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Economy + Finance

HK sees signs of stabilisation in economy as PMI edges up to 49.3 in September (SCMP, Oct. 5): The Nikkei HK Purchasing Managers' Index, compiled monthly to gauge the city's private sector business conditions including retail, construction, manufacturing and services, rose to 49.3 last month from 49 in August. The index reading marked the slowest contraction in the past 18 months. A PMI figure of above 50 means the economy is expanding, while one under 50 indicates a contraction. The report showed purchasing activity rose for the first time in more than two years, a result of increased inventories of pre-production items.

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HK unions slam proposal to raise minimum wage by just HK\$2 to HK\$34.50 per hour (SCMP, Oct. 7): Labour unions were up in arms after it emerged that HK's minimum wage could be raised by HK\$2, or 6.15 per cent, to HK\$34.50 per hour next year, the smallest percentage increase since the baseline was introduced five years ago. A source revealed that members of the Minimum Wage Commission had reached a consensus on the increase – far below the HK\$41 that union representatives on the panel had fought for – which now requires final approval by the Executive Council. The source said the unions first stuck to their guns, as did employer representatives counter-demanding the minimum wage be frozen at its current level of HK\$32.50 at the beginning of last week's meetings. "By the end of the meetings the members agreed to raise the level to HK\$34 - HK\$35," but there was no consensus on the exact rate.

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HK will cash in as China continues to expand abroad, top banker says (SCMP, Oct. 10): HK will continue to thrive as a business hub as China further liberalises its financial markets and promotes the use of yuan in international trade, a veteran banker based in the city says. Benjamin Hung, Standard Chartered Bank's chief executive for greater China and North Asia, played down any adverse impact on the city's economic health rising from the mainland's economic downturn and Britain's looming separation from the European Union. Hung said HK's banking sector would continue to benefit from mainland companies expanding abroad. On October 1, the yuan joined the IMF's reserve currency basket to become the fifth of the reserve currencies held by global central banks, alongside the US dollar, British pound, Japanese yen and euro. HK Monetary Authority chief Norman Chan said HK would play a bigger role in international yuan business as he predicted that half of all China trade would be settled in the currency in five years.

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HK targets 'Belt and Road' countries for transport contracts and links (SCMP, Oct. 15): Iran, Kazakhstan and Myanmar are among the countries being circled by HK's transport giants in a bid to seize deals along the "One Belt, One Road". The South China Morning Post understands the MTR Corporation is eyeing a role in the Kazakhstan capital in a potential deal to train the workforce of Astana's new light rail system, and Tehran is on the radar as one of the latest Silk Road destinations to land a Cathay Pacific flight. Meanwhile, the government has signed new air traffic agreements with Malta and Serbia. "One Belt, One Road" is an initiative devised by Beijing to revive old land and maritime routes linking vast areas across Eurasia. Around 65 countries on three continents are on the route.

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Airport Authority bets on future visitor influx for new hotel and mall complex (SCMP, Oct. 18): A luxury hotel, retail and office complex adjacent to the HK International Airport will start inviting tenders from next month. Skycity Development, which will occupy 25 hectares at North Lantau Island hopes cater an influx of visitors brought on by the completion of the HK-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and the planned third-runway system. The complex underlines the HK government's efforts to create a economy on North Lantau Island and target new revenue flows from the cross-border free trade zone, which covers HK, Macau, Hengqing of Zhuhai, Qianhai of Shenzhen, Nansha of Guangzhou.

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HK's economic rise doesn't reflect stagnant quality of life, study shows (SCMP, Oct. 19): Fifteen years of economic growth in HK has failed to improve people's well-being, according to a recent study from one of the city's leading policy think-tanks. The Bauhinia Foundation Research Centre's first well-being index showed Hongkongers' well-being was almost stagnant between 2000 and 2015, rising by just 0.4 per cent despite GDP per capita increasing by almost 60 per cent. The Bauhinia Well-Being Index collated averages from 11 different subindexes, including income and income redistribution, housing, jobs, health, safety, education, environment, recreation, family, governance and civil society, and transport. Wong Hung, an associate professor in social work at the Chinese University of HK, said Hongkongers failed to benefit from the booming economy because GDP growth was skewed towards certain sectors. "Most of the momentum in our economic growth goes towards real estate and finance, which means more money is created inside these sectors," Wong said. Having so much of the city's growth focused within the two sectors contributes to rising property prices and exacerbates the housing affordability issue, he added.

