

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

December 21, 2020

Philippines poised to lift age of consent for sex from 12 to 16 after decades of lobbying from children's rights activists

Campaigners say the legislation would help protect youngsters in a nation that has become a global hotspot for online child sex abuse. Prosecuting adult perpetrators in rape cases involving children as young as 12 has been difficult because they can argue the sex was consensual.



The Catholic-majority country has one of the lowest ages of consent in the world, allowing adults to legally have sex with children as young as 12. Congress now looks set to approve a bill to raise the age to 16.

Children's rights activists have lobbied for decades to increase the age – enshrined in the penal code since 1930 – but faced resistance from what they describe as a “culture of patriarchy” in a country where abortion and divorce are illegal.

Campaigners say the legislation would help protect youngsters in a nation that has become a global hotspot for online child sex abuse and where more than 500 teenagers get pregnant and give birth every day.

Source: South China Morning Post

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Cambodia's giant life-giving Tonle Sap lake in peril

As night falls over his floating village, fisherman Leng Vann puffs on a cigarette and heaves a sigh for Tonle Sap, the great inland lake that has sustained Cambodia for centuries. More than a million people live on or around the lake, the world's largest inland fishery, but water levels have plummeted and fish stocks dwindled because of climate change and dams upstream on the Mekong.

The lake, a world heritage ecological reserve, depends on an unusual seasonal reversal - in the dry season, it drains into the Mekong via a fast-flowing river artery. But when the rains come from May to October, the mighty Mekong is so powerful that the water flows backwards, replenishing the lake.

It swells over four times its smallest size to 14,500sq km at the height of the floods, according to the Mekong River Commission (MRC) - an area bigger than Lebanon. But lately the reverse flows have been seriously delayed.



Weather conditions linked to climate change, such as a major drought last year and the "El Nino" climate effect, have contributed to the crisis. Environmentalists also point to the dozen or so major dams built across the mainstream Mekong as a factor in slowing the flow, along with smaller irrigation dams built on tributary rivers.

Source: BBC Asia

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More than 7,000 at relief centres as Malaysia's east coast hit by flooding

More than 7,000 people in Malaysia's east coast states of Kelantan and Terengganu were in relief shelters on morning of December 20, due to flooding caused by days of heavy rains during the annual monsoon season.

The flooding worsened in the last few days, forcing the evacuation of villagers to more than 60 shelters in the two states, Bernama news agency reported.

There were 7,308 evacuees at 8am on Sunday, higher than 6,627 on Saturday evening.

The temporary relief centres include public and school halls, and evacuees might have to remain there for several days to several weeks. Officials are closely monitoring water levels in major rivers in these states and would issue evacuation orders if levels rise above their stipulated "danger level" during the rainy season.

The level of a major river in northern Kelantan, Sungai Golok, for example, was at a depth of 10.43m at 8am on Sunday, above its danger level of 10m.

Source: The Straits Times



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China formally indicts 10 Hong Kong activists who attempted to flee by boat to Taiwan

Chinese prosecutors have officially indicted 10 of the 12 Hong Kongers detained in mainland China, months after they were arrested for attempting to flee to Taiwan by boat. The indictment took their cases a step closer to court, although no date has been set for their hearings to begin.



A court in the southern city of Shenzhen, where the 12 have been held, said in a statement on Wednesday that two members of the group had been charged with organizing illegal border crossings, while eight were charged with illegal border crossing. The remaining two, both minors, will be subject to a closed-door hearing and "decisions will be made according to the law," the statement said.

According to China's criminal law, those convicted of organizing illegal border crossing can face two to seven years in jail -- and in severe cases, life imprisonment.

The crime of illegally crossing the border can lead to a maximum of one year's imprisonment. China's judicial system has a conviction rate around 99%, according to legal observers.

Source: CNN.com/ Asia