



### **Economy + Finance**

- Hong Kong private sector grows at fastest pace in almost four years on back of tourists, exports (SCMP, Jan. 4)
- More money for Hong Kong to splash out with 'considerably high' HK\$57.2 billion budget surplus, finance chief writes (SCMP, Jan. 7)
- 5,000 flats could be built on Hong Kong golf course, government study finds (SCMP, Jan. 8)
- Jack Ma to consider listing Alibaba on Hong Kong stock exchange (SCMP, Jan. 9)
- Self doubt about ability to own homes puts Hong Kong consumer confidence behind the mainland, Taiwan and Macau (SCMP, Jan. 10)
- Bank to e-wallet instant fund transfers to launch this year in Hong Kong (SCMP, Jan. 11)
- Optimism over economic outlook for 2018 surges among Hong Kong's finance professionals (SCMP, Jan. 12)
- We must invest in Hong Kong's future, not dish out sweeteners, finance chief says (SCMP, Jan. 14)
- Hong Kong's regulator outlines rules for settling violations, in a move to enhance its efficiency (SCMP, Jan. 15)
- Hong Kong finance chief expects strong growth to continue into 2018, and another big surplus (SCMP, Jan. 21)
- Britain looks to forge closer ties to Hong Kong amid EU exit with biggest innovation festival (SCMP, Jan. 22)
- HK homes cling to top-price rank (The Standard, Jan. 23)
- HK\$20 billion-a-month surge in suspicious ATM withdrawals hits Hong Kong banks after Macau rolls out facial recognition (SCMP, Jan. 26)
- Hong Kong won't ban digital currencies but will educate public on risks via campaign (SCMP, Jan. 30)

### **Domestic politics**

- Organisers say 10,000 took to the streets in protest against contentious joint checkpoint plan for city's cross-border rail link to mainland China (SCMP, Jan. 2)
- Joint checkpoint decision in Hong Kong an 'act of state', leading Beijing adviser says (SCMP, Jan. 3)
- Teresa Cheng takes reins as Hong Kong justice secretary with 'prime mission' to uphold rule of law (SCMP, Jan. 5)
- 'Impolite' accusations against Chinese officials over joint checkpoint part of 'vicious cycle', legal scholar says (SCMP, Jan. 8)
- No integrity issue, Hong Kong's leader says, defending justice chief in illegal structure saga (SCMP, Jan. 9)
- Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam backs under-fire justice chief Teresa Cheng as mortgage deed raises new questions (SCMP, Jan. 12)
- Beijing's man in Hong Kong hails bold new era of cooperation, says liaison office will be 'working more and closer' with city (SCMP, Jan. 15)
- Hong Kong Law Society warns lack of clarity on joint rail checkpoint could undermine 'one country, two systems' (SCMP, Jan. 19)
- Dozens of new faces from Hong Kong join top China advisory body (SCMP, Jan. 26)
- No grounds to ban any more Legco candidates, Hong Kong lawyers say after activist's ban (SCMP, Jan. 29)
- Agnes Chow disqualification 'step towards the evisceration' of Hong Kong's autonomy (SCMP, Jan. 29)
- Ousted Hong Kong opposition lawmaker Edward Yiu cleared for Legco by-election as government backs off (SCMP, Jan. 30)

### **International relations**

- Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam blasts UK group's 'unfounded and unfair' report on city (SCMP, Jan. 16)

- [British peer dismisses Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam's criticism of NGO report as 'overreaction' \(SCMP, Jan. 18\)](#)
- [Britain will continue to speak up on Hong Kong and any pressures 'one, country, two systems' comes under, consul general vows \(SCMP, Jan. 22\)](#)
- [European Union backs Sweden's demand for immediate release of missing Hong Kong bookseller Gui Minhai \(SCMP, Jan. 24\)](#)
- [Patten and Ashdown call on UK PM Theresa May to speak up for Hong Kong during China trip \(SCMP, Jan. 31\)](#)
- [Hong Kong's leader rejects foreign criticism over barring of democracy activist Agnes Chow from legislative by-election \(SCMP, Jan. 31\)](#)

### **Legal affairs and human rights**

- [Hong Kong's rule of law at critical point after prosecution of protesters, top barrister says \(SCMP, Jan. 4\)](#)
- [Bar association condemns insults directed at non-Chinese judge in Hong Kong who jailed senior policeman \(SCMP, Jan. 7\)](#)
- [Hong Kong's top judge warns against 'unwarranted' or 'arbitrary' criticism of courts \(SCMP, Jan. 9\)](#)
- [Hong Kong woman arrested for insulting judge in Frankly Chu case \(SCMP, Jan. 16\)](#)
- [Freedom score for Hong Kong hits seven-year low as Beijing's 'ever greater influence' cited \(SCMP, Jan. 17\)](#)
- [Philip Dykes elected new head of Hong Kong Bar Association in upset win \(SCMP, Jan. 19\)](#)
- [Prepare for more cyberattacks involving extortion this year, Hong Kong information security watchdog warns \(SCMP, Jan. 19\)](#)
- [Hong Kong security minister to follow up and 'keep an open mind' on review of police work guidelines \(SCMP, Jan. 23\)](#)
- [Hong Kong commissioner throws weight behind calls for law to make insulting police a crime \(SCMP, Jan. 24\)](#)

### **Health**

- [Record-high doctors' turnover rate of 5.7 per cent in Hong Kong public hospitals worsens manpower shortage issues \(SCMP, Jan. 7\)](#)
- [How hectic Hong Kong is turning into hotbed of infectious diseases \(SCMP, Jan. 13\)](#)
- [Contact lenses invented in Hong Kong to correct child myopia will cost 40 per cent less than current treatment \(SCMP, Jan. 23\)](#)
- [Swamped Hong Kong hospitals to get HK\\$500 million to handle winter flu emergency \(SCMP, Jan. 31\)](#)

### **Environment**

- [Construction waste may be the greener, smarter way to cover up Hong Kong's landfills \(SCMP, Jan. 6\)](#)
- [Stubborn roadside pollutant on rise again in Hong Kong after three years of decline, group says \(SCMP, Jan. 12\)](#)
- ['More than half' of Hongkongers can accept 5 per cent rise in power bills to support renewable energy \(SCMP, Jan. 27\)](#)
- [Hong Kong's poor breathing in more bad air than the wealthy, study finds \(SCMP, Jan. 30\)](#)

