

Southeast Asian snapshots



Half-marathons running off into the distance, a missing opposition leader in Cambodia, more presidential drama in the Philippines, and Malaysian charity cases that aren't.

In her weekly column *New Mandala* Associate Editor Mish Khan brings you the best and worst from the region.

Malaysia's zakat squandered on splendour

Malaysia's religious affairs minister, Jamil Khir Baharaom, has [come under fire](#) for allegedly paying for a luxurious eight-day trip to the US, totaling RM 410,000 with charity funds designated for orphans and the poor.

The money was drawn from the Islamic Economic Development Foundation (YaPEIM), originally formed to perform charity work in Malaysia or *zakat*. Akmal Nasir, the director of National Oversight and Whistleblowers (NOW), [claimed](#) that during the lavish trip Jamil Khir and his wife played golf and spent time shopping at luxurious, upscale stores.

In response to public disgust, YaPEIM insisted that the amount was partially paid back by the minister. However, no breakdown of the costs were disclosed.

Last week, NOW also [exposed](#) that YaPEIM had spent RM 290,000 to fund a 14-day marriage course in Paris, attended by Malaysian students studying abroad. The necessity of organising such a course for wealthy Malay students was widely questioned.

Jamil Khir has since filed a [defamation](#) lawsuit against Nasir, claiming RM 10 million in compensation.

Duterte snatches the reins

Jubilation [spread quickly](#) in the Philippines on Saturday night after Rodrigo Duterte, the highly popular mayor of Davao, officially announced he will run for president in 2016.

Duterte has for months denied any intention to run, but claims the sudden [change of heart](#) was inspired by the Senate Electoral Tribunal (SET) ruling allowing rival candidate Senator Grace Poe to proceed. Duterte states he will “never accept an American as president”.

The Philippine Constitution [requires](#) presidential candidates to be natural-born citizens. Senator Grace Poe is an adopted founding, as well as a former US citizen.

A disqualification case was filed with the SET insisting that Poe fails to meet the Philippine citizenship requirements. Last Tuesday, the SET [dismissed](#) the case in a narrow 5-4 vote. This ruling is in [disagreement](#) with the Supreme Court, which found that under customary international law, Poe may be considered a naturalised citizen but not a natural-born citizen.

Duterte’s late-minute entry into the political race has [uprooted the entire game thus far](#), with analysts certain he will win over votes from the other candidates.

Rain-sy, rain-sy, go away

Disappointed supporters of the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party are hoping their party president Sam Rainsy will come again another day, following his [decision to not return to Cambodia](#).

This follows the recent decision by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court to enforce a long-dormant 2011 [defamation conviction](#) against him.

In 2008, Rainsy jabbed that Foreign Minister Hor Namhong had run a Khmer Rouge prison. Last Monday, the ruling Cambodia People’s Party voted to remove him from the National Assembly stripping him of his parliamentary privilege.

Rainsy faces a two-year prison term if he returns to Cambodia. Although a CNRP spokesman [originally](#) announced Rainsy would return on Monday and face his arrest, Rainsy seemed to

change his mind and is heading to France to seek political support in hopes of striking a deal.

The CPP are sceptical that Rainsy's case will garner any interest in the West, [stating](#) "World leaders don't have time for them due to the threat of ISIS... No one cares about the CNRP."

They also berated him for comparing himself to Myanmar democracy figure Aung Sun Suu Kyi, who chose to face years in detention for her cause.

Opinions amongst CNRP supporters are [mixed](#). Although many sympathise with Rainsy, others are disappointed in what they perceive as a demonstrated lack of bravery and a failure in his responsibility towards the Cambodian people.

Thailand's mangled marathon

What do Thailand's democratic transition and its annual half-marathon have in common? Answer: they are both poorly run and unnecessarily extended.

There was outrage in Thailand last week as it [unintentionally became home](#) to the world's longest half-marathon.

The Standard Chartered Bangkok marathon, held on 15 November, accidentally increased its 21 kilometre route to 27 kilometres. The Athletic Association of Thailand, which oversees athletic events in the country, said that race officials directed runners to turn in the wrong place and thus lengthened each lap.

A tirade of complaints were unleashed on social media, with comments criticising the race as "ridiculous," a "massive miscalculation," and "incredibly dangerous."

Many have dubbed the event the "super half-marathon", with one commenter noting that "they increased the price this year, so at least you get more kilometres for your money."

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