

# Phuket Gazette

April 9 - 15, 2016

Now inside **THE NATION** every Saturday

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‘I SUSPECT SOME OFFICERS TAKE ‘TEA MONEY’ TO TURN A BLIND EYE’

## Taming the touts



Poachers kill gibbon mothers to take their babies and exploit them for the tourism industry. Photo: Gibbon Rehabilitation Project

**Tough new laws targetting wild animal touts to help clear Phuket beaches**

By Kongleaphy Keam

THE stakes will be raised for those engaged in the illegal, exotic-animal trade once the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment signs off on a new legal draft, which is expected to take effect soon after the Songkran break.

“For more than 20 years we have witnessed the illegal killing and exploitation of endangered and protected wild animals for tourism. Every day, criminals are taking young wild animals such as lorises, gibbons and monkeys, to tourist destinations such as Phuket, Samui, Krabi, Pattaya, the Floating Market and elsewhere in the country,” said Edwin Wiek, the

founder of NGO Wildlife Friends Foundation of Thailand (WFFT).

Mr Wiek hopes that more severe punishments outlined in the new draft of the Wildlife Preservation and Protection Act BE 2535 (1992) will finally act as a deterrent for the trade. The maximum fine for the illegal possession of protected animals will be increased to 100,000 baht and the maximum prison term will be raised to 10 years.

“The killing or trading of protected animals will carry a maximum fine of one million baht,” Mr Wiek said.

Mr Wiek was especially optimistic about the inclusion of a new regulation that requires those caught in possession of protected animals to foot the bill for the care of the animals while their case is processed.

Currently, the act states that the penalty for the possession of a protected animal is a maximum fine of 40,000 baht, four years imprisonment, or both.

“The penalty is always brought down to a fine of a few thousand baht and a sus-

pending sentence. The touts just don’t care,” Mr Wiek said.

Quick to agree was Suwat Suksiri, chief of the Thung Talay Non Hunting Zone in Krabi.

“Touts are continuously being arrested, but they just keep coming back, because the fines are minuscule compared to what they can earn in a day,” he said.

A tout with a baby gibbon who was arrested on Phi Phi Don last year revealed that he was making at least 5,000 baht a day in the low season and more than 20,000 baht a day in the high season, which adds up to about half a million baht a month.

“About 300 species of wildlife in Thailand are protected, meaning that they are in danger of becoming extinct from over hunting or being captured to be sold as exotic pets. Gibbons are one of those protected species,” Mr Suwat said.

Mr Wiek pointed his finger at law enforcement, alleging that police officers might be unaware of wildlife trade laws...

Continued on Page 5

## Sawadee pee mai!

HAPPY New Year from all of us at the *Phuket Gazette*.

We hope you enjoy the festivities and have a wet, wonderful year.

Don’t spend the holidays in jail or worse. Be safe. Wear your helmet and don’t drink and drive.

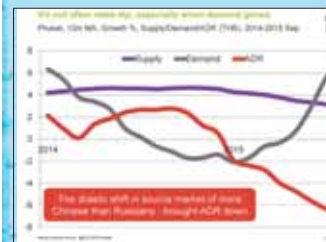
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## BUSINESS



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## LOCAL NEWS

# Briefly

### Woman killed in Pa Khlok home robbery

TWO suspects were arrested on April 4 for murdering a woman during a home burglary in Phuket two day earlier.

The body of Ubon Romporee, 49, was found by her 11-year-old son in their home in Pa Khlok on the afternoon of April 2. The boy arrived home to find his mother had been stabbed multiple times and had her throat cut.

Police believe theft was the most likely motive for the killing, as several valuable items were missing from the home, including a gold necklace, ring and bracelet, as well as a laptop and tablet.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

### Man beaten in school after shellfish gunfire

A MYANMAR national was beaten to the ground inside a Phuket school after attempting to shoot a man who refused to buy a sack of cockles from him on March 31.

## Clean Thai toilets to impress holidaymakers, say officials



Armed with brushes and detergent, PPHO Deputy Chief Dr Krit Sakulpat and other local officials put on gloves and face masks to scrub down some of the island's public toilets in an attempt to impress Songkran tourists for the WC OK: Happy Tourist Toilet campaign launched this month by the Public Health Ministry. For the full story, visit [PhuketGazette.net](http://PhuketGazette.net). Photo: Vachira PR

Named by police only as 'Suriyan', 20, the man allegedly pulled out a homemade gun and tried to shoot fresh food vendor Somjai Utsaha over the disagreement. Mr Suriyan missed and

both men fled the market, but local vendors chased down Mr Suriyan and cornered him in Muang Phuket Municipal School grounds, where they assaulted him, said police.

Under police questioning, Mr Suriyan confessed that his friend had stolen the bag of cockles from another merchant at the market before attempting to sell them on.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

### E-licences put into play to sustain Phuket fish stocks

THE Phuket Fisheries Department launched an e-licencing system on April 1 aimed at regulating local fishing operations in order to sustain fish stocks by limiting commercial fishing in the province.

The department has also warned operators of commercial fishing vessels to renew their licences by the end of the month or face stiff penalties.

Commercial fishing boats found operating without the appropriate licence will be fined between 100,000 and 30 million baht, depending on the

size of the vessel.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

### Bangkok pushes for Samkong underpass by Songkran

THE Samkong underpass is expected to be open to traffic later this month and be fully operational by May, it was confirmed after inspectors from the Ombudsman's Office in Bangkok visited the construction site on April 2.

Boon Tapanadul from the Ombudsman's Office was in Phuket to follow up on the progress of the already delayed project for which the contractor, Wiwat Construction Co Ltd, is currently paying a two million baht-per-day fine.

– *Chutharat Plerin*

### Fire threatens golf course

A FIRE swept across grassland in Cherng Talay on April 2, threatening to spread to nearby forest and golfing facilities in the area.

Thick white smoke billowed

across the bay as the fire spread across the parched ground. Fire fighters' efforts were hampered by walls blocking access to the two fire engines called out to tackle the blaze, which witnesses said started about 11:00am. However, investigators could not determine the cause of the fire.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

### B468k power bill shocks shop owner

THE owner of a small shophouse in Wichit was shocked to get an electricity bill for almost half a million baht this week.

Boonlert Nok Banjong, 48, who has never paid more than 2,000 baht a month to power his single-storey shophouse, was stunned when his bill for March arrived demanding 468,182.82 baht.

"I was speechless. I didn't know what to do."

After a friend of Mr Boonlert's helped out by alerting the Phuket Electricity Authority (PEA) to the nearly half-million baht bill, PEA inspectors visited the shophouse to determine the cause of the extortionate bill.

"The bill was a mistake and we deeply regret the stress caused to Mr Boonlert," said PEA accounts supervisor Chonnasorn Chetawan.

"We recently installed a new electricity meter at Mr Boonlert's property because the old one was playing up. Although the meter is new, the old wires have not been changed yet," he said.

Mr Boonlert's revised bill was 800 baht.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

### Interior Min to seed the ground for grass-root businesses

THE Interior Ministry has designated Phuket as a launch pad for a new government-backed social enterprise initiative to help grass-roots businesses flourish and contribute to bolstering the local economy.

The aim is to help small and medium-sized enterprises in three strategic areas: agriculture, product processing and community tourism," said Interior Minister General Anupong Paochinda.

– *Chutharat Plerin*



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# Phuket airport shops forced to drop prices

By Sukawin Tanthavanich

PHUKET International Airport has slashed the cost of drinking water on sale inside its terminals by 75 per cent and has launched lower priced menus to appease hungry travellers on a budget.

Under pressure from irate tourists complaining on social media about the high costs of food and drink inside the infamous airport, the Ministry of Commerce ordered the Airports Authority of Thailand (AoT) to reduce the price of still water and offer cheaper food options here.

“Retailers at Phuket airport dropped the price of a 600ml bottle of still water from 40 baht to 10 baht on March 25,” said Phuket airport director Thaneer Chuangchoo.

They have also introduced 500ml bottles of water at the same price, he added.

“Food vendors at the airport



The Japanese food selection at the airport. Photo: Water\_sss

have also agreed to offer cheaper alternative menus, with prices ranging from 35 to 40 baht a dish,” said Mr Thaneer, who admitted that a high number of complaints were the reason for

launching cheaper alternatives.

However, Airport Finance Chief Chitpol Santhanakul was keen to justify the higher costs.

“It is normal for things to cost about 20 per cent more at

airports than they would locally. A bar of chocolate, for example, which sells for 100 baht in a shopping mall such as Central Festival or Jungceylon will cost 120 baht at the airport. It’s the same at all airports in Thailand,” he said.

Mr Chitpol stressed that retailers had to charge customers more because of the high rental costs charged by his employer at the airport.

“Either way, Phuket airport is a major international hub. The tourists coming through here are used to high living costs in their own countries anyway. They will find that prices here are still cheaper than in their home towns,” he said.

“A bowl of Japanese-style ramen noodles costs 250 baht here, but in Japan it would actually cost you a lot more. In fact, food at most international airports would be at least double what it costs here,” he said.



The tsunami drill was hailed a success, despite the issue with the towers. Photo: Phuket PR

## Tsunami towers fail during drill

FIVE of the 19 tsunami warning towers in Phuket failed to work properly during the tsunami and earthquake drill on March 30.

“The warning towers in Kata and Karon failed to sound, while the one in Mai Khao couldn’t be heard from 500 meters away,” said Trakul Thotham, director of the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM) Region 8 Office.

