

Must-reads

THE BIG STORY
China halts talks with US on military, climate

China announced yesterday it was stopping dialogue with the United States in areas including between theatre-level military commanders and on climate change, in an escalating furore over House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's (right) visit to Taiwan. Talks on cooperation in drug control and transnational crime will also be suspended. **A1**



SINGAPORE

Two killed in lorry accident, driver arrested

Madam Soniakaur Soniasingh's (right) 17-year-old son, Calvin, was one of two people killed after the lorry they were travelling in crashed into the road divider along Old Jurong Road on Thursday morning. The driver, 25, has been arrested. He was taken to hospital along with the five other lorry passengers who were aged 15 to 20. **B1**



WORLD

Concern over boost to crime agency's powers

A decision by India's Supreme Court to uphold the powers of the country's financial crime investigation agency has drawn flak, with legal experts concerned the authorities can detain suspects without bail on weak evidence. Critics of the government may also be targeted under amended laws. **A12**

BUSINESS

How to apply for first sovereign green bond

Retail investors can apply to purchase Singapore's first sovereign green bond from now until noon next Wednesday. The 50-year Green Singapore Government Securities (Infrastructure), or Green SGS (Infra), was priced to yield 3.04 per cent. Find out what you need to know before applying. **B7**



WORLD FOCUS

Thai lottery sales move online to curb overpricing

The Thai government's recent launch of digital lottery tickets has seen five million tickets selling out in days. The move to online sales was aimed at countering the chronic ticket overpricing. The official retail price for each government lottery ticket is 80 baht (S\$3.10), but vendors (left) hawk them for at least 100 baht. **A20**



SPORTS

Oats for breakfast works fine for swimmer Teong

Teong Tzen Wei (left) has no qualms making sacrifices in chasing his dreams. The Commonwealth Games 50m butterfly silver medalist has been having oats for breakfast every morning since last year. When asked, the swimmer said: "If you really want something, you have to do it wholeheartedly." **B18**

Vaccinated people infected this year less likely to have long Covid

For those who do, symptoms tend to be less severe, do not last as long: Expert

Joyce Teo
Senior Health Correspondent



A study conducted in the Netherlands suggests that one in eight adults with Covid-19 may experience long Covid, which is similar to what has been described in Singapore, early in the pandemic, says Dr Barnaby Young, head of the Singapore Infectious Disease Clinical Research Network at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID). ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

Vaccinated persons in Singapore who had Covid-19 over this recent Omicron wave or the one earlier in the year are much less likely to develop long Covid symptoms, said Dr Barnaby Young, head of the Singapore Infectious Disease Clinical Research Network at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID).

Long Covid has been described as a condition where people still experience symptoms such as chest pain, breathing difficulties and fatigue months after the initial infection has cleared.

"From our experience at NCID, for those who do develop long Covid, the symptoms also tend to be less severe and do not persist so long among vaccinated patients with Covid-19 due to the Omicron variant," he said.

"While we do not have a diagnostic test or treatment specifically for long Covid, we do have some medication for symptom relief, and usually perform some blood or imaging tests to exclude other causes."

His comments come as a new study published in The Lancet medical journal suggests that one in eight adults with Covid-19 may experience long Covid.

About one in eight patients reporting long Covid is similar to what we have described in Singapore, early in the pandemic," said Dr Young.

The new study was conducted in the Netherlands by researchers from the University of Groningen. They collected data - mostly before the Covid-19 vaccine roll-out in that country - from online questionnaires on 23 symptoms commonly associated with long Covid,

from April 2020 to August last year.

The researchers compared the symptoms in people infected with Covid-19 with those who were not. They also asked participants if the symptoms were already present before their infection, in order to identify the core symptoms.

This method allows them to offer an improved working definition for long Covid and provide a reliable estimate of how likely it is to occur in the general population, said Professor Judith Rosmalen from the University of Groningen, the study's lead author.

In the study, about 21.4 per cent of 1,782 participants who had Covid-19 experienced at least one new symptom or a symptom that was more severe than before,

LOWER RISK

We know that vaccination reduces the risk of long Covid by about 50 per cent, and the risk is also lower with Omicron, also by around 50 per cent.



