

RECENT ACTIVITIES

HKETO Director attends Macao Club Gala Dinner

Director of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office (Toronto) (HKETO), Ms Emily Mo, attended the Macao Club Gala Dinner to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Macao Special Administrative Region on December 19.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Ms Mo remarked that Hong Kong and Macao, being the two special administrative regions of China, have been proud to be part of the country's achievements, by contributing to its development and benefitting from its prosperity.

Ms Mo also highlighted the important roles of Hong Kong, Macao, Guangdong and Shenzhen in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area development. With the commissioning of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) last year, the distance between the three places has remarkably shortened.

In addition, Ms Mo updated the participants on the latest situation of Hong Kong. She stressed that the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (the Government of the HKSAR) is determined to resolve the challenges together with the people.

Exhibition panels about the Greater Bay Area and photos of the HZMB and high-speed ferries linking Hong Kong with Macau were displayed at the gala by HKETO.

Click the following link for details.

<https://www.hketotoronto.gov.hk/newsroom/hketo-director-attends-macao-club-gala-dinner.html>

HKETO supports Dragon Ball 2020

Director of the HKETO, Ms Emily Mo, attended the Media Launch of Dragon Ball 2020 hosted by the Yee Hong Community Wellness Foundation on December 16.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Ms Mo shared with the participants that the Xiqu Centre located at the West Kowloon Cultural District in Hong Kong was opened in January 2019. The Centre's facilities are designed for different types of xiqu-related functions and activities.

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To dovetail the theme “Opera” of Dragon Ball 2020 and promote the rich cultural scene in Hong Kong, HKETO will sponsor a photo booth at the event featuring the art of Cantonese opera, plus a pair of Cantonese opera artists for guests to take pictures with.

Click the following link for details.

<https://www.hketotoronto.gov.hk/newsroom/hketo-supports-dragon-ball-2020.html>

HONG KONG NEWS

Hong Kong firmly upholds freedoms and human rights

A Government spokesman stressed on December 26 that the Government of the HKSAR attached “the utmost importance to and firmly upheld human rights and various freedoms” in Hong Kong.

Despite the social unrest affecting Hong Kong over the past six months, freedoms and human rights have continued to be jealously guarded and remained a top priority of the Government. Along with the rule of law, a fiercely independent judiciary, a clean government, a level playing field for business, openness, diversity and inclusiveness, freedoms and human rights constitute its much-cherished core values which underpin Hong Kong’s success.

The spokesman was referring to media reports that an organization, Stand With Hong Kong, had invited religious and faith leaders across the United Kingdom (UK) to sign a letter to the British Prime Minister and Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to urge the UK government to “urgently ensure the lives and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong are protected”.

The spokesman emphasised that the protection of human rights and freedoms, including freedom of speech, of the press, of publication, of association and assembly, of procession and of demonstration; free flow of information; freedom of religious belief and free education; free flow of capital; and free trade and free port are all enshrined in the Basic Law, the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance and other legislation. The provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as applied to Hong Kong before 1997 remain in force. The 50,000-plus public assemblies and processions held over the past five years testify to the freedoms enjoyed by the Hong Kong people.

The spokesman also refuted in the strongest possible terms the statement issued earlier by Hong Kong Watch accusing the Hong Kong Police Force of taking brutal action against “peaceful shoppers and protesters” celebrating Christmas Eve in Tsim Sha Tsui and other areas, as well as an overseas media report that alleged in its

headline that "In Hong Kong crackdown, Police repeatedly broke their own rules and faced no consequences". The Police had adopted a measured and restrained approach throughout and only respond with appropriate and proportionate force when protesters take part in illegal activities. Violence has indeed escalated in recent weeks, including serious acts that endanger public safety and public order by blocking roadways, paralysing traffic, setting barricades, committing arson, vandalising shops and railway facilities, hurling bricks, throwing petrol bombs, flagrantly assaulting bystanders and violently attacking police officers.

