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Switzerland

2024 Art Basel in Hong Kong: A global hub for contemporary art exchange

The 2024 Art Basel in Hong Kong, featuring 242 galleries from 40 countries, is a pivotal platform for global modern and contemporary art exchange. Despite COVID-19 challenges, notable galleries have returned, with a 37% increase in exhibitors compared to last year. Emphasizing global connections and creativity, the fair highlights Asia's success, particularly in the Chinese market. [Global Times](#), Mar 28

Omega's retail expansion and charitable contribution

Swiss luxury watchmaker Omega demonstrates its long-term commitment to Hong Kong's retail sector with the opening of two specialty shops amidst economic challenges. The expansion includes a four-storey boutique in Central and a two-storey space in K11 Musea, underscoring Omega's optimism about the city's retail market. Concurrently, Omega raises over US\$600,000 for the charity Orbis through an auction, aligning its corporate social responsibility efforts with its retail expansion in Hong Kong. Despite Swiss watch exports experiencing a decline in Hong Kong (19% from last year) and China, Omega showcases confidence in Hong Kong's market potential. [SCMP1](#); [SCMP2](#); [Bloomberg](#), Mar 3, 4, 20

China to grant visa-free travel to nationals of six European countries, including Switzerland

China is allowing nationals from Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Switzerland to visit visa-free for up to 15 days with the starting date on March 14 until November 30. This decision aims to facilitate travel for various purposes, including business and tourism, amid China's efforts to boost international passenger flights. [HKFP](#); [DS](#), Mar 7, 14

China and Switzerland in push for Russia to join Ukraine peace summit

China and Switzerland are advocating for Russia's inclusion in Swiss-hosted talks for resolving the Ukraine conflict. However, Ukraine and Russia's differing conditions make their participation uncertain. China emphasizes dialogue for peace but has limited engagement in peace initiatives. The outcome depends on Ukraine's invitation to Russia and Moscow's response. [SCMP](#), Mar 8

Foreign Policy / International Relations

Foreign countries caution travellers to Hong Kong amid Security Law concerns

Following Hong Kong's enactment of a new domestic security law, warnings from Australia, Taiwan, and the UK cautioning travellers about potential risks in the city were condemned by local authorities as "political manoeuvres" and "scaremongering." Defending the law, the government stated it is accurately stipulated with clear penalties, and ordinary travellers are unlikely to unintentionally violate it. The Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, enacted under Article 23 of Hong Kong's Basic Law, targets offenses like treason and espionage. Fast-tracked and unanimously approved, the law has drawn criticism for its perceived vagueness and broad scope. Western states and NGOs have expressed concerns, while Australian and UK advisories highlight potential risks of unintentional violations and legal access restrictions.

Taiwan also cautioned its residents about personal safety in Hong Kong, citing heavy penalties for certain offenses and the vague definition of illegal activity under the new law. [HKFP](#), Mar 25

Tiananmen Square Memorial erected outside European Parliament

A model of the "Pillar of Shame," a memorial to victims of the Tiananmen Square massacre that was controversially removed from a Hong Kong university in 2021, has gone on display in front of the European Parliament in Brussels. The unveiling took place on the same day Hong Kong passed a second national security law giving police new powers to crack down on dissent. Critics and analysts have warned that the new legislation, aligns the financial hub's national security laws more closely with those used on the Chinese mainland, leaving the city's artists and galleries with further uncertainties about what is, or is not, legally permissible. China and Hong Kong's leaders say the new laws are needed to "plug loopholes" as part of their drive to "restore stability" following large-scale and occasionally violent pro-democracy, anti-government protests in 2019. [CNN](#), Mar 20

Hong Kong condemns BBC over 'smearing' Beijing's national security law

The Hong Kong government has criticized the BBC for allegedly "smearing" the city's national security law in an article covering the sentencing of 12 Hongkongers involved in 2019 protests. After the BBC's initial report mentioning the law's impact on protest prosecutions, the government accused the broadcaster of creating a negative impression, prompting the BBC to revise its article. This incident comes amidst broader efforts by the government to rebut criticism of national security legislation, including the formation of a "response and refute team." [HKFP](#), Mar 18

Hong Kong accuses top US diplomat in city of 'scaremongering'

The Hong Kong government accused US Consul General Gregory May of "scaremongering" and making unwarranted comments about the proposed national security legislation. May's concerns about internet censorship and crackdowns on dissidents were rebuked, with the government emphasizing the importance of upholding the rule of law and ongoing criminal trials. Australia also expressed concerns about the legislation's impact on rights and freedoms. Despite criticisms, the HK government reported strong public support for the legislation. [SCMP](#), Mar 2

