

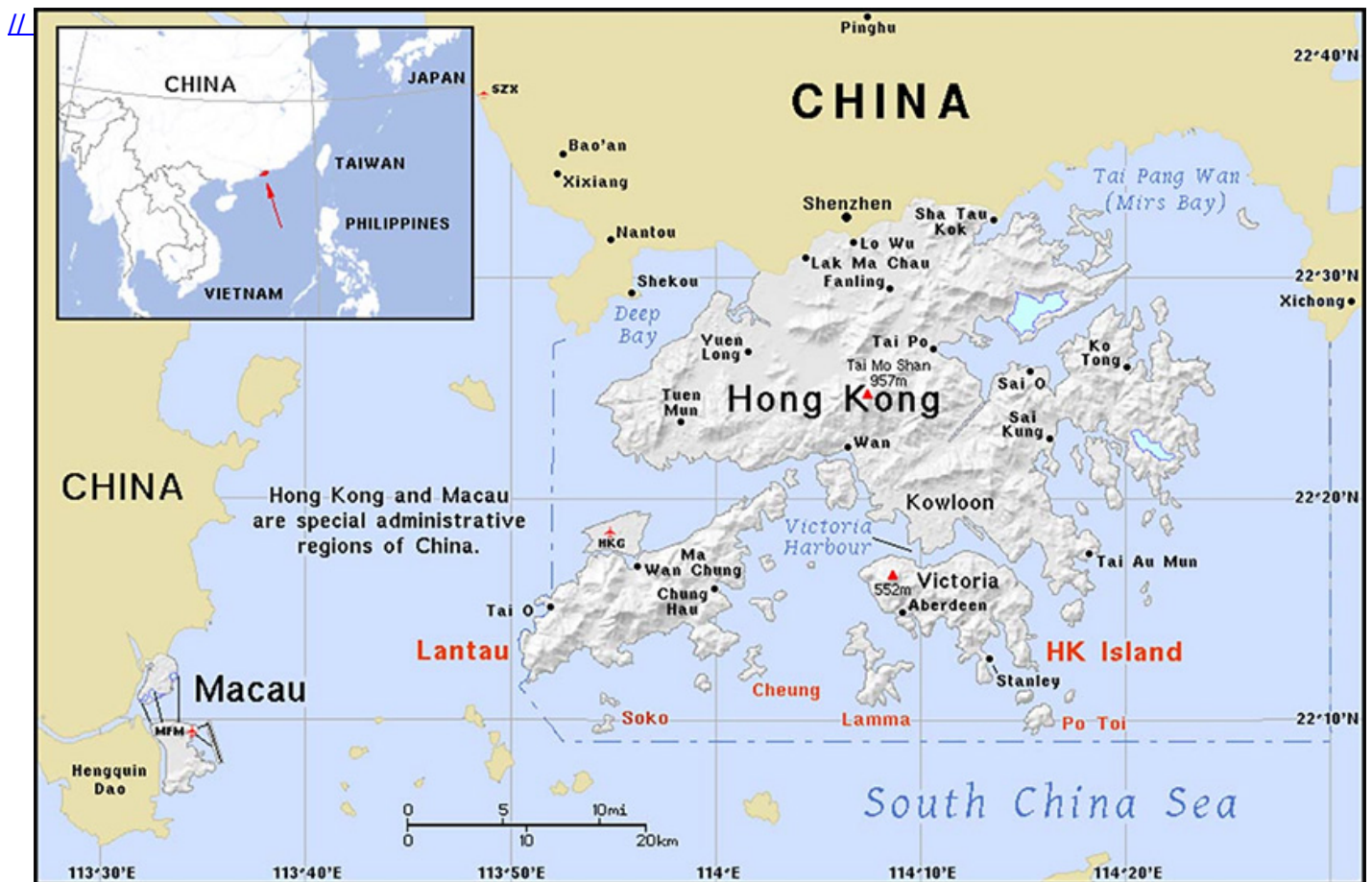


Changes in Electoral System of Hong Kong

Why in News

Recently, China has made changes in **Hong Kong's electoral system**.

