



MALAYSIA

Malaysia seizes hundreds of migrants in latest lockdown raid¹

Malaysia has detained 1,368 undocumented migrants in an area under lockdown in the latest such raid despite fears the crackdown could push vulnerable people into hiding and increase the risk of coronavirus infection in overcrowded detention centres. The Immigration Department stated that people from Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Myanmar and Bangladesh were rounded up in an area near a large market outside the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur.

The United Nations and rights groups were alerted with the raid which included 261 women and 98 children. The authorities stated that the migrants' offences include lacking proper identification, overstaying and holding false papers. They defended the arrests as necessary to preserve law and prevent migrants from travelling. The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) said many of those arrested were asylum seekers not formally registered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee and this arrest could put them in a precarious situation as they were categorised as undocumented migrants when they are fleeing from imminent danger.

Globally, migrants have been particularly vulnerable during the pandemic. In Singapore, thousands of infections have been linked to migrant worker dormitories. The United Nations urged Malaysia to avoid detaining migrants and release all children and their caregiver. They also warned that packed detention centres heightened infection risks. The Immigration Department's Director General Khairul Dzaimie Daud said that all of those screened and detained during the recent raid are tested negative.

Malaysia has about two million registered foreign workers but authorities reported that there are many more without proper documents. The government also never formally recognise refugees and regards them as illegal migrants. The Selayang Wholesalers' Market where many migrants work has been under lockdown since 20 April. Businesses are closed and residents are confined to home after a new cluster of cases was reported there.

¹ Malaysia seizes hundreds of migrants in latest lockdown raid, Channel News Asia, dated 12 May 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/malaysia-seizes-hundreds-of-migrants-in-latest-lockdown-raid-12725430>





Malaysia eased movement curbs earlier this month but has kept tight restrictions on several areas where there have been new outbreaks of the Covid-19 disease with 6,742 reported cases and 109 deaths as at date of reporting.

THAILAND

Cabinet okays transfer of B88.45bn from ministries²

The transfer of a combined 88.45 billion baht (RM11.96 billion) siphoned from the fiscal 2020 budget of each ministry to be allocated to a central fund to fight the pandemic and rehabilitate the economy was approved by the Thai's Cabinet on 12 May. The central fund will be managed by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, empowered by the emergency decree. The available amount to be transferred is far below the previous estimate of 100.4 billion baht (RM13.58 billion).

The Cabinet have previously approved siphoning 10% of the fiscal 2020 budgets of each ministry to be allocated to a central fund to fight the pandemic and rehabilitate the economy. The funds are yet to be disbursed by each ministry and are not tied over budget. The plan is part of the third round of government measures to stem the impact of the outbreak. These measures are targeted on people living in rural areas and on stabilising the financial and capital markets.

The biggest budget subject to transfer is the Finance Ministry's 36 billion baht (RM4.86 billion), which was originally planned to service the principal of existing debt, followed by 18 billion baht (RM2.43 billion) from the Defence Ministry (which earlier planned to spend on armaments such as a submarine), 11 billion baht (RM1.48 billion) from the Transport Ministry and 3.47 billion baht (RM 4.6 million) from the Interior Ministry. With 88.45 billion baht (RM), the government's central budget in fiscal 2020 will amount to 94 billion baht.

Rachada Dhanadirek, deputy government spokeswoman, said the government has scheduled allocating the central fund to fight the pandemic and widespread drought. According to Ms Rachada, the draft bill is scheduled to go before the first, second and third readings of parliament on May 28 or May 29 and later for the senators' vetting, with enforcement likely in June this year. In related news, Ms Rachada said the cabinet

² Cabinet okays transfer of B88.45bn from ministries, Bangkok Post, dated 13 May 2020, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/1916964/cabinet-okays-transfer-of-b88-45bn-from-ministries>





yesterday approved the transfer of 40.32 billion baht (RM5.45 billion) from fiscal 2021 budgets siphoned from various ministries to be allocated to the central budget to fight the deadly virus in 2021. The fiscal 2021 budgets are scheduled for the first parliamentary reading on June 24.

MYANMMAR

Myanmar MPs to Receive COVID-19 Tests before Coronavirus Budgetary Discussions³

The Head of Naypyitaw Public Health Department, Dr. Myat Wunna Soe stated that lawmakers will be tested for Covid-19 at the Union Parliament on 14 to 15 May. The nasal swabs will be taken and sent to Yangon for lab tests which will be done over duration of two days. The Parliamentary session of the Union Parliament, Upper House and Lower House are due to resume on 18 May where lawmakers were instructed to arrive in Naypyitaw 10 days earlier. The Health Department staff will take nasal swabs from lawmakers at the Naypyitaw City Development Committee Guesthouse.

