

Phuket Gazette

July 4 - July 10, 2015

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■ 'WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO STAY ASHORE'

Island's trawlers fear punishment

■ Thai fishing boats refuse to leave ports with new policies being enforced

By **Chutharat Plerin**

COMMERCIAL Phuket fishing boats have vowed to remain ashore rather than be netted by officials and charged for Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing practices.

"We requested that the government relax the strict measures being enforced on us. However, they refused," Somyos Wongbunyakul, president of the Phuket Fishing Association, told the *Gazette*. "The new regulations began on July 1 – no excuses. We have no choice but to stay ashore."

Mr Somyos confessed that many fishing vessels knowingly participate in illegal fishing practices, but argued that it was necessary to sustain a profit margin.

"For example, certain fishing permits allow one boat to use one net. However, this can't catch enough fish, so we use a duel-trawler..."

Continued on Page 4-5



Fishmongers ponder consequences of PM's firm stance on enforcing laws to weed out Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing practices from Thai fleet.

Druggy flees police station, struck by bus

A MAN nabbed for *ya ice* (crystal methamphetamine) made a daring dash from the fingerprinting area of the Thalang Police Station on June 26, only to be hit by a Chinese tour bus.

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BUSINESS



Taking a look at Phuket's potential as a heritage tourism destination.

PROPERTY



Bill Barnett reveals a few rainy-season property surprises based on C9 data.

LIFE&STYLE



SKAL members and others from the community rail against dolphinarium.



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Body of young German tourist found hanging on Koh Phi Phi

THE body of a German tourist was found hanging from a tree on Koh Phi Phi on June 28.

Katharina Rebacz, 26, was found on the secluded Ao Por Beach, on the southeastern tip of Phi Phi Don, at about 5pm by local fishermen, who then notified police.

"We found a letter tucked into her shirt that was written in German. We are keeping the letter as evidence and are having it translated, as we believe it may give us clues about her death," said Maj Sakesan Boonlerd of the Phi Phi Island Police.

"Doctors will confirm the cause of death while we continue our investigation.

"We have yet to rule out foul play."

— *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Students stand up against tyre burning

A GROUP of about 200 students and three teachers from Ban Tha Rua school protested the burning of tyres next to their building, in front of the Yamaha showroom in Thalang on June 25.

The protest follows more than four years of tyre burning near the school by the Yamaha showroom, which disrupts classes and is feared to be a health hazard, explained one Ban Tha Rua teacher, who asked not to be named.

"We don't want to make a big deal of this, we just want help to solve this issue with the owner or other related officials," the teacher said.

Dolphinarium jumps through legal hoops



The Phuket dolphinarium has cleared another set of hurdles in its attempts to open its doors after the Department of Fisheries issued it the necessary public zoo operations licence this month. However, it is now unclear whether the dolphins will be wild caught or not. For the full story, visit PhuketGazette.net. Photo: Dolphin Project

An employee at the Yamaha showroom in Thalang declined to comment. The *Gazette* made several attempts to contact the owner on June 26 and 27. However, he reportedly left the country on June 26.

— *Thanaphon Phromthong*

Officials praise successful drill for earthquake disaster prep

OFFICIALS celebrated a successful multi-day, full-scale earthquake drill last week,

LOCAL NEWS Briefly

which was aimed at decreasing the loss of life should a damaging quake strike the island.

"Many countries around the world face a number of natural disasters that have deep, troubling impacts on the nation. It can take a long time for a country to heal," said Vice Governor Somkiet Sangkaosuttirak. "This is why it is important for us to be ready. I was pleased to see how each department and the participating residents handled the situation."

The full-scale drill took place in Srisoonthorn, which sustained the greatest amount of damage from the imaginary 5.7 magnitude quake.

— *Nichana Madsatool*

Korean tourist drowns while swimming off Koh Phi Phi

A KOREAN tourist drowned off Phi Phi Don on June 27.

Nak Ki Choi, 77, was swimming near Ao Sam Haad at about 1:40pm when his family and friends lost track of him, confirmed Lt Weerapan Kongphul of the Krabi City Police.

"They soon found Mr Choi floating unconscious in the water. He was then rushed to Phi Phi Hospital, where doctors pronounced him dead," said Lt Weerapan.

Doctors confirmed that the cause of death was a heart condition which led to his drowning, Lt Weerapan added.

— *Thawit Bilabdullar*

Bag thief busted after attack on American

POLICE arrested one of two suspects for a bag-snatch theft carried out on an American national in Rawai on June 27.

Supakon Yoosuk, 19, was apprehended at his home in Rawai just hours after the crime, once police were able to identify him from CCTV footage taken off Soi Samakee, where the robbery took place.

"We received a call at about 1pm that two men on a

motorbike had driven up next to the woman while she was walking down the road, hit her in the head and snatched her bag," said Chalong Police Superintendent Noppadol Thiraprawat, who declined to name the victim.

Col Noppadol explained that the victim's bag contained 3,000 baht in cash, a credit card and an iPhone 5.

Mr Supakon confessed to the crime. Police were withholding the name of the accomplice until an arrest was made.

— *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Tour company shut down for employing Nepali staffers

A LOCAL tour company was shut down on June 24 for hiring Nepali agents to sell tour packages at the company's counter in Patong.

Santi Pawai, director of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS) Phuket office, said that the company had ignored several warnings from MOTS about their staff.

Mr Santi explained that officers from MOTS seized the company's tour operation permit.

"The Nepali employees evaded arrest. However, we are searching for them," added Mr Santi.

— *Kongleaphy Keam*

Charges lifted for suspects in trafficking of humans case

HUMAN-trafficking charges were dropped against three suspects who had confessed to illegally smuggling 53 people from Myanmar to Thailand.

The Takuapa Provincial Court judge said that the prosecution lacked sufficient evidence to prove that Phoowarin Boonlieng, 18, Prakob Mard-Ardum, 43, and Songphol Klaimee, 20, had 'threatened, forced, abducted, defrauded, deceived, abused power or gave money or benefits to obtain the consent of a person having control over another person in allowing the offender to exploit the person under his control'.

— *Thawit Bilabdullar*

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Speedboat driver sentenced to two years for two deaths

By Chutharat Plerin

A SPEEDBOAT driver who crashed into a fishing trawler, killing two Korean tourists last year has been sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

"Surat Matosot was charged with reckless driving causing death and damage to property. He has been sentenced to two years in prison, with no option for the sentence being suspended," Maj Sapon Khongthong of the Krabi Police told the *Gazette* on Tuesday.

Mr Surat was sentenced on March 26, 2015.

The fatal accident occurred on October 19, 2014, when *The Seastar* speedboat Mr Surat was driving plowed into the fishing trawler, leaving two passengers dead and 35 injured.

The accident is seen by many as the catalyst for the recent strict enforcement of life-jacket policies on all tour boats leaving from and arriving in Phuket.

After his arrest, Mr Surat attempted to blame a plastic bag for the accident.

"About 20 minutes after we



Mr Surat (inset) was sentenced to two years in prison for the accident that killed two. Photos: Gazette file

departed Maya Bay [at Koh Phi Phi] the sky got very dark and a black plastic bag flew under my seat," Mr Surat told police.

"I was worried it would fly into the tourists, so I decided to pick it up.

"I lost control and crashed into the boat."

It took two days for search and rescue divers to recover the bodies of Korean tourists An Sun Yong, 28, and Ko Min Woo, 31.

Superyacht crew visas slated for November

SPECIAL visas for foreign-flagged superyacht crew is expected to be rolled out by November, the Tourism and Sports Minister Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul confirmed.

The 'new package' for superyachts will include visa law changes and tax exemptions, all timed to line up with an international superyacht show organized by the Ministry of Transport, explained Ms Kobkarn.

"Visas for the crew will match the permit for the yacht, which should allow the boat and crew to work effectively during their stay in Thailand," Ms Kobkarn told the *Gazette* in an exclusive interview on June 26.

The project of securing special visas for superyacht crew and tax exemptions is being helmed by Transport Minister Air Chief Marshal Prajin Janthong.

"He is leading the project and working with other departments, while we are taking the reins of public relations and promotion," Ms Kobkarn said.

— Chutharat Plerin

Drug suspect flees, hit by bus

A MAN nabbed for *ya ice* (crystal methamphetamine) made a daring dash from the fingerprinting area of the Thalang Police Station on June 26, only to be hit by a Chinese tour bus.

Natthawut Chaipaew, 23, was arrested for possession of a Category 1 drug and was in the midst of having his finger prints taken at Thalang Police Station at about 8:45pm, when he escaped.

"I was just holding his hand and pressing his fingers in the ink for fingerprinting when he bolted for the door," Lt Sakorn Booranana of Thalang Police told the *Gazette*.

Mr Natthawut scrambled out of the police office and started running past the Thalang District Office. It took officers about 30 minutes to track him down.

"When we finally spotted him, he was nervously looking



The alleged drug user was hit by a Chinese tour bus.

to cross Thapkrasattri Road, just 700 meters north of the police station," said Lt Sakorn. "Then he went for it."

As Mr Natthawut attempted to cross the road, a Chinese tour bus struck him. A second tour bus then crashed into the bus that hit Mr Natthawut.

Mr Natthawut suffered a

broken leg in the accident and was taken to Thalang Hospital. No other injuries were reported.

"We have added evading arrest charges to his file. However, we've yet to charge anyone for the accidents," Lt Sakorn said. "We are waiting to question the drivers."

— Thawit Bilabdullar

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Officers have 'beef' with illegal Malaysian meat

POLICE seized more than two tonnes of illegally imported beef at a warehouse in Phuket Town on June 26.

Backed by Navy personnel and Phuket City Police, Kasichon Choungchot, veterinary inspector from the Department of Livestock Development in Bangkok, led the raid on the house on Soi Siang Tai.

"We called the homeowner, but nobody answered. So, the Navy officers decided to break into the warehouse in the backyard," said Mr Kasichon.

Inside, officers found more than two tonnes of frozen beef, bones and cattle carcasses.

"We finally were able to find the owner, Somboon Intarat, 55. He confessed to police that he had lied about sourcing the meat from a Thailand slaughterhouse," Mr Kasichon said.



Police found more than two tonnes of illegally imported beef. Photo: Rawai Municipality

"He had actually received the meat from an unknown merchant who brought it up from Malaysia."

