

Phuket Gazette

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‘THEY ATTEMPTED TO OWN THE NATIONAL PARK AND PROTECTED FOREST’

Land-grabbers nabbed

Fraudsters jailed for 59 years over B12bn state land scandal

By Chutharat Plerin

FOUR Thais have been convicted for forging land title documents, claiming ownership over more than 400 rai of Sirinath National Park, government officials announced on June 1.

The felons face up to 14 years in prison and more than nine million baht each in fines, announced the Department of National Parks Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) Director-General Thanya Netithammakun. He was joined by Department of Special Investigation (DSI) Deputy Director-General Pong-In Intarakhao.

Mr Thanya estimated each rai of the forged land to be worth 30 million baht.

“We have been working on land encroachment cases in Sirinath National Park and the Khao Ruak-Khao Muang forest reserve areas since 2012,” he said.

The Phuket Provincial Court sentenced Anoma Fangsen to 14 years in prison; Nakorn Wongsrithong to 13 years in prison; and Chan Pongpa to eight years in prison. Another defendant, Prapas Sae-Ong, received two convictions for separate counts. He was sentenced to 24 years in prison and ordered to pay more than 18 million baht in fines.

In 2014, Sirinath National Park Chief Kitiphat Taraphiban filed a complaint with the Tah Chat Chai Police against Mr Nakorn, Mr Chan and Ms Anoma. Mr Kitiphat alleged that the three were attempting to upgrade illegally-issued *SorKor 1* documents into land title deeds that encroached on Sirinath land.

“The *SorKor 1* documents were submitted to the Thalang Land Office,” Mr Thanya said. “The officers found that the land documents did not match the locations



Department of National Parks Director-General Thanya Netithammakun announced the convictions at the Sirinath National Park HQ. Photo: Chutharat Plerin

of the title deeds. The documents were sent to the DSI for further investigation. All the documents were found to be fake.”

“The accused did not stop there. They filed a complaint against the Thalang Land Office for not processing their request, and asked the administrative court in Nakhon Sri Thammarat to order the Land Office to issue the title deeds.

They attempted to own the National Park and its protected forest. It has taken a long time, but today, the Phuket Provin-

cial Court finally delivered justice. I am proud that we can reclaim that land for our nation,” he said.

“We are working hard to reclaim land for our country. We will continue to do our job, protecting Thailand’s national treasures. These cases are small compared to the convictions yet to come.”

Col Pong-In said the DSI is currently investigating 10 cases of a similar nature, covering more than 600 rai in Phuket, which were the subject of a 2012 raid.

White Sharks hunt for illicit land owners

Twenty-two Phuket land owners to face criminal charges after a Department of Marine and Coastal Resources team investigated 34 plots of land for alleged encroachment of mangroves on east coast of the island.

Full story Page 3

BUSINESS



Teacher supplements his income by growing cash crop in his garden.

PROPERTY



Local developer to bring Tibetan-inspired luxury pool villas to the island.

LIFE&STYLE



The harsh reality and consequences of immigration fraud.



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LOCAL NEWS

Briefly

Authorities capture last of escaped men

THE last of 21 Rohingya escapees, who broke out from a Phang Nga Immigration Detention Center, were arrested May 26, officials confirmed.

Locals in Baan Thai Thoi reported seeing the men hiding inside a mangrove forest and shrimp farm.

One man was shot dead while trying to evade authorities in an earlier apprehension attempt.

Officials said the men will be transported back to the detention center, where they will remain until their case is brought up in court.

— Kritsada Mueanhawong

Guard caught after attempted villa burglary

POLICE arrested a security guard who confessed to breaking into a Pa Khlok tourist villa on May 31, where he was employed.

Officials said Amman Tokanee, 24, was apprehended

Rescuers cut out airport driver pinned against steering wheel



Rescue workers pried an airport taxi driver pinned against the steering wheel of his vehicle, after it crashed into a power pole on June 1. The driver is in critical condition at Vachira Phuket Hospital. Rescue workers spent 30 minutes cutting him out of the Honda Civic. The incident occurred near the water supply plant on Phra Phuket Kaew Road. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

in Narathiwat Province, where he had escaped for fear of being arrested after the incident in Phuket.

Mr Amman allegedly broke into Cape Yamu Villa, but fled the scene after the occupants

confronted him.

Police checked CCTV footage, only to discover that Mr Amman worked as a security guard at the villa.

Mr Amman reportedly confessed that he attempted to steal the occupants' mobile phones.

— Winai Sarot

Gas attendants accountable for phones, idling

GAS station attendants will be held legally responsible for ensuring that drivers turn off their engines and put away their cell phones at the pump, officials from the Department of Energy Business (DOEB) confirmed on May 29.

The new law will punish gas station attendants caught disobeying regulations, with a maximum fine of 100,000 baht, one year imprisonment, or both.

DOEB officials said attendants have the right to refuse to fill a non-compliant customer's vehicle.

While the law has technically been on the books since May 29, DOEB officials have said that strict law enforcement will not take place until 2018.

— Kongleaphy Keam

Phuket mayor makes rounds after deluge

PHUKET City Mayor Somjai Suwansupana took to the streets to hear out locals' complaints, after torrential rains caused flooding and traffic jams on the island.

Mayor Somjai knocked on doors on Amphor Road and discussed solutions with canal area residents about flooding in the area.

Municipality officials have been ordered to keep an eye out for floods and landslides.

— Chutharat Plerin

Woman wakes to robber, theft

A UKRAINIAN woman reportedly woke to a strange man in her room on May 29.

The 29-year-old said she was asleep in the afternoon, when she woke up to see a stranger, whom she believed to be Thai, grab her phone off of her dressing table.

The woman was staying at the Good Dream Guesthouse on Nanai Road.

— Chutharat Plerin

Tourist arrested for feeding fish

A CHINESE tourist was arrested on May 25 for feeding fish at Koh Kai.

The arrest marks the first time a tourist has been detained after emergency powers were granted to law enforcement officers by the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) Region 6 to protect marine life.

The measures, referred to as Article 17, grant additional powers to law enforcement officials, including the ability to arrest anyone thought to be interfering with marine life.

The man was released on a 100,000 baht bail, paid by his tour guide. He must remain in the country until his case is processed by a court.

— Kongleaphy Keam

Baron's builders block boulevard with boulders

SEA gypsies in Rawai threw stones and insults at builders from Baron World Trade Co on May 25, after the construction company made a wall of boulders to block access to the site and began digging on the disputed land.

About 100 sea gypsies gathered to stop construction workers, while police and army officers looked on.

The sea gypsies claimed the boulders blocked access to their sacred ceremonial grounds.

In April, Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada asked Baron to halt development on the project in order to prevent further confrontations.

— Chutharat Plerin

Patong locals shocked after power line fire

A POWER cable mysteriously burst into flames in Patong on May 26.

Stunned passersby watched as bright yellow flames erupted from the power cable outside the Sea View House on Nanai Road just before midday.

Residents feared the flames would spread to nearby buildings and called the fire brigade.

It took six firefighters to extinguish the blaze.

No injuries were reported.

— Chutharat Plerin

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White Shark taskforce chomps down on illicit land ownership

TWENTY-TWO Phuket land owners will face criminal charges, after a Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) team investigated 34 plots of land for alleged mangrove encroachment.

The DMCR investigations are part of a nationwide operation to reclaim 'national treasures' across 24 provinces. The DMCR's 'White Shark' taskforce inspected a total of 34 plots of land, covering about 2,200 rai.

White Shark consists of approximately 120 officers from around the country, including members of the DMCR; Royal Forest Department (RFD); the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP); and the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), and is led by DMCR Deputy Director-General Sakda Wichiansin.

"These plots include golf courses, marinas and shrimp farms. We have called for support from relevant authorities on the island in order to work on this mission," Mr Sakda said.

Officials surveyed property lines at Phuket Boat Lagoon and Royal Phuket Marina (RPM) on



DMCR officers survey property lines at Phuket Boat Lagoon. The taskforce's inspections are aimed at cracking down on illegal developments in mangrove forests. Photo: Chutharat Plerin

May 30.

"At this point, based on our aerial photography, I am standing right in the mangrove forest, according to our map and aerial information," Mr Sakda said, while overseeing inspections at RPM.

RPM Managing Director Sarayuth Mallam presented land title deeds to White Shark members, insisting that all 180 rai at

the marina is legally owned by them.

"I have no problem with the inspection as the officers are just doing their job. We have been doing business here for many years, and everything we do is legal and above board," Mr Sarayuth said.

Officials believe a man, named only as 'Thawat,' brokered the sale of suspect land

documents.

"Mr Thawat is involved in selling of land title deeds to private businesses, both Thai and foreign-owned, in Phuket," Mr Sakda said. "Each of those plots are located in protected areas, which are not meant to be privately owned."

"So far, 22 supposed land owners, with 669 rai between them, have failed to present any

ownership documentation to us. Another 164 land owners, covering 1,522 rai, presented some form of documentation to back their claims."

The Land Department is in the process of verifying ownership documents presented by many of the owners of the parcels in question.

"We have to check the land ownership documents to ensure that they were issued legally, and that the piece of land is actually located where it appears on the land ownership document," Mr Sakda said.

"If the documents were unlawfully issued, we will turn the case over to the Land Department in order to revoke the titles."

Mr Sakda stated that the taskforce was not pursuing any kind of vendetta or agenda other than protecting state-owned properties.

"It doesn't matter who owns the land. From what I hear, some owners are 'well connected' to 'influential people' in the country. It will be disheartening to me if those people support the land owners in any kind of unlawful activities," he added.

- Chutharat Plerin



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It's a gas! Phuket teens concoct

By Kongleaphy Keam

A DANGEROUS new drug mixture known as 'gas' is gaining popularity among Phuket teenagers and others in the southern region. The drug – prepared by mixing cough medicine, allergy medicine, pain killers, or muscle relaxants with a soft drink or other mixer – has yet to be declared illegal.

