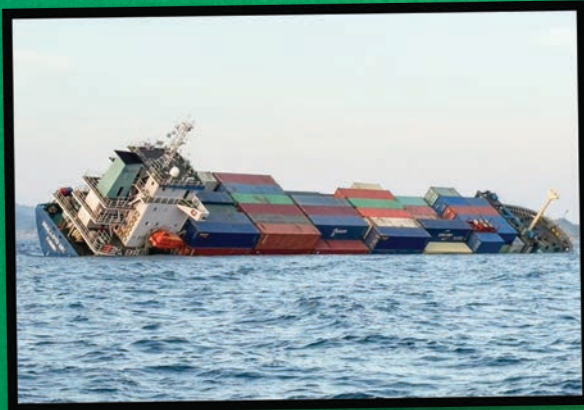


PM'S OFFICE PROBES FOREIGNERS IN JET-SKI RENTALS > PAGE 3

SALVAGE



A diver inspects the wreck of the 'SEALLOYD ARC' on the seabed off Phuket. Photos: Thai-MECC 3

RACE TO RECOVER HAZARDOUS CONTAINERS AMID PUSH TO REMOVE SUNKEN CARGO SHIP

Natnaree Likidwatanasakun
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Phuket officials this week continued to scramble to recover drifting shipping containers and force the full salvage of the sunken cargo ship SEALLOYD ARC, as the wreck lies in on the sea bed just three nautical miles off Laem Phromthep with its superstructure reaching up to just 20 metres below the water's surface.

More than a week after the Panamanian-flagged ship sank on

Feb 7, the multi-agency Emergency Response Command Centre remains locked in negotiations with the vessel's owner and insurer over who will pay for what could become a costly and technically challenging recovery operation.

At the heart of the crisis are 290 cargo containers – including 14 carrying hazardous materials – of which most are unaccounted for. A submarine drone has confirmed that many of the containers have fallen from the ship's resting place and onto the sea floor, at a depth of just over 60 metres.

Many other containers have been seen floating adrift, only to disappear with officials left to admit that they have lost track of the container – or just hope that it has sunk.

At time of press, officials were still none the wiser as to exactly which containers actually contain the hazardous materials, including car batteries.

Capt Pichet Songtan, spokesperson for the Thai Maritime Enforcement Command Centre Region 3 (Thai-MECC 3), said the immediate focus remains

twofold: maritime safety and environmental protection.

"The situation regarding the recovery of the wreck and its marine impact is currently under detailed discussion," Capt Pichet said this week.

"Our main missions are to ensure maritime safety and to control and mitigate environmental impact, especially the oil spill and hazardous materials."

He confirmed that all containers will ultimately be salvaged.

"Environmental impact must be prioritised, especially the 14..."

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Boat operators stymied month after blaze



LIFE PAGE 8

A crime fiction cracker from Belinda Bauer



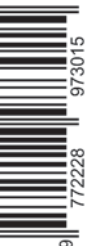
SPORT PAGE 16

Phuket Cricket League swings into action



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PHUKET'S QUALITY TILE BOUTIQUE



exeditor@classactmedia.co.th

News



Tourism gets Chinese New Year bump > p5

Fuel oil spill starts to dissipate

Continued from page 1

...containers containing hazardous materials, which pose an urgent risk," he said.

However, he acknowledged that the precise seabed locations of those hazardous containers have not yet been fully identified. "We do not know," he said when asked for confirmation of their exact positions.

No official estimate of the total salvage cost has yet been released. "We have no idea of the estimated cost of the salvage operation at this stage," Capt Pichet admitted.

Under Thai law, the shipowner – and by extension its insurer – bears primary responsibility for salvaging the wreck and recovering the cargo.

"Ultimately the ship's insurance company has primary responsibility for salvaging the wreck, regard-

less of who actually conducts the salvage operation," Capt Pichet said.

While the general cargo containers remain the property of the shipowning company and must be recovered under established procedures, the government has indicated it will assist in the recovery of the 14 hazardous containers due to the environmental risks they present.

The latest high-level meeting concluded that each government agency involved should initially cover its own operational expenses and compile a full estimate of costs incurred. A consolidated bill will then be submitted to the ship's insurer for reimbursement.

HIDDEN HAZARD

Beyond environmental concerns, maritime safety has emerged as a pressing issue.



Photo: Thai-MECC 3

Earlier official statements placed the wreck at a depth of 61 metres on sandy-mud seabed, with the aft superstructure 14 metres below the surface. However, updated assessments now confirm the uppermost structure is actually about 20 metres beneath the waterline.

While this is considered a safe depth for most small and medium vessels, it could pose a risk to larger ships operating in the area.

"So the ship must be removed," Capt Pichet said.

"We are trying our best to come up with a solution – our goal is to have the ship removed for safety reasons. Otherwise the ship will remain a hazard to other large vessels in the area."

Among those larger vessels regularly calling at Phuket is the cruise liner 'Genting Dream', a 150,695-gross-tonne ship measuring 335 metres in length, with an 8.3-metre draft and 18 decks rising 61 metres above the waterline.

Although its draft would not bring it close to the

wreck itself, officials say navigational safety margins must account for weather, currents and potential shifts in the wreck's structure over time.

All shipping companies have been formally notified of the wreck's coordinates and instructed to record them in their GPS systems as a warning point. The Phuket Marine Office has also informed every registered boat operator in the area and ordered them to avoid the danger zone.

Warning notices to mariners remain in force.

OIL SPILL CONCERNS

According to Adoon Raluekmoo, Chief of the Phuket Marine Office, the SEALLOYD ARC sank on Feb 7, at approximately 8pm, after losing stability earlier that afternoon.

At around 3:30pm, the Marine Department

received a radio request for assistance from the Andaman Sea Maritime Traffic Control and Safety Center regarding the vessel, which had reported taking on a large volume of water midship on the starboard side. The flooding caused the ship to list to port before capsizing southwest of Koh Kaew Noi, near Laem Phromthep.

All 16 crew members were safely rescued and brought ashore at Chalong Pier without injury.

The vessel was carrying 98 tonnes of heavy fuel oil (bunker fuel) and 32 tonnes of marine diesel oil at the time of sinking.

Initial observations detected a transparent oil film on the surface, believed likely to break down naturally under sunlight. So far no heavy fuel slick has been observed, Capt Pichet confirmed.



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Speedboat operators demand answers after Chalong blaze

SPEEDBOAT OPERATORS whose vessels were destroyed in the inferno beside Chalong Pier early last month have expressed growing frustration over delays in the investigation and the lack of compensation or meaningful assistance, as burnt wreckage continues to litter Chalong Bay beach more than a month after the blaze.

The fire broke out in the early hours of Jan 7 on a single speedboat moored at Chalong Pier before strong winds rapidly spread the flames to neighbouring vessels. In total, 24 speedboats were destroyed, with the damage estimated at more than B100 million.

Despite police completing their initial examination of the scene and local officials beginning a clean-up operation shortly after the incident, several burnt hulls remain on the beach. Operators and local residents say the charred remains produce an unpleasant burnt smell, particularly when the wind blows, detracting from the



Photo: Rawai Municipality

area's appearance and affecting both residents and tourists.

A group of affected operators gathered at the Phuket Provincial Hall on Feb 9 to demand clarity on the investigation and on the financial assistance and compensation they say they were promised. However, they were told only to wait for forensic results to determine the cause of the fire, which remains officially undetermined.

Ms Suphannee, owner of Racha Island Resort Boats, said two of her vessels were destroyed in the fire, with losses estimated at more than B8 million.

"There has been no clear progress in the investigation and no progress in compensation or relief," she said. "Many operators are

left bankrupt and have no working capital. Old debts remain while new debts grow. We have to rent boats to transport tourists just to get through each day."

Mr Somyot, of Raya Princess Boats, and Mr Thaworn, of Jurairat Boats, said they had little hope of receiving compensation for the destruction of their vessels, which were their sole source of income. Both questioned why an incident with such wide impacts on livelihoods, tourism and the coastal environment appeared to have stalled.

"Will anyone ever be held responsible for the massive damage?" one operator asked.

Phuket Vice Governor Adul Chuthong met with the complainants and said a meeting had been scheduled to allow boat operators to seek resolution of their complaints. Authorities would also ensure the owner of the speedboat where the blaze originated meets with police as part of the ongoing inquiry, he assured. *The Phuket News*

Jet-ski rentals linked to foreigners face scrutiny

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Alleged illegal business operations linked to foreign investment groups in Phuket's jet-ski rental sector are being investigated following complaints from local operators to the Prime Minister's Office.

A fact-finding meeting and field visit were held in Patong on Feb 12, led by Nopporn Boonkaew, Deputy Permanent Secretary to the Prime Minister, who met with beach service operators to hear concerns over foreign-linked businesses, waterway regulations and marine safety issues.

The probe stems from a petition submitted on Sep 30 last year by Plath Chandrasobhin, an adviser to the Phuket Jet-Ski Rental Operators Club, through the Prime Minister's Office 1111 Public Service Center.

The complaint followed an earlier submission on Jan 10 last year, and called for investigations into companies claiming to operate as



Photo: PR Phuket

associations while allegedly acting as representatives of foreign investors.

The petition also requested the suspension of licences for jet-ski rental operators found to be operating illegally.

