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Switzerland in the local press

Switzerland says West will respond to China's move away from openness (AFP, SCMP, Aug. 3): Switzerland's foreign minister Ignazio Cassis said economic liberalisation had not been matched with political liberalisation and human rights breaches were on the rise in China, according to Sunday newspaper SonntagsBlick. "We are seeing China stray from the path of openness," he said. "This means that Switzerland, too, must defend its interests and values more robustly, for example by strengthening international law and the multilateral system." Cassis said many Swiss companies which had invested in Hong Kong would be affected if China abandoned the city's one country, two systems arrangement. "If China abandons the one country, two systems principle in the case of Hong Kong, it also affects many Swiss companies that have invested there," Cassis said. "If China sticks to its new course, the Western world will react more decisively."

Foreign Policy/International Relations

Damage control for Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's mission to Europe (SCMP, Aug. 25): China's foreign minister Wang Yi will begin a "damage control" tour of Europe including Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, France and Germany. It is expected to focus on 5G and Huawei as more countries ban Chinese technology giant. Beijing's hard line on Hong Kong and its handling of the coronavirus pandemic have also drawn European criticism. Both France and Germany have repeatedly criticised China's imposition of the national security law in Hong Kong, while the EU has imposed arms control measures against the city's police.

Govt slams US for 'self-defeating' moves against HK (RTHK, SCMP, Aug. 20): The US State Department announced its decision to stop honouring agreements to transfer fugitives and convicts between the two sides, as well as one that allows for reciprocal tax exemptions on proceeds derived from international shipping. But in a statement, an SAR government spokesman said it's the US action that merits international condemnation. "The HKSAR Government strongly objects to and deplores the US' action, which is widely seen as a move to create troubles in China-US relationship, using Hong Kong as a pawn", the spokesman said. Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Germany, France and Britain have also suspended their extradition treaties with Hong Kong in recent weeks.

National security law tarnishes HK's image, EU envoy says (SCMP, Aug. 19): Carmen Cano de Lasala, European Union's outgoing envoy for Hong Kong, has warned that the city's international image has been damaged by the imposition of the national security law and companies from the EU will have to reassess their business strategy in the medium-to-long term. She said she had seen more self-censorship in the media, universities and schools in the city after the law took effect on June 30. She said that Hong Kong's attractiveness to businesses had suffered, and that the EU did not see the new law as conforming to the Basic Law, or to China's international commitment to upholding the "one country, two systems" governing framework.

Arrest of media tycoon Jimmy Lai sparks international condemnation (SCMP, Aug. 11): Arrest of local media mogul Jimmy Lai sparked a round of international condemnation with Washington, Brussels and others calling the move the latest example of the government's use of a new national security law to silence political dissents. US Vice President Mike Pence described the arrest as deeply offensive while Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the arrest was proof the Chinese government had "eviscerated" Hong Kong's freedoms. Britain, the European Union and the United Nations also expressed concern over the police move. Lai and six others – including his two sons and some of Apple Daily's management team – were arrested for alleged collusion with foreign forces.

Five Eyes ministers blast Legco bans, postponement (RTHK, Aug. 9): The foreign ministers of the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, along with the US Secretary of State, issued a joint statement saying they were gravely concerned by "the Hong Kong government's unjust disqualification of candidates and disproportionate postponement of Legislative Council elections." The officials, from the nations making up the "Five Eyes" intelligence alliance, said the moves had "undermined the democratic process that has been fundamental to Hong Kong's stability and prosperity".

China and Hong Kong decry US sanctions on officials over national security law (SCMP, Aug. 8): The United States imposed sanctions against Chief Executive Carrie Lam and 10 other top Hong Kong and mainland officials, freezing their assets and prohibiting them from carrying out any kind of business in the country, in light of Beijing's imposition of the national security law in the SAR. Lam was defiant, refusing to be intimidated by what she called "shameless and despicable" sanctions. Beijing's liaison office in HK issued a statement, denouncing the US move as interference in Hong Kong affairs. The cabinet-level Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office echoed the message, declaring that Washington's actions would be "nailed on the pillar of shame for eternity". The Office of the Commissioner of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs hit out as well, saying: "The US brandishing the stick for sanctions will eventually lead to nothing."

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European Union calls on HK to reconsider polls delay, barring of candidates (The Standard, Aug. 4): The European Union has called on Hong Kong authorities to reconsider the decisions to postpone Legislative Council elections through emergency powers, and the disqualification of pro-democracy candidates, including incumbent lawmakers. The protection of civil and political rights in Hong Kong is a fundamental part of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, which the EU supports.

Mike Pompeo condemns HK elections delay (The Standard, Aug. 2): The US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, has condemned the Hong Kong Government's decision to postpone Legislative Council elections by a year from September and urged that it be reconsidered. "There is no valid reason for such a lengthy delay. It is likely, therefore, that Hong Kong will never again be able to vote – for anything or anyone. This regrettable action confirms that Beijing has no intention of upholding the commitments it made to the Hong Kong people and the United Kingdom under the Sino-British Joint Declaration, a UN-registered treaty, and the Basic Law," his statement said.