DR BARNABY YOUNG, head of the Singapore Infectious Disease Clinical Research Network at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases.

three to five months post-infection. This compares with 8.7 per cent of 4,130 uninfected people followed in the same time period, suggesting that one in eight Covid-19 patients (12.7 per cent) in the general population experiences long-term symptoms due to Covid-19, and the researchers said.

The core symptoms recorded were chest pain, breathing difficulties, pain when breathing, painful muscles, loss of taste and/or smell, tingling hands or feet, a lump in the throat, alternately feeling hot and cold, heavy arms and/or legs and general tiredness.

The severity of these symptoms plateaued three months after infection with no further decline. Other symptoms that did not significantly increase three to five

months after a Covid-19 diagnosis included headache, itchy eyes, dizziness, back pain and nausea, the researchers said.

Dr Young said the study is very well conducted and has good quality data, particularly longitudinal symptom data, collected before and after acute Covid-19, and symptom data from a control group who did not have Covid-19.

An important caveat is that the data was collected from people who were infected relatively early in the pandemic, he said. "We know that vaccination reduces the risk of long Covid by about 50 per cent, and the risk is also lower with Omicron, also by around 50 per cent," Dr Young said.

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New programme aims to reverse patients' diabetes by helping them lose weight

Salma Khalik
Senior Health Correspondent

Diabetes can be reversed, even in people who have had it for several years.

A study in Britain has proven that, and now, Singapore's National Healthcare Group (NHG) hopes to show it can also work for Asians.

Its Diabetes Reversal Programme aims to enable at least some diabetes here to become free of a disease that can lead to blindness, kidney failure and even death. The trigger to reversing diabetes is to significantly reduce the weight of people who are overweight or obese, the target being a 10 per cent cut or a 15kg reduction over a period of six months.

Associate Professor Lim Su Chi, a senior consultant at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH) and a principal investigator of the NHG programme, said: "Eight loss is the strongest link to remission. More than half of diabetes here are over-

weight or obese." The British study, called the Diabetes Remission Clinical Trial, had found that the majority who were able to achieve the target weight loss were no longer diabetic.

Those who remained diabetic after losing over 15kg had achieved better control of their sugar levels. The study, conducted between 2017 and 2018, involved putting 149 participants on a low-calorie diet. Its findings were published in The Lancet in 2018 and 2019.

At the end of the first year of the study, 46 per cent were no longer diabetic. However, not all were able to maintain this, with only 36 per cent staying free of diabetes at the end of the second year. Associate Professor Tang Wern Ee, senior consultant at NHG Polyclinics (NHGP) and the programme's lead investigator, said that it is still a very good outcome, as it means that more than one in three were free of the disease.

Diabetes is a major problem here, with more than 400,000 people living with it. If nothing is done, the number is projected to surpass one million by 2050 and cost the country US\$1.8 billion (S\$2.5 billion).



Leading the Diabetes Reversal Programme are (from left) Associate Professor Lim Su Chi, senior consultant at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital; Ms Pauline Xie, National Healthcare Group Polyclinics (NHGP) principal dietitian; and Associate Professor Tang Wern Ee, senior consultant at NHGP. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

The trigger to reversing diabetes is to significantly reduce the weight of people who are overweight or obese, the target being a 10 per cent cut or a 15kg reduction over a period of six months.

Diabetics are unable to use up the sugar in their blood. This can damage blood vessels and reduce oxygen to the heart and brain. Two major contributory factors are obesity and insufficient exercise.

Prof Tang said her team would like to see Singapore moving away from just treating the disease to getting more to become non-diabetic. The programme will recruit 100 participants aged 21 to 60 with a body mass index (BMI) of between 27 and 45 who have had diabetes for less than six years and do not have complications from it. A normal BMI for Asians is 18.5 to 22.9. Half of the participants will be in a control group who will continue to be cared for by their doctor.