Prices for this type of beef in Malaysia range from 100 baht to 160 baht per kilogram, which is cheaper than the 260 baht to 300 baht per kilogram in Thailand, Mr Kasichon

explained.

Mr Somboon has been charged for importing meat without the permission of the Livestock Office in accordance with the Animal Epidemics Act.

Additionally, he will be charged for using a fake licence to sell or own commercial meat.

The beef remains in a sealed warehouse and will be destroyed, confirmed Mr Kasichon.

The maximum penalty for transferring an animal or animal products without permission is a 10,000 baht fine, six months in jail, or both.

"This arrest is part of our department's campaign to carve illegal meat out of the market in Thailand," Mr Kasichon said. "We don't want people getting a virus or bacterial infections." – **Woranut Pechdee**

Captains

From page 1

...system with just one net," Mr Somyos explained.

"We are aware that it is illegal, as we don't have permission to be fishing in this way – but what can we do?"

The move by fishers in Phuket and 22 other provinces in Thailand follows the European Union issuing Thailand a 'yellow card' in April and threatening to boycott fish exported from the Kingdom.

Thailand was given six months to implement a tailor-made action plan to tackle the issue.

"As a result of a thorough analysis and a series of discussions with Thai authorities since 2011, the Commission has denounced the country's shortcomings in its fisheries monitoring, control and sanctioning systems and concludes that Thailand is not doing enough," read the EU statement.

Karmenu

Vella, European commissioner for environment, maritime affairs and fisheries, noted that it was the EU's "rigorous policy on a harmful practice such as illegal fishing, together with our genuine capacity to act" that was paying off.

"I urge Thailand to join the European Union in the fight for sustainable fisheries. Failure to take strong action against illegal fishing will carry consequences."

The warning ushered in the strict Port In-Port Out policy, which demands that fishing vessels prove compliance with a number of regulations as they enter and depart ports, with some variation depending on their size. The following is to be checked: ship registration, ship's licence, ship's captain certificate, ship's engineering certificate, radio licence, radio use certificate, fishing permission (which dictates what

equipment can be used), log-book, captain identification card, steersman identification card, engineer identification card, crew registration (crew list), crew working permit (the pink card), employment contract and safety equipment.

The 15 implemented practices are part of ensuring sustainable fishing practices for Thailand, Wansiri Rongrongmuang, program consultant of the Environment Justice Foundation (EJF), told the *Gazette*.

"The problem of illegal fishing in Thailand has been

going on for more than 30 years. In 1980, Thailand created regulations that limited the number of other trawlers allowed to fish in Thai waters," Ms Wansiri said. "However, officers did not strictly enforce the law, allowing illegal fishing to continue, at least until the Port In-Port Out campaign."

Illegal fishing in Thailand can

be broken down into three types: breaking restriction of a fishing permit by using other equipment; fishing too close to shore; and fishing in prohibited national parks or marine sanctuaries.

"If Thailand successfully implements the regulations, it will bring a great deal of benefits to all of us, especially when we consider our natural resources," Ms Wansiri said.

Ms Wansiri explains that the regulations would allow marine animals to have more successful breeding seasons, which would eventually lead to fishermen having larger catches.

"I hope that the government strictly enforces the new regulations. Such actions will clear Thailand of the EU yellow card. And above all, natural resources and all marine animals will have strong life-cycles, as they will not be bothered by illegal fishing," she said.



/ If the trawlers won't go offshore, so be it, and if they break the law, prosecute them. We have let this problem continue for far too long. /

–Prime Minister Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha

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vow to remain ashore

Mr Somyos, however, pointed out that the six-month time line was unreasonable, especially given that it took South Korea and the Philippines about 18 months to clear themselves of EU yellow cards.

"This is not fair. The government can't do this to us. They never listen to us, only see us as bad men or thieves," Mr Somyos said. "Why don't they discuss extending the deadline with the EU?"

On Tuesday, ahead of a Wednesday meeting between relevant officials and fishermen in Phuket, the door to an extension was slammed shut by Prime Minister Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha.

"If the trawlers won't go offshore, so be it, and if they break the law, prosecute them. We have let this problem continue for far too long, because previously we could not act tough against people hit by poverty. But today we follow the law unconditionally," PM Prayut said.

Mr Somyos vowed on Wednesday to expedite the process for getting ships cleared.



Members of the Phuket fishing community have said they do not want to go fishing and risk the penalties.

However, he explained the stiff penalties were not worth the risk of attempting to fish.

"We do not want to risk being fined 100,000 baht per fishermen, one year in prison or both. Staying ashore really is the only option we have," Mr Somyos said.

The business sector has voiced support for the

government's handling of the IUU issue to guard against EU's ban on seafood imports from Thailand, and is calling on the authorities to speed up measures to meet the IUU deadline for initial appraisal, which is scheduled for August, reported *The Nation*.

Middlemen and smaller businesses in Phuket expect to

be hit by the docking of so many fishing vessels. However, many believe that as long as the issue isn't prolonged, they will survive.

The owner of Kruvit Raft, a well-known seafood restaurant, acknowledged that she would adjust how she sources fish.

"If the fishing boats don't go out, it will surely affect us as

we buy from them daily," Ampa Chooaksorn said.

"However, we will just have to purchase more fish from fish farms and consider cutting a few species from the menu.

"It will affect many people, but I'm sure everyone will continue running their businesses as best as possible."

Yongyuth Taengudom, a Phuket fishmonger who redistributes seafood to hotels and businesses on the island, is sure that the government was taking the best course of action.

"I'm just a middleman. If we don't have fish from the boats for a month or two, I can stay busy. However, I am worried about the fish processing plants and how it could affect them – especially as they most likely already have obligations for orders that they must fulfill," Mr Yongyuth said.

Mr Yongyuth did voice his concern about how the fishermen will survive financially if the boats no longer leave port.

"If it isn't taken care of quickly, there could be a number of consequences," he said.



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Russian tourist beaten to death in Pattaya

A RUSSIAN tourist was pronounced dead on June 26 after having been found seriously injured and unconscious at about 9:30pm in front of a Pattaya hotel that he had been staying at for about a month.

Police are checking CCTV as they investigate the fatal beating of Filonov Pavel, 39.

Foreign fugitives caught hiding in Thailand

SIX foreign fugitives have been arrested for a variety of different crimes, said Pol Maj-General Thamrong Saengwattanakul, commander of Immigration Police Division 3 on Monday.

The six were named as Natallia Makian, Russian; Dmitrii Rodionov, 38, Russian; Chen Hung Hsun, 34, Taiwanese; Hsiao Min Chu, 48, Taiwanese; Mario Schaefer, German; and Wen Liping, 32, Chinese.

Their crimes ranged from extortion, fraud, possession of Ketamine, embezzlement and holding a hostage.

20 cleared after contact with MERS patient

MORE than half of the 36 people who had close contact with the only confirmed Middle East Respiratory Syndrome-



Coronavirus (Mers-CoV) patient in Thailand left medical facilities on Monday after being given the 'all clear' following a 14-day observation period.

The confirmed MERS patient, a 75-year-old man from Oman, is recovering. The 36 people quarantined either sat near the Omani man on a flight to Thailand or are medical workers or taxi drivers.

The rest are still under 14-day surveillance.

Court success 'overwhelms' Thai journalist

THE Bangkok Post's ex-chief reporter for military and secu-

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

rity affairs, Sermusuk Kasitipradit, this week proclaimed victory after the Supreme Court ruled that the newspaper had unfairly dismissed him over his report in 2005 about cracks on the new Suvarnabhumi Airport's runway.

Sermusuk had earlier taken Post Publishing Plc, publisher of the Bangkok Post, the paper's former editor David Armstrong and the board of the newspaper's provident fund to the Central Labour Court after claiming his employment was unfairly terminated on August 29, 2005, when the paper accused him of negligence in his reporting that caused damage to the company.

Prime Minister breaks silence on casinos with 'no'

PRIME Minister Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha has finally broken his silence on the proposal to launch casinos in Thailand and put the brakes on further discussions.

Despite several prominent figures pushing for the legalization - including National Police chief General Somyot Poompanmoung - PM Prayut made it clear that this would not be materializing any time soon.

"The legalization of casinos will take time. Studies and re-

search must be conducted first," PM Prayut said.

Biker hounded by police

POLICE are hunting for a man who authorized a dog to drive his motorcycle last week, according to a report on news24.com. While the appearance of a dog driving a motorcycle without a helmet is not particularly unusual in Phuket, such is apparently not the case in Vietnam where a video gone viral has outraged the Hanoi traffic police.

The video shows a man with a dog driving a Honda Dream in evening rush hour traffic. The clip is reported to have had 83,000 views on one Facebook page alone.

"This act deserves harsh criticism and punishment," local traffic police officer Nguyen Van Quy is quoted as saying by local newspaper Thanh Nien.

If caught, the motorist would be fined up to \$320 (10,800 baht). He would also lose his drivers' license for two months and have his motorbike impounded for a week. Since he was not wearing a helmet, the man faces an additional fine of \$10 (335 baht).

The dog was also without a helmet and did not have a driver's license. It is not yet known whether he or she will face charges.

Prayut stands firm on jailing of students

PRIME Minister Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha stood firm in the face of growing condemnation from the European Union (EU) delegation in Bangkok and the regional United Nations (UN) rights body of the detention of 14 anti-coup students.

"The law is the law..." PM Prayut said, referring to the students who were arrested on Friday for allegedly committing sedition and disobeying the National Council for Peace and Order's ban on political gatherings of five or more people.

He pointed out that the students should understand the conditions Thailand is under today. He insisted that many more students welcome him wherever he visits.

The EU delegation to Bangkok issued a statement on Tuesday urging Thailand to consider its international human rights obligations.

Strict rules in place for 'Thai Select' stamp

IN a move to promote Thai cuisine overseas, the Commerce Ministry will introduce stringent controls on the 'Thai Select' certificate to ensure that authentic and top-quality Thai dishes are served outside of Thailand.

Nuntawan Sakuntanaga, director-general of the International Trade Promotion Department, said the ministry had decided to be strict about granting certificates after receiving complaints about low-quality and inauthentic food being served at some 'Thai Select' restaurants.

Muslim-friendly app to boost Thai tourism

THE Government launched a smartphone app on Monday to attract Muslim visitors, something that could help further boost an industry that has been steadily recovering since a 2014 coup.

