

Occupy Central

HK police target Occupy's 'principal instigators' after all sites cleared: Hours after the last Occupy site in Causeway Bay was cleared on Dec. 15, Police Commissioner Andy Tsang announced that the force would arrest the "principal instigators" and aim to finish its investigations within three months. Police revealed that close to 1,000 people had been arrested since Occupy began, while over 900 had had their identity card numbers recorded. Tsang also said deployment would be stepped up over the Christmas and New Year holiday period to prevent any reoccupy attempts or illegal protests. Most of the dozens of protesters who remained on the grounds of the Legislative Council also packed and left on their own without any police intervention on Dec. 15.

HK needs to be 're-enlightened' on law following Occupy protests, says top Beijing official: HK needs "re-enlightenment" to give citizens a better understanding of "one country, two systems", Zhang Rongshun, vice-chairman of the legislative affairs commission under the National People's Congress Standing Committee, said in remarks seen as signalling a harder line on the city's affairs. Chen Zuor, Chairman of the Chinese Association of HK and Macau Studies, urged Hongkongers to "reflect deeply" on how to contribute to the nation's security and other interests. The high-profile pair's remarks were taken as a hint at Beijing's approach in the wake of Occupy Central and sparked warnings from democracy campaigners of more confrontation. HK academic Professor Lau Siu-kai, a vice-chairman of the association, said relations between HK and Beijing had been hurt by the protests. Alex Chow, secretary general of the Federation of Students, said any attempt to tighten Beijing's approach would lead to more confrontation.

Occupy groups to start 'non-cooperation movement' as follow-up to mass protests: Students and civic groups are launching a "non-cooperation movement" - urging people to delay paying their public-housing rent and to pay tax bills in small and symbolic amounts - as an offshoot of the Occupy prodemocracy protests. "Occupy is taking on different forms. While the government has no timetable for universal suffrage, we do have a timetable to fight for it and challenge the legitimacy of the government," Alex Chow, secretary general of the Federation of Students, said. Secretary for Justice Rimsky Yuen called on the public not to follow the groups' suggestions, saying it was not "a wise act".

HK's religious leaders call for reconciliation after political conflicts: The shadow of the Occupy Central protests loomed large as religious leaders in the city called for reconciliation in their traditional Christmas messages. Cardinal John Tong Hon, the head of HK's Catholic church, said that the city had been "an accommodating society" which accepted different opinions, voices and ways of expression. However, conflicts and disagreements have been spotted in families, schools, offices and among friends. The Archbishop of the HK Anglican Church, the Most Reverend Paul Kwong urged people to restore broken relationships and re-establish mutual trust and understanding between individuals and between the government and the public.

Domestic politics

China leaders stress HK should stick to strict reform framework: State leaders have stressed that HK should stick to the stringent framework for political reform set by Beijing and, for the first time since the Occupy Central protests ended, pledged more support for the city's economic development. The comments, made by President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang during a visit to the capital by Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying, have been taken as a further sign that Beijing will take a sterner approach to the city's political affairs in the wake of Occupy. Professor Lau Siu-kai, vice-chairman of the Chinese Association of HK and Macau Studies, a semi-official think tank, said the leaders' remarks showed a sterner stance but also an effort to restore Leung's authority after heavy criticism.

Top Beijing adviser raps HK for lack of national security law: A top adviser to Beijing on HK affairs has put the controversial idea of a national security law for the city back on the agenda by condemning it as "the only place in China" without such legislation. Chen Zuor, a former deputy director of the State Council's HK and Macau Affairs Office, also joined a chorus of Beijing-linked experts in comparing the city unfavourably to Macau in implementing "one country, two systems". The issue of whether the lack of such a law and the months-long Occupy Central protests were connected warranted "deep thought", Chen added.

Rita Fan tips Regina Ip and Antony Leung as 2017 election candidates: Rita Fan tipped ex-financial secretary Antony Leung and lawmaker Regina Ip as candidates for chief executive in 2017. Fan is a former president of the Legislative Council and now HK's sole representative on the powerful National People's Congress Standing Committee. Leung was financial secretary and Ip the secretary for security in chief executive Tung Chee-hwa's administration. Political commentator Ma Ngok said Beijing seemed to be "establishing some sort of expectation" of competition.

Economy + Finance

Service-oriented trade pact further opens Guangdong to HK firms: HK firms now have greater access to Guangdong and more freedom to operate there, under a new trade liberalisation agreement expected to pave the way for the development of a free trade zone in the province to rival that of Shanghai. The HK government and the national Ministry of Commerce signed an agreement based on the framework of the 11-year-old Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (Cepa), which liberalised cross-border trade. The agreement, known as

Achieving Basic Liberalisation of Trade in Services in Guangdong, removes barriers on 58 sectors such as property, environment and computer installation services from HK. Another 75 service sectors are partially liberalised and are subject to limits through a so-called negative list, which spells out the restrictions on their freedoms rather than the specific freedoms allowed under the previous "positive list" approach.

