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## Switzerland in the local press

**Swiss referendum on responsible business fails (RTHK, Nov. 30):** Swiss firms narrowly avoided facing greater liability for human rights and environmental abuses after a national vote rejected the proposal due to regional differences despite it winning majority popular support. "The Federal Council is pleased with the result, but is also aware that many who have fought for years for the initiative are disappointed today," Justice Minister Karin Keller-Sutter said at a press conference. She said the enactment of new government measures meant supporters would not leave the campaign with empty hands. "The Federal Council is convinced that this is a good way to achieve the common and undisputed goal of better protecting human rights and the environment."

**Hong Kong is rolling out the red carpet to attract family offices (SCMP, Nov. 18):** Hong Kong is rolling out the red carpet to attract family offices to use the city as a regional hub for managing the fortunes and investments of wealthy clans. As many as 50 licensed family offices are operating in the city, two months after the Securities and Futures Commission issued the first licensing guidelines for the industry. "Switzerland, a leading market in private wealth management industry, has a clear regulatory framework for family office operators. Hong Kong should also develop a clear regulatory framework," said Kwan Chi-man, chairman of the Family Office Association of Hong Kong.

**Freelance photographer cleared of charges (SCMP, Nov. 13):** Swiss-born Marc Gerard Progin, a freelance photographer, accused of enabling an assault on a mainland Chinese banking consultant (Lin) during an anti-government protest in HK last year has been cleared of the charge. Magistrate Stephanie Tsui said that even though Progin's behaviour appeared "highly suspicious", she could not rule out the possibility the retiree was there just to film the protest. "There is no evidence that [Progin] was in contact with anyone in the crowd, or that he had attacked [Lin]," Tsui said, before awarding Progin costs of the criminal proceedings. Progin said outside court he was happy with the outcome of a "fair trial".

## Foreign Policy/International Relations

**Britain rebuked by Beijing and Hong Kong government (SCMP, Nov. 24):** British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab tabled a six-monthly report in parliament, in which he criticised the imposition of the law in June, and accused the Hong Kong government of being focused on "retribution against political opposition and silencing of dissent". The remarks brought a strong rebuke from the Beijing foreign affairs office in Hong Kong, which urged Britain to "wake up from its colonial nostalgia and stop any interference in Hong Kong affairs". The Hong Kong government strongly objected to what it called "sweeping attacks and groundless accusations" on several recent developments.

**HK govt slams Five Eyes nations for 'scaremongering' (SCMP, RTHK, Nov. 20):** The SAR government condemned Western countries for criticising the disqualification of four pro-democracy legislators in HK, accusing them of practising double standards and scaremongering. "These comments, irresponsible to the point of malice, are vivid proof of blatant interference in HK matters which are squarely internal affairs of the People's Republic of China," the HKSAR Government said. The foreign ministers of the US, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand said in a joint statement that Beijing's imposition of new rules to oust HK lawmakers "appeared to be part of a campaign to silence critics". The European Union also voiced concern, calling the move a "severe blow" to the city's political freedom.

**Matthew Cheung slams 'barbaric' US sanctions (RTHK, Nov. 10):** Acting Chief Executive Matthew Cheung has described US sanctions on four Hong Kong and mainland officials as "unacceptable" and "outrageous", adding that the authorities will not be intimidated by such actions. Cheung's remarks come after the US announced sanctions on another four Hong Kong and mainland officials – deputy police commissioner Edwina Lau and senior superintendent Steve Li of the police's national security department, deputy director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office Deng Zhonghua, and deputy director of the Office for Safeguarding National Security Li Jiangzhou.

**US slams Beijing over arrest of RTHK producer (RTHK, Nov. 5):** The United States has called on Beijing to stop its "attempts to crush press freedom" following the arrest of an RTHK investigative journalist. In a brief statement, it said "the US is deeply concerned about the arrest. The Chinese Communist Party and their Hong Kong proxies must cease efforts to crush press freedom." Journalist Bao Choy was arrested and charged in relation to searches carried out on owners of vehicles that appeared to have transported some of the attackers in Yuen Long mob attack.

