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THAI FM SIHASAK MEETS THAN SHWE IN PHUKET > PAGE 3



THE PHUKET NEWS CELEBRATES 15 YEARS AT THE HEART OF PHUKET'S STORY

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

From a bold newcomer in a competitive media market to one of Southern Thailand's most established multi-platform news organisations, *The Phuket News* will mark 15 years of publication next Wednesday (Mar 4) – a milestone shaped not only by headlines, but by the community it serves.

Founded under the banner of Class Act Media, *The Phuket News* first rolled off the presses on March 4, 2011. Its arrival came at a time when Phuket's English-language media space was already well established. Yet the new weekly set out with a clear ambition: to provide

consistent, professional reporting that reflected the realities of life on an island that is both deeply Thai and unmistakably international.

Over the next decade and a half, that ambition would evolve into a multimedia network spanning print, digital, radio and video – and into a newsroom that has reported on everything from tourism booms and busts to natural disasters, COVID-19, infrastructure battles, crime crackdowns, environmental concerns and the daily civic issues that shape life in Phuket.

FILLING A GAP, GROWING INTO A MEDIA HUB

When Class Act Media was established in 2009, Phuket was

emerging from the global financial crisis and rebuilding tourism momentum. The island's expatriate population was growing, Russian tourism was rising sharply, and international schools, hotels and service industries were expanding.

The launch of *The Phuket News* in 2011 was built around a simple principle: that Phuket required a trusted, locally based English-language publication capable of bridging communities – Thai and foreign, public and private sector, residents and visitors.

Frank Dreist, Managing Director of Cape Sienna Phuket – Gourmet Hotel & Villas, says the paper quickly became part of the island's fabric. "For me *The*

Phuket News is important because it is a constant in the life of Phuket; it belongs and it is part of Phuket. It represents the foreign influence in Phuket and tells stories about how they are. For people who have been on the island for many years it reflects and showcases the development and highlights the engagement of people with Phuket."

From the outset, the weekly print edition was supported by an expanding online presence – allowing breaking news to be delivered in real time while the print edition provided depth and context.

What began as a weekly newspaper soon expanded into a broader media ecosystem...

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

NEWS PAGE 5

'Seaweed' still floating ashore at Patong Beach



LIFE PAGE 8

Using AI to plan excursions in complex places



SPORT PAGE 16

Phuket's hot Scot Nico bags ONE world title



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News



Tourism arrivals hit a record high note > p6

Making a difference

Continued from page 1

Under Class Act Media, the company expanded beyond print with the launch of Live 89.5 radio – introduced four months before the Russian-language sister publication, *Novosti Phuket*. The addition of a dedicated Russian-language newspaper recognised the growing importance of Russian-speaking residents and tourists to Phuket's economy. This was followed by video reporting through Phuket News TV, together establishing a cross-platform media presence that remains rare for a provincial publication in Thailand.

In 2017, the company further expanded with the launch of a Thai-language publication, *Khao Phuket*, reinforcing its role as a media bridge across communities.

Kongsak Khoophongsakorn, recently installed President of the Phuket Chamber of Commerce, says foreign-language media plays a strategic role in Phuket's development.

He describes Phuket as requiring a "media hub" capable of connecting government, private sector, tourists and expatriates – and says *The Phuket News* has performed strongly in building trust among foreign readers through diverse, balanced and credible reporting.

He noted that comprehensive presentation of both positive and negative issues allows readers to make informed decisions, while suggesting future strategies could include expanding concise English summaries to further engage Thai readers and sharing readership insights with policymakers to support provincial planning.

"Ultimately, collaboration between the media, government, and the private sector is key to effective information dissemination and driving Phuket's sustainable growth as a world-class tourist destination," he said.

CRISIS AND CHANGE

Over 15 years, the newsroom has covered some of the most significant events in modern Phuket history. From maritime disasters that reshaped marine safety enforcement, to airport security developments, to the global shutdown of tourism during COVID-19 and the island's 'Sandbox' reopening strategy, the paper has documented the island's resilience in times of crisis.

That role – particularly in communicating accurate information to foreign audiences – has been widely acknowledged by authorities.

Pol Maj Gen Sinlert Sukhum, Superintendent of the Phuket Provincial Police, said English- and Russian-language reporting is crucial in a province that ranks among the country's top destinations for foreign visitors.

He praised the publication's factual reporting and close coordination with police agencies, adding: "On the occasion of their 15th anniversary, congratulations! We hope *The Phuket News* will continue to serve Phuket province and provide beneficial news to both local residents and tourists."

Pol Lt Col Ekkachai Siri, Senior Inspector of Tourist Police Station 1, Division 2, emphasised the importance of English-language media in communic-



Phuket Airport Immigration Chief Pol Col Rassarin Thiraphatthanakun reads the 'Don't Run' visa-run story in *The Phuket News*. Photo: Supplied

ating policies, procedures and offences to foreign visitors.

"Government publicity through local Thai-language media might not reach the international audience. English-language media is very helpful," he said, adding that further collaboration between media and agencies could strengthen verification and policy dissemination.

He also highlighted the importance of promoting positive developments alongside crime and enforcement news, noting the speed at which negative stories can spread in the digital era.

CONNECTING COMMERCE

For Phuket's business community, the publication has served as both watchdog and partner in building tourism confidence.

Bjorn Courage, General Manager of InterContinental Phuket and President of the Phuket Hotels Association, said, "Congratulations to *The Phuket News* on 15 years of informing, connecting, and supporting Phuket. As PHA president, I value your role in strengthening tourism confidence, the community voice and

sustainable island growth."

James Stewart, Managing Director of Vertigo Video Productions, described the publication as "an essential voice for both the local and international community". "It gives businesses, residents and visitors a reliable source of information that helps the island function and grow," he said.

Jazon Edouard, Founder and CEO of HeadStart International School, noted the strategic importance of multi-language reach. "Since opening in 2011, *The Phuket News* has been our trusted Media Partner on the island. Being able to reach Phuket's diverse community in three languages through one convenient and efficient channel is a key part of our marketing strategy."

COMMUNITY

Beyond business and tourism, community leaders credit the publication with strengthening civic engagement.

Simon Meredith, who serves as Head of School at British International School, Phuket, said, "In a place as international and dynamic as the island, having a trusted local voice that informs, challenges, and

builds understanding is essential."

Alex Longman, President of the Rotary Club of Patong Beach, commended the newspaper's consistent support of charitable and community initiatives. "Through your coverage, many important causes have gained visibility and support that might otherwise not have been possible," he said.

Tina Hall, Executive Director of Phuket Has Been Good To Us Foundation, highlighted the importance of factual reporting in an era of misinformation: "With so much misinformation and emotional reactions on social media, it's more important than ever to have a trusted news outlet that provides accurate, factual reporting and information we can rely on."

Kirsten Fletcher, Australian Consul-General in Phuket, described the milestone as "a huge" one, adding, "*The Phuket News* plays a vital role in bringing our diverse community together and keeping everyone informed about what's happening locally, across Thailand, and around the world."

A MULTILINGUAL GATEWAY

Phuket Airport Immigration Chief Pol Col Rassarin Thiraphatthanakun said the publication's three-language model – Thai, English and Russian – allows diverse audiences to access credible information.

"The content is credible because the media verifies and investigates the facts of various news stories, presenting information from all angles," she said, suggesting the future addition of Chinese-language

content could expand reach even further.

Patong Mayor Lalita Maneesri echoed that view, describing multilingual reporting as essential in an international tourism city and likening it to being a good "host" for visitors.

Piyanoot Hongsyok, Deputy Managing Director of Anuphas & Sons Co Ltd and Honorary Consul of Estonia in Phuket, described the newspaper as "the window through which the world sees our island's global distinction".

THE NEXT CHAPTER

Fifteen years on, *The Phuket News* stands not only as a publication but as part of Phuket's institutional landscape – a platform through which government agencies clarify policy, businesses build confidence, charities raise awareness and residents debate the island's future.

The challenges facing media today are significant: rapid digital change, social media misinformation, economic pressures and shifting reader habits. Yet the fundamental mission remains unchanged – to report accurately, fairly and independently on the issues that matter.

