

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

17th of May 2021

Taiwan was a Covid success story. Now it's fighting its biggest outbreak

Taiwan has imposed new restrictions including limits on gatherings in its capital as it battles its biggest coronavirus outbreak since the start of the pandemic last year.

The democratically-ruled island off the coast of China, widely praised as a success for its handling of Covid-19, reported 335 new cases Monday, 17th of May - a record single-day rise. All but two are locally transmitted, the island's Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) reported.

According to the Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, 155 out of 158 cases in the capital, Taipei, were linked to hostess teahouses.

Taiwanese authorities imposed new social distancing measures Saturday, closing bars, clubs and gyms around the island, and restricting indoor gatherings in Taipei and the surrounding New Taipei City to five people.

In Taipei, people must wear masks outdoors -- failure to do so is punishable by a fine of 3,000 to 15,000 New Taiwanese dollars (\$107 to \$535).

All schools and kindergartens in Taipei and New Taipei will be closed for two weeks starting Tuesday, and several local councils have also been suspended. The measures are in response to "an increasing level of community transmission, shown by cases of unknown sources of infection as well as cluster infections in Taipei City and New Taipei City," the Taiwan Centers for Disease Control said in a news release.

Source: CNN News Asia



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Myanmar's first LGBT minister Aung Myo Min continues lifelong fight against human rights abuses

Aung Myo Min has spent three decades defending human rights after the 1988 uprising led him to dedicate his life to activism. As the country's first openly gay member of cabinet, he hopes to be able to shift mindsets on LGBTQ folk and Rohingya, and other rights issues

Human rights activist Aung Myo Min, 53, has many firsts under his belt. Three decades ago, he became the first openly gay person to become involved in Myanmar's pro-democracy movement, when the bloody 1988 students' uprising led him to dedicate his life to activism.

His work defending human rights and protecting LGBTQ communities from prejudice has won him several international awards, including the Felipa de Souza Award in 1999 and the Schuman Award in 2017.



On May 4, Aung Myo Min broke another barrier as the first LGBTQ person to become sworn in as a member of cabinet, after being appointed by the National Unity Government (NUG) as its Union Minister for Human Rights.

The NUG is made up of opponents of the Myanmar military. Many are lawmakers from the National League for Democracy (NLD), which had won the November 2020 election by a landslide, but was overthrown and accused of voter fraud by the military, known as the Tatmadaw. Some members have been in exile since the February 1 coup.

In Myanmar, discrimination against the community is widespread, with many people believing that being born as LGBTQ is punishment for sins committed in a past life. Gay men are stigmatised, especially if they have HIV/Aids.

Source: South China Morning Post

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'This is too sad': virus stifles Eid celebrations for Asia's Muslims

Indonesians and Malaysians are banned for a second year from travelling to visit relatives – though as in Bangladesh, many are defying lockdown orders. In the southern Philippines, outbreaks and new fighting between government forces and insurgents have prevented people from holding large public prayers

Muslims across Asia celebrated Eid ul-Fitr in a subdued mood for a second year on Thursday as the Covid-19 pandemic again forced mosque closures and family separations on the holiday marking the end of Islam's holiest month of Ramadan.

Worshippers wearing masks joined communal prayers in the streets of Indonesia's capital, Jakarta. The world's most populous Muslim-majority nation allowed prayers inside in low-risk areas, but mosques in areas where there was more risk of the virus spreading closed their doors, including Jakarta's Istiqlal Grand Mosque, the largest in Southeast Asia.



In the southern Philippines, coronavirus outbreaks and new fighting between government forces and Muslim insurgents in one province prevented people from holding large public prayers. Instead, most hunkered down in their homes, while in Maguindanao province, many families displaced by recent fighting marked the holiday in evacuation camps.

In Malaysia, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin unexpectedly announced another nationwide lockdown from Wednesday until June 7 to curb a spike in cases. Inter-state travel and all social activities are banned, which means that like in Indonesia, Muslims cannot visit each other or family graves.

Source: Associated Press

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Hong Kong protests: Jimmy Lai, 9 other prominent activists plead guilty to organising unauthorised National Day assembly

Former lawmakers and leaders of annual Tiananmen Square vigil among those charged over protest two years ago. Ahead of hearing, Democratic Party's Albert Ho says he has 'no regrets' about potential jail term

Media mogul Jimmy Lai Chee-ying and nine other prominent opposition figures pleaded guilty on Monday to organising an unauthorised protest on National Day during the anti-government movement in Hong Kong two years ago.

