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Photo: NBT

INVESTIGATION DRAGS ON AFTER 'HARD LANDING' SHUTS DOWN PHUKET AIRPORT

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Investigators this week said they are still working to determine the cause of the dramatic hard landing involving an Air India Express passenger jet at Phuket International Airport on Mar 11, which shut the airport's single runway for hours and disrupted travel plans for an estimated 18,000 passengers.

Officials confirmed that the aircraft, a Boeing 737-800 operating flight IX938 from Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in

Hyderabad to Phuket, made a hard landing on Phuket Airport's sole runway at about 11:29am.

The aircraft, registered VT-BWQ, suffered damage to its nose landing gear during the landing. Both front wheels detached, causing the nose gear assembly to scrape along the runway surface before the aircraft came to a halt.

Somehow, the aircraft remained upright while its front landing-gear strut ploughed down the runway, sending smoke and tarmac debris flying in its wake. Despite the extreme landing, all passengers

and crew were safely evacuated and no serious injuries were reported.

Airport firefighters and rescue crews reached the aircraft within two minutes of the incident in accordance with the airport's emergency response plan.

Buses were dispatched to the runway to evacuate the 140 passengers and crew members from the aircraft and transport them safely to the passenger terminal.

Medical teams and immigration officials were also deployed to assist passengers.

Authorities have confirmed that

the aircraft remains at Phuket International Airport under the control of the airline while investigators examine the case.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand (CAAT) has also been notified of the incident as part of mandatory aviation safety reporting requirements.

The CAAT told *The Phuket News* that it will cooperate with investigators and may review oversight measures for foreign airlines operating in Thailand depending on the findings, but declined to reveal any details of the investigation so far.

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'Active shooter' exercise held in Patong



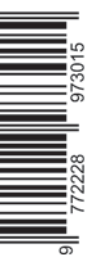
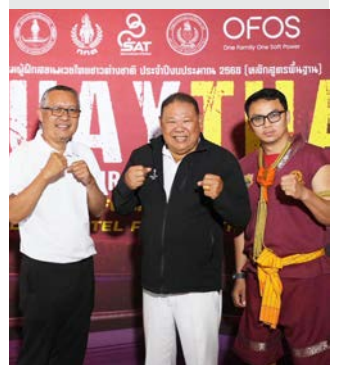
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Immigration volunteers call for extra help



SPORT PAGE 16

Latest course for Muay Thai trainers done



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News



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Air safety hits slew of delays

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ALL STOP

The damaged aircraft blocked Phuket's only runway, forcing authorities to temporarily shut down operations.

Airport officials issued a Notice to Airmen closing the runway from 12:08pm to 6pm, but the closure was later extended to 9pm as teams struggled to move the aircraft.

Engineers eventually decided against using cranes and instead lifted the aircraft's nose with jacks while inflating the nose-gear system with compressed air. Emergency equipment was used to support the aircraft while replacement wheels were fitted one side at a time.

The delicate operation took several hours before the aircraft could finally be towed off the runway at 6:47pm. After maintenance crews inspected and cleaned the runway surface, the airport reopened the runway at 7:08pm.

Airport officials said the closure disrupted 165 flights across Thailand. The

affected flights included 97 at Phuket, 40 at Don Mueang International Airport, 22 at Suvarnabhumi Airport and six at Chiang Mai International Airport.

Phuket Airport General Manager Monchai Tanode confirmed that around 18,000 passengers were affected by delays, cancellations or diversions to other airports.

Airport staff coordinated with airlines, immigration officers and other agencies to assist stranded travellers, providing waiting areas and water while airlines arranged onward travel.

Officials that *The Phuket News* spoke to declined to comment on financial liability for passenger compensation, airline disruptions or potential runway repairs, saying those matters fall under the responsibility of airlines or airport operators rather than the investigation authority.

UNDER INVESTIGATION

The incident has been classified as a "serious aviation occurrence" and is



The closure of the runway affected some 18,000 passengers. Photo: Phuket Tourist Police

now under formal investigation by the Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation Committee, operating through the Office of the Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation Committee under Thailand's Ministry of Transport.

Officials said the investigation is being conducted in accordance with standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

Investigators have already gathered information about the aircraft and its maintenance history. However, authorities said the analysis phase is still underway and no conclusions about the cause of the

hard landing have yet been reached.

"The investigation process is currently gathering and analysing data, so it is not yet possible to determine the cause of the incident," an official from the investigation office said.

Under international aviation rules, investigators must submit a preliminary report within 30 days of the incident, while a final report may take up to 12 months to complete.

Officials declined to provide further details while the investigation continues.

AIRLINE SILENT

As of publication, *The Phuket News* had yet to find

any public statement by Air India Express acknowledging the incident or apologising to passengers. *The Phuket News* contacted airport officials seeking a response from the airline but had not received a reply by press time.

An article by Reuters reported an unnamed spokesperson for Air India Express saying that the plane "experienced an issue with the nose wheel at Phuket Airport... The crew followed all standard protocols, and guests were deplaned".

The same report noted that Air India Express, the budget arm of Air India, has a fleet of over 100 Boeing and Airbus aircraft.

In March last year, India's aviation watchdog reprimanded Air India Express for not changing the engine parts of an Airbus A320 in a timely fashion and for falsifying records to show compliance.

From January to November last year, Air India Express reported 95 technical defects, India's civil aviation ministry said,

the second highest among India's airlines over the period.

Parent Air India, a full-service carrier, has come under intense scrutiny in the last few months after a series of safety lapses and a deadly crash in Ahmedabad last June that killed 260 people.

SAFE, FOR NOW

The CAAT noted that runway incidents involving landing-gear failures can pose significant safety risks, particularly at airports with only one runway.

The successful evacuation of passengers and rapid emergency response helped prevent the situation from escalating into a more serious disaster. Regular training, emergency preparedness and coordinated response procedures are critical to minimising the impact of aviation incidents, the agency added.

Regardless, for now, investigators say determining exactly what caused the hard landing will depend on the results of the ongoing technical investigation.

Immigration officer sentenced for sharing child porn

A FORMER PHUKET IMMIGRATION officer has been sentenced to more than four years in prison, with the sentence suspended, after being convicted of possessing and distributing child pornography online.

The verdict was read in Courtroom 908 at the Criminal Court on Ratchadaphisek Rd in Bangkok on Mar 10, reported Thai news agency Naewna.

The case was brought by Special Cases Division 1 of the Public Prosecutor's Office against Pol Sgt Maj Jesada Tipmanee, formerly attached to Phuket Immigration Police.

The court found Jesada guilty of possessing and disseminating child pornography, distributing obscene computer data, and uploading illegal material into a computer system accessible to the public.

According to prosecutors, between Feb 27, 2021 and Dec 3, 2024 the defendant continuously possessed still and video images of child pornography involving five victims under the age of 18.

The court heard that the

material was stored and uploaded to a computer system via internet service providers, making it accessible both within Thailand and abroad. The prosecution said the defendant intended the content to be disseminated to others for sexual gratification and for public distribution.

Jesada was also accused of producing, possessing, importing, exporting, transporting or otherwise disseminating child pornography and of knowingly uploading obscene data into a public computer system.

The court convicted the defendant on several counts, including distributing or publicly displaying child pornography and possessing and distributing such material for sexual exploitation.

For distributing child pornography, the court imposed a sentence of three years' imprisonment and a fine of B120,000. The defendant was also sentenced to three years in prison and a fine of B60,000 for each of three additional counts related to possession and distribution.

Because Jesada confessed to



Photo: Naewna

the charges, the court reduced the penalties by half, resulting in a combined sentence reported as four years and 28 months in prison and a total fine of B120,000.

However, the court ordered that the prison sentence be suspended for three years.

As part of the conditions of the suspended sentence, the defendant must report to a probation officer three times within one year and complete 24 hours of community service. The court also ordered that all seized evidence be confiscated.

In its ruling, the court noted that the prosecution's evidence did not show that the defendant himself took the nude images. Instead, he uploaded images created by others through his own account.

During the trial the defendant paid compensation to four victims in the amount of B25,000 each, after which the victims withdrew further claims in the case. The court also took into account that the defendant had no previous criminal record.

Officials from Thailand's Department of Special Investigation (DSI) and international law enforcement agencies attended the sentencing hearing as observers.

The case drew significant attention because investigators linked it to the distribution of more than 250,000 files of child pornography.

