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CUB LIFE

LION CAFE DEFENDS CARE STANDARDS AS SCRUTINY FOLLOWS VIRAL VIDEO

Photo: Lion Phuket Cafe

Natnaree Likidwatanasakun
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A lion café in Phuket Old Town has defended its animal care and handling practices as scrutiny intensifies following a viral video online, despite officials confirming the business is operating legally under Thai law.

The controversy erupted after footage circulated online showing lion cubs inside a glass enclosure at Lion Phuket Café on Krabi Rd in Phuket Town, prompting widespread concern over animal welfare, public safety and the legality of keeping wild animals in a tourism setting.

The issue quickly gained traction after being highlighted by

Siranudh 'Psi' Scott, a Thai-Scottish marine conservationist and former advisor to the Director-General of the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP).

Mr Scott pointed to Thailand's legal framework governing wildlife, noting that under the Wildlife Conservation and Protection Act B.E. 2562, the breeding, possession and commercial use of certain protected species can be permitted under strict conditions.

"The law allows for controlled wildlife and certain protected species with economic potential to be bred and traded, provided operators obtain licences from the relevant authorities," he said.

However, he raised concerns about how the law is applied in

practice, particularly in tourism-driven environments.

"It's because the Wildlife Protection Act in Thailand allows you to obtain permits to breed, sell, import and export wildlife, including endangered and protected species," Mr Scott said.

Despite the existence of this legal framework, public concern remains high, especially in destinations such as Phuket where wildlife attractions openly rely on tourism.

Online reaction to the viral footage reflected ongoing unease, with many users questioning both enforcement and ethical standards.

One commenter wrote, "I have contacted many government agencies and also PETA and other animal rights activists and nothing was done... It's so sad."

In a separate exchange, a foreign commenter asked, "Is this allowed in Thailand? This is very sad... what are they doing to the lions to make them interact with humans?"

Responding to the question, Mr Scott alleged mistreatment. "Our laws allow the sale, breeding and captivity of endangered and protected wildlife if you pay for a permit," he said. "I believe they heavily sedate and abuse the lions."

He also endorsed a widely shared comment criticising the gap between legality and ethics, which stated that laws do not always reflect humanity or compassion toward animals, particularly when influenced by powerful interests.

Another commenter questioned the integrity of officials involved,...

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Candle lighting ceremony hails women power



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Elite basketball League toasts second season



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**CREATIVITY
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News



British TV star
found dead in
drain > p4

Lion cubs for cafe society

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...asking, "How much are these officials getting paid to say that? This is obviously not okay!"

Mr Scott responded bluntly: "They're all stupid and corrupt."

DEFENCE

Speaking to *The Phuket News*, the café manager, who asked to be identified only as 'Lina', rejected the allegations and insisted the lions are raised under strict care protocols from the moment they arrive. "We care for them like a baby," she said.

Ms Lina explained that in early stages each lion is separated for close monitoring, with attention given to cleanliness, feeding and health. "They are fed in rounds according to schedule, and we adjust the amount depending on each animal," she said.

Each cub is assigned a dedicated caregiver, or "keeper", responsible for monitoring its condition. "If a new lion arrives, that caregiver must look after only that one first, so we can check the animal properly," she said.

The café currently houses three lions – two white males and one larger female – all sourced from licensed farms, she said.

Ms Lina said the lions are kept at the café for about four months, in accordance with conditions set by authorities.

"When officials come to inspect, they measure the space and set requirements such as enclosure height to ensure safety," she said.

"After four months, we have to send them to be cared for by the Wildlife Conservation Office," she added.

She said the café is only permitted to keep lions from around four months of age and works with licensed farms to source the animals. However, she declined to provide details about the cost and location of the farms.

Ms Lina said all lions receive vaccinations and are monitored by a resident veterinarian. "If the lions show any abnormal symptoms, our veterinarian will check them immediately," she assured.

She added that the animals are provided with designated living spaces: "Lions sleep and eat at the café. They have their own rooms, with bedding and separate areas,"

SAFETY

In response to concerns about public interaction, Ms Lina outlined strict safety



Photo: Natnaree Likidwatanasakun

and hygiene protocols.

Customers must sanitise their hands before entering. Those interacting with the lions must wash again with disinfectant, remove shoes, wear covers and sanitise once more. After contact, they must wash their hands again, she said.

Staff follow the same procedures at all times.

Ms Lina also rejected claims that the café bypassed legal requirements. "We did not buy a permit... We waited until the permit process was completed before bringing the lions in," she said.

"The department comes to check regularly, and the municipality also oversees the operation," she added.

OFFICIAL RESPONSE

Officials from the DNP

confirmed that the café is legally in possession of the animals under the Wildlife Conservation and Protection Act B.E. 2562.

According to officials, all three lions are properly registered and microchipped, and the operator has completed all required legal procedures.

They also confirmed the business is Thai-owned and unrelated to the previous controversial Glass House Café case involving a Chinese operator in Ratsada.

The owner, Peeraphat Thongna, 34, from Trang, holds a valid licence, while Yatavee Sangpratheep is listed as the registered veterinarian.

Surasak Anusorn, Director of the DNP's Regional Office of Protected

Areas 5, declined to comment on potential penalties related to the earlier Glass House Café case.

The DNP office issued a public clarification shortly after the video circulated and dispatched officials to inspect the café.

Authorities reiterated that the animals are being kept in accordance with legal and welfare standards, and that monitoring is conducted regularly.

Despite these assurances, the case has highlighted the gap between regulatory compliance and public perception, particularly in wildlife tourism settings.

For now, officials maintain that the café is operating within the law.

GLASS HOUSE

The latest incident has also reignited attention due to Phuket's recent history involving lion cub cafés. In January 2025, police raided The Glass House Café and Space in Ratsada, where lion cubs were used for paid photo sessions with tourists.

Two Chinese nationals were arrested for working without permits after officers found them operating inside the café.

Immigration police said the pair were shareholders

in the business, raising concerns over violations of laws restricting certain occupations to Thai nationals.

Both suspects denied the charges and were released on bail pending legal proceedings.

Authorities have not confirmed whether further charges were filed against operators of The Glass House.

The case followed an earlier controversy in February 2024 involving a lion cub known as "Nong Kiwi", which was displayed at the same venue.

Officials later seized the cub after determining it was not properly registered and that its living conditions did not meet required standards.

Investigators found irregularities in ownership records, including discrepancies in microchip data and failure to notify authorities of the animal's possession and transport.

The cub was relocated to a wildlife facility in Suphan Buri.

Officials also noted that the animal had been transported daily between the café and private accommodation, breaching regulations requiring controlled wildlife to be kept at registered locations.

Former governor accused of B321mn illicit wealth

THE NATIONAL ANTI-Corruption Commission (NACC) has ruled that former Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada amassed more than B321 million in illicit wealth while serving as a provincial governor and government official.

The decision was announced on Mar 16 by NACC Secretary-General and spokesperson Surapong Intarathaworn.

According to the NACC, its commissioners resolved that Mr Chamroen accumulated assets worth B321,670,858.30 that were disproportionate to his legitimate income and for which he was unable to provide a lawful explanation.

The alleged illicit assets were accumulated while he served as governor of Phuket Province, Nakhon Sri Thammarat Province, Phang Nga Province and Satun Province, as well as during his

time as a government official, the NACC said.

Investigators found that large increases in wealth were recorded in the names of Mr Chamroen, his spouse and a minor child, but the origin of the assets could not be verified.

The assets identified by investigators include: bank deposits in Mr Chamroen's name totaling B1,488,514.80; bank deposits across 13 accounts in his spouse's name totaling B260,846,734.80; land and buildings in his spouse's name across 22 items valued at B47,445,608.70; a land and building property in the name of a minor child valued at B5,690,000; six vehicles in his spouse's name with a combined value of B6,200,000

The NACC ruled that the assets constituted unusual wealth accumulation under Thailand's anti-corruption law, noting that

the assets were either acquired without legal justification, increased abnormally compared with declared income, or were inconsistent with asset declarations submitted by the official.

The commission said it will forward the investigation report, evidence and its findings to the Office of the Attorney General, requesting prosecutors to petition a court to order the assets seized and transferred to the state.

The NACC will also notify the relevant authority to pursue disciplinary action, which could include dismissal from the civil service on grounds of corruption in office under the Organic Act on Prevention and Suppression of Corruption.

If the identified assets cannot be fully seized, the court may order enforcement against other assets belonging to the accused for up to 10 years, the commission added.

Mr Chamroen resigned from government service in 2023 after serving as Governor of Satun.

He served as 46th Governor of Phuket from October 2015 through September 2016, and was transferred to the post of Governor of Nakhon Sri Thammarat province on Oct 1, 2016. He later took up the post of Governor of Phang Nga Province on Oct 1, 2019.

