

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

21st of June 2021

Apple Daily could shut 'in days' after Hong Kong asset freeze

Company adviser says action under security law means it cannot access some \$50 million in funds to pay staff and vendors.

Hong Kong pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily will be forced to shut “in a matter of days” after authorities used the national security law imposed by China to freeze the company’s assets as it arrested the paper’s editor and four other directors, an adviser to jailed tycoon Jimmy Lai told Reuters on Monday.

Mark Simon, speaking by phone from the United States, said the company could no longer access its funds and would be holding a board meeting on Monday to discuss how to move forward.



“We thought we’d be able to make it to the end of the month,” Simon told the news agency. “It’s just getting harder and harder. It’s essentially a matter of days.” His comments signalled that closure was imminent, even after Apple Daily said on Sunday the freezing of its assets had left the newspaper with enough cash for “a few weeks” of normal operations.

The news comes two days after editor Ryan Law, 47, and Chief Executive Cheung Kim-hung, 59, were denied bail after being charged under the security law with “collusion” with foreign forces in relation to a number of articles, marking the first time the authorities have used the security law over content published by Hong Kong media. Three other senior executives were also arrested last Thursday when 500 police officers raided the newspaper’s offices in a case that has drawn condemnation from Western nations, human rights groups and the chief United Nations spokesperson for human rights.

Source: Aljazeera

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Up to 10,000 Japanese fans will be permitted at Olympic venues

Overseas spectators are already banned but organisers said domestic fans could attend providing crowds did not exceed 50% of a venue's capacity.

Fans will not be allowed to shout or speak loudly, and must wear face masks at all times while in venues. The Olympics are scheduled to begin on 23 July, while the Paralympics follow a month later, from 24 August.

Spectator numbers for the Paralympics will be confirmed by 16 July, said a joint statement from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), the Tokyo 2020 organising committee, the Tokyo metropolitan government and the government of Japan.



The decision to allow spectators comes despite the release of a report last week by Japanese medical experts that said holding the Games without spectators was the "least risky" and most desirable option.

"There are so many cases, domestically and internationally [of] sports events with spectators," said Tokyo 2020 organising committee president Seiko Hashimoto. "By exercising thorough measures and based on the government criteria, we believe we can hold the Games with spectators.

"The entire world is facing the same issues and we have to work together to overcome them." Delegates and sponsors will be classed as organisers, and therefore will not be included in the 10,000 spectator limit.

Source: BBC News Asia

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Cambodia charges environmentalists with insulting king, plotting against government

Three activists were arrested for documenting the draining of waste into Phnom Penh's Tonle Sap river. A deported campaigner was also charged. Use of royal defamation laws in Cambodia is a relatively new phenomenon, with the legislation only enacted in 2018.

Use of royal defamation laws in Cambodia is a relatively new phenomenon, with the legislation only enacted in 2018. The three activists – Sun Ratha, Ly Chandaravuth and Yim Leanghy of advocacy group Mother Nature – were arrested on Wednesday for documenting the draining of waste into Phnom Penh's Tonle Sap river.

Over the weekend they were “charged with conspiracy to plot and for insulting the king”, Plang Sophal, a spokesman for Phnom Penh Municipal Court, said on Monday.



Also charged was Mother Nature's co-founder, Alejandro Gonzalez-Davidson, a Spanish environmentalist who was deported from Cambodia in 2015 after he criticised the government's plans for a controversial dam. While Cambodia has a constitutional monarch, King Norodom Sihamoni, it has long been ruled by its strongman premier Hun Sen, Asia's longest-serving leader.

When the lèse-majesté laws were enacted in 2018, they triggered alarm from rights groups who warned they could be wielded to target dissent. If sentenced, the Mother Nature activists face a maximum penalty of five years in prison for insulting the king, as well as 10 years behind bars for the conspiracy charge.

