

# What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In  
The  
News.

31st of May 2021

## China allows couples to have three children

*China has announced that it will allow couples to have up to three children, after census data showed a steep decline in birth rates.*

China scrapped its decades-old one-child policy in 2016, replacing it with a two-child limit which has failed to lead to a sustained upsurge in births.

The cost of raising children in cities has deterred many Chinese couples. The latest move was approved by President Xi Jinping at a meeting of top Communist Party officials.

It will come with "supportive measures, which will be conducive to improving our country's population structure, fulfilling the country's strategy of actively coping with an ageing population and maintaining the advantage, endowment of human resources", according to Xinhua news agency.

But human rights organisation Amnesty International said the policy, like its predecessors, was still a violation of sexual and reproductive rights. "Governments have no business regulating how many children people have. Rather than 'optimising' its birth policy, China should instead respect people's life choices and end any invasive and punitive controls over people's family planning decisions," said the group's China team head, Joshua Rosenzweig.

Also, some experts were sceptical of the impact. "But who wants to have three kids? Young people could have two kids at most. The fundamental issue is living costs are too high and life pressures are too huge."



Source: South China Morning Post

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## Myanmar sentences 28 people to 20 years in jail for torching Chinese-run factories

*A string of mainly Chinese-financed businesses were torched during unrest in Yangon in March. Myanmar has been in chaos since the army took power and arrested Aung San Suu Kyi, with daily protests and strikes against the junta*

A Myanmar military tribunal has sentenced 28 people to 20 years in jail with hard labour for arson attacks on two factories, state media reported, after a string of mainly Chinese-financed businesses were torched during unrest in Yangon in March.

The army-run Myawady news portal said the offenders had targeted a shoe plant and a garment factory in the industrial Hlaing Tharyar suburb of Myanmar's biggest city.

Martial law was imposed in the suburb after the blazes, with dozens killed or wounded when security forces opened fire on antimilitary protesters, media and an activist group said.

The Chinese embassy in Myanmar said at the time that many Chinese staff were injured and trapped in the arson attacks and called on Myanmar to protect Chinese property and citizens. A total of 32 Chinese-invested factories were vandalised in the attacks, with property losses reaching 240 million yuan (US\$36.9 million), China's state-controlled tabloid Global Times said in March.

China is viewed as being supportive of the military junta that overthrew the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1. No group claimed responsibility for burning the factories.



Source: Reuters

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## Hong Kong's 'Grandma Wong' arrested for solo Tiananmen protest

*Hong Kong police have arrested an elderly democracy activist as she made a solo demonstration over China's deadly Tiananmen crackdown in a vivid illustration of the zero protest tolerance now wielded by the authorities in the financial hub.*

Madam Alexandra Wong, 65, was detained on Sunday, 30th of May, on suspicion of taking part in an unlawful assembly as she walked towards Beijing's Liaison Office in Hong Kong. Madam Wong - known locally as "Grandma Wong" - was a regular fixture of the huge democracy protests that swept Hong Kong in 2019.

She could often be seen waving a Union Jack flag, a symbol of her dissatisfaction with Beijing's rule since the city was handed to China by former colonial power Britain in 1997. Protest is now all but outlawed in Hong Kong.

The authorities have used both the threat of the coronavirus and security concerns to ban demonstrations.

A vigil planned for this Friday - the 32nd anniversary of Beijing's 1989 crackdown on democracy protests in Tiananmen Square - has been denied permission for the second year in a row. The authorities have cited the coronavirus, although Hong Kong is currently celebrating no local transmission of cases of unknown origin for the past month.

Activists had also sought permission for a small Tiananmen-themed march on Sunday to the Liaison Office, which represents the central government in the city, but that request was also denied. Madam Wong turned up anyway that afternoon, holding a sign that read "32, June 4, Tiananmen's lament" and a yellow umbrella, which is a symbol of Hong Kong's democracy movement.



Source: AFP

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## Philippines protests China's 'illegal' South China Sea presence

*Manila lodges diplomatic protest against the 'incessant and prolonged' presence of Chinese vessels near Thitu Island.*

The Philippines has protested China's "continuing illegal presence and activities" near islands it holds in the South China Sea.