As Phuket continues to grow as a tourism and residential destination, the need for credible, multilingual local journalism remains as vital as it was in 2011. With *The Phuket News* next Wednesday marking 15 years of service to the island, for many across Phuket's public, private and international communities, the message is consistent: the publication has become more than a newspaper. It has become part of Phuket's story.

Local officials to launch their own 'Phuket Bus' app

PHUKET OFFICIALS are preparing to launch a new 'Phuket Bus' app aimed at upgrading the island's public transport system to so-called 'Smart City' standards.

Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn said the initiative

will modernise transport services through digital technology, making them more accessible for residents and tourists.

The app, developed by the Phuket Land Transport Office (PLTO), will provide real-time bus tracking,

estimated waiting times, route details, travel distances and fare rates under the theme "One App, Travel the Whole Island".

PLTO Chief Adcha Buachan explained that GPS systems have been installed on buses across nine routes,

covering both city and inter-district services, including EV buses and traditional songthaews.

The PLTO plans to expand integration to all 13 inter-district routes, he said.

Improved real-time information would boost travel

confidence, reduce congestion and encourage public transport use, he added.

However, Mr Adcha made no mention of the existing 'Phuket OneMap' app, promoted last year by the Tourism Authority of Thailand, which already



Photo: PR Phuket

offers real-time tracking on six bus lines.

The Phuket News

Thai FM Sihasak meets Than Shwe

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Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkaew held a more than two-hour informal meeting with his Myanmar counterpart Than Shwe in Phuket last week, describing Myanmar's recent general election as "incomplete" but potentially a starting point for renewed dialogue and de-escalation.

The talks took place at the Trisara resort during a Ministers' Retreat on Feb 18, at what Mr Sihasak called a "crucial juncture" for Myanmar and for Thailand as a frontline state sharing more than 2,400 kilometres of border with its neighbour.

Speaking after the meeting, Mr Sihasak stressed that Thailand's primary interest is lasting peace and stability in Myanmar, citing direct implications for border security, international relations and economic cooperation.

"As a neighbouring country, Thailand is directly affected," he said, pointing to annual border trade valued at more than B200 billion, much of it flowing through key crossings such as Mae Sot-Myawaddy along the Asian Highway. More than 80% of bilateral trade takes place across the shared border, he noted.



Than Shwe (left) with Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuanketkaew. Photo: PR Phuket

He also highlighted ongoing concerns over transnational crime, call-centre scam networks, drug trafficking, illegal immigration and environmental impacts, including mining-related pollution affecting shared waterways.

ELECTION 'A CRITICAL OPPORTUNITY'

The Myanmar delegation briefed Thailand on the recent election process, stating that voting had proceeded smoothly and that a new government is expected to be formed before April, ahead of the Songkran festival.

Myanmar also reaffirmed its commitment to dialogue and reconciliation with all parties, including ethnic groups and those advocating for democracy, according to an official summary of the meeting.

While the Thai side described the election as incomplete, Mr Sihasak said it could represent a "critical opportunity" to advance practical implementation of ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus, which calls for an immediate cessation of violence, dialogue among all parties, humanitarian assistance and the appointment of a special envoy.

The Phuket meeting followed discussions at the recent informal ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat in the Philippines, where the situation in Myanmar was also raised among member states. Mr Sihasak said Thailand believes the period following the election could represent a turning point, depending on how Myanmar's new administration proceeds.

However, he was careful to stress that the talks did not

amount to recognition of Myanmar's military administration or a normalisation of relations.

"This is not about endorsement," he said. "It is about maintaining channels of communication and supporting reconciliation under the principle of 'Myanmar-led, Myanmar-owned'."

Under that approach, he explained, Myanmar must lead and take ownership of the peace process, while Thailand stands ready to facilitate dialogue if all parties are prepared to engage.

Mr Sihasak added that particular emphasis had been placed on encouraging dialogue with ethnic groups along the Thai border, including Karen, Kayah and Shan communities, many of whom remain opposed to the central government. Thailand, he said, is prepared to support local-level negotiations aimed at building trust and reducing tensions.

Thailand also urged Myanmar to address concerns raised by the international community, including allowing greater access for humanitarian assistance, reducing violence and avoiding attacks on civilians.

MILITARY RULE

Myanmar's dominant pro-military party won the junta-run elections

late last month after a month-long vote that democracy watchdogs dismissed as a rebranding of army rule.

With democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi detained and her party dissolved, critics said the ballot was stacked with army allies to prolong their grip on power. Voting was not held in large areas controlled by rebel factions amid ongoing civil conflict.

Under the military-drafted constitution, a quarter of parliamentary seats are reserved for members of the armed forces. A combined majority of MPs will elect the president after parliament convenes in March.

Conflict monitors and rights groups have questioned whether the poll will reduce fighting, noting that elections were cancelled in around one in five townships. More than 22,000 people remain detained for political reasons, according to monitoring organisations.

Mr Sihasak acknowledged that the election had been widely criticised but reiterated that disengagement would not help ease tensions.

"If nothing is done, there may be increased fighting," he said. "This is therefore a critical juncture – and we want them to follow the path of peace."

EXAT delays project bidding

THE EXPRESSWAY Authority of Thailand (EXAT) has postponed bidding for the long-awaited Phuket Expressway project to mid-year as it undertakes a more extensive safety review, according to a report by MCOT.

The delay affects the Kathu-Patong section, better known as the Patong Tunnel project, with EXAT requesting an additional one to two months to revise the draft Terms of Reference (TOR). The review follows the collapse of several large construction cranes on infrastructure projects elsewhere in the country that resulted in multiple fatalities, prompting the Ministry of Transport to order stricter safety standards.

The draft TOR, originally scheduled for release in December and later postponed to the end of January, has yet to be published. EXAT is reviewing work procedures, machinery and equipment specifications, and contractor qualifica-



tions to ensure maximum safety compliance.

Despite the delay, EXAT aims to select a contractor and sign a construction contract by 2026, with the expressway expected to open around 2031.

The Phuket Expressway will be the first expressway outside Bangkok and will be open to motorcycles. Authorities say it will ease chronic congestion and reduce accidents on Route 4029 over Patong Hill, while also serving as a disaster evacuation route and improving links between Kathu and Patong.

Phase 1, the 3.89km

Kathu-Patong section, carries an investment of B16.757 billion. Originally planned as a public-private partnership (PPP), it will now be built directly by EXAT after failing to attract sufficient private sector interest. The route will begin at Phra Metta Rd in Patong as an elevated four-lane road, transition into a 1.85km tunnel beneath Patong Hill, and end at Route 4029 in Kathu.

Phase 2, covering the 30.62km Muang Mai-Koh Kaew-Kathu section, is awaiting Cabinet approval, with consideration expected around mid-2026. *The Phuket News*



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Stay tuned.

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The Phuket News

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PHUKET SEVEN DAY WEATHER FORECAST

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Wind 11 m/s

THU MARCH 5

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Photo: Karon Municipality

Russian tourists injured in hotel elevator drop

SIX RUSSIAN TOURISTS were injured after an elevator malfunctioned and dropped inside a hotel in Kata on Feb 16.

The incident occurred at Tuana Hotels Casa Del Sol on Kata Rd. Karon Police were alerted to the incident at 3:20pm.

The group entered the lift on the ground floor and began ascending, but the system failed shortly after moving up. The elevator dropped and stopped about 30 centimetres below the normal floor level.

Police named the injured as Olesia Lukanova, 44; Vladimir Butylkin, 43; Vera Lukanova, 16; Liubov Butylkin, 8; Mikhail Medvedko, 46; and Vera Medvedko, 46. All six sustained minor injuries.

Emergency responders from Karon Municipality arrived with support from

rescue units of the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation's Pearl Centre and an ambulance from Chalong Hospital.

Rescue workers assessed the injured at the scene before transporting them to Dibuk Hospital. Reported injuries included side and back pain among the men, ankle and foot injuries among the women, and back pain for the 8-year-old girl, who was able to walk unaided.

No property damage was reported. Karon Police Chief Pol Col Pathapi Srichai attended the scene. Police said a detailed examination of the elevator system will be conducted, with legal action to follow if safety violations are found.

