



September in Hong Kong

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

Economy + Finance

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Economy + Finance

Hong Kong officials offer firms caught in US-China trade war and city protests fast tracked access to government funds worth up to HK\$35 billion (SCMP, Sept. 5): Smaller firms in Hong Kong caught in the crossfire of the city's protests and the US-China trade war will have immediate access to funding worth up to HK\$35 billion (US\$4.5 billion), senior officials have said. Financial Secretary Paul Chan and Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Edward Yau said the "instant help" was for small and medium-sized firms struggling to raise capital, so they could "ride out the storm". Under the funding proposals, the application process for fresh government cash was being streamlined for smaller companies facing a credit crunch. There were about 40 government funds available with funding worth HK\$35 billion up for grabs.

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Extradition bill's withdrawal 'is first step' in getting Hong Kong back to business (SCMP, Sept. 5): Hong Kong's business community welcomed Chief Executive Carrie Lam's decision to withdraw her administration's proposed extradition bill, with industry groups calling it the first step to restoring confidence and the city's international reputation. Business chambers said the decision was a breakthrough in a political crisis that dealt fresh blows to an economy already weakened by the US-China trade war. The unrest battered the city's tourism and retail sectors. Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Edward Yau said that Hong Kong tourist arrivals were down 45 per cent year on year in the last week of August.

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Beleaguered Hong Kong hit by double whammy as Fitch Ratings downgrades city and stock exchange hit by cyberattacks (SCMP, Sept. 7): Fitch Ratings downgraded the city's rating a notch from AA+ to AA and the city's outlook from stable to negative as it raised doubts about its governance under the "one country, two systems" principle amid continuing protests, an assessment stoutly rejected by city leader Carrie Lam. The downgrade added to the bad news about the stock exchange website, which was forced to suspend its derivatives trading on Sept. 5 afternoon and was found to have been plagued by denial-of-service attacks and an unrelated software glitch. "We disagree with Fitch. That is because what happened in the past few months did not undermine 'one country, two systems' at all,"

Lam said. Although the latest rating means the city still enjoys the status of third-highest investment grade, it will have implications on the borrowing costs of companies and the government.

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Hong Kong tourism suffers worst downturn since Sars outbreak in 2003 – arrivals down 40 per cent in August over protest crisis (SCMP, Sept. 10): Tourist arrivals fell nearly 40 per cent in August from the same time last year, Financial Secretary Paul Chan posted on his blog. That drop is the biggest year-on-year monthly decline since 2003 – during the severe acute respiratory syndrome (Sars) outbreak – and a worrying trend after the 5 per cent drop recorded in July. Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests, triggered by a controversial extradition bill, have dragged on into the 14th week and show no signs of easing. The damage on tourism, one of the four pillars of Hong Kong's economy, has sent shock waves through local industries from catering to hotels and retail. Occupancy rates across the city have plunged below 50 per cent, from over 90 per cent in the past, according to Yiu Si-wing, a legislator representing the tourism industry.

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Social unrest won't stop Hong Kong playing a key role in China's belt and road strategy, say business leaders (SCMP, Sept. 12): The social unrest plaguing Hong Kong will not prevent the city from playing a significant role in China's development and its plan to grow global trade links, said business leaders at the Belt and Road Summit. "Hong Kong remains and will continue to play a very unique role in China's continued development, and also more importantly, in the Belt and Road Initiative [in terms of] our professional services, legal system but also our financial centre," said Victor Chu, chairman and chief executive of First Eastern Investment Group. The two-day summit, held against a backdrop of increasingly violent anti-government protests, attracted 5,000 businessmen and professionals from 60 countries across Europe, Asia and Africa.

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Hong Kong keeps top spot as world's freest economy but Canadian think tank again warns over 'interference from China' (SCMP, Sept. 13): Hong Kong has again been ranked the world's freest economy by the Fraser Institute of Canada, ahead of Singapore, although the city was once more warned that interference from Beijing in local affairs could threaten its position. The 2019 edition of its report "Economic Freedom of the World" placed Hong Kong first in the ranking of free economies, followed by Singapore, New Zealand, Switzerland, the United States, Ireland, Britain, Canada, Australia and Mauritius. China was 113. "While Hong Kong remains the most economically free jurisdiction in the world, interference from China – including the violent crackdown on pro-democracy protests – severely threatens Hong Kong's rule of law, which helps ensure equal freedom for all, and endangers Hong Kong's top position," Fred McMahon, the institute's Dr Michael A. Walker research chair in economic freedom, said. While the government welcomed the ranking, a spokesman hit out at the institute's "ungrounded" comments on the rule of law.

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Hong Kong moves on vacancy tax bill to target property developers hoarding new flats (SCMP, Sept. 13): Hong Kong's embattled government is moving ahead with plans to start imposing a vacancy tax on property developers hoarding new flats, and will submit a bill for vetting by lawmakers when they return to work in October after their summer break. The vacancy tax, which was announced in Chief Executive Carrie Lam's policy address last year and is seen as a populist measure in a city that struggles to provide affordable housing, would be tabled at the Legislative Council. The tax does not apply to the secondary market, which means private homeowners holding on to empty flats will not be affected. "It seems to me the government is keen to target the developers as a way to save itself from the political crisis," said Democratic Party lawmaker Andrew Wan.

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London Exchange rejects Hong Kong's surprise takeover bid in strongly worded endorsement of Shanghai as 'preferred partner' (SCMP, Sept. 14): The London Stock Exchange has rebuffed Hong Kong's unsolicited takeover bid in a strongly worded letter and separate website post spelling out its concerns about the "fundamental flaws" of the plan, which included the current political crisis engulfing the city. The UK bourse's board of directors said it had unanimously rejected the US\$36.6 billion proposal from Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing, which surprised the market when it was announced. In a letter to the chairman and chief executive of Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing, LSE chairman Don Robert pulled no punches, making clear his preference for Shanghai over Hong Kong as a strategic partner. He was referring to LSE's existing stock connect scheme with Shanghai Stock Exchange, which he said gives it direct access to China.

