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UNDERCOVER ASIA

Undercover Asia

CNA's award-winning investigative series Undercover Asia uncovers the hard truths in the underbelly of Asia, and exposes the unintended fallout of change in the fast-moving continent.

Episodes: 10 x 60 mins

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In this season, we investigate:

- The outcome of rules prohibiting maids from getting pregnant in Singapore
- How profit is driving millions of women in India to undergo unnecessary c-sections
- The hidden dangers of Mukbang videos
- The unintended fallout of policies to distress kids in China
- The impact of delisting of Cannabis as a narcotic in Thailand
- The vaping invasion in Southeast Asia

Information correct at time of printing

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Episode 1 – Prohibited Pregnancy

Pregnancy for many is a joyous revelation. But for migrant domestic helpers in Singapore, the discovery results in automatic expulsion, and possibly a lifetime work ban. The rules are so strict that employers are expected to report their helper's pregnancy to the authorities.

It is reported that about 170 pregnant domestic helpers are sent home each year. But actual figures could be higher because many of them hide their pregnancies and resort to illegal abortion methods in Singapore and neighbouring Batam to avoid losing their jobs for good. Employers are also not spared - they have to pay the price of repatriation.

Why do domestic helpers still get pregnant despite the strict rules, and what happens when they turn to dangerous measures in desperation? Undercover Asia explores if there's a better way to deal with maid pregnancies.

Episode 2 – A Million Cuts: India's C-Section Epidemic

A C-section is the surgical method of delivering a baby, meant to be used in complicated pregnancies. It's a lifesaving procedure, but in India, millions of mothers are going under the knife unnecessarily. The C-section rate in India's private hospitals is a whopping 47.4%, far greater than the 15% threshold recommended by the WHO.

As private hospitals of all kinds mushroom across the country, C-sections have become a money-making racket. An increasing number of doctors have little patience for normal deliveries and are in a hurry to wield the scalpel. Hapless mothers in their hands are forced to undergo surgeries which comes with risks for both mother and baby.

Episode 3 – What's Really Up With Mukbang?

With 2 million videos, and 247 thousand creators, Mukbang eating videos are a Korean phenomenon that has gone global.

Ordinary people film themselves slurping, chewing, inhaling - often vast amounts of food. And hundreds of millions tune in.

But while politicians praise Mukbang in India, and government agencies support Mukbang videos in South Korea, China banned Mukbang videos in 2021.

Just why have such seemingly innocuous eating videos gotten politicians involved?

Episode 4 – Double Reduction, Triple The Stress?

To score well in China's school entrance exams, it used to mean attending hours of tuition on top of school. Classes were cheap and ubiquitous, until two years ago.

In July 2021, China banned after-school tutoring, killing a \$100 billion industry overnight. It would have been a worthy tradeoff, if kids could have a carefree childhood. But tuition never went away.

Tuition has now gone underground, and students continue to struggle in a never-ending rat race. Now, only those with time and money can get extra academic help. Is the Double Reduction Policy backfiring?

Episode 5 – Cannabis Cowboy Country

On 9 June 2022, the Thai government took off cannabis in its banned narcotics list. As it is no longer prohibited, the sale of this product is now legal for everyone, except for those under 20 or pregnant or breastfeeding. But three months later, 39 Thai youths reported to hospitals for cannabis intoxication.

As research show the disturbing impact of even one to two experiences of cannabis use on teen brains, and the long-term harm of chronic cannabis use even as a young adult, is the kingdom gambling with its future while cashing in on the Cannabis Green Rush?

Undercover Asia examines how and why the Thai government eased cannabis restrictions, and if its new rules on weed are adequate to ensure the safety of its new generation.

Episode 6 – Smoke and Mirrors: Southeast Asia's Vaping Crisis

Initially conceived as a way for smokers to kick the habit, vaping has since undergone a remarkable evolution in Southeast Asia. It is now a thriving cultural phenomenon, with trendy vape cafes, massive trade shows, competitive tournaments, and a burgeoning online and offline community.

But amidst the glitz and glamour lies great controversy. Even as vaping continues to be promoted as the solution to the global tobacco crisis, public health experts warn that vaping could create a new health crisis of its own, especially with high levels of underage use.

Undercover Asia investigates: Why has vaping gained such popularity among youths? How effective is it as a smoking cessation aid? What aren't vape companies telling us? And could vaping act as a gateway drug into even more dangerous substance abuse?

Episode 7 – Inside The Exotic Butterfly Trade

Every year, more than 100,000 butterflies are shipped across the globe to be sold as collectibles. Among them, some of the most unique butterfly species that come from Indonesia. The country's biodiverse habitat is home to more than 2,000 species. And it has fuelled a growing global industry of butterfly hunters and dealers, with some operating in the black market.

Undercover Asia follows the trails of these alluring insects, from Japan to Indonesia to investigate first-hand how they secretly change hands among hunters, dealers and collectors.

Episode 8 – Lombok's Poisoned Gold

In Indonesia which is Asia's largest gold producer, informal gold mining is a crucial source of income for hundreds of thousands. But this once traditional livelihood hides a deadly secret that may be poisoning its most vulnerable residents and causing irreversible environmental harm.

We reveal the scale of Indonesia's multi-million dollar trade in mercury, the toxic element used to extract gold from its ore. With a new and illegal domestic supply, we reveal how this mercury is being used at thousands of mines and investigate how NGOs have found increased rates of children born with life-changing defects. We meet the miners and the people fighting for change and take viewers into the illicit mines that have been hidden from public view.

With Indonesia bound by international agreements to stop mercury usage by 2025, we learn what is being done to meet that target. We also explore some of the greatest challenges the country will face if it is to protect its citizens from this metal that becomes toxic when used in the wrong ways.

Episode 9 – Tainted Medicine Scandal

Between 2022 and 2023, over 300 children in Gambia, Uzbekistan and Indonesia died after they consumed cough syrup. It sent shockwaves around the world. Investigations revealed toxic ingredients in them. Diethylene and Ethylene Glycol are deadly chemicals which should never be found in medicine. The cough syrups were manufactured by pharmaceutical companies in India and Indonesia. The manufacturing firms deny wrongdoing but, in the months to follow, the findings would open up a Pandora's box of dirty truths.

Episode 10 – Inside Indonesia's Ultras

The Kanjuruhan stadium tragedy of October 2022 killed 135 people. We delve into the heart of Indonesia's ultra football fan clubs, unmasking a world of extreme fandom unparalleled in Asia. Through the eyes of Lutfi, member of Jakmania ultra club and the notorious Manggarai Barrabravas, we experience the adrenaline of a football match, and witness the fans' devotion to the game, their frustrations with the authorities, and their inclination towards violence.

We meet the families of some of the victims of the Kanjuruhan Stadium tragedy like Evi, who is still grieving for her husband and 3-year-old son and Umi, who is mourning the death of her teenage daughter.

As we dig into the events that day, a darker picture of trigger-happy police and pervasive corruption within the Indonesian football league emerges. The tragedy is seen by some as the wake-up call Indonesian football needs but at what cost? And will the promised reforms result in lasting change?

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