

HONG KONG PROTESTS: Hong Kong airport shut down by rally

Written by Taipei Times

Tuesday, 13 August 2019 05:32 -



A combination picture shows Hong Kong protesters yesterday wearing eyepatches in reference to a demonstrator who was injured on Sunday in clashes with police during a protest inside Hong Kong International Airport.

Photo: Reuters

One of the world's busiest airports yesterday canceled all flights after thousands of pro-democracy demonstrators crowded into the main terminal of Hong Kong International Airport, while the central government in Beijing issued an ominous characterization of the protest movement as something approaching "terrorism."

The extreme action by the largely leaderless movement seemed calculated to prompt a stern response from Beijing, and Chinese President Xi Jinping's (习近平) administration responded within hours.

The Chinese State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office issued a statement saying the situation in Hong Kong was "beginning to show the sprouts of terrorism" and constituted an "existential threat" to the population.

"One must take resolute action toward this violent criminality, showing no leniency or mercy," said the statement, attributed to spokesman Yang Guang (杨光). "Hong Kong has reached an inflection point where all those who are concerned about Hong Kong's future must say 'no' to law breakers and 'no' to those engaged in violence."

No new violence was reported by yesterday evening, although the territory remained on edge after more than two months of near-daily and increasingly bloody confrontations between protesters and police.

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Beijing tends toward a broad definition of terrorism, including in it nonviolent protests of government policies on the environment or in minority regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet.

Such a designation adds to the regime's descriptions of protesters as clowns, criminals and traitors intent on overthrowing Chinese rule in Hong Kong.

A crowd of protesters that authorities said numbered more than 5,000 descended on the airport yesterday carrying placards and chanting slogans about police violence.

Hong Kong International Airport said in a statement the demonstration "seriously disrupted" airport operations.

Only flights that had already started boarding or those cleared for landing were allowed to use runways at the airport.

"All other flights have been canceled for the rest of today," the airport statement said.

It later said flights would resume at 6am this morning.

Joydeep Chakravarti, a software engineer whose connecting flight to San Francisco was canceled during a layover in Hong Kong, expressed frustration that he was told to leave the airport when he wanted to stay inside the terminal.

"I don't know what's out there, so I don't want to leave. I didn't make any plans for Hong Kong," said Chakravarti, who had a carry-on bag with laptop, charger and an extra shirt while the rest of his luggage already was checked in on his Singapore Airlines flight.

A massive traffic jam soon formed on the highway leading back to Hong Kong's city center, but

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hundreds of protesters remained in the arrivals hall well into the night with no sign of leaving.

Some protesters were seen walking toward the airport amid the stifling heat.

At the airport, a flight attendant protesting on his day off, who gave only his surname, Lau, to avoid repercussions from his employer, said heavy-handed police tactics had alienated some people.

"The police have told a lot of lies to Hong Kong people. We cannot believe them anymore. We have to come here to protest," Lau said.

Another protester, who identified herself only as Bea, said she took the day off from work to express her outrage because "I feel that I have to do something ... It's just too sad to see what has happened. The police action has gone totally nonsensical."

Later yesterday, two Chinese state media outlets ran videos showing armored personnel and troop carriers purportedly driving to Shenzhen, which borders Hong Kong.

The *Global Times* said the Chinese People's Armed Police were assembling "in advance of apparent large-scale exercises."

In an interview in Berlin, Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei (艾未未) said China's leadership can now only resort to force, since it has failed in its quest to win hearts and minds in Hong Kong.

"Hong Kong people will not be the loser, because they're on the right side of history," he said.

Additional reporting by AFP

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Source: [Taipei Times - 2018/08/13](#)