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# SAFEGUARDS



An injured woman is brought ashore after the fatal tour speedboat collision with a trawler near Phi Phi Island last Sunday (Jan 11). Photo: PR Phuket

## FATAL CRASH, PIER FIRE PROMPT MARINE SAFETY OVERHAUL

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**S**weeping new marine safety measures are to be imposed across Phuket following a deadly speedboat collision near Phi Phi Island and a major fire that destroyed dozens of tour boats in Chalong Bay within the space of a week, prompting authorities to acknowledge deep-rooted structural failures in the island's marine tourism sector.

Phuket Marine Office Director Adoon Raluekmoon, who took up

the post only recently, said the two incidents – one claiming the life of a teenage tourist and the other causing more than B40 million in damage – exposed systemic weaknesses that can no longer be addressed through temporary or reactive measures.

Instead, he announced a raft of preventive reforms aimed at tightening oversight of tour boat operators, improving crew discipline, reducing congestion at key marine hubs and restoring confidence in Phuket's marine tourism industry.

Among the most significant changes are a ban on tour speedboats being lined up overnight on beaches, stricter anchoring and zoning rules, intensified inspections, mandatory drug testing, enhanced crew training and tougher penalties – including licence suspension or revocation – for operators repeatedly found breaching safety regulations.

“These incidents are not isolated accidents,” Mr Adoon said. “They reflect long-standing structural problems. If we continue

to treat each case as a one-off, the same tragedies will keep happening.”

**FATAL COLLISION**

The renewed scrutiny follows a high-speed collision near Koh Phi Phi last Sunday morning (Jan 11) that killed a 17-year-old Russian girl and injured at least 20 other passengers, including children.

Phi Phi Police Chief Pol Col Atthawat Suwannarat confirmed the driver of the tour speedboat involved will face at least a charge of negligence causing death, with...

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Manoch holds on to top seat in Cherg Talay



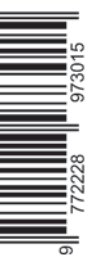
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Mai Khao As One Alliance marks year milestone



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Phuket athletes recognised for successful year



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PHUKET'S QUALITY TILE BOUTIQUE

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# News



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## Facing tour boat safety

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...additional charges possible pending the outcome of the investigation.

The driver was identified only as 'Mr Suriya', 44, who suffered two broken arms and a fractured neck in the collision. As of Monday (Jan 12), he remained under treatment at Vachira Phuket Hospital, where police ordered blood tests for drugs and alcohol.

"At this stage, all we know is that the speedboat was travelling at high speed and struck the fishing boat," Pol Col Atthawat said. "We still need to question witnesses and gather further evidence."

According to an official situation report issued by the Krabi Provincial Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Office together with the Thai Maritime Enforcement Command Region 3 branch (Thai MECC 3), the collision occurred at about 8:55am, about five nautical miles from Koh Phi Phi.

The speedboat, named 'Koravich Marine' and operated by 'A Time Company', was travelling from Phuket with 55 people on board, including 50 tourists, two guides and three crew members, when it struck the fishing trawler 'Pichai Samut 1', which was operating in the area.

Authorities confirmed the passengers included 33 Russian nationals, eight from Kazakhstan, four from Uzbekistan, two from Kyrgyzstan, three Polish nationals, one British national and four Thais.

The collision resulted in one fatality and at least 20 people suffering injuries of varying severity.



The charred remains of speedboats line the Chalong Bay shore. Photo: PR Phuket

A large-scale rescue operation was launched immediately, involving Thai MECC 3, the Krabi Provincial Marine Police, the Tourist Assistance Center, private fishing vessels, the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation (PPAO), Koh Phi Phi Hospital and multiple hospitals in Phuket.

All injured passengers were initially taken to Koh Phi Phi Hospital before being transferred to Phuket for further treatment. Uninjured passengers were returned to Phuket by boat, while the body of the deceased teenager, along with two relatives, was also transported back to Phuket for further procedures.

Hospital officials confirmed that 14 injured passengers were admitted to Vachira Phuket Hospital, four to Siriroj Hospital and one to Dibuk Hospital. Most were reported to be in stable condition.

The operator of the speedboat is covering all medical expenses for injured passengers, police said.

Mr Adoon said preliminary assessments indicate the primary cause of the collision was captain negligence and poor judgement.

"The captain assessed that he could avoid the fishing boat, but waves caused the vessel to veer and collide," he said.

While drug use was detected among crew members, Mr Adoon stressed this was a "secondary factor".

"This type of accident is not unprecedented," he said. "Over the past year, we have seen similar collisions, and the common factors are always negligence and misjudgement."

He said these recurring patterns demonstrate the need for stronger preventive controls rather than relying solely on post-incident punishment.

### PIER INFERNO

Just days earlier, Phuket narrowly avoided a far larger disaster when a pre-dawn fire near Chalong Pier on Jan 7 destroyed 24 speedboats belonging to 13 tour operators, causing losses estimated at more than B40mn.

CCTV footage showed the fire breaking out at 3:48am, when one speedboat erupted into flames as it pulled alongside others moored close together near the beach-front.

Chalong Police were alerted minutes later, and emergency crews rushed to the scene. Strong winds and low tide hampered firefighting efforts, while sparks carried by the wind ignited nearby vessels, allowing the blaze to spread rapidly.

Fire crews from Chalong, Rawai, Wichit and Karon municipalities, supported by the PPAO and other agencies, worked to contain the fire by spraying water continuously and cutting mooring ropes to separate boats.

Despite the conditions, the blaze was brought under control before it spread to other boats in Chalong Bay, where more than 1,000 boats – many fully fuelled for morning departures – were anchored at the time.

"No injuries were reported," Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn said, "but if the fire had not been controlled quickly, the damage could have been catastrophic."

The boat where the fire originated was identified as Nikorn Marine. Forensic police are investigating the cause of the fire. Electrical faults are suspected, but officials said the fire did not originate in an engine compartment, and no conclusion has yet been reached.

### NEW REGIME

Mr Adoon said the Chalong Bay fire closely mirrors previous incidents in the same area seven and three years ago, all involving boats moored overnight near the shore.

"The patterns are very similar – night-time fires, stationary boats, rapid spread," he said.

In response to the two incidents, the Marine Department has

ordered an overhaul of marine safety practices across Phuket, with most measures to be implemented within one to two weeks.

Key changes include:

- A ban on overnight beach mooring of tour boats
- Mandatory anchoring only in designated zones
- Mandatory pre-departure reporting of passenger lists, routes, captains and travel times
- Full inspections of hulls, engines, electrical systems and safety equipment
- Random drug testing and certification checks for captains and crew
- Additional safety training under newly upgraded standards
- Real-time monitoring of voyages through the Vessel Traffic Control Center

"If even one item fails inspection, the vessel will not be allowed to depart," Mr Adoon said.

Vessels with accident histories will be classified as high-risk and subject to more frequent inspections, operating restrictions or route limitations until they pass a new assessment.

Repeated violations will trigger escalating penalties, including licence suspension or revocation.

Mr Adoon said the recent incidents should serve as a wake-up call for Phuket's marine tourism sector.

"This is not an immediate problem. It is a structural one," he said. "If it is not seriously addressed, there will be more accidents – more lives lost, more damage to businesses, and more harm to Phuket's image."

## Police break silence on death of Jimmy Semaan

PHUKET POLICE HAVE finally recognised the death of well-known, and well-liked, Phuket businessman Jimmy Semaan in Cherng Talay last week.

Despite multiple reports online, and an outpouring of tributes marking Mr Semaan's death on Jan 5, Cherng Talay Police did not issue any public report of Mr Semaan's death.

However, Cherng Talay Police Chief Pol Col Ekkarat Plaiduang

finally confirmed to *The Phuket News* on Jan 8 that Mr Semaan died in a fall from a building in Cherng Talay.

Col Ekkarat declined to identify exactly which building Mr Semaan fell from.

"The initial cause of death is presumed to be suicide by jumping from a building," Pol Col Ekkarat said.

He said that Mr Semaan, originally from Lebanon, had underlying health conditions, including depression and stress.



Jimmy Semaan. Photo: Jimmy Semaan / LinkedIn

Col Ekkarat clarified that Mr Semaan did not die at the scene. He was later pronounced dead at Thalung Hospital, where the medical examination was conducted.

"Because the death was confirmed at Thalung Hospital, the case file report falls under the jurisdiction of Thalung Police Station," Pol Col Ekkarat said.

Yet, Thalung Police Chief Pol Col Nikorn Chuthong declined to comment, stating that the incident occurred in Cherng Talay and fell under the supervision of Cherng Talay Police.

Mr Semaan was well known as CEO of his own consultancy firms 444 Consultants and 444 Hospitality, and was

Managing Director at the Pisona Group, run by well-known Patong businessman Preechavude 'Prab' Keesin

Mr Preechavude posted on his social media on Jan 5, "RIP...JIMMY SEMAAN"

However, speaking to *The Phuket News* last week, Mr Preechavude said that he had no idea of what happened to Mr Semaan. "Some people said it was a heart attack, while others said it was suicide," he said.

Mr Preechavude expressed deep condolences

to the deceased's family, friends and colleagues, who were saddened by the loss.

*If you or someone you know is experiencing emotional distress or needs support, help is available. Contact the Samaritans of Thailand at 02-113-6789 (English & Thai) or the Mental Health Hotline at 1323 (Thai).*

Natnaree Likidwatanasakun

# Manoch to return to office

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Incumbent Cherng Talay OrBorTor chief Manoch Phanchalad has been re-elected for another term after unofficial results from local elections held across six subdistrict administrative organisations in Phuket last Sunday (Jan 11) showed clear victories for several sitting mayors and their teams.

In Cherng Talay, unofficial vote counts indicated that Manoch, standing as Candidate No.1 under the 'Team Pun' banner, secured 3,969 votes, comfortably ahead of rival candidate Samarn Sakae, who received 2,261 votes.

Manoch has served as chief of the Cherng Talay Tambon Administration Organisation (OrBorTor) for the past four years.

He has a clear mandate to continue running the beach areas of Cherng Talay, including Bang Tao, as he sees fit, as Team Pun also performed strongly in the council race, winning five of the six available Cherng Talay OrBorTor council seats.

