

Phuket Gazette

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‘IT IS NECESSARY TO OUTLAW SUCH PERFORMANCES’

Hate-speech convict, comedian shutdown

■ Bangkok stops perverse French comedian from taking the stage

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

THE show of controversial comedian and hate-speech convict Dieudonné M'bala M'bala, scheduled to take place last month at Illuzion night club in Phuket, was cancelled after the venue pulled the plug less than 24 hours ahead of the Frenchman taking the stage. Since then, Mr M'bala M'bala has struggled to find his footing in Asia.

“One of the owners of Illuzion was contacted the evening before the show by the Phuket Governor, who asked to cancel the show due to the unknown content of Dieudonné’s speech, which could have disappointed and hurt the Jewish community,” said Illuzion legal representative Panuwat Somrit, from Harwell Legal International Law office.

“Illuzion understood that the Israeli ambassador made a direct request to the Prime Minister for having the show cancelled and the Prime Minister had contacted the Phuket Governor.”

Israeli Ambassador Simon Roded confirmed to the *Gazette* that he had approached the appropriate Thai authorities to prevent the performance from taking place.



Mr M'bala M'bala has been convicted of Holocaust denial and racism. Photo: Thierry Monasse

“Dieudonné was convicted several times in the past years by courts in France and Belgium for crimes of hate speech, Holocaust denial, anti-Semitism, racism and more. Many venues in Europe have forbidden his performances due to their offensive nature and his criminal records,” said Amb Roded.

The Ambassador was grateful for the quick response, especially given the checkered past of Thailand being insensitive to

anti-Semitic issues.

In 2011, a group of high school students in Chaing Mai dressed up in full Nazi regalia for the annual summer sports day. The students of Sacred Heart Catholic School were led by a teen dressed up as Adolf Hitler. Then in 2014, a KFC-like restaurant named ‘Hitler’ popped up in Thailand. Hitler fried chicken, located...

Story continued on Pages 4-5

Diving tourist left alone underwater, found dead

A TOUR company, a boat operator and a British dive professional are all in hot water after a tourist died in their care while diving.

Full story Page 3

BUSINESS



Wedding planning, luxury event organizing witnesses sustained growth.

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LOCAL NEWS

Briefly

Guns on planes argument ends in fatal shooting

AN ARGUMENT about guns on planes quickly ended when one of the men pulled a firearm and shot the other dead on February 15.

Witnesses told police that the argument began between former border patrol police officer Komkrich Wisetmak, 48, and Puttarak Dechapan, 47, a former police volunteer.

Mr Komkrich left the restaurant after shooting Mr Puttarak three times and promptly handed himself in at Thung Thong Police Station.

Mr Komkrich was charged for murder.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

More than five dozen tourists rescued after speedboat sinks

MORE than five dozen tourists were safely rescued after their overloaded speedboat sank near the Similan Islands on February 10, reported officials.

The 50-passenger boat, owned by the Rak Talay tour company, was reportedly carrying 63 tourists at the time.

Three nearby boats and their

Gov backs B313mn plan to end sea gypsy dispute



Governor Chamroen has backed a plan that will end years of conflict between sea gypsies in Rawai and locals who claim to collectively own 19 rai of beachfront land in southern Phuket. The plan would see the central government buying land from title deed holders and developing the area as a permanent residence for the sea gypsy community. For the full story, visit PhuketGazette.net. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

crew conducted the rescue.

Police have yet to charge either the captain or the tour company for the incident.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

British Embassy to hold sexual assault seminar

THE British Embassy will be hosting a seminar in Phuket on February 25 on sensitively

when dealing with sexual assault victims.

Employees of the Phuket Public Health Department and government hospitals have been invited to the event.

The seminar is from 1-4pm at the Royal Phuket City Hotel.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

Speedboat crew member slashed by propeller

SPEEDBOAT crew member Kreetha Sarawaree was rushed to hospital after his back was slashed open by a boat propeller at Koh Lao Lading in Krabi on February 16.

The 25-year-old captain of *Srisawat 5*, Anan Panya, was backing the boat into the crowded pier when the accident occurred. Mr Kreetha sustained serious injuries.

Phi Phi Tour Company agreed to cover the victim's medical expenses.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Thepkrasattri crash kills two

TWO people were killed and another injured in a three-vehicle collision on Thepkrasattri

Road on February 15.

Lampoon Saeton, 56, was pronounced dead on arrival at Thalang Hospital, while Wasuwan Sae-Lu, 62, was taken to Vachira Phuket Hospital, where he later died from his injuries, confirmed Capt Kraisorn Boonprasop of the Thalang Police.

Witnesses told police that a gold Toyota rear-ended Ms Lampoon's pick-up truck, causing it to cross the median into oncoming traffic, hitting Mr Wasuwan's Isuzu almost head-on.

Police were unable to confirm the Toyota driver's name, but noted that they took down their information and will follow up on the incident.

– *Winai Sarot*

Russian almost loses ear in fight with fishmonger

A FISHMONGER is on the run after slashing a Russian tourist's ear in a fight over a 400-baht fish at a fresh market in Patong on February 13.

Russian national Mikhail Ryzov, 36, reportedly paid for the fish with a thousand-baht note and then accused the fishmonger of not handing over his change.

Mr Ryzov reportedly

punched the fishmonger, who retaliated by slicing the tourist's left ear with a knife.

Police have yet to identify the fishmonger, but are continuing their investigation.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

Checkpoint at underpass nabs many motorists

MORE than 40 motorists were fined in a span of two hours at a checkpoint at the northbound exit of the Darasamuth Underpass next to Central Festival Phuket on February 15.

A total of five motorbike drivers were fined for using the underpass, while nine were arrested for making an illegal u-turn at the mouth of the underpass. Each was charged the maximum penalty of 1,000 baht.

An additional 25 motorbike drivers were fined for not wearing helmets and six car drivers were fined for not wearing seat belts. Each was charged 500 baht.

– *Kongleaphy Keam*

Police bust two in B5mn deal

POLICE arrested two key members of a major drug-dealing ring run by an inmate at Yala prison, after the pair confessed to their roles in moving about 5 million baht worth of *ya ba* (methamphetamine) from Chiang Rai to southern Thailand.

During the raids police seized two handguns with matching ammunition, about 116 grams of *ya ice* (crystal methamphetamine) and about 14,000 *ya ba* pills.

According to the suspects, the man behind the deal is Yala Provincial Prison inmate Utsaman Jintra.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Massive granite slab kills one, injures another

ONE Myanmar national was killed and another seriously injured on February 10 after an enormous slab of granite that they were delivering fell on them.

Mong Mia, 23, was part of a four-man crew unloading the slabs in a warehouse in Kathu.

Mr Mong was pronounced dead. The other crew member was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit at Patong Hospital.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

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German charged for Polish pedestrian's death

A GERMAN man is out on bail after being charged for fatally colliding with a Polish pedestrian in Chalong.

Miroslav Slanina, 73, ran into Malgorzata Regina Szczygiel, 44, while she was crossing the road in front of Soi Thao Daeng on Wiset Road at about 8pm on February 13.

"Mr Slanina was taken to Chalong

Police Station and charged with reckless driving causing death," said Capt Chollada Chokdeesrijun of the Chalong Police. "However, he was released within an hour after posting 100,000-baht bail."

Ms Szczygiel was accompanied by her partner, who was not injured in the incident, said Capt Chollada.

Officers said that they need to con-

tinue with the investigation before handing the case to the Public Prosecutor.

"We are hoping to conclude this case as soon as possible so that we can submit evidence to relevant officials and Mr Slanina can face legal action," Capt Chollada added.

- Winai Sarot



Ms Szczygiel's partner was not injured in the accident. Photo: Winai Sarot

Tourist dies scuba diving in Phi Phi national park

By Kongleaphy Keam

A TOUR company, a boat operator and a British dive professional are all in hot water after a tourist died in their care while scuba diving in Phi Phi national marine park on February 12.

Chinese national Minghua Jiang, 62, was recovered unconscious at about noon while scuba diving for the first time near Koh Poda (Koh Yawasam), which is part of Noppharat Thara - Mu Ko Phi Phi National Park.

Mr Jiang, who was on a scuba diving tour with Ao Nang-based Scuba Addicts, was one of two divers accompanied by British dive instructor Geoff Branigan, explained Lt Col Anurak Parinyasathiragul of the Krabi Marine Police.

"Mr Branigan left Mr Jiang underwater alone when he accompanied another diver to the



Mr Jiang was one of two divers out on a scuba diving tour with Ao Nang-based Scuba Addicts, when he was recovered unconscious from the water. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

surface, who was suffering ear pain due to issues with equalizing at depth," said Col Anurak.

"When Mr Branigan went back underwater, Mr Jiang was not where he had left him. Af-

ter a search, Mr Jiang was found unconscious."

Mr Jiang was given emergency first aid and taken to Krabi Hospital. He was later pronounced dead, reported Col Anurak.

Doctors have yet to determine the cause of death, confirmed police.

Investigations revealed that the dive boat's registration had expired on November 28 last year.

Sky lantern sets Phuket hill ablaze



No one was supposed to release lanterns without permission. Photo: Adam Blanchard

A SKY lantern released on Valentine's Day left the hillside between Ya Nui and Nai Harn Beach in flames.

Witnesses say a shift in the wind caused the lantern to crash back into the hill.

It took firefighters more than four hours to extinguish the flames, said Surachai Soison of the Rawai Municipality Fire Department.

No one was supposed to release lanterns without permission from the municipality, Rawai Mayor Aroon Solos told the *Gazette*.

- Sukawin Tanthavanich

Decorated former German Hon Consul passes away

FORMER German Honorary Consul for Phuket Dirk Naumann passed away on Monday, his family announced.

Mr Naumann was well known and respected in Phuket and in his homeland for his 12 years of dedicated service to the island. He retired from his post in July 2014.

He was awarded the Order of Merit from the Federal Republic of Germany, the highest merit the President of Germany can award to a German citizen.