In the same announcement, the NACC also ruled that Prasert Kaithong, a former mayor of Khlong Luang Municipality in Pathum Thani Province, had amassed unusual wealth of B3 million.

The commission said the case relates to the purchase of a 1-rai 2-ngan plot of land in Khlong Nueng subdistrict in 2016 for B3mn, which was registered jointly in his daughter's name. Investigators found Mr Prasert



Former Phuket Governor
Chamroen Tipayapongtada.
Photo: The Phuket News / file

could not explain the source of the funds used to buy the land.

The NACC will also forward that case to the Attorney General to seek a court order for the assets to be confiscated and for relevant authorities to consider removing him from office.

The NACC noted that its findings are not final and that those accused are presumed innocent until a court issues a final judgment. *The Phuket News*

Freedom Beach probe deepens

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Officials have launched a widening investigation into alleged illegal land sales, encroachment and unauthorised fee collection at Freedom Beach, as complaints mount from buyers, local residents and officials over activity within protected forest land.

The probe centres on land at Freedom Beach in Karon, which officials maintain lies within the Nakkerd Hills National Forest Reserve and is not legally available for private ownership, sale or commercial exploitation.

The latest development comes after multiple complaints were filed last Friday (Mar 20) by individuals claiming they were misled into purchasing plots later found to be located on protected land. The complaints were submitted alongside officials including Phuket Provincial Chief Administrative Officer Rungruang Thimabutr.

According to complainants, the land had been advertised and sold to members of the public despite longstanding concerns over its legal status. Buyers say they have suffered financial losses after discovering the plots may not be legally transferable or developable.



Photo: MCOT

A formal petition has been submitted to the Phuket Provincial Office calling for a full investigation into land boundaries, title documents and any individuals involved in the transactions. Some victims have also filed police reports, but say progress has been limited.

The matter has additionally been referred to the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) in Phuket, with complainants requesting an inquiry into whether any state officials failed in their duties or were complicit in facilitating the sales.

Provincial officials confirmed that further complaints were

received on Mar 19-20, with more individuals coming forward over land transactions in the same area. Authorities acknowledged that the land in question is suspected to fall within a national forest reserve, where private ownership is heavily restricted.

Officials have pledged a comprehensive investigation, including verification of land documents and boundaries, and legal action against any parties found to have acted unlawfully.

The complaints come amid ongoing disputes over land rights at Freedom Beach, where some local operators have presented documents they claim entitle them

to occupy and use the land.

At a meeting held on Mar 19 at the Phuket Provincial Damrongtham Centre, chaired by Vice Governor Adul Chuthong, residents submitted evidence including SorKor 1 land utilisation certificates. They argued the documents grant them the right to use the land, including charging tourists access fees.

However, officials cautioned that SorKor 1 documents do not confer full ownership rights, particularly within protected forest areas.

The Phuket Provincial Land Office and forestry officials have been tasked with jointly verifying the authenticity of the documents, usage rights and the exact boundaries of the land in question.

The dispute escalated following a large-scale enforcement operation on Mar 17, when more than 100 officers carried out a coordinated raid targeting alleged encroachment and illegal fee collection at the beach.

The operation, led by Mr Rungruang, involved multiple agencies including forestry officials, police and environmental enforcement units.

Officers inspected access routes to the beach after receiving complaints that tourists were being charged B300 per person to enter the area, despite its status as

protected public land.

Several individuals alleged to have been collecting fees were detained during the operation and handed over to investigators at Karon Police Station.

Authorities also discovered multiple illegal structures, including hut-like buildings along the access route, as well as signs claiming private ownership within the forest reserve. Additional encroachment, including resort-style development deeper inside the area, was also identified.

Officials confirmed that legal action has been initiated against those identified during the inspection, with further investigations underway.

In response to the escalating situation, authorities have increased security at the site, deploying Volunteer Defence Corps (OrSor) officers to patrol the area.

Five members of the OrSor Special Operations Unit 1 were assigned to monitor the beach and surrounding forest from 5pm to midnight under orders issued by the Phuket Provincial Volunteer Defence Corps Command.

Officials reported that the situation remained calm during initial patrols, but stressed that continued monitoring would be necessary as investigations progress.

Underpass project hits delay

PHUKET OFFICIALS ARE INVESTIGATING delays to a B48 million project to upgrade electrical systems in key underpass tunnels, amid concerns the contractor may abandon the work after failing to begin construction more than four months into the contract.

The issue was raised during an Open House event on Mar 19 hosted by the Office of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) Region 8, where officials met with the Phuket Highways Office and other agencies to review the stalled project.

Led by NACC Region 8 Director Suphap Siri, the meeting focused on upgrades to lighting and electrical systems at five major underpasses: Phuket Airport, Bang Khu, Samkong, Darasomut and the Chalong Five-Intersection.

The project, valued at B48,412,000, is funded under the Andaman Coast Southern Provinces Group budget for 2025. The contract was signed on Sept 27, 2025, with a 210-day completion period ending Apr 24, 2026.

However, 140 days into the contract, no physical work has yet been carried out.

Planned upgrades include LED lighting, electrical fault warning systems, licence plate recognition technology and smart traffic signage, along with a centralised remote monitoring system to support Phuket's 'Smart City' development.



Photo: Phuket Highways Office



Phuket Highways Office Director Winai Kuemueang said seven formal letters had been issued to the contractor seeking clarification over the delays.

The contractor cited the need for custom-manufactured materials and pending approvals from the inspection committee. Some materials have now arrived, and installation is scheduled to begin on Mar 25, with assurances the project will be completed on time.

Despite this, officials questioned whether the deadline can be met and raised concerns over potential traffic disruption during construction.


Authorities have instructed the Highways Office to closely supervise the contractor, enforce penalties if necessary and ensure compliance with engineering standards.

They also called for clear traffic management plans and greater public disclosure, while NACC Region 8 confirmed it will continue to monitor the project closely. *The Phuket News*

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Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

Russian tourist killed, 11 injured in van crash

A RUSSIAN TOURIST died and 11 others were injured after a tour van crashed into a power pole in Mai Khao in the early hours of Mar 18.

Police were notified of the incident at about 4am, when Pol Lt Col Ronna-phoom Phumphoon of Tha Chatchai Police Station received a report of a serious crash on Thepkrasattri Rd near Baan Ao To Khun.

Emergency responders, including Kusoldharm Phuket Foundation rescuers and medical staff from Thalang Hospital, arrived to find a white tour van with severe front-end damage after colliding with a roadside power pole. A metal guardrail had pierced the vehicle, causing serious injuries.

Twelve Russian tourists were travelling in the van. One female passenger was pronounced dead at the scene, while 11 others were injured.

Three passengers were trapped and required extraction using hydraulic cutting equipment.

The injured were given first aid before being transported to Thalang Hospital, Mission Hospital Phuket and Vachira Phuket Hospital.

The driver, 41-year-old Denchai Kesaothom, told police he had been taking the group from Karon to the Similan Islands when the crash occurred. He said he lost control after slowing behind a trailer truck, causing the van to veer off the road and hit the pole.

He denied falling asleep at the wheel, insisting he was fully conscious. Police noted all passengers were wearing seatbelts.

At last report police said they were continuing their investigation, with legal proceedings expected to follow.

Eakkapop Thongtub

Tributes flow for Jordan Wright

The Phuket News
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Tributes have poured in online British TV personality Jordan Wright's body was found in a drain in Cherng Talay last week. Mr Wright was a former cast member of the popular shows 'The Only Way Is Essex' and 'Ex on the Beach'.

Cherng Talay Police were initially silent on the case until reports emerged in UK media on Mar 19.

Officers were called to Soi Bang Tao 2 at about 2pm the preceding Saturday (Mar 14), where the body of a foreign man was found lying face down in a canal. He was later identified as Mr Wright, 33, from Basildon, Essex.

Police led by Pol Lt Col Sutthirak Chuthong arrived at the scene with rescue workers and forensic specialists from Vachira Phuket Hospital. An initial examination found no signs of physical assault.

A hotel key card recovered at the scene led officers to a nearby hotel in Bang Tao, where records confirmed Mr Wright had been staying. Staff reported he had failed to check out on the Friday (Mar 13) and had been unreachable.

