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‘I HAVE NEVER ACCEPTED TEA MONEY OR ORDERED MY OFFICERS TO DO SO’

‘WHITE PHUKET’

Phuket Governor launches crackdown on corruption after accusations emerge

By Kongleaphy Keam

THE Phuket Governor has denied accepting bribes and urgently ordered officers to investigate corruption allegations made by the Anti-Corruption Organization of Thailand in a Facebook post on February 13.

“I have never accepted tea money, or ordered any of my officers to do so, from any business – legal or illegal,” said Gov Chokchai Dejamornthan.

The governor set up a committee to look into each allegation at a meeting held at Provincial Hall on February 14.

“We will contact the person who posted this information to provide us with proof and more details. Everything will be done in a fair and transparent manner. If there is any truth to this, the person(s) responsible will face the full force of the law,” said Gov Chokchai.

Additionally, the governor launched a campaign named ‘White Phuket’ and invited the public to file any evidence directly with Provincial Hall.

The Facebook post that started all this was created by Dr Mana Nimitmongkol, secretary-general of the Anti-Corruption Organization of Thailand, with a photo of Laem Promthep accompanying it.

Dr Mana alleged that of the 12 major sectors of the government, namely local police; tourist police; immigration police; Border Patrol Police; the Crime Suppression Division; the Investigation Division of the Provincial Police; Investigation Division of Police Region 5; Region 8 Police; the office to combat human trafficking; the Employment Office; local municipalities; and the Phuket governor himself, corruption was rampant in several or all of them.

One of the examples that he mentioned in his post was the often heard complaint about demands from government officers for ‘tea money’ (bribes) to register migrant workers.

“It starts out with illegal workers being arrested and hauled down to a police sta-



More than 1,000 public and private sector individuals visited Phuket Provincial Hall to show support for the governor's newly-launched anti-corruption initiative. Photo: Phuket PR

tion, but usually ends with officers asking for money to make the case ‘go away’. The ‘price’ for a Burmese worker is 20,000 baht. Businesses owners sometimes negotiate a monthly payment system, or in some areas, a group of shops make a collective arrangement to pay the amount,” Dr Mana stated.

He alleged that each sector has its own people to collect the bribes, including Civil Defence Volunteers and plainclothes policemen, adding that occasional arrests were made to please their bosses in Bangkok, but those too were a sham to enhance arrest statistics and for public relations purposes.

“Whether businesses register their workers or not, it is all the same. Even legally registered workers are intimidated by officers who park their police cars in front of the shop and stop them to ‘check’ their documentation. Many of them – even the legal ones – get scared and run away. They use other tactics too, like keeping the work-

ers out in the sunlight for hours, all in the name of ‘verification’,” Dr Mana added.

He said that the same treatment extends to foreigners who work and invest in Phuket, such as hotels, tour companies, bar and club owners, restaurants, shopping centers, diving schools, language schools and vehicle rental businesses.

“We have estimated that 65 percent of hotels nationwide are illegal, but in Phuket that number is about 85 percent. Many hotels are encroaching on public land and hold illegal documents. Hotels built after 2011 disobey height restrictions and town planning laws. Officers are aware of this, but they receive bribes to close their eyes and ears,” said Dr Mana.

“There was even some talk that officers were asking for 2 million baht as the price to avoid processing the case further. A foreign businessman once told me, ‘I can’t stay in Thailand legally. Thai...

Continued on Page 3

Patong Bay brown water issue to be ‘resolved’

EXPERTS believe that planting water hyacinths is a good temporary solution to counter the repeated appearance of brown water in Patong Bay, which is caused by a plankton bloom due to excessive nutrients in the water.

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BUSINESS



Take charge of your life, even if you feel it is spiraling out of control.

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PROPERTY



Thailand, despite a transition period, has once again proven itself to be resilient.

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LIFE&STYLE



No magic solution to Phuket's marine problems, but slow and steady may win the race just yet.

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LOCAL NEWS

Briefly

Falling tree bangs up tuk-tuk in Karon

A TUK-TUK driver escaped with minor injuries after a palm tree fell directly on top of his vehicle at a crowded shopping district in Karon on February 13.

Prawi Sangkaew, 49, was driving past Karon Plaza when a strong gust of wind caused the 40-year-old palm tree to fall.

The tree narrowly missed the driver's section of the vehicle. There were no passengers aboard at the time.

"Mr Prawi's tuk-tuk was heavily damaged, but he only sustained minor injuries," said Maj Patiwat Yodkhwan of Karon Police.

"A nearby shop was also damaged, but no other property, passersby or vehicles were affected," he added.

Karon Municipality officers are tasked with regular maintenance of trees in the area. Since the incident, they have checked other trees and assured the public that they are well cared for, so 'no problem'.

The municipality will partly compensate Mr Prawi for the damage caused to his vehicle, using funds from the natural disaster budget. The amount of compensation has not yet been determined.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Woman fights charges from 2011 theft case

A THERAPIST accused of stealing a necklace in Trang and sentenced to jail is set to appeal.

The theft occurred back in 2011, when the victim reported to Trang police officers that she was drugged by a waitress named Ploi, and her necklace with a Buddha pendant, worth 700,000 baht, was stolen.

The accused, Pavitra Kongampon, 32, also known as 'Ploi', reportedly worked as a therapist in Karon at the time.