### **Culture and education**

- [New Chinese University chief Rocky Tuan keeps it short on questions of Hong Kong independence \(SCMP, Jan. 3\)](#)
- [Outgoing HKU chief says Beijing officials meet him 'all the time' and wishes higher education 'wasn't so politicised' \(SCMP, Jan. 8\)](#)
- [Don't overlook maths and science, top Hong Kong mathematician warns educators, urging space for children to develop interests \(SCMP, Jan. 9\)](#)
- [Kindergarten and primary schoolteachers in Hong Kong to get training to deal with child abuse cases \(SCMP, Jan. 17\)](#)
- [HKUST's new president candid about contact with Beijing but shies away from hot topic of separatism on campus \(SCMP, Jan. 19\)](#)
- [Hundreds march on Hong Kong university to decry Mandarin-row suspensions \(SCMP, Jan. 26\)](#)

### **Macau**

- [Macau gaming watchdog 'concerned' over sexual misconduct allegations facing casino mogul Steve Wynn \(SCMP, Jan. 30\)](#)

## Varia

- [Former Hong Kong home secretary Patrick Ho pleads not guilty in US court to offering US\\$2.9m in bribes to African presidents and ministers \(SCMP, Jan. 9\)](#)

## Press articles related to Switzerland and Swiss matters

- [Avalanche threat leaves 13,000 tourists stranded in Swiss ski resort \(Reuters, SCMP, Jan. 10\)](#)
- [Donald Trump to address World Economic Forum in Davos despite 'America first' pledge \(Washington Post, SCMP, Jan. 10\)](#)
- [What is Carrie Lam's game plan as Hong Kong's chief executive makes rare trek to Davos? \(SCMP, Jan. 19\)](#)
- [Hong Kong has a role to play in opening the world's eyes to North Korea \(SCMP, Jan. 21\)](#)
- [Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam calls for less inequality and more opportunity during Davos visit \(SCMP, Jan. 27\)](#)

## Economy + Finance

**Hong Kong private sector grows at fastest pace in almost four years on back of tourists, exports (SCMP, Jan. 4):** Hong Kong's private sector grew at its fastest pace in nearly four years in December, fuelled largely by exports to mainland China, according to the Nikkei Hong Kong Purchasing Managers' Index. The robust performance prompted local businesses to abandon the negative economic outlook they had held for 34 months, with company executives expressing optimism over market conditions in the year ahead.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**More money for Hong Kong to splash out with 'considerably high' HK\$57.2 billion budget surplus, finance chief writes (SCMP, Jan. 7):** Hong Kong's finance chief has hinted he would keep splashing money in his upcoming budget in light of a "considerably high" surplus despite the provision in the Basic Law requiring the city to keep the budget commensurate with its GDP growth rate. Financial Secretary Paul Chan said that in the first eight months of the financial year ending November 30, 2017, the city recorded a cumulative year-to-date surplus of HK\$57.2 billion (US\$7.3 billion). That compared with the original estimate of HK\$16.3 billion for the 2017-18 year. Chan is to deliver the city's budget on February 28.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**5,000 flats could be built on Hong Kong golf course, government study finds (SCMP, Jan. 8):** More than 5,000 Hong Kong flats can be built on part of a 170-hectare golf course in Fanling, if golfers and authorities holding the land are willing to let go, according to a study by planners. The revelation came amid calls for the government to develop housing on some 400 hectares of public land across the city which are rented at cheap rates for private recreation. Government advisers on land supply will meet in the next two weeks to discuss whether such private recreational sites held by the Home Affairs Bureau should be considered in solving the city's housing issues.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Jack Ma to consider listing Alibaba on Hong Kong stock exchange (SCMP, Jan. 9):** Alibaba founder Jack Ma Yun promised to consider listing the company in Hong Kong and increasing investment in the city. Ma was responding to Chief Executive Carrie Lam's invitation at the inauguration ceremony of the Hong Kong Association of Zhejiang Entrepreneurs. Lam's invitation came after the passing of Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing's proposal to allow companies offering different classes of shares with different voting power to list in the city. She said the stock exchange had decided to start allowing the dual-class share system in midyear, and described allowing the system as a form of economic innovation.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Self doubt about ability to own homes puts Hong Kong consumer confidence behind the mainland, Taiwan and Macau (SCMP, Jan. 10):** Hong Kong has the lowest overall consumer confidence among mainland China, Taiwan and Macau, surveys conducted by universities across the regions have found. The city's score was dragged down by a sharp decline in faith in the property market despite the government's cooling measures. Addressing the finance panel of Hong Kong's legislature, Financial Secretary Paul Chan said the overall property prices in November last year had exceeded the peak in 1997 by 101 per cent, calling it a "worrying trend".

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Bank to e-wallet instant fund transfers to launch this year in Hong Kong (SCMP, Jan. 11):** The wait will soon be over for Hongkongers wishing to perform real-time fund transfers around the clock, after the government confirmed that a faster payment system linking major banks and electronic payment platforms would kick off in September. A pilot scheme is also in the works to allow people to