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Hong Kong protests fail to slow city's role as foreign investment gateway to China, government data shows (SCMP, Sept. 18): Hong Kong's role as the primary gateway for long-term international

investors to transfer money into China has remained largely intact despite the city being hit by increasingly violent anti-government protests, according to data released by the Chinese government. China received US\$62.9 billion in foreign direct investment via Hong Kong in the first eight months of this year, accounting for 70 per cent of total inflows, according to China's Ministry of Commerce. It has held a long-standing position as a bridgehead for overseas investors to access China and an irreplaceable role for "China money" to be disguised as "foreign money" before being invested back into mainland China to access preferential policies.

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Hong Kong commerce chief Edward Yau says American investors unshaken by protest crisis – and US human rights bill may not hurt economy (SCMP, Sept. 22): American companies are still eager to invest in Hong Kong and are unlikely to be put off by a bill that could pave the way for diplomatic action and economic sanctions against the city's government, commerce chief Edward Yau has said. Yau, speaking in Los Angeles, said the views of US politicians did not necessarily represent public opinion across the country. He said many American companies "understand Hong Kong's situation" and were still interested in exploring opportunities in the city. Yau said the effects of the bill would depend on whether the US government adopted new measures for Hong Kong. He was doubtful Washington would impose new measures on Hong Kong.

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Number of Hongkongers expecting home prices to fall doubles, Citi survey shows, as political crisis darkens the mood (SCMP, Sept. 25): The violent protests that have engulfed Hong Kong have taken a serious toll on confidence in the local property market. The number of Hongkongers who believe home prices will fall in the next 12 months has doubled since the pro-democracy demonstrations began in early June, according to a survey by Citi Hong Kong. Fifty-six per cent of 500 people quizzed about their views on the market in the third quarter said they expect prices to come down, compared with 28 per cent in the April-to-June period. "The results show that many local citizens are expecting a continuous fall in property prices, but the overall interest in property ownership sees no material change despite their views on the property market," said Citi Hong Kong.

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Hong Kong airport feels unrest-related slump, set for 2 million fewer travellers in 2019 (SCMP, Sept. 25): Hong Kong's airport is set to handle 2 million fewer travellers this year than in 2018, as it feels the effects of anti-government protests in the city, according to a revised official forecast. The unrest-related slump is particularly significant given that the travel hub's passenger numbers had been growing in the first half of the year – up 1.03 million in the year to July against the same period of 2018. Michael Yuen, general manager for airport and industry collaboration at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA), told Air Transport World that there would no longer be a 3 per cent increase in traffic, as estimated, but a decrease of the same size, the first annual drop since 2009.

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Plot of commercial land at Kai Tak, Hong Kong's former airport, withdrawn from government tender after failing to attract high enough bids (SCMP, Sept. 26): A plot of commercial land on the runway of Hong Kong's former international airport has been withdrawn from sale after it failed to attract a high enough bid, the Lands Department said. The waterfront site with a gross floor area of 863,000 square feet is earmarked for development of a hotel, offices and shopping centres. The apparent lack of appetite for the site comes as the crippling social unrest that has engulfed Hong Kong, devastating tourist numbers and tarnishing its global reputation. Land sales are the biggest generator of revenues for the Hong Kong government.

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New World donates almost a fifth of its farmland reserves towards building public homes to ease Hong Kong's housing woes (SCMP, Sept. 26): New World Development said it would donate 3 million square feet, nearly a fifth of its farmland reserves to Hong Kong's government and to non-profit organisations for building public homes, stepping up with a tentative answer to the city's housing crisis. The donation could compel the rest of Hong Kong's landowning families to contribute toward the city's land supply to alleviate a housing problem that has Chinese state media has blamed for fuelling the biggest public unrest in the city's history.

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Hong Kong trade woes worsen as exports drop 6.3 per cent in August amid ongoing US-China trade war (SCMP, Sept. 27): The recent weakness in Hong Kong's exports worsened in August, recording a 6.3 per cent year-on-year drop amid the ongoing US-China trade war. Exports declined to HK\$352.7 billion (US\$44.9 billion) while imports shrank 11.1 per cent to HK\$380.8 billion, leaving a deficit of HK\$28 billion, the Census and Statistics Department said. For the first eight months, overseas shipments dropped 4.3 per cent while imports slid at a bigger magnitude, at 6 per cent year on year.

"Uncertainties associated with the development of US-mainland trade tensions will continue to pose downside risks to the already subdued external trading environment. Hong Kong's merchandise export performance will likely remain weak or even worsen further in the near term," a government spokesman said.

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Hong Kong protests leave 'golden week' tourist boom in tatters as visitor arrivals during Chinese holiday period are set to be slashed by a third (SCMP, Sept. 30): Hong Kong's protests have soured the appetite of mainland Chinese travellers for the city during the "golden week" holiday, leaving tourism, retail and food sectors reeling ahead of the traditional peak period. Industry heads predict a sharp year-on-year decline in business as tourist arrivals are expected to tumble around 30 per cent for the seven-day break following National Day on October 1. Restaurants expect a similar slump in turnover and hotel occupancy rates are likely to be slashed by half for the holiday week. The expected nosedive in demand has pushed many firms to offer large discounts in a bid to ride out the impact from the political storm. Tourism lawmaker Yiu Si-wing described his estimated fall on tourist arrivals as the worst since 2003 when the severe acute respiratory syndrome outbreak swept the city.

