

NEW BLUEPRINT | HONG KONG SAR

Govt sets measures to implement micro plan

Officials detail execution, oversight mechanisms during LegCo debate

By **ATLAS SHAO** in Hong Kong
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The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government is establishing a robust implementation and oversight mechanism to translate its first five-year plan into concrete results.

Officials and legislators made the remarks on Wednesday during a three-day joint debate on two motions covering the inaugural five-year plan and the 2026 Policy Address.

Moving the motion on the five-year plan, Chief Secretary for Administration Eric Chan Kwok-ki said the city is committed to fully executing the plan. He sought lawmakers' support for the motion and welcomed their views.

"The implementation of the first five-year plan requires the concerted efforts of all sectors of society," Chan said. "The government will take the initiative and act proactively, working with all sectors and every resident to fully advance its implementation."

The heads of all six senior secretarial and deputy secretarial positions, as well as 15 policy bureaux, in the government will attend the debate sessions.

Lawmakers are set to ask 22 questions covering various policy areas, all of which require written replies from the government officials.

Separately, lawmaker Ronick Chan Chun-ying moved a motion of thanks, stating, "This Council thanks the chief executive for his (Policy) Address." On Sept 16, Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu presented the city's first Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development (2026-30) and the 2026 Policy Address to the Legislative Council.

Eric Chan said implementing the five-year plan is a massive and complex systemic project. It is therefore necessary to establish a public administration framework featuring the five-year plan's leadership role, annual policy implementation, fiscal budget support, and regular accountability reporting.

He said that the government will

use the Policy Address as an "annual action agenda" for implementing the five-year plan, setting key annual priorities, specific policy measures, and projects in line with the plan's strategic direction and requirements, while taking prevailing conditions into account.

During annual duty visits to Beijing, the chief executive will report to the central authorities on the plan's implementation, and review progress toward its targets and indicators, summarize outcomes, and suggest areas for improvement.

The annual Budget, prepared by the city's financial secretary, will provide resources to support these tasks while maintaining the principle of government fiscal sustainability, Eric Chan said.

Ronick Chan, who chairs the Legislative Council's House Committee, said the development plan embeds policy continuity in the system, providing all sectors of society with clear expectations and establishing a precise benchmark for governance.

The debate is divided into six sessions, covering topics including "four centers, one hub"; the Northern Metropolis, regional integration and global network, social welfare, as well as development and security, and governance efficacy.

Lawmaker Kenneth Fok Kai-kong, who represents the sports, performing arts, culture and publi-

cation functional constituency, called on the government to take a broader approach to its proposed aviation strategy. The five-year plan proposed enhancing aviation links with 10 or more partners each year from 2026-30, with Belt and Road Initiative partner countries making up at least 40 percent.

Fok said Hong Kong should adopt a more open policy and foster a fairer competitive environment, which would not only benefit tourism and allow Hong Kong residents to enjoy cheaper fares, but also proactively align with and contribute to the nation's high-level opening-up strategy.

Lawmaker Sunny Tan focused on cultivating emerging industries. He said efforts should be made to build the "Made in Hong Kong" brand into a gold standard representing world-class quality control, strict safety standards, and a reputation for integrity. Relevant sectors include pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and food processing.

Lawmaker Chan Pui-leung, who represents the insurance sector, suggested relaxing the Top Talent Pass Scheme criteria for trades facing personnel shortages. This includes adjusting the subject rankings of eligible universities, or allowing over 10 years of senior industry experience to substitute for certain academic qualifications. He also proposed setting a target for top-talent intake over the next five years.

After the six debate sessions, lawmakers will vote on the two motions.



Chief Secretary for Administration Eric Chan Kwok-ki (standing) speaks during a joint debate on the motions concerning Hong Kong's first five-year plan and the 2026 Policy Address at the Legislative Council on Wednesday. ADAM LAM / CHINA DAILY

City remains world's freest economy

By **GABY LIN** and **SHAMIM ASHRAF** in Hong Kong

Academics and business leaders have given Hong Kong's prospects a resounding vote of confidence, as the city retained its position as the world's freest economy in a recent ranking by the Canadian public policy think tank Fraser Institute.

According to the Economic Freedom of the World 2026 Annual Report, released on Tuesday, Hong Kong ranked first in economic freedom among the 165 jurisdictions assessed, followed by Switzerland and Singapore.

The special administrative region maintained its top position in "freedom to trade internationally" and secured second place in "regulation" among the five areas of assessment, the report said.

The Hong Kong SAR government said the report affirmed the city's strengths as a free-market economy, alongside its open, efficient and fair business environment.

