



July in Hong Kong

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A condensed press review prepared by the Consulate General of Switzerland in HK

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Economy + Finance

Hong Kong's MPF wipes out last year's losses with strong first-half gains thanks to stocks rally, easing of trade war (SCMP, July 5): Hong Kong's compulsory pension scheme has clawed back all of last year's losses as a global stock market rally and an easing in trade tensions boosted returns in the first half of 2019. The HK\$813 billion (US\$104.43 billion) Mandatory Provident Fund on average achieved 8.4 per cent growth in the first half of this year, according to Lipper. The fund lost 8.2 per cent last year, its worst decline since 2011 when markets were hit by the European bond crisis. The MPF is a compulsory retirement scheme that covers 2.9 million Hong Kong workers and self-employed people.

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Political unrest hitting Hong Kong where it hurts – in the wallet (SCMP, July 8): Hong Kong's ongoing political unrest has soured shoppers' appetite for spending, damaging retail sales and adding to the city's economic woes, analysts have said. "The overall picture is gloomy," said Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce senior economist Wilson Chong Sze-kit of the consumer spending outlook. "If the political tensions continue or escalate, they could take a bigger toll on retail sales, by straining consumer sentiment of local households, as well as pushing tourists towards other destinations." Mariana Kou, head of China education and Hong Kong consumer research at investment group CLSA, believes June's retail sales could fall as much as 10 per cent from the same time last year. "June could be very tough, considering the protests and business disruptions," she said. Even taking the recent political unrest into account, American credit-rating agency Moody's reaffirmed the city's "very strong" Aa2 rating.

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Expatriate bankers struggle to find new jobs in Hong Kong as cost-cutting and demand for Mandarin speakers change labour market (SCMP, July 12): For years, Hong Kong was a hot spot with plum jobs for overseas bankers as global firms hired aggressively. But many recently laid-off bankers in the city are finding that cost-cutting and a demand for Mandarin speakers have diminished the opportunities for expats in Asia's financial hub. Expatriate bankers who lost their jobs and want to remain in Hong Kong often have to consider lower-paying options or demotions. While global banks are ramping up their focus on China, more of them are looking for people with language skills and networks on the Chinese mainland. Expatriate executives in Hong Kong earn US\$276,417 a year on average, including benefits, according to a May report by consultancy ECA International.

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Hong Kong protests will put off 350,000 mainland Chinese tourists this year, HSBC estimates (SCMP, July 16): The massive protests that have rattled Hong Kong in recent weeks will put hundreds of thousands of mainland Chinese tourists off visiting the city this year, according to HSBC. The bank believes that the number of visitors from the mainland will continue to grow in 2019, but at a slightly slower rate than it had forecast before people took to the streets in their millions to demonstrate against the now-suspended extradition bill. It has revised down its estimated growth of mainland tourist arrivals for the year to 9 per cent from 9.7 per cent. The initial forecast would have equated to 56 million Chinese tourists. That means, according to the revised forecast, Hong Kong will welcome 350,000 fewer visitors from the mainland this year.

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Hong Kong unveils plan to install 400 multifunctional lamp posts as part of smart city drive (SCMP, July 17): Four hundred multifunctional lamp posts will be installed around Hong Kong over the next three years as part of the government's plan to promote smart city development, with HK\$272 million (US\$34.75 million) being set aside for the project. Equipped with sensors, closed-circuit cameras,

data networks and other related digital facilities, the smart lamp posts could be used to collect air quality, traffic flow and weather data. The data would also be available to the public, government departments and various industries for analysis. Tony Wong, assistant government chief information officer, stressed the smart lamp posts would not cause privacy breaches for citizens. Some functions of the lamps have been withheld until wide public consultations are conducted. Approval from district councils would also be required before these functions could be implemented.

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Hong Kong's retail sector may see double-digit decline year on year over summer holidays due to extradition bill protests, business association warns (SCMP, July 17): Hong Kong's retail sector should brace for a double-digit percentile decline year on year over the summer holidays, a leading industry association has warned, after more violent clashes against the city's controversial extradition bill broke out in two shopping districts. The Hong Kong Retail Management Association said most of its 8,000 member shops in the city had recorded a drop in revenue in June and the first week of July on average, with some posting a fall of double digits. The association said massive protests had led to suspension of business in shops and also affected the income of retail workers. "The protests affected people's lives and the business environment. The association called on the government to solve the problem peacefully and bring [back] social order."

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Standard Chartered cuts Hong Kong's growth prospects through 2021 as US-China trade war puts the squeeze on city's economy (SCMP, July 19): Standard Chartered has lowered its economic growth forecast for the city through 2021 due to headwinds from a prolonged US-China trade war, the latest among several financial institutions to cut their outlook. Hong Kong's gross domestic product (GDP) may grow 1.4 per cent in 2019. "Whereas the US and China met at the G20 and agreed to resume trade negotiations ... it does not seem likely that they will come up with a trade deal soon," Kelvin Lau, Standard Chartered's senior economist, said. The dim view is also weighing on public discontent in the city, which has spilled over into protest rallies of unprecedented scale, as thousands of people continued to vent their dissatisfaction in the streets more than a month after an estimated 1 million people marched to oppose a controversial extradition bill.

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Hong Kong teachers and researchers working on mainland to get three-year tax break in bid to boost Greater Bay Area (SCMP, July 22): Teachers and researchers employed in Hong Kong but working across the border could soon receive a three-year exemption from mainland taxes as part of the government's bid to accelerate development of the Greater Bay Area. Financial Secretary Paul Chan said he recently signed an agreement with Wang Jun, the commissioner of the State Taxation Administration, which would allow a qualified teacher or researcher who is employed in Hong Kong or the mainland and works on the other side to be exempted from taxes – where they work – for three years. The proposal would come into force after ratification procedures were completed and notification by both sides, including the vetting by the Legislative Council.

