

BAYON



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Condomania Comes to Kampot

What would justify a 41 story building in a sleepy little town of 60,000 people? A hotel with hundreds of rooms? An office building with the capacity to accommodate all the current offices in Kampot several times? Depending on the building's footprint there could be hundreds of expensive condos. Space in buildings that tall is necessarily pricey, it costs more to build high. It's all very mysterious, you see, since there's been no official announcement or architect's drawings, only hearsay and a sturdy perimeter construction fence. And that's all before begging the question of who would want to live there.

There is another potential use which I discovered after I wrote the above, but I'll come to that later after recapping the condo situation in Phnom Penh. There are about 9,000 condos in the capital today, but by 2020, there'll be about 38,000. I have to say, after reading four different articles about condos in Phnom Penh, I'm a bit confused when it comes to numbers. One thing that's clear is that, contrary to the bragging of some owners that their units are selling briskly, most new ones are going very sluggishly. Some months ago a new building with 220 units had sold only ten by opening day, not a good start. Moreover, half of the units already built are still available.

One factor of agreement is that most buyers are foreigners coming from China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan and almost all of those are being bought for speculation. It's somewhat understandable why those nationalities (except Taiwan) in particular are eager buyers since a very high percentage of their people are high rise dwellers. That only applies to China's cities, of course. The vast majority spend their lives in little cubicles high up in the air so they're used to the idea, think it's quite normal. But this is Cambodia with a small population and lots of land. Khmers are not used that kind of living so the only likely buyers are also from those countries.

There's a disconnect between how easy it is to finance and build those things here and the number of likely owners/renters who might occupy them. One certain result of that disconnect is the softening of rents in the city. With massive oversupply there'll be price competition for people to occupy those dwellings and an accompanying reduction in land values. Land is only worth hundreds or thousands of dollars per square meter if you can use it in some way to justify the cost.

As a basic rule of thumb, if you purchase real estate for investment purposes you need to get a return of 1% a month to recoup your cost. So for instance, if you pay \$100,000 for a building you need to get \$1000 per month in rent and that still means it'll take 8 1/2 years to get your money back. With maintenance, figure 10 years and that doesn't include any profit. With property sellers asking \$200,000 and up for shophouses here in Kampot, the only way that expense can be justified is if the value of the property rises because nobody can get \$2000 per month rent here. Newly renovated shops right on the river are renting for six or seven hundred a month. If you're buying the property as a domicile, then it doesn't matter how much you are paying.

It's practically a matter of religious faith on the part of a lot of people that property values always go up. In the long run that may be true since we live in a finite world where population is growing, so competition for space will intensify. Nonetheless there are lots of times when values go down. In the case of Phnom Penh, the problem will be local oversupply. There's also the possibility of global financial problems. I bought land near Kampot in 2008, just before the financial crash, for \$4.60 square meter. You wouldn't think a crash in the US would impact land values here, but two years later in 2010, I couldn't sell my land for \$2 per meter.

I was lucky no-one bought it then, because when I actually did sell it in 2014 I got \$5.50 per meter. Now nearby properties are selling for upwards of \$30 meter and are often being bought by locals rather than expats or Chinese. That's very high for ordinary land and prices will certainly crash if another worldwide economic crisis hits. If you paid cash and you are living there, then your only problem will come if you want to or need to sell.

Land owners gain when property values shoot up, but almost everyone else loses. Renters pay more, costs go up. Average people who work in high cost areas have to commute long distances or pay exorbitant rents to live close to work. Shopkeepers are squeezed by rising rents forcing their prices higher.

But then booms are always followed by busts. Booms are bub-



bles and bubbles always burst at some point, it's part of their nature. On the other hand construction booms provide a lot of jobs and spread a lot of money around. If a lot of big-timers lose their shirts when it all goes belly up well that's what speculation is.

It seems perverse to hope for a bust since a lot of wealth and jobs are created by those large construction expenditures and a lot of people will be hard hit when their jobs and income go. Outside money is a boon to the economy and a lot of Cambodians need to migrate from the countryside where there's little money or opportunities and into the cities where the potential for success exists, but still a bust would be welcome in some ways. For one thing, it would stop in its tracks the building of high rises where no market exists.

Who wants a lot of Gold Tower 42s around; that is, steel skeletons of buildings that may never be finished. The space oversupply also exists in the office sector and malls. It took years for Vattanak Tower – one of the first to build high – to rent a majority of its space and a lot of malls are going through hard times, and yet they are still coming. All this construction is happening as if Cambodia was a middle class country, but a majority of Phnom Penh's people are still scraping the bottom of the barrel.

Boom and bust cycles are not inevitable. Two years ago it was clear that a condo oversupply was on the horizon, at that point a moratorium on new condo construction would've been in order. Less people would've been employed but their jobs would've lasted longer. There are now about 50,000 people working in the construction sector. In event of a crash most will lose their jobs. So the choice is 50,000 now diving to 10,000 in a crash or 25,000 steady (numbers are theoretical).

Ah, but lets get back to Kampot. An internet search for info on our planned 41 story building turned up nothing, but a friend was able to get info on it (don't know how he did it). According to the developer, who I understand has not carried through on many of his projects in the past, the first 5 stories will be a shopping mall, including possibly a Lucky supermarket. The next five, a data center, the remaining floors penthouse apartments. I should mention that the lot is very large, it looks like at least a hectare so it could accommodate a lot more than one 41 story building. Dozens of shophouses could be built around it.

