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Interpol chief slams lack of funds for DVI

By Alison Winward

PHUKET: Interpol boss Ronald K Noble, during a visit to the island on May 21, lashed out at the lack of funding from the international community for work to continue in identifying victims of the December 26 tsunami.

"We, as a world community, should be embarrassed that the people in the DVI teams, who should be [regarded as] heroes, aren't getting all the support they need," said Mr Noble, who is Secretary General of Interpol.

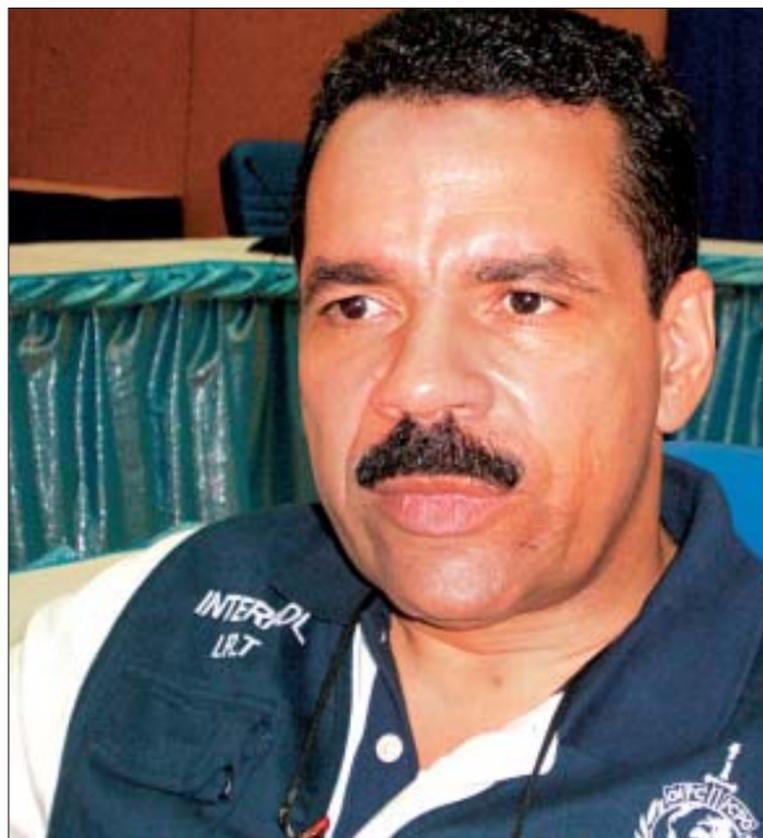
"These dedicated police officers and experts, who have come here to look at these remains and take DNA samples, are having to raise money [for their investigations]."

Mr Noble said that he had heard of DVI (Disaster Victim Identification) staff having to write up business plans to get equipment and funding or to contact friends and colleagues to source ink cartridges for printers.

The situation had become so bad that Mr Noble approved the establishment of a 5,000-euro (about 250,000 baht) petty cash fund to cover expenses.

Since January, Interpol – which is based in Lyon, France – has been co-ordinating the efforts of DVI teams from around the world to return tsunami victims to their families.

At present, the work of the 20 or so DVI teams operating in Phuket is funded solely by their home countries. But this system



Interpol Secretary General Ronald Noble: 'We, as a world community, should be embarrassed...'

is "inefficient" said Mr Noble, as it can lead to duplication of some resources, but shortages of others.

"Individual countries can say they have been here from the very beginning and they have donated enough resources, but really, that isn't good enough for the family members. [They] want their relatives to be identified as soon as possible," he said.

Mr Noble supported the Thai Tsunami Victims Identifi-

cation center's executive committee in its attempts to secure international funding for its work in Phuket.

He said this was particularly important because since the tsunami slipped off the front pages of the world's newspapers and foreign victims were being identified, foreign governments are facing less pressure to continue contributing to the effort, even though it could be necessary for many years.

Phuket Air suspends flights from Bangkok to Bali

By Sangkhae Leelanaporn

THAILAND: Phuket Air has suspended its Bangkok-Bali service after passenger numbers slumped following a ban on the airline flying to and from Amsterdam, imposed earlier this month.

Sribenja Semmeesook, Communication Consultant of Aziam Burson-Marsteller, which handles public relations for Phuket Air, told the Gazette on May 20, "Many customers from the Netherlands and the rest of Europe [previously] used Phuket Air to fly from Amsterdam to Bangkok and then from Bangkok to Bali."

"But since the airline was barred from Amsterdam, the resulting drop in passengers has forced Phuket Air to stop flying to Bali."

K. Sribenja said one of the problems that had caused the airline to be banned from Amsterdam – faulty emergency lighting – had been fixed the day after the Dutch civil aviation authorities acted against the airline.

As regards the other problem – the fact that a Filipino pilot held a medical certificate valid for a year, while the Dutch authorities insist on six-month medical certificates – K. Sribenja said only that the certificates were "not compatible".

She continued, "As I'm sure you can appreciate, it isn't all that easy to reinstate routes after being banned – it takes time to fix everything."

"I'm surprised it has taken as long as it has, though, and I hope we will be allowed to fly into Amsterdam again soon."

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B20m needed for DNA tests on tsunami dead

By Anongnat Sartpisut

PHUKET: Around 20 million baht is needed to pay for testing DNA samples from victims of the tsunami who have yet to be identified, the head of the Thai Tsunami Victims Identification centre (TTVI), Pol Gen Noppadol Somboonsap, said on May 22.

An additional 260 million baht, or more, may be needed to set up a proposed Thai-run disaster victims identification (DVI) center to continue identifying bodies after foreign teams have gone home.

Altogether, 1,663 victims, Thai and foreign, have now been identified. Most of the foreigners have been identified through dental records or fingerprints.

However, investigators are turning increasingly to DNA, particularly to identify the Thai victims, as many of them – especially from Phang Nga – had no dental records and, in places where buildings were washed away, it is difficult to find fingerprints to compare with those taken from the dead.

The DNA samples are now being sent to the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) in Bosnia for analysis.

Gen Noppadol said, “We have already sent about 750 DNA samples ... but with each test costing 10,000 baht, and there still being nearly 2,000 bodies yet to be identified, we are looking at a bill of 20 million baht for DNA analysis alone.”

Gen Noppadol was speaking during a visit to Phuket by Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Pol Gen Chidchai Wannasatit.

The minister said the government plans to establish a new DVI center to continue the work of the foreign teams after they have gone, but added that he could not give more details at present.

Pol Col Pornprasert Kanjanarin, the Joint Chief of Staff, said that around 140 million baht would be needed to set up a system to compare fingerprints, and 120 million baht for software to analyze the results of the DNA tests – but added that these would be only the initial costs. The centre would have a staff of 105.



Phuket-born Tawat Tongtem, 27, is the latest winner in the *Gazette's* 'We Love Phuket' sticker drive. Spotting the license number of his pickup truck on the front page of the *Gazette* issue of May 21, he promptly called up to claim his prize – 2,500 baht in cash. He is pictured receiving the money from *Gazette* Managing Editor Alasdair Forbes. For details of the sticker drive, and how to win fabulous prizes, see page 40 of this issue. Tourist Police love Phuket: page 13.

IN BRIEF

Charity Art Auction at Mom Tri's Villa Royale

KATA: A charity buffet dinner and art auction will be held at Mom Tri's Villa Royale on June 18. All proceeds will go directly towards a scholarship fund for victims of the tsunami.

Donors of art objects for auction include Soul of Asia, the Phuket Art Movement and Phuket Ceramics. All works to be auctioned will be on display at Villa Royale from June 10.

For more information contact Donna Tudge at Tel: 076-330015 or Email: donna@boathouse.com or Joan Watson at Tel: 07-2820422.

Top English clubs to run soccer 'camp' in Phuket

PHUKET CITY: Representatives of English Premiership teams Everton, Bolton Wanderers and Manchester City on May 20 gave their approval for Surakul Stadium to be the venue of a one-day kid's soccer camp on July 21, run by three coaches and two players of each team.

Eam Thavornvongwongse, President of the Phuket Sports Association, said, “The purpose of this course is to give about 300 children in the tsunami-affected areas in Krabi, Phang Nga and Phuket, the opportunity to study techniques with Premier League teams.”

Derek Fazackerley, Head Coach of Manchester City, said “This stadium is in excellent condition for coaching.”

Jungceylon opening postponed

PATONG: The developers of the Jungceylon shopping, entertainment and hotel complex have decided to delay opening it until October, seven months later than planned, because of the tsunami.

Jungceylon public relations and events supervisor Khemawat Pudpuang told the *Gazette* on May 24 that the management team, meeting after the tsunami, decided not to open the center in March, as originally intended, “because they were worried there would be no tourists.”

He continued, “We also talked with people who were to rent space here, and everyone agreed to postpone the opening because there would be no tourists immediately after the tsunami or during the following ‘green’ season.

“We pointed out to them that it would be better for them if we delayed opening the center than it would be for us to open on time and have them paying rent without having customers.

“They accepted what we said and decided that it would be better to wait until the start of the next high season.”

K. Khemawat continued, “A few businesses that had already reserved a space canceled

after the tsunami, but most of them were small traders.

“The big businesses stuck with us because the tsunami was a natural disaster and ... they felt it would not really damage the potential of Phuket tourism.”

The wave actually attracted new business. “Small traders, the ones who had sold souvenirs and such things on the beachfront, approached us about renting space,” claimed K. Khemawat.

– Sangkhae Leelanaporn



PATONG: Officers from Kathu Police Station will find it easier to patrol the sands of Patong Beach with the new 4x4 off-road vehicles presented to them on May 19 by the US Embassy in Thailand.

The vehicles, called ST 4x4s, were donated by E-Z-Go Company, which is owned by Textron, well-known for its Bell Helicopter and Cessna Aircraft brands.

Two of the vehicles, which have a top speed of 40kmh, will be used for patrolling Patong Beach, while a third will be reserved for use by American officials visiting Phuket.

Our picture shows Dan Boling (left), of E-Z-Go, and David L Turner, of the Force Protection Detachment at the US Defense Department, taking one of the new “beach busters” for a spin on Patong Beach.

Democrat leader drops in for coffee

PHUKET: Democrat party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva took part in a "coffee council" discussion with people in Mai Khao on May 23, during a visit to Phuket.

More than 500 people waited to see the opposition leader arrive with Phuket Democrat MP Chalermklak Kebsup and Phuket Provincial Administration Organization President Anchalee Vanich-Thebabutr, both staunch Democrats.

K. Abhisit said the party's "coffee councils" were a good way to learn what voters were thinking and to discuss party policies with them.

He explained, "It is difficult for us to get our message across to the voters, that's why we set up the coffee councils as a way of having direct communication with local people."

"Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra does a radio broadcast to the nation every Saturday. We sent a request three weeks ago to the Public Relations Department to clear things for us to do the same, but we haven't had a reply from them yet," he added.

In the afternoon, K. Abhisit



The PM has TV; the opposition have coffee: Democrat Party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva (wearing tie) at the 'coffee council' in Mai Khao. - Photo by Yodsoi Deechaiya

addressed students at the Prince of Songkhla University, Phuket.

He said, "I hope the students realize that they are entering an important period in their

lives, during which they can learn useful things and prepare to take their place in society."

K. Abhisit added that he had heard the university was re-

considering its controversial decision to run courses in casino management in Thailand, where casinos are illegal.

- Sangkhae Leelanaporn

Drug cases top crime stats again

PHUKET: Drugs were yet again the main cause for arrests in Phuket in April, according to the latest Provincial Police crime statistics.

A total of 93 people were arrested for drug-related offenses between April 1 and April 30, compared with 81 arrests in March.

Possession of *ya bah* (methamphetamine) accounted for the largest number of arrests - 38 - in April, followed by marijuana possession, for which people 30 were arrested.

Of the remaining 25 drug arrests, 20 were for substance abuse, three were for using *krathom* (a plant that acts as a mild stimulant when ingested), one involved Ecstasy and one involved hashish.

Three murders were reported, with one arrest made in each of two cases. The remaining case is still under investigation.

Four attempted murders were reported, with no arrests made, as well as 26 cases of causing bodily harm, for which 14 arrests were made.

Two rapes were reported, with an arrest made in each case, while 24 people were arrested for prostitution.

There were 52 reported cases of theft, with 35 people arrested in connection with 28 incidents. Six of the thefts were snatch-and-run, with two people being charged in connection with four of the incidents.

A total of five motorcycles were reported stolen, with six arrests made in relation to four of the thefts. One car was reported stolen, with no arrest yet made.

B10m tsunami archive to be set up - in Bangkok

By Anongnat Sartpisut

NAI YANG: Some 200 government officers from Bangkok and the six tsunami-affected provinces gathered at the Pearl Village Hotel on May 19 to come up with suggestions as to what

data should be included in the Tsunami Information Center (TIC), which will be built in Bangkok at a cost of 10 million baht.

The hearing was organized by the Fine Arts Department's National Archives of Thailand

(NAT) which will consider the input before deciding on the data to be kept as part of the archive.

Contemporary History Records Officer Sureerat Wongsangiem said the archive will cover five aspects of the tsunami: what happened during the tsunami, how victims were helped, the damage caused, the post-tsunami recovery process, and measures introduced to protect the region from future tsunamis.

"The [TIC] will be built in Bangkok. The government has already approved a budget of 10 million baht.

"The money hasn't arrived yet, but when it does, we will start to build the TIC," K. Sureerat said.

Construction of the TIC is

due to start next month. K. Sureerat added that Phuket Rajabhat University has been helping collect information from local people.

"The NAT has been accumulating information about the tsunami since January, and we expect to continue doing this until September," she said.

Donors look for tsunami aid projects to fund

PHUKET: ThaiTogether, the tsunami aid organization started by Mark Weingard of the Annike Linden Foundation, has a number of donors coming to Phuket at the end of May to meet with organizations seeking funding for tsunami-related projects.

There are substantial funds available for successful applicants.

Any organizations wishing to be considered should initially register with ThaiTogether by visiting www.thaitogether.org/yellowpages/ and entering their organization and projects details.

After registration they may also submit details, including their mission statement and

project proposals, by email to funding@thaitogether.org.

Successful organizations will be invited to make presentations to the donors in Phuket at the end of May. For details visit www.thaitogether.org.



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Queer News

A quiet night in

NAKHON SRITHAMMARAT: A man in Srichon District put a shotgun in his mouth and blew his brains out after his wife refused to let him attend a neighbor's funeral with her.

Arriving at the scene on May 8 with doctors from Srichon Hospital, police found the body of 36-year-old Wimol Phetchoo lying on a bed, dressed only in a loincloth. A shotgun was found at his side, the barrel near what was left of his mouth.

Pol Lt Col Suchart Chanakhum said K. Wimol suffered a single blast to the head which blew apart his cranium, leaving a rather nasty mess all over the bed.

Police suggested that K. Wimol had possibly discharged the weapon by pressing his toe to the trigger, indicating a scenario similar to the way in which Kurt Cobain, famed frontman of grunge band Nirvana, left this vale of tears.

Col Suchart put the time of death, which must have been instantaneous, at two hours earlier.

Police questioned K. Wimol's wife K. Sujit, who told them she had left to attend a neighbor's funeral earlier that evening, leaving her husband at home and feeling somewhat *noi jai* – slighted.

When she returned home, she found he had shot himself in the head, she said.

"He killed himself because he felt *noi jai* that I wouldn't let him come to the funeral with me, because normally we went everywhere together. We loved each other very much and had a nice life together.

"But on the night of the funeral I told him not to come with me – I said that I would go, pay my respects, and be back shortly. That made him feel *noi jai* so he took a gun and shot himself in the head," she said.

Source: *Siang Tai*

THOROUGHLY

Until the three National Disaster Warning Center (NDWC) towers are linked by satellite to their headquarters in Nonthaburi, the job of maintaining, testing – and sounding warnings if necessary – has fallen to Patong Municipality.

Patong Deputy Mayor Chairat Sukbal told the *Gazette* that the municipality has installed phone lines to the towers, allowing municipal officials to test them remotely from Patong Fire Station – and test the system they have, as often as twice a day.

"The Municipality tests the NDWC alarm tower often because it is connected to the office by a telephone line; we don't have to walk to the towers when we want to test them. We test them to make sure they're working well, and every time we do, we make public announcements using sound trucks, fliers, sending faxes to hotels, and via our public address system," he said.

K. Chairat doesn't think the current proliferation of warning systems will continue.

"We haven't been contacted by any agencies that have plans to build more towers here, and I think we have enough," he added.

But while K. Chairat may not have been informed about it, many more towers are on the way, courtesy of the Royal Thai Navy, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the Phuket Provincial Administration Organization (see facing page).

Noppadon Pakprot, Director of the TAT's Services Promotion Division, said his agency plans to build three more towers in Patong as part of its 200-million-baht project to "relandscape" the Patong shore. The budget for the project was approved May 10, though the funds have not yet been made available. Work is scheduled to begin next December or January, he said.

When asked if another set of towers was really needed, he admitted, "After the tsunami there was a rush by several agencies to take action. Without any central body overseeing the effort, there has been some dupli-

After the tsunami, government agencies rushed to set up early warning systems and establish evacuation plans for risk areas. The National Disaster Warning Center tested its pilot warning system in Patong on April 29 amid great fanfare.

But while most people think this system alone should be sufficient, there are now no fewer than five separate warning systems for Patong – two already in place and three more budgeted.

Are so many warning system really necessary? Here the *Gazette's* Sangkhae Leelanaporn and Anongnat Sartpisut review the different systems and the confusion they are creating.



Patong Municipality's warning system, consisting of loudspeakers attached to power poles, was the first to be wired up, but it is not linked to the National Disaster Warning Center in Nonthaburi.

cation of effort." He added that it was too late for the TAT to set up its system in another area that needs one because the plan has already been granted design and budget approval.

He said that the proposed locations of the siren towers might be changed so that they don't annoy tourists during construction or "duplicate" the NDWC towers, which are al-

ready audible along the entire length of Patong Beach.

Dr Jirachai Amornpairoj, General Manager of the Royal Paradise Hotel, said the reason Patong was getting so much attention was probably because of its high international profile and also because of the death toll from the last tsunami.

He told the *Gazette* that he thinks there is no reason to have more early warning systems than is really necessary.

He also disputed K. Chairat's claim that the public has been adequately informed before tests of the NDWC sirens, saying his hotel hadn't been informed—and therefore had no way to warn its guests that the alarm was only a test.

Testing the alarm too often, he pointed out, might also result in a "boy who cried wolf" effect, with people becoming conditioned to ignore it. This could result in a real tragedy if a tsunami were really on the way, he said.

English tourist Suzanne Busby agrees that testing the alarms too often will generate complacency.

"I don't believe there will be another tsunami [soon], but I think there are enough towers already ... we don't need one every 100 meters. That might scare people. If everyone on the beach can hear three towers, why build 10?" she asked.

Sutin Thongmesuk, who runs a beach chair and umbrella rental operation at the southern end of the beach, said he had witnessed the confusion caused because too few people, residents and tourists alike, received advance warning when the alarm was tested on March 18.

"When some people heard the siren, they began to run in a panic because they didn't know it was just a test. People who experienced the first tsunami panicked the most, especially people living along Klong Pakbang.

"What they really need is a good system to warn people beforehand, not 100 different points broadcasting warnings while the public has no idea what is going on," he said.

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ALARMING

FIVE IN ONE: PATONG'S CACOPHONY OF KLAXONS

Patong Municipality Warning System: The first "warning system" in operation, this 560,000-baht public address system was donated by UA Thai Industry Co of Nakhon Pathom and was first tested in early March. It comprises seven sets of two loudspeakers installed on power poles at the following locations: 1. Kalim School; 2. Loma Park; 3. Bank of Asia branch; 4. Sai Nam Yen intersection; 4. Baan Yin Dee Hotel; 5. Suwan Keree Temple School; 6. Sea Pearl Hotel Intersection.

The speakers can emit both sirens and voice messages and are controlled from the Patong Municipality Public Relations Office at Patong City Hall, which is usually closed evenings and holidays. Authority to sound the alarm lies with the municipality.

The system is not linked to the NDWC, but by telephone to the Meteorological Department in Chiang Mai, which will send a warning in the event of a major earthquake. Criticisms of the system are that it is unclear, doesn't cover the entire Municipality, and thus far has broadcast only in Thai.

NDWC Warning System: Comprises three solar-powered siren towers soon to be linked by satellite direct to the NDWC headquarters in Nonthaburi. The system was tested and declared a success on April 29 after the evacuation drill. The siren towers emit a range of 121-decibel sounds and messages in different languages.

The towers (see picture, right) were donated by Bangkok-based Ele Sat Engineering and use communications equipment from Swedish company Kockum Sonics and an Inmarsat satellite system. They are located at the Seaview Phuket Hotel, Phuket Cabana Hotel and Sunset Beach Resort in Kalim.

Although the NDWC will be able to issue warnings direct once the satellite link is established, Patong Municipality will retain the authority to test and broadcast messages through the system.

The Municipality will also be responsible for maintenance of the system, which will be linked by telephone line to Patong Fire Station so that it can be accessed around the clock.

