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Economy + Finance

HK workers can expect 3.5 per cent pay rise next year – same as this year and worst since 2010 (SCMP, Nov. 2): Hongkongers can expect an average pay rise of 3.5 per cent next year – the same increment rate as this year, which also happens to be the worst since 2010 in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, according to a survey. The survey found that employees received an average rise of 3.5 per cent this year, down from 4.3 per cent last year. The increase was the worst since the average pay rise of 1.9 per cent in 2010.

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HK's private sector downturn continues as PMI falls again (SCMP, Nov. 3): October saw HK's private sector decline with the sharpest pace since August after signs of a rebound in August and September, stoking fears over market contraction as the city entered the final quarter of the year. The Nikkei HK Purchasing Managers' Index fell to 48.2 in October from 49.3 in September and 49 in August. A figure below 50 signals a contraction and above it means expansion. The index gauges private sector business conditions including manufacturing, services, retail and construction. The number has now fallen below 50 for the 20th consecutive month.

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HK raises stamp duty to tame surging home prices in the world's least affordable city (SCMP, Nov. 4): HK's top official has raised the property stamp duty for the second time in three years to tame soaring real estate prices in the world's least affordable major city, ahead of an election campaign where housing affordability is likely to be a central issue. Effective November 5, the stamp duty on

property transactions for non first-time buyers will be raised to 15 per cent for individuals and corporate buyers, Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying said. Median residential home prices have more than quadrupled in the two decades since Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty, and have almost tripled since 2008, making the city the world's least affordable major city to own a home.

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Despite growth, stamp duty measures prompt lukewarm GDP outlook for HK (SCMP, Nov. 11):

HK's economy grew 1.9 per cent in the third quarter off the back of stronger domestic consumption, employment and trade. Despite the promising figure, the government set a conservative full-year growth forecast of 1.5 per cent, compared to its previous range of 1 to 2 per cent. Recent cooling measures announced for the city's property market are expected to dampen short-term growth and were cited as one of the reasons for the cautious outlook. The third quarter result marked an improvement on first and second quarter growth rates, recorded at 0.8 and 1.7 per cent respectively. "We expect fourth quarter GDP to expand at a modest pace," government economist Helen Chan said, pinning hopes on a further recovery in exports, favourable income conditions and improved business sentiment.

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Apec ministers fear threat to free trade as Trump presidency looms, HK commerce chief says in Lima (SCMP, Nov. 19):

Trade ministers from all Apec economies have unanimously voiced their concerns over anti-trade policy agendas in the wake of US president-elect Donald Trump's recent victory, HK's commerce secretary said in Peru. HK served as a prime example of success as a result of free trade, Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Greg So told his counterparts from the 20 other economies under the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. "All participating representatives unanimously support the push for free trade, expressing concern over anti-globalisation and trade protective measures," So said. Worries over the future of regional free trade were heightened after the election of Trump, who has vowed to adopt an isolationist approach and to stop the US from signing the Trans-Pacific Partnership deal with Asia-Pacific allies.

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Taxpayers to pay more than half of HK\$11 billion cost for Frozen and Marvel superhero attractions to boost HK Disneyland (SCMP, Nov. 23):

HK Disneyland is seeking to boost business with a HK\$10.9 billion expansion – more than half of which will be funded by taxpayers – featuring, in a global first, zones based on themes from its blockbuster Frozen and Marvel superhero films. The six-year mega upgrade will see the park increase its attractions from 110 to 130 between 2018 and 2023, and is expected to create 5,000 to 8,000 jobs across the tourism industry. The city's tourism industry welcomed the upgrade, expecting a boost for HK.