Source: South China Morning Post

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Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing and Russia agree to strengthen ties

The military leader is in Moscow for a security conference and met a top Russian official to discuss strengthening bilateral cooperation. Meanwhile, deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi thanked supporters for celebrating her 76th birthday with flower protests, as her trial resumed

Myanmar's junta leader and a senior Russia security official on Monday committed to improving ties between their two countries, Russia's Security Council said in a statement.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military overthrew civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy government in February. Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing travelled to Moscow for a three-day international security conference kicking off on Tuesday which brings together defence officials from across the globe.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov earlier on Monday said President Vladimir Putin would not be meeting with Min Aung Hlaing, Interfax reported. Russia's Security Council said its chief Nikolai Patrushev had met Min Aung Hlaing and discussed the "fight against terrorism, issues related to regional security" and foreign interference in Myanmar.

The officials "reaffirmed their desire to further strengthen bilateral cooperation" between Russia and Myanmar, it added. Myanmar state television on Sunday reported that the junta chief was attending the conference in Russia, an ally and major arms supplies to the Myanmar military. The junta's brutal crackdown on dissent has since killed at least 870 civilians since the February coup, according to a local monitoring group.

Source: Agence France-Press



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Indonesia targets its crazy rich Asians with 35 per cent income tax in bid to heal coronavirus-hit economy

Those earning more than US\$350,000 a year face the new rate as part of proposed overhaul that will also add VAT to foodstuffs, education and health care and target major carbon emitters. Taxing the rich could prove lucrative for Southeast Asia's largest economy, where ultra-high-net-worth individuals are proliferating at an even greater rate than in China

In a bid to boost government coffers decimated by the coronavirus pandemic, Indonesia is considering a sweeping tax overhaul that would add VAT to foodstuffs, education and health care, hike rates for high-net-worth individuals and put major carbon emitters in the firing line.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo asked parliament recently to discuss proposals to amend the 1983 law on general tax provisions and procedures.



A leaked draft of the government's proposals showed it was seeking a new tax rate for the highest earners; a new carbon tax; and to widen the scope of VAT to include staple foods, education, health-care and social services, public transport, manpower, postal money orders and even coin-operated public telephones.

Indonesia's need to collect more revenues comes after its budget deficit reached 6.09 percent of GDP last year. Jakarta has allowed the deficit to grow as a response to the pandemic but has said it will return the deficit to within the legal limit of 3 percent GDP by 2023.

Source: South China Morning Post

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Vietnamese being trafficked by Chinese nationals to work in Cambodian casinos, officials warn

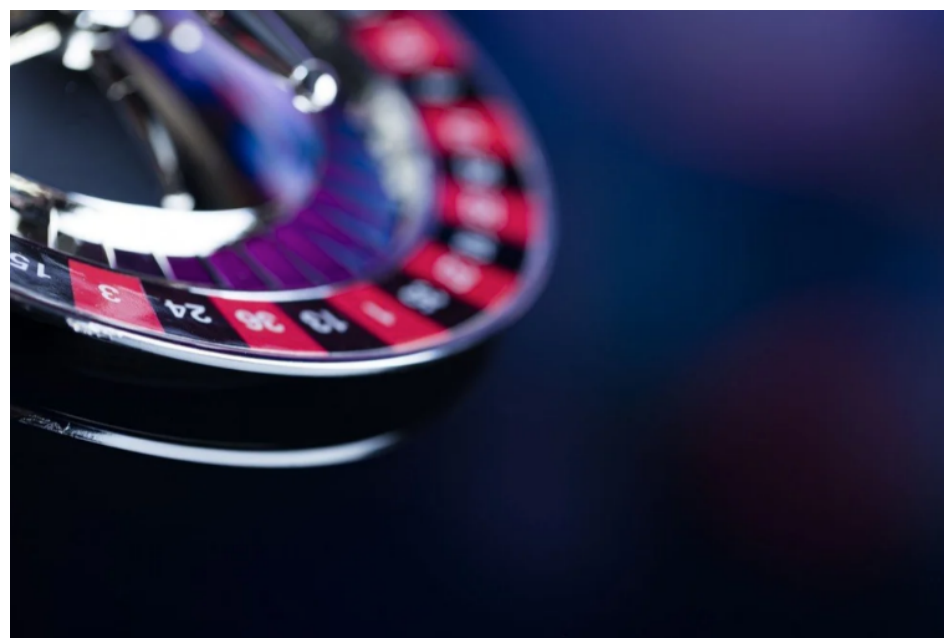
After being offered jobs online, Vietnamese have been forced to work 16-hour shifts and were physically assaulted when they tried to escape. Sihanoukville, which has received massive Chinese investment in recent years, has emerged as one of the primary destinations for labour trafficking