The Director General of the Office of the Union Parliament, U Kyaw Soe said preparations for the swab sample to be taken from lawmakers. They have also instructed lawmakers to arrive 10 days before the parliamentary session begin. The results of lab tests will be available before the sessions begin. The families of lawmakers who accompanied them to Natpyitaw, guesthouse staff, transport and parliament staff and health care providers in the parliament will also be tested for Covid-19. Journalist covering the session will not be tested for Covid-19 however they are expected to follow the Covid-19 precautionary instruction.

Lower House lawmaker, U Aung Hlaing Win of Yangon's Mingaladon Township said that lawmakers have not been banned from leaving the guest house which is also accessible by outsiders and there were no temperature screenings. He assumed that they would be monitored for one week and also provided with meal inside the guesthouse without

³ Myanmar MPs to Receive COVID-19 Tests Before Coronavirus Budgetary Discussions, The Irrawaddy, dated 12 May 2020, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/myanmar-covid-19/myanmar-mps-to-receive-covid-19-tests-before-coronavirus-budgetary-discussions.html>





restrictions. The agenda of the session is the bill on the budgetary top-up for the 2019-20 fiscal year and the proposal to obtain loans from the World Bank to fight Covid-19.

Myanmar's military announced on 8 May that it had 219 military lawmakers and their assistants at the 1,000 bed Naypyitaw military hospital and all were tested negative. The National League for Democracy makes up 59% of the Union Parliament, ethnic minority parties 11%, the military's proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party 5% and the military has a further 25% of the seats. Myanmar has reported 180 Covid-19 cases with six deaths and 74 recoveries on 12 May.

INDONESIA

Indonesia seeks United Nation protection after deaths on Chinese fishing ships⁴

The United Nation Mission said that Indonesia has urged the United Nations Human Rights Council to be vigilant of abusive practices in the fisheries industry after the bodies of three Indonesian fishermen were thrown overboard from Chinese fishing vessels in recent months. Hasan Kleib, Indonesian ambassador to the United Nation in Geneva said that Indonesia underlines the urgent need for the council to protect the rights of vulnerable groups, specifically the rights of people working in the fisheries sector.

The Indonesian mission in Geneva raised the issue on 8 May with the United Nation council which is discussing ways to balance the response to the coronavirus pandemic with protecting human rights. The Indonesian fishermen died aboard Chinese fishing vessels in the Pacific Ocean between December and March, the captain claim that they died from an infectious disease and had to be buried at sea to ensure safety among the crew members. Zhao Lijian, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said that China is taking the report very seriously and is looking into it. The Chinese is in close communication with the Indonesian on the issue and will deal with the issue based on facts and law.

The death of the Indonesian crew members came to light when other Indonesian crew members disembarked at Busan, South Korea in late April, where one of the crew

⁴ Indonesia seeks UN protection after deaths on Chinese fishing ships, Nikkei Asian Review, dated 13 May 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indonesia-seeks-UN-protection-after-deaths-on-Chinese-fishing-ships>





members later died from pneumonia. The fishermen's lawyer issued a statement outlining human rights abuses aboard Chinese vessel. The statement mentioned that Indonesian crew were forced to work 18 hours daily and drink distilled seawater, while the Chinese crew had access to mineral water. Their pay was also partially being withheld. The Indonesian police plan to launch an investigation into the allegation.

The issue has become a diplomatic flashpoint between Indonesia and China whereby Indonesian Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi summoned the Chinese ambassador to express Jakarta's concern and push for a review on the issue. An organisation representing Indonesian migrants also urged the Indonesian government to recall its ambassador to China and to expel the Chinese ambassador to Indonesia.

CAMBODIA

UNDP inks deal with KE to train Kingdom's young entrepreneurs⁵

The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) in Cambodia went into a partnership with Khmer Enterprise (KE) to provide training for the Kingdom's budding entrepreneurs. It will also support the development of the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) sector. KE is an implementation unit of the Entrepreneurship Development Fund established by the Ministry of Economy and Finance. It is latest in the line of start-up support organisations that UNDP has teamed up with to contribute to the Kingdom's economic diversification and sustained economic growth.

