

# What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In  
The  
News.

28th of June 2021

## Malaysia seeks stricter sharia laws for 'promoting LGBT lifestyle'

*A Malaysian government task force on Friday proposed amendments to sharia law that would allow action to be taken against social media users for insulting Islam and "promoting the LGBT lifestyle."*

Sodomy and same-sex acts are illegal under Islamic law in Muslim-majority Malaysia, although convictions are rare.

The amendments to sharia criminal laws were proposed in response to social media posts celebrating the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community as part of Pride Month in June, said Ahmad Marzuk Shaary, deputy minister in charge of religious affairs, in a statement.

"We have found that certain parties uploaded statuses and graphics that insulted Islam on social media in their efforts to promote the LGBT lifestyle," he said

Malaysia is home to 32 million people, where ethnic Malay Muslims make up more than 60% of the population. It has a dual-track legal system, with Islamic criminal and family laws applicable to Muslims running alongside civil laws.

Ahmad Marzuk said the proposed laws would allow enforcement bodies to take action against any Muslim "who insults the religion of Islam" and commits other sharia criminal offenses "by using network facilities, network services or application services." The government task force, aimed at addressing LGBT issues, will also identify constraints faced by officials in taking action and produce guidelines for handling complaints, he added.

Source: South CNN News Asia



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## Myanmar fighting since coup has displaced 230,000 people, UN says

*An estimated 230,000 people have been displaced by fighting in Myanmar and need assistance, the United Nations said on Thursday, as a major armed ethnic group expressed concern about military force, civilian deaths and a widening of the conflict.*

Myanmar has been in crisis since a February 1 coup ousted an elected government, prompting nationwide anger that has led to protests, killings and bombings, and battles on several fronts between troops and newly formed civilian armies.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said relief operations were ongoing but were being hindered by armed clashes, violence and insecurity in the country.

It said 177,000 people were displaced in Karen state bordering Thailand, 103,000 in the past month..

..while more than 20,000 people were sheltering at 100 displacement areas after fighting between People's Defense Forces and the army in Chin State bordering India. Several thousand people had fled fighting in northern Kachin and Shan States, regions with established ethnic minority armies with a long history of hostilities with the military.

The Karen National Union (KNU), one of Myanmar's oldest ethnic minority groups, said it was worried about the military's excessive use of force and the loss of innocent civilian lives as fighting intensifies all over the country. "The KNU will continue to fight against military dictatorship and provide as much protection as possible to people and unarmed civilians," it said in a statement.



Source: Reuters

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## Hong Kong pro-democracy media buckles under China pressure

*The continued targeting of pro-democracy journalists and publications is sending a chilling message to Hong Kong's media, with experts warning of a devastating impact on press freedom in the city.*

On Sunday night, police announced that they had arrested a former senior journalist with the now-shut Apple Daily at the airport as he was trying to leave the city.

Apple Daily closed down after officials arrested its senior leadership under the city's controversial national security law and froze its assets. Its owner, media mogul Jimmy Lai, was already in jail on a string of charges.

News of the arrest came hours after Stand News - popular with pro-democracy supporters - said it would shelve commentary pieces over fears of a crackdown.

Stand News is one of the last openly pro-democratic publications now left in the city. It was among a handful of relatively new online news portals that gained prominence during the 2019 pro-democracy protests. Hong Kong guarantees its residents press freedom under the terms of an agreement which saw Britain hand the city back to China.

But industry stalwarts say that this is being blatantly violated under the national security law, enacted in June 2020 as a response to years of mounting pro-democracy protests. The controversial law criminalises secession, subversion and collusion with foreign forces and carries a maximum sentence of life in prison. "The arrests worsened the feeling of fear prevalent among journalists since the enactment of the national security law," he added. "The closure of Apple Daily has worsened the chilling effect on the media."



Source: BBC News Asia

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## 14 hours to collect a corpse in Jakarta as Covid-19 toll mounts

*It took almost 14 hours to collect a Covid-19 corpse in Jakarta this week, police said, as the Indonesian capital scrambles to deal with a surge in coronavirus cases and deaths.*

Police in the port area of Tanjung Priok said they responded on Monday (June 21) to a call about a Covid-19 corpse, wrapped in a white shroud, left on the doorstep of a North Jakarta home.

Not authorised to handle coronavirus victims, officers called the local task force, but were told there would be a wait. "That body was eighth in the queue because the Jakarta Covid-19 task force was handling other victims," said Tanjung Priok police chief Ghulam Pasaribu.



The body, he said, was collected at 1.30am on Tuesday, more than 13 hours later. It was one of 143 burials in Jakarta that day - the most since the pandemic began - according to Mr Ivan Nurcahyo at Jakarta's parks department, which handles cemeteries and burials. The same day, in another part of town, a 69-year-old grandmother who tested positive had to take public transport to a hospital, after her family failed to find an ambulance, television station MetroTV said.

