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Property leader slams officials

By Dhirarat Boonkongsaen

PHUKET CITY: The President of the recently formed Phuket Real Estate Club (PREC) has slammed bureaucrats for constantly putting obstacles in the way of the booming property market.

Announcing on March 12 that the club plans to stage a public seminar on April 3 at the Royal Phuket City Hotel to address problems faced by those in real estate development, Phummisak Hongsyok, former Mayor of Phuket Town, said, "The real estate market in Phuket has boomed over the past few months because many of the problems that plagued us in the past are disappearing."

"At the end of last year, banks started giving greater support to real estate developers, and buyers began to trust the sellers more. Also, property companies started to do business properly."

But bureaucrats are still holding things back, he said. "The most common questions [the club gets from members] are about the various government offices that are meant to provide clear information, perform administrative functions efficiently, and offer equal treatment to all people."

"These offices are making the real estate business very difficult with red tape, unclear information and unnecessary rules. This blocks development, as the real estate business requires organization and accurate information."

He also called on the authorities to take concrete steps soon to address water shortages on Phuket.



Phummisak Hongsyok: Government officers 'are making the real estate business very difficult'.

academics from Chulalongkorn University.

"One of the main purposes of the PREC is to discuss and find solutions to the problems faced by all those involved in the real estate business. It will assist them in doing real estate business properly," K. Phummisak said.

The seminar will be conducted primarily in Thai and will cost 300 baht to attend, including lunch. Registration will be at 8 am. For more information contact the PREC at Tel: 076-218999 or 076-218747.

Democrats in landslide OrBorJor poll victory

By Gategao Phetsawang

PHUKET: The ruling Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party's attempt to become a force in provincial politics in Phuket received a major setback in the March 14 elections for the presidency of the Provincial Administration Organization (OrBorJor), with the TRT candidate coming last by a long way.

The winner, with 52% of all votes, was Democrat candidate and former member of parliament Anchalee Vanich-Thepabutr. She polled 59,639 votes, followed by independents Wisut Santikul (34,505 votes) and Soratham Jinda (11,106), with TRT candidate Pol Col Apirak Hongtong trailing behind with just 4,977 votes.

The Democrats also managed to get 19 of their 20 OrBorJor member candidates elected, giving them an overwhelming majority in the 24-seat council.

"I'd like to thank all those people who voted for us," K. Anchalee told the *Gazette*, "They trusted us, so we will do our best to develop Phuket along the lines we explained [in the election campaign]."

She said, "I've heard that someone filed a complaint with the Provincial Election Commission (PEC) that I gave calendars to people."

"The PEC will consider if there's anything wrong but we are confident we have done nothing to break the regulations."

Wisut Santikul, the leader of the recently-formed independent OrBorJor Gao Mai – Khon Baan Rao (New Step – Our People) Party told the *Gazette* that he believed he had lost because

Continued on page 2



Don't miss it...

Convention & Exhibition Centre
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Phuket people must have their say on expo center: Chavalit

By Gategao Phetsawang

PHUKET TOWN: Phuket and its tourist trade are essential to Thailand's economy but what matters most is that the island's inhabitants decide their own future, Deputy Prime Minister Gen Chavalit Yongchaiyudh said on March 12.

"I'd like to ask if Phuket people really want to build the International Convention and Exhibition Center (ICEC) or not," he said of the controversial 2.5-billion-baht project which has yet to get off the drawing board.

"Right now, we have the budget – but what exactly do people want Phuket to be?" he asked. "It's really up to them to decide."

Observers saw Gen Chavalit's comment as an attempt to overcome opposition to the intended site for the ICEC project on reclaimed land off Saphan Hin in Phuket City.

"Where the ICEC will be built should be discussed with local people to see if they agree with it or not. If people don't



Gen Chavalit: 'If people don't agree, there will be a problem later.'

agree, there will be a problem later," he said.

Gen Chavalit and government spokesman Jakraphop Penkair visited Phuket to meet media from six southern provinces – Phuket, Krabi, Phang Nga, Ranong, Surat Thani and Chumphon – at a seminar at The Metropole hotel in Phuket City.

Passion aplenty as 'Tosca' plays in Phuket

CHERNG TALAY: The opera gods were smiling on Phuket as the European Chamber Opera (Echo) brought a dinner-scale *Tosca* gloriously to life on March 13 at the Sheraton Grande Laguna.

There were, however, few smiles earlier in the day when rain almost stopped play. Such are the risks taken when any open air production is staged. But the skies remained clear and the only risks taken by the cast were from heat exhaustion and exposure to mosquitoes.

The resort's Puccini Restaurant (how enterprising of the great composer to have branched out into the restaurant business) provided an unusual backdrop of palm trees and tropical flowers to a tale of passion, revenge and sacrifice set in 18th century Rome.

The keen audience of around 70 diners – some of whom, with chairs perilously close to the edge of the swimming pool,

risked emulating Ophelia – were captivated by a delight that transcended the visual and aural and became an exchange of energy between cast and audience.

At times, one could sense the audience breathing as a single entity, becoming participants more than spectators.

Soprano Constance Novis did not simply play the role of Floria Tosca but was, to many, the embodiment of passion, vulnerability, yet, ultimately, strength, perhaps most notably in the 2nd act aria *Vissi d'arte* – and as her role dictated, the most gifted and beautiful of singers.

Tenor Nicholas Ransley made an impressive Caravadossi – his début in the role – as Tosca's lover, while Echo director and baritone Stefan Sanchez was beastly secret police chief Baron Scarpia. He used his voice with restrained malice to send a shiver up the spine on the sultriest of nights.

Despite the confines of the arena, his rich voice carried over the water to hit home with menace. The most powerful people intimidate not

by shouting but by tacit threat.

John Watts took a number of roles, but played the aging sacristan of the

Church of Sant' Andrea della Valle with particular charm and wit. For the benefit of the non-Italian speakers and those new to *Tosca*, he gave an occasional puckish commentary to the audience.

Mention must also be made of Kevin Macrae, who carried two roles as Spoletta, one of Scarpia's aides, and the political prisoner Angelotti. Director Darren Royston and pianist Ian Ryan must also be praised as excellent in their roles.

Was *Tosca* a success? A resounding "yes". Echo vitalize the art of opera and return it to what it once was once: an immediate and sensual commune between singer and audience.

There is a rumor that Echo may bring *Rigoletto* to Phuket within the year. It will be a welcome return for this dynamic and innovative company, who touched the hearts and souls of many.

– Andy Johnstone

Landslide win for Democrats

From page 1

cause of the recent steeply rising popularity of the Democrats in Phuket.

"Another reason is that people got the mistaken impression that I was somehow representing the TRT, even though I kept telling them I was not," he said.

At least one candidate was not beyond using dirty tricks, he noted. "A day before the poll a leaflet was circulated, accusing me of raping a 13-year-old. The leaflets were distributed everywhere, even to my home."

The TRT candidate, Col Apirak, declined to comment on his performance, saying that he would wait until after the results have been officially verified. "Until the results have been approved, nobody can draw any conclusions," he explained.

Phuket Election Commission (PEC) President Dr Prapa Kayee told the *Gazette* that the PEC had received some complaints about *OrBorJor* presidency candidates but none, so far, about member candidates. She declined to give further details.

The *OrBorJor* election center said that 114,322 people voted out of an electorate of 181,806 – a turnout of 63%. There were 4,095 spoiled ballot sheets.



THALANG: Phuket Vice-Governor Niran Kalayanamit plants a rare and endangered species of palm tree called *Keriiodoxa elegans Dransfield*, more commonly known as the white elephant palm.

The palm was planted March 11 at the Khao Prateaw Wildlife Conservation Development and Extension Center in Thalang in honor of HM Queen Sirikit's 72nd birthday, which will take place August 12.

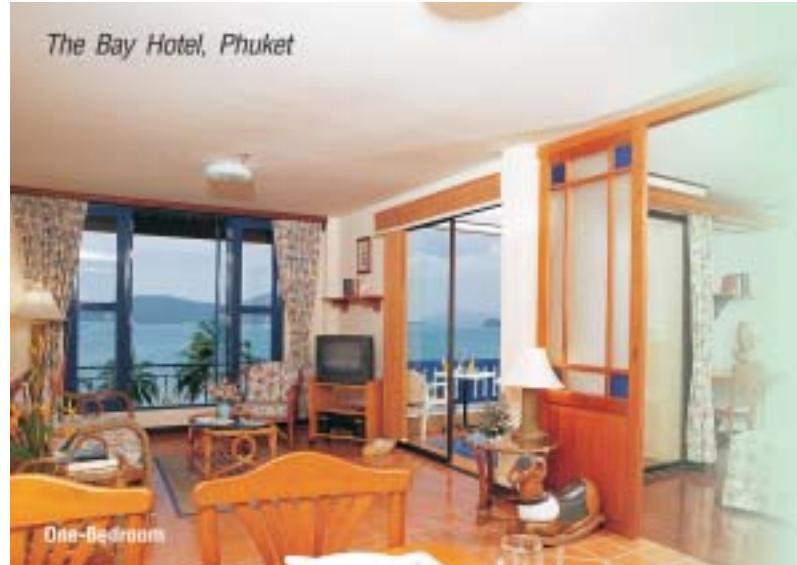
More than 80 students and government employees followed V/Gov Niran's example and planted another 147 of the rare palms.

Love boats on Phang Nga Bay

PHANG NGA: A day-long "Romantic Canoe Wedding Project", will see 18 couples – either recently engaged or newly wed, paddling out into Phang Nga Bay on April 14 for an unusual free

tour of karsts and *hongs*, with the emphasis on true love.

Interested couples should contact the Phang Nga Chamber of Commerce at 076-411656 or the TAT at 076-212213.



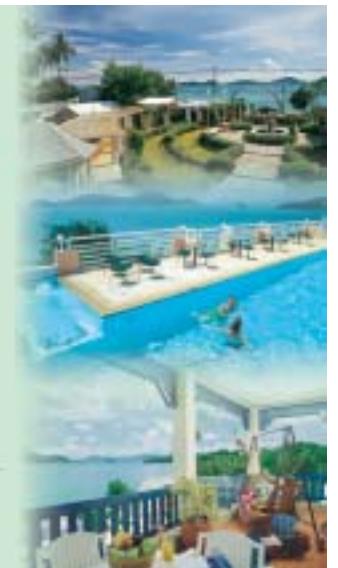
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Gazette launches home delivery

PHUKET: In response to increasing demand from readers for home delivery, as well as pressure from advertisers for paid (vs "give-away") circulation, the *Phuket Gazette* has launched a "Phuket Special Delivery" subscription.

Available to readers in Phuket Province only, the new service promises hand delivery to homes and offices virtually anywhere on the island, "every Saturday morning, rain or shine".

The Special Deliveries started on March 13. Priced at 1,560 baht for a full, one-year (52-issue) subscription, the product is tailored for a limited, high-end market.

"It works out to 30 baht per

Piglet deaths 'not because of bird 'flu'

PHUKET CITY: The recent deaths of 60 piglets on a single farm from respiratory infection were the result of hog cholera, not avian 'flu, according to the island's top livestock official.

The Chief of the Phuket Provincial Livestock Office (PPLO) Sunart Wongchawalit told the *Gazette* that the piglets died after contracting hog cholera, also known as swine 'flu'.

The deaths occurred on a farm on Soi Honsaitong, off Sri Suthat Rd, in Tambon Rassada.

"The owner, Winai Chao-yapraek, bought 30 pigs from a farm in Cherng Talay thinking they had already been immunized against the disease," said K. Sunart.

"When the piglets fell ill, the owner called the PPLO for help. That's when we diagnosed the piglets as suffering from hog cholera. They all died within a week from pneumonia."

"After the first group of piglets died of cholera, K. Winai got 30 more from the same farm. We told him to get cholera booster shots for the second lot of pigs, but he failed to do so, and those pigs died in the same way," explained K. Sunart. "Hog cholera is very different from bird 'flu. It can infect only pigs – not humans or birds," he said.

PPLO Vet Weerapap Termkietpaisarn confirmed that the piglets had succumbed to swine 'flu, saying that they had the classic symptoms of the disease.

"They have difficulty breathing and develop bruises over their entire bodies. Finally, they go into spasm and die," he said.

"Fortunately, all of the adult pigs on that farm and in the surrounding area have been immunized and are still healthy."

- Dhirarat Boonkongsan

issue, versus the newsstand price of 20 baht," noted *Gazette* publisher John Magee. "But we had to do something to ensure the loyalty of our advertisers at a time when they're wary of unpaid circulation.

"We had to get away from the clutter of the give-aways on the tables of Phuket's shops and restaurants. Most of the resorts booted out the give-away publications a couple of years ago."

The *Gazette* took its first step to fully-paid circulation five years ago when it began distribution through newsstands. "We learned quickly that a vendor will cooperate – often allocating eye-level rack space, or prominent table or counter space – when there's a transaction, rather than a 'favor', driving the merchandising," Mr Magee said.

Because of the high costs of island-wide physical delivery, the newspaper plans to cap its local subscriptions at 500.

Readers who wish to subscribe may do so at www.phuketgazette.net/subscribe.asp. Alternatively, they may email subscriptions@phuketgazette.net or telephone Khun Jib at Tel: 076-236555.

Broken leg foils car thief's escape

PHUKET CITY: A man suspected of stealing two cars and electrical equipment tried to escape through a third-floor window at Phuket City Police Station on March 11 and ended up in Wachira Hospital with a broken leg.

The man specialized in robbing the homes of foreigners, police said.

Pol Capt Akanit Danpitaksat, Sub-Inspector of Investigation at Phuket City Police Sta-

tion, told the *Gazette* that the two stolen cars were found at the home of Adison Hongwiengjan, 26, in Soi Thanuthep, Chalong.

"A Mitsubishi was stolen about four months ago," he said. "The owner parked it on Poonpol Rd [in Phuket City] and it disappeared. Yesterday, someone informed the police that the car was in Soi Thanuthep."

Police said Adison was also suspected of carrying out burglaries at two houses in Kamala,



Thanapong: 'I can't exercise my rights as a citizen living in the municipal area?'

Commission (CEC) in Bangkok, contesting the PEC's ruling.

"The PEC dismissed my rebuttal because I couldn't make it to their hearing," he said, explaining that the PEC had telephoned him on the day of the hearing to inform him of it, but that he was in Bangkok at the time.

"The CEC hasn't delivered a judgment yet. Until they do, I am not disqualified. I'd like the CEC to check whether the PEC is doing its job properly and fairly."

"I was born in Phuket City. All my family live in this area. We have four houses and have done business in the area for about 30 years."

He conceded that he had paid taxes for four years in one lump, but pointed out that those taxes had been accepted by the municipality, indicating to him that paying in this way was perfectly legal.

"I've paid my taxes. Yet because of this I can't exercise my rights as a citizen living in the municipal area?"

He added that PEC officers knew the rule on paying taxes, yet the rule was not mentioned in the election handbook for candidates. "How could we know about this rule? Why didn't they include it in the handbook?"

He said that members of his party would continue to campaign for votes though he himself could not do so until his disqualification is overturned.

Blue Canyon suit gets go-ahead

PHUKET (*The Nation*): The Phuket Provincial Court has decided that a complaint filed by a founder of Murex Co, developer of the Blue Canyon Country Club, has sufficient merit for it to proceed.

Rawat Chindapol has filed two lawsuits against Singaporean businessman Sia Leng Yeun and Blue Canyon Holdings (Thailand), alleging falsification of documents and concealment of information, with intent to take control of Murex. The first hearing has been set for March 29.

three in Chalong and two in Phuket City, most of them the homes of foreigners.

The man confessed to stealing the cars and 183 electrical items, including CD players, computers and TV sets, found in his house.

The brown Mitsubishi is awaiting its owner at the police station while the owner of the other stolen car, a black Honda Prelude, has reclaimed the vehicle at Chalong Police Station.

Vibeke Ulmann Weincke, 45, from Denmark, Managing Director of Sun Orient Tours, told the *Gazette*, "I got my car back – nothing damaged. I'd like to say 'Thank you' to the police. They have done a good job."

