

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

1st of March 2021

Myanmar's UN ambassador defies military to plead for immediate global action to overturn coup

Myanmar's United Nations ambassador defied the country's army on Friday and issued an impassioned plea at the UN General Assembly for immediate international action to help overturn the military coup.

Kyaw Moe Tun, remaining loyal to the civilian government ousted on February 1, delivered a dramatic speech while addressing the assembly on Friday.

"We need further strongest possible action from the international community to immediately end the military coup, to stop oppressing the innocent people, to return the state power to the people and to restore the democracy," he said.

The diplomat received a rare round of applause from his UN colleagues at the end of the speech.

Myanmar descended into unrest when the coup ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Suu Kyi has been detained in her house in the capital since the coup. The country has since seen 21 consecutive days of anti-military protests, with demonstrations held in Mandalay and Yangon on Friday.



Source: CNN Asia

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47 Hong Kong opposition figures charged under national security law

The Hong Kong authorities charged 47 opposition activists with violating the city's national security legislation on Sunday, 28th of February in the biggest application of the law since it was imposed by Beijing last year.

Those charged with "conspiracy to commit subversion" were among 53 people -- many prominent former lawmakers, activists and district councilors -- who were arrested last month for organizing, planning and participating in a primary election for the city's democratic opposition last July.

The 39 men and eight women charged Sunday, aged between 23 and 64, are being detained and will appear at West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts. Under their original bail agreements, they weren't required to check in with police until early April. But earlier this week, the group was asked to report to police.



The charges on Sunday mark a sweeping escalation in the application of the national security law, under which previously only a handful of people had been charged and taken to court. The law criminalizes secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign powers, and cases under the legislation can be handled by a dedicated branch of the Hong Kong police and national security courts.

Source: CNN Asia

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Man wins Malaysia's first legal challenge against Islamic law banning gay sex

In its ruling, Malaysia's top court sided with the man, who was charged in a Selangor Islamic court, saying the state was not empowered to make such a law. Critics say the climate is worsening for the gay community in the Muslim-majority nation, with officials often speaking out against LGBT people

A Malaysian man on Thursday won a landmark court challenge against an Islamic ban on sex “against the order of nature”, raising hopes for greater acceptance of gay rights in the mostly Muslim country.

The Muslim man in his 30s - whose name has been withheld by his lawyer to protect his privacy - filed the lawsuit after he was arrested in the central Selangor state in 2018 for attempting gay sex, which he denies.

Same-sex acts are illegal in Malaysia, although convictions are rare.

The country, which has 13 states, has a dual-track legal system, with Islamic criminal and family laws applicable to Muslims running alongside civil laws. LGBT+ advocates say Islamic laws have been increasingly used to target the Southeast Asian country's gay community, with a rise in arrests and punishments ranging from caning to jailing. In a unanimous decision, Malaysia's top court ruled on Thursday that the Islamic provision used in Selangor was unconstitutional and authorities had no power to enact the law.



Source: Reuters

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Cambodia to get back artefacts lost during Khmer Rouge regime from late British collector Douglas Latchford's daughter

The antiquities were taken during the Khmer Rouge regime and are being returned by the daughter of controversial art collector Douglas Latchford. But scores of items were also removed during French colonial rule, and with many sites undiscovered or improperly documented, there is much work to be done

Cambodia's efforts to reclaim artefacts taken during the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime in the 1970s and smuggled through neighbouring Thailand received a boost when the daughter of a controversial late British art collector last month announced she would return more than 100 items worth over US\$50 million.

The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts on January 29 said Douglas Latchford's collection constituted "one of the greatest collections of Khmer cultural heritage outside of Cambodia" and their return was "an incredible event for the Cambodian people and the world".

Latchford, who died last year aged 88, was in 2019 charged by federal prosecutors in the United States for making false documents to transport ancient Khmer valuables around the world.



Source: South China Morning Post

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Philippine critics in firing line of anti-communist misinformation war

Philippine lawmaker Sarah Elago faces a daily barrage of Facebook posts linking her to communist rebels trying to overthrow the government. She says the claims are false, but they could get her killed anyway.

A torrent of misinformation on the social media platform has put activists, journalists, politicians and lawyers in the firing line as President Rodrigo Duterte's government and military out alleged supporters of a decades-old Maoist insurgency.

Facebook's reach into the smartphones used by millions of Filipinos has made it a powerful weapon in amplifying the accusations - known locally as "red-tagging" - which critics say are part of a broader effort to silence dissent.



"Red-tagging is like an order to kill," said Ms Elago, an outspoken Mr Duterte critic who watches her back in public for fear of being physically attacked. In the past year her name has appeared in more than 14,000 public posts on Facebook that also mention the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the communist party, according to data from social media monitoring platform CrowdTangle. AFP's Fact Check team has debunked many of them, including one post on a pro-government page called "Duterte Fact News", which has more than 34,000 followers.

Source: AFP

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At least 18 killed in bloodiest day of Myanmar anti-coup protests

United Nations human rights office says police and military forces confronted peaceful demonstrators in several locations across the country.

At least 18 people have been killed and dozens wounded across Myanmar in the most violent crackdown yet by security forces against peaceful demonstrators protesting against a February 1 military coup, according to the United Nations human rights office.

“Throughout the day, in several locations throughout the country, police and military forces have confronted peaceful demonstrations, using lethal force and less-than-lethal force that – according to credible information received by the UN Human Rights Office – has left at least 18 people dead and over 30 wounded,” the office said on Sunday.



Police were out in force early and opened fire in different parts of Yangon after stun grenades, tear gas and shots in the air failed to break up crowds in Myanmar's largest city. Soldiers also reinforced police.

Source: Aljazeera

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'Inferior' women: China counters Uighur criticism with explicit PR attacks

China, under growing global pressure over its treatment of a Muslim minority in its far west, is mounting an unprecedented and aggressive campaign to push back, including explicit attacks on women who have made claims of abuse.

As allegations of human rights violations in Xinjiang mount, with a growing number of Western lawmakers accusing China of genocide, Beijing is focusing on discrediting the female Uighur witnesses behind recent reports of abuse.

Chinese officials have named women, disclosed what they say is private medical data and information on the women's fertility, and accused some of having affairs and one of having a sexually transmitted disease.

The officials said the information was evidence of bad character, invalidating the women's accounts of abuse in Xinjiang.

"To rebuke some media's disgusting acts, we have taken a series of measures," Xu Guixiang, the deputy head of Xinjiang's publicity department, told a December news conference that was part of China's pushback campaign. It includes hours-long briefings, with footage of Xinjiang residents and family members reading monologues.



Source: Reuters

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Chloe Zhao becomes first Asian woman to win best director

Asians around the world are reacting with "happy tears" as Chloe Zhao made history at the Golden Globe Awards, becoming the first Asian woman to ever win the prize for best director.

Many online praised her for being a "huge inspiration for young Asian girls", adding that it was a "win for women everywhere".

The *Nomadland* director, who was born in China, is only the second woman to win the award.

The first was Barbra Streisand in 1984.

"I cannot stress this enough, as an Asian woman in the arts, it is so inspiring to see Chloe Zhao make history tonight as the first woman of colour to win for best director," said one Twitter user.

This year also marks the first time more than one woman has ever been shortlisted for the title of best director. Regina King and Emerald Fennell were also in the running.



Source: BBC News Asia