

Phuket Gazette

February 25 - March 3, 2017

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‘SHE HAS TO STAY IN THAILAND UNTIL HER CASE IS PROCESSED’

FEEDING FRENZY

Russian tourist jailed, detained in Phuket for ‘feeding fish’ at Koh Racha

By Kongleaphy Keam

A RUSSIAN tourist spent two nights in jail for feeding fish at Koh Racha before paying 100,000 baht bail to be released from a holding cell at Phuket Provincial Court on February 21.

Her passport has been held by the court and she is not permitted to leave the country until after her case is tried. Her initial hearing is not until March 6.

Olga Smirnova, 53, was arrested by Marine and Coastal Resources Department (DMCR) officers at Koh Racha Yai on February 19 and was later taken to Chalong Police Station where she was charged with “feeding fish in a forbidden area or in an area with coral reef”, the maximum punishment for which is a year in prison, a 100,000-baht fine, or both.

Police were unable to provide the name of the tour operator, but said that Ms Smirnova purchased the tour in Patong and maintained that her tour guide did not inform her of the rules regarding feeding fish.

Officials said they allowed for Ms Smirnova to be released on bail the same day that she was arrested.

“She could not raise the required amount of 100,000 baht (approx US\$3,000), so she had to stay in the holding cell at the police station for two nights,” Lt Sakarin Sangjaroen of Chalong Police admitted to the *Gazette*.

“As per Thai law, a suspect can stay in a police station holding cell for a maximum of 48 hours. After that we have to send them to court jail, which we did,” he added.

Ms Smirnova was bailed out by her friend who paid the money on her behalf.

“At this stage, we are waiting for the results of a ‘criminal background’ check before submitting the case to the prosecutor. We cannot say exactly how long that will be. Generally, the process takes about



Under Article 17, DMCR officers may detain tourists for standing on coral; touching, collecting or feeding marine animals; and polluting the environment. Photo: Gazette file

a month,” said Lt Sakarin.

Last month, a Chinese tourist was also arrested and jailed for catching and keeping two fish at a beach on Racha Island. The arrest was made after locals reported the man collecting live fish in a water bottle at Plub Pla Beach, the same beach Ms Smirnova was arrested at.

The punishment was levied as per Article 17, which gives DMCR officers enhanced power and allows for the establishment of any regulations in an area deemed under threat of environmental degradation.

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

Under that act, officers could not arrest people for harming any marine life other than coral. The punishment was a fine of

up to 40,000 baht, up to four years in prison, or both.

However, under Article 17, DMCR officers may now detain tourists for harming any marine life, not just coral.

Last month, the DMCR issued a ‘last warning’ to all tourists visiting the island. Signs explaining what constitutes illegal behavior were also set up at Ao Patok, Ao Siam and Ao Tue, in Thai, English, Russian and Chinese.

“All tour guides must first bring visitors to a central meeting point, where they will undergo an ‘orientation’ and be informed about these laws and guidelines,” said Suchat Rattanaruengsri, Region 6 head of the DMCR.

The rules prohibit boats from dropping anchor when parked at Racha Yai Island, and visitors from standing on coral; touching, collecting or feeding marine animals (including coral); and polluting the environment.

Activists now await Krabi coal plant ‘backdown’

MASS rallies were held in Krabi after the PM approved a hotly-debated coal-fired power plant. The government has now ordered for a new Environment and Health Impact Assessment study, which activists are now awaiting.

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BUSINESS



Factors that investors must watch out for when building a portfolio this year.

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PROPERTY



Beware of unethical agents and part with your deposit carefully.

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LIFE&STYLE



The numerous and unique health benefits of Apple Cider vinegar make it one of nature’s ‘super foods’.

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LOCAL NEWS

Briefly

German jumper survives 9th floor fall

A GERMAN tourist survived a jump off a 9th floor hotel roof in Phuket on February 20 and smashed through the roof of a cafe below.

“Bernhard Scharl was lying on the ground of a local noodle house on Soi Sansabai in Patong at about 5:30pm. There was a large hole in the ceiling right above him, which he had fallen through,” said Lt Col Weerapong Rakhito of Patong Police.

Mr Scharl’s left arm was broken and he sustained several other injuries in the fall.

“According to staff at the hotel, Mr Scharl loves drinking and has done so almost every day since he checked into the hotel with a Thai woman on February 12,” said Col Weerapong.

Police found a letter in his room with contact details of his sister “to foot the bill”.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Woman set on fire by abusive ex-husband

A WOMAN sustained burns to 30 per cent of her body after her ex-husband allegedly hit her, emptied a bottle of lighter fluid over her body and then set her on fire on February 20.

Rungruedee Sithibut, 43, is employed as a cleaner at the Thepkrasattri Municipality Kindergarten. Her ex-husband came by and the two reportedly had an argument before he set her on fire and fled.

Ms Rungruedee was taken to Thalang Hospital for treatment.

“We are hunting for the suspect and hope to apprehend him soon,” said Capt Kraisor Boonprasob of Thalang Police.

– *Winai Sarot*

Wall collapses on Rawai expat

A PORTUGUESE man was injured after a wall collapsed in his house in Rawai on February 19.

Rescue workers arrived at

Diversions placed for collapsed Rawai bridge



The bridge on the road around the Nai Harn lake in the area of Naiharn Beach collapsed earlier this week. It is now under construction, with the budget of 1.3 million baht, by Rawai Municipality. The project is expected to be completed in 2-3 months. During this time, authorities have asked commuters to use the diversion instead, signs for which were placed at the site in English and in Thai. Photo: Rawai Municipality

the scene to find the 3.5-meter-high wall broken into pieces on the floor.