- Gategaeo Phetsawang

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Queer News

Caution: safety sign ahead!

PATHUM THANI: The mastermind behind a structure promoting the government's road-safety campaign has defended his creation from criticism that it is annoying passing motorists and is itself a hazard.

The structure features two life-sized dummies astride real motorcycles mounted on a three-meter-high platform outside the Pathum Thani Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Regional Center on the Rangsit-Pathum Thani Road.

The dummies are wearing helmets and black jackets and are illuminated at night by spotlights.

Many motorists and motorcyclists, however, have expressed concern that the structure could cause accidents because the motorcycles' headlamps and brake lights are always on and annoy passing motorists, particularly at night.

Somsak Arrayabhun, 50, the engineer responsible for the structure, said stoutly that the lights used did not produce a strong-enough beam of light to cause problems for motorists.

"The bulbs run off a 12-volt supply, which produces a very weak light when compared with



A highway official in Pathum Thani thinks these dummies can teach drivers a thing or two about road safety, but local motorists are wondering who the real dummies are. Photo: The Nation

220 volts or fluorescent lamps," said K. Somsak, who heads the center's Mechanical Academic Department.

"I don't think the lights annoy passing motorists and we don't mean to cause trouble for people," he added.

The government campaign aims to encourage motorcyclists to wear crash helmets and keep their headlamps on while riding.

K. Somsak said the structure cost 30,000 baht, took 20 days to complete, and was installed with permission from the Highways Department. He added that 11 more sites are earmarked for similar displays.

Source: The Nation

Grim Reaper exposed as sexist

RAYONG: Residents of Village 7 of Tambon Baan Laeng, Muang District, held a Buddhist *sadaokhro* merit-making ceremony on March 11 to try to turn around a string of untimely deaths that has caused the number of male residents to plummet to the point where there are 141 males and 269 females.

One might imagine that the surviving males might like the way the odds are stacked in their favor, but they're actually quite

nervous. Villagers are sure the village is cursed and no man is safe.

According to village headman Sayan Sripeuk, the worst year was 2003, when the village's ranks of widows really began to surge.

"Sometimes it gets so bad that there's a traffic jam of coffins at the temple waiting to be cremated," he said. "It seems like bad luck just begets bad luck. Men are dropping like flies."

K. Sayan said that, of the males remaining in the village, most are children. Adult females outnumber their male counterparts 3:1.

"I think this bad for our community spirit. We are rapidly becoming a village of old women," said the headman.

"So after discussion with my fellow villagers, we decided to hold this merit-making ceremony to break the curse.

"We invited monks from all over to come and join in by sprinkling the village with holy water in order to drive out the bad luck," he explained.

One of the many widows is 30-year resident Tawil Amponmaha, mother of 1984 Olympic boxing silver medalist Tawee Amponmaha.

"It is very difficult to believe what is going on here. Something strange is happening, and that's why I decided to attend the *sadaokhro* ceremony," she said.

It was not reported whether there would be any effort to keep the remaining men from riding around drunk on motorcycles without crash helmets over the Songkran holiday.

This practice has been statistically proven to take the lives of adult males relative to females by a factor of – you guessed it – around 3:1. *Source: Thai Rath*

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FIGHTI for BEACH



SPECIAL REPORT by Gategao Phetsawang and Sangkhae Leelanapaporn

We shall fight them on the beaches... with those words, British wartime leader Winston Churchill inspired the Allies to fight back and defeat Germany in World War II.

In Phuket, the war continues for the beaches – and it has already been running just as long, perhaps even longer, than the four-year war against Hitler.

Lines are now being drawn in the battle battle over whether the sands should be covered with umbrellas and lounges or left pristine, and whether female tourists should be allowed to go topless or be prosecuted for indecent exposure.

The jet-ski operators appear to be surrounded and wounded – but the cleaning-up operation could take seven years or more, allowing plenty of time for jet-ski supporters to recover and claim a surprise victory.

Yet these are just skirmishes compared with the battles some local vendors have been forced to wage for what they regard as their traditional livelihoods.

It has been a long, drawn-out encounter, extending back years – in some cases even decades. Now, slowly but surely, authorities are restoring order and the vendors appear to be in retreat.

Just about every beach on the island is at one stage or other of the invasion cycle, which works like this: tourist numbers build, one or two vendors venture onto the sands, and for a time there's a perfect balance between commerce and nature.

Then, as tourists continue to arrive – because the destination is so perfect – vendor numbers explode and the sophistication of their operations along the fringes of the beach increases to

the point where they become a turn-off.

The longer authorities allow the encroachment cycle to develop, the harder it becomes to determine the rights and wrongs, and to restore a balance between the attractions of the beach and the distractions of over-zealous vendors.

Within close proximity, three beaches on Phuket's west coast are now at different stages of the cycle. According to Kantee Silapa, Chief of Thalang District, Surin Beach is no longer under siege. The beachside vendors have signed contracts and are set to move to a designated site away from the sand in April, after the high season.

Virtually next door at Le Phang beach, the situation is different. The vendors have yet to be restrained, though the first blows are being struck; the beach area is now being surveyed.

The men with the theodolites and surveyor's pegs have already been at work further north, on Nai Yang beach, which is definitely mid-cycle. Tourists have begun to arrive there in numbers – a third large hotel is being built right on the seafront – and there are nearly 50 shops of one kind or another.

But before it can be established that the shop operators are interlopers, the boundaries have to be established beyond doubt.

Sirinath National Park was established in 1981 around the whole of Nai Yang Beach – or so authorities believed. But four years ago, in a check of the original survey, experts from the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) found that the land between the Crown Nai Yang Suite Hotel and the Pearl Village Hotel is not part of the national park, but belongs to the local Sakoo Tambon Administration Organization (*OrBorTor*).

"If that land belonged to the national park we could proceed,"

NG the ES

K. Kantee said. "But without the clarity of the law, the vendors can take the matter to court and a judge may rule that they have a traditional right to an income, even though their restaurants are on public land. It could be an obstacle."

K. Kantee has spoken to the vendors. Most, he says optimistically, have agreed to move to another site.

[The officers] said they will dismantle the shops this year, even though we always pay taxes for our businesses.'

The Chief of Sirinath National Park, Thanapong Apaiso, told the *Gazette* that a budget of 15 million baht had been set aside to provide alternative sites for the restaurants and shops. Planning was now with the Public Works Department.

The new site would be closer to the main road, with room for 36 small shops, but considerably further away from the beach than the shops are at present.

"We will start to plan the layout soon and I believe that everything will be finished by next year," K. Thanapong added.

But Surapong Panyawai, Chairman of *OrBorTor* Sakoo, told the *Gazette* that things were



Hardly idyllic: the scene along the storefront at Nai Yang where vendors await their fate.

a little more complicated. Eighteen of the shops are on national park land, and 30 are on *OrBorTor* land.

While the 18 can be relocated to a site provided by the RFD, there is doubt whether the other 30 can also be moved to the same site.

park was a forest, with only four dwellings.

With the arrival of the tourists, the houses became restaurants, although one was torn down after the operator planted coconuts and erected a fence. Over time, more shops opened.

K. Jumpri hopes her family can stay at Nai Yang. "I want to live here until my children graduate," she said. "Two of them are still in school. The oldest one has had to drop out because we don't have enough money."

She said that a recent visit to the restaurant by the Director-General of the RFD, Plodprasop Suraswadi, proved to be a watershed.

"When he came to our restaurant, my oldest daughter, who is deaf, gave him a letter that she wrote there and then, explaining that we don't have anywhere else to live."

"After reading my daughter's letter, he declared that the RFD must find a new place for us before ordering us to move."

"We are willing to move if the RFD can find a place for us

to live and do some business," she said. "Other beach operators are being sued and are waiting for court verdicts. We have heard that the authorities have told the beach operators to move so they can build a road."

She agrees that the beach needs to be clean and comfortable but she thinks the rights of shopkeepers should be considered more carefully, too.

"Some of them have spent as much as a million baht but they may lose everything."

K. Wanchai said that some shops have even been sold to new operators, even though there were no land ownership papers.

Another Nai Yang shop operator, who would give only his nickname, Lek, said he had been in business at the beach since 1988, and had invested 100,000 baht in his shop, only to have it torn down by the local authorities who promised him a new location. "But they just dismantled my shop and have done nothing since," K. Lek said.

His business is still open on the site, under a canvas awning.

"[The officers] said they

will dismantle the shops this year, even though we always pay taxes for our businesses."

The operator of the Kwanta Seafood restaurant told the *Gazette* that the change from being accused of operating on national park land to operating on *OrBorTor* land had only muddied the waters.

"Now we are confused about who exactly is responsible for this area," he said. "I can't believe the officers any more when they say that they will dismantle and rebuild our shops for us," he said.

So the cycle continues. And once the shops have been relocated some distance from the beach, the tourists will keep on coming.

The question is, will they be willing to leave the shelter of their umbrellas to go in search of food and drink? Or will a new breed of smiling invaders succeed in carrying goods – and the battle with the authorities – back onto the sand?

It may be some time yet before the war for Phuket's beaches is over.

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Clean beach is in the bag

By Gategao Phetsawang

Once a week, about 80 staff from the TwinPalms Hotel walk along Surin beach to pick up garbage left behind by environmentally-retarded individuals. A far-sighted hotel, indeed.

The hotel's Sales and Public Relations Manager, Somjai Tungkoo, told the *Gazette* that its policy is to treat the environment with respect and care and to keep the scenery looking attractive.

"This project aims to keep the hotel and neighboring areas clean and beautiful," she said.

The project began in December. Everyone from housekeepers to administrative staff take part in the beach-cleaning each Saturday from 9:30 am until midday.

"On Saturday morning, we don't have any training courses scheduled for our staff and the hotel hasn't been opened yet, so everyone comes to join," she explained. "After the hotel opens, we will continue this project, but the number of staff who pick up the garbage may be reduced because we have to serve the hotel

guests." K. Somjai said that there are many vendors and beach chair operators on Surin Beach. "When they see the hotel staff collecting garbage, they also become more alert to keeping the areas clean," she added.

"The beach is a few kilometers in length, alongside Surin public park, where people usually come on weekends for picnicking.

"After we began, we hoped that the amount of garbage would reduce – but that hasn't happened yet.

"Each week we collect enough garbage to fill a truck. Most of it is plastic bags and glass bottles. After collecting garbage along the beach, the staff separate the recyclable materials to make it easier for the Rawai Tambon Administration Organization (*OrBorTor*) to manage later.

"The hotel has asked the *OrBorTor* to put out more garbage bins so people won't leave litter in the park.

"Another project that we have started is recycling papers and plastic material in the hotel. We also maintain large green areas in the hotel and care for some plantations nearby.

'The local beach operators also help to keep the area free of trash.'



Something to sing about: TwinPalms Hotel staff start the day by cleaning up Surin beach.

"In the future, we hope more local people will take part in cleaning their environment," she said. "If the area has nice scenery, it will be good for everyone."

Other hotels also do their bit. The Assistant Personnel Manager of Kata Beach Resort, Rakse Kongkram, said the resort was part of the Magic Eyes (*Taa Wisate*) project, whereby the Thai Environmental And Community Development Association seeks cooperation from hotels and local organizations to collect and recycle garbage along beaches.

"We usually collect garbage three times a year and when there are festivals. We make the

vista appealing for people who come to visit," he said.

"The local beach operators also help to keep the area free of trash."

Hotel staff generally kept an eye on litter along the beach, especially during the wet season.

Sudanong Samantarat, Human Resources Coordinator at the JW Marriott Phuket Resort and Spa, told the *Gazette* that the hotel will begin a project in April, involving about 150 hotel staff, to clean Mai Khao Beach during the low season.

"We want to participate in keeping the beach clean," she said. "Not only the section in front of our hotel but the whole

beach. The villagers also have projects to keep the beach clean."

Nongnuch Makmool, Assistant Convention and Incentive and Public Relations Manager, said that for about three years, hotel staff cleaned the beach every morning. From June to October, more monsoon-driven trash cluttered the shore.

She said that the staff collect an average of about three bags of garbage along Nai Harn Beach every day.

"We have a meeting with more than 10 beach operators every three months, seeking their cooperation in keeping the beach clean," she added.

WARNING : SELLING ALCOHOL TO PERSONS UNDER 18 YEARS OLD IS ILLEGAL



SINGHA NEW LOOK

Premier launches sequel to War on Drugs

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra launched another anti-drug campaign, insisting that pressure must be maintained to prevent the drug scourge from “regenerating”.

Running from March 8 to June 5, the campaign is targeting urban communities, border villages, villages where use of narcotics is known to be spreading, schools, entertainment places, service enterprises, dormitories, rented houses and slums.

The recorded deaths of more than 2,000 suspected traffickers and peddlers during the main “war” last year sparked outcry from human rights activists, who accused the police of acting outside the law – a charge the government has vigorously denied.

Desert isle: A village headman on Koh Samui said the island is bracing for another water shortage and that local residents were already expressing concern over the expected heat wave in April, during which the island can expect to run short of both stored water and tap water.

He said a number of tourism-related businesses had already arranged for shipments of water from the mainland to prepare for an influx of tourists in April, the time of Thailand's annual water-throwing festival, Songkran.

In previous years, local communities and small hotels that rely solely on tap water would bear the brunt of the shortage, said the headman.

Ten Commandments: Through his spokesman, National Police Commissioner General Sant Sarutanond ordered officers to be vigilant and also to ensure safe transport for children during the Songkran holidays.

He said that police stations across the country were organizing activities for children and that officers would pay more attention to the safety of girls and young women because they were often victims of sex crimes.

often victims of sex crimes. Thailand's top cop also urged young girls to follow 10 do's and don'ts to avoid trouble: do not wear short skirts, do not

A dynamic scene of water buffalo racing in Laos. Several participants in blue shirts and hats are running alongside a line of dark-colored water buffaloes on a dirt track. The buffaloes are harnessed together and appear to be in motion. In the background, there are trees, utility poles, and a white sign with red text that reads "ແຂ່ງສົນໄກນາ". Other spectators and a motorcycle are visible further back.

THEY'RE OFF!: Competitors dash from the muddy start line in a female farmers' buffalo race in Surin, held as part of the National Buffalo Fair in the northeastern province.

strangers, do not hang out with “false friends”, do stay close to parents, do not overspend, do not wander around, always go home, do not be swept away by materialism and do not concentrate on boyfriends.

100 clinics to be set up: The government will set up more than 100 centers nationwide this year so that women and children who are victims of sexual and physical abuse can receive treatment and counseling. The initiative is budgeted at 106 million baht.

Public Health Minister
Sudarat Keyuraphan said an average of 12 rape cases are reported every day in Thailand, including two involving underage victims. In a survey of just 21 public hospitals, 61 women died in rape-related incidents last year, K. Sudarat said.

"It is shocking that 31% of news reports on crimes involved rape and murder cases," she said. A Public Health Ministry report revealed that some 3,000 women sought rape and domestic-violence treatment and counseling between 2001 and 2003.

Infected cells: The Justice Ministry has agreed to cooperate with

the United Nations in a bid to rein in drug abuse and HIV transmission in Thai prisons, the Joint United Nations Program on Aids (UNAids) reported.

"As a model country in the fight against HIV/Aids, what Thailand needs to do to maintain this status is to expose what is going on inside jails concerning HIV and drug abuse problems," Kathleen Cravero, deputy executive director of UNAids, said after a visit to Bang Kwang Central Prison and a meeting with Justice Minister Pongtep Thepkajana.

Kanjana. She said the ministry had agreed to cooperate with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime to try to resolve the problem of intravenous drug abuse, which has strong links with HIV transmission among addicts inside the country's jails.

