

# What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In  
The  
News.

9th of August 2021

## Indonesian army hints at ending invasive 'virginity tests' for female recruits

*The Indonesian army has hinted that it will end mandatory "virginity tests" for female recruits, in a move that has been welcomed by human rights groups.*

For decades, the army has subjected female recruits -- as well as, in some instances, the prospective wives of male soldiers -- to the "abusive, unscientific, and discriminatory" tests, Human Rights Watch said in a statement on its website.

During the invasive tests, women have two fingers inserted into their vagina by a doctor of either sex, in a bid to assess whether they have an intact hymen.

Human Rights Watch said the practice amounts to "gender-based violence."

Virginity testing is a widely discredited and condemned practice that the World Health Organization has said has "no scientific validity" and is a "violation of the victim's human rights." Speaking on a teleconference that was uploaded to YouTube last month, Indonesian army Chief of Staff General Andika Perkasa implied that the procedure would be stopped, with training instead focused on "capability."

"We have to be consistent. The selection we do for men should be the same (as) tests for women, in terms of testing their capabilities to follow the basic of military training," he said in the broadcast. Some tests, he added, were now "unnecessary" and "irrelevant." Human Rights Watch welcomed the apparent move in its statement, but it said virginity testing was still used in the country for recruitment to other national roles.



Source: CNN News Asia

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## Singapore to adjust foreign worker policies to address job concerns amid pandemic

*Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in a televised message ahead of National Day that Singapore must manage the quality and numbers of foreigners.*

Singapore will recalibrate its foreign worker policies to balance between being accepting of those from other countries and addressing the economic and social concerns of its citizens, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said.

He said the Covid-19 pandemic has 'strained fault lines' in society, mentioning incidents of racial and religious intolerance.

The government is aware such anxieties over the foreign worker population have worsened because of uncertainties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and authorities are addressing them, Lee said in a televised message on the eve of the country's 56th National Day.

Other tough issues that have come to the fore during this period and which need to be dealt with are support for low-wage workers and the challenge of maintaining racial harmony, he said.

"We have to adjust our policies to manage the quality, numbers and concentrations of foreigners in Singapore," Lee said. "If we do this well, we can continue to welcome foreign workers and new immigrants, as we must."

Just under 30 per cent of Singapore's 5.7 million population are non-residents, up from around 10 per cent in 1990, according to government statistics.



Source: CNN News Asia

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## As Cambodian workers flee Thailand's coronavirus surge, exodus overwhelms border facilities

*Since Thailand attempted to contain the spread of Covid-19 by closing its borders in March 2020, more than 215,000 Cambodian workers have returned, one activist said*

Thailand's recent spike has created a 'dark situation' at the Cambodian border, where quarantine centres are packed, increasing the risk of the coronavirus being transmitted.

Vann Thoeurn, his wife and their teenage son had been surviving on a construction site in Thailand for months despite having no work or salary.

They had been working for six years on different developments in Bangkok but when work slowed after the outbreak of Covid-19, they made the decision to leave, spending their savings on bus tickets back to Cambodia, aiming to return to their family in Kampong Cham province.



Thoeurn, 41, recalls his wife experiencing breathing problems days before their journey. She tested positive for coronavirus but they kept the results secret, boarding a bus from Bangkok on July 25 and crossing into Cambodia the same day.

Cambodian authorities last week responded to such cases of infection among citizens returning from Thailand by closing the border and imposing restrictions in adjoining provinces. As a result, Cambodian migrant workers now face either indefinite joblessness in Thailand or dangerous, unsanitary quarantine conditions upon their return.

Source: South China Morning Post



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## Thai court suspends government order on 'false messages'

*A Thai court on Friday (Aug 6) suspended the implementation of a government order to ban the dissemination of "false messages" and distorted news, ruling it breached individual rights and freedom enshrined in the constitution.*

Media groups had filed a petition to revoke the order after accusing the government of intending to use it to crack down on criticism over its handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

The government had denied it was aimed at the media and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha said last week that the spread of fake news had become a major problem causing confusion in society and undermining the ability to manage the pandemic.



The order issued last week, which also empowered the state regulator to block internet access and take legal action against those it believed were spreading false news, came after the government faced a public backlash over its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Thailand Civil Court ruled that the order breached individual rights and freedom enshrined by the constitution and therefore could not be enforced, after 12 online media organisations filed a petition to the court this week.

In a statement, the court said the order could lead to "the deprivation of rights and freedom of the plaintiffs and people as protected by the constitution" and that the order's phrasing was ambiguous and "opens a possibility to a broad interpretation", which would limit freedom of expression.

Source: Reuters

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## Hong Kong minister signals path to adopting China's anti-sanctions law

*Hong Kong's justice secretary said on Sunday (Aug 8) that a mainland Chinese law to counter foreign sanctions could also be adopted in the China-ruled city by having it written into Hong Kong's mini-Constitution, pending a decision by the Chinese Parliament.*

Justice Secretary Teresa Cheng's comments are the strongest official indication so far that Hong Kong would embrace the mainland law, passed in June to counter foreign sanctions as the United States and European Union stepped up pressure over trade, technology, Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

Under the law, individuals or entities involved in making or implementing discriminatory measures against Chinese citizens or entities could be put on an anti-sanctions list by departments in the Chinese government.

Ms Cheng wrote in an official blog entry that the "most natural and appropriate way" to introduce the anti-sanctions law into Hong Kong would be to add it to an annex of the Basic Law, or Hong Kong's mini-Constitution.

She added that such a move needed first to be approved by the highest organ of China's Parliament, the National People's Congress. The local media has reported that a decision would likely be made during a meeting in Beijing on Aug 17-20. Critics have warned that the anti-foreign sanctions law could undermine Hong Kong's reputation as a global financial hub, and tarnish sentiment among foreign firms.

Source: Reuters