In a statement on 29th of May, Saturday, the Philippines' Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it had lodged a diplomatic protest "against the incessant deployment, prolonged presence, and illegal activities of Chinese maritime assets and fishing vessels" in the vicinity of Thitu or the Pag-asa Island.

It demanded that Beijing withdraw its vessels from the area, saying: "The Pag-asa Island is an integral part of the Philippines over which it has sovereignty and jurisdiction." There was no immediate comment from Beijing.

The latest petition was at least the 84th diplomatic protest the Philippines has filed against China since President Rodrigo Duterte took office in 2016. It comes amid escalating tension over the presence of hundreds of Chinese boats in the Philippines' 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Manila says it believes the vessels were manned by militia, while Beijing has said they were fishing boats sheltering from bad weather.

Thitu or Pag-asa is located some 451 kilometers (280 miles) off the Philippine coast. The island is the biggest of the eight reefs, shoals, and islands Manila controls in the Spratly archipelago. Just 25 kilometers (15 miles) away, on the Subi reef, China has built a mini-city with runways, hangars and surface-to-air missiles. An international tribunal in 2016 invalidated China's expansive claims in the South China Sea, but Beijing has ignored the decision.

Source: Al Jazeera



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## Vietnam detects new hybrid of two COVID variants

*Vietnam's health minister says new strain combines variants first identified in UK and India, and lab tests suggest hybrid may spread more easily than other versions of the virus.*

Authorities in Vietnam have detected a new coronavirus variant that is a hybrid of strains found in India and the United Kingdom, an official said.

Nguyen Thanh Long, the Vietnamese health minister, told a government meeting on Saturday that scientists found the new variant after examining the genetic makeup of the virus that had infected some recent patients.

“That the new one is an Indian variant with mutations that originally belong to the UK variant is very dangerous,” he said. Lab tests suggest the new strain might spread more easily than other versions of the virus, the minister said, adding that Vietnam would soon publish genome data of the newly identified variant.

After successfully containing the virus for most of last year, Vietnam is grappling with a rise in infections since late April that accounts for more than half of the total 6,856 registered cases. So far, there have been 47 deaths.

The Southeast Asian country had previously detected seven virus variants: B.1.222, B.1.619, D614G, B.1.1.7 – the variant first found in UK, B.1.351, A.23.1 and B.1.617.2 – the one detected in India. The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified four variants of SARS-CoV-2 of global concern. These include variants that were identified first in India, the UK, South Africa, and Brazil.

“At the present time, we have not yet made an assessment of the virus variant reported in Vietnam,” Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO Technical Lead for COVID-19, said in an emailed statement.

Source: Al Jazeera



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## There may not be enough doctors in Japan to support the Olympics

*Japan's medical establishment is becoming increasingly anxious about bringing together 78,000 people from 200 countries for the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, even as the country struggles to keep coronavirus infections under control and speed up vaccinations.*

Organisers had initially planned to have about 10,000 doctors, nurses and medical staff on standby for the games, scheduled to start in less than two months, but have had to cut that number down to about 7,000 because they'll be needed to handle ongoing outbreaks.

Although Japan has seen one of the lowest infection rates among rich industrialised nations, it has been trying to bring under control a rise in infections since late last year.

A third state of emergency was expanded and extended in Tokyo and other big cities, with limited results. Speculation over the possible cancellation of the games intensified last week after the US warned Americans not to travel to Japan.

"We have strong reservations about hosting the Olympics at the expense of the lives and health of patients and nurses," said Susumu Morita, secretary-general of the Japan Federation of Medical Worker's Unions, which represents about 170,000 nurses and medical staff across the country. Although foreign spectators were barred from the games in an effort to mitigate the risk of spreading infections, there hasn't been a final decision yet on whether domestic fans will be banned or see their numbers cut.

That lack of clarity is also making it difficult to gauge whether there will be enough medical staff to cope with any emergencies from July 23 to Aug 8, when the games are scheduled to take place.

Source: Bloomberg