Currently, pharmacists are allowed to sell these drugs to walk-in customers, making them easier to access. This is one of the main reasons for its popularity among teenagers.

Officers are now trying to restrict the sale of these drugs to hospitals only, in order to stem the increase in consumption of the drink.

“We do not have an exact number of teenage consumers, but we can say that it is increasing, because the number of pharmacies charged with faking



Officials said the number of pharmacies charged with faking sales records is increasing. Photo: Jamie

their sales records is increasing,” Somsuk Sumparnprateep, head of the consumer protection division of the Phuket Provincial Health Office (PPHO) told the *Gazette*.

WHAT IS GAS?

“The mixture was first produced and consumed many years ago, but our officers only came to know about it in 2013.

It originated from the South and is a variation of 4x100, which is a mixture of *kratom* and cough syrup. It is mostly popular among 15 to 18 year olds,” Sithisak Kallyanapradit, director of the Narcotics Control Board (NCB), told the *Gazette*.

Three of the most common drugs used to produce gas are Procodyl, Tramadol and Dextromethorphan. Prodycol is used to treat allergy symptoms such as itching, runny nose and sneezing. Tramadol is a pain reliever used to treat moderate to severe pain. Dextromethorphan is a cough suppressant, which affects the signals in the brain that trigger cough reflexes.

A 22-year-old from Kathu, who declined to be named, said that his group of six friends consumes about two to three batches per night.

“We feel relaxed and happy when drinking gas. It helps us forget about any kind of stress and puts us in a half-awake,

half-asleep state. Gas makes your body feels like it's weightless and floating and eventually puts you into a deep and peaceful sleep. It's even better than drinking alcohol,” he said. “Also, we rarely catch the flu or a cold.”

HOW DANGEROUS IS IT?

“When mixed together, the different medicines used to make gas have a very potent effect on the nervous system. In some rare cases, if the user overdoses, he or she might even experience heart failure or mental illness. However, it varies from individual to individual and depends on the user's health and drug history,” Mr Somsuk said.

Preparing one batch of gas requires a 100cc bottle of Procodyl and 10 pills of Tramadol.

The vast range of side effects include severe drowsiness, dizziness, weakness, hallucinations, double vision, anxiety, palpitations, facial tics, fever, sweating, tremors, constipation, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, itching, stomach pain, swelling, and several others. Continuous overdose and overconsumption may result in fainting, seizures and cardiac arrest.

A 20-year-old girl, who also declined to be named, told the *Gazette* about her usage.

“We usually stay up drinking gas all night and sometimes sleep all day afterward. It makes us slower when we go to school the next day and reduces our appetite,” she said.

“One of our friends, who drank too much, went to sleep and never woke up. It scared us

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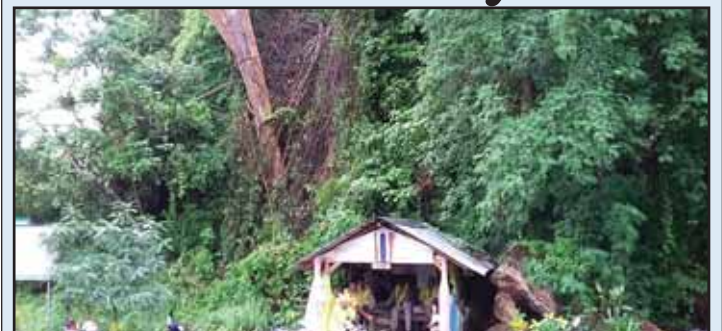
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Falling tree narrowly misses motorcyclists



A 15-meter-tall tree fell from the top of a hill in Krabi about 3pm on May 30, narrowly missing a passing group of motorcycle taxi drivers. Officials said the tree fell due to heavy winds. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

‘legal’ high

at the time, but not anymore, as we don't consume as much as they did," she added.

She also said that another friend went 'crazy' after consuming gas.

"I believe that they partly went crazy because of gas, but they might have had some pre-existing health problems or consumed more than we thought. I still don't think gas is that harmful, otherwise we would all have stopped drinking it," she said.

A 21-year-old Muslim teenager told the *Gazette* that he feels less guilty when drinking gas, as his religion prohibits him from drinking alcohol.

"I was introduced to it through friends of friends. I was quite scared when trying it for the first time, but it made me feel relaxed and peaceful.

Then, I joined their group and drank almost every night. We have fun without fear of being arrested," he said.

"I keep drinking it, because if I don't, I won't be allowed to be a part of the group anymore."

WHY ISN'T IT ILLEGAL?

"As there is no *kratom* involvement, we cannot take any action until the Ministry of Public Health declares it to be illegal," said Phuket City Police Deputy Superintendent Khunnadet Nanongkhai.

According to the Drug Act, BE 2510, gas ingredients are categorized as 'dangerous medicines' that can only be sold by licenced pharmacists.

"This is the only law we can use to control the spread and usage of this medicine," Mr Somsuk said.

"We have been requested to keep an eye on pharmacies, but we don't have the skills to check their records. Therefore, the raids have to be made together with PPHO."

HOW TO CONTROL IT

"We have been doing our best so far to work with the Public Health Office and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to

control the actions of pharmacies. If we restrict the source of the supply, teenagers will have no choice but to stop consuming it," Mr Suthisak said.

"We cannot stop pharmacies from selling these drugs to customers, but we can control their sales," he added.

"Some pharmacists use the demand from teenagers as a way to earn more money. They don't care about the possibly disastrous consequences on the customers' health. All they want is more profit," Mr Somsuk said.

"A small fine is not enough of a deterrent. Unfortunately,

the PPHO has no right to shut down their businesses or suspend their licences. That authority only lies with the governor."

Even though the PPHO has limited the amount of drugs they can sell, pharmacists will always find a way of buying more, he added.

"Gas is very popular in the south, so pharmacies here contact other pharmacies from different regions and collect the drugs from them," Mr Somsuk said.

SUGGESTIONS

The NCB has urged police, the FDA and the pharmacy club of Thailand to keep an eye out for gas abuse, and help each other to solve the problem.

"I requested the Ministry of Public Health to upgrade these medicines to 'psychotropic substances' so they can only be bought at hospitals, with a doctor's prescription," said Mr Sithisak.

"It is still under consideration, as it will make the process cumbersome for legitimate consumers, who will have to waste their time and money going to the hospital for something they could easily get at the pharmacy before."

Mr Somsuk also asked the community to step up and get proactive about the issue.

"As teenagers are the main consumers of this, parents have to keep a strict eye on their children. Community members must also report suspicious activities by any pharmacies," he said.

As there is no kratom involvement, we cannot take any action until the Ministry of Public Health declares it [gas] to be illegal

- Khunnadet Nanongkhai, Phuket City Police Deputy Superintendent

Shuttle bus blown away by heavy winds at Chalong Pier



The bus was eventually rescued from the brink by an OrBorJor crane. Photo: Supawattakan Amnuay Khunluk

In a scene straight from 'The Italian Job', a shuttle bus was blown half-way off of Chalong Pier and left hanging in precarious balance, as Phuket Provincial Administration Organization (*OrBorJor*) workers attempted to haul it back onto the roadway.

Officials said the heavy winds on May 26 were respon-

sible for blowing the bus nearly off the pier from its parking spot at the Phuket Yacht Control Center.

"The bus was parked without the handbrake pulled up," said Chalong Municipality council member Supawattakan Amnuay Khunluk. "It is normally used for taking tourists to the pier. Luckily, there was no one on board at

the time of the incident."

Mr Supawattakan said this should serve as a warning to the *OrBorJor* to ensure that all vehicles are parked safely.

"We hope to avoid any such incidents in the future," he said.

A crane from the *OrBorJor* was called to pull the bus back to safety.

- Chutharat Plerin



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One-way ticket to prison



Removal of coral results in a 5,000-10,000 baht fine, a year in prison, or both. Photo: Nonny Chan Thara

A MARINE expert and environmentalist is calling for help in keeping tourists from taking coral and other marine life out of the country.

Dr Thon Thamrongnawasawat, a member of the National Reform Council (NRC) and a marine expert and activist, expressed his concerns on social media after receiving a large number of reports by airport staff concerning the matter.

"Please help us preserve our reefs," Dr Thon said in a Facebook post. "If you find people doing this, please arrest them. If the airport staff find [marine life], stop them and report them to the fishery office for legal processing. There will be no coral left for the next generation if they keep doing this."

"There is a law for this. Please help each other to enforce it," he added.

Removal of coral may result in a 5,000-10,000 baht fine, one year in prison, or both. However, taking coral or any other kind of marine life out of Thailand is punishable by a fine of five times the estimated value of the item, 10 years imprisonment, or both.

"In addition to law enforcement, I want to ask for cooperation from airlines to help educate their passengers about this. For instance, by having a brochure or an announcement on every flight that possession of coral is illegal," Dr Thon said.

While Dr Thon stated that the airport's help is vital in discouraging damage to marine life, he emphasized that the enforcement of existing laws is up to officers at Phuket's beaches and reefs.

"Tougher laws are needed to discourage this kind of activity. For the national park areas, I have already suggested raising the fines," Dr Thon said.

— *Kongleaphy Keam*

Survivors hang on to rocks after boat sinks



The boat driver fled the scene immediately. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

A BOAT driver abandoned four tourists in rough seas, leaving them hanging on to rocks for dear life, after his overloaded longtail boat capsized near Wang Sai Seafood restaurant, en route to Ao Nang from Railay on May 27.

The boat was carrying 14 passengers – Canadian, Polish and Spanish tourists, among others – when it capsized and sank, after being struck by violent waves, said police. "A passing boat picked up ten of the stranded tourists along with the boat driver, who immediately fled once ashore," said Ao Nang Police Maj Sontat Wattanawalan.

