

China, Hong Kongers clash over protest

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A policeman fires tear gas at protesters to disperse them after a march against a controversial extradition bill in Hong Kong on Sunday.

Photo: AFP

China yesterday slammed anti-government protesters vandalizing the walls of its representative's office in Hong Kong and defacing the national emblem, branding their actions "absolutely intolerable."

Thousands of masked pro-democracy demonstrators briefly occupied the road outside the office in the territory on Sunday night and targeted the building with eggs, projectiles, laser lights and graffiti in a stark rebuke to Beijing's rule.

Hong Kong has been shaken by massive, sometimes violent, protests initially organized to oppose a now-suspended bill that would have allowed extraditions to the mainland.

They have now morphed into a wider movement for democratic reforms.

"Actions by some radical demonstrators have affected the bottom line of the 'one country, two systems' principle, and that is absolutely intolerable," Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Geng Shuang (耿爽) said in Beijing.

Geng said Beijing opposes all acts of violence and "firmly" supports the use of "all necessary measures to safeguard central government agencies in Hong Kong."

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Protesters have vowed to sustain pressure until their core demands — including universal suffrage and the resignation of Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam (林鄭月娥) — are met.

Lam yesterday said the targeting of the office was a “challenge” to national sovereignty.

So far, Beijing has refused to budge. Officials and state media have accused the protesters of playing into the hands of foreign powers who seek to harm China, and backed the Hong Kong government.

Beyond agreeing to suspend the extradition bill, there have been few other concessions and fears are rising that Beijing’s patience is running out.

“These [acts] ... have seriously damaged the feelings of all Chinese people, including 7 million Hong Kong compatriots,” Director of the Liaison Office of the Central People’s Government in Hong Kong Wang Zhimin (王智敏) told reporters, calling on authorities to pursue the “rioters.”

Radical protests have “insulted the country and the nation,” Chinese Communist Party mouthpiece the People’s Daily said in a front-page article.

“These acts of violence seriously undermined Hong Kong’s social order and trampled on the rule of law,” it said.

Meanwhile, anger soared in the territory over a vicious assault on pro-democracy protesters late on Sunday by suspected gangsters that left dozens wounded.

Groups of men — most wearing white T-shirts and carrying bats, sticks and metal poles — set upon anti-government demonstrators as they returned from another huge march earlier that day.

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Footage broadcast live on Facebook showed people screaming as the men beat multiple protesters and journalists at Yuen Long Station and inside subway trains, leaving pools of blood on the floor.

Hospital authorities said at least 45 people were wounded in the attack, with one man in critical condition and five others with serious injuries.

Critics rounded on the territory's embattled police force, accusing officers of taking more than an hour to reach the site and failing to arrest the armed assailants who stayed in the streets around the station into yesterday morning.

Some men in white shirts were later filmed leaving the scene in vehicles with mainland number plates.

Hong Kong Democratic Party lawmaker Lam Cheuk-ting (林卓廷) was one of those wounded in the melee, sustaining lacerations to his face and arms.

He criticized police for their response and accused "triad members" of being behind the attacks.

"Their very barbaric and violent acts have already completely violated the bottom line of Hong Kong's civilized society," he told reporters.

Furious fellow pro-democracy lawmakers held a press conference, accusing the territory's pro-Beijing leaders of turning a blind eye to the attacks.

"This is triad gangs beating up Hong Kong people," Hong Kong Legislator Alvin Yeung (楊岳浩) said. "Yet you pretend nothing had happened?"

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Hong Kong Police Commissioner Stephen Lo (鄧炳强) defended his force, saying officers were busy dealing with violent protests against the government elsewhere.

“Definitely our manpower is stretched,” he told reporters, describing any suggestion police colluded with triads as a “smear” and saying his officers would pursue the attackers.

Yesterday afternoon, masked protesters trashed the office of staunch pro-Beijing lawmaker Junius Ho (何俊仁), who was filmed shaking hands with white-shirted men in Yuen Long shortly before Sunday’s violence.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2019/07/23](#)