OrBorJor Project: Patong will get three permanent watchtowers as part of this project, which will see a total of 16 towers built around the island at a cost of 250,000 baht each. The Phuket Provincial Administration Organization (*OrBorJor*) said Bangkok Phuket Hospital has offered to cover the cost of 10 of the towers.

Each tower will be manned by two *OrBorJor* beach guards, who will be equipped with walkie-talkies allowing them to communicate and relay information through the 8.8-million-baht *OrBorJor* Emergency Radio Network, which is now under construction.

The network will comprise a series of "repeater" antennae spaced at a distance of approximately three kilometers apart. These will form a ring around the island and allow local officials to communicate even if mobile phone networks collapse, as happened after the tsunami and again after the March 28 tsunami scare.

The system is scheduled for completion by September 30. Oddly, there are no reported plans to link the system direct to the NDWC or to the Meteorological Department.

Royal Thai Navy (RTN) Project: Patong will get three of 19 watchtowers to be built around the island at a cost of 80,000 to 100,000 baht each.

Atop each 13-meter structure will be 105-decibel speakers and searchlights capable of illuminating objects as far as 500 meters out to sea to assist in RTN emergency rescue missions.

There appear to be no plans to link the towers to the NDWC or to the *OrBorJor* system, though the RTN has said it will coordinate with the *OrBorJor* to minimize redundancy.

The RTN will discuss the towers' locations in Patong with the *OrBorJor*, which, along with Tambon Administration Organizations, will be responsible for their maintenance after they are built.

Other watchtower locations will be: Mai Khao, Surin, Nai Harn, Rawai, Nai Yang, Chalong, Koh Racha Yai, Kata (2), Karon (2), Kamala (2), Bang Tao/Cherng Talay (3).

Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Project: Patong will get three more alarm towers to be budgeted under the TAT's 200-million-baht coastal redevelopment project for the Municipality's shoreline.

Although few details have been released, the system will include a siren tower with beacon light and will initially be linked only to the Meteorological Department, according to the TAT.

More details about the system will be released soon, the agency says, and a similar system with two warning towers will be installed in Kamala as part of the TAT's 100 million-baht redevelopment project there.



Until the National Disaster Warning Center gets its satellite link working, its three warning towers on the beach will be operated by Patong Municipality.

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TAWAN CRUISES

Womb with a view

By Rungtip Hongjakpet

For just about all parents, taking photographs or videos of their newborn is almost as natural as the act of reproduction itself.

But for parents who just can't wait the full nine months before catching a glimpse of their precious child, Bangkok Phuket Hospital now offers a high-tech, so-called "4D" ultrasound imaging service that provides high-resolution moving images of the unborn child while it is still in the womb.

The *Gazette* visited the hospital recently to learn more about the service from radiologist Dr Uthis Tahratanawong and resident gynecologist Dr Rujirek Leelanapapat.

They explained that "4D" refers to images in four dimensions: the three spatial dimensions of length, width and depth – all over time, the fourth dimension.

In short, the parents can receive VCDs of their child before it is even born.

Dr Uthis explained that the 5-million-baht Voluson 730 Expert unit by GE Medical Services, imported from the US, is thought to be the only one of its type on the island.

It went into service at the hospital about two months ago and has already met strong demand from mothers-to-be and their doting partners – even among visiting tourists.

The reason the service is so popular is the price, the doctors



PRENATAL PAPAARAZZO: Dr Rujirek Leelanapapat (right) gives a mother-to-be her first view of junior.

explained. Dr Uthis said 4D imaging in the US and other western countries generally costs three to four times what it does at Bangkok Phuket Hospital, where the imaging is just 3,000 baht per session.

Dr Rujirek explained that for the medical purposes alone, standard "2D" sonograms, which are also available at the hospital for about 1,500 baht, usually suffice.

However, unlike trained radiologists, most parents see ultrasound images of their eagerly-anticipated progeny as little more than a blur of hazy lines, which in reality seem to bear scant resemblance to the little bundle of

joy they had conjured up in their mind's eye.

That's where the 4D imaging comes in, because it offers far clearer pictures. According to Drs Uthis and Rujirek, it even allows the parents to see the fetus sucking its thumb, smiling, kicking – whatever a fetus might get up to while it bides its time waiting for the white light to appear at the end of the tunnel.

The doctors told the *Gazette* that another positive aspect of 4D imaging is that helps parents to see with their own eyes when there is a health problem with the fetus, such as a cleft lip or cleft palate.

This helps to prepare the

parents mentally, as well as giving them more time to consider treatment options, such as surgery.

"The only problem we occasionally have is that the fetus is out of position, so we have to ask the mother to come back at a later date," said Dr Uthis.

How's that for learning to turn your back to the camera at an early age?

Fortunately, the hospital doesn't charge anything extra in such cases.

Dr Rujirek explained that there were some limitations to the procedure, however.

It is only appropriate for fetuses well into the third trimes-

ter and the imaging quality depends on the amount of amniotic fluid in the womb, which varies from mother to mother.

The less amniotic fluid there is, the less clear the images are likely to be.

These restrictions aside, the service has overall been a big hit.

After finishing the ultrasound the proud parents-to-be are given a CD copy of the images – not a bad head start in putting together the baby's photo album.

For more information, contact Bangkok Phuket Hospital at Tel: 076-254421 or visit Web: www.phukethospital.com or Email: info@phukethospital.com

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Energy-saving drive begins

On June 1, the government will launch a comprehensive energy-saving campaign that will include appealing to the public to switch off lights and air conditioners at home – and to drive more slowly.

Minister of Energy Viset Choopiban said the campaign, already approved by the Cabinet, is aimed at saving 15 billion baht a year by cutting annual energy consumption by 10%. People nationwide will be asked to drive below 90kmh, turn off air conditioners from 12 am to 1 pm and to switch off one light at home after 8:30 pm.

Operators of billboards will be asked to turn off the lights illuminating their hoardings after 8:45 pm, the minister added.

The Cabinet has already instructed all public offices and state enterprises to immediately reduce their energy consumption by 10-15%, and an Energy Ministry committee will randomly check to see that they are following the order, he added.

Plea for justice: On the 13th anniversary of the 1992 Black May incident, the mother of one victim pleaded with authorities to disclose the fate of her son, who disappeared during the pro-democracy protest.

"I am an old woman and I want to perform a funeral for my son before I die," said Sangwan Phomuang, 71.

K. Sangwan said she could not find closure because authorities had still not concluded their reports on what happened to the hundreds of people who disappeared after the protest.

What's my line? Civil rights groups have voiced their opposition to a police proposal that new security laws being drafted to replace martial law in the Deep South should allow authorities to tap into phone conversations without court permission.



PRESSURE COOKER: A police bomb-disposal expert checks a box left outside a travel agency in Pattani's Muang district after local residents alerted authorities to its presence.

The box was later found to contain an electric cooking pot.

idents in the Deep South last year – the raid on an army camp on January 4, the April 28 uprising and the Tak Bai tragedy – in a bid to gain a clear picture of the cause of the violence.

Mutant virus: Thailand is beefing up its pandemic preparedness in response to a World Health Organization (WHO) study that shows bird 'flu is becoming more capable of spreading between people.

The WHO report indicated that the deadly H5N1 avian 'flu virus had the potential to infect people and that a pandemic could be growing.

The Public Health Ministry plans to call in more than 800,000 village health volunteers from around the country in June to instruct them in how to educate their communities about the threat of an influenza pandemic.

Gothom Arya, Director of Mahidol University's Research for Peace-Building Center, said such a provision would definitely violate basic human rights.

Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam, who is in charge of drafting the new law, said he might include the proposal for police to tap phone lines, albeit with provisions for advance court permission.

"I've instructed officials to consider if we can include the suggestion of phone tapping, with court permission, as we have in the law governing the Department of Special Investigation," he said.

Buri Ram bonanza: Cabinet has approved a 340-million-baht budget to restore and develop Prasat Phanom Rung temple in Buri Ram as part of a 2.3-billion-baht development package for the northeastern province.

Culture Minister Uraivan Thienthong said the project is intended to ensure that the temple remains one of the world's pre-

mier heritage sites. Work will begin next year and take about 10 years to complete. It will include further digs to study the temple site, and the relocation of nearby communities.

Government Spokesman Chalermdej Jombunud said the rest of the budget would be spent on developing the province's water resources and tourism industry.

Death stick displays: Open racks of cigarettes at checkout counters across the country will have to come down on September 24, said Narong Sahamethapat, Deputy Director-General of the Disease Control Department (DCD).

The DCD views the displays as a form of advertising tobacco, which is prohibited in Thailand.

Aware of the ban's potential impact on large retailers, the authorities have given them four months to adjust, K. Narong said.

Other anti-smoking regulations in the works include tax in-

creases on cigarettes, extending the use of graphic labels to packets of cigars, and doing away with "light" and "mild" labels that could mislead smokers into thinking that those types of cigarettes would be less detrimental to their health.

Homegrown violence: The violence in the Deep South is apparently motivated by local grievances and there is no evidence of external involvement, claims a report by the International Crisis Group, a multinational organization committed to preventing and resolving deadly conflicts.

"But if this situation is left to fester, it could attract jihadists from outside Thailand," said project director Sidney Jones.

The report, entitled "Southern Thailand: Insurgency Not Jihad", examined three major in-

Dangerous daughter: Thaptim Yossorn, 34, was arrested in Nan Province's Phu Phiang District for trying to kill her mother, Banyen Mongkolwisut, 58, who had demanded her daughter repay 700,000 baht that had gone missing from her bank account.

Police said Thaptim attacked K. Banyen while they were driving through Phitsanulok Province to visit Thaptim's sister.

Thaptim allegedly pulled the car over and tried to strangle her mother with a nylon rope, then beat her head against the ground. Two men driving past stopped to help and insisted on taking the mother to hospital while Thaptim fled in her car.

Around the Nation news roundup is sourced from the pages of The Nation and Kom Chad Luek newspapers.

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Senator slams full moon parties

Negative comments made recently by a member of the Upper House following an inspection visit to a full moon party have prompted an angry response from officials on Koh Samui and Koh Pha-ngan.

Senator Rabiab Pongpanit complained that she saw batik Buddha images displayed next to bikinis on Samui, and that during the full moon party she witnessed foreigners eating magic mushrooms and having sex in public on the beach.

Several high-ranking local officials, including the Governor of Surat Thani, Vichit Vichaisarn, have criticized the senator's comments, and even suggested that she may have been mistaken in what she saw.

Gov Vichit stressed that security is now very tight at the full moon party, especially in terms of drug control, and that police rarely find anyone taking illegal substances at the event, which suggests that there are not many drugs available.

He invited other members of Parliament to visit the island and see for themselves, and added that careless criticism would not help the Surat Thani

authorities, whom he claims are working extremely hard to clean up the image of the full moon party.

Pornled Chokchai, the Chief of the Koh Pha-ngan District Office, was also angered by the comments, and said that not once in three years of inspections had he witnessed foreigners having sex on the beach.

He admitted that the senator may have seen couples hugging and kissing, which he says is quite normal behavior for foreigners. He added that even this is not encouraged in public, and officials often ask partygoers to refrain from too much "heavy petting" on the beach.

K. Pornled said his two priorities for Koh Pha-ngan are to make it drug-free and pollution-free, and that projects in both these areas are already proving very successful.

The head of the Koh Pha-ngan Tourism Association, Chanchod Piriyaasatit, echoed these assertions, and added how impressed he and his colleagues were by the level of official presence at the monthly full moon party.

Most tourists, he said, visit the island to relax surrounded by nature, not to take drugs and have sex, and he expressed concern that rumors would only encourage young Thai people to attend the party as spectators.

Despite strong denials, Koh Pha-ngan – during the full moon party in particular – continues to

FROM THE GULF OF THAILAND



By Commander Sammy Swan



OCEAN LOTION: Staff and owners of some 14 Samui dive shops took part in a clean-up operation as part of Dive Into Earth Week, on April 25. Photos of the clean-up were taken by Collin Parker, a dive instructor and videographer.

be thought of as a hotbed of debauchery. Some argue that such publicity is at least part of the reason for its lasting success.

Whatever the attitude of the government, economic concerns seem certain to guarantee that the party never ends.

Samui airport survey: Following the completion of a survey by researchers from Kasetsart University in Bangkok, a meeting was held recently on Samui to

assess again the prospects for a second airport. Around 50 people attended the meeting.

The survey found that a second airport was feasible, but that it should be built on land reclaimed from the sea, rather than on the current proposed site, which is an important agricultural area as well as one of the island's main water storage basins.

Project director Gasen Chankeaw said the three most

important questions to answer were: whether a second airport is necessary; where it should be built, and what impact would it have in terms of noise pollution?

Meanwhile, a former captain for Thai Airways, Anusorn Wuntwisudweht, claimed that the current proposed location was ideal, because it allowed access from four different directions.

He commented that a large segment of the tourism market was being lost because of the airport's limited capacity.

Some of those present, including Samui Spa Association President Wanwalee Thantikan, believe that, as a major destination, Koh Samui should have a public airport, but the meeting appeared to favor negotiation and reconciliation with the owner of the existing private airport.

To many people on the island, constructing a new airport when there is already a busy facility in place seems both extravagant and irresponsible.

Koh Tao ministerial visit: Somsak Thepsutin, the Minister of Tourism and Sport, recently paid a visit to Koh Tao to find out firsthand what local residents feel they need as the island grows into a major international destination.

Koh Tao has expanded considerably over the past two years, especially as a dive destination, but development is taking place without either controls or regulation.

A number of suggestions were given to the Minister, including ideas for improving transport services from the mainland, upgrading the supply of basic utilities such as water and electricity, and providing better medical services.

Cdr Sammy Swan is a writer for Samui's community magazine.

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This week



PREPPIN' FOR A PUNCH-UP: Phuket Senator Paiboon Upatising (3rd from left) and Phuket Provincial Administration President Anchalee Vanich-Thepabutr (hands crossed) were on hand to watch the Southern Thailand Muay Thai Championships on May 11 to raise money for Sawang Arrom Temple in Rawai. The event was organized by Raywat Areerob (4th from right) and held at the Phuket Muang School in Rawai.



TOP FLIGHT: Anuphas Group CEO Phummasak Hongsyok accepts a plaque from Phuket Governor Udomsak Usawarangkura to commemorate the Phuket Golf Association's naming of Phuket Country Club as the best course in the Andaman Region.



FISHY BUSINESS: Among fisheries experts leading the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) group's 18th Meeting of the Marine Resource Conservation Working Group (MRCWG) were Canadian Donna Petrachenko (black dress) and American Stetson Tinkham. The talks also included a joint session with Apec's Fisheries Working Group.



CLEAN CUISINE: Royal Paradise Hotel General Manager Dr Jirachai Amornpairoj (3rd from right) hosted a dinner for visiting Public Health Minister Dr Suchai Charoenratanakul (center), Phuket Provincial Health Office Dr Wanchai Sattayawutthipong and other local officials at the Royal Kitchen Chinese Restaurant on the 25th floor of the hotel.



SEA-CONDO: Phuket Marina Residence Managing Director Kavinvit Boonudomsum (left) was joined at Andavana Spa by Bob Andrews, Managing Director of Phuket LandSearch Co Ltd, and others in a press conference to announce the May 14 soft opening of the luxury condominium development on Koh Sireh.



SILKY PARTY: SilkAir, which has a daily service to Singapore, held its annual staff party for its Phuket office at Laguna Beach Resort. This year's theme was 'traditional Thai costumes'.

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In The Stars

by Isla Star

GEMINI (May 22-June 21): A person who you've always regarded as a platonic friend will reveal their true feelings to you this weekend. If you can't respond with mutual interest, be careful how you handle this potentially complicated situation. Ask a third party for advice; Sagittarius has had a recent similar experience. On Tuesday, you'll be singing in the rain when a monetary bonus boosts your dwindling bank balance. Wear red to encourage further financial improvement.

CANCER (June 22-July 23): The wheels of your social life will start to turn more smoothly this week. If you are dismayed over a fallout with a close friend last month, you are about to discover the real reason for what had happened. The only way to overcome obstacles blocking your path to career success is to run right over them; circumnavigating them will eventually result in bigger problems. The number 8 has special meaning on Wednesday.

LEO (July 24-August 22): Where close relationships are concerned, many Leos will be tempted to play with fire this week. If you ignore an instinct that is telling you to walk away with your pride intact, there will certainly be burnt fingers to tend to later this month. Keeping up with local news can open doors to new business possibilities that will involve doing little work for impressive financial gain. Wear the color indigo to make a serious impression.

VIRGO (August 23-September 23): A spider's web of intrigue is about to be woven around you. As May turns into June, you are advised to sharpen your wits and keep them that way. If you allow others to believe that the silk can easily be pulled over your eyes, they will do just that. Luckily, someone close has already got wind of the situation; listen to a well-intended warning from Libra.

LIBRA (September 24-October 23): Librans who are climbing the walls in wet weather frustration are advised to channel this negative energy into something more positive. Aries has been trying to run a reasonable proposition past you lately and is about to put it to someone who is prepared to listen. A passionate attraction can only lead to a short-lived relationship; if you're searching for something more meaningful, resist temptation. Number 3 holds the key on Wednesday.

SCORPIO (October 24-November 22): Minor health worries occupy your attention this week. Try not to blow these out of proportion; a visit to a recommended doctor will put your mind at ease. Single Scorpions have not been looking for true love in the right places. Expand your horizons to increase your chances of meeting a prospective partner. On Monday, take advice offered by Gemini with a generous pinch of salt; this is one get-rich-quick scheme that's certain to sink.

SAGITTARIUS (November 23-December 21): Your enthusiasm for life is compromised by partnership problems during the first week of June. If you have been economical with the truth you should lay all your cards on the table if you want to continue this relationship. Another source of interest is about to be revealed, which will probably conflict with your present commitment. The coming weeks are going to be a period of change for the better.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 20): There will be several knocks on your door with requests for help this week. Many Capricorns have acquired a reputation of having a heart of gold, but this could be easily exploited. If there's someone who you feel genuinely deserves assistance, it would still be best not to lend more than you can afford to lose. Romance is well-starred this weekend – your partner has a sensual surprise in store.

AQUARIUS (January 21-February 19): Romance is subject to unsettling cosmic disturbances during the first week of June. But even if parting is sweet sorrow, it doesn't mean that the break will be permanent. This is an auspicious time to take stock of what is really going on in your life and decide which areas could benefit from more of your attention. Grab work opportunities quickly and firmly – someone else is poised to sneak one from under your nose.

PISCES (February 20-March 20): Picky Pisceans may find that it's not the right season to be too choosy. There's some room for negotiation where a business contract is concerned, but it will be a tight squeeze. Leo has some free words of wisdom to offer this weekend that could cause you to wonder if expensive advice received earlier this year was really worth its weight in gold. The scent of lavender will help reduce stress levels.

ARIES (March 21-April 20): Arians who are pining for a special someone who has had to leave temporarily will be cheered up by a communique this week. It appears that absence really is making your heart grow fonder, and the feeling is being reciprocated. This could even mean that wedding bells will be ringing over your head before the end of the year. On Wednesday, Capricorn will try to run rings around you concerning a financial matter.

TAURUS (April 21-May 21): May should have proved to be a very positive time for Taureans. As long as you didn't dig your hooves too deeply in the sand concerning an irritating business situation, there are further benefits to be reaped during the first two weeks of June. If it's too wet to venture far out of doors this weekend, you should consider attending to overdue correspondence – it will encourage some interesting information to flow your way.

The Boa

How does someone born in Bangkok as a man and who holds a diploma in accounting end up designing flamboyant costumes for the Moulin Rose, one of Patong's leading ladyboy shows?

Pichet "Lek" Orapinpong is only happy to explain how.

The younger of two sons, K. Lek, now 37, graduated from Dusit Commercial College, Bangkok, with a diploma in accounting. She became a ladyboy while in Bangkok, and moved to Phuket seven years ago.

She said, "I came to Phuket because my friends invited me to come here. One suggested I get a job in a bar, and offer some kind of sexual service, but I wasn't prepared to do that. It's not my style.

"So I tried to find other work, perhaps involving the performing arts. I was offered a job at Andaman Queen Cabaret, which was what the Moulin Rose was called then.

"It was only just getting started, and I was the first person employed to look after the performers' costumes."

K. Lek had never worked with costumes before, but because she thought the job sounded interesting, she took it.

At first K. Lek's job was solely to make sure the outfits were in good repair, and to fetch and carry them for the performers.

However, her employers were so impressed with her ability and professionalism that they promoted her to costume manager.

Eventually, K. Lek was tempted to try designing costumes as well as caring for them. She said, "I had never studied costume design, but I have always loved to learn new things, and to learn more about things that I like.

"I don't know where my first ideas came from; all I know



is that I wanted to make dresses that suited the song, the choreography and the performer.

