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4pc fuel hike 'will affect all sectors'

By Gategaeo Phetsawang

PHUKET: Businesspeople foresee price rises across the board due to the recent 4% rise in the price of diesel fuel, though they believe it will take some time before the impact is felt in the retail sector.

The 60-satang-per-liter price hike, announced on February 22, reflects the Energy Ministry's inability to continue subsidizing diesel at a rate of 3 baht a liter.

The Ministry, which has already subsidized diesel to the tune of 68.8 billion baht since January 2004, now views the program as unsustainable in the face of rising diesel prices internationally.

Energy Minister Prommin Lertsuridej said the government would not raise prices again this month because it wants time to assess the effect of the first hike on the economy.

Phuket Chamber of Commerce President Eam Thavornwongwongse told the *Gazette* that the increase, while necessary, would surely ripple through the entire economy of the island.



Owners of local fishing boat say they may stay in port; with fuel comprising 60% of operating costs, they warn that the diesel hike means they may not be able to operate at a profit.

He said prices at retail shops, especially in tsunami-affected provinces, would be closely monitored [by the Commerce Ministry] to ensure that

any increases reflect real market pressures.

The Commerce Ministry recently issued a request to more than 400 retailers urging them to

freeze consumer-goods prices until the end of this month.

Tada Pitchayaporn of the Phuket Commercial Office, which will do the monitoring, said any associated rise in retail prices should take at least a month because major retailers have large stocks of goods.

Intense competition in the retail sector should also act to ensure that prices would not rise until market forces cause them to, he said.

"If producers can continue to supply goods at current prices, retailers won't have to pass on increases to consumers."

"No retailer wants to be seen as the first one to increase prices, as that would hurt customer loyalty," he said, adding that any customers with evidence of price gouging could call his office (Tel: 076-213482; 076-212017) to make a complaint.

The Phuket branch of Big C was reported by the state-run Channel 11 TV as having already announced a three-month price freeze, although the *Gazette* has been unable to confirm independently whether this is true or

Continued on page 2

Five 'tigers' given task of expediting Patong plan

By Kamol Pirat

PHUKET: Governor Udomsak Usawarakura has appointed a committee of five "tigers" to speed up the implementation of the recovery plan for Patong Beach.

The committee will be chaired by Vice-Governor Winai Buapradit, who will be joined by Patong Mayor Pian Keesin; Kathu District Chief Khantee Silapa; Kathu Police Station Superintendent Pol Lt Col Teeraphol

Thipjaroen, and Phuket Tourist Association President Pattanapong Aikwanich.

"These five tigers will meet every Wednesday to rebuild the beach quickly according to the plan," the Governor declared.

Gov Udomsak announced the formation of the committee at a meeting of chief provincial officers and local authority staff on February 25 at Phuket City Hall.

He told those present he was concerned at the lack of progress in moving the plan -

commissioned by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) - from theory into practice.

"The government was clear about this," said the Governor. "Patong Beach should be safe and beautiful, and 'restored' in line with the TAT plan, within two months of being hit by the tsunami."

"As a result, other local government officers should share the responsibility for implementing the plan with Patong Municipality."

Travel agents avoiding tsunami 'building sites'

By Sangkhae Leelanaporn

PHUKET: Travel agents are still reluctant to send tourists to Phuket because some properties damaged by the tsunami has not yet been repaired, a meeting on Patong's renovation progress was told on February 25.

Pattanapong Aikvanich, the President of the Phuket Tourist Association (PTA), said discussions with tour companies and journalists from countries such as Germany, Australia and Sweden had revealed the feeling that tourists would not wish to take their vacations in a place that resembles a building site.

This was particularly the case with Patong's beach road, said K. Pattanapong. He added, "I would like to see the organizations involved [in the post-tsunami renovations] make speedy



Chief 'tiger' V/Gov Vinai Buapradit urged Patong Municipality to build fences.

progress in resolving this problem."

Vinai Buapradit, Phuket Vice-Governor and the head of the committee of five "tigers" charged with speeding up the

implementation of the Tourist Authority of Thailand (TAT) recovery guidelines for Patong (see page 1), said the restoration of the beach road was the top priority in the municipality.

"Some businesses have already started renovations, but the problem is that the road still looks like a building site," he said.

He urged Patong Municipality to build fences to block the construction work from view.

However, Patong Mayor Pian Keesin said that some businesses had already made it clear they would prefer to provide their own fencing, while others – especially small businesses – said the fences would get in the way when equipment was being delivered and removed.

The Mayor's solution is to use plants as shields rather than fencing.



Robot is latest VIP visitor

PHUKET: The latest notable visitor to post-tsunami Phuket can walk, climb stairs, remember faces and voices, mimic people, even dance ... yet "Asimo" is no human, but one of the most advanced robots around.

Asimo is being brought to Phuket by the Asian Honda Motor Co and is due to demonstrate its many talents to the public on March 11-13 at Central Festival Phuket.

Asian Honda Vice-President Adisak Rohitasoon said, "This is the first time we will have shown Asimo in the southern provinces of Thailand. "We're doing this because we want to encourage young people in these provinces to be more interested in science. We're also coming to support tourism in Phuket and other tsunami-hit provinces."

Watching Asimo show off its talents will be free. Performances will take place at Central Festival Phuket at 1pm and 5pm on March 11, and at 11am, 1pm, 3pm, 5pm and 7pm on March 12 and 13.

Diesel price hike 'will affect all'

From page 1

whether any other large retailers intend to follow suit.

Although the transport sector is already faced with increased costs, K. Tada said the Transport Business Association of Thailand has yet to agree to any rate increases among its members. He said that such increases were inevitable, however, due to the global trend of rising oil prices.

Still reeling from the affects of the tsunami, the local fishing industry is particularly alarmed by the increase.

Phuket Fishermen's Association President Somyod Wongboonyakul told the *Gazette* that the higher price would have a greater effect on coastal fishermen than on the owners of larger deep-ocean vessels.

Larger boats could still buy diesel sold tax-free by vessels operating offshore. The price under the government's "green oil" program, which was set up to eliminate oil smuggling, will remain lower than that for diesel purchased on land, though it will also rise in line with actual costs.

Pointing out that fuel constitutes 60% of the operating costs of fishing vessels, K. Somyod said that when the green fuel price increases, many fishermen may find it no longer makes economic sense to go out to sea.

"There are at least 40 big fishing vessels in Phuket, about 10% of which are already staying in port as a result of the price hike. It's possible that we will all

stop working if it keeps going up," he said.

He added that the National Fisheries Association of Thailand (NFA) would propose implementation of a new subsidy program, which the NFA is calling the "purple fuel" initiative, whereby fishermen would be able to buy fuel at a reduced price by using vouchers issued by the Fisheries Department.

Tour operators also expect to feel the pinch from the diesel price hike in the short term.

Wichai Ruangjaruwattana, Vice President of the Phuket Tour Operators and Transportation Association, told the *Gazette* he expects it will take about two weeks for the increase to have an effect.

Fuel accounts for about 30% of operating costs, he said, adding that he expected operators to try to reduce costs in other areas, such as payroll, in order to remain competitive.

On March 1, meanwhile, PTT plc announced a 40-satang rise in the price of a liter of gasoline, the third rise in less than two weeks.

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HRH Princess Ubol Ratana Rajakanya hands out gifts to children.

Princess delivers inspiration

PATONG: HRH Princess Ubol Ratana Rajakanya visited Loma Park in Patong on February 28 to offer gifts and moral support to young survivors of the December 26 tsunami.

The Princess, dressed in black, arrived at the beach-side park at 5 pm, accompanied by Public Health Minister Sudarat Keyuraphan. There to greet them was Phuket Governor Udomsak Usawarangura, Patong Mayor Pian Keesin and other officials.

Gov Udomsak spoke briefly on the damage caused to the province by the tsunami, saying that in addition to more than 260 deaths, 283 homes were completely destroyed and another 742 damaged, along with four schools. He estimated the cost of putting right the damage at more than 417 million baht.

Her Royal Highness distributed 200 gift bags to students and presided over the opening of "The Greatest Love of All" exhibition, a memorial to her son Bhumi Jensen, who died in the tsunami while on vacation with his mother in Khao Lak.

This exhibition featured a collection of photos of the life of K. Bhumi and the sale of memorial T-shirts and other products from the Princess's "To Be Number One" campaign.

The Princess told the audience that, despite the heartache of losing her beloved son, she still intended to work hard carrying out her duties and working for the benefit of the Thai people.

She said that her visit was intended to inspire survivors to persevere in the face of hardship and to encourage them to help make the region an even better place than it was before the disaster.

IN BRIEF

Ministers rule, OK?

PHUKET: A team of Thai Cabinet ministers captained by Interior Minister Bhokin Bhalakula took on a side made up of foreign diplomats from 25 different countries in the "Andaman Friendship" football match at Surakul Stadium on February 27.

The Thais, playing in red, beat the blue-shirted diplomats 5-3 in the late-afternoon encounter.

UK minister visits

MAI KHAO: British Arts Minister Estelle Morris on February 24 became the latest member of a foreign government to pay respects to the tsunami dead.

She told reporters, "I was amazed by how quickly people at Patong have rebuilt their shops. It is a clear signal that this tourist place will recover and be as beautiful as it was before the disaster."

Victims get B8.7m

PHUKET: Phuket Provincial Administration Organization (*OrBorJor*) spent 8.7 million baht between January 15 and February 21 on helping Phuket's tsunami victims.

President Anchalee Vanich-Thepabutr said the *OrBorJor* had funded 89 cremations and given 5,000 baht apiece to 36 children who had lost parents.

Police establish how aid money was stolen

By Kamol Pirat

PHUKET: Phuket City Police say they have promising leads relating to the apparent theft of more than 2 million baht in government tsunami relief funds, and expect to make an arrest soon.

The funds were reported missing on February 15 by Metha Mekarat, Head of the Phuket Office of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (ODPM), who said 2.05 million baht had gone missing from a metal box in a restricted room in Phuket Provincial Hall.

Phuket City Superintendent Pol Col Paween Pongsirin and case investigator Pol Lt Col Sian Keawthong led a team from the Phuket Provincial Police Forensic Science Office to the crime scene on February 28.

They dusted for fingerprints, checked for signs of forced entry and collected other

physical evidence, both from the box and the strongroom where it was kept.

The forensics team removed the box from the room and noted that one of its two hasps had been cut and the lock was missing. The other hasp and lock were still intact.

Metal filings from the hasp and a large metal hook were collected as evidence by the investigators, who noted that there were no signs of forced entry into the strongroom.

The thief apparently used the hook to pry back the cover of the box once the hasp had been cut, reached in and made off with 2.05 million of the 2.4 million baht that was in the strongbox at the time.

Col Paween also told the *Gazette* that investigators had questioned Wantana Meesang, the provincial government employee in charge of the room's

security, and several of her subordinates.

He added that the investigation was continuing. No arrest warrants had yet been issued, he said, because police want to ensure their case is airtight before proceeding.

"I will catch this robber and return the money to the strongbox. This case will be closed in the near future," Col Paween said, adding that it was too early to reveal whether suspects included state employees.

Still 3,000 missing after tsunami

BANGKOK (*The Nation*): The Ministry of Interior has reported that almost 3,000 people are still missing in Thailand.

The ministry gave the latest official totals of tsunami-related deaths, injuries and missing as 5,395 dead (1,915 Thais, 1,953 foreigners and 1,527 of unknown origin); 8,457 injured (6,065 Thais and 2,392 foreigners); and 2,991 missing (2,032 Thais and 959 foreigners).

Phang Nga recorded the most casualties, with 4,224 deaths, 5,597 injured and 1,758 reported missing.

Phang Nga is the only province where bodies are still being recovered.

Dog-and-cat show to be staged at Index

PHUKET CITY: Animal lovers are invited to attend Phuket's first "Dog & Cat Festival", to be held at the Index Living Mall on the bypass road from March 5 to 13.

The event will include booths set up by pet-related businesses, dog and cat shows, "dog spa" services, obedience training lessons and a sterilization clinic.

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Since December 26, there have been many stories about how animals in the areas hit by the tsunami, especially in Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, seem to have had a far better survival rate than humans.

There are theories that many animals have better hearing, an ability to detect changes in the Earth's magnetic field or can feel the ground vibrating in a way that humans can't, and that such early warnings enabled them to flee the tsunami well before the water came.

The ways of nature are often hard for civilized man to fathom. While our ancestors knew how to 'read' nature and use the information to forecast the timing of their harvests and their yields, the more urbanized people of today have, in many cases, lost the skills that enabled their ancestors to live off the land.

The clues are still there, though. The World Agroforestry Centre last year published a report on how local wisdom and folklore can provide the pointers needed to "read" nature and help prepare for natural phenomena.

For example, when people in some countries see swallows flying close to the water, or dragonflies swarming, they know they can expect rain within a few hours. It has also been known for cattle and elephants to stampede when a landslide or flood is imminent.

Disasters: Do animals

Disasters have happened throughout time, as nature "adjusts" and "balances" itself. Humans must have "adjusted" too, to enable us to escape or survive these disasters – how else would we still be here?

There are some who believe that animals are far better equipped than humans when it comes to surviving disasters; that they have a sixth sense that warns them of an impending catastrophe, enabling them to head for safety while supposedly more sophisticated humans remain blissfully unaware of what is about to happen.

While humans were standing on the beaches pondering the post-Christmas phenomenon of the waves receding rapidly, what were the animals of Phuket doing?

The *Gazette's* Dhirarat Boonkongsan finds out.

People who could "read" the animals' behavior have been able to escape disasters, while those who couldn't often were hurt or injured, or so the Water Shed Research Centre 1 task group decided early last year.

Wichai Chidchio, the Director of Phuket International Dog School, may not have "read" the behavior of his dog Auzi on the morning of December 26, but it could well be that Auzi's unusual activity on that day saved his life.

"I normally take Auzi to Pleum Sook Beach near Koh Sireh," explained K. Wichai. "He

loves the water so much he can't wait to jump in the sea as soon as we arrive at the beach.

"But that morning, Auzi stayed in the car rather than jump out as he usually did. And when he did get out, he seemed scared of the water.

"I wondered why he was acting so strangely, so I checked his nose to see if he was sick or something, but he was fine.

"We got back in the car and I drove about 20 meters away from the beach, and watched the tide come up and down. I thought maybe Auzi had been scared of the tide.



"But then the water rushed in really quickly; after it hit the wheels of my car, I started the engine and drove away from the beach as fast as I could."

Auzi wasn't the only dog K. Wichai noticed acting strangely. "On December 25, and on the morning of the 26th, the dogs my clients had left with me, for me to train, barked really loudly, and they all seemed to be looking to the higher ground," he said.

"Actually, when I think about it, many animals around me seemed to be acting strangely on

that day and the day before, so maybe we should take more notice of animals – they can warn us of things that will put our lives in danger.

"Maybe dogs could be trained to work on the beach with the beach guards – they do seem to know things that we don't."

Thongbai, the trekking elephant at the Pearl Village Hotel, Nai Yang Beach, also seemed to sense that something out of the ordinary was about to happen.

Thongbai's mahout, Sompong Thasee, said of his 80-year-

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know something we don't?



Left: A puppy that survived the tsunami at the Sea Gypsy village in Laem Tuk Kae. Above: A dog stands amid what is left of Wat Kamala. Right: With water wells tainted by salt water and an ongoing drought, many people are too busy fending for themselves to think about stray dogs.



old charge, "She wouldn't stay still, and kept trying to get out of her chain in the early morning on the day of the tsunami.

"She had refused to go on the beach on December 25; she kept running away from it. I didn't know what was happening, or what to do with her, so in the end I gave up trying to force her to go there.

"It wasn't that she didn't want to carry guests – she was happy enough to have them on her back – and she ate her food as usual, but she just did not want to go onto the beach.

"On the day the wave came up here, it almost reached her, and if I hadn't let her go, I know she would have broken the chain herself."

Indeed, there are stories from Sri Lanka of elephants fleeing the tsunami, and according to veterinarian Preecha Phongkum, the Director of the National Elephant Institute in Lampang, it could be argued that, since comparatively few animals died during the tsunami, they must have been able to sense what was com-

ing in a way humans could not and were able to escape.

"Elephants can tell some things about the changing weather," said K. Preecha. "For example, when a storm is coming, elephants exhibit strange behavior; they may try to pull down the big trees around them – probably because they don't want to be hurt if one of the trees falls on top of them.

"We always see that happen here, and the elephants' owners and the people who work with them know, when they see this, that they should go and make sure their homes are secure and that they should head for somewhere safe from the storm."

The Pearl Village Hotel's K. Sompong agrees. He says that Thongbai seems to know when a storm is coming. "She may scream in a strange voice, and she will spread her ears and her tail moves in a different way," he explained.

Those who make a living from the sea noticed changes in the days preceding the tsunami, although they did not realize at

first what these changes meant.

Sea Gypsy Nounsri Pramong, of Laem Tuk Kae, Koh Sireh, told the *Gazette* about what happened to her family and neighbors in the run-up to the tsunami.

"The fishermen said they caught more fish and other seafood, such as shrimps and prawns, which made us very happy and, possibly, distracted our attention from the tsunami," she said.

"We didn't really notice where our pets were when the water came, but we noticed they were back after the tsunami, and even where homes had been completely washed away, the dogs and cats survived and returned to beg for food, which makes me think they had run away from the tsunami well before the people did."

Kongkiat Kittiwatthwong, a fisheries officer at Phuket Marine Biological Center suggested that the Phuket fishermen's pre-tsunami catches may have been so abundant because marine animals had fled here from the seas around the earthquake epicenter near Sumatra, although why this should be remains a mystery.

Said K. Kongkiat, "Sea turtles can perceive magnetic waves, and it is possible that more marine life was seen here before the tsunami, but, as far as I know, there is no research suggesting that the animals' perception was affected by changes in the magnetism of the earth."