So a five story shopping mall for Kampot... sounds absurd to me. Everything costs more in spiffed out malls than in old style markets and small shops and I can't imagine where the trade will come from in funky Kampot. (I should also mention that I've been wrong before). Sure, people will come to hang out in its air-con splendor, but spend a lot of money? I can't see it. The second part is even stranger and more absurd: a data center in the most expensive space in the city? Data centers can be put anywhere there's a sufficient supply of electricity. You get the cheapest land or space to house it. After all, hardly anybody works there or goes there so the last thing you need is expensive space in the heart of town. Finally, I think the guy is a little mixed up about what the word penthouse means, but regardless, those apartments won't be cheap and there'll be hundreds.

There is one other possible use for that building. I heard from a friend who works high up in a casino company that the developer is figuring on putting a casino there. The thinking being that once the tourist port is built and an immigration post is located, they can claim Kampot is on the Cambo border to comply with the law on casinos. Anyway laws don't mean much when you have the money to influence the authorities; the casino up on Bokor Mt. was given an exemption from the rules which state that casinos can only be located on the country's borders with the exception of Naga in Phnom Penh. My friend also mentioned that the newly installed governor is more amenable to such uses than his predecessor, and maybe why he was replaced.

Now a casino would surely justify a tall building as gambling operators make a lot of money. But it would be a sad day for Kampot. Casinos bring money laundering, crime and general sleaze, though I don't want to taint everyone who gambles. If the first one is successful, there'll be a torrent like in Sihanoukville and degrade the Kampot experience. That truly would be the one thing to drive us away.... but to where?

Another commercial sector that's new to Kampot is girly bars, there are three now and more to come. They're very tame compared to the equivalent in the capital or Sihanoukville, but that may change: regardless an unwelcome addition to the local scene. I had been thinking that the government would not allow that to happen here, but their appearance might be another outcome of the installation of the new governor, I really don't know. On the other hand there are thinly disguised knocking shops just a stone's throw from the old market and it doesn't seem to be a big deal, you know, live and let live. There's also the many KTVs around town where a guy with a basic command of the local language can go. We'll see where that goes: I don't think it'll make a difference, though still not preferred.

Meanwhile the city went on a resurfacing rampage last month laying asphalt on kilometers of streets as well as the giant area around the Durian traffic circle. Personally, I didn't see the need for it as most of what was paved really didn't need to be: it was

a waste of resources. But as I've commented before, the authorities in Cambodia seem to see their worth in how much they can cover with asphalt.

Nice smooth streets are good. My old Tico makes a lot of jarring, rattling noises on rough streets. Since Kampot is stated to be a big tourist destination, lots of money is available to spruce things up. It took three days to resurface the sea of asphalt surrounding the durian circle, which had been done only a couple years ago. It took big equipment and lots of asphalt. In a very rough guess, I'd say it cost tens of thousands of dollars to do that work.

In contrast, think about other ways that money could be spent. The only public playground in town, which is enjoyed exten-



Site of the soon to be Kampot 40 storey tower

sively every clement afternoon by lots of kids, cost \$800. It was built by volunteer expat labor, but labor doesn't cost much here so even if we triple the cost of doing something like that by the government, you could still serve a big part of the city with several playgrounds for the cost of one layer of asphalt on the durian circle. Or how about a public swimming pool so the common people can have a place to swim on a hot April day? Or how about hanging a pedestrian walkway off one side of the old bridge so pedestrians could feel safe and comfortable crossing it? I don't think it'd cost more than 10 or 20 grand to construct it. People would use it just for fun.

Speaking of the durian, the area devoted to the pavement surrounding it is far larger than necessary, even if you look decades in the future. It wasn't that long ago that the durian was constructed and the raised area around it expanded, but they could've doubled its size and still left more than enough room for traffic.

There are several reasons why excess pavement is not the best use of land. For one, it's expensive, asphalt doesn't come cheap, and requires maintenance. It's ugly: There's nothing esthetically pleasing about tarmac, whereas anything else you might do with the space; planters, grass, trees, benches, is far preferable. A smaller paved area would make it easier and safer for pedestrians to get to the center. Excessive pavement worsens drainage problems. Replacing tarmac with planters would allow rain to be absorbed into the earth rather than need to be carried away in the sewer system. All in all, a waste of money.

Since all lesser government officials, except for the commune level, are appointed by the ruling party their major priority is to please the people on top, rather than the citizens they govern. It took 2 1/2 years after the old bridge was closed by safety concerns for it to be repaired and put back into use. The people's wishes were ignored until the PM came to town. He was asked by locals

community owned, the Green Bay Packers football club. Green Bay, Wisconsin is a city of about 100,000 located on Lake Michigan. The club was grandfathered in when the last revamping of the league happened. The owners would never allow another non-commercial team. It's a rotten system.

That is only to say there are other ways of doing things and to emphasize that far more cities could have competitive teams, at least on their own level. Promotion and relegation is set up with a league having tiers. The two best teams move up a level, the two worst move down. The US is so big, it could easily support tiered leagues for each of several regions. With so many teams happening in so many cities, the sport might really catch on. It's the rotten greedy system that holds back the game.

As for Cambodia, while it's clear that lots of people like to play, there aren't many adequate places to do it. The government

seems to favor big projects, whereas what's really needed is a playing field in every neighborhood. In Kampot there're only two fields that I know of: one at the Durian circle and one 6 kilometers west of town off the Sihanoukville highway. There might be one at the town's only high school, but if so it's also inconvenient; 5 ks out of town on Teuk Chhou road. There's also a commercial place that has small fields on astroturf.

The situation in Phnom Penh is far worse with only one field in the inner city at Olympic stadium. I've heard they are building a sports complex a ways out of town north of the city, but anyway you look at it, recreation space is sorely lacking in the capital. There's no way for Cambodia to have a competitive team without devoting more space for people to play. If you have to wade through kilometers of heavy traffic just to get to a place to run around, a lot of people will be discouraged.