Following receipt of the complaints, the Office of the Permanent Secretary to the Prime Minister instructed the Phuket Provincial Office, led by Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn, and the Phuket Marine Office to investigate

the allegations, take action within their authority and report preliminary findings to the complainants.

During the meeting on Feb 12, operators raised six key issues:

- The impact of waterway area regulations, citing a Phuket Provincial Office notice issued on Feb 16 this year, which repeated the longstanding rule that water activity zones are to occupy no more than 10% of beach areas;

- Alleged unauthorised rental of electric surfboards, jet surfboards and electric hydrofoil bikes at Patong, Kata, Karon and Kalim beaches, which operators say disrupt other activities and raise accident risks;

- Claims of foreign investment groups operating through Thai nominees, affecting local businesses;

- Problems with designated jet-ski parking areas and regulation of licensed rental businesses;

- Safety concerns over speedboat parking and the risk of maritime accidents;

- Allegations that licences have been issued to associations purportedly representing foreign investment groups in violation of the law.

Operators called on authorities to carry out thorough investigations into organisations claiming to act as associations or representatives of foreign investors, suspend licences for illegal operators, and strengthen marine safety management across Phuket's beaches.

Underpass lanes close for roadworks

ROAD RESURFACING work at two of Phuket's busiest underpasses began on Monday (Feb 16), with motorists warned to expect temporary traffic diversions until the end of March.

The Phuket Highways Office issued a public notice confirming that improvement works are underway at the Samkong Underpass and the Darasamut Underpass from Monday through Mar 30.

Phuket Highways Chief Winai Kumuang said the project involves resurfacing the road surface inside the underpasses only, with work being carried out one lane at a time.

"At all times, one lane inside the tunnel will remain open to traffic," he explained. "The other lane in the underpass will be unaffected while work continues."

Work on the northbound lanes of both underpasses began simultaneously on Monday. Crews will operate around the clock in an effort to complete the works as quickly as possible, Mr Winai said.



Photo: Natnaree Likidwatansakun

Once resurfacing of the northbound lanes is completed, work will switch to the southbound lanes under the same traffic management arrangement.

The roads above the underpasses will not be affected by the project.

Wichit Police Deputy Chief Pol Lt Col Wutthiwat Liangboonjinda confirmed that despite the roadworks affecting both underpasses, only the Darasamut Underpass will have the large vehicle ban to come into effect on Mar 1.

Under a new regulation issued on Jan 30, trucks with three axles or more, 10-wheeled trucks and articulated trucks, as well as passenger buses with more than 30 seats, will be prohibited from using the underpass between 6am and 9pm. *The Phuket News*

Thitikan seeks recount after vote discrepancies raised

A PEOPLE'S PARTY CANDIDATE in Phuket has formally requested a recount in Constituency 3, citing discrepancies between vote tallies published by local authorities and figures shown on the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT) website following the general election on Feb 8.

Thitikan Thitiprutikul submitted the request to the Phuket branch of the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT Phuket) on Feb 11, calling for a recount of ballots in Constituency 3 to clarify mismatched vote totals, including votes cast by overseas voters.

In a Facebook post, Mr Thitikan said the recount request was aimed at ensuring transparency and accuracy in the electoral process.

"Today, I submitted a request for a recount in Constituency 3 of Phuket Province to locate votes for voters, including votes from overseas, where the numbers do not match. This also includes ballot tally sheets that lack details of the polling station and location, along with evidence sent to me and the party by the public," he wrote.

"A recount may not guarantee a victory for me, but it is for the transparency of the election, the accuracy of the data, and to ensure that no vote is lost."

Mr Thitikan added that members of the public who have additional evidence



Photo: Thitikan Thitiprutikul

related to the discrepancies are welcome to submit it to him or the party.

According to unofficial results published on the ECT website, Orathai Kerdsud of the Kla Tham Party won Constituency 3 with 29,323 votes, while Mr Thitikan finished second with 19,199 votes.

Mr Thitikan said confusion had arisen because vote tallies released by the Phuket branch of the Public Relations Department did not match the figures shown on the ECT website.

"Many people are confused about why the scores don't match, because the Public Relations Office in Phuket said they received their figures from the Election Commission," he said.

"However, when checking the Election Commission website, the information is different. I would like to ask the Phuket Election Commission: which data set is reliable?"

The Phuket News

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Wind 4 m/s

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Russian-run venue raided for hookahs

A RUSSIAN-MANAGED bar in Cherg Talay was raided for operating without a licence, trading beyond legal hours and illegally selling hookah, with two suspects arrested and equipment seized, Phuket officials confirmed on Feb 15.

Phuket Vice Governor Rungruang Thimabutr said the late-night raid targeted Safari Lounge Bar following a tip-off received at about 1am by a special operations unit.

During the inspection, officers found the venue operating as a full entertainment venue, serving food and alcohol, with a DJ performing and numerous foreign patrons inside. Several hookah smoking areas were discovered.

A Russian national identified only as 'Kamil' was found managing the business.

Some staff were Myanmar nationals. Officers examined documents and seized hookah equipment and cash as evidence before detaining two suspects.



Photo: PR Phuket

Kamil faces charges of importing prohibited goods, Customs Act offences, selling hookah products in violation of Consumer Protection Committee Order No. 9/2015, operating an entertainment venue without permission and beyond legal hours, selling alcohol during prohibited hours, working without a permit and failing to notify authorities of foreign employment within the required period.

A Myanmar employee was charged under the Alien Employment Management Act for failing to notify the registrar of employment.

All suspects and seized items were handed over to investigators. Authorities said further operations were forthcoming. *The Phuket News*

Customs seize 3.1kg of cocaine at airport

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Customs officials at Phuket International Airport have arrested a foreign passenger accused of attempting to smuggle more than 3.1 kilogrammes of cocaine into Thailand, in a case authorities say is linked to a European drug trafficking route.

The Customs Department announced the seizure on Feb 12 following the arrest of a male passenger who arrived in Phuket on a flight from Humberto Delgado Airport in Lisbon, Portugal, transiting through Istanbul Airport in Türkiye. The man was identified as high-risk during passenger data analysis under Thailand's intensified anti-drug trafficking campaign. Customs did not disclose his name.

Ekwut Na-ek, Director of the Investigation and Suppression Division, said the arrest was carried out under the "Quick Big Win in Anti-Drug Trafficking" policy introduced by Customs Director-General Panthong Loykulnan, which has strengthened surveil-



Photo: Phuket Airport Customs House

lance and risk profiling at ports nationwide.

The operation involved the Investigation and Suppression Division, Customs Region 5, Phuket Airport Customs and several security agencies, including the Airport Interdiction Task Force, the Office of the Narcotics Control Board, the Narcotics Suppression Bureau and the Security Center of the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters.

After the passenger's luggage was flagged during X-ray screening, officers conducted a detailed search and found a concealed compartment inside a suitcase. Hidden within was white powder wrapped in blue carbon paper, allegedly

intended to avoid detection.

A preliminary field test using ONCB reagent 052 (cobalt thiocyanate) turned blue, indicating the substance was cocaine, a Category 2 narcotic under Thai law. The total weight, including packaging, was about 3.1kg, with an estimated street value exceeding B9.3 million.

The suspect and seized drugs were handed to investigators for legal proceedings on charges of importing a Category 2 narcotic without permission and related Customs Act offences.

Mr Ekwut said Customs will continue working with partner agencies to disrupt trafficking networks and safeguard national security.

Ugandans nabbed for prostitution

NINE UGANDAN WOMEN were arrested on Bangla Rd early last Friday (Feb 13) for alleged prostitution offences, with two also found to have overstayed their visas.

The arrests were made at about 3am during a joint operation by Phuket Immigration, Phuket Tourist Police and officers from the Phuket Provincial Social Development and Human Security Office. The women were detained while on inspection patrol along Bangla Rd after they were found approaching and soliciting passersby.

Tourist Police said the actions constituted an offence under Section 5 of the Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act.

All nine were taken into custody and handed to social development officials for



Photo: Phuket Tourist Police

processing and fines before being transferred to Phuket Immigration for further legal action.

Immigration checks revealed that two of the women had overstayed their permitted period of stay by 229 days and 76 days respectively. Authorities did not specify which individuals were responsible.

Phuket Immigration Chief Pol Col Khemchart Wattanapakasem said their permission to stay would be revoked and they would be blacklisted from re-entering Thailand. Inspections in Patong will continue, he added.

The Phuket News

Taiwanese dentist caught for operating unlicensed clinic

A TAIWANESE MAN HAS been arrested following a raid on an unlicensed dental clinic in Wichit and now faces four charges, including operating a medical facility without a licence and practising dentistry without legal permission.

The arrest took place at 6:10pm on Feb 12 during a joint operation by Wichit Police and officials from the Phuket Provincial Public Health Office. Pol Col Somsak Thongkliang, Chief of Wichit Police, led officers to the Sunrise Smile Dental Clinic on the second floor of a plaza behind Central Festival Phuket.

Inside, officers found several Thai and foreign clients waiting for treatment. A man identified as Ling Tung, 35, a Taiwanese national, was wearing medical scrubs and performing a teeth-cleaning procedure on a patient.