The remaining four passengers managed to cling to rocks until a tour boat came to their rescue. They survived the ordeal with minor scratches from the rocks.

The boat driver, Bumroong Panan, 30, later surrendered to police, and blamed three passengers for sitting at the bow of the boat despite his warnings.

"I told them to move, but they ignored me. After the boat capsized, I got confused and ran away, but I've turned myself in as I didn't mean to cause any harm. It's not my fault," insisted Mr Bumroong.

Police charged Mr Bumroong with reckless driving causing injury and damage to property, overloading his boat, as well as operating with an outdated boat licence, which had expired in March.

The boat was 10.3 meters long, so the driver escaped additional charges for using a small boat while restrictions were in place to prevent small boats from venturing out to sea.

— *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Krabi family wakes up to car in bedroom



Kittiyakorn Sitthisit said she is willing to pay for the damage. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

A SLEEPING family in Krabi received a rude awakening when an out-of-control car crashed through their bedroom wall.

Krabi City Police Lt Col Chatchai Nakpaksri said that the crash, reported by locals on May 30, took down a wall of the family's bedroom and crushed the front door of their home.

"Pratin Tamkaew, one of the occupants of the house, told us that the car came crashing into their bedroom, while she was

asleep with her husband and daughter," Lt Col Chatchai said. "Her husband, Tanakorn Yuthaworawit, was hit in the abdomen and slid under the car."

"Krabi Pitak Pracha Foundation rescuers used a hammer to get inside the bedroom to help Ms Pratin and her daughter, who suffered head injuries and some minor wounds. Mr Tanakorn was taken to Krabi hospital," Col Chatchai said.

All family members are re-

ported to be in stable condition.

"The driver, Kittiyakorn Sitthisit, told first responders that she had just left her friend's house, at an intersection near the crash, when she lost control of the vehicle. She is willing to pay for the damage," Col Chatchai said.

Police charged Ms Kittiyakorn with reckless driving resulting in injury and damage to property.

— *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Missing British man's body found after speed boat sinks



"Our divers had to work in difficult conditions," said Samui district chief Paiboon Omak. Photo: Suchat Hankij

THE search for a British national, who disappeared after a speedboat sank near Koh Samui on May 26, is over, after officials reportedly recovered the man's body on May 29.

Samui District chief Paiboon Omak accompanied divers, who found the body of 46-year-old Jason Robert Parnell.

"Due to heavy winds and quick, murky currents, foreign specialists joined us to help recover Mr Parnell's body," Mr Paiboon said. "The divers had

to work in difficult conditions."

The speedboat Mr Parnell was aboard was reportedly shuttling 32 tourists, a guide and three crew members, when it capsized due to heavy winds and rough seas off Koh Samui. All tourists on board were foreigners on a day trip to various nearby isles.

Mr Paiboon said the search parties were joined by volunteer rescue worker and diver Georgios Nikolaidis, who ultimately discovered Mr Parnell's body wedged among

rocks and debris.

The rescue team took about two hours to retrieve the body due to difficulty in reaching the spot where he was found.

Mr Paiboon said Mr Parnell's body was identified by another passenger on the capsized speedboat, whom authorities have declined to name. Mr Parnell was reportedly travelling alone.

The recovery of Mr Parnell's body marks the fourth death in the incident.

— *Suchat Hankij*

Travel ban on regime critics lifted for some

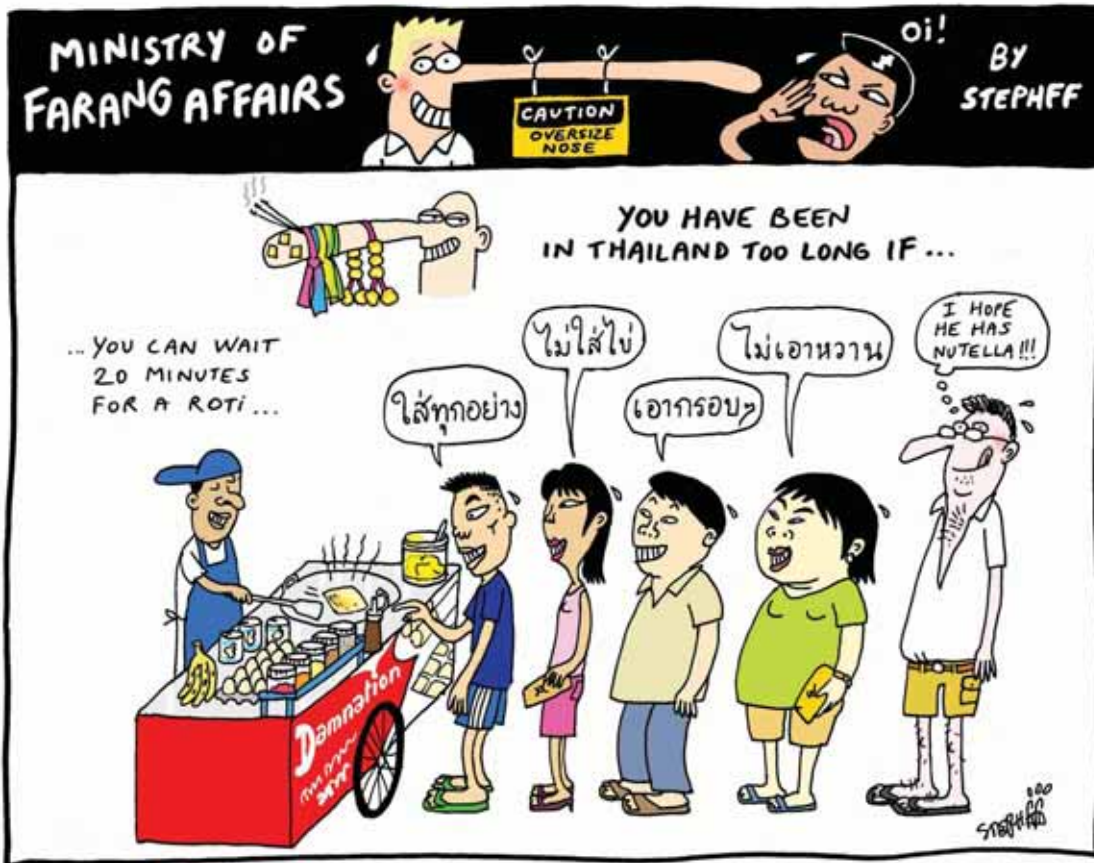
THE National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) lifted an international travel ban on May 27, imposed against some politicians and activists after the 2014 coup. The group, although not tried in court, could not leave the country without court and NCPO permission.

Human rights activists claim the NCPO's decision to partially revoke the ban was motivated by international criticism of the human rights situation in Thailand, after a UN human rights review.

The travel ban is still in effect for those who face trial, including ex-PM Yingluck Shinawatra.

'Tiger Temple' raids discover dead animals

AT LEAST 40 dead tiger cubs, a dead bear and various animal horns were found by wildlife officials on June 1, on the grounds of Thailand's infamous Tiger Temple.



The bodies were found stored in the freezer where the temple kept food for the tigers, officials said.

Wildlife officials in Thailand began removing tigers from the grounds of the temple earlier this week. As of June 1, at least 40 tigers have been removed from the grounds of

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

the temple, with the rest set to be removed in the coming weeks.

Zika reported in Udon Thani

HEALTH authorities are trying to prevent more Zika virus cases after a worker from Udon Thani tested positive for the disease earlier this month.

Although most patients ex-

perience mild symptoms, severe cases of the mosquito-born virus can cause death. The virus is also suspected of causing microcephaly in new-borns.

Provincial health volunteers are advising Udon Thani locals to sleep under mosquito nets to reduce the risk of infection.

The Disease Control Department reported Zika infections in nine provinces this year.

Thousands of monks rally to shield abbot

Tens of thousands turned out on May 29 in a show of support for an indicted Buddhist abbot, charged with money laundering and embezzlement.

An arrest warrant was issued for Phra Dhammachayo, after he failed to answer a summons by the Department of Special Investigations. The temple claims the 72-year-old is too sick to meet with officers, and police fear clashes with devotees if they confront him on temple grounds.

The case against the abbot has also gained momentum in light of a protracted change of leadership in Thailand's ruling council of Buddhist clerics.

Phuket Gazette

Land investigation like never before

THE *Phuket Gazette* supports the government's efforts to return stolen mangrove land to the state, only if the investigation can be conducted in a fair and transparent way, that punishes the real wrongdoers and limits damage to innocent third parties.

Dating back to the start of the tin mining era in the 1930s, the destruction of mangrove forests at the hands of greedy 'investors' is nothing new to Phuket, and has been rife along the island's east coast for decades. This rape of our public land has been allowed to continue to the present day – even decades after the importance of mangrove forests to both coastal and offshore ecosystems had been well established scientifically.

Thailand has a rich history of land probes, but many, if not most, have been limited in scale and politically motivated.

The investigation now underway by the so-called 'White Shark' team is unprecedented in that it is national in scale, focuses solely on mangrove encroachment and is ostensibly free of any political agenda. If carried out in a transparent manner, it could see the return of thousands of rai of degraded coastal land to the state for the redevelopment of these 'national treasures' – accurately described by the investigation team.

Unfortunately, much of this land could take a long time to recover after years of misuse, including the many plots that were used for shrimp farming – an environmentally unsound practice that has degraded vast tracts of former mangrove forest in many coastal regions throughout the country.

Even more problematic could be restoring 'built up' land, which is now home to golf courses and marina developments, if found to be acquired illegally. Such findings could have enormous social implications, putting scores of companies out of business and putting hundreds, even thousands, of people out of work. With each passing day, the possible ramifications of this unprecedented investigation appear ever more staggering.

