

New arrests in Hong Kong as police hold nine democracy activists

Sunday 30 April 2017, by [HAAS Benjamin](#) (Date first published: 27 April 2017).

Morning raids come a day after two disqualified pro-independence lawmakers were charged amid growing signs of crackdown.

Hong Kong police have arrested at least nine democracy activists in connection with anti-government protest last year, the latest in a series of politically motivated prosecutions that critics say are designed to eliminate opposition.

The arrests on Thursday come just one day after two disqualified pro-independence lawmakers were charged, months after the pair stormed the legislature amid a saga over a dramatic anti-China protest during their swearing-in ceremony.

Derek Lam and Ivan Lam were both arrested at their homes around 7am, their political party Demosisto said. They were charged with unlawful assembly and causing disorder in public places for participating in a protest that saw thousands take to the streets in November after Beijing stepped in to bar the two pro-independence legislators.

The protest and surrounding political chaos came just two years after the pro-democracy Umbrella Movement occupied key roads and thoroughfares with tent protests, as a younger generation of activists faces off against Beijing loyalists.

The other activists arrested on Thursday included the chairman and two members of the League of Social Democrats, two members of the Student Fight for Democracy group and the former chair of the Lingnan University student union.

"The Hong Kong government is speeding up prosecutions against activists to wipe out the influence of the opposition camp ahead of president Xi's expected visit to Hong Kong on 1 July," said Joshua Wong, founder and general secretary of Demosisto.

Xi Jinping is widely rumoured to be travelling to the city to mark the 20th anniversary of the territory's return to China from the UK, and police plan to stage huge drills with a force of 29,000 officers.

Another reason for a possible Xi visit would be to swear in the city's next leader, Carrie Lam, who was elected in a controversial vote last month where only 0.03% of registered voters were able to cast a ballot. Demosisto has pledged to mark both the anniversary and the beginning of Lam's term with "a large civil disobedience protest".

The arrests this week are part of a campaign by outgoing leader Leung Chun-ying to ensure he remains influential beyond his term, according to Ma Ngok, a politics professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

“As long as Hong Kong politics remains confrontations over democracy issues, Leung and his hardline views will have a lot of say in Beijing’s policy making,” Ma said. “Leung has two months left and will maintain his hawkish attitude, and there may be more arrests to come.”

Leung wanted to demonstrate to the Chinese government that he is tough on protesters, Ma added, and with the trials set to last months or even years, they could stymie any attempts by Lam to foster reconciliation.

“It’s a typical political persecution in order to threaten the Hong Kong people who are willing to come out and voice demand of universal suffrage,” Leung Kwok-hung, a League of Social Democrats MP, said of the latest round of arrests.

Last month, and just one day after Lam’s election, police announced they would charge nine people more than two years after their involvement in the democracy protests that rocked Hong Kong in 2014.

“This is the third time doorstep arrests have been made this year, the political suppression is not over yet,” Avery Ng, chair of the League of Social Democrats who was also arrested Thursday, said in a Facebook post.

Derek and Ivan Lam were first arrested in January and later released on bail. When they were told to report to police to renew their bail in February, the two refused – a common tactic among activists to test whether the police arrested them without the intent to prosecute. The pair was released in February without being charged.

The two face up to six years in prison if convicted of both charges. The police did not respond to requests for comment.

Benjamin Haas in Hong Kong

P.S.

* The Guardian. Thursday 27 April 2017 06.10 BST Last modified on Thursday 27 April 2017 22.00 BST :

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/27/new-arrests-in-hong-kong-as-police-charge-nine-democracy-activists>