German Ambassador to Thailand Rolf Schulze commended Mr Naumann for his years of service, especially his work after the 2004 tsunami, helping many Thais and foreigners.



Dirk Naumann. Photo: Ulrich Tanner

Anyone who would like to wish a final farewell to Mr Naumann can do so at the Anuphas Kritsadam Temple, where funeral rites are being held until next Tuesday.

- Kongleaphy Keam

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7. Inactivated influenza vaccine, 13-Valent pneumococcal conjugate vaccine and 23-Valent pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (Fluvaxim/Pneumo-13/Pneumo-23)	6,590	5,100
8. Zoster vaccine, Inactivated influenza vaccine, 13-Valent pneumococcal conjugate vaccine and 23-Valent pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (Zostavax/Fluvaxim/Pneumo-13/Pneumo-23)	12,650	10,100
9. Hepatitis B Virus Vaccine (Sero-B) 3 doses	2,999	1,450

*Include Vaccination, doctor fee and other hospital charges

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Dengue case reports spike, but under control says health chief

THE Phuket Provincial Public Health Office (PPHO) is on top of the island's surge in dengue fever cases, despite figures being almost triple those of last year, confirmed officials.

From January 1 to February 6 of this year, 70 cases of dengue fever have been reported in the province, compared to 22 reported cases for the same period last year.

The higher number of reported cases this year, ranks Phuket in the top five provinces most affected by dengue fever.

However, PPHO chief Bancha Kakong said that the higher numbers showed that the province is being extra vigilant and encouraging people to take better precautions.

"I don't think this will have a negative impact on Phuket. In fact, it should instill confidence among locals and international visitors that we are doing our best to prevent the spread of the



Everyone has been asked to take extra precautions. Photo: Gazette file

disease," said Mr Bancha. The high incidence of dengue is due to several factors, said Mr Bancha.

"Although Phuket has a registered population of 380,000, the actual number of people visiting the province throughout the year is in the millions, so naturally there will be a higher rate of cases when the calculation is made based on case numbers per capita," he said.

Mr Bancha emphasized that a strict policy on reporting dengue cases was put in place and noted that even patients suspected of contracting dengue would be included in the stats, even if it later turned out that they had not caught the disease. This would mean that about one-third of the reported cases would eventually turn out to be false alarms, he said.

- Kongleaphy Keam

PM keeps

From page 1

...in Ubon Ratchathani, made international news with its take on the KFC logo, which featured Adolph Hitler in place of the iconic Colonel Sanders, reported *The Diplomat*.

"We highly appreciated the prompt response by the relevant Thai agencies. In the same spirit, we appreciated the club's decision to cancel the show," said Amb Roded. "In recent years, we have indeed witnessed an improvement in awareness and sensitivity in Thailand on the topics of Holocaust denial, anti-Semitism, racism and so on."

Last year, Mr M'bala M'bala was sentenced to two months in jail by a Belgian court for racist and anti-Semitic comments he made during a show in Belgium in 2012. This, however, wasn't the first time the comedian was convicted for hate

speech. In fact, earlier in the year he received a two-year suspended sentence in France for a Facebook comment condoning terrorism.

Days after the attacks that killed 17 people in Paris, Mr M'bala M'bala posted a message that mixed the popular 'I am Charlie' slogan with the name of one of the gunmen, Amedy Coulibaly. The statement read: 'I feel like Charlie Coulibaly'.

Mr M'bala M'bala has been arrested at least 38 times for violating French hate speech laws.

"He claims the country is run by Jewish 'slave drivers' and says 'the big crooks of the planet are all Jews'," reported *The Telegraph*.

"He even complains that 'the Holocaust has become almost a dominant religion' in France, and says Jewish journalist Patrick Cohen makes him

Bigger budget needed to boost Phuket image

THE central government needs to reassess how it determines Phuket's budget due to the vast number of tourists for which the island's infrastructure needs to cater, said Phuket Honorary Consul for Nepal Prane Sakulpipatana at a seminar discussing the island's image on February 12.

"The central government calculates the budget for the island based on its registered residential population of about 380,000 people. They fail to factor in the need for the island to take care of more than 12 million tourists, as well as unregistered Thai citizens and expats - all of whom consume resources and put pressure on the infrastructure," said Ajarn Prane.

Pakpoom Intharasuwan, the provincial chief administrative officer for Phuket, explained that he had been doing his best to secure a larger budget for the island in order to ensure the safety and well-being of tourists and locals.

"We have explained the situation to the central government. This is part of the reason that we have been given such large budgets for the underpasses and flyover projects," Mr Pakpoom said. "These infrastructure development projects might be an



Mr Apinan chaired the meeting. Photo: Phuket PR

inconvenience now, but they are good for the future of Phuket."

The on-going infrastructure improvements on the island were also highlighted by Apinan Juntarungsri, the director-general of the Public Relations Department (PRD).

"The airport-expansion project and other development projects shown that the island is moving in the right direction. These are excellent ways to improve the image of Phuket in the long run," said Mr Apinan.

"Phuket is already very famous as a tourist destination, and has bolstered the reputation of Thailand. There are countless good aspects about the island: the sun and sand; the smiling, friendly people; and the recent gastronomy award."

- Kongleaphy Keam

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comedian off island stage

think of 'the gas chambers'. He has repeatedly invited Robert Faurisson, a famous Holocaust denier, on stage."

Mr Panuwat reiterated to the *Gazette* that Illuzion was only the venue, which had been rented out to the agency organizing the show.

"Illuzion did not ignore or neglect this issue; when Phuket Governor contacted the owner on the day before the performance and explained the situation, Illuzion immediately cancelled the contract for renting its space to the event organizer," said Mr Panuwat.

Despite the last minute cancellation, Illuzion paid no compensation to Mr M'bala M'bala or the organizer.

"Illuzion management would like to apologize to the Jewish community for the accident and welcome the Israeli ambassador to make direct contact with the Illuzion team for



The show was originally slated to be held at Illuzion night club on Patong's renowned Soi Bangla. Photo: Gazette file

any clarification," Mr Panuwat said.

Thailand has faced severe criticism from Human Rights Watch, the United States of America and many private and

government bodies with regards to freedom of expression, following the National Council of Peace and Order (NCPO) taking power in 2014.

Coming under particular fire

are Thailand's lese majeste law, the Computer Crimes Act and other laws being applied in defamation cases. However, Mr M'bala M'bala's speeches, comments and actions appear to fall outside of 'freedom of speech', inside and outside of Thailand.

In 2013, then-French Interior Minister Manuel Valls announced that he would try to legally ban public performances by Mr M'bala M'bala, reported *France 24*.

"Despite a conviction for public defamation, hate speech and racial discrimination, Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala no longer seems to recognize any limits," a statement released by Mr Valls read. "Consequently, the interior minister has decided to thoroughly examine all legal options that would allow a ban on his public gatherings, which no longer belong to the artistic domain, but rather amount to a public safety risk."

Moves to muzzle Mr M'bala M'bala set off a series of debates with regards to freedom of speech.

"These preliminary injunctions that have been pronounced against his shows are dangerous – not for Dieudonné, but because citing 'a risk to public order' opens the way for other similar injunctions," Agnès Tricoire, a lawyer who specializes in intellectual property and freedom of expression and represents the French League of Human Rights, told *The New York Times* in 2014.

After departing from Thailand this year, Mr M'bala M'bala travelled to Hong Kong for another show. However, he was detained upon arrival and deported.

"Civilized societies find it is necessary to put a stop to such hate speech and outlaw such performances," said Amb Roded.

Visas, taxes cause delay of superyacht charter licence

THERE will be further delays in Thailand rolling out the highly-anticipated foreign-flagged superyacht charter licence, industry representatives were told at the Thailand Yacht Show forum on February 10.

Though the regulations and rules with regards to the actual superyacht charter licence were hammered out on August 10, a number of related issues remain as hurdles for superyacht owners, explained Somchai Sumanuskajonkul, a deputy director-general for the Thailand Marine Department.

"The two major remaining issues deal directly with immigration law and value-added tax [VAT]," said Mr Somchai. "The relevant government agencies are working to create one-year-permission-to-stay approvals for superyacht crew members – linking their stays in the country with the ship's stay. Additionally, progress is being made to create a VAT exception for superyachts."

The immigration issues are awaiting final approval by the Immigration Bureau commissioner, while the VAT exception needs to be enacted by royal decree, Mr Somchai said.

Lies Sol, the charter manager and broker of Northrop



Immigration is working to create special visas for superyacht crew members. Photo: Gazette file

and Johnson, expressed her concern that many yacht owners are already having to make the decision of whether or not to send their boats to Asia for next season.

"Could you give us a timeline when the legal aspects of revenue and crew visas will be decided upon?" asked Ms Sol, also noting that preparations needed to be underway by charter brokers handling bookings for next season.

"Please be assured that we are working very hard to get everything taken care of as quickly as possible," Mr Somchai said.

The discussion on the status of the superyacht charter licences between government officials and members of the marine industry was facilitated by the Thailand Yacht Show at the Indigo Pearl.

– Chutharat Plerin

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IN THIS ISSUE

- News: Patong porn peddlers pinched; Jungceylon white knight unmasked. Pages 2, 3 & 7
INSIDE STORY: Tourism health check. Pages 4 & 5
AROUND THE ISLAND: Moving house. Page 8
AROUND THE REGION: Water pollution crackdown. Page 10
PEOPLE: The marine biologist who cannot desert gobies. Pages 12 & 13
LIFESTYLE: Loud and proud in Patong. Pages 14 & 15
MOTORING: Jeep and cheerful diesel. Page 18
GOOD LIVING: Dr Atkins and The Green Man. Page 19
FIRST PERSON: Keeping Phuket on the map. Page 25
BUSINESS & MONEY TALKS: Phuket-Haad Yai flights; Bear market. Pages 30 & 31
SPORT & LEISURE: Too Time with David Holloway; Cricket League; Rebek Champagne runs dry; Soft tennis; Women's basketball. Pages 32 & 33
GARDENING: Week...

