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Oil pipeline will 'wreck tourism'

By Dhirarat Boonkongsan

NAI YANG: Vichit Na Ranong, a former senator and current President of the Thai Hotels Association, has spoken out harshly against the oil pipeline slated to be built in Phang Nga, saying, "It will ruin all tourism here and we will never get it back."

Speaking at the opening of the new convention facilities at his Pearl Village Hotel in Nai Yang on July 21, K. Vichit said, "We have to be careful because the pipeline will be near the Similan Islands, which has very beautiful underwater natural resources, and other places along the west coast, including Phuket."

"Phuket, Phang Nga and Krabi make about a 100 billion baht a year [from tourism], which will disappear if there is something wrong with the area. What will we get as compensation?"

"We don't care only about making money, but the 100 billion baht goes toward supporting local people. We don't want to take the risk if there are other, better ways."

The go-ahead for the oil pipeline, linking a floating hook-up pipeline off Tab Lamu with a refinery at Surat Thani, was ratified at a mobile Cabinet meeting in Nakhon Sri Thammarat last month, with the project slated for completion by 2010.

But K. Vichit said, "I have told the government that if they have to do it so that Thailand will have enough energy, that's fine. But I think they have other choices [of location]. Why do we have to win in energy but lose in tourism? Why don't we work to [win in] both?"

"It's like playing with fire."



Similan Islands at risk? "We have to be careful," says Vichit Na Ranong, one of the fathers of tourism in the South.

If we produce oil to sell to others, we risk getting burned for them. Why don't we just play with enough fire to cook our own meals? That would be safer."

Comparing Thailand with Saudi Arabia, K. Vichit said, "Tourism is our main job. We're different from Saudi Arabia, which mainly sells oil. Saudi Arabia would be all right even if its tourism were destroyed, but Thailand is different."

K. Vichit also slammed suggestions that the pipeline will open a new market of tourists to

the area. "It's absurd for the government to tell us that oil traders will bring more tourists. We have our own markets of tourists. We don't want only oil traders coming here."

"I do not believe that's what the government truly has in mind. They should consider telling the truth, not just finding some unacceptable reasons to try to convince the public that they have the right ... to conduct oil industry operations in tourism places."

Crunch time: pages 4 & 5

Phang Nga airport proposal gets support

By Anongnat Sartpisut

PHANG NGA: The Deputy-Minister of the Transport Ministry, Vichet Kasemthongsri, has backed a proposal to upgrade a disused World War II airfield into a new airport to serve Phang Nga province, at a projected cost of 900 million baht.

K. Vichet gave his backing during a visit on July 24 to the disused airstrip on Koh Kho Khao, an island off Takuapa.

The proposal foresees visitors arriving by air, then traveling by ferry to nearby Baan Nam Kem on the mainland, a distance of about 500 meters, which would take about 10 minutes.

Phang Nga Chief Administrative Officer Surapan Saipan told the *Gazette* that studies have already begun into the possibility of building the airport on the island and complementary facilities at Baan Nam Kem.

He explained that the airfield occupies a piece of land two kilometers long, but that an airport capable of handling Boeing 737 jets would require a runway of at least three kilometers.

"We need to study the possible environmental effects of construction. This will take eight months to a year. But we think that there is a good chance it will be built."

He explained, "Phuket airport is congested, with an average of 86 flights a day. The new airport would serve tourists who want to fly direct to Phang Nga. If people want to fly to Phuket but cannot get a flight, then the new airport could serve them as well. Maybe it will also boost the number of tourists coming to Phang Nga as well."

Continued on page 2



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Burmese sought in murder of motorbike taxi driver

KATHU: A Burmese worker is being sought by police after the corpse of a motorbike taxi driver was found on July 21 by villagers near Talay Keeree village, in the foothills around Kathu.

The body, with 15 stab wounds in it, was identified as that of 45-year-old Narongsak Bunyalernimit from Phatthalung, a van driver with the Take-A-Trip travel agency, who worked as a motorbike taxi driver in his spare time.

Other motorbike taxi drivers at the ST Hotel in Phuket City, where K. Narongsak was based, told police that on July 18 he was hired by a Burmese called "Tone" to take him to work at Super Cheap. They described Tone as being about 22 years old and 1.7 meters tall.

K. Narongsak was found dead three days later.

After making inquiries at Super Cheap, police were able to locate relatives of the wanted man, but were unable to get much information beyond a statement that Tone had left for Ranong, intending to return to Burma.

Pol Maj Teerawat Liumsuwan of Tung Tong Police Station told the *Gazette*, "We have ordered the arrest of Tone, and our investigators are checking whether he has really left Phuket or not."

K. Narongsak's family have retrieved his body and taken it to Phatthalung for cremation.

— *Siripansa Somboon*

15 minutes of fame evaporates



Heading for Chiang Mai: Pornchita "Benz" na Songkhla.

PHUKET: Bangkok-based film company Hub Ho Hin has canceled all roles offered to Phuket residents for the movie *Jaew* (Operation Maid), starring Pornchita "Benz" na Songkhla, because a decision has been made to film location shots in Chiang Mai instead of Phuket.

Jarunee "Maew" Boonsake, second assistant director on the movie, explained, "The director, Yongyuth Thongkongtoon, has decided to shoot in Chiang Mai because we need Songkran festival scenes set there."

"The movie will be released worldwide, so the director wants to show Songkran in Chiang Mai as a way to show [the world] Thai culture."

"We apologize to people in Phuket who have applied for parts as extras. However, we will forward their files to Jarupap "Jib" Padmasiri, the casting director of the movie *Muang Rae* (Mining Town), which Hub Ho Hin will shoot in Phuket."

She added that the company is still seeking three Thai-speaking Westerners for *Muang Rae*, as well as 40 extras with southern Thai looks.

Shooting of the Phuket scenes of *Muang Rae* is scheduled to begin in early October.

Budding actors may contact K. Jib at Tel: 01-8026702 or by email at: jarupap@hubhohin.com

Crackdown to follow illegal labor amnesty

By Kamol Pirat

PHUKET: Deputy Prime Minister Wan Muhamad Nor Matha has warned employers failing to register illegal foreign laborers from Burma, Laos or Cambodia by 4:30 pm on July 31 that they face a fine of up to 100,000 baht or up to 10 years in jail, or both.

The warning came at a meeting on July 26 at the Pearl Village Hotel at Nai Yang, chaired by Deputy PM Wan Nor and attended by Labor Minister Uraiwan Thienthong and other top officials, including the Governors of 10 southern provinces.

A Ministry of Labor press release explained that Phuket had been chosen as the venue for the high-powered meeting because of its reputation for having a large number of "neighbor laborers".

There are currently 15,761 registered Burmese, Laotian and Cambodian workers in Phuket, but the Labor Office estimates that there are 70,000 illegal



No more kid gloves: Deputy Prime Minister Wan Muhamad Nor Matha.

neighbor labor workers on the island.

Special centers with Labor Office and Immigration officers have been set up at each of Phuket's three District Offices and at Phuket City Hall to process the registration of foreign laborers. These are due to close at 4:30 pm on July 31.

Employers who are unable to bring their neighbor laborers along before the deadline, K. Wan Nor explained, may register their foreign workers' names in their absence. The laborers can register in person later. No cut-off date was specified for this.

He also warned that, after the registration deadline expires, task force teams comprising police and Immigration officers, as well as officials from the Labor Office, the Department of Employment and the Governor's Office, will launch raids on employers to check if they are using any illegal neighbor laborers.

In a move aimed at inspiring an effective campaign to round up illegals, the Deputy PM also announced that he will propose to Cabinet a reward scheme funded by the fines levied on employers found guilty of hiring illegal laborers.

He explained that 80% of the reward would go to the informer, who could be a government official, with the remainder shared between the police and any government agencies involved in the arrest.

"This is the first time the government has considered paying rewards to state agencies for following policy," said the Deputy PM. "I hope that this will not be a problem because both I and [Labor Minister] K. Uraiwan agree with this concept," he said.

Plan to build airport in Phang Nga

From page 1

"The budget will be about 450 million baht for the runway and another 450 million baht for buildings, making a total of about 900 million baht."

"I don't see any disadvantages. We won't need to build a bridge because there are already 10 ferryboats providing service to and from the island. They can carry many tourists. The biggest one can carry 10 cars at a time," he added.

But not everyone agrees. Semsak Simsakul, a member of the Khuk Khak Tambon Administration Organization (*OrBor-Tor*), which includes Khao Lak, speaking on July 27 said, "If an airport is to be built, it shouldn't be on Koh Kho Khao; it should be on the mainland."

"I don't know why anyone would pay to fly to Koh Kho Khao and then pay for a ferry ticket to the mainland. The ferries cost around 300 baht for the round-trip — that's expensive. It's cheaper to fly to Phuket and take a bus to Phang Nga."

"If an airport must be built, it should be on the mainland, but I don't believe it's necessary to have one."

Phuket Tourist Association President Pattanapong Aikwanich, speaking to the *Gazette* on the same day, echoed these sentiments.

"[Building an airport in Phang Nga] will have no effect on the tourism industry in Phuket because Phuket and Phang Nga attract different kinds of tourist. Those who go to Phang Nga prefer eco-tourism, nature and quiet surroundings."

"But," he added, "it is not worth building a new airport. The main tourism center in Phang Nga is Khao Lak, and one can drive there from Phuket in about an hour. It is easy to get transport, and there is beautiful scenery along the way."

He theorized that, on the downside, an airport in Phang Nga might even ruin tourism. It could cause a boom mentality, he said, that would result in the destruction of the environment and the eco-tourism that currently at-

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DOWN THE HATCH: Accompanied by a group of smiling sailors, Phuket Governor Udomsak Usawangkura (center) and businessman Gulu Lalvani drink a toast at the official launch in Bangkok of Mr Lalvani's Royal Phuket Marina.

The lavish launch party, on July 23 at the Conrad Bangkok, cost close to 5 million baht and drew guests from far and wide, including friends and associates who jetted in from overseas.

Government plans to build marina in Ao Chalong

By Dhirarat Boonkongsan

PHUKET: Governor Udomsak Usawangkura has announced that Phuket province plans to build a marina in Chalong Bay.

The announcement was made during a recent seminar at the Royal Phuket City Hotel, attended by about 80 participants from both government and private sectors.

Panjit Pissawong, Chief of the Phuket Provincial Commercial Office, told the *Gazette* that Chalong Bay is the most suitable location for a new marina.

It is already home to the new Chalong Pier and to the "one-stop" service that allows foreign mariners sailing into Phuket to clear Customs, Immigration and Marine Department procedures in one place, she pointed out.

K. Panjit said the marina would be a boon to marine tourism, an industry that is expected to grow fast now that import and excise taxes on foreign vessels have been reduced to zero.

"To promote marine tourism, we have to attract yachts-people here by providing marina facilities," said K. Panjit.

She added that human resources would also need to be

developed in order to meet the expected growth in the industry. "We discussed the idea of introducing programs in marine mechanics at polytechnic and vocational schools in Phuket.

"The marina project will be initiated by the government, but will also be open for private-sector investment. The Phuket Provincial Administration Organization, as the representative [body] of the Phuket people, will prepare a master plan for the project at a later date," K. Panjit added.

A source told the *Gazette* that the project would include hotels and a duty-free shopping area.

• In a related development, the Tourism Authority of Thailand has announced that it is considering taking space at the Paris Boat Show and is looking for co-exhibitors.

Participation in the event, which will run from December 3 to 13, will cost between US\$500 and US\$1,000 (20,000-40,000 baht) per company, depending on the number of companies that agree to join.

For more information on the exhibition, visit the website at <http://www.ifbso.com/single.asp?ShowID=12>

Planning board set up

PHUKET CITY: The Phuket Provincial Administration Organization (*OrBorJor*) has set up a committee of professional town planners and architects to study ways in which Phuket's development can be better regulated.

The committee, which will work together with the Phuket Public Works and Town Planning Office (PPO), will focus initially on architectural issues.

At an open meeting of the *OrBorJor*, President Anchalee Vanich-Thepabutr told members that the *OrBorJor* needs to play an active role in planning because the current system has proven inadequate in dealing with the rapid growth the island has experienced in the past 10 years.

The new committee will consult with the PPO, which is expected to announce new island-wide regulations in September.

OrBorJor planners will also be responsible for the design of two new projects: a welcome gateway at Tah Chat Chai checkpoint and a 100-million-baht pier at Ao Por. These designs should also be completed in September, after which a budget proposal will be submitted.

Funding for the pier was approved by the Harbor Depart-

ment this year, though the proposal for its construction was presented at the same time as that for the work on Chalong Pier, which has now been completed.

"The Ao Por pier will be constructed in an architectural style that conforms with the local architectural style of the Pa Khlok District," K. Anchalee promised.

She added that other *OrBorJor* projects will include building a "history park" in Thalang and turning a Sea Gypsy village into a tourist attraction.

The *OrBorJor* will invite each of Phuket's 13 Tambon Administration Organizations (*Or-*

BorTor) and six municipalities to discuss the regulations in September so that they can develop their own local plans within the new framework.

"Local people should also participate in town planning discussions because their opinions are the most important thing. We can't dictate to them how their communities should be planned," said K. Anchalee.

The new committee's budget was not announced, nor was there discussion of how new town planning regulations could be enforced. Under existing law, the municipalities and *OrBorTor* are supposed to enforce such regulations. — Editorial: page 18

Court orders businessman off SorPorKor land

PHUKET: The Phuket Appeal Court has overturned a judgment of the Provincial Court and ordered Phuket businessman Narong Nopdara to vacate 21 rai of land in the Nakkerd Hills in Karon.

The successful appeal was launched by the Phuket Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO), which argued that K. Narong was not entitled to occupy *SorPorKor* land because he

already owns about 800 rai of land elsewhere in Phuket and in Phang Nga.

On July 23, the Appeal Court ordered K. Narong and his associates to quit the 21 rai immediately.

K. Narong's lawyer said that the businessman would take his case to the Supreme Court to try to get the Appeal Court decision reversed.

Meanwhile, the ALRO

has announced that it has canceled *SorPorKor* 4-01 papers on seven pieces of land after showing that the plots are already covered by *SorKor* 1 documents.

The Chief of the ALRO, Teerawut Thawornpattanaong, identified the affected as five rai of land registered to Nab Kraithong, three rai registered to Darunee Lukjon, 34 rai registered to Sombat Srisansuchart, 23 rai registered to Sathit Laum-mai,

58 rai registered to Pian Keesin, 14 rai registered to Huan Yooyen and 22 rai registered to Suparp Saksrithavee.

"This will have no impact on the registered occupiers of the land, and they won't have to move out," K. Teerawut said.

Asked how the occupiers had managed to get two sets of paper for one piece of land, K. Teerawut said, "It was just a little mistake." — Kamol Pirat

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Queer News

A really bad trip

SARABURI: While hallucinating under the effect of drugs, Preecha Chumnum apparently had an odd notion: he cut off 14 of his fingers and toes and ripped his left eyeball out of its socket.

Relatives of 42-year-old K. Preecha rushed him to hospital on the afternoon of July 12 after they discovered his unprecedented act of self-mutilation.

With them they carried a bag containing K. Preecha's severed fingers and toes, hoping doctors could somehow sew them all back on. Unfortunately, the digits had already suffered too much cell death to permit reattachment surgery.

During his extremely bad trip (it was not reported what drug he had taken), K. Preecha somehow managed to hack off all

of the fingers on his left hand. Also sliced off were the big toe, first toe and middle toe on both of his feet.

Ingeniously, he also managed to hack the thumb, index finger and pinkie from his right hand. The middle and ring fingers remained, however, presumably because he could no longer grip the knife.

His brother told a reporter that K. Preecha had fallen into a deep despair after their mother died. Unemployed and a long-term drug abuser, K. Preecha blamed himself for her death.

He is being treated at Saraburi Hospital, but is now fated to live out the rest of his life as a one-eyed man with two fingers and four toes.

Source: Daily News

Onan the Barbarian

RAWAI: Police arrested a 15-year-old boy after a woman spotted him performing the five-knuckle shuffle in her back yard.

The boy, identified only as "A", climbed over a fence and into the yard of a home owned by the 44-year-old woman, identified as "B", on the morning of July 23.

"B" just happened to be undressing at the time, a sight that was apparently so stimulating that the lusty lad could not resist plunging his hand into his underwear.

"B" spotted him in action. Instead of telling him to go play somewhere else, she called the police.

A team of no fewer than 10 policeman, including undercover agents, rushed to the scene from

the Chalong Police Station. There they found "A" still fondling himself, apparently unaware that he had been seen and shopped by the object of his lust.

The police seized the boy and charged him with trespassing. "A" subsequently admitted his wrongdoing.

Police were dubious about his reasons for climbing the fence. "I think he scaled the fence with the intention of robbing her," one officer said. "But when he saw her undressing he decided to play with himself instead."

If found guilty, "A" faces a fine of 2,000 baht and/or a year in juvenile detention, where he will be in good company – behind bars, it is said, the hand jive is an oft-practiced art.

Source: Siang Tai

CRUNCH TIME

The recent comments by Suwalai Pinpradab, Director of the local office of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), that Phuket will not become a truly "world-class" destination unless a range of problems are dealt with have been greeted with applause throughout Phuket's tourism industry.

Her criticism comes at a time when the TAT is pushing to attract more "high-quality", bigger-spending tourists. Here, *Dhirarat Boonkongsaen* and *Gategaeo Phetsawang* look at how this is to be achieved, and at the obstacles that must be overcome.

The overall principle is simple: more tourists equals more income for Thailand. And if you can get each tourist to spend more, so much the better.