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Financial Secretary Paul Chan warns of deficit as Hong Kong government earns less amid protest crisis but continues to boost relief spending (SCMP, Sept. 30): Hong Kong's finance minister has warned of a possible deficit this year because the government has increased spending on relief measures while earning less amid an economic downturn. Financial Secretary Paul Chan gave his assessment after the city's tourism, retail and food sectors reported declining revenue brought on by three months of crippling anti-government protests. "The government now has a reserve of more than HK\$1.1 trillion, meaning the fiscal position is still sound," he said. He said the government would not cut spending amid the pressure of an economic downturn, and would roll out more measures to support the economy and help residents in due time.

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Domestic politics

Masked protesters wreak havoc on Hong Kong airport and trash railway station, forcing desperate travellers to head to city on foot (SCMP, Sept. 2): Anti-government protesters brought chaos and vandalism to Hong Kong's international airport again on Sept. 1, blocking access routes, forcing travellers to walk part of the way to the city, crippling train services and prompting a shutdown of the Tung Chung line by trashing the station. The government issued a statement that severely condemned the vandalism and illegal acts of the protesters. While the protesters' actions disrupted travellers who were arriving or leaving the city, they did not succeed in paralysing the airport, unlike on August 12-13.

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Election ban on Hong Kong pro-democracy activist Agnes Chow overturned (SCMP, Sept. 2): A Hong Kong court has overturned an election ban on pro-democracy activist Agnes Chow Ting, who was barred from a Legislative Council by-election last year because her political party had called for self-determination in the city. The High Court also ruled that pro-democracy lawmaker Au Nok-hin, who ran in Chow's place and won the seat on Hong Kong Island, was not duly elected, because of Chow's wrongful disqualification. Election official Anne Teng invalidated Chow's candidacy, saying the doctrine of "democratic self-determination" promoted by Demosisto contravened the "one country, two systems" principle implemented under the Basic Law. Mr Justice Anderson Chow found that Teng failed to afford Chow an opportunity at the first instance to respond to such doubts. But the judge held firm that self-determination, a doctrine some likened to pro-independence, would not be compatible with the Basic Law, which states that Hong Kong is an integral part of China.

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Hong Kong protests: defiant university students, school pupils and residents go on strike, piling pressure on government to meet demands (SCMP, Sept. 3): Defiant university students, school pupils and Hongkongers from all walks of life went on a citywide strike on Sept. 2, giving the embattled government an ultimatum to meet their demands or face escalated protest action. The strike was held as police announced that 1,117 people had been arrested since the anti-government protests erupted in June. Thousands of students from across the city held a mass rally at Chinese University to kick off a two-week class boycott. Organisers said 30,000 took part. Student representatives read out a joint statement, declaring: "We will carry on with our beliefs and continue our fight. Be it bullets, be it white terror, be it the totalitarian regime, whatever obstacles stand in our way shall never be enough to break our determination."

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Hong Kong protests: Carrie Lam insists she never offered to resign, denies Beijing is stopping her from quitting (Sept. 4): Hong Kong's embattled leader made it clear that she had never offered to resign over the political crisis and social unrest she sparked with her now-abandoned extradition bill, rejecting suggestions that Beijing was stopping her from quitting. She was speaking a day after an audio recording leaked to Reuters suggested she had said in a closed-door meeting that she would step down, given the choice, for bringing "unforgivable havoc" to the city. Lam also dismissed suggestions by critics that the city had lost its "high degree of autonomy" as Beijing had compromised the "one country, two systems" principle by exerting pressure on the Hong Kong government not to give in to protesters' demands. "The central government has also been insisting on the one country, two systems principle. Beijing still believes that the city's government is capable of handling this difficult [situation] ... so there is no issue of the loss of one country, two systems or the high degree of autonomy." Asked if she was considering invoking the Emergency Regulations Ordinance, as some reports had suggested, Lam reiterated that it was her government's responsibility to consider the use of different laws to deal with the crisis in Hong Kong.

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Beijing calls on all Hong Kong institutions to fight 'violent criminals' and end protests (SCMP, Sept. 4): "The Hong Kong government, including the executive, legislative and judiciary branches, as well as all sectors of society must take 'bridling turmoil and curbing violence' as the city's most pressing task and the overwhelming priority," Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office (HKMAO) spokesman Yang Guang said. "Especially to those key violent criminals and their backstage masterminds, organisers and agitators, [we] must show no mercy and pursue till the end." Separately President Xi Jinping listed Hong Kong and Macau issues, along with economic, political, military and foreign affairs, as areas that would face massive and "complex" conflicts as he rallied cadres to struggle against any forces that would threaten Communist Party rule. Pro-Beijing legislator Starry Lee said Yang's remarks showed that the central government was concerned about Hong Kong's situation, but pan-democratic lawmakers said they proved that Beijing had lost touch with the Hong Kong people. "We are not trying to overthrow the Communist Party; we just want Beijing to respect Hong Kong people, and let us elect the chief executive and all lawmakers by popular ballot," Democratic Party lawmaker Helena Wong said.

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Beijing supports me all the way, Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam says, stressing decision to withdraw extradition bill was hers (SCMP, Sept. 5): The decision to withdraw the contentious extradition bill was hers, Hong Kong's embattled leader has stressed, as she revealed that the central government had been supportive of her "all the way" and fully understood and respected her calls over the entire three-month-long crisis. In announcing her decision (to withdraw the bill) on Sept. 4, Lam also ruled out a second key demand from protesters – the setting up of an independent commission of inquiry to investigate police conduct when tackling demonstrations. Lam also said she would invite professionals and academics to examine the city's deep-rooted problems, while she and principal officials would reach out to different communities to start direct dialogues. She also said she would fully endorse the Independent Police Complaints Council's work by inducting new members and overseas experts. Opposition lawmakers were not impressed by Lam's remarks, saying the chief executive failed to explain how her decision would end social unrest.