FREE AT LAST!

Visa runners released after four nights of fear

By Gazette Staff

RANONG: "The Ranong 12", a group of 12 foreign tourists arrested on the morning of February 8 for overstaying their visas, were finally set free on the morning of Sunday, February 12.

During their five-day ordeal they were forced to spend two nights trying to sleep on dirty police cell floors and two more nights locked up on buses during overnight journeys to and from Bangkok, where they were sent to be processed for deportation.

Among the detainees, who included British, South Korean, German, Vietnamese, French, Italian and Swedish nationals, the maximum overstay was just six days.

The detainees were eventually spared deportation from Bangkok following successful negotiations between their embassies and top Immigration officials in the capital. They were then returned, still under detention, to Ranong, from where they were finally allowed to depart the country under expulsion orders.

They then re-entered the country as free men and women on new tourist visas. Here's a diary of what happened.



Chris Taylor with Benjaminaporn Mueang Co., on whose bus the Ranong 12 passengers were held.

The 12 passengers overstayed their visas from the morning of February 8 to the morning of Sunday, February 12.

what should I do?" and they "Do a visa run tomorrow and a 200-baht overstay [fine]."

"That's exactly what [was doing], but then we got pulled over by the Tourist Police and Highway Police and they make a huge problem for us," he said.

Justifying the arrests, Police Maj Songproad Sirikul, the new head of the Ranong Tourist Police, told the Gazette that his office had received a report that a business was assisting illegal aliens by bringing them to Burma. He said he ordered his men to check into this and, when they did, it turned out to be true.

"The police arrested them because they broke the law," he said, while strenuously denying allegations that the arresting officers asked for 5,000 baht from each tourist in exchange for letting them go.

Kamala school tries out tsunami evacuation plan

Woman eats free - and police get a photograph. Promthep wind power project stalled

'Rude mistreatment' of 'accidental' felons

The Ranong 12: overstayer caught in the crossfire?

Patong porn peddlers pinched

Teens can't get enough online porn

PHUKET is changing at exponential speed. The transformation from what this little island looked like ten years ago, to the traffic-congested mayhem we now see on our roads, is dramatic to say the least. But some things never change, or at least they don't change for long.

'Visa runners released after four nights of fear' reads the sub-headline on page one of the February 18-24, 2006 issue of the Gazette. Thankfully, the extreme measure of jailing and preparing to deport a tourist for some-where between one and six days of overstay doesn't seem to be a real possibility anymore, but then again, would you be surprised? Outraged, of course, but surprised?

Quickly coming to be known as the 'Ranong 12', a group of 12 foreign tourists were arrested for overstaying their visas. One of them had received advice

that many a regular tourist and expat has heard before: do a visa run tomorrow and pay the fine.

The fine back then was just 200 baht a day. It has since been raised to 500 baht a day. Things have also become a bit more strict; blurred rules about overstay blacklists, tourist visa limitations and permit to stay limitations often lead to on-the-ground rulings made by officers who may or may not be swayed by some tea money.

Allegations of bribes being part of the visa run industry also remain. Today, it's not uncommon to hear those returning to Thailand via the Sadao border-crossing grumbling about having to slip 200 baht into their passports as they go through, in order to avoid being hauled over the

The gift of hindsight

coals - despite having valid visas and paperwork. Given that doing so implicates the person in the crime and that filming at the crossing is illegal, proving such allegations is tough. For the Ranong 12 though, things were a bit worse than grumbling over 200 baht. Already behind bars and sleeping on grubby jail-cell floors, they were much more vulnerable.

Maj Songproad Sirikul, then-head of the Ranong Tourist Police, 'strenuously denied allegations that the arresting officers asked for 5,000 baht from each tourist in exchange for letting them go', reported the Gazette.

"I think that's impossible. I can guarantee that Tourist Police officers did not ask for money, because we are

not in trouble [financially] and I constantly remind them not to do that," said Maj Songproad.

After five days, which included being locked in two mini-buses for the overnight journey to the Immigration Detention Center in Bangkok, and then being brought back to Ranong, the dozen foreigners were 'deported' to Burma. All 12 promptly returned to Thailand via Ranong Immigration, where they were issued new visas.

So, like unknown numbers of tourists before them, and after them, the Ranong 12 were swept back up in the ever turning, never changing wheel of immigration corruption allegations, wavering visa-law enforcement and on-the-ground judgments that fail to provide precedence for tomorrow, let alone ten years from now.

- Isaac Stone Simonelli

WELCOME TO RANONG FROM YOUR FRIENDS IN THE TOURIST POLICE

Violence flares in South after raid on base of bomb-makers

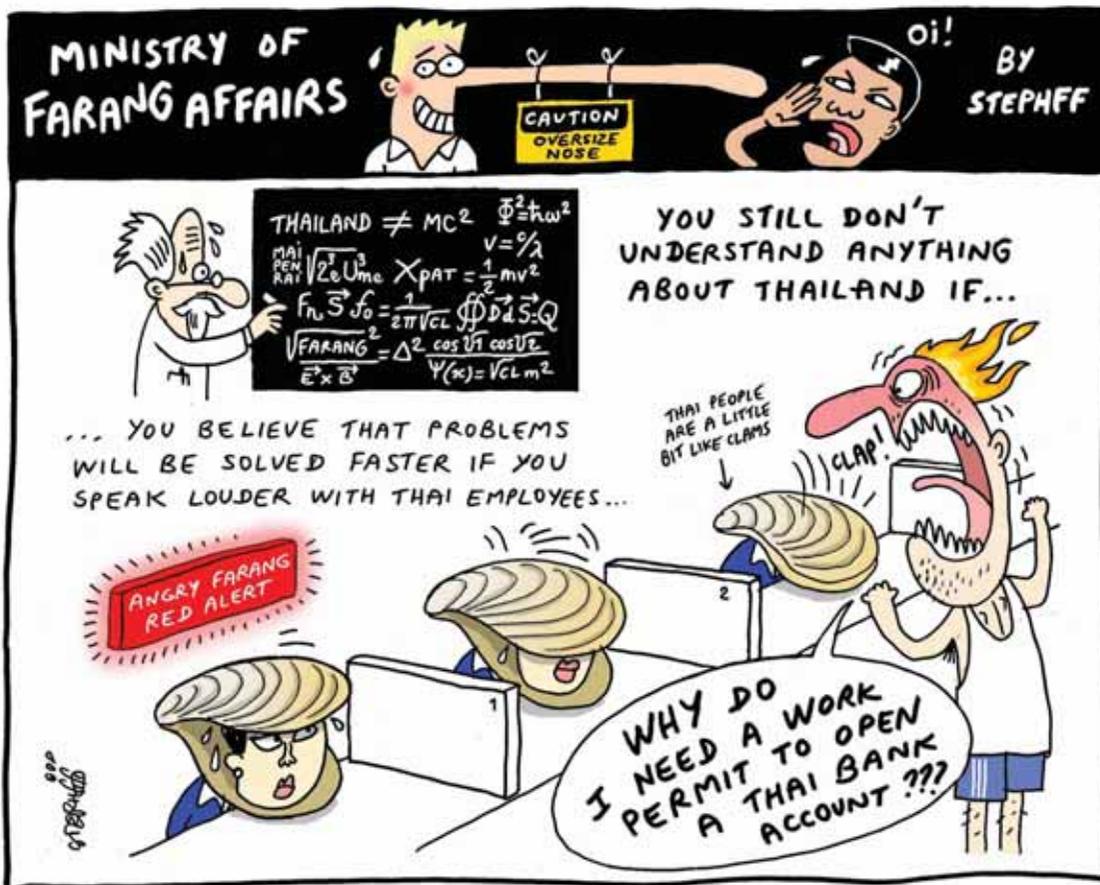
THERE were reports of bomb blasts, school arson and people being shot in several areas of the deep South on February 11 and 12.

The sudden upsurge in violence drew speculation that the attacks were retaliation for the security forces' successful raid on a well-hidden insurgent base used by bomb-makers in Pattani on February 10.

Thepa coal plant 'would inflame the insurgency'

ACTIVISTS have voiced concern that a coal-fired power plant proposed for Thepa district in Songkhla will cause more violence in the Deep South – as mosques, a religious school and Muslim cemeteries would have to be moved to make way for the plant.

The activists also claimed that all three public hearings about the plant and its coal transport pier were not held properly. They have called on the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP) to revoke the Environmental and Health Impact Assessment for the project.



Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt get 'matching' Thai tattoos

HOLLYWOOD stars Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt recently got ink done by a Thai tattoo guru.

In a touching tribute to the strength of their bond – despite reports of marital discord in recent weeks – Woman's Day website said it is understood

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

that Ajarn Noo Kanpai used the same ink for both Mr Pitt and Ms Jolie.

Last month, while the 40-year-old Oscar winner was directing the film *First They Killed My Father* in Cambodia, the couple had a secret session

with Mr Noo, who had previously done tattoo work for Ms Jolie in the past, reported *Woman's Day*.

Thailand puts B2.2bn down to battle malaria

THE Thai government will spend 2.2 billion baht to eradicate malaria within 10 years, a senior minister said on February 15.

The funds would be allocated to the National Research Council and National Science and Technology Development Agency to develop new medicine to fight the mosquito-borne disease, including some strains found to be resistant towards existing drugs, said Deputy Prime Minister Admiral Narong Pipatanasai.

BKK Spanish 'butcher' had help, say police

AN ONGOING investigation suggests that the prime suspect in a gruesome murder may have had at least two accomplices.

Spanish national Artur Segarra Princep is accused of killing and dismembering fellow Spaniard David Bernat.

"We believe the victim's body parts were gradually dumped along the Chao Phraya River and it's likely that more than two people have played a role here," said Metropolitan Police Acting Chief Sanit Mahathavorn on February 15.

