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FT BIG READ

Hong Kong: Beijing opens new chapter

By Ben Bland

When the intended publisher of Xi Jinping, China's Godfather, a critical biography of the Chinese president, was jailed in China on smuggling charges in 2014, Jin Zhong stepped in and published the book himself.

Jin, the Hong Kong publisher of a string of sensitive titles about China's top leaders over the past 30 years, saw no reason not to publish another.

However, the unexplained disappearance late last year of five booksellers from a Hong Kong store specializing in books banned in China, and the suspected role of Beijing in their fate, has changed his mind. Jin has pulled the publication of a follow-up title by the same writer, an overseas dissident, called Xi Jinping's Nightmare.

"The situation now is very worrying," he says. "My wife resolutely opposes me publishing this book. So I've decided to avoid the risk right in front of us."

Jin, a writer who has been banned from the mainland since 1996, says the disappearances are a serious blow to Hong Kong's boisterous trade in banned Chinese books. His view is echoed by Bao Pu, a Hong Kong publisher who helped to smuggle the memoirs of Zhao Ziyang, a deposed former leader, out of China. Bao says bookstores are increasingly reluctant to stock his titles.

A little more than a year after the end of the Occupy protests against Beijing's refusal to give Hong Kong full democracy - demonstrations that at one stage brought the city to a standstill - many in the former British colony believe the disappearance of the booksellers is the most flagrant example yet of the growing threats to their liberties.

From the government covering up British royal insignia on colonial



A protester holds a placard during a protest on January 10 against the disappearances of booksellers in Hong Kong. The disappearances have alarmed activists and deepened suspicions that mainland authorities are squeezing free expression in the enclave

postboxes to the purchase of the city's daily English language newspaper by Alibaba, the Chinese e-commerce group, and ever greater pressure on journalists to self-censor, Claudia Mo, an opposition member of Hong Kong's legislature, says a trend of "mainland-ization" is taking hold.

The case of the booksellers - three of whom vanished while in mainland China, one from Thailand and the fifth from Hong Kong - has crystallized those concerns. Activists believe they were taken by Chinese security forces extending a crackdown on the mainland, where hundreds are believed to have been

detained, into Hong Kong and beyond.

Two of them - one British, the other a Swede - are European citizens and the UK government says it is "deeply concerned" about the disappearances. The worries about creeping mainland influence extend beyond the booksellers to Hong Kong's vibrant media sector and its universities.

Philip Hammond, the British foreign secretary, says that if it is true that one of the men was taken from Hong Kong, this would be an "egregious breach" of the "one country, two systems" arrangement. That constitutional principle was established in 1997 when Beijing took back control and pledged to maintain the territory's freedom of expression, legal independence and "a high degree of autonomy".

While Beijing controls foreign policy, defence and national security, only Hong Kong agencies have the right to enforce the law in the territory. Beijing, however, maintains a large liaison office in Hong Kong, a secretive body tasked with influencing politics and civil society.

"There is a growing feeling in Hong Kong of greater mainland pressure on universities and civil society as well as a greater security presence from the mainland," says Steve Vickers, a former head of the colonial police's criminal intelligence bureau. "The Hong Kong government appears to have considerably diminished autonomy and the liaison office seems to be strengthening its position."

The economy of Hong Kong, a city of 7m, is dependent on trade with the

mainland, while China continues to see the territory as an important financial center. But the sense that China is meddling in Hong Kong comes after voters in Taiwan - which China insists is one of its territories - elected a government that has pledged to reduce its economic reliance on the mainland.

While investors hope that the bookseller disappearances are an isolated case, any evidence that Beijing is interfering in Hong Kong's legal system could deter those who have long used the city as an entry point to China because of its respect for the rule of law.

"President Xi's shift towards a hard authoritarianism is disturbing and counterproductive and will have global implications," the US Congress executive commission on Chi-

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STEVE VICKERS
FORMER HEAD OF POLICE INTELLIGENCE UNIT



Hong Kong: Beijing opens new chapter (continued)

na, which is co-chaired by Republican presidential candidate Marco Rubio, warned last week. "Given recent events, it is unclear when it will stop or who next will be targeted - even foreigners and Hong Kong citizens cannot feel entirely safe."

At least 46m Chinese tourists visited Hong Kong last year and many spent time in the glitzy Causeway Bay shopping district, in search of Rolex watches, Louis Vuitton handbags and books banned in the mainland.

