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MONDAY, AUGUST 17, 2015 + 30 BAHT

Bike for Mom sets world record

More than 294,800 cyclists join event

ARIANE KUPPERMAN-SUTTHAVONG

Hundreds of thousands of blue-clad people nationwide have affirmed their respect, love and loyalty for Her Majesty the Queen and the monarchy with their largest ever bicycle parade which set a new world record yesterday.

The main event was in Bangkok where His Royal Highness Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn led more than 40,000 cyclists who joined the "Bike for Mom" cycling event yesterday evening to mark Her Majesty the Queen's 83rd birthday.

The Crown Prince and Her Royal Highness Princess Bajrakitiyabha led cyclists along the 43-kilometre round-route from the Royal Plaza through Bangkok streets to the 11th Infantry Regiment in Bang Khen.

The event notched up a new record for the world's largest bicycle parade, breaking the previous record set in Taiwan. In 2012, in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of China, Taiwan held the "One Bike One" event and drew 72,919 cyclists across the country to ride, according to the World Record Academy.

The previous world record for the largest bicycle parade consisted of 48,615 cyclists at an event in Italy, and was noted by the *Guinness Book of World Records*. For Thailand, 294,863 people registered to participate in yesterday's "Bike for Mom" parade nationwide. The Guinness World Records committee was also invited to certify the event.

The committee has certified that Thailand now holds the new world record, with 146,266 cyclists nationwide who successfully rode and met its criteria.

People from all walks of life, from children to the elderly, as well as people with disabilities, participated in the event.

In the capital, late-comers braved the heat and bright sunlight yesterday, as they stood in the middle of Sanam Luang, queuing for their last minute registration for the event.

Even for those who didn't enroll by the late July deadline, the much-expected parade could not be missed.

It was an historical day, cyclists and curious onlookers agreed cheerfully,



His Royal Highness Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn leads the mass biking event, followed closely behind by Prime Minister Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha. More than 294,800 people from all walks of life joined the Bike for Mom campaign nationwide. PAT APAPONG UPAI PAI/THASILL

adding the temperature, though hot, didn't stop them from coming. Some came as early as 7am.

By early afternoon, the attention shifted a few streets down to the front of the Royal Plaza, where many waited for HRH the Crown Prince to kickstart the parade.

Most VIPs, including Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, cabinet members, court presidents and high-ranking officials as well as diplomats, had their bicycles lined up since morning at the Royal Plaza. They were joined by various politicians, as well as businessmen and celebrities.

This special moment was televised and the sea of blue blossomed to prove how united Thais are in their overwhelming loyalty to the royal family, observers said.

"I'm happy the Royal Family is supportive of cycling sports and hope it will be a starting point for Thais to ride their bikes more often," said Supakon Pattanakham, an experienced cyclist.

The avid rider says he wants the world to see that Thais chose to ride bicycles as their way of expressing their love for the monarchy.

"It's the first time I have been able to ride with HRH Crown Prince. It might be the only time as well. I wish he'd do that more often," he said, adding he was hoping to show his best skills for this occasion.

Along the cycling route, crowds mostly clad in blue waved blue flags and shouted "Long Live the Crown Prince" when he biked past. The Crown Prince responded by smiling and waving his hand at the people.

It's the first time that such an activity has been held, with HRH the Crown Prince taking part in it side by side with the public, said Boonsong Suthipjit, a



Blue-clad cyclists fill the road leading to the Royal Plaza as they prepare to join the Bike for Mom biking campaign to honour Her Majesty the Queen yesterday. PATTAPONG CHATPATTARASILL

medical doctor from the Royal Household Bureau. "I dropped all other activities I had today, to volunteer as a medic here," said Dr. Boonsong.

"The day is very special," Dr. Boonsong added, as he described how the event differed from other royal celebrations.

He feels it allowed people to take a more active part in celebrations than in past such events.

Meanwhile, villagers in several parts across the country attended the Bike for Mom activity as well. In Mae Hong Son, ethnic Karen highlanders in Hual Sua Thao of Muang district rode their bikes as part of the event.

In Phitsanulok, Wattana Kham-in, an 11-year-old disabled boy with no arms, arrived at Phitsanulok city hall in Muang district with his relatives to join the local

cycling parade.

In Phayao, Plieng Rakphan, an 83-year-old man attended the Bike for Mom event covering 26km in the province. He said even though his bicycle was old, he wanted to be part of this national activity.

Prince uses skills for charity: Page 4
More photos: Page 4

INDONESIA

Wreckage of missing turbo plane located

JAKARTA: The wreckage of an Indonesian Trigana Air plane with 54 people onboard was found in a remote part of the Papua region last night.