“I contacted the company in Bangkok that is in charge of maintaining the towers immediately after we discovered that they weren’t working.”

Despite tsunami warning towers on some of Phuket’s most popular beaches malfunctioning, officials ruled the overall results of the drill a success.

– Sukawin Tanthavanich



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## Police hunt teen thugs



Police speak to the injured tourist. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

POLICE investigating a knife attack by three Thai males on four foreign tourists at Patong Beach on April 1 believe that the trio are from Trang Province and are also responsible for an attack on a Thai man later the same day.

Two Russians received deep cuts on their hands trying to fight off the gang during a robbery attempt, while two Australians were also injured.

The victim of the second incident was stabbed in his side and robbed. Police refused to name the suspects while investigations are ongoing.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

# Hong Kong spearfishers get diving boat banned

By Chutharat Plerin

THE Similan Island's live-aboard diving boat hired by a group of Hong Kong spearfishermen for a hunting excursion from March 29 to April 3 has been banned by park officials from entering the national park for 30 days.

Photos of the Hong Kong spear fishermen showing off their bounty caused an uproar on social media as allegations arose that they had been fishing in the Similan National Park, Thailand's top diving destination.

*Panunee*, the boat from which the tourists were hunting, is touted as a 5-star luxury liveaboard. The company itself, Panunee Sea Master Co Ltd, recently announced its plans to



The spearfishermen showing off their catch. Photo: Facebook

move their base of operations to Indonesia, effective June 2016.

"We have verified that they did not fish in national park waters. However, they are registered as a tour boat, not as a fishing boat – the company was not allowed to support this activity," Nut Kongkasorn, chief of Mu Ko

Similan National Park, told the *Gazette* on April 6. "It does not matter who owns the equipment, as the company is responsible for allowing the fishing equipment on board the boat and for it being used."

Ahead of the ban, the company's sales manager,

Walaiporn Khomson, assured the *Gazette* that they were taking the issue seriously.

"I was shocked when we were told about what happened," said Ms Walaiporn. "We quickly called our staff to determine what had happened, because it was a diving trip and we do not permit fishing activities.

"They [the tourists] refused to accept that we couldn't take them fishing. Our captain did not contact us, and decided to take them outside of the national park area so they could fish.

"Diving has given us great opportunity and we are doing our best to preserve the industry for future generations. We promise we will not be involved in any such matters in the future."

Ms Walaiporn was not available to comment on the ban.

## Fishing vessels tangled in red tape as migrant workers abandon ship

MIGRANT laborers jumping ship for better paying jobs on other fishing vessels is causing a logistical tangle at the Port in – Port out Control Center (PIPO), which is stopping many boats from departing.

"Many boats have not been allowed to leave because the number of crew members on the boat does not match with the PIPO database," explained Kanong Duangkaew of the Phuket Marine Office. "All the names of crew members are registered to the boat. If there are more or less crew, we cannot issue them a permit to leave the port."

The cause of the issue is a high demand for non-Thai fishermen on the boats, who are in short supply, said Phuket Employment Office Chief Pitool Dumsakorn.

"Employers are doing whatever they can to attract these workers, which includes offering better pay to crew members on competing boats," Mr Pitool said. "Workers changing jobs isn't an issue. However, usually the old employer and the new employer do not want to update their crew information



Employment Office Chief Pitool Dumsakorn. Photo: Phuket PR

with the PIPO due to it being a complicated and burdensome process."

At a meeting attended by concerned parties, Mr Pitool suggested finding a way to streamline the process to encourage employers to update their rosters. However, the board at the hearing suggested that the problem was not the process, but the employers and employees failing to take responsibility.

The meeting ended without conclusion. However, all relevant parties will return to the table before the end of April in hopes of settling on a solution.

– Kongleahy Keam

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# Wildlife law to the rescue

From page 1

...or were ignoring the touts. "I suspect some of the officers must be taking 'tea money' to turn a blind eye," he said.

"Local authorities in tourist destinations are turning a blind eye to these organized criminals or mafia, in many cases profiting themselves. It is obvious that the police are not able or willing to enforce the law," claimed a statement issued by the WFFT.

Responding to the WFFT's accusations, Phuket Provincial Police Commander Teeraphol Thipjaroen assured that police are aware of the animal touts and are doing their best to tackle the issue.

"Clearly, the presence of animal touts means that officers are not being effective in stamping out the practice. However, I have not seen any evidence of officers accepting bribes," he said.

"Society has both good and bad people. The same can be said about officers within the force. We cannot guarantee that every single officer is always totally transparent in his or her actions. However, it is also easy for the public to stereotype the police in a negative way, because people usually deal with the police when they are in some kind of trouble," said Gen Teeraphol.

Either way, it's time to stop playing the blame game and start taking action, said the founder and president of the Phuket Anti-Corruption Net-



Gibbon and slow loris touts are regularly spotted at tourist locations in Phuket and Krabi. Photo: Gazette file

work, Surin Bamrunghol.

"There is no evidence of police receiving money from touts, so I can not say whether or not police accept bribes from them," he said.

"It's really not as easy as you might think to pay off the police. If the allegations were true, the touts would have to pay off all of the officers in that area. It just

wouldn't be worth the expense for the tout," said Dr Surin.

Faced with increased pressure from activists to do something about slow loris touts spotted on Kata Noi Beach this month, Lt Col Pornnarong Karnonchai of the Karon Police was forced to admit that catching animal touts was a low priority.

"Tourists' safety and the safety of their belongings is a bigger concern for us. We do our best to take care of smaller issues, such as touts on the beach. However, we are suffering from a lack of manpower," said Col Pornnarong.

"We do want to get rid of the touts, but we just can't go running out of the office every time

we get a report of a tout. The best way to deal with this is to cut off the demand. Tourists must be educated about the harm being done by these touts and the fact that they are illegally in possession of the protected animal," said the colonel.

"If there is no demand, the touts will stop."

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# Phuket Gazette

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**Blaze puts Jammin' Pub out of action**  
Can a foreigner own a Thai-registered boat?

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**IN THIS ISSUE**  
News: Appeal to human rights body in marina row; Fire puts Jammin' Pub out of action. Pages 2 & 3  
INSIDE STORY: The other election: Who will be the next

## ONCE MORE Phuket to vote again but Dems still boycott

By Gazette Staff

PHUKET: Voters are to go to the polls once more on April 23 after Phuket's two Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) candidates failed to get elected to Parliament on April 2, despite running unopposed. However, it seems unlikely that anyone will be elected in this second round of voting, as the Democrat Party has announced the boycotting of the polls.



## Ko Noi assassin still in hiding

By Natcha Yuttaworawit

PHUKET CITY: The hunt continues for Samreng Klaising, the gunman wanted for assassinating prominent Phuket businessman Preecha "Ko Noi" Krairas.

**Patong gets environmental certification**

**First aid for dog poisoning**  
**SDF appeals for people to adopt 90 dogs**

## HOPE FROM EUROPE

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Baby

AROUND THE... Baby picture frames that dangle.

## LIVING THE FANTASY

Ford snacks Premiership.

Not worth its wait in gold - or silver

## Power cable stolen from tsunami tower

"We can't say more because it might help them evade arrest."

## Gambling again tops table of arrests

TRT in Phuket must go on with its work. Co-announced this will morph... arrested shortly after the murder but are now out on bail.

**Bypass road fully open at last**

## The necessity of foreign-run operations in Phuket's 'plagued' dive industry

**Can't get the staff? Serves you right!**



## Maintain faith in the ballot box

IN A rare move, the *Gazette* dove into politics in the April 8-14, 2006 edition as the Democrat Party announced a boycott of the parliamentary election polls, despite Thaksin Shinawatra announcing that he would step down from the Premiership.

"What the PM did last night was for his own benefit; ordinary people who do not understand politics in depth will have seen his announcement and will admire him. But last night, as I was listening to him, many people called me to ask, 'What does it mean?'" said former Democrat MP and current mayor of Patong, Chalermprak Kebsap. "He said he would continue to push Thai Rak Thai policies [after stepping down], so that means nothing has changed.

Mr Thaksin was eventually slapped with a number of charges including abuse of power and tax evasion - I wonder if his name is buried somewhere in the Panama Papers, which are the recent unprecedented leak of 11.5m files from the database of the world's fourth big-

gest offshore law firm. These documents show the multitude of ways in which the rich can exploit offshore tax regimes, though do not directly connect them to criminal activity. Already, 12 national leaders are among 143 politicians, their families and close associates implicated in the documents.

Despite vowing to step down, it wasn't until later that year that Mr Thaksin and his party were removed from power via a military coup. His younger sister, Yingluck, was elected Prime Minister in 2011, but also removed from power by the military after a political deadlock - see National Council for Peace and Order. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

As this issue of the *Gazette* goes to press, Thailand's democratic process continues to flounder. Eclipsed by the political drama playing out in recent months, however, has been the upcoming Senate election, reported Janyaporn Morel ten years ago, little did the *Gazette* editors and reporters

**The gift of hindsight**

know at the time that not one, but three coups would be in store for the Kingdom over the next 10 years.

The phrase 'uncharted waters' is being used a great deal by the press worldwide in reporting the April 2 general elections in Thailand, the *Gazette* warned in its editorial.

At the time of going to press, not all the votes had been counted, but most pundits were predicting that the election could result in a parliament that would not meet constitutional requirements, leading to a second election, possibly a third until something radical happened to break the deadlock.