Phornsiri Manoharn, the TAT's Deputy Governor for International Marketing, told the *Gazette*, "The government's aim is to attract about 12 million international tourists, generating an income of about 384 billion baht, this year. And the government wants more income in 2005. They aim to generate about 490 billion baht from about 13 million tourists."

A swift calculation shows that the per-capita spending of tourists this year will have to be 32,000 baht. Next year, in order to meet the government's target, that figure will have to rise to more than 37,500, an increase of 17%. How will this be achieved?

The key element in the TAT's strategy is to attract what it refers to as "niche market tourists". Tourists will be targeted on the basis of the purpose of their visit, such as eco-tourism, health tourism, diving, golfing, yachting, business or industry conventions or even honeymoons.

K. Phornsiri explained, "We cannot stop budget tourists from coming to Thailand, but we are trying to increase the number of tourists who spend more money during their vacations."

These visitors are referred to by the TAT as "quality tourists". "By this we mean they spend more money and more time here," K. Phornsiri said.

"Long-stay visitors are also considered quality tourists because of their activities during their time in Thailand, such as playing golf and diving."

The focus will not only be on tourists from abroad. According to its Overall Strategy, posted on its website, the TAT aims to boost the number of trips taken by Thais in Thailand by just 3.1%, but to get them to spend a whopping 20% more.

K. Phornsiri said that the increase in the number of domestic travelers is expected to compensate for any fall in occupancy rates created by any decrease in the number of low-paying international tourists.

"We have promotions to



'We have to stop destroying the coral, the marine animals and the tropical fish' – Anupharp Thirarath, former chief of the local TAT office.

encourage Thais to travel domestically, so no one need worry about hotel rooms being left empty by our increasing focus on niche markets," she said.

Anupharp Thirarath, the former chief of the local TAT office and currently the director of the TAT Frankfurt office, told the *Gazette*, "We do not consider tourists' activities and what they expect to see and do in Thailand as being more important than the overall number of tourists who come."

"But if we want to attract a lot of tourists, they should be quality ones."

He added that boosting income generated per tourist required less pandering to "zero-

cost tourists" who prefer cheap shops and typically patronize only restaurants and hotels owned or run by their fellow countrymen.

Vichit Na Ranong, President of the private-sector Tourism Council of Thailand, described the zero-cost tourist problem as a lose-lose situation. "We do, of course, make some money from the zero-cost tourist, but these tourists spend little on shopping and services such as spas, and we have to accept low prices from the package tour operators who bring them in," he said.

"This kind of tourism makes tourists feel bad because some feel they are forced to stay

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FOR PHUKET'S IMAGE



'It's like a snake swallowing its own tail' – Vichit Na Ranong, President of the Tourism Council of Thailand

at a particular hotel or to eat at a certain restaurant at unfair prices. Some tours even take these tourists to shops that set prices at a level that only tourists would pay. This is not what we call 'quality tourism'.

"And the worst thing about this is that it makes tourists see us in a negative way, and they don't come back.

"The TAT spends a lot of money promoting Thailand, but these tourists make a final decision never to come back to Thailand."

Not only do the tourists suffer, he said, but also the hotels.

"Say a tourist spends 4,500 baht a day. We may have to pay up to 3,000 baht of that to the agency abroad because they sent the tourist here. So in the end we get 1,500 baht a day from each such tourist, and we have to survive on that."

He added that the low margins made from cheap package tours has an additional negative impact: there is little money left to develop high-quality facilities or to improve service standards through training.

"It's like a snake swallowing its own tail," he said. "It can increase room occupancy rates,

but it doesn't leave any money to improve facilities or develop human resources," he said.

He believes that it is crucial to ensure that tourists' expectations of Thailand are met by the reality of what they experience once they are in the country.

"We have to make sure the products we offer tourists will not disappoint them, because they will never come back, even if, in the future, we do develop high-quality facilities and services," K. Vichit said.

"We cannot force our guests to stay in the hotels. If they walk out to the beach and see a mess there, they will discover that the claim of 'quality tourism' is not true. They will have learned a negative lesson from us, and that makes it more difficult for us to promote [the country] to them later."

He called on the provincial government to spearhead the attack on the problems. "Phuket needs someone to lead this development. It should be the Governor and the leaders of tourism-related associations. We have the potential to do this, but we first have to decide what we have to do and we should clearly identify the government's and the private sector's responsibilities.

"Phuket is full of potential for development, but we neglect to maintain things in good order. It seems that we have no idea of how to manage ourselves, so we make the mistake of letting good things become bad. And that's a pity.

"Too often, deteriorating situations in Phuket are allowed to continue deteriorating, especially when it comes to the environment and proper organization of our surroundings."

K. Anupharp concurred. "Foreigners who visit Thailand expect to see exactly what the TAT presents to them," he explained. "We can attract 'quality' and 'niche' tourists with our

quality facilities and natural scenery, but we have to stop destroying the coral, the marine animals and the tropical fish."

Phuket is already paying the price for ignoring problems, said Pattanapong Aikwanich, President of the Phuket Tourist Association.

"We have found that the number of people revisiting Phuket is falling. Phuket has the beautiful scenery and the natural

'If we want more quality tourists we have to control the number of illegal hotels. Without good regulation and enforcement by government officers, the number of illegal hotels will add to the problem of oversupply'

– Apichart Asa, Phuket Grand Tropicana Hotel

resources to attract quality tourists, but neglecting our environment will discourage tourists," K. Pattanapong said.

Other problems he identified were poor transportation services, double- or multiple-tiered pricing, or straight-out cheating of tourists through the sale of low-quality goods and services at inflated prices. "It's not only goods in shops, but also the room rates and service charges in the hotels," he said.

One problem the government should tackle, according to Apichart Asa, General Manager of Phuket Grand Tropicana Hotel, is the proliferation of unregistered hotels on the island.

For example, he said, in Kathu District, only 60 hotels, resorts and guesthouses are registered. These are heavily outnumbered by the more than 200 unregistered accommodation businesses.

"It's unfair competition. The managements of unregistered hotels probably make no provision for maintaining a good environment, treating wastewater or even having good security. They can also make greater profits than legal businesses because they don't pay taxes," he said.

"If we want more quality tourists we have to control the number of illegal hotels. Without good regulation and enforcement by government officers, the number of illegal hotels will continue to grow rapidly and will add to the problem of oversupply [of rooms]."

Panu Maswongsa, Director of Marketing of Patong Resort and Vice-President of the PTA, identified water supplies, trash disposal and poor transportation as problems that, if solved, would go a long way toward boosting the Phuket's chances of attracting quality tourists.

Citing the Maldives as an example to imitate, he said that limiting the number of tourists coming to Phuket could be employed to manage problems more effectively.

"This year [the Maldives] will accept only 1.2 million tourists. With a limited number of tourists they are in a better position to manage the number of restaurants, hotels, resorts and shops. The tourists who go there have high spending power and are well-educated," he said.

The problems, it seems, are well recognized, and many solutions are being put forward. What's needed now is someone with the power, the energy and the courage to implement them against what will certainly be well-entrenched opposition.



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Somewhere down the hazy river

By Gategaeo Phetsawang

On the eastern side of Phuket City is the Tha Chin Canal, separating Koh Sireh from Phuket, with its much overlooked and undisturbed mangroves, and its banks dotted with small fishing villages.

Many eco-tour operators tout sights of unspoilt nature around Phuket, and offer to take you roaring over there by speedboat, but River Rovers are the first to offer tours of this forgotten waterway.

"It's just five minutes to Phuket City by car but it seems so far away because it's so peaceful," said Gordon Williams,

Managing Director of River Rovers. "There are villages along the banks and when we travel along the canal, the villagers are surprised to see us."

"The route is narrow and shallow but our boat, *Pitta*, can go where other boats can't," he explained.

"Longtails can make it, but most luxury boats are too big for water less than a meter deep," he said.

"*Pitta* is not small but, she has a shallow draft and we have an outboard motor that we can lift out of the water. She can also turn

in a very small space."

Along the way, tourists can stop off to chat with local villagers, as well as see a wide range of wildlife, including otters, monitor lizards, kingfishers, brahminy kites, white-bellied sea eagles, great egrets, Pacific gray egrets, herons and hornbills living among the mangroves.

Mr Williams explained that

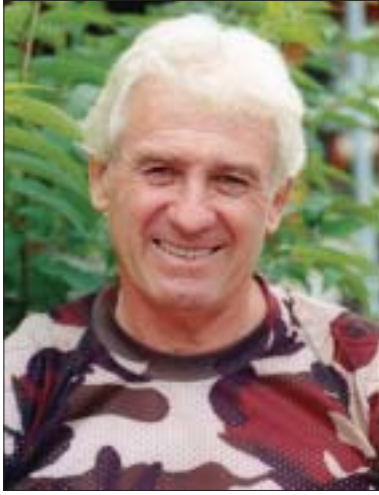
Pitta, which was launched eight months ago, can carry nine guests, enough to enjoy small parties on board. "There are two kayaks that guests can use to paddle down the canal," he said.

The tour starts from Ras-sada Port and is about four nautical miles (about 7.4 kilometers) long,

stopping off at Koh Maphrao and Koh Sireh, though the route varies, depending on the tide.

"If it's low tide in the morning, we go to the floating seafood restaurant at Koh Maphrao first, and then back across the bay into the river from the other side in the evening," he explained.

On Koh Maphrao, tour parties can trek along nature trails, stopping off at villages and rubber plantations. "We also go to little shops near the beach owned by local Thai Muslims. They have a small community there. We spend about two hours on



The Mild Rover: MD of River Rovers, Gordon Williams.



A river less traveled, and at a lazy eight hours for the whole 7.4-kilometer journey, one on which travelers have plenty of time to see marine life both natural and man-made. Lunch is served at a floating restaurant off Koh Maphrao.



Koh Maphrao and 1½ hours at the floating restaurant," Mr Williams said.

He added that the floating restaurant was the attraction that most impressed tourists.

"They can choose the fish they want to eat from the fish pens and catch them with a net. And behind the floating restaurant there are beautiful mangroves that extend back into the island and are home to wild monkeys and birds," said Mr Williams.

The tour, which takes a relaxed eight hours, also includes a visit to the temple on top of the

hill on Koh Sireh, and to the sea gypsy village down below. "We can stop anywhere during the tour. It's up to the guests," he said.

River Rovers might also launch a sunset cruise to Koh Taphao Noi, in Ao Makham, which is part of a marine preserve.

"The trip will begin at 5 pm and it takes only 20 minutes to Koh Taphao, where we can have a beach barbecue and see the lighthouse on the island.

"There are a lot of butterflies and birds to see. And the local people who look after the

lighthouse there are Royal Thai Navy servicemen and their families. There are about only six houses there," he said. "We return from the tour by 9 pm."

Mr Williams said that the Tha Chin Canal tour costs 2,500 baht a head and the Koh Taphao trip will cost 1,500 baht. Individual bookings are accepted, but at least four people must join the group before a tour will be considered.

For more information call River Rovers at Tel: 076-280420 or Gordon Williams at Tel: 07-8812951.

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Govt must protect activists: Amnesty

The government should create a "white list" of at-risk human rights defenders and political and environmental activists to avoid more deaths like that of environmentalist Charoen Wataksorn, said visiting Amnesty International Secretary-General Irene Khan.

K. Charoen, a fisherman, successfully led a 10-year grassroots struggle against the Bo Nok coal-fired power plant being sited in his community in Prachuap Khiri Khan. He was murdered on June 21. Two men later confessed to the killing, saying they had been hired by a local senior village headman to carry out the hit.

Investigators suspected K. Charoen was gunned down because he called for an investigation into officials suspected of corruption and issuing title deeds for public land. Several land officials of Prachuap Khiri Khan now face criminal and disciplinary investigations. K. Charoen also had running feuds with local and national politicians.

Astronomical budget: The Cabinet approved funding for the construction of the 312-million-baht National Institute of Astronomical Research at Doi Inthanon in Chiang Mai Province.

The institute will support the studies of astronomy researchers by collecting money from the public, which will be able to view the stars through the telescope for a fee.

Under the plan, the institute will be autonomous and free of state intervention, with an independent committee appointed to manage it.

Ground will be broken on October 18, the bicentennial birthday celebration of King Rama IV, considered the father of Thai science. The opening of the center will be timed to coincide with HM the King's 80th birthday in 2007.

Flesh trader arrested: A Thai woman arriving at Bangkok International Airport was arrested



LOOK, MA, NO HANDS! Daredevil Kasemsant Tula-wattanukul thrills a crowd in Songkhla with his death-defying "Wall of Death" stunt.

His cousin died performing the same stunt.

In the dry season Kasemsant's troupe, "Jason", can pull in as much as 600,000 baht a month staging the three-to-five-minute performance, which costs just 20 baht a ticket to view.

on charges of luring a woman to Bahrain and forcing her into prostitution. Police identified the suspect as Naree Yaikaew and transferred her to Yasothorn Police Station.

She was deported by Bahrain along with 10 other Thai women suspected of being involved in the flesh trade. Naree denies the charges.

Iron rice bowl: The Department of Agriculture has found two strains of rice that can accumulate iron and might be developed to fight anemia among the poor.

Dr Laddawal Kannanut, of the department's Rice Research Institute, identified the strains as Korkhor 23 and Khao Hom Phitsanulok 1.

She said the Institute will continue its study to find better iron-accumulation strains and employ genetic engineering to improve the strains' ability to accumulate iron. The studies will also determine the best growing and milling techniques to preserve iron in the rice.

Dr Laddawal said 26% of the population suffer from ane-

mia. Iron-rich rice could be a way to help them overcome the problem, she said.

Questions and answers: Many students believe that they will still need to attend tutorial schools, despite the Education Ministry's decision to post questions and answers from previous national university entrance exams on the Internet.

"We want to know how to answer the exam questions, not just the questions and answers," said Sittiwate Jewsittipapai, a student at Suankularb Wittayalai School.

If the ministry wants to reduce students' dependence on tutorial classes it should get examination drafters to explain on the Internet how the answers are arrived at – or improve tuition during normal school hours, he said.

Education Minister Adisai Bodharamik ordered that exams for the past five years be made available on the Internet to make it easier for students to prepare for exams without having to attend cram courses.

Oops, sorry: Crime Suppression Division Commander Pol Major General Kosin Hinthao admitted to the National Human Rights Commission that police took improper action during a bungled drug raid on a house in Ayudhaya.

But, he said, the 50 officers involved were merely trying to threaten the suspect when they fired 200 shots into the home.

Homeowner Udom Satakurama rejected Kosin's claim, saying that the trajectory of the bullets proved that the police intended to harm her family. Her husband was injured in the raid.

Meanwhile, the House Justice Committee resolved that PM's Secretary-General Yongyuth Tiypairat should take responsibility and resign.

K. Yongyuth is believed to have masterminded the raid after receiving information on a suspect in the Prime Minister's complaint box.

Biking for Buddha: An elderly British woman wants to turn bicycles into Dharma propagation vehicles by covering their wheels

with religious messages and charts.

Venezia Walkie, 72, said she has developed a prototype and would offer free installations for people who brought in their bicycles.

"The wheels will communicate about the paths to avoid suffering in line with Lord Buddha's teachings," said Walkie, adding that the first bicycle trip is scheduled for September 18-19 in Lamphun.

Ms Walkie, an artist from Britain, came to Thailand in 1970 on a quest to learn more about Buddhism after reading about it in a book. She fell in love with the Kingdom and later with a local artist, Inson Wongsarm, whom she married.

The two have lived in Lamphun for more than 30 years. Earlier this year, Ms Walkie won recognition from the United Nations for her contributions to Buddhism.

Around the Nation news round-up is sourced from the pages of The Nation and Kom Chad Leuk newspapers.



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Don't miss.... Issues & Answers
www.phuketgazette.net/issuesanswers/index.asp

In the land of soggy spirits

The phrase "Ghost Town" would be the most appropriate to describe Khao Lak at this time of year. But an endless source of amusement are the few determined tourists who ride on rented motorbikes through deep puddles of muddy, red water in the strong winds and heavy rain.

With their helmets and plastic poncho "raincoats" on, and a determined frown saying, "I can do this. I'm going to have fun, and this weather can't stop me!" they look a bit like Dark Helmet in the movie *Spaceballs*. They always give me a good laugh.

And yes, it's great to have a car up here in Khao Lak these days.

Ray of light: When the sun does peek through the clouds, calming down the mostly rough sea, dive operators iQ-Dive and Sub-Aqua-Khaolak – the only dive shops in Khao Lak that stay open through the low season – have been able to run a few successful diving trips to the Similans.

They reported outstanding visibility and even sighted manta rays off Koh Bon, a very unusual sight at this time of the year.

Against all odds: It seems that even more dive shops than anticipated will open next high season, and one diving company that has been declared "clinically dead" several times over the past few years has managed to survive for yet another season.

How they managed to do this is unclear, and many Khao Lak expats have yet to decide whether this is good or bad news for Khao Lak's diving scene.

Concrete news: Indeed, it seems that the diving industry is



SCARFACE: While construction along the beach is generally considerate of the environment, land on the other side of the main road gets rather more robust treatment.

the only one in Khao Lak doing anything. Two dive resorts are currently being constructed in Bang Niang, but details have been hard to come by. I will let you know as soon as I have some concrete information.

In addition, the local diving scene will be "enriched" by the appearance of yet another big operator. The former Viva Mexico restaurant premises on Bang Niang Beach have been sold to Andaman Scuba. The shop appears to be nearly complete.

Big birdbrain: One of the bigger dive shops in Khao Lak had a very bad season due to the fact

that one of its boats, a bright yellow catamaran, was designed to be made from aluminum, but was then built from steel.

Isn't it obvious that this would not work out? It's like making a schoolboy's paper plane from lead and then wondering why it doesn't fly.

