

Hong Kong protesters defy police

Written by Taipei Times

Monday, 21 October 2019 05:48 -



Protesters gesture towards the Tsim Sha Tsui police station in Hong Kong during a march yesterday.

Photo AFP

Hong Kong protesters yesterday flooded the territory's streets in defiance of a ban by the authorities on their march, setting up roadblocks and tossing firebombs amid the firing of tear gas by police.

Tens of thousands of people marched down Nathan Road in Tsim Sha Tsui to West Kowloon, despite a police ban on the event because of the potential for violence.

The rally was originally called to protest a government law forbidding the use of masks at demonstrations, and came after Wednesday's attack on Civil Human Rights Front's organizer Jimmy Sham (鄧天鵬).

Protest leaders carried a black banner at the front of the procession that read, "Five main demands, not one less," as they pressed their calls for accountability and political rights.

Black-clad and masked protesters barricaded streets at multiple locations in Kowloon, where the territory's subway operator restricted passenger access.

The protesters tore off stones from the sidewalk and scattered them on the road, commandeered plastic safety barriers and unscrewed metal railings to form makeshift roadblocks.

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They sang the protest movement's anthem and held up placards depicting the Chinese flag as a Nazi swastika.

Police inside the Tsim Sha Tsui police station fired volleys of tear gas and used a loudspeaker to call on protesters in the street below to disperse.

Hardcore black-clad protesters threw firebombs at the station's iron gate and inside the compound.

Police also fired tear gas after gasoline bombs were thrown toward one subway station.

A water cannon truck and armored car led a column of dozens of police vans down Nathan Road, stopping frequently to spray liquid tinted blue as they moved to clear the road of protesters and barricades.

Residents jeered at riot police walking alongside the vehicles, cursing them and telling them to leave.

The officers, in turn, told people they were part of an illegal assembly and warned them to leave, and unleashed rounds of tear gas in an attempt to disperse the crowds.

Along the way, protesters trashed outlets of a discount grocery chain because of what they say is its pro-Beijing ownership. They also tried to set fire to ATMs and branches of mainland Chinese banks, setting off sprinklers in at least two.

As night fell, protesters returned to the streets, setting trash on fire in intersections. Police responded with more tear gas.

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Matthew Lee, a university student, said he was determined to keep protesting even after more than four months.

“I can see some people want to give up, but I don’t want to do this, because Hong Kong is my home, we want to protect this place, protect Hong Kong,” he said. “You can’t give up, because Hong Kong is your home.”

Many of the protesters wore masks in defiance of a recently introduced ban on face coverings at public gatherings, and volunteers handed more out to the crowd.

Organizers said they wanted to use their right to protest as guaranteed by the territory’s Basic Law, despite the risk of arrest.

“We’re using peaceful, rational, nonviolent ways to voice our demands,” Front convener Figo Chan (陳耀光) told reporters. “We’re not afraid of being arrested. What I’m most scared of is everyone giving up on our principles.”

Source: [Taipei Times - 2019/10/21](#)