

# Press Review Hong Kong

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## Contents

<b>Switzerland.....</b>	<b>2</b>
Germany hits out at Swiss over munitions refusal .....	2
China's CATL, world's biggest maker of electric-car batteries, weighs USD5 bil Swiss GDR sale .....	2
<b>Mainland .....</b>	<b>2</b>
HK and Macau Affairs Office briefed on SAR government's work .....	2
China announces new talent visas for top GBA workers to head to HK, Macao .....	2
Beijing blasts criticism against national security trial of 47 activists .....	2
<b>Foreign Policy / International Relations .....</b>	<b>2</b>
HK tells US consulate general to stop 'scaremongering' over city's future.....	2
Beijing restriction on US diplomatic talks with HK politicians eased .....	2
HK dispatches rescue team to quake-struck Turkey .....	2
Chief Executive began a visit to the United Arab Emirates to promote the SAR.....	2
Hong Kong falls by two places to 34 in the latest Human Freedom Index 2022 .....	3
Activists and media tycoon Jimmy Lai nominated for Nobel Peace Prize by US lawmakers .....	3
105,000 Hongkongers start new lives in UK since BN(O) visa scheme began 2 years ago .....	3
<b>Domestic Policy / Politics .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Inmate visits may pose national security risks, says Secretary for Security.....	3
Over 500 in jail for National Security Law violations and involvement in 2019 protests .....	3
TV, radio stations must air at least 30 min a week on national identity and National Security Law .....	3
Land sales come with a national security warning.....	3
More than 3000 police officers have left the force in the past three years .....	3
Ombudsman finds 'room for improvement' in Justices of the Peace Visit Programme for detainees .....	4
Satisfaction in Hong Kong government is highest since 2017 – survey .....	4
<b>Economy.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Hong Kong's exports fall by 36.7% in January 2023, marking biggest monthly drop in 70 years .....	4
EUR23.4 million campaign gives away 500 000 air tickets to help reboot tourism .....	4
HK falls to 88 <sup>th</sup> in international democracy index .....	4
Ban on CBD products takes effect with more than 77,000 cannabidiol items surrendered by users .....	4
Deficit hits HKD183.2 bil (EUR21.4 bil) in nine months .....	4
HK economy shrinks 'worse-than-expected 3.5%' in 2022.....	4
<b>COVID-19 /Environment / Culture .....</b>	<b>4</b>
HK Ends One of World's Longest Mask Mandates After 945 Days .....	4
Covid curbs and changes in political environment bring HK's liveability ranking down to 92 <sup>nd</sup> .....	4
<b>Macao.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Mask mandate relaxes for most locations.....	5
Financial reserves suffer a loss of MOP20.75 bil.....	5
Chief Executive meets Guangzhou, Zhuhai mayors to boost ties .....	5
New Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone regulations take effect 1 March .....	5
Gaming revenue jumps 82.5% as China, HK travel resumes.....	5
<b>Special Focus: Budget 2023.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Financial Secretary unveils HKD761 bil (EUR89.1 bil) budget in bid to boost post-Covid recovery .....	5

## Switzerland

### Germany hits out at Swiss over munitions refusal

German Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck on Wednesday criticised Switzerland for refusing to supply munitions for German-made Gepard anti-aircraft guns being used by Ukraine to repel Russia's attack. "Some countries still have munitions but are reluctant to supply them to Ukraine for historical reasons," Habeck said in an interview with Die Zeit newspaper. [RTHK](#) Feb 16

### China's CATL, world's biggest maker of electric-car batteries, weighs USD5 bil Swiss GDR sale

Contemporary Amperex Technology Limited (CATL), the world's biggest maker of batteries for electric cars, is seeking to raise at least USD5 billion via a global depositary receipt (GDR) sale in Switzerland, according to a person familiar with the matter. CATL would be joining other Chinese companies in tapping the European market as lingering geopolitical risks and regulatory woes reduce the appeal of other offshore markets like the US. [SCMP](#) Feb 1

## Mainland

### HK and Macau Affairs Office briefed on SAR government's work

The office announced that Xia Baolong, director of the office, met 'relevant people from HK society' several days ago in Shenzhen to learn about the latest developments in HK. South China Morning Post reported that attendees included Chief Secretary Eric Chan, Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Erick Tsang and Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs Alice Mak. Sources said Xia solicited views on 'a number of issues', which included HK's economic recovery after the Covid pandemic subsided and reforms of the district councils. [TS](#) [SCMP](#) Feb 14

### China announces new talent visas for top GBA workers to head to HK, Macao

Starting from 20 February, science, health, legal and other local professional talent in the mainland needed for the Greater Bay Area's development will be allowed unlimited travel to HK and Macao under a new multi-entry visa scheme. Experts said the scheme would help close talent gap in HK. [TS](#) [SCMP](#) Feb 10

