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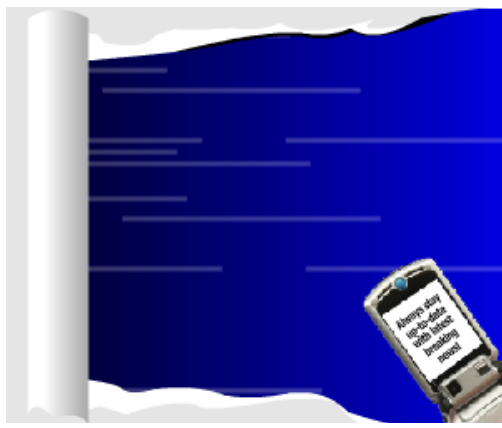
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SAFETY ISSUE

Deadly box jellyfish found in Thai waters

APINYA WIPATAYOTIN

The discovery of a box jellyfish _ one of the most poisonous in the world _ in Thai waters has prompted the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to set up a team to study its origin and behaviour to prevent attacks. Somchai Bussarawit, the chief of the museum and aquarium at the Phuket Marine Biological Centre, said there has never been any reports of this type of box jellyfish being found in Thai waters before.



The presence of box jellyfish in the sea near Krabi has caused concern over its impact on tourism.

"We are not sure whether it is a primitive species living here or a foreign species. We have no information. That is why we have to set up a team to investigate it," he said. Experts in Australia and Japan would be asked to assist the study.

There are two families of jellyfish normally found in Thai waters _ the Chirodripidae and the Carybdeidae, which is the more poisonous of the two.

So far two deaths have been attributed to the jellyfish. The first case happened in 2002 at Koh Phangan in Surat Thani province and the latest in April at Koh Lanta in Krabi province.

The decision to study the box jellyfish came after the son of an Australian journalist was stung while swimming at Koh Mak in Trat province early this year.

The injured Australian returned to Thailand and alerted the Public Health and Tourism and Sports ministries about box jellyfish found in Thailand. He realised there were no measures or knowledge about first-aid for people stung by box jellyfish.

"I hope the study will generate prevention and caution with the public. I don't



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want to disturb the tourism sector, but people should know the facts and know how to make themselves safe," Mr Somchai said.

"At least first-aid treatment must be widely publicised to tourists and local people. Also, there should be warning signs to increase people's levels of awareness," he said.


Vinegar is the best solution to reduce the pain from a jellyfish sting before the victim is sent to hospital, he said. Water should not be used as it only increases the pain.

Resorts and hotels should have vinegar in their emergency kits, he suggested.

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