



November in Hong Kong

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## **Economy + Finance**

### **Hong Kong climbs to No 4 on World Bank's list of easiest places to do business (SCMP, Nov. 1):**

Hong Kong rose one place to fourth in the World Bank's latest ranking of the easiest places to do business, while mainland China shot up 32 places to 46th. For three years in a row, New Zealand topped the international financial body's Doing Business Report, followed by Singapore and Denmark. Hong Kong performed best when it came to ease of dealing with construction permits (1), paying taxes (1), getting electricity (3) and starting a business (5). But it fell short in registering property (53), resolving insolvency (44), getting credit (32) and enforcing contracts (30).

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### **Cryptocurrency rules unveiled by SFC as Hong Kong aims to become major trading hub (SCMP, Nov. 2):**

Hong Kong's financial watchdog unveiled a comprehensive set of regulations governing cryptocurrencies in a move to enhance investor protection which analysts believe could help make the city a major trading centre for virtual assets, analysts said. The new rules, announced by the Securities and Futures Commission, will target funds that invest in digital currencies as well as the trading platforms on which these virtual currency are traded. The new regime will ban retail investors from trading bitcoin via these funds or platform, but allow professional investors. The SFC issued two circulars, one on the funds investing in virtual currencies and the other on trading platforms, effective immediately.

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### **Real test for Hong Kong's economy comes at Lunar New Year as new wave of tariffs hit amid US-China trade war (SCMP, Nov. 5):**

Hong Kong's economy will be tested early next year as a new wave of American tariffs on Chinese goods kick in and trigger many small manufacturers across the border to go under, Hong Kong Trade Development Council has warned. "I am not optimistic at all about the trade war," its chairman Vincent Lo said. "Who can guess [US President Donald] Trump's next step? If it worsens, not only Hong Kong, but the world's economy will slow down." "The manufacturing industry across the border is undergoing a reshuffle, and it is inevitable some smaller ones with a funding bottleneck will go bust," he said. "Lunar New Year [in early February] is a critical time."

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### **Hong Kong asks Guangdong authorities to investigate alleged illegal tour operators after influx of day trippers overwhelms quiet suburb of Tung Chung (SCMP, Nov. 6):**

Hong Kong asked Guangdong authorities to investigate mainland tour agents allegedly operating illegally in the city after an unexpected number of travellers crossed the border via the new mega bridge and caused chaos in the tranquil suburb of Tung Chung. Local officials revealed the move amid fears that the grievances of the affected Tung Chung residents would heighten mainland-Hong Kong tensions, with some localist groups warning to "reclaim" the district if the problems were not resolved soon. Commerce secretary Edward Yau said the Tourism Commission and Travel Industry Council were liaising with their Guangdong counterparts for better coordination over mainland tour groups visiting Hong Kong. A record

number of more than 100,000 people passed through the Hong Kong port of the 55km Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge on Nov. 4, many of them on day trips, pouring into Tung Chung. The tourists mainly took public transport, which placed a heavy burden on buses.

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**Office rents in Hong Kong's Central district may drop for first time since 2013, says Colliers (SCMP, Nov. 7):** Hong Kong's Central district, the world's most expensive office address, will see rents fall next year for the first time since 2013, according to Colliers International. The tanking stock market, rising interest rates and the US-China trade war are all taking a toll on the confidence of financial firms, which make up the bulk of Central's tenants, said the property services company. That may lead to a 4 per cent fall in the area's office rents in 2019, Colliers forecast. Central commands annual rent of US\$307 per square foot, almost a third higher than the US\$235 per square foot in London's West End.

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**Hong Kong remains vigilant against risks of virtual assets even as fintech investments more than double, financial minister says (SCMP, Nov. 8):** Investment in Hong Kong's fintech industry more than doubled last year to US\$550 million, far surpassing Singapore, a testament to the joint efforts of successive governments and regulators to promote the sector, according to Hong Kong financial secretary Paul Chan. But even as it promotes financial innovation, Hong Kong will adopt a number of new measures to strengthen protection of investors in virtual assets or funds, he said. "We are very vigilant over the risks that virtual assets such as cryptocurrencies may pose to investors or the potential that criminals may use them for illegal means."

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**22 Hong Kong labs to get HK\$30 million boost as city's leader signs technology deal with top mainland research institution (SCMP, Nov. 9):** Hong Kong's science and technology sector received a boost with HK\$30 million (US\$3.8 million) in funding set for 22 laboratories, as the city's leader sealed a deal with mainland China's top scientific research institution to launch a local branch in the science park. Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor signed a memorandum of understanding with Professor Bai Chunli, president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS). Under the agreement, the academy will set up a branch to support two platforms at the Hong Kong Science Park that promote innovation and technology advancements in the areas of biotechnology and artificial intelligence (AI). Lam said the signing of the agreement marked "a new chapter" in cross-border technological cooperation.

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**Britain, Hong Kong eyeing free-trade deal, looking to collaborate on fintech, visiting minister says (SCMP, Nov. 12):** Britain and Hong Kong will work more closely to push forward innovations in finance and medicine, as London and Beijing seek stronger ties amid the US-China trade war, according to a visiting British official. Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific Mark Field also said his country was in talks with the Hong Kong government to strengthen the trading relationship between the two economies, including the possibility of a future free-trade agreement. "It is very much in the UK and Hong Kong's interests to ensure we strengthen further our close bilateral relationship, and that includes ... financial technology and it includes the broad area of technology," he said.

