

## Southeast Asian snapshots



*New Mandala* Associate Editor Mish Khan trails through the past fortnight in Southeast Asia to bring you the wonderful, the weird and the overlooked.

This week she brings more lese majeste madness, tributes for Trump, crime and punishment and public spats in the Philippines, and losing the keys to overpriced Toyotas in Cambodia.

### ***Riding backwards into tyranny***

A sea of blue and yellow enveloped the streets of Bangkok in cycling parades last Friday, to honour King Bhumibol Adulyadej's 88th birthday in the lavish ["Bike for Dad" celebrations](#).

The 29 kilometre route was led by Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn, in what is widely believed to be a stunt to raise his public approval. The King's son does not command the same level of devotion as his father, raising questions about the inevitable succession. Resembling a national holiday, schools and roads were shut for the day as thousands turned up to cheer the 600,000 cyclists.

Not everyone was completely satisfied.

One man has [filed a lèse majesté complaint](#) against Nakhon Sawan provincial authorities for giving

him a knockoff “Bike for Dad” shirt. Due to the popularity of the event, the shirts provided to the local administration had run out and were supplemented by similar shirts made by the provincial office.

Banjong Lueadthahan, who was the 2,356th registrant, was given a rip-off that had different text on the clothing tag, and no back pocket. In his complaint, Banjong said supplying a fake shirt harmed the King’s honour.



### ***Blowing Trump’s trumpet***

Hmuu Zaw, Director of Myanmar’s presidential office, has [published an essay](#) on his Facebook page about US presidential candidate Donald Trump.

The lengthy commentary is [generally in favour](#) of Trump, saying he embodies what “ordinary politicians don’t say or think.” Describing Trump as a successful real estate billionaire, Zaw says local fans have dubbed Trump the “American bullet”.

He also “highlighted Trump’s ‘tough’ stance with journalists, his choice of hat, country shirts and the rock and roll music that plays during campaign events.” The post was accompanied by a graphic (pictured below) sourced from a satire website.

Trump stirred controversy last week by [advocating to stop Muslims from entering the US](#) – a call

that's been widely received as disgusting and teetering on fascism.

In a country [not exactly known for treating its own Muslim minority with warmth](#), perhaps there is reason why Trump would resonate with authorities in Myanmar.



### ***Crime busters vs myth busters***

Tensions flared in the Philippines last week after presidential candidate [Mar Roxas said that Davao City's crime free reputation is a myth.](#)

Davao city is well known for going from the archipelago's crime capital to one of the safest cities in the world, under Rody Duterte's seven terms as mayor. It has strict drinking, smoking, drug laws and curfew, and is home to "death squad" vigilante groups who intimidate and even kill criminals. Duterte, also a presidential candidate, is incredibly popular in Davao for this transformation and for his tough talking reputation. He is rumoured to have killed criminals.

The comments angered many locals, who felt Roxas had mocked Davao's achievements. Many [netizens urged Davao city council](#) to ban Roxas from entering the city, boasting that Davao is the only city in the Philippines where it is safe to walk alone at night. The Davao City Police office [posted on Facebook](#) to defend against Roxas's speech, clarifying that out of the 18,000 crime incidents cited by Roxas, only 36 per cent were crimes against persons or properties and the rest



were police operated investigations which yielded positive results.

[Duterte shot back at Roxas](#), saying the only myth was Roxas' claim he graduated from the Wharton School of Economics and that his name was not on the graduation list (Roxas has actually been [confirmed](#) as an alumnus in an official Penn University archive).

Roxas' spokesman responded: "Can I make a counter challenge? If Secretary Mar [Roxas] can produce a graduation photo, will Mayor Duterte produce the names of the people he claims to have killed?"

### ***The wheels come off for Cambodia's opposition***

Cambodia's ruling party, the Cambodia's Peoples Party, warned on Sunday that the opposition [risks losing parliamentary perks](#) such as official salaries and government provided Lexus 570 SUVs if they continue to boycott sessions of the National Assembly.

The opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party began boycotting parliamentary sessions last month after two of its opposition members were beaten in October, and leader Sam Rainsy was driven to self-imposed exile after his parliamentary immunity was stripped and he was issued with an arrest warrant. Deputy Leader Kem Sokha was also ousted from his position as Vice President of the National Assembly.

The CPP has said they are unconcerned about the CNRP boycott as they have a comfortable majority to pass laws, choosing to mock the boycott. CNRP spokesman Yem Ponharith hit back, saying none of them cared about losing access to salaries or luxury cars.



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***Mish Khan is Associate Editor at New Mandala and an Asian studies/law student at the Australian National University.***