CONTEXT:

The U.S. Senate unanimously adopted legislation—"Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act"—supporting "Pro-Democracy" movement in Hong Kong threatening to revoke its special economic status. This step angered China which threatened countermeasures. Lawmakers also approved a measure that would ban the sale of tear gas, rubber bullets and other equipment that have been used by security forces to suppress protests.

BACKGROUND:

- Hong Kong used to be a British colony, got independence in 1997 and became a part of Chinese city.
- According to the constitutional principle—One Country, Two Systems (Now It became One Country No Arguments), the Chinese Communist Government ensured Hong Kong will retain its own currency, legal and parliamentary systems (democratic institutions) and people's existing rights and freedoms for 50 years.
- However, critical voices have emerged in Hong Kong to protest against actions by the government eroding the rights given to Hong Kong.
- At the same time, many citizens have expressed dissatisfaction and anger over the neo-liberal economic policies of the Hong Kong government which have been seen as producing new social inequalities in the society.
- Thus, protests and social movements against the government policies already existed, and the unsolved political and social problems can be seen as the long-term causes for the appearance of the Umbrella Movement.

UMBRELLA MOVEMENT:

The protests of 2014 were about getting the universal suffrage that Hong Kong was promised in the Basic Law, the constitution that lays out how the city is to be governed after its return from Britain to Chinese sovereignty in 1997.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE BILL:

- The "Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act" would require the U.S. President to annually review the favourable trade status that Washington grants to Hong Kong.
- Boosts Hong Kong's pro-democracy protesters, and challenges the Chinese government at a time of strained US-China relations, marked by a protracted Trade wars and Protectionist policies by the two nations.
- The new act is an amendment to a 1992 law that has underpinned US relations with Hong Kong, granting the territory special status as separate from China - in trade, transport and other areas.
- 1992 law grants the US president special power to issue an executive order suspending Hong Kong’s special status if the president determines that the territory is "not sufficiently autonomous" from Beijing.
- This Act holds Chinese and Hong Kong government officials accountable for Hong Kong’s eroding autonomy and human rights violations.
- It also would provide for sanctions against officials responsible for human rights violations in Hong Kong.
- US secretary of state Mike Pompeo would have to certify at least once a year that Hong Kong retains enough autonomy to qualify for special US trading consideration that bolsters its status as a world financial centre.