

Economy + Finance

- Number of people seeking a fresh start outside Hong Kong hits three-year high (SCMP, May 5)
- Hong Kong's anti-trust regulator blames 'unusual' practices for city's high petrol prices (SCMP, May 5)
- Retail sales in Hong Kong grow for first time in two years on upbeat demand, visitor figures (SCMP, May 5)
- Demand drives fastest expansion in three years for Hong Kong business despite mainland headwinds (SCMP, May 5)
- Illegal funds frozen in Hong Kong up 60 per cent, ICAC says as it prepares to host global conference on financial fraud (SCMP, May 8)
- Beijing's financial crackdown puts Hong Kong shares way ahead of mainland peers (SCMP, May 12)
- With trillions of US dollars on the line, Hong Kong and London bid to become finance hub of China's global trade strategy (SCMP, May 15)
- 'Hong Kong and China businesses should partner' to invest in non-traditional belt and road markets' (SCMP, May 16)
- Hong Kong tightens screw on borrowers of multiple loans as property market overheats (SCMP, May 19)
- Hong Kong border shopping complex set to open in July – two years behind schedule (SCMP, May 23)
- Hong Kong could expose itself to bigger financial risks with growing involvement in 'Belt and Road' plan, Moody's warns (SCMP, May 25)
- Hong Kong and Macau regulators intensify efforts against money laundering, financial crime and terrorist funding (SCMP, May 27)

Domestic politics

- No chance Beijing will reform Hong Kong electoral framework in next five years, Rita Fan says (SCMP, May 4)
- Hong Kong chief executive-elect Carrie Lam puts former head of immigration in charge of office (SCMP, May 5)
- First group of Hong Kong pan-democrats to have met Carrie Lam are willing to give her 'benefit of the doubt' (SCMP, May 8)
- Hong Kong leader CY Leung accused of meddling in probe set up to investigate HK\$50m payout (SCMP, May 16)
- Hong Kong chief executive-elect Carrie Lam struggles to find new talent to join her cabinet (SCMP, May 18)
- Hong Kong leader doubles down on attack against pan-democrat in UGL probe (SCMP, May 21)
- Shut up and stay away, pan-dems warn Hong Kong's leader over fee probe row (SCMP, May 23)
- It's too early to discuss Hong Kong's post-2047 future, says Beijing diplomat (SCMP, May 24)
- Chinese state leader Zhang Dejiang announces Beijing's plans to tighten grip on Hong Kong (SCMP, May 28)
- Lowest turnout since 2008 for Hong Kong march in memory of June 4 crackdown (SCMP, May 29)

International relations

- Indonesian President Joko Widodo gets hero's welcome from compatriots in Hong Kong (SCMP, May 1)
- Outrage as Hong Kong democracy campaigners urge US to get tough with Beijing (SCMP, May 5)
- Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte arrives in Hong Kong ahead of Beijing visit (SCMP, May 12)

- [Pakistan prime minister invites Hong Kong to invest in country \(SCMP, May 17\)](#)

Legal affairs and human rights

- [Hong Kong police on alert for terror threat from lone wolves inspired by Islamic State \(SCMP, May 4\)](#)
- [Hong Kong lawyers head urges Beijing to listen and not rush Basic Law interpretation \(SCMP, May 5\)](#)
- [Hong Kong's No 2 official pledges to safeguard media freedom \(SCMP, May 8\)](#)
- [Hong Kong's Bar Association chief warns against making Basic Law interpretations by Beijing 'standard practice' \(SCMP, May 26\)](#)

Health

- [Heat rising in Hong Kong's war on tobacco \(SCMP, May 5\)](#)
- [Hong Kong could see 35 per cent surge in HIV cases by 2021, report says \(SCMP, May 23\)](#)
- [University researchers in Hong Kong develop air purifier that promises to kill, not just trap, deadly bacteria \(SCMP, May 26\)](#)

Environment

- [Hong Kong leader CY Leung downplays smog claim after rebuttal by weather chiefs \(SCMP, May 2\)](#)
- [Breathe easier, Hong Kong is on course to hit global air pollution target \(SCMP, May 17\)](#)
- [Calls to ramp up manpower to prevent illegal dumping in new Hong Kong waste-charge plan \(SCMP, May 29\)](#)