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**Shops may be added at Hong Kong checkpoint of mega bridge to ease influx of mainland Chinese tourists to Tung Chung, leader Carrie Lam says (SCMP, Nov. 15):** Shops could be opened inside the Hong Kong checkpoint of the new cross-border mega bridge to Macau and Zhuhai to prevent a normally quiet town on Lantau Island being swamped by tourists, Hong Kong's leader said. Chief Executive Carrie Lam also said the government was working on other ways to solve the problem, such as getting in touch with bus operators to launch a booking system for services across the bridge. Tempers have flared in recent weekends with tens of thousands of mainland Chinese travellers, many in tour groups, crossing the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge and visiting Tung Chung, rekindling memories of similar scenes in other border towns that had witnessed tensions between locals and visitors.

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**Hong Kong and Australia tie up bilateral trade and services agreement, offering respite from global trade war (SCMP, Nov. 16):** Hong Kong and Australia reached a deal at a regional summit to allow bilateral free trade and services at a time when global economies are under the shadow of a trade war. The pair concluded 18 months of negotiations over a free trade agreement and an investment agreement, which will cover trade in goods, trade in services, investment and other related areas and boost mutual trade and services flow. It is Hong Kong's ninth free trade agreement to date. Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Bureau Edward Yau pointed out that the free trade agreement sent "a positive message" to the world in the face of the raging China-US trade war and

rising protectionism in the world's trade system. Hong Kong and Australia will proceed to administrative process to finalise and sign the agreements in the first half of next year.

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**Trade war starts to bite as Hong Kong economy slows in third quarter with GDP at lower than expected 2.9 per cent (SCMP, Nov. 17):** Hong Kong's booming economy is running out of steam, having grown at a slower than expected 2.9 per cent in the third quarter this year under the weight of weakened property and stock markets. The government warned of "increasing downside risks" and the city might feel the repercussions of an extended US-China trade war. It was the slowest quarterly growth in two years. "The impacts on Hong Kong's external trade have begun to surface, and are likely to become more apparent in the near term," government economist Andrew Au said of the trade war.

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**Record 1.37 million people living below poverty line in Hong Kong as government blames rise on ageing population and city's improving economy (SCMP, Nov. 20):** More than 1.37 million people in Hong Kong are living below the poverty line, struggling to survive in one of the most expensive cities in the world on as little as HK\$4,000 (US\$510) a month, according to official figures. A fifth of Hong Kong's population is destitute, a seven-year high, while even with government intervention 17.5 per cent of the city's children are classed as living in poverty. But despite the number of poor reaching a record high for the second year running, Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung denied claims the government was not doing enough, and said an ageing population, an improving economy, and changing demographics had contributed to the high numbers.

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**Hong Kong falls six places to 18th in global talent ranking, trailing Singapore (SCMP, Nov. 21):** Hong Kong has fallen six places to rank 18th in attracting and fostering talent, according to a global study by the Switzerland-based International Institute for Management Development. Singapore came first among Asian economies, having placed 13th overall, while China came in 39th. **Switzerland** topped the business school's IMD World Talent Ranking, followed by Denmark and Norway. "[Hong Kong's] talent strengths are in appealing to overseas highly skilled professionals, which enables it to sustain its top-tier talent pool," the report said. "However, its gradual decline is worrying for the future, especially considering that it lags behind in terms of public investments in education."

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**Guangdong authorities say they will rein in tour operators using Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge to prevent overcrowding in Tung Chung (SCMP, Nov. 24):** Guangdong authorities have promised to regulate the province's travel sector following an influx of mainland Chinese tourists to a quiet Hong Kong suburb following the opening of the mega bridge a month ago. The pledge came a day after Guangzhou's tourism authority sent an "urgent notice" to mainland Chinese travel agencies to ask them to avoid sending tour groups on weekends to Hong Kong via the mega crossing, which has carried more than 2 million passengers since it opened to traffic on October 24. But the high figures were a headache to people living in Tung Chung, the residential zone closest to the bridge checkpoint, as many tour groups arriving by public bus poured into the area, causing disturbances for residents. The grievances escalated earlier this month, prompting protests by locals.

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**Hong Kong closes gap with Singapore on prosperity index, with institute saying residents enjoy greater level of personal freedom (SCMP, Nov. 28):** Hong Kong has closed the gap on Singapore with Hongkongers enjoying greater levels of personal freedom, safety and security this year than before, according to a global index. The city's overall ranking jumped two places to 22nd out of 149 economies, while Singapore slipped four places to 21st, according to a prosperity index compiled by British-based independent charity organisation Legatum Institute. The index has ranked Norway, New Zealand, Finland and **Switzerland** as the world's top four prosperous economies for the past two years. Both Hong Kong and Singapore took the top spots for ease of trade in the world, with Singapore No. 1 and Hong Kong No.2. But, in terms of education and health, the Lion City outperformed Hong Kong.

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**No more one-day tours to Hong Kong and Macau at weekends, Guangdong authorities tell mainland travel agencies (SCMP, Nov. 29):** Travel agencies across Guangdong have been ordered to halt all one-day trips to Hong Kong and Macau on weekends via the cross-border bridge to reduce the nuisance suffered by the cities' residents. Between Oct. 17 – Nov. 1, about 1.8 million visas to Hong Kong and Macau were issued to applicants across Guangdong (mostly retirees) making for a year-on-year increase of 27%, according to the province's public security department. Aside from Tung Chung residents and activists being upset by the large crowds, there have also been allegations that illegal tour operators were flouting employment laws that prevent mainlanders from working in Hong Kong.

