

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

25th of October 2021

Amnesty to close Hong Kong offices over National Security Law

The human rights group said the law, imposed by China, makes it "effectively impossible" for them to operate.

Amnesty has had a presence in Hong Kong for more than 40 years, and now runs two offices there - one focused on the city and another on the wider region.

The local office will close by 31 October, and the regional office will move out by the end of the year. The broadly worded national security law in Hong Kong criminalises secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces. Critics say it is aimed at crushing dissent but China says it is meant to maintain stability.



Anjhula Mya Singh Bais, chair of Amnesty's international board, said in a statement that a crackdown under the law has forced at least 35 groups to disband this year. "This decision, made with a heavy heart, has been driven by Hong Kong's national security law, which has made it effectively impossible for human rights organisations in Hong Kong to work freely and without fear of serious reprisals," she said.

"The environment of repression and perpetual uncertainty created by the national security law makes it impossible to know what activities might lead to criminal sanctions." Among the groups to have disbanded this year were several leading trade unions, NGOs and professional groups. Several other NGOs, including the New School for Democracy, have relocated to Taiwan.

Source: BBC News Asia

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Cambodia passes law barring dual citizenship for holders of top posts

Cambodia's Parliament on Monday, 25 October, passed constitutional amendments barring holders of the country's top posts, including prime minister, from being citizens of other countries.

Prime Minister Hun Sen had on Oct 6 ordered the Justice Ministry to make the changes, which also allow the Upper and Lower Houses Speakers, and the head of the Constitutional Council, to hold only Cambodian citizenship.

He said this was "to show loyalty to the nation and avoid foreign interference". Mr Heng Samrin, president of Cambodian National Assembly, said the amendments aimed to oppose foreign interference in the country's internal affairs or in the directing of its national and international policies.

"The National Assembly, the Senate, the Royal Government and the Constitutional Council are the supreme bodies of the nation enshrined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia and have a high responsibility to decide on important matters that are the lifeblood of the nation to ensure national independence and sovereignty," Mr Heng Samrin said on his office's Facebook page.

The order by Mr Hun Sen, one of the world's longest-serving leaders after more than three decades in power, to make the constitutional changes came days after a report in the Guardian newspaper wrongly named him as one of thousands of non-Europeans given Cypriot passports.

Source: Reuters



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Thousands evacuated as floods hit central Vietnam

Prolonged heavy rain has triggered widespread flooding in several parts of central Vietnam, killing at least one person, with thousands evacuated and more downpours expected this week.

Footage from the state broadcaster VTV showed people moving belongings and furniture out of flooded homes in Quang Nam province, with water gushing out of a damaged wall in one residence.

In Quang Ngai province, where at least 4,500 people were evacuated at the weekend, children sat on a makeshift raft to move along one street as others waded through knee-deep flood water, some pushing stalled motorcycles.



A tropical low pressure system in the South China Sea is forecast to dump more rain in the southern-central coastal region, the government's weather agency said. Vietnam is prone to storms and flooding due to its long coastline. Natural disasters - predominantly floods and landslides from the storms - killed 378 people last year.

Source: Reuters

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Myanmar frees hundreds of political prisoners after Asean pressure

Myanmar's military government has freed hundreds of political prisoners from the notorious Insein prison, including Ms Aung San Suu Kyi's party spokesman and a famous comedian Zarganar, local media reported.

Minutes after military ruler Min Aung Hlaing's speech on Monday (Oct 18), state television announced that more than 5,600 people arrested or wanted over their roles in anti-coup protests would be freed in an amnesty on humanitarian grounds.

The release was described by some activists as a ploy by the ruling military to try to rebuild its international reputation after Asean took the rare step of excluding the junta chief from its summit.



United Nations special rapporteur Tom Andrews on Twitter welcomed the release but said it was "outrageous" that they were detained in the first place. "The junta is releasing political prisoners in Myanmar not because of a change of heart, but because of pressure," he said. The junta has released prisoners several times since the February coup.

Asean decided to invite a non-political representative to its Oct 26-28 summit, in an unprecedented snub to the military leaders behind the coup against Ms Suu Kyi's elected government. "They came to me today and said they will take me home, that's all," Mr Monywa Aung Shin, a spokesman for Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party, told local media Democratic Voice of Burma late on Monday on his way home from prison. Mr Monywa Aung Shin was arrested on Feb 1 and had spent eight months in prison.