As this edition goes to print, investigators were collecting information about alleged encroachers with the intent of turning this information over to the Phuket Land Department Office. It will be interesting to see if that agency takes any punitive measures against any of its own officers, past or present, without whose help the land grabbers could not possibly have despoiled so much our natural heritage.

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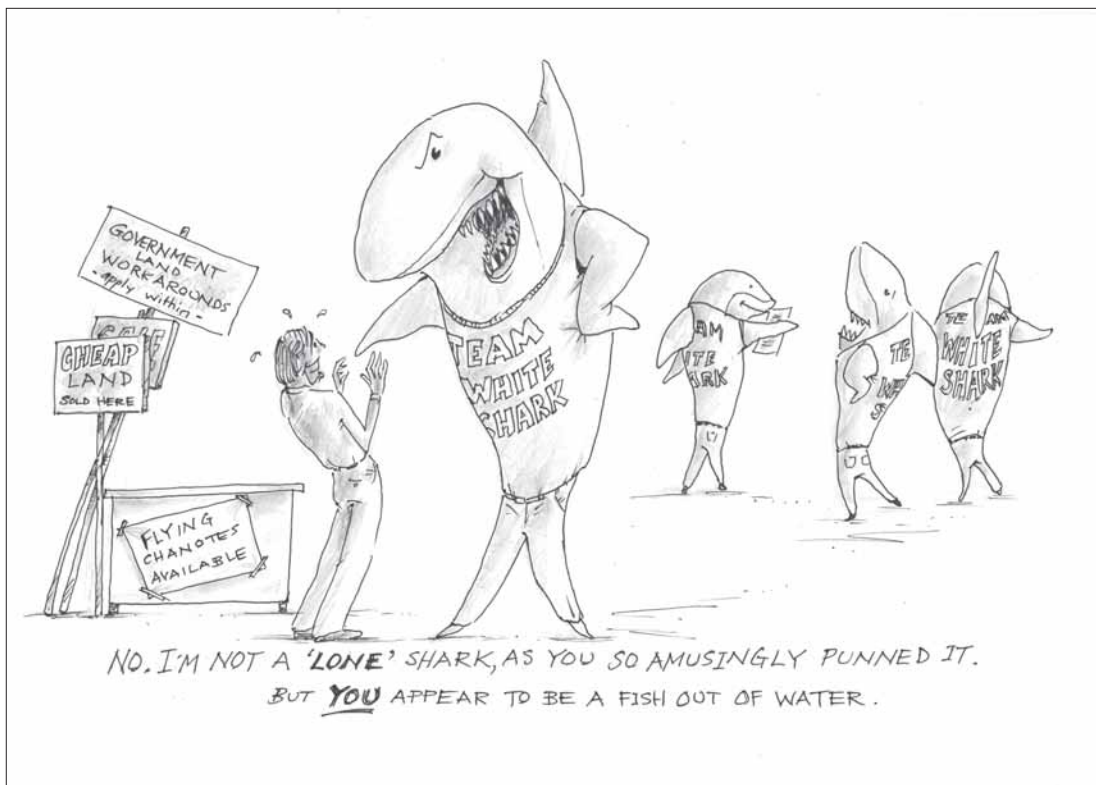
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Volume 23 Issue 23

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Good step in the right direction

Re: Article 17 enforced: DMCR to arrest tourists, guides for disturbing marine life, Mar 28

Very good start in banning despicable behavior by many tourists and in preserving nature for future generations. How about controlling tour boats when they come into harbor and prosecuting them when they don't comply with the law.

Same goes for diving companies. Remember the article about the spearfishing Chinese at the Similans?

Klaas
Gazette forum

This is great news. I just hope they keep this drive up for years to come as it will take years for the damage to recover.

I know it's harsh but it is the Chinese that are by far the worst polluters, and as that seems to be Thailand's choice of customer then they must be made aware of the damage they are doing and the penalties must reflect the damage that's being done.

Simon
Gazette forum

More and more obstacles for foreigners

Re: Profile: Peejay Stanley says farewell to Phuket, May 31

I empathize with Peejay – more and more obstacles are seeing more long-term people decide to leave. It's got very xenophobic over the last couple of years and there seems to be no end in sight.

Mister Ree
Gazette forum

Letters to the Editor

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

Continued traffic jams and chaos

Re: Island View: Daily brush with death, May 31

Well meant article. What about the motorbike and salaeng drivers who approach from the wrong side of the road because they are, I assume, too lazy to drive to the next u-turn, often not wearing a helmet.

Seeing also many farangs not wearing a helmet, in their home countries they wouldn't do so because of strict hefty fines.

As long as there are egoistic reckless traffic rules ignoring motorists on the road, there will be chaos and traffic jams.

Drive safe
Gazette forum

Definitely a step in the right direction

Re: Phuket launches first government-run animal clinic, May 28

A step in the right direction. Let's hope the local OrBorTor start using this government sponsored scheme for soi dogs, instead of talking euthanasia as the answer. They should also ban importing designer dogs for breeding until the soi dog problems are solved.

Harry
Gazette forum

Why was the hillside construction approved to begin with

Re: Land Department revokes B4bn titles for disputed Freedom Beach land, May 30

How could the hillside construction at Nai Harn be approved by the local OrBorTor?

It surely exceeds a 35 degree slope, not to mention that it's extremely doubtful that the 'owner' has proper title.

Rooster
Gazette forum

Paper thin walls also to blame for crash

Re: Car crash is rude awakening for sleeping family, May 30

Really nice of Ms Kittiyakorn that she is 'willing' to pay for the damage. The walls of most houses here are also paper-thin. If properly built, the car would just have crashed with only damage to the car itself.

Sh
Gazette forum

There were severe weather warnings

Re: Briton's body found four days after Samui speed boat sank in storm, May 30

Were they wearing life jackets? Why were they on water when there were severe weather warnings for small boats to NOT go out to sea?

Jane Varley
Facebook

Promoting local vendors

FIRST PERSON

PHUKET is the number one tourist destination in the country, bringing 300 billion baht in revenue to Thailand every year. However, most tourists go to the famous beaches and islands, rather than spending their time and money in local communities.

As a result, many local communities don't benefit from the rapid growth of tourism across the province. Development projects must be planned to bring a higher quality of life and income to local communities, not just to touristic locales.

I've always been told that many tourists would prefer to see the locals' way of life and the true local environment, but they're unsure of how to get there or what to do if they manage to get somewhere off the beaten path.

The government of Phuket generally focuses on a specific type of tourism, which we in the industry refer to as Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism. This offers the opportunity to integrate tourists with local communities, by targeting convention venues in community areas, not just at touristic hotels and accompanying ballrooms.

By targeting urban areas with MICE tourism, we could improve locals' income by introducing tourist demand they would otherwise lose to more traditionally touristic areas. By anchoring conventions in urban areas, tourists will have a chance to experience local products, food and handmade crafts.

Hotel entrepreneurs could be major players in bringing this dream to life, by linking private bus routes between hotels and urban communities.



Charan Sangsarn has been the Secretary General of the Phuket Chamber of Commerce since 2014. He's earned Bachelor's degrees from the Faculty of Law, Ramkhamhaeng University and Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, as well as one from the Faculty of Public Administration, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. He also has

a Master's degree in Political Science from Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University and Ramkhamhaeng University.

Here, he talks about the need to expand Phuket's exhibition industry to further benefit locals.

Moreover, if convention venues are placed near the community, locals will have a chance to work closer to home.

I agree that some routes have road problems, but we must plan for how to make visitors feel comfortable by providing convenient transportation.

We need to move away from the ideas that accommodation in hotels and the convention venues themselves should be in the same place. In fact, if this is not so, visitors will be able to see the beautiful, attractive environment of Phuket during their journey.

During a conference, visitors will be able to eat unique local food, cooked in a traditional way. Locals will no doubt be proud of this because they'll be able to provide food to foreigners and Thai people from other regions.

It would be a shame if the Mai Khao Convention Center doesn't come to pass. I recently heard that the government does not want to build it because of high initial costs. We must rely on the entrepreneurship of the private sector to see this project through.

In addition, infrastructure like water supply and electricity must

be available and ready, otherwise visitors will not be confident with the standards of Phuket.

We would also have to standardize areas around local conventions. For example, toilets, especially in gas stations, always draw complaints from tourists about their uncleanness. In some places, we'd need to improve facilities like these in order to accommodate MICE visitors.

We also need to place signs directing visitors to local food venues and build local food courts like in shopping malls.

The food or products being sold in these areas would also have to be accredited by officials in order to guarantee the quality. That way, tourists will not get diarrhea or have bad memories from buying local products.

We've already made some progress in trying to stimulate local economies, particularly after the Interior Ministry designated us as a social enterprise initiative region. However, I think local officials could help get the ball rolling by exploring the potential benefits of MICE tourism for local communities.



Phuket needs provisions for storm drainage. Photo: Gazette file

Nature's sweet revenge

Island View

By Alexander Maycock

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

side of Chao Fa West.

Of course, we all know what happened to those plains and fields. Years of untrammelled development have wrought their end and the floods are nature's revenge for stomping all over her perfectly planned ecosystem.

The installation of the storm drains at TOT have put paid to that one particularly impassable puddle, but really who has benefited? Certainly not the commuters, as sections of Chao Fa West further to the south are as equally prone to washouts and – as we all learned during the last week's deluge – significant floods are now occurring just north of Kajonkietsuksa School because of excessive commercial and residential development.

Phuket companies just love to jump up and down about their CSR commitments, but surely corporate social responsibility should begin even before the foundations are laid. Provisions for infrastructure such as storm drainage should be made before thousands of local commuters and holiday-makers are inconvenienced by this disregard for nature's natural flow.

WITH the return of the rains last week, Phuket's perennial road-flooding problems also made a dramatic comeback. But not on one stretch of highway that has been blighted for over a decade by impassably deep puddles.