Hotel management said the lift has been closed pending repairs and inspection.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Ukrainian arrested over B10.6bn US Ponzi fraud

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A Ukrainian woman accused of masterminding a US\$340 million (B10.6 billion) pyramid scheme in the United States has been arrested while hiding in a condominium in Phuket, cyber police have confirmed.

The Cyber Crime Investigation Bureau (CCIB) said the arrest followed a request from United States law enforcement authorities seeking Thailand's assistance in locating and extraditing the suspect.

CCIB Commander Surapol Prembutra said the operation was carried out in coordination with the Royal Thai Police and US security agencies. The Ukrainian national is wanted on charges of conspiracy to commit electronic fraud, or wire fraud, in connection with a Ponzi-style investment scheme that allegedly caused losses exceeding US\$340mn.

According to police, the alleged offence falls under Section 1349, Book 18 of the United States Code, which carries a penalty of more than one year's imprisonment.

Pol Lt Gen Surapol assigned senior officers, including Pol Maj Gen Sila Kancharak of CCIB



Photo: CCIB

Division 5, to oversee the case. A team led by Pol Col Theera Chuesuwan conducted intelligence operations that traced the suspect to a condominium in Chalong. The date of the arrest was not reported.

Investigators said they obtained a search warrant from the Phuket Provincial Court before officers from CCIB Division 1, Immigration Bureau 5 and Phuket Immigration executed the raid, supported by the Phuket Provincial Forensic Science Division and Chalong Police.

During the search, officers arrested the suspect under a Criminal Court warrant linked to the US

charges. Items seized included mobile phones, computer equipment, a laptop, an iPad and documents.

Police said the suspect denied all allegations and intends to contest the case in court.

She was transferred to the Office of the Attorney General's Foreign Affairs Division to begin formal extradition proceedings. Representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Homeland Security Investigations and the United States Secret Service observed the process under the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty between Thailand and the United States.

LED lamp left on for pet bird blamed for Patong house fire

A HOUSE IN PATONG WAS destroyed last week after an LED light left on to keep a caged bird warm is believed to have triggered an electrical fire.

Police were called to the blaze in Soi Kalim 8 at 3pm on Feb 17. Firefighters arrived to find thick smoke pouring from the single-storey home as panicked neighbours looked on. The property was completely gutted.

Homeowner Phoraphat Mueydee told police she had returned at 6am to tend to her pet red-whiskered bulbul and left an LED light on before



Photo: Patong Municipality

going to work at her beauty salon in Kamala.

She later received a call from a neighbour reporting the fire.

Police suspect an electrical short circuit and are investigating the exact cause and damage costs.

Eakkapop Thongtub

AI airport camera nabs suspect wanted for beauty clinic fraud

A SUSPECT WANTED IN connection with an alleged B3.7 million beauty clinic fraud involving more than 20 victims has been arrested after being identified by an AI-powered CCTV system at Phuket International Airport.

Tourist Police said the arrest was made at about 8:30pm on Feb 20 after an AI-linked surveillance camera flagged a man matching an arrest warrant issued by the Phuket Provincial Court on Feb 12.

The suspect, Chomthawat Plai-in, 29, is accused of unlawfully using another person's electronic payment card and



Photo: Phuket Tourist Police

causing financial damage to beauty clinic customers who claimed that they had been duped into signing financial agreements far beyond what they had agreed to.

Officers tracked him to a hotel on Bang Yai Rd in Wichit, where he was taken into custody and handed to investigators at Phuket City Police Station. Eakkapop Thongtub

'Seaweed' still plagues Patong Beach

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Phuket Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn has ordered cruise ships anchoring off Patong to move further offshore after inspecting reports of heavy seaweed accumulation along Patong Beach.

Governor Nirat led a field visit to Patong Beach, near the Sea Pearl Intersection, on Feb 17 amid growing local concern that cruise ships moored offshore may be contributing to the algae growth.

Joining the inspection were Kathu District Chief Akkarapol Suthirak Jitsupap; Patong Mayor Lalita Maneesri and Phuket Marine Office Chief Adul Ralukmoon.

Also joining the foray were Phuket Provincial Fisheries Office Chief Prayuth Rattanawan; Phuket Provincial Natural Resources and Environment Office Director Natthakrit Phonphet; Phuket Provincial Public Relations Officer Wimol Nukaeo; Patong Municipal Council Chairman Veerawich Kreuzasombat; and other relevant officials.

Following the site inspection, Governor Nirat chaired a meeting at 10:30am at the Patong Municipality office to discuss both immediate and long-term solutions.



Photo: Patong Municipality

Addressing speculation from local residents, the Governor said cruise ships currently anchor about two kilometres offshore at a depth of approximately 17 metres. As an initial measure to ease public concern, the province has adjusted the mooring distance to three kilometres from shore, where the average depth is around 22 metres.

The five-metre increase in depth is expected to reduce any potential impact from vessel movement, including propeller activity, on the seaweed, he said. The new anchoring distance has been communicated to ship agents and cruise operators, and authorities will monitor the results to determine whether the change improves the situation.

The Marine Department confirmed it is ready to support

the province's measures and will assess the effectiveness of the revised docking distance. If the adjustment helps alleviate the problem, it may be adopted as an appropriate approach. If not, officials will consider alternative measures.

According to scientific data presented by the Phuket Provincial Fisheries Office, seaweed and algae growth can increase significantly when environmental conditions are favourable.

Contributing factors may include "high levels of phosphate nutrients from wastewater", sufficient sunlight and suitable sea conditions, potentially leading to a bloom similar to plankton proliferation, admitted an official report of the visit.

When strong waves or monsoon conditions occur,

accumulated seaweed may be dislodged and float to the surface, eventually washing ashore, the report said.

Officials stressed that while the cruise ship hypothesis remains under consideration, further scientific investigation is required to establish any direct link. It is not customary, and it is illegal, for any vessel to discharge any waste from the septic tanks while in any port or harbour.

The meeting agreed to coordinate with academic institutions to conduct in-depth studies into the underlying causes.

Officials noted that such seaweed accumulations commonly occur between January and April, during the high tourist season.

In the meantime, Patong Municipality has begun collecting and burying the seaweed, as it cannot be reused for other purposes. The clean-up operation is expected to be completed within one to two days.

Regardless, during the visit authorities repeatedly confirmed that the beach remains open and safe for residents and tourists.

In addition to addressing the immediate seaweed issue, the meeting also discussed reducing organic waste in Patong as a longer-term preventive measure.

Officials plan to introduce

technology to manage waste at the source before it is transported to the Phuket Provincial Solid Waste Disposal Centre at Saphan Hin, with the aim of reducing nutrient runoff that could contribute to marine growth.

Governor Nirat said the province would urgently tackle the problem in the short term while developing sustainable, long-term solutions to protect Patong Beach and maintain public confidence during the peak tourism season.

WASTE AT SOURCE

Meanwhile, Governor Nirat has urged urgent cooperation from all government agencies, local authorities and the private sector to tackle the island's growing waste problem, stressing that solutions must begin at the source.

Speaking at the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organisation offices last week, he called for stricter waste separation, reduced organic waste and the use of environmentally friendly packaging under a provincial policy issued in December.

Officials noted that Patong alone generates about 200 tonnes of waste daily. The province aims to cut the volume sent to the central disposal facility through source separation, innovation and cross-sector cooperation, Gov Nirat said.

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Phuket tourism flying high

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Phuket's tourism engine has roared back to its strongest level in eight years, with the island recording a new daily high of 393 flights carrying 71,613 passengers, underlining its dominant role in Thailand's visitor economy.

Figures from Phuket International Airport show that as of Feb 14, the airport handled 146 domestic and 247 international flights in a single day, surpassing pre-pandemic benchmarks and setting a fresh post-COVID record.

The passenger total of 71,613 comprised 23,031 domestic and 48,582 international travellers, reflecting the continued strength of foreign arrivals to the Andaman hub.

Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn welcomed the milestone, describing it as confirmation of Phuket's position as a key gateway on the Andaman coast and a major driving force for national tourism.

The latest figures eclipse the 2019 average of 374 flights and 71,387 passengers per day, previously the island's benchmark year.