Pol Lt Col Khemchat Prakai-hongmani, Director of the Technology and Information Crime Division at the DSI, attended the hearing along with a team of investigators.

Representatives from the Australian Federal Police and agents from the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation were also present.

The DSI expanded its investigation in cooperation with several international agencies,

including the Australian Federal Police, the FBI, US Homeland Security Investigations, INTERPOL, the New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs and authorities in European Union countries.

Authorities said the joint investigation targeted a transnational online network involved in the circulation of child sexual abuse material.

Pol Lt Gen Ruttapol Naowarat, Minister of Justice, said the government places strong emphasis on combating technology-related crimes, particularly those involving the sexual exploitation of children.

He said the Ministry of Justice had instructed the DSI to carry out thorough and ongoing investigations to protect children and young people and to dismantle international criminal networks involved in such offences.

The investigation remains part of broader international efforts to track and suppress online child exploitation networks, officials said.

The Phuket News

Tourism tests Phuket freedoms

The Phuket News
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A series of incidents involving Israeli visitors and Middle East-related tensions in Phuket has sparked debate online about the balance between freedom of expression, religious practice and the island's image as a welcoming tourism destination.

The discussions intensified after a confrontation between a Phuket restaurant owner and an Israeli tourist in Sakhu was widely shared on social media.

The incident involved Thanapol Pathan, owner of Khan Butchery in Soi Bang Malao near Nai Yang Beach. Videos he posted on Facebook on Mar 9 show him ordering a foreign man, believed to be Israeli, to leave the premises.

In the footage, the tourist walks away while Thanapol filming follows him outside the shop, shouting "Free Palestine!" and, while swearing, telling the man to leave. The tourist can also be seen taking out his phone and appearing to record the encounter.

The clips quickly spread across Thai social media platforms, attracting thousands of views and sparking heated debate among netizens.

Some commenters expressed



Image: Thanapol Pathan

support for the restaurant owner, praising his stance and referencing previous controversies involving Israeli tourists in Thailand.

Others criticised the confrontation, warning that such incidents risk damaging Thailand's reputation as a destination that welcomes visitors from many different cultures and religions.

In a later interview with the Phuket Times Facebook page, Thanapol defended his actions and said the dispute began after the tourist objected to a Palestinian flag displayed inside

the restaurant.

According to Thanapol, the man entered the premises and began discussing religion before allegedly asking him to remove the flag. The owner said he refused and asked the visitor to leave.

"As the restaurant owner and a Muslim, I admit I was angry because I felt it was an insult to my rights and faith in my own place," Thanapol said.

He added that it was not the first time tourists had asked him to remove the flag, saying at least

five previous customers had made similar requests, which he had also declined.

Thanapol also noted that the incident occurred during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, when he was fasting.

He said he later spoke publicly to clarify the situation and urged people not to escalate the matter further or create division online.

The debate over political and religious sensitivities in Phuket tourism has also surfaced in another recent incident involving Israeli visitors.

Last Friday (Mar 13), provincial officials inspected the Chabad House Jewish religious centre on Rat-U-Thit 200 Pi Rd in Patong after social media posts questioned the appropriateness of a large 'Purim' celebration held by Israeli residents and tourists.

The inspection was led by Phuket Vice Governor Rungruang Thimabut and involved officials from the Provincial Administration, Patong Police and Kathu District Office.

According to authorities, the visit aimed to verify the nature of activities held at the centre and ensure they complied with Thai law.

Representatives of the organisers told officials that the gatherings are regular religious activities held every week,

including prayer services and communal meals. Friday events typically run from 6pm to 10:30pm, while Saturday activities are held from 9:30am to 6pm.

Organisers said the venue usually attracts about 500 participants and that a larger event is held once each year to mark the Jewish festival of Purim.

Purim commemorates the biblical story of the salvation of Persian Jews from a plot to destroy them, and celebrations traditionally include festive meals, costume-wearing and the exchange of food gifts.

The issue gained attention online after posts claimed that "thousands of Israelis" had gathered for the celebration, prompting debate among social media users.

Some questioned whether large festivities were appropriate during the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, while others defended the event as a legitimate expression of religious freedom.

Vice Governor Rungruang told organisers that religious activities could continue but must comply strictly with Thai regulations. Officials will continue coordinating with relevant agencies to maintain peace and safety for both residents and visitors, he added.

Patong Police stage 'active shooter drill'

PATONG POLICE HAVE released a professionally produced video of an active shooter training exercise designed to demonstrate how officers respond to such incidents and to educate the public on how to react safely in an emergency.

The video, posted online on Sunday (Mar 15), shows officers rehearsing a scenario involving an armed suspect who has taken hostages. The footage was filmed and edited to clearly illustrate the procedures police follow during a crisis and the actions civilians should take to protect themselves.

Patong Police Chief Pol Col Korakrit Khanthakrue stressed that the scenario was a routine police training drill and not a real incident.

"The purpose of creating this video is to let everyone know how they should behave if this type of incident occurs," Col Korakrit said.

He explained that the video also served as a training exercise for



Image: Patong Police

officers, helping them practise coordinated responses to serious crimes such as shootings or robberies.

According to Col Korakrit, the main objective was to ensure both police and the public understand their roles during a crisis.

"The important thing is for everyone to understand their roles and responsibilities, what each person must do and how to act in such a situation," he said.

Unlike typical training drills conducted once for practice, the exercise was filmed in stages so it could be turned into an instructional video. Scenes were recorded multiple times and edited to create a clear

and easy-to-understand presentation.

Col Korakrit said the idea for the video came from officers at Patong Police Station who wanted to present safety information in a format that could easily reach people online.

Phuket Provincial Police later shared the video and encouraged the public to watch and share it so more people understand the safety advice provided.

Police say such exercises form part of ongoing efforts to improve emergency preparedness and ensure officers are ready to respond quickly and effectively to serious incidents.

The Phuket News

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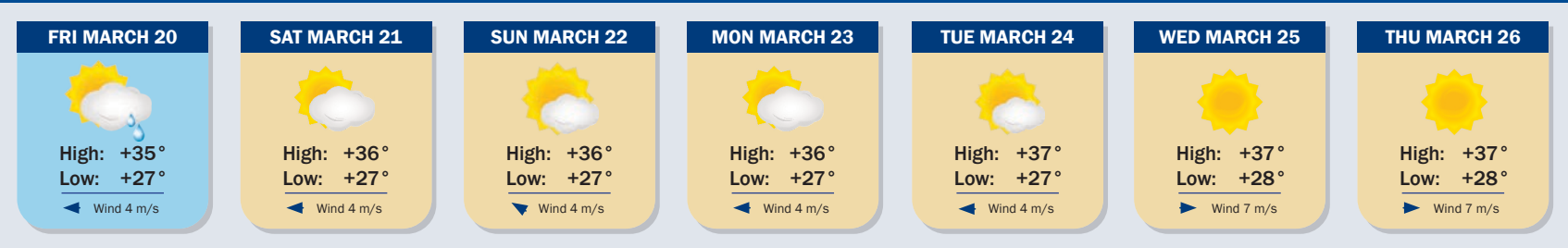


Photo: Phuket Immigration

French fugitive wanted for attempted murder arrested

IMMIGRATION POLICE have arrested a French national in Rawai who was wanted under an international arrest warrant for attempted murder, officials confirmed.

The suspect, identified only as 'Mr Fezal', 46, was apprehended at a residence in Rawai on Mar 12 following a request for cooperation from the French Embassy in Thailand through the Foreign Affairs Division of the Royal Thai Police.

Phuket Immigration officers began investigating after receiving information that the fugitive had fled France and was believed to be hiding in Phuket.

The arrest was carried out by a team led by Pol Lt Col Adisorn Boonchum, an inspector with Phuket Immigration Police, together with Pol Lt Theerapol Nitichat, a deputy inspector.

According to Phuket Immigration, Fezal is wanted under an arrest warrant issued in France

and an Interpol Red Notice for attempted murder with a weapon. The case stems from a violent altercation in France during which a firearm was used, leaving a victim injured. Authorities believe Fezal was the gunman before fleeing the country.

Following the request from French authorities, the case was forwarded to Immigration Division 6 for action. Officers later located the suspect at a residence in Rawai.

Police approached the property and found a man matching the description of the wanted suspect. After identifying themselves, officers questioned the man, who admitted he was Fezal and confirmed he was the person named in the arrest warrant.