### Beijing blasts criticism against national security trial of 47 activists

The Chinese foreign ministry's office in HK expressed strong opposition to US criticism of HK's largest national security law trial, saying it slandered the human rights and the rule of law in the city. [TS](#) [CCFMO](#) Feb 7

## Foreign Policy / International Relations

### HK tells US consulate general to stop 'scaremongering' over city's future

The statement came after the US consulate was unmoved by the warning from Liu Guangyuan, commissioner of Beijing's foreign office in HK, and said it would 'not hesitate to express publicly and privately the US' deep concern over the erosion of HK's autonomy. Regina Ip, convenor of the Executive Council, said diplomats in HK should respect the SAR government. [SCMP](#) [HKGov](#) Feb 25

### Beijing restriction on US diplomatic talks with HK politicians eased

The central government has lifted a requirement imposed in 2020 in November last year for the US' top diplomat in HK to obtain its approval before meeting city officials or representatives of public educational institutes and asked for five days' notice instead. Lau Siu-kai, a consultant at the semi-official Chinese Association of Hong Kong and Macau Studies think tank, said he was surprised by the thaw as Sino-US relations had not improved over the last few years. [SCMP](#) Feb 14

### HK dispatches rescue team to quake-struck Turkey

A 59-member team formed by the Urban Search and Rescue Team of the Fire Services Department, officers from the Security Bureau, Immigration Department and Department of Health, was sent to Turkey to assist with earthquake rescue work. Turkey's consul general Peyami Kalyoncu expressed his gratitude. [TS](#) [RTHK](#) [SCMP](#) Feb 8

### Chief Executive began a visit to the United Arab Emirates to promote the SAR

John Lee told a business forum in Abu Dhabi that the two economies are strong and longstanding business partners, noting that around 9.5% of the trade between mainland China and the UAE was routed through HK in 2021. Lee added that the two governments have agreed to look into signing a memorandum of understanding on green and sustainable finance cooperation. [RTHK](#) Feb 7

- **HK, UAE set to begin talks on free trade deal**

Chief Executive John Lee announced during his visit to Dubai that HK and the United Arab Emirates are set to commence negotiations on a bilateral free trade agreement to boost investment ties between the two economies. The UAE's minister of state for foreign trade, Thani bin Ahmed Al

Zeyoudi, said strengthening investment and trade partnerships with HK supports the strategic cooperation between the UAE and China. [SCMP RTHK](#) Feb 9

- **HK, Saudi Arabia sign 6 deals as CE vows 'new level of cooperation'**

Chief Executive John Lee visited the Saudi capital Riyadh as his first stop on his week-long Middle East trip. The two economies have signed six bilateral agreements to forge closer ties between stock exchanges, business associations and technology firms. But Lee stopped short of reporting substantial progress on his government's efforts to attract state oil giant Aramco or its subsidiaries to consider a secondary listing in HK. [SCMP TS Bloomberg](#) RTHK Feb 3 & 6

**Hong Kong falls by two places to 34 in the latest Human Freedom Index 2022**

The index is jointly published by the Cato Institute and The Fraser Institute. The [report](#) described the involvement of the Chinese Communist Party in HK affairs undermined the 'one country, two systems', and said 'HK's descent into tyranny is a tragedy'. [DSD](#) Feb 2

**Activists and media tycoon Jimmy Lai nominated for Nobel Peace Prize by US lawmakers**

Representative Christopher Smith and Senator Jeff Merkley, who both lead the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, nominated Cardinal Joseph Zen, Lai, former Stand News editor Gwyneth Ho, Joshua Wong, Chow Hang-tung and labour rights advocate Lee Cheuk-yan for the prize, stating that they are ardent champions of HK's autonomy, human rights and the rule of law. All of the nominees have been charged, or are being investigated, under HK's national security law. [SCMP](#) Feb 3

**105,000 Hongkongers start new lives in UK since BN(O) visa scheme began 2 years ago**

The British government figures showed 10,100 Hongkongers applied for the visa programme in the fourth quarter of last year taking the total to 160,700 almost two years since its launch on 31 Jan 2021, up until December last year. About 96% of them - or 153,708 - were approved. The immigration policy, which launched on Jan 31, 2021, allows BNO passport holders and their dependents to live and work in the UK for up to five years, thus providing them a pathway towards permanent residency and citizenship. Meanwhile, the UK's move has drawn continuous criticism from the authorities in Hong Kong and mainland China, with both saying they no longer recognize the BNO passport as a legitimate identity or travel document. [HKFP SCMP](#) Feb 1 & 23