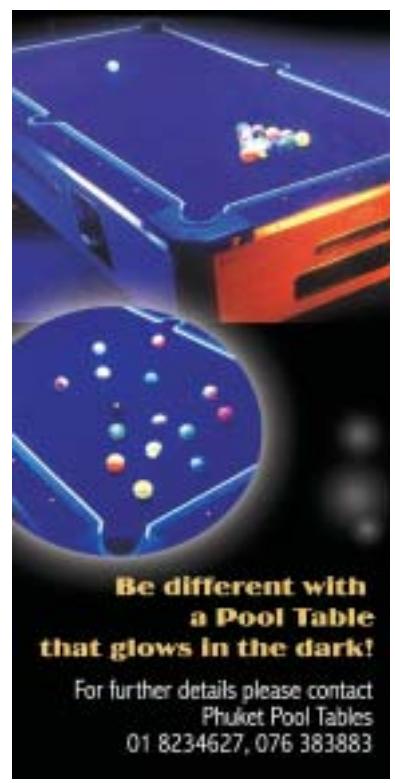
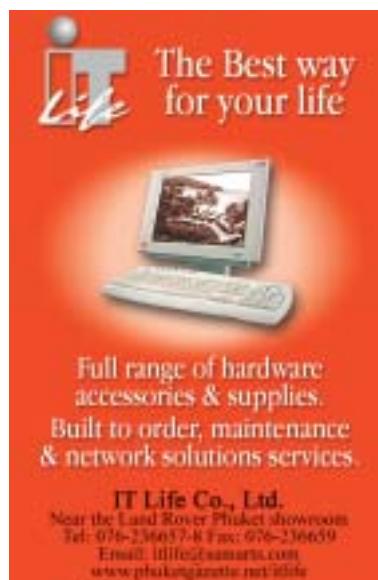
Pedigree retriever: The manufacturer of Pedigree Dry dog food advised its customers to stop giving the food to their pets pending laboratory tests and investigations into reports that several dogs become sick or died from kidney failure after eating the food.

The advice came amid a

wave of unconfirmed reports blaming Pedigree Dry for canine casualties in Thailand and other Asian countries, including Taiwan, which imports the product

wan, which imports the product from Thailand. Manufacturer Effem Foods announced a recall to pull the dog food from store shelves in Thailand and elsewhere in Asia.

Around the Nation news roundup is sourced from the pages of The Nation and Kom Chad Luek newspapers.



The collage consists of four photographs. From left to right: 1) A bathroom with a large white bathtub, a wooden vanity, and a red chair. 2) A hallway with a wooden floor, a red door, and a small dining table with chairs. 3) A room with a red wall, a large wooden door, and a balcony with a green plant. 4) A woman lying in a bathtub filled with water and floating rose petals, with tropical plants in the background.

PM pressures Bangkok Air on fares

The game of political tennis started by news of a second Samui airport continued this month when important personages from Bangkok, Surat Thani and Samui met to discuss again the pros and cons of the plan.

Dr Leekit Hirawengking delivered a message from the Prime Minister saying that if Bangkok Airways refused to reduce the price of flights to Samui, then construction of the public airport would definitely go ahead.

In response to the threat, Pradith Peekakhun, the assistant director of the only airline with service to Samui, said that his company was not in the least bit interested in cutting its prices, and that all of its prices and services, including the controversial 400-baht airport tax, were well within government regulations.

After much horse trading,

the general consensus was that a second airport was inevitable and in many ways would be beneficial to the island, particularly for those owning land on, or close to the island.

Such optimistic assessments are not echoed by many of those involved in the tourism business on Samui, who see the new airport as an attempt to turn the island into a low-end package destination.

Such an outcome would contradict current development trends, and possibly create an imbalance in demand and supply that Samui is not equipped to bear.

Cleaning up: Certain companies on Samui have finally realized that dirt and tourism don't mix.

At least one resort has been conducting occasional beach clean-ups for several years, and now the new Buriraya resort in Lamai is to follow suit.

Easy Divers operating from

Samui is organizing a clean-up in the sea around Koh Tao, where large numbers of divers are beginning to have a serious impact on the area.

The local authority does send out street cleaners once a week but they tend to expend most of their energy smoking cigarettes while pushing around roadside debris.

High-profile campaigns by individual companies, motivated by the wish to promote the company image, seem to be the way forward.

Forward, that is, if Samui wishes to ensure that the bikinis and ambulant baht sources that currently cover its beaches are not permanently replaced by cans, plastic bottles and oil spills.

Bus brigands: Low-cost bus companies offering cheap seats to the south will be the target of a Tourist Police campaign to reduce crime.

These companies offer tickets from Bangkok for as little as 179 baht, but allegedly bump up their profits by robbing passengers while they sleep.

There have been many reports of such thefts in the past, and the Tourist Police once caught a gang who were hiding in the luggage compartment and

rifling through bags during the overnight trip.

A clandestine operation is now planned, though publicizing this may reduce its impact. Travellers who are too mean to pay 500 baht for a government bus are urged to sleep with one eye open as they bump, grind and wobble along during the 15-hour journey from the capital.

Toward the trend:

As Samui becomes ever more diverse and international, parts of the island are developing a contemporary style. New venues, hotels and houses are springing up all the time, many boasting sophisticated design features and the latest services.

Concepts such as "neo-Balinese", "Ibiza-esque" and 'tropical urban chic' are replacing the old bamboo and coconut wood that once symbolized Thai paradise.

Even the locals are getting hip, with mobile Internet devices in most pockets, and blue LEDs on the pickup trucks.

Other examples of the trend

on Samui include POD, a new bar designed by the owners of Q bar in Bangkok and Café Uno, a European-style coffee shop serving pannini and café latte.

Branded boutiques are slowly replacing the old copy stalls that once lined the streets of Chaweng. On a more cultural level, an art gallery opened recently, with an exhibition of contemporary Thai paintings from around the country.

While Samui waits – as it has done for around three years – to hear if it will be granted "special administrative region" status similar to that of Pattaya, island developers and businesspeople seem keen on the proposed name change of the island's municipal

district. Following an upgrade of its status, the island once famous for relaxation and remoteness would carry the lofty title of "Samui City", no doubt making it more attractive to those seeking a tropical paradise.

Cdr Swan is a writer with Koh Samui's community magazine.

FROM THE GULF OF THAILAND



By Commander Sammy Swan

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This week



A ROARING SUCCESS: Singing star Nantida Kaewbuasai was both guest of honor and main attraction at a recent Lions Club of Phuket Pearl charity gala night at the Royal Phuket City Hotel. More than 550 guests raised over 460,000 baht for Lions' Club projects.



BARTERING AND BONDING: Michael Massey (2nd from right) Brokerage Manager (Phuket) of Bartercard (Thailand) Co Ltd, was guest speaker at a gathering of the International Business Association of Phuket (IBAP) at The Watermark restaurant on March 4. He is pictured with, from left, OB Wetzell, Vunlapa Khemthong, Michael Weinstein and Neil Cumming.



OH HAPPY DAY: Mr and Mrs Johann Polt (wearing garlands), guests at the Layon Beach Phuket Aprime Resort, begin celebrating after their Thai-style wedding at the resort. Celebrating with the happy couple are resort owners Norahat and Rojana Raktae-Ngam (5th from left and 3rd from right respectively), other special guests of the couple and members of the resort's management team.



BUSINESS IS BLOOMING: Kanit Yongsakul (2nd from right), owner of the Boat Lagoon hands a bouquet to Banterng Tantivit, Chairman of National Finance Services Public Co Ltd, at the recent opening of its Thanachart Financial Complex, (Phuket) on the bypass road. Around 400 people came to the opening.



REVENUE-RAISING ROTARY RUN: Members of the Rotary Club of Patong Beach (RCPB) and other fun-runners focus on the festivities and frolic at the RCPB's 3rd Annual BBQ and Family Fun Day Fun Run at Bang Wad Dam, Kathu.



FOND FAREWELL AND FEAST: Management and staff of Le Royal Meridien Phuket Yacht Club bid *au revoir* rather than goodbye to Assistant Financial Controller Jamchan Wangnirandh (front, gray shirt) as she departs for fresh but familiar fields – as Financial Controller at the new Meridien Khao Lak.



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A JOB FOR

Never let it be said that Phuket is short of glamor, from the high brow to the er, slightly less than highbrow.

Last weekend, the cognoscenti donned their bow ties for an evening of drama and haute cuisine at the Sheraton, where the Puccini restaurant was the venue for the European Chamber Opera's touring production of *Tosca*.

What's needed now is for someone to write an opera called *Patong*, complete with all the drama, tragedy, pathos and farce that are daily features of our most famous beach.

Perhaps the man to do it would be Serge Consani, the French gourmet chef who has turned into one of Patong's most exciting impresarios.

Serge came to Patong years ago to head resort operations for then-Mayor Pian Keesin, who owns the beachfront Patong Bay Garden Resort.

Serge soon saw the possibilities to operate his own empire of fine French restaurants and boutique resorts. He now heads a collection of properties including the well known Monte Carlo restaurant and hotel on Soi Bangla, the Chez Serge restaurant at the Burasari Resort, the Ma Maison Thai French restaurant and the Saxo French Bistro, among others.

His latest venture is a bit of a departure, though – into the glamorous world of transvestite cabaret.

"I was great friends with Monsieur Helicourt who ran the Moulin Rouge in Paris," recalls Serge, "and when the former Andaman Queen on Soi Katoey became available late last year, I decided to take my love of French burlesque and produce a show that is a tribute to the Moulin Rouge but with a very Thai character."

He's named his cabaret Moulin Rose and involved himself in every aspect of the design. He has refurbished the cabaret using sensuous paintings and interiors and has choreographed the dances and designed the costumes for his troupe of performers.

It's a big, colorful, glamorous show with lots of colored feathers, sequins and skimpy costumes. It's sexy and startling, suitable for adults who like their entertainment on the risqué side.

Nantida's Night: I was at the recent wonderful dinner concert by Nantida Kaewbuasai, which raised funds to provide support for Phuket's autistic children and their families.

The event, sponsored by the Lions Club of Phuket Pearl, raised almost 500,000 baht and was attended by almost all of Phuket's local high society.

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THE THREE TENORS?



Serge Consani (the flat-chested one) with two of the stars of his new Moulin Rose revue.



Nantida Kaewbuasai with Chris 'I'm too old for this' Koppers.

Dr Supaluck Kanchaname-thakul, MC for the gala event, explained, "Autistic children live in their own world, unable to respond to the people around them."

"The Lions Club Phuket Pearl hopes to provide therapy for these children who often ... cannot attend normal schools."

Kopping out: Backstage, Chris Koppers of Soi Moody's, known for his uninhibitedly expressive dancing and on-the-street Elvis Presley impersonations, told me that he was considering giving up his nighttime activities in Patong.

"I'm just getting too old for this sort of thing," he said.

Mr Koppers made his fortune in Hong Kong, manufacturing what he calls "popular junk". But after years of hard work, he found vacations in Phuket more exciting than the factory office.

"I love Thai people because they believe that having fun is the most important thing in life," he told me. "So I decided to move to Phuket and enjoy myself." But I guess we all have to slow down sometime.

After hours: Also seen at the

concert were Martin and Lillian Carpenter and Allan and Claire Mossop, along with that international Man Of Mystery, Andy Street, who all headed over to the recently opened Seua Saming for a late cocktail after the Nantida show.

I went to check out this latest addition to Phuket City's vibrant nightlife. Apparently, there's a smart-casual dress code that requires patrons to wear dresses or nice long pants and a shirt with a collar.

The doormen outside the club wear trendy all-black uniforms but, oddly, the bosses inside wear jeans and T-shirts.

Rotary whirl: The Patong Rotary Club recently held its annual family picnic at Bang Wad Dam. In addition to the great food donated by the Holiday Inn Phuket, more than 400,000 baht was raised through the auctioning of

Thought the days of free love were over?

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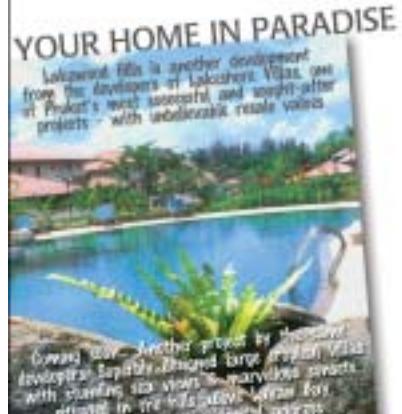
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generous donations by resorts and restaurants around the region.

OB Wetzell was a star, paying 66,000 baht for Bill O'Leary's donation of a full day for 10 people on an Amancruises yacht. Proceeds will benefit Life Home Project and other island charities.

What a gas: For those of you worried about the threat of earlier closing times for that island's entertainment venues, relax.

This is Thailand and Thai people will never lose their love of a good party. If the bars close early, there will be other options.

Already, the Star Mart at

the Caltex gas station at the bottom of Patong Hill is open 24 hours.

Now with outdoor seating, an espresso bar and a gourmet bakery, the Star Mart is pulling in crowds of locals buying their beer after hours and partying by the pumps.

After midnight, another hot spot for fun is outside any of the island's 7-Eleven convenience stores where those with a serious capacity for fun loiter with intent.

Stay tuned for more alternative late night venues if the dreaded early-closing law is enforced at island bars.

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ARIES (March 21-April 20): Your conscience gets the better of you this weekend.

Most Arians will be looking for ways to make amends for past behavior, which will enable them to clear the air. Next week, however, offers up tropical bliss that will leave you wanting more. If you've been single, a new relationship takes root, possibly leading to the true love of your dreams.



TAURUS (April 21-May 21): Your tenacious approach to business gets you noticed in the right places, but this could mean that



dissatisfied Taureans will be on the move. You are getting closer to finding out just how strong and capable you really are, so don't be tempted to give up. Some shaky moments mid-week can easily be circumnavigated with the help of a trusted friend. Wear the color amethyst to make spiritual connections.

GEMINI (May 22-June 21): If you're tired of someone not pulling their weight at work, it's time you stopped dragging the



buffalo cart on their behalf. Those born under the sign of Gemini who can't keep up

In The Stars

by Isla Star

with the pace of life this week need to streamline their responsibilities and offload some. Something fresh and exciting is growing in the jungle, but you will have to wait a while for details.

CANCER (June 22-July 23): Cancerians are likely to be on the receiving end of a shock announcement this week. You should wait for the dust to settle before making any rash moves, no matter how itchy your feet. On Tuesday, Virgo comes up with an offer that's hard to refuse. If you're ready for some fun with no strings attached, this could be exactly what you need. The number 8 has special meaning this week.

LEO (July 24-August 22): Holiday plans are subject to last-minute alterations, and some Leos will find it frustrating to adapt to what cannot be changed. Early next week, you will be introduced to someone who doesn't make an immediate impression, but you should reserve judgment. Cash seems to be

flowing in the wrong direction at the moment; sensible Leos will resist spur-of-the-moment buying.

VIRGO (August 23-September 23): Take care to tie up loose ends, especially if you are taking a trip out of town. Virgoans who have assorted irons in



the fire risk leave to chance something that will have negative consequences. Where romance is concerned, your partner's point of view is worth listening to—especially what they have to say about a mutual friend. On Monday you are likely to find something that you thought was lost for ever.

LIBRA (September 24-October 23): If your zest for life is waning in the heat, plan to



take it easy this weekend. Friends who try to pressure you into being a social animal will just have to understand that you need time out. During the remaining days of March, many Librans will be feeling at a low ebb and should listen to their bodies and spirits telling them to slow down.

SCORPIO (October 24-November 22): This week you will get good news that shows you that recent worry has been unnecessary.



Scorpios who needed a more positive balance in their lives will be happy to close the door on a negative chapter. If you're open to a new relationship, Cupid is due to come calling. If you're already involved, there is a surprise in store.

SAGITTARIUS (November 23-December 21): A situation you thought had already



come full circle takes off at a tangent and you will need to think on your feet. Going with the cosmic flow should come naturally; if your instincts tell you not to do something, you must listen. Financial matters are strongly indicated mid-week. You could be in the right place at the right time to make a profit.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 20): Your hard work



should be rewarded in the coming days. Capricorns who have had their noses to the

grindstone since the start of the year will finally reap some benefits. This is a good time to think of ways to thank those who have supported you. If, however, you've barely climbed out of your hammock during recent weeks, this week offers real temptation to move.