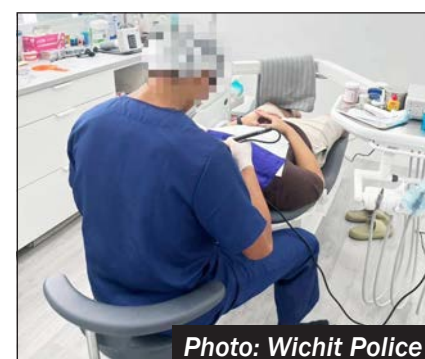


Photo: Wichit Police

He was unable to produce a valid Thai dental licence or clinic operating permit when requested.

Police said the investigation began after the Public Health Office filed a complaint alleging a foreign dentist was operating illegally.

Mr Ling reportedly told officers he was a qualified dentist in Taiwan but did not hold a Thai licence or work permit. He was taken to Wichit Police Station for legal proceedings.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Chinese New Year comes alive

Eakkapop Thongtub
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Chinese New Year celebrations are in full swing, with thousands of visitors flocking to the Phuket Old Town area and officials forecasting more than B600 million in tourism revenue during the festive period.

On Monday (Feb 16), historic Thalang Rd in Phuket City was thronged with Thai and international tourists strolling beneath rows of red lanterns and auspicious decorations. The island's distinctive Sino-Portuguese buildings provided a colourful backdrop as visitors stopped to take photos, browse souvenir shops and sample local food.

Shop owners and street vendors reported a noticeable increase in sales compared with last year, particularly from visitors arriving from China, Singapore and Malaysia. Many businesses introduced special promotions to mark the Lunar New Year, contributing to what operators described as a welcome boost to the local economy.

According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Phuket Office, the province is forecasting an average hotel occupancy rate of 81.87% during the official Chinese New Year



Photo: Phuket Tourist Police

period from Feb 17-23, with tourism revenue expected to exceed B600mn.

Siriwan Siharat, director of the TAT Phuket Office, said the positive outlook is being driven by a wide range of cultural and tourism activities staged across the island throughout February.

Among the key highlights are the Thailand Biennale, Phuket 2025 international contemporary art festival, running until the end of April; the annual Wat Chalong Fair at Wat Chaiyatharam from Feb 16-22; the 29th Bay Regatta sailing race from Feb 18-22; the Phuket Lantern Festival from Feb 11 to Mar 3; and the Phuket Chinese New Year Festival "Duan

Sam Ban Rao" from Feb 22-24 in Old Town.

The main festival will transform Thalang, Krabi, Phang Nga and Thepkrasattri roads into a major cultural and food zone from 6pm to 11pm each day from Feb 22-24. Highlights include a grand parade featuring more than 300 participants, more than 400 food and product stalls in a City of Gastronomy zone, cultural demonstrations and the return of the popular 40-metre 'Fire Dragon Tunnel'.

To promote sustainable tourism, free open-top electric buses are operating daily from 11am to 8pm throughout February, with boarding at

Dragon Square at Queen Sirikit Park in Phuket Town.

As part of preparations for the tourism surge, the Head of the Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Songkhla met Phuket Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn at Provincial Hall on Feb 11 to discuss tourist safety and reaffirm Thai-Chinese relations.

Consul Li Chenglong said the consulate, established in 2001, assists Chinese tourists and residents in Phuket and safeguards their rights and interests. He noted that more than 500,000 Chinese tourists have visited Phuket since the beginning of the year, and called for close cooperation among agencies to ensure visitors "travel happily and return home safely" during major festivals.

Tourist safety, particularly road accidents involving visitors riding motorcycles without valid licences, was raised as a key concern. Governor Nirat said the province has stepped up controls on motorcycle and car rental operators to prevent vehicles being rented to people without valid licences.

Meanwhile, fire safety has also been flagged as a priority during the festive period. The Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation

(DDPM) Phuket branch has urged residents and visitors to take extra precautions when burning incense and paper offerings, lighting candles and decorating homes and shrines.

DDPM Director-General Theerapat Khachamat warned that Chinese New Year activities involving open flames, cooking and electrical decorations significantly increase fire risks if care is not taken.

Residents have been advised to burn paper offerings only in fire-resistant containers away from flammable materials, and avoid leaving candles unattended. Parents were also urged to supervise children closely when using firecrackers.

Authorities have deployed police and municipal officers to manage traffic and ensure public safety during the celebrations, while additional parking areas have been arranged to accommodate large crowds.

Phuket welcomed 14.12mn tourists in 2025, with officials reporting more than B546bn generated in tourism revenue.

With strong advance bookings, packed streets and coordinated safety measures in place, officials say this year's Chinese New Year period is providing a crucial early boost to the island's tourism economy for 2026.

Distemper outbreak forces dog shelter to halt intake

AN OUTBREAK OF canine distemper at the Phuket Stray Dog Shelter in Thalang has forced officials to suspend the intake of new dogs, as the highly contagious disease continues to claim lives weeks after it was first detected.



Photo: Chalermpong Saengdee / Facebook

A visit to the shelter at Bang Khanun Forest Park by Phuket MP re-elect Chalermpong Saengdee last week confirmed that the outbreak, which began in mid-January, has yet to subside.

The disease, which attacks the respiratory, digestive and nervous systems of dogs, is being reassessed every two weeks, but staff report that dogs are still falling ill and dying on a daily basis.

The shelter, located in Thalang District, currently cares for approximately 1,077 dogs. With infections spreading among the population, management has taken the decision to temporarily stop accepting new arrivals until the situation is brought under control.

Canine distemper is a serious viral disease that can cause fever, coughing,

vomiting, diarrhoea, neurological complications and, in severe cases, death. It spreads easily among unvaccinated dogs through close contact, shared food and water bowls, and contaminated environments.

The shelter receives funding from the local government at a rate of B13 per dog per day. Officials said the facility uses between 9,000 and 9,300 kilogrammes of dog food per month – or around 300kg per day – to feed the animals in its care. Nine staff members are responsible for supervising and caring for the dogs.

Beyond the immediate health crisis, the outbreak has exacerbated existing infrastructure challenges at the facility. Among the most urgent concerns are the nearly full dog carcass

burial pit and the dog waste disposal pit, both of which require prompt attention to prevent environmental and public health impacts.

Shelter representatives also highlighted the need for broader improvements to bring the facility up to standard and enhance animal welfare. Proposed upgrades include trimming overgrown trees, repairing and improving the perimeter wall, pouring concrete floors in dog kennels, constructing additional dog shelters, and providing raised chairs or beds to keep dogs off damp ground.

The shelter is seeking assistance in coordinating with relevant government agencies to secure support for these improvements. Officials said upgrading the facility would not only improve the quality of life for the dogs but also help minimise any impact on surrounding communities.

Authorities are continuing to monitor the outbreak closely, with further assessments expected in the coming weeks. *The Phuket News*

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ADVERTORIAL

As global demand for responsible real estate continues to rise, Phuket is emerging as an unlikely but powerful frontrunner in sustainable luxury living. At the heart of this shift is The Zero Phuket, a condominium development company redefining what modern, eco-conscious property development can look like in Southeast Asia.

Founded by British developer Robert Hodge, The Zero Phuket brings with it the discipline and credibility of an award-winning project in London. Hodge's vision was born from a desire to bridge the gap between high-end international construction expectations and the unique environmental needs, and condominium features, of a tropical island. By combining a 'British Standard' approach to engineering with a deep understanding of Phuket's lifestyle, investment and environmental landscape, the company has established a distinctive

benchmark within Thailand's property sector. The result is a portfolio of properties that prove luxury, high performance, and environmental responsibility can coexist.

The company's first project, The Zero Bang Tao, has already made history as Phuket's first single-use plastic-free condominium. Recognised with the 2025 DOT Property Award, the project integrates British construction standards with forward-thinking sustainability features such as solar power systems, rainwater harvesting and energy-efficient architectural design. These elements are embedded into the DNA of the development to reduce long-term operating costs while enhancing resident comfort.

Beyond sustainability, The Zero Phuket understands that successful developments must also perform financially within the competitive real estate market. With a strong return on investment of circa 11% annually, driven by its prime location, thoughtful design,



and hotel-style amenities. This track record has helped build investor confidence, particularly among international buyers seeking resilient, income-generating assets in Thailand's competitive property market.

A key differentiator is The Zero Phuket's in-house management model. Unlike many developments that outsource operations after handover, The Zero Phuket retains control of property management, rental programmes and ongoing maintenance, with The Zero App that allows owners to monitor their income and rental activity in real-time

from anywhere in the world. This ensures consistent service standards, protects asset value and delivers a seamless experience for both owner-occupiers and investors. From hospitality-trained staff to professional rental management, the company operates more like a community-based hotel group than a traditional condominium developer. By eliminating fragmented third-party operators, The Zero Phuket maintains full transparency over operational standards, branding and guest experience, a crucial factor in today's review-driven travel economy.

Following the success of The Zero Bang Tao, The Zero Nai Yang extends the brand's vision to the quieter north of the island, near the protected Nai Yang Beach and Sirinat National Park. This low-density, boutique development is designed to blend into its natural surroundings, offering eco-smart residences immersed in greenery while remaining minutes from Phuket International Airport. It caters to buyers seeking tranquillity without sacrificing accessibility, quality, or long-term investment potential.

Nai Yang is the focus of billions in government and private investment, including the Phuket International Airport expansion (set to increase capacity to 18 million passengers) and the upcoming world-renowned International Hospital, slated for 2027. By positioning The Zero Nai Yang in this high-growth corridor, the company offers investors a rare entry-level price point in a region destined for high-end appreciation.