Police began investigating the grisly crime last month after several human body parts were found floating in various locations in the river. DNA tests confirmed the body parts belonged to Mr Bernat, who was reported missing.

Earlier this month, as the police investigation intensified, Mr Princep fled to Cambodia, where he was arrested.



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Floating ideas

THE spike in the number of marine related accidents in the Andaman is an issue of great concern. The beauty of the Andaman's marine attractions is a major draw for tourists, but the recent deaths of a French snorkeller and Chinese diver, the maiming of two Russian divers and other marine fatalities so far this year is turning the azure blue ocean red.

The major factors in these accidents appear to be a lack of ensuring safe snorkelling practices, reckless speedboat drivers and a general disregard for the law.

Though blame was quickly placed on the speedboat driver who ran over the two Russian divers, the dive community turned on itself regarding the death of a novice Chinese diver.

Taken aboard an unregistered longtail boat to an illegal dive location with an illegally working dive instructor, it is difficult to know exactly where to plunge in. However, there was a call from some for certifying agencies such as PADI to better ensure that those working under their flag are complying with local laws.

It is essential to punish those unwilling to comply with Thai rules and regulations. However, it is also important to rub out the cultural fine print allowing good laws to be bent. Nonetheless, the enforcement of these laws should not be down to independent groups, but government organizations.

The move to post 'No Swimming' signs at the busy lagoon mouth on Koh Hong shows awareness of the need to communicate directly with tourists who may, or may not, be neglected by their tour guides. And though park officials are making 200 'life jackets' available for tourist to use for free, the reality of the situation is that most of the water related deaths reported so far this year were people wearing personal floatation devices (PFDs).

Perhaps more spot checks to ensure that tour companies are following regulations are in order, as well as an update of regulations concerning the kinds of life jackets to be used by snorkellers.

Though more expensive, a life jacket is designed to turn an unconscious person from face down to face up in the water, allowing them to breathe. A personal floatation device, which is standard for the island boat tours that include snorkelling, simply keep a person afloat. Given the difficulties of enforcing any rules that demand tour guides give proper briefings before allowing tourists into the water, the simple solution – though expensive solution – is to ensure that boats providing snorkelling trips in the Andaman are equipped with life jackets, not PFDs.



Different people have different views

Re: German charged for Polish pedestrian's death in Phuket, February 15

After 20 years of living here, I've not yet bought into the notion that Thai drivers are always let free, or that foreigners are always immediately charged.

Maybe we simply have differing views of Thais, Thailand, and the overall quality of life here, but if you're anti-Thai, then you will of course see all manner of bad things.

Old Vard
Gazette forum

Consistency is what tourists want most

Re: Bigger budget needed to boost Phuket image, February 15

Phuket has had very inconsistent policies. Tourists want to know what to expect, not plan a vacation here when the available beach facilities are constantly changing.

It's not possible to please everyone, but at least be consistent. People don't like changes, especially when they are restrictive or unpalatable.

Phuket has lost its charm, but it's not Hong Kong either. Phuket has maximized its potential, and the market demographics are changing.

Anon
Gazette forum

99-baht helmet is better than none

Re: More than five dozen helmet-less drivers arrested in

Letters to the Editor

Do you have an opinion to voice?
Email Editor@PhuketGazette.net

Phuket, February 13

Agree that there's no sense in belittling the 99-baht helmets. Non-thinkers and other whingers have been doing that in the forums for at least 7 or 8 years, so we know for sure that helmet prices are a big discouraging factor in the Thai market.

If they can be forced to buy one at 99 baht, it's certainly better than nothing – and maybe they'll get used to the idea of wearing one.

Thinker
Gazette forum

Is there not regular beach-trash pickup?

Re: Kamala Beach cleared of trash, February 12

Why do businesses have to complain? Isn't there regular garbage collection along the beach?

The beach once had a small team of cleaners, but then I do recall piles of black plastic bags filled and stacked by them, and no trucks came along promptly to remove the bags.

Surely it's time that Kamala's most valuable and visited tourist asset, the beach, had a care plan that regularizes cleaning. New bins would also help.

Chob
Gazette Forum

Minibus driver gets a good talking to

Re: Phuket underpass checkpoint scoops up dozens of motorists, February 16

I was riding southbound in the motorbike lane on Thepkrasattri Road the other morning, when a minibus came speeding up behind me, blaring his horn and flashing lights trying to intimidate so that I'd allow him to under-take.

What he hadn't spotted was the police motorcyclist riding 20 meters in front of me.

I got him to stop the driver and have a 'word'. Made my day.

Agogohome
Facebook

Too many pitfalls in buying property

Re: Property Watch: Foreigners: beware of condo laws, February 10

Too many pitfalls to buying in Thailand – why bother given all the rentals available?

The chances of getting screwed are huge; look at the Vard case – still no progress and the whole process is xenophobic.

I would love to own two or three rai of land somewhere, but it's not worth the hassle. Put it in the wife's name and watch it disappear. We have no rights.

Mister Ree
Gazette forum

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Managing Editor: Isaac Stone Simonelli

Managing Director: Oranee Hildebrand
General Manager: Natthira Susangrat
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Contact us:

Editorial: news@phuketgazette.net
Advertising Sales: adsales@phuketgazette.net
Classified Advertising: classads@phuketgazette.net
Website services: anna@phuketgazette.net
Gazette Guide: guide@phuketgazette.net
Events Sponsorship: events@phuketgazette.net
General: info@phuketgazette.net

Telephone: 076 273555 (10 lines) Fax 076 615240
79/94 Moo 4, Thepkrasattri Rd, T. Koh Kaew, A. Muang, Phuket

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Climbing: a balancing act

FIRST PERSON

SINCE I've been here, nobody has died rock climbing. In fact there are rarely any injuries – maybe one or two a year. I don't understand why the government has suddenly banned the activity. It seems weird, as it has been a popular activity on the island for a long time.

However, it is an official order, so there is nothing I can do. I recognize that the national park chief is worried about tourists' safety, but what about the impact his decision has on locals and the growth of tourism on the island? What about our income?

I do not run a climbing business on the island. However, I have indirectly been impacted by the walls being closed, and I don't think I'm the only one.

We have not lost a huge amount of income, as other types of tourists still come to Koh Yao Noi. Nonetheless, we don't want to lose any part of it if we can help it.

The government might see that only a small percentage of the total number of tourists who visit the island are climbers, so banning the activity will ensure safety and not have a significant economic impact. However, this isn't true.

"Climbers comprise 35 per cent of our bungalow occupancy. Most importantly, climbers tend to have longer stays than other types of tourists,



Maitree Chankarn, 50, is the owner of Baan Than Khao Bungalow on Koh Yao Noi. He is originally from Koh Panyi, Phang Nga. In addition to the bungalows, which saw a tourism boom in the last five years, he runs a number of other small businesses on the island.

Here, he asks that the rock climbing walls in Koh Yao Noi be reopened, as he laments the economic damage the ban on rock climbing has had on him and others in the area.

ists, putting more money directly into the local economy.

A generic tourist will only stay two or three nights, while a climber will stay at least one or two weeks – think about how much more money we can earn from their stay on the island. This impacts hotels, restaurants, bars and other tourist related businesses. Just because they are here to climb doesn't mean they don't participate in other activities on

their rest days. Everyone can benefit from these tourists, especially because they stay so long.

The other major benefit of climbing tourists is that they come during both low and high seasons. Having a tourist market that can help support the economy during the low season is very important, even if it is a small one. This is especially important for small

family-run businesses.

Of course, it is not my place to say if climbing is good or bad. Like everything, it can have positive and negative impacts. On one hand locals make money and tourists enjoy their stay at Koh Yao Noi; on the other hand there are some risks associated with it.

Given that the park chief is concerned about the risks, I believe it would be advantageous to look at implementing more safety measures or to have experts present at the walls to ensure climbers' safety. Making all the companies register with the park and adhere to certain safety standards is reasonable.

If the government does its best to make sure that climbers are safe, nobody will blame officials.

The ban is, without a doubt, destroying a mutually beneficial opportunity for both tourists and locals. And though we want climbing back, we do not want to see tourists die either. The government simply needs to find a way to allow climbers back, while ensuring their safety.



Phuket's traffic and pollution are rising rapidly. Photo: Gazette file

Pollution in paradise

IN 2015, Delhi was named the world's most polluted city.

When I first saw this report, it made me think back to when I was a university student in Phuket and went to Bangkok for a three-month internship.

Nearly a decade ago, everything in Bangkok was good – except for the air pollution. The main reason was the carbon monoxide from cars, motorbikes, buses and trucks.

During my three months in the hustle and bustle of the city, I told myself that I'd never settle down in a place like that. I hate traffic jams and air pollution, and I really missed Phuket – my island of paradise. I knew that I'd start a family here one day.

Recently, I followed through on my wish and now have a family and a job – except that my island of paradise now faces the issue of traffic and air pollution as well.

For example, the other day I drove my motorbike to go for lunch a short distance from where I work. It took at least 20 minutes to get there, thanks to the bumper to bumper traffic on the road. I feel that one of the main contributors to traffic congestion is underpass construction, which affects all of Phuket's main roadways.

Additionally, when cycling

Island View

By Pruth Kulprasit

Do you have an opinion to voice?
Email Editor@PhuketGazette.net

or riding a motorbike behind a bus that is spewing black smoke everywhere, it's hard to imagine that it's passed an annual inspection. In fact, many vehicles on the roads have clearly not passed annual inspections and are emanating black exhaust into the atmosphere.

Another reason for congestion and air-pollution is that we have too many vehicles on the road – the population is growing rapidly and public transportation is inefficient.

There are several other factors causing air pollution and traffic congestion: emissions from industries and households, and farming chemicals, to name a couple. But, in my opinion, the biggest one that needs the most urgent attention is carbon monoxide fuel combustion from vehicles and engines.

No wonder the island is full of smog. I worry that if we do not do something drastic, Phuket will not only become the province with the worst traffic, but also the most polluted city in the world.