AQUARIUS (January 21-February 19): The stars are lining up to shower those



Aquarians with romance. As "irresistible" becomes your new middle name, you may even grow tired of all the attention and seek solitude. But spending too much time alone could mean that you miss out on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet a soulmate. If you haven't heard from an old friend, it's likely they've lost your number.

PISCES (February 20-March 20): Your luck is mainly good this week, with only a slight downward dip

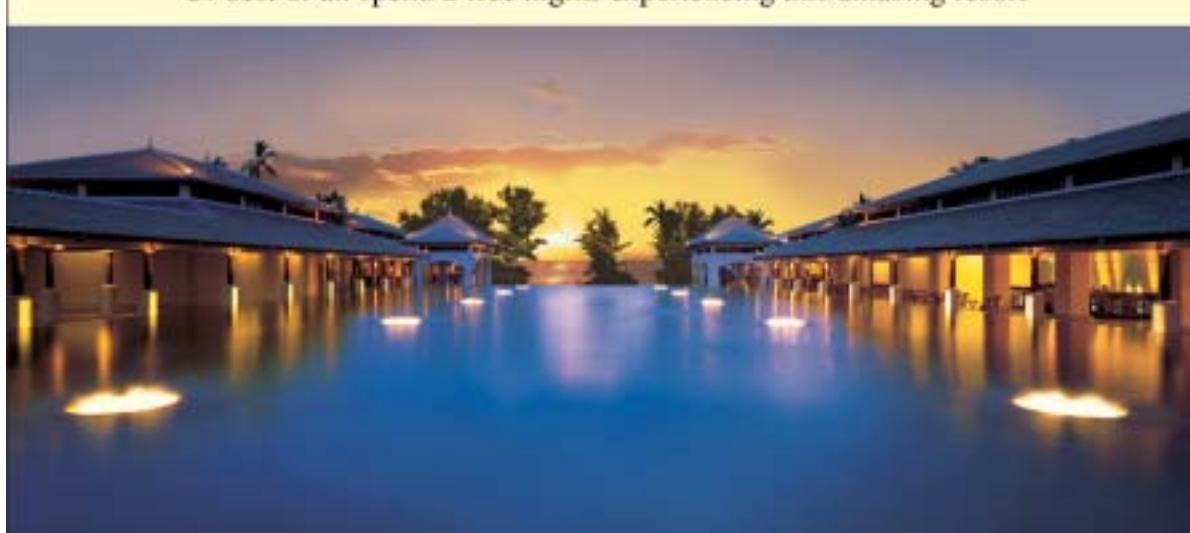


on Monday or Tuesday when a debt rears its ugly head. Although you may feel that this bill should not have your name on it, you may just have to cough up the cash. There's a lesson to be learned from everything that doesn't go the way you think it should.

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The trails attract crowds at weekends but on weekdays, the hills are alive just for you.

VOLCANOES in the suburbs

Within spitting distance – if that's not too touchy a metaphor – of Taipei, Yang Ming Shan park is the antithesis of the polluted concrete labyrinth that serves as the Taiwanese capital.

Consisting of a group of grumbling, semi-dormant volcanoes, the 27,500-acre park is actually within the city limits. On a clear day, you can see the mountain tops from downtown.

The town and the park are nothing alike, however. Fresh air, cherry blossom, flowers and green trails set Yang Ming apart from its smoky urban neighbor.

Yang Ming Shan is also well-known for its hot springs, which are a most acceptable antidote to a hard day's slogging up hills and down dales.

The contrast is apparent as soon as you leave Taipei's bland suburbs. The road winds up to alpine altitudes decked with dense bamboo forests, dark green lakes and numerous nurseries and farms.

The hiking here falls into the category of medium-difficult, with Seven Star Mountain (Qixingshan) one of the most

obvious treks. Some 1,120 meters, it provides the best views over the surrounding countryside and is the most rewarding climb.

On weekends and whenever the cherry trees bloom, most of Taipei seems to head out here, but during the week the park's trails are often deserted.

Hopping into one of the spas at Matsao or Chiku is an integral part of the Yang Ming Shan experience. Except in the more upmarket places, taking a dip is usually quite cheap and the water is heated to around 40-50 Celsius.

With everything below your chin immersed in piping hot water, the aches and twinges of a



After the exercise there's the prospect of a spa or a public bath.

TALES OF A TRAVELER

By Ed Peters

day's hiking just melt away. There's usually a choice of communal, single-sex pools or smaller and more private tubs that are suitable for families and couples.

While the spas are often open 24 hours a day, the atmosphere can get fairly raucous towards the end of the evening when the young bloods empty out of the city's clubs and discos and race up to Yang Ming Shan to round off their night.

The back door to Yang Ming Shan is Peitou, once a rather seedy hot spring resort which has been given a much-needed sprucing. Many of the spas here were originally constructed during the Japanese occupation, and their clientele consists mainly of well-padded executives with well-padded expense accounts.

If you don't have the bucks to dive in here, there are a couple of amusing alternatives.

The waters bubbling out of the spring at Hell Valley, or Diyu Gu, would cause most thermometers to go pop, so bathing is out of the question. But if you want to blend in with the locals, take along a couple of eggs to boil, which seems to be the major pastime here.

Further up in the hills, Chaoming Temple used to be known as Lovers' Temple, and couples would trek up here to swear their undying love to each other. An attempt by the Taoist authorities to scotch such dippy carrying-on – by renaming the temple Bright Tomorrow – failed to stem the tide, but even if you are travelling on your own it's worth dropping by to view the exotic architecture.

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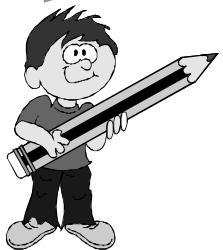
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KIDS THE FUN PAGE FOR ALL THE FAMILY

Spot the Difference



Can you find the seven differences between the two cartoons below? And can you find them faster than the rest of the family?



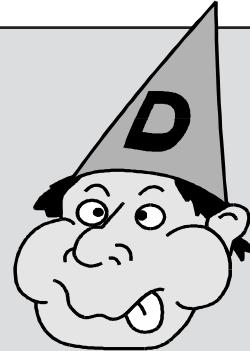
Answers to last week's Monster Quiz

- James Ellroy
- All died of lung cancer
- Carrying fruit or vegetables
- Eye
- Pauldrone
- Capybara
- Messrs
- Raw flesh
- Qiviut
- Nomen
- MCVII
- Krypton and xenon
- Men
- A horse
- Samuel Foote
- Imp
- Sorghum
- Poppycock
- Mauna Loa
- Sir Vivian Fuchs

**Solution to
last week's Crossword**



Get your brain in gear with the Monster Quiz



- What is the correct word for an instrument that measures the sense of touch?
- Which three colors are used to produce an image on a TV screen?
- Which RL Stevenson character said, "Many's the long night I've dreamed of cheese – toasted, mostly."?
- Who described Katherine Hepburn as running "the gamut of emotions from A to B."?
- Pierre Abéard married his student. What was her name?
- Where would you expect to find a Dravidian?
- What is the Vatican equivalent of an ambassador?
- In Catholicism, who is the patron saint of cooks and librarians?
- Who was the original *éminence grise*?
- When the Wateree and Congaree come together, what do they form?
- The dugong and manatee are members of what order?
- Which word can mean to sell, to hunt and to clear one's throat?
- Who or what is likely to suffer from loose smut?
- Which alphabet begins with aleph, beth, gimel?
- Which word, from the Arabic for "the reunion of broken parts", is used as the name of a mathematical system?
- What word comes from the Roman army punishment whereby one in every 10 men was put to death?
- Who was Secretary-General of the UN from 1953 to 1961?
- What substance allows fireflies to produce light?
- Which part of Canada used to be known as Lower Canada?
- In which country would you find the Shiluks?

Answers next week

Never a Cross Word!

Across

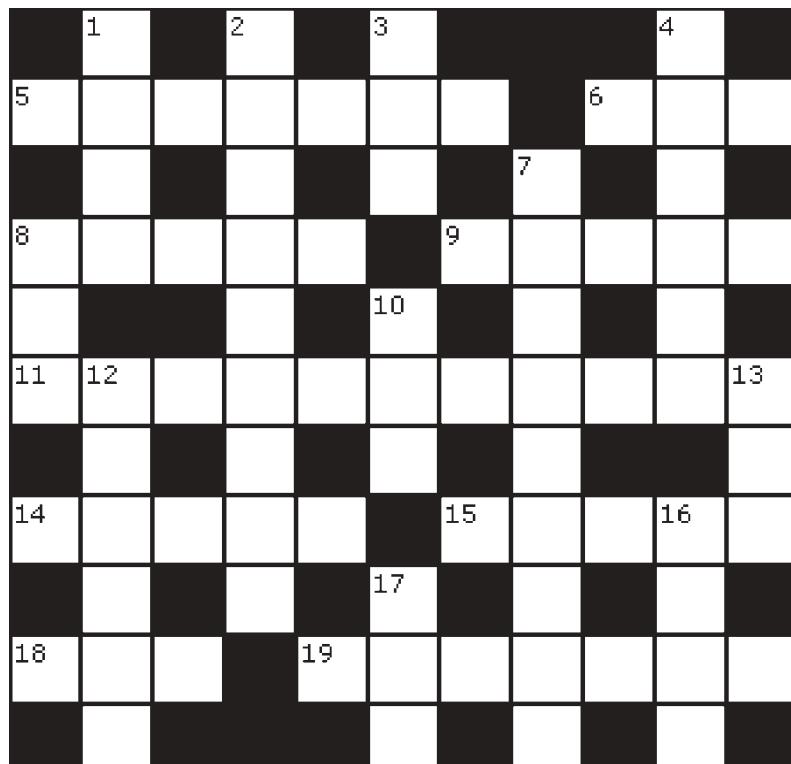
- Cruel rulers.
- A place for flowers or sleepers.
- Homework, maybe.
- Desert waterhole.
- Bin Laden's home these days?
- Its capital is Valletta.
- Greenfly.
- Win a point with a single stroke.
- Rotted.

Down

- Not the nays.
- How the pilot lands without his plane.
- Consumed.
- The R in EIIR.
- Kangaroo or wombat, for example.
- Expected time of arrival.
- Wildebeest.
- Corsica belongs to this country.
- Agree silently.
- Concept.
- Wager.

Solution next week

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Why work should be fun, too

Dear Momma Duck,

I am often confused by attitudes towards work in Thailand. Many Thais regard their work as important and strive hard to succeed. However, I have also met Thais for whom a job is just a job, and nothing more. It is not that these people are lazy. They are hardworking. The difference is that they rate having a job as less important than I would expect. Of course, I have met foreigners who rate work as a low priority, but this attitude seems to be more common in Thailand. Or is it just the people I meet?

Randall Jennings,
Phuket

Dear Randall,

Like all other nationalities, Thailand has people who regard their chosen profession as the most important part of their lives (perhaps to the detriment of their family) and those who regard their job as simply working to survive (sometimes to the detriment of their clients). Most of us fall somewhere in between these extremes. But I do think there are also differences in attitudes towards "work" between different cultures.

For example, a large number of "northern" cultures around the globe seem to place an extremely high value on getting the job done (sometimes known as a "Protestant" or a "Chinese" work ethic).

Other cultures, such as ours, while still getting the job done, seem to place a higher value on relationships and, therefore, tend to take longer.

I have worked in many countries (both "north" and "south") and have also seen big differences in attitude between the business, civil service and humanitarian sectors as well as between "bosses" (typically driven to succeed) and "employees" (whose jobs may be boring and who often receive no recognition). In Thailand, we have a saying about lazy civil servants, "chao cham yen cham" (literally "a bowl in the morning and a bowl in the evening"), meaning they just go to work to pass time and earn their daily meals.

As families and individuals, we're



Momma DUCK

By Wanida Hongyok

also born and raised differently. Some, who are born in a poor family, achieve their goals and are more "successful" than those from well-to-do families.

I think you and I are lucky to have the chance to meet and work with all types of people and, if you are a "boss", it's a challenge to get the best out of your staff. For me, I think a good balance between getting the job done and relationships is the most important. The best way is to learn how

to live with all situations but also not allow negative things to bother you or pull you down. Life is so colorful and we'll never be able to predict all the outcomes. This is the wonder of life.

Dear Momma Duck,

As you are a long-time resident of Phuket City, could you recommend a jeweler for an engagement ring, or perhaps your family prefers to make such

purchases in Bangkok? I am a bit nervous and looking for a reputable establishment.

David Kirk

Dear David,

I talked to a few business friends as well as consulting my mom and all of them recommended a jewelry shop named Sin Yu Chang in downtown Phuket City. It is at 49 Thalang Rd, opposite the small Sin & Lee grocery shop.

The place has a great reputation. There is another branch called Thaweesawan, near the Pearl Hotel on Montri Rd. Their basic prices are similar to other shops but you don't need to worry about the quality of stones. They offer a wide variety of settings.

Bargaining is acceptable, but remember that underlying gold prices are fixed by the government. Most Thai customers are careful to negotiate the percentage re-sale value in case you want to sell back the gold or ring to the shop. I do not blame you for feeling a little bit nervous because you're not buying a *kanom* (snack) but spending a significant amount of money. Best of luck finding a ring that suits your lucky lady.

It's wisest to invest in bonds

Attending a basketball tournament on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur recently, I eavesdropped on a conversation between two young competitors.

One of them was schooled in Borneo and appeared to be of Chinese lineage; the other, from a Bangkok school, seemed to have Pakistani heritage.

They found that they had a lot in common. Obviously, they shared an interest in basketball but within a matter of minutes they found that their mutual interests extended far beyond the sport they were there to play.

Despite their cultural, religious, social and racial differences, they managed to forge a

bond so strong that even after abusing each other on the basketball court to a point just short of absolute warfare, they could walk away smiling, each patting the other's back.

One might remark that this was simply testimony to the fine sportsmanship exhibited at the tournament, but I doubt that this alone could explain the close-



Youth 'n ASIA

By Eric Lacey

ness of the relationship that seemed to have developed between the two.

These two were sent to KL to oppose one another in a sport that is all too often thoroughly aggressive yet they managed to develop a genuine friendship.

The two spoke of their different backgrounds and how people in general were rarely or never exposed to others who differed markedly from themselves.

Each, instead of fearing the unknown and being intimidated by a stranger, talked to the other and embraced their mutual differences.

Biologists might argue that innate human nature – our at-

vistic animal instinct – would normally force the two to be hostile to one another, but that was not the case. Dog-eat-dog-style human nature played no part in this case.

People are generally much more open nowadays, especially the better-educated and those with international backgrounds, which these two were.

The pair in KL would have been proud had they realized how symbolic their cross-culture conversations were, but in the international world such formal recognition is trivial – which is how it should be. I felt I was witnessing an allegory for the world. Racism is illogical, prejudice has no justification and cultural intolerance is nonsensical.

There is competition among people in the world today, but that should not form the basis of discrimination against entire groups of people. These two knew this naturally, without

thinking about it.

Do you have any pet hates that tend towards prejudice? Then contemplate the harmony that developed between these two teenagers.

Such bonds between people of different backgrounds should not be seen as miraculous, even though there are many in this world who would never dream of forming such a bond.

Lack of travel or a poor education should not be excuses for limiting the spread of tolerance and the expression of comradeship or sympathy.

The word must be spread, which is why I wanted to tell you about the conversation between these two young people.

But talking or writing is never as important as doing. It is one thing to tell people not to be racist and quite another to be non-racist oneself.

So don't just advocate tolerance. Practice what you preach.

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Come early or late, but just keep coming

Pretty soon, all entertainment venues will have to close their doors at midnight unless they fall within designated "Entertainment Zones".

Now I know that the government has just delayed the whole thing a while, but it is coming, one way or another.

The expression "Entertainment Zone" sounds like a reproductive organ, and that is clearly what this whole thing is about.