With search and navigation features, the app will help visitors find hotels and shopping centers with prayer rooms and halal restaurants, said Juthaporn Rerngronasa, acting governor of the TAT.

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Dog pound in dire straits

By Anongnat Sarpisut & Stephen Fein

THALANG: Food supplies are dwindling at the Mid Road Dog Shelter in Thalang, leaving some 300 dogs to subsist on rations of cat food donated after the tsunami.

Even this supply is expected to run out by the end of July and there appears to be no long-term solution to the problem.

The controversial facility, opened last July, was intended as a permanent shelter for some of the island's estimated 10,000 to 13,000 stray dogs, but has thus far done little to reduce the number of strays.



B20 tuk-tuk service planned for Patong

By Athiga Jundee

PATONG: By the time high season arrives, 24 tuk-tuks will ply a route through the Patong charging no more than 20 baht a passenger, Teerayuth Prasertpol, Chief Technical Officer at Phuket Provincial Transportation Office, announced on June 24.

K. Teerayuth explained that the tuk-tuks will pass along the route every five to 10 minutes. However, he added that many details of the plan have yet to be decided - including the route and how the tuk-tuks will be decorated so they can be distinguished from those currently operating in the resort.

Korean airlines stop direct Phuket flights

By Athiga Jundee & Ananya Hongsa-ngiam

Also hit are businesses such as that of Kim Hong Feok, who opened his Kang Chon Korean restaurant in Phuket months ago. "I was a bit nervous, but, their operations to Phuket. Some companies have already out Korea, and, dif-

PHUKET CITY: The Phuket campus of the Prince of Songkhla University (PSU) has decided to drop

PHUKET CITY: Phuket and Chiang Mai are to pilot a new e-commerce scheme that will allow tour operators and travel agents

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The gift of hindsight

PUPS found themselves on page one of the July 2, 2005 issue of the *Phuket Gazette*: food supplies were dwindling at the Mid Road Dog Shelter in Thalang, leaving some 300 dogs to subsist on rations of cat food donated after the tsunami. The humiliation of having to eat cat food aside, it was not a good situation. The shelter itself was a controversial project when it opened in July 2004.

Joining the dogs on page one was what, with a decade of hindsight, was clearly a pipe dream: a 20-baht tuk-tuk service planned for Patong. It was expected that a fleet of 24 tuk-tuks would ply a circular route through the streets charging no more than 20 baht per passenger, at least according to then chief technical officer at the Phuket Land Transportation Office (PLTO) Teerayuth Prasertpol, who has since become PLTO chief.

With the devastating effects of the Boxing Day tsunami less than six months old, the *Gazette's* 'Inside Story' delved into the psychological toll the disaster had on those along the Andaman Coast. An additional regional story reviewed the slow recovery process at hard-hit Khao Lak.

Also sneaking into the news was that Prince of Songkhla University (PSU) had decided to drop its con-



The most recent canine issue the island has been confronted with is the number of soi dogs in Nai Harn. Photo: Naiharn Beach Dogs

troversial course in casino and gaming management, after the Senate Committee on Education, Religion, Art and Culture declared that the course was 'opposed to Buddhism'.

Interestingly enough, more than a decade later, casinos and the potential they have for boosting the economy in Thailand has stepped back into the spotlight.

During the past month, several prominent figures, including National Police

Chief Gen Somyot Poompanmoung, were pushing for the legalization of casinos or casino-containing entertainment complexes. However, Prime Minister Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha has finally broken his silence on the proposal to launch casinos in Thailand and put the brakes on further discussions - at least for the time being. Where will we stand one year, five years or even a decade later? Well, only time can tell.

- Isaac Stone Simonelli

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Fishing D-Day

IT IS too early to tell what the long-term ramifications of the recent crackdown on the Thai fishing industry will be, but there is no doubt that drastic change is needed to bring one of Thailand's most notoriously rogue industries up to something approaching acceptable international standards.

The fishing industry was overdue for an overhaul long before the government invoked Article 44 of the interim charter to mandate changes that resulted in the establishment of its Command Center for Combating Illegal Fishing (CCCIF).

The CCCIF is now responsible for the enforcement of new 'Port In-Port Out' procedures and other oversight measures of the kind, that have been in place for many years by most developed nations with major maritime fishing industries.

These include such basic requirements as fishing vessels having to be registered and licensed as such. They also require that vessels over 30 tonnes be outfitted with Vessel Monitoring System equipment, allowing their movements to be accurately tracked by authorities for the very first time.

Given decades of lax oversight by the Department of Fisheries, it is not surprising that so few vessels and crews were able to comply with the regulations that took effect on July 1.

Nationwide, an estimated 3,000 mid-sized fishing vessels in 22 coastal provinces reportedly failed to comply with the measures as the July 1 deadline drew near.

Some fishing businesses have been lobbying the government for more time to meet the requirements [see News pages]. The *Gazette* hopes that the government will listen to their concerns, but not back down on the main objective of establishing a baseline of oversight on an industry that has done so much damage to fish stocks and the maritime environment, not to mention its starring role in Thailand's plummeting reputation among human rights observers.

If the regulations can be enforced – and the *Gazette* realizes this is indeed a big 'if' – they will no doubt have a considerable impact on the domestic seafood industry, with ripple effects across the Thai economy.

The good news for operators who do comply might be a period with drastically reduced competition, reduced total catch and increased profits from higher prices at dockside.

If enforcement results in a period of reduced catch, it would give seafood stocks a period to replenish their numbers. In the longer term, enforcement will lead to better environmental practices offshore and a more sustainable industry overall.



Bottling up nature and selling it

Re: Gazette online, Phuket dolphinarium grinds forward [video], June 30

I am in shock that the dolphinarium has jumped through so many legal hoops with flying colors and without any government concern.

Plenty of people have objected to its construction for numerous reasons.

If Phuket schools or parents want to truly educate their children about marine life, why not take a boat trip to Koh Mai Thon where you can see the dolphins in their natural habitat.

In addition, if Phuket is really concerned about ecotourism, this is one huge deterrent for anyone who truly wishes to visit the island for this purpose.

These concerns don't even begin to touch the issues of what captivity does to the animals that are forced to live in it.

It is an absolute shame that a place with such natural beauty feels the need to bottle it up and sell it to the masses with out concern of what it does to those exact resources they are profiting from.

*Concerned resident
Karon*

Praying for peace

Re: Gazette online, German tourist found hanging from tree on Phi Phi, June 29

What a deeply saddening story. It's hard to understand what deep sadness would in-

Letters to the Editor

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

duce a tourist to take her own life in a foreign country, if that is what happened to this woman.

If she did not take her life, the police should make a true effort to find out who did, and why.

I pray that this young woman has found some peace and that her family is somehow able to cope with this horrible loss.

*Penelope Romero
Rawai*

Lucky no one was hurt by flying boat

Re: Gazette online, Speedboat lodges into Thalang traffic median, June 30

First of all, what a ridiculous story this is.

How fast was this driver going to cause the chain holding his boat to break and send a very large, heavy boat flying into the median?

What if the boat didn't just peacefully land in the median?

I don't want to think about the sort of damage or injuries that could have resulted if the boat hit another car or someone on a motorbike.

I am astonished that the police didn't show up and charge the driver for reckless driving.

How will drivers here learn to take responsibility for their

potentially very harmful actions if they face no retributions for incidents like this?

It's sad, but accidents like this lead me to believe that nothing will ever change.

*Lauren Robinson
Phuket Town*

Why add distractions to the mix?

I wonder if there is a rule about driving with headphones in.

I see many people on motorbikes talking on the phone via head phones or listening to music.

Is this not a distraction?

I am curious if this is discussed during the demonstration before you are able to obtain a driving licence.

How is one able to hear an ambulance, speeding car from behind or any other indicators that keep you alert on the road?

With so many other things to worry about on these dangerous roads, I feel that adding one more obstacle is ridiculous.

*Curious commuter
Patong*

Amazing Thailand

The speedboat driver's recklessness that injured 35 people and cost two people probably 40 years of their lives each cost him a total of two years imprisonment – Amazing Thailand.

*Irene Sampson
Kathu*

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Bring back sun loungers, tourists will come again

FIRST PERSON

WE HAVE been working in Thailand for 28 years, and from the very beginning we put a lot of focus on Phuket, mainly the Kata-Karon area.

I can tell you that this region is struggling. Our own business in Phuket is down 25 per cent overall, compared with last year's sales.

This could be because the baht is more expensive now, but I believe that there are other, bigger problems behind this drop, such as the sun loungers being removed from the beach, slow airport and immigration services and traffic on the island.

The reputation of Phuket has also been damaged by negative media coverage in Nordic countries reporting on recent problems the island has faced.

All of these issues have caused a decrease in the volume of customers choosing Phuket. When people stop choosing Phuket, other potential customers will notice and will choose to go somewhere else as well.

One of the biggest issues is the removal of the sun loungers. This is a service our customers want and always ask for. They miss the sun loungers.

I agree that the beaches look more beautiful without the chairs. Before, there were too many – it was out of control. It was good that the government came in to clean things up. However, they went too far.

The government needs to find a way to please tourists, especially the loyal ones who



Tommy Serban, 35, is the senior product manager of TUI Nordic, a tour operator in Scandinavia. He is originally from Copenhagen and has a master's degree in business management. Mr Serban lived in Phuket from 2007 to 2010 and has been working for TUI Nordic for 14 years.

Here, he discusses the issues Nordic tourists have with Phuket, the current state of Phuket's tourism industry and what problems need to be fixed in order to bring quality tourists back to the island.

return every year.

These return customers are often over 50 years old and stay for two or three weeks at a time. They need the convenience of a sun lounge and an umbrella when they are out in 35-degree heat on the beach all day.

This can be done in a way that is aesthetically pleasing and also allows these tourists their comforts.

The government can invest in proper sun loungers that look nice, and can rent them out to vendors who wish to use them for business.

Another issue that is hurting business is the airport. Immigration is extremely slow, inefficient and unorganized. It is positive that it's now being expanded and further developed, as quality tourists expect quality service.

Right now, quality tourists have to stand in a long queue, and when they finally get out of the airport they drive out onto roads with terrible traffic.

It comes down to this: people are now starting to ask

themselves whether or not they want to come back to Phuket for their next holiday, or if they want to go somewhere else. If repeat customers continue to have holidays jeopardized by their recent experiences here, it will make for a very challenging future for Phuket.