Mainland Relation

Beijing chastises HK testing critics for 'vile acts' (RTHK, Aug. 31): The central government's office in charge of Hong Kong affairs, as well as Beijing's liaison office in the SAR, berated critics of the upcoming universal coronavirus testing scheme. A Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office spokesperson said "anti-China radicals" have smeared the mainland's efforts to help the SAR in its fight against Covid-19 through acts it described as "vile". A liaison office spokesperson, meanwhile, said the "smearing" of the mainland's assistance to Hong Kong was "despicable."

Why China's help in fighting Covid-19 has sparked anxiety rather than appreciation (SCMP, Aug. 9): Team dispatched from mainland will help with universal coronavirus testing and the design and development of at least two makeshift hospitals in Hong Kong. The prevailing reaction to the gesture appears to be anxiety rather than appreciation. Opposition politicians warned of the risks of personal and DNA data being transferred to the mainland authorities. "I hope society can stop all kinds of conspiracies, defaming, smearing and creating conflicts, and should not undermine the relationships between the central government and Hong Kong, especially as it was the [city] government that sought the mainland's help this time," Chief Executive Carrie Lam said. Analysts said they were not surprised, as the offer had become politicized, as with almost any issue involving the mainland.

Domestic Policy/Politics

430,000 sign up for free Covid-19 testing (SCMP, Aug. 31): More than 430,000 people have signed up for voluntary coronavirus testing. That came as the city reported 15 new coronavirus infections on Aug. 30, the third lowest daily tally of cases since July 3. The government said bookings at 80 of the 141 sample collection centres for Sept. 1, the first day of the scheme, were full. Health Minister Sophia Chan earlier said she expected 4 to 5 million people to participate, although Chief Executive Carrie Lam later said her administration had not set a turnout target.

National security law suspect 'caught while trying to flee to Taiwan' (RTHK, Aug. 27): Mainland authorities have arrested around 10 people after intercepting a speed boat southeast of Hong Kong, with reports suggesting those detained included Andy Li who was arrested earlier this month on suspicion of breaking the new national security law. Radio Free Asia reported that a number of activists who had taken part in last year's anti-government protests were detained.

Police are accused of rewriting mob attacks with arrest of opposition lawmaker (SCMP, Aug. 26): Anger over the infamous Yuen Long attacks of July 21 last year by a mob reignited anew after Hong Kong police arrested 16 people – including opposition lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting, whom the force accused of rioting and stoking the violence. The "721 Incident" proved to be a turning point for the anti-government protests and dealt a blow to the police's image after footage of the mob hitting protesters and passengers inside a train carriage went viral online. Democratic Party chairman Wu Chi-wai condemned police for taking "revenge" and accused the government of crushing dissent instead of trying to heal the rifts in society.

Court accepts govt move to block cases by Ted Hui (RTHK, Aug. 24): Two private prosecutions relating to the anti-government protests last year were formally halted after the secretary for justice's intervention. Department of Justice said it would not be pursuing the case involving a taxi driver who allegedly rammed protesters with his vehicle last October, or a traffic police officer who shot a student protester in November. Democratic Party lawmaker Ted Hui had initiated both cases.

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Democratic Party to poll city residents on whether to stay for extended Legislative Council term (SCMP, Aug. 21): Beijing's decision to extend Legco has created a rift between pan-democrats who wish to continue serving and localists arguing for a collective boycott. In a bid for unity, the Democratic Party announced Hongkongers would decide the fate of its seven legislators through a citywide survey carried out before September 30, when the current Legco term expires. Its plan was quickly supported by the Civic Party. The two parties have 12 out of the 22 lawmakers in the opposition.

Security law suspects shocked to be on 'wanted' list (RTHK, Aug. 1): State media reported that Hong Kong police had issued arrest warrants for six prominent pro-democracy figures, all of whom are now overseas, for allegedly inciting secession and colluding with foreign forces. One of the six, Samuel Chu of the Hong Kong Democracy Council, said that he had been an American citizen for almost 25 years. "If the reports are true, the Hong Kong police is issuing an arrest warrant against an American citizen for advocating and lobbying my own government," he said in a statement. Others on the list include disqualified former lawmaker Nathan Law, former UK consulate worker Simon Cheng, and activists Ray Wong, Wayne Chan and Honcques Lau.

Economy/Finance

Highest deficit in history and city must 'reserve financial strength' (SCMP, Aug. 31): Hong Kong will record the highest deficit in its history this financial year and must reserve cash to cope with a possible winter resurgence of Covid-19 and escalating tensions between China and the US, Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung and Financial Secretary Paul Chan have warned. The two rounds of relief measures from the Anti-epidemic Fund had already swollen the budget deficit to nearly HK\$290 billion (US\$37.4 billion), or 10 per cent of the city's gross domestic product. The city's reserve of HK\$800 billion – down from HK\$1.1 trillion in March – was equivalent to about 13 months of government spending.

