

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

15th of March 2021

Myanmar military extends martial law after bloodiest day since coup

Myanmar's military has imposed martial law across more districts around the country following the deadliest day of protests since February's coup. About 50 people were reported killed when troops and police opened fire on protesters in various areas on Sunday. Most deaths were in Yangon.

The violence came a day before ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi was due to appear in court. On Monday, 15th of March, her virtual hearing was adjourned due to internet problems.

Pro-democracy protesters are demanding the release of Ms. Suu Kyi, the head of the National League for Democracy (NLD) which saw a landslide victory in elections last November. She has been held at an unknown location since the 1 February coup. She is due to face a slew of charges her supporters say are fabricated.



The military detained most of the NLD leadership after the coup, alleging voter fraud. No proof has been provided. The military initially declared martial law in two districts of Yangon (Rangoon), the country's largest city, on Sunday after Chinese businesses were attacked. Martial law was imposed in several other areas of Yangon and Mandalay on the 15th of March. Protesters there can now be tried in military courts.

Protesters believe China is giving support to the military in Myanmar (also called Burma) but it is unclear who was behind the weekend attacks.

Source: BBC News Asia

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Thai protest leaders go on trial for sedition and insulting the king

A trial got underway in Thailand on Monday, 15th of March, for activists accused of sedition and insulting the powerful monarchy at a major protest last year, one of a series of mass demonstrations against the country's military-backed establishment.

The 22 demonstrators deny charges of committing sedition and a litany of other offenses, which includes lese majeste, a crime punishable by up to 15 years in prison for each count.

"They can lock me up but they cannot lock up the truth," protest leader Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak shouted as he arrived in a prison truck, defiantly flashing the three-finger "Hunger Games" salute synonymous with the youth movement.



Thailand's youth movement has posed the biggest challenge so far to prime minister and former coup leader Prayut Chan-o-cha, who they say engineered a process that would preserve the political status quo and keep him in power after a 2019 election. Prayut has rejected that.

The length of the trial will be determined later on Monday after the defense and prosecution discuss how many witnesses both sides will call upon for the case, which stems from a September rally.

Source: Reuters

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US offers temporary refuge to Myanmar citizens amid coup crackdown

Those stranded by the violence in their home country will be able to remain in the US for 18 months under the initial order. About 1,600 people currently qualify, and the length of residency can be extended if the hardships or threats remain

The US government said on Friday that Myanmar citizens stranded by the violence following the country's military coup would be able to remain inside the United States under "temporary protected status".

"Due to the military coup and security forces' brutal violence against civilians, the people of Burma are suffering a complex and deteriorating humanitarian crisis in many parts of the country," said Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, using Myanmar's former name.



"After a thorough review of this dire situation, I have designated Burma for temporary protected status so that Burmese nationals and habitual residents may remain temporarily in the United States." The United States has granted TPS protections to nationals of a number of countries struck by political upheavals or natural disasters that make their return difficult. The protection is usually set for a limited period, like 12 months, but can be extended if the hardships or threats remain.

Source: Agence France-Presse

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New Malaysian law punishes misinformation about coronavirus with jail and heavy fines

The government defended the move which has deepened concerns about worsening freedom of expression in Malaysia. The law resembles legislation aimed at combating misinformation introduced in 2018 by the corruption-plagued government of Najib Razak

Malaysia's government has introduced a law that punishes spreading coronavirus misinformation with jail time and hefty fines, sparking fury at what critics labeled an "appalling" attack on free speech.

The shock move comes amid growing concerns about worsening freedom of expression in Malaysia since a scandal-plagued administration seized power last year. The emergency ordinance comes into effect on Friday, 12th of March, and does not need parliamentary approval as the country is currently under a state of emergency to fight the virus.

For spreading information deemed by authorities "wholly or partly false" related to Covid-19 or the state of emergency, the maximum punishment is three years in prison and a 100,000 ringgit (US\$24,000) fine. Those found guilty of funding acts of publishing misinformation face a jail term of up to six years and a 500,000 ringgit fine, according to a copy of the law.



Source: Agence France-Press

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Sex abuse, bullying claims in South Korea against Ki Sung-yueng and other sports stars show rising awareness of misconduct

Footballer Ki Sung-yueng is the latest in a string of South Korean sports stars to have been accused of either sexually abusing or bullying a teammate. Experts say the flood of complaints shows attitudes are changing and hope this could be a catalyst for changing the country's unhealthy 'obsession' with medals

A spate of sexual abuse and bullying claims against South Korean sports stars has prompted calls for the country to rethink its “obsession” with winning medals at any cost.