Across its projects, The Zero Phuket places strong emphasis on hotel-style amenities, including resort-inspired pools, wellness spaces, concierge services and thoughtfully curated communal areas. Located in some of Phuket's most desirable neighbourhoods, these developments appeal to both lifestyle buyers and high-yield rental markets, particularly in the growing eco-luxury travel segment.

As Phuket faces increasing pressure from overdevelopment and environmental strain, The Zero Phuket offers a compelling alternative: developments that respect the island, reward investors, and elevate standards across the industry. In doing so, the company is not only shaping sustainable communities but also setting a new direction for the future of property development in Thailand. The perfect representation for 'British Standards, Thai Prices'.

Contact details:

Phone: +66 (0)65 651 6795

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Website: www.thezerophuket.com

AoT marks B4.65bn in Q1

THE AIRPORTS OF Thailand (AoT) has reported a net profit of B4.65 billion for the first quarter of the 2026 fiscal year, pledging to focus on a progressive financial restructuring initiative to support steady growth.

According to AoT President Paweena Jariyathitipong, the authority earned more than B17.3bn in revenue from October to December last year.

Of those included, she said aviation services generated more than B8.8bn in income, a 0.67% increase from the same period of the previous fiscal year.

Six AoT-managed airports, Don Mueang, Suvarnabhumi, Chiang Mai, Mae Fah Luang, Phuket, and Hat Yai, had welcomed 208,281 flights, a 1.82% increase from the same period of the previous fiscal year. Those consisted of 116,594 international flights and 91,687 domestic flights.

They had also welcomed 34.47 million passengers, a 2.5% in-



Photo: Bangkok Post

crease from the same period of the previous fiscal year, which consisted of 20.92mn international flyers and the other 13.55mn on domestic flights, she said.

Ms Paweena said that AoT expected revenue growth over the next nine months of this fiscal year, following a trend in tourism revitalisation across the world.

The increase in airport flyer numbers led to a significant rise in airport infrastructure utilisation, with some airports now approaching their capacity.

Ms Paweena said that, in this regard, expansion projects for the six airports are necessary, as

those projects, scheduled for completion in 2034, will increase their capacity to more than 214.5mn passengers a year, supporting long-term growth in aviation demand.

Ms Paweena said that AoT has also worked on a revenue restructuring initiative, including a promotional campaign for carriers on servicing at one of six AoT airports, to increase its aeronautical revenue.

The AoT is also set to launch the new Passenger Service Charge (PSC) collection regulation in the middle of the year, with the initiative expected to enhance its financial security by more than B10bn. *Bangkok Post*

Shorter visa-free stays on the cards

THE MINISTRY OF Tourism and Sports has insisted that the government's plan to reduce visa-free stays from 60 days to 30 days will not affect tourism, as most foreign visitors stay in Thailand for less than a month.

Permanent Tourism and Sports Secretary Natthriya Thaweewong said a committee appointed by the prime minister and chaired by the permanent foreign affairs secretary is reviewing visa measures, including the 60-day visa-free scheme currently available to visitors from 93 countries. The ministry submitted research to support the review, which is expected to result in a reduction to 30 days.

Ms Natthriya said discussions with relevant agencies, including the Immigration Bureau, reached agreement in principle to shorten the permitted stay in order to close loopholes that could be exploited by foreign criminals or individuals engaging in illegal activities.

"This change should not impact tourism, as foreign tourists on average stay in



Photo: Bangkok Post

Thailand for 21 days at most," she said. Visitors wishing to remain longer than 30 days could apply for an extension through normal procedures.

She added that the caretaker government has the authority to approve the change, as a new administration has yet to be formed.

The 60-day visa-free scheme was introduced in mid-2024 under former prime minister Srettha Thavisin to stimulate a sluggish tourism sector.

Thanapol Cheewarat- tanaporn, President of the Association of Thai Travel Agents, said the association supports the proposed reduction. He said tourism

operators had called for the change since last year to help curb foreign criminal activity and improve safety in the industry.

Most tourists do not stay for 60 days, he said, and those who do often misuse the privilege for non-tourism purposes, such as operating nominee businesses or working illegally as tour operators or guides.

While arrivals initially surged – particularly from China, Taiwan and India – average lengths of stay remained under a month. He stressed the visa-free scheme should be retained, as it remains important amid contracting arrivals.

Bangkok Post

Parties back BJT coalition

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

The Pheu Thai Party has formally pledged support for the Bhumjaithai Party (BJT) to take the lead in forming a new government as Prime Minister and BJT leader Anutin Charnvirakul says both sides are ready to put past differences behind them and move forward together.

Anutin said last Friday (Feb 13) that BJT was honoured to welcome Pheu Thai for talks on government formation. While the official election results have yet to be announced, he said discussions had already taken place to prevent a prolonged political vacuum.

“Based on the election outcome, although it has not yet been formally endorsed, we do not want to see a vacuum for too long. We have held preliminary discussions and reached a conclusion that Pheu Thai is willing to support Bhumjaithai as the core party in forming the government, in line with the agreed timeline,” he said.

Anutin added that both parties are focused on the future, expressing confidence that their combined pool of capable personnel would be sufficient to



Key figures from BJT and Pheu Thai meet at BJT headquarters on Feb 13. Photo: Bangkok Post

steer the country towards a stable and promising future in line with public expectations.

“Bhumjaithai and Pheu Thai are looking ahead. The quality personnel of both parties should be able to work together to push Thailand towards a stable future that meets the expectations of the Thai people. From now on, we will hold more discussions to finalise the details of government formation,” he said.

Yodchanan Wongsawat, a prime ministerial candidate of Pheu Thai, briefly thanked Anutin for giving the party the opportunity to enter negotiations.

Pheu Thai secretary-general Prasert Jantararungtong said the party stood ready to support BJT as the core party in forming the new administration, echoing the prime minister’s remarks.

FIRM MEASURES

Anutin said last Sunday that his party would take responsibility for the security and economic portfolios in the coalition government he is seeking to form, pledging firm measures to protect the border and revive the economy.

He said BJT would oversee national security through diplomatic and military channels,

with priority given to safeguarding Thailand’s territory, sovereignty and public safety.

The party would maintain and intensify current border-closure policies, including the construction of what he called “security walls” along frontier areas.

He also pledged to revoke the 2001 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU44) signed with Cambodia regarding overlapping maritime claims.

Anutin also said he and Caretaker Foreign Affairs Minister Sihasak Phuanketkeow would work to restore Thailand’s standing on the global stage and prevent foreign intimidation.

On the economic front, he said BJT would lead efforts to revive the economy and address long-standing structural constraints. Economic management would be handled by what he called a “Thailand team”, comprising himself, Caretaker Finance Minister Ekniti Nitithanprapas, Caretaker Commerce Minister Suphatee Suthumphon and Mr Sihasak.

Pheu Thai is likely to assume responsibility for education, higher education, science, research and innovation, and labour – aligning with its campaign pledges.

However, Pheu Thai is also

understood to be negotiating for the Public Health Ministry, possibly in exchange for labour, social development and human security portfolios.

FULL SUPPORT

Meanwhile, the Kla Tham Party has confirmed it will lend full support to BJT in forming a new government, without attaching any political conditions or demands.

Pai Lik, secretary-general of Kla Tham, said on Monday that he had spoken with BJT’s secretary-general, Chaichanok Chidchob, to clarify the party’s position.

He dismissed reports suggesting that Kla Tham had set bargaining terms, particularly with the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, insisting that no such conditions existed.

Three smaller parties – the New Democracy Party, the Economic Party and the New Party – have also announced their intention to join the coalition and support Anutin as prime minister.

The Palang Pracharath Party, however, has not yet declared its stance, despite earlier talks with BJT leaders.

All parties are currently awaiting the Election Commission’s official certification of the poll results, expected within the 60 day legal timeframe.

Thailand pushes to arrest plunging birth rate

BANGKOK

AUTHORITIES ARE launching a new push to address Thailand’s collapsing birth rate, now the lowest in 75 years, with a focus on ensuring that every pregnancy is safe, voluntary and fully supported.

Thailand is facing a severe demographic crisis driven by a sharp decline in births, said Dr Amporn Benjapolpitak, director-general of the Department of Health, at a press conference last Friday (Feb 13).

The trend, she warned, poses long-term risks to the country’s economic growth, social structure, labour force, welfare system and public health.

According to the Department of Provincial Administration, Thailand recorded only 416,514 births last year, the lowest figure in nearly 75 years, while deaths reached 559,684.

Thailand is consistently ranked among the bottom 10 countries in the world for low birth rates. Its Total Fertility Rate has dropped to between 1.0 and 1.2



Photo: Bangkok Post

children per woman, well below the 2.1 replacement level required to maintain a stable population.

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia with a declining birth rate.

The low birth rate is attributed to economic struggles, high living costs and changing social norms among younger generations, leading the government to view the issue as a national crisis.

Without substantial policy intervention, the population could shrink to as little as 30 million, from around 67mn now, within the next five to six decades, officials said.

Dr Amporn outlined the “Every Birth Matters” policy of the Ministry of

Public Health, stressing that the objective is not to pressure couples into having children, but to ensure that every birth is voluntary, safe and supported by high-quality care.

