



January in Hong Kong

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## **Economy + Finance**

**Hong Kong land supply task force cites public support for massive reclamation and use of agricultural sites (SCMP, Jan. 1):** A government-appointed task force unveiled its long-awaited recommendations on ramping up land supply in space-starved Hong Kong, citing "considerable" public support for controversial options such as massive reclamation and using agricultural sites. Presenting the findings of a five-month public consultation on how to plug a supply shortfall that it concluded would be far more than the 1,200 hectares estimated by the government for the city's housing and economic needs over the next three decades, the Task Force on Land Supply also backed the contentious option of using part of the Fanling golf course for building homes. In a statement, Chief Executive Carrie Lam said she would study the recommendations in detail and consider the way forward.

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**Mega bridge and high-speed rail fuel record 2.97 million mainland visitors on day trips into Hong Kong for November (SCMP, Jan. 2):** Two new cross-border infrastructure projects helped fuel a record 2.97 million mainland visitors on day trips into Hong Kong in November, as critics slammed the trend for causing overcrowding and disturbances to locals. The Hong Kong Tourism Board said that the number of mainland day trippers in the city surged 40.3 per cent and accounted for 86.5 per cent of total same-day arrivals in the month, compared with the same period last year. The numbers coincided with the opening of the 55km Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge and the recently launched 26km stretch of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link.

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**Impending storm from US-China trade war pushing Hong Kong toymakers to relocate production from mainland China to lower-cost markets (SCMP, Jan. 3):** Although the existing punitive tariffs only cover some electronic components of toys, the industry is now under greater pressure to relocate their factories to such lower-cost markets as Vietnam, Indonesia and India, according to Lawrence Chan, chairman of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council's toy advisory committee. Amid the doom and gloom, Hong Kong's toy exports are set to grow 1 to 2 per cent in 2019 after 1.6 per cent growth between January and November 2018, which brought exports to HK\$45.2 billion (US\$5.8 billion), Chan said. In the US, almost nine out of every 10 toys are made in China.

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**Hong Kong, Shenzhen multibillion-dollar land reclamation plans may be on collision course (SCMP, Jan. 3):** Industry experts and academics have warned attempting to undertake two major land reclamation's in Hong Kong and Shenzhen at the same time could strain the resources of the Greater Bay Area, ultimately increasing the costs of the already multibillion-dollar projects. Shenzhen has already reclaimed at least 6,900 hectares (17,050 acres) of land since it was established, and according to the city's infrastructure development blueprint, Shenzhen plans to reclaim an additional 5,000 hectares from the sea between 2016 to 2025. Shenzhen is looking at its own reclamation project to spur growth and help reduce housing costs. Shenzhen's imagination has been stimulated by Hong Kong's ambitious Lantau Tomorrow Vision project, which aims to house one million residents.

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**Knock-on from US-China trade war causes slowest growth in 18 months for Hong Kong retail sales (SCMP, Jan. 4):** Hong Kong retail sales grew 1.4 per cent in November – the slowest rate in 18 months – in the shadow of the US-China trade war and volatile stock markets. In the first 11 months of 2018, retail sales jumped 9.7 per cent. Annie Tse, chairwoman of the Hong Kong Retail Management

Association, said demand for luxury goods would remain weak as uncertainty surrounding the trade war prevails. "Who knows if China and the US will reach a deal and what the deal will be," she said, adding that retail sales would at best grow at "a low single-digit rate" in 2019.

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**Cooling property market hits budget surplus as figures for 2019 set to be two-thirds down on last year's, says Hong Kong financial secretary Paul Chan (SCMP, Jan. 6):** A drop in land sales and increased expenditure on public services have reduced the government's surplus to around HK\$46 billion (US\$5.9 billion) this year, down two-thirds from 2017-18, Financial Secretary Paul Chan said. The sharp fall marks a four-year low, even though the government has enjoyed surpluses for the past 15 years. The disclosure sparked calls from critics for the government to think twice before committing to a costly reclamation project east of Lantau Island. Chan said the economy this year might suffer slower growth than in 2018, and circumstances remained challenging due to global uncertainty, in particular the ongoing US-China trade war.

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**Hong Kong has no plan to regulate credit reference agencies, official says – despite TransUnion security flaw that allowed easy access to personal data of millions (SCMP, Jan. 8):** Hong Kong has no plans to regulate credit reference agencies despite the recent exposure of a security flaw at a US-based firm that allowed access to the personal data of 5.4 million local consumers, deputy secretary for financial services and the treasury Chris Sun revealed. He said personal information was already regulated by the data privacy law. Last November, a local newspaper said it easily accessed credit reports of a number of high-profile figures including the city's leader and finance minister from the Hong Kong arm of TransUnion, which has operated in the city for more than 35 years.

