

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

3rd of May 2021

Chinese man dodges two navies to cross Taiwan Strait by rubber dinghy in search of 'freedom and democracy'

According to police captain Shih Chun-hsu, the man, surnamed Zhou, was spotted late Friday evening near the port of Taichung after crossing the roughly 80 kilometer (50 mile) stretch of water from Fujian province, on China's east coast.

He made the journey in a rubber dinghy fitted with an outboard motor carrying 90 liters of fuel.

Zhou was detained in the early hours of Saturday, and told police he had made a break for the island of Taiwan in search of "freedom and democracy." He is currently in quarantine while police investigate his story and ensure he is not a fugitive from justice.

Zhou is being investigated for violating Taiwan's national security and immigration laws, police said in a statement.

The Taiwan Strait is one of the most militarized strips of water in the world, and is patrolled by both the Chinese and Taiwanese navies. According to a recent US Defense Department assessment, China alone has more than 255 Coast Guard ships, as well as dozens of heavily-armed naval vessels, in the region. The strait is also semi-regularly transited by US Navy assets in freedom of navigation operations.

The Republic of China (ROC), as Taiwan is officially known, is not a member of the United Nations or bound by the Refugee Convention. The island does not allow people to officially claim asylum, and anyone found guilty of entering the country illegally faces up to three years in prison and a fine of 90,000 New Taiwan dollars (\$3,200).



Source: South China Morning Post

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Myanmar anti-coup activists threatened but not silenced, as military crackdown continues

Some 1,000 people, including social media influencers, have been charged by the military under Section 505 of the penal code for opposing the coup. Observers say the violence and possibility of a civil war may lead to a state collapse as few global actors had the leverage or will to act against the junta

When

Myanmar

's authorities began cracking down on civilians defying a coup led by the military three months ago, social entrepreneur and digital creator Aung Min began rallying support for the civil disobedience campaign and the pro-democracy National Unity Government on multiple social media platforms.



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Source: South CNN News Asia

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Eight killed as Myanmar security forces fire on 'spring revolution' protests

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Myanmar security forces opened fire on some of the biggest protests against military rule in days on Sunday, May 2, killing eight people, media reported, three months after a coup plunged the country into crisis.

The protests, after a spell of dwindling crowds and what appeared to be more restraint by the security forces, were coordinated with demonstrations in Myanmar communities around the world to mark what organizers called "the global Myanmar spring revolution."

"Shake the world with the voice of Myanmar people's unity," the organizers said in a statement.



Streams of demonstrators, some led by Buddhist monks, made their way through cities and towns across the country, including the commercial hub of Yangon and the second city of Mandalay, where two people were shot and killed, the Mizzima news agency reported. The Irrawaddy news site earlier posted a photograph of a man it said was a security officer in plain clothes taking aim with a rifle in Mandalay.

Three people were killed in the central town of Wetlet, the Myanmar Now news agency said, and two were killed in different towns in Shan State in the northeast, two media outlets reported. One person was also killed in the northern jade-mining town of Hpakant, the Kachin News Group reported.

Source: Reuters

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Protesters fling paint, eggs at court to demand Thai activist's release

Hundreds of Thai protesters hurled red paint, tomatoes and eggs at a Bangkok court on Sunday, May 2, demanding the release of all political detainees, including an activist who was hospitalised after a hunger strike.

The student activist Parit Chiwarak - widely known by his nickname "Penguin" - has been held on remand since being charged in February under Thailand's strict royal defamation laws. He has been denied bail repeatedly.

He faces more than a dozen charges for his role in protests last year against the government of Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha, which also called for reforms to Thailand's unassailable monarchy.

On Sunday, hundreds of protesters gathered in front of Bangkok's Criminal Court to demand Penguin's release - and that of other detained activists involved in the pro-democracy movement.

"We are here today to show that there is injustice," shouted a protest leader. Demonstrators chanted "release the political prisoners" and waved a three-finger salute - a symbol of resistance for the pro-democracy movement.

They sloshed red paint all over the court's entrance, where they had plastered posters of the judge who protesters believed had denied Penguin's bail. Protesters also hurled eggs and tomatoes into the compound as police stood guard with plastic riot shields. By around 6pm, the group dispersed.

The movement broke long-held taboos by calling for reforms to the monarchy, in a country where the royal family is considered untouchable and has been treated with reverence for decades.

Source: AFP



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Japan's nurses protest against request to deploy them to Tokyo Olympic Games

Japan's nurses protested against a request by Olympic organisers for 500 of them to be deployed to the Games, saying that they are "not expendable pawns" to be diverted for a "non-essential" event.

Impassioned tweets poured in from irate medical workers as the hashtag "problematic to dispatch nurses for the Games" trended on Twitter. Many vented their anger over the plan that could deprive Japan of critical medical resources for its Covid-19 fight.