Passenger and flight averages over the past eight years highlight



The inaugural Belavia flight from Belarus arrives in Phuket last month. Photo: AOTGA

the dramatic arc of Phuket's recovery:

2019: 374 flights, 71,387 passengers

2020: 371 flights, 68,259 passengers

2021: 154 flights, 19,861 passengers

2022: 254 flights, 41,827 passengers

2023: 315 flights, 54,007 passengers

2024: 383 flights, 67,077 passengers

2025: 387 flights, 69,874 passengers

2026: 393 flights, 71,613 passengers

The 2021 collapse reflected pandemic-era border closures, when flights fell to just 154 per

day on average and passenger numbers plunged below 20,000. The steady rebound since 2022 has now culminated in a new high, with international services once again accounting for the majority of traffic.

The data reinforces Phuket's reliance on overseas markets, with international passengers making up more than two-thirds of the current total.

The upbeat figures coincided with a Chinese New Year celebration at the airport earlier last week, aimed at welcoming one of Phuket's most important visitor markets.

Monchai Tanode, General Manager of Phuket International Airport, on Feb 16 presided over

the opening ceremony of the 'Chinese New Year Festival 2026' performance at the International Terminal.

The terminal was decorated with auspicious symbols and traditional ornaments, while four Chinese cultural performances were staged for passengers. A parade distributed 500 souvenirs to travellers, to create a festive atmosphere and promote the airport's positioning as the 'Gateway to the Andaman'.

Airport executives said the event reflected both the strong relationship between Thailand and China and Phuket's commitment to delivering a culturally inclusive travel experience.

'TWO-SPEED TOURISM ECONOMY'

Phuket's new record comes against the backdrop of widening disparities in Thailand's tourism economy, as highlighted in recent analysis by the *Bangkok Post*.

According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the top five provinces – Bangkok, Phuket, Chonburi, Surat Thani and Chiang Mai – generated more than B2 trillion of Thailand's total B2.7tn tourism revenue in 2025.

Phuket alone earned B546 billion last year, ranking second nationally and generating more

revenue than the bottom 50 provinces combined.

Yuthasak Supasorn, chairman of the Industrial Estate Authority of Thailand and former governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, described the situation as a "severe overconcentration" of tourism income.

Revenue from the top five provinces accounted for roughly 70% of the national total, while the top 10 made up 81%. The remaining 67 provinces shared just 18.7%.

While visitor distribution showed moderate inequality, income distribution was far more skewed, he said, with foreign tourists driving the lion's share of revenue. In Phuket and Bangkok, foreign arrivals account for 92% and 69% of tourism income respectively.

An econometric model cited by Mr Yuthasak suggests each foreign tourist generates roughly B40,000 in revenue for a province, while domestic tourism has minimal impact on overall provincial wealth.

"This imbalance presents a major structural challenge," he warned, noting that heavy reliance on a handful of destinations leaves the national economy vulnerable to crises affecting those areas.

AoT to hike airport fee

AIRPORTS OF THAILAND (AoT) has announced that the passenger service charge (PSC) for outbound international travellers will increase to B1,120 from B730 per person from June 20, 2026.

The 53% rise will apply at six airports operated by Airports of Thailand: Suvarnabhumi, Don Mueang, Phuket, Hat Yai, Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai.

The domestic PSC will remain at B130. The change was approved by the Civil Aviation Board on Dec 3, 2025.

AoT said the PSC, which is included in ticket prices, represents only a small portion of overall travel costs and is unlikely to affect passenger decisions. The company expects the increase to generate an additional B13 billion in fiscal 2027, to support investment projects including the planned South Terminal at Suvarnabhumi, valued at more than B200bn.

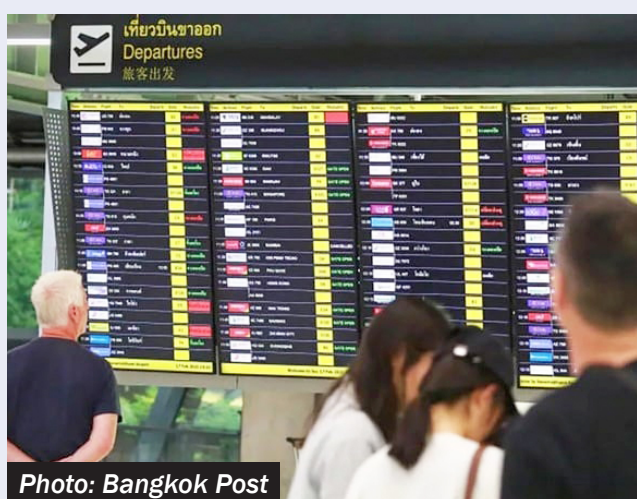


Photo: Bangkok Post

AoT said the additional revenue would strengthen its financial position, reduce reliance on borrowing and fund infrastructure improvements, rather than maximise profit. It also noted that more than 90% of airports worldwide charge fees on both departing and transit passengers, while Thailand charges only departing travellers.

However, critics have questioned the value offered to passengers. Former Democrat Party deputy leader Samart Ratchapolsitte said the

issue was not the size of the increase but what travellers would receive in return. He warned the hike could raise fares on low-cost routes by 7-10% and affect Thailand's competitiveness.

He urged transparent use of PSC revenue for visible service upgrades, including shorter immigration queues, improved baggage handling, adequate seating and reliable Wi-Fi, saying passengers would accept higher fees if clear improvements are delivered.

Bangkok Post

Real estate surge to pass B541bn

PHUKET'S PROPERTY market remains one of Thailand's most attractive investment destinations, with cumulative real estate investment projected to exceed B541 billion between 2021 and 2026, according to Colliers Thailand.

Colliers said strong Thai and foreign demand, branded residences and large-scale mixed-use projects continue to underpin confidence in the island's long-term growth. Between 2021 and 2025, developers launched 45,066 new residential units worth B469.72bn.

The peak year was 2024, when 18,515 units were launched with a combined value of B190.11bn. With a further B71.5bn forecast in 2026, total six-year investment is expected to reach B541.22bn.

In 2025 alone, 72 new condominium and housing projects added 10,312 units worth B81.64bn, with several developments reporting rapid sales.

As Bangkok's residential market remains subdued, investors are increasingly turning to Phuket for stronger returns, particularly in condominium and vaca-

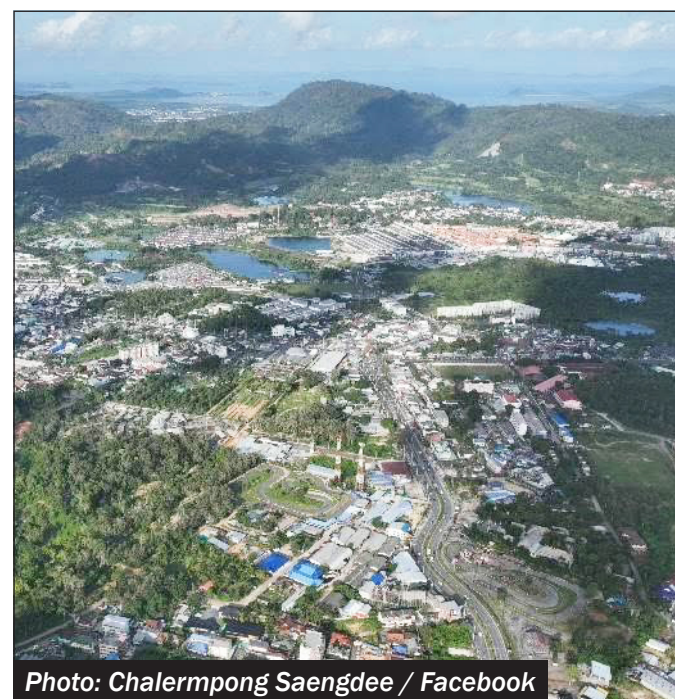


Photo: Chalermpong Saengdee / Facebook

tion home segments. Major developers including Sansiri, AssetWise and local firm Botanica Luxury Phuket plan further launches. New condominium supply in 2026 is projected at 6,000-8,000 units, with key areas including Bang Tao, Cherng Talay, Rawai, Kata and Karon.

Tourism continues to support demand. Phuket welcomed 10.47 million international visitors in 2025, generating B545.87bn in revenue. Buyers from

Russia, Australia, India, China and Kazakhstan remain active in both owner-occupier and investment markets.

