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# Tightened security over political talks

## Beijing begins annual national legislature session

**BEIJING:** Black-clad SWAT teams patrolled downtown and an AIDS group was ordered to cancel a seminar as part of China's security clampdown ahead of this week's opening of the national legislature's annual session.

Officers on motorcycles and in armoured vans circled Tiananmen Square in the heart of the capital, adjacent to the Great Hall of the People where members of the legislature's advisory body began meeting yesterday.

The actual legislature, a largely ceremonial body known as the National People's Congress, will begin its nearly two-week session tomorrow.

Foot patrols were stepped up around the square and retirees mobilised by neighbourhood committees to watch for trouble were stationed every few metres along Chang'an Boulevard that runs along the vast plaza's northern edge.

Police were also cracking down on people visiting Beijing to petition for government legal assistance over various grievances. A group of about half a dozen women who approached the Great Hall carrying shopping bags and wads of documents were forced into a police van and driven away.

As is routine during the session, the highlight of the Chinese political calendar, dissidents and groups working on sensitive social issues were coming under increased pressure.

AIDS activist Wan Yanhai, founder of the Beijing-based Aizhixing Institute, said police had ordered him to cancel a seminar planned for yesterday to mark International Sex Worker Rights Day.

"The seminar is a perfectly normal activity; we're not opposing anything," Wan said. "It's a meeting of the people's government, so they should let the people express themselves." — AP

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**Security clampdown:** A paramilitary policeman stopping a toddler from crossing a restricted area at Tiananmen Square in Beijing where China's top political advisory body began its meeting yesterday. — Reuters