

## COMMENTHK

Yang Sheng

# China-bashing will get US lawmakers nowhere

**Yang Sheng** says the world will not be taken in by Washington's self-serving geopolitical strategies

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government has dutifully rebutted United States politicians' latest attempt to undermine economic ties between the city and the US. But we would miss a wider picture of a new wave of China-bashing maneuvers in the US Congress if we only paid attention to the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office Certification Act, which seeks to restrict and even shut down the city's trade offices in the US.

The National Security Law for Hong Kong was again cited for the introduction of the bill on Hong Kong's trade offices. That is a lousy excuse. The truth is, the latest attempt to hurt Hong Kong's economic interests is part of a new wave of US politicians' efforts to cause trouble for China and contain its development.

Aside from the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office Certification Act, the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday also passed the Preventing Adversaries from Developing Critical Capabilities Act, which tries to double down on restricting American investment in Chinese companies that are developing artificial intelligence, quantum computing, hypersonics and semiconductors. The bill is seen as "the strongest countering China bill ever" by co-sponsor Mike McCaul, chairman of the committee, who also said, "The time now calls for bold new ideas instead of old failed approaches."

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Wednesday also witnessed the Strengthening the Quad Act, which seeks to strengthen and leverage the grouping of Australia, India, Japan and the US to serve Washington's geopolitical strategy against China, calling for expanded cooperation among partners on issues such as "freedom of navigation" and "overflight".

US politicians made no attempt to conceal their intention of turning Quad partners into Washington's foot soldiers to carry out its geopolitical strategy. Democratic congressman Gerry Connolly of Virginia on Wednesday urged Quad members to strengthen their military power, with the underlying intention of threatening China, saying, "That's the whole point of the Quad."

On the same day, the Uyghur Policy Act of 2023 and the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act were also passed in the committee, which proposes various ploys to again play up the so-called "Uyghur issues" and "Tibetan issues", with the purposes of causing trouble in China's two biggest autonomous regions — Xinjiang and Xizang (also known as the Tibet autonomous region).

That a whole batch of China-bashing bills was rushed through in a single day speaks volumes about heightened China paranoia in Capitol Hill. Whatever pretexts were cited by the US politicians, their desperate efforts to hurt China and thus contain its rise are ultimately driven by their paranoid conviction that the US would lose its global hegemony and the benefits it affords should China become more powerful.

It is unsurprising that the recycling of China-bashing ploys, including trade restrictions, investment curbs, tech blockades, "Hong Kong card", "Xinjiang card", "Xizang card" and "Taiwan card" is going on and on. The thing is, will those countries Washington is trying to recruit for its geopolitical strategies — which only benefit the US at the expense of the overall interests of the world — still dance to its tune when all of its ploys have been laid bare?

*The author is a current affairs commentator. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

# Hong Kong needs the anti-abuse law to protect vulnerable kids

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) protects the fundamental freedoms and inherent rights of children, and has been applied in Hong Kong since 1994.

It not only enshrines the child's right to life, to survival and to development (Art.6), but also its right to protection from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment, whether by parents or other carers (Art.19).

The Convention provides that, in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by the public or private sectors, "the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" (Art.3). Its signatories, therefore, are required to take all necessary measures to respect, protect and fulfill children's rights (Art.4).

Since its creation in 1979, Against Child Abuse (ACA), the NGO, has vigorously campaigned for children's rights, promoting child welfare at every opportunity. By prioritizing protection and development, it has bolstered the work of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and championed the interests of the most vulnerable in all areas.

Working on the frontline, ACA's social workers have provided an important outreach for children in danger, through its four dedicated centers. Whereas child abuse cases have been investigated and welfare decisions taken, the families of the children have, wherever possible, been involved in the process. Through multidisciplinary case conferences, ACA has sought to develop strategies that will most effectively advance child protection.

The problem, however, is that many children grow up in highly challenging circumstances. In 2020, The Hub reported that 274,900 children aged under 18 lived in poverty, and this has inevitably created problems. Many people live in subdivided flats (some 200,000 residents live in what the government has called "inadequate housing", including over 34,000 children), and this can lead to family conflicts, particularly in the summer months, when tempers flare.

It's therefore little wonder that child abuse not only exists, but is getting worse. According to the SWD, the incidence of child abuse rose from 0.6 per 1,000 in 2005, to 1.54 per 1,000 in 2022.

