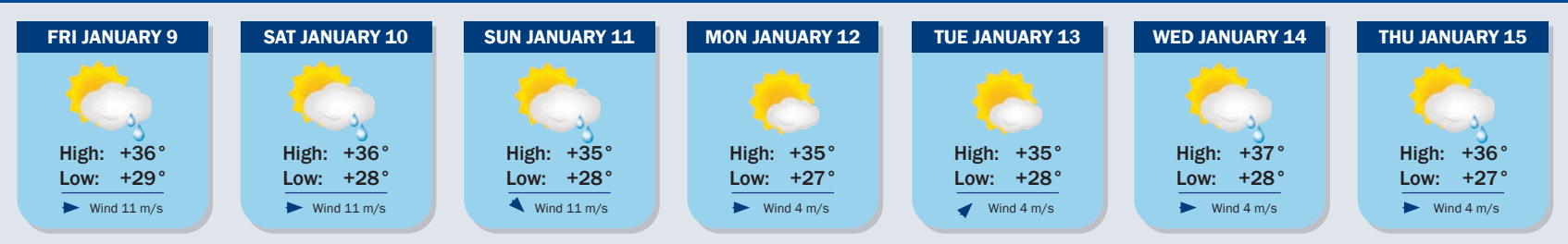
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## PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

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## Kamala park toilets upgrade stalled by local headman

PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS have stepped in after the long-awaited improvement of public toilets at the Kamala Tsunami Memorial Park stalled when a village headman and committee members refused to vacate the building earmarked for renovation.

Phuket Deputy Governor Suwit Phansengiam chaired a meeting at the Damrongtham Centre at Phuket Provincial Hall before the New Year break to address the impasse, with senior officials including Phuket Local Administration Office Chief Wuttichai Bamrungrat and representatives of relevant agencies in attendance.

The Kamala Subdistrict Administrative Organisation (OrBorTor) has already received a special budget from the Tourism Authority of Thailand for the upgrade and has contracted Pavitachart Construction Co Ltd to carry out the work under an agreement dated Nov 20. Construction was scheduled to



Photo: PR Phuket

begin on Nov 21 and be completed by Feb 6, 2026.

However, when the contractor arrived on site to start work, the Moo 3 headman and members of the village committee refused to leave the facility, effectively blocking the project from moving forward in accordance with the signed contract, explained an official report of the meeting.

The report said that officials at the meeting were informed of the reasons presented by the village headman, but the report failed to make it clear to the public exactly what reasons were given.

Yet the official report was willing to explain that the OrBorTor gave its clarification of the project's legal basis, planning process and intended benefit to residents and tourists using the memorial park.

The Phuket News

## Drug arrests spike spurs clampdown

The Phuket News  
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PROVINCIAL authorities have ordered intensified anti-drug operations and stricter enforcement across Phuket after surveillance reports showed drug-related arrests have surged by almost 30% in the first two months of fiscal 2026.

The directive was issued during the 2nd meeting of the Phuket Provincial Anti-Narcotics Centre (ANCC) for fiscal year 2026, held at Phuket Provincial Hall before the New Year break and chaired by Phuket Vice Governor Teeraphong Chuaychoo,

Attending the meeting were senior Phuket Provincial Police officers, including Phuket Provincial Police Deputy Commander Pol Col Phasakorn Sonthikul, representatives from the Office of the Narcotics Control Board Region 8 and members of relevant agencies.

Officials reported that arrests linked to narcotics offences have risen 28.95% compared with the same period in fiscal 2025, with



Photo: Karon Police

methamphetamine pills (ya bah), crystal meth (ya ice), cocaine and heroin being the most commonly seized drugs.

Vice Governor Teeraphong called on all agencies to intensify surveillance and enforcement, particularly over the New Year period, and to act as "the eyes and ears" of the community. Local authorities were urged to strictly enforce laws relating not only to drugs but also drunk driving during the festival period.

Agencies were instructed to clearly define their operational plans, enhance screening and inspection in high-risk areas, and strengthen monitoring

among both formal and informal workforces. All units are to fully implement their plans immediately after the New Year break.

The meeting also reviewed the nationwide 'United Power, Love and Faith, Integrated Drug Problem Solving: Quick Big Win' policy, designed to accelerate visible results in drug prevention and suppression throughout 2026.

Officials said that Phuket remains committed to integrating cooperation from all sectors to enhance drug control measures, protect public safety and maintain peace and order during major festivals and beyond.

## Fire breaks out at Moulin Rouge

FIREFIGHTERS WERE CALLED to Bangla Rd early on Dec 30 after a blaze erupted at the well-known 'Moulin Rouge' club.

The fire, reported at about 7:45am, broke out inside the venue, located above the Dublin Irish Pub, Patong Police reported.

Officers from Patong Police Station and local firefighters quickly responded and worked to bring the flames under control.

Police confirmed that no injuries were reported in the incident.

Patong Police Deputy Superintendent (Investigation) Pol Lt Col Somprasong Labaisai said he was notified while on duty and immediately proceeded to the scene. Upon arrival, officers found firefighters already extinguishing the blaze.

The restaurant's director, identified as a 43-year-old for-



Photo: Patong Police

ign national Sergii Gudz, told police he rushed to the venue after being notified by a friend that the restaurant was on fire. By the time he arrived, the fire had already been put out.

Police officers conducted a preliminary inspection of the damaged area and documented the scene, including preparing a scene record, map and photographic evidence. Forensic police have been called in to determine the cause of the fire.

Authorities have not yet confirmed the extent of the damage or the cause of the blaze.

Eakkapong Thongtub

## Ambulance tailgater blasted

RESCUE WORKERS FROM the Kusoldharm Phuket Foundation have called for greater awareness and responsibility on the roads after a pickup truck was caught dangerously tailgating an ambulance transporting an emergency patient in Thalang.

The incident occurred on Dec 28 while rescue workers were rushing a patient suffering breathing difficulties, numbness in the hands and feet, and fever with chills to Thalang Hospital.

The ambulance was travelling along Thepkasattri Rd towards Muang Mai, passing the Muang Mai Highway Police box and the airport intersection, when a white, Phuket-registered pickup truck with a closed cargo box on back began following closely behind.

According to the rescue team, the pickup truck activated its emergency lights and continued to tailgate the ambulance throughout the journey..



Screenshot: Kusoldharm Phuket Foundation

Rescue workers asked the patient and accompanying relatives whether the vehicle belonged to them, but they confirmed it did not.

Rescue workers stressed that such behaviour is highly dangerous and inappropriate unless the following vehicle genuinely belongs to a relative travelling to the hospital – and even then, a suitable distance must always be maintained for safety reasons.

The Kusoldharm Phuket Foundation stated that there was no intention to pursue legal action, but urged motorists to treat the incident as a serious cautionary example. If an accident had occurred.

Eakkapong Thongtub

# New Year 'peak season' brings surge in waste

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Phuket City Municipality has intensified round-the-clock landfill operations to cope with a sharp rise in daily waste volumes being delivered to the Phuket Provincial Integrated Waste Disposal Center at Saphan Hin, driven largely by end-of-year festivals and major public events.

Phuket City Mayor Suppachoke Laongphet last week inspected landfill pits 4 and 5 at the facility, where municipal staff have been working continuously for more than a week using heavy machinery to level waste and expand usable space.

