



Economy + Finance

- HK retail spending plunges to 17-year-low as visitors decline and yuan weakens (SCMP, Feb. 3)
- HK should brace itself for impact of Trump measures, says financial secretary Paul Chan (SCMP, Feb. 5)
- HK government dismisses report ranking city 5th for fintech (SCMP, Feb. 9)
- HK, Shenzhen officials discuss hi-tech border zone (SCMP, Feb. 10)
- HK pips Singapore to be ranked world's freest economy for 23rd consecutive year (SCMP, Feb. 17)
- HK Financial Secretary Paul Chan announces review of city's narrow tax base 'problem' (SCMP, Feb. 23)
- Paul Chan's surplus plan leaves HK analysts mixed on his fiscal approach (SCMP, Feb. 23)
- Analysts cast doubt on finance chief's HK economic growth forecast (SCMP, Feb. 23)
- HK Mortgage Corporation to offer public annuity scheme for retirees (SCMP, Feb. 28)

Domestic politics

- Carrie Lam promises 'new style' of HK leadership, with housing her priority (SCMP, Feb. 5)
- John Tsang pledges to reboot HK political reform debate (SCMP, Feb. 7)
- Two Chinese state leaders reveal Beijing's backing for Carrie Lam as HK leader in Shenzhen meetings (SCMP, Feb. 9)
- Leung Chun-ying set to be elevated to vice-chairman of the CPPCC (SCMP, Feb. 16)
- Donald Tsang jailed 20 months for misconduct, becoming city's highest-ranked official to be put behind bars (SCMP, Feb. 22)
- Beijing won't appoint winner of chief executive race if it finds candidate 'unacceptable', elder statesman Tung Chee-hwa warns (SCMP, Feb. 23)
- John Tsang, Woo Kwok-hing reach magic 150 nominations in HK chief executive race (SCMP, Feb. 26)
- Carrie Lam's election manifesto focuses on economy, government reforms (SCMP, Feb. 28)

International relations

- United States consulate insists HK people will not be hit by Trump immigration ban (SCMP, Feb. 1)
- Trump urged to push Beijing on HK's autonomy (SCMP, Feb. 9)
- US senators revive bill that would punish officials who curtail HK democracy and freedom (SCMP, Feb. 17)
- HK police hasten to contain diplomatic embarrassment over remarks comparing convicted officers to persecuted Jews (SCMP, Feb. 24)
- Beijing slams UK report which says Legco elections saga and oath row damaged confidence in 'one country, two systems' (SCMP, Feb. 25)
- German and Israeli consulates reportedly give 'positive response' during meeting with HK police over Holocaust remarks (SCMP, Feb. 28)

Legal affairs and human rights

- HK's freedom score down due to Beijing's influence: US-based report (SCMP, Feb. 2)
- 'No plan' to criminalise insulting police in HK in wake of Occupy court case (SCMP, Feb. 20)
- Some 33,000 gather in support of HK officers jailed for beating up Occupy protester Ken Tsang (SCMP, Feb. 23)
- HK newspaper Sing Pao calls police after senior employee's home splashed with red paint (SCMP, Feb. 27)

Health

- [HK doctors say beauticians should not handle high risk procedures and devices \(SCMP, Feb. 8\)](#)
- [Code of practice and possible new laws on marketing baby milk formula to boost breastfeeding in HK \(SCMP, Feb. 12\)](#)
- [Long waiting times at HK public hospitals for mentally ill patients \(SCMP, Feb. 20\)](#)

Environment

- [HK environment chief plays down fears officials to be vexed by country park development \(SCMP, Feb. 6\)](#)
- [Monument option could save HK's historic Red House, development minister says \(SCMP, Feb. 20\)](#)

Culture and education

- [HKU named Asia's most international university ... and third in the entire world \(SCMP, Feb. 1\)](#)
- [University of HK chief quits early after two years of turmoil \(SCMP, Feb. 3\)](#)
- [Embattled HK education minister Eddie Ng says he will retire at end of term \(SCMP, Feb. 27\)](#)