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Lawmakers across political spectrum grill administration on HK\$11 billion expansion for HK Disneyland (SCMP, Nov. 29):

Lawmakers from across the political spectrum questioned the justification for injecting HK\$5.8 billion of taxpayers' money into HK Disneyland's expansion project, with some urging the city to diversify its tourist offerings. But commerce minister Greg So cited the government's control of the Lantau park through 53 per cent of its shareholding, insisting that the authorities must "have a say" in the park's future development. The administration had no plans to reduce its stake or exit the investment, he added. "The future development of Disneyland will have to be coordinated with the government's policies to promote tourism," So said. This could create job opportunities and boost business for retailers, hotels and restaurants. The commerce secretary's explanation was challenged by both pro-establishment and pan-democratic lawmakers, with many doubting if any decision on the park had ever gone in favour of the government rather than Disney.

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Domestic politics

CY Leung 'can't rule out' asking Beijing to interpret Basic Law over HK oath-taking saga (SCMP, Nov. 1):

Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying said he could not rule out asking Beijing to interpret the city's mini-constitution over the handling of the controversial oath-taking by two localists on October 12. Leung said: "We hope to do our utmost to resolve it within HK, but we cannot rule out this possibility." According to the Basic Law, the National People's Congress has the power to interpret the mini-constitution. But the use of such power is a highly sensitive and controversial issue, as improper use of interpretative power would hinder HK's judicial independence and rule of law, according to the city's legal sector.

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CY Leung panned by democratic camp for questioning creation of panel to probe UGL deal (SCMP, Nov. 2):

Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying came under fire from the democratic camp after he questioned the setting up of a special committee in the legislature tasked with investigating his receipt

of a HK\$50 million payment from Australian firm UGL. Accountancy sector lawmaker Kenneth Leung, who put forward a motion to launch the inquiry, claimed the HK leader had attempted to interfere in the affairs of the Legislative Council. But unionist lawmaker Wong Kwok-kin said the chief executive's riposte was justified, adding that the investigation was "an attack driven by political motives". Kenneth Leung's petition was passed after 27 fellow Legco members in the democratic camp gave their support. In response, the chief executive reiterated his argument that the Legco of the previous term had carried out "various thorough discussions" on the agreement signed between him and the firm, and that two previous motions to initiate a similar probe had been voted down in November 2014.

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HK's Legco descends into chaos as Beijing intervention looms (SCMP, Nov. 3): A HK court opens the case on two anti-China localists amid concerns its ruling may be pre-empted by an intervention from the nation's top legislative body to disqualify the pair after clashes over their antics roiled the city's legislature again on Nov. 2. The prospect of a Beijing intervention in HK's court system added to the mayhem of the fourth meeting of the Legislative Council on Nov. 2 during which the two localists, Youngspiration's Sixtus Baggio Leung and Yau Wai-ching, tried to storm the council meeting after they were once again barred from entering the chamber. The court case centres on a legal challenge mounted by the HK government to disqualify the duo, who used derogatory language to insult China during their oath-taking three weeks ago. News of the Standing Committee's plan to intervene emerged on Nov. 1, with sources telling the Post the top body would meet – the same day of the court hearing – to deliberate on the issue, signalling Beijing's anger over the matter. The move has raised alarm in various quarters, with the HK Bar Association expressing "deep concern" and warning that an interpretation would "deal a severe blow" to the independence of the judiciary and do "irreparable harm" to HK.

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Mainland paper slams HK independence advocates in 1,000-word commentary (SCMP, Nov. 3): HK independence advocates have not only hurt the sentiment of China's population but the whole Chinese race around the world and must be punished by law, a commentary by the People's Daily has said as the Beijing-controlled newspaper stepped up its attack against two localist lawmakers amid the oath-taking row. "Their acts have seriously violated the bottom line of 'one country, two systems', the national constitution, the Basic Law and relevant provisions in HK," it read. At least seven articles have been published in various editions of People's Daily since the oath-taking controversy broke out last month, with each piece taking a stronger stance as the incident developed.

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Four arrested after violence at thousands-strong rally over Beijing's review of Basic Law (SCMP, Nov. 7): Traffic resumed early on Des Voeux Road, marking the end of a tense stand-off overnight between police and protesters outside the central government's liaison office in Sai Wan. The clash between officers and the 4,000-strong crowd gathered in the area to protest against Beijing's intervention in the oath-taking saga saw the use of pepper spray by police, while one officer was allegedly injured by protesters hurling bricks. In face of the "unfavourable situation", Demosisto, Student Fight for Democracy, the League of Social Democrats and the Labour Party announced that the rally was over and urged protesters to depart to "avoid sacrifice".