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Withdrawal of extradition bill not an attempt to compromise with violent protesters, Hong Kong Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung says (SCMP, Sept. 8): Chief secretary Matthew Cheung has said the government was not making a compromise with violent protesters by announcing a formal withdrawal of the extradition bill, which sparked the worst unrest in the city in decades. He said Chief Executive Carrie Lam was serious about listening to the grievances of Hong Kong's people. He added the government would organise meetings for officials to talk to residents and hoped such gatherings would not be seen as a "public relations stunt". The city's financial chief Paul Chan and welfare chief Law Chi-kwong also wrote on their blogs that residents should set aside their differences and find solutions for Hong Kong.

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Hong Kong will overcome present challenges to play key role in China's trade strategy, city's leader Carrie Lam tells annual Belt and Road Summit (SCMP, Sept. 12): Hong Kong's embattled leader Carrie Lam remains confident the city will rise again, after more than three months of increasingly violent anti-government protests. Addressing at the annual Belt and Road Summit, Carrie Lam acknowledged that Hong Kong is facing challenges posed by the trade war between the United States and China as well as ongoing social unrest. As Lam and her colleagues assured the foreign guests that Hong Kong would overcome its current difficulties, senior Beijing officials stressed their support for the city leader, agreeing that social stability and long-term prosperity were linked intrinsically. Xie Feng, commissioner of Beijing's foreign ministry in Hong Kong, said that for the city to succeed in international trade, it must defend the one country, two systems principle and the rule of law. "Some extremist forces

in Hong Kong have ... posed grave threats to public security, and flagrantly challenged national sovereignty," he said. "Some foreign forces have intervened... No time should be lost to end the violence and chaos, and every citizen should shoulder their responsibility to defend the rule of law."

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Battles and brawls in Hong Kong's commercial heart as peaceful protest turns ugly (SCMP, Sept. 16): What started as an illegal but peaceful march descended into chaos and violence on Sept. 15 as radical protesters battled riot police in the commercial heart of Hong Kong. Masked mobs hurled petrol bombs at police, set the exit of one railway station ablaze and vandalised the facilities of another station. Riot police fired tear gas and rubber bullets in return and called in water cannons to disperse the crowds. Most of the shops and malls in the areas closed early in anticipation of trouble as the city entered its 15th weekend in a row of social unrest. The lawlessness escalated into confrontations in North Point, with some white-clad people clashing with protesters dressed in black. The Hong Kong government released a statement to strongly condemn the radical protesters for their violent acts.

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Ex-World Bank chief Robert Zoellick says Hong Kong leaders have lost touch, warns of 'dangerous situation' (SCMP, Sept. 20): Hong Kong's leaders are out of touch with the people and have been slow to respond to their needs, according to former World Bank president Robert Zoellick. The former top US trade official said the city was in a "dangerous situation" and any further escalation of its violent protests could also worsen China's tensions with the United States. "I'm very concerned that the Hong Kong government has lost touch with its public, including on issues such as housing for young people," Zoellick said at a round table event in Singapore. Zoellick said any resolution of the crisis had to come from within Hong Kong's legal framework under the "one country, two systems" formula by which the city was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 and promised a high level of autonomy.

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Anti-government protesters rampage through Hong Kong as police struggle to keep up (SCMP, Sept. 22): Anti-government protesters went on an escalated rampage across Hong Kong, taking over shopping centres where they targeted mainland Chinese-linked businesses and vandalised shop fronts, trashing metro stations, blocking roads, hurling bricks and petrol bombs at police, setting fire to barricades and desecrating China's national flag. Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at them and made several arrests. There were also reports of people being beaten up by protest mobs for challenging or provoking them. A spokesman for the government said it strongly condemned radical protesters' violent and vandalistic acts in various districts and police would follow up in accordance with the law to bring lawbreakers to justice.

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Chinese state media condemns Hong Kong protesters who desecrate national flag, calling it 'blasphemy' (SCMP, Sept. 23): State media has slammed protesters for desecrating the national flag, describing the abuse as "blasphemy" against the Chinese people. Communist Party mouthpiece Xinhua also called on silent Hongkongers to serve as guardians of the ensign ahead of National Day on October 1. During violent unrest on Sept. 22, anti-government protesters removed a Chinese flag from outside the town hall, before taking it to a nearby demonstration at a shopping centre, where it was stamped on and spray-painted. The flag was dumped in a large waste bin and later thrown into the Shing Mun River. The state-run agency also urged Hong Kong law enforcement to punish "all acts of abusing the national flag". Beijing sees the desecration of national symbols, including the Chinese flag, as a direct challenge to its sovereignty. Police later said a 21-year-old man was arrested for removal of the flag.

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Hong Kong police may have to open fire if protesters attempt to snatch guns, warns head of officers' association (SCMP, Sept. 24): The head of Hong Kong's biggest frontline police association has warned that officers could be forced to open fire if protesters try to snatch their guns. Lam Chi-wai, the chairman of the Junior Police Officers' Association, said it would be "the only and necessary decision" in that instance. Television news footage showed one of the protesters trying to snatch the officer's gun, but the protester was unsuccessful as other officers arrived and chased them away.