Culture and education

- [Authority endorses report showing 'strong' public support for Hong Kong Palace Museum project \(SCMP, May 10\)](#)
- [Chief Executive-elect Carrie Lam plans HK\\$30,000 subsidy for eligible secondary school graduates \(SCMP, May 23\)](#)

Macau

- [Macau to launch facial recognition and identity card checks for ATMs after withdrawals surpass HK\\$10 billion a month \(SCMP, May 8\)](#)
- [China's No 3 leader urges Macau to boost governance at critical stage for casino city's economy \(SCMP, May 9\)](#)
- [State leader's lavish praise of 'patriotic' Macau is not lost on Hong Kong \(SCMP, May 10\)](#)

Varia

- [Hong Kong issues amber travel alert for the UK in wake of Manchester bombing \(SCMP, May 25\)](#)

Press articles related to Switzerland and Swiss matters

- [Vatican Swiss Guard gets 40 new troops on anniversary of bloody Rome battle to protect pope \(Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, SCMP, May 8\)](#)

Economy + Finance

Number of people seeking a fresh start outside Hong Kong hits three-year high (SCMP, May 5):

The number of Hongkongers trying to emigrate to other parts of the world reached a three-year high last year, according to the latest government data. Figures released by the Security Bureau show 7,600 applied for a certificate of no criminal conviction (CNCC) for outward immigration purposes – 8.6 per cent more than in 2015 and 10 per cent more than in 2014. Nevertheless, Goldmax Immigration Consulting director Benny Cheung said social, political and financial pressures had caused an increasing number of locals to seek greener pastures.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Hong Kong's anti-trust regulator blames 'unusual' practices for city's high petrol prices (SCMP, May 5): Hong Kong's anti-trust regulator has called on the government to intervene in the petrol market after it discovered "highly unusual" practices which hindered market competition and contributed to the notoriously high fuel prices in the city. The Competition Commission found consumers lacked choices as oil companies currently offer only the most expensive type of petrol for motorists, namely the 98 RON. The commission also recommended that the government build its own oil storage facilities and open it up for rental to new players. The petrol market in Hong Kong is mainly dominated by five players.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Retail sales in Hong Kong grow for first time in two years on upbeat demand, visitor figures (SCMP, May 5): Retail sales in Hong Kong grew in March for the first time in about two years at 3.1 per cent, with a recovery on the horizon, according to industry experts. The expansion, the first since February 2015, came in the same month as an uptick in tourism figures, with visitor arrival numbers surging 8.8 per cent, the biggest growth in more than two years. “The March sales are encouraging. We are very close to the end of the tunnel,” said Thomson Cheng, chairman of the Retail Management Association. The rise ended 24 months of decline in retail figures. Spending on jewellery, watches and other luxury items – items usually popular with mainland visitors – grew the most in value, jumping 8.4 per cent in March.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Demand drives fastest expansion in three years for Hong Kong business despite mainland headwinds (SCMP, May 5): Hong Kong’s private sector grew at its fastest rate in more than three years last month thanks to increased global demand for products and services, and despite headwinds from the mainland. The Nikkei Hong Kong Purchasing Managers’ Index, which gauges business conditions in the manufacturing, services, retail, construction and other sectors, rose to 51.1 last month, up from 49.9 in March. A reading below 50 on the index indicates a contraction, while above 50 shows growth. April’s uptick came after consecutive declines from January to March.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Illegal funds frozen in Hong Kong up 60 per cent, ICAC says as it prepares to host global conference on financial fraud (SCMP, May 8): The amount of criminal proceeds frozen has soared by more than 60 per cent year-on-year, according to figures by Hong Kong’s Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). ICAC figures showed that in 2016, a total of about HK\$32 million of crime proceeds were frozen, in addition to HK\$889 million confiscated. In 2015, the figures were HK\$19.7 million and HK\$231 million respectively.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Beijing’s financial crackdown puts Hong Kong shares way ahead of mainland peers (SCMP, May 12): Hong Kong’s stock market is on course to beat its mainland counterpart by the largest margin in five years as Beijing’s regulatory crackdown aimed at cleaning up the financial industry drives a tide of southbound investment. As mainland investors flee yuan-denominated equities amid heightened regulatory surveillance, they have been loading up on less pricey Hong Kong shares as an alternative, through the stock connect programmes that enable cross-border trading. Boosted by the flow of capital from Chinese and overseas investors, the Hang Seng Index’s gain so far this year against the mainland’s stock benchmark is set to be the widest since 2012.

