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Phuket police on high alert

By Gazette Staff

PHUKET: Governor Udomsak Usawarangkura has ordered a heightening of security for all government buildings and tourist areas in Phuket following the April 29 killings in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, and warnings by a Muslim separatist group that foreigners should stay away from the South and neighboring provinces.

Phuket's Provincial Police Commander, Maj Gen Veerayuth Sittimalic, said "We have seen the trouble in the South and will not be careless when it comes to people's safety." He said that security had already been beefed up at places such as the airport and the oil storage depot on Cape Panwa, and more police had been moved to the night shift.

In addition to extra guards at public places, Gov Udomsak also said that police will be posted at all government offices around the island, and office lights will left on throughout the night. "In the dark, it is easy to have trouble," he explained.

The decision to increase security coincided with a warning issued by the United Front for the Independence of Pattani (Bersatu) to "Dear People of the World" that the violence may spread from the South to other parts of Thailand.

In its warning, delivered to the news agency Agence France Presse (AFP) and reported around the world on April 30, Bersatu said, "Persons who plan to visit Thailand NOW are warned not to travel to Patani Raya Region, (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, Satun, Songkhla)



Governor Udomsak Usawarangkura ordered a state of heightened security for the island after the April 28 violence in the South.

and the neighbour provinces (Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi, Pattalung)."

The statement concluded starkly, "Pattani people are not responsible for anything that happens to you after this warning."

Bersatu was formed in 1989 to unite the splinter separatist groups in the Thai-Malaysian border area. Leaders from the various terrorist groups, including the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) and the Mujahadeen Pattani, met with the aim of "gathering fighters for Pattani".

The threat to people and interests in areas outside the five predominantly-Muslim provinces in Thailand (Satun, Pattani, Songkhla, Yala and Narathiwat) appears to be the first open dec-

laration of hostile intent toward a wider population, including foreigners.

Whether Bersatu genuinely intends to launch attacks in other parts of Thailand, or whether it is simply using the threat of violence to rattle tourist markets and thereby damage the Thai economy, is unknown.

The warning came after more than 100 people, dismissed by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra as "teenagers who were given drugs and cash", were killed by Thai security forces in Pattani. At least 30 were killed when police stormed a mosque.

Although some within the ranks of the Thai authorities resolutely deny that the violence was carried out by separatists,

Continued on page 2

Police team transferred for probe misconduct

By Gategeo Phetsawang

THALANG: The entire team of police officers investigating the double murder of Prasert and Thavorn Trairat have been transferred after an internal probe into their conduct by officers from Provincial Police regional headquarters in Surat Thani.

K. Prasert and K. Thavorn, the parents of Thepkrasattri Mayor Prasong Trairat, were gunned down in their shophouse home on May 5 last year.

Pol Col Ronapong Sai-kaew, Superintendent of Investigation for Provincial Police Region 8, which includes Phuket, told the Gazette that the probe was launched after he received complaints from three of the four people charged in the case.

Col Ronapong said he had received a complaint from Wipa Jantong and her husband Sompong Jantong, who were charged with conspiracy to murder K. Prasert and K. Thavorn. They were later released on bail and are currently on trial.

In their complaint, they appealed for Region 8 police to investigate the police officers involved in the murder investigation.

Suchart Maneesuwan, who had confessed to playing a role in the murder, also filed a complaint against the investigating officers, Col Ronapong said, for breaking one of his ribs.

Suchart admitted identifying the victims for the alleged gunman, whom he identified as Pol Sgt Maj Chalaw Ramduang.

Col Ronapong said that, as a result of the investigation into the complaints, all officers in

Continued on page 2

Something Fishy is Happening in Phuket.

★ Heineken

Island security tightened following violence in South

From Page 1

Singapore's *Straits Times* quoted Thailand's Deputy Director of the National Security Command, General Panlop Pinmanee, as saying "It is absolutely certain that they are separatists. They were trained as guerrillas for separatist actions by BRN (the Barisi Revolusi Nasional) and PULO."

Australia was quick to advise its nationals to "exercise caution" during their time in Thailand, particularly in areas frequented by tourists and expatriates.

The travel advisory from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs stated, "We continue to receive reports that terrorist elements in the region are planning attacks."

Foreign ministries of other countries updated their travel advisories to offer similar warnings, though none so far have

mentioned specific tourist resorts by name.

The effect on the tourism industry of the latest incidents and of Bersatu's warning has yet to be assessed. However, AFP quoted Napasorn Kakai, the Tourism Authority of Thailand's No 2 official in Phuket, as saying tourism "will be affected if the unrest is not over soon."

"We are concerned that if the unrest continues it will finally affect Phuket and Krabi," she was quoted as saying.

There are serious doubts in many quarters in Phuket about the government's ability to restore peace in the South.

In particular, critics have targeted the national security forces' perceived heavy-handedness and PM Thaksin's apparent continuing belief that he can solve highly complex problems with simplistic "just do it" policies.

Police team transferred

From page 1

involved in the double murder investigation had been transferred to other provinces.

"The Phuket officers investigating this case were found to have injured K. Suchart, and to have conducted a dishonest investigation. They have been ordered to move to other provinces," Col Ronapong said.

However, he would not name the officers transferred, or say when the order was issued or

where they had been posted to.

"People already know the truth – that a police officer was the real kingpin who hired the gunman," Col Ronapong said.

"The case has now been sent to the courts, so we [Police Region 8] can't be involved in it anymore," he added.

Col Ronapong also confirmed that the alleged gunman, Sgt Maj Chalaw, formerly of the Sikow District Police in Trang, is still being sought by police.

Princess to sing in 'To Be No 1' concert

PHUKET: HRH Princess Ubol Ratana Rajakanya will visit Phuket on May 18 to preside over a "To Be Number One" campaign event. Her Royal Highness will also sing at a concert in the evening.

The campaign, devised by the Princess as a way to get young people to excel in sports, music and other activities, is being supported by provincial authorities throughout the country.

Vice-Governor Niran Kalayanamit yesterday said that Phuket had received four out of seven Best Province awards in the To Be Number One Contest for Region 11, which groups Chumphon, Ranong, Phuket, Nakhon Sri Thammarat, Surat Thani, Phang Nga and Krabi.

Phuket received awards for best province, best village (Baan Bang Ku in Koh Kaew), best entertainment business (Phuket FantaSea) and best teenage discussion forum.

V/Gov Niran said that the Phuket provincial government had earlier organized soccer and

bowling tournaments. The winners of those events will receive shields from Her Royal Highness.

Princess Ubol Ratana will unveil a plaque at the Public Health Office at Baan Bang Ku during a ceremony beginning around 5:45 pm, and give an inspirational speech to teenagers and former drug addicts.

Meanwhile, the winners of the four Region 11 awards will have their work showcased at Saphan Hin in a nine-hour extravaganza that will start at 1 pm and will include singing and dancing lessons, and *takraw* lessons by members of the Thai national team.

In the evening, starting at 4 pm, music stars from recording company Grammy will take to the stage for a free six-hour concert. The highlight of the concert will be a performance of seven or eight songs by Her Royal Highness, at around 7:30 pm.

The Phuket provincial government invites everyone at-



tending the events to wear *To Be Number One* T-shirts, which can be bought from the Phuket Provincial Health Office (PPHO) at prices ranging from 100 to 150 baht, depending on the style chosen.

For more information about the day's activities, call the PPHO at Tel: 076-211330, ext 201.

Top comedy trio to play Phuket

PHUKET: Three first-rate British comedians – Tim Clark, Pierre Hollins and John Fothergill – will perform at the Watermark Bar Restaurant, at the Boat Lagoon, on May 26.

Heading the trio will be host Tim Clark, of whom *The Guardian* newspaper said, "Comperes are the unsung heroes of stand up comedy. The current master of this underrated art is Tim Clark."

Clark regularly comperes at The Comedy Store and Jongleurs venues in the UK, adding to his long career as a professional comedian.

He hosted BBC game show *Give Us A Clue*, and has worked on UK live radio, including spots with Danny Baker on Radio 5's *Morning Edition* and Radio 1's *Loose Talk*. He was also a con-

tributor on BBC 2's *Fantasy Football*.

John Fothergill has played sell-out performances throughout the UK and at the Edinburgh Fringe comedy festival. Britain's *The Sun* newspaper described him as "a top comedy turn and a right funny bloke". *The Guardian* described his act as "hilarious stories delivered superbly".

Pierre Hollins, who may be the world's only player of the electric squash racket, was described by *The Irish Times* as "soon to be huge", while *The Guardian* rated him as a "must see".

The trio will be in Thailand as part of a tour of Asia, and will perform at the The Punchline Comedy Club in Bangkok on May 28 and 29.

The Phuket event has been

organized by Stuart Bird of the Watermark and Gerard Cornielje from SEA Entertainment, and is sponsored by the Holiday Inn Resort Phuket, the Maan Tawan property development and Phil Russell of hotel-travel-asia.com.

More top-rate comedians are expected to perform at the Watermark in September and November.

The May 26 show will start at 9 pm, following a buffet dinner from 6:30 pm-8 pm.

Tickets are 2,500 baht, including dinner and music provided by a live band afterwards.

Tickets bought before May 14 cost 2,250 baht.

For more information contact the Watermark at Tel: 076-239730 or send email to: info@watermarkphuket.com, or visit www.watermarkphuket.com.

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คำเตือน : การดื่มสุราแล้วขับขีรถจะเป็นอันตรายและผิดกฎหมาย

★ Unusual school of fish catches the attention of motorists on superhighway



12 April 2004, Phuket - A unique portrayal of a school of exotic fish being chased by an eager bottle opener is gaining lots of attention on a superhighway in Phuket. This eye-catching display from Heineken is the result of an idea to create a billboard that compliments the island of Phuket. International tourists and locals alike are attracted to this novel portrayal, which captures the character and charm of Phuket in a truly unique way. Both Phuket and Heineken are extremely popular,

each in their own way. Phuket is the much loved resort where people come to refresh themselves while Heineken is famous worldwide for its refreshing taste. The fish and the deep blue sea reflect the exotic island where the blend of sea, sand and sun is an attraction that has made Phuket famous worldwide. All that sun and sea air also has a way of creating a real thirst ...and what better way to quench that thirst than a cool refreshing glass of Heineken.

It could only be Heineken.

Probe into 'illegal' resort at Nai Harn

NAI HARN: Owners of a resort being built in Nai Harn, near Le Royal Meridien Phuket Yacht Club, will likely be ordered to dismantle it by June 10.

The order is expected to be issued after government officers found that no permission had been given for the resort's construction, Vice-Governor Pongpow Ketthong told the *Gazette* on May 3.

V/Gov Pongpow said he had visited the site on April 30 and concluded that the resort – which as yet has no name – had been built without the permission of the Rawai Tambon Administration Organization (*OrBorTor*). More than 20 bun-

galows in the resort have already been completed.

"The issue of who owns the land [the resort is being built on] is currently in court," he said, declining to name the parties involved in the court case. "In any case there are no papers for this land, so that means no one can build on it."

He explained that Rawai *OrBorTor* has already ordered the developer to cease construction and will soon order the demolition of the buildings. If the developer does not dismantle the resort then the *OrBorTor* itself will do so.

The Chief of the Phuket Provincial

Forestry Office (PPFO), Tongchai Sava-pong, told the *Gazette* that his officers are checking whether the land belongs to the PPFO or to the Phuket Agricultural Land Reform Office (PALRO – the office responsible for *SorPorKor* 4-01 titles) and answers are expected within the week.

If the resort is found to have been built on land belonging to the PPFO, the developers will be prosecuted for encroachment, he said.

PALRO Chief Teerawut Taworn-patanapong said, "If we find the land belongs to the PALRO, that means the de-

veloper can't build on it because it is earmarked for agricultural use only."

Sang Chanalert, former village headman of Rawai Moo 1, said, "Before, there was just a hut on the land. They erected a long screen around the site to hide it. When I tried to walk into the area some people came and told me to leave."

"Rawai *OrBorTor* told the developer to cease construction on March 26. So how come the construction continued to the point where the resort is almost finished?"

"If we can't preserve the forest in Nai Harn, soon there will be none left," he added. – *Gategao Phetsawang*

Land office murder probe faltering

By Gategao Phetsawang

PHUKET: A year after the assassination of Pongtorn Hiranyaburana – the Deputy Chief of the Phuket Land Office ordered to investigate suspect land titles – the trail leading to his killers has apparently gone cold.

Pol Col Ronapong Saikaew, Superintendent of Investigation for Police Region 8, based in Surat Thani, on April 28 told the *Gazette*, "We still need more time to track down the gunmen and gather more evidence."

K. Pongtorn was shot execution-style on a lonely stretch

of road as he drove home to Surat Thani on April 25, 2003.

Officers believe that his inquiries were on the verge of disclosing the names of the people responsible for doctoring land titles. His honesty was later praised by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

"We don't have the time to track down the suspects, who have now fled to northeastern Thailand," Col Ronapong said, adding that officers believe that four or more people were involved in K. Pongtorn's murder.

"We don't have enough in terms of witness statements or

material evidence to make a case," he added.

Col Ronapong announced on November 11 last year that officers expected a breakthrough and were closing in on a key person involved in the killing.

But on April 28 he said, "The problem is that we don't have only this case to investigate. Besides this one, there are many others that we have to look into."

Col Ronapong said that he will coordinate with investigating officers and give them another month to follow up on the case. However, he added, "We can't say how long it will take."

New OrBorJor elects chairman and deputies

PHUKET: The Phuket Provincial Administration Organization *OrBorJor* has elected Hutt Katanchaleekul as Chairman.

At the inaugural session of the newly-elected body on April 29, Chaivichit Dattvatkanee was elected deputy chairman and Wacharapong Kuawong second deputy chairman. All three are Democrat Party members.

The 24-member body, dominated by its 19 Democrats, was elected in polling on March 14. The election results were approved by the Central Election Committee (CEC) in Bangkok, and officially announced in Phuket on April 26.

However, the chamber is still without a President. The *Gazette* understands that the separate election of Anchalee Vanich-Thepabutr as *OrBorJor* President has been confirmed by the Central Election Committee (CEC) in Bangkok, but that the official paperwork for this confirmation has not yet been sent to Phuket.

Phuket Governor Udomsak Usawarangkura therefore presided in her stead at the opening session, held at Phuket Provincial Hall. All members were sworn in before the vote. No policy matters were discussed.

– *Anongnat Sartpisut*

Moodies sign goes up in smoke

PATONG: The illuminated sign overhanging the entrance to Soi Moodies entertainment plaza, on Rat-U-Thit 200 Pi Rd, burst into flames on the night of Saturday, May 1.

The sign caught fire at about 10 pm. Phuket Vice-Governor Pongpow Ketthong, who was dining directly underneath, called the fire department.

Restaurant Manager Banai

Ngamsri told the *Gazette*, "They arrived about 10 minutes later, and put the fire out in about five minutes. They were very good."

K. Banai estimated the damage at about 50,000 baht, plus 20,000 baht loss of earnings on the night. No one was injured.

"The fire started from old wiring in the sign," he said. "We will check all wiring to make sure that this does not happen again."

One dead, one critical after karaoke microphone row

THALANG: One man was stabbed to death and another remains in a critical condition following an argument over whose turn it was to use the microphone at the Kon Suay (Beautiful People) karaoke bar and restaurant in Cherng Talay around 1 am on May 3.

Police arrested the alleged killer, 24-year-old Veerasak Nantasin, from Surat Thani, some three hours later at his home at 24/8 Moo 6 in Cherng Talay. A knife was recovered during the arrest.

The dead man was named as 18-year-old Bundit "Koh" Kulabuth. He died en route to

Thalang Hospital from five stab wounds to his back. The other victim, Sanchai "Jek" Benjakarn, 19, remains in the intensive care unit at the hospital.

Pol Lt Col Suwat Kaewprom, Deputy Superintendent of Cherng Talay Police Station, told the *Gazette* that witnesses in the karaoke reported that an argument broke out between the victims and their alleged attacker over use of the microphone.

"Veerasak confessed he did it because he was drunk," Col Suwat told the *Gazette*. "He has been charged with one count of murder and one of attempted murder."

B16.5m for beach restrooms

PHUKET: The provincial government has announced that it will spend 16.5 million baht on building public restrooms at the most popular tourist beaches on the island.

Tawee Homhuan, an engineer at the Phuket Public Works and Town and Country Planning Office (PWTCP), told the *Gazette*, "In each restroom there will be a cubicle for handicapped people, three showers and seven toilets and six sinks."

He explained that one facility apiece will be built at Rawai, Nai Harn, Patong, Kamala, Karon, Bang Tao, and Nai Yang beaches, while Kata and Surin beaches will have two each.

"The responsibility for management and maintenance will rest with the local authorities. They will also decide whether users should pay a fee," he said.

The restrooms are expected to be in use by September 30.

Phuket Air cuts fares

PHUKET: Phuket Air has slashed its economy class fares on flights between Phuket and Bangkok, and Krabi and Bangkok. One-way fares are now 1,500 baht and round-trip fares are 3,000 baht. Previously, best return fares were 4,350 baht for Krabi and 3,950 baht for Phuket.

For more information contact Phuket Air at Tel: 076-220665 or 076-220184-7.



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Queer News

Paper weight

KHON KAEN: Guns, knives, poison, bombs – and recycled paper. Until now, one of these had nothing in common with the others.

However, the next gun fanatic T-shirt you see might read, "Guns don't kill people. Recycled paper kills people."

Yes, recycled paper just became a lethal commodity, after a security guard at a recycling business in Khon Kaen was found suffocated under 2,000 tons of recycled paper recently.

Preliminary investigations indicated that the security guard, Sommai Wongsitthep, 46, who worked at Khon Kaen Wongpanit Co in Muang District, went to sleep on a stack of paper bundles weighing up to 800kg each, Pol Capt Therntoon Soisukhapapan said.

Mechanic Prajuap Matpang, 36, who discovered the

body, said he and about 10 other employees arrived for work at 8 am and found heaps of paper on the floor.

He noticed one of Sommai's legs after two bundles of paper were picked up by a fork-lift truck.

Sommai's wife, Jomthong Wongsitthep, said she went to the factory to look for her husband at 7am after he did not return home as usual at 6:15 am.

"My husband had been working at the recycling plant for a month. "He was a good man and served in the military as a draftee. He was not supposed to have been asleep on duty," she said.

Dr Thitichai Wiangsimma, of Srinakharin University Hospital, said death occurred six hours before the body was discovered and was caused by suffocation.

Source: *The Nation*

Phuket is an island on the move. The lack of an extensive public transport system, the easy availability of credit to buy cars and motorcycles, along with peer pressure, have caused an explosion in the number of private vehicles on the roads.

The increasing numbers of properties and businesses being built in more remote areas also fuel the need to use a vehicle.

Thepkrasattri Rd (the airport road) permits north-south travel without too many tears, although readers may remember delays and financial tribulations surrounding its construction. However, since work to widen the route through Thalang was completed – itself a chaotic exercise – journeys to and from Sarasin Bridge are now far easier.

But Chalermprakiat Ror IX Rd (the bypass road) – already home to Gems Gallery, the Tesco-Lotus and Big C supermarkets, and soon to be joined by the Central Festival shopping mall, Index furniture store, and a little further away, Makro – is little more than a two-lane road.

At the right time of day, at the right time of year, it can be a straightforward sprint along this road and past the large and ever-growing number of small-to-medium sized businesses and occasional *wat*.

