



THE SIX-MONTHLY REPORT ON HONG KONG

1 JULY TO 31 DECEMBER 2024

Deposited in Parliament by the
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs

27 March 2025

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FOREWORD

This 56th report to Parliament on Hong Kong covers the period from 1 July to 31 December 2024, which coincides with my first six months as Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs.

As permanent members of the UN Security Council, the UK and China play an important role in international affairs. We cannot address global challenges unless we cooperate on issues like the climate and nature crisis, health and trade. This Government wants a stable relationship with China, but one where we can robustly raise our concerns. Foreign Minister Wang Yi and I discussed this in meetings in Beijing and London, as well as the importance of using our respective influence responsibly. We must continue to have frank discussions with China, including on our mutual responsibility to uphold our international commitments.

On the fortieth anniversary of the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration last December, I reflected on Hong Kong's unique history and identity, its importance as a global city, and the deep and enduring connection between our people. This makes the erosion of rights and freedoms impacting Hong Kongers' way of life particularly concerning. 45 activists and former politicians received prison sentences under the Beijing-imposed National Security Law. There has been a politically motivated prosecution of British National Jimmy Lai under that same legislation, despite concerns for his health and international calls for his release. Two former editors of Stand News were found guilty of sedition for merely doing their jobs. And the lives of thousands arrested during the 2019 protests remain in limbo five years on as they await formal charges. In protecting national security, Hong Kong's authorities are obligated to respect human rights in accordance with the Basic Law, the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

I was deeply concerned when, on Christmas Eve, the Hong Kong police once again targeted Hong Kongers living in the UK with arrest warrants for exercising their fundamental right to freedom of expression. The Prime Minister and I have met these individuals and heard about the wider chilling effect that transnational repression is having on the Hong Kong diaspora. This Government will not tolerate attempts by any foreign powers to intimidate individuals in the UK. We pledged in our manifesto that we would stand with the more than 200,000 members of the Hong Kong community who have relocated to the UK. They make a valued contribution to our economy, society, and culture.

As major trading nations, we both owe it to our respective populations to work together towards secure and resilient growth. Hong Kong's future would look brighter if China returned to its commitments in the UN-registered Sino-British Joint Declaration. The city would be a more attractive place for businesses to operate, but most importantly, its residents would thrive in a freer environment. I welcome that in this reporting period, Hong Kong's economic, monetary, regulatory, and financial systems remained distinct from the mainland, and that Hong Kong was ranked third of 121 financial centres in

the 36th Global Financial Centres Index. Hong Kong's reputation and future as an open and vibrant city matters deeply to the UK.

This Government will continue to hold China to its legally binding obligations under the Joint Declaration and to call on them to apply the recommendations made in the 2022 UN Human Rights Council report. And this Government will continue to stand with the people of Hong Kong, strengthening the thick web of connections between our societies and remaining steadfast in commitment to the BN(O) visa route. The UK provides a welcoming home to Hong Kongers today and it will continue to do so for Hong Kongers tomorrow.

INTRODUCTION

This series of six-monthly reports reflects our continuing interest in developments in Hong Kong and our commitment to the faithful implementation of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration. This Declaration guaranteed that, for 50 years from 1997, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) would enjoy a high degree of autonomy, except in foreign and defence affairs, and that it would be vested with executive, legislative and independent judicial power. The continuation of Hong Kong's social and economic systems, lifestyle, and rights and freedoms is guaranteed under the Sino-British Joint Declaration. This arrangement was popularly referred to as 'One Country, Two Systems'.

The report structure is based on Annex I of the Joint Declaration, which outlines the agreements made by the Chinese Government. Each section summarises (in italics) the current situation in Hong Kong with relevance to the provisions of Annex I and then reports on important developments over the reporting period.

TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS

- **3 July** – The Legislative Council (LegCo) passes an amendment to the Social Workers Registration Ordinance, requiring that those convicted of national security offences are struck off the register permanently.
- **25 July** – The High Court rules that Apple Daily founder Jimmy Lai Chee-ying has a case to answer in his ongoing national security trial.
- **31 July** – The Court of Final Appeal (CFA) grants permission to former Hong Kong Alliance vice chair Chow Hang-tung and two other defendants to appeal against their convictions for failing to cooperate with the National Security Police.
- **12 August** – The CFA in a unanimous decision upholds Jimmy Lai's and six pan-democrats' convictions for knowingly taking part in a protest on 18 August 2019.

- **14 August** – The CFA grants permission to activist Tam Tak-chi to appeal against his sedition conviction and 21-month sentence.
- **29 August** – Two former Stand News journalists, Chung Pui-kuen and Patrick Lam Shiu-tung, are found guilty of conspiracy to publish seditious publications.
- **29 August** – A nine-person jury acquits seven individuals charged under the United Nations (UN) (Anti-Terrorism Measures) Ordinance.
- **30 August** - The UN Human Rights Council's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention opines that Jimmy Lai is arbitrarily detained in Hong Kong.
- **31 August** – Police arrest two individuals for sedition under the newly enacted Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (SNSO).
- **17 September** – The Epoch Times suspends the publication and distribution of their Hong Kong print edition.
- **19-20 September** – Chu Kai-pong, Chung Man-kit and Au Kin-wai, convicted of sedition under the SNSO, are sentenced to prison terms of between 10 and 14 months.
- **24 September** – Following the intervention of the National Security Committee, the High Court dismisses an application for early release of a defendant convicted of incitement to wound with intent.
- **26 September** – Two former Stand News journalists, Chung Pui-kuen and Patrick Lam Shiu-tung, are sentenced to 21 and 14 months in prison respectively after being convicted of conspiracy to publish seditious publications. Lam is released immediately due to his time served on remand and medical condition.
- **30 September** – The Rt Hon Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers, a retired UK judge and the first President of the UK Supreme Court, concludes his term of appointment on the CFA as a Non-permanent Judge.
- **16 October** – Chief Executive John Lee delivers his annual Policy Address.
- **13 November** – Chow Kim-ho is charged with publishing seditious material, becoming the fourth person charged under the SNSO.
- **14 November** – Four individuals are sentenced under the UN (Anti-Terrorism Measures) Ordinance for conspiracy to commit bombing. One of the defendants receives 23 years and 10 months' imprisonment.

- **19 November** – 45 of the ‘NSL 47’ pro-democracy politicians and activists convicted of conspiracy to commit subversion are sentenced to prison terms ranging from four to ten years.
- **20 November** – Jimmy Lai begins his defence testimony in his ongoing national security trial.
- **26 November** – The CFA rules against the Government, upholding the housing and inheritance rights of same-sex couples. It declares that the current housing policies and intestacy laws are unconstitutional.
- **5 December** – China’s State Council announces the removal and appointment of replacement secretaries for Transport and Logistics and Culture, Sports and Tourism.
- **6 December** – The High Court upholds the Hong Kong authorities’ decision to deny Adam Ma Chun-man’s early release for good behaviour in prison under provisions of the SNSO.
- **11 December** – The Protection of Critical Infrastructures (Computer Systems) Bill is introduced into LegCo for the First and Second Reading.
- **12 December** – The District Court convicts former Democratic Party lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting and six others of taking part in a “riot” following an incident inside Yuen Long station on 21 July 2019.
- **24 December** – National Security Police issue arrest warrants for a further six pro-democracy activists living outside Hong Kong (including in the UK).
- **24 December** – National Security Police, citing provisions of the SNSO, specify another seven activists living in the United States and Australia as “absconders”, imposing measures including cancelling their Hong Kong passports.

