



August in Hong Kong

31.8.2018/No. 176

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

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Economy + Finance

Hong Kong retail sector posts 'ideal' 13 per cent growth but US-China trade war squeeze looms (SCMP, August 2): Hong Kong's retail industry basked in double-digit growth in the first half of the year, according to the latest government figures. Shoppers spent HK\$248 billion (US\$31.6 billion) between January and June, up a healthy 13.4 per cent on the same period last year. The Hong Kong Retail Management Association called the figures "ideal" but cautioned that expansion was set to slow. Its chairman forecast high single-digit growth in the second half and a full-year figure of about 10 per cent, citing China's trade spat with the United States as a restraining factor. "China's gross domestic product will be hit, and mainland tourists' appetite for consumption should also be affected," association chief Thomson Cheng said.

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Artificial island half the size of Kowloon potential home for 1.1 million Hongkongers, think tank and three major global consultants say (SCMP, August 7): A think tank led by Hong Kong's first chief executive Tung Chee-hwa has partnered with three major global consultants to propose reclaiming 2,200 hectares of land to the east of Lantau Island in what would be the largest project of its kind in the city's history. Think tank Our Hong Kong Foundation and its research partners said the project, which aimed to resolve the city's housing problems, could be done in phases and described it as a game changer. Under the proposal, the artificial island measuring almost half the size of Kowloon was expected to accommodate up to 1.1 million people. While one-third of the land would be allocated for housing, 70 per cent of the residential areas would be dedicated to building affordable homes. The rest of the area would be for commercial uses, public facilities and new industries.

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Hong Kong MTR to revamp top management as chief executive Lincoln Leong and others to leave over Sha Tin-Central rail link scandals (SCMP, August 8): Hong Kong's rail operator has overhauled its top management team, with three immediate resignations and the early departure of its CEO next, after the government demanded heads roll for the scandals plaguing the Sha Tin-Central rail link, the city's most expensive rail project. The government – which owns 75 per cent of the MTR Corporation – said it had asked police to investigate "huge discrepancies" and "conflicting reports" in the rail giant's submissions on the HK\$97.1 billion (US\$12 billion) project. MTR Corp chairman Frederick Ma revealed that he had submitted his resignation – for a second time – "on the grounds of accountability," but the government had asked him to stay on until a new CEO was in place in six to nine months. The rail scandal is also subject to an independent investigation commissioned by Chief Executive Carrie Lam.

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Hong Kong MTR's HK\$97.1 billion link scandal: consequences, loopholes and solutions (SCMP, August 9): The sudden departure of several top executives at the MTR Corporation over a construction scandal in Hong Kong's most expensive rail project has rocked public confidence and shocked the city's engineering sector. Democratic Party lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting, deputy chairman of the Legislative Council's transport panel, said the existing mechanism mainly relied on signoffs made by professionals because this was taken to mean they were held accountable and had observed proper ethics. "But monitoring through documents is dysfunctional," Lam said. He alleged that the documents were falsified. Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced the government had appointed three former officials as advisers to help step up management of the troubled project. The trio are former director of the Civil Engineering and Development Department Lau Ching-kwong, former director of the Buildings Department Hui Siu-wai and Wong Hok-ning, former head of the Geotechnical Engineering Office.

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Hong Kong GDP records 3.5 per cent growth for second quarter on strong consumption and markets (SCMP, August 11): Hong Kong's economic health surged 3.5 per cent in the second quarter of 2018 amid buoyant consumption and robust stock and property markets, but prospects are clouded by the escalating US-China trade war. The solid performance brought gross domestic product (GDP) to 4 per cent growth in the first half of 2018. Adolph Leung, deputy government economist, warned that the city's GDP growth will slow down on a worsening trade war. Leung said the trade war could hurt the city's exports in coming months, for example, the US\$250 billion worth of Chinese goods at stake would affect 3.5 per cent of the city's exports. Bank of East Asia chief economist Paul Tang said private

consumption showed signs of weaknesses in the second quarter as shoppers' "wealth effect" soured along with a volatile stock market. Private consumption grew at 6.1 per cent in the second quarter, slower from 8.8 per cent in the first quarter.

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The end of Hong Kong's 'super low interest rate environment' could spell trouble for families, city's finance minister warns (SCMP, August 13): Hong Kong's long-maintained "super low interest rate environment" may soon end, which could bring adjustment to the red-hot property market, adding pressure on family debt and assets, the city's financial chief Paul Chan has warned. 15 banks, including all top 10 mortgage lenders, which combined have 86 per cent of the mortgage market share, announced increases in their mortgage rates recently, affecting all new homebuyers. Existing mortgage borrowers, who have a total of HK\$1.26 trillion in outstanding mortgage loans, may soon face similar pressure as banks are expected to increase their best lending rate, or prime rate, as early as the end of this month – the first rise in 12 years. "Under the linked exchange rate system, Hong Kong has to follow suit to increase interest rates sooner or later," Chan said. "The past long period of a super low interest rate environment may soon end."

