

FREE HONG KONG

NEWS DIGEST

By WONG Yik-Mo, Befria Hong Kong (Sweden), Nederlands for Hong Kong,
Hong Kong Committee in Norway and Støt Hong Kong (Denmark)

Electoral reform

*new beginnings for Beijing
and end of Hong Kong*

Beijing decided to tighten its grip on HK's elections. The reform gives more seats to the pro-Beijing camp in the Legislature and more Beijing appointees to vote for the Chief Executive.

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Still free to speak?

*Freedom of speech and
expression*

In HK, an award-winning documentary was pulled hours before its premiere. China and HK will not show the Oscars this year, reportedly due to the nominated protest film "Do Not Split". Museums are now under National Security surveillance.

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Give the "blood cotton" a chance

opinion

Even with the counter boycott, Chinese customers still buy Better Cotton Initiative products. It's time that foreign companies and governments learn to stand firm for the right.

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Dear friends,

We are a group of Hong Kong activists who have been advocating for international support of democracy in Hong Kong since the Anti-extradition Protest Movement in 2019. While we are grateful that mainstream media often report on major stories in Hong Kong, we think some insider stories not appearing as international headlines are also important in order to form a complete picture of the situation. However, many things are happening every day and it can get overwhelming digesting all the news. So for your convenience, we have compiled this newsletter, which summarises key updates on the Hong Kong situation, international reactions regarding Hong Kong and China matters, and follow-ups of ongoing mass arrests. A list of important dates until May has been provided at the end of the newsletter.

ELECTORAL REFORM

New beginnings for Beijing and end of Hong Kong

Electoral reform has always been the core topic in Hong Kong. From 2014’s Umbrella Movement to the disqualification of elected officials, interpretation of the Basic Law by CCP, cancellation of the 2020 election, free election is the number one no-go for China.

So the National People’s Congress (NPC) voted in early March to ensure the legislature is controlled by patriots. Sources say the Legislative Council will see an increase in the number of lawmakers from 70 to 90, with a section of “Election Committee” on top of the original district constituency and controversial functional constituency.

The other half of the dual-universal-suffrage plea, the Chief Executive Election, will be voted by the Election Committee, only this time there will be 1,500 members instead of 1,200, according to sources, replacing opposition district councillors with members of the Beijing-appointed Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and other pro-Beijing groups. Candidates will need to secure 188 nominations from the Committee, with no less than 15 nominations from each of the five sectors to vie for the leadership role. [[Stand News](#), [NPC Observer](#), [Bloomberg](#), [HKFP](#)]

INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS ▶

Targeted sanctions	Statements
<p>US: 24 individuals now face financial sanctions and travel bans to the US for contributing to “the erosion of the obligations of China under the joint declaration law” under the <i>Hong Kong Autonomy Act</i>. [STAT.GOV]</p> <p>EU: 37 MEPs have written to top EU officials voicing their support for sanctioning government officials responsible for the erosion of democracy in Hong Kong. [Engin Eroglu via Twitter]</p>	<p>UK considers Beijing to be in an ongoing state of non-compliance with the Sino-British Joint Declaration, considering this to be the third time in less than nine months that the Declaration has been breached. [GOV.UK]</p> <p>G7, New Zealand, Australia, Sweden expressed their concerns and urged authorities to respect democracy. [Reuters, NZ Herald]</p> <p>Chinese Embassy in Denmark urged "the Danish side to respect facts and the rule of law, and stop any interference in Hong Kong's affairs and China's internal affairs." [Chinese Embassy in Denmark].</p>

GUARD THE LEGAL SYSTEM

President of the UK's supreme court, Lord Reed of Allermuir declared in an online meeting hosted by parliament that he will step down as a non-permanent member of the Hong Kong top court, the Court of Final Appeal, if he can "no longer serve in good conscience". In the same meeting he also informed -- in light of recent developments in the city's legal system -- that he would not risk the reputation of the supreme court, leading to a regular review of the long-standing agreement and operation of sending UK judges to Hong Kong. [[Apple Daily](#)]