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**Beijing sends clear message to Hong Kong: join forces with Shanghai and boost China's financial power (SCMP, Nov. 30):** Hong Kong and Shanghai have different starting points in internationalisation and different missions, but they have the same goal, which is to serve China's needs of reform and opening-up and boost the country's financial competitiveness in the world, according to a former top Chinese official, reiterating the political message from Beijing. "China is big enough to house two unique, heavyweight international financial centres and let them both fully develop," Li Jiange, former vice-chairman of China Securities Regulatory Commission, said at a financial forum in Hong Kong, adding that Hong Kong and Shanghai can work together and help each other. He said that they can build a common capital market so that they can better serve China's real economy, play a role in the Belt and Road Initiative, yuan internationalisation and Shanghai Pilot Free Trade Zone. Carrie Lam, Chief Executive of Hong Kong, said at the same forum that she expected Shanghai and Hong Kong to expand their scope of cooperation, as a bigger market will be mutually beneficial.

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### **Domestic politics**

**Rule of law and freedom of speech going strong in Hong Kong, city leader tells Japanese media (SCMP, Nov. 1):** Hong Kong's leader has assured Japan of the city's rule of law and freedom of speech, after being bombarded with questions over a political storm associated with a British journalist recently denied a work visa who moderated a talk on independence from China. "Hong Kong is proud of its rule of law and freedom of speech," Lam said on the sidelines of a trade symposium in Tokyo. She added she had yet to field "a single question" from the business community about the issues. "That so many overseas media, especially Japanese media, have been using Hong Kong as a base for reporting is by itself a good indication of the freedom of reporting of journalism in Hong Kong," she continued.

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**70,000 Hongkongers seek new mainland China resident permit despite tax fears (SCMP; Nov. 2):** More than 80,000 Hong Kong and Macau residents have applied for a new permit promising access to 18 social services on the Chinese mainland since the card was rolled out on September 1. Huang Liuquan, deputy director of the Chinese central government's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, pledged that holders would not immediately become subject to mainland taxes on their global income despite a recent amendment to that effect in China's laws. "The permit is an identity document for Hong Kong and Macau residents on the mainland, and a voucher for them to enjoy basic rights, public services and convenience," he said. "It doesn't bear any corresponding relation to taxes."

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**Hong Kong's No 2 official to stay in his job, city leader says amid speculation (SCMP, Nov. 6):** Hong Kong's No 2 official is not getting the boot, the city's leader advised. Chief Executive Carrie Lam was responding to a column published by Chinese newspaper Sing Tao Daily, which said Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung could be removed. Lam called the report that Cheung was getting the boot untrue. "It was a speculative report," she said. "I have no such plans." Whilst the chief executive agreed that it was possible to split up the Transport and Housing Bureau, she noted she did not want to spend time tackling the task at the moment. "We have a lot of ongoing work," Lam added. "I don't want to spend too much energy on restructuring."

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**Young Hongkongers sceptical about city's integration with mainland China, study finds (SCMP, Nov. 7):** Hong Kong youngsters are divided over the city's integration with the mainland, but many share a low sense of national identity and have concerns about the legal and political systems across the border, a study has found. "Hardselling the idea of integration may cause a backfire," said Ho Lok-sang, dean of the business faculty at Chu Hai College of Higher Education. The college compiled its first index on Hong Kong youngsters' acceptance of cross-border integration by polling 1,071 people aged between 15 and 24. About 52.6 per cent of the respondents said they did not agree with the idea of mainland-Hong Kong integration, 5.2 percentage points more than those who agreed. When asked if they saw themselves as Chinese nationals, less than a quarter said they "highly agreed" while nearly 45 per cent said they "highly disagreed".

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**British journalist Victor Mallet denied entry to Hong Kong as tourist (SCMP, Nov. 9):** Veteran British journalist Victor Mallet, who was earlier denied a work visa by Hong Kong immigration authorities, was barred from entering the city as a visitor on Nov. 8. Mallet was denied a renewal of his work visa last month. In August, he moderated a Foreign Correspondents' Club (FCC) event in the city featuring a talk by pro-independence activist Andy Chan, then convenor of the National Party. Officials banned the party in September on national security grounds. The Immigration Department's decision sparked major controversy and concern over press freedom in the city. It has refused to give any explanation for

the move.

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**Hong Kong government had nothing to do with earlier decision to cancel Tai Kwun talk by dissident Chinese writer Ma Jian, Carrie Lam says (SCMP, Nov. 11):** Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam denied she was responsible for an earlier decision by an arts venue to cancel events featuring Chinese dissident writer Ma Jian, as the author went ahead with his two talks without incident. The chief executive said "the government has no involvement", before adding: "I only learned about the incident after it was reported." The row erupted when Tai Kwun – a defunct police station turned culture hub – said it was cancelling two scheduled events involving Ma as part of the Hong Kong International Literary Festival. In a U-turn, Tai Kwun then gave Ma the go ahead, after the venue's director Timothy Calnin said the author had made clear he had no intention of using the platform to promote his political interests. "My case proved that self-censorship is nothing invincible. We must be brave and break it because free speech is the foundation of civilisation," Ma said.

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**Hong Kong and Macau played 'unique and irreplaceable' roles in China's reform and opening up, Xi Jinping says (SCMP, Nov. 13):** President Xi Jinping has declared that the "unique and irreplaceable" roles played by Hong Kong and Macau have been an important reason behind the success of China's reform and opening up in the last 40 years. Speaking at a meeting with a delegation of top officials and business leaders from the two cities, he urged Hong Kong and Macau to integrate into the nation's development plans, especially the "Belt and Road Initiative" and the "Greater Bay Area" plan. Xi said Beijing fully acknowledged the contributions by both cities. "The cities must integrate into the country's development, realise better developments for Hong Kong and Macau, as we co-write the great chapter of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," the president concluded.

