

CITY



Lessons in schooling
Education chief says city could learn from international schools

> EDUCATION C2



No backing down
Carrie Lam stands firm on bid to unseat pan-democrats

> POLITICS C3

Canadian connections

Youth activists and grass-roots groups are fighting for the revitalisation of Vancouver's Chinatown



> LIFE BACK PAGE

Quality of life in city improving, study finds

Survey of Hongkongers sees biggest ever jump and first 'significant' rise since 2010

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Hongkongers' quality of life has "significantly improved" for the first time since 2010, fuelled by greater life satisfaction, inflation-beating pay rises and reduced air pollution, a Chinese University survey has claimed.

But freedom of speech and the intensity of press criticism of the government and local corporations has continued to decline, researchers said.

Compiled annually since 2003, the Hong Kong Quality of Life Index studies year-on-year changes of 23 indicators from the five categories of health, society, culture and leisure, economy and environment.

With a base score of 100 for 2002, the index for 2016 stood at 105.39, compared with 101.32 for the previous year.

It was the biggest jump ever recorded, and the first major improvement since 2010.

The economic index recorded the most significant improvement, spurred by inflation-beating pay hikes for the city's 3.8 million-strong labour force last year.

A brief drop in home prices early last year also contributed to a better housing affordability ratio, but researchers noted the situation was still far from ideal.

In 2016 the ratio stood at 14.55, denoting the number of years required for a median income-earning household to purchase a 300 sq ft flat in urban areas, without spending a dollar of their income on anything except housing.

Professor Terence Chong Tai-leung of the Department of Economics said an ideal ratio would be anything below eight years, and one above 10 years would be "very difficult" for aspiring homeowners.

"This is also a timely message for the new government to do more to solve the housing crisis," added Professor Wong Hung, who heads the university's Centre for Quality of Life.

Pollsters used government statistics and also surveyed 1,001 adults through random sampling by phone, asking them how they felt on a range of issues.

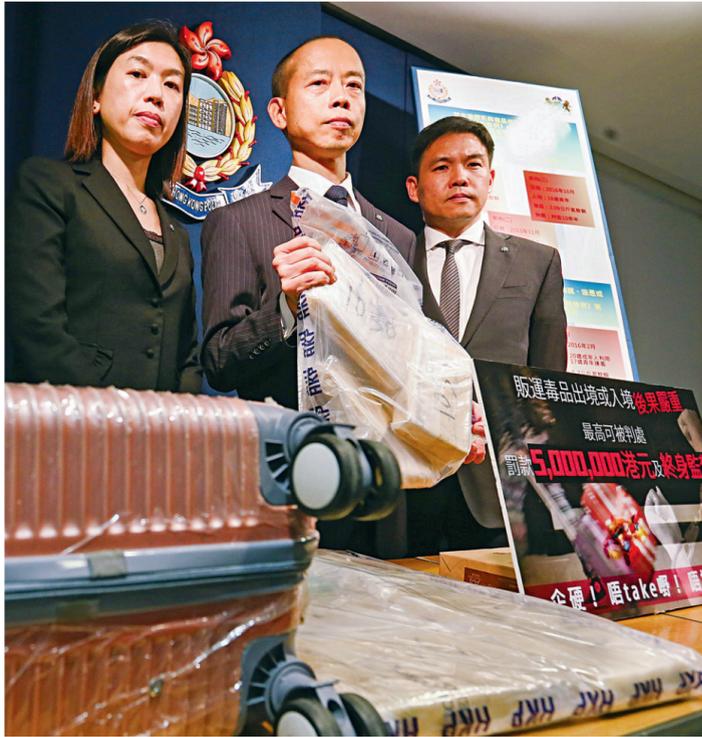
For example, respondents last year gave better scores when asked to gauge their satisfaction in life and their level of stress.

Professor Roger Chung Yat-nork from the School of Public Health and Primary Care said a heightened sense of personal well-being may have driven Hongkongers to devote more time to leisure activities.

But freedom of speech fell for the fourth consecutive year, while the intensity of press criticism was found to have scaled down.

Wong said these two indices accurately reflected the general sentiment among the public.

