PHUKET GAZETTE

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Australians charged with attempted murder: miss â€˜mafiaâ€™ target, shoot German tourists

PHUKET: Two Australian tattoo parlor owners have been charged with attempted murder after opening fire with an unregistered firearm in the heart of Phuketâ€™s party town, Patong, yesterday evening.

John Cohen, 32, and Adam Shea, 26, shot two German bystanders in their attempt to â€œstrike firstâ€• against an alleged Danish mafioso, named by police only as â€œDannieâ€•.

â€œThis is not a complicated case at all,â€• said Phuket Provincial Police Deputy Commander Arun Kleawwatee. â€œThe suspects, afraid they would be attacked by a party that they were in conflict with, decided to strike first.â€•

Patong Police apprehended the two suspects within an hour of the 7:30pm shooting.

â€œWe quickly arrested the suspects at the tattoo shop they are partners in on Bangla Road,â€• Col Arun said.

CCTV footage shows Mr Cohen and Mr Shea walking into many hotels along the street and asking the receptionist for Dannie, Col Arun explained.

â€œThatâ€™s when they spotted Dannie leaving the hotel on a motorbike. Both of them ran out of the hotel, and one of them opened fire with .38 handgun. However, they missed Dannie and hit two German tourists [in front of the Family Mart],â€• he added.

Both parties were expected to show up in court yesterday to resolve a dispute about a â€œbig bikeâ€• worth about 300,000 baht. Dannie did not come to the hearing, Col Arun said.

During police questioning, Mr Cohen allegedly told police that Dannie had sent a group of mafia men to his Phuket home.

â€œHe used to live in Pattaya before moving here. I was afraid he would shoot me since he did not show up at court. So me and my friend decided to make a move first,â€• Mr Cohen told police.

Both suspects have been charged with attempted murder and for illegal possession of a firearm.

Police are now scouring the island for Dannie.

The two tourists injured by the stray bullets fired in Soi San Sabai, off of Rat-U-Thit 200 Pee Road, were taken to Patong Hospital.

â€œJohann Baschenegger, 42, and Joseph Woerner, 71, were both shot in the arm,â€• Patong Police Superintendent Chiraphat Pochanaphan said.

Mr Baschenegger arrived in Phuket around midnight on January 21.

â€œMy friend Joseph arrived before me. We were hanging out in front of the hotel when we were both shot in the arm,â€• Mr Baschenegger said.

Col Chiraphat expressed his concern about how detrimental such an incident could be to Phuketâ€™s vital tourism industry.

â€œThe suspects opened fire in the middle of a dense tourism area and injured two innocent people. They have seriously tarnished Thailandâ€™s reputation and must face the highest penalties under the law,â€• Col Chiraphat said.

This most recent episode of gun violence in tourism regions of Thailand falls on the heels of British national Stephen Ashton, 22, being shot dead by a stray bullet at a New Year's Eve beach party on Koh Pha-ngan, near Koh Samui.

â€“ Kritsada Mueanhawong

Phuket, Thailand

13:20 local time (GMT +7)