CONSTITUTION

Hong Kong continues to function as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. Its constitutional document is the Basic Law. Under the Basic Law, the Hong Kong SAR exercises a high degree of autonomy. And in line with the Joint Declaration, the Hong Kong SAR continues to be constitutionally vested with executive, legislative and independent judicial power, including that of final adjudication.

Hong Kong’s Chief Executive is selected by an Election Committee, rather than by popular vote. In 2021, China’s National People’s Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) made extensive changes to Hong Kong’s electoral system, introducing vetting for election candidates and reducing the number of LegCo members elected by the public. In May 2022, John Lee was selected as the fifth Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR. He was the only candidate.

English continues to be used in official government communications and in the courts. In addition to displaying the national flag and national emblem of the People's Republic of China, the Hong Kong SAR continues to use a regional flag and emblem of its own.

Chief Executive's Policy Address

On 16 October, Chief Executive John Lee delivered his third annual Policy Address. The Chief Executive said he would continue to follow through “the four proposals” put forward in President Xi’s 1 July 2022 speech in Hong Kong marking the 25th anniversary of the handover: improving governance; creating growth; addressing people’s livelihood concerns; and safeguarding harmony and stability.

Lee pledged to safeguard national security following the enactment of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (SNSO) in March 2024, warning against “threats to national security”. All government departments were tasked to review their codes, guidelines and procedures to ensure compliance with SNSO provisions. Lee also announced that the National Security Education Curriculum would be updated.

The Chief Executive set out proposals to launch an International Legal Talents Training Academy and establish an International Organisation for Mediation.

In addition, Lee said the Government would focus on strengthening Hong Kong’s competitiveness, attracting talent, promoting tourism, deepening collaboration within the Greater Bay Area, as well as increasing housing supply.

Ahead of the Chief Executive’s speech, five members of pro-democracy political party the League of Social Democrats, including chair Chan Po-ying, gathered outside Government Headquarters to petition for universal suffrage, as well as protection of rights and freedoms. The demonstration was allowed by the Police, with no arrests reported.

Removal and Appointment of Principal Officials of HKSAR Government

On 5 December, China’s State Council announced the appointment and removal of several principal officials of the Hong Kong Government. Mable Chan Mei-po, formerly Permanent Secretary for Transport and Logistics, and Rosanna Law Shuk-pui, formerly Director of Housing, were appointed Secretary for Transport and Logistics and Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism respectively, replacing Lam Sai-hung and Kevin Yeung Yun-hung.

In its statement, the State Council noted that “the decision was made in line with the HKSAR Basic Law and based on the nomination and suggestion of HKSAR Chief Executive John Lee”. This marked his first cabinet reshuffle in his five-year term.

Legislative Elections: Electoral Arrangements and Voter Registration

In September, the Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) announced that the number of registered voters for Geographical (directly elected) Constituencies dropped to a record low of 4.21 million, falling from approximately 4.47 million in 2021. Between 2023 and 2024, there was a significant decrease of approximately 50% and 17% in voters aged 18-20 and 20-25 respectively.

BASIC RIGHTS & FREEDOMS

Whilst the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in Hong Kong (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) remained protected in Hong Kong Law, rights and freedoms expressly required to be protected under the Joint Declaration, including "freedom of the person, of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association...of strike, of demonstration...[and] of belief" continued to be negatively impacted by the broad application of national security legislation. Same-sex partnerships are not recognised in Hong Kong, despite a CFA ruling in September 2023 that the lack of a framework for the recognition of same-sex partnerships in Hong Kong is unconstitutional.

Press and Media Freedom

Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) reports of harassment

On 13 September, the HKJA stated that dozens of journalists, their family members, as well as neighbours and associates, had been "harassed and intimidated both online and offline". Examples included trolling on social media, sending emails or letters to their home addresses and workplaces (with some warning that they could be endangering national security or breaching the SNSO), and threatening people's personal safety and employment. The HKJA said this "systematic harassment campaign", which took place between June and August, targeted journalists from at least two journalism education institutions and 13 international and local media outlets, including its executive committee.

HKJA Press Freedom Index 2023

On 20 August, the HKJA published its annual Press Freedom Index. Journalists scored Hong Kong 25 out of 100 points, falling 0.7 points from 2022. The public scored Hong Kong at 42.2 out of 100 points, an increase of 0.8 points since last year. For the fifth year in a row, more than 90% of journalist respondents said press freedom in Hong Kong had declined, with 92% of them noting that the newly enacted national security legislation would have a significant impact.

Journalist denied work visa

On 20 August, media reported that Chinese journalist Haze Fan, a Bloomberg News staff member, was refused a visa to work at Bloomberg's Hong Kong Bureau. The Hong Kong Government's Immigration Department did not comment on her case. Fan was arrested in July 2021 by the Beijing authorities for allegedly committing crimes endangering national security and released on bail without charge in January 2022. See also: Right of Abode, Travel and Immigration.

Epoch Times suspends print edition

On 6 September, *The Epoch Times*, a newspaper linked to the Falun Gong, announced that it would suspend publishing and distribution of its print edition in Hong Kong, after failing to extend the lease of its printing site. The newspaper released its

final print edition on 17 September. The Hong Kong edition of the *Epoch Times* remained operational online as of the end of this reporting period.

Freedom of Information

Access to Government Vehicle Registry

As detailed in the last Six-Monthly Report, the Hong Kong Government's Transport Department imposed restrictions on journalists' access to the vehicle registry. Any search now requires a written submission justifying the purpose of accessing vehicle records. There is no mechanism for applicants to appeal any refusals.

During an appeal hearing on 24 September, the HKJA submitted that the new restrictions "disproportionately" limited media freedom and "subverted" the June 2023 CFA ruling that journalism was a legitimate reason to obtain vehicle licensing information from a publicly accessible database. The High Court had not delivered a verdict by the end of this reporting period.

Removal of Books from Hong Kong Public Libraries

During the reporting period, public libraries across Hong Kong continued to remove books deemed "contrary to the interests of national security". The process was expedited following government auditors' recommendation for public libraries to "step up effort" in examining materials. According to local media reports, at least 32 titles were removed in 2024, and around 180 titles removed in 2023 remained unavailable.