**Mike Pompeo condemns Hong Kong for arresting politicians (SCMP, Nov. 3):** US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo condemned Hong Kong authorities for arresting eight pan-democratic politicians, including five currently serving legislators, over an incident at a Legislative Council meeting in May where lawmakers allegedly broke into shouting and physical scuffles with each other. It was the latest sign of the enormous and growing scepticism in Washington over whether Hong Kong's justice system is still capable of conducting fair and apolitical legal proceedings.

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## Mainland Relation

**Shenzhen police complete probe into 12 Hongkongers (RTHK, Nov. 28):** Shenzhen police say they have completed their investigation into 12 young Hong Kong people arrested for allegedly entering mainland waters illegally, and the case has been passed to prosecutors. The group were captured by the Guangdong coast guard on August 23 as they travelled on a speedboat to make their way to Taiwan. Eleven of them had been facing prosecution in connection with anti-government protests, while one had been arrested, but not charged, under the national security law.

**Top Beijing official says HK, Macau will play key role in China's economic strategy (SCMP, Nov. 10):** Zhang Xiaoming, deputy director of the State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, has said Hong Kong and Macau will play an important role in China's new flagship economic strategy to harness the power of its domestic market while insulating it from geopolitical tensions. "Hong Kong and Macau are the focal points of 'dual circulation'. Whether it is to integrate into the internal circulation, or the international circulation, both cities have many unique strengths, and can play their parts," he said.

**Beijing vows to curb external forces from meddling with HK and Macau affairs (SCMP, Nov. 4):** Beijing has pledged to resolutely "prevent and curb" external forces from meddling with HK and Macau affairs, as it seeks to strengthen a sense of national identity and patriotism in the two cities over the next five years. But HK's role as an international financial centre was not mentioned in the proposals unveiled by the Communist Party, while analysts also noted that Beijing had placed more emphasis on its authority by underlining the threat of foreign interference after the city was roiled by social unrest last year.

## Domestic Policy/Politics

**The current Covid outbreak may be the worst yet (RTHK, Nov. 29):** Health authorities warned that HK is seeing the most severe Covid-19 outbreak since the pandemic began last year, as official reported 115 new infections on Nov. 29. All schools at the secondary level and below are to suspend in-person classes for the rest of the year. The Centre for Health Protection said the authorities will hopefully be able to contain the outbreak more quickly this time, citing the increase in the city's testing capacity.

**'Liberal studies move political, kills its soul' (RTHK, Nov. 27):** Education Secretary Kevin Yeung said that the government planned to introduce sweeping changes to the liberal studies secondary school subject, which has been blamed by many pro-Beijing figures for last year's social unrest. The subject will get a new curriculum, grading system and even a different name, and there will be more emphasis on the country's development, the constitution, the Basic Law and the rule of law. Outgoing education sector lawmaker Ip Kin-yuen described the government's decision to overhaul the subject as "abrupt" and made out of "political considerations".

**Chief Executive vows to restore order as well as revive ailing economy (SCMP, Nov. 25):** Chief Executive Carrie Lam unveiled her policy address aimed at urgently rebuilding confidence in a city beset by political turmoil and financial uncertainty, promising to restore social and constitutional order as well as revive the ailing economy. Lam placed her full faith in mainland China's support for cross-border initiatives to help lift Hong Kong out of its current impasse, which she stressed would also require public cooperation to achieve "zero infection" at a time when the city faced an escalating fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

**Police to appeal against court ruling on failure to show identification (SCMP, Nov. 22):** Police will appeal against a recent court ruling that found officers' failure to display identification during last year's anti-government protests violated the city's Bill of Rights. A Court of First Instance judge ruled that Article 3 of the Hong Kong Bill of Rights was breached when the police chief failed to ensure officers displayed their unique identification numbers when carrying out non-covert duties at protests.

**National security police search for evidence at Chinese University HK (RTHK, Nov. 20):** Officers from the police's national security unit entered Chinese University's campus as part of an investigation into a protest there recently. The police said they suspected the protesters, some dressed in graduation gowns and wearing Guy Fawkes masks, had breached the national security law with slogans and banners advocating Hong Kong independence. Beijing's liaison office issued a statement saying it fully supports the police's "decisive action" in relation to the brief protest.

