



**THE SIX-MONTHLY REPORT ON HONG KONG  
1 JULY TO 31 DECEMBER 2025**

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

**26 March 2026**

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## **FOREWORD**

The 58th six-monthly report covers the period from 1 July to 31 December 2025. I want to begin by once again expressing my heartfelt condolences to all those affected by the harrowing Tai Po fire. As His Majesty the King said, in the face of such appalling tragedy, strength comes from supporting one another, and we see that strength in the ongoing collective efforts to rebuild.

Over this reporting period, we have continued to see developments that undermine Hong Kong's political autonomy and pluralism. The Beijing-imposed National Security Law (NSL) continued to expand in scope and practice. Despite assurances that it would target only a "handful" of criminals, Hong Kong authorities made a further 69 arrests in 2025, including for displaying political slogans, peaceful protest and organising petitions.

The Hong Kong authorities also tried to silence criticism overseas. In July, they issued another round of arrest warrants and bounties, including those against members of the Hong Kong diaspora in the UK. At the time, as Home Secretary, I made clear, alongside then Foreign Secretary David Lammy, that such actions represent transnational repression and are wholly unacceptable.

In this context, the UK condemns the politically motivated prosecution in the NSL trial of British national Jimmy Lai. Following the verdict, I instructed officials to summon the Chinese Ambassador and expressed the UK's condemnation in the strongest terms. After Mr Lai received a 20-year sentence, the UK expanded the British National (Overseas) route to reaffirm our commitment to the people of Hong Kong. We will continue to use every opportunity to press China to release Mr Lai. The Prime Minister raised his case directly with President Xi during his visit to Beijing in January.

These actions sit within a wider, consistent, long term, and strategic approach to managing the UK's relationship with China, rooted firmly in UK and global interests. Only through sustained engagement can the UK cooperate where we can whilst also challenging China where we must.

Hong Kong is central to that approach. We will continue supporting British businesses operating in the city. We will strengthen cooperation with Hong Kong authorities where it protects UK security, including combatting serious organised crime. And we will be unwavering in our support for the rights, freedoms and autonomy China guaranteed to Hong Kong under the legally binding Joint Declaration and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. That remains the best way to maintain a stable and thriving Hong Kong which serves the interests of its people, the UK, and China.

**Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs**

## 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 report structure is based on Annex I of the Joint Declaration, which outlines the agreements made by the Chinese Government. Each section summarises the current situation in Hong Kong with relevance to the provisions of Annex I and then reports on important developments over the reporting period (1 July – 31 December 2025).*

## TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS

- **3 July** – The Hong Kong SAR Government introduces an alternative framework for legal recognition of same-sex partnerships.
- **7 July** – The Hong Kong Government proposes further amendments to existing Prison Rules to restrict or prohibit lawyers and religious personnel from visiting inmates on national security grounds. The amendments are gazetted and take effect on 18 July.
- **9 July** – National Security Police arrest four members of the Taiwan-based “Hong Kong Democratic Independence Union” on suspicion of conspiracy to commit secession under the NSL. Three are charged, including a 15-year-old minor.
- **14-17 July** – The High Court handles the applications of 12 appellants who appealed against their convictions and sentences for conspiracy to commit subversion in the “NSL 47” case.
- **23 July** – The High Court rules that transgender individuals are entitled to use public toilets according to their affirmed gender, in a landmark LGBT rights case.
- **24 July** – Nine Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs of the UN Human Rights Council issue a joint communication to the Chinese Government expressing concern over a reported “surge” in transnational human rights violations targeting Hong Kong activists overseas.
- **25 July** – National Security Police issue arrest warrants for 15 overseas-based pro-democracy activists, all members of the “Hong Kong Parliament” in exile, for subversion under the NSL, including three living in the UK.
- **15 August** – Closing arguments begin in the trial of British national Jimmy Lai. His Defence opens its case on 20 August and concludes on 28 August.
- **4 September** – A nine-member High Court jury unanimously acquits all seven defendants of their conspiracy charges under the United Nations (Anti-Terrorism Measures) after a 160-day trial.
- **5 September** – Approximately 180 workers protest at Swire Coca-Cola’s Sha Tin factory after a driver’s dismissal. Police declare the gathering unauthorised.

A planned strike is called off as an agreement is reached between the union and the company.

- **9 September** – In another landmark LGBT rights case, the High Court rules in favour of a lesbian couple seeking to list both names on their son’s birth certificate.
- **10 September** – The Legislative Council vetoes the Government-proposed Registration of Same-sex Partnerships Bill, marking the first rejection of a Government bill under the ‘patriots governing Hong Kong principle’.
- **17 September** – UK’s Permanent Representative to the WTO and UN, Kumar Iyer, calls for Jimmy Lai’s release during an Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.
- **17 September** – Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu delivers his fourth annual Policy Address.
- **8 October** – The District Court dismisses the testimony of an expert witness summoned by National Security Police and acquits a 30-year-old protester.
- **20 November** – The Home Secretary, Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP, confirms Hong Kong BN(O)s will retain their existing 5-year pathway to settlement in the UK.
- **26 November** – A major fire breaks out in Tai Po, resulting in at least 168 deaths and 79 injuries. Beijing’s Office for Safeguarding National Security in Hong Kong (OSNS) warns against foreign interference. Arrests follow on national security grounds.
- **2 December** – Chief Executive John Lee announces the establishment of an independent review committee to investigate the causes of the fire in Tai Po. The committee’s report is expected to be published within nine months.
- **6 December** – The OSNS summons foreign correspondents from at least six major international news organisations in Hong Kong to “meetings” at its premises, warning them about their reporting on the fire in Tai Po and Legislative Council elections.
- **7 December** – The 2025 Legislative Council General Election takes place, with around 1.32 million votes cast to elect 20 Geographical Constituency seats. The voter turnout rate was 31.9%.
- **11-12 December** – Police invoke Section 13 of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (SNSO) for the first time to arrest a total of ten individuals for alleged “unlawful drilling”. Two of them are charged with conspiracy to commit subversion under the NSL.
- **14 December** – Hong Kong’s largest pro-democratic political party, the Democratic Party, votes to disband and enter liquidation.
- **15 December** – The High Court convicts Jimmy Lai on all three charges: two counts of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces under the NSL and one count of conspiracy to publish seditious publications under the Crimes Ordinance. Mitigation hearings are set for 12 January 2026.

- **15 December** – The Foreign Secretary, Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, calls again for Jimmy Lai’s immediate release in Parliament.
- **17 December** – G7 Foreign Ministers and the High Representative of the European Union echo call for Jimmy Lai’s release in a joint statement.
- **23 December** – Closing arguments conclude in the national security trial of Kwok Yin-sang, wanted activist Anna Kwok Fung-yee’s father. Verdict is set for 11 February 2026.

## **NOTABLE INCIDENTS**

### **Fire in Tai Po**

On 26 November 2025, a fire broke out in a residential block under renovation in the district of Tai Po and quickly spread to several adjacent blocks. This devastating tragedy, one of the deadliest residential fires in Hong Kong, claimed the lives of at least 168 individuals, including residents, foreign domestic workers and one firefighter. Approximately 79 others were injured and hospitalised. Preliminary investigations into the cause of the fire suggested that the blaze was exacerbated by substandard construction netting and other protective materials such as flammable foam boards.

Immediately after the fire broke out, President Xi Jinping expressed his condolences to the families of the victims and all those affected by the disaster. He urged “all-out efforts to extinguish the fire” to minimise casualties, directing the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (HKMAO) and Central Government Liaison Office (CGLO) to support SAR relief and rescue operations. On 27 November, in his first public appearance since the fire began, Chief Executive John Lee thanked President Xi for his support and declared disaster relief the immediate priority. The Hong Kong authorities arrested at least 16 individuals by the end of December in connection with the fire for a range of offences including manslaughter, corruption and fraud.

On 26 November, the Foreign Secretary, Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, said on X: “The horrendous fire in Tai Po apartment blocks is truly devastating and deeply distressing. The UK sends heartfelt condolences to all the families affected and to the people of Hong Kong”. On 28 November, His Majesty the King delivered a message to the people of Hong Kong expressing his condolences and honouring the emergency services.

During and immediately after the fire, local Hong Kong residents voluntarily organised grassroots support networks online, sharing critical information such as emergency hotlines and shelter locations. Some appeared at the scene and nearby areas to offer free commodities and transportation services. Their efforts complemented the Hong Kong Government’s coordinated response to deliver timely assistance to those affected.

An online petition launched by a fire concern group calling for an independent commission of inquiry quickly gained momentum, securing approximately 14,000 signatures. On 29 November, a university student who set up the group was arrested for alleged sedition under the SNSO after distributing flyers near Tai Po MTR Station.

The flyers raised “four demands”, including the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry. The OSNS issued a statement warning the public not to use the disaster to disrupt Hong Kong, citing foreign interference. In the following days, National Security Police made three further sedition arrests.

On 2 December, Chief Executive John Lee announced plans to establish an independent committee chaired by a judge, to “conduct a comprehensive and in-depth review to reform the building works system and prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the future”. He later appointed High Court Judge David Luk Kai-hong, chairman of the Electoral Affairs Commission, as the committee chair, with an investigation report due within nine months.

On 3 December, the OSNS issued another statement regarding foreign forces attempting to destabilise Hong Kong and warning against exploiting the tragedy for political purposes. On 9 December, former Civil Human Rights Front member Wong Kwok-ngon was charged with disclosing details of a national security investigation and publishing seditious materials under the SNSO, marking the first national security prosecution linked to the fire.

Government investigations into the fire remained ongoing by the end of the reporting period.

## **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. 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.*

*Elections for the Legislative Council were held on 7 December 2025. Of the 90 seats available, 20 are elected directly by the public through a popular vote. The voter turnout rate was 31.9%.*

*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.*

### **President Xi Jinping’s Remarks on ‘One Country, Two Systems’**

During celebrations of China’s National Day on 30 September 2025 in Beijing, President Xi addressed Hong Kong in his keynote speech. Consistent with the position he articulated during his visit to Hong Kong in 2022, Xi reaffirmed Beijing’s commitment to the ‘One Country, Two Systems’ principle. The President also

reiterated his support for Hong Kong's deeper integration into the overall national development framework.

