

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN HONG KONG:

HONG KONG WATCH BRIEFING ON EVENTS: JULY 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

POLITICAL PRISONERS: ARRESTS, CHARGES, & TRIALS

In the last month, Beijing continued its crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong, with the following developments:

- Hong Kong police raid homes of overseas activists and target families.
- Former chair of disbanded political party Demosisto arrested, along with four others.
- Ten arrests as police deploy in force on 4th anniversary of the Yuen Long mob attacks.

THE STATE OF THE RULE OF LAW AND POLICING

- Number of registered voters falls for second year in a row as next District Council election confirmed for December 10
- Over 60 other human rights organisations, bar associations, scholars and activists issue joint statement on China's crackdown on lawyers.
- The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute calls on The Law Society of Hong Kong and The Hong Kong Bar Association to condemn the issuance of arrest warrants and bounties against eight overseas activists.

A FREE PRESS IN THE CROSS HAIRS

- Security chief condemns Ming Pao over 'misleading' op-ed by Democratic Party chair.
- Hong Kongers 'welcome' to report library books that may endanger national security.
- Hong Kong press club survey finds that almost 70% of journalists have self-censored, and 83% say conditions have worsened.
- Hong Kong's High Court rejects government bid to ban pro-democracy protest song.

STATE SECURITY AND ECONOMY

- Over 27,000 Hong Kong students left city's schools last year amid emigration wave
- Bill that could close Hong Kong trade offices in US advances in Senate.
- Work dries up for US consultancies in China after national security raids.
- Hong Kong's economy shrinks in second quarter of 2023.

- Hong Kong stock exchange removes a China-risk section for mainland-incorporated companies in its listing application rules.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

- Chief Executive John Lee barred from APEC summit in US in November.
- Man charged after attack on Hong Kong protestors in Southampton.
- Lord Patten calls on British judges to quit Hong Kong's top court after bounties for dissidents.
- UK MPs call for sanctions on Hong Kong officials targeting UK-based activists.
- Démarche of Chinese Ambassador to the UK following arrest warrants and bounties.
- Canada makes it easier for Hong Kongers to stay and work in Canada.
- Hong Kong Watch calls on the Canadian Government to investigate the issuing of visas for Hong Kong Police officers to attend the World Police and Fire Games.

POLITICAL PRISONERS: ARRESTS, CHARGES & TRIALS

Hong Kong police raid homes of overseas activists and target family members

Following the arrest warrants and bounties issued by the Hong Kong police for eight overseas activists at the start of the month, police officers from the national security department targeted family members remaining in Hong Kong.

On July 11, Hong Kong police raided the family home of Nathan Law and took his parents and brother in for questioning.¹ On 20 July, police raided the homes of relatives of Dennis Kwok, a former legislator, and Christopher Mung, a UK-based trade unionist.

A police spokesperson said the questioning related to suspicion of “assisting the fugitives to continue to engage in acts that endanger national security”.²

On 24 July, the son and daughter of the businessman Elmer Yuen were detained by police. The questioning of Yuen’s family was the fourth action against the families of wanted activists this month by the national security police division.³

Former chair of disbanded political party Demosisto arrested, along with four others

¹ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hong-kong-police-raid-family-home-of-exiled-activist-nathan-law-crxmnrx29>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/20/hong-kong-police-raid-homes-relatives-two-exiled-activists>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/24/daughter-hong-kong-activist-elmer-yuen-detained-national-security-police>

Ivan Lam, the former chair of disbanded political party Demosisto which was co-founded by wanted overseas activist Nathan Law, was arrested along with four others and accused by police of supporting people based overseas who "endanger national security".⁴

The arrests came just days after Hong Kong police put up bounties for eight pro-democracy activists living abroad.

Many prominent young activists were members of Demosisto, which had been led by Law and former student leader Joshua Wong. It was disbanded on June 30 2020, the day the security law was enacted.⁵

Derek Lam, a founding member of the party had his home raided and was also questioned by national security police.⁶

Ten arrests as police deploy in force on 4th anniversary of the Yuen Long mob attacks

Eight men and two women were arrested around Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai on the anniversary of a mob attack that took place around Yuen Long MTR station four years ago.⁷

Among those arrested was Alexandra Wong, also known as "Grandma Wong." She pulled out a pro-democracy yellow umbrella and British flag from her bag.

On July 21, 2019, over 100 rod-wielding men stormed Yuen Long MTR station leaving 45 people injured – including journalists, protesters, commuters and pro-democracy lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting.