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Hong Kong's crucial retail sector slowed by high rent, manpower shortage and staff turnover, survey shows (SCMP, July 23): Hong Kong's notoriously high rent is the biggest challenge for local retailers followed by manpower shortages that limit customer service, a new survey by KPMG and the Hong Kong Retail Management Association has found. The retail association said the retail industry requires undesirable working hours, including on public holidays, which might be unfavourable to workers, particularly young people. She said this was a factor in the workforce shortage. The city's retail industry is also facing uncertainties from the US-China trade war and the recent extradition bill protests.

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Hong Kong promotes Eddie Yue to lead monetary authority, taking no chances on its choice amid turbulent economic times (SCMP, July 26): Eddie Yue, who joined the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) from its establishment in 1993, has been promoted to head the de facto central bank, as the government looks to the veteran insider to help the city chart a steady course through unprecedented turbulence. Yue will take over on October 1 from Norman Chan as the HKMA's third chief executive in 26 years, overseeing one of the world's largest currency reserves. His promotion suggests that Hong Kong's government is taking no chances in its choice for the guardian of the city's currency and one of the world's largest reserves.

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Hong Kong's export slump hits three-year low in June 2019 due to US-China trade war and drop in local consumption (SCMP, July 26): Hong Kong's exports in June plummeted at the fastest rate in more than three years under the shadow of the US-China trade war. June's overall export figures dropped 9 per cent year on year to HK\$309.6 billion (US\$39.6 billion). Exports to Asia were also down

by 8.4 per cent. Posting at HK\$1.89 trillion, the city's total export figures fell 3.6 per cent in the first half of 2019, compared with the same period last year. Financial Secretary Paul Chan said the sharp fall in the overall export figures last month was linked to the US-China trade war, while local consumption had also dropped.

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Extradition bill protests will hit Hong Kong economy as it reels from US-China trade war, Financial Secretary Paul Chan says (SCMP, July 28): "I am sure everyone understands that the longer the protests stretch on, the effect on small and medium businesses will become more obvious and the livelihoods of some groups of citizens will be impacted," Financial Secretary Paul Chan wrote in his blog post titled "Internal and external troubles". He continued: "To foreign businesses and tourists, Hong Kong now appears unstable, which has affected their interest in coming to Hong Kong for leisure, business and investments." He also warned that the continuous economic downturn would likely lead to an increase in unemployment, which is currently at a low of 2.8 per cent.

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American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong urges 'clear leadership', investigation after more extradition bill clashes (SCMP, July 29): The American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong has urged the city's leader to immediately deal with the root causes of recent violence and political deadlock, which its members say have taken a toll on business confidence and its image as a safe place. It said the issues arising from the extradition bill protests hurt its members' revenue instantly, and prompted longer-term doubts over cancelled events, shelved investments and even a deepening perception within their companies and overseas customers that Hong Kong had become a riskier place to do business, according to its recent survey. AmCham members representing sectors ranging from financial services to logistics and tech, said the formal withdrawal of the bill and the setting-up of an inquiry would help restore confidence in Hong Kong as a global financial centre.

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Hong Kong protests, government 'inability' to address concerns damaging business confidence, Fitch warns (SCMP, July 31): Hong Kong's current political unrest and rising public distrust in the government run the risk of damaging business confidence and eroding the quality and effectiveness of governance, Fitch Ratings warned. Protests featuring diverse groups, with widening demands underscoring the steady rise in social and political divisions in recent years, emanated mainly from the deep-seated apprehension of the erosion of autonomy under "one country, two systems", as well as economic inequality and high living costs, the global rating agency said. Hong Kong's AA+ rating, which is three notches above mainland China's A+ rating, rested on the assumption that the territory's governance standards, rule of law, policy framework, as well as business and regulatory environments remain distinct from those of the mainland, Fitch said.

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Domestic politics

Anatomy of a divided city: extradition protesters say frustration with government brought them to the streets (SCMP, July 2): As a rule, July 1 in Hong Kong is a peaceful day, a time to celebrate the city's freedoms on the anniversary of its return to Chinese rule in 1997. This time it was different. Instead of calm demonstrations, July 1 unfolded in a series of escalating clashes, outbursts and destruction. It was a day of anger and solidarity with an estimated 550,000 black-clad protesters taking to the streets to denounce the government. It was the third mass protest march in less than a month. A march on June 9 drew an estimated 1 million protesters and a march on June 16 was attended by an estimated 2 million. Throughout July 1, radical demonstrators tried to swarm the Legislative Council, shattering glass doors and dismantling metal bars. Riot police stood by inside the building throughout the day while the crowd went on the rampage outside, and were nowhere to be seen when the protesters finally forced their way inside at night and vandalised the chamber. It was after midnight when hundreds of riot police left their headquarters in Wan Chai to swoop into action. By that time, the last of the diehard protesters remaining in the chamber had left the building.