We need to address these issues and work together to fix them. We must listen to the tourists, as they spend a lot of money here, which then goes back into the local community.

The Nordic market, especially our customers, have been very loyal to this destination. We all have good times and bad times, but we've always wanted to come back here.

This is a fantastic destination with beautiful beaches, nice people and good food. People like coming back to Thailand. It won't take much effort to make positive changes here that can go a long way to improve Phuket.

Once these problems are fixed, Phuket can go from good to excellent again.



This crew took up residence on Bang Tao Beach. Photo: Mauri Grant

Soi animals: Good, bad, scary, weird

Island View

By Rae Kelly

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

THERE are many a tale told time and time again by Phuket residents of good, bad, scary or weird encounters they've had with stray animals who live their lives on the streets of this island.

The stray dog problem was recently cast into the spotlight in Rawai and Nai Harn. However, this problem is not exclusive to the south of the island – it's the entire island's problem, and it needs to be a priority for the heads of the provincial government.

A person can hardly drive 100 meters without seeing a soi dog. And I personally have had to kick away aggressive ones when taking walks, while some are summoned away by their reluctant 'owners'. Others have simply jumped my fence to have a quick nap in the shade by my front door.

I have a near-daily battle with a soi cat who is constantly trying to run into my house; I've accidentally ran into a cat with my motorbike after it decided to dart out in front of my tyre (it survived); and another cat died underneath the tyre of my friend's bike. We had to dispose of it without knowing if it had an owner waiting for it to come home.

It is in the nature of many Buddhists (and most caring people in general) to show

kindness to the creatures of the earth, an honorable trait that is exhibited through feeding and caring for stray animals.

Although these animals are being fed, many are not being claimed and taken in as pets, which means they are not getting spayed or neutered.

There are organizations on the island, like the Soi Dog Foundation and Paws, who work tirelessly to find homes for stray animals and sterilize and vaccinate the ones who roam the streets, in an effort to reduce the stray population and keep the island free of rabies.

The second phase of a sterilization and population control program launched by the Soi Dog Foundation is set to be completed this year.

I would be interested to know the statistics, and if programs like this are actually helping contain the number of strays on the island. If so, these types of initiatives should receive the full backing of the provincial government in order to keep safe both the animals and their two-legged human companions.

Issues & Answers... ...asking the questions that affect you...

Wondering what documents are needed to bring a motorbike on a train trip

IN MARCH 2016 I would like to ride my motorbike from my winter residence in Phuket to Surat Thani and then travel to Chiang Mai on the state railway system.

Do I need to have my green book or can I provide a photocopy to ship my motorbike on the train as I travel with it?

John
Alaska

Surat Thani train station officer, replies:

I advise that you bring the original ownership and registration documents of your motorbike and your personal identification documents with you on the trip.

Photocopies might be okay, but original documents are normally better.

The motorbike can only be transported if you are travelling with it.

There is no direct line from Surat Thani to Chiang Mai. You will have to stop in Bangkok

Send us your queries and we'll ask the right people to respond to them.

Submit your issue at

www.PuketGazette.net/IssuesAnswers

along the way.

First, you will need to go to buy a ticket for yourself, which will cost between 200 and 1,300 baht from Surat Thani to Bangkok, depending on which class you choose.

It is important that you do not forget to inform our staff that you will have the motorbike travelling with you.

After that, take your motorbike to our cargo office.

Make sure you do this at

least two hours before your train is scheduled to depart from the station.

The starting price for transporting a motorbike is 800 baht, depending on the model of the bike and the engine power.

When you arrive in Bangkok, you will need to go through the same process to get to Chiang Mai. The prices should be similar, if not the same.

Saichon Kaewthammarat,

Before bidding: Take stock of eBay stock



Finance

By Don Freeman

WHILE you are probably familiar with eBay as a great place for deals on everything imaginable, you might not be familiar with the large cap internet auction stock as an investment.

However, there are some compelling reasons why investors should be taking a closer look at the stock right now.

For starters, and at the end of last September, eBay announced it will create two independent public companies, eBay and PayPal, in the second half of this year.

Investors with a long memory will remember that PayPal had gone public in February 2002 at a price of USD\$13 per share to raise \$70.2 million; but just a few months later (in July 2002), it merged with eBay in a US\$1.5 billion deal and was delisted.

It's not clear what exactly triggered the decision to spin off PayPal, but it might have to do with eBay failing to receive placement in the new Apple Pay payments offering – possibly because of a deal with Samsung on a fingerprint-reading payment system which may have angered Apple.

It's also worth mentioning that in early 2014, eBay and activist investor Carl Icahn had reached an agreement where the latter retracted his proposal to split off PayPal in return for appointing one of his candidates to the board and then expanding the number of independent directors to 10 on the 12-seat board.

After the split was an-

nounced, analysts were initially optimistic, but then the reality set in that it will take some time for the split to be done (possibly at the beginning of Q3 2015) with significant operational improvements for both companies not expected until after the separation is completed. Likewise, there are upfront costs that will hit the bottom line and there is always the risk that operational improvements or cost savings ended up being a mirage.

Nevertheless, and as a standalone company, eBay could be in a better position to return cash to shareholders in the form of dividends or stock buybacks. An independent PayPal will also be much more appealing to potential customers like Amazon.com who

compete with eBay, have more freedom to aggressively take on Apple Pay and could even once again become an acquisition target.

On the other hand, PayPal could see some profit leakage to eBay with any commercial agreement between the two likely favoring the latter over the former – who would now be

free to execute agreements with other payment services.

As for share performance, eBay has generally traded between the US\$50 and US\$60 level since the start of 2013, while each time this year when shares looked as though they would break lower, the stock would attract more buyers and instead move a bit higher.

In May, shares finally broke above US\$60 to hit an all time high of US\$63.23 in early June, as institutional buyers bought bullish calls and call spreads while selling bearish puts.

/ eBay has generally traded between the US\$50 and US\$60 level since the start of 2013, while each time this year when shares looked as though they would break lower, the stock would attract more buyers and instead move a bit higher. /



There are compelling reasons why investors should look closely at eBay stocks. Photo: Leon7

Ultimately though, it will be up to the market to decide on a proper share valuation for eBay and PayPal as separate companies; but with the spin-off date getting closer, many investors will, rightly or wrongly, view owning shares of two well-known brands as being better than owning shares of only one.

Given that stock splits also tend to attract more buyers before the actual split date, there's good reason to believe shares of eBay will continue to

move higher until the PayPal separation is completed.

Before you buy any shares of eBay, you will need to determine what, if any exposure, you might already have to the stock, as it tends to be widely held in exchange-traded funds and other funds.

For that reason, it's always a good idea to consult with an investment adviser before making any individual stock purchase, to help you determine just how much actual exposure you have to the stock

and what the right asset allocation is for your portfolio.

Don Freeman, BSME is president of Freeman Capital Management, a Registered Investment Advisor with the US Securities Exchange Commission (SEC), based in Phuket. He has over 15 years of experience working with expatriates, specializing in portfolio management, US tax preparation, financial planning and UK pension transfers. Don can be reached at 089-970-5795 or email: freemancapital@gmail.com.

Toyota's new truck to breathe life into market

TOYOTA pulled the wraps off its much-anticipated all-new one-tonne pick-up truck, which is hoped to help dramatically re-energize the stalled automobile market.

The new model, which sports the Revo badge, is priced from 569,000 baht to 1.139 million baht. It is available with

a choice of diesel and gasoline engines and three body styles.

The various configurations add up to 33 sub models.

Kyoichi Tanada, president of Toyota Motor Thailand, said Thailand accounts for 70 per cent of Toyota's global pick-up production in six countries.

Toyota plans to sell 14,000

new Hiluxes per month, up from the 11,000-unit average during the first quarter.

The pick-up truck market has been suffering from low prices of agricultural products and high household debt. Pure pickup sales have dropped by 12.5 per cent to 84,830 units.

– *The Nation*

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Heritage tourism on Phuket

By Jules Kay

WHILE Phuket has become a leading mass tourism destination and Thailand's second market after Bangkok, travel specialists and local businesses are digging deep into the island's rich culture and history to satisfy a growing demand from high-end visitors seeking immersive experiences on the island.

The local Baba culture provides one such source of inspiration for those wanting to venture beyond the confines of the luxury resorts and spas. Straits Chinese, locally known as "Baba" or "Peranakan" settled in Phuket in the 19th century, drawn by opportunities in the island's then fledgling tin mining industry.

Pranee Sakulpipatana, vice president of the Thai Peranakan Association, whose family has lived in Phuket for 150 years, says when she was a child, 99 per cent of the 65,000 people living in the town were Baba. Since then, the urban population has grown to 350,000, significantly diluting the community.

However, Pranee says the influx of residents from around the country and the millions of tourists who visit the island each year are nothing to be afraid of. "We have a strong culture, and I tell locals we can use that to show people what



A child gets ready to participate in the Baba wedding parade through Old Phuket Town. Photo: Gazette file

Phuket is all about. The success of the annual Phuket Old Town Festival [which follows Chinese New Year] shows the strength of Peranakan culture."

For the past decade Pranee has also been reviving the Baba wedding tradition.

What started as an initiative to help the island lure back tourists after the 2004 Asian tsunami, has grown into a regular fixture on the local calendar. Back then, the Ministry of Culture was desperate to help the local tourism industry recover.

"Phuket was facing a crisis," she says. "The ministry asked

us if there was anything we could do to help. I had seen a wedding where a few couples had their photos taken in front of the Thai Hua School [a Sino-Portuguese building that formerly housed the first Chinese-language school on the island but is now a museum]. I thought that was something we could work with."

Phuket held its first Baba wedding festival on October 23, 2005. Forty eight couples joined the celebrations – a significant number given it was the year 2548 in Buddhist Era – and were hosted in local historic build-

ings, featuring a tea ceremony, various rites and rituals specific to the Baba culture, traditional dress and plenty of local cuisine.

"It took a lot of energy, but I turned my abstract dream into a reality," says Pranee. "I am proud to show our culture and give back to Phuket."

The festival, which has grown in popularity ever since, was held on June 20 this year.

Blue Elephant Cooking School and Tourism Authority of Thailand supported the event, which now targets high-end wedding planners from as far afield as India, Korea,

China, Japan, Australia and Germany. The event cost about 40,000 baht per couple, including two nights accommodation.