Wong Ji-yuet and jailed for 37 months for rioting in 2019

Wong Ji-yuet, one of the 47 pro-democracy figures facing a charge under Hong Kong's national security law has been sentenced to 37 months behind bars for rioting in 2019.

She was among 14 sentenced for between 36 months to 52 months for a single charge of rioting on Nathan Road in Yau Ma Tei on November 18, 2019.⁸

THE STATE OF THE RULE OF LAW AND POLICING

Number of registered voters falls for second year in a row as District Council election slated for December 10

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-66117142>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/07/hong-kong-pro-democracy-activist-arrests>

⁶ <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/07/13/hong-kong-national-security-police-raid-home-of-ex-member-of-pro-democracy-party-no-arrest-made-reports/>

⁷ <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/07/22/ten-arrests-as-hong-kong-police-deploy-in-force-on-4th-anniv-of-yuen-long-mob-attacks/>

⁸ <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/07/13/hong-kong-activist-wong-ji-yuet-jailed-for-37-months-for-rioting-in-2019/>

Hong Kong has close to 83,000 fewer registered voters in 2023, making it the second consecutive year the number of voters in the city had fallen.⁹

The number of young voters aged 30 or below dropped by just over 10 per cent, from 622,446 to 558,286,

The provisional voter figures were revealed after the Hong Kong government announced that the next District Council election, where only 20 per cent of the seats will be democratically elected, will be held on December 10.

Over 60 other human rights organisations, bar associations, scholars and activists issue joint statement on China’s crackdown on lawyers

Marking the 8th anniversary of the crackdown that began on 9 July 2015 in China – known as the “709” crackdown – which led to the roundup of over 300 lawyers and legal assistants in China, the joint statement also highlights recent cases in China and the increasing repression of lawyers in Hong Kong.

The statement expresses concern that “the Hong Kong authorities are following a similar path” to mainland China since the imposition of the National Security Law. “Prominent lawyers Chow Hang-tung, Albert Ho and Margaret Ng are currently awaiting trial on a range of national security crimes, for their human rights work. UN experts have recently called for Chow Hang-tung’s release,” the statement notes.¹⁰

The International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute calls on The Law Society of Hong Kong and The Hong Kong Bar Association to condemn the issuance of arrest warrants and bounties against eight overseas activists

The International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute’s (IBAHRI) Co-Chair and Immediate Past Secretary General of the Swedish Bar Association, Anne Ramberg Dr Jur hc, commented: “Offering a cross-border bounty on the head of Hong Kongers overseas poses a serious threat to their safety. It is an intolerable affront to the rule of law and a ‘Wild West’ practice.

“This latest move is even more worrying considering the mounting evidence of China’s covert police stations in countries around the world. The IBAHRI calls on the Australian, UK and US governments to take concrete steps to guarantee the safety of the eight accused individuals and the ever-growing Hong Kong community seeking protection overseas.”¹¹

⁹ <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/08/01/number-of-registered-hong-kong-voters-falls-for-second-year-in-a-row-as-district-council-election-confirmed-for-dec-10/>

¹⁰ <https://www.hongkongwatch.org/all-posts/2023/7/10/hong-kong-watch-joins-over-60-other-human-rights-organisations-bar-associations-scholars-and-activists-in-a-joint-statement-on-chinas-crackdown-on-lawyers>

¹¹ <https://www.ibanet.org/Hong-Kong-IBAHRI-expresses-concern-over-arrest-warrants-for-overseas-pro-democracy-figures>

A FREE PRESS IN THE CROSS HAIRS

Security chief condemns Ming Pao over ‘misleading’ op-ed by Democratic Party chair

The Hong Kong Security Bureau has condemned Ming Pao for publishing a “misleading” opinion piece written by Lo Kin-hei, the chairperson of the Hong Kong’s largest pro-democracy party, the Democratic Party.¹²

It was not the first time the government condemned Ming Pao, with the newspaper’s comic strips being criticised by government officials, also for being “misleading.” In May, Ming Pao suspended one satirical comic strip after 40 years following government complaints.¹³

Hong Kongers ‘welcome’ to report library books that may endanger national security

Members of the public are “welcome” to report books that may endanger national security to the government department that oversees the city’s public library system, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has said.¹⁴

Public libraries will follow up on complaints and possibly remove library materials from the shelves for review. They will not respond to any complaints.

