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THOUSANDS FLEE HONG KONG FOR BRITAIN AMID CRACKDOWN

The UK is accepting applications from 5.2 million eligible Hong Kong residents for British National Overseas (BNO) passports that allow the recipients to live, work, study and eventually become citizens in Britain. To ensure privacy, Hong Kong residents will apply using a cellphone app. Only 350,000 Hong Kongers held BNO passports before Britain offered the new path to citizenship back in July, but since then applications have surged. Thousands of BNO passport holders have already arrived in Britain, which expects between 258,000 and 322,400 of them to apply for residency over the next five years. "This is a really unique emigration wave – some people haven't had time to actually visit the country they're relocating to. Many have no experience of living abroad," said Miriam Lo of the Excelsior UK relocation agency. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said London is honoring its "profound ties of history" with Hong Kong. (Associated Press, January 31, 2021)

CHINA TO STOP RECOGNIZING BRITISH NATIONAL OVERSEAS PASSPORTS

China has announced that, on the same day that the British Consulate in Hong Kong will begin accepting BNO passport applications, it will no longer recognize them as either a travel document or an ID. China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson criticized Britain's citizenship offer to Hong Kongers: "The British side's attempt to turn a large number of Hong Kong people into second-class British citizens has completely changed the nature of the two sides' original understanding of BNO. This move seriously infringes on China's sovereignty, grossly interferes in Hong Kong affairs and China's internal affairs, and seriously violates international law and the basic norms of international relations." (NPR, January 29, 2021)

HK EDUCATION BUREAU RELEASES NEW SCHOOL NAT. SEC. GUIDELINES

The Hong Kong Education Bureau's new school guidelines include a national security curriculum that teaches primary school students about the dangers of subversion and colluding with foreign forces. They will learn to sing the national anthem, view the police and the People's Liberation Army as Hong Kong's protectors, and study the four main security offenses, including terrorism and secessionism. "Clearly point out that safeguarding national security is the responsibility of all nationals and that as far as national security is concerned, there is no room for debate or compromise," the guidelines read. Hong Kong schools will also inject national security education to other subjects, including geography and biology, and "organize various game activities, such as puppet theatre, board games, creating picture books to establish a good atmosphere and improve students' understanding of national security." School leaders must prevent students and teachers from joining political activities, inspect notice-boards, and remove any library books that endanger national security. (Reuters, February 4, 2021)

CHINA CUTS TRADE WITH NEPAL BY 95%

The time has come to reconsider whether Nepal should trade with China, the country's Minister for Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Lekh Raj Bhatta, said in a rare criticism of Beijing. He referenced an "undeclared blockade-like situation" that China has been using to restrict its own exports to Nepal. On the pretext of containing the transmission of COVID19, China is allowing only about ten truckloads of goods to enter Nepal per day, or about 5% of the normal volume. About 1,500 containers of Chinese goods worth an estimated \$200 million remain stranded on the border, resulting in devastating losses for Nepali importers. Beijing is reportedly restricting its exports to "express its displeasure" about splits within the Nepal Communist Party. (*The Straits Times*, February 3, 2021)

CHINA BLOCKS UN CONDEMNATION OF MYANMAR COUP

China has blocked a United Nations Security Council statement condemning the military coup in Myanmar and the arrest of the country's elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. As one of five UNSC permanent members, China vetoed the resolution, arguing that sanctions and international pressure will only make things worse in Myanmar. Beijing calls the coup a "cabinet reshuffle" and a Myanmar internal issue. Although China benefits from Myanmar's alienation from the west, it had created a working relationship with Aung San Suu Kyi. Beijing also protected Myanmar from criticism at the UNSC over its abuses against the country's Muslim minority Rohingya population. (BBC, February 3, 2021)