“We found Abel Eduardo sitting nearby with a bloody four-inch wound on his right leg. We administered first aid before taking him to Dibuk Hospital,” said Panupong Na Takuatung of Rawai Rescue.

Rescue workers believe that constant hammering to fix another part of the house, or shoddy construction, may have been the cause of the incident.

– *Winai Sarot*

Messy Kata wiring causes fire, blackout

A TRANSFORMER exploded after a jumble of electric wires sparked on February 19 in Kata, causing thick, black clouds of smoke and hours of blackout in the area.

The incident occurred near the heavily trafficked Kata Beach Resort junction. Crowds of tourists and locals gathered at the scene, watching the sparks and flames in shock.

Residents nearby used fire extinguishers to help put out the flames and prevent them from spreading to their homes.

Karon Municipality rescue workers and fire-fighters arrived at the scene and spent about 20 minutes battling the flames.

“Luckily, no one was injured. We believe the sparks started because of the messy wires,” said Supachai Janpet, head of the Karon Municipality rescue team.

– *Winai Sarot*

Sleepy taxi driver crashes in Thalang

A TAXI driver was injured after he fell asleep at the wheel and crashed into a concrete pillar in Thalang on February 20.

“The collision occurred on the northbound Thepkrasattri Road near Muang Thalang School at about 4am. The Toyota was pretty banged up at the front,” said Lt Sunan Petnhu of Thalang Police.

Tourists Ruan Huiqiang and Ying Leyan, both 23 years old, were bruised and shaken, while the driver, Thornpon Seewan, 32, sustained injuries on his head and chest. The trio was taken to Thalang Hospital.

“Mr Thornpon told us that he had picked up the tourists from Patong and was heading

to Phuket International Airport. He said that since it was early in the morning, he fell asleep and lost control of his taxi,” said Lt Sunan.

The driver was charged with reckless driving causing injuries and property damage and will be taken to the Thalang Police Station after his recovery.

– *Winai Sarot*

B200K worth of ya bah seized

A MAN was arrested with about 200,000 baht’s worth of *ya bah* (methamphetamine) pills while trying to enter Phuket on February 19.

“We caught him at the Tah Chat Chai checkpoint just as he had arrived in Phuket from Narathiwat,” said Lt Col Thawat Tansakun of Tah Chat Chai Police.

The suspect, Apisee Ya, 26, had nearly 1,400 pills in his possession. He confessed to and was charged with possession of a category 1 drug with intent to sell.

“The drugs were uncovered during a random check – we are closely monitoring all buses and vehicles entering Phuket.

We will question him further to broaden our knowledge about the drug network he is a part of,” said Col Thawat.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

‘Foot waving’ foreigner criticized

A FOREIGNER who stuck his foot out the window of a passenger van has received a lot of criticism on social media after pictures of the incident were posted online.

The pictures were taken two weeks ago by a Facebook user, who wished to remain anonymous, driving behind the van on Thepkrasattri Road near the Bang Kho junction in Koh Kaew. He says he passed the van later and saw that it was a foreign passenger.

While some made light of the incident by saying it was a funny new way of greeting invented by foreigners, others said they understood that people came to Thailand to relax and enjoy themselves, but that this kind of behavior was inappropriate and dangerous.

The Facebook user said that the purpose of posting the pictures was not to shame anybody, but just to let others know how they are expected to behave in Thailand, and that foreigners should consider whether or not they would do something like that in their home country.

The user also said that tour companies, guides and transport operators should inform tourists about refraining from unacceptable behavior that hurts the image of Phuket as a tourist destination.

– *Winai Sarot*

Tourists rescued after boat crash

FORTY four Italian and French tourists were rescued on February 16 after a speedboat crashed into an underwater concrete pole near Rassada.

The boat left the Gypsy Pier behind the Westin Siray Bay resort in Rassada at about 10am. The crash occurred less than five minutes into the journey. A passing tourist boat helped rescue everyone on board.

“We have yet to learn why the concrete structure is there,” said Phuket Marine Office chief Surat Sirisaiyas.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Protestors await official order on coal plant EHIA

THE National Energy Policy Committee (NEPC) has resolved to continue the construction of a controversial 870-megawatt Krabi coal-fired power plant, Prime Minister Gen Prayuth Chan-o-cha announced on February 17. The decision was made by the committee during a meeting at the Government House, amid an uproar about the value of the plant and Thailand's future energy policy.

Large crowds of protesters gathered outside Government House in Krabi awaiting the decision on the plant, which has drawn much resistance from locals and environmental activists over the years.

"This is totally against the government's own initiative of 'Krabi Go Clean'. We don't mind a power plant, just not a coal plant that will ruin the environment and drive tourists away," said Amarit Siripornjuthakun, head of the Krabi Tourism Council of Thailand.

"It will affect tourism for sure. Tourists come to Krabi to breathe fresh air and see unspoiled natural beauty – not to breathe in black smoke and ruin their health. Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand representatives said they will help those who live within a five-kilometer radius, but what



Protestors outside the Government House. Photo: The Nation

about the rest of us?" Mr Amarit added.

The location of the plant is reportedly part of the wetlands protected under the Ramsar Convention, an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable utilization of wetlands, and was marked out as a protected zone in 2001.

Police cracked down on the protest outside the Government House on February 18, arresting 16 protesters including three leaders of the demonstration. Legal experts condemned the move, saying it was a severe violation of the protesters' rights and demanded that they be released immediately. Officials said they were acting with authority under the absolute power

of Article 44 in the interim charter. As at press time, five of them were released.

