

FLIGHT CHAOS SPURS OVERSTAY AMNESTY > PAGE 3

JITTERS



Tourists receive assistance after flights via the Middle East were cancelled. Photo: AOTGA

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT COULD CUT PHUKET TOURIST ARRIVALS BY UP TO 10%

The Phuket News
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Tourism leaders have warned that the ongoing Middle East conflict could reduce tourist arrivals to Phuket by as much as 10% in the short term if flight disruptions and traveller uncertainty continue, raising fresh concerns for the island's tourism-dependent economy.

Speaking after a European marketing trip culminating at the global travel trade fair ITB Berlin, Phuket Tourist Association President Thaneth Tantipiriyakij said the immediate impact of the conflict has been on airlines operating through Middle Eastern hubs, with several flights cancelled or adjusted as regional airspace

closures continue to disrupt long-haul routes.

"European tourists can still travel normally," Mr Thaneth said. "The main issue right now is airlines operating from the Middle East. Some flights have been cancelled or adjusted because of the conflict."

The disruption comes as tensions in the region have forced airlines to reroute or suspend services through major Gulf aviation hubs, affecting passengers travelling between Europe and Southeast Asia.

Many long-haul travellers who would normally transit through major Middle Eastern airports are now being forced to reroute through alternative aviation networks, he explained.

"In many cases travellers are switching to Asian airlines such as Thai Airways or connecting through European carriers instead," Mr Thaneth said.

"Return travel to Thailand is still possible, but some passengers who originally planned to fly with Middle Eastern airlines must change their route."

Although Phuket does not heavily depend on Middle Eastern carriers, the disruption still affects the island's international visitor flows, particularly those travelling from Europe via Gulf hub airports.

According to tourism data compiled from the Travelink Dashboard and Phuket Immigration, a total of 1,239,748 foreign tourists arrived in Phuket during January and February this year.

Those visitors travelled on 5,777 flights operated by 68 airlines from 89 cities worldwide, reflecting the island's wide international connectivity.

Of those arrivals, 73,965 travellers – around 6% – arrived via Middle Eastern airlines, including services operated by Qatar Airways, Emirates and Etihad Airways.

"While the proportion is relatively small, certain markets are more directly exposed to the conflict, particularly Israel and Gulf countries, which together account for roughly 2-3% of Phuket's tourism market," Mr Thaneth said.

"If the conflict escalates or continues for an extended period, the Israeli market could decline..."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

NEWS PAGE 3

Oil panic sees fuel rush at petrol stations



LIFE PAGE 8

Tracing local wildlife to the Jurassic age



SPORT PAGE 16

Phuket hosts historic pony jump event



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News



Big Buddha opens under rules > p5

Iran war raises tourism fears

Continued from page 1

...by 70-90%, while arrivals from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries could drop by around 70%," he added.

EUROPEAN TRAVEL AT GREATER RISK

While direct Middle Eastern visitor numbers represent a relatively small share of Phuket's tourism base, industry leaders say the bigger concern lies in the knock-on effect on European travel.

Many flights between Europe and Southeast Asia rely on large Middle Eastern transit hubs for connections, meaning prolonged disruption could reduce travel capacity and increase ticket prices.

"If the situation continues for one to two months, the Western European market could fall by around 13%, which would reduce Phuket's total tourist arrivals by roughly 4-5%," Mr Thaneth said.

When combined with the potential loss of travellers from Israel and Gulf markets, Phuket could see a total short-term decline of between 7% and 10% in visitor numbers, according to the association's analysis.

Despite the risks, Mr Thaneth said the island's tourism base remains relatively diversified.

Visitors from Russia, India, China and the Asia-Pacific region account for more than 60% of Phuket's tourist arrivals, many travelling on routes that do not depend on Middle Eastern hub airports.

"The situation is not yet critical," he said, "but it requires close monitoring."

NATIONAL RISKS

The conflict has also raised broader concerns for Thailand's national tourism industry, which remains one of the country's most important economic sectors.

According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand aims to welcome 36.7 million international tourists in 2026, generating around B2 trillion in tourism revenue.

However, officials have warned that prolonged disruption to global aviation routes could significantly affect those targets.

Caretaker Tourism and Sports Minister Artthakorn Sirilattayakorn said a worst-case scenario could see foreign arrivals fall by up to 25%, reducing visitor numbers to between 27mn and 29mn travellers if the conflict continues for more than three months.

A more moderate scenario – if the war ends within three months – could result in an 18% decline, with total arrivals reaching around 30-31mn visitors.

In the most optimistic scenario, if tensions ease within two to four weeks, the impact on tourism would be minimal, with arrivals falling by only about 2%.

For now, however, officials say it is too early to determine the full economic impact.

Tourism authorities are focusing on diversifying



Photo: Phuket Tourist Police

promotional campaigns toward short-haul and regional markets to reduce reliance on long-haul travel routes.

"We still have to do our best to maintain arrival flows during the Easter and Songkran holidays," Mr Artthakorn said.

EUROPE PUSH

The warning comes as Phuket tourism officials step up efforts to strengthen long-haul markets in Europe despite the geopolitical uncertainty.

Mr Thaneth and other tourism representatives travelled to Europe last week as part of a marketing delegation organised ahead of ITB Berlin, one of the world's largest travel industry exhibitions.

The delegation held promotional roadshows in Madrid and Paris before attending the Berlin event from Mar 3-5.

The Madrid event marked a relatively new marketing effort for Phuket, targeting the Spanish market, which tourism leaders believe holds long-term potential despite not yet

being a major source of visitors.

Around 40 Spanish tour company representatives attended the business-to-business roadshow, with many expressing interest in Phuket as a destination.

However, the lack of direct flights between Spain and Phuket remains a key barrier to growth.

A similar industry event in Paris also drew about 40 European tour operators, with positive feedback from the French travel trade.

During the visit, Phuket tourism officials also met executives from Air France to discuss the possibility of expanding direct flights between Paris and Phuket.

Industry leaders told *The Phuket News* increasing direct long-haul flights is critical to reducing Phuket's dependence on transit hubs in the Middle East.

VALUE SHIFT

At ITB Berlin, Thapanee Kiatphaibool, Governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, outlined a broader strategy to strengthen Thailand's long-haul tourism sector.

The agency is promoting a new campaign positioning Thailand under the concept 'Unforgettable Experience: Healing is the New Luxury', targeting travellers seeking wellness, sustainability and high-quality travel experiences.

Ms Thapanee said the strategy reflects a shift toward 'value over volume' tourism, focusing on higher-spending visitors, longer stays and sustainable growth rather than simply increasing arrival numbers.

European markets remain particularly important for this strategy, she said. In 2025 Thailand welcomed 965,898 visitors from Germany, an increase of 10.6% year-on-year.

German tourism also continued to grow at the start of this year, with 115,700 German visitors arriving in Thailand during January, up 2.55% compared with the same period last year.

European travellers are among Thailand's most valuable tourists, staying longer and spending more than many regional markets.

On average, German visitors spend 15.58 nights in Thailand per trip, with strong demand for beach holidays, wellness tourism, nature travel and slower 'experience-focused' itineraries.

At the Berlin event, the Tourism Authority of Thailand led a delegation of 165 Thai tourism operators in business negotiations with international buyers and travel companies.

The agency said participation in the event is expected to generate more than B5.5 billion in economic value through business deals and future travel bookings.

ON WATCH

Meanwhile, Phuket Governor Nirat Pongsitthavorn said provincial authorities are closely monitoring developments in the Middle East but stressed that the overall impact on the island remains limited for now.

"Some airlines have adjusted flight schedules in response to the evolving conflict, but travel to and from Phuket is still operating normally," he said.

Passengers are advised to check their flight status with airlines at least 24 hours before departure, he added.

Mr Nirat said tourist arrivals to Phuket remain broadly stable and continue to follow normal seasonal travel patterns, with strong European demand helping offset fluctuations linked to the Ramadan travel period.