Mainland

China criticizes Washington's stance on Hong Kong Security Law

The Chinese Foreign Ministry criticized the US for alleged political manipulation and double standards regarding Hong Kong's proposed Article 23 legislation. Spokeswoman Mao Ning accused the US of throwing "dirty water" on the legislation while having numerous national security laws itself. The US expressed concern over the legislation's broad definitions of "state secrets" and "external interference," fearing it could stifle dissent. Meanwhile Beijing vows to "resolutely counter-attack" any US visa restrictions on Hong Kong officials due to the enactment of the Article 23 domestic national security law. [SCMP1](#); [SCMP2](#), Mar 1, Apr 1

Article 23 – Beijing's point man on Hong Kong says 'very satisfied' with swift passage

Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office director Xia Baolong met with Chief Executive John Lee on March 21 in Shenzhen for a briefing on the approval of the domestic national security legislation. According to a [government statement](#), Lee told Xia that his administration would focus on 'developing a vibrant economy and a caring community'. [RTHK](#); [The Standard](#), Mar 21, 22

China's 'two sessions' 2024: Hong Kong delegates to raise ways to keep city unique

Hong Kong's annual political meetings in Beijing convened amidst efforts to revitalize both mainland China and Hong Kong's sluggish economies. Attendees addressed various proposals aimed at attracting mainland tourists, bolstering cross-border integration, and supporting mainland companies' global expansion. Key issues that surfaced included mainland China's economic challenges and Beijing's ongoing emphasis on national security in Hong Kong. Although not on the official agenda, national security remained a consideration in Beijing's assessment of Hong Kong policies. Observers also watched for signals regarding US-China relations and Beijing's strategy for Hong Kong's role in attracting foreign investment amidst geopolitical challenges. [SCMP](#), Mar 2

Domestic Policy / Politics / Law

Hong Kong's Chief Executive John Lee advocates for National Security Legislation

Chief Executive John Lee told reporters before the weekly Executive Council meeting that the legislation on national security, which has come into effect on March 23 is defensive, with stringent and clear safeguards for human rights and freedoms. He underscored the importance of explaining the benefits of the new national security law to local and overseas business communities, emphasizing its enactment under Article 23 of the Basic Law. Lee pledged ongoing efforts to inform businesses during overseas visits and highlighted the law's role in fostering stability and security for investment. Additionally, he plans to strengthen connections with markets like Asean and the Middle East while promoting education on national security and Chinese culture. [RTHK](#), Mar 26

University removes "unauthorized" student publication

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) removed an unauthorized student publication, previously managed by the student union, due to alleged illegal remarks on national security, reflecting increasing challenges to student autonomy in Hong Kong universities. [HKFP](#), Mar 26

Jimmy Lai's landmark trial

J. Lai, a prominent media tycoon and pro-democracy advocate, faces charges related to sedition, collusion with foreign forces, and publishing seditious material. Lai has long been an outspoken critic of China's Communist Party and is the highest-profile figure to face prosecution under the law. If convicted, he could receive a possible life sentence. Reporters without Borders see the prosecution of Jimmy Lai the founder of the pro-democratic Apple Daily tabloid as the final nail in the coffin of press freedom in Hong Kong.

Media mogul Jimmy Lai has unveiled his alleged involvement in an international lobbying effort. According to witness Andy Li, a defendant turned prosecution witness, Lai's support for the "Fight for Freedom, Stand with Hong Kong" (SWHK) group included establishing a trust fund in the US and lobbying the UK government to take action against Beijing. SWHK advertised in British publications, urging then-incoming Prime Minister Boris Johnson to hold China accountable for its commitments to Hong Kong's democratic rights. Hong Kong's former colonial ruler Britain and the United States have called for Lai's immediate release. Lai pleads not guilty as the prosecution continues with witnesses to the stand. [SCMP1](#); [SCMP2](#); [HKFP](#); [Reuters](#); [RSE](#), Mar 13, 18, 21

High Court upholds sentences for pro-democracy figures

In the midst of Hong Kong's political landscape, Chief Executive John Lee and his administration have been granted extensive powers under the new national security legislation, raising concerns about potential misuse and its impact on civil liberties. Concurrently, the High Court, led by Judge Anna Lai, upheld sentences for pro-democracy activists, including former members of the disbanded Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China. The decision to maintain the 4.5-month prison terms for each individual, despite their appeals, underscores the ongoing tension surrounding political dissent and the rule of law in Hong Kong. [SCMP](#); [DS](#), Mar 14, 15