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Annuity plan not enough to sustain Hongkongers after retirement: Allianz survey (SCMP, August 15): Hongkongers have little interest in the Hong Kong government's annuity scheme, a survey has found. More than 50 per cent of the 800 respondents surveyed by Allianz Global Investors do not plan to join the annuity scheme because of a lack of incentives and poor understanding of annuity products. Only 9,410 senior citizens said they intend to invest a total of HK\$4.94 billion (US\$629.3 million), less than half the HK\$10 billion target, the Hong Kong government announced the subscription details of the programme. A HK\$1 million investment will give a monthly income of HK\$5,800 for men and HK\$5,300 for women over the age of 65. Hong Kong is tackling social and health challenges arising from a rapidly ageing population. About 18 per cent or 1.3 million of the city's population is 65 years or older, and this is forecast to increase to about 31 per cent of the population by 2036.

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Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam unveils Beijing-backed boost for city's innovation and technology sector (SCMP, August 16): Hong Kong's innovation and technology sector is due for a significant boost from a slew of initiatives announced in Beijing, including the setting-up of two new state-backed laboratories in the city's science park and a cross-border cooperation arrangement to be signed later. The new measures were unveiled after an unprecedented meeting in the Chinese capital attended by Vice-Premier Han Zheng and other central government officials as well as Chief Executive Carrie Lam and her Macau counterpart Fernando Chui. This was the first working group meeting on strategising the next steps for the ambitious "Greater Bay Area" project, which aims to develop Hong Kong, Macau and nine Guangdong cities into a financial and innovation powerhouse to rival Silicon Valley. It marked the first time that the chief executives of Hong Kong and Macau were included as members of a working group chaired by a top Beijing leader directly reporting to China's cabinet. Lam revealed after the meeting that the working group had made significant decisions on supporting Hong Kong's innovation and technology sector, as well as social policies for the city's residents living, working or travelling in the nine mainland cities included in the bay area project.

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Innovation, technology will give Hong Kong economy a boost and help develop high-end industry, senior officials say (SCMP, August 19): Innovation and technology (I&T) will become profitable in Hong Kong and drive the city's bid to develop high-end manufacturing, according to two senior officials. Both Financial Secretary Paul Chan and Secretary for Innovation and Technology Nicholas Yang said Hong Kong's economy and the technology sector can benefit from Beijing's "Greater Bay Area" project, which aims at turning the city and 10 neighbours in southern China into a financial and innovation hub rivalling Silicon Valley. Hong Kong's innovation and technology sector is set to get a significant boost from a slew of initiatives announced in Beijing, including the setting-up of two new state-backed laboratories in the city's Science Park and a cross-border cooperation arrangement to be signed later. "[We are] developing the high value-added manufacturing industry, which is based on new technology ... and doesn't not require a lot of land," Financial Secretary Paul Chan said.