Vietnamese citizens are being lured into migrating to Cambodia, sometimes illegally, with attractive but often fraudulent offers to work in casinos and online gaming establishments, Vietnamese officials have warned.

The Vietnamese embassy in Cambodia last week highlighted the risks of trafficking, noting both the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and the difficulty of controlling the porous border between the two countries.

In a Facebook post, the Vietnamese embassy urged its citizens to be vigilant about suspicious advertisements for jobs offering between US\$800 and US\$1,000 a month. "According to the victims, we found out that the operation to entice and bring Vietnamese people to Cambodia is led by a number of Chinese people, with the participation of both Vietnamese and Cambodians," the embassy said on its Facebook page.

The Chinese embassy in Cambodia had also flagged concerns about trafficking related to online gambling, releasing a statement last September warning that Chinese citizens were being smuggled into Cambodia from Vietnam and elsewhere to work in illegal sectors.



Source: South China Morning Post

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Racist episodes spark soul-searching in Singapore: 'Why is this still happening?'

Episodes of racial intolerance have fuelled soul-searching in Singapore, where a wide-ranging debate on race is playing out online. Some critics blame imported 'foreign ideas' for sowing dissent, but scholars say the younger generation is unafraid of the vocabulary of global racial discourse

When a Singaporean woman of Indian descent was struck by a flying kick from an ethnic Chinese man spouting racial slurs last month, the attack was so alarming that it prompted Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to call it a moment of national embarrassment.

Racially motivated assaults are rare in Singapore, which is known for its laws aimed at maintaining peace among the majority Chinese and minority Malay and Indian communities, but the multi-ethnic city state of 5.7 million has long had to contend with episodes of racial intolerance.



The victim of May's attack told local media that the suspect - a 30-year-old has been arrested - had approached her from behind while she was walking briskly through a park with her face mask lowered.

The 55-year-old ethnic Indian woman said the man repeatedly shouted at her to pull her mask up, before becoming verbally and then physically abusive after she tried to explain that she was exercising. Pictures shared on social media showed the woman's hands and arms covered in scratches from where she hit the ground.

Source: South China Morning Post

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Arrests within months if ICC crimes against humanity probe into Rodrigo Duterte's drug war goes ahead: rights lawyer

The International Criminal Court prosecutor Fatou Bensouda has asked for an investigation into the Philippine government, saying there is reason to believe it 'deliberately' killed up to 30,000 Filipinos in the crackdown between 2016 and 2019

Experts say action by the court could now be swift and while the Duterte administration has vowed not to cooperate, it will not be able to bar the probe from proceeding.

Arrest warrants could be issued within months if the International Criminal Court's investigation into the Philippine government's "war on drugs" proceeds, a human rights lawyer has said.



The prosecutor's office of the ICC in The Hague announced on Monday it was requesting an investigation into the government of Rodrigo Duterte on suspicion of crimes against humanity.

In a 57-page document, the ICC's outgoing chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said her office's review had found "a reasonable basis to believe" the Duterte government had "deliberately" killed 12,000 to 30,000 Filipinos between 2016 and 2019. It said the killings, which it called "widespread and systematic", had been committed by state security forces.

Source: South China Morning Post