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Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam says she fears damaging city's reputation further by invoking emergency powers to quell protests (SCMP, Sept. 25): Hong Kong's embattled leader said she was holding back from invoking emergency powers to crack down on more than three months of anti-government protest chaos and escalating violence on the streets to avoid inflicting further damage on the city's reputation. Chief Executive Carrie Lam also defended the use of force by police, saying it was "remarkable" by global standards there had been no fatalities during months of protest clashes. Lam indicated she was not close to using the Emergency Regulations Ordinance, which would give her

government sweeping powers to tackle the social unrest, despite fresh calls from pro-establishment politicians to ban the use of face masks by protesters to conceal their identities while breaking the law.
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Pro-democracy Hong Kong lawmaker Roy Kwong hospitalised after attack by three men (SCMP, Sept. 25): A pro-democracy lawmaker and prominent figure in Hong Kong's ongoing protests was sent to hospital and discharged following an assault. Roy Kwong was ambushed by four individuals – including one filming the assault – in a car park in Tin Shui Wai. The government later condemned the attack and said police would follow up on the case. Legislative Council president Andrew Leung also strongly condemned the attack as he called on Hongkongers to resolve the impasse through rational dialogue.
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Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam sticks to her guns on police inquiry (SCMP, Sept. 27): Chief executive Carrie Lam meets public in first community dialogue under tight security in Wan Chai. Lam was out to show sincerity and humility, shouldering the blame for the social upheaval and taking the verbal onslaught in her stride, including calls for her to step down, but stuck to her guns in not conceding to the rest of the protest movement's demands. Nearly half of the 30 people who got a chance to ask her questions focused on calls for setting up a commission of inquiry into the use of force by police – which Lam once again rejected, insisting that the Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC) was already on the job and that it would be best to leave it to the watchdog. Lam insisted that protesters' remaining demands, including a blanket amnesty for those arrested, were not in line with the rule of law. Lam remained defensive when addressing the questions as she reaffirmed that there was no room for compromise over violence and sovereignty.
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Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters declare 'We are back' on fifth anniversary of Occupy movement (SCMP, Sept. 28): Protesters put up thousands of posters across downtown Hong Kong, many declaring "We are back" to the government on the fifth anniversary of the Occupy movement. The Occupy movement was a failed 79-day blockade in Central that protesters used to call for universal suffrage in Hong Kong. Tens of thousands people gathered at Tamar Park to mark the fifth anniversary of the Occupy Central movement, which many see as the forerunner of this round of protests. As night fell, the peaceful protest gradually gave way to violence. Throughout the evening, riot police set up checkpoints in the city, stopping buses and searching for people taking part in the protest. The Occupy protests five years ago ended without any major government concessions. This time, Hong Kong is engulfed in the biggest social unrest since the return to China in 1997 with no end in sight.
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Police battle protesters as they set streets ablaze in central Hong Kong (SCMP, Sept. 30): Rioting protesters set many parts of Hong Kong's bustling commercial streets ablaze on Sept. 29 as the city saw a 17th straight weekend of unrest. Chaos and violence engulfed Admiralty, Wan Chai and Causeway Bay, with riot police battling mobs of protesters for hours. More than 100 people were arrested and 25 had been taken to hospital with injuries. A 39-year-old Indonesian journalist working for Suara Hong Kong News was said to have been hit in the right eye by a beanbag round and was in a serious condition in hospital. Police confirmed the firing of a live round in a statement that "strongly condemned" protesters for their violent acts. In a statement, the government severely condemned the "serious, illegal acts of radical protesters".
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International relations

China tells US politicians to stop 'interfering' in Hong Kong after Nancy Pelosi backs push for democracy bill (SCMP, Sept. 6): China has called on US lawmakers to immediately halt the push for a bipartisan bill on human rights and democracy in Hong Kong, saying the situation in the city does not concern them. The call by the Chinese foreign ministry came a day after Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced that she would withdraw a controversial extradition bill that triggered a wave of protests across the city. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said she welcomed the withdrawal of the extradition bill, but urged the city's leadership to do more to fulfil the "legitimate aspirations" of the Hong Kong people, including universal suffrage and an investigation into police violence. Pelosi also said members of Congress "look forward to swiftly advancing the bipartisan Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act to reaffirm the US commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the face of Beijing's crackdown", adding that both Democrats and Republicans "stand united" in supporting the Hong Kong people's pursuit of democracy.
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Germany's Angela Merkel renews call for peaceful resolution to Hong Kong protests (SCMP, Sept. 7): German Chancellor Angela Merkel renewed her call for a peaceful resolution to the unrest in

Hong Kong as she wrapped up a three-day trip to China. Merkel had called for a peaceful resolution to the situation and for Hong Kong's rights to be "guaranteed" at a joint press conference with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in Beijing. Li, the most senior Chinese official to have publicly commented on the Hong Kong protests, said Beijing supported the Hong Kong government to end the "chaos" within the framework of the law. But he added that it was Chinese business and that Chinese people had the wisdom to handle the protests on the basis of law. He did not respond directly to a question about possible Chinese military intervention in the city.

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Hong Kong protests: peaceful pleas for United States' support quickly descend into usual mayhem as tear gas fired and MTR station trashed and burned (SCMP, Sept. 9): Thousands of protesters joined a peaceful march to the US consulate in Hong Kong on Sept. 8, urging American officials and politicians to support their cause by taking diplomatic action against the city's government, while radicals broke away from the main rally to unleash chaos once again. Protesters are encouraging US lawmakers to pass the act, a piece of bipartisan legislation that could pave the way for Washington to sanction mainland Chinese and Hong Kong officials as well as strip the city of its special status as a separate trade and customs entity from the rest of China. The bill would require Washington to assess the city's political autonomy each year to determine whether it should continue to be given that special status under the US-Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992.

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Hong Kong leader tells US Congress not to 'interfere' with city's affairs, and calls on anti-government protesters to stop asking Washington for help (SCMP, Sept. 11): Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam expressed "deep regret" over the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, and said it was a move to "interfere with SAR affairs". "Any form of interference from foreign congresses is extremely inappropriate," Lam said. "I hope no more local figures, particular those in certain positions, will ask proactively for the American congress to pass the act." Anti-government protesters have urged American officials and politicians to support their cause by taking diplomatic action against the city's government by passing the act. The piece of bipartisan legislation could pave the way for Washington to sanction mainland Chinese and Hong Kong officials as well as strip the city of its special status as a separate trade and customs entity from the rest of China.