IN BAD TASTE

Elon Musk to rescue May from Brexit hole

Having been trapped for many weeks between a rock and a hard Brexit, hope was starting to fade for Theresa May. However entrepreneur, Elon Musk, has said he can pull her out of the dark, piss-smelling cave that is Jacob Rees-Mogg's mind.

Mrs May has been stuck in a hole of her own making for over a year, alongside David Davis, a DUP IOU and a small Thai boy. Nobody knows why the small boy was there, but it might explain why David Davis has been so distracted of late.

Mr. Musk is confident he has the technology to navigate the u-bend that Mrs May's White Paper has been flushed down. The submersible will first be sent 10 feet into Boris Johnson's rectum – nobody is actually trapped there, but everyone agrees that it would be a funny thing to do.

Rumours persist that Mrs May has had to eat her own excrement to survive – but only when it comes to the North Irish border. One of the rescuers said: 'We expect her to exit unscathed – which is more than can be said for the UK'.

Rees-Mogg ready to face world after total makeover

Conservative curiosity Jacob Rees-Mogg is reported to be ready to face the world under his new identity of Jake 'The Geezer' Moggster, after spending a week at an exclusive boot camp in an attempt to reinvent himself as a right tough-nut. The move comes as a prelude to making an attempt at grabbing the party leadership from beleaguered Theresa May and giving her a good hard slap on the way out.

The bespectacled oddity is said to have dropped his ultra upper class Wodehousian persona along with his double-barrelled surname, and is instead now modelling himself more on Danny Dyer than Gussie Fink-Nottle. A photograph is circulating on Twitter showing the now heavily tattooed North-East Somerset MP stripped to the waist and mugging to the camera with his fists raised, challenging any Remainers to come and have a go if they think they're hard enough.

His constituency agent told reporters: 'All will be revealed shortly, but there is some truth in the current speculation. Jake Mogg will be holding a press conference at Westminster and will be also making an important announcement. Now fark orf and write something proper cushty if you know what's good for you, you muppets.'

Meanwhile supporters of the Moggster are said to be delighted. Darren Clapp, from Peckham whose parents, during the Thatcher years, bought the dilapidated flat in the tower block where he now lives said: 'Great news. I think that Mr Rees-Mogg really connects with me and my kind. Some say he's a bit stuck-up but I won't have it. Empathy with the scum of the earth like me is his real skill.'

'He knows what the poor and disadvantaged have to endure and now he's going to be a well proper geezer in Parliament too and

that, then I can't wait for him to right all those wrongs. I'm hoping we can welcome him down the pub shortly and, if he could glass me and call a nonce, then I can die happy. Sorted.'

May boasts: 'Trump told me to sh*g my own daughter

In a series of elaborate dares, President Trump has not only insisted that the Prime Minister sues the EU, but that she also does a striptease for whole twenty seconds and swallows a goldfish. Not wanting to lose face, Mrs May has agreed eat dog food, do 100 push-ups and make an obscene phone call to Michel Barnier.

When she pointed out that she had no children, Trump became despondent, claiming that if Mrs May wanted to join his 'cool gang' she should smell the feet of everyone in the room. Mr. Trump made it clear that she needed to drink a whole keg of beer before she could wear one of the NATO-themed togas he had had made.

Desperate to appease her new boyfriend, the Prime Minister said she would agree to smoke a cigarette and 'go to third base', but only if it led to a preferential trade agreement. Mrs May further agreed for Mr. Trump draw genitals on her face with permanent marker – although which of the Cabinet it resembled most, she would not say.

Friends of Mrs May expressed concern that she would jump off a cliff if he told her, but the electorate were told not to get their hopes up. As her pièce de résistance Mrs May, on request, completed the 'Condom Challenge' – whereby she forced a condom into a nostril, snorting it back into her throat and back out her mouth; which she boasted was 'easier than Brexit'.

Marketing arseholes mulling over what body part they will make women feel crap about in 2019

August is the traditional time of year when the creative minds in advertising departments decide what perfectly normal physical attribute of a woman's body they will claim is a horrific blemish needing expensive alteration.

Simon Williams, a marketing consultant who is not allowed to see his own children, explained that finding new ways to create and exploit the insecurities of stressed women was a constant challenge.

"Our high point will always be the thigh gap. But I think I have a strong contender this year. Visible collarbones! This year we are going to generate an incessant media barrage to convince women that a visible collarbone is the ugliest thing ever and that having one makes them worthless as human beings.

"We have social media influencers ready to post Photoshopped images of starlets tagged 'life goals'. We have several beauty vloggers preparing shows about their collarbone camouflage regimens so as to create the impression that it's a perfectly sane thing to worry about.

THE SOOTHSAYER

By The Stool Pigeon HoChiMinh City, Vietnam

The morning was only two beers old when Alan decided to get his fortune told.

He had met a middle-aged woman named Thao the day before. She adamantly claimed to know a lot about Alan because she could read strong messages from his aura.

"I want to read the cards. I think they hold an important message for you. Your future is about to see a major change."

Alan laughed. "No thanks, my dear. I don't believe in any of that hocus-pocus stuff."

The soothsayer persisted.

"You have girlfriend in Vietnam. She has big problem in her family."

"I don't think so, but if she does, that's her problem and not mine."

Alan laughed again and brushed aside the woman he would eventually turn to for advice.. He then went to meet Ngoc, his girlfriend, at the bar where she worked.

Ngoc's shift ended at midnight, so they often went together to a late-night club named Apocalypse Now. On this particular Friday, it was Ngoc's 25th birthday and they went to Apocalypse Now to celebrate. It was there that Ngoc issued the oft-repeated mantra of young Southeast Asian women. "My mama very sick. I must go take medicine to her."

In most such circumstances Alan would merely have laughed. But in Ngoc's case he felt differently. He had known her for almost three months and she had never asked him for anything. She had established a degree of faith and trust with Alan, so he figured that despite the one in a thousand odds against, perhaps this situation was genuine.

