



June in Hong Kong

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A condensed press review prepared by the Consulate General of Switzerland in HK

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Economy + Finance

Hong Kong tourism and shopping sectors post good April figures, suggesting full recovery (SCMP, June 1): The recovery in Hong Kong's tourism and shopping industries gained momentum in April, with double-digit growth in visitor numbers and retail sales. The city's tourist arrivals rose 11 per cent for April on a year earlier, meaning a third month of large growth in a row, the Tourism Board said. Meanwhile, the government said retail sales jumped 12.3 per cent year on year. Looking at the first four months of the year as a whole, retail sales were up 13.9 per cent year on year and tourist arrivals were up 10 per cent.

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Hong Kong 'lags Singapore and others' in preparation for hi-tech future, Economist Intelligence Unit report says, citing failure to invest in R&D (SCMP, June 5): A report published by The

Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) placed the city 10th in a technological readiness ranking, alongside the likes of Belgium and South Korea. Regional rival Singapore was joint top with Australia and Sweden. "Hong Kong ranks lower than Singapore, largely because of its persistent weakness in R&D," said Duncan Innes-Ker, Asia regional director at the EIU. "R&D these days tends to be closely associated with hi-tech manufacturing, and there is little of this in Hong Kong." The Hong Kong government's plans to double R&D spending in its current term of office were a positive signal, but even if Chief Executive Carrie Lam is able to achieve this difficult task it will still leave the territory lagging regional rivals, Innes-Ker said.

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Hong Kong's digital spending to surge to US\$5.8b by 2022 as consumers turn to mobile media (SCMP, June 6): Revenue generated from digital sources in Hong Kong such as over the top streaming video and internet advertising, surpassed offline sources for the first time last year, and is forecast to reach US\$5.8 billion by 2022, as consumers increasingly use mobile devices to watch streaming videos and read news, according to a PwC study. Taking into account the city's digital revenues of US\$4.5 billion last year, the segment is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.1 per cent between 2018 to 2022. In contrast, non-digital media, such as newspapers, magazines, and traditional TV, are likely to generate less advertising and consumer spending, down from US\$4.3 billion in 2017 to US\$4.05 billion in 2022.

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'Greater Bay Area' plan could solve Hong Kong's land needs, Chief Executive Carrie Lam and former city leader CY Leung say (SCMP, June 7): China's "Greater Bay Area" project could answer Hong Kong's housing needs and address land shortage, both the city's former leader Leung Chun-ying and its current chief executive Carrie Lam said at a forum. They said the bay area project could provide opportunities for Hongkongers to look for flats, schools and care facilities for the elderly outside the space-starved city. The economies of Hong Kong, Macau and nine other cities under the bay area scheme were worth a total of US\$1.58 trillion last year, covering an area of 56,000 sq km and with an estimated population of 68 million.

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Number of Hongkongers planning to leave for new lives in Canada jumps 30 per cent as experts warn of brain drain (SCMP, June 11): A 30 per cent jump in the number of Hongkongers applying to emigrate to Canada has left experts warning of a potential brain drain among a younger generation struggling to cope with the city's high cost of living. Official figures show 1,561 people applied for permanent residency last year, and with an estimated 300,000 Hongkongers in the city already holding a Canadian passport, overseas experts have suggested this could point to a loss of faith in Hong Kong's future among a demographic typically well educated and middle class. Dr Yan Miu-chung, a Hongkonger who moved to Canada in 1993 and is the director of the University of British Columbia's (UBC) school of social work, said what was more worrying was that the 300,000 with Canadian passports living in the city could return to North America anytime and trigger a "talent drain".

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AI pioneer named as head of Hong Kong's Science Park; board of directors gets 8 new members (SCMP, June 14): Eight professionals ranging from a top immunologist to a big data expert will help steer the development of Hong Kong's Science Park as the government officially announced a reshuffle of its board, confirming that a pioneer in the use of artificial intelligence will be the new chairman. Incoming chairman Sunny Chai will replace Fanny Law, whose term as head of the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation, which operates the park and three industrial estates, expires on June 30. In a statement, Chief Executive Carrie Lam praised Law for "capably" steering the work of the park as the city's "flagship innovation and technology institution". A government spokesman said that with the new members, the Science Park's board of directors "is a repository of strong expertise from a wide variety of technology and professional areas".