Authorities have begun legal proceedings in accordance with Thai law and international procedures for handling foreign fugitives.

The Phuket News

Illegal hotel, yacht tours caught in raids

The Phuket News
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Authorities have arrested two foreign nationals in separate operations targeting illegal business activities in the province's tourism sector.

In the first case, a Russian national was arrested during a raid on a hotel in Patong on Mar 12. The inspection was carried out at a property on Phra Metta Rd by a special operations unit of the Phuket Provincial Administration led by Phuket Vice Governor Rungruang Thimabut.

Officials from the Provincial Administration, police investigators and other relevant agencies joined the operation following complaints that a foreign investment group was illegally operating the hotel.

During the inspection, authorities found the property was operating without a hotel licence. Investigators said the business was controlled by a Russian national who allegedly used Thai nominees as a front to lease the building and run the hotel.

Officials reported that the property had 83 rooms in operation and was being promoted to foreign tourists



Photo: PR Phuket

through online booking platforms.

The operator was charged with operating a hotel without a licence, while officials are expanding the investigation to examine potential violations related to the use of Thai nominees to hold assets on behalf of foreign investors, which is prohibited under Thai law.

In a separate case the same day, a German national was arrested off Phuket after authorities discovered he was captaining a yacht used to run an unlicensed multi-day tour.

The arrest took place at about 5pm in waters off Mai Khao during a joint operation by Marine Police, Tourist Police and officers

from the Department of Tourism.

Investigators said the vessel belonged to a boat rental company but was being used to conduct organised sailing tours marketed online to foreign tourists.

Six German tourists were found on board and told officers they had booked the trip through a website as part of an 11-day sailing tour in the Andaman Sea.

Authorities confirmed the operator did not hold a valid tour operator licence and charged those responsible with running an illegal tour business. Officials said investigations into similar operations are continuing.

Indian tourists robbed of B30k by Patong ladyboys

SIX INDIAN TOURISTS have reported being assaulted and robbed of B30,000 by a group of transgender women after arranging a meeting through a mobile application in Patong early on Mar 9.

Pol Lt Chittawan Pengkaew, Deputy Investigator at Patong Police, said the men filed a complaint at about 4:27am.

The tourists told police they were staying at a rented house on Soi Khuan Yang and had invited a person they contacted through a mobile app to their accommodation at about 12:30am.

They said an argument broke



Image: Patong Police

out when they realised the visitor was a transgender woman. The individual then allegedly called several friends, with about four more arriving.

The group reportedly demanded B40,000 before assaulting and threatening the tourists, taking about B30,000 before fleeing.

Police are reviewing CCTV and investigating.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Two killed, struck by bridge

TWO MYANMAR NATIONALS were killed when a truck carrying a prefabricated house struck a pedestrian overpass in Thalang on Mar 11.

Police were notified of the accident at 9:50am at the pedestrian bridge in front of Hong Yok Bamrung School on Thepkrasatri Rd in Mai Khao.

Officers from Tha Chatchai Police arrived to find an 18-wheel Hino truck stopped by the roadside. The victims, identified as Than Htike Aung and Hein Kyaw, were found dead at the scene.

Police said the men had been riding on top of the prefabricated structure to help lift low-hanging wires along the route. As the truck passed under the pedestrian bridge, both men were struck by the overpass.



Photo: Tha Chatchai Police

The driver told police he believed the load would clear the bridge. Officers are reviewing CCTV and continuing their investigation.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Nebu back in spotlight as construction approved

The Phuket News
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Questions have resurfaced over the controversial Nebu hotel project in Cherng Talay after residents reported that construction has been approved at the site in Pasak Soi 6, despite earlier orders for development to be halted pending review of the project's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Local residents contacted *The Phuket News* after project sales staff reportedly told prospective buyers that the development had received permission to proceed.

When contacted, Nebu Marketing Manager Pitchayanin Raiwinsuradid said the project had received building permission from the Cherng Talay Tambon Administration Organisation (OrBorTor).

However, the company had not provided a detailed statement or supporting documentation regarding the approval by press time.

In a brief reply, Ms Pitchayanin said the company was reviewing the matter internally and would provide a response "next week".

The project, previously described as a multi-storey hotel development on a small plot in a designated low-density residential 'Yellow Zone', has drawn sustained community opposition and parliamentary scrutiny.



The sales office. Photo: Natnaree Likidwatanasakun

Cherng Talay OrBorTor Chief Manoch Panchalad confirmed that the project had received approval under relevant laws.

"The project has been granted permission under the Building Control Act and related environmental regulations. The review process followed the required legal procedures," he said.

However, when asked about conditions attached to the approval, including building height limits, parking provisions and management of construction traffic in the narrow residential lane, Mr Manoch declined to provide further details.

He also declined to address concerns raised by residents regarding the width of Pasak Soi 6 and whether large construction vehicles could

legally access the road.

"If residents have questions, they can contact the OrBorTor directly for information," he said before ending the conversation.

PREVIOUS HALT ORDER

The issue drew national attention last year after residents petitioned authorities over the project, citing zoning violations, traffic risks and environmental concerns.

During a site visit in February last year, then-Phuket MP Thitikan Thitipruethikul questioned how a hotel project had been approved in a Yellow Zone typically reserved for low-density housing.

Officials at the time ordered construction suspended pending review of the EIA process.



Photo: Kathu District Office

Officials probe land clearing at Bang Wad

OFFICIALS IN KATHU District are investigating land excavation and tree felling near the Bang Wad Reservoir after a backhoe operator claimed the work was being carried out to prepare land for agricultural use.

District officers inspected the site on Mar 12 following a tip-off that heavy machinery was clearing land in the area.

The inspection, conducted at about 2pm, was ordered by Kathu District Chief Akkarapol Sutthirak Jitsupap and led by Deputy District Chief and Head of

Security Affairs Jirawat Namat and Deputy District Chief for Prevention Anurak Poolsak, accompanied by members of the Kathu District Volunteer Defence Corps.

Officials found a backhoe and its operator working at the site. The driver told officers he was levelling the land to create an access path for a garden.

The operator presented a land title deed issued in 1997. Officials said further checks are required to verify the document and whether the permission was granted. *The Phuket News*

Hanuman sculpture to be installed off Koh Racha Yai

A FIVE-METRE-TALL HANUMAN sculpture is scheduled to be installed underwater off Koh Racha Yai on Mar 26 as part of the Rotary Club project 'Save Underwater World', with funding for the initiative projected at more than B5 million.

The installation forms part of an effort to restore coral reef ecosystems while creating a new conservation-focused dive attraction south of Phuket.

Preparations were reviewed on Mar 10 when Phuket Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn met representatives of Rotary International District 3330 and related agencies at Phuket Provincial Hall.

Among those attending were Rotary District 3330 Governor Thakrit Butrunroj, district finance committee chairman Sasawat Limpanich, and representatives from the Phuket Marine and Coastal Resources Research Center.

Officials confirmed the sculpture will be placed at Siam Bay near Koh Racha Yai, where it will serve as an artificial reef base designed to attract coral larvae and marine organisms, helping restore the surrounding marine ecosystem.

Governor Nirat stressed the project must proceed with careful environmental safeguards and scientific oversight, calling for ecological assessments to ensure compliance with recognised marine conservation standards.



Image: DMCR

He also proposed installing underwater cameras at the site to monitor changes in the marine ecosystem in real time and allow the public to observe marine life developing around the sculpture.

Project organisers said the Hanuman sculpture has been constructed from marine-grade cement, commonly used for artificial reefs because it allows coral and other marine organisms to attach and grow over time.

The statue forms part of a broader plan to create an underwater art attraction off Koh Racha Yai inspired by characters from the Ramakien epic, including Hanuman, Rama, Ravana and Suphannamatcha.

Officials said the Hanuman statue will be the first sculpture installed underwater as part of the initiative. *The Phuket News*



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Tourism braces for fallout

Bangkok Post

Thai tourism should brace for an influx of foreigners seeking a safe haven amid growing geopolitical conflict, similar to the surge experienced during the Russia-Ukraine War, when Russian arrivals reached 1.74 million in 2024 and significantly affected property markets in major tourism destinations.

Yuthasak Supasorn, chairman of the Industrial Estate Authority of Thailand, said the current conflict in the Middle East has reminded the tourism industry of the earlier war in Eastern Europe. The short-term impact, he said, begins with rising fuel prices, which then push up international airfares and reduce long-haul travel demand.

