

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

Thai protests: Teenage girls lead 'Bad Student' movement to demand educational reforms

High school students are calling for a curriculum overhaul, equality and a relaxation of rigid rules. Since August, the female-led 'Bad Student' movement has campaigned for the resignation of the Education Minister and even staged a mock funeral for him. "Girls and LGBTQ people are suppressed by the patriarchy both at home and at school. This has made me come out to fight for myself and for everyone" said Benjamaporn Nivas.



Thai schools have very strict dress standards, with ponytails and ribbons mandated for girls and military-style crew cuts for boys. But after years of having rules drummed into them, Ploy and her fellow high school activists have gone rogue, emboldened by the broader political protest movement currently sweeping Thailand. The students want cultural change, a curriculum overhaul, equality and a relaxation of rigid rules.

Youth-led pro-democracy demonstrations have rocked Thailand since July, and have for the most part been peaceful.

Source: South China Morning Post

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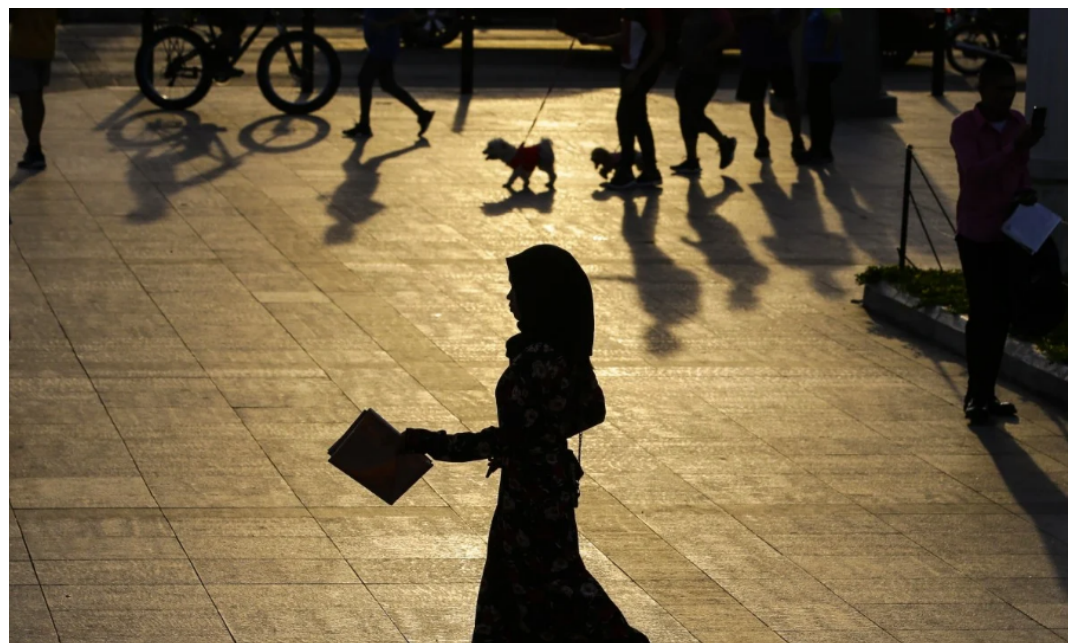
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The Philippines wants to outlaw child marriage. But in Muslim-majority Bangsamoro, change will be hard

Proposed legislation banning marriages for children under 18 conflicts with the country's Code of Muslim Personal Laws, under which girls as young as 13 can be married. Experts say decades of war in the Bangsamoro region have caused an increase in child brides, while long-held cultural practices could prove difficult to shift.

According to Girls Not Brides, a partnership of civil society organisations committed to ending marriages involving children, 15 per cent of Filipino girls were married before their 18th birthday, and 2 per cent were married before the age of 15.

Most registered child marriages in the Philippines take place in the BARMM – which is in Mindanao, the country's second-largest island – where women can marry at a very young age under the 1977 Code of Muslim Personal Laws.



Last month, Senate Bill 1373, which criminalises marriages between an adult and a minor – defined as a person under the age of 18 – was unanimously approved by the Senate. A similar measure, House Bill 1486, has bipartisan support and is awaiting a nod from the House of Representatives that is expected to come by next year.

Source: South China Morning Post

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In Singapore, holding up a smiley-face sign in public is frowned upon by law

Police have charged activist Jolovan Wham with violating public order, on the grounds that he had carried out a one-man protest. Wham has been in jail twice this year – for questioning the Singapore judiciary's independence, and for inviting Hong Kong's Joshua Wong to speak via Skype at an event that did not have a police permit.

One afternoon in March, Singaporean activist Jolovan Wham stood on a pavement, held up a piece of cardboard with a smiley face drawn on it, took a picture and posted it to social media. On Thursday, police charged Wham with violating public order, on the grounds that he had carried out a one-man protest in Singapore, where public demonstrations are heavily restricted and the ruling party insists on “zero tolerance” for unauthorised gatherings.

Wham, 40, said the smiley-face sign was intended to show solidarity with a climate campaigner who had stood in the same spot days earlier.



Source: South China Morning Post

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Hong Kong activists including Joshua Wong plead guilty at protest trial

Prominent Hong Kong dissident Joshua Wong and two other leading activists pleaded guilty on Monday (Nov 23) at the start of a trial over their involvement in last year's protests, with the trio saying they were expecting jail terms.



Hong Kong was convulsed by seven straight months of huge and often violent democracy rallies last year in which millions took to the streets.

Beijing and local authorities have refused demands for free elections and have responded with a widening crackdown against democracy supporters. Wong, 24, was prosecuted alongside fellow activists Ivan Lam and Agnes Chow over a protest which took place last summer outside the city police headquarters.

Source: The Straits Times - Asia

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Japanese PM Suga stirs hopes that married women can depart from convention

Japan's civil code requires married couples to have the same surname, but the prime minister's recent comments suggest change is afoot. A recent survey showed that 70.6 per cent of respondents were in favour of such a change. Hopes are growing in Japan that the country will move towards allowing married couples to use different surnames after Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga recently suggested that he remained committed to introducing the option, a departure from current legal requirements.

Japan's Civil Code requires married couples to have the same surname, and conventionally, the burden of altering family names has largely fallen on women.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has recommended a revision to the law, saying it is discriminatory toward women, and surveys in recent years have shown many in Japan are in favour of having the option of keeping their surname even after marriage.



When Suga was asked at a parliament committee meeting on November 6 about his past call for creating the option, he said, "As a politician, I bear a responsibility as I have said such things."

Source: The Straits Times - Asia

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China planning new policies to take on ageing population: State media

China is planning to include new measures to encourage more births and address its rapidly ageing population as part of its new 2021-2025 "five-year plan", state media reported on Monday (Nov 23). China will offer extensive financial and policy support to encourage couples to have more children, the official China Daily cited experts as saying.



China introduced a controversial "one-child policy" in 1978, saying efforts to reduce poverty and develop the economy were being undermined by rapid population growth, especially in the countryside.

But the world's most populous nation decided in 2016 to relax restrictions and allow couples to have a second child in a bid to address the rapid increase in the elderly as well as a dwindling workforce. Some experts say it should now scrap all limits entirely. The number of citizens aged 60 or over stood at 254 million at the end of last year, accounting for 18.1 per cent of the population.

Source: The Straits Times - Asia