These unlawful and violent acts must be condemned, curbed and ended if Hong Kong is to continue as a vibrant international financial, business and logistics hub. As in any society that believes in the rule of law, it is incumbent on the police force to maintain public safety and order.

The spokesman concluded that for a long time, Hong Kong has always enjoyed the full substance of real freedoms - the envy of many other economies. This is one of the success factors which make Hong Kong tick and propel the city forward. The HKSAR Government will ensure that this crucial attribute is well preserved and safeguarded.

Click the following links for details.

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201912/26/P2019122600492.htm>

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201912/25/P2019122500670.htm>

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201912/26/P2019122600515.htm>

In addition, the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, broadcasted the "Letter to Hong Kong" on Radio Television Hong Kong on December 29. Mr Cheung reiterating that Hong Kong is a remarkably resilient and resourceful international city with a strong "can-do" spirit, and by working together, we can rebuild, reclaim and rejuvenate the remarkably resilient spirit of Hong Kong. Please click below for the text.

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201912/29/P2019122800332.htm>

Government firmly refutes unfounded, misguided claims in open letter from a group of overseas politicians and persons

The Government of the HKSAR on January 1 refuted as unfounded and misguided claims in an open letter to the Chief Executive signed by a group of overseas politicians and persons.

A Government spokesman made clear that since Hong Kong's return to the Motherland, "One Country, Two Systems" and a high degree of autonomy had been faithfully

implemented in strict accordance with the Basic Law of HKSAR. The Basic Law clearly stipulates that the HKSAR is an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Foreign politicians and organisations should not interfere in any form in the internal affairs of the HKSAR.

Severe violence by radical protesters

Over the past six months, it was widely reported (though less so in overseas media) that protester violence had escalated and reached an alarming level. Masked rioters have vandalised public facilities and shops, committed arson, hurled petrol bombs as well as wantonly attacked police officers and people with different views in various districts, seriously undermining public order. An innocent man was set on fire in broad daylight by protesters while a government contract cleaner was killed by a brick thrown at him. So far, 520 police officers have been injured on duty.

No protesters have been killed as a result of direct Police action, while several policemen have been seriously injured. This is the stark reality that foreign politicians and organisations, including the signatories of the open letter, must be made aware of.

The extent of students and minors being involved in such violent protests is particularly worrying. Two secondary school students have been arrested for bringing a highly explosive substance, triacetone triperoxide (TATP), to their school in Ma On Shan. The explosive substance was safely removed by Police.

And just days ago, a 16-year-old teenager was arrested for assaulting police officers and robbery for attempting to snatch a gun from a police officer. He has been refused bail by the court.

The severity of the situation has often brought our city to a chaotic halt, with many citizens suffering from severe disruption to daily life and fear for their personal safety. This fear is not confined to physical violence, but to the immense pressure of being bullied or harassed simply because of their background and opinions.

Police exercise restraint in law enforcement

The spokesman stressed that Police do not initiate actions against protesters and only respond with appropriate and proportionate force when protesters take part in illegal activities.

Since June 9, over 1 000 demonstrations, processions and rallies have been held in Hong Kong. All along, Police have facilitated the conduct of peaceful and lawful public meetings or public processions. However, if protesters resort to violence, the Police

have no choice but, if there are no other means and after giving warnings where circumstances permit, to use appropriate force to prevent injury to life and property.

Freedom and rule of law

The spokesman further stated, “The HKSAR Government fully recognises that freedom and the rule of law are the core values of Hong Kong and the cornerstone of our long-term prosperity and stability, and the HKSAR Government is determined to safeguard these core values at all times.

“In fact, the extensive media coverage – local, international and in the digital world – about the protests and events is unprecedented in Hong Kong’s history. That in itself is evidence enough that the freedom of the press is well protected, and citizens of Hong Kong continue to enjoy the freedom of participating in lawful and peaceful demonstrations to express their views.

“In Hong Kong, we believe in the rule of law which means people are innocent until proven guilty; that offenders are only charged if there is enough evidence to do so; and we place our faith and trust in the integrity of our fiercely independent judiciary,” the spokesman said, noting that Hong Kong’s judicial independence ranked second in Asia and eighth in the world, according to the World Economic Forum: Global Competitiveness Report.