CIVIL AND POLITICAL FREEDOMS IN DANGER

Press Freedom

Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. was requested by the Chinese government to eliminate its media assets, including South China Morning Post. This move has sparked fears among journalists that the media house will be purchased by a Chinese entity and subjected to a much heavier editorial from Beijing. [[Wall Street Journal](#)]

On TV, the political show "LegCo Review" by Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) was pulled before its planned airing. This is the latest case of censorship by RTHK, who has pulled several shows and episodes lately due to their "indecent nature". Calvin Ho, a pro-democracy district councillor, had his voice and name removed from a video he provided to RTHK. The decision was made by the management due to their new guidelines. Calvin Ho is one of the 47 democratic politicians who are currently on trial for national security charges. [[Apple Daily](#), [RTHK](#)]

Freedom of assembly

Three judges at the court of appeal say that not only those present at a protest, but also others such as masterminds, lookouts and social media posters can be held criminally liable for "joint enterprise" doctrine, sparking fears among the populace. [[HKFP](#)]

For over 30 years, HK has been one of the few places in the world to still commemorate the June 4th massacre. In 2020, the vigil was banned by authorities citing coronavirus measures. 25 pro-democracy figures were arrested for "taking part" or "incitement to take part" in "unauthorised assembly" and still await trial. [[BBC](#)]

Freedom of association

Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF), the coalition which organised the mass peaceful protests in 2019, was questioned in March 2021 by major pro-Beijing news outlets on its right to exist. It has been accused of secretly organising large-scale riots and receiving funds from the US National Endowment for Democracy, an offence of "Collusion with a Foreign Country" under the

National Security Law (NSL). The pressure of being targeted by Beijing led to the departure of its major member organisations, including Civic Party and Democratic Party. CHRF is not the first political organisation to be threatened. In 2018, Hong Kong National Party was banned for “secession”. Demosisto disbanded on 1 July 2020 when the NSL came into force. [[HKFP](#), [BBC](#)]

Freedom of speech and expression

“Inside The Red Brick Wall”, An award-winning documentary about the siege of Polytechnic University, was pulled hours before its first public screening. Pro-government media and officials had been putting pressure on the movie, saying that it could be in violation of NSL. In China, the showing of the Oscars ceremony has been banned this year due to the nomination of “Do Not Split” by Norwegian director Anders Hammer. The Oscars, which has been broadcast in HK every year since 1969, will also be dropped by local

channels. TVB, a free-to-air TV station, said it was “purely a commercial decision.” The documentary is about the pro-democracy protests. [[SCMP](#), [Bloomberg](#), [France24](#)]

Dissident artist Ai Weiwei, who is opening an exhibition in the M+ museum, may face censorship after LegCo member Eunice Yung publicly criticised the nature of his work. Yung asked Carrie Lam in a LegCo session if there would be a department to vet museum exhibitions, to which Lam replied she would make sure museums followed national security guidelines. [[RTHK](#)]

A senior Hong Kong prosecutor, William Wong, has been suspended from his duties following allegations from pro-Beijing groups that he supports the pro-democracy movement. He received the notice only three days before the suspension would take effect. [[Apple Daily](#)]

MORE SURVEILLANCE

New SIM card registration policy

The government has announced plans to force prepaid SIM-card buyers to register their identity, sparking surveillance fears. Telecommunications companies are allowed to store the data for 12 months, and law enforcement agencies are allowed to access it without court approval under “emergency circumstances”.

A recent survey shows over 60% of respondents fear that police will get new powers to acquire personal data. The Hong Kong Journalists

Association objected to the plan, over concerns that it may be difficult for journalists to protect their sources, as the government did not clearly define “urgent and emergency situations”. A representative for the IT industry in the city's Election Committee said the plan appears to be aimed at detecting national security offences rather than curbing crime, since a criminal may not be in Hong Kong even if they are using a (virtual) number from Hong Kong.

There are over 12 million pre-paid SIM cards in use in Hong Kong, many of which are used by protesters to communicate without exposing their identity. [[HKFP \(1\)](#), [\(2\)](#)]

BRAINWASHED YET?