The plane was located in the Bintang highlands part of the Oksibil region and there were no reports of any survivors. Local villagers told authorities that they saw a plane crash into a mountain.

The Trigana Air Service plane was flying from Papua's provincial capital, Jayapura, to the Papua city of Oksibil when it lost contact with Oksibil's airport, said Transportation Ministry spokesman Julius Barata.

There was no indication that the pilot had made a distress call, he said.

TheATR42-300 twin turboprop plane was carrying 49 passengers and five crew members on the scheduled 42-minute journey, Mr Barata said. Five children, including three infants, were among the passengers.

Local media reports said all the passengers are Indonesians. The airline did not immediately release a passenger manifest.

A plane was sent yesterday to look for the missing airliner, but the air search was suspended due to darkness and limited visibility, Susanto, the head of Papua's search and rescue agency, said.

Oksibil, which is about 280km south of Jayapura, was experiencing heavy rain, strong winds and fog when the plane lost contact with the airport minutes before it was scheduled to land, said Susanto.

Indonesia has had its share of airline woes in recent years. From 2007 to 2009, the European Union barred Indonesian airlines from flying to Europe because of safety concerns. AGFNCIS



A Trigana Air Service ATR42-300 twin turboprop plane. AP

Full report: Page 5



Bumpy start

Tak will be the first province to develop a special economic zone (SEZ) under the government's policy to promote border trade and development. But the ambitious effort has hit early problems including land disputes with locals, insufficient privileges for investors and a vague blueprint for the scheme.

Report: Page B1

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NATIONAL

Colleges curb hazing horrors

SPECIAL REPORT: Victims speak out after reports of deaths, abuse nationwide stir public outcry, write Taam Yingcharoen and Dumrongkiat Mala

University freshmen nationwide are expected to join hazing rituals or so-called *rab nang* ceremonies on the first day of the 2015 school semester today, but a growing number of students and authorities are vowing to reform the half-century old ceremony rife with incidents of violence and abuse.

Opponents of hazing — in which university seniors organise activities and command first-year students to participate — say the practice now includes ritualistic activities which humiliate, degrade and risk causing emotional and physical harm to others.

It is only in recent years that the violence and degradation associated with the tradition have emerged publicly, with photos of hazing violence leaked onto social media causing a public outcry.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has condemned the week-long tradition that takes place during new students' orientation. "The physical and mental abuse violates several human rights, and many are turning a blind eye to these harsh realities," said NHRC commissioner Angkhana Neelapajit.

In 2008 a freshman student at Uthenthawai University in Bangkok died during a hazing session after reportedly failing to comply with orders given by his seniors. He was viciously beaten, and later succumbed to his injuries.

Another incident occurred in 2014 when a 16-year-old freshman student diagnosed with leukaemia was forced to drink an alarming amount of alcohol, then told to submerge his body face-down in the ocean. He drowned.

Thailand has long preserved a tradition of intense hierarchy, and this old-school system continues to prosper, Ms Angkhana said.

A recent hazing-related accident in Chiang Mai on Aug 5 — in which fireworks blew off the left hand of Nampol Silapongprai, a sophomore student at Maejo University's Faculty of Agricultural Production — has increased pressure on authorities to take action. Police said Mr Nampol lost his left hand while making homemade fireworks to set off at a hazing ceremony at the university.

Maejo is among the Thai universities with a strong reputation for what is known as Sotus — Seniority, Order, Tradition, Unity, and Spirit — among students. Sotus is indoctrinated into students to promote respect for seniority, discipline and unity and is mainly applied to first-year arrivals.

"The hazing tradition in Maejo University is the strictest one in the country

I have encountered. Seniors force freshmen to take part and if they oppose, they exclude them from university society," said Panuwat Songsawatthai, a junior at Maejo University's Faculty of Political Science, who founded the Anti-Sotus Facebook page which now has 28,000 followers.

Mr Panuwat said he was forced to join a hazing activity when he was a freshman despite the fact that he did not want to take part.

After launching the Anti-Sotus page, many Maejo students came forward to voice their opposition to hazing.

But for the first two years after speaking out against hazing, Mr Panuwat said his life was a nightmare.

"Many claim initiation is a process of giving birth to new Maejo babies, and hazing is a symbol of cutting Maejo's umbilical cord, but when I spoke of how terrifying the hazing was, I suffered much criticism and multiple threats," he said.

"Verbal abuse evolved into a mob of barbaric students beating me to the ground. I had trouble sleeping for months out of fear of reliving that experience," he said.

Mr Panuwat said he was threatened by people carrying guns and knives, as a warning for "not respecting the law of Maejo as the law of the kingdom. Keeping the hazing tradition undisclosed is part of the oath which first-year students must take, he said.

Many former graduates also join the hazing ceremony while drunk, he said, adding they sometimes unleash jabs and kicks on first-year students for no reason.