This is all very worrying. Indeed, in Bangkok, a recent opinion survey found that many people were worried that the country would descend into chaos and violence.

People's worries were merited. However, the April 8 issue wasn't all politics. The silence of the tsunami warning towers along Phuket's west coast last week eerily echoed a simi-

lar silence that fell over the island in April 2006. As the *Gazette* goes to print, the reason behind the malfunctioning of five warning towers last week remains unknown. However, ten years ago the silence of the Ao Yon tower was very clear, with the headline reading: Power cable stolen from tsunami tower.

Government officials rightfully railed against the unknown thieves who had stolen the power cable, rendering the tower inoperative.

"The thieves may make just 500 baht [from selling the copper cable as scrap metal], but they didn't think that it might save more than 100 lives if a tsunami happened," said an officer at the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Phuket Office. "If the power is cut from one tower, then all the other towers further down that line will be put out of action.

Though only follow up stories will reveal the truth behind why the towers failed to sound last week, we can only hope it wasn't a repeat of such senseless petty crime.

- Isaac Stone Simonelli

## AMLO to hunt Thais named in 'Panama Papers'

THE Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO) will ask its counterpart in Panama for information on the involvement of Thai nationals in possible tax evasion in the wake of a massive data leak from a law firm based in the Central American country.

A year-long worldwide media investigation into a trove of 11.5 million documents, leaked from a Panama-based law firm with offices in 35 countries, exposed a tangle of confidential financial dealings by the elite, from aides of Russian President Vladimir Putin to relatives of Chinese President Xi Jinping, sports celebrities and movie stars.

The vast stash of records from law firm Mossack Fonseca, the so-called Panama Papers, was obtained from an anonymous source by German daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung and shared with more than 100 media groups by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

A Thai media outlet has published an unverified report that Mossack Fonseca has 21 Thai clients, whose activities are allegedly involved with 963 overseas companies.

## 'Ya ice' leak possibly killed drug runner

POLICE say around 60 balls of an unidentified off-white substance were found inside the



stomach of a fair-skinned Asian man whose body was found on April 3 in a large bag in Bangkok's Klong Ong Ang waste filter.

It is believed the 155-centimeter-tall man may have been a drug runner attempting to smuggle illegal drugs via body packing - swallowing the substance in plastic bags or condoms to avoid police detection.

A source at the Institute of Forensic Medicine said the substance was suspected to be *ya ice* (crystal methamphetamine).

Wounds on the man's body were not life-threatening, so it was suspected that he died from the drug bags inside him bursting or leaking, the source said.

## NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

### Man arrested for murder, attempted rape of schoolgirl

POLICE arrested a village headman on April 4 for allegedly killing an 18-year-old schoolgirl during a rape attempt in Kalasin on December 23.

The 18-year-old was going

back to her home when an attacker kicked her motorcycle to the ground and dragged her to a roadside ditch in an apparent rape attempt. The girl fought off her attacker, but later died from her injuries.

Ban Si Than village head Krittidech Rawengwan has denied the charges of murder and attempted rape.

### CDC defends move to change free education

THE Constitution Drafting Commission (CDC) has intensified its defense of the proposal to offer 12 years of free

education until Mathayom 3 in a bid to prevent it from becoming an explosive issue.

The charter clause has already drawn opposition from parents and academics.

Article 54 of the draft charter, which will be decided in a public referendum in August, stipulates the state shall provide 12 years of free education starting from pre-school, instead of at Prathom 1 of primary school as is now the case.

If this stipulation comes into effect, children would only be guaranteed free education until they complete Mathayom 3, or junior secondary school, and not senior secondary school as it currently stands.

## Prawit defends NCPO's use of special powers against mafia

DEPUTY Prime Minister Gen Prawit Wongsuwan on March 30 defended the National Council for Peace and Order's (NCPO) decision to resort to special powers provided by Article 44 of the interim charter to crackdown on the mafia.

NCPO spokesman Col Piyapong Klinpan said that military officers would not abuse the powers, as they would only take action against influential figures who are on the NCPO's blacklist and have committed at least one of 16 specific offenses.

Royal Thai Police deputy spokesman Krissana Pattana-charoen also defended the move, saying it was necessary because the police were struggling with a lack of manpower.







# Don't drive drunk

## FIRST PERSON

OF COURSE Songkran is a time when people want to socialize, throw water at each other and generally have a good time. Drinking alcohol is usually part of the celebrations and there's no real harm in people getting a little tipsy.

The thing is, people just don't walk about as much as they used to. These days most people drive about, which, of course, is a lot more dangerous if they have been drinking.

We don't want to ruin anyone's Songkran by arresting them or fining them and impounding their vehicle but sometimes we are forced to take these measures – even if it means locking someone up – to save that person's life and possibly the lives of the people around them.

Drinking impairs a driver's ability at the wheel. They take longer to react to dangerous situations and make poorer decisions on the road. Drunk driving is one of the most dangerous, cruel and irresponsible actions a person can take. They are not only willfully putting their own life in danger. They are putting the lives of countless innocent people in danger as well.

Drunk people not only cause numerous road accidents and deaths, they are often involved in other crimes; from inappropriate dancing to fighting. The number of criminal offenses that involve drunk people during the Songkran holiday is too long to list.

Perhaps the best option is simply not to drink alcohol at all during the holiday. It would be



Phuket Provincial Police Commander **Teeraphol Thipjaroen**, 56, took up his position on the island last year. He is a graduate from the Royal Police Cadet Academy and has been working in Phuket since 1983, except for brief postings to Krabi and Surat Thani.

Here he talks about the roles and responsibilities of the police and citizens during Songkran to help each other reduce drunk driving and accidents during the New year celebrations.



Have fun, but most importantly, be safe. Photo: Gazette file

a great deal more fun than ending up in jail or having to deal with the consequences of injuring or killing another person.

The police on the island will do their best to protect you, even from yourself. However, we cannot guarantee your safety. You too have to be responsible for yourself.

During the 'Seven Days of Danger' road-safety campaign we will be establishing checkpoints to help us crack down on traffic violations and drunk driving. As part of this effort the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) has ordered us to seize any vehicle being used by a drunk driver during

the Songkran holiday safety blitz. Such a measure makes perfect sense and will be strictly enforced. However, we can't be everywhere all the time. So, it is essential that you don't allow yourself, friends or family to drink and drive – be a hero and save their life.

In short: Be responsible. If you drink, don't drive.

I don't want to see anyone's Songkran holiday ruined because they lost a loved one to senselessness on our roads. Help us have zero deaths on Phuket's roads during this year's Songkran Seven Days of Danger campaign.

Happy Songkran everyone!



Songkran celebrates Thai culture and traditions. Photo: Gazette file

## The Songkran Goddess

### Island View

By Pranee Sakulpipatana

SONGKRAN is one of the happiest festivals celebrated by Thais. When I was young and lived in Phuket, I always found the Songkran celebrations in other provinces such as Chiang Mai to be very unique and beautiful.

Over the years Phuket has grown into a hub filled with Thais from all corners of the country living and working here, so the Songkran celebrations have similarly evolved. These days people in Phuket celebrate Songkran the same way as people in the northern and northeastern provinces.

Songkran is a significant time of the year for Thai fortune tellers as well. It marks the start of the year for Thai Horoscopes. People listen to the predictions made by the Goddess of Songkran, who is known as Nang Songkran or Miss Songkran, who is said, each year, to ride on the back of the animal associated with that particular year.

As Songkran falls on a Wednesday this year, Miss Songkran is depicted lying on the back of a donkey as she takes the form of 'Monta-tevee' or Princess Monta. She wears an emerald green costume adorned with ornamental cat's eyes. She carries an iron weapon in her right hand and a walking stick in her left. Any

offerings made to Monta-tevee should be milk or butter.

Although Songkran is considered a very Thai tradition, the festival is strongly influenced by Hindu traditions, as is Buddhism, which arrived in Thailand from India hundreds of years ago.

The festival is a celebration of traditional ways of life and one of the most important aspects of this festival is taking the time to pay respects to our ancestors.

One of the most important activities during the Songkran festival is when people pay respects to the elders in the family and community by sprinkling scented water on their hands.

This is just one of the many traditions that make Songkran so much fun. It is, after all, the new year, so celebrations are in order.

My sincere hope is that the younger generation of Thais fully understand the history and traditions of Songkran, so they can help preserve this very important aspect of Thai culture promoting good actions and good manners. Let's hope Songkran lives on as a unique aspect of Thai culture for many more years to come.

## Words from the Wise

**“The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it.”**

– Albert Einstein

**“Most rock journalism is people who can't write, interviewing people who can't talk, for people who can't read.”**

– Frank Zappa

## Issues & Answers

### Are helmet cameras and dash cams legal here?

I HAVE seen people set up cameras on their cars and some even have the camera on their helmets while driving. I know it is a growing trend for people filming extreme sports, but are helmet cameras legal in Thailand?

Deputy Superintendent **Teerawat Leamsuwan of the Phuket City Police replies:**

Thank you for your query. Yes, cameras on cars and helmets are both legal.

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They are used for filming traffic while driving. In fact, police have started using these cameras as well.

Dash cams and helmet cameras are very beneficial, as they provide valuable evidence for police officers when there is an accident.

It helps us to deal with many rude drivers and solve accident cases, as we have video evidence on hand showing exactly what happened.

