


Press Review Hong Kong

31 December 2023 / N°240

 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
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Consulate General of Switzerland in Hong Kong



Contents

Switzerland	2
Best and Worst Cities for Expats in 2023	2
Switzerland top on global talent rankings, Indonesia up but still lags 73 places behind Singapore	2
Foreign Policy / International Relations	2
US adds Hong Kong to the list of 'foreign adversaries' in national defence spending bill	2
HKD1 mil bounties on ex-UK consulate local staff & 4 more overseas activists/UK, US citizen	2
Beijing, HK hit back at Germany, France for giving Chow Hang-tung human rights prize	2
Mainland	2
Chief Executive Lee ends duty visit vowing to boost ties with mainland neighbours	2
Consulates & global bodies must win Beijing's approval to extend property leases under new bill	2
Domestic Policy / Politics / Law	2
HK's freedoms 'better protected' under NSL, government tells UN ahead of human rights review	2
Activist Koo Sze-yiu denied bail for a third time over plan to protest 'unfair' District Council race	2
Hong Kong customs seizes drugs worth HK\$4.4 billion in first 11 months of year	3
Apple Daily NSL trial begins, with first day focusing on sedition charge	3
Tiananmen vigil group trio to hear verdict in three months	3
Trial closes with verdict expected in 3-4 months	3
Activist Agnes Chow jumps bail, to stay in Canada; Beijing, HK slams Agnes Chow for fleeing HK	3
Economy	3
Hong Kong's new investment visa scheme could be a double-edged sword	3
HK to regulate crypto exchanges amid young people's involvement in suspected money laundering	3
Hongkongers make 1.32 million outbound trips over Christmas, beating pre-pandemic levels	3
Yuan trading, talent growth and green finance as areas for cooperation with Vietnam and Laos	4
Companies with mainland China or overseas parents back to pre-coronavirus levels	4
'HK to strengthen I&T cooperation with mainland' and seek HKD2.8bn funding for research centre	4
2024 outlook: Growth will worsen, exports expected to rebound, fiscal deficit to reach HKD110bn	4
75% of companies struggling to source talent; scheme unveiled to attract investment and talent	4
Hong Kong-listed companies ploughed record USD14 bn into buy-backs in 2023	4
Hong Kong home prices down 20% from historical peak, rebound hinged on US interest rate cuts	4
Moody's cuts HK outlook to negative	4
Chinese EV battery giant CATL will set up R&D centre in Hong Kong.....	4
US reducing reliance on China forces HK exporters to sever some local, mainland ties	5
Society / Culture / Education	5
Hongkongers' outlook for future of city's development takes 'very significant drop,' survey finds	5
Hong Kong's showcase of national achievements: a threat to Science and Heritage Museums?	5
Macau	5
Government disagrees with Moody's downgrade to negative	5
Lawmakers pass CE election amendment bill	5
Special Focus: District Council Election 2023	5
Hong Kong appoints 179 councilors; DAB leads amid low turnout, boycott arrests.....	5

Switzerland

Best and Worst Cities for Expats in 2023

The Austrian capital retained its place at the top of the list, which was last published in the pre-pandemic days of 2019. The survey's compilers highlighted the city's vibrant cultural scene, architecture and history. Followed by the Swiss city Zurich, in second spot for its political stability and high-quality infrastructure, while on the other side of the world, Auckland was praised for its high standard of healthcare and cultural dynamism. [Bloomberg](#) Dec 12

Switzerland top on global talent rankings, Indonesia up but still lags 73 places behind Singapore

Rich nations dominate the global talent landscape – [Switzerland](#) has topped the table every year, followed by [Singapore](#) and the [United States](#) – but developing countries like Indonesia have made the largest strides by improving quality of life and job sustainability. [Indonesia](#) has made the greatest improvement among Asian countries in developing and harnessing talent over the past decade, according to a report by INSEAD, climbing 14 spots on the list. Still, there's more to be done for Indonesia, which placed 75th out of 113 countries. [SCMP](#) Dec 5

Foreign Policy / International Relations

US adds Hong Kong to the list of 'foreign adversaries' in national defence spending bill