[#Top of the Document](#)

With trillions of US dollars on the line, Hong Kong and London bid to become finance hub of China’s global trade strategy (SCMP, May 15): Hong Kong and London have locked horns at a two-day high-level forum in Beijing over which city is best placed to act as the finance hub for China’s global trade and commerce strategy. Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying insisted the city was “the preferred destination” for capital flows from the mainland. Leung cited the city’s status as the largest offshore settlement centre for yuan trade and its title as the world’s No 1 stock market for new listings in 2016. However, his bid was swiftly challenged by British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond. Hammond said London remained the financial centre of the world and had the skills and capability needed to deliver China’s trade initiative.

[#Top of the Document](#)

‘Hong Kong and China businesses should partner’ to invest in non-traditional belt and road markets’ (SCMP, May 16): Hong Kong businesses should team up with their mainland counterparts to invest in “non-traditional” markets under China’s go-global trade scheme, Yvonne Choi, Hong Kong’s commissioner for the “Belt and Road Initiative”, said the 30-member delegation led by Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying offered good insight for countries hoping to have high-quality service providers in infrastructure. Choi advised smaller and medium-sized companies to partner with mainland enterprises to mitigate risks.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Hong Kong tightens screw on borrowers of multiple loans as property market overheats (SCMP, May 19): Hong Kong has announced the second set of mortgage-tightening measures in a week to cool a property market that has broken records, taking aim at borrowers with multiple loans and whose income sources come from outside the city in an attempt to reduce banks’ credit risks. Starting immediately, banks must allocate a larger risk weighting toward their assessment of credit worthiness, while cutting the amount of allowable loans on residential and commercial properties, according to a

statement by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA). The city's de facto central bank has unveiled eight rounds of tightening measures since 2014.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Hong Kong border shopping complex set to open in July – two years behind schedule (SCMP, May 23): A pop-up shopping complex near the border with Shenzhen is finally set to open in July after a two-year delay, mainly luring Hongkongers instead of mainland Chinese tourists as originally planned amid uncertainty about visitor arrivals. Originally touted as a complex to draw mainland tourists away from North District, it is now targeting 45 per cent of patrons from Hong Kong, 30 per cent from the mainland and the rest tourists from other countries. The complex is located on a 420,000 sq ft site in San Tin, Yuen Long. It is expected to create about 2,000 jobs.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Hong Kong could expose itself to bigger financial risks with growing involvement in 'Belt and Road' plan, Moody's warns (SCMP, May 25): Hong Kong could face bigger financial risks and see its credit ratings drop further with its growing involvement in China's plan to open up trade along a new Silk Route, according to a report issued by Moody's. Moody's cut Hong Kong's credit rating from Aa1 to Aa2, a move which came hot on the heels of the agency's first downgrade to China's rating since 1989. Hong Kong's finance minister Paul Chan said he strongly disagreed with Moody's decision despite the close economic relationship between the city and the mainland. He described the downgrade as "mechanical". Chan slammed the agency for overlooking Hong Kong's sound economic fundamentals, robust financial regulatory regime, resilient banking sector and strong fiscal position.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Hong Kong and Macau regulators intensify efforts against money laundering, financial crime and terrorist funding (SCMP, May 27): Hong Kong and Macau have launched simultaneous shake-ups of the systems they have in place to tackle the growing menace of money laundering, financial crime and the funding of terrorist groups. In separate yet starkly similar announcements, financial regulators in both cities stated their "determination" to fight serious financial crime and laundering, underlining the threat they posed to "financial security and stability". In a signal that Beijing – whose concerns about capital flight and the movement of corrupt cash are well documented – wants a more co-ordinated approach to tackling the problem, the opening line of the Macau Monetary Authority statement said the upholding of financial security had been "elevated to the national level". The casino hub's financial regulator stressed that the statement had been agreed by the People's Bank of China and the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) following a meeting in the former Portuguese enclave on May 26 which agreed to create a "Financial Security Expert Alliance". The meeting was attended by the HKMA and senior officials from the People's Bank of China.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Domestic politics