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Cyberattacks could cost Hong Kong massive US\$32 billion annually, according to study (SCMP, June 15): The potential economic losses in Hong Kong because of cybersecurity attacks could hit a whopping US\$32 billion (HK\$249.6 billion) annually – or about 10 per cent of the city's gross domestic product – within the next few years, according to a study. The huge potential costs include ransom money and stock price changes as well as indirect setbacks such as reputational damage. "Hong Kong is in line with other developed markets in terms of cyber resilience," Microsoft Asia's chief cybersecurity officer Michael Montoya said. "As companies embrace the opportunities presented by cloud and mobile computing to connect with customers, they take on new risks." The study, commissioned by Microsoft and carried out by consultancy Frost & Sullivan, surveyed 1,300 business and IT executives in the Asia-Pacific region.

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HK\$5 billion needed to make new Hong Kong biomedical technology centre a 'bright spot', top scientist Tsui Lap-chee says (SCMP, June 18): A leading Hong Kong scientist has proposed that the government inject HK\$5 billion (US\$641 million) into setting up a biomedical technology centre in a bid to develop the city as a world-class hub for the discipline. The centre, which would be built in a technology park planned for a border area with mainland China, should seek to draw the brightest minds from across Hong Kong and Guangdong province to enhance cooperation, according to Professor Tsui Lap-chee, a world-renowned expert in molecular genetics who was tasked by the city's leader Carrie Lam to head a preparatory panel for the project. Tsui said his rough estimate was that HK\$5 billion would be enough to cover the centre's operating costs in the first eight years.

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Downward spiral of Sino-US trade spat will hurt Hong Kong, commerce chief Edward Yau warns (SCMP, June 20): The impact of the escalating Sino-US trade row on Hong Kong is "worrying" as punitive tariffs - "spiral downward", the city's secretary for commerce and economic development has warned. Edward Yau said that about 17 per cent or HK\$60 billion (US\$7.6 billion) worth of Chinese exports in question passed through the city to the United States, and about 9 per cent or HK\$6 billion of US exports went to mainland China via the city. Hong Kong also faced an "unquantifiable impact from the spillover" of the dispute between the US and Europe, which could trigger trade to divert from Hong Kong to other countries, he said. "We are worried about the worsening Sino-US trade dispute, and it is a pity to see that the goodwill the two countries built over the years is being lost. We fear that the trade war will become an irreversible step as each side only cares about its own interests," Yau said.

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Hong Kong rail giant MTR Corp ordered to conduct full probe after safety lapses along HK\$97.1 billion Sha Tin to Central link (SCMP, June 22): The board of Hong Kong's railway operator came down hard on managers caught on the back foot over a string of shoddy construction scandals, ordering them to review the entire reporting and supervision mechanism for safety lapses at the city's costliest rail project. MTR Corporation chairman Frederick Ma said the board would bring in an external consultant to conduct the review, which is expected to be completed in three to four months. The action came as the MTR Corp held its second impromptu board meeting in the wake of a wave of revelations by the media of problems plaguing the HK\$97.1 billion (US\$12.4 billion) Sha Tin to Central link. Transport minister Frank Chan said it was "totally unacceptable" that MTR managers had failed to properly supervise contractors, or report incidents of faulty construction to the government, which is the majority shareholder in the company.

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Fourth runway for Hong Kong unlikely, airport chief says (SCMP, June 25): Hong Kong is unlikely to get a fourth runway after its third airstrip is completed by 2024, even as Asian cities race to boost flight capacity to meet surging demand for air travel, the local airport chief has said. Jack So, chairman of the Hong Kong Airport Authority, put that down to a lack of supporting infrastructure for the potential influx of travellers, such as hotels, roads, restaurants and even car parking spaces. The city is currently building a third runway on reclaimed land under a HK\$141.5 billion (US\$18 billion) expansion project, which includes a new passenger concourse, a new airport terminal train and baggage system.