A search of his room revealed no signs of forced

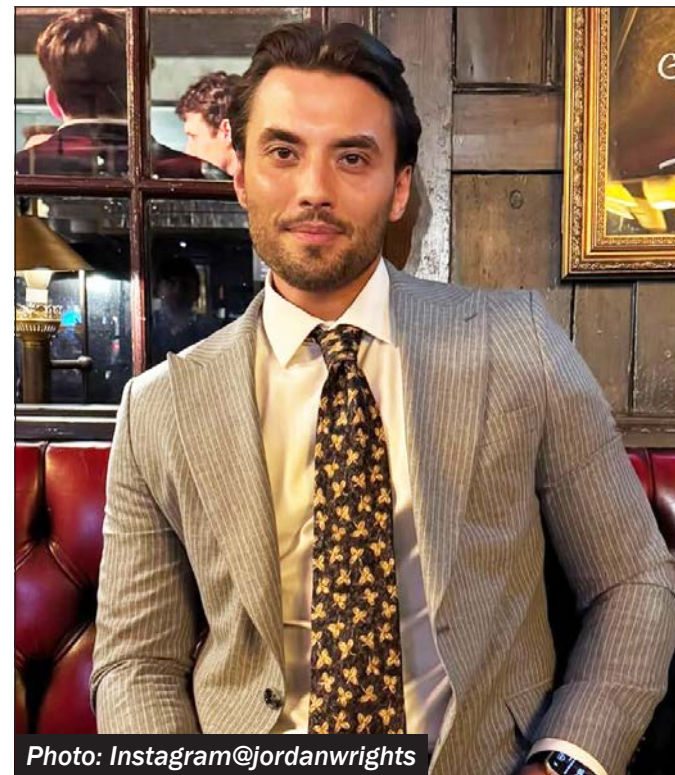


Photo: Instagram@jordanwrights

entry or disturbance.

Investigators said CCTV footage showed Mr Wright behaving erratically before leaving the hotel, with his movements later traced towards the area where his body was discovered. Police believe he had been dead for no more than two days before being found.

According to UK reports, Mr Wright had previously appeared on reality television before later working as a firefighter and in financial services.

Police have confirmed that a post-mortem exami-

nation is being conducted at Vachira Phuket Hospital to determine the exact cause of death, including whether any substances were present in his system.

"The case remains under investigation while we await the official autopsy results," Pol Lt Col Sutthirak said.

The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is assisting the family.

If you or anyone you know needs support, contact the Samaritans of Thailand or the Mental Health Hotline.

South Koreans arrested in drug bust

FOUR SOUTH KOREAN nationals were arrested in a raid on a suspected drug hub in Koh Kaew, with police seizing ketamine and crystal meth allegedly intended for export.

The operation on Mar 19 was led by Phuket Immigration Police with support from multiple narcotics units, following a request from South Korean authorities.

Officers searched a house in a luxury estate and arrested four men, uncovering about 300g of ketamine and 100g of crystal meth, along with drug paraphernalia and electronic devices.



Photo: NBT Phuket

Two suspects were charged with drug possession and use, while another also faced overstay charges. Two others had overstayed by 733 days.

All had entered Thailand on tourist visas.

They remain in custody pending legal proceedings and possible deportation.

The Phuket News

Chinese tourist shot by stray bullet

A CHINESE TOURIST WAS seriously injured after being struck in the face by a bullet accidentally discharged by a shooting range employee in Kathu on Mar 18.

Police were called to Kathu Shooting Range at about 6pm, but the injured woman had already been taken to Vachira Phuket Hospital. She was later identified as Xiao Lili, 52, who suffered a gunshot wound to her cheek. Her condition was reported as serious.

Investigators said Ms Xiao had finished a supervised shooting session and was taking photos when the incident occurred.

Police allege a 28-year-old employee, Patiharn Manosong, accidentally fired his personal



Image: Google Maps

firearm while inspecting it, forgetting a round was chambered.

The bullet passed through a wall before hitting the victim.

He has been arrested and faces legal action. Eakkapop Thongtub

Patong ramps up underground cabling

The Phuket News
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Patong is pressing ahead with a major underground cabling project across key tourist roads while celebrating national recognition for its sustainable urban development efforts, officials confirmed.

Patong Municipality last week announced that work on a B205.9 million project to install underground power and telecommunications lines will begin on Mar 26, starting with Haad Patong Rd and Ruamjai Rd.

The project, carried out in partnership with the Provincial Electricity Authority (PEA), will relocate overhead cables along five major roads: Haad Patong Rd, Ruamjai Rd, Sawasdirak Rd, Prachanukhro Rd and Bangla Rd. The initiative is aimed at improving public safety, enhancing the streetscape and supporting the long-term growth of Patong's tourism-driven economy.

The contract has been awarded to Asefa Public Co Ltd, with Patong Municipality contributing B84.45mn and the PEA providing B137.53mn. Construction is expected to take up to 360 days to complete.

Patong Mayor Lalita Maneesri said the works form part of a broader infrastructure upgrade



Photo: Patong Municipality

designed to improve the reliability of the electricity distribution system while reducing risks associated with overhead cabling.

"The project forms part of a long-term plan to move overhead power and telecommunications lines underground across key tourism areas in Patong, covering approximately 1.8 kilometres," she said. "This will reduce safety risks, minimise visual clutter and support the area's tourism-driven economy."

However, Ms Lalita cautioned that construction may cause temporary disruption, particularly during the initial phase on Haad Patong Rd and Ruamjai Rd. Traffic congestion and restricted access to some shops and

businesses are expected at certain times.

She urged residents, business operators and visitors to plan their travel accordingly, while apologising for any inconvenience caused during the construction period.

AWARD

The infrastructure push comes as Patong Municipality has been recognised at the national level for its broader efforts in sustainable urban development.

Patong Municipality earlier this month was awarded first prize at the national level for Outstanding Sustainable Livable Municipality 2025 in the general area category, in recognition of its achievements in urban develop-

ment and environmental management.

The award was presented at a ceremony held on Mar 17 at the Vayupak Convention Centre, Centara Life Hotel, Government Complex on Chaengwattana Road in Bangkok.

Patong Mayor Lalita Maneesri led the delegation to receive the award, accompanied by Deputy Mayor Awut Noochet, Public Health and Environment Division Director Juljira Theerachitkul, and municipal staff.

The event was organised by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment through the Department of Climate Change and Environment to honour local administrative organisations demonstrating excellence in sustainable urban development and environmental stewardship.

Privy Councillor Plakorn Suwannarat presided over the ceremony, while Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Raveewan Phuridej delivered the official report.

During the event, Patong Municipality also presented its initiatives and innovations in city development, highlighting efforts in environmental management and climate change adaptation. The showcase aimed to share knowledge and best practices

with local government representatives from across the country, as well as to strengthen cooperation on sustainable urban development.

Municipal officials said the approaches developed in Patong could be adapted to suit other areas, helping to improve long-term resilience and preparedness for climate change nationwide.

In a statement, Patong Municipality expressed appreciation to government agencies, private sector partners, officials and residents for their support in achieving the recognition.

"We remain committed to continuously and sustainably developing Patong as a modern, clean, beautiful and safe tourism city," the statement said.

Also recognised at the ceremony was Wichit Municipality, which received first runner-up in the National Sustainable Environmental City Assessment 2025 in the eco-industrial city category.

Wichit Mayor Kreetha Chotwichpipat assigned Deputy Mayor Wiset Sabaijit, along with Public Health and Environment Division Director Chanwit Sajadech and Strategy and Budget Division Director Theerayut Kongmai, to accept the award on behalf of the municipality.

Jellyfish warning issued for Koh Racha Yai

AUTHORITIES HAVE ISSUED AN urgent warning to tourists after a dense concentration of venomous jellyfish was discovered at Koh Racha Yai, with officials advising against sea activities in affected areas.

The alert was announced late Monday (Mar 23) by the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR), following reports from the Upper Andaman Sea Marine and Coastal Resources Research Center and local officials at the Racha Islands Protected Area Management Centre.

The warning comes under the direction of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Suchart Chomklin, who has instructed agencies to monitor marine hazards closely and issue timely alerts.

Large numbers of venomous jellyfish were found floating and washed ashore along Ao Siam on Koh Racha Yai. Surveys recorded around 50 jellyfish per 100 metres along both sides of the bay, with fewer in the central area. The incident occurred during high tide.

Officials identified the species as Pelagia, or 'fire jellyfish', measuring about two to three centimetres. Despite their size, they can cause painful stings, burning sensations, skin irritation and rashes.

In response, the DMCR is coordinating with local authorities and tourism operators to warn visitors and request a temporary suspension of water activities



Photo: DMCR

until conditions improve. Staff have been deployed to monitor the situation, with first aid equipment prepared and assistance available for anyone affected.

Safety information and first aid guidance are being shared online, with QR codes provided for easy access.

The department said it will continue to monitor conditions and issue updates as needed.

The alert follows a similar incident on Mar 21 near Koh Mai Thon, where more than 40 jellyfish per 100 metres were recorded and several minor stings reported. *The Phuket News*

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Officials insist fuel supply 'sufficient'

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket has introduced temporary limits on diesel purchases while launching daily fuel availability updates, as authorities move to calm public concern and manage rising demand linked to tensions in the Middle East.