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China's top body lays down law on HK oath-taking (SCMP, Nov. 8): China's top legislative body voted unanimously to endorse an interpretation of HK's Basic Law rule on oath-taking that will effectively disqualify two localist lawmakers and block advocates of HK independence from contesting future Legislative Council elections. The ruling by the National People's Congress Standing Committee, which requires public officials to take their oaths "sincerely" and "solemnly" or face disqualification, paves the way for by-elections to fill the seats to be vacated by Youngspiration duo Sixtus Baggio Leung and Yau Wai-ching. It also leaves the fate of lawmakers such as Lau Siu-lai and Edward Yiu, whose original oaths were invalidated, hanging in the balance. Responding to the ruling, Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying gave his strongest signal yet he was prepared to move on controversial national security legislation to stamp out independence advocacy. Asked if it was time to resurrect a law that was aborted in 2003 amid mass protests, he said: "We have not seen anyone advocating independence in the past but now we see it. This indeed deserves our attention." In setting out the ruling, Basic Law Committee chairman Li Fei said the Standing Committee's interpretation was an "important component of the rule of law in HK". The interpretation of Article 104, which applies to oath-taking by public officers including principal officials, lawmakers and judges, states that upholding the Basic Law and pledging allegiance to HK as part of China are the legal requirements for running for and taking up public office.

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Warning goes out against banning more HK lawmakers (SCMP, Nov. 8): The government was warned it would be unwise to disqualify more lawmakers in the wake of the interpretation announced by Beijing. It came a day after the central government effectively banned two directly elected pro-independence lawmakers, Sixtus Baggio Leung and Yau Wai-ching of Youngspiration, from the Legislative Council in the wake of the oath-taking row. Furthermore, Zhang Rongshun, vice chairman of the Legislative Affairs Commission under the National People's Congress Standing Committee, said an oath should be invalidated if a person deliberately violates or blasphemes with his behaviour, speeches, clothing or props. The move has sparked concern as to whether at least 10 pro-democracy lawmakers, who have either brought banners, paused deliberately or chanted slogans before or after taking the oath, would be barred. Eric Cheung, a legal scholar at the University of HK, feared the "all-encompassing decision" would become a tool to exercise political screening. When asked whether the government would launch any legal challenges against other lawmakers on the oaths issue, Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying said the administration would act in accordance with law.

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Hundreds of HK lawyers in silent march against Beijing oath ruling (SCMP, Nov. 9): Hundreds joined a silent march by the legal profession in protest against the intervention by Beijing in a controversial oath-taking case, claiming it harms judicial independence. However a Basic Law adviser to Beijing said it was up to a local court to decide whether the mainland ruling banning pro-independence lawmakers Sixtus Baggio Leung and Yau Wai-ching was retrospective and posed a legal challenge for more pan-democrat lawmakers over the way oaths were taken. It was the fourth silent march staged by lawyers against Beijing's intervention in the judicial system since the handover in 1997.

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Thousands turn out to decry HK independence (SCMP, Nov. 14): Opponents of HK independence staged a show of force as thousands of people took to the streets around the government headquarters in one of the largest rallies of its kind in recent years. The demonstration, which organisers said was attended by more than 40,000 people, followed a withering attack on separatism by Beijing's top man in the city, Zhang Xiaoming, who upped the ante in the controversy over the Legislative Council oath-taking saga. Zhang accused localist lawmakers of "blasphemy" against the oaths and of treating the wider HK community like "idiots". Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying also warned in a rare interview with Xinhua that his government would not allow independence advocates to "appear in the city's political system", including the Legislative Council and civil service, or to spread their ideas in schools.

