

Australia and New Zealand on Monday expressed grave concerns over developments in Hong Kong and the human rights situation in the Xinjiang region of China, as the two nations sought get in lockstep over their biggest trading partner.

In the first face-to-face meeting between heads of both countries in over 15 months, Australia and New Zealand presented a united front on China.

Quarantine-free travel between Australia and New Zealand began last month after both nations controlled the spread of COVID-19, allowing Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison to visit New Zealand.

Talks were focused among other things on China, with Australia currently at loggerheads with Beijing while New Zealand has strengthened economic ties with China, with the two countries this year upgrading their free trade agreement.

New Zealand's approach to China has lead to suggestions by political commentators and the media that Wellington may not be taking a strong enough stance on China's human rights' issues.

Ardern rejected this, saying New Zealand and Australia had similar positions on issues such as trade and human rights.

"You'll see Australia and New Zealand have broadly been positioned in exactly the same place on these issues consistently so I really push back on any suggestion that we are not taking a strong stance on these incredibly important issues," she said in a joint press conference.



Image source: BBC

Morrison backed Ardern, saying Australia and New Zealand were trading nations, but neither would ever trade its sovereignty.

“I think as great partners, friends, allies and indeed family, there will be those far from here who would seek to divide us and they will not succeed...,” he said.

In a joint statement both prime ministers expressed grave concerns over developments in Hong Kong and the human rights situation in the Xinjiang region of China, and called on Beijing to respect the human rights of the Uighur people and other Muslim minorities and to grant the United Nations and other independent observers unfettered access to the region.

Activists and U.N. rights experts say at least a million

Muslims have been detained in camps in Xinjiang. The activists

and some Western politicians accuse China of using torture,

forced labour and sterilisations.



Image source: Taiwan News

China initially denied detention camps existed, but has since said they are vocational centres designed to combat extremism. In late 2019, China said all people in the camps had “graduated.”

In Hong Kong, Beijing has clamped down on political protest, introducing a new security law in 2020 that criminalises what it considers subversion, secessionism, terrorism or collusion with foreign forces.

Australia’s ties with China have deteriorated since Australia led voiced support for an independent inquiry into the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic.

China has in recent months moved to restrict imports of Australian products such as barley, wine and beef, with the World Trade Organisation saying last week it would establish a

dispute settlement panel to resolve the barley row.

Ahead of Morrison's visit, New Zealand said it would back Canberra in the spat.



**CERTIFICATE COURSE IN
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

SIX-WEEK ONLINE COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
BY THE KOOTNEETI

JOIN TODAY!

team@thekootneeti.com
courses.thekootneeti.in
(+91) 120 4565994

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team

Facebook Comments