The government seems to believe that if it removes all temptation and access to, er, entertainment, the young people of this country, with their roaring libidos, will be magically relieved of the urges of hormone-stirred indiscretion and bad behavior forced upon them by the evils of modern society.

I have lived in Thailand for about eight years now and a lot has changed.

When I first arrived nothing closed at all, ever, not even doors or, for that matter, eyelids.

I remember driving to work in the mornings. Half the bars were still full and revelers were still spilling onto the streets.

The area around what was then the Shark Club was heavy with the reek of vomit.

The embalmed Euro-trash congregating outside 7-Eleven were constantly waving my car down, thinking that I was a taxi driver, albeit a very pale-looking one.

Ladies who had failed to sell their charms by that time desperately yelled at me to stop and transact some well-discounted and well-marinated fun.

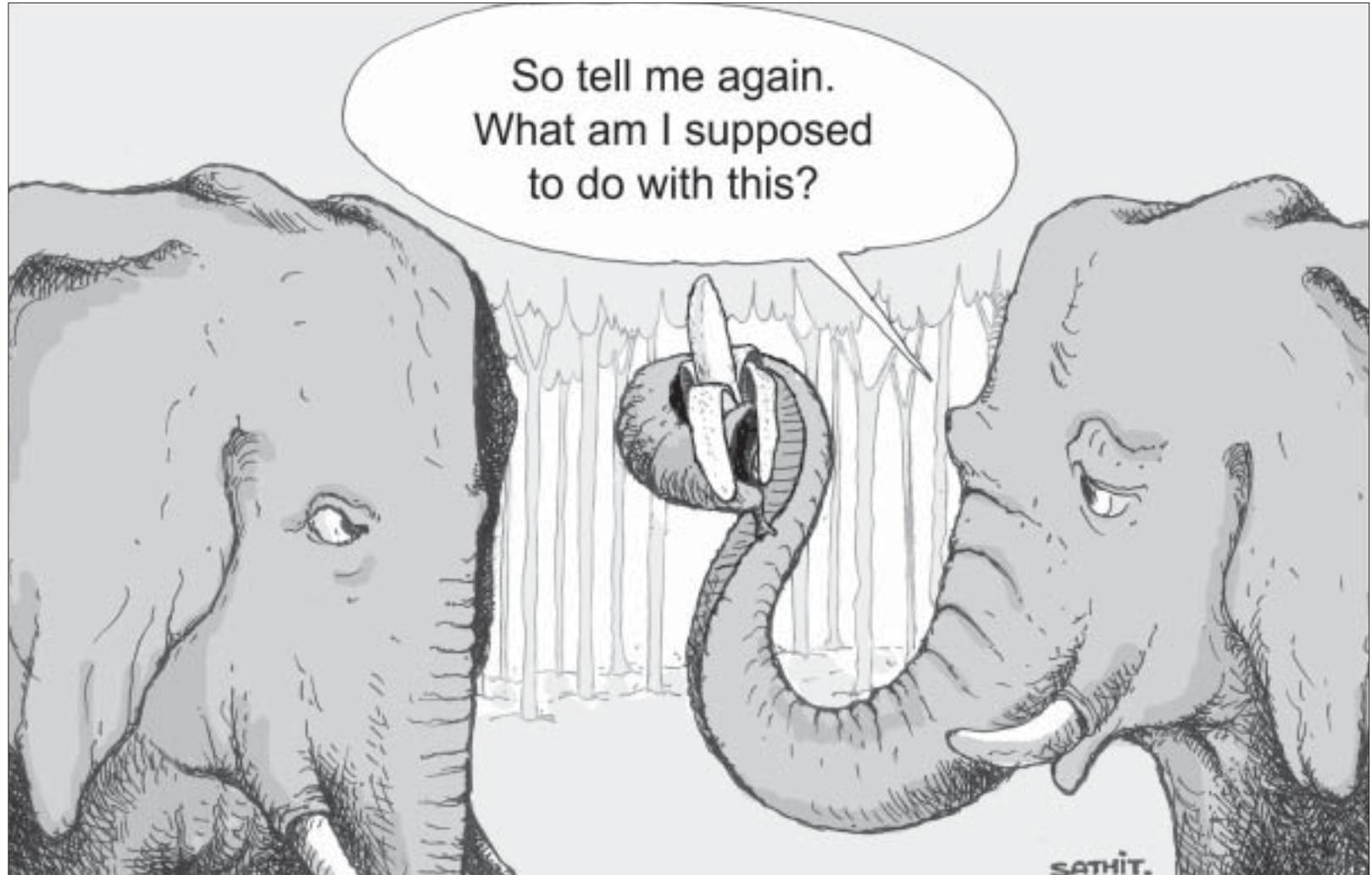
Fights were everywhere, with the most intense usually involving ladyboys – satin-clad eye-scratching kick-boxers who would encircle their drunken victims like rabid jackals, squabbling for a chance to tear away the flesh.

You might survive cheating on your wife, but if you knew what was good for the family jewels, you would never ever anger a *katoey*.

I would look forward to the show every morning because I never knew what to expect.

I recall, too, the dueling sex show touts who, because of the amount of competing entertainments available, basically had to outgross each other to attract attention and the tourist dollar.

Remember the guys with their books and cards with those illustrations and photographs depicting women with breasts the



size – if not the shape – of Manhattan and descriptions of what they were prepared to do behind those green doors? They would approach you and start barking every sexual proclivity known to man.

My favorite was nude thalidomide jello wrestling, while the next act, Phranee, waited in the wings with her razor blades installed at the ready.

But the most curious of these, I recall, was the picture I was shown that involved an elephant. An interesting act to catch, I am sure, if perhaps a little slow going.

To be honest, I think we are all better off without this crap. It would be alright if it was truly underground.

But you know Phuket – if it's not in your face, it doesn't exist. No chance of sexual subtlety here.

In the long run, it adds nothing to the fiber of Phuket, or of the country, for that matter. The government's clean-up is a positive step toward eliminating the country's seedy underbelly and toward ending the widespread negative perceptions much of the world seems to have of Thai women.

Although I do miss the morning show, the clean-up has otherwise vastly improved my mornings. There has always been

DOWNSIDER

By George Bentick

something horrifying to me about the sun coming up at the end of a long, dysfunctional night – the chirping of birds outside the window as you try to recover from whatever it was you were doing in the preceding hours.

The spinning ceiling was all too often the cause of desperate beseechings to The Maker along the lines of, "God, if you get me through this now, I promise I will never, ever do this again."

I'll let you in on a little se-

cret: God knows you're full of it and to prove it she has sent the Thaksin government to drive the point home.

The entertainment on my little morning drive is now well and truly gone.

Our Boss in Bangkok has banished the unfettered libido and given us all what amounts to a trip to the woodshed.

The watchword now seems to be "Abstinence".

The government is telling us to abstain from all that is evil, even going so far as to suggest at what age young women should be doing this and that and, further, warning that youth will be exterminated on sight if found

out and about after the 10 pm curfew.

So is Thailand slowly becoming the Utah of Asia? To be quite honest, I have no real objection if it is.

If they want to close at midnight, then so be it. I don't believe that anyone's lifestyle will be that radically affected.

It's all a question of timing. Instead of going out and starting late, you'll have to make it onto the scene a few hours earlier.

If you're not sure about all this, why not join us at the Crazy Girl Bar this Saturday at 9 pm. Our talented Phranee will be on stage again, doing readings from the Bible.

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Deconstructing bureaucracy

People in the property industry will tell you that the Land Department, once renowned as perhaps the most "flexible" of government departments when it came to rules and regulations, has gone a long way toward cleaning up its act since the land title investigation started and arrests of senior officials were made.

But the Land Department is only one of the government organs responsible for issuing paperwork for land and buildings.

Tambon Administration Organizations (*OrBorTor*), for example, are responsible for issuing building permits and registering ownership of new homes. Some *OrBorTor* are notorious for their eagerness to receive undocumented income in return for issuing documents.

Failure to pay results in long delays at best and outright refusal at worst. Other agencies at various levels are similarly difficult to deal with.

That the President of the new Phuket Real Estate Club, Phummisak Hongsyok, felt moved to vent, in public, the industry's frustration with the bureaucracy (see page 1) is an indication that something is seriously wrong.

K. Phummisak did not address the monetary side of the problem, but what he did say was damning: "These offices are making the real estate business very difficult with red tape, unclear information and unnecessary rules. This blocks development, as the real estate business requires organization and accuracy of information."

Bureaucrats in any country tend to make things more difficult than developers would like, and with good reason – an unregulated property industry has the potential to cause considerable damage to the environment.

Though the vast majority of developers are honest people concerned with preserving the environment, a small percentage are interested in nothing but turning a swift and handsome profit. The job of the bureaucrats, on behalf of society, is to prevent such excesses.

But what happens all too often in Thailand, and particularly in Phuket, is that some of the bureaucrats forget this responsibility in their own hunt for swift and handsome profits.

This is not a problem for unethical developers and the current system suits them very well. However, for developers who want to do the right thing, and for society at large, it is a disaster.

It is time for the government to put the other state and local authorities under the microscope, the way it did with the Land Department. This will be a painful process in the short term. In the long term, a more honest, transparent and helpful bureaucracy will be to everyone's benefit.

– The Editor

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Editor: Rungtip Hongjakpet

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Deputy Editor: Alan Morison

Chief Reporter: Sangkhae Leelanapaporn

Investigation Team: Gategaeo Phetsawang, Dhirarat Boonkongsaen, Supaporn Sriprom, Siripansa Somboon

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Letters

The *Gazette* is pleased to receive mail from readers. Please write to us at 367/2 Yaowarat Rd, Amphur Muang, Phuket 83000, fax to 076-213971 or send an email to editor@phuketgazette.net

with your views for publication in our next issue. We reserve the right to edit all letters. Pseudonyms are acceptable only if your full name and address are supplied.

The law must treat all riders equally

The letter from Ray Lukassen (*Gazette*, March 6-12) reads as if it is from someone who has broken the law and is now looking for someone to blame. No country forms its legislation with a sub-clause stating, "This does not apply to foreign tourists."

Why should Phuket allow people to ride motorcycles without a licence?

It is the driver's responsibility to comply with the law. Anyone without a valid driving licence should be fined and also have their vehicle impounded, to be released on production of the correct documentation.

There are already enough problems on Phuket's roads without letting unlicensed tourists add to them.

John Lunn
Phuket

Reporters entitled to their opinions

Perapong Pholpramul of the Phuket Reporters' Club, (*First Person* March 6-12) seems to be denying that the process of reporting necessitates the need for the reporter to subjectively select information then produce a report or opinion piece.

Journalists manipulate and redraw the metaphorical boundaries of what is good or bad journalism according to the vested interests they serve.

K. Perapong, use your position to create journalism of distinct substance and insight, sorely missing in all of the English dailies in this country.

Why not strike out and give a genuine opinion where it's needed (I assure you that a solid attack on Thaksin's recent censoring of the media would have elicited much more reader interest) rather than toeing the gutless line that having a subjective view is wrong or somehow not worthy of better or proper journalism.

Michael Beljak
Muang Krabi

Dual-pricing brings more pain than gain

I thought the places where local expats had to pay more than Thais were extinct.

I was wrong. I went to the gym in Sai Nam Yen Rd and was told the price was 1,500 baht a month. Then they told my wife she had to pay only 900 baht a month because she is Thai.

I pay my taxes so I expect the same treatment as Thais. Boycott the businesses that use this political and unfair practice.

Mathew
Phuket

Post it, then turn on the cameras

Kudos to the postal authorities for dealing with the postal bandit. I and others living in Rawai-Chalong have often failed to receive registered and regular mail.

Perhaps our mail suffers a similar fate to that in Patong? It may be time to install surveillance cameras in all of Phuket's post offices.

Mark Brindle
Rawai

Seven-year glitch lets the 'mafia' rule

I had to chuckle when I saw your online poll about the removal of jet-skis from Phuket beaches within seven years. Seven years?

If there wasn't so much corruption and "mafia" control of tourist industries on the island, this issue would have been resolved in seven weeks.

Just like tuk-tuk overcharging, or the gangs that run Chalong harbor, or the police who offer "instant solutions" that involve a trip to the ATM for a foreigner, the jet-ski issue is another classic example of who really runs Phuket.

It also demonstrates the lack of control (and courage) of the authorities who are supposed to make the necessary changes.

Kirk Leader
(former Phuket expat)
Vancouver, Canada

Hijacked? Why we feel deflated

On returning to our rented car at Robinson in Phuket City, we were told by two car park attendants that we had a flat tire.

Their "friend", equipped with a carjack, appeared and offered to change the wheel. We observed an exchange of smiles and realised this was probably a scam.

We paid, the wheel was changed, and we left. Scam or good Samaritan? We suspect the former.

Phil and Claire Adams
Nai Harn

Letters conveying views and suggestions are published here. Those seeking comment from government officials and/or business owners are published in *Issues & Answers* on the facing page.

Educators must learn the lesson

I have friends who used to teach in Thailand but they moved on to China, Japan and Taiwan. These were highly qualified people and excellent teachers. All left for the same reasons; more money and less hassle.

All of them report that students of English in those countries are way ahead of students in Thailand.

Many Thais themselves will admit that Thais' foreign-language abilities are poor. Even more disturbing, Phuket seems to be near the bottom of the class.

Given the number of foreigners who live here and the millions of English-speaking tourists who visit, Phuket should be a leader in its English-language abilities. The fact that it is so far behind suggests that something is seriously amiss.

Accusing fingers are often pointed at the foreign teachers. To be sure, Phuket has seen plenty of unqualified, unmotivated, and unintelligent English teachers. These people probably shouldn't be allowed in a classroom in any country. But can all the foreign teachers be so bad? Or is something else wrong?

I taught in two government schools in Surat Thani, one primary and one high school, each with a different bureaucratic system. The red tape was bad, especially the paperwork involved in trying to accommodate changes the school would make to the grading system almost every day.

But they eventually left you alone and let you teach. They provided a half-way-decent textbook, a workbook, and so on. The kids already knew a fair amount of English.

FIRST PERSON

sloppy, underqualified and overpaid. The solution, as proposed by the Phuket Area Education Office (PAEO) is to bring in stricter standards to prevent unqualified foreigners from entering Phuket's classrooms. Peter Meltzer, an American who has worked as an English language teacher in Surat Thani and in Phuket, in private and government schools as well as hotels, looks at the problems from the foreigners' viewpoint and offers solutions.

During my time in Phuket, I taught in two primary schools. I was shocked. The facilities were the same in both: one small whiteboard, one marker, one fan. There were no desks, no chairs, no books, no paper, and 25-30 kids staring at me. Most couldn't answer even the most basic questions in English.

A Thai teacher would sit in the back of the class to "watch and learn". His facial expression was clear: "Well, go ahead and teach. I'm waiting."

According to the system used in Phuket, students are already supposed to know the "language target" for the day, taught to them by their Thai English teacher. The native speaker is supposed

Last week in this column, foreign teachers in Thailand came under fire as being idle,

only to lead activities that reinforce what the students have already learned.

So go ahead, come up with an activity which can be done in the withering heat, which requires no materials, which can educate and entertain 25 screaming children who don't understand a word you say, and which addresses the language target for the day, which the students seem to know nothing about. Now do this for 50 minutes, five or six times every day.

It would be very easy to point fingers but what would be much more valuable, I believe, would be to make some suggestions as to how things could be improved.

Get help: Phuket should hire a quali-



fied native-speaking English teacher as head teacher of the Phuket English Program (PEP). This person would work with the PAEO to establish a curriculum, write sample lesson plans, prepare contracts, hire teachers and report on the progress of the PEP throughout the year.

When foreigners are hired, the head teacher will train them, help them to adjust to living in Phuket, and place them in schools.

Invest serious money: Does Phuket want highly qualified teachers? It is not going to get them just by being an exotic tropical destination. Other countries offer teachers good salaries and benefits, career prospects and better work environments.

If Phuket is not willing to match other countries, then it should forget about attracting good teachers.

Slash the red tape: The Phuket authorities seem committed to making it as difficult as possible to come here and teach English.

