

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

26th of April 2021

Indonesian navy submarine found split into three on sea bed

An Indonesian navy submarine that sank off the coast of Bali on Wednesday, April 21, has been found split into three pieces on the sea bed, officials say. All the vessel's 53 crew have been confirmed dead.

Navy officials said they had received signals from the sub's location more than 800m (2,600ft) deep early on Sunday, 25th of April. An underwater rescue vehicle loaned by Singapore was sent down to get visual confirmation of the wreckage.

The KRI Nanggala disappeared after requesting permission to dive during a torpedo drill. The reason for its sinking is not yet clear. Sunday's statement came a day after the Indonesian military confirmed that debris from the sub, including prayer mats, had been found in the area where it went missing.

Navy Chief of Staff Yudo Margono said more items from the submarine had been recovered including an anchor and crew safety suits.

The head of Indonesia's military, Hadi Tjahjanto, confirmed that there was no chance of finding any of the crew alive. Experts had said earlier that the depth at which the submarine was found was well beyond its survivable limit and it was only carrying enough oxygen for three days. The KRI Nanggala's disappearance led to an international search operation with US, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, and India providing help. The German-built vessel was more than 40 years old but underwent a refit in 2012.



Source: BBC News Asia

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Southeast Asian Leaders Call For Immediate End To Violence In Myanmar

Leaders of nine Southeast Asian countries on Saturday, 24th of April called for an immediate end to the violence in Myanmar, where the military government has cracked down violently on the enormous protests over its February coup.

At an emergency summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations held in Jakarta, Indonesia's president called the situation in Myanmar "unacceptable."

Hundreds of thousands of pro-democracy protesters have demonstrated in the months since Myanmar's military seized full control of the country from the democratically elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

In response, the military has imposed Internet blackouts, arrested thousands and fired on protesters. At least 748 people have been killed and 3,389 are being detained, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a Burmese human rights group based in Thailand.

The official statement released Saturday by ASEAN leaders makes five demands of the military junta, including an "immediate cessation" of the violence and a peaceful solution to the situation via "constructive dialogue," mediated by a special envoy appointed by ASEAN. The leaders also demanded that Myanmar's military government allow the arrival of humanitarian assistance.



Source: NPR

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Philippines logs over one million Covid-19 cases in new, grim milestone

The Philippines has chalked up over a million Covid-19 infections, hitting a new, grim milestone as it debates whether to keep quarantine restrictions in place to hold on to recent gains against the pandemic or reopen the economy further to stem massive jobs and corporate losses.

There were close to 9,000 new cases reported on Monday 26th of April, bringing the nation's total to 1,006,428. Nearly 17,000 people have died.

The Philippines is the second worst-hit country in South-east Asia, after Indonesia, which has over 1.6 million Covid-19 cases.

Data crunchers said the number of cases in Metro Manila, where nearly half the infections were recorded, was going down following the strict restrictions under quarantine in place since mid-March. But they warned that it was still too early to open up the economy even further.

The Philippines placed Metro Manila and four nearby provinces – home to a quarter of the nation's population – in strict lockdown from March 29 to April 10, as its efforts to contain fast-spreading variants of the coronavirus floundered. At 10,000 to 15,000 new cases a day, the country was seeing twice as many infections than it did when the pandemic peaked in August last year.

Hospitals were so inundated with patients that many died of Covid-19 before even being wheeled into an emergency room. Some died inside tents set up at hospital parking lots. At least one died trying to self-quarantine inside his car.



Source: The Straits Times

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In Cambodia, extended Phnom Penh coronavirus lockdown leaves garment workers, market vendors hungry

Cambodia has closed markets in its capital and extended a two-week lockdown, designating some areas red zones and prohibiting people from going out. This has created a food emergency for many textile and other workers, with a labour analyst calling the government's response 'out of control'

The Cambodian government's two-week lockdown to contain a surge of Covid-19 cases in the capital, Phnom Penh, has cut off food supplies for thousands of garment workers, market vendors and others who survive on a day-to-day income.

Prime Minister Hun Sen announced the restrictions on April 14, which allowed only people in essential jobs such as delivery, restaurants and food and medical supply factories to work, with families permitted to visit markets three times a week. Days later, the government declared four communes and three villages "red zones", banning residents from leaving their homes except for medical reasons.