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**Hong Kong government to split up overburdened Transport and Housing Bureau, Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung says (SCMP, Nov. 15):** Hong Kong's government will break up its overloaded and trouble-plagued Transport and Housing Bureau within this term, the chief secretary Matthew Cheung announced. He said the office's broad remit was leaving its staff "under huge pressure". Answering lawmakers' questions on a possible reshuffle at a Legislative Council meeting, he agreed there was a "practical need" to reorganise the government's structure. "The bureau has been knee-deep in trouble. There have been so many emergencies and accidents coming up, and [officials] are under huge pressure," he said. "I don't think there will be much objection from the public or from lawmakers."

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**Hong Kong may step up monitoring of border after accusations Guangdong defence force stole land (SCMP, Nov. 16):** Hong Kong land officials may step up monitoring of the border by taking aerial photos after mainland Chinese officers on the other side allegedly turned city land into a garden without permission. The Lands Department announced the move a day after the city's leader revealed the Hong Kong and Shenzhen governments were locked in a border dispute, both sides having a different understanding of how it should be drawn. Chief Executive Carrie Lam told lawmakers both sides held a meeting after the revelation. She said Shenzhen officials claimed to have diverted the course of the Sha Tau Kok River, which forms the border, for flood prevention, in 2013 and arbitrarily changed the demarcation point, without telling Hong Kong. Her government maintained the border had not moved, but Shenzhen had a different understanding of the demarcation. Both sides would listen to legal advice and work together to resolve the dispute, she said.

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**Benny Tai and other leaders of Hong Kong's Occupy movement used unlawful demonstration in democracy push, trial hears on opening day (SCMP, Nov. 20):** The three founders of Hong Kong's huge pro-democracy movement of 2014 mobilised an illegal demonstration to force local authorities to respond to their political demands, prosecutors told a court. Opening the case, Andrew Bruce SC said the trio were joined by six other key protesters when organising various unlawful sit-ins, better known as the Occupy movement. The three founders were academics Benny Tai, Dr Chan Kin-man as well as Reverend Chu Yiu-ming, who denied three joint counts. Tai responded to a motion politicians had tabled in Britain's House of Commons to condemn the Hong Kong government over the prosecution. "The whole world, including those legislators in the UK and people from other parts of the world who care about democracy, human rights and justice, are concerned about the prosecution against us," he said. Each charge carries a maximum jail sentence of seven years.

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**Hong Kong lawmaker to withdraw Legco motion calling for national security law amid business concerns over proposed sanctions in US report (SCMP, Nov. 20):** A pro-Beijing party in Hong Kong is set to withdraw a legislative motion calling for controversial national security laws amid concerns it

would be used to justify American sanctions on the city over mainland “encroachment” of freedoms. Liberal Party leader Felix Chung under pressure from the business sector, announced that he would request to change his motion topic in the Legislative Council to one on the ongoing US-China trade war, and, if this was rejected, would fully withdraw his bid. Chung said he did not want his motion, originally set for a debate and a vote next month, to fan the flames sparked by US congressmen intent on creating trouble for Hong Kong or China.

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**Hong Kong pro-establishment candidate Chan Hoi-yan wins Kowloon West by-election (SCMP, Nov. 26):** The Hong Kong opposition camp’s hopes of regaining veto power in the legislature were dashed as pro-establishment candidate Chan Hoi-yan took the remaining seat in the Kowloon West constituency in by-election. Chan took 106,457 votes – 13,410 more than her main rival, Labour Party stalwart Lee Cheuk-yan, who ran at the behest of ousted lawmaker Lau Siu-lai. Lau’s ejection from the Legislative Council for improper oath taking last year had triggered by-election. After losing by-election, the pan-democrats will be outnumbered 18 to 16 in Legco’s geographical constituencies. This means they will not be able to stop further changes to the legislature’s rule book, which require majority support in both the geographical and functional constituencies.

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**Lee Cheuk-yan calls on Hong Kong’s pan-democrats and localists to work together after Kowloon West by-election loss (SCMP, Nov. 28):** Defeated election candidate Lee Cheuk-yan called on Hong Kong’s pan-democrats and localists to work together in future polls after a loss that revealed shrinking support for the opposition camp. The Labour Party stalwart and long-time legislator also said he would run in no more elections. Lee said young voters, especially localists, may feel unrepresented and have no motivation to vote. While both sides mostly oppose the city’s government, pan-democrats believe in the democratisation of China generally while localists, a more recent emergence, focus on the welfare of Hongkongers specifically. Though their political ideals may differ, Lee said pan-democrats and localists had common ground at the policy level.

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**Chinese army free to send soldiers to perform volunteer work outside of barracks, says Hong Kong security minister (SCMP, Nov. 29):** The Chinese army’s Hong Kong garrison can freely decide on sending soldiers to perform volunteer service outside military sites, said the city’s security minister, and the local government has no record of how many such occasions this has occurred on. Secretary for Security John Lee also played down worries raised by pan-democratic lawmakers and argued that the city should be thankful for the People’s Liberation Army’s help. Lee addressed the issue in Legislative Council, as People Power lawmaker Raymond Chan filed a question following up on the first incidence of soldiers helping with the clean-up of country parks after Typhoon Mangkhut battered the city in September. Under Hong Kong’s Garrison Law, the PLA must not interfere in local affairs but troops can be called out to help with disaster relief if requested by the Hong Kong government. Such a request has never been made since the city returned to Chinese rule 21 years ago. Referring to the country park clean-up, Lee said the law did not apply, as the army took part in the charitable activity on invitation.