### **China's Fourth Plenum and 15th Five-Year Plan: Hong Kong's Role**

The Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party convened in Beijing in October 2025, adopting the Recommendations for Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (2026-2030). The session reaffirmed the guiding principle of 'One Country, Two Systems' and the basic policy of Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong, underscoring the Central Government's commitment to supporting the SAR.

The Plenum emphasised the need to promote the city as a key driver within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). The recommendations also called for strengthening Hong Kong's role as an international financial, shipping, and trade centre, while accelerating the SAR's transformation into a global hub for innovation and technology.

According to local media reports, a delegation of senior mainland Chinese officials delivered a series of seminars inside Hong Kong Government Headquarters on the "guidance" outlined at the Plenum.

### **Appointments in Central Government Liaison Office (CGLO) in Hong Kong**

On 11 October 2025, China's State Council announced the appointment of Sun Shangwu, formerly deputy editor-in-chief of PRC state-owned newspaper *China Daily*, as Deputy Director of the CGLO in Hong Kong.

On 31 December, the State Council formally appointed Zhang Yong as Deputy Director of the CGLO. Zhang previously served as Director General of the Second Economic Bureau, Office of the Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commission and Executive Vice-President of China COSCO Shipping Corporation Ltd.

### **Government Orders Use of "Chinese Mainland" in Official Translation**

In October 2025, local media reported that the Hong Kong Government's Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, issued a circular to all Government departments and the Legislative Council directing them to adopt "Chinese Mainland" (instead of "Mainland China") as the official Chinese translation. The terminology shift was widely viewed as aligning with the 'One-China' principle of the People's Republic of China.

### **Chief Executive's Policy Address**

On 17 September 2025, Chief Executive John Lee delivered his fourth annual Policy Address. Drawing on President Xi's remarks, the Chief Executive reaffirmed that the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle remains as the "best institutional arrangement" for the SAR.

Lee pledged to adopt China's "Holistic Approach" to safeguarding national security and implementing the 'patriots administering Hong Kong' principle. The Chief Executive committed to enhancing civil service performance appraisal systems to reinforce accountability and efficiency.

In terms of economic and financial developments, Lee vowed to consolidate Hong Kong's position as an international financial centre through offshore RMB, green finance, fostering a tokenised financial ecosystem, expanding carbon trading with the GBA and building an international gold trading market. Other priorities include expediting the Northern Metropolis project as well as increasing land and housing supply.

### **Legislative Council Rules of Procedure: New Code of Conduct**

In July, the Legislative Council (LegCo)'s Committee on Rules of Procedure proposed a new code of conduct. In addition to safeguarding national security, the amendments would require lawmakers to "sincerely support the Chief Executive and the SAR Government in administering Hong Kong", while performing their duties "in a constructive manner". The proposed Code specifies that lawmakers should not "intentionally vilify the governance credibility of the Chief Executive and the SAR Government."

The Code also introduces performance requirements including a minimum attendance threshold, participation in a specified number of votes, submission of annual work reports and extensive engagement with the public. It establishes a five-tier sanctions framework for violations.

Andrew Leung Kwan-yuen, President of LegCo, stated that the new Code would not restrict legislators from expressing views or criticising the Government, emphasising that those committed to serving the public would not breach the rules. However, he said lawmakers must "not cross the red line or go too far".

On 23 July, the legislature unanimously passed the LegCo (Powers and Privileges) (Amendment) Bill to endorse the new Code. The new Code will take effect on 1 January 2026.

### **Legislative Council Elections**

The Legislative Council elections held on 7 December 2025 were the second since China's National People Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) made extensive changes in March 2021 to Hong Kong's electoral system to ensure "patriots rule Hong Kong".

#### Legislative Council Elections: Participation and Results

As in 2021, no pro-democratic candidates participated in the December 2025 legislative elections. In the lead up to the nomination period, press rumours circulated that Beijing had advised incumbent lawmakers aged 70 or above to opt out.

Nominations closed on 6 November. A total of 35 incumbent legislators, including 75-year-old New People's Party chair Regina Ip Suk-yee and 74-year-old LegCo President Andrew Leung Kwan-yuen, chose not to seek re-election. All 12 incumbent legislators aged 70 or above opted out. On 10 November, the Candidate Eligibility Review Committee (CERC) confirmed the eligibility of 161 candidates.

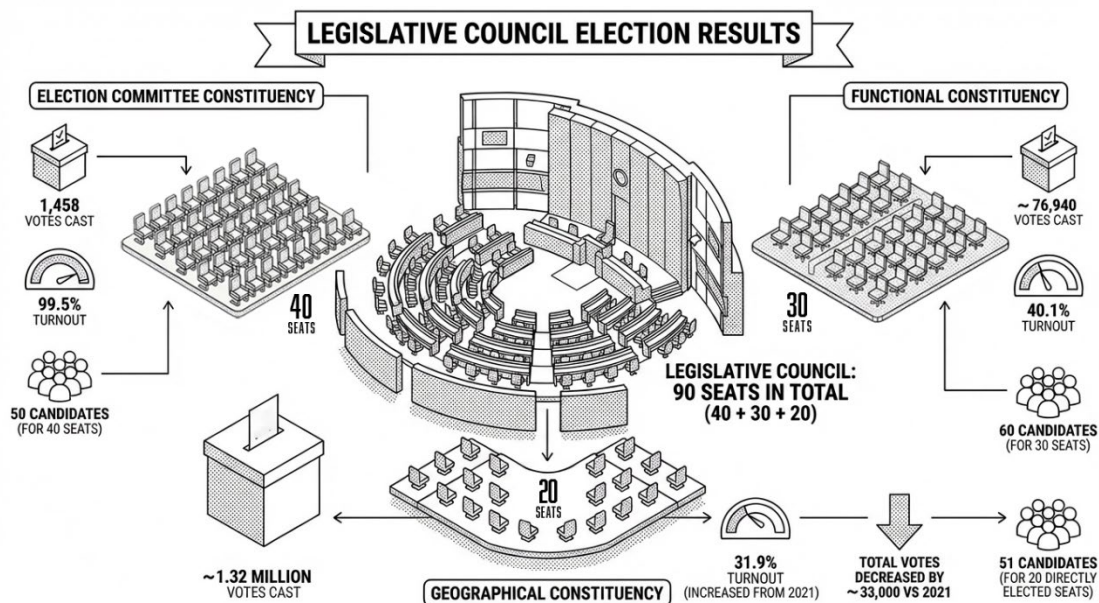
Established in July 2021 to uphold the 'patriots administering Hong Kong' principle, the CERC serves as a vetting body for election candidates, following an initial check

by the National Security Police. Decisions made by the CERC cannot be challenged in court.

Beijing's OSNS issued two statements warning against attempts to "disrupt" the elections. On 6 December, the Office summoned a group of foreign correspondents from at least six major international news organisations to "meetings", citing their election-related reporting. Further details are provided in the 'Press and Media Freedom' sub-section.

Following the tragic fire in Tai Po, on 27 November the Chief Executive suspended all campaigns and election promotion activities in order to focus government efforts on disaster relief. Prior to the suspension the Hong Kong Government had stepped up its efforts to boost voter turnout. Elections took place on 7 December 2025.

- Election Committee Constituency results: 1,458 votes were cast to elect 40 seats. Turnout was 99.5%. 50 candidates from the Election Committee contested the 40 seats.
- Functional Constituency results: Around 76,940 votes were cast to elect 30 seats. Turnout was 40.1%. 60 candidates contested the 30 seats.
- Geographical Constituency results: Around 1.32 million votes were cast to elect 20 seats. Turnout was 31.9%, an increase from the 2021 elections due to the lower voter registration. Compared with 2021, the total number of votes decreased by approximately 33,000. 51 candidates contested the 20 directly elected seats.



Media reported that a record high of roughly 41,000 invalid ballots were cast, accounting for 3% of the vote. On 30 October 2025, Secretary for Security Chris Tang warned publicly that inciting others to cast blank votes or not to vote in the legislative elections may violate the Elections (Corrupt and Illegal Conduct) Ordinance and the NSL, and that authorities will take decisive enforcement action based on the evidence.

Overall, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong remain the largest pro-Establishment and pro-Beijing party in the Legislative Council, having secured a total of 20 seats across the three constituencies.

After casting their votes, voters received Government-issued “thank-you” cards redeemable for free access to museums and other public facilities, shopping vouchers, movie discounts and health check services. Some companies granted employees a half-day leave upon presenting their “thank-you” cards as proof of voting.

## **BASIC RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS**

*Whilst the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) remain protected in Hong Kong law through the Basic 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” continue 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 recognition is unconstitutional. On 10 September 2025 the legislature vetoed the government-proposed Registration of Same-sex Partnerships Bill, marking the first time a government bill was rejected by the LegCo under the “patriots governing Hong Kong” principle following the electoral overhaul in March 2021.*

### **Press and Media Freedom**

#### OSNS’s Warnings Against Foreign Correspondents

On 6 December 2025, in the wake of the tragic fire in Tai Po and on the eve of the Legislative Council elections, the OSNS summoned a group of foreign correspondents in Hong Kong to “meetings” at its premises, warning them about what it described as “distorted” coverage of the Tai Po fire and the upcoming legislative elections.

Reportedly, OSNS held these “meetings” with senior representatives and journalists from at least six major international news organisations, including *Agence France-Presse*, *The Financial Times*, *The New York Times*, *Associated Press*, *Bloomberg News* and *The Wall Street Journal*, during which officials read out a statement to attendees.

Later that day, OSNS released a statement claiming that, in the aftermath of the fire, foreign media in Hong Kong had been spreading false information to smear the SAR Government and undermine the legislative elections. The statement urged foreign media to comply with Hong Kong laws and warned them against interference in China’s domestic affairs “under the guise of press freedom”. The statement added: “the Office will not tolerate acts by anti-China elements seeking to exploit the disaster to disrupt Hong Kong”, concluding with a Chinese phrase, “勿謂言之不預”, commonly translated as “do not say we did not warn you”.

