

Hong Kong: News Highlights, April 2024

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Within the government, the Labor and Welfare Department announced plans to amend the Trade Unions Ordinance [to require](#) that union founders sign a declaration stating that the union is not a threat to national security. Secretary for Justice Paul Lam [announced](#) that the department will not pursue an additional fake news ordinance since the current Article 23 Legislation meets some of the existing needs. This month, the government released statistics showing that average wait times for criminal cases in district courts as well as disciplinary cases in which inmates were sentenced to solitary confinement had both hit record highs in recent years. In addition, media discovered that the government had begun a trial run [in its installation of CCTV cameras in Mong Kok with facial capture technology](#), some of which are installed on smart lampposts.

Article 23 of the Basic Law [went into effect in March](#). Since then, the Hong Kong government and the international community have continued to dispute the impacts of the law. The government's "response team" will continue this work. But information on its expenditures and staffing are not made public for national security reasons. The [British government](#), foreign ministers [of G7 countries](#), and high-ranking [officials from the EU](#) have all expressed concern about the new regulations, while the Hong Kong government [has issued its criticisms in response](#).

As for national security cases, from the implementation of the National Security law to the beginning of this year, there had been [a total](#) of 291 individuals arrested in relation to national security crimes, with 170 individuals and 5 companies prosecuted. Roughly 87% of national cases [have been processed](#) at various levels. Many cases also saw new developments this month. A Portuguese man [accused of being chair of the Hong Kong Independence Party](#) pled guilty to conspiracy to incite others to secession and [was sentenced](#) to 5 years in prison. In [the case](#) of [Jimmy Lai](#) and [Apple Daily](#), [charged with](#) conspiracy [to collude](#) with [foreign forces](#), Andy Li [concluded his testimony](#) and [Chan Tsz-Wah began his testimony](#). Chow Hang-tung, accused of inciting subversion of state power alongside other former members of the Hong Kong Alliance, invited members of the public who participated in the annual Tiananmen memorial vigil to submit written testimonies and statements on the event, in an effort to return power over the authorship of history to the public. Meanwhile, [the first trial](#) under the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance began. [In the case](#), one defendant [testified for](#) the prosecution, [alleging that](#) the three defendants were members of the "Dragon Slayer Team" and describing the structure and operations of the organization. The defense questioned whether the National Security Department had ulterior motives in its decision to destroy most of the notes taken in their initial meeting with the defendant.



Chow Hang-tung, one of the Hong Kong Alliance members accused of inciting subversion of state power, released an article inviting members of the public who participated in the annual Tiananmen Vigil to write testimonies and offer evidence in the case, in an effort to return power over the authorship of history to the public. (Source: InmediaHK)

In other cases, one of the four members of the bail fund Spark Alliance who [were earlier charged with money laundering](#) has now pled guilty and [been sentenced to 16 months in prison](#). In the Yuen Long Attack case, [the first defendant who was not part](#) of the [white-shirted mob](#) that attacked protestors has now been found guilty of riot and sentenced 33 months in prison. In 2019, a Hong Kong University of Science and Technology student filed a suit in small claims court demanding compensation from the police for their firing of tear gas without warning during a rally. This month, the Department of Justice has succeeded in having the suit quashed.

Within civil society and the media, the Hong Kong Journalists Association's application for a judicial review of the Transport Department's new license plate search system [has been approved](#). A year after winning a judicial review to have the gender changed on their identity card, a transgender individual [has finally received his new identity card](#) with the correct gender listed. This month also saw a number of groups voice their opinions on various government policies: Ten different environmental organizations [held a press conference](#) on the planned [San Tin Technopole](#) development, arguing that the project's Environmental Impact Assessment was filled with errors and omissions, urging the Environmental Advisory Committee to veto the project. LegCo member Tik Chi-yuen arranged for seventeen different civil society groups, trade unions, and social welfare organizations to meet with the Secretary for the Environment and Ecology to discuss the planned garbage levy, but the Secretary only attended the meeting for half an hour. Finally, a representative of Reports Without Borders [was detained and refused entry to Hong Kong](#). The representative also revealed that they had been followed and suspected that their conversations had been secretly recorded when they were in Hong Kong the previous year.



Ten environmental organizations held a press conference arguing that the Environmental Impact Assessment for the San Tin Technopole contains numerous errors and omissions, urging the Environmental Advisory Committee to veto the project. (Source: InmediaHK)

In [the lead-up to International Workers' Day](#), former Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions member Joe Wong Nai-yuen [announced](#) that he had no plans to apply to hold a demonstration this year after [his experience last year](#), during which he briefly disappeared and was unreachable by phone before reappearing and cancelling the originally scheduled march. The Association for the Rights of Industrial Accidents Victims petitioned for the establishment of a memorial day for workers killed on the job and a memorial erected in their honor. The pro-establishment Federation of Hong

Kong and Kowloon Trade Unions, which applied to hold a demonstration last year but ultimately withdrew their application, [plans to hold a Mayday celebration and forum](#) this year. Nine pro-establishment labor organizations also plan to launch a “Mayday Declaration” to [advocate for a higher minimum wage](#).

This month also saw continued obstructions to arts and cultural activities due to complaints or issues with securing venues. The opening ceremony of the House of Hong Kong Literature was cancelled after complaints were filed alleging that it was not licensed as an entertainment venue. The event was then moved to another location, [only for police to arrive](#) during Anthony Wong Yiu-ming’s autograph signing. The Book Punch bookfair originally scheduled to take place at a local school was also cancelled due to complaints. In addition, two publications were prevented from going to print this month. House of Hong Kong Literature magazine *Formless* announced that it would cease publication after its funding from the Hong Kong Arts Development Council was suspended. Similarly, new issues of a Hong Kong University of Science and Technology student publication were prohibited from being distributed as scheduled. In addition, last year certain media outlets had put in a request with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department to obtain a list of books purchased by libraries only for this request to be denied. The media outlets then referred the issue to the Office of the Ombudsman. After investigation, the Office of the Ombudsman has now concluded that the department’s practices did not violate regulations.

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P.S.

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