

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

7th of June 2021

Months at sea: Boat carrying Rohingya washes up in Indonesia

A total of 81 refugees on Idaman Island are staying in emergency tents and have been provided with food and water by locals as they await their fate.

A boat carrying 81 Rohingya refugees has washed ashore at an uninhabited island in Indonesia after drifting for more than 100 days at sea, leading to a tense standoff with local authorities as to whether they will be allowed to enter the country or be driven back to sea.

The small wooden boat was discovered early morning on Friday in waters off Idaman Island off the coast of Aceh province, about two hours away from the town of Lhokseumawe, which is usually only used as a rest spot for fishermen in the area.



“Our staff in the field have met with the refugees who said that they have been travelling for three months. They travelled from India to Aceh using a small twin-engine, 100-seat boat ” said Rima Shah Putra, the Director of Geutanyoe Foundation, an NGO which provides education and psychosocial support to refugees in Indonesia and Malaysia.

It is thought that the refugees, many of them women and children, had originally travelled from camps in Bangladesh to waters off the coast of India, where their boat broke down and was fixed by the Indian coastguard which gave them supplies of food and water, but did not allow them to land. The Indian coastguard is also thought to have found that eight of the 90 refugees who originally set sail had died on the boat. The refugees were refused re-entry into Bangladesh, forcing the passengers to try to reach Malaysia before coming ashore at Idaman Island

Source: Al Jazeera

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Tiananmen: Hong Kong vigil organiser arrested on 32nd anniversary

Pro-democracy activist Chow Hang Tung has been arrested by Hong Kong police on the 32nd anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown.

Ms Chow is vice chairwoman of the Hong Kong Alliance which organises annual vigils for victims of Beijing's deadly crackdown on democracy protesters. She has been arrested for promoting unauthorised assembly. It comes as Hong Kong has banned the vigil for the second year running, citing coronavirus restrictions.

Police have closed off Victoria Park, where citizens usually gather each year to mark the anniversary. Thousands of officers have been placed on standby to stop any attempt to hold the event.



Hong Kong and Macau are the only places in Chinese territory where people can commemorate the deadly 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy protesters. But this year, authorities in Macau also banned the vigil for the second year in a row, saying it would violate local criminal laws. However, Ms Chow continued to call on residents to commemorate the anniversary in their own ways.

"Turn on the lights wherever you are - whether on your phone, candles or electronic candles," she had posted on Facebook a day before her arrest. Some lit candles or held their phone lights aloft at 20:00 local time (12:00 GMT) to mark the anniversary. Officers dispersed groups and there were reports of one arrest in Mong Kok district.

Ms Chow was arrested early in the morning outside her office by officers in plain clothes, according to reports. She was placed in a black saloon car and driven away.

Source: BBC News Asia

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Philippines bars nurses from working abroad as annual limit is reached

The Philippine government suspended the sending abroad of nurses, and their assistants and aides, because the annual limit of 5,000 healthcare workers deployed has been reached.

The processing of permits for the medical workers has been suspended immediately, Mr Bernard Olalia, head of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, said in a June 1 statement posted on the agency's website.

The Philippines, which sends thousands of medical staff overseas to work every year, is seeking to reinforce its healthcare system as local coronavirus cases surge.

The nation added 6,955 cases on Saturday (June 5), bringing the total to more than 1.2 million.

Healthcare staff who have been issued employment certificates to work overseas will still be allowed to leave, according to the statement.

"The processing and issuance of overseas employment certificates and deployment of new hires for healthcare workers are hereby suspended effective immediately," Olalia said. "Healthcare workers who were already issued with their corresponding overseas employment certificates, however, are allowed to depart for their overseas employment," the POEA official added.

Late last year, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases said the move was needed given the "national demand" for healthcare workers amid the coronavirus pandemic.



