

Phuket Gazette

May 27 - June 2, 2017

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FOREIGNERS ARRESTED WITH FORGED EUROPEAN PASSPORTS

FAKERS NABBED

■ Fake passport fiasco due to human error, says Phuket Immigration Chief

By Kongleaphy Keam

TWO Indian men are being held in custody at Phuket Prison after they were arrested for entering Thailand using fake passports.

"The suspects, Raj Kumar, 36, and Sandeep Singh, 30, were first arrested at 5pm on May 20, but managed to escape from Sakoo Police Station. They were then recaptured at 11pm the same day," said Phuket Provincial Police Commander Teerapol Thipjaroen.

They were taken to court on May 22 and denied bail.

"They have received a six-month sentence from the court for escaping police custody. As for the fake passport charge, we need more time to investigate before sending the case to the prosecutor," said Sakoo Police Superintendent Jirasak Siemsak.

"At this stage, we cannot say how long the investigation will take. We have to send the passports to the Portuguese Embassy and question the suspects about anyone in Thailand being involved in these types of crimes so that we can unravel the whole network," he added.

The men confessed that they were Indian by birth and wished to work in Canada, but were afraid of visa rejection. They contacted an agent in Phuket who promised to provide them with fake passports and accommodation. They initially entered Thailand in March at Suvarnabhumi International Airport using their real passports.

After obtaining fake Portuguese passports in Thailand, they went to Malaysia (using their real passports), but returned in April via the Satun border where they used the fake (Portuguese) ones. They then came to Phuket and stayed at a hotel in Patong.

On May 19, they boarded a flight to Canada at Phuket International Airport



The men confessed that they were Indian by birth and wished to work in Canada, so they paid an agent in Thailand more than two million baht for fake passports. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

with a transit in South Korea. However, South Korean immigration officials denied them onward boarding and the two were rerouted back to Phuket.

"South Korean authorities did not specify the exact reason that the men were refused entry," said Col Supachok Yongstar of Phuket Immigration Office.

The suspects told police that they had spent more than a million baht each on the entire process, including accommodation and flights to Malaysia and Canada.

"It is perplexing that Thai immigration allowed them to pass through. According to CCTV footage at the airport, the passports were scanned as per the usual procedure, but nothing suspicious was detected," said Gen Teerapol.

Gen Teerapol vowed to continue investigating the fake passport network until it was entirely unraveled.

"Our investigation shows that the passports are not manufactured in Thailand, but it does serve as a 'meeting point' for agents and customers to meet and conduct these

transactions. We believe there may be some Thais involved in the network as well," said Maj Gen Teerapol.

Phuket Immigration Police also vowed to boost security measures to prevent such incidents from occurring in future.

Col Supachok admitted that, paradoxically, it was becoming more and more difficult to detect fake passports nowadays as the technology had become more advanced, but added that Phuket's immigration control technology was up to date.

"The reason the fake passports were not detected is human error. Forgers are known to use real passports to make fake ones and only change the personal information inside. So, it is more about officers' level of scrutiny, not technology," said Col Supachok.

He said that this was a model case for officers to follow in order to avoid repeating the same mistake(s).

"We have already ordered our officers to be extra-careful, especially with European passports in the south of Thailand," he added.

Three caught for extortion, impersonating police officers

Three men were arrested for impersonating police officers and trying to extort money from two teenagers in Phuket. The suspects had Civil Defense and veteran ID cards in their possession and posed as Region 8 officers.

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Tracking weekly and monthly stock charts can help gauge markets.

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Infinity Condominium launches new luxury development in Bang Tao.

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LIFE&STYLE



From a marine perspective, Samui Island on Thailand's west coast is an unpolished jewel.

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LOCAL NEWS
Briefly

Citizens urge officials to fix dangerous road

OFFICIALS responded to complaints about a “dangerous and uneven” road after social media users posted pictures of Sakkidej Road in Wichit, urging authorities to take immediate action to fix it.

Frequent users of the road told the *Gazette* that it curves and dips in patches, making it dangerous to drive on, especially at night.

Patiwetwottisak Sookhii, director of the Phuket Highways Office, said that renovation work was ongoing but riddled with problems.

“A 50 million baht budget was approved to smooth out and widen the road. However, the renovation work has been sporadic. Each time we requested the amount approved in the budget, we were given funds in chunks of 10 or 20 million baht, which caused inevitable delays,” said Mr Patiwetwottisak.

“Some parts of the road are uneven because of problems with site design and cars driving over patches of road that were in the process of being



HRH Princess Maha officiates museum launch

Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn presided over the grand opening ceremony of the Peranakannitat Museum in Phuket Town on May 17. Phuket Governor Norraphat Plodthong and Phuket City Mayor Somjai Suwansupana, along with other officials and hundreds of Phuket citizens, were present to welcome the Princess. The museum building, erected a hundred years ago in traditional Phuket style, housed one of the earliest regional banks in Thailand. An old police station building opposite the museum was also renovated to present exhibits relating to the birth of Old Phuket Town from the Thonburi era until the reign of King Rama VI. Photo: Winai Sarot

repaired,” he added.

The Phuket Highways Office has requested for another 50 million baht to complete the project.

“If the budget is approved, we will repair this road by the

end of May. If not, we will have to present our case again and wait for the budget to be approved,” said Mr Patiwetwottisak.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

restaurant on May 17.

A Facebook user named Tanaphat Nuansakul posted a CCTV video of the incident on his page. The theft occurred at Tukabkhao Restaurant in Phuket Town.

The clip showed a foreigner walking into the restaurant, standing near another customer’s table for a few minutes and then making off with her bag (that was hanging on the back of her chair) when no one was looking.

