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## Switzerland in the local press

**Which central bank will launch world's first digital currency? (SCMP, Oct. 14):** The race among central banks to launch sovereign digital currencies is heating up. A working group was formed by central banks of Canada, England, Japan, Switzerland, Europe and the US Federal Reserve, along with the Bank for International Settlements, in a bid to avoid unintended barriers for transferring sovereign currencies in their electronic forms. The Swiss National Bank has taken a sceptical view of rolling out an electronic Swiss franc for use by the general public, but is researching the broader use of digital central bank currencies with the Bank of International Settlements.

**Alibaba joins forces with Switzerland's Dufry to shake up duty-free market (SCMP, Oct. 6):** Alibaba Group and Switzerland-listed Dufry have agreed to form a joint venture in China. The move underscores the burgeoning opportunities in duty-free shopping in China, as consumers shift at least some of the US\$258 billion in annual overseas travelling expenses back home, amid global travel restrictions as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. It could also introduce a strong contender into a market that has been dominated by a single firm – the state-owned China Duty Free Group.

## Foreign Policy/International Relations

**Fine line for US consulate (The Standard, Oct. 29):** The United States consulate in Hong Kong could be ordered to close if it sheltered pro-independence activists, political commentator Lau Siu-kai says. The US consulate general in Hong Kong & Macau reportedly denied entry to four suspected political activists at its Central premises, where they planned to seek asylum. One of the four is believed to have faced protest-related charges. The attempt came hours after former Studentlocalism convener Tony Chung was arrested on his way to seek asylum at the diplomatic mission.

**Ireland suspends extradition agreement with HK (RTHK, Oct. 23):** Ireland's Foreign Affairs Minister Simon Coveney says Dublin has decided to suspend its extradition agreement with Hong Kong, over concerns about the SAR's national security law. The United States, Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Germany, France and Finland have also terminated their extradition agreements with the SAR in light of the national security law.

**Beijing warns Finland not to interfere in HK affairs (RTHK, Oct. 17):** The Chinese embassy in Finland has expressed "grave concern" and "strong opposition" towards Helsinki's decision to suspend an extradition agreement with Hong Kong. Finland announced it would halt such arrangements with the SAR, citing concerns about the new national security law here, and the possibility of criminals being sent to mainland China, where it said the judiciary isn't independent.

**Chinese envoy warns Canada against granting asylum to HK protesters (SCMP, Oct. 16):** China's Ambassador to Canada Cong Peiwu has blasted Canada for reportedly granting refugee status to Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters, calling it "interference" that would encourage "violent criminals" in Hong Kong. He was responding to a question that a Hong Kong couple who took part in pro-democracy protests had been granted asylum in Canada. "If Canada wanted to keep the 300,000 Canadian passport holders in Hong Kong safe, it should want to protect them from such "violent criminals," he said.

**US sanctions 'have no effect under HK law' (RTHK, Oct. 16):** The Hong Kong government has dismissed threats from the US to sanction financial institutions found to be working with 10 local and mainland officials including Chief Executive Carrie Lam and Liaison Office chief Luo Huining deemed to have undermined the SAR's high degree of autonomy, saying any such sanctions wouldn't be valid under local law. Beijing has responded by warning that China will take countermeasures if Washington continues "interfering" in local affairs. The SAR government also struck a defiant note, saying the threat of sanctions against banks "is another example of US hegemony".

**Trudeau warns Beijing over HK, treatment of Uighurs (RTHK, Oct. 14):** Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau warned China that its "coercive diplomacy," repressive measures in Hong Kong and detention of Uighur Muslims are counterproductive for itself and the rest of the world. Trudeau took aim at Beijing's record as he marked the 50th anniversary of Canada's diplomatic ties with China. He mentioned Canada's "concern for the protection of human rights and places like Hong Kong and the Uighurs."

