

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

10th of May 2021

Myanmar poet dies after detention, body returned with organs removed

Myanmar poet Khet Thi, whose works declare resistance to the ruling junta, died in detention overnight and his body was returned with the organs removed, his family said on Sunday, 9th of May

Mr Khet Thi's wife said both of them were taken for interrogation on Saturday by armed soldiers and police in the central town of Shwebo, in the Sagaing region - a centre of resistance to the coup in which elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi was ousted.

"I was interrogated. So was he. They said he was at the interrogation centre. But he didn't come back, only his body," his wife Chaw Su told BBC Burmese language news in tears from Monywa, around 100 km away by road. "They called me in the morning and told me to meet him at the hospital in Monywa. I thought it was just for a broken arm or something... But when I arrived here, he was at the morgue and his internal organs were taken out," she said.

She had been told at the hospital he had a heart problem, but had not bothered to read the death certificate because she was sure it would not be true, Ms Chaw Su said. Chaw Su said the army had planned to bury him but that she pleaded with them for the body. She did not say how she knew her husband's organs had been removed.

"He died at the hospital after being tortured in the interrogation centre," the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners activist group said in a bulletin that put the toll of civilians killed since the coup at 780. The group, which monitors details of killings, did not identify the source of its information.



Source: Reuters

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Laos records first Covid-19 related death over a year into the pandemic

A 53-year-old Vietnamese karaoke club worker died from the virus in the capital Vientiane, the National Taskforce for Covid-19 Prevention and Control reportedly said Sunday. The woman's condition was complicated by diabetes and other medical issues, reported the Vientiane Times.

Laos is experiencing a surge in Covid-19 cases since its New Year Holiday on April 14.

As of Saturday the country had only recorded a total of 1,233 cases, of which 1,184 were reported in the last month, according to data from John Hopkins University. Of those, 28 cases were recorded Saturday.

Older people are contracting the virus and those who have underlying health conditions are more likely to experience severe symptoms, said the deputy director general of the country's health department, Bouathep Phoumin, at a press conference Sunday, according to Vientiane Times.

Laos has administered 184,387 Covid-19 vaccine doses to its roughly 7.28 million population, according to Oxford University's Our World in Data and CNN research.

Health authorities have reportedly linked the recent surge to a superspreader whose close contacts gave inaccurate information on their whereabouts and condition, said the Vientiane Times.



Source: Reuters

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Vexed over coronavirus response, young Thais set up Facebook group to share tips on moving abroad

The 'Migrate' Facebook page has become a platform for people to discuss pathways for emigration, with Thais already living overseas dispensing tips. The US, Australia, Japan and Canada top the list of destinations that members want to move to in search of a better future

Hundreds of thousands of Thai students and young professionals dissatisfied with the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic and the slow pace of vaccinations have formed an online group to discuss ways to quit the country for good.

The Facebook group called "Migrate" has garnered more than 800,000 members in less than a week of being set up. It has become a platform for people to discuss pathways for emigration, with participants seeking advice and Thais already living abroad sharing tips.

The US, Australia, Japan, Canada and Germany top the list of destinations that members want to move to in search of a better future.

Much of the private group's discussions centre around better job and wealth prospects that other countries can offer, compared to fewer opportunities in Thailand.

For many of the young members, the current Covid-19 outbreak – the nation's third and the worst since the pandemic began – and the slow vaccine roll-out have fuelled anger toward an establishment-backed government which previously rejected their calls for reform with a crackdown on protests.



Source: Bloomberg

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Indonesia deploys 400 battle-hardened troops to troubled Papua

Indonesia has deployed 400 more soldiers in the easternmost region of Papua, an army spokesman said on Thursday, 6th of May as an exiled separatist leader warned that the military looked set to launch its biggest security operation in the area in decades.

Last week, President Joko Widodo, better known as Jokowi, ordered a crackdown on separatists after an intelligence chief in Papua was shot dead in an ambush.

The battle-hardened 315/Garuda Battalion, whose soldiers got the nickname "Satan troops" after taking part in bloody conflicts in Timor-Leste, are being brought in after a breakdown in dialogue with separatists, said army spokesman, Brigadier-General Prantara Santosa.

"They are only trained infantry troops, not special forces," he said, without specifying where they would be sent and describing their deployment as a routine rotation.



The deployment to the region, where there has been a low-level insurgency for decades, comes after Indonesia recently designated armed Papuan separatists as "terrorists", a move that activists said could boost the security response in the region. Mr Benny Wenda, a British-based independence leader who has declared he leads an interim government from exile, warned that it appeared Papua was facing the largest military operations since the 1970s.

"The Internet is being cut off, hundreds of troops are being deployed, and we are receiving reports that West Papuan civilians are fleeing from their villages," Mr Wenda said in a statement. Rights activists say Internet services have been disrupted in the provincial capital of Jayapura and nearby Sentani since April 30.