The victim was a tourist from Hong Kong having dinner with her family. The bag contained her passport and several valuables, including an iPhone, cards and cash.

“We know the suspect’s face and will also check other CCTV cameras in the vicinity to see where he went,” said Capt Kraisor Parkaree of Phuket City Police.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Gambling, cock-fighting ring busted

FIFTEEN people were arrested while 15 others are on the run after Thalang Police raided a cock-fighting ring in Moo Baan Para on May 21.

Thalang Police officers raided the area after receiving complaints from locals about illegal cock-fighting and gambling.

The suspects ran into a nearby forest when they saw police; 15 were captured while 15 others got away. All suspects were charged with gambling and taken to Thalang Police Station for legal processing.

– *Winai Sarot*

Warning issued to unlicensed hotel operators

KATHU District Chief Jirawat Namatra issued an ultimatum to illegal hotel operators after locals and members of the business community filed complaints about unlicensed hotels operating in Patong.

“We inspected the ‘Boomerang Hotel’ and ‘Capitano Hotel’ in Patong on May 17 and found that they were operating without a hotel business licence,” said Mr Jirawat.

Both owners were charged for illegally operating a hotel business. The case is being followed up by the Phuket Provincial Administration Office.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Taxi driver’s arm severed in grisly accident

A TAXI driver’s arm was severed in a high-speed crash on May 24 after he lost control of his vehicle in a curve, crashed into an electric pole and fell into a five-meter-deep ditch at the roadside.

“The driver, Thawin Chaiponrit, 23, had lost his left arm and was bleeding profusely,” said Lt Thanakan Uchanaramee of Sakoo Police.

Mr Thawin was driving two Iraqi tourists to the airport when the accident occurred.

One of the tourists suffered serious injuries to his shoulder, arm and hand, while the other sustained only minor injuries.

“The road is very dangerous; we believe the driver was not familiar with it,” said Lt Thanakan.

– *Winai Sarot*

Police hunt for foreign bag snatcher

POLICE are hunting for a suspect, believed to be a foreigner, who stole a bag from a diner at a



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Three arrested for extortion, impersonating police officers

By Winai Sarot

THREE men were arrested for impersonating police officers and trying to extort money from two teenagers in Phuket on May 21.

The arrests were made by a joint task force of Region 8 and Cherng Talay Police officers at a PTT gas station in Cherng Talay.

The suspects, Thongchai Katthong, 30; Ittipol Kranara, 32; and Pathompong Rattanasuvan, 51; had Civil Defense and veteran ID cards in their possession.

“The three men presented themselves as Region 8 Police officers and arrested two underage teens for drinking *krathom* (an illicit drug) in Soi Palai, Chalong,” said Lt Col Kraisoron Chumchuen of Region 8.

“They handcuffed the two and took them to a room in Wichit, which they claimed was a safe house, for questioning,” he added.

They then called their relatives and friends, asking for 30,000 baht each in exchange



The suspects posed as Region 8 police officers. Photo: Winai Sarot

for their freedom. After negotiations, the families agreed to pay 10,000 baht each. The men arranged to meet them at the gas station at 4pm.

During the negotiations, the families and friends of the two teens became suspicious about the entire transaction, so they called up Region 8 police headquarters to ask if the three ‘officers’ actually worked there.

When the families learned the officers were fake, they informed Region 8 Police of the

whole incident.

“We followed the families to the gas station and arrested the suspects. Each was charged with extortion and impersonating a police officer,” said Col Kraisoron.

The three then led police to a room in Chalong where they had detained the two teens, who were then charged with possession of a category 5 drug.

“We will question the three men further to broaden the case and crack the network,” Col Kraisoron added.

Police chief dispels bomb threat rumors

OFFICIALS have warned the public to be careful about sharing unconfirmed reports on social media after a bomb threat warning created panic among Phuket vendors last week.

The original source of the message is unknown, but it was widely circulated online. It read:

“Stop going to walking street market, Chilva market or any other weekly markets in Phuket. A group of people from Pattani have come to sell Khao Creab (local crispy biscuit) in Kathu market, but they actually plan to bomb it. The police have called me to inform other vendors of this threat.”

Phuket Provincial Police Commander Teerapol Thipjaroen denied the reports and urged people to be wary of threats or warnings received on social media.

“I have already checked and can confirm that this is merely a rumor. I want the media to help us urge the public to be careful of spreading such messages. They can create mass panic, so please think twice before believing or sharing



Gen Teerapol. Photo: Gazette file

misinformation,” said Gen Teerapol.

“Secondly, if there are people from Pattani here in Phuket, it is their right as citizens. People from the deep south often come here for business or job opportunities. Please don’t label them all as terrorists as that is a very biased and negative thing to do,” he added.

Gen Teerapol added that officers were doing their best to protect the island.

“Phuket is a tourism province, so we have people from all over the country and the world. We closely monitor all entry and exit checkpoints via air, land and water. We want the public to feel confident and safe,” he added.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

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Security beefed up following bombing

SECURITY measures have been stepped up throughout the capital in response to the May 22 bombing at Phramongkutklao Hospital in Bangkok.

Police and soldiers are stationed on roads around Suvarnabhumi Airport, at several major Skytrain stations, bus terminals, hospitals and government offices. At the airport, police with K-9 dogs walked among tourists.

Authorities also set up security checkpoints on King Kaew Road, Suvarnabhumi 3 Road and the road running from Bang Na-Trat Highway to the airport.

Vehicles are being searched thoroughly, including with bomb detectors, before being allowed to pass through checkpoints.