Trang Police investigated the matter for about five years, until April last year, and after collect-

Miss Thailand Universe visits 'cute' PM Prayuth



Miss Universe Thailand 2016 Chalita Suansane visited Prime Minister Gen Prayuth Chan-o-cha at the Government House on Valentine's Day. The 65th Miss Universe 2016 was taken to the Government House by Tourism and Sports Minister Korbkarn Wattanavrangkul. "He [Gen Prayuth] wished me to do my duties at my best and focus on my studies," said Ms Chalita, who is a junior studying microbiology at Mahasarakham University. "He is nothing like I see on TV. He is very cute in person," she said smiling. She also presented the PM with a brown teddy bear and a bouquet of flowers. Photo: The Nation

ing enough evidence summoned Ms Pavitra to the Trang court. She was found guilty of the crime and handed a sentence of 10 years imprisonment.

"They have CCTV evidence against me, including fingerprints, and the judge gave me the guilty verdict," said Ms Pavitra.

She approached the Ministry of Justice's Rights and Liberties Protection Department (RLPD) in Phuket for help in the matter.

"Ms Pavitra was given an appointment for April this year to make an appeal. We have received her request and will be providing her with a lawyer," said Chayathip Jitlang, an officer at the RLPD.

Ms Pavitra also provided the department with a picture of herself in 2011 to prove the use of false evidence in the case against her.

"I have asked them to re-check the prints and also look at the CCTV photo capture closely. The girl in the picture does not look like me. Moreover, I have had a tattoo on my left wrist for 18 years – she doesn't even have that," Ms Pavitra told the Phuket Gazette.

Most importantly, I had never even been to Trang before all this happened."

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Thai man's body found after two days

A MAN'S rotting corpse was found at his house in Thalang on February 10.

The victim, Thaweechai Noppakao, 54, is believed to have been dead for at least two days before his body was discovered by his daughter. Officers believe he died due to health complications.

Locals of Moo 8, Baan Liporn in Srisonthorn reported the incident to officials.

"Mr Thaweechai lived in a one-storey house. There was no sign of struggle or the room having been ransacked," said Lt Col Anukul Nuket of Thalang Police.

Police questioned the victim's daughter, who said that her father stayed alone in the house.

"She said they kept in touch over the phone and she came to visit him sometimes," said Col Anukul.

The body was taken to Thalang Hospital.

"Mr Thaweechai's daughter said that she had been out of touch with him for a few weeks, so she came to visit him. After

arriving at the house, she found that the door was locked. She knocked, but didn't receive a response, so she broke down the door with the help of the neighbors," he added.

His daughter agreed that the cause of death could be his heart condition, but the exact cause will be determined after a postmortem examination.

– *Winai Sarot*

Drug dealer busted with gun, ya ice

A drug dealer was charged with several crimes in Phuket on February 10, after he was busted with a homemade gun, ammunition and *ya ice* (crystal Methamphetamine) on February 8 in Wichit.

Maj Thanasak Sawangsri with his team took the lead on the case after receiving a tip-off about a drug delivery.

"We spotted Keerati Laocomplete, 27, at about 4:30pm on a Honda motorbike at the Phanason Residence in Wichit. We identified him based on the description we were given and approached him. Upon searching

him we found 3.51grams of *ya ice*, a homemade gun and bullets in a bag that he was carrying," confirmed Maj Thanasak.

Police questioned him for more than a day and charged him with possession of a category 1 drug with intent to sell and with illegal possession of a firearm.

– *Winai Sarot*

One injured in taxi, salaeng collision

A crash occurred early morning on February 10 when a salaeng (motorbike with a sidecar) crashed into a taxi, which then slammed into a barrier at the Heroines' Monument roundabout.

"The taxi, driven by Prapoj Boontang, was heading to Patong from Phuket Airport," said Capt Boonprasob of Thalang Police. "The two passengers were not injured."

The road circling the monument was littered with breakfast food items and Thai sweets that a vendor, driving the salaeng and named by police only as Nitthaya, was transporting to sell.

The bumper, front left fender, headlight and bonnet of the taxi were damaged by the impact with the motorbike.

"Ms Nitthaya was taken to Thalang Hospital to be treated for minor injuries," said Capt Kraisor.

A dashcam video was uploaded by a Facebook user, named as Woranat Nicky Donyangprai which showed the crash taking place.

"The salaeng was heading toward the monument from the left. I saw the taxi getting hit from its left side and the sidecar getting flung into the air due to the impact," Mr Woranat told the *Gazette*.

"The taxi driver was not speeding, but it seems the motorbike was going the wrong way and taking a shortcut to cross the monument instead of going around it."

Police have yet to charge anyone in the incident.

A number of accidents have occurred at the monument in the past few months, resulting in two deaths, which included a police officer.

Daily commuters have complained about the steel railings placed to block people from using the roundabout, saying that this might be one of the reasons these collisions occur.

– *Winai Sarot*

Mayor reveals Patong brown water solution

By Kongleaphy Keam

OFFICIALS have found an experimental or 'beta' solution for the repeated appearance of brown water in Patong Bay, which is caused by a plankton bloom.

Patong Mayor Chalermluck Kepsup on February 9 revealed that the proposed solution is to grow *eichhornia crassipes*, better known as water hyacinths, to counter the plankton.