"European markets have continued to show strong growth," he said.

Provincial authorities are also monitoring security concerns and misinformation related to the conflict, with surveillance in key tourist areas operating around the clock.

Local officials are coordinating with national security agencies to ensure visitor safety and maintain confidence in Phuket as a travel destination.

Hotels urged to waive fees over flight chaos

THE PHUKET TOURIST Association and the Thai Hotels Association – Southern Chapter have called on hotel operators and tourism businesses across Phuket to waive rescheduling and cancellation fees for guests affected by flight suspensions linked to unrest in the Middle East.

In a joint statement issued to members, hotel operators and tourists, the associations said recent tensions in the Middle East have prompted several airlines from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other international routes to temporarily

suspend or adjust flight schedules.

As a result, some tourists have been unable to travel to Thailand and Phuket as planned, while others currently staying on the island are unable to return home according to their original itineraries.

The associations described the situation as a force majeure event beyond the control of both tourists and tourism operators.

To help mitigate the impact, maintain traveller confidence and uphold Thailand's reputation as a leading global destination, the associations urged tourism businesses in Phuket to adopt

supportive measures for affected guests.

They recommended that hotels consider waiving fees for date changes and cancellations directly related to the flight disruptions. Operators were also encouraged to offer special or reasonable rates for guests who need to extend their stays due to travel delays.

In addition, the associations asked hotels and tourism businesses to provide timely travel information and necessary assistance to affected visitors.

"The cooperation of all stakeholders at this time will reflect Thailand's strong spirit of

hospitality and help preserve the positive image of Phuket as a high-quality destination for international travellers," the statement said.

The associations expressed appreciation for the understanding and continued support of tourism operators during what they described as a challenging period for international travel.

Monchai Tanode, General Manager of Phuket International Airport, confirmed that there are currently no stranded passengers at the airport, as most tourists were aware of the situation and postponed their trips from last weekend.



Phuket Tourist Association President Thaneth Tantipiriyakij. Photo: PTA

However, from Feb 28 to Mar 2, a total of 25 flights were cancelled – 13 inbound and 12 outbound – affecting more than 6,000 passengers.

The affected airlines include Qatar Airways, Air Arabia, Emirates, Etihad Airways and Unicair, as well as Israeli airlines operating connecting routes.

The Phuket News

Oil panic spurs fuel rush

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Motorists across Phuket rushed to petrol stations last week amid fears of fuel shortages and price hikes triggered by escalating tensions in the Middle East, prompting inspections by authorities after some outlets temporarily ran out of certain fuel types.

Long queues formed at petrol stations across the island on Mar 3 after Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul revealed that Thailand's oil reserves could last about 60 days if no additional imports were secured, raising concern about the country's energy security.

Drivers began lining up from early morning, with queues stretching beyond forecourts and onto nearby roads in several areas. Some residents were also seen bringing containers to store fuel, reflecting public anxiety about possible supply disruptions.

The surge in demand came after the Ministry of Energy confirmed that

Thailand holds about 7.66 billion litres of fuel reserves, including legally mandated stockpiles and crude oil shipments already in transit. Officials said the reserves would be sufficient for roughly 60 days of consumption in a worst-case scenario where no new imports arrive.

During inspections on Mar 3, Phuket Provincial Commerce Office Chief Waranit Apiratjirawong confirmed that a Caltex petrol station in Phuket Town had temporarily run out of Gasohol 95 due to unusually high demand combined with a temporary pause in fuel deliveries during the holiday period.

Further inspections in Phuket Town and Thalang District over the following two days found that some stations had run out of certain fuels, including Gasohol 91, E20 and diesel, while awaiting new deliveries.

Officials said some outlets operated by PTT Public Company Limited, Bangchak Corporation and PTG Energy had temporarily



Photo: PR Phuket

run out of certain fuel types. However, stations operated by Shell and Caltex were able to continue selling all fuel products as normal.

Authorities said the overall situation remained orderly and there was no evidence of fuel hoarding by petrol station operators.

Fuel price adjustments announced on the same day added to public concern. Shell raised the price of Gasohol and E20 by B1.50 per litre and diesel by B4.20 per litre, while Caltex increased Gasohol and E20

by B0.90 per litre and diesel by B1.80 per litre. Other operators maintained existing prices.

Airin Phanrit, Deputy Spokesperson for the Prime Minister's Office, said authorities are closely monitoring the situation and ensuring that essential goods remain available.

Businesses must clearly display prices and comply with the Price Control Act B.E. 2542 (1999), she said.

Violations such as unjustified price increases or hoarding goods carry penalties of up to seven

years' imprisonment, a fine of up to B140,000, or both.

United States, West Africa and Malaysia.

Officials also warned that storing fuel in large quantities can be illegal and dangerous if done improperly. Motorists were advised to refuel vehicles only as needed and avoid bringing containers to petrol stations unless required for occupational purposes.

FREEZE

In response, Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul ordered that diesel prices be frozen at B29.94 per litre for 15 days, with the measure applied nationwide at stations operated by PTT. The government said the price cap will remain in effect until Mar 17, when the situation will be reviewed.

Officials from the Department of Energy Business urged the public not to hoard fuel, stressing that domestic supplies remain sufficient.

Deputy Permanent Secretary and Energy Ministry spokesperson Veerapat Kiattifuengfu said authorities had held urgent talks with oil traders to ensure continued supply and diversify crude oil imports away from the Middle East.

Thailand imports only part of its crude oil from the region, he said, and efforts are underway to secure additional supplies from countries including the

RESERVES BOOSTED

Amid the concerns, the government later confirmed that new supply agreements had increased Thailand's effective fuel reserves to about 95 days of consumption.

Energy Minister Atthapol Rerkpipibun said the additional reserves were secured through new import arrangements from suppliers outside the Middle East, helping reduce the country's exposure to disruptions in the region.

The government has also increased the national reserve requirement for oil traders, raising the mandatory stockpile ratio from 1% to 3% to strengthen energy security.

Flight chaos prompts overstay amnesty

MIDDLE EAST FLIGHT DISRUPTIONS have prompted the Immigration Bureau to waive overstay fines for stranded foreign travellers, as authorities also tighten screening measures at Thailand's major airports amid heightened security concerns.

The announcement, reported by Phuket Immigration, follows airspace closures and flight cancellations after attacks targeting key aviation hubs in the Middle East, including Dubai and Qatar. Passengers unable to depart Thailand due to the disruptions will not face overstay penalties if they intend to travel onward once flights resume.

The Immigration Bureau said the move forms part of a broader package of measures aimed at strengthening the screening of foreign nationals, tackling transnational crime and easing congestion at airport immigration halls.

Under the temporary measure, foreign nationals stranded by Middle East-related flight disruptions – and whose permits to stay expired on or after Feb 28 – will have overstay fines waived if they can demonstrate onward travel plans.

Travellers wishing to remain in Thailand temporarily may apply for a 30-day extension of stay, supported by certification from their embassy.

The policy follows multiple flight cancellations after attacks and regional airspace closures on Feb 28 disrupted travel through the Gulf. Authorities said about 22 outbound and 12 inbound flights across around 10 airlines were affected, leaving some passengers unable to depart as scheduled.



The Immigration Bureau also said enhanced screening measures are also being introduced to prevent transnational criminal groups from exploiting Thailand's tourism recovery.

According to immigration spokesperson Choengron Rimpadee, officers have been instructed to intensify checks targeting foreign call centre gangs and so-called "grey capital" networks that may attempt to relocate operations to Thailand following crackdowns in neighbouring countries.

Additional scrutiny is also being applied to travellers linked to regions affected by the Middle East conflict.

Officials said the measures aim to balance faster passenger processing with stronger security.

"Airport immigration must strengthen screening measures while managing rising passenger volumes," Pol Maj Gen Choengron said. "These steps are necessary to protect national security and maintain confidence in Thailand's border controls."

