

What happened

Beijing's power grab

In a move which could have far-reaching consequences for Hong Kong's future, China unveiled a highly contentious plan to impose a national security law which would effectively bypass the semi-autonomous territory's legislature. The law, submitted at China's annual National People's Congress, would allow Beijing to crack down on anything in Hong Kong that it regarded as "treason, secession, sedition or subversion". China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, said the law should be brought in without delay, and Hong Kong's leader, Carrie Lam, said it had her full support.

But the announcement was condemned by countries around the world, including Britain and the US, and triggered fury among pro-democracy activists. Thousands of protesters who took to the streets over the weekend were met with tear gas and water cannon from police; scores were arrested.



Taking to the streets in Hong Kong

What the editorials said

This is a flagrant "power grab", said The Times. The new law will allow Chinese authorities to "arrest, detain and deport anyone it suspects of terrorism, foreign interference or seditious activities. In other words, anyone it wants". Having "hacked away" at Hong Kong's autonomy ever since the handover from British rule in 1997, Beijing has now "taken a bulldozer" to the "one country, two systems" principle which underpins the region's governance, said The Guardian. Even worse, it means China's national security bodies (including the secret police) are now free to set up branches there.

The aim of the law is obvious, said the FT: China's president, Xi Jinping, wants to "snuff out" protests of the kind seen last year, when millions of pro-democracy activists took to the streets in a wave of unrest triggered by China's growing domination. "Beijing hopes the law will either scare future protesters off, or can be wielded to crush them" – ensuring in the process that Hong Kong can't be used as a "base for dissent that could spill over into the mainland".