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Soaring rents make Hong Kong the most expensive city for expats, according to Mercer (SCMP, June 26): Hong Kong regained its dubious status as the most expensive city for expatriates among 209 cities worldwide amid soaring accommodation costs, according to consulting firm Mercer. Hong Kong edged out Tokyo, Zurich, Singapore, and Seoul among the top five most expensive cities in the world. Hong Kong ranked No 2 last year, although it held the No 1 spot in the 2016 rankings. Mercer's annual survey rates prices on rental accommodation, meals, and entertainment among a measure of 200 daily necessities in comparing the living cost for expatriates in 375 cities worldwide.

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Hong Kong can be a 'powerful connection point' for Belt and Road countries, city's chief executive tells business summit (SCMP, June 29): Hong Kong was poised to become part of a tech corridor of 11 cities in the Greater Bay Area, which could then be a "powerful connection point" to the larger global Belt and Road trade initiative, Chief Executive Carrie Lam said at the Belt and Road Summit. Lam, along with two other ministers, emphasised Hong Kong's role in connecting global businesses and championing free trade, pointing out that the "one country, two systems" model of governance was its "singular most important advantage". Lam also witnessed the signing of a free-trade agreement between Hong Kong and Georgia, with commerce minister Edward Yau saying the city would continue to "build more alliances of like-minded free traders" amid looming trade disputes.

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Flats nearly 50 per cent cheaper for young couples and families among basket of measures to tackle Hong Kong housing crisis (SCMP, June 30): Subsidised flats will be nearly 50 per cent cheaper for young couples and middle-class families as part of a basket of measures Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced on June 29 in a bid to ease Hong Kong's housing crisis by providing more affordable homes. Reforming the pricing system for subsidised flats was one of six measures Lam announced that would benefit young couples and families struggling to buy homes. Other proposals included imposing a vacancy tax equivalent to two years of rental income on empty new flats, reallocating more land originally earmarked for private housing to build public flats, inviting the Urban Renewal Authority to build starter homes at Ma Tau Wai, imposing more stringent conditions on developers' sales of uncompleted flats, and forming a task force to drive temporary housing projects launched by community groups.

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Domestic politics

Hongkongers consider public order and rule of law to be more important than democracy, survey shows (SCMP, June 1): Hongkongers consider democracy to be the least important among 12 social indicators, with its eight out of 10 score falling behind public order and rule of law, a survey has found. "It is now the low tide of democracy movements. We do not know if citizens [have become] discouraged and apathetic," Dr Robert Chung, director of the Public Opinion Programme at the University of Hong Kong, who conducted the survey, said. Respondents were asked to rate the importance and actual performance of 12 social indicators, from zero to 10. "Public order", "rule of law" and "corruption-free practices" were rated the most important indicators with the same mean score of 9.2, with "stability" and "freedom" coming next with scores of nine and 8.9. "Democracy" was rated the least important with eight, and given a performance rating of six.

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June 4 Tiananmen anniversary vigil in Hong Kong (SCMP, June 5): More than 100,000 people have gathered in Victoria Park in Hong Kong to mark the 29th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown, according to the organisers of the annual candlelight vigil. The vigil is the only large-scale public gathering in China to remember the events of June 4, 1989, that brought an abrupt end to a pro-democracy movement in the heart of Beijing. Many activists, including students and civilians, died and the exact death toll may never be known. Attendance in recent years has dipped amid rising localist sentiment. University student unions snubbed the event for the second year in a row, saying it was not the city's responsibility to spur democratic development in mainland China and end one-party rule.

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Could call to give vote to half a million Hongkongers in mainland China open door to voting rights for all citizens overseas? (SCMP, June 6): The Hong Kong government has said it would consider giving voting rights to hundreds of thousands of citizens living over the border in mainland China, prompting the immediate question of whether this would be extended globally. Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Patrick Nip said at the weekly Legislative Council meeting that any arrangements for polling outside Hong Kong must be critically examined. "As the Greater Bay Area develops, there will be more and more Hongkongers living in mainland China making frequent trips back and forth... how their voting rights will be affected needs to be studied," Nip said, stressing it was a complicated issue with legal considerations. "Our youngsters do not only go to the Greater Bay Area for work, but also to Taiwan and all over the world. If you launch such a policy, it must apply worldwide," pro-democracy lawmaker Charles Mok said.