Airlines operating between Europe and Asia saw fuel consumption increase by an average of 14.8% after Russian airspace was closed, forcing aircraft to reroute. Flights between North America and Asia recorded a 9.8% increase in fuel use for the same reason. The situation was worsened by jet fuel prices peaking at US\$150 per barrel in 2022.

While the Russia-Ukraine war affected the long-term cost



Photo: Bangkok Post

structure of aviation, the Middle East conflict has instead created immediate disruptions to regional flight schedules. Air strikes have resulted in periodic emergency airspace closures in several countries.

Major airlines linking Europe, the Middle East and Thailand – including Emirates, Etihad Airways, Qatar Airways, Turkish Airlines, Flydubai and Oman Air – have faced challenges managing flight routes in order to avoid high-risk areas.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) estimates that airspace closures and flight adjustments during the peak of the conflict could reduce tourist arrivals from five Middle Eastern countries – Iran, Iraq, Jordan,

Lebanon and Syria – by 30-50%, or roughly 3,500 to 5,000 visitors within a single month.

The impact is expected to be most noticeable during the Eid al-Adha festival in May, a major travel period for Middle Eastern tourists.

“Geopolitical conflicts have reshaped the purpose of international travel,” said Mr Yuthasak, a former governor of the TAT. “With its balanced foreign policy, domestic stability and open visa policies, Thailand is increasingly perceived as a safe haven for people from conflict-affected regions.”

This has created a new category of travellers whose motivations extend beyond leisure, including those seeking temporary refuge,

recovery or opportunities for relocation and investment.

The trend was evident in 2023 when more than 1.4mn Russians visited Thailand, rising to 1.74mn in 2024 and accounting for 15% of Russia’s total outbound travel.

Mr Yuthasak said the government’s decision in late 2023 to extend the visa-free stay for Russian nationals from 30 to 90 days was a key factor encouraging longer stays.

The influx has had a significant impact on property markets in beach destinations such as Phuket. Russians have accounted for 40-60% of foreign condominium purchases, pushing property prices up by 10-20% and driving luxury rental prices up by as much as 300%.

Mr Yuthasak also noted that arrivals from conflict zones can create social challenges, where the presence of visitors from conflict areas has raised concerns among some residents.

PREPARATIONS

As global tensions continue to influence travel patterns, Mr Yuthasak said the government should prepare for a potential rise in long-term visitors.

Thailand needs stronger integrated security risk management, he said, noting that

perceptions of public safety remain weaker than in destinations such as Vietnam and Singapore.

Improving digital security, strengthening enforcement against transnational crime and maintaining careful diplomacy are also important as Thailand continues to welcome visitors from conflict-affected nations such as Russia and Israel.

The concentration of foreign investment and long-stay demand in destinations such as Phuket and Pattaya has also pushed up housing prices. Encouraging tourists and expatriates to move to secondary cities could help spread economic benefits and ease pressure on local living costs.

Thailand should also expand alternative financial channels and more flexible cross-border payment systems to support travellers and investors from sanction-affected regions, while maintaining transparency and regulatory compliance.

Regulatory reform could further attract high-value migrants, he said. Streamlining rules for medical tourism and improving the long-term resident visa programme would make Thailand more competitive and appealing to skilled professionals, retirees and investors seeking stability.

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ADVERTORIAL

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

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

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

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

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

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

Learning Business Through Real-World Application

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



Photo: BTEC Level 3 Business

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

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

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

sional exposure and real-world context.

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

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

A Holistic Pathway to University and Beyond

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

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

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

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

Expanding Choice, Empowering Students

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

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

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

Moves to address fuel woes

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

The government is moving to ensure equitable fuel distribution after the war in the Middle East prompted panic buying across Thailand, causing long queues and shortages at petrol stations in several provinces.

Energy Minister Autapol Rerkpiboon convened an urgent meeting with oil traders and refinery representatives on Monday (Mar 16) to address distribution delays that left some service stations temporarily without fuel.

The meeting agreed to speed up deliveries by deploying additional fuel trucks, increasing delivery frequency and boosting volumes moved from storage depots to affected areas.

The ministry stressed that close coordination among all relevant sectors will help restore normal supply as quickly as possible, and urged the public not to panic, assuring that Thailand's energy reserves remain sufficient.



A notice informing motorists that fuel deliveries are pending and supplies are temporarily unavailable. Photo: Bangkok Post

Despite assurances, reports from several provinces indicate anxiety over shortages has already driven motorists to stock up.

In Phang Nga's Takua Pa district, long queues formed outside petrol stations as residents and businesses rushed to buy fuel. Some stations ran out of diesel early in the morning after sustained demand from dawn. Deliveries resumed in the afternoon when tanker trucks arrived, but new queues quickly formed, raising fears supplies could be exhausted again within hours.

Local business leaders said petrol stations in the province are receiving about

30-40% less fuel from storage depots, forcing operators to manage distribution carefully and discourage stockpiling.

In Betong district of Yala some petrol stations that had not yet run dry began restricting operating hours. Motorists queued at many stations, with some bringing large containers capable of holding up to 200 litres.

Several stations limited purchases to roughly B1,000 per customer. Agricultural workers said the limits have made it difficult to obtain enough fuel for irrigation pumps and farm machinery.

In the western province

of Tak, queues of vehicles stretching up to three kilometres were reported along the Mae Sot-Tha Song Yang road as residents waited outside petrol stations from as early as 4am. To prioritise local demand, authorities have temporarily banned fuel sales to vehicles from Myanmar.

Shortages were also reported in Phitsanulok province, with several stations reporting that they had run out of diesel early in the day on Monday. One station attendant said a delivery of 31,000 litres of diesel could be exhausted in less than a day because of surging demand.

The disruption has affected religious services. A prominent Buddhist temple in Nakhon Phanom province suspended cremation services after failing to secure enough fuel for its crematorium, which requires about 90 litres of oil per cremation.

In response, the Ministry of Commerce is preparing measures to help consumers cope with rising fuel costs, caretaker Commerce Minister Suphaje Suthumpun said.

No new Cambodian workers allowed in

BANGKOK

THE THAI GOVERNMENT has reaffirmed that no new Cambodian migrant workers will be allowed into the country due to security concerns, despite pressure from the private sector.

Labour Minister Treenuch Thienthong said the government understands the concerns raised by businesses over labour shortages. Ms Treenuch made her comments after a meeting with the Joint Standing Committee on Commerce, Industry and Banking on Mar 11.

The private sector has urged the government to urgently address the shortage of foreign workers, especially those from Cambodia, warning that the problem could undermine the country's competitiveness. The employment of Cambodian workers became a contentious issue following last year's Thai-Cambodian border clashes.

Ms Treenuch said the Labour Ministry has reaffirmed five key principles for managing Cam-



Cambodian workers in Sa Kaeo. Photo: PR

bodian workers now in Thailand.

First, the meeting served as a platform for the government to hear the private sector's concerns and recommendations on labour shortages.

Second, the government will not allow new Cambodian workers to enter the country. Instead, it will focus on managing workers already here with valid work permits.

Third, all Cambodian workers must be formally registered and have clear employer certification confirming their employment with a specific company.

Fourth, all measures implemented must not affect national security. The Labour Ministry will closely coordinate with security agencies when introducing any policies.

Bangkok Post

Thai crew return home from attacked ship

BANGKOK

TWENTY THAI CREW MEMBERS of the Bangkok-registered cargo ship *Mayuree Naree* attacked near the Strait of Hormuz on Mar 11 arrived back home through Suvarnabhumi airport on Monday (Mar 16).

Precious Shipping Plc (PSL), the owner of the bulk carrier, said its senior executives received the crew members at the airport and provided them with welfare support including physical and mental health examinations.

The company confirmed three other crewmen were still missing in the wake of the attack, which resulted in the vessel catch fire before being extinguished.

Adm Thadawat Thatphithakkul, chief of staff of the Royal Thai Navy, confirmed last Saturday (Mar 14) that the sailors remain alive aboard the damaged cargo ship.

"Rescue vessels have not yet been able to reach them because Iranian forces may fire at ships in the area, making it too dangerous for recovery teams to approach," he said. Authorities are continuing to check whether the three sailors have sustained injuries, but confirmed there have been no fatalities.

However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said confirmation of the survivors must come from the government of Oman.

