

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

15th of November 2021

Singapore migrant workers yearn for freedom as strict curbs persist

Curbs have been eased for most in Singapore, where vaccinated people can go out shopping and to restaurants, but the low-paid migrants remain subject to strict restrictions that mostly allow them to travel only between their work and dorms

More than 300,000 migrant workers, many of them from South Asia, live in dorms in the prosperous city state, where they are typically packed into shared rooms and sleep on bunk beds.

The vast complexes were hit by Covid-19 and locked down at the start of the pandemic, while restrictions were introduced across the whole island nation for a period to prevent a broader outbreak.



Curbs have been eased for most in Singapore, where – despite currently facing a renewed virus wave – vaccinated people can go out shopping and to restaurants, and borders are gradually reopening. But it is a different story for the low-paid migrants, who remain subject to far more onerous restrictions. “It’s a very painful life ... like prison,” said construction site worker Uddin, adding that before the pandemic he used to meet friends at the weekend to drink coffee, recite poetry and gossip.

When the dormitories – self-contained and usually in out-of-the-way parts of Singapore – became the epicentre of the city’s first Covid-19 wave last year, it sparked national soul-searching. Calls mounted to improve the livelihoods of migrants who have for decades done the back-breaking work of constructing the financial hub’s gleaming skyscrapers, cleaning housing estates and maintaining public transport.

Source: Agence France-Presse

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Thai protesters defy court order against royal reform rallies

Despite a court ruling intended to put a stop to their call for royal reform, demonstrators in Thailand gathered on Sunday (Nov 14) to continue their push for change and protest the judgment that labelled their movement an attempt to overthrow the monarchy.

The protest came just days after Wednesday's controversial verdict that deemed three prominent protest leaders guilty of violating the Constitution through speeches and actions that the court said were aimed at toppling the royal institution.

"Say no to absolute monarchy," shouted hundreds of protesters, alleging that the ruling was an attempt to reinstate absolute monarchy, which ended in 1932 for Thailand.



Tensions rose when protesters started marching from the Pathum Wan intersection in downtown Bangkok towards the German Embassy to submit a petition. King Maha Vajiralongkorn was reported to have recently returned to Germany, where he has spent most of his time in the last few decades. His extended stays in the southern German state of Bavaria had earlier been scrutinised by protesters.

"We came here to ask for our human rights to demonstrate and protest in a country that calls itself democratic. It is not normal for a constitutional court to decide that criticism is treason," said one protester outside the embassy in Sathorn Road. Riot police and water cannon trucks were seen at multiple points in the city as small skirmishes broke out between demonstrators and law enforcement. The latter fired rubber bullets.

Source: The Straits Times

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Philippine President Duterte to run for senator, avoids clash with daughter for vice-presidency

President Rodrigo Duterte will not be going toe-to-toe with his daughter Sara Duterte-Carpio in a race for the vice-presidency in next year's election after all. In yet another dizzying twist, the Philippines' 76-year-old leader is instead running for senator.

"I don't want him to run for vice-president. I want to avoid a family feud... I have high respect for the president and his family," Senator Christopher "Bong" Go, his long-time aide, told reporters.

His press secretary Martin Andanar said last Saturday (Nov 13) that Mr Duterte would file papers to register to run for vice-president at the poll commission's office in Manila on Monday.



But Mr Duterte did not show up as the 5pm deadline allowing the last-minute replacement of candidates came and went. He instead registered to run for senator via a representative. That averted what would have been a showdown between him and Ms Duterte-Carpio, who is herself running for vice-president but under the political party of former president Gloria Arroyo, not her father's.

She is being paired with former senator Ferdinand Marcos Jr, 64, son and namesake of the late dictator, who is running under his own party. In the Philippines, the president and vice-president are elected in separate contests. Mr Duterte has refused to support Mr Marcos, whom he suggested on Sunday was a communist at heart. "I never gave a commitment that I will support (the Marcoses)," he said.

Source: The Straits Times

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Hong Kong opens new modern art museum under national security cloud

A senior Hong Kong cultural official said on Thursday (Nov 11) that freedom of expression was not above a China-imposed national security law, on the eve of the opening of a contemporary art museum intended to put the city on the global cultural map.

The multi-billion dollar M+, featuring contemporary artwork from leading Chinese, Asian and Western artists, is Hong Kong's bid to match museums like the Tate Modern in London, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

But the imposition of a sweeping national security law by China last year on its once freest city is casting a pall over the opening, as curators and artists struggle to find a balance between artistic expression and political censorship.



Earlier this year, pro-Beijing politicians and media outlets criticised certain works in the M+ for breaching the national security law and inciting "hatred" against China, including a photograph by Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei, giving the middle finger in Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

"The opening of M+ does not mean that artistic expression is above the law. It is not," Mr Henry Tang, the head of the West Kowloon Cultural District, a new cultural hub that includes the M+, told reporters. Mr Tang stressed all exhibits must "comply" with the national security law and that certain works in their collection, including Mr Ai's contested photograph, would not be displayed.