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China blasts Germany after foreign minister meets Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong at human rights event (SCMP, Sept. 11): China has protested to Germany after the German foreign minister Heiko Maas met Hong Kong pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong at an event in Berlin. Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said China had lodged "stern representations" with Germany. Hua said Beijing was "strongly dissatisfied" over Maas meeting Wong, secretary general of pro-democracy Hong Kong political party Demosisto. Wong had travelled to Berlin for the event, hosted by the German newspaper Bild to celebrate human rights activists around the world. Wong compared the anti-government protests in Hong Kong to the situation in East Berlin during the cold war. "If we are in a new cold war, Hong Kong is the new Berlin," Wong said.

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Activists testify before US Congress for legislation supporting democracy in Hong Kong (SCMP, Sept. 18): Prominent pro-democracy figures from Hong Kong made direct calls to United States lawmakers, urging Congress to pass new legislation that bolsters US support for the city's autonomy. Activists including Joshua Wong and Denise Ho travelled to Washington to testify before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China. Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act would, among other things, require the US to sanction Chinese officials deemed responsible for "undermining basic freedoms in Hong Kong". Support in Congress is growing for the bipartisan bill, which is now backed by 45 lawmakers across the Senate and House of Representatives. Beijing regards the legislative move as evidence of efforts by "foreign forces" to interfere in Hong Kong affairs, which it considers an internal matter.

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US House speaker Nancy Pelosi backs congressional legislation on Hong Kong (SCMP, Sept. 19): Speaking at a news conference featuring Hong Kong activists Joshua Wong and Denise Ho, who testified before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), US House speaker Nancy Pelosi said she would bring the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019 to a vote "as soon as possible". The bill, which has apparently angered Beijing, is currently under review in the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and an identical version is in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. A statement from the Hong Kong commissioner's office of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it had expressed "indignation over and firm opposition" to Pelosi's remarks. "It has to be emphasised that no one has the right or freedom to carry out separatist activities or a colour revolution here, to act above

the law and undermine law and order, or to bring disasters upon the city by colluding with foreign forces,” the statement said.

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Donald Trump attacks China on trade and urges restraint on Hong Kong protests in speech to UN General Assembly (SCMP, Sept. 25): US President Donald Trump launched a forceful and lengthy attack on China over its trade policies during his address to the United Nations General Assembly, and urged restraint from Beijing in its handling of ongoing protests in Hong Kong. Trump also said his government was “carefully monitoring” the situation in Hong Kong, where weeks-long anti-government protests have continued to see violent clashes between demonstrators and local police. “The world fully expects that the Chinese government will honour its binding treaty made with the British and registered with the United Nations in which China commits to protect Hong Kong’s freedom, legal system and democratic ways of life,” Trump said.

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Chinese diplomat slams US for ‘negative and disgraceful role’ in Hong Kong protests (SCMP, Sept. 25): A top Chinese diplomat in Hong Kong has lashed out at US politicians and officials for pushing legislation to support democracy in the city, calling the move “the epitome of hegemony” and warning that its passage would hurt American interests. Song Ruan, from Beijing’s foreign ministry commissioner’s office in Hong Kong, also blasted “the US and some other Western countries” for playing a “negative and disgraceful role” in the ongoing anti-government protests in the city. American support of the protests “constitutes a grave violation of international law and norms governing international relations”, said Song, who is deputy commissioner at the office. “The US is threatening to pass the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act with a view of justifying its interference in other countries’ internal affairs with its domestic law,” Song said. “This is the epitome of hegemony.”

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Beijing vows to retaliate after US’ Hong Kong human rights bill is approved by congressional committees (SCMP, Sept. 26): China said it would “hit back forcefully” at the United States after the US Congress officially pushed ahead with a bill to support democratic freedoms in Hong Kong by putting pressure on Chinese authorities. The Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019 moved through the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, setting the stage for votes in both chambers in the coming weeks. China’s foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said in a statement that the bill was an attempt to “wantonly interfere in China’s domestic affairs” and had shown the “malicious intention of some in the US Congress to contain China’s development”. A separate statement by the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office of the State Council said the bill was intended to support anti-China forces and rioters in Hong Kong, which would “pour oil on the flame”. A commentary by state-run Xinhua accused the US of staging a colour revolution in Hong Kong through using human rights and democracy as the reason.

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British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab calls on China to live up to Hong Kong obligations, but stops short of granting right of abode to BN(O) passport holders (SCMP, Sept. 27): British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab called on China to “live up to its obligations” to Hong Kong under the Sino-British Joint Declaration, reasserting Britain’s commitment to the continuing legality of the handover treaty. Raab also warned Beijing against military intervention in Hong Kong and expressed concern over alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang. The Chinese embassy in London hit back the same day expressing “grave concern” over his “irresponsible remarks”. During the House of Commons debate, Raab stopped short of granting right of abode to holders of BN(O) passports, which around 3.4 million Hongkongers were eligible to apply for before the 1997 handover.

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[Legal affairs and human rights](#)

Seven members and staff of Hong Kong taxi association among 17 charged over vote-rigging during 2016 Legislative Council elections (SCMP, Sept. 5): Seven members and staff of a taxi association were among 17 charged over vote-rigging during the Legislative Council elections in 2016. Four of them assisted some 240 ineligible voters to register for the Information Technology Functional Constituency with false qualifications, according to the Independent Commission Against Corruption ICAC. Others offered bribes of up to HK\$1,000 (US\$127) to 41 people to ensure they voted for a particular candidate. In 2017, the ICAC arrested 72 people over the incident.