The junction by the TOT's main office on Chao Fa West was transformed into a no-go lake with every heavy tropical downpour – growing deeper and deeper with each passing year.

The freak storm in February brought both north and south bound traffic on the road to a virtual standstill at this spot, until pumps could be brought in to offer some relief.

About a week after that flood, work began on the installation of some very serious storm drains. As anyone who had to travel that route over the past few months will tell you, the roadworks for the storm drains caused holdups almost as heavy as any of the storms.

However, job done and just in time. As the traffic lights were swung back into place last week, the heavens opened and put the engineers' work to the test.

The section of the Nakkerd Hills running parallel to Chao Fa West at that junction funnel the rain into a series of lakes – with nature intending that the excess from the major monsoonal deluges soak into the flood plains at the base of those hills and the buffalo fields across the other

Words from the Wise

“Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”

– Nelson Mandela

“You have enemies? Good. That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life.”

– Winston Churchill

Issues & Answers

Unattended trash at Nai Yang Beach

I SPOTTED rubbish that had a wretched stench at Nai Yang Beach last week.

I would like to ask you to kindly manage the waste in the area.

It has been left there for quite a while now, and has begun to smell horrible. It is unattractive for both tourists and locals and is blocking the beautiful view of the area.

Anthony Dupont
Nai Yang

Kittikorn Prateep Na Thalung, President of Sakoo Administration Organization

(OrBorTor) replies:

The only trash truck that takes care of this area is out of order, and hence unable to pick up the trash.

We are trying to repair it as soon as possible, and would like to apologize for any inconvenience caused.

The location has been duly noted and will be cleared soon.

We appreciate the time and effort on your part to bring it to our attention.

Send us your queries and we'll ask the right people to respond to them.

Submit your issue at:

www.PhuketGazette.net/IssuesAnswers

Market trends in emerging markets

Identifying the rallies and trends in stock market indicators



Finance

By Don Freeman

MAY to October is often a season of choppy sideways action. The old adage, 'Sell in May and go away,' already appears to be holding true as over the last three weeks, US markets and global markets have pulled back from overhead resistance levels on their technical charts.

The Nasdaq index in particular is looking bad as tech, semiconductor and biotech stocks largely fail to rally, while the Dow Jones along with many sectors appear to be breaking down.

Since July 2014, the all-important S&P 500 index has largely been in a choppy sideways trading range; roughly between the 1,800 and 2,100 levels, going basically nowhere for investors.

This means the S&P 500 is neither in a bull nor a bear market. So until the index breaks out above the 2,100 level, or plunges back below the 1,800 support level, we can only speculate on the direction the market will go, or whether another recession is lurking around the corner.

Here are several key sector or market indices to watch closely to see which direction the markets and the economy



The Nasdaq index in particular is looking bad as tech, semiconductor and biotech stocks largely fail to rally. Image: Don Freeman

might be heading in.

The PowerShares S&P 500 High Beta ETF (NYSEARCA: SPHB), which indicates whether investors are taking risks by investing in growth stocks, was in a good rally. However, the SPHB has fallen off since late April, indicating investors are not taking risks right now.

The iShares NASDAQ Biotechnology Index ETF (NASDAQ: IBB) briefly rallied only to fall back to a support level. If IBB falls through that support level, it's not looking good for biotech, and it won't help the biotech-laden Nasdaq's performance.

The SPDR S&P Retail ETF (NYSEARCA:XRT) bottomed in January/February, then rallied, only to hit resistance before getting slaughtered in May. This is not something you want to see on a bull market advance and there is no sign that XRT will breakout again.

Of course, the shift from brick-and-mortar retail to eCommerce – also leveling the playing field for smaller players – is partially to blame for XRT's performance.

The iShares Dow Jones Transportation Average ETF (NYSEARCA:IYT) also rallied, but that rally has since rolled over and it looks like IYT

could continue to head lower.

As with retail, watching the transportation index roll over is not a good thing to see. The iShares MSCI Emerging Markets Index ETF (NYSEARCA: EEM) tried to rally.

It did break out above a key level, but recently fell back down below that level.

That's not a good sign for the global economy nor for developed countries or many

large cap stocks that rely on trade with or have a significant presence in emerging markets.

The SPDR STOXX Europe 50 ETFs (NYSEARCA: FEU) performance resembles that of emerging markets. However, Europe faces even more uncertainty with the coming BREXIT vote, the ever-present threat of terrorism and the ongoing refugee crisis that is fueling political resentment against European leaders.

Right now, I am neither bearish nor bullish about the market. However, without positive action in the above key sectors or markets, the overall market will have a hard time moving higher; meaning cash is the safest place to be for risk-averse investors.

The problem is predicting

what will happen as the increasingly unpredictable US presidential elections are still six months away while the FED could come up with yet another quantitative easing to blast the markets.

The shift from brick and mortar retail to e-Commerce is partially to blame for XRT's performance.

What we do know for sure is if key sector indices keep breaking down, we could be in for another nasty recession as the overall market, from a technical stand-

point, is starting to look more and more like the market in 2007, just before everything crashed the following year.

Keep an open mind as we enter the summer months and watch the price action of these and the major US markets.

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: free mancapi@gmail.com.

SCB president resigns

YOL Phokasub, the president of Siam Commercial Bank (SCB), has unexpectedly tendered his resignation, which will come into effect on July 1. Mr Phokasub joined SCB in 2007.

He will remain active as an SCB director and a member of the executive board, said bank representatives.

Late 2014, the bank announced a 2-man leadership initiative. Mr Arthid Nantha-

withaya became deputy chairman of the executive committee and chief executive officer, and Mr Yol took the presidency. Mr Arthid and Mr Yol both have extensive experience in wholesale and retail businesses respectively.

The bank's share price slightly advanced by 1.17 per cent to 129.50 baht as of May 27.

– The Nation

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Direct investments looking good

THAILAND remains the prime destination for direct investment due to its central location in the region bordering Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Malaysia, according to Knight Frank Thailand.

2015 saw increased supply of serviced industrial land by 2.7 per cent – 151,194 rai. Since 2011, supply has grown by 2-8 per cent annually, comprising new and expansion of existing industrial estates. Industrial land sales surged 55.9 per cent to 3,549 rai, recovering from the previous year, when sales fell.

From late 2013 until mid-2014, the Board of Investment could not authorize any large-capital projects, which dented the volume of transactions for industrial land that year. Foreign investors were also becoming cautious due to political uncertainty.



Industrial land sales have surged in recent years. Photo: 401(K) 2012

Marcus Burtenshaw, executive director and head of commercial agency, said on May 24 that the company expects growth to continue this year from investment in electronics, auto parts, food and renewable energy industries. While Japanese investment remains subdued, European and Chinese investments have increased.

Industrial estates in Bangkok and Samut Prakan-Bangprakong boast the highest average price at 10.71 million

baht per rai, followed by the Eastern Seaboard at 4.86mn baht and the northern zone of Pathum Thani-Ayutthaya at 3.98mn baht. Industrial land rose in price by up to 4.4 per cent from last year. The northern zone recorded the fastest growth last year of 4.4 per cent, followed by the Eastern Seaboard with 3.3 per cent. From 2012-13, industrial land in the Suvarnabhumi-Bangpakong and Eastern Seaboard regions increased by 10 per cent due to flooding.

Some industrial estates hiked their prices by up to 25 per cent. The total supply of ready-built factories rose 6.4 per cent to 2,745,232 square meters last year.

From 2012-13, supply expanded in locations that were not affected by the 2011 floods, such as the Eastern Seaboard and Suvarnabhumi-Bangpakong.

– The Nation

Kingdom ranks higher this year



Five Asean countries made the ranking. Photo: Astore International

BETTER government efficiency is the reason Thailand climbed two steps in the World Competitiveness Ranking for 2016, according to the IMD World Competitiveness Center.

Thailand ranks 28th among 61 economies. All five sub-indicators in the government efficiency pillar public finance, fiscal policy, institutional framework, business legislation and societal framework are taken into account. Economic performance remained at 13th, business efficiency was 25th and infrastructure fell to 49th.

In the infrastructure pillar, Thailand sits at 6th in mobile broadband subscribers, energy intensity is 58th, showing low energy efficiency. In the business-efficiency pillar, while the labor force and factors for the financial and banking sector are ranked in the top 15, labor pro-

ductivity is as low as 55th.

Professor Arturo Bris, director of the center, said on May 30 that one crucial fact that the center's research underlined yearly was that current economic growth is by no means a guarantee of future competitiveness.

Thailand should especially accelerate mega-project investment and launch inclusive political and social reform for social and economic stability.

All scores for human development, computers per capita, student/teacher ratio, broadband subscribers, secondary school enrollment and high-education achievement are below 50th place.

Thailand was urged to focus on issues ranging from investment and education to political reform to boost its competitiveness ranking in a few years.

- The Nation

Cultivating jasmine to make extra cash



Green-fingered Vichan Tongsanay with his cash crop, which earns him a supplementary income of 300 baht a day. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

Kritsada Mueanhawong

THE growing nationwide demand for jasmine has led one man to set up his own backyard cottage industry.

Vichan Tongsanay, 40, who works as a deckhand at the Krabi Marine Office, said he earns around 300 baht per day by selling the flowering plant. "I've been growing jasmine in the heart of my village for 5-6 months," Mr Vichan said. "I'm then able to sell it at a market about a kilometer away."

Mr Vichan began growing

jasmine as a hobby during a holiday, in a half rai vacant plot owned by a relative.

He bought 200 young jasmine plants for about 2,000 baht. "After studying books, looking at online forums and discussing with friends, I started growing them."

Mr Vichan said jasmine is a particularly finicky plant to grow. He recommends keeping each bush around a meter away from each other and to fertilize the soil regularly in order to ensure that the plants flower regularly. He added that his gardening venture

took some time to get into, but he expects to keep the plants for approximately 10 years.