Deputy national police chief Gen Chalermkiat Srivorakan said security checkpoints would be set up at 27 locations in the capital to operate 24 hours a day.

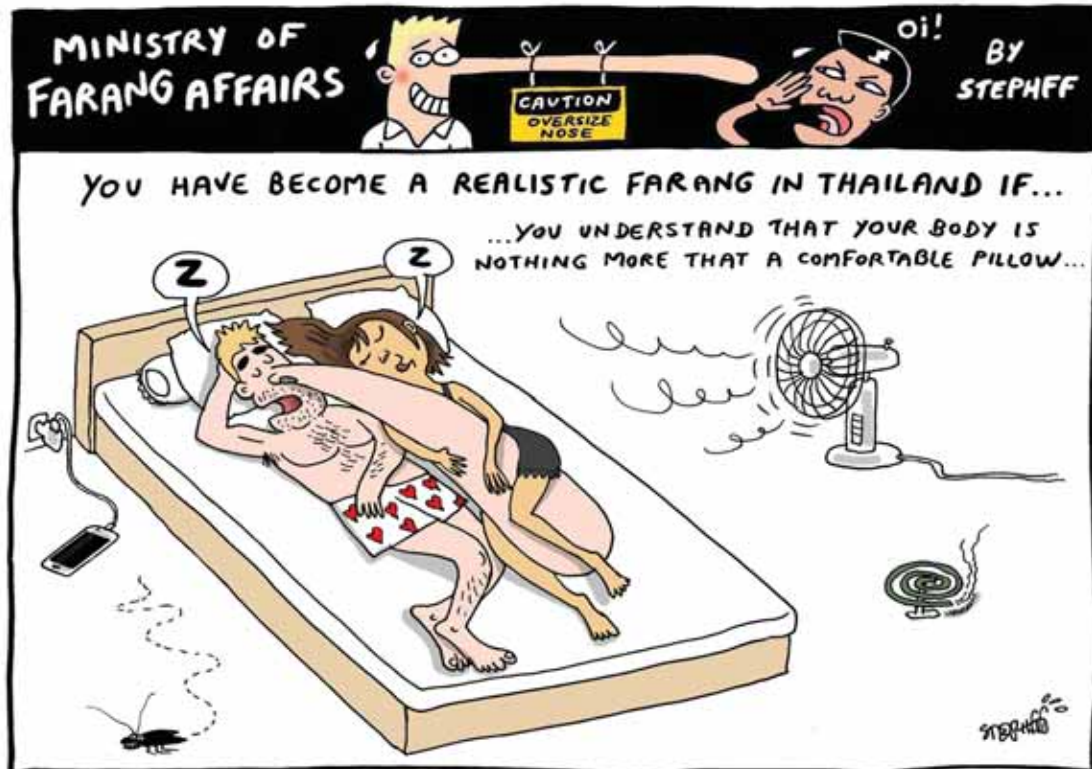
The checkpoints include those at Army headquarters, the Civil Service Commission opposite Government House, Mor Chit Skytrain Station, Central Ladprao department store, Suvarnabhumi Airport, On Nut Road and Seacon Square department store.

Academics say foreign unis beneficial

SEVERAL Thai academics have expressed support for the government's plan to allow foreigners to set up universities in special economic zones (SEZs) to address skill shortages, although they have urged certain criteria and conditions to ensure good quality and few negative impacts to Thai institutes.

As the plan – which has been approved by the Cabinet and the junta – requires Prime Minister Gen Prayuth Chan-o-cha to invoke his power under Article 44 of the interim constitution because of the required exemption of some normal rules, the Education Ministry has been waiting for two junta orders about the plan to be published in the *Royal Gazette* before implementation, said Education Minister Teerakiat Jareonsettasin.

Many countries such as Ja-



pan, the United States and the United Kingdom have already shown interest, he said.

Mr Teerakiat said foreign educational institutions located primarily in SEZs would only be allowed to teach courses in fields not available in Thailand, such as those involving certain high technologies. The idea is to drive the country's economy with innovation as per the 'Thailand 4.0' policy and to support the SEZs' economic and trade expansion, he said.

"They must be really outstanding or they wouldn't survive, as parents would rather send their kids to Thai schools if they weren't very good ... The foreign institutes' presence would also help keep Thai researchers, teachers, administrators and university students on their toes," said Suchatvee Suwansawat, rector of King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang and head of the Council of University Presidents of Thailand.

Calls to legalize protection of elephants

The National Legislative Assembly (NLA) held a seminar to seek a more comprehensive legal approach to protect Thailand's elephants on May 23.

Wallop Tangkananurak, chairman of the NLA committee tasked with following up on animal protection mechanisms, said the seminar was the first move in a planned wider-scale cooperation to achieve success in the protection of pachyderms.

At the seminar, NLA mem-

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

bers, experts from the National Institute of Elephant Research and Health Service, the Wildlife Conservation Officer at the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums were invited to express their opinions and concerns on the elephant draft bill.

All speakers agreed that the priorities were the problem of street elephants and the threat from wild elephant to humans.

They urged the introduction of new laws to protect elephant-related businesses and mahouts, an overhaul of existing laws in order to comply with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, as well as the integration of relevant laws into a new elephant law that would ensure pachyderms continued to be known as Thailand's national animal.

Urgent bills may require Article 44 push

THE government is hoping to get up to 60 urgent pieces of legislation on the statute book this year, including crucial reform and strategy-related bills.

It is still unclear, however, which legislation will require a push via powers granted under Article 44 of the interim charter.

The secretary-general of the Council of State, Distat Hotrakitya, said on May 23 after the weekly Cabinet meeting that the advisory committee for reform legislation under the 'Por Yor Por' super-board had set up a subcommittee to oversee the related legislation.

