

US Senator blocks Hong Kong People's Freedom and Choice Act

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In news

Recently the US senator blocked a bill that would give Hong Kongers refugee status

Key points

The bill called the Hong Kong People's Freedom and Choice Act, would have allowed Hong Kong citizens to reside and work in the US as part of a federal programme reserved for individuals from war-torn countries or those who are seeking refuge from natural disaster or other difficult circumstances.

Why is the bill significant?

- The proposed legislation sought to protect Hong Kongers facing persecution under the Chinese government's tightening grip by permitting Hong Kong residents targeted for exercising their democratic freedoms to seek refugee status in the US.
- If passed, this law would have also allowed Hong Kong residents already residing in the US to remain in the country if they feared political persecution and harassment by government authorities in Hong Kong.
- It would have granted Hong Kong residents 'Temporary Protected Status' in the US.

Why was it blocked?

- According to Republican Senator Ted Cruz who Democrats were using this bill "to advance their long-standing goals on changing (US) immigration laws".

- Cruz had also claimed that China would be using this legislation to exploit US immigration laws and to recruit spies working in the interest of China.
- The senator had insisted that the legislation was a part of a purported larger immigration agenda by the Democrats who were pushing for relaxed immigration rules.
- Immigration has been a point of contention for years between the two political parties in the US and under the Trump administration, immigration laws have become even more harsh.

Hong Kong

- Hong Kong, officially the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, is a metropolitan area and special administrative region of the People's Republic of China on the eastern Pearl River Delta of the South China Sea.
- Hong Kong became a colony of the British Empire after the Qing Empire ceded Hong Kong Island at the end of the First Opium War in 1842.
- The colony expanded to the Kowloon Peninsula in 1860 after the Second Opium War and was further extended when Britain obtained a 99-year lease of the New Territories in 1898.
- The whole territory was transferred to China in 1997.
- As a special administrative region, Hong Kong maintains separate governing and economic systems from that of mainland China under the principle of "one country, two systems".