Hong Kong's Civic Party Dissolves After 18 Years

The Civic Party, once a prominent pro-democracy force in Hong Kong, officially dissolves after 18 years, following a leadership vacuum and mounting legal risks under the Beijing-imposed national security law. Chairperson Alan Leong, a senior counsel, expressed difficulty in assessing the party's legal liabilities even post-disbandment. Founded in 2006 by lawyers and lawmakers, the party's closure signifies a significant setback for Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement, which has seen numerous civil society groups fold since the enactment of the security law. [HKFP](#), Mar 18

Economy

Hong Kong aims to lead in Global Sustainability Standards at One Earth Summit

Hong Kong plans to be among firsts to align its sustainability disclosures with global standards set by the International Sustainability Standards Board, aiming to solidify its leading position in sustainable finance. Secretary Christopher Hui announced plans for a roadmap targeting all financial service sectors, emphasizing the city's commitment to addressing global sustainability demands. The initiative was discussed at the One Earth Summit, highlighting the urgency of climate action and Asia's potential as a hub for climate solutions. Key speakers emphasized the need for substantial funding to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions and restore biodiversity, alongside the increasing focus on climate and impact investing globally. [SCMP](#), Mar 26

Hong Kong's business landscape and the National Security Law

Foreign firms in Hong Kong are reviewing their operations post Article 23 legislation, but insiders suggest changes were already made following the 2020 Beijing-imposed law. Concerns persist about unintentional breaches and handling confidential information, though experts note differences between Hong Kong's legal system and mainland laws. Despite the recent passing of a domestic national security law (Art. 23), authorities assure that regular business activities and international exchanges remain unaffected. Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu anticipates HK\$40 billion (US\$5.1 billion) in investment and 13,000 jobs from the 49 (19 mainland, 6 US, rest from overseas) companies that have agreed to set up shop or expand their operations in Hong Kong as part of the government's latest bid to promote the development of the innovation and technology (I&T) ecosystem, emphasizing the city's ongoing efforts to bolster its economy and I&T ecosystem. [SCMP1](#); [SCMP2](#), Mar 20, 26

Hong Kong to shine with fireworks and revitalized harbour light show for tourists

The government has announced a series of initiatives aimed at reviving its tourism industry. Therefore, initiatives are being launched to boost tourism in Hong Kong, including monthly pyrotechnic and drone shows and revamping "A Symphony of Lights". Mr. Raistlin Lau highlighted efforts to increase visitor numbers and spending, with the Hong Kong Tourism Board offering tourism packages to stimulate the local economy. [DD](#), Mar 20

Luxury surges, public housing delays, and development plans

Luxury property rental values in Hong Kong have rebounded, exemplified by tycoon Lee Shau-kee's mansion at 35 Barker Road on The Peak, which saw a 3% rise to HK\$24.9 million (US\$3.07 million), maintaining its status as the city's most expensive property. Meanwhile, residential rental values for tiny flats have also increased, with one unit in Shau Kei Wan jumping 9% to around HK\$115,200 (US\$14,700). In addition to that, the average wait time for a rental flat in Hong Kong's public housing system has risen to 5.8 years, attributed to construction delays. The Housing Authority expressed concerns over the prolonged wait times, highlighting the pressing need for infrastructure development to address housing demands. Addressing the city's housing challenges, the Development Bureau seeks HK\$32.5 billion (US\$4.2 billion) funding from the Legislative Council for the Kwu Tung North/Fanling North New Development Area. The project aims to create a predominantly residential community, accommodating government offices relocated from urban areas, with population intake expected to start in 2029. [HKFP](#); [The Standard1](#); [The Standard2](#), Mar 7, 19, 20

Hong Kong's Q4 2023 GDP Up 4.3%, driven by key sectors

Hong Kong's GDP saw a robust 4.3% growth in Q4 2023 compared to the previous year, slightly surpassing Q3 figures. Services, trade, accommodation, and transportation sectors led the surge, while others like finance and insurance showed modest or negative growth. Overall, the data indicates a mixed but generally positive economic performance for the period. [DD](#), Mar 19

Hong Kong to host major cryptocurrency conference in 2025 as city woos virtual asset firms

Hong Kong aims to position itself as a global hub for virtual asset businesses, with plans to host the 2025 Consensus, one of the world's largest cryptocurrency-themed conferences. The event, expected to attract around 10,000 attendees, reflects the city's efforts to embrace and develop its virtual asset industry. While local and mainland Chinese players have responded positively to Hong Kong's supportive policies and regulatory framework, major international firms have been cautious due to regulatory uncertainties for the sector and Covid-19 travel restrictions. [SCMP](#), Mar 7