Varia

- [MTR to form investigation panel on Tsim Sha Tsui station firebombing \(SCMP, Feb. 11\)](#)

Economy + Finance

HK retail spending plunges to 17-year-low as visitors decline and yuan weakens (SCMP, Feb. 3):

The city's retail sales totalled HK\$436.6 billion at the end of 2016, down 8 per cent compared to 2015, government figures showed. It marked the biggest drop in consumer spending since 1999. But it wasn't all bad news, as total sales in the fourth quarter were up 2.3 per cent on the third quarter, and December's year-on-year sales decline narrowed compared with previous months, reflecting a revival in tourist arrivals that month, a government spokesman explained. Louis Tse, director of VC Brokerage, said the drop in mainland visitors was the main reason for the retail slump. "Before 2015, when the yuan was strong, [mainlanders] loved coming to HK. Now they prefer to go overseas to places like Southeast Asia," he said.

[Top of the Document](#)

HK should brace itself for impact of Trump measures, says financial secretary Paul Chan (SCMP, Feb. 5):

Financial Secretary Paul Chan and Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury Professor Chan Ka-keung both have issued warnings about possible trouble in the global economy, with countermeasures planned if HK is hit by the impact of US President Donald Trump's protectionist policies. "HK is an open economy. Any untoward changes in international trade and financial systems will unavoidably affect us," Professor Chan Ka-keung said. "Even though Trump's executive orders have not yet directly impacted us yet, his trade protectionism policies will have an effect on the international supply chain. His military and diplomatic policies will also bring geopolitical risks. HK will not be spared."

[Top of the Document](#)

HK government dismisses report ranking city 5th for fintech (SCMP, Feb. 9):

The government has dismissed a research report by Deloitte ranking HK only fifth last year among leading fintech hubs, saying the study did not directly compare financial technology development but rather financial and business environments as a whole. Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury Professor Chan Ka-keung said the report did not specifically compare fintech development but rather compiled results from three organisations which ranked the competitiveness of financial centres, their innovation capacity and business environment. According to the treasury minister, HK's rate of fintech use by "digitally active people" in 2015 was double that of Singapore, according to the Fintech Adoption Index compiled by consultancy Ernst & Young. The minister also highlighted a survey published by InvestHK in November on the increasing number of fintech start-ups in HK, up from 86 in mid-2015 to 138 at last count.

[Top of the Document](#)

HK, Shenzhen officials discuss hi-tech border zone (SCMP, Feb. 10):

A joint task force on the development of an innovation and technology park on the Lok Ma Chau Loop held its inaugural meeting in Shenzhen on Feb. 9. The meeting was co-chaired by Secretary for Innovation and Technology Nicholas Yang and Shenzhen Vice-mayor Ai Xuefeng. With the Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Zone on the north side of Shenzhen River and adjacent to the Lok Ma Chau loop, Yang said the project would bring mutual benefits to the two places. After years of delay, the HK and

Shenzhen governments finally struck a deal in January to jointly develop the 87-hectare site into an -innovation and technology park, settling a long-running -dispute over ownership of the border site, which belongs to HK.

[Top of the Document](#)

HK pips Singapore to be ranked world's freest economy for 23rd consecutive year (SCMP, Feb. 17): HK has once again beat key rival Singapore to be ranked the world's freest economy by a Washington D.C.-based think-tank for the 23rd consecutive year. The city scored 89.8 out of 100 points in the annual index of economic freedom compiled by the right-wing Heritage Foundation over 180 economies. **Switzerland ranked the fourth and scored 81.5.** Out of the 12 components measured in the Index of Economic Freedom report, HK achieved the maximum score of 100 points in fiscal health, and 90 points or more in seven other areas, including business freedom, tax burden and property rights.

