



April in Hong Kong

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

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Economy + Finance

Hong Kong's retail sales dropped by 10.1 per cent in February, the worst fall in 3½ years, as economic uncertainty took hold (SCMP, April 2): Hong Kong retail sales slumped 10.1 per cent in February, the first such drop in almost three and a half years, as economic uncertainty ate into consumer

confidence. The year-on-year drop in monthly sales, to HK\$40.7 billion (US\$5.18 billion), resulted in a 1.6 per cent decrease in the first two months of this year. Annie Tse, chairwoman of the Hong Kong Retail Management Association, said performance in the two months was alarming, and unlikely to improve. Tse pointed out that the trade war clouded the economies of Hong Kong and mainland China, pending a deal between Washington and Beijing.

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Japan keen on Greater Bay Area but says Hong Kong's 'one country, two systems' vital to its success, at Tokyo symposium (SCMP, April 10): Yoshihiro Seki, State minister of economy, trade and industry, said that Beijing's Greater Bay Area development plan could help companies from his country tap into the Chinese market, but Hong Kong's "one country, two systems" ruling principle was key to its success. The symposium was held for the first time overseas, hosted jointly by the Hong Kong, Macau and Guangdong province governments, and was attended by Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam and Governor of Guangdong Province Ma Xingrui.

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Hong Kong's middle class saving for children's weddings and homes, estimate they need US\$637,000 for retirement (SCMP, April 11): Buying children a house and paying for their wedding are the top priorities for Hong Kong's middle class, who estimate they need at least HK\$5 million (US\$637,175) to cover retirement expenses, according to a survey by China Construction Bank (Asia). Sylvia Ng, head of consumer banking division at CCB (Asia), said the survey showed that Hongkongers were worried about expenses after retirement. "Although the middle class has relatively higher income, they also have [a] bigger financial burden, such as their children's education and planning for their own retirement," Ng said.

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Hong Kong has retained its title as the world's most expensive urban centre to buy a home (SCMP, April 13): Hong Kong has retained its title as the world's most expensive urban centre to buy a home, according to a survey of 35 cities around the world by real estate consultant CBRE. The average cost of owning a home in Hong Kong rose 5.5 per cent last year to HK\$9.4 million (US\$1.2 million), which translates to US\$2,091 per square foot for a typical abode measuring 574 square feet (53 square metres), or about 40 per cent more than second-placed city Singapore, CBRE said. The survey findings underscore the challenge for Hong Kong's chief executive Carrie Lam, as affordable housing is a mainstay of her administration's policies.

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Hong Kong's dollar millionaires swell at the slowest pace since 2014, due to trade war-induced bear market (SCMP, April 16): The ranks of Hong Kong's US dollar-denominated millionaires grew at their slowest pace since 2014, as the US-China trade war weighed on financial markets and depressed stock values all over Asia, according to a report by Citibank. The number of Hong Kong residents with at least HK\$10 million (US\$1.27 million) in liquid assets – bank deposits, mutual funds, stocks and bonds – rose 1.5 per cent to 69,000. Those with the same amount in total assets, including property holdings, grew 3 per cent to a record 511,000. In a city of 7.48 million residents, that would be about 7 per cent of the population.

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Hong Kong film industry gets major breakthrough with mainland China deal, but Chief Executive Carrie Lam says it comes with conditions (SCMP, April 17): Hong Kong filmmakers, who have long complained of restrictions on making cross-border movies, will be allowed greater flexibility after Beijing announced that it will lift five significant requirements in a much-needed breakthrough for a once-massive industry fallen on difficult times. Among the requirements no longer valid are restrictions on the number of Hongkongers taking part in mainland film productions and the percentage of artistes and the requirement of mainland-related plots in films jointly produced by the mainland and Hong Kong. The move was welcomed by Chief Executive Carrie Lam and the local film industry. Lam said the industry had to respect mainland regulations and not just produce movies that cater to Hongkongers.

