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Beijing-friendly Liberal politician calls for public inquiry into 'unlawful' CSIS

Critics of Beijing say Michael Chan's statement on CSIS comes amid an effort to foster an aura of racism around the foreign-interference issue

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Beijing-friendly Liberal politician calls for inquiry into CSIS | National Post



Michael Chan, a former Ontario Liberal cabinet minister and current deputy mayor of Markham, Ont., in 2013. CSIS has long raised concerns about Chan's relationship with the China's government, but he strongly denies any inappropriate behaviour. PHOTO BY GALIT RODAN/THE CANADIAN PRESS/FILE

A prominent Ontario politician with a history of echoing Beijing's talking points on controversial issues is urging Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to call an inquiry into Canada's spy agency, accusing it of a litany of wrongdoing from racial profiling to spreading false allegations.



Federal politics has been dominated in recent weeks by concern over China's alleged meddling in Canadian affairs, especially during the last two federal elections.

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Monday he's asking a parliamentary committee and others to investigate the charges of election interference, after media reports suggested the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) had repeatedly warned the **TRE** government of such activity.

But Michael Chan, a former Ontario Liberal cabinet minister and current deputy mayor of Markham, Ont., used an open letter the same day to level a blistering attack on CSIS itself, accusing the agency of persecuting him for 13 years, among other ills.

"I'm writing to respectfully request that you immediately convene a full public inquiry into the profoundly disturbing activities of CSIS, its leaders and employees," he said in the message directed at Trudeau. "Canadians deserve clear answers and reject the notion that CSIS's secretive veil shields them from the highest standards of integrity, transparency and accountability."

Posted initially on Twitter, the missive has been covered widely in Chinese-language media this week.

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Chan could not be reached for comment by deadline. A CSIS spokesman said he was unable to discuss operational matters for security concerns but added that the agency acts “in a manner that respects the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.”

2

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Chinese Canadians tell MPs foreign influence is widespread, has been happening for decades

The letter would not be the first time the councillor in York region north of Toronto has directly or indirectly tried to refute controversy around Beijing, its policies or representatives.

He's spoken repeatedly in favour of China's clampdown on the Hong Kong democracy movement, suggested Conservative calls for a tougher stance on China would provoke anti-Asian hate and questioned Canada's arrest of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou.

CSIS has raised concerns about his relationship with the People's Republic government; he strongly denies any impropriety.

Critics of Beijing said Thursday that Chan's statement on the intelligence service comes amid an effort to foster a general aura of racism and harassment around the foreign-interference issue.

An image like that would make it difficult for the Liberal government to set up a registry for agents of foreign governments, says Gloria Fung of the group Canada-Hong Kong Link. Such a registry is the leading proposal being considered to counter the threat of Beijing's covert interference.

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“They have tried to spread this narrative of anti-Asian racism in order to stop our government from passing this act.”

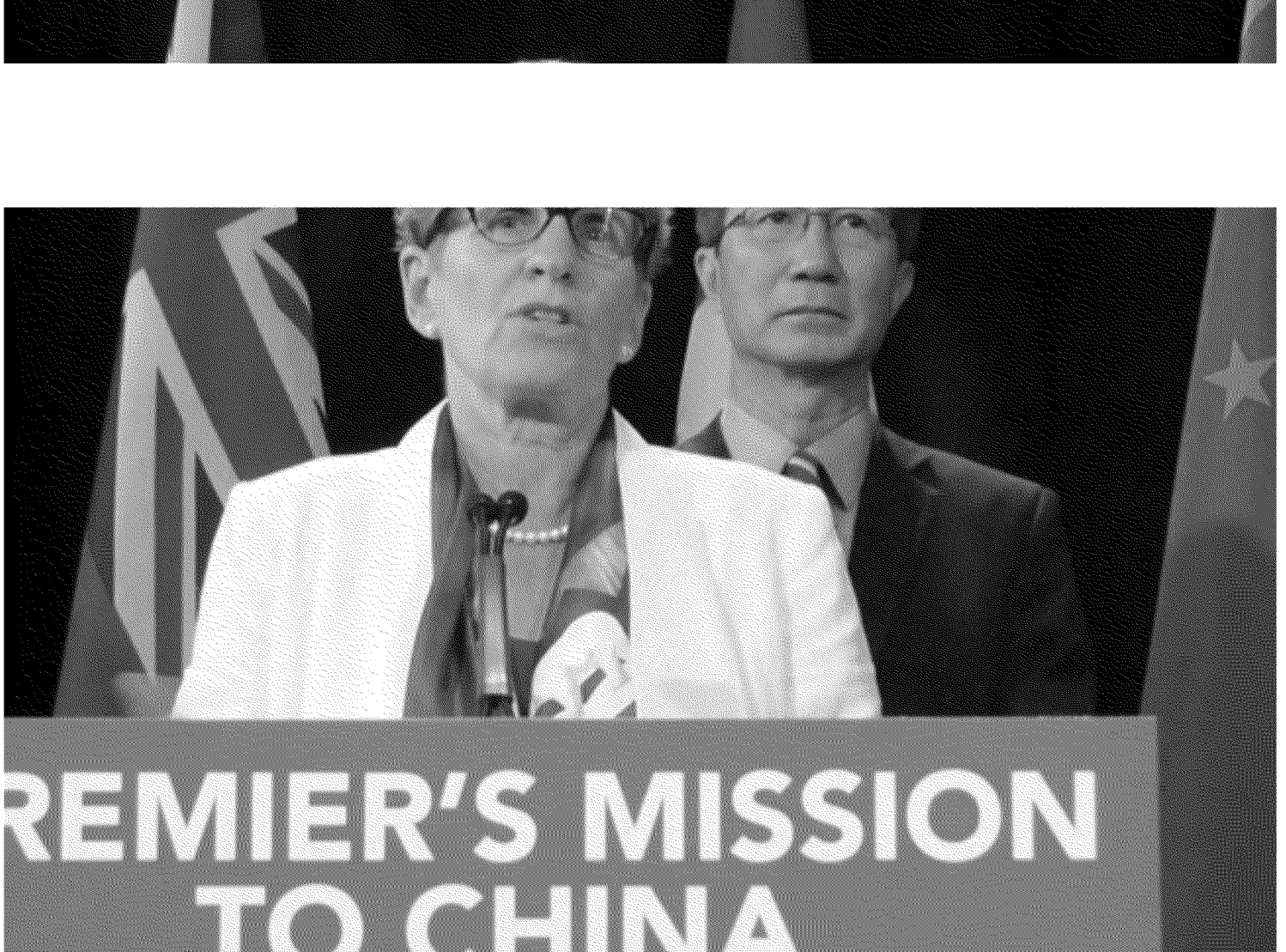
But if there is a cloud over Chinese Canadians currently, Fung said, it’s because of actions by Beijing’s proxies here, not government persecution. She is heading a new coalition of 33 multicultural groups pushing for a foreign-agent registry.

Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino announced Friday the government would start consultations on legislation to establish a registry, though offered no guarantees on when a law might be introduced.

Toronto’s Jonathan Fon, a prominent Chinese-Canadian commentator, said Chan’s letter appears to be an attempt to convince ethnic Chinese that security agencies are targeting them because “they hate Asians, they hate the Chinese,” making members of the community feel like victims, he said.

Chan was a member of the Ontario legislature for 11 years, eventually becoming international trade and immigration minister. CSIS warned the province that he may be under the sway of Chinese diplomats, but then-Premier Kathleen Wynne said she had no concern about his loyalties.

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Former Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne with then-International Trade Minister Michael Chan in 2014. PHOTO BY ANTONELLA ARTUSO/POSTMEDIA/FILE

When a Chinese-language newspaper ran a column by Fon critical of Chan in the midst of the controversy in 2015, its editor was fired. She said the Chinese consulate had complained about the article, while the paper's owner was Wei Chengyi, honorary chair of the Confederation of Toronto Chinese Canadian Organizations, a longtime Beijing ally.

Chan retired from provincial politics in 2018, then ran last year for York regional council. As the councillor in the city of Markham garnering the most votes, he was named deputy mayor.

Last month, a Globe and Mail report said CSIS agents had warned Trudeau that Liberal politicians should be wary around him because of his contacts with various Chinese consulate officials. Chan responded that the agency never interviewed him about its "false and unsubstantiated allegations" and that he met with envoys from various nations as part of his work on an "overseas project."

While governments and human-rights groups worldwide have taken China to task in recent years for its increasingly authoritarian bent, Chan has steered a different path.

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At a [2019 rally](#) in Toronto, he defended attempts to suppress mass pro-democracy protests in the city, saying, “We support Hong Kong’s police strictly handling unrest, Hong Kong’s government carefully defending the rule of law, China’s government carefully observing Hong Kong.”

Days after Beijing imposed a harsh new national security law on Hong Kong in 2020, the [China News Agency](#) quoted Chan as praising the widely condemned legislation, saying it would bring stability and other benefits to the city.

He was quoted by China’s [news.sina.cn](#) website as saying Canada was drawn into the embarrassing position of arresting Meng on a U.S. extradition request largely because of a dispute over technology and trade between two world powers.

He worked to bring the Chinese government’s controversial Confucius Institute to the Toronto public school board, before the board’s tentative alliance with the organization was voted down by trustees.

And Chan was quoted by the official Xinhua news agency in 2009 as being moved by celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the People’s Republic in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square, saying “[Great is my motherland](#), and great are the people of my motherland.”

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In his open letter, he cited what he called CSIS’s persistent and unlawful leaking of “purported intelligence” to journalists; a “complicitous, self-serving and unsettling” relationship between the agency and the media; its spreading of “false and unsubstantiated allegations”; and charges that CSIS is “rife with unacceptable and longstanding systemic racism.”

Being targeted by the service resulted in threats to his and his family’s safety by “specific malevolent organizations,” Chan wrote.