The losses that the yellow boat – proudly touted as a "speedy catamaran" – racked up due to being a ridiculously slow (except for the speed with which it burned fuel and money) must have been huge, as must have been the complaints from dive guests who were promised a fast boat.

With this example in mind, other operators are looking for better options.

Fiberglass-hull boats have been this season's winner and rumors say that there is yet another new design coming, able to

reach the remote Richelieu Rock in the Similans in an hour and 20 minutes.

All clear: The Khao Lak construction boom continues apace with rubber plantations disappearing all along Highway 4.

Recently, a field about the size of Patong's Nanai Rd fresh market area was cleared, leaving an open red expanse all the way from the hills to the highway, priming the site for yet another housing project.

While the Khao Lak beachfront is being developed in a more considerate way, leaving plenty of the original vegetation untouched and keeping buildings low-rise in order not to obscure the panorama, nobody seems to care about the hinterland.

Everyone who has driven between Khao Lak center and Bang Niang Beach would agree

that this stretch of the highway looks, to put it kindly, rather unattractive, mainly due to the rows of shophouses.

If the hinterland is developed in the same uncontrolled way, all that Khao Lak will have left will be the 12 kilometers of beach.

Then, as land prices start to spiraling upward, we shall see how long resort and hotel owners will keep their promises not to build high-rises.

Jeopardy junction: My observation in my previous column about the lunar landscape known as the Bang Niang intersection has not prompted any attempts by officials to fix the dangerous junction.

There were, however, nods of agreement from several readers, who said that the intersection is being made even more dangerous by the trucks and cars parked in front of the new 7-Eleven on a corner of the junction. These conceal oncoming traffic on the main road from anyone trying to pull out of Bang Niang.

Perhaps several accidents a day and another "mob" will be necessary to elicit the correct official reaction here.

The Bang Niang intersection definitely needs fixing, with traffic lights installed and speed limits enforced. Let's hope that this cry for common sense is heeded by a responsible official somewhere.



ANDAMAN COASTING

By Franky Gun

Cash cow: Bang Niang's second ATM has been installed in front of the Bang Niang Minimart. The location chosen is

rather odd though: it sits directly opposite Bang Niang's very first ATM, which is in front of the 7-Eleven.

Perhaps the Minimart owners hoped that the new ATM would boost their sales, which have been dwindling since the 7-eleven opened.

Perhaps it would be more effective if they lowered their over-the-top prices ...

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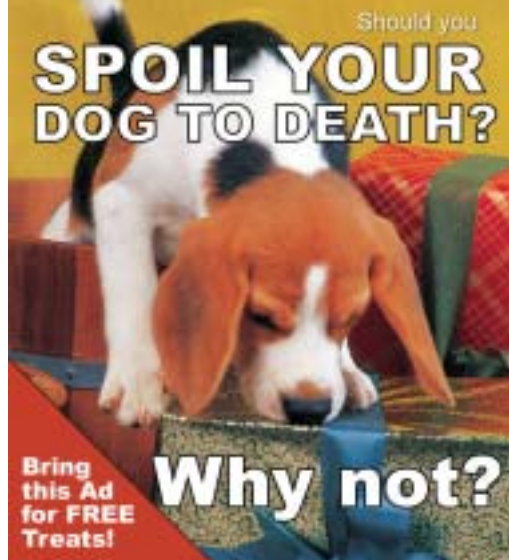
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This week



BANG A GONG: At the re-opening of the Phuket Cultural Center are (from left): Dr Prasit Koeysiripong; *OrBorJor* President Anchalee Vanich-Thepabutr; Dr Chirawat Nijanet; Phuket Cultural Center Director Asst Prof Pranee Sakulpipatana; and Dr Prapa Kayee.



SENSES WORKING OVERTIME: At the SenSes Health & Beauty Clinique opening party in Cherg Talay on July 16 are (from left) SenSes Director Parichat Namchoo, General Manager Saksri Kerdphol and Director Suchana Chaloeemtoem.



PICTURE THIS: TwinPalms Phuket GM Olivier Gibaud (left) congratulates the winner of the Surin Beach and Park Photo Contest 2004, Prayoon Anukarn (right), runner-up Bandit Namprasit (white shirt) and second runner-up Suksak Samrahit at the Oriental Spoon Restaurant & Oyster Bar at TwinPalms.



VIVE LA REVOLUTION: Philippe Seigle (left), Regional GM of Le Meridien Thailand Resorts, and Achim Brueckner (3rd from right), Hotel Manager of Le Meridien Phuket Beach Resort, are joined by Prof Jan Kubes (3rd from left), professor of business management at the Swiss business school IMD, and his family for a liberal, egalitarian and fraternal celebration of Bastille Day at the resort.



INTERNATIONAL AND IN TOUCH: Joan Watson, President of the Phuket International Women's Club (PIWC) presents a scholarship to a fortunate Phuket Rajabhat University student. Six scholarships totaling 140,000 baht were presented by the PIWC to needy local students.



ARCH DISCIPLES: At the opening of the Architect & Engineering Exhibition 2004 at the Royal Phuket City Hotel are (front row from left): Delice Thai Co MD Tanate Trivuthi; Sinchai Chanthira and Phummisak Hongsyok, respectively Administration Manager and Chairman of the Phuket Real Estate Agent's Club; and Dr Prasit Koeysiripong.

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LITTLE CHAMPION

Thanachon 'Chon' Ying came up the hard way, kicking and punching to fund his own schooling. Now he is head trainer at one of Phuket's top gyms, and is studying for a business degree.

The *Gazette's* **Stephen Fein** talked with the little boxer with big ambitions.

Everyone finds his or her way to Phuket differently. One young man who got here the hard way is 25-year-old Thanachon "Chon" Ying, head trainer and camp controller at Phuket Thai Boxing Camp & Gym in Rawai.

Chon began his professional fighting career at just 10 years of age as a way to make money to pay for school. Born into an ethnic Karen family in Chiang Mai's Mae Jae District, Chon was one of nine brothers and sisters in his family's rural village.

By the age of 16, he had won his first belt, becoming Northern Champion in the 45-kilogram weight class. He later moved up to the 48kg weight class, and by the age of 19 won the Northern title in that division, too.

With a professional career of about 85 wins and just 20 losses, perhaps the most impressive part of Chon's career is that he has never been knocked out — though quite a few opponents have suffered that fate at his hands.

In fact, it was Chon's hands that finally forced him to give up professional boxing. Talking with the *Gazette* in the Manager's room at the Phuket Boxing Stadium recently, he showed a long scar down the back of his right hand, extending almost all the way from his knuckles to his wrist.

The scar is the result of several operations to repair broken bones in the back of his hand — bones that were broken on the foreheads of some of his unluckier opponents.

When asked how it was possible to break one's hand while wearing boxing gloves, Chon says, "It's easy. I've done it twice already. The gloves were only six ounces.

"The hardest thing about professional Muay Thai is making the weight. The only way to do it is by training a lot and eating only a little bit."

Unlike most champs, Chon didn't disappear into obscurity when faced with forced retirement. Even though he was still young, his considerable experience in the ring meant that he was ready to begin teaching others the art of Muay Thai, which was gaining in popularity internationally at about the time he took up coaching.

Chon began teaching at the



Budding tycoon: Chon is studying for a business degree at Chiang Mai University.

Lanna Boxing Camp in Chiang Mai, the camp for which he had formerly boxed.

The camp was also home to one of Thailand's most famous Muay Thai boxers, Parinya "Nong Tum" Kiatbusaba, a hefty boxer who surprised Chon and the other fighters in the Lanna

stable when he began applying lipstick before fights.

Later to become renowned through his life story as portrayed in the movie *Beautiful Boxer*, Nong Tum was to a considerable extent responsible for raising the international stature of Muay Thai.

Having completely jumped the gender divide by having sex reassignment surgery, the petite Nong Tum now lives in Bangkok, working as an actress.

When asked about his relationship with Nong Tum, Chon told the *Gazette*, "All the boxers were surprised when Tum started

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WITH A BIG HEART



Left, Chon (front, left) with 'Nong Tum' (right) when they both trained at the Lanna Camp.

Below left, Chon with one of his foreign students, who are always much taller than him.



bows and knees through the study of Muay Thai. Chon said that the experience was a positive one, and had allowed him to develop good listening comprehension in Cantonese.

His other teaching stint abroad involved moving to Dubai to help set up the first-ever Muay Thai gym in that country. This effort never really panned out, however, because of what Chon described as "cultural misunderstandings". Still, the experience

was another eye-opener.

Chon came to Phuket about nine months ago, thanks to the friendship between Lanna Camp co-owner Andy Thompson and Phuket Thai Boxing Camp & Gym owner Steve Illyes.

Steve told the *Gazette* that in addition to being head trainer, Chon is responsible for the progress of the 15-20 fighters in the camp at any given time, almost all of them foreigners.

Many of Chon's students tower over him; even when he was in the ring with other Thai fighters, was almost always shorter than his opponents.

Steve explains that, because of Chon's height disadvantage, his arms were usually too short to allow him to get them around his opponents and tie them up in a clinch, an extremely important defensive maneuver in Muay Thai.

"He had to rely on determination and superior preparation," says Steve, adding that Chon's most dangerous weapon was his front kick to the stomach.

As if being head trainer weren't enough, Chon is also involved in the business side of the camp, responsible for functions such as customer relations and purchasing.

The experience is valuable for Chon, who is now in his third year of a degree program in business studies at Chiang Mai University, considered by many to be the best Thai university outside Bangkok. Not bad for someone who had to fight professionally from the age of 10 to put himself through primary school.

The good news for Phuket is that, upon graduation, he plans to return to Phuket and stay on as head trainer at Phuket Thai Boxing Camp & Gym.

Those interested in studying with Thanachon can contact him at Phuket Thai Boxing Camp & Gym, located at 82/5 Moo 2, Patak Rd, Rawai (Tel: 076-284090; 01-6931136; Fax: 076396932; Web-site: www.phuketmuaythai.com; Email: thaiboxing_gym@yahoo.com).

putting on lipstick, but the whole thing was really quite gradual. But after a while there were a lot of reporters coming to the camp to see Tum.

"Anyway, even though she is in Bangkok now and no longer boxes, we still stay in touch by telephone," he said.

Before coming to Phuket,

Chon gained international experience in teaching Muay Thai. He spent a year in Guangzhou, China, teaching people in that region.

Many of the people there had already studied Kung Fu. Like many martial arts aficionados, they wanted to expand their arsenal of weapons to include el-

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Do Not Drink Tap Water!

In The Stars

by Isla Star

LEO (July 24-August 22): Last month's irritating trend of stops



and starts is about to be forgotten in a welcome wave of smooth progress.

Those born under the sign of Leo can look forward to some interesting developments as August gets under way.

This week, however, your focus should be set on domestic matters. There are several issues on the home front that should be addressed before they are blown out of proportion.

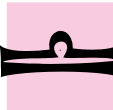
VIRGO (August 23-September 23): Virgoans should take care



not to walk blindly into caves that may not have an escape route. You are in a slightly vulnerable situation where business is concerned and a certain strong individual is not trustworthy. Having agreements checked by a third party is highly recommended this week.

Romance remains light-hearted, with Sunday being an especially rewarding day. Wear citrus shades to activate more energy.

LIBRA (September 24-October 23): The month of August



promises to be a magical time for Librans. Truth and transformation are highlighted; reaching your full potential is definitely on the cards and others will be wondering why everything you touch turns to gold.

Don't be lured into sharing too many secrets of your success. Communication with family is important this week, but don't place too much faith in the postal system.

SCORPIO (October 24-November 22): The first week of



August could find many Scorpios wondering where they have left their rose-tinted shades. A somewhat somber mood will gradually

What do the **HEAVENS** hold in store for **YOU** in the coming week?

lighten as the week goes by and you should realize that this period of reflection is necessary.

Remember that you don't have to keep moving mountains in order to prove yourself. The color sky-blue will help you accept things the way they are.

SAGITTARIUS (November 23-December 21): An invitation to



smoke the pipe of peace should be accepted. Sagittarians who are ready to clear the air will have a one-off chance to do so this week.

Don't leave good luck solely in the hands of fate. You have the power to create improvements in your life and should look carefully at ways of doing so. On Thursday, a Cancerian will show you his or her true colors.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 20): Your romantic



skills could use some honing. To impress that special someone, Capricorns will need to polish up their ability to charm the birds out of the trees.

A job offer could wing its way toward you mid-week, but all is not what it seems; tap into the island grapevine to discover the true story behind the offer. The number 2 could bring you luck on Sunday.

AQUARIUS (January 21-February 19): A chance encounter this weekend gives you



food for thought. Aquarians who have been thinking about moving to pastures new could get the kick-start they've been waiting for.

You may be comfortable in your present situation, but accepting a new challenge could open doors to exciting new directions. If you're nervous about family reaction to the chance of an adventure, you could be pleasantly surprised.

PISCES (February 20-March 20): Don't be tempted to go walking in the jungle bare-foot this weekend.



Pisceans who are too trusting could experience a sharp shock when their toes encounter an irritable scorpion. As long as you have your wits about you, there will be no danger of getting caught up in an unscrupulous deal.

Business matters are highlighted in August; if you can gain others' respect from the beginning, success is guaranteed.

ARIES (March 21-April 20):



Arians are advised to check their change carefully when making purchases on Sunday. Monetary mistakes, which will not be in your favor, are highlighted. It's also important to keep a grip on your feelings this weekend when dealing with someone

close to you. By Monday the atmosphere will be calmer and you should catch an early glimpse of how positive the month of August is going to be.

TAURUS (April 21-May 21): If your ship hasn't come in yet,



it's time to check on the whereabouts of the treasure chest you've been expecting. There can be no further excuses for delays, so get stubborn and demand results.

Those Taureans who have already received that long-promised windfall will have no trouble finding things to spend it on this weekend.

GEMINI (May 22-June 21): If you are tired of chasing your



tail around in circles and still not quite managing to catch it, this week allows you to see a way of standing still and getting what you need.

Others are about to seek your talents out; make sure you set a price that reflects your real worth. Selling yourself short now will set a negative pattern for the coming months.

CANCER (June 22-July 23): Being one corner of a love



triangle is a situation for Cancerians to avoid this week. Any doubts that suspicious liaisons are taking place need to be investigated immediately.

If you discover that someone has been pulling the wool over your eyes, it should be enough motive to move on swiftly. A debt is about to be paid off; remind yourself that later is better than never.

A diamond, it is said, is forever, and probably more people aspire to wear a diamond than any other gem.

In addition to being valuable and nearly indestructible, a diamond, many believe, can strengthen one's personality.

Darunee and Pierre Dimitrov of DD Jewel Design in Phuket City have huge experience in creating jewelry – Pierre spent 30 years in the jewelry trade in the US and Europe.

They believe that there has been a change in how people think of jewelry.

"People no longer look for jewelry with strong or classical designs, the purpose of which was to display the wealth and power of the wearer," Pierre says.

"These days, nice jewelry can also fit in with a person's lifestyle. It can be fun, it can be lovely, and it can make one's life more colorful."

Making jewelry is a complex business, Pierre explains, involving not only the shape alone, or the materials used.

"It's much more complicated than that. The way it looks when we finish it is most important."

Darunee adds that choosing a piece of jewelry is not something that should be taken lightly, by either the buyer or the seller. "We don't want our customers just to buy something that takes their immediate fancy. The design should fit [their looks and character]."

"With some customers, we tell them that we see a clash between them and the ring, for example, that they first choose. We advise them to try others that fit more harmoniously with them."

Pierre agrees. "The most beautiful jewelry for a person should fit the person's personality. That's why any piece should be designed keeping in mind the person who will wear it."

At the apex of jewelry is the diamond – the most expensive and the most valuable gem of all.

K Darunee explains, "The diamond has its own dimension. It's not just an ornament. It also has value, of course, that can be converted into cash, but it can also be part of a family's heritage."

Great care should be taken when buying diamonds, she stresses, to ensure one buys the



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Accessorizing

Diamonds: Not just a matter of buying what first catches your eye



Four diamond ring designs from D D Jewelry

highest quality. "Before buying a diamond nowadays you should do some research on it."

"One thing that few people realize is that diamonds come in a variety of grades and prices, based on the Rapaport Diamond Report."

The Rapaport Report is a monthly wholesale diamond price list used by dealers worldwide to keep up with changing market prices. It lists prices per carat for the various grades of diamond.

The price asked for a diamond is not up to the jewelry shop alone, the couple say. "The customer should know about pricing as well," Darunee says.

Pierre stresses, "A diamond certificate is also important. It is

like a passport certifying the diamond is what the seller claims it is. If you don't have a real certificate from an independent laboratory, you will not get a good price if you decide to sell it."

Darunee adds, "Buying a diamond or diamond jewelry is an investment. Having a certificate guarantees that the diamond is good."

It means that your diamond has international worth. Singaporeans, Americans, Europeans or whoever will be able to iden-

tify the source and know that your diamond is of real quality."

The most widely respected diamond certificates are issued by the Diamond High Council (known by its Belgian initials, HRD) in Antwerp, Belgium; and the New York-based Gemological Institute of America (GIA).

— **Dhirarat Boonkongsaeen**

DD Jewel Design is at 242/2 Yaowarat Rd, Phuket City, Tel: 076-217288 or 01-9709077; Email: info@ddjewelddesign.com; Website: www.ddjewelddesign.com

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Raising a toast to brighter days

The weather is a bit gray these days, so one way to brighten them up is with a delicious cocktail, especially one that calls to mind the bright, clear days of the high season: the Blue Andaman, devised by Apisit Aetla, Bar Supervisor at the Cape Panwa Hotel.

K. Apisit stresses, "It is a special cocktail that you'll find only at the Cape Panwa Hotel. It was created in July."

"When you drink it, you first get the aroma of oranges from the Blue Curaçao, and the lemon juice blends with the pineapple juice for a sweet-and-sour taste."