Words from the Wise

"The sun, with all those planets revolving around it and dependent on it, can still ripen a bunch of grapes as if it had nothing else in the universe to do."

– Galileo Galilei

"We only have to look at ourselves to see how intelligent life might develop into something we wouldn't want to meet."

– Stephen Hawking

Issues & Answers

What will tourists' first impressions of Kata be?

WHAT impression do you suppose new tourist arrivals will get of Kata Beach when they first walk to what's supposed to be one of Phuket's finest beaches?

We believe something needs to be done to improve the appearance. Beach umbrellas looked much better than what's in this picture.

Concerned Resident
Kata

Karon Mayor Thawee Thongcham replies:



The area over there is private land. So, we cannot force them to move out or remove the equipment. However,

what we can do is to make the area cleaner and better organized, thus making it a bit better to look at.

We have sent them a letter already, but did not see any improvement. I understand that this is not a good picture of tourism in Kata. I really appreciate your concern for our reputation.

I will soon invite all the operators and landowners for a meeting to find a solution for this.

Ups and downs in the price of oil

Finance

By David Mayes

FOR somebody who pays attention to commodity prices, these are extremely interesting times. I still remember many talking heads on television predicting that we'd never see oil below 100 dollars per barrel. The argument was extremely convincing, especially when the markets seemed to be confirming its truth.

With the flood of shale oil and the lifting of embargoes on Iran as the main reason given behind a move nobody saw coming, oil has been in a freefall.

What's interesting is that not a single oil analyst from the big financial institutions predicted this move. As far as I know, there weren't even any lone conspiracy theorists or armchair analysts that got it right. This dramatically proves my point about nobody having a crystal ball and that all cycles come to an end. I didn't expect the commodity cycle to end so dramatically, especially considering how much money has been printed in the last seven years, and nobody else seemed to have either.



Analysts did not seem to predict the recent freefall in the price of oil. Photo: ResoneTIC

The main question we need to ask ourselves is what this ultimately means for the world economy. Indeed, most econometric models weight the price of oil more heavily than other factors, and a low oil price should have a positive impact as it lowers costs of production and transportation.

However, markets will read whatever they want into any news event and the low price seems to be generating a nega-

tive interpretation.

The story that seems to be driving traders is that the low oil price is a leading indicator of a global slowdown rather than an opportunity for the economy to operate in a more favorable way. The thing to remember though, is that the price of an oil company is not the same as the price of oil. Oil companies are more closely correlated to the S&P 500 than the price of oil.

Take ExxonMobil for ex-

ample. It is still trading at over 75 dollars per share at the time of this writing. It's off of its high by about 25 per cent, compared to about 70 per cent decline in the price of oil. The direction oil companies' stocks will trade from here is more likely to follow the broad market. Most serious investors know the price of oil will not remain low forever and this is reflected in the way most of the oil majors will trade alongside the market.

Investing in troubled, smaller companies is different. It's very risky and best left to professional speculators. A buyout can yield amazing returns; however, it could lead to bankruptcy if you end up with worthless shares.

In any event, I know the current oil price is very bad news for many of Phuket's expats who work in the industry in one form or another. Many offshore service providers are making mass layoffs, the latest being 10,000 jobs gone from Schlumberger. The good news is that everything is cyclical and eventually oil prices will begin to rise again. Don't ask me when though, and if anyone out there tries to convince you that they do, think about how many people got it right when it came to predicting the current collapse in oil price.

David Mayes, MBA, resides in Phuket and provides wealth management services to expatriates around the globe, focusing on UK pension transfers. He can be reached at david.m@faramond.com or 085-335 8573. Faramond UK is regulated by the FCA and provides advice on pensions and taxation.

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Peeking behind Phuket's lace veil

By Sahar Aftab Paliwala

WITH its idyllic beaches and beautiful beachfront resorts, Phuket is not only a hub of tourist activity, but with Asean integration now a factor, it is also well on its way to becoming a key global economic player. One industry that has seen sustained growth in the past decade is wedding planning and luxury events management.

Here is a little insight into what adds to Phuket's appeal as an ideal wedding destination.

LOCATION

Most industry players emphasize location as a key strategic advantage for the wedding and event planning business.

"Phuket is easily reachable with direct flights from many places around the world and our clients love the opportunity of a layover-free trip to their wedding destination," explained Jess Tantapaiboon, director of communications at Wedding Bliss Thailand.

Chonlada Lafferty, director of The Bridal Planner Co Ltd, agreed that Phuket's location is second to none, adding that the new airport will encourage tourists to choose Phuket over other destinations in Southeast Asia.

Price is a key factor as well, said Masawan Chavanavatch, sales and PR manager at Sala



Support services such as chefs and photographers are key industry players. Photo: Chaz Cruz Photographer

Phuket Resort and Spa, adding that the luxury pool-villa experience, with efficient services at affordable prices, is a great selling point for Phuket.

COMPETITION

As any industry with growth potential is prone to do, wedding and event planning has drawn its fair share of competition as well.

"The competition is very strong," said Ms Chonlada. "It is a big market, but you have to work hard to maintain your

brand's reputation."

Jeanette Skelton, director of Luxury Events Phuket, agreed, adding that there is no room for complacency. She also noted that budgets are quite competitive as the industry has continued to grow, with few players exiting the market.

Growing competition in Phuket helps to keep businesses on their feet, but the growth of the industry worldwide provides opportunities for them to form global partnerships as well.

"The current trend is for new

companies based around the world, mainly in Hong Kong, mainland China or Singapore), to try and arrange a destination wedding in Phuket for its couples. They seek partnerships with planners in Phuket and we gladly help with big high-end projects," explained Ms Jess.

AUXILIARY FUNCTIONS

Another important factor for wedding planners and luxury event organizers is a well-functioning support system.

"Phuket has 5-star wedding

support services, from lighting to photography, chefs, flowers and videographers," says Ms Skelton. Sightseeing opportunities in neighboring Krabi and Phi Phi also add to the appeal, she added.

A wide selection of decorators, planners and entertainers allows couples to find the style that suits them best; from exotic and tropical, to sophisticated and refined luxury, Ms Jess said.

Phuket's mouth-watering cuisine, year-round warm weather and Thai hospitality are all added advantages.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) was hailed by all as an important contributor to the industry's future stability.

"With the many media channels that TAT has, it can be an amazing help in promoting what we do in Thailand for the wedding industry," said Ms Jess.

However, security concerns remain a deterrent to industry growth, which is why local government should ensure that safety remains a priority, highlighted Ms Chonlada.

These are some of the factors contributing to Phuket's rise as a hot favorite wedding destination for couples from all corners of the globe.

Chinese cash pours into popular tourist provinces

A SPATE of Chinese investment has flooded into the real-estate and tourism sectors in Chiang Mai and Phuket, two of the most popular destinations for Chinese travellers.

While the investment has contributed to the growth of both sectors, local operators have been advised to improve their products and services to compete with the Chinese or else risk losing market share.

Quality Condominium Co-executive Vasant Chawla said that there was an influx of Chinese investment in the real-estate sector in Chiang Mai.

From a positive point of view, this would boost the growth of the sector. Most of the Chinese investors were small; people who started out by seeking second homes in Chiang Mai before later renting them out as daily accommodation to the growing number of Chinese tourists.



The rising number of Chinese arrivals has led to Chinese investors making headway in the tourism industry. Photo: Isaac Stone Simonelli

The entry of Chinese investors has affected small operators in Chiang Mai's real-estate and tourism related businesses, as Chinese customers prefer to use the services of investors from their own country.

However, it is not clear which real estate is mainly controlled by Chinese investors. Most of the 49 per cent of the property in question is owned

by Chinese, while Thai partners manage the businesses.

Some of the Chinese investors later expand from real estate into the tour-guide business, hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops to provide a comprehensive service to Chinese tourists in the province, which has hit local investors.

"Local business people should improve their service

quality to compete with the Chinese rivals," Mr Vasant said.

Non Hiranchet, secretary of the Chiang Mai-Lamphun Real Estate Association, said most of these kinds of Chinese investors came to Chiang Mai on private trips to explore opportunities to take over small property assets, or form joint ventures with local developers. Most of the targeted projects are close to the city center.

Mr Non predicted that this year such investors would take over about 10 housing projects in Chiang Mai worth 15 billion baht.

"At the moment this phenomenon has yet to hit local developers, but has boosted the growth of the housing sector. But in the long run it could affect local business people, who have to improve their products and join forces to defend their turf," he said.

- The Nation



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Thailand Yacht Show 2016

Deputy Prime Minister General Thanasak Patimaprakorn and dignitaries descended on Phuket for the launch of the inaugural Thailand Yacht Show on February 11 at Ao Po Grand Marina. The 4-day aquatic exposition, in partnership with the corporate sector and the Thai government, combined the best aspects of yacht charter, the boating industry and luxury lifestyles. The event aimed to promote Phuket as a luxury yacht charter hub in the Asia Pacific region and attracted marine leisure industry leaders and consumers from around the world. The *Phuket Gazette* and *The Nation* were proud to be National media partners for this prestigious event.



RIBBON CUTTING: Deputy Prime Minister General Thanasak Patimaprakorn (center); Tourism and Sports Minister Kobkarn Wattanavarangkura (5th from left); and Transport Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith (5th from right) are joined by dignitaries from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the Marine Department and Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada (2nd left). Photo: Phuket Best Event



Publisher of the *Phuket Gazette* John Magee (left) and Managing Editor Isaac Stone Simonelli (center) greet Deputy Prime Minister General Thanasak Patimaprakorn. Photo: *Phuket Gazette*



Chairman of Lan Kwai Fong Holdings Dr Allan Zeman (2nd right) with Andara Resort & Villas executives at Ao Po Grand Marina on the opening day of the Thailand Yacht Show 2016.