Travel specialists agree that Phuket's unique history and culture can be used to market the destination to wealthy visitors. Khiri Group has developed its 'Cultural Walk' to provide small groups with a chance to explore Old Town at street level.

"The walk is all about learning the local lifestyle," says Andre van der Marck, the company's vice president. "So we visit a local shrine and pay respect to the spirits, then visit the 'oldest herb shop' in town and learn about traditional medicine."

"We also explore historic Chinese shop houses in the beautiful streets of Thalang and Soi Romanee, and visit old-style barbers. Food has to be present too, so we will try the Muslim influenced roti, and some Chinese food that was brought here by Hokkien immigrants in the 19th century."

Jules Kay is a marketing consultant, editor and content curator with 15 years experience working in the Southeast Asian luxury property, lifestyle and tourism sectors. His latest project is an exclusive mixed-use residential resort development on Kamala Beach (www.montazure.com).

How to promote a sales funnel successfully



Business Buzz

Simon Wetherell

WE HAVE now covered how to prepare the marketing and sales process. The next part, crucial to any success, is getting the message out to the target market.

It does not matter how good your product, customer service or social media presence is if nobody knows you exist.

The internet and social media are enemies to a perfectionist, so you are far better getting on with it and improving as you go, than trying to have the perfect solution.

When looking to promote your business, different social media platforms have different benefits, as we have covered in the past, but you can never go wrong with having a website (a Facebook business page and blog in particular) and market-

ing them using Facebook. You can always add more as you go, but this is the perfect starting point while keeping it simple.

These are the low hanging fruit, they cover a huge and easily targeted audience and can be used for almost any product or niche there is.

Unfortunately not everyone has a marketing budget, so the great benefit of social media is that you can also start with free methods which normally require a time investment instead, but at least you are in the game and can build from there.

Simon Wetherell is a social media expert, lawyer, best-selling author and international speaker. He now resides in Phuket where he trains businesses and individuals on how to profit from the use of social media. For more information go to <http://PhuketOnlineMarketing.com> or call him on 095 085 3355.



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Jungceylon Shopping Center, Patong, Phuket

Fabulous resort opening



From L to R: Barry Robinson, president and managing director of Wyndham Hotel Group South East Asia and Pacific Rim; Krongchit Soontornnoont, vice president of Sea Pearl Business; Kobkarn Suriyasat Wattanavrangkul, minister of tourism and sports; Sommai Phasee minister of finance; Sumit Soontornnoont, president of sea pearl business and Mullika Soontornnoont, vice president of Sea Pearl Business, at the opening of the Wyndham Sea Pearl Resort Phuket. Photo: Pacharawat Wasikarn

New coworking place opening

HATCH Coworking Space Phuket, the trendy new coworking venue at Limelight Avenue, held an Open House Party late last month.



There were six guest speakers, L to R: Thamasak Choothong (6th from left), Suay Restaurant & Iron Chef Champion; Phonsunt Phathrapeephan (11th from left), CEO of D-Imageplus; Wisarut Charthakul (12th from left), CEO of Memory Box; Nitaya Yangyeun (5th from left), CEO of Niya Media; Pracha Assawaveera (9th from left), Manager of SIPA Phuket; and Wirachai Pranveerapaibool (10th from left), CEO of The Attitude Club. As the founders of the new coworking business, they were joined by their employees.

Senzanome Phuket held a make-up workshop for the latest collection



Make up artist Vorapol Pimtacha (left), Regional Manager of the Make Up Store, is seen here making up well known model Dorothy Petzold.

7th BABA Wedding in Phuket

The Thai Peranakan Association organized their seventh BABA Wedding ceremony at an historic Sino-Portuguese mansion June 20-21, to celebrate Peranakan culture with elegant cultural costumes and authentic local BABA cuisine.



Tuang Teh: the tea ceremony during a Baba wedding. Boonsri Hongyok receives a cup of tea from groom Patara Suwannakarn, while bride Kyeong Ju Park prepares to do the same for Narong Hongyok, president of Anuphas Vividharn, seated at right.



From L to R: Rungrat Srisuk and groom Thanusak Phungdet; Kyeong Ju Park with groom Patara Suwaanakarn; and Fong Yen Ting with husband Choo Chee Chong.

Amari Phuket welcomes Phuket's Professional & Fun Ladies Club

The management team of Amari Phuket late last month gave a warm welcome to the Phuket Professional & Fun Ladies Club at a Sunset Cocktail Party held on the clubhouse rooftop.



Pierre-Andre Pelletier (4th from right), vice president and area general manager for Amari Phuket; Richard Margo (2nd from left), hotel manager, Amari Phuket; and Penprapa Chooklin (4th from left), the hotel's manager for marketing communications hosted Cecilia Pitre (3rd from right), founder of the Phuket Professional & Fun Ladies Club and other members.



Renowned Australian vocalist Simone Kopmajer.

Jazz for Nepal:

The Rotary Club of Tongkah organized a charity jazz concert featuring Austrian vocalist Simone Kopmajer last month at Limelight Avenue. All proceeds were donated to Nepal.



From L to R: Concert organizer Peerapit Ongcharoen of the Rotary Club of Tongkah; Simone Kopmajer; and Kanittha Prasopsirikul, PR Director of the Boat Lagoon, who made a spontaneous donation of 20,000 baht for Nepal. Photo courtesy of Chayut Wahphitak



From L to R: Vichart Jirathiyut, managing director of Hitman Jazz; John Magee of the Phuket Gazette; and Rose Maitland Smith, presenter of PGTV's 'Phuket Today' show.



Rotary of Tongkah members turned out in large numbers. The event saw more than 300 enthusiastic attendees.



From L to R: Ponganant Suwannakarn, owner of Limelight Avenue, and Rotary past president Dr Chukiet Thitadilok.

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Olympians take 'Road to Rio' at Thanyapura



Olympians stand with Thanyapura leaders and Phuket officials.

TWENTY-FIVE future Olympians began their 'Road to Rio 2016' at Thanyapura Phuket – the first Official Federation Internationale de Natation (FINA) Training Center in Southeast Asia.

Thanyapura and FINA have awarded 25 scholarships to swimmers from around the region, who will train and live at Thanyapura, while preparing for the 2015 FINA World Championships and the 2016 Rio Olympics – for which they have wild cards.

The scholarship applicants were selected from 11 countries, including Thailand, Nepal, the Maldives, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, India, Myanmar, Timor Leste and Rwanda.

A female and male swimmer from each nation will train at Thanyapura Phuket under the guidance of Thanyapura Head Swimming Coach Miguel Lopez.

"I am excited to have these 25 swimmers at Thanyapura. I have found a great pool of talent. The team momentum will make the swimmers better," Mr Lopez said. – *Phuket Gazette*

SKAL denounces dolphinarium

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

SKAL International Phuket & Southern Thailand's executive committee, as well as the local community, have lashed out at the island's unopened dolphinarium as news broke that the facility had leapt through yet another bureaucratic ring (see page 2).

"SKAL International Phuket & Southern Thailand wish to publicly condemn this project and protests 'vividly' against the opening of a dolphinarium in Phuket," a statement from the group read on Tuesday.

The statement from the executive committee calls on all SKAL and non-SKAL members from all industries in Phuket to join the protest against the project.

"SKAL International Phuket & Southern Thailand strongly believes that seeing dolphins in captivity can be 'miseducational', with educational messages taking second place to entertainment in circus-style performances and up-close encounters, where visitors' desire for interaction appears to override any educational benefit, [with the venue] geared to commercial purposes only," the statement read.

"This is an outrage and an unnecessary attraction for Phuket. Tourists come for the beauty that is Thailand, a country rich in natural biodiversity, and by allowing this project to happen, Phuket is taking a step backwards," one executive



Dolphins that are forced to interact with species that they would normally avoid in the wild can develop illnesses. Photo: Dolphin Project

committee member told the press.

Speaking to the *Gazette* in an exclusive interview, Natasha Eldred, managing director of travel marketing company Shine PR and Cove Monitor for Ric O' Barry's Dolphin Project, explained why the dolphinarium is not just an ethical issue, but also how it could damage the island.

"I would like to present a strong case for the negative impact on 'Brand Phuket' if we allow this dolphinarium or any others to open. I visit many travel agents and journalists in many countries and they always ask about non-exploitative ac-

tivities that Phuket offers to guests. The thought of captive dolphins and seal performing tricks is abhorrent to most 'quality' tourists," Ms Eldred said.

"Tourists are becoming way savvier and with the recent beach cleanup 'to restore beauty and a natural state to Phuket's beaches', [the dolphinarium] contradicts this statement from the governor, as building a concrete tank to house wild dolphins that have been caught from Taiji is not a sustainable or natural act of tourist management."

Spearheading the battle against the dolphinarium is dolphin trainer turned animal

rights activist Ric O' Barry, well-known for his role in the Academy-award winning documentary *The Cove*.

"If Phuket actually imports dolphins from Taiji, it's going to be a blemish on tourism in Phuket on an international scale, because Phuket will be supporting this dolphin slaughter," he said.

At this stage it is unclear whether or not the dolphinarium will be importing the same marine animals originally slated for the project or sourcing different animals.

A direct connection between five wild caught dolphins originally bound for the dolphinarium and the annual slaughter of thousands of dolphins at the Taiji cove in Japan was confirmed by Asia Director of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society to the *Gazette* last year.

"We are just going to have to wait for them to officially file the paperwork and see what animals they want to import. For example, if they request to import 20 dolphins, it doesn't mean they can get the 20 dolphins from the exporting country," a fisheries official told the *Gazette* this week.

However, the response – both within the expat and Thai community – remains strong against the project.

"There really is overwhelming support to stop this, but how we get everyone in one place to show the authorities is the key factor," said Ms Eldred.

WHAT'S ON in Phuket

July 4. Independence Day Party at Friendship Beach Resort

Independence Day celebration at Friendship Beach Resort. Traditional BBQ buffet from 6:30pm to 9:30pm featuring award winning ribs, salmon filet, southern fried chicken, hot dogs, Thai dishes, salads, desserts and sides. Welcome drink included. Dance and party to classic rock, pop and funk from the 70s, 80s and 90s with DJ Bobby D and watch the fireworks display from our waterfront restaurant and bar. Adults: 790 baht, kids under 12 years: 350 baht. Party ends at 11:30pm.