No chance Beijing will reform Hong Kong electoral framework in next five years, Rita Fan says (SCMP, May 4): One of Hong Kong's leading pro-Beijing figures, Rita Fan, has ruled out any chance of the central government amending the rigid framework it has set for reforming the city's electoral system in the next five years. The former Legislative Council president advised opposition pan-democratic politicians demanding a new framework to stop insisting on revising or scrapping it. Beijing's conditions for electing Hong Kong's leader, laid down on August 31, 2014, by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, were rejected as too restrictive and undemocratic by opposition lawmakers. It triggered the Occupy protests and the entire process was shelved. Fan, the city's sole representative on the NPC Standing Committee, said there were no voices in China's top legislature calling for an amendment or abolition of the controversial framework, and it would remain unchanged in the next five years.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Hong Kong chief executive-elect Carrie Lam puts former head of immigration in charge of office (SCMP, May 5): Hong Kong's former immigration director Eric Chan is set to head the next chief executive's office, according to incoming leader Carrie Lam. Lam defended Chan after legislators questioned his understanding of policies, and the relevance of his disciplinary services background. She described Chan as the "most suitable candidate" given his experience in public administration, adding there was no rule stipulating the post requires someone with a specific professional background.

[#Top of the Document](#)

First group of Hong Kong pan-democrats to have met Carrie Lam are willing to give her 'benefit of the doubt' (SCMP, May 8): Hong Kong chief executive-elect Carrie Lam's first meeting with pan-democrats since winning the election ended on a positive note despite the camp earlier saying they had "no basis of mutual trust" with her. Seven lawmakers from the Professionals Guild held a meeting

with the city's next leader, touching on hot button topics such as constitutional reform. Convenor Dennis Kwok said he sensed that Lam was sincere about healing divisions in society and improving her relationship with lawmakers. Kwok said after the meeting: "We will give her the benefit of the doubt for now. We are willing to work together if she is genuine in repairing the relationship between the legislative and executive branches of the government."

[#Top of the Document](#)

Hong Kong leader CY Leung accused of meddling in probe set up to investigate HK\$50m payout (SCMP, May 16): Opposition pan-democrat lawmakers have accused Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying of interfering with a Legislative Council probe into a HK\$50 million payment he received from an Australian firm before he became Hong Kong's leader. They suspect a proposal set out in a document by pro-establishment lawmaker Holden Chow to change the scope of the investigation originated from Leung's office. Chow, of the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, admitted that Leung had approached him and commented on the paper. Both men stopped short of confirming the origin of the changes, but Leung said he had a "need and the right to raise my views with the committee". In a joint statement, 22 pan-democrat lawmakers said Leung "has no right to interfere with the Legco panel's discussion". They also urged Chow to quit the panel.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Hong Kong chief executive-elect Carrie Lam struggles to find new talent to join her cabinet (SCMP, May 18): With just six weeks to go before she takes over as Hong Kong's leader, Carrie Lam appears unlikely to fill her new cabinet with the fresh blood she promised earlier. The chief executive-elect has yet to find her justice and finance secretaries, and is filling most ministerial posts with internal promotees and incumbents. Lam has already suggested that the kitchen is too hot for some of the candidates she wants, in a political climate that puts top government officials under intense scrutiny and pressure. The criteria set by Beijing, such as the "trustworthiness" of candidates, and whether they had taken the initiative to communicate and interact with mainland officials, was making headhunting even more difficult, according to a source familiar with preparatory work for the next administration.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Hong Kong leader doubles down on attack against pan-democrat in UGL probe (SCMP, May 21): Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying fired yet another broadside at an opposition lawmaker Kenneth Leung. It was the seventh time in a week that Leung Chun-ying, whose five-year term will end in 41 days on June 30, had referred to the Legislative Council select committee's investigation into him. The storm erupted after it was revealed that he had discreetly engaged a pro-establishment lawmaker Holden Chow to amend a document on the scope and direction of the probe. The chief executive also reiterated that the pan-democrat Kenneth Leung must quit the investigative panel over conflict of interest. Leung Chun-ying said Kenneth Leung had made "groundless" claims that tax authorities were investigating him. He was suing Kenneth Leung for defamation. The latest salvo by the chief executive came after pro-establishment lawmaker Holden Chow quit the panel on May 19. Chow had come under fire for submitting Leung Chun-ying's amendments to the inquiry committee without raising the latter's involvement.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Shut up and stay away, pan-dems warn Hong Kong's leader over fee probe row (SCMP, May 23): Hong Kong's leader must stop intervening in a probe into his financial dealings with an Australian firm and retract his comments on the matter, pan-democratic lawmakers said. Accusing the city's top official of abusing his power, 26 pan-democrats issued a statement to "seriously condemn" Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying and set out plans for an impeachment motion against him as early as June 7. The group also defended lawmaker Kenneth Leung, who has vowed to stay on the investigative panel despite the chief executive repeatedly pressing him to quit the probe as he was facing a defamation suit by the leader over the payment controversy. A Legco select committee was set up last year to investigate the case at the request of pan-democrats.

