

## HK democracy protests resume

Written by Taipei Times

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A policeman direct pedestrians as demonstrators shout slogans before a march for democracy in Hong Kong yesterday.

**Photo: AFP**

Thousands of pro-democracy protesters took to the streets of Hong Kong yesterday for the first time since mass demonstrations shut down parts of the territory for more than two months during the Umbrella movement from Sept. 26 to Dec. 15 last year.

A sea of yellow umbrellas — the symbol of the campaign — moved slowly through central Hong Kong with crowds shouting for “true universal suffrage.”

However, numbers were well below expectations, with 13,000 attending, organizers said — just over one-quarter of the 50,000 they had hoped for.

“Today’s protest was not a small one. It was smaller than we expected, but it is wrong to say Hong Kongers have given in to fake democracy,” organizer Daisy Chan (陳麗英) said.

Police officials said up to 8,800 people had joined the march, a fraction of the tens of thousands who gathered at the peak of the protests last year.

Authorities have made no concessions to activists’ demands and tensions remain high in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory.

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Police officials before the rally said that demonstrators were likely to once again try to occupy some of Hong Kong's main roads, which were cleared of tented camps in December last year.

By late afternoon, the march remained peaceful, with no sign that the crowds — including many people carrying yellow balloons — planned to take back the streets.

“We do not have a plan [to reoccupy]. If others want to do it, they will have to do it themselves,” student leader Alex Chow (何俊仁) said.

There was a sense of determination among demonstrators.

“We just want to express our frustration with the government in Hong Kong,” protester Ronnie Chan said. “We understand there is very little we can do, but if we do not speak out, nothing will change.”

The pro-democracy rallies drew about 100,000 at their height and saw intermittent clashes with police officers, but public support faded as the weeks passed.

China has promised Hong Kongers the right — for the first time — to vote for their chief executive in the 2017 election.

However, Beijing ruled that nominees must be vetted by a pro-Beijing committee, a proposal heavily criticized by activists.

The movement's founders, including academic Benny Tai (戴耀廷), along with teenage activist Joshua Wong (黃之鋒) and other student leaders, urged residents to keep fighting as they joined yesterday's rally.

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“If we do not dream, we do not have hope. We should persist, then we will succeed,” Tai said.

Wong warned against accepting universal suffrage within the restrictions of Beijing’s framework.

“I hope people understand that if we take that now, it will be [that way] forever,” he said.

Political analyst Sonny Lo (羅祥仁) said that residents were exhausted from protests for reform.

“Members of the public are tired of politics. The democrats have to strategize very carefully,” Hong Kong Institute of Education head of social sciences Lo said.

Hong Kong’s government is urging the public to support Beijing’s electoral plan, which needs the backing of two-thirds of the territory’s legislature to be passed.

Executive Council convener Lam Woon-kwong (林煥庭) told protesters to accept Beijing’s offer.

“You cannot threaten the central authorities,” he said on a radio program. “If we can have consensus to have universal suffrage in 2017 first and democratize further later, it would be a more pragmatic approach.”

For some protesters, backing down is not an option.

“I’m just doing my bit. Some people might have compromised, but I definitely will not,” a father of two named Alvin said.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2015/02/02](#)