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Angry Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam emerges after day of unprecedented violence and slams protesters but says she is willing to listen (SCMP, July 2): Hong Kong's embattled government emerged early on July 2 morning, condemning the violent takeover of the city's legislature by mostly young protesters, and vowing to go after those who trashed the building and fled before riot police moved in. Chief Executive Carrie Lam said at a 4am press conference she was angry and saddened by the violence and chaos. "I am very outraged and distressed and I strongly condemn it," she said. "We have seen two entirely different public scenes. One is a regular march on July 1. Regardless of the number of participants in the march, the march was peaceful and generally orderly. This fully reflects the inclusiveness of Hong Kong society, and the core values we attach to peace and order," Lam said at police headquarters. "The second scene, which really saddens and shocks a lot of people, is the extreme

use of violence and vandalism by protesters who stormed into the Legislative Council building. This is something that we should seriously condemn, because nothing is more important than the rule of law in Hong Kong.” She said the government would “pursue the lawbreaking behaviour to the end”.

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Public increasingly backing radical Hong Kong protesters despite unease over violence, say academics, as Carrie Lam's government faces even greater resistance against extradition bill (SCMP, July 8): Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement against the extradition bill received a shot in the arm to keep the pressure on the government to completely withdraw the unpopular legislation, political commentators said after the mass rally in Kowloon on July 7. The fact the older generation had turned out in force to support youngsters spearheading the movement meant that the recent protest violence, widely condemned across the city, had not turned public opinion in favour of the administration, they said. Dr Cheung Chor-yung, a senior teaching fellow at the City University's department of public policy, said: “Some people are getting more sympathetic to the protesters because they see that the government is too stubborn and has not responded to the demands by the protesters despite rounds of protests, be they peaceful or violent.” Political analyst Dr Ma Ngok, of Chinese University, also said: “Members of the public have not distanced themselves from the young protesters. It is clear that people have more sympathy and understanding towards their actions.”

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Beijing's top man in Hong Kong backs Carrie Lam and slams 'uncivilised radicals' (SCMP, July 12): Beijing's top representative in Hong Kong has stressed the central government's strong backing for the city's embattled leader Carrie Lam while condemning “uncivilised radicals” behind recent protest violence. Wang Zhimin, the director of Beijing's liaison office in Hong Kong, underlined the importance of the rule of law and decried the use of violence by young protesters who broke into the Legislative Council on July 1 and damaged the premises. “The central government firmly supports Lam and her administration to continue its effective governance in accordance with the law, playing a proactive role,” Wang said. He also criticised a minority of Hongkongers for colluding with foreign forces to “mess up” the city. Opposition lawmaker Claudia Mo, convenor of the pan-democratic bloc, said Lam should be held accountable. “Carrie Lam is the ultimate culprit, she has been the perpetrator of what's happening in Hong Kong,” Mo said. “She's facing this fundamental loss of confidence and trust from Hong Kong people ... She must come out urgently to respond to the people's demands.”

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Hong Kong sees record surge of voters since 2003 as 350,000 new people register after extradition bill protests (SCMP, July 12): A record 350,000 Hongkongers have signed up to vote in the past two months amid calls from extradition bill protesters to oust pro-government politicians in the coming elections. The news was a boost to the city's opposition pan-democrats, who, according to analysts, stand a better chance to win seats in the district council elections in November. The Registration and Electoral Office said that more than 350,000 voter applications had been received in the latest round of a registration campaign that began in May. It was a record jump in new registrations since at least 2003. Last year, 81,363 people registered as voters. In 2017, there were 83,161 registrations. Past experience suggested people would always flock to register as voters following a large-scale pro-democracy campaign. At the end of 2018, there were more than 3.81 million registered voters.

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Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam slams 'rioters' who attacked police in Sha Tin on Sunday and calls on all residents to defend rule of law (SCMP, July 15): Hong Kong's embattled leader Carrie Lam has condemned the “rioters” who attacked police officers on July 14, saying their violent acts cannot be tolerated in a society with the rule of law. Lam also dismissed suggestions she had tendered her resignation, after visiting injured police officers at a hospital. At least 22 people were injured when violent clashes broke out in Sha Tin on July 14. Commissioner of Police Stephen Lo described protesters involved in pitched battles at shopping centres as “rioters”, and vowed to track down those responsible and hold them accountable. Lam said police officers had remained restrained while “rioters attacked them”. She also urged people to defend the rule of law.

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Hong Kong human rights activists denounce escalating violence used by police and protesters in ongoing extradition battles (SCMP, July 15): Local human rights activists expressed concern over injuries suffered by protesters and police during a bloody clash in Sha Tin on July 14, pointing out that both sides had increased their levels of violence as the protests continued. The confrontation left 28 people injured, including 13 police officers – one of whom had part of his finger bitten off. Video footage and photographs showed protesters bleeding from head wounds and one having his wrist bent back by police after being subdued. Icarus Wong, a member of Civil Rights Observer, said the situation was worrying. “Injuries to both protesters and the police have become more serious,” he said. Law Yuk-kai,

the director of Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor and who was at the protest, said police and protesters were hostile to each other. He urged the force to take a softer approach to future protests to avoid further bloodshed. The protest in Sha Tin started as a peaceful march on July 14 that organisers said drew an estimated 115,000 people. Minor scuffles broke out after the march ended, but the situation intensified after 9pm, when police tried to clear protesters from streets in Sha Tin. Protesters instead retreated to New Town Plaza, a shopping centre linked to the Sha Tin MTR station, where they faced off with police in riot gear.

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Embattled Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam's approval rating rises a little but she remains least popular chief executive since city's handover in 1997 amid fallout over extradition bill (SCMP, July 17): The approval rating of Hong Kong's embattled leader Carrie Lam has rebounded slightly to 33.4 out of 100, but she remains the least popular chief executive in the 22 years since the city returned to Chinese rule, according to a survey by the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute. But the ratings of three other top officials have sunk to new lows, with Secretary for Justice Teresa Cheng scoring just 21.6 out of 100, with 68 per cent of respondents against her remaining in the job as the fallout from the now-suspended extradition bill continues. Only 21 per cent of respondents wanted John Lee to remain as security chief while 59 per cent wanted him to step down. The survey was carried out between July 2 and 8, after extradition bill protesters stormed and vandalised the Legislative Council.