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Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam hits back at 'prejudiced comments' that question city's high degree of autonomy (SCMP, June 7): Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam has shot back at those who make "prejudiced comments" about the city, telling them to not take things at face value and declaring that part of her job is to dispel such misconceptions. Lam said there had been "quite a bit of misunderstanding or prejudiced comments" about the implementation of the "one country, two systems" blueprint in the city. The "unique" constitutional position of the chief executive – where he or she would be responsible to both Hongkongers and the central government – had been one of her major challenges in office, she added. She claimed she had delivered her election pledge to work closely with lawmakers across the political spectrum and that the social atmosphere had improved.

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Neighbourhood and Workers Service Centre, one of Hong Kong's oldest political and grass-roots advocacy groups, on the verge of collapse (SCMP, June 9): Money troubles and infighting have left one of the Hong Kong's oldest political and grass-roots advocacy groups on the verge of collapse. The Neighbourhood and Workers Service Centre (NWSC), which has represented workers in past labour disputes and fought for issues such as standard working hours, has lost more than a third of members and more than half of its governing board. They have quit over suggestions from one of its key mobilisers, veteran lawmaker Leung Yiu-chung who said the group was running out of money to

finance a committee fighting for workers' rights. That, coupled with the emergence of political differences between Leung and younger members of the group, led to the mass resignations.

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Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam announces judge-led inquiry into MTR Corporation's Sha Tin-Central rail link corner-cutting scandal (SCMP, June 12): Hong Kong's leader announced an independent investigation into the Sha Tin-Central rail link's corner-cutting scandal, vowing to give a former judge "all necessary power" to uncover what went wrong on the MTR Corporation's HK\$97.1 billion (US\$12 billion) project. Chief Executive Carrie Lam said that, given the "severity" of the incident, forming a commission of inquiry – a high-powered inquisition, which can summon witnesses – was appropriate. Former non-permanent judge of the Court of Final Appeal Michael Hartmann, 73, will lead the inquiry. Revelations of shoddy work – and faulty documentation of it – have in recent weeks marred the most expensive rail project in the city's history.

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No British-style probe into causes of Mong Kok riot, Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam says (SCMP, June 13): Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam rejected a call for an investigation into the causes of the 2016 Mong Kok riot, saying however that if a panel were set up for this purpose, it should look into who had told the city's young people to "break laws to achieve justice". Chief Executive Carrie Lam was responding to pro-democracy lawmaker Shiu Ka-chun's request that the authorities follow in the footsteps of the British colonial government, which had looked into the policy issues that led to riots in the 1950s and 1960s. Lam replied. "Any government, at any time, has room for improvement. No matter how we have worked perfectly, society will have voices of dissatisfaction and anxiety." She said this was not an excuse to break the law, and the current social situation in Hong Kong was far from severe.

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Hong Kong's controversial China rail checkpoint bill finally passed by lawmakers amid protests, delays and expulsions (SCMP, June 15): Hong Kong's legislature finally passed a bitterly contested bill to set up a joint border checkpoint with mainland China in the heart of the city after a marathon debate that saw attempts to delay the vote descend into chaos. The so-called co-location bill was passed by 40 to 20 votes for approval to station mainland Chinese immigration officers at the West Kowloon terminal of the HK\$84 billion (US\$10.75 billion) high-speed railway that will link the city to Guangzhou. The Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (Co-location) Bill allows for passengers to clear both Hong Kong and mainland border checks at a single location, which means mainland laws will be enforced on Hong Kong soil for the first time. Opposition politicians and their pro-democracy supporters see it as a violation of Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, which would undermine the city's autonomy under the one-country, two-systems governing policy. Secretary for Transport and Housing Frank Chan said the co-location arrangement would provide young Hongkongers with opportunities for business and development.

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Beijing loyalist Maria Tam tapped for Basic Law Committee promotion (SCMP, June 20): Beijing loyalist Maria Tam will be elevated to vice-chairwoman in a committee that advises the central government on Hong Kong's mini-constitution, taking the place of former justice minister Elsie Leung, sources told the Post. Her promotion is part of a reshuffle in the 12-member Basic Law Committee, that comes under China's top legislative body, the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC). The committee gives input on any interpretations or amendments to the Basic Law and will also be consulted if the NPCSC wants to add or delete national laws applicable to Hong Kong in Annex III of the mini-constitution.

