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Switzerland in the local press

Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin to hold first summit in Geneva on June 16 (SCMP, May 25):

The two leaders would be discussing 'issues of strategic stability', as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. Biden making his first international trip as president, will go to Geneva immediately after separate summit with his key Western allies in the G7, Nato and the European Union.

Controversy on Swiss donated Chinese contemporary art collection (SCMP, May 16):

Art collector **Uli Sigg**, feels he is the one trapped these days, by the ping-pong dialectics of global politics. Targeted by pro-Beijing nationalists in Hong Kong for a collection that some perceive as "anti-China". Back in 2012, he donated 1,464 works then valued at USD166.7 million and sold an additional 47 pieces to the future M+ museum for USD22.7 million. Sigg is now in HK for the last stage of gifting his contemporary Chinese art collection to the city, a drawn-out and controversial saga that has taken nearly a decade.

Tokyo 2020: Roger Federer calls for end to Olympic uncertainty (SCMP, May 15):

Former doubles gold medallist and 20-time grand slam champion says he has yet to decide if he will play in Tokyo. "...But if it (Olympic Games) doesn't happen because of the situation, I would be the first to understand. I think what the athletes need is a decision: is it or is it not going to happen?"

Facebook's Libra crypto project plans to launch a USD pegged digital currency (SCMP, May 13):

Digital currency group Diem Association, formerly known as Facebook Inc's Libra project, which comprises 26 financial firms and non-profits, said it was relocating its main operations from **Switzerland** to the US and withdrawing its payment system licence application with the **Swiss** financial regulator.

Police probe death of Swiss diplomat (ChinaDaily, May 5):

Iranian police started investigation of the death of a Swiss diplomat who died reportedly falling from a high-rise in the capital Teheran. The Swiss woman, in her 50s, fell from the upper floors of the 20-story building in which she lived in, the state-run IRNA news agency reported. The Swiss Foreign ministry acknowledged that an employee "died in a fatal incident on Tuesday".

Foreign Policy / International Relations

At least four British nationals 'mistreated, tortured' while in detention (SCMP, May 30):

According to Britain's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office at least four British nationals under detention in HK have allegedly been mistreated or tortured since 2019, compared to just one such case before that. Hong Kong's Security Bureau declined to confirm or deny the reports, saying more information would be required to ascertain the accuracy of the allegations. It pledged to handle all cases of alleged torture or mistreatment seriously.

Hong Kong asks WTO to reverse America's 'Made in China' rule (SCMP, May 29):

Commerce chief Edward Yau says the United States has imposed discriminatory and unjust requirement for political reasons. In February Yau also emphasized that HK's economic and trade status was on par with that of other WTO members and its special position was widely recognised by the international community. The executive order was filed by former US president Trump in retaliation for Beijing's decision to impose a national security law.

US secretary of state Blinken slams HK's new election bill (SCMP, May 28):

Blinken says the bill 'severely constrains people in HK from meaningfully participating in their own governance' and also called for the dropping of charges 'against all individuals charged under the National Security Law and other laws merely for standing for election'. The new election bill was passed by the HK Legislature on Thursday meant to align the city's electoral process with Beijing's declaration that only "patriots" can hold leadership roles there, changes that prompted US top diplomats to announce sanctions in March.

Mainland

Beijing agencies overseeing HK condemn threats against judge (SCMP, May 30):

In a statement on Sunday, two central government offices overseeing HK have joined the city's justice department and legal sector in decrying threats made against a local judge after sentencing of media tycoon Jimmy Lai and nine opposition figures over their roles in an illegal 2019 rally. In a separate statement, the HK and Macau Affairs Office similarly slammed the threats, warning they constituted a breach of the Beijing-imposed national security law.

Beijing to expand HK office focusing on National Security Law and propaganda (SCMP, May 24):

HK and Macau Affairs Office spokesman Yang Guang expected to head new department dealing with disseminating official information. Former liaison office legal director Wang Zhenmin tipped to run national security affairs department. The expansion is seen by some observers as a signal the central government's determination to win the "ideological battle" in the city.

Hainan's offshore duty-free sales have surged over the past year (SCMP, May 5):

Beijing's plan is to turn the tropical island into the nation's largest "free-trade port" and a duty-free shopping mecca by lowering taxes, relaxing visa requirements and loosening restriction on capital flows and data by 2035 that it could one day rival Singapore or Hong Kong. The country's financial regulators have also announced new policies for Hainan, including making it easier to convert the yuan and improve market access for foreign investors.

Domestic Policy / Politics**Exhibition documenting Hongkonger's support of Tiananmen protesters opened (SCMP, May 30):**

Organisers of HK's vigil opens museum to visitors wishing to leave flowers to mark crackdown's anniversary. The alternative was announced police force's decision to ban the annual June 4 candlelight vigil for the second year in a row.