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**First-time homebuyers in Hong Kong unlikely to get any help from government as Chief Executive Carrie Lam says no plans to increase mortgages (SCMP, Jan. 9):** Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam has made it clear her government has no immediate plans to ease the loan-to-value ratio requirement on residential mortgages, and the issue will be handled with "extreme prudence". She said any relaxation of the mortgage requirements could mean heavier burdens on loans for homebuyers, and more importantly, any issue of such signals would affect what is considered a sensitive market.

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**Hong Kong minimum wage to jump to HK\$37.50, in biggest rise since it was introduced (SCMP, Jan. 10):** Low-paid Hong Kong workers are set to benefit from the biggest increase yet in the city's minimum wage, which will jump to HK\$37.50 (US\$4.80) an hour from May, after a formal endorsement by the government. The 8.7 per cent rise from the current HK\$34.50 was expected to bump up the pay of about 150,000 workers, mostly in security and service jobs. But it reportedly could also add an extra HK\$700 million a year to the expenses of the business sector. It will be the biggest increase since Hong Kong launched a statutory minimum wage in 2011, which started at HK\$28 an hour. Despite the latest increase, Hong Kong's minimum wage is still far lower than many other developed countries'.

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**Fears of cargo cartel spark probe into 'super alliance' at Hong Kong container terminal (SCMP, Jan. 11):** Hong Kong's competition watchdog has opened an unprecedented investigation into whether a new "super alliance" between four of the five operators at one of the world's busiest container ports breaches antitrust regulations. The Competition Commission said it was investigating the alliance "as a matter of priority", while other players in the trade and logistics industries raised an outcry that it would monopolise the container trade, the lifeblood of business in the city. The new group, formed by Hongkong International Terminals (HIT), COSCO-HIT Terminals, Asia Container Terminals and Modern Terminals, will jointly operate and manage 23 berths across eight terminals at Kwai Tsing.

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**Luxembourg and Hong Kong sign mutual fund recognition agreement to ease cross border sale (SCMP, Jan. 15):** Luxembourg has signed a mutual funds recognition agreement with the Securities and Futures Commission aimed at encouraging more cross border fund sales. Over the past few years the SFC has signed similar cross border fund sales agreements with mainland China, Malaysia, France, Switzerland and Britain. These agreements are part of the Hong Kong government's efforts to develop the city as an international asset management centre.

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**Hong Kong banks need to adopt this key hiring practice as virtual era dawns (SCMP, Jan. 17):** The Hong Kong Monetary Authority is expected to issue the city's first virtual bank license during the first quarter. HKMA deputy chief executive Howard Lee said hiring the right talent mix would be key for traditional banks to develop successful fintech operations. However, he said banks would need to adapt

a speedier recruitment process when searching out tech personnel, instead of the conservative banking culture where vetting for senior banking positions can take six months or longer. Since September 2017, the HKMA has introduced seven measures – including the licensing of virtual banks – to promote the development of Hong Kong into a smart banking city.

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**Seek common ground and rise to the challenge of developing infrastructure, Carrie Lam tells Hongkongers as Central-Wan Chai Bypass opens (SCMP, Jan. 19):** Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam called on the city to pull together and seek common ground to meet the challenges facing it, after her first official ride on the new HK\$36 billion (US\$4.6 billion) Central-Wan Chai Bypass. Lam added that Hong Kong was once again facing problems caused by the development of large infrastructure and land, but that the city must not be deterred.

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**Hong Kong tops the table as world's most expensive housing market for 9th straight year (SCMP, Jan. 22):** Hong Kong has been ranked as the world's least affordable housing market for a ninth consecutive year in a global survey. A family would on average need to save up for 21 years without spending a single dollar to afford a home in the city, according to the Demographia International Housing Affordability Study. That is the longest saving period in the study's history and beats the previous record of 19.4 years set by Hong Kong in 2017. In second place was Vancouver with a home-price to median-income ratio of 12.6, meaning it would take an average of 12.6 years to save enough money for a house. A family in Singapore needs to save for 4.6 years to buy a home while in the US that period is 3.9 years.

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**Pre-tax profits rise at Hong Kong banks for third year, but loan growth decline may weigh on sector in 2019 (SCMP, Jan. 25):** Pre-tax profits at Hong Kong banks rose for a third straight year in 2018, thanks to a wider interest margin after the lenders raised their prime lending rate for the first time in 12 years, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) said. Growth in pre-tax profits in 2018 was also higher, at 19.4 per cent; it stood at 15.7 per cent in 2017. But HKMA also issued a warning about the risks that lay ahead, and said the US-China trade war had already led to declines in loan growth in the second half of last year. HKMA said it would continue to focus on financial technology in 2019. In the first quarter this year, it will issue a first batch of virtual banking licences.