On Saturday, 24th of April, Phnom Penh City ordered all public markets closed for two weeks, further straining residents' access to food.

Garment worker Un Sopheap, 35, has been in quarantine since April 9, after neighbours in her block of small rental rooms tested positive for Covid-19. She said she received part of her salary and a small stipend – about US\$135 – while quarantining but now cannot go out to buy fresh food after the block was designated a red zone. This meant she went four days in a row eating only rice with soy sauce, sometimes with egg.



Source: South China Morning Post

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Singapore's migrant workers remain segregated, weeks after new cases among them dropped to near zero

Most workers remain confined to their dormitories, only able to mix with the wider community on 'essential errands' after requesting permission. The government is concerned that, until vaccination is widespread, dormitories remain potential sites for a fresh outbreak

It has been a year since migrant workers in Singapore were confined to dormitories to prevent an outbreak of Covid-19 in their ranks from spreading across the island. Now, weeks after new cases among the labourers dropped to almost zero and thousands have received vaccinations, some wonder how long it will take for restrictions to end.

“I don't have any freedom to move around, only allowed to leave from the dorm to worksite, dorm to worksite,” said Arif, a 30-year-old worker from Bangladesh who's been living in housing on the same construction site since the pandemic began. “Right now my only feeling is I want to go home to see my family, but I haven't got the vaccination. I worry if I go home, I cannot come back.”



The 320,000 migrant workers living in dormitories who help build and service the city came into focus last year as Covid-19 raged through their packed buildings, threatening to wreck the nation's efforts to control the virus. The news turned a spotlight on their living and working conditions which some labour organisations had been warning about for years. With a vaccine drive now in full swing, most dormitory residents remain largely segregated from the rest of the population, with permission for only limited trips away from their workplace or living quarters.

Source: Bloomberg

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A Sri Lankan's tragic death in Japan casts a harsh spotlight on controversial refugee system

A Sri Lankan woman fled to the authorities in Japan in August last year hoping to escape from domestic violence, only to end up dying in detention in Nagoya last month.

Ms Ratnayake Liyanage Wishma Sandamali, 33, who was taken into custody for overstaying her visa, died on March 6, having lost 20kg in detention over a stress-induced stomach condition.

"I need to recover but I don't know how to do it. Please help me to recover," she wrote in a February letter to non-profit group Start, which helps immigrants, adding that she was being deprived of medical attention.

She is the 18th foreigner to die in detention since 2007. The case has become a lightning rod for activists who decry inhumane Third World treatment in a First World country.

Ms Wishma was vomiting blood in her final days, and was so weak that she had no control of her arms and legs. The immigration authorities allegedly turned a blind eye to medical expert advice to put her on an intravenous drip or to grant her provisional release to ease her stress. A report by public broadcaster NHK suggested that officials tend to suspect malingering for minor illnesses in their reluctance to grant provisional release.

Yet at the same time, Japan is pushing through reforms to its Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law that will forcibly deport refugees if their applications for the right to stay are rejected twice.

Source: The Straits Times



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Hong Kong police chief wants 'fake news' law as he ramps up attacks on newspaper he accused of inciting hatred

Commissioner of Police Chris Tang escalates attack on local media over coverage of National Security Education Day. Good to have a law to 'assist national security and make Hong Kong safer', Tang says

Hong Kong's police chief would back a new law banning fake news and has doubled down on his criticism of a local newspaper which he said "incited hatred" with its coverage of National Security Education Day last week.

Commissioner of Police Chris Tang Ping-keung escalated his attacks against Apple Daily on Tuesday, two days after the tabloid-style newspaper said its reporting of events was based on facts and pointed out a free press was enshrined in the Basic Law, the city's mini-constitution.



Tang's accusations stemmed from the newspaper's front page coverage of last week's security day, and the Reuters photograph it published of children playing with toy guns. Citing online comments, it likened the scene to an incident in 2019.

On August 31 that year, during the anti-government protests that gripped the city, officers used pepper spray against people in a train carriage at Prince Edward MTR station. The front page prompted the police chief to warn against the spread of fake news, while over the weekend newspapers supportive of Beijing demanded Apple Daily, which is owned by Next Digital founder Jimmy Lai Chee-ying, be outlawed.

Source: South China Morning Post