

Hong Kong leader admits local elections revealed ‘unhappiness’ with government

HONG KONG: Hong Kong’s leader Carrie Lam acknowledged on Tuesday (Nov 26) that a crushing defeat for the city’s pro-Beijing establishment in weekend polls revealed public discontent over her government’s handling of months of political unrest.

The elections showed concern over “deficiencies in the government, including unhappiness with the time taken to deal with the current unstable environment and of course to end violence”, Mrs. Lam said at a weekly press briefing.

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Mrs. Lam was speaking a day after poll results showed democratic candidates secured almost 90 percent of 452 district council seats in Sunday’s local elections, a landslide victory in polls that were widely seen as a barometer of support for her.

“I did confess that this particular election has clearly reflected that many voters wanted to express their opinions and views to the government, to myself,” she said.

“The views and opinions expressed ... are quite diverse. There are people who want to express the view that they could no longer tolerate the violence on the streets.

“There are of course people who felt that the government has not handled competently the legislative exercise and its aftermath.”

The Hong Kong government, she said, would “seriously reflect” on the views reflected by voters, and that the pro-establishment parties will continue to serve the people. She said she would “improve governance”.

Despite the defeat, the central government has not asked her to take

responsibility, she said.

Mrs. Lam also thanked residents for orderly voting on Sunday despite a relatively volatile environment and said she hoped the peace at the weekend was a voice by people against violence.

Mrs. Lam added she hoped the peace over the weekend was not just for the election, but a voice from people that they do not want violence.

The district elections votes are important because pro-democracy groups have seized on the council polls as a chance to prove the depth of public support for the protest movement, which Beijing-aligned Mrs. Lam had dismissed as the work of a radical fringe.

Outrage erupted in Hong Kong this year against a now-withdrawn Bill introduced by Lam's administration that would have allowed extraditions to mainland China.

The protesters have subsequently issued five demands, including direct elections of the legislature and chief executive, and a probe into allegations of police brutality against demonstrators.

But Mrs. Lam sidestepped those calls, instead reiterating an earlier pledge to open a dialogue among all parties in the territory, a proposal that opponents have dismissed as too little, too late.

"What we need to do now is (open) community dialogue and invite social leaders to help us analyze the causes of the disturbances and Hong Kong's deep-seated social problems, and to come up with solutions," Lam said.

When asked about the protesters at the Polytechnic University in Hong Kong, Mrs. Lam urged protesters to leave peacefully and safely as soon as possible.

She noted that everyone wanted to "go back to their normal life" and that violence will not move things forward.

Polytechnic University remains a symbol of the chaos that has engulfed the city.

University authorities estimate as many as 50 protesters may be holed up across the sprawling and increasingly filthy campus, too frightened to attempt an escape but cracking under the strain of their isolation. Some protesters' estimates were

lower, suggesting just a handful remain.

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