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Fight over controversial Hong Kong rail checkpoint moves to High Court as lawyer warns it could prompt Beijing intervention (SCMP, June 22): The fight over the controversial joint checkpoint arrangement at Hong Kong's express rail terminus has shifted from the Legislative Council to the High Court – a move that could lead to intervention from Beijing. Bar Association chairman Philip Dykes earlier warned that the legal challenges could, "very likely", trigger Beijing to interpret the Basic Law. University of Hong Kong legal scholar Eric Cheung said the court will judge whether the applications were filed based on reasonable arguments. A spokesman for the Transport and Housing Bureau said the government respects a citizen's right to apply for a judicial review.

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Beijing's bay area plan for southern China is the focus as state leader Han Zheng meets Hong Kong's Carrie Lam (SCMP, June 26): Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam had her first formal meeting with Chinese Vice-premier Han Zheng since the state leader was appointed to take charge of the city's affairs. Han now oversees development for the "Greater Bay Area", a project to transform Hong Kong, Macau and nine Guangdong cities into a financial and innovation powerhouse to rival Silicon Valley. Han told

Lam that Beijing attached great importance to the bay area plans, which were “personally planned, personally pushed” by President Xi Jinping. The country’s central leadership approved of Lam’s work on the economy, people’s livelihoods and the implementation of the one country, two systems policy in her first year in office, Han said.

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Disqualified lawmaker Lau Siu-lai calls for democrats to show unity as Hong Kong by-election is set for November 25 (SCMP, June 27): Hong Kong will have its next Legislative Council by-election on November 25, setting up a potential showdown between pro-democracy and pro-establishment camps. Lau Siu-lai was among six opposition lawmakers removed from their Legco seats amid the oath-taking saga. “It was one month earlier than expected, that requires democrats to work together for this uphill battle,” Lau said, who was poised to contest for her lost seat. To guard against the possibility of Lau being barred from entering the election, most democratic parties have backed veteran former lawmaker Lee Cheuk-yan. However, this has been challenged by veteran pan-democrat Frederick Fung, who has proposed a primary for the right to contest the seat in the by-election.

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Legal affairs and human rights

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam: I never handed over a fugitive to mainland China against US wishes (SCMP, June 1): Hong Kong’s leader has categorically denied ever surrendering any fugitive to mainland China, strongly objecting to the United States government’s allegation that she did so on Beijing’s orders last year. Chief Executive Carrie Lam’s office released a statement, expressing “deep regret” over the US State Department’s claim in its annual report that she had turned down an extradition request “at the behest” of the central government last October. “Currently, there is no surrender of fugitive offenders arrangement between [Hong Kong] and the mainland,” her office said. “Therefore, no surrender of a fugitive has ever been made to the mainland. The [Hong Kong] government deals with any movement of persons in and out of Hong Kong in accordance with the laws of Hong Kong.” The fugitive in question was identified as 28-year-old Chinese hacker Iat Hong by US prosecutors in a separate, high-profile New York bribery investigation into former Hong Kong home affairs minister Patrick Ho.

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Domestic helpers want 11 hours rest and for you to stop treating them like ‘slaves’ Hongkongers told (SCMP, June 10): Domestic helpers’ unions in Hong Kong launched a petition demanding the government make it compulsory for employers to give their workers 11 hours of uninterrupted rest. Organisers of the campaign hope to get 35,000 signatures, roughly 10 per cent of the city’s domestic helpers, a number they believe should prompt the government to take notice. They have also called for helpers to be given decent accommodation, so sleeping in kitchens, store rooms, and toilets would become a thing of the past. All of these issues should be stated clearly in the government’s standard employment contract – the only contract the government accepts for people hiring domestic helpers – so they will no longer live like “slaves” in the city, campaigners added.

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Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam hits back at critics ‘politicising’ jail term for activist Edward Leung (SCMP, June 12): Critics of the jail sentence imposed on activist Edward Leung Tin-kei over his role in the 2016 Mong Kok riot were politicising the issue and harming Hong Kong’s rule of law, the city’s leader Carrie Lam said. She was responding to comments criticising the High Court’s decision to jail Leung for six years for rioting and assaulting police in one of the city’s worst outbreaks of civil unrest in decades. Former Hong Kong governor Chris Patten said he was disappointed to see the “vaguely drafted” Public Order Ordinance being used “politically” to place harsh sentences on activists. While Lam admitted that the Hong Kong government had its shortcomings, she said young people should not break the law in the pursuit of social justice.

