

# Sleeping competition was nothing to yawn at

The benefit of having a quick afternoon nap is being looked at scientifically, writes **Apiradee Treerutkuarkul**



Teenagers vie to be the first to fall asleep in a competition at CentralWorld shopping complex yesterday. The aim was to promote dozing for 10 to 15 minutes after lunch, which is believed to refresh people. Taking a quick nap is also being included in the latest campaign for safe driving habits and is co-organised by a group under the patronage of HRH Princess Galyani Vadhana, the Ramathibodi Foundation and Mahidol University. SOMCHAI POOMLARD

**A**s an engineer, 37-year-old Sompong Sabaengban always makes sure he has sufficient sleep each night because drowsiness could put his life and that of others working at a car manufacturing plant in danger.

As someone who is aware of the importance of sleep, Mr Sompong decided to take part in the country's first-ever siesta competition held at a Bangkok shopping mall last week.

Organised by the the Drowsy Don't Drive Foundation, the competition aimed to raise public awareness on drowsiness which is a significant factor in road accidents.

The event was also held to introduce a sleeping test device developed by Mahidol University's Department of Biomedical Engineering.

The device is designed to measure the amount of sleep a person has.

It can also measure how deep the sleep is.

"We believe drowsy driving contributes much to road accidents in Thailand," said Manoon Leechawengwong, the foundation's president. "But this factor is much downplayed and has not yet been really studied."

Sleeping is divided into four stages. Stage one refers to the transition of the brain waves in the awake state of 8-13Hz to 4-7Hz leading to drowsy sleep. Some people facing drowsy sleep in this stage may lose some muscle tone and awareness of the external environment, resulting in road accidents.

Stage two, which is the focus in the siesta competition, represents the period that people could sleep well and would feel refreshed when waking up.

At the competition, contestants who were able to get into the stage-two sleeping within 20 minutes would get reward points from the organiser.

Mr Sompong was one of the con-

testants who could enter the secondary level of sleeping with 20 minutes.

Dr Manoon said drowsy drivers should take a nap until reaching this secondary level of sleeping before taking on the road again. This could help reduce road accidents caused by drowsy driving.

In the United States, drowsiness is believed to be responsible for one-sixth of deaths caused by road accidents, he

said. To help drivers know if they are fit to drive, the foundation was working with Mahidol University's Department of Biomedical Engineering to develop the "mini-polysomnogram" — the sleeping test machine — to measure motorists' sleeping levels.

Yodchanan Wongsawat, director of the university's Brain-Computer Interface Lab, said each stage of sleeping had different shapes of brain wave and frequencies which can generally be de-

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tected by the polysomnography machine available at large-scale hospitals for treating patients with sleeping problems.

The mini-polysomnogram machine is specifically designed to measure if a motorist enters stage-two sleeping long enough to make them fit to drive.

“An estimated 12 minutes of stage-two sleeping is sufficient for drivers to feel more refreshed after waking up and drive safely to their destinations,” he said.

The biomedical engineer said he was planning to make the textbook-size wireless machine with a weight of about 1 kilogramme, so it could be developed as a mass product within the next two years.