## **Domestic Policy / Politics**

**Inmate visits may pose national security risks, says Secretary for Security**

Chris Tang alleged certain individuals, who frequently visited inmates, attempted to instill hatred against the government. He cited two people who paid more than 600 visits to 106 inmates jailed over the 2019 protests. He said the visitors either tried to make political gains through the prison visits or earn money by selling daily necessities to inmates. [RTHK HKFP](#) Feb 24

**Over 500 in jail for National Security Law violations and involvement in 2019 protests**

According to the Correctional Services Department, as of end-December last year, 522 people were jailed at correctional institutions for national security law violations and their involvement in the 2019 protests, a 26% jump from the figure recorded in the previous year. [TS SCMP](#) Feb 23

**TV, radio stations must air at least 30 min a week on national identity and National Security Law**

The authorities announced the new rules as part of the midterm review of the 12-year licence for Television Broadcasts, ViuTV, HOY TV, Commercial Radio and Metro Broadcast. Meanwhile, the required broadcast hours for English programming on English-language radio stations was reduced from 80% to 55%. [SCMP HKFP](#) Feb 15

**Land sales come with a national security warning**

The Lands Department has added national security clauses to all land sale and short-term lease tender documents in HK. A buyer can be disqualified if they or their parent firms engage in activities that endanger national security or affect public order. Property developers dismissed fears about a drop in investor confidence, despite there being no consultation on the change. John Lee said the property sector understands and supports the need to uphold national security, dismissing suggestions that the addition of national security clauses to land sale documents is affecting investor confidence. He added that the government had been selling land as usual since the clauses were put in place in November. [TS SCMP Bloomberg Reuters RTHK SCMP HKFP TS](#) Feb 13 & 14

**More than 3000 police officers have left the force in the past three years**

Chris Tang, Secretary for Security, said the force has devised plans to strengthen recruitment. [RTHK](#) Feb 8

## **Ombudsman finds ‘room for improvement’ in Justices of the Peace Visit Programme for detainees**

The Ombudsman Winnie Chiu noted that institutions of some departments and organizations do not immediately notify all the persons in custody, detained, or hospitalized when JPs arrive at an institution for surprise visits. Chiu added some institutions also do not inform institutionalized persons that they can request to meet JPs in private. [TS](#) Feb 2

## **Satisfaction in Hong Kong government is highest since 2017 – survey**

A recent survey conducted by the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute found that Chief Executive John Lee’s popularity rating had “increased significantly” since last month, with the Hong Kong leader scoring 57.0 marks, according to the results of a random telephone survey conducted by the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute (PORI). [HKFP](#) Feb 1

## **Economy**

### **Hong Kong’s exports fall by 36.7% in January 2023, marking biggest monthly drop in 70 years**

Total value of exports for January reach HKD290.9 bil, with the government pointing the finger at continued weak external demand; while imports fall by 30.2 per cent to hit HKD316.3 bil, according to Census and Statistics Department. Exports to mainland China were particularly hard hit last month, falling more than 43 per cent year on year. [SCMP](#) Feb 27

### **EUR23.4 million campaign gives away 500 000 air tickets to help reboot tourism**

The SAR government officially commenced the global promotion campaign in an attempt to put the international spotlight on HK again. Chief Executive John Lee said HK is ‘back on centre stage’ after three years of stringent Covid-19 rules. The free air tickets will be distributed by home-based airlines Cathay Pacific, HK Express, and Hong Kong Airlines. [HKFP](#) [TS](#) [RFA](#) [Bloomberg](#) [Reuters](#) Feb 2

### **HK falls to 88<sup>th</sup> in international democracy index**

HK saw its ranking slip three spots on the Economist’s democracy index, landing 88<sup>th</sup>, a ranking behind Libya and Ukraine. The index said HK’s civil service has suffered loss of manpower due to worsened political conditions and shrinking freedoms, while the national security law has hindered the formation of unions. [HKFP](#) [TS](#) Feb 3

### **Ban on CBD products takes effect with more than 77,000 cannabidiol items surrendered by users**

Hong Kong’s ban on products that contain a substance derived from cannabis came into force on Wednesday with more than 77,000 such items already surrendered by the public to authorities. Possessing or consuming CBD could face seven years in jail and a maximum fine USD128,000. Those who sell or produce the items may be imprisoned for life or fined USD 641,000. [SCMP](#) Feb 1

### **Deficit hits HKD183.2 bil (EUR21.4 bil) in nine months**

HK’s deficit for the first nine months of the current fiscal year stood at HKD183.2 bil after taking into account the EUR2.34 bil generated by the issuance of green bonds, a government spokesman said. Expenditures for the nine-month period amounted to EUR69.5 bil and revenues EUR45.7 bil. [TS](#) Feb 1