But find yourself stuck behind a convoy of road trains advancing through their crawler gears, or worse, between hot-rodding minibuses and airport limousines, and it's the road to Hell. Good intentions are few and far between.

Jockeying drivers vie for half a vehicle's length advantage and succeed in turning two lanes into three, four, five or more.

Work due to start on May 7 to widen the bypass road to an official four, and in one section six lanes, should bring some welcome relief.

When completed, the 10-kilometer stretch from the Dara Samut School intersection (close to the Thainaan restaurant) to just north of the Boat Lagoon on Thepkrasattri Rd will, it is hoped, make life and traveling far easier, up to a point.

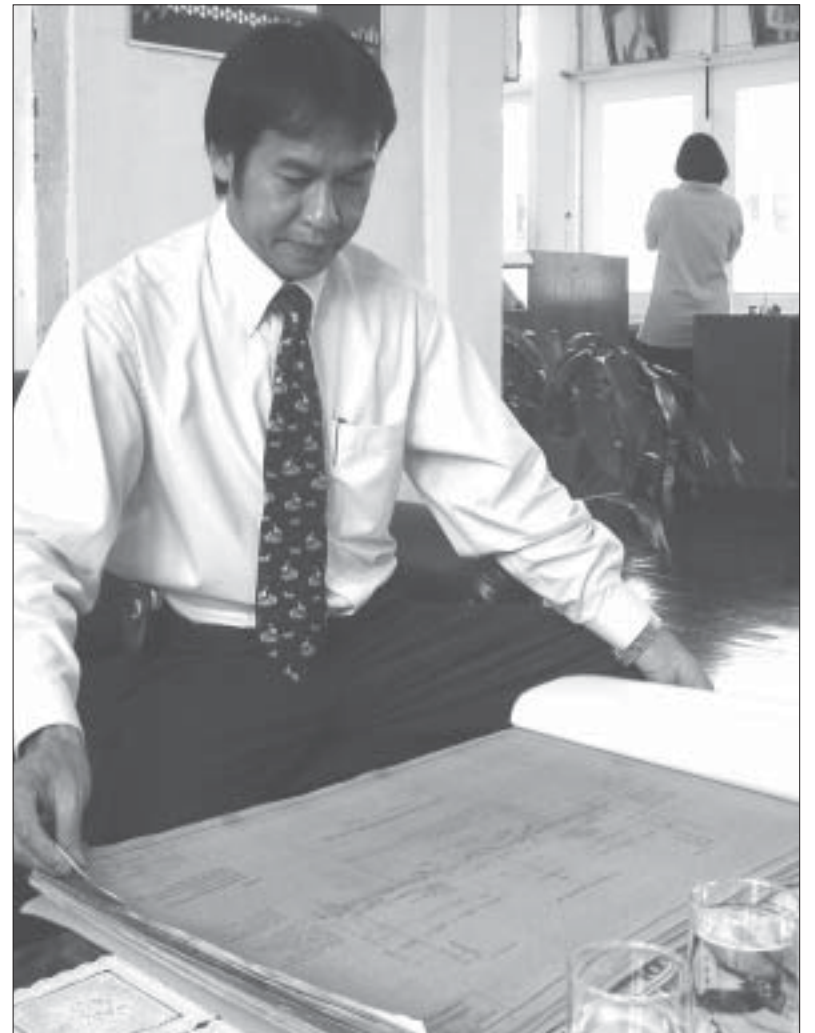
Chiang Rai Harn Charoen Enterprise Ltd (CRHC) were awarded the contract by the central government to expand the bypass road on the basis of a bid that won on a combination of both cost and completion time – 111 million baht and 510 days respectively. Funding for the project is coming from Bangkok.

The consensus is that work on the bypass road is overdue. Business expansion along the road has been rapid. These businesses, though expected to benefit from an easier traffic flow once the widening has been completed, look set to suffer in the coming 510 days.

Pornthip Wiwatikul, owner

ROAD

This week work was due to begin on widening Chalermprakiet Ror IX Rd – the bypass road west of Phuket City. Will this solve the island's traffic problems? Or will it simply create problems elsewhere? SANGKHAEE LEELANAPAPORN and SIRIPANSA SOMBOON take a close look at the project.



Wanchai Wattanasiri, Chief of the Phuket Provincial Highways Office, examines blueprints for the bypass road expansion.

of Pornthip Seastore on the bypass road, told the *Gazette* that while she agrees that expansion of the road is good news for Phuket, her business will be affected. "This project is bound to affect sales and I'll lose customers because it's going to take so long to finish. They just won't

'The town planners didn't do a very good job of supporting the tourism industry in the first place, at least in terms of road building. It's too difficult to improve it now.'

want to stop with construction work just outside of a shop. Or they won't be able to stop."

Another business owner expressing concern was Chan Sim, managing director of Chan's Antiques, which only recently moved to new premises on the bypass road. He estimates that his business will lose around

10% of its customers over the course of the project's construction. The government will not pay compensation for lost business.

But not everyone foresees a problem.

Sakda Prathitkham, Manager of Tour East Company Ltd said that construction work would have little impact upon his business. "My staff go out to visit

customers, rather than the other way round," he said. "We have only a few people coming into the office, so it shouldn't affect us greatly."

This may prove to be an optimistic view of the potential situation.

The difficulties faced by drivers in navigating the road while work is underway have not, so far as the *Gazette* has been able to ascertain, been considered.

One section where existing problems may be exacerbated – once work has been completed – is on the southern side of the Dara Samut School intersection. The anticipated volume of traffic from Central Festival and other routes has led planners to widen this section to six lanes. However, some 100 or so meters toward Chalong, these six lanes will merge into the current haphazard one lane each-way road, forming a bottleneck.

Although blueprints show the merge, whether factors such as typical road behavior have been taken into account could not be expanded upon.

Wanchai Wattanasiri, Chief of the Phuket Provincial Highways Office (PPHO) told the *Gazette* that a submission has been

Two heads are better than one

SRISAKET: Villagers in Khukan District are still trying to interpret an unusual event in their village – the birth of a two-headed cow.

The calf was born alive to owner Prasit Sukkrawan on April 4, but died soon afterward.

By the time journalists arrived at K. Prasit's home in Village 3, Tambon Son, they found excited villagers crowding around the lifeless biological oddity, some lighting incense sticks and others praying for the winning numbers in the upcoming lottery draw.

The dead calf, prominently displayed on the front page of the next day's newspaper, had two fully-formed heads coming from a shared neck and was in all other respects a normal calf.

Through the incense smoke billowing inside her barn, 33-

year-old K. Prasit told the press she had had a premonition of the strange birth. The previous night, she explained, she had dreamed that a friend in a nearby village had given birth to a child with two heads, one with curly hair and the other with straight hair.

Upon waking the following morning, she heard her pregnant cow lowing in pain.

A veterinarian was called in to extract the calf, but it took several hours – and a great deal of agony on the cow's part – to extract the calf.

Ruling out the possibility that the two-headed calf could have been just a fluke of nature, K. Prasit said, "I don't know whether this is good luck or bad luck.

"This cow has given birth to three calves. The first was stillborn, the second is still alive, and the third is this two-headed cow."

K. Prasit is sure the two-headed calf is somehow related to her personal life. She had twin daughters herself, she explained, and hadn't heard from her husband, an itinerant laborer, for more than four months. It all had to be related somehow, she said.

At 72, elderly neighbor Naak Jantharachit probably thought she had seen it all – until now. "I have never seen a two-headed cow before.

"It is a very odd cow and I believe that this will surely bring good luck. Besides, this village has four pairs of twins, one male and three female.

"My neighbors and I have determined that the winning digits in the next lottery draw will be 52 and 92," she said confidently.

The success or otherwise of their prophecy is not known.

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TO GLITCHES

made to the Director General of the Highways Department in Bangkok for an east-west overpass to be built at the Dara Samut School intersection.

He was unsure whether funding will be granted, but in any case such a project is a long way off; first the bypass road widening must be completed so that its impact can be assessed, and then the overpass would be subject to a survey and a feasibility study before any decision could be made on whether to build it.

No plans seem likely to be made within three years, if at all, for this project to aid the movement of traffic between Phuket City and Patong.

In any case, there must be a major question mark over the capacity of the Kathu-bound section of Wichit Songkram Rd to deal with the larger volume of traffic that would inevitably follow the building of an overpass across the bypass road.

It looks likely that commuters and tourists will have to endure difficulty in finding entrances to and from businesses, avoiding construction vehicles and workers, and the irritation of contra-flow systems, leading to the frustration of driving straight past one's intended destination, and on the wrong side of the road.

Do the companies involved in building these mega-projects take any responsibility for traffic control? Experience has shown most road users in Phuket that the Big C and Tesco-Lotus superstores, while keen to have as many customers as possible, leave traffic control to good luck and the local government.

Security guards occasionally venture out onto the highway to slow down traffic to allow customers to depart. In most cases, however, one must look for a gap, or proceed to block the road with the

'This project is bound to affect sales and I'll lose customers because it's going to take so long to finish. They just won't want to stop with construction work just outside of a shop.'



Exhaust fumes fog the air as vehicles wait for the lights at the Tesco-Lotus intersection. Will a wider bypass road cure traffic problems? Or will it simply move them elsewhere?

vehicle and force oncoming traffic to stop.

In their favor, Big C did construct a footbridge across the bypass road, although as most shoppers come by car or motorcycle, the value of the bridge is negligible. Following Big C's lead, Central Festival will build a footbridge and bus stop.

At an International Business Association of Phuket meeting last year, a spokesperson for Big C read a prepared statement suggesting that the feasibility of an overpass or underpass serving both Big C and Central Festival was being considered.

Like Phuket City, Patong has a mega-project in the making. Jungceylon, in the center of town, will, it is hoped, bring tourists and shoppers by the coach- and car-load. Anyone familiar with the roads around Patong during the high season can attest to the fact that it hardly works now.

K. Wanchai has inspected the roads in and around Patong, and his assessment is bleak. "We cannot build more roads through Patong - nor can we widen the existing ones - because there are so many people and businesses there," he said.

"The town planners didn't

do a very good job of supporting the tourism industry in the first place, at least in terms of road building.

"All we can do for Patong is to improve the quality of the roads and do our best to smooth traffic flow. It's too difficult to improve it now."

Just reaching Patong can be a problem. Going "over the hill" is a harrowing business involving near-hairpin bends, first-gear driving, heavy trucks and delays.

Talk of a tunnel through to Patong emerges every so often. In 2001, Sweden's Skanska Teknik Co Ltd received 3 million

baht to conduct a "pre-feasibility study" of the idea. Three years on, however, Phuket Governor Udomsak Usawarangkura has scotched the idea of a Patong tunnel, perhaps permanently.

"A tunnel is a fanciful idea. It's not feasible and we will not go ahead with it," Gov Udomsak told the *Gazette*.

"Instead, I want the Department of State Highways to make the road over the hill less steep. I have sent a paper to them on this matter," he continued.

Making the hills around Patong less hilly may be a Herculean task but Gov Udomsak is positive that it will reduce the number of accidents and allow traffic to flow more smoothly.

K. Wanchai agreed with Gov Udomsak on the cost-to-benefit ratio of a tunnel, although he did not venture an opinion on a scheme to make the roads less steep. More lanes, he said, are planned for the Phuket City-Patong route.

The PPHO will concentrate its efforts on renewing the surface of a number of Phuket's roads, adding more lighting, and beautifying the median strip on Thepkrasattri Rd.

"We aim to have a full 40 kilometers of plants along the road," K. Wanchai said. "We are discussing this project with the [Provincial Administration Organization] now"

The long-term future of Phuket rests on many issues and transport is just one of them. As the economy of Phuket appears to be flourishing with little restraint, and more people prosper, greater numbers of vehicles will appear on the roads.

There is one advantage to this, perhaps: the more traffic jams there are, the more slowly the traffic will move. This "enforced" speed limit may just keep the road accident statistics down.

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By Rittiwat Suwannarattaphum

Often-overlooked Koh Sireh, on the eastern side of Phuket City, is home to several poor communities, including shanty villages of Burmese laborers. For many of them, health care is beyond reach and the conditions they live in promote concern about the spread of disease.

Such concern has resulted in the opening of the Rassada Public Health Care Center in Moo Baan Keha, where World Vision Foundation of Thailand members and Burmese volunteers are working to raise awareness of infectious diseases, with particular focus on HIV/Aids.

Aroonsak Whongjit, the World Vision project coordinator at the center, explained, "It is much more difficult for them to get medical services than it is for Thai people. They are treated as insignificant, and some of them choose not to seek medical treatment, particularly the unregistered foreign workers.

"If they have an infectious disease, this can put the whole community at risk," he said.

More than 10,000 Burmese are currently registered as living in Phuket, said K. Aroonsak, and he expects that number to grow. "More and more Burmese people are working here, both legally and illegally. Most of them are teenagers. Most are single and enjoy sexual intercourse, and could be unknowing carriers of HIV and other serious diseases," he said.

Built on two rai, the center has two diagnosis rooms and a consultation room, but there are no facilities for overnight stays and patients diagnosed as having serious diseases are transferred to



An uphill battle to help those society despises

hospitals with better facilities.

"We are just like any ordinary health center. We have to coordinate with the hospitals for immediate assistance in an emergency," said K. Aroonsak.

While two other World Vision staff work with K. Aroonsak at the center, the rest are Burmese volunteers, including Dr Maung Maung Soe. "I worked in Burma for seven years but then discovered that Thailand's thousands of Burmese laborers were

living in poverty. So I just wanted to give them something better," he told the *Gazette*.

"I've worked at more than 100 projects [like this] in Thailand, and doing this at least protects Burmese and other people from fatal diseases," he added.

Since the clinic opened on September 30 last year, more than 500 villagers have visited it. A dozen or so have been diagnosed as having HIV or Aids. These patients are given counsel-

ing, asked if they want to return home, and receive other care. In some circumstances, patients are given food, medicine and even a place to live.

"For patients with Aids who want to return to their home country, the clinic will contact the Immigration office, help them to complete the necessary paperwork, and help with travel costs," K. Aroonsak said.

Aids sufferers who do not want to go home are cared for by

Caring for people at the bottom of the barrel: Dr Maung Maung Soe (left) and World Vision project coordinator Aroonsak Whongjit.

volunteers. However, budget constraints have forced the clinic to limit the care budget to no more than 2,500 baht a person a month.

Although K. Aroonsak is deeply grateful for the eight million baht in donations from the governments of Japan, Australia, Britain, the US and Hong Kong that made the clinic a reality, he said his main challenge is still a shortage of funds.

Other major obstacles, he said, are a shortage of staff and under-trained volunteers. "All those things are equally significant and we have much more to do," he said.

One of the most economical strategies used by the center is health education, using comic books, video tapes, brochures and posters, most in Burmese language, and volunteers to explain HIV and Aids to villagers. "We also have cheap condoms at just two baht apiece," K. Aroonsak told the *Gazette*.

More volunteers are required to help with the education program, he added. "The most important criterion is the ability to speak Burmese and Thai," he said. Medical experience is not necessary. Volunteers are taught the basic methods of preventing disease from spreading before they teach it to others.

Anyone interested in joining the project should call the Rassada Public Health Care Center at Tel: 076-252749.

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



SINGHA NEW LOOK

Tourist car ban on Koh Chang

Koh Chang is to be ruled off-limits to vehicles from the mainland from 2007, according to the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry.

Environment Minister Plodprasop Suraswadi said the plan would allow only local vehicles to traverse the tourist island in Trat province. He said no more roads would be built on the island under the Koh Chang Development Plan, and the authorities were hoping to encourage people to use boats as their main means of transport.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has floated a plan to develop the island into an international tourist destination on a par with Phuket.

Tourism Minister Sonthaya Kunplome said that about five billion baht would be spent on infrastructure projects on the island, as well as on marketing the island as a tourist attraction.

"We will urgently tackle the problems of garbage and limited water resources there," he said.

K. Sonthaya said the authorities would refrain from building a reservoir on the island, citing environmental concerns.

Land prices on Koh Chang have been increasing, and a rai could now fetch as much as 10 million baht.

Cell division: Mobile phone operator Total Access Communication (DTAC) has called on the government to impose quality-control standards on mobile phone batteries as part of measures to prevent the power cells from exploding.

DTAC is also urging the government to reduce the current 30% import tax on cell phone batteries to encourage consumers to use genuine ones. An industry



Six-year-old twins are 'married' to each other in Samut Sakhon in a traditional Mon ceremony. The ritual is based on the belief that the ceremony will bring improved health to the children, who were both sickly in their early years.

source estimated the market value of mobile phone batteries in Thailand at about one billion baht this year. Many consumers unwittingly buy fake, low-quality batteries because they are unable to distinguish them from real ones. They are also attracted by the lower price, he said.

Runway opposition: A survey by the *Chiang Mai News* found about 80% of people living in Chiang Mai's Mae Hia district oppose the 2.1-billion-baht project to expand Chiang Mai International Airport in their district.

The airport's expansion, set for completion in 2007, will enable the airport to carry 60 flights daily. The newspaper survey is not the only indication of widespread opposition to the plan. A public hearing conducted by Airports of Thailand Plc mirrored the newspaper's results.

To accommodate the airport expansion, 28 privately owned buildings and some local government offices would have to be moved.

A final decision on the plan is expected in about five months.

Green gasoline: A government project to distribute tax-free diesel fuel to fishing boats working 20-40 kilometers offshore is a hit, selling 105.4 million liters of diesel fuel since its inception in April 2000. The project was established to put an end to the offshore sale of fuel smuggled in from neighboring countries.

Somchai Poonsawas, Director of the Customs Department's Marine Enforcement Unit, said current strong sales have resulted from higher demand, a lack of monsoon winds, and a drastic reduction in the smuggling of diesel fuel, known

in Thailand as "green gasoline".

"The green gasoline is of better quality than the illicit product. Moreover it is 3-4 baht a liter cheaper than on the mainland," he said.

Student evaluation: Schools run by the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA) have been ordered to conduct urine tests on their students when the new semester begins this month, as part of a government plan to keep schools drug-free.

Bangkok Deputy Governor Tharin Sangansermisri, who is also in charge of education, said all 433 BMA schools were each given 5,000 baht to carry out the testing.

"The tests should begin immediately at the beginning of the next semester," she said, adding that the BMA's public health department would also offer technical support for the plan, known as the White School Project.

ICT capital of Isarn: Khon Kaen will launch a pilot information and communications technology (ICT) project in Nam Phong and Nong Song Hong districts as part of its effort to become the ICT capital of the Northeast.

Deputy Governor Kaenpetch Chuangrangsri said the ICT research project would enable rural communities to create ICT databases and develop new skills. Each community would have their own chief information officer, he said.

In conjunction with the Software Industry Promotion Agency, the province will also promote the Isarn Software Park, which has already attracted four software companies. Khon Kaen University will jointly supervise the initial budget for the pilot

project, which is 10 million baht.

Fujian flu shots urged: The Public Health Ministry is urging elderly people and children to be immunized against Fujian 'flu. Dr Somsong Rakpong, director of the Medical Sciences Department, said the World Health Organization had warned that Fujian 'flu was spreading in Southeast Asia.

Dr Somsong said many companies produced vaccines and children less than 12 years old, people with coronary disease, elderly people and those infected with HIV should be vaccinated.

