



November in Hong Kong

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Contents

Foreign Policy/International Relations.....	2
Hong Kong can rely on European Union's support in 'difficult times' (SCMP, Nov. 29).....	2
Chinese envoy to Germany Wu Ken again denounces outreach to pro-democracy Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong (SCMP, Nov. 28).....	2
Former British consulate worker claims he was tortured by Chinese police (SCMP, Nov. 21).....	2
District Council elections must proceed as planned, European Union urges (SCMP, Nov. 19).....	2
French President Emmanuel Macron tells Chinese leader Xi Jinping talks are needed to calm Hong Kong situation (SCMP, Nov. 7).....	2
British government urges Hong Kong protesters to 'end the violence' while calling for 'proportionate' police response in handling demonstrators (SCMP, Nov. 1).....	2
Mainland Relation.....	2
Time for Beijing to rethink Hong Kong script after pan-democrat landslide (SCMP, Nov. 27).....	2
PLA 'committed to protecting' Hong Kong as stand-off intensifies (SCMP, Nov. 18).....	2
Xi Jinping again backs Hong Kong police use of force in stopping unrest (SCMP, Nov. 15).....	3
Beijing's top office in Hong Kong urges stronger crackdown against unrest (SCMP, Nov. 14).....	3
Communist Party elite wrap up meeting to safeguard national security in Hong Kong (SCMP, Nov. 1).....	3
Domestic Policy/Politics.....	3
Hong Kong protests won't force China's hand over allowing city to become 'sovereign democracy', former city leader CY Leung says (SCMP, Nov. 29).....	3
Polytechnic University siege will end on Nov. 29 (SCMP, Nov. 29).....	3
Ruling that Hong Kong mask ban is invalid suspended again until December 10 (SCMP, Nov. 28).....	3
Police receive 1,200 complaints over handling of anti-government protests (SCMP, Nov. 27).....	3
More than 8,000 petrol bombs primed for Hong Kong streets 'found in weapons factory at Chinese University' (SCMP, Nov. 19).....	3
Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam reveals 16 new measures about Greater Bay Area (SCMP, Nov. 7).....	4
No country would tolerate 'violent and destructive acts' of Hong Kong's protesters (SCMP, Nov. 6).....	4
Xi Jinping meets Carrie Lam and backs her 'hard work' amid protests (SCMP, Nov. 5).....	4
Economy/Finance.....	4
Record HK\$42.23 billion for commercial plot in Hong Kong's costliest land tender (SCMP, Nov. 28).....	4
Hong Kong exports shrink 9.2 per cent in October (SCMP, Nov. 27).....	4
HK's status as trade hub based on political stability, EU figures in HK warn (SCMP, Nov. 27).....	4
Hong Kong investors to get easier access to mainland China markets in latest amendment to trade pact (SCMP, Nov. 22).....	4
City's economy expected to shrink 1.3 per cent for the year (SCMP, Nov. 15).....	4
Hong Kong retail sales drop 18.3 per cent in September (SCMP, Nov. 2).....	5
Technology/Innovation.....	5
How Hong Kong is quietly contributing to China's mighty tech rise (SCMP, Nov. 4).....	5
Special Focus.....	5
Beijing repeats threat of consequences after Donald Trump signs Hong Kong acts (SCMP, Nov. 28).....	5
Hong Kong elections: pro-Beijing camp left reeling by overwhelming defeat (SCMP, Nov. 25).....	5

Foreign Policy/International Relations

Hong Kong can rely on European Union's support in 'difficult times' (SCMP, Nov. 29): The team from the European External Action Service EEAS, which represents the EU on diplomatic and foreign affairs, was visiting Hong Kong for their annual "structured dialogue". "True friends stand by each other at difficult times, and Hong Kong can count on the EU in this regard," Gunnar Wiegand, managing director for Asia and the Pacific at the EEAS said in a statement. The visit came amid the long-running protests in Hong Kong and after repeated statements from Brussels on the city's need to uphold the rule of law and maintain its autonomy.

Chinese envoy to Germany Wu Ken again denounces outreach to pro-democracy Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong (SCMP, Nov. 28): China's ambassador to Germany Wu Ken has lashed out at German politicians for expressing support for Hong Kong protesters, calling a September meeting in Berlin between German lawmakers and Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong "a direct provocation" of Beijing's ire. The encounter "has severely disrupted" the European country's relations with China, Wu said. The remarks came as China stepped up its criticism of the US, Britain and other countries over their "meddling" in China's internal affairs.