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Nuisance call law may be amended to lessen the impact on Hong Kong's business sector, says government (SCMP, April 17): A proposed law tackling nuisance calls in Hong Kong could be amended to minimise the harm to the business sector, commerce officials said as lawmakers warned the new measures could inflict damage on innocent parties. At a panel meeting at the Legislative Council, permanent secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Clement Leung said the government could discuss with the commercial sector to alleviate the negative impact on normal business activities caused by regulating person-to-person calls. Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Edward Yau also said the law should not be a scourge for businesses.

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Hong Kong tops Singapore, Tokyo and Seoul in global business survey – but not in a good way (SCMP, April 18): Hong Kong is the most expensive city in Asia for business travellers, a survey has found. The overall cost of visiting the city jumped 1.4 per cent to US\$515 (HK\$4,000) compared to last year, according to an annual report from management consultants ECA International. Taking into account the cost of hotels, meals, drinks, laundry, taxi rides and other daily necessities, the city costs 4 per cent more than Tokyo, and 8 per cent more than Seoul, which are second and third on the list respectively. But business travellers to Singapore will be better off, with a 2.3 per cent drop in costs to US\$468 per day as it slipped to fourth in the rankings.

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Hong Kong still attractive for bankers despite high living costs, senior headhunter says (SCMP, April 23): Hong Kong remains an attractive destination for portfolio managers and investment bankers looking to switch jobs despite its persistent reputation as one of the world's most expensive cities to live in, according to Selby Jennings, a senior industry headhunter. It said the city remains a "key focus" for candidates, including ones based in other major financial centres such as London and New York. "Hong Kong is seen as a gateway to one of the most interesting and fast-growing markets at this time: China," Selby Jennings said. Despite a bumpy fourth quarter for banks as Asian markets fell sharply last year, salaries and new offers have not declined, but remained flat.

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Alibaba boss Jack Ma urges Hong Kong to digitise governance in smart city push, saying data is like 'golden sand' (SCMP, April 25): Hong Kong must digitise its governance and release more data to transform itself into a "smart city", according to Alibaba chief Jack Ma. The founder of the world's largest e-commerce platform told local lawmakers and four top officials visiting the firm's headquarters in Hangzhou that in the modern world data was like "golden sand". Members of the group were briefed on the tech giant's City Brain projects, which use real-time data to enhance urban planning. Lawmaker Elizabeth Quat, chairwoman of the legislature's IT panel, said Ma had urged the Legislative Council to push officials to build an "e-government" focused on innovation and technology.

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Hong Kong sells itself at Belt and Road Forum in Beijing as Chief Executive Carrie Lam touts benefits of city's special status (SCMP, April 26): Hong Kong was out to sell its edge as a global financial hub for China's Belt and Road Initiative, with the city's leader touting advantages such as its freedoms and the rule of law, which have come under increasing scrutiny from the international community. "Hong Kong can ... help in many other ways, given our status as a global financial centre. Under the 'one country, two systems' principle, Hong Kong has maintained its market-based financial system, underpinned by the rule of law and internationally aligned regulatory regimes," Chief Executive Carrie Lam said in a speech at the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing. Meanwhile, Hong Kong Monetary Authority's chief executive Norman Chan said in a panel discussion that there were three factors behind the city's success as an international financial centre: geographical proximity to mainland and Asia countries; the strong support given under 'one country two systems'; and the city's common law system.

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Hong Kong economy experienced minor growth in first quarter of 2019, financial secretary says (SCMP, April 28): Hong Kong's economy grew slightly in the first three months of this year despite a bad start to 2019 worldwide amid the raging US-China trade war, the city's financial secretary Paul Chan said. Revealing the city's initial performance for the year, Chan said its economic health improved marginally from the low ebb of 1.3 per cent growth in the fourth quarter of last year. Talks between Beijing and Washington had gained pace since January, with expectations of a settlement to cancel tit-for-tat tariffs, he said. "If both parties can resolve their differences to a certain extent and partially or entirely scrap tariffs, it will boost the world's economic sentiment and favour Hong Kong's economic growth," Chan said.