Tourists and Patong beach operators complained about the presence of murky water, which they believed was untreated wastewater being discharged from hotels in the area.

However, experts explained that they were plankton blooms, often caused by excessive amounts of nutrients, in the form of nitrogen and phosphorus, spurred on by days of bright sunshine.

The area near Pakbang Canal was the worst affected, but further away from there, the blooms started to fade.

The reason for the presence of excessive amounts of nutrients in the water in the first place, however, does lead back to wastewater.

"We acknowledge that the nitrogen and phosphorus comes from the wastewater discharged into the sea. However, it is thoroughly treated and safe. The biological oxygen demand (BOD) is not more



Officials say the brown water at Patong Bay can be countered by planting water hyacinths. Photo: Kongleaphy Keam

than 20mg, which is a safe level," Mayor Chalermluck told the *Gazette*.

"The issue is more about our treatment systems. Thailand's water treatment laws do not clearly specify the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus permitted during treatment. Therefore, even though the water is treated, it still contains these two elements in higher quantities," she added.

Mayor Chalermluck added that since Patong Bay was not completely 'open' sea, the absence of high tides caused the water to be still, which was an additional reason for the presence of excessive nutrients.

This recurring issue has been ailing Patong for many years now.

"Water hyacinths consume nitrogen. We will plant them at the beginning of the canal, be-

fore the water starts flowing into the sea," Mayor Chalermluck said.

Water hyacinths can only be grown in fresh water so experts are now testing the water to determine which part of the bay is fresh water and which is sea water.

"Water will also be treated at Kathu Municipality, as the machine there can get rid of nitrogen," said Mayor Chalermluck.

"For a permanent solution, we have asked for a higher budget so we can get a new wastewater treatment machine in Patong. I cannot confirm how long this will take, but rest assured that we are doing our best.

"We are continuously monitoring the water and can assure everyone that for now, it is safe to swim in Patong Bay," Mayor Chalermluck added.

Foreigners afraid of working in Thailand



Officials at a Provincial Hall meeting called by Phuket Governor Chokchai to discuss corruption allegations. Photo: Phuket PR

Continued from Page 1

...people have to pay [bribes] too, but foreigners have to pay more'.

"Even after the money is paid and they are granted permission to run their business, the officers come back later and arrest them for not having proper documentation. Now, foreigners are afraid to work in Thailand. A foreigner who has been staying in Thailand for 18 years told me that uniformed officers raided his company and threatened to arrest him if he did not pay 60,000 baht. He was afraid, so he negotiated down to 50,000 baht (5,000 baht per month for 10 months). Brown uniformed officers in Patong are rumored to earn up to 30 million baht per month."

Dr Mana also alleged corruption in the 180mn baht Khong Katha reservoir and the 14mn baht, 4km bicycle lane in Suan Luang.

"Many foreigners jump off buildings, supposedly from drug overdoses. However, there are many bars mixing *ya bah* in their drinks, which could be one of the factors driving these foreigners to suicide.

"Officers don't care about these people's lives or the damage to Thailand's reputation – they only care about the money they can make," alleged Dr Mana.

Gov Chokchai, after discussing all the allegations in the post, asked relevant officers to investigate further and report back to him within the week.

He highlighted eight main areas for relevant officers to investigate, namely restaurant tea money; threats to foreign investors and businessmen; hotel management; business registration; the Khlong Katha Reservoir project; bicycle lanes at Suan Luang; mixing alcoholic drinks with *ya bah* (methamphetamine) in Patong bars; and tea money to avoid processing cases legally.

A day after the meeting took place, more than a thousand public and private sector representatives gathered at the Provincial Hall to express their support for the 'White Phuket' project.

Army addresses parking concerns

OFFICERS from the Region 4 Army Headquarters in Phuket visited Patong Beach last week to address complaints about the bike rental management system, particularly the decades-old problem of theft of space from the public.

Vendors and locals in the area said that the beach looked disorganized as dozens of rental bikes were parked chaotically and illegally along the road.

Among those present were officials from Army Region 4, police, navy, Patong Municipality and others.

"At the moment, it has been taken care of and the beach road is organized again. However, we will keep an eye on this in the future to ensure that



Maj Gen Pornsak visited Patong Beach to take stock of illegal parking by rental vehicles along the beach road. Photo: Phuket PR

rental vehicles are not being parked in unauthorized spaces," said Army Region 4 Deputy Commander Pornsak Poon-sawat.

"We will also continue to

work with local authorities to ensure that public land and beaches are being managed effectively," Maj Gen Pornsak added.

– Kongleaphy Keam

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Chonburi teens to face assault charges

POLICE will summon three teenagers to face assault charges after a man who allegedly shot dead their friend filed a complaint against them on February 12.

Lt Colonel Theerawat Chansripetch, deputy chief of Saensuk police in Chon Buri, said 50-year-old engineer Suthep Poshomboon filed a complaint against the three teens, accusing them of assaulting him.

Col Theerawat said the three would be summoned for interrogation tomorrow and police would also summon the driver of the van the three were riding in to face charges as well.

Mr Suthep faced the charge after he fired at Nawapol Pheungphai, 17, who allegedly opened the door of his car and tried to drag Suthep out, following a road rage incident earlier this month.