For reservations please call Charlie at 089-728 5304.



Join the Independence Day fun at Friendship Beach Resort. Photo: Ginny

July 15-19. Cape Panwa Hotel Phuket Raceweek

Now in its 12th year, Cape Panwa Hotel Phuket Raceweek offers exceptional sailing on the east coast of

Phuket and quality accommodation. Four nights of extravagant parties that have become famous in the Asian yachting scene make this one of the best summer sailing

regattas.

Cape Panwa Hotel Phuket Raceweek 2015 has a comprehensive commercial sponsorship and partnership program that enables corporate

Asia to get involved with the world of sailing. The growing popularity of sailing in Asia makes it the ideal platform for companies to increase their brand awareness. For more information, email info@phuketraceweek.com or call 089-000 4664.

July 30. Asahna Bucha Day

This full-moon day of the eighth lunar month commemorates the Buddha's first sermon to five disciples after he attained enlightenment more than 2,500 years ago. Evening candlelight processions will be staged in all Thai Buddhist temples throughout the island.

August 12. HM The Queen's Birthday

HM Queen Sirikit's birthday is also marked as Mother's Day in Thailand, with festivities taking place throughout the country.

Substituting never tasted sweeter



Excuse Buster

By Craig Burton

'SWEETNESS is the favorite taste for everyone. Eating too much sugar (sucrose) or artificial sweetener is not good for health. Nowadays, the natural sweetener from stevia is a good choice for sugar substitution because it is up to 300 times sweeter than sugar, non toxic and no calories,' said Pisamai Kulkanjanatorn, Associate Professor of Mahidol University's Faculty of Pharmacy.

Could this perennial shrub native to the northern regions of South America, which is now cultivated commercially all over the world, including Thailand, be the holy grail of sweeteners? It is a winner in my house and the first choice I recommend to clients.

WHAT IS SO SWEET ABOUT STEVIA?

The leaves of the stevia plant contain several chemical substances called glycosides. The main extract of this calorie-free plant are called *stevioside* (the most common

form and considered the more bitter extract) and *rebaudioside* (less bitter form).

WHAT FORMS CAN I BUY IT IN?

I personally buy it in its raw, powdered form so it looks green and has a bitterness to it. But it can be bought as a liquid extract form and also a more refined white form which are isolates of one or more of the steviol glycosides mentioned above, some of these are less bitter. Also when combined as said with other types of sweeteners, they are more favorable to some – just always check that they are not adding it to an artificial sweetener and ideally Xylitol is a good compliment but check the ratio of each to know what you are getting. You will also find stevia powder in tea bags – which is nice too, especially mixed with other herbal tea varieties.

DOES STEVIA HAVE ANY OTHER HEALTH BENEFITS?

Stevia is not only sweet, thus helping you to replace other sweeteners and start balancing



The stevia plant's leaves contain glycosides. Photo: Forest and Kim Starr

blood sugar levels, but there is mounting evidence that stevia can aid in glucose tolerance and clearance after a meal. A recent study in type II diabetic subjects shows that they reduced after-meal blood glucose levels by an average of 18%. (Gregersen S, Jeppesen PB, Metabolism). One mechanism is that stevia is actually a good source of chromium which is an important factor for enhancing insulin activity. Studies show that people with type 2 diabe-

tes have lower blood levels of chromium than those without the disease.

A double-blind, placebo-controlled study published in the *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* in 2000 demonstrated that oral *stevioside* taken at doses of 250mg, three times a day for one year resulted in significant, lasting decreases in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure in patients with mild to moderate hypertension.

IS STEVIA FDA APPROVED?

More than 30 countries permit the use of stevia extracted powder (steviol glycosides) as a food additive or dietary supplement. Steviol glycosides were approved by Thai FDA since 2002. The United States originally banned it in 1991 based on inadequate toxicological evidence of its safety, but they permitted the use of steviol glycosides as a food additive in 2008 and the EU, after stringent testing, also allowed it in 2011.

WHERE CAN I BUY IT?

There are health food stores in Phuket selling it – especially the tea. But a simple google search will find providers in Thailand who can ship it.

Craig Burton is a nutritional expert with more than 15 years of experience at the forefront of the health and well-being field. He offers a high-level of his expertise in functional training and nutrition, focusing on detoxification, food intolerance and nutrient deficiency. For more information visit thetruthtotruth.com

Holistic with herbs

ABHAIBHUBEJHR Hospital in Prachin Buri is celebrating 74 years with a traditional medicine program.

Set up in 1941, the hospital is the only facility in Thailand where conventional and Thai traditional medicine are integrated to ensure as many patients as possible are cured of their ailments.

The hospital embraces Thai traditional medicine (TTM) for some treatments and its TTM clinics are open to all. At the end of this year, to mark its 74th anniversary, it will formally open the Abhaibhubejhr Thai Traditional Medicine Hospital, with treatments for diabetes, hypertension and stroke.

"Our first task is to make war on diabetes," says the hospital's Chief Pharmacist Supaporn Pitiporn, who adds that current spending on diabetes medication is 50 billion baht a year.

Conventional medicine, she adds, is not the only solution for the disease, as modern medication focuses on cure rather than the causes, which mostly stem from lifestyle and diet.

And indeed, there is little point in taking drugs to lower



TTM is integrated to cover all ailments. Photo: The Nation

blood sugar without making changes and adapting to a sugar-free diet.

That is where TTM comes in. Ms Supaporn says that patients, particularly those who hail from rural areas, do not relate to scientific terms such as insulin or blood sugar. TTM can help them control their blood sugar through cooking the right foods and incorporating vegetables from their backyards and local plants into their daily diet.

"Our target is to empower people to cure themselves, if not from the disease itself, but from its causes and encourage them to take care of their health through their lifestyle by adopting a holistic approach rather than just taking drugs prescribed by the doctors," Ms Supaporn added.

– The Nation

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Choosing your mask is choosing how you see the underwater world -- so make your decision wisely. Photo: Aqua Lung

Avoiding missed experiences

Diving

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

THERE is no substitute for the first time a diver sees – assuming they're not having mask issues – the majestic wings of a giant manta ray as it sweeps in from the deep blue. A shadow at first that grows larger and larger until you realize that the manta has come to see what this funny bubble blower is all about...

Shortly after jumping from Blue World Safari during a day-trip to Hin Muang, there was that magical moment. Many in the group had never seen a giant manta ray before, my dive buddy included. As it stretched its wings and glided across one of the pinnacles, painted purple with soft corals, I looked for my buddy. She was about five or six meters away, looking down into the deep blue below as she fiddled with her mask.

It wasn't clear if her mask was fogging up, if it was leaking or if her hair had just gotten stuck in the strap. Either way the seconds slipped by slowly, painfully. Eventually, she looked up and was greeted by one of the greatest treasures of the marine world. However, not everyone is so lucky – many more experiences below the ocean's surface come and go in seconds.

When it comes to bad mask experiences, most divers have had them: the mask that leaks the entire time, the mask that instantly fogs, the mask that does both and even the mask that hurts.

For those of us with weird faces, the issue is even more persistent, and despite diving for years with poorly fitting masks that have either sent me swimming with my eyes closed half the time because I was tired of clearing the mask, to just turning every precious nudibranch into a colorful blur, it

Diving in a fog

WHY the new-mask fog? Well, when the silicone is attached to the frame of a mask it is done at an exceptionally high temperature. As the silicone cools over the next couple of days there is a chemical release that creates a light film on the lens of the mask. There are a number of ways to scrub the film off, all of which should be done a few times to get the best results.

- Plain white toothpaste – the more baking powder the better, says Dmo. Make sure the lens is dry. Rub the toothpaste everywhere and leave over night before rinsing and repeating. Even before jumping on a dive, a little toothpaste can go a long way in ensuring a fog-free experience.
- Burning it off (this doesn't work on all masks, as some lower-quality masks could melt). Hold a lighter up close to the center of the lens. The flame will immediately cause what looks like condensation on the lens. Slowly work the lighter around until the 'condensation' is gone.
- Once the chemical film is gone, other methods such as baby shampoo, commercial defoggers and hand soap can all work. Though a commercial defogger is perhaps the best option, rumor has it nothing is better than a dive instructor's spit.

Photo: NOAA

had never occurred to me how essential a perfect mask was until I thought my buddy was going to miss her first manta.

Darren 'Dmo' Moss, direct sales manager and customer service for Aqua Master, knows masks.

I clearly didn't. Like many divers I assumed if you sucked in through your nose and the mask stuck: Hey! It was a good fit.

"I deal with people sucking masks to their face everyday. Any mask will fit when you are using physics like that, but that doesn't mean it will fit when you're diving," Dmo says, months after the manta dive. "It's mimicking the mask being under pressure. However, when you dive you equalize, so it really is a false fit."

Dmo is up-selling me though.

"The best mask isn't the most expensive mask or cheapest mask. It's the one that fits best, which is why Aqua Lung puts so much effort into creating new technology and a

variety of skirt shapes when developing their masks."

So the crux of a perfect mask hunt is: how do you know if it fits? The simple answer is that it takes time, as a diver needs to try on a variety of masks, pressing them to his or her face gently and letting a friend or store representative check the seal of the skirt around the lips, cheeks, nose, eyebrows and eye sockets.

"Common places for a mask to leak is along the eyebrows, eye sockets and just below the nose," Dmo explains.

"We test clearing, equalizing and what I call the joop-joop test – where it's simulating having a regulator or snorkel in your mouth by pouting your lips like a kiss – this is to make sure the seal doesn't break."

Finding a good mask is like finding a good shoe – you tend to try on a number of running shoes, even from the same brand – before settling on the best shoe for you. In that same train of thought, it's hard not

to feel like you're walking into the shoe store when it comes to the variety of masks that even one company, such as Aqua Lung, has on show. Also, like in running shoes, there is real technology pushing the advancement of masks, the kind of technology that go beyond salesmanship and into significantly improving a diver's experience.

In general, a diver needs to take into account the fit – which you should have guessed by now – lenses, strap technology, volume of the mask and perhaps the color of the skirt.

LENS

When it comes to single verses bi-lense masks, it really comes down to preference, though those who want prescription lenses – which can easily be set in four different models of Aqua Lung masks at the Aqua Master service center in Chalong – will have to go with the bi-lense. However, for the rest of

us, it really comes to comfort.