"After a couple of minutes, you'll feel the kick of the vodka, but the saké makes the

taste softer. It's a really nice aperitif."

The hotel likes to decorate the cocktail glass with a bird carved from papaya, and K. Apisit will even give lessons on how to carve it. Call him at the hotel (Tel: 076-391123) to book a lesson.

Ingredients: Vodka 1oz; Blue Curaçao 1oz; Sake ½oz; Lemon juice 1oz; Pineapple juice 1oz; Syrup 1oz.

Method: Decorate a glass with a carved bird. Pour all the ingredients into a shaker and add three or four ice cubes. Shake until all the ingredients are well blended. Pour into the glass, keeping the ice back. Drink immediately.

— **Anongnat Sartpisut**

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Angus O'Tool's is an Irish Pub in Karon owned by a consortium of Irish and Brits and headed by the very affable John, a Milwall fan, and Maurice Deveny, a Birmingham City supporter.

John is the front-of-house man, while Maurice works his magic in the kitchen. His culinary credentials include having frequently prepared meals for Britain's Queen Mother.

Angus O'Tool's is everything an Irish Pub should be, apart from the fact that it's within stumbling distance of a beautiful tropical beach. The authentic design was by Andrew Scattergood, a man whose reputation is growing. Carrying out his vision was construction manager Paul "Geezer" Vincent. The bar is a fine example of his excellent work and the tasteful interiors alone warrant a visit.

As I approached, I was delighted to hear proper Western music, not the vapid R'n'B or mind-numbing dance music that turns most the Karon entertainment strip into a cacophony of white noise by 10 pm most evenings. So I was already feeling groovy when I got into the place.

The music, from one of the pub's many international satellite feeds, came from a "classic rock" channel, making it a real Oasis in Karon, if you know what I mean.

In fact, Angus O'Tool's may be the most wired venue on the island. In addition to UBC and other packages, it also has a South African satellite feed. If you want to see the F1 without those annoying ad breaks, O'Tools is the place to go. The abundance of sports channels – 18 in all – also means they get all the cricket and lots of other events not available in most Phuket pubs.

Naturally, they have a big screen TV, and they even get the



Everything an Irish Pub should be, apart from the fact that it's within stumbling distance of a beautiful tropical beach.

– Photos by Kanittha Thanthanasap.

Getting gently bombed at Angus O'Toole's

Daily Telegraph delivered daily for those who like to keep up with events in the British print media.

You won't go thirsty here, either – especially if you like beer. O'Tool's has a wide range of brews to choose from, including Guinness and Kilkenney on draft at a very reasonable 190 baht a pint, by far the least expensive we're

aware of on the island.

Maurice explained that he would like to drop the prices even further, once the sales volume makes this feasible. This would almost be a reason to relocate to Karon, in my opinion.

If you like something a bit harder, you won't go away disappointed either. A glance along the top shelf revealed all the

troops were accounted for correctly lined up for inspection. Whatever your tipples, it's there and it's genuine. Perhaps best of all, it's a "free pour" bar, the only one in the area. This means the spirits are poured into drinks not by measuring glass, but by hand – almost always to the customers benefit.

If I needed another reason to exchange my NoLo (North Of Lotus) citizenship, it would be this: Every Tuesday is Ruby Tuesdays night, with Brummie Balti. Now many people have enticed me with promises of a proper British curry. All have failed, frankly, so it was with trepidation that I asked to sample some. "Just the sauce," I said with suspicion.

Ten minutes later a bowl of Korma sauce arrived at the table and, by Jove, it was the right color. The smell was right, too. My heart raced, could it be? The first taste revealed that this is indeed a proper Britcurry. It was perfectly *unauthentic* Indian.

It was proper and British, no excuses. I was in heaven. O'Tool's also do a monster breakfast, I am pleased to report – along with the fact that I may now be looking for an apartment in the Karon area.

I asked Maurice how he was going to maintain the authentic atmosphere. He replied, "We have quite a few partners, many of whom do not live here full time. Their frequent visits mean their eyes aren't clouded by being here all the time. This really helps us keep it real."

"We also listen to customer comments. Everyone has opinions, and normally these are expressed with their legs. So we actively encourage our patrons to give some input into the bar by

telling us what they want. It's better than having them vote with their feet," he added.

The venue opened on Christmas Day last year and already enjoys a good deal of repeat trade. This is an encouraging sign. They also have very reasonably-priced accommodations above the pub, including a penthouse on the top floor, complete with a Jacuzzi.

Angus O'Tool's is a remarkably friendly pub, too. We felt right at home almost instantly and, get this, if we'd brought the dog he would also have been in heaven too. O'Tool's is a "dog-friendly pub" and if a customer decides to have a night out the town with Fido or Spot, the lucky dog will even be treated to a bone. Lovely. So dogs need not apply, however.

Good news for smokers, too. The open-air design means it's cool without air-con, so you can puff away to your lungs' content without the room ever getting too smoky.

The evening was progressing nicely indeed when I asked about specialty drinks and shooters, etc. This is normal journalistic practice during the course of such reviews and one I am compelled to endure as part of my ethical code of practice – and to remain in compliance with the *Gazette's* ISO 2004HIC "Standards in Pub Reviewing" certification.

Purely by coincidence, I was already full of beer when before me appeared what is

known in these parts as "A Depth Charge". This concoction consists of Guinness, into which a very large measure of Drambuie liqueur is dropped, tumbler and all.

I am a big boy, and not typically fazed by such things, so took it like a man. Mum, you would have been proud of me.

The next five minutes were rather interesting. There was a very pleasant tingling sensation running through my veins which made me fairly immune to the surrounding conversations. I had become comfortably numb. This is a very fine shooter indeed. These should be indulged in one at a time, however, with sufficient periods between to reassess balance and coordination.

Later in the evening, Maurice was feeling groovy too, for he had kept me company in the sinking of the Depth Charge. In such a state, one always seems to hear music more clearly.

On went DVDs from an excellent collection: *U2 at Slane Castle* followed by *Clapton Live*. It was a reluctant parting, but I was primed to go out and look for a new apartment.

Angus O'Tool's is situated off Patak Rd, around the corner from the Karon Café and opposite the Islandia Hotel. Ample parking is available. For more information visit the Website: www.otools-phuket.com or call Tel: 076-398262.



Maurice takes a break from working magic in the kitchen – including genuinely unauthentic British curry.

After DARK

by Sam Vimes

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Hidden Words

Hidden in the grid below are the names of at least 25 varieties of fruit. The words may read vertically, horizontally or diagonally. They may also read right-to-left or down-to-up. See if you can find more than your family or friends. Score: More than 10, good; more than 15, very good; 25 or more, excellent.

E	T	A	N	A	R	G	E	M	O	P	Q	F	L	E
Y	T	O	F	Z	H	L	F	G	C	V	H	X	Y	U
A	R	V	L	C	J	O	L	H	I	L	R	I	C	M
B	Z	R	A	E	P	C	E	V	X	V	N	G	H	I
X	L	E	E	E	M	R	N	O	S	M	A	D	E	M
Z	P	U	A	B	R	O	G	Y	E	M	I	L	E	G
M	P	R	E	Y	E	G	P	V	I	H	L	E	R	S
I	E	U	C	B	B	S	X	T	N	H	B	M	C	U
Y	R	L	G	P	E	Y	O	U	R	L	Y	O	F	V
B	F	R	O	D	G	R	R	O	A	R	R	N	S	G
L	T	T	L	N	D	A	R	C	G	T	R	Y	F	P
A	U	G	A	V	M	D	K	Y	I	E	E	I	V	I
M	F	P	I	B	L	C	G	U	U	V	B	R	P	N
B	T	B	U	H	U	V	R	E	Z	T	W	X	J	E
Y	Y	T	R	R	P	F	V	D	S	U	A	L	A	A
G	A	L	R	A	E	F	Z	C	G	N	R	A	D	P
N	R	A	S	P	B	E	R	R	Y	O	T	E	Y	P
Y	N	E	A	P	A	U	R	H	C	C	S	L	S	L
T	K	R	R	N	A	R	H	G	D	O	L	P	N	E
T	G	Z	A	D	H	P	O	R	W	C	X	P	M	J
T	O	N	D	U	R	I	A	N	R	O	D	A	R	R
Q	A	M	A	N	G	O	Y	Y	P	I	R	E	F	T
B	U	S	B	E	Z	B	P	X	A	V	O	Y	O	A
T	M	S	L	B	D	N	E	P	N	U	J	I	R	H
H	Q	V	T	O	C	I	R	P	A	E	A	P	K	U

Brain Buster!!

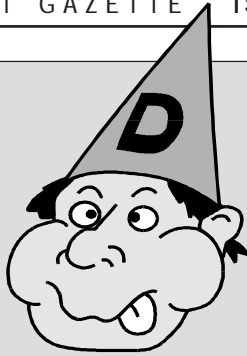
Mrs Swell is found murdered on a bed. On the floor by the bed is a knife. The knife was instrumental in her death, yet there is no trace of blood and there are no cuts on her body. So how was the knife used to murder her?

Mrs Swell slept on a waterbed. Her killer used the knife to cut the bed open and drown her.

Solution to last week's Crossword

C	O	L	L	E	A	G	U	E		A
	W		O		M		N			N
S	L	I	T		O	L	D	E	S	T
E		S			U		O			A
V	U	L	T	U	R	E		S	I	R
E		E		F		A		W		C
N	E	T		O	U	T	C	A	S	T
D		P		N				M		I
A	L	K	A	L	I		E	P	I	C
Y		U		T			M			L
S		I	L	L	E	G	I	B	L	E

Get your brain in gear with The Monster Quiz



1. Who killed John Lennon?

2. What was sparked by the "shot heard around the world"?

3. What machine is on the cover of the album, *Abba Arrival*?

4. Who was described as the "Great Cham of Literature"?

5. Who wrote the 1959 novel *Eating People Is Wrong*?

6. Who are the "Glimmer Twins"?

7. Who was the lead singer of Joy Division?
8. The band New Order was formed from which other band?

9. Which US city covers the largest area?

10. Which country is between Ethiopia and Somalia?

11. Who wrote of "the clumsy, wasteful, blundering and horribly cruel works of nature"?

12. Which children's book was written for a bet, using a vocabulary of just 50 words?

13. Vent, cascabel and trunion are parts of a what?

14. Amberjack, croaker and
- megrin are all types of what?

15. In the European Middle Ages, what weapon did a balister use?

16. Who worked as a patent office clerk before becoming a famous scientist?

17. What great project did George Goethals build?

18. Which movie actress was born Harlean Carpentier?

19. What was the answer to the riddle of the Sphinx?

20. In which country is the Skeleton Coast?
- Answers next week.

Never a Cross Word!

Across

1. Faster than the speed of sound.

8. Not working.

9. Not often.

11. Medical practitioner.

12. Storyteller.

15. In-depth study.

16. Mr Thaksin, for example.

18. Make less tight.

20. Swiss mountains.

22. Amazed.

Down

2. California university.

	1	2		3		4		5		6
7										
8					9					
				10						
11			12			13				
		14								
15									16	
								17		
18				19			20			
						21				
22										

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S MONSTER QUIZ

1. Steve Wozniak; 2. Yangon, Myanmar; 3. Hydrogen; 4. Richard Burton; 5. Belgium; 6. Rudolph; 7. Nevada; 8. Greenland; 9. 1981; 10. IBM; 11. Uzbekistan; 12. Bartender; 13. A star; 14. Telemann; 15. Scott Joplin; 16. Beagle; 17. They lay eggs; 18. Navigation; 19. Australia; 20. A lion.

3. For example.

4. Take to court.

5. Lack of clothing.

6. Solution between extremes.

7. She lost a glass slipper.

10. Computer information.

13. Often goes with roll.

14. Accompany.

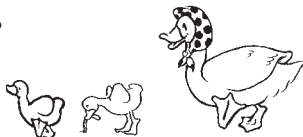
17. Run away.

19. A long time.

21. By the way.
- Solution next week.

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HEARD & scene

With Mother's Day approaching, the *Gazette's* **Siripansa Somboon** went out and about recently and asked five kids: "If you had a million baht, what would you buy for your mother?"



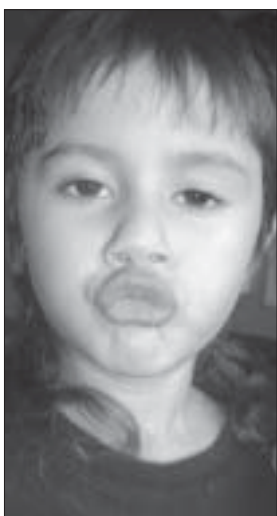
Ariya Chaloemtoem
Age: 6
From: England

If I had a million baht, I would give it to Mommy and buy beautiful clothes, earrings, diamond rings, glass and a Nokia mobile phone that can play music, but I can't remember which model phone, and a table, because I love mommy. My Mom is beautiful, and she's the best.



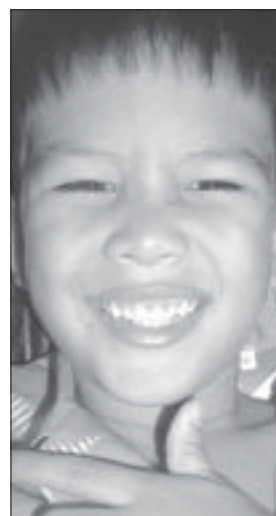
Nichakamon Angsukeeratirat
Age: 4
From: Phuket

If I had a million baht, I would buy ice cream, candy, milk, a telephone and a beautiful shirt for my mom. My mother loves wearing shirts. I like seeing her wear a beautiful shirt – that is why I would buy it for her. She could spend the rest of the money on anything she wanted, because I love my mom.



Niki Holland
Age: 4
From: Finland

I would buy McDonald's to eat with my mom. I'd also buy a helicopter and a new car for her, and both of them would be pink. I really like it when Mom takes me to Lotus every day to play with the toys. I would give the rest of the money to her to go shopping because she loves to go shopping.



Piraphol Arunrat
Age: 5
From: Phuket

I would give all the money to Mommy because she needs beautiful dresses for work. I would like her to be the most beautifully dressed person at Bangkok Bank. And if my mom had bought enough clothes, she could spend the rest of the money on buying me toys and guns and Ultraman stuff.



Pirada Arunrat
Age: 4
From: Phuket

I would buy a big piece of Thai silk for Mommy because she is beautiful. Mommy always buys silk for herself and Grandma, and she looks very happy when someone buys it for her. I like seeing her wear her Thai silk suit to work. I would ask what else she would like, and I would buy that for her, too.

Getting disproportionately ugly

The June 12 issue of this journal contained a powerful juxtaposition. First we learned that the *National Geographic Traveler* has consigned Phuket to the near-bottom of a list of desirable tourist locations with the damning indictment "getting ugly".

Then there was a plaintive letter from a reader who had nicked a towel from a Pattaya hotel. He had been arrested for this crime, fined 1,000 baht, and then deported with a red stamp in his passport.

He wanted to know what the red stamp meant. An official from the Immigration Office was glad to enlighten him. The red stamp meant that the reader was "a menace to society" who would "not be allowed into Thailand ever again".

Whew. Getting ugly is right. When you can be fined 1,000 baht, deported, and banished from Thailand's sunny



shores forever just for pinching a towel, all I can say is that it must have been one hell of a towel. I bet it was a custom-made designer towel woven from the finest cashmere wool and decorated with emeralds and diamonds by Gianni Versace himself.

Phuketians will be relieved to know that this draconian punishment was imposed in Pattaya. So if Phuket is getting ugly, Pattaya must be getting downright hideous. I trust that Duncan Stearn [Streets of Pattaya col-

umn] will soon pen a Pulitzer Prize-winning column apprising us of the situation there.

The Pattaya Towel Bandit can take comfort in the knowledge that, by being labeled a menace to society, he has been elevated to a place in history alongside such illustrious social deviants as the Boston Strangler, Jack the Ripper, Adolf Hitler, and possibly even Attila the Hun.

I am happy to report that in my several excursions to Pattaya, I have never once pilfered a hotel towel. This is because the establishment I stay at (which, for the purpose of avoiding lawsuits, I shall call the Happy New Squallor Guest House, Laundry, Somtam Stand and Beer Bar) doesn't provide towels. You have to bring your own.

Which, I must say, is pretty hideous of them. You'd think, for the lavish 500 baht per night I spend there, that they could at least provide towels.

But they don't, and it is this fact alone that has rescued me from temptation and saved me from being fined 1,000 baht and deported as a menace to society

with a red stamp in my passport that will bar me from Thailand forever.

The misfortune suffered by the Pattaya Towel Bandit is an illustration of what I call the Principle of Disproportionate Response. This is the instinct that makes a person who has been bitten by a mosquito attack it with thermo-nuclear weapons. It is largely practiced by military people and law enforcement officials who have gone berserk.

Fortunately, in Thailand the Principle of Disproportionate Response is not often applied. But when it is, people notice. Influential magazines notice. And the world whispers, "Getting ugly!"

The most common example is when the police raid a bar or night club and make all the patrons pee into cups to test them for drugs. The purpose of this exercise is to stop drug use by Thai youth.

It doesn't matter that the patrons thus humiliated are rarely on drugs, or Thai, or even youths. Nor does it matter that they are often foreign tourists who will spread the news and give greater

international credence to the perception "Getting ugly!"

But we can turn this situation around. With clever marketing, we can develop the Principle of Disproportionate Response into a tourist attraction. Think of how thrilled the average jaded tourist would be if he were caught in one of these pee-in-the-cup roundups.