Legislation that would push forward reform and strategy might pass through the Por Yor Por fast-track route, he said, adding that the responsible committee, if it had an opinion to offer on a piece of legislation, could voice it to the government.

Despite the fast-track process, Distat did not rule out the possibility of invoking Article 44. However, he added that if the regular procedure worked well and within the deadline, absolute authority under an Article 44 order would not be necessary.

The government has made it clear that the use of Article 44 is only for urgent issues and is a temporary measure, Mr Distat explained.

Government approves more doctors, nurses

THE Cabinet on May 23 approved the Public Health Ministry's request for additional civil-servant positions for nurses, doctors and dentists.

Government Spokesperson Lt-Gen Sansern Kaewkamnerd said after the Cabinet meeting that the request to add 10,992 positions for nurses had been accepted, while ministers had also approved 2,000 civil-servant positions for doctors and

600 for dentists.

He said that as there were already 2,200 vacant positions for nurses, another 8,792 new posts would be created over a three-year period.

Some 2,992 nursing positions will come into being this year, and another 2,900 in each of the next two years.

Earlier, the Cabinet had decided to allow the Public Health Ministry to use the already-vacant positions for nurses first, and had denied the request for new positions, but this met with anger from temporary-employee nurses, who were waiting to be enlisted as civil servants.

Gen Sansern explained that as the number of doctors and dentists per 10,000 people was still lower than average, the Cabinet had approved new civil-servant positions for these professions in order to mitigate the shortages.

However, the request for pharmacists has not been approved by the Cabinet, because Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha instructed the Public Health Ministry to check the number of vacant positions first. This was because it had been found that there was one pharmacist per 6,200 people, which was already on target for the ministry, Gen Sansern added.

Fertility clinics under review for illegal surrogacy

AT LEAST four unnamed fertility clinics in Thailand are believed to be linked to a cross-border network of surrogate mother-for-hire services, according to Thai customs and public health authorities.

Nimit Saeng-ampai, chief of the Nong Khai customs checkpoint, where six Thai suspects were detained on May 20 after returning from Laos, said the Public Health Ministry would follow up on this case.

Mr Nimit said Nikom Simarat, who drove the six Thai suspects across the border to a Laotian fertility clinic, would face an additional criminal charge if traces of genetic materials were found in the containers, as such smuggling would violate Thai law.

Thai fertility clinics are believed to have cooperated with counterparts in Laos and Cambodia to provide cross-border surrogacy services for foreigners, especially Chinese.

Importance of tracking periodic charts

Monthly and weekly charts provide strong indicators of market movements



MONTHLY charts are among the first buy signals I look for when doing stock selection because these charts show bigger time frames where long term trends can be seen. As we enter the summer months, a short term pull back could still happen and this would be perfectly normal price action.

However, as of late April, we haven't yet seen any price action to suggest a pullback is coming. Thus, for the longer term, we still have to lean toward the upside assuming that the bullish trend of the previous five months will likely continue.

Looking over several monthly charts for a variety of stocks that either both my clients and I own or that I have on my watchlist as potential investments, we are starting to see more of our stocks breaking into new highs.

Tech giant Apple (NASDAQ: AAPL) got caught up in the overall choppy market trading over the past two years. Late last year, AAPL began breaking out to have about five months of solid gains that have put shares at an all time high.

Online retail behemoth Amazon.com (NASDAQ: AMZN) recently had another strong monthly close at new all time highs and has steadily closed higher for the past couple of months.

Small cap building materi-



Charts provide signals for stock selection by showing bigger time frames and trends. Photo: Burak Kebapci

als manufacturer Builders First Source (NASDAQ: BLDR) got clobbered in the wake of the financial crisis and is still not back up to pre-crisis highs. However, BLDR's monthly chart is finally starting to show and break out from a strong cup and handle base. This should also be considered a bullish sign for other housing related and building material stocks.

Small cap online health care marketplace stock Care.com Inc (NYSE: CRCM) had Google Capital take a big position in it several months ago, triggering a big gain as other investors rushed in. The tech-

nical chart now shows a nice consolidation since 2014 while in March, shares moved to a two year high on huge volume – a very bullish sign.

Large cap oil and gas stock EOG Resources (NYSE: EOG) is still breaking lower on its monthly charts for the past few months. However, the weekly charts show weeks where shares are ending higher. This is a potentially bullish signal making the stock worth watching to see if its monthly closes can move higher.

Small cap casino stock Golden Entertainment (NASDAQ: GDEN) moved from US\$5 to US\$13 between late

2014 and mid 2016. Usually when we see huge advances like that, stocks cool and pull back a bit – exactly what GDEN did. Shares have since hit a new all time high.

Small cap biopharmaceutical stock Theravance Biopharma (NASDAQ: TBPH) has broken out from a bullish cup and handle formation to close at an all time above the 'cup' portion on its technical chart with shares also above its 2014 IPO debut level.

Large cap railroad stock Union Pacific Corporation (NYSE: UNP) had broken out from its post financial crisis consolidation pattern in 2010 and

had a good run from the US\$40 to US\$110 level (end of 2015) before falling off. UNP has just had another big breakout and appears to be heading back up to its 2015 highs.

Mid cap global life sciences software stock Veeva Systems (NYSE: VEEV) recently hit an all time high on its monthly chart to close above its IPO debut price after consolidating sideways for around 2 and a half years – a fairly bullish sign.

The latest S&P 500 chart also shows the index closing higher for five months in a row (or roughly since the end of the US elections). This price action has ended roughly two years of consolidation or sideways movement.