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Chinese officials scramble to deliver new Hong Kong strategy but military response not an option (SCMP, July 18): Mainland Chinese officials in charge of Hong Kong affairs are working on a comprehensive strategy to solve the city's political crisis that will be presented to the top leadership for deliberation soon, according to people familiar with the discussion, but resorting to military force is not on the table. Officials are developing both an immediate strategy to handle the increasingly violent weeks-long protests in the city, as well as a long-term plan that may lead to an overhaul of Beijing's approach to managing the restless former British colony. Sources say at this stage Beijing still believes the crisis is best left for the Hong Kong government to handle and it should not get directly involved. The principles of avoiding bloodshed and keeping the city "largely stable" remain unchanged. Despite speculation to the contrary, they are firm about not considering the use of the People's Liberation Army as an option.

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Hong Kong protesters 'went to Taiwan in June' to explore options for asylum (SCMP, July 20): The South China Morning Post has learned that more than 30 Hongkongers fled to Taiwan on July 2. Taiwanese activists revealed that between a dozen and 60 protesters had arrived from Hong Kong since early July, or were planning to seek shelter in Taiwan. Hong Kong has been rocked by protests and violent clashes since early June – including the Legislative Council being stormed and vandalised on July 1. But their status remains unclear, since the protesters have not yet been charged with criminal offences in Hong Kong, and verifying their claims will be difficult. Taiwan also lacks clear and specific laws on handling asylum and refugee claims. In April, bookseller Lam Wing-kee – who claimed he was kidnapped by Chinese security agents in 2015 for selling books banned across the border – left Hong Kong for Taiwan.

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Two of three men arrested over Hong Kong's biggest bomb plot, discovered on eve of major anti-government protest, are members of pro-independence groups (SCMP, July 21): At least two of the three men arrested over the city's biggest bomb plot are members of different pro-independence groups Hong Kong National Front and Hong Kong Independence Union, suggesting there could have been collaboration across the movement. Both groups have denied knowledge of the explosives found at an industrial building in Tsuen Wan. Among the seizures were knives, catapults, helmets, face masks and goggles. A police source said detectives were still investigating the source of the explosives and what they were intended for.

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Central Hong Kong becomes battleground as riot police clash with protesters after third major march against extradition bill and siege of Beijing's liaison office (SCMP, July 22): The heart of Hong Kong's business district was turned into a war zone on July 21 night as riot police fired tear gas and rubber bullets into crowds of protesters to chase them off the streets, after a day of defiance that saw them lay siege to Beijing's liaison office for the first time in the social unrest over the now-suspended extradition bill. The government issued a late-night statement to strongly condemn protesters for deviating from their mandated march route and challenging Beijing's sovereignty by besieging the liaison office, where they vandalised the national emblem. The liaison office statement said: "The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government strongly condemns the protesters who blatantly challenged the national sovereignty by maliciously besieging and storming the [liaison] building as well

as defacing the national emblem. The HKSAR Government will deal with these acts in a serious manner in accordance with the law.” “The [local government] is concerned that a small number of radicals incited the masses in an organised manner, challenged the rule of law, and even stormed the [liaison] office in Hong Kong,” the statement said. “Such acts threaten the law and order in the SAR and ‘one country, two systems’. It is totally unacceptable to society.” That was after masked protesters threw eggs at the front of the liaison office building in Sai Ying Pun, the symbol of Beijing’s presence in the city, spray-painted obscenities on the walls, blackened security cameras and shone laser light beams at staff trapped inside before they retreated.

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At least 45 injured as rod-wielding mob dressed in white rampages through Yuen Long MTR station, beating screaming protesters (SCMP, July 22): At least 36 people were injured in unprecedented late-night violence at a Hong Kong railway station on July 21, as a rampaging mob of men in white T-shirts attacked black-clad protesters and passengers indiscriminately. They hurled objects at protesters and travellers alike, and assaulted members of the public, including journalists. The government condemned the attacks in statement. The statement said: “In Yuen Long, some people congregated at the platforms of the MTR station and train compartments, attacking commuters. It led to confrontations and injuries.” It continued: “This is absolutely unacceptable to Hong Kong as a society that observes the rule of law. The [government] strongly condemns any violence and will seriously take enforcement actions.” Three press watchdog groups strongly condemned the assault of two journalists at Yuen Long station.

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Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam blasts violence at Yuen Long and liaison office, amid further extradition bill unrest (SCMP, July 22): Hong Kong’s leader hit out at “shocking” violence in Yuen Long on July 21, and the siege of the central government’s office in the city by protesters who defaced the building facade and national emblem. Chief Executive Carrie Lam met the press with her full team of top officials as well as Commissioner of Police Stephen Lo, after a night of unprecedented violence in the city. She strongly condemned the attacks in Yuen Long, which she described as shocking, and pledged police would fully investigate them. Lam dismissed as “completely groundless” accusations that police colluded with the suspected triad members. On the unrest outside the liaison office, Lam criticised the defacement of the national emblem on the front of the building, and said the protesters were challenging the country’s sovereignty and the principle of “one country, two systems”.