Helmet cameras are additionally useful – wearing a helmet camera also means you're wearing a helmet, which is a very good thing.

## E-payment readies for soft launch



Minister Apisak. Photo: The Nation

THE first phase of Thailand's e-payment system will kick off nationwide in July, Finance Minister Apisak Tantivorawong said.

This includes use of the Any-ID scheme, which will allow anyone to transfer money by using their ID card, mobile number or email address.

It also involves promotion in the private and public sectors of the use of the e-payment system, such as for the payment of value added tax and payments between the private and public sectors with additional electronic data capture/chip terminals.

The minister announced that the aim is to expand the number of card-receiving machines from 200,000 currently to 500,000 throughout the country by the end of July.

— The Nation

# Understanding counter trend rallies



Finance

By Don Freeman

IN EARLY March, US and global markets began a short-term counter trend rally that has seen these markets regain about 50 per cent of their prior decline. However, there are reasons you need to remain cautious by staying largely in cash.

The stock market began to rally in 2009 hitting an all-time high last summer. Since then, the market has fallen back with lower highs and lower lows. This culminated in a deep August-September trough, before a short rally and another deep trough in late January and early February, before the present rally.

This current rally could be the continuation of a much longer term bull market, but it could turn out to be a counter trend rally, which can also be another name for a bear market rally. However, we don't actually know yet whether the stock market is still in some sort of a long-term bull market, or has already started to enter a bear market, or whether it's just experiencing another correction before heading higher again.

What's important to remember is that any kind of a counter trend rally in bear markets, do not last long and are usually followed by sell-offs, or new bear market lows.



The current rally could be a longer term bull market or turn out to be a bear market. Photo: knowmadic news

I suspect that the current stock market rally is a short-term counter trend rally that could last anywhere from several weeks to as long as one to three months. If you are a long-term buy-and-hold investor and are still heavily invested in US or global stocks, I highly recommend raising some cash on this latest rally, and pairing back the stocks that have not any hope of returning to life.

However, there have been some signs that the iShares PHLX Semiconductor ETF and its underlying semiconductor stocks are poised to move higher.

If that occurs, it will be a good sign for tech stocks and the overall market in general (including the Nasdaq composite) given that semiconductors power most of the technology that ultimately powers the global economy.

So if you are an active trader with a stomach for risk, you might want to consider taking a "hit and run" approach with selective leadership growth stocks where you buy and sell quickly once a target exit price is reached. This may mean you end up selling before maximizing profits, but you need to assume that any trading gains

will be smaller as prices change quickly while the rally itself will be of short duration.

Don Freeman, BSME is president of Freeman Capital Management, a Registered Investment Advisor with the US Securities Exchange Commission (SEC), based in Phuket. He has over 15 years experience working with expatriates, specializing in portfolio management, US tax preparation, financial planning and UK pension transfers. Call for a free portfolio review. Don can be reached at 089-970-5795 or email: freemancapital@gmail.com.



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# Cold business for Songkran

By Chutharat Plerin

SONGKRAN can be a lucrative time of year for the island's ice makers as sales rise with the summer heat. Many revellers load barrels onto pick-up trucks, filling them up with water and a big block of ice.

In fact, Songkran ice sales are a good barometer for measuring the state of the tourism industry on the island, according to ice factory owner Jiraporn Piromrit, who runs Kwanyuen ice shop on Phra Baram Road and distributes ice to restaurants, shops and bars in Patong.

"We usually get a lot more orders during Songkran. However, we can see from last year's sales that the number of tourists was down compared to previous years," said Ms Jiraporn.

"Orders for blocks of ice dropped by about half last year, but orders for ice cubes increased. Although this meant we did not really lose much income, it was an indicator that people were generally spending less; buying ice cubes in small amounts rather than the more costly blocks of ice.

"However, it's difficult to predict sales during Songkran. We just have to see how it goes, which will depend on the number of tourists visiting and whether or not there are any restrictions put in place."

The manager of the O ice factory on Wichitsongkram Road, Patorn Neti, said she usually sees a 20 per cent increase in ice sales during the Songkran festival.

"We usually distribute about five tons



Big blocks of ice are often dumped into barrels of water for a shockingly cold water fight. Photo: Adam Jones

of ice in the Wichit area each day, but sales usually increase by about 20 per cent on April 13 and April 14," said Ms Patorn.

"Water shortages in the dry season can be a problem, but it has never reached a crisis point. When water be-

comes scarce, we reduce our output and let our customers know about it."

Ms Patorn reasoned that while O Ice in Wichit maintains a fairly steady output year-round for customers in the area, ice makers delivering to tourist zones were the ones most affected by

fluctuations in the tourism industry.

"We are doing alright, but I have heard that some ice-making operations with customers in Patong have not been doing so well since the middle of last year, and there are no signs that it will be any better this year," she said.

## Spanish arrivals to Phuket on rise

THE number of Spanish tourists visiting Thailand has risen by almost 30 per cent this year while the number of Russian tourists continues to rapidly decline, according to the latest figures released by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

Despite a drop in the overall number of European visitors to Thailand by about nine per cent, there was a 28 per cent rise in the number of tourists from the Iberian Peninsula this year. However, Russian tourist numbers dropped by 45 per cent.

"About 5.5 million European tourists visited Thailand in 2015, which is nine per cent lower than last year. Overall tourism revenue was 406,214 million baht, which is a three per cent decrease compared to last year," said Tanes Petsuwan,



A plane full of tourists lands in Phuket. Photo: Isaac Simonelli

TAT executive director for Europe, Africa and Middle East.

Although the exact figures for Phuket have yet to be released, officials estimated that the decline in Europeans visiting the province was not significant.

Phuket TAT director Anoma Wongyai said the wide choice of alternative destinations outside Phuket was impacting local tourist numbers.

- Kongleahy Keam



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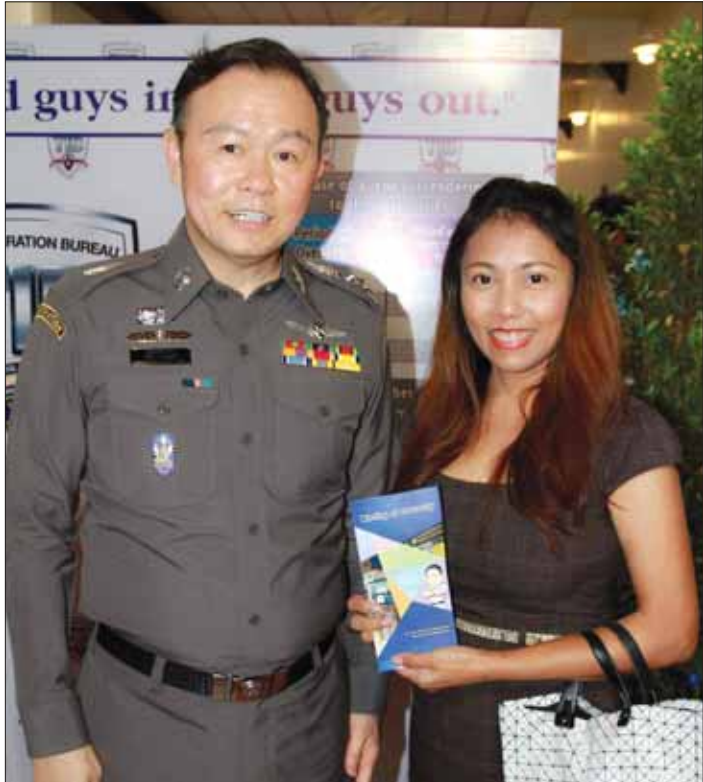
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## Immigration chief sets record straight

Immigration Commissioner Nathathorn Prousoontorn flew into Phuket from Bangkok on March 25 as part of a nationwide campaign to promote the Immigration Bureau's 'Good Guys In, Bad Guys Out' campaign. About 400 people attended the public meeting held at Phuket Boat Lagoon. The campaign aims to build awareness of the latest visa rules and regulations affecting foreigners, specifically, new policies concerning overstay rules.



Immigration Commissioner Nathathorn Prousoontorn and Phuket Gazette Managing Director Oranee Hildebrand. Photo: Phuket Andaman News.

## Sri Panwa launches new Habitia pool villa retreat

Sri Panwa launched its latest collection of luxury accommodation, The Habita, on March 23. The new retreat adds 20 new Pool Suites and 10 Pool Penthouses to the south-coast spa resort, which overlooks Cape Pana.



(From L-R) Business Development Executive Angkana Thanasiriphong; Senior Business Development executive Aimwadee Suchatpong and Resident Manager Sumana Vorachun. Photo: Phuket Andaman News.

## Beach Volley Fest a slamming success

The Thailand Beach Volley Festival Phuket Powered by PTT was held March 23-27 on Karon Beach. Organizers hailed the contest a success with 35 teams from more than 20 countries competing in amateur and professional matches.

The Thai national team was knocked out of the professional men's final as the USA/Brazil team dug into the sands and spiked a win against the Russian-Guam team. The venue gained its reputation as an international beach volleyball from staging the FIVB Beach Volleyball World Tour between 2006 - 2013, with the FIVB declaring the sand on Karon beach the best quality of anywhere on the World Tour. The Thailand Beach Volley Festival Phuket attracted entries from 22 nations in total, competing in three separate classes; Men's 2x2, Women's 2x2 and 4x4 mixed.