[Top of the Document](#)

HK Financial Secretary Paul Chan announces review of city's narrow tax base 'problem' (SCMP, Feb. 23): Financial Secretary Paul Chan announced a new policy unit would be established in an effort to review HK's tax regime and narrow the city's tax base. In handing down the 2017-18 budget, Chan revealed his plan to widen the salary tax bands, introduce new rebates and increase allowances on the back of an estimated HK\$92.8 billion fiscal surplus for the current financial year. He warned, however, the city was vulnerable to volatility in the global economy and financial markets, with 45 per cent of government revenue in 2015-16 coming from land sales and profits tax alone. During question time with the media Chan was asked the direction of the tax review and if a progressive profits tax or a goods and services tax would be introduced to broaden the base. Broadening the tax base would, not be the unit's short-term goal, Chan responded.

[Top of the Document](#)

Paul Chan's surplus plan leaves HK analysts mixed on his fiscal approach (SCMP, Feb. 23): Financial Secretary Paul Chan has promised to earmark two-thirds of the HK\$92.8 billion surplus on elderly services as well as sports and innovation. Explaining his ideas on fiscal policy, the accountant-turned-minister identified his "three objectives of public finance" – developing the economy and improving people's livelihood, investing for the future, and sharing the fruits of success. Duncan Innes-Ker, regional director for Asia at research firm Economist Intelligence Unit, said: "Few people will notice much difference between Paul Chan's budget and those of his predecessor. The government continues to take a cautious approach to spending the huge fiscal surplus that the territory has built up."

[Top of the Document](#)

Analysts cast doubt on finance chief's HK economic growth forecast (SCMP, Feb. 23): HK's economy grew 1.9 per cent last year – the slowest rate since 2012. But a noted improvement in recent months prompted the government to forecast stronger growth of 2 to 3 per cent this year. Growth picked up from 0.8 per cent in the first quarter to 3.1 per cent in the fourth thanks to a strong recovery in the export sector, Financial Secretary Paul Chan said in his maiden budget speech. But analysts questioned whether Chan's prediction might be too optimistic on the back of the risks arising from the prospect of more US interest rate rises, President Donald Trump's uncertain trade policy and persistent weakness in global trade.

[Top of the Document](#)

HK Mortgage Corporation to offer public annuity scheme for retirees (SCMP, Feb. 28): The government-owned HK Mortgage Corporation will offer a public annuity scheme as early as next year to allow retirees to invest a minimum lump sum of below HK\$300,000 in exchange for a stable monthly income until their death. HKMC chief executive Raymond Li said the proposed plan would go to the board for approval before the end of June. If approved, it will be launched within 12 to 18 months. The age and minimum investment amount for the scheme has not yet been fixed, but Li said the threshold will be lower than HK\$300,000 to allow more retirees to apply for the products.

[Top of the Document](#)

Domestic politics

Carrie Lam promises 'new style' of HK leadership, with housing her priority (SCMP, Feb. 5): Chief executive contender Carrie Lam has promised to lead HK with a "new style" of governance, featuring business facilitation, public engagement and use of the surplus to share the fruits of economic development with the people. The former No 2 official highlighted land and housing, development of new industries and education as her priorities, but said it would take a few more weeks to draft her policies.

[Top of the Document](#)

John Tsang pledges to reboot HK political reform debate (SCMP, Feb. 7): Chief executive contender John Tsang walked the fine line of trying to appeal to both pan-democrats and Beijing by promising to restart the political reform process and revisit a controversial national security bill if he were elected. The former financial secretary also called for a review to look into introducing a two-tier progressive profits tax to lessen the burden on small- and medium-sized enterprises and a negative income tax that would help low-income groups.

