

## Protesters, police clash in HK

Written by Taipei Times

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Protesters clash with police during a demonstration outside the Hong Kong Legislative Council yesterday.

**Photo: AFP**

Hong Kong police yesterday fired tear gas and rubber bullets at protesters who had massed outside government headquarters in opposition to a proposed extradition bill that has become a lightning rod for concerns over greater Chinese control in the territory.

The violence came after protesters earlier in the day forced the delay of a legislative debate over the bill, which would allow criminal suspects in Hong Kong to be sent for trial in China.

The mainly young crowd had overflowed onto a major road as they overturned barriers and tussled with police outside the government building, but when some appeared to have breached a police cordon around the building, the police launched their response, which also included firing pepper spray and water hoses.

Earlier, a curt government statement said that the legislative session scheduled to begin at 11am would be “changed to a later time.”

Officials gave no indication of when that would be and Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam (林鄭月娥) canceled a scheduled news briefing.

Some businesses closed for the day, and labor strikes and class boycotts were called.

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At a brief news conference, Hong Kong Police Commissioner Stephen Lo (鄧炳强) called the demonstration a riot, potentially meaning long jail terms for anyone arrested.

“We condemn such irresponsible behavior,” Lo said. “There’s no need to hurt innocent people to express your opinions.”

Protesters were seen throwing rocks, bottles, metal barricades and other projectiles at police.

Police spokesman Kong Wing-cheung (孔國基) defended the decision to use non-lethal weapons, saying that officers would not have had to do so if they were not facing a serious threat.

The state of the legislative process remained unclear following the violence, which had largely ended by about 5pm after police herded demonstrators across a pedestrian bridge.

However, traffic in one of the busiest parts of the territory remained blocked and several hundred protesters seemed in no hurry to leave.

Earlier in the day, protesters said that they hoped the blockade would persuade Lam’s administration to shelve the amendments.

Dressed in black T-shirts and jeans, many protesters appeared undaunted by demands to disperse from police.

They also seemed mindful of Beijing’s growing use of electronic surveillance such as facial recognition technology to build dossiers on those it considers politically unreliable, with many donning surgical masks to hide their features, as well as to safeguard against tear gas.

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Hong Kong residents can face travel bans and other repercussions if they cross the border into mainland China.

“Most of these protesters don’t expect the government to compromise. They just want to express their own opinions,” said Joseph Cheng (鄭經), an observer of Chinese and Hong Kong politics now retired from the City University of Hong Kong. “The anger is still there and the anger will burst again at the next opportunity.”

The government pushed ahead with plans to present the amendments to the legislature yesterday, despite a weekend protest by hundreds of thousands of people.

Lam has defended the legislation as necessary to close legal loopholes with other countries and territories. A vote is scheduled on Thursday next week.

At a regular briefing, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs repeated its support for the bill.

Spokesman Geng Shuang (耿爽) also denied that Beijing has been interfering in the territory’s affairs in a way that contravenes agreements made when Hong Kong was handed back to China.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2019/06/13](#)