Medal winners and organizers celebrate on the sand. (Middle row L-R) Haad Thip Deputy Manager External Affairs Prateep Kaewprasit; PTT Phuket Terminal Division Manager Suchat Thitikul; Tourism Authority of Thailand Phuket Office Director Anoma Wongyai; Karon Municipality Councilor Jaded Vitcharasorn; and Winner group Enterprise Product Manager Vithasa Tor Saengchantara. Photo: Pentangle Promotions

**Events in Paradise**

# Tourism Minister opens aesthetic surgery hub

Catering to the growing demand from overseas clients for medical tourism facilities in the province, Phuket International Hospital opened its new Phuket Plastic Surgery Institute (PPSI) on March 21. The state-of-the-art facility is the largest in the country, offering a full range of cosmetic and aesthetic surgery.



Minister of Tourism and Sports Kobkarn Wattanavrangkura presided over the opening ceremony of the new medical tourism facility. Photo: PPSI

# Royal show of support for Phuket team at ITB Berlin

Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya visited the ITB Berlin 2016, held March 9-13, to meet tourism officials and entrepreneurs from Thailand at the international travel trade show. Members of the Phuket Provincial Administrative Organization, the Phuket Tourist Association and the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Phuket Office were among those who greeted the princess.



Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya receives flowers from the Honorary Consul of Chile for Phuket, Nantana Wongsatayanont, during a visit to the ITB Berlin 2016.



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# Ultraman swimmer completes epic circumnavigation of island

By Gazette Editors

WE WANT to know the story behind your trashy pictures... and we'll reward you for it.

The procedure is simple:

**Step 1:** Take a photo of way-laid garbage you have seen anywhere on the island and 'pin it' to get a GPS location. Send it in a message to the *Phuket Gazette* Facebook page or Editor@PhuketGazette.net.

**Step 2:** Garner as many likes for your photo as you can once it's put on our Facebook page.

**Step 3:** At the end of the eight-week competition, the weekly winners will go toe-to-toe. Whoever racks up the most likes on Facebook will receive a beautiful piece of junk-art made by one of Phuket's own.

SWEDISH Ultraman World Champion Jonas Colting became the first-ever man to swim around Phuket as he stepped onto Mai Khao Beach on April 6.

"We are proud that someone has made history to be the first man to swim around the beautiful island of Phuket. This is a great activity to showcase Phuket as a sports and tourism hub of Asia. Big congratulations to Jonas, his team and to the organizers," Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada said.

Mr Colting was joined by his training partners Thobias Peterson and Daniel Karlsson Engdahl throughout the eight legs of the more than 140-kilometer swim.

Cheers and applause greeted the weary, but fulfilled, swim-



The three swimmers cross the finish line. Photo: Thanyapura Phuket

mers as they rose from the water and broke the finish tape, where they had embarked eight days ago, swimming about 17km each day.

Aside from the mammoth total distance, the swimmers

also prevailed against strong winds, currents, jellyfish and the tropical heat.

"I was aware of the big challenges being the heat and the sun. We took lots of proactive measures like getting in the wa-

ter early in the morning, lots of sunscreen, and [drinking] some young coconut every day after finishing," Mr Colting said.

Characteristic of ultra-distance athletes, he and his crew adapted to the workload and felt stronger every day along the way.

"It's been great to feel the support of everyone involved in this project and the great organization behind [the event]! As hard as it is to swim every day, supporting and organizing is probably just as hard and I've been very impressed by the dedication of those in the support team. The island of Phuket is truly beautiful and it's a pleasure to experience it from the water," said Mr Colting.

The organizers plan to make Swim Around Phuket an annual event, attracting marathon swimmers from all over the world to face the challenge.

## Tri-lingual tryst 'Patong Girl' premiers in Phuket this month

A YOUNG German lad falls in love with the mysterious, native beauty Fai while on holiday in Thailand with his family. He follows his heart, but things get complicated... That's the synopsis of *Patong Girl*, the latest tri-lingual movie co-produced by Thailand-based moviemaker Tom Waller.

Set for release in Phuket on April 18 at SF Cinema at Jungceylon, *Patong Girl* is a modern romance set in Phuket.

Mr Waller has produced or co-produced about 14 films. All were partially or mainly set in the Kingdom, including the hit romantic drama *Butterfly Man*, which received rave reviews after its release in 2002.

He has also recently worked on the Hollywood movie *Mechanic Resurrection*, starring Jason Statham, Jessica Alba and Tommy Lee Jones, which was filmed partially in and around Phuket and is set for release in August.

In an exclusive interview with the *Gazette*, Mr Waller said *Patong Girl* is another romance set in an exotic location, but the similarities with *Butterfly Man* end there.

"Fai doesn't betray the protagonist. Things get more 'complicated' for this couple as the truth is unraveled," he said.



Tom Waller. Photo: Supplied

"The film is primarily in German and English, with some Thai, of course, when the locals speak among themselves. We are showing it in cinemas with both English and Thai subtitles," said Mr Waller.

Phuketians who are familiar with Patong may wonder where some of the scenes were filmed. Many of them were actually shot in Pattaya due to budget restraints, admitted Mr Waller. However, the talented international cast give a very intense and realistic performance, he said.

"Aisawanya Areyawattana (Amp), the Thai actress who plays Fai in *Patong Girl*, gives a very credible performance, and all the German cast are extremely convincing as a German family on holiday for the first time in Thailand," said Mr Waller.

- Nick Davies

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# Appeal of traditional Songkran

By Nick Davies

FOR many visitors to Thailand in mid-April, Songkran festivities appear, on the surface, to be just a fun and boisterous way to keep cool, but the traditions of the Thai new year celebrations are rooted in a much gentler aspect of Thailand's Buddhist culture.

The four-day festival is a highly significant astrological event in the Buddhist calendar. It marks the movement of the sun from one sign of the zodiac to another, as well as a transition of seasons – a time of change and regeneration – washing away the old and welcoming the new, as it were.

The word Songkran originates from the Pali language. In Sanskrit it is called 'Sankhara', or 'Sankranti', indicating that the festival was likely introduced in the north of Thailand centuries ago by Brahmin priests and then trickled down,

spreading out to the eastern and northeastern provinces and eventually down south.

Subsequently, while the general theme of the festival remains the same, people in different parts of Thailand celebrate Songkran in different ways, infused with local traditions unique to each area.

Paruja Prunglek is a native of Songkla Province and a hobbyist historian. She spent several years in Chiang Mai and now owns a cafe in Phuket, giving her an insight into the differences in regional Songkran celebrations. Her family's roots in Songkla go back hundreds of years over several generations, during which the traditions of Songkran have hardly changed.

"My great grandfather was always insistent that we understood the meaning and significance of traditional ways, especially for festivals such as Songkran. He wanted to make sure we would pre-



Paruja Prunglek from Songkla is a hobbyist historian and wants to preserve the traditional customs of Songkran. Photo: Nick Davies

serve them," said Ms Paruja.

Traditionalists like Ms Paruja frown on the wasted water and risque behavior of today's watergun-toting Songkran rev-

ellers. That's not to say they are killjoys, but just more acutely aware of the real meaning of the water celebrations.

"Pouring water slowly is a

ceremonial libation. It is a way of paying respects and giving thanks to the water goddess (*Mae Nam*). We gently wash Buddha images to symbolize washing away negative thoughts and energies and starting the new year anew," said Ms Paruja.

There are many Phuketians who do not celebrate Songkran at all. It is not a tradition for Muslims or for Phuket's extensive Chinese population. Additionally, many of the Thais living here are from other provinces, so they usually return to their hometowns to celebrate with their families.

The water throwing really is not a traditional part of Songkran celebrations. It stems from the custom of pouring just a little water over the hands of elders as a sign of respect.

Asked if she would ensure her own children knew the ancient ways, Ms Paruja replied, "Of course. It is the essence of being Thai."

## Thais reading more



Younger Thais are more avid readers. Photo: Sohum

THE good news is that Thais are reading more. The bad news is that fewer Thais are reading.

That's the bittersweet word from the National Statistical Office, whose sixth *Survey on Reading of Population* determined that Thais now spend on average twice as much time reading as they did two years ago.

The same poll of 55,920 households across the country in 2014 and 2015 also found, that the percentage of the public who read declined in that time from 81.8 to 77.7.

The office says 48.4 million Thais read and spend an average of 66 minutes a day at it.

Younger people are more avid: children six to 14 read 71 minutes a day and youths 15 to 24 devote 94 minutes a day to the written word.

Among the working population ages 25 to 29, the average time spent reading each day is 61 minutes. Senior citizens 60 and up are reading 44 minutes a day.

"We were very proud to learn that Thais are spending more time reading, although the number of readers has decreased," said Pattama Amorn-sirisomboon, the director of the government's Human Resource Development Bureau.

- The Nation

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# Splashing into a watery conundrum



Keep It Green

By Patrick Campbell

“WATER, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink” would do nicely as a motto for Songkran. When my son and his partner paid a surprise visit from London a few years ago, they unwittingly chose to arrive on the day of the water festival. The motorbike trip from Phuket City to Rawai, a mere 16 kilometers, took three hours. Not only were they soaked to the skin, but all their belongings, including two computers, were drenched. Innocents abroad!

Songkran returns this year on April 13<sup>th</sup> – at once a festival of purification, an opportunity to welcome the new year, a chance to make merit by washing Buddhist icons, and an excuse to indulge in lots of horsing around with water at alfresco street parties. While it is a joyous family occasion, it has its downside – as my son discovered.