"It's impossible to change this culture,

it is handled like a cult and it will always be mandatory," said Mr Panuwat, adding things would be different if hazing participation was voluntary.

"I cannot brainwash people, or exterminate those who cause harm to make the world a better place. If hazing is able to stand and survive the test of time, this is what you have to accept as culture and tradition," he said resignedly.

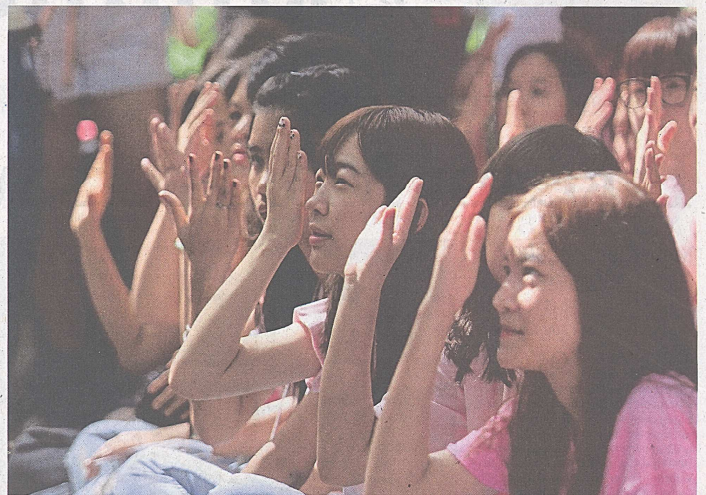
Some students back the rituals, despite the bad publicity. Krisada Bhakdee, vice-president of Maejo University's Student Development and Alumni Relations, defended the university's students hazing ceremony as a way to unify the student body.

"Our hazing ceremony creates responsible, caring and humble citizens for the nation, and it is because of this long tradition we can say that we are one of the most unified universities in the country," he told



A mob of barbaric students [beat] me to the ground. I had trouble sleeping for months.

PANUWAT SONGSAWATTHAI
A JUNIOR AT MAEJO UNIVERSITY'S FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE



Freshmen sit together as seniors welcome them in an activity called CU First Date at Chulalongkorn University yesterday. The welcoming activity was held after the announcement of the university admission results. NARUPON HINSHIRANAN

the Bangkok Post.

The university has a strict policy to protect students, and all seniors are told not to have physical contact with freshmen students throughout the seven-day hazing ceremony, he said.

Recently, 15 students were suspended from hazing activities because of violence and abuse.

"The fireworks explosion that occurred earlier had nothing to do with the university,"

and it was an independent act by the freshman student," he said.

"I have much respect and admiration for Mr Panuwat, who is willing to stand up [because] he is concerned about the human rights violations that may occur," he added.

Meanwhile, the NHRC has vowed to reform the education system to include a human rights programme to ensure students taking part in hazing rituals understand the basic rights of the individual.

"There are still sexual and physical offences being reported in hazing-related activities at suburban universities," said Ms Angkhana.

Some incidents were pulled together and a case taken to court, but there have yet to be any individual prosecutions, she said, adding that appalling acts committed by individuals were never mentioned.

The Office of Higher Education Commission (Ohec) declares it will have zero tolerance for any form of violence in freshmen hazing rituals this year.

Ohec secretary-general Pinit Ratananukul said all universities must apply the new policy to condemn abusive activities.

The activities should be voluntary and parents have the right to observe them, he said. Ohec has now created a "4-must" policy for universities during the orientation and hazing periods, he said.

The policy is comprised of the following: all hazing-related activities must be constructive and have a good public image; the rights and liberty of the freshmen and the principle of equality must be respected; there must be no violations against the individual's physical or moral integrity; there must be no alcohol; hazing-related activities must not interfere with learning; and all the activities must be supervised and under the responsibility of the campus administrators, teaching staff and the senior students.

Any staff member or senior student who disobeys the guidelines will face a disciplinary investigation which can result in serious punishment, Mr Pinit said.

Recently, Ohec ordered universities nationwide to stop late-night hazing rituals to protect student safety. The order had been circulated to all universities and will be strictly enforced, he said.

Ritual 'cleanses' women's assets

Police stations under the Metropolitan Police Bureau's Division 6 are on the look out for fraud in which old Thai-Chinese women are lured by a Chinese-speaking gang into a fortune-telling scam.

Three Chinese suspects linked to the scam were arrested earlier this month. On Aug 3, officers from the Chakkrabat, Phlap Phla Chai Area 1 and Yannawa police stations arrested three Chinese nationals, two women and one man, and seized 6,825 yuan (37,000 baht) and 13,770 baht cash they had allegedly swindled from their elderly victims.