The study will take three years in all, and recruitment is progressing. Diabetics who fit the profile and wish to volunteer can find details at <https://for.sg/dmtrial>

It was quite scary," he said. He is now eating less - he has a banana and a slice of bread for breakfast instead of his usual large plate of nasi rawan, or rice with black beef soup. He added: "Thinking long term, I don't want to have my legs cut off or have my kidneys fail."

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Ministers concerned about limited progress on Myanmar peace plan

PHNOM PENH • Asean foreign ministers registered their disappointment that plans to resolve the political crisis in Myanmar have hardly made progress, amid a lack of commitment by the country's authorities to implement a peace plan.

The ministers, in a joint communique issued yesterday, proposed that Asean leaders at their summit in November take stock of the military junta's progress in implementing the Five-Point Consensus, in order to decide on the way forward.

The document said the ministers, who met on Wednesday, extensively discussed recent developments in Myanmar, including the execution of four opposition activists last month.

"We recommended that the Asean Summit assesses the progress towards the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus by the State Administration Council to guide the decision on the next steps," the ministers said.

This is the second time in a row that an Asean joint communique, which usually avoids referring to the domestic situation in a member country, has devoted a paragraph to the political situation in Myanmar, and the first time it has used such strident language.

The consensus was drawn up in April last year to bring an end to the chaos following the February 2021 military coup that has killed more than 2,000 people. Its five points are: an immediate end to violence in the country, dialogue among all parties concerned, the appointment of an Asean special envoy to facilitate mediation, provision of humanitarian assistance by Asean, and a visit by the special envoy to Myanmar to meet all parties.

"We reiterated our commitment to peace and stability in the region and expressed Asean's readiness to assist Myanmar in a positive, peaceful and constructive manner, including in the delivery of humanitarian assistance," the communique said. "We agreed that the special envoy... shall engage all Myanmar relevant stakeholders at the earliest."

The communique also addressed the ongoing war in Ukraine, with the Asean ministers saying they continue to reaffirm their respect for sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity.

Reiterating calls for compliance with international law and the United Nations Charter, the communique said that the leaders underlined the importance of an immediate cessation of hostilities and the creation of an enabling environment for the peaceful resolution of conflict.

Hariz Baharudin

Asean wants US, China to cool tensions: Vivian

Situation is dangerous for the region even as both sides aren't looking for conflict, he says

Hariz Baharudin
Assistant News Editor
In Phnom Penh

Asean countries want temperatures between the United States and China to come down, especially with military manoeuvres in the region bringing a real risk of accidents and miscalculations, said Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan.

Both sides are not looking for conflict, but the situation now is dangerous for the region, he warned, underscoring how important it was for South-east Asia that the two superpowers get along.

Dr Balakrishnan was speaking to Singapore reporters yesterday at the close of the 55th Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting, where ministers from the grouping also met their counterparts from key partners, including Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Dr Balakrishnan said that during these talks, he observed that both sides were not looking for conflict. Recounting his conversation

with Mr Wang on Thursday, Dr Balakrishnan said he conveyed that "the main danger is you've got a lot of ships and planes and missiles massed around there".

"Even though I know you don't want to go to war, there is a danger of accidents and miscalculations. So for what it's worth, we've made the appeal that for the rest of us in South-east Asia - we actually want temperatures to come down."

China embarked on its largest-ever live-firing military drill in the waters around Taiwan following a controversial visit by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Her visit has angered China, which had warned against it and called it a provocation, while the US said it did not change America's "one China" policy.

Yesterday, Beijing announced that it would suspend cooperation with the US on a range of issues, including talks on climate change.