Hong Kong press club survey finds that almost 70% of journalists have self-censored, and 83% say conditions have worsened

An anonymous survey of the Foreign Correspondents’ Club (FCC) Correspondent and Journalist members reveals that many are finding the working conditions in Hong Kong to be increasingly difficult.¹⁵

Almost 70 per cent of journalists in Hong Kong say they have self-censored in their own writing, while 83 per cent said they believed the working environment for journalists in the city had “changed for the worse.”¹⁶

Hong Kong’s High Court rejects government bid to ban pro-democracy protest song

¹² <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/07/13/hong-kong-security-chief-condemns-ming-pao-over-misleading-op-ed-by-democratic-party-chair/>

¹³ <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/05/11/prominent-hong-kong-political-cartoon-by-zunzi-suspended-after-government-complaints/>

¹⁴ <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/07/06/hongkongers-welcome-to-report-library-books-that-may-endanger-national-security/>

¹⁵ <https://www.fcchk.org/statement-on-results-of-fccs-press-freedom-survey/>

¹⁶ <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/07/06/almost-70-of-journalists-have-self-censored-83-say-conditions-have-worsened-hong-kong-press-club-survey/>

Hong Kong's high court has rejected a government attempt to the protest song Glory to Hong Kong, saying an injunction could create a chilling effect and undermine freedom of expression.¹⁷

The government had sought the injunction banning online publication or distribution of the song, arguing it insulted China's national anthem and could give people the impression that Hong Kong was an independent country.

The song became an unofficial anthem after the 2019 pro-democracy protests and ensuing government crackdown.¹⁸

STATE SECURITY AND ECONOMY

Over 27,000 Hong Kong students left city's schools last year amid emigration wave

Over 27,000 primary and secondary students discontinued education in Hong Kong last year amid the city's emigration wave.¹⁹

Chief Executive John Lee made talent attraction a key part of his Policy Address last year, with the introduction of the "Top Talent Pass Scheme" targeting high net worth individuals and graduates of top universities around the world.

As of the end of May, authorities had issued 21,000 visas through the scheme. Around 95 per cent of successful applicants were from mainland China.

Bill that could close Hong Kong trade offices in US advances in Senate

Legislation that could close Hong Kong's economic and trade offices in the US cleared a key Senate committee this month.²⁰

The bill, called the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office (HKETO) Certification Act, would require the White House to "remove the extension of certain privileges, exemptions and immunities" to the offices if it decides that Hong Kong no longer enjoys a high degree of autonomy from Beijing.

The bill – sponsored by senators Marco Rubio, a Florida Republican, and Jeff Merkley, an Oregon Democrat – was approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and is now

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/28/court-rejects-attempt-ban-glory-hong-kong-protest-song>

¹⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-court-rejects-govt-bid-ban-protest-song-2023-07-28/>

¹⁹ <https://hongkongfp.com/2023/07/12/over-27000-hong-kong-students-left-citys-schools-last-year-amid-emigration-wave/>

²⁰ <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3227624/bill-could-close-hong-kong-trade-offices-us-advances-senate>

expected to go to the full Senate for a vote. A similar version of the bill has been introduced in the House of Representatives.

Work dries up for US consultancies in China after national security raids

Top US consultancies are struggling to attract business in China as Beijing's national security raids scare away local clients and global investors pull back from dealmaking in the country.

Management consultancy Bain is telling new China hires to wait until as late as 2025 to start their jobs, while roughly half of McKinsey staff do not have paid client projects to work on. Boston Consulting Group's China team has been holding strategy sessions on how to revive its flagging business, according to half a dozen people close to the firms.²¹

Hong Kong's economy shrinks in second quarter of 2023

Hong Kong's GDP declined by 1.3 per cent between April and June 2023, marking a sharp reversal from the 5.4 per cent expansion after the pandemic reopening in the first three months of the year.²²

It is a return to the short-lived fits and starts of growth which have blighted Hong Kong's economy since the rallies against authoritarianism four years ago.

Visitor numbers are still around 40 per cent below their levels in the early part of 2019.

Hong Kong stock exchange removes a China-risk section for mainland-incorporated companies in its listing application rules

The Hong Kong stock exchange has removed a China-risk section for mainland-incorporated companies in its listing application rules, which the bourse said was to align disclosure requirements for IPO-aspirants from other countries.²³

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Chief Executive John Lee barred from APEC summit in US in November

The US has decided not to invite Hong Kong's Chief Executive John Lee from attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in San Francisco in November.²⁴

John Lee, along with 10 other Hong Kong and Chinese officials, was placed under sanctions by the US government in 2020 after implementing a national security law.