Municipal officials confirmed that Phuket is currently generating approximately 700 tonnes of excess waste per day that cannot be processed by the incinerator, which has a maximum capacity of 500 tonnes per day. The overflow has placed increasing



Photo: Phuket City Municipality

pressure on landfill capacity, particularly during periods of high tourist activity.

Mayor Suppachoke said waste volumes show no sign of easing, describing the situation as a daily race against time for frontline workers.

"The amount of waste being delivered to the disposal centre continues to rise, while the landfill area remains the same," he said. "At present, more than 1.2 million tonnes of waste are already stored at the site, which presents a major challenge for waste management."

To manage the strain, staff from the Waste Management and Sanitation Division and the Engineering Department have been operating heavy machinery 24 hours a day at landfill pits 4 and 5 to push and level waste, increasing capacity to accommodate new deliveries.

Organic waste is directed to pits 4 and 5, while dry waste – including tree branches and construction debris – is partially diverted to pit 3, which does not generate odours.

In parallel, municipal workers are carrying out odour-control measures,

with microbial inoculum sprayed across landfill pits 4 and 5 three times daily to reduce smells and limit environmental impact on surrounding communities.

Mayor Suppachoke praised municipal staff for maintaining uninterrupted operations, including during public holidays.

"All staff are working tirelessly on the ground every day, sacrificing their time and effort for the public good," he said. "Their work is essential to keeping the situation under control while long-term solutions are being developed."

# Turtle lays eggs on Karon Beach

A RARE AND EXCITING sight greeted beachgoers at Karon Beach last week after a green sea turtle came ashore to lay eggs, drawing the attention of both Thai and foreign tourists.

The turtle was spotted on Karon Beach at about 11am on Jan 3. Witnesses watched as the large turtle slowly crawled up the beach before digging a nest and laying her eggs.

After completing the nesting process, the turtle used her hind flippers to cover the nest with sand, carefully smoothing the surface before returning to the sea.

Karon Beach lifeguards quickly secured the area, placing ropes and wooden markers around the nest to prevent disturbance from people or vehicles. The incident was then reported to Karon Municipality, which coordinated with marine specialists for further inspection.

Later in the afternoon, officials from the Rare and Endangered Marine Animals Group at the Upper Andaman Sea Marine and



Photo: DMCR

Coastal Resources Research Center in Wichit inspected the nesting site. They confirmed the turtle was a green sea turtle and that the nest contained 124 eggs, all of which were viable.

An enclosure has since been built around the nesting area to protect the eggs from human interference and predators. Authorities are now considering the next steps, including whether the eggs should be left to hatch naturally at the site or relocated to a protected research facility for incubation and rehabilitation.

Green sea turtles are listed as an endangered species, and officials noted that successful nesting events on Phuket beaches are relatively rare.

Eakkapop Thongtub

# Free open-top EV bus tours in Phuket Town

PHUKET CITY MUNICIPALITY HAS launched free sightseeing tours aboard two new 17-seater open-top electric buses, providing residents and visitors with a fresh way to experience Phuket Old Town while supporting environmentally friendly urban tourism.

The initiative, described by Phuket City Mayor Supachok Laongphet as a New Year's gift to the public, will run until Feb 28. The service aims to stimulate the local economy, promote sustainable tourism, and showcase the city's distinctive Sino-European heritage and community lifestyle.

Mayor Supachok, accompanied by senior municipal executives and officials from the Tourism and Sports Division, conducted a route test on Christmas Day to finalise operations ahead of the official launch. He said the EV buses form part of the municipality's broader policy to promote tourism in new, creative formats while enhancing Phuket's urban image.

"The EV buses are designed with colours and themes reflecting the identity and landmarks of Phuket, inspired by the unique Sino-European architecture of Phuket Old Town," Mayor Supachok said. "We invite both residents and tourists to join this new tourism experience, enjoying Old Town's atmosphere and the lifestyle of Phuket people up close."

The free service will operate five rounds per day for each vehicle, with buses departing hourly. One bus will depart at 11am, 1pm, 3pm, 5pm and 7pm, finishing at 8pm. The second bus will operate at 12pm, 2pm, 4pm, 6pm and 8pm, finishing at 9pm.



Photo: Phuket City Municipality

Passengers can board at Dragon Plaza at Queen Sirikit Park on Thalang Rd. Walk-in registration will be available daily from 11am to 8pm during the project period.

The bus will depart from Dragon Plaza and make the following stops:

The Chartered Bank Building; Surin Circle Clock Tower; Bang Neow Shrine; Saphan Hin Park – King Rama 9 Commemoration Park; Suriyadet Circle; Wat Mongkol Nimit; Baan Bang Neow Community Museum; and Kiew Thien Keng Shrine.

The bus then returns to Dragon Plaza at Queen Sirikit Park.

For more information, passengers can contact the Tourism and Sports Division of Phuket City Municipality at 076-540524, located at the Dragon Plaza.

Phuket Town Mayor Supachok expressed his confidence that the EV bus tours will not only enhance the visitor experience but also reinforce Phuket City's commitment to sustainable, eco-friendly urban development. *The Phuket News*

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# Tourism still a stalled engine

Bangkok Post

The Thai tourism industry last year faced its first contraction since the pandemic, with several setbacks consistently hampering tourist confidence.

Before the New Year break, the Tourism Authority of Thailand downgraded its forecast for the year to only 33 million arrivals, ending the rising trend from 2021 to 2024, when numbers surged from 430,000 to 35.5mn.

With a new government expected after the general election on Feb 8, tourism operators hope the industry will again become a priority, regaining its role as a key engine of the Thai economy.

## FAILED ATTEMPTS

At the beginning of 2025, the government led by the Pheu Thai Party aimed to restore tourist arrivals to the same level as 2019, using the 'Amazing Thailand Grand Tourism and Sports Year' campaign to draw 39mn arrivals and generate B3.5 trillion.

However, several events prompted airlines to reduce capacity due to weak demand.

The most crucial was Chinese actor Wang Xing being lured from Thailand to a scam compound in Myanmar. This incident sent shockwaves throughout the



The Tourism Council of Thailand predicts a rebound to at least 35.5 million foreign arrivals next year, if no unexpected events occur. Photo: Molpasorn Shoowong / Bangkok Post

Chinese market, which experienced a sharp plunge in bookings from the first quarter until the end of this year.

In March, an earthquake rocked Bangkok causing the State Audit Office building to collapse and further eroding the confidence of tourists who watched frightening scenes on viral video clips.

Even though the previous government attempted to make the nation a regional hub for festivals, such as the Maha Songkran World Water Festival and approving hosting of Asia's first Tomorrow Land electronic music events between 2026 and 2030, there was a limited effect for the industry.

The 'Tiew Thai Khon La Khrueng' subsidy programme for locals was launched during the low season, but was heavily criticised for its unstable and inconvenient system, prompting several hotels to avoid participation.

Global tourism also slowed following sweeping new US tariffs and a continued trade war with China, while the Israel-Hamas conflict disrupted flights in the Middle East mid-year.

The outbreak of the Thailand-Cambodia border conflict in June proved to be the nail in the coffin for the eastern border provinces.

The removal of former premier Paetongtarn Shinawatra over leaked phone calls with Cambodian Senate President Samdech Hun Sen disrupted tourism stimulus measures, including free domestic flights for foreign tourists.

In addition, the controversial bill to legalise casinos in entertainment complexes was rejected.

## STIFF COMPETITION

Thailand also faced stronger tourism competition from rivals Vietnam, Japan and China.