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Seven Hongkongers injured in Yuen Long MTR station attack plan to sue police chief for failing to prevent incident (SCMP, Sept. 9): Seven Hongkongers who claim they were injured during a mob attack at Yuen Long railway station have said they will sue the city’s police chief and demand compensation, arguing the force could have made plans to prevent the violent incident that left at least

45 injured. Democratic Party lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting, who is helping the seven, said he hoped the legal action would force police to reveal relevant documents and surveillance camera footage, as well as give more details on their plans before the incident took place. About 100 white-clad men, including rural villagers and suspected triad members, ambushed protesters, returning from an earlier demonstration in Sai Ying Pun, at the station. Other passengers were also caught up in the attack.
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Police handling of Yuen Long attacks the main source of Hongkongers' complaints against force since anti-government protests began (SCMP, Sept. 18): At an open meeting hosted by police and the Independent Police Complaints Council (IPCC), the watchdog revealed that the force's Complaints Against Police Office (CAPO) had received 623 complaint cases, involving 822 allegations, from 2,823 people stemming from public order events related to the fugitive bill. Around two-thirds of the complaints were about alleged police misconduct and neglect of duty. The IPCC's chairman, senior lawyer Anthony Neoh SC, said 71 of the allegations were related to the Yuen Long attack on July 21.
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Hong Kong police used 'retaliatory violence' against arrested protesters, according to Amnesty International report (SCMP, Sept. 20): Hong Kong's embattled police force has been accused of resorting to "retaliatory violence" by torturing or ill-treating suspects arrested during the ongoing protest crisis, according to an investigation by a human rights group. The findings released by NGO Amnesty International included interviews with 21 people arrested but later released, who claimed they were punched or severely beaten by officers with batons even when they did not put up any resistance. Others claimed they were assaulted or threatened at police stations. The report came as another group of 10 people who accused police of the same actions launched a "Sue the Abuser" crowdfunding scheme in a bid to raise HK\$10 million to launch civil actions against the force.
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Hong Kong Court of Appeals calls for immediate review of laws and policies that discriminate against same-sex relationships (SCMP, Sept. 26): The Court of Appeal called for a "proper and effective" review of all laws and policies that discriminate against same-sex relationships in Hong Kong. The court's call emerged after three judges unanimously agreed to reduce the jail term of a sex offender who complained he had been given a manifestly excessive sentence for consensual buggery with a minor because he was gay.
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Arbitration agreement between Hong Kong and mainland China a 'game-changer' for city's industry, Secretary of Justice Teresa Cheng says (SCMP, Sept. 30): An agreement allowing interim protection for assets, evidence, and other measures in mainland China involved in arbitration cases heard in Hong Kong is set to take effect on Oct. 1. Secretary of Justice Teresa Cheng has called the pact signed between the Hong Kong government and the People's Supreme Court of China a "game-changer" for the special administrative region's arbitration industry. Hong Kong is the first and only jurisdiction to have this arrangement with the mainland. "This gives Hong Kong's arbitration industry a great advantage," Cheng said. She added that the city was already a premier arbitration destination, with up to date and universally applied arbitration laws, an independent judiciary and a large pool of talent.
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Health

Right to die: proposed changes to law would allow Hongkongers to choose treatment they want to receive if they become terminally ill (SCMP, Sept. 7): Rapidly greying Hong Kong is taking steps to let people decide the treatment they receive when they become terminally ill, and to choose where they prefer to die. Proposed changes to the law would allow people to draw up an advance medical directive – commonly referred to as a "living will" – to specify they do not want treatment that will prolong their life when they are dying. This includes stating they do not wish to be resuscitated or kept alive by artificial respiration. Dr Tse Chun-yan, the Hospital Authority's task force adviser on advance directives, made it clear that the proposals do not open a back door to allowing euthanasia.
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Veteran Hong Kong businessman Henry Fan surprise pick to take charge of city's ailing Hospital Authority (SCMP, Sept. 11): Former executive councillor and veteran businessman Henry Fan will take charge of Hong Kong's Hospital Authority in December, the Post has learned. Fan's appointment is something of a surprise as he was only appointed a member of the authority in December 2018, and has no medical background. "Health care is one of the deep-rooted problems in Hong Kong. Chief Executive Carrie Lam wants Fan to take a fresh look at it from a new perspective," a source said.
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At least half of services at Hong Kong's first Chinese medicine hospital will be subsidised by government, health bureau says (SCMP, Sept. 14): At least half of the services provided by Hong Kong's first Chinese medicine hospital will be subsidised by the government, according to the Food and Health Bureau, as it began inviting interested operators to submit applications. The Tseung Kwan O facility, which is expected to start operating in phases by the end of 2024, is part of the government's promise to incorporate Chinese medicine into the city's health care system. Dr Cheung Wai-lun, project director of the Chinese Medicine Hospital Project Office of the Food and Health Bureau, said the hospital would adopt a public-private partnership model, with the government providing the capital investment for construction of the hospital and recurrent funding for delivery of subsidised services, training and research.

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Environment

Hong Kong set to lead green building and flood-risk initiatives in Greater Bay Area as protests cast doubt over role (SCMP, Sept. 24): Hong Kong is expected to play a leading role in driving efforts in the Greater Bay Area to make buildings more energy efficient and mitigate flood risks arising from climate change. Collaboration to achieve both goals will be spearheaded by organisations based in the city, according to the Hong Kong Green Finance Association. Confirmation of Hong Kong's potential leading roles in regional cooperation comes as the city is grappling with 16 weeks of anti-government protests that have disrupted social order. The political crisis had raised concerns the city could find itself frozen out of future GBA collaborations if Beijing were to lose its patience.

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Hong Kong government announces halving rent for tenants of EcoPark to boost economy hit by US-China trade war and months of political unrest (SCMP, Sept. 26): The Hong Kong government has announced it will cut rents for all tenants of EcoPark by half as part of a series of measures to boost the city's faltering economy, hit by the US-China trade war and months of political unrest. The rent cut will take effect from October 1 and will last for six months. "The government cares about the green industries. The rent cut supports the relief measures announced by the secretary for finance, which include a variety of ways to support businesses in Hong Kong," Secretary for the Environment Wong Kam-sing said. Wong announced recycling companies would also benefit from an earlier measure of waiving additional sewage service charges imposed on businesses.