HK's financial surplus will be used to meet multibillion-dollar construction target: Financial Secretary John Tsang expects HK to have a financial surplus in each of the next three fiscal years, allowing the government to "save up" in advance for public housing plans without sacrificing other services. Tsang's comment came after it was revealed on Dec. 18 that an estimated HK\$27 billion would be injected as the first payment into a new "housing reserve" to help the Housing Authority meet the government's goal of building 290,000 public flats in the next decade.

New HK housing target won't hit home prices, say analysts: Property analysts and developers do not see any disruption in HK's housing market after the government's proposed move to increase the supply of private homes to 19,000 a year. The target of housing supply in the coming decade will go up from 470,000 to 480,000 under a government proposal to tackle the city's housing shortage, Secretary for Transport and Housing Anthony Cheung announced. Of the targeted supply, 200,000 will be public rental flats; 90,000 will be subsidised flats for sale, and 190,000 private units.

HK hotels, restaurants feel the pinch amid decline in tourist bookings: Gone are the days when hotel room rates skyrocketed during the Christmas holidays. A drop in overseas visitors and more mainlanders coming on day trips have taken a toll on the hotel industry, according to the Federation of Hotel Owners. Michael Li, the federation's executive director, said prices were down 10 per cent on last Christmas. Due to the Occupy Central protests, overseas tour agencies had stopped promoting HK, affecting Christmas and perhaps also Lunar New Year bookings, Li said. Mainland visitors are also not spending as much as before and do not book rooms in advance of their visits.

Startup incubator opens in Shenzhen's Qianhai business hub: The Shenzhen hub of Qianhai opened a 58,000 square metre area designated for young entrepreneurs from HK and elsewhere to start their businesses. The area, named "Qianhai Shenzhen-HK Youth Innovation and Entrepreneur Hub", was among a series of 50 initiatives and proposals announced by Shenzhen officials to foster cooperation in Qianhai between the service industries of both areas. After officiating at the hub's opening ceremony in his first official visit to Qianhai, Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying said he understood many young people were hopeful about the project. Shenzhen officials promised that a third of Qianhai's land would be reserved for HK companies.

International relations

British MPs barred from HK to stop 'oil being poured on fire': British MPs were banned from entering HK because their visit could "pour oil over fire" and give Occupy Central activists "the illusion of external support", Chinese ambassador to Britain Liu Xiaoming has written. He wrote on the Daily Telegraph on Dec. 6 that the ban on entry was "not intended to insult the committee", as China was only safeguarding its national sovereignty and security. Liu was referring to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, which is conducting an inquiry into the implementation of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration. On Dec. 1, British Prime Minister David Cameron's spokesman told the Telegraph that the decision (ban on entry) was "mistaken" and "counterproductive".

HK minister says China alone pledged to keep city's way of life intact: The constitutional affairs minister is under fire after claiming that Beijing alone promised to keep HK's way of life intact for 50 years, rather than forming part of its deal with Britain. Arguing that Britain has "no moral duty" towards its former colony, Raymond Tam gave his interpretation of the key concept in the 1984 Joint Declaration that paved the way for the 1997 handover and underpinned "one country, two systems". Taking questions in the Legislative Council on Dec. 17, Tam reiterated earlier remarks by the Foreign Ministry that Britain had "no sovereignty over, no governance of, and no superintendence" over the city after 1997.

CY Leung, senior HK officials snub UK inquiry into Joint Declaration: Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying has snubbed a British parliamentary committee's invitation to give evidence at its inquiry into the implementation of the Joint Declaration. Richard Ottaway, chairman of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee - whose visit to HK was banned by Beijing - said in an interview with the South China Morning Post that his committee invited Leung and other HK officials earlier this week to give evidence to the inquiry via video link. "But they refused without giving any reason," Ottaway said. A HK government spokesman said Beijing had already cautioned Ottaway that the city's constitutional development was an internal affair of the mainland and HK.

Legal affairs and human rights

'Blinded by desire for high life', Hui jailed 7½ years; Kwok sentenced to five years: Disgraced Rafael Hui, who was "blinded by the desire to sustain the high life", was jailed for 7½ years, becoming the highest-ranking former HK official ever to be locked up. Property billionaire Thomas Kwok was sentenced to spend the next five years in a cell, as a key chapter closed in the biggest graft trial in the city's history. The High Court's landmark ruling sends a clear warning against business-government corruption in today's HK. Hui took a total of almost HK\$20 million in bribes to be favourably disposed to Sun Hung Kai Properties. He was found guilty of five out of eight counts, including misconduct in public office and bribery. Kwok's former subordinate Thomas Chan was jailed for six years and Francis Kwan, a former stock exchange official, was sentenced to five years in jail. Chan and Kwan were involved in all the payments.

Asia may see push for 'right to be forgotten' online, HK official says: Privacy watchdogs across the Asia-Pacific region are holding out the possibility of taking collective action to press for individuals' "right to be

forgotten" after what made them news becomes outdated, according to Hong Kong's privacy commissioner Allan Chiang. He also downplayed concerns that allowing people to ask for links on search engines to be deleted would inhibit freedom of information and erase history. Lawmaker and ex-journalist Claudia Mo said deleting links would affect press freedom and newsgathering.