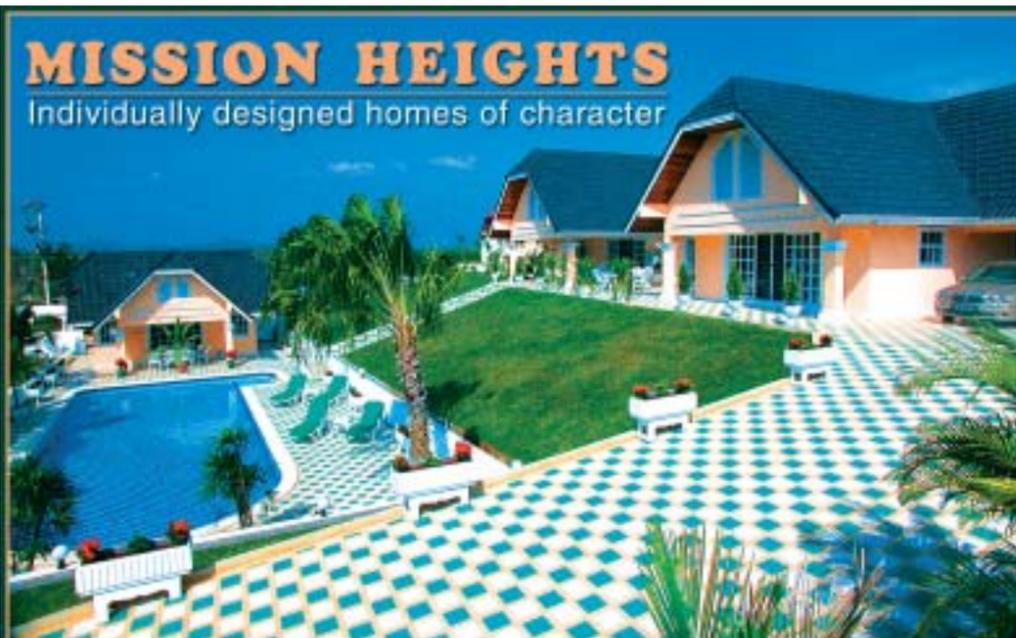
"I learned by doing, and I seemed to get good results. That made me feel very proud of myself."

Before the tsunami, Moulin Rose Cabaret had 30 performers. Now it has just 19, but as there are 13 routines per show, K. Lek still has many costumes to devise.

She bases her designs around the performers' personalities and the dance routines they will be following. Inspiration comes from a variety of sources.

"Sometimes I watch movies on TV, which give me ideas, although I don't do straight copies. I use them as a guide then create my own styles," she said.

"Our shows are rather sexy in style, so the costumes are sexy too, and fairly revealing."



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GIRL POWER! (left) Pichet "Lek" Orapinpong (in striped top) trained as an accountant. She retains a good head for figures – and the clothes to go around them.

FEMMES FATALE: (right) Performers at the Moulin Rose show off just a few of K. Lek's creative designs.



FEATHER IN HER CAP: (right) 'Our shows are rather sexy in style, so the costumes are sexy too, and fairly revealing,' says K. Lek.



The costumes K. Lek designs are made at a small tailor's shop in Patong, although K. Lek often finishes off the outfits by adding trimmings herself.

Sometimes she buys ready-made dresses from the market and customizes them by adding trimmings, such as leather.

She continued, "Feathers [also] look great on dresses – the more feathers, the better, but feathers cost 350 baht each, and our budget is quite limited.

"I have to find materials that fit in with our style, but which aren't prohibitively expensive."

The most expensive dress in the show cost 20,000 baht, but K. Lek is adept at re-trimming old costumes to give them a new look, so they can be reused in new routines.

Most of the fabrics and trimmings are bought locally, on the grounds of cost.

According to K. Lek, "Many people in the audience must think our dresses are very expensive, but with a little bit of imagination, I can make them look good, without spending too much money."

K. Lek has now become general manager of the cabaret, and choreographs shows and trains performers as well as designing the costumes.

Away from Moulin Rose, K. Lek has a boyfriend, a foreigner.

She said, "He is really supportive and he always tells me what a good job I have done if he enjoys the show. He knows how hard I have worked to get this far."

She continued, "My parents and my older brother, are sup-

portive, too, and understanding, and they don't try to persuade me to find another job."

If K. Lek ever decides she has had enough of the cabaret, she would like to own either a coffee shop or a clothes shop.

She said, "Even now I want to learn more about designing clothes and tailoring.

"I'm not very good at putting my ideas on paper, so I have to explain to the tailor what I want the costume to look like.

"Perhaps if I study more, I will be able to design even better costumes.

"But I wouldn't want to make only cabaret costumes, I would like to make clothes for day-to-day wear as well."

She continued, "Anyone, man, woman or ladyboy can succeed in a job – if they are interested in it.

"It's the same with designing costumes for ladyboys – you don't have to be a ladyboy yourself to do it well.

"You just have to be open-minded, and have faith in yourself, and your colleagues."

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Tops in the tropics



SOUND THE ALARM: A bevy of the beautiful contestants show that bright and light is the key to looking good on Phuket.

During the Miss Universe contestants' recent visit to Phuket, islanders had the opportunity to see first-hand what the world's most beautiful women choose to wear in the tropics, and the message was loud and clear — anything you like as long as it's cool, colorful and comfortable.

Here are a few pictures showing what the beauties donned as they went out and about during their stay.



Miss Hungary Szandra Proksa shows that pink can still look pretty.



BIKINI BOMBSHELLS: (from left) Miss Australia Michelle Guy, Miss Canada Natalie Globova and Miss Ethiopia Atetegeb Tefaye Worku are happy to wear matching bikinis on board Royal Phuket Marina developer Gulu Lalvani's motoryacht *Divia II* at the Phi Phi Islands.



Big dots and a big smile work for Miss Guatemala Aida Estrada.



Miss Croatia Jelena Glisic sports a hat in the midday sun.



A low-cut neckline with frills keeps Miss Norway Helene Traasavik smiling.

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Sticker fever continues unabated

PHUKET: Since its launch on May 7, the *Phuket Gazette's* "We Love Phuket" sticker campaign continues to yield surprises.

Originally budgeted for 8,000 stickers, the project has now printed and placed 14,000.

Conceived primarily to raise spirits, the sticker campaign is now also raising money. Unexpected demand from abroad, where the item is priced at 50 baht (plus postage and handling), is currently producing 50-60 orders a day.

The *Gazette* is donating 80% of the proceeds of these sales to charities monitored and approved by the newspaper.

The response from the market of many millions of former visitors to Phuket, from places as far flung as Milan, Mindanao, Santa Barbara, Sydney and St Tropez, confirms not only fond memories of Thailand but also a desire to actively spread the word.

The third surprise in the campaign has been the response from Phuket businesses.

Hotels, many of which now hand the stickers to guests as they check-out, as well as airlines, restaurants, golf courses and other businesses on the island have thus far donated prizes valued at more than 240,000 baht.

The prizes, known as Rak Mak! (Love A Lot!) Awards, are distributed weekly to owners of vehicles identified at random by *Gazette* staff as displaying the sticker.

The winning vehicle numbers are announced on the front page of every edition of the *Gazette*.

Stickers are available from the *Gazette* office for local residents, while those wishing to show their support for Phuket from overseas may order the stickers online at www.phuketgazette.net/welovephuket.asp.



LOVE PATROL: Above, Pol Maj Bundit Khaosutham (left), Inspector of Phuket Tourist Police, and Pol Sgt Maj Wichai Pheawpanchoo show their love for Phuket by putting the "We Love Phuket" sticker on all the Tourist Police patrol cars.

LOVE IS A BEAUTIFUL THING: Right, Miss Ecuador Ximena Zamora (left) and Miss El Salvador Irma Dimas show their Love Phuket.



Local businesses interested in supporting the campaign through donation of prizes are invited to contact Khun Pam at Email: LovePhuket@PhuketGazette.Net or by calling Tel: 076-236555.



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GLOSTER
MADE FOR LIFE

Happily taking the bliss

You don't become one of the world's leading hotel brands without knowing your stuff, so I was interested to find out how that knowledge had been applied to the new spa at the Hilton Phuket Arcadia Resort at Karon Beach.

Developed at a cost of 60 million baht, or around US\$1.5 million, this has to be one of the most – if not the most – expensive spas on the island.

I was expecting something out of the ordinary, and something extraordinary was certainly what I got as I arrived – a peacock crossed my path as I walked to the reception.

The spa was “conceptualized” by Hilton International’s Director of Spa Development – Asia, Simon Littlewood, as a “village” of 15 villas set in its own garden within the resort’s grounds.

By my reckoning, after deducting the cost of the reception area, boutique, beauty salon and juice bar, the average cost of each villa is just under US\$100,000 – more than a “real” house in many parts of the world.

And it shows. From the imported-from-France L’Occitane beauty products on sale in the boutique to the sturdy toilet doors, to the innovative menu of “spa cuisine” and drinks offered at the juice bar, the spa simply exudes quality.

The spa treatment menu could almost be interchanged with the spa cuisine menu, rich as it is with honey, sesame, coconut, mint, lemongrass, cucumber, milk and other edibles.

The similarity ends, however, with the “facials”, which include Rene Guinot’s highly regarded Hydradermie.

“The menu is a blend of Thai therapeutic ingredients and Western technology,” said Spa Manager Siripen Amornsirichutipon.

K. Siripen heads a team of 15 therapists, some of whom

worked at the previous spa at the Arcadia before the hotel was rebranded and taken over by Hilton last year.

All staff received additional training from a Bangkok-based spa consultancy before moving to the new spa.

My therapist for the afternoon was K. Waree, and my temporary “home” was the spa’s most luxurious villa, which is aimed at couples and has a cruciform marble Jacuzzi and a pair of rainwater showers in its own private garden. It also features two treatment beds in the air-conditioned interior, as well as an indoor shower, WC and

steam room.

After I had showered and had a spell in the lemongrass-scented sauna, K. Waree gave me The Spa’s signature treatment, “Equilibrium Therapy”.

This combines massage with specially-created wild mint oil and the application of a *luk pra kob* Thai herbal poultice. It lasted for around an hour, which was probably a lifetime too short. I could have stayed there forever.

But I couldn’t, and, after a cup of zingy ginger tea, it was time for my Tropical Fruit Facial.

In its raw form, this looked more like dips for crudites than a beauty treatment: bowls of mashed papaya, puréed banana, brown sugar, pulped cucumber and yoghurt, to exfoliate, soothe and nourish my skin.

“Putting back a little of what life takes out,” is – according to the publicity material – the aim of the spa.

Mission accomplished.

Equilibrium Therapy: 2,300 baht; Tropical Fruit Facial: 1,600 baht; herbal steam: 450 baht, plus 10% service charge and tax.

The Spa at the Hilton Phuket Arcadia Resort & Spa, 333 Patak Rd, Karon Beach, Tel: 076-396433, website: www.hilton.com, email: spa.phuket@hilton.com



ROOM FOR ONE MORE? The only thing better than sampling the delights of the cruciform Jacuzzi alone is enjoying it with a friend. Well, it does save water...

WELL BALANCED: A combination of wild mint oil and a *luk pra kob* poultice makes up The Spa’s signature treatment – Equilibrium Therapy.



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Do Not Drink Tap Water!

After DARK
by Sam Wilkinson

Yoonique jamming

Once upon a time there was a fairy tale location, agreeably off the beaten track, where would-be Jimis, Jims and Van Morrisons would gather to act out their musical fantasies.

The alfresco (mostly al caldo) bar was a rough diamond, featuring old fashioned outdoor *pissoirs* that brought ammonia-induced tears to punters' eyes, mosquitoes the size of a single-engine Cessna and grisly hamburgers that could wilt a vegetarian at 20 paces.

It was cheap, tacky and – best of all – it was the musical heartbeat of southern Phuket.

One could sometimes catch flashes of passing brilliance from artists traveling through and local improvisators, often on their way to or from a hotel gig. Sometimes the music was worse than dreadful, driving drinkers away with ringing ears, swearing never to go back, but they usually did.

After all, where else could they go for live music at the southern end of the island?

That location today has realized its commercial potential with high-grade accommodation, a swimming pool, a canny chef as well as Sunday afternoon jazz sessions. So where has the rough and tumble stuff gone to? Where can you get a good jam for very little bread? Where's the coolest live music bar in the south of the island?

It's at Yoonique, an eclectic place just behind the Reggae Bar by Nai Harn's lake/temporary disaster area. Here, you can catch live rock, reggae, soul, blues, folk, Thai "songs for life" and just about anything else except Gregorian chant.

The setup is similar to the southern funsters' old haunt, except for one important thing: it's a lot quieter, because the live music is usually performed indoors.

Unusual portraits vie for

QUALITY KARAOKE: Yoonique's open 'mike' policy ensures a lively variety of acts, but without the 'frog squawk' crowd making a show of it.



wall space with modern art works. Antiques and curios are casually strewn around, and there are piles of interesting books to borrow. John Lennon and Jimi Hendrix gaze down onto a drum kit and ready-to-use amps and guitars. A red sofa arrangement sits to the right of the stage and several pine tables and benches stand outside in a tropical garden setting.

There's a marked mobile theme to Yoonique's décor, which features scooters such as a Vespa, an MZ, a Supercup, an old Honda and a glorious Lambretta. One could easily imagine Ornella Muti and Giancarlo Giannini propping up the bar in lightweight cotton suits sipping espressos, except for the sad fact that they've both moved on to the big cinema in the sky. There's even an ancient Mercedes-Benz parked in the field outside that doubles as a kids' playground.

The clientèle, appropriately, is from all walks of life, nationalities, ages and frames of

mind. The fact that people from Surin, Patong and Kata regularly make the trip south for Yoonique's Tuesday evening jams and Friday Mexican food speaks for itself. Yoon and Shannon Bunna, a young Thai-Canadian couple have succeeded in

putting the "oo" back into cool while their competitors struggle to keep the "er" in beer. They run a successfully smooth operation and still stay musician-friendly.

The music? Check out Spacey Steve's interpretations of

artists like JJ Cale and Oasis, or "Shorty" Jamie's version of *Psycho Killer*, or Marty's wonderful Joni Mitchell repertoire. It all adds up to Yoonique's happy, ego-free way.

Local bands use the venue as a home away from home, rehearsing there while enjoying a few beers. There are theme nights, open birthday parties, Mardi Gras to Halloween to Christmas celebrations, and more often than not a party gets started at Yoonique at the drop of a hat.

If you're into tattooed brazen ladies of the night and televised sports, don't bother with Yoonique – it'll likely bore you stiff. But if your idea of a good night out is to meet friendly people in a relaxed atmosphere with food and drinks at reasonable prices, check this place out – but don't forget to take your guitar and to wear flowers in your hair.

Yoonique: 14/61-62 Wiset Rd, Nai Harn. Tel. 06-6836362. Email: bluephoenixdesign@hotmail.com



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The truth, pur-lease!

To put it lightly, it's hard to get straight information about Phuket on the Internet.

Take the example of simple financial transactions on the island. One site states, "Fixed prices are the norm in department stores, but at other places (hospitals, bars, police stations for example?) bargaining is acceptable and expected".

Again, 1stopchiangmai.com gives some hot tips on bargaining such as, "Your opening gambit should always be in Thai. This way they will take you for a local expat (God forbid)."

But then, according to the site, a typical Thai store owner will ignore the canny tourist's three-month intensive Thai course and reply in pretty good English – well, good by Phuket standards, anyway.

"This one is good quality, sure. I buy from factory 150 baht. In Bangkok it's more expensive, maybe 300 baht."

Strangely enough, in order to obtain goods for a premium price you are then recommended to employ pidgin English. "300 baht? Where?"

"Maybe you buy 300 baht in Phuket. Tourist in Phuket he have too much money."

Transaction concluded.

OUTSIDE IN By Lis Kinswoman

Throbbing and whining. The website goasia.about.com cheerily informs us that "Patong's nightclubs are throbbing with the beat of disco again." Well, we're happy to hear that.

Reuters claims that "The annoying whine of jet-skis is no longer heard." If only.

Meanwhile, trv.net boldly states, "When Bangkok goes to sleep Patong really begins to rock."

Yeah, sure. At the 7-Eleven?

Patong polemics. Just when will anyone out there say something nice about Patong? On thortree.lonelyplanet.com a young lady belches out the following invective about the resort town.

"What a disgusting, tasteless, highly commercialized, tacky sh*tpit. Full of tattooed gorillas on 'roids. I've only met one [Thai] there who actually comes from Phuket."

Another contributor to the site at least tries to balance the situation: "Although the island

itself must be nice this spot is horrible! Fat dumb white guys with Thai girls."

At the other end of the gender question, a girlsofpatong.com reassures the insecure male visitor that "if you want a vacation where you are treated like Elvis, Patong will be your next booking for sure."

A load of old rubbish. In my desperation to find a truly no-holds barred positive statement about Phuket's nightlife center, I cheated and went to a Thai site www.beachpatong.com, but even there things looked a tad rough.

"The official permanent population (of Patong) is 14,797 persons but the real number is probably as high as 60,000, estimated from the garbage."

More confusion. A classic Net FAQ is, "When is the best time to visit Phuket?"

The Lonely Planet states authoritatively "The best time to visit Phuket is from January to May" whereas a sister website informs us that "The best overall time for visiting Phuket is between November and February."

However, bbc.com glibly cites "...December and August" as the peak tourist visiting times.

What the hell, anytime's the right time if you want to be treated like Elvis.

A lame imitation of a comic gem

In recent weeks I've gone through a hefty 900-word history of colonialism in Africa, some vintage early Evelyn Waugh and three pricelessly funny novels by PG Wodehouse, a new discovery for me. But since Wodehouse died 30 years ago, his books hardly call for a newspaper review.

Then I made the serendipitous discovery of *Wake up, Sir!* (Scribner, New York, 2004, 334pp) by American novelist Jonathan Ames.

This purports to resurrect the character Jeeves, the valet to Bertie Wooster.

Jeeves, fond of quoting Latin poets and Shakespeare, invariably saves the day for his master Bertie Wooster, the upper class twit who attended Eton and Oxford but is an incurable dim bulb.

In *Wake up, Sir!*, Jeeves becomes an imaginary playmate to the narrator, young novelist Alan Blair – like Calvin's Hobbes.

While the new Jeeves does a passable imitation of the old – impeccably formal diction always accompanied by "Sir" – the novel fails badly with the substitution of Alan Blair for Bertie Wooster, who may have been a feckless protagonist but a keen narrator. His running jokes just got funnier each time they came around.

A novel about a novelist is always a risky proposition, and more so in this one since Alan Blair just isn't very interesting. Tedious and self-obsessed, he is trying to be funny but isn't.

Like Jonathan Ames, who received praise from Philip Roth and Joyce Carol Oates for his first novel, *I Pass Like Night*, Alan Blair published a precocious first novel, *I Pity I*.

Ames followed his novel with *The Extra Man*, about an elderly Manhattan sophisticate paid to go on dates with wealthy women. Blair is in the throes of writing an identical novel called *The Walker*.

After treatment for alcoholism, he is living with an uncle and aunt in a New Jersey suburb.

When they discover that he has relapsed with a couple bottles of wine each night, they throw him out.

Thus begins a five-day journey, first to Sharon Springs in upstate New York, where he gets drunk in a bar and winds up with a broken nose and two black eyes, then to the Rose Colony in Saratoga Springs, a refuge for novelists, poets, painters and sculptors.

There are times when the loopy humor of Bertie Wooster leaks out and here is one of them, as the woman admitting him to the Rose Colony inspects his battered face and asks if he's seen a doctor:

"I didn't go to a doctor, but I'm fine. The nose is swollen and pushed a little to the right, but it's nothing drastic."

"I could stand to be more on the right. I tend to be too liberal in my policies, though I'm not against prayer in schools, which I think would help with test scores."

Then his reflections on vice:

"That's always the lure, though, this time it will be better, different, which seems to be the hook with most vices."

"Gambling, sex, alcohol, drugs, Chinese food – you always give these things a second chance or a hundredth chance, but something healthy, like kayaking, if you don't go for it the first time, you never try again."

Blair gets drunk every night, and stoned on marijuana to boot, and manages to bed a beautiful sculptress. There is no plot to speak of.

Wodehouse's plots varied little from book to book but at the end each contentious issue was satisfactorily wrapped to a conclusion, thanks to the brilliant intervention of Jeeves.

Jeeves plays no part in the resolution of *Wake Up, Sir!*, which simply shambles to a highly improbable conclusion. To anyone familiar with the real thing, this novel is a lame travesty.



Off the SHELF

By James Eckardt



TAT intervenes in jewelry fraud

Phuket Gazette
May 1995

PHUKET: Euamporn Jirakanwisai, Assistant Manager of the Southern Thailand Region, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), disclosed last month that the TAT had received a complaint from Hong Kong tourists Mr and Mrs Wi-Seen Yuen, who had bought jewelry in Phuket, only to discover later that its value was far less

than they had been led to believe.

The Yuens were on holiday in Phuket and were approached by a tout from Bangkok who enticed them, with the promise of bargain-price jewelry, into a Patong gem shop. There, they spent 162,000 baht, of which 122,000 was for gems and 40,000 for gold.

Later, in Singapore, they had their purchases professionally assessed and discovered that they had been "severely ripped

off". They returned to Phuket and, with the help of the TAT, descended on the offending shop and demanded full repayment of their money. Despite attempts by the shop to retain 30% – for handling charges – the Yuens were finally successful in obtaining a full refund.

