

HK protesters not deterred by tear gas

Written by Taipei Times

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A pro-democracy protester wears plastic wrap to protect himself from pepper spray at a rally near government headquarters in Hong Kong yesterday.

Photo: AFP

Hong Kong police fired repeated volleys of tear gas to disperse pro-democracy protests yesterday and baton-charged the crowd blocking a key road in the government district after issuing official warnings against illegal demonstrations.

The territory's Admiralty district had descended into chaos as chanting protesters converged on police barricades surrounding colleagues who had earlier launched a "new era" of civil disobedience to pressure Beijing into granting full democracy to Hong Kong.

Police, in lines five-deep in places and wearing helmets and gas masks, staged repeated pepper spray attacks and shot tear gas into the air. The crowd fled several hundred meters, scattering their umbrellas and hurling abuse at police, calling them "cowards."

However, demonstrators returned and by early evening, tens of thousands of protesters were thronging streets, including outside the prominent Pacific Place shopping mall that leads toward the Central financial district.

Fresh rounds of tear gas cleared some of the roads in Admiralty and pushed protesters toward Central.

Police had not used tear gas in Hong Kong since breaking up WTO protests against South

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Korean farmers in 2005.

Clouds of tear gas also blew back toward police lines, but it is unclear how many people on either side have needed treatment.

“We will fight until the end... We will never give up,” said Peter Poon, a protester in his 20s, adding that they may have to execute a temporary retreat as night falls.

Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying (梁振英) pledged “resolute” action against the protest movement known as Occupy Central with Love and Peace.

“The police are determined to handle the situation appropriately in accordance with the law,” Leung said just hours before the charge.

A spokesperson for China’s Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office added that the government in Beijing fully supported Hong Kong’s handling of the situation “in accordance with the law.”

Inside the cordon, thousands had huddled in plastic capes, masks and goggles as they waited for a fresh police charge to clear the area before Hong Kong was to open for business this morning.

However, Beijing last month rejected demands for Hong Kongers to freely choose the territory’s next leader, prompting threats from activists to shut down Central.

China is thought to want to limit elections to a handful of candidates loyal to Beijing.

While promising a fresh round of public consultation, Leung also described Beijing’s decision as “legally binding.”

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Publishing tycoon Next Media Group (壹傳媒) chairman Jimmy Lai (黎智英), a key backer of the pro-democracy movement, said he wanted as big a crowd of protesters as possible to thwart any crackdown after a week of student demonstrations.

“The more Hong Kong citizens come, the more unlikely the police can clear up the place,” said Lai, also wearing a plastic cape and workmen’s protective glasses.

“Even if we get beaten up, we cannot fight back. We will win this war with love and peace,” he said.

Organizers said as many as 80,000 people thronged the streets in Admiralty, galvanised by the arrests of student activists on Friday. Police have so far arrested 78 people, including Joshua Wong (黃之鋒), the 17-year-old leader of student group Scholarism, who was dragged away after he called on the protesters to charge the government premises. He was still in detention yesterday.

His parents said in a statement the decision to detain him was an act of “political persecution.”

Source: [Taipei Times - 2014/09/29](#)