Source: Bloomberg

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Japan's LGBT activists push to pass equality law before Tokyo Olympics

Japan is far behind the international standard,' said Yuri Igarashi, co-chair of the Japan Alliance for LGBT Legislation. Japan does not legally recognise same-sex partnerships, and LGBT people often suffer discrimination at school, work and at home

Japanese sexual minority groups and their supporters, in a last-ditch effort to get long-sought equality legislation passed before the Tokyo Olympics, submitted requests on Friday to the governing Liberal Democratic Party, whose conservative members have stalled the bill.

The groups also have widened their campaign to gain corporate support for their cause in hopes of pressuring Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's pro-business party to support the legislation.



“In order to protect the lives and livelihood of sexual minorities, enacting an LGBT law that states discrimination is not tolerated is an indispensable first step,” said Kane Doi, Japan director for the New York-based group Human Rights Watch. “An enactment of such a law in Japan ahead of the Olympics is also necessary for the international community,” Doi said, adding that Japan needs to demonstrate its commitment to ensuring equality for LGBTQ athletes, journalists and other participants in the Olympics, set to begin July 23.

Support and awareness of sexual diversity has slowly grown in Japan, but there is still a lack of legal protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Japan does not legally recognise same-sex partnerships, and LGBT people often suffer discrimination at school, work and even at home, causing many to hide their sexual identities.

Source: BBC News Asia

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Chinese birth-control policy could cut millions of Uyghur births, report finds

Chinese birth-control policies could reduce the ethnic minority population in southern Xinjiang by up to a third over the next 20 years, according to new analysis by a German researcher.

The analysis concluded that regional policies could cut between 2.6 and 4.5 million minority births in that time. China has been accused by some Western nations of genocide in Xinjiang, partly through forced birth-control measures.

China denies the allegations, saying birth-rate declines have other causes.

The new study, by researcher Adrian Zenz, is the first such peer-reviewed academic paper on the long-term population impact of China's crackdown on the Uyghurs and other minority groups in Xinjiang.

It found that under China's birth-control policies in the region, the population of ethnic minorities in southern Xinjiang would reach somewhere between 8.6 and 10.5 million by 2040, compared to 13.1 million projected by Chinese researchers before Beijing's crackdown.

"This [research and analysis] really shows the intent behind the Chinese government's long-term plan for the Uyghur population," Mr Zenz told the Reuters news agency, which first reported the study.

In his report, Mr Zenz writes that by 2019 Xinjiang authorities "planned to subject at least 80% of women of childbearing age in the rural southern four minority prefectures to intrusive birth prevention surgeries, referring to IUDs or sterilisations".

Source: BBC News Asia



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Indonesian workers still face abuse at sea, despite efforts to end modern slavery: report

Greenpeace says 26 firms from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Ivory Coast and Nauru were cited in scores of forced labour complaints from 2019 to 2020. The growing problem comes even after Indonesia sought China's help in protecting its workers, and the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to protect seafarers during the Covid-19 pandemic

Chinese and Hong Kong fishing companies are among a growing number of firms involved in forced labour practices towards Indonesian migrant workers, a new report by environmental group Greenpeace reveals, underlining the challenges in eradicating modern slavery practices at sea despite continuous diplomatic efforts.

The report released on Monday found that 26 firms from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Ivory Coast and Nauru were cited in scores of complaints of forced labour at sea from 2019 to 2020.

With more than 200,000 seafarers, Indonesia is the world's third-largest seafaring manpower, behind China and the Philippines, data from Indonesia's foreign ministry shows. The Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (SBMI), whom Greenpeace collaborated with, said it received 338 complaints between September 2014 to July 2020.

Greenpeace analysed reports submitted from May 2019 to June 2020, and identified forced labour in 62 cases, almost double the 34 cases recorded in its report released two years ago. The group also identified 45 vessels of interest, far higher than 2019's figure of 13. In most of the 45 suspected ships, common indicators of forced labour included the withholding of wages, abusive working and living conditions, deception, and abuse of vulnerability, according to Greenpeace.



Source: South China Morning Post