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More misery for struggling HK retailers as 2 to 3 per cent Chinese yuan depreciation hits sales to tourists (SCMP, Oct. 25): The weakening of the yuan against the HK dollar is making life even more difficult for the city's retailers as it forces up the price of local goods for mainland visitors amid an already weak tourism industry. Some jewellery, electronics and luxury goods retailers – whose products are favoured by mainland shoppers – have raised yuan-denominated prices by 2 to 3 per cent to offset a two-week slide in the currency, which saw its value shrink 1.5 per cent against the US dollar, to which HK's currency is pegged. HK's tourism industry is experiencing its worst slump in years after a "golden decade" beginning in 2003 saw visitor numbers grow 216 per cent while the yuan appreciated more than 30 per cent against the HK dollar. Mainland tourists account for about three quarters of the city's visitor arrivals, according to the latest government statistics.

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HK government's plan for new towns and reclaimed islands to house growing population (SCMP, Oct. 28): HK will need to find – or reclaim – at least 1,200 hectares of extra land to house its growing population and stimulate the economy after 2030, according to the government's latest long-term planning blueprint. Secretary for Development Paul Chan Mo-po also said the government was "very determined" to develop brownfield sites to increase land supply.

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UnionPay bans mainlanders from using card to buy insurance investment products in HK: (SCMP, Oct. 30): State-backed UnionPay, the mainland's biggest bank card provider, said it had banned customers from using its services to buy investment-related insurance products in HK with immediate effect, the latest move by the authorities to try to stem an outflow of cash as the yuan continues to weaken. Customers could, however, still buy pure insurance products covering accidents, deaths and illnesses, the statement said. Mainland investors have been pouring into HK to buy insurance products to hedge against the declining yuan and skirt strict capital controls to move money offshore. Capital outflows from the mainland have accelerated. China's foreign exchange reserves fell for the third month in a row in September to US\$3.17 trillion, the lowest level since June 2011.

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HK regulatory probe on UBS underlines urgent need for listing reform (SCMP, Oct. 31): The Securities and Futures Commission (SFC) is investigating the role played by Swiss bank UBS as a sponsor in a number of unnamed stock market listings in the city. Another case that illustrates just how urgent reforms are still needed in HK to tighten up the accuracy of the financial information being offered during flotations. The disclosure by UBS, released with its third-quarter financial results, said the SFC first informed the lender about its investigation this month and that it may face a range of penalties from paying a fine to risking being banned from advising clients in HK. Investment banks such as UBS who guide companies to market are legally liable for the information contained in a listing prospectus, increasing the potential of litigation.

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Domestic politics

HK leader says city must 'safeguard' beneficial 'one country, two systems' arrangement (SCMP, Oct. 2): HK officials celebrated National Day on Oct. 1 with a call for residents to uphold "one country, two systems", as local youths challenged the city's political status quo. Delivering his final October 1 speech in his current term, Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying described the guiding political principle as the "most beneficial and most practical arrangement" for Hongkongers. All eight universities saw impromptu displays of banners printed with "HK Independence", defying authorities with demands for the city to split from the mainland. The banners hung outside major university buildings were later removed. Professor Lau Siu-kai of the Chinese Association of HK and Macau Studies, a mainland think tank, said: "I believe the central government will be unhappy about [displaying these banners on National Day]." The pro-independence movement in the city, Lau added, was mainly limited to young people. Last month, seven lawmakers proposing self-determination were elected to the Legislative Council.