The luxury vacation home segment remains a standout, with 1,100 units launched across 40 projects in 2025, valued at B27.22bn. However, Colliers cautioned that rising supply may increase competition and pricing pressure, urging developers to focus on quality and realistic pricing strategies. *The Phuket News*

'Aem Cyanide' sentenced to life

NAKHON PAHOM

Bangkok Post

The Criminal Court sentenced Sararat "Aem Cyanide" Rangsiwuthaporn to life imprisonment on Feb 20 for poisoning a police officer with cyanide in Nakhon Pathom province.

Sararat, 39, is suspected of killing 14 other people with cyanide and has already been found guilty of one murder.

The court in Bangkok ruled that she intentionally poisoned Pol Maj Nipa Sangchan by mixing cyanide into her food or drink on Apr 1, 2023. Pol Maj Nipa died from acute heart failure precipitated by cyanide.

Judges said Sararat acted with intent to kill to obtain financial gain from earlier fraud committed against the officer. The court initially imposed the death sentence but commuted it to life imprisonment after the defendant confessed and gave useful testimony.

On Nov 20, 2024, the Criminal Court sentenced Sararat to death for poisoning and killing her friend, Siriporn



Sararat at the Criminal Court on Apr 26, 2023. Photo: Police

Khanwong, with potassium cyanide. The court found she had placed potassium cyanide in Siriporn's consumables, left her to die and stole her belongings. Fatal cyanide levels were later detected in the victim's organs.

Sararat faced charges of premeditated murder for the purpose of theft and an attempt to cover up the crime. She denied the charges.

Investigators suspect Sararat administered potassium cyanide to 14 people between 2015 and 2023, allegedly to avoid debts or steal valuables. They linked the serial cyanide killer to

heavy online gambling, large bank transactions and attempts to hide evidence.

The Kanchanaburi native, dubbed 'Aem Cyanide', was arrested on Apr 25, 2023, and she was pregnant when caught. Police wrapped up their investigation into her criminal cases in June 2023, about the time she miscarried during the fifth or sixth month of her pregnancy.

In Thailand, the purchase of a certain amount of deadly cyanide is technically not illegal. The law requires a buyer's permit only when they buy a substantial amount.

Mass tiger deaths at Tiger Kingdom in Chiang Mai

CHIANG MAI

THE REMAINS OF 72 TIGERS who died at the Tiger Kingdom in Chiang Mai have been destroyed to ensure none of the parts ends up in the illegal wildlife trade, the Protected Area Regional Office 16 said on Monday (Feb 23).

Citing the result of a preliminary necropsy, officials said the tigers were infected with feline parvovirus and died as a result of a secondary bacterial infection, which resulted in complications.

A total of 246 tigers were kept at Tiger Kingdom's facilities in Mae Rim and Mae Taeng districts. As of Feb 18, 72 tigers had died – the largest incidence of mass deaths of captive tigers ever recorded.

The director of Protected Area Regional Office 16, Kritsayam Kongsatree, said on Monday that while some of the remains were incinerated, many of the carcasses ended up being buried due to capacity constraints.

Each grave was marked with flags and given an identification number corresponding to the individual tiger, while disinfectants were applied to prevent topsoil contamination and the spread of the disease.



Photo: Bangkok Post

The process was carried out entirely by the tiger camp staff, under close supervision from the Department of Livestock Development and conservation officials, Mr Kritsayam said, adding both facilities in Mae Rim and Mae Taeng districts remain closed to the public.

Several veterinarians have raised their concerns about the origin of the outbreak, with some questioning whether the deaths were truly caused by a viral infection, or whether they were caused by contaminated food supplies.

One of the veterinarians at the site, Wisit Asaithamkul, expressed unease about the local disease surveillance system, suggesting that other causes may have been overlooked.

He warned that failing to address systemic weaknesses in disease surveillance could undermine not only animal health and wildlife conservation, but also human health. Bangkok Post

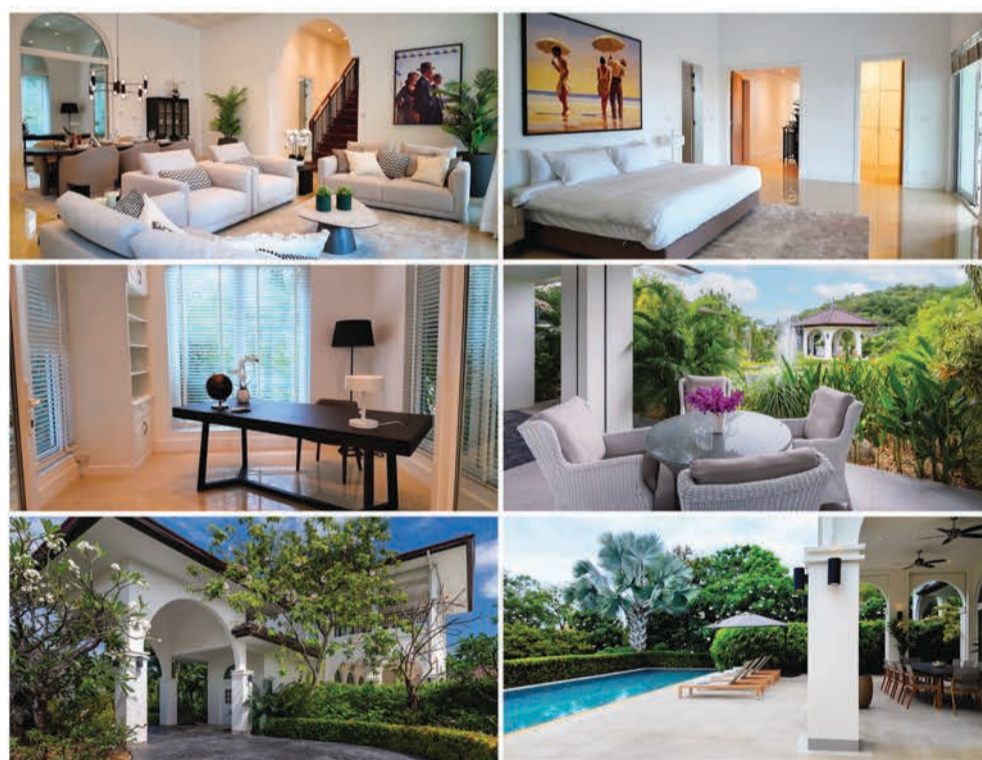


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The Grand Mosque in Bahrain. Photo: Todd Miller



The brilliant Kuwait Towers. Photo: Todd Miller



Beirut's Blue Mosque. Photo: Todd Miller

Using AI to plan complex travel itineraries



GLOBETROTTER

Todd Miller

We hear endlessly about how artificial intelligence is transforming everything. As a frequent traveler and a willing guinea pig, I decided to put AI to a practical test: Could I rely on it to plan complex travel in places I'd never been? Could it replace the hours I normally spend piecing together information from blogs, forums, reviews and guidebooks?

Recently, I tried exactly that. I tested AI travel planning in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Beirut – three destinations where reliable information can be scarce, opening hours inconsistent and

ground truth very different from online descriptions. The results were enlightening, occasionally frustrating, and sometimes unintentionally hilarious.

Bahrain: AI Starts Strong

My experiment began in Bahrain, where AI performed surprisingly well – so well, in fact, that it encouraged me to continue the test.

I asked AI to plan a detailed itinerary: what to see, where to go and when the lighting would be best for photography. The recommendations were clear, logical, and – crucially – mostly accurate.

One of the best tips was that I could visit the Al Fateh Grand Mosque until 7pm. I had no idea it stayed open that late. That single piece of information transformed my day. I arrived just before sunset, when the last golden light filtered through the arches. The mosque

was completely empty – no crowds, no tours – leaving me alone with the stillness and the geometry of the space.

AI also suggested specific photographic details and vantage points, which genuinely improved my shots. For once, I felt like I had a competent digital assistant guiding my trip.

It wasn't perfect. AI recommended visiting Block 338, the dining and creative district, around 7pm. This was technically a good suggestion, but the area was nearly dead at that hour. In Bahrain, nightlife doesn't really come alive until well after 9pm.