#### Press Freedom Index

On 17 October, the Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) released its annual Press Freedom Index. Journalists scored Hong Kong 28.9 out of 100 (zero as the lowest possible score, 100 as the highest), an increase of 3.9 points, marking a “slight rebound” from the historic low in 2023. The public rating component was suspended this year “due to budgetary and environmental constraints”. Journalist respondents rated “self-censorship” at 1.8 out of 10, the lowest-scoring factor in the Index. Most respondents cited “fear of negative consequences” and of “offending” the Central and Hong Kong authorities as the reasons. Respondents scored “difficulties for news media in obtaining information needed for reporting” at 2.7 out of 10.

Respondents noted some improvements in legal safeguards for information access (3.5 out of 10) and media reluctance to criticise the SAR Government (2.8 out of 10). The highest scores concerned “media hesitancy in criticising large corporations” (5.4 out of 10) and “journalists facing physical threats during interviews” (4.6 out of 10).

The HKJA described the improved rating as “a positive sign” but stressed that it does not indicate “any substantive improvement in Hong Kong’s press freedom landscape”. The HKJA attributed the perceived improvement primarily to “journalists adapting to the current media environment”.

### Hong Kong Free Press

On 31 October, local independent news outlet *Hong Kong Free Press* (HKFP) announced that the Inland Revenue Department (IRD) had closed its 20-month investigation into an alleged tax shortfall of HKD \$3,020 (approximately £300) for the 2021/2022 fiscal year. HKFP settled the case for HKD \$57,692 (approximately £5,700). The IRD authorities had previously stated that HKFP was “randomly selected” for an audit.

HKFP noted the audit had “diverted resources from journalism” and “likely cost the taxpayer much more than the pocket change it generated”.

In May, the HKJA revealed at least six independent news outlets, including HKFP, had been facing simultaneous tax audits and backdated demands from the IRD. In addition, 20 individuals linked to Hong Kong independent media were facing similar tax inspections.

### **Freedom of Association**

#### Disbandment of the Democratic Party

On 14 December 2025, Hong Kong’s largest pro-democratic political party, the Democratic Party, formed in October 1994, formally voted to disband and enter liquidation. Of the 121 members present at the extraordinary general meeting, 117 voted in favour of dissolution and four abstained. The Democratic Party held seats in the Legislative Council from before 1997 through to 2021 when the electoral system was overhauled to a ‘patriots only’ system.

The party issued a statement following its dissolution: *“In politics, we have worked to open up elections and to press for the implementation of universal suffrage as promised in the Basic Law, while consistently stressing that diversity, openness,*

*transparency and accountability are crucial to Hong Kong... After weathering thirty years of storms, the Democratic Party has come to the moment when a full stop must be written. Yet we believe that the convictions and perseverance of these three decades will leave their mark on Hong Kong's history".*

The Democratic Party Chairman thanked supporters and announced the party would cease operations on 15 December. The party's remaining funds and assets will be donated to an association supporting victims of industrial accidents.

#### Six Pro-democracy Groups Removed from Societies Register

On 22 August 2025, Hong Kong authorities published notices in the Government Gazette to remove 285 organisations, believed to "have ceased to exist", from the societies register. These included at least five disbanded pro-democracy groups. Affected groups were required to provide proof of their continued existence within three months to avoid deregistration.

#### **Freedom of Assembly**

No large-scale demonstrations or protests were reported during the reporting period. Several small-scale demonstrations took place on various occasions.

On HKSAR Establishment Day on 1 July, activist Lui Yuk-lin, known as "Female Long Hair", conducted a solo protest in Victoria Park. She held a banner and chanted slogans opposing the government's import labour scheme. Police officers filmed her throughout the process.

On 21 July and 31 August, under visible police presence, individuals appeared at Yuen Long and Prince Edward MTR Stations to mark the sixth anniversaries of incidents associated with the 2019 protests. Reportedly, Lui Yuk-lin appeared at Yuen Long MTR Station on 21 July. Police searched her, warned of potential NSL breaches on what they described as a "sensitive date", and subsequently escorted her away.

On 5 September, approximately 180 workers staged a protest at Swire Coca-Cola's Sha Tin factory following the dismissal of a truck driver involved in a traffic accident. The group presented four demands to the company, including the reinstatement of the driver. Police at the scene swiftly declared the gathering an unauthorised assembly and instructed participants to disperse. An "open and constructive" dialogue held the same day between the company and the Swire Beverages (HK) Employees' General Union resulted in an agreement, leading the union to call off a planned strike and workers to resume their duties the following day.

The same month, the Magistrates' Court acquitted activist Yu Wai-pan of charges relating to the unauthorised display of a poster at a street booth in Causeway Bay in September 2022. The poster featured images of former League of Social Democrats members. Magistrate Kestrel Lam Tsz-hong ruled that the poster was not particularly conspicuous. Lam noted that the poster was only displayed for around 40 minutes and did not obstruct pedestrian flow. The magistrate emphasised that the court must consider the defendant's rights under the Basic Law.

## **Submission of Report under the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

On 10 October 2025, the Hong Kong Government announced that it had submitted its fourth report (as part of China's seventh periodic report) under the United Nations (UN) Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

This fourth report was published exclusively in simplified Chinese, marking a departure from previous practice.

### **Academic Freedom**

In July, local media reported that all eight public universities in Hong Kong funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) signed an accountability agreement requiring them to follow the "advice and guidance" of the Central Government and align with President Xi Jinping's remarks. This three-year agreement includes commitments to contribute to Hong Kong's integration into national development and to strengthen education on China's Constitution, the SAR's Basic Law, and the NSL.

Also in July, local newspaper *Ming Pao* reported that the City University of Hong Kong had introduced new restrictions requiring scholars to obtain prior approval before accepting media interviews or attending events organised by foreign consulates in Hong Kong.

### **Freedom of Religion or Belief**

On 2 September 2025 in the Vatican City, His Eminence Cardinal Stephen Chow Sau-yun, Catholic Bishop of Hong Kong, held his first meeting with Pope Leo XIV to discuss the state of the Catholic Church in China and Hong Kong, as well as China-Vatican relations.

During a public dialogue in Australia on 15 September, Chow addressed concerns regarding civil liberties in Hong Kong. He stressed that "religious persecution per se is not happening" in the city. He reiterated the importance of building bridges with China and the Chinese Communist Party through dialogue and empathy.

Separately, the Hong Kong authorities amended prison rules to restrict or prohibit "religious personnel" (including, but not limited to, chaplains) from visiting inmates and conducting religious activities in prisons on national security grounds. Details are provided in the 'Legal System' section.

### **Equality**

#### Alternative Framework for Legal Recognition of Same-sex Partnerships Vetoed by Legislative Council

In September 2023, the Court of Final Appeal (CFA) delivered a landmark judgment, ruling that the absence of an alternative framework for recognising same-sex partnerships was unconstitutional. On 27 October 2023, the CFA set a two-year deadline for the Government to implement such a framework in compliance with its ruling.

On 3 July 2025, the Hong Kong Government, in a paper submitted to the Legislative Council Panel on Constitutional Affairs, formally introduced a proposed framework for legal recognition of same-sex partnerships.

Local media reported that a significant number of lawmakers had voiced strong opposition to the Bill. Some of them cited concerns regarding the lack of public consultation. The Bill was published in the Government Gazette on 11 July, with its First and Second Reading held in LegCo on 16 July. Chief Executive John Lee warned that non-compliance with the CFA's ruling would "violate the rule of law" and bring "serious consequences".

On 10 September 2025, the legislature vetoed the Government-proposed Registration of Same-sex Partnerships Bill, marking the first time a Government bill was rejected by the LegCo under the "patriots governing Hong Kong" principle. A total of 87 lawmakers were present: 71 voted against and 14 voted in favour of the Bill.

Amongst those who supported the bill were seven Executive Council (ExCo) members, including Regina Ip Lau Suk-ye, chair of the New People's Party and all five members of her party, as well as non-affiliated legislators. Gary Chan Hak-kan, chair of Hong Kong's largest pro-Establishment party, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong backed the bill in his capacity as an ExCo member. Those who opposed the bill said the outcome demonstrated that they are not "rubber stamps".

Secretary for Mainland and Constitutional Affairs Erick Tsang Kwok-wai expressed respect for LegCo's decision. The HKMAO described the protection of same-sex partner rights as a "complex issue" and warned the public not to politicise the matter. Chief Executive John Lee remarked that same-sex partnership remained a "contentious issue". He pledged to continue exploring administrative measures to provide protection for same-sex partners and safeguard their rights.

### Rulings on LGBT Cases

On 23 July 2025, the High Court ruled against the Hong Kong Government, holding that transgender individuals are entitled to use public toilets according to their affirmed gender. The Department of Justice filed an appeal against the ruling on 22 September.

On 9 September, the High Court ruled in favour of two applicants, a lesbian couple who had been barred by the Hong Kong Government from listing both their names on their son's birth certificate. In his judgment, the judge held that the authorities' refusal to include the gestational mother's name as a legal parent on the child's birth certification was unconstitutional as it infringed upon the child's rights to privacy and family life.

### **Artistic Freedom**

In July, local media reported that 14 independent bookstores were excluded from the Hong Kong Book Fair 2025 by the Hong Kong Trade and Development Council (HKTDC) and subsequently announced plans to organise an alternative book festival. Several of these bookstores had previously published titles related to the 2019 protests. On 21 July, PRC party-state media outlet *Wen Wei Po* characterised the alternative event as an act of "soft resistance". Separately, HKTDC reportedly

requested participating bookstores at the official Book Fair to remove certain titles following “complaints”.

In August, local media reported that screenings of an award-winning Taiwanese film were cancelled during the Hong Kong International Film Festival after it failed to meet censorship requirements set by the Hong Kong Government. In October, local newspaper *Ming Pao* reported that the authorities had banned at least 13 films on national security grounds since 2021, with an additional 50 films required to undergo edits prior to screening.

