

Hong Kong Police Fire Tear Gas Amid Continuing Pro-Democracy Rallies



People holding umbrellas gather at Victoria Park to take part in an anti-extradition bill protest in Hong Kong, Aug. 11, 2019.

Suzanne Sataline contributed to this report from in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong police fired tear gas at protesters Sunday who staged demonstrations in two locations in the territory — the Shui Po area and a main shopping district in the Causeway Bay area.

This weekend's round of pro-democracy rallies marks the tenth straight weekend for the demonstrations.

"We hope the world knows that Hong Kong is not the Hong Kong it used to be, one protester told the Associated Press.

Chinese officials are upset that British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab had a telephone conversation with Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam Friday about the demonstrations.

"China solemnly demands that the British side immediately stop all actions that meddle in Hong Kong affairs and interfere in China's internal affairs," said a Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman.

On Saturday, it didn't seem to matter that police barred several protest marches, citing the fear of violence. Thousands of residents, furious with government indifference and harsh policing, fought battles throughout the city as they tried frenzied, urban guerrilla tactics to block roads, occupy the airport terminal, march en masse, participants shrugging off rounds of tear gas.

Protesters staged the flash protests in lieu of organized, legal marches after police took the highly unusual step of denying permits, saying they would invite violence. Instead, groups of several hundred protesters gathered in the Kowloon neighborhoods of Tai Po and Tai Wai before hitting the tourist center of Tsim Sha

Tsui.

For many hours people staged a sit-in at the airport, the second since Friday, to attract international attention to their cause. In addition, strikers blocked the Cross Harbor Tunnel quickly before darting away.

Some lit a fire outside the police station in Tsim Sha Tsui. Others hurled taunts and rocks and shone laser pointers at officers' faces until squads of riot police pushed forward, dousing the crowd with tear gas. Soon after, the protesters dispersed and moved on to their next target.

Police released a statement, condemning the "violent acts."

Protesters, however, said they would continue with such provocative actions because it was proving effective in rattling the government and winning the support of Hong Kong residents.

"Even if the government won't let us legally protest, we'll come out," said Jack, a 25-year-old auditor standing near the front line in Tai Po. "For us, it's like, 'Live free or die.' We don't want to live in a world like China now."

Now in their third month, mass protests started in June, when government critics demanded that the city withdraw an amended bill that would allow the government to ship criminal suspects elsewhere for trial, including mainland China.

Residents — more than 2 million marched in June — said the bill would open the door to specious accusations against dissidents, religious figures, businessmen and others who actively oppose China's Communist Party.

Under pressure from millions of residents, Lam, the city's chief executive, agreed to shelve, but not kill, the bill. Hong Kong officials have refused to concede to any demands made by the protesters, including the creation of an independent commission into police actions against protesters and the full withdrawal of the controversial extradition plan.

Young people have staged increasingly risky and provocative actions to get the government to respond. As a result, their decisions to besiege police stations, square off with police and even set fires, has resulted in quicker and harsher police response, as well as hundreds of arrests.

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