Still, AI had performed well enough that I thought: Why not try this again in Kuwait?

Kuwait: The Desert of Misinformation

If Bahrain was encouraging, Kuwait was a spectacular tumble into the sand. With only a day to explore, I asked AI to prioritise the must-see sites. The first suggestion? A remote island requiring boat transfers and far more time than I had – and possibly impractical altogether without private arrangements.

Not a great start.

Next, AI assured me I could visit the Grand Mosque from 9am to noon. Confident, I arrived at 9:30am on Saturday... only to be told, politely but firmly, that the mosque is closed to visitors on Saturdays.

Strike two.

Still trying to salvage the plan, I followed AI's enthusiastic recommendation to visit the Martyrs Museum, described as a powerful and moving experience. I took a taxi 30 minutes out of the city, only to find the building completely closed.

Strike three.

When your "intelligent" travel assistant sends you on a half-hour ride to a museum that is closed, you begin to question how smart it really is.

By the end of my Kuwait day, I had abandoned AI entirely and returned to old-fashioned human advice – asking locals and adjusting on the fly. The best recommendation in Kuwait, to visit the Mirror House, came from comments I discovered in a travel forum.

Still, I was curious: was Bahrain a fluke? Was Kuwait an outlier? That curiosity followed me on to my next stop: Beirut.

Beirut: Where AI Fell Apart Completely

If Kuwait was a comedy of errors, Beirut was an exercise in chasing AI-generated fiction across a city.

I asked AI to design a photography-focused itinerary that included the Blue Mosque, the Yellow House, and several architectural highlights. It produced an



Inside the Mirror House. Photo: Todd Miller

elegant route with recommended lighting times, suggested angles and even an efficient walking loop.

There was just one problem: this plan ignored opening times.

AI sent me to the Yellow House while it was locked. So I reshuffled and returned later – only to encounter the Blue Mosque closed at precisely the time AI had me scheduled to visit. I ended up zig-zagging across central Beirut, doubling back repeatedly, wasting hours and hemorrhaging energy.

By mid-afternoon, it was obvious: AI had created a perfect itinerary for a fictional Beirut that existed only in its training data. In the real world, it was utterly useless.

I managed to get the photos I wanted, but I was exhausted by all the duplicated visits.

So, What Did the Guinea Pig Learn?

Across Bahrain, Kuwait, and Beirut, the lesson was clear: AI is impressive, but it is not reliable for real-world travel logistics – especially in places where information changes quickly or isn't maintained online.

AI excels at structure, creativity, and inspiration. It's brilliant at suggesting themes, photographic ideas, and routes. But when it comes to the gritty details – opening hours, closures, transportation realities – it can lead you spectacularly astray.

And yet, when it works, as it did in Bahrain, it feels like a superpower. A private travel assistant available 24/7.

The Bottom Line

AI is not a map. It's a compass. It can point you in a direction. But you still need to navigate yourself.

And sometimes, that's exactly what makes travel – and experimentation – so rewarding.

Adventurer Todd Miller has explored more than 120 countries. He authored the best-seller ENRICH: Create Wealth in Time, Money, and Meaning. www.ToddMiller.asia

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Shelter sees Statham doing his 'thing'

David Griffiths

One of the things I love about Jason Statham as an actor is that he has never tried to stray too far out of his lane. When it comes to choosing roles, Statham knows that his fan base loves action films with basic storylines. Therefore, we haven't seen him do the same as Arnold Schwarzenegger or Vin Diesel and go out and try to be funny in a comedy.

Instead Statham has kind of stuck to the films that he knows his fanbase like. Films like *Crank*, *The Meg*, *A Working Man* and even going into the *Fast & Furious* franchise – films with basic storylines that know how to deliver good action sequences even things. Now Statham keeps that trend going with his latest film – *Shelter*.

In *Shelter* Statham plays Mason – a mysterious man who has shut himself off from society by living on a remote island in an old lighthouse keeper's hut. Every now and then he is brought supplies by a man (Michael Shaeffer – *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*) and his daughter Jessie (Bodhi Rae Breathnach – *Hamnet*).

Jessie tries to reach out and befriend Mason – but he is not having any of it – he has his dog and his hermit lifestyle and he is happy with that.

But that all changes one day when Jessie and her father try to make a delivery during a storm. Their boat is



Jason Statham and Bodhi Rae Breathnach in *Shelter*. Photo: IMDb

destroyed and Mason is forced to rescue Jessie. After seeing how bad her injuries are he is forced to make a trip to the mainland to get medical supplies. During that time Mason's image is caught on a social media post and that is where the action really starts.

Using an illegal surveillance system he has been told should not be in use, Mannafort (Bill Nighy – *Love Actually*), the former head of MI5, traces Mason and instantly sends a 'kill team' after him. That attracts the attention of the current head of MI5, Roberta (Naomi Ackie – *Mickey 17*), and suddenly the

audience are left with two questions. Who is Mason and why does Mannafort want him dead?

Fanbase love

While *Shelter* is an enjoyable action film to watch like so many films in the genre these days it never really goes to the next level or try anything different. Screenwriter, Ward Parry (*The Shattering*), keeps this safe and makes this the kind of film of Statham's fanbase love. An entertaining action flick where Statham plays a fairly relatable character.

Where the film works is that Parry along with director Ric Roman Waugh (*Greenland*) are smart enough to know that keep the audience interested they need to raise the suspense by not making this a movie about a man on the run but more about a man doing what he can to protect an innocent girl. No matter what Mason has done in the past nobody wants to see Jessie suffer for it as well.

The biggest weakness of this film is arguably that anyone other than Mason and Jessie have very little characterisation at all. Even the hitman and henchmen sent after Mason just seems to be fodder for Statham to kick and punch throughout the film.

If you are in the mood for an easy to watch, entertaining action film then *Shelter* is well worth a look. It may not reach any massive heights but the action is serviceable and the film will be loved by those who love Statham movies like *The Transporter* and *The Beekeeper*.

Shelter is currently screening in Phuket and is rated 15+. 3/5 Stars.

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

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Grow Boating Phuket Evening - Mar 2026

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>

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International Women's Day Lunch 2026

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Singha, TGR Haas F1 sign partnership

FORMULA ONE

SINGHA CORPORATION has announced a three-year partnership with TGR Haas Formula One team in a deal that reinforces its image as a global Thai brand.

Team principal Ayao Komatsu and drivers Oliver Bearman and Esteban Ocon were in Thailand to attend the official launch event at the Boon Rawd Brewery headquarters in Bangkok on Feb 21.

"This is a significant year for Singha in global motorsport, as we are now present across all three FIA single-seater categories – Formula 1, Formula 2, and Formula 3 – in the same season," said Voravud Bhironbhakdi, First Senior Executive Vice President of Boon Rawd Brewery Co, Ltd, and Co-CEO of Boon Rawd Trading Co, Ltd.

"Our partnership with TGR Haas F1 Team as



Photo: AFP

Official Beverage Partner marks our 17th year in Formula 1. We are also proud to support two Thai drivers competing in Formula 2 and Formula 3 – Tasanapol Intraphuvassak and Nandhavud Bhirombhakdi.

"TGR Haas F1 Team continues to show strong progress. Equally important is the excellent chemistry between Singha and the team, creating an open and dynamic working relationship.

"The presence of team principal Ayao Komatsu together with Formula 1 drivers Oliver Bearman and Esteban Ocon in Thailand reflects the importance the team places on Singha. Both drivers will also film a global commercial in Thailand to further promote the partnership worldwide," he added. *Bangkok Post*

Jeeno wins on home soil

GOLF

Bangkok Post

With the roars of her adoring fans reverberating around Siam Country Club's Old Course, Jeeno Thitikul emerged from a nerve-shredding final day shootout with Japan's Chisato 'Chizzy' Iwai to claim victory in the 19th edition of the Honda LPGA Thailand last Sunday (Feb 22).

Underlining her status as world No.1, Jeeno delighted her faithful followers by capturing her eighth LPGA Tour title, banking a cheque for US\$270,000 (B8.3 million) and becoming the third Thai to have her name etched on the coveted trophy, following Ariya Jutanugarn in 2021 and Patty Tavatanakit in 2024.