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Hong Kong’s Independent Police Complaints Council to step up monitoring of the force, new chief pledges (SCMP, June 20): The new chairman of Hong Kong’s police watchdog pledged to be more proactive in reviewing the practices of the force, and said he would even take issues to the city’s leader when necessary. The promise by Anthony Francis Neoh comes as the force recovers from a public confidence crisis in recent years following criticism of their handling of major protests, including the city’s 2014 Occupy demonstrations. Neoh was speaking after attending his first regular meeting as head of the Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC), which reviews probes carried out by the force itself into complaints against officers.

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Hong Kong court bans public from using mobile phones with cameras during jury trials (SCMP, June 22): People will be banned from using phones with cameras in Hong Kong courts during jury trials

after the city's judiciary barred the devices. Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma issued the directive in the wake of recent cases of photo-taking during proceedings. "Jurors must be free from all actual or perceived interference, pressure or distraction," a spokesman for the judiciary said. Those caught using phones may be held in contempt of court, which may result in a fine or jail time depending on the severity of the offence. Alternatively, violators could be fined HK\$2,500 (US\$318) under the Summary Offences Ordinance. The ban will take effect from July 19. Parties to court cases, their lawyers, law enforcement officials and members of the press are exempted.

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Foreign judges key to success of Hong Kong's top court, chief justice says (SCMP, June 26):

The presence of eminent overseas judges at the city's top court is a key to the body's success, Hong Kong's chief justice has said amid pro-Beijing lawmakers' concerns. Geoffrey Ma's remarks came on the heels of the appointment of Brenda Hale and Beverley McLachlin, two non-permanent judges, to the Court of Final Appeal (CFA). Pro-Beijing lawmakers have questioned the judges' liberal stance on equality issues and whether they would uphold Chinese national interests. Hale is from Britain, and McLachlin from Canada. Ma stressed overseas judges from top courts in Australia, Britain and other common law jurisdictions are "leading jurists of the present or indeed any generation" and helped add legal expertise to the city.

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Health

Student intakes ramped up as Hong Kong grapples with chronic shortage of doctors, nurses and dentists (SCMP, June 1):

From next September, the city's medical, nursing and dentistry schools will boost their student intakes to fix the severe manpower shortage in the health care sector, Secretary for Food and Health Sophia Chan confirmed. Hong Kong's crowded public hospitals are often stretched to breaking point especially during the flu season. The government last year said in a health care manpower report it had a general shortage of doctors, dentists, dental hygienists, general nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, medical laboratory technologists, optometrists and radiographers.

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Hong Kong should ease post-Fukushima ban on some Japanese food imports, government says

(SCMP, June 6): Hong Kong should relax a ban on food imported from Japan which has been in place since the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the government proposed and said that it considered the health risk low. The suggestion of relaxing the seven-year-old ban was based on a scientific assessment of food safety, said a government source, who said trade was not the main concern. The government plans to resume imports of fruit, vegetables, milk and dairy from the four neighbouring prefectures, as long as they pass radiation tests. The ban on produce from Fukushima should stay in place "with a view to addressing the concerns of the public", said the proposal submitted to the Legislative Council by the Centre for Food Safety, under the Food and Health Bureau.

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Hong Kong engineers develop world's first robotics system capable of performing brain surgery inside an MRI scanner (SCMP, June 13):

Hong Kong engineers have developed the world's first robotics system capable of performing brain surgery inside an MRI scanner, paving the way for more accurate and efficient treatment of illnesses such as Parkinson's disease. The new device also greatly reduces the time needed for the surgery, which can last up to a whole day, as it can simultaneously work on both sides of the brain. The new device was designed and developed by a University of Hong Kong mechanical engineering team and tested by neurosurgeons from the Chinese University.