"Amid increasing global economic uncertainties and rising trade protectionism, Hong Kong remains firmly committed to maintaining its free port status, zero-tariff policy, and simple and low tax regime, providing a secure, stable, fair, predictable and internationalized business and investment environment for investors and entrepreneurs from around the world," a government spokesman said.

Under the "one country, two systems" framework, the city enjoys the strong support of the motherland while maintaining close connections with the rest of the world, the spokesman said.

While offering convenient access

to both the Chinese mainland and international markets, the city continues to practice common law in both the Chinese and English languages. It also provides financial, shipping, trading and professional services that align seamlessly with international best standards, supported by an efficient government structure and a clean, professional civil service, according to the spokesman.

"These strengths enable Hong Kong to fully leverage its roles and functions as a super connector and super value-adder, making it the best gateway for mainland enterprises to enter international markets and for overseas enterprises to enter the mainland," he added.

The Chinese General Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong welcomed the news, saying such recognition is especially significant for the local business community. It not only affirms Hong Kong's long-standing commitment to maintaining a free and open market, but also serves to boost confidence among enterprises and investors both at home and overseas, it said.

Looking ahead, the chamber said it will continue to help align the SAR's first five-year plan with the nation's strategies, and seize opportunities arising from initiatives such as the Northern Metropolis, creating greater development prospects for companies and residents.

Billy Mak Sui-choi, an associate professor at Hong Kong Baptist University's Department of Accountancy, Economics and Finance, said Hong Kong's regulations and tax regimes have remained consistent over time, creating a stable environment for business development.

He said he believes Hong Kong can continue to be the world's freest economy. "As a free port, the city conducts no customs tariffs and allows for free currency exchange. ... All of these characteristics make it ideal for trade," Mak added. "From this perspective, Hong Kong's position should not be replaced by other places any time soon."

Edward Chen Kwan-yiu, an honorary professor at the University of Hong Kong's Business School, said Hong Kong thoroughly deserved the ranking.

Chen said the city can be "a very good intermediary" that helps bridge different stakeholders, bypassing possible policy constraints across global markets, given its free-flowing channels for capital, and information, as well as expertise.

"Hong Kong could be a broker in compromising different restrictions. It's free in terms of trade and investment, foreign exchange, with no capital control. And also it (allows) free flow of information, free flow of capital, and free flow of talents coming to Hong Kong," he added.

In the first eight months of this year, Invest Hong Kong — the government's investment promotion agency — aided 520 mainland and overseas enterprises with setting up or expanding their presence in Hong Kong.

Between the end of 2022 and August, more than 310,000 individuals arrived in Hong Kong under various talent admission programs.

Li Xiaoyun contributed to this story.

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Reaching the community



A group of "district tutors" in national security education from Po Leung Kuk, a women's and children's welfare society, are appointed at the Hong Kong Science Museum on Wednesday, following their completion of the National Security Education District Tutor Training Scheme provided by the Security Bureau and the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau. Launched in 2024, the program invites members from district councils, schools and community organizations to undergo training, enabling them to help deepen public understanding of national security education across local communities. ANDY CHONG / CHINA DAILY

SAR needs stronger mediation strategy

By **OSWALD CHAN** in Hong Kong
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A political party representing the city's business and professional sectors has proposed 10 measures in a research report aimed at ensuring the city becomes a global mediation hub.

The Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong (BPA) proposed hosting a global mediation summit in the city, accelerating the establishment of the Hong Kong International Commercial Court, and expanding mediation services to cover emerging and high-end industries.

The alliance also recommended inviting authoritative international organizations to set up offices in the city, and striving to host a United Nations branch.

"Upgrading the status of Hong Kong from an arbitration stronghold to a comprehensive international legal hub integrating litigation, arbitration and mediation will attract a large amount of business to Hong Kong," said Jimmy Ng Wing-ka, the party's leader and a lawmaker representing the Industrial (Second) functional constituency.

Ng said the planned Hong Kong International Commercial Court is expected to allow overseas lawyers to represent clients in certain commercial proceedings, and actively

recruit current or retired judges from common law jurisdictions to participate in adjudication, thereby enhancing the international business community's confidence in the rule of law in Hong Kong.

The Judiciary announced in May that it planned to establish the Hong Kong International Commercial Court, a specialist division of the High Court, within a year to adjudicate complex, high-value international and cross-boundary commercial disputes. The International Organization for Mediation, inaugurated on Oct 20, 2025, successfully mediated its first international maritime dispute in May.

Priscilla Leung Mei-fun, the BPA's vice-chairwoman and a lawmaker, said: "Given the complex international trade and investment environment, and the lack of a unified dispute resolution mechanism among economies participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, Hong Kong's development as a global mediation center will serve as a primary venue for establishing a dispute resolution mechanism for the initiative."