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### **Domestic politics**

**Thousands join Hong Kong New Year's Day rally as independence activists complain of harassment (SCMP, Jan. 2):** Thousands of protesters took to the streets of Hong Kong to air their grievances against the government in the traditional New Year's Day rally, this time with pro-independence activists complaining of harassment and restrictions. The Civil Human Rights Front, which organised the annual event, estimated 5,500 people turned out to call for greater democracy and warn against "shrinking freedoms", while police put the figure at 3,200 at the peak. Both estimates were roughly half of last year's figures for the same event. Around 30 independence advocates, most dressed in black and some wearing masks, raised flags and banners with "Hong Kong Independence" slogans during the march which started in Causeway Bay. Some also waved Tibetan independence and Taiwan flags to demonstrate their support for separatist sentiments.

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**March organiser could be banned from 'Civic Square' over 'failure to stop separatist' display at forecourt of Hong Kong government headquarters (SCMP, Jan. 3):** A key pro-democracy group could be barred from an iconic space outside the Hong Kong government's headquarters over its "failure to stop separatists" from promoting their political ideas during a protest it organised, authorities warned. The government said at the end of the march that there were individual participants carrying placards "with slogans advocating independence", who ignored advice from security guards and forced their way into the forecourt. In its reply citing the letter to organisers, the government said: "The government allowed the public to go into the site for public meetings, demonstrations or for expressing their views, but it cannot allow individuals to use the venue to advocate independence thoughts."

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**Chinese court officers did not have to tell Hong Kong government about arrest at high-speed rail station, Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung says (SCMP, Jan. 5):** Chinese court officers did not have to notify the Hong Kong government about the arrest of a local traveller at the West Kowloon rail station the city's chief secretary Matthew Cheung said, as pressure mounted on him to explain if officials were told about the move. Cheung was referring to a mainland media report that a Hong Kong resident, surnamed Lung, who was wanted by a Shenzhen court, was arrested in the city by mainland court officials in October, after being stopped by immigration officers. Cheung said the case did not fall under a previously agreed arrangement between the two sides, because Lung was not wanted in relation to a

criminal investigation. A Security Bureau spokesman said under the existing mechanism, mainland authorities should notify the Hong Kong government when a local resident is subject to "criminal compulsory measures", or dies an unnatural death.

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**Lawmakers warned playing Chinese national anthem as tactic to disrupt Hong Kong legislature meetings risks breaking law under new bill (SCMP, Jan. 10):** Lawmakers playing the Chinese national anthem as a confrontational tactic in the Hong Kong legislature could be breaking the law under a newly proposed bill to criminalise abuse of the song, the city's constitutional and mainland affairs minister warned. Patrick Nip also stressed whether behaviour was deemed abusive would depend on if it was conducted "publicly ... and with an intention to insult the anthem". The remarks came a day after the government unveiled legislation to criminalise any disrespectful acts to March of the Volunteers. Anyone who publicly and intentionally insults the anthem, whether through the use of its lyrics or score, could risk a three-year jail term and a fine of HK\$50,000. The government plans to introduce the National Anthem Bill to the Legislative Council on January 23.

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**Legco closes down inquiry into misconduct allegations against CY Leung, for want of first-hand information (SCMP, Jan. 11):** Hong Kong's legislature decided to wrap up its inquiry into the misconduct allegations against former leader Leung Chun-ying, after admitting it had not been able to get any first-hand information over the past 25 months. The decision came after the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) announced in December that its four-year investigation into Leung had ended with the Justice Department concluding that there was not enough evidence to press charges against the former chief executive. The Legislative Council set up a select committee in November 2016 to look into Leung's receipt of part of the HK\$50 million (US\$6.4 million) payment from Australian firm UGL during his time in office.

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**Carrie Lam 'shocked' as Hong Kong lawmakers criticise increase in age limit for elderly welfare payments from 60 to 65 (SCMP, Jan. 11):** Hong Kong's leader deflected criticism from lawmakers over an increase in the age limit for elderly welfare payments from 60 to 65, pointing out that they approved the change in last year's budget. Expressing shock at the opposition by lawmakers from across the political spectrum, Chief Executive Carrie Lam said the move had been approved by the Legislative Council and could not be halted. Starting from February 1, the age limit for applying for the elderly comprehensive social security assistance (CSSA) scheme will rise from 60 to 65. The current subsidy amount ranges from HK\$2,600 (US\$330) to HK\$3,485. People aged 60 to 64 will only be able to apply for adult social security allowance, which ranges from HK\$1,760 to HK\$2,665 a month

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**Leader of outlawed Hong Kong National Party refuses to answer panel's questions after it refused to switch date of meeting so his lawyers could be present (SCMP, Jan. 14):** The leader of the outlawed pro-independence Hong Kong National Party refused to take any questions during his appeal against its ban, in protest against the rejection of his lawyers' request to postpone the hearing, the Post has learned. Andy Chan appeared before a three-member panel of the Executive Council without barrister Gladys Li and lawyer Mark Daly, who had prior engagements. The review hearing was arranged after Chan decided to appeal against the Secretary for Security John Lee's decision to ban the party on September 24, on the grounds it posed a credible threat to national security and public order in the city. The Executive Council set up a panel to hear the case.