Catching them young



Police Narcotics Bureau officers display cocaine seized from a 15-year-old girl at the Shenzhen Bay control point. They snared 20kg of the drug worth HK\$20 million. Two men aged 23 and 24 were arrested separately. They are thought to have paid the girl about HK\$10,000 to bring the contraband to the city, according to Chief Superintendent Ma Ping-yiu. Officers believe they have broken the cross-border smuggling syndicate. They are

investigating whether the gang recruited other underage locals to bring drugs across the border. Narcotics Bureau Superintendent Ng Wing-sze said the girl was dressed like an office worker when she was picked up at the control point – suggesting she may have worn office clothes to appear more mature and attract less scrutiny from officers. He said he thought the cocaine was mainly intended for local consumption. Photo: Dickson Lee

EDUCATION

Students raise game with 25 perfect scores in IB exam

Some 15 ESF pupils get the maximum 45 marks, along with six at St Paul's Co-Educational College

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At least 25 students clinched perfect scores in the International Baccalaureate (IB) examination, seven more than last year.

Among those achieving the maximum 45 points were 15 from international schools under the English Schools Foundation (ESF), six from St Paul's Co-Educational College, and one each from Canadian International School, Diocesan Boys' School, German Swiss International School and Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School.

It was the best result by the seven ESF schools, prior to any grade reviews, since they adopted the IB diploma as a university entrance qualification in 2007.

Some 2,000 students in 29 international and local schools took the IB exam, according to the International Baccalaureate Organisation, a non-profit educational foundation that authorises schools to offer the curriculum.

Most students in Hong Kong take the city's own Diploma of Secondary Education while a few sit the British A-level curriculum. IB diploma candidates tackle six subjects, three at standard



Six perfect scorers, left to right, Chu Pui Yan Jasmine; Tang Ka Yan Tiffany; Wu Sitong Eva; Lam Gigi; Lo Chun Yin Jason; and Kwong Chun Hei Adrian. Photo: Handout

level and the rest at a higher level. In addition, students must complete three components, which include assessments such as a 4,000-word research paper and projects in art performance, sports or community service.

Grades are based on work over two years and exams in May. Nicole Hon Wing-lam, 17, the top scorer at Canadian International School, said the news was "very unexpected".

"My IB coordinator called me during dinner and asked me about my summer. I had no idea what was to come. It was all very exciting. My grandmother started crying [when I told her]," she said.

Hon, who is deciding between studying medicine at the University of Hong Kong or microbiology at the University of Toronto in Canada, said leading a balanced study life had helped her get through the gruelling exams.

"During that time, I didn't quit doing other things. I did yoga, figure skating and continued to play in our school band. It helped keep me mentally sane and helped me not to be too overwhelmed with exams," the teenager said.

A total of 18 Hong Kong students received the top score last year out of a total of 147 worldwide.

AVIATION

AUSTRALIA URGES OPEN SKIES IN BID FOR CHINA TRAVEL

Trade minister presses city authorities for 'more liberalised' air traffic rights as Virgin Australia unveils plan to take on Cathay Pacific and Qantas

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Australia is urging Hong Kong to open up its skies and agree a free trade deal on aviation as experts warn the city risks being left at a "disadvantage" in a golden age of outbound Chinese travel.

Beijing and Canberra last year negotiated an "open skies" deal to allow an unlimited number of flights between the two countries, but Hong Kong was not included as it negotiates its own air traffic rights under the Basic Law, the city's mini-constitution.

Steven Ciobo, Australia's minister for trade, tourism and investment, yesterday pressed Hong Kong officials to secure a "more liberalised" deal, claiming an agreement could be reached within current trade negotiations.

"Hong Kong has a tremendous amount going for it, but one area I think Hong Kong could do better in, to be honest, is in air services agreements," he said.

Ciobo was in town to support the launch of Virgin Australia's direct flights between Melbourne and Hong Kong.

Under the current arrangement, air traffic rights heavily favour Cathay Pacific Airways, which has taken all the available locally allocated slots and effectively sidelines competitor Hong Kong Airlines from operating to Australia's major cities.

Cathay Pacific said it supported the government's policy of progressive liberalisation.

"Traffic rights are an important asset not to be traded lightly," an airline spokesman said.



I think Hong Kong could do better ... in air services agreements

TRADE MINISTER STEVEN CIOBO (ABOVE)

"Hong Kong enjoys an important geographical position, and foreign carriers are naturally always interested in trying to secure added advantages."

Finding a way around existing rules, Hong Kong Airlines and Virgin Australia joined forces to serve the city and Australia. Last year, Hong Kong Airlines' parent company, HNA, acquired a major stake in Virgin Australia.

The two are arch-rivals of Cathay Pacific and Qantas, Australia's national airline. Yesterday, Virgin Australia Group unveiled a plan to take on the two prestigious carriers in Hong Kong.