In September, pro-democracy playwright Candace Chong Mui-ngam accused the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts of censoring her anniversary interview and promotional materials. She alleged that the institution imposed vague “red lines” and interfered with her musical *Sing Out*. Chong claimed she was barred from being credited or appearing on stage for the curtain call. In October, the West Kowloon Cultural District cancelled Chong’s LGBT-themed play *We Are Gay* hours before ticket sales, citing complaints that the work promoted confrontation and defamed Hong Kong.

## LEGAL SYSTEM

*The legislative power of the Hong Kong SAR is vested in the Legislative Council (LegCo). Most law in force in Hong Kong has been made locally and the Hong Kong SAR has maintained a common law system. Following the electoral overhaul in March 2021, implemented as required by 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.*

### **UK Government Reaffirms Position on Indefinite Suspension of Extradition Treaty with Hong Kong**

On 30 July, the Minister of State for Security, Rt Hon Dan Jarvis MP, reaffirmed that “the 1997 UK-Hong Kong Extradition Treaty remains suspended”. The Minister clarified that amendments to the Extradition Act 2003 do not represent any change in the suspended extradition cooperation with Hong Kong but rather formalise the severing of ties between the British and Hong Kong extradition systems by removing their designation under the Act. The Minister further emphasised that the UK Government “will never allow a situation where Hong Kongers or any other nationality is extradited for politically motivated purposes”, noting that UK courts retain robust powers under the Act to assess whether any individual extradition request is politically motivated and, where necessary, to bar extradition.

### **“NSL 45”: Pro-democracy Politicians and Activists Released from Prison**

During this reporting period, a further five defendants of the “NSL 45” were released upon completion of their sentences. This reporting period also saw the first instance of early release under the existing national security framework.

The individuals released from prison were:

- Carol Ng Man-ye, Frankie Fung Tat-chun and Nathan Lau Chak-fung, released on 28 July 2025

- Tiffany Yuen Ka-wai, released on 19 August
- Andy Chui Chi-kin, released on 27 October

On 28 October, former District Councillor and convenor of the political group Power for Democracy, Andrew Chiu Ka-yin was granted early release and a reduced sentence in exchange for turning prosecution witness during the trial and testifying against all other defendants. Chiu became the first person to receive early release under existing national security legislation.

### **Further Amendments to the Prison Rules**

On 7 July 2025, the Hong Kong Government’s Security Bureau, proposed further amendments to prison rules to “effectively prevent, suppress and punish acts and activities endangering national security”. The proposed changes would provide greater powers to restrict or prohibit lawyers and religious personnel (including, but not limited to, chaplains) from visiting inmates and conducting religious activities in prisons. In addition, under particular circumstances that provide cause for concern, prison authorities would be empowered to apply for a warrant from a magistrate to bar a convicted person in custody from communicating with a specific legal representative. A similar mechanism would be applied to bar visits to prisoners awaiting trial or appellants by registered medical practitioners on national security grounds. In particular, the revised rules would require visitors to sign a declaration aligning their visits with the “statutory purposes”, such as facilitating the rehabilitation of inmates and preparing them for reintegration into society.

In a statement released on 16 July, the Hong Kong Government emphasised the need to amend prison rules, noting that the amendments draw on relevant law and practices in other jurisdictions, including the UK. The authorities cited national security risks amidst the “complicated geopolitical situation” as justification for the changes. The 2025 Prison (Amendment) Rules were published in the Government Gazette on 18 July under the negative vetting procedure, taking effect immediately.

The Chairman of the Hong Kong Bar Association expressed confidence in the Judiciary’s ability to protect prisoners’ rights, stating that the courts would “act as gatekeepers” to ensure any restrictions on legal visits are evidence-based.

## **JUDICIAL SYSTEM**

*The judicial system in place prior to the establishment of the Hong Kong SAR continues to be maintained in general. The prosecuting authority in Hong Kong remains within the Department of Justice. The landscape on civil, commercial, and criminal cases not linked to national security remains unchanged, functioning in line with common law and international standards, without evidence of executive interference.*

*Following the imposition of the Hong Kong National Security Law (NSL) in July 2020, changes were implemented to the judicial system in relation to national security offences. Hong Kong’s courts are having to adjudicate on a National Security Law where the authority of the Chief Executive on security matters is placed above that of*

*their own; this has increased political pressure to interpret national security legislation robustly.*

*Judges from other common law jurisdictions continue to sit on the Court of Final Appeal (CFA). Judges continue to be appointed by the Chief Executive in accordance with recommendations by the Judicial Officers Recommendation Commission. The Hong Kong SAR maintains arrangements for reciprocal juridical assistance with some foreign states, although many of these were suspended following the imposition of the NSL.*

### **Jimmy Lai's National Security Law and Seditious Trial**

The trial of British national Jimmy Lai Chee-ying, founder of the now-closed pro-democracy newspaper *Apple Daily*, concluded during this reporting period with closing arguments delivered on 28 August 2025. The trial lasted a total of 156 days following its opening on 18 December 2023. Lai pleaded not guilty to all charges. In December 2025, Hong Kong's High Court convicted him on all charges: one count of conspiracy to publish seditious publications under the Crimes Ordinance and two counts of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces under the NSL. Key developments and details of the High Court verdict are as follows.

On 11 July, at the ASEAN Summit in Malaysia, the then Foreign Secretary, Rt Hon David Lammy MP, raised Jimmy Lai's case with Wang Yi, Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China.

Ahead of closing arguments, Jimmy Lai's son Sebastien Lai told *Nikkei Asia* that his father had been held in solitary confinement for nearly 1,700 days, suffering weight loss and prolonged exposure to heat without sunlight. On 15 August, the Hong Kong Government issued a statement rejecting these allegations and stressing that "the medical care received by Lai Chee-ying in custody is adequate and comprehensive".

Closing arguments in Lai's trial commenced on 18 August and concluded on 28 August. During the trial five prosecution accomplice witnesses, including three former *Apple Daily* staff, along with Andy Li Yu-hin and Chan Tsz-wah, testified against Lai in court. Royston Chow Tat-kuen, former senior executive of *Apple Daily's* parent company Next Digital, also testified against Lai.

On 17 September, during the 60th session of the UN Human Rights Council, the UK's Permanent Representative to the WTO and UN, Kumar Iyer, delivered a statement during the Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, calling for Lai's release.

In October, Jimmy Lai received the World Press Freedom Hero Award 2025, presented by the International Press Institute, which honours "journalists who have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to press freedom". On 15 October, Lai's wife and daughter, Teresa Lai and Claire Lai, met Pope Leo XIV in the Vatican City.

In a December interview with Agence France-Presse (AFP), Claire Lai described, in detail, her father's physical deterioration. She said that authorities denied him communion and that prison guards took petty and vindictive measures to demoralise him. On 3 December, the Hong Kong Government issued a statement condemning

AFP’s “fact-twisting” reporting. On 12 December, the authorities reiterated that “the medical services received by Lai Chee-ying in custody are adequate and comprehensive”.

### High Court Verdict

On 15 December, the High Court convicted Jimmy Lai on all three charges. The verdict was delivered by a panel of three judges, Esther Toh Lye-ping, Alex Lee Wan-tang and Susana Maria D'Almada Remedios. The Court concluded that Lai was the “mastermind” behind conspiracies to solicit international sanctions and hostile actions against China and Hong Kong, as well as to publish seditious articles through *Apple Daily*.

In its 855-page judgment, the Court dismissed Lai’s testimony as “contradictory, inconsistent, evasive and unreliable”, while ruling the prosecution witnesses’ evidence as “solid and irrefutable”. The judges emphasised that Lai “was not on trial for his political views” and his stance was only a “useful background” to ascertain his intent to promote and implement his political agenda through *Apple Daily*. The judgment further clarified that Lai’s activities prior to the announcement of the NSL only “serve as the background against which his post-NSL statements, conduct and intention are to be considered”. The Court concluded that Lai’s sole intent was to “seek the downfall” of the Chinese Communist Party.

The elements constituting his offences, according to the judgment, were as follows:

#### Count 1 – Conspiring with senior Apple Daily executives to publish seditious materials (local Crimes Ordinance)

- 17 of 161 *Apple Daily* articles were identified as “objectively seditious”, intended to incite hatred and contempt against the Hong Kong SAR Government. The Court found that Lai “deliberately used *Apple Daily*” and his influence to run a “sustained campaign” undermining the legitimacy of the central and Hong Kong authorities and damaging their relations with the Hong Kong public.

#### Count 2 – Conspiring with Apple Daily executives to collude with foreign forces (NSL)

- The Court found that Lai’s pre-NSL campaign for foreign sanctions was “open and direct”. After the NSL, he continued advocating for sanctions, shifting to more “indirect, implicit and subtle” language in editorials, forums, writings, tweets, and live chats – a change “in form rather than substance”. The conspiracy with senior *Apple Daily* management persisted after the NSL.

#### Count 3 – Conspiring with others to collude with foreign forces (NSL)

- The Court found that prior to the NSL, Lai and others agreed to pursue international lobbying to gain foreign support for Hong Kong’s resistance movement and push for sanctions against China and the Hong Kong SAR and that WhatsApp exchanges showed Lai actively organising lobbying before the NSL. The Court concluded that this arrangement continued post-NSL, with co-

conspirators following Lai's direction to unite legislative, international and street fronts to achieve a 'China implosion'.

In defining "foreign collusion", the judges stated that international advocacy, coordination with overseas individuals, and even indirect, subtle or implied requests can constitute collusion with foreign forces. The Court clarified that collusion is an "action crime", requiring only proof of the act of seeking sanctions, rather than a "result crime" which would require sanctions to be imposed.

In response, on 15 December, the Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, delivered an oral statement to Parliament on British national Jimmy Lai [*full statement at Annex*]. The same day, on instruction from the Foreign Secretary, the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) summoned the Chinese Ambassador to protest the politically motivated prosecution of Jimmy Lai.