[#Top of the Document](#)

It's too early to discuss Hong Kong's post-2047 future, says Beijing diplomat (SCMP, May 24): A top Chinese diplomat in Hong Kong has said it is too early to discuss what will happen to Hong Kong after Beijing's promise of "one country, two systems" expires in 2047, as the city should focus on efforts to boost the economy and safeguard national security. Song Ru'an, deputy commissioner of Beijing's foreign ministry office in Hong Kong, also reiterated that any effort to make Hong Kong an independent nation would lead nowhere. In recent years, there has been increasing concern that Beijing is increasing its control over Hong Kong, with localist groups proposing that a referendum should be held in Hong Kong to decide whether it can become independent in 2047. The idea has been snubbed by Beijing and Hong Kong officials.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Chinese state leader Zhang Dejiang announces Beijing's plans to tighten grip on Hong Kong (SCMP, May 28): China's No 3 state leader Zhang Dejiang warned Hong Kong not to confront the central government over the "high degree of autonomy" it was promised and that it must enact its own national security laws, as he laid down Beijing's sternest and most detailed strategy for the city in recent years. He announced that Beijing would "go into further details" about consolidating its sovereignty over Hong Kong in several areas, such as the pace of political reform, its power over the chief executive, and its authority to appoint and dismiss key officials. Zhang, the head of the National People's Congress, also rejected the notion of separation of powers in Hong Kong. He said the [Hong Kong] special administrative region should steadfastly implement the constitutional obligation of national security under the Basic Law. Chief executive-elect Carrie Lam reiterated her election manifesto stance that while legislating Article 23 was a constitutional obligation, "past experience tells us that the subject is highly controversial and could easily cause social disturbance". The last attempt to enact the contentious legislation, in 2003, brought half a million Hongkongers out on the streets in protest.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Lowest turnout since 2008 for Hong Kong march in memory of June 4 crackdown (SCMP, May 29): Hong Kong organisers said only 1,000 people turned up at an annual march to remember the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, the lowest official count since 2008, while the police said the turnout was 450 at its peak. Richard Tsoi, chairman of the event's organiser, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, said the alliance's annual candlelight vigils tend to be more popular than the march, and he expected a large turnout at Victoria Park on June 4. Support has waned in recent years as more people, especially younger Hongkongers, believe the city should focus on its own fight for democracy rather than seeking it on the mainland.

[#Top of the Document](#)