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Hong Kong's banks back on the hiring spree after a decade of lay-offs as they prepare for virtual banking, Greater Bay expansion (SCMP, April 30): Hong Kong's recruiters are busy hiring again for the city's banking industry after a decade of shrinking headcounts, as they prepare for expansion in the Greater Bay Area and a boom in virtual banking. Large banks are hiring multilingual bankers with solid backgrounds in credit, information technology and compliance as they ready themselves to expand their services in the 11 cities that make up the bay area scheme. Hong Kong's monetary authority recently granted the first four of the city's virtual bank licences. Each of these licence holders told the South China Morning Post they were looking to hire bankers as soon as possible as they prepare to launch their services.

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Domestic politics

Thousands take to Hong Kong streets against proposal to extradite suspects to mainland China (SCMP, April 1): Thousands of protesters took to the streets of Hong Kong, intensifying a campaign against the government's controversial plan to allow the transfer of fugitives to mainland China, Taiwan and Macau. They warned that the next generation of Hongkongers could be victimised under a different legal system north of the border and urged the government to work out an extradition arrangement with Taiwan only. The march organisers said 12,000 took part in the rally while Police however put the turnout at 5,200 at its peak. The protesters said they lacked confidence in the legal system on the mainland and believed there was no guarantee of a fair trial there.

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Extradition bill not made to measure for mainland China and won't be abandoned, Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam says (SCMP, April 1): Hong Kong's controversial extradition proposal was not tailor-made for mainland China and the government would not shelve the bill, the city's leader Carrie Lam said. "I must stress the bill does not just involve mainland China, but equal treatment [with all jurisdictions]. It is not set specifically for mainland China," Lam said. "The bill is not tailor-made for a specific jurisdiction."

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New deputy director of Beijing's liaison office makes first public remarks: Calls on Hongkongers to be patriotic, study Chinese history and help develop nation (SCMP, April 3): Hongkongers should be patriotic, learn more Chinese history and help in the overall development of the nation. Those were the words of Lu Xinning, the new deputy director of the central government's liaison office. She also promised that her office would continue to listen to Hong Kong's younger generation.

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Register at centre of police investigation containing personal details of 8,000 Hong Kong voters has gone, election officials admit (SCMP, April 9): Hong Kong election authorities have contacted police after admitting they cannot find a folder containing the personal details of 8,000 voters, which is wanted as part of a law enforcement investigation. Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Patrick Nip said he had told officials to notify the affected voters and various government bodies as soon as possible. "I apologise to the residents. Hong Kong elections have been organised in a fair and open manner, and we would not allow any error to undermine the people's confidence in public elections," he said.

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Occupy leaders found guilty over role in Hong Kong's 2014 umbrella movement (SCMP, April 9): Nine democracy leaders responsible for the largest civil disobedience movement in Hong Kong's history were found guilty over their roles in the 2014 protests. While Hong Kong courts recognised the notion of civil disobedience, it "is not a defence to a criminal charge", Judge Johnny Chan wrote in a judgment. The protests were sparked by frustration with a restrictive proposal Beijing issued for the election of Hong Kong's leader. Pro-democracy protesters were upset because the proposal lacked an option that would allow them to nominate candidates. The unprecedented civil disobedience exercise turned into an occupation that spread to the city's prime commercial districts. Hong Kong's last colonial governor, Chris Patten, condemned the verdict, calling the prosecution "vengeful". James P. McGovern, chairman of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China in the United States, and senator Marco Rubio said the prosecution punished peaceful political dissent and narrowed the space for free expression and peaceful assembly. In Beijing, foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said the central government firmly supported the Hong Kong government "in punishing the main perpetrators and organisers of the illegal Occupy Central in accordance with the law", adding that the protest had challenged the city's law, prosperity and stability. Lu said it was "biased or groundless" for any foreign politician to suggest the ruling had undermined Hong Kong's freedoms. But a group of pan-democratic lawmakers issued a statement accusing the government of censoring opposition through the judiciary.