Stick to milk, son: Wutthisit Suebsuwan, better known as "Tem" of the boy band UHT, confessed to drunk-driving and assault charges after being arrested last month.

At first he was sentenced to an 8,000-baht fine and a four-month jail term but after he confessed, the court commuted this to a two-month suspended sentence, a 4,000-baht fine and 12 hours of community service.

"Tem" said he was sorry for what he had done, and promised not to lose his temper in the future. He said he might spend his community service clearing an old cemetery.

After the flood: A wide variety of fossilized seashells discovered in Phrae's Long district were dated at around 200 million years old. Phrae Governor Somsak Boonpluang is optimistic that the discovery site can be developed for tourism.

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

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Exodus causes famine

The end of April. Middle-aged tourist couples can occasionally be seen on the streets in Khao Lak, but there is no doubt about it – the season is over.

Some business owners seem to be living in denial, despite the certainty that there are now six months of next-to-nothing ahead. Others, apparently, can hardly wait to get their stuff packed up and go home.

As usual, the restaurants on Bang Niang Beach blew the whistle to end the season first, right in the middle of April while young tourist families with children were still roaming about.

The answer to the question, “Why are you in such a hurry?” will always remain shrouded in mystery, because the beach restaurant owners took the traditional route and fled the scene.

That’s not really much of a boost for tourism.

Many visitors enjoy eating lunch and dinner right on the Beach, within the sound of the ocean – something they have dreamed of and worked long and hard hours for in Europe or the States, or Japan or China, for that matter.

After they fought so hard just a couple of months earlier for the right to put up sunchairs and shades on the beach, it seems rather erratic of the Bang Niang beach business people to go home before the tourists do.

Putting up with boredom:

Khao Lak is rich in natural attractions. There’s a 12-kilometer stretch of pristine beach, with the diving attractions of the Similan Islands a mere hour away by speedboat, well preserved jungle, beautiful mountains, six beautiful waterfalls within easy reach, lagoons and mangroves – you name it.

But there are still several things missing, man-made things that would allow tourists, especially families, to spend a couple of fun-filled hours after dinner or in the afternoon doing something other than nodding their heads in a live music pub or watching on a big-screen TV as Schumi drives



Crazy but true, the novel marriage of resort, golf and Indiana Jones-style adventure. Where? In Khao Lak, of course. The crocodile offers a hole in one, for those who dare risk their balls. The puddles and broken *boraan*-style brick walls are deliberate, to add just the right amount of authenticity to the fun.



to victory for the 25,649th time.

Khao Lak people were promised a gym (oops, where are the investors?), a cinema (just removing the signboard announcing it solved this problem) and a big shopping center (the Khao Lak Center, which actually turned out to be just another row of shophouses) – all dust in the wind.

We almost gave up hope for an innovative Khao Lak attraction when, just like a miracle, out of the blue it appeared ... ta-daaa ... finally Khao Lak got its very first man-made tourist attraction, accessible to rich and poor, big and small: The Khao Lak Jungle Adventure Mini-Golf course.

Yes, miracles do happen. Achim “Kim” Linke, 45, from Germany, has been in Thailand and working in the tourism industry for more than 20 years. Now he has decided to fill in the Khao Lak attraction gap with a beautifully designed mini-golf course.

Knowing this project was underway brought a smile to the face of each and every Khao Lak resident. This splendid attraction opened at the beginning of April and is on the right-hand side of the road to the Chong Fah waterfall, just a few hundred meters from Highway 4.

Here, the visitor finds an exotic “ancient” jungle adventure city, built of red *boraan*-style

(“antique”) clay bricks, amid lush tropical vegetation.

Entering this impressive project is like stepping into an Indiana Jones movie.

Everything, starting right at the entrance with the reception and restaurant, is beautifully laid out and designed.

Arriving guests walk towards an ancient temple wall, dominated by a seated Buddha statue with a waterfall dropping from a height of some four meters. Water courses and plants sit side-by-side with authentically-styled and carefully distressed temple ruins.

Not one resort or hotel in all of Khao Lak comes anywhere near it for design and style.

And we are talking about a mini-golf course here. I was truly impressed. Every mini-golf enthusiast is sure to derive maximum fun from this 18-hole course. Starting off with some

easy mini-greens, the difficulty level steadily increases, though with one or two easier holes interspersed to give room for a soothing break, until the visitors reach Hole 18.

“Here, anyone taking it too seriously will sooner or later start to tear his hair out,” says Kim with a knavish smile. “You can easily hit the ball 20 times or more without ever getting it into the right hole.”

At the start, a player can choose from eight holes, and it’s a bit of a lottery.

Two of the holes scores a hole in one, while the remaining six lead the the ball through tunnels to crazy destinations, including taking it right back to the starting point.

Hole 8 is particularly funny. Here, a realistic crocodile awaits the players with wide-open jaws. If the player manages to hit the ball right into the croc’s mouth, he or she will score a hole in one. Anything else leads to disaster. Puddles and broken brick walls abound.

“The philosophy behind this project was to give Khao Lak what it needed so badly – fun after-dinner fun for families with kids,” Kim explained. “The fun factor is important for our project and for Khao Lak in general.”

Visitors, especially families with kids, will definitely have fun-filled hours for a fee of 250 baht for adults or 150 baht for children. Kids under a meter tall get in free.

The Jungle Adventure Mini-Golf course is illuminated at night to ensure that Khao Lak tourists have a welcome activity option apart from the remaining three or four “hot and sizzling” pubs and bars. The course is open from 12:30 pm to 10 pm.

The mini-golf is a big step forward in helping to increase Khao Lak’s popularity among families – and perhaps the first step down the path to catching up with fun-filled destinations such as Phuket and Samui.

I hope every Khao Lak resident appreciates this “gift” as much as I do. Could the season end on a better note?



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By Franky Gun

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This week



CROSSING THE LINE: CEO of Le Meridien Resorts and Hotels, Robert Riley (5th from right), and Regional Managing Director Asia Pacific, Michael Sagild (rear, right), meet and greet colleagues at Le Meridien Phuket Yacht Club during their recent visit.



CHINDAPOL CHINWAG: More than 500 members of the Chindapol family, including (from right) former MP Rewut Chindapol, President of the Court of Appeal Phaisarn Charoenwut, and Manager of the Ben Ja Run Construction Company Ronachai Chindapol, gathered for the clan's 19th annual reunion.



I SEE UBC: Somphop Poshakrishna (left), MD of Southern TV Network Co Ltd, and Manager-Regional Sales of UBC TV, Somphong Rattanaphan, at a recent Big C Superstore rally showing children that education comes not just from schools.



SPEED INDEED: The "Meet and Greet T-Speed Fair", promoting broadband Internet services from TT&T Public Co Ltd, was held at the Tesco-Lotus Superstore in April. Phuket Vice-Governor Niran Kalayanamit (center), was welcomed by TT&T Senior Vice-President of Marketing and Services Suroj Lamsam (left) and Vilai Chaivises, Tesco-Lotus Phuket Managing Director (right).



EYE IN THE SKY: The HeliCam aerial photography team, with feet firmly on the ground but ideas soaring in the clouds, celebrate the successful launch of their unique service at Tesco-Lotus Superstore.



IN VOGUE: Managing Director of Angel Model + Promotion Management, Ann Hanson (left), and Director of Operations Lies Sol at the recent Pleasure Leisure Fashion Awards held at the Sphinx Theatre and Restaurant, Patong.

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Fostering a haven

The modest buildings and grounds of the Life Home Project are hidden away in Phuket City with no signs or outward evidence of the 40 women and children infected with HIV living within.

It's lunchtime when I arrive, my first visit in around a year. A dozen of the smaller children are having what at first seems a peaceful nap after lunch. But the quiet is broken by sudden coughing and wheezing, little lungs racked by respiratory infection.

"In the past year, we've lost six of our family to Aids," Helene Fallon Wood, Life Home Project's fundraising chairperson tells me. "One was a baby."

"Tuberculosis is common in those infected with HIV so we try to give each of our residents as much personal space as possible to prevent the spread of communicable diseases."

While children try to sleep, in the new art room, a number of women are quietly drawing and painting symmetrical designs onto fabric.

These *mandalas* are then made into banners and sold to benefactors such as Patong's Holiday Inn Resort, where they were hung from the ceilings last Christmas.

Kathy Manthei directs the art program at Life Home Project. The program helps the women, usually rejected by their families and friends, to earn an income to pay for their basic needs.

"Almost all of our women have been housewives infected with HIV by their husbands," explained Kathy.

"They have no skills and have not earned a living in the past. With our art projects, they



Children slumber in the midday heat while their mothers make *mandalas* to sell to benefactors, such as the Holiday Inn Resort.

learn design, drawing, painting, sewing, organizational planning, inventory maintenance and production.

"This allows them to operate and manage their work, thereby giving them potential to earn an income," she continued.

I watch the women work, not unlike women working in factories anywhere in Thailand.

But these women are different. Some have infected sores on their arms and faces, others seem tired. But they all smile when they see me. These women are the lucky ones. They are given medicine and the opportunity to earn money to support their children.

Behind the charming smiles are heartbreaking tales. One of the younger women tells how she was born into a family of six children, all with different fathers. She was sent to live with one of her mother's boyfriends when she was 12.

He raped her and infected her with HIV. Eventually, the boyfriend, her mother and two of her sisters died of Aids. Homeless, this young girl found a place at Life Home Project.

Jose Luis Gay founded the project after teaching local Sea Gypsy children how to sail. The longer he stayed on Phuket, the more he realized the need to help those left behind by the island's soaring prosperity.

"The women are victims from careless husbands who infected them and consequently, their children," Jose said. "Over the past two years, we have in-



Off the WALL

With Bruce Stanley

visited women and children to Life Home Project as they have nowhere else to go.

"In the past year, the government has made anti-retroviral medication available, but that does not save these women from being rejected by their families."

The number of people dying from Aids-related diseases in Western countries is now a fraction of the amount dying at the height of the epidemic. But here in Phuket, I am told, the drugs given to HIV patients are not the latest generation.

These women and children still cannot look forward to a long and healthy life, but will, perhaps, have longer and healthier lives than they would have had without the drugs they receive.

"Life Home Project is indebted to the generosity of the local community, which has supported our programs this past year," added Helene.

"Donations from the British Business Association of Phuket, the Rotary Club of Patong, and the Evason, and last year's fundraising ball at the JW Marriott resort, allowed us to

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of hope



Pennapa "Jim" Wuttimang, Secretary of the Life Home Project, stands in front of a *mandala* banner to be sold at the fundraising gala ball, which will be held at the JW Marriott Phuket Beach Resort & Spa, on May 29.

renovate our main house and buy washing machines and a dishwasher. Dishwashers are important in preventing the spread of TB," she explained.

"But we have outgrown our rented premises. Through this year's ball on May 29, again at the JW Marriott, we hope to raise enough money to buy a piece of land. Our goal is to build a home large enough for all the women and children who need us."

As I prepare to leave Life Home Project, I meet Khun Nui.

She tells me that her mother died of cancer when she was 13. Her father, an alcoholic, blew all the family money on gambling.

Hoping for a better life, she married young to a man who became addicted to heroin and karaoke singers.

Hoping that having children would turn him into a responsible family man, she had several children and supported her family by doing laundry, cleaning the local Chinese shrine, and selling tea and rice soup in the evenings.

Eventually her husband became sick and died. Not long after, she fell ill and ended up living in a cave with others infected with HIV.

"I had nowhere else to go. Then someone told me about Life Home Project and I came to Phuket and now I have food, support and encouragement from Jose, who is like our godfather," said Khun Nui.

"My health is okay, though I have a problem with my eyes. I need an injection into my eye every week in order to slow down the blindness that is part of my HIV condition.

I don't want to be blind. I hold onto my hope and my courage to live."

Khun Nui has written a poem, and has had it translated into English. She hands it to me and smiles.

For more information about the Life Home Project, contact Helene Fallon-Wood or Khun Nut at Tel: 076-242632 or email: lifehome@loxinfo.co.th.

**We took the wrong direction
And then what?
Do we bury ourselves in sadness and hopelessness?
No!**

**Time goes by. Never wait for anybody.
Seize the days we have left,
Why do we wait for death?
Let's live with hope in every breath we take.**

**There will be Life tomorrow,
Though our wish will never be given
And obstacles will keep coming.
Let's keep the hope to breathe, to live this life, to smile, to laugh, and to love.**

**My life has been very lonely.
Will anybody understand how it really feels,
Especially when my heart and soul became so chilled?
I have fought with suffering.
I have borne all the pain.
I have waited for people who are generous enough to understand,
And there I have found them.**

**Although my face looks ugly
And my eyes are not shining bright but are a little bit blind,
I still have a strong mind to live for tomorrow.**

**Although it is not cured today,
There may be a cure one day.
Please don't give up because of your sorrow.
There may be a magical medicine tomorrow.
Who knows?**

**If you ask me if there really is a magical medicine
I am telling you from my heart within,
Yes there is.
It's simply the love, kindness, care and understanding.
All the medical treatment within.**

- Nui, mother and Aids sufferer.

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In The Stars

by Isla Star

TAURUS (April 21-May 21): Taureans who are celebrating coming of age this week are likely to be doing so away from their usual habitat. Travel is on the agenda and this could open doors to new possibilities. If you're tired of what has become a daily rut, don't despair because there's every likelihood that a dramatic career change is around the corner. The number 9 has special meaning mid-week.



poised to sign an important agreement. Last-minute information comes to light and you should pay careful attention before making a final commitment. Your luck will be better after Tuesday, so stalling until then is your best bet. When a friend suggests an innovative scheme this weekend your initial reaction is to step quickly sideways. But the idea is worth a hearing.



GEMINI (May 22-June 21): Finances will require deft juggling and you may have to delay delivering on a promise to a loved one. Plan a surprise social outing to cushion the blow and the air should remain clear. Where work is concerned, this is not an auspicious time to trust to luck. If you want to be sure that a job is done, don't rely on another person's word.



LEO (July 24-August 22): The atmosphere is cooler than you imagine. Clear signs are coming that someone in your life is a fair-weather friend. This week gives you an opportunity to put this relationship into a more realistic context and avoid further sticky situations. A work-related problem dissolves and you are about to learn of promotion possibilities. Wearing more earthy shades will help you feel confident.



CANCER (June 22-July 23): The heat is on for Cancerians who are

VIRGO (August 23-September 23): Your social life is set to expand. Your natural charm is at an all-time high this week and others are drawn to you like a magnet. A small financial disappointment shouldn't be cause for concern because large gains are more than possible in the near future. Family matters need handling with kid gloves this weekend. If it's a problem concerning in-laws, choose your words carefully.



LIBRA (September 24-October 23): Librans often find it hard to say something directly, but this week you will need to find the words to put someone straight before matters get seriously out of hand. The chances are that you will gain a new aura of respect by facing up to what is really going on and dealing with it in a clear-cut way. On a lighter note, holiday plans seem certain to take off.



SCORPIO (October 24-November 22): Burning the candle at both ends is a necessity this week for those who are determined to see closure in work-related issues. However, this should be a temporary state of affairs and a more relaxed atmosphere will prevail as next weekend approaches. Stick to



your principles when a colleague makes an untoward suggestion. Don't cut corners if you want to maintain your reputation for trustworthiness.

SAGITTARIUS (November 23-December 21): It may feel as if there's not much going on, but action is slowly stirring behind the scenes. Your ability to be in the right place at the right time will bring some benefit this week and there are indications that you could soon be splashing out on a new luxury item. The number 5 will bring you luck on Tuesday.



CAPRICORN (December 22-January 20): An abandoned romantic dream is about to re-emerge. Just when you were thinking that all was lost, the target of your affections comes back on the scene. Your need for security should encourage you to ask the right questions. If the answers are less than satisfactory, you will know how to react. May means fresh starts for those born under the sign of Capricorn. Don't make the wrong choice.



AQUARIUS (January 21-February 19): If you've done your homework, there will be no problems passing



the exam. Aquarians who are well-prepared can expect good results from wherever they direct their energy this week. On the other hand, if recent hot weather conditions have encouraged you to do no more than collapse in the shade, you could find that livelier candidates are already at the winning post. Wear watermelon red to get into gear.

PISCES (February 20-March 20): Any beachcombing you indulge in this week will turn up more than just flotsam and jetsam. Pisceans who keep their eyes peeled are likely to come across something of value. In any case, taking regular long beach walks will help you get back in shape if you've been spending too much time in a horizontal position due to recent boiling temperatures. Taurus is interested, but is finding it difficult to make a move. Just give it time.



ARIES (March 21-April 20): You should be able to see clearly in which direction your advantages lie and follow through to a satisfactory conclusion this week. Most Arians will have no difficulty rising to the challenges that May will throw at them. Regarding romantic affairs, there's a choice to be made – and this shouldn't be a matter of tossing a coin. Give careful thought to what you expect to get from a relationship.



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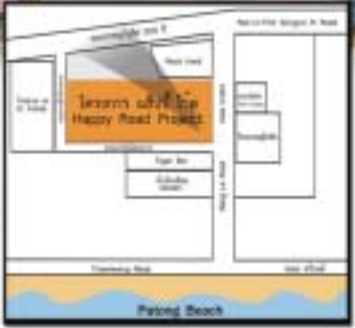
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The Shark is dead. Long live the Star

Some of the newer members of our happy little community may not be aware that a giant among discos once stood in Patong. And get this: it was one of the few places that actually had a disco license.

That disco was the Shark Club which wore the mantle of No 1 place in town. A good job they did of it, too.

Testament, if needed, is found on the Internet, where the place is reviewed and discussed as if it were still operating.

For a variety of reasons, the Shark Club was ordered closed. The venue finally re-opened last year as Star Wars, and then after a rethink as Star World, and finally as the Star Club.

It had a bit of a makeover but nothing as splendid as the Tiger Pub, which was surprising as it was owned by the same people. The Tiger Pub is outstanding, the Star Club looked like an afterthought.

Through the changes never quite managed to regain its position at the top of the tree. The fact that they had deaf and tasteless DJs banging away for the benefit of their friends night after night did not help.

On the several occasions I went there, I never saw the DJ even look at the dance floor to check whether he was actually achieving the purpose for which he was employed – specifically, to make people dance. His booth, however, was always full of minor DJs and people in what I hesitate to call DJ clothing, who always looked very impressed with the obscurity/undanceability of the tunes he was playing.

All this may be about to change. A new group of investors has appeared on the scene and they are a shrewd bunch who have not put a foot wrong in over 15 years in Thailand.

First to go were the walls. They have been opened up with large windows and the effect is amazing. Now the club is clearly

'Modify are mainly from Phuket but have been working in Trang. When I saw them I could not help but conclude that they had the most interesting selection of pants I have ever seen worn by one band in one night.'

visible from the junction of Soi Bangla and Rat-U-Thit 200 Pi Rd.

The new music policy is proper party music, not ramping up to dance or techno until very late. The music is played by a DJ with the ability to do it, or is programmed by one of the new partners, a former Juliana's DJ, until they find someone suitable.

Ideally, by next high season they will have recruited a person-



ality DJ who may even talk between records and have a laugh with people who are on holiday.

Another immediate change has been the construction of a super stage, complete with excellent sound and light system, and big enough to hold the seven-piece band Modify and their four gorgeous, well-choreographed dancers.