On February 20, the government seemingly accepted demands from protesters and ordered that the Environmental and Health Impact Assessment (EHIA) of the Krabi coal-fired power plant be restarted from the beginning. A clear instruction and official order on the EHIA study was expected to be issued by the government after the Cabinet meeting on February 21. However, while the prime minister addressed guidelines and a preferred timetable of at least one year for the revisited EHIA study, the Cabinet did not issue a written order.

– The Nation

B16mn 'red light' traffic cams installed in Phuket



Gov Chokchai with officials at the meeting. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

FIVE new high-tech 'red light cameras' were launched on February 16 in response to Phuket's recognition as one of the five most dangerous provinces for road travel in Thailand.

"These cameras can help catch those who are speeding, not wearing helmets or running red lights. A computer then automatically prints a penalty notice, which will be sent to the driver's house," said Governor Chokchai Dejjarmornthan.

"The main purpose of this is to change bad driving behavior in Phuket and scare people into obeying traffic laws," he added.

Governor Chokchai met with Phuket Provincial Police Commander Teeraphol Thipjaroen and Deputy Chair of the 'Thai Road Safety Network (TRSN)' Dr Wiwat Seetamanotch at Phuket Provincial Police Station to discuss details of the project. Gov Chokchai confirmed that the budget for the

project is 16 million baht.

Cameras have been placed at the Khao Lan junction on Thepkrasattri Road; the Chao Fah West and Kwang Road junction; the See Kor (Kathu-Patong Road) junction; the Kamala junction; and the Komaraphat Road junction in Phuket Town.

"The reason for choosing these five spots is that a lot of traffic violations have been reported there over the years. Last year, Khao Lan junction recorded 43 accidents, 2 deaths and 23 injuries. See Kor junction saw 28 accidents, 1 death and 33 injuries, and the Chao Fah West-Kwang Road junction saw 51 accidents and 46 injuries," said Gov Chokchai.

According to statistics by the SRF, Thailand has the second-highest number of road accidents and deaths in the world, with one accident or casualty every 40 minutes.

– Kritsada Mueanhawong

British big bike rider kills elderly local man



The owner of the big bike sustained minor injuries. Photo: Winai Sarot

A THAI man was killed after a British man crashed into him in Thalang on February 20.

Chawalit Sritha, 69, was riding a Honda Wave and collided with Adam Howard's Yamaha big bike.

"Mr Chawalit was critically injured and taken to Thalang Hospital where he was later pronounced dead. Mr Howard was treated for minor injuries,"

said Capt Kraisorn Boonprasob of Thalang Police.

The Yamaha broke into two pieces. The Honda was damaged at the rear end.

"Witnesses said that Mr Chawalit was riding out from the soi and had almost crossed the road when the speeding Yamaha came in and crashed into his bike," said Capt Kraisorn.

– Winai Sarot



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High profile figures offer to provide bail

HIGH-profile figures have come forward to provide bail for Jatupat Boonpataraksa, a student activist who has been detained since December 22 for sharing on his Facebook account a BBC Thai article deemed insulting to the Monarchy.

The non-profit 'Thai Lawyers for Human Rights Center' on February 22 filed a petition with the Khon Kaen provincial court to seek bail for Mr Jatupat.

According to Jatupat's lawyer Krisadang Nucharat, the petition reasoned that the investigation into the case is complete, with the police already forwarding it to prosecutors.

The 25-year-old activist is a law student at Khon Kaen University and should be given the chance to continue his studies, Mr Krisadang said.

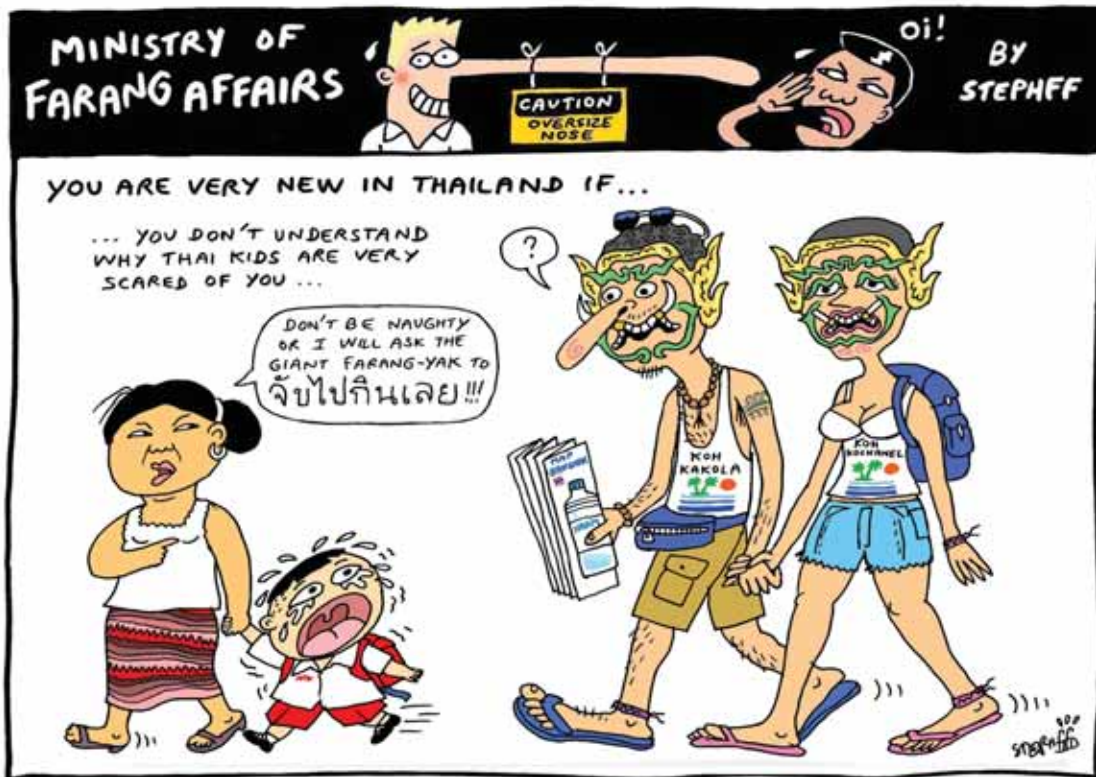
Philosopher and activist Sulak Sivaraksa also joined with Jatupat's father Viboon Boonpataraksa to contribute bail.