"I feel comfortable doing this in my spare time. The demand of jasmine in Krabi is high right now and there's a lack of land to plant. Most of our jasmine is grown in other provinces," Mr Vichan said.

Mr Vichan is looking forward to an increase in sales in August, when National Mother's Day arrives, as Thais traditionally use the flower while saying prayers for their mothers.

Business operators lack faith in local economy

INVESTORS have expressed a lack of confidence in Thailand's economy because of a decline in exports, the drought-induced expected slowdown in domestic consumption, and the sluggish global economy.

Somkiat Anuras, vice chairman of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber's Business Confidence Index was only 42, while Economic Confidence Index stood at a very low 22.8. Scores above 50 indicate positive confidence.

Mr Somkiat cited the aforementioned factors for the lack of confidence, along with low agricultural prices that caused a drop in farm incomes. Based on a recent survey from chambers of commerce in Thailand, 43.7 per cent of business operators reported a drop in sales.

Most business operators said their costs remained unchanged, while 45.6 per cent had higher

costs. According to surveys, just over 47 per cent in the central region had higher sales and said they were more competitive. The South's Economic Confidence Index was the highest, almost 47 per cent said tourism had improved and rubber prices were likely to rise. The government has been advised to collaborate more with the private sector and inject more money into the grassroots economy to prevent a worsened economic slowdown. Business operators also urged the government to take control of product prices and factors affecting production, promote public investment through stimulus measures and improve infrastructure in each region with equality.

The Thai economy is expected to improve in the latter half of this year, subject to global economic factors.

- The Nation



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Brandon Beal in concert at Illuzion Phuket



Brandon Beal, popular American singer on the stage at Illuzion.

Over 4,000 partygoers got a blast on May 27, when Brandon Beal took over the microphone in an unforgettable performance at Illuzion Phuket.



Energy dancers from Illuzion getting down during a performance.



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Local cashew nut snacks go global

Methee Phuket Co Ltd General Manager Arpa Warapiwattanankul visited the *Phuket Gazette* office recently to deliver samples of her company's cashew nut products, which are going global after the company inked a distribution deal with King Power.



Arpa Warapiwattanankul (center), GM of Methee Phuket Co Ltd hands over cashew nut snacks and drinks to *Gazette* reporter Sukawin Tanthavanich (left) and Nick Davies, the *Gazette's* Deputy Managing Editor.

Sansiri launches new project

Sansiri PCL invited Phuket media to the launch of its new developments, Saransiri Koh Kaew and the 'Sansiri House – made for every feeling' campaign on May 24.



Metha Angwatanapanich, Sansiri PCL's Senior Executive Vice President – Business Development and Project Development Division (Low Rise) presents the new Phuket projects.

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Vachira Hospital says 'thank you' to donors

By Chutharat Plerin

VACHIRA Phuket Hospital on May 23 awarded certificates and souvenirs to more than 50 regular blood donors to the hospital's blood bank.

The 'thank you' event for blood donors and more than 70 supporting organizations was hosted by hospital director Dr Jessada Chungpaibulpatana at the hospital's Baan Khun Poom building and coincided with the blood bank's 49th anniversary.

The guests included Phuket Vice Governor Kajornkiet Rakpanitmanee as well as 52 blood donors, among whom were people who have given blood between 48 and 96 times.

"The Vachira Hospital Blood Bank was opened on May 23, 1967 after a visit by HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej and HM Queen Sirikit for that purpose," said the hospital's blood bank head Dr Suprang Suttantapidok.

"This event is to honor the King and Queen of Thailand and to thank all the people who have donated blood over the years," she said.

"Last year 29,360 units of blood were supplied to patients in Phuket. We'd like to thank the media for publicizing blood donation drives, which have helped save many lives," she added.

Donor Sampawat Wanna-



Phuket Vice Governor Kajornkiet thanks 76 time blood donor Mr Sampawat. Photo: Chutharat Plerin

sangkam has donated blood 76 times since he was a teenager.

"Next month will be my 77th donation," said Mr Sampawat.

"I'm glad my blood can go to help save others' lives. Giving blood has the added benefit of a free medical check-up whenever you donate," he said.

Donor Thitipong Lohatad has overcome a fear of needles by giving blood regularly.

"I first donated about five years ago when I was a student. A friend of mine dragged me along to the blood bank without telling me what he was going to do. My friend asked me if I wanted to donate as well, so I did. I was surprised that it didn't hurt. It felt great and I have been donating ever since," he said.

"I am not rich, but I love helping people, so giving blood is something I can do for a good cause instead of donating money," said Mr Thitipong.

Celebrating 'Snake'

Phuket musicians to stage tribute jam session

WELL-KNOWN Phuket-based musician Piboon 'Snake' Kayalak passed away on May 25, aged 51.

Over the past eight years, Mr Piboon played all over Phuket at some of the island's top live music venues. A Thai native, Piboon was bassist for the Colin Hill & Pjae Stanley Band.

"He will be remembered as a superb musician, friend and brother, who performed with some of Phuket's most professional and in-demand musical acts over the past eight years.

He was not only revered and appreciated by his peers for his musicianship but also his calm and gentle nature, dedication, loyalty, genuinely infectious smile, and for being one the 'good guys' that you meet rarely in the journey of life.

He recorded on many musical projects and luckily this legacy will live on through the ages to remind us all of his contribution to life," said Colin.

Friends and family are arranging a tribute 'super jam' night at The Roadhouse in Karon for Tuesday June 21 to which musicians who knew Mr Piboon are invited to go along and play for a final musical send off. Updates and more information is available on Colin Hill's facebook page.

– Nick Davies



Snake smiles on stage at The Roadhouse. Photo: Christian Mouchet



Snake performs at the Exo Bar in Rawai. Photo: DW Wolf

Aviation interns awarded epaulets

VOCATIONAL students studying aviation at Thalang Technical College (TTC) were awarded epaulets and certificates after completing internships as ground crew at Phuket International Airport on May 31.

The hands-on work experience is part of a training program to give the students a head start in civil aviation careers with Nok Air, Thai Airways, Thai Air Asia and Kase Aviation, which is the organization responsible for aircraft maintenance and repairs at Phuket Airport, Chiang Mai Airport and Don Muang International Airport in Bangkok, under Thailand's Department of Civil Aviation.

College director Tawatchai Nuinn said the ceremony was a proud moment for the students and their parents.

"We have signed partnerships with four airline titans to offer knowledge and experience to our students that they wouldn't receive otherwise.



Left: Students awarded after completing their internships. Right: Students familiarize themselves with a cockpit. Photo: Thalang Technical

Students also have the opportunity to intern at their airlines' offices at Phuket International Airport. These internships are sponsored by the Civil Aviation Training Center, Airport of Thailand Phuket office and the Air Technical Training School," said Tawatchai.

"Thalang Technical College is the only college in Thailand to offer an aviation maintenance curriculum. It's wonderful to have such valuable cooperation

with the private sector as well as government policies to support the rapid growth of the country's aviation industry," he said.

Kase Aviation President Nattapan Saneywong Na Ayutthaya, said the internships were a valuable asset for the graduates, who would now be able to join domestic and international aviation companies with ease and perform to their fullest potential.

– Sukawin Tanthavanich



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Test driving the new 'Ferrari of the sea'

LEE Marine in Phuket, recently hosted Fabio Rota, the production coordinator for powerboats from Premier Composite Technologies (PCT) in Dubai. With Fabio at the helm, the Lee Marine team sped across Phang Nga Bay on ATARI VI, Lee Marine's own Premier 38.

Speed is what Fabio knows best. He is pumped when it comes to getting the most out of his Premier powerboats. He is a seasoned professional with strong knowledge of the use of composites in building speed boats.

PCT is a leading global supplier and manufacturer of advanced composite components for architectural design, transportation, aerospace, marine, oil and gas markets. "PCT is the only company in the world that makes production standard carbon boats," said Fabio.

PCT has built several high performance custom racing yachts and some of them are performing extremely well in competitions such as the 2016 Rolex Sydney Hobart Race. Three high-profile, high-performance race yachts built using PCT's hi-tech construction formula completed the demanding 628-mile race, securing standings in the top 15 finishing yachts; a remarkable achievement, considering that 25 per cent of the fleet withdrew from the race.

Following the success of their sailboats, PCT has now entered the power boat segment with the launch of the P38, a finely tuned power boat with a sleek design that is capable of reaching 60 knots.

"Performance depends on the experience and ability of the pilot at the helm of the boat," said Fabio, after reaching speeds in excess of 125 knots on sea trials with the PCT marine team. The world speed record is 170 knots.

Fabio's experienced piloting was evident when he coaxed higher speeds than ever seen on the ATARI VI. Inseparable in his mind is Premier's technology combined with speed. He persistently fine-tunes the products at all levels; in the factory and on the water, insuring each model lives up to its well-earned reputation as a 'Ferrari of the sea'.



The Premier 38 is a new breed of power boat from Premier Composite Technologies in Dubai. Photo: Lee Marine Phuket

He was constantly looking, listening, waiting and meticulously adjusting to push for the highest possible performance.

Designed by Farr Yacht Designs, the hull and deck of the P38 is made from infused carbon-foam composite structures and a full length carbon-glass chassis joins the hull and deck. A carbon-fiber structure supports the carbon composite hardtop.

GRP and infused carbon composites are combined to increase rigidity and to save weight. Powered by up to three 350HP engines, the P38 comfortably climbs to in excess of 60 knots; one of the fastest in her class.

Hull design is the most important aspect of any boat striving for speed and Fabio's experience with boat hull designs is another strength. On the P38 drawings, one of his first Premier assignments, he completely removed the 10cm-deep, 4-meter long keel. Then he sharpened the rounded corners on the sub-structure, which added another five knots of speed performance to an already fast boat.

