

What's happening in Southeast and East Asia

In
The
News.

31st of August 2021

China cuts children's online gaming to one hour

Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen received her first shot of the island's homegrown Covid-19 vaccine on Monday, a public show of support for the new drug which is central to plans for inoculation self sufficiency amid low immunization rates and struggles to obtain vaccines from overseas.

Monday's island-wide rollout of the Medigen Covid-19 vaccine, developed by Taipei-based Medigen Vaccine Biologics Corporation, comes after the drug was approved for emergency use last month by Taiwanese authorities for anyone above 20 years old, with at least 28 days between the two doses.



The vaccine has yet to complete phase 3 clinical trials and no efficacy data is available.

Paul Torkehagen, Medigen's director of overseas business development, told CNN in May that the company designed a "very large" phase 2 clinical trial to ensure the vaccine's safety and effectiveness, with 3,800 participants. Normally, a stage 2 clinical trial only involves several hundred people. Data from the trials showed that 99.8% of participants were able to form antibodies against Covid-19 after taking two doses of the vaccine, Medigen's CEO Charles Chen said.

Source: CNN News Asia

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China cuts children's online gaming to one hour

Online gamers under the age of 18 will only be allowed to play for an hour on Fridays, weekends and holidays, China's video game regulator has said.

The National Press and Publication Administration told state-run news agency Xinhua that game-playing would be only allowed between 8pm to 9pm.

It also instructed gaming companies to prevent children playing outside these times. Earlier this month a state media outlet branded online games "spiritual opium".

Inspections of online gaming companies will also increase, to check that the time limits are being enforced the regulator said.

Earlier rules had limited children's online game-playing to 90 minutes per day, rising to three hours on holidays. The move reflects a long running concern about the impact of excessive gaming on the young.

A month prior to the latest restrictions, an article published by the state-run Economic Information Daily claimed many teenagers had become addicted to online gaming and it was having a negative impact on them. The article prompted significant falls in the value of shares in some of China's biggest online gaming firms.

In July, Chinese gaming giant Tencent announced it was rolling out facial recognition to stop children playing between 22:00 and 08:00. The move followed fears that children were using adult ID's to circumvent rules.



Source: CNN News Asia

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Singapore will pass new laws to combat racism, workplace discrimination: PM Lee

Muslim nurses can now wear headscarves at work, PM Lee said in annual policy address, where he also announced new anti-racism laws incorporating restorative justice

Singapore will introduce new laws to deal with racial and workplace discrimination, and in a widely expected landmark move, will allow Muslim nurses to wear the Islamic headscarf to work, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said on Sunday.

The government will also boost employment rules amid a 'growing restlessness' by middle-income Singaporeans over foreign workers.



The state of Singapore's vaunted social harmony, put under the microscope recently amid a slew of racist episodes during the Covid-19 pandemic, was keenly in focus as Lee addressed residents in the National Day Rally, an annual televised policy speech.

The measures unveiled in the address represent one of the biggest recent updates to the extensive set of policy levers wielded by the ruling People's Action Party's (PAP) to keep a lid on intercommunity tensions in the multiracial nation.

Workplace discrimination and the economic stress faced by low-income workers were also high on Lee's agenda, as he announced an expansion of the so-called progressive wage model that the country currently uses in place of a universal minimum wage.

Source: South China Morning Post

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Afghan refugees in Indonesia protest against Taliban, demand resettlement

Thousands of refugees, mostly from the Hazara minority, have been living in Indonesia for years, awaiting resettlement to places like Australia or Canada

Many defied coronavirus restrictions to protest in Jakarta, saying repatriation is out of the question after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.

Hundreds of Afghan refugees protested in Indonesia on Tuesday against a prolonged resettlement process, saying they needed to be offered new homes now that repatriation was out of the question after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.



Thousands of refugees from Afghanistan have lived in Indonesia for years as they await resettlement in third countries such as Canada or Australia. Most are from the Hazara ethnic minority. They are Shiite Muslims, despised by Sunni Muslim radicals and discriminated against by many in the Sunni majority country.

