

Occupy Central

Thousands return to streets in protest at government's decision to cancel talks with students: Supporters of the Occupy movement returned to the streets in a massive show of support after the government scrapped a promised dialogue with students on Oct. 10. The crowds at the main rally site in Admiralty swelled to tens of thousands, organisers said. Premier Li Keqiang, in Germany to meet Chancellor Dr Angela Merkel, said he was confident that "social stability" could be preserved in HK and stressed that Beijing would not change its "one country, two systems" approach to the city. Merkel hoped the demonstrations remained peaceful.

New Occupy report to Beijing promised: Protesters have been promised a new report will be sent to Beijing that will spell out their sentiments and worries about the framework for political reform. The government will also explore the option of setting up a platform for young people and students to be involved in discussions on political development beyond the 2017 chief executive election. Chief Secretary for Administration Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor announced the moves on Oct. 21 after a televised discussion with students. But the Federation of Students said the umbrella movement (Occupy Central) will continue as there has been no concrete response from the government.

Police in the line of fire: Pressure was mounting on Oct. 15 for the police officers captured on video beating an unarmed protester to be arrested as more allegations of violent behaviour by police emerged. Calls for the seven - who were suspended from duty - to be arrested and placed under formal criminal investigation came both from lawyers representing the alleged victim, Civic Party member Ken Tsang, and from angry officers within the ranks of the police force, with one describing their behaviour as "disgraceful". Occupy Central joined calls for a full criminal investigation in a statement issued on Oct. 16 which also called on its supporters to be "vigilant" and not allow violence during protests, "which would give the government the excuse to launch a crackdown".

David Cameron says Britain should stand up for HK rights: British Prime Minister David Cameron said on Oct. 15 that Britain should stand up for the rights of people in HK. Answering a question in parliament about the unrest, Cameron said it was important people in HK were able to enjoy freedoms and rights set out in an Anglo-Chinese agreement. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei, asked about Cameron's comments, said HK matters were an internal affair. "HK is a special administrative region of China. No foreign government or individual has the right to gesticulate on this issue," he told a daily news briefing in Beijing.

US hits back at claims that 'external forces' are backing Occupy Central: Those who accuse foreign countries of backing protests in HK are "distracting from the issues at hand", the United States said as it hit back at claims that Washington is meddling in the city's internal affairs. The remarks made by the US consulate in HK come just one day after Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying noted that "external forces from different countries from different parts of the world" had taken part in the Occupy movement at ATV's Newline on Oct. 19. Scott Robinson, spokesman for the US consulate general, rejected the accusation that Washington is manipulating the activities of any person, group, or political party in HK.

Occupy Central organisers want independent HK, People's Daily claims: Occupy Central organisers were accused of plotting for an independent HK in a commentary published in state media the People's Daily. The People's Daily said the movement was ultimately a violent protest and reasserted Beijing's claim that foreign powers were working behind the scenes. State Councilor Yang Jiechi discussed the HK crisis when he met US Secretary of State John Kerry in Boston for two days of talks. A senior US State Department official said Yang and Kerry had engaged in a "non-combative" yet "direct and candid" exchange over a range of issues, including HK.

Public support for Occupy movement growing, survey shows: Public support for the Occupy movement has grown since the campaign began, and it continues to divide residents, a Chinese University survey has found. Support for the movement was particularly significant among young people, pan-democrats and moderates. Pollsters said they believed that the police force's controversial handling of protesters - including using tear gas and batons - was a catalyst. Nearly 38 per cent of respondents said they supported the Occupy movement, which seeks to have chief executive candidates in 2017 run without vetting by Beijing. More than 35 per cent said they did not support the Occupy protests. The poll, conducted between October 8 and 15.

China won't budge on HK poll decision, plenum statement shows: The Communist Party's key meeting ended on Oct. 23 with a pledge to guarantee implementation of "one country, two systems" and maintain the long-term prosperity of HK in accordance with law. Analysts said it suggested Beijing was unlikely to yield on its decision over HK's political reform. Academics said the remarks were in line with Beijing's stance on HK's political development - that electoral reform must be carried out within the framework of the Basic Law.

Bar Association slams Occupy Central for flouting injunctions to clear streets: The Bar Association says Occupy protesters' defiance of injunctions to clear the streets is eroding the rule of law and sets a bad precedent. In a statement, the association said it viewed "with dismay" recent calls for open defiance of the injunctions to clear protest sites in Mong Kok and Admiralty. It said deliberate defiance of a court order would result in a direct affront to the rule of law.

Occupy protests have hit credit-card spending, warns Financial Secretary John Tsang: Credit-card spending has plunged as major shopping areas are hit by Occupy protests, the financial secretary says. The impact would soon be reflected in short- and medium-term economic data, Tsang said. While the financial market

remained stable, Tsang said that some foreign investors were delaying decisions before making investments in HK. Terence Chong, an economics professor at Chinese University, agreed that Occupy had affected retail businesses because the protest sites were in areas frequented by tourists. But Chong said Occupy was unlikely to affect the financial market, as it was not dependent on a physical area.

