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## Switzerland in the local press

**Xi Jinping urges world leaders to put aside divisions in virtual Davos speech (SCMP, Jan. 25):** Chinese President Xi Jinping urged world leaders to put aside ideological confrontations in a speech to the World Economic Forum. In the address, issued via video link, he warned that attempts to “isolate, intimidate, decouple and sanction” others will “only push the world into division, even confrontation”. China’s state leaders have long used the forum, usually held in the Swiss resort of Davos but moved online this year, as a platform for Beijing’s messaging to rally international support.

**Franco Frattini dog meat tweets saw CAS ban overturned, Swiss Court says (SCMP, Jan. 16):** The Federal Supreme Court of Switzerland has explained the reason why it overturned the original ruling from Chinese star swimmer Sun Yang’s hearing at the Court of Arbitration for Sport, saying that CAS panel president Franco Frattini had shown a possible bias against Chinese people. The court found doubts over the impartiality of Frattini and overturned the ruling. It did not rule on any other aspect of Sun’s case.

## Foreign Policy/International Relations

**EU Parliament condemns China deal over Hong Kong crackdown (SCMP, Jan. 22):** The EU has lost credibility on human rights by sealing an investment deal with China, a resolution in the European Parliament warned. MEPs meeting in Brussels overwhelmingly passed the resolution which broadly condemned the crackdown on Hong Kong activists by the central government in China. The resolution also called for “targeted sanctions” against Chinese and Hong Kong officials held responsible for the police action. The opinion of EU lawmakers is important as they will need to approve the German-backed investment deal that was agreed in principle last month after years of talks.

**China slaps sanctions on US over HK arrests (RTHK, Jan. 18):** China has slapped sanctions on the United States after six Hong Kong and mainland officials were singled out by Washington over the arrests of more than 50 pan-democratic figures this month over last year’s Legco primaries. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said Beijing had decided to impose sanctions on US officials, members of Congress, personnel at non-governmental organisations and their family members over their “nasty behaviour” on the Hong Kong issue.

**Hong Kong decries latest US sanctions as ‘insane, shameless and despicable’ (SCMP, Jan. 16):** Hong Kong’s government has lashed out at the United States for “insane, shameless and despicable” interference in the city’s internal affairs after the departing administration in Washington slapped sanctions on six officials from China and Hong Kong over the enforcement of the national security law. In announcing the sanctions, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called the recent opposition arrests in Hong Kong “appalling”. Meanwhile, an activist group said that five Hong Kong protesters who reportedly fled to Taiwan had arrived in the US intending to seek asylum.

**Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office lashes out at foreign countries (SCMP, Jan. 12):** The ministerial-level Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office (HKMAO) has lashed out at a joint statement by four governments of Australia, Canada, Britain and the United States condemning the mass arrest of Hong Kong opposition figures, accusing the countries of seeking to foment a “colour revolution” to overthrow the nation’s constitutional order. It also labelled the foreign governments’ comments as “blatant interference” in Hong Kong police’s law enforcement actions and a “grave violation” of the country’s “domestic affairs and judicial sovereignty”.

**Government hit back at 'slandering' foreign officials (RTHK, Jan. 10):** The Hong Kong government accused foreign governments of making “slandering” remarks about the National Security Law, which it said was equal – if not better than – similar national security laws in other jurisdictions. The SAR government statement came hours after the foreign ministers of Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US Secretary of State issued a joint statement expressing their concern with the arrest of 55 people on suspicion of subversion.

**EU, UK urge release of Hong Kong opposition figures (RTHK, Jan. 6):** The EU called for the release of the dozens of opposition figures arrested in Hong Kong and said it was eyeing possible further sanctions on China over its crackdown. “We call for the immediate release of the arrested people,” European Commission spokesman Peter Stano said. “The mass arrest of politicians and activists in Hong Kong is a grievous attack on Hong Kong’s rights and freedoms as protected under the Joint Declaration,” British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said.

