

HK working to block Taiwan in WTO: US report

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The logo of the WTO on its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, is pictured on June 2, 2020.

Photo: Reuters

The Hong Kong government has been working with China to block Taiwan's meaningful participation in the WTO, the US Department of State said in a report published on Thursday.

Even as the Chinese government took new measures to erode democracy in Hong Kong, representatives of the territory acted on behalf of Beijing to advance its objectives in the international arena, the report said.

The latest annual Hong Kong Policy Act report, published by the state department and mandated by the US Congress, assessed the state of democratic freedoms in Hong Kong from March last year to last month.

During that period, Beijing moved to disable the role of pro-democracy legislators in Hong Kong's government and effectively criminalize peaceful political expression critical of the central and local governments, the report said.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) National People's Congress Standing Committee approved sweeping changes to Hong Kong's electoral system, blocking the participation of political groups not favored by Beijing and greatly diminishing Hong Kong voters' ability to elect representatives of their choice, the report said.

In international affairs, Hong Kong continued to vote separately from mainland China in a number of organizations and multilateral entities, but the extent of the PRC's influence was unclear, it said.

In some organizations, there were reports that Hong Kong representatives were acting on

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behalf of China to advance the PRC's political objectives, the state department said.

It cited reports that in the WTO, of which Taiwan is a member, Hong Kong had been working on Beijing's behalf to prevent Taipei's meaningful participation and block it from any leadership positions.

"This indicated that Hong Kong's ability to participate autonomously in these organizations may be eroding," the report said.

On the economic front, although Hong Kong's economic and financial systems remain distinct in many respects from China's, the differences have narrowed, and business and rule of law risks that were previously limited to mainland China are increasingly a concern in Hong Kong, the report said.

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