Again, I ignore the mainstream news media's constant reports of doom and gloom to instead follow price action of the market and individual stocks. It's also important to remember that historically, the stock market can make upward progress even in the face of uncertainty, confusion and the negative media reports.

Don Freeman, BSME, is president of Freeman Capital Management, a Registered Investment Adviser with the US Securities Exchange Commission (SEC), based in Phuket. He has over 20 years experience working with expatriates, specializing in portfolio management, US tax preparation, financial planning and UK pension transfers. Don can be reached at 089-970 5795 or freeman.capital@gmail.com.

Ministry opposes hike in VAT

THE Finance Ministry is wary of the impact on the economy from the hike in value-added tax (VAT) proposed by the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) and plans to oppose it.

The NLA has suggested raising VAT from 7 per cent at present to 8 per cent.

Finance Ministry permanent secretary Somchai Sujjapongse said a hike in VAT rate will adversely impact the economy at a time when economic growth is accelerating. Gross domestic product growth in the first quarter was 3.3 per cent, he said.

He said the Finance Ministry is upgrading tax collection under the national e-payment project. This could help tax officials collect an additional 100 billion baht annually, he said.



NLA wants to increase VAT from 7 to 8 per cent. Photo: The Nation

The Finance Ministry will propose to the Cabinet to continue the current VAT rate at 7 per cent for the fiscal year, which ends in September, he said.

The VAT rate has already been cut from 10 per cent to 7 per cent, but successive governments have been wary of restoring the higher rate due to fear of a backlash from the public and its impact on the economy.

– The Nation

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Drug laws need a rehaul

THE recent arrest by Region 8 Police of two men for posing as officers of the law and trying to extort money from the families of teenage boys found drinking krathom leaf extract is just the latest reminder of the need for our Kingdom to reconsider and revise its draconian drug control laws.

It might strike some as futile to urge a military government to take such measures, but in reality there has never been a better time for Thailand to move forward in this regard. It is encouraging that the current government is the first in our memory to have floated the possibility of such reforms, but it is equally discouraging that it has yet to effect any real changes.

In many ways the current administration has just maintained and extended the policies of its elected predecessors, with the seldom-enforced yet supremely annoying alcohol sales time restriction measures brought in by Thaksin coming as just the most obvious example.

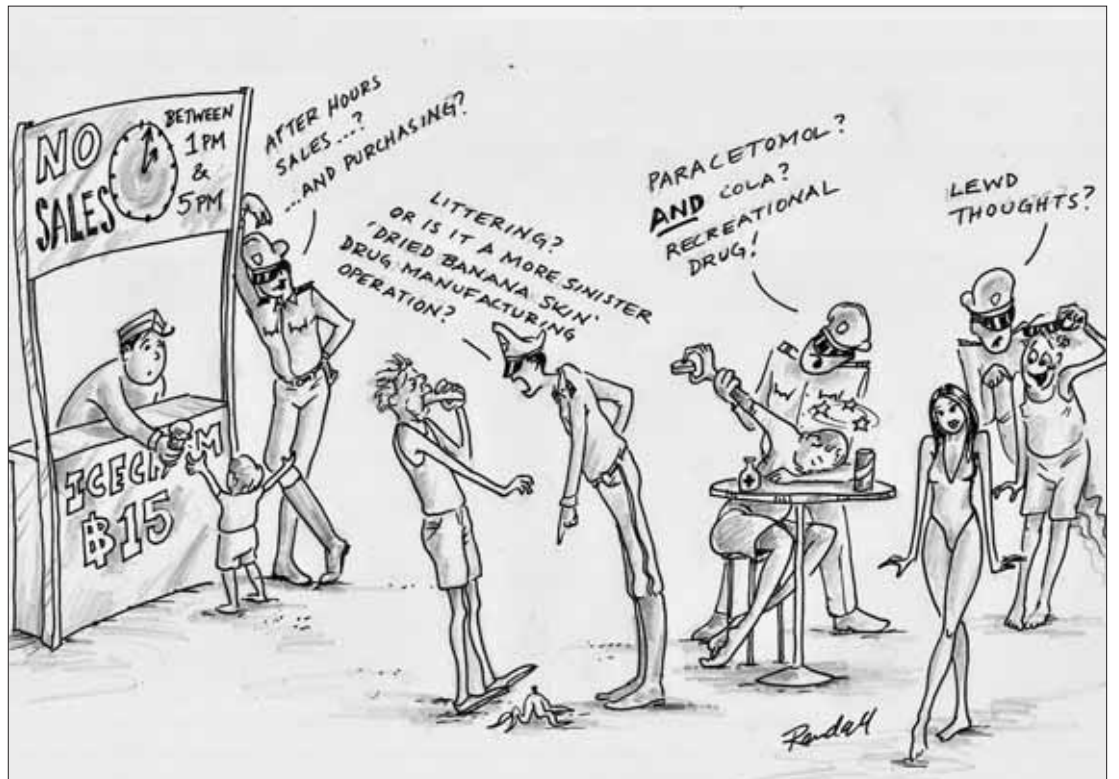
If the theme was "Bring Happiness Back to The People", why can't we legally purchase a can of beer at a 7-Eleven between the hours of 2pm and 5pm?

Despite having some of the harshest drug laws on the planet, Thailand has over the years managed to consolidate its international reputation as a recreational drug paradise. It is perhaps a sad fact that this comes in second only to its reputation as a sex tourism destination, though of course the two themes very often run hand-in-hand.

From the hallucinogenic, drug-fuelled 'Full Moon Parties' on Koh Tao to the heroin-soaked back sois of Bangkok's Khaosarn Road, the entire range of recreational drugs are cheap and readily available to any and all willing to indulge.