Its CEO John Borghetti said Sydney, Brisbane, and another unnamed city – possibly Perth or Adelaide – were being considered for new Hong Kong flights.

Zhuhai-HK airport bridge link 'in place'

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Plans to allow travellers to check in and take a shuttle bus across the mega bridge from Zhuhai directly to Hong Kong's airport are gathering pace, the *Post* understands.

A parcel of land has been reserved by the Zhuhai government on an artificial island off the mainland city for the Hong Kong Airport Authority to use.

This would pave the way to set up passenger check-in and ticketing facilities for Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) on Zhuhai's offshore island, a source familiar with the matter said.

The facilities would also increase prospects of a shuttle bus service being operated for transit passengers across the bridge.

The completion of the Hong Kong section of the bridge project has been delayed until the end of this year.

The arrangement comes as the Pearl River Delta becomes the focus of Beijing's Greater Bay Area development plan, bringing

together Hong Kong, Macau and nine cities in Guangdong.

Coupled with enhanced transport links, the bridge and coach service would attract more air travellers from the west of the Pearl River Delta, increasing Hong Kong's competitiveness against airports in Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

An aviation insider, who was not authorised to speak on the matter but had knowledge of Zhuhai plans to integrate the airport and the bridge, said: "Inside the customs, immigration and quarantine building on the Zhuhai offshore island, they have already left space for HKIA to do check-in and ticketing and develop a bonded coach service."

The coaches could park next to the airport's ferry terminal and use existing facilities to move people into the restricted area of the airport.

Meanwhile, Zhuhai Airport is developing similar plans for a cargo service to handle freight for HKIA, subject to approval by the authorities in Hong Kong and on the mainland.



CITY DIGEST

Axe and knife scares prompt police search

Two men were found carrying an axe and a folding knife on to MTR trains in two separate incidents yesterday, sparking a citywide police search. The incidents happened at Choi Hung and Wong Tai Sin stations in a period of four hours. In the first case, police were called in after a bald man was found carrying an axe. Another man aged about 50 was later seen carrying a knife. No arrests have been made.

Man arrested over rape in Kwun Tong flat

Police arrested a 36-year-old man on suspicion of raping a 46-year-old woman in Kwun Tong. The alleged incident happened in a flat in Tung Ming Street on Wednesday last week. The case came to light when the woman sought medical treatment at Caritas Medical Centre on the following day and reported it to police. Officers picked up the suspect in Kwun Tong on Wednesday night.

MARK SIX

There was no winner of the first prize in last night's draw. The winning numbers were 2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 30 and extra 28. The second prize of HK\$38,400 was won by seven tickets. Third prize paid HK\$19,200 and was won by 363.4 tickets.

Parlour manager held over trade malpractice

Customs officers arrested the female manager of a beauty parlour on Canton Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, on suspicion of giving out false trade descriptions of the services on offer and engaging in unfair trade practices involving misleading omission in the sale of a service. The 39-year-old woman from the parlour in World Commerce Centre was later released on bail pending further inquiries.

Police swoop on man in indecent assault case

A 64-year-old man accused of indecently assaulting an 18-year-old woman in Cheung Sha Wan on two separate occasions in May and earlier this month was arrested in Mong Kok.

"The first priority is Melbourne, the second priority is Sydney or Brisbane, but knowing how cheeky we could be, we could go to a third city first," he added.

"The timing will dictate the city we will use, but our intention is to have widespread coverage across Australia."

Borghetti said Hong Kong was seen as a natural gateway given the rising number of outbound Chinese travellers.

"So our first stepping stone is clearly Hong Kong. Why? It's such a geographically well-placed hub. Within five hours, you pick up half of the world's population."

Last year, 1.2 million Chinese tourists visited Australia. That figure is twice the number who came five years ago. And within 10 years, the total is due to hit four million.

In recent years, Hong Kong International Airport has been operating at nearly full capacity, making it difficult to add new flights.

Borghetti said he was optimistic Virgin Australia would gain greater access into the city.

Ellis Taylor, of the aviation publication *Flight Global*, said "serious reform" of the city's air traffic agreements was needed.

"Given that Australia now has open skies with China, the present arrangement puts Hong Kong at a disadvantage, especially with the huge growth in passengers between China through to Australia," he said.

David Flynn, of *Australian Business Traveller*, said it made sense to reform air traffic rights in light of Virgin Australia's ambitions to quadruple its number of flights.

"I think this is one area where airlines and their passengers would be in complete accord, simply because a growing market needs room to grow."