TEAM GAZETTE: Proud National Media Partners for the inaugural Thailand Yacht Show

Phuket radio hosts spread good vibes in Mae Hong Son

Radio hosts and DJs from Studio Line Agency's stations 88 Nice Peak FM and 93 Green FM headed to a school in Mae Hong Son Province in northwest Thailand to make a donation of sports and educational equipment for the '7th Love Charity' event on January 13. The local radio celebrities handed out uniforms, sports kits and equipment, books and more to the kids at Baan Pakea school situated in the town on the Burmese border.



Sarasri Sukthorn, Manager of Studio Line Agency Co Ltd with the team of DJs from 88 Nice Peak FM and 93 Green FM pose with students from Baan Pakea school in Mae Hong Son.

ents in Paradise

Lee Marine shines at inaugural yacht show

Leading Phuket-based yacht sales and service company Lee Marine International Marine Brokerage officially opened their new brokerage office at Ao Po Grand Marina during the Thailand Yacht Show 2016 on Feb 11, showing off a collection of 12 luxury boats on the water and generating 'strong interest' in potential buyers from Thailand, Hong Kong and Singapore.



Lee Marine Founder & CEO Josh Lee (left) with Lee marine General Manager Martin Holmes at the Thailand Yacht Show 2016. Photo: Phuket Gazette

Celebrity performance for Chinese New Year held at Central Festival Phuket



(From L-R) Nepal Honorary Consul for Phuket Ajarn Pranee; Central Retail Corporation Vice President Wilaiporn Pitimanaaree; former senator Tunyaratt Acharyachai; actress and fashion model Praya Lundberg; Phuket Deputy Governor Chokdee Amornwat; Chinese Vice Consul General for Phuket Wang Huijuan; and Kata Group Resorts President Pramook Acharyachai. Photo: Central Festival Phuket



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Threesome at Chalk & Cheese



Isaac couldn't get enough of the Swedish meatballs.

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

THERE are certain balls you remember, and certainly certain balls you crave. Made from Patrik Lundgren's mother's recipes, like a number of the dishes plated up at Chalk & Cheese by Thong Dee, the Swedish meatballs at Chalk and Cheese are the kind of balls that slip into both categories – for men and women.

On an island where farang food is abundant and Thai food is cheap, flavorful and diverse, there seems to be little need to crave something so specific as the Swedish meatballs at Chalk & Cheese. However, the bustling corner-style brasserie hidden in Kathu is the sort of place that you find yourself racing down the back roads just for lunch.

I have never had as

much fun reviewing a restaurant as I did with my fellow editors, during our three-hour dining experience. Patrik is funny, relaxed and friendly, creating a personality-based restaurant that carefully walks the line of casual fine dining. You can have Gravad Lax Salad, Australian Beef Carpaccio, Duck Normandy; or Risotto with king prawns and semi-dried cocktail tomatoes, while jamming out to The Beatles and watching the four expats at the table next to you have a laugh over a game of cards and a bottle of reasonably priced wine.

Then there's those meat balls. Though it's taboo to use the 'Big D' in a food review, this particular dish is worthy: those Swedish meat balls are simply delicious.

THREE Gazette editors descended on Chalk & Cheese – A Brasserie by Thong Dee, located in the heart of Kathu. Three hours and 'several' glasses of wine later, a single opinion for three different reasons was ready to be plated up.



Sahar says the Duck Normandy is a necessary repeat dish.

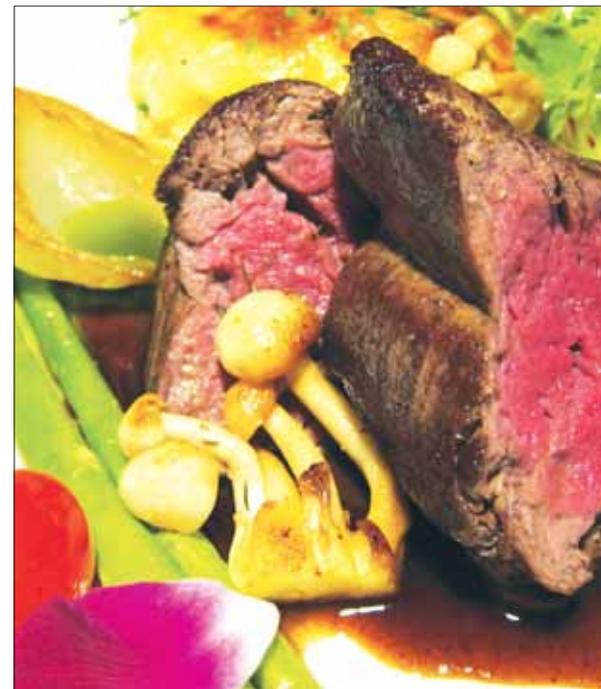
By Sahar Aftab Paliwala

WHETHER you've planned an intimate meal with a loved one, or a night out with family and friends, Chalk & Cheese is an ideal dining choice for many reasons. The place offers a brimming sense of well-being, brought on not only by the delectable choices on the menu, but also the unwavering attention of the owner, Patrik Lundgren, and his staff.

As an overt food reviewer, I thought personal attention would obviously be on the menu, but the many delighted patrons I encountered on subsequent visits showed that all guests were treated with just as much care.

The décor is modern, but cozy – in other words, quintessential casual fine dining. The restaurant also houses a private room with a balcony, ideal for throwing small, intimate parties.

Each carefully crafted dish deserves attention, but my personal favorite is Duck Normandy. The duck is carefully grilled to bring out the fat, and then cooked to perfection with calvados sauce, caramelized apples and cider. Served with roasted potatoes on the side, this tender, juicy treat will keep you reaching for more. And for those thus-inclined, an equally tempting choice of desserts such as almond cake, tiramisu or cheese-cake await.



Brie is a big seller, but the beef also gets an award.

By Katie P Arnold

AS AN editor, it may come as a surprise that no word can garner my attention more than this coagulation of milk protein known as cheese.

But 'what's in a name', as they say. For me, the more important concern is what's going to go in my belly. At Chalk & Cheese, the answer was 'everything'. And you know what, I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

To choose one dish above all is like asking which dinosaur was the greatest, or which Golden Girl would win in a fist fight. You just don't know.

For starters, you cannot miss out on the lightly fried brie with cranberry jam. In fact, you should probably have it for dessert or a palate cleanser... or as a main.

But as I must choose a

separate main dish from my fellow editors (thanks a lot, guys) I will choose the dish that touched my heart and my stomach in all the right places.

The Australian Beef Tournedos in a red wine reduction served with potatoes au gratin. The beef was tender, the reduction complemented the natural juices of the meat, and the plate was decorated with layers of pearl onions filled with basil oil.

The Au Gratin was soft and creamy, with a cheesy flavor that reminded me of home.

Chalk & Cheese is one of those restaurants that caters to those seeking a fine-dining experience in a casual atmosphere. Owner Patrik Lundgren will make sure you are comfortable, entertained and well-fed.

What more could you want?

February 21. Siroj Mini Marathon

The 4th 'Siroj Run for Health, Run for Charity Mini Marathon' will be held at Phuket International Hospital. The event will feature a 12 kilometer mini marathon for men and women for an entry fee of 250 baht. Winners will be awarded HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Royal Trophies.

There will also be a 4km fun run for men and women for which the entry fee is 200 baht, as well as a 3.5km three-people-team family fun run for an entry fee of 500 baht. VIP runners may register in any category for an entry fee of 2,000 baht. Top finishers will be awarded Phuket International

Hospital trophies.

Registration begins at 4:30am and the race starts at 6am. This event is sponsored by the *Phuket Gazette*.

February 22. Makha Bucha Day

Falls on the full moon of the third lunar month and commemorates the Buddha's ordaining of 1,250 monks who had arrived unannounced from afar only seven months after the Buddha began his teachings. It is also the date the Buddha delivered his Fundamental Teachings, just months before his death.

WHAT'S ON in Phuket

March 26. Thailand Beach Volley Fest

International amateur beach volley tournament with teams from

Asia, Australia, Europe, and the Americas competing. Classes are divided into men's 2 x 2, women's 2 x 2 and mixed 4 x 4. Players of all levels are welcome to compete. Entry fee is 2,000 baht. Free admission for spectators. Sponsored by the *Phuket Gazette*.

April 6. Chakri Memorial Day

Chakri Day commemorates the origins of the Chakri dynasty founded by Rama

I who established Bangkok as the nation's capital. HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej is the ninth monarch of the Chakri dynasty.

April 13-15. Songkran Festival

Songkran is the Thai New Year Festival also known as the Water Festival. The word Songkran literally means transformation or change. Held during the driest month in Thailand, Songkran is full of symbolic traditions such as pouring water on other people to wish them good luck for the New Year. The festival also includes parades, pageants and paying homage to one's ancestors, among other celebrations.



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Dangers lurking in Eden

Can you identify poisonous plants in your garden?



Gardening

By Patrick Campbell

WHEN I was knee high to a grasshopper in rural England, there were few dangers in the countryside. True, there were scary tales of deadly nightshade that would kill you if you ate the attractive purple-black berries, and of adders lurking in the hillside bracken with potentially lethal bites.

Of course I was blissfully unaware that one third of all the world's flora contain poisonous compounds in their tissues. Here in Phuket, that figure is certainly higher. While many plants have edible fruits or leaves, significantly more are toxic. Knowledge, however, is everything. If you get lost in the jungle but know what to eat, you will probably come out in one piece.

But back to our Phuket garden. Many of the most poisonous plants belong to the huge genus of *apocynaceae*.

Many of the most poisonous plants belong to the huge genus of *apocynaceae*.

Of these, one of the most lethal is the evergreen nerium oleander. It has been around since ancient times, and although classed as a Mediterranean shrub, it grows in many temperate and tropical climes. Indeed, it looks innocuous enough with its pleasant scented clusters of white or pink flowers – many hybrids now come in deeper shades of cerise and red – but all parts of the shrub are potentially lethal. There was one infamous occa-

sion when a family in New Zealand inhaled smoke from a bonfire containing oleander branches and were all violently ill. Legend has it that soldiers from the army of Alexander the Great died in similar circumstances. The culprit is a cocktail of chemicals that causes seizures or worse. More likely to be found in a Phuket garden is its cousin, *thevetia peruviana*, popular here on account of its vigorous growth and abundance of bright yellow bells. But it is the glossy green fruits, inviting perhaps to children or pets, which pose a potential threat.