Footballer Ki Sung-yueng is among the latest names in a growing list of sports men and women to have been accused of misconduct, with two of his former school teammates claiming Ki forced them to perform oral sex on him in 2000 when Ki was 11 and his alleged victims one year younger.



Ki's case follows renewed interest in sexual abuse allegations facing short-track speed skater Lim Hyo-jun, who has been accused of pulling down the pants of a teammate and exposing his body parts to female athletes at a gym, and a bullying case against four volleyball players, including twin sisters Lee Jae-yeong and Lee Da-yeong, who were suspended indefinitely by their V-League clubs after admitting to having bullied teammates in school. Last month another volleyball player, Park Sang-ha, abruptly retired when faced with charges of bullying.

Source: Agence France-Presse

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Japanese firms are 'afraid' and will leave Hong Kong due to China crackdown, SBI boss Yoshitaka Kitao says

Kitao highlighted Beijing's national security law as a reason Hong Kong was now 'not a good place for financial institutions'. 'If I want to do business in China, I would rather have an office in Beijing or Shanghai or somewhere,' he said

China's crackdown in Hong Kong has left Japanese finance firms "very much afraid" and reconsidering whether to remain in the city, a senior banker said on Monday in a rare public declaration of concern from within the industry.

Yoshitaka Kitao, chief executive of financial conglomerate SBI Holdings, which runs Japan's largest online brokerage, told the *Financial Times* he was planning to pull his company's operations out of the southern Chinese city, arguing that "without freedom, there is no financial business".



Other Japanese companies, he told the newspaper, were thinking about doing the same but were less willing to say so openly. Beijing is struggling to quash dissent in semi-autonomous Hong Kong after huge and sometimes violent pro-democracy demonstrations in 2019.

It has imposed a broad national security law on the city that has criminalised much opposition, and is planning to enact new rules vetting all political candidates for their "patriotism".

Source: South China Morning Post

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Philippines: 'Bloody Sunday' killings show Rodrigo Duterte's brutal presidency isn't letting up in his last full year

Police and soldiers raided the homes and offices of nine activists over the weekend, shooting nine dead and arresting six. Human rights experts say the incident follows a pattern of bloody deaths and abuses of authority throughout president's administration, which ends in June next year

The Sunday slayings of nine activists by Philippine security forces show that in his last full year in office, President Rodrigo Duterte is not letting up on the killing spree he started five years ago.

In what is now being called "Bloody Sunday", police and soldiers raided the offices and homes of community organisers in provinces near Manila. They shot dead nine of them – including a married couple – and arrested six.



The authorities said caches of weapons and grenades were found, and that the activists were killed because they resisted – allegations that have been met with widespread skepticism.

The raids took place two days after Duterte met Philippine security forces in Davao City and urged them to kill communists. "I've told the military and the police, if they find themselves in an encounter with the communist rebels and you see them armed, kill them, don't mind human rights," he said in comments broadcast on television. "I will be the one to go to prison, I don't have qualms."

Source: South China Morning Post

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Beijing choked in dust storm amid heavy north-west winds

The Chinese capital Beijing was shrouded in thick brown dust on Monday (March 15) due to strong winds blowing in from the Gobi desert and parts of north-western China, in what the weather bureau has called the biggest sandstorm in a decade.

The China Meteorological Administration announced a yellow alert on Monday morning, saying that the sandstorms had spread from Inner Mongolia into the provinces of Gansu, Shanxi, and Hebei, which surround Beijing.

The tops of towerblocks in central Beijing were barely visible on Monday morning, and commuters could be seen wearing improvised headwear to protect their faces and hair.



"It looks like the end of the world," said Beijing resident Flora Zou, 25, who works in the fashion sector. "In this kind of weather I really, really don't want to be outside." Heavy dust and snow storms also hit neighbouring Mongolia over the weekend. claiming at least nine lives, the country's National Emergency Management Agency said Monday.

Eight people were killed in the southern province of Dundgovi and a five-year-old child died in the central-western province of Arkhangai due to the storms, the agency said in a statement. A total of 565 people have been found alive among the nearly 600 people who got lost in the storms, it said, adding the search for those who remain missing is still underway.

Source: The Straits Times