Article 44 asked to be revoked

THE THAI Lawyers for Human Rights Centre (TLHRC) has called on the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) to revoke the Article 44 order against the Pathum Thani-based Dhammakaya Temple and to use normal judicial procedures instead.

The TLHRC said in a statement that the use of the Article 44 order might lead to human rights violations.

The order authorizes officers to take actions beyond their usual duties in line with normal judicial procedures, such as seizing an area, controlling infrastructure, searching premises, vehicles and persons as well as dismantling structures or barriers.



These actions could affect the rights and liberty of at least 6,000 people within the compound, many of whom have not been accused of any wrongdoing nor are the subjects of arrest warrants.

The lawyers said the order was also against the rule of law, as it specifically applied only to the temple, and it might also be against other international treaties that Thailand has ratified.

New format set for police reshuffle

AN IMPENDING reshuffle of the police will focus on decentralizing the administration of the Royal Thai Police (RTP), a high-ranking police source said on February 20. The changes follow the order by Prime Minister General Prayuth Chan-ocha, as chief of the National Council for Peace and Order, under Article 44 of the interim charter that was published in the *Royal Gazette*.

Police positions of the level of deputy commander and below will be reshuffled, the source said, but the planned adjustments

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

are not much different from the previous format although there will be clearer steps.

As per the National Police Act 2004, each division's commander was required to submit a list of candidates for promotion for the national police chief's consideration before the candidates are screened by a board for appointment.

PM Prayuth invoked sweeping powers based on Article 44 to issue an order on April 26, 2016 amending the act authorizing national police to appoint officers directly. The amendment was made after the 2015 appointment of deputy superintendents and inspectors was delayed until last year.

Under the new format, each command chief will set up a committee comprising deputy commanders to screen candidates. The names compiled by the panel will then be forwarded to the national police chief, who will chair a board also comprising deputy national police chiefs to consider appointments.

Secretaries cut in media pro council

THE National Reform Steering Assembly's (NRSA) media reform committee has agreed to cut the number of permanent secretaries that will sit on the

media professional council from four to two after protests from news outlets.

The permanent secretaries on the council will come from just the Culture Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office. The two vacant seats will be filled by representatives from independent agencies – the National Human Rights Commission and the Consumer Protection Board.

Media outlets, however, remained unsatisfied with the changes.

Thepchai Yong, president of the Confederation of Thai Journalists, said on February 21 that regardless of the number of state officials on the council, the intention remained clear – the new body was an attempt to control the media.

"These mechanisms are unprecedented," the veteran journalist said. "Plus, once the council has such authority, interest groups will come about and intervene."

The permanent secretaries that would sit on the panel were usually appointed by politicians, Thepchai noted. "And not all 'media representatives' could be trusted, because anyone could establish an organization and send representatives to sit on the council," he said.

Mr Thepchai said the law should be reviewed because it was not in line with the government's promise to return the country to democracy. So, the media would continue to oppose the regulatory bill, he said.

"We will meet with the National Legislative Assembly and the government," Mr Thepchai said. "We will put more effort [to oppose this] because this could have great impact."

Green skytrain plans move one step closer

THE State Enterprise Policy Committee on February 20 approved the first batch of rail-transport system installations for BTS Skytrain Green Line's two extended routes.

The batch is worth 23 billion baht and due to open in 2020.

Firstly, the route will be extended to the North from Mo Chit to Kukot via Saphan Mai and then will be extended South from Bearing to Samut Prakan.

The total budget for the project is 84.52bn baht.

The committee, chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak, instructed The Krungthep Thanakom Co Ltd, a state enterprise under the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, to conduct the process of finding an operator for the two extended routes, said BMA Governor Pol General Aswin Kwanmuang.

The operator will not bear the cost until the BMA is able to pay back the company, starting from 2029, he said.

Previously, the Bangkok Metropolitan Council decided to not approve BMA's proposal asking for a budget for asset transfer of the Green Line's extensions from Mass Rapid Transit Authority.

Laos agrees to help in nabbing lese majeste suspects

ARMY Chief Gen Chalermchai Sittisart said Laos has agreed to consider Thailand's proposal to help tackle Thai criminals including anti-monarchy dissidents in its territory.

The Army Chief returned from his two-day official visit to Laos to meet high ranking security officials there.

Gen Chalermchai said he had expressed concerns over the moves against Thailand in Laos and asked the counterpart to help Thailand in the matter.

The army chief said he did not discuss with his counterpart about extradition. But the security bodies were responsible for that and were currently working on it, he said.

The army chief with other high-ranked officers paid an official visit to Laos during February 20 and 21.