Up a narrow staircase opposite a Burberry store sits the shuttered Causeway Bay Books shop. It is one of several in the area that sell everything from lurid, semi-factual tales of top leaders' personal lives to weighty re-examinations of historical events like the cultural revolution.

Though popular with mainland tourists, who take them home and recirculate them, the books are less so with the authorities in Beijing. Some of the titles on corruption and Communist party rivalries appear to contain well-sourced information from disgruntled insiders.

The store has been closed since late December when its co-owner Lee Bo, a British citizen, disappeared after visiting the company's warehouse in Hong Kong. He was the last of the five booksellers to vanish; the other four have been missing since October.

Local police say their Chinese counterparts have told them Lee is in the mainland. Having initially reported him missing, his wife now claims Lee travelled to the mainland voluntarily and is "assisting with an investigation".

Gui Minhui, the store's co-owner and a Swedish citizen, has been paraded on Chinese state television, confessing to a 12-year-old drink-driving offence and claiming he went back to the mainland from Thai-



Chinese President Xi Jinping is photographed during his visit to Egypt's parliament on January 21. The Chinese premier warned against "deviation and distortion" in his meeting with Hong Kong Chief Executive CY Leung, last month.

land of his own volition. The whereabouts of the other three remains unknown and, despite repeated requests, Chinese officials have refused to tell journalists, the Hong Kong authorities and the relevant foreign governments where they are being held or even of what they are accused.

Human rights campaigners like William Nee of Amnesty International say the case looks like the work of China's state security apparatus with unexplained disappearances, a televised confession, no formal charges and pres-

sure on family members to reduce publicity.

"It's very worrying that there are signs that China is much more aggressive at going after its critics in regions outside of mainland China's jurisdiction," says Nee, who is based in Hong Kong.

Bei Ling, an exiled Chinese writer in the US, says that while government critics have long known the dangers of their activities in the mainland, those overseas now fear the ever longer arm of China's security forces.

Agnes Chow, one of

the leaders of the Occupy movement in 2014, says activists are worried about the implications for Hong Kong as well as their own safety. At the height of the Occupy protests Chow briefly stepped down as a campaign spokesperson due to what she calls political pressure on her family. She says she will not bow to such pressure again.

A senior Western diplomat says the booksellers' case shows that fears of a "mainlandization" of Hong Kong are well founded. At the University of Hong Kong, the city's prestigious educational institution, students, faculty and alumni are fighting what they see as a politically motivated crackdown after Johannes Chan, a pro-democracy law professor, was denied promotion.

Chan argues the apparent abductions are indicative of an escalation of interference by Beijing. "One of the conclusions [by Beijing] after Occupy was that some tertiary institutions in Hong

Kong were out of control and playing a supportive role to the demonstrating students," he says. "So China has tightened control on Hong Kong."

He says pro-Beijing figures have been appointed to key positions at universities, while the blocking of his promotion sends a message to academics to steer clear of politics. The Hong Kong government insists it only recruits on merit.

Journalists in Hong Kong complain of a similar trend, with physical attacks on reporters, advertisers withdrawing business from publications deemed critical of Beijing and growing media control from Chinese investors.

The most high-profile transaction has seen Alibaba, the e-commerce group, acquiring the South China Morning Post, the city's English-language newspaper, for \$266m. Alibaba has unashamedly vowed to make the newspaper's coverage of China, already criticized for being soft on

Beijing, even more positive.

The Hong Kong Journalists Association reports that since the Occupy protests, its members have faced a growing threat of violence and interference from the police. Its 2015 annual survey said journalists were "caught between two fires", and squeezed by "external pressures from the likes of the Hong Kong government and big business, and internal pressure in the form of escalating self-censorship to comply with establishment viewpoints".

When asked if it is stepping up control of the territory, the Chinese foreign ministry insists that Hong Kong citizens continue to enjoy "full rights and freedom in accordance with the law" and that its commitment to "one country, two systems" is "unflinching".

In recent years, however, Beijing has made its approach to Hong Kong clear. In 2014, just before the protests began, it released a white paper on the territory's future insisting that it must be "governed by patriots". A subsequent campaign against "damaging information" vowed to wipe out "reactionary and harmful information from Hong Kong and Taiwan". In December at a meeting with CY Leung, Hong Kong's pro-Beijing chief executive, Xi warned against "deviation and distortion" undermining one country, two systems.

Michael Tien, a businessman and lawmaker, argues that Hong Kong's radicals are reaping what they have sown. "One country two systems' has always been a balance, it's all grey, there's no black and white," he says. "I think we've been crossing a line in forgetting that we're part of China and there are signs that China is losing patience."