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Maternity leave in Hong Kong: government considering subsidies to help businesses offset cost of giving new mothers 14 weeks off (SCMP, August 21): Hong Kong bosses could be offered a subsidy to partly offset the costs of a government push to extend statutory maternity leave to 14 weeks, the labour minister has revealed. A government study, expected to be completed by the end of the year, is looking to increase the current entitlement of 10 weeks' leave on 80 per cent pay, to bring Hong Kong in line with the standards of the International Labour Organisation. Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Law Chi-kwong said the government was also studying whether it could pay part of the cost for the extra days. New mothers in Japan enjoy 14 weeks of maternity leave, while those in Singapore have 16 weeks.
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Hong Kong and Shanghai leaders pledge to deepen cities' ties and drive China growth amid US trade war (SCMP, August 25): Hong Kong and Shanghai will deepen ties to drive growth in China and further open up the country, the cities' leaders pledged, putting aside their traditional rivalry to navigate uncertainties thrown up by the escalating trade war with the United States. Chief Executive Carrie Lam and Shanghai mayor Ying Yong witnessed the signing of 15 agreements to promote the cities' businesses, collaborate in cultural activities, improve access to each other's financial markets, create an alliance between their respective universities and boost interaction between young people, among other things. Lam said the two cities should work more closely to "serve the nation's needs and contribute to the country's development".
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Hong Kong high-speed rail to mainland 'will be profitable' from September 23 start date, carrying 80,000 passengers a day (SCMP, August 26): Hong Kong's transport authorities have announced that the long-delayed and over-budget high-speed train service will directly connect the city with 44 destinations in mainland China, and promised it will be profitable from the day it starts on September 23. The HK\$84.4 billion Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link is now expected to carry 80,100 passengers a day – 28,900 fewer than previously estimated – and will be run for 10 years by the MTR Corporation under two agreements signed to transfer operating rights to the railway giant. "We are pretty confident that the high-speed rail will not be incurring any loss in the future," Secretary for Transport and Housing Frank Chan said, basing his claim on the latest projection of daily passenger flow and "competitive" ticket pricing.
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Lucrative land sales that drive up property prices are a 'de facto tax' on homebuyers, Hong Kong government adviser says (SCMP, August 28): Hong Kong's policymakers are imposing a "de facto tax" on residents by failing to increase land supply, which drives up land costs and leads to developers setting unaffordable home prices, a government adviser has said. Joseph Yam, a non-official member of the Executive Council, criticised exorbitant land sales under the administration, saying these unnecessarily shore up the government's fiscal reserves. As high land costs trickled down to homebuyers, those who splurged to buy or rent a home would then be paying a form of indirect – or "de facto" tax – set out by the government, Yam wrote in a blog post. The council functions as the cabinet of Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam.
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Streamlined visit visa system opens door to more mainland Chinese tourists in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan (SCMP, August 29): At least 7.8 million mainland Chinese residents will find it easier to get a visa to visit Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan from next month, with authorities announcing -visitors will soon be able to apply for the document from their city of residence, rather than their registered household address – usually their birthplace. This and three other new measures related to easier travel to the three cities would take effect on Sept. 1, the Public Security Ministry's State Immigration -Administration announced. The other three measures are to allow mainlanders to apply for and renew passports for foreign trips and travel permits to the three places from their city of residence; speeding up processing of travel documents so they are available in seven days instead of eight to 13 days; and expediting immigration procedures at checkpoints for the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, set to open on September 23 and the bridge linking Hong Kong with Macau and Zhuhai.
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List of 11 types of international 'talent' unveiled in bid to lure qualified professionals to Hong Kong (SCMP, August 29): Hong Kong released a list of 11 types of migrants who will get priority to live in the city even if they do not have a job lined up yet, under a scheme to attract highly qualified people. The list specifies professions in the city's pillar industries of financial and professional -services, such as those in investment management, financial -services, law and technology. But it also includes specialists in waste treatment, naval architects, ship superintendents and those in creative industries such as game design and music. The Labour and Welfare Bureau said the list was intended to draw talent who could support the city's development as a "high value-added and diversified economy" and was less about providing manpower for industries where there are labour shortages. Talented foreigners can apply to enter Hong Kong through its existing Quality Migrant Admission Scheme, where up to 1,000 people are allowed into the city even if they have not secured employment yet.
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First single-digit expansion for Hong Kong retail in half year as growth hit by US-China trade war (SCMP, August 31): Hong Kong's retail industry has recorded its first single-digit expansion in half a year, the government revealed, as growth slows amid economic uncertainties from the US-China trade war. Shoppers spent HK\$38.9 billion (US\$4.96 billion) in July, up 7.8 per cent on the same month last year, official figures showed. The slowdown followed the fifth consecutive month of double-digit growth in June, during which sales of goods in all categories increased. The Hong Kong Retail Management Association Chairman Thomson Cheng said escalating trade tensions between the world's two largest economies had soured consumer sentiment among both locals and mainland Chinese tourists. The depreciation of the mainland Chinese currency, the yuan, against the Hong Kong dollar had also played a role in dampening growth, he added, as shoppers from across the border, who account for the lion's share in Hong Kong, were getting less bang for their buck.

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Domestic politics

Hong Kong National Party gets 28 extra days to argue against police attempt to ban it (SCMP, August 1): Hong Kong's Security Bureau has given a pro-independence party facing a possible ban an extra 28 days (until September 4) to submit arguments against the unprecedented proposal by the police. Under the Societies Ordinance, the security minister is required to give an affected group "an opportunity to be heard" or a chance to make "representations in writing" before deciding on a ban. Barrister Ronny Tong, an adviser to the city's leader, said the security minister's latest move may have factored in the lack of established procedures over time limits. "Because there are no precedents, the security minister may have been inclined to entertain the HKNP's request to prevent giving them firepower in court," Tong said.

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'Regrettable and inappropriate', Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam says of Foreign Correspondents' Club talk by separatist leader Andy Chan (SCMP, August 5): Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam has weighed in on the controversy surrounding the city's Foreign Correspondents' Club (FCC) for inviting the founder of a separatist party to give a talk, describing the move as "regrettable and inappropriate". China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked the FCC to cancel a talk by Chan. The request by the ministry's office in the city was turned down by the club, which intends to go ahead with the event on August 14. Chan's party is facing a possible government ban for being an "imminent threat" to national security. Lam said: "We find it a pity and regrettable that some organisation has insisted on holding an event on the theme of Hong Kong independence and Hong Kong nationalism. We respect ... the activities of the FCC in Hong Kong, and I hope our friends in the FCC would also respect Hong Kong as an inalienable part of China." On the issue of Chan's group advocating Hong Kong independence, Lam said: "My position – and that of the government – has been very firm and without any ambiguity. We would not tolerate and would restrain any attempt to call for separatism ... in accordance with the law."

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Cease threats against Foreign Correspondents' Club, press groups tell former Hong Kong leader CY Leung (SCMP, August 8): International and local press groups urged Hong Kong's former leader Leung Chun-ying to stop threatening the city's Foreign Correspondents' Club over its lease of a government-owned building, as he continued his barrage of criticism against it. The former chief executive has been highly critical of the FCC's refusal to cancel an August 14 talk at its premises by separatist party leader Andy Chan despite a request from Beijing to do so. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) described Leung's remarks as an attempt to "muzzle and publicly threaten an organisation that strongly defends the media's role to hear from all areas of society and politics". The director of Reporters Without Borders' East Asia bureau, Cédric Alviani, said Leung's comments were "totally out of place and only shows that Leung runs out of arguments to justify the Chinese censorship attempt". Chris Yeung, chairman of Hong Kong Journalists Association, added: "Leung is essentially asking the FCC to cancel the talk by Chan and stop inviting similar guests in future, or else the lease might not be renewed or even be taken back earlier. That's blatant political pressure."