Modify are mainly from Phuket but have been working in Trang. When I saw them I could not help but conclude that they had the most interesting selection of pants I have ever seen worn by one band in one night. They play a mixture of pop classics, current chart hits and top Thai tunes. Not a sign of *Hotel California*.

The venue is now being positioned as Patong's next level of entertainment, as opposed to a pick-up joint. The managers aim to make it a quality live music and entertainment venue, and already have a pro-

gram of events planned to keep us amused during the low season.

The first major event will be the hosting of a concert for one of the hottest new pop stars, David "Farang Lang Kwai" (the farang buffalo rider), who has a mass following in Isarn. He will be supported by the legendary Oy Khatorn, well known for her popular sing-along, lighter ballads.

The concert will be from 9 pm on May 14. Take some ear protectors as the screaming may be dangerous. I know; I am a veteran of the Tik Sherow gig in Patong a few months ago.

In my travels through the south of Thailand, I have noticed many of the big cities have very large venues with similar dancing and music on offer, and they are usually fantastically popular.

The Star Club reminds me of those venues. Entertainment is key, and it looks like the new

management know what they are doing. I expect this place to be a success with the local Thais because it is a product familiar to them.

The Western male audience in Phuket typically go where the Thai girls go, but the new management is planning a full program of events for the high season that is aimed at also attracting couples and mixed gender groups.

It's a tough challenge, but they have the enthusiasm and talent to make it happen. The development of the massive Jungceylon hotel and shopping complex across the road, which will become the new center of Patong, will increase their chances tenfold.

We all want more entertainment and it's up to us to support those who endeavor to provide it. See you there.

After DARK by Sam Vimes

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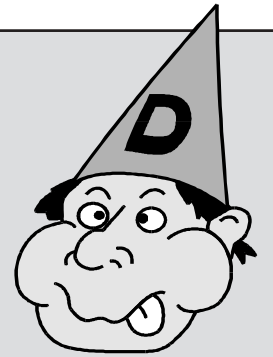
KIDS THE FUN PAGE FOR ALL THE FAMILY

Hidden Words

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

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

Get your brain in gear with The Monster Quiz



- What is the correct word for the small metal hoop that supports a lampshade?
- From what language does the word "teak" derive?
- Who discovered Penicillin?
- Which movie won best picture and best actor Oscars in 1967?
- And who was the actor?
- Which rock star's real name is Gordon Sumner?
- In 1977, 582 people died in a collision between two Boeing 747s. Where?
- Who lost the Punic Wars against Rome?
- When did the Han dynasty come to power in China?
- Who was sworn in as Vice-President of the USA in 1953?
- Which US state is known as The Bluegrass State?
- What is the capital of Macedonia?
- What happened there on July 26, 1963?
- Whose son was kidnapped by Bruno Hauptmann?
- Which country is between Switzerland and Austria?
- Vexillology is the study of what?
- Which country's flag consists of vertical bars of black, yellow and red?
- In which country would you find the Ophthalma Range of mountains?
- Who was chess world champion from 1972 to 1975?
- Which movie had the alternative title, *How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love The Bomb*?

Answers next week.

Never a Cross Word!

Across

- Arctic or Indian, for example.
- Capital of India.
- Anti-aircraft fire.
- Rapidly pulsing light.
- Donkey.
- Thaksin and Chuan, for example.
- Birds' element.
- Tripoli inhabitant, perhaps.
- Dry.
- Daft.
- Gardeners' enemies.

Down

- San Franciscan, for example.
- Not acid.
- Bat's primary sensory organs.
- Sleeping through the winter.
- Attacker.
- Home of Ariel Sharon.
- Printer's blue.

Solution next week.

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

Brain Buster!!

Mel Colly stared through the dirty soot-smearred window on the 26th floor of the office tower. Overcome with depression he slid the window open and jumped through it. It was a sheer drop outside the building to the ground. Miraculously after he landed he was completely unhurt. Since there was nothing to cushion his fall or slow his descent, how could he have survived?

A. Mel Colly was a window washer. He was so sick and tired of window washing, he opened the window and jumped inside.

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S MONSTER QUIZ

- King Oliver;
- Pi;
- Duff;
- Tongan;
- Doris Day;
- Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria;
- Iran;
- Russia;
- Andrew Johnson;
- Edinburgh Castle;
- Pete Sampras;
- Die in a plane crash;
- United Arab Emirates;
- Hank Aaron;
- Tobacco;
- GI Joe;
- Missouri;
- Bank of America;
- William Hogarth;
- 1994.

Solution to last week's Crossword

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

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HEARD & scene

The *Gazette's* Rittiwat Suwannarattaphum and Athairat Muangkong went out and about and asked: "If you could telephone anyone, who would it be – and why?"



Name: Patcharawadee Sintusiri
Age: 21
Origin: Krabi
Job: Student

If I could phone anyone, the first and last one would be the Lord. I am just curious to know why he doesn't allow all people to be equally rich. Then, I would probably ask him for his holy blessing to make everybody have peaceful lives, with no more killings or fighting. This would be fair, and we would all gain merit.



Name: Kanoknart Ramna
Age: 21
Origin: Phuket
Job: Student

If I could phone anybody, I think I would call myself – in the future. I would bombard my future-self with a load of questions, mostly about how my life will turn out. And one must-ask question would be whether or not I could have a romantic moment with Keanu Reeves. I hope the answer will be a "yes".



Name: Tanja Hinsch
Age: 20
Origin: Denmark
Job: Student

If I could call anybody, I would call Superman. I would tell him that although he is a super hero of great fame, he looks rather ridiculous wearing bright red tights. I would invite him to my place for advice on better dressing. This could improve his image, and perhaps, with redesigned red pants, turn him into a fashion icon.



Name: Sunthorn Sae-Eaw
Age: 19
Origin: Phuket
Job: Chef

If I could phone anybody, it would be Prince William of England. There's probably a long line of women flirting with him. I would ask him how he takes care of his body and why he projects so much charm. When I have this information, half of the women in the world would probably form a queue asking *me* to marry them.



Name: Chris Woodward
Age: 48
Origin: England
Job: Carpenter

If I could phone anyone, the first that springs to mind would be my 25-year-old daughter, Enni. While I am on vacation, she might be having a party at my apartment. It would be really scary if I could hear chattering and noise. I would beg her not to ravage my apartment – I just don't want to be homeless.

News stories I would like to see

Here are some imaginary news stories I wish the papers would run. They won't, of course, because the stories are false. But, hey, a guy can dream, can't he?

MINISTER DENIES NEW SONGKRAN POLICY: The Minister of Social Control, Pharisee Savonarolakul, today denied rumors that her ministry is considering a new policy with regard to Songkran celebrations.

"Our current policy will be in force for the foreseeable future," Minister Pharisee affirmed. "That is to discourage people from drinking while driving during Songkran, because too



many people are getting killed." The rumors, which Khun Pharisee dismissed as "malicious, frivolous, and ill-intentioned," say that the ministry plans to drop the policy for the following reasons:

During Songkran, smart people stay home. Anybody who goes out on the streets is stupid. Anybody who drinks and drives is even more stupid. So it is actually the stupid people who are getting killed.

This trend is not to be discouraged. Killing off large numbers of stupid people during Songkran will result in a smarter gene pool and a more intelligent population.

Minister Pharisee dismissed the rumors by saying, "Balderdash, poppycock, and twaddle. Our government has no problem with the current gene pool. After all, it produces people who vote for us.

"And it's not true that only stupid people go outside during Songkran. Why, the entire cabinet went out this past Songkran, and look how smart we are."

US GOVT MULLS NEW IMMIGRATION RULES: The US Immigration and Naturalization Service today would neither confirm nor deny reports of new restrictions to be placed on incoming tourists. It has already drawn flak from several governments who are upset at its new policy of fingerprinting and photographing new arrivals.

"We are currently considering the possibility of requiring incoming tourists to provide stool samples immediately upon arrival," an anonymous source reported. "This is because we have learned that stool samples of terrorists contain a significantly larger percentage of adrenaline than those of non-terrorists.

"Targeting their stools gives us a potent new weapon against terrorists. New arrivals whose stool samples show a high amount of adrenaline will be detained for thorough questioning," he added.

When asked if tourists could bring their own samples with them from abroad, the source said, "No, We don't know whose stools they might be carrying. But if we take samples on the spot, carefully monitored by skilled excrementologists, we will know exactly where they come from."

Asked what would happen to tourists who were unable to produce stools on demand, the source smiled and held up an enema kit.

US GOVT POO-POOS NEW CONSPIRACY THEORY: A White House spokesman, Scott McClellan, today scoffed at a conspiracy theory currently being bruited about on the Al-Jazeera television network.

Many Iraqis believe that the suicide bombings and other attacks on Coalition forces throughout Iraq are actually being encouraged by the Coalition Provisional Authority.

"Why would we do that?" McClellan asked at a press conference. "How stupid do you think we are? Wait, don't answer that question."

Sheikh Yabooty, the leader of the Iraqi dissident group Al-Foofaraw, has suggested that the American government, far from having its head stuck in a dark and shameful place, is acting

with hitherto unprecedented subtlety and guile.

But he put it somewhat more bluntly: "Boosh not stupid. Or maybe Boosh stupid but Cheney, Rumsfeld not. They make Iraqis kill American troops and other Iraqis. This give Americans excuse to say, 'OK, we give up, we go home.'

"Then big trouble in Iraq. Sunnis kill Shia, Shia kill Sunnis, everybody kill Kurds. Governing Council run away to luxury villas on Riviera.

"Everything big mess. Finally terrorists take control, set up government, rule Iraq.

"All terrorists happy. Osama and Al-Qaeda come out of caves in Afghanistan, ride in triumph into Baghdad. Hamas, Hezbollah, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Islamic Jihad – all terrorist groups come to Baghdad, have big party.

"No music, just lots of yelling. No dancing, just terrorists kissing each other and firing guns in air. No alcohol, just tea and coffee. No women, just sheep. Some party, you betcha.

"Then, while party going on, America nuke Baghdad. All terrorists wiped out. George Boosh happy, win election. Americans make him king for life," he concluded.

Despite McClellan's dismissal of this theory as "pure hogwash," US Secretary of State Colin Powell was overheard to mutter, "We should be so smart."

S. Tsow can be flamed at stow@yahoo.com, except when he's providing stool samples.

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Brilliant work of demented genius

Writers Ernest Hemingway and H L Mencken considered Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* as the great American novel. The tradition of an adolescent narrator spinning his tale loosely continued in such disparate novels as J D Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

This genre has now reached its apotheosis with DBC Pierre's *Vernon God Little* (Faber and Faber, London, 2003, 279pp).

This is a dazzling pinwheel of a novel, outsized, profane, farcical, wacky, brutal, poignant, tender, and howlingly funny.

The narrator is a 15-year-old schoolboy from a small Texas town whose best friend is a "Meskin" boy named Jesus Navarro who one day shoots dead 16 of his high school classmates before turning the rifle on himself.

You know you're in the hands of a demented genius when the novel opens like this:

"It's hot as hell in Martirio, but the papers on the porch are icy with the news ... It tells you normal times just ran howling from town. Probably forever. God knows I tried my best to learn the ways of this world, even had inklings we could be glorious; but after all that's happened, the inkles ain't easy anymore. I mean - what kind of f—en life is this?"

F—en is Vernon's favorite word. The novel opens with him in the town jail, being questioned about his friendship with Jesus.

The town has been taken over by an unruly mob of cable news camera teams and tabloid hacks. Pressured on all sides, Vernon dreams of escape over the border to Mexico.

Eulalio (Lally, Lalito) Ledesma is a TV camera repairman who has stolen a minicam and passes himself off as a CNN reporter.

He latches on to Vernon and to Vernon's widowed mom who, like nearly everyone else in this novel, is obese, dim-witted, greedy, self-obsessed, and a slave to the TV tabloids.

Eulalio moves steadily up through a chain of women as he

develops himself into a one-man media conglomerate.

Vernon is passed on to a demented shrink named Dr Oliver Goosens and flees from a suspicious rectal examination. Packing up his few belongings for his flight to Mexico, he decides on his CDs of Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings and Hank Williams.

"I kept them because those boys have seen some shit - hell, all they sing is about the shit they've seen; you just know they woke up plenty of times on a wooden floor somewhere, with 90 flavors of trouble riding on their ass. The slide-guitar understands your trouble. Then all you need is the beer."

He takes a bus down to Houston to see Taylor Figueroa, a first-year college girl he idolizes, then makes it across the border to Mexico. Broke, he sells everything he owns in a *cantina*. Which leads to this scene:

"Don't f—en ask me when the first tequila arrived. Suddenly, later in life, glass-clear skies swim through the open side of the bar, with stars like droplets on a spider's web, and I find myself smoking sweet, oval-shaped cigarettes called Delicados, apparently from my own pack. I'm loaded off my ass. These guys' mustaches are up where their hair should be, and huge f—en caves are howling underneath, full of gold and tonsils, just look at them, singing their hearts out."

Meanwhile, a conspiracy of dunces has plastered Vernon's face all over TV, accusing him not only of being an accomplice in the massacre but also of 18 other murders while he's been in Mexico. Betrayed by Taylor Figueroa, he winds up on Death Row.

It is only here, toward the end of the novel, that Vernon returns to the day of the massacre and we learn what had driven Jesus Navarro over the edge.

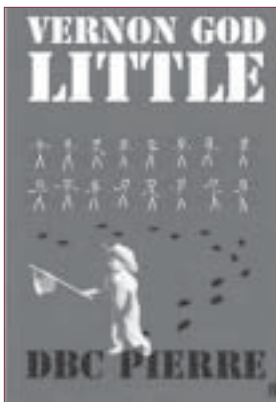
The end is a little too pat, just as the arrival of Tom Sawyer spoils the end of *Huckleberry Finn*. But this novel is a towering achievement.

And I only learned after reading this masterpiece that it won the 2003 Booker Prize. And most deservedly so.



Off the SHELF

By James Eckardt



I try to refrain from standing on a soapbox and expounding my prejudices in this column because I tend to get wobbly and slip off. Metaphorically and physically.

This week, though, I would like to bend your ear with a few observations about events that may affect Phuket's future in profound ways. Or I may have had too much *ma muang* and fallen into a columnist's clammy *klong*. You decide.

The Software Industry Promotion Agency (Sipa) kicked off its activities in Phuket with a day-long Software Business Seminar a couple of weeks ago.

The seminar outlined a series of activities and goals which, with a bit of luck and a lot of hard work, could finally make the phrase "Cyber Paradise" more than a cynical sigh.

Let's face it. Phuket doesn't hold legions of university-trained, English-adept computer savants: we'll never be able to compete on that score with, let's say, Bangalore.

Phuket doesn't enjoy 8 Mbps of broadband readily available in every nook and cranny of the island: that's Hong Kong. We don't have the mountains of capital and marketing savvy available in, oh, Singapore.

But Phuket does have one huge advantage over all those places. It can be summarized in a simple question: Given the choice, who the hell would live in Bangalore, Hong Kong or Singapore, when they could live in Phuket?

That's where we have the competition beat cold. Our greatest strength. The one area where Phuket leaves all the other Cyber Centers in the dust.

Sipa, as a government agency, works with the Board of Investment. The BoI's prime task is to bring big business to Thailand by using corporate tax incentives, providing help

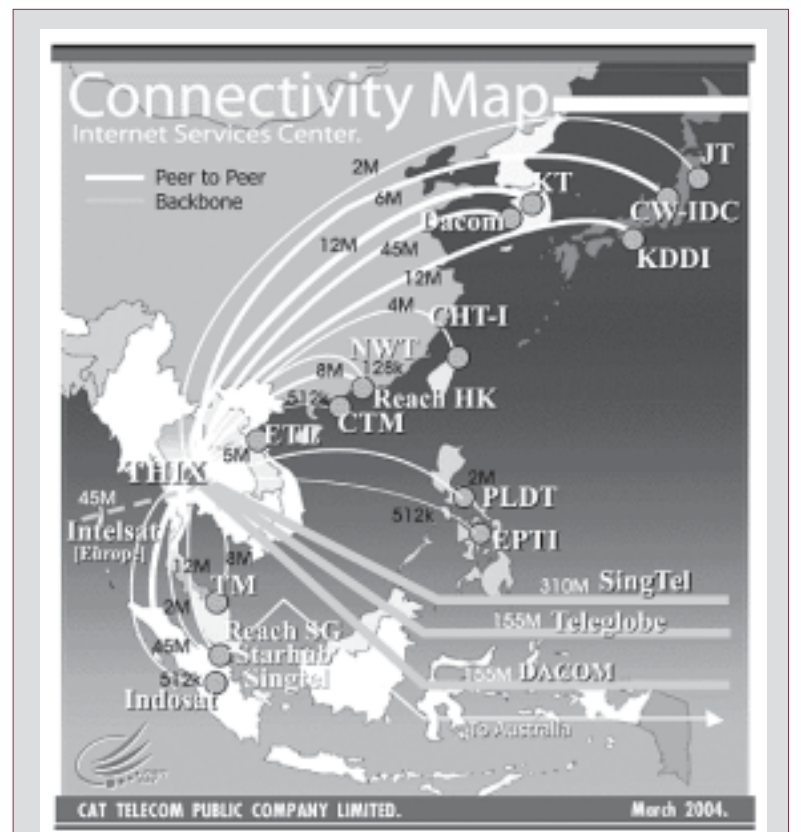
setting up manufacturing sites, reducing import tariff on imported manufacturing equipment, and the like.

Of course, Sipa is interested in bringing traditional BoI-sized corporations to Phuket: an IBM development center, or a Microsoft team (for, say, Xbox games, or Windows Mobile platform support), maybe a J2ME Java mobile application center (McNealy should spread some of those two billion Microsoft bucks out here where the, uh, Sun shines, eh?).

Landing a big-name software company through mega-BoI incentives would do much to put Phuket on the global software development map.

But in the long term, in my opinion anyway, Phuket stands to benefit the most from cultivating a big bunch of small companies: a thousand points of software entrepreneurial light, if you will.

The largest growth in the software business in Phuket won't come from big companies moving their development and



According to the Communication Authority of Thailand's official Internet map, all the country's data gets routed through Bangkok. Could Sipa/Phuket break the logjam?

Sipa: Gearing up for a great leap forward?

support efforts to our sunny isles. Rather, the big boom will come from within - small, scrappy, companies with great ideas and little or no capital, ready to try new approaches - the kind of environment that will bring sustainable growth in employment, for foreigners and Thais alike.

But that ain't BoI territory. At least traditionally, BoI has gone after the big fish.

Sipa needs to work with the big companies, sure, but it also needs to make the Phuket playing field inviting to lots of smaller companies.

Most surprising: based on what I've seen, Sipa seems to understand this.

The Software Business Seminar addressed many of the issues that face small software startups: quick visas and work permits for techies; "scaling down" BoI requirements and making them more software-company friendly; easy access to high-quality training; help with marketing.

One of the main objectives presented by Sipa: "To attract foreign as well as local software specialists who are Phuket lovers to invest and work in Phuket."

That draws a double-thumbs-up from my direction.

While I'm on the subject, there's an interesting opportunity awaiting Sipa in Phuket - a true litmus test of Sipa's near-term capabilities.

At this moment, all major high-speed Internet lines carrying data on and off the island go through Bangkok. Many people believe that the peren-

nial slowdowns we see here are due to Bangkok sucking up bandwidth, leaving those of us "up-country" to fight over the dregs.

