

Police besieged by Hong Kong demonstrators

Written by Taipei Times

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Protesters gather outside police headquarters in Hong Kong yesterday.

Photo: AP

Thousands of protesters yesterday evening blockaded the Hong Kong police headquarters, demanding the resignation of the territory's pro-Beijing leader and the release of demonstrators arrested during Hong Kong's worst political crisis in decades.

The latest protest comes after the government refused to meet the demands of demonstrators who have marched in their millions to oppose a bill that would allow extraditions to the mainland.

Opposition groups, after putting on the biggest political rallies in Hong Kong's history, have called for the complete withdrawal of the extradition legislation and for Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam (林鄭月娥) to step down, but the movement has also morphed into a wider expression of public anger at Lam and leaders in Beijing after years of sliding political freedoms.

Throughout yesterday the predominantly young, leaderless protesters used spontaneity and movement to up the pressure on authorities.

Peaceful civil disobedience was used across key parts of the territory's commercial district, with a main roadway seized and two government offices briefly blocked, but the focus for the day and into the evening was police headquarters, where thousands gathered, many chanting "release the righteous" and "shame on police thugs" — references to those detained during violence last week between demonstrators and the police.

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Anger toward the police force has exploded since officers on Wednesday last week used rubber bullets and tear gas to clear crowds of protesters from the streets.

Opposition groups have demanded an investigation into allegations of police brutality and the release of those detained during the clashes, in addition to Lam's ouster and a cancelation of the extradition bill.

Rights group Amnesty International yesterday said that it had verified multiple instances of police violence that breached international laws, while the Hong Kong Bar Association added its voice to calls for an investigation into police tactics.

Crowds outside police headquarters grew in the evening as workers joined the largely student-led protest, where demonstrators used metal barricades to fortify their positions, and used unfurled umbrellas and masking tape to obscure CCTV cameras.

Police held back from any response, and with the exception of a few thrown eggs, the demonstration remained peaceful.

Earlier in the day, smaller groups of protesters briefly blocked the entrances to the nearby immigration and revenue departments.

"We need to flow like water," to be able to retreat and regroup and adapt, said protester Chris, referencing a famous quote from martial arts superstar and Hong Kong legend Bruce Lee (李小龙).

Another protester likened the crowds to artificial intelligence.

"They learn from themselves, nobody really teaches them, they just adapt to different

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situations,” said Bernard, 21.

The call for the demonstration was made by student unions, as well as informal organizers over social media apps such as Telegram.

“Blossom everywhere,” read a statement circulated on Thursday in a Telegram chat group.

Lam has so far defied calls to step down, and while she has apologized and suspended the bill indefinitely, it has failed to quell anger.

Pro-democracy demonstrators have vowed to hold another mass rally on July 1.

Opponents of the extradition bill fear it will ensnare Hong Kongers in China’s opaque and politicized justice system, and also give Beijing a tool to target critics based in the semi-autonomous territory.

Separately yesterday, former Philippine secretary of foreign affairs Albert del Rosario — a critic of China’s claims in the disputed South China Sea — was denied entry to Hong Kong and deported, his lawyer said, adding that he was not given a reason for the expulsion.

Hong Kong immigration authorities did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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