When his friends are boasting that they have skied Mount Everest or went over Niagara Falls in a barrel, he could smile urbanely and say, "That's nothing. I was forced to pee in a cup and get tested for drugs in a nightclub raid by the Thai police."

If things had really gotten ugly, he could boast, "I spent a night in a Thai jail."

Indeed, with a little imagination, the TAT can adopt "Getting Ugly!" as a tourism promotion slogan. This will attract a whole new generation of tourists eager for a unique experience: to watch the Principle of Disproportionate Response at work.

S. Tsow can be flamed at stsow@yahoo.com, except when he's nicking hotel towels or peeing into cups.

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Eco's exasperating 521-page fib fest

Umberto Eco is a genius. And like a lot of geniuses, he is insufferable. Professor of Semiotics at the University of Bologna he is endlessly erudite, inventive, funny and, for page upon interminable page, boring.

His first burst onto the literary scene with a most improbable bestseller called *The Name of the Rose*, a murder mystery set in a medieval monastery (which was made into a movie with Sean Connery).

His latest novel, *Baudolino* (Harcourt, New York, 2000, 521pp), opens in 1204 as the pilgrims of the Fourth Crusade are sacking Constantinople. The eponymous hero, Baudolino, saves the life of a Greek noble and unfolds the tale of his life.

Which is quite a whopper. For Baudolino is a prodigious liar. His lying skills as a child first attracted the attention of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa when that worthy was lost in a forest near Baudolino's peasant shack in northern Italy.

Adopted by the emperor, he is dispatched to the University of Paris for an intellectual and worldly education. Here he picks up a gang of friends who will stay loyal to him into his old age.

This is a picaresque novel moving from Paris to Germany to Italy through a series of wars and sieges, romances and follies. The great ambition of Baudolino and his friends is to find the legendary Prester John, the Christian king somewhere beyond the borders of Islam. Historically, this was one motive for the Portuguese voyages of discovery. In the late 1400s two Franciscans actually undertook the arduous overland trek and found him: the emperor of Ethiopia. He took such a liking to the pair that he kept them prisoner for 30 years.

The novel is well over its halfway mark in 1190 when Baudolino and his comrades finally set off east from Turkey following the mysterious death of Frederick Barbarossa during the Third Crusade.

Alas, Umberto Eco is much more

fond of tall tales and extravagant language than any realistic wrapping up of plot. The pilgrims pass through a land of perpetual darkness and come to the Sambatyau, a roaring river of stone. The passage below will give a savour of what Eco is up to:

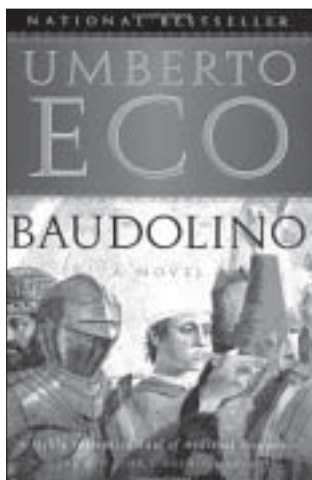
"There were cataracts that plunged down from dozens of rocky eaves arranged like an amphitheatre, into a boundless final vortex, an incessant retching of granite, an eddy of bitumen, a sole undertow of alum, a churning of shist, a clash of orpiment against the banks . . . It was a reddening of haematrites and cinnebars, a glow of blackness as if it were steel, a flight of crumbs of aureopigment from yellow to bright orange, a blueness of armenium, a whiteness of calcinated shells, a greening of malachite, a fading of lithargirium into saffrons ever paler, a blare of risigallam, a belching of greenish earth that faded into dust of crisocolla and then transmigrated into nuances of indigo and violet, a triumph of aurum musivum, a purpling of burnt white lead, a flaring of sandracca, a couch of silvered clay, a single transparency of alabaster."

And he's just getting started. The pilgrims come into Pndapetzim, the kingdom of Prester John's supposed son, which is inhabited by speedy one-legged skiapods and blemmyae whose faces are in their chests and pantians who use their ears to cover their faces. It also has pygmies, giants, suicidal Nubians, treacherous eunuchs and satyrs-that-are-never-seen. When the Kingdom is attacked by a horde of White Huns, Eco wrings much humor out of the disastrous resistance this motley bunch puts up.

Baudolino and the survivors of his band flee back to the west, are captured by the King of the Assassins and kept in chains

by his cynocephali – creatures with human bodies and dog's heads – and finally, after six years, escape to Constantinople, flying on the backs of huge rocs. There is a final confrontation here where the true cause of Frederick Barbarossa's death is revealed.

All this is beautifully described, with much flash and humor and long philosophical asides. But really, at the end you think: So what?



Off the SHELF

By James Eckardt

A message written in letters of Wi-Fi

I am fresh back from a trip to the US and Canada, and have many tales to tell. Foremost among them: the central role that wireless (or "Wi-Fi") Internet access plays in almost every nook and cranny of North America.

Two years ago, wireless network access in its early incarnation (known as 802.11b), caused excitement. Now, it's everywhere. I've rarely seen a new technology become so pervasive in such a short span of time.

The most exciting part about wireless in North America? It's inexorably moving from cheap to free.

That's a revolutionary change. A couple of years ago, we saw the first wave. The big chain restaurants installed wireless equipment and charged by the hour for Internet access – buy a latte at Starbucks, or a hamburger at McDonald's, and for a fee (which often exceeded the price of the food or drink) you can get on the Internet for an hour or two.

Within the past year, the big telephone companies have jumped on the bandwagon, with unlimited access and a network of wireless hotspots that spans entire cities.

Customers need pay only the equivalent of 800 to 1,000 baht a month for wireless network access, with the fee usually being added to their mobile phone bill.

Now we're seeing the third wave: free, unlimited Internet access for customers. Buy a cup of coffee at Joe's Café, and you

can use Joe's wireless connection for as long as you like.

It's a good deal for everybody: no doubt Joe needs a fast Internet connection from time to time, but it just sits idle for 23 hours a day. For less than 4,000 baht, Joe can drop in a wireless router, use the wireless connection when he needs it, and let his customers revel in the bandwidth the rest of the time.

It's cost Joe next to nothing. There's no billing or staff overhead. He doesn't need to buy more computers, doesn't need to set up an Internet café. Almost everybody who wants to get online these days has a portable with a wireless card. Talk about a win-win situation.

Even restaurant chains like the International House Of Pancakes (IHOP) are starting to offer free Internet. I went to an IHOP for breakfast one morning and saw a big sign on the front – FREE WIRELESS INTERNET, it said. I ran back to my hotel room, grabbed my laptop, ran back, plugged in and had my email updated in no time.

There are some drawbacks, of course. Ain't no such thing as a free lunch. The wireless hotspots "leak", so anybody who's sitting at Jim's Café, next door to Joe's, can probably log on to Joe's network and nobody would be any the wiser. Some Internet Service Providers discourage the practice (although that attitude is changing, particularly in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy, where

free wireless hotspots proved to be an enormous boon for emergency workers and New York residents – see www.eff.org/Infrastructure/Wireless_cellular_radio/wireless_friendly_isp_list.html for a fascinating glimpse behind the scenes).

Most of all, though, companies that charge for wireless Internet access are headed for the dodo list. It won't be long before free, unlimited Internet access is as common as sun-

shine. Er, even more common than sunshine, if you're talking about Seattle.

Oddly, in my experience anyway, this drive to free Internet access is occurring mostly in smaller cities around the US and Canada. I saw the largest concentration of free wireless hotspots in Walla Walla, Washington. The cities of Colorado Springs and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, have drawn a lot of admiration for bringing free wireless to many public places.

It seems that the folks upcountry aren't as entranced by the profit motive as their big city cousins.

Down to earth with a bump: Back in Phuket, I've been using the 1,000-baht-a-month TTT/CAT "Hi-Net" ADSL service for a couple of months now, and I've been pulling my hair out.

Recently, my ADSL line has been going dead eight or 10 times a day. Each time I have to reset my modem – a time-con-

suming, laborious process that only a gearhead could love – and about 90% of the time, the connection comes back. (A pal reports that he could re-connect most of the time by turning his ADSL modem off, then back on again. Your results may vary.)

After swearing at the modem a few hundred times, I discovered an odd fact: the line only dropped when it had been idle for some time. It appears as if something, somewhere, is disconnecting my line after it goes idle – and my modem isn't smart enough to re-initiate the connection.

So I tried a little experiment. I went to www.kbco.com, a US radio station that offers free

streaming audio – a constant, live broadcast of the same material that's going out over the waves in Boulder, Colorado.

In the past 24 hours, my line hasn't dropped, even once. So now I listen to the radio when I'm not using the Internet, then disconnect from the site when I need to get work done, always making sure that I log back on to KBCO when the work is over. It ties up ADSL bandwidth unnecessarily, but it sure does work.

– Woody Leonhard

Woody Leonhard has written a number of books in the "...for Dummies" series on computing. Readers can contact him at: woody@khunwoody.com

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Phuket's plans blighted by short-term self interest

The establishment by the new Provincial Administration Organization (*OrBorJor*) of a planning committee to come up with sensible plans for the development of the island is a welcome move.

There is one major structural flaw, however. If a plan is to work, it must include regulations. Those regulations must be enforced. If the regulations are not enforced, any amount of planning is futile.

This problem is no secret – major figures in the tourism industry are crying out for enforcement of rules (see pages 4 and 5).

Enforcement is the responsibility of lower-level local administrative bodies, and a large question mark hangs over the ability and the willingness of some of these bodies to police the regulations effectively and fairly, and with the community's and the island's best interests at heart.

While some of these bodies appear to try hard to follow the rules and to get people living in their jurisdictions to do so as well, others are plainly afflicted with severe short-term thinking. The thought process involved is simple enough to describe: "I'll get myself elected, and then I can influence matters in a way that benefits my bank balance."

The sad result is that although the short-term thinkers may get richer today, in the process they slow or even reverse the economic progress that would make them and everyone else wealthier in the long term – and without the same level of damage to the island's environment, its aesthetics and its quality of life.

Perhaps the *OrBorJor* should be considering, as an essential adjunct to its local participation aims, some form of civic and ethical education that would give local elected figures, and the officials who work with them, the ability to think outside the money box.

It would be naïve to expect anyone to be converted from money politics to sainthood by such an education. But perhaps they could be tempted onto a more righteous path if they could understand that the real aphrodisiac in politics lies, not in cold cash, but in the ability to pull or push the levers of power and make a real difference to the lives of thousands of people.

This, and not the amount of gold around one's neck, or the size of one's revolver, is what brings real, lasting respect from the community. This is what causes people to raise statues in one's memory.

Until local leaders understand this, any plans and regulations for the island, whether great or small, are doomed to half-hearted implementation and patchy enforcement.

– The Editor

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Editor: Rungtip Hongjakpet

Managing Editor: Alasdair Forbes

Deputy Editor: Chris Husted

Chief Reporter: Sangkhae Leelanapaporn

Investigation Team: Dhirarat Boonkongsaen, Gategaeo Phetsawang,

Kamol Pirat, Anongnat Sartpisut, Siripansa Somboon

Desk Editors: Stephen Fein, Andy Johnstone

Managing Director: Rungtip Hongjakpet

Marketing Manager: Oranee Pienprasertkul

Website Services Manager: Natthira Susangrat

Distribution Manager: Passara Kaewbumroong

Financial Controller: Benjawan Lukthan

Publisher: The Phuket Gazette Co Ltd

Contact us

Advertising Sales: adsales@phuketgazette.net

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Website Services: anna@phuketgazette.net

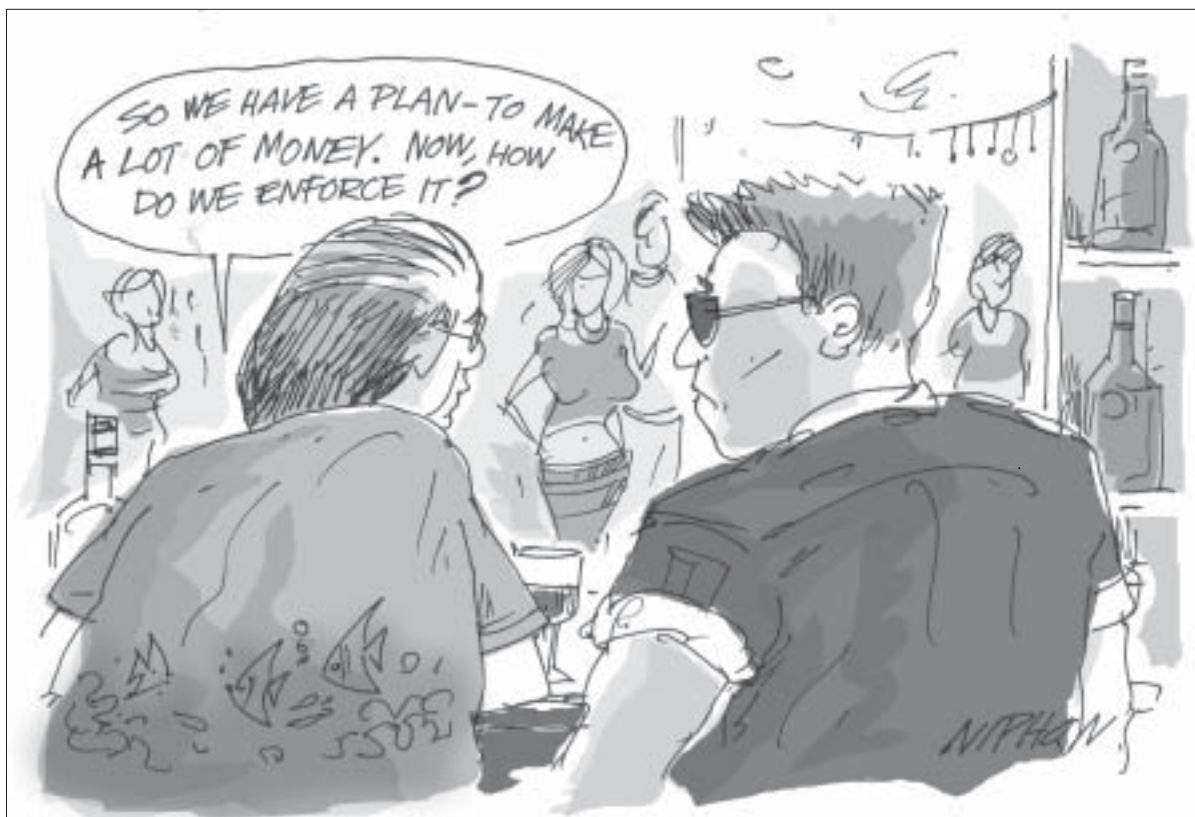
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Telephone: 076-236555 (10 lines) **Fax:** 076-213971

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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.

A less than clever choice of name

Recently in Patong, I was traveling down the southern end of Rat-U-Thit 200 Pi Rd when I saw a sign for a newly opened restaurant. Its name: Shark Fin Restaurant! I only hope that all dive businesses, sensibly-minded tourists and people concerned about the marine environment will not frequent this restaurant and that, subsequently, it will go out of business.

Alistair Bevan
Patong

TAT must make up its mind on quality

Local Tourism Authority of Thailand director Suwalai Pinpradab's comments in your paper left me feeling that unless I was Japanese and paying several million baht for my family sojourn in your lovely holiday spot, I would not be very welcome.

Phuket tourism can surely work in a sustainable and profitable way on more levels than those described by K. Suwalai.

I am unsure what a "high volume, low paying" tourist is, but would hardly expect to visit here with my family for 15 days for anything less than 500,000 baht. Does this fit that category? We are definitely not Japanese, although at home we do drive BMW and Mercedes-Benz cars which could perhaps, through the tinted glass, give that impression.

K. Suwalai should remove her tinted glasses and recognize the wonderful warmth, hospitality and intrinsic honesty of the

Thai people as significant attractions in themselves.

Investment in improved infrastructure would be good for tourists and locals alike.

I agree with K. Suwalai that this environment should attract as much protection as possible, and not only in the interests of the tourist dollar, or yen.

G. Vause
Wellington
New Zealand

Yet more madness on Phuket's roads

Over the past few weeks, more people are using the as-yet-incomplete road linking the stretch of Chao Fa West Rd just south of Promphan Charoen supermarket and the new junction near the Morning Star School on Chao Fa East Rd.

Driving in Phuket is dangerous enough, but this new road has taken the challenge of arriving at one's destination unscathed to new heights.

Cars, trucks and motorbikes stop smack in the middle of the road, often waiting for vehicles to come out of the narrow exit into Chao Fa West Rd. The vehicles coming out of the side road onto Chao Fa West Rd often ignore oncoming traffic – a lack of patience, caused, I would guess, by the interminable wait for a break in the traffic.

The added dangers of traveling along this section of road are starting to take their toll. I pass the intersection twice a day, and every day last week I saw at least one accident at the intersection.

Until the authorities implement — and enforce — safety measures, more people will be in-

jured or even killed along this stretch of road.

R. D. Jennings
Chalong

Patong's cracked pathway policies

While walking along the new expensive walkway next to Patong Beach recently my progress was impeded because the beach chair people had moved their chairs on to the walkway, as had various vendors

At some points there was so much junk on the path you had to walk on the street to avoid it.

I thought this pathway was to walk along. Can traders just set up shop like this on the path? Does anyone have responsibility for keeping it clear of traders?

These people are laughing at authority around here, knowing no action will be taken. Again, a beautiful environment has turned into a shrine to junk. It's no wonder Phuket is rated low among international tourist destinations.

Loong Dave

Poonsak Naksena, Chief Administrative Officer of Patong Municipality, replies: Patong Municipality officials and local police from Kathu Police Station are conducting a drive to remove the sidewalk vendors.

The operation began along the beach road on July 21, and will expand to cover other roads in Patong. We will also erect barriers to stop motorbikes being parked on sidewalks.