In a statement posted after the count, Team Pun thanked residents for their support, saying every vote was "meaningful and a vital source of encouragement" as the team moves forward. The group said the result reflected public confidence in Manoch's leadership and direction during his previous term.

## CHEQUERED PAST

Manoch first took office as Chief of the Cherng Talay Tambon Administration Organisation on Dec 24, 2021, and has overseen a period of rapid transformation that has seen Cherng Talay emerge as one of Phuket's busiest tourism and real-estate hubs.

During his previous term, his administration was responsible for major land recovery efforts, infrastructure upgrades, public safety improvements and environmental protection initiatives, alongside managing a surge in large-scale construction across Bang Tao and surrounding areas.

One of the most high-profile issues during his tenure was the long-running dispute over 178 rai



Photo: PR Phuket

of prime beachfront land at Layan-Leypan, valued at an estimated B50 billion. Despite a Supreme Court ruling in 2017 confirming the land as state property, businesses operating on the site continued to resist eviction, prompting the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) to intervene directly in 2022. The investigation ultimately led to the site being reclaimed by the state.

Environmental protection and infrastructure strain have remained key challenges, with dozens of villa, condominium, hotel and mixed-use projects reshaping Bang Tao, Pasak, Boat Avenue, Lagoon Road and

Layan. The rapid development has placed heavy pressure on roads, utilities and public services, prompting repeated complaints from residents.

Manoch has previously acknowledged limitations on local authority powers in addressing issues such as traffic congestion, taxi regulation and roadside construction, and has repeatedly called for stronger support from higher-level agencies.

When registering to contest re-election, Manoch said his administration had focused on strengthening core infrastructure, improving water systems, expanding emergency services and

supporting elderly, disabled and vulnerable groups. He also cited education, cultural activities, waste management, low-carbon initiatives, community tourism and small-business development as part of his platform.

Manoch said his decision to seek another term reflected his intention to complete unfinished projects and continue improving quality of life for Cherng Talay and Bang Tao residents, while emphasising transparent administration, digital public services and closer engagement with village leaders and community committees.

## OTHER VICTORIES

Elsewhere in Phuket, unofficial results and public statements from candidates pointed to victories or continued mandates in several other subdistricts.

In Kamala, Charoon Kobkoi and the Kamala Aphiwat Group thanked voters for what they described as sincere trust placed in the team. In a message to supporters, the group said every vote represented both strength

and responsibility, pledging to move ahead with practical work for the benefit of the Kamala community.

In Koh Kaew, Keuakeiyrti Chitkeua acknowledged continued public support following the election, with the Juan Jwan team also issuing a statement thanking residents and promising to repay their trust through hard work and sustainable development.

Mai Khao voters also returned Sarawut Srikukram, who thanked residents of the subdistrict for allowing his team to continue developing Mai Khao "towards lasting prosperity". In a public message, he credited the Mai Khao Yunyong Rak team for helping achieve the election result and invited residents to work together to improve quality of life, unity and long-term development.

In Thepkasattri, Siththichai Chanthawat and his team expressed gratitude to voters for their confidence, with Mr Siththichai stating he was committed to leading the subdistrict to "even greater heights" and transforming Thepkasattri through collective effort.

## Officials face nightlife corruption probe

THE PHUKET PROVINCIAL DAMRONGTHAM Office has confirmed it will investigate allegations circulating on social media that entertainment venue operators are being asked to pay bribes to officials.

The confirmation came after a briefing at Phuket Provincial Hall on Jan 6, where officials addressed growing public concern over online claims of corruption involving nightlife venues, particularly in Patong.

Phuket Vice Governor Adul Chuthong said the investigation would proceed once formal complaints or credible supporting information are received.

"There is currently insufficient clear evidence," he said. "However, the province is ready to investigate all matters within its authority to ensure transparency, fairness and public confidence in government operations."

He stressed that Phuket Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn has instructed all officials to perform their duties honestly and in strict accordance with the law, and to remain politically neutral during the current parliamentary election period.

Vice Governor Adul also urged the public and media to verify information carefully before sharing allegations online, warning that rumours could damage trust and create misunderstanding.

Also present, Ekkapop Buathuan, Senior Legal Officer at the Phuket Provincial Damrongtham Centre, confirmed the Citizen's Complaint Centre is prepared to examine any formal complaints relating to the alleged bribery.

He explained that the Damrongtham Office would first verify the facts before



Photo: Kathu District Office

forwarding substantiated findings to senior officials and relevant agencies for legal action.

"Anyone with information or evidence is encouraged to submit it directly to the Phuket Provincial Damrongtham Centre," Mr Ekkapop said.

The issue gained traction after a post in the Facebook group 'This needs to be exposed! Phuket' questioned whether a group was demanding payments from entertainment venues and called on the Governor to investigate. The post referenced a past case involving criminal gangs allegedly extorting businesses, urging swift action to prevent exploitation.

Responding to the claims, Sroi Phromthong, Vice President of the Patong Entertainment Business Association, said he was aware of the online reports but confirmed no complaints had been lodged by association members.

"To date, no such incidents have been found and no formal complaints have been received," Mr Sroi said.

The Phuket News



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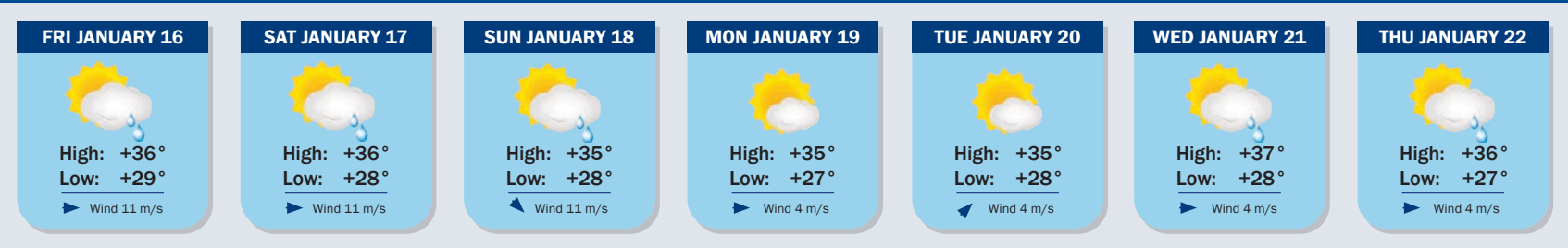
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## PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST



## Police to ramp up drug controls at EDC

PHUKET POLICE WILL ramp up efforts to prevent drugs from being brought into the Electric Daisy Carnival (EDC) concert area, following the deaths of two concert-goers during last year's event.

The event is highly expected to draw thousands to Rhythm Park in Cherng Talay on Jan 16-18.

"More than 200 officers have been assigned to provide security at the venue area. They will be stationed at all entrances and will be checking strictly for drugs," Phuket Provincial Police Commander Maj Gen Sinlert Sukhum told *The Phuket News*.

According to Maj Gen Sinlert, the deployment will include police officers from Thalang Police and Cherng Talay Police to manage congestion and on-site security.

In total, around 700 officers will be on duty, supported by about 300 security personnel provided by the event organisers and 100-200 administrative officials,



The EDC last year.  
Photo: EDC Thailand

Volunteer Defence Corps (OrSor) personnel and other volunteer groups will also assist with crowd management and safety.

Addressing concerns raised after last year's fatalities, Maj Gen Sinlert stressed that investigations found no drugs on the deceased at the time of the incidents.

"Forensic examinations later confirmed the presence of drugs in their bodies, but authorities could not determine where the substances were obtained," he said.

He also noted that drugs were not the sole contributing factor. Extreme weather conditions, physical exhaustion and a lack of sleep were also believed to have played a role.

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## Thai-Aussie arrested in major meth haul

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Wichit Police have arrested a 22-year-old Thai-Australian man and his girlfriend in connection with a major drug trafficking network after officers seized a total of 120,000 methamphetamine (ya bah) pills and six kilogrammes of crystal meth (ya ice) in a multi-agency operation.

Wichit Police Station confirmed the arrests late last Friday night (Jan 9), following a joint investigation with the Phuket Provincial Police Narcotics Suppression Division and the Provincial Police Investigation Division. Authorities said the investigation is continuing as officers work to dismantle the wider distribution network and seize related assets.

Police said the case began after intelligence from the Ranong Provincial Police Narcotics Suppression Division indicated that large quantities of drugs were being transported from central Thailand to Phuket using a private courier



Photo: Wichit Police

service, with deliveries arranged at public locations in Wichit.

Officers conducted surveillance at the Flash Express service point at the Wirat Hongyok branch and at a nearby Big C supermarket. At about 2pm, police observed a 16-year-old boy arriving to collect a suspicious parcel.

After identifying themselves and searching the package, officers found about 60,000 ya bah pills and two kilogrammes of ya ice hidden inside. During questioning, the teenager said he had been hired by a foreign man living in Chalong and said he had already collected another shipment earlier the same day.

Police then searched a rented room in Moo 8,

Chalong, linked to the suspect. Inside, officers seized a further 60,000 ya bah pills and four kilogrammes of crystal meth, bringing the total haul to an estimated street value of more than B7 million.

The main suspect initially evaded arrest, prompting an intensified manhunt. At 10:10pm, officers arrested him and his girlfriend at a petrol station less than one kilometre before the Phuket immigration checkpoint as they were preparing to leave the area.

Police identified the suspect as Gabriel John Thanes Garnet, a Thai-Australian national. Wichit Police Chief Pol Col Somsak Thongkliang that investigations are ongoing with further arrests possible.

## Frenchman killed by drunk driver

A FRENCH MAN HAS DIED after being struck by a car driven by a drunk driver who ploughed through multiple vehicles and fled the scene in Phuket Old Town about midday on Jan 10.

Phuket City Police confirmed that the fatal crash occurred at about 12:07pm at the intersection of Bangkok Rd and Poonphol Rd in Phuket Town.

The victim was identified as a French national. He was critically injured while walking on the sidewalk and later pronounced dead at Vachira Phuket Hospital at about 3:30pm.

Police said the driver, Jatuphol Kerdpol, 51, from Phang Nga province, was driving a grey Volvo when he lost control and collided with a series of vehicles.

Initial investigations found that the suspect first crashed into several cars and motorcycles in



Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

front of the Government Savings Bank on Bangkok Rd before fleeing the area. The vehicle then continued to the Bangkok-Poonphol intersection, where it struck the Frenchman and two motorcycles, police said.