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HK lawmaker Claudia Mo resigns from Civic Party citing 'differences' over localism and other issues (SCMP, Nov. 14): HK lawmaker Claudia Mo is quitting the Civic Party, citing long-standing "differences" on issues like localism with the party she co-founded 10 years ago. Mo said she would continue serving the legislature as an "independent democrat" under the label "HK First" – a two-person political alliance she formed in 2013 with then fellow legislator Gary Fan of the NeoDemocrats.

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Barred HK localists vow to keep fighting after High Court disqualification (SCMP, Nov. 16): HK's High Court disqualified two pro-independence lawmakers over their oath-taking antics last month, prompting the pair to vow to appeal at all costs and plunging the city deeper into political uncertainty. Far from ending the row, the ruling sets the stage for more disputes, with questions as to whether the pair can fight to retain their newly won Legislative Council membership through further legal battles, and whether and when by-elections can be held to fill their vacated seats. Sixtus Baggio Leung and Yau Wai-ching promptly vowed to appeal all the way to the city's top court if necessary after the judge decided they had "declined" to take their oaths "faithfully and truthfully". The ruling came a week after Beijing intervened by interpreting the city's mini-constitution to insist oath taking be conducted sincerely and accurately, but the judge claimed he was unaffected by that in arriving at his conclusion. The Youngspiration pair were widely condemned for using "HK is not China" banners and what sounded like a derogatory word for "China" with wartime connotations during their swearing-in ceremony on October 12. The judge Thomas Au, adopting a common law approach to the Oaths and Declarations Ordinance, said the localist pair "did not truthfully and faithfully intend to commit themselves" to the oath, as they "objectively clearly" did not recognise the principle of "one country, two systems". Au rejected the localists' argument the court could not intervene in this case due to the doctrine of separation of powers – ruling that because oath-taking was a constitutional requirement over which the court was the "final arbiter".

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Xi Jinping gives nod to work of HK government and urges CY to be 'resolute' in safeguarding national unity (SCMP, Nov. 22): President Xi Jinping "fully acknowledged" the HK government's

handling of the oath-taking saga, signalling “forcefully” that there was no room for the city’s independence from China under ‘one country, two systems’, Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying said in Lima. Xi also asked Leung to unite society and safeguard national unity, among a number of expectations he had of the city’s top official, according to state media Xinhua. Recalling a 45-minute meeting with Xi on the sidelines of the Apec forum in Peru, Leung thanked the president for his recognition but maintained there was no mention of his own re-election plan.

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HK’s No 2 official calls on Legco to clamp down on ‘misbehaving’ lawmakers (SCMP, Nov. 22):

HK’s No 2 official hopes that the Legislative Council will tighten its rules to stop maverick lawmakers from “misbehaving” during council meetings. Chief Secretary Carrie Lam was speaking a week after League of Social Democrats lawmaker “Long Hair” Leung Kwok-hung took a folder of confidential documents from development undersecretary Eric Ma’s desk during a meeting while Ma was answering a question concerning the Wang Chau housing project. The folder was returned to the official after a few minutes. Ma later reported the incident to police, while Leung explained that he had taken the folder because he was not satisfied with Ma’s answer on how the government had dealt with a consultancy company that misused housing and development information obtained from the authorities. The chief secretary added that Leung Kwok-hung’s antics had undermined the relationship between the executive branch and the legislature, the mutual trust between officials and lawmakers, as well as Legco’s public image.

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HK will have no future if pro-independence activists aren’t stopped, pro-Beijing heavyweight Rita Fan says (SCMP, Nov. 23):

Pro-Beijing heavyweight Rita Fan, who a month ago dismissed any need for the national parliament to intervene in the city’s oath-taking saga, has changed her tune, saying instead that such intervention was “urgently” needed to stop the rising calls for independence in HK. Fan, HK’s sole representative on the National People’s Congress Standing Committee, said there was no question of HK becoming independent, adding that the city “would have no future” if the pro-independence activists were not stopped.

