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Thai revellers set new 'human wave' record

Olarn Lertratanadamrongkul and Sompoch Sombat
The Nation (Thailand)

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At 7pm on Friday (April 15), some 50,208 people got together in Thailand to break the Guinness World Record by taking part in the Human Waves NOAL World Record on Khao Niew Road as part of the Songkran (New Year) celebrations in Khon Kaen.

Infrared devices placed at both ends of the road counted the number of participants.

A similar record was broken on this very road last year, when 42,652 people took part in creating the human wave, which is part of the campaign to ensure a booze-free Songkran, explained Nirut Utha, director of the centre for limiting alcohol consumption. This "human wave" phenomenon was first held in 2009.

This year's participants were crowded in a 800-square-metre part of the road, while another 50,000 revellers celebrated the events nearby.

Meanwhile, some 148 deaths and 2,316 injuries have been reported after four of the "seven dangerous days of Songkran", road safety officials said on Friday.

The death toll was 64 lower or 30 per cent down from the previous year. The number of people injured was down by 418 or 15 per cent.

The number of accidents - 2,141 - was down by 374 or 15 per cent, Kamol Rodklai, deputy permanent secretary for Education, told a press conference on Friday.

Bangkok topped the four-day death toll with eight deaths, followed by Suphan Buri and Chiang Mai, which both recorded seven deaths.

Nakhon Si Thammarat had the most injuries with 103, followed by Chiang Rai with 100. Nakhon Si Thammarat had the most accidents at 97, trailed by Chiang Rai at 93, he said.

Kamol said on Thursday (April 14) alone, there were 515 accidents, which killed 32 people and injured 556 people across the country.

Drunk drivers were still the major cause of accidents at 45 per cent, and 81 per cent of crashes involved motorcycles, he said.

The major cause of injuries and deaths in the North and Northeast was drunk driving at 50 per cent, while in the Central region travelling without wearing safety helmets was the prime concern (42 per cent).

Police have been told to strictly enforce motoring laws to deter people from driving over the speed limit, driving while drunk or riding without helmets.

"We've told bus transport companies to provide two drivers per bus if the bus travels more than 400 kilometres - so they can take turns driving.

"And all drivers are not allowed to drink alcohol. Anyone who violates the ban will be jailed for up to three months or face fines of 2,000 baht to 10,000 baht (US\$66-\$330). Moreover, [bus] companies will be fined 40,000 baht (\$1,325), which will affect renewal of transport licences," Kamol added.

Vocational institutions have set up 250 centres to help provide vehicle checks and basic repairs on primary and secondary roads nationwide free of charge. People were told to call 1156 for information about these.

With Songkran, the traditional New Year festival, officially ending on Friday, the State Railway of Thailand (SRT) and bus companies are offering extra trips to help travellers get back to Bangkok this weekend.

SRT will add 12 Bangkok-bound train trips from the North and Northeast to support an expected 40,000 passengers per day from Saturday to Monday (April 16-18), SRT public relations division chief Nuanla-ong Wongchan said.

The extra train trips include the 962 departing Sila-ard at 7.30pm, arriving in Bangkok at 04.45am; the 976 departing Si Sa Ket at 4.30pm, arriving in Bangkok at 3.30am; the 936 leaving Udon Thani at 8.40pm and arriving in Bangkok at 8.30am; and the 934 from Ubon Ratchathani, leaving at 7.45pm and arriving in Bangkok at 8.10am.

The SRT had over 250 train trips for travellers for this year's Songkran break, she said, but reminded passengers to beware of thieves and not to hand on to steps while

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travelling due to the risk of injury from falling off moving trains.

Holiday-makers were seen queuing up to buy tickets for Bangkok and elsewhere at the bus station in the southern transport hub of Hat Yai. Tickets for all 35 buses scheduled daily for Bangkok from Hat Yai were fully booked till Sunday. This prompted the state Transport Co to prepare extra buses so people would not be stranded. In the northeast province of Si Sa Ket, private bus firms were also reported to have added eight more daily trips.

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