STRAP

Some might scoff at 'strap technology', but for divers with long hair – from Rasta dreads to golden locks – there can be quite a tangle if you're not careful with your strap. Or, the mask will end up getting pulled up as the strap is placed above a hair bun or pulled down if the strap is placed below the bun – neither is ideal.

To combat this – as part of a series of masks developed by women for women – Aqua Lung rolled out a Comfort Buckle System (CBS), that apparently does wonders.

VOLUME

Volume is simple: low-volume masks are better. They create less buoyancy, are quicker to clear and are easier to equalize. However, the real selling point is that low-volume masks bring the lens closer to your eyes, which increases your field of vision. The more you can see – clearly – the more opportunities you have to witness those underwater moments a person carries with them for a lifetime.

COLOR OF SKIRT

Despite what some people might say, the clear silicone used for the skirt of a Aqua Lung mask when it is created in Italy is the exact same quality as the black silicone.

The real difference is that as a beginner the extra light allowed in by a clear skirt can be more comforting and also enhance the experience of seeing all the bright wonderful corals at places like Hin Muang. On the other hand black silicone is going to provide some eye protection at the surface – it is often preferred by photographers and freedivers.

Passion for aviation: Part I



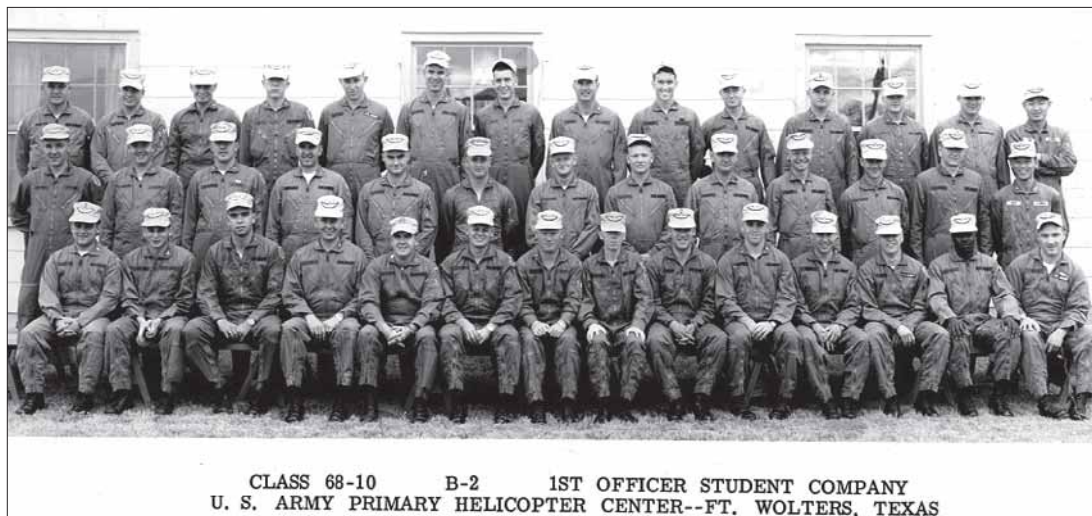
By Stephen Fein

MOST recreational flyers on the island know Pat James as the affable Texan in charge of flight and safety operations at Phuket Airpark in Pa Khlok, as well as for his role as president of the Phuket Flying Club.

But in his younger days, Mr James was a combat pilot who completed two one-year tours of Vietnam in a capacity that is definitely not for the faint-hearted: as a combat helicopter pilot.

Asked how he originally got interested in a career in military aviation, Pat said he gravitated toward flying as a way of avoiding some of the more mundane aspects of military life.

"My career in aviation really started out as a path of least resistance. I signed up with the US military in 1966. One of the first things they had me doing was washing dishes and cleaning grease traps. I wanted to know what I had to do so I wouldn't have to do that anymore. They said: 'Well, if you were an officer you wouldn't



Pat James gravitated toward flying as a way of avoiding some of the more mundane aspects of military life.

have to clean grease traps anymore', so I said 'sign me up!'.

"I ended up passing all the physical and written tests and was eventually allowed to attend an officers' candidate school. While I was there, it was all infantry training – especially marching. All we did was march. We marched to classes. We marched here, there and everywhere. So I asked, 'How do I not have to march around all the time?' They said, 'Well, if you were a pilot you would not have to march so much.' So, again, I said, 'sign me up!'.

Pat then went on to take all the required tests and managed to graduate as an officer, leaving his days of grease trap scrubbing and endless marching behind him.

After graduation, almost all his classmates were immediately shipped off to Vietnam. Pat, however, stayed another year to attend a one-year helicopter flight training program.

"I took to it like a duck to water. I loved flying. It was simple and straightforward for me in every aspect."

After 'earning his wings', Pat was likewise sent off to Vietnam, where he was immediately confronted with all the challenges of piloting a helicopter in wartime conditions.

"You learn to fly in conditions that you would never encounter anywhere else, or would never allow yourself to fly in under any other circumstances – and we did this on a daily basis. Night flying, bad

weather flying, low-level flying in trees. You certainly learn how to hone your skills flying helicopters with a full year in Nam. We had a lot of fun and excitement doing it, with some real adrenaline rushes."

Missions often included flying provisions to the front.

"Infantry on patrol there would go six months at a stretch without seeing a dry pair of socks," he said.

For those out on the front lines, the sight of a Huey (Bell UH-1 Iroquois) approaching with fresh provisions was the best sight they could imagine.

"One thing they loaded us up with one time was ice cream. We got it from a Navy ship offshore. We swapped them out with captured North Vietnam-

ese flags and AK-47s. In return, they loaded us up with cartons and cases of ice cream, which we would take to the guys in the camps out in the field," he explained.

Combat aircraft aren't equipped with refrigerators, so it was inevitably a race against time to deliver the highly-prized ice cream to their intended recipients in the jungle camps.

"There is usually a 12 to 24-hour delay shuttling this stuff back to the right location. By the time they got it was liquefied, but the guys on the front didn't care one bit. They loved it, even if it was more of a milkshake than real ice cream," he said.

Pat said that while there were some dark times in Vietnam, the successful delivery of such delicacies to the troops on patrol missions was one of his fondest memories of the conflict.

"Their eyes would just light up. It was one of the best times, most fun time and bonding times you could ever have in those types of situations," he said.

Read Part 2, about Pat's second tour of Vietnam and his experiences with fixed-wing aircraft in next month's Up In The Air. Aviation enthusiasts can contact Pat at Phuket Airpark in Pa Khlok. For more information about the Phuket Flying Club visit the website: pat@phuketaviationclub.com

AirAsia adds Bangkok-Bangalore

AIRASIA will operate five direct flights per week to Bangalore from Bangkok, starting on September 1. The promotion air fare (1,490 baht/trip) is now available for booking on its website until July 5.

'Bangkok-Bangalore' takes passengers to one of India's most progressive cities to witness its cutting edge technology, medicine and education.

Tassapon Bijleveld, CEO of Thai AirAsia, has seen Thai AirAsia recently expand to many more routes. From the start of the year the airline has added Nan, Loei, Roi Et and Buri Ram, all well received. For the last half of the year, the airline plans to expand internationally both in its biggest market of China and to India where it has noted many interesting opportunities.

"I am confident our Bangkok-Bangalore direct flight will receive great interest as Bangalore is one of south



Mysore Palace is about 150 kilometers from Bangalore. Photo: The Nation

India's most important cities. It is well known for its education and attracts many students, especially medical students. Its technological advancements also set it apart. Our new flight provides a great opportunity for both tourism and investment," says Mr Tassapon. "We are also working with AirAsia India, which has an extensive domestic network in India. This will help Indian travellers looking to visit Thailand. In the past year, Indian travellers were among the top ten most frequent visitors to Thailand.

Also for Thai tourists, they

will be able to discover many Indian destinations with AirAsia India's flights to Kochi, Goa, Pune, Jaipur, Chandigarh, New Delhi and Visakhapatnam."

From September AirAsia flight FD 137 will depart Don Mueang International Airport at 9pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday, and will arrive at Bengaluru International Airport at 11pm (local time). The returning flight (FD 138) will leave Bangalore at 11:45pm before landing at Bangkok at 5am.

—The Nation

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Escape to Coconut Island paradise



Phuket Pads

By Patrick Lusted

A RARE opportunity is presenting itself on Koh Maprao, or Coconut Island, in the form of a piece of private, pristine beach front featuring a luxury, tropical villa ready for the taking.

The essence of Asian simplicity is captured by this Balinese style villa, isolated on the enchanting beach front on Coconut Island, which is off the east coast of Phuket.

Not part of an estate or development, this villa creates the perfect degree of seclusion, yet is still near Phuket's finest amenities and outstanding cuisine, with floating restaurants just 10 minutes away.

Relax on the home's comfortable, furnished veranda and enjoy the peaceful tranquility of the breathtaking views of Phang Nga Bay and the surrounding islands.

To experience Coconut Island means to truly understand the idea of escaping into paradise. You can relax in your own spa tub, pamper yourself in the pool and jacuzzi or meditate in the sala by the beach while listening to the gentle sea and wildlife.

An open floor plan is comprised of four bedrooms, a large living area, three bath-



Relax and enjoy a view of the private beach, and learn what it means to truly escape into paradise.

rooms, an office, a kitchen and a dining area.

The kitchen is fully fitted and equipped with modern kitchen appliances, including a gas oven, microwave, refrigerator, washer, dryer and ample work space. Cupboards are made from teak wood and counters are black marble.

The office is off the living room and has air conditioning

and windows which look onto the garden.

The spacious master bedroom has fully ducted air conditioning and a ceiling fan, in addition to a large walk-in closet. Glass doors lead to the veranda with sea views.

The en suite bathroom has a spa, double sinks made of black marble and white porcelain and a outdoor garden bathtub that

is completely private.

The guest bedroom also offers sea views and has doors leading to the veranda. There is an en suite bathroom, a large built-in closet and sitting area.

The additional two bedrooms are single size and also have fully ducted air conditioning, ceiling fans and built-in closets. They share an en-suite bathroom. The bedrooms offer

tropical views of the surrounding forest.

All bedrooms have solid teak floors, and the main living area has high vaulted ceilings with wood accents.

The pool measures 12x5 meters and overlooks the beach, as it is located just a few footsteps from the sand. There is a jacuzzi, shower and attractive lighting features.

The garden has grass, coconut trees, frangipani trees, tropical plants and ferns.