Reject foreign interference into HKSAR’s affairs

The spokesman rejected outright the suggestion in the open letter that the international community establish an international independent inquiry mechanism.

“Such action, coupled with the threat of Magnitsky sanctions, would be a gross interference in Hong Kong’s governance and autonomy as well as the sovereignty of our nation. No government would tolerate such action or bow to such pressure,” the spokesman added.

On political reform, the spokesman said this was also an internal matter for the HKSAR Government.

“We did introduce legislation to make the selection of the 2017 Chief Executive election more democratic only to have it rejected by those politicians claiming to be championing for democracy,” the spokesman said.

The spokesman emphasised that, “the HKSAR Government will continue to engage different sectors of society through the usual channels, whilst broadening and rejuvenating its communication with the public.

“Since September last year, the Chief Executive and Principal Officials of the Government have started a dialogue with the public through various channels.

“The Government is also establishing an Independent Review Committee comprising experts and community leaders. The Committee will look into the causes and full circumstances of the social unrest and probe Hong Kong’s deep-seated social conflicts, from affordable housing, land supply, wealth gap, upward social mobility and opportunities for our young people to social justice.

“The Committee will recommend ways to address the real and long-entrenched community concerns that underlie the discord.

“We understand that many in the international community are concerned about Hong Kong and its future but Hong Kong people have the wisdom and resilience to solve the current impasse on our own. And we will,” the spokesman added.

“We also understand that Hong Kong is being used as a pawn by some in the West to further their own agendas based on a one-sided narrative that paints a negative picture of the HKSAR Government’s actions to restore calm and peace while ignoring the ongoing serious threats to law and order by radicals that they would hardly tolerate in their own country.”

Click the following link for details.

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202001/01/P2020010100045.htm>

Implementation of new round of SME measures in January 2020

To further strengthen its support of Hong Kong’s small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the Government of the HKSAR will implement a number of measures starting from January, including the launch of the new “SME ReachOut” service, and enhancements to the Dedicated Fund on Branding, Upgrading and Domestic Sales (BUD Fund) and the SME Export Marketing Fund (EMF).

Starting from January 1, a dedicated service team entitled “SME ReachOut” will commence operation to support SMEs through face-to-face meetings to help identify funding schemes that suit SMEs, while answering questions relating to applications. The goal is to enhance SME’s understanding of the Government’s funding schemes, with a view to encouraging better utilisation of the support provided by the Government.

Additional resources have also been injected into the BUD Fund and the EMF to raise the cumulative funding ceiling and the ratio of initial payments, as well as to expand the geographical coverage of the BUD Fund starting from January 20 to help enhance the enterprises' competitiveness and support their exploration of Mainland and overseas markets.

Click the following link for details.

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201912/29/P2019122800214.htm>

Free Trade Agreement and Investment Agreement between Hong Kong and Australia enter into force

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and Investment Agreement signed between Hong Kong and Australia in March this year will enter into force officially on January 17, 2020, providing Hong Kong traders and investors with legal certainty and more favourable access to the Australian market, while creating more business opportunities and enhancing trade and investment flows between Hong Kong and Australia.

The agreements which cover trade in goods, trade in services, investment, government procurement, intellectual property, competition and other related areas are comprehensive, modern and of high standard. Against the prevailing uncertainties in the global economic environment, these agreements provide high transparency and predictability for trade and investment.

This FTA is a high quality and representative one. Hong Kong will continue to explore free trade opportunities with like-minded economic and trading partners.

Click the following link for details.

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201912/18/P2019121700664.htm>

Hong Kong-Cambodia and Hong Kong-Estonia tax treaties in force

The Government of the HKSAR spokesman said on December 27 that the Comprehensive Avoidance of Double Taxation Agreements (CDTAs) with Cambodia and Estonia signed in June and September this year respectively came into force on December 27 and 18, 2019, respectively, after the completion of the relevant ratification procedures. The CDTAs will have effect in respect of Hong Kong tax for any taxable periods beginning on or after April 1, 2020.