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Trade war puts dent in Beijing's plan to turn Hong Kong and surrounding cities into new Silicon Valley (SCMP, August 9): The US-China trade war has complicated Beijing's ambitious plan to transform 11 cities including HK and Macau in the "Greater Bay Area" into the Chinese version of the "Silicon Valley", the Post has learned. A source with knowledge of the matter said the announcement was delayed so as to avoid being further targeted by the United States, taking lessons from its "Made in China 2025" plan, which Washington treats as an all-out challenge. "The trade war is a key factor," a source close to Beijing said. "Look at how the rosy projection of the 2025 plan is being targeted by the US." "Tuning down the scale of the plan may attract ridicule, but painting a future too bright may give fuel to the US," said the source, highlighting the conflict Beijing faced. The solution was to roll out the policy measures one by one whenever they were ready, but not the whole plan at one time

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Why redrawing map for Hong Kong district council elections is a bigger deal for opposition camp (SCMP, August 12): Hong Kong's pro-democracy politicians are crying foul over proposals to redraw the boundaries of more than a quarter of the seats for coming district council elections, believing they will be adversely hit – and a political scientist says they have a point. Stan Wong, associate professor in Polytechnic University's department of applied social studies, last year published a study with surprising findings – buildings in constituencies held by pan-democrats were twice as likely to be switched to a different district than those in seats controlled by the pro-establishment camp, and “redistricting” could cut the chances of pro-democracy incumbents being re-elected. The Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) has proposed redrawing boundaries in 128 constituencies and creating 21 new seats in 10 districts for polls in 2019 to take into account population growth.

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Maria Tam denies Beijing intervened in Hong Kong separatist's FCC speech, saying 'there is zero tolerance for Hong Kong independence' (SCMP, August 13): Beijing “did not intervene” in the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents' Club's plan to host a talk by separatist party leader Andy Chan, pro-establishment camp heavyweight Maria Tam said. Tam, now the vice-chairwoman of the Basic Law Committee, brushed aside accusations that Beijing was undermining freedom of speech in the city, and also said she supported the decision by Leung Ka-wing, the head of RTHK, the city's public broadcaster, not to live stream Chan's speech. “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not intervene with anything, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs commented,” Tam said. Tam said: “I totally support [the ministry], because there is zero tolerance for Hong Kong independence.

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Hong Kong separatist party leader Andy Chan calls China 'a threat to all free peoples in the world' in fiery Foreign Correspondents' Club speech (SCMP, August 15): Andy Chan, a leader of a minor party facing a ban for promoting Hong Kong independence, denounced China as “a threat to all free peoples in the world” and insisted separation was the only solution for the city in a defiant speech that elicited immediate and strong condemnation from Beijing. He also called on foreign powers, including the United States and Britain, to step in, asking Washington in particular to put pressure on Beijing by expanding its trade war to Hong Kong. In a strongly-worded statement, Beijing's Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Hong Kong condemned the FCC, accusing it of abusing press freedom and freedom of speech, as well as obstructing the city's rule of law by providing a platform for Chan. The Hong Kong government also issued a statement admonishing Chan and the FCC. “Providing a public platform for a speaker to openly advocate independence completely disregards Hong Kong's constitutional duty to uphold national sovereignty. It is totally unacceptable and deeply regrettable,” it said. Victor Mallet, the FCC's first vice-president, said the club neither took sides nor espoused the views of its guest speakers, and that it only valued freedom of speech and association, as enshrined in the city's mini-constitution, the Basic Law.

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Hong Kong No 2 highlights 'cordial relationship' with FCC as lawmakers demand it is punished for hosting talk by separatist Andy Chan (SCMP, August 15): Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung highlighted the “cordial relationship” that existed between the Hong Kong government and the Foreign Correspondents' Club (FCC), as pro-establishment lawmakers called on the administration to kick it out of its government-owned premises for hosting a talk by separatist Andy Chan. He reiterated the government's belief that the FCC's decision to host the talk by the convenor of the Hong Kong National Party was “deeply regrettable, unacceptable and inappropriate”, but said the relationship between the two would not change. A statement signed by 32 pro-establishment lawmakers accused the club of having “given up” on its morals, and added it could have broken local laws by hosting the talk. “We think it is unreasonable for the club to use freedom of speech as a shield,” the statement read. Priscilla Leung, the Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong legislator, said the government should consider terminating the current lease and immediately review its terms. By inviting Chan to speak, Priscilla Leung said the club could have violated the mini-constitution, which states Hong Kong is an inalienable part of China.

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Number of mainland Chinese migrants coming to Hong Kong drops, government data shows (SCMP, August 15): The number of mainland -migrants entering Hong Kong via a one-way permit saw its biggest drop in a decade, government data showed, raising questions on whether the city has become a less attractive destination. Some 41,000 mainlanders moved to the city in the past 12 months, a decrease of 14,700 compared to the same period -between mid-2016 and mid-2017, according to figures released by the Census and Statistics Department (CSD). The one-way permit scheme, in place since 1995 and which allows up to 150 mainlanders each day to move to the city, is meant to help spouses and children born across the border to reunite with their families in Hong Kong. Close to

950,000 mainland -migrants moved to the city via the scheme as of end-2016, making up about 12.8 per cent of Hong Kong's population.