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We did not bow to e-cigarette makers in rejecting full ban, Hong Kong health chief Sophia Chan says (SCMP, June 16):

Hong Kong's health minister defended her decision not to ban electronic cigarettes, saying the government was being pragmatic in its planned regulations. Having turned down the total ban suggested by her own bureau in 2015, Sophia Chan said officials did not rule out more stringent controls in future. She denied she had backed down to e-cigarette producers and said a complete ban was only "one way of regulating cigarettes". The government plans to effectively allow the controlled sale of e-cigarettes, as well as putting health warnings on them similar to those on traditional cigarettes. To start with, officials will align the rate of tax on e-cigarettes with the one on traditional tobacco.

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Mould scare prompts removal of indigestion drug Enzyplex from Hong Kong's public hospitals and shops (SCMP, June 22):

A drug used for digestive disorders was removed from shop shelves in Hong Kong after tests on several tablets found they were contaminated with mould. The city's public hospitals and clinics also stopped dispensing of Enzyplex, an over-the-counter drug made in Indonesia,

with the Hospital Authority saying that about 4,000 of its patients had been prescribed the medication. It added that while the Monascus mould found on the tablets would not harm healthy people, there was “a possible risk of infection” among people with weakened immune systems.

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Environment

Government watchdog to investigate three public departments in Hong Kong over possible maladministration (SCMP, June 4): The decision to axe two banyan trees, thought to be more than 70 years old, in Hong Kong has triggered an investigation into three public departments, the government watchdog said. Ombudsman Connie Lau said the Lands Department, Home Affairs Department and the Development Bureau’s Tree Management Office would be investigated. “The felling of the trees has attracted wide media coverage and public debate,” an Ombudsman statement read. Some accused the officials of not taking “due care of the health conditions of the trees” nor adequately consulting relevant experts and the local community, it added. The watchdog will look into whether the department had sufficient grounds to fell the trees, as well as how it typically maintains them.

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Residents divided over using parks for Hong Kong housing: Greenpeace survey (SCMP, June 6): Hongkongers are split over whether the fringes of the city’s country parks should be developed to free up land for housing, although a majority believed the parks should be protected, according to a Greenpeace survey. Of the 1,008 people polled in April and May, 50.1 per cent “had doubts over” developing the fringes of country parks to increase land supply or thought the idea “unacceptable”. Some 42 per cent felt that it was “acceptable” or was “worth considering”. The rest lacked strong convictions on the issue. Campaigner for Greenpeace Andy Chu said the results showed there was no consensus on the idea. In space-starved Hong Kong, protected country parks make up about 40 per cent of the city, while 7 per cent is used for housing.

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‘Reverse vending machines’ could dispense cash for used plastic bottles in Hong Kong to boost dismal recycling rate (SCMP, June 11): Environment minister Wong Kam-sing said offering consumers financial incentives to return bottles for recycling would help boost plastic waste recovery rates. “Smart reverse vending machines” could be introduced at “convenient locations” around town to facilitate and enhance recycling efficiency, he said. Consumers would pay a bottle deposit when buying a drink and the machines would accept the empties for recycling and return that deposit. Wong said the consultant carrying out the government study would “engage relevant trade associations and other stakeholders to seek their views before submitting a final proposal to the Environmental Protection Department for consideration”. Millions of plastic drinks bottles go each day into Hong Kong’s overflowing landfills.

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Proposal for another study on Hong Kong waterfront draws ire of advisers after their earlier suggestions were ‘discarded’ (SCMP, June 25): Harbourfront advisers in Hong Kong have slammed a government proposal to study management of the city’s promenade, saying they already gave their views after a long inquiry on the same subject, and the government ignored them. Many members of the Harbourfront Commission, which advises the government on development, told a meeting that they had already spent six years studying better management of the city’s scenic 73km waterfront, concluding that a statutory authority was needed to centralise responsibilities for related matters. They also expressed disappointment that their efforts were essentially ignored by Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam, who in a U-turn last October said she did not intend to set up the planned HK\$10 billion (US\$1.28 billion) harbourfront authority.

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Culture and education

British officials boost resources to ensure student visa chaos is not repeated in Hong Kong this summer (SCMP, June 3): British immigration authorities have promised to put in place more resources for their visa application service to avoid a repeat of the chaos last summer when more than 1,100 Hong Kong students were affected by delays to their documents, according to a local legislator Ip Kin-yuen. Hongkongers will be able to use an online application system, Access UK, this year to process documents. Ip released a report on the delays, which included a letter from UK Visas and Immigration. “We have reviewed what happened and have put in place necessary resourcing and operational plans to ensure it doesn’t happen again,” the letter read.