John Gray, owner of eco-tour company John Gray's Seacanoes, believes animals are able to sense things humans can't, but he believes this is a purely natural gift, rather than anything supernatural.

He said, "When I go to the mountain with my dog, the dog may know better than me where the snakes are and the best way to run away. I think animals are much more attuned to nature than humans, although I don't think they knew about the earthquake before us."

His theory is that animals have no hesitation in running away as soon as they realize that something is wrong, while humans, with their notorious curiosity, tend to wait around to see what is going to happen.

"One of the reasons people don't give animals credit for being intelligent is that people are more stupid than we are willing to accept," he said, adding that people should realize that what we call progress and development are not necessarily always steps forward.

"People should perhaps learn to care more about nature rather looking for what they can take from it, he said, arguing that getting closer to nature and identifying more with nature can help us survive whatever nature throws at us.

"We are too immature to be responsible with regard to the environment. When it comes to sharing with others, protecting other people, being selfish, we are not responsible in the way we treat our planet.

"We have advanced our technology to a level far in advance of our levels of ethics and responsibility."

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By Seonai Chongrak

The wonder of wander

Post-tsunami relief and aid has come in all shapes and sizes, and one of the more eye-catching groups appearing to lend a hand are three "Wandergesellen", members of an ancient European guild of itinerant craftsmen that dates back some 800 years.

The Freie Vogtländer Deutschlands' guild (FVD) still operates under the same code and regulations as when it was founded, and the trio of Adrian Rondinelli, Martin Maurer and Alex Frommled are three of its newest members.

The young men are doing a two-month stint at Ko Yao Island Resort repairing and rebuilding bungalows. A most unusual sight the young men are, replete with clothing and tools that date back in style to the Middle Ages.

Nevertheless, they have become part of the scenery on Koh Yao Noi, scooting about on bicycles, their big felt hats flapping in the wind and big grins on their faces.

The dedication to guild rules among members is remarkable, demonstrating a respect for tradition and craftsmanship that is not often seen in the modern world of prefabricated plastic chairs. Members must be single, under 30, and willing to wander about for three years and a day – never staying in any place of work longer than three months.

Each did a three-year apprenticeship, Alex and Adrian in carpentry and Martin in stone masonry. They didn't know each other before they became wanderers. Alex was born in southern Germany, Adrian and Martin in Switzerland. During their apprenticeships, each encountered an FVD member and made the decision to "wander".

To join the guild, candidates must first be approved by a committee. Once this is done, the would-be wanderer orders two sets of the distinctive Wandergesellen outfits from the tailors.

A "leaving party" takes place in the home of the wanderer's parents the night before his departure. The next morning, with the rising sun, the new suit



Above: (from left) Alex Frommled, Adrian Rondinelli and Martin Maurer take a break from their charitable chores.

Right: Martin uses his masonry skills to rebuild a home.



is donned and the wanderer sets off, his second outfit packed in a small bag, along with a travel book and some cash – just enough to get him on his way.

Once outside the home, the novice is met by an older member of the guild. Together they walk, never looking back, until they are a full 50 kilometers from the novice's home town.

When they reach this distance, the novice ceremonially leaps over a welcome sign and is "free". But freedom comes at a cost: he may not return to within 50km of his hometown until his three years and one day is up.

The guild believes this lengthy initiation helps craftsmen become "real men" and gain the necessary experience to become master craftsmen.

For the first three to four months on the road, the new wanderer travels with a "mentor" who shows him the basics, such as how to ask for work, food and a bed for the night.

After that, he is on his own.

All three men admitted to being frightened when it came time to "go over the edge" and sever themselves from all they had ever known.

The first five to six months of travel were pretty tough, they admitted, with dreams of home comforts, girlfriends, warm rooms and hot meals haunting them in times of hardship. But after a while they got over the homesickness and started to enjoy their many experiences.

Far and wide they traveled, throughout Germany and Switzerland. Sometimes they slept in

the relative coziness of hostels; at other times they found themselves having to sleep in frozen fields, snow chilling them to the bone during the long, dark nights.

One week they might land a "cushy" job on a building site, with hot meals, hot water and a bed, but before long they would have to move on – hitchhiking away with no idea where they would end up next. After a few years of travel, they said, the "bush drums" got louder; reports of work hither and yon increased and it became easier to find employment – albeit temporary.

As luck would have it, Martin was hitchhiking in Switzerland one day when he was picked up by one of the owners of Ko Yao Island Resort. They got talking and an invitation was extended to come to the little island and build bungalows. During his wanderings, Martin had already met Adrian and Alex, and suggested their help might be useful too. The owner agreed to fly all three out to Thailand.

So here they are, wearing their trademark flared black trousers, puffed white shirts, black waistcoats and strange felt hats, helping Koh Yao rebuild after the tsunami, and sharing their impressive building skills with the locals.

They probably never in their wildest

imaginations dreamed that they would end up in tropical Thailand after a tsunami – but it has to be a great deal better than sleeping in a frozen field in Europe in the depths of winter.

They will be in Phuket soon for a well-earned break, so if you see them – and it won't be hard to pick them out of a crowd – make sure to say hello: they have some great stories to tell.



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Government retreats on zoning plan

The government shelved its controversial plan for village-by-village security zoning in the terror-plagued Deep South, following a barrage of criticism from within Thailand and abroad.

Making a face-saving retreat, Government Spokesman Jakrapob Penkair insisted the plan to assign each village a color, and reduce or deny state funding to those classified as sympathetic to insurgents, was merely a trial balloon.

"The government has not issued any specific instructions for zoning and it will not do anything seen as undermining the solidarity and unity of Thai citizens," he said.

He urged critics not to hype up what they anticipated to be possible consequences of the plan, saying scenarios such as the involvement of foreign terrorists did not accurately reflect the situation.

The government is planning a convening of the joint House-Senate session on March 30 and 31 to debate ways to deal with the insurgency.

The debate is to focus on two issues: the southern violence and the fight against poverty there. It will be broadcast live by radio and television stations, he K. Jakrapob said.

Holiday branding: The National Buddhism Office will propose promoting Makha Bucha Day as "International Loving Day" in the future, in the hope that it will result in more people taking part in religious activities with their loved ones.

Office Director Chakradharm Dharmasakti said Makha Bucha Day, which falls just after Valentine's Day (this year it was on February 23), is meant to illustrate people's love for one another, as that was the day that 1,250 Buddhist monks met Buddha to listen to his sermon before spreading his words to all living creatures.

K. Chakradharm said this year's low turnout for two mass



A motorcyclist in Chiang Mai gets fuel from roadside vending machine that offers both regular and premium unleaded gasoline.

Motorists have been attracted by the relatively low prices the machines offer.

Makha Bucha Day ceremonies in Bangkok may have been due to hot weather. Next year's ceremonies need to be geared more towards attracting young people, he added.

Corruption? The Supreme Court accepted a lawsuit filed against the nine members of the National Counter Corruption Commission (NCCC) over their decision to award themselves a pay rise. The first hearing is scheduled for March 14, said court official Supat Suthimanas.

Public prosecutors filed the petition one day before the deadline given by a Supreme Court tribunal that had advised legal action be taken against the nine members of the NCCC.

The court tribunal agreed unanimously that the graft-busters had committed malfeasance by giving themselves a salary rise, an action it said had caused damage to the NCCC, the Finance Ministry and taxpayers.

Pipe dream: Up to 70% of Thai farmland will be irrigated within the next four years, up from just 23% today, if the government's massive 200-billion-baht initiative to improve water supply and

distribution is implemented, said Natural Resources and the Environment Minister Suwit Khunkitti.

K. Suwit said Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has assigned government agencies to draw up development plans for each of the country's 25 river basins, to improve the management of water supply and distri-

bution for households, agriculture and industry.

The Ping and Moon river basins, in the North and Northeast respectively, have been chosen for pilot projects aimed at improving agricultural productivity and output, he said.

Crises 'R' Us: Acting on PM Thaksin's instructions, the Na-

tional Security Council (NSC) is drafting a plan for an operations center that will be in charge of dealing with national crises.

The new center will be responsible for ensuring preparedness and for alerting relevant agencies, and will act as the central command and control headquarters for the prime minister to deal with crises, said NSC head Gen Winai Phattiyakul.

Kiddie coverage: Parents of students in government schools from kindergarten up to high school are being offered low-cost life insurance coverage for their children for the duration of the school year.

Parents can pay 50 baht a year for coverage of 30,000 baht in the case of accidental death and 100,000 baht if their child is disabled.

The project is being offered though the Office of the Basic Education Commission. Interested parents can call the hotline number 1186 for information between April 1 and May 30.

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

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Speedboat accident sparks new rules

Following the speedboat accident that killed 15 people off the coast of Samui in January, the Harbour Department says it will introduce new regulations that may even include barring speedboats from operating after dark.

The District Chief of Koh Phangan, Pornlert Chokchai, said the sheer number of boats taking people to the full moon party makes it impossible for the authorities to check every vessel, and this is why accidents can happen.

On February 13, he invited the owners of all the speedboat companies to a meeting on the island to discuss a suitable approach to the problem.

The few who attended agreed that stricter regulations should be applied toward all types of boats, especially in terms of adhering to passenger limits and providing life jackets, but none would not endorse any re-

strictions on operating hours. The Harbor Department is currently checking around 100 vessels to make sure they are properly licensed and conform with government regulations.

This will also involve a mechanical inspection and ensuring that the masters of the boats are trained and in possession of a skipper's permit.

In addition to the inspections, speedboat operators will no longer be allowed to stop off Haad Rin Beach, the location of the monthly Full Moon Party. Instead, they will have to drop passengers at the main pier, where checks can be more easily carried out.

Meanwhile, Surat Thani Governor Vjith Vichaisarn recently announced the launch of a speedboat operator's association in the province, which will establish clear guidelines regarding rules of the sea and also help collect information on passen-

FROM THE GULF OF THAILAND



By Commander
Sammy Swan



Peter Medgyessy (2nd from right), former Prime Minister of Hungary, and Katalin Medgyessy (right), are welcomed to the Central Samui Beach Resort by General Manager Jacques Mury (2nd from left) and Executive Assistant Manager Carmen Marienberg during their recent stay on Samui.

gers traveling to and from the various islands around Koh Samui.

The association will distribute information to its members and will also ensure that every boat meets the required safety standards and carries a two-way radio on board, so that assistance can be summoned

from other association members.

It is hoped that the new regulations will be enforced swiftly and effectively in order to prevent more accidents, and that standardizing safety measures will encourage revelers to continue visiting the famous party on Koh Pha-ngan, the image of which has suffered con-

siderably because of this accident.

Dry season preparations: As the dry season approaches, the Surat Thani provincial government is keen to ensure that there is enough water for all its citizens.

Every year an estimated 30,000 people in the province are affected by drought, and this year the government is conducting checks to measure water availability, identify reserves, assess water quality and make provisions for storage and supply.

Trucks are also being sought to deliver water in times of drought, and health officials are looking into the possible health issues that may arise, in order to ensure that complaints such as dehydration or stomach problems can be treated as quickly as possible.

A special fire station will also be established to respond to forest and bush fires.

Residents and businesses are urged to begin saving as much water as possible in order to avoid what is a potentially serious shortage during the hottest months.

Cdr Sammy Swan is a writer for Samui's community magazine.



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This week



ROYAL THANKS: Michael Jenselius (2nd from left) and Annie Nuanchanta (left) have an audience with King Carl XVI Gustav and Queen Silvia at The Oriental hotel in Bangkok in recognition of Mr Jenselius's raising of funds for tsunami relief.



EX-PRESIDENTS' CLUB: Bill Clinton (right), on a tour of tsunami-struck areas with George Bush Snr, is greeted at the beginning of their stay at the JW Marriott Resort & Spa by the resort's GM Craig Smith.



MEAL READY TO EAT: Enjoying a thank-you dinner during their stay at The Metropole hotel are, from right, Dr Derek Benedix, Lt-Col Mark Gleisner and Lt-Col Ken Dunn (seated) from the US Army Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) Central Identification Laboratory. Lertyuth Ketnak, the hotel's Office Manager, is on the left.



ROTARY CENTENARY: Phuket Senator Paiboon Upatising (3rd from right) and Prasert Fakthongphon (4th from right), the President of the Phuket Shrine Club, join more than 100 people celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Rotary Club.



COMPUTER CASH: (from right) Dr Surapong Suebwonglee, the ICT Minister, accepts a donation of 1 million baht from Sanpat Sophon, the President of the Association of Thai Computer Industry, and Wilson Tan, the President of the Asian-Oceanian Computing Industry Organization, on behalf of the Thai Red Cross Society's tsunami relief fund at Phuket's first international ICT conference.



PROACTIVE HOME PRO: Wanlop Ploytubtim (2nd from left), the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Services joins Achira Sineha, the Assistant MD of Home Pro, at the company's handover of construction materials – worth some 4 million baht – that it donated for post-tsunami reconstruction work in the affected provinces.



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PISCES (February 20-March 20): Pisceans who are coming of age this week can look forward to life steadily getting better. A thoughtful gift will come as a welcome surprise. If you've had a hard time making ends meet recently, your mood could be lightened by financial gain on Sunday. Gemini has a business proposal that could become worthwhile, but get all the facts before making serious decisions.

ARIES (March 21-April 20): Arians should not to splash out too much cash this week. You are certain to be tempted to buy more than is on the grocery list. Finances are subject to ups and downs during March; stay on an even keel to avoid ending up deep in the red by the end of the month. Affairs of the heart are well-starred on Tuesday.

TAURUS (April 21-May 21): Your agenda is still overloaded and you need to relax more. Taurians should have more faith in others' abilities, and delegate some of their responsibilities. Aquarius would love to share the burden. An unresolved emotional issue plays on your heartstrings; it's time to lay this matter to rest. On Wednesday, there's a strong chance of an unexpected monetary gain coming from overseas.

GEMINI (May 22-June 21): You're more than ready to climb a few steps higher on the career ladder, but the only way to get ahead now is to take the initiative. With your natural entrepreneurial skills and the stars on your side for the rest of the month, it shouldn't be too difficult to come up with a winning formula. Wear brighter colors than usual to ignite a spark of romantic interest from Capricorn.

CANCER (June 22-July 23): Those born under the sign of Cancer who are ready to kick a bad habit will be backed by astral energy this week. Turning over a new leaf can open up new directions and help you to gain respect from influential movers and shakers. Mid-week, a friend in need asks for your support, but you should refrain from helping to open this pot of worms.

LEO (July 24-August 22): The stars will ensure that your energy is high this week. Make the most of these conditions to take care of all the boring chores that have been conveniently pushed to the back of your mind. Those Leos who are tired of being single can look forward to an exciting meeting of the minds on Sunday. If you're already involved, it's likely you will discover a surprising new side to your partner.

VIRGO (August 23-September 23): Progress in business matters should be smooth, but Virgoans should be on the lookout for a silver-tongued someone who can't be trusted. As a precaution, be sure to get personal references before committing to any kind of partnership. An old flame is about to come back into your life; if you don't want to re-ignite this romance, make this abundantly clear.

LIBRA (September 24-October 23): Librans should not waste energy trying to convince someone they need to see things from a different point of view. Instead, stick to your own agenda. Love is about to blossom as a friendship turns into something more; you should let this relationship grow slowly. On Monday, there are bureaucratic hurdles to be overcome and you may need to bite your tongue.

SCORPIO (October 24-November 22): Your appetite for the good life will be diminished until midweek, when a blast of astral energy will send you rocketing into action. Scorpions who doubt whether someone's intentions are honorable will receive truthful answers on Wednesday. Don't be fooled by smooth talk when it comes to an apparently irresistible bargain. The number 8 has special meaning on Sunday.

SAGITTARIUS (November 23-December 21): Sagittarians are likely to feel the heat more than usual this week. Don't feel guilty for moving at a snail's pace for a few days; the world will still go on around you. Balance your schedule so there's more time to relax. On Saturday, your partner makes a chance remark that gives food for thought. Changes for the better are in the air.

CAPRICORN (December 22-January 20): Get out and about. Capricorns will be the center of attention at social gatherings this weekend. Pisces is particularly interested in you and will appreciate the chance of getting closely acquainted. Finances are not so well-starred until the middle of the month; you need to find better ways of letting money work for itself. The color warm orange helps to build confidence.

AQUARIUS (January 21-February 19): Aquarians will enjoy a casual weekend, with the emphasis firmly on family relaxation. If you're single, get together with like-minded friends. You will have to wait longer than expected for a debt to be paid; send out tactful signals to hurry matters along. Those traveling this week should be prepared for delays. To compensate for this, you'll meet interesting people along the way.



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Specs appeal

One essential accessory for life in Phuket is a pair of sunglasses. But buying sunglasses is not as simple as walking into the shop and choosing a pair that looks good on you.

Thidarat Sirirattikarn, manager of Better Vision Phuket, says, "Most of our customers already have a brand in mind when they come in, and just want to try many styles before buying."

But, she adds, "You should check the lenses to make sure there is no distortion and that looking through them does not cause discomfort."

An essential part of selecting sunglasses is checking their ability to block ultraviolet (UV) light. Ideally, buy sunglasses that block 98% or more of UV.

Surprisingly, there is usually no relationship between price and UV-blocking ability; many of the higher-priced glasses are expensive because you are paying for the brand name or for durability.

The coating that stops UV light is clear. The tint in sunglasses is for blocking visible light – UV light is outside the visible range.

Wearing dark glasses that allow UV light to pass through can be worse than wearing no sunglasses at all.

Because there is less visible light coming through the glass, the pupil of the eye opens wider, letting in more UV, which can damage the retina.

Some shops have a UV light so that customers can test sunglasses. Put the glasses on and if the light appears to be turned off, then the UV protection is high.



LOOKING GOOD: Don't be swayed by just by the whims of fashion and big-name brands. Take your time to find a pair that both suits your Phuket lifestyle – and protects your eyes from the harmful effects of UV light.