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Andy Chan's pro-independence speech at FCC shows Hong Kong's 'inadequacies' in upholding China's national security, says top Beijing official (SCMP, August 16): The actions of a Hong Kong independence advocate Andy Chan and the Foreign Correspondents' Club (FCC) that gave him a platform have exposed the city's "inadequacies" in upholding national security, Beijing's head of the city's affairs said. In the strongest official warning yet on the city's obligation to enact national security legislation, Zhang Xiaoming, director of the State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, piled pressure on the local government to act against separatist advocacy. He censured both Andy Chan and the FCC in strong language, accusing the activist of committing a crime under Article 9 of the Crimes Ordinance, which covers sedition, and the club of assisting him in committing the offence. Chief Executive Carrie Lam followed up by declaring her government "cannot compromise" its constitutional duty in protecting the nation's security, sovereignty and integrity. While it was her government's duty to enact national security laws, Lam said, the "relatively controversial" move would have to be made after considering public opinion.

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Carrie Lam rules out cutting number of mainland Chinese migrants to Hong Kong (SCMP, August 18): Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam ruled out reducing or scrapping the quota for mainland Chinese migrants settling in the city, accusing political activists of "brainwashing" local residents into blaming people from across the border for the city's housing shortage and inadequate resources. In Facebook live session, several viewers suggested abolishing or reducing the daily quota of 150 one-way permits issued to mainlanders reuniting with their families and settling in the city, but Lam rejected the idea. Lam suggested that young mainlanders migrating to Hong Kong could ease the problems caused by the city's ageing population and low birth rate.

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New mainland China ID card for Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan residents will be revoked if holders pose threat to country, documents reveal (SCMP, August 19): Hongkongers working and living in mainland China will have their identity cards revoked there if they pose a threat to national sovereignty and security, the Chinese government revealed. That came days after the central government announced that residents from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan could start applying for the new smart cards from September 1 to enjoy access to a wide range of social and public services across the border, including school places for children and a housing scheme. The new ID card is not a travel document and Hongkongers will have to use their home return permit, which has an eight-digit code, to cross the border.

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'Not enough evidence to prosecute Hong Kong separatist Andy Chan': Beijing loyalist Maria Tam adopts different stance from top official Zhang Xiaoming (SCMP, August 21): A vice-chairwoman of the Basic Law Committee said there was not enough evidence to prosecute separatist party leader Andy Chan for sedition as spelled out in the Crimes Ordinance, rejecting the recommendation of a top mainland Chinese official. In her remarks, the first by a pro-Beijing heavyweight to differ from that of Zhang Xiaoming, director of the State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, Maria Tam said using the Societies Ordinance still made the most sense to put a grip on the activities of the Hong Kong National Party (HKNP) founder. She also said she believed the road map for controversial national security legislation, as set out in the Basic Law's Article 23, "has been developing" in the city.

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Chinese foreign ministry brands Hong Kong separatist Andy Chan deplorable for writing to Donald Trump.... while city leader Carrie Lam was lost for words (SCMP, August 22): The Chinese foreign ministry has called a Hong Kong separatist "deplorable" for sending a letter to US President Donald Trump, calling for the city and China to be kicked out of the World Trade Organisation. "The letter... fully exposed [Andy Chan's] true face, colluding with external forces to stir up trouble in China and Hong Kong," said the office's spokesman in Beijing, adding that such plan would have no chance to succeed. Hong Kong National Party leader Chan published an open letter calling for WTO membership to be revoked from China and Hong Kong, citing a "rapid deterioration of freedoms" in the city and a loss of autonomy under Chinese rule. The foreign ministry's remarks came hot on the heels of Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam, saying she could "not find the adjectives" to describe how inappropriate it had been for Chan to send the letter. "Of course such action is not appropriate," Lam said. "And just describing it as inappropriate perhaps has not reflected the public outcry and anger with that sort of action."

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Political reform and national security law can be achieved ‘at the same time’, Hong Kong think tank claims (SCMP, August 27): A committee with members from all corners of Hong Kong society should be formed to propose a new round of political reforms, including the enactment of a national security law, a think tank led by a former Legislative Council president said. The Hong Kong Policy Research Institute, whose convenor is veteran pro-Beijing politician Jasper Tsang, believed tying both issues together and rolling out a public consultation would help both aims be achieved. “The opposition camp always says it wants to see universal suffrage before considering a national security law, while Beijing apparently likes to see Hong Kong have a national security law first before any political reforms,” Tsang said. “If we do both at the same time, we believe the concerns of both sides can be addressed at the same time.”