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**Hong Kong lawmakers united against government's 'heartless' decision to raise age threshold for elderly welfare payments (SCMP, Jan. 15):** Lawmakers across Hong Kong's political divide have snubbed the welfare chief's offer of additional support for senior citizens to compensate them for the loss of allowances they will no longer be entitled to under a controversial change in the age threshold from next month. In a Legco panel meeting, Wilson Or of the city's largest pro-establishment party, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, said: "It is extremely disgraceful and heartless for a government, which is sitting on reserves worth trillions, to curtail welfare for the elderly." Pan-democrats Au Nok-hin and Fernando Cheung raised amendments to the motion demanding the government shelve the age threshold change.

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**No perceived bias in Leung Chun-ying UGL probe, so no outside legal advice, says Hong Kong justice minister Teresa Cheng (SCMP, Jan. 17):** Prosecutors looking into corruption claims against former Hong Kong leader Leung Chun-ying did not need to get outside legal advice because there was no possible perception of bias or conflicting interests, the city's justice minister said. Secretary for Justice Teresa Cheng's comments came after her department said last month there was not enough evidence

to charge Leung, who received undeclared payments from an Australian firm before and after he became chief executive. Pan-democrats were dissatisfied with Cheng's answers. Democratic Party lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting said Cheng had failed to maintain consistency in the department's handling of cases.

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**Ousted Hong Kong lawmaker Lau Siu-lai to challenge decision to ban her from standing in Kowloon West by-election (SCMP, Jan. 18):** Ousted Hong Kong lawmaker Lau Siu-lai is to launch a legal bid to invalidate the Legislative Council by-election in November she was barred from running in, the Post has learned. Lau, who was accused of once advocating self-determination for the city, is expected to argue that she was not given a chance to explain her political stance before being disqualified. The former lawmaker confirmed that she would file an election petition, if she cleared the funding arrangement with the crowdfunded Justice Defence Fund. Lau was unseated in 2017 from the legislature for improper oath-taking, a move that triggered the Kowloon West by-election last November. While she tried to win back her own seat, the returning officer argued the activist had not genuinely changed her stance calling for "democratic self-determination" in 2016, despite Lau ditching her previous stance before her last campaign.

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**Hong Kong's first major political crisis of the new year? (SCMP, Jan. 19):** Hong Kong's leader has managed to ease her first major crisis of the new year by winning back the support of her political allies who turned against her over the unpopular decision to raise the age threshold for elderly welfare payments. Chief Executive Carrie Lam ended up offering a new monthly cash allowance to those who would have been deprived of their regular payments under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme. A day after pro-establishment lawmakers joined forces with their opposition colleagues to rebuke her in the Legislative Council for raising the age threshold from 60 to 65 years for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients, Chief Executive Carrie Lam admitted there was room for improvement in her government's handling of the scheme, but insisted she was not bowing to pressure.

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**Anthem law not aimed at forcing patriotism, Hong Kong constitutional affairs chief assures (SCMP, Jan. 21):** The proposed national anthem law for Hong Kong is not aimed at forcing residents to love the country, and the last thing authorities want is to prosecute people over disrespect for the song, the city's constitutional affairs minister has said. Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Patrick Nip said he appreciated the need for a multipronged approach to address anti-mainland Chinese sentiment among Hongkongers who booed the national anthem. "We can't make people patriotic simply through the passage of a law," Nip said, adding that the primary aim of the bill was to promote respect for the anthem.

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**Lawyers' group calls on Hong Kong justice minister to delegate prosecution decisions (SCMP, Jan. 23):** The Bar Association has called on the justice minister to establish protocol and delegate prosecution decisions to the top prosecutor, after her department controversially dropped a case against former Hong Kong leader Leung Chun-ying. The professional body said that, given Cheng's official status in Executive Council, the public might have doubts on controversial prosecution decisions – whether they were made with legal considerations, "or whether it was politically expedient". To resolve the public's concerns, the association urged Cheng to follow the British example and delegate all prosecution decisions to the director of public prosecutions, for all but the most exceptional cases. It also urged Cheng to clearly explain if the policy of seeking external legal advice had changed.

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**Lawmaker loses bid to summon Hong Kong justice minister Teresa Cheng to discuss CY Leung decision with Legislative Council (SCMP, Jan. 25):** A pro-democracy lawmaker's bid to rally support for summoning Hong Kong's justice minister to the legislature was easily defeated. Civic Party lawmaker Dennis Kwok had asked for Secretary for Justice Teresa Cheng to present the Legislative Council with all relevant documents and testify about her handling of the case involving former chief executive Leung Chun-ying. The non-binding motion, which required a majority in both the functional and geographical constituencies, failed. The pan-democrats have questioned if Cheng, who has the final say on prosecutorial decisions, deviated from standard practice by not seeking the opinion of independent counsel in the case.

