

Thousands mourn student as HK lawmakers arrested

Written by Taipei Times

Sunday, 10 November 2019 10:25 -



People observe a moment of silence at a vigil for Alex Chow in Hong Kong yesterday. **Photo: AP**

Tens of thousands of Hong Kongers last night packed into a park to mourn a student who died during clashes last week as police arrested a group of pro-democracy lawmakers.

Hong Kong has been upended by five months of huge and increasingly violent pro-democracy protests, but Beijing has refused to give in to most of the movement's demands.

Tensions have soared since the death on Friday of Alex Chow (鄧梓謙), 22, who succumbed to head injuries sustained during a fall as police skirmished with demonstrators inside a parking structure last weekend.

Yesterday's rally — one of the few in the past few months to obtain police approval — means Hong Kong has witnessed 24 weekends of protest in what has become the most profound challenge to Beijing's rule since the territory's 1997 handover from the UK.

Many at the peaceful and somber rally wore black.

"I want an independent inquiry, because that proves Hong Kong is still a place with rule of law," a 35-year-old woman, who gave her surname as Wong, told reporters, echoing the movement's core demand for an investigation into police tactics.

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Wong, who said she moved to Hong Kong from China three years ago, said that she also wanted to see less confrontational tactics from protesters.

“I think nonviolent ways can also win,” she said.

The rally came after police brought charges against at least seven lawmakers who face up to a year in jail if convicted.

Three were arrested overnight, three attended appointments yesterday evening to be booked and one refused to appear.

The charges relate to chaotic scenes that broke out within a legislative committee in May as pro-democracy lawmakers tried to stop a controversial bill that would allow extraditions to China from being discussed.

At the time, Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam (林鄭月娥) was fast-tracking the bill through the Legislative Council, a move that ignited record-breaking street protests in which millions marched.

“The protests that have been going on for five months are yet to finish, but the government is already launching massive arrests of pro-democracy legislators in collaboration with the police,” the lawmakers said in a joint statement.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2019/11/10](#)