More importantly, road accidents rise steeply, partly as a consequence of drunk driving and speeding. But despite the fact that the festival comes near the end of Phuket’s dry season and in the hottest month of the year, there is rarely any concern about water shortages. In fact, Mr Wiwat, director of the meteorological office, recently expressed the belief that reserves will last until May’s seasonal rains. Surprising when one considers just how much is



From time to time, untreated wastewater finds its way into Phuket’s popular beaches. Photo: Gazette file

used for domestic purposes alone. To take one obvious example, my garden needs at least two hours of watering every other day. But more reservoirs and extended mains systems have made a big difference.

The position in regard to water disposal is far less comforting. On neighboring Phi Phi island, which daily produces 40 tons of solid trash, there is no sewage plant at all. Apparently building one would cost 300 million baht and the island, despite its huge revenue from

tourism, cannot find the money. As a consequence, a shocking 83 per cent of the island’s waste water is pumped straight into the ocean. “Our only hope is that hotels, restaurants and other businesses act responsibly,” declared Mr Punkum of the local *OrBorTor*. Some hope!

Is Phuket any better? Admittedly, it does not endure the same jam-packed congestion as Phi Phi in high season, but the rash of high density apartment blocks, laundries and hotels

means that the spewing forth of domestic outflow is unremitting. Where does it all go? Are septic tanks adequate? Should we be resigned to the slow seepage of domestic effluent into the environment? How much dirty water is discharged straight into public sewers? What about escalating levels of pollution?

These may be rhetorical questions, but solutions need to be found.

The shortage of water treatment plants on the island, and

polluted canals means that black water has been pouring into the sea for years, especially after prolonged rainfall. In the last two years, residents have complained about the “stinking black wastewater” at Kamala Beach, or in Nong Harn pond at Karon. There have been similar pollution problems at Koh Racha, and mass poisonings of fish in Klong Ban Yai in Phuket City, in a canal that empties straight into the sea at Saphan Hin. When the quality of the canal water at Bang Tao was tested in 2014 (a projected wastewater project was abandoned that year), the biological oxygen demand (BOD) showed readings five times above normal. Sadly, the results of tests conducted on water quality at Phuket’s main beaches have never been made public.

The process of killing the goose that lays the golden tourist egg may be slow, but it is an inexorable one.

On a recent flight down from Bangkok, the flight path followed the coast from the estuary of the Chao Phraya River down past Hua Hin and on south past Koh Samui. Predictably enough, a huge brown stain stretched along several kilometers of it!

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

## Kata Noi Beach ranks among best in world

KATA NOI BEACH wiggled its way into the TripAdvisor Travelers’ Choice awards for best beaches in the world this year.

The west-coast beauty spot squeezed into 19<sup>th</sup> place, just ahead of Clear Water Beach in the United States.

“We know travellers around the globe love sun and sand vacations, so we’ve tapped the TripAdvisor community to help us identify the world’s best beaches,” said Barbara Messing, chief marketing officer for TripAdvisor.

“The 2016 Travelers’ Choice Beaches award-winners will inspire many to book their next getaway, knowing that these beautiful spots are the very best from the TripAdvisor global

community!”

Kata Noi Beach also ranked third best in Asia, while Nai Harn Beach was awarded 6<sup>th</sup> place. Not too far behind Phuket were Phra Nang Beach and Railey Beach – both in Krabi.

Additionally, Kata Noi was awarded first place in the ‘Top Ten Beaches – Thailand’ category, followed by Nai Harn Beach in second place.

The top beach in the world was Grace Bay, Providenciales, Turks and Caicos. The place was described as: “Unbelievably clear, clean water with hundreds of shades of blues and greens and white sugar sand beaches – ahhhhh!”

Making the top 10 cut was Thailand’s neighbor, Myanmar,



Kata Noi Beach, where the waves and water are like baby bear’s porridge: not too hot or cold, not too big or small, says TripAdvisor. Photo: Roberto Faccenda

which saw Ngapali Beach skate in at number 8. In striking contrast to Phuket beaches, Ngapali Beach was described as: “Three

kilometers of beach without a soul to be seen. No seashells, no rocks, no vendors!”

Though Kata Noi made the

list, TripAdvisor seemed to struggle to find what distinguishing features warranted the ranking, describing it as a place where the “waves and water [are] like baby bear’s porridge: not too hot or cold, not too big or small. Simply perfect in every way. Really.”

“I was not aware of the ranking. However, I am very glad to hear our beach ranked among the most beautiful in the world,” said Karon Mayor Thawee Thongcham. “I am grateful to everyone involved in recognizing the beauty of our beach. As Kata Noi is one of the best beaches in the world, I would like to call on tourists and locals to join together and help us protect this national treasure.”

– Isaac Stone Simonelli



# According to the Brahman

## Understand the origins of Thailand's water-filled New Year

### Looking Back

By Anand Singh

SONGKRAN is Thailand's traditional New Year festival. The word 'Songkran' is derived from Sanskrit, meaning to pass or move into, which is appropriate because according to Brahman astrology, the sun changes position from the Aries constellation to the Taurus constellation during this period, between 10<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> of April. The Songkran festival has its roots dating back to ancient India, where people celebrated the coming of spring. Today, Songkran is celebrated throughout South East Asia, particularly in Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia, where it is famously known as the water festival.

Thais celebrate Songkran in a variety of ways. They visit Buddhist temples to make merit, visit family, wash the hands of elders as a sign of respect and throw water indiscriminately at each other for fun. Songkran parades are also held where the star of the procession is the 'Nang Songkran' (Nang means lady), usually a young, beautiful Thai woman dressed in traditional Thai costume.

The reason why Nang Songkran is associated with the Thai New Year is because of an old Brahman legend. Thousands of years ago, there lived a very rich man who possessed every material wealth he could want. But he had no son and nobody to carry on his family name. Heartbroken after trying and waiting for many years, he prayed to the sun and moon and asked to be blessed with a son. He prayed for three years but his prayers went unanswered.

One day, when the sun was high above the Aries constellation, the rich man went to pray at a Bodhi tree near the river.

When he reached, he washed his rice offerings seven times at the river, cooked the rice and prayed to the gods. With a pure and desperate heart, he asked the gods to bless him with a son. The gods felt sorry for the rich man and so they went to Indra, the king of the gods and told him about the man's plight.

The merciful Indra was moved and agreed to bless the rich man with a divine son. Not long after the rich man's wife was pregnant. The rich man was finally happy and he named his son Dhammaban Kuman. He built a castle near the river for his son to live in.

Years passed and Dhammaban Kuman grew. Since he was a child of the gods, he was able to learn divine skills, such as bird language and the ability to see into the future.

One day, Brahma, the creator of the universe descended from heaven and paid Dhammaban Kuman a visit. He presented Dhammaban with three riddles. If Dhammaban was not able to answer the riddle correctly, Brahma declared that he would sever the boy's head. But if Dhammaban was able to answer the riddle correctly, Brahma would cut off his own head as an offering.

Then Brahma presented his riddle. "Where is a man's 'Rasi' (dignity) in the morning? Where is it in the afternoon and where is it in the evening?" Brahma proclaimed.

Dhammaban Kuman thought for a moment but he could not figure it out. He asked Brahma to give him a week to think. Brahma agreed.

During that week, Dhammaban Kuman thought and thought but he could not come up with an answer to the riddle. The days passed by and the thought of losing his head scared him more and more as Brahma's deadline loomed closer. On the sixth day,



Nang Songkran is associated with the Thai New Year because of an Brahman legend. Photo: Arian Zwegers

Dhammaban still could not figure out the riddle. He went back to his castle and prepared for the final end. That was when he heard two eagles talking atop the Bodhi tree.

"Dhammaban is doomed on the morrow", said one of the eagles. The other eagle was more sympathetic, and asked whether his friend knew the answer to Brahma's riddle.

"Of course I do", said the eagle. "In the morning, a man's Rasi is on his face, that is why he washes his face in the morning. In the afternoon, it is on his chest, and that is why he washes his chest in the afternoon. In the evening, it is on his feet and that is why he washes his feet in the evening. But Dhammaban will never figure it out."

Later that day Brahma appeared before Dhammaban and demanded an answer. The creator of the universe was shocked when the boy correctly answered his riddle. It was Brahma who now had to give up his head.

Brahma went back to his heavenly abode and called upon his seven daughters. He told them about the riddle and why he must now cut off his own head. There was one problem however. If Brahma's head were to ever touch the ground, fire would engulf and consume the earth. If his head were to ever be dropped into the sea, the seas would dry out forever. If Brahma's head were to be suspended in the air, the air would be devoid of any rain.

Brahma then ordered his daughter, Thungsa Devi to place his head on a golden tray. His daughters were instructed to take his head to a sacred cave on Mount Kailash and lay it there.

Ever since, it is said that on New Year's Day, or Songkran, Brahma's seven daughters would return to this sacred cave on Mount Kailash and bring their father's head out for a procession across the sky. The daughters would take turns every year to hold the golden tray on which their father's head laid. They became known as 'Nang Songkran'.

Thus the tradition of appointing a Nang Songkran is still observed in celebrations during the Songkran festival.

## Show consideration for local community this Songkran

THE upcoming Songkran holiday will no doubt be full of fun and festivities for all, but local businesses know a different side to the story.