"My mother lives in Danang. I must go there for four or five days. Can I borrow money from you?"

"How much do you need?"

"Up to you. I think medicine and doctor very expensive. Maybe you can give me two or three million dong (\$120-180 US)."

Alan gulped and puckered his lips, as if he were lost for words. He wasn't carrying that much money, and besides, he wanted to give the idea some thought.

When he had first met Ngoc, they were in Nha Trang. He was sure that at that time she had said she was from there – not Danang.

Alan decided to put granting Ngoc's multi-million dong birthday wish on hold. He told Ngoc he would meet her early the following afternoon to discuss things and - if he could help her – would bring two or three million dong.

Ngoc usually spent the night with Alan, but mysteriously had to leave early each morning, despite not having to be at her job until 4 p.m. Alan intended to use the interim time to quaff a few decision beers.

I met Alan for the first time at a non-descript bar in Pham Ngu Lao ward of District 1. He was beside himself with bewilderment and as I was the handiest pair of ears in the proximity, he insisted on using me as a sounding board for his dilemma.

"Where are ya from mate? Nice to meet ya. You're not going to believe this, but the weirdest thing happened to me today."

I finished my coffee and ordered a Halida beer. This had all of the makings of a verbal diarrhoea-filled tale.

I didn't have to coax the guy to continue.

"This woman read my cards and told my fortune this morning. I couldn't believe what she knew. Let me get one thing clear – I don't believe in any of this fortune telling nonsense one bit. But she told me things about my past that no one else could possibly know."

Alan went on to cite examples of this woman's clairvoyant prowess. She miraculously knew that his wife had died three years before. He and his wife had been visiting relatives in Perth when she suffered a heart attack and perished.

"How could she possibly know that mate?"

She also knew that he had recently met a young woman in a 'seaside town north of here.' She accurately told him the first initial of her name.

The next amazing exhibit of fortune telling was suggesting that 'N' had a family member who was seriously ill. According to the soothsayer, 'N' would soon ask Alan for some money, if she hadn't already. She stressed the fact that 'N' would be reluctant to do this because she was afraid Alan wouldn't believe her.

Still imposing his bewildering tale upon me, Alan told me he asked what other information the soothsayer could give about Ngoc. He had decided to provide the clairvoyant with the full name – in hope of increasing the chance of accurate imagery. (Not bad for a guy who says he doesn't believe in this nonsense).

He was advised to give Ngoc whatever money he could, for Ngoc was a good girl and it would likely jeopardize his relationship with her if he failed to help her in this time of dire need. She also strongly insinuated Alan should return for a further card reading after he had given Ngoc the money.

Alan paid the woman 50,000 dong (\$4 US) and went to an out-of-the-way bar to drink away the hours before he was to meet Ngoc. This, of course, is where your narrator became a reluctant listener.

At first, I admit I was somewhat impressed by the apparent sixth-sense capabilities of the mysterious woman. I asked Alan if he had told anyone in HoChiMinh City about his wife's death.

"No", he replied, "I only mentioned it to Ngoc."

"Aye, there's the fly in the ointment", I offered. The words, 'What do you mean by that?' had barely slipped across his lips, when he looked outside the open-ended room and witnessed Ngoc and the soothsayer walking along the

street together.

"Holy shit mate. I'll be right back."

Alan left his barstool and beer and darted across the street. When he caught up to the women, onlookers were treated to a melodramatic performance.. Plenty of verbal blows were dished out from all parties – but nothing physical.

Alan never returned to the bar that afternoon, neither to pay for nor to finish his beer.

I asked the barmaid, Cho, if she knew Alan.

She indicated that she had never seen him before.

"And what about those two ladies?"

Cho said she had never seen the older one before, but the young one lived close by – with her husband.

As for the soothsayer, she inadvertently saved Alan a lot of money and grief in the long run. For had she been as incredibly clairvoyant as Alan had first thought, she would have known he was in the bar and never have walked by in the first place.



The CAMBODIA DREARY

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This is a work of fiction and satire any semblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental



To Stop Moral Decline Govt. Bans Women

BY SAL UT
THE CAMBODIA DREARY

To address falling moral standards, changing social mores, and nagging from their wives, the government has, in an immaculately conceived plan, banned women. "We're simply not ready as a society," repeated a spokesperson.

"From today, all public displays of women will be banned," frothed a spokeswoman. "Apart from us, stone Apsaras who bring in money and they can't sleep with, and smiling poor, disabled ones who bring in money and they don't want to sleep with," she continued.

A contract to build a toll booth on all Cambodian vaginas will be put out to tender before being given to Sokimex. It is unclear how they will excuse the harvesting of swathes of forest on this occasion.

Critics have argued that it would be easier and more effective to ban sleazy, corrupt politicians, but the ensuing power vacuum

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More Awards for Sihanoukville

BY CHOY MAI
THE CAMBODIA DREARY

Following the award of worlds best beaches. Which was a little unbelievable. Sihanoukville is gun-

ning for other top world awards.

Worlds largest number of garbage piles seems easily achievable given the state of the place.

Another will be the largest number of construction sites per head of local population along with the

largest number of Casino licences.

Judging by recent numbers caught by the polices the largest number of Chinese drivers without licences is a sure fire winner.

Now the Chinese have fully taken over the town the shitty side of

their dodgy casino dealings is floating to the surface.

Future categories could possibly be largest number of gunfights (wonder where the guns come from). Along with the kidnapping mecca of SEA will sure fire up some *Cont page 17*

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'ALFASLEEP Claims Successes, More Headlines

BY RAY BIDLOONY
DISASSOCIATED PRESS

UP HIS OWN ARSE – St. Putain de Lemedia announced further triumphs for the 'ALFASLEEP church as he led true believers, donors and other half-wits in worship of himself. "Brothers, Sisters, step into the limelight and see something resembling the truth, for only in

your column inches are you truly free." The sermon capped a truly spectacular year for 'ALFASLEEP, who have rescued more headlines than ever before.