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Harsh charges used against Occupy leaders could have chilling effect on future of social movement in Hong Kong, legal experts warn (SCMP, April 11): The successful conviction of the nine leaders of the 2014 Occupy movement using charges that carry harsher punishments could have a chilling effect on Hong Kong's social movement in the future, legal experts and rights groups said. They were responding to the West Kowloon Court ruling the day before which found the group all guilty of at least one count of conspiracy to cause public nuisance, inciting others to cause public nuisance, or inciting others to incite. Former Bar Association chairman Alan Leong said the three charges were unclear and could have a chilling effect on the organisers of any future rallies. Tam Man-kei, director of Amnesty International Hong Kong, also expressed concern over the verdict, as the government could refer to the judgment to charge other Occupy protesters with the three offences.

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China facing its worst national security threats since cold war, says Beijing's top official in Hong Kong, as he attacks unnamed political groups for foreign links (SCMP, April 15): Beijing's top official in Hong Kong condemned unnamed political groups for "colluding with anti-China forces" and bad-mouthing the city at a time when the country was coping with what he described as the most hostile security environment since the cold war. As he warned them against their actions, Wang Zhimin, director of the central government's liaison office in Hong Kong, also praised the recent conviction of the founders of the Occupy protest movement of 2014, calling it a validation of the city's rule of law. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said her administration would not sit back and allow subversive and separatist acts even though the city had not yet drafted its own national security legislation, as prescribed by Article 23 of the Basic Law.

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Crackdown on Hong Kong independence will continue, city's leader Carrie Lam vows in report to Beijing on banning of separatist party (SCMP, April 19): Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam has vowed to continue the crackdown on the city's pro-independence movement in a Beijing-requested report which details the government's efforts in banning a separatist party last year. The document, submitted to the central government on April 16, was the result of an unprecedented state letter issued weeks ago requesting a report from the chief executive on the outlawing of the Hong Kong National Party (HKNP) while backing the move. In the report's conclusion, Lam said the city government had a responsibility to safeguard national security and its stance on Hong Kong independence was "very clear and unambiguous". "Any act undermining national security is not in the interests of the nation, and will bring turmoil to Hong Kong society," she wrote. Pro-democracy lawmaker Alvin Yeung said the HKNP ban was entirely within the authority of the Hong Kong government and he feared the move left the city on a slippery slope for Beijing to intervene. But pro-Beijing lawmaker Holden Chow dismissed the criticism and said Lam was only doing her job as she was constitutionally accountable to the central government.

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Hong Kong mainland affairs minister bemoans pro-democracy lawmakers' boycott of Shanghai and Hangzhou trip (SCMP, April 21): Hong Kong's mainland affairs minister Patrick Nip said he was disappointed that pro-democracy lawmakers boycotted the city legislature's four-day mainland trip, saying they should not politicise the visit. All seven pro-democracy lawmakers who signed up for the official visit to Shanghai and Hangzhou decided to drop out earlier this month, as they said the political atmosphere had turned sour over the bill which would allow the transfer of fugitives to jurisdictions the city lacks an extradition deal with, including mainland China, Macau and Taiwan.

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Four of nine Occupy leaders jailed for up to 16 months over roles in Hong Kong's 2014 umbrella movement (SCMP, April 24): Hong Kong reopened one of the most emotional and divisive chapters in its history as four of nine democracy leaders and key activists convicted on public nuisance charges over the 2014 Occupy protests were jailed for up to 16 months. Two founders of the city's biggest civil disobedience movement, academics Benny Tai and Dr Chan Kin-man were given the longest jail terms, at 16 months. Because of poor health and his years of contribution to society, Reverend Chu Yiu-ming, the third founder, had a 16-month sentence suspended for two years. Legislator Shiu Ka-chun and League of Social Democrats vice-chairman Raphael Wong received eight months each. Lawmaker Tanya Chan had her sentencing adjourned as she would have to undergo surgery in two weeks. Former student leaders Tommy Cheung and Eason Chung were sentenced to 200 hours of community service and eight months' jail respectively, but Chung also had his prison term suspended. The judge criticised the nine for putting their political demands before the lives of others.

