

Thousands pray for health and peace

Bangkok residents flocked to make merit at temples yesterday to mark the beginning of the three-month Buddhist Lent, while many temples upcountry also saw streams of merit-makers and beautiful parades of candle carvings. Merchant Sunantha Churat, 42, who made merit at Wat Rakhang Kositaram, said her family planned to worship at nine different temples - a number believed to bring maximum merit - to ensure their good health and longevity. Thammasat University student Tossapol Boonchuay said he and his friends made merit and prayed for peace in Thailand. A 35-year-old woman, who identified herself only as Lamiad, said that making merit helped her feel less stressed about the current economic problems. In Saraburi, thousands participated in the annual ceremony to present flowers to monks, held from Saturday until yesterday. In Prachin Buri's Ban Sang district, governor Oros Wongsith presided over an alms-giving ceremony at Wat Bang Kra Bao and urged 1,000 merit-makers to cast votes in the national referendum on the new constitution. In the northeastern province of Ubon Ratchathani, Interior Minister Aree Wongsearaya presided over a candle-carving contest that featured a procession of 80 trucks carrying carved candles, and northeastern traditional dances. The contest was won by Wat Pa Noi, with Wat Sri Saengthong and Tambon Rai Noi Administration Organisation in Muang district in second and third places. They received cash prizes of Bt100,000, Bt80,000 and Bt50,000, respectively. In Nakhon Ratchasima, throngs of residents and tourists turned out to watch a procession of beautiful candle carvings based on Lord Buddha's story, HM the King's works and Jatukam Ramathep. A total of 49 candle-carving teams were competing for a trophy from HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and cash prizes of Bt80,000, Bt50,000 and Bt20,000. The winners were Wat Mai Sapathum in Chok Chai district, Wat Burapapimol in Pi Mai district, and Sribuddha Community in Chok Chai. In the South, merit-makers crowded Wat Mahathat Woramahawihan in Nakhon Si Thammarat's Muang district. Many of them said they prayed for His Majesty the King's good health and peace in the country. Temples in Surat Thani saw streams of people coming to make merit and listen to the Buddha's teachings. People presented monks with fluorescence lights instead of candles this year as all temples now have power supply. Security was tight at temples in the restive southernmost provinces, which saw fewer merit-makers due to fears of insurgent attacks. Meanwhile, people who visited their hometowns over the long weekend started travelling back to Bangkok last night, prompting Mor Chit bus terminal to schedule more buses and conduct checks on the condition of drivers to ensure public safety. The extended weekend had its share of road fatalities, with three accidents in Phitsanulok yesterday claiming four lives and leaving a young boy injured. In the province's Muang district, irrigation official Santisak Yaemsaothong, 52, died when his pickup truck crashed into a power pole on Singjawat Road at 1am yesterday. Police suspect Santisak dozed off while driving home. Two women were killed when a speeding pickup truck rammed into their motorcycles at an intersection on the Phitsanulok-Wang Thong road. Benjawan Aksornsarakit, 42, and Sunthorn Pongkhao, 48, died on the spot while Benjawan's 11-year-old son, Jakkrapong, was injured. The pickup driver, Thammnoon Rangthong, 25, a former Thai youth rugby player, turned himself in to police at the scene. In Phrom Phiram district, Paiboon Pibal, 46, was killed after his speeding motorcycle skidded at a sharp curve on a rural road in Ban Saphanhin village.

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