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Top Beijing representative in Hong Kong condemns attack on liaison office during extradition protest, says rioters will be punished (SCMP, July 23): Beijing’s top official in Hong Kong has slammed unprecedented attack on his office by anti-government protesters who defaced the national emblem on the building front, saying their radical actions had offended all Chinese people. “The recent intense protests in Hong Kong completely went beyond the limits of peaceful demonstration. Some protesters publicly challenged the bottom line of the city’s rule of law, the authority of the constitution and the Basic Law, as well as the central government’s authority, sovereignty, national security, dignity and symbols,” Liaison office director Wang Zhimin said.

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Hong Kong police to launch raids on white-clad thugs, including members of 14K and Wo Shing Wo triad gangs, who unleashed terror on protesters and bystanders in Yuen Long (SCMP, July 23): Police were set to launch a series of raids in Hong Kong to arrest the white-clad men behind mob violence in Yuen Long, which left at least 45 people injured. Force insiders told the Post they believed more than 100 attackers wielding wooden sticks and metal rods, including members of the 14K and Wo Shing Wo triad gangs, were involved in terrorising protesters and passers-by. As of July 23 night, 11 people had been arrested, and sources said 10 other attackers had already fled the city.

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Chinese military can be deployed at Hong Kong’s request to contain protests, Beijing says (SCMP, July 24): The Chinese military has said that it can be deployed to Hong Kong to maintain social order at the request of the city’s government, and said that July 21’s siege of the mainland government’s liaison office in the city was intolerable. Wu Qian, a spokesman for China’s defence ministry, reiterated state media reports by saying the vandalism of the central government liaison office in Hong Kong – after weeks of mass protests against the city’s extradition bill – was a challenge to the bottom line of the principle of “one country, two systems”. Asked how the defence ministry would handle events in Hong Kong and independence forces, Wu said only that “Article 14 of the garrison law has clear stipulations”, without elaborating further. That article states that the Hong Kong government – in accordance with the Basic Law, the city’s mini-constitution – can ask the central government for assistance from the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA’s) Hong Kong garrison for the maintenance of public order and disaster relief.

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Civil servants threaten strike in frustration over police handling of Hong Kong unrest as Lennon Wall appears in Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office (SCMP, July 26): Hundreds of Hong Kong civil servants and government employees have anonymously aired their frustrations against the city's administration and the police's handling of the recent unrest, with some threatening industrial action if their demands are not met by mid-August. Civil servants from at least 44 departments, including non-frontline officers from the police force, the justice department and judiciary, issued two petitions. Apart from written petitions, dozens of messages echoing similar calls were posted on a "Lennon Wall" in the office of Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office (Pico), a strategic department directly reporting to Chief Executive Carrie Lam.

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Chaos, tear gas and anger as protesters descend on Yuen Long (SCMP, July 27): In the northern town of Yuen Long, riot police used tear gas, sponge grenades, pepper spray and batons to drive back protesters, who responded with umbrellas, sticks and projectiles. The latest rally came after an armed mob attacked anti-government protesters and passers-by in the area on July 21, injuring at least 45 people. Tens of thousands of protesters, in clear defiance of a police ban, took to the streets of Yuen Long. At least three groups had applied to hold protests in the town to condemn the assaults. Fearing an escalation of the violence, police made the rare decision to reject the applications, but the demonstration still went ahead. In the crowd was Leonard Cheng, president of Lingnan University, one of eight publicly funded colleges in Hong Kong. Cheng said he was there as an "observer" because he was worried about the dangers facing students and staff attending the demonstration.

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Hong Kong protesters use 'guerilla tactics', clashing with police and unleashing more chaos – all the way from Sai Wan to Causeway Bay (SCMP, July 29): Hong Kong's young protesters changed tactics as they turned a rally in Central into a 6km multipronged march all the way from Sai Wan to Causeway Bay. Tens of thousands of protesters defied a police ban for the second consecutive day and occupied major thoroughfares on Hong Kong Island. Several protesters told the Post that the new tactic of splitting the main body of protesters into different groups was a way to drain the energy and resources of police. Police made at least a dozen arrests while tear gas was fired at various locations on Hong Kong Island. The protest movement, which started in June by denouncing the now-shelved extradition bill, seems to have transformed into a drive against the Hong Kong government – and even the city's constitutional system. The most frequent chant in the crowd on Sunday was "Liberate Hong Kong: the revolution of our times".

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Beijing tells Hong Kong return to normality 'the most pressing priority' in response to unrest and protests that followed extradition bill controversy (SCMP, July 30): Beijing made it clear to Hong Kong that a return to law and order should be "the most pressing priority", and praised the city's beleaguered police officers in an unprecedented show of support, despite heavy public criticism over allegations of excessive force used against anti-government protesters. The Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office (HKMAO) spokesman Yang Guang reiterated the central government's support for embattled Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam and urged the Hong Kong public to oppose the use of violence. Even those who defaced the national emblem and spray-painted anti-Chinese slogans on the central government's liaison office building recently were merely described by him as "a small number of radicals". Instead, he focused on appealing to Hong Kong people to defend the rule of law as a core value of the city and a cornerstone of its success. When asked about the possibility of the People's Liberation Army being called in, Yang would only say the basis for such a deployment was outlined in the Basic Law and Garrison Law. Yang also lashed out at some foreign critics for making "irresponsible and "laughable" comments about Hong Kong. He warned China would not tolerate any foreign intervention. Opposition lawmakers from the pan-democratic camp decried it as another sign that Beijing had lost touch with the Hong Kong public and misunderstood the root causes of their grievances. Most mainland Chinese analysts described Yang's comments as soft and moderate. "It shows Beijing is still patient and tolerant. It wants to win over the majority in Hong Kong by making a difference between peaceful demonstrations and unlawful protests and violence," said Zhang Dinghui, an expert on China's Hong Kong policy at Shenzhen University.