Rear Adm Parach Rattanachaiyaphan, spokesman for the Royal Thai Navy, said



Photo: Supplied

Thai authorities are closely monitoring the situation and coordinating assistance through diplomatic channels and naval cooperation.

Precious Shipping Plc confirmed the *Mayuree Naree* had complied with all maritime security protocols before the attack.

The company also expressed gratitude to the Royal Navy of Oman for assisting in the rescue of the 20 sailors and providing temporary shelter.

Meanwhile, at a briefing at Government House on Saturday, Kritpech Chaichuay, director-general of the Marine Department, said there are currently no Thai-flagged vessels operating in the Arabian Gulf.

Two vessels owned by Thai business interests but registered in Singapore remain safely docked in the United Arab Emirates, carrying a total of 36 Thai sailors along with other foreign crew members, Mr Kritpech said, confirming that all are safe. Bangkok Post

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Phuket Immigration Volunteers Need You!

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket Immigration Volunteers are calling for new recruits as rising demand and limited staffing stretch the long-running support unit that assists thousands of foreigners navigating the island's visa system each year.

The volunteer group, operating under the supervision of the Phuket Immigration Office, currently has about 20 active members across four service points, including Phuket Town, Patong and Blue Tree.

However, according to long-serving volunteer and spokesperson Gerar Teuben, finding suitable candidates has become increasingly difficult.

"We need people who are genuinely committed," Mr Teuben explained to *The Phuket News*. "This is not something you do casually. It requires time, training and responsibility."

Mr Teuben, who has lived in Phuket for 37 years, has served as a volunteer for 18 years. He helped establish the Immigration Volunteer programme following the 2004 tsunami, alongside fellow founder Kevin Moss.

Having experienced first-hand how complex visa processes were in earlier decades – particularly when English-language support was limited – he said the aim was simple: to give something back.

"At that time, the process was much more difficult. Many foreigners didn't



Photo: Supplied



Photo: Supplied

understand what to do," he said. "We wanted to help people who had the same problems we had."

First point of contact

Today, volunteers assist tourists, retirees, business owners and long-term residents with visa extensions and documentation requirements.

Operating as the first point of contact at Immigration offices, volunteers explain visa categories and extension options, check documentation before applicants see officers, help complete forms and provide guidance on requirements for tourist, marriage, retirement and business extensions.

"We provide information only," Mr Teuben stressed. "We check papers and explain the process. We cannot change rules or make decisions."

Volunteers receive no salary, visa benefits or special privileges. Members must maintain their own visas independently and, until recent years, even paid for their own uniforms.

Training is extensive. Applicants must receive Immigration approval, undergo background checks through their embassies, complete a six-month to one-year training period, pass a written examination and serve a probation period of at least one year.

"It can take up to a year before someone is fully qualified," Mr Teuben explained.

The group is seeking long-term foreign residents who hold valid long-stay extensions – such as retirement or marriage visas – and who can commit at least two full days per week.

"They must have strong interper-

sonal skills and be able to remain calm under pressure," Mr Teuben said.

Language skills are an advantage but are not mandatory.

'Detailed guidance'

"We are the first people visitors see," he added. "Sometimes they arrive frustrated or confused. You must be patient and professional."

Fellow volunteer Carmen Keppler noted that many elderly foreigners – particularly those who do not speak English fluently – rely heavily on volunteer assistance.

"Older applicants often need detailed guidance. We go through everything step by step," she said.

It can be very stressful at times as applicants don't always receive the information they expect. "It's about communication," Mr Teuben said. "You must know how to explain things clearly and respectfully."

Despite the challenges, he said the reward is straightforward. "People come in frustrated and worried," he said. "They leave with a smile. That's why we do this."

Interested candidates can contact the Immigration Volunteers through their official website at PIV-Phuket.com or email piv.information@gmail.com, where enquiries are screened before formal applications are submitted for approval.

Mr Teuben stressed the role is not suited for everybody. "We are here to help," he said. "That is the only reason to join."



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

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The Real Digital Divide: Commanders Versus Chatterboxes



Image: Joe Smith

THE AI EDGE



Joe Smith

Sentiment about AI's true value has been on a rollercoaster ride recently.

By the end of last year, it was clear that AI had been a bubble. New models were just like the old ones. They were still clunky and error-prone, excelling only at meme-slop. AI companies would never recoup their spends on data centres, and their clients couldn't make money from AI projects. In October and November a trillion dollars of value was wiped from US stocks (before they recovered).

Last month, though, investors started freaking out for precisely the opposite reason. AI was TOO good. The subscription software industry, in particular, was seeing an extinction event. The Jobs Apocalypse was back on.

What prompted this realisation was a set of plugins Anthropic released for its Claude model that promised to make redundant the specialised, industry-specific software used in law, finance,

marketing and more. Software-as-a-Service was doomed.

And yet, to the average user, the experience of using LLMs is pretty much the same as it was 18 months ago. How can all this be true at once?

The explanation, commentators now think, has to do with a growing divergence, a bifurcation, in the way that AI is being used. The vast majority of us still ask chatbots for things like shopping and dining recommendations, drafting text and making videos. We sit and wait for the answer, sometimes copy-and-pasting the results into other apps.

'Fleets of AI agents'

Power Users, by contrast, harness teams of AI agents to execute large chunks of their workflows. They don't ask questions, they set their agents goals – often with their own KPIs – and let them get on with it. They are not looking at a chat box; they work with command lines and automation layers, and their AI agents run in the background, connected to all the other tools they use.

And in contrast to what was reported a year ago about AI's negligible effects on productivity, Power Users

record big time savings and performance improvements.

This phenomenon, dubbed the "Agentic Divide", has been the subject of influential papers from institutions like Anthropic Labs, MIT Sloan Business School and Stanford's Digital Economy Lab. They prophesy the "death of the chatbot era".

A big catalyst for the Agentic Divide has been Claude Code. This started as a terminal tool for coding, but has now evolved into an orchestrator, or conductor, of "Agent Teams". Unlike standard chatbots, it allows a lead agent to spawn and manage multiple sub-agents that work simultaneously across different files and complex technical tasks.

It is this shift that defines the Power User. They've moved beyond chatting with an AI to essentially managing a small, autonomous software engineering firm.

Stanford's Erik Brynjolfsson predicts: "By 2050, most people will command workforces larger than the

biggest multinational corporations of today. But our 'employees' won't be people sitting in cubicles or standing on factory floors. They will be fleets of AI agents."

Don't feel like you're about to become a power user? Worries that you might get left on the wrong side of this digital divide are probably premature. The internet also used to be abstruse before it was democratised by graphical user interfaces and point-and-click functionality. As this happens with AI, perhaps the best thing to work on is your mindset. Can you, like a Power User, think less about chatting to your AI, and start commanding it?

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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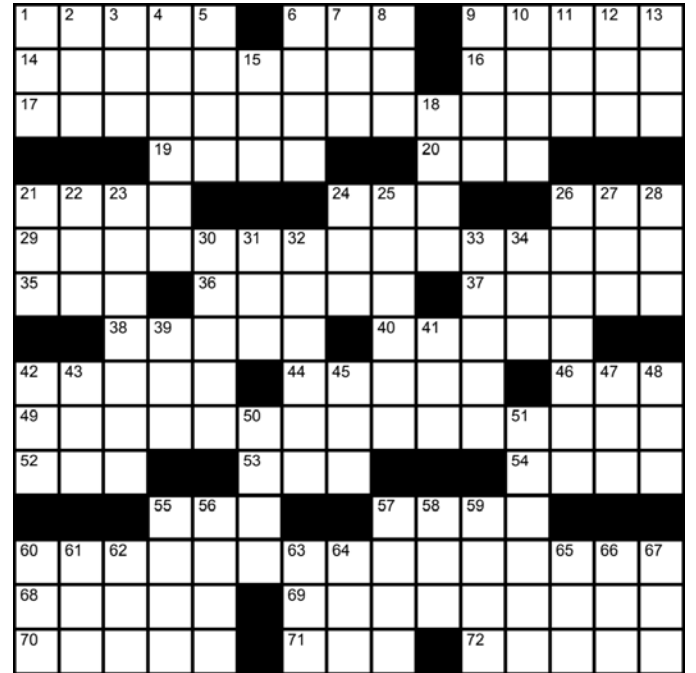
POP QUIZ

- Who failed his music class at school?
- What is consistently ranked the most popular name for a boat?
- What city is known as the Glass Capital of the World?
- In Aussie slang what are Bum Nuts?
- What did Oliver Pollock invent in 1778?

