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HONG KONG NATIONAL SECURITY TRIAL TO PROCEED WITHOUT JURY

Hong Kong's new Secretary for Justice, Paul Lam Ting-kwok, has ordered a trial without jury for dozens of opposition activists charged under the city's national security law for holding an unofficial primary election in 2020. The order to hold the trial before national security judges rather than average Hong Kongers was made on grounds that "involvement of foreign factors" had endangered the "personal safety of jurors and their family members." After being charged with subversion 18 months ago, 47 people are now facing trial without jury, including more than 30 who have been held without bail. (*South China Morning Post*, August 16, 2022)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: For 177 years, trial by jury was used in Hong Kong under the common law legal system. Since China imposed the national security law upon Hong Kong three years ago, however, so-called "sensitive cases" have been heard by hand-picked national security judges.]

CHINA FORCING POLITICAL CRITICS INTO PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS

The CPC is putting its political critics into psychiatric facilities where they are drugged and tortured, according to a new report by Madrid-based rights group Safeguard Defenders. "We found evidence of this abuse taking place every year that data was collected. One-third of victims were sent back into psychiatric prison again and again, with one victim locked up 20 times. Inside the psychiatric wing, victims were forcibly medicated, subjected to painful electroshock therapy without anesthesia, beaten and tied to a bed, and left to lie in their own waste," the report said. The study, which draws on the testimony of 99 people over a seven-year period, claims China's authorities confine critics with no history of mental illness to police-run psychiatric hospitals known as ankang and in other facilities run by the Ministry of Health. It documented at least 109 such "black hole" facilities nationwide. "There is no public data or any available channel to properly estimate the scale of China's ankang system. It is completely secretive so only cases we can know about are those told by victims or family members who report to media or human rights NGOs," said the report's author, Mou Yanxi. (NikkeiAsia, August 16, 2022)

SOLAR PANELS PILE UP AT U.S. BORDER DUE TO XINJIANG FORCED LABOR LAW

Solar equipment has been piling up at the U.S. border since the U.S. Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act went into effect in June. U.S. customs officials are holding modules with capacity of more than three gigawatts, and many Chinese manufacturers have stopped exporting to the U.S., assuming that 9-12 gigawatt modules will soon be detained as well. China dominates the global supply chain in solar, with Xinjiang a key manufacturing hub. The U.S. is the second-largest solar market after China, but is heavily reliant on Chinese imports. Thanks to supply-chain delays in the first six months of 2022, less than half of the planned solar power additions in the U.S. was installed. (Bloomberg, August 15, 2022)

AS BIRTHS SLUMPS, CHINA DISCOURAGES ABORTIONS

According to a notice from the National Health Authority, to boost birth rates China is discouraging abortions and will make fertility treatment more accessible. The authority said the measures were crucial for "promoting the long-term balanced development of the population" and it would carry out reproductive health promotion to enhance public awareness while "preventing unintended pregnancy and reducing abortions that are not medically necessary." Authorities have introduced policies such as tax deductions, longer maternity leave, enhanced medical insurance, housing and childcare subsidies, and extra money for a third child. China's uncompromising "zero-COVID" policy has undermined peoples' desire to have children. In 2021, China's fertility rate was among the lowest in the world at 1.16; well below the 2.1 needed for a stable population. This year, new births in China are set to fall to record lows, falling below 10 million from last year's 10.6 million babies – a total that was itself 11.5% less than in 2020. Between 2015 to 2019, China carried out more than 9.5 million abortions. (Reuters, August 16, 2022)

NIH TERMINATES GRANT AFTER WUHAN LAB REFUSED TO SHARE DATA

The National Institute of Health (NIH) is terminating a grant for the Wuhan Institute of Virology on bat coronavirus research. In an August 19th letter to Kentucky Congressman James Comer (R-KY-1), who sits on the U.S. House of Representatives Oversight Committee, the NIH said it was terminating the sub-award to the Wuhan Institute of Virology "for failure to meet award terms and conditions requiring provision of records to NIH upon request." "NIH has requested on two occasions...the laboratory notebooks and original electronic files from the research conducted at [the Wuhan Institute of Virology]. To date, [the institute] has not provided these records. NIH has determined that [Wuhan Institute of Virology's] refusal to provide the requested records, and failure to include the required terms in [the] subaward agreement represent material failures to comply with the terms of award," the letter read. (Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, August 24, 2022)