**China is slammed over Hong Kong law (SCMP, Oct. 7):** The group of mostly Western countries, represented by Berlin's ambassador to the United Nations, Christoph Heusgen, expressed "deep concerns" in a UN speech over the national security law Beijing has imposed in Hong Kong. "We urge the relevant authorities to guarantee the rights which are protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Sino-British Joint Declaration, including freedoms of speech, the press and assembly," Heusgen said. Beijing and its UN allies fired back, rejecting what they deemed interference in "China's internal affairs".

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**New EU envoy to Hong Kong sees 'changing behaviour' (SCMP, Oct. 4):** Thomas Gnecchi, the European Union's new envoy, said he had noticed "worrying signs" about the way various sectors in the city were responding to the national security law. "Self-censorship is foremost in their thoughts and they feel the need to change their behaviour. We see schools having to change their curriculum, we see journalists changing the ways they report," he said. He added the EU business community, which is the second-largest in Hong Kong, would closely follow how the new law was implemented.

#### **Mainland Relation**

**How does Hong Kong stay relevant in China's new technological era? (SCMP, Oct. 30):** Hong Kong must work closely with Shenzhen and other neighbours over the border on technological innovation to stay relevant, according to analysts, after Communist Party leaders made self-sufficiency in that field a top priority for the Chinese nation. Beijing promises to uphold Hong Kong prosperity, stability in fifth plenum communique, but no mention of 'one country, two systems' as previously referred to. Johnny Lau, a veteran China watcher, said the absence of undertakings to uphold one country, two systems in this year's communique reflected that Beijing viewed Hong Kong's unique political model as less significant in the country's development.

**Beijing's man in HK urges city to capitalise on Greater Bay Area opportunities (SCMP, Oct. 21):** Luo Huining, head of Beijing's liaison office, says Hong Kong 'cannot afford to miss' out on the possibilities afforded by the Greater Bay Area scheme. He said the city's integration into the nation's development blueprint was not aimed at the "mainlandisation" or marginalisation of the city. Political commentator Johnny Lau said Luo's remarks indicated Beijing wanted Hong Kong to maintain its competitiveness to boost the development of the Greater Bay Area and the whole country.

**President Xi calls on more young Hongkongers to work, study, live in mainland (SCMP, Oct. 14):** President Xi Jinping has urged more young Hongkongers to work, study and live in mainland China during celebrations marking Shenzhen's 40th anniversary as a special economic zone. Xi told the ceremony that Shenzhen's meteoric rise showed what could be achieved through implementation of "one country, two systems", referring to the governing principle under which Hong Kong is part of China but promised a measure of autonomy. "We must attract more Hong Kong and Macau youth to study, work and live on the mainland, and boost interaction and communication between youth in Hong Kong and Macau with those in Guangdong, to bring their hearts closer to the motherland," he said.

#### **Domestic Policy/Politics**

**Tony Chung charged with secession (RTHK, Oct. 29):** Police have charged Tony Chung, a former leader of pro-independence group Studentlocalism, with secession, money laundering and conspiracy to publish seditious material. Two other former members of the group were also re-arrested. Police said that they were looking into whether the trio had incited secession via social media posts. When the national security legislation was imposed by Beijing, Studentlocalism announced that it would cease to operate in Hong Kong, although its overseas members would continue their activities.

**Differing opinions behind Patrick Hodge's appeal judge appointment (The Standard, Oct. 29):** Pro-establishment lawmakers are questioning foreign judges' understanding of the Basic Law and Hong Kong's "One Country, Two Systems". Judiciary Administrator Esther Leung said all overseas judges would have to swear to uphold the Basic Law. Lord Hodge's appointment as non-permanent judge of the Court of Final Appeal was accepted by Chief Executive Carrie Lam and endorsed by Legislative Council.

**Police to launch national security hotline (SCMP, Oct. 29):** Hong Kong's police national security unit is set to launch a new multi-platform hotline as early as next month for the public to report information that would help enforce the new legislation. Informants' identities would be kept secret and the intelligence gathered would only be handled by national security police. The National Security Department has arrested at least 22 men and six women so far.

