

CHINA WARNS U.S. OF RETALIATION IF PUNISHED FOR HONG KONG LAW

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

Call for rollback: Pro-democracy protesters gathering in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong, on Sunday to protest against China's new security law. AFP/ISAAC LAWRENCE

China on Monday threatened counter-measures against the U.S. if it was punished for plans to impose a sedition law on Hong Kong, that the business hub's security chief hailed as a new tool that would defeat "terrorism".

Beijing plans to pass a new security law for Hong Kong that bans treason, subversion and sedition after months of massive, often-violent pro-democracy protests last year.

But many Hong Kongers, business groups and Western nations fear the proposal could be a death blow to the city's treasured freedoms and thousands took to the streets on Sunday despite a ban on mass gatherings introduced to combat coronavirus.

As police dispersed the crowds with tear gas and water cannon, Washington's National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien warned the new law could cost the city its preferential U.S. trading status.

But China's Foreign Ministry said Beijing would react to any sanctions from Washington. "If the U.S. insists on hurting China's interests, China will have to take every necessary measure to counter and oppose this," Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters on Monday.

Hong Kong has become the latest flashpoint in soaring tensions between the world's two super powers which China has likened to "the brink of a new Cold War".

The refusal to grant Hong Kongers democracy has sparked rare bipartisan support in an otherwise bitterly divided Washington during the Donald Trump administration.

Foreign-backed plot

Beijing portrays the city's protests as a foreign-backed plot to destabilise the motherland and says other nations have no right to interfere in how the international business hub is run.

Protesters, who have hit the streets in their millions, say they are motivated by years of Beijing chipping away at the city's freedoms since it was handed back to China by Britain in 1997.

Hong Kong enjoys liberties unseen on the mainland, as well as its own legal system and trade status.

Campaigners view the security law proposal as the most brazen move yet by Beijing to end free speech and the city's ability to make its own laws. Of particular concern is a provision allowing Chinese security agents to operate in Hong Kong, with fears it could spark a crackdown on those voicing dissent against China's communist rulers.

The proposed law, which China's rubber-stamp legislature is expected to act on quickly, will also

bypass Hong Kong's own legislature.

The city's influential Bar Association on Monday described the proposed motion as "worrying and problematic" — and warned it may even breach the territory's mini-constitution. The proposal has spooked investors with Hong Kong's stock exchange suffering its largest drop in five years on Friday.

Hong Kong's government has welcomed the law.

"Terrorism is growing in the city and activities which harm national security, such as 'Hong Kong independence', become more rampant," Security Minister John Lee said in a statement.

U.S. sanctions

Meanwhile, in a separate development that signals rising tensions between China and the U.S., Beijing vowed to shield a Chinese government institute and eight companies sanctioned by the U.S. over alleged human rights violations in the restive Xinjiang region, where China is accused of mass repression of mostly Muslim minorities.

The U.S. Department of Commerce announced the sanctions on Friday, saying they were triggered by human rights abuses against Uighurs and other minority groups in Xinjiang in China's far northwest. Beijing urged Washington to reverse the decision, saying the Commerce Department had "stretched the concept of national security" to "meddle in China's affairs and harm China's interests".

Subscribe to The Hindu digital to get unlimited access to Today's paper

Already have an account ? [Sign in](#)

Start your 14 days trial now. [Sign Up](#)

Find mobile-friendly version of articles from the day's newspaper in one easy-to-read list.

Enjoy reading as many articles as you wish without any limitations.

A select list of articles that match your interests and tastes.

Move smoothly between articles as our pages load instantly.

A one-stop-shop for seeing the latest updates, and managing your preferences.

We brief you on the latest and most important developments, three times a day.

*Our Digital Subscription plans do not currently include the e-paper ,crossword, iPhone, iPad mobile applications and print. Our plans enhance your reading experience.

To continue enjoying The Hindu, You can turn off your ad blocker or [Subscribe to The Hindu.](#)

[Sign up for a 30 day free trial.](#)

END

CrackIAS.com