Free education under threat

A government- proposed overhaul of the mandatory school subject "Liberal Studies" would have all textbooks vetted and the syllabus rewritten to have two-thirds of the topics focus on China, with topics such as national security, lawfulness, and patriotism to be expanded. The government said that the reform aims to cultivate an understanding of mainland China instead of to brainwash. School heads have called for a delay for the reform, while polls conducted by unions from pro-Beijing and opposition camps respectively show polarised views among teachers. [SCMP (1), (2)]

Pro-Beijing lawmakers called for the installation of surveillance cameras in classrooms in order to

identify "bad apples" in the profession. Education authorities have since asked schools to report on the number and location of surveillance cameras on their premises. Educators are worried whether the survey was a step towards mandatory surveillance in classrooms, while two of the city's largest teachers' unions and many students have voiced their opposition to the proposal. [SCMP (1), (2), [HKFP](#), [AppleDaily](#)]

Since NSL was enacted, two teachers have been disqualified for spreading ideas of independence. Another teacher is facing possible disqualification pending an ongoing investigation on "biased materials". According to the government citing the NSL, foreign English teachers with contracts at government schools may also be required to swear allegiance to the city, adding to the 177,000 civil servants who have already done so. [[HKFP](#)]

TRAVEL BANS

from inside out

Thousands of people fled Hong Kong, including politicians and activists. But now it might not be so easy to get away. The Hong Kong Government unveiled proposed legislation in February that would give the immigration department authority to stop people from leaving. The amendment is likely to pass and take effect on 1 August. Former legislative councillor Ted Hui warned the international community that the new immigration policy could ban anyone, even "civilians who have expressed dissent", from leaving Hong Kong. Hui suggested expanding visa programs and residence eligibility rather than relying on political asylum options. [[The Guardian](#)]

The British National (Overseas) passport, a special passport for Hong Kong citizens, can no longer be used to withdraw early from the Mandatory Provident Fund, as Hong Kong authorities no longer recognise the passport as a legal document. Externally, the Hong Kong Government has also asked 14 consulates, including the Swedish, Dutch, and British ones, to reject BN(O) applicants for the working holiday visa. Britain responded that the Hong Kong government "has no authority" to order other countries not to accept a UK travel document. A Western diplomat in Hong Kong said that the government has no way to enforce its request. [[HKFP](#), [Hong Kong Standard](#)]

Lifeboat counts

UK: On 31 January, the UK government launched a new visa route for BN(O) holders and their close family. The visa would allow them to live and work in the UK for five years, after which they can apply for indefinite leave to remain. After one year of this status, they can apply for British citizenship. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the move honoured the UK's "profound ties of history and friendship" with Hong Kong. About 5.4 million Hong Kong residents are eligible for this scheme. [[BBC](#), [GOV.UK](#)]

Canada offers immigration opportunities also for non-BN(O) holders, specifically work permits for Hong Kong students and their dependents that can lead to citizenship, as well as fasten family reunification process. In 2020, over ~27 billion EUR electronic funds have been recorded transferred from Hong Kong Banks to Canada. [[Gov't Canada](#), [Global News](#)]

EU "calls on the Council and the Commission to consider the creation of a 'lifeboat' scheme for the citizens of Hong Kong in the case of any further deterioration of human rights and fundamental freedoms", [RC-B9-0169/2020](#).

Netherlands: Parliamentary parties Groenlinks and Partij voor de Dieren have recently expressed their support for a lifeboat scheme for Hongkongers. Partij voor de Dieren wants Dutch embassies to play a greater role in protecting human rights activists under pressure. Groenlinks told Netherlands for Hong Kong: "We are very much in favour of this. A lifeboat scheme for Hongkongers is also a powerful signal to China: we are doing everything we can to protect Hongkongers, here and there." [[Netherlands for Hong Kong](#)]

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- Groenlinks (Netherlands)