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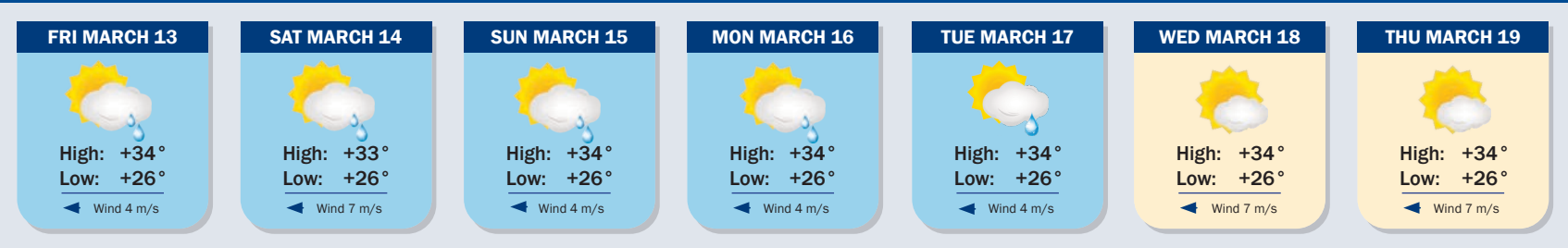
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Officials curb nudity on beaches

POLICE INSPECTED a small beach in Rawai last Friday (Mar 6) following orders from Phuket Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn to crack down on public nudity at Phuket beaches.

Officers from the Tourist Police Bureau carried out the inspection after images circulating on social media showed tourists appearing nude on a public beach in Rawai.

Tourist Police patrol officers conducted the inspection in cooperation with Rawai Municipality, led by Mayor Thames Kraithat.

Officials confirmed the incident took place at a small, relatively secluded beach about 100 metres long that requires a walk of roughly 200 metres from the nearest road. At the time, about 20 tourists were swimming in the area.

Following the inspection, Tourist Police co-

ordinated with Rawai Municipality to increase patrols at beaches and tourist areas in line with the governor's policy.

Authorities have also begun installing multilingual signs informing visitors of rules governing behaviour in public areas, including the prohibition on nudity. Officers are also advising tourists about Thai laws and appropriate conduct in public spaces.

The crackdown follows a directive issued by Governor Nirat on Mar 5 ordering agencies to strengthen enforcement and public awareness after incidents of tourists appearing nude on Phuket beaches.

Officials are also seeking cooperation from embassies, hotels, tour companies and tourism businesses to help inform visitors about appropriate behaviour while travelling in Phuket.

The Phuket News

Van driver arrested for Sakhu hit-and-run

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Police have arrested a van driver accused of running over an injured motorcyclist and fleeing the scene near Phuket International Airport last week.

Officers from Sakhu Police confirmed the suspect was apprehended at about 10pm on Mar 4 at the KFC Oasis Phuket Airport outlet on Thepkrasattri-Nai Yang Rd in Bang Ma Lao, Sakhu.

The arrest followed a tip-off from a local resident who reported spotting a van believed to be involved in the incident. Police later confirmed the vehicle was a yellow-plated passenger van registered in Bangkok to Siam Taxi Cooperative Co Ltd.

Authorities declined to publicly release the driver's name.

The arrest followed the accident at 6:50am on Mar 3 on the road leading out of Phuket International Airport, in front of the Nai Yang Ice Factory in Moo 1, Sakhu.

Police and rescue workers from the Kusoldharm Phuket Foundation arrived at the scene to find



Photo: Sakhu Police

Kritsada Champathong, 39, of Mai Khao, lying face down on the road but still conscious after being thrown from his motorbike.

Witnesses said several vehicles were forced to brake suddenly after a pedestrian crossed the road.

According to eyewitnesses, the motorcycle ridden by Mr Kritsada was travelling behind a van and was unable to stop in time, causing it to collide with the rear of the vehicle and throw Mr Kritsada onto the road.

While Mr Kritsada was lying on the road, another van approaching from behind ran over him before continuing without stopping.

CCTV footage from nearby cameras reportedly captured the sequence of events, showing several

vehicles braking before the motorcycle struck the slowing van. The footage then shows a second van driving over the injured rider and leaving the scene.

Rescue workers provided emergency first aid before transporting Mr Kritsada to Thalang Hospital.

Police said Mr Kritsada, who works for Thai AirAsia in the aircraft parking area at the airport, suffered seven broken ribs, a punctured lung, chronic urinary retention and the amputation of his little finger, but is now in stable condition.

The van driver was charged with reckless driving causing serious injury and failing to stop and render assistance, police said, while adding that the investigation was continuing.

Tourist injured in Patong hotel fall

A 53-YEAR-OLD RUSSIAN tourist was seriously injured after falling from a fourth-floor hotel balcony in Patong on Mar 4.

Police were called to the scene, a hotel on Rat-U-Thit 200 Pi Rd, at 6:05pm

Officers led by Pol Lt Col Chanan Mekchai arrived with Phuket Tourist Police and rescue workers to find Iuliia Bondarenko, 53, lying injured on a second-floor level. She had suffered a head injury and multiple abrasions.

Rescue workers from the Kusoldharm Phuket Foundation provided first aid before she was taken to Patong Hospital and later transferred to Vachira Phuket Hospital.



Photo: Phuket Tourist Police

Police said Ms Bondarenko had arrived in Phuket earlier that day with her husband. He told officers the couple had been drinking in their room before an argument, after which she went onto the balcony and jumped.

At last report, police said they were reviewing CCTV footage and that the Russian Embassy had been notified. *Eakkapop Thongtub*

Raid nets 4,300 meth pills

FOUR SUSPECTS WERE arrested and more than 4,300 methamphetamine pills (ya bah) seized during a drug suppression raid at the sea gypsy village in Rawai last Friday (Mar 6).

The operation was conducted by the Mueang Phuket District Anti-Narcotics Operations Center together with a special operations unit from the district administration targeting suspected drug trafficking.

Deputy District Chief Thiti Bunyasathien led members of the Volunteer Defence Corps (OrSor) in surrounding and searching a house in Moo 2, Rawai.

Four suspects were arrested. A 26-year-old man was found with bundles of meth pills and faces charges of selling and distributing a Category 1 narcotic as well as drug use.



Photo: Mueang Phuket District Office

A 17-year-old suspect was arrested with 10 ya bah pills, 0.57 grammes of crystal meth and three shotgun shells, while two other suspects, both aged 20, were found with small quantities of ya bah.

In total, officers seized 4,348 ya bah pills, 0.57g of crystal meth and three rounds of ammunition.

All suspects and evidence were handed to police for further legal action. *The Phuket News*

Big Buddha reopens under scrutiny

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The tourist-popular Big Buddha viewpoint in Phuket reopened to the public last week under strict conditions after being closed for more than a year following the deadly 2024 landslide.

The landmark site, home to the giant statue of Phuket Big Buddha on the hills between Kata and Chalong, is now operating daily from 9am to 6pm under the management of Wat Kittisangharam (Wat Kata).

The reopening is subject to 25 conditions set by Thailand's Royal Forest Department, which governs the forest reserve land where the site sits. Temple officials confirmed the site will officially be known as 'Wat Kittisangharam (Big Buddha)', and will now be managed by the temple committee instead of the Phra Phuttha Ming Mongkol Sattha 45 Foundation, which previously oversaw the project.

Five monks from Wat Kata, under Abbot Phra Kru Wisutthikit-iyaphon, will be stationed at the site. Authorities have approved the use of 15 rai of land, while other parts of the hill remain under investigation.

A merit-making ceremony involving 77 monks was held on



Photo: Addy Patong / Facebook

Mar 2 to dedicate merit to victims of the landslide that struck the hillside below the statue on Aug 27, 2024. The disaster killed 13 people, injured many others and destroyed homes in Soi Patak 2 after heavy rain triggered a slope collapse.