The suspects were identified as Sai Sianghua, 39; Liang Faying, 50; and Chen Mincheng, 67. They are allegedly members of a gang that has robbed well-to-do old women out of a total of some 9 million baht recently.

Police have received complaints about the scam since late last year, often stemming from encounters at markets in the Thai-Chinese communities of Yaowarat and Yannawa.

Victims were approached by a group of Chinese-speaking people who talk them into believing that they or their family are facing a bad omen that could prove fatal if it is not pushed away by a Chinese ritual.

The victims were asked to attend a ritual and bring their valuables along. They were asked to put their valuables into a black rubbish bin liner, take them to a rite performed by a "master" fortuneteller, then take the bag back home and leave it unopened for 15 days.

In most cases, the victims became suspicious, opened the bag and realised they had been conned because their valuables were of course not in the bag. The gang switched the bag on them with one containing non-valuable items of a similar weight.

On Aug 25 last year, Rattaya Eimworawuthikul, 61, told police she lost gold necklaces, diamond rings and cash totaling 130,000 baht to the gang when she agreed to attend the rite. She was approached by

a Mandarin-speaking gang while she was shopping at the Saint Louise market in the Yannawa area.

Later on April 14, another case emerged. Chutima Treewithayaphum, 67, was conned into agreeing to take part in a similar bad luck cleansing ritual.

Again, a Chinese-speaking group approached the victim with a similar story. While she was walking on Mangkon Road, they approached her with a story that her daughter, who was studying abroad, could die if she failed to attend a bad-luck removing rite with a Chinese fortuneteller.

Ms Chutima put her valuables — cash in US dollars, Japanese yen and Korean won and gold withdrawn from a bank

safe — in a black rubbish bag and went to attend the rite. Again she was told by the Chinese fortuneteller not to open the bag for 15 days. Like other victims she didn't realise she had brought home a different bag until she opened it later to find milk and drinking water inside.

On June 15 Supha Aphiwathanakul, 75, the mother of well-known doctor Metha Aphiwathanakul, of the Prasat Neurological Institute, lodged a complaint with Phlap Phla Chai Area 1 police that she had lost her cash in foreign currencies, jewellery and gold bars worth a total of 7 million baht to a similar gang.

Most recently, a victim who did not want to be identified told police on June 27 she was approached by a three-member gang who tried to befriended her while she was shopping at Talat Kao market in the Chakkrabat area. She told them she wasn't interested and walked away.

But shortly after that a new face turned up with an even scarier story that her daughter might die if she didn't seek a rite to ward off the bad luck. The trick worked and she ended up losing diamond rings, diamond earrings, gold necklaces and cash worth 526,200 baht.

Following the complaints, the police stations in the area where the victims were approached started working together to track down the gang, said Pol Maj Gen Chayapol Chatchayayudch, chief of the Metropolitan Police Bureau's Division 6.

Based on evidence they found including images of suspects taken from security cameras, investigators began tracking a group of suspects and narrowed down the list to the three they arrested on Aug 3. The suspects denied any wrongdoing. "All victims identified the suspects and police have pictures of them while attempting to con the victims as evidence," said Pol Maj Gen Chayapol.

Pol Col Nakharin Sukthongnit, chief of the Phlap Phla Chai Area 1 station, said one of the spots where this scam is most likely to come up is the Wat Leng Nei Yi area, a popular tourist attraction and shopping place drawing Thai-Chinese visitors from all over the country.

Chinese-speaking gang cons elderly out of their valuables, writes Wassayos Ngamkham



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AVIATION

New push to solve ICAO safety concerns

AMORN RAT MAHITTHIROOK

A new sub-committee has been set up to bring about a speedier conclusion to the problems in Thailand's aviation industry, said Transport Minister ACM Prajin Juntong.

The sub-committee — the seventh of its kind — will look into issues raised by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) with the Department of Civil Aviation (DCA) safety standards and will also speed up plans to set up a command centre

tackling the problems raised. The panel, headed by air force chief ACM Treetos Sonjaeng, met for the first time on Tuesday, said ACM Prajin, who heads the steering committee.

The panel is in the process of working out how it will fix the problems raised by the ICAO, but its chief task is to speed up the Transport Ministry's handling of the issue.

In response to the DCA's failure to meet a 90-day deadline to correct shortcomings earlier identified by the ICAO, Thailand received a red flag on June 18.

DCA director-general Parichart Khotcharat admitted progress was slow, especially in finding foreign experts to assist with reviewing air operator certificates.

More research was also needed on the legal aspects of potential contracts with outside consultants, as well as any potential economic and social impacts from their work as stated in Section 23 of the constitution, she said.

Finding funds to hire foreign experts was another dilemma for the department, she said.

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