Business owners on Bangla Road – one of the most high-traffic areas on the island, where thousands of people come together to participate in the water splash fun – have requested that partygoers

show consideration towards the community while they are celebrating.

"I don't have a problem with people having fun during the festival. I even provide free water to my customers to go outside the bar and play. However, I just want to urge people to be cautious; don't drink too much and be respectful of others," said Thongkham Buayai, the

owner of Heroes Bar on Bangla Road.

"For instance, adding ice to the water can get people sick and using silly spray creates a huge mess for us to clean up. Additionally, spraying water carelessly everywhere – especially indoors – causes damage to property and electronic items," she added.

– Chutharat Plerin



Songkran on Soi Bangla. Photo: Gazette file

## Residential market up this year



The Baan Pracha Rath financial package is for houses priced up to 1.5mn baht. Photo: Love Krittaya

THE residential property market witnessed strong growth in the first quarter, thanks to the government stimulus package cutting transfer and mortgage registration fees, and its recently introduced "Baan Pracha Rath" financial package for the purchase of homes priced up to 1.5 million baht.

"Our presales in the first quarter came in at 9.36 billion baht, up 4 per cent from our earlier estimate of 9bn baht," said Lersuk Chuladesa, chief operating officer of Pruksa Real Estate.

Other developers such as Golden Land Residence, LPN Development and Supalai recorded growth in sales over the period as well.

– *The Nation*

# The property name game



Property Watch  
By Bill Barnett

IT'S hard to trace the origin of the practice of naming people, places and things. Arguably you could start with Adam and Eve, and perhaps that first gated-estate village called the Garden of Eden. Yes, the branding gurus were hard at work, even way back then.

I've been reading about the current backlash in Mainland China against the increasing evils of 'Westernization'. One of the first initiatives was to force gated-estates to allow open roadways through these newly urbanized areas. Aside from the obvious traffic issues, the aim has been to close the gap between wealthy Chinese and the rest of the population.

Foreign-looking architecture has also come under the gun.

Next, in what could be a developer's nightmare, is the government requiring real estate projects with Western names to change them to local, or geographically-correct, monikers. Out goes the Riviera, Swiss Alps, Tex Mex, or chic global city names. Is this a great step backwards, or a great leap forward?

Property players are traditionally adept at re-writing the map. Look at Laguna Phuket which in actual fact is in Cherngtalay, or



Khao Yai is a prime example of Western influence on the Thai property market. Photo: Prachanart Viriyarak

even Natai over the bridge in Phang Nga province that for the most part is Ko Pilai. And yes, Kamala of course hosts the Millionaires' Miles. We live on an island where most people still use the term Phuket Town, instead of its correct name of Phuket City, as it has been for quite some time.

Real estate developers need to create unique selling points for their projects, and so adopt theming, or rely on a legacy Western name that stimulates sales for their condos or villas, rather than using the terms Baan, Talay, Lanna, or a hundred other over-used clichés.

Certainly in Mainland China, nationalism looks dead set to collide with consumerism, and the property set may

learn that losing an international feel will force them to come up with new ideas to sell expensive real estate.

After being cut off from the West for such a long period of time, the Mainland has an appetite for foreign brands, travel destinations and themes from other places. I get that entirely. I left the US over thirty years ago for exactly the same reason. Chinese travelers go abroad not for glimpses of the same as they can find at home, but for new ideas, sights and sounds.

On the other hand, I have often written about the silliness of Asia looking at the West as a role model, and in Thailand you have to go no further the Khao Yai to see that a misguided few

have come to think that the Italian countryside really has been magically transported to the Kingdom. Not.

While we shout about globalization, yet think we need to go local, the list of simple old names that have existed so long is under attack. Urbanization is a reality, and maps will be re-written, be it by governments, real estate developers, or wise-guy branding folks.

The reality in Phuket is that we live in a parallel universe where both Thai and foreign brands continue to co-exist. It will be interesting to see how China finds their own middle ground in the name game.

We will always have Shanghai, or will we?

## B100bn investment to develop Rama IV

INVESTMENT worth more than 100 billion baht being pumped into condominium, retail, office and hotel development on Rama IV will transform the road into a new landmark area of Bangkok over the next few years.

According to a survey conducted by *The Nation*, Rama IV Road is currently witnessing an aggressive level of investment to

develop both residential and commercial buildings in the area.

For instance, TCC Group will develop a 50-bn-baht project on an 80-rai plot at the Armed Forces Academy's Preparatory School on Rama IV.

Construction commences this year, with the overall project scheduled for completion within five years.

– *The Nation*

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## Jovago targets 95 per cent hotels with domestic hotel booking app

A NEW hotel booking app has been launched in Myanmar with the aim of boosting domestic tourism.

Developed by Jovago, the app 'Extranet' is available in Burmese and features a selection of more than 700 hotels across the country. It is targeting partnering 95 per cent of hotels in Myanmar by the end of this year.

Hugo Schleicher, managing director of Jovago Myanmar, said the number of hotels should rise to 1,000 by the end of June. He said Myanmar was the next boom market for the company, which had offices in 15 countries.

"We are targeting people from everywhere in the country. Our expectation is to become the market leader here. We aim to grow business by 20 per cent every month," he said.



Myanmar welcomed 4.5mn tourists in 2015. Photo: Christopher Michel

Myanmar welcomed 4.5 million international visitors and 2.46 million domestic travellers in 2015, according to the Hotels and Tourism Ministry.

The app is available for Android phones and can be used to confirm a booking within 10 minutes. Users can pay with international credit cards, such as Visa and MasterCard, while Myanmar Payment Union will

be accepted in the future.

Mr Schleicher said the app did not require much data usage and was designed for places with very slow Internet access.

The number of bookings in the second week doubled that of the first week, he added.

Jovago expects more than 2,000 confirmed bookings via Extranet by the end of this year.

– *The Nation*

# And the survey says...

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

SURVEYS are often seen as one of the lowest forms of data collection for a variety of reasons. Often respondents may not provide accurate answers or be comfortable providing answers that are perceived as unfavorable. Nonetheless, as STR Global has shown with more than 30 years of data collection in the hotel industry, important and valuable data can be gleaned by well-designed and developed surveys.

Part of that success comes from the enormous data set used by the hotel data collection and analysis company.

“STR Global has been established as the leading global provider of competitive benchmarking, information services and research to the hotel industry for over 30 years. We are currently gathering performance data from over 52,000 hotels in more than 160 countries,” explains Fenady Uriarte, STR Global’s Southeast Asia business development manager.

The company states that its

mission is to democratize data intelligence and provide one standardized worldwide platform, consistent methodology, transparency and quality service around the world.

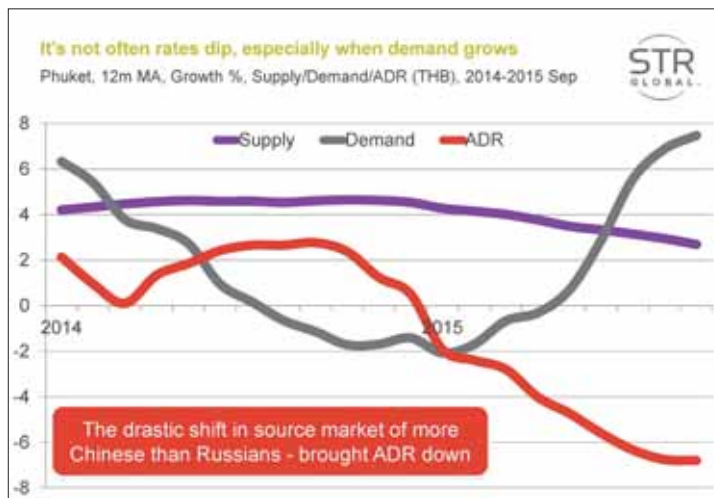
“In line with our mission to provide our clients with the best data, STR/STR Global data reporting guidelines were developed to align with the Uniform System of Accounts for the Lodging Industry, Eleventh Revised Edition (USALI). The guidelines align with USALI to uphold benchmarking best practices and performance data consistency,” says Ms Uriarte.

The detailed understanding of the industry and the nuances in the Data Reporting Guidelines is fundamental to the usefulness of the data set collected via the ‘Hotel Survey’.

In the guidelines, the small questions that could force a participant to incorrectly adjust their figures through misunderstanding are clearly outlined. For example, “Only revenue generating guestrooms should be reported to STR/STR Global as rooms sold. Complimentary

**/ We report aggregated data only. We do not release individual hotel, brand or company-specific data. /**

**– Fenady Uriarte, business development manager STR Global Southeast Asia**



The data collected by STR Global each year reveals a number of important trends and indicators for Phuket properties. Image: STR Global

rooms should be excluded in the rooms sold figures.”

Another excellent example for reporting rooms available is this:

“There should be no adjustment in room availability reported to STR/STR Global if rooms are temporarily out of service for renovation. If a property removes all rooms from inventory for renovation (complete closure), STR/STR Global should be notified so that the property may be marked as ‘Renovation Closed’. If rooms are permanently removed from inventory, hotel management should contact STR/STR Global to adjust

the hotel’s room count. Additionally, if rooms are closed for an extended period of time (typically over six months), ‘Extended Closed Rooms’.”

The incentive for hoteliers to provide accurate data comes through the understanding of the need for data intelligence and desire to use STR benchmarking programs.

“For example, by using the STAR Report, a benchmarking program that allows a hotel to compare its performance against its aggregate competitive set and local market, a revenue manager or hotel manager can accurately track and manage their hotel perfor-

mance against the market according to the real conditions in his or her marketplace,” says Ms Uriarte.