**Law firms banned from case of HK detainees (RTHK, Oct. 28):** Five law firms representing 12 Hong Kong anti-government protesters who were arrested by mainland authorities in August have been told by the Justice Ministry that they are banned from handling the cases. Five lawyers appointed by the protesters' families were prevented from seeing the detainees in Shenzhen. Authorities have told them that lawyers to represent the detainees have already been chosen, although the relatives dispute this. The 12 were allegedly fleeing by boat to Taiwan when the Guangdong coast guard detained them.

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**University of HK appoints mainland scholars to top posts (RTHK, Oct. 28):** The University of Hong Kong's governing council appointed two mainland scholars as vice-presidents, with one refuting reports that he is a member of the Chinese Communist Party. Dozens of representatives from the HKU student union held a peaceful protest, insisting that the appointments should be postponed and the institute should give a full account of the political background of the candidates.

**More HK arrivals from mainland to skip quarantine (RTHK, Oct. 27):** The SAR government said it plans to allow more Hongkongers to return from the mainland without having to undergo quarantine from next month, saying the coronavirus situation across the border has stabilised. Chief Executive Carrie Lam said there would be a limit on the numbers. But still those who are exempted from quarantine must provide a negative result from a throat swab test (known as a PCR test) to show they are not infected.

**'Reasonable to let HK residents in mainland to vote' (RTHK, Oct. 20):** Chief Executive Carrie Lam said that it would be unreasonable to deny Hong Kong permanent residents living on the mainland the chance to vote in elections in the SAR, although she did not refer to voters in other jurisdictions. She said that any changes to voting arrangements, especially any changes that allow those living outside Hong Kong to vote, will require a legislative amendment.

**Long-reigning king of southern China, Hong Kong looks north to a possible usurper (SCMP, Oct. 15):** President Xi Jinping has given Shenzhen the starring role in turning southern China into an economic powerhouse, but Hong Kong is largely absent in his prescription for regional greatness. Xi has sparked fears within Hong Kong, the financial hub, which was rocked by months of anti-government protests last year, that it could be shunted to the sidelines of Beijing's grand plan for the region. While some observers caution Hong Kong might lose its competitive edge, others say it has irreplaceable role to play as an international financial centre.

**CE postpones policy address to next month after Xi's Shenzhen visit confirmed (SCMP, Oct. 12):** Chief Executive Carrie Lam has abruptly postponed her policy address (originally scheduled on Oct. 14), citing the need to secure more opportunities for the city's post-pandemic recovery from Beijing, and will instead spend the day with President Xi Jinping in Shenzhen to celebrate its 40th anniversary as a special economic zone. Lam says main reason for delay is to feed new measures (for economic recovery) set to emerge from Beijing talks into her address.

**Discussions on Hong Kong independence off limits in schools and universities (SCMP, Oct. 7):** Discussions on independence are off-limits in schools and universities, and teachers pushing a separatist stance could face criminal investigation, Hong Kong's education chief Kevin Yeung warned. He defended his bureau's decision to deregister a primary school teacher for life who was accused of spreading 'independence' message in classroom materials and lesson plans. Critics warned of a chilling effect on freedom of speech in schools.

## **Economy/Finance**

**Hong Kong has a huge role to play in supporting China's fintech juggernaut (SCMP, Oct. 28):** Hong Kong has a vital role to play in the development of financial technology in China as the country's fintech giants including Alibaba Group Holding, Ant Group, Tencent Holdings and others have plenty of room to increase revenue at home and internationally, according to Financial Secretary Paul Chan. "As the mainland continues to expand its flourishing fintech sector, Hong Kong, as one of the world's leading financial centres, has much to offer and is poised to reap the rewards," Chan said.