Economy and markets stable despite protests, John Tsang says: HK's economic condition and financial markets have remained stable despite the Occupy Central protests, Financial Secretary John Tsang told fellow finance ministers from Apec on Oct. 23. Tsang said the government would need to collect more data to assess the protests' impact. Some sectors including transport, food and beverage, retailing and tourism have said they had suffered during the protests.

World Bank says Occupy protests fail to impact HK's business climate: The Occupy protests have not affected HK's business climate, says the World Bank Group, which in its annual report rates the city as the third easiest place in the world to do business. "Right now, the pro-democracy campaign does not appear to have an impact on the overall business confidence," said Wendy Werner, manager for trade and competitiveness at the World Bank Group. "From what we can see here, as long as transparency is strong, there's good corporate governance rules, and we have business-friendly rules and regulations, the investment climate really should stay intact, and that seems to be the case right now [in HK]," Werner said.

Occupy threatens city's growth, warn Norman Chan and Joseph Yam: The head of the Monetary Authority and his predecessor have warned that the Occupy movement is harming HK's economy and could have a damaging long-term effect on the city's growth. Joseph Yam, head of the authority from 1993 to 2009, said the city's prosperity rested on its role as a middleman in the finance industry between the mainland and foreign countries. Norman Chan, the authority's current chief executive, told Xinhua the Occupy movement would lead to social instability.

Student leaders may try to crash Apec summit in Beijing to seek talks: Student leaders are considering whether to send representatives to Beijing during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit next month to convey their demand for genuine universal suffrage directly to top officials. Details of the plan, who should go and how many, and whether there would be a back-up plan if they were refused entry to Beijing were still open to discussion, secretary general of the HK Federation of Students Alex Chow said. Meanwhile, in Legco on Oct. 30, pro-establishment lawmakers called for an investigation of the organisation and funding sources of the Occupy Central movement.

Economy + Finance

No date set for 'through train' after start date missed: HK Exchanges and Clearing chief Charles Li has no idea when the scheme to directly link the HK and Shanghai stock markets will eventually begin operations. Li said that all the technical and regulatory work on the Shanghai-HK Stock Connect scheme was complete and declined to speculate on the reason for the delay. Li refused to be drawn on whether the pro-democracy Occupy Central protests had played a part in the delay.

Labour woes will put brakes on growth: A shrinking workforce is expected to slow down economic growth in the city for the next five years, the latest Hang Seng Bank research shows. Labour's contribution to growth will be increasingly constrained by demographics and limited room for a rise in the participation rate of the work force, the report added. Meanwhile, an HSBC report warned of a possible contraction in domestic demand and increased market volatility as the US gears up for an interest rate rise. "In addition, political developments in HK have so far added uncertainty to earnings prospects in the city, although at this point in time it is difficult to assess how much," the report said. GDP contracted for the first time in three years in the second quarter, causing the government to lower its 2014 forecast to a range of 2 to 3 per cent - down from the previous estimate of 3 to 4 per cent.

Extra pay of HK\$3 an hour may help up to 280,000 workers, data shows: Up to 280,000 of the city's lowest paid workers will benefit if the hourly minimum wage of HK\$30 is raised to between HK\$32 and HK\$33, as government advisers are likely to recommend. Employers, meanwhile, would face additional wage costs of just 0.1 to 0.3 per cent, official data showed. The suggested increase of HK\$2 to HK\$3 an hour was generally agreeable to advisers on a government-appointed commission tasked with reviewing the minimum wage, in force since 2011, sources said.

Domestic politics

Pan-democrats make grab for Legco chairmanships as reform bargaining chip: Pan-democrat lawmakers have made a surprise grab for the chairmanships of two key Legislative Council subcommittees. The move, part of their campaign of non-cooperation on political reform, means government bills are likely to face more obstacles and lengthier scrutiny. Pan-democrats will outnumber pro-establishment lawmakers by six on the Public Works subcommittee and by 12 on the Establishment subcommittee. Pan-democrats hope the obstacles they can create will pressure the administration to negotiate with them over Beijing's restrictive framework for electoral reform, which rule out an open vote for chief executive in 2017.

C.Y. Leung faces separate probes of HK\$50 million deal with Australian firm: HK's graft-buster and police in Australia will launch separate investigations into a HK\$50 million deal between Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying and an Australian firm. Secretary for Justice Rimsky Yuen said he had delegated full responsibility to Director of Public Prosecutions Keith Yeung to avoid any perception of bias. Leung was paid HK\$50 million by engineering firm UGL in 2011, months before he became chief executive. It wanted to buy insolvent property firm DTZ, of which Leung was a director.

CY Leung denies wrongdoing in accepting HK\$50m in UGL deal: Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying said he did not feel he had done anything wrong, morally or legally, by accepting HK\$50 million in a deal with Australian engineering firm UGL. He said he had not provided any service to UGL and therefore there was no conflict of interest. He also denied tax evasion.