Trade woes worsen with exports falling 3 per cent (SCMP, Aug. 27): The recent decline in Hong Kong trade worsened in July, with exports falling 3 per cent from a year earlier. Exports shrank to HK\$328.5 billion (US\$45.9 billion) following a 1.3 per cent decline in June, while imports dropped 3.4 per cent year on year to HK\$358.3 billion in July, the Census and Statistics Department revealed.

Seventh border crossing facility opens for business (RTHK, Aug. 26): An opening ceremony attended by top Hong Kong and Guangdong officials was held for the latest border crossing between Hong Kong and Shenzhen. The new facility, linking Liantang in Shenzhen with Heung Yuen Wai, is the seventh cross-border point and cost HK\$33 billion, which was double the initial estimate. Because of the Covid-19 restrictions, only cargo trucks are allowed for the time being.

US delays 'made in China label' rule by 45 days (RTHK, Aug. 24): The Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Edward Yau said Washington has delayed till November 9 an order mandating that goods made in Hong Kong for export to the United States will need to be labelled as made in China. The move followed Beijing's imposition of a national security law on Hong Kong and Washington's decision to end the SAR's special status.

Jobless rate edges down to 6.1 percent (RTHK, Aug. 19): Jobless rate edged down to 6.1 percent in the three months to July after rising for nine consecutive months, with the government crediting the temporary lull in coronavirus infections here, along with billions of dollars in handouts to struggling businesses. Secretary for Labour and Welfare Dr Law Chi-kwong warned that the labour market will remain under "significant pressure" in the short term.

Some four in 10 AmCham members considering leaving HK over security law (SCMP, Aug. 14): Nearly four in 10 members of American Chamber of Commerce are considering relocating from Hong Kong due to the national security law, an indication of rising corporate fears over the sweeping new legislation, though most are still planning to stay, according to a recent poll. About 39 per cent of the respondents said they had plans to move capital, assets or operations out of the city after more details were revealed about the new law, an uptick from 35.5 per cent of businesses polled in July.

Financial institutions gripped by anxiety over United States sanctions (SCMP, Aug. 9): Financial institutions, from banks and fund managers to brokerages and insurance companies, have been gripped by anxiety and uncertainty since the United States slapped sanctions on key local and mainland Chinese officials over the imposition of the city's national security law. Bank insiders told the Post that they were caught between a rock and a hard place, having to tread an unclear line on US requirements to avoid doing business with the 11 officials named in the sanctions list while also ensuring they did not run foul of local law by complying. They expressed surprise over the Hong Kong Monetary Authority's assurance that unilateral sanctions had no legal status in the city, and that they were not obliged to comply, despite the risk of retaliation by the US.

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Financial chief: 'travel bubbles' can revive economy (RTHK, August 2): Financial Secretary Paul Chan said the SAR could accelerate its recovery if it brought Covid-19 under control and arranged a so-called "travel bubble", allowing people who'd tested negative for the virus to go to the mainland and Macau, and vice-versa. "This will allow us to resume our business activities as quickly as possible, and help tourism, retail, catering and other industries and related employees increase their income," he wrote. He said the arrangement could be extended to other parts of the Asia-Pacific region if it proves successful.

Macao

GDP drops by 68% in Q2 (macaubusiness.com, Aug. 21): GDP dropped by 67.8 per cent year-on-year in the second quarter, local authorities confirmed. The decline was more than the 49% contraction reported for the first three months of the year. Service exports showed a sharper fall of 92.3% year-on-year in the second quarter, of which exports of gaming services and other tourism services dropped by 97.1% and 93.9%. This can be attributed to the almost 99% drop in visitor arrivals amid the ongoing travel restrictions.

Mainland to reinstate tourist visas to Macau (RTHK, Aug. 11): Macau is set to welcome an influx of gamblers after the mainland announced that tourist visas would be reinstated for all provinces from September 23. The National Immigration Administration said, provided the domestic coronavirus situation continued to improve, residents would be able to apply for individual and group travel visas to enter Macau. Residents from the neighbouring Guangdong will be able to apply from August 26, the National Immigration Administration said. Residents from Zhuhai city are permitted from August 12.

Special Focus

NPCSC decides to retain entire Legco for a year (RTHK, Aug. 11): National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) has made a unanimous decision to allow the entire Legco to stay on for a year, now that the elections have been postponed until next September. Four pro-democracy lawmakers will be able to retain their seats even though they were barred from running in the now-postponed polls for the next council. The one-year extension of the current Legco term fills a vacuum until next year's elections, which could have led to constitutional and legal problems for the government.

Chief Executive Carrie Lam delays legislative elections (SCMP, Aug 1): Embattled leader Carrie Lam set off another political storm by invoking emergency powers to postpone the Legislative Council elections scheduled for September by one year, citing the risk of further escalating a resurgent Covid-19 crisis. She announced that China's top legislative body would step in to rule on resolving any legal issues stemming from the vacuum that would be created by pushing back the elections from September 6 this year to September 5, 2021. The central government itself issued a statement expressing support for Lam's move. Lam's decision triggered outrage among opposition politicians, who had been banking on winning an unprecedented majority in the 70-seat legislature, buoyed by their trouncing of pro-establishment rivals in last year's municipal-level district council polls.

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