Chai Arunanondchai, president of the Tourism Council of Thailand, said 2025 was proof tourism is highly sensitive to uncontrollable factors.

Looking ahead to 2026, if no unexpected events occur, he said tourism should rebound to at least 35.5mn foreign arrivals, similar to the 2024 level, driven by more flights, events and marketing measures already prepared for next year.

Despite being under a caretaker government, Thailand should use all available means to restore border peace and mitigate the impact on flood-stricken provinces, said Mr Chai.

Tourism operators admitted they might have to wait for major stimulus projects until a new

government is elected, causing Thailand to lose opportunities, he said.

The new government should prioritise tourism along with improving the economy to restore spending by local travellers, said Mr Chai. In addition, new policymakers should focus on infrastructure investments, including high-speed railways, new airports and man-made attractions, to enhance the nation's competitiveness, he said.

According to a report by SiteMinder, a hotel guest acquisition and revenue platform, Thailand will remain among the top 10 preferred destinations in Asia-Pacific in 2026, alongside Singapore, India, Indonesia, China and Australia.

Supakrit Phansomboon, country manager for Thailand at SiteMinder, said the nation must continue to promote its strengths in food, hospitality and wellness tourism, while upgrading infrastructure to increase competitiveness.

Mr Supakrit said the tourism sector has already moved past the period of pent-up demand, when hotels could raise room rates by 20-30%.

Operators need to adopt dynamic pricing strategies that align with demand in each specific market and destination, he said.

## Phuket enjoys 'growth' New Year

PHUKET'S TOURISM sector showed strong signs of recovery over the New Year period, with rising long-haul arrivals helping push hotel occupancy above 80% and generating more than B1.14 billion in revenue for the island, according to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Phuket Office.

TAT Phuket reported that the overall tourism situation during the New Year festival of 2026 was "recovering and growing", driven by an increase in tourist numbers, a packed calendar of events and festivals, and an expansion of direct flights from long-haul markets between October and December 2025.

The growth was most evident among visitors from Europe and North America, particularly Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Between Dec 31, 2025 and Jan 4, 2026, Phuket recorded an average hotel occupancy rate of 80.76% across 1,883 registered



Patong celebrations for the New Year brought thousands to Patong Beach. Photo: Patong Municipality

hotels. The average length of stay during the period was 4.01 days, TAT Phuket reported.

Thai nationals accounted for about 30% of visitors, averaging 100,171 visits, while foreign tourists made up the remaining 70%, or an average of 225,515 visits. In total, 325,686 visitors travelled to Phuket during the New Year period, generating at least B1.143 billion in tourism revenue, TAT Phuket said.

## HOLIDAY SURGE

In parallel with the tourism rebound, Phuket International Airport stepped up preparations to handle a sharp increase in passenger traffic over the New Year.

Ahead of the break, Monchai Tanode, General Manager at Phuket Airport, conducted an inspection of services, facilities and security measures at the airport.

Mr Monchai said the airport had integrated cooperation with both government and private sector partners to ensure passenger processing remained fast, smooth and efficient throughout the peak period.

Measures included increasing the availability of baggage carts, stepping up the frequency of restroom cleaning, and deploying additional staff to assist and advise passengers in terminal areas.

Heavy passenger volumes were expected from Dec 26 to Jan 5 as people travelled home for the holidays and visited Phuket and other Andaman provinces.

During the period, Phuket Airport anticipated handling approximately 674,481 passengers across about 4,064 flights.

The Phuket News

## Oil shrugs off Maduro arrest

GLOBAL CRUDE OIL markets revealed little reaction in the immediate aftermath of the US military operation in Venezuela to detain President Nicolás Maduro on Jan 3, says the Thai Energy Ministry.

US President Donald Trump accuses Maduro of heading Venezuela's Cartel de los Soles criminal network, which he labelled a foreign terrorist organisation. He also linked the Venezuelan leader to a surge in illegal migrants arriving in the US.

Despite the US invasion, local energy officials downplayed concerns over oil price volatility.

Veerapat Kiatfuengfu, deputy permanent secretary of the Energy Ministry, said Venezuela's current output of 800,000 to 1 million barrels per day represents only about 1% of global supply.

"Although Venezuela holds the world's largest oil reserves, its production and sales remain far below potential," he said.

"The arrest of its leader had a minimal impact on prices thus far."



Photo: Bangkok Post

Thai Oil Plc, the country's largest refinery, reported benchmark prices edged down slightly on Jan 2. West Texas Intermediate slipped to US\$56.79 a barrel, while Brent crude fell to \$60.75 a barrel.

According to Opec, Venezuela's proven reserves totalled 303 billion barrels in 2024, accounting for roughly one-fifth of global supply. Saudi Arabia was second with 267bn barrels, followed by Iran with 209bn barrels.

Trump pledged US oil companies would step in to repair Venezuela's "broken infrastructure" and restore profitability.

Thailand's exposure to Venezuelan crude remains

limited. Only a handful of firms, such as Tipco Asphalt Plc, previously imported heavy crude for asphalt production.

However, US sanctions imposed prior to the pandemic restricted exports from Petróleos de Venezuela, Venezuela's state-owned oil company.

Tipco Asphalt subsequently halted purchases, said deputy managing director Soranat Nantamontri.

The company estimated its sales for 2025 to be on par with the 1.15 million tonnes recorded in 2024, due partly to limited raw materials following the trade sanctions.

Bangkok Post

# Anutin promises border wall

**BANGKOK**

Bangkok Post

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul has promised to pursue a border wall project, contingent on his Bhumjaithai Party retaining administrative power after the general election next year.

Anutin, the Bhumjaithai leader, said on Dec 29 that the plan to build a wall along the Thai-Cambodian frontier and a policy to strengthen security forces will remain intact if the party wins the poll on Feb 8, according to various media reports.

The financing for the barrier's construction will primarily come from the defence budget as part of a national security enhancement campaign, he added.

The caretaker prime minister emphasised this stance during his visit to Ta Kwai Temple and Hill 350 in Phanom Dong Rak district of Surin, areas that experienced significant border clashes between Thai and Cambodian troops before a ceasefire on Dec 27.

The Thai armed forces plan to build the border wall in phases, starting in uncontested locations, likely beginning with Pong Nam Ron district in Chanthaburi province. The wall is estimated to cost around B7 million per kilometre, excluding the expense of a patrol road constructed behind the barrier for security purposes.



PM Anutin (fifth from left) with soldiers protecting Ta Kwai Temple in Phanom Dong Rak district of Surin on Dec 29. Photo: Ministry of Interior

In October, the Thai army pledged to act on the initiative of Her Royal Highness Princess Chulabhorn Krom Phra Srisavangavadhana by building a "Thai-Cambodian border wall" to improve the safety of soldiers and civilians living in border areas.

### CEASEFIRE BROKEN

Meanwhile, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army confirmed that Cambodia broke the ceasefire on Tuesday morning (Jan 6), firing mortar rounds at the Chong Bok area of Ubon Ratchathani and wounding a Thai soldier.

The incident occurred at 7:25am in Nam Yuen district, the announcement said. The mortar rounds were fired from the Cambodian side, landing in front of Hill 469.

One Thai soldier, Sgt Maj 1<sup>st</sup> Class Prachya Pilachai, leader of the 1st Rifle Platoon of Infantry Company 6021, was injured by shrapnel and

evacuated for medical treatment. His condition was "green", the announcement said, which is safe.