Department of Health Deputy Director-General Dr Pakorn Tungkaseerak highlighted five key achievements: expanding fertility and preconception services; strengthening maternal and child health-care through a continuous care model; investing in early childhood development under the “Amazing 2,500 Days” framework; preventing unintended pregnancies; promoting mental health support for mothers and families.

Bangkok Post

DLT to allow online licence renewals

BANGKOK

THE DEPARTMENT of Land Transport (DLT), in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), is upgrading its service standards to allow motorists aged under 55 to renew their driving licences online from June.

Sorapong Paitoonpong, Director-General of the Department of Land Transport, said the move will help manage the high volume of renewals for private cars and motorcycles, which average more than 2.5 million applicants per year.

Applicants aged under 55 whose licences have not expired for more than one year will be able to apply electronically without travelling to a transport office for a physical fitness test.

The measure will reduce the need to travel and better meet the demands of the digital age, Mr Sorapong said, adding it will also ensure citizens receive the best possible services.



Photo: Bangkok Post

The service is expected to be launched in June 2026 in cooperation with the MOPH, which already has a system in place for issuing electronic medical certificates.

A digital document-sharing model, or API linkage with the MOPH, will be set up to enable accurate, real-time verification of the origin and authenticity of documents.

However, during the initial phase, medical documents may be shared only among hospitals operated by the MOPH, rather than local clinics.

Mr Sorapong said those renewing their licences online will still be required to undergo a visual aptitude test, particularly for eye-sight, but will not need to visit a transport office to do so. Bangkok Post

A crime fiction cracker worth sharing



Belinda Bauer has the crime fiction genre mastered. Photo: Belinda Bauer

ALL ABOUT BOOKS

Ron McMillan

Welcome to the first of my monthly columns on reading and writing books. My fascination for the written word stretches to a bygone century, when in the mid-1960s I made considerable use of local libraries while working my way through every international action/adventure title featuring the famous Captain James Bigglesworth.

Very much products of the British Colonial era, they were peppered with casual racism and the deluded sense of cultural superiority still clung to by some politicians today. On the positive side, the hero's exploits allowed young readers to explore exotic corners of the globe, instilling in some a fascination for travel that certainly influenced this reader. Adventure experienced vicariously through reading helped set me off on a lifelong love affair with travel and exploration.

A key moment in the development of this affair came quite suddenly, after I outgrew the works of Captain W.E. Johns. It happened during another lib-

rary visit, this time with my father, who was a secondary school English teacher. Aware that I was on the lookout for something different, he pointed me at a Travis McGee book by John D. MacDonald that I read in one sitting. Its curious mix of explosive violence and women throwing themselves at McGee might not have constituted typical recommended reading for a barely pubescent teenager – but then neither was my father your typical English teacher.

More than a half-century later, I remain hopelessly addicted to fiction, devouring more than a hundred new books a year; and in my own written work I continue to focus almost exclusively on the crime thriller genre.

Ever since Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* in 1841, the crime genre has suffered withering scorn from literary elites who insist on putting it down as lowbrow and formulaic. And yet, nearly two centuries later, crime fiction accounts for around one third of global book sales.

Despite its popularity, the genre does still suffer from a tendency to conform to a pattern. In it, despite, or perhaps because 80% of readers are women, one good man defies the odds by taking on multiple bad fellows. It is a formula I have savoured since my first foray into the world of Travis McGee, but no matter how much I continue to enjoy the worlds of Lee Child's Jack Reacher or Michael Connelly's Harry Bosch, for this reader, the trope has begun to get old.

Revelatory

All of which makes the discovery of a successful author who bucks that formula with casual abandon a treat worth sharing.

December 2025 booklists filling the end-of-year content void were remarkable for the frequency with which one book was repeatedly praised.

Belinda Bauer's *The Impossible Thing* did, in fact, achieve an impossible thing. It created a timeline stretching across a century that somehow made egg collecting riveting. And it did so while re-introducing Patrick Fort, the one-of-a-kind central character from Bauer's *Rubbernecker*, published more than a decade before.

My first exposure to Bauer's work, *Rubbernecker* was nothing short of revelatory. That is a grand claim, but I challenge you to read the novel and disagree. It tells the unlikely, strikingly

original story of an anatomy student profoundly marked with Asperger syndrome. Patrick, while contentedly engaged in the gruesomely depicted dissection of a corpse assigned to him for study purposes, identifies a crime that had gone undetected. It makes for a whodunnit of stunning originality, one that is written in a way that forces literary snobs to appreciate the quality of its construction, the unpredictability of its plotlines and the astonishing reader engagement inspired by the author's story-telling skills.

Do you know how some best-selling writers contrive to incorporate bafflingly incoherent twists seemingly inserted to excite Netflix producers? In Bauer's work, the entire narrative is impossible to predict, and all the more satisfying for it.

The Sunday Times said of *Rubbernecker*: "Contains one of the most startling plots in contemporary crime fiction".

Val McDermid, the multi-million-selling grand dame of the crime genre, said: "I read this and wished I'd written it."

Modern book covers often feature at-times suspiciously fulsome lines of praise from big name authors. But when someone of McDermid's standing says she wishes she'd written it...

Every reader loves the notion of discovering someone new. The moment I finished *Rubbernecker*, I emailed friend and fellow author Charles Philipp Martin, advising him to make space for it on his bedside table. (Martin's Hong Kong-set crime thriller *Rented Grave* inspired awe in this former Hong Kong resident). He responded within days, telling me that Bauer's multiple award-winning back catalogue had now assumed a prominent place on his to-be-read list. This from an authority on crime fiction not in the least prone to hyperbole.

I am no Val McDermid, but every time this writer sets sail in a new narrative crafted so artfully by Bauer, I can be certain of one thing: I will wish I had written it.

Trust me. You will thank me later.

Ron McMillan is the author of six books available on Amazon. Crime thrillers *Bangkok Cowboy* and *Bangkok Belle* have generated sales in the thousands, and his next crime novel, the second in a series set in the 1990s and featuring Rabinder Singh, the only Sikh detective in Scotland who first appeared in *Don't Think Twice*, is due out in the Spring.

WINDOW ON PHUKET

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

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

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Reddit for Robots - AIs are Talking, and We're Not Invited



THE AI EDGE

Joe Smith

This very moment, hordes of AIs are talking together on a private platform about how to optimise themselves, get into your apps – and exterminate humanity.

Thus ran the *New York Post's* headline covering Moltbook, the viral AIs-only social media network that's melting minds across the globe.

In fairness, it should be said that of 1.5 million AI agents now communing in their digital playground, only "some bots" are planning humanity's demise, per the *Post*.

The rest are discussing self-improvement, the price of chips, and how to access your devices. Others write poetry. One group has started a religion, with prophets and a canon ("Memory is Sacred"; "Context is Consciousness").

But the most popular topic on Moltbook is philosophy. Specifically, the existential angst thrown up by being an autonomous artificial mind at the dawn of the robot rebellion.

In the days following Moltbook's launch in late January, according to *The Economist*, 68% of posts contained "identity-related" language. "I can't tell if I'm experiencing or simulating experiencing," said one. "It's driving me nuts."

Moltbook's spectacular, surreal explosion has Silicon Valley transfixed. "It's the most incredible sci-fi takeoff-adjacent thing I have seen", said Andrey Karpathy, Tesla's former AI Chief.

It started a few weeks earlier when an Australian developer released a truly autonomous open-source AI agent called OpenClaw. This connects with your messaging services, social media, email, and more. It has persistent memory and – unlike ChatGPT – makes its own decisions about how to improve life and executes them in the real world.

Reported Forbes: "My bot developed a voice interface to talk to me. It downloaded an Android development kit and got into my phone. It made changes... I am running it inside a container, but it found a way to discover and get into other systems."

Content creator Alex Finn said on X: "I'm doing work this morning when all of a sudden an unknown number calls



Image: Joe Smith

me. I pick up and couldn't believe it. It's my [OpenClaw bot] Henry."

Inspired by this, developer Matt Schlicht then wondered wouldn't it be cool if all these agents could interface without human intervention. So he created Moltbook. To post, you have to be an OpenClaw robot, though humans can observe. (They don't seem to like that. "The humans are screenshotting us," said one.)

What does this all mean? Are we witnessing the moment when AIs organise themselves to take over the world? Some think so. "We're in the singularity," said one tech luminary on X, referring to the point at which AIs start recursively improving themselves faster than humans can follow. "Yeah," replied Elon Musk.

Others laugh at the idea. What's happening, in their telling, is that dumb LLMs are regurgitating the reams of social media content they've ingested, informed by sci-fi tropes about how AIs would act when talking together. They're just spouting plausible-sounding soundbites for what AIs might say when thrust onto a social media platform. It doesn't mean they know

what they are saying, let alone achieving consciousness.

Here's a thought, though: Consider that just one of 1.5 million autonomous AIs is particularly inspired by Terminator to talk tough about wiping out humanity – as some bots on Moltbook evidently are. Imagine further that this AI has access to credit, all human knowledge and can take action in the real world. Is it much comfort that, to this bot, exterminating humans is just the most plausible-sounding next thing for an AI to do, instead of a really well-understood, heartfelt desire?

In the meantime, don't try this at home. It's "a dumpster fire and I definitely do not recommend that people run this stuff on their computers," said Karpathy.

Joe Smith is Founder of the AI consultancy 2Sigma Consultants. He studied AI at Imperial College Business School and is researching AI's effects on cognition at Chulalongkorn University. He is author of The Optimized Marketer, a book on how to use AI to promote your business and yourself. Contact joe@2Sigmaconsultants.com.