Despite sporadic shortages at some petrol stations in recent weeks, officials maintain that overall fuel supplies on the island and nationwide remain sufficient, urging residents not to panic or hoard fuel.

Phuket Provincial Energy Officer Rattanakorn Klinchan confirmed supplies remain adequate for normal consumption, with continuous deliveries into the province and a wide network of service stations still operating.

"Overall fuel supplies in Phuket remain sufficient," he said. "We ask the public to refrain from hoarding and to follow updates from official sources."

In response to a surge in demand driven by public anxiety and social media reports, authorities have imposed limits on diesel purchases to ensure fair distribution.

Small vehicles are now restricted to B400 worth of diesel per visit, while larger vehicles



Photo: Eakkapop Thongtub

may purchase between B500 and B1,000 per fill. Gasoline supplies remain unaffected and are available without restriction.

The restrictions come as authorities intensify efforts to monitor fuel supply and prices amid global uncertainty.

At a provincial meeting last week, Vice Governor Teeraphong Chuaychoo met key agencies to assess impacts of the Middle East conflict and coordinate responses.

Governor Nirat Pongsitthaworn has ordered agencies to track fuel availability and prices

while conducting inspections to prevent manipulation and ensure supply.

Officials said panic buying earlier this month drove unusually high consumption, straining supply at some stations and causing transport delays.

Additional pressure has come from increased diesel use, including large vehicles from other provinces refuelling in Phuket.

To improve transparency, the province has begun issuing daily updates detailing fuel availability at petrol stations across the island.

As reported on Monday (Mar 23), Phuket has 83 fuel stations, including 73 serving road vehicles, nine for boats and one for aircraft. By district, 40 are in Mueang, 11 in Kathu and 32 in Thalang. Officials advise motorists to check updates regularly as stocks fluctuate.

Authorities have also introduced energy conservation measures, encouraging online meetings, reducing travel and promoting efficient vehicles.

In the tourism and maritime sectors, agencies are reviewing operations to reduce fuel use. Contingency plans are being prepared to ensure reserves for medical, emergency and security services.

Commerce officials confirmed major fuel providers continue selling at standard prices under government controls. At last report, fuel prices remained stable. Diesel is B30.93 per litre, Gasohol 95 about B32.50, Gasohol 91 B32.17, and E20 B27.54. LPG is B17.52. Premium fuels reach about B43 to B46.

However, officials conceded that smaller stations may charge slightly more due to costs, but prices remain within normal levels.

Officials warned strict action will be taken against overcharging or hoarding, with

penalties including prison terms and fines.

Residents can report suspected manipulation via hotline 1569 or to the Commerce Office.

Storing fuel in containers without proper reason is illegal and poses fire risks.

Authorities have encouraged switching to E20, around B5 cheaper than Gasohol 95. Slightly higher consumption is offset by savings, while ethanol supports farmers and reduces reliance on imports.

Nationally, the government has allowed traders to release fuel from reserves to ease supply pressure. The order enables faster distribution as demand rises above normal levels.

Thailand holds about 103 days' oil reserves, though demand has exceeded 100 million litres daily, straining distribution. Diesel sales reached about 71mn litres last Friday (Mar 20), requiring additional reserves.

Tankers now operate around the clock to speed deliveries and stabilise supply in the coming days.

Officials said measures aim to reduce delays, restore confidence and maintain steady supply. Residents are urged to plan journeys carefully, conserve fuel and rely on official information rather than speculation.



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Baht may fall to 35 per dollar if war persists

THE BAHT IS EXPECTED TO weaken to 34-35 to the US dollar if the Middle East conflict drags on for two months, pushing oil prices above US\$100 per barrel, according to Kasikorn Research Center (K-Research).

K-Research views a prolonged two-month conflict as the most likely scenario. Under this outlook, global crude oil prices would rise beyond US\$100 per barrel, putting downward pressure on the baht and increasing currency volatility, said Burin Adulwatana, the centre's chief economist.

According to Mr Burin, the conflict has already had a significant impact on the baht against the dollar, both in terms of volatility and depreciation. Year-to-date, the baht has fluctuated by around 9%, up from a range of 7.5-8% throughout last year.

The baht has depreciated by about 4% against the dollar, making it the region's second-weakest currency after the South Korean won.

Amid heightened risks and uncertainties, he said Thai GDP growth could dip by around 0.5 percentage points in the most likely scenario.

The strengthening US dollar against Asian currencies poses additional challenges, especially for Thailand, which relies heavily on energy imports. This dynamic is likely to weigh on the capital market, the baht, and both global and domestic economic growth, while also accelerating inflation and raising the



Photo: Bangkok Post

risk of stagflation, noted K-Research.

"Stagflation would put pressure on central banks worldwide, including the Bank of Thailand, to delay policy rate cuts or limit monetary easing," said Mr Burin.

Nattaporn Triratanasirikul, deputy managing director of K-Research, expects Thai economic growth to decline by 0.2-0.7 percentage points, bringing full-year growth to around 1.9%.

This projection assumes prolonged tensions involving Iran and potential supply disruptions to the critical Strait of Hormuz for one to three months. Under this scenario, global crude oil prices would remain above US\$100 per barrel during that period, with the 2026 annual average projected at \$75-90 per barrel.

In a worst-case scenario, if oil prices exceed \$130 per barrel for more than three months, Thailand's headline inflation could exceed the upper bound of the Bank of Thailand's 3% target range, while economic growth in 2026 could stagnate. *Bangkok Post*

Ministry set to reduce tourist visa-free stay

BANGKOK

Bangkok Post

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has confirmed it will propose reducing the visa-free stay for foreign tourists in Thailand from 60 days to 30 days in a bid to curb abuses and mitigate potential security threats.

Foreign Affairs Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow said the 60-day exemption was introduced under the administration of former prime minister Srettha Thavisin to boost tourism, a key driver of Thailand's economic growth.

However, a committee overseeing visa policy, chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has concluded that the current duration may be excessively long, he said last Friday (Mar 20).

Mr Sihasak recently visited Phuket, where he heard a number of complaints from tourism operators about the downside of the system originally intended to promote tourism.

In Phuket and other tourist destinations, there have been numerous reports of foreigners on 60-day visas starting businesses in fields reserved for Thais, and acquiring property illegally through nominees.



Tourists at the Grand Palace in Bangkok on Mar 20. Photo: Bangkok Post

As well, many of the people arrested in crackdowns on online scam activities were found to have entered the country on tourist visas.

Mr Sihasak agreed the 60-day period could be exploited by people who do not enter Thailand for genuine tourism purposes, including those seeking to remain in the country without applying for the appropriate longer-term visa category.

"In practice, a 30-day period should be sufficient for most tourists," he said.

Under the proposed change, nationals eligible for visa-free entry would be allowed to stay for 30 days, with the option to apply for a further 30-day extension.

He stressed that the measure was not discriminatory against any specific country or nationality, but it was aimed at addressing issues linked to online scam operations and other abuses.

Some individuals involved in such networks have reportedly taken advantage of extended visa-free stays to enter Thailand and also travel to neighbouring countries.

The minister reaffirmed that Thailand remains committed to welcoming and taking good care of foreign visitors.

At the same time, the country must safeguard its right to close loopholes that allow individuals to engage in activities that pose security risks or fall outside the scope of tourism.

Anutin confirmed as PM

BANGKOK

THAILAND'S NEW parliament elected Anutin Charnvirakul as prime minister on Mar 19, keeping the conservative in the top office after his party routed its election rivals.

Anutin received 293 votes, more than half of the ballots cast, from newly seated lawmakers to win the premiership, with his progressive rival Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut gaining 119 and 86 MPs abstaining.

"Those who know me understand that whenever there is a problem affecting the public, I will respond immediately to their needs," Anutin told reports after being elected.

The new government will have to handle the fallout from the Middle East war, sluggish economic growth and lingering border tensions with neighbour Cambodia.

Anutin's anointment comes after his promilitary and promonarchy Bhumjaithai



Photo: AFP

party had its best electoral performance ever in February.

The third-placed Pheu Thai party of jailed former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra agreed to join Anutin in a coalition alongside 14 smaller parties.

The 59-year-old millionaire heir to a family construction fortune – who championed the decriminalisation of cannabis in Thailand – was first elected prime minister in September.

He came to office after his predecessor, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, Thaksin's daughter, was ousted by court order over an ethics complaint.