His co-defendants included former lawmakers, veteran democrats and the head of a civil rights alliance behind many of the city's highest-profile rallies. Six of them also pleaded guilty to related charges, with each count carrying up to five years' imprisonment. Several of the defendants were already either in jail or in custody over separate convictions or alleged offences.

Prosecutor Priscilia Lam Tsz-ying told the District Court that the police had earlier rejected an application by the Civil Human Rights Front for permission to stage a rally in Causeway Bay and Central on October 1, 2019. The decision was upheld by the force's appeal board, but several defendants encouraged people to take part in the demonstration, according to Lam.

Protesters threw bricks and firebombs and blocked major thoroughfares during "riotous incidents in the course of or after" the unauthorised assembly, she claimed. "Two black-clad protesters threw eggs at a poster which had an image of the president of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping and a national flag of the PRC printed on it near Southorn Playground," she said.

Source: South China Morning Post



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China bars foreign curriculum, ownership in some private schools

China's State Council announced new laws halting the teaching of foreign curriculum in schools from kindergarten to grade nine (K-9) and prohibiting the ownership or control of any private K-9 schools by foreign entities.

The laws, which will come into effect on Sept 1, are the latest in a series of measures taken by Beijing to tighten control of its fast-growing education sector and public discourse.

China currently has private K-9 schools that teach local and foreign curricula. Ninth grade students in China are typically 15 or 16 years old.

The members of the board of directors or other decision making body at a private K-9 school should be Chinese nationals and should include representatives from the regulators, according to the Private Education Promotion Law published on Friday (May 14) on a government website.



The K-9 schools will no longer be able to organise entrance tests or recruit in advance. They also will be barred from establishing private schools or converting themselves into private schools. China is framing tough new rules to clamp down on a booming private tutoring industry, aiming both to ease pressure on school children and boost the country's birth rate by lowering family living costs, Reuters reported last week.

The new law is "stricter-than-expected for compulsory education schools (K-9 schools), especially in the complete ban of connected party transactions, and K9 private schools can't be controlled by agreement," said US bank Citi in a note on Sunday. "We expect K12 players' majority of revenue and profit would be under challenge," Citi added.

Source: Reuters

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Tokyo Olympics: Japanese cities left in limbo over 'host town' deals as coronavirus concerns persist

Hong Kong's fencing team and swimming team planned to stay in Yonezawa and Yamatokoriyama respectively but those plans have been cancelled. The uncertainty surrounding the hosting arrangements coincides with a surge in coronavirus cases across Japan and in Tokyo specifically

Japanese communities planning to welcome athletes from around the world – including Hong Kong – before the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics remain unsure whether the “host town” programme will proceed due to disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Across Japan, 528 towns agreed to host athletes from 184 countries and regions before the Olympics, scheduled to begin on July 23, and the Paralympics, which start on August 24.



Zheng Zhaokang, the fencing team's head coach, confirmed the plans were changed due to concerns about the coronavirus. The team now plans to remain in Hong Kong for training before travelling to Japan immediately before the start of the Games.

“People in the town have been really looking forward to this for a long time and they are very disappointed,” Burton said. “I know quite a few people who have been studying English and Chinese so they would be able to speak to the athletes and make them feel more comfortable and at home, but it looks very much as if that is not going to happen now.”

Japanese officials have also been forced to cancel plans, with at least 31 municipalities backing out of hosting agreements.

Source: South China Morning Post

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Philippines douses five-hour blaze in hospital treating Covid-19 patients

Firefighters put out a blaze early on Sunday, 16th of May, at one of the Philippines' largest hospitals that had prompted the evacuation of dozens of patients from the facility, which also treats coronavirus sufferers.

No casualties were reported in the fire at the government-run Philippine General Hospital in the capital, Manila, which was extinguished at dawn. Its cause is not known.

On Twitter, Vice-President Leni Robredo made an appeal for "big, industrial fans" to clear the smoke caused by the fire.

Some patients were transferred to nearby hospitals, including two who needed surgery and 12 babies from the neonatal intensive care unit. Hospital staff said the fire started in an operating room supply area soon after midnight.

The hospital has more than 1,300 beds and treats 600,000 patients a year, it says on its website.

With more than 1.1 million infections and deaths in excess of 19,000, the Philippines ranks second in South-east Asia in terms of Covid-19 cases.



Source: Reuters