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## Mainland Relation

**Beijing expands liaison office in Hong Kong as it seeks to tighten supervision (SCMP, Jan. 29):** Beijing is sending new blood to its liaison office in Hong Kong as it seeks to tighten supervision and policy implementation in the city, according to sources with knowledge of the matter. The liaison office needed more staff because Beijing had given it more responsibilities. They included making sure Hong Kong was being "ruled by patriots", helping the city contain the coronavirus, trying to build bridges with young people, and identifying long-term governance challenges.

**'Understandable if Beijing wants political overhaul' (RTHK, Jan. 19):** Chief Executive Carrie Lam says it is "understandable" if Beijing feels there is a need to revamp Hong Kong's political system, as what has happened in the SAR in the past few years has been "worrying". Lam made the remark when she was asked for her views on her predecessor CY Leung's suggestion that the chief executive could be selected through "local consultations" instead of the usual small-circle election, and that this would be perfectly in line with the Basic Law. If Beijing sees the need to make changes, she said she would definitely cooperate, as the CE answers both to the SAR and the central government.

**Experts warn rifts between Hong Kong, mainland China remain (SCMP, Jan. 6):** Beijing's ambition to catapult the Greater Bay Area economic zone, which includes Hong Kong and Macau, into a cultural and tourism hub through youth engagement will have to first address the cross-border political divide, academics and experts have said. While observers said such initiatives would promote the bay area's economic prosperity, the central government would need to bridge the cross-border gap in political and cultural views, particularly after 2019's anti-government protest movement and Beijing's imposition last year of a national security law on Hong Kong.

## Domestic Policy/Politics

**Aircrew quarantine could start in two weeks (SCMP, Jan. 27):** Airline industry chiefs have urged the Hong Kong government to rethink its plans to quarantine aircrew for 14 days, as Cathay Pacific Airways told staff the rule could start after February 11. While government officials have yet to announce finalised plans, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) expressed grave concern over the damage the measure could inflict. It said the measure would reduce flights – especially those carrying valuable and essential goods such as vaccines – when they were critical to combat the coronavirus pandemic and support the economy.

**HK could see 'ambush lockdowns', says Carrie Lam (RTHK, Jan. 26):** Chief Executive Carrie Lam said that more lockdown orders could be imposed to curb the coronavirus after a "successful" operation in Yau Ma Tei and Jordan, adding they will be "ambush-style operations" made without any prior announcements. She said that the weekend lockdown helped stop the spread of the virus, as 13 cases were identified from more than 7,000 residents living in around 150 buildings. She added that the authorities will be more "aggressive" with Covid-19 testing, adding that they have identified a few more places to impose mandatory testing orders.

**Civil servants' worries grow over allegiance pledge (RTHK, Jan. 18):** Civil service unions have expressed concerns about whether they could hold rallies or speak to the press in future, in light of a new pledge of allegiance the government is demanding civil servants make. Around 180,000 civil servants have been told they face dismissal unless they sign a declaration stating that they will uphold the Basic Law, pledge allegiance to the SAR, be dedicated to their duties, and be responsible to the government.

**CE distances herself from call for dual nationality curbs (SCMP, Jan. 12):** Chief Executive Carrie Lam has distanced herself from an adviser's call for Beijing to strip residents who acquire foreign citizenship of their right to live in the city. She said her de facto cabinet had not discussed the dual nationality proposal, lodged by a senior pro-establishment figure Regina Ip as Hong Kong braced for a surge of emigration after Britain offered locals a new route to citizenship. The new visa scheme for those eligible for British National (Overseas) status was envisioned as a lifeboat for Hongkongers in the wake of the Beijing-imposed national security law.

**'Beijing had every right to introduce security law' (RTHK, Jan. 11):** Justice Secretary Teresa Cheng has hit out at "baseless challenges" against Beijing's introduction of the national security law in Hong Kong, saying the central government has always had the power and duty to enact laws on national security matters. She said it is completely misconceived to say that the principle of One Country, Two Systems has been undermined by Beijing's move to introduce the national security law, especially when the SAR had been unable to fulfil such responsibilities.