MORE ACTIONS ON CHINA

That we are happy to see

US: Representatives from the US and China had a two-day meeting in Alaska. During this live-streamed meeting, both sides criticized the other heavily on a variety of issues, with tough and direct tones. It was the first meeting between the nations under the Biden administration, signalling the new president's intended stance on China policy. [[Reuters](#)]

EU: Top EU leaders decided on 17 March to sanction Chinese officials over human rights abuses against Uyghurs, targeting individuals and entities with asset freezes and travel bans. This is the first EU sanction on China since the embargo following the Tiananmen Square massacre. EU foreign ministers approved the list on 22 March, which includes three Chinese officials, as well as the state-run organisation Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps Public Security Bureau. China responded by counter-sanctioning 14 European individuals and institutions, including five MEPs, three MPs, two scholars, the EU Political and Security Committee of the Council, the EU Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights, the Mercator Institute for China Studies (Germany), and the Alliance of Democracies Foundation (Denmark). The European Parliament, whose approval the China comprehensive agreement on investment (CAI) requires, said there would be no talks about CAI until China lifts its sanctions. [[Reuters](#) (1), (2), [CNA](#), [DW](#), [Miriam Lexmann via Twitter](#)]

UK: In London, roads surrounding the proposed site for the new Chinese embassy could soon be named Tiananmen Square, Uyghur Court, Hong Kong Road, Xiaobo Road (after Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo) and Tibet Hill, after councillors voted to assert “support for the freedom and diversity of our borough”. [[MSN](#)]

Netherlands: A great majority of the Dutch parliament has recently passed a motion to denote the situation of Uyghurs in China as a "genocide", which makes the Netherlands the third country to do so after Canada and the US. 55 Dutch-Chinese organisations with ties to the CCP issued a statement condemning the designation. The statement has been taken by political parties such as Groenlinks as evidence of Chinese influence within the Netherlands. [[NLTimes](#), [Nieuwspoor](#)]

GIVE THE “BLOOD COTTON” A CHANCE

Opinion

By WONG Yik Mo

China boycotts foreign brands in retaliation against western sanctions. Some Hong Kong artists are also on board with China's boycotts. Eason Chan, inter alia, said in a statement that he “would never tolerate any defaming of China”, and terminated a work contract with Adidas, despite their cooperation for ten years. Clearly the price of a work opportunity in China is eventually selling the soul.

Hongkongers are learning this every day in different new ways. That is the reason why we protested by advocating the concept of building a “yellow economy”, or “doing business with conscience”. The EU has spent years dealing with China about the Uyghurs’ rights through dialogue, and now China is denying the truth about Xinjiang completely. All the efforts of the EU are in vain.

Will these brands eventually kowtow to China? It is indeed hard to give up the Chinese market for values, but the good news is that these brands are still selling products in China every minute. The Chinese Basketball Association and Football Association still haven’t terminated the sponsorship contract with Nike. So maybe it’s right, for once, that brands can give us a chance to prove that the need with China is mutual.

Foreign companies and governments should give China a chance to learn that this is a major way in which they are earning foreign reserves, and are even helping with employment in the country. Therefore, the dependency is far from being one-direction. Meanwhile, make good use of Chinese capital from the customers to support businesses with conscience, for example the Better Cotton Initiative, and diversify production lines to other countries, especially the ones with the same values.

MASS ARRESTS CONTINUE

SAVE12: Among the 12 activists who were arrested by Chinese coastguards on 23 August 2020, eight who were convicted and jailed in Shenzhen for "illegal border crossing" were handed over to the National Security Section of HK police on 22 March. They have been jailed for seven months and may face new national security charges as they have been labelled as "separatists" by MFA China. One of them, activist Andy Li, has been officially charged for collusion with foreign powers under NSL. Authorities have refused to disclose his whereabouts but sources said he has been held in solitary confinement at a psychiatric hospital. Li's case will be heard at court on 31 March, but he will not be able to attend due to quarantine. [HKFP (1), (2), [Hua Chunying via Twitter](#), [Apple Daily](#)]