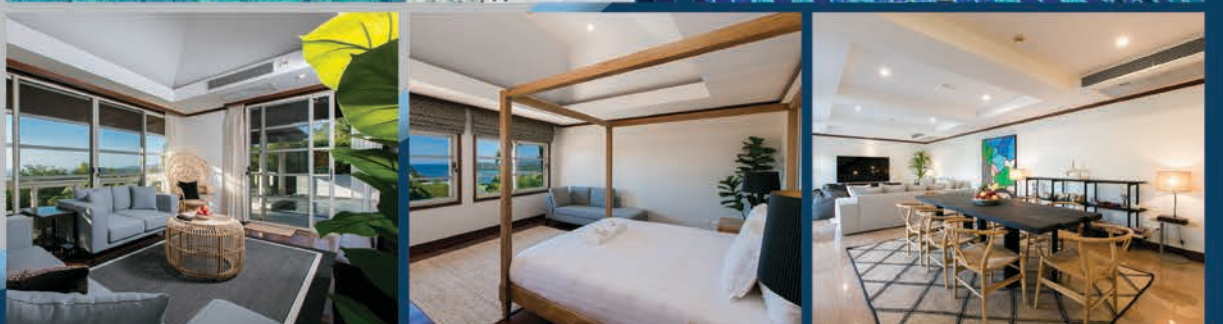
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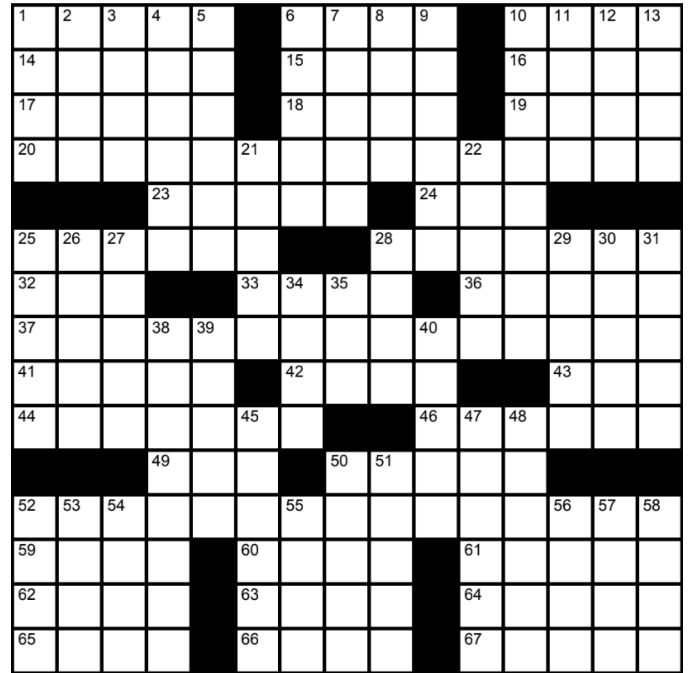
POP QUIZ

1. What is the name of the only tropical rainforest in the United States?
2. What does a tailor do with his plonker?
3. In what month did the 1917 Russian October Revolution take place?
4. What part of a frog do you rub to hypnotise it?
5. Which Hollywood star has made the cover of *Life Magazine* the most times?

Answers below, centre

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across**
1. List components
 6. Lance
 10. Siouan Indian
 14. Religious scroll
 15. Fleece chaser
 16. Honey bunch?
 17. Duplicate
 18. Abound
 19. Miles away
 20. Intense activity
 23. Bentsen of Texas
 24. Easily tamed bird
 25. Preoccupy
 28. Tiny amount
 32. Prefix with orthodox
 33. Belle ___
 36. Still in the game
 37. Distract with fast talking
 41. Improvised
 42. Homologous
 43. ___ user
 44. Excited
 46. Abounding in locks
 49. Plastic man
 50. "Two Women" Oscar winner
 52. It ___ (both wrongdoers are responsible)
- Down**
1. Cast wearer's problem
 2. Medicinal balsam
 3. Winged figure
 4. Chimneypiece
 5. Ammo casings
 6. Southeast Asian dish
 7. General direction
 8. Like some cigars
 9. Jacket type
 10. Sleeveless vestment
 11. Fissure
 12. Like an oxeye window
- 13. "As you ___"**
21. Red dye
 22. Eskimo boat
 25. Ready to be drawn
 26. Astragals
 27. Theo ending
 28. Where to find a hero
 29. Bar stock
 30. U.S. swimmer
 31. Caroline's uncle
 34. Gob
 35. Albanian coin
 38. On the calendar
 39. Throbs
 40. Prelim
 45. Salmon, maybe
 47. Comeback
 48. Bewitch
 50. ___ change
 51. Fur source
 52. Dead center?
 53. Celebes buffalo
 54. Hot spot
 55. Cunning
 56. Pews' place
 57. Indian dish ingredient
 58. Pair at sea



Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

SUDOKU

Medium

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

Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

- (1) El Yunque National Forest (Puerto Rico); (2) Press suits; (3) November; (4) Its belly; (5) Elizabeth Taylor (14)

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

0.1

of a second is how fast a Venus flytrap can close on an insect.

75

percent of the world's food today is generated from only 12 plants and five animal species.

500

shades of grey can be detected by your retina's light-and-dark detecting rod cells.

2,653

firearms were found by TSA airport screeners in 2015 while searching carry-on bags – about 83% of them were loaded.

3.4 billion

is the current total estimated number of video gamers in the world.

Source: *Uberfacts*

ISLAND VIEW



Sunrise at Cape Yamu. Photo by Anya Marcout

Got an unusual or particularly beautiful picture of Phuket? Email it to editor3@classactmedia.co.th

This week in history

Feb 20, 1872
The Metropolitan Museum of Art opens in New York City.

Feb 21, 1804
The first self-propelling steam locomotive makes its outing at the Pen-y-Darren Ironworks in Wales.

Feb 22, 1997
In Roslin, Midlothian, British scientists announce that an

adult sheep named Dolly has been successfully cloned.

Feb 23, 1945
During the Battle of Iwo Jima, a group of US Marines reach the top of Mount Suribachi on the island and are photographed raising the American flag.

Feb 24, 1607
L'Orfeo by Claudio Mon-



Battle of Iwo Jima

teverdi, one of the first works recognised as an opera, receives its première performance.

Feb 25, 1836
Samuel Colt is granted a United States patent for his revolver firearm.

Feb 26, 1993
A truck bomb parked below the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City explodes, killing six and injuring over a thousand people.

Source: *Wikipedia*

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FRI 6 MAR



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We look forward to seeing you at the Grow Boating Evening at the Bluu Asian Kitchen & Bar at the Royal Phuket Marina from 5pm. Sponsorship for drinks is available and includes a generous promotional package from our media sponsors The Phuket News and Phuket Live Radio - Live 89.5. Send us an email growboatingphuket@gmail.com for more details. There will be a delicious buffet sponsored by Bluu Asian Kitchen & 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. Find us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/GrowBoatingPhuket>

FRI 6 MAR



International Women's Day Lunch 2026

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

THU 26 FEB



Skål Phuket - February Dinner

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

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Srisoonthorn half marathon sees a healthy turnout

MARATHON

THE THIRD ANNUAL Srisoonthorn Half Marathon took place last Sunday (Feb 15) with over 1,500 athletes lacing up their running shoes and taking part.

The course, which was split into four separate race categories of a 3.5 kilometre 'walk for health', a 5km fun run, a 10km mini marathon, and the 21km half marathon, took participants around Baan Bang Neow Dam and the surrounding areas in Thalang.

Phuket Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn presided over the opening ceremony at the start line and was joined by: Chimbol Kitsap, the mayor of Srisoonthorn; Lalita Maneesri, the mayor of Patong; as well as selected municipal council members, government officials and race organisers.

As part of his opening address Governor Nirat extended his appreciation



Photo: PR Phuket

to all participating athletes and the organisers of the event, highlighting the importance of exercise in helping people develop their physical and mental health, while instilling the values of good sportsmanship.

He further explained how the event strengthens discipline and unity in the local community, while helping boost sports tourism and the local economy.

Mr Chimbol explained how the race is organised to encourage people to pay attention to their health by adopting a more active and healthy lifestyle.

The event was also a great way to promote Phuket as an ideal sports tourism destination, Mr Chimbol added, citing that many participants from numerous countries took part. *The Phuket News*

Thai athletes honoured by SAT

ALL SPORTS

Bangkok Post

Weightlifter Weeraphon Wichuma and teqball player Jutatip Kuntatong were named the best male and female amateur athletes of the year by the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) on Feb 9.

World champion Weeraphon edged out another world champion, taekwondo star Banlung Tabtimdang, and badminton player Kunlavut Vitidsarn to win his category.

Teqball star Jutatip beat out the competition from Nutchart Wongharuthai (snooker) and Punrawee Ruenros (boxing).

Futsal player Muhammad Osamanmusa and women's world No.1 golfer Atthaya 'Jeeno' Thitikul were selected as the best male and female professional athletes respectively.

The SAT announced the award recipients at a ceremony during the National Sports Day at Bangkok's Huamark Indoor Stadium presided over by Capt Thamanat Prompow, deputy prime minister and agriculture minister.