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Chris Patten warns HK pro-independence antics ‘dilute support’ for democracy (SCMP, Nov. 26):

HK’s last governor has torn into pro-independence activists, saying it would be a tragedy if the “moral high ground” achieved by student leaders in the 2014 Occupy protests was lost because of pro-independence antics. Chris Patten, who is in the city for a short visit, accused such activists of “diluting support” for democracy in HK. However, he also lamented the “slow progress” of democracy since the 1997 handover and suggested the central government should have exercised restraint when considering an interpretation of the Basic Law.

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HK government guns for lawmaker Lau Siu-lai in oath-taking controversy (SCMP, Nov. 29):

HK’s government has decided to take a third newly elected localist lawmaker to court after succeeding in having two others disqualified for failing to take their oaths of office properly. The Department of Justice said it would initiate legal proceedings against Lau Siu-lai. Legislative Council president Andrew Leung, who gave Lau a chance to retake her oath after the first attempt was deemed inappropriate last month, was also named in the new case. But the Justice Department stopped short of specifying what grounds it would use in the legal action. “It is not appropriate for us to provide further comments at this stage in view of possible proceedings,” the department said.

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HK chief executive vows to improve relations with pan-democratic lawmakers (SCMP, Nov. 30):

Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying has vowed to improve the government’s relationship with pan-democratic lawmakers, who for once did not bother to protest during the leader’s annual visit to the Legislative Council. The no-show, the pan-democrats insisted, was designed to highlight the rift between Leung’s administration and the pro-democracy camp, especially after several weeks marred by Leung’s attempts – the latest one triggered against another lawmaker Lau Siu-lai in oath-taking controversy on Nov. 29 – to disqualify lawmakers showing independence leanings. The show of defiance came a few days after Leung pledged to unite the whole legislature, a comment interpreted as a sign that he would seek a second term.

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Advocating independence for HK will bring calamity to the country and people, says congress chairman (SCMP, Nov. 30):

Advocating independence for HK would “bring calamity to the country and the people” and it should not be underestimated, China’s state leader overseeing the city’s affairs warned. Zhang Dejiang spoke to a delegation from the Silent Majority for HK, a Beijing-friendly group which was vocal in opposing the Occupy protests in 2014. “I believe that the vast majority of HK

residents will clearly see the true colour of HK independence and insist on the struggle against it," he said. "The interpretation (of Basic Law) fully shows the central government's determination in safeguarding 'one country, two systems'. Don't say it doesn't matter because there is only a small minority talking about independence. We must not underestimate it."

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Beijing expected to grant permanent home-return permits to current and former HK pan-democrats (SCMP, Nov. 30): The central government will announce as early as on Nov. 30 that all pan-democrats who failed to renew their home-return permits, including former and incumbent lawmakers, will be granted permanent permits in a conciliatory gesture to those at odds with Beijing for more than two decades. Home-return permits are required by Hongkongers to enter the mainland. They are issued to HK permanent identity card holders. The offer will cover all current and former legislators, and even district councillors who had failed to renew their permits previously. A pan-democrat told the Post that Beijing might be adopting a two-pronged approach – cracking down hard on independence advocates, while being cordial with conventional pan-democrats.

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International relations

US official says oaths by HK localist lawmakers were 'silly', but they should be free to speak their minds anyway (SCMP, Nov. 12): US officials are treading a cautious line over Beijing's move to disqualify two HK lawmakers seeking independence from China, as events unfold amid a highly volatile transfer of power in Washington. On one hand the United States has called for restraint from the Chinese government and warned of repercussions for HK's legal system after Beijing issued an interpretation of the Basic Law, HK's mini-constitution. But on the other, a senior Department of State official who spoke to the Post bluntly dismissed as "silly" the oaths by the two lawmakers, Yau Wai-ching and Sixtus Baggio Leung. The pair pronounced China as "Chee-na", a Japanese term deemed derogatory to many Chinese people. A number of US lawmakers have previously floated the idea of amending the US-HK Policy Act as a way to step up threats against China in the event of violations of the one country, two systems policy. But Trump, who has said little about the human rights situation in China, is seen as unlikely to follow up on that idea.