The newest Premier 38 launches early next year with performance up to 70 knots, powered by three Mercury Verado 400HP engines. The Premier 61 (P61), when launched in mid-2016, will carry the status of the longest center console outboard boat available on the market. P61 features include a proper cabin

and speeds surpassing 70 knots.

Firm plans are underway for the Premier 55 (P55) to debut later this year. Following this, the Premier 29 (P29) and Premier 45 (P45) are on the drawing boards and expected to be available in 2017.

PCT's ground-breaking, fresh, new designs with low maintenance and high performance are perfect for Asian waters. The new range of center-console powerboats from Premier Composite Technologies will be available soon at Lee Marine International Marine Brokerage.

- *Phuket Gazette*

Foreign wedding bells ring out for Thai destinations

SEVENTY three buyers from 15 countries met with 116 local operators last month, promoting wedding business with the goal of making Thailand one of the top global destinations for the sector.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) held the 'Amazing Thailand Romance Trade Meets' events in Bangkok and Krabi, in order to promote the country as a truly major destination for wedding and honeymoon couples, said Juthaporn Rerngronasa, TAT's deputy governor for International Marketing.

Thailand already ranks as a top-six global market for weddings and honeymoons, as well as being the most popular destination for such business in Asia, and an emerging destination among Middle Eastern and African markets, she said.

"This year, there is a strong record for selling weddings and honeymoons from major source markets such as the United States, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, France, the UAE, Australia, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and Indonesia," she added.

Representatives from these markets joined networking and business sessions with local sellers representing hotels, resorts, destination management companies and event planners



Weddings and honeymoons are billion-dollar earners for Asia's tourism industry. Photo: earl subejano photography

based in Thailand.

Weddings and honeymoons are billion-dollar earners for Asia's tourism industry, and Thailand is emerging as one of the region's top spots for tying the knot, she said.

According to the TAT, wedding business worldwide is valued 10.56 trillion baht (US\$298 billion), with US\$80 billion coming from overseas weddings.

Rong Phukaoluan, president of the Krabi Hotel Association, said Krabi is crowded due to an increase in the number of visitors travelling to the province.

Krabi Airport's expansion plan is scheduled to be completed by 2019, doubling the current capacity of 4.5 million arrivals per year. South Korea's Asiana Airlines wants to add Krabi as a new destination, but is unable to do so right now due to the airport's limited capacity, Mr Rong said.

- *Suchat Sritama*

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NEXT TO PHUKET ZOO

Monsoon divers do it in the rain

Diving

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

THOUGH nearly a month late, the southwest monsoon season finally arrived in Phuket. With the annual torrential rains comes the standard question, "Is there still diving around Phuket?"

The simple answer is, yes.

Unlike the diving in Khao Lak, which pretty much has its shutters pulled down when the Similan Islands are closed, Phuket continues to offer excellent diving options.

Once we suffer through the first few weeks on non-stop rain, there will be plenty of beautiful days and clear water during the 'Green Season.'

Low season divers have two main options: prepare to dive some lesser-known locations – there is at least two sides to every island – or make sure your hotel has a house reef.

Unfortunately, Kata Reef is usually a disaster to dive during low season, so if you vote for the house reef, it might be necessary to book a place on Phi Phi Don.

House reefs are rarely the jewel of a diving location, but



The writer dives next to an octopus (left). Low season diving is usually marred by poor weather and rough seas. However, adventurous divers can still find a plethora of marine life in the waters around Phuket, such as this seahorse wrapped around a starfish (right). Photo: Gazette file



sometimes you just want to get wet. After months of only seeing the goldfish in your fish tank, something as common as a lion fish, parrot fish or even a skunk clownfish is a vast improvement.

More often than not, it's possible to see more wildlife in 45 minutes on a barren reef

than all day trudging through the jungle.

For those not willing to trade Phuket for Phi Phi – the number of reasons are seemingly countless – don't fret too much. Just pop a couple of Dramamine in case the ocean gets rough in the less-than-predictable weather, and be

prepared to dive the eastern and leeward sides of some islands.

If a storm flies in, it's very likely you'll have to switch from the King Cruiser Wreck or the unprotected pinnacles of Shark Point to the wall of Koh Doc Mai.

Koh Doc Mai has plenty of

marine life treasures. With a keen eye and a little luck, it's possible to discover numerous species of nudibranchs, colorful sea slugs, ghost pipefish and even tigertail seahorses.

Bottom line is to score bottom time. Whether it's raining or shining, don't forget: you're a diver, you like to get wet.

Phuket's Muslims turn their eyes heavenward

MUSLIM clerics in Phuket will scour the skies on June 5 to see if the moon is visible and determine the beginning of the month-long fast of Ramadan.

The sighting of the moon is the traditional prerequisite for proclaiming the arrival of a new month on the Islamic lunar calendar, said Phuket's Islamic Committee Secretary Piyadet Chuachalard.

"We set up the moon sighting on June 5. If we can see the moon on that night, fasting will begin the next day," said Mr Piyadet.

If a sliver of the moon is spotted, a report is sent to the Phuket Islamic Council. If the council then confirms the sighting with a second person, word is sent to the Central Islamic Council of Thailand, in Bangkok.

The Bangkok Council then checks the time of the sighting with the Royal Thai Navy Sci-



Nearly five per cent of Thailand's population identifies as Muslim, making Islam the second most popular religion. Photo: Gazette file

ence Department. If the time is confirmed by Navy records, an announcement will be made to all Muslims in Thailand that Ramadan has begun.

During Ramadan, practicing Muslims do not eat, drink, smoke or engage in sexual activity while the sun is up.

The month of fasting culminates in the celebration of Eid, which is typically a three-day

festival when the entire community comes together for special prayers and to congratulate each other. The rest of the holiday is spent visiting friends and family.

The month of fasting is observed to commemorate the first revelation of the Koran to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), according to Islamic belief.

– *Kongleaphy Keam*

Ramadan Recipe: Pakistani Pakoras

by Zohaib Sikander



For the Batter:

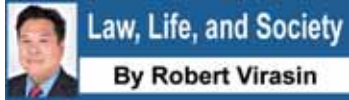
1 cup besan (chickpea flour)
1/2 cup water
1 teaspoon red chili powder
2 teaspoons cumin powder
4 cloves crushed garlic
3 inches crushed ginger

Ingredients:

4 thinly sliced potatoes
2 cups corn oil (for frying)
salt to taste

- Add water to the besan in a large bowl, while whisking.
- Add the chili powder, cumin powder, garlic, ginger, salt and chopped coriander. Stir the batter.
- The potatoes should be thinly sliced so they can cook easily.
- Heat the oil in a deep fryer.
- Dip the potato slices in the batter and fry them until they are golden brown.
- Remove them from the oil with a spoon and set them on a paper towel for a bit, to soak up excess oil.

The painful facts of immigration



Law, Life, and Society

By Robert Virasin

IN FEBRUARY, Mr Sittichai Boonkeian murdered his 13-year-old daughter and committed suicide by hanging himself from a ceiling fan. His wife, Chonrat Mungmart, believes that Mr Sittichai's murder-suicide was a result of the anxiety and problems associated with their separation. Mr Sittichai and his daughter were living in Florida and his wife was in Thailand.

Ms Chonrat was separated from her husband and daughter as a result of committing immigration fraud. She attempted to bypass a multiple-year wait time for entry into the United States by spouses of U.S. permanent residents, by entering into a fraudulent marriage with a US citizen. The fraud was discovered, and she was deported.

While there are many problems with the US immigration system, Ms Chonrat's attempt to shortcut through the immigration system had serious consequences and led to the long-term separation of her family. Ms Chonrat should have waited, because, unlike most people, Ms Chonrat had a legal pathway to immigrate to the United States.

There are three pathways for immigration to the United States: foreign nationals can immigrate through an employer's sponsorship, they can invest a large sum of money



Illegal immigration to the United States can result in the deportation and blacklisting of the attempted immigrant. Such circumstances may have perpetuated Mr Sittichai's murder-suicide. Photo: Gazette File.

and start a business in the US, or a US citizen or US permanent resident can file a petition for their immediate relatives. The current wait period for a spouse of a US Permanent Resident is less than three years.

Instead of a three year wait, Ms Chonrat's immigration fraud makes her an immigration violator and inadmissible from entering the US without a waiver. Immigration fraud is

one of the grounds for inadmissibility.

The other six inadmissibility categories are: health-related grounds, such as communicable diseases; certain criminal or drug offenses; economic grounds (foreign nationals deemed to be a public charge; intending immigrants, who attempt to enter with a non-immigrant visa; previously removed or deported individuals from the United

States; and other miscellaneous legal grounds, such as polygamy.

Overcoming a finding of inadmissibility is difficult. Individuals who have been found inadmissible will have to submit an application for a waiver of their inadmissibility. These applications have a high evidentiary requirement.

Most immigrant waivers require a showing of extreme hardship to a US citizen family

member. The extreme hardship encompasses economic, social and psychological hardship. In addition, the application must address why it would be difficult for the US citizen to move to the waiver applicant's home country. The decision to grant waivers are discretionary, and very difficult to get approved.

There are many people in the world who are desperate to go to the United States.

They listen to rumors, people who have unsubstantiated advice, or scammers, who provide false options. Potential immigrants need to understand that there are limited options for legally entering the United States.

Some people do not currently qualify to immigrate. However, people's lives and immigration laws are constantly changing. These changes may open future avenues for immigration to the United States.

However, when someone has been found to have committed immigration fraud, they are permanently barred from entering.

With the exceptions of waivers in limited circumstances, they have closed their door to obtaining a visa.

Robert R. Virasin serves as managing director of Virasin and Partners. He is a licensed U.S. attorney and a graduate of the University of California Los Angeles, University of Houston Law School, and Chulalongkorn University. He can be reached via email info@virasin.com.