Helicopter dash fails to save heart failure woman

Phuket Gazette
May 15-31, 2000

MAITHON ISLAND: The Police Aviation Division's helicopter flew to Maithon Island on April 28 in an unsuccessful bid to save the life of a woman who had had a heart attack.

Duangjai Kullawanich, 50, and her husband, Dr Suppachai Kullawanich, a top heart specialist from Ramathibodi Hospital in Bangkok, were walking on the beach in front of the resort when her heart failed.

About 50 heart doctors were on the island at the time, on a break from a seminar they were attending on Phuket.

Attempts by some of the doctors to restart K. Duangjai's heart were unsuccessful and the helicopter was then called. She was pronounced dead an hour after arriving at Wachira Phuket Hospital.

THE TIME machine

News from the past

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Wordly wise

"Democracy is a device that ensures we shall be governed no better than we deserve."

– George Bernard Shaw. Irish dramatist, Nobel Laureate and democratic socialist (1856-1950).

KIDS

THE FUN PAGE FOR ALL THE FAMILY

Spot the Difference



Can you find the seven differences between the two cartoons below? And can you find them faster than the rest of the family?



Brain Buster!!

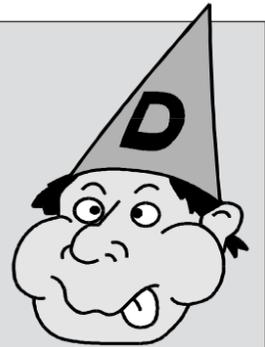
A bridge is four kilometers long and strong enough to hold 10,000 kilograms, but no more. A loaded truck weighing exactly 10,000kg drives onto the bridge. At the halfway point, a sparrow weighing 30 grams lands on the truck, yet the bridge doesn't collapse. Why?

Answer: The truck would have burned off more than 30 grams of fuel in the first two kilometers of crossing the bridge. Therefore the sparrow's weight would have had no effect.

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S MONSTER QUIZ

1. The garibaldi; 2. Peek Frean in 1861; 3. The adjutant stork; 4. The branch of forestry dealing with the development and care of forests; 5. A donut-shaped structure; 6. Tokamak; 7. The Men's Choir Shouters; 8. Amelia Earhart; 9. The Channel Islands; 10. Kisumu; 11. Nyanza; 12. Helios; 13. The Northern Lights and the Southern Lights; 14. The Barents Sea; 15. Edward Fitzgerald; 16. Eldrick; 17. The Masters in 1997; 18. Mel Tormé; 19. Where Eagles Dare; 20. Canillejas-Casa de Campo with 30 stations.

Get your brain in gear with The Monster Quiz



1. The book *Skellig* was written by whom?
2. Which famed regiment is sometimes called *Les Képis Blancs*?
3. What is the Norwegian national costume called?
4. Which legendary WWII operation took place May 17, 1943?
5. Who designed Colossus, the first programmable digital electronic digital computer?
6. David St Hubbins, Nigel Tufnel and Derek Smalls formed which rock group?
7. What was the name of their 1992 album?
8. *Russefeiring* is celebrated by whom?
9. Who created the comic-book character Astérix, and when?
10. What, in the French version, is the name of his Druid friend?
11. Adrian, Brodie and *Stahlhelm* are all types of what?
12. Who was the first female member of the fictional Justice Society of America (JSA)?
13. What was her first job in the JSA?
14. Deviation from an intended course due to rotation about the vertical axis of a craft is called what?
15. The Social Ground Coffee Lounge company operates in which country?
16. Darling, Herzog and Higgs are thoroughfares in which metropolis?
17. Which landmark edifice in New York opened May 28, 1930?
18. Lexus vehicles are produced by which auto manufacturer?
19. Which chemical element has the symbol Ds and the atomic number 110?
20. Noctilucent clouds generally occur when and between which latitudes?

Answers next week.

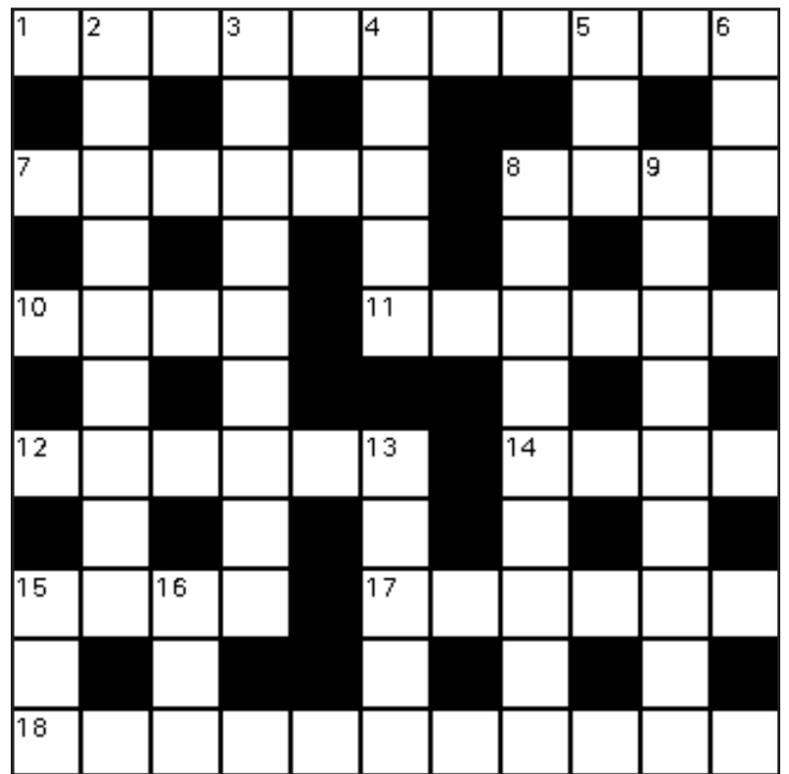
Never a Cross Word!

ACROSS

1. Could it be turned into a sword?
7. Assassination.
8. Bird's home.
10. Software should be friendly to him.
11. Seed used in cooking.
12. He was beaten by William at Hastings.
14. Very important people.
15. Desire.
17. In wrestling, can be full or half.
18. Device for measuring temperature.

DOWN

2. State between Texas and Mississippi.
3. The first layer of paint, usually.
4. Buffalo's defenses.
5. Mr Lincoln.
6. Consume.
8. Hometown of C&W.
9. Signalling with flags.
13. Aussie dog.
15. Not dry.
16. Opposite SSW.



SOLUTION TO LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD



Solution next week.

Pickup truck up in Pattaya

Under normal circumstances a newspaper item concerned with the machinations of Pattaya City Hall would elicit about as much interest from me as watching a nil-nil draw in a soccer match. Yet, an item in the *Pattaya Today* caught my eye.

The article noted how the elected representatives had rejected a request by the Department of Hole Digging and Shovel Leaning for money to buy more vehicles. The reason for the refusal to release funds was based on the knowledge that, according to the books, there were sufficient vehicles to spread around the number of employees.

The crunch came in the next line when it was stated more than 100 pickup trucks had gone missing in the past couple of years. That just begged the question: How do you just lose over 100 pickups?

Think about it. K. Chittfurbrains turns up at the depot bright and early on Monday morning and is told to go and take pickup No 303 and travel down to the intersection of Third Road and North Pattaya Road and "look busy".

Off he goes in a cloud of diesel fumes, returning to the depot some eight hours and six plates of *som tam* later ... on foot. You would think that somebody in the depot, even if it was only the cleaner, might notice that K. Chittfurbrains was missing something?

OK, let's assume no one noticed. Next day, K. Watchmepull-rabbitoutofmyhat turns up at the depot and he is told to jump in the nearest pickup and drive off into the traffic maelstrom of Pattaya and "do something". Eight hours, five plates of

som tam and three cans of Chang beer later he returns to the depot on foot.

Does anyone seriously expect the ratepayers of Pattaya City to believe that no one noticed that he had forgotten to return a rather large item to its appropriate place?

Did no one ask him where it was? It does make me wonder about our overall security.

If City Hall can't figure out what's happened to 100 pickups,

imagine the surprise they'd get if terrorists attached a few kilos of gelignite to an ornamental fountain and blew the thing into its next incarnation.

The minutes of the next council meeting might contain a couple of entries – tainted with a hint of incredulity – such as: "Any ideas about what happened to the Dolphin Roundabout? Oh, and by the way, we seem to have mislaid a couple more pickups."

Of course, there is the chance aliens have become so bored with snatching half the population of the Mid-Western states of the US and performing experiments on the victims that they've taken to beaming up pickups from Pattaya.

It's probably more fun and a sad commentary on the average brain capacity of a farmer from Incest, Illinois, that a Thai pickup – sans driver – might prove of greater scientific value and possibly possess a greater frontal-lobe capacity.

I can tell that you're thinking, "Well, that's just typical of the Thais." Perhaps, but it is a quality shared by others, too.

A report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper noted that the Australian Department of Defence (DoD) couldn't account for the exact whereabouts of AUD\$500 million – yes, a number with more zeros than a WWII Japanese aircraft carrier – of hardware.

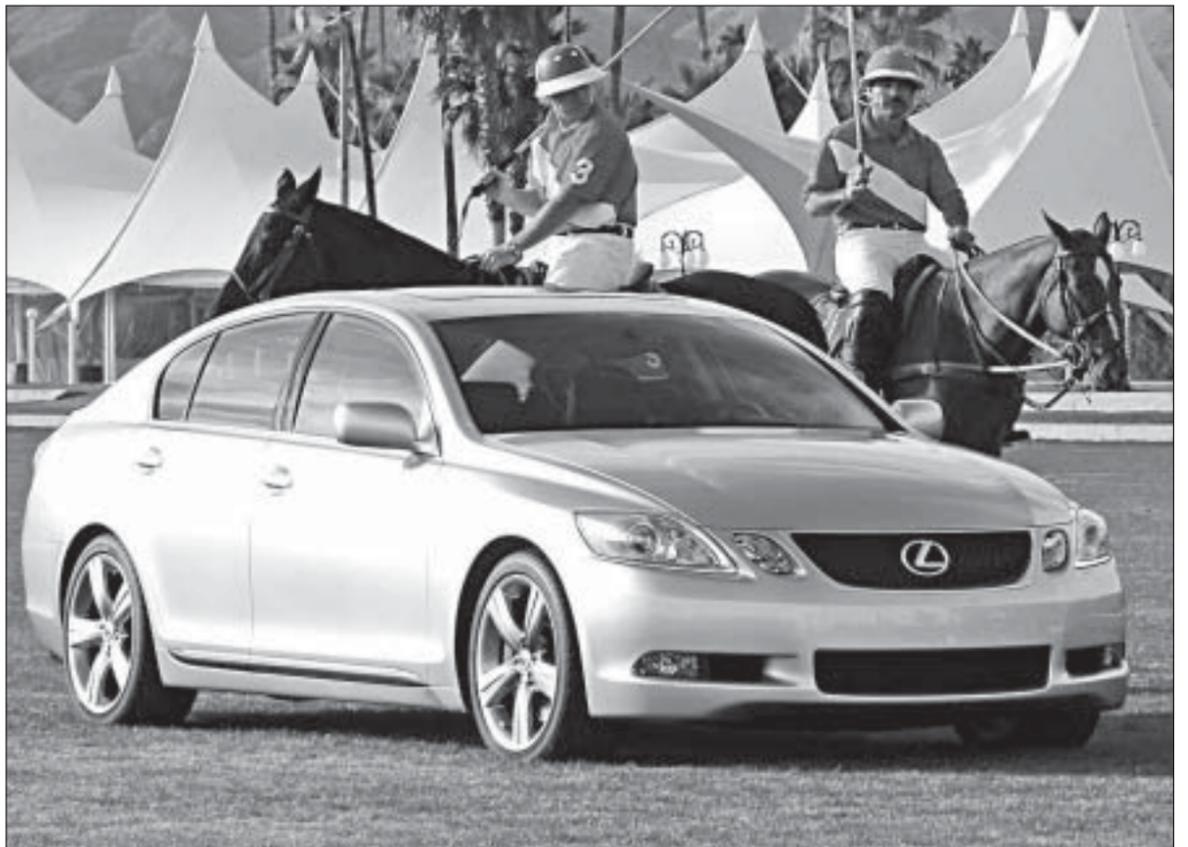
The DoD commented that there is no evidence to suggest anything is missing, but then again they can't really be sure.

It was admitted in a report that the DoD's financial management practices were not all they should be. They couldn't be certain where items such as aircraft engines might be at any given time, although they were sure no "crucial" items were missing.

It's comforting to know that we are not likely to see an Australian armored vehicle plying the streets of Pattaya with K. Watchmepull-rabbitoutofmyhat at the wheel, in place of his mislaid pickup nor K. Chittfurbrains sailing about Pattaya Bay on his day off in a guided-missile destroyer.



The Lexus



The Lexus brand has been around for 16 years but it is only now that third-generation models are coming into their own and proving just what masterpieces of engineering these cars really are.

Strangely, Lexus does not introduce new models on a regular basis, perhaps demonstrating the strength of the brand. It has

become ultra-successful – particularly in the US, where it is market leader in its sector – almost despite itself.

To maintain this position, Lexus has recently introduced the new GS430, a revised four-door sports sedan of the previous GS300 and GS430 models.

The original GS series was launched in 1993 but it did not

receive the same kind of critical acclaim as the LS400, despite carrying much of the same hardware.

In 2000, the model was upgraded and a 4.3-liter V8 was made available, to complement the existing 3-liter V6.

The 2005 GS430 is shortly to go on sale in Europe, sporting a revised 300bhp (220kW), 32-

Aye, there's the rub...

Thai massage. The very words evoke a range of images as diverse as the desires of those who aspire to get one: from the enticing and exposed back of the beautiful *farang* lady, flower in her hair, undergoing "aroma-therapy treatment" at an over-priced hotel spa all the way down – literally in some cases – to the smelly old man getting a down-and-dirty hand job or oral equivalent in a smoke-filled rabbit warren along a seedy soi.

But between these two black-and-white extremes lie the shades of gray that make up the rich tapestry that is Thai massage. But just how does one approach a topic so vast – and so inscrutable – to most foreigners?

No person, apart from a human sponge with unlimited free time and financial resources, could possibly hope to review every massage service offered in Phuket.

So, rising to the challenge,

Stool Pigeon has chosen to ignore the overpriced and/or excessively immoral elements of the local massage industry – at least for the purposes of this review – and narrow his field of reference to a precise geographical entity, Phuket City.

But even in this limited realm there seems to be a new establishment offering some sort of massage services popping up every day – and just about everywhere you look: beauty parlors, fire-trap shopping arcades, nondescript shophouses, and as adjuncts to restaurants with low turnovers ... the list goes on.

Phuket is becoming to massage what Nevada is to gambling. In Nevada, you can't even pull into a highway gas station without being confronted by a row of slot machines.

And if you think getting a massage – perhaps with a lube job thrown in – at the local Shell station sounds rather far-fetched, guess again. It's already here.

1. **Madam Massage** (Phuket Merlin Hotel, 158/1 Yaowarat Rd, at the intersection with Thungka Rd, open daily 10 am to 10 pm, Tel: 076-212866)

The *Pattaya Mail* recently reported that the Department for the Development of Thai and Alternative Medicine – the same people who last year were encouraging us to drink our own urine – has now opened its 17th "motorist massage" venue, this one at a Bangchak filling station in Sing Buri. But now I am really starting to digress ...

Stool Pigeon has already been to about 20 different places in the city, yet feels he has only just begun to scratch the surface of this dynamic, ever-expanding domain.

As a result, this review doesn't claim to be comprehensive, nor completely up to date.

But for what it's worth, here is Stool Pigeon's guide to the top three places offering traditional Thai massage in Phuket City at reasonable rates – 120 baht an hour or less.

Let's give them a hand, as for sure they've given many of us one or two in the past.

Stool Pigeon



nexus

valve V8, or a new direct-injection V6.

Both engines are mated to an all new, close-ratio, six-speed automatic transmission, complete with steering wheel-mounted sequential manual shift.

A number of other innovative features are part of the comprehensive equipment list in the GS, including variable damper settings: normal mode for everyday comfort or sports mode for improved handling.

A new, variable-assistance electric power-steering system is fitted, while there is a sonar sensor that detects obstacles in front of the car and activates a pre-crash safety system that will automatically optimize seat belt and emergency braking efficiency.

By comparing the information received from the radar with the speed of the vehicle, the steering angle and the yaw rate, the system takes up any excess slack in the front seat belts and activates the brake assist to aid emergency braking.

Other safety features include vehicle stability control – now able to detect the onset of a skid and automatically correct it

– traction control, water-repellent glass for the front doors and the usual side-impact door beams and deformable front and rear structures.

Adaptive headlamps are fitted, which move according to the steering angle, an innovation pioneered by BMW and fellow Teuton Mercedes-Benz.

As with all previous and current Lexus models, there is a superb, concert-hall reproduction audio system fitted as standard, complete with multiple speakers and an dashboard-mounted, six-disc CD player.

When the first Lexus hit the streets in 1989 it was the sound system that received the most compliments and Toyota should be congratulated for continuing this high-quality audio in its luxury brand.

Similarly, the quality of the wood trim cannot be bettered. Using the same walnut veneer as Yamaha pianos, the GS430 is superb throughout, including the walnut-and leather-trimmed steering wheel.



By Jeff Heselwood



FAR LEFT: A true thoroughbred, the new Lexus GS430 is built upon the bloodline of its previous incarnation to produce a vehicle that should see its dominance in the North American luxury car sector continue. It even has a sonar safety system.

The steering wheel itself is fully adjustable for both rake and reach, and incorporates a tilt-away mechanism when the driver's door is opened.

Standard on the GS430 but optional on the GS300 is a feature a memory that adjusts the driver's seat, exterior mirrors and steering wheel position.

Other nice touches include automatic headlamps, a dual-zone automatic climate-control system with a smog sensor and automatic recirculation mode – useful in Bangkok traffic jams – and a universal transceiver that will operate electric gates, garage doors or home security systems.

This is the best Lexus yet and should stem the tide of European imports that threaten Toyota's supremacy in North America.

Despite the excellent BMW 5-series and the success of the E-Class Mercedes-Benz in many countries, including its near-dominance of the market throughout Southeast Asia, the new GS430 is certainly worth a closer look.

Jeff Heselwood may be contacted by email at: jhc@netnavigator.com



TOP: A dual-zone automatic climate control with a smog sensor and a recirculation mode should mean that even a drive through Asia's polluted city centers will be like a drive in the countryside.

INSET: With an audio system the envy of a concert hall and acres of walnut and leather, the GS 430 cossets you from the moment you get in.

A guide to Phuket City massage parlors



Phuket's oldest massage parlor, Fairy Barber & Thai Massage, opposite the Thavorn Grand Plaza Hotel, has been laying on hands for almost 20 years.

Here you can get two hours of relaxing, traditional Thai massage for 120 baht per hour. They have 30 massage beds and all of the masseuses are professionally trained – most with years of hands-on experience. It's also the only massage joint in the city I am aware of that actually enforces the no-smoking ban that supposedly applies to all air-conditioned, public venues – and you can smell the difference.

Like most hotel massage places, the beds are divided by partitions that can be opened or closed to cater to group or private massage, but unlike most other places set up this way, it doesn't result in the massagee being blasted by cold air conditioning, loud music, or both.

The entire operation is calm and relaxing; they have nice, clean bathrooms with a sauna (80 baht/hour), along with complimentary

hot towels and herbal tea. Unlike many of the 20 or so places I visited, sheets here are changed promptly after every guest.

This is an important consideration for Stool Pigeon, who has caught the cooties in less well-run establishments.

Regular clients here tend to be local businessmen with the odd expatriate thrown in. The girls do the full two hours and keep the mobile phone chatter to a minimum.

The only thing Madam Massage is missing is marketing. There isn't even a sign on Yao-warat Rd in front of the hotel alerting passers-by to its existence. Stool Pigeon passed by this place for years, on the way to dingier venues, not even aware of its existence.

2. Rome Place Hotel (23/8 Phuket Rd, Tel: 076-213425)

Likely the biggest massage venue in Phuket City, the traditional Thai massage section here comprises the entire second floor of the hotel, with 24 massage rooms and three massage beds in each – 76 beds altogether.

Officially it's open from midday to 2 am daily. The best

time to turn up is at 8 pm when they have the evening shift change and the display cabinet-goldfish bowl is full.

The girls tend to be cuter and younger than at other venues in this price range, but they do get a good deal of in-house training and most are capable of giving a competent massage. Expect fairly frequent mobile phone interruptions, however.

Rates are 120 baht an hour, minimum two hours. Herbal tea complimentary. (Note: this review only encompasses what goes on at the second floor; wander up two more floors and you're on your own.)

3. Manohra Hotel (17/4 Kom-arapaj Rd, Tel: 076-219842)

A bit dingy and subject to high turnover among staff, but with a core of highly-competent masseuses. The rate here is a reasonable 100 baht and hour, with VIP rooms (hotel rooms with king-sized beds and firm mattress, and TV) charge at an additional 100 baht an hour.