Answers below, centre

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across**
- Deep cavity
 - The Company
 - Blubbers
 - Some salesmen
 - Clear
 - Flees
 - Shoestrings
 - Part of T.G.I.F.
 - Final notice
 - Bolivian export
 - "When We Were Kings" subject
 - Flees
 - Everyday article
 - Band section
 - Lowest deck on a ship
 - Pancakes served with sour cream
 - Accustom: Var.
 - Delicate
 - Popular mints
 - Grazing locale
 - Flees
 - Formal vote
 - Big Apple inits.
 - Sailed through
 - Excuse
 - Recipe abbr.
 - Flee
 - Block house?
 - Soap ingredient
- Down**
- 20's dispenser
 - Support system?
 - Jabber
 - Slender
 - City near Phoenix
 - Give up
 - Kind of contribution
 - Chucklehead
 - Fabric
 - "Aeneid" figure
 - Cup handle
 - Kind of particle
 - Firm
 - Varnish ingredient
 - Help for the stumped
 - Legendary Giant
 - Cousin of "Phoey!"
 - Japanese art of flower arrangement
 - Freight weight
 - Supplement
 - Relating to a pair of genes
 - Neighbor of a Vietnamese
- Across**
- Trickster
 - Decoy
 - Cyclotron bit
 - Complicated
 - Put up
 - Blunder
 - Sue Grafton's "___ for Lawless"
 - Extreme
 - Zap
 - Wish undone
 - Common Market: Abbr.
 - Chemical suffix
 - Kick in
 - Captivated by
 - Yellowstone sight
 - Pervasive quality
 - Area 51 conveyances?
 - The one over there
 - Vereen
 - Synagogue
 - Greetings
 - It may need massaging
 - Miss. neighbor
 - Dashboard abbr.
 - Mad Hatter's drink
 - Chop off
 - Collagen target
 - Canny



Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

SUDOKU

Medium

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

Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

- (1) Elvis Presley; (2) Serenity; (3) Toledo (Ohio, USA); (4) Eggs; (5) The U.S. dollar sign (\$)

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

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

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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

5

minutes is how long female mayflies live for at most – just long enough to mate and lay eggs.

40

percent of the world's population contracted the Spanish Flu in 1918, which killed more people than World War I.

66

percent of people who have ever lived past age 65 in the entire history of the world are alive today.

65,500

adopted children, over 4% of all adopted children in the USA, have lesbian, gay or bisexual parents.

17.5 million

people were banned from flying on planes in China in 2018 because of their poor 'social credit' score.

Source: Uberfacts

ISLAND VIEW



Tropical silhouettes at Kata Beach. Photo by Luke Gullins

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

This week in history

Mar 20, 1922
The *USS Langley* is commissioned as the first United States Navy aircraft carrier.

Mar 21, 630
Emperor Heraclius returns the True Cross, one of the holiest Christian relics, to Jerusalem.

Mar 22, 1963
The Beatles release their

debut album *Please Please Me*.

Mar 23, 1935
Signing of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of the Philippines.

Mar 24, 1603
James VI of Scotland is proclaimed King James I of England and Ireland, upon the death of Elizabeth I.



Rialto Bridge

Mar 25, 421
Italian city Venice is founded with the dedication of the

first church, that of San Giacomo di Rialto on the islet of Rialto.

Mar 26, 1971
East Pakistan, then a province of Pakistan, declares its independence from Pakistan to form Bangladesh, prompting the start of Bangladesh's War of Independence.

Source: Wikipedia

Trades & Services

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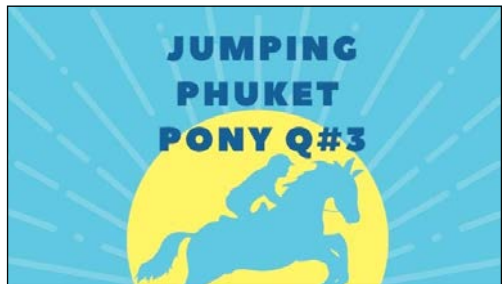
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FRI 20 MAR



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

SUN 22 MAR



Charity Dinner at Restaurant Jampa
 An Evening Dedicated to Community & Empowerment - We invite you to a special charity dinner to support two incredible local causes! An Evening Dedicated to Community & Empowerment We invite you to a special charity dinner to support two incredible local causes:

Phuket Sunshine Village Foundation and the Nakhon Sri Thammarat Sport School Women Football Team. Every ticket helps provide a brighter future for children and empowers female athletes in our community. Amazing chefs & a great wine pairing for 6000 THB p.p. for a good cause. Sunday, 22nd March 2026 - Jampa, Phuket - 6:30 PM Dress Code: Casual Your presence makes a difference. Let's dine for a cause. Please scan QR code to pay or reserve a spot here and we contact you - hello@radach.com

TUE 24 MAR



Rotary Club of Patong Beach
 The only English-speaking Rotary Club in Phuket, we welcome Rotarians from around the world! With members from 18 nationalities, we are a diverse, dynamic, and well-known club in Thailand. 1st Tue each month - Fellowship dinner at different locations in Phuket, 3rd Tue each month - dinner meeting at Four Points by Sheraton Phuket Patong. Join us! if you are passionate about making a difference. More info - www.facebook.com/RCoPB

THU 26 MAR



Skål Phuket - March Dinner
 Skål Phuket Rooftop Dinner at Kee Sky Lounge. Our host of the month of March, Doeke Bonga, extends a warm invitation to all Skalleagues and friends of Skål for

a great evening at The Kee Resort and Spa. The night starts at 6pm with networking drinks at Sky Bar, overlooking Patong Bay, followed by an al fresco dinner at The Kee Sky Lounge rooftop (weather permitted). Members B1300 - Non-Members B1700. Bookings - contact@skalphuket.org, more info at facebook.com/SkalPhuket

SAT 28 MAR



The Sea's Feast
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 LISTEN ONLINE

F1 races in Bahrain, Saudi cancelled

FORMULA ONE

F1 RACES IN BAHRAIN and Saudi Arabia have been cancelled as the Middle East war engulfs the region, motorsport's governing body the FIA announced last Saturday (Mar 14).

"It has been confirmed today that, after careful evaluations, due to the ongoing situation in the Middle East region, the Bahrain and Saudi Arabian Grands Prix will not take place in April," the International Automobile Federation (FIA) said in a statement.

"While several alternatives were considered, it was ultimately decided that no substitutions will be made in April.

"The decision has been taken in full consultation with Formula One Group, local promoters and our member clubs in the region."

Bahrain had been scheduled as the fourth Grand Prix this season to



No F1 this season in Bahrain. Photo: AFP

take place on Apr 10-12, with the Saudi race a week later.

The Gulf has been battered by two weeks of Iranian drone and missile attacks after the United States and Israel started their war on Iran.

Bahrain has been targeted with frequent attacks that have hit buildings and a refinery, as well as its large US military base.

Saudi Arabia has also weathered scores of strikes, some of them targeting the oil infrastructure that is crucial for the world's biggest exporter of crude.

"The FIA will always place the safety and wellbeing of our community and colleagues first," FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem said, adding no substitute races will take place. AFP

Antonelli wins maiden F1 GP

FORMULA ONE

AFP

An emotional Kimi Antonelli won a grand prix for the first time last Sunday (Mar 15) in China ahead of Mercedes teammate George Russell and Lewis Hamilton, who made his maiden podium for Ferrari.

The 19-year-old Antonelli converted being the youngest pole-sitter in Formula One history into victory after both McLarens dramatically failed to start the Shanghai race.

Antonelli briefly lost the lead at the start but once he got back in front he controlled the pace to cruise home to the chequered flag by more than five seconds from Russell. Charles Leclerc was fourth in the second Ferrari.

"I'm speechless, I'm about to cry to be honest," said Antonelli as he choked back tears.

"Thank you to the team for helping me to achieve this dream."

It was an almost flawless drive from the youngster, apart from one heart-fluttering moment when he locked up at the hairpin on his penultimate lap.

But he recovered to avoid nothing more damaging than a small excursion off track.

Early championship leader Russell was full of praise for his young teammate after the dominant Mercedes team secured a one-two for the second race running.



