

Phuket Gazette

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‘ANY GOVERNMENT OFFICERS COMPLICIT IN THIS CASE ARE GUILTY’

Freedom Revoked

■ Land Dept throws out Chanotes after years of legal fracas

By Kongleaphy Keam

THE long-debated four-billion-baht land titles, covering 65 rai off Freedom Beach, were officially revoked by the Land Department on May 12, as the two *Chanotes* were proved to overlap the Khao Narkkerd Preservation Forest.

The Land Department signed off on the order on May 12, and the Royal Forest Department (RFD) officially received the letter on May 24. Officials from the RFD said they are processing the order, before notifying the title holder, who has 15 days to appeal after receiving the letter.

The case first came to light when the RFD's director-general at the time, Somchai Piensathaporn, informed the Public Sector Anti-Corruption Commission (PACC) of irregularities concerning the land title deeds.

The first application to issue *Chanote* titles for the land was filed on July 18, 1990 by Panthong Na Ranong. Then, on April 12, 2011, the titles were issued under the name of Eakkachai Sae-Iw.

In July 2011, PACC Secretary-General Amphol Wongsiri stated that his investigation revealed that 200 million baht had been paid to officials for approval and authorization of the land deeds.

At the time, evidence was being collected to transfer the case to the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) in Bangkok.

In 2012, Pheu Thai Party spokesman and then-MP, Prompong Nopparit, paid a visit to the island to review the case. "Everything appears to be in order as far as the documents and title deeds are concerned," Mr Prompong said at the time. "However, an inspection of the land itself indicates that



Officials surveyed the alleged property lines of the disputed land titles, located on the high ground surrounding Freedom Beach. Photo: Gazette File

there is a conflict with several Phuket Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment regulations."

Mr Prompong explained that a site survey had proved that the land marked by the two *Chanote* titles, numbered 98414 and 98415, was within the boundaries of the Khao Narkkerd Preservation Forest. "Another issue is that some of the land has a slope of over 35 degrees, designating it as a 'mountain area.' The current title deeds do not apply to this type of terrain. In any case, title deeds cannot be issued for land within a protected forest. Any government officers complicit in this case are guilty," said Mr Prompong.

However, the lawyer defending the pri-

ivate investor in the case, At Srisamut, said that his client, Eakkachai Sae-Iw, had evidence that the land was acquired before the area was declared a national forest and that he could prove purchase of the land through a tax payment receipt – the lowest form of land claim available in the Kingdom.

On August 12, 2014, the RFD sent a letter to the Land Department to examine the two *Chanotes*. The official letter to revoke the *Chanotes* was signed just two weeks ago. "The title holders still have the right to appeal this order within 15 days," said Phuket Land Office Chief Watcharin Jetanavanich. "At this point, we have yet to receive any appeal," he added.

Police officer faces charges after death of Rohingya man

POLICE said they will file charges against an officer who shot and killed a Rohingya man, after he escaped from Phang Nga Immigration Detention Center early on May 23.

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Number plate auction raises B22mn to help crash victims

THE sale of lucky licence plates raised 22 million baht last week to fund road safety campaigns and rehabilitation programs for traffic accident victims.

More than 300 licence plates were auctioned off at the 11th annual two-day event organized by the Phuket Land Transport Office (PLTO), held May 21-22.

"The highest bid was 1,111,111 baht for the luckiest plate of them all: *Gor Ror 9999*.

The lowest bid was for *Kor Ror 6060*, which fetched 23,000 baht," said PLTO Deputy Chief Nanthapong Cherdchu.

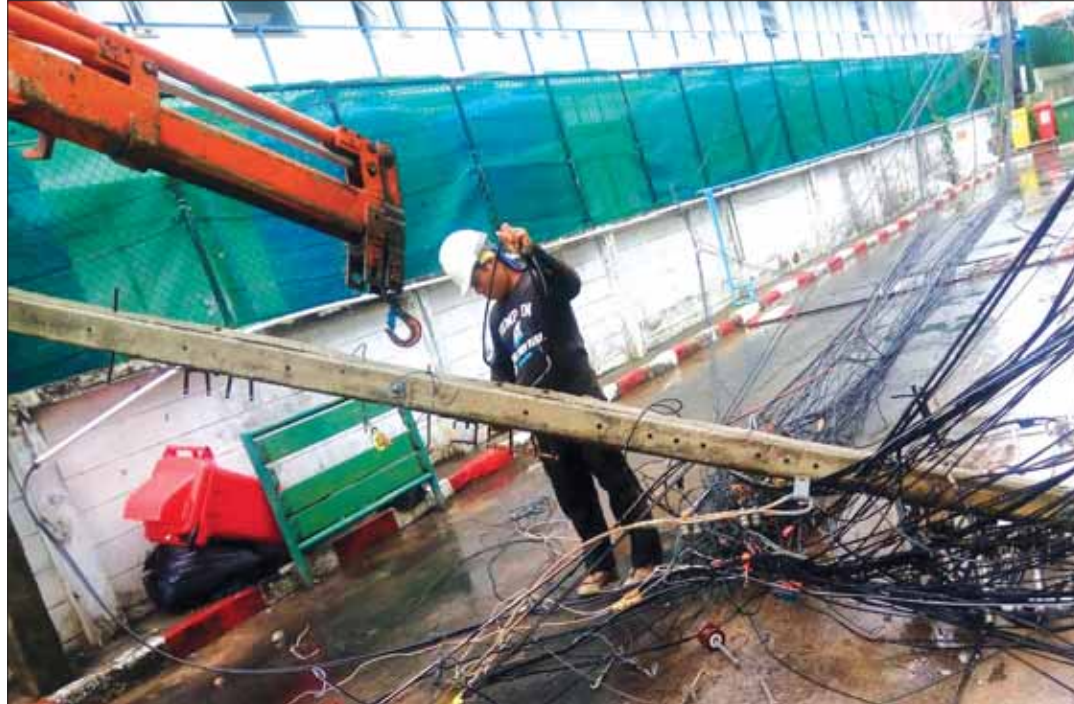
"Altogether, the annual licence plate auctions have raised just over 195 million baht. The money raised is used to buy wheelchairs and prosthetic limbs for people seriously injured or disabled in road accidents," said Mr Nanthapong.

- Sukawin Tanthavanich

Missing man's body washes up at Nai Thon

THE body of a man who was swept out to sea at Nai Thon

Fierce storm downs Patong power lines



A fierce tropical storm brought down several Patong power lines at about 1pm on May 24. Several areas in Patong and throughout the island were severely flooded. The storm also damaged seven houses in Thalang, causing an estimated 300,000 baht worth of damage. Local authorities provided aid to those badly affected by the storm. Many areas also faced severe traffic congestion. Photo: DDPM

Beach on May 22 was found washed up on a private beach the next day, about two kilometers south of the spot where he disappeared.

"Staff from the Andaman White Beach Resort spotted the body of Wichit Sophon, 30, who

LOCAL NEWS Briefly

was reported missing at about 8pm the night before by his girlfriend, Sompong Noinak," said Sakoo Police Lt Kriangkrai Prawat.

"We suspect he hit his head on rocks," said Lt Kriangkrai.

Mr Wichit was swept out to sea while walking along the beach with his friend, Athid Sensuk, who reported that they were both engulfed by a powerful wave. Mr Athid managed to hold on to a rock, but Mr Wichit was washed away.

Mr Wichit's family transported the body to his home town in Buriram.

- Winai Sarot

Suicidal woman convinced not to jump off cape

CRISIS negotiators on May 20 talked down a woman threatening to commit suicide by jumping off the top of Promthep Cape.

Rawai Mayor Aroon Solos and municipality staff learned of the impending suicide attempt when the distraught

woman posted her plans on Facebook while commemorating Visakha Bucha Day.

The Facebook post by *Noo Noi Nang Fa* (Little Angel), written in Thai and accompanied by a selfie of the woman wearing a black dress, translates as: "At midnight, I will not stay in this world anymore. This is the last dress I will wear. Today is Visakha Bucha. Everyone else is celebrating, but I will commit suicide. For those who know me, you can come to my funeral. It will be a page-one story across Phuket if someone finds my body, which will not be a pretty sight. For that, I am sorry. I know that what I am about to do is a sin. Goodbye world".

Mr Aroon immediately dispatched staff to the scene. They arrived just before midnight and waited for the woman.

As promised, *Noo Noi Nang Fa* turned up at the cape around midnight. However, she was eventually persuaded by the crisis negotiators not to jump.

"We were not able to find out why she wanted to commit suicide, but she was clearly very stressed about something personal. We just hope she will get over it," said Mr Aroon.

A follow-up Facebook post by the woman revealed that she planned to become a nun.

- Kongleaphy Keam

Police hunt for karaoke killer

POLICE are hunting for the murderer of a man who was stabbed outside a karaoke bar in Thalang on May 20.

"We found the body of Chaiyuth Innsathorn, 35, outside Panan karaoke bar at about 3:20am. His throat was slashed and there was blood on his head and clothes," confirmed Thalang Police Lt Suporn Muangkai.

"Another man named Rachane Rakpong, 27, was injured on his right wrist and taken to Thalang Hospital."

Ladawan Raksa, a waitress at the bar, told police that four men were hanging around outside the bar when Mr Chaiyuth and his friend pulled up on motorbikes. Mr Chaiyuth honked at the men's car, after which one of them called out to ask if they had a problem.