On 17 December, the G7 Foreign Ministers and the High Representative of the European Union issued a joint statement calling for the immediate release of Jimmy Lai.

The Hong Kong Government, Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (OCMFA) of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong SAR, HKMAO, OSNS and CGLO in Hong Kong issued several statements condemning Lai. All 15 policy bureaux and six disciplined services in Hong Kong released statements in support of the ruling, pledging to safeguard national security. Chief Superintendent of National Security Police, Steve Li Kwai-wah commented on the case outside the court, criticising Lai and expressing support for the verdict.

Reporters Without Borders condemned the guilty verdict in Jimmy Lai's "sham trial". The Hong Kong Journalists Association also issued a statement expressing "regret" over the verdict but later removed it following condemnation from the Hong Kong Government.

### Court Procedures

Mitigation hearings for Lai and eight other co-defendants (including six former *Apple Daily* staff, Andy Li and Chan Tsz-wah) have been scheduled to begin on 12 January 2026. By the end of this reporting period, no date had been set for sentencing.

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

On 25 July 2025, National Security Police issued arrest warrants against 15 overseas-based pro-democracy activists for subversion under the NSL, including three living in the UK, offering HKD\$200,000 (approximately £20,000) for information leading to their arrests and prosecutions. All 15 individuals are associated with the "Hong Kong Parliament" (HKP), an organisation which was formed by pro-democracy activists in exile.

In addition, National Security Police re-issued arrest warrants for four other overseas activists who had established the HKP's "Electoral Organising Committee". Arrest

warrants and bounties of HKD\$ 1 million each had previously been issued for various NSL offences.

In response to the arrest warrants issued on 25 July, the then Foreign Secretary and then Home Secretary (now Foreign Secretary), the Rt Hon David Lammy MP and the Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, released a joint statement the same day.

Statements denouncing the arrest warrants were made by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Canada's Foreign Minister Anita Anand and Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree, and Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong, on 26 July, with a subsequent statement made by the European Union on 31 July.

On 4 August, the Hong Kong authorities, labelled 16 of the 19 wanted activists linked to the HKP as "absconders." The Secretary for Security invoked measures under the SNSO against the 16, including the cancellation of their Hong Kong passports. Additional restrictions included barring any person from providing funds and resources to, leasing properties to, and establishing a joint venture or partnership with them. Any violation is liable for a maximum penalty of seven years' imprisonment.

On 8 August, the UK issued a statement alongside other G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) member states (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union) as well as G7 RRM associate members (Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden) in response to the arrest warrants:

According to local media reporting, the family members of at least seven of the wanted activists were interviewed and questioned by the national security police during this reporting period. As of the end of this reporting period, a total of 34 arrest warrants had been issued for individuals overseas by the Hong Kong Police for national security offences.

### **Trial of 47 Pro-democracy Politicians and Activists Under the NSL**

On 19 November 2024, the High Court handed down sentences for 45 pro-democracy politicians and activists convicted of "conspiracy to commit subversion" under the NSL. The sentences ranged from four to ten years. By the end of the reporting period, a total of 14 defendants had been released from prison after completing their jail terms. Details are provided in the 'Legal System' section of this report.

Following the High Court's decisions in November 2024, 12 defendants filed an appeal against their convictions and sentences, with another two appealing against their sentences only. Ahead of the leave to appeal hearings, one appellant, activist Tam Tak-chi, withdrew his application without explanation. From 14 to 17 July 2025, the Court of Appeal heard the applications of the remaining 13 appellants. On 14 July, former District Councillor Michael Pang Cheuk-ki dropped his application, leaving 12 applicants. Amongst the 11 applicants seeking to overturn their convictions, Gwyneth Ho Kwai-lam stated that, unlike the other appellants who also requested lenient sentences, she would not seek a lighter sentence if her conviction was upheld. Separately, the Court of Appeal heard the Department of Justice's application to

overturn the High Court's acquittal of Lawrence Lau, one of two of the initial 47 who were acquitted.

On 17 July, the Court of Appeal confirmed that it would deliver its rulings on all 13 appellants "within nine months". The earliest anticipated release date for any of these appellants is May 2028.

### **Implementation of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (enacted locally under the Basic Law Article 23)**

Since its enactment on 23 March 2024 until the end of this reporting period, at least 40 people had been arrested under the SNSO. A total of ten individuals had been charged. During this reporting period, at least 20 were arrested and three charged (all for sedition). For the first time, arrests were made for "unlawful drilling", which is training in the use of an offensive weapon or the practice of military exercises.

The arrests and prosecutions under the SNSO were as follows:

23 July: 18-year-old Leung Kai-lok was charged with sedition and criminal damage for allegedly writing seditious phrases including "Liberate Hong Kong" on the walls of a men's toilet in a commercial building. National Security Police arrested him as he exited the restroom after allegedly committing the act for the third time. Prosecutors said Leung had incited hatred against the fundamental system of the PRC, as well as the constitutional order of the Hong Kong SAR. He was also accused of inciting violence and civil disobedience. The defendant pleaded not guilty on 15 December. The case was adjourned to 23 February 2026.

31 July: A 43-year-old man was arrested for sedition and criminal intimidation. He allegedly sent letters to several local media outlets containing material that incited hatred against the constitutional order of the Hong Kong SAR.

26 August: 19-year-old Lan Fei was charged with sedition. She later pleaded guilty to producing promotional videos for the "Hong Kong Parliament" in exile and promoting its elections online. On 13 November, the defendant was sentenced to 12 months in prison.

24 November: National Security Police arrested two operators of a pancake shop in Kwai Chung for sedition and non-SNSO offences. Police alleged that one of the suspects had posted seditious content on social media and financed activities endangering national security. Media reports suggested that the shop was known for hiring former inmates jailed for offences linked to the 2019 protests.

11 and 12 December: Police invoked Section 13 of the SNSO for the first time to arrest a total of ten individuals for alleged "unlawful drilling." Two were subsequently charged under the NSL, while the other eight arrestees were released on police bail. Further details are provided in the next section.

In late April 2025, National Security Police charged the father of wanted activist Anna Kwok Fung-ye under the SNSO for allegedly withdrawing cash from a life and

personal accident insurance policy in Anna Kwok's name. Mr. Kwok pleaded not guilty to the charge. On 9 October, the Magistrates' Court ruled that the defendant had a case to answer. The defence concluded its case on 16 October and closing arguments were delivered on 23 December. The verdict is scheduled for 11 February 2026.

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

According to the Hong Kong Security Bureau, as of June 2025 National Security Police had arrested a total of 332 people under national security offences, with at least 165 convicted.

#### Activist Joshua Wong Charged with Foreign Collusion

On 6 June 2025, activist Joshua Wong was re-arrested while serving a four-year and eight-month prison sentence for conspiracy to commit subversion under the NSL. He was charged with colluding with foreign forces after allegedly conspiring with Nathan Law and others to seek sanctions against Hong Kong and China. A case management hearing was held on 21 November. His case has been adjourned until 6 March 2026.

#### Hong Kong Alliance and Chow Hang-tung

Three former Hong Kong Alliance committee members, Chow Hang-tung, Albert Ho Chun-yan, and Lee Cheuk-yan, are charged with incitement to subversion and have been in custody since September 2021. Their trial, first set for May 2025 and then 11 November, is now postponed to 22 January 2026.

#### Joseph John

On 15 April, the Court of Appeal (CA) dismissed an application for leave to appeal by Joseph John (also known as Wong Kin-chung), a dual Portuguese and Chinese national, against his five-year sentence for conspiracy to incite secession. The court held that the mandatory minimum sentence of five years applies to all conspiracy offences under the NSL. In September, the CA rejected his leave application to the Court of Final Appeal (CFA). The defendant then sought leave directly from the CFA. On 3 November, the CFA rejected his leave application and upheld the lower Court's ruling.

#### Arrests and Prosecutions

- Secession: On 9 July, National Security Police arrested four members of the Taiwan-based Hong Kong Democratic Independence Union on suspicion of conspiracy to commit secession. On 11 July, three of them, including a 15-year-old minor, were formally charged with the offence. Police alleged that the organisation had advocated for Hong Kong independence, provided military training and sought foreign interference. On 15 December, the minor defendant, who had turned 16 and was classified as "other participants" under the three-tier NSL sentencing regime, was given three years and six months' imprisonment after pleading guilty. The other two defendants remained on remand, with the next hearing set for 22 January 2026.

- **Terrorism**: The case of 34-year-old technician Cheung Lai-ming, accused of possessing explosives and charged with conspiracy to commit terrorist activities, remained ongoing.
- **Subversion**:
  - In July, 22-year-old Chan Ho-hin (initially charged with sedition under the SNSO after allegedly posting content on social media “provoking hatred” against the authorities), was charged with inciting subversion under the NSL.
  - On 11 December, National Security Police arrested nine men for alleged “unlawful drilling” under Section 13 of the SNSO. Police claimed that the group had conducted “military-style training” in an industrial building as early as 2024. Chief Superintendent of National Security Police, Steve Li Kwai-wah, noted that some suspects had appeared at the Tai Po fire site wearing clothing similar to that worn by protesters during the 2019 unrest. A woman linked to the group was arrested the following day. On 15 December, two of the nine men were charged with conspiracy to commit subversion under the NSL. The remaining eight individuals were released on bail and had not been charged as of the end of the reporting period.

### **Use of United Nations Anti-Terrorism Law**

On 9 September 2024, a trial began involving seven individuals charged with conspiracy to commit bombing of prescribed objects under the United Nations (UN) (Anti-Terrorism Measures) Ordinance, marking the second time that the law was invoked in Hong Kong since its local enactment in 2022. The defendants were accused of plotting to plant bombs at multiple locations across Hong Kong during the 2019 protests. All seven pleaded not guilty.

On 4 September 2025, following a 160-day trial and four days of deliberation, a nine-member High Court jury unanimously acquitted all seven defendants of their conspiracy charges. The police held a press briefing the same day, emphasising the seriousness of the case and the quantity of explosives involved. The police stated that they would “study the case” with the Department of Justice. Superintendent of National Security Police Cheung Pak-kit commented that national security legislation, rather than the UN Ordinance, will be used against future cases involving similar elements. One of the acquitted defendants, Ng Tsz-lok, was re-arrested and charged in October under the Public Order Ordinance for his involvement in multiple riots during 2019. Details are provided in the relevant section.