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Culture and education

Hong Kong pupils and alumni from over 120 schools form human chains as anti-government protests continue (SCMP, Sept. 9): Thousands of Hong Kong school pupils and alumni formed human chains on September 9, as part of ongoing protests to pressure the government to meet their demands. Though the government has withdrawn a contentious extradition law amendment bill that initially sparked protests, demonstrations continue to insist on four other demands being met. Most students opted to form their human chains before classes started. Organisers said students face pressure from parents and school administrators, noting that participation in a class boycott in early Sept. was low after pupils were told they needed parental consent before they could join strikes.

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Hong Kong should focus on encouraging workforce of future to learn practical skills, says VTC boss (SCMP, Sept. 16): Subsidies should be given to support quality degree programmes more oriented towards practical skills to boost Hong Kong's long-term economic development, Dr Roy Chung, the chairman of the Vocational Training Council, said. He said the government should also consider having a government-subsidised local university offer these applied degree programmes in the interest of the city. **Switzerland, for example, offers applied degrees which run in parallel to the academic pathway in universities, Dr. Chung said. "Switzerland has a population of about 8 million, similar to Hong Kong and there are eight universities of applied sciences of which seven are public," he said.**

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Hong Kong's school students and teachers are suffering from emotional problems over anti-government protests, survey finds (SCMP, Sept. 20): More than 40 per cent of the schools polled in a survey reported emotional problems among students caused by the ongoing anti-government protests, while a quarter of them spotted similar issues among teachers. "Some students have experienced very big shocks to their emotions by what was happening in society," Wong Kam Leung, the federation chairman, said. He added some students were also experiencing nightmares and were finding it difficult to concentrate on their studies.

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Hong Kong government's move to advise publishers on liberal studies textbooks evokes mixed response from educators (SCMP, Sept. 25): Hong Kong government's move to advise publishers on liberal studies textbooks has evoked mixed response from educators – some fearing it could lead to political censorship of school curriculum, while others considering it a step forward in the right direction. The Education Bureau announced the plan while citing worries among a section of the public that certain liberal studies textbooks “have misled students and spread hatred and bias” amid the ongoing social unrest. The bureau also said it would consider the possibility of requiring publishers to submit their liberal studies textbooks for scrutiny in the long run, to eventually come up with a list of recommended textbooks.
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Society

Hong Kong edges out Singapore in liveability survey, Osaka and Tokyo among world's top 10 (SCMP, Sept. 6): Hong Kong has edged out rival Singapore by two places in the latest liveability survey by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), which ranked the Japanese cities of Osaka and Tokyo among the top 10 in the world. Hong Kong, at 38th, outperformed competing Asian financial centre Singapore (40th) for the second year in a row. Both did well in terms of stability, health care, education and infrastructure, but suffered in the culture and environment category, which dragged down their overall rankings. The survey, which was conducted in June just as Hong Kong's anti-government protests were breaking out, also took into account the political landscape.
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Hong Kong train derailing: services returning to MTR East Rail line as fourth crack revealed (SCMP, Sept. 18): A fourth crack has been discovered on the track near to Hung Hom station as services partially returned to the MTR line where a train derailed on Sept. 17. One of two platforms serving the East Rail line has reopened at the major interchange, which was closed for nearly 24 hours after several carriages of a commuter train came off the track. The derailment was the most serious in Hong Kong for two decades, with five passengers taken to hospital. The cause of the derailment is not yet known, although the government and rail operator the MTR Corporation have vowed to conduct a “thorough investigation” and would not rule out any possible cause.
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Hong Kong Jockey Club cancels Happy Valley race meeting over threat of anti-government protests (SCMP, Sept. 18): A race meeting at Hong Kong's Happy Valley course was cancelled just hours before it was meant to start, out of fears anti-government protests could compromise the safety of staff, customers and horses. The racing schedule had been so far unaffected by the social chaos engulfing the city in recent months, but that changed when Hong Kong Bet, a horse part-owned by polarising pro-establishment lawmaker Junius Ho, was down to run.
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Macau

Chips are down for Macau casinos amid Hong Kong protests, slowdown in mainland Chinese economy (SCMP, Sept. 4): The immediate outlook for Macau's casino sector looks grim, after gross gaming revenue fell 8.6 per cent in August – its biggest monthly drop since June 2016 – from US\$3.3 billion in August 2018 to US\$3 billion, according to the Macau Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau. “If the gross gaming revenue doesn't hold up [during Golden Week], the China slowdown might be worse than everyone thought,” Japanese investment bank Daiwa Securities said. The remainder of this year could be worrisome for casinos, especially if the Hong Kong protests continue. Additional challenges to Macau's VIP sector might now come from new casinos opening up in Southeast Asia, which might offer more opportunities for Chinese high rollers to gamble with less oversight.
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Beijing praises ‘harmonious and stable’ Macau at appointment of new leader Ho Iat-seng, sparking comparisons with restive Hong Kong (SCMP, Sept. 12): President Xi Jinping has praised Macau's prosperity, stability and harmony as the central government appointed Ho Iat-seng as the casino hub's next leader, saying it proved the principle of “one country, two systems” could work. Xi also expressed hopes that Ho, elected unopposed and to be sworn in on December 20, would “stand high and look far” to grasp where the city fits into the national development strategy. Ho, a businessman and former president of Macau's Legislative Assembly, got 392 of 400 votes in a choreographed ceremony on August 25. Baptist University journalism lecturer Bruce Lui, a veteran China-watcher, said Beijing was taking the chance to reflect its hopes for Hong Kong. “The praises for Macau are the deficiencies of Hong Kong,” he said. “Macau is always a successful model in Beijing's eyes, with its stable society and economy deeply integrated with the mainland.”
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