"Mr Chaiyuth reportedly punched one of the men, whose friend then drew a knife and slashed his throat and his friend's wrist," said Lt Suporn. "The men then ran back to their car and drove off."

Police are questioning other witnesses and examining CCTV footage to help locate the suspect and his friends.

- Winai Sarot

Tattooed body washes up on Karon Beach

THE body of a man wearing only underpants washed up on Karon Beach on May 19.

A foreign tourist was shocked to discover the body while walking along the beach at 7:30pm and contacted the police.

The deceased was aged 35-40 and was about 165-170cm tall. He was bald and appeared, by the dark color of his skin, to be a Thai national, Karon Police captain Weerayuth Thansirisukhaworakul told the *Gazette*.

Doctors confirmed drowning as the cause of death. Police said that so far, there were no missing persons reports fitting the man's description.

Investigators said there were no immediate indications of violence on the body. Photographs of the body at the scene show a piece of green twine tied around the waist.

The body has tattoos on both arms. One of the tattoos, in Thai script, loosely translates as 'Anything for you, My Love'.

- Kritsada Mueanhawong

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Police officer to be charged for death of Rohingya detainee

By Kritsada Mueanhawong

POLICE are preparing to file charges of murder with intent against a police officer who shot and killed a Rohingya man after he escaped from Phang Nga Immigration Detention Center early on May 23.

“According to witnesses, Muhammad Kornee, 18, threw a big rock at one of the officers. The officer used his gun to defend himself,” said Capt Chatree Pienkayai of the Phang Nga City Police.

“Charges of attempted murder will also be brought against Mr Muhammad.”

The deceased man was one of 21 Rohingya who broke out of the center at 3am.

“The detainees escaped by using a saw to cut their way out of the second floor of the center and used a rope to climb down,” Phang Nga Police General Worawit Pranprung told the *Gazette*.

The men split into two groups; 15 of them made their way down a waterway leading to Phang Nga Bay, while the other six headed for forested hills nearby, said Gen Worawit.

Eleven of the men were captured on the same day. This includes three men cap-



Eleven men were captured on the same day and three on the next. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

tured immediately after the escape, five who were found hiding in a forest near Tam Num Put Hospital, one caught in Bang Toei sub-district and two captured in Bor Saen sub-district.

Three more men were captured the next day in Bor Saen. Locals in the area also aided police in their search by providing information about the men’s whereabouts.

Six of the escapees were still

on the run at the time the *Gazette* went to print.

The Muslims for Peace Foundation took the body of the dead Rohingya man to Phuket to conduct a funeral for him. The foundation will also inform the man’s relatives of his death.

In May last year, 106 Rohingya men and women were found on Koh Ree in Mu Koh Surin National Marine Park, northwest of Phuket. The



Russian man found dead with drug paraphernalia



Police found drug paraphernalia but no signs of violence or forced entry. Photo: Winai Sarot

THE body of a Russian man with a needle embedded in his left arm was discovered at an apartment near Khao Rang in Phuket City on May 23.

The body of Anton Murov, 38, was discovered when a concerned colleague went to check up on him after he failed to turn up for work.

There was a tourniquet still bound around his upper left arm. Drug paraphernalia was found on a table near the body. However, police did not find any illicit drugs in the room.

“There were no wounds indicating violence. Nor was there any sign of robbery,” said Major Nucharee Long-kaew of the Phuket City Police, adding that Mr Muromov appeared to have died at least 24 hours before discovery of the body.

– Winai Sarot

Paradise Beach vows to appeal demolition

PARADISE Beach Management Co Ltd has vowed to appeal a Patong Municipality demolition notice of the property they currently occupy at Paradise Beach, claiming that their land document is legal.

Nituch Prasertnetikul, the lawyer speaking on behalf of the company and the current land owner Sophon Eakwanit, said that news of the demolition notice, handed down on May 11, was negatively affecting their business. Mr Nituch said they are considering whether to file a complaint against Patong Mayor Chalermluck Kepsup over the notice.

Ms Chalermluck told the *Gazette* that the demolition process will continue, despite threats of a lawsuit, and signed the demolition notice May 19.



Mr Nituch said the company would appeal as their land documents were legal. Photo: Chutharat Plerin

“We will appeal as our *SorKor* 1 No 276 is legal,” Mr Nituch said. “The municipality does not have the right to order us to prove our land documents.”

Ms Chalermluck said that everything the municipality is doing is according to the law and that she will continue to do her job.

“We are doing this for the benefit of the public,” she added.

– Kongleaphy Keam

Warning to tour boats: Steer clear of dolphins

OFFICIALS have warned tour guides and boat operators to stay at a safe distance from marine life, after a large pod of dolphins was spotted near Koh Mai Thon off the southeast coast of Phuket.

Suchat Rattanaruengsri, head of the Marine and Coastal Resources Conservation Division Region 6, was joined by marine experts and officials as they looked into reports by tour groups boating around the island on May 18.

"A pod of 23 bottlenose dolphins was found swimming around Koh Mai Thon, about 500-800 meters out," Mr Suchat said. "This is the largest group of dolphins we have ever seen."

Mr Suchat said officials were concerned that sounds from the boats would disturb the mammals and that some tourist boats circled the pod too closely in order to get a better vantage.



Noise from the boats are disturbing marine life. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

"We have kept an eye on the dolphins for the past ten years," Mr Suchat said. "They used to wander and live around Koh Kai, but due to the number of tourist boats frequenting the island, they've moved to the calmer Koh Mai Thon instead. If everyone wants to keep them around here for a long time to come, we're advising a plan to educate tourists and boat operators on what they should and

should not do. Boats must stay at least 500 meters away from the group and go slowly. They're more likely to come to the boat by themselves."

Mr Suchat said that he and other officials had informed local tour boat businesses about the proper behaviors around dolphins, and that they hoped for their cooperation in order to keep the animals around.

- Kritsada Mueanhawong

New powers



A DMCR officer chides a tourist caught bagging fish and coral on Koh Kai. Officers now have the power to arrest such tourists. Photo: DMCR

DEPARTMENT of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) officials are adopting tougher laws in an attempt to rescue three islands off Phuket's coast from man-made environmental damage.

A committee, assembled by members of the DMCR Region 6, agreed to expand the powers of DMCR officers and to level harsher punishments for tourists and boat operators that disturb wildlife.

The new punishments, which include up to one-year imprisonment, a 100,000 baht fine or both, went into effect on Tuesday, May 24.

In deploying the new regulations, the committee cited Article 17 of DMCR regulations, allowing the establishment of any regulations to an area deemed in harmful condition.

The deteriorating environmental situation of Koh Kai Nok, Kai Nai and Kai Nui, located halfway between Phuket and Koh Yao, came to public attention after pictures posted on social media, showing tourists proudly displaying captured fish in plastic bags, went viral.

Researchers working with the DMCR said the percentage of living coral surrounding the islands has plummeted, from 80 per cent of coral recorded as living in 1991, to less than 10 per cent this year.

DMCR officers were expected to begin patrolling the island with their expanded authority by Friday, May 27. DMCR Region 6 Chief Watcharin Thintalang said the current patrol implementation involves 12 officers on a rotating daily watch.

"With this new law, we will have the right to immediately arrest tourists, tour guides and boat operators for disturbing or damaging marine life, or being

complicit in its destruction said Mr. Watcharin.

Mr Watcharin said the special nature of the islands, which are not technically national parks and are therefore not afforded the same level of protections, compelled the committee to expand the DMCR's protective powers.

Previous legislation allowed DMCR officers to use the Wildlife Preservation and Protection Act BE 2535 (1992), in which coral is considered a protected animal, to catch and turn in people suspected of harming marine life to the police.

Under that Act, officers could not arrest or turn people over to the police for harming any marine life other than coral. The punishment under that law was a fine up to 40,000 baht, up to four years in prison or both.

However, under Article 17, Mr Watcharin said DMCR officers may now detain tourists for harming all marine life, not just coral.

Tourists no longer immune

Mr Watcharin said previously, officers' willingness to detain and hand suspects over to the police was hampered by a fear of deterring tourism. Those fears, he said, have since been addressed by the DMCR committee.

Mr Watcharin said he sees the impunity of boat operators and their tourists changing dramatically after Friday.

"The new law will make them scared, he said. "It requires us to take them to the police station right away, where they'll be charged with violating the Wildlife Preservation and Protection Act BE 2535 (1992) and the Marine and Coastal Resources Management Act BE 2558 (2015).

"We have the power now.

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Let's see if they do get scared," Mr Watcharin told the *Phuket Gazette*. "For example, if a tourist is found torturing fish, they will have to face the legal process," he said.

"They will be taken to a police station and their case will have to go to court," he said. "That means they'll have to stay in Thailand until the case is decided."

Thon Thamrongnawasawat, a member of the National Reform Council (NRC), said that the new regulations will have no affect on the island's tourism industry.

"Some have asked me, 'will we dare to actually arrest tourists, because of the adverse effects it could have on the tourism economy?' To which I responded, 'if tourists do something illegal, are we just to ignore it because they are tourists,'" Mr Thon said.

"I think it only takes a few cases of arresting lawbreakers before others will get scared and never do anything like that. Instead of enjoying their time in Phuket, they'll spend their holiday in court. No one will choose that."