pay government bills using their electronic wallets, which have been fast developing in the city over the past year. Hongkongers are no strangers to electronic payments – they now account for 60 per cent of total private consumption expenditure in the city.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Optimism over economic outlook for 2018 surges among Hong Kong's finance professionals (SCMP, Jan. 12):** Finance professionals in Hong Kong are six times more optimistic about the city's economic outlook in 2018 compared to last year, thanks to economic growth in mainland China, a firm US economy, low interest rates and a government plan to ease tax burdens on companies, according to a survey. The poll by the Hong Kong office of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), a global accountancy body, found that 32 per cent of respondents were positive about the city's business and economic prospects in 2018, increasing from just 5 per cent at the same time last year.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**We must invest in Hong Kong's future, not dish out sweeteners, finance chief says (SCMP, Jan. 14):** A huge surplus expected in Hong Kong's budget will be invested in the long-term development of the city, with priority given to elderly care, medical services, research and creative industries, the financial secretary Paul Chan revealed. He also ruled out introducing a sales tax to widen the city's narrow revenue base, saying it would be inappropriate in the current financial and political climate. He promised to consider offering larger tax breaks, issuing more inflation-indexed government iBonds and dishing out cash handouts to all residents again, but said the government had a responsibility to invest in the city's future rather than one-off sweeteners.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hong Kong's regulator outlines rules for settling violations, in a move to enhance its efficiency (SCMP, Jan. 15):** Hong Kong's securities regulator has signalled to the market its willingness to settle regulatory breaches that fall into the "not-so-serious" category, emulating similar policies by the UK's Financial Conduct Authority to find a speedier and more efficient way to optimise its enforcements of financial rules. The SFC would fine or penalise companies and individuals that breach the city's securities regulations, but won't pursue criminal prosecutions in cases that can be settled without resorting to legal recourse, according to guidance notes published in December about the reasons and purpose of opting for settlement.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hong Kong finance chief expects strong growth to continue into 2018, and another big surplus (SCMP, Jan. 21):** Hong Kong's economy will get 2018 off to a good start, riding on growth in exports, robust domestic demand and the end of a tourism slump, the city's financial chief Paul Chan said. Hong Kong's economy has shown strong growth over recent months. The government expected 2017's economic growth to be 3.7 per cent. "We expect to continue the upward trend from 2017," Chan told a financial forum. "Currently both our external trade and internal demand are very robust." He noted that the unemployment rate – which hit a two-decade low of 2.9 per cent during the last quarter of 2017 – and rebounding tourism numbers as further reasons to be optimistic. That said, Chan admitted the government still had economic challenges ahead, with the city's land shortage the most pressing.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Britain looks to forge closer ties to Hong Kong amid EU exit with biggest innovation festival (SCMP, Jan. 22):** Britain is forging closer ties with Hong Kong as it prepares for life outside the European Union, the country's consul general in the city says. Andrew Heyn said the two economies had "remarkably similar" aims concerning innovation, technology, research and development. Meanwhile a "strategic dialogue" between the two governments was ongoing, seeking to reduce trade barriers and develop joint initiatives, Heyn said. Britain's departure from the European Union, scheduled for next year, and its consequent ability to strike its own trade deals was one factor driving these initiatives.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**HK homes cling to top-price rank (The Standard, Jan. 23):** The average Hong Kong family needs to save everything it earns for 19 and a half years - without consuming anything, including food and beverage - to be able to afford an apartment, a survey on international housing affordability indicated, after the SAR market was ranked the least affordable for the eighth consecutive year. Hong Kong had a median multiple of 19.4 last year, the highest figure ever in the survey conducted by Demographia. Median multiple, widely used for evaluating urban markets, is the median house price divided by the median household income. The survey covered 293 metropolitan housing markets in nine countries.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**HK\$20 billion-a-month surge in suspicious ATM withdrawals hits Hong Kong banks after Macau rolls out facial recognition (SCMP, Jan. 26):** Hong Kong banks have been hit by an unprecedented HK\$20 billion-a-month (US\$2.55 billion) surge in suspicious ATM withdrawals, exposing a legal loophole

which could deal a significant blow to the battle China is waging against illicit capital flight via its notorious underground banking system. The extent of the problem has emerged less than a month after Beijing set strict limits on overseas ATM withdrawals by individuals and made it illegal for anyone to withdraw cash other than the card holder. The run on cash machines has been fuelled by so-called “money withdrawal gangs” driven out of Macau last year when the casino hub installed facial recognition technology across its ATM network. This left Hong Kong – where the holder-authorized use of multiple bank cards by someone else is perfectly legal – as an obvious replacement.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hong Kong won't ban digital currencies but will educate public on risks via campaign (SCMP, Jan. 30):** The explosion of unregulated initial coin offerings (ICOs) and volatility in the price of virtual currencies is of concern to Hong Kong policymakers, who said it would not ban them, but would educate people about the risks of such investments. The public education campaign would highlight that cryptocurrencies have fluctuated in price, are not backed by any physical commodity or the issuer, and are subjected to hacking risks. It would be rolled out from March in MTR stations and print, digital and broadcast media, the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau said. The government stressed that it had no plans at the moment to follow the lead of South Korea and mainland China and ban cryptocurrencies or ICOs.

[#Top of the Document](#)