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HK caught in tug of war as customs seize shipment of military vehicles from Taiwan (SCMP, Nov. 25): HK has been pitched into the choppy waters of South China Sea diplomacy after it intercepted nine Singapore-bound armoured personnel carriers on a container ship from Taiwan. The seizure – by customs officers at the Kwai Chung container terminal – comes at a time of cool relations between Beijing and Singapore after the city state backed the Philippines in its territorial dispute with China. "The Terrex ICVs were used by the Singapore Armed Forces in routine overseas training and shipped back via commercial means as with previous exercises. Singapore authorities are providing relevant assistance to HK customs and expect the shipment to return to Singapore expeditiously," Singapore's Ministry of Defence said in a statement. However, sources told the Post that the Singaporean authorities would need to contact the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to secure the return of the armoured vehicles. Under the city's Import and Export Ordinance, a licence is required for the import, export, re-export or transshipment of strategic commodities.

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Beijing demands Singapore abide by 'one-China' principle after military vehicles seized in HK (SCMP, Nov. 29): The row between China and Singapore over the impounding of the city state's military vehicles in HK escalated as Beijing lodged a diplomatic protest on Nov. 28. Foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said China made "representation" to Singapore after nine combat vehicles were stopped by HK customs en route from Taiwan. Geng called on Singapore to abide by HK laws and the "one China" principle. Observers said the protest was a warning to both Singapore and Taipei, which have seen their relationships with Beijing deteriorate. Beijing accuses Singapore of being intractable over the South China Sea disputes. It also cut off official communication with Taiwan after Tsai Ing-wen from the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party came into power in May. Military ties between Singapore and Taiwan go back more than four decades. Euan Graham, director of the international security programme at the Lowy Institute in Sydney, said the warning by Beijing was aimed at "killing two birds with one stone". "On one hand, it is a punishment intended to deter Singapore from being outspoken on the South China Sea," Graham said. "On the other hand, it is aimed at further isolating Taiwan's new DPP-led government."

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Legal affairs and human rights

Amending other laws could pave the way for HK national security legislation (SCMP, Nov. 14): Amendments could gradually be made to existing laws to enact -Article 23 of the Basic Law on -national security legislation, HK's former justice minister Elsie Leung said. Leung, also vice-

chairwoman of the Basic Law Committee under the National People's Congress, suggested lawmakers float their own ideas on how to enact Article 23. Leung said it could minimise conflict in the legislature because it would not be the government presenting a proposal for discussion. She cited the events of 2003 when half a million people took to the streets to oppose the legislation, forcing it to be scrapped. Leung said amendments could be made to the Crimes Ordinance, Public Order Ordinance, Societies Ordinance and other laws to achieve the purpose of -prohibiting any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion and theft of state secrets as required under Article 23.

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Pro-Beijing DAB urges HK government to tackle criminal, bogus asylum seekers (SCMP, Nov. 30): A pro-Beijing political party survey, released on Nov. 29, was used to bolster calls for the Hong Kong government to crackdown on bogus asylum seeker claimants. According to the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of HK's opinion survey, 91 per cent of the 606 respondents said asylum seekers convicted of crimes should be sent back to their countries. More than half did not support reopening refugee camps in HK. Some 73 per cent said the government should set a time limit for protection claims to be raised and 58 per cent said HK should withdraw from the UN Convention Against Torture entirely. DAB lawmaker Holden Chow said the number of "fake" asylum seekers, or protection claimants, had "not only caused an economic burden, but also caused a lot of crimes", and genuine applicants were the minority. The DAB lawmakers urged the government to expedite the screening of protection claims and clear the backlog of over 10,000 claims. Human rights lawyer Patricia Ho said the political party's survey questions "came from a place of ignorance about relevant laws in HK and court decisions". She said while the government should act faster to screen protection claims, "this type of language and rhetoric should be condemned".