Locals were quick to praise St. Putain. "Encouraging sanctions was a master stroke," gushed Srey Koyt, a former garment factory worker from Russei

Keo district. "700 colleagues and I have been liberated from ILO approved factories!" she cried with perhaps joy, before returning to fellating local policemen.

The minority of indentured, underage sex workers are indefinitely unavailable for comment

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FAUX NEWS

Trump's dentures modified to avoid misspeaks

As the perils of enunciation smacked in the face of President Trump at his press conference with President Putin in Russia, misspeak has now enhanced fake news as Donald's pet pieces of nomenclature for the imparting of data and official information.

"Be fair," explained Trump, "how do I know what I think 'til I've heard what I said." Quite....

Having misread his text, leaving out a pretty significant 'not' at a pretty significant moment, government staff are now wading through thousands of texts and comments to see if other misspeaks have prevailed in the President's utterances and output.

"Donald's command of the English language is poor," admitted a close confidant from the White House. "We practice a wide range of commonplace sayings as well as hackneyed phrases so he can mumble something. We also train him to raise his right hand and form the figure 'O' with his fingers. Otherwise he falls over. But we often have to rely on him reading out a text as it stands. Fortunately, his self-confidence is so sky-high as to ensure it sounds reasonable - you must admit, he has a wonderful voice tone! While his ideas may be repulsive and unfathomable, they sound rather pleasant, don't you think?"

Trump is now having new dentures fitted which quiver if he utters a sentence without the word 'not', making sure he can correct any omission.

"That should do the trick", said his dental consultant. Being 72, doctors are reluctant to meddle with other parts of the President which desperately need attention.

"Inserting a functioning brain would, at this stage, be too risky", confirmed a surgeon, "and as for a heart, well, that's been a lost

cause from the start."

"All in all I'm quite happy with how the President speaks," said his dentist. "It was far more difficult with George W., who seemed to refer to tourists whenever he meant terrorists. He lent the tourist trade a whole new facet during his tenure."

Trump's diction, then, appears not to be the problem, while the content remains a challenge to the world at large.

Boris Johnson makes his resignation speech

After quitting the cabinet last week over the state of Brexit, Boris Johnson made his resignation speech to parliament today. Here is a transcript of what he said:

"Hello, grubbledy mugwumps. I am fed up with our higgledy-arsed approach to Brexit, and to explain it most simply, I would like to tell you a story. It is a story about us mugwumps.

"We all live in a big mugwump nest in the ground. But some of us don't like that, we would like to build a mugwump nest in the sky.

"Some might say it is cake-having-and-eatingly impossible, that you can't have a mugwump nest just floating in the sky. But I say, all we need to do is to believe in it. If only the Chief mugwump would at least let us try, then we would see.

"Instead she has decided that we will build a mugwump nest half-above ground, for which we are having to negotiate with the beetles and slugs about how we can do it.

"It's not what I wanted. I don't like it and I will hit something soon if I don't get what I want. I would be happy to take over as Chief mugwump if that helps.

"For too long, us mugwumps have been stuck in the ground eating earthworms. If we could live in a mugwump nest in the sky then we could catch passing trout and beef products.

"It makes sense, as I'm sure you can hear. But people aren't listen to me so I resigned. I will be in my portapotty if you need me."

Trump Not Sure About Whether He's Sure About Russia Or Not

In a frank and honest statement earlier today, President Trump has admitted that he isn't sure about whether or not he's sure about Russia's involvement, or non-involvement, in the Meddlingate crisis.

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For more details, E-mail bp@forum.org.kh



Mr Trump, looney, was speaking at a White House press conference, and answered the first question with the resolve of a man who hasn't any, and an assertiveness that only people with no assertions on it would understand.

Assertivistically, Trump said:

"You can take it from me, that I'm just not quite sure!"

After last week's visit to Helsinki to meet Mr Putin, Mr Trump even admitted that he wasn't actually sure that he had been taken to Helsinki - it having looked like so many other places - and even claimed that he wasn't really convinced that the man in front of him had been Mr Putin.

"It could've been him, and then again it couldn't've. I always thought he was a bit taller. I'm not really sure on either of those aspects," he said.

There was one thing Mr Trump was sure about, however. He winked cunningly at journalists as he said:

"If there's one thing I am damned sure about, it's the fact that I'm not really sure about any of what went on last week, what's going on this week, or will what go on in any week in the future. About that, I'm sure, so help me God!"

Red Hen Restaurants are Riding a Wave of Popularity

Restaurants called "Red Hen," were at first riding a wave of hate from conservatives protesting the owner of a Red Hen restaurant ordering Trump Press Secretary Sarah Sanders to leave. And not because he was afraid there wasn't enough food in the restaurant to feed her.

Sanders was asked to leave because of her working for Trump. The restaurant owner knew it would be hard for customers to digest their food while Sarah was there, worrying that Trump might be coming in too.

After liberals found out conservatives were attacking the place, the liberals started coming to the Red Hen for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The conservatives were unable to attack the restaurant any further due to the long lines that now gathered at the restaurant every day. The Huckabee Huckelberrys are a favorite of the clientele.

Bear Grylls and Warwick Davies Lake District Programme Too Funny

Warwick Davies has confessed that he absolutely loves the Lake District and was delighted to have the chance to enjoy it with adventurer Bear Grylls.

Bear Grylls, however, took a different view. "Not that bl**dy dwarf", he is rumoured to have said. "If he so much as looks like he's going to fall off a cliff I'll wet myself laughing."