Simon Cheng: former British consulate worker detained in Shenzhen claims he was tortured by Chinese police (SCMP, Nov. 21): Former British consulate employee Simon Cheng, who was detained by mainland authorities for 15 days in August after visiting Shenzhen, has claimed he was tortured and pressed for information about activists in Hong Kong's anti-government protests. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said he summoned the Chinese ambassador in London to express outrage at Cheng's alleged mistreatment. Chinese foreign affairs ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said: "China resolutely opposes remarks of the British side on issues related to Hong Kong."

Hong Kong's District Council elections must proceed as planned, European Union urges (SCMP, Nov. 19): The European Union has urged the Hong Kong government not to delay this District Council elections, amid speculation about a possible postponement in the face of ongoing protests in the city. Addressing the situation at Polytechnic University, in which the campus was besieged by police, the EU called on all sides to exercise restraint and engage in de-escalation efforts. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also urged restraint from all sides and said the US was "gravely concerned by the deepening political unrest and violence in Hong Kong".

French President Emmanuel Macron tells Chinese leader Xi Jinping talks are needed to calm Hong Kong situation (SCMP, Nov. 7): French President Emmanuel Macron said he raised human rights and the Hong Kong situation during his talks with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping. Macron's visit to China concluded with pledges to work together on climate change, but the French leader also said he also called for a de-escalation of the situation in Hong Kong through dialogue after months of protests. "We have repeatedly called on the parties involved to [engage in] dialogue, to show restraint, to de-escalate," he said.

British government urges Hong Kong protesters to 'end the violence' while calling for 'proportionate' police response in handling demonstrators (SCMP, Nov. 1): Britain has called on anti-government protesters in Hong Kong to "end the violence", while also asking police to "be proportionate" in their handling of demonstrators. London's stance was spelt out in its latest six-monthly parliamentary report on Hong Kong. A Hong Kong government spokesman said in response to the report that foreign governments should not interfere in any form in the internal affairs of Hong Kong.

Mainland Relation

Time for Beijing to rethink Hong Kong script after pan-democrat landslide, Chinese analysts say (SCMP, Nov. 27): The results of the district council elections will boost the power of the non-establishment camp and possibly influence the race for the city's leader, observers say. A central government official agreed that Beijing was surprised by the landslide win for the pan-democrats. The results mean the pan-democrats look set to take up all the 117 seats for district councillors in the 1,200-member Election Committee that selects the chief executive. Nanjing University law professor Gu Su said Beijing might now have to agree to chief executive nominations that were acceptable to both camps.

PLA 'committed to protecting' Hong Kong as stand-off intensifies (SCMP, Nov. 18): The Chinese defence ministry has dismissed concerns about PLA soldiers in Hong Kong leaving their barracks on Nov. 16 to help with the clearing of roadblocks and debris, saying the garrison was committed to protecting national security and the city's stability. A Hong Kong Government spokesman said the garrison had volunteered its services to the clean-up effort and it was not at their request. This was not the first time the People's Liberation Army local garrison been involved in public community work; they helped remove fallen trees after Typhoon Mangkhut struck last year.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Xi Jinping again backs Hong Kong police use of force in stopping unrest (SCMP, Nov. 15): Chinese President Xi Jinping has underlined Beijing's support for Hong Kong police to use force to quell the unrest in the city and called on the judiciary to punish violent lawbreakers. While attending the BRICS summit in Brazil, Xi said that putting an end to the violence and restoring order remained Hong Kong's most urgent priority. "Our commitment to fully implement 'one country, two systems' has not changed, and we resolutely oppose any foreign forces seeking to interfere in the internal affairs of Hong Kong," he said.

Beijing's top office in Hong Kong urges stronger crackdown against unrest (SCMP, Nov. 14): Beijing's liaison office in Hong Kong says the city is "sliding into the abyss of terrorism" and a harsher crackdown is needed to end the unrest and restore order. This week, a protester was shot by police, a man was set on fire, roads were blocked and university campuses turned into battlegrounds. The central government's liaison office said it "resolutely supports the Hong Kong government in adopting every necessary measure to end the unrest and restore order as soon as possible, arrest the criminals and severely punish their violent acts". It called on the Hong Kong government, police and judiciary to "decisively adopt all necessary means to forcefully crack down on various acts of violence and terrorism".

China's Communist Party elite wrap up meeting with pledge to safeguard national security in Hong Kong (SCMP, Nov. 1): Chinese Communist Party leaders ended their plenary meeting by issuing a communique that revealed little in the way of new policy initiatives but included a pledge on Hong Kong to safeguard national security through legal means. "[We must] establish a sound legal system and enforcement mechanism for safeguarding national security in the HK and Macao special administrative regions," it said. Hong Kong-based China watcher Johnny Lau said he expected to see a clear shift in policy direction as Beijing looks to strengthen its control over Hong Kong.