Many bars in Soi Bangla put tables and chairs on the sidewalk. We will be serving notice on the bar owners to follow the law and remove them.

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.

Why the land probe is taking so long

FIRST PERSON

Most people are aware that laws exist to prevent state land being transferred into private hands. Many of the complaints alleging that this has occurred or alleging complicity between "influential persons" and corrupt government officials to fake papers to occupy land – often in the hills – come from ordinary people concerned at what is happening in their area.

I cannot disclose the total amount of land in Phuket that is currently under investigation because, in many cases, we are still gathering evidence. The process of checking and investigating is long and drawn-out for a number of reasons.

One of these is that we must check not only the suspect parcel of land but all bordering plots as well, whether government land or privately-owned land.

Don't forget that it is not just the CSD that is involved but also a number of other agencies. We must liaise with the Land Development Department (LDD), the Agricultural Land Reform Department (ALRD) and the Royal Thai Survey Department, which has access to the most accurate maps available – they come from the military.

Another factor that holds up our investigations is that career bureaucrats are transferred to a new province every four years, or less. The problem of illegally-owned land is not new – it has been going on for at least five years – and trying to trace some of the bureaucrats we want to interview is not easy. Some may have been transferred two or more times in the interim. Some have retired.

Pol Col Korawath Panprapa (right), of the Bangkok-based Crime Suppression Division (CSD) and the man responsible for inspecting all contested land title papers in Phuket, spoke with the *Gazette* during his recent inspection visit to the island about how the land investigation is being conducted and why it is taking so long.



One of the high-profile cases currently being investigated is land in the Panturat Hills next to the bypass road. We received petitions from local people saying that some of the land appeared to be forestry land.

Some of it is earmarked as *SorPor-Kor 4-01* while other areas under investigation are plots on slopes steeper than 35° from horizontal, which by law is state-owned land. Although this is government land, it appears that some people have taken over this land by using forged documents.

We are checking in Phuket to deter-

mine the demarcation between private and state land because it is well-known that some influential people have taken the land to develop expensive homes for foreigners.

Using GPS (global positioning system) equipment, we have confirmed that some lots currently in private hands are indeed national forest land. A large reservoir – suitable for supplying water to a housing estate – was also discovered in the hills.

This investigation will not include every single parcel of mountain land on the island, just the ones where an allega-

tion of malfeasance has been made. That said, we are reviewing all land titles issued [for land on and around the Panturat Hills] and I expect our investigation to form a guide to the handling of similar cases in the future.

I should point out that it is my experience that not all land titles issued for plots in the hills of Phuket are illegal. Quite the opposite, in fact – I know of some plots for which [legal] titles were issued 100 years ago. The rights of anyone with a legal entitlement to hold land will be protected by this investigation.

As well as protecting the rights of legal landowners, a prime aim of this investigation is to protect Phuket's natural beauty. If all the hills are cleared and developed, then there will be little left for tourists and people who live here to admire.

We need to solve the problem of corruption in Phuket. [Transparent] cooperation between the various government offices that form the investigating committee – including the LDD and the ALRD – will be the key to the success of the investigation.

As for what potential land buyers can do to protect themselves, I suggest that they take great care to check all the documents relating to their intended purchase, particularly if it is a beautiful plot next to the beach or on a hillside.

My investigation should not be viewed as placing obstacles in the way of Phuket's commercial development; the majority of documents issued, and the majority of business dealings here, are legal.

Compiled by Kamol Pirat

Intrusive behavior of CAT's bill collectors

My next door neighbor received a visit from two men claiming to represent the Communications Authority of Thailand (CAT) recently. They carried a bill for my telephone number amounting to approximately 25,000 baht. They showed him the bill, and asked if he thought I would pay it.

This is not only an intrusion of my privacy, but also a rather dumb and unethical thing to do.

My neighbor, knowing that I had had a similar problem with overcharging in the past, correctly advised them to get a breakdown.

This was the second time I was to be charged with a long list of phone calls to points all over the globe – calls I could not possibly have made because I wasn't even in the house at the time.

They came back later and presented me with a supposed breakdown printed on recycled paper. There was a list of numbers called, but no dates, durations or charges. There was no official bill, no CAT logo and no account number.

When I asked them what they wanted they said, "Money". I told them that I don't usually walk around with 25,000 baht

and told them to leave the bill with me.

In the meantime, CAT arbitrarily disconnected my international service, with no notice whatsoever. After five months I managed to get the call details, but still no proper bill.

If this is the way CAT operates, it can't be making much money – or friends. Perhaps the manager of the local CAT office could explain if this is standard business practice?

Voravit Vorapiboonpong, the Chief of CAT's Phuket office, replies:

When customers do not pay within one month of the due date, CAT first calls them.

If the debtor takes no action, CAT staff will then go to debtor's house with a statement showing the amount owed and requesting payment. If a full statement is requested, we will supply one.

If the bill is still not paid, our official policy is to sue. However, we usually try to come to a deal with debtors because it takes two years to have a case heard in civil court.

In reminder statements, we

use the recycled paper to show payment details. We will issue an official receipt upon payment. In the case in question, our officials were unable to locate the bill owner at home, so the neighbor volunteered to deliver it for them.

Unfortunately our staff do not speak English well, so it can lead to misunderstandings. If you have further questions, please go to our office on Phang Nga Road or call Tel: 076-216861.

Frustration over work permit cancellations

I am a shareholder in a Thai limited company which has 20 million baht in registered capital, qualifying us for up to 10 work permits. I have two questions.

1. Our foreign workers – all of whom hold multiple-entry, non-immigrant B visas – have their work permits canceled when they return to their home countries during the low season.

Time, effort and hundreds of thousands of baht were spent obtaining these permits and then, a few months later, they are canceled. Can a foreign worker not have an extended break abroad and then start work again?

2. I am the manager of the company and have held a work permit for this firm since 1999.

I am planning to take a two-week vacation but my work permit will expire five days after I go on holiday. I was told that my work permit will be canceled if it expires while I am away.

I have been advised to do a visa run and return to Thailand for a day to submit my work permit renewal papers, all before I go away. Why must foreign workers lose their work permits by taking a holiday?

Company Owner
Rawai

Sawang Maneerat, Technical Labor Officer of the Provincial Labor Office, replies:

The expiration of your work permit depends upon the expiry date of your permit to stay.

You should always renew your work permit before it expires, and if it is due to expire while you are on vacation, then you should leave and re-enter Thailand to get your permit to stay renewed *before* you go on holiday.

Your work permit renewal papers should then be submitted as normal, otherwise your permit will expire.

Issues & ANSWERS

Want to know how to get something done? Can't understand some of the dafter 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

The current administration in Bangkok has yet to actually commit money to the proposed conference and exhibition center in Saphan Hin.

In fact, the matter is still being discussed by a special cabinet committee. The members of this committee have changed a number of times, which has delayed any decision.

The center should have a range of other facilities, such as an entertainment complex, to make it more attractive.

However, I don't think that the government and the Tourism Authority of Thailand will fund the building of anything more than a conference center itself. My view is that a conference center on its own, as the government advocate, will not succeed.

I therefore appreciate the efforts made and the proposals put forward by two Thai companies regarding this long-awaited project.

A third company – a Thai-Japanese joint venture – met with

Ideas for convention center are welcome

me during their recent survey of a number of sites around the island. Their plans include an adjoining hotel and entertainment complex, and I look forward to reading their final report and proposals.

Whoever makes a firm proposal first, private or state, and commits funds, will get the green light to start work.

Avian 'flu: There is no need to worry about avian 'flu as I have ordered Pol Lt Col Chakkit Srisuwan, the Superintendent of Tah Chat Chai Police District – which includes the checkpoint – to be especially vigilant for smuggled or suspect poultry.

All consignments of birds, alive or dead, must be accompanied by a permit – including laboratory results – issued by the originating province's Livestock Office certifying that the birds are free of avian 'flu.

All *kamnan* (senior village chiefs) in Phuket are under orders to inspect any chicken or other bird farms within their assigned areas and to report their findings to the Provincial Livestock Office. We must be serious about the problem of avian 'flu before it affects tourism.

In addition, officers at the checkpoint continue to be on the lookout for criminal activity and, from August 1, will start cracking down on illegal workers who were given until the end of July to register [and become legal].

Land committee: On July 19, Prime Minister Thaksin Shina-



Flashback to March this year, when Vice-Governor Niran Kalayanamit (left) tucked into fried chicken to help convince the public that chicken meat was safe despite avian 'flu.

watra ordered each province to set up its own "land committee" to investigate irregularities with

and disputes over land. In fact, Phuket has had its own land committee for about eight months – I



THE GOVERNOR'S LETTER

formed it soon after I took office in October last year.

Chaired by the province's Chief Administrative Officer, the committee investigates every instance of land that has been, for example, cleared and readied for construction without the true owner of the land being known, and any other disputes involving land titles.

Incidentally, last week I visited the Samsara development in Kamala, which has been the subject of an investigation for the past year.

Nothing should be read into the fact that I visited the site and no decision has yet been made on its future; I went simply to look at what is happening there. I have no involvement in this case.

Governor Udomsak Usawarangkura

A lifestyle illness

In the past year, I have heard of a number of entertainment celebrities who have developed metastatic colorectal cancer, more commonly known as bowel cancer.

One, aged around 50 and the host of a travel program, died from it. Another is a Thai rock singer and leading music entrepreneur who is fighting the final stages of the disease.

He disappeared from the music scene for a while to undergo surgery and chemotherapy for his condition, but he benefits from a strong will to survive. In fact, he has just released a new album, partly to earn funds to meet the high cost of his treatment. He is a good role model for those facing the same phenomenon.

I also know of a doctor – a gastroenterologist in fact – in his 30s who is currently undergoing chemotherapy following surgery for cancer of the colon.

These three cases suggest a number of things, the first of which is that colorectal cancer seems to be occurring more frequently now than in the past. It may happen to a friend, a family

member – or anyone – at any time.

Second, colorectal cancer appears to be found more frequently in those at the middle-to-upper end of the socioeconomic scale.

The three examples given are all people who fit into this category and this is in line with more detailed research carried out into the epidemiology of colorectal cancer.

People in the higher socioeconomic strata of developed countries appear to be running a greater risk than people in developing regions such as Africa or Asia.

Studies conducted in Thailand between 1998 and 2000 project an alarming upward trend in the incidence of colorectal cancer here. Currently, of all the cancers afflicting Thais, colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer for men and the fifth most common for women. I should stress that these are incidences of the disease, and *not* mortality rates.

Changes in the lifestyle and eating habits of Thais, particularly the more upwardly-mobile urban Thais, appear to be contributory risk factors.

Third, colorectal cancer is not necessarily found only in people aged 50 or over, despite the fact that most cancers are found in the elderly. People with a family history of any form of cancer are perhaps more likely to develop colorectal cancer before their 50th birthday.

There are ways to reduce the risk of developing colorectal cancer, and food is a natural place to start: go for a high-fiber, low-fat, low-calorie diet, rich in fresh fruit and vegetables.

It is sensible to undergo screening for colorectal cancer – particularly if there is a history of cancer in your family – because detecting it early is vital, especially in the over-50s.

Screening is usually done by analysis of the feces by what is known as an "occult stool blood test" or by undergoing a barium enema to facilitate an X-ray of the colon. Alternatively, your physician may recommend sigmoidoscopy, which uses a fiberoptic scope to examine the rectum and sigmoid colon for irregularities.

Remember: as with all cancers, the earlier the condition is detected, the greater are the chances of survival.

Dr Teeradej Ratanachaikanont is the Surgical Oncologist at Bangkok Phuket Cancer Center.



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Suppliers respond to housing boom

By Siripansa Somboon
& Anongnat Sartpisut

PHUKET CITY: The Architect and Engineering Exhibition held at the Royal Phuket City Hotel from July 15 to 18 marked a new era for home product availability in Phuket, with some 83 companies showcasing their products, greatly expanding the range of homeware open to Phuket homeowners.

Tanate Trivuthi, Managing Director of the exhibition's organizer, Delice Thai Co Ltd, told the *Gazette*, "We saw the property boom and realized the demand in Phuket for these products. We started organizing this exhibition eight months ago. It is the biggest ever held in the Phuket, which is the center for sales of these products in the Andaman region."

Some 83 companies, 15

from Phuket, set up stalls, including big guns CPAC, Keehin, Jotun, Mazuma and AEG, as well as smaller Thai operations such as Siri Handicrafts from Samut Prakan.

The show also attracted companies from abroad, including swimming pool company Barrier Reef Pools, from Queensland, Australia.

"Most of the exhibitors came from Bangkok because we recently held an exhibition there," K. Tanate said.

He added that about 12,000 visitors came to view the exhibits, among them project developers, architects and retailers, as well as ordinary homeowners, and that the response from the exhibitors was positive, with nearly all of them expressing interest in joining home shows in the future.

Smathi Piamsa-nga, of Dis-

trict Cargo Sales Upper Southern Thailand, Thai Airways, said, "We joined the exhibition to launch our 'Thai Cargo Thai Care' project [a point-to-point domestic and international cargo delivery service].

"Although we did not reach our target of converting 70% of queries into custom, we think that our exhibit was a success."

Sirirat Boonpeng, Director of Siri Handicrafts Co Ltd, also supported the show. "We had a fair result. Maybe our products are new in the market, but it is worthwhile in the long term to show our products at this kind of exhibition. It benefits us as entrepreneurs, and orders will follow," she said.

However, K. Sirirat said that she thought the home show should have attracted more visitors.

"Maybe people did not

know about this exhibition or when it was going to be held. In Bangkok, if an exhibition has good public relations, there are many visitors. But if it does not, there are less. There should have been more people than this," she said.

K. Sirirat added, "For exhibitions like this in the future, I will have a representative in Phuket so people become aware of our products. But we need to know which company will be promoting the exhibition and details of the exhibition, to see whether it would be suitable for us or not."

Looking to greatly expand the home show concept in Asia is YSMO Events, which until now has stayed in the marine events market. YSMO will stage the inaugural The Home Show Asia at the Royal Phuket City Hotel from October 1 to 3, with

a view to staging a series of home shows throughout Asia.

Gareth Twist, Director of YSMO Events, told the *Gazette*, "We are currently in discussions with the [UK daily newspaper] *Daily Mail* about introducing to Asia a counterpart to the Ideal Home Show in the UK.

"At the end of next year we will go to Bangkok, and probably then to Singapore and then Hong Kong. This is a long-term trend and it is growing."

Mr Twist explained, "We came up with the idea because we have seen the growing trend in property in Phuket and throughout Asia. Five years ago Phuket had 20 to 30 property developers, now we are looking at 120 to 150.

"So we can see that many people are going to want home furnishings, decorations and interior design, as well as lighting, garden furniture, soft furnishings, curtains ... just about anything for the home.

"Many people living in Phuket are going to Chiang Mai and Bangkok to buy furnishings. We miss out on a lot of trade because people don't know where the suppliers are. So we are hoping this marketing effort will bring a lot more to local companies, shops and tradesmen."

To date, the October show has received 25 bookings, mainly from local home product providers, including JD Pools, Soul of Asia, Andaman Artifacts and Island Technology. There will be 96 booths of three square meters each, costing 35,000 baht apiece to rent.

Mr Twist has high expectations of The Home Show Asia, with recent trends in Europe showing home shows becoming very popular. "We certainly believe that this will be a success. Phuket has so many people buying property, and this is only the start of the trend. In England there is now about a show a month altogether attracting about half a million people," he said. "They are very successful."

Rising sun shines on Orbis fund

Following last week's article on Orbis Investment Management, this week sees a review of one of their funds, the Orbis Japan Equity Fund. This is the only fund in their range that is based in Luxembourg. The fund has been independently rated as AAA by Standard & Poors and as AA by Forsyth Partners, and has been awarded five stars by Global Fund Analysis.

There are in fact three different Orbis Japan Equity funds. The "core" fund is denominated in yen and the two sub-funds are in euros and US dollars. The sub-funds invest in the same equity portfolio as the core fund, but hedge their exposure to fluctuations in valuations of euros and US dollars, respectively, and their benchmark is the Topix index with the same currency adjustments.

Most investors will be familiar with the Nikkei Dow Index, which covers 225 different shares listed on the Tokyo stock market. The Topix Index may be less well known, but has a much broader coverage and is more representative of the whole Japanese market.

Little has been written in this column about the Japanese stock market, and for a good reason. Japan was something of an investor's dream during the 1970s and '80s. It reached its peak of almost 40,000 as measured by the Nikkei Dow Index on December 31, 1989.

Thereafter it became an investor's nightmare, plunging dramatically, showing false dawns on a number of occasions before moving further downward. By early 2003, it had lost a staggering 80% of its value.

The Japanese stock market was merely reflecting, albeit in

an exaggerated manner, what had transpired in the economy. The boom that Japan enjoyed from the 1960s until the end of the 1980s turned into a slump from 1990 onwards. Asset prices in the stock market and the property market were vastly inflated and, with recessions and periods of anemic economic growth during 1990s and early 2000s, asset prices crashed.

The Japanese economic model, hailed for its merits, quickly became a perfect example of a structure with deep problems that nobody seemed to have the courage or foresight to change. The Japanese government's incompetence was not to blame alone; the majority of the corporate sector was equally responsible.

Change has taken years but, led by the private sector, it is taking place. This is not to say that everything that was wrong with Japan has now been rectified but there has been progress.

The banking sector, especially the big banks, are in much better shape. The exception is UFJ, but this banking giant is planned to merge with Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi, which will result in a massive capital injection. It will also create the world's largest bank with assets of over US\$1.75 trillion (about 75 trillion baht).

The Japanese economy is showing good economic growth. Much still has to be restructured in Japan before the economy can be said to have recovered but after years of gloom, perhaps things are actually improving.