Key areas investors must watch



Finance

By Don Freeman

TRUMP has been in office less than a month and already some of his most strident critics are acting as if it's the end of the world. However, what investors need to remember is the fact that Trump faces an extremely hostile national/Washington DC press along with plenty of opposition from within his own government (such as Federal bureaucrats fearful of any effort to 'drain the swamp') and even within his own party (the so-called 'establishment Republicans' still bitter over their defeat in the primaries).

While there are plenty of distractions being created by both Trump and his opponents, these are the three key areas that investors need to keep a firm eye on for this year:

1. Tax Reform: Earlier this month, Trump announced that he would be releasing his 'phenomenal' tax plan in the next few weeks. That news sent the S&P, Dow and Nasdaq to record highs and triggered a broad-based dollar rally. Keep in mind that any kind of large scale tax reform will be difficult to pass when there are so many entrenched special interests. However, the markets will remain happy – so long as they



The decision on Obamacare is one of the major factors for investors to watch out for. Photo: NY

see progress on any tax reform plans being made.

2. Obamacare: So far, the only real move by the Trump administration against Obamacare has been to scrub positive language about it on the HealthCare.gov website and to issue an executive order to 'minimize the financial burden' of it on insurers and healthcare providers. Keep in mind that long-time Obamacare foe Tom Price, a Republican Congressman who's an orthopedist by training, has only just been sworn in as the new secretary of HHS. Price could decide to keep the law on life support by altering the benefits

required to be provided by insurers or he could just pretty much blow up the whole thing by altering enforcement of the individual mandate. Beyond such tinkering, repealing and/or replacing, it won't happen overnight – especially with health care accounting for as much as one-fifth of the US's economy and disagreement or uncertainty among Congressional Republicans over what to do about the law.

3. Immigration: Trump's travel ban on travellers from seven majority-Muslim countries is more or less a distraction or a proxy fight as the real fight will be over other more dra-

matic immigration policy changes. In Silicon Valley, an estimated one-third of the workforce is foreign-born with tech companies keeping a wary eye on any effort to restrict H-1B visas (a move that would be widely popular with American workers) or immigration in general. However, most big tech companies have a presence overseas where work can easily be shifted to and there are already reports that cities like Vancouver are trying to capitalize on the uncertainty surrounding any future immigration changes.

We may not know for certain what Trump's tax reform or

Obamacare plans will ultimately be; but if they are well received by business and investors alike, stocks will definitely move higher. Likewise, immigration is an emotional hot button issue; but one that ultimately has little impact on the top or bottom lines of most stocks when compared to tax reform and fixing or repealing Obamacare.

My job for my clients is to make money over time and this requires me to ignore politics and focus 100 percent of my attention on the price action of our stocks and funds regardless of what the new president is tweeting.

It is important to stay invested in the leading sectors and stocks until the trend changes. The leadership stocks and sectors currently are in technology (software, semiconductors), industrials and steel; even emerging market countries such as Thailand and Russia look good.

Don Freeman, the President of Freeman Capital Management, is a fee-only Phuket-based registered Investment Advisor with the US Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) who has over 15 years of experience providing personal financial planning and wealth management advice with an emphasis on investing in low-cost ETFs to both working and retired expatriates.

Women top tourism target

THAILAND needs more female tourists – particularly from Japan and India – as they usually spend more than male travellers, according to Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul, the Minister of Tourism and Sports.

"Currently, female Japanese tourists represent 30 per cent of total arrivals. We should increase the portion to half, or more than 600,000 in the future," Ms Kobkarn said.

India is becoming an emergent source market for female travellers.

"In general, female travellers spend over 15 per cent more than males do. If we can secure more female tourists it would help drive [our] entire tourism," Ms Kobkarn added.

The rise of female tourists is seen as partly attribute to greater opportunities for women in general.

"Women's economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to strengthening

women's rights and enabling women to have control over their lives and exert influence in society. It is about creating just and equitable societies," Ms Kobkarn said.

She said women often face discrimination, with some experiencing exclusion because of factors such as ethnicity or caste and that tourism and sports would help empower women tourists around the world.

The roles of women in Thailand's national development have not yet been fully established. Factors that affect women's participation in the socio-economic field include inadequate gender awareness in the policy and planning process, social stereotyping, structural barriers, cultural impediments, lower educational attainment, lower socio-economic status, and power sharing issues with the opposite sex.

– The Nation

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Rethinking power

RECENT protests against construction of the proposed coal burning electricity generating plant in Krabi is a classic case of the NIMBY ('Not In My Back Yard') phenomenon, and one which is also seriously testing the government's resolve over the public's right to protest.

It is difficult to believe that the year is 2017 and we are still burning coal, which conjures up bleak images of sooty, impoverished child laborers from the time of the industrial revolution.

Yet three centuries – and a great deal of global warming and several nuclear meltdowns later – we are still relying on coal for our power needs.

Proponents point out that coal is still a relatively cheap and efficient source of fuel and that considerable progress has been made in reducing its environmental impacts, especially air and water pollution. Unfortunately, the so-called 'clean coal' we have all heard so much about is still a long way down the road and only reduces, but does not eliminate toxic emissions.

Coal burning generates more pollution than any other standard fuel source and is a huge contributor to global warming by pumping enormous amounts of not only carbon dioxide, but also the worst of all greenhouse gasses, methane, into the air.

Residents of Nua Khlong in Krabi, the proposed site of the plant, cannot be blamed for mobilizing and protesting against such a facility in their area.