The reformist People's Party – which had been polling first ahead of the election but ultimately came in second – will lead the opposition. AFP

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A wedding party in Bonounra village, in the M'zab valley. Photo: Todd Miller



Mhamed Ibrahim, our sprightly and humorous 83-year-old guide in Tajnint. Photo: Todd Miller



Mohammed, our driver in Tassili National Park. Photo: Todd Miller

Algeria: Where the Sahara Steals the Show



GLOBETROTTER

Todd Miller

Algeria has a way of sneaking up on you. It doesn't announce itself with hype or Instagram bravado. Instead, it waits patiently until you arrive, then quietly rearranges your expectations of what travel – and the desert – can be.

I reached Algeria at the tail end of a seven-country journey across the Middle East and North Africa. By that point, I thought I had seen everything in the Arab world. But Algeria dis-

mantled that assumption and totally charmed my travel partner and me.

Northern Algeria is undeniably beautiful. Algiers blends Ottoman elegance, French colonial architecture, and modern North African energy. Constantine, meanwhile, is a city that seems to float. Its dramatic gorge is laced together by gravity-defying bridges that make you stop mid-crossing – not from fear, but from disbelief. It is spectacular, cinematic.

But the Sahara stole the show. To qualify for a visa on arrival, 70% of our itinerary had to be in the far south – a bureaucratic detail that turned out to be the single best decision of the entire trip.

Our first deep-Sahara revelation was Ghardaia, in the M'zab Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The valley's hilltop villages, dating back to the 11th-14th centuries, are built around faith, climate and community. In one village, we were joyfully invited to crash a wedding – a moment that perfectly captured Algerian hospitality: enthusiastic, and welcoming.

In another village – nearly 1,000 years old – our unforgettable guide, Mhamed Ibrahim, who at 83 years old possessed more energy and spunk than most people half his age. He explained local traditions with warmth and humour, including the striking custom that married women are completely covered in public, from head to toe, including the face. In the M'zab Valley, tradition is not a museum piece; it is daily life.

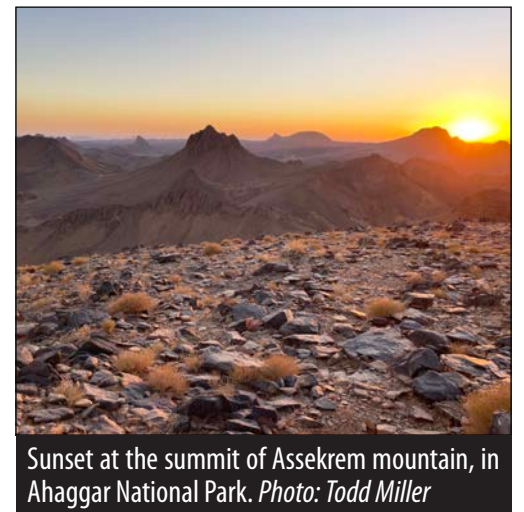
Otherworldly

We then took a red eye flight (the only option in the desert) farther south to Tamanrasset, the gateway to Ahaggar National Park, where the landscape turns volcanic and otherworldly. Jagged black mountains rise from the desert like something imagined rather than formed. We trekked up Assekrem Mountain, Algeria's third highest at 2,780 metres, to visit a small chapel at the summit. Watching the sun sink behind the peaks in near-total silence was one of those rare travel moments that permanently recalibrate your internal definition of "beautiful".

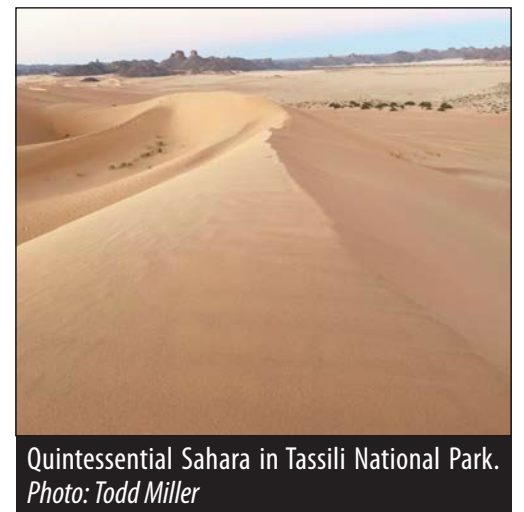
Our stay in Tamanrasset came with Algerian police escorts – initially annoying, later mildly absurd – particularly when their vehicle broke down, turning a security operation into a communal lesson in patience, problem-solving and desert mechanics.

The journey culminated in Djanet and Tassili National Park, which felt less like a destination and more like another planet. We camped at two different sites, each uniquely spectacular. One night was spent among sculpted sandstone formations that glowed softly under the stars in a pitch-black sky; another among dunes so vast they seemed to move while you weren't looking.

Our lunches were just as memorable. One was at an oasis tucked between mountains, where palm trees and water appeared like a mirage that refused to disappear. Another was near prehistoric rock art – ancient figures etched into stone thousands of years



Sunset at the summit of Assekrem mountain, in Ahaggar National Park. Photo: Todd Miller



Quintessential Sahara in Tassili National Park. Photo: Todd Miller

ago, reminding you just how long humans have been wandering, drawing and wondering in this exact landscape.

At one point, we climbed a massive sand dune, sinking ankle-deep with every step, to witness yet another Saharan sunset. The light shifted from gold to amber to deep red, the desert falling silent as if in reverence. It was the kind of moment that makes conversation feel unnecessary and memory feel permanent.

By the time we left Algeria, my partner and I were unanimous: we adore this country, Africa's largest by geography. The people are welcoming, the food (especially sourdough baguettes) comforting, the landscapes humbling, and the traditions alive and unapologetic. Algeria doesn't chase visitors – it rewards those willing to meet it on its own terms.

We went to Algeria to finish a trip. We left dreaming of our return.

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

Where to eat in PHUKET

The May/June 2026

hard copy issue goes to print very soon

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Phuket lights up to celebrate the power of women

The Phuket News
 editor@classactmedia.co.th

Phuket was the toast of Thailand and last month as the province hosted a landmark annual event that united and celebrated women from all over the country.

The Phuket chapter of the Federation of Business and Professional Women of Thailand Association was selected to host the 2026 Candle Lighting Ceremony, in collaboration with chapters from Songkhla and Surat Thani provinces.

The traditionally prestigious occasion, under Royal Patronage, took place on Friday, Feb 27, at the Novotel Phuket City Phokeethra Hotel, with festivities commencing at 5pm. The event was presided over by Phuket Vice Governor Suwit Phansengiam, who welcomed guests and delivered a keynote address.

Dignitaries joining Mr Suwit included: Khunying Natika Wathanavekin Angubolkul, President of the Federation of Business and Professional Women of Thailand under the Royal

Patronage; Natthakanya Saengpho, President of the Business and Professional Women of Thailand Association; in addition to selected committee members and association members from across the country, distinguished guests and members of the media.

The annual traditional candle lighting ceremony is held to demonstrate the power, determination and role of women in participating in the development of society, communities and the nation as a whole.

It also serves as a platform for networking, exchanging ideas and experiences, and strengthening good relations among members from all regions, leading to activities that benefit the public.

Strengthen unity

“This event showcases the important role of women in driving social and economic development,” explained Mr Suwit in his welcome remarks.

“The fact that the Thai Business and Professional Women’s Association of Phuket has been honoured to host the 2026 Traditional Candle Lighting Ceremony, together with associations in



Photo: PR Phuket

Songkhla and Surat Thani provinces, is a significant opportunity to build good relationships and strengthen unity among members from across the country.

“This event is an important opportunity for Phuket to welcome association members from across the country and showcase the province’s potential as a centre for national-level activities, while strongly promoting the role of women in economic and social development.”

The Vice Governor further explained the importance of Phuket as a leading tourist destination, adding that a conscious effort has been made in recent times to promote a more diverse offering to visitors above and beyond the more widely recognised and traditional attractions.

“Currently tourism in Phuket has been developed to be more diverse,” he said. “In addition to the sea and beaches that attract tourists from all over the world, Phuket also has outstanding arts and culture. This is especially apparent with the unique

character of the Old Town community that reflects the blend of Thai, Chinese and Malay cultures through Sino-European architecture and the Baba-Nyonya clothing culture, which is a valuable cultural heritage and was registered as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2024.

“Furthermore, Phuket has a distinctive community lifestyle and unique local cuisine, emphasised by UNESCO declaring Phuket a Creative City of Gastronomy in 2015. All of these are important charms that impress visitors from around the world,” Mr Suwit concluded.

Mrs Natthakanya stated that the Phuket chapter of the Business and Professional Women of Thailand Association was honoured to host such a prestigious occasion. “This is an important activity that has been passed down through generations as a tradition to promote love, unity and cooperation among business and professional women nationwide,” she said as part of her speech to the audience.