International relations

Indonesian President Joko Widodo gets hero's welcome from compatriots in Hong Kong (SCMP, May 1): Indonesian President Joko Widodo began a visit to Hong Kong on April 30 with a pledge to ramp up economic progress, so his country would one day overtake China and India in terms of growth. The reassurance is an important matter for Indonesians working abroad, especially the 149,000 employed as domestic helpers in Hong Kong. Widodo was to meet Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying, as well as business leaders, as he wrapped up his visit on May 1.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Outrage as Hong Kong democracy campaigners urge US to get tough with Beijing (SCMP, May 5): The central government has accused Hong Kong's highest-profile democracy campaigners of involvement in foreign meddling in China's internal affairs by addressing a US congressional panel. The campaigners urged the US to take a tougher stance against Beijing in order to protect the city's freedoms. Student activist Joshua Wong, one of the leaders of the Occupy protests, attended the session in Washington, along with veteran democrat Martin Lee and Lam Wing-kee, one of the Hong Kong booksellers who went missing and later turned up in the custody of mainland Chinese authorities. The city's last British governor, Chris Patten, joined them as the Congressional-Executive Commission on China was told that the "high degree of autonomy" promised to Hong Kong had decayed over two decades of Chinese rule. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang strongly objected to the panel. "The hearing is an overt interference in China's internal affairs. China is strongly dissatisfied and firmly opposed to it," Geng said. He reiterated the central government's commitment to the "one country, two systems" principle, under which Hong Kong has had greater freedoms than mainland China since it returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte arrives in Hong Kong ahead of Beijing visit (SCMP, May 12): The Philippine president has arrived in Hong Kong for the first time to pay a visit to Filipinos in the city before heading to Beijing for a high-profile development summit. Duterte is the second state leader to visit the city recently, following a recent visit by Indonesian President Joko Widodo. In Hong Kong, he is expected to meet with members of the Filipino community. The city is home to some 180,000 Filipinos, most of whom work as foreign domestic workers, according to government figures. Philippine foreign affairs spokesman Robespierre Bolivar highlighted the significance of Duterte's stopover in Hong Kong. "The [Filipino] community [in Hong Kong] has also been instrumental in promoting enhanced trade relations between the Philippines and Hong Kong and in promoting our country's investment opportunities and tourist destinations," he said.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Pakistan prime minister invites Hong Kong to invest in country (SCMP, May 17): Pakistan invited Hong Kong to invest in the country's infrastructure and anticipated property market boom, as a top-

level delegation to the city got down to business. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif held meetings with Hong Kong's outgoing and incoming leaders and businessmen. Before arriving in Hong Kong, the Pakistani delegation was in Beijing to attend the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation on China's ambitious plan to open up trade along a new Silk Route. They discussed infrastructure projects with Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying and his successor Carrie Lam who takes over in July.
[#Top of the Document](#)

Legal affairs and human rights

Hong Kong police on alert for terror threat from lone wolves inspired by Islamic State (SCMP, May 4): Extremists inspired by the Middle East terror group calling itself Islamic State may have sneaked into Hong Kong or are already lurking in the city, putting anti-terrorist police on alert to prevent lone wolf-style attacks. Police said the danger was real, but the city's terrorism threat level remained moderate as there was no specific intelligence indicating an imminent attack or Hong Kong being targeted. The warning came as security experts urged the authorities to raise public awareness about the threat of global terrorism so as to recruit more "eyes and ears" across the city.
[#Top of the Document](#)

Hong Kong lawyers head urges Beijing to listen and not rush Basic Law interpretation (SCMP, May 5): The Law Society has urged Beijing to grant more channels for Hongkongers to convey their views on legal issues before making any interpretation of the city's mini-constitution, describing previous instances as too "rushed". Society president Thomas So said he led a delegation to Beijing to meet the Ministry of Justice, the State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, All China Lawyers' Association, the Basic Law Committee and the Supreme People's Court.
[#Top of the Document](#)

Hong Kong's No 2 official pledges to safeguard media freedom (SCMP, May 8): Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung pledged that the government was committed to safeguarding "freedom of speech, of the press and of publication", which he said was "the cornerstone of Hong Kong's continuous success as an international metropolis". He also promised: "[The government] will continue to partner with the press and the media to make Hong Kong flourish and thrive."
[#Top of the Document](#)

Hong Kong's Bar Association chief warns against making Basic Law interpretations by Beijing 'standard practice' (SCMP, May 26): The new head of Hong Kong's professional body of barristers Paul Lam has warned against worsening fears over the city's autonomy and judicial independence if "standardising" Beijing's interpretations of the city's mini-constitution means making it a regular practice. He said he would not agree to such interventions becoming standard practice, unless the aim was to genuinely make the process more transparent. The Basic Law gives Hong Kong judges the power of adjudication, but also entitles China's top legislature to have the final say on unresolved issues through an interpretation, the result of which is binding on the city's courts. The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress NPCSC has made five interpretations since 1998.
[#Top of the Document](#)

