

# Hongkongers await Beijing olive branch after rare weekend of calm

Monday 9 December 2019, by [AFP](#) (Date first published: 9 December 2019).

## Contents

- [‘Very large number’](#)
- [‘We still have plans’](#)

Hong Kongers have delivered a clarion call for change over the last fortnight with a landslide local election defeat for the government and more than one in ten hitting the streets peacefully on Sunday — but will Beijing listen?

Monday 9 marks the sixth month anniversary of a movement that has upended the semi-autonomous Chinese hub’s reputation for stability and blanketed its streets with unprecedented scenes of political violence.

**But the last two weeks has seen a dramatic drop-off in clashes and vandalism** — something the city’s pro-Beijing leadership has insisted must be a precursor to any meaningful dialogue.

The question on many lips now is whether chief executive Carrie Lam — and Beijing — will take the opportunity to reach out before anger explodes once more.

*“Ignoring our voices will only make the snowball get bigger and bigger and there will be consequences to that,”* Bonnie Leung, a prominent figure within the pro-democracy movement’s more moderate wing, [Civic Party et Civil Human Rights Front] told AFP.

The rare period of calm began in the run up to city-wide local polls in late November — the only election with universal suffrage.

Millions turned out tipping pro-establishment parties out of office and flipping all but one of the city’s 18 local councils to the pro-democracy camp.

The vote shattered government claims that a “silent majority” opposed the protests.

**Then on Sunday 8 the city witnessed its largest mass rally in months with organisers estimating some 800,000 people turned out**, a vivid illustration of the public frustration that still seethes under the surface.

**The rally, which received rare permission, was almost entirely peaceful.**

Small fires were lit outside two major courts and police pepper sprayed bystanders during an argument. But no tear gas was fired — the first time a mass rally has been smoke free since the middle of August.

## **‘Very large number’**

Jimmy Sham, from rally organiser the Civil Human Rights Front [and LSD leader], said the ball was now firmly in the government’s court.

*“We have to remind the SAR government that 800,000 people is still a very, very large number,”* he told reporters.

*"Carrie Lam should listen to our Hong Kongers' demand as soon as possible," he added.*

Semi-autonomous Hong Kong has been battered by increasingly violent demonstrations in the starkest challenge the city has presented to Beijing since its 1997 handover from Britain. Millions have marched in protests fuelled by years of growing fears that authoritarian China is stamping out the city's liberties.

The movement's demands include an independent inquiry into the police's handling of the protests, an amnesty for those arrested, and fully free elections.

**But there is little sign Lam is willing to budge.**

Since the electoral drubbing, her administration has made vague commitments to listen to people's demands, but no concrete concessions.

Beijing has stuck by her even as she languishes with record-low approval ratings and the city police force's reputation takes a hammering.

**'We still have plans'**

**The movement's more radical wing — which has embraced violent tactics — appears to have faded into the background for now.**

**- Hardcore protesters had vowed to restart widespread travel disruptions at dawn on Monday if there was no response from Lam. But the threats did not emerge.**

- On LIHK, a Reddit-like web forum that serves as a virtual command centre for frontliners, **discussion abounded on whether a resumption of tactics that disrupted ordinary Hong Kongers for much of October and November might backfire.**

*"Many people think the dawn action has devolved into just disturbing residents while having no effect pressuring the government,"* one popular post read, referring to the tactic of paralysing the transport network.

**- Some are looking to more traditional labour action.**

Mung Siu-tat, head of HKCTU (Hong Kong's pro-democracy Federation of Trade Unions), said more than 30 newly founded unions have reached out for help in recent weeks.

*"Quite a number of them are formed by white-collar workers, professionals and executives, who in the past might find it less necessary to unionise but have been politically awakened by the movement,"* Mung told AFP.

- Arrests skyrocketed in October and early November, especially after thousands of more hardline activists were surrounded by police on a university campus.

*"The scale (of violence) may go down a bit because of the massive arrests over the last few weeks,"* political analyst Dixon Wong told AFP.

But there are growing fears unrest may return if Lam and Beijing do not offer some sort of olive branch.

On Sunday evening, organisers called on marchers to go home, one black-clad protester took off his mask. *"You have been leading marches for 30 years but what have you achieved?"* he shouted.

*"We still have plans for a lot of things we want to do for Hong Kong."*

---

**P.S.**

<https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/12/09/hongkongers-await-beijing-olive-branch-rare-weekend-cal>

[m/](#)