Another way to ensure you are getting good UV protection is to buy brands well known for making sunglasses (as opposed to brands well known for making shoes, clothing or cars).

Look for stickers indicating approval by organizations such as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) or Occupational Safety and Health Administration of the US, or the British Standards Institute, for example.

Also bear in mind that UV light can be reflected off sand, buildings or water. Larger wrap-around-type sunglasses are more effective at stopping reflected UV coming under the lenses or from the sides.

Experts recommend either dark gray or dark green lenses as offering the best overall protection for your eyes with the least distortion of color.

For those planning to spend

a lot of time on the water, go for dark green, dark gray or dark brown with a mirror surface.

Better Vision Phuket is near The Metropole hotel on Montri Rd, in Phuket City. Tel: 076-211705. Prices of sunglasses range from 1,250 to 40,000 baht. Gazette Shopper Card holders can get a 30% discount on all brands apart from Cartier and Oakley.

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Weeks ago, the Thai government called an official halt to the active search for bodies left behind by the retreating tsunami.

But amid the devastation of Baan Nam Khem in Phang Nga, one man doggedly pursues a personal mission – to find as many of the village's victims as possible before the authorities finally call a halt to the recovery of bodies.

Briton Rob Brown talked with the *Gazette's* Alasdair Forbes about the setbacks and says that he will not give up until the last corpse is found.



Rob Brown checks one of the pumps he uses to drain the dozens of pools in and around Baan Nam Khem. He has already emptied about 20.

FINDING

Rob Brown indicates a small oblong shape drawn in the sand near a large klong, and marked at one corner with a stick. "I'm pretty sure there's a body under there," he says. "We found three human bones."

There were a lot of corpses in this part of Baan Nam Khem just after the tsunami. As people ran from one wave, another came from the side and swept hundreds of them into the klong. Roughly one third of the population of 4,000 or so died on December 26.

Rob has checked the area with his signature sniffing pipe, a two meter length of blue plastic tube through which he sniffs the air close to the ground, allowing him to pinpoint where the smell is strongest. There is a body buried there, he reckons.

Different species smell different, Rob says. Cows and dogs might not smell the same as people, but pigs are a problem. In the weeks he has been in Baan Nam Khem he has been fooled a couple of times, and has spent hours carefully removing debris only to find a pig underneath.

He keeps his nose in tune by sniffing cotton wool he keeps in an air-tight plastic bag. The monks at the temple, he explains, allowed him to take a swab from a corpse there.

Since January 18, the 62-year-old from Weybridge, in Surrey, England, has been on a personal crusade to find as many corpses as possible before the Thai government decides to draw the curtain on this phase of the tsunami

recovery and begins bulldozing over any remains that may not have been recovered.

Already Rob has had to use his secret weapon – a letter from the authorities acknowledging the value of his work – to stop the Thai Army dumping debris in one of the many pools he believes still contain human remains.

Nam Khem is dotted with lagoons, the legacy of the old tin-mining days, and many of the village's tsunami victims ended up in them.

Bodies that floated were easy to recover and were picked up in the days after the waves hit, but others still lie trapped below the water, tangled in wreckage.

So far, Rob has found and recovered 15 bodies. At first he would persuade one of the local people to take him and the corpse in a pickup truck to the nearby Baan Bang Muang temple. But these days the authorities require him to report his finds to the po-



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THE FORGOTTEN



Rob Brown surveys one of the ponds in Baan Nam Khem. There is a body, he says, just under the small boat he uses, which can be seen bottom left of the picture.

lice and hand the remains over to them.

Some of the bodies have been easy to find – “I tripped over one of them. I don’t know how anyone could have missed it.” – but most have been recovered after days of pumping to empty the pools. “I must have drained 20 lakes,” says Rob.

It’s gruesome work. The flesh on the bodies now has the consistency of jelly. Rob tells of one corpse, that of an infant,

“I was scouring around the lakes and I saw a foot, floating, just a foot, with a shoe on it. One of the blokes helping me went in there and was trying to tug on it to get the body out. I tried to tell him to stop, but I don’t really speak any Thai.

“I knew what was going to happen. It just fell apart. We managed to recover most of it, but it was getting dark and we couldn’t find the head. The army found it the next day.”

Rob arrived in Thailand “as soon as I could get here.” He explains, “I’ve been to Thailand eight times, and I love it, though I’d never been this far south before.” Once he arrived, he immediately pitched in, helping to recover bodies in Phuket.

His expertise in locating corpses was recognized by a doctor from Thammasat University, who persuaded him to go to Nam Khem where, the doctor said, his abilities would be in much greater demand.

For the first four nights he

slept on the beach, the reek of death all around him. The doctor (who did manage to find accommodation for herself) helped to organize some large pumps to drain the pools in the devastated village, and on the third day they set to work.

Said Rob, “The engineers wanted to run the pipe [from one of the pumps] all the way down to the sea. I didn’t want to do that.

“I got the digger to dig a channel one meter wide all the way down to the sea. The idea was that the water rushing out would erode the sides of the channel. It went really wide.

“Sure enough, the next day I went down to the beach and there was an arm sticking out of the sand. So it worked.”

The partnership with the doctor didn’t last long. When she stopped taking Rob’s phone calls, the pumps were taken away, so now he works on with two smaller ones he has managed to scrounge up.

Rob feels let down, but the doctor’s distance is not something that is likely to deter the bluff Brit. The locals have provided him with a room to sleep in, and one of them insists on laundering his clothes for free – he wears military gear “because it lasts longer”. He pays for food from his own dwindling pocket.

He has also been lent a small boat and he rides around on a two-stroke road-racer motorbike, also on loan. The one thing that worries him is the money he owes for fuel to run the pumps – currently around 10,000 baht.

But still he carries on. In

any case, he’s been in rougher places, including a spell as a mercenary in Angola in the late 1960s, under the infamous psychopath, “Colonel Callan”.

Angola’s not a topic Rob likes to talk about – “I really don’t want to go into that.” But he does reveal that he and some others were pursued right across the country by the Cuban-backed forces before they managed to escape.

“We ran all the way to what was then Northern Rhodesia,” he says. “I’m still a wanted man in Angola.”

Is what he is doing now some kind of atonement?

“Maybe [Angola] changed me. I don’t know. I’m no expert – I’m not a psychologist. But I do feel deeply about people who have been hurt. I feel a lot for these people [in Baan Nam Khem]. They are poor people – very poor people.

“I have a lot of compassion. I have a lot of heart. And all of that

was a long time ago, and it was a bit of a mix-up. I suppose it all [seemed like] a bit of an adventure. It’s like a friend of mine who joined the French Foreign Legion then wished he hadn’t. He ran away, and there’s a price on his head, too.”

Rob has been recovering bodies on and off for the past 10 years, mostly in Africa, after a friend asked him to help out. He’s plainly proud of his skill in what he does, but how does he feel when he finds a body?

He says, “It’s not a pleasant thing to do. The smell... If I take you to a corpse you wouldn’t like it either. But it doesn’t affect me mentally at all, really; it’s a body that has to be retrieved.

“It used to bother me in the old days, but now I don’t feel

anything when I’m working. It’s a job to be done, though with total respect.

“But after I get the body out, and it’s gone to the temple, I think about it then ... I weep when it’s a child, even with people watching me.”

While he has been in Baan Nam Khem, Rob’s life in England has been languishing. Over the past couple of decades he has built a solid career as an investigator for law firms and a deliverer of writs. But he says his heart’s not in it any more. He plans to rent out his house in England and retire to Thailand. He’s met a special person and they will be married in June.

Meanwhile, he will carry on with the search. Is he obsessed? “Nah,” he says, “I’m just doing my thing. It’s not an obsession. I just want to do this.”

But, he concedes, “It’s the most bizarre type of occupation, digging dead bodies up. I know they’re dead. I

know they’re going to smell and they’re going to look blooming awful. But I have a lot of compassion. I love helping people, especially if they’re down. I’ll go on until I find the last body.”

How will he know it is the last body? “I won’t. But I’ll carry on until they tell me I have to stop.”

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Picking up the pieces after the tsunami

Dr Ngamwong Jarusuraisin keeps a special eye out at his tsunami group sessions for signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among those attending.

This is a condition that can develop in people who have been through something particularly unpleasant or shocking, something far beyond their normal experience.

Even people who did not directly experience the traumatic event – by being caught up in it or witnessing it themselves – can suffer PTSD, brought on by hearing accounts from people who were there, or via media coverage, or because the event has affected them in some way, by destroying their home or workplace, for example.

It is common for people with PTSD to suffer flashbacks to whatever triggered the condition. The images can come at any time, disturbing sleep or, if they come when the person is awake, making them unable to concentrate on whatever they are doing at the time.

People who have lost loved ones, who are already grieving for the people they have lost, may also be wracked by guilt, con-

vinced that they could – and should – have done more to protect their loved one, even if there was nothing they could have done.

Dr Ngamwong, a psychiatrist and family doctor at Bangkok Phuket Hospital, is a member of a small team of mental health professionals who, inspired by Singaporean psychologist Victor Adam, are conducting free group therapy sessions for tsunami survivors.

He talked to **Sangkhae Leelanapaporn** about what he is trying to achieve, and how.

'In the case of those ... affected by the tsunami, I feel group therapy sessions will be more effective, because they involve people who have been through the same event'

vinced that they could – and should – have done more to protect their loved one, even if there was nothing they could have done.

PTSD can also affect children, even if they do not suffer from it themselves, as Dr Ngamwong explained.

"If a parent has PTSD and it causes them to behave aggressively, then it may have a long-term effect on the child, something that becomes apparent only when the child grows up," he said.

It is thought that certain people may be genetically more susceptible to PTSD than others,

although growing up in a nurturing, supportive environment can reduce the chances of a child suffering from PTSD as an adult.

Dr Ngamwong believes most of the people hit by PTSD as a result of the tsunami will have started to experience symptoms before the end of March; symptoms of the disorder usually manifest themselves within three months of the traumatic experience.

He said it is possible for people with PTSD not to realize they have it, because it can show itself in a number of ways that appear to have no connection to whatever triggered it.

These symptoms may include headaches, stomach aches, a feeling of failure, a general feeling of unhappiness, boredom and a lack of interest in things such



Dr Ngamwong: 'We can all talk and discuss problems together.'

as hobbies, poor sleep and nightmares (though not necessarily about the traumatic event).

He said, "With PTSD in general, it is possible to use medication to control symptoms and lift feelings of depression, or to use a combination of medication and therapy for six months.

"But in the case of those who have been affected by the tsunami, I feel group therapy sessions will be more effective, because they involve people who have been through the same event."

Dr Ngamwong and Dr Adam held the first group session on February 9, and the group now meets every Wednesday between 6 pm and 7 pm at Patong Hospital.

Meetings, said Dr Ngamwong, are carefully structured so that he is not the "leader", with the other people present following him.

"There's no need for me to be the leader, or to talk to people individually," he explained, "We can all talk and discuss problems together."

At present, the sessions are conducted only in English, but if there is demand from Thai people, Thai language sessions will be set up, too.

However, said Dr Ngamwong, "Group therapy is common in Western countries because, culturally, Westerners will talk about things that concern them, but Asian people, on the other hand, won't."

Dr Ngamwong recalled how one of the sessions held so far helped one woman find the will to continue after losing several million baht when the res-

taurant she had just bought was wrecked by the tsunami.

"She was happy that no one was killed, but she was still very depressed because she had lost all her life savings," he said.

"But then we heard from someone who had lost his partner in the tsunami. They had spent all their time together, then, suddenly, the partner was gone.

"The man talked about how this had affected him, but that helped the woman who had lost her restaurant to realize that she, too, could go on with her life."

Dr Ngamwong continued, "We are trying to solve problems, but we do try to lighten the mood sometimes, to prevent the meetings becoming too negative.

"For example, we started a session with 30 minutes of dance therapy. We turned off the lights and everyone danced how they wanted to, regardless of style, or whether they could keep in time to the music or not.

"It was intended to give people who felt shy a little confidence, and also to make everyone feel at ease.

"Then everyone was asked to concentrate on moving parts of their bodies – their neck, say, or their feet.

"That helped to draw the thoughts of those who were pre-occupied away from what was bothering them and it helped make the discussion that followed a lot more productive."

Anyone interested in joining Dr Ngamwong's sessions should contact the Stress Release Tsunami Victims Center at 04-7469899.



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A rebuilding of faith

By Alison Winward

While the government continues to dither in its delivery of aid to people in need, what started as a plan to build homes for the four Christian families in the tsunami-hit sea gypsy village on Koh Sireh has ended up making habitable almost 40% of the 276 houses there.

"We started work on January 4, and our original intention was to re-house just the four Christian families in the village," recalls Amnart Pitchacoon, the minister at the Phuket Christian Assembly on Thalang Rd, Phuket City.

"But when we had finished building their houses we still had some money left, so we started to help with other houses," he said.

As donations poured in from Christian communities, Christian volunteers arrived from elsewhere in Thailand, the UK, Sweden, the US and New Zealand to carry out the work.

"We've spent between 25,000 and 100,000 baht on each house," said K. Amnart.

Those whose homes were destroyed could choose whether to have volunteers rebuild their houses for them, or be given the materials to do the rebuilding by themselves.

At the time of going to press, the church had helped to rebuild or repair 113 houses there.

Christian sea gypsy Yong Pramongkit, speaking on the veranda of the newly-built home she shares with her disabled husband, Nang Talaluk, and their two children, said, "I was very, very sad when our house was lost. We had no money so we had no way of rebuilding it."

Before the tsunami, K. Yong made a living from repairing nets and other fishing equipment, but she lost her tools to the



Left: Volunteers continue rebuilding homes at the sea gypsy village on Koh Sireh.

Below: Yong Pramongkit (left) with her disabled husband, Nang Talaluk, outside their new home.



'This has been an amazing experience, and very humbling for me ... and people seem to be very grateful for our help.'

tsunami and has been unable to work since. The family's sole income since December 26 has been 2,000 baht from the government, she said.

Despite some claims to the contrary, and although some 40 people have attended services at the sea gypsies' tiny church, compared with between 16 and 20 before the tsunami, K. Amnart's wife, K. Mem – herself a Christian – is adamant that no one is

"bribed" to convert.

"We have heard of people [offering 'bribes'], but for us, if someone becomes Christian be-

cause they have got a new house, we don't rejoice," she said, "but if they start to genuinely trust in the Lord, then we can rejoice."

Dwaine Cooper, a carpenter in Pennsylvania, in the US, had no doubt why he was helping rebuild the battered Koh Sireh community.

He explained, "God has blessed me very much and I was able to express his love to other people."

Doing that appeared to involve spending the best part of 10 days atop a very rickety ladder, toiling in the un-Pennsylvanian heat with other volunteers from the US.

He said, "This has been an amazing experience, and very humbling for me ... and people seem to be very grateful for our help."

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KIDS

THE FUN PAGE
FOR ALL
THE FAMILY

Spot the Difference



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





Brain Buster!!


Mr Black was having a beer with Mr Brown and Mr White. One was wearing a black shirt, one a brown shirt and one a white shirt. "It's odd," said Mr Black to the other two men. "We're all wearing different colors, yet none of us is wearing the color that is the same as his name." "True," said the man in the white shirt. Who was wearing which color?

Answer: Mr Black: brown; Mr White: black; Mr Brown: white.

SOLUTION TO
LAST WEEK'S
CROSSWORD

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

Get your brain
in gear with
The Monster Quiz



1. Who coined the phrase "The Iron Curtain"?

2. What is a knobkerrie?

3. Trevor Baylis is most famous for creating what?

4. Which legendary aircraft was first flown March 5, 1936?

5. Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili, who died March 5, 1953, was better known by what name?

6. Who is the lead singer of Limp Bizkit?

7. Name two movies for which Limp Bizkit has supplied songs.

8. Who is the US Secretary of State?

9. How many others have held the post?

10. TASER, the stun-gun widely used by police forces, is an acronym of what?

11. Paul Hewson and Dave Evans are better known by what aliases?

12. Which company produces the iPod?

13. What is the correct word for a crowd of owls?

14. Who, in 1949, coined the phrase "the Big Bang"?

15. Where would you find the group of buildings called The Mob Quad?

16. Which three cities form South Africa's PWV megalopolis?

17. Disciples of the 36 Chambers: Chapter 1 is an album by which rap outfit?

18. The current bad boy of pop, Pete Doherty, fronted which band?

19. What did James Trusler achieve in 67 seconds in 2003?

20. Which compound has the chemical formula C₆H₁₂O₆?

Answers next week

Never a
Cross Word!

Across

1. A little drink in Scotland.

4. Bushy plants.

7. Easily stretched.

8. The nearest star.

10. Arts degree.

11. Too young to go in.

12. How far from here to there.

14. Cry of pain.

15. Concealed.

16. Squashed circle.

18. Cousin of the boa constrictor.

19. Requirement.

Down

2. Ability to be counted upon to

3. do what's required.

3. Carrier of dengue fever.

4. Was a secret agent.

5. In reference or in regard to.

6. French middle class.

9. Citizen of Yerevan, maybe.

13. Stocking material.

17. Measure of acidity.

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

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S MONSTER QUIZ

1. The Communist Manifesto; 2. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels; 3. Moony; 4. James Potter, Peter Pettigrew, Sirius Black and Prof RJ Lupin; 5. A rich Belgian chicken soup; 6. A dance style briefly popular in the '60s; 7. One. The USA; 8. Seviche; 9. Coco Chanel; 10. Siberia; 11. Rivers in Hades; 12. Heteronyms; 13. White grapes; 14. The taka; 15. Brine; 16. Tajo; 17. Sir Thomas Wyatt; 18. Movement, Respiration, Sensitivity, Growth, Reproduction, Excretion and Nutrition; 19. All living things on Earth; 20. 456.3 million.