Few people realize that the Internet backbone, in fact, runs near Phuket's shores: there's no technical reason for Phuket's bits to run upstream to the congestion in Krung Thep.

We could, at least in theory, tap directly into the Internet backbone and start the island sipping directly from the cyber fire hydrant. There are monumental political hurdles to clear, to be sure.

But I wonder if Sipa will be able to get Phuket linked directly to the backbone?

Time will tell.

Woody Leonhard has written a number of books in the "...for Dummies" series on computing. Contact him by email to: woody@khunwoody.com

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Time to ban Bangla traffic

It's happened before and, in this perilous world, it will probably happen again – the jitters that Phuket suffers when anything related to terrorism happens within a few thousand miles of the island.

This is not to say that the jitters are unjustified. In the aftermath of the destruction of the World Trade Center, local hotheads told the *Gazette* that if the US attacked Afghanistan, local Muslims would target Westerners for retaliation.

After the Bali bombing, the foreign ministries of many countries advised their nationals to avoid or at least be very careful in Phuket, especially in Patong, which was perceived (because of its supposed similarity to Kuta) as the next potential target for Jemaah Islamiyah bombers. In both cases nothing happened.

Now the separatist organization Bersatu has issued a warning that foreigners should stay away from the five southernmost provinces of Thailand and “the neighbour provinces (Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi, Pattalung)”. While there is no explicit threat of violence, there is an implicit one.

So Phuket is once again on high alert. The governor has ordered all government offices to leave the lights on all night, police have been moved to night duty, and security has been beefed up at important places, such as the airport and tourist sites.

Yet again, however, one simple tactic to make potential bombers' jobs more difficult has not been employed: making Soi Bangla pedestrians-only.

Bar owners in Patong were recently asked by police to keep an eye out for motorbikes left unattended, particularly the newer models that have enough space under the seat for storing a crash helmet. This is certainly a sign that the police consider bombs driven into Bangla a genuine threat. Yet the road has not been closed to traffic.

True, the tourist season is winding down, but Soi Bangla at night is still the place with the highest concentration of “soft targets” – people – on the island.

Barring traffic has the added attraction that it would make Soi Bangla a much more pleasant place to frequent. A temporary ban on traffic could easily be turned into a permanent one.

This suggestion has been made time and again, and the only opponents appear to be the tuk-tuk and motorbike taxi drivers who feel they have something to lose if barred from driving along Bangla.

Can this really be the reason the provincial government has not implemented a traffic ban? Are the interests of a small group to be protected at the expense of the potential deaths of hundreds?

– The Editor



Letters

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

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

Dog rapist deserves full shame treatment

The European “animal” in Kamala who sexually abused a dog for six months needs to be named and shamed.

At the very least he should be made aware that other people know of his depravity.

Congratulations and thanks must go to Khun Gaew and the Soi Dog Foundation for rescuing and taking care of the unfortunate dog.

Alistair Beveridge
Phuket

Puzzling decisions on home ownership

After reading *Secret of transparency* [*Gazette*, May 1-7], I would like to relate my recent experience.

My wife and I are building a house in Chalong. Following legal advice, my wife owns the land and I have two signed, registered, back-to-back 30-year leases on the land.

Late last year I had plans drawn up using a reputable, well-established Thai architect, who currently has many sizable projects on Phuket.

When he submitted the plans for approval by Chalong Tambon Administration Organization [*OrBorTor*], I asked that they be registered in my name as I will own the house.

After several weeks of delay, the *OrBorTor* replied that I could not register the plans in my name because I was not a resident of Thailand.

My architect was most surprised. He had just submitted plans on behalf of two other foreigners, in Laguna and Cherg Talay, who had their plans approved and registered in their names without delay or hassle. Neither foreigner had a residence permit.

I was not going to challenge the Chalong *OrBorTor* decision, as this would likely have delayed the plans from being approved at all and could well have caused “technical problems” later on.

But I find it very hard to accept that one government officer has the power to interpret the law as he or she thinks fit. How can it be that a person can do one thing in one district, yet is not allowed to do the same thing in another?

Homeless in Chalong

Internet connections – a step back in time

Nearly five months after the government promised fast and cheap Internet connections, the cost of a reasonably fast connection in Phuket is between five and eight times more expensive than in the US or Europe. When will we get these ADSL lines at a reasonable price?

Does the government think it can get IT-related businesses to come to Phuket when they will have to step back five or six years in time? Fiber optics cost the same in Thailand as everywhere else, so what's the reason for the high price?

Who is getting all the money made on the ADSL lines? Someone must be making plenty.

The next time the people

advocating an IT future for Phuket visit Singapore, someone should also show them what a really fast Internet connection looks like.

Karsten
Phuket

More must be done on Phuket security

It's reassuring that the authorities are making a serious effort to safeguard people, property and investors after the recent violence in the southern provinces.

But what about the vulnerable tourist spots in Phuket? For example Soi Bangla – surely it's time to make it a pedestrian zone, to at least minimize the risks.

What about reassuring us that the emergency services can cope with a major incident? Are there enough hospital beds and trained medical staff?

If anything happens in Phuket, even a minor incident, then the tourist industry here is finished. It's on the decline already. The economy will be finished and the unrest and problems of the deep south provinces will quickly surface all across the region, because without tourist revenue these provinces have little else.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised about the apparent lack of vision from local governors when the same naivety is demonstrated by the national government.

I hear so many times of Thailand's desire to be like Malaysia or Singapore. Indonesia would be a better comparison.

Paul Brent
Phuket

Phuket Gazette

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

GRIPING AT THE GRASSROOTS

I was born in Khok Makham, Rawai's village 2. I had to stop studying at grade seven because my parents had so many children to take care of. Currently, I operate a small beverage stand and beach lounge/umbrella operation at Nai Harn beach. I have been doing this for 10 years. I can make some money doing this, especially in high season when many visitors come to Nai Harn.

Nai Harn was very different 10 years ago. There were far fewer vendors back then. It will be alright, however, as long as they are organized properly, because there are more tourists now than there were in the past.

In the beginning, *OrBorTor* Rawai had their people look after the trash situation on Nai Harn Beach, which is especially bad during the monsoon season. Local vendors and beach-chair operators pitched in and helped out.

Later, the *OrBorTor* told us they didn't have enough staff to take care of the entire Nai Harn area. But this is our place of business, so if we don't keep it clean, who will?

Our beach guard also keeps an eye out to make sure tourists are safe, and we have assisted the police in catching thieves.

Last year, my wife and I saw a pair of suspicious characters and reported them to the police, who were able to apprehend them after they snatched the bag of a foreigner – as we thought they might. We did this because we don't want Nai Harn to become a hangout for criminals.

When I find something wrong in Rawai, I report it to the *OrBorTor*. I expect them to at least listen to our problems, but they don't seem to care about us much. We always get the same answer: that they do

Thailand's constitution mandates devolution of power to local bodies, but many government critics feel the present administration is doing just the opposite – strengthening Bangkok's already powerful grip over the provinces and denying citizens the right to take part in their own government.

One man who believes that the voice of the common man is being given scant attention, even at the most basic grassroots level of government, is Nai Harn villager Somphot Maneesri.

Feeling his community's needs have been largely ignored by the Tambon Rawai Administration Organization (*OrBorTor* Rawai), he has initiated his own Orchid Project to undertake small-scale public works projects that he feels the *OrBorTor* should be responsible for.

But his group's work has received a rather frosty reception from some members of *OrBorTor* Rawai, an organization he once campaigned for a seat on – but failed to win. Now he is running for the village headman in Rawai village 2.

FIRST PERSON



not have enough staff or budget.

So we set up our own group, the Orchid Group, to do such work. There are about 15 of us, all Rawai residents.

Even without much of a budget or manpower we can make a difference, such as when we cleaned soil and debris from the roadside drainage ditch in front of Sawang-Arom temple, which is prone to flooding during the rainy season. We never saw an *OrBorTor* team dealing with that problem, even though the flooding damages the road.

When we asked the *OrBorTor* to fix it, they said they didn't have the budget. I

never know how they spend their budget. They don't do what they should do, such as deal with the garbage problem. Many people know this.

The Orchid Group keeps an eye on Rawai. We spruce up public areas on weekends, even though we have no funding. We don't do it just for village 2, but in all of Rawai's villages. We don't discriminate between Buddhist and Muslim, because we are all Thais.

But whenever I suggest to officials that things are not in proper condition they treat me with contempt, as if I am their enemy. With our activities to improve

Rawai, we were seen as too assertive. But I don't think I will be in danger for doing the things that should really be the *OrBorTor*'s responsibility. I am a Rawai native and I see them as my brothers.

Last year I ran for an *OrBorTor* Rawai seat, but I was not successful. But I introduced myself to the people and I think I got positive feedback.

This year, I will run for Village 2 headman to replace Sin Ponrop, who will retire on August 28.

Our first priority is garbage. The *OrBorTor* has been unable to deal with this problem. We often found mysterious garbage bags dumped in our village. Later, we found out that they came from houses in Nai Harn that are not served by the *OrBorTor* garbage collectors.

I expect the *OrBorTor* to figure out what the real problems are before doing work on projects that Rawai doesn't need. After they meet, we want to know what they plan to do.

In my experience, the common man is a "nobody" in the eyes of community leaders. When I asked a past village headman to sign a land document, he kept postponing it. Later, I had to go over his head to get it approved, and then he complained that I had done so.

That's why I want to get some authority. The job of headman is to serve the people, listen to their problems and keep them informed.

If I am elected headman, I will continue the activities that our group is doing, but I will be able to serve the community in an official capacity as well.

If I fail, I will continue to work for people with Orchid Group. I just want to keep my home village of Rawai well-maintained. That's my only concern.

Lousy Internet connection

Why do I have to dial up 17 times, at any time of the day, to get online with KSC, I-Net or EnjoyNet? Or, in fact, any ISP? Is it a case of not enough modems, or lack of bandwidth, or over-subscription?

Android Humanoid
Rawai

Penwipa Pianchob, Metropolitan Support Manager of Internet Thailand Public Co Ltd, replies:

If we know your login name, the I-Net dial-up number that you use and the error messages you are getting, these will help us figure out the problems more easily.

We have checked if we have any of the problems you mentioned and have found that, in Phuket, we do not. In addition, our modems in Phuket are all working fine.

There are four I-Net dial-up numbers in Phuket, as follows: 076-232212 and 076-233331 (56k connections for TT&T subscribers), and 076-357888 and 076-360036 (56k connections for TOT subscribers).

There can be many reasons for dial-up connection problems. These include incorrectly set properties for dial-up network-

ing, poor telephone lines, or a malfunctioning modem or modem driver. We need to have more details in order to solve your problem. Please contact our call center at 076-210656.

Weerapong Anakewongsawat, Support Technician at Internet KSC Phuket, replies:

There are three numbers for connection to KSC in Phuket. These are 076-358000, 076-360222 and 076-360555. The problems may be from poor telephone lines or lines carrying a lot of traffic. Your computer should show a code or error message giving the reason you couldn't connect.

Most probably the difficulty is due to a busy line so you can change to use another number from the three that we have. We will increase the telephone lines in the future if those three numbers get too busy.

The contact numbers for technical support are 076-214496 and 076-214497.

Utaiwan Bua-ngam, Customer Service Officer of Professional Computing System Co Ltd (EnjoyNet), replies:

There are many possible reasons for your problem, but I

think it may come down to busy lines.

We have three access numbers for the Phuket area – 076-233299, 076-360000 and 076-360055. If you find that one of them is busy, you can use one of the others.

For more information about technical support for EnjoyNet call 076-355501. To help us solve the problem, tell us your user name and the error number or message.

Ex-boss won't pay what he owes

I worked for a well-known property firm in November and early December last year.

While I was there, I paid out-of-pocket to buy some things the company needed. I was told by my ex-boss that I would be reimbursed from the petty cash account.

I left the company over three months ago and I haven't heard anything about my money from my ex-boss since then.

I have evidence of the purchases in the form of receipts from the shops where the items were bought.

What do the laws say about

this kind of problem? Now that I am no longer an employee, can I still complain to the Labor Office?

Will I ever get my money back?

Ex-employee

Rungsan Imsomphot, Chief of the Phuket Office of Labor Protection and Welfare, replies:

Our office cannot help you because you have already left your job with the company and because you voluntarily agreed to pay for the items while you were there.

That was a personal agreement between yourself and your ex-boss, unrelated to your terms of employment.

However, if you bring the receipt to me I will call your ex-boss, discuss this issue with him, and try to work out an agreement.

If this fails, however, your only legal recourse is to file civil charges with the Provincial Court.

It will take a long time for the case to be heard and you will need to pay attorney fees. This probably won't be worth it for you if the amount you feel you are owed is small.

Issues & ANSWERS

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

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

Down-under relations come out on top

I had an important meeting on April 20 with visiting Australian Ambassador Miles Kupa. We discussed security issues affecting Australian residents of Phuket as well as trade between our two countries.

On the first point, I assured him that Phuket is dedicated to ensuring security, law and order for all. Our efforts extend to transport on the island and to other provinces, and to a wide range of other places frequented by foreigners, including hotels, hospitals and entertainment areas.

Thus far, the province has been able to provide safety and security for both residents and foreign visitors to a satisfactory level. Security officials also check vehicles coming onto the island at Tah Chat Chai for bombs and other threats to security, and English-language news is broadcast on both radio and TV.

In April we conducted a special training session on rescuing hostages and dealing with other such emergency situations. This session also included the correct way to disseminate information relating to the current troubles in the troubled southern border provinces.

Trade and investment issues were also discussed. This month, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra will travel to Australia to sign the Thai-Australian Free Trade Agreement, which goes into effect as of January 1, 2005.

Under the terms of this agreement, Australia will eliminate tariffs on 83% of Thai exports, including vegetables, fruit, pre-packaged foods, jewelry, small cars, pick-up trucks and many more. Further tariff reductions will follow, with taxes on all Thai exports to Australia being elimi-

nated over a 10-year period.

Thailand will initially reduce the duty on 50% of Australian imports, with all tariffs on Australian imports eliminated within 20 years.

We discussed ways to increase trade by establishing a greater number of direct air links between Phuket and points in Australia. If we can accomplish this, consumer costs on Australian goods sold in Phuket should

decrease as a result of lower transport costs. This is because, at present, many of the Australian products coming here must be transhipped through Bangkok.

Current trade between Phuket and Australia is 11.6 billion baht a year, with Phuket exporting 9.9 billion baht and importing 1.7 million baht. Phuket's main export to Australia is tin, while imports include sailboats and rubber products.

Australian investment in Phuket for the first quarter of 2004 was over 10 million baht, mostly in the real estate, food and beverage, and import-export sectors.

Phuket's expanding health-tourism industry, which features excellent health-care facilities and spas, can attract Australian tourists. This growing industry would benefit from increased marketing in Australia, and any government support or assistance for this effort would be beneficial.

I think we should support efforts to increase contacts between potential Thai and Australian investors, especially in industries where each can benefit from the other's expertise, such as the cultured pearl and wine industries. Phuket busi-



THE GOVERNOR'S
LETTER

nesses could also benefit from Australian know-how in quality-control, product development and manufacturing.

Education is another important issue, and the Australian government promotes the education of Thai students in its country.

I would also like to see Phuket benefit from Australian expertise in aquaculture, and I asked the Ambassador to consider cooperating in establishing a marine science faculty at the Prince of Songkhla University's Phuket Campus.

He replied that there is a university in Queensland that has great expertise in this area, and I am hopeful he will respond to my request to help establish ties between the two institutions.

Long-term approach: After six months as CEO Governor of Phuket, I still cannot point with pride to any single project that has been successfully completed, because all the work I have initiated is part of long-term development goals for the province.

One area that requires such a long-term effort is the island's public water supply. I have tried to improve public water supply by having the Irrigation Department construct the new reservoir [in Thalang]. Not only am I working with them to expand service, but also to upgrade the quality of water provided. Eventually, I would like to see all Phuket residents enjoying potable tap water.

Sanitation is another important long-term goal. I will organize a campaign to

make garbage collection the primary goal of all local administrations.

While the province will lead this effort, funding must come from local administration budgets. Local leaders want the province to buy garbage trucks for them or construct incinerators, but I don't agree with this. I think all residents need to become more conscientious and take more personal responsibility for disposing of the waste they produce.

Each tambon must also have a clearly defined garbage collection system and other sanitation standards. Each must distribute plastic bags to all of the villages in its jurisdiction and manage its own budget. We need to conduct this project island-wide in order for Phuket to establish a reputation as a clean province.

Equally important is the marine environment. We should check all passenger ferries to see how much garbage they take to sea, in order to ensure that all of it is returned to shore for proper disposal. Garbage that is disposed of at sea will simply end up drifting back onto our beaches, making them a mess.

Tour operators need to take more responsibility in this regard. Phuket's greatest asset is its fine beaches, and tour operators are only killing themselves if steps are not taken to ensure that beaches are kept clean.

I give each locality freedom in how they maintain clean beaches, but this is one matter that needs to be addressed with the utmost seriousness.

Governor Udomsak Usawarangkura

What happens when you run out of blood

Blood. We all have it and we all need it, and sometimes we need more of it than we have. Accidents, major operations and other medical conditions can necessitate a blood transfusion.

Reserves are low in most countries, particularly if you have a rare blood group. Thailand, and Phuket, are no exceptions.

The first known transfusion of blood was performed as early as 1667 when Jean-Baptiste Denis transfused two pints of blood from a sheep to a young man. He died, as did many others from these experiments.

When blood is mixed between two human individuals (let alone from a sheep), it can lead to *agglutination* or clumping. Blood forms clumps, it doesn't flow properly, causing blockages.

Fortunately, in 1909, an Austrian, Karl Landsteiner discovered that people fall into different blood groups. Blood transfusions became much safer and in 1930, he received a Nobel Prize for his earlier discovery. Ironically, Professor Landsteiner died in 1943 of a blood clot.

On Phuket, the Thai Red Cross Society and Wachira Hospital perform blood collection, screening and distribution.



HEALTH WATCH

By Peter Davison

Blood supplies are also stored at each of the major hospitals. The blood bank at Wachira Hospital is staffed by paid and volunteer staff who also run the Phuket Blood Donor Club, an active group of volunteers who meet each month.

Blood can be donated at the blood bank, but there is also a mobile blood collection unit that goes into the community to collect blood from school or hotel staff, or those of other organizations.

Approximately 30% of blood on Phuket is donated from

the mobile blood collection unit. Around 1,000 donors donate blood each month, of which just 10 are foreigners.

Phuket's blood bank is very safe as it adheres to international standards and procedures for screening. Before donating blood, all potential donors must complete a screening questionnaire to eliminate candidates whose blood may not be suitable.

Once donated, all blood is screened for HIV, hepatitis and syphilis, with external quality control maintained by Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok.

So how do we determine which blood type is compatible for us? We all have these little marker things called antigens on the surface of our red blood cells and we all have different ones, except for identical twins.

Within our blood plasma, we also have antibodies. Individuals have different types and combinations of these molecules and your blood group depends on these combinations and, essentially, what you inherited from your parents.

Because some blood groups are not compatible with others, we use the ABO and Rh classification system to identify donors and recipients, ensuring that a transfusion is successful.

This is done by taking a

sample of your blood and analyzing it in a laboratory. Under the ABO blood typing system, there are four different blood types. A, B, AB or O.