Despite his misgivings, Bear agreed to do the BBC adventure programme with Warwick.

This involved Bear laughing hysterically as Warwick swung dangling on a rope kicking his legs whilst trying to scale a peak. Later, Bear was seen crying with laughter as Warwick was forced to physically wrestle a stoat off his packed lunch. Eventually the producer was forced to cut filming after Warwick slipped down a badger set and could be heard faintly screaming "he's biting my arse!" below ground as Bear lay above ground convulsed with laughter.

"I wouldn't have missed it for the world", Bear said later.

"I'm proud to represent little people in doing adult activities." said Warwick, with a heavily bandaged backside.

Brexiteers' new tactics of mutilation and extortion

In the current apocalyptic and grisly political landscape of the UK, Jacob Rees-Mogg has proven himself as deranged as any serial killer. Every day for the last week he has ordered one of his Brexiter minions to sacrifice himself/herself by resigning. He has then posted a part of their body to Prime Minister Theresa May.

Mogg has said he will continue with the daily ritual until the government changes course on Brexit. "We must have the

f..f..f..Brexit we desire," he hissed. "Or else..."

So far, Boris Johnson and David Davis are the highest profile Brexiteers who have been ordered to quit by creepy medieval dungeon-keeper Mogg. Each of them offered a toe to Mogg so that he could continue his psychotic plot.

The PM appears not to have been persuaded. Although she now has enough Conservative body parts to build half a Warwick Davies, it is thought that she is baking them into a pie to serve to Mogg the next time he visits 10 Downing Street.

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TECHNOLOGY PAGE

Google Assistant:

Awesome features you need to start using

Google's A.I. assistant learned some new tricks while you weren't looking.

Google has had voice search features in Android for years, but when Google Assistant rolled out on the Pixel in October 2016, everything finally came together. You can now get Assistant on all modern Android devices, and Google has already announced new Assistant features at I/O 2018 that will make it even better (okay, and maybe a little too real, in the case of Duplex).

It can be easy to miss the improvements if you don't obsessively keep an eye on the news, so here they are in one place: the coolest new features in Google Assistant.

Change the Assistant voice

There's nothing wrong with the default Assistant voice, but perhaps you're getting a little sick of it. Google added a handful of alternatives last year and recently expanded to a total of eight different voice options. It only takes a moment to change the voice, but the menu is somewhat buried.

Start by opening the settings menu via Assistant or the Google Home app. Go to Preferences > Assistant voice, and you'll be able to choose between the eight options. Tap on any of them, and they will begin reading off a sample. Once you've chosen, go back and all your Assistant devices will use the new voice.

Routines

Using Assistant to do the same few things all the time can be tedious, but Routines might be able to help. This feature allows you to connect multiple actions to a single command. There are only a few pre-determined routine commands right now, but they could still save you a lot of time.

To get started, open the Assistant settings and scroll down to Routines. In this menu, Google provides six pre-loaded commands: good morning, bedtime, I'm leaving (leaving home), I'm home, let's go to work, and let's go home. Say any of those, and you'll trigger the associated Routine. Each one includes a few customization options including smart home devices, travel info, and audio playback. You can also modify the trigger phrase at the top of the Routine settings page.

Custom routines

If Google's pre-loaded routines aren't doing what you want, you can also create a completely custom routine from scratch. Go to Routines under the Assistant settings, but don't tap on the "Ready-made" options. Instead, hit the plus button down at the bottom to make a custom routine.

You'll need to enter at least one trigger phrase to start. Then, add actions either by typing in commands or using the "Popular actions" list. Being able to input text means you can have your routine do anything you could do manually in Assistant. Remember to add a custom response to your routine so you know it triggered correctly, too. You can also have Assistant play media like podcasts, music, and sleep sounds at the end of a routine.

When you're all done, you can change the order of actions, which is handy if you've crammed a lot in there.

Trigger multiple actions

Assistant launched with a single-tasking approach. You told it one thing to do, and it would either do that thing or tell you it didn't know how to help. If you had more requests for Assistant,

you'd start over with a new command. Google has quietly added support for multiple actions in a single command, but it won't work on everything.

You can give this a shot right now by stringing two commands together. For example, "Turn off the lights and give tomorrow's forecast." Assistant will do both without a second command. Unfortunately, you can't use routines or shortcuts with multiple commands. In addition, this feature is only live on the Google Home version of Assistant. It won't work on your phone.

Location-based reminders

Google was famously slow to add reminder support to Google Home, but it's been there for a while. More recently, Google expanded reminder functionality to understand location. Your Google Home doesn't move, of course, but your phone does.

When you add a reminder via Assistant on Home or your phone, consider adding a location. For example, "Remind me to buy milk when I go to [a grocery store]." The reminder won't appear on Google Home because it doesn't go anywhere with you, but your phone will ping you when it detects you're in the right place.

Identify songs

Wondering what that vaguely familiar song playing in the background is? Google Assistant is probably the fastest way to find out. On your phone, long-press the home button to launch Assistant, and you might have a contextual button that says "What's this song?" That only appears when Assistant hears music in the background. If it doesn't show up, you can say/type that phrase to launch the recognition.

Assistant listens for a few seconds, and then returns a match. You'll get the song, artist, album, lyrics, and links to listen to it online.

Sync connected smart home devices

Google Assistant supports numerous smart home devices, but you might notice that devices you've just added to your account don't always work right away. That's because Assistant isn't constantly scanning for new connections. You can give it a kick-start.

After adding a new smart home device like a camera or thermostat, open up Assistant and say, "Sync my devices." Assistant tells you it's syncing with your connected accounts, and a few seconds later any newly added devices will appear in your list. Make sure to add them to rooms in Assistant for full functionality.