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Hong Kong police 'under investigation' by corruption watchdog over failure to protect public during Yuen Long attacks (SCMP, July 31): The Independent Commission Against Corruption has initiated an investigation into allegations of police misconduct over the force's much-criticised failure to protect the public from mob violence on July 21 in Yuen Long, according to sources. Opposition lawmaker and former ICAC investigator Lam Cheuk-ting, a vocal critic of police action against protesters, said there was enough proof to suggest that law enforcers in Yuen Long had neglected their duty and deliberately allowed the attackers to go on a rampage. Also on July 30, 44 out of 49 suspects were

charged with rioting after they were arrested during an illegal protest in Western District on July 28. Separately, five out of another 14 people arrested over July 27's illegal rally in Yuen Long, when the town was rocked by more protest violence, appeared in court on July 30 to face charges of obstructing police or possessing offensive weapons.

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International relations

China protests over British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt's warning on Hong Kong agreement (SCMP, July 3): China lodged protests with Britain over Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt's warning that Beijing would face serious consequences if it failed to honour the terms of the agreement to hand over Hong Kong. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said Beijing had made "stern representations" over the comments, and accused Hunt of still harbouring "colonial illusions". Hunt said that the Sino-British Joint Declaration, signed in 1984 and setting out the terms for Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty, was a legally binding agreement "to be honoured ... and if it isn't there will be serious consequences". Hunt's comments came after Hong Kong was rocked by some of the worst political unrest since its 1997 handover from Britain to China. The Office of the Commissioner of the Foreign Ministry in Hong Kong also issued a strongly worded statement, condemning Hunt's comments as "ridiculous and hypocritical". The diplomatic offensive continued at a press conference in London by Chinese ambassador Liu Xiaoming, who said: "I do hope that the British government will realise the consequences and would refrain from further interference from further damaging their relationship."

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Beijing slams Hong Kong tycoon Jimmy Lai and US officials over Washington meetings on extradition bill, using words 'national scum and Hong Kong sinners' (SCMP, July 10): Beijing's foreign ministry has lashed out at Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai and two top US officials, accusing them of threatening China's national security by discussing the now-suspended extradition bill in Washington. A spokesman for the central government's foreign ministry commissioner in Hong Kong said that Beijing "resolutely opposes foreign forces' intervention in Hong Kong affairs". The statement was aimed at meetings between Lai, US Vice-President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. According to US Department of State spokesman Morgan Ortagus, they "discussed developments related to amendments to Hong Kong's Fugitive Offenders Ordinance and the status of Hong Kong's autonomy under the 'one country, two systems' framework". Beijing foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said that it was wrong for any foreign force to meddle in Hong Kong affairs in any way.

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European Parliament approves motion on Hong Kong, as Beijing calls it full of 'ignorance and prejudice' (SCMP, July 19): The European Parliament voted to adopt a resolution calling for the Hong Kong government to formally withdraw its highly unpopular extradition bill, just hours after Beijing accused the motion of being full of "ignorance and prejudice". The resolution, tabled by 85 parliamentary members, called on the Hong Kong authorities to immediately release and drop charges against the peaceful protesters, and set up an independent investigation into the use of force by its police force. "It is full of ignorance, prejudice and double standard hypocrisy. It is pointing fingers and making orders at the SAR [special administrative region] government and the central government's Hong Kong policies. Their ignorance and attitude have left people speechless with astonishment and horror," China's foreign ministry said. "The Chinese side strongly condemns this and expresses its strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition." Amid reports that Germany and Britain were considering suspending arms sales to the Hong Kong police, the European Parliament's motion "calls for the EU, its member states and the international community to work towards the imposition of appropriate export control mechanisms to deny China, and in particular Hong Kong, access to technologies used to violate basic rights".

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Donald Trump says Xi Jinping 'acted responsibly' in Hong Kong extradition bill protests (SCMP, July 23): US President Donald Trump said that Chinese President Xi Jinping had acted "responsibly" in allowing the demonstrations to continue in Hong Kong. "I'm not involved in it very much but I think President Xi of China has acted responsibly, very responsibly," Trump told reporters in the White House when asked about the violence on July 21. "They've been out there protesting for a long time." Trump did not directly address July 21's events, but called the ongoing protests "relatively non-violent". He said he hoped Xi would "do the right thing", without elaborating. "China could stop [the protests] if they wanted," the US leader said.

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Beijing says Hong Kong citizens would be 'saddened' by foreign countries' decisions to upgrade city's security status following clashes (SCMP, July 25): Hua Chunying, a spokeswoman for Beijing's foreign ministry, has said that Hong Kong people would be saddened by the recent decisions by foreign countries to issue travel warnings to their citizens for the city, amid recent clashes between

protesters, local gangs and police. After the Yuen Long clashes, Japan and South Korea's consulates in Hong Kong have issued travel warnings or alerts on July 23, with the former warning of indiscriminate attacks in various communities in the New Territories. Other countries, including the United States and Britain, had previously issued such warnings. The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which has for some time been advising its citizens to maintain a "high degree of caution" in Hong Kong. Hua also questioned if the US had been behind the violence in Hong Kong, when she was asked to comment on the US State Department spokesman's call for the Hong Kong government to respect the freedoms of speech and assembly. "We urge the US to retract their black hand behind Hong Kong as soon as possible," Hua said. A spokesman for the US consulate general in Hong Kong countered that Hua's statement was "ridiculous". "The ongoing demonstrations in Hong Kong reflect the sentiment of the people of Hong Kong and their broad concerns about the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy," the spokesman added.

