

CHINA

Fugitive Whose Case Sparked Hong Kong Turmoil to Surrender to Taiwan

Man whose flight to city led to extradition-law uproar wants to turn himself in, officials say



Hong Kong police prepared for Chief Executive Carrie Lam's annual policy address on Wednesday. PHOTO: MIGUEL CANDELA/EPA/SHUTTERSTOCK

By Mike Cherney and Joyu Wang

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HONG KONG—A prisoner wanted for murder in Taiwan whose case set in motion a chain of events that led to months of antigovernment protests in Hong Kong has agreed to surrender himself to Taiwanese authorities, Hong Kong said.

Chan Tong-kai, who is due to be released Wednesday from a Hong Kong prison where he is serving a sentence for money laundering, has asked to be sent back to Taiwan, the city's government said late Friday. Officials will help Mr. Chan return to Taiwan, the government said.

A lawyer for Mr. Chan didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Mr. Chan allegedly murdered his girlfriend in Taiwan in 2018 and dumped her body in a suitcase. After the killing, he fled to Hong Kong, where authorities couldn't send him back to face charges because there is no extradition agreement between the two jurisdictions.

The case prompted Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam to propose a law that would have allowed Mr. Chan to be sent back to Taiwan to face charges.

The law was broadened to include any jurisdiction Hong Kong didn't have an extradition agreement with, including mainland China.



An extradition bill sparked unrest in Hong Kong before Chief Executive Carrie Lam, shown at a press conference on Wednesday, eventually withdrew it. PHOTO: ED JONES/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

The prospect of a law allowing Hong Kong to send people to stand trial in China's opaque and sometimes brutal legal system sparked mass protests that have at times brought the global financial hub to a standstill. Opponents of the law said it could have been abused for political ends.

Though Mrs. Lam has since pledged to withdraw the extradition bill, protests have intensified with demands broadening into requests for democratic reform and an independent inquiry into alleged abuses by police.

Attendance at rallies in recent weeks appears to have fallen from its peak earlier in the year, but unrest remains a weekly occurrence. Another march planned for Sunday could draw big crowds, though police have refused to approve it. Mrs. Lam announced a series of welfare initiatives this week in an effort to sap the movement's momentum.

Mr. Chan was given a 29-month sentence in Hong Kong. He is set to leave prison on Wednesday, released early for good behavior and time served after his arrest, local media said.

Local media reported that Rev. Peter Koon, who visited Mr. Chan in prison, said he had been baptized in prison and decided to turn himself in about one month ago to reduce chaos in Hong Kong. Rev. Koon didn't respond to a request for comment.

On Thursday, Taiwan's Ministry of Justice urged the Hong Kong police to continue to detain Mr. Chan until he finished his prison sentence, and to provide evidence to aid Taiwanese authorities in the case. The ministry said it filed requests this year—twice for transferring evidence and once for sending Mr. Chan to Taiwan for trial—to the Hong Kong government through the island's Mainland Affairs Council, which oversees China policy. The ministry didn't get any response from Hong Kong, it said.

Hong Kong's government said its courts don't have jurisdiction over the Taiwan murder charge and local authorities don't have any grounds to extend Mr. Chan's detention or pursue the murder case.

"We have done what we could do," Hong Kong Police Senior Superintendent Li Kwai-wah said Friday. He said the bar is high for transferring evidence because Hong Kong and Taiwan have different legal systems.

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Corrections & Amplifications

Chan Tong-kai is due to be released next week from a Hong Kong prison. An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated he was due to be released next month. (Oct. 18, 2019)