On Tuesday, hundreds gathered outside the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the capital, Jakarta, despite coronavirus restrictions prohibiting demonstrations, to demand that their cases be expedited.

“In the past year the UNHCR has been telling us there is only one per cent chance of resettlement,” said refugee Hakmat Ziraki. “Our people are dying every day,” he said. “We need some justice, we need resettlement.”

Source: Reuters

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Philippine Hospitals in revolt against COVID-19 and unpaid claims

The paper says hospitals are in virtual revolt at the state insurer's seeming monumental inefficiency and detachment.

Just as the highly contagious Delta variant is driving up the Philippines' daily Covid-19 case count to its highest levels since the pandemic struck in March 2020, the country's largest hospital groups are threatening to "disengage" from the state-run Philippine Health Insurance Corp. (PhilHealth) over billions of pesos worth of unpaid claims.

Pushing these hospitals to the brink of such a drastic action is PhilHealth's unexpected issuance of Circular No. 2021-0013 last week temporarily suspending the payments of claims to hospitals under investigations "pertaining to fraudulent, unethical acts, and/or abuse of authority."



The circular was seen as the last straw by hospitals that, earlier in the week, had already slammed PhilHealth for its inability to pay its obligations on time. The Philippine Hospital Association (PHA) decried during a hearing of the House committee on health the alleged "arbitrary denial" of billions of pesos' worth of claims that has put hospitals in a precarious financial situation. Private Hospitals Association of the Philippines (PHAP) board member Dr Gerry Gonzales said they have even come to the point of looking at their expenses to see "if we can pay the salaries of our health workers."

That money being withheld by PhilHealth would have been used by hospitals to keep their operations up and running and pay for their frontliners.

Source: Philippines Daily Inquirer

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Nearly 65,000 Hongkongers have applied for BN(O) visa scheme so far amid exodus under national security law

Activist group suggests that trend means London's estimate of 100,000 in first year is 'beginning to look conservative'. Official figures show that 47,300 applications were approved, with 71 per cent of those coming from outside Britain.

Some 71 per cent of those applications for the British National (Overseas) visa scheme were filed from outside Britain, while the rest were made inside the country, according to official figures released on Thursday.

However, the number of applicants for the scheme from April to June – 30,600 – was down slightly from the 34,300 recorded in the first two months since its launch on January 31.



Britain launched the visa in response to Beijing's imposition of a national security law on Hong Kong, one London said raised human rights concerns and constituted a "clear and serious breach" of the agreement under which the city was returned to China.

An estimated 5.4 million of Hong Kong's 7.5 million residents are eligible to apply for the scheme, which allows those with BN(O) status and their dependents to live, work and study in Britain for up to five years, and to apply for citizenship after six. Willis Fu Yiu-wai, senior immigration consultant for Goldmax Associates, said inquiries peaked in February when online applications opened. The figures dipped in May, he said, before picking up again slightly in August, with many people looking for advice on long-term plans.

Source: South China Morning Post

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Vietnam lockdown adds to global coffee supply concerns

Vietnam has added to concerns over global supplies of coffee as the South East Asian country's biggest city remains in lockdown.

The exporting hub of Ho Chi Minh has been kept under tough travel restrictions after a surge in cases of the Delta variant of the coronavirus.

Vietnam is a major producer of robusta, the bitter tasting bean used in instant coffee and some espresso blends. Wholesale robusta bean prices have risen by about 50% so far this year.

The lockdown of the South-Eastern city of Ho Chi Minh means Vietnam's exporters are struggling to transport goods, including coffee beans, to ports for shipment around the world.

The travel restrictions present yet another problem to exporters already faced with a serious shortage of shipping containers and soaring freight costs. The city and its ports are a key part of the global shipping network that runs from China to Europe. The Vietnam Coffee-Cocoa Association and other trade organisations have called on the country's government to ease the restrictions to help avoid further delays to shipments and related costs.

Last week, Vietnam's transport minister responded to the concerns by ordering regional authorities in the south of the country to take action to ease unnecessary burdens on the transport of goods, including coffee. The issues faced by Vietnamese producers are just the latest problem to hit the coffee industry.



Source: BBC News Asia