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## **HONG KONG BRACES FOR FURTHER POLITICAL TURMOIL AS GOVERNMENT PREPARES TO SEND EXTRADITION BILL TO LEGISLATURE**

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11.06.2019

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Japan Times (11 June 2019)

Hong Kong residents braced for further political turmoil as the territorys government prepared to send the legislature a widely opposed bill that would allow criminal suspects to be extradited to mainland China.

The legislation has become a lightning rod for concerns about Beijings increasing control over the former British colony, which had been promised it would retain its own legal and social institutions for 50 years after its return to Chinese rule in 1997.

Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam said the bill will be sent to the legislature on Wednesday for debate. The legislatures president, Andrew Leung, scheduled a vote for June 20.

Police closed off streets surrounding the legislature and government headquarters. Local media reports said thousands of additional officers were being mobilized to keep order amid calls for protesters to begin gathering Tuesday night.

Some businesses announced plans to close Wednesday and there were scattered reports of students planning to boycott classes.

A protest on Sunday by hundreds of thousands of people, the semiautonomous territorys largest in more than a decade, reflected growing apprehension about relations with the Communist Party-ruled mainland.

Critics believe the legislation would put Hong Kong residents at risk of being entrapped in Chinas judicial system, in which opponents of Communist Party rule have been charged with economic crimes or ill-defined national security offenses, and would not be guaranteed free trials.

Lam, who canceled her regular question and answer session on Wednesday, said the government has considered concerns from the private sector and altered the bill to improve human rights safeguards.

She emphasized that extradition cases would be decided by Hong Kong courts.

Even the chief executive could not overrule the court, to say that because (a country) wants this offender, I will surrender, Lam said.

Ronny Tong Ka-wah, a lawyer and member of Lams administration advisory committee, said Sundays protest showed a lack of trust in Hong Kongs administration, partly because Lam was

largely picked by Beijing and not elected by popular vote. However, Chinas patience with Hong Kongs demands has its limits, Tong said.

We need to gain the trust and confidence of Beijing so they can allow us the freedom of political reform, Tong said. They dont want to see Hong Kong as a base of subversion. And Im sorry, were doing exactly that.

Opponents of the proposed extradition amendments say the changes would significantly compromise Hong Kongs legal independence, long viewed as one of the main differences between the territory and mainland China.

Hong Kong Bar Association Chair Philip Dykes said a lack of faith in Beijing remains a crucial issue.

The government is asking these people with decades of mistrust suddenly to trust the system and to accept assurances that the (Chinese) mainland will offer that they be honored. And thats clearly not persuading the people, Dykes said in an interview.

Hong Kong currently limits extraditions to jurisdictions with which it has existing agreements and to others on an individual basis. China has been excluded from those agreements because of concerns over its judicial independence and human rights record.

The proposed amendments to the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance and the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance would expand the scope of criminal suspect transfers to include Taiwan, Macau and mainland China.

Lam has said the changes are necessary for Hong Kong to uphold justice and meet its international obligations. Without them, she said Hong Kong risks becoming a fugitive offenders haven.

Supporters have pointed to the case of Chan Tong-kai, a Hong Kong man who admitted to Hong Kong police that he killed his girlfriend during a trip to Taiwan. Because Hong Kong and Taiwan dont have an extradition agreement, he has not been sent to Taiwan to face charges there, though he has been jailed in Hong Kong on money laundering charges.

Under its one country, two systems setup, Hong Kong was guaranteed the right to retain its own social, legal and political systems for 50 years. As a result, residents enjoy far greater freedoms than people on the mainland, such as the freedom to protest or publicly criticize the government.

Nevertheless, the Communist Party exerts influence on the Hong Kong government.

Hong Kong voters cannot directly elect their chief executive. Lam was elected in 2017 by a committee dominated by pro-Beijing elites and is widely seen as the Communist Partys favored candidate.

The Legislative Council, Hong Kongs parliament, includes a sizable camp of pro-Beijing lawmakers.

Beijing has made substantial efforts in recent years to integrate Hong Kong with the mainland. Last October, China opened the worlds longest sea-crossing bridge, connecting Hong Kong and Macau to the city of Zhuhai in southern Guangdong province. The government has named the three combined locales the Greater Bay Area, which it aims to turn into a center for technological innovation and advanced manufacturing.

Those in Hong Kong who anger Chinas central government have come under greater pressure since Chinese President Xi Jinping came to power in 2012.

The detention of several Hong Kong booksellers in late 2015 intensified worries about the erosion of Hong Kongs rule of law. The booksellers vanished before resurfacing in police custody in mainland China. Among them, Swedish citizen Gui Minhai is currently being investigated on charges of leaking state secrets after he sold gossip books about Chinese leaders.

In April, nine leaders of a 2014 pro-democracy protest movement known as the Umbrella Revolution were convicted on public nuisance and other charges.

In May, Germany confirmed it had granted asylum to two people from Hong Kong who, according to media reports, were activists fleeing tightening restrictions at home. It was the first known case in recent years of a Western government accepting political refugees from Hong Kong.

[https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/06/11/asia-pacific/hong-kong-braces-political-turmoil-government-prepares-send-extradition-bill-legislature/#.XQAUG\\_6hmUk](https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/06/11/asia-pacific/hong-kong-braces-political-turmoil-government-prepares-send-extradition-bill-legislature/#.XQAUG_6hmUk)

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