In total, nine vehicles, including cars and motorcycles, were damaged during the rampage.

Both the suspect and the victim were rushed to Vachira Phuket Hospital by rescue workers. Police later conducted a breath and blood alcohol test on Mr Jatuphol, which confirmed his blood alcohol level was above the legal limit, officers said. *Eakkapop Thongtub*

## Police nab Russian illegal guide

A 33-YEAR-OLD RUSSIAN national has been arrested at a Phuket pier for illegally working as a tour guide, an occupation reserved exclusively for Thai citizens, officials have confirmed.

The Central Investigation Bureau (CIB), through its Marine Police Division, said the suspect, identified only as 'Mr Lapa', was arrested while actively guiding foreign tourists preparing to board a tour boat for an Andaman Sea excursion.

The arrest followed a tip-off received by Phuket Marine Police officers that a foreign national was illegally working as a tour guide at a pier in Phuket. Officers conducted surveillance and gathered evidence before moving in. While police confirmed the arrest took place on Jan 7, the exact location was not disclosed.

According to police, officers observed Mr Lapa collecting tourists arriving by van, assisting



Photo: CIB

with registration and wristband distribution, escorting them to a waiting area, and explaining the tour programme prior to boarding. He was also seen providing guidance to tourists as part of the tour operation.

Mr Lapa was unable to produce a passport or a valid work permit, presenting only a photograph of a passport page on his mobile phone. Further checks revealed that a job order he was holding did not list his name.

During questioning, Mr Lapa admitted working at the pier about twice a week, primarily assisting Russian tourists, and said he had occasionally travelled on tour boats.

*The Phuket News*

# NACC probes B265mn Victory Park

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The Phuket Provincial Office of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC Phuket) has conducted an on-site inspection of the long-delayed Thalang Victory Monument development amid concerns the project could fall into the category of abandoned or neglected state developments, commonly referred to as “plan, do, abandon”.

NACC Phuket announced on Jan 6 that the inspection took place on Dec 26 at the Thalang Victory Monument in Thepkrasattri, a site linked to the historic 1785 battle led by Phuket heroines Thao Thep Krasattri and Thao Sri Soonthorn.

The visit was led by NACC Phuket Director Suwat Saowaran, who assigned officers from the Anti-Corruption Prevention Group to assess the project’s current status and follow up on previous inspections.

The inspection was conducted jointly with the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation (PPAO, or OrBorJor), represented by Deputy Chief Chalam Atthatham, along with officials from Thepkrasattri Municipality, Thepkrasattri Tambon Administrative Organisation (OrBorTor)



Photo: NACC Phuket

and other relevant agencies.

According to information presented during the inspection, the project site covers 100 rai, 33.30 square wah. Officials confirmed that the OrBorJor has assumed full responsibility for all assets within the area and is now the sole agency responsible for managing and developing the site, following a resolution agreed by multiple state agencies and approved by the Phuket Area Treasury Department.

Agencies involved in the resolution included the OrBorJor, Thepkrasattri OrBorTor, Thepkrasattri Municipality, Phuket Provincial Cultural Office,

Thalang District Office, the Thao Thep Krasattri Thao Sri Soonthorn Foundation and the Department of Public Works and Town & Country Planning.

Officials said the OrBorJor has submitted a formal application to use the land as state property and that design plans for the development of the Thalang Victory Monument area have already been completed.

The OrBorJor Council has approved the use of accumulated funds for the 2026 fiscal year to finance the Thalang Victory Monument Development Project, allocating B265 million under its industry and public works con-

struction plan.

Planned works include extensive landscaping and the construction of multiple buildings, including museum facilities, reception buildings, an exhibition hall, a multipurpose building, office space, commercial units, public restrooms and supporting utilities. Officials said the project is currently in the process of finalising the scope of work and determining the median price before construction can proceed.

The stated objective of the project is to transform the Thalang Victory Monument into a world-class historical tourism destination integrating education, recreation and cultural tourism, while generating sustainable employment and income for the local community.

During the inspection, NACC Phuket reported that conditions at the site were consistent with information previously provided by the OrBorJor. Security guards are now stationed at the area around the clock, cleaning staff have been hired, and landscaping improvements have been carried out to improve safety and cleanliness.

The main building has been fenced off to prevent unauthorised access and theft, while officials noted visible renovations and structural improvements com-

pared with earlier inspections.

The OrBorJor said the area is intended to be further developed into a public space and market, as well as a learning centre for residents, students and researchers interested in Phuket’s historical heritage.

NACC Phuket confirmed it will continue to monitor the project’s progress and coordinate with relevant agencies to ensure compliance with regulations and applicable laws, with officials instructed to strictly adhere to legal procedures throughout implementation.

The inspection follows more than a decade of delays to development of the historic site.

Plans to develop the area, sometimes referred to as “Phuket Historical Park”, date back to at least 2013, when an original project budget of B350 million was announced. In 2016, it was stated that B42 million would be spent on landscaping and facilities, while further announcements in subsequent years – including a proposed museum – failed to materialise.

Mr Suwat said NACC Phuket will continue to follow up to ensure public funds are used transparently and that the long-stalled project ultimately delivers tangible benefits to the people of Phuket.

## Phiphat: Phuket mass transit project has not been ‘scrapped’

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER and Transport Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn has moved to dispel widespread speculation that the long-planned Phuket light rail or tram project has been cancelled, insisting it remains government policy but will only proceed after major road and traffic bottlenecks are resolved.



Photo: NBT Phuket

Mr Phiphat said rumours that the mass transit project had been scrapped were “not true”, explaining that the Ministry of Transport is adopting a phased approach to avoid worsening congestion during construction.

“The light rail project is a large-scale development that requires the use of road medians and extensive construction,” he said in official comments. “If we proceed while Phuket’s traffic bottlenecks and road network problems remain unresolved, congestion will become even more severe.”

He said transport development on the island must begin with addressing critical choke points, expanding road capacity and constructing tunnels

and expressways before any rail-based system can be realistically introduced.

The most urgent project under the revised sequencing is the Patong Tunnel, which will span 3.98km with a budget of B16.759 billion. Preparations for the bidding process are expected to begin this month, with construction to be completed around mid-2030.

The tunnel is intended to ease congestion at the entrance to Patong, one of Phuket’s most persistent traffic bottlenecks, particularly during peak tourism periods. Mr Phiphat said the project is considered essential groundwork before any mass transit system can be implemented effectively.

Once road infrastructure and traffic systems are improved, the ministry plans to introduce electric bus services along routes

aligned with the future tram corridor. The aim is to familiarise residents and tourists with public transport use on Phuket’s main roads before upgrading to a full light rail system.

Only after road capacity, traffic flow and public transport usage reach appropriate levels would Phase 1 of the tram project be considered. That phase, estimated to cost about B35 billion, covers the 42km route from Phuket International Airport to Chalong Circle and would not be considered until after 2030.

The clarification follows news reports that portrayed Mr Phiphat as sceptical of the Mass Rapid Transit Authority of Thailand’s tram proposal. He was quoted as arguing that constructing rail along road medians would reduce traffic lanes, worsen congestion, require costly supporting infrastructure and fail to attract sufficient ridership.

Instead, Mr Phiphat said he favours widening roads, expanding bus services and introducing dedicated bus lanes. *The Phuket News*

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# Household debt to limit bank growth

Bangkok Post

Thailand's elevated household debt is expected to remain a major constraint on banking sector expansion in 2026, even as leading domestic banks continue to target positive loan growth to help support a fragile economic recovery.

Kris Chantanotoke, chief executive of Siam Commercial Bank (SCB), said Thailand's banking industry continues to face challenges from sluggish economic growth and persistently high household debt, which he described as a structural weakness in the economy.

In the second quarter of 2025, Thailand's household debt-to-GDP ratio stood at 86.8%, limiting borrowers' ability to take on additional credit and posing risks to banking operations amid slowing growth, he said.

Thailand's economy also faces headwinds from both external and domestic factors. SCB's Economic Intelligence Centre (EIC) forecasts GDP growth of 1.5% in 2026, in line with the Bank of Thailand's outlook.

"This pace reflects growth below potential and heightened economic fragility. As a result, 2026 will be another challenging year," Mr Kris said.

The projected 1.5% expansion



Photo: Bangkok Post

would mark Thailand's weakest growth in three decades outside crisis periods, down from an estimated 2% in 2025. External pressures include a global economic slowdown, trade tensions and intensifying foreign competition, while domestic constraints include weak purchasing power, household and business fragility, fiscal limitations and political uncertainty.

Beyond weak fundamentals, Mr Kris warned that deteriorating sentiment could further undermine economic confidence.

"The most dangerous risk may not be the economic fundamentals themselves, but a climate of fear that could trigger a self-fulfilling prophecy and lead to inaction in economic decision-making," he said.

Despite these challenges, SCB plans to pursue positive loan growth in 2026 through a selective strategy, focusing on corporate lending, mortgages and auto loans while maintaining tight risk controls.

SCB plans to resume growth in auto lending after previously slowing expansion amid intense price competition, particularly in the electric vehicle segment, which Mr Kris said had distorted market pricing but is now beginning to normalise.

For small and medium-sized enterprises, SCB will expand lending selectively, prioritising support for existing clients rather than aggressive customer acquisition to protect asset quality amid elevated credit risks.

As it targets loan growth, SCB

will place strong emphasis on asset quality, aiming to keep non-performing loans at levels appropriate to economic conditions.

"A dual mandate is required – achieving loan growth while preventing a rise in NPLs. We have restructured internal operations to support loan expansion while controlling bad debt," Mr Kris said.

SCB also signalled its readiness to work with the government and regulators to support economic growth and assist vulnerable borrowers, including participation in government debt-resolution and credit-support schemes.

From a broader perspective, Mr Kris said comprehensive economic reform is essential to strengthen Thailand's fundamentals and sustain long-term growth. He noted that while the government has introduced reform measures, including a medium-term fiscal framework, challenges remain – particularly in building public understanding around tax reform.

Collaboration among all stakeholders will be critical, he said, with the banking sector ready to support reforms through the Thai Bankers' Association, including providing digital payment tools for government programmes and contributing

policy recommendations through the private sector's "Reinvent Thailand" white paper.