Solution next week

A tale from the monkey house

Word comes to Stool Pigeon that a certain foreign resident went out for a drink at a local beer bar and found himself sitting across the bar from the same policeman who had arrested him for drunk driving a few weeks earlier.

Given the normal chaos along Rat-U-Thit 200 Pi Rd, one might wonder just how drunk one has to get before being pulled over for this particular offense – I always thought one would have to crash straight into the police station before any eyebrows would be raised.

At any rate, this gentleman somehow managed to get arrested and was subsequently thrown into the communal jail cell at Kathu Police for five hours, presumably to sober up.

Over beer and a few laughs, he explained to the officer that, after his arrest, he was forced to share his cell with a gibbon and its Thai handler; the man makes an illegal living forcing the animal to pose for pictures with tourists and, as a result, is a regular overnight guest at the precinct house.

In the wild, gibbons live in old-growth tropical rainforests. A single gibbon family has a territory of up to 125 rai – somewhat larger than the dimensions of even the most generously proportioned Thai prison cell.

The gibbon's handler, who was also drunk, promptly curled up on the cement floor and fell asleep. Five hours alone with the shrieking, free-swinging primate turned out to be a very sobering experience indeed.

Holding pattern: Home, the upscale lounge bar on Soi Viking, is up for sale. Its affable proprietor, Peter Cohen, described Patong as being as "dead as a doornail" after the tsunami. With so few of the upscale tourists he is trying to attract about, it hasn't been worth his while to stay open.

Now he is biding his time, hoping either to sell the place or



NO PARKING: A rather shapely hostess, tightly clad in the highly-popular Von Dutch line of clothing, poses with a Bangla barrier. The location of the barriers is of considerable importance to barkeepers, who like to position them so that they will channel stumbling drunks into their establishments.

to reopen if – or when – the tourists return, possibly at the beginning of the next high season.

Peter said that if he can find a buyer for his Home, he might try to do something else in Phuket, but on a larger scale. Interested parties can give him a call at Tel: 07-0170135.

Buddha bar: The well-publicized arrival of 1,800 tourists aboard a chartered Star Cruise liner ended

up being a bit of a flop, despite the authorities having blocked off the southern end of the beach road – for the first time ever – to throw a big party for them.

At the same time, though less publicized, an American navy ship also made an R&R call on Patong.

But despite the arrival of so many well-heeled tourists, and at a time when their presence is needed more than ever, there

wasn't much for them to spend their money on. All the bars were closed for Makha Bucha Day, which happened to fall right in the middle of their short stay here.

Some of the hip-hop defenders of Western democracy were spotted hanging out in restaurants, covertly drinking beer out of coffee cups. It looks like they managed to learn a few of the local tricks pretty fast.



Disaster in the making: One can only wonder what is going to happen in Phuket when the first big rains arrive. Apart from the usual, such as the explosion of electrical transformers, expect landslides, flooding and soil erosion on an unprecedented scale.

All across the island, huge mountainside tracts are being stripped of all vegetation and, in some cases, tarred or cemented over. Expect big problems along the road over Mt Mayhem (aka Patong Hill), especially where one new real estate development has excavated away right to the very base of the road.

People complain about CNN's inaccurate reporting of the tsunami damage, but can we really blame them? The truth is that it's almost impossible for a first-time visitor to tell where the tsunami damage ends and the influence of environmental terrorists posing as property developers takes over.

Send questions, comments, tales, witticisms or criticisms to stoolpigeon@phuketgazette.net

Punter's guide to Pattaya

Pattaya has been in the throes of a building boom not seen anywhere on the planet since Harry Truman decided to level Hiroshima and Nagasaki with a matching pair of atomic bombs to make way for a series of American fast-food franchises and car dealerships.

The upsurge in building began a few short years ago and has accelerated faster than a Suzuki Smash off the lights at South Pattaya Road.

Pattaya has cornered the Thai brick and concrete market and almost everybody seems to be cashing in on this almost unseemly rush to build.

Khun Lek, owner of the fastest *somtam* cart this side of Sukhumvit Highway, now has a list of properties hanging alongside the papaya salad and seems

to be forever fielding calls on her mobile phone from interested parties wanting to check out the latest bargains in Soi Wherehellisthat.

Anybody with a mobile phone, digital camera and laser printer seems to be hanging out a real estate shingle and looking for customers.

At last count, Pattaya had more real estate agencies than beer or karaoke bars.

Indeed, down in Soi Healinghands, Khun Noi has spent 100 baht on converting the Nimble Fingers Karaoke and Massage Bar into the Wallet-Emptiers Real Estate Agency.

The question for potential purchasers of real estate is: who can you trust? Who can you believe?

After all, real estate agents in Western countries have a reputation not much better than those of used car salesmen, politicians and pedophiles.

In most countries people need to have completed a government-approved course in order to set up shop in the real estate caper; not so here in Pattaya.

Therefore, in the interests of protecting my reader – especially the ones born yesterday – I have decided to compile a list of the most common phrases employed by real estate agents to advertise their products, with an accompanying sentence or two to describe what they really mean.

Highest International Standards: We conform with the North Korean Building Code, the Recommended Building Structures Certificate of Burkina Faso and the Engineering Strictures of Tajikistan.

Investment Opportunity: We are having great trouble selling this "dog" and the stupid owner won't budge on the price.

Recently Renovated: If you consider the length of time *homo sapiens* has been walking in an upright position, 1977 is recent.

Beach Access: Once you cross



FROM THE STREETS OF PATTAYA
By Duncan Stearn

Sukhumvit Highway, make your way via the little dirt road you'll see on the left. Keep walking for about 30 minutes and you'll see a barbed wire fence. Carefully lift the lower strand and crawl through. Turn left and walk for another 10 minutes and there, right in front of you, is the beach.

Off the Beaten Track: In the middle of nowhere.

Imported Flooring: Illegally logged from the forests of

AM Production
DIRECT EXPORT
Made to Order
NEW T-Shirt
European Quality:
- Polo shirts
- Sweatshirts
- Baseball caps
- Embroidery
- Pens, Lighters
Tel: 076-321850
Fax: 076-321851
Email: info@best-t-shirt.com
www.best-t-shirt.com
Ask for: Mr. FRANZ

Phuket Property Consultants Company Limited
New
single house for sale/rent in Soi Sai Yuan, 500 sqm, 3 bed, 3 bath, private swimming pool & Jacuzzi and green garden.
5.8 million only.
Mobile: 09-4744622

LOOKING FOR JUMBO AT LAVATORIAL LAUNDROMAT

I see from the papers that they're training elephants to use toilets in Chiang Mai. A photo published in many newspapers shows Diew, a five-year-old bull elephant, sitting on a toilet that looks much like a large washing machine. Film clips on CNN showed him flushing afterward by pulling a cord.

Obviously this feat represents a great leap forward in elephant evolution. As Neil Armstrong might remark, "That's one small poo for an elephant, one giant turdski for elephant kind."

Just think, if we can train elephants to use toilets, it's only a matter of time before we'll have them driving cars, logging on to the Internet, and chatting on mobile phones.

I am, however, concerned about a significant omission in the training of young Diew. Nowhere in the media was it reported how he cleans himself afterward.

Have they trained him Western-style to rip off a few lengths of toilet paper with his trunk and wipe his bottom with it? Since he's an Asian elephant, it's more likely that they've taught him to suck up water into his trunk, reach behind him, and blow the water ... you know, up there.

It's lucky for Diew that he's not an Indian elephant, or he'd have to follow the elaborate post-defecation rituals described in the *Vishnu Purana*. Here we are informed that, after excretion, the

lingam (male sex organ) must be washed once, the *guda* (anus) must be washed three times, the left hand 10 times, and the right hand seven times.

All fairly tricky for an elephant that has no hands, but perhaps the front feet can serve as a substitute. I am a bit suspicious about the need for washing the *lingam*, though, as it plays no role in the defecatory process; even more so because, after being washed, it's supposed to be rubbed with earth, then washed again.

As every teenage boy can tell you, this business of washing and rubbing the *lingam* may very well produce an unfortunate physiological reaction that could easily lead to a socially undesirable activity, one which the *Vishnu Purana* would certainly frown upon. But maybe elephants are different from teenage boys.

Let's hope so – and let us quickly move on to a topic which is less likely to arouse the slumbering censor and his fierce pen.

The Thai government will view with great interest this development in elephant training.



We all know that elephants tend to hang around tourist venues – and occasionally they have to do their business.

It would be bad for tourism if elephants got into the habit of dumping their wastes, say, at the top end of Soi Bangla, in the lobby of the Dusit Thani, or in the ar-

rival hall at Phuket International Airport.

No doubt the average elephant in Phuket often has to take a poo while plodding along the streets. What if the pachyderm inadvertently hits an imprudent tuk-tuk following too closely behind? Imagine the distress of tourists riding in a tuk-tuk that is suddenly crushed beneath a giant elephant pie falling from on high. This is certainly *not* the kind of image the TAT wants to project.

Yet where is the elephant supposed to deposit his fecal offering? If he is properly toilet trained, he might go into a gas station to use the facilities provided for humans. But even if he could somehow get through the door, the commode would likely be unable to bear his weight – even if it were American Standard. Picture the wrath of a gas-station owner who finds that his commodes have all been squashed flat by defecating elephants.

An intelligent elephant, remembering that the toilet he was

trained on looks like a washing machine, is more likely to venture into the nearest laundromat in quest of relief.

Housewives doing their laundry would be less than pleased when the elephant lumbers up to a washing machine, lifts the lid with his trunk, sits atop, and trumpets proudly as he squeezes off a big one into the churning depths. An elephant pie in the washer could seriously impair the seductive charm of any woman's lingerie.

No, gas stations and laundromats are not the solution. I therefore call upon the government to erect toilets for elephants at strategic intervals along our major thoroughfares. These would not only provide relief for our pachyderms – they would serve as tourist attractions that no other country could match.

S. Tsow can be flamed at stsow@yahoo.com, except when he's out admiring elephants perform their defecatory duties.

property prattle

Laos and the backblocks of Bangladesh.

Keenly Priced: There's a sucker born every minute. Some idiot will come along and snap up this over-priced piece of garbage.

Sea Views: If you stand on a stool in the en-suite bathroom and look carefully between the two condo towers situated about five kilometres away you will, on a clear day, catch a glimpse of blue water.

Modern Thai-style Home: Chickens and pigs in the backyard, rainwater draining into giant earthenware pots, no hot water, a polluted stream (not more than a trickle) out the back provides daily washing water. Comes complete with nosy neighbors who tend to start drinking *lao kao* at about 6 am and don't stop until they fall over comatose.

Classic Style: No architect has

designed anything remotely like this since Frank Lloyd Wright died.

Natural Beauty: The neighbors haven't mowed the blasted lawn for about 20 years and there are weeds and vines growing out of control all over the joint. A colony of monkeys also seems to have taken up residence.

Only five minutes from Foodland/Friendship/Lotus/Carrefour: By fast-attack helicopter or Formula One race-car.

Renovator's Delight: A shanty in the middle of a tapioca plantation. One decent bump from a tail-wagging dog and the whole structure will come crashing down around your ears and look like a giant mound of kindling.

Prestige Living: By comparison with the backstreets of Lagos, Mogadishu and parts of Cairo, this is luxury.

Secluded Area: No hot or cold running water. Kilometers from anywhere remotely civilized or habitable. You'll have to walk for 20 minutes or more before seeing anything resembling human habitation.

Modern Flexible Design: You want a roof, we'll put a roof on the house. You want a flushing toilet, we'll do that as well. You want a bedroom and a living room, we can accommodate your wishes. Just add a few zeroes to the asking price and your every wish is our command.

24-Hour Security: Come on, cut him some slack, the poor bastard has to sleep and eat sometime.

Any similarity between the above collection of marketing adjectives and the advertising used by most of the real estate companies to sell their products in Pattaya is purely intentional (and tongue-in-cheek).

	<p>Siam International 38/54 Nanai Road, Patong, Kathu, Phuket 83150</p>
<p>Siam International</p>	<p>❖ Legal consultation Contact: ❖ Company formations Tel: 076 346 149 ❖ Notarial Fax: 076 346 150 certifications Email: ❖ Contracts siamint@loxinfo.co.th ❖ Work permits ❖ Bookkeeping ❖ Visa service ❖ Translations</p>

The Phuket Gazette
- Since 1994 -

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Govt must speed up aid

Those who were not directly affected by the tsunami will recall the weeks afterward, when foreign governments persisted – despite a deluge of emails from those living here – in labeling Phuket, in their travel advisories, as smashed beyond redemption.

The British government, for example, advised travelers that Phuket's infrastructure and public services were "severely disrupted".

It was true that, in some parts, for a few days, infrastructure and services were disrupted, but few people here can have failed to have been impressed by how fast power and phones were restored, and how swiftly roads were cleared.

The effort by the Provincial Electricity Authority in particular in bringing power back to Khao Lak, where hundreds of poles were flattened, was world-class.

The sad fact is that although the hardware, apart from houses, has been extensively repaired, fixing of the software – the social services – has been slow beyond belief.

Over the past month the *Gazette* has heard stories from the homeless, the jobless and the otherwise destitute about the lack of government help. These people praise the individuals and non-governmental organizations, but are full of cynical disenchantment over the slowness with which funding is arriving from the local authorities.

In some cases, those local authorities themselves have been made to look bad by promises from further up the chain that have not been fulfilled.

There have also been delays caused by the need to ensure that those who put in claims for aid are who they say they are, and are in dire need. Rules intended to prevent too much money from sticking to bureaucratic fingers have also resulted in labyrinthine procedures that inevitably slow delivery of aid.

In Baan Nam Khem, one of the worst-hit areas, the *Gazette* met one couple whose house, scant meters from the sea, was severely damaged by the tsunami. In the seven weeks since the tsunami, the sum total of aid they had received from the government was a five-kilo bag of rice.

In the plywood shanties of Baan Bang Muang, several families told of their difficulties in getting a tank to store water for washing. "By all means build a tank," they were told by the authorities, "but don't ask us for money for it."

These are just two examples. Readers will have heard of hundreds more. These people need help. They have been hurled into the darkness by the tsunami. The authorities must make strenuous efforts to bring them light, and soon.

– The Editor

The Phuket Gazette

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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.

Better uses for B2bn

Is this really the right country, or the right moment, to spend 2 billion baht on "a dome with a high-tech crystal prism to display the known victims" as a tsunami memorial [*Gazette*, February 19]?

For a start, what about the unknown victims?

And secondly, doesn't Thailand have other things to spend this money on – schools, for example? Electricity supply? Water supply? Wastewater treatment and roads? – particularly as there are still so many people out there who were affected by the tsunami who have yet to receive a single baht from the government?

For example, there are business operators in Patong who have not received any of the 20,000 baht promised by the government, and as the banks are not lending money too easily, they are set to be the next victims of the tsunami.

Those who died will always be in our hearts and will never be forgotten, so let's help those who are still alive before we do anything else.

Amorn
Chalong

A very "dome" idea

Tsunami memorial?! Can somebody please explain to me why 2 billion baht should be spent on a tsunami memorial [*Gazette*, February 19] when so many people who lost their businesses and/or homes still haven't received a single baht from the government?

It is good to remember the victims, but it could be done in a more simple and elegant way

than building a "dome with a high-tech crystal prism".

Money is needed here, but to be spent in more useful ways, such as on people who are still alive and without income.

I lost my business in Patong (a souvenir shop) and I didn't get anything from the government and the banks are reluctant to lend money. I haven't received any donations and now I don't know what to do about my future. Maybe they should include a memorial as well for those who are still alive but have been left to "look after themselves" – as is the case with most of the 900 business operators in Patong.

Olivia Preeyapong
Chalong

A monumental folly

I was shocked to read your recent article about how – if I understood correctly – Plodprasop Suraswadi is proposing to spend up to 40 million Euros (2 billion baht) of taxpayers' money on a monument to the dead, while I read regularly claims about victims receiving insufficient help, or even no help at all, from the government.

I personally have spent the last six weeks collecting a considerable sum of money from my friends in Europe to buy nets, repair boats and buy new engines for fishermen.

K. Plodprasop, please tell me how I explain to the schoolchildren in my country, who organized cakes sales to raise 7,500 baht for the tsunami victims, that the Thai government proposes to build a monument which will not be of any benefit to the survivors yet will cost between 1.5 billion and 2 billion baht.

Please tell me this is just a bad dream, and that this money will be spent on reforestation, water conservation and other projects which will benefit the survivors.

Guido Jouret
By email

A new, better way?

I read with interest the story "Pian ordered to get moving" [*Gazette*, issue of February 26], which stated that there was "Worry that Patong is 'slipping back into old ways.'"

Let me see if I understand this: We want more people to come to Patong Beach, so to work toward that goal we will have fewer beach chairs ...

Am I missing something here? What exactly was wrong with the "old ways"? Isn't it because of the "old ways" that hundreds of thousands came here before the tsunami hit?

I am sure I speak for the many loyal *farang* who have been coming here for years, if not decades, when I say that we liked Patong as it was (except for the tuk-tuk drivers), that we value our enduring relations with the vendors on the beach, and that the only change we would like to see is the restriction of jet-skis to certain areas and a reduction in their numbers.

We are the people whose "word of mouth" brings new visitors here. We are the people who were here on December 26 and who have stayed or returned. It is bizarre that the tourism authorities and provincial administration are going out of their ways to annoy us.

Ken Freed
Patong

Letters conveying views and suggestions are published here. Those seeking comment from government officials and/or business owners are currently published only online, at www.phuketgazette.net.

Good reasons behind volunteer permits

I have done a lot of thinking about this topic and had plenty of conversations with others about it too. I admit that I am, or I was, only partially educated about the issue, which is a dangerous thing.

I was [initially] under the impression that volunteers having to hold work permits was A Very Bad Thing. It perplexed me as to why the government would adopt this policy.