The incident came after it was confirmed that Thai schools in northeastern provinces bordering Cambodia reopened on Monday (Jan 5) after being closed for about a month by the recent border clashes.

Primary and secondary schools and kindergartens reopened and parents quickly sent their youngsters back to classes on Monday morning. The reopening followed the return home of evacuees who had been staying in temporary government shelters on Dec 28.

Prapassorn Sangkomol, a teacher at Anuban Ban Kruat School, said about 80% of students returned to classes, while Pusita Naradee, director of Ban Kok Fuang School in Lahan Sai district of Buriram, said that 95% of students enrolled in kindergarten and primary levels showed up.

# Speeding declared main New Year accident culprit

**BANGKOK**

SPEEDING HAS BEEN the leading cause of road accidents during the New Year holiday, according to the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation.

Saharat Wongsakulwiwat, the department's deputy director-general, said on Monday (Jan 5) that over the first six days of the seven dangerous days campaign from Dec 30 to Jan 4, authorities recorded 1,364 accidents, with 1,313 injuries and 241 fatalities.

Speeding accounted for causing the highest share of crashes at 32.57%, followed by sudden lane-changing at 30.86%, he said.

Motorcycles were involved in nearly 69% of all cases, with most incidents occurring on straight sections of road, particularly on highways and local village routes.

The peak period for accidents was between 9am and noon, with

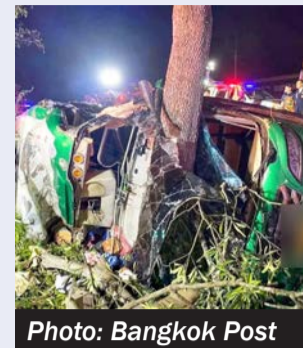


Photo: Bangkok Post

young adults aged 20-29 the most affected. Narathiwat recorded the highest number of accidents and injuries at 12 on Sunday (Jan 4), while Phetchabun saw the most fatalities at three.

Bangkok recorded the most deaths at 20, while seven provinces registered zero fatalities, Mr Saharat said.

The director-general of the Probation Department, Piya Raksakul, said from Dec 30 to Jan 3, a total of 2,957 people were placed on probation for drink driving, 160 for driving under the influence of drugs, four for reckless driving and two for speeding.

Bangkok Post

# Top court ruling shields cardholders from fraud

**BANGKOK**

THE SUPREME COURT HAS established a new legal precedent strengthening consumer protection by ruling that credit card holders are not liable for fraudulent transactions carried out using their card details by criminals.

The court said that, in the event of a dispute, the burden of proof rests with the issuing bank, which must demonstrate who actually used the credit card. Liability cannot be automatically presumed to lie with the cardholder.

The ruling was disclosed by the Thailand Consumers Council (TCC), which noted the judgment, released on Dec 17, dismissed a claim against a credit card holder.

The court found consumers should not be held responsible when their credit card information is misappropriated and used without authorisation, marking a new standard in consumer protection jurisprudence.

Surakit Singhapol, legal and litigation officer at the TCC, said the ruling represents an important legal principle in consumer litigation and establishes clearer standards for proving damage in cases involving credit card use. The court made it clear that the mere fact that a person's name appears on a credit card does not automatically mean that person conducted the disputed transactions.



Credit cards seized from three members of a forgery gang during a media briefing in 2015. Photo: Bangkok Post / File

The ruling said financial institutions failed to produce sufficient evidence to prove the cardholder personally used the card or was involved in the acts that caused financial loss. As such, responsibility could not be imputed to the cardholder by assumption alone.

Mr Surakit said consumers who fall victim to technology-related crimes or financial fraud should not be forced to bear losses arising from the actions of third parties or from deficiencies in the security systems and risk management practices of financial service providers.

"The fact that a consumer is the named cardholder does not mean they are always the person who made the transaction," he said. "If the bank cannot prove that the cardholder carried out the transaction, then the cardholder cannot be held liable for the debt."

He said consumers are in a weaker bargaining position compared with financial institutions, which possess specialised expertise.

Requiring consumers to prove their innocence in every case would impose an unreasonable burden and run counter to principles of fairness, consumer protection and the legislative intent to reduce structural inequality between service providers and users, he added.

Mr Surakit said the TCC would use the court ruling as a guideline in providing legal advice to consumers affected by unauthorised credit card use. It will also serve as a basis for policy advocacy with regulators and financial institutions to improve consumer protection measures.

Last year, the TCC received complaints involving credit card fraud amounting to losses of more than B17 million. Bangkok Post

# Cannabis shops face new regulation shift

**BANGKOK**

THE MINISTRY OF Public Health is pushing to enact a new ministerial regulation on cannabis before the next government takes office, with the draft now under review by the Office of the Council of State.

The regulation, recently forwarded for legal scrutiny, would mark a major shift in the cannabis sector by restricting sales to designated venues such as hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, herbal shops and authorised folk-healer premises. Sellers would be required to obtain licences from the Department of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine, which also provides mandatory training.

Public Health Minister Pattana Promphat said on Monday (Jan 5) that the ministry had submitted the draft for consideration, though it remained unclear whether approval would



Photo: Bangkok Post

come in time. "I will sign the regulation the moment it reaches me, and it will take effect immediately," he said.

"As for the next government, I cannot predict whether cannabis policy will change, but if it stays on the same course, the bill can proceed."

He noted that the draft would not need to return to Cabinet even if delayed; a new minister could either continue with it or scrap it, depending on policy direction.

According to the department, Thailand currently has 18,433 registered cannabis shops. Of these, 8,636 licences expired last year, and just 1,339 outlets renewed their permits. Bangkok Post



Photos: Azzurra Laguna Phuket



# Bellissimo beachside dining at the Azzurra

**Ben Tirebuck**  
editor3@classactmedia.co.th

Italian cuisine is always a firm favourite, so it is with great anticipation that we make our way to the recently renovated Azzurra restaurant at the Angsana Laguna Phuket on the shores of Bang Tao Beach for an evening of fine dining.

Taking our seats on the breath-taking rooftop terrace we are treated to extensive beach and sea views, something that really showcases its magic when the sun starts to set, while live music from down below enhances the relaxing setting perfectly.

Our waitress explains that Azzurra, meaning “sky blue” in Italian, is inspired by the serene hues of the Amalfi Coast, celebrating a dining experience that is bright, sincere and welcoming. On hearing this, my dining partner and I feel our anticipation levels move up a couple of notches!

The ambience is warm and welcoming, the staff are attentive and personable

and the menu reveals itself to be mouth-watering. We start off with the Antipasto Misto plate, a delectable choice of Italian cold cuts, pickles, cheeses, olives and sundried tomatoes that is the perfect start for the sumptuous meal ahead.

We then savour the Minestrone Di Verdure soup made from organic local mixed vegetables which is a real treat, closely followed by the Burrata E Pomodorini, which has to be one of the finest we have ever tasted. Burrata dishes often fall foul of being somewhat “samey” but this dish is elevated by a delicious pesto sauce that marries so well with the juicy tomatoes and creamy cheese. Bellissimo!

### Melt in the mouth

For main course we order the Filetto Di Salmone Alla Toscana fish dish and the Filetto Di Mazo Alla Rossini steak option. The fish is of the highest melt in the mouth variety, while perfectly crisped skin is always a welcome addition to such a dish. A special mention

must go to the creamy tomato and spinach sauce accompanying the dish, which is excellent and very “moreish”.