"We are not closing the islands or limiting the number of tourists that can visit them, like the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Preservation has done with Tai Chai," he



A tourist bags wild fish at Koh Kai. Pictures of tourist activity, including bagging fish and cutting coral, have garnered outrage on social media over the past few months. Photo: DMCR

added. "Tourists can enjoy the islands as usual, they just have to obey our laws or face the consequences. Officers from the Department of Tourism were involved in the committee and if it really does end up affecting tourism, we'll address it."

On May 23, tour operators were called in for a meeting about the new rules with DMCR officials. Boat operators and tour guides said that, for the most part, they were cautiously supportive of the new measures.

"I totally agree with the new regulations, said Gembira

Travel & Trading manager Sommit Plookpuet. "Yes, tourism is our livelihood, but if it destroys our marine life, it simply means we'll have no way of making money. If there's no more coral and no more fish, they'll stop coming."

"We plan to cooperate completely with the new regulations," Mr Sommit said. "While I think taking those who disobey the law immediately to the police station is harsh, I do think it will work."

"Honestly, the fines at places like national parks don't really work," he added. "No one re-

ally cares about a few hundred baht. This new rule will take those who disobey the law to the police station. That wastes their time and it affects their whole day. For sure, folks aren't going to take those chances."

Mr Sommit's comments were echoed by Wichai Ruengjongwattana, a representative of Sun Shine Tours Andaman.

"I think the main reason that tourists and operators end up damaging marine life is because there are no clear regulations set up," Mr Wichai

said. "Now, there are. Print the 12 regulations out on posters and put them up on the three islands in English, Thai, Chinese and Russian, and let's see if anyone dares to disobey the law."

More regulations to come?

Mr Watcharin said the DMCR Region 6 committee sees the implementation of Article 17 as potentially useful to other islands, not just Koh Kai Nok, Kai Nai and Kai Nui.

"Sure, Article 17 could be expanded to include other at-risk islands and increase powers of enforcement for our officers, but enforcing the law is not easy," he said. "We need officers for that. For example, when we arrest a tourist, we have to take them to the police station on the shore by boat. If we use this law for many islands, we will not have enough officers for every possible detention. Right now, we're just focusing on these islands."

"The real purpose of this regulation is not to have our officers arresting people across the whole sea, but to protect the natural environment around these islands by discouraging their degradation, Mr Watcharin said. "We never want to arrest people, we only want them to obey the law and appreciate the natural beauty of these islands."

- *Kongleaphy Keam*



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Man shoots Krabi Woman in the face

KRABI City Police are searching for a suspect believed to be involved in a drive-by shooting, which resulted in the death of Maleerat Sakkaew on May 21.

Capt Pipat Wongdet of Krabi City Police stated that a single shot to the face ended 49-year-old Ms Maleerat's life, who was at her shop in Krabi Town at the time.

"Witnesses said that Ms Maleerat was working in the kitchen when two men arrived, in a black Toyota Vigo pickup truck without a registration plate. Upon exiting the vehicle, one of them walked into the kitchen and shot Ms Maleerat," explained Capt Pipat. "She was dead by the time we arrived."

The men have not been identified, but an investigation is underway. The motive of the homicide is currently unknown.

– *Chutharat Plerin*

Marine Dept issues storm warning



Storms are expected to last through May 28. Photo: Gazette File

THE Phuket Marine Office issued a warning on May 24 to all boats headed to Phi Phi archipelago and Racha Island to remain ashore, confirmed Phuket Marine Chief Surachai Burapanontachai.

"All boats 10 meters or less than 400-horsepower engines have been prohibited from leaving the shore, as waves of up to four meters in height are expected in the Andaman Sea," he said.

"However, if these boats want to access nearby islands in Phang Nga Bay, such as Koh Lon regardless of the warning, they may do so with caution," he added. Heavy rains have damaged at least seven houses in Phuket, in addition to several power poles and trees. Officials warned flooding may also worsen traffic conditions.

Phuket lifeguards have also warned swimmers to be cautious before entering the rough seas, given current weather conditions.

The storm warning issued by the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Phuket Office also remains in effect until May 28.

– *Kongleaphy Keam*

Coral bleaching threatens popular Phi Phi dive spots



Conservationists proposed closing off Maya Bay to tourists to help restore the bleached coral. Photo: Petchrung Sukpong (Aey)

CORAL bleaching is rife in Phi Phi National Park – the worst ever recorded in Thailand – alarmed conservation officials reported May 18.

Many varieties of coral have been affected by the bleaching, which is due to sea temperatures rising to between 31 to 35 degrees Celsius, an official from the Department of National Parks Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) said.

"Staghorn coral, lesser coral, mushroom coral, cauliflower coral and hump coral are all being affected by the bleaching, which is far worse than

what we observed in 2010," said Tikamporn Wongtawatchai, a specialist from Marine National Park and Protected Areas Innovation Center (MNIPC).

"Coral bleaching has been recorded all over the Hat Noppharat Thara-Mu Ko Phi Phi Marine National Park, but the bleaching is worse at Koh Kai," said Mr Tikamporn.

This is the first time hump coral has been affected by bleaching, indicating that the bleaching is far worse than ever before. The bleaching has occurred in several popular dive spots, including

Pileh Bay, Loh Samah Bay, Koh Yoong, Monkey Beach, Koh Pai and Koh Gai.

Earlier this month, conservationists proposed closing off Maya Bay to tourists to help restore the bleached coral and other endangered marine life there.

"We cannot control nature. However, we can stop people from disturbing the marine life in these spots. Hopefully, this latest report of the extensive damage will persuade the DNP to take quick action by closing off Maya bay and other spots in Phi Phi National Park affected by the bleaching," said Mr Tikamporn.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Bridge collapse in Krabi disrupts traffic, leaves motorists stranded



Motorists are advised to use Petchkasem Road after temporary alternative route collapsed. Photo: Pornthip Paklao, Ao Luek Municipality

TORRENTIAL rain has swelled rivers in Krabi, causing a road bridge to collapse, leaving motorists stranded in Marui District.

"The main bridge across Khlong Pak Lao is closed for repairs, so the Marui-Ao Luek road was being used as an alternative," the Krabi Department of

Rural Roads said on May 23.

Motorists are advised to use Petchkasem Road instead until both bridges are repaired.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

17 schoolgirls perish in blaze

A GIRLS' boarding house in Chiang Rai burned down late on May 22, killing 17 girls aged between five and 12.

Five others were injured and two were still unaccounted for at the time of going to press.

The fire broke out in the boarding house of the Pithakkiart Witthaya School in Wiengpapao district at 11pm, police said.

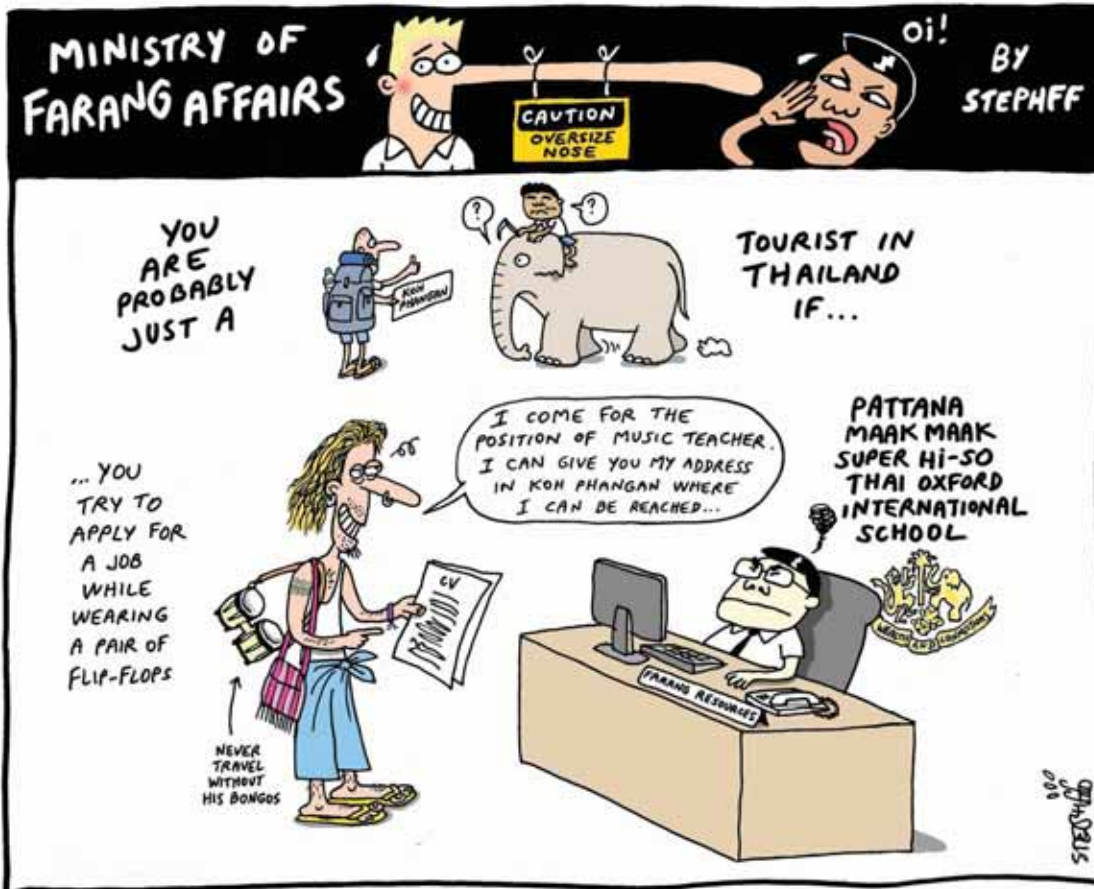
Rescuers could only evacuate a few of the boarders. The rest were trapped inside. Most of the victims' bodies were burned beyond recognition.