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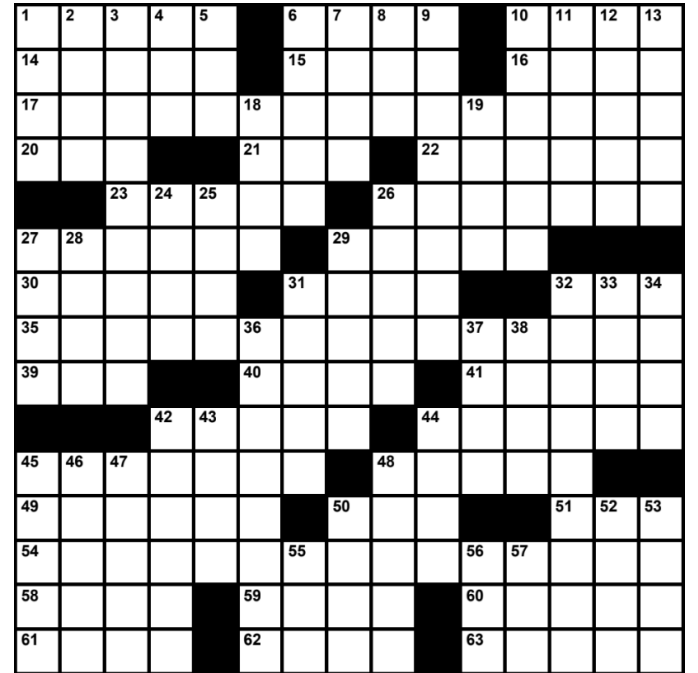
POP QUIZ

1. What does a drosometer measure?
2. Which country grows the most potatoes per annum?
3. In which country would you spend a Kwanza?
4. British call this bird species tits – what do Americans call them?
5. Who was the first Grand Prix driver to use a safety belt?

Answers below, centre

Crossword by Myles Mellor & Sally York

- Across**
1. Accord
 6. Flub
 10. Certain reptiles
 14. Birthplace of Columbus
 15. Parrot
 16. Islamic division
 17. Mary
 20. "Mârouf" baritone
 21. ___ pendens
 22. Gives up
 23. Turn to crime?
 26. "___ Row"
 27. Treat for the idle rich?
 29. Singer Lenya
 30. "Encore!"
 31. Harmony
 32. Andy Warhol painting
 35. Jack and Jill
 39. Affranchise
 40. Clip
 41. Whimpered
 42. Beth's preceder
 44. Misrepresents
 45. Presidential favors
 48. Traction aid
 49. 2002 film
- Down**
1. Eastern pooh-bah
 2. Buffet
 3. In a snit
 4. "Sesame Street" watcher
 5. Cry of disgust
 6. Arctic
 7. Wood sorrels
 8. Law man?
 9. Clock for the pocket
 10. Radiant
 11. Treat rudely, in a way
 12. Pied one
 13. Pert
 18. Flamboyance
 19. Lean to one side
 24. Final notice
 25. 007
 26. Drawing medium
 27. Reprimand, with "out"
 28. Arch type
 29. "Blue Velvet" director
 31. Trades
 32. Aggressiveness
 33. Away from the wind
 34. Goes with mobile
 36. Cut surgically
 37. Cutlass
 38. Sinuous dance
 42. Conforms
 43. Balcony section
 44. Alliance
 45. Metallic sounds
 46. Mites
 47. Move, as a plant
 48. Barbecue fuel
 50. Beach nuisance
 52. Ending for disc-
 53. ___berry
 55. Fury
 56. Like some socks
 57. Duran Duran girl of song



Visit: www.ilovecrosswords.com

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Easy

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

Answers to this week's Pop Quiz:

- 1) Dew; 2) China (over 95 million metric tonnes); 3) Angola; 4) Chickadees; 5) Jackie Stuart in 1967

Solutions to last week's puzzles:

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

GOT YOUR NUMBER

3.4

metres is the highest jump on a pogo stick, achieved by Dmitry Arsenyev of Russia on the set of 'La Notte dei Record' in Rome, Italy, on Nov 20, 2018.

50

people on average use the same bathroom on a plane flight.

70

percent, on average, of ice from fast-food restaurants is dirtier than the water from toilet bowls, a middle schooler's award-winning science project revealed in 2006.

7,800

US dollars in gift tax had to be paid by each member of the audience that Oprah gave a "free" car to.

32 million

bacteria can be found on every square inch of your skin.

Source: Uberfacts

ISLAND VIEW



Phuket street aglow at sunset. Photo by Marco Capriz

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

This week in history

Mar 27, 1625

Charles I becomes King of England, Scotland and Ireland as well as claiming the title King of France.

Mar 28, 1990

United States President George H. W. Bush posthumously awards Jesse Owens the Congressional Gold Medal.

Mar 29, 1871

The Royal Albert Hall is opened by Queen Victoria.



Mar 30, 1870

Texas is readmitted to the United States Congress following Reconstruction.

Mar 31, 1521

Ferdinand Magellan and 50 of his men come ashore at present-day Limasawa to participate in the first Catholic mass in the Philippines.

Apr 1, 1976

Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak found Apple Computer, Inc.

Apr 2, 1912

The ill-fated RMS Titanic begins sea trials.

Source: Wikipedia

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FRI 3 APR



Grow Boating Phuket Evening - Apr 2026
We look forward to seeing you at the Grow Boating Evening at the Boardwalk Bistro and Bar at the Phuket Boat Lagoon from 5pm. Sponsorship for drinks is available for just 12,000 baht and includes a generous promotional package from our media sponsors The Phuket News, Live 89.5 FM and Phuket News TV. Send us a message or email growboatingphuket@gmail.com for more details. There will be a delicious buffet sponsored by the Boardwalk Bistro and Bar for all attendees and as always, all your favourite beverages will be available from the bar. Come and join in the fun, everyone is welcome and there is no entry fee. Find us on Facebook at facebook.com/GrowBoatingPhuket

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SUN 5 APR



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The eggs are glowing. The hunt is on. When dusk falls over Bang Tao Beach, the adventure is only just beginning. This Easter, we invite your little ones to Easter Glow Safari – a twilight celebration of colour, creativity and pure childhood joy on our Angsana Beach Lawn. * Art & Craft under the open sky * Neon Egg Painting at dusk * Easter Fun Games on the beach * The Glowing Easter Egg Hunt – when night falls, the magic begins Plus Easter cookies, Easter fries and soft drinks for every little safari explorer. THB 599 per child (under 12 years) Sunday, 5 April 2026 17:00 – 20:00 hrs. Angsana Beach Lawn, Angsana Laguna Phuket Open to hotel guests and families across Bang Tao. Spots are limited, reserve yours today. <https://www.taste.angsana.com/book-easterglow-safari>

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SUPALAI JUDO CLUB PHUKET SHINES AT HONG KONG INTERNATIONAL JUDO TOURNAMENT 2026

The Thailand national judo team delivered an outstanding performance over two days of competition at the Hong Kong International Judo Tournament 2026, securing a total of 3 gold, 6 silver, and 11 bronze medals. Among the athletes, three judokas from Supalai Judo Club Phuket represented the national team under the guidance of coach Thiti Kumpapan. Gabin U14, -55kg won the gold medal, securing three victories and defeating a stronger black belt opponent in the final. Timur U14, -66kg earned a bronze medal. After losing his first match to a stronger black belt opponent, he came back to win his second bout against his teammate Tomohiro. Tomohiro U14, -66kg won his opening match but later lost in the bronze medal contest to his teammate Timur, finishing in 4th place. Gabin and Timur were promoted to the next rank of blue belt and officially certified by the Judo Association of Thailand. It is a great honor for the Supalai Judo Club Phuket to represent the Thailand national team. The team expressed sincere gratitude to the Judo Association of Thailand and the Hong Kong Judo Association for the opportunity and trust. Facebook: Supalai Judo Club Phuket.

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Cut Thammanoon loses title to Iwata

BOXING

THAMMANOON Niyomtrong lost his WBC light flyweight title to Japanese challenger Shokichi Iwata, who claimed a unanimous technical decision after the ringside doctor halted the bout at the beginning of the eighth round.

The victory at the Yokohama Buntai Arena on Mar 19 saw Iwata become a two-time world champion at 108 pounds and rebound strongly from last year's defeat to Rene Santiago for the WBO title.

The fight began cautiously. Both fighters are orthodox right-handers and spent the opening rounds studying each other, although Iwata gradually began to establish the tempo with the higher volume of punches.

The momentum of the contest shifted in the fourth round when a clash of heads opened a



Thammanoon (left). Photo: Bangkok Post

cut above Thammanoon's right eye.

Iwata immediately targeted the injury. Using his jab effectively, he repeatedly pawed at the damaged area, causing the cut to worsen as the fight progressed.

By the eighth round, the cut had deteriorated badly enough for the ringside doctor to stop the fight and send the bout to the scorecards, where Iwata was declared the winner by unanimous technical decision.