On 4 September, three of the seven defendants were convicted by the same jury of an alternative bombing offence under local legislation, and the remaining four were acquitted. On 27 October, the three convicted were sentenced to 18 years in prison,

for having placed bombs in the men’s toilet of a public hospital and at Lo Wu MTR Station in 2020. All three have appealed against their convictions and sentences.

### **Court Rules Against National Security Police**

On 8 October 2025, the District Court acquitted a 30-year-old protester (a former shooting range staff member who is currently serving a 52-month sentence for rioting during the 2019 protests), of the non-NSL charge of “unlicensed possession of firearms and ammunition”. Judge Winnie Lau Yee-wan dismissed the testimony of an expert witness summoned by National Security Police, noting that the drafting style of the police’s firearms forensics report was “distinctly different” from previous submissions in other cases. The court ruled that the prosecution had failed to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt.

The ruling was delivered at the lower court level, marking the second time that the court has ruled against National Security Police regarding their submission of documentary evidence. In March 2025, the CFA unanimously overturned the convictions of Chow Hang-tung and two other defendants for failing to cooperate with National Security Police under the NSL. The CFA highlighted that the prosecution relied on “heavily redacted versions” of the police investigation report.

### **Senior Judicial Appointments**

On 25 July, the Chief Executive accepted the recommendation of the Chief Justice and extended the term of an Australian non-permanent CFA judge for three years.

- The Honourable Mr. Justice William Gummow, starting 29 July 2025

The same day the Chief Executive also accepted the recommendations of the Chief Justice and extended the terms of the following Hong Kong non-permanent judges of the CFA, each for three years:

- The Honourable Mr Justice Frank Stock, starting 1 September 2025
- The Honourable Mr Justice Patrick Chan Siu-oi, starting 21 October 2025

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, three from Australia and one from New Zealand. Since Beijing’s imposition of the NSL in June 2020, a total of ten overseas non-permanent judges have left, or retired from, the CFA.

On 18 September, the Chief Executive accepted the recommendation of the Judicial Officers Recommendation Commission to reappoint the Honourable Mr Justice Roberto Ribeiro as a permanent CFA judge for a three-year term. The Legislative Council endorsed his reappointment on 16 October. Amongst the four permanent judges on the CFA (including the Chief Justice), Justice Ribeiro is the only one who has exceeded the statutory retirement age of 70.

### **Prosecutions under the Legislative Council (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance**

During a 2019 LegCo Committee meeting on the proposed Extradition Bill, then pan-democrat legislator, Lam Cheuk-ting, allegedly acted in concert with other opposition lawmakers to “assault, obstruct, or molest” several pro-Establishment members,

thereby disrupting proceedings. He was subsequently charged with misconduct under the LegCo (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance and pleaded not guilty.

On 6 November 2025, the District Court acquitted Lam of misconduct in LegCo. Judge Andy Cheng Lim-chi ruled that the prosecution failed to establish sufficient evidence of Lam's alleged conspiracy to disrupt proceedings. The court also questioned the credibility of testimony provided by two pro-Beijing legislators involved in the incident.

Lam remains in prison serving a six-year-and-nine-month sentence for conspiracy to commit subversion in the "NSL 47" case, in addition to 37 months' imprisonment for participating in a riot related to the 2019 incident at Yuen Long.

### **Arrests in relation to 2019 Protests**

According to the latest Hong Kong Police statistics, at least 10,279 individuals were arrested in connection with the anti-Extradition Bill protests in 2019. As of April 2025, 2,976 charged with offences including rioting, unlawful assembly and possession of offensive weapons, had undergone or were undergoing judicial proceedings, with at least 2,422 subject to legal consequences. Approximately 7,000 arrestees remained under police investigation. New arrests in relation to 2019 were made during this reporting period.

On 28 October 2025, National Security Police arrested five individuals for alleged offences connected to the 2019 protests, including "aiding and abetting riot", "incitement to riot" and "conspiracy to incite riot" under the Public Order Ordinance (POO), and the SNSO. The arrestees allegedly manufactured and supplied weapons to rioters on multiple occasions, as well as published seditious content online inciting unlawful acts and hatred against the authorities. On 30 October, two of the five were formally charged with "conspiracy to incite riot" under the POO. One of the defendants, Ng Tsz-lok, was additionally charged with "incitement to riot". He was acquitted of a conspiracy charge under the UN (Anti-Terrorism Measures) Ordinance following a jury trial at the High Court in September (details provided in the previous section).

In September, Secretary for Security Chris Tang Ping-keung said around 430 people remained in prison and other correctional facilities due to offences relating to the 2019 protests or national security.

## **PUBLIC SERVICE**

### **New National Security Guidelines for Civil Servants**

In July 2025, Secretary for Security Chris Tang announced that the Government would issue new national security guidelines for all 180,000 civil servants. The guidelines will outline how civil servants should identify and respond to acts of "soft resistance" and relevant risks to fulfil their duty of safeguarding national security in the SAR. Tang noted that the new guidelines will apply to every civil servant, from cleaning staff to policy officials.

## **Recruitment of Senior Civil Servants: Administrative Officer Post**

In June 2023, the Hong Kong Government's Civil Service Bureau announced plans to expand the pool of eligible candidates for civil service positions requiring an undergraduate degree. Under the new arrangement, third and final-year university students may apply for various civil service jobs before graduation, with successful candidates joining the Government upon completing their studies.

In October 2025, Secretary for the Civil Service Ingrid Yeung Hoi Poi-yan stated that the Government had received approximately 20,700 applications for the joint recruitment of five civil service graduate grades. Amongst these, applications for the position of Administrative Officer, the policy grade entry point, rose by three per cent from last year to 13,600 – the highest number since the 2021/2022 recruitment year. In addition, around 18,300 people applied for the role of Executive Officer II. Yeung said that she was “encouraged” by the number of applications this year, noting that it reflects the willingness of many young individuals to join the Government and serve the public.

## **Establishment of International Ombudsman Academy**

On 25 August 2025, the Office of the Ombudsman launched the online-based Hong Kong International Ombudsman Academy (HKIOA).

According to the Office of the Ombudsman, the HKIOA is a virtual platform for promoting best practices in public administration and the handling of public complaints. It will provide workshops, seminars and mediation training for over 100 Government bodies and public organisations under the local Ombudsman Ordinance.

Officiating at the opening ceremony, Chief Secretary Eric Chan Kwok-ki remarked that the academy will not only foster international exchanges but also play an instrumental role in “telling good stories of Hong Kong”. Chan reaffirmed the importance of public oversight in strengthening governance, urging civil servants to regard complaints as opportunities for improvement.

## **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”.*

On 17 September, the Chief Executive set out his fourth annual Policy Address with a focus on the Northern Metropolis project on Hong Kong's border with Shenzhen. Another priority was boosting the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) across Hong Kong and ongoing policy development to strengthen Hong Kong as an international financial centre. The Chief Executive committed to building vibrant bond, currency and gold markets. He also referenced the licensing regime being established for stablecoin issuers and legislative proposals for digital asset dealing and custodian services.

On 9 October 2025, HSBC announced its plan to privatise Hang Seng Bank. HSBC was already a majority shareholder in the Bank before the privatisation.

On 9 December, Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing (HKEX) launched 'HKEX Tech 100 Index', tracking 100 large and medium-sized publicly listed companies spanning AI, biotech and pharmaceuticals, electric vehicles and smart driving, information technology, internet, and robotics.

## **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 11 July, the Hong Kong Government stated it would adopt mainland Chinese regulatory standards for the first time in the construction of the Northern Link mass transit lines.

On 31 October, the contract for dedicated servers supporting activist investor David Webb’s highly regarded ‘Webb-site.com’ expired which resulted in the closure of the website, alongside Webb’s declining health. The website was curated to promote transparency in the city’s financial markets. The data repository remains available for download. An individual has taken on the role of updating the database and the successor website is available via Webb-database.com.<sup>1</sup>

On 3 November, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) announced plans to open an office in Hong Kong.

### **CK Hutchison Port Divestment Developments**

During the reporting period, reporting on CK Hutchison’s ports divestment focused on whether COSCO Shipping would join the buyer consortium and seek governance rights, as a condition of the sale receiving approval from mainland Chinese regulators. In late July, Bloomberg reported COSCO was seeking “veto rights or equivalent powers” and extensive information access. After the exclusivity period agreed between CK Hutchison and the initial consortium parties expired in July, CK Hutchison confirmed it was considering inviting a “major strategic investor” from Mainland China to participate in the sale, though did not name COSCO directly. In late December, former COSCO executive Zhang Yong was appointed deputy director at the CGLO, with speculation in the media that he had been chosen to help shepherd the deal to completion in 2026.

## **MONETARY SYSTEM**

*The Hong Kong Government continues to have formal discretion over its monetary and financial policies. No capital or exchange control policy was applied to the SAR in the reporting period. The authority to issue Hong Kong currency remains vested in the*

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<sup>1</sup> On 13 January 2026, David Webb MBE passed away. Our thoughts continue to be with his family, friends, and all who knew him. He leaves behind a remarkable legacy which will continue to have a positive influence for many years to come.

*Hong Kong SAR Government. Markets for foreign exchange, gold, securities and futures continued free of interference.*

The Hong Kong SAR maintains its status as an international financial centre and was ranked third of 120 financial centres in the 38th Global Financial Centres Index. Hong Kong's monetary and financial systems continue to be overseen by its four major independent regulators.

As of 3 November 2025, the Banking (Amendment) Ordinance 2025 entered into force. A key amendment established a voluntary mechanism allowing authorised institutions to share information on suspected illicit activity via Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA)-designated secure platforms.

Between 2 and 5 November, the HKMA hosted their fourth Global Financial Leaders summit. The summit brought together 300 global financial leaders, including a virtual keynote from Vice Premier He Lifeng. The conference covered issues ranging from macroeconomic developments, digitalisation and leadership.