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Health

Cancer-linked chemicals found in HK hairy crab (SCMP, Nov. 2): Authorities have urged retailers to stop selling hairy crabs from two mainland farms after some were found to be contaminated with cancer-causing chemicals. Two out of five hairy crab samples from three importers and two retailers were found to contain excessive levels of dioxin and dioxin-like polychlorinated biphenyls. Both are highly toxic chemical compounds that can cause cancer and damage the reproductive and immune systems, a Centre for Food Safety spokeswoman said.

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Highly toxic hairy crabs may have been hidden, then sold with fake documents: food safety watchdog investigates (SCMP, Nov. 17): A Sheung Wan hairy crab retailer has been accused of hiding toxic hairy crabs during a citywide recall then selling them with fake documents, according to the food safety watchdog. Dr Gloria Tam, the centre's controller, announced yesterday that the sample, taken from the shop in the latest test, was "extremely similar" to a batch of toxic crabs from Lake Tai on the mainland discovered by the centre earlier this month. Since November 1, the government has issued a mandatory recall and trade ban on hairy crabs from the two farms on the lake in eastern Jiangsu province. The centre suspected the problematic sample was left over from the toxic batch and that its declared origin of Xiantao city in Hubei province was false. But the crab-seller denied there was any fabrication and instead claimed there had been a mix-up between different crabs. "We are investigating the case and the centre will prosecute when necessary," said Dr Gloria Tam, the centre's controller. "It is possible that it involves forged documents."

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Doctors raise doubts over plans to more than double HK emergency ward fees (SCMP, Nov. 19): Doctors and patients' groups have expressed concerns over proposals that could see emergency ward fees more than double in an attempt to cut waiting times and prevent overuse. It is understood that consultants for the Hospital Authority have suggested raising the fee for accident and emergency services from HK\$100 to HK\$220, in an effort to also maintain the proportion of government subsidy at 82 per cent, which was set in 2003. The move is hoped to drive away patients who visit emergency wards unnecessarily and alleviate the pressure on overburdened wards, where patients had to wait for more than 10 hours to see doctors in some hospitals during peak flu season. However, Dr Axel Siu, vice-president of the HK College of Emergency Medicine, said the introduction of the HK\$100 charge for emergency ward services in 2002 showed adding fees was not an appropriate approach. "The number of patients dropped within a short period of time, but then the number increased gradually in 2004 onwards," Siu said.

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Environment

Human aerial art on HK beach aims to draw attention to ocean protection (SCMP, Nov. 3): More than 900 children and volunteers in HK teamed up to form a "human art piece" to raise awareness in the city on ocean protection. Event organiser Ocean Recovery Alliance, which has been running the

event since 2012, hopes that Kids Ocean Day will spur HK's youth to protect and care for the ocean's ecosystem.

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HK landfills overflow as household waste rises for fifth year running (SCMP, Nov. 23): The amount of waste dumped in the city's overflowing landfills has risen for the fifth year in row with the bulk of it still coming from households, new data has shown. Two-thirds, or 3.7 million tonnes, of the 5.5 million tonnes of solid waste discarded last year was comprised of municipal solid waste – rubbish generated domestically from homes, and commercial or industrial activities – most of it food, paper and plastics. The remaining 1.8 million tonnes was mainly comprised of waste from the construction sector. Between 2010 and 2015, the amount increased at an average rate of 1.9 per cent per year, outpacing population growth of 0.8 per cent but slower than economic growth of 2.9 per cent," according to a research brief by the Legislative Council secretariat.

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Culture and education

HK education system not to blame for student suicides, say government advisers (SCMP, Nov. 7): Advisers on student suicide prevention have ruled out the city's education system as a direct cause of the phenomenon, even though they are calling for a review of the system to reduce students' burden and recognise non-academic achievements. But the final report prepared by the Committee on Prevention of Student Suicides, which was submitted to the Education Bureau, stopped short of calling for more teachers, social workers and psychologists to better identify and help students with problems, prompting educators and social workers to call for extra resources to tackle the problem. Education lawmaker Ip Kin-yuen said the bureau was shirking responsibility and a thorough review of the education system was needed.