Krathom and marijuana are both 'Category 5' drugs that are among the most widely used drugs in Thailand, after state-sanctioned substances like alcohol and caffeine. Both are relatively harmless drugs with medically-proven medicinal effects, a fact which has prompted many governments around the globe to decriminalize them or even make their sale legal, providing new sources of taxable revenue in the process.

Yet here in Thailand, these substances serve as just two more devices in the extortionists toolbox – and from the victim's standpoint it does not always matter whether the extortionists are state officials or sad imposters thereof.



Must give credit where it is due

Re: Opinion: Phuket hospital deserves credit, not blame, May 21

The generosity of the Thai people in providing free hospital care for many self inflicted foreigners' injuries is amazing. The passports should be held till payment received by grateful family and governments for their citizens.

Megan Billington
Facebook

Hope truck driver gets to walk free

Re: 21-year-old biker killed in Phuket pick-up collision, May 23

Look at the damage to the pickup. Does anyone think the bike rider was driving within the speed limit, or even twice the speed limit? I hope the police let the pickup driver go free of all charges.

Chas
Gazette forum

Work harder to get better tourists

Re: Phuket district chief vows to crack down on illegal hotels, May 19

When you build footpaths decent public toilets and a non corrupt transport system, you might get the rich tourists you dream of.

Until then you are cutting off the hand that feeds you.

Greg Harrison
Facebook

Letters to the Editor

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

Given the names of the two locations above, one might assume that they have foreign owners. Nice to see the law being applied 'equally' given the number of Thai-run places.

Rule number one in business over here: Don't upset the locals or be too successful. It's a world of hurt.

Now if they would only address the illegally rented condos rented out for less than 30 days, I might finally get rid of my noisy neighbors!

Mister Ree
Gazette forum

Cock fighting channel on Thai TV

Re: Illegal cock-fighting, gambling ring busted, 15 arrested, May 22

If it's illegal, why is there a cock fighting channel on Thai TV?

Rick Menlove
Facebook

Shop owners are the real culprits

Re: Ten arrested, B20mn of merchandise confiscated in Phuket raid, May 20

Big deal. 10 foreigners arrested and 20 million baht

confiscated. But there are twice as many still operating. Why are the people who own these shops not arrested?

The people caught are small fish just trying to make a living, but there's no point in arresting them if the owners continue to be allowed to go scott free. And all the arresting officers can boast and parade for the media as much as they like, but if stamping out piracy is their goal, they are doomed. Failure is guaranteed.

Bazza
Gazette forum

Hope this doesn't mean a new fee

Re: Fake passport suspects recaptured after escaping police custody, May 22

So they entered and departed Thailand on fake passports, easily, but Korea managed to detect them? Are we to expect a 500 baht per foreign passenger 'fee' to upgrade systems, same as the baggage scanners 'fee'?

Peter Brown
Facebook

Bag snatcher will likely be caught

Re: CCTV captures foreigner stealing tourist's bag, May 18

It looks to be the job of a well organized bag grabber and perhaps a retired expat living in Phuket, so he may get caught sooner or later.

Asterix
Gazette forum

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Bang Tao to see luxury condos

By Kongleaphy Keam

INFINITY Condominium launched the grand opening of its seven-storey condo project in Bang Tao on May 19.

The project will comprise of 78 units ranging from 59 square meters to 60.6sqm and include one bedroom, two bedroom, and two bedroom deluxe condominiums.

“Construction will start by end of the year and is expected to be completed in two years. The units will be available for sale starting from the grand opening day. Even at this stage, we have received a lot of positive feedback from our agents,” said Apiwat Chaiyarat, general manager of the project.

“The unique thing about this project is the size of the rooms. One bedroom unit is 59 sqm, which is rarely found in Phuket – the general size of other one-bedroom condominiums is only about 30-40 sqm,” he added.

Other than size, the project location is another attractive feature for potential future owners, says Mr Apiwat.

“Bang Tao is centrally located and has access to many



The condos are targeted at high-end customers who demand comfort . Photo: Infinity Condominium

places like temples, nightlife venues, shopping centers, restaurants and Phuket International Airport. You can also walk to Bang Tao Beach or enjoy the services at Catch Beach Club which is right in front of Infinity Condominium,” said Mr Apiwat.

“From an investment point of view, we can see that Bang Tao is developing gradually.

Areas like Patong are over-saturated, so other areas, particularly Kamala and Bang Tao in the north, are up and coming,” he added.

The target market for the condominium is high-end luxury users, particularly foreigners who prefer comfortable living spaces.

“Even though the price is higher than other projects, we

are offering a valuable product with a full range of service such as fitness rooms, swimming pool, parking, yoga, playground, rooftop lounge and 24/7 security,” said Mr Apiwat.

“Our guaranteed rate of return is also much higher than the market average. This makes the project ideal for both living and investment,” he added.

Developers investing in ‘proptech’ start-ups

SOME of Thailand’s property firms have expressed interest in collaborating with and investing in start-ups to create property technology (proptech) to support business growth for the long term.

Sansiri is one of the first to invest in proptech by setting up Siri Venture, a joint venture with Siam Commercial Bank, to develop innovations ranging from conception to commercial viability.

Established with initial registered capital of 100 million baht, Siri Venture aims to build a network of at least 300 proptech start-ups by 2020.

The initiative consists of three parts: support the proptech ecosystem, set up a “fund of funds”, and provide venture capital. However, the company is still in the process of finalising the figures for both the “fund of funds” and the corporate VC fund, hoping to complete the process this year.

