

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

11th of October 2021

Taiwan President Tsai to pledge defence of sovereignty and democracy

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen will pledge to defend the island's sovereignty and democracy in a major speech on Sunday (Oct 10), saying it faces challenges more complex and severe than ever, at a time when tensions with China have risen.

Democratic Taiwan, claimed by China as its own territory, has come under increasing military and political pressure from Beijing, which this month included four straight days of mass incursions by China's air force into Taiwan's air defence identification zone.

According to an outline of her Sunday national day speech, as described to Reuters by a source briefed on its contents, Ms Tsai will say Taiwan is on the front lines of defending democracy and faces unprecedented complicated and severe challenges.



She will reiterate Taiwan's full determination to defend itself and maintain regional peace and stability, and also stress that Taiwan will not "advance rashly". But when it comes to Taiwan's sovereignty, there can be no backing down, she will say.

Speaking earlier on Saturday in Beijing, Chinese President Xi Jinping vowed to realise "peaceful reunification" with Taiwan and did not directly mention the use of force after the week of tensions with the island that sparked international concern. Taiwan reacted angrily to the speech, saying only Taiwan's people have the right to decide their own future, and decrying China's coercive tactics.

Source: Reuters

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Cambodia jails news site owner for 1 year over false posts

A Cambodian court on Thursday (Sept 30) sentenced the owner of a news website to a year in prison for incitement to cause a felony, a prosecutor said, for posting disinformation about a land dispute at a national park.

Youn Chhiv, who ran the Koh Kong Hot News website, had "posted comments to cause confusion" on Facebook, said Mr Vey Phearom, deputy prosecutor at the provincial court in Koh Kong.

The journalist, he said, had admitted to falsely claiming that a Sept 3 eviction by police of villagers from national park land was unlawful and the land had been awarded to them by Prime Minister Hun Sen.

Mr Vey Phearom said the judge started the trial the moment Youn Chhiv reported for a summons, in a case that was initiated at the order of Defence Minister Tea Banh, a Koh Kong native. Neither Mr Tea Banh nor Youn Chhiv's lawyer could be reached for comment on Thursday. Staff of the news site were not immediately available for comment.

The imprisonment comes at a time when human rights groups have accused the government of using the judiciary to discourage dissent through harsh punishments. Mr Ith Sothoeut, director of the Cambodian Centre for Independent Media, said the Koh Kong case was intended to send a message. The Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association recorded 35 cases of harassment against 72 journalists in 2020, with imprisonment and violence the most common violations.

Source: Reuters



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Ancient Indonesian teen's DNA reshapes views on migration and race of early humans

The teenager, named Besse by scientists, was buried in Indonesia's Wallacea region and is one of the few well-preserved specimens found in the tropics.

Genetic traces in the body of a teenager who died 7,000 years ago furnish the first clue that mixing between early humans in Indonesia and those from faraway Siberia took place much earlier than previously thought.

Theories about early human migration in Asia could be transformed by the research published in the scientific journal *Nature* in August, after analysis of the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), or the genetic fingerprint, of the woman who was given a ritual burial in an Indonesian cave.

“There is the possibility that the Wallacea region could have been a meeting point of two human species, between the Denisovans and early homo sapiens,” said Basran Burhan, an archaeologist from Australia's Griffith University. Burhan, one of the scientists who participated in the research, was referring to the region of Indonesia that includes South Sulawesi, where the body, buried with rocks in its hands and on the pelvis, was found in the Leang Pannige cave complexes.

The Denisovans were a group of ancient humans named after a cave in Siberia where their remains were first identified in 2010 and scientists understand little about them, even details of their appearance. The DNA from Besse, as the researchers named the young woman in Indonesia, using the term for a newborn baby girl in the regional Bugis language, is one of the few well-preserved specimens found in the tropics.

Source: Reuters



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A preacher on TikTok and a politician on Facebook spark concerns over Malaysia's racial divide

Two social media controversies have highlighted concerns over growing intolerance in the multiracial country

Civil society groups in Malaysia have warned of growing racial and religious intolerance in Malaysia following two controversies on social media at the weekend, one involving a Muslim preacher and one involving a senior politician.

In a viral TikTok video that has amassed 17,000 views, the Malaysian Muslim preacher Syakir Nasoha accused Buddhists, Hindus and Dayaks – the indigenous people of the eastern Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah – of killing Muslims, sparking fears that his words would incite violence against those groups.

