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Tightening grip: On Hong Kong-China relations

What is the issue?

Recent developments suggest that the “one country, two systems” model of Hong Kong-China relations is coming under unprecedented stress.

What is the political status of Hong Kong?

- Hong Kong, at roughly 1,100 sq km, is smaller in size than Delhi, and is home to an estimated 7.4 million people.
- It was a British colony from 1841 until sovereignty was returned to China in 1997.
- Hong Kong is now part of China under the “**one country, two systems**” principle.
- Under this, the city of Hong Kong remains a semi-autonomous region with the Basic Law (the city’s mini-constitution) for 50 years from 1997.
- This ensures that Hong Kong keeps its own judicial independence, its own legislature and economic system.
- It has its own laws and courts, and allows its residents a range of civil liberties.
- The constitutional document is a product of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration.

What happened in Hong Kong after the handover?

- Since the handover, Hong Kong residents have repeatedly protested to protect their Basic Law freedoms, with the first major pro-democracy protest taking place in 2003.
- In 2014, over 1 lakh city residents took part in the ‘**Umbrella Revolution**’ to protest against China’s denial of democratic reforms.
- In 2019, several Hong Kongers agitated against a proposed [extradition law](#) and continued with pro-democracy marches even after the legislation was withdrawn.
- The law allowed the local government to extradite a suspect to places with which the city has no formal extradition accord.
- In effect, this would allow suspects accused of crimes such as murder and rape to be extradited to mainland China to face trial.

What events indicate China’s hard line approach towards Hong Kong?

- [China’s new national security law](#) - It punishes the protestors with harsh punishments for offences including secession, subversion, terrorist activities, and collusion with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security.
- It led to Hong Kong’s most well-known pro-democracy newspaper, Apple Daily, ceasing

publication.

- **Overhaul of Hong Kong's electoral system**- The electoral reforms reduced the share of directly elected representatives in Hong Kong's legislature and introduced a new candidate review committee to ensure only patriots can run for office.
- Pro-Beijing candidates swept the patriots only polls with many of the pro-democracy opposition figures either boycotting or unable to contest the elections.
- **Tiananmen vigil** - The annual vigil has taken place in Hong Kong for decades to mark the anniversary of Chinese troops crushing peaceful democracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on 4 June 1989.
- This year, the park was closed by the police and the anniversary went without commemoration.
- **Removal of Pillar of Shame** - Pillar of Shame, standing in the campus of Hong Kong University was erected in 1997 to commemorate the crackdown at Tiananmen Square.
- It was removed by the construction crew in December 23. Memorials to Tiananmen at three other universities were also removed.

References

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/tightening-grip-on-hong-kong-china-relations/article38050939.ece>



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