Jimmy Lai jailed for up to 18 months after government freezes his assets(SCMP, May 15 & 28):

Pro-democratic media tycoon Jimmy Lai's assets of USD64 million frozen by the government using the Beijing-imposed national security law. Lai holds a 71% stake in the parent company Next Digital of the pro-democratic newspaper AppleDaily. The newspaper claims that its future is uncertain without further cash injection. Some of Hong Kong's most prominent democracy campaigners were given new prison terms on May 28, this time over an unauthorised protest on October 1, 2019. Some of the new sentences are to be served concurrently. Lai is currently facing three security-related charges and serving a 14-month sentence (for taking part in unauthorised assemblies in Aug 2019).

More than 34'000 HKers apply for Britain's new BN(O) visa scheme (SCMP, May 27):

In its first two months, 7'200 of 34'000 applications have already been approved according to Britain's Home Office. The British National (Overseas) scheme was launched on January 31 in response to Beijing's imposition of a national security law on Hong Kong, one that London said raised human rights concerns and constituted a "clear and serious breach" of the agreement under which the city was returned to China.

Hong Kong electoral changes: lawmakers pass landmark bill (SCMP, May 3 & 27):

With nearly all opposition lawmakers ousted from their seats or having resigned in protest, pro-establishment members ensured bill sailed through LegCo. The bill will drastically reshape its electoral system and meet Beijing's bottom line that only "patriots" should be allowed to govern the city. Chairman of the Democratic Party, Lo Kin-hei said the legislative changes had reduced general voter's say in election. . The bill was scrutinised in the near-complete absence of opposition lawmakers as most from the bloc had resigned en masse last November over the disqualification of four of their colleagues.

Red Cross declines being part of the election committee (SCMP, May 15):

The Hong Kong Red Cross declined to take its seat in the revamped 1,500-strong election committee that will pick the city's chief executive, citing its policy of political neutrality. The Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau said it respected the group's decision, and that its seat in the Election Committee's medical and health services sector would be filled by the Human Organ Transplant Board, a statutory body.

Chief Executive receives flour in the mail, prompting alarm (TheStandard & RTHK, May 14):

On 13 May, CE Carrie Lam, Secretary for Security John Lee, and Police Commissioner Chris Tang, each received a letter with white powder. A day later, RTHK received a similar letter containing white powder. No one was injured in the incidents. Police classified the cases as "discovery of suspicious objects", adding that the powder did not contain any dangerous substances.

LegCo approved an oath-taking bill (HKFP & RTHK, May 12):

LegCo approved a bill adding district councillors to a growing list of Hongkongers obliged to swear allegiance to the government. Councillors who refuse the pledge in the coming weeks, as well as those found to be "unpatriotic", will be removed from office. Those accused will be immediately suspended from office until the courts make a decision. Over 20 district councillors already resigned in recent months.

HK leader attacks foreign media over coverage of ‘so-called peaceful’ protests (HKFP, May 11): Foreign media outlets came under attack by Chief Executive Lam again over the way they report so-called “peaceful” protests and demonstrations in the city. Lam said that supposedly peaceful assemblies in the city have been “abused” and that reporting on them by foreign media disregarded the city’s commitment to the rule of law. Lam did not specify which foreign media she was referring to.

Joshua Wong and three others jailed for unauthorized June 4 vigil (AppleDaily, May 6): Four Hong Kong pro-democracy activists including Joshua Wong, district councillors, Tiffany Yuen and Janelle Leung, received prison sentences of up to 10 months for taking part in an unauthorized June 4 vigil last year. They pleaded guilty to gathering at Victoria Park last year to commemorate the victims of the massacre in Beijing in 1989. For the first time, authorities refused to grant permission for the annual candlelight vigil, citing the pandemic, but thousands of people turned up. Wong, who is serving a 13.5-month jail term for his involvement in the anti-extradition protests in 2019, was sentenced to another 10 months in jail.

Grab opportunities offered by China’s development blueprint or be left behind (SCMP, May 3): Former Chief Executive CY Leung warns that HK could be left behind if it doesn’t grab the opportunities offered by China’s development blueprint and added that even some poor and remote areas on the mainland are thriving a lot more than certain parts of HK. The 14th five-year plan is an action agenda for the social and economic development of China over the next five years, from 2021 to 2025 and it seeks to support HK in enhancing its status as a global financial, transport and aviation and trade centre, as well as to deepen cooperation with neighbouring cities as an element for the GBA development.

Economy / Finance

HK retail sales rise 20.1% in March, but sector’s recovery is losing steam (SCMP, May 4): Hong Kong’s retail rebound lost steam in March, posting a 20.1% year-on-year increase that was significantly lower than February’s figure, despite the easing of COVID-19 social-distancing rules. Provisional figures released by the Census and Statistics Department on Tuesday showed retail sales in March had risen to HKD27.6 billion (USD3.5 billion).