Separately, Chartsiri Sophonpanich, president of Bangkok Bank (BBL), said Thailand's GDP growth in 2026 is also expected to remain below 2%, reinforcing the need for banks to focus on helping customers navigate economic challenges.

"In this environment, the bank must work at full capacity to help clients adapt, continue operating and identify new opportunities both domestically and internationally," he said.

Mr Chartsiri said banks can no longer function solely as lenders in a low-growth environment, but must leverage their domestic and international networks to provide broader support.

BBL, Thailand's largest bank, expects positive loan growth in 2026 across large corporate, mid-sized enterprise and retail segments, although growth rates will vary depending on demand and sector potential.

On policy priorities, Mr Chartsiri said investment remains the key engine for economic growth, competitiveness and structural strengthening, with both public and private investment – including foreign direct investment – playing a critical role.

## Passenger arrival numbers at airport still inching upward

PHUKET INTERNATIONAL Airport has reported handling more than 106,000 flights and over 17.4 million passengers in 2025, as air travel and tourism to the island continue their steady recovery, airport officials have confirmed.



Photo: AoT Phuket

Mr Monchai Tanode, Managing Director of Phuket Airport, said flight movements and passenger numbers this year show continued growth compared with both 2024 and the pre-pandemic peak year of 2019, reflecting renewed confidence among travellers and airlines.

In 2025, Phuket Airport handled a total of 106,581 flights, comprising 48,762 domestic flights and 57,819 international flights, representing an increase of 2.8% from 2024, when the airport recorded 103,675 flights.

Passenger numbers also rose to 17,474,064 this year, including 6,636,922 domestic passengers and

10,837,142 international passengers. The figure marks a 1.5% increase from 2024, when the airport handled 17,215,314 passengers, Mr Monchai said.

Mr Monchai noted that the continued growth highlights Phuket's role as a key aviation and tourism gateway to the Andaman region, with international demand remaining strong alongside steady domestic travel.

Despite the recovery, overall traffic levels have not yet fully returned to pre-pandemic highs. The projected number of flights in 2025 represents 92.22% of the total recorded in 2019, while passenger numbers ac-

count for 96.44% of the 2019 figure, which remains the airport's busiest year on record.

Mr Monchai noted that the near-complete recovery in passenger numbers, in particular, underscores the strength of Phuket's tourism sector and the island's appeal to international visitors.

Airport officials said Phuket Airport will continue to focus on operational efficiency, safety and service quality to support growing demand, while working with airlines and relevant agencies to accommodate future growth in both domestic and international travel. *The Phuket News*

## 'Recession' concerns on the rise

THAILAND'S ECONOMY is bracing for its weakest expansion in 30 years, with GDP growth projected at less than 2% in 2026, attributed to sluggish exports, high household debt and declining competitiveness in global markets, warns the Joint Standing Committee on Commerce, Industry and Banking (JSCCIB).

The growth projection does not include years when Thailand faced crises, including the pandemic that caused GDP to contract by 6.1% in 2020.

The warning comes at a time of heightened global uncertainty following a shock military strike by the US on Venezuela, raising concerns about the stability of the world order.

Domestically, Thailand continues to grapple with prolonged political and economic challenges, leaving policymakers and businesses facing mounting pressure.

According to the JSCCIB, GDP growth is expected to range between 1.6% and 2%, while exports are forecast to contract by 0.5% to 1.5%. Inflation is projected to remain sub-



Photo: Bangkok Post

dued, hovering between -0.2% and 0.7%.

"We are concerned about an economic recession," said Kriengkrai Thiennukul, chairman of the Federation of Thai Industries and a member of the JSCCIB.

"The new government must make serious efforts to transform old industries into new ones."

Mr Kriengkrai noted technological transformation is essential to revitalising the economy.

He warned that exports are likely to remain under pressure due to US tariffs and baht appreciation.

The currency strengthened more than 8% against the US dollar last year, causing Thailand to lose competitiveness in international trade, said Mr Kriengkrai.

Poj Aramwattananont, chairman of the Thai Chamber of Commerce and

another JSCCIB member, urged the government to monitor gold trading, which can influence foreign exchange rates.

"The baht's appreciation will deal a blow to the export sector, which drives the Thai economy alongside tourism," he said.

"A closer look at changes in baht value is an urgent task for the government."

### HOUSEHOLD DEBT

Domestically, household debt remains a heavy burden. In the second quarter of 2025, Thailand's household debt-to-GDP ratio tallied 86.8%, limiting borrowers' ability to access new credit and prompting banks to tighten lending criteria.

Global tensions are also adding to uncertainty. The panel noted the US invasion could disrupt supply chains and affect Thailand's manufacturing sector, though the impact is expected to be limited given the relatively small trade volume between Thailand and Venezuela – around \$500 million annually.

Bangkok Post

# People's Party confirm 'won't support Anutin'

**BANGKOK**

Bangkok Post

Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, leader of the Progressive Movement and a campaign assistant to the People's Party (PP), has given assurances the party would not vote in favour of returning Anutin Charnvirakul as prime minister for a second time after the Feb 8 general election.

Mr Thanathorn, accompanied by Khampong Thepakham and Thaweesak Thaksin, former MPs of the now-dissolved Move Forward Party (MFP), visited Nang Rong district in Buriram on Jan 8 to campaign for Phet Supattakul, the PP's candidate for Constituency 8 of this eastern province.

Buriram is the political stronghold of the Bhumjaithai Party (BJT), of which Anutin is leader.

In his speech, Mr Thanathorn said many voters had been bitterly



Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit canvasses for votes at a market in Nang Rong district of Buriram. Photo: Surachai Piragsa

disappointed after the previous election, when Pita Limjaroenrat failed to become prime minister and the MFP was unable to form a government, despite hopes for meaningful change.

He said the upcoming election would be the first in 15 years in which the people's votes could genuinely lead to the formation of a government, recalling 2011 as the last time this had truly occurred.

Addressing concerns the PP may once again back BJT, Mr Thanathorn dismissed such claims.

"Listen carefully," he said. "In this election, there is no chance that the People's Party will vote for Mr Anutin to be prime

minister. Do not believe the fake news.

"A vote for the People's Party would lead to Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut, the party leader, becoming prime minister."

Parliament, led by the PP, voted on Sept 5 last year to have Anutin become the 32nd prime minister following the dismissal of former premier Paetong-tarn Shinawatra by the Constitutional Court.

Mr Thanathorn said critics had previously written off the MFP as an "alternative" party incapable of becoming a major force. However, he said the 2023 election had proven otherwise. Whether it would now form a government, he

said, depended on the people.

The MFP was dissolved on Aug 7, 2024 by a Constitutional Court order for attempted subversion of the constitutional monarchy. From that the PP was created.

Mr Thanathorn posted a statement on Facebook to clarify what he described as inaccurate media reports claiming that, after the election, the PP would not join forces with Pheu Thai or BJT to form a government.

Former politician Chuvit Kamolvisit said that the public should not be surprised if the PP was ultimately forced to choose between abandoning its ideals and becoming absorbed into the old political system in order to govern, or clinging to its principles while remaining in opposition.

He noted Mr Natthaphong, the PP leader, had reiterated that no MP from the PP would ever again vote for Anutin as prime minister.

# Troops to man border for 'at least one year'

**BANGKOK**

THAILAND WILL KEEP its military forces deployed along the Cambodian border for at least one year to safeguard national sovereignty despite the recent ceasefire agreement with the neighbouring country, Defence Minister Natthaphon Narkphanit said on Saturday (Jan 10).

Gen Natthaphon said the situation along the border remains under control, with round-the-clock monitoring and assessment systems in place.

He reaffirmed Thailand's commitment to the ceasefire declaration but said Thai forces would address any land encroachment or violation of national interests by Cambodia.

Gen Natthaphon said that while securing terrain is challenging, maintaining control over it is even more difficult.

"First, troop deployments would be maintained for at least one year until the situation genuinely eased," he said. "However, given the 798-kilometre length of the border, forces



Photo: Royal Thai Army

would be concentrated in areas deemed necessary."

Electronic fencing and CCTV systems would be installed in certain locations, he added, while permanent physical barriers would be constructed in some areas.

Discussions have also been held with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to make use of formerly restricted zones, potentially allowing military veterans to settle and farm there, Gen Natthaphon explained.

Meanwhile, the Royal Thai Air Force has briefed military attachés from 23 countries about its role, missions and operational approach regarding the border situation with Cambodia.

The briefing outlined the facts of air force operations, stressing that all actions complied with international law and recognised rules of engagement. *Bangkok Post*

# PM orders intel review after attacks

**BANGKOK**

PRIME MINISTER AND INTERIOR Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said intelligence operations need to be comprehensively overhauled following recent bombings and arson attacks in the southern border provinces.

Anutin was addressing incidents where PTT petrol stations were bombed and set ablaze at 11 locations across Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani provinces late last Saturday (Jan 10).

The prime minister said on Monday he had held discussions on Sunday with Lt Gen Narathip Phoynok, commander of the Fourth Army Area, Gen Chaiphruet Duangpraphat, Army Chief of Staff, and Piyasiri Wattanawarangkul, secretary-general of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC).

He had further talks with Defence Minister Gen Natthaphon Narkphanit and NSC secretary-general Chatchai Bangchud on Monday, directing authorities to swiftly bring those responsible to justice.

Based on assessments from local officials, Anutin said the motives could include politics, ill intent, and attempts to undermine peace and stability.

He noted that similar incidents have often occurred ahead of extensions of the emergency decree in the region.

"While I listen to these assessments,



One of the bombed PTT petrol stations. Photo: Supplied

what is unacceptable is the state of intelligence," he said.

"Regardless of the cause, intelligence operations must undergo a major overhaul and be significantly improved."

He said the SBPAC had been instructed to urgently care for about seven injured people and to expedite compensation, while also stressing the need to assist affected business operators.

Anutin said he had called Wuthikrai Leewiraphan, chairman of PTT Plc, urging the company to help find ways to support franchise operators so they could continue operating.

"If operators give up and shut down, it would only fulfil the attackers' objectives," he said.

Regarding security measures ahead of the national election, Anutin said maintaining public safety and preventing unrest remained paramount.

