USDeclares Israeli Settlements on West Bank Legal

The US caused an international furore by changing its policy on Israeli settlements on the Palestinian West Bank, declaring that it no longer sees them as illegal. The settlements are civilian Israeli communities built on the disputed West Bank territory, which was occupied by Israel post the six-day war of 1967. The UN has long maintained that such settlements are illegal under international law and that the West Bank and the occupied lands should be returned to the Palestinians. However, in recent years, more and more Israelis have begun living in the settlements, some motivated by ideology, but most of them attracted by the cheaper cost of living.

This has led to the growth of settlements from being isolated outposts to some settlements becoming cities in their own right, such as Maale Adumim, which has a population of 41,000. The settlements were also politically convenient for Israel's right-wing parties, with many right-wing governments incentivising settlements. The growing population of the settlements meant that opposition to settlements became unpopular across the Israeli political spectrum. International actors such as the UN, US and EU maintained that the settlements were illegal. The settlements would also prove to be a major obstacle in any peace deal between Palestine and Israel, which was the main reason why the US, despite being an Israeli ally, opposed the settlements. Donald Trump’s administration so far has been consistently supportive of the Israeli cause, supporting Israel’s claim that Jerusalem is its capital and moving the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. However, changing the US policy on Israeli settlements is unknown territory. Not only is the US breaking with its allies, but also its declaration is likely to lead to growth in settler communities and the annexation of settler communities by Israel.

Hong Kong Tense as University Stand-off Nears End

The Hong Kong police have laid siege to the Hong Kong Polytechnic College since Sunday night. Pro-democracy protests have been in force all summer and there was renewed anger after the death of a 22-year-old student in a confrontation with the police. Universities were long seen as a safe space for protestors, with groups providing food and medical aid. However, on Sunday night, the police surrounded the Hong Kong Polytechnic College and declared that everyone inside would be arrested. As the situation inside the college deteriorated, thousands of Hong Kong citizens started marching towards the college to free the protestors. While some protestors surrendered after mediations between the police and the protestors, others escaped through manholes, sewer tunnels and by climbing over walls and walk bridges.

It has attacked Hong Kong’s court, put in place a pro-China police chief and indicated that it will delay the Hong Kong district elections. What we are witnessing today is the poisonous fruit of globalisation. When China first started participating in global markets in the 1980s, the neo-liberal order encouraged it, claiming that if China opened up to trade, it will result in China becoming more democratic. However, the opposite has happened. China has grown more repressive and democracies are growing more and more illiberal. The fact that the economies of so many countries are now intertwined with China, means that no country is willing to speak up against China’s repression, whether in Hong Kong or Xinjiang, for the fear of punitive economic measures by China.