### **Domestic politics**

**Organisers say 10,000 took to the streets in protest against contentious joint checkpoint plan for city's cross-border rail link to mainland China (SCMP, Jan. 2):** Organisers said 10,000 took to the streets to voice their concerns over what they see as campaign by Beijing to reduce Hong Kong's autonomy through a series of contentious moves. Police put the rally turnout at a more conservative 6,200. The main theme of the rally, organised by the Civil Human Rights Front, was opposition to formal endorsement by China's top legislative body of a controversial plan to set up a joint checkpoint at the West Kowloon station of a high-speed rail link that will connect Hong Kong with Shenzhen and Guangzhou. Critics of the so-called co-location arrangement fear it will undermine the city's autonomy by allowing officials from across the border to enforce mainland Chinese laws for the first time on Hong Kong soil – specifically over a zone leased to them at the terminal. Other themes included opposition to changes to the rule book for the city's legislature, which protesters fear will enable the Hong Kong government to force through unpopular legislation, including a highly contentious national security law.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Joint checkpoint decision in Hong Kong an 'act of state', leading Beijing adviser says (SCMP, Jan. 3):** Decisions by China's top legislative body are tantamount to “acts of state” that Hong Kong courts have no jurisdiction over, a leading mainland adviser declared amid a rapidly escalating row over the legality of a joint checkpoint plan for a cross-border rail link that will see national laws enforced in part of the city. Lau Siu-kai, who heads a semi-official think tank on Hong Kong affairs, cited Article 19 of the Basic Law, which stipulates that Hong Kong courts “shall have no jurisdiction over acts of state such as defence and foreign affairs”. “Decisions of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, the highest body that embodies sovereignty, are undoubtedly acts of state,” Lau said.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Teresa Cheng takes reins as Hong Kong justice secretary with 'prime mission' to uphold rule of law (SCMP, Jan. 5):** Hong Kong's incoming secretary for justice, Teresa Cheng, says the “prime mission” of the role is to uphold the rule of law. And in a reference to debates about Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, and the city's relationship with Beijing, Cheng said people “will ultimately arrive at the same legal conclusion” if they analyse issues “objectively and rationally”. Cheng, an expert in arbitration, will take over from Rimsy Yuen who officially leaves office on Jan. 6. She was nominated by the city's Chief Executive Carrie Lam and appointed by Beijing's State Council. On recent debates over Hong Kong's constitutional situation, Cheng said: “One country, two systems' is the most favourable and appropriate arrangement for Hong Kong.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**'Impolite' accusations against Chinese officials over joint checkpoint part of 'vicious cycle', legal scholar says (SCMP, Jan. 8):** It is unfair and “impolite” to accuse mainland Chinese officials and experts of malice as they endorse a joint checkpoint plan for Hong Kong's cross-border rail link and such aspersions only make implementing the “one country, two systems” principle worse, a legal heavyweight warned. Basic Law Committee member Professor Albert Chen, a legal scholar at the University of Hong Kong, also said such conspiracy theories would offer nothing productive to the relationship between Hong Kong and the central government. Chen defended the proposal's legality, saying a team of mainland experts had worked on it extensively and offered it in goodwill.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**No integrity issue, Hong Kong's leader says, defending justice chief in illegal structure saga (SCMP, Jan. 9):** Chief Executive Carrie Lam has defended the city's new justice minister Teresa Cheng over the suspected illegal structures at her home, saying it was not an integrity issue as both of them learned about the matter only after Cheng was appointed on Jan. 5. Lam said Cheng had probably lacked political sensitivity, and she had promised to rectify the issue as soon as possible. "For a very successful lawyer with an international reputation like Teresa to make up her mind to join my team, it is a very difficult and tough decision." Lam said, noting that it was hard to attract talent into the administration given the city's political situation.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam backs under-fire justice chief Teresa Cheng as mortgage deed raises new questions (SCMP, Jan. 12):** Chief Executive Carrie Lam appealed for more tolerance towards her new justice minister Teresa Cheng over the scandal involving illegal structures at her house, even as a mortgage deed for the property emerged, raising suspicions of a cover-up. At her first question-and-answer session this year, Lam told the Legislative Council that she believed Cheng did not intentionally cover up the issue and rejected calls for the new minister to resign, insisting that she was still the right person for the job. This was despite a new revelation that a mortgage document signed in 2008 for Cheng's Villa De Mer home in Tuen Mun did not mention the existence of a basement. Speaking after the session, pro-establishment legislator Paul Tse, also a solicitor, warned it was a criminal offence to hide information from the bank when applying for a mortgage.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Beijing's man in Hong Kong hails bold new era of cooperation, says liaison office will be 'working more and closer' with city (SCMP, Jan. 15):** Wang Zhimin, director of the central government's representative office in Hong Kong, said his office would be "working more and closer" on youth development and a range of other issues with the city's administration. In response to reporters' questions, Wang sought to clarify his remarks, saying: "I meant to say [the Hong Kong government and liaison office] would walk together for the sake of Hong Kong." The liaison office's role is often seen as a concern, with the opposition pan-democrats accusing it of meddling in local affairs beyond its purview. A spokesman for Chief Executive Carrie Lam's office said in a statement: "The liaison office plays a key role in assisting the government and various sectors in promoting ... exchanges and cooperation with the mainland. This is fully in line with the central government's support for Hong Kong in integrating its own development into the overall development of the country."

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hong Kong Law Society warns lack of clarity on joint rail checkpoint could undermine 'one country, two systems' (SCMP, Jan. 19):** The Law Society of Hong Kong warned that the lack of a clarification on the legal basis of the controversial joint-checkpoint plan for the cross-border rail link risked undermining the Basic Law and the "one country, two systems" principle. The so called "co-location" plan allows mainland officials to enforce national laws in the "mainland port area", which will take up one-fourth of the West Kowloon terminal and is "deemed as the mainland". The society urged the Hong Kong government to clearly convey the concern to mainland authorities "so that the legal basis for the co-location arrangement under the Basic Law may be clarified".

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Dozens of new faces from Hong Kong join top China advisory body (SCMP, Jan. 26):** More than 50 new faces from Hong Kong have been appointed to China's top political advisory body, in one of the biggest reshuffles for the city's delegates in recent years. They included young business leaders, professionals, pro-establishment politicians and former officials. The body consisted of 2,158 delegates from around the country, including about 200 from Hong Kong. The city's former chief executives Leung Chun-ying and his predecessor Tung Chee-hwa were also re-appointed. They were expected to stay on as CPPCC vice-chairmen when it convened its first plenary session in March.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**No grounds to ban any more Legco candidates, Hong Kong lawyers say after activist's ban (SCMP, Jan. 29):** Legal professionals, including a top adviser to Hong Kong's leader Ronny Tong, see no grounds for electoral authorities to ban any more candidates from running in the coming Legislative Council by-election after pro-democracy activist Agnes Chow was disqualified from the race. At least 2,000 people rallied outside government headquarters at Tamar for a pro-democracy protest, warning against any further disqualification. Chow's nomination was ruled invalid on Jan. 27 by a returning officer from the Electoral Affairs Commission on the grounds that her party, Demosisto, had called for "self-determination" for the city, rendering her ineligible under rules to curb independence advocacy. Veteran China watcher Johnny Lau said he believed that the Hong Kong government had been under pressure from Beijing to disqualify Chow. Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung insisted that the returning officers were "politically neutral." "They have been doing their job in an unbiased manner," Cheung said.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Agnes Chow disqualification ‘step towards the evisceration’ of Hong Kong’s autonomy (SCMP, Jan. 29):** The disqualification of democracy activist Agnes Chow Ting from running in the Hong Kong legislature’s by-election is “outrageous”, a world renowned democracy scholar Professor Larry Diamond said, warning the move symbolised “another step towards the evisceration” of the city’s high degree of autonomy from China. Hong Kong election officials triggered a political storm when they barred Chow, 21, from standing in the March 11 poll on the grounds that her party, Demosisto, had called for self-determination for the city, which they claimed deviated from “one country, two systems”. Diamond, who visited Hong Kong in 2016, reiterated it was not politically smart or appropriate to advocate Hong Kong independence, saying that any move towards that goal would be met with force.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Ousted Hong Kong opposition lawmaker Edward Yiu cleared for Legco by-election as government backs off (SCMP, Jan. 30):** Former opposition lawmaker Edward Yiu was given a last-minute green light to run in the coming legislative by-election, preventing a further escalation of the political row gripping Hong Kong over the disqualification of another candidate. The pro-democracy politician was in danger of being barred from the race, having been stripped of his Legislative Council seat just six months ago, but political commentators said he had dodged a bullet with the government deciding to limit the fallout from the disqualification of activist Agnes Chow. Chinese University political scientist Ivan Choy and Lau Siu-kai, vice-chairman of a semi-official think tank based in Beijing, both saw Yiu as having a narrow escape as the government did not want to escalate the backlash.