On 14 December, the US Congress passed the 2024 National Defence Authorization Act, including Hong Kong and Macao under China's jurisdiction for the first time, aligning them with nations like Cuba and North Korea. Despite this, Lau Siu-kai from a semi-official Beijing-based think tank anticipates minimal impact due to ongoing American business interests in the regions. [HKET reNews](#) Dec 20

HKD1 mil bounties on ex-UK consulate local staff & 4 more overseas activists/UK, US citizen

On 14 December, Hong Kong's national security police issued arrest warrants with a HKD1 million (EUR 116'671) bounty for five overseas activists, including Simon Cheng and Frances Hui, for alleged secession, subversion, and collusion with foreign forces. This brings the total to 13 wanted under national security laws. British Foreign Secretary David Cameron and US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller condemned the actions, emphasizing threats to democracy and human rights, and rejecting Hong Kong's jurisdiction in the US and UK ([UK Statement](#); [US Statement](#)). [TS AFP](#) Dec 14

Beijing, HK hit back at Germany, France for giving Chow Hang-tung human rights prize

Prominent Hong Kong activist Chow Hang-tung received the Franco-German Prize for Human Rights and the Rule of Law, as announced in a [press release](#) by the French and German foreign ministries. They praised winners for their dedication under risky conditions. However, the Hong Kong government and China's Foreign Ministry in HK countered in statements ([HK Statement](#); [China's FM Statement](#)), criticizing the award amid ongoing legal proceedings and urging against interference in internal affairs. [SCMP HKFP](#) Dec 13

Mainland

Chief Executive Lee ends duty visit vowing to boost ties with mainland neighbours

Chief Executive John Lee completed a duty visit to Beijing, pledging to foster cooperation with mainland Chinese neighbours through the Northern Metropolis mega project and to consolidate the city's role as a hub for international finance, technology and culture. The bay area is a central government initiative to link Hong Kong, Macau and nine cities in Guangdong province into an integrated economic and business hub. [SCMP](#) Dec 20

Consulates & global bodies must win Beijing's approval to extend property leases under new bill

China now requires consulates and global bodies in Hong Kong to obtain approval from its foreign ministry to extend property leases, affecting about 110 cases. The Development Bureau announced this new rule on 7 Dec., impacting 10 plots of land and 100 flats, without naming any of the 63 consulates or eight recognized bodies. [SCMP](#) Dec 7

Domestic Policy / Politics / Law

HK's freedoms 'better protected' under NSL, government tells UN ahead of human rights review

According to the Hong Kong government, the city's rights and freedoms have been better safeguarded since the implementation of the Beijing-imposed national security law, leading to a major shift from chaos to governance and creating a safer, more orderly environment. This assertion was made to the United Nations ahead of a routine human rights review. [HKFP](#) Dec 27

Activist Koo Sze-yiu denied bail for a third time over plan to protest 'unfair' District Council race

Veteran activist Koo Sze-yiu was denied bail for the third time in Hong Kong for planning a protest against reformed District Council elections. Arrested on December 8 for alleged seditious intent under an older law, not Beijing's national security law, he faces up to two years in prison. His next court hearing is set for January 10. [HKFP](#) Dec 27

Hong Kong customs seizes drugs worth HK\$4.4 billion in first 11 months of year

In 2023, Hong Kong customs seized a record 8.4 tonnes of drugs worth HK\$4.4 billion (USD 564.1 million) in 11 months, marking a two-decade high. With increased arrests at 274, the surge in crystal meth, cocaine, ketamine, and cannabis confiscations is attributed to enhanced local and international cooperation. Customs pledges continued vigilance and strategy adaptation to counter evolving drug smuggling trends. [SCMP](#) Dec 27

Apple Daily NSL trial begins, with first day focusing on sedition charge

The National Security Law (NSL) trial of media tycoon Jimmy Lai and his pro-democracy paper Apple Daily commenced on December 18 2023, centering on a contentious sedition charge under colonial-era laws. International observers from diplomatic missions and global powers like the EU, UK, and US closely watched, criticizing the proceedings and calling for Lai's release, highlighting concerns over Hong Kong's rule of law and press freedom ([EU Statement](#); [UK Statement](#); [US Statement](#)). China vehemently condemned the international response as interference and political bias, accusing them of double standards and undermining Hong Kong's judicial independence, further intensifying global scrutiny and diplomatic tensions over the city's democratic institutions. [SCMP](#) Dec 19 [Reuters](#) [The Times](#) [NPR](#)