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Former HK leader calls for unprecedented meeting with 200 local advisers to Beijing over chief executive race (SCMP, Oct. 5): With less than six months to go before HK chooses a new leader, former chief executive Tung Chee-hwa reflected the high stakes involved by taking the unprecedented step of inviting about 200 local delegates to China's top political advisory body to discuss plans for the coming election. The move was widely seen as a sign that Beijing is not leaving anything to chance, even among its staunchest loyalists, given how close the race may be in March. The gathering was held at Beijing's liaison office in Western district amid continuing signs of disunity in the pro-establishment camp and the pan-democrats' vow to secure a bigger say by winning up to 300 seats on the 1,200-strong Election Committee, which will pick the city's next leader. Chinese University political scientist Dr Ma Ngok and a second source familiar with Beijing's preparations for the Election Committee polls said it reflected Beijing's anxiety about losing control. "The pro-establishment camp has been disunited, and Beijing could be worried about its less preferred delegates winning [on December 11]," Ma said.

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Interpretation on HK independence is unnecessary: former justice minister Elsie Leung says (SCMP, Oct. 7): With localists bent on a radical agenda among HK's newly elected lawmakers due to be sworn, a former justice minister has ruled out the need for Beijing to step in and reinterpret the Basic Law, as the city has enough legal firepower under its mini-constitution to take on calls for independence. Elsie Leung, currently vice-chairwoman of the Basic Law Committee under the National People's Congress Standing Committee, said it would be better to handle the issue locally than take the politically sensitive and problematic route. Elsie Leung's remarks are seen as a reflection that Beijing is not considering reinterpretation as a course of action. "Leung is authoritative and well-trusted by Beijing," Chinese University political scientist Ivan Choy said. "However, the pressure is mounting on the next chief executive to enact national security legislation under Basic Law Article 23, especially as Macau has already done so."

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Activist Joshua Wong demands HK government response to blacklisting in Thailand (SCMP, Oct. 7): Student activist Joshua Wong demanded local officials respond to the "blacklisting" of HK residents by other governments after he was denied entry to Thailand and detained for 12 hours at Bangkok airport on Oct. 5. Wong, 19, said a country had every right to deny entry to anyone it wished, but to do so on the grounds of a foreign blacklisting was "incomprehensible". Thai officials confirmed Wong was turned away at Beijing's request. China's foreign ministry said it "respected Thailand's exercise of immigration control". HK's Security Bureau echoed the mainland government's response, saying it respected the right of other jurisdictions in exercising immigration control. Wong was invited by Thai student activist Netiwit Chotipatpaisal to address politics students at Chulalongkorn University on the 2014 Umbrella Movement.

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Did Beijing tell Thai authorities to bar activist? Message ‘lost in translation’, HK’s justice minister says (SCMP, Oct. 8): HK’s justice minister Rimsky Yuen blamed “differences in translation” for confusion over whether the Thai prime minister admitted China’s role in stopping student activist Joshua Wong from entering Bangkok. Rimsky Yuen’s remarks, which Wong dismissed as irrelevant, came as Thai police were quoted as saying that Beijing had not requested that the 19-year-old be sent back to HK after he was detained at Suvarnabhumi airport and held in solitary confinement for more than 10 hours.

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Three rejections and multiple deviations mark HK Legislative Council swearing-in (SCMP, Oct. 13): A blue banner bearing the words “HK is not China” took centre stage as two localist lawmakers used it as a protest prop to pledge loyalty to the “HK nation” at the opening of the new Legislative Council. The pair, and a third lawmaker who inserted his own words into the official script, saw their oaths rejected. Four localist and seven pan-democratic legislators protesting similarly played it safer by either shouting slogans or making extra statements before or after taking their oaths as the city’s 70 lawmakers were sworn in. Professor Lau Siu-kai, a former top policy adviser to the government, warned of a backlash from Beijing over the display of the “HK is not China” banner.

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Andrew Leung becomes president of HK Legco after dispute over British nationality (SCMP, Oct. 13): Pro-establishment legislator Andrew Leung became the new Legislative Council president, after pushing the vote ahead by presenting a copy of a declaration confirming he had given up his British nationality. Leung won the race by 38 votes to democratic camp nominee James To’s zero. There were also three blank votes. Just before the vote, most of the pan-democrats tore up their ballot papers and stormed out of the meeting room. The Basic Law requires the Legco president be a Chinese citizen with no right of abode in any foreign country.