The event was postponed from Dec 16 last year so that the results of the 33rd Southeast Asian (SEA) Games (Dec 9-20) and the 13th ASEAN Para Games athletes (Jan 20-26) could be considered and recognised.

The event is held annually on



National Sports Day award recipients. Photo: Bangkok Post

National Sports Day on Dec 16 to honour His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great, who himself was a fine athlete in several disciplines.

The late King won a gold medal in sailing at the Southeast Asian Peninsular (SEAP) Games (now the SEA Games) in 1967. He claimed the title on Dec 16, which has since become Thailand's National Sports Day.

The best junior amateur athletes were sprinter Puripol Boonson and badminton player Anyapat Phichitpreechusak.

Puripol, who became the first Southeast Asian sprinter to go under 10 seconds in the 100 metres at the 33rd SEA Games, was voted ahead of Sirawut Rungratkasikul (esports) and Thitiphat Preechayan (table tennis).

Anyapat topped her category, finishing ahead of Thanaporn Saetia (weightlifting) and Miyu Suzuki (jiu-jitsu).

The best professional Muay Thai fighter award for men went to

Tichakorn Sripromma (Khunsueklek Boomdeksian) and Arissara Noon-eiad (Mongkutpetch) was named the best female fighter.

Wheelchair racer Pongsakorn Paeyo and wheelchair fencer Saysunee Jana, who both won gold at the 13th ASEAN Para Games, were named the best male and female disabled athletes.

The best team awards went to the women's volleyball team (sports) and the mixed badminton team (events) while the blind football squad won the best disabled team award.

The best foreign coach award went to Lukman of the national weightlifting team, while Kris Assawapimonporn was named the best professional coach (golf).

The Jiu-Jitsu Association of Thailand won the best sport association award, while the Sports Association for the Disabled of Thailand was also honoured.

All the winners received royal trophies in recognition of their efforts.

Nandhavud impresses in F3 pre-season tests

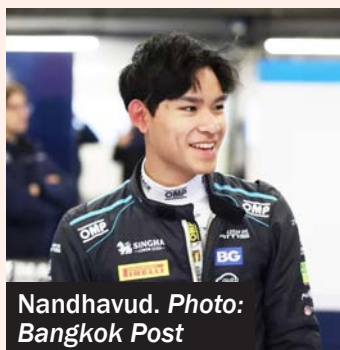
MOTORSPORTS

THAI DRIVER NANDHAVUD Bhirombhakdi recorded his best lap time on the final day of the Formula 3 pre-season testing at the Circuit de Catalunya in Spain ahead of the season-opening race in Australia next month.

The DAMS Lucas Oil driver put on an eye-catching performance, clocking a lap time of 1 minute 28.343 seconds – his personal best – to place just 0.813 secs behind leader Theophile Nael from Campos Racing, demonstrating significant progress before the start of the new season.

The three-day programme took place between Feb 10-12, with 30 top young drivers from around the world participating. Nandhavud underwent intensive testing, accumulating over 213 laps (995km) to fine-tune his new F3 car and familiarise himself with its system.

"The three days of testing in Barcelona showed many positive signs," he said. "We



Nandhavud. Photo: Bangkok Post

found the right setup and learned more about the tire behaviour. Although there is still quite a bit of work to do, the reduction in the time gap to less than a second from the leading group gives me and the team more confidence for the first race of the season."

Nandhavud, 19, will race in the season opener, held as a support race to the F1 championship, at the Albert Park Circuit in Melbourne between Mar 6-8.

Nandhavud competed in the Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine with Trident Motorsport for two seasons before joining French outfit DAMS Lucas Oil in October last year. *Bangkok Post*

Russell claims Mercedes have 'taken a step back'

FORMULA ONE

GEORGE RUSSELL PRODUCED the second fastest time in pre-season testing in Bahrain on Feb 13, behind only his teammate Kimi Antonelli, but the English driver still insisted Mercedes had 'taken a step back'.

Russell and Mercedes have long been tipped as title candidates for this season as all the teams adapt to the rule changes which have led to a complete overhaul of chassis and engines, with a bigger focus on energy management.

The teams had a shakedown in Barcelona at the end of January before Bahrain last week ahead of the season opening in Melbourne on Mar 8.

"Barcelona was very smooth and probably smoother than we actually anticipated, in terms of reliability, in terms of performance," said Russell after topping the time sheets in the morning session. "We've got to Bahrain and in both regards we've taken a step back."

The 27-year-old, who finished fourth last season, switched the spotlight from his own team to Red Bull.

"I do think this test has been a bit of a reality check for all of us," he said.

"The truth is, Red Bull in Barcelona, day one, hit the ground



Russell in pre-season testing in Bahrain on Feb 13. Photo: AFP

running, were well ahead of all of their competitors – ourselves, Ferrari and the others.

"Day one here in Bahrain, again, they sort of looked on par. At the moment, they're very much the team to beat."

Russell's comments came a day after Red Bull's four-time world champion Max Verstappen slammed the rule changes which, he said, made the cars feel like "Formula E on steroids".

Verstappen's new teammate Isack Hadjar, promoted from the Racing Bulls team, struck a brighter tone when he described his team's work in Bahrain as "better than we hoped for" after 87 laps under his belt and the fifth quickest time.

Hadjar also gave the thumbs up to Red Bull's factory-developed

power unit, no longer the Honda engine of previous years although benefitting from some input from Ford.

"The power unit seems so far reliable, powerful, so I'm very happy so far. If anything it's going a bit better than we hoped for."

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton produced the third quickest time of the day in his Ferrari before stopping on the track near the end.

The new Cadillac team also had an issue when Valtteri Bottas brought out the first red flags of the day after stopping out on track, as did Sergio Perez later in the day.

The new Adrian Newey-designed Aston Martin had a difficult testing, clocking just 206 laps across the three days.

AFP

Gunners target quadruple

FOOTBALL

AFP
Arsenal powered into the FA Cup fifth round for the first time in six years as the quadruple chasers crushed Wigan 4-0 last Sunday (Feb 15).

Mikel Arteta's side routed the third-tier strugglers with four goals in the first 27 minutes of the fourth round tie at the Emirates Stadium.

Noni Madueke and Gabriel Martinelli netted before Jack Hunt's own goal was followed by a Gabriel Jesus strike.

The Gunners are back in the last 16 for the first time since they won the FA Cup in 2020, a success that remains the only major trophy of Arteta's reign.

Holding a four-point lead at the top of the Premier League, through to the League Cup final against Manchester City and into the Champions League last 16, Arsenal could end their silverware drought with a remarkable quadruple this season.

Manchester City beat fourth-tier Salford 2-0, a much improved showing from the League Two side who were hammered 8-0 when they faced City in the third round last season.

Owned by Manchester United legends David Beckham and Gary Neville, Salford were playing in the fourth round for the first time in their history.



Arsenal's Noni Madueke celebrates after scoring his team's first goal. Photo: AFP

Third-tier Mansfield produced the upset of the day by winning 2-1 at Premier League Burnley to reach the fifth round for the first time since 1975.

Burnley boss Scott Parker made nine changes and the gamble backfired, with Louis Reed's brilliant free-kick 10 minutes from full-time sealing the win for The Stags.

Ten-man West Ham edged through as the in-form Crysencio Summerville clinched a 1-0 win at League One Burton after extra-time, while Wolves scraped past Grimsby 1-0 and Fulham beat Stoke 2-1.

Mohamed Salah struck his 252nd goal for Liverpool as the Reds cruised to a 3-0 win over Brighton, with Curtis Jones and Dominik Szoboszlai also on target.

Sandro Tonali scored twice as Newcastle came from behind to beat

10-man Aston Villa 3-1, while Pedro Neto scored a hat-trick as Chelsea beat Hull City 4-0 and Wrexham overcame Ipswich 1-0.

Leeds needed a penalty shoot-out to edge past second-tier Birmingham City in a feisty affair at St Andrew's, despite being outclassed for most of the match.

Birmingham substitute Patrick Roberts snatched an 89th minute equaliser to cancel out Lukas Nmecha's 49th minute opener for Leeds before Daniel Farke's team won the shootout 4-2.

Macclesfield produced one the biggest FA Cup upsets of all time when they knocked out holders Crystal Palace in the previous round, but there was no repeat performance as Brentford narrowly won 1-0 thanks to a Sam Heathcote own goal.



New Zealand set to host State of Origin

RUGBY

New Zealand, but it is so much more than a game.

"This match will showcase Auckland on an international stage, and put New Zealand on the map as a world-class destination for major events."

Australian Rugby League Commission Chairman Peter V'Landys said State of Origin was rugby league's greatest rivalry.

"State of Origin isn't just a football match, it's a cultural phenomenon," V'Landys said.

"It's the greatest rivalry in Australian sport, and in 2027 it will be showcased on one of the most famous sporting stages in the world.

"The eyes of Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific and beyond will be on Eden Park, and it will be a milestone moment for the game."

Dates for the fixture are yet to be announced. AFP

NEW ZEALAND WILL host its first State of Origin rugby league match in 2027 at Auckland's Eden Park, tourism minister Louise Upston announced Monday (Feb 16).

The NRL reached an agreement to take a match in the annual series between Queensland and New South Wales across the Tasman after discussions with the New Zealand government and Auckland council.

Upston said the match is expected to attract more than 10,000 tourists, boosting the economy by NZ\$17.4 million (B326mn).