Remembrance of the Tiananmen Square Massacre

For the fifth year in a row, marches previously held on HKSAR Establishment Day on 1 July and China's National Day on 1 October did not take place. In July, the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute (HKPORI) announced that it would stop tracking the public's attitude towards the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, after considering various factors including legal risk.

Also in July, media reported that former Hong Kong Alliance vice chair Chow Hang-tung, who remains on remand for subversion under the NSL (details provided in the "Legal System" section of this report), launched a Judicial Review in March 2024 challenging the prison authorities' decision to block her access to four books, including one on the massacre. The authorities argued that the books "twisted the Chinese government's handling of the protests", "promoted anti-government mindset" and "negatively affected the thoughts of prisoners". Chow Hang-tung argued that all four books were not banned in Hong Kong and hence the Correctional Services Department's ban was unconstitutional. The application for the Judicial Review had not been heard by the end of the reporting period. No hearing had been scheduled by the end of this reporting period.

Freedom of Assembly

No large-scale demonstrations or protests took place in 2024. Some small-scale demonstrations did take place, such as the League of Social Democrats' protest in relation to the Chief Executive's Policy Address (detailed in Constitution section).

Civil Society

On 23 July, the Hong Kong Christian Institute, founded in 1988, announced that it would cease operations by the end of the month and de-register itself, citing the “social environment”. The Institute had supported the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the 2019 protests. In a statement, the group explained it was “unable to operate in a way where it can freely carry out its missions”.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

On 10 September, the religious sector in Hong Kong held an event to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. In their joint opening speech, the six religious leaders (representing Catholicism, Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity and Islam) remarked that they “will follow the instructions of the Third Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee” in enhancing mainland and overseas connections. Catholic Bishop of Hong Kong, His Eminence Cardinal Stephen Chow Sau-yan, said the Hong Kong and mainland dioceses would work together to promote the “sinicisation” and “localisation” of Catholic churches.

Academic Freedom

In July, local media reported that Hong Kong Baptist University Students’ Union passed a motion to dissolve itself. Only two student unions of the eight publicly funded universities remain operational.

In September, Human Rights Watch and the Hong Kong Democracy Council released a special report entitled *Academic Freedom in Hong Kong under the National Security Law*. Most of the interviewees said that they self-censored regularly on Hong Kong and Chinese socio-political topics. The report added that “university administrations appear to have put up little discernible resistance to government pressure”.

In response, the Hong Kong SAR Government issued a press release calling into question the authenticity and credibility of the report.

Equality

On 26 November, the CFA ruled against the Government and upheld the housing and inheritance rights of same-sex couples. It declared that the current housing policies and intestacy laws in Hong Kong were discriminatory and unconstitutional. In response, the Hong Kong SAR Government said it respected the CFA ruling, and “will study the judgment thoroughly and seek legal advice from the Department of Justice for appropriate follow-up actions”.

LEGAL SYSTEM

The legislative power of the Hong Kong SAR is vested in LegCo. Most law in force in Hong Kong has been made locally and the Hong Kong SAR has maintained a common law system. Since March 2021, and following the imposition of the 2020 National Security Law, the UK has declared China to be in a state of ongoing non-compliance with the Sino British Joint Declaration. New laws of interest passed by the Legislative Council in this reporting period are as follows:

Amendments to the Social Workers Registration Ordinance

On 3 July 2024, the Legislative Council passed an amendment to the Social Workers Registration Ordinance. This increased the number of government-appointed members on the Social Workers Registration Board from six to 17. All members are required to swear an oath of allegiance to the SAR. The new law stipulates that social workers convicted of national security offences will be stripped of their licence permanently, with no mechanism for appeal.

The Protection of Critical Infrastructures (Computer Systems) Bill

On 25 June 2024, the Hong Kong Government proposed a new law on the cybersecurity obligations of operators of critical infrastructure. On 11 December, the Protection of Critical Infrastructures (Computer Systems) Bill was introduced into the Legislative Council for First and Second Reading. The draft legislation stipulates that critical infrastructure operators will be required to conduct regular security audits, formulate emergency response plans and report cybersecurity incidents to the regulatory authority and any relevant violation is liable for penalties of fines up to \$5,000,000 HKD (approximately £510,000). The bill was subject to legislative scrutiny as of the end of the reporting period.

JUDICIAL SYSTEM

The judicial system in place prior to the establishment of the Hong Kong SAR continued to be maintained in general. The prosecuting authority in Hong Kong remained within the Department of Justice. The courts continued to exercise independent judicial power, decide cases in accordance with the laws of the Hong Kong SAR and refer to precedents in other common law jurisdictions. In October, the World Justice Project published its Rule of Law Index 2024. Hong Kong was ranked 23rd out of 142 countries and territories globally, maintaining its 2023 position.

Judges from other common law jurisdictions continued to sit on the Court of Final Appeal (CFA). Judges continued to be appointed by the Chief Executive in accordance with recommendations by the Judicial Officers Recommendation Commission. However, Hong Kong's courts are having to adjudicate on an opaque National Security Law that places the authority of the Chief Executive on security matters above that of their own. The Hong Kong SAR maintained arrangements for reciprocal juridical assistance with some foreign states, although many of these were suspended following the imposition of the NSL.

Trial of 47 Pro-democracy Politicians and Activists under the NSL

As reported previously, in January 2021 National Security Police arrested 55 pro-democracy politicians and activists. On 28 February 2021, 47 out of the 55 arrested were formally charged with conspiracy to commit subversion under the NSL. On 30 May 2024, the High Court delivered its verdict for the 16 defendants who pleaded not guilty. 14 were found guilty and two were acquitted, marking the first ever acquittals under the NSL.

On 19 November, the High Court handed down sentences for the 45 who were found guilty, ranging from four to ten years. The Court categorised Benny Tai, Au Nok-hin,

Andrew Chiu Ka-yin and Ben Chung Kam-lun as “principal offenders”, and the rest as “active participants”. Tai received a sentence of 15 years in prison, reduced to 10 years for his guilty plea – the heaviest of all 45 convicted. Given time already served on remand, 19 defendants are due for release within a year of sentencing.

In response, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Indo-Pacific, the Hon Catherine West MP, released a statement the same day, which the Prime Minister later repeated and affirmed in Parliament as the Government’s position:

“China’s imposition of the National Security Law (NSL) in Hong Kong has eroded the rights and freedoms of Hong Kongers. Today’s sentencing is a clear demonstration of the Hong Kong authorities’ use of the NSL to criminalise political dissent.

Those sentenced today were exercising their right to freedom of speech, of assembly and of political participation, as guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Basic Law. The UK will always stand up for the people of Hong Kong, and all states should uphold their international obligations to protect these fundamental rights.”

Also on 19 November, the European Union Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy issued a statement, noting that the sentencing of the 45 pro-democracy politicians and activists represented “another unprecedented blow against fundamental freedoms, democratic participation and pluralism in Hong Kong.” G7 Foreign Ministers also condemned the sentencing in their Foreign Ministerial Meeting statement of 26 November.