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**Chinese constitution should apply in Hong Kong and Basic Law is only a supplement, Beijing legal scholar Wang Zhenmin argues (SCMP, Nov. 30):** A Beijing legal scholar has argued that the Chinese constitution should apply in Hong Kong while the Basic Law, the city’s mini-constitution, was only a supplement and an adaptation of the national one. Tsinghua University law professor Wang Zhenmin made the argument in an article in the latest issue of Bauhinia magazine. Pro-establishment politicians in Hong Kong endorsed Wang’s arguments but opposition pan-democrats warned it could give people the impression that Beijing was trying to diminish the role of the Basic Law. Appointed the legal chief of Beijing’s liaison office in Hong Kong in 2016, Wang was expected to return to Tsinghua this month. In his latest essay, Wang argued that while the socialist provisions in the national constitution could not be directly enforced in the city, the Basic Law ensured the constitution was still applicable in Hong Kong “as a whole”. Civic Party lawmaker Alvin Yeung said Wang’s comments could be a “disservice” to both the city and the mainland amid the deepening US-China trade dispute. “This is a moment when Hong Kong’s uniqueness in sharing a legal system different from that on the mainland should be remembered to preserve its status as a separate customs territory in the World Trade Organisation,” Yeung said.

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**Government’s dismissive attitude led to Occupy protests, co-founder Chan Kin-man tells Hong Kong court (SCMP, Nov. 30):** Dr Chan Kin-man, one of the founders of the Occupy protest, said the government’s dismissive attitude towards their movement set the tone for the civil disobedience that brought Hong Kong to a standstill in 2014. Chan, who is on trial alongside eight other key figures, was



the first defence witness to take stand, after prosecutors finished laying out their allegations. The scholar said he and others were left with no choice but to block roads four years ago, when the local government would not listen to proposals on how future leaders in the city should be elected. Chan has pleaded not guilty to three joint charges: conspiracy to cause public nuisance; inciting others to cause public nuisance; and inciting people to incite others to cause public nuisance. "I think these charges are unreasonable. In particularly some charges that will have a long-term effect on the freedom of speech in our society," Chan said. He said he would have pleaded guilty if he were charged with taking part with an unlawful assembly, but not with the present charges, which his lawyers argued were unconstitutional.

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#### **International relations**

**Hong Kong government hits back after US report warns Beijing's 'encroachment' on city's freedoms could erode its status as global business hub and affect import of American technology (SCMP, Nov. 15):** The Hong Kong government has expressed regret over "biased conclusions and unfounded accusations" after a body advising the United States Congress said Beijing's "encroachment" on the city's political system could diminish its standing as a global business hub and affect the export of American technology to the city. In its latest report, the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission recommended an assessment of the country's export control policy on technology "as it relates to US treatment of Hong Kong and China as separate customs areas". The report also accused the Chinese government of taking "additional steps toward undermining Hong Kong's legal autonomy". A spokesman for the Hong Kong government said foreign legislatures should not "interfere in any form in the internal affairs" of the Hong Kong special administrative region (HKSAR). "Under the Basic Law, Hong Kong is a separate customs territory and we remain committed to enforcing strategic trade controls. Hong Kong has, and will continue to maintain, close cooperation with the United States on the matter."

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**Changing trade policy on Hong Kong will hurt United States just as much, city's leader Carrie Lam says in response to critical congressional report (SCMP, Nov. 16):** Hong Kong's leader expressed regret that a US congressional report had seen relations between the city and mainland China through a "coloured lens" and said any change to the city's trade status would not benefit either side. The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission warned Beijing's "encroachment" on the city's political system could diminish its standing as a global business hub. It recommended reviewing the arrangement to treat Hong Kong and the mainland as separate customs areas in the export of dual-use technology. "Any change to trade policy would not only be unfair to Hong Kong, it would also undermine US interests in Hong Kong," the chief executive said. Lam pointed out that the US enjoyed an annual US\$34.5 billion trade surplus with the city, the highest in any economy. Half of the 1,351 US companies in Hong Kong had their regional headquarters in the city too, she said.

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**Top US diplomat in Hong Kong Kurt Tong says congressional report calling for reassessment of city's trade status 'certainly deserves careful review' (SCMP, Nov. 17):** The United States' top diplomat in Hong Kong said a congressional report calling for a reassessment of the city's special trade status given Beijing's "encroachment" on the political system and rule of law "certainly deserved careful review". US Consul General Kurt Tong's comments came a day after Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam said the allegations carried in the report were unfounded and warned any changes to US trade policy on the city would be detrimental to both sides. Tong said the report was compiled by a group of experts and that the annual review on US-China relations received congressional funding. The US government would look forward to continuing conversations with the Hong Kong government on the two systems framework and other policy issues, he added.

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**Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam rejects British MPs' criticism of prosecutions over 2014's pro-democracy Occupy protests (SCMP, Nov. 20):** Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam has hit out at British legislators who criticised the city's prosecution of nine key figures from 2014's pro-democracy Occupy protests, saying foreign politicians should not "interfere with the city's internal affairs". The motion, tabled by Fiona Bruce, chair of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, urged the British government to raise the issue with the Hong Kong government and "consider further action". It was co-signed by seven other members of parliament. "Under the prerequisite of Hong Kong's judicial independence and the rule of law, it was our prosecution authority that made prosecution decisions," Lam said. "Now it is foreign governments or parliamentarians who are demanding we make certain decisions in prosecution. This is very obviously interfering with internal affairs, and is very undesirable," she added.

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**US consul general extends hand of friendship to China aboard USS Ronald Reagan and emphasises desire to ensure stability in the region (SCMP, Nov. 23):** US Consul General Kurt Tong welcomed Chinese officials and People's Liberation Army personnel on board the visiting USS Ronald Reagan in a celebration of friendship, but his underlying message asserted his country's right to patrol regional waters and maintain its military presence. The port call by the USS Ronald Reagan came after the amphibious assault ship USS Wasp was denied entry into Hong Kong waters in September. The approval for this naval visit was seen as an attempt by Beijing to ease tensions before a critical meeting between President Xi Jinping and Trump at the coming G20 summit, against the backdrop of the US-China trade war.

