

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

1st February 2021

Britain launches new visa for millions of Hongkongers fleeing China's crackdown

Scheme allows Hong Kong residents with a BNO passport to live and work in the UK with a pathway to citizenship after five years.

A new visa scheme offering millions of Hong Kong residents a pathway to British citizenship went live on Sunday as the UK opened its doors to those wanting to escape China's crackdown on dissent.

From 31st of January 2021, anyone with a British national overseas (BNO) passport and their dependents can apply online for a visa allowing them to live and work in the UK. After five years they can then apply for citizenship.



The immigration scheme is a response to Beijing's decision last year to impose a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong to snuff out huge and often violent pro-democracy protests.

While many Hongkongers are concerned about the loss of political freedom at home some are also concerned about what they will find abroad in the UK from Covid-19 lockdowns to damp and dark winters.

Source: The Guardian

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Myanmar coup: Aung San Suu Kyi detained as military seizes control

Myanmar's military has seized power after detaining Aung San Suu Kyi and other democratically elected leaders.

Troops are patrolling streets in major cities and communications are limited. The top army commander is now in charge and a one-year state of emergency has been declared, army TV announced.

The move follows a landslide win by Ms Suu Kyi's party in an election the army claims was marred by fraud. She urged her supporters to "not accept this" and "protest against the coup".



No major violence has been reported. Soldiers blocked roads in the capital, Nay Pyi Taw, and the main city, Yangon. International and domestic TV channels, including the state broadcaster, went off air. Internet and phone services have been disrupted. Banks said they had been forced to close.

The military takeover follows weeks of tensions between the armed forces and the government following parliamentary elections lost by the army-backed opposition.

Source: BBC News Asia

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Vietnam re-elects Nguyen Phu Trong as Communist Party chief for third time after secretive Congress

Trong, a 76-year-old pro-China conservative who is rumoured to be in poor health, was given the nod after a week of closed-door talks. His re-election is a boost for the high-profile anti-corruption campaign he spearheaded, which has swept through the party, police and armed forces.

Vietnam's ruling Communist Party chief Nguyen Phu Trong was re-elected Sunday, 31st of January 2021 - a victory that makes him the most powerful leader in decades- but his win was overshadowed by a serious coronavirus outbreak in the country.

Trong, a 76-year-old pro-China conservative who is rumoured to be in poor health, was given the nod after a week of closed-door talks at the twice-a-decade Communist Party congress. It will be his third term in office -- a feat unprecedented in Vietnam's modern era.



Another stint in the top job for Trong is seen as a boost for his high-profile anti-corruption campaign, officially dubbed a "blazing furnace", that has swept through the party, police and armed forces.

Source: Reuters

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China rejects Hong Kongers' UK-issued passports

Move seen as challenge to British offer of extended visas and residency

China on Friday, January 29, said it will "no longer recognise" the British National (Overseas) passport for Hong Kongers, as Britain prepares to open its doors to millions more residents of the former colony following a security crackdown by Beijing.

The Chinese move follows a promise by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government to provide long-term sanctuary for Hong Kong residents who want to leave the territory.



Holders of British National (Overseas) status — a legacy of UK rule over Hong Kong up to 1997 — will from the 31st of January will be able to apply to live and work in Britain for up to five years, and eventually seek citizenship.

BNO passport holders previously had only limited rights to visit the UK for up to six months, and no right to work or settle.

Source: AFP.com

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Singapore rights groups speak out over arrests for transphobia protest

The rare protest was held amid anger in the LGBT community over a student's claims that the Education Ministry interfered with her transition. In response, the ministry and Institute of Mental Health said her school was 'committed to providing the education support the student needs'

Singapore's LGBT rights groups on Wednesday, 27th of January, urged introspection from authorities after police arrested three people for staging a brief peaceful protest against transphobia in the education system.

The rare protest in the city state was held amid anger in the LGBT community over recent revelations by a student diagnosed with gender dysphoria who claimed the Education Ministry interfered with her transition.



The Singapore Police Force late on Tuesday said three demonstrators between the ages 19 and 32 were released on bail after being detained hours earlier for “allegedly taking part in an illegal assembly without a permit” outside the ministry’s headquarters.

Source: South China Morning Post

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Hundreds of Rohingya go missing from Indonesian refugee camp, feared trafficked to Malaysia

Just 112 refugees remain at the makeshift camp in Lhokseumawe, well down from the almost 400 that arrived there last summer. Neither local authorities nor the UN could account for the whereabouts of the refugees from the stateless Muslim minority from Myanmar

Hundreds of Rohingya are missing from a refugee camp in Indonesia and are believed to have been trafficked to neighbouring Malaysia, officials and sources said Thursday, 28th of January.

Just 112 refugees remain at the makeshift camp in Lhokseumawe on Indonesia's northern coast this week, well down from the almost 400 that arrived between June and September last year.



Neither local authorities nor the UN could account for the whereabouts of the refugees from the stateless Muslim minority from Myanmar, who are feared to have enlisted traffickers to help them cross the Malacca Strait into Malaysia.

Source: South China Morning Post

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China releases Tibetan activist who was sentenced to five years' jail

A Tibetan activist sentenced to five years in prison by the Chinese authorities for "inciting separatism" after appearing in a New York Times documentary has been released from jail, his lawyer said

Mr Tashi Wangchuk was sentenced in 2018 after prosecutors cited a short documentary about his work protecting his culture as evidence of his alleged incitement. He had been taken into custody two years earlier.

The documentary followed Mr Tashi as he travelled to Beijing where he attempted to get Chinese state media and courts to address what he describes as the diminishing use of the Tibetan language.

His lawyer, Mr Liang Xiaojun, tweeted on Thursday that Mr Tashi had been escorted home by officials and was now with his sister's family in Yushu, Qinghai province, and was in good health, although Mr Liang was unsure if Mr Tashi was "fully free".

China's Constitution nominally protects free speech, but critics say it is a fig leaf for a hardline approach to any critical opinions of Beijing.



Source: The Straits Times

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Two Indonesian men flogged in Aceh province for having gay sex

A gay couple were flogged in Indonesia's conservative Aceh province Thursday, 28th of January justice officials said, in a public spectacle lambasted by human rights groups.

The two men were whipped nearly 80 times each for having gay sex, which is outlawed in Aceh province under local Islamic law. The pair, who were not identified, winced in pain and pleaded for the whipping to stop, as a masked officer beat their backs with a rattan stick.

The punishment was briefly halted and the men, both in their twenties, were allowed a drink of water before it continued. The mother of one man fainted at the sight of her son being whipped.



The men were arrested in November at a rental home where a landlord found them half-naked in their room. Gay sex is not illegal elsewhere in Indonesia and Aceh is the only region in the world's biggest Muslim nation that imposes syariah law.

Source: The Straits Times