My initial response, which was shared by others, was, "Why would people who were giving so much suddenly be inconvenienced and, potentially, be fined or even imprisoned for working altruistically?"

This is an interesting topic as opinion [here] can so easily become skewed due to lack of information or misinformation. This might be due to the fact that there isn't a great deal – that I can perceive – of transparency regarding the rationale behind the Thai government's policy decision.

The issue of work permits for aid volunteers has been discussed at length at a recent Thai Together meeting (Thai Together is an umbrella forum for the locally-based aid projects) and the consensus, which I share, is that having to get a work permit is a pain in the ass, but the reason for implementing – or enforcing – the policy is understood.

It's understood [within the aid community] because there

FIRST PERSON

The announcement on February 7 that volunteers involved in post-tsunami recovery projects must hold work permits caused a sharp collective intake of breath among aid workers.

Sayan Chuaiyjan, head of the Phuket Provincial Employment Service Office, said there could be no exceptions and that his office would begin to enforce the regulations soon – possibly in March. "Work is work," said K. Sayan, "Even if it is for charity."

Offenders could face penalties of up to three years in jail, or a fine of up to 30,000 baht, or both.

Here, Californian Matt Cohen, a vacationer-turned-volunteer who is now continuing with his vacation, gives his opinion.



are, apparently, some local foreign expatriates who are raising foreign money, supposedly for the recovery effort, and using it for their own gain, to rebuild their own businesses.

These are just rumors, but it appears that it has been happening with greater frequency than one would like to believe, which is ugly – though not that shocking.

From what I understand – and I can't verify this information – but as an example, there are people in Thailand, business owners – say, an expatriate who lives here – who is collecting foreign funds that he claims are going toward rebuilding Thai busi-

nesses and lives in and around his area.

In reality, he is using the money for his own gain to rebuild his own business, which is a dive shop.

The Thai government has realized what some people are doing and wants to have some recourse against those people. The easy way for it to do this would be to have a registration system. If the authorities suspect a person, then they can search their records and see if that person is registered as an aid worker and holds a work permit or not.

At the moment, if suspicions are raised – within Thailand or outside – as to an individ-

ual's actions, the Thai government has no way of keeping an eye on the person or tracing where the money is going.

If the person is not registered, then they can be instantly fined or jailed. If the person is registered, then the government or Labour Office can say, "Okay, you say that you are a volunteer, that the money [you have raised] is going toward aid projects. Prove it."

If the person can't provide proof, then he or she can also be fined or jailed.

I, and the other people at the Thai Together meeting, now believe that enforcing the work permit rules will be very helpful.

Ultimately, the government is trying to regulate the people involved in these projects rather than remove genuine volunteers. A *bona fide* operation will not have a problem in registering its volunteers with the government to get work permits.

Thai Together will be recognized by the Thai government as an official non-profit organization and the volunteers working on the projects associated with Thai Together will get work permits.

Everyone who was present at the most recent Thai Together meeting – including those who provided legal counsel – felt that the enforcement of the work-permit policy is an inconvenience but one that is both understood and ultimately worthwhile.

My initial reaction – which was shared by many others – was based on ignorance of the whys and wherefores of the policy.

Most people are leery about accepting any spoonfed information from the Thai government, but that's probably down to [their] stereotyped view [of the Thai government].

I have found that initial reactions to [the] Thai policy are generally overly cautious – verging on paranoia, laced with conspiracy theories and fears of oppressive intent [by the Thai government].

Fingers crossed that the work-permit policy ends up being for the benefit of all ...

Seeing red over Green Fins

I feel I must respond to the rather one-sided account of the "Green Fins" project in Sylvie Yaffe's article.

First, when we hosted the Green Fins project in Patong, more than 40 people attended, not 20 as stated.

Second, naming dive companies as "environmentally-friendly", does a disservice to those who also attended but were not named. In fact, two of the companies that were named do not exist; Genesis Liveboards changed into a new company more than six months ago, and Bubble Blue is a videographer.

More importantly, the Dive Operators Club of Thailand (DOCT) has been very active in post-tsunami clean-up operations.

Racha Noi, Racha Yai, Kata Noi and Patong have been cleaned up by our members and volunteers. We have a program whereby Kata, Karon, Kamala, Surin and Bang Tao beaches/seabeds will be cleaned up during the month of March.

Apart from local dive company staff, we have had volunteers from Bangkok, Pattaya, Krabi, and many other provinces attend the clean-ups.

Many tourists are also volunteering to help us.

Lastly, I feel that Dr Nippon should be more active with his project. If he has a product to sell (which he has, even though it is free), then he, or his representatives, should get out and visit the dive operators. A good salesman does not sit in his office waiting for potential clients to come to him.

There is an insurance saleswoman in Phuket who is extremely successful because she not only has a very positive personality, she constantly visits her clients to keep up-to-date with them. There is a lesson to be learned here.

Alistair Beveridge
Managing Director
Sea King Divers Co Ltd
Rawai

Sylvie Yaffe replies: Yes, the article was "one-sided". How could it be anything else when we are all on the same side; that of the environment. Mr Beveridge's attitude is just another example of the disharmony that seems to plague the dive industry.

He is correct when he says that more than 40 people attended. However, the article states "fewer than 20 dive operators", not people. If he has a list with more than 20 dive companies on it, then I will apologize.

I did not name companies that do not exist. There is Bubble Blue dive operator based in Khao Lak that is involved with Green

Fins. Genesis Liveboards still uses that name on its website.

I agree that naming of some dive companies as "environmentally-friendly" may be a disservice to other companies. In fact, the draft I submitted to the Gazette stated the "usual environmentally-active dive operators".

When it was edited, the meaning changed.

Phuket is fortunate to have K. Nippon working at the PMBC. He is intelligent, humble, well-spoken and very caring and knowledgeable about the reefs in Phuket. He is simply asking for the support from the dive industry, for the sake of the environment.

How rather one-sided to compare one of Thailand's foremost coral experts with an insurance saleswoman whose livelihood depends on the commission she makes from her clients. Could it not also be argued that the president of the DOCT, too, should visit each of his "clients" to keep them up to date – and have a very positive personality?

Nai Thon Beach better – for now

After the tsunami, Nai Thon Beach was for a few weeks actually dirtier than it was before. Now, it's fabulous; there is more beach than when the sea was too close for comfort during the monsoon season.

I went out snorkeling a few days ago amid the newly moved rocks and boulders and there was an astonishing array of marine life, all busily feeding off the new rocks. All were big – at least as long as my forearm.

I have never seen a puffer fish so huge, nor grouper, moray eel or other marine life, and all so close to shore. It beats diving.

Recently, however, there have been locals spear-fishing around those rocks and I cannot help but feel a pain in my heart every time I see them.

When they kill off all the mature fish, or scare them all away, we will be left with nothing to appreciate and make us go "Wow!" anymore.

What can we do?

Dragonfly
Nai Thon Beach

Images and stories of kindness sought

The Thai Kindness Movement Foundation (TKM) and IBM (Thailand) are partnering to collect stories and pictures that illustrate the courageous contributions of the tsunami relief volunteers and organizations, who so generously and selflessly assisted the victims of the recent dreadful events in the six-tsunami-hit provinces of Thailand.

TKM and IBM hope to rec-

ognize these efforts and keep a database of these powerful stories as an informal history written by the people who acted on the front lines during and following this disaster.

The documenting of these events and of the follow-up support will be kept as an invaluable reference tool for study by future generations.

This information could also be very helpful in preparing for a similar crisis in the future.

TKM and IBM invite each tsunami relief volunteer and organization to submit two photos each with an accompanying story.

One photo should exemplify your "kindness in action" with a 50-word description (approximately) of your volunteer work.

The other photo, also accompanied by about 50 words, should illustrate kindness you experienced from other people while you were assisting, such as from villagers, medical staff, boat drivers, schoolchildren or anyone else.

Please specify the names of the people involved (if known), as well as the time, date and location of the action, and email them to: tsunamithaikindness@yahoo.com

Thai Kindness Movement
Foundation
By email

A Yankee in the court of King Dost

The *Man Who Would Be King* (Farrar Straus Giroux, New York, 2004, 351pp) is the amazing story of Josiah Harlan, the first American in Afghanistan, who, following in the footsteps of his hero Alexander the Great, marched 250 miles north from Kabul to subdue an Uzbek slave-trading warlord and was acclaimed king by the grateful Hazara tribe.

Harlan was a Quaker from Chester County, Pennsylvania. Despite never having attended medical school, he was employed as a ship's surgeon on a voyage to Canton and Calcutta, then became a British Army surgeon in the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1825. He was also a self-taught classicist, botanist and military tactician.

After his stint with the British Army, Harlan spent 18 years as a foot-loose adventurer in central Asia. He was the inspiration, author Ben Macintyre believes, for Rudyard Kipling's short story *The Man Who Would Be King*, which, in 1975, John Huston made into a great movie starring Sean Connery and Michael Caine.

Macintyre came upon Harlan's story in 1989 while serving as a war correspondent for *The Times* in Afghanistan. Macintyre started his research in the Punjab, where Harlan lived in the 1820s.

Finally, in a tiny museum in Harlan's hometown in Pennsylvania, Macintyre stumbled upon a treasure: "I finally discovered Harlan's lost voice: in an old box, buried and forgotten among the files, was a tattered manuscript hand-written in curling copperplate, most of Harlan's missing autobiography, unnoticed and unread since his death, along with letters, poems and drawings."

In 1826, aged 27, Harlan raised his own private army of 100 ruffians and mercenaries under the American flag and strode boldly from Ludhiana, the frontier garrison town of British India, into the political cauldron of central Asia.

Beyond was the sprawling Punjab kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Beyond that was the Khyber Pass and the Afghan kingdom of Dost Mohammed Khan, who had usurped his half-brother, Shah Shujah al-Moolk, in 1809.

Harlan proposed to the ex-king, in exile in Ludhiana, that he march his force around the outskirts of Punjab and enter Kabul to suss out prospects for the Shah's restoration to the throne.

After assorted confrontations with minor warlords, Harlan dismissed his

Off the SHELF

By James Eckardt

troops and, disguised as a Muslim holy man, continued on with a few faithful retainers. He made it to Kabul, where he was more impressed by the incumbent king, Dost Mohammed, than his predecessor.

Harlan returned to the Punjab and enlisted in the foreign officer corps of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, whose cool tactical brilliance was matched by a ferocious appetite for women, boys and strong drink.

The maharaja eventually made Harlan governor of the province of Gujrat, but after seven years, Harlan fell out of favour and returned to Kabul to become adviser to Ranjit Singh's worst enemy, Dost Mohammed Khan.

In the service of the Afghan king, Harlan reached the pinnacle of his career, leading a modern army equipped with artillery across the Hindu Kush to subdue the Uzbek warlord Mural Beg, a notoriously cruel slave trader.

The persecuted Hazara tribe proclaimed him their king. Two years later, though, he had to return to Kabul, leading

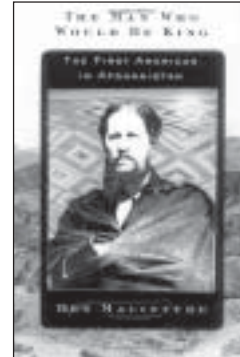
his starving army through the fierce blizzards of the Hindu Kush.

"Harlan's experience in the mountains had changed him, but the transformation had begun many years earlier," Macintyre writes. "He had arrived in Afghanistan as a *feringhee* [white foreigner], utterly convinced of his cultural and moral superiority, but slowly, first as a visitor and a spy, then as a courtier to Dost Mohammed, now as a prince, he had absorbed, and been absorbed by, the civilization he once disdained. At least one half of Harlan was now Afghan. He wore Afghan clothes, spoke their languages, and understood their traditions."

Thus Harlan was appalled by the British invasion of Afghanistan. Dost Mohammed had to flee Kabul just two weeks after Harlan arrived with his half-starved army.

In 1842, Harlan was back home in Pennsylvania when news reached him of the annihilation of the 15,000-strong British army in Afghanistan and the restoration of Dost Mohammed.

Harlan died in obscurity 30 years later. But Ben Macintyre has brought him, gloriously, back to life.



Google's Gmail looks very promising

Nearly a year after Google launched the beta test version of its 1,000-megabyte (just less than 1 gigabyte) free web-based email service Gmail (gmail.google.com/), it seems that it is finally becoming openly available.

I am hearing more and more reports of friends inviting other Phuket residents to create Gmail accounts.

Each Gmail account holder can invite up to 50 people to create an account. This simple system will help stem an explosion in the number of new accounts being created, thus giving Gmail time to react to demand.

Given Google's impeccable

record at designing simple interfaces and running servers that spit out results in the blink of an eye, Gmail may well have just what it takes to knock Yahoo! and Hotmail from their perches as the top choices for free email.

Gmail claims to satisfy three major demands of web-based email: the ability to find emails quickly, greater storage and faster interaction. After only a week of using Gmail, I could not fault it on any of these aspects.

Although Gmail is currently available only in English, it can send and read email in most languages using all the popular Internet browsers, though JavaScript and cookies must be enabled.

The first thing new users will want to do with their account is obvious: send mail. So unless you want to type in the intended recipient's email address in each and every email you send, the best thing to do is to import your address book.

Gmail's Import Contacts feature can import contact information only from CSV (comma

separated value) files, so the first step is to export your current Address Book.

In Outlook Express, open the Address Book and select File | Export | Other Address Book, and then select Text File (Comma Separated Values) and click Export.

Enter the name the exported file is to be called, then click Browse and navigate to where the file is to be saved. Click Save, then click Next, tick the check boxes beside the information you want to include (First Name, Last name, E-mail address, and so on) and click Finish.

Step-by-step instructions on creating a CSV file of exported contacts from Yahoo! and Hotmail, while using IE, Mozilla or Firefox, can be found at gmail.google.com/support/bin/answer.py?answer=12118

The next step is to import your Contacts into Gmail.

Log into your account and click Contacts on the left-hand side of the screen, then Import Contacts at the top-right of the yellow box.

In the popup box, click Browse and navigate to where you saved your exported Address Book and select it, then click Import Contacts.

Now, when you start typing in an email address when composing an email, Gmail will auto-prompt email addresses starting with the same characters entered, refining the choice as you type.

The Gmail Address Book

will not import entries that do not have email addresses, nor does it recognize group mailing lists.

The features that really set Gmail apart from Yahoo! and Hotmail are free automatic forwarding and POP3 access, which, respectively, allow users to receive email sent to their Gmail account via another email address, and to receive Gmail through their preferred mail client software, such as Outlook, Outlook Express, Eudora or Thunderbird.

Years ago Yahoo! stopped free forwarding and POP3 access, which allowed you to download your Yahoo! email and land it in the Inbox of your mail client.

Hotmail announced late last year that free POP3 access, even for people who use Microsoft's Outlook and Outlook Express, will be stopped sometime this month.

To set up to receive your Gmail via your mail client, log into Gmail, click Settings in the top-right corner and then click "Forwarding and POP" at the top of the yellow box.

In the lower half of the yellow box choose either "Enable POP for **all mail** (even mail that's already been downloaded)" or "Enable POP only for **mail that arrives from now on**."

Choose whether to keep a copy of downloaded email in your Gmail Inbox, to archive it or to delete it.

In Step 3, configuring your mail client to download email,

click on "Configuration instructions" to bring up a list of instructions for configuring Outlook Express and Outlook 2002 (and older) (Windows); Outlook Express and Outlook 2002 (and older) (Mac); Outlook 2003; Entourage 2004; Entourage X; Eudora 5.1 (and higher) (Sponsored & Paid Mode); Eudora 5.1 (and higher) (Light Mode); Netscape Mail 7.x; Netscape Mail 6.2; Netscape Mail 4.5, 4.6, or 4.7; Apple Mail; Mozilla 1.7; Thunderbird 0.x as well as general instructions for configuring other mail clients

For Outlook and Outlook Express users, as well as for later versions of Netscape, Gmail offers a downloadable "configuration tool" to set up your mail client for you.

For example, to download the tool, click on "Outlook Express and Outlook 2002" at the top of the list of supported mail clients, then click on "Run the auto-configuration tool."

Once the file is downloaded, double-click the configuration tool icon, and select the mail client you'd like to use with Gmail. Enter your Gmail user name (everything before '@gmail.com') in the "E-mail address:" field, then enter your name in the "Display name:" field, and click "Configure".

You then will be able to receive, read and send Gmail email just as you would with all your normal, non-web-based email.

Of course, first you have to get your invitation from a friend.

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Mixed success for job creation ploys

By Kamol Pirat

PHUKET: The Phuket Provincial Labor Office (PPLO) has received a 21-million-baht budget from the Labor Ministry to employ those left jobless by the tsunami in public projects to clean-up after the disaster.

The project began January 14 and will run until the end of March. Those taking part, most of whom worked in the island's tourism industry, will be paid 175 baht a day, the government's maximum wage rate for unskilled workers.

PPLO Chief Dechar Peukpattananuruk said the project was part of the Labor Ministry's two-step approach to dealing with tsunami-related joblessness in the province.

The first step, he said, was to provide free transport home for out-of-work staff from other provinces. This effort was coordinated with labor offices in other provinces, which would try to find the workers employment in their home provinces after they returned, he said.

So far, 1,341 workers have taken part in the work project, in which the unemployed are put to work by local tambon administration organizations and municipi-

palities. The workers are paid by the local bodies, which in turn receive refunds from the PPLO.

Projects have included clean-up work at beaches in Karon and Rawai, as well as diving to collect debris in Patong Bay, he said.

K. Dechar explained that many hotels that are closed for repairs continue to pay their staff at their basic salaries, about 6,000 baht a month for rank-and-file staff. Normally, such workers would earn much more than this from monthly service charges that can be as high as 20,000 baht a month during the high season at successful hotels.