The grilled Angus beef tenderloin is equally rewarding in its presentation and taste; succulent, juicy and cooked to perfection, while the accompanying sautéed spinach and blueberry sauce really helps elevate the overall dish.

We finish off sharing a Panna Cotta Alla Vaniglia for desert and we are not left disappointed. The Panna Cotta passes the requisite “jiggle test” and the chocolate ganache is on an altogether different level, ensuring the perfect taste sensation end to a delightful dining experience.

To round off such a wonderful evening we get the chance to speak with the person responsible for our delicious cuisine – head Chef Mirko Cappa. Italian-born Mirko explains how he leads Angsana Laguna Phuket’s vibrant culinary scene with over 15 years of international experience across luxury hotels and fine dining restaurants from Italy to Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America.

Mirko adds how he likes to honour his Italian culinary roots while championing fresh, sustainably sourced ingredients. With heartfelt hospitality and inventive flair, he continues to shape memorable dining experiences that respect tradition, celebrate local produce and bring people together through food.

We could not agree more, having experienced first-hand such a philosophy clearly demonstrated through his range of cooking throughout the evening. However, while the food is naturally the main star of the show, it must be emphasised that the venue and the excellent staff also make for a thoroughly pleasant and enjoyable experience, one that we would highly recommend and very much look forward to repeating soon.

*Azzurra Laguna Phuket, 10 Moo 4, Srisoonthorn Road, Cherng Talay, Thalang, Phuket. Reservations: +66 76 358 500 / fbreservation-lagunaphuket@angsana.com.*



## The February/March 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.

# Want to be in it?

CONTACT JASON TODAY – gm@classactmedia.co.th

# Getting to know the man behind the words

## ALL ABOUT BOOKS

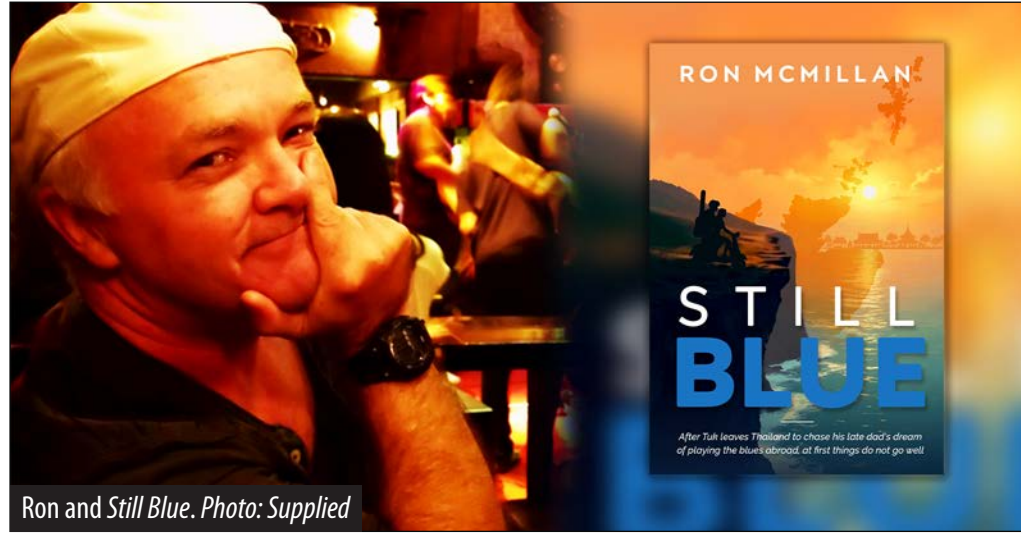
The Phuket News  
editor3@classactmedia.co.th

**R**on McMillan, an author now based in Chiang Mai, started out as a writer and photo-journalist amidst the flying rocks and toxic teargas clouds of Seoul in the run-up to the 1988 Olympics. After covering the Seoul Games from opening to closing ceremonies, he shifted base to Hong Kong in time for the final decade of British colonial rule.

In the sunset era of analogue photography, he travelled the region freelancing for magazines and corporate clients in Asia, North America and Europe. Assignments took him to Afghanistan and Japan and many of the countries in between, including forty-nine trips to Mainland China during the boom years set off by Deng Xiaoping's momentous declaration that "to be rich is glorious."

Between 1989 and 1995, Ron made five "tourist" visits to North Korea, each time secretly on assignment for western magazines. His photographs ran on the covers and inside pages of titles including *Newsweek*, *Asiaweek*, *L'Express Magazine* (France) and, what was considered at the time to be the holy grail of photojournalism, the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*.

For the last 30 years, eagle-eyed goons in Pyongyang have ensured that



Ron and Still Blue. Photo: Supplied

all photographs of the dictator Kim statues (there was only one during Ron's visits) portray the 22-metre-tall monstrosities in their entirety.

The rigidly enforced rule only came about after Ron's photographs of North Koreans bowing reverently to gigantic bronze feet featured prominently in international media. That his only tangible professional legacy takes the form of photographs forbidden from being taken is an irony that does not escape him.

He frequently found himself under citizen's arrest in North Korea and, despite lying to men carrying guns throughout the region, he was only shot at once (in South Korea, a shotgun-fired explosive teargas canister that passed inches from his kidneys). He also experienced first-hand only one police car chase in China. He maintains that

spending a weekend in Bangkok trapped in the grip of the Michael Jackson media circus was as disconcerting as anything North Korea threw at him.

"I took my work very seriously," says Ron. "But in truth I was a dilettante photographer, in it for the travel, the oddball experiences and the thrills."

### Clichéd

As the digital photography era began to take over, and having written many travel articles to accompany his own photographs, Ron devoted himself to writing full time. In the late 2000s he edited book manuscripts for a Bangkok-based vanity publisher. Many were autobiographical, often sticking to the clichéd formula of the poor, naïve, well-meaning middle-aged foreigner who falls head-over-heels in love with precisely the wrong Thai bar girl.

Years later, Ron decided to turn the story on its head, and the result is *Still Blue*, his latest novel. It tells the tale of how Tuk, a young Bangkok blues guitarist, falls for precisely the wrong Scottish backpacker. He follows his new girlfriend to Glasgow, where she claims her rich daddy will set them up with a blues venue of their own, modeled after Bangkok's famous Adhere, the 13<sup>th</sup> blues bar.

Tuk is already a second-generation bluesman. As a child he followed his father around blues venues in Thailand, and was repeatedly told how, should any opportunity come along to play overseas with big name stars, he should grab the chance with both hands. Sadly, long before that might happen, young Tuk saw his father die from electrocution on a waterlogged Bangkok stage.

Many years later, when the chance to play abroad arises, he is not about to let it pass him by. But he reckons without the failure of his new relationship – and soon finds himself alone in a strange land, facing the shame of returning to Bangkok having failed in everything he set out to achieve.

When he learns that one of his father's heroes, Taylor Gray, is to headline a small blues festival in the Shetland Islands, he seizes one last opportunity to chase his father's dream.

*Still Blue* and five other books by Ron McMillan (including two well-received *Mason & Dixie* crime novels set in Bangkok) are available from Amazon as eBooks or paperbacks.