[Top of the Document](#)

Two Chinese state leaders reveal Beijing's backing for Carrie Lam as HK leader in Shenzhen meetings (SCMP, Feb. 9): Amid speculation that Beijing's liaison office in HK does not represent the stance of the central government, Zhang Dejiang, chairman of the National People's Congress, told leaders of business chambers and pro-establishment figures that Lam was indeed Beijing's preferred candidate for the top job, according to a source with knowledge of the meetings on Feb. 5-6. "The decision was made at the meeting of the Politburo Standing Committee on December 25," the source said. Zhang, the third-ranking leader in the Politburo, is head of the Communist Party's leading group on HK and Macau affairs. Sun Chunlan, a Politburo member and head of the Communist Party's United Front Work Department, joined Zhang for the meetings.

[Top of the Document](#)

Leung Chun-ying set to be elevated to vice-chairman of the CPPCC (SCMP, Feb. 16): Outgoing chief executive Leung Chun-ying is expected to be elevated to the position of vice-chairman of China's top advisory body next month, following his shock announcement in December that he would not seek a second term as HK's leader, according to several well-placed sources. That would raise the unpopular Leung to the position of an elder statesman in the manner of the city's first chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa, who currently enjoys the same status. Leung will be nominated as a delegate to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) at the two-day meeting of the Standing Committee on February 27 and 28. He will then be elected CPPCC vice-chairman at the closing ceremony of the advisory body.

[Top of the Document](#)

Donald Tsang jailed 20 months for misconduct, becoming city's highest-ranked official to be put behind bars (SCMP, Feb. 22): HK's former leader Donald Tsang became the city's highest-ranked official to be put behind bars after he was sentenced to 20 months in prison for misconduct. The city's former chief also faces a retrial, tentatively set for September, for a bribery charge that the jury failed to reach a verdict on last week. After a high-profile six-week trial, the jury found Tsang had failed to disclose a conflict of interest when he approved three applications from radio broadcaster Wave Media between 2010 and 2012, including a request for a digital broadcast licence. At the time, Tsang was in negotiations with property tycoon Bill Wong over a luxury Shenzhen penthouse where he intended to retire. Wong was also a 20 per cent shareholder of the radio station. During the trial, the prosecution said Tsang had "abused the system" by intentionally keeping the property a secret from the Executive Council while they were discussing the applications despite rules requiring executive councillors to declare any conflicts of interest.

[Top of the Document](#)

Beijing won't appoint winner of chief executive race if it finds candidate 'unacceptable', elder statesman Tung Chee-hwa warns (SCMP, Feb. 23): Elder statesman and vice-chairman of China's top advisory body Tung Chee-hwa has warned that Beijing will not appoint the winner of next month's chief executive election to the city's top post if it deems him or her unacceptable. It remains unclear if Tung mentioned or was referring to John Tsang, the underdog who enjoys the biggest mass appeal among the four candidates in the leadership race. An adviser at the meeting said Tung did mention the former financial secretary while talking about the importance of the central government's trust in the city's leader. "In response to some advisers' questions regarding the chief executive election, Tung said John Tsang's capability can't compare with Carrie Lam, and the central government doesn't trust him," the adviser said. Tung's warning came days after HK and Macau Affairs Office director Wang Guangya told a number of local politicians that Beijing's top echelons had made a collective decision to back former chief secretary Lam in the election. Democratic Party chairman Wu Chi-wai urged the Registration and Electoral Office to launch an investigation into Tung's remarks to ensure the election is fair. Civic Party lawmaker Dennis Kwok said it would be unacceptable for Beijing to refuse to appoint a duly-elected chief executive.

[Top of the Document](#)

John Tsang, Woo Kwok-hing reach magic 150 nominations in HK chief executive race (SCMP, Feb. 26): HK's leadership election is set to be a three-horse race as two underdogs have secured enough support to get an entry ticket, with one of them, former financial secretary John Tsang, formally submitting his bid on Feb. 25. Tsang and retired judge Woo Kwok-hing will join Carrie Lam, seen as Beijing's preferred choice, to compete for the top job on March 26. Critics say Tsang, who

enjoys higher support in opinion polls, has only a slim chance of winning as he secured little backing from the pro-establishment camp, bagging just 10 of his 160 nominees from that sector. An aspirant needs 150 nominations from the 1,194-member Election Committee to qualify, and at least 601 votes to win. In the afternoon, the pan-democrats handed 47 nominations to Woo after a discussion, bringing the retired judge's total number of tickets to 156. The remaining contestant, lawmaker Regina Ip, said she would "fight till the end" before nominations closed on March 1, while admitting she lagged behind.

