
Protesters in Hong Kong to Vote on Government Proposals

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With crowds likely to swell at the weekend, student leaders late on Thursday announced a plan for an electronic poll of protesters on reform proposals tabled by senior city government officials in talks on Tuesday that failed to break the deadlock.

"The government always says that the students don't represent the people in the plaza and Hong Kong citizens, so we are here to make all our voices heard and we will tell the government clearly what we think," Alex Chow, one of the students guiding the movement, told protesters.

In the poll, to be held on Sunday, demonstrators would be asked whether the government's offer to submit a report to the central government's Hong Kong and Macau affairs office on the protests would have any practical purpose.

Hong Kong returned from British to Chinese rule in 1997 under a "one country, two systems" formula that allows it wide-ranging autonomy and freedoms and specifies universal suffrage as an ultimate goal. But Beijing is wary about copycat demands for reform on the mainland eroding the Communist Party's power.

Friday marked the start of the fifth week since tens of thousands began blocking major roads to oppose to a plan by the Chinese central government to let Hong Kong people vote for their leader in 2017 for the first time but limit candidates to those vetted by a panel stacked with Beijing loyalists.

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Opponents of the protests tried to forcibly dismantle makeshift barricades around a protest zone in the heart of the densely populated Mong Kok district, as they have done on many days during the occupation, but police intervened.

Last weekend saw bloody scuffles between protesters, opponents of the movement and police, who have labelled the Mong Kok protest zone a "high-risk area".

The United Nations Human Rights Committee on Thursday gave a boost to the protest movement by calling on China to ensure universal suffrage in Hong Kong, including the right to stand for election as well as the right to vote.

Chinese Foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said that while the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights applied to Hong Kong "the covenant is not a measure for Hong Kong's political reform".

It was not immediately clear how, if the covenant applied to Hong Kong, it could have no bearing on its political reform.

A chasm exists between the Hong Kong government and the protesters who have also been calling for the current leader, Leung Chun-ying, to step down. The government branded the movement's occupation of streets illegal and has repeatedly said open nominations are not allowed under Hong Kong laws.

The talks on Tuesday marked a shift in the government's approach from stonewalling to dialogue, although expectations for a breakthrough had been low.

The poll would be the first potentially constructive response from the protesters after the student leaders emerged from the talks disappointed. They planned to hand the results to the government on Monday.

A massive yellow banner with an umbrella symbolising the movement and calling for "real universal suffrage" was hung from the Lion Rock mountain on Thursday that could be clearly seen from the city below.

Firefighters and mountain rescue crew pulled it down on Friday.