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CHINA/HONG KONG: RELEASE OF JOURNALIST DOES NOT ALLEVIATE CONCERN
OVER HANDOVER

The release on parole of journalist Xi Yang on 25 January is welcome, but does not alleviate concerns about freedom of expression in China and the uncertainties faced by journalists and others in Hong Kong, Amnesty International said today.

Xi Yang, a reporter for the Hong Kong *Ming Pao* newspaper, was sentenced in 1994 to 12 years' imprisonment for writing an article about the Chinese government's financial plans. He was unexpectedly released at the end of a week of controversy about proposed legal reforms in Hong Kong.

"Xi Yang's release is good news, but he should not have been jailed in the first place," Amnesty International said. "However, other Chinese journalists remain imprisoned in China -- as does Xi Yang's co-defendant, bank employee Tian Ye."

The laws under which Xi Yang was imprisoned continue to be used, and at least 10 other people are currently imprisoned as prisoners of conscience under those laws.

"Xi Yang's case underlines the risks faced by those who uphold freedom of expression in Hong Kong. These risks will be increased if proposals by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Preparatory Committee to water down the Bill of Rights and repeal other human rights safeguards are carried out."

Xi Yang's imprisonment in 1993 was widely seen as a warning by China to Hong Kong's media. This signal remains clear. In October 1996, China's Foreign Minister Qian Qichen stated that after 1 July 1997, '*Hong Kong should not hold those political activities which directly interfere in the affairs of the mainland of China*', and added that the media will have to avoid propagating "*rumours or lies*" or "*putting forward personal attacks on Chinese leaders*".

"Hong Kong's economic success is dependent on the free and open flow of information," Amnesty International said. "But this will be lost if the press is not allowed to freely engage in public debate and legitimate scrutiny of the government."

Amnesty International again urged Chief Executive-Designate Tung Chee-hwa to uphold the freedoms guaranteed under international human rights standards, and in particular to confirm that his administration will not amend the Hong Kong Bill of Rights in any way which reduces its scope and effectiveness

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