Brickbats to The Metropole hotel, which although it has a large massage facility, chooses to employ a double-pricing policy of

120 baht an hour for Thais and 220 baht for foreigners. They priced themselves out of this review.

Finding a good masseuse is largely a matter of chance, and – like playing the lottery – it all comes down to choosing the right number.

Phuket Gazette
- Since 1994 -

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Dengue fever threat must be countered

The recent announcement that Dulwich College in London has severed its ties with Phuket's Dulwich International College is only the latest in a string of setbacks for the island in the past six months starting, of course, with the tsunami.

Despite the efforts of the tourism industry and the government to lure back visitors, there can be little doubt that the next six months will give new meaning to the term "low-season".

Already there has been a sharp drop in bookings from important sources of low-season tourists such as Taiwan, where ancient Chinese beliefs deter people from traveling to areas where many have died.

While there is little that most island residents can do to prevent events such as tsunamis, rising oil prices and the re-branding of private schools, the island is faced with another threat that each and every one of us can and should take steps to combat. That threat is dengue fever.

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has urged the public to protect themselves from the bite of the vector mosquito, *Aedes aegypti*, and also to drain, cover or chemically treat any standing water where the mosquito larvae can develop into the adult form.

This year we need to be more vigilant in this effort than ever. Despite spraying of insecticide in coastal areas after the tsunami, the incidence of dengue on the island, with 68 reported cases from January 1 to April 30, is already about twice what it was during the same period last year.

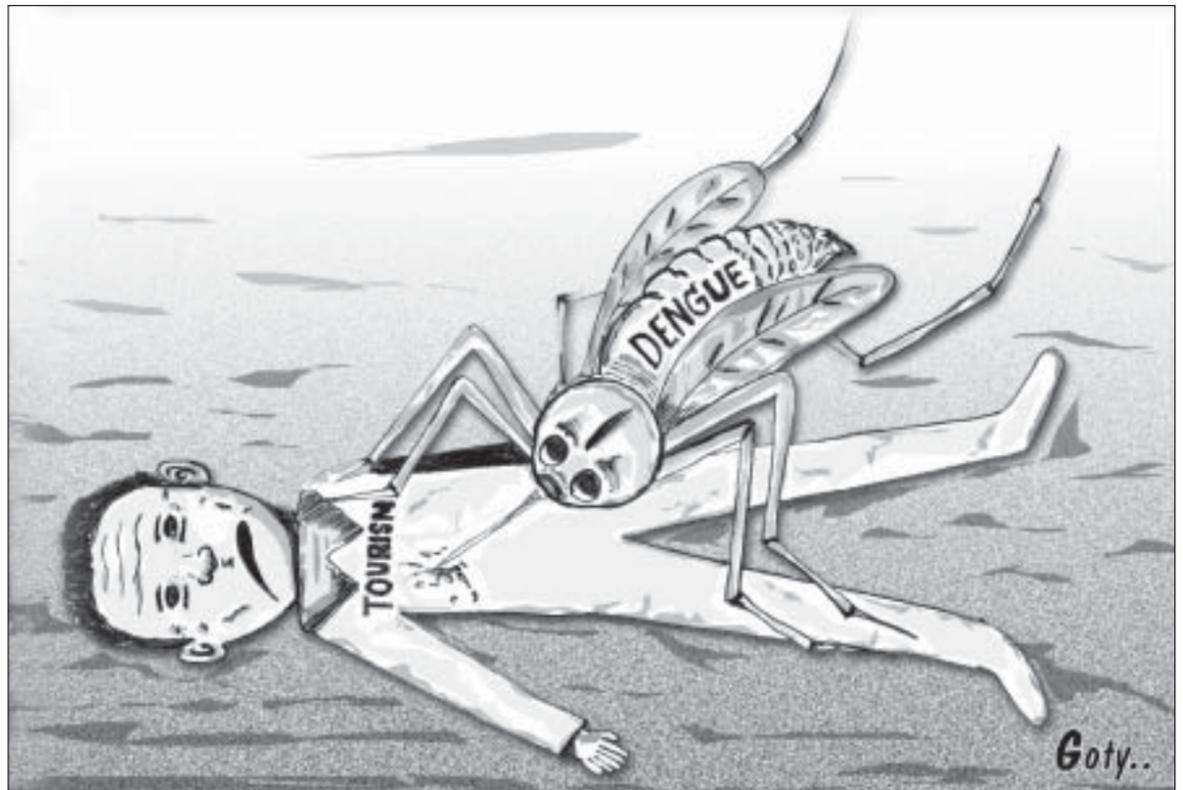
The MoPH is also investigating the possibility that a new, deadlier sub-type may have mutated from one of the four serotypes of the dengue virus that are common in Thailand.

Many factors have contributed to the continuing rise of dengue as one of Thailand's most serious public health problems. Foremost among them is rapid urbanization, with Phuket being a prime example.

Our inadequate water, sewage, and waste-management systems are creating perfect conditions for the *Aedes aegypti* to thrive.

Each new housing project or resort becomes a potential breeding site for the insect, and the concurrent rise in the human population increases the odds of dengue completing its life cycle, passing back and forth between its human and insect hosts.

We should all do our part to prevent the spread of dengue, not just to protect ourselves and our loved ones but also to preserve the health of the tourism industry on which we all rely. — **The Editor**



Letters

The *Gazette* is pleased to receive mail from readers. Please write to us at 367/2 Yaowarat Rd, Amphur Muang, Phuket 83000, fax to 076-213971 or send an email to editor@phuketgazette.net with

your views for publication in our next issue. We reserve the right to edit all letters. Pseudonyms are acceptable only if your full name and address are supplied.

A concrete complaint

I like Phuket and I spend time here almost every year. The thing that I do not like is that every year I see a large increase in concrete construction along the coastline, with a large decrease in the green landscape that once edged the shoreline.

The beauty of the coastline should be considered one of the most precious treasures that nature has given to the island. I would strongly suggest that the government do something to stop this destruction, perhaps by evaluating what the Indian authorities have done to protect the coastline in Goa.

Although India is not a rich country, people there recognize that the coastal landscape is a source of wealth, both now and for the future. For this reason there is a simple law in Goa that forbids any permanent construction within 500 meters of the shoreline.

In this way, people are allowed to build both tourist accommodations and homes for themselves without destroying Goa's beauty.

I am afraid that in 15 years' time the beauty of the Phuket coastline will be almost completely lost. Meanwhile, Goa's coastline still will remain intact, continuing to attract tourists generating money for local people.

Federico Parodi
Italy

Blitz bullsh*t

Two questions arise from the *Gazette's* May 21 news story, "Police blitz late-night venues": Why do the police and the government officials make these

claims? And why does the *Gazette* publish this nonsense when anyone who lives in or around Patong knows that many entertainment venues remain open way past the 1 am curfew?

Walk along Soi Bangla, Soi Sea Dragon, Soi Tiger, Rat-u-Thit 200 Pi Rd and you can see that most places stay open until at least 2 am, with some open until 3 am or 4 am, or later still elsewhere.

Most bar owners and ex-bar owners would admit – off the record – that they have been offered dispensation to stay open. If they refuse or are unable to meet the requirements, then they must abide by the law or face temporary or permanent closure.

Many of the venues that stay open past the curfew are also the ones that ignore the rules governing the maximum level of noise (91dB) in an entertainment venue.

The laws that apply to entertainment venues are inappropriate in a tourist location but as they are law, they should be enforced, irrespective of who owns or manages the venues – or pays "tea money" to officials to keep them open.

Paul Brent
Phuket

Far be it from us to change the utterances of public officials, or to shield the public from them.

— Editor

Wagner's Twilight of The Suds?

I read that Richard Wagner has opened an automatic car wash in Rawai [Around The Island, *Gazette*, May 14], but I will not be using it.

I'd rather give my 100 baht

plus tip to the guy and his four kids who clean, vacuum and dry my pickup truck every couple of weeks.

I can't imagine a machine being better than the four or five pairs of eager hands that remove every trace of dirt from the inside and outside of my vehicle.

Okay, they may take 40 minutes, but my pick-up is returned in showroom condition. Mr Wagner's jibe that using the "wrong cloth" to wash a vehicle will damage the paintwork was also pretty feeble.

No, Mr Wagner, you can keep your high-tech Western-style car wash; I prefer the Thai way.

And if you think you're going to make a small fortune from of this business, I hope you are starting with a big one.

Roger Neill
Chalong

Why now?

Can someone please explain the reasons behind the introduction of entertainment license fees now (*News, Gazette*, May 21) when we still have so far to go to recover from the tsunami?

We need our money to rebuild [our businesses]; taxes and these new fees will kill us off forever.

Victor
By email

Cruise control

The beaches of Phuket are beautiful; most officials now litter them with land-roving vehicles [see news pages of this issue?]

I certainly hope they are used on an emergency-only basis, and not as "cruise" vehicles.

Scott
By email

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Letters conveying views and suggestions are published here. Those seeking comment from government officials and/or business owners are published in *Issues & Answers* on the facing page.

Landbridge was 'never a good idea'

FIRST PERSON



The shelving of the Ministry of Energy's (MoE) controversial Strategic Energy Landbridge (SELB) oil pipeline project from Phang Nga's Tab Lamu to Nakhon Sri Thammarat came as much-needed good news for the Phang Nga tourism industry, which is still reeling from the effect of the tsunami.

Phang Nga Tourist Association President Anupong Sanguannam spoke with the *Gazette* and explained why the project was a bad idea for the province.

I am glad the SELB project has been delayed because it is incompatible with [Phang Nga's] tourism-based economy.

At this point in time, the government needs to target its funding toward post-tsunami recovery of the tourism industry, including infrastructure redevelopment and other efforts that will bring tangible benefits to the people of Phang Nga.

If the government had gone ahead with the SELB project, it would have harmed our tourism well into the future, because tourists are less likely to want to visit a place that is home to a petrochemical facility.

I can't comment on how much money or other benefits such a project might have generated for the country, but I can say for sure that it would have affected tourism.

In fact, I couldn't see any real benefits it would have brought to local people.

Even with the best available environmental protection controls in place, there would always

remain some risk of leakage [of oil] into the environment.

It wouldn't take a large release of oil into the environment to impact upon tourism.

Even a small oil slick washing up on our beaches could harm our image among tourists even more severely than the tsunami, which destroyed only about 10% of the coral reefs [in the area].

A [large] oil spill could have an even worse impact than that and would be even harder to clean up after.

I recognize that oil costs are high at the moment, but we have to ask ourselves how much the SELB project would have reversed that situation – especially as Thailand is not [a major] oil-producing country and has no

ability to control the price of crude oil.

The project would have only served to reduce our need to buy refined oil from Singapore. I think it would be better for us to start looking at alternative sources of power.

Most people in Phang Nga knew very little about how the project was proceeding, but ev-

erybody here knows about the benefits of tourism and how they are spread throughout all sectors of the economy.

On average about 30% of tourist spending goes on hotel accommodation, another 30% on food and beverages, and the rest is spent on souvenirs and sundries, so everyone can benefit.

Tourism generated some 9 billion baht in revenue for the economy last year, but we expect to lose about 4 billion baht [because of the tsunami] during the first five months of 2005.

In the past, we had 5,000 to 6,000 hotel rooms available; now only 500 to 600 are rooms still open.

Of these, only about 50 or 60 rooms are occupied at present, and most of the guests are actually government officers or volunteers [working on the tsunami recovery].

We need to reverse this dire economic situation, and rebuilding our tourism infrastructure is a far better way to do it than building a large petrochemical project.

Building regulations for foreigners

Friends of mine, a Swiss couple, would like to build a house in the Patong area on land I own.

They would like to have the house registered in their name.

They submitted the plans and all the details almost three months ago to Patong Municipality but have still not received permission to build.

The Municipality said that foreigners cannot have a house registered in their own name but our lawyer says that they can.

Can foreigners have a house registered in their name? How long does it take for permission to be granted?

I have heard that it is normally between a month and six weeks. My friends have been waiting at least twice this length of time.

Many people have told me that my friends should just take some money to the Municipality and after that everything will happen very fast. Should they do that?

Please help them. They love Thailand and Thai people very much, but now they feel discouraged and have lost faith in the Thai local government.

Grace Patong

Pongtap Fongsee, Assistant Officer at the Phuket Provincial Land office, replies: Foreigners may have a house registered in their name.

However, I do not know how long it will take them to get building permission.

If you are in Patong, you must ask for permission from the Patong Municipality.

If you are in Kamala, you have to apply for permission from the Kamala Tambon Administration Organization, and so on.

I can't suggest anything else.

Issues & ANSWERS

Want to know how to get something done? Can't understand some of the dafter things that seem to go on in Phuket? Want to pitch an idea to Phuket's authorities or institutions? Then this is the forum for you.

Submit your queries or suggestions to us and we'll ask the appropriate people to respond to them.

Write to: The Phuket Gazette, 367/2 Yaowarat Rd, Muang, Phuket 83000. Fax 076-213971, or submit your issue at www.phuketgazette.net

How can I get tsunami aid from the state?

My shop in Patong was destroyed by the tsunami. Is the Thai government helping shop owners or not.

If it is, where do I apply for assistance?

I am an Indian citizen but I have been working and paying taxes in Thailand for the past seven years.

Nakorn Tipsat, Chief of the Phuket Office of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (ODPM), replies:

First, you should declare losses and damage at the nearest police station and bring the police report to Patong Municipality (or the relevant local government authority) to register as a tsunami victim so that you can receive assistance.

Patong Deputy Mayor Chairat Sukbal replies:

Victims may declare their losses at the Municipality's offices.

Because of the enormous scale of the damage [from the tsunami] we are cooperating with a variety of other organizations.

Which of these can help you depends on the circumstances.

For example, if someone has lost a house, they need to contact the Social Development and Welfare Office.

For basic day-to-day help, they can contact the ODPM.

You can contact the Municipality and we will decide how much help we can give you, and advise you on what other organizations can offer aid.

Do new SIM card anti-terror regulations apply to all?

Following the government's proposal to tighten control of phones using prepaid cards, many retailers seem confused as to whether they will be allowed to sell prepaid SIM cards to people who do not hold Thai ID cards.

Will we be allowed to buy SIM cards on production of our passports?

Martin Grundy UK

Angkana Wongprasert, Director of Public Relations at the

Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, replies:

Thailand introduced regulations governing prepaid SIM cards on May 10, as a way of helping prevent bombs attacks in the country's southern border provinces [using explosive devices triggered by mobile telephones].

Both Thais and foreigners may buy prepaid SIM cards. Anyone wanting to do so must produce an ID card or a passport,

and the name of the customer, the salesperson and the shop must be recorded by the retailer.

The person buying the SIM card must be the person who will use it.

In the three southern border provinces only, those who already have prepaid SIM cards must contact the relevant mobile phone operator to register personal details. This does not apply in other provinces, where only new users must produce identification documents.

What fees are incurred when selling a house?

We wish to sell our house – which is owned by an offshore company – in Phuket.

Can someone please tell us what taxes and fees will have to be paid in Thailand and when they will have to be paid?

John Hamilton Phuket City

How much does it cost to transfer property out of Thailand?

SM2005 Malaysia

Pongtap Fongsee, Assistant Officer of the Phuket Provincial Land Office, replies:

The two main payments to

be made are the transfer fee (2% of the estimated value of the land and/or house) and company income tax (maximum 2.5% of the estimated value of the land and/or house).

These and other minor fees, including government stamps, are due when the sale is finalized.

Dual-speed ADSL in Phuket: slow and stop

For the past three weeks I've been regaling you with my experiences with running the 1,000-baht-a-month ADSL Internet lines from TOT (Cybergold) and TT&T (Hi-Net). Both government-sponsored services are supposed to operate at 1 million bits per second (1 Mbps) when downloading data into your computer, and 256 Kbps when you send data out.

A quick glance at the graph will show you that TT&T won the speed race. But the graph doesn't tell you who lost.

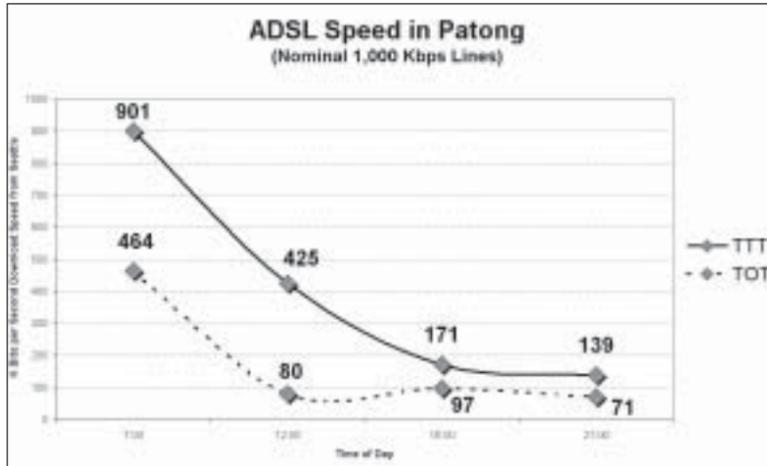
Both TOT and TT&T have completely ineffective customer support. I've spent almost a month trying to get straightforward problems resolved with both of them, and to date I've come up with absolutely zip.

TT&T's sporadically malfunctioning Domain Name Server, which occasionally bars me from getting to specific websites, continues to fail at times. The people at TT&T have been kind and responsive – but they haven't solved the problem. The fact that the sporadic error may be indicative of DNS Cache poisoning and a hacker attack (as explained last week) doesn't seem to faze anybody. I'm not sure anyone at TT&T has the slightest inkling what's going on.

I've talked to TOT's broadband people on the phone at least 20 times, and sent a handful of faxes. They still won't give me an email address to contact them, so I have to re-explain my problem every time they (or I) call.

KHUN WOODY'S COMPUTER

Their most recent piece of advice was to change my modem – but they faxed me the instructions for the wrong modem. I still can't get into any secure websites, such as Hotmail, amazon.com, any banking site, and so on.



If Phuket's ADSL were a racehorse, the poor thing would be sent to the knacker's yard.

TOT continues to insist that nobody else has reported the same problem, but I've heard from *Gazette* readers who say they can't get to any secure sites with their TOT ADSL connections, either.

I feel confident in saying that Bangkok-based tech support for both TOT and TT&T broadband is, basically, clueless. After living in Phuket for four and a half years and working in the computer biz for 30 years, I'm certain this is a competence, not a language or cultural, problem.

On to the speed tests. If you run TT&T's speed test (at www.tttbroadband.com) on a TT&T ADSL line, TT&T will tell you that your connection is blazingly fast. Cool. No doubt TOT has a similar speed test squirreled away somewhere. I completely ignored those tests, of course, and instead relied on an industry standard ADSL test, measuring upload and download speeds from a server in Seattle that's connected directly to the Internet backbone. You can read about the test and its limitations at www.dslreports.com/stest?loc=97.

The results in the graph shown are not definitive. There was no attempt to be statistically accurate, to adjust for outlying data or to construct proper sampling regimens. These are the raw results of 90 tests, taken on the same computer, with standard Windows XP SP2 settings, at different times between April 24 and May 16.

The TOT line went down a half-dozen times during the tests. The TT&T line went down, too, but not nearly as often. TT&T generally gave out at the same time as the TOT line, which probably means that all ADSL communication with Phuket broke down at those points. Reliability is still a problem.

Both TOT and TT&T advertise 1 Mbps service for 1,000 baht a month. In the morning, TT&T comes close to living up to its billing; TOT doesn't even deliver half of what they say they

offer. By noon, TOT's speed, on average, isn't much faster than a dial-up modem – and it stays that way for the rest of the day. TT&T's speed in the afternoon and evening is about twice that of TOT – which isn't saying much. I found that weekends were only a little faster than weekdays, and that TOT, in particular, is slower now than when I started testing, and it's getting worse.

The fundamental problem is obvious. TOT and TT&T are offering cheap ADSL service, knowing full well that they don't have the hardware to support it. In most countries that would be called "fraud." In Thailand, however, there might be another name for it. Consumers look at the TOT and TT&T 1 Mbps offerings, and they can't understand why the government's competitors charge five or six times as much for the same service. Now we all know how TOT and TT&T can charge so little.

Phuket Governor Udomsak Usawarangkura, last week I promised I would tell you about the third problem with ADSL service in Phuket. Here it is: TOT and TT&T's service is laughably slow. In South Korea, everybody gets full 8 Mbps Internet access, all the time, for the same price that we pay in Phuket for one-hundredth of that capacity. Hong Kong, too. Singapore isn't quite that fast, in general, but it's close. Anybody who tells you that Phuket is an IT City is pulling the wool over your eyes, Governor. We don't have a good Internet connection. Never have had.

The graph shows the winner in the TOT v TT&T stakes. The loser? Easy; all of us are losers.

Until Phuket has reliable, cheap, fast Internet access, we can't even begin to compete with other regions in Asia, much less with the rest of the world. Anyone who thinks they can telecommute from Phuket need only sit down at any Internet café, anywhere on the island, and give ADSL a try.

– Woody Leonhard
woody@khunwoody.com

ON THE MOVE

JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa has appointed **Lenka Juraskova**, from the Czech Republic, as Director of Marketing Communications.