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Samui: An unpolished marine jewel



On Deck

By Duncan Worthington

SAMUI is an island of coconuts and a microcosm of Thailand's modern tourism industry, with facilities geared to backpackers at one end of the scale, right up to five-star resorts at the other, and everything in between. From a marine perspective, it is – to some extent – an unpolished jewel.

If Samui Island was on Thailand's east coast, in the Andaman Sea, it would be one of the hottest sailing destinations in Asia, however, it's location on the country's little promoted and oft-overlooked west coast means it has never had its time in the spotlight, unlike big brother Phuket.

And in some ways, that is a good thing.

The island reportedly welcomes upwards of one million visitors a year, the main gateway being Bangkok Airway's privately-owned airport, the second via ferry from the mainland.

While the number of visiting yachts to the island is relatively small, Samui is not unknown to the sailing community in Asia. The Samui Regatta, which has just concluded at Centara Grand Beach Resort Samui, has long been



A stunning view of the Ang Thong Marine National Park located just off Samui. Photo: Trageds

promoting Samui and its surrounding areas and has showcased the excellent cruising grounds and racing conditions the island has to offer since its inception 16 years ago. Each year the regatta attracts sailors from Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and of course Thailand, and it's fair to say has single-handedly promoted Samui's sailing credentials overseas.

Speaking with the regatta's Race Director, Simon James, he notes the potential of the island. "Samui is relatively undis-

covered in the cruising sense. Onshore the island offers something for everyone, from affordable accommodation and all manner of eateries, to the uber-luxe for those who wish to indulge," says James.

"On the water, the experiences are equally diverse. Of the many beaches and coves around Samui, there are lots of quiet spots to enjoy and explore. The islands off Samui's southwest coast are worth exploring and there are some excellent reefs off Koh Taen and Koh Mat Sum, while the

42-island Ang Thong archipelago to the northwest of Samui is spectacular," he adds.

In addition to some cruising yachts and those that come to race at Samui Regatta, the island is becoming more popular with superyachts, however, to really put Samui on the map as a leading cruising destination, investment in marine infrastructure is needed.

"What Samui lacks is a marina. There has been talk for many years, but with a marina Samui would see more international yachts visiting the island,

as well as many more yachts basing themselves long-term in Samui – all of which will add significant revenues to the local economy," adds James.

As part of the government's plan to make Thailand the 'Marina Hub of Asean' two potential marina sites have been identified on Samui – Mai Gan Cape is in the North of the island and according to the Marine Department marinas can potentially be built on either side of the cape, while the second site is at Thongtanode Bay, located in the south.

These are suggestions by the Marine Department, and they have made it clear that the government isn't looking to build marinas but entice and support private investors to build.

Looking at the larger Gulf of Thailand picture, the entire region is currently served by just one large-scale international-standard marina (Ocean Marina Yacht Club in Jomtien, in Pattaya). Clearly further infrastructure investment is needed if the region is to be opened up.

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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Top golfers battle for Laguna trophy

LAGUNA Golf Phuket hosted the 'Singha Phuket Open 2017' as part of the All Thailand Golf Tour 2017. The tournament is a newly-launched professional golf competition organized by Sports Management Group (SMG) with Singha Corporation as the founding sponsor.

Aiming to expand the 'All Thailand Golf Tour' and promote Phuket as a sports tourism hub, Singha Phuket Open 2017 was held from May 25-28 at Laguna Golf Phuket as a co-sanction golf event with Asian Development Tour (ADT). The event was held in celebration of Laguna Phuket's 30th anniversary celebrations.

Some of the pros who participated in the tournament were Thaworn Wiratchant, Udorn Duangdech and Danthai Boonma, who will be competing for a more than 2 million baht prize fund.

"With a world-class golf course and facilities, excellent



Key panelists, VIP guests and Laguna Golf Phuket's homegrown young golfers strike a pose. Photo: Laguna Golf Phuket

conditions and Asian hospitality along with our newly upgraded PGA-branded Laguna Golf Academy, we are all geared to welcoming the professional golfers of the first Singha Phuket Open," said Mr Paul Wilson, AVP, Group Golf Director.

"Several homegrown golfers

also played in the tournament, emphasizing Laguna Golf Phuket and Asian Development Tour's shared commitment of developing the game in Asia and inspiring junior golfers by providing great platforms for them to learn and grow," Mr Wilson added.

– *Phuket Gazette*

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Aristocrats of waterways



MOST of Thailand has high annual rainfall and Phuket is no exception, as anyone who lives here through the monsoon can testify. But like all natives of hot countries, Thais have a special reverence for water and its vital role in life.

One of the impulses behind Songkran is to cleanse and renew, to herald the onset of the new rains that will bring sustenance to the parched earth. This respect is related to rice, the staple food and lifeline of all Thais, and the single most important contributor to the Kingdom's economy.

Why rice? Because successful production of the cereal is reliant on water: all those marshy paddy fields are testament to its dependence on a constant supply of H₂O in the growing season from May to November.

Unsurprisingly then, aquatic plants are a prominent feature of Thailand's floral landscape – more so than in Europe or America. Take the lotus (*nelumbo nucifera*), which is the national flower, not of Thailand, but of India and Vietnam. However, it is a constant presence here in lakes, water gardens and decorative pots.

In fact, the lotus is central to Buddhist iconography: deities are often depicted seated on a lotus flower; the divine one apparently caused lotuses to burst into bloom wherever he walked. Most important of all, the lotus is one of the eight auspicious signs of Buddha – a symbol of cosmic harmony or spiritual illumination.

I first encountered the plant many years ago in London when I bought the seed heads for inclusion in an arrangement of dried flowers. These massive heads are truly exotic, resembling the pierced spout of a watering can. But even these are upstaged by the fat pink or white buds which develop into blooms up to 20cm across.