Following the disaster, authorities ordered the site closed while safety and legal issues were investigated. According to temple committee member Satchapol Thongsom, the Forestry Depart-

ment later approved reopening the limited area on Dec 18, 2025, provided all operational conditions are strictly followed.

The requirements include protecting forest resources outside the permitted area, clearly marking boundaries, allowing official inspections and using the land only for approved religious purposes. Construction of additional permanent structures is prohibited without permission, and any environmental damage could result

in the permit being revoked.

Temple officials stressed the site will not be commercialised. Flowers, incense and candles will be provided for visitors, and donations will be used only for maintenance. Entry will initially be free during the first month while the temple evaluates operating costs and visitor numbers.

OBJECTIONS

The reopening comes despite a class-action lawsuit filed by residents affected by the landslide, which remains before the Phuket Provincial Court. The plaintiffs are seeking compensation from the foundation previously responsible for the site.

Phuket MP Chalermpong Saengdee has also raised concerns about safety, legal issues and transparency.

"My concerns are about the structure, unresolved legal cases and safety measures, especially regarding landslides," he said, adding that it remains unclear whether all permits from relevant agencies were properly issued. He also called for transparency in the handling of donations.

Residents affected by the disaster have also formally objected to reopening the site until safety concerns and compensation issues are resolved.

In a Feb 2 letter to the Phuket governor, community representative Pathomporn Koprasiropong called for reopening to be delayed pending an independent geological and engineering assessment of the hillside, improvements to drainage systems and investigations into possible land encroachment.

The letter also urged compensation for victims' families and a public hearing with affected communities.

Phuket Bar Association president Runnapa Phutkaew also questioned whether adequate engineering studies and landslide prevention measures have been implemented.

"If a similar incident occurs again, it would become a public hazard. The question is who would be responsible," she said.

She noted that the cause of the 2024 landslide remains central to the ongoing court case, with debate continuing over whether heavy rainfall alone caused the collapse or whether construction activity on the hill worsened the disaster.

Despite the concerns, temple officials say reopening the viewpoint aims to restore access to one of Phuket's most recognisable landmarks while ensuring operations fully comply with government regulations.

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Officials move to fix work permits

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Provincial officials are scrambling to resolve delays in the renewal and issuance of work permits affecting more than 130,000 foreign workers in Phuket, after mounting complaints from employers that the backlog is disrupting businesses across the island.

Phuket Vice Governor Teeraphong Chuaychoo has ordered urgent action after the issue was raised during the monthly meeting of labour agencies held at the Phuket Provincial Labour Office at Phuket Provincial Hall on Mar 4.

The meeting brought together the five main labour-related agencies operating in the province: the Phuket Provincial Labour Office, the Phuket Provincial Employment Office, Phuket Skills Development Institute 21, the Phuket Provincial Labour Protection and Welfare Office, and the Phuket Provincial Social Security Office.

Officials reviewed the operational results for February and discussed key challenges affecting the province's labour administration, including coordination with other agencies and obstacles affecting employment management.



Photo: NBT

However, the most pressing issue raised was the growing delay in issuing and renewing work permits for foreign workers.

Phuket Provincial Employment Office Chief Pichit Singthongkam told the meeting that the backlog stems from ongoing changes to the work permit processing system, which is currently in a transitional phase.

The Department of Employment introduced a nationwide outsourcing system on Oct 13, 2025, designed to modernise the process by allowing applications

and work permit issuance through the digital e-WorkPermit platform.

The system operates through more than 40 service units across Thailand and was intended to improve efficiency, transparency and convenience for employers and workers.

In Phuket, however, the system has struggled to keep pace with demand.

The island's large foreign workforce has created a heavy volume of applications that exceeds the processing capacity of the outsourced service provider

responsible for producing and issuing the permits.

Officials warned that the delays are affecting a wide range of businesses, particularly those in the tourism industry, which relies heavily on foreign labour.

Employers have filed continuous complaints about the slow renewal process, saying it is disrupting hiring plans and delaying employment approvals for workers already in the system.

According to statistics from the Phuket Provincial Employment Office, as of October 2025 the island had a total of 138,244 foreign workers.

Of those, 121,198 workers are from the four main neighbouring nationalities commonly employed in Thailand, while 16,260 are classified as general foreign workers from other countries. Another 503 workers fall under the investment promotion category and 283 are ethnic minority workers.

Officials said the scale of the workforce reflects both Phuket's dependence on foreign labour and the large administrative burden involved in processing work permits.

Mr Teeraphong acknowledged the seriousness of the delays and instructed the Phuket Provincial Employment Office to urgently develop solutions.

He said the province will soon convene a meeting with employers and relevant agencies to discuss practical measures to accelerate the process.

Provincial authorities stressed that they are aware of the problem and intend to address it quickly.

"We are not ignoring this issue," officials said during the meeting, adding that the province will take concrete steps to resolve the backlog and prevent further disruption to the local economy.

Mr Pichit explained that the main bottleneck lies in the production stage of work permits through the outsourced system, which currently lacks sufficient capacity to handle the large number of applications submitted by employers in Phuket.

As a temporary measure, the Phuket Provincial Employment Office has begun coordinating closely with the outsourcing company responsible for the service.

Additional officers have been assigned to work at the Foreign Work Permit Service Center in Phuket to assist the public, monitor the process and report developments to central authorities.

The officers will also oversee the operations of the outsourcing service provider and evaluate its performance to ensure it meets the required standards.

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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.

First Thais evacuated from Iran arrive at Suvarnabhumi

BANGKOK

AFP

The first group of Thais evacuated from Iran since the start of its war with the United States and Israel arrived in Bangkok on Monday (Mar 9), with some lauding Tehran and its slain supreme leader.

The group of 29, including domestic workers, university students and children, landed at Suvarnabhumi airport after crossing into Turkey from Iran over the weekend.

Mizan Kepan, a 34-year-old psychology student who was evacuated from Iran, called the Islamic republic's late Ayatollah Ali Khamenei "our spiritual leader whom we loved very much".

The United States and Israel began air strikes against Iran on Feb 28, killing Khamenei and prompting a wave of retaliatory attacks across the Gulf.

"Everyone who sees what is happening today can



Thai nationals evacuated from Iran with Sihasak Phuanketkeow (right) at Suvarnabhumi airport in Bangkok on Monday (Mar 9). Photo: AFP

see which powerful countries are the most brutal," Mizan said, noting a strike on an elementary school in southern Iran that the country's authorities said killed at least 150 people, mostly students.

US President Donald Trump has blamed Iran for the strike, while Tehran has blamed Washington. A *New York Times* investigation has found the US military was most likely responsible.

Another Thai student, who arrived in Bangkok with her husband and three children held a portrait of Khamenei while walking through the airport, remarking: "Iran will prevail."

Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow, who

greeted evacuees at the airport, said their journey was difficult, but urged Thais remaining in Iran to leave.

About 110,000 Thais were living in the Middle East, including around 65,000 in Israel and about 250 in Iran, according to the ministry.

FUEL PRICE CURBS

Meanwhile, the Cabinet was set to approve a series of short- and medium-term energy management measures on Tuesday to cope with surging global energy prices driven by the conflict in the Middle East.

The government held an emergency meeting on Monday chaired by Prime

Minister Anutin Charnvirakul.

A 15-day diesel price freeze was extended while petrol prices will be adjusted incrementally through mechanisms managed by PTT, confirmed Transport Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn.

Finance Minister Ekniti Nitithanprapas said that, with global oil prices continuing to rise, Thailand must adapt quickly to reduce reliance on expensive fossil fuels. One way to achieve that is to promote the use of ethanol-based fuels.

Therefore, the Energy Ministry is moving to promote the wider use of ethanol fuels produced from sugarcane and cassava, which will add to the crops' value while expanding alternative energy options, he said.

Addressing concerns about the nation's oil reserves, Mr Ekniti said the country has enough oil reserves to last over 90 days without new imports.