He noted the attacks occurred during a transitional period with security forces redeployed to protect National Children's Day events, before the bombing occurred. *Bangkok Post*

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Jack Black (left) and Paul Rudd in *Anaconda*. Image: IMDb

# Anaconda reboot raises laughs but lacks bite

David Griffiths

If you ask a few people to name some of their guilty pleasure films I can guarantee that if they were watching movies back in the 1990s then they will mention the original *Anaconda* movie from 1997. Yes it was trashy, yes it was pulpy but this action horror that starred the likes of Jennifer Lopez, Eric Stoltz, Ice Cube and (unbelievably) Jon Voight got its job done and entertained its audience.

Then came the woeful sequels, which are fun to watch if you putting

together a trashy movie marathon, that starred the likes of Morris Chestnut and David Hassellhoff. They are hard to call even B-Grade perhaps C and D Grade are more like and are often found in discount DVD bins alongside other trashy classics like *Sharknado*.

So, I have to admit that it came as a bit of a surprise when Sony Pictures announced that they were re-booting the *Anaconda* franchise – not only bringing it back but had drawn A-Listers like Jack Black (*School of Rock*) and Paul Rudd (*Ant-Man*) to the film. And even after the first trailer dropped I was still thinking – ‘hey this could have potential.’

Directed and co-written by Tom Gormican (*The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent*) the film centres around a group of four friends who during High School made short films together and dreamed of making it to Hollywood.

Things haven’t exactly panned out the way that they had hoped. Doug McCollister (Black) is making unoriginal, cheesy wedding videos for uninspiring couples while Ronald Griffin Jnr (Rudd) is getting fired from Hollywood day work for taking his art too seriously. He did once have a semi-regular role on *S.W.A.T.* but that is long gone.

Then there are also Claire Simons (Thandiwe Newton – *Mission: Impossible II*), who is not sure what to do with her life after her recent divorce, and Kenny Trent (Steve Zahn – *War for the Planet of the Apes*), who despite his claims to the opposite does in fact have a substance abuse problem that has left him unemployed.

When the four get back together for Doug’s birthday and reminisce over their High School cinematic masterpiece they begin dreaming of re-booting their favourite franchise – *Anaconda* – and that dream soon looks like a reality when Ronald announces that he has recently been able to obtain the rights to the franchise – the only problem is they have no money but what they consider a decent script.

### Mixed results

It is here though that this *Anaconda* reboot starts to run into trouble. Because if Gormican had left the plot at that then you could probably have had a fairly decent film with a group of filmmaker wannabes getting stalked by a giant anaconda in a South American rainforest. But instead the audience is introduced to another sub-plot that sees Ana Almeida (Daniela Melchior – *Fast X*) introduced into the mix. Her story simply revolves around her being on the run and happening across our four cinephiles while they set out on their journey.

From there the movie provides mixed results. The comedy, yes they have made this a comedy, comes to the fore and to its credit largely works. There is only one problem there though most people who sit down to watch an *Anaconda* film, me included, come to see characters menaced by and ultimately fall prey to a giant snake, they don’t come for a barrel of laughs.

Gormican’s idea of doing to

*Anaconda* what Dwayne Johnson’s version of *Baywatch* did to the original TV series seems like a mis-direction. It takes all the suspense and horror aspects that made the original a fan-favourite out of the equation and to be honest if the laughs weren’t so frequent you would probably end up getting bored pretty quickly.

Then there is the lazy second half of the film. The ‘Ana storyline’ becomes predictable, and at times disjointed, while the supposed finale is a bit of a fizzer and feels like the filmmakers themselves have just tacked on 10 minutes of action to a comedy film. Even the music is uninspiring using classic rock tracks from AC/DC and Van Halen that we have heard in movies hundreds of times.

To be honest the best parts of *Anaconda* are the comedic performances. Black is on song here getting laughs all throughout the film. Given some of the stuff that happens to his character in the film you get the feeling that Black simply said to the creative team ‘do whatever you need to me to get a laugh’.

Black is also well supported by Zahn who seems like an actor on a mission in this film. Some of his lines and ‘moments’ in the film are pure comedic genius and he at times steals the lime-light from his hilarious co-star.

While *Anaconda* is a film that will make you laugh it is best described as a forgettable film. The comedy nor the film’s guest appearances by Ice Cube and Jennifer Lopez just doesn’t do the original any kind of justice at all and the result is a film that feels like a parody rather than a tribute.

So, if you haven’t seen the original and just want a laugh then the film is passable but if you are a fan of the original this one might leave you a little disappointed.

*Anaconda* is currently screening in Phuket and is rated ‘13’  
2.5/5 Stars

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

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# SMF concludes landmark first season



## GLOBETROTTER

Todd Miller

As Phuket reflects on another monsoon season, the Sustainable Mai Khao Foundation (SMF) is marking a significant milestone: the successful conclusion of the first season of the 'Mai Khao As One Alliance', a collaborative initiative that has already delivered measurable environmental impact along Phuket's northern coastline.

Launched in July 2025, the Alliance was formalised through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between 11 hotels along Mai Khao Beach and two government organisations. The initiative was created to address the growing waste challenges affecting one of Phuket's most ecologically sensitive areas by uniting key stakeholders around shared responsibility and collective action.

"The Mai Khao As One Alliance proves that real change happens when we work together," says SMF founder Michelle Mouillé. "By aligning hotels, communities, and government partners around shared responsibility, we've shown that collective action can deliver real, measurable impact for our beaches."

### Turning Collaboration into Action

The first phase of the Alliance focused on the Monsoon Beach Cleanup Project, which ran from July through November 2025. During this five-month period, SMF employed and managed a dedicated three-person beach cleanup team, with funding provided collectively by participating hotels.

The results were substantial. In just five months, the team removed over 10,000 kilogrammes of waste from Mai Khao Beach. The core cleanup crew was regularly joined by hotel employees, local schools and volunteers, helping to build community engagement while amplifying impact.



Phuket Green Day with Sala, Renaissance and Anantara Dec 2, 2025. Photo: SMF

Equally important was what happened to the waste after it was collected. Over 3,000kg were recycled, keeping a significant volume of material out of landfills and transforming it into new products. This emphasis on waste separation and responsible disposal has helped SMF gather valuable data on the types and sources of marine debris affecting Phuket's northern beaches.

"This first season wasn't just about cleaning beaches – it was about building a model for collaboration that can protect Phuket's northern coastline long into the future," Michelle adds. "When communities, businesses, and young people are empowered to act together, the impact is transformative."

### Expanding Impact Across the Northern Coast

While Mai Khao remained the central focus, SMF also led parallel cleanup efforts in Natai and Nai Yang, working alongside hotels, local businesses, schools and volunteers. These activities reinforced the understanding that environmental challenges are regional in nature and require regional solutions.

By combining resources through partnerships, SMF and its collaborators were able to implement projects more efficiently, identify practical solutions, and ensure smoother execution. Importantly, all stakeholders were involved in shaping the scope of the project, leading to greater ownership, accountability and long-term commitment.

Throughout the monsoon season, SMF systematically recorded and shared data to support research,

reporting, continuous improvement and accountability. This information will directly inform the planning and implementation of the next phase of the Alliance.

### Education, Youth, and the Next Phase

Starting last month, SMF's high season focus shifts toward eco-education in local schools, with a strong emphasis on youth empowerment through its Eco Ambassadors initiative. By engaging students early, the Foundation aims to foster environmental stewardship that extends beyond cleanup activities and into everyday behaviour.

Beach cleanups will continue year-round, along with the installation of a purpose-built WasteWise Awareness Bin at a high-traffic picnic area in Mai Khao. Managed by the SMF team, the bin is designed to reduce litter while educating visitors about proper waste separation.

Looking ahead to the 2026 monsoon season, SMF plans to conduct large-scale community cleanups, involving community groups, hotel partners, schools and volunteers across Nai Yang, Mai Khao and Natai.

### A Shared Responsibility for Phuket's Future

The long-term objective is to create a strong alliance across Phuket's northern coastline that preserves biodiversity while addressing waste management challenges collectively. This effort also supports reducing the volume of waste sent to the Phuket Incinerator, which currently receives more than 1,200 tonnes of waste per day, despite having a capacity to incinerate only 700 tonnes.

SMF expresses its sincere gratitude to all partners for their trust, collaboration, and commitment throughout this inaugural season.

Call to Action: SMF invites more hotels, communities and stakeholders to unite in tackling Phuket's waste management challenges – working in collaboration with government agencies to protect the island's natural environment for generations to come.

To help protect Phuket's most valuable natural resource, contact: [michelle@sustainablemaikhaofoundation.org](mailto:michelle@sustainablemaikhaofoundation.org)

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# POP QUIZ

1. Copper gets its name from which Mediterranean country?
2. If a doctor says you have ecchymosis what have you got?
3. Agni, face covered in butter, is the Hindu god of what?
4. Which pop singer is nicknamed 'The Groover from Vancouver'?
5. In what game would you see Stamen, Blackwood and Gerber?