Source: Reuters

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Vietnam jails mother and son for spreading news of deadly land dispute

A mother and son were sentenced to eight years in prison by a Vietnamese court Wednesday, 5th of May, for spreading news online about a land dispute that left four people dead, their lawyer said. Vietnam's authoritarian rulers typically move swiftly to muzzle critics and dissidents posting their opinions on social media.

Can Thi Theu - who has already served two prison sentences - and her son are believed to have been the first to spread news on social media about a clash between police and local residents in a village on the outskirts of Hanoi, in January 2020, in which three policemen and a resident were killed.

Villagers there had been resisting the military's attempts to build an airport on their land. At a one-day trial in northern Hoa Binh province, Theu and her 32-year-old son Trinh Ba Tu were jailed for eight years for "spreading information against the communist state," said lawyer Dang Dinh Manh.



"Both defendants were strong at the trial today and although they admitted the acts that they did, they don't think what they did was wrong," he said, adding that both defendants would appeal. Theu's older son Trinh Ba Phuong and another relative, who were arrested in June last year together with the other family members, will face trial at a later date.

Land disputes are common in Vietnam, where powerful individuals and companies often make claims on property. "This conviction is a travesty of justice," said Emerlynne Gil, Amnesty International's deputy regional director for research. "They are clearly being punished in retaliation for their peaceful activism to expose injustices and human rights violations." The government, headed by Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, a former deputy head of the Public Security Ministry, strictly controls freedom of expression and the right to protest, but flashpoints occur.

Source: AFP

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Taiwan-Macau gay couple win legal battle for marriage recognition

A Taiwan court ruled in favour of a Taiwanese-Macanese gay couple on Thursday, 6th of May, in a legal test case greeted by activists as a first step towards getting full recognition of same-sex unions with foreigners.

Taiwan is at the vanguard of the burgeoning gay rights movement in Asia and became the first place in the region to legalise marriage equality in 2019.

Over 5,700 same-sex couples have wed since then but there are still some restrictions that heterosexual couples do not face.

Under current rules, Taiwanese can marry foreigners - but only those from countries where same-sex marriage is also recognised. In Taiwan, marriages must be recorded at local household registration offices to be deemed legal.



On Thursday, the Taipei High Administrative Court revoked a government office's 2019 decision to reject the marriage registration of Ting Tse-yen and his partner Leong Chin-fai from Macau. Activists hailed the reversal as an "initial success". It is the first time a court has directly ordered the household registration office to record an international same-sex marriage, according to their lawyer Victoria Hsu.

While the ruling sets a precedent it will not apply to other international same-sex couples, Hsu said, as she urged the government to amend the law to avoid multiple legal battles. "The freedom of marriage is a basic right that should be fully protected instead of having to go through a case-by-case review," Hsu said.

Source: The Straits Times

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Hong Kong teen among 5 held under security law: Police

A 15-year-old was among five people arrested in Hong Kong under a sweeping national security law, police said Thursday, 6th of May, with local press reporting social media posts sparked their detention.

Officers from a specialist team in the financial hub arrested four males and one female aged between 15 and 24 on suspicion of subversion.

Local reports said three of those detained were scooped up on Thursday morning during raids looking for members of a group called "Returning Valiant".

"Their comments left on social media could constitute the offences of secession and subversion under the national security law," a police source told the South China Morning Post daily.



It was reported the raids stemmed from a burglary probe in which four others were arrested. A statement posted on Facebook by "Returning Valiant" said some of its members were arrested under the national security law and that lawyers were looking into the situation. "Political suppression will not make us step back... We will continue to fight against the tyranny," the statement added.

So far over 100 people - mostly pro-democracy politicians and opposition figures, have also been arrested under the new law targeting acts of subversion, secession, terrorism and foreign collusion.

More than half of them have been prosecuted under the draconian law which carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment if convicted.

Source: AFP

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Anti-Olympics campaign gains traction online in Japan amid Covid-19 fears

An online petition in Japan calling for the Tokyo Olympics to be cancelled has garnered more than 200,000 signatures in the past few days, as public concerns mount over holding the Games in a pandemic.

With less than three months to go before the start of the summer Olympics, already postponed for a year due to the coronavirus, questions still remain over how Tokyo can hold the global event and keep volunteers, athletes, officials and the Japanese public safe from Covid-19.

In two days since its launch, an online campaign called "Stop Tokyo Olympics" has gathered over 210,000 signatures, exceeding its initial 200,000 goal.

Facing a fourth wave of the pandemic and struggling with a slow vaccination rate, residents in Tokyo were sceptical about whether the Olympics should go ahead, and wary about foreign visitors.

"We strongly call for the prevention of spread of coronavirus and protection of lives and livelihood by using available resources to stop the Olympics," Mr Kenji Utsunomiya, the online petition organiser, wrote on his website. Mr Utsunomiya is a lawyer who has run several times for Tokyo governor. The Japanese government is set to extend states of emergency in Tokyo and three other areas until the end of May. Opinion polls in Japan have found a majority of the public is opposed to the Games, which are due to open on July 23.

But organisers have repeatedly said the Games will go ahead, unveiling detailed Covid-19 protocols for athletes and officials.



Source: Reuters