Tien says political divisions risk damaging Hong Kong's competitiveness at a time when its economy is struggling because of the China slowdown.

The opposition sees it differently. James To, a member of the city's legislative council, says that only true democracy can give the chief executive and the government the legitimacy to enact the reforms the city needs to thrive.

"I'm really worried about the future of Hong Kong," he says. "I sincerely urge the top leaders to think again."

There are signs that China is much more aggressive at going after its critics in regions outside of mainland China's jurisdiction.

WILLIAM NEE
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Activists drive youthful sense of separate identity

Just as in Taiwan, which has its own democratic government but is claimed by China, Beijing is losing the battle for the hearts and minds of young people in Hong Kong.

The number of Hong Kongers describing their identity as Chinese alone dropped from a high of 39 per cent just before the Beijing Olympics in the summer of 2008 to 18 per cent in December, according to surveys by the University of Hong Kong. During the same period, the proportion identifying themselves as a Hong

Konger has jumped from 18 per cent to 40 per cent. The trend towards a separate Hong Kong identity is more pronounced among those aged under 30, the data show.

After failing to pressure Beijing into giving Hong Kong genuine democracy, some young protesters have increased their demands and are calling for a referendum on Hong Kong's future or even independence. "We don't just want universal suffrage but self-determination so we can

decide the future of Hong Kong," says Agnes Chow, a 19-year-old student who helped lead the Occupy movement.

Edward Leung, another student, helps run HK Indigenous, one of several small, radical groups that are pushing for a more confrontational approach to Beijing and the Hong Kong government. "We want to resist the recolonialization of Hong Kong by the Chinese Communist party," he says.

Leung says young people must be willing to fight back against

the authorities, but the 24-year-old philosophy student, who looks more like a bookworm than a revolutionary, is also pursuing more conventional means, standing in a by-election next month for the legislative council.

His party has only 70 members but he hopes to use the election to spread his message of opposition to Beijing.

"Our generation, the post-1990s generation, is rising and in future we will be the ones in charge," he says.

By Joshua Goodman in Bogota

AS negotiations to end Colombia's half-century conflict close in on a final deal, attention is turning to the fate of an aging bank manager-turned leftist rebel who is being held at a U.S. maximum security prison alongside notorious terrorists.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia consider Ricardo Palmera to be a prisoner of war and have long insisted he be released for a peace accord to be signed. But the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama has long rejected freeing Palmera, who is serving a 60-year sentence in connection to the FARC's holding captive of three American defense contractors for more than five years a decade ago.

With peace talks expected to wrap up as early as March and President Juan Manuel Santos heading to Washington tomorrow to cement U.S. support for an accord with the FARC, there is a renewed push to win the 65-year-old's release.

Last week, Colombian Sen. Ivan Cepeda, a trusted conduit of both the FARC and Santos, quietly met with Palmera at the United States' highest security prison to discuss how he can contribute to peace, according to officials in Colombia and the U.S. familiar with the meeting. Cepeda was accompanied by Colombian diplomats and the conversation monitored by U.S. law enforcement, said four officials, who insisted on not being named because they weren't authorized to discuss the issue publicly.

The officials wouldn't reveal specifics about what was said in the meeting, but the visit was unusual. Dubbed the "Alcatraz of the Rockies," the 400-plus inmates at the "Supermax" penitentiary in Florence, Colorado, including Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and some al-Qaida operatives, are kept in their cells as much as 23 hours a day and are normally allowed to meet only with their lawyers and family.

Palmera's lawyer, Mark Burton, didn't reply to repeated email and phone requests seeking comment.

For FARC leaders, Palmera, better known by his nom de guerre Simon Trinidad, is a symbol of what they consider to be heavy-handed U.S. meddling in Colombia's conflict. When peace talks began in Cuba in 2012, Colombia's main rebel movement named him one of its five chief negotiators, using an empty seat and life-size cutout to draw attention to his imprisonment.

He was extradited to the



In this Jan. 3, 2004 file photo, Ricardo Palmera, known as Simon Trinidad, a leader of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC, shouts out as he is escorted by soldiers, at a military base in Bogota

As peace nears, renewed push to free Colombian rebel in US

U.S. in 2004 and convicted of conspiracy to kidnap the three Americans and sentenced to the maximum 60 years, though he beat more serious charges of actual hostage-taking and terrorism as well as drug-trafficking. The Americans were rescued in 2008.

