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Bangkok, March 29th: The spirit and energy of boat racing returned to Bangkok today with the arrival of the inaugural King's Cup Elephant Boat Race and River Festival, taking place by the banks of the Chao Phraya River.

On land, spectators were treated to an opening spiritual blessing ceremony as well as a celebration of Thai culture with dance performances and traditional drumming. On the water twelve teams were competing for the coveted King's Cup - teams include the Royal Thai Navy Seals as well as international teams. Each team was paddling a specially commissioned boat decorated with artistic elephant heads rising elegantly above the water, and tails inspired by traditional Thai fish motifs.

Each race takes place across 200m with 4 teams per heat, the first to cross the finish line wins and progresses to Sunday's grand closing Trophy Ceremony.

The atmosphere on the water and in the stadiums was off to an electric start with the heat between Pilipinas Orient Dragons (Philippines); Dongguan Sheen Fine (China); Pradu Thong Goddess (Royal Thai Navy) and Yutthakarnnawa (Royal Thai Navy Seals) the highlight. The international paddlers fared well but they were no match for Thailand's best. With less than 6 seconds between each elephant boat, the Royal Navy Seals came out on top taking only 46.68 seconds to paddle 200m. Second spot was the Pradu Thong Goddess (Royal Thai Navy) at 48.11 seconds followed by Dongguan Sheen Fine (China) at 49.14 seconds and finally the Pilipinas Orient Dragons (Philippines) at 52.47 seconds.

While the teams battle it out on the river; entertainment at the riverside festival included the Indoor Rowing Asia Cup Tournament with rowers from 10 countries going head to head. Visitors to the three day event are also treated to luxury champagne tents, vintage car displays, and musical concerts by top Thai artists including Atom, J Jetrin, New Jiew and Singto Numchok. The foodie village is well stocked with a host of pop up food stalls by a selection of Thailand's top restaurants and Bangkok's favourite chefs.

Tapping into its conservational expertise, Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas is aiming to raise significant charitable donations through ticket sales that will in turn all be donated to elephant related projects throughout Thailand.

List of Sponsored Teams

1. Yutthakarnnawa (Royal Thai Navy Seals) - Chang Mineral Water
2. Singburi - Casillero del Diablo
3. Pradu Thong Goddess (Royal Thai Navy) - JW Blue Label
4. Pradu Ngern Goddess (Royal Thai Navy) - Price Waterhouse Coopers
5. Dongguan Sheen Fine Club, China - CITI

6. Samutprakarn - Veuve Clicquot
7. Nonthaburi - Avani Hotels
8. Institute of Physical Education - Mercedes Benz
9. Pilipinas Orient Dragon - Anantara Hotels
10. Nakornsithammarat - EGAT (Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand)
11. Porn Phra Kaew - Bangkok Bank
12. PhetNava - Keith & Kim

To join Anantara Hotels in celebrating Thailand's national animal and to support fundraising for their conservation and welfare, please visit <https://www.bangkokriverfestival.com/>