Antonelli celebrates after his win in Shanghai. Photo: AFP

"A huge congratulations to Kimi because it's always very special to win your first race," said Russell, whose lead has been cut to four points by Antonelli.

The Italian replaced Hamilton at Mercedes and the seven-time world champion said he could not be more pleased for the teenager and his old team.

"I'm so so happy for you buddy, and I'm so honoured to be able to share this moment with him," said Hamilton.

"He took my seat obviously, at this great team. So big congratulations to Mercedes.

"They're really pulling ahead at the moment. We've got a lot of work to do to try and keep up."

Oliver Bearman was fifth in the Haas, followed home by Pierre Gasly

(Alpine) and Liam Lawson (RB).

Rounding out the top-10 points scorers were Isack Hadjar (Red Bull), Carlos Sainz (Williams) and Franco Colapinto (Alpine).

Four-time world champion Max Verstappen continued Red Bull's poor start to the new season when he was told to retire his car on lap 46.

Current world champion Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri both failed to start because of separate issues that left McLaren without a car in the race.

It has been an awful start to the season for the constructors' world champions.

In the season's opening race in Melbourne only one McLaren took part after Piastri crashed on his way to the grid, meaning the Australian is yet to race in a grand prix this season.

Supanida ends title drought at Swiss Open

BADMINTON

THAI SHUTTLE SUPANIDA Katethong claimed her first title in nearly two years by winning the US\$250,000 (B8 million) BWF Swiss Open in Basel last Sunday (Mar 15).

The Thai seventh seed upset top seed Putri Kusuma Wardani of Indonesia 21-11, 21-15 in the women's singles final to win the Super 300 tournament at St Jakobshalle.

It was her first title triumph since the 2024 Thailand Open and her third World Tour crown. The 28-year-old won the Super 300 US Open for her first World Tour title in 2023.

With the victory, Supanida moved up three spots to No.11 in the new Badminton World Federation (BWF) world rankings.

Supanida won a silver medal at the 33rd Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in December last year when Thailand hosted the biennial tournament. She lost to compatriot Ratchanok Intanon in the gold medal match.

She became the third Thai player/pair to win a BWF title



Supanida. Photo: AFP

this year after Kunlavut Vitidarn (men's singles, Malaysia Open) and Dechapol Puavaranukroh/Supissara Paewsampran (mixed doubles, India Open).

Meanwhile, Kunlavut was officially confirmed as men's world No.1 in the latest BWF world rankings.

The 24-year-old Thai star has surged to the top with 100,779 points from 17 tournaments played, replacing China's Shi Yuqi who has 100,567 points from 11 tournaments.

Kunlavut's return to the summit of the sport was confirmed when he reached the quarter-finals of the All England Open in Birmingham on Mar 6.

Bangkok Post

'Supergirl' calls time on young career

MMA

ANNA "SUPERGIRL" JAROONSACK walked out of Lumpinee Stadium last Saturday morning (Mar 14) knowing the fight was over.

Not just the one with opponent Yu Yau Pui. All of them.

The 22-year-old Thai announced her retirement after a first-round TKO loss at ONE Fight Night 41, closing the chapter on a career that began when she was still a teenager and once promised so much.

Backstage, she explained the decision with a calmness that suggested it had been coming for a long time.

"I was going to retire eight years ago," she said. "At that time my parents were going to break up. I was a kid and I wanted them to stay together. That's why I fought until now."

Supergirl debuted in ONE Championship aged just 16 in 2020, quickly emerging as one of the promotion's most exciting young prospects.

But the story behind the bright lights was far more complicated. For years, she said, fighting had never truly been about chasing titles or fame.

"I just wanted them to be proud, to be happy," she said. "I



Supergirl lays her gloves down on the canvas at Lumpinee Stadium after a TKO loss at ONE Fight Night 41. Photo: Bangkok Post

did it for everyone else. But now I'm too tired and look at myself, like, 'What about me?'"

The emotional cost of that decision slowly began to surface.

"In the last two or three years I have had panic attacks," she said. "I could not sleep and had bad depression."

Still, she kept going. However, even before stepping into the ring last weekend, she knew the end was near. What mattered was finishing on her own terms.

"I was going to do it even if I win or lose," she said.

OVERWHELMING

In recent years, she said, the pressure of fighting had become overwhelming. Support from her boyfriend, Thai MMA fighter Peter Danesoe, helped her begin to see a different future.

"He told me, 'You work hard, you make money, and you can help people, help animals,'" she said. "That made me think differently."

Supergirl says she has never been motivated by money or fame.

"I have food, I have a house, I have a car. That's enough for me. I don't want more. Some people don't have meals, they don't have anything."

Instead, she now hopes to focus on helping others – including the many animals she has taken in over the years.

"I have nine kids," she said with a smile, referring to her pets. She will also return to helping run the family's Jaroonsack Gym in Phuket.

For years, Supergirl had been fighting for reasons that no one else knew. Now, finally, she feels free to stop.

"I don't hate Muay Thai," she said softly.

"I love having Muay Thai in my life. But I just don't want to fight now."

Nick Atkin / Bangkok Post

Young Gunner stunner

FOOTBALL

AFP

Arsenal moved a step closer to the Premier League title as teenager Max Dowman became the competition's youngest ever goalscorer in a dramatic 2-0 win against Everton last Saturday (Mar 14).

Mikel Arteta's Gunners struggled to break down obdurate Everton until the closing moments at the Emirates Stadium.

But Sweden forward Viktor Gyokeres finally found a way through in the 89th minute, and the ensuing scenes of delirium on the pitch and in the stands underlined the significance of Arsenal's fourth successive league win.

There was still time for Dowman to run the length of the pitch and slot home, with Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford nowhere to be seen after coming up for a corner that ended in a rapid Arsenal counter-attack in the final seconds.

Dowman, aged just 16, is the youngest scorer in the history of the Premier League, as well as Arsenal's youngest scorer.

Arsenal, trophyless since 2020, are hunting a first English title in 22 years.

The quadruple chasers rode their luck to beat Everton despite a disjointed performance, adding to the mounting feeling that they will be one of the



Arsenal's Max Dowman celebrates his historic goal. Photo: AFP

least stylistically impressive champions in recent memory if they do take the crown.

The Gunners are now nine points ahead of second-placed Manchester City, who could only draw 1-1 with West Ham at the London Stadium in the day's late kick-off.

City captain Bernardo Silva gave his side the lead in the 31st minute before Konstantinos Mavropanos equalised for the hosts just four minutes later.

LABOURED

Manchester United bolstered their bid to qualify for the Champions League with a 3-1 win against Aston Villa on Sunday.

Casemiro, Matheus Cunha and Benjamin Sesko were on target for Michael Carrick's team who leapfrogged three points ahead of Villa into third place.

United co-owner Jim Ratcliffe last week praised Carrick's "excellent" work, but stopped short of committing

to the former Old Trafford star on a long-term basis.

But Carrick is making a strong case to earn the job on a permanent basis after stabilising United and securing a seventh win in nine games since taking over as interim boss following Ruben Amorim's sacking.

Fifth-placed Liverpool laboured to a 1-1 draw at Anfield against troubled Tottenham. Dominic Szoboszlai's first-half free-kick gave the home side the lead before Richarlison equalised in the 90th minute.

Sixth-placed Chelsea were beaten by Newcastle thanks to Anthony Gordon's goal at Stamford Bridge, while Brighton beat Sunderland 1-0 to climb into the top half of the Premier League.

The games between second-bottom Burnley and Bournemouth, Crystal Palace and Leeds, and Nottingham Forest and Fulham all ended goalless, while Brentford and Wolves played out a 2-2 draw on Monday.

Thai squad named for key AFC Asian Cup qualifier

FOOTBALL

THAILAND HEAD COACH Anthony Hudson has named 23 players for the AFC Asian Cup qualifier against Turkmenistan on Mar 31.

A victory over Turkmenistan at Rajamangala National Stadium would secure top spot in Group D and guarantee Thailand's passage to next year's finals in Saudi Arabia.

Both Thailand and Turkmenistan are locked on 12 points but the Central Asian side holds the head-to-head advantage, having beaten the War Elephants 3-1 earlier in the campaign.

Defenders Naruebodin Weerawatnodom, Manuel Tom Bihir and defensive midfielder Kritsada Kaman have been recalled while Port defender Peerawat Akkratham was the only new face in the team.