[#Top of the Document](#)

### **International relations**

**Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam blasts UK group’s ‘unfounded and unfair’ report on city (SCMP, Jan. 16):** The city’s leader Carrie Lam has hit out at the latest report of UK-based group Hong Kong Watch, slamming it as interfering in Hong Kong’s internal affairs with “unfounded and unfair” comments. The 10-page report, compiled by British peer Paddy Ashdown, suggested that recent events had raised concerns over the city’s rule of law, including the joint-checkpoint plan which would grant mainland officers almost full jurisdiction in part of the West Kowloon terminus of the cross-border rail link. She slammed Hong Kong Watch for “interfering in Hong Kong’s internal affairs”. Hong Kong Watch was set up by British human rights activist Benedict Rogers, who was refused entry to Hong Kong in October last year.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**British peer dismisses Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam’s criticism of NGO report as ‘overreaction’ (SCMP, Jan. 18):** The British peer who published a damning report about the former colony has dismissed as an overreaction the Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam’s claim that he had interfered in Chinese affairs. Paddy Ashdown, a co-founder of the London-based Hong Kong Watch group, insisted that it was “absolutely within the terms” of the Sino-British Joint Declaration for him to speak out. The former Liberal Democrats leader, who is lobbying the UK government to consider giving British National (Overseas) passport holders citizenship in the long run “if things go really badly”. Lam’s assertion that Hong Kong matters were China’s business only was “manifestly not true”, Ashdown said. “This is Britain acting absolutely within the terms of the Joint Declaration, which is a treaty,” he said. “And this has been scrupulously and carefully done.”

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Britain will continue to speak up on Hong Kong and any pressures ‘one, country, two systems’ comes under, consul general vows (SCMP, Jan. 22):** Despite the prospect of criticism, Britain will not give up on closely monitoring developments in Hong Kong and speaking up about pressures it feels the “one country, two systems” concept is under, the nation’s consul general in the city says. Andrew Heyn said the British government continued to have an obligation to monitor developments in Hong Kong under the Joint Declaration, a treaty it signed with China in 1984 to provide for the city’s return in 1997. On calls for Hong Kong to be independent, Heyn stressed that Britain’s position was that this would not be realistic or desirable for the city.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**European Union backs Sweden’s demand for immediate release of missing Hong Kong bookseller Gui Minhai (SCMP, Jan. 24):** The European Union’s ambassador to China said he expects Chinese authorities to immediately release Swedish citizen and Hong Kong-based bookseller Gui Minhai, echoing demands from Stockholm. Sweden confirmed that Gui, who has published books on the personal lives of Chinese Communist Party leaders, was taken into custody while travelling with Swedish diplomats to seek medical treatment in Beijing. EU ambassador to China Hans Dietmar Schweisgut said the EU “fully supports” Sweden’s efforts to resolve the issue with China. Gui was abducted in Thailand while on holiday in 2015, one of five Hong Kong booksellers who went missing that year and later

appeared in custody on mainland China. The four others have returned to Hong Kong.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Patten and Ashdown call on UK PM Theresa May to speak up for Hong Kong during China trip (SCMP, Jan. 31):** The last British governor of Hong Kong Chris Patten urged his prime minister to speak up for the city during her first state visit to China, saying the former colony faced increasing threats to “basic freedoms, human rights and autonomy”. In a letter sent to Theresa May, Patten and his fellow British peer Paddy Ashdown encouraged her to insist on “the continued validity of the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the principles of ‘one country, two systems’” during her meetings with President Xi Jinping and other Chinese leaders. They said the UK should not shirk its responsibility to Hong Kong while building ties with China, which May will visit from January 31 to February 2.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hong Kong’s leader rejects foreign criticism over barring of democracy activist Agnes Chow from legislative by-election (SCMP, Jan. 31):** Hong Kong’s leader rejected foreign interference in the city’s internal affairs and denied coming under any pressure from Beijing to bar Agnes Chow from running in the March legislative by-election as the European Union criticised the disqualification of the pro-democracy activist. “There are absolutely no grounds for that sort of accusation or allegation of pressure,” Chief Executive Carrie Lam said after the EU issued a statement warning that banning Chow from the by-election “risks diminishing Hong Kong’s international reputation as a free and open society”. Chow’s candidacy was ruled invalid by a returning officer on the grounds that her party, Demosisto, had called for the city’s “self-determination”, rendering her ineligible under rules to curb independence advocacy. The EU’s European External Action Service, which handles the union’s foreign relations, said: “The protection of civil and political rights in Hong Kong is an essential part of the implementation of the ‘one country, two systems’ principle”. “If some kinds of political ideology are clearly contravening the Basic Law or one country, two systems ... they could not fit our legal requirements,” Lam said. “Foreign organisations and politicians should not interfere in any form in the internal affairs [of Hong Kong],” a government spokesman said.