Each of us will fit into one of these four types. Next we look at the Rh factor. If you have it, you are Rh positive. If you do not have it, you are Rh negative.

Thus there are eight possible blood grouping systems, one of which will fit you. A negative or A positive. B negative or B positive and so on.

About 16% of Westerners are Rh negative but only 0.3% of Thais are. This leaves a shortfall in the amount of Rh negative blood available for transfusions, particularly to the foreign community.

With only 10 foreign donors giving blood each month, and a growing population, this further reduces the availability of Rh negative blood.

Your blood, particularly if it is Rh negative, is urgently needed; the life you save may be your own. Please contact me for details on how to donate blood.

Peter Davison is Manager of International Services at the Phuket International Hospital. To contact him call Tel: 076-249400 or email peter@phuket-internationalhospital.co.th

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Putting the fizz into Phuket

By Gategao Phetsawang

PHUKET: Dry Blackthorn cider, one of the most popular alcoholic ciders in the UK, has been launched in Phuket, nearly a year after its Thai debut, in Pattaya.

Apple Honey Co Ltd, the sole Thai distributor for the apple-based drink, made by Matthew Clark Brands Ltd in Bristol, made the soft launch in Phuket in the middle of last month.

Managing Director Selina Lovett explained, "Blackthorn is one of the biggest cider brands in the UK, holding 5%-10% of the total alcoholic beverage market. It's a traditional dry cider with 6% alcohol.

"We already import cider to Pattaya, where our main office has been set up since June last year. We also distribute to Koh Samui, Koh Lanta in Krabi, and Koh Chang," she said.

"Now we also want to distribute to Phuket, where we have set up our second office."

Mrs Lovett said that Blackthorn's popularity in the UK makes the brand easily recognizable for tourists and foreign residents in Thailand, the main market, and offers a refreshing alternative to beer and wine.

The introduction of Blackthorn was well-received in Pattaya, where 105,600 cans were sold from June last year to January, she said. She expects much the same reaction in Phuket. "There are about 60 bars in Phuket that have bought Blackthorn, and that number grows every week," she said, adding that by next high season she expects that number to at least triple.

Although the primary market is initially bars, next to be targeted are restaurants and the major hotels on the island. Look-



'Our target is to sell as much as we can this year': Selina Lovett.

ing further down the road, Mrs Lovett said that Apple Honey is also considering making Black-

thorn available at major supermarkets on Phuket.

Depending on the location and the clientele of each outlet, each 440-milliliter can is expected to sell at prices varying from 130 baht and 200 baht.

"Our target is to sell as much as we can this year, but it will take time to gain customers as we have just begun the company," she said.

Mrs Lovett declined to reveal the amount invested in importing the cider, but said, "It's a large investment. We are doing well but we haven't taken any of the profits yet. It's our first year and we are reinvesting any profit in the company."

For more information about the availability of Blackthorn cider on Phuket, call Nigel Rodgers at Tel: 01-4160047 or email: applehoney86@loxinfo.co.th.

ON THE MOVE

Punjalux Hongsakul, 26, from Yala, is the new Public Relations



Manager at the Thavorn Grand Plaza Hotel, in Phuket City. K. Punjalux graduated in arts communication from the Rajabhat Institute Phuket. Before taking up her new position, she was a graphic designer at Data Media Asia for two years.

Natthanit Tabhiran, 29, from Bangkok, has been appointed Sales & Marketing Manager of the new boutique resort, the Aspasia Phuk-



et, formerly called The Breakers, at Kata Beach. She has a degree in marketing from Srinakharinwirot University in Bangkok. Her work experience includes positions with real estate companies and hotels.

American Gary Carpen, 36, has joined Le Royal Meridien Phuket



Yacht Club as an English teacher. He has a degree in business administration from St Norbert College in the US. He has 10 years' experience in sales management, marketing and training in America. Before joining Meridien, Mr Carpen was a teacher at Satee Phuket School.

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

Scary times ahead for bond-holders

Currency markets became strongly pro-US dollar after Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the US Federal Reserve (the central bank) gave testimony to Congress in late April.

Nothing that he said was Earth-shattering, but he did point out that the Fed's fear of deflation in the US economy had receded and that, at present, inflationary pressures were benign.

He also noted that the US economy was recovering and that employment statistics were improving.

The last thing that the Fed wishes to do is panic markets. Mr Greenspan's statements were designed to let everyone know that if the data on the US economy continues to be positive, interest rates will rise – but slowly and gradually.

The Fed is concerned (without actually saying so) that bond markets will go into panic mode, as they did in 1994.

It is not just a matter of the Fed having to soothe US bond markets. Global bond markets, especially emerging country bond markets, anxiously watch every pronouncement from the Fed and every bit of US economic data that is released.

History shows that on February 24, 1994, there was a world bond market crash.

Everyone has heard of stockmarket crashes; they make headlines. But most of the media – the tabloids in particular – know that if they were to publish headlines stating "Bond markets crash," at least 95% of their readers wouldn't have a clue what the newspaper was on about. (Some would think it had something to do with Agent 007).

Bonds – fixed-interest in-

struments varying in validity from three months to 30 years – have certain economic allies and certain economic enemies.

Their allies are low inflation, deflation, low or negative economic growth and falling short-term interest rates.

If an investor, for example, has bought a 10-year bond yielding a fixed 5% a year, and economic conditions deteriorate so that any new buyer of a similar 10-year bond can earn, say, only 3%, obviously the original investor is sitting pretty in comparison.

An example: US\$100 invested at 5% interest returns



MONEY TALKS

By Richard Watson

US\$5. But if the rate changes to 3%, it takes an investment of almost US\$167 to achieve the same US\$5 return.

The bond that yields 5% is therefore seen as more desirable and thus more valuable than the 3% bond.

The end result is that the original investor can continue to enjoy a better-than-present market income on a guaranteed basis until the investment matures, or can sell the bond for a substantial capital gain.

The reverse is also true. If interest rates on a 10-year bond rise, the original holder of the bond will make a capital loss if he sells the bond. If he does not, he will have to endure below-market interest rates.

World bond markets are huge, with a capitalization many times that of stockmarkets. Prob-

ably all members of every pension fund – and almost all insurance policy holders in the world – are investors in bonds, though whether they are aware of this is a different matter.

Alan Greenspan is walking on eggshells with respect to the bond market. If the US economic improvement continues, short-term interest rates will have to rise – and it is the function of a central bank to set the level of short-term interest rates.

The situation is so delicate that if Alan Greenspan broke his normal quietly-worded approach and bluntly said something to the effect of, "Economic growth is robust and we will have to act to nip inflation in the bud. So interest rates will need to rise this year," the bond market would experience something akin to a heart attack.

In 1994, even though he employed his customary diplomacy, that is what happened. Bond markets were spooked by strong economic growth and rising short-term interest rates.

There was a global sell-off, the effects of which were felt far from America's borders. Indonesia, Hong Kong and even Thailand all felt the sudden chill.

The crash came on February 24, 1994, and it turned into a rolling crash. Investors often believe that when bond markets crash, stockmarkets boom, and vice versa. Sometimes this is true, but not always.

1994 was a good example. The fear in emerging market bond markets spread to stockmarkets. By February 1994, the Thai stockmarket had reached its all-time high as measured by the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) index, at slightly over 1700. February 24 changed that

and by the time the Asian financial crisis hit Thailand in July 1997, the SET index had fallen back to 1400.

Those with long memories will recall the Mexican economic collapse of December, 1994. Its origins too can be found in the bond market crash that started on February 24 that year.

The biggest danger to investors in bonds, especially medium- to long-dated bonds in emerging markets, is at this stage of the economic cycle. All participants have an element of risk. Fasten your seatbelts.

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

VITAL STATISTICS: VEHICLE REGISTRATIONS SOAR

Type of vehicle	Mar '03	Mar '04	%Change
Cars with capacity for no more than 7 people	317	447	41.0%
Cars with capacity for more than 7 people	9	9	0.0%
Pickup trucks	201	266	32.3%
Motorcycles	1,995	2,559	28.3%
Taxis	0	0	0.0%

Source: Phuket Provincial Transportation Office

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How to calculate tide highs and lows

A couple of readers have asked about tides on Phuket. Basically, tides are due to the gravitational pull of the Moon and Sun. The lunar gravitational effect is about twice that of the Sun and creates high water bulges on opposites sides of the Earth.

As the Earth rotates every 24 hours, most places on the Earth's surface will therefore have two high and two low tides each day. These will be approximately six hours apart but because the Moon rotates around the earth in 24.83 hours, they come around 50 minutes later each day.

Tide tables covering Krabi and Phang Nga are available from the Hydrographic Department offices in Bangkok, but often local sailors use the Phuket tide tables published in the *Gazette Guide* and in the *Gazette Online* (at www.phuketgazette.net/tides/index.htm).

You will see the times of highs and lows in the tables as well as the tide range, which is the difference between the height of high water and the low water before or after it.

The depths of the tide are measured above the Chart Datum. This is, broadly, an imaginary plane placed over the bottom of the sea at a height that clears obstructions at the lowest of low waters.

Theoretically, you should always have at least the depth indicated on the chart, plus the relevant tide height at any place.

Check, too, to see when your chart was produced. In areas of sand or mud banks, like

Phang Nga Bay, you will find these often move a bit.

Tide heights and tidal streams, the movement of water (current) due to the tide's rise and fall, can be estimated on the rule of twelfths for each hour of tide:

	Change	Cumulative
1st hour	1/12	1/12
2nd hour	2/12	3/12
3rd hour	3/12	6/12
4th hour	3/12	9/12
5th hour	2/12	11/12
6th hour	1/12	12/12

From this you will see that the tide will rise the most and the current will be strongest in the third and fourth hours of each tide cycle.

Remember that entrances to bays and inlets can cause water to bank up, with marked local effects.

A handy way of estimating the state of tide is to keep an eye on the shore for drying.

If you see wet sand or rocks, the tide should be falling and conversely, if they are dry, you can reckon the tide is rising.

Tidal stream direction and speed can be estimated by observing the current flow past fixed objects such as buoys or pot markers.

With practice, you'll find these estimations become quite accurate.

This is extremely important here because tide streams of more than 1.5 knots are frequent and, when applied to the vector of a yacht doing 5 knots, the difference between course steered and course over ground can be quite large.



Before the MAST

B38m upgrade for stadium approved

By Rittiwat Suwannarattaphum

PHUKET CITY: The race is on to repair Surakul Stadium in time for a key inspection in June by officials from Fifa, international soccer's ruling body, who will decide whether Phuket's most important sporting event yet will go ahead.

Governor Udomsak Usawarangkura told the *Gazette* on April 29 that Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has approved the budget of 38 million baht required to complete the project.

But many improvements need to be made in a very short time if Phuket is to stage matches in the Women's Under-19 World Cup in November. Work is expected to start just as soon as final contracts are signed.

The governor said that the improvements included new seating (the stadium currently has bare concrete terraces), new lighting and spotlights, a better sound system, an electronic scoreboard, a media center and



Surakul Stadium's outdated scoreboard and concrete terraced seating is slated for a huge overhaul now that PM Thaksin Shinawatra has approved 38-million baht in funding for the facility.

facilities for live telecasts around the world. The pitch will also have to be relaid.

The Under-19 Women's World Cup Finals have the po-

tential to bring millions of baht to Phuket at the start of the next high season, as well as create global publicity for the island's many tourist attractions.

Rak Nong Paan 'Number One' in five-a-side soccer tourney

PHUKET CITY: Rak Nong Paan team narrowly beat the New Wave team 4-3 on May 3 to advance to the second round of the "To Be Number One Cup" five-a-side soccer competition, held at Surakul Stadium.

Rak Nong Paan dominated early play of the 20-minute match, going ahead 3-0 after a goal in the seventh minute by



Jamlong Raksayot (left), of the New Wave team, tries to outmaneuver a Rak Nong Paan defender during the "To Be Number One" football tournament held at Surakul Stadium from May 3 to 5.

Yottana Kanmak, a former member of the Thailand national Under-19 soccer squad.

Desperate, New Wave turned on the pressure and scored in the ninth minute with a goal by Jamlong Raksayos. But just before half time, Anan Tou-lang struck back for Rak Nong Paan, giving his team a solid 4-1 lead.

New Wave found their form in the second half and pulled to within 4-3, but were unable to even the score before the final whistle.

Yottana told the *Gazette*

that his team gave a rather poor showing and were sloppy in the second half. "We slowed down our attack, thinking that New Wave could never match our score," he said. "But we were wrong. They hit back with three goals."

However, he said he felt his squad still had a good chance of advancing to the finals of the tournament, which will involve 90 teams from Phuket and surrounding provinces.

Final results will be published in next week's *Gazette*.

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Do Not Drink Tap Water!

Amigos do the double

By Stephen Fein

PATONG: Amigos Bar emerged top of the Patong Pool League after the final week of this season's play with 61 points, 14 clear of second-place Heroes Bar (47 points). Coming a close third were last season's champions Anchor Bar, with 46 points.

The boys from Soi Sea Dragon also took the Cup Final, beating fellow finalists Champs Bar by the narrowest of margins.

As league champs, Amigos hosted the league party and award presentation ceremony on April 29. But it wasn't yet time to put away their cues and pick up their beer mugs, as they were still slated to take on the determined crew from Champs Bar in the league's knock-out Cup Final.

That exciting match was as close as could be. After singles and doubles play, the points were level at 6-6. The Cup came down to the beer leg, which Amigos took.

On the night, generous



HAPPY HOMBRES: Amigos Bar celebrate winning the Patong Pool League and Cup Final.

league members pitched in and donated 24,000 baht to help fellow league player Ped Steward of Heroes Bar pay for medical treatment after the Scot was in a motorcycle accident during the Songkran festival.

After a careful statistical analysis of this season's play, Sammy Lee of Heroes Bar was declared the league's top player, having amassed a league high of 55 points.

Other top scorers, by team, were: **Anchor:** Dum Sompornnumphet (49 pts); **Amigos:** Oh Tunt and Dave Nelson (48 points each); **Waikiki:** Jarong Chuchana (46 pts); **Shakers:**

Stuart Hooper (43 pts); **Football Crazy:** Dave Staddon (42 pts); **Lek Murphy's:** Dave Natrass (41pts); **Happy Days:** John P. Marinko (33pts); **Champs:** Geoff Hopkins (29 pts); **Pickles:** Mike Halgreen and Chris Chambers (28 points each); **In-Between:** Koson Once (24 pts); **Speak Easy:** Alan Page and George (23 points).

The final league standings are: 1. Amigos (61); 2. Heroes (47); 3. Anchor (46); 4. Champs (40); 5. Waikiki (36); 6. Football Crazy (32); 7. Shakers (32); 8. In-Between (24); 9. Lek Murphy's (24); 10. Pickles (21); 11. Happy Days (20); 12. Speak Easy (13).

DARTS Champs hold on to top of league

PATONG: After week six of play, Champs Bar continue to hold top spot in the Patong Darts League, with In-Between hot on their heels. Both teams picked up the maximum three points on April 27.

Patong Darts League table: 1. Champs (15 pts); 2. In-Between (14 pts); 3. Off Shore (9 pts); 4.

Amigos (8 pts); 4. Football Crazy (8 pts); 6. Didi's (7 pts); 6. Valhalla (7 pts); 6. Piccadilly (7 pts); 6. Shakers (7 pts); 10. Happy Days (5 pts).

(Note: Happy Days and Didi's each have one game in hand)

Results for April 27: Didi's 4, Champs* 5; Happy Days* 4,

Football Crazy 5; Off Shore* 6, Piccadilly 3; Shakers* 5, Amigos 4; Valhalla 3, In-Between* 6 (* = winner of beer leg)

May 11 fixtures: Champs v Piccadilly; Didi's v Valhalla; In-Between v Amigos; Off Shore v Football Crazy; Shakers v Happy Days. (Home team listed first.)

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As the most popular small SUV, its appeal has been limited until now

Toyota's right little RAVer



HAVE A RAV4: Color-keyed bumpers can be added to change the appearance of the car.

The RAV4 has been around for a while, and Toyota's little SUV remains one of the most user-friendly and comfortable in its class. It is also now available for the first time with a high pressure, common-rail diesel motor, in addition to the existing gasoline models.

A common-rail diesel is rather like a gasoline injection engine, in that the common rail is maintained at a constant high pressure, with each injector operated electronically by a central processor.

Until recently, diesel engines relied on relatively simple technology, with a low-pressure mechanical injector delivering fuel to a pre-combustion chamber in the cylinder head. While it was quite fuel-efficient, it lacked precision and refinement, generating noise and vibration.

The Toyota common rail system and its computer technology deliver precisely the right amount of fuel at exactly the right

time, direct into the center of the combustion chamber. The control this system offers provides greater engine flexibility and improved fuel consumption, not to mention less typical diesel noise.

The two-liter turbodiesel in the RAV4 develops a modest 116bhp (85kW) at 4,000 rpm, but the torque output is far more impressive with 250 Nm available across a rev range of 1,800 to 3,000rpm.

Mated to a full-time 4WD with a five-speed manual gearbox, the little SUV is equally at home on- or off-road. On-road, the diesel RAV4 is a little sluggish, with the 0-100 kmh time a leisurely 12.1 seconds, while top speed is quoted as 170 kmh. Not exactly a road-burner but a solid, reliable work horse.

Toyota introduced the RAV4 in 1994, labeling it as the

"first SUV that offers GTi handling and performance". True enough, it was an off-roader that was more like a sporting hatchback. It rapidly found many followers and even with this new version, more than 30,000 RAV-4s have been sold in Europe in the first 12 months.

As well as the diesel motor, it is available with a 1.8-liter gasoline engine and two-wheel drive, or a two-liter gas motor and four-wheel drive.

The appeal of the RAV4 is that it is roomy, great fun to drive and offers reasonable performance. Available in either three- or five-door body styles, it also has options to fully customize the interior and the exterior.

Power windows are standard on the five-door, but optional on the smaller car, while a sunroof is optional on both.

Power steering is standard, and with the five-door you get luggage compartment illumination.

To change the appearance of either car, color-keyed bumpers can be added.

So can roof rails and a moulded spare wheel cover for the rear. If anything, the three-door looks better balanced, with the larger five-door appearing over-bodied.

Standard safety features include ABS and EBD (electronic brake-force distribution). The three-door RAV4 has to settle for drum rear brakes; the five-door has discs all round.

Front airbags are standard on both models, with side impact bars in the doors.

Front seat belts are equipped with pre-tensioners and force-limiters, while in the rear, three-point belts are fitted for all occupants, although in the smaller car the centre seat only features a lap belt.

The RAV4 is by far the most popular of the small SUVs

on the market, but its appeal has been limited until now because of the absence of a diesel version – essential in most major European countries.

Now that Toyota is offering three different motors and two body styles, expect the vehicle to become even more successful at in Japan and abroad.

Toyota recently moved into the No 2 slot in terms of global auto makers, displacing Ford for the first time.

In Japan, it has nearly one third of the domestic market and it is strongly represented in many other Asian countries.

With the aid of its ambitious Formula One project, based in Germany and with drivers Olivier Panis of France and Cristiano da Matta of Brazil, you can be sure the Japanese giant will not rest until it becomes the undisputed world number one. Look out, GM.

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



By Jeff Heselwood



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Why do wine prices keep going up?