Tiananmen vigil group trio to hear verdict in three months

Chow Hang-tung, Tang Ngok-kwan, and Tsui Hon-kwong of the disbanded Hong Kong Alliance await their verdict within three months after appealing their national security case conviction on December 7. Accused of withholding information from police, their defense, led by Philip Dykes, contested the lack of evidence proving the Alliance as a 'foreign agent,' the basis of the police's request. [HKFP](#) Dec 7

Trial closes with verdict expected in 3-4 months

Hong Kong's largest national security trial concluded its final legal debates on 4 December, with 16 democrats denying conspiracy to commit subversion. Defense lawyer Trevor Beel argued the prosecution was criminalizing political issues, violating common law clarity principles. Judge Andrew Chan stated a verdict would come in 'three to four months,' pending Judge Alex Lee's handling of Jimmy Lai's case. [SCMP](#) [HK Court News](#) Dec 4

Activist Agnes Chow jumps bail, to stay in Canada; Beijing, HK slams Agnes Chow for fleeing HK

Agnes Chow, prominent in Hong Kong's pro-democracy movements, announced in a [social media post](#) that she has moved to Canada for studies. After serving a jail term and remaining under supervision, Chow detailed a police-escorted trip to China as a condition to retrieve her passport. Still under investigation and expected to report to the police, the Hong Kong government and police criticized her departure and vowed to pursue justice. The government and police did not confirm the details of her trip to China despite media inquiries. [Reuters](#) [BBC](#) [SCMP](#) [HKstatement](#) Dec 4

Economy

Hong Kong's new investment visa scheme could be a double-edged sword

Hong Kong's new Capital Investment Entrant Scheme requires applicants to invest HK\$30 million (USD 3.85 million), including HK\$27 million (USD 3.46 million) in financial assets and HK\$3 million (USD 384'600) in a CIES portfolio. Eligible are foreigners, permanent residents abroad, and Macau/Taiwan residents over 18. Successful applicants and dependents may gain residency and, after seven years, permanent residency, provided they maintain continuous residence and meet financial requirements. The scheme aims to attract global talent and capital while offering residency benefits. The drawbacks of such schemes, however, include wealth inequality, corruption risks, national security concerns and ethical considerations. [SCMP](#) Dec 28

HK to regulate crypto exchanges amid young people's involvement in suspected money laundering

Hong Kong is planning to regulate over-the-counter cryptocurrency exchanges following multiple incidents where young people were unwittingly involved in suspected money laundering. The cases, often involving individuals in their 20s, revolved around using virtual assets for illegal transactions. Authorities aim to introduce legislative changes to oversee these operations, amidst concerns over the lack of understanding and regulatory oversight in virtual asset trading. The move comes as a response to the recent exploitation of young residents and the broader risks associated with unlicensed trading platforms. [SCMP](#) Dec 28

Hongkongers make 1.32 million outbound trips over Christmas, beating pre-pandemic levels

Over the Christmas holidays, Hong Kong residents made 1.32 million outbound trips, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. However, visitor arrivals and hospitality business have not fully recovered. While departures increased significantly compared to 2018 and 2019, inbound tourism still lagged behind 2018 levels. Industry leaders are calling for measures to boost consumption as the city navigates post-pandemic and post-protest recovery. [SCMP](#) Dec 26

Yuan trading, talent growth and green finance as areas for cooperation with Vietnam and Laos

HK sees yuan trading, talent development and green finance as three potential areas of cooperation to boost its ties with Vietnam and Laos, said top treasury official Christopher Hui. [SCMP](#) Dec 21

Companies with mainland China or overseas parents back to pre-coronavirus levels

Government figures show more than 9,000 companies with mainland China or foreign head offices, with total of 468,000 staff based in city, in line with 2019 numbers. Mainland China has most satellite operations, followed by Japan, US, UK and Singapore. [SCMP](#) Dec 21

'HK to strengthen I&T cooperation with mainland' and seek HKD2.8bn funding for research centre