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Bookseller Lam Wing-kee leaves Hong Kong for Taiwan, fearing proposed extradition law will mean he is sent to mainland China (SCMP, April 27): Bookseller Lam Wing-kee, who claimed he was kidnapped by Chinese agents in 2015 for selling books banned across the border, left Hong Kong for a new life in Taiwan, expressing deep fears about the government's controversial extradition proposals. A source close to Lam said his move had received the blessing of Taiwanese authorities. Lam was among five Hong Kong booksellers who disappeared in late 2015. He reappeared in June 2016 and claimed security agents in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, had put him through eight months of "mental torture". Mainland authorities have accused him of illegal operations and jumping bail, and he is still wanted for criminal investigation.

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Estimated 130,000 protesters join march against proposed extradition law that will allow transfer of fugitives from Hong Kong to mainland China (SCMP, April 28): An estimated 130,000 protesters took to the streets in Hong Kong to oppose a legislative amendment that would allow the transfer of fugitives to places such as mainland China, in the largest turnout for a rally in five years. Organiser Civil

Human Rights Front, warning it could escalate its actions, demanded the proposed law be dropped immediately. Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung dismissed worries about possible abuse of the proposed extradition arrangement, saying it would not apply to cases involving human rights, politics or capital punishment. Executive Council member Ronny Tong had earlier urged the government not to bow to pressure, no matter the size of the protest. Critics fear Beijing could abuse the new arrangement to target political activists. Human rights groups also claim forced confessions and arbitrary detention are routine on the mainland. In pushing for the changes, the government said its amendment bill was aimed at closing such a loophole so fugitives could be brought to justice.

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Man who killed girlfriend in Taiwan could be free by October, setting effective deadline for Hong Kong government's extradition plan (SCMP, April 30): Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam has stressed the "absolute urgency" to have a controversial bill passed in time to extradite a fugitive wanted in Taiwan over the murder of his girlfriend, given that he could be released as early as October after he was jailed for 29 months on money laundering charges by the High Court. The man at the centre of the storm was sentenced for money laundering stemming from the theft of his murdered girlfriend's money and property. "Many people have stated their views. I hope the government can explain more to ease people's concerns," Lam said. "If there are any constructive suggestions from lawmakers that might help address worries among the public, I promise I will handle and consider their words seriously."

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International relations

Hong Kong government rejects 'one country, one and a half systems' warning in British parliamentary report (SCMP, April 6): Hong Kong's government rejected warnings that its autonomy and rule of law were at risk after a British parliamentary report concluded the city was moving towards "one country, one and a half systems". A spokesman for the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau said the policy of "Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong" was intact and "in strict accordance with the provisions of the Basic Law", the city's mini-constitution. The British report said Hong Kong authorities had targeted not only independence advocates but also journalists who gave them a platform. It said "independence is not a realistic option" for Hong Kong. "But citizens of a free society have the right to express their views freely. If the Hong Kong authorities' approach to the independence movement were to be replicated more broadly, this would be a very grave threat to the autonomy promised under the joint declaration."

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United States retracts critical comments about Hong Kong in 2019 National Trade Estimate report (SCMP, April 9): Washington has retracted critical comments about Hong Kong in a recent trade report over the city's alleged failure to fulfil its obligations to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The move came a week after Hong Kong complained to the US government over the "inaccurate" statement in the US 2019 National Trade Estimate (NTE) report. Hong Kong is a free port and there is no law, or administrative procedure, for valuing goods for customs duties purposes. In accordance with the relevant WTO agreement, Hong Kong made the notifications to the WTO in 1996. As there has been no change to the policy since, there is no need for Hong Kong to submit further notifications to the WTO, according to the Hong Kong government.