- Additional reporting by Bangkok Post

Russian Ambassador praises Thai neutrality

BANGKOK



Tomikhin. Photo: Bangkok Post

EVGENY TOMIKHIN, the Russian ambassador to Thailand, has praised the country's longstanding stance of neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which he says is reflective of its balanced approach to international relations and the historical ties between the two nations.

"Thailand decided from the very beginning to remain neutral and follow a balanced line in international matters concerning this situation," he said, adding Moscow values this stance and continues to engage in dialogue with Thai government authorities, universities, researchers and journalists.

The ambassador met Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul to discuss bilateral issues, geopolitical developments and Russia's perspective on the war on Feb 24, the fourth anniversary of the Russia-Ukraine war.

He accused Western nations of provoking and prolonging the war in

Ukraine, arguing the conflict is part of a centuries-long pattern of attempts to weaken Russia. He claimed Western governments are fuelling the fighting by supplying weapons and resources while avoiding direct involvement.

He described the war as a "hybrid conflict", involving not only military operations but also information campaigns and political manoeuvring designed to undermine peace talks. Despite negotiations in Geneva, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, "provocative actions" from the West continue to escalate tensions.

Tomikhin said Thailand's position reflects its tradition of friendship with Russia, dating back to 1897 when diplomatic relations were first established between King Rama V and Tsar Nicholas II.

Bangkok Post



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Photos: Simon Lomas



Tracing Phuket wildlife to the Jurassic era

Simon Lomas

An innocent photo taken of a bird in my back yard recently prompted childhood memories of studying dinosaurs at school, leaving me curious whether any species currently present in Phuket could be traced back to the Jurassic period.

It all started after I snapped a couple photos of a Little Cormorant in the water pool outside my balcony. This bird is there every day, diving for fish before perching on a small log with its wings outstretched, drying in the sun. This is where the history lesson in school about dinosaurs came into my mind. Yes, we all know the main ones such as the T.Rex and Triceratops that were in all the movies. But the photos reminded me of Archaeopteryx – one, if not the first, of the feathered birds.

The Archaeopteryx evolved in the area that is now southern Germany around 150 million years ago when Europe was a warm tropical sea, full of islands and much closer to the equator than it is today. A quick check revealed that the Cormorant is a very old species of bird that has been around for around 35mn years. There are different types and subspecies that all evolved to match their environment over time, but the Cormorant in various guises goes right back to the dinosaurs that died out 65mn years ago. Looking at the photo in the pond out the back and comparing it to fossils and the like of Archaeopteryx, they look remarkably similar.

Then there are the various types of Hornbill present in Thailand that occasionally surface in Phuket. The Hornbills have also been knocking around for a very, very long time,

around 48 to 50mn years. They originated in Africa before spreading to Asia, in a similar manner to humanity. Around 22mn years ago the species split into ground-dwelling and tree-dwelling Hornbills, with the ones similar to what we have today emerging around 19mn years ago. However, Hornbills are believed to have split from their closest living relative, the Hoopoes, around 75mn years ago, meaning they survived the dinosaurs' extinction. Today, there are over 60 recognised species of Hornbills, with the highest diversity found in Asia.

Ancient

Others that surprised me include Herons, Egrets and Storks. We have a fair few types here in Phuket seen on the beaches, ponds and water holes. Herons (family Ardeidae) are a fairly ancient group of birds, with fossils in the family dating as far back as 60mn years. While the family emerged shortly after the dinosaurs (Paleogene period), modern-looking Heron species appeared more recently, around 7mn years ago, with some of the current types arriving during The Miocene Epoch (23 to 5.3mn years ago). Some specific species have remained largely unchanged for millions of years; for instance, the Great Blue Heron has existed in its current form for over 1.5 to 1.8mn years.

Then there is the Grey Faced Buzzard. There are many birds of prey in Phuket such as the Oriental Honey Buzzard, White Bellied Sea Eagle, Brahminy Kite, Booted Eagle, Peregrine Falcon and the Grey Faced Buzzard. What surprised me is that Eagles seem to be the most recently evolved. Eagles, Hawks and Kites all came from the family Accipitridae and split into their own species at various times since. Kites seem to have been the first to evolve around 36mn years ago. Based on biological research, the evolutionary timeline indicates that an ancient group of birds recognised as Kites appeared around 36mn years ago and Eagles are believed to have descended from this, with the first to emerge Sea Eagles, followed by Booted Eagles. This interested me as the White Bellied Sea Eagle and Booted Eagle are a common sight in Phuket.

While they share a common ancestor within the family Accipitridae, Kites are generally considered a more ancient line of birds. However, the genus Butastur (which includes the Grey Faced Buzzard) belongs to the family Accipitridae, with origins in the Early Eocene (about 50mn years ago). The Grey Faced was one of the early Buzzards but in its current form is only around 300,000 years old.



An interesting fact I did not know is that Falcons are NOT part of that group and are descended from the same family as parrots. Falcons (family Falconidae) evolved from, or are closely related to, an ancestral group of predatory birds in the Southern Hemisphere, around 50 to 60mn years ago. They belong to the group Australaves, sharing a more recent common ancestor with parrots and songbirds than with Hawks or Eagles. Falcons evolved approximately 50 to 35mn years ago, with earlier raptorial ancestors dating back 58 to 55mn years, while modern Falcons began diversifying around 7.5mn years ago, likely originating in Africa, or Eurasia. The Peregrine Falcon diverged roughly 3 to 8mn years ago and is the fastest bird on the planet, reaching speeds over 200mph in its hunting dive, known as a stoop, with some estimates reaching up to 238mph.

Many birds that have been flying Phuket skies in their current form trace back before even the earliest humans set foot on the planet, some to the time of the dinosaurs. Yes, flightless birds such as Ostriches, Emus and Cassowaries are older but, of course, they do not inhabit Phuket. All wildlife interests me, particularly evolution and how nature determined certain shapes, colours and traits were key to the survival of certain species. I am not a paleontologist or evolutionary biologist but was amazed that this discovery came from just a couple of photos from my balcony while drinking coffee and I hope this read provides a nice differential from the news we take in every day.



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Divisive but near perfect dark horror

David Griffiths

Very few films being released this year have me as excited as *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple*. The original *28 Days Later* is a cult classic and, while *28 Weeks Later* was a complete let down, the sins of the past were forgotten when director Danny Boyle and screenwriter Alex Garland returned to the helm with *28 Years Later* – a film that stayed true to the franchise while incorporating a modern artistic feel.

Now comes *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple*, a film that rightfully has fans nervous. Once again Boyle moves to the bench because the person in charge this time around is the surprising choice of Nia DaCosta. DaCosta hasn't exactly set the world alight so far as they directed the remake of *Candyman* and then delved into the Marvel universe with the lukewarm received *The Marvels*. The saving grace with *The Bone Temple* seems to be the fact that once again the brilliant Alex Garland has penned the screenplay.

28 Years Later: The Bone Temple picks up straight after the events of the previous film. After his encounter with Sir Jimmy Crystal (Jack O'Connell – *Sinners*), Spike (Alfie Williams – *28 Years Later*) is literally left fighting for his life.

It turns out that Jimmy believes that he is the son of Lucifer and has managed to convince a group of young teens that it was his father who caused the 'plague' to destroy the world. He has given Spike an ultimatum either be killed or successfully kill one of his gang in a knife fight.

After miraculously winning the fight Alfie becomes one of Jimmy's fingers and soon learns that the gang roams the countryside torturing people that Jimmy believes his father wants punished. And while Spike is forced to go along with it he soon learns that another of the fingers, known as Ink (Erin Kellyman –



Jack O'Connell, Erin Kellyman, Maura Bird, Alfie Williams, Ghazi Al Ruffai in *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple*. Photo: IMDb

Solo: A Stars Wars Story), is beginning to doubt Sir Jimmy's story.

In a bid to 'prove' his story Jimmy sets a path that will see him go up against Dr Kelson (Ralph Fiennes – *Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows*), who has managed to befriend one of the zombies, known as Samson (Chi Lewis-Parry – *Gladiator II*), and is now experimenting on him.