'Democracy would see poor people dominate HK vote': Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying told media that if the government met pro-democracy protesters' demands it would result in the city's poorer people dominating elections. In an interview with foreign media, carried in the Wall Street Journal, the Financial Times and the International New York Times, the embattled chief executive reiterated his position that free elections were impossible. Leung's latest comments are likely to further fuel the anger of protesters who see him as hapless, out of touch and pandering to the whims of a small number of tycoons who dominate the financial hub.

CY Leung's popularity hits record low 'as society becomes more polarised': Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying's popularity sank to a record low as distrust in his government rose to an 11-month high in a poll released on Oct. 27. In the latest Chinese University poll, 43.3 per cent of respondents said they did not trust the government. "The findings indicate society is getting more polarised," said Dr Victor Zheng Wan-tai, a research fellow at the Chinese university's Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies.

James Tien defiant as he resigns as Liberal leader after sacking from CPPCC: The Liberal Party's James Tien has insisted Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying should consider quitting to encourage political reconciliation - hours after the nation's top political advisory body CPPCC expelled him for making just that demand. Tien resigned as leader of the party he co-founded after the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference confirmed his removal.

Legal affairs and human rights

Flood of responses on anti-discrimination law amendments will delay results: An unprecedented flood of submissions on planned amendments to anti-discrimination laws will delay results of the public consultation on the changes by two to three months. With three days left for submissions, more than 80,000 have been received, with many revealing misconceptions about the planned amendments. The consultation seeks views on how the four anti-discrimination laws, covering sex, family status, disability and race, should be reviewed and whether they should be combined.

Health

HK has 'highest level' of Ebola prevention control at airport, says health secretary: HK has adopted the highest possible level of preventive measures at the border to block the fatal Ebola virus that has spread out of West Africa, the health minister says. Secretary for Food and Health Dr Ko Wing-man did not see any need yet to keep travellers from infected countries from entering Hong Kong, as the World Health Organisation had not deemed it necessary. "We have enhanced monitoring in different areas, apart from border control, and have also issued guidelines to medical frontline staff," Ko said.

Plan to tighten food safety regulations after 'gutter oil' scandal: HK's health authorities plan to tighten controls over food safety following the Taiwanese "gutter oil" scandal. The new regulations will be stringently enforced on traders who import, sell or produce edible oil, Secretary for Food and Health Dr Ko Wing-man said. The city currently does not check imports of edible oil, instead relying only on food safety certificates that are issued by authorities in the exporting countries. Earlier this month, the Centre for Food Safety banned all animal fat and oil imports from Taiwan after Kaohsiung oil supplier Chang Guann was found to have sold "edible" oils containing industrial lard oil and so-called gutter oil. It also ordered a recall of all animal-oil-related products.

New rules on high-risk beauty procedures may take at least a year: A government proposal to regulate high-risk medical procedures at beauty salons would take at least one year to implement. The government plans to propose a new law this year to prohibit private premises without emergency life-saving facilities from carrying out complicated or especially risky treatments. A government source said it would likely take at least one year for the law to take effect, as it would have to make its way through the Legislative Council.

Overseas doctors may get shorter training to ease manpower shortage ... for now: The Medical Association has proposed that overseas doctors' internship training be shortened from a year to six months, as a way to ease a manpower shortage in public hospitals. At present, overseas-trained doctors must undergo a 12-month internship after passing the Licentiate Examination of the Medical Council before being fully registered. Another option is limited registration, which requires annual renewal of their licences after passing interviews and being assessed by the Medical Council.

Environment

Air pollution slows growth of children's lungs, says UK study: Medical experts are urging the government to take more effective action to clear the city's air after a new study found that air pollution restricts the growth of children's lungs. The preliminary analysis of a six-year study done in Britain indicates that children exposed to nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter have slower lung growth. Studies in HK have found similar results. Undersecretary for the Environment Christine Loh said major steps were being taken, including the replacement of catalytic converters in minibuses and taxis, and the replacement of more than 80,000 diesel vehicles by 2019.

Scientists examine the health risks of HK's notorious 'street canyons': HK's notorious "street canyons" have become the latest research subject for a group of the world's top scientists specialising in air pollution and health. Researchers from Britain, Canada and HK are conducting a three-dimensional air quality study in the city, which has a unique urban morphology - a dominance of high-rises and a close proximity between the population and traffic. The study will not only map the three-dimensional movement of air pollutants, but also try to relate the

pollution levels to the health of residents living at various heights in high-rises. It will assist urban planning and building designs to minimise pollution impacts in HK and other megacities across Asia.

Culture and education

Teachers' union slams government plan to review liberal studies curriculum: A teachers' union has spoken out against a government plan to trim politics-related content in the secondary school liberal studies curriculum. The Professional Teachers' Union criticised the government for intervening in the subject, suggesting the move could be related to the Occupy Central movement, which has involved many students. The union said that it would be "extremely foolish" of the government if it tried to blame the subject. The bureau said the curriculum review was ongoing and that results would be released in July 2015. But the teachers' union called on the government to stop any "unprofessional and abnormal" intervention in the curriculum.

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