Throughout 2023, the alarm bells have been ringing, despite the retreat of COVID-19, which generated so much domestic stress.

In August, the police announced there had been a jump of almost 30 percent in child abuse cases in the first six months of this year in comparison with the same period in 2022. Of the 716 cases, about half involved physical violence, exposure, ill-treatment, or neglect of a child, while the other 50 percent involved sexual offenses.

The SWD has confirmed the problem, and it reported there were 1,439 child abuse cases last year, up 5 percent on the 1,367 reports in 2021. Of these, 45 percent of last year's cases involved physical harm, while 19 percent were related to child neglect.

On Nov 16, moreover, when ACA issued its annual report for 2022-23, its statistics made for a somber reading. In the reporting period, its hotline received 1,232 calls, an increase of 8.5 percent over the previous year. The calls included 187 cases of suspected child abuse, with 56 percent involving physical violence. Of the other cases, 16 percent involved psychological abuse, 11 percent multiple abuse, 9 percent sexual abuse, and 8 percent child neglect.

There were, ACA reported, 222 children and 206 abusers involved in the cases, and, tellingly, 70 percent of abusers (142 people) were family members of the victims (including 66 mothers and 42 fathers). About 25 percent of the suspected victims were aged 6 to 8, and they were the most affected age group, followed by children aged 9 to 11, and those aged 3 to 5.

These figures, while alarming, are not huge, but they are only the tip of the iceberg. Most child abuse occurs in domestic situations and is never reported. Behind closed doors, children face beatings, isolation and humiliation, and their plight rarely comes to light, with situations sometimes going from bad to worse. All too often, neighbors and others look away, and the victims have no idea of whom to turn to for help.

Although, moreover, child psychological abuse is a significant concern, the child cruelty law offers minimal protection. When cases are prosecuted, it is invariably on the basis of tangible evidence, including wounds or bruises. Although the equivalent UK law has been strengthened (the "Cinderella Law"), to make clear that emotional suffering is, like physical abuse, prosecutable, Hong Kong, despite ACA's entreaties, has yet to follow suit.

It's time for the Commission on Children, chaired by the chief secretary, Eric Chan Kwok-ki, to take up the cudgels and seek a strengthening of the child cruelty law. Once this is done, it will help to deter abuse and incentivize the reporting of cases.



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In the meantime, child abuse can be combated only if the authorities are aware of it, meaning it must be reported. In 2011, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that all Convention signatories should establish mechanisms for reporting violence against children. Over 70 countries have now enacted legislation to make compulsory the reporting of suspected child abuse, including Australia, Canada, Japan, Switzerland and the US.

In the Canadian province of Ontario, a highly effective model has been introduced. It places a duty on the public, including health professionals who work with children, to report if they have reasonable grounds to suspect a child is being mistreated. This means that not only doctors, nurses and teachers are expected to report abuse, whether emotional, physical or sexual, but also relatives and neighbors. It's no longer possible for people to simply do nothing, claiming "it is none of my business".

In Hong Kong, a child protection regime is finally on the horizon. In the Policy Address 2022, the chief executive, John Lee Ka-chiu, realizing that child protection needed to be prioritized, announced that his government would take forward "at full steam" the creation of a mandatory reporting regime.

On June 2, 2023, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Bill was gazetted, and it contains a legislative framework for a compulsory reporting regime for child abuse cases. On June 14, it was introduced into the Legislative Council for first and second readings.

The bill defines a child as a person under 18, and imposes a mandatory reporting duty upon professional practitioners in the social welfare, education and healthcare sectors. Although not as comprehensive as the Ontario model, the bill requires the mandated reporters to make a report to the authorities as soon as practicable if there is a reasonable ground to suspect that a child has been suffering or is at real risk of suffering serious harm.

The bill provides protections for the specified professionals, and it is a defense if somebody has previously made a report about the child in question, or if there is an honest belief that another professional has already reported the matter.

Although the bill is a significant step in the right direction, the maximum penalties are very low, with offenders facing a maximum penalty of only three months' imprisonment and a fine of HK\$50,000 (\$6,406). If the legislation is to have teeth, these penalties may need to be adjusted. After all, it is a serious matter to endanger a child by not reporting its plight and the consequences can be tragic, and a sentence of three months' imprisonment is of a type currently reserved, for example, for somebody who causes an annoyance in a public place or urinates in public.