**Financial chief predicts growth in China will lift local economy in third quarter (SCMP, Oct. 25):** Mainland China's return to growth will help the HK economy recover from its battering by the coronavirus, according to the city's financial chief Paul Chan, who predicted a "significant improvement" to third-quarter performance and exports in September. But achieving that progress depended on how well HK contained the spread of Covid-19, a fight that had already strained public resources, he said.

**Cathay to cut 8,500 jobs, axe Dragon subsidiary (RTHK, Oct. 21):** Cathay Pacific has announced that its Cathay Dragon regional subsidiary will stop operating, while 8,500 staff roles will be cut – about a quarter of the total across the group – as it struggles to survive the coronavirus pandemic. "The global pandemic continues to have a devastating impact on aviation and the hard truth is we must fundamentally restructure the group to survive," Cathay CEO Augustus Tang said.

**National security law: Banks told by HKMA to report suspicious transactions (SCMP, Oct. 20):** Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) advised banks to file suspicious transaction reports for dealings that may be related to violations of the national security law to Joint Financial Intelligence Unit, an investigative division of the Hong Kong Police Force and the Customs & Excise Department. The obligation will apply to both local and international banks in the city.

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**Jobless rate climbs to 6.4 per cent, highest in nearly 16 years (SCMP, Oct. 20):** Unemployment in Hong Kong has surged to a nearly 16-year high of 6.4 per cent as the city continues to feel the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The unemployment rate rose 0.3 percentage points for the three months to September. Government warns labour market has recently shown signs of stabilising but will remain under pressure.

**Travel bubble with Singapore (RTHK, Oct. 15):** The government said that Singapore had agreed to set up a travel bubble with Hong Kong, so residents can fly between the two places without having to be quarantined. Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Edward Yau told a press conference that travellers would first have to take a Covid test recognised in each place, and no transit passengers would be allowed on the same flights as the "bubble" passengers. He said the two governments hope the scheme could be launched within weeks.

**2027 target for \$624b vision start (The Standard, Oct. 6):** Reclamation under the Lantau Tomorrow Vision program could start before 2027. Despite challenges over financing, the administration is pressing on with the project and aims to win approval for research funding in this legislative year. It is expected to cost HK\$624 billion to make it a reality. That will be by creating through reclamation three islands off east Lantau with a total area of about 1,700 hectares. Officials are advancing the line that the project will buttress housing needs over the next 30 years.

#### Technology/Innovation

**More flexibility needed to develop hi-tech region (SCMP, Oct. 26):** Professor Dennis Lo, a renowned medical scientist who won the Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences last month, has called for the Greater Bay Area to open its doors to genetic testing firms from the city and extend patent protection there. "If the Greater Bay Area wants to compete with technology pioneers in other bay areas, there should be more flexibility and encouragement for people to start their own businesses," Lo said. "It will be very important to do so," he said, explaining that Hong Kong, with only 7.5 million people, would not be able to develop influential hi-tech companies.

#### Macao

**The World Press Photo Exhibition shuts down in Macau (SCMP, Oct. 9):** The World Press Photo Exhibition 2020 has been abruptly shut down in Macau, with speculation that sensitive images featuring anti-government protests in Hong Kong last year was the reason. "If [this] is a result of pressure related to some photographs on display, then we consider it to be a serious and worrying incident that signals an erosion of freedom of expression," said the Macau Portuguese and English Press Association.

#### Special Focus

**China takes issue with British visa policy for Hongkongers (SCMP, Oct. 23):** China's foreign ministry has doubled down on its threat to stop recognising BN(O) passports. The British government is set to create a special class of visa for Hong Kong holders of British National (Overseas) passports as the first step in a new pathway to earning the right of abode in the country and full British citizenship. According to the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, there would be no cap on the number of BN(O) passport holders allowed to take part, and applications would open on January 31, 2021. More than one million people from Hong Kong could move to Britain in the next five years under the new visa scheme, including 500,000 in the first year, according to British media reports citing official estimates.

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