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Chinese Vice-Premier Han Zheng urges Hong Kong officers to ‘firmly’ safeguard national security and rule of law (SCMP, August 28): Chinese Vice-Premier Han Zheng has urged Hong Kong’s disciplined forces to “firmly and effectively” safeguard national security and the city’s rule of law, while “comprehensively and accurately” implementing the “one country, two systems” governing principle. Meeting a 120-strong delegation of Hong Kong’s law enforcement officials led by Secretary for Security John Lee, Han – ranked No 7 in the Communist Party hierarchy – also “fully recognised” their hard work in making a success of the governing formula that allows the city a high degree of autonomy. It was seen by commentators as a strong signal of Beijing’s support for the city’s disciplined forces.

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No evidence pair from Joshua Wong’s Demosisto party were detained by Chinese security services, Hong Kong leader says (SCMP, August 29): Hong Kong’s leader said mainland authorities had not notified her about any of the city’s residents being detained or arrested and would not comment on “unsubstantiated allegations” made earlier by the localist Demosisto party. Chief Executive Carrie Lam was responding to claims made by Demosisto founder Joshua Wong, who said two of its members were detained by state police on the mainland. It said they were interrogated for hours about their views on Tibetan independence, the 2014 Occupy movement for greater democracy, and their links to the group. Lam remarked: “All the details were provided unilaterally by one side, even without the affected people appearing to substantiate their claims or allegations.” As a matter of principle, Hongkongers should respect laws in other jurisdictions, she said.

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Separatist leader Andy Chan’s FCC talk and call for US sanctions on Hong Kong cited as new evidence for proposed party ban (SCMP, August 30): A Hong Kong separatist party leader’s defiant speech at the city’s Foreign Correspondents’ Club and subsequent call for the US to extend its trade war with China to Hong Kong have been used as new evidence by police to justify their proposed ban on the Hong Kong National Party (HKNP). Assistant Commissioner of Police Rebecca Lam, in a report to Secretary for Security John Lee, said the party, through remarks made by its convenor Andy Chan, showed it “remained firmly committed to achieving its objective of Hong Kong independence”. The police report came one day after Chinese Vice-Premier Han Zheng, after a meeting with Lee in Beijing, urged the city’s government to act “in accordance with the law” when dealing with the HKNP.

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Beijing studying possibility of Hongkongers serving in People’s Liberation Army (SCMP, August 31): Authorities in Beijing are considering allowing Hong Kong residents to serve in the national military, the defence ministry has said. The news came after China’s elite Tsinghua University announced last week – much to the concern of Hong Kong students enrolled there – that it would require first-year students from the city and Macau to go through a mandatory three-week military course previously only compulsory for mainland students. The Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong vice-chairman Horace Cheung, a lawmaker, said permitting Hongkongers to do so would improve their “sense of national identity”. Hongkongers currently do not have to serve in the People’s Liberation Army, and there is no policy in place for them to take up military service voluntarily.

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Legal affairs and human rights

Hong Kong autonomy, oath-taking saga among issues NGO delegation will raise at meeting with UN committee on racism (SCMP, August 2): Beijing’s increasing pressure on Hong Kong’s autonomy and the disqualification of six lawmakers over an oath-taking saga will be among the issues raised by an NGO delegation when it meets members of a UN committee on racial discrimination in Geneva. The UN committee, made up of human rights experts, will hold hearings on August 10 and 13 to assess how Hong Kong has implemented provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The NGO delegation said members would argue that little progress had been

made by city's government in fighting racial discrimination and human trafficking, and protecting the rights of migrant workers.

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Mainland Chinese police to Hong Kong criminals: you can run, but you can't hide here – as they hand back three suspects in HK\$23 million jewellery robbery (SCMP, August 5): Guangdong police have told Hong Kong's criminals not to try hiding across the border as they handed over three suspects involved in a Tsim Sha Tsui jewellery robbery where HK\$23 million (US\$3 million) worth of valuables was snatched in 90 seconds. Liang Ruiguo, political commissar of the Criminal Investigation Bureau with the Guangdong Provincial Department of Public Security, said his province and Hong Kong were no "shelters for cross-border crime". Li Chi-hang, director of crime and security for Hong Kong police, said the force would continue its close collaboration with their mainland counterparts. Guangdong police handed back the three suspects under an administrative arrangement because the city and mainland have so far failed to reach a formal fugitive transfer agreement.

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Hong Kong police's anti-fraud squad froze HK\$530 million lost to scammers over past year, with plans to expand unit (SCMP, August 13): Hong Kong's police force will increase manpower at its anti-fraud squad by a third, after receiving more than 22,000 calls over the past year and thwarting the transfer of HK\$530 million (US\$68 million) in funds to scammers. In cases of commercial fraud through email, scammers cheated victims out of HK\$759.4 million in the first six months of the year. The Anti-Deception Coordination Centre, set up in July last year with seven officers, has a headcount of 25. The unit has foiled 97 scams so far, with plans to expand its strength to 34 members.

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Health

Subsidised screening for more than 2 million Hongkongers hopes to tackle colon cancer (SCMP, August 1): The first of 2.55 million people can get heavily-subsidised screening for colon cancer, with health authorities announcing a five-year plan to combat the city's most common cancer. From August 6, those aged 61 to 75 – or born in the years 1942 to 1957 – will pay no more than HK\$100 for a faecal test to detect blood in the stool and no more than HK\$1,000 (US\$127) for a colonoscopy at participating clinics. Subsidised screening would be extended to younger Hongkongers aged between 50 and 61 at a later date, costing the government HK\$940 million in all.

