

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WE WELCOME YOUR VIEWS on anything newsworthy. Please include your name and address on your letters. We reserve the right to edit all letters for clarity, content and length.

Thai students in meltdown thanks to the AEC

Yesterday was the first day of my university's final exams. Thanks to the Asean Economic Community, it was also the first time I finished an exam with sweat all over my body.

All I could think of during the afternoon exam was that I shouldn't be here at college in the middle of summer. I don't know about other AEC nations, but summer heat in Thailand can reach 40 degrees, which is definitely not a good environment in which to study. It's almost impossible for students to focus when our seats, our faces and our clothes are all soaking.

I have just signed a petition demanding changes on this. Apparently I am not alone. Judging by the rising support for the online campaign, students all over the country agree with me.

We're not at against the AEC. The point is that summer is the time for vacations, not study or exams. The students are frustrated. The teachers are frustrated. From where I'm sitting, we're not on the right path towards effective education.

Attakorn Noojoo

EIA process in desperate need of transparency

Re: "Streamline EIA approval process to cut costs, developers say", Business, April 24.

Discussions regarding Thailand's environmental impact-assessment process invariably disregard "corrupt practice". Overworked, victimised, squeaky-clean and people-focused, the industry acts its role superbly.

Housing Business Association president Atip Bichanond complains that current procedures rely too heavily on "the personal judgements of the EIA committee members". For "personal judgements" we could read "brown envelopes". Some projects are approved within four weeks, he says, while others take over a year. For "four weeks", read "very fat brown envelopes".

Environmental Impact Evaluation Bureau director Piyanant Soponthanaporn reasons that decentralisation and a revision of the rules is necessary to solve delay problems, but goes no further. He claims that 72 firms are licensed to produce EIA reports. What are these firms? Are they qualified to pass judgement based on the laws of the land? Who appoints and pays them? Are they open to public scrutiny? Do brown envelopes motivate their frequent skirting of due process? A truly responsible and open body would publicly eval-

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uate both the new and old systems. Transparency should be a key target in any policy revision but there is no sign of it here.

Pruksa Real Estate president and CEO Thongma Vijitpongpun says fast-tracking the approval process will boost the economy – or does he mean inflate the bubble? Speed, shoddiness, self-interest and short-term profit are the key mantras of Thai developers, not concern for the nation or its economy.

LPN managing director Opas Sriipayak is annoyed at having to alter project designs. So why not design them correctly in the first place, in accordance with established rules and regulations? Acting within the law could make life so much easier.

Sansiri president Srettha Thavisin whinges at having to postpone launches because of EIA delays. This is a whitewash. It is (illegal) common practice to begin

construction prior to EIA or building certification, and design specifications are frequently altered along the way in any case. Anarchy is part of the planning. It's the depth of corruption that causes delay.

The Indian guru Osho wisely observed that "people who are not intelligent learn to be clever". Creative corruption explains the "deconstruction" of much of Thailand, especially Bangkok. Since the industry campaigns to make "the process" quicker, easier, cheaper and more localised, deconstruction is likely to get a whole lot worse.

Why would seasoned foreign investors choose to buy into such chaos and deception?

John Shepherd

No road here is safe for cyclists

Re: "How to make roads safe for cyclists", Editorial, May 7.

No road is safe for cyclists in Thailand, whether with or without cycling lanes. So, the best advice is to forget about encouraging cyclists onto the roads, which only places them in danger from the poor discipline of motorists, exacerbated by poor law enforcement in Thailand. Sticking to public parks and designated areas like the one at Suvarnabhumi Airport is best for all cycling enthusiasts.

Fair-play