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HK government accuses localist lawmakers of hurting feelings of Chinese with ‘offensive’ oath-taking (SCMP, Oct. 14): The HK government has denounced two localist lawmakers for modifying their oaths at swearing-in ceremony and hurting the feelings of Chinese people by displaying “HK is not China” banners and referring to the city as a “nation”. Academics said the localists were cutting a fine line between demonstrating their rejection of China and directly contravening the city’s mini-constitution, the Basic Law. Under the Oaths and Declarations Ordinance, any person “who declines or neglects to take an oath duly requested” shall vacate or be disqualified from office.

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HK government fails to block localist duo from retaking Legco oaths, but wins right to seek judicial review (SCMP, Oct. 19): Declaring full-frontal war on Oct. 18 night, the HK government took the unprecedented step of mounting a legal challenge to disqualify two pro-independence lawmakers on grounds that they had contravened the Basic Law during their swearing-in last week. In a last-minute bid, the administration sought but failed to obtain an interim injunction to bar Youngspiration pair Sixtus Baggio Leung and Yau Wai-ching from retaking their oaths. But Mr Justice Thomas Au did allow an application for a judicial review against Legislative Council president Andrew Leung’s decision over the retaking of the oaths. The hearing on the application has been set for November 3. The pan-democratic camp accused Leung Chun-ying of “ruining the separation of powers” by inviting the courts to intervene in Legco’s domestic affairs. A mainland official handling HK affairs warned Beijing would have to come up with measures to counter calls for HK independence if the row over the oath-taking could not be resolved within the city. He did not rule out an interpretation of the Basic Law by the National People’s Congress Standing Committee, saying: “We should not demonise the Standing Committee’s interpretation of the Basic Law.”

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HK’s legislature in total gridlock as pro-establishment walkout leaves localists unable to retake oaths (SCMP, Oct. 20): Two pro-independence lawmakers were unable to retake their oaths on Oct. 19 after their pro-establishment rivals forced the session to be aborted by walking out, plunging the Legislative Council into further paralysis and uncertainty at the beginning of its new term. In denying the localists a second chance to be sworn in, after they insulted China and referred to Hong Kong as a “nation” when they modified their oaths last week, pro-establishment politicians were hailed as “lawmakers who love the country and love Hong Kong” by state news agency Xinhua. But their political opponents accused them of siding with the administration in letting it interfere in the legislature’s operation – using, in an ironic role reversal, the same tactics that the pan-democrats are known for. Secretary for Justice Rimsky Yuen dismissed accusations that the government had damaged the separation of powers by mounting a legal challenge the night before the Legco meeting to bar the localists from retaking their oaths. Yuen denied the possibility of Beijing being behind the

legal -action, and stressed there was no plan to seek the highly controversial option of going beyond local courts to ask the national legislature to interpret the Basic Law. With oath-taking incomplete, the new Legco is unlikely to deal with any bills or other matters. Separately, Foreign Ministry commissioner Song Zhe dismissed the argument for self-determination held by some Hongkongers as “confused and misleading” and “in no one’s interest”.

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National People’s Congress might step in to interpret Basic Law if oath-taking case ends up in Court of Final Appeal, scholar warns (SCMP, Oct. 26):

The National People’s Congress might eventually have to interpret the Basic Law if the case involving the swearing in of two localist lawmakers ended up in the Court of Final Appeal, a Hong Kong academic warned. Professor Lau Siu-kai, vice-chairman of the semi-official Chinese Association of Hong Kong and Macau Studies, also said that the new Legislative Council president would offend Beijing if he let duo retake their oaths.