Thai Airways workers appeal to Prayuth

A GROUP of Thai Airways International (THAI) employees have called on Prime Minister General Prayuth Chan-o-cha to exercise his special powers under Article 44 of the interim charter to tackle "corrupt and dubious" practices at the national flag carrier.

Nares Peung-yam, a THAI employee representative, said the airline's board of directors and management had recently reduced the lifespan of aircraft in the fleet from 25 to 20 years, which would result in the disposal of old planes at low prices.

Secondly, the airline's man-



agement had acquired as much as 60 billion baht in fresh funding under a 2009-2011 business rehabilitation plan for the acquisition of new aircraft, which would lead to long-term debts for the airline, according to the allegation.

Another complaint lodged by the employee group alleged irregularities in the airline's accounting for old aircraft, resulting in a failure to accurately reflect the airline's business and financial performance.

THAI is embroiled in a Rolls-Royce bribery scandal in which more than 1.25bn baht was allegedly paid to officials between 1991 and 2005 to enable the UK firm to supply aircraft engines to THAI.

Two arrested for cocaine

A woman from Ecuador and a Russian man have been arrested after 2.35 kilograms of cocaine was found mixed into



More students allege teacher's sexual crimes

AS MORE primary schoolgirls step forward to say they were victims of alleged molestation by teacher Anupan Kujard, Ban Kluay Municipality School director Kasamaporn Buapiban said on February 14 that the accused has been suspended from civil service by the Muang Chai Nat Municipality to make way for investigation.

Another source reported that this case could involve at least 24 young victims.

Ms Kasamaporn, who is part of the fact-finding committee, said they were working on the case and had interviewed some students and parents. She also vowed to ensure justice and proceed with disciplinary action against the 41-year-old so he is not allowed to teach at this or any other school if found guilty. She said the school would also go ahead with revoking his teaching licence later.

She said the school will also provide remedial measures for the affected students and their parents, and will table the matter at upcoming meetings with parents. Ms Kasamaporn went on to say that this unprecedented case should not damage the school and its teachers' good image.

The case came to light when the parents of a 12-year-old filed a police complaint on February 10 alleging that the teacher had molested their child and 10 others for several months.

bottles of skin lotion at Suvarnabhumi Airport on February 13.

Narcotics Suppression Bureau (NSB) third division chief Maj General Wutthipong Phetkamnerd said yesterday that following a tip-off, Jenny Carmen del Nozio Acuna Pacheko, 55, had her luggage searched at the airport when she disembarked from a flight from Peru. Seven bottles of lotion laced with cocaine were found.

According to police, she confessed to smuggling the drugs and said she was to deliver them to a man she identified as Michael Shabanov, 31. Police arrested him later at a Bang Na hotel where he was waiting for her, Gen Wutthipong said.

Mixing cocaine with skin lotion was a new smuggling tactic and the drugs can be extracted later, Gen Wutthipong added.

Four Thai men were arrested on February 13 and 227,400 *ya bah* (methamphetamine) pills were seized in Nonthaburi's Muang district following a tip-off. Khomkrit Chanleuchai, 42, and Phusit Chaiburi-opas, 27, were arrested at a house where they allegedly kept illicit drugs smuggled from the North. Police later arrested Alongkorn Khongthana and Chulapong Saelee who showed up to allegedly collect the pills for distribution. Three other drug busts were reported at the same press conference.

Inquiry into hit-and-run incident forensics urged

THE Anti-Corruption Network Foundation on February 14 urged the national police chief to launch an inquiry into the two forensic police officers who inspected the evidence in the 2005 hit-and-run case that led to the arrest of former teacher Jomsap Saenmuangkhot.

Ms Jomsap has consistently maintained her innocence.

The inquiry into Lt Colonel Tossapol Thammawong and Pol Colonel Prathum Phrommee should be transparent and the results submitted to the Supreme Court via the Nakhon Phanom Provincial Court within 30 days, the group said.

Mongkolkit Suksintharon, vice chairman of the foundation's center that takes complaints about cases allegedly involving scapegoats, submitted the request to General Chakthip Chaijinda via deputy spokesman Colonel Kritsana Pattanacharoen at the Royal Thai Police headquarters in Bangkok.

Ms Jomsap was sentenced to three years and two months in jail for allegedly running over and killing an elderly bicyclist. She was granted a royal pardon in April 2015 after serving 18 months behind bars.

PM warns coal plant protestors

THE prime minister warned on February 14 that people planning to march to Bangkok on Friday to protest against the Krabi coal-fired power plant would be arrested.

After a Cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Gen Prayuth Chan-o-cha said he wanted to warn members of the group opposed to the plant to not stage a protest in the capital because it would be against the law and protestors would be arrested.

"I ask them not to go to Bangkok [to protest]. Such movements are forbidden and they will be arrested if they go ahead. If there is anything to be concerned about, please discuss it in your area," he said.

He added that the coal-fired power plant in Krabi was needed, which was why he had ordered the Energy Ministry to hold a meeting on Friday to determine the fate of the project.

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Take control of your life

Finance

By David Mayes

MANY times in life it can seem like things completely spiral out of your control, and this can leave us feeling helpless. I have seen this happen not only numerous times with decisions my clients have made, but have made the exact same mistakes in my own investments.