As a general rule of thumb, any plant that contains a milky, latex-like fluid should be handled with care, a description which would include adeniums (the juice was used by native Tanzanians to coat their arrow tips with), euphorbias and plumerias. A complete list would run to hundreds of plants that includes tropical favorites such as angels' trumpets (*brugmansia*), *dieffenbachia* or dumb cane, most varieties of lily, *solanum* and *veratrum*. Even the peel of mangoes and the leaves of tomatoes are toxic. The worst of all though is the innocuous sounding castor-oil plant.

A most attractive shrub with huge glossy, maple-shaped leaves, its purplish clusters of berries contain deadly ricin. According to the *Guinness Book of Records*, it is the most



Thevetia peruviana is popular here on account of its vigorous growth and abundance of bright yellow bells. However, be wary of the glossy green fruit. Photo: Wendy Cutler

poisonous of all plants.

But before you rush out and dig up these offenders, remember that serious incidents resulting from their ingestion, are extremely rare. Your children are far more likely to suffer painful rashes from poison ivy, stinging nettles or hairy caterpillars.

In fact, all these plants – and

many more – are sources of complex compounds, which are revolutionizing the pharmaceutical industry. To give one example: 3,000 known alkaloids exist in plants. Many, disguised in pills, capsule and injections, are already helping to combat ailments from heart arrhythmia and malaria to asthma and hemorrhages.

Despite what we do to her, never underestimate Mother Nature's capacity for good.

If you have gardening or environmental concerns, contact Patrick at drpaccampbell@gmail.com. Many of his creative and academic publications can be found at his website: [GreenGaloshes Wordpress](http://GreenGaloshes.Wordpress.com).

Tip of the Week: Hard Wood Cuttings

NOW is a good time to strike hard wood cuttings as the earth in your Phuket garden is moist to a depth of several inches. The lazy way is to insert them into a hole made with a metal skewer or stake, but if you can turn the soil over, it will aerate it, exposing potential pests and giving your cuttings a better chance.

With hard wood cuttings, make a slanted cut from the parent branch and remove most of the fo-

liage. Six inch cuttings should be large enough with one to two inches embedded in the earth. Water lightly after planting.

Easy varieties to grow from cuttings include *ruellia*, *solandra*, *hibiscus schizopetalus*, *thevetia*, *murraya*, *jatropha* and *thunbergia*. Leggy growers such as *dracaenas* can be cut back to halfway and the cut part re-planted. Plants with latex-like sap do better if left to dry out for a day or so.



Ruellia is one variety that can be grown from cuttings. Photo: Alex Popovkin

Volley Festival hits Karon

KARON Beach is preparing its sands for the Thailand Beach Volley Festival Phuket powered by PTT on March 23 through March 27.

The program will feature an international amateur beach volleyball tournament, of which there are three classes: two X two men, two X two women and four X four mixed.

After preliminary pool play, the men's two X two event will divide into two divisions.

There will be medals for first, second and third place in each class and certificates for all participants. To date, entries have been received from Asia, Australia, Europe, North America and South America. The tournament is open to amateur players of all levels of proficiency.

The program includes a beach party on March 26 for participants and closes with the prize presentation ceremony on March 27.

To accommodate the large number of teams expected to compete in the tournament, a total of six courts will be setup on Karon Beach, including a center court with seating



A total of six courts will be set up on Karon's sands to accommodate the large number of participants and spectators expected to join the five-day festival. Photo: Gazette file

for spectators.

Supporting the main event will be a number of activities including the PTT Schools Cup and the PTT Beach Volleyball Clinic, which will be held on the final two days of the event. There will also be beach volleyball coaches on hand to run clinics for individuals and groups who want to learn the

basics of the sport or take their skills to a higher level.

A number of sales and display outlets will also be on site at the sponsor village.

The 2016 Thailand Beach Volley Festival Phuket powered by PTT is supported by the Tourism Authority of Thailand, PTT Public Company Limited, Phuket Province, the *Phuket*

Gazette, Winner Group, Haad Thip and Woraburi Phuket Resort and Spa.

For further information and entry forms for the tournament, please go to www.pentanglepromotions.com or <https://www.facebook.com/Phuket.Thailand.Open>

– *Phuket Gazette*

New HeadStart International campus opens



Mr Edouard. Photo: HeadStart PR

HEADSTART International School last week held an opening ceremony for its new campus, located near Central Festival Phuket.

"Our new campus is situated on 15 rai of beautiful landscape and is very easy to access from major locations in Phuket," said School Director Jazon Edouard.

Some of the facilities at the new campus include fully-stocked libraries for both primary and secondary levels, drama and dance facilities and a theater to hold school performances.

"I am confident that students will be happy at our new location, which has many additional facilities to provide a perfect learning environment," said Parimol Praisamran, HeadStart's school licensee.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

Winning Weekend for the Thanyapura Swim Academy

FINA Olympic hopefuls swept medals and broke records at the South Asian Games and Thanyapura-PIA's Open Swim League

PHUKET, THAILAND -- With over 30 medals won and individual and team national records broken for five different countries, the Thanyapura-FINA "Targeting Rio 2016" program had its most successful meet to date at the South Asian Games in Guwahati, India from the 10th to 15th February 2016.

FINA's "Targeting Rio 2016" worldwide scholarship program helps identify, qualify, and prepare athletes for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Since May 2015, over 20 sponsored athletes have been based in Thanyapura Phuket, the official FINA swim training center for South and Southeast Asia.

Aishath Sajina of the Maldives broke the national record for the 200-meter breaststroke by over 7 seconds. She also set a new national standard for the 50-meter breaststroke. Her sister Shajan recorded new national records for the 100-meter and 200-meter freestyle, while her 800-meter freestyle set the new record for both 400 meters and 800 meters.

Sofia Gadegaard Shah of Nepal reclaimed the 200-meter freestyle national record during the event's

preliminaries and lowered it further at the finals, while her 100-meter freestyle in the first leg of the 4x100 relay and her individual 100-meter freestyle also broke the national record. She also set a new record in the 400-meter individual medley and lowered Nepal's 50-meter freestyle record, going under the 29-second barrier twice. Countryman Sirish Gurung set the national record for the 400-meter freestyle.

Bangladesh's Najma Khatun set new national records in the 200-meter, 400-meter, and 800-meter freestyle. Compatriot Mohammad Mahfizur Rahman also went under the national record in all the freestyle distances, first in the 400-meter freestyle, then bested the previous national record by three seconds in the men's 200-meter freestyle and took bronze in the 1,500-meter freestyle lowering the national record by over 11 seconds. Rahman also broke national records and won bronze in both the 50-meter and 100-meter freestyle.

Kimiko Raheem set a new Sri Lanka record in the 100-meter freestyle as the starting swimmer of the country's 4x100 freerelay. She also



FINA Olympic hopefuls swept medals and broke records at the South Asian Games. The FINA "Targeting Rio 2016" swimmers are currently training at Thanyapura Phuket, the only FINA official training centre in South and Southeast Asia. From left: Aminath Shajan (Maldives), Aishath Sajina (Maldives), Sofia Gadegaard Shah (Nepal), Kimiko Shihara Raheem (Sri Lanka), Cherantha Desilva (Sri Lanka), Miguel Lopez (Thanyapura Aquatics Head Coach), Mohammad Mahfizur Rahman (Bangladesh), Shivani Prakash (India) and Najma Khatun (Bangladesh).

claimed the gold medal, the meet record, and Sri Lanka's national record by almost 2 seconds in the 200-meter backstroke. She continued her winning ways in the 100-meter backstroke, breaking the old meet record by 3 seconds and the Sri Lanka national record. Raheem claimed victory in the 50-meter freestyle with a new meet record of 26.4 seconds and replicated that feat in the 50-meter backstroke with a new meet

record of 29.75 seconds. Finally, she lowered the national record in the 100-meter freestyle on the way to her fifth individual victory. Cheran de Silva took bronze in the 100-meter freestyle, and set a new personal best in the 50-meter freestyle, finishing fourth.

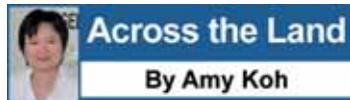
Sajan Prakash of India claimed gold in the 1,500-meter freestyle and set a new meet record, while Shivani Singh won the bronze medal in the 100-meter freestyle.

Meanwhile back in Phuket the "Targeting Rio 2016" team also participated at the Thanyapura Phuket International Academy Open Swim League on February 13, joining 130 competitors aged from 5 to 26 years old featuring entries from Kanjonkiet, British International School, Headstart, ISS Samui, and Thanyapura-PIA.

Thiha Aug of Burma and Gio Hem of Cambodia put their competitors through their paces, while new arrival Temurute Strickland of the Cook Islands made a spectacle and dominated the 50-meter backstroke. Susan Guo of the Thanyapura-PIA High Performance Program won all her events.

The Thanyapura FINA swimmers are back to optimize their potential at Asia's leading sports, health, and wellness destination with the aim to go to the Olympics 2016. Thanyapura has plans to expand its project starting with the first 100 m training pool in Asia, additional tennis courts and another hotel.

The persistent growing pains of Phuket



Across the Land

By Amy Koh

LAST month, MasterCard Asia Pacific Destinations Index 2015 announced that Thailand is the most popular regional travel destination for 2015, with three of its cities making the top ten list. Bangkok was the most popular, followed by Phuket in fifth place and Pattaya in eighth.

The survey was based on 167 destinations from 22 countries across Asia Pacific and represented 90.1 per cent of all international overnight arrivals in the region. The Airport Authority of Thailand (AOT) also saw a 21.3 per cent growth in passenger traffic for 2015 through its six main airports. The AOT expects this growth to continue through 2016.

