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# 100 asylum-seekers queue up since June

By Ma Miu-wah

MORE than 100 Chinese subjects have sought political asylum in Hongkong since the June 4 incident, informed sources have told *The Hongkong Standard*.

The success rate is unknown but those winning asylum are given valid identity documents allowing them to stay in the territory. In some cases Hongkong authorities also offer financial aid to those unable to earn a living.

Many asylum-seekers have successfully obtained sanctuary in foreign countries, but sources said the offers had become less and less generous since last autumn, several months after the June 4 massacre.

Asylum has become a sensitive point in Sino-Hongkong relations since June 4, with dissidents fleeing the mainland's crackdown allegedly smuggled through Hongkong to other countries.

The Chinese authorities have repeatedly criticised Hongkong authorities for "conniving" at pro-democracy activities under its nose.

Little information is made public on asylum-seekers. Most cases are treated with top confidentiality.

The Hongkong Government and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have remained tight lipped on the issue.

The Government Information Services said it could not give any details concerning asylum seeking in general.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office spokesman in Hongkong, Mr Christopher Osborne, said he guessed discretion for granting asylum rested with the Hongkong Government.

However, he confirmed that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was notified of all cases.

Sources familiar with

## Surprise decision from UN body

ONE avenue for mainland asylum-seekers is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, better known in Hongkong for its work with boat people.

People accepted as political refugees by the UNHCR will not be sent back to their home country. But sources said dissidents seeking help from the United Nations body faced a longer wait and had a slimmer chance of success.

One exception is the case of a Chinese worker calling himself Mr Li Yuan, who sought asylum in Hongkong in August last year.

He was rejected by the Hongkong Government, but was eventually sent to Holland with the help of the UNHCR.

Mr Li sought political asylum in Hongkong after speaking out at a public gathering organised by local pro-democracy activists. He said he had witnessed the June 4 incidents in Beijing, supporting his claim with letters from mainland relatives saying authorities were trying to find him.

Observers said Mr Li's success was related to the political wrangle between Beijing and Hongkong last summer over dissident mainland swimmer Yang Yang. Mr Yang was allowed to overstay and eventually was allowed to go to the US.

The UNHCR may have feared that this case would spark reprisals by Chinese authorities on unsuccessful asylum-seekers such as Mr Li.

asylum application procedures said that asylum-seekers applied either directly to the Hongkong Government or indirectly through local pro-democracy organisations.

There are two broad categories of asylum-seeker: those who have illegally entered the territory by themselves and those who have been helped by the pro-democracy groups.

After applying to the Government for asylum, the mainlanders are kept at San Uk Ling detention centre while their cases are processed.

Sources said applications could take from two days to three months to process.

Those winning asylum are issued with valid identity documents containing all the basic particulars and a photograph. This document enables him or her to work and live freely and independently in Hongkong.

But sources said it was often not easy for Chinese subjects to make a livelihood here, even with the identity documents.

They were often handicapped by a poor command of Cantonese, and some found it difficult to accept jobs relatively junior to their previous positions.

Among the asylum-seekers are people who left important positions and wide renown in

China. Sources said this could make local employers wary.

The Hongkong Government offers as much as about \$1,000 a month to these jobless.

It is not known how long the successful asylum-seekers can live in Hongkong or whether they can apply for permanent identity cards after seven years of residence.

However, successful applicants are not necessarily well-known Chinese dissidents.

What is more important is that they provide convincing evidence of persecution by Chinese authorities. For this they go through hours of interrogation by authorities in Hongkong.

The asylum-seekers can also apply for visas to go to foreign countries.

Their particulars are sent to foreign consulates in Hongkong either through the Government or through local pro-democracy groups.

Initially the most generous in accepting dissidents was France, the base of the most prominent dissident organisation, Federation for a Democratic China led by Mr Yan Jiaqi and Wu'er Kaixi.

But the United States is moving to take over this position.

Other popular countries include Canada, West Germany and Australia. Sources said there is also a growing trend for asylum-seekers to go to Taiwan.

Foreign countries vary in their readiness to grant full citizenship to asylum-seekers. Taiwan will grant full passports and citizenship.

Sources said other foreign countries had become less obliging as time went by. This was linked to conciliatory moves towards the regime in Beijing.

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**Alliance plans worldwide rally**

By KENT CHEN

THE Hongkong Alliance in Support of the Patriotic Democratic Movement in China is planning to mount a worldwide rally on June 3 to commemorate the first anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Alliance spokesman Mr Cheung Man-kowng yesterday said they expected the rally to bring their month-long commemorative activities to a climax.

The 210-group coalition plans to designate June as "the Month of Democracy" to mark the first anniversary of the June 4 killings and to promote democracy.

Mr Cheung said June 3, a Sunday, would be the ideal time for their international protest action as it was also the eve of the military crackdown.

But he added the Alliance had yet to contact overseas Chinese solidarity groups on the joint activity.

During June, mass rallies, exhibitions and performances would be held, Mr Cheung said.

Other pro-democracy activities in the pipeline included exhibitions and rallies during the Ching Ming Festival on April 5 and on the 71st anniversary of the May Fourth Movement.

Meanwhile, the Alliance has netted a turnover of \$1 million from their stalls at four Lunar New Year fairs.

Mr Cheung estimated the net profits from the selling of pro-democracy items to be as much as \$100,000.

Mr Cheung said the stalls had sold 20,000 miniature of the Goddess of Democracy statue.