

'The end of Hong Kong': Activists warn more arrests are coming

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Pro-democracy activists have warned that China is carrying out a political purge in Hong Kong and say they fear more arrests are coming.

Their warning comes as analysts say the world is watching the financial hub take its last breath of freedom as China tightens its reigns.

A crackdown on pro-democracy Hong Kongers has escalated since the Chinese Communist Party imposed the new security law on the financial powerhouse in June, with well-known activist Agnes Chow and outspoken media publisher Jimmy Lai both arrested in the last 48-hours.

- The tycoon says he's overwhelmed by the support after becoming the most high-profile person to be arrested under a new national security law and has urged patience in a "long-term fight" for democracy.

- A post on Ms Chow's Facebook page said police had taken her from her home, with another eight people were arrested.

- Media tycoon Jimmy Lai's publication Apple Daily promised to 'fight on' in a front-page headline above an image of Lai being detained by police. More than 500,000 copies were printed, said on its website, up from the usual 100,000 daily circulation.

Asia expert Dr Leonid Petrov, from the Australia National University, said it was clear Beijing was cracking down on dissents.

"Certainly Beijing's patience for opposition has been running thin," he told The New Daily. "The arrests started in early July, with a number of teenagers who participated in the protests. Some people had their houses searched [and] their computers were confiscated.

"The arrest of Agnes Chow is another step in cracking down against the opposition."

Australia-Hong Kong Link leader Jane Poon said the pro-democracy community was bracing for more arrests. *"It's a total infringement on freedom,"*

Ms Poon said. *"I was born in Hong Kong, I lived in Hong Kong, I've never seen this happen before. For me, it's a shock. "This is the end of Hong Kong. I believe there will be more arrests ... I hope the international community will speak out for Hong Kong."*

The arrests brought condemnation from countries around the globe, with US Vice-President Mike Pence saying it was: *"deeply offensive and an affront to freedom-loving people around the world".*

But China's political class will be unphased by the ire of the international community, lecturer in Chinese studies at Melbourne University Sow Keat Tok said.

"They haven't given up totally caring what the rest of the world thinks but at the moment Beijing feels cornered by the international society," he said.

"China feels, if it doesn't take a strong stance, it's going to lose a lot of face, so President Xi Jinping has to make sure he stands firm to bring Hong Kong back into control.

"It has a lot more at stake than just whether or not it will bode well in the international community. Xi's personal leadership, his ability to reign, is at stake. This is something we need to take into consideration."

Coming days will be crucial for activists, as they watch what happens in the country. Hong Kong's independence is riding on their decision, Mr Tok said.

"We have not seen the exact charges, the evidence that will be produced in court, that will be important. "I think there is a lot to play out in the next week. "

The crackdown is likely to continue, as President Xi wrestles to gain control over the financial hub, said Dr Petrov.

"I believe that Hong Kong simply has been sacrificed for the greater cause of stability," he said.

"This year, 2020 has been particularly been testing china's ability. Beijing could not tolerate Hong Kong citizens criticising the regime." What we are witnessing is the end of a free Hong Kong", Dr Petrov said.

"The three institutions of democracy are independent media, free elections and impartial courts," he said. "The elections have been postponed, media has been silenced, and activists arrested. We will see what happens in terms of the persecution of Jimmy Lai and Agnes Chow. If they are punished with hefty penalties that would mean the end of democracy in Hong Kong."

P.S.

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