Q: Food prices seem to be going down but wine keeps getting more expensive. Can you shed some light on this?

A: Yes, wine is becoming more expensive in Thailand. The Thai government is making a concerted effort to collect maximum tax on imported wine, tobacco and auto parts.

It also wants to support Thai fruit and vegetable "wine" by making imported wine more expensive. At the same time, cheap produce from China is flooding into Thailand and driving prices downward.

I find this ironic because most imported wine is bought by foreigners while most of the food is bought (and produced) by Thais.

The most likely outcome is that less tax will be collected from wine as fewer people buy it because of its higher cost. Thai farmers will be left out because they lack the capital and specialized skills needed to produce wine commercially.

So, expect imported quality wine to continue being in short supply and more expensive here than in other Asian nations with lower tax rates.

Q: A visiting friend brought a bottle of Chilean wine made from a grape called "Carmenère" and the wine was fantastic, but I cannot find out anything about this grape. What can you tell me?

A: Carmenère was once common in Bordeaux but is now found almost exclusively in Chile. According to Chilean winemaker friends, carmenère was brought to Chile sometime in the mid-19th century.

Recently, DNA testing has revealed that much of what was thought to be merlot in Chile is actually carmenère. A handful of bright winemakers have begun labeling their merlot wines by the correct name carmenère, one of which you have just discovered.

I remember carmenère grapevines as being almost in-



By Steven Roberto

distinguishable from merlot except that the berries are a little larger. The wine's taste is similar to merlot, but not as herbal. Carmenère wine often has a supple texture and is well balanced. In Thailand you can find a good example from Baron Philippe Rothschild, a carmenère sourced from the Rapel Valley near Santiago.

One of my former professors at the University of California Davis, Dr Carole Meredith, recently discovered that some cabernet franc in California is actually carmenère. So, who knows, one day we may also enjoy great carmenère from California.

Q: What is the purpose of that dent in the bottom of most wine bottles?

A: When glass was first used to create wine bottles it was not strong enough to contain Champagne's high pressure. English glassblowers discovered that putting an indentation, called a "punt" at the bottom of the bottle somehow helped make them stronger, and punts soon became the norm on all wine bottles.

Advances in glassmaking have long since made the punt unnecessary but it lives on as a matter of custom.

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

Phuket's vibrant restaurant scene has grown beyond the time when the discerning diner had to venture into a five-star resort to find a meal of international character and flavor.

I would even say that in my 10 years of reviewing restaurants on Phuket, menu standards and levels of service at many of the island's better resort restaurants have declined.

Even though there is now a broader selection of food, there has also been a constant turnover of executive chefs and F&B managers who repeatedly change menus, creating confusion for the Thai chefs who constantly have to learn new recipes and styles of presentation. This makes for an inconsistent experience for the guests.

Fortunately, there have also been some imaginative and creative Thai chefs and managers, well trained in international restaurants, who have opened their own dining establishments in the past few years. This is where to find the excitement in dining out on the island.

The latest is Carmen at Surin Beach, near the entrance to the Amanpuri and Chedi resorts.

Carmen, named for the opera by Bizet, has been adopted by the Surin villa jet-set as one of their new places to play. Carmen is like a traditional Italian trattoria, offering a substantial menu of popular Mediterranean foods in a relaxed, informal setting, decorated with warm earth tones and soft lighting.

Supaireen "Gift" Jitsunoh operated the well-known and popular restaurant, Pomodoro, on Sukhumvit Rd in Bangkok before deciding to open her own restaurant in Phuket.

"I have brought my most popular menu from Pomodoro, based on guest comments over the years," she says. "Plus I was able to hire one of the best chefs of Italian cuisine, who was also eager to move out of the city to the beauty of Phuket."

The chef, Prayoon Kleangmee, learned his culinary skills in the kitchens at Caffè di Roma, Matteo, DaLino and Bite, all restaurants popular with Bangkok's more sophisticated diners.

"I make all our pastas and our bread fresh every morning



CREATIVE: Carmen's menu has color and flavor aplenty.

Carmen hits all the right notes

after I search for the best seafood and vegetables from the local market," Chef Prayoon says.

Each day, he compiles a special menu so that guests can choose from a blackboard selection.

Today's begins with a warm carrot and spinach soup with fresh cream. The carrot and spinach textures are clearly separated in the bowl and the taste is rich, light and stimulating. He offers his homemade bread, still warm from the oven.

Other soups include a cassola, fresh seafood in a deep spicy tomato soup and a callera – onion soup, oven-baked with a thick cheese crust. I want to try them both but we have to move on to a salad course and I want the traditional Caesar, which is served on a large, broad plate.

"The success of a Caesar salad is in the dressing," he tells me, but I find his fresh lettuce and crispy bacon a nice addition.

At Carmen, Chef Prayoon offers guests a choice of fresh spaghetti, penne, fettuccine, fusilli or farfalle to join with one of his nine sauces, which include all'aglio, olio e peperoncino, spicy dried sausage with garlic, garlic olive oil and chili, or his alla pescatora – fresh prawns,

mussels, clams and calamari in a rich, spicy tomato sauce.

Carmen's menu has exotic designer fusion pizzas, pan-fried fresh fish, New Zealand steak, rack of lamb, lobster thermidor and the most generous serving of tiramisu for dessert on Phuket.

My dinner bill was 600 baht. I didn't choose from the boutique wine list because Carmen's ambient music and delicious cuisine was giving me all the buzz I needed.

Carmen, 14/1 Moo 3 Srisoonthorn Rd, Surin Village (near the Chedi Hotel), Cherng Talay, Thalang, Phuket 83110. Open daily, except Saturdays, from 4 pm. Happy Hours between 4 pm and 7 pm. Dinner is served between 7 pm and 11:30 pm. For reservations and further details call 076-325713 or Fax: 076-325103.

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On the menu with Bruce Stanley

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Kazakhstan is primed for a property boom – just ask the CIA

Dulwich International College Phuket, CB Richard Ellis Thailand and several Phuket property projects will this month join an international exhibition and property and investment conference in Almaty, largest city in the central Asian Republic of Kazakhstan.

Phuket is becoming increasingly popular for holidays and for holiday home buyers from Kazakhstan and surrounding countries, along with other places in Asia where people are working in the oil, mining or financial industries.

Previously part of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan is now enjoying foreign investment totaling billions of dollars to develop its massive natural resources – petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron ore, manganese, chrome ore, nickel, cobalt, copper, molybdenum, lead, zinc, bauxite, gold and uranium, to name just a few.

Almaty, the largest city and the former capital, is a forest of office towers under construction for the headquarters and offices of international oil and mining companies.

When Kazakhstan is mentioned in Phuket, many people say “Where?” Until recently, the countries of Central Asia were rarely mentioned because people had come to think of the whole of the Soviet Union as one nation, something like the US.

Now these former Soviet states are independent countries, re-establishing themselves in



– Map courtesy of the US Central Intelligence Agency.

PROPERTY & HOMEZONE
By Graham Doven

school atlases. For those who don't know, Kazakhstan is bordered by Russia to the north, China to the east, the Caspian Sea to the west and the other former Soviet states of Central Asia – Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan – to the south.

The Central Intelligence Agency website says of the country, “Kazakhstan, the largest of the former Soviet republics in territory, excluding Russia, possesses enormous fossil fuel reserves as well as plenti-

ful supplies of other minerals and metals. It also is a large agricultural – livestock and grain – producer.

“The country has also embarked upon an industrial policy designed to diversify the economy away from overdependence on the oil sector, by developing light industry.”

Anyway, an intrepid bunch of pioneers from Phuket are heading off to open up this new frontier. Dulwich Headmaster David Cook and CB Richard Ellis Managing Director Thailand, David Simister, will be guest speakers at the 3rd International Property and Investment Conference. I shall be going too.

A local businessman who travels frequently between Kazakhstan and Thailand has advised us to buy economy class tickets.

“Don't waste your money,” he advises. “I will be traveling back to Almaty on the same flight. We give the captain US\$50 and he upgrades us.”

Home of the Week

Laid-back living at the top



This villa, in the Ayara Baan Thai Cherng Lay estate above Surin Beach, boasts views to the sea from all rooms.

The three double bedrooms sleep six in comfort, and if the dual-purpose study is used as a bedroom, the number of sleepers can be raised to eight.

The entire grounds cover 1,350 square meters and the villa itself has some 600 sqm of living space arranged on two levels.

As this home is positioned at the top of a ridge, it benefits from year-round sea breezes that provide coolness on the sultriest of days. Tropical gardens and fish ponds have been built around the many mature trees

that were left in place during construction.

The villa is at the end of a road and access to the house itself is gained either from the rear mountain-view side or from the front, which enjoys views to the sea and has twin covered parking spaces.

As well as the three bedrooms with attached bathrooms and the bedroom-cum-study, amenities include a private 12 x 5-meter infinity-edge swimming pool and a Jacuzzi, as well as a large pool terrace.

Besides open-air salas for lounging and dining in, the home has a modern kitchen, satellite television, stereo and maid service.



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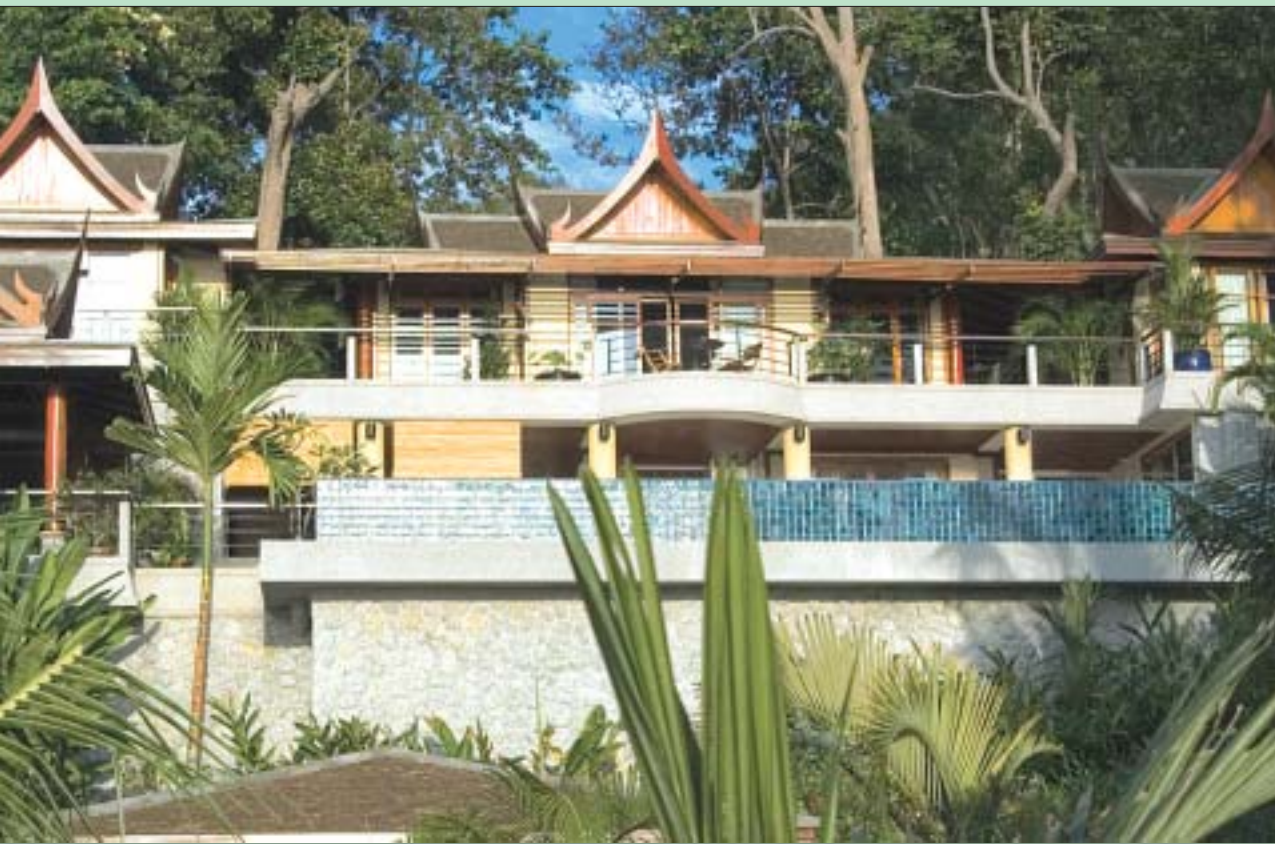
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All the water in the house passes through a filter before it comes out of the taps.

There is also an RO (reverse osmosis) system under the kitchen sink to provide pure drinking. This is linked to an ice maker and water dispenser in the refrigerator.

The villa has an extensive customized lighting system with control panels in each room.

All of the exterior lights are programmed to switch on at dusk and off at dawn. There is also an integrated security system.

The price for the home is 34 million baht.

For further information or to inspect the house, contact Brad Kenny at Tel: 01-6334279 or send an email to: esppt@phuket.ksc.co.th.



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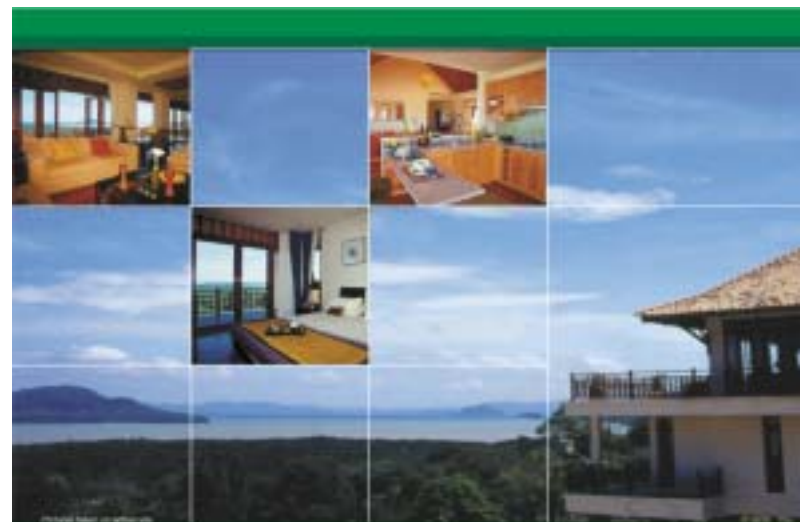
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I know. I'm a little odd. The subject of *The Two Ronnies* came up the other day. For anyone who didn't spend his youth watching too much TV in the '70s, *The Two Ronnies* was a British comedy series, and it was simply superb.

Gardening

with Bloomin' Bert

Four candles, please

Everyone has a favorite sketch, but mine is definitely Four Candles. "Four candles, please," says one Ronnie. He's duly given four candles, to which the response is "No, fawk 'andles - 'andles for forks!"

This has to be the most tenuous link to a gardening column in the history of the *Gazette*, but the golden candle plant is worth it. Otherwise known as the golden shrimp plant, lollipop plant, or *lue-ang-khriirii-pun* in Thai, it adds a spectacular splash of bright yellow wherever it sits in your garden.

Originally from Peru, it's one of those plants that almost looks too good to be true. Instead of the more traditional green leaves with the odd flower here and there, the golden plant takes the idea of color one step further. It cheats.

It does have the traditional leaf set-up that it shares with many members of the plant kingdom - large, deep green oval leaves with prominent veins - but they're not all green.

Some of them modify themselves to form bright yellow bracts (like the red leaves of the poinsettia, or the colored parts of a bougainvillea) that mimic the appearance of flowers.

They look like candles from

a distance. They almost hide the true flowers, which contain all the mechanisms for fertilization of the plant.

The flowers look like tiny white shrimp, which is where it gets one of its alternative names. The flowers last only a few days, but the yellow bracts can linger on for several weeks, resulting in a continuous display of these impressive vertical candelabras.

Lets face it, fertilization by insect and bird pollinators is the main reason flowers exist, so why shouldn't they cheat and have some of the leaves help them along in this regard?

Golden shrimp plants are perfect for pots on patios and look wonderful in borders for a sweeping splash of yellow. Put them against a dark background and they'll really stand out.

The plant can grow up to about six feet, but to reach that height and still look as if someone cares, it'll need regular, sensible pruning. Prune it by about half a couple of times a year. It may look a bit brutalized at first, but it will bounce back.

These things are sun worshippers, but don't get into the same state as their human counterparts who visit Phuket with the same intention. While the tour-



The golden shrimp plant is ridiculously easy to propagate. Photograph by Huajie Liu

The golden shrimp's leaves become greener, and the "four candles" you have when you originally bring the plant home from the garden center will quickly multiply. Lots of sun, high humidity and a fair amount of water are all the plant demands. It could have been invented for Phuket.

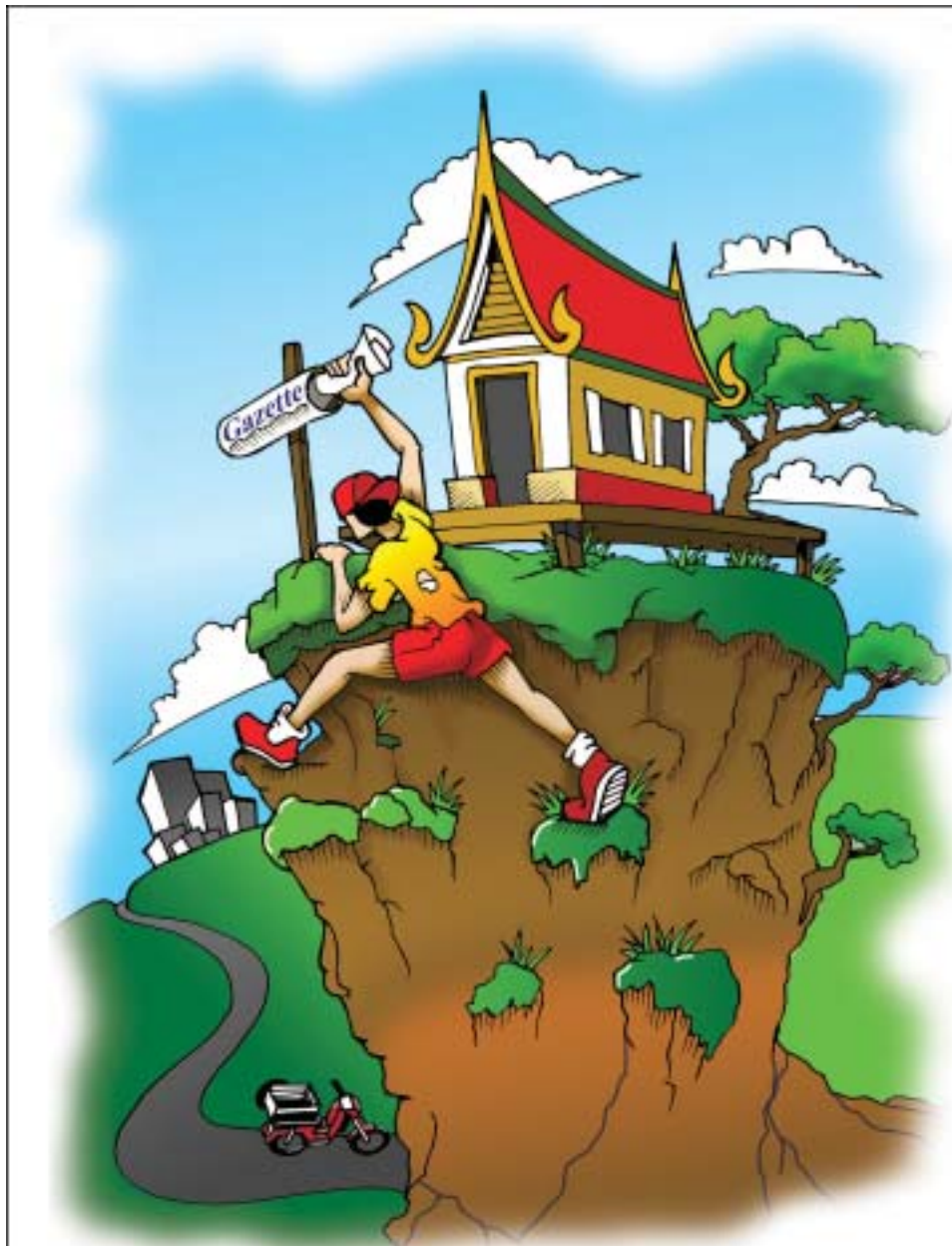
Another bonus of the golden shrimp plant is how ridiculously easy it is to propagate it. Just cut an eight-to-10-inch stem and strip the lower set of leaves.