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Motion on teaching of Chinese history at junior secondary level passed in HK's Legco (SCMP, Nov. 17): A motion requiring that Chinese history be taught as an independent and compulsory subject at the junior secondary level, which pro-Beijing legislators said would help address what they called the issue of "radical separatist thoughts among youngsters", has been passed in the Legislative Council. But many pan-democrats call it a "brainwashing" move, saying the Chinese history subject was the "new national education". Chinese history is currently taught in all schools at the junior secondary level, but some schools combine the subject with others such as world history.

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HK universities urged to look beyond mainland to boost paltry foreign student numbers (SCMP, Nov. 24): HK's publicly-funded -universities need to be more international as 76 per cent of non-local students enrolled in the eight institutions in the last academic year were from the mainland, the city's official auditor said. The auditor found only 3.9 per cent of enrolled students at the eight local public universities were non-local but not from the mainland in the 2015-16 academic year. A government policy limits intake of foreign students to 20 per cent after public universities have filled their quota of local undergraduate places. There is no limit on non-local students for postgraduate programmes.

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Macau

Former Macau top prosecutor snared in corruption probe to face 1,970 criminal charges (SCMP, Nov. 12): Macau's former top prosecutor – who was once hotly tipped to become the city's chief executive – will face almost 2,000 criminal charges when he appears in court next month, it has been revealed. The extent of the allegations against Ho Chio-meng was released by Macau's Court of Final Appeal. Ho was prosecutor general – a position equivalent to that of the Director of Public Prosecutions in Hong Kong – from the 1999 handover of the former Portuguese enclave until 2014. In a case that has rocked the city's legal establishment, he is accused of an array of crimes along with former colleagues and members of his family. The litany of his alleged crimes is detailed on a 1,970-item charge sheet, including initiating or founding a criminal syndicate, fraud, money laundering, unlawful economic advantage, abuse of power and document forgery.

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Macau's gaming industry set for recovery in 2017, says S&P (SCMP, Nov. 25): 2017 will be a recovery year for Macau's gaming industry with gross gaming revenue (GGR) expected to grow by as much as 10 per cent next year, according to S&P Global Ratings. The city has seen a year-on-year rise in GGR for three consecutive months after 26 months of decline. The rebound from recession in the casino industry coincides with the opening of two new resorts which are helping draw recreational gamblers to Macau. S&P Global Ratings credit analyst Sophie Lin said that although China's ongoing anti corruption campaign remains a potential risk for the casino industry, Macau was shifting from VIP driven to mass-market driven growth which is less sensitive to regulations. The non-gaming sector has

emerged as a higher priority for the Macau government which is seeking economic diversification with more family-friendly projects to help draw visitors. Non-gaming spending in Macau jumped an impressive 17 per cent year on year to 1,806 patacas per visitor in the third quarter, according to a Macau government survey. The recovery of the casino sector and non-gaming diversification helped Macau snap out of its two-year economic contraction.

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Varia

HK quality of life nears lows of 2003 with sentiments on housing affordability, freedom of speech down (SCMP, Nov. 4): HK's overall quality of life has slumped to its lowest level since 2003, with sentiments on housing affordability, freedom of speech, the economy and noise pollution deteriorating the most, an annual local study found. The quality of life score for last year dipped to 101.83 from 2014's score of 102.95 in the Chinese University of HK study. The latest score was only slightly better than the study's lowest recorded level, in 2003, when the severe acute respiratory syndrome epidemic hit the city. The indices included health, culture, leisure, the economy and the environment.

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Pensions, lack of quality care homes top worries of elderly in HK (SCMP, Nov. 21): Almost half of the elderly in HK were upset about their pension arrangements and the lack of quality care homes, a new survey which polled more than 1,000 elderly people showed. The levels of disappointment on these two aspects were the highest among 10 factors which most older people believed would affect their hope for the future. Other factors that upset the respondents include opportunities to contribute to society, elderly health care services, outdoor space and community facilities, and elderly community support and living environment.

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