Hong Kong's Chief Executive John Lee announced plans to enhance cooperation with mainland China to boost innovation, technology, and tourism. Meeting with Ministries of Science and Technology and of Culture and Tourism during his capital visit, he highlighted the joint development of the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Cooperation Zone with Shenzhen. Additionally, Hong Kong seeks HKD2.8bn (USD364 mil.) to create a semiconductor technology research institute, aiming to mitigate US chip restrictions and commence operations at Yuen Long InnoPark by 2025. [RTHK](#) [SCMP](#) Dec 19

2024 outlook: Growth will worsen, exports expected to rebound, fiscal deficit to reach HKD110bn

Economists predict Hong Kong's GDP growth will slow to 3.3% in 2023 and 2.7% in 2024, while the Chamber of Commerce forecasts 2.9% for 2024. Exports might drop 9% this year but could increase by 4% to 6% in 2024 due to AI and electronics demand. Despite this, According to the latest [Business Prospects Survey](#) by the city's oldest business group, 42% of businesses expect lower turnover compared to 2019. The government anticipates a HKD110bn (USD14.1bn) deficit in 2023, with revenues at HKD651bn (USD83.5bn) against HKD761bn (USD97.6bn) expenditures, depleting reserves to 11 months. [RTHK](#) [TS](#) [Bloomberg](#) [SCMP](#) Dec 7, 12, 14 & 15

75% of companies struggling to source talent; scheme unveiled to attract investment and talent

In Hong Kong, 75% of companies face talent shortages, down from 85%. To attract workers, businesses are offering higher wages, with an expected average salary increase of 3.3% in 2024. The ManpowerGroup survey, covering over 40,000 employers in 41 countries, reveals these trends. To combat this, the government launched a scheme requiring foreign investors to have a minimum net worth of HKD30 million (USD3.85 million), including HKD27 million (USD3.46 million) in assets and a HKD3 million (USD384'600) investment in innovation and technology industries. [SCMP](#) [RTHK](#) [Survey](#) Dec 12 & 19

Hong Kong-listed companies ploughed record USD14 bn into buy-backs in 2023

Share buy-backs by Hong Kong-listed companies have hit a record this year, as unrelenting sell-offs have made Asia's third-largest stock market the cheapest in the world. Some 186 companies have spent HKD111.4 bn (USD14.3 bn) repurchasing their own shares. Social-media giant Tencent Holdings, insurer AIA Group and HSBC Holdings have spent the most on buy-backs this year. The repurchasing spree has come as the Hang Seng Index heads for an unprecedented fourth straight year of decline, as China's slowdown and the most aggressive interest-rate hikes in the US for four decades trigger foreign outflows. [SCMP](#) Dec 12

Hong Kong home prices down 20% from historical peak, rebound hinged on US interest rate cuts

Hong Kong home prices have dropped by almost 20% from their historical peak in 2021, according to the Rating and Evaluation department. Swiss investment bank UBS expects home prices to decline by 10% in 2024 as high interest rates dent demand and an abundance of housing stock boosts supply. The unfavorable economic environment and high borrowing costs are likely to prompt developers – many already facing a shortage of cash – to offer flats at discounted rates, UBS said in November. Property agents believe now is an opportune time to consider buying. According to property firm JLL, Small-and-medium sized homes in Hong Kong will fall in price by another 10% next year to settle at levels seen back in 2016. [SCMP](#) [RTHK](#) Dec 11 & 12

Moody's cuts HK outlook to negative

Moody's Investors Service has downgraded the credit outlook for Hong Kong from stable to negative, marking the first time the city had lost its stable outlook since January 2022. 'Following signs of reduced autonomy of Hong Kong's political and judiciary institutions, notably with the imposition of a National Security Law in 2020 and changes to Hong Kong's electoral system, Moody's expects further erosion of the city's autonomy of political, institutional and economic decisions to continue incrementally,' the ratings agency said. [SCMP](#) Dec 6

Chinese EV battery giant CATL will set up R&D centre in Hong Kong

Science Park to host centre for Contemporary Amperex Technology (CATL), according to government source, with about 500 staff to be recruited. Move by world's biggest maker of batteries for electric vehicles would mark further win following similar announcement by drug giant [AstraZeneca](#). Hong Kong has been stepping up efforts to lure foreign investment. Last month, the government's Office for Attracting Strategic