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**Hong Kong opposition lawmakers walk out of meeting with No 2 official Matthew Cheung as row over controversial welfare change rumbles on (SCMP, Jan. 25):** Six pro-democracy lawmakers walked out a meeting with Hong Kong's No 2 official to protest against an unpopular change in welfare

payments. They had asked for a meeting with the city's leader Carrie Lam but the chief executive, attending the World Economic Forum in Switzerland, sent her No 2, Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung to discuss a controversial rise in the age threshold for the elderly Comprehensive Social Security Allowance (CSSA) scheme, from 60 to 65. Welfare sector lawmaker Shiu Ka-chun described the meeting with acting chief executive Cheung and welfare minister Law Chi-kwong as unpleasant, calling the pair stubborn. He said they were unmoved by the lawmakers' calls to cancel the change, which comes into effect on February 1.

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### **International relations**

**Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam writes to Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte over concerns about jailing of four men on drug charges (SCMP, Jan. 3):** Chief Executive Carrie Lam has written to the Philippine president to raise concerns about four Hongkongers jailed for life on drug charges in the Southeast Asian country, making the case a top-level diplomatic issue. "The chief executive wrote that since the charges were serious, and Hong Kong people, including the families involved, were concerned, she would like to draw the president's attention to the matter and ensure the Hong Kong residents' well-being and their right to a fair trial are being protected," the source said. Lawmaker James To has been helping the men as they fight to clear their names. He said the families were grateful that Lam had stepped in.

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**Hong Kong bishop brought out of retirement by Pope 'mainly over China relations' (SCMP, Jan. 9):** Pope Francis had the Vatican's relationship with China on his mind, when the Holy See brought Hong Kong's former bishop John Tong out of retirement to serve as acting head of the city's 394,000-strong Catholic community, according to fellow worshippers and commentators. The Vatican's surprise move of appointing a retired bishop as the diocese's "apostolic administrator", broke with past practice in Hong Kong and Asia. While the move sparked speculation on whether it was politically motivated to block a bishop who was sympathetic to Occupy protesters, others have called for calm and not to look into sinister motives. Tong, who played a role in efforts by the Vatican and Beijing to secure a breakthrough in bilateral ties, was appointed as acting head, after his successor Michael Yeung died on Jan. 3 from illness. Local Catholics expect the Vatican to appoint a new bishop for Hong Kong within six months.

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

**Tougher measures proposed for overstayers with jobs and employers of illegal workers as Hong Kong government seeks to deter economic migrants (SCMP, Jan. 4):** The Security Bureau wants tougher penalties for employers that hire illegal workers as it seeks to deter economic migrants from coming to Hong Kong. Authorities proposed that the maximum penalty for employing illegal workers be raised from three years in prison to 10 under a proposed amendment to the Immigration Ordinance. The maximum fine would also increase by almost 43 per cent, to HK\$500,000. Visitors overstaying and caught working, either paid or unpaid, would also face a harsher charge, of taking unlawful employment, which carries a three-year jail term.

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**Hong Kong immigration chief shoots down 'conspiracy' claims over visitor rejections, insisting that officers follow law and policy (SCMP, Jan. 6):** There is "no conspiracy involved" when visitors are refused entry into Hong Kong without explanation, the city's immigration chief has said, adding that his officers are guided by law and policy. Director of Immigration Erick Tsang said: "Do not always assume there is a conspiracy behind the decisions of the department, or whether actions are linked to specific cases. We handle many cases daily and most go unnoticed." He added that safeguarding national security was one of his job priorities. Tsang's comments followed recent controversy centred on the Immigration Department's barring of veteran British journalist Victor Mallet from entering Hong Kong as a tourist. Tsang said the department turned away tens of thousands of incoming visitors each year, ranging from parallel traders to pregnant mainland women suspected of coming to the city to give birth. The immigration chief insisted that his officers acted under proper law and policy.

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**Laws to tackle aggressive sales tactics in Hong Kong could be expanded beyond gym and beauty salon industries, says commerce chief Edward Yau (SCMP, Jan. 16):** Hong Kong's commerce chief has said the government may consider expanding legislation that introduces a cooling-off period in industries dogged by aggressive sales tactics – and crack down on those who try to bypass new rules. Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Edward Yau was responding to criticism that the government proposal only covers salons and gyms and only sales greater than HK\$3,000 in the two trades. Yau also said regulating beauty salons and gyms was only a starting point,



with 77 per cent of high-pressure selling in these industries, but that the government could expand the ruling to other trades.

