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Pattaya police, army bust 32 foreigners for playing bridge

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Soldiers, Pattaya police and Bang Lamung district officials raided a bridge club, arresting 32 players for having too many playing cards and decks without an official seal. (Photos by Trinai Jansrichol)

CHON BURI – Nearly three dozen foreigners, many of them pensioners, were arrested and fined 5,000 baht each for playing bridge in Pattaya.

Local police, soldiers and Bang Lamung district officials raided a Jomtien & Pattaya Bridge Club meeting above Alto's restaurant off Thapraya Road in the resort city on Wednesday, taking into custody 32 people, mostly European nationals, and holding them until 3am.

Pattaya police chief Sukthart Pumpunmuang told AFP Thursday the raid was sparked by a member of the public complaining to the government's anti-corruption centre. It was initiated by district officials, local media said, not by Pattaya police.

"The chairman of the bridge club is arguing that they were not gambling (for money)," Pol Col Sukthart said.

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(Photo by Trinai Jansrichol)

Finding score books, but no money, police initially speculated that the foreigners were gambling, but transferring cash later between bank accounts. Bridge club officials tried in vain to explain bridge is played only for points.

The card players' plight was eased after the president of the **Contract Bridge League of Thailand**, Chodchoy Sophonpanich - a civic activist and a member of the prominent banking family - went to Pattaya on Thursday morning to advise police that bridge was treated under the law as a sport rather than gambling.

Local media reported that she intended "to educate police" on the rules of bridge.

"Police know that bridge is a sport because a similar case happened before, but this time it was military and district officials who initiated the raid and they probably didn't know," said Chaiyut Assanaiyarat, the bridge league's manager.

While they found no financial evidence of gambling, police charged the group with possessing more than 120 playing cards that were not produced by the Excise Department, in violation of Section 8 of the Playing Cards Act of 1943.

Pol Col Sukthart added that all but one of the 26 men and six women arrested were freed on 5,000 baht bail after 12 hours in custody. One woman remained in jail after she refused to sign a report saying she was caught gambling.

Police said those arrested included 12 British nationals, three Norwegians, three Swedes, two Australians, a German, a Dane, a Canadian, a New Zealander and a Dutch and Irish national. The other nationalities were not made public.

A British embassy spokesman said officials were in contact with local authorities "following the arrest of several British nationals".

The bridge club is a venue popular with elderly foreign players that advertises publicly and meets three times a week above a restaurant. It has been in operation since 1994.

Local media said Thursday afternoon that police have deferred further legal action, pending more investigation.



Video by YouTube user Aiaguay Na Pattaya



(Photo by Trinai Jansrichol)