Domestic Policy/Politics

Hong Kong protests won't force China's hand over allowing city to become 'sovereign democracy', former city leader CY Leung says (SCMP, Nov. 29): Mass protests even by hundreds of thousands of people will not force China's hand to grant Hong Kong full autonomy to become a "sovereign democracy", former chief executive Leung Chun-ying said. He accused 'dark forces' of being behind anti-government movement. Hitting out at the West, he said Hong Kong has been an easy proxy and soft target to be used against China.

Polytechnic University siege will end on Nov. 29 (SCMP, Nov. 29): Hong Kong's police force has said it will end its siege of Polytechnic University on Nov. 29 and revealed it had already seized more than 3,800 petrol bombs from the campus. No more police officers would be stationed outside the campus and it would be reopened to the public. More than 1,000 radical -protesters and their supporters occupied the campus a fortnight ago, and engaged in fierce battles with the police on November 17. Some 1,100 have already left the campus. Most were arrested, sent to hospital or released after police took down their details.

Ruling that Hong Kong mask ban is invalid suspended again until December 10 (SCMP, Nov. 28): The Hong Kong government has obtained a further reprieve until next month over the controversial ban on face masks, which was ruled unconstitutional. A Department of Justice spokesman confirmed that a notice of appeal had been served to the High Court and the judicial review applicants. The government is expected to challenge the judges' interpretation of the Basic Law. The lower court ruling touched a raw nerve with Beijing. Zang Tiwei, spokesman of the Legislative Affairs Commission of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, said only the Standing Committee, the nation's top legislative body, had the power to decide whether Hong Kong laws complied with the Basic Law.

Police receive 1,200 complaints over handling of anti-government protests (SCMP, Nov. 27): Hong Kong police have received more than 1,200 complaints over their handling of often violent anti-government protests, according to the city's security minister, who added no officers have been disciplined so far. John Lee also told the Legislative Council there had been about 5,800 protest-related arrests since June. Some 2,600 people were injured during the protests and sent to hospital, including 470 police officers. Police had fired 19 live rounds and about 10,000 rounds of tear gas during demonstrations.

More than 8,000 petrol bombs primed for Hong Kong streets 'found in weapons factory at Chinese University' (SCMP, Nov. 19): More than 8,000 petrol bombs ready for use on Hong Kong's streets have been found at Chinese University so far, a source has told the Post. A source familiar with the situation said the petrol bombs were found on the Sha Tin campus of the Chinese University, which was occupied by radicals during four days of clashes with police before their retreat. It became a battleground of intense clashes, where officers fired more than 1,000 rounds of tear gas at protesters, accusing them of hurling hundreds of petrol bombs at police.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Beijing gives Greater Bay Area fresh push as Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam reveals 16 new measures including easing of restrictions on buying homes and school enrolment (SCMP, Nov. 7): Beijing has promised to make it easier for Hongkongers to buy a home and send their children to local schools in the nine Guangdong cities under the Greater Bay Area integration plan, as Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam announced a raft of measures to push forward the scheme. Lam also made it clear that Hong Kong's role under the ambitious national development project had not lessened, even though the city has been plagued by almost five months of social unrest.

No country would tolerate 'violent and destructive acts' of Hong Kong's protesters, says Chinese Vice-Premier Han Zheng (SCMP, Nov. 6): Chinese Vice-Premier Han Zheng has described the violent protests in Hong Kong as "extreme and destructive acts" that would not be tolerated in any country in the world and ending it is the responsibility of the entire administration – the executive, legislature, and the judiciary. Han met the city's leader Carrie Lam in Beijing. Han said radical separatists have crossed bottom line but added that the central government remained fully confident about the implementation of the "one country, two systems" governing principle on Hong Kong.

China's Xi Jinping meets Hong Kong leader, backs Carrie Lam's 'hard work' amid protests (SCMP, Nov. 5): Chinese President Xi Jinping expressed "high trust" in Hong Kong's embattled leader Carrie Lam in a meeting with Lam in Shanghai and "fully affirmed" the chief executive's response to the unrest. "To curb the violence and stop the chaos in accordance with the law is still the most important task faced by Hong Kong. At the same time, we must do a good job in dialogue with the community and improve people's livelihood," Xi said. Hong Kong commentators and Beijing-loyalist politicians said the meeting with Xi was the central government's way of trying to quash rumours Lam would be replaced soon and reiterate what she had to do to lead the city out of the current impasse.

Economy/Finance

Record HK\$42.23 billion for commercial plot in Hong Kong's costliest land tender (SCMP, Nov. 28): Sun Hung Kai Properties has won the biggest parcel of commercial land ever sold in the city for a record HK\$42.23 billion (US\$5.4 billion). The winning bid of HK\$13,345 per square foot was at the low end of a valuation range of between HK\$41.1 billion and HK\$63 billion. The record price, however, cannot mask the effects of the unprecedented political crisis that has sapped investment appetite, with the office sector seeing vacancy rates, rents and capital values deteriorate over the last six months.