HK economy rebounds sharply, 7.8% growth in first quarter (SCMP, May 3): A stronger than expected growth of 7.8% in the first quarter of 2021 marks an 11-year high after a historic low a year ago amid the coronavirus pandemic. The advanced forecast by the Census and Statistics Department on Monday showed a V-shaped rebound in GDP from an all-time low of a 9.1% contraction in the same period last year. This performance also marks the end of a six-quarter decline which began in Q3 2019 and “reflected the very strong growth of exports of goods amid the global economic recovery led by mainland China and the United States” a government spokesman said. Tourism remained in the doldrums, he added.

COVID-19 / Health & Environment

Vaccines surplus to be donated, government suggests (SCMP, May 30): HK government revealed last week that it was considering to donate COVID-19 vaccines amid a sluggish inoculation drive, but health and public affairs experts argued the announcement itself was not enough to spur residents into action. On Friday, property tycoons sent shock waves across the city by announcing they were sponsoring a lucky draw to win a new flat for those who have two jobs.

Government tightens arrivals, Singapore travel bubble put on hold (SCMP, May 17): The long awaited travel bubble between the two destinations has been put on hold indefinitely for a second time amid a sharp resurgence in untraceable COVID-19 cases in Singapore.

Flight from UK and Ireland to HK resuming on Friday (SCMP, May 4): Hong Kong removes extremely-high-risk classification for both countries, lifting a flight-arrival ban imposed more than four months ago to guard against more transmissible coronavirus variants.

Covid testing: Domestic helpers accuse government of discrimination (TheStandard, May 3): HK government required all helpers in the city (about 370’000 people) to undergo mandatory testing by May 9 after a helper was earlier tested positive for the mutual coronavirus variant with unknown source. One of the helpers said she still finds it hard to understand why domestic workers are the only ones who need compulsory testing, but not the employers or other foreign workers.

Macao

Health Bureau targeted by cyberattack (Macao Post Daily, May 11):

The Health Bureau's IT system was "maliciously" attacked on two consecutive days last week, affecting the normal functioning of its various systems such as the Macao Health Code system, Covid-19 vaccination booking system and nucleic acid testing appointment system. The Health Bureau strongly condemned the cyberattacks and transferred the case to the Judiciary Police for investigation

Macao resident wins landmark cross border same-sex marriage case in Taiwan (MB, May 6):

Macao resident won a legal battle to get his same-sex marriage with his Taiwanese partner legalised, making it the first successful cross-border gay marriage union in Taiwan. On the same day gay marriage became officially recognised in Taiwan in 2020, Macao resident Leong Chin Fai attempted to register his union with his partner, but the union was denied as marriage with Taiwanese nationals was not allowed for residents of jurisdictions that did not recognise gay marriage, such as the Macao SAR. A Taipei court on 6 May pronounced that the Department of Household Registration must allow marriage.

Special Focus: Press Freedom

Libraries remove additional pro-democracy books (HKFP, May 10):

Nine books written by Hong Kong pro-democracy figures and critics of Beijing were removed from local public libraries for review, after the authorities cited potential national security law violations. Among the authors vetted are former Democratic Party chairman Albert Ho and former lawmaker Tanya Chan.

Top producer at embattled documentary series Hong Kong Connection quits (RTHK, May 6):

Paul Lee Yin-chit's resignation came hours after an episode from the programme about the July 2019 Yuen Long mob attacks was handed a 2021 Human Rights Press award. RTHK reportedly told his team to only report on human interest and social issues. Lee headed the HK's longest running 30-min TV documentary programme Hong Kong Connection since 1978.

RTHK dismisses vocal journalist on World Press Freedom Day (AppleDaily, May 3):

RTHK decided not to renew the contract of journalist Nabela Qoser, who incurred the wrath of pro-Beijing politicians and media during the social unrest of 2019 with her tough questioning of officials. Qoser was cleared of wrongdoing, but RTHK reopened its investigation last October. RTHK responded that it handled staff issues in accordance with the established mechanism and procedures.

Public broadcaster removes online archives (RTHK, May 3):

RTHK announced on 3 May that it would delete content more than a year old from its online channels. The controversial documentary series Hong Kong Connection and satirical show Headliner were among the first to be taken down.

Press freedom index reaches record low (SCMP, RTHK, May 3):

Perceived levels of press freedom among Hong Kong journalists have crashed to the lowest on record according to the Hong Kong Journalists Association's (HKJA) latest survey, with 85% of the more than 360 respondents blaming the SAR government. The association's main index on press freedom in 2020 came in at 32.1 out of 100, down 4.1 points from the year before and the lowest figure since the survey was first carried out in 2013. The survey found that self-censorship worsened, it became more difficult to access information, and there was a sense of dwindling legal protections for those in the industry. The HK Journalists Association (HKJA) warned on Monday that although media workers have never been more pessimistic about press freedom in the territory, the worst is yet to come.

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