Source: Reuters

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Philippines to review thousands more 'drug war' killings, says justice minister

The Philippines Justice Ministry will review thousands of killings in President Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs, its chief said, after releasing details of a first batch of cases that it said pointed to abuses by police.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) released details on Wednesday (Oct 20) of 52 killings by police in the five-year-old campaign that challenges the official narrative of the national police, that all of the thousands of victims were drug dealers who had resisted arrest.

The Philippines has come under pressure from the United Nations to investigate allegations of systematic murders of drug suspects, and the International Criminal Court recently announced it would investigate Mr Duterte's bloody campaign.



Asked by Reuters if the Philippines would expand its investigation into the war on drugs, Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra said: "Time and resources permitting, the DOJ will review these thousands of other cases, too." The release of details mark a rare admission by the state that abuses may have taken place in the anti-drugs campaign.

UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet had urged the Philippines this month to publicise its findings on the 52 cases so its work can be evaluated. In several cases the DOJ probed, those killed had no traces of gunpowder on their hands, or did not have a gun at all, the department said on Wednesday.

Source: Reuters

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First woman head of Japan's top union vows to fight sexism at workplace

The first female head of Japan's largest trade union vowed on Friday, 22 October, to fight workplace sexism in a country where women still face pressure to "become a good wife and a good mother".

Ms Tomoko Yoshino, 55, said she felt a "great responsibility" to improve opportunities for women in Japan, which is ranked 120 out of 156 nations in the World Economic Forum's latest global gender gap report.

She became president this month of the Japanese Trade Union Confederation, known as Rengo, which has about seven million members.



"I felt that it was up to me to break through this Japanese glass ceiling and not pass up on this opportunity," Ms Yoshino told reporters at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan. She pledged to work towards a society "in which it is comfortable, or easier, for women to work and to live". Many women in Japan leave the workplace when they have children, and find themselves disadvantaged if they try to return, she said.

This has led to the "very low" representation of women in leadership roles, including in politics, with female candidates accounting for just 18 per cent of those running in Japan's general election on Oct 31, Ms Yoshino said. Just three out of 21 ministers in Japan's Cabinet are women. "The division of gender or sex roles in Japan is still very deeply rooted, whether within the workplace, the community or the family," Ms Yoshino said.

Source: Reuters

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For Chinese-Indonesians in Yogyakarta, a Dutch colonial law is the reason for why they can't own land

The semi-autonomous Indonesian sultanate only grants ethnic Chinese citizens up to 30-year leasehold titles, after it resurrected a Dutch colonial-era law.

While the ban is seen as discriminatory and perpetuating racial identity politics, attempts to abolish it have come to nothing.

For doctoral candidate Kezia Dewi, studying the history of Indonesia's Chinese settlements is more than just of personal interest, being one of the country's roughly 3 million ethnic Chinese. Such academic research is also rare, because many see the topic of Chinese-Indonesian land ownership as sensitive and divisive.



“The existing body of research on Chinese-Indonesian settlements is largely focused on the history of Chinatowns dispersed throughout Indonesia and their conservation. This is why I eventually decided to tackle the controversial issue [of land ownership] in both colonial and postcolonial times,” the 38-year-old said.

Her PhD research at Belgian university KA Leuven has given her first-hand access to the colonial archives of the Netherlands. Various parts of Indonesia were under Dutch rule for about 350 years until 1942.

Source: South China Morning Post

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China seeks to lift homework pressures on schoolchildren

Parents are being asked to ensure their children have reasonable time for rest and exercise, and do not spend too much time online. In August China banned written exams for six and seven year olds.

Officials warned at the time that students' physical and mental health was being harmed. In the last year the state has also introduced a number of measures aimed at moderating children's "addiction" to the internet and popular culture.

The latest measure was passed on Saturday by the National People's Congress Standing Committee, the country's permanent legislative body.



Full details of the law have not yet been published, but media reports suggest it encourages parents to nurture their children's morals, intellectual development and social habits. Local government will be responsible for implementation, such as providing funding for "enriching extra-curricular activities".

The law received a mixed reaction on social media site Weibo, with some users praising the drive for good parenting while others questioned whether local authorities or the parents themselves would be up to the task. In July, Beijing stripped online tutoring firms operating in the country of the ability to make a profit from teaching core subjects.

Source: BBC News Asia