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Hong Kong cancer patients who don't qualify for government subsidies find help in charity's crowdfunding drive (SCMP, August 8): A patient support group in Hong Kong has initiated a crowdfunding initiative to help cancer patients who fall outside the government's medical safety net seek support from the public. Cancerinformation.com.hk Charity Foundation aims to lighten the financial burden on sufferers who are ineligible for local assistance programmes. Those who fall into this group include middle-class cancer patients and those using drugs not covered by government subsidies. Alan Ng, the foundation's founder, said he hoped to leverage the power of society to help cancer patients in need.

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Health officials in Hong Kong take action to prevent outbreak of dengue fever as it warns city could see more infections (SCMP, August 16): Public hospitals will use a real-time monitoring system to alert health authorities if they treat patients suspected of having dengue fever, so fast action can be taken in areas where an outbreak seems imminent. Medical personnel will submit case details via an online platform called "e-Dengue" as they step up the fight against the mosquito-borne virus. The Centre for Health Protection announced that four people had dengue fever, which they contracted locally. It was unusual to have this number of cases confirmed in a day, it said, and warned it could herald more infections. Hygiene officers fogged the areas patients had visited with liquid insecticide, while health officials stepped up mosquito control measures at hospitals and told schools to do the same.

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Dengue fever-carrying mosquitoes more widespread in Hong Kong as government urges community action (SCMP, August 22): The area of Hong Kong infested by dengue fever-spreading mosquitoes was last month bigger than during any month of July in the past 11 years, according to a widely used index, and health chiefs have sought community efforts to curb the disease. With two newly confirmed cases on August 21, so far there have been at least 18 local cases of dengue fever since August 14. Apart from Cheung Chau, Lion Rock Park in Wong Tai Sin was believed to be another source of infection for most cases. The government closed the park for 30 days for thorough mosquito control work. Acting secretary for food and health Dr Chui Tak-yi said community efforts would be essential in combating mosquitoes. The Hospital Authority said it would place extra orders for several thousand sets

of dengue fever rapid test kits.

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Centre for Health Protection controller describes local outbreak of mosquito-borne disease as 'very quick' and 'unprecedented' (SCMP, August 26): Two more people were diagnosed with dengue fever on August 25, bringing the total number of people in Hong Kong who have contracted the mosquito-borne virus locally to 26 this year, the health authorities said. The latest updates meant nine of the local cases either live on or had visited the island of Cheung Chau, while the remaining 17 had gone to the popular Lion Rock Park or Wong Tai Sin, the district where the park is located. Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung said hygiene officials would go to Cheung Chau to spray insecticide around all homes and schools, before the new academic year begins on September 3. "We will expand work to cover the whole Cheung Chau," he said.

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Environment

Not using new e-waste collection service could harm environment, Hong Kong minister warns (SCMP, August 1): Consumers and sellers who choose not to make use of a new government scheme for the disposal of electrical appliances could unknowingly harm the environment, Secretary for the Environment Wong Kam-sing has warned. He issued the public reminder as a producer responsibility scheme covering air conditioners, refrigerators, washing machines, television sets, computers, printers, scanners and monitors entered into force on August 1. Under the scheme, producers and sellers are required to provide free and approved removal services for old and unwanted appliances to customers who buy new ones of the same type from them. The goods have to be taken to a recycler licensed to process and store e-waste. Producers also have to pay a recycling levy of between HK\$15 and HK\$165 per item to the government every quarter – although both industry players and the government have conceded that the costs could eventually be transferred to the customer.

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Company responsible for recycling Hong Kong's electronic waste dismisses concerns it cannot keep up with demand (SCMP, August 5): The sole contractor of the government's new disposal scheme for electrical appliances has brushed off concerns over whether it could cope with the recycling demand, saying it was presently running at only at a quarter of its normal capacity. Alba IWS was responding to criticisms against the arrangement of the Producer Responsibility Scheme, which began on August 1 and retailers are required to provide free, government-approved removal services for old or unwanted appliances to customers. The government has employed Alba to provide free collection services and to run its new waste electronics processing plant in Ecopark, Tuen Mun. Each year, the company receives about HK\$200 million (US\$25.5 million) in return.

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Hong Kong green groups call for endangered species smuggling to be dealt with using organised crime laws (SCMP, August 19): Hong Kong conservationists are calling for wildlife offences to be included in the same laws used to combat organised crime for greater deterrence and investigative firepower. Despite Hong Kong's pivotal role in the global wildlife trade, the city has yet to crack down on any related criminal enterprises, though most experts believe local poaching and smuggling of endangered species are closely coordinated. Experts have suggested wildlife crimes be included under the Organised and Serious Crimes Ordinance (Cap 455), also known as OSCO, which would help authorities target the "kingpins" rather than the "mules".

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Ground-level ozone: the invisible, deadly pollutant undermining Hong Kong's quest for clean air (SCMP, August 21): Between 2013 and last year, average concentrations in the air of major pollutants such as tiny particulates of nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide plummeted by between 28 and 36 per cent. Yet the city is still choking, and one cause is an invisible, lesser-known pollutant lurking in the lower atmosphere, vexing policymakers and scientists who seek a solution: ground-level ozone. While initiatives to control other major pollutants have yielded results, local ozone pollution has surged 20 per cent since 2013, hitting a two-decade high.

