

# What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In  
The  
News.

4th January 2021

## South Korea reports population drop, with more deaths than births for first time

South Korea recorded more deaths than births in 2020 for the first time ever, prompting calls for action to revive the country's falling fertility rate.

For years, South Korea has struggled with a growing demographic crisis. The country's fertility rate -- the average number of children a woman will have in her lifetime -- has repeatedly hit record lows, and ranks near the bottom of the lowest fertility rates in the world. Meanwhile, South Korea's population continues to age, sending the country into a demographic decline.

But last year's census data, released by the Ministry of Interior and Safety on Monday, appears even more alarming.



There were only 275,815 births, a record low -- compared to 307,764 deaths, a 3.1% increase in fatalities from the previous year. This is the first time South Korea has hit the "population death cross," when the number of deaths surpasses births, the ministry said in a news release -- and the first time the total population has shrunk. The population continues to age rapidly, the census showed: 32.7% of people are in their 40s and 50s, and nearly a quarter are over the age of 60.

Source: CNN.com/Asia

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## Thailand offers work permits to undocumented migrants to curb Covid-19

Thailand on 29th of December said it would allow undocumented migrant workers from Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar to work in the country legally for about two years to curb the spread of Covid-19. Migrants have to sign up online and be registered by an employer before mid-September in order to receive a work permit until February 2023, according to a resolution by the Cabinet.



The announcement came as Thailand deals with its worst coronavirus outbreak to date, with more than 1,500 cases since mid-December having been linked to mostly Myanmar migrant workers at a seafood market in central Samut Sakhon province.

Thailand has about 2.2 million registered migrant workers - mainly from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos - but many others work informally in sectors from fishing to farming, activists say.

The Migrant Working Group (MWG) - a network of civil society organisations - estimated that between 600,000 and 800,000 migrants would be eligible to register under the new measures.

Source: The Straits Times

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## Indonesia starts nationwide Sinovac Covid-19 vaccine distribution

Nationwide distribution of the Covid-19 vaccine that was developed by Chinese firm Sinovac Biotech started on Sunday, January 3. Mass inoculations are scheduled to begin later this month.

The distribution exercise comes after Indonesian state vaccine producer Bio Farma received 1.2 million doses of the vaccine on Dec 6 and 1.8 million doses on Dec 31.

Bio Farma began distributing the Sinovac vaccine to health facilities across the country's 34-provinces on Sunday, said the company's Covid-19 vaccination spokesman Bambang Heriyanto. He added that the storage facilities necessary for keeping the vaccine doses had been prepared.



Indonesia, currently struggling to control South-east Asia's worst coronavirus outbreak, plans to inoculate 181.5 million people aged 18 and above, or around 67 per cent of its nearly 270 million people, within 15 months. The shots will first be given to its 1.3 million health workers. Another 17.4 million front-line workers will get vaccinated after and then 21.5 million people aged 60 and older will get the jab between January and April.

Source: The Straits Times

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## Malaysian cartel allegedly sold fake halal meat to Muslims for 40 years

A local media investigation said the group smuggled meat from non-halal certified sources including China, Brazil, Canada and Ukraine. Products such as kangaroo and horse meat were mixed with and sold as halal beef, said a New Straits Times report, which has also prompted a probe in neighbouring Singapore.



A meat-fraud scandal is roiling Malaysia after a local news outlet uncovered a cartel that allegedly bribed customs officials in order to smuggle in all kinds of meat and label it halal, triggering outrage in the Muslim-majority country.

For more than 40 years, the conspirators allegedly bribed senior officers from several government agencies to import meat from non-halal certified slaughterhouses including Brazil, Bolivia, Canada, China, Colombia, Mexico, Spain and Ukraine, according to the New Straits Times, which first reported the story.

Source: South China Morning Post

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## Japan halts new entries from around world over new coronavirus variant

Japan on December 28th, suspended new entries into the country by nonresident foreign nationals arriving from most of the world through the end of January as it seeks to prevent the spread of the new, potentially more transmissible coronavirus variant.

The government will also require Japanese citizens and foreign residents coming from countries and territories where the new variant is confirmed to submit negative virus test results within 72 hours of departure and undergo tests upon arrival from Wednesday through the end of January.

The new virus strain, first detected in Britain, has since been confirmed in more than 20 countries as well as in Hong Kong.



Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told reporters Monday that the government implemented the arrival restrictions to “protect our citizens’ lives and livelihoods, by taking measures in advance” to forestall the spread of the new virus strain. He also said that response to the new variant was the same as to the original COVID-19 virus and called for people to wash hands, wear masks and to hold New Year’s celebrations “quietly.”

Source: Japan Times. Co