Enterprises announced that it had attracted more than 30 foreign and mainland Chinese companies which pledged to invest about HKD30 billion (USD3.8 billion) in the city. [SCMP](#) Dec 6

US reducing reliance on China forces HK exporters to sever some local, mainland ties

A push by the US to drastically reduce its reliance on mainland China has forced Hong Kong exporters to sever some ties at home and over the border, with firms also cutting down on imports of raw materials due to threats of boycotts, industry leaders have told the Post. Hong Kong firms in Vietnam say US asking them to register their company in Singapore, and nominate representative from city state. But some brush off such requests, as well as demands to cut use of raw materials from mainland China, saying impact of decoupling still limited. But a shippers' organization said moves to diversify away from the country would not be easy, as it was an integral part of the global supply chain and difficult to replace. Amid the disruption, manufacturers and brands both locally and abroad said they had to face new business realities, some of which required overhauling operations. [SCMP](#) Dec 3

Society / Culture / Education

Hongkongers' outlook for future of city's development takes 'very significant drop,' survey finds

The annual survey by the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute reveals Hongkongers have a net optimism rate of zero for the city's 2024 development, a significant drop from the previous year's 28 percentage points. Despite widespread pessimism about Hong Kong's future, individuals showed less negativity regarding their personal prospects, with many expecting personal improvement. The sentiment reflects a divergence between public and personal outlooks amid economic and governance concerns. [HKFP](#) Dec 28

Hong Kong's showcase of national achievements: a threat to Science and Heritage Museums?

A Hong Kong government proposal has sparked controversy as it suggests relocating the Science Museum from Tsim Sha Tsui to make way for a new museum dedicated to national achievements, the Chinese Communist Party, and China's founding. This new museum will also highlight national security and aerospace technology. Meanwhile, the future of the Heritage Museum, currently located in Sha Tin, is uncertain. The city's culture minister, Kevin Yeung Yun-hung, stated this is just an option, emphasizing individual plans for each museum. Critics worry this may lead to the Heritage Museum's closure, noting these are among 15 public museums managed by the government. [SCMP](#) Dec 25

Macau

Government disagrees with Moody's downgrade to negative

Moody's has downgraded Macao's outlook from stable to negative, mirroring its latest assessment of mainland China's deteriorating economic situation. According to the US-headquartered agency, 'Macao's large tourism and gaming sectors are heavily dependent on China, while its banking system is similarly exposed to cross-border claims to the mainland.' Much like the Hong Kong administration, the Macao government has expressed its disagreement with the outlook changes, stressing that the territory's 'abundant fiscal and foreign exchange reserves' would enhance a 'strong ability to respond to and withstand external risks.' [MB](#) [MPD](#) Dec 7

Lawmakers pass CE election amendment bill

The Macau Legislative Assembly passed an amendment to the Chief Executive Election Law, mandating candidates to uphold the MSAR Basic Law and pledge allegiance to the PRC and MSAR. The new law, effective January 1, requires candidates to sign a declaration of allegiance and undergo assessment by the Committee for Safeguarding National Security of the MSAR. Disqualified candidates cannot appeal nor run for five years, and inciting blank or invalid votes is criminalized with up to three years imprisonment. [MPD](#) Dec 15

Special Focus: District Council Election 2023

Hong Kong appoints 179 councilors; DAB leads amid low turnout, boycott arrests.

Hong Kong held its first "patriots-only" District Council election under a new system, with the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress (DAB) emerging as the biggest winner, claiming 109 out of 264 seats. However, the election saw the lowest-ever turnout at 27.5%, with 1.2 million voters participating, and over 93% of the newly elected also holding positions in the three committees responsible for electing and nominating candidates. Chief Executive John Lee announced the appointment of 179 district councilors amidst discussions on voter engagement. Additionally, six arrests were made on election day, and a man was detained earlier for inciting election boycotts. [HKGov](#) Dec 12; [SCMP](#) Dec 11; [HKFP](#) Dec 11; [HKFP](#) [SCMP1](#) [SCMP2](#) [HKElectionGuide](#) Dec 10 & 11; [SCMP](#) Dec 4

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