[#Top of the Document](#)

#### **Legal affairs and human rights**

**Hong Kong’s rule of law at critical point after prosecution of protesters, top barrister says (SCMP, Jan. 4):** Hong Kong’s rule of law is at a critical juncture following government efforts to prosecute activists under obscure charges to deter others, a top barrister said. The worrying assessment by Senior Counsel Lawrence Lok was a key factor driving him to run for a leadership position at the Hong Kong Bar Association this month, a professional body he hopes will act as a watchdog to safeguard freedom of speech and assembly in the city, he said. The contentious joint checkpoint proposal for the city’s high-speed rail link to mainland China – which would see national laws enforced on Hong Kong soil for the first time – had no legal basis at all, he said.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Bar association condemns insults directed at non-Chinese judge in Hong Kong who jailed senior policeman (SCMP, Jan. 7):** The Hong Kong Bar Association slammed recent personal attacks on the non-Chinese ethnicity of a magistrate who jailed a retired senior police officer Frankly Chu for three months for attacking a bystander at a 2014 protest, urging authorities to take swift action. The association said it had documented insulting, racist or xenophobic words and actions directed at Indian-born principal magistrate Bina Chainrai. It warned that such personal attacks against the courts or judicial officers could undermine respect for the courts, due process and the course of justice. Such conduct may even constitute contempt of court. The statement echoed condemnation levelled by Equal Opportunities Commission chairman Professor Alfred Chan who slammed such attacks as eroding the image of Hong Kong as an international cosmopolitan city.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hong Kong’s top judge warns against ‘unwarranted’ or ‘arbitrary’ criticism of courts (SCMP, Jan. 9):** Hong Kong’s top judge and the justice minister warned against “unwarranted” or “arbitrary” criticism of the courts, with Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma making a strong case for the importance of the city’s common law system. Without specifying some of the recent high-profile rulings for which the judiciary has drawn fire, Ma acknowledged it was “healthy” for the public to comment, and “criticisms of the judiciary can be constructive in that they enable improvements to be made”. However, he added, “any criticisms which are levelled against the judiciary should be on an informed basis” and “any unwarranted criticisms made against the rule of law cannot be of any benefit to the community”.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hong Kong woman arrested for insulting judge in Frankly Chu case (SCMP, Jan. 16):** A Hong Kong woman was arrested for contempt of court for reportedly hurling abuse at a judge outside court after she handed down a sentence in a high-profile assault case involving a retired senior policeman.

On the day in question, Principal Magistrate Bina Chainrai jailed retired police superintendent Frankly Chu for three months for hitting a bystander with a baton during Hong Kong's Occupy protests in 2014. Someone was heard shouting racist remarks on a megaphone: "Dismiss all foreign judges, we want Chinese ones. This is outrageous," and "Judges in PRC's courts must be all Chinese." Chainrai was born in India but educated in Hong Kong before she was called to the bar in 1982 and appointed as a permanent magistrate in 1990.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Freedom score for Hong Kong hits seven-year low as Beijing's 'ever greater influence' cited (SCMP, Jan. 17):** Hong Kong's latest global score for freedom has fallen to a seven-year low of 59 out of 100, according to an annual report by a Washington-based human rights NGO, which blamed the figure on Beijing's "ever greater influence" on the city's political affairs. The Freedom House report for 2018 also cited the "expulsion of four pro-democracy lawmakers from the legislature" and "jail sentences against protest leaders" as key contributors to Hong Kong's score. The report covered 209 countries and territories and Hong Kong ranked 111 overall.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Philip Dykes elected new head of Hong Kong Bar Association in upset win (SCMP, Jan. 19):** Leading human rights lawyer Philip Dykes was elected as the new chairman of the Hong Kong Bar Association, unseating the incumbent in an upset victory after the most heated and politically charged contest in years. Calls for reform prevailed over incumbency as Dykes, seen as the underdog, beat Paul Lam by around 100 votes after campaigning for the influential body of barristers to play a more progressive role in protecting the city's rule of law. Dykes also stressed there was no reason for the association's relationship with Beijing to deteriorate under his leadership. He had already built good ties across the border during a previous stint as chairman a decade ago, he said.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Prepare for more cyberattacks involving extortion this year, Hong Kong information security watchdog warns (SCMP, Jan. 19):** Cybersecurity complaints rose to a record high last year due to a spike in malware attacks with the trend likely to continue this year, Hong Kong's information security watchdog warned, as it raised the possibility of more incidents involving extortion. Last year, the Hong Kong Computer Emergency Response Team (HKCERT) received 6,506 complaints – 7 per cent more than the previous year. About one in three, or 2,041, were on malware attacks, an 80 per cent spike from the year before. The watchdog warned extortion and fraud-related cyberattacks could rise this year, as more hackers were working on behalf of shady clients rather than launching attacks on their own.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hong Kong security minister to follow up and 'keep an open mind' on review of police work guidelines (SCMP, Jan. 23):** Hong Kong's security minister acknowledged the difficulties faced by frontline officers on duty and promised to follow up on their concerns over the use of force after a meeting with police union members. The association, which represents two-thirds of officers in the force, held separate emergency meetings with Secretary for Security John Lee and Secretary for the Civil Service Joshua Law to discuss how to strengthen protection for frontline law enforcers. The talks were prompted by the jailing of former superintendent Frankly Chu, who was sentenced to three months behind bars for hitting a bystander with a baton during the 2014 Occupy protests. The ruling caused an uproar and resentment among police ranks, according to the association. Junior Police Officers' Association chairman Joe Chan said his group had ruled out the possibility of a work-to-rule action. They would also not consider public protests.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hong Kong commissioner throws weight behind calls for law to make insulting police a crime (SCMP, Jan. 24):** Hong Kong's police commissioner said he would support a law to make insulting officers on duty a crime, in what appeared to be a move to placate the city's police union. Stephen Lo said an increasing number of disputes in the city was a reason a law was needed. Meanwhile, Hong Kong enjoyed its lowest level of crime in 46 years last year, Lo said. A total of 56,017 crimes were reported in 2017 – a 7.6 per cent drop from 2016. That translates to 758 cases per 100,000 people in Hong Kong, which is the lowest since 1971. The city saw a significant decrease in violent crime – with 9,086 cases reported in 2017 down 10.1 per cent from 10,103 in 2016.

