

South China Morning Post

A1: Stand-off at 'Civic Square' after rally

A New Year's Day pro-democracy march by thousands of demonstrators ended in scuffles and a defiant stand-off with police at the newly reopened "Civic Square" protest site outside Hong Kong's government headquarters.

Organisers said 10,000 took to the streets on Monday to voice their concerns over what they see as campaign by Beijing to reduce Hong Kong's autonomy through a series of contentious moves. Police put the rally turnout at a more conservative 6,200.

The protesters made their way from Wan Chai to the government compound in nearby Admiralty, where the otherwise peaceful march became unruly as police officers surrounded demonstrators outside the East Wing Forecourt, popularly known as "Civic Square".

The square, a magnet for public demonstrations, had been closed since students stormed it and triggered the Occupy protests of 2014, but it was reopened to the public last Thursday with restricted access.

A1: Changing of the guard for flag-raising service

The new year saw a changing of the guard in one of the most popular and symbolic sights in Beijing – the daily flag-raising ceremony in Tiananmen Square.

On Monday, the People's Liberation Army took over responsibility for the ceremony, which takes place at sunrise in the heart of the Chinese capital, replacing the paramilitary police that had fulfilled the task since 1982.

The change was a symbol that China had entered a "new era" in terms of its national ceremonies. By taking over the flag-raising event, the PLA was showing its "strong will" to modernise itself, defend national unity and safeguard world peace, Xinhua reported.

The event was broadcast live on state media. It will be repeated daily from now on by a PLA honour guard accompanied by an orchestra, it said.

On the signal from eight buglers positioned on Tiananmen Rostrum, 96 soldiers marched across the square carrying a huge national flag.