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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; China; Hong Kong

CHINA EXPANDS ITS USE OF SECRET DETENTION

Tens if not hundreds of thousands of people are now under "residential surveillance at a designated location" (RSDL), a system that allows security forces to seize people from their homes, offices, or public places, place a hood on their heads and transport them to solitary confinement where they can be held for months without charges or trial. By June 2021, the Chinese court system showed 22,845 verdicts used pre-trial RSDL; that, however, represents a minimum number, because it does not include ongoing cases, those that did not go to trial, or national security cases, which are not recorded. Those in RSDL, many of whom are foreigners like Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, are held without daylight, in windowless rooms with artificial light always on, and overseen by guards who do not interact with them. They spend hours each day sitting motionless on a stool or chair without any mental stimulation, and only leave their room for interrogation. Showers are rare and detainees are force fed "medication" that keeps them mentally impaired. (*Guardian*, June 22, 2021)

U.S. MUTUAL FUNDS INVEST \$150MM IN XINJIANG COMPANIES

Since 2018, America's three largest mutual funds, Vanguard, State Street and BlackRock, which cumulatively manage the savings and pensions of tens of millions of Americans, have invested more than \$150 million in publicly traded companies in Xinjiang. Evidence of suspected forced labor there has led the U.S. to block imports from the region, yet Securities and Exchange Commission filings reveal some Xinjiang companies are included in environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) funds marketed to ethically conscious investors. One Vanguard ESG fund includes four Xinjiang companies, one of which boasted in annual reports of "maintaining stability in Xinjiang," working to "strengthen the ideological re-education of transferred workers," and providing "vocational training" to people in the region. (*South China Morning Post*, June 25, 2021)

UNDER PRESSURE, UKRAINE DROPS CRITICISM OF XINJIANG RIGHTS ABUSES

China has successfully pressured Ukraine to withdraw its support for an investigation into human rights violations in Xinjiang by threatening to withhold 500,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines. Ukraine had joined 40 other countries in signing onto the Canadian statement to the UN Human Rights Council, which urges China to allow independent observers into Xinjiang. Canada's UN Ambassador, Leslie Norton, accused China of "torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, forced sterilization, sexual and gender-based violence, and forced separation of children from their parents by authorities." Beijing responded by citing historical Canadian abuses against indigenous peoples, and Belarus read a statement defending China's right to manage its own internal affairs. Ukraine has purchased 1.9 million doses of China's CoronaVac vaccine and as of May had received 1.2 million of them. (Associated Press, June 25, 2021)

CHINESE SCIENTISTS REMOVED VIRUS RECORDS FROM U.S. DATABASE

Records of early COVID-19 cases in Wuhan that prove the virus had been circulating in the province for longer than Beijing has admitted were deleted from the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) database at the request of Chinese scientists. In March 2020, scientists in Wuhan uploaded sequences of the virus to a U.S.-based archive, then three months later they asked for those sequences to be deleted, which they were, according to the NIH. The deletions are "evidence of deliberate obfuscation of early events in the emergence of Sars-Cov-2 in Wuhan in fall 2019 and evidence of deliberate obstruction of the investigation of those events," said Richard Ebright at Rutgers University. The deleted sequences, which were taken from patients in Wuhan in January and February 2020, were later found because they had not been deleted from Google Cloud. "Submitting investigators hold the rights to their data and can request withdrawal of the data," NIH said. (*Financial Times*, June 23, 2021)

HONG KONG BEGINS TO CENSOR FILMS

Effective immediately, Hong Kong films will be vetted to ensure they do not criticize Beijing. The new censorship guidelines go into effect for Hong Kong's film industry to root out "any act which may amount to an offense endangering national security." According to the new guidelines: "When considering a film as a whole and its effect on the viewers, the censor should have regard to his duties to prevent and suppress acts or activities endangering national security, and the common responsibility of the people of Hong Kong to safeguard sovereignty, unification and territorial integrity." (*Deutsche Welle*, June 11, 2021)