



# Jock-ularity

## IS THAILAND SAFE?

It is now sadly the beginning of the low season in the beach resorts around Thailand. Songkran saw the last of the masses to visit for some time and the holiday trade is now gritting its teeth to the prospect of yet another long low season.

In Phuket and in particular Patong, a dramatic downturn has been experienced over the last couple of weeks. Sure it is to be expected that for the next few months the tourist trade does diminish but the question has to be asked, why so dramatically and why so quickly this year?

World media has in the recent past, not given Thailand and for that matter S.E. Asia a particularly good press, sighting terrorism in the area as a reason why tourists should not travel. The Bali bombing, SARS, and Chicken flu have served to play no little part to help dissuade people also.

Southern Thailand has historically seen ethnic difficulties and it has always been accepted that a strong Muslim presence exists in the south.

However the media has over the last year or so paid particular attention to Thailand's internal troubles and also to the resolves or perhaps excuses offered by central

government as to why the problems exist and the reasons for the various recent uprisings.

The drafting of police from other regional forces to the south to assist in the keeping of the law has obviously done little or nothing to ease the situation as there have been numerous police killings and civilian shootings over the last year or so. More recently the theft of a large quantity of agricultural fertiliser of a similar type to that used in the Bali disaster has served to further raise peoples awareness and suspicions about the safety of Southern Thailand. Most recently the uprisings in Yala province has received major world attention further dissuading the public to travel to the region.

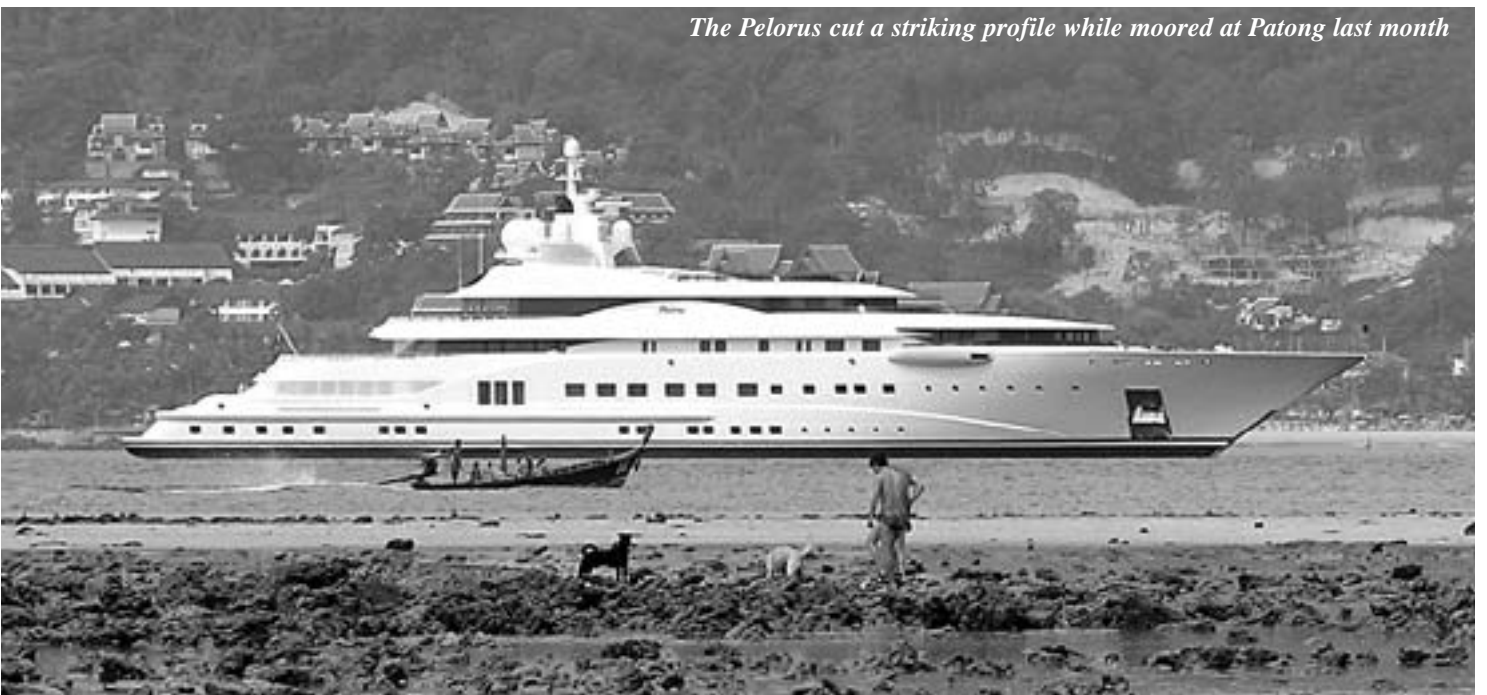
The BBC for one have warned people not to travel to Southern Thailand sighting a line from Ranong to Surat Thani down as being hostile areas.

What is Thailand doing about this issue? Answer, very little indeed when you consider that tourism accounts 6% of GNP. The only real assurance travellers are aware of when coming to Thailand is a slight increase in Airport security, but that is

should be said is no more that most other countries.

Take Bangla Road (Patong) for example, after the tragic events of Bali special police and an increase in regular policing was seen everywhere. Sadly that soon fell away and now little or nothing is being done to protect people's safety. The "checkpoint" at Kathu is no more than a farce, where, if people are stopped at all it is due to not having a helmet on or failing to fix their seatbelt. No heed is taken to what the person is carrying or indeed the nature or destination of the journey is ever in question.

People are concerned that safety is not such a big issue here and someone in high office should go on record to assure that Thailand is taking this matter seriously. The question of resources and cost of policing is not and should not be a factor and if we are to survive this lowest of low, low seasons the powers that be MUST become pro active and show that people's safety, both Thai nationals and tourists alike is a major concern and is being addressed. All this is a must if Thailand wishes to regain it's rightful place at the top of the tourist tree.



*The Pelorus cut a striking profile while moored at Patong last month*