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**Tightening of Hong Kong's competition laws to cover mergers on the horizon, says Competition Commission chairwoman (SCMP, Jan. 17):** Hong Kong's competition law could be tightened if ongoing talks about it covering mergers across all industries, as well as statutory bodies, bear fruit. Competition Commission chairwoman Anna Wu revealed that the body was reviewing the Competition Ordinance with the government, about three years after the law came in. Wu said one of the topics she would bring up was widening the law's scope to regulate mergers likely to greatly reduce competition in Hong Kong across all sectors, rather than only applying to telecoms companies as it currently does. But she saw challenges ahead. "Handling the issue over merging will be the most difficult. It touches on the interest of the business sector," she said.

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**Policing Hong Kong's Occupy protests was tough, say judges in Frankly Chu appeal – but excessive force still illegal (SCMP, Jan. 25):** Hong Kong's top court acknowledged the extreme difficulties faced by police who handled 2014's Occupy protests, but stressed that excessive force would not be condoned. That message was relayed in remarks concluding the case of retired superintendent Frankly Chu, three days after the Court of Final Appeal dismissed his last bid to clear his name over a baton attack on a passer-by during the pro-democracy protests. The case split a city already deeply divided over the 79-day Occupy protests, which shut down major roads as protesters called for greater democracy in the city.

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## **Health**

**Hong Kong enters winter peak flu season week earlier than last year with health officials urging elderly and children to get shots (SCMP, Jan. 3):** Influenza activity is expected to increase in the coming weeks as the city has entered the winter peak flu season, the health authorities have warned. According to Dr Wong Ka-hing, controller of the Centre for Health Protection, 960,000 doses of seasonal flu vaccine were administered by December 23, a more than 50 per cent increase compared with the same period last year. Almost 40 per cent of those who got jabs were children under 12 years old. "We urge the public, especially children and the elderly, to get vaccinated as soon as possible," Wong said, adding it usually took around two weeks for the body to develop antibodies after vaccination.

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**Non-urgent patients wait up to 8 hours at Hong Kong's public hospitals amid flu surge – and things unlikely to get better before Lunar New Year (SCMP, Jan. 7):** Overcrowded public hospital wards are bracing for an even heavier winter flu load ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday next month, with non-urgent patients having to wait up to eight hours to see a doctor. The overall occupancy rate at public hospitals was 109 per cent on Jan. 5, which meant temporary beds had to be laid along corridors or in between fixed ones. Tseung Kwan O Hospital had the highest occupancy, at 128 per cent, followed by Queen Elizabeth Hospital with 121 per cent.

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**Hong Kong food safety watchdog tightens checks on imported products after criticism (SCMP, Jan. 8):** Hong Kong's food watchdog said it had tightened checks on food entering the city via air, land and sea after a government auditor's report accused it of failing to ensure product safety. New guidelines have been issued to health officials at the airport to ensure they only allow food to be imported with proper documents, said Vivian Lau, director of food and environmental hygiene. Last November, the Audit Commission issued a review report on the Centre for Food Safety, which is under the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. The report said the centre issued import licences for food products despite 94 per cent of them not coming with the required documents, such as health certificates.

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**Hong Kong's bakers told to switch up ingredients after cookies and biscuits found to contain chemicals linked to cancer (SCMP, Jan. 16):** Hong Kong's consumer watchdog has asked bakeries to change the ingredients used to make cookies and biscuits, after at least 50 types sold in the city were found to contain carcinogenic substances. The Consumer Council said it had found traces of glycidol and acrylamide – chemical by-products of the manufacturing process that increase the risk of cancer – in almost 90 per cent of the 58 samples tested between August and October last year. Meanwhile, 35 types of cookie were found to contain 3-MCPD, another chemical by-product that can harm the kidneys and male fertility.

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**Hong Kong university joins forces with top overseas institutions to set up city's first international research centre on dementia and other neurodegenerative diseases (SCMP, Jan. 17):** The first international research centre in Hong Kong to focus on neurodegenerative diseases such as dementia will be established jointly by a local university and three top overseas institutions. The centre, to be set up by Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), will look into Alzheimer's disease, the most common cause of dementia, together with Harvard Medical School, Stanford University School of Medicine and University College London (UCL). In Hong Kong, about one in every 10 people aged 70 or older suffers from dementia. The number with dementia was estimated to increase from more than 100,000 in 2009, to around 300,000 in 2039.

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**Protesting Hong Kong nurses demand action over manpower shortages, saying public hospitals need more staff not money (SCMP, Jan. 21):** Hong Kong authorities must hire more nurses to tackle an ongoing manpower crisis at public hospitals, according to the city's largest nursing guild. More than 100 members of the Association of Hong Kong Nursing Staff, which represents 60 per cent of the city's 50,000 nurses, gathered outside the government headquarters to voice their discontent at the shortage. Secretary for Food and Health Professor Sophia Chan told the protesting nurses that starting from the end of the month, the authority's pay for frontline medical staff working on extra shifts would be increased by 10 per cent. But she was booed by protesters, who said public hospitals needed more staff, not money.

