

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

8th of March 2021

Myanmar military occupies hospitals and universities ahead of mass strike

It's the latest move by the military junta, which seized power on February 1, to consolidate its control of the country in the face of mass protests and resistance to its increasingly violent rule.

More than 54 people have died in crackdowns on protests, including many teenagers and young people, according to the United Nations.

In many districts of the biggest city, Yangon, on Saturday and Sunday, witnesses reported sounds of gunfire and stun grenades. Terrified residents watched and filmed as security forces raided residential areas in the city and made several nighttime arrests. Residents told Reuters police fired shots and did not give reasons for the arrests, which continued into the early hours of Sunday.



One of those detained in the raids Saturday was a party official from Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD). Khin Maung Latt died while in custody, according to advocacy group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) and Reuters.

Khin Maung Latt had worked as a campaign manager for one of two Muslim lawmakers elected in 2020. Mourners gathered for his funeral on Sunday in Yangon.

Source: CNN Asia

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Thailand protesters rally to demand release of leaders, defying ban on public gatherings

Police warned protesters that they risked being arrested and could face harsher measures if they became unruly

Hundreds of demonstrators gathered in the Thai capital on Saturday evening to demand that authorities release some protest leaders from jail, defying an order on late Friday banning public gatherings in the city.

A youth-led protest movement sprang up last year calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, a former junta leader, and reform of the powerful monarchy. Thai courts have denied recent requests for bail for some of the jailed protest leaders.



“Release our friends,” shouted the protesters in unison, as they gathered in front of a criminal court, which was surrounded by barbed wire. A water cannon truck could be seen behind the gates of the court. “Abolish 112,” they also said, referring to Thailand’s lese majeste law, or Section 112 in the Thai criminal code, which prohibits anyone from insulting or defaming the king.

“Protests are illegal. Anyone who joins or invites others to join is breaking the law,” Piya Tavichai, deputy commissioner of Bangkok Metropolitan Police Bureau, told a news conference.

Source: Reuters

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Singapore will tighten requirements for pass that allows foreigners to live and work there as dependants

The tilt toward local workers has been a defining element of the government's plan to heal the labour market. Last year's contraction in employment was the sharpest in more than two decades, almost entirely on the side of non-residents

Foreigners living as dependants in Singapore who decide to seek employment will soon have to obtain their own work passes, Manpower Minister Josephine Teo said on Wednesday.

The vast majority of Dependant's Pass (DP) holders – generally the spouses or children of someone on an Employment Pass – don't work, while those who do currently need just a letter of consent, or LOC, from the ministry. Starting May 1, the government will “regularise” their work arrangements in line with other foreign-worker requirements, Teo said in a speech to parliament.



“We will provide sufficient time for existing DP holders working on an LOC, as well as their employers, to transit to this new arrangement,” Teo said in comments provided by the ministry. “Most of them meet prevailing work-pass criteria. Those that do not will have to cease working in Singapore.”

Source: South China Morning Post

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Hong Kong court grants bail to 15 of 47 pro-democracy activists in landmark national security hearing

Fewer than a third of prominent pro-democracy activists charged under a new national security law were granted bail Thursday after a hearing at a Hong Kong court.

The 15 defendants included ex-lawmakers Kwok Ka-ki, Jeremy Tam and Helena Wong, chief magistrate Victor So said. All the remaining 32 defendants, including former law professor Benny Tai and activist Joshua Wong, have been remanded in custody until the next hearing on May 31.

The 47 defendants were charged on Sunday with subversion under the new national security law, which Beijing enacted unilaterally last summer. The case marks a sweeping escalation in the application of the law, which Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam had previously said would be limited in effect and only target a small number of fringe activists.

In granting bail, chief magistrate Victor So said the defendants must not publish any speeches or commit any acts on any platforms that may reasonably be deemed as endangering national security. The 15 defendants are also not allowed to take part in any elections, with the exception of voting.



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Philippine leader's order to kill rebels 'legal', says spokesman

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's order to kill armed rebels was legal, his spokesman said, as Catholic leaders joined condemnation of the killings of nine activists in separate weekend raids against suspected insurgents.

Human Rights groups are outraged over the deaths of what they said were legitimate activists under the guise of counter-insurgency operations, which came two days after Mr Duterte told security forces they could kill rebels if they were holding a gun and to "ignore human rights".

"The President's kill, kill, kill' order is legal because it was directed at armed rebels," his spokesman, Mr Harry Roque, said in a briefing, adding that the government would still investigate the incident.