Cultural / Education / Science / Social

Hong Kong slips to 86th place in World Happiness Report

On March 20, the International Day of Happiness, the United Nations (UN) unveiled the World Happiness Report for 2024. This comprehensive report compiles data from 143 countries and regions, offering a global ranking of

happiness based on the life satisfaction of surveyed individuals. While Finland remains at its top position for the seventh consecutive year, Hong Kong's ranking has continued to slip over the past three years, dropping from 77th in 2021 to 86th this year. [TimeOut](#), Mar 22

More Hong Kong children fell victim to sexual abuse through online activities in 2023

Hong Kong saw a 12.3% increase in child abuse cases in 2023, totaling 1,349 cases, with half involving sexual abuse, including instances where perpetrators met victims online. The rise in online-related abuse prompts concerns, as perpetrators exploit features like "read and delete" on dating apps, leading to legislative efforts for mandatory reporting and protection for professionals reporting abuse, following a scandal involving abuse at a Children's Residential Home. [HKFP](#), Mar 18

Macau

Macao's Gaming Revenue Rises by 5.5% in March

Macao's casinos reported a 5.5% increase in gross gaming revenue (GGR) for March, reaching 19.5 billion patacas (US\$2.4 billion), according to the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ). This marks a significant rise compared to February and a notable 42% increase year-on-year from March 2023. [MN](#), Apr 2

Special Focus: Article 23 – Basic Law

On March 19, 2024, the Hong Kong government passed the Safeguarding National Security law, also known as Article 23, after a rushed public consultation and legislative review process. The new Article 23 of the Basic Law in Hong Kong pertains to national security and took effect on March 23. It involves regulations aimed at safeguarding against activities that threaten China's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security. This can include acts such as secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces. The implementation of Article 23 is portrayed as controversial by western media, as it raises concerns about potential limitations on freedom of speech, expression, and assembly according to Amnesty International. Under this law, definitions of "national security" and "state secrets" have been adopted from mainland China, granting broad authority to the government of Hong Kong. New offenses, increased penalties, and expanded powers for law enforcement raise concerns about freedom of expression, association, and legal rights. The law also imposes obligations on citizens to report on others, enhanced police power, and allows executive lawmaking without legislative oversight. With the suppression of opposition voices following the 2020 National Security Law, the government was able to push through Article 23 legislation, virtually unopposed. [RTHK](#); [HKFP](#); [SCMP1](#); [SCMP2](#); [The Guardian](#); [Amnesty International](#), Mar 7, 19, 22, 27

As the government sought to expedite the legislative process, concerns mounted domestically and internationally. While local politicians hailed the law's passage as a historic moment, foreign governments, newspapers and NGOs expressed reservations, citing its potential impact on freedoms. The New York Times and BBC got criticized by the Hong Kong government for publishing articles that it deemed as an "extremely misleading" coverage of the newly enacted domestic national security legislation. [HKFP](#); [SCMP1](#); [SCMP2](#), Mar 20, 27

Despite concerns, government authorities emphasized the law's necessity and supported its passage, signaling a unified stance on bolstering security measures. However, former commerce chief Frederick Ma Si-hang warned of potential isolation if concerns from the US and Europe aren't addressed regarding the city's domestic national security law. Ma urged the government to engage the business sector in explaining Hong Kong's situation to international partners to prevent isolation. In light of recent developments, Hong Kong's Justice Secretary cautions residents against inciting hatred of authorities through online criticisms of the law, emphasizing legal consequences for such actions. Prisoners convicted of national security offences will find it hard to be granted early release because of how serious their crimes are, Hong Kong's leader John Lee has said, warning the public "not to test" the city's laws after the enactment of the new Article 23 legislation. Justice Minister Paul Lam and Security Chief Chris Tang assured in an interview with the Post on March 29 that absconders would likely be the initial focus of enforcement, with sanctions among the penalties they might face. Such individuals could have their Hong Kong passports cancelled or lose all licences and professional qualifications granted under the law. Chief Executive John Lee issued the warning on March 26, a day after sources confirmed that activist Adam Ma Chun-man did not get the early release normally granted for good behavior in prison. He also pledged to enhance intelligence gathering and law enforcement efforts post-implementation, underlining the government's commitment to national security and economic development. [SCMP1](#); [SCMP2](#); [SCMP3](#); [SCMP4](#); [SCMP5](#), Mar 23, 24, 26

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