One strategic data point that hoteliers find important in the STAR Report is the ranking, which sets a property’s performance against hotels in the competitive set. The three key areas used in determining the ranking are occupancy, average daily rate and revenue per available room. By misreporting information to STR in the Hotel Survey, a company would skew its ranking, making it more difficult to determine which business decisions are necessary to make, based on the data provided.

Of course, the crux is that STR ensures the confidentiality of the data, as failing to do so would allow hoteliers to make targeted attacks on direct competitors based on the information provided.

“Strict controls are maintained in each processing step to ensure that data is handled responsibly. We report aggregated data only. We do not release individual hotel, brand or company-specific data. This is part of the trust that enabled STR to become the industry standard around the world,” confirms Ms Uriarte.

## AccorHotels expands network with Novotel Phuket Surin Beach Resort

ACCORHOTELS announced its expanded partnership with Destination Resorts Company, Limited to manage Novotel Phuket Surin Beach Resort on April 1.

The rebranded resort, presently DoubleTree Resort by Hilton Hotel Phuket Surin Beach brings the existing number of AccorHotels managed Novotel resorts in Thailand to eight.

“The Novotel brand, which is AccorHotels’ oldest and most recognized in Thailand, continues to appeal to travellers, particularly those with families,” said Patrick Basset, COO of AccorHotels Upper Southeast and Northeast Asia.

Four other Novotels are currently in the pipeline for Thailand, including Novotel Phuket Phokeethra, which is scheduled to open in the sec-



Destination Resorts will manage Novotel Phuket Surin Beach Resort. Photo: Novotel Phuket

ond half of this year.

“We are pleased to expand our partnership with AccorHotels. The success of our other Novotel resorts gives us great confidence in the future of Novotel Phuket Surin Beach Resort,” said Gary Murray, CEO of Destination Resorts. “The resort will be the third property managed by

AccorHotels in partnership with Destination Resorts.”

Novotel Phuket Surin Beach Resort features 254 rooms and suites, two restaurants, a poolside bar and a kids’ club, among other facilities. Conference facilities are available in a meeting room that accommodates up to 40 guests.

– Phuket Gazette

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Note: the images are people and industry the actress has worked with.




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**PROJECT MANAGER (URGENT)**  
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- Managing budgets and financial plans as well as controlling expenditure
- Maintaining statistical and financial records
- Setting and achieving sales and profit targets
- Analyzing sales figures and devising marketing and revenue management strategies
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- Planning work schedules for individuals and teams
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- Dealing with customer complaints and comments
- Addressing problems and troubleshooting
- Ensuring events and conferences run smoothly
- Supervising maintenance, supplies, renovations and furnishings
- Dealing with contractors and suppliers
- Ensuring security is effective
- Carrying out inspections of property and services
- Ensuring compliance with licensing laws, health and safety and other statutory regulations
- Experience with references in Asia or Thailand

**Front Office**

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- Monitor customer's accounts and till accounts
- Excellent verbal and written English communication skills
- Over 1 year experience will be advantage

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- Assess customers' needs, preferences and make recommendations
- Mix ingredients to prepare cocktails
- Restock and replenish bar inventories and supplies
- Comply with all food and beverage regulations

**Housekeeping Supervisor**

- Oversee the work of housekeeping staff
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- Ensure training of new hires
- Issue supplies to housekeeping staff at the beginning of each shift

Contact Monthipa. Tel: 083-691 4028.  
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**Phuket Gazette**

# Live to ride, ride to live

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

AS THE CEO of Power Station Motorsport, Erik Svensson is responsible for the commercial operations of Harley-Davidson of Bangkok and newly opened Harley-Davidson of Phuket. This 74-year-old man's love affair with motorcycles started more than 60 years ago, when he was at boarding school in Canada.

Mr Svensson had picked up boxing after moving from his hometown in Japan to Canada for school, but shifted gears when a teacher let him start riding and fixing up his motorcycle. Mr Svensson was 13 at the time, waking up early to ride the tracks before school started.

After years of training, he stepped onto the Daytona International Speedway track for the Daytona 200. It was 1961, the first year the race wasn't held along the beach.

The ambitious 19-year-old finished just behind Roger Reiman, taking second place after an unfortunate bike stall. Mr Svensson was riding at a time in the race's history when

Harley motorcycles dominated the field. It wasn't until the 1970s that Japanese-manufacturers really took over the runway.

"I've been riding for so long, and so often that it's second nature to me. The only thing that's going to stop me from riding is getting really old," Mr Svensson says. "Young riders these days just want to go fast – and they get into some serious accidents. I would know, I used to be that young too."

Riding is about getting to understand the feel of the bike and the road so you are the bike, and you can anticipate the changes of the road ahead."

During his professional racing years, Mr Svensson rode a Tohatsu 125cc and 250cc, but the first bike he ever owned was a 1952 Honda 220cc.

"Riding, like anything, takes practice, practice, practice. You do it so often that you don't have to think about what you're doing anymore. Like walking," he says. "What I love about riding is the sense of freedom and the adventure. Every bike ride is really an adventure. You

meet different kinds of people, from all walks of life, and it's a great way to get grounded and get back to feeling like yourself. I like that about Harleys. It's the real deal. It's about connecting back to who you are, in the spirit of freedom and adventure. That's a big difference with Harley riders. You meet some very interesting and grounded people."

Mr Svensson opened Harley-Davidson of Bangkok in 2001, after 20 years as the CEO of a successful export furniture company. The original shop was designed to be a garage to service his own bike and also his friends' bikes. However, it quickly grew to become a hub for motorcycle enthusiasts.

Though a genuine entrepreneur and serious businessman, Mr Svensson leads a rather private life, preferring to spend time with his family, if he's not busy at work or on the open road with his favorite bike; the Harley Ultra Classic.

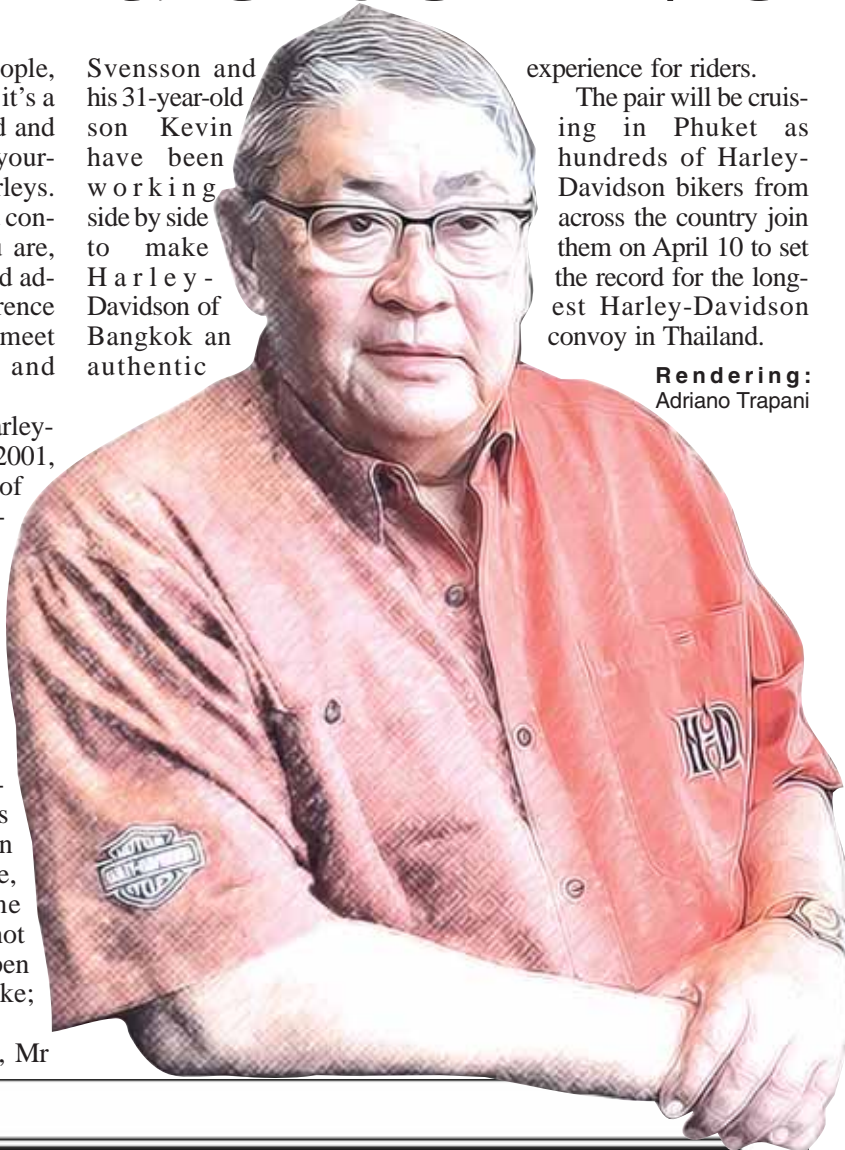
For the last eight years, Mr

Svensson and his 31-year-old son Kevin have been working side by side to make Harley-Davidson of Bangkok an authentic

experience for riders.

The pair will be cruising in Phuket as hundreds of Harley-Davidson bikers from across the country join them on April 10 to set the record for the longest Harley-Davidson convoy in Thailand.

Rendering: Adriano Trapani





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