By the end of the reporting period, at least 12 defendants had filed an appeal against their convictions and sentences, with another two appealing against their sentences only. Local media reported that the Department of Justice (DoJ) had no plans to appeal against the sentences for the 45 convicted defendants. Separately, the DoJ had filed an appeal against Lawrence Lau’s acquittal.

Jimmy Lai’s National Security Law and Sedition Trial

Jimmy Lai Chee-ying, founder of Apple Daily, stands accused of two counts of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces under the NSL, and one charge of conspiracy to publish seditious publications under the Crimes Ordinance. Lai has pleaded not guilty to all three charges. On 25 July, the High Court ruled that Lai has a case to answer for all three charges.

On 20 November, the Defence’s opening case began with Lai testifying in his own defence. As of the end of the reporting period, Lai’s testimony was still ongoing after more than 20 court days. His trial had sat for 113 days.

On 30 August, the UN Human Rights Council’s Working Group on Arbitrary Detention opined that Lai is arbitrarily detained in Hong Kong. The Group opined that the appropriate remedy would be to release him immediately. The Group also called upon the Government of Hong Kong to revise the provisions of the NSL to ensure that they comply with its obligations under Articles 9 and 14 of the ICCPR.

Jimmy Lai's Legal Action against PRC State-owned Newspaper *Ta Kung Pao*

In June 2020, Chinese state-owned newspaper *Ta Kung Pao* published an article accusing Apple Daily founder Jimmy Lai Chee-ying of planning to abscond from Hong Kong ahead of the enactment of the NSL. In November 2020, Lai filed a writ asking the Court to bar the newspaper from publishing similar content, in which he demanded an apology and compensation from the newspaper.

During a High Court hearing on 3 October 2024, Lai requested that a jury be established to deliver a verdict on whether the article contained malice. Former Secretary for Justice Rimsky Yuen, representing *Ta Kung Pao*, submitted that trial by a judge alone would be more appropriate and efficient.

On 10 October, Judge Queeny Au-Yeung rejected Lai's request, ruling that the case involves "complexity" and requires "prolonged examination of documents", and is therefore "not suitable" for jury trial. Judge Au-Yeung noted that the "modern trend" is against having a jury in defamation cases, and her decision "effectively adopted the UK's reasoning on why jury trials should be discretionary rather than mandatory". She ordered Lai to pay costs of \$300,000 HKD (approximately £30,000) for the proceedings.

National Security Police's Arrest Warrants for Activists Living Outside Hong Kong

On 24 December 2024, National Security Police issued arrest warrants for six activists living outside Hong Kong, including four currently living in the UK, offering \$1,000,000 HKD (approximately £100,000) for information leading to their arrests and prosecutions. The six activists are Carmen Lau Ka-man, Tony Chung Hon-lam, Chung Kim-wah, Victor Ho Leung-mau, Joseph Tay and Chloe Cheung Hei-ching. They were accused of NSL offences including foreign collusion, secession and subversion. Police also froze their Hong Kong assets. The Hong Kong authorities accused the six activists of calling for Hong Kong's independence and for foreign sanctions against China and Hong Kong, criticising them for "betraying" China and "neglecting" the interests of Hong Kong. As of the end of this reporting period, there are 19 arrest warrants issued for individuals overseas by the Hong Kong Police for national security offences.

On 24 December, the Hong Kong National Security Police also used their powers under the SNSO to label seven activists living overseas – for whom arrest warrants were issued on 3 July and 14 December 2023 – as "absconders". The measures taken against the seven individuals included cancelling their Hong Kong passports, barring any person from providing them funds and resources, leasing properties, and establishing a joint venture or partnership with them, as well as suspending some of their qualifications.

In response to the arrest warrants issued on 24 December, the Foreign Secretary, Rt Hon David Lammy MP, released a statement the same day:

“On Christmas Eve, the Hong Kong police once again targeted individuals for exercising their right to freedom of expression, including British National Overseas (BNO) passport holders living in the UK.

We will not tolerate any attempts by foreign Governments to coerce, intimidate, harass, or harm their critics overseas, especially in the UK.

We call on Beijing to repeal the National Security Law, including its extraterritorial reach. And we call on the Hong Kong authorities to end their targeting of individuals in the UK and elsewhere who stand up for freedom and democracy.

The UK will always stand up for the rights of the people of Hong Kong. This Government is deeply committed to supporting all members of the Hong Kong community who have relocated to the UK and made valuable contributions to life in the UK. Ensuring their continued safety remains a priority.”

The other two wanted activists are reportedly living in Canada. In a statement, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, Mélanie Joly, said: “This attempt by Hong Kong authorities to conduct transnational repression abroad, including by issuing threats, intimidation or coercion against Canadians or those in Canada, will not be tolerated”. The EU and US also issued statements denouncing arrest warrants.

Implementation of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (Article 23 National Security Legislation)

Since its enactment on 23 March until the end of the reporting period, a total of 15 people had been arrested under the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (SNSO). A total of four individuals had been charged. All four charges were for sedition.

Three defendants were convicted during this reporting period. All three pleaded guilty. One was sentenced to 10 months in prison and the other two were sentenced to 14 months in prison.

The **convictions** were as follows:

- **19 September:** Chu Kai-pong, was sentenced to 14 months in prison for wearing a T-shirt in public with a “seditious” slogan on it. The T-shirt said, “Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times”. Chief Magistrate Victor So Wai-tak ruled that Chu had intended to incite hatred against the Hong Kong SAR Government by wearing the T-shirt.

The same day, Chung Man-kit was sentenced to 10 months in prison for writing graffiti on the back of seats on public buses. Chief Magistrate Victor So said the “publicly visible” slogans the defendant had written endangered national security. The slogans included “Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times” and “Hong Kong independence, the only way out”.

The Hong Kong SAR Government released a statement following the first convictions under the SNSO, noting it “demonstrates that any person intending to endanger national security or incite social hatred can never escape sanctions of the law”. The Government also highlighted the “unambiguity” of the provisions of the SNSO, adding that “clear lines have been drawn between unlawful seditious acts and expressions, and lawful constructive criticisms” under the new security law.

- **20 September:** Au Kin-wai was sentenced to 14 months in prison for posting statements and videos on social media calling for the dissolution of the Chinese Communist Party and for President Xi Jinping and Chief Executive John Lee to step down. Chief Magistrate Victor So noted that the content had “clearly” attempted to challenge China’s sovereignty.

On 31 August, police arrested a 41-year-old man and a 28-year-old woman for sedition, for allegedly placing memorial lanterns across Hong Kong and forging a suicide note, linking a person’s death to Hong Kong’s political developments and the 2019 protests. Both were granted bail pending investigation.

On 13 November, a 57-year-old man was charged with publishing seditious publications. He was denied bail.

Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (National Security Law)

Beijing imposed a National Security Law (NSL) on the Hong Kong SAR on 30 June 2020. According to the Hong Kong Security Bureau, since its imposition until 1 November 2024, a total of 304 people had been arrested for national security offences and 176 charged, with at least 161 people convicted or awaiting sentence.

The Hong Kong Alliance

As detailed in the last Six-Monthly Report, three former committee members of the disbanded Hong Kong Alliance, including vice chair Chow Hang-tung, filed an appeal against their convictions for failing to cooperate with National Security Police. The case concerned the Alliance’s refusal to hand over details of its financial reports and activities to aid investigation, thereby breaching the implementation rules of the NSL. The defendants were given four and a half months’ imprisonment as a result.

On 31 July, the Court of Final Appeal (CFA) granted permission to Chow and two other defendants to appeal against their convictions. They sought leave directly from the CFA after the High Court dismissed the application on 14 March.

National Security Offenders Denied Remission and Early Release

As recorded in the last Six-Monthly Report, on 25 March 2024, Adam Ma Chun-man, imprisoned for five years for incitement to secession under the NSL, was denied early release due to changes to prison rules under provisions of the SNSO. The provisions came into effect two days before his anticipated release. The amended rules state that those imprisoned for national security offences are not eligible for early release unless the Commissioner of Correctional Services is satisfied that the release “will not be

contrary to the interests of national security". Subsequently, Ma brought a judicial review of the denial, the first ever legal challenge against the SNSO.

During a High Court hearing on 22 October, Ma's Defence argued that the new rules violated procedural fairness, emphasising that it was a "legitimate" expectation for him to be released early.

On 6 December, High Court Judge Alex Lee Wan-tang ruled against Ma, noting that remission is discretionary, and, referencing a UK House of Lords' judgment, that the Executive is in a more appropriate position than the Judiciary to ascertain whether early release would be detrimental to the interests of national security.

National Security Committee's Decision on Remission and Early Release

On the Hong Kong SAR Establishment Day on 1 July 2021, a 50-year-old man stabbed a police officer and then himself immediately afterwards, resulting in his death. Following the incident, 30 former members of the disbanded Hong Kong University Students' Union Council passed a resolution expressing "deep sadness" over the death of the attacker and appreciating his "sacrifice to Hong Kong". Police initially charged four ex-members with advocating terrorism under the NSL, but the charge was dropped after the defendants pleaded guilty to an alternative, non-NSL offence of incitement to wound with intent. In October 2023, the defendants received prison sentences of 24 months each, reduced to 15 months after the Court of Appeal allowed their sentencing appeals on 13 September 2024.

One of the defendants in this case, Kinson Cheung King-sang, applied to the High Court for immediate release, arguing that he should be entitled to a one-third remission of sentence customarily granted for good behaviour in prison. On 24 September, High Court Judge Anna Lai Yuen-kee dismissed his application, noting that the Chief Executive had issued a certificate to certify that the case, despite not being an NSL or SNSO offence, involved national security, and the National Security Committee (NSC) had concluded that Cheung's early release would be detrimental to national security. The application was refused on the grounds that NSC decisions are not subject to judicial review.

Use of Sedition Laws under the Crimes Ordinance

Stand News

The verdict in the "Stand News" case, after being adjourned three times, was delivered on 29 August 2024. Chung and Lam were found guilty of conspiracy to publish seditious publications. The Court ruled that 11 out of the 17 articles put forward by the prosecution were seditious. In his judgment, Judge Kwok Wai-kin noted that the news outlet promoted "localism", with the intention to "smear and vilify" the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities and incite hatred against them.

In response, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Indo-Pacific, the Hon Catherine West MP, said:

“Journalism is not a crime.

Yet two former Stand News editors have been found guilty of sedition in Hong Kong today, for doing their job.

Free media is essential if societies & economies are to prosper. But HK has dropped from 18 to 135 in World Press Freedom Index since 2002.”

On 9 September, the Media Freedom Coalition published a statement signed by 23 member states, including the UK:

“The undersigned members of the Media Freedom Coalition are gravely concerned about the guilty verdict against the former editors of Stand News and the wider suppression of media freedom in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Journalism is not a crime. Chung Pui-kuen and Patrick Lam have been prosecuted for over two and a half years. Their guilty verdict falls against a wider backdrop of increased media self-censorship and the hostility by Hong Kong authorities against local and foreign journalists and their representative bodies, especially since the imposition of the National Security Law in June 2020. The introduction of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance in March 2024 is further hampering the free exchange of opinions and information which is vital to Hong Kongers, Hong Kong’s institutions, and its international reputation as an open place to do business.

Media freedom has been a central factor for Hong Kong’s success in the past and is an essential foundation of a free and inclusive society. To enable media workers to safely fulfil their legitimate role in scrutinising government policy and actions, journalism should not be prosecuted under the guise of national security.

We urge the Hong Kong and China authorities to abide by their international human rights commitments and legal obligations, and to respect freedom of the press and freedom of speech in Hong Kong, in line with the Basic Law and the recommendations of China’s 2024 Universal Periodic Review and Hong Kong’s 2022 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights review.”

On 26 September, the Court sentenced Chung to 21 months in prison. Lam received 14 months’ imprisonment but was released immediately due to his time served on remand and his health condition. Judge Kwok Wai-kin noted that the defendants were “not doing genuine journalistic work” but took part in the “so-called resistance” against the government. The same day, Reporters Without Borders released a statement to condemn the verdict, describing it as a “dangerous precedent” and calling for the “outrageous judgment” to be overturned.

On 22 October, media reported that Lam had filed an appeal to the High Court against his conviction.

Tam Tak-chi

Activist Tam Tak-chi sought leave to appeal against his conviction and sentence, after being found guilty of seven counts of “uttering seditious words” and given a 21-month prison sentence in 2022. He supported his application with a 2023 judgment of the Judicial Committee of the UK Privy Council, which supported his contention that an intention to incite violence is an essential element of sedition offences.

In March 2024, the Court of Appeal dismissed his application, maintaining that intention to incite violence is “not a necessary ingredient” of sedition, and seditious intention must be interpreted with reference to the “specific legal and social landscape” in Hong Kong. Tam then applied for leave to appeal to the Court of Final Appeal (CFA).

Use of United Nations Anti-Terrorism Law

On 23 April 2024, the trial began of seven individuals charged under the United Nations (UN) (Anti-Terrorism Measures) Ordinance, marking the first time the ordinance was invoked in Hong Kong. Six defendants were charged with conspiracy to commit bombing of prescribed objects, with another one charged with conspiracy to assist commission of terrorist acts. All of them pleaded not guilty to their charges.

On 29 August, a nine-person jury, in a 7-2 vote, found all seven defendants not guilty of their respective conspiracy charges, concluding the trial after a total of 83 days. The defendants were released immediately except one who was found guilty of an offence under the Crimes Ordinance.