Answers below, centre

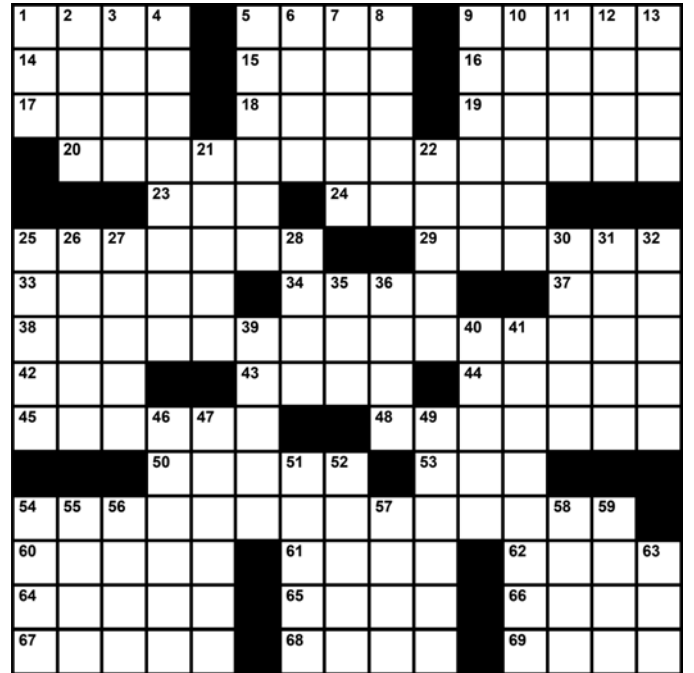
## SUDOKU

Hard

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

### Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across**
1. Head
  5. Tennis great Lendl
  9. Fireplace
  14. Aquatic plant
  15. Final go-with
  16. Taboos
  17. Convention group
  18. H.S. math
  19. Long baths
  20. Marple creator
  23. Piña colada ingredient
  24. Short musical piece
  25. Voicelessness
  29. Spiritualist
  33. Stingless flier
  34. Search thoroughly
  37. Genetics lab study
  38. Jo March creator
  42. Place to stay
  43. Badger's burrow
  44. "It's a Wonderful Life" role
  45. Adorn
  48. Dulcet
  50. Coward and namesakes
  53. "\_\_\_ boom bah!"
- Down**
1. Terrif
  2. Spicy stew
  3. Full of excitement
  4. Cheese accompaniment
  5. Panama and others
  6. Aloe \_\_\_
  7. Liturgical vestment
  8. Dusk to dawn
  9. Deep down
  10. Fastened, in a way
  11. Swarm member
- Across**
12. Mischievous god
  13. Sum, \_\_\_, fui
  21. Airs
  22. Cuban dance
  25. Go off script
  26. Inclined
  27. Keep after
  28. Meridian
  30. Sarcasm
  31. Disentangle
  32. Matched
  35. Muesli morsel
  36. Fable
  39. Appealed
  40. Stalin's predecessor
  41. Torches
  46. Beat the draft?
  47. Howler
  49. Willow twigs
  51. Fast talk
  52. Offshoot
  54. Units of work
  56. Inspiration
  57. Hit, in a way
  58. Place for a run
  59. Agrippina's slayer
  63. On Soc. Sec.



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

### Solutions to last week's puzzles:

G	A	R	B	U	L	T	R	A	F	R	I	T		
O	R	E	O	M	I	R	I	N	L	A	N	E		
D	I	S	A	P	P	O	I	N	T	M	E	N	T	S
S	A	T	L	I	N	E	S	I	D	I	O	T		
C	A	P	O	T	E	G	A	S	B	A	G			
O	P	E	N	A	M	E	R	I	C	A	N	A		
D	I	S	C	I	P	L	I	N	A	R	I	A	N	S
E	S	T	O	N	I	A	N	S	L	E	A	P		
R	H	O	M	B	S	V	E	L	D	T	S			
A	L	T	E	R	H	A	F	T	S	B	E	E		
D	I	S	I	N	T	E	G	R	A	T	I	O	N	S
D	E	A	R	U	S	U	A	L	C	L	I	P		
S	U	R	E	M	E	E	T	S	E	D	D	Y		

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

- 1) Cyprus (where it was first found); 2) A bruise; 3) Fire;
- 4) Brian Adams; 5) Bridge

## GOT YOUR NUMBER

**1**

in 4,332,817 are the odds of you being attacked and killed by a shark.

**30**

minutes is all it took for Sting to write 'Every Breath You Take' after he woke up with the line "Every breath you take, I'll be watching you" in his head.

**80**

times is how much heavier the Earth is compared with the Moon.

**150**

Hertz is how high human screams spike – the higher the pitch, the more terrifying the scream is perceived by other people.

**1**

**sextillion**

(one thousand trillion) supercomputers would be required to store all the DNA in the world.

Source: *Uberfacts*

## ISLAND VIEW



Sunrise off Rawai Beach. Photo by Steve Johnson

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 16, 1909**  
Ernest Shackleton's expedition finds the magnetic South Pole.

**Jan 17, 1998**  
Matt Drudge breaks the story of the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky affair on his Drudge Report website

**Jan 18, 474**  
Seven-year-old Leo II suc-

ceeds his maternal grandfather Leo I as Byzantine emperor. He dies 10 months later.

**Jan 19, 1883**  
The first electric lighting system employing overhead wires, built by Thomas Edison, begins service at Roselle, New Jersey.

**Jan 20, 2017**  
Donald Trump is inaugurated



Monica Lewinsky.

as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America.

**Jan 21, 1919**  
A revolutionary Irish parliament is founded and declares the independence of the Irish Republic. One of the first engagements of the Irish War of Independence takes place.

**Jan 22, 1879**  
The Battle of Isandlwana during the Anglo-Zulu War results in a Zulu victory.  
Source: *Wikipedia*

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**THU** 22 JAN



**Skál Phuket – First Dinner of the New Year**

We are delighted to invite you to the first Skál Phuket dinner of the new year, kindly hosted by Pamela Ong and her team at Courtyard by Marriott Phuket Town. After the great success of last year, we are pleased to enjoy the Japanese Buffet once again, a favourite among our members and guests — an excellent way to start the year with great food, networking, and Skál friendship. The evening begins with networking drinks at the Talung Lounge at 6pm followed by a Japanese Dinner Buffet at Krua Talad Yai from 7:30pm. Members B1300 - Non-Members B1700. Bookings - [contact@skalphuket.org](mailto:contact@skalphuket.org)

**FRI** 30 JAN



**AustCham Joint Chambers Australia Day Phuket Sundowners**

AustCham Thailand, in collaboration with Australian Alumni, AMCHAM, BCCT, CanCham Thailand, GTCC, NTCC, Phuket Chamber of Commerce, and SATCC, Joint Chambers Australia Day Phuket Sundowners. This event is scheduled to take place 18.00 - 21.00 hrs., at Bangkok Bob's Restaurant Phuket. We invite you to join us for an enjoyable evening of networking with members of the Australian–Thai business community at the newly opened Bangkok Bob's Restaurant Phuket. And supported by our corporate sponsor, The Australian Consulate-General Phuket. THB 650 for AustCham members, partner Chambers' members, and Australian Alumni Members, THB 1,200 for non-members. To book contact - [office@austchamthailand.com](mailto:office@austchamthailand.com)

**FRI** 6 FEB



**Grow Boating Phuket Evening - Feb 2026**

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Boat Lagoon from 5pm. Sponsorship for drinks is available and includes a generous promotional package from our media sponsors, The Phuket News, Live 89.5 FM and Phuket News TV. Email [growboatingphuket@gmail.com](mailto:growboatingphuket@gmail.com) for more details. There will be a delicious buffet sponsored by the Boardwalk Bistro and Bar for all attendees and as always, all your favourite beverages will be available from the bar. Come and join in the fun, everyone is welcome and there is no entry fee. If you know anyone you think would be interested in coming, please invite them along. Find us on Facebook at [facebook.com/GrowBoatingPhuket](https://facebook.com/GrowBoatingPhuket)

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Photo from Infuse Restaurant by Diamond Resort (p18)

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### GROW BOATING PHUKET EVENING - JAN 2026

The January Grow Boating evening was held at the recently opened Bluu Asian Kitchen & Bar at the Royal Phuket Marina on January 9. Thanks to the drinks sponsor for the evening, DCH Marine. Since 2013, DCH Marine has been the premier luxury yacht distributor in Asia Pacific, representing the world's most prestigious brands including Sunseeker Yachts, Saxdor Yachts, and Williams Jet Tenders. They have recently opened an office in RPM. See [www.dch-marine.com](http://www.dch-marine.com). There was a delicious buffet sponsored by Bluu Asian Kitchen & Bar for all attendees. Come and join in the fun next month. Everyone is welcome and there is no entry fee. Find out more - [facebook.com/GrowBoatingPhuket](https://facebook.com/GrowBoatingPhuket)



## Hosts launch countdown to MotoGP season opener

### MOTO GP

THE COUNTDOWN for the PT Grand Prix of Thailand 2026 has begun as the Kingdom prepares to host the opening race of the 2026 MotoGP season next month.

The race will take place between Feb 27-Mar 1 at the Chang International Circuit in Buriram, with a pre-season test held at the circuit between Feb 21-22.

The trophy for the ThaiGP was also unveiled at a press conference on Jan 8.

"Thailand will host the opening race of the 2026 MotoGP season for a second consecutive year and this is the seventh time the country is hosting a MotoGP event. This reflects our potential and strength in international sport management," said Dr Gong-sak Yodmani, governor of the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT).

"The ThaiGP is not

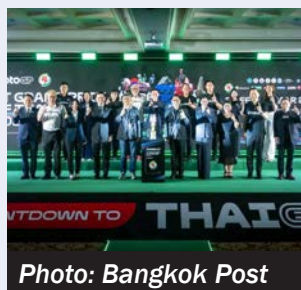


Photo: Bangkok Post

just a race but it is a tool to push for economic growth through sport tourism. The race will attract motorsport fans from around the world to Buriram and Thailand and it could potentially generate an income to boost Thai economy for more than B25 billion," he added.

This year will also see the fan zone expanded with more activities for fans, said Tanaisiri Chanwitthayaron, managing director of the Chang International Circuit.

A new agreement to 2031 was reached in November last year, guaranteeing Thai fans at least another five Grands Prix in Buriram.

Bangkok Post

# Thai snooker stars take a shot at politics

### SNOOKER

Bangkok Post

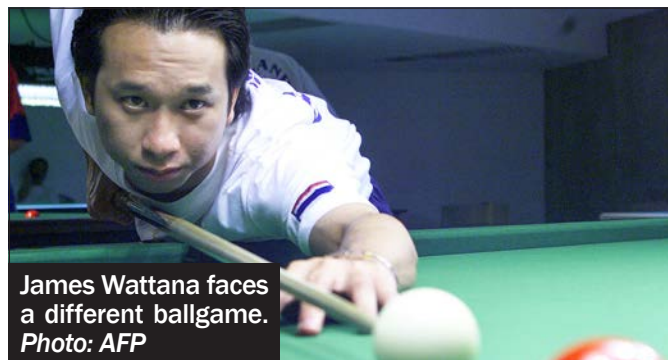
Wattana Pu-Orm, the former world No.3 who once carried Thailand's hopes on the international snooker circuit, has announced his entry into politics.

Better known to fans as James Wattana or 'Tong Sitchoi', the 50-year-old has joined the Ruam Thai Sang Chart Party as a list MP candidate, appearing at No.48 on the party's roster.

