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## **Switzerland in the local press**

**Switzerland to pull funding from German Swiss International School (GSIS) in Hong Kong, threatens legal action over name (SCMP, March 27):** Switzerland says it will withdraw from the GSIS after its attempts to have more say in running the campuses were voted down last week. Government officials also threatened the German Swiss International School with legal action if it did not remove the terms “Swiss” and “Schweizerische” from its name. But the school told the Post it would not agree to the request and would take tough action to defend its brand. The months-long row started after the election of three members who did not speak German fluently to the board in March last year despite a regulation stating only those fluent in the language could take the role. Earlier this month, the GSIS was involved in another controversy when the Education Bureau ordered the school to shut down its business college by the summer because it was deemed to be providing postsecondary vocational education it had not registered for.

## **Foreign Policy/International Relations**

**Hong Kong hits back at US report on ‘police brutality’ (SCMP, March 12):** Hong Kong has hit back at the US State Department’s report that highlighted allegations of “police brutality” and other human rights issues, stressing that the city’s embattled police force has been dealing with unprecedented protest violence. The State Department issued its annual report about human rights situations in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau. It touched on the anti-government protest movement that started in the city in June last year, the pro-democracy bloc’s landslide victory in the district council elections, and other latest developments in the city.

**United States unlikely to impose sanctions on Hong Kong, cabinet advisers say after visit (SCMP, March 10):** The United States is unlikely to impose sanctions on Hong Kong under a bill the Trump administration signed into law last year covering human rights in the Asian financial hub, a group of advisers to the city’s leader said after meeting American officials. “They understand that if sanctions are imposed against officials, US interests will eventually be affected if there are countermeasures against them,” Regina Ip, chairwoman of the pro-establishment New People’s Party said, calling on Washington to respect Beijing’s authority over Hong Kong.

## **Domestic Policy/Politics**

**Hong Kong may turn sports and expo centres into temporary hospitals (SCMP, March 31):** Hong Kong may look at using major sports and entertainment stadiums as an option to meet growing demand for isolation space, as dozens of Covid-19 patients still wait for hospital beds that are being rapidly filled up. Another 41 infections confirmed on March 30 took the city’s total to 682, most of them coming from overseas. Experts suggested isolating patients showing mild to no symptoms in government facilities or even at home instead of using up precious hospital space. Hospital capacity remained tight and the Hospital Authority earlier announced 400 “second-tier” beds – ordinary ones converted by adding negative-pressure facilities – would be available by the end of the week.

**Government adviser Ronny Tong defends Hong Kong police’s use of sedition law, after arrest of opposition politician Cheng Lai-king (SCMP, March 27):** Hong Kong’s sedition laws, though nearly 80 years old, are still necessary to provide the only offence against hate crimes in the city, a top government adviser Ronny Tong insisted, after an opposition politician Cheng Lai-king was arrested for an online post against a police officer. The arrest has already drawn criticism from the pro-democracy camp, which said it would have a chilling effect on free speech. Top legal scholar Johannes Chan says it now flies in the face of freedoms guaranteed under the Basic Law, and would be challenged in court.

**Andrew Cheung to be Hong Kong’s next chief justice (SCMP, March 24):** Andrew Cheung, who is a permanent judge of the Court of Final Appeal, will become the chief justice from January 11 next year, succeeding Geoffrey Ma. Chief Executive Carrie Lam praised Cheung as a man of “high integrity” and “exceptional qualities”. She said the appointment would need to be endorsed by the Legislative Council, and expressed concern it could be delayed by political wrangling. Opposition lawmakers have prevented the Legco’s agenda-setting House Committee from electing a chairman for the past six months.

**Hong Kong will close borders to visitors (SCMP, March 23):** Chief executive Carrie Lam announced that starting from March 25, non-residents would not be allowed into Hong Kong, transit passengers included, for a two-week period. Anyone arriving from mainland China, Macau or Taiwan will be allowed in, she said, provided they had not travelled anywhere else in the past 14 days and subject to quarantine orders. Chief Executive Carrie Lam warned of a “critical situation” and appealed for public vigilance and compliance with home quarantine orders. Earlier this month, Hong Kong already introduced home and mandatory quarantine measures to people arrived from foreign countries.

**Chief Executive Carrie Lam revives working from home, postpones exams (SCMP, March 21):** Hong Kong postponed university entrance examinations by a month and ordered civil servants to resume working from home as its leader warned the city was facing “a critical moment” over the next two weeks in containing the spread of the deadly coronavirus. Chief Executive Carrie Lam also announced the closure of public sports facilities, museums and libraries that had reopened earlier this month. Schools would remain suspended until further notice. The Diploma of Secondary Education exams have been postponed until April 24.

**Occupy co-founder Chan Kin-man has ‘no regrets’ over going to jail after early release from Hong Kong prison (SCMP, March 14):** One of the founders of Hong Kong’s Occupy movement was released from jail, and said he had no regrets over his role in bringing the city to a standstill in 2014. Chan Kin-man, former sociology professor, said he believed the recent anti-government protests illustrated to the public why they had to take part in a civil disobedience campaign six years ago, and accused the government of lacking openness, transparency and impartiality. He said he was aware that some young people had turned radical over the past few months, but accused the government of being responsible.

**Top WHO official praises Hong Kong, Singapore for ‘very effective’ measures (SCMP, March 3):** Dr Michael Ryan, executive director of the World Health Organisation’s health emergencies programme, has praised the “very effective” measures Hong Kong and Singapore are taking to suppress transmission of the new coronavirus. He said measures taken needed to be based on the local situation. Hong Kong has not banned people entering the city from most parts of the world, but implemented forced quarantine for those returning from areas hard hit by the outbreak, such as the mainland, Iran and some South Korean and Italian regions.