NSL47: Among the 47 politicians and activists, who were charged on 28 February under NSL over last year's unofficial primary elections, a total of 11 have been temporarily released on bail, and 4 had their bail grants revoked after government prosecutor's appeal. The next hearing is scheduled for 31 May. [[SCMP](#)]

Aug 18 protest trials: Trials began on 16 February for nine democrats, including *Apple Daily* chief Jimmy Lai, who have been charged with "organizing or taking part in an illegal march" back in August 2019. Two of the defendants pleaded guilty. The court refused to admit a report prepared by Clifford Stott, a UK expert who sat on and later criticised Hong Kong's Independent Police Complaints Council. Sentences are expected to be announced on 1 April. [[HKFP](#), [SCMP](#), [China Times](#), [Deutschlandfunk](#)]

Jimmy Lai has been in custody since 2020, being arrested for five cases so far [[Wikipedia](#)]:

- Alleged unlawful assembly on 31 August 2019. Arrested 28 February 2020 with two other pro-democracy figures, released on bail. Trial scheduled for 7-15 April 2021. [[on.cc](#)]
- Alleged participation in an unauthorized assembly on 18 August 2019. Arrested 18 April 2020 with 14 other pro-democracy figures, released on bail. Trial ongoing.
- Alleged collusion with foreign forces to request foreign governments to impose sanctions on HK and mainland Chinese officials. Arrested 10 August 2020 with 9 others, released on bail.
- Alleged fraud for violation of lease terms for office space. Police referred to a further investigation into possible NSL violation. Arrested 2 Dec 2020, bail denied after appeal by prosecutor. Case adjourned until April 2021.
- Assisting activist Andy Li to escape to Taiwan. Arrested 16 February 2021 while in prison.

Activist Tak-chi Tam (aka Fast-beat) has remained in custody since 2020, having been arrested multiple times for three cases and 14 charges, including a colonial-era offence of sedition. Tam applied in October to drop sedition charges, as they go against the Basic Law. The application will be reviewed on 31 March 2021. Although Tam has not been charged under the NSL, his cases would be heard by a security law judge. Trial for all three of his cases will be undertaken in May 2021. [[HKFP](#)]

Table 1: Hong Kong 2019 Protest Movement Database

Item	Number of people			Last update	Sources
Total arrested	10 294			31 Jan 2021	1
Total charged	> 2300			31 Jan 2021	1
Total charges over rioting (up to 10 years imprisonment)	695 (13-61 years old)			19 Feb 2021	2
	Found not guilty	Pleaded guilty	Found guilty		
	24	7	5		
	No. of trials scheduled		Scheduled until		
	317		September 2023		
Longest jail charge	5 years and 6 months (Rioting)			19 Feb 2021	2

[Sources: (1) [Hong Kong Watch, HKFP](#) (2) [Stand News](#)]

Table 2: Hong Kong National Security Law Database

Item	Number of people		Last update	Sources
Total arrested	100		2 Mar 2021	1,2
	Secession & subversion	82		
	Terrorist Activities	1		
	Collusion with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security	7		
	* Some arrestees have unknown charges.			
Total charged	56		7 Jan 2021	2
Overseas on wanted list	Around 30 according to state media		7 Jan 2021	1, 3

[Sources: (1) [Stand News](#) (2) [Bloomberg](#) (3) [SCMP](#)]

IMPORTANT DATES

March - May 2021

- 29-30 March 2021: NPCSC will convene to revise Hong Kong Basic Law Annexes, implementing NPC's Electoral Overhaul Decision.
 - 31 March 2021: Court reviews application for dropping sedition charges against activist Tak-Chi Tam. Court hearing of activist Andy Li would proceed without Li since he will be in quarantine.
 - 1 April 2021: Expected announcement of sentences for the August 18 protest trials.
 - 7-15 April 2021: Trial for charges over alleged unlawful assembly on 31 August 2019 against three veteran pro-democracy figures including Jimmy Lai.
 - 10-14 May 2021: Trial for the 14 charges on activist Tak-Chi Tam, expected to last for 5 days.
 - 31 May 2021: Hearing of NSL case for 47 opposition politicians and activists.
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End of News Digest