For those interested in Japanese investment, the only sensible route is via a fund. The Orbis Japan Equity Fund has comfortably outperformed the



MONEY TALKS

By Richard Watson

average Japanese funds and the Topix index. It appears to be an excellent vehicle for investors as, in addition to its performance, it has also recorded significantly lower volatility.

The fund's managers expect Japanese corporate profits to grow to the "mid-teens" in the year to March 2005. They also say Japanese equities are attractive thanks to the combination of a policy of nearly 0% interest rates and loose money supply, and Japanese share-price earnings multiples at or below those in Western stock markets.

The fund's managers claim that the Japanese economy is

growing and that the growth is broadly based. Despite this, consumer prices continue to decline at 0.4% a year, and the fund is based on companies most likely to benefit from the economic expansion.

The "core" Orbis Japan Equity Fund is large at 177 billion yen (US\$1.6 billion or about 65 billion baht), and the euro and US dollar sub-funds are several hundred million euros and US dollars, respectively, each.

Orbis have a good website (www.orbis.bm), with performance data on the funds available at the click of a mouse.

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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What exactly does the DOCT do? The Dive Operators Club Of Thailand is practically a household name in the Phuket dive industry, yet most people are unaware of many of its functions and services.

The DOCT is a non-profit organization and is funded from memberships and private donations. The *Gazette* spoke with Richard Motein, president of the DOCT's Phuket Chapter, about trends in diving and the group's most recent achievements.

The DOCT is well known for providing free dive training for qualified Thais, with the aim of increasing the number of professional Thai divers working in Phuket. The organization spends 1 million baht a year on this scheme and trains 12-18 Thais up to the level of professional divemaster.

Lesser well known among its services are free classes in computers, English language and first aid for Thai staff working for DOCT-affiliated companies.

As an additional service to the community, the DOCT organizes blood donation drives to ensure that supplies of hard-to-find blood types are available in case of emergencies.

Charmed life: On June 29, the DOCT attended the Coastal Habitats and Resources Management (Charm) conference, held over three days in Ao Nang, Krabi. Charm is an environmental project, funded by the European Community, that focuses on Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi and Trang Provinces.

It works with many groups, including the Department of Fisheries, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), the Similan & Surin National Park Offices, NGOs and local communities.

The conference brought together many of these agencies, with DOCT Phuket giving its first presentation ever. The DOCT delegation said the conference was successful and it is excited about the new working relationships it has formed with the National Parks Department and other groups.

Regarding new develop-



Montri "Ma" Siritas now works full-time as a divemaster after completing the free DOCT training program open to qualified Thai nationals.

So what *does* the DOCT do?

ments in The Similans, Mr Motein would not elaborate but said he was "quite excited about the changes". For the first time, it appears that the DOCT and the National Park Department will work together.

Another first at the conference was that the DOCT was provided with a book containing many official forms translated into English. This included applications for business licenses, work permits, TAT licenses and boat licenses.

"The Charm people did an excellent job and the DOCT looks forward to future conferences," said Mr Motein.

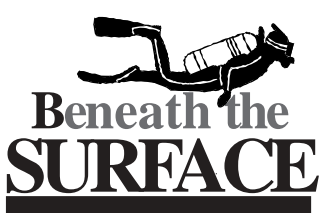
Clean living: Environmental protection and increased public awareness are also among the DOCT's chief concerns. On September 18th, the DOCT will host

its 4th annual Earth Day Clean-up at Racha Yai. There will be a treasure hunt, with prizes above and below the surface.

Anyone interested in volunteering to help or-

ganize the event or wanting to take part can get more information about it from the DOCT website.

Anyone interested in learning more about the DOCT or the services it offers should visit its website at: www.doct-phuket.org



By Sylvie Yaffe

240 vie for honors in motocross



Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's a rider in the Cherg Talay motocross.

By Anongnat Sartpisut

CHERG TALAY: Some 240 daredevil riders took part in a thrilling set of races which set the hills around in Cherg Talay ringing to the sound of two-stroke engines on July 25.

The competition – the third heat in the Southern Thailand Motocross League, following similar events on Samui and in Pattani – featured races in two different off-road disciplines; enduro – a point-to-point cross-country dash, and motocross – racing around a jump-filled track.

Motorcycles of any engine size were permitted but most riders in Thailand favor high-revving 125cc machines.

All the riders in the Under-13 junior class bar the winner, 11-year-old Piset Ketsuwan from Pattalung on a 125cc bike, rode 80cc machines.

The enduro race – which featured two divisions, the Super Cup for professionals and the VIP class for amateurs – took place in the morning in the hills close to Rydges Beach Resort and the Layan Beach Phuket Aprime Resort.

Most of the day's action was in the afternoon motocross races with riders placed in seven classes ranging from professional to beginner and Under-13s.

The track – built close to the Cherg Talay *OrBorTor* offices near Rydges, saw its share of spills and thrills including a game attempt by young Piset to compete against the big boys. He took a tumble on a berm (the built-up bank of a corner) but still managed to complete his foray into adult racing.

The date and venue for the fourth heat of the league have yet to be scheduled.

Taekwondo students get chance to go to Korea

PHUKET CITY: Lucky local Thai youths under the guidance of former South Korean national taekwondo team member Park Hee Kang, who is currently instructing at Phuket City's Dragon Gym, will have the chance to visit Korea this December on an exchange program he has organized.

Mr Park – who represented his country in 1997, 1998 and 1999 – told the *Gazette*, "I have just come back from Korea. While I was there, I talked with Lee Kyeng Bea, a friend of mine.

"He is an international-level referee with the Korean Taekwondo Association (KTA)

and a former coach to the [Korean] national taekwondo squads."

That chat, he said, resulted in the decision to launch the exchange program.

"The athletes from Phuket will be able to immerse themselves in the culture of the home of taekwondo, and experience first-hand the original methods of sparring, punching and kicking."

Mr Park hopes that the exchange of ideas and experience between the two sets of athletes will help develop local talent to the point where some of his students will win places in the Thai national taekwondo team.

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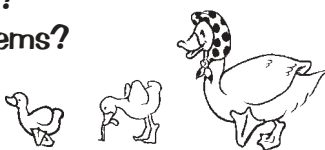
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Katamanda challenges all-comers

KATA: Katamanda Estate staff have recently formed a ladies' volleyball team and a men's soccer team for friendly games with nearby hotels and any other businesses willing to take them on.

Inaugural games were played on July 15 against Le Royal Meridien Phuket Yacht Club at the hotel's staff facilities at Nai Harn. Regular practice sessions paid off for the ladies, who beat the Yacht Club team by two games to one.

The men's soccer match was no less thrilling for the boisterous supporters. The Yacht Club team, however, swept the board with a 2-0 win.

Pictured are a mixed bag of players from all four teams.

Anyone wishing to field a volleyball or soccer team for an occasional friendly match should contact K. Pui at Katamanda, Tel: 01-8226570.

Big prizes up for grabs in Patong 7-a-side Cup

PATONG: A hefty 419,000 baht will be up for grabs in the Sixth Patong Cup seven-a-side soccer tournament, which will take place in Patong on August 12.

The tournament will be split into in five categories:

A: Open category with 90,000 baht for the winning team, 60,000 baht for the runners-up, 30,000 baht for third place and 15,000 baht for fourth.

B: Open category for those registered as living in the Patong Municipality area. Prizes: 1. 60,000, 2. 30,000 baht, 3. 15,000 baht, 4. 5,000 baht.

C: Under 17 years of age;

D: Under 14 years of age;

E: Oldsters - over 34 years.

The last three categories are open to players registered as living in Patong.

Teams must register by August 6. For more information call the Patong Educational Bureau at Tel: 076-342078.



The victors celebrate their narrowest of all possible wins.

Happy Days win league by 1 point

PATONG: In the final week of play, Happy Days held on to win the Patong Darts League by the narrowest of margins, just one point, thanks to an exciting beer leg win over a stubborn Piccadilly side on July 20.

A gentleman identified only as "Mutt" crowned the achievement for Happy Days, with a maximum 180.

While falling just shy of playing the role of spoiler, Piccadilly won the match 5-4 to take two points, enough to move them into fifth in the final standings.

Meanwhile, In-Between took all three points against

Shaker's to finish in second place, with 37 points to Happy Days' 38.

The league resumes on August 3, with at least two new teams expected to compete.

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Japanese auto maker Nissan, these days controlled by Renault of France, is to make a massive investment in Thailand to expand production and introduce a number of new models to the Kingdom.

Nissan is to invest more than 10 billion baht in its Thai operation, Siam Nissan Automobile, over the next five years to broaden the vehicle line-up and improve production capacity.

The investment is aimed at turning Siam Nissan into a fully competitive, world-class automaker, positioning Nissan for strong profit growth throughout Southeast Asia.

As a result of the increase in capacity, by 2008 Siam Nissan's workforce will double from the current level of around 2,000 employees.

As part of the new business plan, Nissan will introduce 10 new models to the Thai market by 2008, beginning with the luxury Teana sedan this year and its popular X-Trail SUV early next year.

Siam Nissan's current line-up consists of six models, including the locally assembled Frontier pick-up (*Gazette*, June 26), and the Cefiro and Sunny passenger cars. With these additions, Siam Nissan's domestic sales are forecast to triple to 130,000 units by 2008, with the remainder of production being exported to other Asian countries.

As part of the expansion, the plant's production facilities, including the body shop, paint shop and chassis operation, will be upgraded. In addition, Siam Nissan's engine plant will expand output from just 42,000 engines last year to 250,000 by 2008. The plant produces both gasoline and diesel variants.

The President of Siam Nissan, Kosaku Hosokawa, said, "Thailand offers us great potential for growth and, given the right investment conditions, it could also present us with a strong base for exports to global



markets, including [the Association of Southeast Asian Nations]."

An official Nissan statement said: "The new investment will be an important element of Nissan's profitable growth momentum under its new three-year business plan, called Nissan Value-Up."

"Under that plan, which will go into effect in the next fiscal year starting April 2005, Nissan aims to reach annual global sales of 4.2 million units, up from a little more than 3 million units in fiscal year 2003."

The first new model, the Teana sedan, introduced to the domestic Japanese market last year, features a 3.5-liter gasoline engine and sees Nissan enter the luxury segment in Thailand for the first time.

Meanwhile, the X-Trail, which has proved extremely suc-

Selling well elsewhere and coming soon to Thailand: The Teana, above, and the X-Trail, below.



cessful in European markets, combines rugged good looks with genuine comfort and strong performance. Nissan claims a new breed of customers has been attracted by the X-Trail.

First introduced in the fall of 2003, the X-Trail features a 2.2-liter dCi common-rail diesel producing a healthy 134bhp (100 kW) and a hefty 314Nm of

torque. There are also two gasoline engines of 2.0 and 2.5 litres, delivering 138bhp (103kW) and 162bhp (121kW) respectively.

The X-Trail is equally at home on or off the road. An advanced electronic stability program linked to an active-brake limited-slip differential gives fine performance in all conditions.

There is also traction control, the latest generation ABS and electronic brake assist and permanent all-wheel drive is standard. The latest model X-Trail incorporates subtle design changes including redesigned

front and rear bumpers, new 16-inch alloy wheels and roof-mounted driving lights to increase visibility on main beam.

Thailand's motor industry sales totaled 533,176 units last year, up 30% on the previous year and almost four times the figure achieved in 1998, when sales plunged to their lowest point due to the Asian financial crisis. Siam Nissan's sales in 2003 totaled 43,557, giving the company an 8.2-per-cent market share.

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



By Jeff Heselwood

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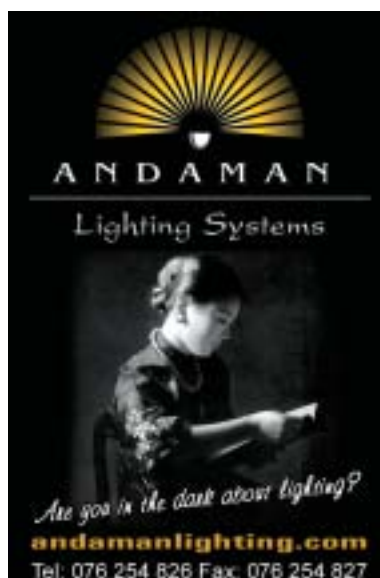
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Champagne spoons and other dubious gizmos

QI remember watching a movie in which a silver spoon was put into a bottle of Champagne to keep the wine fresh after the bottle had been opened.

I saw one of these spoons for sale on the Internet and would like to know if they really work. They are very expensive.

A Like the claim that a light breeze grounds Phuket's mosquitoes, the silver wine spoon myth is one of those false claims that just won't die. There are a few sellers of these silver devices that claim to keep Champagne fresh. And yes, they are all expensive but I suppose the sellers assume that if you can afford wine, you can afford an expensive spoon.

At room temperature, dissolved carbon dioxide in Champagne exerts around 6,000 kilograms of force per

square meter, roughly six and a half times the pressure of the earth's atmosphere.

To conserve those bubbles after opening simply keep the wine chilled, as carbon dioxide is reasonably soluble in wine at low temperature. Use a Champagne stopper to hold the pressure and keep oxygen out. Your Champagne should stay tasty for at least a day or two.

You can buy Champagne stoppers at Emporium in Bangkok or just bring a few back with you next time you go to Singapore.

By the way, the largest seller of silver spoons I know is the same French company that makes the Vacu Vin Wine Pump, which also belongs in the same quack sci-



By Steven Roberto

ence category as the silver wine spoon.

The maker claims that this device removes air from a bottle of wine, keeping it fresh after opening by creating a partial vacuum. While this device does indeed create a partial vacuum in the bottle, in doing so it strips away much of the wine's aroma. The vacuum does not remain; air eventually gets back into the wine and doubles the injury done.

In any case, once a bottle of wine is opened, removing air from the empty portion of the bottle would have minimal benefit because the air would have already set in motion chemical and enzymatic oxidation of the wine. This would continue even after the air was removed.

A better way to remove the air would be with an inert gas like nitrogen but this is impractical for home use.

So, the most sensible compromise is just to put the cork back into the half-full bottle and refrigerate the wine to slow down the rate of oxidation.

Only remove the cork after the wine has been removed from the refrigerator and reaches the desired serving temperature. Oxygen is more soluble in wine at low temperature.

The best and only certain way I know to preserve wine's quality after the bottle is opened is to drink it...

Steven Roberto is a winemaker and restaurant consultant from California. He is the Wine and Beverage Director for the award-winning Baan Rim Pa restaurant in Patong. Email: stevenroberto@lycos.com

One of the golden rules of review writing is that superlatives are The Worst Idea. They can be seen as the kiss of death.

So, does the Oriental Spoon Restaurant and Oyster Bar – part of the TwinPalms Phuket – live up to the headline? In a word, yes.

You know that this is a special place from the moment you walk in. I did, and came up with the headline right then. Where to sit? At the Oyster Bar, in the Japanese section, or at the handsome high tables in the center of the restaurant? Or just stand and gawp at the architecture and style, which, as Goethe said, is like frozen music?

The General Manager of TwinPalms – and a name already well known to many on the island – is Olivier Gibaud. Decidedly urbane in his uniform of white linen shirt and sand-colored linen trousers – and at the same time thoroughly pleased with himself – he greets us, offers us Martinis, and rhapsodizes about both TwinPalms and Oriental Spoon.

Three points: first, his rhapsody is not hubris but justified pride in a beautiful project. Second, why Oriental Spoon? "Because spoons are the common eating tool in the Orient," says Mr Gibaud. Third, the name

Surin's hippest trip

TwinPalms was not inspired by the "out there" TV series of the '90s *Twin Peaks*.

Back to the food, and my dining companion and I are eyeing with interest the seafood platter being presented to a nearby, seemingly love-struck couple.

Mr Gibaud, a genial host, notices our interest and promptly dispatches one of the snappily dressed waiters – black T-shirt, black trousers and a PDA on the hip – to bring the same for us.

Helping us to eat these pleasures are Somjai Tungkoo, Sales and PR Manager, and Sittichai Jitnatum, Executive Assistant Manager.

Any worries I had that the 650-baht plate of oysters, tiger prawns, black and blue crabs, mussels and clams would prove too small were unfounded. It's meant to be shared and is exceptional value. "Affordable luxury," Mr Gibaud comments.

A dash of one of the range of condiments mingles exquisitely with the natural juices for a fresh, sexy starter – especially when coupled with a glass of Laboure Roi chardonnay.



Exceptional value: the Oriental Spoon's seafood platter.

The table starts to fill with more dishes. My attempts to hog the spicy pomelo salad and the *pak krood* salad with prawns and chicken are thwarted as my companions leap in with forks as quick as lightning.

Both of these dishes are prepared to the best traditional recipe to be found, as are all of the Oriental Spoon's dishes – both Thai and Western. K. Sittichai tells me that the restaurant's chef, Adirek Sribuppha, and his colleagues sampled as many as 40 different versions of each dish in an effort to find the best recipe

to use at the Oriental Spoon. This devotion to their art shows.

The seared spicy tuna salad with near-caramelized onions and garlic, one of Mr Gibaud's favorites, is a delight. And the price? A mere 180 baht.

It is less than double this price for sea bass with ginger, lemongrass and chilies, and the fresh-from-the-sea taste is no illusion: it was landed just a few hours before.

Forgetting my Englishness for a moment, I tuck in to the sticky rice that accompanies the *gai yang* – Isarn-style grilled

chicken – with my fingers.

The food is passed back and forth as rapidly as the conversation. The volume of the music – a mélange of Coldplay, bhangra beats and more – keeps pace with the increasingly animated chat.

My dessert is a cappuccino and a healthy-sized slab of chocolate cake, the topping almost like mousse. My dining companion opts for simple hot chocolate to round off the evening.