Restrictions, requirements, teaching certificates, teaching licenses, visas, work permits, bureaucracy, paperwork, and a lack of long-term prospects are just a few things teachers have to endure.

Many foreign teachers have reached breaking point. I know qualified people who are leaving because they are tired of dealing with the Thai school system.

The PAEO's plan to create more standards (that age-old bureaucratic solution) will make life more complicated. In the short term, this will succeed only in frustrating the remaining good teachers. In the long term, no one of quality will come here to teach.

Speedboat driver's license for beginners

I recently read in the *Gazette* that the driver of a speedboat must have a Helmsman Level 2 license. What is this and how do I obtain one?

Sao
Phuket

Kittipong Wasukri, Officer, Phuket Marine Office, replies:

To drive a speedboat in Thailand, you must have a Helmsman Level 2 license issued by the Marine Office.

To get one of these licenses you must pass a written test of 40 questions and an oral exam of five questions to prove that you understand boat operating regulations in Thailand.

A copy of these regulations is available in Thai only at the Phuket Marine Office. However, the written and oral tests can be taken in Thai or English.

When applying, you will need to bring to the Phuket Marine Office:

- Three two-inch photos
- Either your passport or your Thai ID card. If you are a foreigner, you must also bring a letter from a consulate or embassy of your home country verifying that the passport is genuine, accurate and valid.
- If you are a foreigner, you must bring a letter issued by an

Immigration Office confirming your address in Thailand. This letter must also be verified by a consulate or embassy of your home country. Thais must produce their house registration paper.

• A medical certificate verifying that you are fit to drive a boat.

• Proof that you have at least two years' experience in basic seamanship. This requires a signed and dated letter from the owner of a boat that you have learned on. It is not necessary to have learned on a Thai-registered boat, but the boat must have been registered somewhere for at least two years.

You will need to bring a copy of the boat's registration, signed and dated by the owner of the boat, as well as a signed and dated copy of his or her passport or Thai ID card.

Please note that while Marine Office regulations do not stipulate what type or size of vessels are appropriate for you to have gained experience on, these factors will be considered in the decision whether to issue you a license.

You will also need to bring one copy of all the documents submitted with your application.

Minimum wages for Thai graduates

If a Thai national has studied abroad and graduated with either a Higher National Diploma or a BA, is there a minimum wage he or she should receive when employed in Thailand?

Edward Chambers
Phuket

Wassana Kladngam, Records Officer at the Office of Labor, Protection & Welfare, replies:

If someone holds a BA or HND from any academic institution, the minimum wage currently is 6,360 baht a month.

For more information, visit www.phuketlabour.org (in Thai only).

Issues & ANSWERS

Want to know how to get something done? Can't understand some of the daffter things that seem to go on in Phuket? Want to pitch an idea to Phuket's authorities or institutions? Then this is the forum for you. Submit your queries or suggestions to us and we'll ask the appropriate people to respond to them.

Write to: The Phuket Gazette, 367/2 Yaowarat Rd, Muang, Phuket 83000. Fax 076-213971, or submit your issue at www.phuketgazette.net

Bans on noisy bars

Lately, bars have been popping up like mushrooms in Kata and I am starting to wonder whether a bar can open in any road or soi?

Bars should be restricted to Tai Na Rd and the Kata Center area. They should be banned from Patak Rd, Soi Ket Kwan and Kok Tanode Rd.

What can we sleepless residents do to ban the bars from our sois?

Suzanne

Kata

Tawatchai Thongmung, Palad of Karon Municipality, replies:

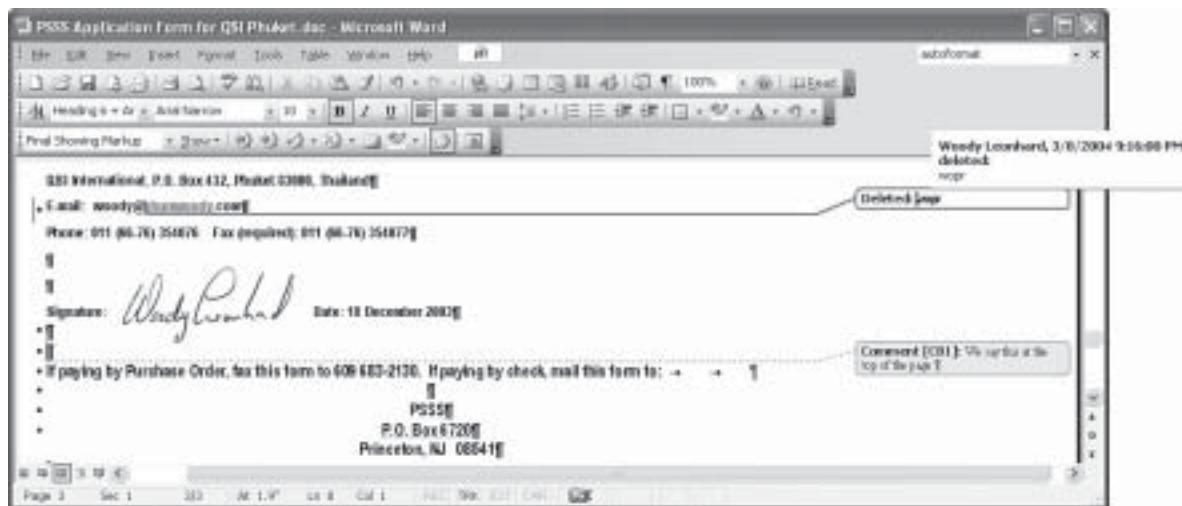
I have received many complaints about this, so the Karon Municipality, in cooperation with the Chalong police, have been checking entertainment licenses to ensure that bar owners are op-

erating legally. Bars not operated legally will be closed down.

Under the law, bars are allowed to open anywhere except within 500 meters of academic institutions or religious centers.

Before bars or entertainment places are allowed to open, they must ask for and receive the approval of the people in the community. Potential bar owners must go around and gather the written approval (usually in the form of signatures) of two out of every three residents. If this has not been done, the bar in question must close down.

If you are bothered by particular venues, contact Chalong Police Station at 076-381974. Letting them know there is a problem is a good way of ending the noise.



Word 2003 shows tracked changes and comments in balloons to the right of the text with lines showing where the change took place. If you hover your mouse over a tracked change, details appear in a box floating above it.

'Invisible ink' leaves tear stains

COMPUTER Q&A

Ask the experts. Email chris@phuketgazette.net

QI just read that a company called SCO filed a lawsuit against DaimlerChrysler. Some reporters found a copy of the lawsuit on the Web showing that SCO was originally going to sue Bank of America (BofA).

Apparently the Word document had "invisible electronic ink" showing that the original lawsuit was for Bank of America, but people had changed the Bank's name to DaimlerChrysler. What gives? Where does this invisible ink come from?

AAccording to CNET, SCO released a Word document that inadvertently showed the original target of its litigiousness was BofA. Somehow the geniuses at SCO put together a lawsuit against BofA, then decided to go back and change the lawsuit so it was directed at DaimlerChrysler – by performing a search and replace on the document, in effect, changing "Bank of America" to "DaimlerChrysler". (I've written about SCO before. Couldn't happen to a nicer bunch.)

Unfortunately, the explanations that have been floating around in the press – including on CNET – reflect a lack of understanding about Word and its features.

Word doesn't have "invisible ink" but it does have a feature called Track Changes, and that can prove embarrassing.

All versions of Word allow you to track changes made to a document. Typically, you tell Word to start tracking changes when a document goes out for edits. Each editor makes changes to the document, and Word keeps track of who did what.

When the author (or final editor) gets the document back, there's a set of tools that make it easy to hop through all the changes made to the document, and accept or reject each change in turn.

In Word 97 and 2000, you tell Word to start tracking changes by clicking Tools | Track

Changes | Highlight Changes, clicking the box marked Track Changes While Editing, then clicking OK.

In Word 2002 (the version in Office XP) and Word 2003, you just click Tools | Track Changes. When the document comes back, open it.

Unless somebody turned off Track Changes, the changes will be immediately visible: in Word 97 and 2000, they're highlighted in different colors; in Word 2002 and 2003, they appear in balloons off to the side. If you want to make the changes visible, or bring up the toolbar that helps you hop through them, in Word 97 or 2000, click Tools | Track Changes | Accept or Reject Changes. In Word 2002 or 2003, click Tools | Customize | Toolbars, check the box marked Reviewing, and click OK, then choose Final Showing Markup from the main dropdown box.

Microsoft built solid, reliable (if not particularly pretty) reviewing capabilities into Word 97 and 2000. But the 'Softies changed the reviewing features in Word 2002, and botched them so badly that many experienced editors won't even try to review tracked changes with Office XP. Word 2003 brought some sanity back, although it's still harder to use than Word 97 or 2000.

Those news reports that talk about "invisible ink" are actually referring to tracked changes.

You can get rid of all the tracked changes in a document by clicking the Accept All Changes button on the reviewing toolbar. You can also get rid of all the tracked changes by copying the text in the document into a new document. But you can't get rid of tracked changes by telling Word to stop tracking changes, or by hiding the reviewing toolbar.

The moral of this story: don't release Word documents. If you have to let a document out of your hands, convert it to PDF format (using a shareware package such as MakePDF, www.docauto.com), or send it in Rich Text Format (RTF), or as text only.

– Woody Leonhard
woody@khunwoody.com

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Scotsman runs amok

Adecade ago, the American owner of Phnom Penh's only bookstore, Bert's Books, would run advertisements in the *Phnom Penh Post* showing his grinning bearded mug and the caption: "Always carry a book with you and people won't think you look so stupid."

Of course, this can be carried to extremes. My dim-witted photographer at *Manager Magazine* carried a book with him, the same book, for months: Iain Banks' *Whit*. This and the stodgy black-and-white covers of his 11 novels put me off Iain Banks.

My mistake. *Dead Air* (Little Brown, London, 2002, 408pp) is a screamingly funny, over-the-top, wild-eyed madman's rant about the evils of our times post-September 11.

The ranter-in-chief is a Scottish radio DJ named Ken Nott whose midday show in London gives him a political license to kill. A self-proclaimed rationalist liberal "evangelical atheist", Nott has the ear of millions as he skewers conservative cant and puts down deranged call-in listeners. His is the perfect job for the self-obsessed silver-tongued iconoclast.

The novel opens on the morning after a farewell party for a couple who are moving from London to New York. People have been drinking and doing drugs all night and Nott instigates an orgy of throwing furniture off the terrace.

Then suddenly everyone's mobile phones start going off and Nott "wondered hazily whether for some bizarre reason everybody here had something urgent that they had set alarms for, a little after two o'clock on a Tuesday in September."

The day is the eleventh and it is in an atmosphere of growing paranoia and hysteria that the twisted plot-line evolves.

Nott spends a large part of his off-air time drunk and stoned and careening about among various friends and lovers. The great love of his life is the exotic Celia Merrial from Martinique who survived a

stroke of lightning when she was six and has since been convinced that she is half dead.

"I have to try to explain this," Nott writes in his baroque, hyper mode. "She doesn't mean half dead in any trivial sense of being tired-out or tired of life or anything like that, but half dead in a way unique to – and only capable of definition by – her own bizarre, self-made religion, a belief system without name, ceremony or teachings,

which she cleaves to with the airy casualness of the truly convinced, not the fundamentalist intensity of those who secretly guess they may well be wrong. It's a mad concoction of Voodoo spirituality and cosmologically intense physics, like something Stephen Hawking might have dreamed up on a really bad acid trip."

There is another problem with their romance. Celia is married to John Merrial, the most feared crime lord in London: "A quiet, even diffident guy, by all accounts, with a half-posh, vaguely southern accent, pale skin and black hair, usually dressed in an unshowy Savile Row suit and not at all the sort of chap who could have people much more important than me rubbed out as quietly and efficiently – or as painfully and messily – as he wants, any day of the week. And I'm screwing his wife. I must be f***ing mad."

Whenever Merrial is out of town, Nott and Celia make love at London's best hotels. Is this connected to the night a woman named Raine picks up Nott in a disco, drugs him and abducts him in a taxi? Before a team of goons can snatch him, Nott kicks out the taxi window and escapes. But who is after him now?

There are any number of plot twists leading to Nott's terrified confrontation with his own mortality and an improbable redemption that leaves the reader feeling cheated.

But if *Dead Air* fails as literature, it's certainly worth the read for its laugh lines. And now I plan to read my ex-photographer's discarded copy of *Whit*.



Off the SHELF
By James Eckardt

On the Move

Wanchai Wattanasiri, 56, from Kamphaeng Phet, has been appointed as Chief of the Phuket Provincial Highway Office. He has a master's degree in public administration from Burapha University in Chon Buri. Before moving to Phuket, he was in charge of the Project Engineering Section of the Department of Highways in Bangkok for more than 10 years.



Sirikorn Johnstone, 38, from Lampang, has been appointed Nurse Manager of the Bangkok Samui Hospital on Koh Samui, Surat Thani. She holds a master's degree in Human Management from Chiang Mai University and a degree in Nursing Science from Lampang Nursing College. She worked in the Bangkok Phuket Hospital for two years before moving to Koh Samui.



Been promoted? Made a career change? Know someone who has? Let us know by email to onthe move@phuketgazette.net.

Another cuppa java, anyone?

By Gategao Phetsawang

PHUKET: Nine Western-style coffee shops are already open in Phuket and more are on the way. The island's newest coffee franchise, Coffee World, recently opened at Tesco Lotus and the company plans to open 10 more branches on the island, at a rate of one or two a year.

Four of these will be owned and operated by sub-franchisers who want to invest in the growing Phuket coffee market.

Vitoon Supavatanakul, owner of the Coffee World franchise, told the *Gazette* that investors see Phuket as second only to Bangkok in terms of potential.

"Average income [in Phuket] is not much different from Bangkok," K. Vitoon explained. "The chances of success in business are better here than in other provinces."

"That said, Coffee World does want to extend further into southern Thailand at some point in the future, so that we can continue to grow."

"We plan on expanding to Koh Samui, Khao Lak and Krabi, as well as Haad Yai and Songkla," he added.

K. Vitoon reasoned that the best place for the first Coffee World would be in Tesco Lotus,

where many people do their regular shopping. The next branch will open early next year in another high-traffic area, the Jung Ceylon mall in Patong.

He said that the local market for coffee franchise shops is very large and although he expects new shops to continue opening at a steady pace, he still believes there is enough room for all of them.

"The market is big enough to share," he said. "I think it will grow in line with the local economy. Other coffee franchisers are not our competitors; they are companions in the same line of business. We can all grow in this market and that will give the customer more choices."

Nationwide, there are 39 branches of Coffee World, Phuket being the newest. Each shop requires an investment of about 2.6 million baht but the price can vary depending on the area in which it will be built.

"We expect to get our investment back in about two years," K. Vitoon said. "Currently, we are doing better than expected because we have both foreign and Thai customers."

He added that the shop gets between 130 and 200 customers on a normal day. The record so far is 300 people in a day.



Bean encounter: Vitoon Supavatanakul of Coffee World.

"We continuously offer new coffee menus for our customers so they have various choices and come back to us again," he said.

Narumon Patabeesukchai is Manager of the Patong branch of the worldwide franchise, Starbucks. The shop has been open for three years on the beach road.

K. Narumon agrees that there is still room for more coffee shops on the island, but is not as bullish as K. Vitoon.

"It's still possible for new coffee shops to open in Phuket and make a profit, but in the near future, competition in this market will become more intense."

"We don't think of other shops as rivals," she added, "because we have our own operational system and business model. Most of our customers are tourists, so our business depends on local tourism."

"The important thing for us is to maintain the superior standard of our services and products."

Nattanit Nathiwirun, Assistant Managing Director of Black Canyon, Phuket, also believes there is still room for expansion in the market.

She explained, "Each brand is unique in regards to packaging, taste, service and location. The competition between the brands isn't that intense."

Competition does exist, however, especially since Black Canyon also has a branch at Tesco Lotus.