One mistake leads to another poor decision and in the end we are left almost paralyzed to make any more for fear of continuing to compound even more mistakes.

It doesn't need to be this way, however, and usually taking action, even if only re-reading the advice of experts that reinforces our decision to stay on course, can be a very empowering thing. In no area of our life is it more important to feel like we can have control over our destiny than in our financial lives. Education is the very best way to do this.

I have long advocated investors educating themselves and if you have read my column for any length of time you may have read some of my previous suggestions. After having read over 100 books on economics,



Sometimes you have to take the bull by the horns to take control of your life and not let things spiral out of control. Photo: tm Flickr

trading, and investing in my life, I had gotten to a point where anything I read was something rehashing the same old thing. However I recently read a book that absolutely blew me away and is one I would have probably never read to be honest. I only read it because it was given to me by a friend who works for Tony Robbins.

If you don't know who Tony

Robbins is, you may have been living in a bubble for the last 3-4 decades. He is the number one motivational speaker in the world and has advised everyone from President Bill Clinton to Oprah Winfrey. I have read his other books and absolutely loved them. However, when I saw the title "Money: Master the Game", I figured it was simply all about getting your own

psychology right so you can earn money. I doubted he had anything of value to add on the topic of investing.

Sometimes finding out you are dead wrong is an amazing surprise. The book is a wealth of information from the best of the best in the investing world. Because of who he is, Tony is able to interview people who normally require a 500 million USD minimum investment, such as Ray Bagio, who gener-

ously shares his own asset allocation model that any small investor can replicate with low cost index funds. Ray Bagio runs the world's largest hedge fund with US\$160 billion in assets under management. Tony also interviews John Bogle from Vanguard, Warren Buffet, David Swensen, Paul Tudor Jones, Sir John Templeton and many others who condense lifetimes of experience into one book.

I liked the book so much that I have decided to do a series of articles on some of the main points; however there is no substitute for reading the entire book. It can get a little technical in places but he always explains it in simple terms that anybody can understand. If there is one book that could mean the difference between running out of money when you are too old to re-enter the workforce and living out your golden years in luxury, this is it.

David Mayes, MBA, lives in Phuket and provides health, wealth, and life coaching to expatriates around the globe. He has been involved in financial markets for 15 years and specializes in tax efficiency and UK pension transfers. He can be reached at lifisamazingthailand@gmail.com

SIPA to give SMEs, OTOP digital facelift

THE Software Industry Promotion Agency (SIPA) plans to promote 4,000 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and One Tambon One Product (OTOP) entrepreneurs to utilize digital technology to support their businesses.

It will also provide a channel management systems (CMS) to help SMEs and OTOP entrepreneurs distribute their products online.

Chainarong Chatrattana-waree, business promotion measures manager at SIPA, said that the agency had develop Entrepreneur Total Digital Services to allow SMEs and OTOP entrepreneurs to utilize digital technology in terms of digital commerce, enterprise resource planning software (ERP) for SMEs, training and consultants to support their businesses. The agency will use CMS to support the 4,000 OTOP entrepreneurs and SMEs in 10 provinces, such



Utilizing technology to support businesses. Photo: Pixabay

as Chiang Mai and Khon Kaen.

CMS is a tool that allows SMEs and OTOP entrepreneurs to upload their products and services by themselves, and the sales information of products and services will automatically be shown via the e-marketplace platform.

As part of the CMS step, in March this year the agency will allow SMEs and OTOP entrepreneurs who the members of the Entrepreneur Total Digital

Services project to distribute their product via CMS and connect to three e-market platforms – AIS marketplace, www.tara.com and www.thaimall.net.

The project aims to create added value for SMEs and OTOP entrepreneurs so that they will be able to create competitiveness and opportunities for products and services.

The agency will develop "Thailand I Love U" to allow entrepreneurs to promote their

products and tourist destinations via the online channel and utilize software, such as accounting software, to manage their business operations in order to enhance their businesses.

Customers will also be able to utilize the "Thailand I Love U" application.

The agency will also develop a template website for SMEs and OTOP entrepreneurs to use to promote their products and services and connect with the "Thailand I Love U" application, which aims to create added value to those products and services.

"We develop tools and a digital platform to support and promote SMEs and OTOP entrepreneurs so that they can promote their products and services easier to the market and be able to create added value for their products and services," said Mr Chainarong.

– The Nation



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Phuket Gazette

Time to clean up Patong Bay

ALGAL blooms at Patong Beach are an embarrassment that needs to be treated as a high-priority issue by authorities.

The root cause of the problem, untreated wastewater, needs to be directly addressed by increased treatment capacity.

Growing water hyacinths along the banks of the brackish Klong Pakbang is not going to be the solution.

Officials need to carefully review the history of the Danish-funded bioremediation waste pond using Canna plants at the Patong wastewater plant, put in place after the tsunami, with the intent of curbing seaweed growth at that time.

As per Wikipedia, “water hyacinth is an aquatic plant native to the Amazon basin and is often considered a highly problematic invasive species outside its native range”.

This plant and other species are already a problem in many Thai waterways, where they are known to choke out native species, block navigable waterways and impede runoff drainage, thus adding to flooding woes – as if Patong doesn’t have enough problems in that regard already.

After the fast-growing plants die, they need to be physically removed, otherwise they will just float downstream into the bay and mingle with all the other biomass there.