"He was convicted to teach the FARC a lesson," said Carlos Lozano, a Communist Party politician and past intermediary to the FARC. "If Obama really wants to help build peace, after expending such an effort on war-making and weapon selling, then he can facilitate an agreement to allow this man to be at the peace table. The moment has arrived."

Born into a wealthy cattle-ranching family and the son of a senator, Palmera was an unusual recruit for the peasant-based FARC. After watching fellow leftists gunned down by right-wing militias during a previous peace attempt in the 1980s, he left his job as a bank manager near

his home in Valledupar and fled to a guerrilla hideout in the jungle.

His elite pedigree and familiarity with real-world politics are valuable assets for the FARC as it prepares to disarm and compete at the ballot box, Lozano said.

Although FARC negotiators insist Palmera's release is a priority, they have not said flatly that they would jetti-

There is no compelling, extraordinary or humanitarian reasons to release this international terrorist.

FORMER CAPTIVES' LETTER

son a deal over the issue. U.S. officials, meanwhile, haven't ruled out an early release or transfer but insist Colombia has not made any such request and say it's not a topic of negotiations.

Santos, in an interview with The Associated Press, was emphatic that he isn't seeking Palmera's release, because it's not in his hands, but would view any such move by the U.S. favorably.

"Of course I would like it because it would help the process," he said. "It would be a tremendous gesture for the FARC, for their dignity, as they really have made this issue an important issue for them. And you sometimes you have to make concessions of this sort to make the agreements stronger," he said. "But again: this is something I can't commit myself to."

Another Colombian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter, said the White House and State

Department have expressed a willingness to consider repatriating Palmera, but also have cautioned that opinion inside the U.S. government is divided.

Clearly, some Americans balk at any move to free Palmera. Sen. Marco Rubio, a Republican presidential candidate, introduced a resolution last year opposing Palmera's release.

The former American captives also oppose letting him go. "There is no compelling, extraordinary or humanitarian reasons to release this international terrorist — tried, convicted and sentenced for a crime involving national security," they wrote in a November letter to a federal judge.

Keith Stansell, one of the former captives, told the AP he still suffers nightmares and has scars from being chained during his captivity.

"His conditions are a thousand times better than mine were," Stansell said, "and he's a terrorist." AP

By Rodney Muhumuza,

BIRDS sing in the canopy and a leopard roams the thick undergrowth of this rainforest in Uganda, where the mosquito-borne Zika virus was discovered almost 70 years ago. Yet while alarms are being sounded in the Americas amid serious health issues, there is little concern here.

Zika fever is suspected in a surge of birth defects in Brazil, where infections were first identified last year, but in Uganda, humans have never suffered a Zika outbreak since the virus was first found, in a monkey, in 1947.

Now, there is sudden interest in the 10-hectare forest for which the virus is named, located on the edge of Lake Victoria and 23 kilometers from Kampala, the capital.

"People have been calling me and saying, 'What are you going to do with that mosquito? What are you still doing there?' And I tell them that I have lived here for seven years and nothing has ever happened to me," said Gerald Mukisa, a caretaker and tour guide at the forest.

An Associated Press team this week visited the Zika Forest, which has 35-meter-tall trees and is, now fittingly, a research site for scientists with the Uganda Virus Research Institute. There's also a derelict observation tower. Birdwatchers come and go, and musicians have come here to shoot videos for their songs. Real estate

Uganda: Little concern, impact of Zika virus in Zika Forest



Gerald Mukisa, a caretaker at the forest who also acts as a tour guide, poses in the Zika Forest, near Entebbe about 25 kilometers east of the Uganda capital Kampala

developers threaten encroachment on the forest reserve.

But until the breakout of Zika in the Western Hemisphere, not much attention was paid to the virus in the forest, according to Ugandan officials. Zika is not considered a very important disease in tropical Africa where malaria, also transmitted by mosquitoes, is a major killer.

"We have foxes here, rabbits, pythons, and even a leopard that lost its partner," Mukisa, stocky 50-year-old in jungle boots, said

as he trekked through the forest, bending away undergrowth that blocked his path. "People come here mostly as students or tourists. Now people are starting to ask about the mosquito."

The different impacts of the virus on humans in the tropics of Africa and those in Latin America and the Caribbean may be related to immunity and the fact that the mosquitoes carrying the virus here and there are different, with different habits.