The 10% hotel service charge is applied to all room charges and other hotel services provided to guests, including food and beverage services. The proceeds are divided evenly among all hotel staff, regardless of position.

K. Dechar explained that workers being retained on base salaries were still eligible for the Labor Department work project.

Other PPLO projects, such as finding work for employees in other resort destinations – Koh Samui for example – have been less successful.

He also noted that few in the Phuket hotel industry had taken advantage of free transport to other resort areas for fear of losing seniority and promotion opportunities when their hotels re-opened for business.

When asked how many hotel employees were out of work as a result of the tsunami, K. Dechar said it was difficult to estimate because such figures were not collected on an industry-by-industry basis.

Dr Jirachai Amornpairoj, General Manager of the 250-room Royal Paradise Hotel in Patong, said few hotels in Patong have laid off employees because they viewed the post-tsunami downturn in occupancy rates as a temporary situation – and believed that things would begin to return to normal soon.

"If they lay off employees now, they will run into staffing problems when occupancy rates begin to climb again," he said.

Dr Jirachai said many hotels were using "management tools" to deal with the current situation. These included salary reductions, including half pay, and unpaid leave.

He said such approaches help spread the burden evenly among hotel owners and their employees.

One hotel has been taking a more creative approaches. The Hilton Phuket Arcadia Resort and Spa in Karon has

rented some of its workers to property agency Knight Frank Phuket, which has a shortage of staff for villa management.

Stephen O'Brien, Managing Director of Knight Frank Phuket, told the *Gazette*, "Since December 26, we have received a surge in villa management instructions from owners living abroad and hence we needed more staff and contractors to assist us.

"For instance, we required more pool cleaners, maids, gardeners and cleaners and we needed them urgently, so we turned to the Hilton."

Hilton General Manager Peter Hourigan said that the cost of providing these services was no more than villa owners paid at other times. "When we set this up with Steve, we wanted to make sure that our staff had plenty of active work to do and not price ourselves out.

"As it turned out, we are seeing good demand for our services and everyone is happy – the villa owners, Knight Frank and our staff."

Mr O'Brien added, "It looks impressive when a lawn at one of our managed villas is being mowed by a guy in a Hilton uniform, and the quality of workmanship is outstanding.

"We even use Hilton drivers to transport guests staying at our managed villas to and from the airport, into Phuket City, or to play golf."

'If [hotels] lay off employees now, they will run into staffing problems when occupancy rates begin to climb again.'
– Jirachai Amornpairoj, GM of the Royal Paradise Hotel.

The Mediterranean Property Fund is for investors who want to commit their money for at least five years.

To discourage early encashment, investors are penalized if they withdraw their capital before the five-year period has expired. The penalties start at 10% if the money is withdrawn immediately, and are reduced by 0.5% per quarter to 0% after five years.

This may seem harsh but fund managers in this category do not want investors confusing their fund with some types of instant-access savings accounts.

They are, though, aware that many investors may require an income, and up to 7.5% of the capital invested may be taken as income from year 2 onwards, on an annual basis.

There are no entry fees nor a bid/offer spread. The fund works on a monthly basis, understandable when it is considered that all properties have to be individually valued by CB Richard Ellis before each dealing date.

Well, now for the interesting part – what has the fund achieved in returns so far? It was launched in May 2003, and the value of the investment has risen steadily ever since.

By May 2004, it had risen by 11.8% and by the beginning of December, it was up 16.8%. What is important is that there has been no volatility; it just keeps rising in value month by month. These figures are net to investors after all costs have been subtracted.

The fund managers, Abacus Financial Services, have considerable experience in fund

Investing on the home front

management and are conservative in their expectations, stating that they expect annual returns of only 8-10% per annum, but the fund has exceeded their projections to date.

Although the fund is allowed to invest anywhere in the Euro Zone and will no doubt venture further afield in the longer term, the initial area of focus is Spain, in particular, Spain's southeastern coastal regions – the Costa del Sol, Costa Blanca and Costa Brava.

This is because of a huge transition that is taking place in these areas. Traditionally, they were agricultural and fishing areas but that has changed dramatically in the past few decades.

It is estimated that there are now more than one million foreign property owners resident in Spain on either a part- or full-time basis.

Europe has an aging population, with people seeking a better climate in which to retire to. Also, many people buy Spanish property for investment and long-term holiday accommodation.

Spain, as a member of the European Union (EU), shares a common currency with most other member states – the euro.

This removes currency worries not only for travel but for investment. It also has a lower cost of living than many other EU member countries, and it is easy



MONEY TALKS

By Richard Watson

to move between EU member countries.

The demand for Spanish property is going to increase, as is the number of people wishing to live there. It is estimated that a further 800,000 to 1.5 million people will be buying property there, mainly in the southeast, over the next few years.

It is somewhat unusual in the Euro Zone for anything to be booming, and an aging population is usually a negative factor for economic growth, but this region is a noteworthy exception.

Another advantage that Spain offers retirees and other expatriates is the relatively short distance they have to travel to return to their home countries, plus – an important plus for potential purchasers – property can be held in the owner's name.

The fund, as it grows, intends to diversify its Spanish investments. It will seek to enter direct joint ventures and partnerships with established Spanish and international developers, undertaking major commercial projects such as regional shopping centers, retirement villages and industrial parks.

It's time for some technical

information about the fund, which is an Open-Ended Investment Company (OEIC) registered in the Isle of Man.

For investors who are unaware, or need reminding of the different types of funds, OEICs are one of the various types of funds approved by the EU.

Being "open-ended", it has no termination date, unlike closed-end funds, which have fixed termination dates, which can present problems.

OEICs are, basically, unit trusts or mutual funds, depending on which terminology you are used to using. Instead of buying or selling units, investors buy or sell shares in the fund, but in reality, there is no difference.

Few member states of the EU have trust law encompassed in their legal codes (neither does Thailand, for that matter), hence the use of a company structure rather than a trust structure.

Trusts are, in fact, an Anglo-Saxon concept, and it is usually only countries with some historic link with the UK – such as the United States, Australia, South Africa and Hong Kong – that have incorporated trusts into their legal systems.

The fund has a minimum investment of 25,000 euros and subsequent investments are a minimum of 5,000 euros. Investors have two routes into the fund: either directly with the fund manager through an independent financial adviser, or via a "port-

folio bond" issued by an insurer. Standard anti-money laundering requirements have to be met.

The fund is a "roll up" type; in other words, it capitalizes all income and capital gains.

The fund does not buy shares in other property-related companies, something I consider to be an advantage.

For sterling investors, the pound is overvalued against the euro at present, which gives some scope for currency gains. For investors with other "home" currencies, this would have to be assessed on an individual basis.

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: 01-081-4611. Email: imm@loxinfo.co.th.



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Chances are that if you are diving in Thailand, then the equipment you are using came from Dive Supply, a 10-year-old business at the very heart of the diving community.

Holger Saupe, the Managing Director of Dive Supply, is in many ways a typical entrepreneur but one with a gentle demeanor that he rarely gets the chance to share.

Mr Saupe's story, his path to Phuket is as interesting as his life since he arrived here.

"In 1988, I was a naïve 23-year-old tired of the political situation in my native East Germany. I decided to attempt to escape to West Germany by crossing the border in one of the forests," he said.

"I was caught and was put in a prison for political prisoners in the East until a human rights organization in West Germany managed to get me released."

His release came shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall, which he described as "...a special time of change in Germany". Mr Saupe soon met Frank Sommer, who is now co-owner and the CEO of Dive Supply, and the two experimented with various business ventures in Germany.

"I learned a lot about how to run a business and, many years later, we are still partners," said Mr Saupe.

It was Mr Sommer, Mr Saupe said, who encouraged him to move – in 1994 – far from Germany, to the Far East.

"At that time, Frank was involved with Dive Asia. It seemed interesting, so I underwent a dive-training course. I hoped to become a PADI instructor but made my way up to be a rescue diver," he explained.

Mr Saupe realized that his desire to be a dive instructor was being overtaken by his interest in business.

"At that time, in 1995, Frank was surveying the east and west coast areas of Thailand to determine whether setting up a distributorship for diving equipment manufacturers would be a feasible venture," he said.

At the time, most dive businesses sourced their equipment

From an East German prison to an East Asian success story

Change in business strategy

The new year brought with it the arrival of a new era for Dive Supply, with the opening of the firm's 1,600-square-meter warehouse and headquarters at Chalong.

This is the third base for the company, which started in a 30-sqm office at Karon Beach, then moved to a 500-sqm shop at Patong Beach in 1997.

The directors believe the new warehouse, on Patak Rd, may be the biggest distribution center for the diving industry in Asia.

Despite the company's significant investment in the new premises, the official opening was, unsurprisingly, a muted affair.

"We couldn't hold a party to celebrate when so many of our customers were suffering because of the tsunami. Some even lost their lives," explained Chief Executive Officer Frank Sommer.

Mr Sommer added, however, that Dive Supply will mark its official opening later in the year, with a small party and an



The new Dive Supply warehouse in Chalong, where trade customers will be able to shop for diving equipment "like in Makro or Lotus".

exhibition by equipment suppliers.

The move to Chalong is more than just a geographical change for the decade-old company; the warehouse will be for trade customers only, signaling a change in business strategy.

Mr Sommer said, "We will not be covering the retail side of the business any longer."

"That will be left to our trade customers, retailers and dive operators themselves, and should help them to grow their businesses."

The change has been "carefully calculated", according to

Managing Director Holger Saupe. "The opening of our new head office and warehouse is a strategic long-term move that will directly benefit the whole diving industry in Thailand," he said.

"The new location is involved in wholesale, repair and service for trade customers only."

"Our trade customers can now go shopping as they would in Makro or Lotus."

Dive Supply's new base is at 88/5 Patak Road, Chalong. Tel: 76/383414-6, Fax: 076/281525, email: info@divesupply.com

could best help them. We have made arrangements for the dive companies to have long-term payment plans as well as considerable discounts on equipment.

"This will help them to get back on their feet, to restart their businesses," he added.

"At the old Dive Supply shop in Patong, the waters stopped just outside of it and, thankfully, all of our staff were okay."

It was not all good news. "One of my closest friends – Heinz, the owner of Mosquito Diving, and his two lovely daughters were taken by the tsunami. I feel deeply affected by this," said Mr Saupe.

He said that Dive Supply – with its many friends and international contacts – is in the fortunate position of being able to help child victims of the tsunami and has, to date, collected 800,000 baht.

"We are working in conjunction with the Phuket International Women's Club to provide support to children in the areas that have been affected. The money will go towards setting up a grant program for orphans so they can continue to get an education, right up to college level," said Mr Saupe.

"It's natural to feel down after such a catastrophe as this, but one thing to consider is that such a disaster probably happens only once every 300 years."

"Yes, business is perhaps just a third of what it was or should be at this time of year, but hope remains that the economy will recover," he commented.

"Farang love Thailand, and this country is not like, say, the Philippines or Myanmar, which have more problems of a political nature."

"I am telling friends overseas that they should come back to and support Thailand, in memory of Heinz and the many other significant people we

Beneath the SURFACE
By Chris Cruz

lost," he said.

As for Dive Supply's objectives for the coming years, Mr Saupe said that the move from the old headquarters and shop at Patong to the new premises at Chalong has been a carefully calculated strategy.

"Relocating our business is a long-term move that will directly benefit the whole Thai diving industry," said a confident Mr Saupe.

"My own motivation to work hard is my daughter, Sophia, who will be three in May."

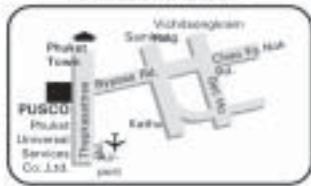
"There is hope – again – for Thailand and there is hope for my daughter," he concluded.

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Somtam Express wins Rebak Champagne Run

LANGKAWI: Scott Duncan's *Somtam Express* has won this year's Rebak Champagne Run, the traditional overnight race from Ao Chalong to Rebak Marina, in Langkawi, Malaysia, completing the journey in 19 hours 30 minutes.

The locally-built Phuket 8 outpaced five other Phuket-based yachts in the non-stop race, which is held on the eve of the

final registration day for the BMW Langkawi International Regatta, which this year runs from March 1 to 5.

The other yachts that started off from Chalong Bay at 12:30pm on February 26 were the impressive 73-foot *Stormvogel* with Luke Hancock at the helm, Reinhard Haiber's *Pytheas Aura*, Kevin Gillow's King's Cup Cruising class winner *Minx*, Nick

Band's *Emerald Blue* and Bill Crump's 55ft *Fistral*.

But it was *Somtam Express* that finished the 120-nautical-mile race first, crossing the finish line off shore from Rebak Marina at 8 am, and also winning handicap honors, despite taking more than four hours to complete the last few miles as the breeze died off in the closing stages of the race.

Only minutes separated *Emerald Blue* and *Stormvogel*, which finished second and third, respectively.

All yachts finished the race before the 5 pm (Malaysian time) deadline. For their efforts, the crew of each yacht received a bottle of Champagne and two glasses to celebrate at the prize-giving party.

Source: Asian Yachting News



TRUE GRIT: Les Bird is seeking to raise money for tsunami relief by competing in the gruelling New Zealand Ironman Triathlon.

Patong Darts League

PATONG: At the end of week five, Queen Mary and Didi's sit atop the Patong Darts League standings with 10 points each.

Piccadilly came back from being down 2-4 in the singles, to beat Amigos 5-4. Phil closed the decider with a two-dart finish.

Amigos salvaged a point by winning the all-important beer leg when Welshman "Sure, up to me" Kevin checked out with an impressive 17, double-bull.

Note: Last week's *Gazette* incorrectly reported Nag's Head as beating Queen Mary. In fact Queen Mary won, taking all three points. The standings have been updated to reflect this.

February 22 results: Amigos 4* Piccadilly 5; Champs 3* Queen Mary 6; Didi's 7* Two Black Sheep 3; Nag's Head 6* Pickles 3; Offshore 6 Happy Days 3*; Valhalla 5 Shakers 4*. (*=winners of beer leg)

Standings after February 22: 1.= Queen Mary; Didi's (10pts); 3.= OffShore*, Amigos (9); 5.= Piccadilly, Champs (8); 7.= Pickles. Shakers*; 9. Happy Days (6); 10.= Nag's Head, Valhalla (5); 12. Two Black Sheep (3). (*= 1 game in hand)

March 8 fixtures: Pickles v Queen Mary; Didi's v Champs; Nag's Head v OffShore; Piccadilly v Shakers; Two Black Sheep v Happy Days; Valhalla v Amigos. (Home teams first).

Volleyball stars join Patong show tourney

PATONG: Six current Thai national beach volleyball players and two former Asian Games champions took part in an exhibition tournament at Patong Beach on February 26 to promote tourism to Patong following the December 26 tsunami.

Before the men's and women's show matches got underway, the famous *Satree Lek* (Iron Ladies) *katoey* volleyball stars put on a display of volleyball skills, matching brute power and delicate accuracy, much to the delight of the small crowd.

The first of the serious matches was the men's beach volleyball, with national squad captain Tawee Thongkumnerd and teammate Thiti Tanapongthon taking on fellow national squad stars Sathaporn Sangreung and Montri Cha-emnoi.

Long rallies and powerful spikes dominated the match, which Tawee and Thiti won in straight sets 15-10, 15-12.

In the women's match, current Thai women's national beach volleyball team captain Numfon Inthern and teammate Suphapon Doksunthei took on



Tawee Thongkumnerd (red top #1) tries to slap the ball past a block by Sathaporn Sangreung in the men's exhibition match.

former national stars Rattanaporn Alaisuk and Manasnunt Phangka, who together won the women's doubles beach volleyball title at the 13th Asian Games in 1998.

Throughout the match, excellent teamwork and hard-hit shots provided a superb spectacle

of volleyball and an exciting match for the crowd.

The experience of Rattanaporn and Manasnunt proved too much for Numfon and Suphapon, with Rattanaporn and Manasnunt winning 15-12, 15-11.

— Kamol Pirat

Sponsors sought for NZ triathlon bid

PHUKET: Phuket resident Les Bird, a former British Police Commander in Hong Kong, is due to take part in the gruelling March 5 New Zealand Ironman Triathlon and is seeking sponsors to raise money for Laguna Phuket's Tsunami Recovery Fund.

The race comprises a 3.8-kilometer swim, 180-km cycle race and full-length marathon. Mr Bird hopes to complete the course in 15 hours, and to raise 1 million baht in the process.

Proceeds will likely focus on providing sports and fitness development opportunities for children affected by the tsunami.

In December last year Mr Bird organized Phuket's first-ever children's triathlon (co-sponsored by the *Gazette*) and also raised some 450,000 baht for the LifeHome Project through his participation in the Gold Coast marathon.

Pledges can be made via www.lagunaphuket.com/tsunamifund.

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Three is still lucky for

The top-selling BMW 3-series has moved into its fifth generation with a new model launched at the Geneva motor show, which is celebrating its 100th year from March 3 to 13.

All versions of the new 3-series come with a six-speed manual gearbox, or an optional six-speed automatic. Topping the range is the 330i with, in BMW parlance, a new "lightest-in-class" six-cylinder engine, complete with Valvetronic induction system, which was recently introduced on the 6-series.

The 325i comes with a 218bhp (160kW) six-cylinder engine, while the entry-level 320i has a two-liter diesel or gasoline engine based on that of the outgoing 318i, but with improvements to the intake and exhaust systems. Four-cylinder variants will follow later this year.

The original 3-series began in the mid-1970s as a two-door, four-cylinder model, but in 1977 the six-pot motor from the larger 5-series was added to the range. In 1983, four-door models were introduced and the range expanded to offer a number of different engine options, including, two years later, the first diesel.

Of all the global automakers, BMW is one of only two



that have consistently made a profit over the past 35 years, the other being world No 2, Toyota.