Health

Heat rising in Hong Kong's war on tobacco (SCMP, May 5): To discourage smoking, the Food and Health Bureau has tabled an amendment in the Legislative Council to the existing tobacco-control law aimed at increasing the size of health warning labels on cigarette packets to 85 per cent from the current 50 per cent, and the number of warnings from six to 12. The amendment was gazetted on April 21, although it is subject to negative vetting by lawmakers. Those who oppose the move question the effectiveness of bigger and tougher warning labels, but experts point out that the evidence is right there. Hong Kong is lagging far behind. The city introduced health warnings covering 50 per cent of packs in 2007 along with 11 countries; a decade later, all of them have increased the size of warning labels except Hong Kong.
[#Top of the Document](#)

Hong Kong could see 35 per cent surge in HIV cases by 2021, report says (SCMP, May 23): The number of Hongkongers living with HIV is expected to surge by 35 per cent in the coming four years, with 74 per cent of infections taking place among men who have sex with men, according to the latest report by the government's Advisory Council on AIDS. The report forecasts that there could be 2,800 infected people by 2021. Young men aged below 30 are particularly vulnerable to the deadly disease because of drug abuse, group sex and the common use of instant messaging apps to find sex partners, according to the report.
[#Top of the Document](#)

University researchers in Hong Kong develop air purifier that promises to kill, not just trap, deadly bacteria (SCMP, May 26): An air purification system that claims to remove up to 99.99 per

cent of airborne bacteria and viruses has been developed by researchers at Hong Kong's University of Science and Technology. Different from other filters, which only trap bacteria, the technology not only kills but also prevents growth of microorganisms, according to the research team. The Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Disease found the system eliminated 98.8 per cent of the Middle East respiratory syndrome virus, and more than 99 per cent of H1N1 and H3N2 influenza, and Enterovirus 71 – a cause of hand, foot and mouth disease.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Environment

Hong Kong leader CY Leung downplays smog claim after rebuttal by weather chiefs (SCMP, May 2): Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying drew criticism from current and former Hong Kong Observatory chiefs for claiming that local pollutants had caused smog in Guangdong, prompting him to say his remarks merely referred to views from across the border. Former Observatory director Lee Boon-ying said in a blog post that the combination of wind direction and air stability meant there was little chance of smog from Hong Kong drifting to Guangdong. Incumbent director Shun Chi-ming shared Lee's post on Facebook. Christine Loh, undersecretary for the environment, said it was common sense that mainland China was much larger than Hong Kong, so pollutants from the city could not affect overall air quality in Guangdong. She said Leung's remarks were courtesies made in the context of suggesting that the two sides should cope with the problems together as Hong Kong and Guangdong both produced pollutants.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Breathe easier, Hong Kong is on course to hit global air pollution target (SCMP, May 17): A report on Hong Kong's efforts to improve air quality is expected to show "significant progress" towards hitting international targets in cutting pollutants over the past 4½ years and by 2020, environment undersecretary Christine Loh says. Annual average concentrations of PM10 – specks of respirable particulates smaller than 10 microns that can enter deep into the lungs – dropped from around 53 micrograms per cubic metre in roadside readings in 2012 to under 40mcg last year. Roadside levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO2) fell from 120mcg to 80mcg. Cleaner shipping fuel and a campaign to phase out dirty old vehicles are two of the reasons for the improvement.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Calls to ramp up manpower to prevent illegal dumping in new Hong Kong waste-charge plan (SCMP, May 29): Green groups and a union for environmental protection workers have urged the government to set up a designated office with up to 1,000 staff to boost enforcement of laws on the dumping of waste. The Environment Bureau has proposed a quantity-based charging scheme of 11 cents per litre on the disposal of municipal solid waste. Full implementation is expected in the second half of 2019. According to official statistics, the average Hongkonger throws out about 1.39kg of household waste per day. A target was set in 2014 to slash that figure by 40 per cent by 2022. The city's municipal solid waste has increased by over 80 per cent in the past 30 years, far outpacing the population growth of 34 per cent.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Culture and education