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#### **Legal affairs and human rights**

**Reason for Financial Times journalist Victor Mallet's Hong Kong visa denial to stay secret after Legco motion calling for explanation fails (SCMP, Nov. 1):** Hong Kong's pro-establishment lawmakers shot down a proposal to summon immigration officials to the legislature to explain their expulsion from the city of veteran British journalist Victor Mallet. The Legislative Council rejected by 36 votes to 24 a motion that would have forced security minister John Lee and the head of the Immigration Department to explain the decision last month not to renew Mallet's visa. Lee has been tight-lipped in the face of international calls to reveal the reasons behind the refusal, arguing that disclosure would undermine immigration controls and security. In response to the Legco motion, he reiterated that the government would not comment on individual cases. Withholding reasons for visa refusals was common practice overseas, Lee said.

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**Hong Kong's privacy watchdog launches formal investigation into massive Cathay Pacific data breach (SCMP, Nov. 6):** A formal investigation is being launched over the massive data breach at Cathay Pacific Airways that affected millions of its passengers, Hong Kong's privacy watchdog announced. Following a "compliance check", there were now reasonable grounds to believe that the airline may have contravened legal requirements, Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data Stephen Wong said. "The compliance investigation is going to examine in detail, among others, the security measures taken by Cathay Pacific to safeguard its customers' personal data and the airline's data retention policy and practice," said Wong.

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**Demosisto report detailing human rights concerns in Hong Kong removed from UN review hearing, Joshua Wong claims (SCMP, Nov. 7):** A report detailing alleged suppression of politics and human rights problems in Hong Kong has been removed from a United Nations' summary for the current review hearing in Geneva, pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong said. Wong said the party wrote to Gianni Magazzeni, head of the universal periodical review in the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), asking for an explanation, but had not received any reply. Wong believed that the Demosisto report was removed due to political censorship by the OHCHR under pressure from the government in Beijing.

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**In a UN first, Hong Kong's human rights situation singled out from China's, with city's global reputation at stake, 45 civil society groups say (SCMP, Nov. 8):** In a first, UN member states have singled out Hong Kong's human rights situation from that of China's with specific recommendations, elevating scrutiny of the city and placing its international reputation on the line, an alliance of 45 civil society groups said. The warning from Hong Kong's United Periodic Review Coalition came after UN representatives from Britain, France, Canada and Australia publicly urged both national and local officials to uphold rights and freedom in Hong Kong. Five country representatives including those of the Netherlands, the United States and Germany submitted written questions on the state of the city's press freedom and restrictions to the freedoms of expression and association. In response to concerns, Hong Kong's delegate to the UN hearing, Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung, sounded a defiant tone, calling the concerns "unwarranted, unfounded and unsubstantiated" and stemming from "a lack of understanding".

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**Cathay Pacific under fire from 15 countries on data breach, bosses reveal as they address 'one of Hong Kong airline's worst crises' (SCMP, Nov. 15):** Cathay Pacific Airways said it was facing one of the worst crises in its history as the airline revealed it was being questioned by 27 regulators from 15 jurisdictions over a data breach that has affected 9.4 million passengers. The disclosure came as top executives from the airline underwent a grilling in the Hong Kong legislature during which they said the majority of affected passengers were from outside the city. Lifting the lid on the extent of the impact, the executives said 245,000 Hong Kong identity card holders and 55,000 passport holders in the city had been affected. They did not profile the passengers overseas. Lawmakers called Cathay "pathetic" and

accused the carrier of covering up the breach after the airline took seven months to make it public. The incident took place in March but was only announced on October 24.

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**Public interest defence could spare newspaper from legal troubles in TransUnion credit exposé, lawyers say (SCMP, Nov. 30):** A Hong Kong newspaper that used top officials' personal information to expose security loopholes in a Chicago-based credit bureau's online platform may avoid prosecution, if it was done in the public interest, say legal and privacy experts. According to sources, TransUnion has reported the incident to police, and called the exposé a "misuse of consumer data" to fraudulently access credit reports. Chinese-language newspaper Ming Pao said it obtained the credit reports of Hong Kong's leader, Chief Executive Carrie Lam and finance secretary Paul Chan from TransUnion. The newspaper claimed loopholes in the website meant that it could obtain highly sensitive personal information using Lam and Chan's identity card numbers and age, both of which can be found on publicly available documents. Ming Pao also claimed to have bypassed simple security questions before obtaining the credit reports, which held sensitive information such as address, credit card and phone numbers, as well as credit records. TransUnion accused the paper of misusing personal data. "This was not a cyber breach. Instead, it was misuse of consumer data to fraudulently access consumer credit files," it said.

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### **Health**

**High demand for Hong Kong public health care among biggest challenges for Hospital Authority, its next chief says (SCMP, Nov. 1):** A high demand for public health care is one of the biggest challenges confronting Hong Kong's service providers, the city's next hospital chief said. From August 1, 2019, geriatrician Dr Tony Ko will serve as the next chief executive of the Hospital Authority, which runs the city's public hospitals. Caring for some 90 per cent of the city's inpatients yet employing just 40 per cent of its doctors, public hospitals have long battled a chronic shortage of staff and increasing demand for service. Ko vowed to take his new responsibilities seriously and singled out high patient demand, reducing the rate of staff turnover and improving the quality of service as among the major challenges before the authority.