[Top of the Document](#)

Carrie Lam's election manifesto focuses on economy, government reforms (SCMP, Feb. 28):

HK chief executive hopeful Carrie Lam has vowed to reform government structure and boost the economy if she is elected, but has not made promises relating to universal suffrage or national security. Lam, though, made pledges to revamp the Central Policy Unit, saying its future role should be on helping roll out cross-departmental policies. She proposed adding 20 to 30 young members to the reformed unit so as to "directly send the voices of the youth to the ears of the chief executive". The next government should strengthen its ties with foreign governments, with Lam vowing to assign more officials overseas to act as "economic ambassadors". In addition, she said she would revive incumbent Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying's idea of a Culture Bureau. She also proposed a new Tourism Bureau, and the existing Transport and Housing Bureau would be divided in two. On education, she followed other chief executive contenders and promised to abolish the much-criticised territory wide system assessment for Primary 3 schoolchildren. Lam also revealed she had secured more than 400 nominations from the 1,194-member Election Committee that will pick HK's next chief executive on March 26. She submitted 579 nominations from the 1,194-member Election Committee that will pick the city's next leader on March 26, just 22 short of the final number of votes she will need to win the race.

[Top of the Document](#)

International relations

United States consulate insists HK people will not be hit by Trump immigration ban (SCMP, Feb. 1):

The United States consulate dismissed fears that Hongkongers would be affected by the country's controversial immigration ban after a US institution issued letters to international students not to leave the US. Kristin Haworth, spokeswoman for the US consulate, told the Post that HK residents would not be affected by the executive order. She said that embassies and consulates around the world would process and issue visas to "eligible visa applicants who apply with a passport from an unrestricted country, even if they hold dual nationality from one of the seven restricted countries."

[Top of the Document](#)

Trump urged to push Beijing on HK's autonomy (SCMP, Feb. 9):

A group of China specialists in the United States has urged the administration of President Donald Trump to work with London to ensure Beijing respects the autonomy of HK. In a policy recommendation report for Trump, they said the US should "publicly call attention to the concerning trend of encroachment by Beijing on HK's autonomy". However, it also said the US must respect China's sovereignty over the city. The report urged the administration not to abandon the "one-China policy", and to reaffirm US commitments to Asia. The report highlighted eight HK grievances with the central government, ranging from the disappearance of booksellers to media censorship and the banning of elected members of the Legislative Council. The report said such grievances created uncertainty over HK's ability to remain an international financial centre, and that Beijing's intervention in local affairs could lead to more public protests in the city. Beijing has previously called on foreign nations not to interfere in HK affairs.

[Top of the Document](#)

US senators revive bill that would punish officials who curtail HK democracy and freedom (SCMP, Feb. 17):

Three US senators, including former presidential candidate Marco Rubio, reintroduced a shelved HK human rights bill that would establish "punitive measures" against government officials in HK and mainland China who suppress basic freedoms in the city. The HK Human Rights and Democracy Act is a piece of bipartisan legislation first proposed in the wake of the 2015 disappearances of the five Causeway Bay booksellers, all of whom eventually resurfaced on the mainland. The bill would require the US president to identify people responsible for the surveillance, abduction, detention, or forced confessions of booksellers and journalists, and other actions suppressing basic freedoms in the city, and to freeze their US-based assets and deny them entry to the country. It also requires US authorities not to deny visa applications from HK residents on the basis of their arrest or detention associated with the Occupy protests. A HK government spokesman criticised the act. "[The government] expressed deep regret over the foreign legislature's introduction of a bill seeking to interfere in the affairs of HK without evidence indicating mainland authorities have enforced law across the boundary," he said.