In Phuket, I have never relegated this marvel to the kitchen garden, though everything is edible – flowers, seeds, leaves, even the rhizomes. Instead, I planted a couple, Thai style, in waterproof earthenware pots, half filled with the rich, glutinous mud sold at nurseries – and



The lotus is one of the eight auspicious signs of Buddha – a symbol of cosmic harmony or spiritual illumination. Photo: Jon Sullivan

watched them grow.

A couple of provisos. The leaves may turn brown and rusty-looking at the edges. If so, you can easily snap the brittle stalks off. Secondly, the lotus is a heavy feeder and will need special fertilizer every couple of weeks. But it is worth the trouble.

To those of us who hail from the West, water lilies [nymphs] are much more familiar presences, in part because some varieties thrive in temperate conditions that would spell death to the exotic lotus.

There must be few goldfish ponds in England without a complement of lilies. Moreover, they have been immortalized for art lovers by French Impressionist Claude Monet who created more than two hundred paintings based on the water lilies in his garden.

But if these plants are not revered here as the lotus is, they are still regarded as key players in any aquatic landscape. Indeed, there is a Thai book devoted entirely to water lilies, all 150 colorful hybrids.

You can grow them here in wide pots – as you can the lotus – but although they are generally sold in this way, they look better in fish-ponds where their floating pads have plenty of room for maneuver.

Where the lily wins over the lotus is in its exceptional range of colors; on the other hand, the lotus scores both because of its fragrance and because it blooms well clear of the water on graceful stems, and so needs

a much smaller surface area.

It will happily grace a vase-shaped container.

Fruit festival held to promote local produce



A giant durian served as the festival centerpiece. Photo: Phuket PR

PHUKET Grocery held a fruit festival at its outlet in Phuket Town from May 22-26. The opening ceremony was chaired by Decha Phetwong, chief of Phuket's Office of Commercial Affairs.

Phuket Grocery General Manager Thavich Boonpraser said that the purpose of the event was to support and promote local agricultural products to Thais and foreigners.

Some of the activities at the

festival included fruit carving and watermelon eating competitions with cash prizes of more than 10,000 baht. A giant durian served as the festival centerpiece and was a popular photo prop for shoppers.

Mr Decha praised the establishment for providing customers with a chance to purchase fruits at reasonable prices and showcasing the potential and value of local products.

– Sukawin Tanthavanich

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Coast to coast in search of culture

By Zohaib Sikander

HIS Excellency Jaime Nualart is currently the Ambassador of Mexico to Thailand. Born in Mexico City in 1952, Amb Nualart remembers his childhood with fondness.

“I went to a good school and was among the top three students of my class. I had good friends, but I was also very shy. That is perhaps the reason my mother decided to enroll my three siblings and I in art school.”

An avid puppeteer, the ambassador learnt this skill at art school.

“I entered my puppets in theater performances at school, as I was too shy to perform in front of an audience myself. I had a close friend in class with me (who is now one of the most recognized Mexican authors) who was also very shy,” Amb Nualart says.

“We were both encouraged to overcome our shyness and stage fright by one of the professors in the school, who groomed us and helped us become more confident.”

Amb Nualart then went on to study journalism at univer-

sity and worked in television, cinema, radio and education. He later joined the National Institute of Fine Arts in Mexico, where he was in charge of public relations and dissemination of programs. He has also worked with the Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra and handled promotion, public relations and international tours all over South America, North America, Europe and Asia.

“I started travelling a lot which gave me the chance to learn about other cultures and countries. That’s what led me to join the Ministry of External Affairs in 1982,” says Amb Nualart.

“The same year I went to Japan and worked at the Mexican Embassy in Tokyo for five years. Those were wonderful times, both in my personal and professional life. I was in charge of cultural activities and promoted Mexican art and culture in Japan.”

The ambassador takes a keen interest in all sorts of art manifestations, from ancient and classical to contemporary art, performing arts, even fashion and gastronomy.

During his stay in Japan, the

things he loved the most were Japanese art, food and culture.

“I learnt about Japanese theater, such as ‘*kabuki*’, a very sophisticated form of art expression called ‘*noh*’ which is the most ancient, elaborate and aristocratic form of Japanese theater. I used to go to the theater every Sunday where I met one of the living national treasures of Japan, the director and actor at one of the *noh* schools, and I even became the first Westerner to ever perform on that stage,” he says.

Amb Nualart also loves cuisine from other countries he has lived in, including Thailand and India.

“I believe food traditions are something that help us identify with other cultures,” says Amb Nualart.

Mexican and Thai authorities are now considering opening an honorary Mexican consulate in Phuket.

“The Mexican Embassy in Thailand was established nearly 40 years ago. However, more than 25,000 Mexicans visit Phuket and nearby islands every year, so we want to have a honorary consulate here as a reference point to help resolve

any issues they face during their stay,” Amb Nualart says.

Mexico and Thailand have always enjoyed strong relations and the ambassador is confident that they will prosper further in the future.

“I have been working with Thai authorities and institutions such as universities and research centers regarding matters that are significant for both countries.

These include health, food security and climate change. We are also starting a partnership with the University of Khon Kaen in the field of edible insects,” says Amb Nualart.

“We have bilateral trade worth more than 6 billion dollars with Thailand and this number is rising sharply. We

trade in manufactured goods, rice, electronic components and auto parts, to name a few things. I’m convinced that Mexico’s future role in the world is along the same lines as countries in the Asia Pacific or USA. We all share the Pacific Ocean, where the most dynamic economies of the world are located.”





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