The stories offer a window into the strains on Indonesia's fragile healthcare system as case numbers and deaths mount. Indonesia recorded 14,536 new coronavirus cases on Monday, the highest daily increase since the pandemic began. The country has identified 2,018,113 cases and 55,291 deaths, the highest in the region, although the true figures are likely far higher. Public health experts attribute the spike to increased mobility over the Muslim Eid Al-Fitr holiday, and the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant.

Source: Reuters

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## Tibetans, Uighurs protest against Beijing 2022 Olympics

*Dozens of Uighurs and Tibetans demonstrated outside The Olympic Museum on Wednesday, 23rd of June, calling for a boycott of the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing.*

On the annual International Olympic Day, protesters from Switzerland, France, Germany and Liechtenstein rallied in Lausanne, the Swiss city that hosts the International Olympic Committee.

"We have gathered here today in Lausanne in front of the Olympic Museum to tell the IOC that we are not okay with Beijing being the 2022 Olympics host nation again," Ms Tashi Shitsetsang, president of the Tibetan Youth Association in Europe, told AFP.



"Beijing has been the host nation in 2008 and the human rights situation has since then gone from bad to worse. So we... call on the international community to boycott Beijing 2022," she said. Protesters waved Tibetan and East Turkestan flags and held up placards reading "No rights, no Games" and "Stop genocide Games". Many wore traditional dress.

"The Chinese government has just recently started a multifaceted campaign to essentially erase Tibetan language, Tibetan culture and identity, and same goes for the Uighurs there in East Turkestan," said Ms Shitsetsang. "We all have witnessed there's a genocide against the Uighur people, right now." Beijing was selected in 2015 as the host city for the Winter Games, narrowly beating Almaty, the largest city in Kazakhstan.

China denies mistreating the Uighurs, insisting it is simply running vocational training centres in Xinjiang designed to counter extremism.

Source: AFP

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## As Philippines marks pride month, low-income LGBT folk struggle to be heard

*Every June, Filipinos from the LGBT community gather to assert their rights, but working-class people face challenges in being out and free. Advocates say local anti-discrimination laws don't go far enough to protect the community, while a house bill to protect LGBT folk has been stymied for years by Duterte's allies.*

Anne Villarama, a 37-year-old housekeeper in Manila, longs to be able to wave a rainbow flag in a pride parade without fear one day. The mother of one belongs to the LGBT community, which has long faced discrimination in the Philippines, a country with a mostly Catholic population that has conservative views around issues of gender diversity.

For many LGBT folk, the pride month of June has been a time for the community to rally and assert their rights. Until the Covid-19 pandemic put a halt to physical events, the turnout at pride marches had risen every year, with the Metro Manila Pride March seeing a record 70,000 attendees in 2019.

But for people like Villarama, being part of the working class makes it a challenge to be openly free to be themselves. A 2011 study by GALANG Philippines, an organisation for economically disadvantaged people from the lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LBT) community, found that "LBTs were more marginalised than gay men, as they were less likely to find jobs and more likely to become victims of violence".

During the Covid-19 pandemic, trans workers were among the most affected, with lockdowns and social distancing hitting their incomes.



Source: South China Morning Post

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## Singapore woman jailed for 30 years for torturing, killing domestic worker

*Myanmar national Piang Ngaih Don was stamped on, strangled, battered with brooms and burnt with an iron, according to court documents. The prosecution had sought life imprisonment for Gaiyathiri Murugayan, 41, who the judge said committed 'among the worst types of culpable homicide'*

A woman who starved, assaulted and ultimately killed her domestic worker in Singapore was sentenced to 30 years in prison on Tuesday, with the judge describing the case as “among the worst types of culpable homicide”.

The affluent city state is home to about 250,000 domestic workers who mostly come from poorer Asian countries, and stories of mistreatment are common. But the abuse inflicted on Myanmar national Piang Ngaih Don, 24, was particularly awful and captured on CCTV installed in the family's home. The domestic worker was stamped on, strangled, choked, battered with brooms and burnt with an iron, according to court documents.

The domestic worker died in July 2016, after her employer, Gaiyathiri Murugayan, repeatedly assaulted her over several hours. Gaiyathiri, 41, pleaded guilty in February to 28 charges including culpable homicide. Another 87 charges were taken into account in sentencing.

She appeared in court on Tuesday wearing glasses and a black mask, and sat silently with her eyes closed and head bowed as the judge read his decision. After hearing an additional plea of mitigation submitted by Gaiyathiri in a bid to avoid the life sentence sought by the prosecution, Justice See Kee Oon sentenced her to 30 years in prison starting from the date of her arrest in 2016.



Source: Agence France-Presse in Singapore