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University of Hong Kong places 25th in 2019 QS World University Rankings – its top marks in seven years (SCMP, June 7): University of Hong Kong (HKU) achieved its best showing in seven years in the QS World University Rankings 2019, coming in at 25th place among 1,000 institutions around the

world. University of Science and Technology (HKUST) fell from 30th last year to 37th, while Chinese University dipped three places to 49th. City University (CityU) slid from 49th last year to 55th, Polytechnic University (PolyU) went down from 95th to 106th.

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Time to double Hong Kong research funding, task force says (SCMP, June 7): As Hong Kong seeks to develop itself into an innovation hub, a task force reviewing research funding has recommended doubling the government's input and setting up a steering council to oversee planning and policy. The task force – set up by Chief Executive Carrie Lam last year – announced seven proposals as it launched a consultation with stakeholders and the public on June 6. It is collecting views up to July 10. Presenting an interim report, chairman Professor Tsui Lap-chee said one suggestion was for the government to provide more support to R&D development with a view to doubling overall competitive research funding in Hong Kong from about HK\$2 billion to HK\$4 billion (US\$509.7 million) a year by 2022.

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Hong Kong Education Bureau under watchdog scrutiny over 'lax' screening and 'transparency' of school applications for fee rise (SCMP, June 26): The government watchdog will scrutinise Hong Kong's education authority over public concerns that its approval process for raising school fees is "lax and lacks transparency". The Office of the Ombudsman pointed to how 147 schools – semi-autonomous ones in the Direct Subsidy Scheme, private and international schools – were given the green light to raise fees last year, with some of them charging more than HK\$200,000 (US\$25,000) a year. Secretary for Education Kevin Yeung said the application assessment system was reviewed regularly and the bureau would cooperate fully with the watchdog's investigation.

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Student anger as Hong Kong Baptist University opts to keep rule that stops them graduating unless they pass Mandarin exam (SCMP, June 28): Baptist University will retain its unpopular requirement for students to pass a Mandarin module to graduate, its highest authority on academic matters decided on June 27, more than five months after 30 students stormed a language centre in protest. But the university's student union rejected the senate's decision, calling it a move to "dilute the controversy" without addressing the views of students. The graduation requirement has been in place since 2007. Students can take a three-part Mandarin course or to be exempted from it, they must pass a proficiency test by its language centre or attain a certain grade in an exam by China's state language regulator.

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Macau

Macau money chiefs order UnionPay clampdown over illicit mainland China cash fears (SCMP, June 8): A new crackdown on UnionPay cards has been launched by Macau monetary chiefs, as fresh concerns surface over illicit capital flows out of mainland China. The Monetary Authority of Macau has issued a warning to financial institutions to tackle the illegal use of UnionPay cards to evade strict exchange controls. They made the move against what it called "illegal acts" after pawn shops operating in Macau casinos had their UnionPay point-of-sale terminals removed. It is the latest move in a long-running campaign to tackle China's problem with an underground banking network, through which billions of yuan has flowed from the nation's economy in recent years.

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Press articles related to Switzerland and Swiss matters

Traditional watchmaking in the Swiss Alps is the new summer fad for children (SCMP, June 13): Children as young as 12 can now spend their summer assembling a watch movement in the snow-capped village of Verbier. This is the latest of the 40 or so elective courses offered by Les Elfes International. "We are hoping to provide [students with] a full immersion in the Swiss watchmaking world," says Malko Shraner, sales and marketing director at Les Elfes. Students will kick off the morning with a visit to the Fondation Haute Horlogerie (FHH) by Richemont in Geneva, where they will – with tiny binoculars mounted on their noses – learn how to disassemble and reassemble the classic mechanical ETA watch movement commonly employed in traditional Swiss watch brands. Shraner makes it clear that the monetary value of watches is not what the camp is about. Instead, "we thought it [would be] a very nice way to share with kids from all around the world something extremely traditional [from] Switzerland, [which would also provide them with] lessons in patience and meticulousness".

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