Source: Reuters

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Cambodia ends quarantine for vaccinated travelers

Cambodia will stop requiring quarantine for travelers who have been vaccinated for Covid-19 starting on November 15, Prime Minister Hun Sen said on Sunday.

The Prime Minister made the announcement in a voice message on social media after the Southeast Asian country has required lengthy quarantine for more than 18 months.

"After seeing that people have two doses and a negative Covid test, they will be allowed to travel all over the Kingdom of Cambodia," he said.



Hun Sen said travelers will have to show their negative test 72 hours prior to travel and have two vaccine doses. Those who are unvaccinated will be quarantined for 14 days.

Hun Sen said vaccinated foreigners and Cambodians who are in quarantine will be allowed to leave from November 15. "This is a quick way to reopen the country and facilitate travel for our people. I know some of our citizens want to go abroad but are worried about coming back with quarantine required," he said.

Cambodia has vaccinated nearly 90% of its more than 16 million people, one of Asia's highest inoculation rates.

Source: CNN News Asia

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US journalist detained in Myanmar released: Junta

A US journalist imprisoned in Myanmar since May has been released and deported from the country days after being sentenced to 11 years in jail, officials said on Monday (Nov 15).

Danny Fenster, 37, was being taken to the capital Naypyidaw from Yangon where he was jailed and would be deported, a government source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

He had been working at local outlet Frontier Myanmar for around a year and was arrested as he headed home to see his family in May. "We can confirm that he has been released and will be deported. Details will be released later," junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun said.



He was due to go on trial on Tuesday on charges of terrorism and sedition, which could have seen him jailed for life. "It's wonderful news for all of his friends and family," his colleague at Frontier Myanmar Andrew Nachemson said. "But of course he never should have spent six months in jail... and all the local journalists who remain imprisoned should also be released immediately."

More than 1,200 people have been killed by security forces in a crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group. The press has also been squeezed as the junta tries to tighten control over the flow of information, throttling internet access and revoking the licences of local media outlets. More than 100 journalists have been arrested since the putsch, according to Reporting Asean, a monitoring group. It says at least 30 are still in detention.

Source: AFP

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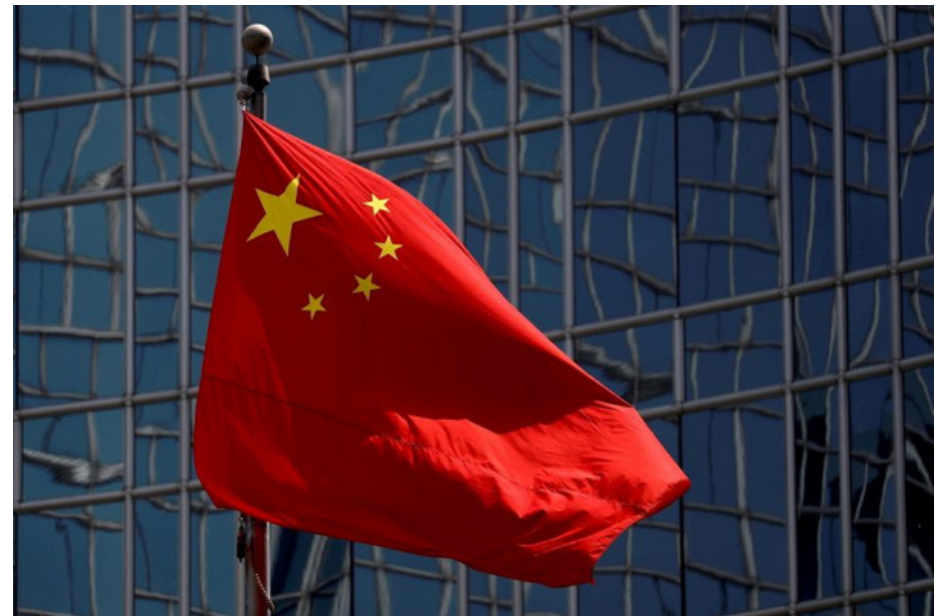
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Xi to deliver party doctrine to change course of China

Chinese President Xi Jinping is set to deliver the first resolution on Communist Party history in 40 years, giving him the mandate to potentially rule for life as a major summit wraps in Beijing.

The landmark document, which could change the course of China, is expected to be announced in a communique on Thursday (Nov 11) as the party wraps up a four-day meeting.

Only Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping have authored a so-called historical resolution, and both used their works to dominate party politics until they died.



The party's powerful Central Committee has been huddled at a military hotel in Beijing since Monday for the final major gathering before a leadership congress late next year, where Mr Xi will seek a precedent-defying third term. Getting that group of 400 mostly male political elites, including state leaders, military chiefs, provincial bosses and top academics, to endorse his vision of the party's past and future will send a strong signal that Mr Xi has the power base to remain in office.

This week's event - the current Central Committee's sixth full session, or plenum - is one of seven major summits in China's five-year political cycle and regarded as the most important. It represents the last chance for horse-trading before the 2022 leadership congress.

Source: Bloomberg