Three other defendants, who pleaded guilty to the same charges, were sentenced on 14 November. High Court Judge Judianna Wai Ling Barnes sentenced defendant Ng Chi-hung to 22 years and four months in prison for being the mastermind of the alleged bomb plot – the longest prison sentence ever handed down by a Hong Kong court for a national security offence. The second defendant, Wong Chun-keung, who became an accomplice witness, received 13 years and six months’ imprisonment. The remaining defendant, Pang Kwan-ho, was jailed for 10 years. The Court described the case as “serious”, noting that the defendants intended to kill police officers to subvert the Hong Kong SAR Government.

Non-permanent Judges on the Court of Final Appeal

On 30 September, the Judiciary announced that the Rt. Hon Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers, the first President of the UK Supreme Court and Non-Permanent Judge on Hong Kong’s CFA, “did not wish to have his term of appointment extended” after 12 years of service due to “personal reasons”. Lord Phillips’ term of office at the CFA expired on 30 September 2024.

Since Beijing’s imposition of the NSL in 2020, a total of nine overseas non-permanent judges have left the CFA. At the end of the reporting period, six overseas judges from common law jurisdictions were serving on the CFA, including two from the United Kingdom and four from Australia. The Chief Justice stressed that the operation of the CFA “will not be affected by any change in membership of the Court”.

18 August 2019 Protest Conviction Appeals

As recorded in the previous Six-monthly Reports, seven pro-democracy politicians, activists and pan-democrat legislators, including Martin Lee Chu-ming and Apple Daily publisher Jimmy Lai Chee-ying, appealed against their convictions for participating in the 18 August 2019 protest after being cleared by the CFA of “organising” it. On 12 August, a panel of five CFA judges in a unanimous decision upheld the pan-democrats’ convictions for “knowingly taking part” in the 18 August 2019 protest. All seven defendants had served their jail sentences fully before the verdict.

Injunction in relation to ‘Glory to Hong Kong’ Song

‘Glory to Hong Kong’ is a song written during the 2019 anti-Extradition Bill protests. As recorded in previous Six-monthly Reports, in May 2024, the Court of Appeal (CA) allowed the Hong Kong SAR Government’s appeal by granting an interim injunction to prohibit (on national security grounds) four types of unlawful acts related to the song.

On 18 July, the CA dismissed an appeal by former Hong Kong Alliance vice chair Chow Hang-tung against its decision, ruling that her contention was “not reasonably arguable” as she was neither a defendant nor party to the civil injunction proceedings. The court described Chow’s application as “totally without merit”, ordering her to pay \$100,000 HKD (approximately £10,000) to cover litigation costs.

This reporting period saw further instances of compliance after Google blocked Hong Kong viewers’ access to all 32 videos listed in the injunction. Media reported that streaming platforms including Apple Music and Spotify had made the original version of the song inaccessible to users living in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Canada and the United Kingdom.

On 6 August, 71-year-old Li Jiexin was jailed for 18 days after being convicted of six offences in relation to playing a musical instrument and collecting money in public without permit. National Security Police arrested him following investigations which found that he performed ‘Glory to Hong Kong’ outside MTR stations in 2023.

Prosecutions under the National Anthem Ordinance

On 19 August 2024, 22-year-old Chan Pak-yui, diagnosed with autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, was sentenced to eight weeks in prison after being found guilty of insulting the Chinese national anthem during an international volleyball match held in Hong Kong. Magistrate Kestrel Lam Tsz-hong ruled that the defendant had deliberately insulted the national anthem, noting Chan in his police statement confessed that he “disliked” the Chinese national team and anthem. Chan subsequently filed an appeal against both conviction and sentence. In October, local media reported that the defendant had abandoned his appeal and agreed to serve his sentence immediately.

On 12 November, 19-year-old university student Lau Pun-hei was charged with insulting the national anthem during a 2026 World Cup qualifying match held in Hong Kong in June. Lau allegedly turned his back to the field when the anthem was played, in the presence of plainclothes police officers who were observing and filming

spectators. The defendant was granted bail in his first mention hearing at the Magistrates' Court on 19 November. The case was adjourned to 6 January 2025.

Outstanding Arrests in relation to 2019 Protests

According to Hong Kong Police statistics, at least 10,279 people were arrested in relation to the 2019 anti-extradition bill protests. As of March 2024, 2,961 had undergone or were undergoing judicial proceedings.

On 28 October, Security Secretary Chris Tang said that there is no time limit for prosecuting the more than 7,000 individuals who still have not been charged. He denied it was unfair that those who were arrested but not charged have waited for more than five years for a prosecutorial decision.

21 July 2019 Yuen Long Incident

As reported in previous Six-monthly Reports, former Democratic Party lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting, along with six others, were charged in August 2020 for taking part in a "riot", following an incident inside Yuen Long station on 21 July 2019. Lam and six other defendants pleaded not guilty to rioting.

On 12 December 2024, all seven defendants were convicted of rioting. The District Court adjourned sentencing until 27 February 2025.

PUBLIC SERVICE

An updated Civil Service Code came into effect just prior to the start of the reporting period. Its terms risk undermining the requirement for the appointment and promotion of public servants to be based on only "qualifications, experience and ability" and for the maintenance of "Hong Kong's previous system of recruitment, employment, assessment, discipline, training and management for the public service."

Updated Civil Service Code

The renewed Civil Service Code, which took effect in June, reinforces the requirement of "upholding the constitutional order and national security". It states that "all civil servants must promote and implement government policies, decisions and actions", and they cannot, by any means, criticise any government policies or "support opposing views of any other party".

On 5 August, Secretary for the Civil Service Ingrid Yeung Ho Poi-yan said that the updated Code will "have no impact" on those participating in civil service unions as they can continue to express "different" views relating to issues such as pay, benefits and occupational safety. The Civil Service Bureau has stated that violation of the Code could result in disciplinary action, including dismissal.

FINANCE

Over the reporting period, the Hong Kong SAR Government continued to have the formal autonomy to manage its own “financial matters, including disposing of its financial resources and drawing up its budgets and its final accounts”.

In July, media reporting suggested that some Chinese state-backed financial institutions sought to recoup distributed pay from employees. While a more common practice in Mainland China, this has not previously extended to Hong Kong.

During his 16 October Policy Address, Chief Executive John Lee announced the creation of four taskforces on a) attracting talent; b) developing the low-altitude economy (e.g. logistics and tourism via aircraft); c) tourism and d) the silver economy (i.e. ageing population). Other measures included reduced excise duties on alcohol above a certain threshold (exceeding 30% ABV) and enhancing Hong Kong’s role in RMB clearing, gold trading and connect schemes.

