

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

15th February 2021

Myanmar coup: Protesters face up to 20 years in prison under new law

Myanmar's military has warned anti-coup protesters across the country that they could face up to 20 years in prison if they obstruct the armed forces.

Long sentences and fines will also apply to those found to incite "hatred or contempt" towards the coup leaders, the military said.

The legal changes were announced as armoured vehicles appeared on the streets of several cities. Hundreds of thousands of people have taken part in protests in recent days.

The demonstrators are demanding the release from detention of their elected leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and the restoration of democracy in Myanmar, also known as Burma.

Ms Suu Kyi's lawyer said she would be detained for a further two days. She will then be tried via video link at a court in the capital Nay Pyi Taw on Wednesday, Khin Maung Zaw added. Ms Suu Kyi was rounded up with other members of the government on 1 February, but her detention was due to end on 15 February, according to Reuters news agency. The charges against her include possession of unlawful communication devices - walkie-talkies used by her security staff.



Source: BBC Asia

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Malaysia to hand 1,200 Myanmar detainees to country's navy

Malaysia will deport 1,200 detained Myanmar nationals after the Myanmar military government, which took over in a Feb 1 coup, offered to send three navy ships to pick them up, officials from both countries and two sources told Reuters.

Myanmar, via its embassy in Kuala Lumpur, made the offer to take back its citizens held in Malaysian immigration detention centres last week, according to two sources familiar with the matter.

The detention centres typically hold asylum-seekers and refugees, along with others who are in Malaysia without proper documents. Malaysia does not formally recognise refugees, regarding them as illegal migrants. The officials did not respond to queries as to whether those being repatriated included refugees.

Detainees have in the past included members of the Chin, Kachin and the Muslim Rohingya communities fleeing ethnic conflict and persecution by the military in Myanmar. Malaysia is home to more than 154,000 asylum-seekers from Myanmar, according to the UN refugee agency UNHCR. There are also thousands of migrant workers.



Source: Reuters

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Thai pro-democracy protesters return to the streets calling for royal reforms

Thai pro-democracy protesters scaled a massive Bangkok monument on Saturday (Feb 13), draping it in a crimson cloth and calling for the kingdom to abolish its draconian royal defamation laws.

Momentum for the youth-led movement calling for an overhaul to Premier Prayut Chan-o-cha's government has slowed in recent months due to a fresh wave of coronavirus infections in Thailand.

But the recent detention of four prominent leaders has spurred protesters into action, bringing hundreds back to the Democracy Monument intersection in Bangkok's historic quarter under the close watch of scores of riot police.



The leaders were charged under the lese majeste law, which carries penalties of up to 15 years per charge if found guilty of insulting the monarchy. "I want to stress the purpose of today's rally is to call for 112 to be abolished," said Panupong "Mike" Jadnok, referring to the law by its penal code section.

After rearranging flower pots around the monument to say "112", activists draped a massive red cloth over Democracy Monument in an act of defiance.

Source: Agence France-Presse

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Philippine President Duterte's forces have a new target: University students

The posters that appeared on campus were chilling. They warned that the University of the Philippines had become a breeding ground for communist sympathisers and that students and professors needed to be on high alert for anti-government insurgents. Some students were even named as possible offenders.

No one knew where the posters had come from, but they were found on many of the university's campuses across the country over the past few weeks, according to students and university activists. Late last month, the government decided to get involved.

To weed out possible communists at the elite institution, Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana announced a decision to end a 32-year agreement that barred security forces from entering the campus and arresting individuals without first coordinating with university officials. Professors and students can now be held on mere suspicion.

By allowing security forces back on campus, they said, the government had targeted one of the few places in the Philippines where criticism of President Rodrigo Duterte was still tolerated. For them, the purpose of the new rule was clear: another crackdown on political freedom in a country where dissidents are often tagged and dispatched at a moment's notice.



Source: New York Times

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7.1-magnitude earthquake in Japan's Fukushima leaves thousands without power

The earthquake shook buildings in the capital Tokyo and elsewhere, but no tsunami warning was issued. About 950,000 households were hit by blackouts and there were no irregularities at the Fukushima nuclear facility

A strong earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 7.1 hit off the coast of eastern Japan on Saturday, 13th of February, shaking buildings and triggering widespread blackouts, but there appeared to be no major damage and no tsunami warning was issued.

The epicentre of the earthquake was off the coast of Fukushima prefecture at a depth of 60km (36 miles), near the epicentre of a 2011 killer quake which triggered a towering tsunami and killed more than 18,000, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said.



The earthquake, which hit at 11.08pm local time, and shook buildings in the capital Tokyo and elsewhere. The Meteorological Agency said no tsunami warning had been issued.

Source: Reuters and Agence France-Presse

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Concern over proposed Hong Kong law that could bar anyone from leaving

A Hong Kong government proposal that could give "apparently unfettered power" to the immigration director to stop anyone from leaving the city is deeply concerning, barristers said Friday (Feb 12)

Hong Kong's influential Bar Association (HKBA) submitted a paper to the city's legislative council expressing alarm over the law, which could bar any individual - Hong Kong resident or not - from boarding a carrier out of the financial hub.

Since the imposition of a new national security law last June, an increasing number of democracy activists and politicians have fled the financial hub and gone into exile, as China tightens its grip on the semi-autonomous city.

The political situation has also prompted an exodus of Hong Kongers in general, many of whom are taking up immigration plans offered by places including the UK, Canada and nearby Taiwan. In late January, the city's government proposed amending an existing law to empower the director of immigration to bar an individual from leaving without first going through a court.

"It is particularly troubling that the grounds on which such an intrusive power may be exercised are not stated in the proposed legislation, and no explanation for why such a power is necessary, or even how it is intended to be used, is set out", HKBA said in the submission on Friday.

Source: The Straits Times



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Jailed Chinese lawyer Yu Wensheng wins top human rights prize

An imprisoned Chinese lawyer who worked on high-profile rights cases and advocated to abolish the death penalty on Thursday (Feb 11) received the Martin Ennals Award, the world's most prestigious human rights prize.

Yu Wensheng was hailed by the award jury for his "bravery", with Philippe Currat, the head of the Martin Ennals Foundation, voicing hope that shining a light on Yu's achievements would "help him regain the freedom he has lost".

The 54-year-old rights lawyer, who according to his wife Xu Yan is in poor health after years in prison, was detained in Beijing in January 2018 over his activism for democracy and the rule of law.



He was arrested in front of his young son just hours after he wrote an open letter calling for constitutional reforms, including multi-candidate elections. Last June, he was sentenced to four years in prison, according to his wife, on charges of "inciting subversion of state power".

Phil Lynch, head of the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) - one of the 10 leading rights organisations serving on the Martin Ennals Award jury - hailed the prize as "symbolic".

The award issued by the Geneva-based foundation "also puts the Chinese government on notice that unjustly imprisoning Yu Wensheng... or any other human rights defender, will not go ignored, and that it will not silence their voices," he said.

Source: The Straits Times