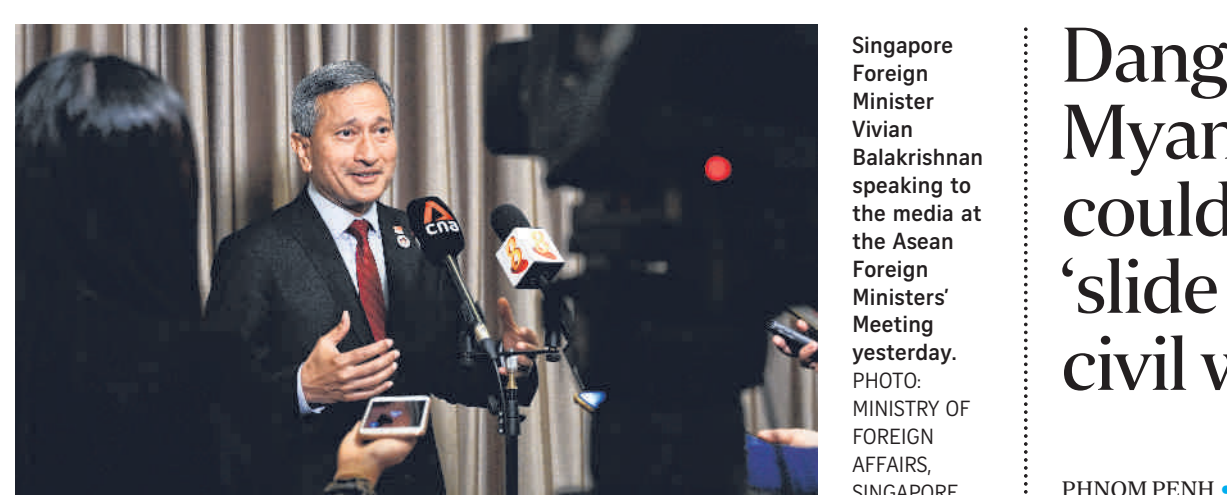
Dr Balakrishnan, who met Mrs Pelosi when she visited Singapore on Monday, noted that although her visit to Taiwan was not the first by a US House Speaker, it did take place at a very

WE ALL HAVE SKIN IN THIS GAME

So those are the stakes. So when we make the appeal, please have a care. I know you have to compete, maybe even confront, but we all have skin in this game. And we do want America and China to get along.

SINGAPORE FOREIGN MINISTER VIVIAN BALAKRISHNAN, warning that conflict between the superpowers means high prices, less efficient supply chains and a more divided, disruptive and dangerous world.

politically sensitive time for both China and the US. This has contributed to raising the temperature and tensions on the ground, he added.



Singapore Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan speaks to the media at the Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Phnom Penh on Thursday. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SINGAPORE

Far left: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (centre) leaving before the start of a gala dinner of foreign ministers in Phnom Penh on Thursday.

Left: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken attending the East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers' Meeting in the Cambodian capital yesterday. PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Danger that Myanmar could 'slide into civil war'

PHNOM PENH • There is a real danger that the political crisis in Myanmar could turn into a civil war, given how there has been no progress on peace plans that the country had agreed to with Asean, said Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan yesterday.

"I have to be very frank. It's very dire. I think there is a real danger that the coup is sliding into a civil war. There's been no progress on the Asean Five-Point Consensus," Dr Balakrishnan said.

The consensus was drawn up in April last year to bring an end to the chaos following the February 2021 military coup that has killed more than 2,000 people.

Speaking to Singapore reporters at the end of the 55th Asean Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) and related meetings, Dr Balakrishnan said Myanmar executed four activists last month despite appeals by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, in his capacity as Asean chair, and Asean Special Envoy on Myanmar Prak Sokhonn.

"The timing - the recent executions, or even the earlier bombing by the Tatmadaw (armed forces) - so soon after PM Hun Sen visits Myanmar, the special envoy goes to Myanmar, reflects, actually, the high level of cynicism or even outright disrespect for the role of Asean," said Dr Balakrishnan.

Dr Balakrishnan and Mr Blinken also reaffirmed the excellent and longstanding partnership between Singapore and the US, with the former welcoming the US' continued and constructive engagement in the region.

"We can't interfere, but if they do not see that there is value in dialogue, national reconciliation and the making use of Asean's good offices, then I'm afraid it's a very dire situation," Dr Balakrishnan said of the Myanmar junta. "How long will this go on for? I've heard estimates four years to 20 years. I don't know, but I'm pessimistic."

Asked how Asean would define and measure progress in the coming months, he said the ministers were formulating some options that he was not at liberty to share. "Let's not jump the gun, because if, for instance, in the remaining few months, they actually stop the violence, engage across the political spectrum, give access to our special envoy... those will be positive steps," he said.

Hariz Baharudin

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