To prepare for the bill's enactment, the government intends to provide training for mandated reporters, and this is welcome. A practice guide is envisaged to assist them in identifying cases that require early identification, reporting and intervention (and also to avoid any superfluous reporting). The number of residential child care places will also be increased, so that emergency placements of children in danger can be speedily achieved.

The bill was considered by the LegCo's Bills Committee on July 25, Sept 9, Nov 11 and Nov 25, and the next meeting is scheduled for Friday. Although proper scrutiny is essential, there cannot be any foot-dragging. Some people may consider the proposals go too far, but the sooner the bill is enacted, the safer our children will be.

In recent years, there have been a number of tragedies involving children whose plight was known to others (including 5-year-old Yeung Chi-wai, who died in 2013 after prolonged abuse and risk), and whose deaths could have been avoided. The bill offers real hope that such tragedies, if not wholly eliminated, can at least be minimized for the future.

If the bill can be expedited in December and enacted by the New Year, it will be the best possible Christmas present for the city's children.

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# SAR's proactive stance on climate change is beacon of hope at pivotal COP28 summit

In a world grappling with the existential threat of climate change, the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP28), which opened on Thursday in Dubai, presents a crucial juncture for global leaders to forge a path toward a sustainable future. Against this backdrop, Hong Kong, represented by a delegation led by Secretary for Environment and Ecology Tse Chin-wan, is gearing up to make a significant impact at COP28, showcasing its commitment to combating climate change and driving innovation in green technology.

Hong Kong's pivotal role in addressing climate change is underscored by the proactive stance taken by the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corp (HKSTP). In June, HKSTP unveiled its visionary "Net Zero Emissions by 2045" initiative, setting a bold precedent by committing to achieving the Science-Based Targets initiative's net-zero emissions standards five years ahead of Hong Kong's Climate Action Plan 2050.

As part of an ambitious showcase on the international stage, seven forward-thinking companies from the HKSTP are set to participate in COP28. These companies bring not only innovative solutions but a vision for a sustainable future. Among them, Archireef brings a novel approach to marine conservation with its 3D coral reef printing technology. Other participants include i2Cool, a pioneer in electricity-free cooling technology, and M Concept Studio, introducing the highly efficient and eco-friendly Flatcool Technology.

Neuron Digital Group brings its expertise to the table, utilizing smart platforms to analyze data and optimize building energy efficiency. Halo Energy, a trailblazer in electric vehicle charging solutions, joins the lineup alongside InnoBlock, the creators of the carbon management platform TT Green. Synap Technologies adds to the roster, focusing on waste-to-energy solutions, furthering



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the cause of carbon reduction.

As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, the global focus on sustainable development has heightened. The demand for green technology is on the rise, and Hong Kong, as the standard bearer of innovation in the region, aims to meet this demand. Through its participation in COP28, HKSTP not only reaffirms its commitment to sustainable development within the local innovation ecosystem but also positions itself as a catalyst for global change.

The return of Hong Kong to the COP summit after a prolonged absence because of the COVID-19 pandemic is indeed an excellent opportunity, as noted by Climate Change Commissioner Wong Chuen-fai. He emphasizes that Hong Kong's participation serves two key

purposes: understanding the latest global developments in climate action and showcasing Hong Kong's contributions to the cause. This includes efforts such as green finance initiatives, positioning the city as a key player in the international drive for sustainability.

In a world grappling with extreme weather events and the adverse impacts of climate change, the urgency of collective action cannot be overstated. The Lancet Countdown report on climate change and health, authored by leading experts, paints a stark picture of the health crises linked to climate change. From heat waves to air pollution, the toll on human health is evident, and the upcoming COP28 presents an opportunity to address these challenges head-on.

The report underscores that the adverse effects of climate change are not distributed evenly, with vulnerable regions bearing the brunt of health risks. It calls for urgent and concrete measures across five priority areas, emphasizing the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with the Paris Agreement. The report advocates for a just energy transition, adaptation efforts, and a focus on public health measures to reduce air pollution and promote healthier lifestyles.

COP28 is not just a platform for policy discussions; it's a test of world leaders' commitment to tackle the climate crisis. The focus on health, as highlighted in the Lancet Countdown report, could catalyze a paradigm shift away from fossil fuels and toward a sustainable future. Hong Kong's delegation, armed with innovative solutions from its Science Park, stands as a beacon of hope in this critical global endeavor. As the world converges in Dubai, let Hong Kong's commitment to green technology and sustainability echo as a resounding call to action for a planet in peril.

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