

## From The Editor

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# China's reopening border, AOCR2023 in Bangkok, and Songkran

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The exciting first quarter of 2023 started with that, after three years of absence due to COVID-19 pandemic, the first group of Chinese tourists from Xiamen arrived in Bangkok, Thailand, on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> January just a day after China abandoned zero-COVID policies and reopened its border on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January. Asian countries treated Chinese tourists after China reopened border differently. With the evidence that most Thai and Chinese residents had been vaccinated and COVID-19 had been categorized as an endemic in both countries, Chinese tourists were welcomed and under the same regulations as those from other countries. The first day of China's reopened border was managed closely by three ministries: the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, and the Ministry of Transportation, mainly to balance between safety from another COVID-19 outbreak and the flow of the tourism industry.

During 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> February, the Royal College of Radiologists of Thailand (RCRT) and the Radiological Society of Thailand (RST) hosted the 21<sup>th</sup> Asian Oceanian Congress of Radiology (AOCR), 40 years after they last hosted the 4<sup>th</sup> AOCR in 1983. Leaders in Radiology from Asian Oceanian countries united and exchanged their experiences and opinions on various topics. This issue takes core messages from Asian Symposia in AOCR on post COVID lung disease. Other hot topics from AOCR will be addressed in the next issues.



*Leaders in radiology from Asian Oceanian countries appear with their national costumes in the AOCR Gala Dinner.*

Then, the unspecified amount of Caesium-137 radioactive material, contained in a steel tube; about 5 inches wide, 12 inches long and 25 kilograms heavy; went missing from a steam power plant in Prachin Buri Province, Thailand, on 23<sup>rd</sup> February. The company was aware of this missing during the routine check on 10th March. Local officials and those from Thailand's Office of Atoms for Peace have launched searches and a 50,000 baht reward has been offered for information which leads to the recovery by the company. Residents in all districts of Prachin Buri were asked to alert authorities if they came across any steel tube matching the description and to stay away from it. On 20<sup>th</sup> March, the Office of Atoms for Peace (OAP) officials' hand held geiger counters detected traces of Caesium-137 at a steel recycling plant. The OAP's officials were told that the cylinder and its radioactive content had already been melted in the furnace with other metal scraps. Residues of the cylinder and its contents, after the melting process, remained within the closed melting system. A day later, it was officially announced that the missing caesium-137 has already been melted, along with other metallic scrap at the facility. The OAP experts conducted radiation checks at the foundry and in its surrounding areas and detected radiation outside the compound of the foundry. Medical physicists explained that the level of radiation emitted by the missing Cesium-137 cylinder was estimated to be just 41.4mCi (millicurie). That

figure was 57.76 million times lower than the radiation emitted at Chernobyl and 11 million times less than at Fukushima. RCRT together with the Medical Council of Thailand took this opportunity to educate people on radiation hazards. However, Emeritus Professor Kwan Hoong Ng from the department of Biomedical Imaging, Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia calls for effective risk communication on this issue, in order to deal with future disaster.

In April 2023, Thailand's Ministry of Public Health reported that the average new COVID-19 cases and deaths from COVID-19 per day were 24 and lower than one, respectively [1]. The end of wearing masks and social distancing due to the pandemic was officially marked on Songkran, the water splashing festival which is Thailand's traditional new year, in 2023. It was the first since pre-pandemic days marked the end of wearing masks and social distancing due to the pandemic as people, both local and visitors from around the world, as many as over 100, 000, gathered in one famous place [2]. After Songkran, Bangkok's daily number of Covid-19 cases has experienced a significant spike to 700. However, the majority of new cases appear to involve older sub-variants of the virus rather than the emerging Omicron sub-variant XBB.1.16, which has registered 27 reported instances so far [3].



*More than 100,000 locals and visitors from around the world gather at the heart of Kon Kaen, one of the biggest cities in the northeastern region of Thailand, to celebrate Songkran [2].*

Songkran is celebrated every April usually during 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>, a time when Thais traditionally reunited with their families, visited a temple and poured scented water to Buddha images, monks and senior relatives in the morning and gathered with buckets full of water at city landmarks to dance, sing and splash water in the afternoon. Songkran celebrations were kept to a minimum during 2020-2022 during the outbreak. Water splashing festivals to mark new year like Songkran in Thailand are also seen in other continental ASEAN countries such as Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and southern China.

Meanwhile, Songkran is also known as a time for accidents and fatalities on Thailand's roads. According to the government spokesperson, there were 1,324 deaths and 110,152 injuries during the Songkran Festival from 2018 to 2022, with most accidents involving individuals aged 15-19. The data collected from April 11th to 16th showed that there were 17,775 injuries, which increased by 19.26% from the previous year. There were also 236 deaths, which decreased by 26.81% from the previous year. Among those injured, 3,814 people had to be hospitalized, which increased by 81.84% [4]. The most common causes of accidents and fatalities were speeding, drunk driving, neglecting seat belts, and violating traffic laws [4, 5].

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