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**Hong Kong kindergartens and childcare centres to begin Lunar New Year holiday early as flu outbreaks spread (SCMP, Jan. 25):** All kindergartens and childcare centres in Hong Kong will shut for the Lunar New Year holiday about a week earlier than planned in an attempt to curb the spread of flu, the government said. About 1,000 facilities will begin their holidays on Jan. 26 after flu outbreaks hit more than 35 per cent of them. Dr Wong Ka-hing, controller at the Centre for Health Protection, said the flu situation at kindergartens and childcare centres was very serious and it was not known whether the seasonal peak had yet arrived. An outbreak at a school is defined as three cases in four days.

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## **Environment**

**Central-Wan Chai Bypass inspires call for air purification systems across other high-traffic zones in Hong Kong (SCMP, Jan. 4):** Green groups have urged the Hong Kong government to set up more air purification systems in high-traffic areas, inspired by the world's largest version for the Central-Wan Chai Bypass, which can remove at least 80 per cent of key pollutants from roadside emissions. HK\$36 billion (US\$4.6 billion) bypass would open to traffic on January 20 after nearly 10 years of construction. The greenest feature is an air purification system in the tunnel – the first in Hong Kong and the largest of its kind in the world in terms of air volume handled – which can remove at least 80 per cent of harmful suspended particulates and nitrogen dioxide, two key roadside pollutants. World Green Organisation chief executive Dr. William Yu called on the government to explore the feasibility of installing the system at other high-traffic tunnels and areas to improve air quality.

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**Hong Kong could get less polluted winter thanks to El Niño, as weather effect brings less mainland Chinese smog (SCMP, Jan. 7):** Hong Kong could experience a less polluted winter than normal if a strong enough El Niño weather effect whips up in the Pacific Ocean towards the end of what is typically the smoggiest season of the year, findings from a new study suggest. According to Chinese University researchers, Hong Kong's air quality is usually higher under El Niño conditions as the associated weather – more rain, less frequent northerly winds and higher wind speeds – tend to disperse pollutants.

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**Hong Kong's air quality targets pitched too low to favour development such as Lantau Tomorrow Vision, says environmental group Clean Air Network (SCMP, Jan. 18):** A new set of proposed five-year air quality objectives running up to 2025 may have been pitched overly conservatively to make it easier for major future projects like a large-scale reclamation east of Lantau Island to meet them, according to the Clean Air Network. The objectives, revised every five years, set concentration limits for seven key pollutants and the number of times levels can be exceeded in a year, with reference to World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines. A department spokesman said the Lantau plan would have to conduct and pass its environmental impact assessment study. The plan would have to comply with the air quality objectives (AQOs) "at the time of the decision".

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## **Culture and education**

**University of Hong Kong students and staff united in desire to remove city's leader as chancellor (SCMP, Jan. 2):** Students and staff at Hong Kong's oldest university started the new year with a joint appeal to the governing council to remove the chancellor's powers to appoint members and select its chairman behind closed doors. The University of Hong Kong's Student Union, Academic Staff Association, and Alumni Concern Group, said amending the university statutes would be the easiest way to introduce much-needed change in governance, forgoing the need for legislative amendments. This came as controversial government adviser Arthur Li began his second term as council chairman, having been reappointed last month by Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam, a move the groups called a "grave misdeed". According to the 108-year-old institution's governing ordinance, the school's top position of chancellor is by default the city's chief executive.

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**Fintech courses put facts at the fingertips (SCMP, Jan. 4):** One-year fulltime master of science in financial technology (MScFinTech) will be jointly offered by Hong Kong University of Science and Technology's schools of business management, engineering and science. Professor Tam Kar-yan, dean of the school of business and management, adds, "We work closely with industry, and talk to banks, asset management firms and regulators." Tam also points out that fintech, which is driven by changes in technology, is a fast-changing field and the programme will regularly need to revise its curriculum. Programme graduates are expected to be able to analyse the engineering mechanism and financial principles of financial technologies.

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**Low pay and politics means Hong Kong teachers have little incentive to work in mainland China, groups say (SCMP, Jan. 12):** Hong Kong teachers have poured cold water on the idea they might be interested in working in mainland China. Teaching unions were responding to a notice issued by the Ministry of Education, that said residents from the city, Macau, and Taiwan could take exams allowing them to teach at primary and secondary schools across the border. Among requirements for any applicants were upholding the leadership of the Communist Party and passing a Mandarin test. Teaching groups suggested these conditions, plus the lower pay on the mainland, meant there was little incentive for Hong Kong educators to make the move.