A total of 38 girls were staying at the house, most of whom were from hilltribes in Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai. The Wiengpapao district office provided a shelter and basic necessities for the survivors. The school is run by the Patthakit Suksan Foundation.

Lawyers appeal convictions in Koh Tao case

LAWYERS have filed an appeal against the conviction of two Myanmar nationals sentenced to death for the 2014 murder of two British backpackers in Koh Tao.

The 198-page appeal claims that the questioning and charging of the migrant workers was unlawful because it was done without lawyers or any trusted persons present and that the retracted confessions were extracted through torture or abuse.



University prof shoots himself

WANCHAI Danaitamonut, a lecturer at Phranakhon Rajabhat University, who was suspected of murdering two colleagues, shot himself dead after police tracked him down to a Bangkok hotel on May 19.

He allegedly killed Pichai Chaisongkram and Nattapon Chumwor-athayee while they were giving an oral exam.

After six hours of negotiations with police and his relatives, Wanchai shot himself in the head. He was later pronounced dead, according to police. Throughout the day, the suspect had pointed his pistol to his temple during the negotiations for his surrender.

The standoff, broadcast live by many television channels, continued into the evening. It is believed that Mr Wanchai had a conflict with Mr Pichai over academic qualifications.

It is unclear if Mr Wanchai also had issues with Mr Nattapon.

Blaze at fitness center kills two

TWO fitness enthusiasts were killed and three others injured from smoke inhalation after a fire broke out at a building site at Tawandaeng entertainment venue in Rat Burana district in Bangkok on May 24.

The fire broke out at 9:30am at the two-storey building on Suksawat Road. Firefighters took an hour to bring the flames under control.

The cause of blaze is still under investigation.

The pair who succumbed to the smoke were customers at a fitness centre located above the site.

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

Rapper leads reforestation project in Nan

A HIGH-profile music group's deforestation initiative in Nan will start in July, with the intention of galvanizing local farmers to help implement the program and make it sustainable.

The 'Plant It Now Group' has designated about 500 rai of land

in Nan's Santisuk district as the best area to grow a forest instead of a maize field.

The group was set up by rapper Apisit Opas-aimlikit, former candidate for Bangkok governor Suharit Siamwalla and advertising film director Thanonchai Sornsriwichai.

The group came together as a consequence of an issue going viral on the internet – the bald mountains in Nan deforested because of widespread maize plantations on forest land.

"Deforestation began with the maize price guarantee, which is quite profitable, so galvanising local farmers to help implement the programme and make it sustainable," said Mr Suharit.

TV stations issued warnings

FOUR free-to-air stations were summoned by broadcasting regulators on May 23 to provide reasons for broadcasting the live telecast of a murder suspect who threatened to commit suicide, which allegedly broke broadcasting rules.

The broadcasting regulator has not yet punished the operators but has issued warnings.

They may have also broken other regulations related to TV programming and scheduling.

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Valid Until : 1 February – 30 June 2016

Phuket Gazette

Article 17 applauded

THE Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) was correct to invoke Article 17 of the Marine and Coastal Resources Management Act (2015) to afford greater protection to the Koh Khai island group, which for too long has been exploited by unscrupulous tour operators.

Located just five kilometers off Phuket's lower east coast, the islands are perfectly situated to serve as money spinners for tour operators offering cheap tours to large groups of novice snorkelers and other environmentally unsound practices, such as 'sea walker' tours that are a threat to the sea floor.

The islands are far enough from Phuket to have maintained relatively healthy coral populations, even decades after the reefs off Phuket's coastline disappeared.

The most convenient aspect, at least from the tour operators' perspective, is that the islands lie just outside the confines of Ao Phang Nga National Park. Thus, there are no associated entry fees or special environmental measures in place.

For these reasons, the Koh Khai group has increasingly become a victim of its own success, falling under threat by hordes of package tourists that seem to have little regard for the environment other than as a source of entertainment.

A recent Facebook post that went viral in Thai social media shows images of East Asian tourists capturing reef fish and corals in plastic bags accompanied by signs in Chinese lettering and the plea: "Help! Anybody! Save Koh Khai!"

The Thai-language media was quick to vilify East Asian tourists as the culprits. In reality, the culprits are greedy Thai tour operators who ferry them there and provide little or no instructions about how they can and should behave while there.

The DMCR and Department of National Parks (DNP) were correct to take advantage of the powerful new legislation allowing them to effectively 'adopt' the islands as 'environmental emergency areas' allowing for enhanced ability to prosecute perpetrators of environmental crimes. However, enforcement effort needs to focus first on tour operators rather than the ignorant tourists they cater to.

In closing, the *Gazette* notes that the many two-year 'score cards' of the current government that appeared in the international media recently made little or no reference to Article 17 or any other of the other unprecedented measures undertaken by the current government to protect our marine environment. Issues of democratic development aside, the current government deserves greater recognition for its efforts in this regard.



Need to finish off the cleaning job at Surin

Re: *Grand (re)opening of Surin Beach announced, May 21*

I do hope somebody has the good sense to allocate some money in finishing off the 'cleaning' job.

Right now there would be 20,000 lumps of cement and even broken glass left behind and the place looks awful.

Chob
Gazette forum

Lengthy sentences are beyond cruel

Re: *EXCLUSIVE: Phuket Prison's female inmates talk about their lost lives, May 23*

The circumstances around these unfortunate women, probably first offenders, and exaggerated terms of prison as punishment are cruel beyond description.

These lengthy sentences deprive their children of a mother and cause mental anguish for her entire family for the rest of their lives. They also deprive the State of a productive worker. Tragic.

Seht1912
Gazette forum

Worldwide drug reform is necessary

Re: *Opinion: Young lives forever ruined by drugs, May 22*

"Despite the harshest of deterrents, many young people still take to drug dealing with reckless abandon."

This is, and always will be, the case as long as there is easy money to be made.

If a purportedly powerful

Letters to the Editor

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Email Editor@PhuketGazette.net

nation like the USA can't even impede the growth in its illegal drug trade, let alone reduce it, then what chance do we have here? Worldwide reform is needed in thinking about recreational drugs.

CaptainJack
Gazette forum

Rest in peace you innocent souls

Re: *At least 17 children killed in boarding-house fire, May 23*

This is the most tragic news to come out of Thailand recently. Rest in peace you dear souls.

Shannon Doherty
Phuket forum

Well organized day trips are the solution

Re: *Tour boats warned to steer clear of dolphins off Phuket, May 21*

Dolphins have been around a long while now.

I know they came back to Mai Thon about three years ago and have been seen between there and Koh Doc Mai for some time and then spread as far as Phi Phi.

This is a far better way to see them than in the aquarium. Day trips done well will be far better for both tourists, the locals

and the boat trips.

This will mean far more profit for everyone for years to come if the dolphins are not scared off.

Simon
Gazette forum

Do not obliterate this quaint area

Re: *Rawai sea gypsies finally see the light, May 19*

In civilized countries it is called the right of adverse possession. The occupying persons cannot be summarily evicted if the legal owner had never given them notice to vacate since many years.

In other words they have become the new legal owners.

These industrious people are providing an excellent dining experience and very fresh seafood market which is nearly unique in all Thailand.

I hope the Phuket government realizes this and puts a stop to the planned takeover by the condominium interests which will forever obliterate this quaint area.

William Hoover
Facebook

Phuket really needs a suicide hotline

Re: *Phuket crisis negotiators stop suicidal woman from jumping off rooftop, May 21*

Happy she's safe. Clearly a Case in point for establishing a suicide hotline in Phuket.

Max Daley
Facebook

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Spirit of giving back

FIRST PERSON

TO MY knowledge and from what I see in the hospital, more and more people are coming to the island, with this year seeing the largest influx of visitors yet. Meanwhile, the airport is expanding to welcome more tourists as well. More tourists means that more blood is likely to be required.

We don't begrudge the visitors coming to Phuket; the Tourism Authority of Thailand are doing their job and we are doing ours. Additionally, we don't wish to deny blood to anyone who needs it. All we can do is try our best to help them.

Shortage of staff is a major problem that we are facing at the blood bank. We do not have enough officers to meet the ever-increasing requirement of patients. We have made some headway in this regard, but we still need more staff to fulfill our requirements.

I have discussed the issue with the hospital director, Dr Jessada Chungpaibulpatana, and he agreed to fill more open positions for medical technologists.

It takes about 20 minutes to collect blood from a donor, but the blood isn't ready for use at that point. It takes up to two days to process it, ensure that it is safe for use and matches the patients' blood type.

This is why we need qualified specialists in the laboratory to test blood for Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, HIV, syphilis and other diseases, be-



Dr Suprang Suttantapidok, MD, is a hematologist at Vachira Phuket Hospital and the head of the hospital's blood bank. A Phuket native, she graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at Siriraj Hospital and specialized in hematology. She has been working for Vachira Phuket Hospital since 2013.

Here, she talks about the blood-related issues that Phuket faces and the needs of the blood bank to support the increasing number of visitors on the island.

fore it can be used.