Put it in moist potting soil or sand, keeping one to two sets of leaves above the soil line. Place it in the shade initially and it should root really easily, at which time it can be planted outside to enjoy the sun.

The Two Ronnies, Messrs Corbett and Barker, have probably never been to Phuket. They probably never considered the link between gardening implements and a rather impressive tropical flower. But I'd like to think they did.

ists in Patong get pinker by the hour, resulting in the familiar barbecued-shrimp look at the end of

their two-week stint, these permanent residents just look even healthier.



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Property Gazette

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Large European-style residence in Phuket City, 4 bedrooms, 3 en-suite bathrooms, separate kitchen/dining area, lounge, large study, storage room, 3-meter ceiling (some teak wood), low maintenance garden, patio area, fish pond, cable TV, 3 phone lines, double car parking, marble floor, air conditioning, large communal swimming pool, quiet neighborhood. Includes owning company. 7.9 million baht. Tel: 076-240612, 09-587-2609. Fax: 076-240613. Email: interval@loxinfo.co.th

GOLF VIEW LAND

2 rai of prime land available for sale in Loch Palm Golf Course, Kathu. Fantastic golf course and mountain view. 2.9 million baht per rai. Tel: 076-341-871, 01-5697616.

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Hilltop houses - two remaining - 2km from Laguna. From 7.8 million baht. 3 bedrooms, 3 baths, study, living room, kitchen, maid's room, laundry, 2-car garage. 250-sqm covered area, private swimming pool. Completion October 2004. Purchase choices can include Chanote or long lease. Private sale: no brokers. Tel: 01-8930692. Email: toto@phuket.ksc.co.th

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Would you like to own a beautiful hotel and restaurant close to Karon Beach? Buy the entire company (4 buildings with 20-room hotel, restaurant and rental property) for 23.5 million baht OR buy the two main buildings (14-room hotel plus restaurant) for 15 million baht. The land is freehold Chanote and is ready for rapid company transfer to foreign ownership. For more info, visit www.geocities.com/hotelinparadise/ Tel: 01-6931136 Email: hotelinparadise@yahoo.com

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Located on the popular and exclusive west coast of Phuket, between Kamala and Patong Beach. The property is divided into two parcels, 5 Rai above main road, 10 Rai below. The steep terrain gives a unique and spectacular sunset ocean view. The lower parcel has a building permit issued. The owner wants to sell both parcels, individually or together.

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Spectacular seaview villa south of Patong, luxury golf course mansion at Laguna, for sale by owner. For more info please call: 01-7974413. or Email: info@tomkatconsulting.com. Please see website : www.tomkatconsulting.com

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Beautiful 4.75-rai plot in Rawai for sale, complete with Chanote title, paved road and electricity, for 3.8 million baht. Tel: 076-381181, 076-381-189.

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Detached 2-story, 3-bedroom house, with panoramic views over Chalong Bay. Quiet location at Khao Khat, between Phuket City, Cape Panwa and Chalong. Furnished: 24,500 baht a month. Unfurnished: 19,500 baht, negotiable. Call or email for info and photos. Tel: 076-256407, 01-676-4849. Fax: 076-256407. Email: amono@loxinfo.co.th

NEW HOUSE

fully furnished. 3-bed house, 10 mins drive to Laguna area, 800m from the Heroines' Monument, with aircon, UBC TV, standard kitchen and garden. 30,000 baht/month for long-term contract. 3 months' deposit required. Tel: 06-682-9922. Email: mvanichakul@hotmail.com

FOR RENT IN KAMALA

2-bedroom apartment for long-term rent, fully furnished, aircon, UK-style kitchen, UBC TV, swimming pool and Jacuzzi in a private new development. Agents welcome. Please call for more details. Tel: 01-9580489, 09-874-6185.

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Fully furnished, Thai-style, 3-bedroom house, with sea view, in town. Tel: 09-9724158.

NEW HOME WITH POOL

New furnished or unfurnished Kamala home with pool, 6 months minimum rental, 35,000 baht. Pls call after 4 pm. Tel: 076-385940.

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5-bed, 5-bathroom Thai-style house for rent at Loch Palm Golf Course. Close to Dulwich College. Fully furnished and less than a year old. Ready to move in. 800-sqm garden. 3 tel lines. Car available if required. Short- or long-term rental OK. Please email for further details. 45,000 baht per month. Tel: 65-983-70340. Email: chris_winter@veritasdgc.com

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of Patong. Furnished 4-bedroom house with a spectacular view over Patong Beach. Big garden, UBC TV, for long-term rent only. Tel: 02-513-8348, 01-8915325. Email: jorg1@bkk4.loxinfo.co.th

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3-bedroom house, in desirable Chao Fa Thani Estate, garden, backs on to klong, 3 bathrooms, living room, study, dining room, kitchen, air-conditioned, fully furnished. 30,000 baht a month. Tel: 076-281018, 09-4729841.

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PATONG SEA VIEW

apartment. Patong apartment with sea view, kitchen and cable TV. 10 mins to beach. 500 baht/day 10,000 baht/month. Tel: 06-0268145. Email: capnard@excite.com

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for rent. Next to Wat Chalong. Has kitchen, aircon and ensuite bathroom for 5,000 baht per month. Tel: 09-594-3209. Email: olebay_th@yahoo.co.uk

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for rent. Resort hotel in tropical garden between Kata and Karon beaches for lease from original landlord. 63 rooms, big seafood restaurant, pool and pool cafe. Email: powerbaeda@web.de

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Property Gazette

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Property Wanted

SPECIAL PROPERTY
wanted. I am looking to buy a property in the Bang Tao (or close) area of Phuket. I would like sea views and a house which is 'a bit special'. I am looking to pay a max price of 60 million baht. I would also consider buying a plot of land if the land is right. If you have such a property. Email: icrphkt@hotmail.com

HOME OFFICE
wanted. I am interested in renting a shophouse, long term, in a reasonable location with facilities. Tel: 07-9752326. Email: bus_asia@hotmail.com

EXPAT NEEDS
long-term rental. I will be moving house soon when my contract finishes and am therefore looking for a house for long-term rental. I am pretty flexible regarding location but it needs to be a house and not a flat. Willing to pay up to about 20,000 baht a month and a one-month deposit. Look forward to receiving any details. Email: phuket_expats@hotmail.com

HOUSE NEEDED
Kathu or City. Expat living and working in Phuket is looking for a detached house in the Kathu or Phuket City area. House must have fenced garden, a minimum of 2 bedrooms, aircon and preferably a European kitchen. Please send all details by email to Email: jimberan1@hotmail.com

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near Robinson. We are looking to buy or rent one unit in one of the new shophouse buildings near Robinson department store (behind night market). The shophouses are yellow. Please contact us urgently. Tel: 076-264445-6.

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in Patong. I'm looking to buy 1 rai in Phuket/Patong. Please contact me by email if you have something under 2 million baht. Email: sgellepes@sbcglobal.net

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PATONG APARTMENT
Seaview, kitchen, cable TV, 10 mins to beach. 500 baht/day. 10K/month. Tel: 06-0268145. Email: capnard@excite.com

Accommodation Wanted

HOUSE WANTED
3-or 4-bedroom house, unfurnished, wanted for long-term rental in Karon, Kata, Kata Noi or Patong areas. Close to the beach. Tel: 07-8973108. Email: dx24@hotmail.com

SEEKING VIEWS
We are a couple who have visited Phuket many times. We are here now and looking for accommodation with ocean views on a monthly basis - low season only. We require a pool and satellite TV. We can pay 7,000 to 10,000 baht a month. Email: butterfly33@yahoo.com

COMFORTABLE FLAT
I am looking for a comfortable flat in Patong or nearby between June 15 and July 20, approximately. Must have kitchen, cable TV, aircon and fan. Must also be located in a good area. Email: midcac@hotmail.com

RENTAL IN PATONG
Girl from Norway looking for apartment or house in Patong. Need it long term, from Sept 2004 to May 2005. Require two bedrooms, fully furnished and access to swimming pool. Email: lilla_4ever@hotmail.com

HOLIDAY HOME
wanted. English/Thai family needs a house with 3-4 bedrooms, swimming pool, aircon, kitchen, satellite TV, and hot/cold water in the bathroom. We will need it for holiday for one month mid-July to mid-August 2004. Should be near ocean-prefer walking distance, preferably Patong area. Email: arlhome@netvigator.com

LOOKING 4 A HOUSE
I'm looking for a nice detached house in Rawai. 2 bedrooms, bathroom, phone line, furnished or not. I'll return to Phuket in September and I am looking to lease a place long-term. Please email details to: richardtekram@hotmail.com

HOUSE OR APT
for family. Our family of 4 (2 kids: 3yrs, 5yrs) is looking for a nice house/apartment to rent during our visit to Phuket from May 27 to June 20. Must have aircon, parking and preferably a pool. Only quiet locations, distant from traffic noise and nightlife wanted. We are also interested in car rental and daytime sailing/fishing trips and excursions to beautiful beaches and other islands. Email: noreng@directbox.com

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in Kamala. 2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, 1 large living room, kitchenette and private garden/swimming pool. Tel: 076-325000.

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*** All applications will be treated with strictest confidence. Only shortlisted candidates will be notified for an interview. ***

HOTEL STAFF
 wanted for a small, 5-room hotel in Patong. We have a vacancy for a female all-rounder aged between 22 and 32. Should be an English speaker, with duties to include reception, accounting, bar, breakfasts, room-cleaning, laundry and other typical hotel jobs. Salary dependent on qualifications. We offer free accommodation, food, laundry, motorbike, mobile phone and health insurance for the right applicant. Tel: 06-1062566. Email: philipp@loxinfo.co.th

ELECTRICIAN NEEDED
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Applications should be submitted by email to
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If you think this is you, please contact; Khun Pen 076/342511 or send email to info@diveupply.com

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 The Mangosteen Resort & Spa, a high class boutique resort in Nai Harn, is looking for an experienced Spa Manager (Thai national only). Good command of English language is a must. HR Manager urgently needed for a team of 100 employees. Please contact for more details. Tel: 076-289399. Fax: 076-289389. Email: hajo@mangosteen-phuket.com

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Thai person with good English skills required to find property and land for sale. Own transport necessary. Good salary and commission paid. Tel: 076-280805 or 01-2710496.

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for Angel model and promotion shoot on May 15. Tel: 01-5396106, 01-0856806.

ENGLISH TEACHERS
ECC has positions for native English speakers in government primary schools in Phuket City. Start date May 10. Please send CV by email or fax. Tel: 076-219062. Fax: 076-214498. Email: eccpkt@ecc.ac.th

HEAD GARDENER
We are looking for a man, suitably-experienced in gardening and able to understand some English, to work as Head Gardener. Good salary for the successful applicant. Tel: 076-281084, 01-8953185. Email: man@islandhomephuket.com

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Housekeeper needed urgently. Must be able to speak English and live in. Good wages and working conditions offered. Please call for more info. Tel: 076-273427.

SECRETARY
Property Secretary required. Bright English-speaker required to continue the setting up of a villa project in Koh Kaew. Requirements: independent; computer literate; and have own transport. Salary dependent on experience. Please contact for more information and to apply. Tel: 076-236616, 01-8952206. Email: siamuk@loxinfo.co.th

THAI MARINE LEISURE
Authorized agents for QBE insurance, as well as a yacht broker, is looking for a male Thai national with a good command of English, own vehicle, love of meeting people and a passion for hard work. Experience in the marketing field is an advantage. Please send your CV by fax or email to apply. Tel: 01-7970835. Fax: 076-238974. Email: insurance@thaimarine.com

ELECTRICIANS
2 experienced Electricians, a Foreman, and an Accountant (QuickBooks Pro experienced) wanted. Tel: 076-254752.

Articles for Sale

BAR EQUIPMENT
for sale. Pool table, bar with overhead display, cabinet for glasses, mirrored bottle and glass display, sink unit in cabinet, and various TVs, for sale. Call for details. Tel: 01-5369079.

GOLF CLUBS
Tommy Armour 845s V-31 EVO Cavity PW-3 iron, True Temper Tri-Gold graphite shafts (black). 2 Orlimar TriMetal Plus fairway woods: 12 and 14, True Temper ultra-lightweight graphite shafts (green). 2 sets of Ping Eye 2 irons, PW-2 iron Red dot and Blue dot. Ladies Mizuno irons, PW-3 iron only used twice. Tel: 05-098-0976. Email: donadams@mail.com

PICNIC TABLES
Rustic 2m solid wood picnic tables with built-in benches. Made to order by local Thai man. Ideal for outdoor living or for restaurants/bars. Other sizes available. Free delivery to your home or business. Price: 3,500 baht each. For more info and pictures please email. Tel: 09-6475625. Email: lum@rawai.com

CHILD CAR SEAT
1-month-old car seat for child up to age 4. Never been used. New price: 6,500 baht; will sell for 5,000 baht ono. Make your baby safe. Tel: 072-635260, 09-5893389. Email: nytram74@hotmail.com

SAMSUNG V200
Samsung model V200 for sale. 1 month old. Perfect condition, still under warranty. Please contact Khun Natthada for more details. Tel: 01-5366732, 01-536-6732. Email: samenta_great@hotmail.com

BABY COT FOR SALE
Baby cot, with padded aluminium frame and mosquito netting sides and cover. Size: over 1m x 1m. Good for small babies up to a year old or a bit more. Also have a pushchair in good condition. Price: 1,500 baht for both items. Tel: 076-202208 or 09-9705259. Email: info@sunrise-divers.com

TRIATHLON BIKE
Specialized triathlon bike in perfect condition. Perfect for budding or established triathletes. Only 6 months old, 35,000 baht ono. Contact for more info. Tel: 07-263-5260. Email: nytram74@hotmail.com

CANON/NIKON
cameras for sale. Canon EOS 650 with 35-105, 80-200, 50mm lenses, wide angle adapter, and flash. Excellent condition and works perfectly. Price: 25,000 baht. Nikonos 35 mm IV-A. Old, but like new. Never been used underwater. Classic and perfect. Price: 15,000 baht with case. Tel: 076-274484 or 07-1862883. Email: dphawaii@hotmail.com

MONITOR FOR SALE
Brand new 17" HP monitor. New price is 8,500 baht. Will sell for 4,500 baht. Tel: 06-2775298. Email: thay_harly@hotmail.com

SONY PC110
Camcorder for sale. Sony PC110 Mini DV, 20 months old. Cost 65,000 baht (have original receipt and warranty card). Will sell for 25,000 baht ono. Complete with all original accessories (battery, power adapter, lens shade, remote control, DV in/out cable, and AV cable). Tel: 01-2727556.

Articles Wanted

MOBILE PHONE
Want to buy a mobile phone in 'as new' condition. Must be new model. Price should be good for you and me. Email: butterfly33@yahoo.com

SOUND EQUIPMENT
Want to buy: mixer, amps, speakers, microphones, the whole works. Prefer to buy everything together, but individual pieces considered. Tel: 06-6836326. Email: bluephoenixdesign@hotmail.com

TREADMILL
A quality treadmill running machine wanted in a good condition. Must be robust and in perfect working order. Tel: 09-2167220. Email: julianburgess@myway.com


CAMERA CASE
Sony Cybershot P7 underwater case wanted. Tel: 09-2875933. Email: sipos@hawaii.edu

USED ITEMS WANTED
Are you moving? Then sell us your stuff for our empty apartment. We are looking to buy: luxury-quality mattress or bed, and stuffed sofa; coffee table; end tables; table lamps; cooking utensils; and even a cappuccino machine. Tel: 01-740-8526. Email: morganlanbin@yahoo.com

UBC SET & AIRCON
Would like to take over (must include installation and tuning) a UBC satellite set. Also looking for a portable air conditioner (on wheels). Please contact with details. Email: blueskies10000@hotmail.com

SECONDHAND FLUTE
Looking for a secondhand flute in good condition (for intermediate musician). If you have one, or if you know where to buy in Phuket or Bangkok, please contact me. Email: elsbellon@hotmail.com

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wanted. 20-22 feet in length with central console, not older than year 2000. Equivalent boat considered. Please email with more details. Email: balipenang@hotmail.com

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paul.scholten@simpsonmarine.com
Mobile Phone: +06012-6011705

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simon.theseira@simpsonmarine.com
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29-foot fiberglass motor yacht with Thai registration. 2 x 280hp Mercruiser engines. Price: 3.5 million baht ono. Please contact for more information. Tel: 076-239864. Email: hktmkt@ksc.th.com

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for rent at a prime location at Surin Beach. Contact Khun Tud. Tel: 01-7978952; 01-7977624. Email: susieyoga@hotmail.com

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wanted. We need to have our website translated into Chinese, Japanese, Malaysian, Thai, French and Italian. You must be a native speaker of the language. Tel: 076-346142, 01-7881466. Email: richard_melen@hotmail.com

Personals

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players wanted for some exciting games. Please call or fax for more details. Tel: 076-386113 or 01-577 8443. Fax: 076-386114.

FEMALE TO GUIDE ME
I am a photographer, single and looking for a nice woman that would guide me as my companion on my visit to Thailand in June. I am looking for an intelligent woman who likes to talk and is interested in art and architecture. If you are slim, aged 30-40 and single, please feel free to contact me. Email: fv62@hotmail.com

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4 x 4s

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Nice Toyota Tiger 4WD, 2.5 turbo diesel, 2 doors, lots of extras. 34,000km, new in June 2002. Price wanted: 580,000 baht. Contact Jim. Tel: 07-8823940. Email: albertjames1940@hotmail.com

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for sale. 2 years old, 16,000 km, green. Only 35,000 baht. Tel: 01-6912881.

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HONDA WAVE
Red Honda Wave for sale. 13,900km, 18 months old. 20,000 baht. Tel: 06-595-3210. Email: ecoquest66@hotmail.com

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YAMAHA FRESH
2003 Yamaha Fresh II motorbike. Electric starter, front disc brake, only 8,000km. Red, just one year old. Has been rented. Bike is in excellent condition. New tax and insurance. Price: 21,950 baht. Tel: 06-2725078. Email: sk2max@hotmail.com

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Wanted

HONDA MTX125
Looking urgently for a Honda MTX 125, in decent condition, for a fair price. Small repairs no problem, but no junkers please. Email: klauszelm@hotmail.com

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