### **Economy/Finance**

**Hong Kong wages could drop 10-20 per cent in 2020 for city blighted by coronavirus pandemic, impact of anti-government protests (SCMP, March 31):** Hongkongers’ monthly pay could plunge 10-20 per cent this year as the city reels from the Covid-19 pandemic and the lasting impact of the anti-government protests that broke out last summer, Alexa Chow, managing director of AMAC Human Resources Consultants, said. The forecasts were made as official figures revealed the median wage increased 3.8 per cent year on year to HK\$18,200 (US\$2,350), in data not reflecting the grim economic picture in Hong Kong today, job market experts said.

**More economic pain ahead Hong Kong’s finance chief says, as he predicts gloomy outlook for global economy (SCMP, March 30):** Hong Kong’s financial chief has predicted the global economy will contract in the first half of the year on the back of the coronavirus pandemic, and the city is unlikely to repeat the quick rebound it managed after the severe acute respiratory syndrome (Sars) outbreak in 2003. Chan warned that unlike previous shocks in the global market that were triggered by financial turbulence, the coronavirus had interrupted the global production, trade and supply chains, and had seriously hit the real economy.

**Hong Kong drops to sixth in new global financial centre rankings (SCMP, March 28):** Hong Kong fell three slots to sixth place in Z/Yen Group’s newly released rankings of global financial centres, overtaken by Tokyo, Shanghai and Singapore. New York took the top spot in the index, followed by London, according to the Global Financial Centres Index (GFCI) report. The drop in Hong Kong’s global competitiveness came as the city has been in the grip of social unrest since June, when anti-government protests triggered by the now-withdrawn extradition bill erupted.

**World’s costliest offices are poised to enter tenants’ market (SCMP, March 27):** Hong Kong’s notoriously pricey office rental sector is fast becoming a tenants’ market as last year’s protest movement and the current coronavirus pandemic have prompted struggling companies to bail on their leases. The average Hong Kong office rent will slide to HK\$60.6 per square foot in 2021, down 16.8 per cent from last year, according to an industry report.

**Hong Kong loses ranking as world’s freest economy (SCMP, March 18):** Months of social and political unrest have knocked Hong Kong off the top of a widely regarded index ranking the world’s freest economies, a position the city held for 25 straight years. Regional rival Singapore climbed from second into first place in the latest Index of Economic Freedom published by the Heritage Foundation. The foundation said Hong Kong’s economy had become increasingly integrated with the mainland through trade, tourism and financial links, but risks to the city’s economic freedom had correspondingly risen. Rounding out the top five were New Zealand, Australia and **Switzerland**.

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**Hong Kong jobless rate hits nine-year high (SCMP, March 17):** Hong Kong's jobless rate rose in February for a fifth straight month, hitting 3.7 per cent – the highest in more than nine years – as the city's economy reeled from the double blow of the coronavirus epidemic after months of political unrest that had pushed it into recession. The unemployment rate rose 0.3 percentage points for the three months to February, from 3.4 per cent for the November-to-January period. The underemployment rate also increased to 1.5 per cent from 1.2 per cent.

**Hong Kong finance minister Paul Chan moves to ease market fears, says city's systems can handle economic uncertainty (SCMP, March 10):** Hong Kong's financial secretary Paul Chan has said the city's stock market and banking systems can withstand fluctuations in the global economy. He added the city's de facto central bank, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, and stock regulator, the Securities and Futures Commission, had stepped up inspections of stock and derivative trading. "We have yet to see the risk of market manipulation," he said.

**Hong Kong's retail sales plummet 21 per cent in January (SCMP, March 3):** Hong Kong's retail sector, battered by a steep drop in mainland tourists attributed to the coronavirus battle, plunged by 21.4 per cent year to year in January, with the government warning of dire repercussions to the overall economy and joblessness. Only supermarkets and petrol stations were impervious to the downturn, with grocery sales soaring 10.2 per cent in January as citizens started hoarding toilet rolls, rice, and sanitising products as the epidemic worsened.

#### Technology/Innovation

**Experts give backing to more smart lamp posts across Hong Kong but call for cameras removed (SCMP, March 9):** A government plan to introduce about 400 multifunctional lamp posts across Hong Kong should go ahead but with their cameras removed and other safeguards created to allay public concerns about privacy and data collection, an expert committee said. The lamp posts are part of the government's "smart city" initiative and come equipped with a range of technologies. They can collect information about traffic conditions, pedestrian flows, illegal waste dumping and pollution levels. The advisory committee, composed of IT and privacy experts, recommended authorities replace the cameras and Bluetooth detectors with alternatives that are more "privacy friendly".

#### Macao

**Macao to ban all non-residents with travel history from entering or transiting through it (SCMP, March 24):** Macau is to ban all non-residents who have recently travelled abroad from entering or transiting through the city, including those from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, to stop a surge in coronavirus infections. As of March 23, Macau had 25 cases, of which 15 were imported cases or patients with travel history. Asked whether Macau will also propose banning the sale of liquor like Hong Kong, Chief Executive Ho Iat-seng made clear he had no such intentions. The Macau government has so far used eight hotels for quarantining all arrivals, including its own citizens.

#### Special Focus

**Hong Kong to limit public gatherings to four and shut cinemas, gyms and other social spots (SCMP, March 28):** People in Hong Kong will no longer be allowed to assemble in groups of more than four, and leisure venues for public gatherings will be closed, under the toughest social distancing measures the government has taken yet to combat a resurgence of coronavirus infections. Bars and restaurants will only be allowed to operate at half their capacity and persons at each table will be limited to four. Chief Executive Carrie Lam warned of a "public emergency situation". She did not move on an earlier plan to ban the sale of alcohol in bars and restaurants, facing a backlash from an industry already hit hard by the public health crisis.

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