Dark horror

This is a film that is going to divide audiences. Some will see the deviation from that would consider the main events of this new world a waste of time while others will see the exploration of deep topics such as Satanism as a piece of creative genius from Alex Garland who once again shows why he is currently the world's best screenwriter with a screenplay that is filled with drama, suspense and tension throughout the film.

Perhaps the biggest surprise of *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple* is just how much both DaCosta and Garland let the film delve into dark horror. Some of the torture scenes going into the territory that Rob Zombie made famous with films like *The Devil Rejects*.

While some may argue that they are difficult to watch they are also an important element of why this film so different to anything else in cinemas at the moment.

The darker feel of the film also allows the cast to put in some truly memorable performances. Ralph Fiennes is in his element here – whether it be a scene where he is forced to cover himself in blood or dance erratically to Duran Duran, he delivers with one of the best performances of his career. Nobody quite plays crazy like Fiennes and it is a bit of a surprise that his performance here didn't warrant some attention during awards season.

Fiennes is also well supported by Alfie Williams and Jack O'Connell. As he did in *28 Years Later*, Williams once again acts well beyond his age and no matter how confronting the scenes are that he is acting in he is a true professional who has a huge career ahead of him. Then there is O'Connell, who seems to relish in some of the darker sides of his character. Like Fiennes he is one of the reasons why this film will be long remembered.

I am still a little confused as to why Nia DaCosta directed this film when I would have thought that Danny Boyle would have been perfect for the job, but I am glad she did. She brings a darker element to the franchise and together with the images created by cinematographer Sean Bobbitt (*12 Years A Slave*) puts together a near perfect film.

28 Years Later: The Bone Collector is currently screening in Phuket and is classified 18+.

4/5 Stars

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

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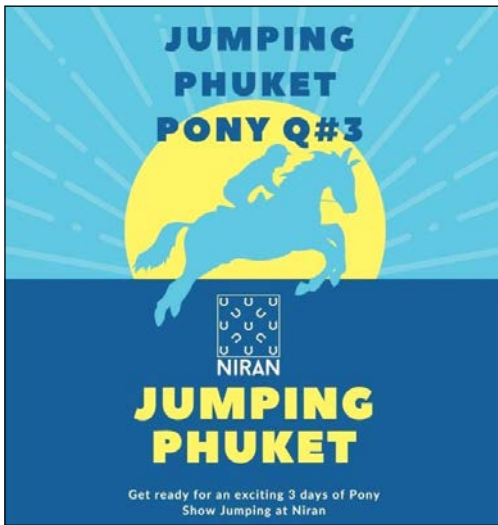
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FRI 20 MAR



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

SUN 22 MAR



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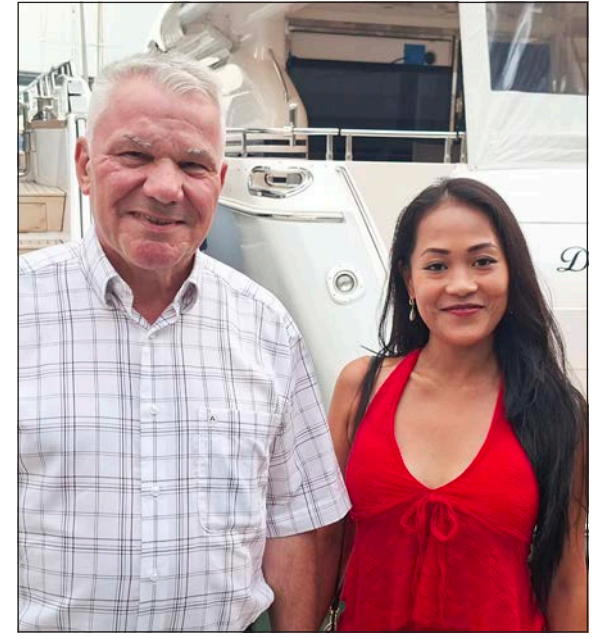
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GROW BOATING PHUKET EVENING - MAR 2026

Great to see many new and regular attendees at the Grow Boating Evening held on March 6 at the RPM Members' Lounge at the Royal Phuket Marina. Thanks to the drinks sponsor for the evening Royal Phuket Marina, a distinguished world-class destination that combines luxury waterfront living with an award-winning, state-of-the-art marina. The delicious buffet was also sponsored by Royal Phuket Marina. Come and join in the fun next month, everyone is welcome and there is no entry fee. Find us on Facebook at facebook.com/GrowBoatingPhuket



Mercedes set gold standard

FORMULA ONE

AFP

George Russell claimed victory at the Australian Grand Prix last Sunday (Mar 8) to open the season with a bang as Mercedes showed they are clear early pacesetters under sweeping new regulations.

Mercedes came into the Melbourne race as the pre-season favourites and lived up to the billing.

After a front-row lockout in qualifying, pole-sitter Russell weathered an early battle with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc to claim a statement victory over teammate Kimi Antonelli.

Russell called the win "very sweet" and team chief Toto Wolff is confident they have a package that can challenge for the drivers' and constructors' world title.

"To see us take a solid 1-2 in race one with the season ahead hopefully means we can try and fight for a world championship," said Wolff.

"It will take a lot of hard work and we know our



Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli (left) and George Russell (centre) with third-placed Charles Leclerc of Ferrari on the podium in Melbourne. Photo: AFP

competitors will be chasing us down, but this is exactly how we wanted to start the year."

Melbourne was the first race under F1's most radical regulation overhaul in years, with cars smaller and lighter and the power units now 50% battery.

Russell said drivers should give the new rules time, but the likes of Lando Norris and Max Verstappen were not impressed.

"We've come from the best cars ever made in Formula One, and the nicest

to drive, to probably the worst. It sucks," McLaren world champion Norris raged.

"Everyone knows what the issues are. It's just the fact the engine is a 50-50 (combustion-electric) split and it just doesn't work."

Williams' Carlos Sainz said the public criticism by drivers was "self-harming" for the sport and should be kept private.

NO FEAR

Just one rookie started their first full season as an F1

driver in Australia and 18-year-old Arvid Lindblad showed no fear.

In his first F1 race, the Racing Bulls driver stormed to a composed eighth, surging as high as third at one point.

The Briton finished ahead of a slew of more experienced competitors including teammate Liam Lawson after showing his potential all weekend.

"I know I'm sort of the 'young kid' and I'm the rookie, but when I'm in the car, I'm a fierce compet-

itor," said Lindblad, who has Indian heritage.

"I'm going to take every opportunity I get, and I think I showed that."

Lindblad replaced Isack Hadjar, who moved up to partner Verstappen at Red Bull.

There is always speculation how the midfield will shape up at the start of each season behind the big four of McLaren, Ferrari, Red Bull and Mercedes.

Haas, Racing Bulls and Audi (formerly Sauber) staked an early claim to be "best of the rest" in Melbourne with all three getting cars into the top 10.

Ollie Bearman in his Haas finished seventh, with teammate Esteban Ocon 11th.

"To come away with P7 for the team is unbelievable – only beaten by the top four teams," said team chief Ayao Komatsu.

"We have a huge learning curve over the next few races but I don't think we could have started the year any better."

QUICK FIX

Silverstone-based Aston

Martin endured a horror start after serious issues with their Honda power unit and a lack of spare parts.

Amid fears that extreme vibration in the chassis could cause permanent nerve damage, Fernando Alonso and Lance Stroll were never going to challenge.

Team boss and design maestro Adrian Newey said he felt "powerless" as new partner Honda work on the problem.

"It's not going to be a quick fix," he warned.

Cadillac made its debut in Melbourne – the first independent constructor to enter the sport since Haas in 2016.

It was a rude awakening with Sergio Perez 16th and last, three laps behind, and Valtteri Bottas failing to finish.

But team principal Graeme Lowdon was happy with how they started.