[Top of the Document](#)

HK police hasten to contain diplomatic embarrassment over remarks comparing convicted officers to persecuted Jews (SCMP, Feb. 24): Senior HK police officers are scrambling to snuff out a growing international embarrassment to the force as two consulates criticised one of their own for comparing the taunts suffered by seven police officers to the plight of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. The German consulate in HK described the comparison as “utterly inappropriate”, echoing a statement by the Israeli consulate on Feb. 23, which called the reference “inappropriate and regretful”, and demanded no further comparisons be made to the Jewish Holocaust. A police source familiar with the matter told the Post that the force had arranged meetings with the two consulates on Feb. 24, hoping to explain the situation and clear up any misunderstandings. Discontent among police officers escalated after seven policemen were sentenced to two years’ jail for kicking and punching activist Ken Tsang. At a mass gathering on Feb. 22 attended by 33,000 serving and retired police officers and their relatives, a station sergeant was filmed comparing the insults the officers had suffered with the Nazi persecution of Jews during the second world war.

[Top of the Document](#)

Beijing slams UK report which says Legco elections saga and oath row damaged confidence in ‘one country, two systems’ (SCMP, Feb. 25): The Chinese foreign ministry has dismissed the findings of a British report that pointed to the Legislative Council elections saga and the oath-taking row as factors that have damaged people’s confidence in the “one country, two systems” principle. Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang urged the British government to stop publishing such reports and intruding into HK’s affairs. “HK affairs are China’s internal affairs,” Geng said. “Foreign countries have no right to interfere.” Geng added that the central government had upheld the principles of “one country, two systems”. While noting that the policy continued to function well in the vast majority of areas, the British government urged central and local authorities, as well as all elected politicians, to take steps to restore domestic and international confidence. The biannual study on the former British colony covered the latter half of 2016 and was released on Feb. 24 and presented to the British parliament.

[Top of the Document](#)

German and Israeli consulates reportedly give ‘positive response’ during meeting with HK police over Holocaust remarks (SCMP, Feb. 28): The German and Israeli consulates reportedly gave “a positive response” during a damage control meeting called by the HK police in the wake of controversy over a Holocaust comparison made by a police officer at a mass rally. The Post learned that the force met representatives of the two consulates on Feb. 24 in a bid to contain the fallout, while long-running Israeli newspaper Haaretz described the comparison as “ill-advised” in a report published on Feb. 26, adding that the police faced “a type of diplomatic incident”. “We received a positive response from both consulates,” a police source familiar with the matter said. He said the force reiterated its stance in the meeting.

[Top of the Document](#)

Legal affairs and human rights

HK’s freedom score down due to Beijing’s influence: US-based report (SCMP, Feb. 2): Beijing’s creeping influence on HK’s political, civil and economic affairs has taken a toll on the territory’s latest global score for freedom, according to an annual report by Washington-based rights watchdog, Freedom House. The Freedom in the World 2017 report cited “Beijing’s encroachment on freedoms” as a key driver of a downward trend in HK, reflected in cases such as the disappearance of five booksellers in 2015, the recent oath-taking saga in the legislature and mounting pressures on media and academic independence. The report gave HK an aggregate score of 61 out of 100 this year – with 0 being the least free and 100 as the freest – which was two points down from last year’s score of 63. Mainland China, classified as “not free”, scored just 15 out of 100.

[Top of the Document](#)

‘No plan’ to criminalise insulting police in HK in wake of Occupy court case (SCMP, Feb. 20): The Security Bureau said that it had no plans to introduce a new law to ban insulting behaviour against police officers, despite renewed calls for such legislation following the jailing of seven officers for the assault of an Occupy activist. The jailing of the seven officers for two years each in the controversial assault case has reignited tensions that first exploded during the 79-day civil disobedience movement of 2014, when thousands of protesters occupied major thoroughfares to demand greater democracy. Many police supporters said the jail term was too harsh as they claimed that the seven officers were insulted by activist Ken Tsang, who is currently appealing his own five-week prison sentence for assault.