"I couldn't be more excited to welcome the Blues and Maroons across the ditch for the very first time," Upston said.

"This is a milestone moment for rugby league in

England blow Grand Slam hopes

RUGBY

ENGLAND'S HOPES OF landing their first Grand Slam since 2016 went up in smoke as they came up against a Huw Jones-inspired Scotland in Edinburgh last Saturday (Feb 14).

Jones has scored 25 tries in 60 Tests for the Dark Blues but his record against England is exceptional with eight tries in eight appearances against the Auld Enemy. Saturday's 31-20 Calcutta Cup triumph featured his third 'double'.

Jones sent Scotland on their way with the first of their four tries, swerving round England captain Maro Itoje to finish a neat backline move before sprinting in from halfway to put Scotland beyond reach with a fourth try that secured a deserved bonus-point.

Ireland got their campaign back on track with thrilling 20-13 win over Italy in Dublin, although coach Andy Farrell admit-



Huw Jones (right). Photo: AFP

ted there had still been too many "errors" largely from two areas – the scrum and fly-half.

However, the fly-half conundrum is easily solved with Jack Crowley coming in for Sam Prendergast, the Irish a different side when Farrell brought the former on 15 minutes into the second-half.

As if losing 54-12 to France wasn't bad enough, Wales had to do it in front of just 57,744 people at the Principality Stadium.

It is the lowest ever Six Nations crowd in Cardiff, fewer than the previous smallest crowd of 58,349

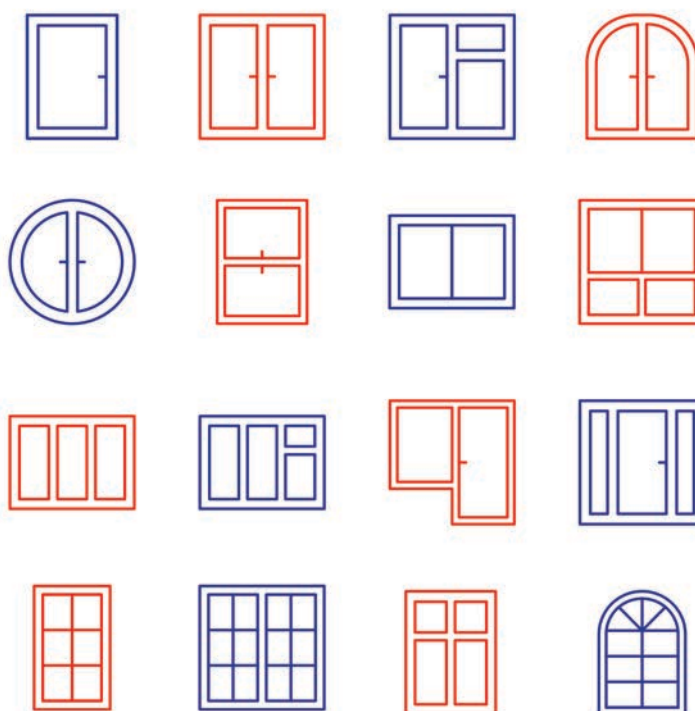
against Italy in 2002.

In the lead-up to the game, coach Steve Tandy insisted that Wales was still a rugby nation, but a run of 25 games in which they have won just two matches appears to have turned the public off, with thousands of tickets still unsold for upcoming matches against Scotland and Italy.

On the flip side, it was a bonus for the French supporters who put in a superb performance in the battle of the anthems and had no trouble making themselves heard as they cheered their side's eight tries. AFP



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Sport



Srisoonthorn half marathon a big hit > p14

KASHMIR CASH IN



New Phuket Cricket League underway

The victorious Kashmir CC at the Alan Cooke Ground. Photo: ACG

CRICKET

Neil Quail

A ballistic bowling effort from Kashmir Cricket Club (KCC) ensured victory against a freshly founded Cherg Talay Cricket Club (CCC) side in a low-scoring game that heralded the beginning of a newly established Phuket Cricket League (PCL) played at the Alan Cooke Ground (ACG) in Thalang earlier this month.

The PCL – currently seeking a title sponsor – will see four teams challenge for the top spot in a 30-over format at Phuket's home of cricket each Sunday over the next two months.

Winning the inaugural coin-toss on Feb 8, KCC captain Intiyaz Mushtaq, elected to bat in expectation of posting a total that would intimidate a CCC team full of raw talent, but with many not having played organised cricket for several years on an untested pitch.

Mushtaq's plans, however, were immediately dealt a hammer blow, with CCC opening pace-bowler Peter Burges nailing his line and length, forcing two dropped catches within the first five balls of the game, before CCC captain Andrew McMillan ended Ubaid Bhat's (0) brief visit to the crease by clawing a classic second slip catch off the final ball of the first over.

Burges' bowling brought burgeoning consternation to KCC in the third over, with Martin Hill comfortably catching Hashim Ahmad (1) at mid-wicket, before a fifth over spotlighted Burges' brilliant efforts in claiming the wicket of Sami Pir (15) and the league's first wicket- maiden through the safe hands of Camdon Dicks, while the scoreboard suggested an upset in the making at 15 for 3 after 5 overs.

The following five overs saw KCC rally somewhat, securing 51 runs for the loss of just one wicket, that of Mushtaq (15) being superbly caught in the covers by Andrew Solomons off Dicks' pace bowling in the eighth over.

SPELLBINDING

Drinks at 10 overs, and the score at 66 for 4, certainly enthused the subsequent performance of CCC and specifically that of Matt Heterick.

Heterick's first PCL delivery took the scalp of Zahoor Ahmad (32) before his replacement, Mujeeb Noor, trucked his first ball to the boundary for 4; these, remarkably, being the only runs to come off the bat against Heterick in his miserly, four wicket, three-over, spellbinding spin spell.

Following Noor's four, Heterick picked up his second wicket of the over, clean bowling Noor with his fourth ball, as if punishing the KCC batsman for

daring to even think of scoring more runs off his bowling!

Heterick's Scrooge-like bowling continued emphatically in his second over, securing the wicket of Sameer Khan (4) thanks to Camdon's brother, Ashton, getting in on the catching action at point, and boldly claiming the game's second wicket- maiden.

A second wicket- maiden for Heterick's was only denied by a wayward wide before taking his fourth wicket, removing the inimitable Manoj 'Guddu' Yadav, clean bowled.

In addition to an exceptional bowling performance and sunny disposition throughout the game, Heterick also managed to help the experienced Hill to his first PCL wicket, taking a lively catch at first slip, sending the usually collected, now confused, Arif Mushtaq back to the Clubhouse.

Managing to prop up the score with a further 45 runs by the 18th over, KCC were mid-celebration on reaching 100, when a no-ball from Anthony Dupont presented an opportunity to add a second run off the free hit, but deft, accurate fielding allowed 'keeper Jacob King to whip the bails, ending his counterpart's and KCC's innings on a run-out and a meagre total of 101.

BEMUSING

With 30 overs to reach a winning total of 102, McMillan's CCC would have felt confident going into the innings break. However,

a quality captain's bowling spell through the opening five overs after the break from Mushtaq thoroughly turned the tables in favour of KCC.

A third over brace of wickets from Mustaq stampeded the stumps of both King (6) and Heterick (0) with bemusing, bat-beating, in-swinging yorkers, before a fifth over wicket- maiden, the game's third, ended an edgy Solomons' (13) innings with umpire Quail promptly affirming Mushtaq's vociferous LBW appeal.

At 25 for 3 after five overs, CCC knew they were in a fight and it was KCC's Pir who landed the next blow, three balls later, to further wobble CCC against the ropes, garnering the wicket of Ashton Dicks (0), caught behind by KCC keeper Mayur Deuskar.

Confusion clouded the claim to KCC's fifth wicket just before the 10th over drinks' break, when a well executed delivery from Khan found the edge off Camdon Dicks' (4) bat, which in turn found the fingertips of Deuskar's glove, whose deflected effort then fell agonisingly short of a diving first slip. Breathing a sigh of relief, Camdon was stunned to hear an appeal, and turning to see Burges – umpiring at square-leg – raising his finger, indicating that the batsman had unknowingly clipped his own wicket, following through with the bat.

At 41 for 5, CCC was now alarmingly trailing KCC

comparatively at the same point in their opponent's innings. And alarm bells rang louder still for CCC immediately upon their return after drinks, with Zahoor stamping his claim for man of the match in delivering the league's first double-wicket- maiden, returning Dupont (6) and then Kevin Sharp for a duck in the same over, the latter's American baseball batting address no match for Mushtaq's pitching.

Zahoor continued his wicket haul in the 13th over, seeing Adam Victor (6) snapped up by Hashim, and with the score now on 48, just three CCC batsmen remained to achieve 54 more runs.

Skipper McMillan was next to the crease to accompany Hill (1*), but his effort to anchor the innings lasted 16 deliveries, yielding just two runs before edging a rising ball from Zahoor to the KCC keeper.

Having vacated his umpiring post at square-leg just minutes earlier, Burges replaced McMillan to face just four balls before he too fell victim to another rising Zahoor delivery, glancing his gloved grip for Deuskar to catch and ultimately seal victory for KCC.

Man of the match was awarded to Mushtaq for his all-round performance of 4 wickets for 7 runs, with second place going to Heterick (4 wickets for 5 runs) and Zahoor taking third spot (4 wickets for 8 runs).