Send daily info

Assistant is great for calling up little tidbits like the weather, stock quotes, or even jokes. You don't even have to ask every time, though. You can have Assistant proactively send you certain bits of information as a daily update.

To configure a daily update, start by asking your question normally—ask it for the weather, a dad joke, whatever. After Assistant pulls up the content, you can follow up with "Send this to me daily." Assistant asks what time you want the update, and you're all set. To change or cancel a daily update, just say, "See my subscriptions."

Have Assistant remember things for you

Your squishy human brain is fallible, but Google Assistant can remember things without fail. All you have to do is ask it. You can tell Assistant to remember things just by saying "Remember



that [some piece of information].” You could tell Google to remember where you parked, what you did with the spare house key, your high score in Tetris, or anything else. As a handy bonus, Assistant also saves maps when you tell it where you parked.

Later, you can ask Google to recall the information in various ways. You can be direct, like asking Assistant “Where did I park?” You can recall factoids you’ve saved with “What did I say about [x]?” or “Remind me about [x].”

Search your Google Photos uploads

Google Photos is a fantastic backup solution for all your snapshots. Google offers unlimited storage of images and videos, provided you’re okay with a little compression, and Pixel owners get free full-quality backups. If you want to look for specific photos you’ve taken, you can do it right from Google Assistant. All you have to do is ask.

Assistant plugs into the amazing search capabilities of Google Photos, so you can ask to see almost anything. You can ask Assistant to pull up pictures of specific people, locations, and even objects. Tap the image results to scroll through them immediately, or open Google Photos via the shortcut under your pics. Just make sure you preface your request with something like “my photos” to ensure you get images from your Google Photos library rather than images from a Google search.

Take and share screenshots

You can capture screenshots on Android phones by holding the power and volume buttons, but Assistant can do it, too. In fact, it might be faster if you intend to share the screenshot right away. Open Assistant and say, “take a screenshot” or “share a screenshot.”

It takes a moment to capture the screenshot, but you’ll get a preview as soon as it’s done. Assistant then immediately brings up the sharing interface so you can send the screen to a message or upload it someplace. The screenshots taken via Assistant aren’t saved locally, so you won’t end up with clutter from repeated screenshot captures.

Listen to podcasts

Google has built a basic podcast interface into the Google app, and the easiest way to access it is via Assistant. You might want to listen to podcasts in this fashion because Google’s solution is quick and easy. Just say, “listen to [podcast name]” to fire up the latest episode. If you were in the middle of an episode, Assistant picks up where you left off.

Your progress is not device-specific, either. You can start listening to a podcast on your phone, then tell Assistant on Google Home you want to listen to the same podcast. Rather than start over, it starts where you last listened on your phone.

Explore menu

Google used to hide all of Assistant’s features in a series of esoteric, buried menus. Now, there’s a much more sensible way to find out what sort of cool things you can do with Assistant in the Explore menu.

To access this menu, open Assistant and tap the blue drawer icon in the upper right corner. Here, you can find all the services supported by Assistant broken down into categories like Social & Communication, Education & Reference, Games & Fun, and more. Each tile links to a full info page where you can see sample commands and (if necessary) link your account. Bottom line: Checking out the Explore menu is the easiest way to keep track of newly added apps and services.

There are also some general Assistant command suggestion at the top. You don’t even have to speak the suggestions, just tap the bubble and they’ll be dropped right into Assistant.

Typing to Assistant

Google Assistant first appeared in the Allo app, and in that iteration, you could input text to “chat” with the Google’s bot. But the more powerful baked-in phone version of Assistant began its life

with only voice input. That’s fine when you’re in a situation where you can talk to your phone, but voice dictation isn’t always appropriate. Well, you can type your questions and commands, too.

To access the keyboard in Assistant, just long-press your home button as you normally would. But instead of speaking right away, tap the keyboard icon in the lower-left corner. Assistant will expand to fill the screen, and you can begin typing. Assistant will respond to all the same commands that you’d use in a voice-dictation situation, and you’ll also find contextual suggestions above the keyboard. And because these suggestions are part of Assistant, they appear no matter which keyboard app you’re using.

Editable history

Google Assistant used to be a transient experience—whatever you said to Assistant would be lost to the ether as soon as you left the Assistant UI. But now there’s a full history of your commands, and you can edit them too.

To access your Assistant history, you need only drag up on the overlay when Assistant pops up. This will drop you into a full-screen interface that shows your recent queries. Scroll up to see everything you’ve asked and how Assistant answered.

Editing is a snap, too. Long-press on a query, and it will be highlighted along with Assistant’s reply. From there, you can either delete or edit it. Deleting will completely remove the query (and associated activity) from the history. This is just like removing something from your Google search history, so it won’t be used to inform future search and Assistant predictions.

If you choose to edit a query, the text is dropped into the text field along with an open keyboard. You can tap send to immediately repeat the command, or make some changes and send it again. Just note that none of this undoes the actions performed when the command was first issued.

Shortcuts

There are dozens of services and apps integrated with Assistant already, but some of them get preferential treatment. For example, you can tell Google to control your Hue lights directly, but lights connected through Homey require you to preface all commands with “Tell Homey.” It can get a bit tedious, but shortcuts are here to help.

To create a shortcut, go to the Assistant settings and open the settings. Scroll down and tap on the Shortcuts option. The shortcut screen has a box for what you want to say, and one below that for what you want Assistant to actually do in response.

In the top box, input whatever snappy shortcut phrase you want. It tends to work better if you use the microphone button to speak the shortcut. Assistant will sometimes put a sample command in the bottom box, but you can change that to the command you want. It has to be the full phrase you’d say to Assistant, including the “Tell [X]” part if needed. Once your shortcut is saved, it’ll work by voice and text.