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British lawmakers condemn conviction of nine Occupy leaders in Hong Kong, saying ruling was politically motivated (SCMP, April 12): British parliamentarians have condemned the conviction of nine leaders of Hong Kong's biggest civil disobedience movement for being "politically motivated", while a government minister expressed concern the ruling could discourage legitimate protests in the future. The MPs also voiced concerns about the Hong Kong government's plan to change the city's extradition law, including allowing fugitives to be handed to mainland China. On the court ruling, a spokeswoman for the British consulate in Hong Kong said it hoped the ruling would not discourage legitimate protests in the future nor discourage young people from engaging in politics. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam has hit back at local and international critics who accused her government of political persecution, dismissing their "groundless attacks".

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Foreign diplomats voice concern over freedoms of speech and assembly (SCMP, April 25): Foreign diplomats in Hong Kong voiced concern over Hongkongers' freedoms of speech and assembly in light of the jailings of nine Occupy leaders. A spokesman for the US consulate said the charges the activists faced and the sentences were a cause for concern. "Such prosecutions can stifle the exercise of the basic freedoms enshrined in the Basic Law," he said, referring to Hong Kong's mini-constitution. A spokesman for the British consulate said it would be deeply concerning if people were deterred from taking part in peaceful protest. The European Union's office said the sentences "may hinder Hong Kong people from exercising their rights to peaceful assembly and pursuing their aspirations for universal

suffrage". Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council said it was "deeply regretful" the activists were convicted and sentenced for peaceful protests.

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United States 'disappointed' by convictions of Hong Kong's Occupy democracy protest leaders, warns against erosion of city's governing formula (SCMP, April 26): The US State Department has for the first time directly criticised a Hong Kong court ruling on the 2014 Occupy protests, expressing its disappointment over the convictions of nine leaders of the civil disobedience movement and warning that "continued erosion" of the one country, two systems governing formula would risk the city's special international status. The State Department also said it was closely monitoring a proposed amendment to the city's fugitive law that would allow for the extradition of suspects to both mainland China and Taiwan on a case-by-case basis.

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Legal affairs and human rights

New chief of Hong Kong's Equal Opportunities Commission warns against 'hastily made law' to protect sexual minority rights (SCMP, April 12): The new chief of Hong Kong's anti-discrimination watchdog has avoided committing himself to pushing the government for legislation to protect sexual minority rights, warning a "hastily made law" would do more harm than good in society. Ricky Chu, who started his three-year term as chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission, also stressed that the watchdog should remain neutral on the issue of LGBT rights to win the trust of opposing sides.

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Protecting rule of law in Hong Kong will be 'uphill battle' says lawyers group, as they predict situation will get worse in city (SCMP, April 12): The Progressive Lawyers Group, which is made up of about 100 lawyers and law students, published a report titled "The Good Fight: Hong Kong's Uphill Battle for the Rule of Law". The group highlighted a number of incidents from last year that had caused alarm over the city's rule of law, including the prosecution of nine Occupy activists, and the government's refusal to renew the working visa of British journalist Victor Mallet. "The deterioration of the rule of law will continue and will accelerate, mainly because there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel, regarding electoral reform," said Jason Ng, convenor of the group.

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Leader of powerful Hong Kong rural body vows 'at all costs' to fight to safeguard male villagers' right to build small houses following landmark court ruling (SCMP, April 17): The top leader of Hong Kong's powerful rural affairs body has promised villagers he will fight to safeguard their small-house rights "at all costs" as patriarchs take a more militant posture over a landmark court ruling. The High Court ruled that the government trading or granting public land to villagers to build small houses was unconstitutional. While acknowledging the entitlement to build a house existed as a traditional right protected under the Basic Law, the court said it only applied on private rural land already owned by villagers.

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Press freedom in Hong Kong hits six-year low as public fears Beijing's influence (SCMP, April 17): Press freedom in Hong Kong has hit a six-year low among the city's public with Beijing's influence labelled their main concern for the first time, according to an annual public opinion survey. More than 1,000 members of the public gave the city's press freedom an overall score of 45, on a scale of 0 to 100 – a record low since the survey, jointly released by the Hong Kong Journalists Association and the Public Opinion Programme of the University of Hong Kong on Tuesday, started in 2013. The association's chairman Chris Yeung said: "The public and journalist community are increasingly worried. Some responses are even alarming."