Formerly an interpreter for the Czech government, she took up a position at Marriott Phuket last year as Marketing Communications Manager.

She holds a master's degree in English, American Studies and philology from the Charles University, Prague.



The new Head Chef of Cucina Italian Kitchen at the JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa is German **Andreas Hameder**.

Mr Hameder has worked in restaurants across Italy, including La Rosetta and the Cul De Sac restaurants in Rome and Berlin before moving to Thailand in 1999. He was formerly Group Executive Chef of La Piola Italian restaurants in Bangkok and Pattaya.

Athiga "Joy" Jundee, 22, from Surat Thani Province, has recently joined the *Phuket Gazette* as a reporter.

A graduate of the Faculty of Service Industry at Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus, she majored in hotel and tourism management.

K. Joy spent three months training in the public relations department at the JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa before taking up her position at the *Gazette*.



Been promoted or got a new job? Know someone else who has? Let us know by email to onthemove@phuketgazette.net

Will Britain and

The pace of British economic growth is slowing and this trend is expected to continue. How can one be confident about this situation? The best guide is to look at the politicians.

Prime Minister Tony Blair took the Labour Party to the polls in early May and won a unprecedented – for Labour – third term of office. However, as Labour had one more year of their then-existing five-year term to run, they could have held an election in 2006.

A number of factors made 2005 an obvious choice to call an election. PM Blair's government has, in the past four years, embarked on a major spending plan which expired at the end of the last financial year, April 5, 2005.

This spending on infrastructure and health care gave a welcome stimulus to the UK economy but, because of its size, was not sustainable in the long term.

The UK's central bank, the Bank of England (BoE), has in measured steps lifted interest rates 1.75% from a low of 3% in late 2003 to the current 4.75%. Normally, central banks raise in-

terest rates to curb potential inflationary trends but in this case it was one of the BoE's lesser concerns.

The UK has enjoyed uninterrupted economic growth since early 1993. The slowdown of

2000-2003, which pushed a number of countries – including the US and Germany – into recession had little effect in the UK. Naturally enough, elements of the British economy felt the chill wind from some of their major trading partners, but on the broader front the

economy remained firmly on track.

The BoE raised interest rates for two reasons: to reign in booming residential property prices and to dampen massive consumer spending, both of which were fueled by borrowed money.

At the start of the current period of economic growth in early 1993, the British residential property market was in the doldrums. "Negative equity" was rife, and around 2 million properties were repossessed by banks and building societies from those unable to meet repayment costs. This was caused by the then Con-

MONEY TALKS

By Richard Watson



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MICE drive still in low gear

By Rungtip Hongjakpet
& Anongnat Sartpisut

PHUKET: Panu Maswongsa, the Vice-President of Marketing for the Phuket Tourism Association is aggrieved. "Why did the government hold a meeting about the tsunami in Chiang Mai earlier this month? Why didn't they hold it instead in Phuket, Krabi or Phang Nga, the provinces hit by the tsunami?"

According to K. Panu, the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions) market offers the tsunami-affected provinces their best hope of filling their rooms in this post-tsunami "green" season.

But so far there have been few takers. "The Tourism Council of Thailand (TCT) is offering special MICE packages, and some people have contacted the TCT about these packages, but not many," said K. Panu.

He questions whether the government is doing enough to support post-tsunami tourism in Phuket, in terms of promoting the province as a MICE venue, or in using the facilities itself. "We don't think the government has done much at all," he said.

But Uraiwan Tohom, Front Office Manager of the Royal Phuket City Hotel, disagrees. She said, "I'm happy that the government is helping to try to bring tourism back to the Andaman region, although we are trying to help ourselves, too, by joining Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) roadshows and so on."

Before the tsunami, the Royal Phuket City's MICE facilities had an annual occupancy rate of 80%.

But, said K. Uraiwan, "After the tsu-

nami, things changed. In the first two months after the tsunami, we got a lot of tsunami-related MICE business, from both the private and the public sectors, from foreign embassies and aid organizations and so on. The hotel was actually quite busy then, even though we didn't have many tourists."

But since March, groups based in Phuket because of the tsunami have been pulling out, and, according to K. Uraiwan, there are no MICE bookings for June or July.

"From January until now it has been 80% government. I suspect private firms are going elsewhere for economic reasons. They are going to places that are cheaper," she said.

Laddawan Somniam, Director of Sales for Hilton Phuket Arcadia Resort & Spa, which has the island's largest conference facilities, believes that attempts to lure back the MICE market have a better chance of succeeding if individual hotels promote themselves as part of the destination of Phuket, rather than as separate entities.

"The ability of MICE to boost tourism depends on the image of the whole province ... One hotel cannot work on its own, it has to work as part of a destination. And when the image of Phuket recovers, so will tourism," said K. Laddawan.

Last year, the MICE market generated 46.87 million baht in revenue for the Hilton – around one quarter of the hotel's total revenue – and that was when many facilities, such as the ballroom and function rooms, were closed for renovation.

But following the tsunami, around 80% of the MICE events booked for the Hilton have been cancelled or postponed.

Said K. Laddawan, "Even organizers who had already paid their deposits pulled out. Between January and March, we lost around 10 events – and potential revenue of around 35 million baht."

The keys to surviving, said K. Laddawan, are reducing rates, attracting business back – and getting government support.

She said, "We are fortunate that we have many facilities suitable for MICE, so currently we are attracting government events."

Phuket is a popular MICE destination because it is easily accessible from Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong. But, said K. Laddawan, "I have just come back from Singapore, where I visited a destination management company to promote Phuket as a MICE destination."

"But the people I spoke to said the TAT should be working harder at public relations to re-launch tourism to Phuket."

However, K. Laddawan is optimistic that the market will recover by November.

TCT President Vichit Na Ranong, too, feels that the government could be doing more to stimulate the MICE market here, by promoting Phuket as a destination, and by choosing the province as a destination for its own MICE events.

At present, Phuket accounts for only about a tenth of the country's MICE business.

"The government can do more to help than it is at the moment. It should be conducting more aggressive public relations, and be stimulating the market to travel here. And Thai Airways could help, too, by offering special packages."

Business registrations fall in wake of tsunami

PHUKET: In the four months following the tsunami, registration fees for new businesses on Phuket fell by more than 546,000 baht compared with last year's statistics.

A total of 473 new businesses were registered between January 2 and April 30, and 91 businesses closed, according to the Phuket Provincial Business Development Office (BDO). In the same period last year 510 new businesses were registered, with 87 businesses closing down.

In April, 113 businesses were registered, of which 88 were limited companies and 25 were partnerships.

Of the business registrations, 45 were property or land sale companies, followed by 15 tourist-related businesses and 12 sub-contractors. The remaining concerns were in catering companies, architecture firms and merchants.

The BDO figures show that at the end of April there were 10,001 businesses registered in Phuket – 7,159 limited companies, 2,827 partnerships and 15 private businesses.

Blair weather a bleak fiscal future?

servative government's stupidity in trying to maintain fixed exchange rates during a recession in what is now the "Euro Zone".

This resulted in interest rates of 10% during a recession although inflation had – at an average of 1.6% – all but disappeared in the UK. Britain's overnight exit from fixed exchange rates allowed interest rates to fall rapidly and the economy to rally.

In 1993 conditions started to improve and by the middle of the '90s, the property market was again moving briskly forward, with property prices rising steeply in the second half of the decade.

Another boom, that of the stock market, came to an abrupt halt in early 2000. The British public took to the residential property market as the only "sensible" method of investment and, in general, completely ignored what had transpired after the housing bubble of the late 1980s.

The BoE, keen to keep the UK economy on track, followed the lead of many other countries and reduced interest rates to aid a slowing British economy. This was fuel to the fire of the housing boom; it made borrowing even cheaper.

Considering that 92% of British mortgages are "adjustable" – that is, linked to movements by the BoE on interest rates – any downward movement is widely welcomed.

The man in the street found himself in a comfortable position. He was earning an income from employment or business, and then suddenly had a new tax-free income from the increase in the value of his property.

For many homeowners, property prices rising by 20% a year offered them an income or capital gain that was better than a normal income. A feeling of affluence prevailed and naturally people wanted to spend some of this new found wealth.

The mortgage finance sector in the UK is an intensely competitive business and lenders were only too willing to let people increase their borrowing on existing loans. After all, the tenders themselves were being cushioned by appreciating real estate prices.

The credit card sector also saw a vast increase in business as people wanted to flex their plastic on a wide variety of purchases.

Consumer spending on borrowed money included everything from cars to consumer durables to holidays. Even if you did not own your own property, the urge to keep up with the

"Joneses" was there. It was also easy to achieve; financial institutions were competing with each other to lend money.

Another trap was the British mindset. Over decades, Britain had experienced higher-than-average inflation accompanied by higher-than-average interest rates. By the first few years of the 21st century, interest rates were at 50-year lows; it was just too good an offer to resist borrowing money. Financial institutions were almost giving it away.

What was not realized was that British inflation was at multi-decade lows. Real borrowing costs still existed.

With interest rates rising over the past 18 months, at a much faster pace than inflation, people are starting to realize that perhaps things are not as good as they might have seemed.

The British consumer has borrowed to levels never seen before in history; there is a debt mountain.

Housing prices have moved from rising to falling but mortgage and credit card bills are rising.

The additional income gen-

Another trap was the British mindset. Over decades, Britain had experienced higher-than-average inflation accompanied by higher-than-average interest rates.

erator – increasing house prices – has disappeared and is starting to reverse.

UK retail sales have stalled and even moved into negative figures. UK manufacturing is suffering from the same problem. Rising interest rates have increased the attraction of holding sterling as an asset and the currency is overvalued by about 20% against the US\$ and around 10% against the euro.

The BoE will be watching the economic data very closely but, if current trends continue, they will see that they have been very successful in their politics. Late summer or early autumn could easily see the reversal of interest rate rises.

This will undoubtedly

cause the value of sterling to fall, which is positive for the UK economy.

The BoE's task will then be to stop the spending pattern of the consumer from turning from a defeat into a rout.

Two million mortgages in the UK, which had a fixed interest element in them, expire in the second half of 2005 and become adjustable.

No wonder PM Blair took the country to the polls in May 2005.

Richard Watson runs Global Portfolios Co Ltd, a Phuket-based personal financial planning service. He can be reached at Tel and Fax: 076-381997, Mobile: 01-081-4611. Email: imm@loxinfo.co.th.

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By Andy Johnstone

Getting ever closer to the moment when I am to stride – resplendent in the full uniform of a golfer – onto the fairway and take a tentative swing at a ball, the lesson today is putting.

I entertain the idea that I might not be too bad at this aspect of the game. Hours spent on crazy golf courses and a natty little portable putting green at home convince me that I may impress Bruce Whitehead, the Laguna Phuket Golf Club pro.

I aim perfectly with my toes in a straight line to the hole, which is some six yards away and move the club, gently tapping the ball.

I tap it too gently, and it withers to a halt halfway to the hole. Not only that, but I swung my arms and let dreaded flexible wrist back into the stroke.

Bruce invites me to form my shoulders, arms – pointed slightly inward to my ribcage – and hands, and by definition, the club, into an inverted isosceles triangle and to move it as such, rather like a pendulum.

I make a few practice swings – pivoting, nay rocking the triangle – before addressing the ball.

The aim looks perfect and the ball has the legs – too much, in fact – to reach the hole but it suddenly veers off to the left, ending its run about a yard wide and beyond its mark.

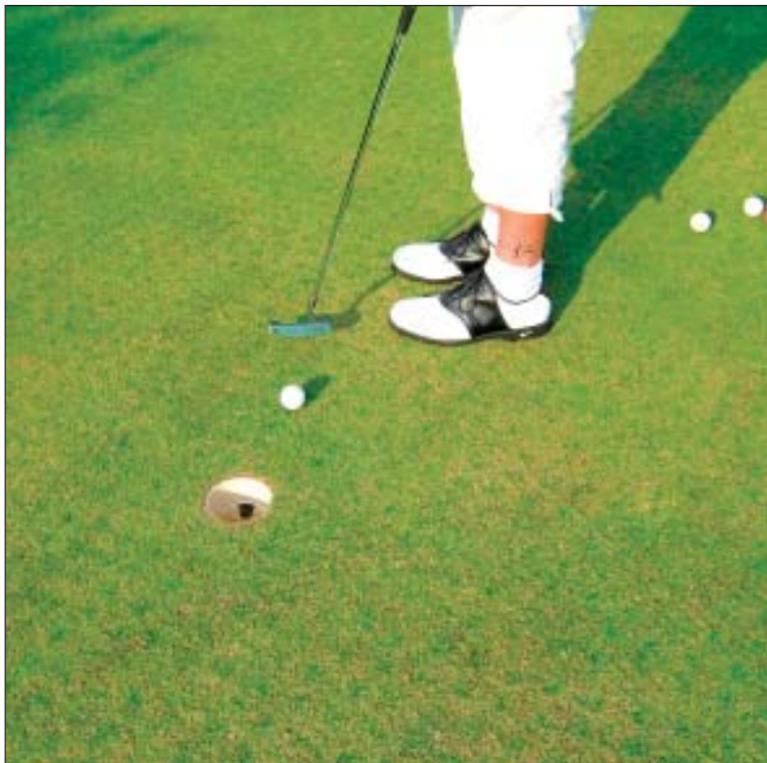
I know that golf balls do not have an iron core, but I still look around expecting to spot a fairy or a putting-green gremlin with a large magnet.

Lesson 1:

Whereas my mini-putting green at home is set up on a dead flat floor, a real putting green is anything but billiard-table smooth.

And let's be honest, it would be pretty dull if putting greens were that flat. The minute peaks and valleys, the rises and the falls, add spice to the game and test the skill of the player.

Although it is fairly easy to spot if a green is on a slope, the eyes of the novice golfer must learn to read the micro-topogra-



A critical factor in making a good putt is to put out of mind any thoughts of what might – or might not – happen.

Swinging for the perfect putt

phy of each inch of the green from the ball to the hole.

Viewed with a pair of eyes some six feet above the ground, it looks deceptively smooth. "It's best to crouch down and check the line before you aim," notes Bruce. "Every little bump or undulation will send the ball off target."

Bruce scatters a few balls in a random arc some distance from the pin and I, heeding his earlier words, squat down on my haunches and read the terrain from the first ball to the hole.

The ground slopes up, then down. There are other, almost imperceptible undulations between me and the target, a tuft of grass here for example. I attempt to memorize the terrain to plot the path of my ball, like a Tomahawk cruise missile's guidance system.

Playing a so-called "breaking putt" requires the golfer to determine the very point where the ball will reach the undulation and aim for that. The ball will break

left or right once it reaches this point – an element of trial and error, luck and a basic understanding of physics will lead you to determine which way it will go.

Once you have chosen the line, all that remains is to putt the ball with the right amount of force. Obviously enough, if you strike the ball too hard, you will hit the putt right through the break. Hit it too softly and even though you may have aimed correctly, it will still miss on the low side.

I prepare to putt again, ignoring the inner chattering monkey, the "yips" and in full knowledge that the ball will either go in, or it won't.

Rejecting any doubt, the gray areas of what might happen – and not lingering too long over making the shot – are vital.

I relax, make my backstroke, putt the ball, and follow through. The ball reaches the break point, arcs sweetly to the right and disappears into the hole.

Next stop, a round of golf.

For more information about Laguna Phuket Golf Club's beginners' and improvers' lessons, contact Bruce Whitehead or Andy Combe, LPGC Pros at Tel: 076-324350 or Email: golf@lagunaphuket.com

Rugby 10s to raise funds for orphans

PHUKET: The 7th AirAsia International Phuket Rugby 10s will be held at the Karon Municipal Stadium on May 28 and 29, with profits going to a scholarship fund for children orphaned by the tsunami.

Patrick Cotter, Chairman of the Phuket Vagabonds RFC, said, "It's the kids who will need our help, as they have lost not only their parents but their futures as well. To this end the AirAsia Phuket International Rugby 10s will be raising donations for the fund not just this year but for the foreseeable future.

"The annual Phuket AirAsia International Rugby 10s is seen as a possible conduit for [helping these children], especially as the timing of the [event] in May will come as international interest in the victims of the tsunami subsides."

This year, US\$100 of the US\$400 entry fee for each of the 24 teams in the event will go to the scholarship fund.

In addition, Sports travel

agents Gullivers have offered to arrange for former England international and popular after-dinner speaker Gareth Chilcott to host a charity dinner on the Monday evening following the event. Chilcott will be en-route to New Zealand for the Lions tour and has offered his services free.

Gullivers has also offered a "Lions package" as a prize for raffle or auction. The package includes tickets for the first Lions' test against the All Blacks at Christchurch on June 25 and the match against Manawatu at Palmerston North, along with accommodation aboard the P&O cruise liner *Pacific Sky*.

For more information about other fund-raising efforts in Phuket's rugby community, contact Patrick Cotter by email at: phuketvagabondsrfc@yahoo.co.uk.

Meanwhile, the preliminary rounds of this year's competition will be played on May 28, followed by the playoffs for the finals on May 29.

Schedule for the preliminary matches (May 28)

Time	Pool	Fixtures
8:00 am	A	ASRU Warriors v Alabang Eagles
8:17 am	A	Osan RFC v HKCC Aberbeen
8:34 am	B	Hong Kong FC v Taipei Baboons
8:51 am	B	Rainbow Warriors v Ram Hyenas
9:08 am	C	Cruiser Rams v Samui Simians
9:25 am	C	Wanderers v Manila Nomads
9:42 am	D	British Club Bangkok v Bucks Rugby 'B'
9:59 am	D	Penang All Blues v Pattaya Panthers
10:16 am	E	Phuket Vagabonds v Tequila Mockingbirds
10:33 am	E	Bangkok Japanese v Bucks Rugby 'A'
10:50 am	F	CNCF v RSC Hot Dogs
11:07 am	F	Bedok Kings v Pot Bellied Pigs
11:24 am	A	ASRU Warriors v Osan RFC
11:41 am	A	Alabang Eagles v HKCC Aberbeen
11:58 am	B	Hong Kong FC v Rainbow Warriors
12:15 pm	B	Taipei Baboons v Ram Hyenas
12:32 pm	C	Cruiser Rams v Wanderers
12:49 pm	C	Samui Simians v Manila Nomads
1:06 pm	D	British Club Bangkok v Penang All Blues
1:23 pm	D	Buck Rugby 'B' v Pattaya Panthers
1:40 pm	E	Phuket Vagabonds v Bangkok Japanese
1:57 pm	E	Tequila Mockingbirds v Buck Rugby 'A'
2:14 pm	F	CNCF v Bedok Kings
2:31 pm	F	RSC Hot Dogs v Pot Bellied Pigs
2:48 pm	A	ASRU Warriors v HKCC Aberbeen
3:05 pm	A	Alabang Eagles v Osan RFC
3:22 pm	B	Hong Kong FC v Ram Hyenas
3:39 pm	B	Taipei Baboons v Rainbow Warriors
3:56 pm	C	Cruiser Rams v Manila Nomads
4:13 pm	C	Samui Simians v Wanderers
4:30 pm	D	British Club Bangkok v Pattaya Panthers
4:47 pm	D	Buck Rugby 'B' v Penang All Blues
5:03 pm	E	Phuket Vagabonds v Buck Rugby 'A'
5:20 pm	E	Tequila Mockingbirds v Bangkok Japanese
5:36 pm	F	CNCF v Pot Bellied Pigs
5:52 pm	F	RSC Hot Dogs v Bedok Kings

Patong Pool and Darts Leagues

Patong Darts League

May 17 Results: Didi's* 7 Piccadilly 2; Nag's Head* 4 Two Black Sheep 5; OffShore 6 Pickles 3*; Valhalla 2 Dog's Bollocks 7*; Amigos v Queen Mary postponed. (* = Winners of beer leg)

Standings: 1. OffShore (43pts); 2. Queen Mary (34); 3. Shakers (29); 4. Pickles (27); 5. = Amigo's, Didi's (26); 7. Piccadilly (25); 8. Valhalla (21); 9. Nag's Head (20); 10 Dog's Bollocks (15); 11. Two Black Sheep (9).

May 31 fixtures: Pickles v Shakers; Didi's v

Amigos; Piccadilly v Dog's Bollocks; Two Black Sheep v Queen Mary; Valhalla v Nag's Head (Home teams first).

Patong Pool League

Knockout Cup results, Round 1, May 19: OffShore Bar* 10 Queen Mary 2 (3-0); Amigos 8 Pickles* 4 (2-1); Anchor Bar 10 Sports Corner* 2 (2-1); Dog's Bollocks 7 Tatum Mansions* 5 (2-1); Nags Head 6* Shakers 6 (2-1). (*Winners of beer leg)



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Phuket is Jones' town in ITF tennis tourney

PHUKET: Australian Alun Jones lifted his second title in three weeks when he won the last tournament of the current ITF series, the US\$10,000 TAT Phuket Open, at the Phuket City tennis courts on May 21.

The Canberra-based player, who won the opener of the three-event circuit two weeks ago, stemmed the surprise run of Asian-American Phillip King of the US with a straight-sets 6-3, 6-1 victory in the final.