[#Top of the Document](#)

## **Health**

**Record-high doctors' turnover rate of 5.7 per cent in Hong Kong public hospitals worsens manpower shortage issues (SCMP, Jan. 7):** A record-high number of doctors left Hong Kong's public hospitals last year with a turnover rate of 5.7 per cent, sparking concerns that existing measures have failed to solve an exodus crisis, the Post has learned. The current shortfall of more than 250 doctors is partly a result of increasing job opportunities in the more lucrative private market, causing a talent drain

in departments that are in urgent need of medical staff, such as emergency and internal medicine. The long-standing problem prompted calls for the government to look into the possibility of hiring doctors from overseas.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**How hectic Hong Kong is turning into hotbed of infectious diseases (SCMP, Jan. 13):** Busy and hectic lives mean an increasing number of Hongkongers have little time to consider personal hygiene, a phenomenon which has inadvertently turned the city into a hotbed of infectious diseases, a medical expert has cautioned. The warning comes amid reports that the city recorded 10 flu-associated deaths in the first nine days of 2018. According to University of Hong Kong microbiologist Dr Ho Pak-leung, since the 2003 outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome, public awareness about communicable illnesses has grown, but high infection rates abound due to a lack of action. Vigilance and personal hygiene are essential to prevent viruses being easily transmitted, Ho says.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Contact lenses invented in Hong Kong to correct child myopia will cost 40 per cent less than current treatment (SCMP, Jan. 23):** A Hong Kong university whose researchers invented the first-ever day contact lenses to reduce short-sightedness in children has partnered with a local start-up to produce the device, which will be 40 per cent cheaper than an existing myopia treatment. Research team leader and head of PolyU's optometry school Professor To Chi-ho said the lenses could slow the progression of myopia by up to 60 per cent in primary school-aged children.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Swamped Hong Kong hospitals to get HK\$500 million to handle winter flu emergency (SCMP, Jan. 31):** Hong Kong's public hospitals are getting HK\$500 million (US\$64 million) in extra funding from the government as they struggle to cope with a deluge of winter flu cases amid a severe shortage of nursing staff. Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced the major cash infusion, saying it was needed to ease the heavy burden on public hospitals where bed occupancy rates have gone through the roof and patients have spilled out of wards into corridors. Relief measures supported by the additional funding would include recruitment of new clerical staff to reduce nurses' administrative burden; recruitment of part-time medical professionals; and suspension of hospital accreditation to enable the institutions to focus on treating patients.

[#Top of the Document](#)

## **Environment**

**Construction waste may be the greener, smarter way to cover up Hong Kong's landfills (SCMP, Jan. 6):** A veteran soil mechanics expert says he has found a greener, smarter way to cover the mountains of waste piling up in Hong Kong's landfills – by using more waste. Taking construction waste from work sites and laying them on top of regular municipal rubbish as a “final cover” could also free up valuable space at landfills, said Charles Ng, CLP Holdings Professor of Sustainability at the University of Science and Technology. The quantity of overall construction and demolition waste disposed of at landfills climbed to 1.62 million tonnes in 2016 or 4,422 tonnes daily, 5.3 per cent more than in 2015.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Stubborn roadside pollutant on rise again in Hong Kong after three years of decline, group says (SCMP, Jan. 12):** Concentrations of a stubborn roadside pollutant intensified in Hong Kong last year, reversing three years of decline and casting doubt on the government's ability to meet its air quality targets for 2020. The Clean Air Network's latest review of the city's air showed average annual NO2 concentrations measured at the government's three roadside air quality monitoring stations had risen from about 82 micrograms per cubic metre of air in 2016 to 85mcg last year. That was despite roadside NO2 levels falling steadily since 2013.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**'More than half' of Hongkongers can accept 5 per cent rise in power bills to support renewable energy (SCMP, Jan. 27):** More than half of Hongkongers would accept a 5 per cent increase in their electricity bills to support renewable energy, according to findings from a survey by conservation group WWF-Hong Kong. “Hong Kong must use more renewable energy if it wants to reduce carbon emissions. And solar energy has the most potential to be developed,” Olivia To, WWF-Hong Kong's public engagement officer for climate, said. The city currently generates 48 per cent of its energy from coal, 27 per cent from natural gas, and the remaining from nuclear and renewable sources.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hong Kong's poor breathing in more bad air than the wealthy, study finds (SCMP, Jan. 30):** Hongkongers who live in “socially deprived” areas of the city are more exposed to bad air than those in wealthier areas, suggesting a degree of “environmental injustice”, a new study by the University of Hong Kong has found. Constituencies in districts such as Yuen Long, Sham Shui Po, Wong Tai Sin and Kwun

Tong, which ranked high in social deprivation, also measured high average PM2.5 concentrations ranging from 68 micrograms per cubic metre of air to 84mcg over a month, the study found. The study is not the first to suggest such a correlation between socioeconomic standing and air pollution exposure. The Clean Air Network last year found roadside air pollution to be worst in the western parts of Hong Kong, with the hardest hit neighbourhoods also the poorest, most socially deprived, densely populated and clogged with traffic.

[#Top of the Document](#)

### **Culture and education**

**New Chinese University chief Rocky Tuan keeps it short on questions of Hong Kong independence (SCMP, Jan. 3):** The new head of the Chinese University of Hong Kong Rocky Tuan touted the official line of “rational and peaceful discussion” in response to questions on independence advocacy in the city at his first official meeting with the media. “Freedom of research and speech are the fundamental and core values of the university, which we will definitely defend and strengthen. Meanwhile, I do hope that discussions can be conducted in a rational and peaceful way,” Tuan said.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Outgoing HKU chief says Beijing officials meet him ‘all the time’ and wishes higher education ‘wasn’t so politicised’ (SCMP, Jan. 8):** Professor Peter Mathieson, the outgoing head of the University of Hong Kong, has described his tenure as filled with “pressure from everybody”, saying that apart from local officials, he was also given advice “all the time” by Beijing’s liaison office. Mathieson, who will take up the post of vice chancellor of the University of Edinburgh, called on Hong Kong’s leading university to continue its international approach, rather than focus solely on ties with mainland China. “I wish higher education was not so politicised,” he said. “I think it would be simpler for people like me if politics wasn’t such a complicating factor.”