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**Hong Kong to remain vigilant over bird flu threat, health chief Sophia Chan vows, as Japanese research confirms H7N9 virus can be transmitted via respiratory droplets (SCMP, Nov. 5):** Hong Kong's health minister Sophia Chan promised the government would stay alert over any possible outbreak of bird flu in the city as new research in Japan confirmed the H7N9 virus could be transmitted via respiratory droplets. She said the government had done a lot in the prevention and surveillance of bird flu at local farms and markets selling live poultry. "We will continue to communicate with international organisations and health organisations to understand more about avian flu and the risks," she said.

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**For successful HPV vaccination, offer shots free and in schools, Hong Kong researchers say (SCMP, Nov. 7):** Chinese University research shows the key to a successful HPV vaccination programme is introducing a free, school-based scheme, which is expected to boost the coverage rate in Hong Kong to more than 80 per cent. In 2016, cervical cancer was the ninth leading cause of cancer fatalities among women in Hong Kong. Chief Executive Carrie Lam said in her policy address last month that all girls in primary school would be vaccinated against HPV. They will get their first shots in Primary Five starting from next September, with the second in Primary Six.

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**Hong Kong to ban under-18s buying alcohol in shops (SCMP, Nov. 15):** Although the city's bars and clubs are already banned from serving or selling alcohol to minors, retailers do not have to follow the rule. Department of Health noted its Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office would enforce the Dutiable Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance 2018 from November 30. The new law specifically prohibits the sale and supply of intoxicating liquor to anyone under 18. "The new legislation aims to prevent young people's access to alcohol," said Dr Jeff Lee, the office's head. "We also urge everyone, especially young people, to adopt an alcohol-free healthy lifestyle." But he explained that the law did not apply to family gatherings or social events with no business intent.

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**What regulations govern beauty treatments in Hong Kong? (SCMP, Nov. 16):** Hong Kong does not have specific laws regulating beauty treatments. But a fatal beauty treatment blunder in 2012, in which a woman died after receiving treatment from beauty chain DR Group, has prompted the government to look into plans of regulating the medical beauty sector. The government has proposed the Private Healthcare Facilities Bill, which was passed by the Legislative Council on Nov. 15. The new ordinance aims to regulate four types of premises, namely hospitals, day procedure centres, clinics and health service establishments. The framework would cover the licensing scheme and regulatory requirements

of those premises. Health minister Professor Sophia Chan said high-risk medical procedures performed there would also be regulated. A separate regulatory framework on medical devices is also expected to be submitted to Legco in this legislative session.

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**New cancer cases in Hong Kong projected to rise by up to 40 per cent by 2030 (SCMP, Nov. 21):**

The number of new cancer cases in Hong Kong is projected to rise by up to 40 per cent over the next decade or so, while there may already be more women than men with the killer disease, according to forecasts. The projection came as the latest statistics from the Hong Kong Cancer Registry showed that a record high 31,468 new cases were diagnosed in 2016, 1,150 more than in the previous year. And the number of people confirmed with the disease, the leading cause of death in Hong Kong, was expected to rise further, according to registry director Dr Wong Kam-hung. Types of the disease expected to see the biggest rise included colorectal, breast and lung cancers, with each forecast to increase by around 40 per cent.

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**Hong Kong halts sale and import of California romaine lettuce, blamed for North American E coli outbreak (SCMP, Nov. 28):**

Hong Kong has suspended the sale and import of romaine lettuce – also known as cos – harvested in California after US food safety investigators found the vegetable grown in the state appeared to be the source of the recent E coli outbreak in North America. Hong Kong's Centre for Food Safety said the import and sale of romaine lettuce harvested in California "has been suspended with immediate effect". The centre also urged the trade to stop using and selling romaine lettuce produced in California immediately and asked the public not to eat such lettuce from California or unknown sources.

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**75,000 doses of Sanofi Pasteur flu vaccine from batch containing impurities have been used in Hong Kong (SCMP, Nov. 28):**

About 75,000 doses of imported flu vaccine belonging to a batch containing impurities have been administered in Hong Kong, the city's health authorities disclosed. The Department of Health said 175,000 doses from a batch containing "white particles" had been delivered to the city's public health care providers from French manufacturer Sanofi Pasteur. All flu vaccination services had therefore been suspended at hospitals and outpatient clinics, but were expected to resume gradually from Dec. 1, the Hospital Authority said. "There has been no adverse reaction reported related to vaccinations with the affected batch," the authority added. "Members of the public feeling unwell after vaccination should seek medical advice.

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**Almost all food imported into Hong Kong by air getting through without safety documents, government auditor finds (SCMP, Nov. 29):**

More than nine in 10 food products imported by air were given official permission to enter Hong Kong despite having no documents to prove they were safe, according to an Audit Commission report. The report criticised the Centre for Food Safety for failing to ensure import licences were issued only after the importers submitted necessary documents, such as a health certificate, to support safety claims. The director of food and hygiene agreed with the audit recommendations, a spokesman for the centre said.

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## **Environment**

**Fees for new waste charging scheme set with 'restraint', Hong Kong environment minister Wong Kam-sing says (SCMP, Nov. 1):**

Hong Kong's environment minister defended the government's new waste charging scheme, stressing that the proposed fees had been set with "restraint". The plan, which is expected to be launched soonest in late 2020. A draft bill will be presented at the Legislative Council on November 14. Under the proposal, 80 per cent of rubbish generated by housing estates, residential buildings and shops will have to go into designated bags, which will be priced at an average of 11 HK cents (US\$0.01) per litre. Nine sizes, ranging from three litres to 100 litres and with T-shirt and flat-top designs, will be made available. The remaining 20 per cent will be charged by weight.