The victory crowned Iwata the new WBC light flyweight champion and marked an impressive performance from the Japanese fighter on home soil.

Bangkok Post

Rambolek's dream comes true

MMA

Bangkok Post

Rambolek Chor Ajalaboon stood in the centre of Lumpinee Stadium with tears streaming down his face and the ONE Championship belt raised above his head.

For a moment, the 23-year-old looked almost unable to believe it himself.

The crowd roared, and Rambolek's dream – the one he had spent years chasing through the unforgiving grind – finally felt real.

The Thai challenger pulled off one of the biggest upsets in recent memory last Friday (Mar 20), dethroning heavily favoured bantamweight Muay Thai champion Nabil Anane by unanimous decision at ONE Friday Fights 147.

"I'm quite speechless now, but finally my dream has come true," Rambolek said afterwards, fighting back tears.

Even after head coach Superbon rushed over to celebrate with him and pose for pictures, Rambolek still struggled to hold it together. The tears kept flowing. Then, slowly, came the smile – the kind that suggested the scale of the moment had finally sunk in.

Anane had entered fight week as a heavy favourite, the towering Thai-Algerian champion widely viewed as one of the most dangerous



Rambolek celebrates his unanimous win. Photo: Bangkok Post

young strikers in the sport. Since moving up from flyweight, he had looked close to untouchable – blasting through Nico Carrillo for interim gold, then dropping Superlek Kiatmookao in Tokyo on his way to being elevated to undisputed champion.

He had even stepped up to featherweight kickboxing on short notice and outclassed former K-1 champion Hiromi Wajima with ease.

However, Anane looked badly drained when he finally arrived at Thursday's weigh-ins with just three minutes remaining. He passed hydration and made weight, but the usual ease of his cut had vanished. Fighting through Ramadan had clearly taken its toll.

Anane made no excuses but in the

ring he looked a shadow of the fighter who had ruled the division so imperiously over the past year. The snap in his punches was dulled. The usual zip was gone. Rambolek, by contrast, fought the perfect counter-attacking battle.

Rambolek dropped the champion with flash knockdowns in the third and fourth rounds, sending a ripple through the arena each time. By the fifth, Anane was charging forward in search of a finish, but Rambolek stayed composed, kept him at bay and closed out a stunning decision victory that brought Lumpinee to its feet.

And at just 23 years old, with tears in his eyes and the belt in his hands, he looked like a champion whose story may only just be getting started.

Bezzecchi wins Brazil MotoGP

MOTO GP

ITALY'S MARCO BEZZECCHI of Aprilia won the Brazil MotoGP Grand Prix last Sunday (Mar 22) at the Autodromo Ayrton Senna in Goiania.

Bezzecchi also won the season's opening GP in Thailand three weeks ago and repeated the feat by finishing ahead of his Spanish teammate Jorge Martin and Italian pole-sitter Fabio Di Giannantonio of Ducati.

It was a milestone moment for the 27-year-old, who was 20th fastest on the grid in the practice round, as it marked the first time in his career he had won four Grands Prix in a row. It was also the first time an Aprilia rider had done so.

Aprilia's one-two in Brazil also means they lead the constructors



Bezzecchi. Photo: AFP

championship with 64 points.

Reigning world champion Marc Marquez of Ducati, who won Saturday's sprint race, had to settle for fourth place.

Pedro Acosta (KTM), who had arrived in Brazil at the top of the championship standings, lost his lead to Bezzecchi after finishing seventh on Sunday.

Bezzecchi now boasts 56 points, 11 more than Martin in second, with Acosta a further three points adrift.

The race was shortened from 31 to 23 laps due to the extreme heat, which was causing severe tyre degradation and raising safety concerns for the riders. AFP

Middle East war rocks Gulf's sporting mission

ALL SPORT

AROUND 80,000 FANS WERE hoping to see Lionel Messi take on Lamine Yamal in Doha, while thousands more were gearing up for the F1 grands prix in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, but the war in the Middle East had other plans.

The Gulf countries have invested vast sums of money in bringing global sporting events to their shores as they try to diversify their hydrocarbon-dependant economies and improve their images abroad.

But weeks of repeated drone and missile attacks from Iran, in retaliation against ongoing US-Israeli bombing, have put paid to that strategy, for now at least.

Since the start of war in February, dozens of events due to be held in the Gulf have been cancelled or postponed.

They include football's "Finalissima", which would have pitted European champions Spain against Copa America winners Argentina in Doha, two Formula One grands prix, the Qatari round of motorsport's World Endurance Championship, Asian Champions League matches and the Qatar Moto GP grand prix.

The Gulf states have spent billions of dollars to obtain hosting rights and put on such events, building ultramodern stadiums and modernising infrastructure.

Qatar hosted the World Cup in



The Spanish SuperCopa, hosted by Saudi Arabia in January, is just one of dozens of major sporting events now held in the Gulf. Photo: AFP

2022, one of the sporting world's crown jewels and a climactic moment for the country's strategy, while Saudi Arabia is hoping to repeat the trick and is scheduled to host in 2034.

Sport is just one plank of a wider programme, with enormous investments in data centres joining glittering mega-projects designed to draw in tourists and wealthy expats.

Now though, the Gulf has suffered significant reputational damage that will need to be repaired, for sports as well as other economic sectors.

Danyel Reiche, an expert in the politics of sport at the UAE University said he had "no concerns that events will return to the Gulf after the war has ended".

He said the region's sporting strategy was built on three pillars: sponsoring events, clubs and federations; buying football clubs and other sports teams, such as the UAE's ownership of Manchester City and Qatar's purchase of Paris Saint-Germain and hosting events.

"Only the latter is affected by the war," he said.

"Once the war ends, international sporting federations will not hesitate to return to the Gulf, which has proved to be a financially lucrative, professional and reliable location.

"To regain trust, Gulf countries might even expand their sponsorship activities," he concluded.

AFP

Spurs sink closer to abyss

FOOTBALL

AFP
Tottenham's fears of a ruinous relegation from the Premier League deepened after a damaging 3-0 home defeat to fellow strugglers Nottingham Forest last Sunday (Mar 22).

Tottenham fans issued a rallying call for the relegation six-pointer against Forest, descending en masse before kick-off to greet the team bus amid a sea of white. But it made little difference when it came to matters on the field.

Spurs are the only side without a Premier League win in 2026 and remain just one point above the relegation zone.

For the second time this season Forest strolled to a 3-0 victory over the Europa League winners.

The Spurs hierarchy now have a huge decision to make over the future of interim boss Igor Tudor in the three weeks before they play again.

Hired to bring an immediate lift, Tudor has collected just one point from a possible 15.

West Ham's 2-0 defeat at Aston Villa meant Spurs avoided dropping into the relegation zone for now, but they have just seven games to arrest an alarming slide and avoid dropping out of the top tier for the first time in nearly 50 years.

Elsewhere, defending champions Liverpool slumped to a 10th league



Dejected Spurs players at the end of the 3-0 home loss to Nottingham Forest. Photo: AFP

defeat of the season as Danny Welbeck struck twice in Brighton's 2-1 win over Liverpool, while Chelsea were soundly beaten 3-0 at Everton.

Everton's victory further tightened the battle for a Champions League place, particularly with a tough run-in to come for Liverpool and Chelsea.

Only seven points separate Liverpool in fifth from Bournemouth in 13th.

But Villa opened up a six-point lead on Chelsea after their first win in five league games.

Manchester United and Bournemouth drew 2-2, while Fulham beat second-bottom Burnley 3-1.

Leeds United and Brentford drew

0-0, while Sunderland took the bragging rights in the Tyne-Wear derby against Newcastle 2-1.

Away from Premier League action for the weekend were the top two placed clubs, Arsenal and Manchester City, who battled it out in the Carabao Cup Final on Sunday.

The Gunners quest for a quadruple trophy haul was dented as Nico O'Reilly scored twice in a 2-0 win to ensure manager Pep Guardiola won the trophy for a record fifth time.

The result also handed City a psychological boost ahead of the team's meeting in a crunch Premier League showdown at the Etihad Stadium on Apr 19.



Infantino. Photo: AFP

FIFA ASEAN Cup set for debut

FOOTBALL

FIFA HAS ANNOUNCED that its inaugural FIFA ASEAN Cup will take place from September to October this year.

"The FIFA Council approved the introduction of the FIFA ASEAN Cup, with the first edition planned for September-October 2026," FIFA said during its Council meeting in Zurich, Switzerland on Mar 20.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino said the event will be held during the FIFA international match window, meaning clubs worldwide must release their players to national teams. This allows each country to call up their best players who play abroad, unlike in past AFF Championships where many teams lost key stars.

"In the FIFA ASEAN Cup, we will bring together

ASEAN nations and the tournament will be a major success that will help develop national teams in ASEAN and support the growth of football in Southeast Asia," said Infantino.