Holding her nerve in the face of Iwai's spirited charge, Jeeno posted a closing four-under-par 68. Her 72-hole total of 24-under 264 was one stroke ahead of Iwai, who swooped with two eagles in a bogey-free 66, exerting extreme pressure on Jeeno.

But it was Jeeno who prevailed, prompting an outpouring of joy at the Pattaya venue as she was drenched in water by her fellow-Thai players before being hugged by her mother.

"For me, winning in my home country means a lot... more than a major feeling," Jeeno said. "I would rate it like A+++." My mom came up to me when I finished 18 and she cried a



Jeeno with the trophy. Photo: Supplied

lot, and I told her: 'I finally won the tournament in front of you'. She was really emotional – and that made me emotional, too."

Victory for Jeeno, who celebrated her 23rd birthday on Friday (Feb 20), was the perfect denouement, too, for tournament sponsors, officials and, most of all, the thousands of members of the Jeeno Thitikul Fan Group who strode the fairways cheering her on throughout the week.

It was Jeeno's third win in her last five LPGA Tour starts and will cement her position atop the Women's Rolex Ranking. Following bogey-free rounds of 67 and 63, Jeeno swept to the top of the leaderboard with a 66 on Saturday. Despite Iwai's best efforts, the Thai

would not be displaced from the summit.

From the moment Iwai holed out for her second eagle of the day at the 10th to join Jeeno at 23-under it was a two-horse race with a four-stroke gap back to their nearest pursuers.

In what turned into an absorbing, match play-style contest on the back nine, the duo exchanged blows. Although Iwai never managed to get in front, she was level with Jeeno for most of the way with both players spurning opportunities to move clear.

Ultimately, it was Jeeno who landed the decisive blow, holing a 10-footer for a birdie-three at the 17th to regain sole possession of top spot.

IOC chief hails Milan-Cortina as a 'new kind' of Winter Olympics

WINTER OLYMPICS

INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC Committee (IOC) president Kirsty Coventry lauded Milan-Cortina 2026 as a "new kind of Winter Games" as she declared them closed last Sunday (Feb 22).

These Olympics used mainly existing venues for 16 days of medal-filled action spread for hundreds of kilometres across the Italian Alps. "You delivered a new kind of Winter Games and set a new standard for the future," Coventry told her Italian hosts at the closing ceremony in the Verona Arena, an ancient Roman amphitheatre.

After Coventry spoke, the two cauldrons in Milan and in Cortina d'Ampezzo, the chic mountain resort that hosted the women's alpine skiing, were extinguished to formally signal the end of the Olympics.

Earlier, the Olympic flag was handed over to the leaders of the two regions that will host the next Winter Olympics in the French Alps in 2030.



The closing ceremony. Photo: AFP

GRAND SLAM

In the final events, Chinese freestyle skier Eileen Gu won gold in the halfpipe event to deliver the third gold of her career. In doing so, the 22-year-old became the most decorated freestyle skier – man or woman – in the history of the Winter Games.

Elsewhere, the USA beat Canada in an overtime thriller to win the men's ice hockey title for the first time since the 1980 'Miracle on Ice' win over the Soviet Union in Lake Placid.

With US President Donald Trump ratcheting up the tensions with his North American neighbour over the past year, the game had an added political edge.

Other highlights included Norwegian cross-country skier

Johannes Klaebo achieving a historic Grand Slam.

His six golds in Tesero took his Olympic tally to 11 and the 29-year-old became the first athlete in history to win all six cross-country skiing races at one Games.

Klaebo joined two other athletes to have won all of their events at a single Winter Olympics – US speed skater Eric Heiden, who took five golds at the 1980 Lake Placid Games, and Norwegian biathlete Ole Einar Bjoerndalen, who won four in Salt Lake City in 2002.

The only athlete in Winter or Summer Games history with more Olympic titles than Klaebo is American swimmer Michael Phelps, who won 23 golds.

Switzerland's Franjo Von Allmen matched alpine ski legends Toni Sailer of Austria and France's Jean-Claude Killy as just the third man to win three golds in the sport at the same Winter Games.

Von Allmen won the downhill and super-G races, also pairing up with Tanguy Nef to claim victory in the team combined in Bormio.

The Swiss men's team were the stand-out outfit in northern Italy, winning four of the five golds on offer and eight of the 15 total medals up for grabs.

CONTROVERSY

Elsewhere, Alysa Liu ended America's 24-year wait for a women's individual skating gold with a dynamic free skate featuring seven triples, while also winning the team title.

Liu's compatriot Ilia Malinin was hot favourite to take gold in the men's individual event after guiding the USA to a second consecutive team gold, but he tumbled to a humiliating eighth spot.

The 21-year-old, who has revolutionised and dominated the sport, said his failure was "definitely mental" after he fell

twice in a surprisingly awkward effort.

Similarly, American Lindsey Vonn made the headlines for all the wrong reasons after crashing badly just seconds into the downhill and breaking her leg.

That she was even racing at all was incredible given that she sustained a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament just a week before the Games.

One of the most recognisable female faces in global sport, another comeback now looks unlikely for the 41-year-old Vonn.

Controversy stirred after skeleton racer Vladyslav Heraskevych of Ukraine refused to ditch a helmet depicting pictures of Ukrainian sportsmen and women killed since Russian forces invaded his country in 2022.

He was disqualified, bringing the IOC into conflict with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Norway finished atop the medals table with 18 golds and 41 medals overall. The USA were second with 12 golds and the Netherlands third with 10, the same number as host nation Italy.

AFP

Eze win for Gunners at Spurs

FOOTBALL

AFP

Eberechi Eze was the scourge of Tottenham again as his double restored Arsenal's five-point lead at the top of the Premier League in a 4-1 win last Sunday (Feb 22).

Eze, who nearly joined Spurs prior to moving to Arsenal from Crystal Palace last August, scored his first goals since netting a hat-trick in the first north London derby of the season last November.

The pressure was on Arsenal to respond after back-to-back draws at Brentford and Wolves had allowed Manchester City to close in at the top.

Mikel Arteta's men rose to the challenge to inflict more pain on their local rivals in Igor Tudor's first match as interim Tottenham boss, with Viktor Gyokeres also scoring a brace for the Gunners.

City have a game in hand in the title race and home advantage when the top two meet in April.

But a much-needed victory gives Arsenal some breathing space in their quest for a first league title in 22 years. Tottenham remain just four points above the relegation zone.

Manchester City, meanwhile, squeezed to a 2-1 win against Newcastle on Saturday, with Nico O'Reilly scoring both goals for Pep Guardiola's side.

Benjamin Sesko was Manchester United's super-sub as the Slovenian



Eze (left) celebrates scoring against Tottenham. Photo: AFP

scored the only goal against Everton to send Michael Carrick's men clear in fourth spot.

Liverpool needed Alexis Mac Allister's 97th minute goal to beat Nottingham Forest 1-0, who had their fourth manager of the season, Vitor Pereira, taking charge for the first time in the league.

Pereira's side looked set to earn a deserved point until a dramatic finale which saw Forest slip to within two points of the bottom three.

Fulham climbed above Sunderland into the top half of the table after becoming just the second visiting side to win at the Stadium of Light this season, Raul Jimenez's double securing a 3-1 victory for Marco Silva's men.

Crystal Palace eased the rising

discontent at Selhurst Park with just a second win in 16 games as Evann Guessand's first Palace goal in the 90th minute beat 10-man Wolves 1-0.

Burnley dented Chelsea's chances of Champions League qualification by snatching a 1-1 draw at Stamford Bridge, while Aston Villa laboured to a 1-1 draw against Leeds United.

Elsewhere, 40-year-old James Milner set a new record of 654 Premier League appearances in Brighton's 2-0 win at Brentford.

"It's the drive and hunger. You want to be the best every day whether it's game or training," said Milner on the secret to his longevity.

Third-bottom West Ham missed a chance to boost their survival bid after a dour 0-0 draw with Bournemouth at the London Stadium.



Photo: AFP

Record relegation for Sheffield Wednesday

FOOTBALL

SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY became the first ever English Football League club to be relegated by the month of February after last Sunday's (Feb 22) 2-1 'Steel City' derby loss away to Sheffield United in the Championship.