As another hashtag - "protect lives above the Olympics" - trended, they said their responsibility must be to their patients, and called on Japan to "get its priorities straight".

Aichi Medical Workers' Federation, the protest organiser, said: "We've reached our absolute limits. Give us more funding and please, please give us some time to rest and increase staffing." It added: "We've got absolutely nobody to spare for Tokyo 2020."

A widely shared picture showed an unnamed nurse holding up a sign that said: "We are not expendable pawns." Media reports on Monday, a day after the third state of emergency was declared in parts of the country, said that Tokyo 2020 organisers had asked the Japanese Nursing Association to deploy 500 nurses to the once-delayed sporting event, which will flag off in less than three months on July 23.

Tokyo 2020 chief executive Toshiro Muto confirmed the reports, but said organisers were striving to "come up with a feasible way of securing that many nurse resources".

Source: The Straits Times



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Domestic workers alarmed by compulsory Hong Kong vaccine plan

Hong Kong migrant worker groups on Saturday, May 1, criticised plans to make coronavirus vaccines compulsory for all foreign domestic helpers, labelling the move "discriminatory and unjust".

Health officials said they were planning to roll out mandatory inoculations for the 370,000 domestic helpers in the city, mostly poorly paid women from the Philippines and Indonesia.

Those wanting to apply for work visas - or renew their current ones - would need to show they had been vaccinated, officials said on Friday.

If the plan goes ahead it would be the first time Hong Kong has directly tied working rights for foreigners to vaccines. "This is clearly an act of discrimination and stigmatisation against migrant domestic workers," Ms Dolores Balladares Pelaez, chair of United Filipinos in Hong Kong, told reporters.

Labour groups representing domestic workers said they were angered other foreigners - and locals working in environments such as care homes - were not also required to get vaccinated. "Again, we are being singled out and targeted," Ms Pelaez added.

Health officials announced the vaccination plan after two domestic helpers were found to be infected with one of the more virulent strains of the coronavirus. All domestic workers have also been ordered to get tested over the coming days - a measure that did not extend to the families they work for. Officials said domestic workers were deemed "high risk" both because they enter from overseas and often gather outdoors in large numbers on Sundays - their one day off in the week.

Source: AFP



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Cambodians complain of lockdown hunger as Covid-19 outbreak takes toll on poor

Residents in Cambodia's capital gathered on Friday, April 30, to demand food from the government, outraged at what they called inadequate aid distribution during a tough Covid-19 lockdown that bars people from leaving their homes.

The authorities put Phnom Penh and a nearby town under a hard lockdown on April 19 to quell a surge in coronavirus infections that has seen Cambodia's case total balloon from about 500 to 12,641 since late February, including all 91 of its deaths.

"People in my village haven't received a food donation yet. It has been 10 days," factory worker Oum Sreykhouch, 25, told Reuters by telephone from the city's Meanchey district, where about 100 people protested for a second day.

Though private food deliveries are operating, markets and street food services are closed, making it difficult for poorer families to get supplies, with many without income because of the stay-home order.

The government has asked residents to apply for food aid. Some families in Meanchey district said they had just received a package of 25kg of rice, a case of instant noodles and canned fish. Others were still waiting.

Amnesty International on Friday called Cambodia's lockdown an emerging humanitarian and human rights crisis, with nearly 294,000 people in Phnom Penh at risk of going hungry. "The Cambodian government's outrageous mishandling of this Covid-19 lockdown is causing untold suffering and sweeping human rights violations," Ms Yamini Mishra, its Asia-Pacific regional director, said in a statement.

Source: Reuters



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Indonesia's self-taught dental workers say they fill a need in society – just not in Hong Kong

Four domestic workers breached the conditions of their stay in Hong Kong by offering dental services despite having no training. But in Indonesia, self-taught street dentists known as 'tukang gigi' cater to those who can't afford formal healthcare and they are legally protected

When four Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong were arrested last month for breaching the conditions of their stay and offering dental services despite having no training, it caused a stir.

The four had rented a room on their days off to offer treatments such as scaling, trimming, fillings and braces – charging between HK\$200 and HK\$2,000 – to fellow Indonesians.

In comments to the media, a Hong Kong Immigration Department spokesman said practising dentistry without registration was a threat to health and safety, in a time of Covid-19. “The situation is absolutely unacceptable,” the spokesman said.

In Indonesia, however, scores of self-taught street dentists known as “tukang gigi” or “dental workers” ply their services legally and are protected by the country's constitution, which recognises them as traditional healthcare workers offering specific services to those who find professional alternatives too costly and out of reach.

The country of 270 million and more than 17,000 islands has a thriving informal industry, with these workers, or tukang, offering all sorts of services, from car repairs to men's grooming and massage.

Source: South China Morning Post

