

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

14th of June 2021

National security law: Hong Kong censors told to ban films that breach Beijing-imposed legislation

Under new guidelines, censors must determine whether films support or promote acts of subversion, secession, terrorism or collusion with foreign forces. But some industry figures warn creativity could suffer in industry once known as 'Hollywood of the Far East'

Hong Kong filmmakers will have to toe a new line under the national security law, with official censors now authorised to ban movies that breach the Beijing-imposed legislation.

According to amended guidelines gazetted on Friday for censors under the Film Censorship Ordinance, public screening of films will not be allowed if they are found to be “endorsing, supporting, promoting, glorifying or inciting” acts of subversion, secession, terrorism or collusion with foreign forces.

Some film professionals and commentators raised concerns about the implications of the new policy on the film sector, suggesting that creativity and freedom of expression would suffer in an industry once dubbed the “Hollywood of the Far East” being subject to the same political restraints as in mainland China. The cultural and creative sectors have been targeted by pro-Beijing politicians and media as part of a campaign against those seen as supporting the anti-government protests of 2019.

A local cinema was pressured into scrapping the screening of a documentary on the fierce clashes between police and radical protesters occupying the Hong Kong Polytechnic University at the height of the social unrest.

Source: South China Morning Post



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International Criminal Court seeks full investigation into Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's 'war on drugs'

The outgoing ICC chief prosecutor said she had 'reasonable basis to believe that the crime against humanity of murder has been committed'. Manila pulled out of the ICC in 2019 after a preliminary examination into Duterte's drug crackdown

The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor sought a full investigation into crimes against humanity during the Philippines' war on drugs, in one of her last acts before stepping down this week.

Fatou Bensouda is asking judges at the world's only permanent war crimes court to authorise a probe into allegations that police unlawfully killed as many as tens of thousands of civilians between 2016 and 2019.

Manila pulled out of the ICC in 2019 after the ICC launched a preliminary examination into President Rodrigo Duterte's drug crackdown, but the court said it could still investigate crimes committed while it was a member. "I have determined that there is a reasonable basis to believe that the crime against humanity of murder has been committed ... in the context of the government of Philippines 'war on drugs' campaign," Fatou Bensouda said in a statement.

Gambian lawyer Bensouda, whose term of office ends on Tuesday, and "any authorised investigation in the Philippines will fall to my able successor, Mr Karim Khan, to take forward", she said.

Source: Agence France-Presse



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Malaysia to deport thousands of undocumented Indonesian migrants amid pandemic

Indonesia is preparing to receive thousands of deportees from Malaysia, a government official said on Friday, 11th of June, amid a crackdown there on undocumented workers and as the country suffers its most severe coronavirus outbreak so far.

Malaysia will send back about 7,200 people to Indonesia, which wants the most vulnerable people, including women and children held in detention centres, to be returned first, said Ms Femmy Eka Kartika Putri of Indonesia's coordinating ministry for human development.

Millions of undocumented workers from Indonesia, Myanmar and Nepal and Bangladesh work in Malaysia, often in the plantation, construction and manufacturing sectors.



But Malaysia has toughened its stance during the pandemic, arresting and deporting thousands of undocumented migrants. Coronavirus cases and deaths hit record levels last month in Malaysia, which has the most cases per capita in South-east Asia. Malaysia's foreign ministry directed queries on the move to the immigration department, which declined to comment, but the plan comes amid a nationwide lockdown, in place until June 14.

Mr Wahyu Susilo, founder of the Migrant Care, a non-governmental group, said the authorities were scrambling to accommodate the planned influx, with no system in place to ensure adequate care, such as social assistance. "There are no specific mitigation efforts post-deportation," he said.

Source: Reuters

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South Korea eases Covid-19 restrictions on concerts, sports events

South Korea began easing restrictions on large concerts and sports events on Monday, 14th of June, after announcing last week that it would loosen a series of coronavirus curbs as the country pushes ahead with its vaccination drive.

Up to 4,000 people will be allowed to attend K-pop concerts and other cultural shows from Monday, up massively from a capacity limit of below 100 people since late last year, according to measures announced by health officials last Friday, 11th of June.

Sports stadiums will be able to operate at a 30 per cent to 50 per cent capacity, depending on the districts, up from 10 per cent previously.

While South Korea has fought small clusters of Covid-19 infections in recent months, the daily infection number hit a two-month low on Sunday while the government has pushed through with its vaccination drive.

The government has also said it would loosen some quarantine restrictions for fully vaccinated overseas visitors.

From July 1, some of those travellers can apply for exemptions from having to observe South Korea's mandatory two-week quarantine if they are visiting family or travelling for the purpose of business, academics or public interest, the health authorities said on Sunday.



Source: Reuters

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The 'tube houses' that dominate Vietnam capital Hanoi's streets

Tall, thin and brightly coloured, Hanoi's "tube houses" dominate the city's streets as nine million people compete for space in Vietnam's bustling capital.

Although Vietnam saw a number of villas and garden houses built during the French colonial period, Hanoi has few of these grand residential homes.