It might be a bit of a stretch to argue that Krabi's 'pristine' natural environment would be threatened by such a plant when, in fact, most of the province has been in a state of degradation for decades as a result of unsustainable development associated with the tourism industry boom, as well as the vast rubber and palm oil plantations that actually make up most of the rural landscape in the South.

The government has agreed to review the project's environmental impact report, but maintains that the project will eventually become a reality in some form.

The government needs to rethink its devotion to such a filthy and outdated technology and seriously push for more alternative sources of power, such as producing bio-gas from left over biomass from palm and rubber plantations.



Officials need to reprioritize

Re: Russian arrested, may face prison term for feeding fish, Feb 20

100k bail and up to 40k fine for feeding fish but plough your taxi into a motorbike and get done 400 baht – someone's priorities are seriously wrong!

*Mister Ree
Gazette forum*

Phuket's beaches in state of decline

Duncan Worthington's article is spot-on.

Some of the best beaches in the world are in inexorable decline because of the authorities' refusal to forge the simplest of solutions.

I was at Nai Harn Beach recently. The sea is no longer consistently limpid and clear. Partly because of unregulated waste discharge, but also because there is no public toilet. Let alone a shower. Hundreds of bathers, most using the sea as a public convenience. Down the road is an elaborate outdoor gym which hardly anyone uses.

*Rattled in Rawai
Letter to the editor*

Quite easy to clean up Phuket beaches

Re: Opinion: Time to clean up Phuket's beaches, Feb 19

It is quiet easy; the beaches are already cleaned of the tourists the government chased to neighboring countries, so treatment of wastewater is not a priority anymore. At the Layan

Letters to the Editor

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

Beach end of the national park, the turds from the project on top and probably the hotels there are lying on the beach at low tide and smelling disgusting. I am a foreigner and after 12 years here still don't understand why the government cannot set, or even recognize, the priorities.

*Eric
Gazette forum*

Hope he is punished appropriately

Re: Phuket woman set on fire, ex-husband wanted by police, Feb 20

What a little coward that man must be! I hope he gets punishment commensurate with the pain and permanent damage he has inflicted on her.

*Bob Sullivan
Gazette forum*

Locals need to stop being ignorant

Re: Photos of foot waving for-foreigner criticized in Phuket, Feb 18

'Stories' like this only show foreigners just how ignorant local people can be. "...consider whether they would do that in their home country"? Well of course they would, and do; in the

rest of the world, these things are normal. Only in Thailand are feet somehow 'dangerous', but riding motorbikes with no helmets and talking on the phone while on the wrong side of the road.... well, that's just fine. Priorities anyone?

*CaptainJack
Gazette forum*

Conditions ripe for another disaster

Re: Speeding British biker kills Phuket local, Feb 21

Only a matter of time before it happens in Kamala. Tourists on noisy rentals speeding between the lights. Lighting at night is poor, policing non-existent, someone is going to end up dead or very seriously injured. I hope this British rider's extensive holiday insurance is going to help the family of the man he killed.

*Denver Owens
Facebook*

Krabi badly needs a waste incinerator

Re: Threat of mass rallies after Krabi coal plant approved, Feb 18

Krabi has to build a waste incinerator! Instead of importing coal, they can burn all the plastic lying right in front of their houses. The problem then would be the expensive and complicated air filters to remove the bigger part of the toxic exhaust. I do not know whether they could manage that.

*Ernst Ruetimann, Trang
Gazette forum*

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Keeping Phuket property dealings honest



I HAVE written quite a few articles over the years, hopefully in a balanced way, on reservation deposits, property investments and purchases in Phuket, which have always included a word of caution about how practices in Thailand on property deposits can vary significantly from other Asian property investment destinations, such as Hong Kong and Singapore.

Certain elements of Phuket's property community are complicit and intent on damaging a fragile market that requires reputable and ethical business practices to underpin and maintain the investment climate.

The reason I felt inclined to write about this issue is because an almost identical scenario has recently occurred twice in quick succession, as lightning is never supposed to strike, in relation to the same set of circumstances, but entirely different properties.

Let me set out the scenario: foreigner contacts an agent and identifies a 're-sale' or second-



It is unwise to place a 'reservation deposit', unless it is truly safe. Photo: Tumisu/ Pixabay

hand property for sale. Agent persuades foreigner to place a 'holding deposit' or 'reservation deposit' to 'prevent the property being sold to another party'. Foreigner is told he/she should engage a law firm and check the land, the property and review the legal structure before committing to a full sale and purchase agreement and completion. Foreigner is explicitly told, and the reservation agreement states that the deposit is 'refundable'.

This is where the issue lies. Most people believe refundable

means that subject to reasonable conditions, you can obtain a refund. In some cases, a refund is conditional – but on very clear grounds. Most people will, unfortunately, take a word 'refundable' at face value.

Two recent incidents have triggered my concern. In the first, the law firm representing the buyer found out there was no legally registered access from the public road to the property itself. The solution for this issue was uncertain and could have taken months, if not

a year. The buyer asked for the deposit back, but the request was denied outright.

In the second instance, the seller simply contacted the buyers – who had moved all of their belongings by shipping container to Phuket – and stated he wouldn't sell, even with a binding agreement in place. The buyers tried to ascertain what had happened, and worked out the seller was pocketing the cash from high season rentals and taking a risk that he could sell the property again later. The

seller then, in violation of the contract, later offered an alternative date. The buyers refused, and then the seller pounced on the refusal and stated he would pocket the reservation deposit.

In both instances, the agent held the deposit 'safe' for the buyers, but refused to hand back the deposit 'safely'. The agent also changed from 'best friend and regular dinner date' to 'generally un-contactable and unwilling to discuss'.