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**Controversial No 2 at Hong Kong University Paul Tam to step down – but concerns are raised over his potential replacement (SCMP, Jan. 25):** A source told the Post the university's governing council would receive interim provost and deputy vice chancellor Paul Tam's notification of resignation, from April 1, during its meeting on Jan. 22. The council would also discuss whether to approve the appointment of economist Professor Richard Wong to the position. Dr William Cheung, chairman of HKU's academic staff association, expressed concern over the choice of Wong because of his pro-Beijing stance. He believed Beijing had influenced the choice of Wong and expressed concerns that Zhang was trying to replace senior management with pro-China allies.

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## **Society**

**Hong Kong government set to make selected data public, which could be a help for drivers and hospital patients, among others (SCMP, Jan. 4):** Victor Lam, the government's chief information officer, announced that government bodies, including the Transport Department and the Lands Department would be releasing 650 new open data sets this year, taking the total number of open data sets available to about 4,000 by the end of this year. One of those to be made available in March next year would be real-time parking vacancy data of on-street metered parking spaces. The Hospital Authority currently updates every 15 minutes on data on waits for emergency services. It is planning to let patients know how long they must wait for services at specialist outpatient clinics.

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**Cross-harbour tunnel tolls plan stalls as Hong Kong government makes face-saving U-turn (SCMP, Jan. 23):** A contentious bid by the government to drum up support in the legislature for revamping Hong Kong's cross-harbour tunnel tolls was shelved in a face-saving U-turn because of strong political opposition. The decision to withdraw a non-binding motion in support of the toll adjustment plan marked the second major climbdown by Chief Executive Carrie Lam's government in recent days, following the backlash over a change to the age threshold for elderly welfare payments. The toll plan was intended to ease congestion by raising fees at the publicly operated Cross-Harbour Tunnel and Eastern Harbour Tunnel while lowering them for the privately run Western Harbour Tunnel, which is currently underused because of its higher charges.

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**Hong Kong engineers split over conclusion that rail platforms at centre of construction scandal are structurally safe (SCMP, Jan. 24):** The row over the structural integrity of newly built platforms at a Hong Kong station has further split the city's top engineering body, with members accusing it of damaging the profession's reputation by prematurely concluding the structure is safe. The Hong Kong Institution of Engineers (HKIE), which has more than 34,000 members, was criticized after it said Hung Hom station was structurally sound, a view it said was based on expert opinion. However, a group of 21 members disagreed and has called on HKIE to withdraw the statement. The group said given that the investigation was ongoing, and expert witnesses held differing views on the subject, the conclusion was premature and played down the management failings of the MTR Corporation.

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#### **Macau**

**High-rolling VIPs help Macau casinos pull in gaming revenues of US\$37.6 billion in 2018 (SCMP, Jan. 2):** Gambling revenue in Macau rose 14 per cent in 2018, the second consecutive year of gain as demand to wager in the Chinese territory continued to rebound from a prolonged slump. December was also the 29th straight month where revenue in China's only legal gambling hub rose versus the same month a year prior, according to data released by the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau. Revenue rose 16.6 per cent to 26.47 billion patacas (US\$3.3 billion) versus the 10-15 per cent estimates of analysts polled by Reuters. Revenue for the full year was 302.85 billion patacas. However, a US-China trade war and slowing Chinese economy is likely to weigh on sentiment in the high-roller VIP segment, keeping any further revenue gains checked, analysts said. The special administrative region has been encouraging casino operators to diversify to help broaden its economic base. Currently, tax from casinos accounts for over 80 per cent of the Macau government's total revenue.

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#### **Press articles related to Switzerland and Swiss matters**

**With Donald Trump absent, Wang Qishan will seek to make China's case at World Economic Forum in Davos (SCMP, Jan. 19):** There will be no US delegation, French president or British prime minister at Davos, but analysts say that will not make Chinese "firefighter" Wang Qishan's task – delivering Beijing's message to the world's political and business elite – any easier. Wang will be joined at the forum by the leaders of other top economies, including Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. In recent years, Beijing's top leaders have used the Davos podium to try to present China as a business-friendly champion of globalisation.

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**China on track for more growth, Vice-President Wang Qishan tells worried world elite in Davos as he rebukes US 'bullying' (SCMP, Jan. 24):** Chinese Vice-President Wang Qishan sought to reassure the world's business and political elite about China's economy at the World Economic Forum on Jan. 23, while also warning other countries against dominating future technologies and making what appeared to be a thinly veiled criticism of the Trump administration's "bullying" tactics. "One thing that is certain is that China's growth will continue and be sustainable," he said, after an introduction by Klaus Schwab, the forum's executive chairman. Wang also warned against protectionism and unilateralism, apparently referring to US President Donald Trump's "America-first" policies aimed at China.

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