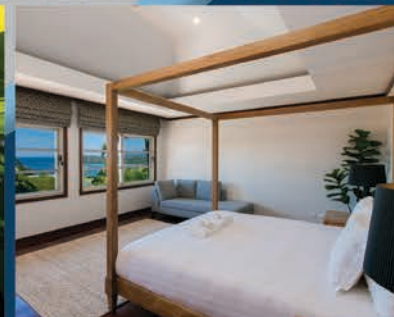
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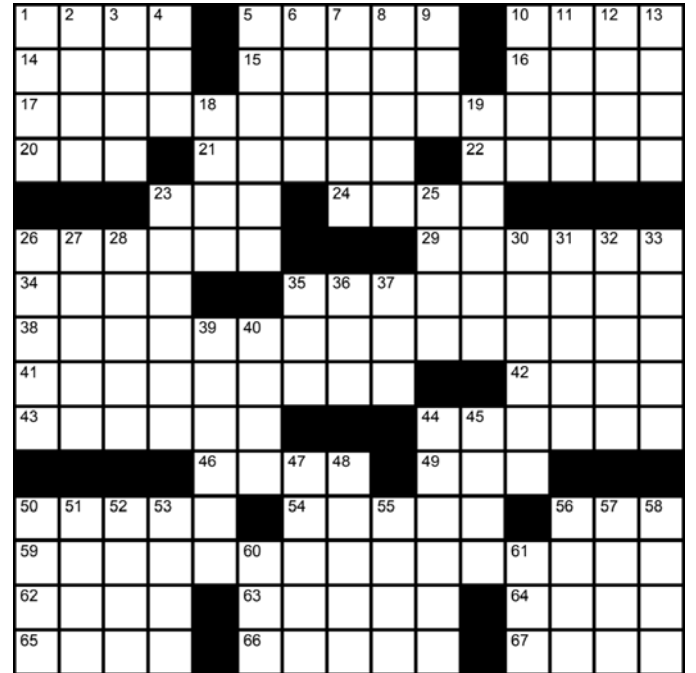
# POP QUIZ

- Which playing card is called the Curse of Scotland?
- What does a racoon do before eating its food?
- What is the world's smallest ocean?
- Which herb did the Romans eat to prevent drunkenness?
- Who wrote 'Dr Zhivago'?

Answers below, centre

## Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across**
- Habit
  - Ne plus \_\_\_
  - Vitreous substance
  - After-lunch sandwich
  - Sweet rice wine
  - Narrow street
  - Let-downs
  - Didn't straphang
  - Come-ons
  - Dostoyevsky novel, with "The"
  - Fish-fowl connection
  - \_\_\_ weight
  - 2005 Best Picture nominee
  - Blowhard
  - Available
  - Homegrown artifact
  - Martinets
  - Finnic people
  - \_\_\_ frog
  - Geometric figures: var.
  - African grazing areas
  - Many an office has one
  - Grp. involved in "the Troubles"
  - Adjust
  - Handles
  - Garden worker? programmer
  - Decays
  - Steep
  - Stock
  - Cut short
  - Positive
  - Chances upon
  - Countercurrent
  - Hephaestus and Demeter
  - Part of a score, maybe
  - Lie
  - Stole
  - Jocko Conlan, for one
  - Rear half of a griffin
  - Prosecuted
  - Flush
  - Antenna holder
  - Split
  - Punjabi royal
  - Digging, so to speak
  - Feeler
  - Paranoiac's worry
  - Above ground level
  - Sarge, e.g.
  - Old Mogul capital
  - Computer
  - Unoriginal
  - Marinara alternative
  - Old World plant
  - Bleated
  - City in Scotland
  - Short pants
  - \_\_\_ maison: Fr.
  - Time div.
  - Starfleet Academy grad.
  - Natural
  - Home to the Palazzo Gambacorti
  - Some organs
  - While lead-in
  - In \_\_\_ parts
  - It's located on Lake George
  - Annexes
  - In \_\_\_ of
  - Bygone despot
  - De Valera's land
  - Social group
  - Fearless
  - Children's author Blyton
  - Glimpse
  - Tease wool
  - Bump off
- Down**
1. Hephaestus and Demeter
  2. Part of a score, maybe
  3. Lie
  4. Stole
  5. Jocko Conlan, for one
  6. Rear half of a griffin
  7. Prosecuted
  8. Flush
  9. Antenna holder
  10. Split
  11. Punjabi royal
  12. Digging, so to speak
  13. Feeler
  18. Paranoiac's worry
  19. Above ground level
  23. Sarge, e.g.
  25. Old Mogul capital
  26. Computer



Visit: [www.ilovecrosswords.com](http://www.ilovecrosswords.com)

## SUDOKU

Easy

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

### Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

- (1) Nine of Diamonds; (2) Washes it in water; (3) The Arctic; (4) Parsley; (5) Boris Pasternak

### Solutions to last week's puzzles:

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
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| A | L | L | O | T | S | U | S | U | R | P | I | N | G |   |
| S | L | A | T | E | Y | P | E | R | S | I | S | T | S |   |

## GOT YOUR NUMBER

**2**

words are usually all that is required for people to distinguish the voice of a close friend or relative amongst other voices.

**60**

percent, on average, is how much of the human body is water.

**150**

degrees Celsius (302°F) is the cut-off point for life, theoretically. Proteins fall apart and chemical reactions cannot occur at that temperature.

**28,000**

kilometres per hour is how fast the International Space Station travels, taking only 90 minutes for the weightless laboratory to make a complete circuit of Earth.

**500,000**

US dollars a year is still earned by the song 'Whoomp! (There It Is)'. It was released in 1993.

Source: *Uberfacts*

## ISLAND VIEW



Waves at Nai Harn Beach. Photo by Klaus Zimmermann

Got an unusual or particularly beautiful picture of Phuket? Email it to [editor3@classactmedia.co.th](mailto:editor3@classactmedia.co.th)

## This week in history

**Jan 9, 1431**

The trial of Joan of Arc begins in Rouen, France.

**Jan 10, 1920**

The Treaty of Versailles takes effect, officially ending World War I for all combatant nations except the United States.

**Jan 11, 1972**

East Pakistan renames itself Bangladesh.

**Jan 12, 1915**

The United States House of Representatives rejects a proposed constitutional amendment to require states to give women the right to vote.

**Jan 13, 27 BC**

Octavian transfers the state to the free disposal of the Roman Senate and the people. He receives Spain, Gaul and



Queen Elizabeth I.

Syria as his province for 10 years.

**Jan 14, 2004**

The national flag of the Republic of Georgia, the so-called "five cross flag", is restored to official use after a hiatus of some 500 years.

**Jan 15, 1559**

Elizabeth I is crowned Queen of England and Ireland in Westminster Abbey, London.

Source: *Wikipedia*

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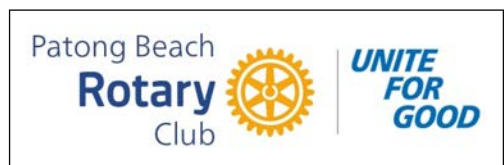
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# Fencing star targets gold medal double

## ASEAN PARA GAMES

WHEELCHAIR FENCER Saysunee Jana is targeting two gold medals at the upcoming ASEAN Para Games in Nakhon Ratchasima.

Saysunee made history after becoming the first woman to win three gold medals – epee, foil and sabre – at a single Paralympics in Paris in 2024.

However, she has never competed in the ASEAN Para Games as the sport was not included in the tournament since the 2008 Games in Thailand.

The 51-year-old will compete in two events – epee class B and foil class B – in the Jan 20-26 tournament and she is hoping to win both.