ECONOMIC SYSTEM

The Hong Kong SAR Government maintained its “capitalist economic and trade systems” during the reporting period, retaining formal autonomy in economic and trade decisions. Hong Kong continues to be a separate customs territory and engages independently with other jurisdictions through its membership of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

On 5 July, the Legislative Council (LegCo) gazetted the ‘Extension of Government Leases Ordinance’. Around 2,400 leases will expire from June 2025 to 29 June 2047 and approximately 300,000 leases will expire on 30 June 2047. This will allow those general-purpose land leases (commercial, residential and industrial) to be automatically extended for another 50 years upon expiry, to provide businesses with additional confidence in Hong Kong’s property rights beyond 2047.

On 9 October, Hong Kong SAR Secretary for Finance Paul Chan and Deputy China International Trade Representative of the People’s Republic of China Ministry of Commerce, Ms Li Yongjie, signed the Second Agreement Concerning Amendment to the Agreement on Trade in Services of the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement, furthering liberalisation in services trade and investment between Hong Kong and Mainland China. The Agreement will enter into force on 1 March 2025.

On 15 October, the Fraser Institute’s Economic Freedom of the World 2024 Annual Report ranked Hong Kong as the world’s freest economy out of 165 jurisdictions, regaining its position from Singapore. The report was based on data from 2022. Despite the top ranking, the report warned that Hong Kong’s rating continued “to fall precipitously” between 2018 and 2022.

On 20 October 2024, Dr Kelvin Wong was appointed as the new Chair of the Securities and Futures Commission. Dr Wong will serve until October 2027.

On 28 October 2024, Hong Kong’s Financial Services and Treasury Bureau released a ‘Policy Statement on Responsible Application of AI in the Financial Market’,

demonstrating their commitment to supporting the adoption of technologies while providing guidance to the sector.

On 8 November, Xia Baolong, Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office, convened Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee, HKSARG Secretaries, and leading business figures in Shenzhen for a symposium. He encouraged Hong Kong's private sector to "recognise their duties" in supporting the Northern Metropolis project.

Between 18 to 20 November, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) hosted the Global Financial Leaders Investment Summit. Chief Executive John Lee attended the 2024 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting on 16 November held in Lima, where he witnessed the signing of a Free Trade Agreement between Hong Kong and Peru. The Financial Stability Board Plenary met in Hong Kong between the 3 and 4 of December.

MONETARY SYSTEM

The Hong Kong SAR maintained its status as an international financial centre and was ranked third of 121 financial centres in the 36th Global Financial Centres Index. Hong Kong's monetary and financial systems continued to be overseen by its four major independent regulators.

The Hong Kong SAR Government continued to have formal discretion over its monetary and financial policies, intended to safeguard "the free operation of financial business and the free flow of capital within, into and out of the jurisdiction." No capital or exchange control policy was applied to the SAR in the reporting period. The authority to issue Hong Kong currency remained vested in the Hong Kong SAR Government. Markets for foreign exchange, gold, securities and futures continued free of interference.

The Exchange Fund continued to be managed and controlled by the Hong Kong SAR Government, via the HKMA, and continued to regulate the exchange value of the Hong Kong dollar, within a band of HKD \$7.75 to \$7.85 to one US dollar. As of the 6 December, the official foreign currency reserve assets of Hong Kong amounted to USD 425.1 billion, representing over five times the currency in circulation.

SHIPPING

Hong Kong's port maintained its status as an international maritime centre. It continued to operate as a free port. Hong Kong continued to host well-established professional ship management services providers, including in maritime insurance, ship finance and port infrastructure.

The Hong Kong SAR Government maintained autonomy in maritime policy and administrative decisions. Hong Kong has ratified 37 out of 59 International Maritime Organisation conventions and denounced three others. The Mercantile Marine Office continued to register local seafarers and regulate their employment terms and conditions.

The Hong Kong SAR Government, via the Marine Department, continued to operate the Hong Kong Shipping Registry (HKSAR) separate from mainland China. Hong Kong maintained autonomy to issue certificates for registered ships under its own legislation.

On 16 October, in his 2024 Policy Address, the Chief Executive John Lee announced that the Hong Kong Port and Maritime Board would be reformed and reconstituted as the Hong Kong Port and Maritime Development Board, with additional funding to support it to undertake greater promotional work for Hong Kong's marine sector in Mainland China and overseas.

On 15 November, the Hong Kong SAR Government announced an Action Plan on Green Maritime Fuel Bunkering, which set out range of targets and activities to support the decarbonisation of Hong Kong's shipping sector.

CIVIL AVIATION

The Hong Kong SAR Government continued to manage civil aviation in accordance with the provisions of the Joint Declaration. Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) continued to facilitate both commercial and tourism flows and enabled the city to maintain its status as an international and regional aviation centre.

EDUCATION

The Hong Kong SAR Government has maintained (as is stipulated in the Joint Declaration) an education system that covers kindergarten, primary, secondary, tertiary and international schooling. The languages of instruction at primary and secondary levels of public education continued to be English and Cantonese. Autonomy for post-secondary education institutions is largely upheld (see academic freedom), although the Hong Kong SAR Government has set out that under the NSL, students are required to complete a mandatory course covering the Basic Law and NSL.

Patriotic Education

On 3 September, the Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence was officially renamed the Hong Kong Museum of the War of Resistance and Coastal Defence to spotlight the Second Sino-Japanese War from 1937 to 1945. The Chief Executive John Lee called the museum one of the "important cultivation bases for promoting patriotism". He highlighted the role of the museum in enhancing the understanding of the public, particularly young people, about China's wartime history, adding that the authorities would "spare no effort" to promote patriotic education and strengthen people's national pride.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND UK BILATERAL RELATIONS

The Hong Kong SAR Government continued to participate as members of delegations of the PRC, such as at the G20 and COP. As envisaged by the Joint Declaration, the PRC continued to extend to the Hong Kong SAR a wide range of international agreements to which it is party. The decision to extend the application of international treaties signed by the PRC to Hong Kong continued with consultation of HKSAR, as

required by the Joint Declaration. The Hong Kong SAR Government continued to implement agreements with states, regions and relevant international organisations in the economic, trade, financial and monetary, shipping, communications, tourism, cultural and sports fields.

Hong Kong participated in relevant international economic and trade organisations and forums such as the WTO and the APEC, as well as other international trade agreements.

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority continued to participate in multilateral institutions and international forums and conferences, some as a separate member and others as a member of the PRC delegation.

There continued to be no international organisation that Hong Kong participates in as a separate member and where the PRC is not a member.

The Central People's Government continued to be responsible for bilateral agreements with foreign governments for consular missions in Hong Kong, as set out in the Joint Declaration. Similarly, the Central People's Government continued to enter into agreements and arrangements for the establishment of offices of International Organisations in Hong Kong.

Consular missions in the Hong Kong SAR, including the British Consulate-General, continued to operate. 14 Economic and Trade Offices continued to operate overseas and seven in the mainland on behalf of the Hong Kong SAR Government.

British National (Overseas)

On 28 November, the Home Office published the latest UK immigration statistics. Following its launch on 31 January 2021, until September 2024, there were approximately 224,200 applications, with approximately 215,612 visas granted.