The water quality problem in Patong Bay is one that can be rectified, but it requires an industrial approach – not gimmickry.

It is unacceptable for officials to simply pass off this brown stain on our reputation as a tourist destination by saying “it is still safe to swim” or “it will return to normal when the weather changes”.

Officials need to imagine just how disappointed first-time tourists must feel after being enticed to our shores with images of crystal clear seas, only to get to the beach and see that the water there more closely resembles a craft-beer brewing failure. Sadly, the appearance of algal blooms has now become an annual occurrence – one that strikes the island at the worst possible time: in the middle of our high season for tourism.

Let us not forget that Patong is Phuket’s most popular beach and, for better or worse, remains the poster child for an island that continues to sell itself as a tropical island paradise. We need to do better.



Loss of a marvelous human being

Re: *Phuket mourns death of Soi Dog co-founder, Feb 13*

Rest in the celestial choir dear lady. You have truly earned your wings and place at the feet of the greatest. A job few would aspire to, Gillian took the challenge and went above and beyond for animals that most would forget. She will be greeted by thousands of grateful companions who will accompany her on her walk through the next life. Thank you.

Megan Billington
Facebook

Phuket soi dogs and dog lovers are indebted to Gill Dalley who worked very hard over the years and will be sadly missed. Condolences to her family and the marvelously dedicated team.

Harry
Gazette forum

Back to being disorganized in no time

Re: *Patong parking complaints spark military blitz, Feb 13*

Give it a couple of days and all the parking slots by the beach will be full of bikes for rent again. Usually the ones ripping through red lights on the Kamala ‘raceway’ at 100kph with a shirtless, helmetless twonk on board.

Denver Owens
Facebook

Organized? What minute of the day was this? It’s been chaos all this week as normal. Tuk-tuks taking all one side of the street, so tightly packed that you can’t even cross the road

Letters to the Editor

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

to the beach. Then, when one does pull away, people try to use that space to cross the road and get abused by other tuk-tuk drivers who fight for the space.

Then the other side is just bikes for rent, vendors, and little scammers demanding money to park in a space that they do not own.

Simon
Gazette forum

Good intentions do not always win

Re: *Opinion: Drawing lines in the sand, Feb 12*

I believe the new governor’s heart is in the right place, and indeed he has tried to fix Laem Singh Beach, but as any governor who has ever worked in Phuket will tell you, there are ‘certain interests’ who cannot be stopped.

Roger Bishop
Gazette forum

Complaints should be anonymous

Re: *Breaking: Anti-Corruption agency, Phuket Gov lock horns over corruption, Feb 14*

“I have learned that corruption happens nationwide, but officers in Phuket do it without

any fear of consequences,” Dr Mana wrote in his post. 100% correct. We expats know it from first-hand experience. “...invited the public to file any evidence directly at Provincial Hall.” If it cannot be done anonymously, then I for one will never disclose what I know.

Chas
Gazette forum

Real criminals are the jet-ski renters

Re: *Australian jet-ski victim's partner awaits trial in Phuket, Feb 9*

The real criminals are the authorities who allow jet-ski thugs to continue operating uncontrolled.

They are the ones who should account for the death of this Aussie. Shame on you.

Vegasd8
Gazette forum

Outside lane closed, traffic in chaos

Re: *Phuket's Bypass Road ripped up for repairs, Feb 9*

The road surface has been dug up from the end of the underpass all the way up to and well beyond the U-turn.

The outside lane is closed and the traffic is in chaos. All this only weeks after the underpass was ‘finished’. What a joke!

CaptainJack
Gazette forum

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Market signals in the new year



By The Book
Kevin Hodges

LAST year, Thailand experienced a record number of tourist arrivals – 32.6 million (up 9 per cent year-on-year), generating 1.6 trillion baht in revenue (up 12.6 per cent year-on-year).

As we go further into 2017, occupancy rates for rental properties over the high season look good – albeit slightly lower than previous years – especially for pool villas, which seem to be like gold dust right now.

In some respects, 2016 was a tremulous year, both in Phuket and abroad. However, many seem to hold a positive view for the year ahead.

Thailand, while going through a period of transition, has once again proven itself to be resilient, with tourist arrivals at record highs, a stable currency and one of the best performing equity markets in 2016 (up 20 per cent year-on-year). With elections due in early 2018 and infrastructure improvements planned, the outlook is positive.



Thailand, including Phuket, experienced a record number of tourist arrivals in 2016. Photo: Gazette file

On a global scale, 2017 – under a Trump presidency and most likely populist policies – will improve the American economy. The US stock market clearly thinks so and a healthy US economy will be good for the global economy.

In Europe, we will see the UK enact article 50 and be the first nation to leave the Euro Zone. So far, none of the doomsday predictions have

come to fruition. There are some bright sparks in Europe, particularly the economies of the northern EU countries.

An improvement in both US and EU economies would be advantageous for the property market here.

Since reaching a peak in 2013-14, resale prices in Phuket have come down, in some cases by as much as 20 per cent. At some current lev-

els, buyers could not purchase land and build for the same cost as purchasing a property in the secondary/resale market here.

This, coupled with a reduction in the number of new developments in Phuket, has led to an increase in resale transactions.

Land prices still haven't come down in Phuket, as land owners tend to be willing to hold on longer for prices to re-

cover, rather than chase the market down.