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US State Department worried by Beijing's hints it could use troops to put down Hong Kong protests (SCMP, July 26): The United States government has expressed concern about recent statements by a senior Chinese military official suggesting that mainland forces could be deployed in Hong Kong to quell dissent on the city's streets. Protests against Beijing's influence over Hong Kong have raged through the city for nearly two months, prompted by a proposed amendment to Hong Kong law that would have allowed the extradition of suspects to mainland China. The State Department expressed support for protesters' "broad and legitimate concerns about the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy", which it said threatened the city's place in international affairs. Beijing has shot back against any critique from foreign governments over the protests, accusing – without evidence – US government officials of being behind the ongoing unrest. The State Department told the Post it "categorically reject[ed] the false charge of foreign forces as the black hand behind the protests," referring to an allegory often employed by Beijing to refer to external interference.

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Legal affairs and human rights

Press freedom in Hong Kong 'at its worst' with journalists attacked and berated by police and protesters on both sides of extradition bill clashes (SCMP, July 8): Press freedom in the city had fallen to its lowest level amid reporters being attacked at rallies by police and protesters, the Hong Kong Journalists Association warned. "We have seen violence, excessive use of force, harassment and abuses by police and protesters from both ends of the political spectrum against journalists at anti-extradition law rallies for various reasons," Chris Yeung, Chairman of the Hong Kong Journalists Association, said. "[This] will really restrict reporters' freedom to report and ultimately people's right to know," he added. Yeung also cited other incidents, including the denial of Financial Times Asia news editor Victor Mallet's work visa after he chaired a talk at the Foreign Correspondents' Club by Andy Chan, then convenor of the pro-independence Hong Kong National Party.

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Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents' Club renews call for independent inquiry into reports of police impeding journalists amid members' criticism (SCMP, July 16): The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Hong Kong (FCC) has renewed its call for an independent investigation into reports of journalists being impeded in covering the recent extradition bill protests amid criticisms from its members that the club has not been proactive enough in defending press freedom. FCC president Jodi Schneider made the call as dozens of members signed a petition questioning the club's absence from July 14's march against mistreatment of journalists by police, which was organised by seven media groups. The city has witnessed a series of anti-bill protests over the past month, which soured relations between police and the public and left dozens injured, including journalists.

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Hong Kong press associations 'strongly condemn' attacks on journalists at Yuen Long MTR station (SCMP, July 23): Hong Kong press associations have condemned the late-night attack on passengers and journalists at a railway station that left at least four reporters injured. A joint statement issued by the Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA), the Hong Kong Press Photographers Association and the Independent Commentators Association, made an urgent appeal to the local police to protect citizens and journalists. "The assault on journalists constitutes a severe infringement of press freedom and the public's right to know, and hinders [journalists] from fulfilling their duty as the fourth estate," the statement read. "We strongly condemn such violent acts and demand the police arrest the attackers still at large."

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Health

Experts warn of mental health crisis triggered by Hong Kong extradition protests after alarming uptick in suicide thoughts and calls for emotional support (SCMP, July 4): Hong Kong's recent

turmoil has led to an alarming increase in suicidal thoughts and calls for emotional support, with specialists urging the government to immediately address a potential mental health crisis. Samaritan Befrienders, a suicide prevention group, said that it had received 42 calls for help since June 9. Clarence Tsang, the group's chief executive, said all the calls were "bill related", referring to the government's unpopular extradition bill that brought millions of Hongkongers to the streets last month. Tsang said the number of calls was five times higher than the number received by the group from March to May. "This is a public mental health situation," Tsang said. Paul Yip, director of the Centre for Suicide Prevention at the University of Hong Kong, went further. "The whole society has fallen into hysteria due to a volcanic eruption of the deep-seated identity crisis triggered by the bill," he said. "People are upset, worrying about safety of others and feeling uncertain about their own life. I have never seen Hongkongers so unsettled and troubled by the feeling that nothing is under control." Three deaths that included suicide notes or other references to the current crisis have been recorded since the mass protests began last month.

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How Hong Kong is losing doctors and nurses as health care workers seek to leave amid uncertainty over extradition bill crisis (SCMP, July 6): More Hong Kong doctors and nurses have considered bidding farewell to Hong Kong, with the trend sparked by the ongoing extradition bill crisis, according to emigration agencies in the city. Benny Cheung, director of Goldmax Immigration Consulting, noted that inquiries between April and June from people seeking greener pastures abroad tripled from the first quarter of the year, with top destinations being Canada, the United States and Australia. Cheung attributed the surge in cases, which included doctors and nurses, to the furore over the now-suspended extradition bill. There is a global demand for medical professionals, especially in some developed countries with ageing populations.

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Nearly 1 in 10 people in Hong Kong likely to have depression, according to HKU survey conducted during extradition bill crisis (SCMP, July 11): Nearly one in 10 people in Hong Kong were found to have suspected depression in a study conducted during the extradition bill crisis, as the city suffered an "epidemic of mental health" issues. The rate of probable depression among Hongkongers amid the latest protests was nearly twice the level recorded during Occupy Central in 2014, according to the University of Hong Kong (HKU) survey. More people were having suicidal thoughts too, according to the study. Professor Gabriel Leung, the dean of HKU's faculty of medicine who led the study, described the situation as "very concerning". "This is an epidemic of mental health [issues] linked to serious societal events," he said. Leung suggested the government be more engaged with young people to address the problems.