Google Express shopping list

Google Assistant has always been able to add items to a shopping list, but that list used to live solely in Google Keep. As such, it was just a list. But Google recently changed the shopping list functionality to plug directly into its Google Express delivery service, which could be very useful if you’re a subscriber.

All you have to do is say, “Add [item name] to my shopping list.” It will show up in your Google Express shopping list instantly. You can access that list in the Google Express app, or simply say “Show me my shopping list.” That takes you to the online version of your list, which can be shared with any of your contacts. If you’re a Google Express subscriber, you can tap “Shop your list” to get filtered search results from supported local retailers. Add items to your cart, and you’re done.

Bits from the Beach

Well it has been another less than boring time down in the former Cambodian tropical paradise of Sihanoukville, and in the former sleepy town of Kampot.

The Sihanoukville square closed on schedule on 7 July. Most bars had their last trading nights well in advance, taking time to dismantle their structures. For the last month there was hardly any electricity and nothing was done with the toilets and it was a squalid mess, with people relieving themselves wherever they could. Meanwhile in the last week or two the new owners had crews in drilling test holes for foundations. Within a few days of closure, almost everything had been pulled down. There is now a very nice large building site, backing one on beach road for some huge multiplex to be constructed.

Speaking of construction, someone took a stock of all the construction going on along the 3 roads parallel to Ochheateal beach, Beach Road, 23 Tola Street and Polaway Street. There are apparently 22 buildings under construction and 20 other sites where the former structure has been pulled down, awaiting the commencement of construction. This is only this beach area and does not include the massive number of new buildings under construction in town, where the old building is pulled down and within a month or two the new building is already a couple of levels constructed.

Plenty of construction work is going on at Otres as well. The supposed retirement village already had nearly a dozen topped out buildings and dozens more under construction. When this rumoured 200 hectare site is completed, it will possibly be the second largest city in the country. Just in front of this, on the land between the beach and rear road between Otres 1 and 2, the piling machines are working at putting footing in for what is likely to be some large buildings. This is the land that is rumoured to be owned by Jack Ma.

It has been a very rainy last month or two and it is obvious that there has been no thought given to infrastructure, especially stormwater. When it rains the roads become rivers and the low lying sides become lakes, in some places over half a metre deep for quite some time. Worse places are past the old LV nightclub, in front of Kampong Som City Casino and in front of Yadouli Casino.

All this stormwater is mixing with the effluent overflow from the septic tanks and sure enough there is a reported small outbreak of Typhoid starting. One expat reported that one doctor said they are treating over 100 cases. Here is a word from the wise, if you are one of the 45 western expats left in town, get either a booster jab or take an oral course of Typhoid vaccine.

There was a rumour going around that the Big Easy had been bought out and was about to close. This was news to the main shareholder when it was mentioned to him, so while that is not the case yet, what is the bet it may well happen. Rumour is that many of the businesses from Angus Steakhouse on up, have been given notice. The Reef Resort is already pulled down, so too is most of old Utopia and most of GBT and the old Ernies/Stevie C building and the shops down from that (original Ernies burgers) and across the road. Moi Bee Buy supermarket on Serendipity Beach Road has closed and Khmer Wholesale will be operating out of the Otres facility and are opening in Kampot as well.

With the square closing, many of the few expats in town are wondering where there is to drink and hang out. There is above

us only sky, but Gary has moved on from there and the owner is away a lot and the place is lacking life. But fear not a new "square" has opened, called Youth Town. It appears that the inappropriately named Youth Town is now the place to go to get girls as many from the square have migrated here and some of the square bar owners have opened up as well. Other old names that have reopened here are Enzo and Martini bar from the beach, in a two level cramped space and Graham, from Stumble Inn at Pub street is about to open. Youth Town is located up from Build Bright University on the corner of street 814.

Good luck getting there through the flooded and severely pot holed streets as this is becoming a major narrow thoroughfare. Many a moto has ended up on its side as the rider did not know there was a very deep and steep sided pot hole lurking under the water.

The roads are just getting worse and worse due to the rain and trucks. Not only those roads around town, but also the highways into Sihanoukville and Kampot are a pot holed mess. In fact the rain was so bad late last month that route 4 was closed to traffic due to flooding north of Pich Nil. This sent hordes of trucks along route 3 and route 41 and these two roads only took a couple of days to become pot holed messes. The worse bit is the road just over the new Kampot bridge on the Sihanoukville side. No visitor would ever think that it was a nice tarmaced road, just two months ago.

Yes Kampot has seen its fair share of rain, so much so that the dam has filled up a couple of times and the Competent Authorities have had to release masses of water with has caused some flooding problems for residents. They are so competent at this that they do not leave the gates open during heavy downpours or release in little batches, just wait until bursting point and release so much water at once that they cause flooding. One would hate to think what would happen if they were Incompetent Authorities.

In Kampot all the rain seems to have effected some of the expats in a way that it used to in the days of old in Sihanoukville. The founder of the Kampot Survival Guide announced its closure. A group took it over with the blessing of the founder. However when the new group showed the old owner the mock-up of the new professional cover things went haywire. There were claims and counter claims on social media. Files were deleted by one party and then that party was locked out of administrative rights to social media pages they had founded. Honestly one never knew there was such a lack of laundry facilities in Kampot that so much dirty laundry had to be done in public. Still it provided a talking point apart from the normal topics of the rain and flooding and influx of the social lepers that are the poor refugees from the Chinese invasion of Sihanoukville.

The way many of the old timer Kampotians are talking about the ex-Snookyvillers one would think there is a class structure. At least the new immigrants to Kampot are not going around shooting each other in the legs like happened recently in Sinoukville. In what was likely a warning message 4 of the new Sino overlords were shot in the legs by an unknown and uncaught assailant. The rumour is that it was a friendly reminder to settle some debts.