

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

19th of April 2021

Hong Kong court jails Jimmy Lai and other prominent activists for 8 to 18 months over 2019 protest

Among those sentenced was Jimmy Lai, 72, who founded the pro-democracy Apple Daily newspaper. Lai received 14 months in prison for his involvement in two protests on August 18 and 31, 2019.

Also jailed for taking part in both events was Lee Cheuk-yan, a 64-year-old former lawmaker and veteran pro-democracy activist, who received a total of 14 months in prison. Three former lawmakers were jailed over the August 18 march, including "Longhair" Leung Kwok-hung, who received an 18 month sentence, Au Nok-hin, 10 months, and Cyd Ho, 8 months.

During Friday's sentencing hearing, judge Amanda Woodcock said the defendants "deliberately defied the law" and the unauthorized protests posed "a direct challenge to the authority of the police, and therefore law and order." She said sentence imposed should "reflect the seriousness of the offense and culpability," as well as the "conscious decision" by the defendants to break the law.

Several defendants avoided prison, receiving suspended sentences in respect of their advanced age and long record of public service. They included Martin Lee, an 82-year-old veteran barrister often referred to as "Hong Kong's father of democracy," and veteran pro-democracy activists Albert Ho, Margaret Ng and Leung Yiu-chung. Former lawmaker Yeung Sum received a suspended sentence for his role in the August 31 protest.

The sentences were handed down after Lai and others were found guilty earlier this month of organizing and participating in two protests on August 18 and August 31 in 2019, both of which had been banned by police. Each charge carried with it a maximum penalty of five years in prison.



Source: CNN News Asia

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Japanese journalist detained in Myanmar

Myanmar authorities detained a Japanese journalist in Yangon on Sunday, 18th of April evening, Japan's government said on Monday, adding that it was trying to seek his release.

BBC Burmese quoted a witness as saying freelance journalist Yuka Kitazumi was picked up from his home and taken into custody by troops on Sunday night. He was asked to raise both hands and was taken away in a car, it said. Japan's government spokesman described the journalist as a man in his forties, without naming him.

“We are seeking, from Myanmar, his quick release, and we are trying to secure the safety of Japanese nationals,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato told a news conference, adding that the government was seeking details on the circumstances surrounding the journalist's detention. A spokesman for the junta did not respond to calls asking for comment.



Mr Kitazumi runs a media production company, Yangon Media Professionals, and used to be a journalist with the Nikkei business daily, according to his Facebook page and interviews with online media.

He was arrested previously in February while covering protests against the Feb 1 coup but was released soon after. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners activist group, 737 people have been killed by security forces since the coup and 3,229 remain in detention.

Source: Reuters

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UN fears Myanmar heading into 'full-blown conflict', as protesters cancel new year festivities

United Nations rights chief Michelle Bachelet urged countries to take action to prevent a conflict like the one in Syria. Meanwhile, activists have boycotted celebrations for the five-day new year holiday, known as Thingyannew, to show their opposition to the coup

In a statement, the UN rights office urged countries to take immediate and decisive action to push the military leaders behind a February 1 coup in Myanmar to stop their “campaign of repression and slaughter of its people”.

“I fear the situation in Myanmar is heading towards a full-blown conflict,” said Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. “States must not allow the deadly mistakes of the past in Syria and elsewhere to be repeated.”

Myanmar is in chaos and its economy paralysed since the military seized power from civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1.

A junta crackdown against dissent has resulted in the civilian death toll reaching at least 710 as of late Monday including 50 children, according to a local monitoring group. Ethnic armed rebel groups have meanwhile stepped up attacks on the military and police in recent weeks, raising fears of Myanmar spiralling into broader civil conflict.

And the military has retaliated with air strikes that have reportedly displaced thousands of civilians. “The military seems intent on intensifying its pitiless policy of violence against the people of Myanmar, using military-grade and indiscriminate weaponry,” Bachelet said.



Source: Agence France-Presse

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Rodrigo Duterte reappears amid anger over surging cases, lack of hospital beds in Philippines

The president had not been seen for two weeks, prompting speculation over his health. Filipinos have taken to social media to express frustration at the government's Covid-19 response, with the country the worst-hit in Southeast Asia

As the Philippines experiences an unprecedented surge in Covid-19 cases that is overwhelming all Metro Manila hospitals, anger is rising at the government's handling of the crisis and President Rodrigo Duterte's absence from public view over the last two weeks.

Duterte appeared in a pre-recorded "Talk to the People" address televised late on Monday evening following speculation about his health or possible death. He had not been seen since his former aide-turned senator Christopher "Bong" Go released a video marking his 76th birthday on March 28.



His previous weekly address was postponed twice and to allay fears, Go on Saturday released videos of him biking and playing golf in the darkness. "If you want me to die early, you must pray harder. What you want to happen is to see me go," the president said. Duterte's voice at times turned hoarse, and he struggled to find words. Instead of explaining his long absence, he said: "When I disappeared for several days, I did it on purpose. The more you rummage about for me like a child, and the more you mock me, the more I'm filled with zest."

Filipinos on social media also expressed outrage at the perceived preferential treatment given to government officials who jumped hospital queues while some had died waiting for admission.

Source: South China Morning Post

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Japan announces it will release treated radioactive water from Fukushima nuclear plant into sea

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga met members of his Cabinet including industry minister Hiroshi Kajiyama to formalise the decision on Tuesday, despite concerns from China. The announcement comes a decade after a massive earthquake and tsunami triggered a triple meltdown in March 2011

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga met members of his Cabinet including industry minister Hiroshi Kajiyama to formalise the decision, which comes a decade after a massive earthquake and tsunami triggered a triple meltdown in March 2011.

The decision came despite China saying it had “deep concerns” over the plan. On Monday China’s foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said Beijing had through diplomatic channels asked the Japanese government to “adopt a responsible attitude”.



“The Japanese side often asks other countries to fulfil their international responsibilities, and right now, the international society is looking at Japan – so Japan cannot turn a blind eye or turn a deaf ear,” he said. “This issue is very significant, so Japan needs to be responsible to the international public interests, which is also being responsible to the Japanese people’s interests.”

South Korea had also raised concerns about the plan, as had Japanese fishermen who fear consumers will shun Japanese seafood over safety concerns. Yet these concerns appear to have fallen on deaf ears. Suga had previously said a decision on the waste water was needed as the storage tanks at the Fukushima plant would be full by the summer of 2022.

Source: South China Morning Post/ Kyodo