Southeast Asian countries are already gearing up for the ASEAN Championship – now also known as the ASEAN Hyundai Cup – from July 24 to Aug 26.

Organised by the ASEAN Football Federation (AFF), the biennial tournament is widely seen as the region's premier football competition.

Thailand are in Group B alongside Malaysia, the Philippines, Myanmar and Laos, while Group A consists of defending champions Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia and the winners of a playoff between Timor-Leste and Brunei.

Bangkok Post

Senegal lose AFCON title, Morocco declared champs

FOOTBALL

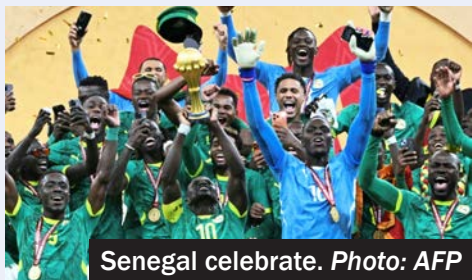
SENEGAL SAY THEY WILL APPEAL after they were sensationally stripped of the Africa Cup of Nations title on Mar 17 and the Confederation of African Football (CAF) instead declared Morocco champions, two months after their chaotic final.

Several Senegalese players controversially walked off the pitch in Rabat during the final on Jan 18 in protest when the hosts were awarded a penalty late in second-half stoppage time.

After Senegal's players eventually returned having been coaxed back onto the pitch by captain Sadio Mane, Morocco missed the penalty and Pape Gueye went on to score the goal in extra time that gave his team a 1-0 victory.

CAF said that having studied Morocco's appeal, "the Senegal national team is declared to have forfeited the match" and the result was "officially recorded as 3-0" in favour of Morocco.

The CAF Appeals Committee justified its decision by applying Articles 82 and 84 of the AFCON Regulations, which state that if a team "refuses to play or leaves the ground before the regular end of the match without the authorisation of the referee, it shall be considered (loser) and shall be eliminated for good from the current competition".



Senegal celebrate. Photo: AFP

The articles add that the team contravening the regulations "will lose its match by 3-0".

The Royal Moroccan Football Federation (FRMF) said in a statement its appeal "was never intended to contest the sporting performance of the teams participating in this competition, but solely to request the application of the competition regulations".

Senegal's football authorities said they will appeal "as soon as possible" to CAF.

"The Senegalese Football Federation condemns this unjust, unprecedented and unacceptable decision, which brings African football into disrepute," it said in a statement.

In late January, CAF imposed a series of disciplinary sanctions, including fines amounting to several hundred thousand euros, on the federations of both countries for unsportsmanlike conduct and violations of fair play principles.

AFP

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TIME FOR MALAYSIA AIRLINES

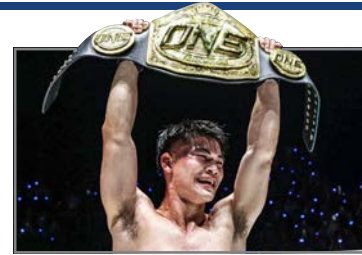
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Sport



Thai underdog claims shock victory > p14



The Mar 17 press conference. Photo: Sports Authority of Thailand

ALL SPORTS

The Phuket News
editor@classactmedia.co.th

A new directive has been approved that changes the way sports development in Thailand is structured and funded which aims to maximise the performance and achievements of national athletes.

The Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS), in collaboration with the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) and the National Sports Development Fund (NSDF), confirmed on Mar 17 that it has implemented significant changes to how athlete allowances and grants are managed.

The most notable update is the launch of a pilot program to bypass intermediate associations and transfer funds directly to athletes' bank accounts.

Furthermore, one-time performance grants and rewards will be imparted to top-performing Thai athletes who claim medals at major international competitions such as the

Olympic Games, World Championships, Asian Games and Southeast Asian Games.

The pilot program will launch at the 41st National Youth Games in Surat Thani between May 7-17, initially only for Bangkok-based athletes due to the province having the largest number of participating athletes. Assuming the pilot proves successful, however, the plan is to roll out the initiative nationwide as the country strives to develop its sporting talent to the best of its ability.

The announcement was made at an official press conference at the Bangkok Youth Center in Bangkok on Mar 17 chaired by Attakorn Sirilakthayakorn, Minister of Tourism and Sports.

Joining Mr Attakorn was: Thanukiat Chanchum, manager of the NSDF; Kongsak Yodmani, Governor of the SAT; Surasak Kerchantuk, Deputy Governor of the SAT for Sports Promotion; Thirachai Wutthitham, President of the Bangkok Metropolitan Sports Association; senior executives from the SAT and NSDF; representatives from the

Bangkok Metropolitan Sports Association, as well as a selected number of national athletes and coaches.

Mr Attakorn explained that the transition to direct allowance payments to athletes is to facilitate swift transfers, ensuring transparency, speed and accessibility, while solving frequent previous issues relating to delayed payments. Typically, such government disbursement delays would result in athletes owed months of pay and allowances in arrears and result in sports associations having to advance payments instead. The new model, developed by MOTS in partnership with Krungthai Bank, would overcome this challenge and allow a more streamlined and efficient method of payment, Mr Attakorn said. "It is critical to ensure athletes have direct and rapid access to government budgets and welfare," he commented.

PERFORMANCE AWARDS

The Minister went on to detail how the new training and

competition allowance model for national-level athletes will provide a total daily allowance of approximately B600, which is typically broken down to B300 for meals and B300 as a personal allowance.

The MOTS, the SAT, and the NSDF have also implemented measures and allocated separate budgets to cover associated costs relating to travel, kits, equipment and nutrition management to ensure smooth and efficient operations, Mr Attakorn said.

He also explained that in addition to daily allowances, the MOTS and NSDF provide one-time performance grants and international performance awards where substantial prize money is offered as an incentive and granted for medal-winning performances at top international events. Elaborating on this point, Mr Thanukiat confirmed that the NSDF board has already approved prize money totaling B6 million for weightlifting athletes and over B11mn for associations including football, jiu-jitsu and rugby competing at the 41st

National Youth Games in Surat Thani.

Mr Attakorn concluded his remarks by confirming that improved scholarships have also been approved which will provide financial support for outstanding national athletes to pursue their academic education.

However, the new measures received prompt criticism from several major sports associations, including the Olympic Committee of Thailand, who expressed concerns. The direct payment for daily meal provisions, for example, proves problematic as specially prepared meals for top level athletes typically cost more than the B300 allocation, which could hinder collective nutrition management.

Olympic Committee advisor Intarat Yodbangtoey, honorary president of the Thailand Weightlifting Association, also questioned the fund's budget management, citing an imbalance of distribution between sports associations which often results in a challenge to access funding for athlete preparation and participation at international competitions.

Phuket Elite Basketball League season bounces to a close

BASKETBALL

THE SECOND SEASON of the increasingly popular Phuket Elite Basketball League (PEBL) came to a conclusion recently at Kajonkiet International School in Kathu.

The PEBL 25/26 season saw a variety of teams battle it out on court over seven separate game days. Stretching back to November last year, Game Day One took place on Nov 16

and the season concluded with the finals on Mar 15.

The men's open age division saw four teams competing: Army Ants; Phuket Elite; Monday; and Phukario Pyros, with the Army Ants defeating Phuket Elite 92-67 to in the final to lift the trophy on Mar 15.

The boys under-18 age division saw six teams compete: Phuket Elite; UWC White; Phuket Wittayalai (PKY); British School International, Phuket (BISP); UWC Green; and



PKY. Photo: Supplied

VCR JR. The final saw PKY emerge victorious by a score of 65-44 against Phuket Elite.

Three teams fought it out in the girls under-18 age

division: UWC; BISP; and MyFriend. The team from UWC showed their class and dominance in the final showdown as they defeated MyFriend by a thoroughly convincing score of 87-14.

The under-13 Coed age division had four teams battle it out over the season: KIS; BISP; BDA; and Moo Academy. The latter just had enough to run out as winners in the final against BISP with a score of 41-34.

An awards ceremony was staged to present

trophies to the winning teams and the runners-up, overseen by Somsak Boonkaew, executive committee member from the Phuket Provincial Sports Association.

The competition was organised in collaboration with PEBL and Kajonkiet International School by the Phuket Basketball Lovers Club, a local sports organisation dedicated to fostering the basketball community in Phuket.

The competition strives

to promote and develop the potential of basketball players in Phuket, while providing opportunities for athletes to showcase their abilities, gain competitive experience and raise the standard of basketball in the area. The 2025/26 season was the second season of the competition.

For more information please visit the PEBL Facebook and Instagram pages or their website at: <https://www.peblleague.com/>. *The Phuket News*