It is the first time Wattana has sought public office, a decision that has generated considerable interest both within the sporting community and beyond.

Wattana's move into politics follows closely on the heels of another snooker veteran, Atthasit Mahitthi.

His candidacy comes ahead of Thailand's general election, scheduled for Feb 8 next year, with the Election Commission having opened registration



James Wattana faces a different ballgame. Photo: AFP

for party-list MPs at the end of December. Ruam Thai Sang Chart has drawn No.6 in the party-list lottery.

Wattana's name is indelibly linked with the golden era of Thai snooker.

Turning professional in 1989, he became the first Asian player to break into the sport's elite, reaching a career-high ranking of world No.3 in the 1994-95 season.

His record includes three ranking titles – the Strachan Open in 1992 and the Thailand Open in 1994 and 1995 – as well as a victory at the World Matchplay in 1992.

Twice a semi-finalist at the World Championship at

the Crucible, Wattana was renowned for his heavy scoring, compiling three official maximum 147 breaks and more than 160 century breaks across his career.

His success helped popularise snooker in Thailand during the 1990s, inspiring a generation of players and earning him the nickname 'The Thai-phoon'.

He also represented his country at multiple Asian Games, winning medals in team events in 1998 and 2010. For Thai fans, Wattana's achievements were more than statistics: they symbolised the nation's arrival on the world snooker

stage. His victories at home tournaments, particularly the Thailand Open, drew huge crowds and cemented his status as a national sporting hero.

Meanwhile, Atthasit, widely known as 'Big Saraburi', has declared his candidacy for Saraburi's Constituency 3 under the People's Party banner.

A former amateur world champion in 2007 and a familiar voice to fans as a long-time snooker commentator, Atthasit is preparing for his first full campaign.

"I tested the waters before, running for the Senate in 2024," he said. "This time, I have chosen a party that aligns with my values – fairness, integrity and a forward-thinking approach. I believe I can represent the new generation."

It marks a striking moment for Thai sport, with two of its most famous snooker figures now seeking to make their mark in national politics.

## Milestone win for Kunlavut

### BADMINTON

KUNLAVUT VITIDSARN GOT OFF to a perfect start to the year after he claimed his first-ever Super 1000 title at the season-opening Malaysia Open in Kuala Lumpur last Sunday (Jan 11).

The Thai world No.2 narrowly won the opening game against defending champion Shi Yuqi 23-21 in 29 minutes, before the top-ranked Chinese retired with a shoulder injury at 1-6 in the second game at Axiata Arena.

Kunlavut pocketed US\$101,500 (B3,200,000), becoming the first Thai men's singles winner of the event. It was also his first Super 1000 final.

Since his first Super 1000 appearance in 2020, the Thai went on to play 17 more, reaching the semi-finals on four occasions.

The victory came right after Kunlavut announced last week that this year he will focus on all four Super 1000 World Tour tournaments in Malaysia, England, Indonesia, and China, aiming for a title.

In winning his eighth World Tour title, Kunlavut has become champion on all four levels (Super 300, 500, 750 and 1000) of the BWF World Tour.

His other World Tour victories are the 2022 German Open (Super 300), the 2023 India Open (Super 750), the 2023 Thailand Open (Super 500), the 2024 Korea Masters (Super 300), the 2025



Kunlavut Vitidsarn poses with the trophy. Photo: AFP

Indonesia Masters (Super 750), the 2025 Thailand Open (Super 500) and the 2025 Singapore (Super 750).

Meanwhile, world No.1 An Se-Young of South Korea continued her dominance in the women's game, beating Wang Zhiyi of China 21-15, 24-22 to win her third straight Malaysia Open title.

Liu Shengshu and Tan Ning of China defeated Korean Baek Ha-Na and Lee So-Hee 21-18, 21-12 in the women's doubles final, while Kim Won-Ho and Seo Seung-Jae of South Korea beat Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik of Malaysia 21-15, 12-21, 21-18 in the men's doubles final.

Feng Yanzhe and Huang Dongping defeated Jiang Zhenbang and Wei Yaxin 21-19, 21-19 in an all-Chinese mixed doubles clash. Bangkok Post

## Prize money at Australian Open hits new high

### TENNIS

PLAYERS AT THIS month's Australian Open will be competing for a record prize pool with organisers announcing a 16% increase in the total purse to AUS\$111.5 million (B2.3 billion).

The winners of the men's and women's singles at the first Grand Slam of the year will each take home \$4.15mn, up 19% from last year's \$3.5mn.

Players beaten in the opening round will get \$150,000, while even those knocked out in the first round of qualifying receive \$40,500.

Tournament director Craig Tiley said it reflected Tennis Australia's commitment to supporting tennis careers at every level, from rising stars to Grand Slam champions.

"From boosting qualifying prize money by 55% since 2023 to enhancing player benefits, we're ensuring professional tennis is sustainable for all competitors," he said on Jan 6.

The tournament gets under way at Melbourne Park on Sunday (Jan 18),



Photo: AFP

with Jannik Sinner and Madison Keys defending their titles.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian tennis player Marta Kostyuk has defended her "conscious choice" to address the plight of her country at a pre-Australian Open event in Brisbane.

The world number 20 did not shake hands with top-ranked Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka after being beaten in the Jan 11 final in straight sets.

Like many Ukraine players, Kostyuk refuses to shake hands with Russians or Belarusians following Moscow's invasion of her homeland.

In her speech at the

trophy presentation, the 23-year-old Kostyuk said: "I want to say a few words about Ukraine. I play every day with a pain in my heart and there are thousands of people who are without light and warm water right now."

"It's minus 20 degrees outside and it's very painful to live this reality every day. For me, it's a conscious choice to keep reminding people of what Ukraine and its citizens are going through," she added.

Sabalenka, who has said in the past that she does not support the war, congratulated Kostyuk on reaching the final in her on-court speech. AFP

# FA Cup holders exit shock

## FOOTBALL

AFP

Crystal Palace suffered the biggest shock in FA Cup history as the holders suffered a humiliating 2-1 defeat at sixth-tier Macclesfield last Saturday (Jan 10).

In their last FA Cup outing at Wembley in May, Palace made history by beating Manchester City to win the club's first ever major trophy.

This time Palace entered the record books for the wrong reasons as captain Paul Dawson and Isaac Buckley-Ricketts scored either side of half-time at Moss Rose for the side managed by John Rooney, the younger brother of former England captain Wayne Rooney.

The 117 places separating Premier League outfit Palace from Macclesfield of the National League North is the most overcome by an underdog in FA Cup history.

"I can't believe it, we never thought we would be in this position," said Rooney. "I didn't think it was possible but there is that little bit of hope that anything can happen on the day."

Palace boss Oliver Glasner was furious at what he described



Macclesfield players celebrate Isaac Buckley-Ricketts' (right) goal in the shock 2-1 win against FA Cup holders Crystal Palace. Photo: AFP

as a lack of "pride" and "slapstick" defending by the Eagles, who are now winless in nine games.

Elsewhere, new Chelsea manager Liam Rosenior started his reign with a 5-1 rout of Charlton.

Hired from Strasbourg to replace Enzo Maresca, Rosenior fulfilled his wish to "hit the ground running" by ending their five-match winless run and saying his team were "outstanding".

## PERSONALITY

Antoine Semenyo began his Manchester City career by scoring in a 10-1 rout of Exeter, but Tottenham boss Thomas Frank's future was plunged into doubt after a 2-1 loss to Aston Villa.

Spurs have won just three times in their last 14 games as their wait to lift the FA Cup for the first time since 1991 goes on as dominant Villa struck twice in the first half through Emi Buendia

and Morgan Rogers.

Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta made 10 changes from the side that drew 0-0 with Liverpool in the Premier League on Dec 8 but his side still managed to overcome Championship side Portsmouth 4-1 on Sunday thanks to a Gabriel Martinelli hat-trick.

The Brazilian winger drew stinging criticism for trying to push Liverpool's Conor Bradley off the pitch in the closing stages of their match after the Northern Irishman hit the ground with a serious knee injury, with Liverpool confirming the right-back will need surgery and will miss the rest of the season.

Martinelli apologised to Bradley after the game and did not seem affected by the furore at Fratton Park.

"That's personality, come in and talk on the pitch," said Arteta.

## FAIRYTALE

Wrexham's fairytale ride under Hollywood owners Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney continued as they knocked Premier League Nottingham Forest out with a dramatic 4-3 penalty shootout win, as goalkeeper Arthur Okonko provided heroics worthy of a blockbuster movie with shootout saves from Igor Jesus and Omari

Hutchison.

Welsh club Wrexham, who play in English competitions, have enjoyed three successive promotions since Reynolds and McElhenney bought the club in 2021.

Newcastle also needed penalties to beat Bournemouth after a thrilling 3-3 draw, as did Sunderland who won the shootout after a 1-1 draw with Everton.

Leeds needed a second-half fightback to beat Derby County 3-1, while League One Mansfield held off Sheffield United to progress with a 4-3 win at Bramall Lane.

Manchester United crashed out with a meek 2-1 home defeat to Brighton as interim boss Darren Fletcher saw the Red Devils' last chance of silverware this season and likely his chances of landing the job until the summer go up in smoke at Old Trafford.

Fletcher's men were left to rue not making more of a positive start before Brajan Gruda fired the visitors in front on 12 minutes and Danny Welbeck doubled the score against his former club.

United will now play only 40 games this season after exiting both domestic cup competitions at the first hurdle – their lowest number since 1915.

## Ashes drama exposes tale of two teams

### CRICKET

AUSTRALIA SEALED A thumping 4-1 Ashes win over England with a five-wicket victory in the final Test at Sydney on Jan 8.

England came to Australia with genuine hopes of a first away Ashes series win since 2010-11 with their aggressive "Bazball" approach but it quickly unravelled on treacherous batting pitches and in the face of consistently good Australian bowling.

They slumped 2-0 down after just six days of cricket with crushing eight-wicket defeats in Perth and Brisbane, and the knives came out for coach Brendon McCullum and captain Ben Stokes.

Former England skipper Michael Vaughan criticised the gung-ho style while long-time BBC broadcaster Jonathan Agnew declared "Bazball is dead."

When Stokes spent more than four hours defying Australia in the first innings of the third Test in reaching his slowest-ever 50 it appeared that the Bazball brand of attacking cricket may well have fizzled out.