Health

HK private health insurance plan 'will help 1.5 million people': The government expects about 1.5 million people to benefit from a long-awaited voluntary health insurance scheme which will cost the public purse HK\$256 million in tax rebates a year and HK\$4.3 billion in subsidies for high-risk patients over a 25-year period. Under the reforms, all private health insurance policies will have to meet 12 criteria set by the government. Insurers will have to offer a so-called standard plan for which even people with pre-existing conditions will be guaranteed acceptance. But premiums for all policies would rise by about 9 per cent to an average of HK\$3,600 per year, according to projections by the Food and Health Bureau. A three-month consultation was launched and it could be up and running by 2016 if passed by the Legislative Council.

Hospital admissions surged by 20pc during 'flu season', authority reports: Demand for beds in acute medical wards during the annual "flu period" rose by 20 per cent last winter, the Hospital Authority revealed on Dec. 19, adding that over 200 new beds will be opened this year to ease the pressure. The authority attributed the surge to an "ageing population" and "increased complexity of patients". Commenting on a newly released consultation document on a voluntary health insurance scheme, authority chairman Dr John Leong said he believed it provided an alternative choice for the public.

Woman, 68, in critical condition after being diagnosed with bird flu: A 68-year-old woman is in critical condition in Tuen Mun Hospital with the H7N9 strain of bird flu. It is the first confirmed case of bird flu in the city this winter. The woman had visited the Longgang district of Shenzhen on December 13 with friends and they had eaten chicken there, Secretary for Food and Health Dr Ko Wing-man said, adding that the woman had not touched any live poultry or visited a wet market either in Longgang or HK before she developed symptoms. "H7N9 cases have been moving south," Ko said. "We expect to see more imported H7N9 cases."

Environment

Landfill expansion approved after filibuster battle: Controversial plans to expand Tseung Kwan O landfill were finally approved after weeks of filibustering by pan-democrats ran out of steam. The scheme was also caught up in a non-cooperation campaign by pan-democrats, who have vowed to delay approval of government funding requests except those that affect people's livelihoods. The campaign is intended to pressure the government into offering a better deal on political reform.

HK lawmakers approve HK\$7.5b Ta Kwu Ling landfill expansion, Tuen Mun study: Environment officials had another victory, securing funding for an extension to the Ta Kwu Ling landfill and a study into expanding the Tuen Mun tip. The Legislative Council's Finance Committee approved the controversial HK\$7.5 billion plan to expand the New Territories landfill, which officials had said would reach capacity by 2017. Lawmakers already approved funding for the HK\$2.1 billion expansion of the Tseung Kwan O tip, triggering outrage from residents who said they were considering legal action.

HK government to release 10-year plan to cut energy consumption in buildings: The Environment Bureau is expected to release a 10-year energy-saving roadmap early next year, including an official target to cut buildings' electricity consumption, a government source told the South China Morning Post. The roadmap could be highlighted in Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying's policy address next month. It would be the third blueprint to be formulated by the bureau since last year. The first was aimed at improving air quality, while the second targeted a reduction in waste.

Culture and education

Arts audiences grow but old problems remain: Hongkongers are attending a growing number of cultural events, but average attendance is only half an event per person per year, a study of attendance and box-office receipts shows. Of all the art forms, xiqu, or Chinese opera, has shown the most dramatic increase in audience and box office - belying the perception that it is a dying art. A lack of suitable venues, with the West Kowloon Cultural District still being developed, left the cultural sector struggling to expand, despite government funding of HK\$3.5 billion per year.

Macau

Sweeping changes for Macau Chief Executive Fernando Chui's second term: Macau Chief Executive Dr Fernando Chui has named an all-new team of top officials for his crucial second term as city leader in what is being seen as the most significant political shake-up since the former Portuguese enclave returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1999. Chui - faced with shrinking casino revenues, slumping GDP growth and growing grass-roots calls for social and political change - rung the changes by replacing all five policy secretaries, most of whom he inherited from his predecessor Edmund Ho.

Macau watchdog to meet bankers over dirty-money crackdown: Financial regulators have called top bankers in Macau to a key meeting next month as part of a Beijing-inspired dirty-money crackdown that has rocked the city's under-pressure casino sector and sent gaming stocks tumbling. Monetary Authority chiefs told city bankers they would "explain a live monitoring system" which would give Beijing's powerful Ministry of Public Security unprecedented access to all transfers through the state-backed China UnionPay bank payment card.

Xi Jinping tells Macau to stick to 'one country, two systems' in veiled swipe at HK: President Xi Jinping pushed national education and his desire for young people to understand "the true meaning" of the "one country, two systems" model to the forefront as he ended his two-day visit to Macau. While praising Macau, which is marking the 15th anniversary of its return to China, for its implementation of the model devised by paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, Xi warned against "external infiltration and interference", in what an analyst described as remarks aimed at protesters in HK. The president's speech, at a ceremony to inaugurate second-term Macau Chief Executive Fernando Chui's new ruling team, gave a clear sense that the decisions made in Macau and HK must take into account wider national interests. As Xi spoke, nearly 100 young Macau protesters took to the streets to demand an open and fair political system. Some said they had been inspired by HK's "umbrella movement".

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