²¹ <https://www.ft.com/content/0b869421-10fd-41e7-8280-5d09a224062f>

²² <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2023/07/31/hong-kong-economy-falls-short-tourists-avoid-china/>

²³ <https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/hong-kong-removes-requirement-flag-china-risk-listing-applications-2023-07-31/>

²⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/07/27/hong-kong-john-lee-apec/>

Hong Kong Watch joined with 52 other civil society organisations urging President Biden to oppose any decision to allow Hong Kong's Chief Executive to attend the summit.²⁵

Man charged after attack on Hong Kong protestors in Southampton

A man has been charged in connection with an attack on Hong Kong protestors in Southampton in June.

Zheng Gong, 23, of High Street, Southampton has been charged with racially aggravated assault.²⁶

Lord Patten calls on British judges to quit Hong Kong's top court after bounties for dissidents

The last governor of Hong Kong, Lord Patten of Barnes, has pressed British judges to quit the territory's top court after a bounty was set for the capture of exiled pro-democracy campaigners.

He said that the latest move by Hong Kong police to offer rewards of £100,000 for information leading to the return of eight activists based overseas demonstrated that the rule of law had been "comprehensively trashed" by the local authorities and the Beijing hierarchy.

"I have never told independent judges what I thought they should do," said Patten. "But if I were taking the decision for myself then I would find it very difficult to sit as a British judge on Hong Kong's court of final appeal."²⁷

UK MPs call for sanctions on Hong Kong officials targeting UK-based activists

Hong Kong officials involved in targeting UK-based pro-democracy activists who had bounties placed on them should be subject to sanctions, opposition and Tory backbenchers have urged the UK government.²⁸

Démarche of Chinese Ambassador to the UK over Hong Kong

Following the issuing of arrest warrants and bounties for eight overseas activists, as well as the questioning of their families, a senior UK Foreign Office official conducted a formal diplomatic démarche of the Chinese Ambassador to the UK.²⁹

²⁵ <https://www.hongkongwatch.org/all-posts/2023/7/28/hkw-welcomes-conformation-from-the-biden-administration-that-hk-ce-john-lee-will-not-attend-the-apec-summit>

²⁶ <https://www.hampshire.police.uk/news/hampshire/news/news/2023/july/man-charged-after-racially-aggravated-assault-in-southampton/>

²⁷ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/uk-judges-in-hong-kong-should-quit-over-bounties-for-dissidents-w6tccd6pr>

²⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/06/mps-call-for-sanctions-on-hong-kong-officials-targeting-uk-based-activists>

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fcdo-statement-demarche-of-chinese-ambassador-on-hong-kong>

Canada makes it easier for Hong Kongers to stay and work in Canada

The Canadian Government has announced the expansion of the Stream B Pathway for Hong Kongers, which will remove the education requirement for those Hong Kongers who have moved to Canada under the Open Work Permit to gain permanent residency.³⁰

Paul Chiang MP, speaking on behalf of the Minister for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship said: “Our Government sees expanding and simplifying these dedicated pathways to permanent residency as a win-win situation.

“It allows us to welcome more Hong Kongers and simultaneously help our businesses fill labour gaps with people who already have work experience here.”³¹

Hong Kong Watch calls on the Canadian Government to investigate the issuing of visas for Hong Kong Police officers to attend the World Police and Fire Games

Hong Kong Watch Canada called for the Canadian Government to investigate the decision to issue visas for over 300 Hong Kong police officers to attend the World Police and Fire Games hosted in Winnipeg.³²

A video emerged on social media of Hong Kong Police officers marching through the streets of Winnipeg as part of the games. After boos from the local Hong Kong community who came out to protest their attendance, some of the officers were heard issuing threats and seeking to intimidate the crowd.

³⁰ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2023/07/canada-makes-it-easier-for-hong-kongers-to-stay-and-work-in-canada.html>

³¹ <https://www.hongkongwatch.org/all-posts/2023/7/11/hong-kong-watch-canada-welcomes-the-expansion-of-the-stream-b-pathway-for-hong-kongers>

³² <https://www.hongkongwatch.org/all-posts/2023/7/30/hong-kong-watch-calls-on-the-canadian-government-to-investigate-the-issuing-of-visas-for-hong-kong-police-officers-to-attend-the-world-police-and-fire-games>