[Top of the Document](#)

Some 33,000 gather in support of HK officers jailed for beating up Occupy protester Ken Tsang (SCMP, Feb. 23): HK witnessed one of the most significant mass demonstrations in its history on Feb. 22 when 33,000 serving and former police officers held a show of support for colleagues who were

jailed for assaulting an activist during the 2014 Occupy protests. The massed ranks of mostly former police officers were out to register – with a disciplined dignity – their condemnation of what they believe to be the harsh and unjust treatment of seven colleagues by the city’s judicial system. The huge turnout threatens to escalate an already significant chorus of criticism aimed at District Court Judge David Dufton and the judiciary as a whole. Joe Chan, chairman of the Junior Police Officers’ Association, said his association and three other police staff associations – the Superintendents’ Association, the Police Inspectors’ Association and the Overseas Inspectors’ Association – would write to Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying urging legislation that would ban insulting acts against public officers on duty.

[Top of the Document](#)

HK newspaper Sing Pao calls police after senior employee’s home splashed with red paint (SCMP, Feb. 27): Chinese-language newspaper Sing Pao Daily News called the police on Feb. 26 after the home of a senior staff member was splashed with red paint as the recent harassment against the publication intensified. It was the fourth time the newspaper had called the police since February 19, after the newspaper’s editorial staff spotted suspicious people following its managing staff and lingering near their office in Kwun Tong and their homes. In a statement on Feb. 26, the newspaper “strongly condemned” interest group(s) involved in the city and mainland China over suspected use of triad gangs to intimidate staff in a bid to disturb the chief executive election. “[The groups] used such extreme violent and base acts to make sure the candidates they like would be elected.” Lawmaker James To said the action had seriously violated press freedom and was a challenge to the law enforcement ability of the police. He urged police and the government to face up to the incidents and bring the perpetrators to justice. The long-time pro-establishment newspaper, whose chairman Gu Zhuoheng is allegedly a wanted man in mainland China, raised eyebrows last year when it began running critical articles about Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying and Beijing’s liaison office in HK.

[Top of the Document](#)

Health

HK doctors say beauticians should not handle high risk procedures and devices (SCMP, Feb. 8): A collective of HK doctor groups has argued that a number of risky medical devices and beauty procedures should be operated by them, not by beauticians. It comes just days after details surfaced of a government proposal, which identified 15 types of devices that are most commonly used by non-medical practitioners for non-medical purposes, such as beauty treatment, for tighter regulation. The proposal has faced strong opposition from the beauty sector, which argued the devices had been in common use for a long time without any problems. A special meeting will be held at the Legislative Council to gather stakeholders’ opinions on the proposal, with a bill expected to be tabled later in the year.

[Top of the Document](#)

Code of practice and possible new laws on marketing baby milk formula to boost breastfeeding in HK (SCMP, Feb. 12): A voluntary code that restricts the marketing of infant milk formula is set to launch in the next few months, the undersecretary for food and health has revealed. And a panel of scientists would screen health and nutritional claims by makers of formula before they are allowed to be printed on packaging, if a law regulating the claims is enacted, Sophia Chan added without giving a timetable. She said such legislation would come in if the code did not improve claims’ veracity. Chan said the code aimed to encourage breastfeeding and to provide proper product information to mothers.

[Top of the Document](#)

Long waiting times at HK public hospitals for mentally ill patients (SCMP, Feb. 20): Patients with mental illness need to wait up to more than three years to see a doctor at public hospitals because medical manpower has failed to meet surging demand for such services. It raises questions as to whether such patients are receiving proper care especially after recent tragedies, including the February 10 arson attack on a Tsim Sha Tsui-bound MTR train, involving those with records of mental illness. World Health Organisation guidelines suggest one psychiatrist serves every 10,000 people, meaning HK should have more than 700 psychiatrists, instead of just 373, working in the public and private sectors.