The Hong Kong SAR Government continued not to recognise the BN(O) passport as a valid travel document.

Visits

From 26 to 28 September, Hong Kong Financial Secretary Paul Chan Mo-po visited the UK. On 26 September, he attended the annual *Hong Kong Trade Development Council Dinner* in London. He also met with Tulip Siddiq, the then-UK Economic Secretary to the Treasury, and Andrew Bailey, the Governor of the Bank of England. On 27 September, Chan attended a Hong Kong Association lunch and met representatives from across the UK's financial, business and political communities the same day.

Between 14 and 15 November, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Indo-Pacific, the Hon Catherine West MP, visited Hong Kong. She met with Chief Secretary for Administration Eric Chan Kwok-ki and Financial Secretary Paul Chan. The Minister discussed areas of cooperation and challenged on areas of contention. After her visit, the Minister underscored the importance of regular, frank exchanges with the Hong Kong authorities, and continuing to listen to Hong Kong's diverse voices.

Trade and Investment

Hong Kong represents the UK's 18th largest global trading partner, having accounted for 1.4% of total UK trade in the four quarters to the end of Q3 2024. Total trade in goods and services (exports plus imports) between the UK and Hong Kong SAR was £24.5 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q3 2024, a decrease of 15.6% or £4.5 billion from the previous year.

On 24 September, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of the People's Republic of China in Hong Kong, Cui Jianchun, attended the BritCham Hong Kong Summit 2024. In his speech, Cui recognised the contribution of the local British Chamber of Commerce to "maintaining Hong Kong's stability and prosperity" as well as "promoting the development of UK-China relations".

Hong Kong continued to seek accession to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Free Trade Agreement in this reporting period.

Culture

Between 1 July and 31 December 2024, the British Council delivered 1,854 university and school entrance exams and 1,750 UK professional qualifications. 5,284 Young Learners and 1,166 Adult students attended in-person English language courses between in the same period. The British Council also delivered 33,580 IELTS tests.

In July and August, the British Council conducted pre-departure briefings for over 900 students going to study in the UK. 4,989 Study UK visas were issued to Hong Kong students in September 2024, and the British Council held a Study UK Universities Roadshow for prospective university students in September.

In October, the British Council successfully organised the third edition of SPARK. With the theme of health and wellbeing, the three-day festival provided a platform to promote UK arts, culture, education and the English language. Comprising 36 performances, artworks, workshops and talks co-created by 20 UK and 20 Hong Kong arts and education institutions, SPARK attracted approximately 9,000 participants.

In September, the UK Department for Business and Trade (DBT) led an outward mission showcasing British sustainable fashion at CENTRESTAGE, a premier tradeshow in Hong Kong and a key component of Hong Kong Fashion Fest. Eight British fashion labels participated.

Since 2021, the Government has provided a Welcome Programme to support BN(O)s as they integrate into their new communities in the UK. This support includes funding for English language and destitution support, a network of regional Welcome Hubs, support for Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations working with this community and a dedicated GOV.UK page available in English and Cantonese. Through the Welcome Programme, BN(O)s have accessed 17,061 English language courses and received over 283,000 instances of support through VCSE organisations.

DEFENCE

The maintenance of public order in the Hong Kong SAR continued to be the responsibility of the Hong Kong SAR Government. There has been no evidence that military forces sent by the Central People's Government to be stationed in the SAR for the purpose of defence have interfered in the internal affairs of the city. Expenditure for these military forces have been borne by the Central People's Government.

RIGHT OF ABODE, TRAVEL & IMMIGRATION

The Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department remained the sole issuing authority for the Hong Kong SAR passport. Nationals who were entitled to visa-free access to Hong Kong prior to the establishment of the SAR continued to enjoy visa-free access. As of the end of the reporting period, nationals of 170 countries were entitled to visa-free access to Hong Kong.

Entry denials

On 8 September, German journalist David Missal, departing Beijing for Hong Kong, was denied entry to Hong Kong without explanation after being held and questioned for 13 hours by immigration officials at the airport. In response to media enquiries, the Immigration Department said it “acts in accordance with the law and relevant policies”. Missal was amongst the winners of the 2019 Human Rights Press Awards.

On 14 September, a French photojournalist working for Associated Press, Louise Delmotte, was denied entry to Hong Kong as a tourist without explanation, according to local media reports. This followed the Immigration Department's earlier refusal to renew her work visa. Delmotte won multiple photojournalism awards, including for her exclusive photos of Apple Daily founder Jimmy Lai in prison in August 2023.

In a statement, the Hong Kong Press Photographers Association urged the immigration authorities to “increase communication with the journalism industry and provide more open and transparent guidelines on visa approvals, in order to maintain the long-lasting position of Hong Kong's high level and positive image of press freedom”. In response, Chief Executive John Lee said the Immigration Department was “acting in the same way as immigration authorities in other jurisdictions” by reviewing the “characteristics” of each entry and examining it “in accordance with the policy and the laws”.

CONCLUSION

Under the Sino-British Joint Declaration, China agreed that Hong Kong would enjoy a high degree of autonomy. China also guaranteed the continuation of Hong Kong's social and economic systems, lifestyle, and protection of rights and freedoms. During this reporting period, it's clear that China remains in a state of non-compliance with the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

While the detail set out in this report indicates that Hong Kong retains autonomy across the economic, monetary and financial spheres, and that Hong Kong's common law and judicial systems continue to independently adjudicate civil, commercial and

criminal cases, Hong Kong's national security infrastructure continues to impinge on the rights and freedoms of individuals in Hong Kong and overseas.

National security is a primary concern for all governments, but this must be balanced against the rights and freedoms of individuals, as outlined by internationally accepted standards. These standards set high thresholds for limiting freedom of expression on national security grounds, including an intent to incite imminent violence.

As permanent members of the UN Security Council, the UK and China play an important global role. The UK believes that meeting the commitments of the Joint Declaration remains the best way for China to ensure Hong Kong's security and global stability. As a co-signatory to the Joint Declaration, the UK will continue to hold China to account on the legally binding promises made.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

British National (Overseas)	BN(O)
Central Government Liaison Office	CGLO
Conference of the Parties	COP
Court of Appeal	CA
Court of Final Appeal	CFA
Central People's Government	CPG
Department of Justice	DoJ
Economist Intelligence Unit	EIU
European Union	EU
Foreign Correspondents' Club	FCC
Hong Kong Arts Development Council	HKADC
Hong Kong Bar Association	HKBA
Hong Kong Journalists Association	HKJA
Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office	HKMAO
Hong Kong Monetary Authority	HKMA
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region	HKSAR
Independent Commission Against Corruption	ICAC
Legislative Council	LegCo
National People's Congress Standing Committee	NPCSC
National Security Committee	NSC
National Security Law	NSL
Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	MFA
People's Republic of China	PRC
Reporters Without Borders	RSF
United Nations	UN
UN Human Rights Council	HRC