The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, an influential church group, in a statement denounced the use of what it called unnecessary force and violence during "Bloody Sunday".

On Sunday, Lieutenant-General Antonio Parlade, head of an anti-rebel task force, told Reuters the raids were "legitimate law enforcement operations", and the authorities had search warrants for firearms and explosives.

Source: Reuters

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Chinese President Xi calls for 'popularising' Mandarin in Inner Mongolia

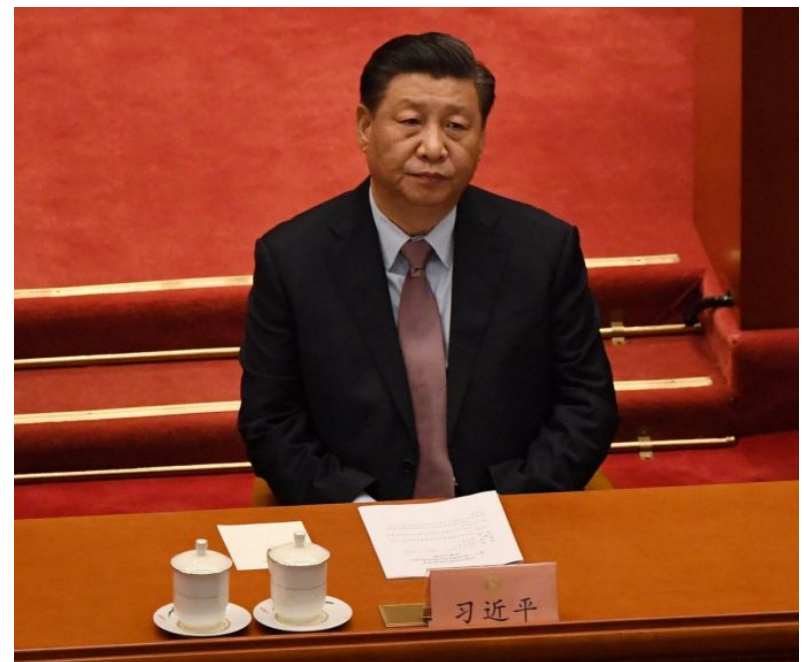
The authorities in Inner Mongolia must "solve ethnic problems" and push the use of the Mandarin dialect, Chinese President Xi Jinping has said, months after the region was rocked by protests over a new rule that would reduce the use of the local language.

The region in China's far north borders the independent nation of Mongolia, with which it shares ethnic, cultural and linguistic ties. Tens of thousands took part in demonstrations and school boycotts last year after an edict mandated that Mandarin replace Mongolian as the medium of instruction, part of a nationwide drive to assimilate China's ethnic minorities into the majority Han culture.

Rare mass rallies, the largest Beijing had witnessed for decades, were followed by a crackdown as armoured vehicles surrounded schools and police arrested dozens of protest leaders.

On Friday (March 5), Mr Xi doubled down on the integration policies. Speaking at an annual convention of political leaders in Beijing, he said Inner Mongolia should "unwaveringly promote the use of national common textbooks", to correct "wrong ideas" on culture and nationality, according to a readout of the meeting in state media.

Last year, parents who refused to send their children back to school were threatened with layoffs, fines and students' expulsion. In one district, officials offered cash to students who convinced their peers to return, according to official notices.



Source: AFP

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Cambodian woman's death spotlights exploitation of migrant workers at South Korean farms

Nuon Sokkheng's death at a farm in Pocheon last December has revived criticism over South Korean exploitation of some of the poorest people in Asia. Activists say migrant labourers, who often are crammed in shipping containers, work 10-15 hours a day, with only two Saturdays off per month

In the bleak landscape of dull blue and grey in Pocheon, a town near South Korea's ultra-modern capital, hundreds of migrant workers from across Asia toil in harsh conditions, unprotected by labour laws while doing the hardest, lowest-paid farm work most Koreans avoid.

The death of a 31-year-old Cambodian woman worker at one of the farms in December has revived decades-long criticism over South Korean exploitation of some of the poorest, most vulnerable people in Asia. Officials have promised reforms, but it's unclear what will change.

More than two months after Sokkheng's death, South Korea this week announced plans to improve conditions for migrant farm workers including expanding health care access. Daunted by opposition from farmers, officials chose not to ban using shipping containers as shelter. Her death, and those of many others, highlight the often cruel conditions facing migrant workers who have little recourse against their bosses.



Source: Associated Press