The hell with rules about superlatives. This is the hippest trip.

Oriental Spoon Restaurant and Oyster Bar at TwinPalms Phuket, 106/46, Moo 3, Surin Beach Rd, Cherng Talay, Phuket. Open from 4 pm until late. Tel: 076-316500 or visit: www.twinpalms-phuket.com for more details.

On the menu with Andy Johnstone

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Home of the Week

Chalong



A high-class home for the family

From the imposing street frontage through to the marble-floored entry hall and sweeping staircase, to the cool open-plan living and dining rooms, this Romanesque home in Land & Houses Park is extremely well presented.

No expense has been spared on decoration throughout its five bedrooms and four bathrooms, and all other areas are similarly well thought-out. Liberal use has been made of marble, timber and plush carpeting.

The Western kitchen – equipped with European appliances including a gas range, oven extractor hood and two-door refrigerator – has ample storage space with paneled timber cupboards and

work tops in easy-care granite.

The dining room serving to the kitchen features a carved surround and shelf. There is a roomy laundry opening onto the rear garden.

The upper floor has five tastefully decorated bedrooms, all with built-in closets and ensuite bathrooms. The two master bedrooms have balconies overlooking the gardens.

An airy gallery at the top of the stairs overlooks an area presently used as a gym and exercise zone. The quality soft furnishings and light fittings – including chandeliers and wall sconces – give this residence an air of quality and luxury.

The house has eight air conditioners, and boasts plenty of natural ventilation.

Doors opening to terraces and upper balconies open the home to cool breezes and the perfume of the mature gardens. These are full of tropical plants and palm trees, as well as a sala and patio.

The home has a carport and a garage, as well as cable and UBC TV, and well water.

The 200-square meter house stands on a plot of 758 sqm, and is surrounded by an iron fence and wall, and, beyond those, other attractive neighboring properties.

The land title is Chanote and the asking price is 12 million baht.

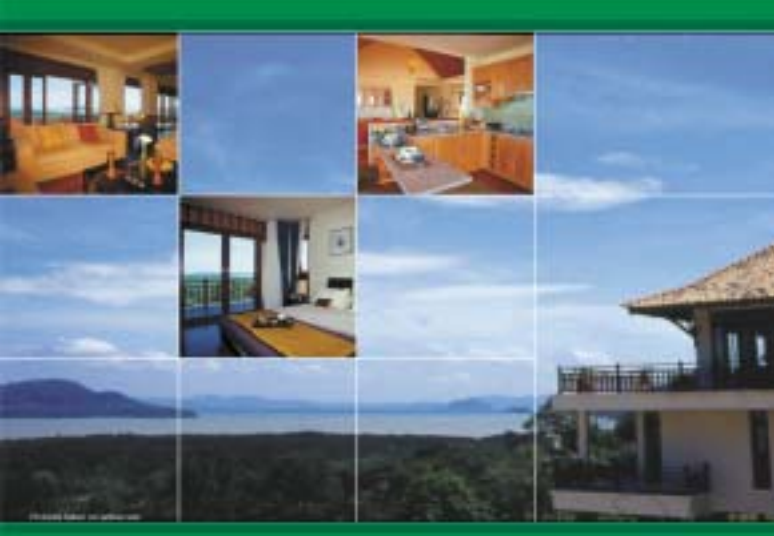



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Construction Update

by Anongnat Sartpisut

Doctors from the Bangkok Phuket Hospital and Wachira Phuket Hospital have joined together to establish the Bukitra property development, comprising 48 homes on 28 rai on the lower slopes of the east side of Rang Hill.

Bukitra, which means "Mountain Home", will offer wide views to the southeast, close-up mountain views to the west, and the urban landscape of Phuket City down below.

Monton Janjamsai, project consultant of the developer, Property and Health Co Ltd, explained that the project broke ground in May and the show home is expected to be complete by November this year.

The first homes should be ready for tenants by mid-2006, and the entire project is expected to reap gross sales exceeding 330 million baht.

K. Monton said that the aim of the development is to offer a high quality of living, which will, in theory, improve homeowners' health.

"People living here will be offered a convenient lifestyle with information technology at home, and the sense of being at home. They will be among natural surroundings with sea and mountain views, which will provide relaxation during the working day."

He added that the development will target professionals who work at home, with high-speed Internet access provided by TOT. "Every home in the project will have broadband Internet access through fiber-optic lines, so extra cables will not be needed for telephones," K. Monton said.

"The homes will also feature integrated security systems connected to the Internet. Homeowners can set up closed-circuit cameras in their homes and see everything that is happening through the Internet," he explained.

The homes, available in four styles, will be of "contemporary tropical" design, with the focus on natural ventilation.

There will be three "Batavia"-style homes, costing 18.5 million baht each. The 570-square-meter interior space will include five bedrooms, seven bathrooms and toilets, drawing

Doctors offer a hillside remedy



Architect's impression of the 5.9-million-baht Sabannga design.

room, dining room, kitchen, laundry room, maid's room and a general purpose room, complemented by parking space for three cars.

Nine units, cost 15.5 million baht each, will be built in the three-story "Kasalong" style. This design offers 440sqm of interior space comprising four bedrooms, four bathrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen and maid's room. The style will also feature space to park four cars.

The two-story "Yotaka" units, each with 330-sqm interior space, will cost 7.9 million baht apiece and will have three bedrooms, four bathrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen, maid's room and parking space for two cars.

The most affordable design is the "Sabannga" style, which will cost 5.9 million baht per unit. These two-story homes will each have three bedrooms, three bathrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen, maid's room, as well as space to park two cars.

K. Monton said, "Our goal is to sell quality of life with IT in a resort atmosphere. We believe

that potential homeowners want what we are offering, and that this project will be very successful."

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Gardening

with Bloomin' Bert

Why do so many people choose to either visit or live in Phuket? There are some stunning beaches for sure; the weather is wonderful (most of the time), and there is something to keep everyone amused, day or night.

But I rather suspect that there's more to it. Like so many other people who choose Phuket from among the millions of other possible places worldwide, I am here very much because of the easy lifestyle. The *mai pen rai* attitude abounds here. In some ways, this place turns us all into beach bums of varying degrees, without our even realizing that it's happening.

It's inevitable that plants, too, will follow the underlying trend here to do as little as possible. If that means not even bothering to grow some kind of stalk or supporting structure for itself, then so be it. The philodendron has to be classed as the beach bum of the plant world. If it were human it would be inhaling all sorts of illicit substances and going, "Far out, man."

The philodendron has no means of supporting itself at all, and has to rely solely on other, stronger and more self-reliant

THE TREE-HUGGER



Philodendrons come in many colors including, in this case, a bright yellow-green.

plants nearby to do this rather tiresome job. Its name means, roughly, "tree-hugger". It basically attaches itself to the host and wraps around it.

It doesn't do much harm in the process – it may be bone idle, but it doesn't have an ounce of malice. Why would it want to harm the plant that's doing all the hard work for it anyway?

Philodendrons come in a huge number of varieties, with all sorts of leaf shapes and colors. Most of the larger ones can be trained to grow on a pole to create a slender upright plant. It doesn't have to be anything natural to act as a host for this selfish clamberer – man-made or otherwise, it will seize the chance.

If you have a pole supporting a car port or balcony roof, then this is an absolutely perfect way to attempt to hide it, as the philodendron will quickly become the pole's best friend.

These pole plants must be continuously pruned to keep the vines on the pole, as sometimes they can go a little astray. You'll probably prefer something that's fairly "leafy" looking, so you'll need to trim back new growth on the vine tips. This keeps the plant full and helps prevent it looking stringy – don't forget its natural beach bum tendencies.

This group of plants is surprisingly diverse, ranging from vines with three-inch heart-shaped green leaves to vines with leaves three feet long. Some types have glossy green leaves.

Others have velvet-textured patterned leaves, while yet others have deep-red leaves and stems.

Water is just about all the philodendron needs. Water it often enough to keep the soil evenly moist, but don't let it get soggy and don't let the plants stand in water. Phuket's high humidity is ideal for enthusiastic growth, but they'll tolerate lower levels of humidity if you want to grow them

inside your air-conditioned mansion.

Most philodendrons are native to the jungles of tropical America, so they're much more content with the medium light intensity they would have on the jungle floor. They do get a bit unhappy if they're given a sunny spot in the garden, as their leaves start to develop sunburn and will make it very clear that they should be where we all should be – quietly enjoying a beer in the ample shade of a conveniently placed tree.

Look before leaping

Recently, a potential buyer asked whether Phuket's property boom was well founded and whether he should take this into consideration when approaching his property purchase.

It is no secret that the Phuket property market is experiencing good times. This has been the case more or less since 1997 when the devaluation of the baht provided a major stimulus to foreign investment in property in Phuket.

The single event that threw this into doubt was 9/11, which led to a softening of prices over the following 12 months.

Interestingly, however, this was most prevalent in the less exclusive areas; truly prime sites and properties still attracted interest and sold or rented in appreciable numbers.

Despite dips in tourist figures caused by the Sars and bird 'flu scares, both sales and rental transactions have increased dramatically over the past two years.

The number of new property developments and real estate agencies bear witness to this.

Because financing options are not generally available to non-Thais, the fundamentals of a cash-based market still underlie the Phuket property scene.

We are also fortunate not to have a one-dimensional pool of buyers, and are not at great risk from economic or political upheaval in a single region of the world. Prime land in Phuket is in

relatively short supply, so there seems no way to argue logically that property is overvalued in high-demand areas.

Only a worldwide economic slowdown or a series of terrorist outrages seem likely to alter this dynamic.

However, such optimism does not excuse an unreasoning approach to property investment on the island. Some less-favored areas or estates are not performing well at all.

In addition, the plethora of inland development at almost all levels and in all niches of the overall market should give buyers pause.

While it seems that demand for prime areas still outweighs supply, especially for built and nearly-finished products, it is already noticeable that this is

not the case with those developments perceived as being off the beaten track – for example, in the hinterland – or offering no tangible attractions in terms of location over their competitors.


The situation is highlighted even more starkly when one examines sales trends in the secondary market, where poorly-designed, -built and -located properties can be difficult to sell.


William Pinsent has lived in Phuket since 1981 and is a director of Phuket Land Ltd. More articles by the author can be found at www.phuketland.com/gaz/gazmain.htm



Ask WILLIAM

By William Pinsent





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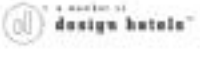
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Property Gazette

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PATONG STUDIO

apartment comprising living room with kitchenette, separate bedroom with bath. Aircon, telephone and UBC. Quiet, clean, European-standard furnishings. Long-term rental preferred, from 8,000 baht a month. Tel: 076-292345, 01-0833071.

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Property Gazette

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CHEAP ROOM PATONG

Looking for a cheap room in Patong. Must have aircon and cable TV. Max rent: 4,000 baht/month. Tel: 07-921-5021. Email: info@bjthailand.com

ADVANCE PAYMENT

for house. Will pay 1 year in advance for right house. Requirements: Chalong/Rawai area; min 2 bedrooms; 2 bathrooms; telephone line; max rent: 10,000 baht a month. Tel: 01-4152358. Email: groupjewelry@msn.com

LONG-TERM RENTAL

House in Patong wanted for long-term rental: minimum 1 year. Need 2-3 bedrooms. Tel: 09-8093566. Email: lennartviberg@hotmail.com

APARTMENT

I would like to rent an apartment with all amenities, including a swimming pool, for the whole month of January. Email: villathani@hotmail.com

PATONG RENTAL

wanted. Looking for a 2-bedroom apartment or house in Patong, with access to pool, fully furnished and with security. Would like to rent from September 1 through to April 30 next year. Please email details to: lilla_4ever@hotmail.com

BUNGALOW/HOUSE

to rent. Needed from March 19 to April 23, 2005 (5 weeks) in Kata area. Need 2 bedrooms w/aircon, kitchen, bath/shower, toilet, fridge. Best location would be near Kuktanod Rd. Max rent: 15-20,000 baht per month. Email: tastum@hotmail.com

HOUSE IN NAI HARN

Looking for house in the Nai Harn Beach area to rent for the month of August. Please contact me with details. Tel: 01-8953185. Email: non@islandhomephuket.com

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Mom Tri's Boathouse, Phuket

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Qualifications:

- Male/female, minimum age of 25
- 2-3 years' experience in the field
- Good command of written and spoken English
- Computer literate in Fidelio, MS Excel & Word

Please contact: HR department,
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Tel: 02-2614401-6 E-mail: personnel@strategiccatering.com

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Restaurant at The Mangosteen Resort & Spa, a 40-villa luxury boutique resort in the South of Phuket, is seeking to fill the following positions:

- **Waiter/Waitress:** good command of English language, several years of experience in the service area.
- **Bartender:** good command of English language, minimum 3 years' experience as bartender.
- **Captain**

Please send your application by email or fax to our HR Manager. Tel: 076-289399. Fax: 076-289389. Email: myfuture@mangosteen-phuket.com

MANGOSTEEN FRONT OFFICE

The Mangosteen Resort & Spa, a 40-villa luxury boutique resort in the South of Phuket, is seeking to fill the following positions:

- **Receptionist and reception supervisor:** Good command of the English language, several years of experience in guest relations, and knowledge of the Fidelio Front Office software necessary.
- **Reservation officer and telephone operator:** Very good command of the English language and several years of experience in a reservation department. Fidelio software knowledge a must.

Please send your application by email or fax to our HR Manager. Tel: 076-289399. Fax: 076-289389. Email myfuture@mangosteen-phuket.com

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- Good command of English.

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- Male, bachelor's degree in related field.
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- Good command of English.

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- Female, bachelor's degree in related field.
- Pleasant personality, service-minded with excellent communications skill.
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LEATHERS FACTORY

Westcoast leathers factory, makes boots, jackets, pants, bags to order in 2-3 days. Free transportation to see factory, located at 99/10-14 on the bypass road, call Sumon at Tel: 01-6919346.

SHIPPING CONTAINERS

Secure dry storage at your site or in our yard. Rent for 2,200 baht per month. Purchase price available on application. Please call for more information. Tel: 01-8924804, 01-1251873.

SITE OFFICE

Air-conditioned and fully insulated site offices for rent at 4,800 baht per month, or for sale from 120,000 baht. Call Safeway for more information. Tel: 01-892-4804, 01-1251873.

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Shareholder in successful, 13-year-old company needs to sell. 4 million baht, including share in property, clean balance sheet. Email: m_mr38@hotmail.com

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FOR A FREE OF CHARGE INSURANCE QUOTE FOR YOUR BOAT, COMMERCIAL OR PLEASURE

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Email: insurance@thaimarine.com

View Phuket's endless MOTOR SHOW next page.

Do Not Drink Tap Water!

Alcoholics Anonymous

is holding meetings in English
at the following places:

Phuket City

Mission Hospital
on Wed and Sun at 7 pm

Phuket International Hospital
on Fri at 7 pm

Patong

Patong Hospital
on Mon, Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun
at 7 pm and on Fri at 8 pm

For more info, please call
01 895 4763 and 01 891 2895.

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List **YOUR**
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50% Discount on All Treatments at SenSes

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HOTELEX
EXHIBITION



MALIBU FLAIR BARTENDING CONTEST

MISS COCKTAIL CONTEST

12 - 15 AUGUST 2004

AT ROYAL PHUKET CITY HOTEL

ORGANIZED BY FOOD AND BEVERAGE

MANAGERS CLUB PHUKET

FREE
ENTRANCE

12 Aug Speedy Bed-Making
13 Aug Fashion Show and Broadway Show
from Fantasia Entertainment Group
Cocktail reception party for hotel
owners, management and purchasing
managers

14 Aug Malibu Flair Bartending Contest
Single Amateur and Duo Professional
Contest
15 Aug Malibu Flair Bartending Contest
Single Professional Contest
and Miss Cocktail Contest
Fashion Show and Broadway Show
from Fantasia Entertainment Group

งานแสดงอาหารและเครื่องดื่ม 2004

★ แข่งขันการผสมเครื่องดื่ม MALIBU ชิงชนะเลิศ

★ การประกวดผู้เสิร์ฟเครื่องดื่มยอดเยี่ยม

วันที่ 12-15 สิงหาคม 2547 ณ โรงแรมรอยัลภูเก็ต ซิตี้

จัดโดย ชมรมผู้จัดการฝ่ายอาหารและเครื่องดื่ม จ.ภูเก็ต

12 ส.ค. การแข่งขันปรุงแต่งประเภทสีและรวดเร็ว
13 ส.ค. แข่งขันโชว์ และ การแสดงชุด บรอดเวย์โชว์
จากแฟนตาเซีย เอ็นเตอร์เทนเมนต์ กรุ๊ป
จากเมืองตอกเทล เจ้าของธุรกิจโรงแรม
ฝ่ายบริหารและฝ่ายจัดซื้อ

14 ส.ค. แข่งขันการผสมเครื่องดื่ม Malibu ชิงชนะเลิศ
ประเภทสี เดียวมือสมัครเล่น และประเภทคู่มืออาชีพ
15 ส.ค. แข่งขันการผสมเครื่องดื่ม Malibu
ชิงชนะเลิศประเภทสี เดียวมืออาชีพ
ประกวดผู้เสิร์ฟเครื่องดื่มยอดเยี่ยม (มีสต็อกเทล)
แฟนตาเซีย และ การแสดงชุด บรอดเวย์โชว์
จากแฟนตาเซีย เอ็นเตอร์เทนเมนต์ กรุ๊ป



บันทึกภาพถ่ายทอด
ออกอากาศทางโทรทัศน์
170 ประเทศใน 6 ทวีป

พบพิธีกรรับเชิญ
ดีเจบุษ ติสสี