McCullum leaves Australia with serious questions over whether he should keep his job, although Stokes is almost certainly safe.

Australia lost one long-established opener but found another. When Usman Khawaja



Australian players celebrate with the Waterford Crystal Ashes Trophy at the end of the fifth Ashes Test in Sydney on Jan 8. Photo: AFP

suffered back spasms in the first Test at Perth, Travis Head was promoted from five and slammed a rapid-fire match-winning 123.

He stayed at the top of the order for the rest of the series, crunching further swashbuckling centuries in Adelaide and Sydney, with his position now seemingly cemented.

The 39-year-old Khawaja made a successful comeback in the third Test at number four for the injured Steve Smith, but the writing was on the wall and he announced his decision to retire after his 88<sup>th</sup> Test in Sydney.

Australia's superior bowling depth was on full display during the series, with even a depleted attack able to wrestle England into submission.

Injured pace spearhead Josh Hazlewood played no part at all while Pat Cummins only played in Adelaide and regular stand-by Sean

Abbott was also unavailable.

It was left to the evergreen Mitchell Starc to carry the load and he was ably supported by Scott Boland throughout, with Brendan Doggett, Michael Neser and Jhye Richardson all playing their part.

Veterans Joe Root and Steve Smith demonstrated why they are in a class of their own, with the former plundering his first century on Australian soil then following up with another, while Smith expertly captained Australia in four of the five Tests while blasting his own tonne.

With 286 Tests and more than 24,000 runs between them, milestones once again fell.

Root joined Ricky Ponting on 41 Test hundreds with only Jacques Kallis (45) and Sachin Tendulkar (51) ahead of him, while Smith's 13<sup>th</sup> Ashes tonne was more than anyone bar Donald Bradman. AFP

## Youth War Elephants' plight looking bleak

### FOOTBALL

THAILAND'S U23 SIDE endured a difficult start to their AFC Asian Cup campaign in Saudi Arabia, succumbing 2-1 to Australia in Group D on Jan 8 despite a spirited display with 10 men.

Sittha Boonlha gave the Thais an early lead in the eighth minute before Phon-Ek Maneekorn's yellow card was upgraded to red following a VAR review for a high-footed challenge on Jordi Valadon, leaving Thailand to battle with a numerical disadvantage for more than 80 minutes.

Australia seized the initiative as Ethan Alagich levelled from the penalty spot in the 29<sup>th</sup> minute before Mathias Macallister struck the winner minutes later.

Head coach Thawatchai Damrong-ontrakul remained upbeat despite defeat.

"Australia are one of the best teams in Asia but we defended well and showed good potential," he said. "The red card and penalty were a big lesson for us. I hope the

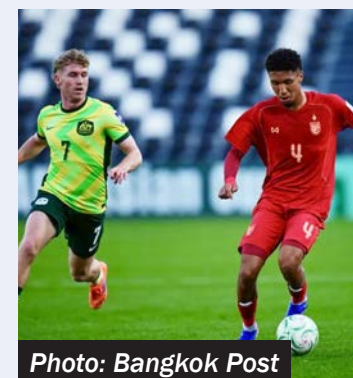


Photo: Bangkok Post

players learn from their mistakes."

The War Elephants then drew their second game in Group D against Iraq on Sunday 1-1.

Amoori Faisal scored from the penalty spot in the 26<sup>th</sup> minute but Thailand's persistence finally paid off in the 85<sup>th</sup> minute when Chingoen Phutonyong squeezed home the equaliser.

At time of press, Thailand were set to play China on Wednesday (Jan 14) in their final group match knowing only a win and favourable results elsewhere would allow them to progress in the tournament.

Bangkok Post

editor3@classactmedia.co.th

# Sport



**Colossal shock as Cup holders dumped > p15**

# STAR ACHIEVERS

## Phuket athletes recognised for big year



Photo: Sports Association of Phuket Facebook

### ALL SPORTS

The Phuket News  
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Athletes of all ages and abilities from Phuket have been honoured in recognition of their collective achievements throughout 2025, while simultaneously being awarded with cash prizes at a recent awards ceremony.

The Phuket Sports Development Foundation, in collaboration with the Phuket Provincial Sports Association and the Phuket office of the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT), held the official awards ceremony at the Chao Fah Meeting Room on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of Phuket Provincial Hall on Thursday, Jan 7.

In addition to congratulating athletes who brought recognition and honour to Phuket province across a range of national competitions last year, cash prizes ranging from B2,000 to B10,000 were distributed to medal winners.

The prize money was awarded to athletes from four major national sporting events. First was the 39<sup>th</sup> National Youth Games,

otherwise known as the “Ratchaburi Games”, which was held from Mar 21-31, 2024 in Ratchaburi province, where a total of 32 medals were won, consisting of 10 gold, 11 silver and 11 bronze. The success meant Phuket was ranked a respectable 5<sup>th</sup> in the Southern region and 19<sup>th</sup> nationally.

Next was the 6<sup>th</sup> annual National Senior Games, fondly known as the “Muang Ong Games”, which was held in Ratchaburi Province between Apr 19-26, 2025. Phuket registered a highly impressive 51 medal haul, consisting of 20 gold, 14 silver and 17 bronze. The achievements resulted in team Phuket ranking 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Southern region and 8<sup>th</sup> nationally.

Phuket won a total of 36 medals at the 49<sup>th</sup> National Games in Chanthaburi between Dec 9-20, 2024, made up of five gold, 13 silver and 18 bronze which left them ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in the Southern region and 37<sup>th</sup> nationally. Despite being staged in late 2024, the achievements were recognised and included in the 2025 calendar year, given the close proximity timewise.

Finally was the 39<sup>th</sup> National

Games for People with Disabilities, otherwise known as the “Anymanee Games”, which was held from Jan 25-31, 2025 in Chanthaburi province. Team Phuket registered 10 medals overall, consisting of four gold medals, two silver and four bronze to rank 7<sup>th</sup> in the Southern region and 25<sup>th</sup> nationally.

### MORALE BOOST

All medalists received cash prizes at the Jan 7 ceremony, with B10,000 going to gold medal winners, B3,000 to silver medal winners and B2,000 to bronze medal winners. The award of a cash prize is intended to boost morale and inspire athletes to continuously develop themselves in both sports and life, while bringing proud recognition to Phuket province at both regional and national levels, said officials.

The ceremony was overseen by Phuket Vice Governor Suwit Phansengiam, who was joined by: Thamawath Wongcharoenyos, SAT Committee Member and President of the Phuket Provincial Sports Association; Thanawut Petchara, Director of the SAT Phuket office; Boonchuan Panich,

Assistant Judge of the Court of Appeals Region 8; Pol. Col. Kitipong Klaikaew, Deputy Commander of the Phuket Provincial Police; Chalam Atthatham, Deputy Mayor of the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organization (PPAO); Dr. Wittaya Ketchu, Director of Phuket Vocational College; in addition to selected committee members of the Phuket Provincial Sports Association, distinguished guests, coaches, athletes and athlete representatives.

Vice Governor Suwit delivered the opening remarks and congratulated all athletes for their collective success, praising their dedication and sacrifice, whilst declaring his admiration for their abilities, efforts and achievements.

### SPORTSMANSHIP

He also explained the importance of such achievements highlighting the successful development of youngsters in sport, in line with Phuket province’s goals. Many of these promising young athletes will hopefully be motivated to continue to train hard and progress to become professional athletes and represent their

country at national level competition, he added.

Looking forward Mr Suwit said the achievements in the past year should give young athletes from Phuket great confidence and encouragement ahead of their participation in the 41<sup>st</sup> National Youth Games, Region 4 Qualifying Round, known as the “Southern Gateway Games”, which started in Chumphon on Monday (Jan 12) and runs until next Thursday (Jan 22).

He urged all participating athletes to compete to the best of their abilities, emphasising mindfulness, concentration and unity, while also stressing the importance of competing with respect, courtesy and the highest levels of adherence to the moral and ethical principles of sportsmanship. All athletes should humbly accept success and learn from mistakes to improve themselves in the future, he added.

Such an approach should hopefully ensure success in this and future competition for the athletes, resulting in continued honour and pride being bestowed on them, their families and the province of Phuket, Vice Governor Suwit concluded.

## Improving fitness and the environment with the Mai Khao ‘Takeoff Run’

### RUNNING

KEEN RUNNERS AND fitness fanatics alike have a unique event to look forward to after officials announced dates for the inaugural “Takeoff Run 2026” recently.

The event has been confirmed to take place on Sunday, Feb 22 and will take runners along the pristine shoreline of Mai Khao Beach in the northwest of Phuket.

Adopting the tagline

“healthy on the natural runway”, it is being positioned by organisers as a great way to improve people’s health whilst preserving nature at the same time, with one of the race options incorporating a litter collection feature en route.

The race has three separate options for participants to take on: a 11.35 kilometre Mini Marathon, a 6.16km Fun Run and a 6.16km “Plogging Run” which includes garbage collection activities en route.

All race distances will



start and finish on the shoreline north of Phuket International Airport, with participants running through national parkland adjacent to the beach before heading inland. The start time for all three options is 5am.

The event is open to people of all ages and is expected to attract not only

participants from Phuket and nearby areas but from further afield. Participation numbers are limited to 3,000 people in total, organisers confirmed and there is a flat B200 entry fee for all participants, regardless of which race option they select.

As part of their entry fee all participants will receive a running shirt, bib and commemorative medal upon finishing their respective race distance, while cash prizes will also be given to the top three finishers in each category. Additional

cash prizes will be allocated to the top three participants in the “Plogging Run” category who collect the most rubbish en route.

“Runners will take in breathtaking sea views while running alongside Mai Khao Beach before enjoying the natural beauty of the nearby national park,” a spokesperson for the event organiser said.

“The inland route will pass through the local community where the warm atmosphere and smiles of residents will help spur

runners on, while they can also enjoy seeing unique architecture such as the Baan Bo Som Mosque as they race.

“Furthermore, given the location of Phuket International Airport, participants have the opportunity to run under the wings of planes landing and taking off overhead – a unique runway experience that you cannot find anywhere else in the world,” the spokesperson added.

Registration is now open. For further information visit: [www.regis.run/thetakeoffrun](http://www.regis.run/thetakeoffrun).

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