- The measures are part of **China's efforts to consolidate its authoritarian grip** over **Hong Kong Special Administrative Region** (HKSAR) following the **imposition of a national security law in June 2020**.



Key Points

- **The New Electoral System:**
 - **Increased Membership of the Legislative Council:**
 - The number of **Hong Kong's Legislative Council (HKLC)** members will be **increased to 90**, with the **additional members also nominated**, thereby

reducing the share of elected representatives.

- Currently, only half of the 70 members of HKLC are directly elected and the rest are nominated.

◦ **Expansion of Election Committee:**

- The Election committee (**Hong Kong electoral college**) has been expanded to include Beijing-nominated members.
- The **Election Committee**, as previously, **will be responsible for electing the Chief Executive**, and will also choose some of the members of HKLC.

◦ **New Candidate Qualification:**

- The selection of “patriots” will be ensured by the setting up of a **new candidate qualification review committee**.

▪ **Implications:**

- The change will give **Beijing-appointed politicians a greater say** in running the **Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR)**, marking the biggest change since the handover in 1997.
- An increased number of pro-Beijing officials would **weaken the power of the opposition to influence the city's leadership**.
- It will erode the political freedoms that distinguished Hong Kong from the mainland under the “one country, two systems” model.

▪ **Implication for India:**

- Hong Kong is a destination for **re-export of Indian goods to the global market**.
 - Hong Kong is the **fourth largest export market for India**.
- India is of the view that **Hong Kong can play an important role in strengthening ties with China**, as it is considered a gateway to China.
- Thus, global tensions due to **political unrest in Hong Kong carry consequences for India's trade with the rest of the world**, as well as with China.

▪ **Criticism:**

- The **European Union** has condemned the change and warned China of broader sanctions.
- The **G7** termed this move a step towards **eliminating dissenting voices and opinions in Hong Kong**.
- All major economies such as the **USA, UK, Australia have condemned the move** and have urged **China to allow a more participatory and representative form of system**.
- The change is **non-compliance with the Sino-British Joint Declaration**.

Sino-British Joint Declaration

▪ **About:**

- It is a treaty signed between the **United Kingdom and China in 1985** on Hong Kong under Chinese sovereignty.
- According to the treaty, **China would reassume control of Hong Kong**, which was occupied by Britain after the **Opium War in 1840**, from July 1, 1997.
 - **Opium Wars:** The Opium Wars were two wars **fought between the Chinese Qing dynasty and European powers**. Both the wars were a result of the Qing Dynasty's attempts to curb the opium trade.
 - The **first was fought from 1839-1842** and the **second one from 1856 - 1860**.

▪ **Provisions:**

- It stated that **China's basic policies regarding Hong Kong "will remain unchanged**

for 50 years" and ensured a **high degree of autonomy to Hong Kong**. These policies are stipulated in the **Basic Law**, the city's mini-constitution.

- Under the Basic Law the Constitution that has governed Hong Kong since 1997 the HKSAR is a part of China but enjoys **"a high degree of autonomy"** and **"executive, legislative and independent judicial power"**, except in foreign policy and defence.
- It also says **"the socialist system and policies shall not be practised" in Hong Kong for 50 years.**
- It held that **Britain would be responsible for the administration of Hong Kong until 1997** and the Chinese government would give its cooperation.

Way Forward

- The new legislation has been seen as the **final nail in the coffin for Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement** and an **erosion of the autonomy** guaranteed to the city when it was handed over to China in 1997.
- With the national security law and the new electoral changes, the **space for the pro-democracy opposition in Hong Kong has been drastically reduced.**
- China must **act in accordance with its legal obligations** and respect fundamental rights and freedoms in Hong Kong.

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