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**New Chief Justice slams unfounded attacks on judges (RTHK, Jan. 11):** The new Chief Justice Andrew Cheung has condemned unfounded attacks on judges, saying an independent and impartial judiciary must be maintained in Hong Kong. He said judges must not be subject to improper pressure or influence when discharging their duties. He reminded all judges to exercise self-restraint when dealing with high-profile cases, or cases with a political flavour. He has also rejected the idea of setting up a panel to review sentencing guidelines, saying this role is best served by the courts themselves.

**Police use national security law for first time to block access to website (SCMP, Jan. 9):** Hong Kong police have invoked the national security law for the first time to block a local website dedicated to publishing first-hand accounts of the anti-government protests in 2019 and the personal details of officers and pro-Beijing figures. Sources said the force had started asking internet service providers (ISPs) to halt access to the HKChronicles website citing Article 43 of the law and its implementation rules. Officers can order ISPs to block access to electronic information deemed likely to constitute a crime endangering national security.

**Court rulings not reason for reform (RTHK, Jan. 5):** Outgoing Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma said that he's not against judicial reform, but spoke out against such calls from people who don't get their way with court judgements. Ma said many members of the public would find this results-driven reason hard to accept. He stressed people should come up with more details about their ideas for reform, and the judiciary is always willing to consider ways to improve. He also insisted he or the judiciary faced no pressure from the authorities over the years about court cases.

**'Hong Kong is a powder keg waiting to explode' (RTHK, Jan. 3):** Researchers have described Hong Kong as a "powder keg waiting to go off", warning that social unrest may return after a survey they conducted showed an overwhelming majority of local students lacking trust in the government. The Chinese University's School of Public Health and Primary Care interviewed 250 senior secondary school pupils last year, and 87 per cent of them said they have no confidence in the administration. Terry Lum, the head of HKU's Department of Social Work and Social Administration, said the situation in the SAR is worse than the polarisation in the United States, making the city very difficult to govern.

## **Economy/Finance**

**Coronavirus impact left HK with trade deficit of HK\$342.2 billion last year (SCMP, Jan. 26):** Hong Kong exports shrank by 1.5% to HK\$3.927 trillion in 2020 from HK\$3.988 trillion the year before, while total imports decreased 3.3 per cent to HK\$4.269 trillion, according to the Census and Statistics Department. The deficit for 2020 narrowed nearly 20 per cent compared to the net trade deficit of HK\$426.8 billion recorded in 2019.

**Pandemic got Hong Kong to embrace e-commerce (SCMP, Jan. 22):** Hong Kong finally jumped on the e-commerce bandwagon over the past year as social-distancing measures related to the Covid-19 pandemic kept residents at home, with industry leaders saying they expect the changes to stick – even in a post-coronavirus world. Those in the sector said disruptions to brick-and-mortar businesses appeared to have pushed Hongkongers – once among the world's most reluctant online shoppers – to increasingly buy items with the click of a button.

**Jobless rate surges to 16-year high of 6.6 percent (RTHK, Jan. 20):** Hong Kong's latest unemployment rate has climbed by 0.3 percent to 6.6 percent, the highest in 16 years, and an academic warned that the worst is not over yet. The latest jobless figure covered the three-month period from October to December last year. The Census and Statistics Department says the unemployment rate worsened across almost all the major sectors, with the retail, accommodation and food services industries having recorded more distinct increases.

**Just 3.57 million arrivals in 2020 amid coronavirus pandemic (SCMP, Jan. 15):** Plagued by the collapse of travel amid the coronavirus pandemic, arrivals to Hong Kong plummeted nearly 94 per cent year on year in 2020 to just 3.57 million, a 36-year low for the once-mighty tourism hub. It marked a precipitous plunge from the 55.9 million people welcomed in 2019, a year in which arrivals had already dropped due to the anti-government protests.