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Paralysis and protests over HK Legco oaths as localist pair force their way into chamber in scenes of chaos (SCMP, Oct. 27):

HK’s Legislative Council was thrown into tumult yet again with a meeting adjourned for the second time in three weeks, as two localist lawmakers barred from attending stormed into the chamber with the help of other pan-democrats. The latest descent into chaos came a day after Legco president Andrew Leung made a dramatic U-turn to defer the second oaths of Sixtus Baggio Leung and Yau Wai-ching – who used insulting language towards China in their initial swearing-in – pending a court ruling on a judicial review filed by the government. The administration earlier mounted an unprecedented legal challenge against the president’s initial decision to give the pair a second chance. The Legco president also banned the duo from entering the chamber, to no avail. It was the second adjournment in just two weeks of the new Legco session since legislators were returned in elections last month. On Oct. 19, the pro-establishment camp staged a walkout to block the two localists from retaking their oaths, spurring Andrew Leung to abort the meeting due to a lack of quorum.

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Opening shots fired as battle for HK’s top job finally gets under way: retired judge Woo Kwok-hing, executive and legislative councillor Regina Ip, Financial Secretary John Tsang and Chief Executive CY Leung (SCMP, Oct. 28):

HK charged into election mode as retired judge Woo Kwok-hing’s declaration he was gunning for the chief executive post prompted other potential contenders to fire their own opening shots, with incumbent Leung Chun-ying unleashing the strongest salvos. For the first time, executive and legislative councillor Regina Ip confirmed speculation she was “interested” in running for HK’s top job, while a Liberal Party veteran disclosed details of Financial Secretary John Tsang’s strategy to gain votes. Responding with a thinly-veiled attack, Chief Executive CY Leung urged his Exco cabinet members to stay “focused and dedicated” on the current administration’s work, which included preparing for his policy address and the budget next year.

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HK’s former Legco president Jasper Tsang on chief executive candidates and Article 23 (SCMP, Oct. 29):

Retired Legislative Council president Jasper Tsang offers insights on two potential chief executive candidates and the city’s political stalemate. “Legislating on Article 23 of the Basic Law is our constitutional obligation, but we have been procrastinating for nearly 20 years now and both governments have come to an understanding that there is no urgency in doing it. We have to do it, but at the same time it is quite obvious our problems have not been caused by the absence of this piece of legislation. I don’t think anyone believes that making this piece of law will solve all our problems,” said Tsang. Regarding his thoughts on Regina Ip and Woo Kwok-hing running for the top job, both have their strengths and weaknesses. Judge Woo is highly respected and has a strong background in law but lacks policy research and governance experience. Ip, on the other hand, has all-round experience as a former senior government official and an elected legislator. She has a lot of good qualities although her style of doing things may not always be acceptable to a lot of people. He also referred to the latest Legco oath-taking chaos and the deepening political rifts in already divided society. “Most people say the divisions that have developed in the last few years need to be resolved. The majority don’t believe Hong Kong can become independent from China. Most of us want to see “one country, two systems” succeed. Of course, we see young people talking about Hong Kong breaking away from China, but a vast majority do understand that it is not an option. Most believe our future lies in the success of “one country, two systems”, “said Tsang.

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HK ministers stay tight-lipped over leadership race (SCMP, Oct. 30):

HK ministers largely kept their heads down, a day after two top officials tipped to run in the chief executive election next year pulled no punches in attacking each other. The only exception was Secretary for Development Paul Chan, who thanked Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying for his support over the past few years, but did

not acknowledge his immediate boss, Financial Secretary John Tsang. Meanwhile, Liberal Party honorary chairman James Tien, a key supporter of Tsang, warned HK could “see at least a million protesters on the 20th anniversary of the handover should Leung get re-elected”. Tien also criticised the Chief Executive for allegedly inviting the liaison office to intervene in local politics, damaging “one country, two systems” from within. Analysts expected more leaders to take sides as the race for the city’s top job heats up. On Oct. 27, Leung unleashed a thinly-veiled attack on Tsang, suggesting cabinet members should be “responsible” and focus on the upcoming policy address rather than thinking about joining the city’s leadership race. Tsang hit back, saying officials must also be responsible for the city’s long-term interest. Only retired senior judge Woo Kwok-hing has declared his candidacy, while executive and legislative councillor Regina Ip said she was “interested”.