The supply of blood in our blood bank is available for use in our own hospital, as well as other nearby government and private hospitals. We also coordinate with the Phuket Regional Blood Center (PRBC).

In case we do not have enough blood to meet our requirements, we call the regular donors on our list for blood types A, B, AB, O and Rh-negative.

Our hospital has a lot of specialists and experts, so many patients come here for treatment, both as inpatients and emergency cases. Some people are hospitalized for months on end, so we need a steady supply of blood for their treatment.

At this point, we do not use blood substitutes or other blood-based products. Therefore, we need more people to donate blood in order for us to regularly replenish our own supplies.

We do have blood units in stock, but there is always demand for more. We welcome

all blood donors, whether Thais or foreigners. With the increasing number of people, the chances of accidents and emergency cases become higher too. Of course, we can always hope that this won't be the case, but we need to be prepared regardless.

Blood units can be stored for more than 40 days, so donors are welcome to come and help us build up our supplies.

The media has a very important role to play in this situation. Most of the readers of the *Phuket Gazette* are foreigners. This makes it a valuable and important forum to spread the message to all foreigners that the more blood they donate, the more lives we can save.

Your blood can help save many lives, especially donations of Rh-negative, which is more common among foreigners than Thais.

Blood donations can be made at Vachira Phuket Hospital, Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 8pm, and Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays from 8:30am to 3pm.



The morning rush at the Samkong Underpass construction site doesn't seem like much of an alternative. Photo: Highways Dept

Daily brush with death

LIVING in Phuket and being surrounded by beautiful hills and beaches, one sometimes tends to forget what a gamble braving the island traffic on a motorbike can really be.

Not to say that motorbike riders are hardly to blame; that's far from being the case. However, only those of us who regularly risk our lives on two wheels in the labyrinth of four-wheeled vehicles and more, can testify to the true dangers of being a motorbike rider in Phuket.

I've been in Thailand for almost a year now, and after two months of spending a handsome amount on taxis, tuk tuks and bike rentals in the beginning, I felt the need to buy myself a bike – which is a pretty standard practice here. A few dozen brushes with death later, I think I've managed to narrow down the worst enemy of Phuket bikers: minivan drivers.

These guys hardly seem to know – or care – what or who is around them, as long as their wheels are touching the asphalt. When commuting to work, I used to take the back road near British International School to reach Koh Keaw. That is, until I experienced being run off the road by minivan drivers during the morning rush.

I'm not talking about a few wrong passes here and there. I

Island View

By Zohaib Sikander

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

mean switching lanes, overtaking on steep, narrow roads and generally driving with reckless abandon. Much as I love the invigorating morning air and greenery of the back road from Kathu to Koh Kaew, there are only so many times I can escape these regular brushes with death, particularly now that there is ongoing construction near the mining museum, leaving only one narrow lane for cars, motorbikes and those lethal minivans on both sides of the road.

The trudging bumper to bumper morning rush of the Samkong Underpass construction site doesn't seem like much of an alternative, perhaps, but at least the road is wider and the possibility of staying safe ever so slightly higher. I wouldn't say it's a choice between a rock and a hard place – more like a rock and certain doom.

My self-preservation instinct eventually dominates and I'll grudgingly settle for crowded and frustrating – even if just means I live to see yet another just as crowded and frustrating day.

Words from the Wise

“Everything will be okay in the end. If it's not okay, it's not the end.”

– John Lennon

“Believe in yourself and all that you are. Know that there is something inside you that is greater than any obstacle.”

– Christian D. Larson

Issues & Answers

Am I allowed to bring frozen fish to Thailand?

MY WIFE and I like to fish in our spare time and would like to bring some fish that we caught in Norway for our friends and family in Thailand.

Do the rules allow us to bring frozen fish into Thailand?

Gordon Grindland
Norway

Mr Thasakorn Noknork of the Fish Quarantine Phuket Office replies:

Thank you for your query. The answer depends on the

purpose of importing the fish and how it is imported, that is, by land, air or sea.

If you are only bringing a few

kilograms of fish for personal use, then it won't be a problem. They are considered as a normal product that you are allowed to bring inside the country.

However, the exact quantity depends on the specific rules outlined by the airport, airline and customs officials as well.

However, if you bring them in via a fishing boat or to use them commercially, you have to request permission from Customs House and the fish quarantine office first.

Send us your queries and we'll ask the right people to respond to them.
Submit your issue at:
www.PhuketGazette.net/IssuesAnswers

Servicing your clientele the right way

Finance

By David Mayes

I OFTEN run across clients of other firms who complain that they receive absolutely no service on their policies. I understand how they feel, but having been in the industry a long time I also understand why. It is simply a misalignment of interests and is inherent in the way many of the insurance companies allow the introducing and servicing firms to be compensated.

The main problem stems from a practice called “indemnifying commissions”, where the insurance company charges a management fee to the clients and pays the introducer a one-off upfront fee. Now, if things go well from here, an introducer can then expect referrals or additional business and thus interests are theoretically aligned. The problem however, lies in situations where things don’t go so well and a relationship sours. At this point attentive service is probably needed the most, however when a “troublesome client” is almost certain to lead to no future revenues, interests are no longer aligned as the client becomes a lot of work with no future value. The situation then becomes one of damage limitation.

The above scenario is ex-



It is best to agree to provide the new servicing agent with some form of ongoing fee. Photo: GetCredit

tremely common and leads to what I call “orphaned clients”, who are left with no service on their policies since the insurance companies do not step in to fill the gap (they still collect their fees, however). Half the time the original brokers fail and leave the industry altogether, and their replacement knows they are likely to get nothing but headaches from a given account. Thus they ignore it. I have known brokers who have gone a whole year without a single paycheck and still spent hours every day sending emails and trying to smooth over relationships with disgruntled clients, only to be forced to leave the

industry when their savings ran out. While there are many unscrupulous people out there I think the problem is structural more than anything else, but luckily that means there is a very easy solution.

Insisting that there is no “lock in” or “redemption penalties” will avoid a situation where you get orphaned, as insurance companies will only indemnify commissions if they know they can get them back from clients via redemption penalties. The same is true of underlying investments, anytime there is any redemption penalty of any kind it means someone is taking an upfront

commission. This means their business model is more dependent on finding the next commission, not providing great service and earning an ongoing fee. If they are compensated via an ongoing fee, this not only incentivizes them to give great service, but also builds them a steady income and ensures they can stay in business for the long term.

So what if you have an existing policy and have already been orphaned? You can always find someone to take over the servicing of the account for free, but this is usually a bad idea. Every time I have done this myself, the client turns out

to be a lot of work because they still have a bad taste in their mouth from the original experience. Nobody wants to be on the receiving end of abuse, and this leads to an ongoing situation where the client continues to get poor service.

In this instance it is best to agree to provide the new servicing agent with some form of ongoing fee. It shouldn’t be exorbitant, but remember that you get what you pay for. Even then you need to understand that you cannot buy returns. You need to understand the risks of everything you do and remember that anyone who guarantees anything when it comes to a return above and beyond what a bank pays on an interest-bearing account is not being truthful. Paying a management fee simply ensures your account will get serviced, but it doesn’t mean projected returns will be achieved.

David Mayes, MBA, resides in Phuket and provides wealth management and life coaching services to expatriates around the globe, specializing in UK pension transfers. He is a regional representative of Faramond Group, located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Faramond UK is regulated by the FCA to provide advice on pensions and taxation. He can be reached at 085-335 8573 or david.m@faramond.com

B300mn for digital startups

THE Information and Communications Technology Ministry is expected to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on May 28 with 12 parties to jointly promote the incubation for potential digital start-up businesses, said ICT Minister Uttama Savanayana.

The participating parties include Advanced Info Service, Total Access Communication, True Corp, Bangkok Bank, Siam Commercial Bank, Krungthai Bank, as well as

several universities, such as Chulalongkorn.

The ministry has set aside 300 million baht to launch the project, which will be open to applicants in the fourth quarter of this year, so they can be trained to develop their own digital start-ups in different fields.

Applications can be submitted to the ministry, which will then pass them on to different training venues in line with their proposal.

— *The Nation*

Tips for establishing a start-up

Biz Chat

by Zohaib Sikander

TO PICK up from where I left off last time, let’s discuss the financial and legal steps involved in starting a small business.

Plan your financials: Whether you are putting in a couple of months’ salary, or your entire life savings, finances need to be properly laid out. Many of us make the mistake of putting in too much or too little at the start, and fail miserably in generating returns.

It is also vital to plan cash flows, that is, the daily running costs of your business. When starting out, costs of fixed assets, current assets and operations need to be calculated before and after expenses, so that you can foresee your requirements at least a year into the future.



Businesses easily fail due to lack of planning. Photo: Bradley Gordon

I have seen several cases where people have put in all the hard work needed to succeed, but failed only because of poor planning.

Legal formalities: When registering your company, you will need to mention whether you want to work alone or in a partnership. When working alone, you won’t be answerable to anyone and you get to keep what you earn. However you will be responsible for every

loss your business might incur.

A partnership can be good for those who want to be more careful with their money as well as their ideas. The ‘two heads are better than one’ theory is applied in this one.

Zohaib Sikander is the Business Editor at the Phuket Gazette. He has a degree in entrepreneurship and operations management. Drop him a line at zo@phuketgazette.net

Centara plans for MICE hub

By Sukawin Tanthavanich

THE Centara Grand West Sands Resort & Villas Phuket revealed an expansion plan on May 16, which revolves around the construction of a new convention center.