“It’s great that the sport is returning this year as the tournament will be held in Thailand,” said Saysunee.

“I’ve been training continuously since the 2024 Paralympics, so I’m very well-prepared. I want to win gold medals in both events in front of my Thai fans so I



Saysunee. Photo: AFP

hope there will be a lot of support.

“I also plan to use this competition as preparation for the world ranking tournaments in February in Italy, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Asian Para Games in October in Japan,” she added.

Saysunee is Thailand’s most decorated wheelchair fencer. She won gold medals at all major tournaments including the Paralympics, Asian Para Games, World Championships and Asian Championships.

The 13<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Para Games will feature men’s and women’s wheelchair fencing in epee, foil and sabre. *Bangkok Post*

# SEA Games stars’ cash bonus

## SEA GAMES

Bangkok Post

Thai medalists, coaches and associations from the 33<sup>rd</sup> Southeast Asian (SEA) Games have received a B487,365,000 cash bonus from the government.

Thailand finished as overall champions of the 2025 biennial tournament with a record-breaking 233 gold, 154 silver and 113 bronze medals.

According to the SEA Games prize scheme, a gold medalist receives B300,000, silver medal winners get B150,000 and a bronze winner receives B75,000.

The rowing and canoeing association, which delivered 12 gold, nine silver and five bronze medals, received the largest share of the bonus, totalling B36,832,500.

The hockey association, who won four gold, one silver and three bronze medals, received B34,020,000 and the takraw association, which produced six golds, three silver and two bronze, earned B25,207,500.

The jiu-jitsu association, which won the most gold medals with 14, in addition to 11 silver and 5 bronze, received a bonus of B24,585,000, while the aquatics association pocketed B24,900,000 from winning 11 gold, 10 silver and 12 bronze, while the kabaddi association received B22,185,000 from winning four gold, one silver and one bronze.



Minister of Tourism and Sports Atthakorn Sirilatthayakorn (centre) at the Dec 26 ceremony. Photo: Bangkok Post

The athletics association received B18,225,000 for 13 gold, 13 silver and 4 bronze, the ice hockey team received B14,490,000 from one gold and one silver, while the volleyball association received B14,010,000 from winning two gold and two silver.

The cricket association, who received B12,600,000 for two golds, rounded off the top 10 biggest earners.

“On behalf of the government and the Thai people, I would like to express my admiration for the athletes, coaches, sports associations, officials, and all those involved who participated in the 33<sup>rd</sup> Southeast Asian Games, for the success of the Thai national team,” Minister of Tourism and Sports Atthakorn Sirilatthayakorn said at the official ceremony at the Huamark Indoor Stadium in Bangkok on Dec 26.

“This is a result of the sacrifices, both physical and mental, of everyone involved, and it also demonstrates the

potential and capabilities of athletes, sports personnel, and sports associations to the international community,” he added.

“I sincerely hope that the success and awards you have received will serve as encouragement for you to further develop your abilities and I wish you all success in future competitions.

“For the athletes who did not win medals this time, I encourage you all to continue training and developing your potential to achieve success in future competitions. I offer my encouragement and wish you all happiness and prosperity.”

Dr Patpong Pongsakul, Inspector-General of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Dr Gongsak Yodmani, the Sports Authority of Thailand Governor, and Tanukiatt Junchum, manager of the National Sports Development Fund also attended the ceremony.

# Luke Littler storms to second world darts title

## DARTS

TEENAGE DARTS SENSATION Luke Littler stormed to a second consecutive world title with a demolition of Dutchman Gian van Veen at London’s Alexandra Palace last Saturday (Jan 3).

Littler became a national phenomenon in England with his shock run to the final as a 16-year-old two years ago and has since gone on to dominate the sport.

The world number one bounced back from dropping the opening set to romp to a 7-1 victory and scoop the record £1 million (B42mn) in prize money on offer to the winner.

“The first time was so nice, I had to do it twice,” said the 18-year-old.

Littler was rarely troubled throughout the tournament at the oche but had to overcome an uncomfortable relationship with the crowd at the annual festival of darts.

“You guys pay for the tickets and you pay for my



Littler. Photo: AFP

prize money so thank you, thank you for my money! Thank you for booing me,” Littler snapped after his last-16 clash against former world champion Rob Cross.

The pressure on his young shoulders finally showed as Littler broke down in tears during his celebrations seconds after a securing the title with a 147 finish.

At just 23, Van Veen is another rising star of the sport but even the European champion had no answer to Littler’s relentless accuracy.

The Englishman hit 16 maximum scores of 180 to record a three-dart average of over 106. *AFP*

# Sport greats honoured with nicknames

## ALL SPORTS

THE SPORTS REPORTERS and Photographers Association of Thailand has announced its annual nicknames for prominent sporting figures in 2025, a long-standing tradition reflecting key moments, achievements and controversies in Thai sport over the past year.

Among the 12 individuals and organisations honoured, several stood out for their impact on both the national and international sporting landscape.

The association said the nicknames were intended to capture both the triumphs and defining narratives of Thai sport in 2025, a year marked by historic achievements.

Rising athletics star Puripol “Bew” Boonson received the nickname “The 9-Second Sprint Deity” after becoming the first Southeast Asian sprinter to run the 100 metres in under 10 seconds. His landmark time of 9.94 seconds, combined with three gold medals at the latest SEA Games, marked a breakthrough for Thai track and field.

World No.1 golfer Atthaya “Jeen” Thitikul was dubbed “The Irresistible Swing”, reflecting her dominance on the LPGA Tour. The 22-year-old continued to rewrite records, collecting mul-



Puripol. Photo: Bangkok Post

multiple player-of-the-year awards and posting the lowest average score in LPGA history.

Badminton great Ratchanok “May” Intanon was given the nickname “Fired-up, Ageless May” in recognition of her remarkable resurgence late in her career. At the age of 30, she captured her first-ever women’s singles gold medal at the SEA Games and closed her final appearance at the regional event with a total of two gold medals.

Khunying Patama Leeswadtrakul, an International Olympic Committee member, was bestowed with the title “Global Sports Ambassador”, reflecting her prominent role in international sports governance.

As president of the Badminton World Federation, which oversees more than 200 member nations,

she spent much of the year travelling across Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, Asia and Africa to attend high-level meetings and strengthen cooperation between international sports federations and Thailand’s sporting bodies.

Widely respected for her ability to connect key decision-makers and resolve issues at both international and national levels, Khunying Patama has helped improve coordination and access for Thai sports organisations on the global stage. She has also contributed to the promotion of Thai culture, most visibly through her practice of greeting athletes with the traditional wai during medal ceremonies, a gesture since embraced by badminton players worldwide.

Finally, Dr Gongsak Yodmani, governor of the Sports Authority of Thailand, was dubbed “The Crisis Finisher” for steering Thai sport through a turbulent year.

As Thailand hosted the 33<sup>rd</sup> SEA Games, he faced mounting challenges ranging from budget constraints to venue management issues. Despite persistent scrutiny, the Games concluded with Thailand topping the gold medal table, reinforcing his reputation as a leader capable of delivering results under pressure.

*Bangkok Post*

# Man United sack Amorim

## FOOTBALL

AFP

Ruben Amorim was sacked by Manchester United on Monday (Jan 5), bringing a dramatic end to his turbulent 14-month spell as manager of the struggling Premier League giants.

The dismissal of the Portuguese follows growing tensions with Old Trafford bosses, including director of football Jason Wilcox, over recent days.