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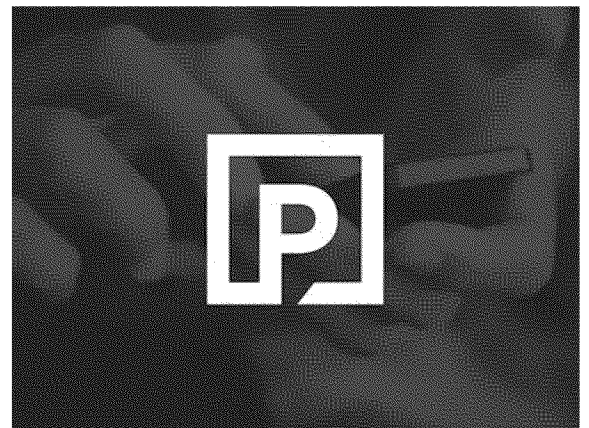
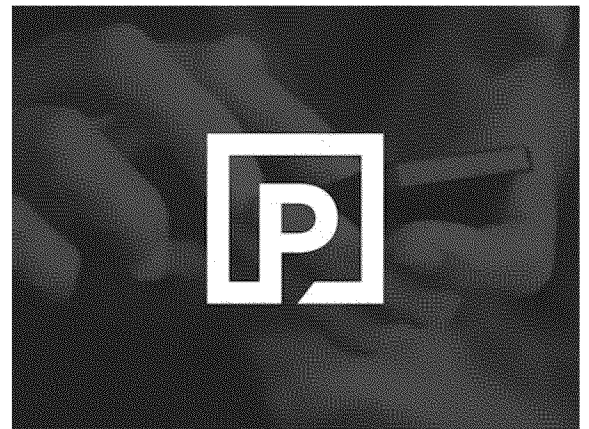


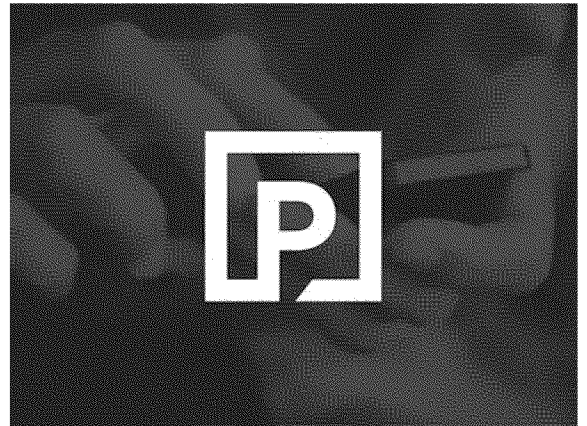
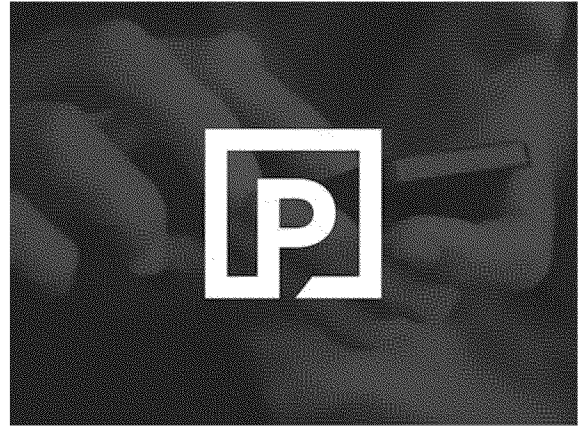
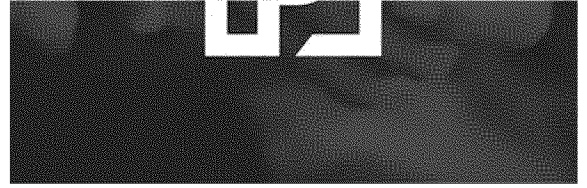
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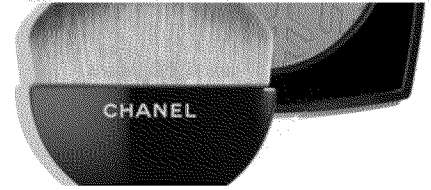


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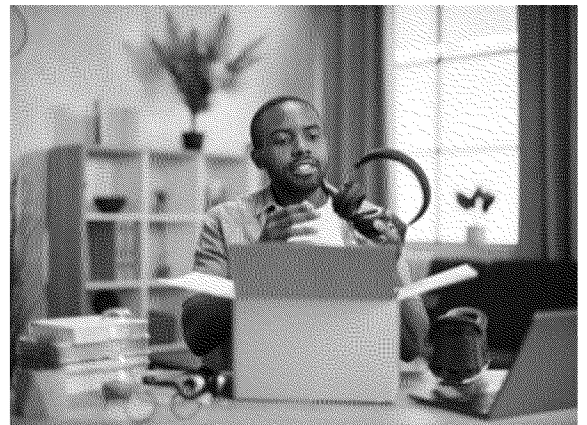


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