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Health

Hong Kong's new voluntary health insurance plan kicks in, but government expects possible benefit adjustments (SCMP, April 2): Hong Kong's new voluntary health insurance plan officially kicked in on April 1. Deputy Secretary for Food and Health Fong Ngai said the government would monitor the scheme's roll-out to see if changes were needed. The Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme was designed to relieve the burden on the city's public health care system. Under the current arrangement, benefit amounts offered in standard plans are prescribed by the Food and Health Bureau.

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Overseas doctor recruitment row intensifies as hospital consultants and Hong Kong health minister call on Medical Council to explain why it rejected the proposals (SCMP, April 6): A row caused by Hong Kong's medical watchdog rejecting proposals to relieve a chronic doctor shortage escalated as public hospital consultants united with the city's health minister to demand an explanation.

The Medical Council dismissed four options aimed at attracting more overseas doctors to the city's understaffed public hospital wards. Hong Kong's public hospitals are short of about 300 doctors at any given time. Recruiting more from abroad has long been floated as a solution but has been met with resistance from the health sector.

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Hong Kong sashimi lovers beware: watchdog finds excessive mercury levels in over 50 per cent of raw tuna samples (SCMP, April 16): Professor Nora Tam, chairwoman of the Consumer Council's testing committee, said that of 19 tuna sashimi samples taken from local restaurants and supermarkets, 10 were found to contain methylmercury levels exceeding the limit in Hong Kong by a range of 6 per cent to nearly 200 per cent. Another tuna sample was found to have parasites, specifically roundworms. Tests on 31 raw salmon samples also found one to contain parasites. The Centre for Food Safety advised the public to avoid eating raw fish, especially the elderly, young children, pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems.

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Doctors and Hong Kong government move closer to agreement on procedures for staff trained overseas (SCMP, April 26): The medical sector and the government have narrowed their differences over how to relax the rules for overseas-trained doctors to work in Hong Kong, after a leading professional group expressed goodwill in a meeting with the health minister Sophia Chan. Chan also said there had been a positive response to proposals that the application procedures should be streamlined for overseas-trained specialist doctors to come to work in the city, and that there should also be more promotion opportunities for them.

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Environment

After a stop-start history, Hong Kong is restarting a road-pricing plan for traffic-clogged Central (SCMP, April 15): Proposals for electronic road pricing have been made several times since the 1980s, only to be shelved after furious objections from motorists, district officials and politicians. The government's new plan is to charge motorists who enter an area of Central covering 14 streets from the waterfront to Hollywood Road, including the major arteries of Queen's Road Central, Des Voeux Road Central and Connaught Road Central. The proposal will be up for consultation from next month.

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Hong Kong sixth out of 13 in Asia-Pacific green rankings but the city could do better, particularly in cutting waste (SCMP, April 21): Hong Kong is the sixth most environmentally friendly place in the Asia-Pacific region, lagging behind some of its neighbours, according to an international consumer research group. ValueChampion compiled its findings based on publicly available data on 13 cities and countries in the region to determine which places generate less pollution and plastic waste, while adopting renewable energy technologies, preserving green space and encouraging public transport. The city came behind Japan, Singapore, Australia, South Korea and New Zealand in the rankings. Although Hong Kong fared well in terms of encouraging public transport, greenhouse gas emissions, the availability of green space and water safety, Hong Kong produces the most plastic waste per capita.

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Green groups and academics outraged over new housing project near Hong Kong Wetland Park, calling it a 'bad precedent' (SCMP, April 23): Academics and environmental groups have urged the government to review its wetland conservation policy after the Buildings Department approved another housing project on the edge of Hong Kong Wetland Park. The department revealed last month that it had approved the building plans of Mutual Luck Investment to build 19 residential towers with nearly 2,000 total flats in Fung Lok Wai, one of the last remaining wetland areas to the east of the nature park. Roy Ng, campaign manager for the Conservancy Association, said the latest residential developments would threaten the habitat of the birds and other wildlife.