This has created two court cases, which would be completely unnecessary if matters had been handled more professionally, more ethically and frankly speaking, with less trust provided by the buyers.

So, as I have repeated over the years – don't place a reservation deposit unless it truly is safe, the other party or the intermediary can absolutely be trusted, the deposit truly is refundable, or is something you simply don't care about losing.

Desmond Hughes has been an owner and operator of his law firm in Thailand for 14 years, and is a senior partner at Hughes Krupica law firm hugheskrupica.com

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Benefits of vinegar consumption



Excuse Buster

By Craig Burton

ONE thing in common at nearly all the centers I work at in Phuket is giving clients Apple Cider vinegar. Either clients have it as a salad dressing or it's given with water before meals.

A lot has been written about its remarkable healing properties. Is it a true health wonder or is it mostly fiction? I am always weary of any foods and elixirs being singled out, but I think this 'super food' has many beneficial properties. It's not about the minerals it possesses, but that it contains acetic acid, which plays an important role in gut function.

Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, said, "All disease begins in the gut". Well, our gut needs acidity to function and acetic acid is a great source. What about all those who say alkalize or die? It's all about specifics. Too much alkalinity in the wrong places (like the gut) decreases digestion and the gut's ability to keep bad bugs down. However, too much acidity in the blood can lead to acidosis and tissue breakdown. This is why the gut loves acidity, but a healthy gut has buffers to handle the high acidity.



Weight loss is one of the benefits of consuming Apple Cider vinegar. Photo: pexels

INCREASE IN INSULIN SENSITIVITY

There are many studies supporting that vinegar improves insulin sensitivity and helps to lower blood sugar responses after meals. In 2004, a study cited in the American Diabetes Foundation's publication *Diabetes Care* found that taking vinegar before meals significantly increases insulin sensitivity and dramatically reduces the insulin and glucose spikes that occur after meals.

A 2005 study cited in the

Journal of American Dieticians Association showed that vinegar improves insulin sensitivity during consumption of a high-carbohydrate meal by 19-34 per cent. A 2007 study cited in *Diabetes Care*, shows the simple act of taking vinegar at bedtime moderates waking glucose concentrations in adults with type 2 diabetes by about 4-6 per cent.

WEIGHT LOSS

The most important first step in losing weight in my opinion is balancing blood sugar and im-

proving insulin sensitivity, so it makes sense it will help people lose weight.

In one study (2009 Kondo T, Kishi M, Fushimi T, Ugajin S, Kaga T.), overweight participants lost an average of two pounds over the four-week period, by simply consuming two tablespoons of vinegar prior to two meals each day. Some even lost up to four pounds.

For those who are overweight because they overeat, adding vinegar has shown to increase feelings of satiation with a study showing increased feelings of

fullness making people eat 200-275 fewer calories for the rest of the day (Ostman E1, Granfeldt Y, Persson L, Björck I. 2005).

BUG KILLING ACTION

Hippocrates used vinegar for wound cleaning over two thousand years ago. Vinegar has several studies indicating its disinfection action and is regularly used as a food preservative, as it inhibits bacteria like *E. coli* from growing and spoiling our food.

ALTERNATIVES

Apple Cider Vinegar is the current favorite among the health circles but there is another possibility and that is Thailand's answer to Apple Cider vinegar – Coconut Cider vinegar. I have read that the mineral content is higher, which makes sense as coconut water is mineral rich. I use both regularly, either adding a dash with my meals (combined with olive oil and herbs and spices to make a nice dressing). I also consume a teaspoon in a cup of water before meals to help digestion.

A word of warning: don't go crazy and start swilling the bottle as the acid can damage tissue and cause problems. Instead, always dilute vinegar before consuming by adding small amounts to water.

Thailand offers free tourist visa for another six months

THE Cabinet has decided to extend the free-visa incentive for foreign tourists by another six months.

Under the measure, visa fees will be waived at all Thai embassies and consulates until August, though visas on arrival will still cost a thousand baht.

On February 21, Government spokesman Sansern Kaewkamnerd said that waiving visa fees from December to February had increased foreign arrivals by 12 per cent.

The move was first introduced on December 1 after arrivals from China plummeted by 30 per cent due to the crackdown on zero-dollar tours.

Officials say they hope that extending the fee waiver will give Thailand's tourism industry a boost as it heads into what is traditionally a low season.



Air or sea tourists can enjoy visa-free trips. Photo: Gazette file

Earlier, it was announced that visitors from Singapore, Indonesia and Brunei and 46 other countries now need to apply for a tourist visa if they make more than two trips to Thailand via land. However, air or sea tourists can still enjoy the visa-free trips for up to 30 days at a time.

"This is a worrying inconve-

nience," Songkhla Tourism Industry Council chairman Surapol Kampalanonwat said.

Songkhla welcomes millions of tourists from Singapore, Indonesia and Brunei via its land-based checkpoint, bringing in more than a billion baht in revenue annually.

– *The Nation*



The Tourism Authority of Thailand is holding a festival from March 13-15 to commemorate Thao Thepkrasattri and Thao Srisunthorn for protecting Phuket from being attacked by the Burmese. The festival will include performances about historical events, booths selling local products and local foods. Photo: Gazette file

The story of the Emerald Buddha

Looking Back

By Anand Singh

THE Emerald Buddha is one of Thailand's most revered artifacts. Contrary to its name, it is actually carved out of jade. It is a figurine of the seated meditating Buddha. A beautiful and ancient piece of art, it draws tens of thousands of visitors to the Grand Palace and Wat Phra Kaew every year.