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International relations

Push China to ensure rights of Hongkongers are protected, US officials urged (SCMP, Oct. 7):

The US congressional commission on China has urged its administration officials to press the Chinese government on safeguarding the rights and freedoms of Hongkongers as the city faces a renewed threat of interference from the mainland authorities. In its latest annual report on human rights and rule of law conditions in China, the Congressional-Executive Commission on China has particularly highlighted the worrying case of the five missing booksellers, who were allegedly abducted by mainland agents last year for publishing and selling books critical of the Chinese Communist Party. The US Congress, it stated, should consider ways to “express the important connection between maintaining a free press, a vibrant civil society, an independent judiciary, and transparent governance in HK and the mutual interests shared by the US and China in maintaining HK as a centre of business and finance in Asia”.

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Legal affairs and human rights

British government report highlights law enforcement in HK as a cause of concern (SCMP, Oct. 13):

The British government’s latest report on HK raised concerns over the former British colony’s law enforcement, citing as an example the disappearance of five HK booksellers who later resurfaced under the custody of mainland authorities. The report urged Beijing to restore confidence in the “one country, two systems” policy that ensured that the city enjoy freedom and a high degree of autonomy. A HK government spokesman responded by saying that the city’s freedom had always been secure and urged “foreign governments” to stop interfering.

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Former HK leader Donald Tsang faces extra bribery charge over Shenzhen penthouse (SCMP, Oct. 12):

A year after his first court appearance, former HK leader Donald Tsang was slapped with a third charge over redecorating a three-storey rental penthouse in Shenzhen that he failed to disclose when he was chief executive. The High Court - approving the prosecutors’ request – ruled that Tsang should face an extra count of “chief executive accepting an advantage”. The new charge under the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance, in addition to two counts of misconduct that Tsang is already facing, carries a maximum HK\$500,000 fine and seven years in jail. Tsang is expected to return to court for another hearing on October 27.

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Health

Top medical school Karolinska Institute opens first overseas base in HK (SCMP, Oct. 7):

One of the world’s top medical institutes, the Karolinska Institute, has opened its first overseas base in HK, where stem cell researchers look to engineer human organs such as the heart, liver and brain. The research centre will focus on innovation in the fields of biomedical engineering, gene-editing, RNA technology and bioinformatics. Dr Ronald Li, the centre’s executive director, said such research could potentially allow scientists to replace some failing human organs with new lab-grown organs constructed with stem cells.

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New scheme to allow HK patients with incompatible kin to swap organ donors (SCMP, Oct. 14):

A pair exchange scheme for organ donation is expected to launch in the city in the second half of next year the soonest. The arrangement will allow two potential recipients who have incompatible kin to exchange donors for suitable organs, and is set to reduce long waiting times for kidney transplants. As of 30 June this year, 1,983 patients were lining up for new kidneys. Dr Cheung Wai-lun, director of cluster services for the Hospital Authority, said that the arrangement had already been approved by the authority’s ethics committee. “We are now seeking legal advice to see if the pair exchange scheme is contradictory to the Human Organ Transplant Ordinance,” Cheung said.

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Environment

HK's electric car owners still stuck in the slow lane (SCMP, Oct. 6): Many private residential car parks do not allow charging stations. The government was well aware of this. Secretary for the Environment Wong Kam-sing said that the government had been taking measures to alleviate the problem. Since April 2011, developers who put the necessary electric vehicle charging infrastructure in the car parks of new buildings, including provision of sufficient power supply and wiring to facilitate future installation of chargers, would be granted concessions on gross floor area. And in June 2011, planning guidelines for new buildings were amended to "recommend" 30 per cent of private car parking spaces be installed with chargers. "I think the government should make it mandatory for residential car parks to have charging stations," said Professor Chau Kwok-tong, an expert in electric vehicles at the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering at the University of HK.