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Hong Kong to pay for recyclers to collect plastic waste in trial scheme covering homes, offices and schools in 3 districts (SCMP, August 26): A trial scheme to boost Hong Kong's dismal waste plastic recycling rate will be rolled out next year in three districts, the city's No 2 official announced. Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung said the government would pay for recyclers to collect waste plastic from private and public residences, schools, public offices and government-run recycling centres. The contractors, hired by the Environmental Protection Department, would be required to sort, shred, clean and melt the used plastics to produce regenerated materials or products for local or overseas markets.

Tenders will be called later this year.

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Culture and education

Full-day kindergartens do not make kids smarter than those in half-day schools, Hong Kong study finds (SCMP, August 2): Children who attend full-day -kindergartens are not smarter or more well-adjusted than those who are in half-day programmes, but parents still believe it is better to spend a longer time in school, a University of Hong Kong study has found. Researchers randomly selected 346 children, both boys and girls attending full- or half-day sessions at 15 kindergartens across the city and assessed them from 2015 to last year. They found no significant difference in terms of the children's language, cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. Still, the researchers suggested education authorities establish full-day sessions at most of the city's kindergartens, as this would help single parent or dual-income households with their childcare needs.

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HKU to announce DSE exam score requirements for medical degree before students sit tests (SCMP, August 7): Youngsters aiming to do a medical degree at the University of Hong Kong from next year will know upfront the minimum required score to qualify, even before they sit their Diploma of Secondary Education exam. Professor Gabriel Leung, the medical faculty dean, said the change meant youngsters would not need to keep guessing if they would get into the highly competitive programme, which admitted 235 students this year. HKU also announced it would increase its intake of medical degree students to 265 next year, as part of a government push to boost publicly funded training places for doctors, dentists, nurses and allied professionals for the coming three years.

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West Kowloon Cultural District Authority fires main contractor on Hong Kong's M+ Museum over financial settlement controversy (SCMP, August 17): The authority managing Hong Kong's multibillion-dollar arts hub has finally fired its cash-strapped main contractor following a protracted financial settlement controversy, raising uncertainty over further delays and cost overruns at its museum project. The West Kowloon Cultural District Authority said it had terminated the HK\$5.9 billion (US\$750 million) contract for the M+ visual culture museum with Hsin Chong Construction due to the company's insolvency. It said the problem was caused by "severe financial troubles" faced by the parent company Hsin Chong Group. The authority had helped Hsin Chong Construction pay about HK\$1.5 billion to 17 or 18 subcontractors from February 2017 to June 2018.

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City University veterinary medicine degree to get HK\$32 million in funding after 10-year campaign for support (SCMP, August 21): City University will finally receive up to HK\$32 million (US\$4.08 million) in public funding each year to launch a six-year veterinary medicine degree course after fighting for government support over the past decade. Chief Executive Carrie Lam said that the government would be happy to endorse the University Grants Committee's (UGC) recommendations, which will be officially tabled later this year, to subsidise the programme. Lam said the course was "timely", as at least 75 per cent of emerging human infectious diseases originated from animals. "Good public health is the cornerstone of any safe and liveable city," she said, expressing her hopes that the city's first bachelor programme in veterinary medicine could build a local pool of expertise alongside that of overseas veterinary surgeons.

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Macau

Macau poised to become richest place on the planet by 2020 (SCMP, August 8): Fresh data from the Inter-national Monetary Fund (IMF) predicted that by 2020, Macau would overtake oil-rich Qatar with the highest per-capita gross domestic product of any country or jurisdiction on earth. This year the IMF ranked Macau, with a US\$122,489 per capita GDP, second behind Qatar, for which it said the equivalent figure was US\$128,702. Singapore was ranked fourth with US\$98,014, just behind Luxembourg with US\$110,870 while Hong Kong took 10th place with a per capita GDP of US\$64,533. By 2020, Macau would become the richest place in the world with a per capita GDP of US\$143,116. However, Macau lawyer and social commentator Sérgio Almeida Correia, wrote in his blog: "In terms of quality of life, green areas, pollution, education, health, sport, renewable energies, recycling of urban waste, hygiene and cleanliness of public spaces, accessibility for disabled people, road cycling, public transport might not rank quite as high by any means."

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Varia

Hong Kong reclaims lead over Singapore in global liveability rankings as 'social unrest drops' four years after Occupy (SCMP, August 14): Hong Kong has reclaimed its lead over Singapore in liveability rankings, climbing 10 places in an annual global survey which attributed the score to lower

levels of social unrest four years after the pro-democracy Occupy movement rocked the city. But an analyst warned of increased political censorship in Hong Kong, adding that Beijing's hardline stance against independence advocacy could lead to less freedom of speech, which would cause companies to leave for greener pastures. The latest study by the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Hong Kong at 35th – up from 45th last year – which is two places ahead of the Lion City. Singapore is at 37th this year, dropping two spots from last year's 35th.

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