Meanwhile, even as critics lined up to denounce the preacher's video, a senior politician from the Bersatu party, Borhanuddin Che Rahim, was making waves on Facebook for a post in which he questioned the role of the badminton player S. Kisona, who is of ethnic Indian descent, in the national team.

In a post that has since been deleted, Borhanuddin asked "which estate" had the Badminton Association of Malaysia recruited the player from, using a derogatory term for ethnic Indians. The two incidents highlighted concerns over growing intolerance in the multiracial country, where a senior counterterrorism official has recently warned that religious and ethnically motivated extremism poses the single biggest threat of a terrorist incident. The incidents have also highlighted claims that this intolerance is being fuelled by politicians seeking to exploit racial divisions.



Source: South China Morning Post

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'The most powerful law' in Singapore: Foreign Interference bill brings concerns for civil society

The Fica bill will allow authorities to demand user information from internet companies and target people deemed to be collaborating with foreign actors

With Singapore imposing fresh Covid-19 restrictions in recent days amid surging new cases, the vaccine pacesetter's stuttering approach to adhering to its once-vaunted "living with the virus" blueprint has been the talk of the town.

In all likelihood, that topic – heatedly being debated by residents on social media, online forums and sparsely occupied coffee shops – will be on the back burner when the country's parliament convenes on Monday.

Instead, political observers expect the main action to come during the second reading debate on the draft foreign interference bill. Described by veteran political commentator Eugene Tan as having "the makings of being the most powerful law on our statute books", the 249-page Foreign Interference (Countermeasures), or Fica, bill was introduced for a first reading on September 13.

With Fica, the government will have the ability to direct global internet and social media companies to disgorge user information, remove applications from app stores, and block content, among other things. In some instances, authorities can use these measures pre-emptively – without having to give reasons. Individuals, meanwhile, can be designated as "politically significant persons" – a status that would be publicised and require them to abide by strict rules pertaining to political donations and declaration of their links to foreign entities.



Source: South China Morning Post

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Journalists Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov win Nobel Peace Prize

They were honoured “for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace,” the Nobel Committee said

Journalists Maria Ressa of the Philippines and Russia's Dmitry Muratov won the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday for fighting for freedom of expression at a time when democracy is increasingly under threat.

Ressa, is co-founder of Rappler, a digital media company for investigative journalism. Muratov is a co-founder of Russia's leading independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*.



The pair were honoured “for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace,” said the chairwoman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Berit Reiss-Andersen. “They are representatives of all journalists who stand up for this ideal in a world in which democracy and freedom of the press face increasingly adverse conditions,” she said.

Ressa, 58, said the prize shows that “nothing is possible without facts,” referring to the links between democracy and freedom of expression. “A world without facts means a world without truth and trust,” the outspoken critic of Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte told a live-streamed interview with Rappler. Ressa and Rappler, which she co-founded in 2012 and still heads, have faced multiple criminal charges and investigations after publishing stories critical of Duterte's policies, including his bloody drug war.

Source: Agence France-Presse

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How Southeast Asia's factory disruptions are hurting Apple, Toyota, other global brands

The manufacturing hubs of Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand produce goods for some of the world's largest consumer brands

Fresh coronavirus outbreaks in Southeast Asia have hurt factory activity across industries, threatening the region's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and disrupting global supplies of goods such as apparels, cars and electronics.



Coronavirus curbs have led companies to shut factories and suspend or reduce operations at a time when Asia's manufacturing sector is already grappling with rising raw material costs and signs of a slowing Chinese economy.

Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand are three of the region's major manufacturing hubs and produce goods for some of the world's largest consumer brands. In Vietnam, since April, a new wave of infections has forced Vietnam's largest cities and industrial hubs to impose strict lockdowns, prompting electronics, apparel and footwear manufacturers to suspend or reduce operations. The outbreak initially hit northern industrial areas, where suppliers for Apple, Samsung and other global tech firms are located.

In Malaysia, several carmakers and semiconductor companies have said in recent months that pandemic-related disruptions in Malaysia were hitting supply chains. Malaysia accounts for 13 per cent of global chip packaging and testing, and 7 per cent of the world's semiconductor trade passes through the country.