UNDP Cambodia aims to enhance entrepreneurship training through incubation, acceleration programmes and a national dialogue to showcase the Kingdom's start-ups with the greatest potential. The partnership aims specifically to ensure that Cambodia's next generation of entrepreneurs are well-equipped with practical, world class training and mentorship with accessibility to suitable funding and investment readiness support at

⁵ UNDP inks deal with KE to train Kingdom's young entrepreneurs, The Phnom Penh Post, dated 12 May 2020, https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/undp-inks-deal-ke-train-kingdoms-young-entrepreneurs?_cf_chl_jschl_tk_=e0a1d570d5bd6d78002664787fb6692bfdad8367-1589334100-0-AZYvaGjueASFdaMj0cVIK2oY8dXblpwYodBXgK7AxM50I2RekGOQgLqxR6hklgRKwJMI8Qicd6RHeFGV7rVJtPAulj-A9XDD3E-UufYrx4iECVb30nqwEfLkdW2MZ0uPOtfv7Nzz33V1V0SnlyoGbMo1ECUR9I9SFJLin1OfIzbPa5xc0XeK-kXYnEdmT-zOmD_UiC_KWfNjam1hxx_0CTXEzKcXCZM0xkI19tP5mrYExRNvwEd-HCYlvCvO_kP5qrz7RdgJn92yjL4wizZjGPMot4WEi_qxwcUED0eo6J_ERalzUFLMwbO_p_D1ZlxbVBCbT9lr1lpuP-H5D9i1EjXMzRmGtSd-1fXkTFonGx6





the early stages of their start up. It also lay the foundation for UNDP Cambodia and KE to re-enforce their common efforts in improving SME ecosystem by providing technical and financial support to SMEs in priority sectors including e-commerce and sustainable SME cluster development.

Nick Beresford, UNDP representative in Cambodia is very pleased to partner with KE to create opportunities and provide training and support to help the next generation of young entrepreneurs and professionals to develop and thrive especially during the Covid-19 pandemic and continuity in managing and recovering from the impact of the pandemic.

UNDP Cambodia launched the business incubation programme Bluetribe in collaboration with KE during early May to search for eager, talented entrepreneurs in need of advice and support from people who care passionately about the growth of the Kingdom's SME sector. KE CEO, Dr Chhieng Vanmunin said that the implementation unit with the support from the Ministry of Economy and Finance is proud to collaborate with UNDP Cambodia to create the business incubation programme which promotes decent youth employment and entrepreneurship development which is in line with KE's vision and mission to become the National Platform for promoting entrepreneurial activities.

The strategic collaboration would create a synergistic platform and its impact on young, aspiring entrepreneurs and SMEs in the country would be greatly amplified. UNDP said that Bluetribe will provide selected youth with quality training and mentorship as well as access to seed funding to start and build their businesses.

PHILIPPINES

Philippines Counts on a Building Boom to Soften Pandemic Blow⁶

The pandemic have caused airports and roads to be emptied but the Philippines will keep building them with a RM693 billion infrastructure plan to revive an economy slammed by the outbreak. Secretary Vince Dizon, Presidential Adviser on Flagship Programs and Projects mentioned that an economic stimulus package is being prepared that will include major funding for infrastructure. The government is reviewing RM344 billion worth of

⁶ Philippines Counts on a Building Boom to Soften Pandemic Blow, Bloomberg, dated 13 May 2020, <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/philippines-counts-on-a-building-boom-to-soften-pandemic-blow-1.1435368>





projects which was listed as priorities to include those with high and immediate economic impact.

Dizon opined that there should be a greater sense of urgency in getting the economy back on track and the key to transition into the new normal will be strengthening the infrastructures. Economic managers are pushing to accelerate the building plan after the Philippine economy shrank 0.2% in the first quarter -- its first contraction since 1998 -- as the government imposed a lockdown to halt the spread of coronavirus. The central bank has taken the lead in providing stimulus to the economy amid the virus outbreak, cutting the policy rate and lenders' reserve requirement ratio.

Bank of the Philippine Islands lead economist, Emilio Neri said that the infrastructure push will help speed up economic rebound in 2021, but won't be enough to prevent a "meaningful contraction" this year and the likelihood of returning to full capacity in the second half is quite low at this point.

The challenges ahead are the Philippines' infrastructure lenders such as Japan and China are also facing economic downturns from the pandemic. However, Dizon is confident that these countries, as well as multilateral agencies, won't turn their backs on Duterte's building plan for they believe in the stability of the Philippines' economy and the ability to pay is very strong. Big businesses, whose finances have taken a hit from the outbreak, may have to be convinced to continue projects. The government is open to offering them better terms and is still determined to start 100 key projects before Duterte's term ends in 2022.

Among the companies involved in the infrastructure plan are San Miguel Corp., which plans to build a RM63.39 billion airport north of Manila; Udenna Corp., which proposed a monorail in central Philippines; and a consortium of big conglomerates pitching to upgrade the capital's main airport. Dizon said the pandemic also revealed the Philippines badly needs health and digital infrastructure, which will be included in the revised list to be released this month.

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