"We're up against incredible competition, who we have huge respect for, but I've got enormous belief in the team that we're building here," he said.

Semi-final heartache for Thai ace Kunlavut

BADMINTON

KUNLAVUT VITIDSARN bowed out in the semi-finals of the US\$1.45 million (B46mn) All England Open in Birmingham last Saturday (Mar 7).

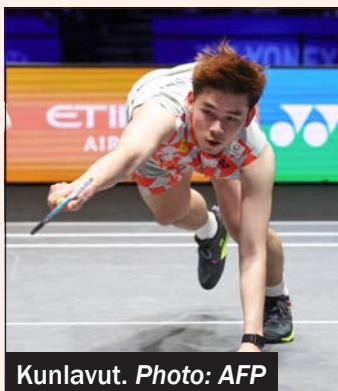
The Thai second seed went down to Taiwan's Lin Chun-Yi after a three-game battle, 14-21, 21-18, 16-21, in 78 minutes at Utilita Arena Birmingham.

Despite the defeat, reaching the semi-finals of the sport's oldest tournament was Kunlavut's best effort in Birmingham.

The 24-year-old had previously fallen at the last 16 stage on six occasions at the Birmingham tournament.

He returned to No.1 in the world when the new BWF rankings were released on Tuesday (Mar 10), replacing China's Shi Yuqi, who was upset in the first round on Mar 3 by India's Lakshya Sen.

Lin Chun-Yi defeated Sen to win the men's singles title,



Kunlavut. Photo: AFP

while Wang Zhiyi of China overcame world No.1 and Paris 2024 Olympic champion An Se-young of South Korea to claim the women's singles title.

South Korea's Kim Won Ho and Seo Seung Jae beat Malaysia's Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik in the men's doubles, Liu Sheng Shu and Tan Ning of China defeated South Korea's Baek Ha Na and Lee So Hee in the women's doubles, and Ye Hong Wei and Nicole Gonzales Chan of Taiwan beat France's Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue in the mixed doubles final.

Bangkok Post

India win record T20 World Cup

CRICKET

INDIA COACH GAUTAM GAMBHIR praised his team's "bravery and courage" in racking up big totals to win a record third T20 World Cup title last Sunday (Mar 8).

Suryakumar Yadav's India hammered New Zealand by 96 runs in a one-sided final in Ahmedabad after they posted a massive 255-5 batting first.

Opener Sanju Samson's 89 laid the platform for India to score more than 250 for a second straight match, after their seven-run semi-final win over England, and for the third time in the tournament.

"If you score 250-plus runs in the semi-final and final then it shows the kind of quality and the kind of bravery and courage we played the tournament," Gambhir said.

"We did not want to fear losing, high-risk, high-reward is an important thing in this format.

"I would have been happy to get bowled out for 110-120 but our target is 250. Captain also wanted to play this brand of cricket, so credit needs to go to the captain as well."

Gambhir, who replaced Rahul Dravid as coach after the T20 World Cup triumph in 2024, was under fire coming into the tournament after home defeats in other formats.



India's players celebrate their record win. Photo: AFP

India were beaten 2-0 by South Africa in a Test series last year and New Zealand won an ODI series 2-1.

"My accountability is not towards any social media talk, my accountability is towards the 30 in my team" said Gambhir on facing criticism.

"Whether I have won two ICC (International Cricket Council) trophies or not those 30 people matter to me the most."

India won the ODI Champions Trophy and the T20 Asia Cup last year under two-time World Cup winner Gambhir.

Gambhir, 44, credited captain Suryakumar, who sat alongside the coach in the press conference, for the T20 success.

"Surya has made my life a lot

easier in this format, I think he is a phenomenal leader," said Gambhir.

"My simple philosophy with Surya is that milestones don't matter, trophies do."

Samson, a wicketkeeper-batsman, stood out as the team's star after he made a stunning comeback in the team midway to score three successive half-centuries.

The in-form Samson, who hit 97 not out and 89 in his previous two innings, blasted five fours and eight sixes in the final to be named player of the tournament.

"Making a comeback like that and playing those kind of innings with such flamboyance, you need to be a special talent and he deserves a lot more than he has got till now," said Gambhir. AFP

FA Cup throws up shocks

FOOTBALL

AFP

Sunderland suffered an embarrassing FA Cup fifth round exit against third tier strugglers Port Vale last Sunday (Mar 8), while Championship side Southampton upset Fulham.

Sunderland have enjoyed an impressive first season back in the Premier League, but this was a dismal defeat for Regis Le Bris's side.

Ben Waine, a boyhood fan of Sunderland's arch rivals Newcastle, capitalised on poor marking to head the 28th minute winner, sending Port Vale into the FA Cup quarter-finals for the first time since 1954.

Jon Brady's side appear destined for relegation, but they beat second-tier Bristol City in the fourth round and produced an even more remarkable performance to make a mockery of the 56-place gap between them and Sunderland.

The giant-killing will delight their most famous fan, pop star Robbie Williams, who grew up near their Vale Park stadium in Burslem, and is now the club's president.

It was also a memorable moment for Brady, a 50-year-old Australian who replaced the sacked Darren Moore in January and has spent his managerial career in the shadows with Brackley and Northampton.

"I'm trying to let it sink in at the moment," said Brady. "It's nice to



Southampton captain Taylor Harwood-Bellis celebrates his team's 1-0 win at Fulham. Photo: AFP

create history, isn't it!"

At Craven Cottage, Ross Stewart's ice-cool penalty in stoppage-time sealed Southampton's 1-0 upset win.

It was a bitter loss for Fulham manager Marco Silva, who paid the price for a selection gamble that saw nine changes but backfired.

Southampton won it in the first minute of stoppage-time when Finn Azaz was fouled by Fulham defender Joachim Andersen and Stewart drilled his spot-kick past Benjamin Lecomte.

Relegated from the Premier League last season, they are through to the FA Cup quarter-finals for the first time since 2022.

Premier League strugglers Leeds beat second tier Norwich 3-0 to reach their first FA Cup quarter-final since 2003.

Leeds boss Daniel Farke twice led Norwich to promotion to the Premier League before being sacked in 2021.

Prioritising his fight to avoid relegation, Farke's decision to make nine changes paid off against his former club with goals from Sean Longstaff, Gabriel Gudmundsson and Joel Piroe.

Liverpool beat Wolves 3-1, Arsenal overcame a tricky test at Mansfield Town to win 2-1 and Manchester City shrugged off 10 changes to their starting line-up to crush Newcastle 3-1.

Chelsea won 4-2 to progress but only after a mighty scare against second-tier Wrexham, who twice took the lead at the Racecourse Ground.

Hollywood-owned Wrexham, watched by actors Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney and who are currently in the Championship play-offs, took the game into extra time with the score 2-2 before George Dobson was sent off and Chelsea made their numerical advantage count.



Photo: Supplied

Thais bag historic ASEAN futsal title

FUTSAL

THAILAND CELEBRATED a historic breakthrough Mar 2 as they clinched their first-ever ASEAN Women's Futsal Championship title, edging Australia 5-4 in a thrilling final at Terminal21 Hall in Nakhon Ratchasima.

The victory marked a milestone moment for Thai women's futsal with captain Darika Peanpailun the star of the night, delivering a stunning hat-trick with goals in the 31st, 35th and 36th minutes.

Her performance not only turned the tide of the contest but also earned her the accolade of Most Valuable Player of the tournament.

Thailand's other goals came from Sangrawee Meekham, who opened the scoring in the fifth minute, and Jenjira Bubpha, who struck in the 19th. Jenjira's consistency throughout the competition also saw her

finish as the tournament's top scorer.

Australia benefitted from two own goals – Sangrawee inadvertently turning the ball into her own net in the 17th minute, followed by Sasiprapha Suksen in the 24th.

The Aussies also found the target through Alexia Elisabeth Karrys-Stahl in the 24th minute and Nikkita Fazzari in the 40th, keeping the contest alive until the final whistle.