The mosquito responsible for

the virus' spread across the Atlantic belongs to a subspecies called *Aedes aegypti aegypti*, and that might be a crucial difference. The one found in Uganda is known as *Aedes aegypti formosus*, and it targets animals more than people, according to Dr. Julius Lutwama, the leading Ugandan scientist investigating viruses spread by bugs. He said there have been no reported cases here of birth defects like microcephaly — babies born with small heads — that have been linked to the virus in Latin America.

While there has never been a known outbreak among people in Uganda, a few people have tested positive over the years, said Lutwama, who works with the Uganda Virus Research Institute and has investigated Zika for years. Yellow fever and dengue fever are more commonly reported in Uganda, and people infected with those diseases may also build resistance against Zika, he said.

"Because these diseases are closely related and they are being transmitted by the same mosquito, the likelihood of cross immunity is very high," he told The

Associated Press.

Matthew Aliota, a University of Wisconsin expert on the spread of mosquito-borne viruses, said scientists believe the cycles of Zika transmission are different in Uganda. While the *Aedes aegypti aegypti* in Latin America and the Caribbean prefers feeding on human blood, in Uganda the other type of the mosquito is spreading the virus. And that one prefers feeding on animals.

"Most of the transmission is in the animal cycle, with occasional spillover in humans," said Aliota, who recently studied the eruption of Zika cases in Colombia.

Lutwama said the last time a sample in his lab tested positive for Zika was about three years ago, when a woman in northern Uganda with suspected yellow fever was found instead to be infected with Zika.

"This patient had a fever, joint pains, nausea," he said, adding that the symptoms were mild. Dr. Issa Makumbi, the head of epidemiology and surveillance at Uganda's Ministry of Health, told AP "there is no threat" of a Zika outbreak in Uganda. AP

ASK THE VET

by Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester



ALLERGY BLOOD TEST FOR DOGS

ALLERGIES are some of the most common skin conditions we have to deal with in daily practice here in Macau. It seems as if most dogs that come from other countries into Asia, especially HK and Macau, seem to develop some sort of contact or food allergy.

Allergies can be suspected if the dog has symptoms such as sneezing, runny nose, watery eyes and itchy skin. To confirm the diagnosis, tests must be performed. Allergies may be diagnosed through skin tests, blood tests, elimination tests and food trials. An **allergy blood test** may be used if the dog is suspected of having inhalant allergies.

BLOOD TESTS FOR ALLERGY TESTING

The blood tests are most commonly used to diagnose allergies if the vet suspects inhalant allergies. There are two blood tests that can be used in canines to detect allergies. The vet will extract a blood sample and perform the test on the sample. The two tests are the RAST (radioallergosorbent) test and the ELISA (enzyme linked immunosorbent assay) test. These are both similar in methodology, but the ELISA test is considered superior, giving more accurate results.

RAST TEST

The RAST test will be performed on a blood sample, which should contain an allergen specific antibody, should the dog be allergic to any possible allergens. The antibody will point to the exact substance the dog is allergic to. The test can be performed at any time and the results will be available in one or two days.

ELISA TEST

The ELISA test is very similar to the RAST test and will also reveal the presence of certain antibodies, if the dog is allergic. The ELISA test is pricier, but it is said to give more accurate results.

DISADVANTAGES OF BLOOD TEST FOR ALLERGY TESTING

The blood tests performed to detect allergies in dogs may only be used to detect inhalant allergies or parasite allergies. If the dog is suspected of contact allergies or food allergies, the blood tests will not show any conclusive results. In these cases, elimination trials are necessary.

Another disadvantage is that there are certain antibodies that are not yet identified and are secreted in reaction to different lesser known allergens. Consequently, the test may not isolate the exact allergen



and additional tests may be required.

ALTERNATIVE ALLERGY TESTING

The allergies may also be detected by using one of the following procedures:

- Intradermal testing, which will require the dog to be injected with different suspected allergens. This may not be effective if the allergen is rare. Intradermal testing cannot detect food or contact allergies, but it is believed to be more efficient than blood testing in diagnosing inhalant allergies.

- Food trials are only used if the dog is suspected to have food intolerance and displays symptoms that involve the gastrointestinal system. The trials may be time consuming and the allergen may not be detected.

- Elimination tests are used if the dog is

suspected to have contact allergies and blood testing is not possible or hasn't given conclusive results. The tests will involve removing one suspected allergen at a time from the dog's environment and waiting for up to two weeks to monitor the dog's reactions.

Hope this helps

Till next week

Dr Ruan

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