Hong Kong exports shrink 9.2 per cent in October as weak global demand, trade tensions persist (SCMP, Nov. 27): The city's October exports value shrank 9.2 per cent to HK\$348.5 billion (US\$44.5 billion) from the same month last year – a steeper fall from 7.3 per cent in September, according to the Census and Statistics Department. Last month, imports also slipped 11.5 per cent to HK\$379.1 billion. A government spokesman attributed the accelerating decline in October to the sluggish global demand and ongoing US-China trade disputes, with exports to many major markets registering visible falls.

Hong Kong's status as trade hub based on political stability, EU figures in protest-racked city warn (SCMP, Nov. 27): Hong Kong's status as a trade and investment hub is based on its political stability and "operational efficiency", both of which could be jeopardised by a significant deterioration in the city's ongoing political crisis, economists and European trade officials warned. The European response to the Hong Kong situation has been more muted, and a senior trade official suggested that Brussels still sees Hong Kong as a vital hub, though this position should not be taken for granted.

Hong Kong investors to get easier access to mainland China markets in latest amendment to trade pact (SCMP, Nov. 22): In an annual amendment to the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (Cepa), the Hong Kong and mainland governments agreed to allow local companies to further penetrate into markets across the border. Restrictions on Hong Kong investors' access to mainland China markets in tourism, testing and certification, television, film and other industries will be further loosened next year in changes to a trade pact that officials hope will help the city move out of recession amid the ongoing social unrest.

City's economy expected to shrink 1.3 per cent for the year (SCMP, Nov. 15): Hong Kong's economy is expected to shrink by 1.3 per cent this year under the shadow of the US-China trade war and political unrest in the city, officials said. It would be the first annual decline since 2009. Government economist Andrew Au said "local social incidents" had dealt a heavy blow to an economy already weakened by the slowing global economy and the ongoing tariff war between Washington and Beijing. Au said the unemployment rate, now at 2.9 per cent, could increase.

Hong Kong retail sales drop 18.3 per cent in September (SCMP, Nov. 2): Hong Kong shoppers continued to shy away from spending as retail sales tumbled 18.3 per cent in September year on year on the double blow of the ongoing social unrest and the protracted US-China trade war. In the first nine months of 2019, retail sales shrank 7.3 per cent year on year. Tourist arrivals to the city plunged 34.2 per cent in September year on year, with the biggest group of visitors – mainland Chinese, who account for 78 per cent of the total – down 35 per cent.

Technology/Innovation

How Hong Kong is quietly contributing to China's mighty tech rise – with a higher education push (SCMP, Nov. 4): As China continues its drive to be a technology powerhouse, Hong Kong has been quietly pumping new blood into China's start-up scene – mainly in the form of students from the city's cluster of world-class universities. Hong Kong is home to five of the world's top 100 universities. Some of their strongest research areas are in computer science and engineering, disciplines that have laid the foundations for the development of artificial intelligence and robotics. Hong Kong has become an unlikely incubator of tech talent, helping China make bridges with rest of the world.

Special Focus

Beijing repeats threat of consequences after Donald Trump signs Hong Kong acts (SCMP, Nov. 28): US President Donald Trump signed into law the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act that could bring diplomatic action and economic sanctions against the Hong Kong government. He also signed into law the Protect Hong Kong Act, which will prohibit the sale of US-made munitions to law enforcement agencies in Hong Kong. The Chinese government has criticised his signing of the Human Rights and Democracy Act, saying it amounted to “gross interference” in China's internal affairs and again warning Washington there could be unspecified consequences. The Hong Kong government also responded to the signing of the acts and said that the US had “enormous economic interests” in Hong Kong and said that the “unilateral” actions by Washington would have negative impacts on its relationship with Hong Kong and on American interests.

Hong Kong elections: pro-Beijing camp left reeling by record turnout and overwhelming defeat (SCMP, Nov. 25): The pro-democracy camp had won 17 out of 18 district councils, taking more than 340 seats out of 452. Youthful, fresh-faced candidates, many active in the anti-government protests roiling the city over the past six months, were among prominent winners of the historic district council elections which had a record turnout of 2.94 million voters, representing 71.2 per cent of registered electors, up from the previous figure of 47 per cent in 2015. City leader Carrie Lam promised to reflect on the voters' message. The elections were seen as a barometer of support either for the anti-government protest movement or for the embattled leader Carrie Lam and her handling of the roiling unrest.

[#Top of the Document](#)

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