K. Nattanit added, "Coffee World has just recently opened and they are doing some promotions, but many people are familiar with us already and know we provide excellent coffee."

"Initially, [the opening of Coffee World] will affect us, as their location at the front is outstanding and customers will notice them easily. It may cut the number of people who go into the mall and find us," she explained.

"They also have promotions to attract customers during their opening period."

She concluded, however, "I am quite confident that there will be many more coffee shops in the future, but in the end people will decide which shop they like the most and only go there."

Black Canyon will open two more branches this year, at Central Festival and in Patong.

Like Starbucks' Narumon, the owner of Coffee Lovers, Waralee It-thisiri, believes her shop's target market is different from the competition because of its location – at the Robinson department store.

"Customers will choose the most comfortable and convenient place to come and buy coffee," she said. "We will be expanding to other areas – including Kata beach – and will open two more branches in Patong as well as a store called Coffee Express for the wholesale market, selling equipment and ingredients for making coffee."

Building on solid foundations

Last week we covered a number of investment alternatives. Here are some more possibilities, all related to bricks and mortar:

Real estate: This category of investment offers a wide choice. Most common is the purchase of a house or apartment for an individual's own use.

Many people are also attracted to invest in property because of the perceived safety. If investors were frank, after the first housing purchase, subsequent property investment offers an asset that one can actually see and touch. With other forms of investment, the investor usually ends up with only a piece of paper.

There is probably also a certain element of status in owning more than one property.

Undeveloped land is an alternative – but as with all property, the most important factor is location, location, location.

I am deliberately not referring to real estate in Thailand. Investors – with some exceptions – cannot own property in their own names here. Land title issues have been well covered elsewhere in this newspaper.

Commercial property: This is difficult for the average investor because it requires both substantial amounts of capital and special knowledge.

However, there is an easy

solution – buy a fund in this sector. A fund offers investors professional management, economies of scale and, when necessary, almost immediate liquidity.

Again, the track record of the fund has to be good. It should have low to zero volatility. Commercial property funds are often listed and trade like any other share.

There is another variety known as Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS). These are also listed on stockmarkets and give investors access to a portfolio of commercial properties.

Since these are, in effect, stockmarket shares, they can have advantages in times of stockmarket enthusiasm but in bear markets, commercial property is not immune.

Ground rents: These allow an investor to participate in land ownership and benefit from an income. They also avoid fluctuations in the price of land.

Ground rents have been used for centuries and predate stock and bond markets. The British nobility had the problem of owning land in towns and cities. They did not want to sell this land, but they did want income from their assets. They simply allowed development of this land on a leasehold basis in exchange for a fixed return – ground rents.

These leaseholds are nor-



MONEY TALKS

By Richard Watson

mally for 99 years but in some cases are for as long as 499 years. This is an extremely safe form of investment because ground rents must be paid or the whole property is forfeit.

The ground rent holder has first claim – before any other creditor. The only practical way to invest in this area is to buy a ground rent fund.

Specialist property investment: The most attractive investment in this sector is student accommodation. In Britain, universities can offer accommodation to only about 22% of the student population and much of this accommodation is of poor quality.

Universities are already stretched financially in trying to meet their two main objectives – teaching and research – leaving them unable to renovate or build student accommodation.

This task has fallen to the private sector. It is a growing market – about 5%-7% every year. I am aware of only one group that has entered this market and they use unit trusts (mutual funds) as their investment vehicle. For investors, it has

produced good returns with zero volatility.

The biggest problem that ground rents and student accommodation funds have is their huge popularity. They often have to deal with huge amounts of incoming funds.

It's not easy to invest huge sums in a short period, so the managers have closed many funds to new investment. Only one remains open and it is not as easily accessed as in the past. However, it does have the advantage of a choice of investment in Sterling, Euro or US dollars.

Next week I shall complete my roundup of useful investment vehicles.

Richard Watson runs Global Portfolios Co Ltd, a Phuket-based personal financial planning service. He can be reached at Tel and Fax: 076-381997, Mobile: 01-0814611. Email: imm@loxinfo.co.th.

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SOME TIPS FROM THE GREAT GARY PLAYER

Keys to winning

Practice makes perfect, they say. A better way to put it would be, "Practice makes permanent – perfect practice makes perfect."

Gary Player used to say that golf was all about luck and the more he practiced, the luckier he became. I once had the chance to ask the South African legend where this quote came from.

The reality, it seems, was that Player was merely trying to find a way to deflect a journalist's remark that he had been lucky to win after having hit the ball all over the golf course.

This was not luck. In my view, winning in this manner takes far more skill than when one's best game is on display. Player was such a great competitor he seemed to find a way to

win, even when his form on the day was far from perfect.

Player is also considered one of the world's best practitioners. I asked him what he thought constituted "good practice".

I was hoping for just one or two brief pearls of wisdom but his answer was far more involved. "Good practice is working on your weaknesses. If you are only hitting four fairways a round, go and work on your driver. Set up an imaginary fairway on the range and give yourself a target.

"Hit 14 drives, making sure to walk away from each drive so you get a little of the rhythm of

the golf course. Don't just learn to hit robot drives. Tee the ball on different sides of the tee to give yourself a different look. Make it real.



TEE TO GREEN

Jon Morrow

"If you can't find the green with the irons, then practice those. In between drives, you can choose whatever iron you would need to get to the green based on a good drive. Again, set yourself a target.

You need to monitor if your practice is really helping.

"Lay down a rope to represent the edges of a small green (please don't try this at Loch Palm's lagoon driving range). Don't leave until you've hit your target number of greens in regulation.

"Always practice your short game. This is the easiest way to shave strokes from your score. First, practice holing straight two-foot putts. This will give you confidence, which is everything in putting.

"Hole three consecutive putts. Then move away one foot at a time until you miss. Once you start nearing your personal best, the element of pressure comes in just like on the course.

"Then practice the same exercise on a sloping section of the green, but this time holing just one ball from each of the four quarters of the clock. This will give you confidence on the breaking putts as well as uphill and downhill putts.

"Practice chipping, and don't forget bunker shots," he added.

Player was considered the king of bunker play. As a young man he would set himself a target of holing five bunker shots per session. He would never leave until he had holed them.

"If you don't finish strong, work on your fitness. Walk, run or even go to the gym if that's what you enjoy. For golf fitness, lighter weights with more repetitions are best.

"And always follow weightlifting with stretching so you don't limit your range of motion. If you practice better than you play, work on your mental strength."

Player told me the story of how, in "the steaming hot St Louis Open," he would go down to the scoreboard every day and visualize his name at the top of the list with the words 1965 US Open Champion next to it in gold

letters. On the final day, he was presented with the US Open trophy.

"Set yourself realistic practice targets in each department, stick to them and monitor them. How else will you know if you're getting better?"

"Above all," he said, "work hard. Hard work is good for the soul and the conscience. It is a license to succeed. If you've worked hard to achieve the right to win, you will feel like you have earned it."

The harder Player worked, the steelier his resolve grew when it came to the crunch. One sensed he felt cheated when he hadn't won, so great was his belief in this aspect of his preparation.

"I don't expect the average man in the street to practice like I do," was another of his favorite sayings. "But don't expect any more out of your life or your golf than you put into it."

These are wise words indeed from one of golf's greatest ambassadors.

How do you decide what is the best way for you to practice? Of course, this depends on the individual. As a general rule, pay far more attention to the short game, especially chipping.

You may have read that chipping is a completely different swing. This is rubbish. The chipping swing is simply a mini-swing containing virtually all the ingredients of the full swing. It is a wonderful way to teach your hands and arms the correct striking motion.

Just as in the full swing, grip, set-up and alignment are all important. Once you have found the correct position, with the weight slightly to the left side and the ball in the center of the stance, just swing the club back and forth on a slightly opening-inside-to-closing-inside arc, making sure you brush the grass after the ball.

As you go further away from the target, the correct elements of the full swing (a turn of the torso going back and a turn of the legs, hips and stomach going through) will appear naturally.

Don't question what is happening, just figure it out based on the club, the ball, the strike and the target. The rest, as Gary Player would say, comes down to practice.

Jon Morrow is a golf course design and construction consultant. Tel: 01-7284492. Email: jnmorrow63@hotmail.com



Blue sky and big hitting marked the C

Entry call regatta in

KOH SAMUI: With two months to go, the organizing committee is now back in full swing for the 3rd Koh Samui International Regatta, to be held from May 23 to 29, 2004.

For the third year, the Regatta is organised under the auspices of the Yacht Racing Association of Thailand (YRAT).

The Royal Thai Navy will once more lend the support that made the first two Samui Regattas such a success. The format will remain the same with the five days of competition featuring a mixture of passage races and round the cans, followed by daily prize giving cocktail parties and the closing gala dinner awards ceremony.

Joining the existing main sponsors – Central Samui Beach Resort, Coconut Land & House, Santiburi Dusit Resort, Singha Beer and Strategic Catering – are QBE Insurance and the Coco Group of Companies. These major sponsors, together with the many co-sponsors and participating outlets, will again come together to make the regatta a true island event.

Confirmed entries now stand at 20, with half of these being new participants, so the organizers expect the final number of competitors to match or exceed last year's 50 boats.

Some of the early entries include Frank Pong's new *Jelik* (the 75 ft. Reichel Pugh sloop, ex-*Pyewacket* of Trans-Pac record fame), Neil Pryde with *Hi Fidelity* and the 80 ft. *Swan-Maligaya*, all vying to take the Waterford Crystal trophy from Ray Roberts on *Hollywood Boulevard*. Another first-time contender will be Dr John Wardill on *Australian Maid*. The sports boat class will see the latest Phuket Sports 8, *Alakazzam*, joining

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(bold listings are Thai flagged boats)

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29 Ft 2003 Prowler 9000	Honda 4-stroke, 2 x 50 Hp	Price on Application	
28 Ft 86/02 Indian Open Sportfisher	Yamaha 200 Hp	THB	1,500,000
21 Ft 1997 Sealay Laguna 21	Mariner 200 Hp (50 hrs)	THB	1,200,000
18 Ft 2000 Skip Jack 18	Yamaha, 2 x 85 Hp	THB	750,000

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64 Ft 1993 Traditional Wooden Ketch	Yanmar 45 Hp	USS	100,000
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60 Ft 1982 Penisi Ketch	Hino 175 Hp	USD	47,500
60 Ft 1998 Penisi Sloop	Yanmar 50 Hp	USD	45,000
56 Ft 1973 Classic Corten Steel Ketch	Perkins, 64 Hp	USS	70,000
45 Ft 1981 Blawater Ketch	Ford Lehman, 65 Hp	USS	118,000
33 Ft 1986 Nauticat 33	Ford 90 Hp	THB	3,500,000
31 Ft 1983 Masi 95 (Peterson)	Volvo Penta, 22 Hp	Refined to USS	25,000

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challenge event at Laguna.

for 3rd Samui

Somtam Express and *Attitude 8*.

This year will also see the addition of an offshore multihull class with the first Samui built RB8000 *Coco Blues* competing against the Farriers *Cedar Swan* and *Vivace*.

Meanwhile, the beach cat class will again see the Nacras and Taipans going head to head, with a few new Hobies competing for good measure.

Capital TV will again be shooting a 25-minute video program to be aired via Star World sports and UBC satellite networks across Asia.

For details, visit the web site www.samuiregatta.com or email peter@samuiregatta.com

Golfer smacks ball 310 yards

LAGUNA: Guests and visitors turned out to try a name-brand driver and enjoy several competitions at Laguna Phuket Golf Club recently.

The new Cobra Driver 440 SZ (for men) and Cobra Driver 355 SZ (for women) inspired some long hitting on the second hole at the course, with member Lance Taylor belting the ball 310 yards – about average for Tiger Woods, but a long way for a non-professional.

Results:

Challenge: Paul Moorhouse and Norela Moorhouse, Ian Stewart and Betty Stewart, Allan and Shirley Peter (Dusit guests).

Long Drive Contest: Ladies, Anita Peters, 220 yards; Men, handicap 0-10: Lance Taylor, 310 yards; handicap 11-20: Paul Moorhouse, 280 yards; handicap 21-plus: Mario Matinelli, 260 yards. **Closest to the pin** (hole 3): Lance Taylor. **Straight drive** (hole 4): Maggy Wigman.



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SHAMELESS SUN WORSHIPPERS: From left, Opel's new-ish Tigra Tin Top; the BMW Mini Cooper Cabriolet; and the dramatic-looking Chrysler Crossfire Roadster.

TOPLESS FUN

Motor shows follow a pattern, whether in North America (the world's largest), Bangkok (one of the less popular events) or Europe. One notable exception, however, can be found in Geneva's annual motor show.

Geneva is considered neutral territory for major players because there's no local motor industry. Knowing that no one auto company will dominate the show, a large and diverse collection of carmakers join in presenting their latest creations.

This year Volkswagen, Audi, Mercedes-Benz and BMW from Germany, French auto makers Peugeot and Renault, Ferrari, Lancia and Fiat from car-mad Italy, along with several American manufacturers, unveiled new models.

This show, Geneva's 74th,

seemed to have a definite open-top theme, with a number of auto makers displaying convertibles.

Most significant was the much anticipated replacement for the Mercedes-Benz SLK sports coupé.

The SLK, introduced as long ago as 1996, was the first roadster to feature a folding metal roof. Now everybody is getting

in on the act, with several so-called coupé-cabriolets on the market.

The sleek 2004 SLK coupé, although still relatively compact inside, has vastly more trunk space even with the roof down, thanks to a new, more efficient folding mechanism.

Visually, it is similar to the SLR McLaren supercar introduced at last September's Frankfurt show, with a Formula One-style nose. Sure to be a success, the new SLK, with a choice of

V6 or V8 power, goes on sale almost immediately.

Another luxury car marque, Rolls-Royce, showed a drop-top version of its Phantom, this one labeled 100 EX – 100 for the marque's centenary this year, and EX for experimental.

The luxury car maker admits the show car is unlikely ever to see production, but it was an interesting exercise with a deck-planked rear surround and solid aluminum hood.

Next to the Rolls-Royce, and also a member of the BMW family, was a cabriolet version of the Mini Cooper, an attractive variant on the Mini theme. Expect more developments of the base Mini model as BMW endeavors to exploit the brand's strengths.

Meanwhile, over at Opel, the Tigra name has been resurrected with an electro-hydraulic retractable steel roof. Called the Tigra Tin Top, the little car will seriously challenge Peugeot's 206 CC and is, if anything, more attractive to the eye.

Ironically, the Tigra Tin

Top is produced by Heuliez in Cerizay, France. As well as the roof, the Tigra's trunk is operated electro-hydraulically and opens or closes at the touch of a button.

Available with a choice of 1.4 or 1.8 liter motors and manual or auto transmission, the Tigra is likely to be the class leader in this segment of the market.

To digress from convertibles, there were a number of outrageous concept cars including Volvo's YCC, a car "designed by women for women".

It features interchangeable seat covers and a wrap-around rubber front bumper for those unavoidable parking scrapes.

DaimlerChrysler's Jeep division showed a muscular off-roader with "go anywhere" ability, while Hyundai's new SUV, the Tucson, first seen at the 2004 Chicago show, is sure to be a winner.

It is expected to take the Korean marque past the two-million-units-a-year threshold.

Back at BMW and back to another drop-top, the Bavarian

auto maker showed a convertible version of its new 6-series, a sleek but expensive open-top sports tourer. The lines of the 635 look better in convertible form, though, but the cloth top does nothing for its appearance.

The Chrysler Crossfire also lost its roof, but in this case its looks actually improve quite dramatically.

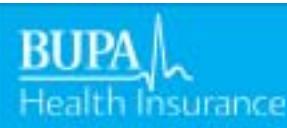
The Crossfire is an American sports car, Porsche-style, and uses a great deal of Mercedes-Benz know-how and components, including a 3.2 liter V6 engine producing a stimulating 218bhp (160kW) and 310Nm of torque. The top speed of the Crossfire Roadster is a healthy 240kmh, while at speeds over 100 kmh a rear spoiler is automatically deployed to increase stability. It is a welcome addition to the Chrysler lineup and one which should raise both the profile and profitability of this part of the DC empire.