The 25-year-old Jones picked up US\$1,300 while King received US\$900. The Australian, who was born in Boksburg, South Africa, has now accumulated three titles in his career. The first came in Berri, Australia three years ago.

The US\$25,000 ITF Women's Circuit contest was due to take place on May 23 at the Phuket City Tennis Club, with most of Thailand's big names taking part.

Fed Cup players Napaporn Tongsalee and Monthinee Tang-



Alun Jones (right) poses with surprise runner-up Phillip King of the USA (2nd from right), whom he beat 6-3, 6-1 in the final.

phong were two local hopes after Thai No 2 Suchanan Viratprasert opted to play in China. Rising stars Thassha Vittayaviroj, Nudnida Luangnam and Pichitra Thongdach were also due to compete.

Meanwhile, in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, Napaporn

reached the semi-finals of the US\$25,000 Toyota Women's Open 2005 following an upset win over second seed Emily Webley-Smith of England, 0-6, 6-3, 6-3. She was beaten by the Wynne Prakusya of Indonesia, 6-0, 6-3, who went to be the eventual winner.

Clean sweep for Savnac and Lerman in Ao Yon weekend dinghy regatta

AO YON: Four 59ers sailed five races in near-perfect sailing conditions on May 22.

Michael Hallager and Russell Huebschle had the downwind pace, but they just couldn't keep the boat under them; they capsized in the first two races, leading to solid last place finishes. It wasn't pretty.

By the third race, though, they had sorted themselves out, and they stayed close to the race leaders around the course and ultimately finished second.

Richard Buckminster and Robert Warnes did well considering helmsman Buckminster fell off the boat twice during the racing.

Nevertheless, the pair had a strong second-place finish in the last race. This proved to be critical, as both Buckminster/Warnes and Hallager/Huebschle were tied on points overall (both



Despite their reputation, Andrew DeBruin and Alastair Purves (above) managed not to capsize throughout the day.

with 16 points) and the "look back" ultimately looked to be the last race sailed. Buckminster/Warnes took third overall for the day.

Andrew DeBruin and Alas-

tair Purves were consistent, with three second-place finishes and respectable boat handling and - despite a reputation for capsizing often - no swimming.

They were in the lead during the second half of the second race and it was only a slow spinnaker douse around the last mark that let Savnac/Lerman slip ahead and finish in front. DeBruin/Purves placed second overall for the day.

Azzum Savnac and Russell Lerman rounded the weather mark first and hoisted their red spinnaker first in all five races.

Their boat handling, both upwind and downwind, was solid. Only in race two, where the lead swapped back and forth three times, was there any real pressure on them.

Savnac/Lerman won the day's regatta with five straight victories.

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Phuket Diary

May 28-29

The 7th AirAsia Phuket International Rugby 10s. Teams from around the world will be competing for the Clive Williamson Memorial Trophy in the 7th AirAsia Phuket International Rugby 10s. Entry for spectators will be free, but funds will be raised for an orphans' scholarship fund in Khao Lak.

Location: Karon Municipal Stadium Event time: 8 am to 6 pm both days. Contact Patrick Cotter on Tel: 09-8731190 or Email: phuketvagabondsrfc@yahoo.co.uk

June 22

Punchline Comedy Club. Top UK comedians Paul Zerdin, Richard Blackwood and Andy Askins from London's Comedy Store will perform a one-night adults only show. Watermark will also put on a three-course set dinner before the show, strictly by reservation only. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Location: Watermark Bar Restaurant at the Boat Lagoon. Event time: 7pm-11pm. Contact: Stuart Bird. Tel: 01-7376184. Email: info@watermarkphuket.com. Websites: www.watermarkphuket.com and www.punchlinecomedy.com.

July 21

Asarnha Bucha Day. Asarnha Bucha Day public holiday commemorates the first occasion when the Buddha, his teachings and five disciples were present together after his enlightenment.

July 21

Vassupanayika – Buddhist Lent Day. Following Vassupanayika, monks are obliged to remain in a certain place, preferably a monastery, for a period of three months from the day after Asarnha Bucha Day. It is a public holiday.

August 12

Birthday of HM Queen Sirikit. August 12 is the birthday of HM Queen Sirikit, a public holiday and, by tradition, Mother's Day in Thailand.

White wines: The pick of the bunch

Among the thousands of grape varieties that have been identified, only about 20 are familiar to most consumers. When it comes to white wine, just three varieties seem to dominate.

The first, the Chardonnay grape, grows well in a wide variety of locations around the world and makes consistently excellent, rich and complex wines. It is without doubt the best known – and most adored – of all the white wines. Winemakers consider this grape variety, or "selection", the most versatile and easiest to work with.

At its best, Chardonnay offers bold, ripe, rich and intense flavors of green apple, fig, melon, pear, peach, and pineapple, along with spice, honey, butter and hazelnut flavors.

Burgundy, California's Russian River Valley and Sonoma Coast, Australia's Barossa Valley and Margaret River are

WINE



By Steven Roberto

ther "grassy" or "musky". One British wine critic went so far as to describe it as "tomcat piss on a gooseberry bramble".

It is often blended with other grape varieties, but alone and at its best, Sauvignon blanc can yield amazingly complex and richly-flavored wines with citrus, fresh-mown grass, sweet pea and other aromas of perfume.

New Zealand's South Island and France's Loire Valley are home to the world's most celebrated Sauvignon blanc producers. The sweet dessert wines of Bordeaux and Australia made from the grape variety are also well known.

Other important – but lesser known – white wine grape varieties include the Chenin Blanc, one of the longest-lived white wines grown in South Africa and France's Loire Valley; Gewürztraminer, a pink grape that makes a white wine whose name no one can pronounce; the newly rediscovered and exciting Pinot Grigio from Italy and Alsace, with its distinctive guava and sour cream flavors; and Bordeaux's own lemon-and-beeswax-flavored St Emillion, which is perhaps now best known in its Australian form.

Future articles will describe these other exciting grape varieties in greater detail.

Steven Roberto is a winemaker and restaurant consultant from California. He is the Managing Director of enVision Phuket, a Phuket-based wine importer and consultant. Email: stevenroberto@lycos.com.

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My favorite white wine grape, however, is Riesling. I love its intensity, crisp acidity and distinctive floral, lime, piecrust, mineral slate and honeysuckle flavors. There is no other wine like Riesling, which is also one of the most food-friendly of white wines – and probably the only one that can accompany barbecued and grilled foods.

Germany's Mosel-Saar-Ruwer, Pfalz, Rheinhessen and Rheingau wines are probably the best-known Riesling regions, but Rielsing also achieves brilliance in France's Alsace Valley, in Austria, in New Zealand – and even in parts of Canada. The grape is also used to create some delectable dry table wine and exquisite – yet phenomenally expensive – sweet dessert wines.

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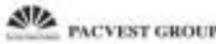


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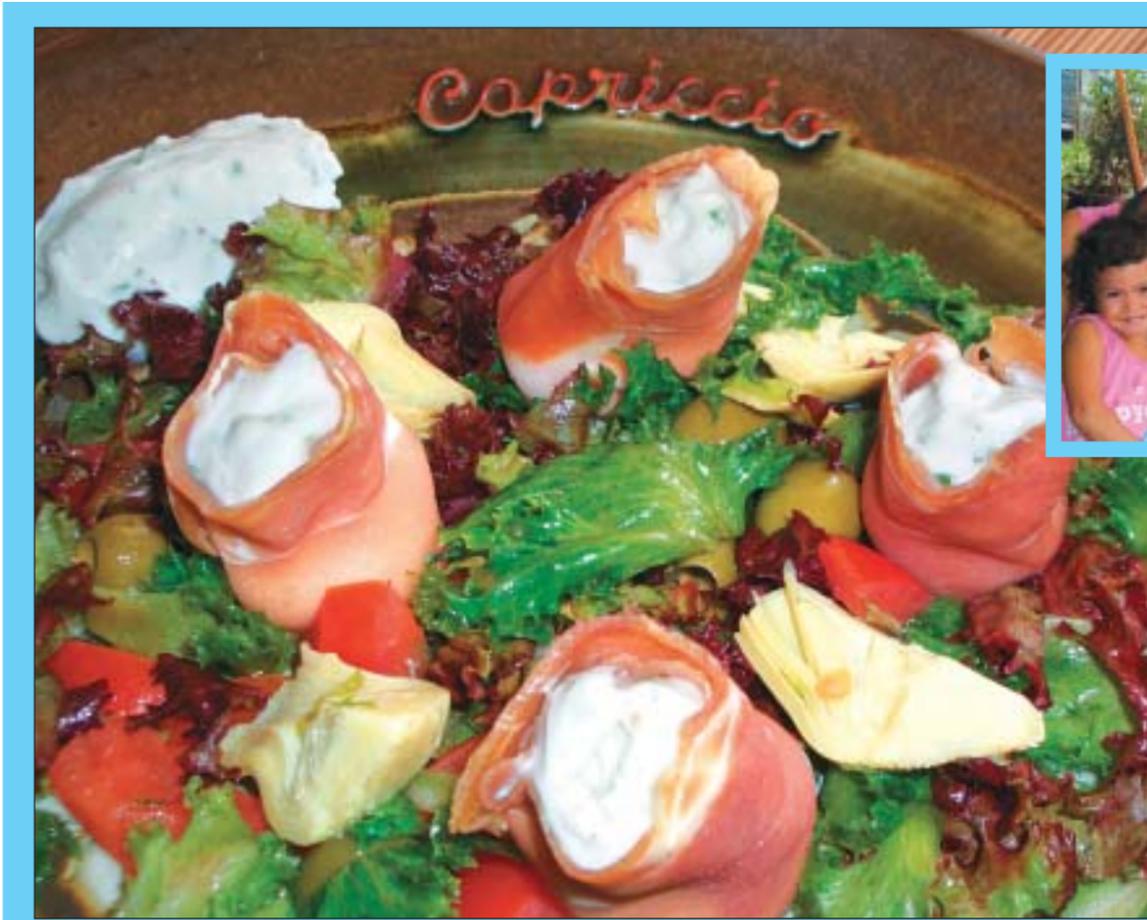
By Jenna Wise

Whether it's hot and humid, or raining and chilly, Mediterranean cuisine suits the climate in Phuket rather well. One restaurant where you can enjoy a home-cooked Italian meal is Al Capriccio at Kata Beach.

Owner Giuseppe Greco says he plans to remain open throughout the long, low season this year. "Normally we close during the quietest time, but this season I don't want to my staff to be without an income because of the short-lived high season," he explains.

Giuseppe and wife, Antharin "Wun" Sanguan, opened Al Capriccio four years ago and offer a selection of dishes including fresh pasta choices and pizzas baked in a traditional oven.

"I enjoy experimenting with using ingredients," Giuseppe explains. "For instance, mascarpone cheese is more usually associated with the dessert tiramisù, but I think it works really well in other dishes, such as the antipasto and risotto recipes here."



LEFT: Giuseppe's special antipasto with Parma ham and mascarpone and gorgonzola cheeses.

ABOVE: Giuseppe with his Antharin "Wun" Sanguan and their children.

Daring to be different with homemade recipes

Antipasto For 2 people

Ingredients:

- 8 slices Parma ham;
- 200g mascarpone cheese;
- 50g gorgonzola cheese;
- 2 stalks scallions, chopped finely (only use the green part);
- 1 cup roughly chopped green salad leaves;
- 2 artichoke hearts, cut into halves;
- 8 green olives;
- 1 tomato, chopped medium;
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil;
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar;
- Freshly ground black pepper and salt to taste.

Method:

Blend the two cheeses well together and mix in the chopped scallions. Place some of this mixture onto each slice of Parma ham and carefully roll up, reserving seven teaspoons of the mixture to put separately onto the plates. Mix the salad ingredients together in a large bowl, adding the

oil, vinegar and salt and pepper to taste. Arrange some salad on each serving plate and stand four of the Parma ham rolls onto each plate, with a teaspoon of the filling placed on the side.

Risotto with Peppers and Mascarpone For 2 people

Ingredients for the vegetable stock:

- 1 white celery stalk, chopped roughly;
- 1 onion, chopped roughly;
- 1 large carrot, chopped roughly;
- Salt to taste;
- 4 cups of water;
- ½ yellow bell pepper;
- ½ red bell pepper;
- 200gm risotto rice (no other kind will work properly);
- 150gm mascarpone cheese;
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped onion;

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil;
- ½ glass white wine;
- Fresh basil leaves to decorate.

Method:

To prepare the vegetable stock, put all the vegetables and water into a large pan and bring to the boil. Simmer for 30 minutes, then strain. Grill the bell peppers for about 8 minutes and cool before removing the skins and chopping. Put the oil into a large pot and fry the onion until it is soft and yellow. Turn the heat down very low and add the rice slowly, stirring constantly and moving to the sides of the pot. Pour the white wine carefully into the middle and mix with the rice. Cook gently until the wine has evaporated, then add the stock liquid slowly. Simmer the risotto for 20 minutes. Halfway through this cooking time, add the bell peppers. The rice should be al dente when served. After removing from the

heat, add the mascarpone cheese and mix well. Decorate with fresh basil leaves before serving.

Fish Fillet in Lemon Garlic Sauce For 2 people

Ingredients:

- 2 fillets from a 700g white snapper;
- ½ glass white wine;
- Salt and pepper to taste;
- Plain flour to dust the fish;
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil;

For the sauce:

- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley leaves;
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil leaves;
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped garlic;
- The juice of ¼ lemon;
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil;
- Salt and pepper to taste.

Method:

To prepare the sauce, simply put all the ingredients into a blender and blend until smooth and creamy. Serve cold. Dust the fish in flour. Heat the oil in a skillet and cook the fish for 3-4 minutes on each side over a medium heat. Add a little salt while cooking.

When the fillets are almost cooked, add the wine. When this has evaporated, remove from heat and serve with salad. Pour the sauce over the fillets just before serving.

Al Capriccio Italian restaurant, 46 Taina Rd, Kata. Tel: 076-333176 or 01-7889517. Open daily from 12:15pm-3:30pm and from 6pm to 11pm.



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No reservations about buying into resorts

How many times have you heard a traveling businessman or hotel executive say, "I am sick and tired of hotel rooms. I've had enough of living out of a suitcase with nowhere to hang my hat."

Now, it seems, there are people who are actually paying money to *live* in a hotel, or even buying apartments or villas within a hotel. This is nothing new on the island; Amanpuri has had villas for years, but the concept is fairly new in the lower end of the market.

According to Bill Barnett of C9 Hotelworks, this is a new direction for Phuket's property market. He said, "The buyers are coming in and looking for returns. The market is changing, and it's no longer just about the concept of buying into a purely residential project, but instead it's about investing into a hotel or resort.

"This is showing a more intelligent property market, which has existed overseas but [until now] was not here. It's an advantage to the buyer to be part of the resort because you get to use all the facilities of the resort and you get the benefits of the existing rental market.

"Mixed-use developments are also lowering the risk for the developer. They are more advantageous because you are selling off some of the risk. It helps both the developer and the investor," he said.

Mr Barnett has been involved in setting up The Residences at Crowne Plaza Karon Beach Phuket.

This was a long-standing hotel in Phuket known as Karon Villas and Royal Wing. It was bought by an overseas, institutional investment group that realized the potential for better re-



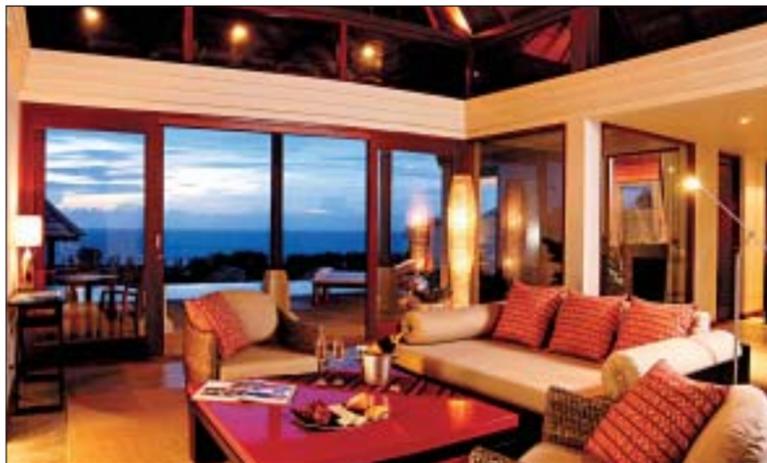
More and more people are buying property within resorts or hotels, such as at the Pavilions at Layan Beach (pictured above and below) to take advantage of the high-end lifestyle and to access the rental markets available through the resorts.

turns of selling off private property.

Crowne Plaza Karon Beach Phuket will benefit from the new private investment, as buyers feel that by buying in to a hotel, they are buying in to a business that already has income.

The project includes 32 resort apartments, which will go on sale in July at prices ranging from 12 to 14 million baht each. They are located at the front of the hotel, which is on the beach road, and while there will be swimming pool exclusively for the resort apartments, tenants will also have the use of all the resort's facilities.

Other examples of this concept are Pavilions at Layan Beach, which has 21 villas that are owned by the hotel as well as nine residential villas that were sold at around 22 million baht



each. The operators already have a property in Bali and plan to expand in Thailand. Meanwhile, Layan Gardens is combining residential with vacation club ownership.

Grove Gardens on Cape Yamu is a new resort-style residential project that gives buyers an opportunity to benefit from being run by a hotel company that holds properties such as the Jiva Resort in Kata. Even Sheraton at Laguna is now taking on the management of Laguna Villas.

There could be an interesting scenario this high season with the hotel market competing for potential villa customers after a depressed low season.

In a way, Phuket does mirror Bali in that the holiday-villa-rental market, which has been successful there for 20 years.

The market is just starting in Phuket, but it heralds the advent of existing hotels with international marketing contacts selling individual units to private investors.

Construction Update

Sapam

PHUKET CITY: A sea view over Ao Sapam is one of the attractions of a new development under construction off Thepkra-sattri Rd.

Baan Sapum Resort is a 55-unit development by Century Estate Co Ltd on 48 rai close to Phuket City, the bypass road shopping area and two private hospitals.

All the properties in the development have two stories, but there are three different styles of home for buyers to choose from.

Type A, of which there will be seven units, has floor space of 400 square meters, with four bedrooms, four bathrooms, a living room, dining room, kitchen, maid's quarters, laundry area and two car parking spaces. Prices start at 8.9 million baht.

Type B homes, which will cost from 5.8 million baht, each has 300sqm of floor space, with three bedrooms, three bathrooms, a living room, dining room, kitchen, office area and two car parking spaces. There will be 14 type B units.

There will be 34 Type C homes, boasting 250sqm of floor space, with three bedrooms, three bathrooms, a living room, dining room, kitchen and two car parking spaces. They cost from 4.8 million baht.

The homes are situated so that each has a sea view from the upper storey.

Shared facilities at the development include a swimming pool with a Jacuzzi and slide, tennis court and a clubhouse, and 24-hour security.

Project Sales and Marketing Manager Teera Thaworn-nuvong said all facilities will be for the use of residents only.

Said K. Teera, "As we won't allow outside members and all facilities will be for residents alone, residents' privacy is guaranteed.

"Residents will have to pay a maintenance fee at first, but once 50% of the homes are occupied, we will allow residents to form a committee to take over managing central areas and services, such as gardening and gar-

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By Graham Doven

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by Anongnat Sartpisut

sea views near the city



A three-bedroom Type B home, which costs from 5.8 million baht, stands complete as work continues on another alongside.

bage collection.”

Construction of the project started at the beginning of last year and should be completed by the middle of 2006. So far, 10 homes have been built, along with the tennis court, pool and

clubhouse.

K. Teera said that sales have been slow but steady, with 17 properties already sold.

He said, “Foreigners and Thais have bought or intend to buy these properties, although

most of the buyers are Thai.”

For further information, visit 65/19 Moo 1, Tambon Koh Kaew, Muang, Phuket 83000. Tel: 076-239007-8 or Fax: 076-239229, Email: info@phuket-baansapum.com or visit the website: www.phuket-baansapum.com

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Home of the Week

Chalong

Large-scale living in Chalong



This large two-story contemporary-design house is located on the Land & Houses Park estate in Chalong, which features its own clubhouse, restaurant, bar, gym and a sizable communal swimming pool. The housing estate is a short drive from Phuket City and the island's major shopping areas, and is also conveniently close to Rawai and Nai Harn Beaches.



looking the lake behind, set in a mature garden with a neat lawn and mature tropical plants

The two-year-old property, located well away from the main road, is two minutes' walk from the clubhouse. The house boasts optimum security, with high walls and ornate corrugated railings and an automatic gate, a large carport with room for three cars as well as a rear storage area.

Internally, the house occupies 440sqm, with four bedrooms and two en-suite bathrooms. One of the bedrooms has a walk-in wardrobe and two of the smaller bedrooms are split-level, making them ideal for a child's play or study area. All of the bedrooms are situated on the upper level with an office area featuring large windows, affording a generous lake view.

Downstairs, there is both a Western kitchen and a Thai-style kitchen with a breakfast bar. There is also a large, high-ceilinging open-plan living and dining area with wide windows, high columns and patio doors opening through to a terrace, pool and garden area.

toilet, and a separate toilet and laundry room.