There were some notable absentees as Benjamin Davis, Suphan Thongsong, Jonathan Khemdee and Thitiphan Puangchan have all been left out, while Suphanat Mueanta is injured.



Photo: Bangkok Post

The match will kick off at 7:30pm and be shown live on Thai Rath TV (32) and the Thai Rath YouTube channel.

SQUAD:

Goalkeepers: Kampon Pathomakkakul, Patiwat Khammai and Saranon Anuin.

Defenders: Suphanan Bureerat, Peerawat Akkratham, Naruebodin Weerawatnodom, Pansa Hemviboon, Manuel Tom Bihir, Nattapong Sairiya and Nicholas Mickelson.

Midfielders: Peeradol Chamrasamee, Theerathon Bunmathan, Chanathip Songkrasin, Sarach Yooyen, Kritsada Kaman, Iklas Sanron, Thanawat Suengchitthawon, Anan Yodsangwal, Seksak Ratee and Supachok Sarachart.

Forwards: Supachai Chaied, Yodsakon Burapha and Jude Soonsup-Bell.

Bangkok Post

France win Six Nations, England in a muddle



THE GLOBAL RUGBY COACH

IN A DRAMATIC CONCLUSION to the 2026 Six Nations France beat England 48-46 with a last penalty kick of the game to become champions.

Despite French elation the question puzzling everyone is how England could produce such a rousing performance after losing their previous three games.

This has been their worst ever Six Nations performance. One suggestion is that the players were more motivated by the situation than by the coach. Some would say it is not the coach's role to motivate players but to create an environment that provides the stimulus.

Whichever way you fall, this performance has muddied the water as far as Steve Borthwick's tenure as coach is concerned. With the World Cup only 18 months away, a decision needs to be made immediately.

Two players came out of this game with their flights to Australia booked: Fly Half Finn Smith and Number 6 Ollie Chessum. Both put in quality performances. Chessum's interception try came just as France was looking to pull away. Smith showed not only exceptional technical competency but a maturity in decision-making beyond his years.



France celebrate. Photo: AFP

Elsewhere, Ireland crushed Scotland 43-21 to win the Triple Crown. Despite defeating Italy 31-17, Wales still collected the Wooden spoon.

Of course, this Six Nations, despite its quality, will soon become history. Next on the international calendar is the Nations Cup commencing in July. Twelve of the strongest nations in rugby will form two groups of six teams. Fixtures will take place in both the July and November windows, with teams travelling between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres.

It promises to be an exhilarating tournament with the top side in each group meeting in a Grand Final showdown.

Until then, we return to club rugby with the Gallagher Premiership, URC, and Top 14. It's sure to be an exciting time between now and July.

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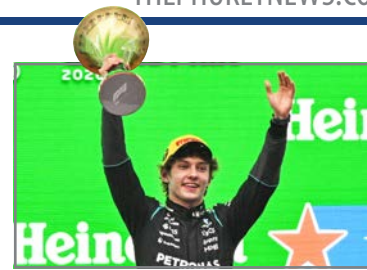
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Sport



Antonelli bags first F1 win in China > p14



TOP CLASS
Phuket hosts latest Muay Thai coaching course

Photo: Sports Association of Phuket

MUAY THAI

The Phuket News
editor3@classactmedia.co.th

An intensive five-day training course for students looking to qualify as fully-fledged coaches in the national Thai sport of Muay Thai took place in Phuket last month.

A total of 100 local, national and international students attended the course between Feb 3-7 in pursuit of their official C-Level Muay Thai license, undertaking a series of lectures as well as practical demonstrations.

The focus of the course was to develop the requisite skillset to enable the students to become qualified trainers of the sport themselves, therefore allowing them to teach others when back in their homeland.

This included general combat techniques involving punching, kicking and the correct use of

knees and elbows as well as learning the science behind muscle relaxation, a key component in reducing fatigue, stiffness and injury.

The course was held at the Dara Hotel on Chao Fa East Rd in Wichit and was arranged and facilitated by the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) and the National Office of the Boxing Commission, who elected to chose Phuket as the desired location due to its strong ties to the national sport.

Thammawat Wongcharoenyos, SAT Committee Member and President of the Phuket Provincial Sports Association, visited the venue on Feb 5 to meet many of the students to lend encouragement.

Mr Thammawat was joined by Wandee Isarangkun Na Ayutthaya, a senior director from the SAT Office of the Boxing Committee, Thanawut Petchchara, Director of the Phuket Provincial Sports Authority

Office, in addition to selected officials and lecturers.

NATIONAL ART FORM

During an address to the participating students Mr Thammawat explained that the sport of Muay Thai is very much regarded as a national art form and key component of Thai culture. He furthermore expressed his pride at Phuket being selected from a number of national venues to host the course, citing the strong Muay Thai links and presence across the island as potential deciding factors.

Mr Thammawat thanked the SAT and those specifically involved in designing and delivering the course, explaining its importance in allowing participants to stay abreast of developments in the sport, including in areas such as sports science and understanding and implementing prohibited substance regulations. Adhering to ethical standards within the sport

is of critical importance, he added.

In concluding his remarks, the Sports Association of Phuket chief also strongly encouraged all participants to fully immerse themselves in the course in order to maximise the opportunity to learn from such qualified experts.

SOFT POWER

The course was the third held in Phuket following previous editions in July 2025 and April 2024 and is another example of how the sport is being used as a key component in the government's soft power drive to attract increased tourists numbers and revenue to Thailand, while simultaneously enhancing the country's image on the international stage.

It is expected that initiatives such as the Phuket-based Muay Thai coaching courses will continue to inspire foreigners to visit Thailand to further their studies which will significantly

boost Thai tourism revenue.

Phuket in particular is internationally renowned for training and developing local and international talent with 43 officially registered Muay Thai camps across the island, including the famous Tiger Muay Thai and Bangtao Muay Thai & MMA gyms, while the island also boasts two top-class standard boxing stadiums in Patong Beach Boxing Stadium and Bangla Boxing Stadium.

A raft of local and international talent has either been based in Phuket or graced the various Muay Thai gyms across the island at some stage on their way to starrng on the global stage through promotions such as the UFC and ONE Championship; Alexander Volkanovski, Anatoly Malykhin, Loma Lookboonmee, Rafael Fiziev, Petr Yan, Valentina Shevchenko, Celest Hansen and Israel Adesanya are just a handful of such examples.

Phuket's 'Color Fun Run' returns to Thanyapura

RUNNING

PHUKET'S MOST COLOURFUL running event is set to return to the island next month after organiser's recently confirmed dates for the annual Color Fun Run at Thanyapura Health & Sports Resort.

More than 1,000 runners of all ages and abilities are expected to join in the festivities, which this year is confirmed to take place on Saturday, Apr 4.

The annual event has become established as a

firm favourite with families residing in Phuket and visiting tourists alike due to its unique standing in fusing sport and culture. The occasion is inspired by the famous Holi Festival from India, which sees an explosion of vibrant colours, energy, music and movement throughout the day.

As opposed to some of the more serious events geared towards professional athletes, the Color Fun Run promotes fitness for fun rather than competition, welcoming everyone from very young children to



those that are young-at-heart, regardless of athletic prowess.

The event will take place on the grounds of the Thanyapura Health & Sports Resort in Thalang starting at 4pm with two distances for participants to choose from: a 1.5 kilo-

metre or 5km course.

Each participant will be equipped with a pair of sunglasses and a bag of colourful powder before setting off. Throughout the course volunteers at colour stations will shower the runners with multi-coloured powders, while runners will return the favour by throwing their own coloured powder back at volunteers, other runners and spectators.

It results in a hugely fun experience with all participants typically covered head-to-toe in the colours of the rainbow by the conclu-

sion of the race. The coloured powder that is used is certifiably safe, washes off with water, and does no damage to the surrounding environment.

Once the run has concluded participants have the chance to enjoy a range of refreshments, while live musical entertainment acts provide chance for anyone with any energy remaining to shake a leg. There will also be a kids activity zone to keep the younger attendees occupied in addition to several fun-themed obstacle courses

for participants to enjoy.

Each participant will be given a T-shirt and a commemorative medal of completion, while limited edition race kits are also available.

The event organiser explained that it is the perfect occasion for families and fun runners of all levels, while also encouraging group participation due to entry fee discounts for groups of four people or more.

Registration is open now at: <https://bit.ly/4aOHWz>.

The Phuket News