

# What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In  
The  
News.

8th February 2021

## Myanmar generals shut down Internet as thousands protest coup

*Internet shutdown knocked government websites offline, rendered mobile banking apps unusable, and plunged the country already hit by bans on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram into an information black hole.*

Myanmar's military regime shut down the Internet nationwide on Saturday, February 6, 2021, as thousands of people rallied on the streets of Yangon and Mandalay to protest the February 1 military coup.

The protests were the largest since Monday's putsch, when the military detained state counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as several top politicians and newly elected lawmakers convened to open Parliament.



Ms Suu Kyi will remain under detention until Feb 15 pending investigation into breaching the country's import and export law. According to online monitoring group NetBlocks, Internet connectivity on Saturday had collapsed to 16 per cent of ordinary levels from about 2pm Myanmar time.

Phone calls could still be made, but locals avoided them where possible, fearing they could be under surveillance. The shutdown drew swift condemnation from the Asean Parliamentarians for Human Rights. Its chairman Charles Santiago called it an "odious act that puts the people of Myanmar at even greater risk".

Source: The Straits Times

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## Indonesia bans mandatory Islamic headscarves for schoolgirls

*The move was applauded by rights activists, who say non-Muslim girls have been forced for years to wear a hijab in conservative parts of the country. State schools across the nation of nearly 270 million will face sanctions if they fail to comply with the edict from Education Minister Nadiem Makarim*

Indonesia has banned schools from forcing girls to wear headscarves after the case of a Christian pupil pressured to cover up sparked outrage in the world's most populous Muslim nation.

The move was applauded on Friday by rights activists, who say non-Muslim girls have been forced for years to wear a hijab in conservative parts of the country.



On Wednesday, February 3, 2021 he said religious attire was an individual choice, and said schools “cannot make it compulsory”.

Source: Agence France-Presse

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## Critics of Philippines' anti-terror law lumped in with communist rebels as deadly 'red-tagging' continues under Duterte

*Rights groups say hundreds have lost their lives over the past four years to a deadly game of finger pointing that equates any left-wing activity with terrorism. Two retired judges who oppose the controversial new anti-terror law are among the latest to be singled out after an army officer accused them of sedition*

Even as the Philippines' Supreme Court began hearing petitions against an anti-terrorism law that seeks – among other things – to root out communist rebels, a host of Filipinos have already been marked out as such, in a deadly form of labelling known locally as “red-tagging”.

Hundreds of accused communists are thought to have lost their lives since Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte came to power in 2016, with the United Nations' Human Rights Office reporting at least 248 human rights defenders, legal professionals, journalists and trade unionists killed in relation to their work between 2015 and 2019.



Source: South China Morning Post

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## Malaysia to move migrant workers to hotels

*The Malaysian government said the programme would help curb the Covid-19 outbreak and indirectly assist hotel operators hurt by the pandemic*

Malaysia's government has kicked off a plan to temporarily house migrant workers in near-empty hotels across the nation to tackle the worsening spread of Covid-19 cases due to workplace clusters.

Malaysia's Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry said in a statement that the programme will help curb the virus outbreak and indirectly assist hotel operators hurt by the pandemic.



Overcrowded conditions in employee dormitories have been a key source of infections, spurring record cases and pressuring Malaysia's health system. The nation has more than 1.5 million documented migrant workers, 91 per cent of whom live in accommodation that does not meet minimum housing standards, according to the Ministry of Human Resources.

Source: South China Morning Post

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## Controversy in Hong Kong over plan to educate students on national security

*The government's announcement that students from the age of six will be taught the dangers of subversion and foreign interference has been controversial, with many teachers questioning the move.*

Late last Thursday, February 4, 2021, the Education Bureau released guidelines which stated that primary school pupils should learn about the basic concepts of national security, including subversion, secession, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces.

They would also be taught on how to sing and "respectfully listen" to the national anthem and about the role of the police and the People's Liberation Army as "protectors" of Hong Kong.



Older students in secondary schools would be taught that existing rights and freedoms were not unlimited and be educated more in depth on the offences related to national security. They would also be told about the challenges China faces and the opportunities the mainland presents.

National security would be taught through a variety of subjects, including Chinese history, civic education, geography and biology.

Source: The Straits Times

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## Meet North Korean defector Jihyun Park, who's now seeking election to local council in UK

*'The UK people welcomed me to this land and I finally found my freedom. I want to pay back,' she says.*

Jihyun Park shares the civic concerns of any other would-be town councillor in Britain, from local education to potholes in the roads.

Park is believed to be the first defector from the oppressive state to have run for office in any country, other than South Korea, after fleeing human trafficking in China and the brutal privations of a North Korean prison camp.

Thirteen years after finding refuge in Britain, the 52-year-old is standing for Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative party in council elections coming up in May, pledging to speak for other "voiceless people".

Park first tried to flee the world's most reclusive state in 1998, when it was in the grip of famine. She and her younger brother trekked to China, where they got separated, and she was sold into a sham "marriage" with an alcoholic gambler. After six years in China and having borne a son, Park was arrested by Chinese police and sent back alone to North Korea, where she was thrown into a detention camp for political criminals and forced to do back-breaking manual labour.



Source: Agence France-Presse