The property has a Chanote title and is for sale at 14.3 million baht.

For further information contact: Richard Lusted, Siam Real Estate, at Tel: 076-288908. Email: info@siamrealestate.com. Website: www.siamrealestate.com.



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Gardening

with Bloomin' Bert

Looking good is a matter of containment

After last week's merciless attack on our American friends, I thought that this week, in the interests of fairness, I'd try to redress the balance and have a go at the Canadians. So I sat down and thought about it, but unfortunately couldn't come up with a great deal. No, I tell a lie – there is one thing, apart from the compulsion to finish every sentence with the word "ay".

And why are they obsessed with their national flag? It's everywhere Canadians are. I would even suggest that there isn't a single Canadian in Phuket who doesn't have some representation of a red maple leaf within a meter or two of them right now.

The Canadian maple leaf would be an ideal introduction into my gardening article, but there's a slight problem – maples don't grow here, as far as I'm aware. So there's not a great deal I can say about them, apart from that there are probably a lot of them in Canada.

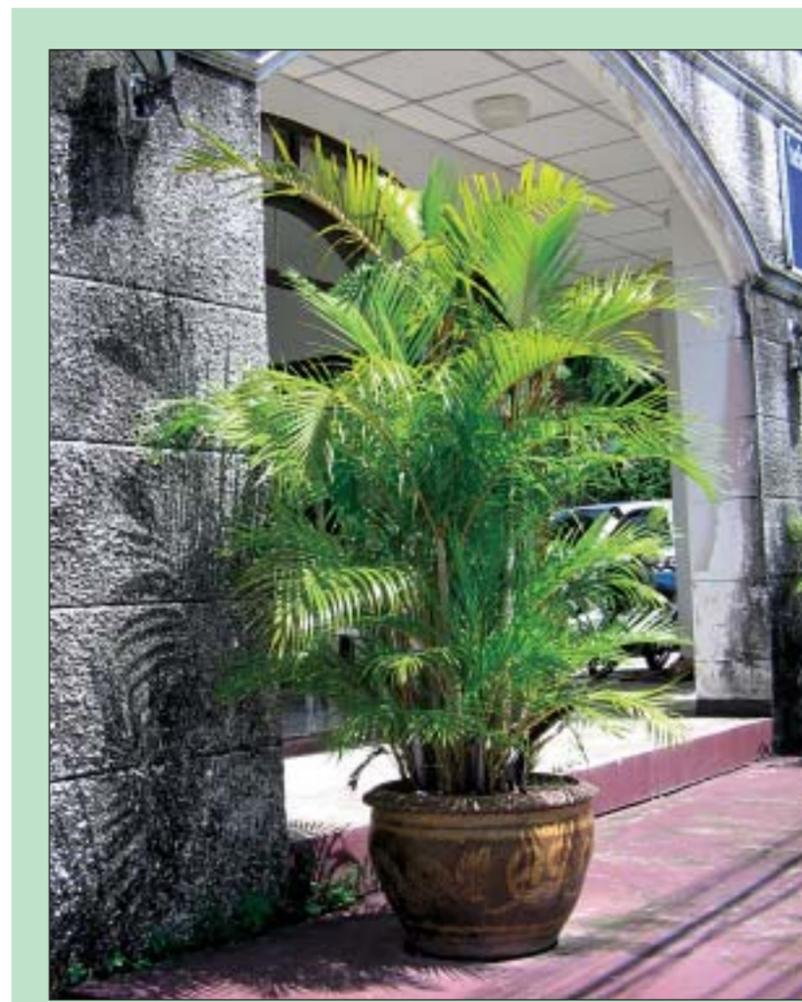
Instead, I'll attempt to finish what I started last week – containers. We looked at various ways you could grow plants in pots, but we didn't really talk about what plants to put in them, so here are a few ideas.

The "experts" will try to tell you that you should consider aspects such as color, form, composition and texture when selecting and designing your potted plant choices. This is complete nonsense of course. Plant what you like, wherever you like – just remember that white flowers against a white wall won't exactly leap out at you.

The great thing about pots is that if you don't like where you've put something, you could always pick it up and move it elsewhere.

If you have a fairly large concrete area that needs livening up, palms are ideal. Royal palms, with their single stems, or golden cane palms (the ones that cascade all over the place), are perfect for corners.

I was nearly evicted from a house I where I used to live be-



CORNERED: Potted golden cane palms, with their fronds splaying out, are perfect for making corners look more attractive.

cause of these. The landlady was convinced that the weight of half a dozen huge palms on her balcony would cause them to end up on – or through – the carport below.

Once palms are in pots, there's no shifting them. The weight of the soil alone means that once the tree and the soil are united, the only way of removing them is to lift them out by crane, which is exactly what I had to do in order to remain a tenant at that house.

You might want to put a few tall plants toward the back, just to hide the wall and provide a little shelter for the smaller stuff at the front. Canna are always good for that – they flower year round, and give a bright splash of color.

The foliage of these things is bold and banana-like. You can try planting them singly initially, but you'll find that it won't take long for them to multiply.

Hibiscus, or *cha-baa* in Thai, is also a favorite. It's a fast-

growing, shrubby plant, which is grown for the exotic, brilliant burgundy, five-lobed leaves. Loud tropical shirt designers would be lost without them.

Just remember that the flowers last for only one day, after which they lose interest and drop off. This is totally normal – they'll be replaced with new blooms the next day.

For leaves with some color, the best bet is *sanchesia speciosa*, or *ue-ang-thawng* in Thai. Unlike the hibiscus, its flowers are noth-

ing to write home about, but the leaves are certainly distinctive. Each leaf has an impressive set of bright yellow ribs.

Sanchesia speciosa needs plenty of water if it's in a pot; a day of neglect will result in a serious sulk.

You might want a few low, filler plants as well, either in pots of their own, or set around the bases of larger plants and trees. Coleus, or painted nettle, is perfect for this. Thais know it as *rue-sii-phasom-laeo*.

The term "nettle" is spot-on, as that's exactly what they look like in shape, but with burgundy-colored leaves. You'll be pleased to hear that they don't carry the self-defense mechanism of their European namesakes.

Lantana (*phakaa-krong*) is a sprawling shrub, which is often considered a weed here, but in my opinion, I think it looks pretty good in pots. It has small clusters of bright, vibrant flowers in various colors. Depending on variety, they can be upright and shrubby or sprawling, weeping or trailing.

"Container gardens" – full of containers and pots of all shapes and sizes – give plenty of options, as you can create them absolutely anywhere that space is available, and put virtually anything you want into them.

Canadians should be aware that their national symbol probably isn't an option, though.

Want to know more about a plant in your garden?
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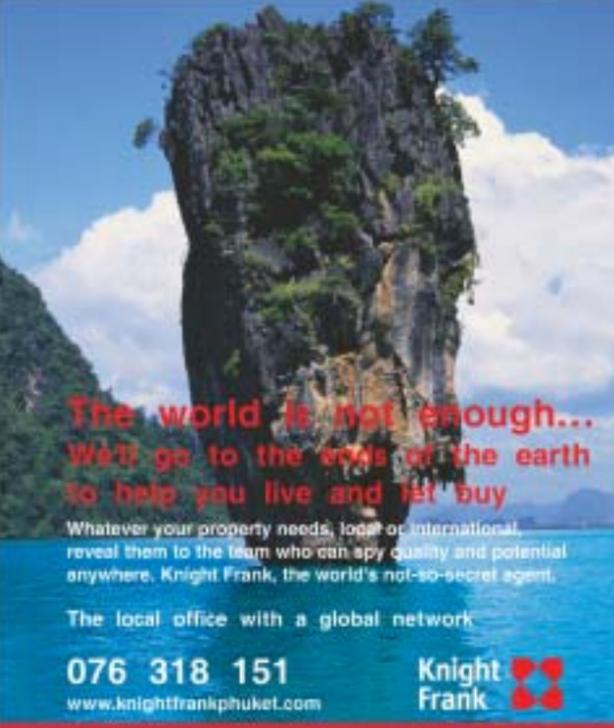
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Property Gazette

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ROOMS FOR RENT
in Patong. Thai-&Bali-style, with aircon, Cable TV, fridge and coffee. Tel: 076-344-427-8.

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apartment. A301 The Sands: 148sqm, 2 bathrooms, lounge, dining room, kitchen, balcony with views over lake and running track. 150m from Nai Harn Beach. Price: 6.5 million baht fully furnished & ready to move in. Tel: 076-273304, 01-8919729. Fax: 076-273303. Email: bobyapp@mac.com For further details, please see our website at http://homepage.mac.com/bobyapp/A301_TheSands/PhotoAlbum4.html

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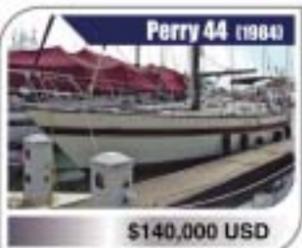
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required. Kia Ora Catamaran Charters, located on Koh Samui, requires an experienced skipper to operate our 52-foot day-charter sailing catamaran. Please contact for more information. Tel: 077-425264 or Email: mark@kiaorathailand.com Please see our website at: www.kiaorathailand.com

JUNIOR SECRETARY

Tilleke & Gibbins International, established in Thailand since 1893, is coming to Phuket. We are establishing a full service legal office at Cherngtalay and we require:

JUNIOR SECRETARY

- Secretarial diploma
- Good command of English
- Good and accurate typing skills
- Able to operate MS Office
- Experience is a plus
- Good coordination skills
- Service-minded and organized

Please contact for more information. Tel: 06-9890919. Send resumé to: trw@tillekeandgibbins.com

JOB VACANCIES

Krabi La Playa Resort is now recruiting for the following positions:

- Reservations Manager
- Restaurant Manager
- Personnel Manager
- Sales Executives

A minimum of 3 years' experience in the hotel field is required. Please contact for more information. Tel: 075-637-500, 01-8812317. Fax: 075-695497. Email: worasuda@krabilaplaya.com For further details, pls see our website at: www.krabilaplaya.com

INVESTOR STAFF

wanted. Danish grillhouse chain seeks investor for the last 29% of shares. We have 3 shops, with turnover of about 20 million baht. We are also looking for franchisees in Kata, Kamala, Phuket City, Krabi. Franchise investment 400,000 baht. Staff wanted: Thai, 28-40 years, must have skills in Word and Excel and be English-speaking. Admin work, 3-4 hours/day. Contact Mr Kim Kristiansen. Tel: 06-2989500. Email: la@grillhousedk.com For more details please see our website at: www.grillhousedk.com

PIMALAI RESORT

& Spa, a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, is currently looking for guest service officers. English required, computer literate. Fidelio front office a plus. Other positions available: Graphic Designer, Bell Boy, Admin Secretary. Tel: 075-607999. Fax: 075-607987. Email: rdm@pimalai.com For further details, please see our website at: www.pimalai.com

EXPERIENCED STAFF

wanted for property development company in Phuket. For more information, check: www.immobilienplus.com/jobs

WEB SHOP DESIGNER

I need to hire some professional Web shop builders to do updates, create new shops, etc. I work with OS-Commerz and Shop-Factory (PHP, MySQL). Please contact for more information. Tel: 09-8093566. Email: lennartviberg@hotmail.com

BOOKKEEPER

wanted. Min 3-years' experience, Quickbook Pro knowledge, office near Wat Chalong. Email: bic1@phuket.ksc.co.th

NANNY

Basic English required. Monday-Saturday, 9am-6pm, Chalong circle area, references. Tel: 09-4744083, 076-281391, 01-9872821.

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opportunities. Phuketsail Group, Thailand's yacht equipment leader is seeking highly qualified candidates:

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teacher. Need 2 kindergarten English teachers. Native speakers only, please. Email: info@kajonkiet.com

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At least 2 years' experience in Networking and hardware maintenance. Good command of spoken English would be an advantage. Tel: 076-272572, 01-5358041. Fax: 076-273447. Email: wilawan@greatglove.com

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Television. 25-inch, perfect condition, 2½ years old. Dual language, stereo, remote control, silver finish. 8,000 baht or nearest offer. Tel: 01-9366284. Email: khunmark@gmail.com

RATTAN BED

for sale. Beautiful rattan bed, queen size, very good condition: 3,500 baht. Please contact for more information. Tel: 076-281479. Email: palmtree@loxinfo.co.th

Articles Wanted

ROAD/MOUNTAIN

bike for 168cm female considering Triathlon. Must be in reasonable condition. Please contact for more information. Tel: 06-9537624. Email: michaela_trigg@yahoo.com.au

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Looking for baby capsule and pram, in good condition and at a reasonable price. If you have one, please contact with full details. Tel: 07-909-895. Email: antoniobruno@hotmail.com

DV CABLE WANTED

I am in urgent need of a new or used DV cable that allows me to connect my Sharp digital video camera to my desktop and laptop computers. Tel: 06-6853121, 04-060-3787. Fax: 076-240622. Email: phuketholidays@yahoo.com

Bulletins

Alcoholics Anonymous

is holding meetings in English at the following places:

Phuket City

Mission Hospital on Wed and Sun at 7 pm

Bangkok Phuket Hospital

on Fri at 7 pm

Patong

Patong Hospital on Mon, Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun at 7 pm and on Fri at 8 pm

For more info, please call 012732053 (Scandinavian), 018954763 (English) or 018912895 (Frank)

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PRIME RETAIL SPOT

Highest traffic, best exposure on the island. Please call for more information. Tel: 01-8920528.

MASSAGE SHOP

for quick sale. Massage shop in Nanai Rd, Patong, for rent 12,000 baht per month, no key money. Has everything you need. Moving to BKK; make me an offer now! Please contact me for more information. Tel: 09-809-3566. Email: lennartviberg@hotmail.com

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for sale. Kamala, main road. Aircon, 40 seats, well-established walk in. Take over: 6,000 baht/month; 900,000 baht for sale. Please call after 4 pm. Tel: 076-385940.

BAR FOR SALE

in Kata Center, 6,000 baht/month. Price: 270,000 baht. Please call for more information. Tel: 07-8814415.

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Corporation for sale: 15,000 baht. Please contact for more information. Tel: 07-8934960.

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Patong. Entertainment license, Thai company, work permit. See our website at: www.homebarphuket.com

INVESTOR WANTED

European-Thai company, Phuket. Tel: 01-5697618. Email: investor_wanted@hotmail.com

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TSUNAMI RESORT

Active investor/partner sought for redevelopment of eco-resort on Phra Thong Island in Phang Nga. Site is a world-class setting, with two beautiful beaches, abundant wildlife, years of successful operation based on a love of nature. Email: simi@losthorizonsasia.com

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Personals

BACKGAMMON

Retired businessman looking for backgammon players on Phuket Island. Please call if interested. Tel: 076-386-113, 01-5778443.

TRIP TO EUROPE

Easy-going European guy (46), living in Phuket, is traveling to Europe for a couple of weeks in August, and does not want to go alone. If you are a nice, charming, uncomplicated and slim Thai lady between 20 and 40 and want to join me, then I would like to invite you. All you need is a passport, and I do the rest. Don't wait too long, and send me an email with a picture of you. Let's go. Email: bpauidai@yahoo.de

ROMANCE

I am 52, physically fit, and traveling to Phuket early next month. Hoping to meet an attractive and sincere Thai woman 25 to 33 years old. Email: ydelk@hotmail.com

FEMALE FOR FUN

on Phi Phi. Looking for a female companion, romance, friendship, just to have a few days of fun at the Phi Phi Islands with me, around June 6. Email: timesreporter@tscnet.com

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VERY NICE BMW 525

Immaculate 1993 model. Engine very recently rebuilt, transmission rebuilt, new exhaust installed, new radiator, new computer, etc. Great imported CD stereo with amp, preamp equalizer, subwoofer, etc. Very popular red/maroon color, which looks great with no peeling or fading. Runs great and has less than 100,000km. 430,000 baht ono. I don't have room for a new car, hence the sale. Tel: 09-8733996. Email: eljefe3@gmail.com

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TOYOTA VIOS

Year 2004, 1.5S, airbag, ABS, 6-CD player, tape etc. Urgent sale. Call Khun Karn at Tel: 06-7885672.

Pickups

MAZDA PICKUP

4 door, 2.2L, diesel, good condition, stereo, 1992: 120,000 baht. Call Khun Wofgang. Tel: 01-079-2583.

2002 TOYOTA 4WD

pickup. Toyota Tiger Extra Cab. 38,500km, metallic gold color, chrome bumpers, vinyl liner, 2.5-liter engine, excellent condition. No accidents or tsunami damage. 500,000 baht. Tel: 05-0685860, 06-278-5265. Email: alanmat@ozemail.com.au

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Four-door pickup, year 2000, 2.5-liter turbo diesel, with Carryboy. In good condition, 80,000km. Extra alarm, new CD, timer for engine stop. 460,000 baht or 110,000 + 9,100 per month over 3 years and 8 months. Tel: 01-585-8788. Email: runo9@hotmail.com

1999 ISUZU

Turbo 2500 pickup. Dark green. Quick sale: 250,000 baht. Tel: 09-6506221. Email: ek_phuket@hotmail.com

LARGE FAMILY SUV

575,000 baht. Powerful 3.0-liter turbo-diesel, Isuzu Grand Adventure model, 5-speed. Bought Nov 15, and has 83,000km. Very economical, with comfortable leather seats that can fit 7 adults. Price includes German-made roof-top luggage box, which can hold up to 4 golf bags. Great condition and well-maintained. Serious inquiries only please. Tel: 09-7299619. Email: wpm@hongkong-hotels-network.com

4 x 4s

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SUZUKI JEEP

Red Caribian for sale, good condition. Price: 120,000 baht. Tel: 01-8915474.

TOYOTA HILUX

4WD, year 2000 model, GOA cab, 87,000km, insurance to Sept. 385,000 baht ono. Email: detnon@hotmail.com

99 JEEP CHEROKEE

Dark red, full options, all extras. Bullbar, 6-disc stereo, new tires, aluminum wheels, leather interior. Built and registered in 1999. 85,000km. Garage maintained. Farang owner buying new car. Photos available. A bargain at 430,000 baht. Be fast and drive with class. Tel: 07-893-8747. Email: bigbhouda5@hotmail.com

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TOYOTA VIOS FOR RENT

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NOUVO FOR RENT

Blue, good condition: 3,500 baht a month; or black Nouvo, new model, 2 months old: 4,000 baht a month. Can view first, but both long-term rental only. Tel: 06-9400069. Email: wijitra_nammata@yahoo.com

SPECIAL PRICE

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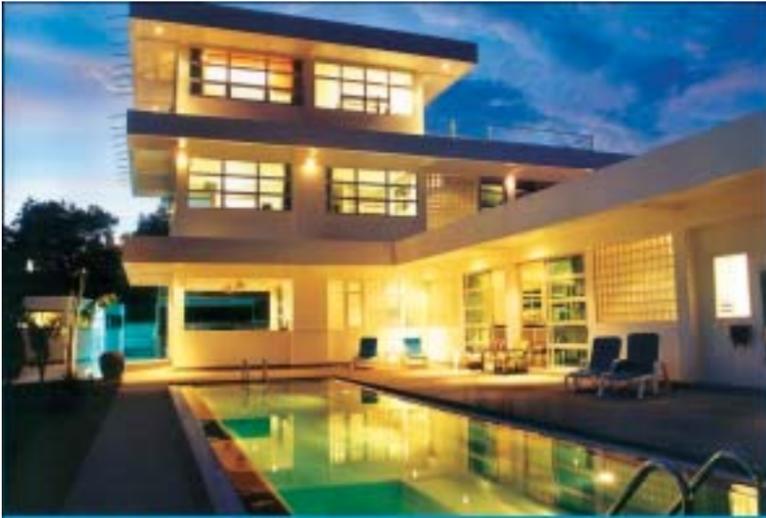
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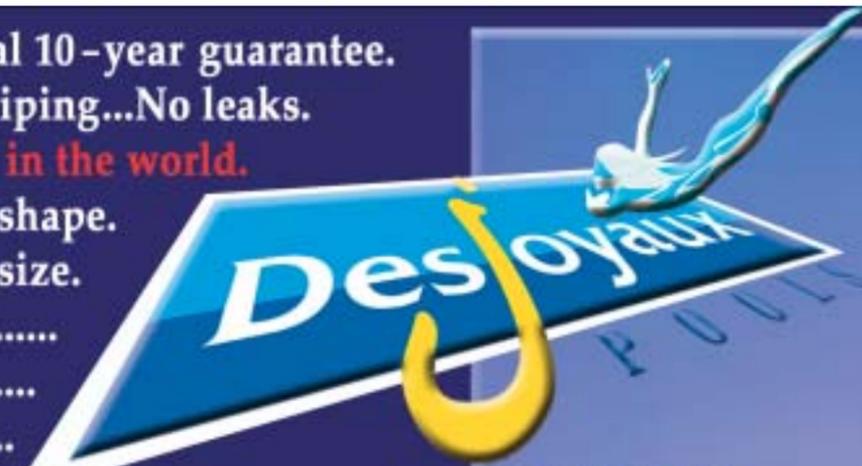
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