With the much awaited Phuket airport expansion due to be completed in March 2016 effectively doubling its annual capacity from 6.5 million to 12.5 million passengers, 2016 will no doubt be another busy year for Phuket. The road works infrastructure development currently being undertaken throughout the island is unfortunately growing at a much slower pace. With ongoing



The Airport Authority of Thailand saw a 21.3 per cent growth in passenger traffic for 2015 through its six main airports. The AOT expects this growth to continue through 2016. Infographic: MasterCard Asia

ing road works cutting right across the heart of the island, along with road closures and traffic diversions, Phuket remains mired in traffic chaos. No doubt, the island needs all these developments in infrastructure to support its growth, but it's proving to be a slow and painful process.

Residents and tourists alike

are spending more time traveling around the island, and a trip to the airport must now be planned carefully in advance, or the result will surely be a missed flight. This inconvenience to Phuket's residents and visitors is increasingly being likened to the infamous traffic jams in Bangkok. However, Bangkok now has an

integrated mass transit system comprised of the Bangkok Transport System (BTS) and Mass Rapid Train (MRT) which alleviates the problem to a certain extent. Phuket, on the other hand, will have to wait for another ten years at the very least, for the proposed light rail system to become a reality.

In view of the current situ-

ation and the future construction of infrastructure around the island, property buyers must be very careful about the location in which they are looking to buy a property. Certain locations around the island could see years of construction ahead, especially if the light rail system comes to pass, which would mean more traffic jams, road diversions and flooding. This eventually will make selling a property in those locations harder and owners would end up having to offer large discounts on the property just to dispose of it.

The same can be said of long term residents who must now seriously consider moving or renting properties closer to schools or work places rather than endure the long drive time between home, school, and work. Rental properties closer to schools may now fetch a higher rental income due to increased demand from parents looking to relocate. With the next new school term starting in April 2016, for many parents the hunt for a new rental property is beginning.

Amy Koh is the sales manager of Engel & Voelkers Phuket. To contact Amy, or for more information, visit www.engelvoelkers.com/en/phuket

Proud Real Estate to expand in Phuket

PROUD Real Estate Co is launching more hotels and amusement attractions in Hua Hin and Phuket to cash in on the flood of tourists.

The company plans to open a mixed-use project in 2019 consisting of a 100-room InterContinental Phuket Resort, a house, a condominium, retail shops and other attractions.

The company built the Vana Nava Hua Hin water jungle theme park at a cost of 1.2 billion baht. More than 500,000 people visited the amusement park last year.

Last October, the company launched the 500-million-baht True Arena Hua Hin, which turned the beach-resort town into a sports-tourism destination, providing sports facilities for local residents and visitors, including 20,000 retirees and expatriates.

"Our goal is also to provide

a multi-sports complex for Southeast Asia for professional training," said Executive Director Proudpath Liptapanlop.

"Our hope is to inspire and provide an opportunity for tennis enthusiasts to become professionals by providing them with the best training facilities and a chance to participate in world-class tennis events," she said.

"Our aim for the year 2020 is to become the largest investor for leisure attractions or non-traditional attractions," she added.

The son and daughter of Suwat Liptapanlop, a former deputy prime minister, said the family had poured 8bn baht into Hua Hin over the past six years.

The company realized 850mn baht in revenue last year - 500mn from the water park and 350mn from the hotel. Revenue is expected to reach 1bn baht this year.

- The Nation

Another UK takeover part of Singha Estate's B20-bn plan

SINGHA Estate, the property arm of Singha Corporation, plans to invest 20 billion baht in real-estate projects this year, including more than 1bn baht to acquire another hotel chain in Britain with nearly 1,000 guestrooms.

"Besides England, we're also looking for potential acquisition deals for hotels in Germany and Spain," Chief Executive Officer Naris Cheyklin said.

About 80 per cent of the capital-expenditure budget will be spent on six to seven joint-venture and acquisition deals in various property and related businesses in Thailand and abroad. They include hotels, industrial estates, logistics, warehouses and shopping malls.

Last year, Singha Estate scooped up 26 UK hotels with 2,880 rooms for 8.8bn baht.

The company is also looking for businesses, especially

hotels and logistics companies, in the CLMV markets [Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam] with the focus mainly on Myanmar and Vietnam.

The time frame is two to three years.

In Thailand, the company will make many JV and acquisition deals, including two industrial estates, one warehouse and two shopping-mall operators this year.

The aim is to balance its business portfolio.

"We will diversify our investment to different products and different markets to avoid risks," he said.

The expansion is in line with the company's five-year business plan to boost annual revenue to 30bn baht by 2020 from 7bn baht projected for this year.

"We expect the contribution from overseas businesses to soar from 20 per cent of total



Singha Estate CEO Naris Cheyklin. Photo: Singha Estate

revenue to 30-40 per cent in five years," he said.

The company on its own develops super-luxury real-estate projects, mainly condominiums, office buildings, retail complexes and housing estates.

Its projects under development and construction include the ESSE Asoke and residential projects under Nirvana Plc.

- The Nation

Ditching Regent for better marketing

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

EFFECTIVE marketing is essential to securing occupancy numbers, both in high and low seasons, leading many resort and hotel owners to rely on pre-established brands with loyal clientele. However, when those brands fall down on the marketing side, as the Regent brand did for what is now known as the Amatara Resort and Wellness Center in Cape Panwa, it's time to pull the plug and go independent.

"We needed wider reach and distribution, as well as better market penetration," General Manager Brice Borin told the *Gazette* last month. "When you pay a high fee for a brand, you have a certain level of expectation – not only for service, but for marketing to elevate and bring your hotel to the world."

"The re-branding was a challenge. However, because we were already doing a lot by ourselves, it wasn't really a big change. The Regent wasn't like the Hilton or Accor, driving a huge number of rooms for us."

Since the lightning fast re-branding, which saw 95 per cent of all necessary changes



The Hammam Turkish-bath-style spa at Amatara Resort and Wellness Center in Cape Panwa. Photo: Amatara

made within days of the owner informing Mr Borin that the company was going independent, the Amatara has become affiliated with the Worldhotels conglomerate for the yet-to-be launched 'World Luxury'.

"Phuket remains one of the top island-destination choices for travellers globally and we are delighted to provide all Worldhotels' guests with this luxurious haven when they travel to Thailand," said Roland Jegge, the executive vice president of Worldhotels Asia-Pacific. "We cannot wait

to see what the future holds for Worldhotels, especially around the Asia-Pacific region."

During its three years of operation as the Regent Phuket Cape Panwa, the now-independent Amatara maintained a well-balanced client distribution by nationality, even with only five Regent marketing offices. The hopes of increased occupancy from smaller market segments will help fortify the resort's already strong resilience for when markets fail, such as when the Russian market disappeared almost

overnight in Phuket.

The company is additionally reaching new markets with the branding of the resort as a wellness center. As part of the wellness center, the Amatara will be introducing Thailand's first hammam.

The hammam, also known as Turkish bath, is the Middle Eastern variant of a steam bath. It usually involves hot and cold rooms, with the Moroccan-style version incorporating mud treatments as well.

"So we'll have a 2,000sqm facility as we add four treat-

ment rooms to our existing eight rooms. There will be a detox room, a steam room, a physiotherapy room, a fitness studio, a slimming room and, of course, the first hammam facility in Thailand," said Mr Borin. "The exclusively designed Thai hammam brings together traditional Turkish and Moroccan bathing practices with the gentleness of Thai spa therapies."

Additionally, the spa will include a salt cave, which allows guests to inhale dry, salt-enriched air to reap the rewards of the health benefits associated with the therapy.

"These facilities, along with wellness-retreat programs, will be marketed toward a slightly different segment than we previously catered to," Mr Borin said. "Additionally, the facilities will be value-added experiences for guests and will also be open to all Phuket residents."

Though the change of the brand and the upgrading of the spa facility were dealt with swiftly, the Amatara team has embraced the changes, helping to continue to drive the hotel forward, Mr Borin said.



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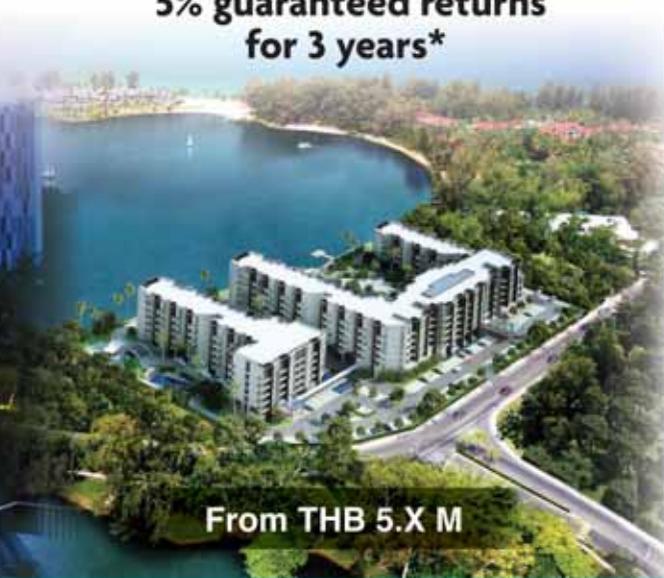
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3 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, kit-chen. Long-term rental: 23,000 baht / month. Tel: 080-146 1393. Email: vespa jai@hotmail.com

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Requirements:

- Fluency in English, both written and spoken
- Perfect command of Microsoft Excel, Word, and generally computer literate
- Problem solving personality, pleasant and service oriented
- Male or female, Thai national
- Experience preferred

Interested candidates should apply in writing, including a resume and photograph, and stating expected salary. Email to Khun Pissa at pena@goldenbuddhaharesort.com Tel: 081-892 2208 or 081-895 2242. Please refer to our website prior to applying www.goldenbuddhaharesort.com

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