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**Hong Kong's environment chief Wong Kam-sing urges public to back waste charging scheme, saying city is 20 years behind Seoul and Taipei on issue (SCMP, Nov. 5):**

Hong Kong's environment minister Wong Kam-sing called for public support for a proposed mandatory waste charging scheme, saying the city was already about 20 years behind Seoul and Taipei in starting such an arrangement. Wong also made clear the scheme's purpose was not to boost tax revenue, but to reduce waste. "As an advanced city in Asia, Hong Kong ... is already 20 years slower than Seoul and Taipei in reducing waste through such a scheme. The per capita disposal of municipal solid waste has been increasing," he said. "It doesn't match our image as an international city. There has been increasing pressure on our landfill

sites.”

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**Officials in Hong Kong and mainland China disagree over fate of white dolphins in Pearl River (SCMP, Nov. 20):** The population of Chinese white dolphins in the Pearl River estuary is “basically stable” despite nearly a decade of disruptive marine construction works on the world’s longest sea crossing and a near 20 per cent drop since 2005, according to the bridge’s management authority. Research commissioned by the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge Authority – a project-managing body jointly established by the three governments – indicated that dolphin numbers in the Lingding Channel have remained roughly the same since work began in 2009. The authority’s figures stand in contrast to the annual studies commissioned separately by Hong Kong’s Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department on Chinese white dolphin. According to the department, a historic low of 47 dolphins were spotted around the island from April 2017 to March 2018, down from 87 in 2010-11. They have largely disappeared from northeast Lantau since 2012, when work on the Hong Kong section of the bridge started.

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### **Culture and education**

**Videos in English, Hindi and Nepali help Hong Kong’s ethnic minorities understand city’s education system (SCMP, Nov. 1):** An NGO has rolled out video explainers in three languages to help ethnic minorities navigate Hong Kong’s education system. Unison said many of the city’s ethnic minorities only had a low level of Chinese language ability, leading to obstacles in further studies, employment and access to social services. To empower the parents to make informed decisions about their children’s education, Unison launched the first series of its kind titled “You, Your Child and School”. The series contains six videos in three languages: English, Urdu/Hindi and Nepali. The series explains to parents the basics of the Hong Kong education system as well as the application procedures for kindergartens and primary schools.

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**University of Hong Kong to give bonus points for admission to pupils who get top grades in their DSE exam subjects (SCMP, Nov. 4):** The University of Hong Kong will implement a new scoring system next year to reward those who have excelled in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE) examination, giving bonus points for top grades which may help students get onto their desired programmes. It announced the new bonus points system, under which applicants would gain between 0.5 and 1.5 extra points if they scored Level 5, 5\* or 5\*\* – the top grade – in DSE subjects. In addition, the university said it had no plans to adopt a lower minimum admission requirement.

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**Low turnout as HKU profs pick two mainland Chinese among three new representatives to university governing council (SCMP, Nov. 9):** University of Hong Kong teaching staff mostly stayed away from voting for their three representatives to the university’s governing council. From a field of five, those elected were two mainland scholars, finance professor Chen Zhiwu and engineering professor Quentin Yue Zhongqi. HKU’s governing council has 24 members, nine of whom are elected by staff, students or other stakeholders. The other 15 comprise those appointed by Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam or the council, and ex officio members. Dr William Cheung Sing-wai, chairman of the HKU academic staff association, said “Even if one is elected to the council, can he or she really defend academic freedom? When teaching staff do not see that a council position matters that much, they may consider letting go and not vote at all.”

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**HKU academic staff express discontent over retirement at 60 in forum with management and alumni (SCMP, Nov. 21):** University of Hong Kong (HKU) changed its retirement policy in 2016, with those turning 60 being given a new contract and a non-tenured position if approved, rather than simply having their contracts extended like before. For some, the switch to non-tenured positions would mean a pay cut. HKU is among four publicly funded universities that have retained 60 as the retirement age. The others are Polytechnic University, Baptist University and Education University, and all have the discretion to extend an academic’s service depending on merit and staffing needs. HKU’s staff association has failed in its repeated attempts to raise the retirement age to 65, even after a 2013 staff survey showed an overwhelming proportion of academics were in favour of it. Professor Sea-ling Cheng from Chinese University shared statistics of the rising age of academic staff in the US and Canada, where there is no compulsory retirement age.

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**University of Hong Kong to partner with Tsinghua University in Beijing for big artificial intelligence push (SCMP, Nov. 26):** The University of Hong Kong is to join up with Tsinghua University in Beijing with the aim of breaking new ground in artificial intelligence (AI), especially in the areas of

medicine, financial technology and environmental protection. HKU's vice-president and pro-vice-chancellor Professor W. John Kao, as well as engineering dean Christopher Chao said the strategic partnership would help Hong Kong and Beijing become global leaders in technology. "Beijing and Hong Kong can leverage the entire ecosystem whether it's policy, education or finance. So it's more than just two universities coming together, but two cities working on this very complex issue," Kao said.

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#### **Macau**

**Policy Address: Chui announces cash handout increase, other social benefits (Macau Daily Times, Nov. 16):** In 2019, the annual cash handout from the government will increase to MOP10,000 and MOP6,000 for permanent and non-permanent residents respectively, the Chief Executive (CE) announced. Chui was at the Legislative Assembly to disclose the Policy Address for the Fiscal Year 2019, entitled "Seize Opportunities for Balance Development". In a presentation which did not contain news of significant changes to the current policies, Chui announced several measures to strengthen the social security network. Next year, the government will finish compiling the preliminary draft of the Macau Master Plan as well as complete the overall urban preliminary plan.

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