This mechanism aims to resolve disputes through equal consultation based on fairness and inclusiveness, promoting win-win cooperation within the Belt and Road Initiative and generating greater demand for Hong Kong's

professional services in legal, trade, finance, and logistics, she added.

Sunny Tan, a BPA vice-chairman and a lawmaker representing the textiles and garment functional constituency, said the government should vigorously expand the special administrative region's international mediation network, promote pilot projects for cross-border enforcement of commercial settlement agreements in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and build a sustainable "mediation ecosystem".

Under the Foreign Judgments (Reciprocal Enforcement) Ordinance, Hong Kong currently has direct registration enforcement arrangements with 15 designated jurisdictions. However, most jurisdictions in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, as well as Japan and South Korea, are not covered.

"The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is Hong Kong's second-largest trading partner; the Middle East, particularly the six Gulf states, is a key node in the Belt and Road Initiative, and Japan and South Korea are major economies in the region. The lack of enforceability of the judgment will directly weaken the local business community's willingness to choose Hong Kong as a venue for dispute resolution," Tan said.

Conference explores collaboration across Asia-Pacific arts scene

By **CHITRALEKHA BASU**
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The Association of Asia Pacific Performing Arts Centres Annual Conference (AAPPAC), which opened at Freespace in the West Kowloon Cultural District on Wednesday, kicked off with a reimagined version of the ritual folk dances performed to mark Chinese festivals.

The event marks the 30th anniversary of the association — the largest network of arts centers and organizations in the Asia-Pacific region. The conference features four days of exchanges and activities, running through Friday.

Performed by Hong Kong's TS Crew, *No Dragon No Lion* strips the lion-dance form of its elaborate costumes; mixes traditional dance moves with kung fu, parkour, breakdance and Cantonese Opera; and replaces beating drums with live beatboxing and the allegro movement from Vivaldi's "Spring" concerto.

If that sounds a bit much, it resonates with the "messiness" that Yvonne Tham, chairperson of the AAPPAC executive committee, said was inherent in the diversity that the network represents. Over 350 cultural leaders from close to 70 cities are attending the conference.

As Tham says, even if the multitude of voices can seem a bit overwhelming, the idea is to hear each other out in order to bring about more collaborative projects and resource sharing connecting cities and cultures.

AAPPAC has returned to Hong Kong after 20 years. In her opening speech, Betty Fung Ching Suk-ye,

CEO of the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority, and deputy chair of the AAPPAC Executive Committee, remarked on the significance of this moment. Resonating with the government's ambition to consolidate Hong Kong's position as an East-meets-West center for international cultural exchanges, Fung said that the core mission of WestK was rather similar — to build a center of cultural exchange, driven by the ideas of "bringing in and going global".

She said that so far, WestK has signed 50 memorandums of understanding with top international performing arts centers. As the cultural district's newest facility, the WestK Performing Arts Centre, a state-of-the-art theater complex with infrastructure to support a diverse range of performance forms, including musicals, nears completion, the moment is ripe to reach out to prospective partners and collaborators around the world.

Across the border, Shenzhen too has seen rapid expansion of cultural infrastructure lately. The spectacular Ateliers Jean Nouvel-designed 222,000-square-meter Shenzhen Opera House, when it opens in 2029, will be in need of a large and appreciative audience.

Ding Zhongyuan, deputy director general of the Shenzhen Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television, Tourism and Sports, said that his team is keen to "balance content quality and market demand". To that end, they are developing a public-focused program. The hope is to make the cultural district in the Shenzhen Bay area a rallying point for arts aficionados from the cities in the Guang-

dong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

But can alliances like AAPPAC make a real difference to protecting livelihoods in the time of funding cuts and the looming threat of AI replacing jobs in the arts sector? New-media artist and academic Keith Lam, a panelist at the conference, said that AAPPAC can help build "bridges that might help professionals like engineers, artists, and technology experts, even scientists, to come together without any predetermined agenda."

"A conference like this is very important for Hong Kong artists because our city is small. So we have to think of ways to make sure that our work is not limited to a Hong Kong audience."

Brenna Hobson, the Sydney Opera House's director of programming, said she prefers to look at the positive side of the presence of AI in arts. "Hopefully it can free people up to do less of the sort of work that involves manual drudgery and more of creative thinking. I do think that performing arts will be durable in that it involves people being in a room together, and that's what's special about it."

At least one of the things she watched on her first day at AAPPAC 2026 has already piqued her interest. "Even as I was watching the opening performance, I wondered if we could get them on the Sydney Opera House Forecourt. So you're always hoping to see excerpts of full-length works that you could potentially work with in the future, and hear conversations about what work might be touring through your region, or who you could be working with."