The resort is located on the west coast of Phuket near the Sarasin Bridge on Mai Khao Beach. With 558 hotel rooms, and a water park with swimming pools, lazy river and water slides.

All rooms, suites as well as villas, are of modern design, equipped with views of the Andaman Sea.

According to sales manager Pawita Pratum-kaew, the need for convention activities has greatly multiplied recently, resulting in the need for a center that would cater to the growing demand of companies, governors, business people and officials alike. The hotel is planning to cater to domestic as well as international clients.

Phuket has developed into a sustainable MICE (Meetings Incentives Conferences/Conventions and Exhibitions/Events) city, which means a center such as this one has now become obligatory. The project to make Phuket a MICE hub began quite a few years ago, and it has finally delivered.

The plan to make an international convention center in



The convention center may be the answer to Phuket's requirements for national as well as international events organized throughout the year by officials and business people alike. Photo: Centara Grand

Mai Khao has been toyed with for years with fruitless outcomes, which makes the Centara Grand convention center project one to look forward to. "We are excited to

present our 2,548 square meter convention center, which will have the capacity to hold 820 at a time during seminars and exhibitions," Ms Pawita told the *Gazette*.

The construction is set to start in January 2017 and will be finished by early fourth quarter. Centara representatives refused to disclose the details of the project's budget.

Dearth of pilots likely in Thailand



Thailand currently has about 5,000 pilots. Photo: MrTime2give

THE Thai Pilots Association suggested government-funded scholarships for students aspiring to be airline pilots, following forecasts revealing a shortage of pilots in the coming years.

At the Thailand Aviation Expo held May 7-8, President of the Thai Pilots Association Sanong Ming-charoen said there are about 5,000 Thai commercial pilots in Thailand.

"However, an increasing number of airlines, combined with the small number of pilots graduating each year, will result in a shortage of pilots in Thailand.

"Airlines should make a clear plan of their demand for pilots annually, so that relevant units can produce sufficient personnel," he said.

Suwaphit Wongwiriyanit, a female AirAsia pilot, said that female pilots have a better chance these days, if they want to work in the aviation industry.

- Suwit Rattivan

Loans to go electronic



The National e-Payment network will boost consumer convenience. Photo: Thomas Nilsson

CIMB Thai Bank is developing an app for e-housing loans after the number of applications rose for e-personal loans.

Onanong Udomkantong, executive vice president for retail lending products, stated that increasing popularity of the online channel reflects the uptrend of self-service consumers.

The bank is creating a website for home loans after seeing more consumers searching for resale homes and comparing the interest rates of all financial institutions.

The behavior of consumers has changed from visiting

residential projects and collecting information on interest rates and the campaigns of banks from the sales staff there.

The bank has promoted a special personal loan for self-service customers - a 60-month term with a low interest rate of 18 per cent versus the maximum of 28 per cent allowed by the regulator.

"We should charge low interest for self-service to convince people to use more online channels. The bank can save and convert the lower cost into a lower interest rate," Ms Onanong said.

Information accessibility encourages new-age customers to search for what is best for them and they prefer making financial transactions by themselves. The upcoming National e-Payment network will also boost consumer convenience, she added.

- The Nation



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Limelight Avenue hosts first anniversary party

Downtown shopping mall Limelight Avenue celebrated its 1st anniversary on April 28 with a live performance by celebrity singer Rose Sirinthip and a lucky draw with a Yamaha motorcycle for the top prize.



Limelight Avenue owner and party host Panee Koysomboon draws lots for the prize draw.

PIA introduces UWC to Phuket luminaries

Following the announcement that Phuket International Academy (PIA) will become Thailand's first United World College (UWC) in August, the school hosted a dinner on May 18 to present its plans for the new endeavor. Distinguished guests at the dinner included Phuket Vice Governor Kajornkiet Rakpanitmanee and many of the island's international consular officials.



(from L-R) Julian Whiteley, Chief Executive of Phuket International Academy; Vice Governor Kajornkiet Rakpanitmanee; top model Metinee Kingpayom; and Philipp Graf von Hardenberg, President and CEO of Thanyapura Phuket.





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Thank you for visiting us

Representatives from Anantara Maikhao Phuket Villas visited the *Phuket Gazette* on May 12 to promote their new hotel, the Anantara Layan Phuket Resort & Spa.



(from L-R) Jularak Cholharn, Assistant PR Director for Minor Hotel Group; Natthira Susangrat, Phuket Gazette's GM; and Phatcharee Akhama, Anantara Maikhao Villas's Sales & Marketing Communications Executive.

Earth Day activities

Amari Phuket offered a hand of support to the local community's Earth Day activity on May 3. Volunteers from the resort visited Patong Library to plant a tree and decorate the garden. Waraporn Kamkeaw from Patong Library gave a special speech thanking the team for the garden's beautiful new look, which is now ready to welcome visitors into its green atmosphere.



Amari Phuket's Vice President and Area General Manager, South Thailand, Pierre-Andre Pelletier was among the green-fingered Amari volunteers to visit the library.



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Animal clinic opens in Phuket Town

By Chutharat Plerin

PHUKET City Municipality has established the first government-run small animal veterinary clinic, providing free animal care services in the area.

The new clinic is located next to the municipality office, across the road from Provincial Hall in Phuket Town.

“We are the first municipality to establish an animal clinic. To my knowledge, we are probably the first ones in the country to provide such a service,” said veterinarian Boonsom Roongudom.

“The reason for opening this clinic is that the problem of stray dogs and cats in the area is increasing,” he said.

“Many pet owners are not that well off and some owners have a lot of pets. Taking them to clinics for treatment is not affordable for them.”

As well as offering advice about caring for small animals such as dogs, cats, rabbits, squirrels and other pets, the clinic provides first-aid treatment for injured animals.

The clinic also offers rabies vaccinations and accepts com-



Veterinarian Boonsom Roongudom operates on one of the clinic's first patients while Phuket City Mayor Somjai Suwansupana, Deputy Mayor Dr Kosol Tang-Utha and Soi Dog Foundation founder John Dalley look on. Photo: Phuket City Municipality

plaints about stray dogs, so they can be taken to a shelter. The services are available for Phuket City Municipality residents only. Identification card or proof of residence in the area is needed.

Mr Boonsom said the clinic is hoping to sign an MoU with the Soi Dog Foundation and the Livestock Office, in order to provide free neutering services in the future.

Phuket City Municipality

Mayor Somjai Suwansupana said that the clinic aims to protect people from danger, educate them about pet care, and manage noise and cleanliness.

“We wish to educate owners that cats and dogs are capable

of spreading diseases to humans. Owners must learn to accept responsibility if they want to keep pets,” said Ms Somjai.

The clinic is open Monday-Friday, 9am-3pm.

Divalicious delights



Divalicious on stage at the Hard Rock Cafe Phuket, Patong. Photo: Nick Davies

STARLETS Divalicious put on a debut live performance at the Hard Rock Cafe Phuket, Patong on May 22.

The four teen singers – Qistina Barry, Lucy Mester,

Dasha Gorodtsova and Julianna Mester – were given the opportunity to perform live at the Hard Rock Cafe after winning HeadStart's Got Talent contest held at Headstart Inter-

national School in March.

The band members also study music at Phuket Academy of Performing Arts at the Phuket International Academy.

– Nick Davies

Wood chock stations placed on Patong Hill



DDPM officer Sampawat Wannasangkam holds a wood chock on Patong Hill. Photo: DDPM-Patong

THE Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, Patong Municipality (DDPM-Patong) has placed wood chock stations along the roadside for drivers of buses and trucks to use as a safety precaution.

The red and white painted blocks are intended to be placed under the wheels of stalled vehicles to keep them safely in place, until they are able to move on.

“We have equipped 20 stations along the hill road in both directions to help avoid accidents. Drivers of trucks and

buses that have stopped can ensure their vehicle doesn't roll back down the steep hill,” said DDPM-Patong chief Sampawat Wannasangkam.

The stations as well as related signs were installed well before the Songkran Festival, which usually brings with it a lot of traffic.

“However, staff on buses and other drivers need to be responsible for returning the wood chocks after they have been used,” he added.

“If any wood is moved from its assigned station, other drivers in trouble will not be able to contain their situations”

Officers from DDPM-Patong regularly drive along the road making sure there is wood in each station.

“We are working hard to make the hill road safer for motorists, and hope we all take up this responsibility to support each other.”

The stations and signs now remain, as the DDPM-Patong feels it may be useful for every day driving as well.

– Chutharat Plerin

Small boating equals big pleasure



SIZE isn't everything in the boating world, although I'm sure some people would like to challenge me on that. The fun you can have on a boat isn't intrinsically linked to its size or price, it's more related to how you use the boat, with whom, and how often.

While the Thai government is rolling out the red carpet for foreign-flagged superyachts over 30 meters to charter in Thai waters, let's spare a thought for the small-boat sailor. Specifically, the small powerboat sailor.

We all know of Phuket's on-water beauty, or at least you should if you live here. It's easy to become blasé about it and forget that beauty if you don't spend much time on the water. However, when you do get out and among the islands, it is easy to see why images of Phuket and its surroundings have been around the world more times than Sir Robin Knox-Johnston.