A separate staff house has four rooms, two bathrooms, a shower, a toilet, a kitchen, a lounge, a washing room, ceiling fans and an air conditioner.

Currently, there are permanent staff consisting of a husband and wife team, one maid who also cooks, one gardener who maintains the generator and pool, and one on-call boatman who is also a handyman.

The amazing thing about this property is that you are about 20 minutes from all major facilities. By boat it is only 10 minutes to the Ao Por Pier and 15 minutes away from Boat Lagoon and Royal Phuket Marina.

For more information contact: Patrick Lusted at Siam Real Estate, quote reference number: HSOB2051 T: 076-288908 www.siamrealestate.com

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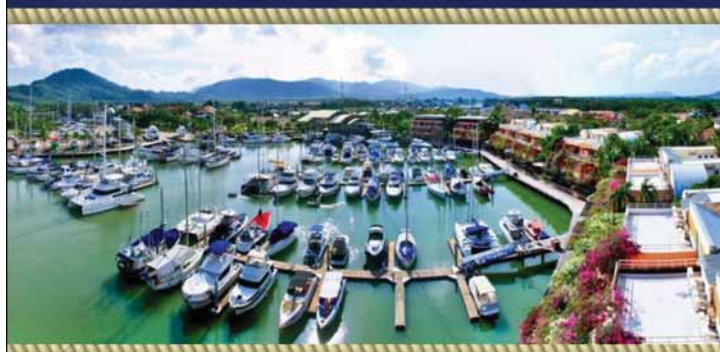
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Presales picked up during May, top firms report

LEADING property developers recorded high presale levels in the first five months of the year, a sign that demand is recovering.

"The property market showed signs of recovering in May after the market dropped last year and grew only slightly in the first quarter, by less than 5 per cent," said Thai Condominium Association president Prasert Taedullayasatit.

According to a survey by *The Nation*, listed property firms enjoyed strong growth in presales compared with the same period last year.

"We are confident of achieving our presales target of 14.2 billion baht in the first half after seeing demand for homes show a strong recovery since May," said AP (Thailand) chief marketing officer Vittakarn Chandavimol. - *The Nation*

Tourism's disruptive behavior



Property Watch

By Bill Barnett

AS THE island rains have drenched the collective spiritual well-being of Phuket's hotels and property people, a little step into the reality zone could be needed.

There is little doubt that the months of May and June – well, throw in September – remain agonizing for those in the trade. I came to live here in 2000 and, year in and year out, it's pretty much the same line, though the faces, places and perhaps haircuts have changed.

Typically the online rant goes, 'I've never seen the island this quiet. Folks I know have moved to [insert Chiang Mai, Vietnam, Cambodia or any other flavor of the month]. It's all over for the island, time to move on'.

I've had a good, hard look at data compiled by C9 Hotelworks from the first five months of the year and in reality it's mainly an affirmation of things we already knew or should have expected. Wait, there will be surprises later on, so keep reading.



Tourists still arrive, though we always think the island is quieter than the year before. Photo: Saran Mitrarat

Let's take a quick look at the Russians. This is the second largest international market for Phuket. Back of a burned out ruble, comparing 2014 to 2015, numbers went backwards by 42.5%. On overseas arrivals, Russia still accounts for 11.4%, though it has slid down from a peak of 20.4% last year and 18.5% in 2013. There is a defined gap in the market where the Russian's once occupied such a prominent place. Who will be the replacement players?

Of course, it's the Chinese. Mainland China now accounts

for 37.2% of the international set. Growth this year in the five-month period has been 30.9%. In 2014 this tracked at 11.7%. The volume is there, though the impact on average room rates and length of stay is obvious.

Meanwhile, South Korea, which holds 5.3% of the segment, slipped by 15.3% versus last year. Expect MERS to add to the loss. One of the key segments for Phuket's upscale pool villa resorts is the Korean honeymoon market and this appears to be in marked decline.

A closely watched market by

hotels is Australia, who still rank in the Top 5 with 6.3%, but this year dropped numbers by 7%. Most industry watchers cite currency as a key negative, but on the flip side, numbers to Bali remain up for Australians.

Taking a step backward, most of the fast-growing segments to Phuket are from Asia – meaning Hong Kong, Indian, China, and Malaysia, with growth in this band for January through May sitting at 30 to 34% over the same period in 2014. One unlikely star performer is South Africa, who are

tapping into the increase in flights via the Middle East and are up over 80% for the period versus 2014.

This shift has been in the worst since the Grand Financial Crisis and will only become more defined as regional airlift increases and a rising consumer class targets leisure holidays. While there's a cry that the legacy Europeans have abandoned Phuket, it is entirely untrue. Western Europe as a group grew 8% this year and topping the list has been France with an uptick of 31.7%.

Clearly Phuket hotels, tourism and property players have to understand the trend is here to stay, and forward plan offerings and investment which are now being disruptive to old school thinking. Change may not always be viewed as good, or necessarily bad, but in this case it's inevitable.

Bill Barnett is Managing Director of C9 Hotelworks (c9hotelworks.com), a Phuket-based hotel and property consulting firm. His blog (thephuketinsider.com) is the source for all hotel and real estate news within Greater Phuket.



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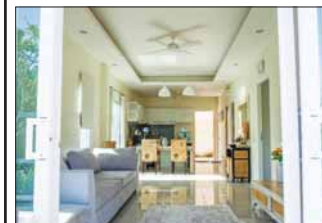
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Hearing lizard voices in Phuket

By Bruce Stanley

I ALWAYS wonder what people are listening to through their earphones while driving their motorcycles or walking around Central Festival. Are they all listening to the same music, or are they just listening to their friends talk?

I think I may now have the answer. Silvano Stabile arrived on Phuket several years ago, and was contracted by Twinpalms group to design and manage a radio program that would promote and set a new and higher standard for marketing the resort's many projects. They couldn't have made a better choice.

Silvano has spent most of his life developing and promoting music, art and style. Born outside of Naples, Italy, his family moved to France when he was quite young.

"I always wanted to play music and be near that industry. I was destined to follow my imagination. My mother bought me a guitar at 14 years old as I was determined to become a pop star. I played my own compositions in the corri-

dors of the Metro in Paris," he said.

He also explored the musical sounds happening around the world and learned to mix one style with another using early computer programs. This was in the early days before DJ culture surpassed live music in the club circuits.

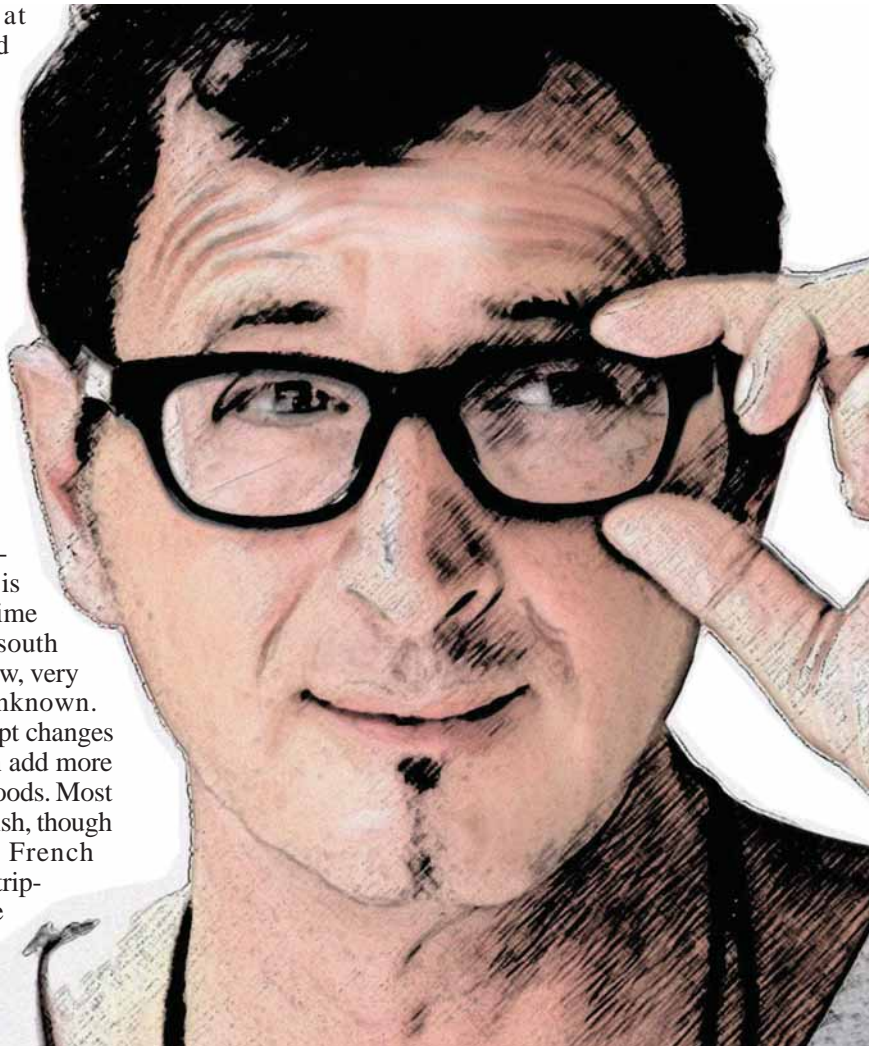
His talent for creating a stimulating musical environment led to his being named as an artistic director at Virgin Megastore on Paris' elegant Champs-Elysees. He worked in Paris for 16 years before moving to Portugal's trendy Algarve region, where he entertained for another seven years.

He came to Phuket to visit friends a few years ago and immediately felt drawn to explore the opportunities to develop a music identity for Phuket.

"My intention is to create musical sequences that inspire emotions as I believe everyone desires to be connected to their emotional selves. Music does not speak a language or often make sense, so people are more free to connect with their feelings," explained Silvano.

His project at Twinpalms is called Voice of the Lizard (VOTL) and it can be found on the internet. One program, SongStory, combines music and interviews with some of Phuket's most interesting people, who talk about their work or their personal histories by choosing music that has been important in their lives.

"I create programming for VOTL that is a journey through time and space, mixing south and north, old and new, very familiar and the unknown. There are many abrupt changes of atmosphere which add more emotion and more moods. Most programs are in English, though we do have the French language program, Strip-tease, and some interviews in both French and Italian," he said.



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