But it has not always been so; BMW has had its troubles in the past. In 1959 the Munich-based company nearly went under. Its large sedans were not selling and its previously superior motorcycles were also proving hard to shift.

A merger with Daimler-Benz was proposed but rejected by shareholders, and it was the Quandt family that came to the rescue. The secretive Quandts still own a majority of shares in BMW, which has – since disposing of the troublesome Rover car company in Britain in 2000 – reported record profits in recent years.

The company's product lineup now includes some of the best-selling models in the world, including the US-built X5 4x4,



NOT LOOKING BACK: A safety feature on the new 3-series is a two-stage rear brake light that increases its illuminated area during a forced stop or when the ABS cuts in, giving a clear warning to cars behind.

the luxury 7-series range and, of course, the hugely successful Mini.

The 3-series, though, is by far BMW's biggest seller and although the 2005 model was launched initially only as a four-door sedan, coupé, cabriolet, estate and M3 performance models will follow in the coming 12 months.

An interesting extension to

the dynamic stability control (DSC) is a brake assistance program. The DSC includes "brake standby" which pre-tensions the braking system when the driver abruptly releases the throttle, while a "soft stop" option modulates the brake application to prevent the nose of the car diving when traveling slowly. In addition, the brakes are lightly applied in wet conditions to ensure

the brake discs remain dry.

To alert following drivers of an emergency stop, there is a two-stage rear brake light. In the event of a forced stop, or when the ABS cuts in, the area of the brake light that illuminates is increased, giving a clear warning to cars behind.

The active steering pioneered on the 5-series is available as an option on six-cylinder 3-

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model, while run-flat tires are now fitted as standard. These tires allow the car to be driven for up to 240 kilometers at speeds of 80kmh even when the tires are completely deflated.

The new 3-series is slightly larger than its predecessor, with much of the increase in dimensions devoted to added space for rear-seat passengers. Six airbags are fitted, including head bags for both front and rear occupants.

When the new car is subjected to the stringent Euro NCAP tests later this year, it is expected to achieve the much coveted maximum of five stars in the various crash tests.

As well as the anticipated NCAP rating, the new 3-series is one of the first cars in the world designed for the rigorous side-impact and high-speed rear-impact test requirements in the US.

The new, hotly awaited 3-series will go on sale in Europe in the second quarter of this year, with deliveries to Asia starting around July.

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

series models. Active steering is speed-related, but also can detect a slide and compensate automatically, far faster than the driver would be able to.

The body of the new 3-series is claimed to be both stiffer and lighter than the outgoing

CAN YOU HANDLE IT? The speed-related active steering, pioneered on the 5-series, is available as an option on six-cylinder 3-series models. The system can also detect a slide and compensate automatically, far faster than the driver would be able to.



TAKE YOUR PICK: All versions of the new 3-series come with a six-speed manual gearbox, or an optional six-speed automatic.



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Memorable Intra Muros

Standing rigidly to attention, not a glimmer of a smile on his face, with the Filipino flag fluttering bravely from his clenched fist and the national anthem tinkling from a portable cassette recorder, Carlos "The Tour Guy" Celdran is off again.

For the next three hours, with only the occasional pause to draw breath or hoot with laughter, Manila's one-man Google-On-Legs is going to romp around Intra Muros, the oldest part of the Philippine capital.

This is no "on-your-left, on-your-right, finest-example-of-its-kind"-type tour, dripping with clichéd facts and figures. It's a jaunty, personal, hilarious waltz through history and culture, spiced with a killer sense of Pinoy ridiculousness.

No sooner have the notes of *Lupang Hinirang* died away than Celdran is pointing out that it sounds not unlike the Marseillaise, the French national anthem. And that, by extension, the Philippines – colonized off and on for the best part of four centuries – have drawn from a fair slice of foreign culture in arriving at their own quirky national identity.

Intra Muros was originally a Chinese settlement, but the Spanish took over the site in 1590, and replaced wooden buildings with stone.

Its walls are three kilometers long and six meters high, and are nearly all that remain after intense aerial bombardments during World War II, although the church and monastery of San Augustin there have changed



little since their construction in 1606.

From Manila Cathedral – which dates back to the 17th century but was completely rebuilt in the 1950s – Celdran pied-pipers his temporary flock around the sights.

The cathedral is an ideal starting point, as its central door is covered with an impressive bronze bas relief depicting its history. Celdran also carries a stack of photos to back

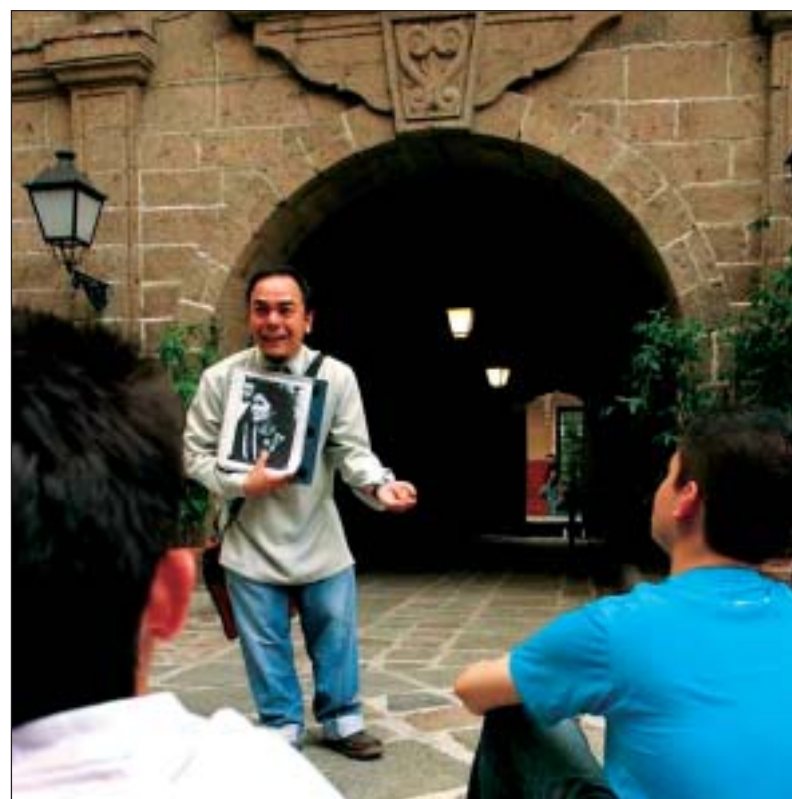
up his ceaseless commentary, and can never resist a good joke, no matter at whose expense.

The tour passes the spot where Dr José Rizal – artist, sculptor, author, doctor, teacher, linguist, scientist and fearless independence campaigner – was executed by firing

squad in 1896. "Shouldn't we have chosen somebody more incompetent as a national hero?" wonders Celdran.

TALES OF A TRAVELER

By Ed Peters



Left: Some of the buildings that survived the WWII bombing.

Above and below: Guide Carlos Celdran amuses with his one-of-a-kind mix of historical fact and juicy gossip.

Throughout the walkathon, a single name keeps popping up with jocular regularity. Former presidential consort, shoe collector extraordinaire, gay fashion icon, international bugbear, Imelda Marcos springs to the fore at Casa Filipina, her own not-insignificant contribution to the country's arts scene.

After a brief between-the-lines biography showcasing some of La Belle Imelda's career ("she bent over backwards to help all those nice men") Celdran explains the history of the museum.

Stuffed with gorgeous antiques dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was curated by Imelda who – having searched out the better pieces in private houses – would suggest that their owners might care to donate them, adding a date and

time for collection in the same breath.

"I've been running this tour for three years now, and I'd say it hovers between the irreverent and informative," says Celdran,

who is also a serious artist and self-described "cultural activist".

"I've taken all sorts – foreign tourists, groups of school kids, even some of the Marcos children, who were totally frank about their parents.

"I run a couple of other walking tours, but Intra Muros is by far the most

popular. Come here and you find yourself in the heart of the city as well as the very heart of the Philippines."

Carlos Celdran's tours cost just 440 pesos (310 baht). Email celdrantours@hotmail.com for details.



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Home of the Week

Chalong

Superb sala style

Rich and striking interior decor, sandstone walls and a quality kitchen are some of the most memorable features of this three-bedroom home in Rawai which is now up for sale.

The house lies on a 1,600-square-metre (one-rai) block in a very quiet soi, just south of Chalong Circle and its amenities, and only a few minutes away from Rawai and Nai Harn Beaches.

This is a single-story "courtyard" home with three bedrooms, all with built-in closets and en-suite bathrooms; a fourth bedroom/study, guest bathroom, maid's quarters and laundry area, as well as a separate guest house in the garden.

The living areas feature stone walls, while the kitchen contains state-of-the-art appliances, including a stainless steel cooker hood, and timber cupboards and granite worktops.

Timber, granite, terracotta



and stone are used extensively, and the deep blue tiled pool which sits in the courtyard has a surrounding terrace of pale sandstone; there is also a pool bar and, nearby, a sala.

The house has four air conditioners and seven ceiling fans and is well-ventilated because of the many shuttered doors and windows.

There is a carport under the main roof and the grounds are landscaped in tropical style. The

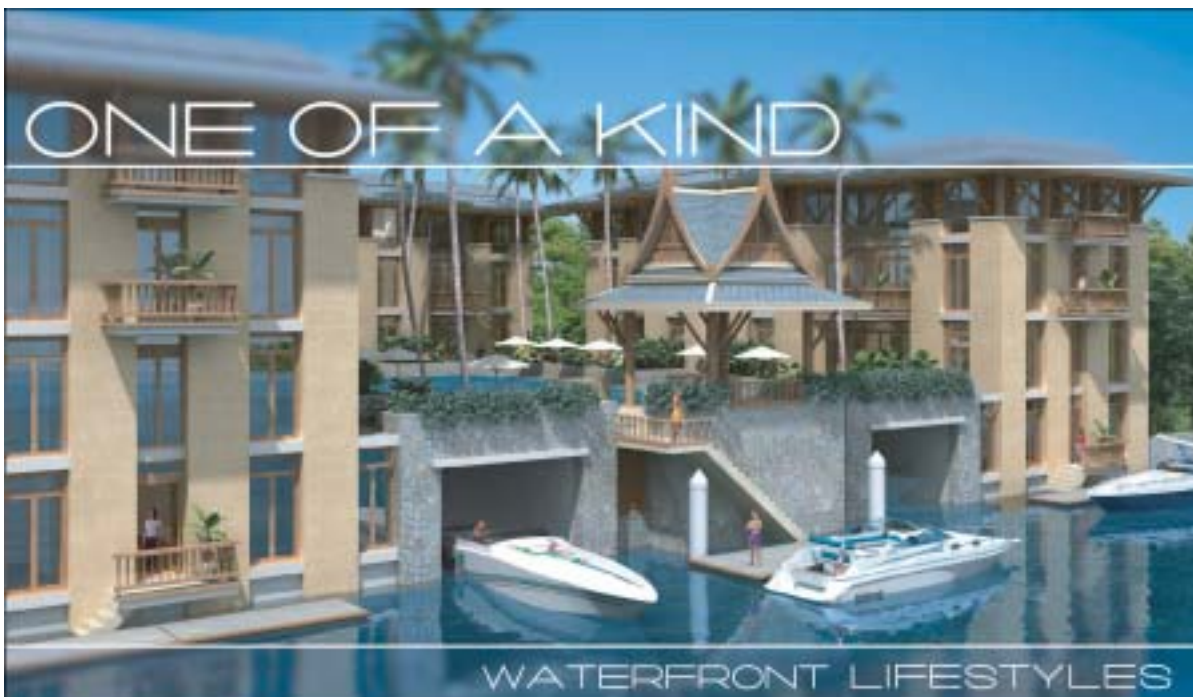
property is walled and has additional off-street parking space.

Utilities include cable/UBC, two telephone lines, well water and solar water heating, septic tank, home security system and three-phase electricity. The land title is Chanote and the asking price is 15 million baht.

Contact: Richard Lusted, Siam Real Estate, Tel: 076-280805, email: info@siamrealestate.com, website: www.siamrealestate.com



Thai delight: the home comprises a series of well-appointed sala-style pavilions, which feature first-class fittings throughout.



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Construction Update

by Anongnat Sartpisut

The two-story Santa Margarita design, with its round seven-meter tower, offers approximately 550 square meters of usable space and is available with prices starting at 21.6 million baht.



The five-bedroom La Jolla is also a two-story design, and features a main entranceway in the form of a small tower.



Kalita on target at Rawai

RAWAI: Newport Land & Development Co Ltd broke ground on its Kalita At Rawai Coast residential project in the middle of last year and expects the project to be completed by the end of 2006.

The luxury homes are located on a 3.5-rai hillside plot overlooking Chalong Bay, opposite the access road to the Mangosteen Resort & Spa.

Newport Land Managing Director Atiwut Laparojkit told the *Gazette* that the 7-unit development offers villas built on two basic design themes.

The two-story Santa Margarita design, featuring a round seven-meter tower, offers ap-

proximately 550 square meters of usable space in a split-level arrangement that includes five bedrooms, with an optional media room or guest suite, 4½ bathrooms, an oversized two-car garage, infinity pool with sala, and kitchen with a walk-in pantry.

Other options include a three-car garage, Thai-style kitchen and a sixth bedroom. Prices for the units, available in Spanish Colonial or Tuscan sub-design themes, start at 21.6 million baht. The first model home, a Spanish Colonial, is expected to be ready for viewing in October.

The second design, the La

Jolla, is also a two-story design. It has five bedrooms and 440sqm of usable space, featuring a main entranceway in the form of a small tower.

These homes are available in Tuscan and Mediterranean sub-design themes, both of which include a two-car garage; infinity-edge pool with sala; kitchen with walk-in pantry, and numerous other options. Prices start at 20.2 million baht.

K. Atiwut said that all four designs, drawn up by Newport Land's in-house architects, are intended for family living.

Exteriors will be of sand-finished stucco, with imported concrete tiles and roof shingles

to give a smooth, classic look. Also imported will be remotely-controlled roll-up garage doors.

To save energy, the units will have white aluminum dual-glazed windows and sliding glass doors, low-flush toilets, fully-insulated 15-centimeter exterior walls and roof, as well as skylights in the dining room ceiling.

Project infrastructure includes underground electricity and water supply, common gardens and garbage collection areas. Security features will be arranged after consultation with buyers.

The project is targeted at those seeking a second home in Phuket, including families, retirees or local residents.

The developers say an initial survey has shown the greatest interest as coming from the UK and expats in Hong Kong.

In the construction industry you hear all sorts of expressions that mean nothing to people outside of the business.

"I fell over some RC pipes," said one of my colleagues, who had actually just rolled his car off the edge of the road and hurt his leg on some pipes while climbing back up the bank.

In the construction business, the people who look after pipes and other – for want of a more precise technical term – things, are called the M&E engineers, the M&E standing for "mechanical and electrical". And RC, for those not involved in the arcane world of building, stands for "reinforced concrete".

Engineers are notorious for their linguistic laziness and penchant for abbreviating words to a group of seemingly meaningless letters.

They must have formulated the language in the Philippines, because people come and ask you where they can find the CR.

CR? A CR is a "comfort room", or toilet, for people with less delicate sensibilities and no fear of calling a spade a spade.

Lee Brock is an M&E engineer. He worked with K-Tech, the construction giant, in Bangkok for seven years.

The company was involved in building projects ranging from office blocks to housing estates, office fit-outs to factories, hotels and shopping malls.

In fact, he started the M&E Division of K-Tech, which became a multi-million-baht division of the company. K-Tech is one of Thailand's most successful construction companies, trading on the stock market at around seven baht a share.

Its MD, Bob Kevorkian, is one of Thailand's most visible characters and is recognized for both his sharply-developed business acumen and his somewhat larger-than-average physical proportions. It is said that he is the biggest man in the Kingdom.

He is also supposed to be on good terms with the cream of Bangkok's "society". I used to think that everyone wanted to take a photo of Mr Kevorkian at parties, but then I realized that it was almost impossible to take a photo that he wasn't in.

Mr Brock is now based in Phuket for his Monday-to-Friday job. He is working with long-term colleague David

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The ABCs of M&E

Gregan, who established Siam Cossine Consultants Co in Thailand in 1995, and commutes at the weekend to Trang Province where he and his wife run a farm.

"The essential component about the M&E engineering is to have proper designs," said Mr Brock. "It's important to be sure about what you want in a house or a development before you start.

"Infrastructure can be the most expensive part of a building project. You must have a clear vision of what you want, so that the M&E engineer has a clear idea of what he is to do," he continued.

"Inefficient designs, the positioning of the houses on the site, even basics such as the amount of glass to use for the windows – these are often inaccurately assessed.

"Again, if you don't get the sums right for estimated power usage or water supply, then the developer can lose a lot of money and the buyers end up paying too much," Mr Brock added.

Most so-called electricians here are not qualified, he adds. "Holding a screwdriver does not make a person an electrician. Some of these would-be sparks sit around watching someone else doing electrical work



ENGINEERING EXPERIENCE: Lee Brock (left) and David Gregan, both from Siam Cossine Consultants Co, both believe that good M&E designs of a house can save money in the long run.

and think that they know what they are doing.

"Then they turn up at a site – still with their trusty screwdrivers in their hands – and sign up as a contractor."

This attitude might have been acceptable many years ago, he says, but not now.

"The net result of employing underqualified or perhaps unqualified designers and engineers is big problems – safety not the least of them – and financial heartache.

"My advice is simple: get

the professionals in before you start a project.

"Halfway through construction is probably too late," said Mr Brock.

Bye-bye tabby: Following many anxious requests, I am happy to report that there is no longer any feline activity in the roof of my office.

It appears that someone had put a piece of board between the tree and top of my office wall, forming a ramp that the cat was using.

Once this was gone – the board that is, not the wall – so was the cat.