The 74th Geneva Show was a breath of fresh air – almost like coming out of a winter of hibernation. Seeing old friends, making new ones and, most of all, greeting a great selection of desirable motors.

Jeff Heselwood may be contacted by email at jhc@netvigator.com.



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Whole lot of Heaven

The only bagel shop on Phuket (and quite possibly in southern Thailand) is a great place to meet friends for a healthy snack.

Bagels & Beyond, a few meters down the road to Chalong Pier from the Chalong Circle, was opened by Kirsten and Mark Kindermann last year after they moved to the island from Hua Hin.

There, Mark was sport-leisure manager at the Sofitel Central and Kirsten taught Ashtanga yoga to ladies from the Royal Family.

Before that, they lived in Abu Dhabi in the Middle East, where Mark taught English at the UAE Naval Academy. "I've had a varied working life," he says, "which includes running an organic farm in Hawaii, where Kirsten and I met."

His colorful career pattern includes having attended culinary school for two years, followed by varied restaurant experience, so Mark decided to provide Phuket with something that was lacking – bagels.

Apart from bagels with a wide variety of fillings, customers can also enjoy Mark's homemade burritos. He also has plans to offer a more extensive menu, starting in low season.

Helping him in the kitchen is Sunee Sakduang, whom Mark and Kirsten met on Koh Samui where she had a restaurant.

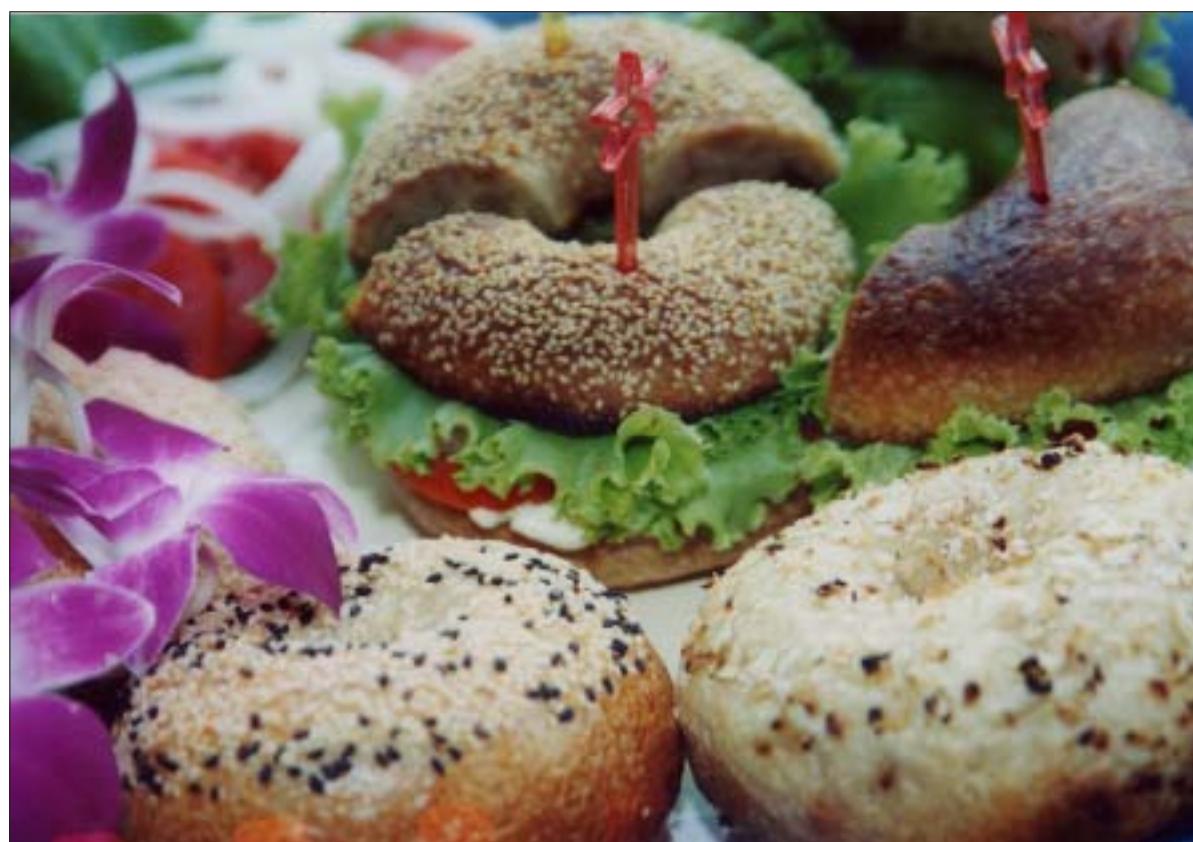
"When I heard on the grapevine that K. Sunee had given up her business, I tracked her down and asked her to come and help us," explains Mark.

"Her friendly personality and skills in the kitchen meant that her restaurant on Samui was always popular with foreign travelers and she is a welcome addition to our shop."

Pumpkin Bisque For 4-5 people

Ingredients:

1 kilo pumpkin, skinned, seeded and cut into 1-inch cubes;
2 medium-sized onions, roughly chopped;



The taste tells the story at Bagels and Beyond, where Mark Kindermann and Sunee Sakduang (below) also turn out a great 'Nutty Monkey' Smoothie and a fine Pumpkin Bisque (below right).



Guest chef

By Jenna Wise

Method:

Heat the oil in a large saucepan and sauté the onions, garlic, celery, herbs and spices until the onions are transparent. Add the chopped pumpkin and enough water to cover it. Bring to the boil, cover the pan and simmer until the pumpkin has softened. Strain all the vegetables and

retain the stock. Put the vegetables into a blender and add some stock after they have blended smoothly to get the desired consistency of the bisque – it should be quite thick. Add the milk last. Decorate with fresh coriander leaves and serve.

Fresh Mango Salsa For 3-4 people

Ingredients:

6 large tomatoes, chopped small;

1 medium onion, chopped small;
1/3 green bell pepper, chopped small;
1 long green chili pepper, chopped small;
2 garlic cloves, minced;
10 sweet, ripe – but firm – mangoes, cut into small cubes;
1/2 teaspoon lemon juice;
A dash of white vinegar;
Salt and pepper to taste;
1 small bunch fresh coriander, finely chopped.

Method:

Mix all the ingredients in a large bowl, adding the cubed mango, lemon juice, vinegar, salt and pepper last. Marinate for at least 30 minutes in the fridge, then add ingredients to your taste. This salsa makes an ideal cool, fresh accompaniment.

'Nutty Monkey' Smoothie Makes 1 large glass

Ingredients:

3 frozen bananas;
1/4 cup coconut milk (fresh if possible);
1 tablespoon ground cashew nuts;
2 tablespoons plain yogurt;
1 cup small ice cubes;
1 tablespoon honey;
1/2 cup water;
chocolate sauce.

Method:

Put all the ingredients, except the chocolate sauce, in a blender and whiz until you have a smooth consistency. Drizzle some chocolate sauce down the inside of the glass and pour the smoothie in. Fresh mint leaves make a good decoration for this drink. Mark recommends peeling bananas and storing them in a freezer in a plastic Ziplock bag: a good idea, he says, if you want to use bananas in a blended drink or baked recipe, because you always have them to hand.

Bagels & Beyond is at 1/4 Chalong Pier Rd, Phuket. Tel: 07-8850020 and 07-2659969. Opening hours 8 am-4 pm except Saturdays and Sundays, 9 am-4 pm. Closed on Mondays.

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Evils of erosion

This is not the first time the subject of land erosion has been discussed in this column. In fact, any article about the destruction of forests, and the massive flooding that can follow in low-lying land is sure to mention erosion several times.

Thailand was once covered in lush jungle and tropical rainforests, full of wildlife and magnificent flora. Now the hills of the North lie barren. The great rainforests which once stood there are almost entirely gone, thanks to the lust for teak and other hardwoods.

The planting of eucalyptus is an even worse disaster. The

eucalyptus tree is a very efficient hunter for water and grows rapidly in Thailand's tropical climate. Unfortunately, almost nothing else gets the opportunity to live in the vicinity of the eucalyptus tree, apart from a few hardy scrub bushes and ferns that require very little water to survive.

In the Australian outback, where the eucalyptus is native, the tree survives and thrives in the arid conditions, with its ability to search and find the available water.

Much of the coastal regions of Australia, which are now considered to be "the bush" were once lush forests. The destruction of these forests for the magnificent timber from the cedar trees, and the desire for more farmland, has turned much of the coastal region into dry bushland populated by eucalyptus gums and a few snakes, wombats and lizards.

The lessons, it appears, have to be learned again and again and again. In southern Phuket, where development is in full swing, the erosion is still happening, either through ignorance, stupidity or cynical lack of care.

The soil on huge swathes of the island is just waiting to be

washed away into the sea when the rains come. A lot of small life disappears from the land – and the sea – when the brown soil spreads across the sea.

For any developers who may be concerned about this problem, there is a program instigated by HM the King to fight erosion.

OB Wetzel, a project manager in Phuket who has been involved in several developments on hillsides, told me that the Agriculture Department office in Phang Nga has seedlings to give – yes, free – to anyone who needs to control soil loss.

These seedlings grow rapidly, and within a few days will start to seal the soil, preventing erosion when the rains come.

There is no way to avoid some loss of soil during construction, but from what I've seen, much of the problem in Phuket has come from land that has been totally cleared of vegetation.

There is no excuse for this kind of behaviour. The local authorities should be given lessons on erosion and its consequences, and should prosecute offenders.

A little care from both developers and authorities will go a long way.

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The badlands: Too many developers either don't understand or don't care about the damage that can be done by stripping vegetation off of plot of land.

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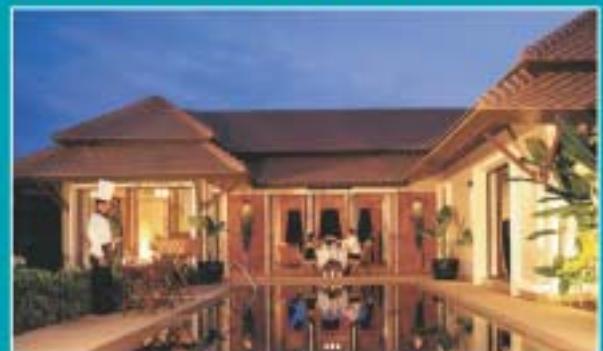
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Some people are born idle. I should know; I'm one of them. While everyone else is enjoying a rambunctious game of soccer on the beach, I'm much happier sitting in the shade, trying my best not to allow my beer to warm up in the Phuket heat.

If there's a job that needs doing, I'm quite content to let someone else do the work, as long as they don't mind.

There's a group of plants that have exactly the same agenda – epiphytes. Despite the rather medical-sounding name, this group of plants just can't be bothered doing that much for themselves.

If they were human, they would be quite content to have someone else perform menial tasks, such as lifting food to their mouths, provided that having to chew at the same time as having a massage was not too much of a chore.

A large number of plants belong to this somewhat lazy group. Many mosses and lichens are epiphytes. So are some seed plants and many ferns.

One of the best-known of these is probably the bird's nest fern. Others are bromeliads (members of the pineapple family, *Bromeliaceae*) and orchids. In fact, over half of the 20,000

Gardening

with Bloomin' Bert

Freeloaders of the forest

species of orchids are epiphytic.

The thing that sets these plants apart is their tendency to lean on others for their existence. Most people know what a parasite is. A parasite attaches itself to another organism, and extracts nutrients from it. The host organism suffers as a result, so parasites are generally unpopular and unwanted.

It's important to note, however, that epiphytes are not parasitic. They don't directly harm the host plant. (Who knows – the plant they choose to attach themselves to might actually enjoy the company.)

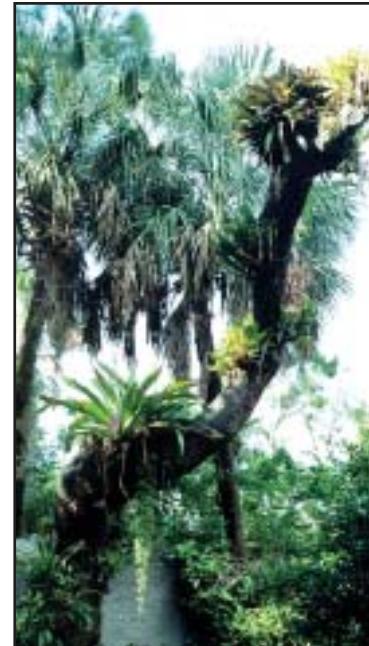
But they do get a leg up on life by taking advantage of other plants. Epiphytes are not rooted in the ground. They grow above the surface, using other plants or objects for support. By doing this, an epiphyte can reach a po-

sition where the light is better or where it can avoid competition for light.

Most epiphytic seed plants and ferns require high humidity and are found in tropical and subtropical rainforests. They are therefore quite at home in Phuket. If we had 1,500-meter-high mountains here, they'd be even happier as a group, because that's where they flourish best.

Having no contact with the soil, epiphytes get most of their nutrients from the atmosphere. Getting enough water and nutrients this way can be a problem, so many epiphytes have adaptations similar to desert plants, enabling them to collect, absorb and store water and restrict its loss.

Some epiphytic mosses and lichens take another route, shriveling when water is short. They act just like the grass you see at



Epiphytes perch on an old tree.
Photo courtesy of Bob Black,
Professor Emeritus at the
University of Florida.

roadsides all over Phuket at the moment – you'd think it was dead, with little chance of recovery when the rains return. But like the grass, these mosses bounce back when water becomes available. They are able to absorb it rapidly and resume growth.

For epiphytes, major sources of water are dew, moisture in the air and rainwater running down the support tree. In

some bromeliads, the leaves are arranged as a tightly-rolled funnel, forming a water-tight container.

Rain and plant debris are trapped in these funnels or "tanks", and absorbing tissues at the base of the leaves take up both water and nutrients.

You can attach epiphytes to the trees in your garden really easily. The best method is one that doesn't pierce the trunk of the host tree – how would you feel if someone nailed a fern to your arm? Palm trees, for example, will never heal if the trunk is punctured and will always be susceptible to invasion by fungi or insects. Other trees will eventually heal over, but nails aren't a good idea.

String or thin wire is the best way to fasten an epiphyte. The fastening should stay on until the plant becomes established. This may look a bit ugly for a while because you need to use plenty of binding to stop it moving – like a cast on a broken bone. If the epiphyte is completely immobile, roots will establish easily.

In the "epiphyte for life" these plants are pretty half-hearted in their determination to exist. You need to take on some of that responsibility yourself – they just can't be bothered.

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Property Gazette

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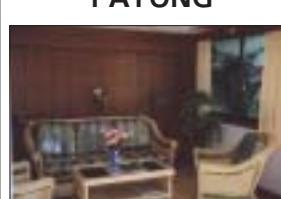
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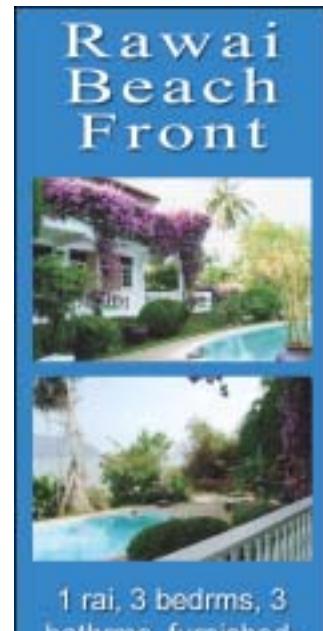
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Chief Accountant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thai Nationality, Male / Female • Bachelor's Degree in Accounting or Higher • Good command of English • Computer literate with good knowledge of Fidelio System • Good knowledge of local laws and regulations • At least 2-3 years experience as the Chief Accountant position 	1 position

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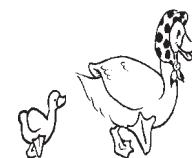
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