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HK government pushes for wider harbourfront boardwalk (SCMP, Oct. 20): The authorities have proposed a wider harbourfront boardwalk linking North Point to Quarry Bay to satisfy public demands for more space, as well as to attract cyclists and anglers, a document submitted to the Harbourfront Commission showed. The Civil Engineering and Development Department now suggests extending the boardwalk by 2.5 metres to 10 metres after gathering feedback from the public who called for more space, according to the document.

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Culture and education

HK students fare poorly in understanding the wider world (SCMP, Oct. 8): HK senior secondary students have a weak international perspective that needs strengthening, with those from poorer families being worse off, a study has found. The poll was conducted by Chinese University's International Affairs Research Centre and think tank Roundtable Education. George Tsang, director general of Roundtable Education, pointed out that there was a positive relationship between the students' family economic condition and the students' self-assessment of their global vision and international knowledge. Looking forward, Tsang recommended using resources to develop the global vision of students from grass-roots families and optimising curriculum and teaching strategies.

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HK educators hit out at plans to launch guidelines on Basic Law education (SCMP, Oct. 20): A plan to launch guidelines for schools on Basic Law education in this school year has been criticised by educators as potentially exerting "invisible pressure" and interfering with internal school affairs. The move comes at a sensitive time for the city as an independence movement is gaining popularity among Hongkongers, including students. The guidelines were intended to help schools in self-planning and self-assessing Basic Law education through professional training courses, an Education Bureau spokeswoman said. She added that the tool was still at the drafting stage and more details would be revealed later. In August, the Education Bureau set off a storm by warning that teachers risked disqualification if they encouraged students to engage in pro-independence talk. Secretary for Education Eddie Ng later said students could only discuss the contentious topic within the limits of the Basic Law, which states that HK is an inalienable part of China.

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Macau

Chinese premier Li Keqiang gives Macau his seal of approval (SCMP, Oct. 10): Premier Li Keqiang heaped praise on HK's sister special administrative region, hailing Macau as a "treasured lotus land, a beautiful and special place" as he began a landmark three-day visit to the casino-dominated city. Security was tight for the occasion, which also saw the arrival of Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa and a host of top political leaders from Africa and South America for a two-day international conference beginning on Oct. 11. The meeting aims to boost China's economic relationship with the developing world and chart a new course for the world's most cash-rich gaming hub. Without giving details, Premier Li said there would be "new measures and policies" to favour Macau, aimed at making "better use of its position as a world centre of tourism and leisure and a commercial and trade cooperation service platform" between China and the world's Portuguese-speaking countries.

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Macau to become a centre for yuan settlement, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang confirms (SCMP, Oct. 13): Beijing has confirmed that Macau will become a key centre for yuan settlement as China moves to extend and enhance its economic clout in the developing world. The confirmation came via state news agency Xinhua as Premier Li Keqiang departed Macau after a three-day landmark visit during which he lavished praise on the city and attended a conference along with the prime minister of Portugal and the leaders of a number of African and South American nations. The move to make Macau a clearing house for yuan transactions is a key plank in a list of policies aimed at boosting and

diversifying the economy of the former Portuguese enclave and weaning it off an over-reliance on gaming. Li said the central government would help support Macau to develop into a banking platform for yuan clearance between China and the world's Portuguese-speaking countries.

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Varia

Four in 10 Hongkongers want to leave city, with some already planning their exit (SCMP, Oct. 12): About 40 per cent of Hongkongers want to move away from the city, with one in 10 hopeful emigrants making actual plans to do so, a Chinese University of Hong Kong survey has found. Respondents cited dissatisfaction with the government, crowded living conditions and major political and social disputes as the main reasons for their plan. The survey revealed younger people had a stronger desire to move than their older counterparts. About 57 per cent of those between 18 and 30 said they had emigration plans compared with just 26 per cent of those aged 51 and above. Taiwan was also the most preferred destination, with 16.3 per cent of respondents picking the island. Australia and Canada came in second and third place. Many of those looking to leave HK said factors such as bigger living areas and higher democracy and freedom levels were behind their destination choices.

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