However this trend cannot last forever – eventually the prices of resale properties will have to realign. As the global economy improves and people begin to see stability in Thailand, investors will return.

The current lack of new developments will push demand for resale property and thus prices. As already mentioned, rental occupancy has remained strong, proving that people cannot stay away from Thailand. When the global economy improves, we should expect an improvement in rental rates and tourist arrivals as well.

As the sayings go 'The time to buy is when there's blood in the streets' and 'You pay a very high price for a cheery consensus'. While there certainly isn't blood on the streets, by buying now you are likely to achieve attractive returns, that will no doubt become even more attractive in the coming years.

Kevin Hodges can be reached at Siam Real Estate Tel: 076-324042 Email: kevin@siamrealestate.com; www.siamrealestate.com

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The carnage in Phuket must stop



IT'S BEEN another gruesome few weeks on Phuket's waters with speedboat accidents and jet ski deaths. When does it stop?

Sadly, there's no magic pill I'm aware of. These problems have grown over time due to negligence by the relevant authorities in not doing their jobs or applying the laws that already exist. Phuket doesn't need new rules, it needs enforcement of what is there. And a backbone.

After a Google search, looking at some overseas case studies and talking to Phuket friends, I have come up with some simple ideas to help make Phuket's beaches and waters safer and better for all.

For any Phuket officials reading this, please keep on reading.

Jet Skis and Catamarans

"Create just one or two embarkation and disembarkation points along a beach. Two for the longer busier beaches, one for smaller beaches – and keep some beaches clear of all such services. Tourists that wish to use such devices go to the designated locations, board and return there. All renters are based at those locations and cannot move up and down the beach courting custom.

"This method is used very



It would be a good idea to have one or two embarkation and disembarkation points. Photo: Gazette file

well in Boracay, Philippines – a beach destination that welcomes approximately 1.5 million visitors per year.

Beach Chairs and Umbrellas

Limited numbers on all the main popular tourist beaches should be allowed, while some lesser used beaches should remain 'virgin'. Tourists can then choose which beach they wish to visit.

The beach chairs and umbrellas should be rented out by approved personnel. These people should be salaried and all rental income should go to a beach management authority (more on that later).

Lifeguards

This is an essential service on every beach. These should be appointed, managed and paid for by the above-mentioned beach management authority. The current suggestion that the budget will be reduced is very shortsighted. Phuket can find billions to build a tram service, yet appears unwilling to fund a 22mn-baht-a-year lifeguard service that is essential to the safety of all beachgoers.

Cleanliness

All beaches must be kept clean, 24/7/365. This will not happen by itself. Beach clean-ups en-

gaging with local businesses will help, as will paid-for beach patrols. Public toilets on all beaches are a basic necessity, not a luxury. All untreated pollution released into the sea must stop immediately and penalties for offenders need to be serious. Warnings don't work. Thousands of baht are not a deterrent to businesses. Penalties in the millions of baht would be more effective, as would jail time for serial offenders.

Beach Management Authority

One single beach management authority for the entire island of Phuket that has the power (and desire) to enforce all re-

lated rules is essential to managing Phuket's top asset – its beaches. This authority should not be a committee and should not include any of the current stakeholders or government officials. It must be made up of new personnel and be 100 per cent independent of all island officialdom.

How is this authority funded? All beach chair and umbrella rental fees go to the beach management authority. Licences are issued to jet-ski/ parasail/ beach catamaran operators for a fee, and these fees go direct to the beach management authority. Penalties and fines from polluters or beach operators go directly to the beach management authority. It is highly likely the beach management authority can be self-funded.

These are just a few suggestions. They're not all mine – these ideas have come about from observation and listening, something Phuket's authorities would do well to try. They are not exhaustive either. More needs to be done, but a sensible and effective start is needed – Rome wasn't built in a day and Phuket's decades of negligence cannot be fixed in a day either.

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

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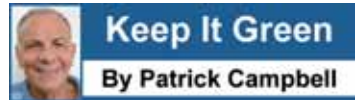
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Monitor lizards celebrated Valentines Day by professing their love openly in Koh Lanta. The two, who asked to remain nameless, were found hugging each other in a pond. Locals and tourists gathered around to take a peek, as it was surely a sight to see. The lizards, however, didn't care or panic and spent about 20 minutes posing for the cameras. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

Local initiative to clean up your act



IN ONE of his last essays, “Civilization and Its Discontents”, Sigmund Freud, one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century, argued that mankind had a ‘death wish’, a willed capacity for self-destruction. “Civilization’s aim was,” he said, “to combine single human individuals, families, then races, peoples and nations into one great unity, the unity of mankind”. But he added, “man’s natural aggressive instinct, the hostility of each against all, and all against each, opposes this program of civilization.”

Now, nearly ninety years on, it seems a particularly prescient observation. Of course Freud was thinking principally of mankind’s insatiable appetite for war, all too aware, in 1930’s Germany, that Hitler was cranking up his military machine. However, were he alive today, Freud would surely be aware that, despite the killing fields of war, the threat to our natural environment posed by man’s selfishness and greed, is a far more serious long-term problem, something that endangers the very existence of our planet.