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Lab tests confirm HPV vaccines seized from two private medical centres in Hong Kong are fake (SCMP, July 25): Laboratory tests have confirmed that vaccines for the human papillomavirus (HPV) earlier seized from two private medical centres in Hong Kong are indeed fake but with no hazardous substances. The Department of Health made the announcement of the interim results after joint operations with customs on July 10 and 12. Samples of the products were sent to laboratories for analysis. Tests showed that while they did not contain hazardous impurities or particulate matters, there were no traces of HPV vaccines. Authorities are conducting an investigation on the case.

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Environment

Hong Kong's Ocean Park will treble solar power capacity by 2020 to reduce carbon footprint and tackle climate change (SCMP, July 5): Hong Kong's entertainment resort Ocean Park has vowed to tackle climate change by trebling its solar energy generation capacity by 2020. The resort in Southern District will install a solar power system of about 460 kilowatt-peak (kWp) or 460,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh). The electricity would be sold to HK Electric as part of a feed-in tariff scheme introduced by the government in 2018 to encourage the use of renewable energy for domestic and commercial purposes. The project was expected to begin in the fourth quarter of 2019 and be completed by the end of 2020.

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Hong Kong's Disneyland Resort aims to become city's biggest producer of solar power by 2019 in bid to tackle climate change and reduce carbon emissions (SCMP, July 9): Hong Kong Disneyland Resort is installing the city's largest solar power system, which will generate 70 per cent more clean electricity than the biggest such facility at present. The theme park on Lantau is setting up more than 4,500 solar cells aiming to produce at least 1.86 megawatts-hour (MWh) of electricity per year, equivalent to the annual electricity consumption of 564 three-person households. The electricity will be sold to CLP Power Hong Kong as part of a feed-in tariff scheme introduced by the government in 2018.

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Greenpeace launches Hong Kong pollution campaign as volunteers talk about the impact city's bad air has on their health (SCMP, July 19): To better monitor the air quality in Hong Kong, Greenpeace has launched a citywide public campaign to attach 115 diffusion tubes to lamp posts in five districts. The tubes, to be put in places near local amenities such as schools, public parks and footbridges, will collect street air samples for two weeks, and be taken to Britain to test the nitrogen dioxide levels in the samples. Commissioned by the environmental concern group, the survey also found 68 per cent of Hongkongers were dissatisfied with the city's air quality. Citing Chinese University research, Tom Ng, a campaigner at Greenpeace, said 70 per cent of nitrogen dioxide was produced locally by cars and ships, and said urgent action by the government was needed to protect the public's health.

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Culture and education

Education officials defend controversial liberal studies subject after former Hong Kong leader blames it for encouraging violent protests by young people (SCMP, July 5): Hong Kong education officials have defended the controversial school subject liberal studies, saying it should not be blamed for violent protests over the extradition bill as a former leader had suggested. "There is no proof that liberal studies causes students to take radical actions," Wendy Au, principal assistant secretary for education, said. Former chief executive Tung Chee-hwa, now vice-chairman of China's top political advisory body, had said the subject was a failure and one of the reasons behind youth problems in the city. The curriculum, made compulsory for all upper secondary school pupils in 2009, aims to cultivate critical thinking and positive values through six modules.

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Young people not a problem and most have protested in peaceful and reasonable manner, Hong Kong education minister says (SCMP, July 11): Hong Kong's education chief has said the city's young people are not a problem and that most peacefully expressed their concerns about society in recent protests. Secretary for Education Kevin Yeung also pledged to help the government to communicate better with students, so officials could understand and consider young people's needs and points of view when drawing up policy. Young protesters have been at the forefront of recent demonstrations that forced the government to suspend its controversial extradition bill. Former Hong Kong leader Tung Chee-hwa said he was saddened by the violent protests and that teaching liberal studies at secondary schools as "one of the reasons behind the youth problems today". Yeung said the liberal studies curriculum was aimed at helping young people to become citizens with the right values, critical thinking and social responsibility.

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Time for new law to put Hong Kong's bullies in their place and force schools to act rather than stay silent, think tank says (SCMP, July 22): A think tank founded by the vice-chairman of the city's youth development commission has proposed the implementation of an anti-bullying law in Hong Kong, to raise awareness of the problem in the city and to better track such cases in schools. MWYO, an independent group set up by Lau Ming-wai, which focuses on youth issues, called for the government to set up a working group to look into matters relating to bullying and coordinate the data collection, which the city lacked. In a recently released report, the group noted the lack of specific legislation on bullying or cyberbullying in Hong Kong had led to poor awareness and under-reporting in schools.

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Society

Younger people in Hong Kong less happy than peers in Singapore even before extradition bill crisis, survey shows (SCMP, July 31): Young people in Hong Kong were less happy than their peers in Singapore even before the extradition bill crisis cast a pall over the city, university researchers said. The Department of Social and Behavioural Sciences at City University surveyed more than 2,300 people aged 40 or below in Hong Kong and Singapore in the first half of the year. Local respondents scored 6.8 points out of 10 on a "happiness index" – lower than the 7.48 recorded in the Lion City. The figure could have dropped further if the study was done in early July as protests against the now-shelved extradition bill escalated. The study aimed to provide understanding of happiness and satisfaction with quality of life in 11 areas among younger people in both cities. The categories include political and social; housing, medical and health care; as well as law and order.

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Macau

Twelve drop out of Chief Executive race (Macau Daily Times, July 26): Twelve Macau residents who collected application forms for the fifth Chief Executive election have dropped out of the race, leaving former President of the Legislative Assembly (AL) Ho Iat Seng as the sole candidate, the

Electoral Affairs Commission announced. Ho received a total of 379 nominations from the currently 399 members of the election committee. The election will be held on August 25.
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