[Top of the Document](#)

Environment

HK environment chief plays down fears officials to be vexed by country park development (SCMP, Feb. 6): The city’s environment chief has played down concerns that conservation authorities would be put in a difficult position helping the government identify sites within country parks in which development could be considered. Environment secretary Wong Kam-sing said the relevant agencies and bureaus would have to play their “respective roles” and “exercise their duty”. He was responding to statements made by his boss, Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying, who last month claimed he had asked the relevant authorities – including the environmental protection department – to study suitable

sites on the fringes of protected country parks for possible residential development. "Development and environmental bodies have their respective roles ... and the objective is to achieve a balance in society [between housing and development]," Wong said.

[Top of the Document](#)

Monument option could save HK's historic Red House, development minister says (SCMP, Feb. 20): The Tuen Mun house believed to have served as the secret base for the 1911 revolution led by Sun Yat-sen could be declared a proposed monument "when necessary" so it could be saved from the wrecking ball, development minister Eric Ma said. Ma made the remarks as 300 people protested outside the Red House, calling on the government to immediately propose it be named a monument so the site's new landlord cannot demolish the building as planned. The controversy stems from a widely held belief the two-storey house served as the base for Chinese republican revolutionaries in their plot to overthrow the Qing dynasty in the 1900s.

[Top of the Document](#)

Culture and education

HKU named Asia's most international university ... and third in the entire world (SCMP, Feb. 1): The University of HK has been ranked the world's third most international university, according to a recent ranking of 150 institutions around the world. While HKU retained the position it scored previously on the annual list, Chinese University saw a great leap upward to 28th from 108th last year, as the ranking changed its methodology to factor in for the first time a university's global reputation. HKU was ranked highest among all Asian universities. **ETH Zurich and École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, both located in Switzerland, came first and second in the rankings.**

[Top of the Document](#)

University of HK chief quits early after two years of turmoil (SCMP, Feb. 3): University of HK vice-chancellor Peter Mathieson shocked the city's academic and political circles by announcing his resignation, two years before his contract expires, to take the helm at Scotland's prestigious Edinburgh University. His premature departure follows recent years of tension and clashes between the university's governing body and students amid allegations of political interference in academic freedom at HK's premier higher learning institute.

[Top of the Document](#)

Embattled HK education minister Eddie Ng says he will retire at end of term (SCMP, Feb. 27): HK's embattled education minister Eddie Ng will retire when his term comes to an end in June, he announced. Ng also looked back at his past five years in the post and hit out at critics who blamed him for being the mastermind of plans to introduce national education. The government eventually backed down on the compulsory introduction of the subject in 2012 after 10 days of protests, giving schools the choice of whether to teach the subject. According to the University of Hong Kong's public opinion programme, Ng's net approval rate stood at minus 54 per cent last month, the poorest among all bureau chiefs.

[Top of the Document](#)

Varia

MTR to form investigation panel on Tsim Sha Tsui station firebombing (SCMP, Feb. 11): The shocking firebombing of a peak hour MTR train at Tsim Sha Tsui injured at least 18 people on Feb. 10. It prompted the MTR Corporation to form an investigation panel to study how the blaze was handled and possible improvement measures. Transport minister Professor Anthony Cheung said the government would require the company to have a thorough review of its current safety and emergency measures. The 60-year-old suspect, who had murmured "burn you to death" on the packed train before he lit a bottle and hurled it at passengers, according to a police source. Secretary for Food and Health Ko Wing-man said the suspect had a history of mental illness and that recently his situation had been relatively stable. But he was due to undergo a check-up and had missed a recent medical appointment.

[Top of the Document](#)

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