Many of us live on the island of Phuket, but it's the islands just off the coast and nearby in Phang Nga Bay and it's environs, that make Phuket such a fantastic boating destination. Phuket is the perfect stepping stone for some island-hopping, and speedboats or small powerboats are the ideal vessels with which to enjoy this fun.

Boating is seen as an expensive pastime, and to a point that's true. But peoples' imagi-

nations do run wild and boating has been placed firmly in the luxury bracket (perhaps even super-luxury bracket by some) without much basis in reality. A shared-day charter of a 30-foot speedboat, for example, by a group of 10 friends is likely to cost the same as a green fee at one of Phuket's top golf courses.

There are lots of charter opportunities in Phuket, and for those looking to buy there are plenty of options too. Most major international brands are represented here, from Beneteau, Monte Carlo, Riva and Wider, to the slightly larger models offered by Princess Yachts, Riviera and Sunseeker, and so choice is not a problem.

At the smaller end of the powerboat scale, Gulf Craft's 30-foot range has proved to be a popular island-hopping choice for individuals, families and hotels around the region for a number of years, and has been joined by two new brands this year who look set to capitalize on Phuket's small boat market.

The multi-award winning Axopar Yachts have made a bang since their launch in Thailand at the Phuket International Boat Show, with sole distributor Derani Yachts having sold eight of the Finnish-designed and-built boats, which offer a quality build and ride for a reasonable price, with lots of customizable options.

The futuristic-looking Premier Composites from Dubai use aerospace materials and carbon composite to deliver a diverse range, from the Premier 29 to the



Boating can be a great family activity and it doesn't have to cost as much as a superyacht. Photo: Axopar 28 T Top

38, 45 and beyond. Premier Composites are represented in Thailand by Lee Marine.

The increased interest in small boat ownership could be the result of several factors: lower maintenance and operation costs; convenient dry stack offerings at Phuket Boat Lagoon and Royal Phuket Marina; ease of use,

and the overall fun factor of a boat full of family members or friends.

While the light is currently shining on superyachts, let's not lose sight of the needs of smaller boat owners and the need for the industry to encourage more people into boating locally. The best way to do that is to start small.

Duncan Worthington is a long time Phuket resident and through Infinity Communications (www.infinitycomms.com) consults to leading consumer brands, as well as hospitality and marine clients, in Thailand. In his 'spare time' he runs the marine portal www.MarineScene.asia. #OnDeckPhuket

Consecutive LPGA titles for Thai golfer

THAILAND'S Ariya Jutanugarn held back Australia's Su Oh on May 22 to win the LPGA Kingsmill Championship by one stroke and capture her second golf championship title in a row.

The 20-year-old golfer from Bangkok became the first Thai player to win an LPGA title at the LPGA Classic in Alabama earlier this month and made back-to-back triumphs with this victory.

Ms Ariya said she found winning easier the second time around.

"I didn't get nervous," she said. "I didn't get excited until the last putt."



A triumphant Ariya (center) poses with her trophy. Photo: The Nation

She said she hopes her triumphs inspire other Thais to seek LPGA success.

"Right now we have a lot of players starting to play golf - a lot of juniors - and if I can inspire somebody, it's really great," she said. "I hope a lot of players come to the LPGA."

- The Nation

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Visakha Bucha commemorated

THOUSANDS of Buddhists in Phuket observed Visakha Bucha Day, one of the most important Buddhist festivals of the year, on May 20. The festival commemorates three defining events in the life of the Lord Buddha; his birth, attaining enlightenment at 35 years old, and then his death at the age of 80.

All three events are said to have occurred on the same day of the year, that is, the full-moon day of the sixth lunar month.

Devout Buddhists celebrate the festival by visiting temples to listen to sermons and meditate. Many people also make merit by offering alms and flowers to monks.

Candlelight processions mark the evenings, with gatherings at temples for the *wian tien* ritual: walking in clockwise circles three times around the main temple building, holding candles, incense sticks or lotus flowers. This represents the three essential parts of Buddhism, namely: the Buddha; the *Dhamma*, the teachings of Lord Buddha; and the *Sangha*, the monkhood.

On this day, many Buddhists also reaffirm their faith in the five precepts of Buddhism, which is the basic code of ethics followed by all Buddhists.

These comprise refraining from the following: harming other living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication.

Many Buddhists wear white clothes and avoid wearing perfume and jewelry on the day.

The festival is also widely celebrated in other countries in Asia, including India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Tibet, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia and Myanmar.



Buddhist monks led ceremonies throughout the day at Tha Rua Temple near Heroines' Monument. Photos: Nick Davies & Phra Siriya Essara



Caring for plants in dry weather

Some plants fare well in dry weather but others need more care



THIS is the time of year when the prolonged dry weather stimulates certain flowering trees to bloom as if their very lives depended on it.

In a sense this is literally true, since an exceptional drought will probably mean that fruits may not form, and even that mature trees may shed so many leaves that they die.

Already the present dry season is one of the most severe on record and much of Thailand is suffering from an acute shortage of water. Songkran has come and gone, with its own complement of human fatalities, but the rains have still not started.

Some plants benefit from dry conditions, for example bougainvilleas, Rangoon creepers, *tecoma stans* or yellow bells, *tabebuias*, plumerias, *poincianas*, *lagerstroemias* or crape myrtles and golden rain trees.

Among smaller shrubs, crottons, cordylines, *durantas*, *hamelias*, *jatrophas*, orange jasmines, oleanders, *scheffleras* and *allamandas* possess considerable powers of drought resistance.

What most of these plants have in common are mechanisms which allow them to access water deeper in the soil



Some plants, such as the plumeria, benefit from dry conditions. Photo: Sankarshansen

and/or efficient resistance to moisture loss through foliage. Since evaporation is heavier in direct sunlight, many are shade tolerant.

A tree down the road from my house fits this bill, since it always seems to give off its best in dry weather. It grows

right by a road dense with traffic fumes, but seems to pull out the stops every spring. It is a *kapok* tree, and right now its branches are covered with what look like clumps of cotton wool. *Ceiba pentandra* – to give it its botanical name – is native to the

Americas and West Africa, but like so many plants, it has found its way to Southeast Asia.

It is a very substantial tree and produces hundreds of pods. These large green capsules split into five segments to reveal seeds embedded in

masses of fluffy fiber. This floss-like material is light, durable and resistant to water, and when I was a child, it was used as a substitute for cotton wool, or down, for stuffing toys, pillows, life-jackets, and used as insulation.

Nowadays, *kapok* has been largely replaced by synthetic fibers, but the tree is still grown commercially in Asian rainforests. The flowers, which hang from bare branch tips before the new leaves appear, are an important source of nectar and pollen. Even the bark has its uses as a diuretic and possible treatment for diabetes. The tree possesses large spines to deter the unwary.

A close relative is *ceiba speciosa*, a popular ornamental in California and Australia, with large, distinctive deep-pink flowers.

Of course, cotton proper is produced by a completely different plant related to the Asian hibiscus. It has been a staple crop in the American south for centuries. It is not grown much in Thailand – the country ranks 72nd among growers – although there are moves afoot to change all that.

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.com.

Tip of the week: Dealing with poor drainage

AS THE rains continue unabated, you may have a problem in your garden with poor drainage.

This causes water to remain in the pore spaces and air, necessary both to roots and beneficial soil-dwelling organisms, is unable to infiltrate the soil.

Soil texture, or a low-lying location will contribute to this. Phuket has more than its fair share of clay, which often drains poorly.

To improve matters, work in plenty of organic

material, or place your plants in raised beds which have well-drained soil. Drainage pipes to carry away excess moisture are another possibility.

If none of these solutions are possible, consider adapting your garden, or at least the poorly-drained parts, to the existing conditions, and grow plants suited to moist areas.

These might include gingers, *heliconias*, cannas, lilies and various varieties of iris, ferns, *hostas* and *gunneras*.

Thailand law: Littering is illegal



Property Watch
Desmond Hughes

HYGIENE and cleanliness are very personal, and judging by the aroma at the airport and on airplanes, often seem to be an optional affair. But living in our environment is a shared community exercise, and Phuket does suffer from the stresses and strains of tourism, as well as a lack of regard by certain sectors of the community to cleaning up trash and not dumping rubbish.

There is a law in Thailand that clearly states littering is illegal: Act of Maintaining Cleanliness and Tidiness of the Country BE 2535 (1992). I occasionally wonder if people are aware of it, and then I remember that most people don't actually read legislation in their spare time.

Like many laws in many countries, enforcement is difficult and resources are not sufficient to police social responsibility. To ensure we live in a clean environment, cooperation from our fellow inhabitants is necessary, and the best result of any drive to improve the environment is a majority consensus, or a strong and active minority task force dragging the reluctant with them.

I recently saw a summary of the wonderful beaches in



Once something is cleaned, its cleanliness needs to be maintained. Photo: Zohaib Sikander

Phuket in a glossy high-end magazine and, because it was such a good summary, I was reminded of the value of beaches in the minds of our visitors.

Ask many residents how many times they visit the beach and the excuses you will often hear include that they don't have time; that the beach is too hot in hot season; and the sea is too rough or the weather too wet in the monsoon or 'green' season.

What struck me is that the reviews of such beaches that appear overseas doesn't really tell the true story, and understandably many magazines are promoting Phuket, not trying to uncover issues that need to be resolved.