Source: Reuters

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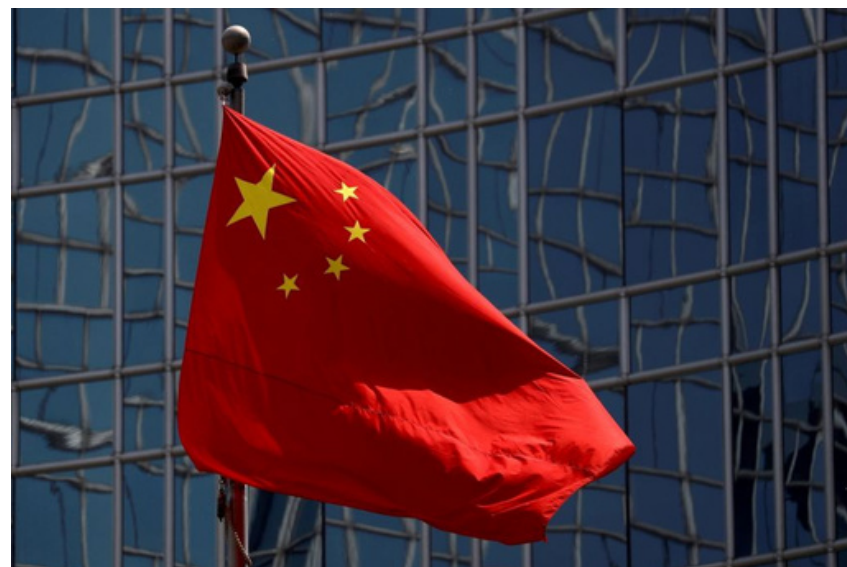
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Chinese ex-journalist detained on suspicion of defaming war heroes

A Chinese former journalist whose work exposed official corruption has been detained by police on suspicion of insulting "heroes and martyrs" of the Korean War after comments he made about a patriotic film, state media reported.

According to screenshots of a social media post that can no longer be accessed, Mr Luo Changping said Chinese people "rarely reflect on the justice" of the war, and used a pun to suggest the soldiers were foolish.

Police in the island province of Hainan detained Mr Luo on suspicion of "infringing on the reputation and honor of heroes and martyrs", according to a notice shared on Weibo by the official CCTV.



Mr Luo had confessed to the crime, according to CCTV. He could not be reached for independent comment. In the social media post, Mr Luo was commenting on "The Battle At Lake Changjin", a patriotic film released on Sept 30 and starring actor Wu Jing. "Public security organs will severely investigate and punish" such infringements, said the police notice.

In one recent case, a defendant was sentenced to eight months in prison for a similar offence. The ruling Communist Party has long kept a tight grip on its history, with its legitimacy resting in part on victories over the Japanese forces in World War II and over the Nationalists to end China's civil war in 1949. Mr Luo's work as a journalist included reporting on a former deputy director at China's state planning body who was sentenced to life in prison for corruption in 2014. He received an award from Transparency International in 2013 for his work.

Source: Reuters

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Hong Kong's oldest university orders Tiananmen statue removal

Hong Kong's oldest university has ordered the removal of a statue commemorating protesters killed in China's 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, according to a legal letter released on Friday (Oct 8).

The 8m-high copper statue was the centrepiece of Hong Kong's candlelit vigil on June 4 to commemorate those killed when Chinese troops backed by tanks opened fire on unarmed pro-democracy campaigners in Beijing.

The statue shows 50 anguished faces and tortured bodies piled on one another, and has been on display at the university campus for more than two decades.



The decision was blasted by the statue's Danish sculptor Jens Galschiot, who told AFP its removal illustrated the ongoing purge of dissent in the once outspoken and semi-autonomous business hub. In a legal letter to the now-disbanded Hong Kong Alliance (HKA) - the organiser of the city's huge annual Tiananmen vigil - the University of Hong Kong (HKU) demanded the group "immediately... make arrangements for the sculpture to be removed from the university's premises" by 5pm on Oct 13.

"If you fail to remove the sculpture... it will be deemed abandoned," the letter said. It added that the university will deal with the statue in a manner it sees fit without further notice. Mr Richard Tsoi, former member of HKA's standing committee, said the university's request was "unreasonable" and he has sent a request to HKU's chancellor to keep the statue. "As a space with free speech and academic freedom, the University of Hong Kong has the social responsibility and mission to preserve the 'Pillar of Shame'," Mr Tsoi said in a statement.

Source: AFP