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. By the end of December, the official foreign currency reserve assets of Hong Kong amounted to USD 427.9 billion, representing over five times the currency in circulation.

## **SHIPPING**

*Hong Kong maintained its own systems of shipping management, regulation and registration over the reporting period. Free access to Hong Kong's ports for foreign civilian vessels remains in place, consistent with the continued operation of Hong Kong's separate maritime administration.*

The number and tonnage of ships under the Hong Kong Shipping Register saw an increased rate of decline over the reporting period, resulting in the Singaporean register overtaking it as the fourth largest shipping register globally.

On 1 July, the Hong Kong Government officially reconstituted the Hong Kong Maritime and Port Development Board as a key high-level advisory body to support the development of the shipping and wider maritime sector.

Hong Kong Maritime Week took place between 16 and 22 November and saw the launch of a new "port partnership" programme by the Transport and Logistics Bureau to support Belt and Road connectivity.

## **CIVIL AVIATION**

*Hong Kong maintained its own system of civil aviation management over the reporting period, including keeping its own aircraft register and retaining responsibility for routine business and technical management, including airport management and air traffic services within the Hong Kong Flight Information Region. Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) continues to facilitate commercial and tourism flows and enabled the city to maintain its status as an international and regional aviation centre.*

In his September 2025 Policy Address, the Chief Executive stated that the Government would work towards a specified target for sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) consumption ratio for flights departing from Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) by 2030. On 21 October, the Transport and Logistics Bureau confirmed this was envisaged to be between 1% and 2%.

## **EDUCATION**

### **National Security Education**

In July 2025, the Education Bureau distributed anti-terrorism comic books to more than 900 primary and secondary schools across Hong Kong. According to the Government's Inter-departmental Counter Terrorism Unit (ICTU), relevant materials were designed to "elucidate the threat of radicalisation" in schools and to strengthen young people's awareness of extremism and emergency preparedness.

In October, the Security Bureau launched national security comics and introduced cartoon characters to promote national security in kindergartens. Secretary for Security Chris Tang also announced plans to incorporate themed drama performances as part of the Government's efforts to strengthen national security education for children. He emphasised that plays featuring relatable storylines would help students better understand concepts related to national security and law-abiding awareness.

In the School Administration Guide, updated by the Education Bureau in November 2025, teachers are advised to review the details of activities organised by external parties to prohibit content that endangers national security or that promotes political propaganda.

### **Patriotic Education**

Speaking at the opening of a patriotic education base for Hong Kong and Macao students in Beijing on 21 August, Chief Secretary for Administration Eric Chan said he hoped the facility would serve as a platform to foster patriotic sentiment and deepen young people's understanding of national history in both SARs.

On 23 August, at the launch of an exhibition marking the 80th anniversary of the War of Resistance (formally known as the Second Sino-Japanese War from 1937 to 1945), Chief Executive John Lee called on the public to remain vigilant, warning of the presence of "hostile forces". In his Policy Address delivered on 17 September 2025, Lee pledged to further promote patriotic education through relevant memorial activities, cross-border collaboration and curriculum reforms.

In October, the Education Bureau announced revisions to the senior secondary Chinese History curriculum, adding topics such as the founding of the Chinese Communist Party and "socialism with Chinese characteristics". The changes will take effect in the 2027/2028 academic year and will be formally assessed in the Diploma of Secondary Education examinations starting from 2030.

## FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND UK BILATERAL RELATIONS

*Subject to the principle that foreign affairs are the responsibility of the Central People's Government, representatives of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government continue to participate, as members of delegations of the Government of the People's Republic of China, in negotiations at the diplomatic level directly affecting the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region conducted by the Central People's Government. The UK Government and Hong Kong SAR Government continue to maintain a bilateral relationship on relevant points.*

### **British National (Overseas)**

The Home Office published the latest UK immigration statistics on 27 November 2025. From 31 January 2021 until 30 September 2025, over 230,000 visas have been granted to those on the British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) visa route. Those with BN(O) status and their eligible family members can apply to come to the UK to live, study and work in virtually any capacity on a pathway to citizenship. By the end of September 2025, nearly 1,500 individuals on the BN(O) route have been granted settlement in the UK.

On 20 November, the Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP, announced that the permanent settlement qualifying period for migrants would be doubled to 10 years. It was confirmed on 20 November that BN(O) status holders would remain eligible to settle permanently in the UK after five years, granting a reduction in the qualifying period for settlement.

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

### **Visits**

On 17 October 2025, the FCDO's Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Olly Robbins, visited Hong Kong.

On 31 October, the Cabinet Office's Second Permanent Secretary, European Union and International Economic Affairs, Michael Ellam, visited Hong Kong.

Between 25 and 26 November, Hong Kong Financial Secretary Paul Chan Mo-po visited the UK. On 25 November, he attended the annual *Hong Kong Trade Development Council Dinner* in London. On 26 November, Chan attended a Hong Kong Association lunch.

In December, the Minister of State for Investment, Lord Jason Stockwood, visited Hong Kong and met Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Algernon Yau. He attended the UK Investment Conference on 2 December and met investors and business leaders across the city.

### **Trade and Investment**

The Hong Kong SAR was the 18th largest trading partner in the four quarters to the end of Q3 2025 accounting for 1.5% of total UK trade. Total trade in goods and services (exports plus imports) between the UK and the Hong Kong SAR was £28.3 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q3 2025, an increase of 13.8% or £3.4 billion

in current prices from the four quarters to the end of Q3 2024. Of this £28.3 billion, UK total exports to Hong Kong SAR amounted to £17.2 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q3 2025 (an increase of 9.6% or £1.5 billion in current prices, compared to the four quarters to the end of Q3 2024).

On 2 December 2025, the UK hosted its Investment Conference in the Hong Kong SAR, which was supported by Hong Kong's investment promotion agency, Invest Hong Kong. The conference brought together around 300 attendees to participate in 17 sessions with 51 speakers from industry and government. Attended by the Minister of State (Minister for Investment), Lord Jason Stockwood, and senior business leaders from the UK and Hong Kong, the conference provided an opportunity for the UK to convey its growth strategy to international investors and further foster the partnership between the UK, Hong Kong and the global investment community.

## **Culture**

Between 1 July and 31 December 2025, the British Council delivered 1,526 university and school entrance exams, as well as 1,841 UK professional qualifications. A total of 4,944 Young Learners and 1,479 Adult students attended in-person English language courses. The British Council also delivered 25,938 IELTS tests during this period.

In July and August, the British Council hosted pre-departure briefings for 2,335 young students preparing to study in the UK. Also in July, the UK Department for Trade and Business (DBT) led a delegation of Hong Kong fashion trade associations, Government officials, academics and designers to London to engage with the British Fashion Council and leading UK brands.

In September, the British Council held a Study UK Universities Roadshow for prospective students, with participation from more than 50 UK universities and over 6,000 students from international schools and local Direct Subsidy Scheme schools. Also in September, the British Consulate led a mission to showcase British fashion at CENTRESTAGE, Hong Kong's leading fashion tradeshow. The UK was the event's first-ever Partner Country, and the UK Pavilion showcased 16 innovative brands and emerging designers.

In November, the British Council led a delegation of Hong Kong cultural leaders to London and Manchester to exchange best practices on sustainability.

## **International Organisation for Mediation Begins Operations**

In his September Policy Address, the Chief Executive pledged to strengthen Hong Kong's role in international mediation through supporting the work of the International Organisation for Mediation (IOMed).

The IOMed became fully operational on 20 October. In her opening remarks, China's Vice Foreign Minister, Hua Chunying, described the organisation as "a new platform in the field of international rule of law", emphasising its commitment to equal consultation and win-win cooperation. Hua further stated that "the vision behind the establishment of IOMed is highly consistent with that of the Global Governance Initiative", expressing confidence that the organisation will make Hong Kong the "capital of mediation".

## **International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT) Announces Plans for a Hong Kong-based regional office**

On 11 December, the General Assembly of UNIDROIT – an intergovernmental organisation – authorised the establishment of an Asia-Pacific liaison office to be based in Hong Kong. This would be UNIDROIT’s first office beyond its Rome headquarters. The Hague Conference on Private International Law – a similar intergovernmental organisation – has maintained a regional Asia-Pacific office in Hong Kong since 2012.

## **DEFENCE**

*The maintenance of public order in the Hong Kong SAR continues 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.*

On 3 July 2025, a fleet of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA), led by the aircraft carrier Shandong, entered Hong Kong waters for a five-day visit. In his welcoming remarks, Chief Executive John Lee described the visit as a demonstration of “national defence and security safeguarding high-quality development.”

On 22 August, the PLA completed its 28th routine troops rotation, according to the Ministry of National Defence of the PRC. The incoming personnel pledged to uphold the principle of ‘One Country, Two Systems’, ensure full implementation of the Basic Law of the SAR and the Hong Kong Garrison Law, strengthen operational capabilities, and safeguard national security.

On 27 October, the PLA Hong Kong Garrison conducted a joint patrol drill aimed at strengthening emergency response, rapid planning, swift deployment and contingency handling capabilities. The PLA stated that its troops adhered strictly to Hong Kong laws and regulations governing roads, waterways and airspace throughout the operation.

## **RIGHT OF ABODE, TRAVEL AND IMMIGRATION**

*The Hong Kong SAR Immigration Department remains 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 about 170 countries were entitled to visa-free access to Hong Kong for a period ranging from 7 days to 180 days.*

### **Journalist denied work visa**

On 22 August, media reported that a senior reporter with Bloomberg News’ Asia, was refused a work visa renewal by the Hong Kong Immigration Department. No official explanation was provided. The Foreign Correspondents’ Club (FCC) issued a statement, noting that “this decision and the lack of explanation reinforces widespread concerns about the erosion of press freedom in Hong Kong, which is protected under

the Basic Law and the Bill of Rights”. The FCC stressed that “it is important to provide the visa applicant with a proper explanation for any denial of work visas or entry into Hong Kong”, adding that “this suggested improvement to the system would show greater transparency in dealing with freedom of the press, which is vital to preserving Hong Kong’s image as an international business centre”. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) stated that this decision “sends a chilling message to the business community: even journalists working for a business-focused news agency can be denied entry simply for doing their job”.