Instead, tree-lined streets are packed with dwellings that are barely 4m wide, but are three times that in depth.

Typically, a tube house might be home to a family of four, but two or three generations of relatives sometimes have to jostle for space.



The first tube houses - known as *nha ong* in Vietnamese - are thought to have appeared in the capital at the end of the 19th century, when villagers looking to sell silver, traditional herbs and tools began to move to the area.

A narrow architectural style evolved from the limited available space, said senior lecturer Tran Quoc Bao from the National University of Civil Engineering. The design is still a favourite in modern day Hanoi, where architects now refer to them as "adjoining houses".

"This model of house is essential for an urban architect (today). The adjoining house is a combination of both the traditional and modern residence," the Hanoi-based said, adding that they can also be found in many other Vietnamese cities.

Source: AFP

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Cambodia begins eviction of 'floating home' communities amid protests

Cambodia's capital of Phnom Penh on Saturday, 12th of June, began overseeing the dismantling of "floating home" communities on the banks of the Tonle Sap River over the objections of long-time residents who say they have nowhere else to go.

For generations, the floating wooden houseboats of Phnom Penh have been both livelihood and way of life for mostly ethnic Vietnamese families, home to fish farming and interconnected by warrens of hand-built bridges interspersed with sunken poles and small boats.

"Our ancestors have always been here," said Mr Kith Dong, 54, as he and relatives dismantled his home, consisting of a grayling timber platform with a sloped tin roof off the shore of Phnom Penh's Prek Pnov district. He said the city order did not give his family enough time to relocate.

"If they extended by a few more months, we would have time to build a home," he said. The Phnom Penh Municipality says the communities amount to floating slums that are eyesores and health hazards, with trash bags and raw sewage floating alongside the houseboats. Mr Si Vutha, head of Prek Pnov district's land management office, oversaw the dismantling on Friday, 11th of June.

"There are 316 homes that we have to evict today. This really affects the beauty of the city, the environment. You sit on a boat, it smells very bad," said Mr Si Vutha. Mr Si Vutha said the evictions are intended to clean up the capital ahead of Phnom Penh's hosting of the 2023 South-east Asian Games, as the newly built stadium is only a few kilometres away.



Source: Reuters

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Junta orders Doctors Without Borders to stop work in Myanmar city

An international medical charity warned on Wednesday, 9th of June, of "life-threatening" consequences for thousands of HIV and tuberculosis patients in Myanmar after it was ordered by the junta to stop work in a southern city.

Doctors Without Borders - widely known by its French initials MSF - received a letter from regional authorities "asking us to suspend all activities" in southeastern Dawei, where it has provided HIV care for over two decades.

"Suspending MSF's activities could be life-threatening for many of our patients at a time when public services remain severely disrupted," it said in a statement. Almost all public hospitals remain closed following the country's February coup with many doctors joining a huge civil strike, leaving the healthcare system incapacitated.



MSF added it had reached out to authorities to "understand" the decision, which it said would impact 2,162 people living with HIV and receiving antiretroviral treatment in the city. The charity also warned of the risk of further disease transmission, including tuberculosis, as it has been filling gaps in the nation's faltering TB programme since February. MSF has requested for authorities in Dawei - the hometown of junta leader Min Aung Hlaing - to reverse the decision, it added.

More than 800 people have been killed across the country since February, according to a local monitoring group. On Tuesday the Red Cross said it was urgently ramping up efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of 236,000 people in Myanmar, which was already reeling from the Covid-19 pandemic before the coup struck. The announcement came after the charity's president Peter Maurer was granted a rare meeting with Mr Min Aung Hlaing last week and called for increased humanitarian access to the country.

Source: AFP

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China denounces G7 after statement on Xinjiang and Hong Kong

China has accused the G7 of "political manipulation" after it criticised Beijing over a range of issues. In a joint statement at the end of a three-day summit, leaders of the G7 countries urged China to "respect human rights and fundamental freedoms"

Issues highlighted included abuses against the Uyghur Muslim minority group and the crackdown on Hong Kong pro-democracy activists.

China's embassy in the UK accused the G7 of "baseless accusations". "Stop slandering China, stop interfering in China's internal affairs, and stop harming China's interests," a spokesman said.



The statement by the G7 - the world's seven largest so-called advanced economies - included pledges on a number of issues, such as ending the coronavirus pandemic and steps to tackle climate change, as well as references to China. The group, made up of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US, called on China to respect human rights in Xinjiang, a north-western region that is home to the Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities.

Experts generally agree that China has detained as many as a million Uyghurs and other Muslims and imprisoned hundreds of thousands more in its crackdown in Xinjiang, which began in 2017. There have been widespread reports of physical and psychological torture inside prisons and detention camps in the region. China denies the allegations.

The G7 statement also called for rights and freedoms to be respected in Hong Kong, where a new security law passed by China last year has made it easier to punish protesters. The leaders said Hong Kong should retain a "high degree of autonomy", as established under agreements when it was handed back to China in 1997.

Source: BBC News Asia