China's Security Law: Impact on Hong Kong

Why in news?

China's national security law gave it a wide-range of powers over Hong Kong.

What is the history?

- Hong Kong was under British rule until 1997.
- Then, the territory was given to China under the condition that it retains some autonomy, including its economic system, for 50 years.
- As the Chinese firewall took hold, several technology companies were shut out, including Google and Facebook.
- But with the quasi-independence afforded by "one country, two systems", Hong Kong was integrated into the global Internet.
- Global tech companies were able to operate close to China without being subject to the country's laws.

What is the new national security law?

- The law was put into effect without the involvement of the local institutions.
- It criminalises activities like secession, subversion and, organization and perpetration of terrorist activities.
- It also criminalises collusion with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security.
- Some specific offences include damaging government buildings and lobbying against the Chinese government.
- The law also allows a National Security Committee to investigate and prosecute violators.

What are the provisions of the law on the tech front?

- On the technology front, the new surveillance and censorship rules could subsume the territory into China's Great Firewall.
- The Hong Kong Police are given extensive new controls to censor Internet content, track people online, and seize electronic records.
- They can investigate Internet platforms and their data as well as order its deletion.
- Penalties for the companies include fines up to nearly $13,000 and six months jail time.

How have tech companies reacted?

- Major tech companies have suspended their responses to Hong Kong government requests.
- They said that they would first reassess the law's new controls.
- They have to decide on whether to accept the new data-sharing and censorship requirements of the law or leave the territory altogether.
- Their decisions will have significant weight on Hong Kong's future as an international business hub, and on digital free speech as a whole.

What is the key takeaway?

- This marks yet another step of national border disputes erecting new virtual walls between territories.
- These government decisions may lead to the creation of a "splinternet".
- [Splinternet is a characterization of the Internet as dividing due to various factors, such as technology, commerce, politics, nationalism, religion, and interests.]

Source: The Indian Express

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