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- ungoliant** Posted: 14 | 5 Feb 2016 at 20:42
The response of the Bridge Club of Chiang Mai to this fiasco was to enjoy the highest turnout of the season for the weekly Friday game.
14 Like 0 Dislike 0 Reply
- pettersson** Posted: 2 | 5 Feb 2016 at 15:48
Is the RTP so stupid that they thought playing Contact Bridge is encroaching on the army and Police gambling casinos?
51 Like 1 Dislike 0 Reply
- mutley** Posted: 598 | 5 Feb 2016 at 14:57
Just seen this on the beeb who seem to be treating it as a joke but then they would.
13 Like 4 Dislike 0 Reply
- JohnnyG** Posted: 41 | 5 Feb 2016 at 11:32
The police should be charged over this incident with bring the country into disrepute given how many newspapers around the world have made their readers wonder if all Thais are not more than a little stupid. I am grateful that the RTP weren't carrying Luk Thep dolls and removed all doubt about that possibility.
88 Like 1 Dislike 1 Reply
- Comment reply** Posted: 5 Feb 2016 at 19:25
The dolls were the drivers who stayed in their vehicles.
16 Like 0 Dislike 0 Reply
- tg1955** Posted: 263 | 5 Feb 2016 at 10:04
Pattaya police are a joke! They made a complete fool of themselves ...
119 Like 2 Dislike 0 Reply
- JohnnyG** Posted: 41 | 5 Feb 2016 at 11:32
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113 Like 1 Dislike 1 Reply
- Comment reply** Posted: 5 Feb 2016 at 19:25
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26 Like 1 Dislike 1 Reply
- tg1955** Posted: 263 | 5 Feb 2016 at 10:04
Pattaya police are a joke! They made a complete fool of themselves ...
145 Like 2 Dislike 0 Reply
- jck** Posted: 817 | 5 Feb 2016 at 09:45
The PM/junta chief could gain a little credibility by issuing a public apology to those arrested, refund the "fines" and offer compensation for the embarrassment the police/ army has caused to members of an established bridge club. Thailand's international image that the PM thinks is tarnished by some journalists has suffered yet another blow due to this fiasco.
136 Like 4 Dislike 1 Reply
- Comment reply** Posted: 5 Feb 2016 at 20:20
Ahhh - there you have it ... It was the reporting which tarnished the nation's image. If there was no media, Thailand's reputation would shine like a beacon throughout the world.
24 Like 1 Dislike 1 Reply
- JaiDee70** Posted: 2 | 5 Feb 2016 at 09:18
Obviously the Thai police and army cannot comprehend the fact that enjoy card playing for the brain stimulation, fun and social interaction it gives them...it's such an Asian mentality that card games must involve gambling... move onto Philippines, Malaysia or Vietnam you trouble making elderly farang, at least you are welcome to spend your hard earned retirement funds there..."Land of Smiles" has always been a farce to bring the tourists in, "Land of Swindle" much more like it...
109 Like 1 Dislike 0 Reply
- WhizBang** Posted: 164 | 5 Feb 2016 at 09:01
The depths of stupidity that is Thai officialdom, has reached a new low.
132 Like 1 Dislike 0 Reply
- dickemery** Posted: 1,379 | 5 Feb 2016 at 08:56
should had played monopoly,you get a free get out of jail card
133 Like 3 Dislike 0 Reply
- Jirao2** Posted: 9 | 5 Feb 2016 at 08:53
There are so many illegal activities in Thailand, I guess somebody in the bridge club did not pay protection money to the Army now, since the club had been playing bridge for so long at this premise, I new kid on the block also want a piece of the pie...LOL.
110 Like 0 Dislike 0 Reply
- Tubon** Posted: 8 | 5 Feb 2016 at 08:17
It already went international, as it is on Yahoo news. If there was a law against embarrassing Thailand, many public figures would be in trouble.
154 Like 0 Dislike 0 Reply
- johncat1** Posted: 1,596 | 5 Feb 2016 at 08:05
All down to money. The raiding party smelt money but had to make do with 5,000 Baht from each card player as compensation because no gambling and no money involved. They must have been gutted
129 Like 1 Dislike 0 Reply
- kitchenjoe** Posted: 5 | 5 Feb 2016 at 07:50
as far as I know prostitution is illegal in thailand....and not bridge....so why the cops dont open their eye what is going on in most bars and in the wide open....maybe the bar owners pay protection while the bridge club is not.....
146 Like 4 Dislike 0 Reply
- SWalker** Posted: 5 | 5 Feb 2016 at 06:52
Aha! Caught red handed. Shhhh! Don't tell them but a few us evil bridge players sometimes play for a penny a point. Could you imagine the carnage if the gendarmes had found stacks of pennies? The horror!!
109 Like 2 Dislike 0 Reply
- Jules** Posted: 793 | 5 Feb 2016 at 05:39
Since they are no longer permitted to put one-man roadblock to extract money from farang, they needed to find a new way to line their pockets. They are so dumb they do not realize the damage they have caused to Thailand's image. They are unbelievable, they manage to outsource to live the life.
164 Like 1 Dislike 0 Reply
- ayai** Posted: 81 | 5 Feb 2016 at 04:42
At last a thoughtful anti corruption move. Let us pounce on these elderly tourists, troublemaking like this. An in private too. Shame
123 Like 1 Dislike 0 Reply
- babalu** Posted: 901 | 5 Feb 2016 at 04:35
Bring it to the source, no education, they just don't know what that is and unwilling to learn.
110 Like 1 Dislike 0 Reply
- surfup** Posted: 3 | 5 Feb 2016 at 02:24
Foolish Thai police,there is so much Real crime going on in that cesspool of a city and they choose to go after elderly farang expats for playing a card game that is played for points not money and will affect people on that going there,as it's news all over the world,
150 Like 1 Dislike 0 Reply

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