The chairman of the Hong Kong Journalists Association warned that local companies may need to consider the risks of investing in overseas talent, citing an increase in visa denials beyond those publicly reported.

## OTHER REPORTS

On 13 August, the US Department of State 2024 Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Hong Kong highlighted several significant human rights issues, including “arbitrary arrest and detention”, “transnational repression against individuals outside of Hong Kong” and “serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom”.

In a study commissioned by the UK Government and published on 28 August 2025, entitled “Exploring the experiences of Hong Kongers, including BN(O)s, living in the UK”, most participants reported feeling welcome in the UK and within their local communities. However, the report found that integration was influenced by factors such as their reasons for moving to the UK, English language proficiency and the length of time they had lived in the UK.

In September 2025, the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation published a report entitled “*We Were Made to Suffer’: Systemic Abuse and Political Control Inside Hong Kong’s Prisons*”. Drawing on interviews with 17 former prisoners and open-source records, the report presented evidence of “targeting of political prisoners”, “political indoctrination”, “assaults” and “chronic medical neglect” by Correctional Services Department staff.

On 8 September, the European Union (EU) published its annual report on Hong Kong’s economic and political developments. The EU noted that the SNSO has further exacerbated the chilling effect of the NSL.

On 25 September, the Fraser Institute’s Economic Freedom of the World 2025 Annual Report ranked Hong Kong as the world’s freest economy out of 165 jurisdictions, once again overtaking Singapore, which was placed second. The ranking was based on data from 2023. Despite retaining its top position, the report noted a consistent decline in Hong Kong’s overall economic freedom score. It also noted that the deterioration in the territory’s “regulation” and “legal system and property rights” was “due to a notorious 2020 security law that seems to have ended China’s promise of “one country, two systems”.

On 28 October, the World Justice Project published its Rule of Law Index 2025. Hong Kong was ranked 24th out of 143 countries and territories globally, down one place

from 2024. The SAR's overall score remained unchanged, however, its ranking on fundamental rights fell five places, from 62nd to 67th.

According to a report released on 10 December by KPMG ('Chinese Mainland and Hong Kong IPO Markets 2025 Review and 2026 Outlook'), Hong Kong topped Global IPO Fundraising in 2025.

## **CONCLUSION**

Hong Kong continues to retain a high degree of autonomy in economic, monetary, and financial matters; economic freedoms remain broadly preserved as envisaged in the Joint Declaration, and Hong Kong is cementing its position as a leading international financial centre through a record 2025 IPO boom.

However, the erosion of rights and freedoms has continued. Beijing has further consolidated its control of Hong Kong's legislature through the recent LegCo elections in which only pro-Beijing parties were allowed to participate. This leaves no space for opposition voices, evidenced by the recent disbandment of the Democratic Party, the oldest pro-democracy party in the territory. Furthermore, amendments to prison rules have given authorities greater ability to restrict access to lawyers and religious leaders by those detained in prison.

This reporting period has seen the further entrenchment of national security legislation and its application in ways that undermine the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the Joint Declaration. The national security case against British national Jimmy Lai dominated domestic and international headlines. His long-awaited verdict came on 15 December 2025, with mitigation now scheduled for January 2026 and sentencing expected to arrive shortly after.

There has been some progress for the LGBT community, with positive but limited rulings for transgender individuals and same-sex parents. However, the notable first veto of a Government Bill by the 'patriots only' LegCo rejected the framework for recognition of same-sex partnerships.

The UK Government continues to assess that China is in a state of ongoing non-compliance with the Joint Declaration and will continue to hold China to its international obligations. We remain committed to defending the values of openness, accountability, and the rule of law that underpin Hong Kong's unique identity.

Finally, this reporting period was marked by the tragic Tai Po fire in late November. As His Majesty the King said, the UK stands with all those affected and pays tribute to the strength of the people of Hong Kong to come together and support each other in times of crisis.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

British National (Overseas)	BN(O)
Central Government Liaison Office	CGLO
Court of Appeal	CA

Court of Final Appeal	CFA
Central People's Government	CPG
Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference	CPPCC
Candidate Eligibility Review Committee	CERC
Executive Council	ExCo
European Union	EU
Foreign Correspondents' Club	FCC
Hong Kong Journalists Association	HKJA
Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office	HKMAO
Hong Kong International Ombudsman Academy	HKIOA
Hong Kong Monetary Authority	HKMA
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region	HKSAR
International Organisation for Mediation	IOMed
Legislative Council	LegCo
Member of the Parliament	MP
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 of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong SAR	OCMFA
Office for Safeguarding National Security of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong SAR	OSNS
People's Republic of China	PRC
Reporters Without Borders	RSF
Safeguarding National Security Ordinance	SNSO
United Nations	UN
United Nations Human Rights Council	UNHRC

## ANNEX

Statement by the Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, to Parliament on Jimmy Lai, 15 December 2025.

“With permission, Madame Deputy Speaker, I will now turn to today’s verdict in the trial of Jimmy Lai.

Today, Hong Kong’s courts ruled that Jimmy Lai was guilty of foreign collusion under the National Security Law, which Beijing imposed on the city five years ago. They also found him guilty of conspiring to publish seditious materials.

Jimmy Lai is a British citizen. He has been targeted by the Chinese and Hong Kong governments for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression. This was a politically motivated prosecution which I strongly condemn.

Jimmy Lai now faces the prospect of a sentence which, for a man of 78 years, could mean the rest of his life in prison. I call again for Jimmy Lai’s immediate release.

On my instruction, the Foreign Office has today summoned the Chinese Ambassador to underline our position in the strongest terms. My Acting Consul General was present at court to bear witness today.

And for many in this House – and for the large diaspora community living in the UK – it is heartbreaking that such a violation of a British man’s rights could occur in Hong Kong. Because the Hong Kong of Jimmy Lai’s childhood was a city where a twelve-year-old boy seeking opportunity could go on to build a business empire, then a media platform.

It was a city of freedom. And that freedom brought great prosperity. So when the Joint Declaration was signed by the United Kingdom and China in 1984, both nations declared their commitment to that prosperity.

And our countries agreed that Hong Kong’s uniqueness was the foundation of its success. Its high degree of autonomy. Its executive, legislative, and independent judicial power. Its rights and freedoms, including of speech, of the press, of assembly and of association.

And these were to be enshrined in law.

For many years, Hong Kong was the embodiment of the commitments made in that Joint Declaration. The city, the economy, and most importantly the people thrived.

And it was a remarkable, shining example to the world of what Hong Kong's people and cooperation between the UK and China could achieve. And indeed, it is partly because of our important economic as well as our political history with Hong Kong that China remains our third largest trading partner today.

But in 2020, China began to break commitments in that Declaration. Hong Kong's free media spoke out and they were punished for it. In June 2020, China breached the Joint Declaration by imposing its National Security Law on the city. A law imposed on Hong Kong to silence China's critics. A law that undermined Hong Kong's autonomy and threatened the rights that China had once freely committed to upholding.

And it was not long before the new law was applied. Jimmy Lai was arrested, along with other advocates of democracy, free speech and freedom of assembly. This British citizen, this businessman and journalist, this father, husband and grandfather, has endured five years of incarceration. Meanwhile, his supporters around the world have campaigned tirelessly for justice.

I pay particular tribute to Jimmy's son, Sebastien Lai who has endured such pain and shown such determination and dignity in fighting for his father and for the wider rights and principles at stake.

I know many Honourable colleagues have had the privilege of meeting this determined man who has endured so much to take on his father's mantle, speaking up where his father cannot.

The Government has continually and repeatedly raised Jimmy Lai's case with China at every opportunity – urging the authorities to agree to his release. Yet the Hong Kong authorities continue to refuse us consular access to our citizen. For a 78-year-old man whose health is suffering.

So Jimmy Lai remains imprisoned despite international calls for his release and concerns regarding his health. Imprisoned despite UK Ministers raising our concerns directly and privately with Hong Kong and Chinese officials. And imprisoned despite our repeated requests for consular access, the most recent of which was submitted on Thursday.

So, once again I call for Jimmy Lai to be granted full access to independent medical professionals to assess his health and ensure he receives adequate treatment.

Today's verdict is sadly not a surprise. But no state can bully and persecute the British people for exercising their basic rights.

We have seen how the Hong Kong authorities have tried to use the National Security Law to target even those living on British soil for speaking up. The UK has repeatedly called for the National Security Law to be repealed and for an end to the prosecution of all individuals charged under it.

And it remains imperative that the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities end the deliberate targeting of opposition voices through arrest warrants and bounties in the UK and elsewhere.

The safety of the Hong Kong community in the UK is a top priority for this government. And as the Prime Minister recently said, protecting our security is non-negotiable. It is our first duty.

This government is unequivocally clear that China poses a series of national security threats to the United Kingdom. And that is why we have taken further steps and tougher measures to defend our democracy by disrupting and deterring threats from China and other state actors.

Including upgrading sovereign technology, removing Chinese made surveillance equipment from sensitive sites. Drawing up new legislation to tackle state threats modelled on counter terrorism powers. Rolling out new training to police forces across the country on tackling state threats and protecting individuals from transnational repression.

And continuing to support the Hong Kong British National Overseas route which has welcomed over 200,000 Hong Kongers to the UK. And where the Home Office has confirmed as part of the Earned Settlement consultation, they will retain a five-year settlement route in the UK.

China has not upheld its commitments to the people of Hong Kong. But we will. Jimmy Lai chose to remain in Hong Kong to speak up for what was right. He is currently paying the price.

But for the sake of Jimmy Lai, for his family, but also for the people of Hong Kong, for the joint Declaration we signed, and for the rule of law, we will not relent on this. Joined by nations across the world, we call again for the immediate release of Jimmy Lai.

I commend this statement to the House.”