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Don’t overlook maths and science, top Hong Kong mathematician warns educators, urging space for children to develop interests (SCMP, Jan. 9):** A renowned Hong Kong mathematician urged the government to provide more science-related jobs and scholarships, saying that parents should also allow space for their children to discover their interests and potential. The comments by Professor Mok Ngai-ming come as scientists have warned of fewer local pupils opting for maths and science subjects, a trend they said would endanger the government’s bid to boost the technology sector.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Kindergarten and primary schoolteachers in Hong Kong to get training to deal with child abuse cases (SCMP, Jan. 17):** Kindergarten and primary schoolteachers in Hong Kong will be trained to deal with child abuse cases in light of a recent wave of reports that have sparked concern in the city. Educational psychologists and various frontline experts will teach and advise educators on how to identify signs from pupils who may be victims, as well as how they should respond to a case of suspected abuse. Between January and September last year, 704 cases – an average of 78 a month – were flagged to authorities, more than the monthly average of between 71 and 74 in the three preceding years.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**HKUST’s new president candid about contact with Beijing but shies away from hot topic of separatism on campus (SCMP, Jan. 19):** The newly appointed head of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) said he had met Beijing’s representative in the city but had “never received any advice” from officials. Professor Wei Shyy, 62, a Taiwan-born US national and currently the provost of HKUST, told journalists that it would not benefit the university to refuse to talk to any parties. But he did not directly answer questions on whether he would allow pro-independence discussions on campus, or how he would handle cases of students wanting to set up groups to discuss the feasibility of separatism.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hundreds march on Hong Kong university to decry Mandarin-row suspensions (SCMP, Jan. 26):** Hundreds marched on Baptist University campus to protest against the suspension of two students over an ill-tempered stand-off with staff about the school’s Mandarin language requirements. They would not rule out escalated action if management do not reverse the decision. At issue was the suspension of student union president Lau Tsz-kei and medical student Andrew Chan for their involvement in an eight-hour stand-off at the school’s language centre. During the incident Lau was filmed using foul language towards a staff member. Lau and Chan’s supporters were particularly aggrieved that they were suspended before disciplinary proceedings concluded.

[#Top of the Document](#)

## Macau

**Macau gaming watchdog 'concerned' over sexual misconduct allegations facing casino mogul Steve Wynn (SCMP, Jan. 30):** Gaming regulators in Macau have expressed concern over sexual misconduct allegations facing US casino mogul Steve Wynn and warned that rules governing eligibility to operate a casino in the city would be strictly enforced. It comes as the process to renew highly lucrative casino operating licences in the world's richest gaming destination enters a crucial phase. Officials from the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau met with Wynn Macau management on Jan. 29 before issuing a statement expressing concern. Wynn Macau generates about 70 per cent of its parent company Wynn Resorts' revenue.

[#Top of the Document](#)

## Varia

**Former Hong Kong home secretary Patrick Ho pleads not guilty in US court to offering US\$2.9m in bribes to African presidents and ministers (SCMP, Jan. 9):** Former Hong Kong home affairs secretary Patrick Ho has pleaded not guilty to corruption charges brought by a US federal court after he was accused of offering bribes worth a total of US\$2.9 million to prominent African politicians. Ho was indicted by the Southern District of New York and faces eight bribery and money laundering charges related to pay-offs to government officials in Africa on behalf of a Chinese oil and gas company.

[#Top of the Document](#)

## Press articles related to Switzerland and Swiss matters

**Avalanche threat leaves 13,000 tourists stranded in Swiss ski resort (Reuters, SCMP, Jan. 10):** Around 13,000 people were left stranded in the Swiss ski village of Zermatt after heavy snow and a power cut saw mountain lifts, ski runs, walking paths and train services all closed. Zermatt authorities began airlifting guests out of the stricken Swiss Alpine resort. However, the tourist office said there was no reason for concern in Zermatt. "Power has returned, there's still the chance that it could go out ... but at this time things look good," a tourist office spokeswoman said. "The atmosphere in the village is relaxed and comfortable."

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Donald Trump to address World Economic Forum in Davos despite 'America first' pledge (Washington Post, SCMP, Jan. 10):** President Donald Trump will address the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, later this month, the White House said. This comes despite the leader's insistence on pulling back from the globalised economy. The surprise engagement will place Trump among many of the world's richest and most influential leaders in government, business and foreign policy. The January 23-26 gathering will also place Trump deep in the belly of a European-flavoured elite that has openly scorned the American as boorish or reckless.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**What is Carrie Lam's game plan as Hong Kong's chief executive makes rare trek to Davos? (SCMP, Jan. 19):** Hong Kong's top official, a rare guest at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, is likely on a mission to sell the city as still autonomous and attractive to the world, experts say. Chief Executive Carrie Lam will appear at the Davos forum. "The chief executive has always said she would like to take more opportunities to go overseas to promote Hong Kong," a spokesman for Lam's office said this week. Lam could be sending a message to world leaders that Hong Kong still enjoyed autonomy and the rule of law, which were key to its success in drawing overseas investors and businesses in the past, according to international relations experts.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hong Kong has a role to play in opening the world's eyes to North Korea (SCMP, Jan. 21):** It is quite a pleasant surprise to see the University of Hong Kong sponsor a "North Korea's Public Face" exhibition of 20th-century propaganda posters from the collection of Katharina Zellweger, a Swiss humanitarian aid volunteer turned research fellow on North Korea at Stanford University. Visitors can see a note complimenting the Swiss and North Korean consulates for their assistance in staging the exhibition. "I hope to make a small contribution towards fostering a better understanding of a country about which little is still known ... These posters can be viewed as historical documents that accurately express the ways in which North Korea views both itself and the broader world," is her message.

[#Top of the Document](#)

**Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam calls for less inequality and more opportunity during Davos visit (SCMP, Jan. 27):** Hong Kong's leader returned home after promising to address issues such as income disparity and a lack of opportunities for young people as she wrapped up her five-day trip at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. "The government and I have both benefited a lot from [the trip], because this can raise Hong Kong's status in such an important international forum." Elsewhere at the same event, US president Donald Trump suggested an intellectual property fine, in what could foreshadow a trade war with China. Lam said any such barrier to trade would be a bad thing for Hong

Kong. She also attended 12 bilateral meetings with political and business leaders from other countries. **Lam saw to the signing of three memorandums of understanding between the Hong Kong government and Swiss financial authorities, as well as between the Hong Kong Private Wealth Management Association and the Swiss Bankers Association. The papers promote more cooperation in areas such as the internationalisation of the Chinese yuan, wealth management and fintech.**

[#Top of the Document](#)

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