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Culture and education

'Greater Bay Area' opens up to Hong Kong teachers, but can they accept lower pay and political differences on mainland? (SCMP, April 6): Although Beijing is making it easier for Hong Kong teachers to work in the "Greater Bay Area", many are deterred by escalating political tension as well as differences in culture, education systems and pay. Since January, Hong Kong residents have been allowed to sit for teaching certification examinations previously meant only for mainland Chinese, with the request that candidates "support the leadership of the Communist Party and its education policies", according to the Ministry of Education. Until now, most Hong Kong teachers working on the mainland have been employed by private international schools.

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Dispute at Hong Kong's German Swiss International School highlights prickly matter of language requirements for board members (SCMP, April 15): A controversy at the German Swiss International School has cast light on the governance of overseas-funded schools, which have contrasting requirements for sitting board members. The row erupted on the board of the school, which is funded by the governments of Germany and Switzerland, after three Chinese parents who do not speak German fluently were elected as board directors last month. According to an article of the board's regulations, only members who are fluent in written and spoken German are eligible to become directors. The three parents were each given the title of "pending director" despite being successful in the election in early March. One email exchange between the German consul and the chairman of the board on March 29, which the Post has seen, reads: "The German language requirement in the article was fully compliant with the law of Hong Kong. Ignoring these warnings and ignoring the existing rules has led to the situation. "From the perspective of the German consulate general, the election was a clear breach of the articles," it continued. The school conceded in a statement that the board article incorporated 15 years ago – which states that only members fluent in written and spoken German are eligible to be elected board directors – is outdated and the school is working to revise and update the companies ordinance.

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Threat from artificial intelligence sees Hong Kong education fund doubled as city workers are urged to prepare for world of the future (SCMP, April 22): An enhanced subsidy for adults in Hong Kong to acquire new skills is the government's latest effort to prepare workers for redundancy as artificial intelligence and technology develop, the city's welfare minister said. Secretary for Labour and Welfare Law Chi-kwong said the upgraded Continuing Education Fund starting this month was part of the strategy to respond to the potential impact of AI development on future demand for labour. "The future development of AI and technology may massively replace many existing job types," Law said. "One of [the bureau's] responsibilities is how to make good preparation for the changes in the future labour market."

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Macau

President of Macau's Legislative Assembly Ho Iat-seng tipped to be city's next chief executive and will probably run unopposed (SCMP, April 25): The president of Macau's legislature, Ho Iat-seng, was expected to be the sole candidate in the city's leadership election in August, after he announced his intention to run recently. A respected business leader in Macau, Ho Iat-seng entered politics in 2000 as a local deputy to China's legislature, the National People's Congress. From 2004 to 2009 he was an adviser to Macau chief executive Edmund Ho in the Executive Council. Under Macau's electoral law, the chief executive is elected by a 400-member election committee. Incumbent Chief Executive Fernando Chui's tenure ends on December 19 after 10 years in the post.

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Press articles related to Switzerland and Swiss matters

Switzerland to sign belt and road deal during President Ueli Maurer's China trip (Reuters, SCMP, April 16): Switzerland will sign an accord backing China's "Belt and Road Initiative" when President Ueli Maurer visits China this month, cementing ties with a major trading partner as other Western countries view the gargantuan project with scepticism. Neutral Switzerland sees the belt and road accord to be signed during Maurer's trip as a way to support economic development, especially in central Asia. "The aim of the memorandum is for both parties to intensify cooperation on trade, investment and project financing in third markets along the routes of the 'Belt and Road Initiative,'" the finance ministry said without giving more details. Switzerland, one of the first Western states to recognise the People's Republic, was the first country in continental Europe to reach a free-trade agreement with China, its largest trade partner after the European Union and US.

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