

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

25th January 2021

Four people smugglers jailed for decades over deaths of 39 Vietnamese found in UK truck

The leader of the group Ronan Hughes was sentenced to 20 years while another major figure Gheorghe Nica got 27. The bodies of the migrants – some as young as 15 – were discovered in the back of a truck at a port near London in 2019.

Four men were given lengthy jail terms on Friday for the manslaughter of 39 Vietnamese men, women and children who suffocated to death in a stifling, airtight shipping container in 2019 as they tried to make their way to Britain.

The discovery of so many dead people – some as young as 15 – in the back of the truck on an industrial estate to the east of London shocked Britain and Vietnam, and shone a spotlight on the illicit global trade that sends the poor of Asia, Africa and the Middle East on perilous journeys to the West.



As oxygen levels fell, some tried desperately to escape, but in vain. Others used mobile phones to say their last farewells to devastated relatives on the other side of the world.

Source: South China Morning Post

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Myanmar's displaced Christians rebuild lives on Yangon's outskirts

Hammering at bamboo poles to erect a stilt house, minority Christians who have fled conflict in northern Myanmar are building a sanctuary on the outskirts of Yangon. The small Christian community in the Buddhist-majority nation is part of 200,000 people displaced since 2018 by fierce fighting in northern Rakhine state.

The conflict between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army, a militant group agitating for more autonomy for ethnic Rakhine people, has left hundreds dead or injured.

It has spilled over into neighbouring Chin state, forcing ethnic Chin, who are predominantly Christian, out of their villages and into temporary camps.

The coronavirus pandemic has pushed once-bustling Yangon into an economic slump, making it difficult for the Chin migrants to find work.



Despite their troubles, having a safe place without the daily fear of artillery shelling or soldiers encroaching on their village is a godsend for the Chin migrants.

Source: The Straits Times

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Mongolian PM resigns, blames President after protests against Covid-19 curbs

Mongolia's Prime Minister resigned a day after protests against his government's Covid-19 controls measures erupted in capital Ulaanbaatar.

Prime Minister Khurelsukh Ukhnaa submitted his resignation and a proposal to dissolve his government on Thursday, 21st of January after hundreds gathered outside the Parliament building to demonstrate against the policies.

The protests erupted after a video appearing to show a mother being hastily discharged from a local maternity hospital in a bathrobe because she had tested positive for the coronavirus was widely circulated online.



Demonstrators flocked to Parliament to protest against her treatment on Wednesday, some wearing only bathrobes and slippers to show solidarity with the woman. While the protests were not unusually large, they lasted well into the winter night, where temperatures can fall as low as minus 40 deg C. Protesters said they were upset more broadly with extended lockdowns and restrictions on movement, as well as a ban on cross-border travel.

Source: Bloomberg Asia

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Thailand jails woman for more than 43 years for insulting monarchy

A Thai woman has been jailed for 43 years for criticising the royal family, the country's harshest ever sentence for insulting the monarchy. The former civil servant, known only as Anchan, posted audio clips from a podcast on social media.

The 63-year-old said she had simply shared the audio files and had not commented on the content. Thailand's lèse-majesté law, which forbids any insult to the monarchy, is among the strictest in the world.

After a three-year break, Thailand revived the controversial law late last year in an attempt to curb months of anti-government protests, with demonstrators demanding changes to the monarchy.



She was initially sentenced to 87 years, but this was cut in half because of her guilty plea. Anchan is among a group of 14 people charged with lèse-majesté shortly after a military junta seized power in 2014, vowing to stamp out criticism of the monarchy.

Source: BBC News Asia

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Malaysian musician Choo Hao Ren slammed for music video featuring Instagram influencer Qiu Wen in brownface

The Mandopop singer released the video as an advertisement for a skin-whitening product, in which he helps a young woman with tanned skin. It has drawn fiery responses, including calls for Choo to be cancelled, while he was also criticised for propagating antiquated ideals of equating fairness with beauty

On Sunday, 24th of January, YouTube personality Choo Hao Ren, known by his stage name Haoren, released the video as an advertisement for a skin-whitening product called Snowbebe.

The main character was played by Qiu Wen, a popular Malaysian Instagram influencer, who was slathered with make-up to achieve a darker skin tone – a move lambasted online for evoking brownface.



The music video, White Doll, opened with two schoolgirls mocking Qiu Wen for her tanned skin. Choo was cast as her secret admirer, who left her numerous skin-lightening remedies including whitening drink sachets. Two months later, a cascade of animated sparkles revealed Qiu Wen's lighter skin tone, with her classmates fawning over her transformation.

Source: South China Morning Post

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David Perry QC quits prosecution of Hong Kong activists

British barrister was called 'mercenary' by United Kingdom foreign secretary for taking on a case against pro-democracy figures.

The British QC hired to run the prosecution of senior Hong Kong activists, including the media mogul Jimmy Lai, has pulled out of the case after widespread pressure, the territory's government has said.

David Perry QC had been instructed by the Hong Kong justice department to prosecute 76-year-old Lai and eight others including the democracy figure Martin Lee and the veteran activist Lee Cheuk-yan. The group are charged with public order offences for organising and taking part in an unauthorised assembly. Lai, who is in jail on remand, is facing multiple separate charges including under the national security law.



In a statement on Wednesday the Hong Kong government said there had been “growing pressure and criticism from the UK community directed at Mr Perry QC for his involvement in this case”.

Source: The Guardian

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Indonesia to deport US 'digital nomad' who tweeted that Bali is LGBT friendly

Kristen Gray and her partner arrived in Bali at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, enthusing about the 'elevated lifestyle' and low cost of living. But officials said she may have violated immigration laws by working, as well as suggesting Bali was 'queer friendly' and easily accessible to foreigners

An American woman and self-described digital nomad will be deported from Indonesia after posting tweets that sparked a social media backlash over perceived western privilege and lack of cultural awareness, after she said Bali was "LGBT friendly".

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim-majority nation and its LGBT community has for years faced discrimination and sometimes violent attacks. Only 9 percent of Indonesians agreed that homosexuality is acceptable, according to a survey by the Pew research centre last June.

In a series of tweets at the weekend, Kristen Gray wrote about the perks of her decision to move to the tropical island of Bali, describing it as the "perfect medicine", a place that was LGBT friendly, and where the low cost of living afforded her a luxurious lifestyle.



Source: South China Morning Post

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Protests flare as President Duterte targets 'state enemies' at University of the Philippines

The university has been painted as a hive of communist agents, and the government said it was ending a pact keeping military and police off-campus. Senator Risa Hontiveros took a dig at China by saying the government's focus should be on communist intrusions in the disputed South China Sea

Faculty members and students at the University of the Philippines (UP) erupted in protest on Tuesday after the country's Defence Secretary suddenly announced he was nullifying a 32-year-old agreement banning police and soldiers from entering any of the state institution's campuses without prior notice.

One of the country's top-tier educational institutions, the 112-year-old university has long had a reputation for being a bastion of student activism. While the state-funded school has 32 branches nationwide, the most famous is the sprawling main campus in Diliman, Quezon City.



In 1971, students protesting oil price hikes took over and set up a "Diliman Commune" that defied police and military encroachments for eight days.

Source: South China Morning Post