**Judicial reform must come from within city's legal system (SCMP, Nov. 18):** Executive Council member Ronny Tong, a senior counsel, issued the warning a day after Zhang Xiaoming, deputy director of the State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, made it clear that it was time to revamp the city's judicial system and that anti-China activism would no longer be allowed among legislators and officials by law. Judicial reform in Hong Kong had to come from within the city's legal system as any outside action would be seen as disrupting the judiciary's independence, Tong said.

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**Compulsory tests to begin; prison threat for refusal (RTHK, Nov. 14):** Hong Kong is introducing mandatory Covid-19 testing for high-risk groups with a threat of prison for anyone who refuses as the SAR steps up social distancing and quarantine rules. Secretary for Food and Health Sophia Chan says the measures are essential if the SAR is to avoid a fourth wave of coronavirus cases. The government will publish the groups of people covered by compulsory tests. It will include people with symptoms, those linked to an outbreak, and staff working in jobs deemed as high risk, as well as people completing quarantine.

**Beijing's resolution on unseating lawmakers raises eyebrows among lawyers (SCMP, Nov. 13):** The legality of Beijing's unprecedented resolution allowing for the summary disqualification of four opposition Hong Kong lawmakers has raised concerns among the city's legal community. Hong Kong's Law Society urged the government to address the legal basis behind the removal, a day after the Bar Association accused Beijing of impairing "legal certainty" with its ruling. The Bar Association argued that Beijing's move had bypassed the existing censuring procedure laid out in Article 79 of the Basic Law, which required a two-thirds vote in the Legco chamber to remove a lawmaker.

**No quarantine for Guangdong returnees from Nov 23 (RTHK, Nov. 11):** Hong Kong residents returning to the territory from Guangdong or Macau will be exempt from undergoing quarantine from November 23, as long as they test negative for Covid-19 and register with the Hong Kong government in advance. However, it's only a one-way arrangement and Hongkongers travelling in the opposite direction still face 14 days of quarantine on arrival.

**Home quarantine option removed for most arrivals (RTHK, Nov. 11):** The government announced tighter coronavirus restrictions for anyone flying into Hong Kong. From Nov. 13, arrivals from all places other than the mainland will have to undergo 14 days of quarantine in a hotel, rather than a residential property. Currently, this rule only applies to people coming from 15 'high-risk' countries. Health Secretary Sophia Chan says the requirement is needed to prevent returnees from infecting others during a quarantine period at home.

**Arrest of RTHK producer an attack on press freedom (RTHK, Nov. 3):** Pro-democracy lawmakers expressed alarm over the arrest of an RTHK producer who worked on programmes on the July 21 Yuen Long outrage, saying the police's move was a clear attack on Hong Kong's press freedom. Democratic Party lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting said the arrest would undoubtedly put pressure on journalists, but urged them to stand firm. Civic Party leader Alvin Yeung also condemned the arrest, and questioned whether authorities were taking "revenge" against the producer, who was trying to get to the bottom of what happened in Yuen Long riot last year.

## **Economy/Finance**

**Lawmakers expressed concerns about Lantau Tomorrow Vision (SCMP, Nov. 28):** Lawmakers pressed officials for further clarity on the controversial HK\$624 billion (US\$80.5 billion) Lantau Tomorrow Vision reclamation project, as they raised a raft of concerns including costs while vetting an initial funding request for feasibility studies. Lantau Tomorrow Vision, a signature policy of city leader Carrie Lam, aims to build 1,700 hectares (4,200 acres) of artificial islands in waters east of Lantau Island and a new transport network, to create a new metropolis and housing hub.

**Measures to better link city with rest of Greater Bay Area (SCMP, Nov. 25):** Beijing's plan to create a southern regional powerhouse took centre stage in the policy address, with a series of measures announced to better integrate the city with its neighbours, especially in the aviation and technology sectors. Chief Executive Carrie Lam outlined a new employment scheme to encourage businesses with a presence both in Hong Kong and elsewhere in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) to recruit and send 2,000 local university graduates over the border. She said Hong Kong's Airport Authority would acquire more shares in Zhuhai airport to build a "world-class aviation cluster".