**American Chamber of Commerce survey finds businesses pessimistic for 2021 (SCMP, Jan. 11):** More than 40 per cent of the companies surveyed by the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong (AmCham) expressed pessimism about their prospects for 2021, while a third said they felt the city had become less competitive as a global business hub over the past year. The rapid deterioration of US-China relations remained a pressing concern for the business executives surveyed, as did the ongoing pandemic and Hong Kong's changing political and economic climate.

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**Financial secretary Paul Chan signals fewer handouts in coming budget (RTHK, Jan. 10):** Financial secretary Paul Chan said he will have to keep some firepower in reserve to tackle any uncertainties Hong Kong may face in the coming year, amid calls for sweeteners in his upcoming budget. He said government reserves dropped some 30 percent to HK\$800 billion (about US\$103 billion) in just one year because of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the deficit in the current fiscal year expecting to hit HK\$300 billion (about US\$38 billion) after introducing numerous relief measures.

**Strong national growth should help lift Hong Kong out of recession (SCMP, Jan. 3):** Beijing's grand plan to stimulate domestic growth should help lift Hong Kong out of recession by the end of the year, the financial chief Paul Chan has predicted. After two years of shrinking gross domestic product, city poised to return to economic expansion in second half of 2021, Chan said. The pace of the recovery would depend on several other factors, including successfully fighting the pandemic, he said, adding government support would continue until the health crisis was brought under control.

#### Technology/Innovation

**Novel device could help patients with spinal injuries avoid invasive surgeries (SCMP, Jan. 12):** Patients suffering from spinal cord injuries could soon be able to avoid invasive operations with a novel, non-surgically implanted neurostimulator developed by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. It is also powered by ultrasonic waves instead of conventional batteries, obviating the need for future surgeries to replace them.

#### Macao

**President Xi praises Macau leader Ho Iat-seng in containing the pandemic (SCMP, Jan. 27):** Chinese President Xi Jinping held an unprecedented virtual meeting with Macau leader Ho Iat-seng to hear his annual work report due to the coronavirus pandemic. He was effusive in his praise for Ho's success in responding to the health crisis. "In the face of the sudden pandemic, you responded quickly, adopted stringent measures and brought it under control within a short period of time," he told Ho, noting Macau had gone more than 300 consecutive days without a local infection.

#### Special Focus

**Patriots must rule HK, Xi Jinping tells Carrie Lam (RTHK, Jan. 27):** President Xi Jinping has told Chief Executive Carrie Lam that 'patriots' must rule Hong Kong for the SAR to maintain stability and prosperity, while safeguarding the practice of 'One Country, Two Systems' and the entire constitutional order. The president's comments came during a video conference when Lam delivered her work report to state leaders virtually for the first time due to the coronavirus pandemic. Xinhua quoted Xi as saying that the concept of 'patriots ruling Hong Kong' is a "fundamental principle" that affects national sovereignty and security. "The central government's comprehensive jurisdiction over the SAR can only be achieved if patriots rule Hong Kong," Xi said. He also said he was "very concerned and worried" about the coronavirus situation in the SAR. But at the same time, he pledged Beijing's full backing for Hong Kong in its fight against Covid.

**Mass arrests of former opposition lawmakers and activists (SCMP, Jan. 6):** More than 50 former opposition lawmakers and activists were arrested on subversion charges in the biggest crackdown yet under Hong Kong's national security law, with authorities accusing them of a plot to "overthrow" the government. Most of those detained had either organised or taken part in primary contests held by the pan-democratic camp last July as part of a "35-plus" strategy to maximise its chances of taking control of the 70-member legislature. The mass arrests, which included a raid on a law firm and court orders being served to four media outlets demanding journalists surrender documents related to the case, sparked an outcry from the opposition camp and its supporters which included Western governments. Both the Office for Safeguarding National Security and the liaison office, Beijing's top representative arm in Hong Kong, issued statements backing the crackdown.

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