Phi Phi discharges 93 per cent of its wastewater straight into the sea. Photo: Fabio Achilli

Anyone who cares about our natural heritage knows the key areas of concern. Headed by climate change, they include rising sea levels and ocean warming; atmospheric and water pollution; over-fishing; deforestation and loss of wildlife habitat; poaching; field and forest burning; solid waste and waterborne pollution.

The year 2016 was not only the hottest on record, but it was also characterized by extreme weather events: flash floods, cyclones, landslides,

droughts and inundations. It is estimated that the world needs to invest one trillion pounds every year in clean energy (the clean trillion) to enable us to move away from the high carbon fossil fuels that, more than any other single factor, are creating global warming.

Is Phuket especially at risk? Yes, it is. And for three related reasons. One, because of its dramatic economic growth, its infrastructure has significantly failed to keep pace, resulting, inter alia, in

unacceptable levels of pollution; two, because it is an island, its encircling seas – more sensitive to contamination and climate change than land masses – are key to its well-being; three, because as a tropical environment, its ecosystems are being decimated by global warming – coral reefs for example – far faster than anticipated. Tropical systems are inevitably more at risk, if only because they have evolved within narrow temperature ranges.

It is therefore always grati-

fying to hear of local initiatives – any initiatives – which address these concerns. Vice-Governor, Teera Anantaseriwidhya, addressing Phuket’s ‘Trash and Wastewater Committee’, has recently issued an order to local authorities, demanding that they clean up streets and dump sites on the island. Not before time. And while words in Phuket generally speak louder than actions, it is to be hoped that his warning “that these issues are serious and must be addressed urgently” will be heeded. In particular, the committee “must take more effective action about all forms of waste disposal on the island.”

They could start with Ko Phi Phi, which, despite its massive income from tourism, discharges 93 percent of its wastewater straight into the sea. Or, more modestly, with my neck of the woods in Saiyuan, which, because of pot-holed dirt tracks that pass as roads, has become a haven for fly-tippers and garbage dumpers.

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



Last Friday, children from Gecko School, Thalang, joined forces with the staff of Phuket Marriott Resort and Spa, Nai Yang, to clean Nai Yang Beach. Afterwards, the kids enjoyed snacks and drinks provided by the Marriott. Photo: Maciek Klimowicz



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An irreparable loss for Phuket

By Phuket Gazette

GILL Dalley, a prominent member of the Phuket community and co-founder of the Soi Dog Foundation, passed away in Phuket last week at the age of 58 after a short battle with cancer.

She was the inaugural winner of the 'Canine Hero of the year' award at the 2011 Animals for Asia conference in Chengdu, China, and the first non-Asian by birth to be named 'Asian of the year' by Channel News Asia, Singapore, in their annual awards.

"It is with deepest sadness that we announce the passing of Soi Dog co-founder Gill Dalley, after a short battle with illness. Out of respect for the family's privacy, no further statement will be made at this time, although more information will be available in due course," the foundation announced on its Facebook page.

The Network for Animal Protection (NetAP) expressed their condolences at Gill's passing.

"Deeply shocked, we take note of the death of Gill Dalley,

co-founder of our long-time partner, the Soi Dog Foundation'. We can't find any words, only sadness. Gill, we will never forget you," they announced.

Gill and her husband John retired to Phuket in 2003, from Yorkshire, UK. The couple were determined to do something about the stray dog and cat problem they had witnessed previously on holidays. They teamed up with Margot Homburg, a Dutch retiree who had registered Soi Dog Foundation as a Dutch set up the year before and had been sterilizing dogs in her home city of Bangkok, before moving to Phuket.

Working together as dog catchers and nurses, the three of them ran mobile clinics, utilizing volunteer vets from overseas, mainly at their own expense. A year later, Gill, who had been weakened by a broken rib, darted a dog which ran into a flooded former rice paddy. In retrieving the dog she unknowingly became infected by a rare soil borne bacteria. She developed septicemia a few days later and was given a 10

per cent chance of survival.

Gill survived, but lost both her lower legs and suffered damage to her arms. In December 2004, she discharged herself from hospital determined she would be home by Christmas. Three days later, the tsunami struck, killing her best friend and volunteer Leone Cosens. Gill, still wheelchair-bound, initially counseled survivors and relatives of victims before commencing to work at mobile clinics throughout the area.

With Margot forced to take early retirement through ill health, Gill became the driving force in expanding the work of Soi Dog Foundation, including the establishing of its first shelter. While her husband John focused on the illegal Thai dog meat trade, it was Gill who took the lead in expanding Soi Dog's sterilization program, preventing thousands of unwanted puppies and kittens being born with no future, and at the same time fulfilling Leone's dream to establish a shelter for dogs that had been victims of cruelty and abuse, and discarded puppies

too young to fend for themselves.

Over the past three years she designed and oversaw the building of the largest hospital entirely dedicated to street dogs in Asia, and a shelter facility that is probably unmatched anywhere in the world. A perfectionist by nature, everything had to be right, even to the types of screws used to attach fittings. Every building at the shelter including a cat hospital was designed by Gill, determined to provide the best possible care for those dogs and cats that had nowhere else to turn.

Today, the Soi Dog Foundation is the largest one in Asia working with stray dogs and cats. Employing nearly 200 staff, it is reg-

istered in seven countries and aims to achieve 100,000 sterilizations per year, and to end the Asian dog meat industry.



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