Cambodia and Estonia were the 38th and 75th largest trading partners of Hong Kong in 2018 respectively. The CDTAs will bring a greater degree of certainty on tax liabilities

for those who engage in cross-border business activities, and help promote bilateral trade and investment activities.

Click the following link for details.

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201912/27/P2019122700345.htm>

Visa-free access to Uzbekistan for HKSAR passport holders

The Government of the HKSAR has received notification from the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan (Uzbekistan) that with effect from January 1, 2020, HKSAR passport holders may visit Uzbekistan visa-free for a stay of up to seven days entering through the international airports with a return air ticket.

Uzbekistan is along the Belt and Road. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, this visa-free arrangement would bring greater travel convenience to the travellers of Hong Kong and strengthen the tourism, cultural and economic ties between the two places.

Including Uzbekistan, 167 countries and territories have granted visa-free access or visa-on-arrival to HKSAR passport holders.

Click the following link for details.

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201912/23/P2019122300690.htm>

Hong Kong Customs reminds public not to bring cannabis products from overseas into Hong Kong

Hong Kong Customs on December 23 reminded members of the public that they should pay attention to whether the products they purchase when travelling overseas during the New Year holidays contain cannabis or controlled cannabinoids (such as tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC) since illicit import of such products is a criminal offence.

Customs noted that individual overseas jurisdictions have earlier legalised recreational use of cannabis. Products containing cannabis or controlled cannabinoids (such as THC) in different forms, including food, drinks and topical products for applying to skin, hair or nails, as well as cannabis extracts, may be available for sale at local stores. Members of the public are reminded that cannabis and THC are controlled dangerous drugs in Hong Kong and it is a criminal offence to bring such products into the city.

Under Cap. 134, trafficking in dangerous drugs, or illicitly importing to and exporting from Hong Kong, procuring, supplying, manufacturing, or dealing in or with dangerous drugs, constitutes a criminal offence. The maximum penalty is life imprisonment and a fine of HK\$5 million. Illicitly possessing or smoking, inhaling, ingesting or injecting

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dangerous drugs is subject to a maximum penalty of imprisonment for seven years and a fine of HK\$1 million.

Click the following link for details.

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201912/23/P2019122300577.htm>

Updates on Hong Kong

The information page “Hong Kong Update” under the Brand Hong Kong website provides topical info for overseas audiences to learn the updates in Hong Kong, including information on known processions, Government responses to the protest actions and clarifications. It also provides social media links about Hong Kong.

You are invited to browse the page by clicking the link:

<https://www.brandhk.gov.hk/html/en/WhatSON/HKUpdate2019.html>

In addition, the Information Services Department (ISD) has produced a series of episodes to update the public about the situation in Hong Kong.

<https://youtu.be/xkPAWJtET1U> (睇真 D • 知多 D：第十則資訊 Chinese only)

<https://youtu.be/U2ewaYnh99I> (睇真 D • 知多 D：第十一則資訊 Chinese only)

International media partnership with the Information Services Department

A series of articles with branded contents about various sectors of Hong Kong were published at different international media platform, under the partnership with ISD, to promote the unparalleled advantages of Hong Kong. Please click the links of the articles for details.

Financial Times

[Fintech and the Regulatory Evolution](#)

Bloomberg

[Asia's Connection Point for Change](#)

The Economist

[The “game changer” for Hong Kong arbitration](#)

ICAC updates international communities on anti-corruption efforts

The latest issue of the ICAC's electronic newsletter, ICAC Post (Issue 38), has been uploaded on the ICAC corporate website. Highlights of this issue include:

- A glimpse of ICAC's latest anti-corruption dialogues
- ICAC flagship command course equips LEA leaders for changes
- Professional accountants – Company guardians against corruption
- HK ranked world's 3rd most competitive place

Click here to read the details.

<https://www.icac.org.hk/icac/post/issue38/en/>

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