LARGER THAN LIFE

By Graham Doven

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Gardening

with Bloomin' Bert

Katoeys are confusing. For readers who have just stepped off the plane, *katoey* is the Thai word for a gentleman that thinks he's a lady, and wants the rest of the world to think so too.

Some of them are stunning, and that's the confusing part – there are plenty of them that most red-blooded males might describe as “gorgeous”. Things are certainly not always what they seem.

Paul Hogan got it right in that '80s film *Crocodile Dundee*. Having made the mistake once of getting a little too intimate with one of these “gorgeous” blokes, through no fault of his own, he takes matters into his own hands next time he is in doubt, grabbing the unfortunately butch-looking lady's nether regions.

Once her gender is confirmed, Dundee winks at the poor woman. “Just checking,” he says. I'm certainly not advocating that method next time you're approached in Patong, but it's certainly worth a thought.

There are a couple of things that can often give the game away. The first is the Adam's apple; that's very hard to hide. The second is those furry chins,

Don't call me 'ginger'



FURRY, FLOPPY AND CONFUSED: The *costa speciosus variegatus*, or variegated crepe ginger, has traits that appeal to the boy and girl in every one of us.

Photo from www.gingersrus.com

a bit like your Great Aunt Gladys. Particularly unattractive.

In the plant world, the closest thing we've probably got to a *katoey* plant is a member of the ginger family – the *costa speciosus variegatus*. It's a ludicrously long and complicated name for a plant that is otherwise known as the variegated crepe

ginger, or *huang mai-naa* in Thai.

The French got something right when they assigned genders to absolutely everything. A palm tree is masculine, and a rose is feminine – there's little confusion here. But the variegated crepe ginger hasn't chosen which side of the fence it's going to go to, and it's all down to its furry feel.

It kind of needs a shave, but hasn't quite decided whether it wants one or not.

It's a curious plant. From a distance, it looks a lot like any other variegated-leaved plant (ie, the leaves have more than one color). Up close, it's a different story. Both sides of the 10cm-long leaves are covered in a layer of fine fur, unlike most other species I'm aware of.

The large, soft, leaves of this tropical evergreen appear on maroon-red stems that emerge straight from the ground. Each leaf has a narrow white strip along each margin, with occasional light streaks through the blade of the leaf. These leaves spiral around the stem in arching clumps that can form some fairly elaborate shapes.

They can reach more than a couple of meters tall – the tallest stems occasionally falling over onto the ground. This is another *katoey* aspect of the plant: it pretty much does what it wants, and does its best not to conform to the usual rules of the plant world. It really doesn't care what the rest of that world thinks.

Most members on the floral side of the evolutionary scale take the easy, predictable route, and simply reach skyward in the most direct way possible, if there's more light in one particu-

lar direction, then they will turn that way in order to follow it. Fairly predictable.

Not the variegated crepe ginger. Sometimes it will form elaborate spiral shapes, almost as if it wants to take its time getting there. Often it will change direction as if purely on a whim. It has to be one of the most non-conformist plants around.

It produces gorgeous white flowers, five centimeters in diameter, but only when it feels like it. These sprout from cone-like heads at the tips of the branches. The leaves are spectacular; the flowers are a bonus.

For best results, this plant should get few hours of direct sunlight every day, but should not be left to bake all day. This plant has feelings and emotions, after all. If you put it in fertile, organic, moist but well-drained soil, it will be particularly content.

All members of the crepe ginger grow from thick fleshy roots. These rhizomes are similar in appearance to the ginger root that you would buy at the local market. Most people take the easy way out and buy them as a pre-potted plant, but even if you start out with bare rhizomes, they are still easy to grow.

Plant the rhizome 2 or 3cm below the surface in a sandy loam or clay soil that has been improved by adding some of that coconut husk-based compost you see in those white sacks at every garden center. A single rhizome will produce new shoots and increase to a fairly big clump in a very short space of time.

A plant with feelings? Not quite sure which direction to turn? Fur on the oddest parts of its anatomy? No wonder it's confused.

Want to know more
about a plant
in your garden?

Email Bloomin' Bert at:
bloominbert@hotmail.com

Property Gazette

Properties For Sale

INEXPENSIVE LAND

11-rai lots at Bang Sai. Chanote, paved road, Electricity: 1.4 million baht total price US\$36,000. Also, 14 rai in Pakchit. Quiet, year-round stream, view from "top: 550,000 baht per rai". Pls call 09-8739947 (Ann) or 06-6826211 (Sine) for more info.

HOUSE IN THALANG FOR SALE



10 minutes from the airport and 10 minutes from Dulwich International College. 8mx4m swimming pool, 5 aircons, 2 bedrooms, 1 child's room, 2 bathrooms & 1 separate building useful as a store house or maid's room. 504sqm, Chanote title. 5.5 million baht, including furniture. Pls call for more info. Tel: 01-6078000.

QUALITY STUDIO APARTMENTS

Four studio apartments on Patong hillside. Includes kitchen area, separate bathroom and parking area. Beautiful gardens and swimming pool. 2.65 million baht. Tel: 07-8893838, 06-2707228, 09-5902581. Email: asiainproperties@yahoo.co.uk

NEW SINGLE HOUSE

in Kathu for sale. 2 stories, 3 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, fully furnished. Mountain view. 560 sqm. 6.9 million baht. Pls call Tel: 07-2799500 for details.

GOOD LAND FOR SALE



If you are looking for peace and tranquility with 260-degree seaview, then this is it. Slightly elevated land about 40m above sea level, with spectacular views across Ao Makham bay. On a clear day you can see Phi Phi Islands. As the land is elevated, all plots will have seaview, some better than others, so early viewing is recommended. The Purchase price includes: Access road, electric and water to the site plus Nor Sor 3 Gor Title. Each plot is approximately 1 rai. There are no building constraints, other than local laws, so you can have your dream house built to your specification. 8 million baht per plot. Tel: 076-212248, 01-8929592. Fax: 076-355326. Email: kodesh32@hotmail.com

NEW HOUSE

in Nai Harn for sale. 2 floors, 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, large garden. 4.5 million baht. Pls call Tel: 01-7520275.

PATONG SEA VIEW

house. Lovely Patong sea view house for sale. 2 bedrooms, 2.5 baths. Roof-top garden and swimming pool. Fully furnished, 6.5 million. Tel: 06-3418781. Email: solitude001@aol.com

LAND FOR SALE

370 talang wah (1,480sqm) Soi Saliga, Rawai. Private sale, 3.4 million baht only. Please call Tel: 076-288422.

PATONG CONDO

sale. Studio, 28sqm, freehold, 490,000 baht. Pls contact for more info. Tel: 09-4743418. Email: chotip_5@hotmail.com

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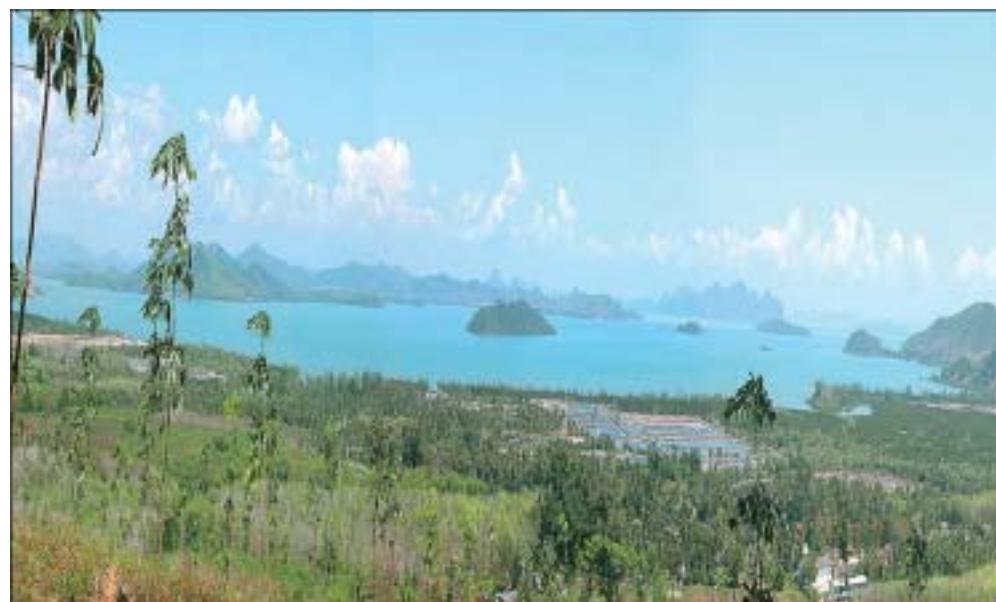
Imagine a view like this... we have many seaview properties for sale. Call now to see the sunset.



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Best sea view in Phuket, in The Dao Tiam Project, above Mission Hills Golf Course. Better than land selling for 6-12 million baht/rai. The only land I know of with a complete view of Phang Nga Bay. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and up rai lots available. Chanote title. 3.2 million baht/rai. Tel: 06-5950188 E-mail: nsupin@yahoo.com

SEAVIEW CHANOTE

land, with well water and road, located in Ao Makham, 1,220 sqm, 60m to the sea and a small harbor. Property is surrounded by a solid wall and is ready to build on. Must see to appreciate. Price: 5.7 million baht. Tel: 07-2728216.

PATONG CONDO

Apt for sale: 56sqm, 350m from beach, panoramic view. 1.35 million baht. Please contact for more information. Tel: 09-4740227. Email: chotip_5@hotmail.com

3 RAI IN PATONG

Off Sai Nam Yen Rd. Great sea views. Nor Sor 3 Gor title. 18 million baht. Will sell 1.5 rai for 10 million. Already divided into 10 plots. Great development project. Tel: 01-273-2169. Email: sleeves@sleeves.com

LAND IN MAI KAO

2 rai + title. 5 million baht. No tsunami damage. Please contact for more info. Email: aom_206226@hotmail.com

ONE-STORY HOUSE

in Anupas Golf Ville. 4 bedrooms, 5 aircons, kitchen with dining room & built-in furniture in every room. Price: 5.7 million baht. Pls call for more info. Tel: 07-2836716.

RAWAI CONDO

for sale. 250,000 baht total price, payable in instalments. 150,000 baht initial payment, and the remaining 100,000 baht transferred at the Land Office after 1 year. Freehold title. Please contact for more info. Tel: 09-4740227. Email: chotip_5@hotmail.com

RAWAI TOWN HOUSE

Sale 650,000 baht. Freehold, 400 meters beach. Please contact. Tel: 09-4743418. Email: chotip_5@hotmail.com

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Patong. 2 bedrooms, 1 bath. Large house on large lot with room for expansion. Aircon, just completely remodeled. Must see. Call for appointment. Tel: 07-8821963. Email: benlee53@hotmail.com

BEACHFRONT LAND

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Property Gazette

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3-BEDROOM OCEAN

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PATONG LUXURY

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PATONG BLUEPOINT

seaview. Nice apartments, just outside Patong, in Baan Suan Kamnan (24/2), a nice, green residential area. Great seaviews. Available from April. Take beach road toward the "Amari Hotel", once over the bridge keep left. Just before Viewpoint Bluepoint go right and enter Baan Suan Kamnan, then follow arrow. Tel: 06-786-6350. Email: buurmanb@hotmail.com

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1- AND 2-BEDROOM

houses in Kata/Karon. Fully furnished, aircon, TV, etc. 5 mins from the beach. Please contact for more info. Tel: 06-9488139. Email: jefdejong@hotmail.com

Accommodation Wanted

HOUSE, VILLA

or apartment. Retired Swede with Australian wife, moving to Phuket in early April, looking for long-term rental. Prefer at least 2 bedrooms, close to water. All suggestions welcome. Email: cppaul@bigpond.com

BUNGALOW

in Nai Yang. Looking for beach bungalow to rent in Nai Yang. Must have aircon and small kitchen. Close to the beach, any time of the year. Call Toni or Andy or email details. Tel: 021-5590783, 08-28912961. Fax: 021-5593232. Email: ux@gem.co.za

PLACE WITH ADSL

and kitchen. I need a place with in-room ADSL and kitchen from March 1 to May 1 at Patong Beach or hills. My budget is 12,000-15,000 baht per month, with electricity and water included. Tel: 04-8447077. Email: cold_ko@hotmail.com

1-BED APARTMENT

with phone. I am looking for a 1-bed apartment with phone line or ADSL. Areas of interest are Chalong, Kata, Karon, and Rawai. Email me with any details. Email: paul@default.org.uk

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CHALONG AREA

I would like to rent a Thai-style house - with 1 bedroom, living room, bathroom, kitchen - in the Chalong or Chalong Bay area (close for my work). Not expensive, please. Would also like 1 aircon unit in the house. Please call me, in Thai or English, with details. Tel: 01-5388495.

APARTMENT/CONDO

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- At least 3 years' management experience in sales or retail business.
- Excellent spoken and written English and computer literacy.
- Pleasant personality, good interpersonal and presentation skills.
- Strong sales, marketing and leadership skills.
- Own transportation and valid driving license will be an advantage.
- Proactive, and able to work independently and under pressure.
- Service-minded.

Interested candidates may apply in person or submit resumé, transcripts and a recent photo to:

Pasaya Shop, Central Festival

Floor 1, 74-75 Moo 5 Tambon Wichit, Amphur Muang, Phuket, 83000.
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Email: michael@wineconnection.co.th
Fax: 076-282-414 / Tel: 076-282-411/2

FINANCIAL

controller. Asia Debit, a leading provider of international Internet merchant account and online secured credit card payment solutions, is seeking a Financial Controller

Qualifications:

- Male or female, age not over 40
- Bachelor's degree in any related field
- A very high level of written and spoken English
- Familiarity with Thai and international accounting standards
- Good working knowledge of Internet banking is a plus

Tel: 076-264445. Fax: 076-264447. Please submit resumé stating qualifications and experience, expected salary and a recent photo via email to: oil@asiadebit.com

PHP/MYSQL

programmers. A new Web development company setup in Phuket is offering jobs for:

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- Thai Chef de Partie

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Please send your resumé with a recent photo or apply in person to: Three Dolphins Resort Co., Ltd.

Trisara

80/1 Moo 6 Srisoonthorn Road, Chermg Talay, Thalang, Phuket, 83110 Thailand
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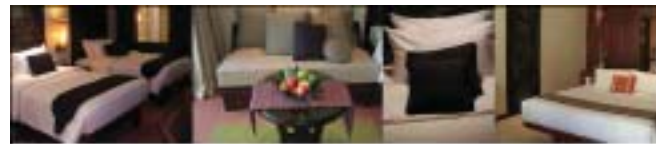
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Maid & cook. Please call for more information. Tel: 076-273427, 01-8295388.

Employment Wanted

SPANISH TEACHER

or guide. I am Javi, a Spanish native looking for a full time job as Spanish teacher or tourist guide. Pls contact for more info. Tel: 037-351958. Email: jcampolier@hotmail.com

FLOOD VICTIMS

in Phuket. To flood victims in Phuket who need a professional chef's help. Do you request some help or assistance from a professional chef? A German chef offers his professional help and knowledge to work in your hotel or restaurant for pocket money. Live in for one year to train and teach your staff to be qualified chefs perhaps by new systems in the restaurant or just some new ideas. It will be attractive to new travellers and guests. I have almost 30-years' experience - in Spain, Austria, New York, South Africa, Seychelles - from small pubs to 5-star hotels and some airline catering. Contact me for more details by email to: langnerAndy.web.de

RESORT GM

seeks opportunity. Experienced European resort GM with more than a decade in Thailand. Ample pre-opening experience and sales & marketing experience. I speak Thai and several other languages as well. Culturally adjusted, available now following recent unfortunate events in Phuket. Email: resortgm@gmail.com

ENGLISH TEACHER

I am seeking work as an English teacher anywhere in Phuket. I have five years' experience and can provide a CV/resumé and references upon request. Pls contact for more info. Email: bobtheflamingchicken@yahoo.co.uk

CHEF

Multi-talented European chef currently in New Zealand. Previous working experience in Thailand. Looking for new challenge. For CV and contact details, please email at: littlchef@safe-mail.net

SENIOR DEVELOPER

or Manager. A 33-year-old Scandinavian is searching for work back on Phuket. Education: MSc plus economics. Experience as CTO, business developer, project developer, project manager. Also experience in real estate, hotels and marketing. Looking for: a. manager's position in areas of experience; or b. developer's position in Microsoft ASP, the 'net and databases. Email: sveand@gmail.com

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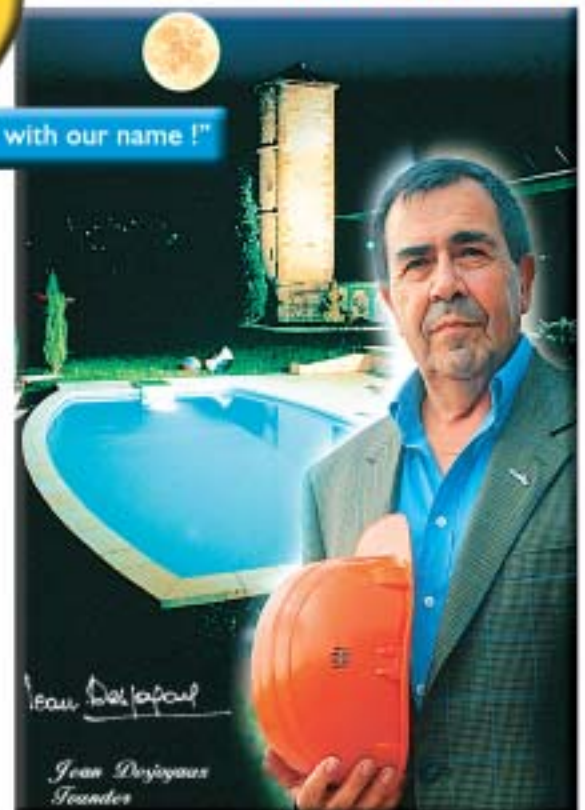
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