No one really knows who carved it or where it originated. Some speculate that it was carved in the north of Thailand, more than five centuries ago. Others believe that the style is more closely related to Sri Lanka.

An interesting legend takes us back to the early 15th century in Chiang Rai. Amid a violent storm, an old Chedi was struck by lightning and ripped open. After the storm passed, the abbot of the temple walked up to the Chedi and noticed an old Buddha statue with an emerald green nose.

He took the image out of the Chedi, began peeling off the stucco it was covered with, and found a beautiful emerald



The Emerald Buddha figurine is housed inside Wat Phra Kaew in Bangkok. Photo: JPSwimmer

green Buddha statue.

When news spread of the abbot's discovery, people flocked to pay their respects. King Sam Fang Kaen of Lanna heard about it and insisted on bringing the Emerald Buddha to Chiang Mai, his capital city.

The King sent his elephant to transport it to Chiang Mai. However his elephant kept going to the city of Lampang instead, which he saw as a sign that the guardian spirits wanted it to stay in Lampang. He ordered a temple to be built where

the Emerald Buddha was installed with great veneration.

In 1468, King Tiloka of Lanna brought the statue to Chiang Mai, where it remained for almost a hundred years, until the mid 16th century. At that time, Prince Chetthathirath, crown prince of Lan Xang, (modern day Laos), was invited to occupy the throne of Chiang Mai.

After being crowned, the young king decided to return home to Luang Phrabang in 1552. He took the Emerald Buddha with him. A few years later,

the Burmese attacked Luang Phrabang and forced King Chetthathirath to flee to Vientiane. He took the Emerald Buddha with him, where it remained for the next 200 years.

In 1779, during the reign of King Taksin, a rebellion was brewing in the Laotian territories, which King Taksin ordered to be stopped. In the war that followed, Vientiane was captured and brought back under Siam's hegemony. On his way back to Thonburi, Chao Phraya Chakri, leader of the

King's forces, brought the Emerald Buddha with him. King Taksin ordered the statue to be installed in Wat Arun.

When King Taksin was deposed in 1784, Chao Phraya Chakri was crowned King Rama I. One of his first acts as king was to move the capital from Thon Buri, on the western banks of The Chao Phraya River, to the eastern side. There he built a magnificent capital, at the center of which was the Grand Palace, with a temple built to house the Emerald Buddha. This temple became known as 'Wat Phra Kaew', or the Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

The statue is a symbol of great veneration among Thais. During the early days when Bangkok was first established as a city, it was often paraded in the streets to ward off evil and mitigate the spread of disease and other calamities.

The attire of the Emerald Buddha, intricately carved out of gold, is changed three times a year, during the start of the hot, rainy and cool seasons. The changing of the attire must be carried out either by the king or the crown prince in a solemn ceremony.



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Setting the professional bar higher

By Sahar Aftab Paliwala

WATCHARAPONG Saikaew, or Pom, as he is better known, is the Assistant Director of Events at Angsana Laguna Phuket and the first Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) in Thailand. With a lucrative career and a four-year Hotel and Tourism Management degree from Prince of Songkla University under his belt, he is a proud flag bearer for the Banyan Tree group, which is also where he started his career years ago.

He became interested in the certification after he saw the letters 'CMP' in the signature of one of his American clients.

"I became curious to see what it meant and so I did a bit of research and found that it is one of the most respected certifications in this field worldwide. The requirements were least 3 years of professional experience, a 25 hour certification course and an examination," says Mr Pom.

"No Thai body offered the course at the time, so I took it up with TCEB (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau) every opportunity I

got. TCEB is a state enterprise, but managed independently. It seemed hopeless and taking the exam in Singapore or the US was a very expensive option."

One of the goals of TCEB is to develop human capital and have enough educated Thais in this field.

"An event management course was introduced a few years ago at some universities in Thailand. Even though it's a global field, the subject is less than 30 years old. Additionally, there is no standardization," he says.

In July last year, a department under TCEB, called MICE Capability Development Department offered the course for the first time.

"TCEB formed a bootcamp and flew in a trainer from the CIC (Convention Industry Council), a group of professional organizations and associations working in the field of meetings and event management. Most of the participants were industry experts, some with more than 30 years of experience, but they all had to go through the classes to get this credit in order to apply for

the examination," says Mr Pom.

After attending a four days course with 60 participants, Mr Pom waited for his 'clearance' to come through, before enrolling for the exam.

"After the course was done, they checked our resume and background. Once I was given the green light, I enrolled for the first sitting, which was being held on November 4. I studied all the material cover to cover, as we had been advised to do. The exam was very tricky – not only are you unaware of which questions count toward your final score, but each question has a different, but unknown weight. Additionally, you cannot simply use your prior experience to answer the questions – you need to have a thorough knowledge of international standards, which you can only gain by studying the material," he says.

Mr Pom says he chose CMP for his own development, but it will also help set a positive example for other professionals and improve the overall image and competitive advantage of Thailand.

"However, I also feel a little pressurized because I have to make sure I maintain the standard of my work. It has given a good image to myself and my company, but also pushed me into the spotlight," he says.

At Angsana, he handles all kinds of events, but specializes in Indian weddings. His loyalty to the Banyan Tree group, where he has held several positions throughout the course of his career, is easily understood.

"They invest a lot in developing the careers of their staff. At most workplaces it's just talk, but not here," he says.

Apart from work, Mr Pom enjoys travel and landscape photography.

"I would love to

go to Japan if I had the chance, but there are many amazing locations to photograph in Thailand itself."





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