



A girl aims a water pistol at the camera during Songkran, Thailand's traditional New Year festival, on Silom road in Bangkok. — AFP photos



People gather in front of a bar during Songkran.



People react to being soaked in cold water during Songkran.



Youth hang out together during Songkran.



Revelers play in a fountain as they carry water guns while celebrating Songkran.

Thais soak in new year with nationwide water fight

Hordes of revelers armed with plastic water guns poured onto Thai streets yesterday for a second day of watery warfare to ring in the kingdom's traditional new year. Known as Songkran, the Thai holiday is celebrated by paying respect to elders and sprinkling water over Buddha figures at local temples. But the festival has also become one of the world's biggest and booziest water fights. Every April rowdy street parties erupt across the nation as hundreds of thousands of Thais and tourists don floral shirts and drench each other with brightly-coloured water pistols.

Similar but smaller water festivals are also held in neighboring Buddhist countries like Myanmar and Laos. The burst of color was especially striking this year in Bangkok, where many Thais have worn only black and white for the past six months to mourn the October death of the deeply revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej. "At its peak I think there were hundreds of thousands of people in Silom," city official Vallop Suwantee told AFP, refer-

ring to a downtown Bangkok district that has become a Songkran hotspot.

"Overall the situation is orderly," he added. Many see the soggy celebration as a fun-filled respite from the sweltering heat that engulfs Thailand during its hot and dry season. But the military junta that came to power in 2014 has tried—mostly in vain—to rein in the revelry with bans on skimpy clothing and restrictions on alcohol. The generals have also struggled to curb drunk driving, which surges during the holiday week, earning it a reputation as Thailand's "Seven Deadly Days".

Authorities reported 167 road deaths over the first three days of this year's festival—a toll only marginally lower than the 181 deaths recorded over the same period last April. The number of road accidents was also up slightly, according to the Interior Ministry, with nearly half of the crashes involving drunk drivers. — AFP



Revelers spray water at each other as they take part in a water festival celebrating Songkran.