Their goalkeeper, Sarah Maree Easthope, was named the tournament's best shot-stopper.

The Thai champions were later rewarded with a B2million cash prize, presented by Football Association of Thailand president Nualphan Lam-sam and vice-president Adisak Benjasiriwan.

Earlier in the day, Vietnam secured third place with a commanding 4-1 win over Indonesia.

Bangkok Post

Six Nations edges towards dramatic climax

RUGBY

IT'S ALL TO PLAY FOR this weekend as the Six Nations Championship comes to an end.

Scotland or Ireland can become champions if England beats France in Paris in the final game of the tournament tomorrow evening (Mar 14).

France remains favourites to retain their title thanks to their superior points difference over both Scotland and Ireland, who clash in Dublin.

Scotland are full of confidence after their 50-40 win over France last weekend. This is a very talented Scottish team, brim full of Lions talent, with impressive mobility that pressures the opposition.

Ireland will be no pushovers. They had to work hard to last weekend to defeat Wales 27-17 in Cardiff.

Wales host Italy tomorrow and the visitors are on top of their game. Buoyed by their first win ever over England last



Scotland's Darcy Graham against France. Photo: AFP

Saturday they will be keen to demonstrate it was no fluke.

The French need to win in Paris tomorrow to cement the title, while England has only pride to play for. Do the visitors have the character to deal with the pressure?

England finished the game in Rome in disarray. At one point, the captain Maro Itoje and flanker Sam Underhill sat together in the naughty corner for 10 minutes. Italy capitalised on their two-player advantage to win 23-18, leaving England coach

Steve Borthwick puzzled.

Borthwick is a hunted man, not liked by the public. His playing style restricts player freedom. He plays players out of position. As in football, I think the RFU may be close to appointing an overseas coach, a Thomas Tuchel for rugby, as there seems to be no English contender for the position.

My picks? If France scores early tomorrow then it could be a stampede. I think Scotland will beat Ireland in a very close game, so close it may even be a draw. AFP

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Sport



Mercedes fire as F1 season starts > p14



JUMP!

Phuket hosts historic national pony qualifier

The upcoming THCH 2026 Pony Jumping Qualifier is a defining moment for equestrian sport in Phuket. Photo: Supplied

EQUESTRIAN

Ira Sipari

Phuket is set to make equestrian history next weekend as “Jumping Phuket – Pony Q#3” arrives at the Niran Equestrian Center at Niran Farm in Thalang, marking the first time an official qualifier of this level has ever been held on the island.

Taking place from Mar 20-22, the event is officially recognised by the Thailand Equestrian Federation (TEF) and forms part of the 2026 Thailand Pony Jumping Championship Series – one of the country’s premier competitive circuits for young riders and ponies.

For Phuket’s growing equestrian community, this is more than just another competition. It is a milestone moment. A national series now being held in Phuket.

The Thailand Pony Jumping Championship Series (THCH

2026) is a nationwide championship programme designed to develop young equestrian talent and create a pathway for competitive pony riders across Thailand. Throughout the season, riders compete in official qualifying rounds to collect points and gain experience in professionally organised events under federation standards.

Until now, qualifiers have traditionally been hosted in major mainland equestrian hubs. Bringing an official Pony Jumping Qualifier to Phuket signals the island’s rising profile within Thailand’s equestrian landscape.

“This is a proud moment,” Ira Sipari owner at Niran Equestrian Center explained. “Hosting an official qualifier shows that Phuket is ready to stand alongside the country’s top venues.”

WHAT TO EXPECT

“Jumping Phuket – Pony Q#3” promises a dynamic and family-friendly weekend of sport,

community, and horsemanship. The event will feature:

- Official Pony Jumping Qualifier classes for THCH 2026
- Classes tailored to different pony heights and rider age groups
- Open horse jumping classes
- A welcoming spectator atmosphere
- Food and beverages available at the onsite restaurant.

Young riders will tackle carefully built courses designed to test rhythm, balance, accuracy and partnership between pony and rider. For many, this competition represents an important step in building confidence, gaining competitive experience and progressing within the national championship series.

Parents and trainers also acknowledge the value of competing in a federation-recognised event without needing to travel off the island, a significant advantage for Phuket-based equestrian families.

Hosting an official TEF-recognised qualifier is a major

achievement for Niran Equestrian Center at Niran Farm, a venue that has steadily grown into one of Phuket’s leading equestrian facilities.

Known for its professional coaching, structured training programmes and community-focused competitions, the centre has invested heavily in raising standards. The arrival of a national championship qualifier reflects that commitment.

Beyond competition, the venue offers a relaxed countryside setting, allowing spectators to enjoy the action in a welcoming and accessible environment, whether they are lifelong horse lovers or simply curious to experience something new.

GROWING THE SPORT IN THE SOUTH

The significance of this event extends beyond one weekend. By hosting a qualifier in Phuket, the Thailand Equestrian Federation is helping to expand the reach of pony jumping in Southern Thailand.

Opportunities like this inspire young riders, strengthen regional training standards and create new pathways into competitive sport. They also demonstrate that Phuket is not just a tourism destination, but an emerging centre for youth sport and equestrian excellence.

“Jumping Phuket – Pony Q#3” is open to spectators, making it a perfect weekend outing for families and sports enthusiasts alike. Visitors can watch talented young riders compete, enjoy food and refreshments on site and experience the excitement of show jumping up close.

From the rhythmic canter approach to the final clear round over the last fence, the atmosphere promises energy, sportsmanship, and celebration.

As Phuket prepares to host its first-ever official THCH 2026 Pony Jumping Qualifier, one thing is clear: this is not just another event, it is a defining moment for equestrian sport on the island.

Phuket is ready to jump.

Healthy turnout for ‘Discover Phuket Night Run’

RUNNING

THE RECENT “Discover Phuket Night Run 2026” saw a healthy turnout with over 2,000 local, national and international athletes joining in the fun.

The event took place on Saturday, Feb 28, at the Queen Sirikit 72nd Birthday Anniversary Park in Phuket Town, with Phuket Vice Governor Suwit Phansengiam overseeing the opening ceremony ahead of the

6:30pm race start.

The competition was divided into a 4 kilometre and a 10km run, with runners of all ages and abilities joining in, including several professional runners from overseas.

As the klaxon sounded the start of the race crowds of people cheered the runners on as they embarked on the course.

Following the race there were medals awarded to the top finishers while market stalls offered local food and

beverage specialities. There were also a series of live musical and dance performances to further entertain those present.

Mr Suwait was joined by Suppachoke Laongphet, Mayor of Phuket City, along with selected heads of government departments, public and private sector organisations, local residents and tourists in the count down the race.

In his opening remarks Mr Suwit explained that the “Discover Phuket Night

Run 2026” is more than just a sporting event.

“It is an important platform that reflects the cooperation of all sectors in promoting people’s health, while also enhancing the image of Phuket as a sports tourism city with the potential and readiness to host national and international events,” he said.

In his remarks Mr Suppachoke explained that Phuket City Municipality organised the event to encourage people of all ages

and levels of fitness to pay attention to their health through exercise and to pursue a more balanced and healthy lifestyle.

Furthermore, he told how the event helped promote sports tourism in Phuket to a wider audience, both nationally and internationally, demonstrating the province’s capacity to organise best in class sporting events.

It also illustrated the importance of initiating and fostering good cooperation

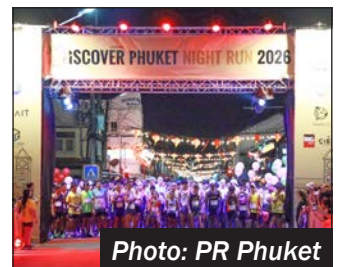


Photo: PR Phuket

between government agencies, the private sector and the public, he added.

The benefits of such occasions also extend to helping businesses in Phuket by stimulating the local economy, Mr Suppachoke concluded.

The Phuket News