Island's musicians bid 'adieu, PJae'



Texan soul singer Peejay Stanley (center red) performed her last gig in Phuket on May 13, at a farewell party at the Bliss Beach Club. Ms Stanley was accompanied by friends and joined on stage by other Phuketian musicians in attendance. She is returning to Texas before pursuing musical opportunities in Panama. Photo: Christian Mouchet

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Phuket's luxury real estate market in the low



AS I sit in my office on a faceless Saturday afternoon heading into low season, a song that flips up on Spotify grabs my attention – Ike and Tina Turner's 'River Deep, Mountain High'.

My heart nearly skips a beat as Tina grittily sings the lines "And it gets stronger, in every way. And it gets deeper, let me say. And it gets higher, day by day."

Sadly, the same can not be said about the state of Phuket's luxury real estate market.

Welcome to the post-high season postmortem on Phuket's pish posh uber luxury property market. The hills are not exactly 'alive with music' these days. Land issues, a crush of resale units on the market and heavy discounting is the current trend making the outlook somewhat gloomy. Predicting when that trend will end is hard to say.

Speaking to developers and real estate brokers in the luxury property sector, this year's high season was as flat as a pancake.

One key lead indicator of sentiment is that a number of villas in famed hospitality-led residential projects on the west coast are up for sale.

At one iconic hotel in particular, property resales have been few and far between, put-



Luxury pipeline projects such as Rosewood and a few other hotel-led offerings are still in the planning stages, so the outlook for the year remains largely unclear. Photo: Rosewood Hotels & Resorts

ting more villas back into the market. Turn back the page a few years and it was a different story. Anxious investors were lining up just to get on the waiting list.

There is little doubt that a double negative has been the on-and-off saga over Sirinath National Park, which has affected a number of ultra villa estates and played out prominently in the press.

It's been a public relations nightmare with the end result remaining unclear.

While Phuket arguably has the highest valued resort property market of any resort destination in Southeast Asia, ongoing land issues are having a certain impact on sentiment.

Another key rallying call has

been Surin and the swank strip of beach clubs and outlets that became a social house for the wealthy. The strip was undoubtedly a key demand driver for upscale properties in the area. Today though, the beach lies in ruins, as does much of Layan and Bangtao. Half-tumbled fences, rubble and the skeletal remains of buildings make the place look like the scene of a bomb blast.

Although the government has acted in good faith to get rid of the illegal structures, one has to ask, 'where is Plan B?'

What about the restoration and promotion of quality versus quantity?

Will Surin Beach end up the same as Nai Thon with paved public parking that is tented by

vendors and become a public market place instead of a haven for beach-goers?

There is little doubt that Surin's strip of trendy clubs added value to nearby properties, such as Surin Hill, Ayara Surin and Surin Heights, as well as other stand-alone properties.

For buyers of ultra villas, the incline of the property, elevated views and exclusive privacy win over flat, seafront land any day. However, with the Surin Beach strip now gone, the game has changed.

As we move through 2016 and look at the mounting million-dollar offerings at Anantara Layan, Avadina Hills, Point Yamu by Como and MontAzure, it may appear impressive but the competitive

landscape has not changed.

As well as fewer buyers making fiercer competition, owners are now willing to negotiate back to favorable currency appreciation.

Luxury pipeline projects, such as Rosewood and a few other hotel-led offerings, are still in the planning stages so the outlook for the year remains largely unclear.

Getting to the gist of things, Phuket's luxury property stable remains strong and contains some of the most beautiful properties on earth. But like a garden that goes untended, external factors are weighing in heavily and in the day and age of disruption, the sector has dwindled to a crawl instead of a sprint. Yes the determined crawl is taking the market forward at a much slower pace, but one can't help but wonder how sentiment will be regained in the present. For now, the industry needs to somehow come together, address the negative impact of the disruptions and hopefully restore confidence a little better than the sight of rubble littering many of Phuket's famed west-coast beaches.

Bill Barnett is the Founder and Managing Director of C9 Hotelworks (C9Hotelworks.com), a leading Thailand-based hospitality and real estate consulting firm.

Sansiri launches advertising blitz showcasing residential properties

SANSIRI is set to highlight their house brands through a new campaign "Sansiri House – made for every feeling", showcasing five brands; Narasiri; Setthasiri; Burasiri; Saransiri and Kanasiri.

Sansiri has also revealed its latest low-rise property in Phuket – 'Saransiri Koh Kaew', which is valued at just over a billion baht. This follows the success of previous detached, semi-detached and townhouse developments by Sansiri in the Koh Kaew area, namely Burasiri, Habitia and Habitown, all of which have been well received in the market.

Saransiri Koh Kaew is located on 50-2-78.79 rai of land. The development comprises 202 two-story detached houses with unit land plot sizes ranging from 57 square wah and house sizes up to 149-151 square meters. Each



The "Sansiri House, made for every feeling" campaign showcases five of the developer's brands. Photo: Sansiri

house is 140sqm near the front of the development, and comprises a bedroom on the ground floor, 3 bedrooms on the second floor, 2 bathrooms and parking for 2 cars.

Mr Metha Angwatanapanich, senior executive vice president business and project development division at Sansiri revealed that Habitown Koh Kaew, sold out at the end of

2015, and Habitia Koh Kaew, was also well received by customers and sold out earlier this year. Burasiri, a single detached house development also in the Koh Kaew area, is now over 70 per cent sold, with the target market being Thai and foreign businessmen in Phuket and families of students at nearby schools."

– *Phuket Gazette*

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Green building ideas discussed



Phuket Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada. Photo: Sukawin Tanthavanich

THE Phuket & Southern Thailand FM & Green Building Seminar, held at the Royal Phuket City Hotel on May 27, introduced local developers to the latest eco-building concepts, products and opportunities in Asia.

Governor Chamroen Tipayapongtada presided over the seminar, which featured a 'Green Building Case Study' and talks from industry experts on experiences and opportunities for green building in the region.

"I'm glad to see that major players in the development industry participated in the seminar and I hope they'll move forward with some of the sustainable ideas we've heard here today. Cost-effective and sustainable development is the way forward," said Governor Chamroen.

- *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

Tibetan-inspired villas coming to Phuket



An artist's rendering of the pool-style living coming to Phuket with Boat Pattana's Shambhala Sol pool villas. Image: Boat Pattana

PHUKET-BASED developer Boat Pattana is bringing 'luxury pool villa living' to the island, with the launch of residential project Shambhala Sol.

The name of the new low-

density residential project is a Tibetan phrase meaning 'tranquil land'.

The 32 fully-furnished pool villas will be located on Soi Yod Saney, near the Big Bud-

dha and Chalong Temple, representatives told the *Phuket Gazette* on May 14.

"Shambhala Sol is at the heart and soul of Phuket and the villas are designed to fit in



Boat Pattana CEO Panupong Kritchanarat. Photo: Chutharat Plerin

with the natural tropical surroundings," said Boat Pattana CEO Panupong Kritchanarat.

"The units are an ideal investment opportunity for living or renting out, in an area where there is ongoing property growth," he added.

Priced from 6 million baht, the villas range in size starting from 280 square meters.

Each villa has its own private plunge pool, two bedrooms and two bathrooms.

Mr Panupong did not reveal when construction would be completed but said a grand opening would be announced soon.

- *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

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Phuket Gazette

Making science accessible to all

By Kongleaphy Keam

ASST Prof Dr Aree Choodum, 36, originally from Phatthalung Province, is currently a professor at Prince of Songkla University (PSU) Phuket Campus and also part of a team of researchers who invented cheap effective explosive test kits, for which they were awarded silver medals at the International Exhibition of Inventions Geneva 2016.

Dr Aree is an expert in forensic chemistry and one of the few professors in Thailand who has studied the subject in depth.

“Some people study science just for the sake of studying it. However, the important thing is to know how to adapt it in order to make our lives easier,” Dr Aree said.

“Science should not be complicated and only understood

by scientists. Everybody should have access to it and get the chance to use it to improve their lives. Most importantly, it should be easily accessible, cheap and simple.”

Dr Aree’s latest research was used to develop low cost explosive testing kits which can be used to test explosive substances before and after a bomb incident.

“The test kits comprise a polymer in a small tube. We can take it to the scene, conduct the test, and know the results immediately,” Dr Aree said.

The testing kit only costs about 30 to 80 satang per tube, as opposed to other tests which cost up to 78 baht per test. It can also be reused up to nine times, which effectively brings the cost down to 10 satang per test, Dr Aree explained.

Dr Aree has several other in-

ventions to her name. She has invented affordable testing kits for everyday use, such as drug testing kits, kits to test for the presence of formalin in food, test kits for mercury and many others to test for dangerous substances in food.

“We eat everyday, so there should be something cheap to test whether the food we are eating is safe to consume,” Dr Aree said.

“The same goes for parents who are worried that their children may be involved with drugs. They can also use my inventions to easily test their kids at home without taking them to the hospital or police station. I think this is something that our society needs nowadays.

“We want science to answer people’s needs rather than just being a subject taught in class.”

Long before achieving success, Dr Aree was an ardent student of chemistry. She received a scholarship from the Development and Promotion for Science and Technology talents project to continue her studies from the time she started her bachelor’s degree until she earned her doctorate, all of which she accomplished at the Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai

Campus.

After finishing her doctorate, Dr Aree was appointed as a Forensic Science professor at PSU Hat Yai Campus. She also did a short stint as a researcher at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland.

“Thailand

needs to advance further and use science to help our people. This is what I always teach my students and hope that they will use this logic to continue innovating even further.”



Some people study science just for the sake of studying it. However, the important thing is to know how to adapt it in order to make our lives easier / - Dr Aree Choodum, Asst Professor, Prince of Songkla University

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