Each beach in Phuket, and in particular the beach I recently visited with my wife and son as he grows to an age where he will want to go to the beach as an outlet for fun and exercise, needs a serious and regular clean up. There is trash to be seen everywhere, and this issue exists all over Phuket. The roads near construction camps, the back of shop-houses, the restaurant bins, the parks, the rare pavements, the bottom of hills – they all need a really good clean.

Once something is cleaned, then its cleanliness needs to be maintained. This is the part of the cleaning process that remains a problem for ongoing

improvement. I am all for burying electric cables to make the views more attractive, but then I would also like my gaze not to fall upon discarded plastic drink containers and the like.

There has been a lot of finger pointing recently regarding bad behavior on the now heavily regulated and monitored social media sites – prawn buffets; stampedes for Japanese ice cream in 7-elevens, and accusations of littering in foreign national parks, to name a few recent 'trending topics' attracting a high number of viewers.

However, notwithstanding the social media furor about specific, perhaps isolated, incidents, the facts are the facts and

they are before our very eyes – we are surrounded by too much rubbish, and that needs to be better managed by everybody.

Socially responsible people are not solely the answer, but they help. Lecturing irresponsible people can often result in rebellion, or a hardened attitude. Leading by example and ensuring others see and perhaps feel a twinge of embarrassment about their own littering habits can have some impact.

Education is always the beginning of attempting to change habits and behavior. I remember the 'Keep Britain Tidy' campaign in the UK, a good few decades ago, which was criticized as indicative of 'Nanny State interference'. Notably, the act of littering did actually decrease following a sustained, but expensive campaign.

I have seen some good and creative Thai advertisements recently that focus on habit-changing, and they have a good injection of humor to boot.

While we consider the aerial drone shots of our properties for sale, or we are delivering a sales pitch about the 'pristine' beaches and 'lovely green' environment in Phuket, perhaps we should consider for a moment what the fortunate people who have the gift of sight actually see when they check the hyperbole against reality, and whether there is anything we should be doing to improve matters.

Zcape III Condominium units near completion



Zcape III Condominium nears completion. Photo: Tri Property

Zcape III Condominium by Bangkok-based developer Tri Property in Phuket's central business district is more than 80 per cent complete.

Situated opposite Central Festival Phuket, the residence covers just over three rai with eight floors comprising 417 single and double-bedroom units ranging in size from 26.56 to 42.23sqm.

Facilities include a central swimming pool, library and private parking spaces.

The condo units are priced between 2.4 and 2.5 million baht each. Most of the units were snapped up by local buyers with the aim of renting them out, leaving only a few unsold units remaining, according to Tri Property executives.

– *Phuket Gazette*

Playground and green space planned for Rawai residents

LOCAL developer Phuket9 Real Estate Development is involved in the construction of an 8.5 rai public park in Rawai.

The park is being built at the cost of 8 million baht, into the green leisure space bordering the Rawai VIP Villas housing estate.

The expected date of completion is November 2016.

The leisure space comprises a 3.5 rai activity area with indoor and outdoor playgrounds, a restaurant, a kids pool and other water attractions," said Phuket9 Real Estate Development co-founder and CEO Andrey Kozhushnyy.

A large part of the park is set aside as open space.



A number of facilities will be available for the children of Rawai inside the park. Photo: Phuket9 Real Estate Development

"There will also be five rai of green space featuring bicycle tracks and footpaths among manicured gardens," said Mr Kozhushnyy.

Parking will also be available for visitors, which the developers hope will be a mix of locals and tourists.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

Marriott coming to Nai Yang this June



Phuket Marriott Resort and Spa is an addition to several Marriott properties in the province. Photo: Marriott Hotels PR

MARRIOTT Hotels is launching the Phuket Marriott Resort and Spa, Nai Yang Beach, next month.

Inspired by cultural and architectural characteristics of Thailand, the resort is located about 10 minutes' drive from Phuket International Airport.

It has 180 rooms and is designed as a combination of traditional Thai style and sophisticated, modern architecture, by using relaxing earth tones along with contemporary Thai décor.

The resort features 24-hour facilities, including a bar and restaurants with local and international cuisine; a beachfront grill with fresh seafood; a fully

equipped 24-hour fitness center; a spa; children's activities at the kids' pool area and a beachside kid's club.

A 108 square-meter ballroom and several function rooms will cater to various types of events, ranging from private parties to exclusive seaside weddings.

With 500 hotels and resorts in more than 50 countries around the world, Marriott Hotels aims to enhance every aspect of their guests' stay.

Other resorts of the group in Phuket are Renaissance Phuket Resort & Spa, JW Marriott Phuket Resort & Spa and Marriott's Phuket Beach Club.

- *Phuket Gazette*

Sea gypsies light up

THE 25-household Rawai sea gypsy community is overjoyed to finally have electricity, as a land-rights conflict hampered their access to the power grid for years.

The free installation of a 3,000-watt solar cell-powered system to generate electricity in the area is the result of an initiative by Phra Khru Wimpanyakhun, the 'solar monk' based in Ubon Ratcha-thani, who is also the founder of the solar cell-powered Sri Saeng-dham School.

"An 80-year-old woman told me that she was very happy to finally see light in her house - she had lived her entire life in darkness," recalled Nirund Yangpan, a community leader.

"People in the village either have their own transformers or connect with ones who have electricity. We have to pay about 1,500-1,800 baht per household every month, which only provides enough power to run a television, a rice cooker, a fan and three light bulbs."

Mr Nirund hopes that more houses in the area will install solar cell-powered systems.

Phra Khru Wimpanya-



Installation of the panels was funded by donations from people nationwide. Photo: Redplanet89

khun said he was delighted to help the community. He also outlined a sustainability policy called the 'Three baht fee for an endless supply of electricity via solar cells for off-grid areas.'

He urged each family to pay the daily fee of three baht to help 'save up' for the system.

"Saving it [three baht a day] for three years, the community will get 82,125 baht to buy nine 120-amp deep-cycle batteries. It costs 40,500 baht to maintain the solar power system. You also still have 41,625 baht in savings, which could be seed money to purchase a new set of solar

cells when the 25-year lifetime has expired," Phra Khru Wimpanyakhun explained.

The move could be applied to any rural area unable to access the power grid, he said.

He said installation of the solar cell system for the Rawai sea gypsies was funded by a 180,000 baht donation from people nationwide, while 25 fans were provided to the community by the Phuket Red Cross Society.

The initiative was led by Vassana Tipayapongtada, wife of Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada and president of the Phuket Red Cross.

- *Gazette Reporters*

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- ▶ Good communication skills, team player
- ▶ Thai-English speaker

Qualified candidates are invited to send a CV to Khun Anna (General Manager), by email, fax or post to:

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Phuket Gazette

Sing it to me one more time

By Nick Davies

FOR half a decade Texan soul singer Peejay Stanley has been entertaining Phuketians with a larger than life stage presence guaranteed to get audiences on their feet.

Peejay's singing style has been described as similar to Joan Armatrading, Tracy Chapman and Nina Simone, but she is probably best described as a motown, soul and blues artist with a voice like Gladys Knight.

Peejay and her husband, also an American, arrived with plans to settle as permanent expats in Phuket. Last week, however, the island's best-known soul sister put on a farewell performance ahead of her departure for greener pastures in June.

Peejay first came to Phuket in January 2011 to explore the possibilities of live music. She and her husband; a teacher at an international school, had been living in Saigon, Vietnam and both were looking for something new.

"There's no really good live music possibilities in Saigon. They are into deejays and elec-

tronic music but there's no place for live music as there are not many expat musicians."

Peejay threw herself with gusto into her Phuket project. She quickly became acquainted with established musicians and music producers on the island, arranging jam sessions and exploring openings for live music at resorts. Her professionalism has been a large part of her success, tackling the music scene with a unique blend of business acumen, determination and a bubbly, contagious smile.

"It's been fantastic. Not only are there a lot of expat musicians, they get the music I do. Like motown, the Beatles, the sixties thing..."

When she arrived, Peejay made a beeline for Phuket's best-known music venues and producers – Music Matters bar, Colin 'Illy' Hill, Patrick Chua from Rockin' Angels Blues Cafe and Legend Music's producer Gary Crause – and soon found her niche as a crowd-pulling diva.

"The hoteliers I met with also understood the value of live music, and had budgets for it, so that was the beginning of

my live singing in Phuket."

Peejay did everything by the book from day one but five years on and the legislation of staying legit has become 'more of a pain', hence her and her husband's joint decision to move on, despite wishing they could stay.

"It's getting harder to stay. Every time I renew my visa there are changes and new rules to follow that are new to the lawyers and accountants as well. Those changes cost money; 6,000 baht here, another 30,000 baht there. The money I do make has to go out to a lot of other people but it keeps getting eaten up... There's always something new to be booked for."

"We are going to miss Phuket a lot – the food vendors, the dogs, the smiles – but I need to go some place where I feel wanted. That shows up in [a country's] legislation, when for example, you can buy property.

Peejay's final performance on the island was a farewell do at Bliss Beach Club, which turned into a jam session as local musicians took the opportunity to join Peejay on stage one last time.

But the music doesn't stop there. For the past few months, Peejay and her band have been working with Phuket-based

music producer Gary Crause (Phuket Academy of Performing Arts) to lay down tracks for 90 songs that Peejay can take with her, and use as unique and original backing tracks for future live

performances. Some of the songs have been turned into music videos and CD albums.

Photo: Nick Davies



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