

# New leopard street graffiti sparks more probe anxiety

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Unlike most high-level scandals that surface in the Thai media, the case surrounding Italian-Thai Development (ITD) president Premchai Karnasuta for allegedly poaching and killing a black leopard has been reignited in the form of art.

As of Thursday, a new piece of graffiti art depicting a black leopard appeared within 100 metres of ITD's head office.

If viewed from a certain angle, it also draws attention to an advert for Leo beer on that building, which is visible in the background. The Thai brand uses a leopard as its logo.

The words "Justice For Wildlife" and "No Crimes Against Nature" were also engraved in the artwork.

Two similar pieces of street art featuring the same animal have appeared in Bangkok in recent weeks and then mysteriously been removed.

The latest work was a collaborative effort between members of a Facebook group called "A CALL for Animal Rights Thailand", and graffiti artist Tossraporn Klunkaew.

The goal was to raise awareness of the slow progression of a probe into the construction tycoon for allegedly sneaking into a forbidden part of Thungyai Naresuan National Park and conducting a hunting expedition there that resulted in the death of some rare animals.

The public has expressed suspicions that state officials may be meddling with the case to give the suspected wrongdoers an advantage.

"Graffiti sometimes gets a bad rap but in fact it is a form of expression that can change society for the better. Before the Premchai incident went viral, I didn't even know we had black leopards left in the wild," Mr Tossraporn said.

"Once I learned more about the case and realised they were protected in a wildlife sanctuary, I immediately took action and we spent quite some time planning this artwork," Mr Tossraporn added.

The graffiti artist was given permission to use the wall by the owner of the automotive parts shop it connects to.

Tanat Thanakitamnuy, a member of "A CALL for Animal Rights Thailand", told the press that most headline-making stories fade from memory over time.

"We all thought the scandal was going to die down like other cases in recent history. But to my surprise, the president of Seub Nakhasathien Sasin Chalermklarp successfully reignited the flames for justice to be served," Mr Tanat said.

"To put this in perspective, how would you feel if you let someone into your house and they decided to kill your pet dog? It's the same case for the black leopard, which belongs to a national wildlife sanctuary. It is a pet of all Thais and he [Premchai] killed it," Mr Tanat said.

Udomchai Artharnpichit, a relative of the brake shop owner who lives adjacent to the graffiti, said that he was shocked by how much attention the graffiti artwork has received.

"As you can see there is graffiti work all over this area. But it's clear why this black panther is resonating with so many people," he said.