Authority endorses report showing 'strong' public support for Hong Kong Palace Museum project (SCMP, May 10): A consultancy report that reflected "strong" public support for building Hong Kong's version of the Palace Museum has been unanimously endorsed by the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority set to manage the project, with an aim to finalise a deal with Beijing by next month. The approval came despite concerns over the transparency of the plan and methodology of the opinion polls, as well as two pending judicial reviews against the HK\$3.5 billion project announced in last December.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Chief Executive-elect Carrie Lam plans HK\$30,000 subsidy for eligible secondary school graduates (SCMP, May 23): The incoming government is planning to subsidise eligible secondary school graduates with HK\$30,000 to enable them to pursue degree courses at self-financing tertiary institutions, one of the measures floated by Chief Executive-elect Carrie Lam at her meeting with representatives of education sector on May 22. After a meeting between Lam and about 30 education sector representatives, Professional Teachers' Union president Fung Wai-wah said that there was not much disagreements about Lam's plans to improve school staffing; support integrated education and special education; and grant financial aid to secondary school graduates to help them pursue degree courses at self-financing tertiary institutions.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Macau

Macau to launch facial recognition and identity card checks for ATMs after withdrawals surpass HK\$10 billion a month (SCMP, May 8): Facial recognition technology will be used to scan millions of bank card users at ATMs across Macau in an unprecedented move by authorities to tackle money laundering and capital flight. The high-tech screening system and identity checks will first be installed at ATMs in and around casinos before it is extended to cover all 1,300 cash dispensing machines in the former Portuguese enclave. Ahead of Chinese state leader, Zhang Dejiang's visit to the city on May 8 – the Macau government said all holders of mainland-issued China UnionPay bank cards “will be required to scan their mainland identity card and undergo a facial recognition check”.

[#Top of the Document](#)

China's No 3 leader urges Macau to boost governance at critical stage for casino city's economy (SCMP, May 9): China's No 3 official began a three-day visit to Macau by urging the casino city to boost its governance and efficiency at a critical stage of economic transformation. Zhang Dejiang, chairman of the National People's Congress and the top official in charge of Hong Kong and Macau affairs, said he was in the former Portuguese enclave to experience and inspect the city's robust development and offer encouragement on behalf of Beijing. While acknowledging Macau's achievements since its handover to Chinese sovereignty, Zhang noted it was at a critical stage for economic transformation and called on different sectors to work together with the government in writing the city's next chapter.

[#Top of the Document](#)

State leader's lavish praise of 'patriotic' Macau is not lost on Hong Kong (SCMP, May 10): China's No 3 official Zheng Dejiang heaped praise on Macau for its patriotism, pragmatism, and regard for national security, holding up the former Portuguese enclave as an example to Hong Kong on how to meet Beijing's expectations. Zheng Dejiang did not specifically name Hong Kong, but his remarks and unprecedented visit to Macau's legislature were widely seen as a deliberate contrast with the state of affairs in the more troubled of the two cities, which enjoy greater autonomy as special administrative regions of China. He was referring to the city's success in enacting its own national security legislation under Article 23 of its mini-constitution, or Basic Law, in 2009. In stark contrast, after shelving its own relevant legislation in 2003 due to overwhelming public fears that freedoms would be curtailed, Hong Kong has yet to decide whether to start again.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Varia

Hong Kong issues amber travel alert for the UK in wake of Manchester bombing (SCMP, May 25): The Hong Kong government issued an amber travel alert for the UK in the wake of the Manchester concert bombing. The alert was made hours after Britain raised its terrorism threat level to “critical” – the highest level – following the suicide bombing at an Ariana Grande concert at the Manchester Arena, which killed 22 people and injured dozens. A government spokesman said Hongkongers who planned to visit the country or were already there should monitor the situation, exercise caution, attend to personal safety, avoid travelling to places with large gatherings of people and pay attention to advice of the local authorities.

[#Top of the Document](#)

Press articles related to Switzerland and Swiss matters

Vatican Swiss Guard gets 40 new troops on anniversary of bloody Rome battle to protect pope (Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, SCMP, May 8): Vatican Swiss Guard gets 40 new troops on anniversary of bloody Rome battle to protect pope. Not anyone can be a Swiss Guard. Applicants have to be a practising Roman Catholic, Swiss, single, between 19 and 30 years old and at least 1.74 metres tall.

[#Top of the Document](#)

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