### **HK economy shrinks ‘worse-than-expected 3.5%’ in 2022**

Hong Kong economy shrinks ‘worse-than-expected 3.5 per cent’ in 2022, but experts predict 3% growth this year under return to normal. Economy contracted 4.2% yoy in the fourth quarter of 2022, latest estimates show. Decline in GDP was mainly attributable to the continued weak performance in external trade, but the economy was expected to recover this year as Hong Kong returned to normality, government says. For the whole of 2022, the latest GDP forecast was for a 3.5 per cent contraction, which would be the city’s third in four years. The government expects a recovery in 2023. [SCMP](#) Feb 1

## **COVID-19 /Environment / Culture**

### **HK Ends One of World’s Longest Mask Mandates After 945 Days**

Masks will no longer be needed outdoors, indoors or on public transport, Hong Kong leader John Lee said at press briefing Tuesday. The move comes as the government seeks to attract tourists and overseas workers to revitalize the finance hub. Next month will see Hong Kong host the biggest series of international events since often-violent protests in 2019 shut down much of the city, including a music festival, Art Basel and the Rugby Sevens tournament. [Bloomberg](#) Feb 28

### **Covid curbs and changes in political environment bring HK’s liveability ranking down to 92<sup>nd</sup>**

According to ECA International, the ranking for HK for Asian expatriates fell by 15 to 92<sup>nd</sup> behind that of most places, including Taipei, Tokyo, Sydney, London, Vancouver, and San Francisco. Singapore remains the most liveable location for expatriates from East Asia. [TS](#) [SCMP](#) Feb 8

## Macao

### Mask mandate relaxes for most locations

Residents and tourists can go mask-free in outdoor areas from today with masks only required when taking public transport and in medical institutions and care homes. That leaves HK as one of the last jurisdictions with the mask mandate still intact after authorities extended the policy to 8 March. [TS](#) Feb 27

### Financial reserves suffer a loss of MOP20.75 bil

The government suffered a loss of MOP20.75 bil last year from investing its financial reserves, representing an annual negative return of 3.4%. As at the end of last year, the financial reserves stood at MOP557.97 bil, made up of basic reserves of MOP185.13 bil and extraordinary reserves of MOP372.84 bil. [MN](#) [MB](#) Feb 22

### Chief Executive meets Guangzhou, Zhuhai mayors to boost ties

Ho Iat Seng met with the mayors of Guangzhou and Zhuhai cities in Macao yesterday to discuss regional cooperation and recent measures adopted for Hengqin and Nansha. Ho expressed confidence that Macao's economy would make a firm recovery this year with the healthy and orderly development of the gaming and tourism sectors. [MB](#) Feb 15

### New Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone regulations take effect 1 March

According to the Standing Committee of the Guangdong Provincial People's Congress, the regulations cover eight chapters and focus on six aspects, including Administration, Planning, construction and management, Industrial development, Facilitation of Macao residents living and working in the zone, Promotion of the integration between Hengqin and Macao and legal protection. [MN](#) [MPD](#) [MDT](#) [MB](#) Feb 9

### Gaming revenue jumps 82.5% as China, HK travel resumes

The Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau said yesterday GGR climbed 82.5% last month year-on-year to MOP11.6 bil (EUR1.32 bil), beating the median estimate of a 36.5% increase, according to analysts surveyed by Bloomberg. That is the first rise since February last year and the highest monthly revenue since January 2020. [MDT](#) Feb 2

## Special Focus: Budget 2023

### Financial Secretary unveils HKD761 bil (EUR89.1 bil) budget in bid to boost post-Covid recovery

Paul Chan aimed to strike a balance between meeting the immediate needs of residents and businesses hit by Covid restrictions and stick to fiscal prudence. Residents will receive another EUR585 in vouchers, while new taxes will target smokers and the Hong Kong Jockey Club. Chan expected a deficit of EUR16.4 bil in 2022-23, the second-worst performing fiscal year after 1997. [SCMP](#) [HKFP](#) [TS](#) [RTHK](#) Feb 22

- **HKD3 bil (EUR351 mil) boost for AI and tech research:** The fund is earmarked as authorities consider developing an AI super-computing center. Another EUR5.9 mil is allocated to boost the development of the Web3 industry, which covers the application of cryptocurrencies and non-fungible tokens. [TS](#) Feb 23
- **Set up Green Technology and Finance Development Committee to drive HK into an international green technology and finance center:** The committee will invite industry representatives from green technology, green finance, and green standard certification to assist in the formulation of an action agenda. [TS](#) Feb 22
- **New office to co-ordinate matters of Northern Metropolis:** Chan noted that the Metropolis supports HK in establishing a new industry pattern of 'South-North dual engine (finance-innovation and technology)'. [TS](#) Feb 22
- **Police equipment budget rises 59%:** The rise came despite the fact that the Force spent only an estimated 8.5% of the allotted HK\$507 million (EUR59.4 million) budget for equipment in the 2022-23 financial year. [HKFP](#) Feb 22

[Back to top](#)

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