The club, sixth in the Premier League table after a 1-1 draw at Leeds on Sunday, issued a statement thanking Amorim for his service. "The club's leadership has reluctantly made the decision that it is the right time to make a change. This will give the team the best opportunity of the highest possible Premier League finish," the statement read.

The dismissal is a dismal end for Amorim, who won just 25 of his 63 games at United in all competitions during the shortest reign for a permanent manager since David Moyes was sacked just eight months into his tenure in 2014.

The club said it plans to appoint a caretaker boss for the rest of the season. Current under-18s coach Darren Fletcher,



It is the end of the road at Manchester United for Ruben Amorim. Photo: AFP

a former United midfielder and technical director between 2021 and 2024, will take charge of the team on a temporary basis until the new appointment is confirmed, the club said.

Names in the frame for the full-time job include Enzo Maresca, who left Chelsea last week, Crystal Palace boss Oliver Glasner and former England manager Gareth Southgate.

### 'MASSIVE WIN'

In on-field action Arsenal fought back from a goal down to beat Bournemouth 3-2 last

Saturday (Jan 3) to further stretch their lead at the top of the Premier League.

A goal from Gabriel Magalhaes and two from the returning Declan Rice sent the Gunners six points clear of Manchester City and Aston Villa in second and third place respectively.

"It's just unbelievable, it says a lot about how much we've grown. The team found a way to beat them and it's a massive win," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said after the match.

Manchester City's title

challenge suffered a huge setback as managerless Chelsea salvaged a dramatic 1-1 draw on Sunday.

Chelsea midfielder Enzo Fernandez equalised deep into stoppage-time to cancel out Tijjani Reijnders' 42<sup>nd</sup> minute opener.

Just days after Chelsea parted company with boss Maresca, the Blues were managed by Under-21 coach Calum McFarlane, who will never forget his first senior match as a manager after frustrating his opponent, the decorated Pep Guardiola.

But despite the damage McFarlane inflicted on Guardiola's title dreams, Strasbourg boss Liam Rosenior remains the leading candidate to replace Maresca on a permanent basis.

Elsewhere, Unai Emery's Aston Villa extended their winning run at home by beating Nottingham Forest 3-1, recording their 11<sup>th</sup> consecutive home win in all competitions.

England forward Ollie Watkins gave Villa a deserved lead before John McGinn scored twice in the second half to seal the win for the Villains.

Sean Dyche's Forest, who have now suffered four straight league defeats, remain one place above the relegation zone, four points clear of West Ham, who

slumped to a damaging 3-0 loss at Wolverhampton Wanderers.

The Hammers travelled to face the winless basement club in desperate need of a victory but it was the hosts who emerged triumphant to record their first win of the season.

Jhon Arias gave the home side an early lead, Hwang Hee-chan doubled their advantage from the penalty spot shortly after the half-hour mark and teenager Mateus Mane sealed the points in the second-half.

Liverpool drew 2-2 at Fulham, with Harry Wilson opening the scoring for the hosts against his former club before Florian Wirtz levelled and Cody Gakpo scored what looked like the winner in the 94<sup>th</sup> minute.

However, the visitors' celebrations were cut short when Harrison Reed took aim from outside the box and blasted into the top corner for his first goal in three years to snatch the draw.

Elsewhere, Tottenham and Sunderland drew 1-1, while Igor Thiago's hat-trick fired Brentford up to seventh with a 4-2 win at Everton.

Newcastle beat Crystal Palace 2-0 and Brighton defeated Burnley 2-0 to end a six-match winless run and move up to 10<sup>th</sup> place in the table.

## Joshua discharged from hospital after fatal car crash

### BOXING

FORMER WORLD HEAVY-weight boxing champion Anthony Joshua has been discharged from hospital after surviving a fatal car accident in Nigeria that killed two of his close friends.

Joshua was travelling on Dec 29 with friends Sina Ghami and Latif Ayodele on a busy highway linking Lagos and Ibadan in the southwest of the country when their SUV rammed into a stationary truck.

The Traffic Compliance and Enforcement Agency (TRACE) in Ogun state, where the accident occurred, said preliminary investigations showed the vehicle was moving at excessive speed and had burst a tyre before the crash.

"Though heavy hearted and full of emotion over the loss of his two close friends, Anthony Joshua was deemed clinically fit to recuperate at home," a Lagos and Ogun state governments spokesman said on Dec 31.

Both state governments had been overseeing the boxer's treatment since the crash. Nigerian police said the two victims died at the scene.

After leaving Lagos's Lagoon Hospital, the 36-year-old former heavyweight champion and his mother paid their respects at the funeral home where the bodies of his



Joshua. Photo: AFP

friends were "being prepared for repatriation", the statement said.

Joshua's family hails from the southwest Nigerian city and he is known to visit there when he is in the country.

Lagos, Nigeria's bustling economic capital, throngs with visitors from across the country and diaspora each December.

Photographs released by the police showed a mangled wreckage of a black sports utility vehicle.

In December, Joshua knocked out YouTuber-turned-boxer Jake Paul in a Netflix-backed bout in Miami.

The former Olympic champion Joshua has since been linked with a fight against compatriot and fellow former world champion Tyson Fury, who posted his condolences on his Instagram page after the crash.

Joshua's last fight before the match with Paul was a fifth round knockout loss to fellow Briton Daniel Dubois in September 2024. AFP

## Coach plots tactical shift for Asian Cup

### FOOTBALL

THAILAND U23 TEAM head coach Thawatchai Damrong-ongtrakul has confirmed that his side will adopt a more pragmatic approach at this month's AFC U23 Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia.

The War Elephants, who dazzled with attacking flair at the SEA Games, will now be asked to prioritise defensive organisation against stronger continental opposition.

The Football Association of Thailand (FAT) has named a 23-man squad for the tournament, which runs from Jan 6-24.

Notably absent are 10 of the key figures from the SEA Games campaign, including prolific forward Yotsakon Burapha, scorer of seven goals, as well as Kakana Khamyok, Chanapach Buaphan, Waris Choothong, Thanakrit Chotemuangplak and Seksan Ratee.

In their place, Thawatchai has turned to emerging talent. Among those called up are Iklas Sanron and Sittha Boonlaha, alongside 18-year-old Wichan Inaram, a promising



Thawatchai. Photo: Bangkok Post

forward from Bangkok United and Bangkok Christian College.

The coach admitted the reshaped squad faces a steep learning curve, stressing that the side must abandon the expansive style that brought success in regional competition.

"We cannot play offensively as at the SEA Games. We must focus on accuracy, discipline and defensive solidity," he explained.

Thawatchai confirmed on Monday (Jan 5) that Pichitchai Sienkrathok has been appointed the new captain of the team for the tournament, with Sittha Boonlaha serving as vice captain.

Pichitchai, who has been with the team since the first

training camp during the ASEAN U23 Championship in Indonesia, is a good choice as skipper for his young team, Thawatchai explained.

"Pichitchai has been named team captain because he has talent and leadership qualities. Along with Sittha, they both command respect from their teammates," said the coach.

Thailand have been drawn in Group D alongside Australia, Iraq and China. They opened against Australia yesterday (Jan 8) at Al Shabab Stadium, Riyadh, before facing Iraq on Jan 11 and China three days later.

All matches will be streamed live on YouTube via BG Sports.

Bangkok Post

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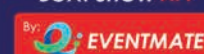
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