**Surge in virus cases grounds HK-Singapore 'bubble' (RTHK, Nov. 21):** HK and Singapore officials agreed to delay a so-called travel bubble for at least two weeks – less than 24 hours before the first flights were due to depart. Hundreds of travellers had already booked to take advantage of the bubble arrangement, which allows people to skip a mandatory two-week quarantine period as long as they test negative for Covid-19 before departure. The HK government postponed the arrangement as the fourth wave of coronavirus infections triggered a sharp rise in local, and untraceable, cases in HK.

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**Hong Kong can reap the rewards of RCEP even as an outsider, analysts say (SCMP, Nov. 17):** the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), signed by China and 14 other Asia-Pacific nations, could help Hong Kong minimise the damage wrought on its economy by the souring of Washington-Beijing relations and the coronavirus pandemic, according to city analysts. While Hong Kong is not a member economy of the RCEP, the city has expressed an interest in entering negotiations to join. Lawmaker Felix Chung, leader of the pro-business Liberal Party, said Hong Kong could extract gains from the pact even before becoming a member, in terms of logistics, trade and supply chains.

**Unemployment rate remains at 16-year high of 6.4 per cent (SCMP, Nov. 17):** Unemployment rate has remained at a 16-year high of 6.4 per cent between August and October but fears are mounting over the impact of the government's wage subsidy scheme ending this month. Secretary for Labour and Welfare Law Chi-kwong noted there were further signs of stabilisation but he expected the jobs market to remain under pressure in the near term.

**Ant IPO suspended in Shanghai and Hong Kong (RTHK, Nov. 4):** Ant Group's US\$37 billion stock market listing has been suspended in both Shanghai and Hong Kong in a dramatic move just two days before what was set to be the world's largest-ever stock market debut. The Shanghai stock exchange first announced that it had suspended Ant's initial public offering on its STAR market, prompting Ant to also freeze the Hong Kong leg of the dual listing. Ant said it may not meet listing qualifications or disclosure requirements, and also cited recent changes in the fintech regulatory environment.

#### **Macao**

**Macau to offer annual cash handout despite downturn (RTHK, Nov. 16):** Delivering his annual Policy Address, Macau's Chief Executive Ho Iat-seng said as in previous years, each permanent resident will receive 10,000 patacas (about US\$1,250), and non-permanent residents 6,000 patacas (about US\$750). He also said that Macau is seeing a rather significant fiscal deficit, as the economy has been seriously affected by Covid-19. But he said he is hopeful that the enclave's gambling industry will slowly recover in the coming year.

#### **Special Focus**

**Patriotism must sit at the heart of Hong Kong's political system (SCMP, Nov. 17):** Zhang Xiaoming, deputy director of the State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, has declared that clarifying state allegiance rules for Hong Kong lawmakers is a key step to establishing the patriotism that must underpin the city's political system. He said that a lack of understanding over Beijing's "one country, two systems" policy was to blame for a series of Hong Kong "fallacies". He also said such misunderstandings must be corrected, and further urged the city authorities and its legal sector to heed local calls to reform the judiciary. "People who love the country and Hong Kong, govern Hong Kong, and people who are anti-China and cause trouble in Hong Kong are out. This is a political rule under 'one country, two systems', and has become a legal requirement now."

**Opposition lawmakers hand in their resignations (RTHK, Nov. 12):** Legco's 15 remaining pan-democratic lawmakers tendered their resignations, a day after four of their colleagues were disqualified by Beijing. The SAR government announced that pro-democracy lawmakers Alvin Yeung, Dennis Kwok, Kwok Ka-ki and Kenneth Leung had been stripped of their seats in Legco with immediate effect. The move came after the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) passed a resolution saying that legislators who promote or support Hong Kong independence, refuse to acknowledge China's sovereignty over Hong Kong, ask external forces to interfere in Hong Kong's affairs or commit other acts that threaten national security should be disqualified. Convenor of the pan-democratic camp, Wu Chi-wai, said he hopes the mass resignation will show the entire world how "ridiculous" it was for the National People's Congress Standing Committee to oust the four lawmakers, and how Beijing has "completely destroyed One Country, Two Systems".

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