The struggling Owls were left with a mountain to climb after being docked 12 points for entering administration on Oct 24 last year and a further six in December for repeated late payment of wages.

That left them rooted to the foot of the Championship table on minus seven points after 32 games heading into Sunday's clash at Bramall Lane, with Wednesday knowing that they had to win to delay their inevitable drop.

But they are destined for League One with 13 games of the Championship season remaining after a 10th straight loss left them 41 points adrift of safety with just a maximum of 39 available.

Several members of the senior squad were sold or released in the summer transfer window, with Thai owner Dejphon Chansiri's failure to pay wages on time leading to restrictions.

Once the club was placed into administration it effectively ended Chansiri's 10-year ownership.

A preferred bidder for the club was announced in December but a takeover has still to be completed.

Founded in 1867, Sheffield Wednesday is one of England's oldest professional football clubs with a rich early history including FA Cup wins and League titles. AFP

England slump again as Ireland lay down marker



THE GLOBAL RUGBY COACH

IF SCOTLAND SHATTERED England's flimsy playing veneer on Feb 14 then Ireland obliterated it last Saturday (Feb 21).

Ireland was dominant in all areas of the field on their way to a 42-21 victory, begging the question: what is England doing on the training field during the week leading up to kick off?

Coach Stuart Borthwick loves data although, in my experience, the last thing players enjoy doing is sitting in meetings having data thrown at them. Rugby is an action sport where learning takes place on the training field.

It is also a good idea to play players in the position they play for their clubs. After all, that is where their talent was noticed and why they were selected.

Ireland ticked all the boxes labelled 'playing fundamentals'. They passed accurately, tackled ferociously, aligned and realigned quickly, supported in numbers, ran straight, parallel to the touchline, and worked hard off the ball.

Wales found some playing tradition against Scotland, and the crowd recognised it. *Land of My Fathers* echoed around the stadium, and the



Dejected England. Photo: AFP

ghosts of yesteryear came alive on the field. A 3-point 23-26 loss could and maybe should have been a narrow win for Wales.

Rugby needs a fluent Wales. Rugby in Wales is akin to rugby in New Zealand. It is in both their DNA and culture.

France have players capable of improvising and producing magical moments. I love the way French players react to what is happening around them. They don't stand in confusion; they join in. This was evident in the 33-8 win against Italy.

Italy's forwards are coached by former hooker Andrea Moretti. He has guided and turned them into a formidable unit. He is arguably the best forward's coach in Europe. The very best coaches get players to transfer from the training field to the match-day arena. If they don't, they aren't coaches, and they certainly aren't coaching.

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Home comfort for Thailand's Jeeno > p14

BRAVEHEART

Phuket's Nico wins Muay Thai world title



Nico Carrillo celebrates with the ONE Championship interim featherweight Muay Thai belt. Photo: Bangkok Post

MMA

Bangkok Post

Phuket-based Muay Thai athlete Nico Carrillo stood in the ring at Bangkok's famed Lumpinee Stadium having heard the chants before.

As the Braveheart theme echoed around the venue on Feb 14, it was preceded by a familiar roar – "King of the North" – lifted straight from Game of Thrones and now inseparable from the Scot's rise.

This time, however, he left the capital with a crown to match it.

Carrillo edged Shadow

Singha Mawynn by majority decision to claim the ONE Championship interim featherweight Muay Thai world title in a brutal, high-level co-main event at ONE Fight Night 40 – completing a journey that began in heartbreak just over a year ago.

"Hard work pays off," Carrillo said backstage afterwards, his lip split and face marked from battle. "All the pain in the world you put yourself through to get this belt – it's worth it. And I feel that today."

Shadow started fast, and two judges awarded him the opening three rounds. A third, Ricky Sewell, scored the first round even. Carrillo, unusually measured, admitted he was lagging.

"I felt I was behind on the scorecards but I wasn't stressed about it," he said. "Probably a different approach than you're all used to seeing from us."

MOMENTUM

The momentum swung decisively in the fourth round.

Carrillo dropped Shadow with a heavy right hand, earning 10-8 scores across all three cards. With his jaw later revealed to be broken, the Thai contender wilted under sustained pressure in the fifth as Carrillo closed strongly.

Two judges, Shane

Byrne and Ian Cartwright, scored the bout 47-47 but awarded Carrillo the victory on overall criteria due to the knockdown. Sewell had it 48-47 for the Scot.

"I know three, four and five were me," Carrillo said. "There was no way he was finishing me in the fifth. He was scared of the power by then."

There was no animosity between them. Carrillo revealed Shadow once asked him for photos before either had reached this stage.

"I believe the way me and Shadow are should be an example," he said. "There's no need for bad blood."

VINDICATION
For Carrillo, the title represents vindication.

In January 2025, he was stopped in the first round by Nabil Anane while chasing interim bantamweight gold, the brutal weight cut leaving him drained. The lesson was clear: the division was no longer viable.

Three fights at featherweight later, he looks physically stronger and mentally settled – and now holds gold.

Undisputed status may have to wait. Champion Tawanchai PK Saenchai is recovering from surgery on a broken leg sustained in December. Carrillo had previously suggested the

Thai should be stripped if inactive, but softened his tone after victory.

"Speedy recovery to Tawanchai," he said. "I'll just enjoy this win. I want to go back and cuddle my wife, my coaches and teammates."

Talk of interim defences or a potential tilt at Superbon's featherweight kickboxing belt will inevitably follow. Carrillo, for once, is not rushing.

"I'd like another two fights this year," he said. "But first I want to recover. The last camp kind of merged into this one."

For now, the King of the North will rest. After all, the crown is finally his.

Date confirmed for Sakhu Trail Beach Run

RUNNING

A DATE HAS BEEN confirmed for the inaugural 'Sakhu Trail Beach Run' which aims to provide participants a challenging workout while promoting the natural beauty of the local area.

The event will see athletes take on a 10.5 kilometre route through Sirinath National Park in the north west of the island on Sunday, Apr 19, starting at Nai Thon Beach Park and ending at Ching Pla Market

at Nai Yang Beach.

The route is a combination of road, trail and beach through local communities and stunning natural environment, which is suitable for beginners and professional runners alike, race organisers said at an official press conference on Feb 15.

Trun Panyawai, director of Sakku District Administration Organisation, oversaw the press conference and was joined by: Salan Santisasankul, head of Sakhu Police Station; Sumeth Suvarnarat, deputy

of Sakhu District Administrative Organisation; Pappawin Hang, head of Sirinath National Park; Tinan Thong, champion of the Amazing Thailand Marathon 2025, in addition to selected government officials and representatives from various public and private sector organisations.

Mr Trun explained that the race is targeting a total of 1,800 participants and is divided into six separate age specific groups for male and female athletes. The top three finishers in each category will receive a trophy

and cash prize, while all participants will receive commemorative T-shirts and medals.

"It is not too difficult a trail, meaning it is accessible for all levels of fitness," explained Mr Trun.

"The stunning route offers participants an opportunity to experience nature up close, taking in nature trails, vibrant local communities and beautiful white sand beaches.

"It is an ideal opportunity to reaffirm the standing of Sakhu as one of the important 'lungs' of Phuket

province as it possesses some of the best quality air on the island, perfect for physical pursuits like this," he added.

"The hope is that the event can prove to be a big success so as to become a regular landmark running occasion in Phuket, which can help promote the local region while boosting its economy," Mr Trun concluded.

Applicants from outside of Phuket can apply for a 50% discount on selected accommodation options for the dates of Apr 18-20 to

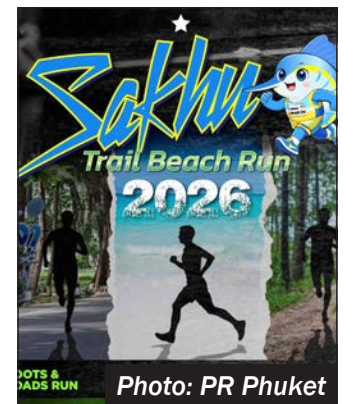


Photo: PR Phuket

coincide with the race. Interested candidates can apply to join the race at <https://soft.events/run/sakhu-trail-beach-run-2026> or via 'Sakhu Trail Beach Run 2026' on Facebook.

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