

Lam formally rescinds extradition bill

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A man at a home electronics store in Hong Kong yesterday watches Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam announce the withdrawal of an extradition bill.

Photo: AP

Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam (林鄭月娥) yesterday said that her government would formally withdraw an extradition bill that has ignited months of protests.

In a five-minute televised address, Lam said that her government would withdraw the bill to “fully allay public concerns.”

“Our citizens, police and reporters have been injured during violent incidents,” Lam said. “There have been chaotic scenes at the airport and [mass transit railway] stations; roads and tunnels have been suddenly blocked.”

“Visitors wonder whether our city is still a safe place for travel or business. Families and friends have been under stress and arguments have flared. For many people, Hong Kong has become an unfamiliar place,” she added.

Lam shelved the bill in June and in July said that it was “dead,” but has until now refused to withdraw it entirely, a key demand of the protesters who said it could be revived.

By formally withdrawing the bill, Lam conceded to one of five key demands of the demonstrators, but did not concede to the others, which include an independent inquiry into police behavior, amnesty to those arrested and democratic reforms to give Hong Kong

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residents universal suffrage.

Lam said that she did not believe the government should establish an inquiry to look into police behavior, deferring to the Independent Police Complaints Council, to which she said she would add two new members.

Instead, Lam said that her government would open a platform for dialogue, inviting community leaders, experts and others to investigate social issues and advise the government.

“After more than two months of social unrest, it is obvious to many that discontentment extends far beyond the bill,” she said.

As news of the bill’s withdrawal spread, riot police were seen patrolling metro stations as some protesters called for people to gather at various stations.

“Of course I won’t accept it. We have five demands. We want all of them, not one less. The most important issue to be solved is the police abuse of power,” a protester named Alan said.

A survey released yesterday of private business activity showed the “steepest deterioration in the health of the private sector since February 2009.”

Ahead of Lam’s speech, Hong Kong’s Hang Seng Index jumped 4 percent.

University and secondary students this week launched a class boycott and protesters have planned further action in the weeks ahead, including another attempt to paralyze the airport and a rally outside the US consulate to call on lawmakers to pass legislation that would sanction officials deemed as suppressing freedom or human rights in Hong Kong.

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Protesters remained suspicious of Lam's concession.

"She's just doing this to try and disintegrate the movement. A lot of people think that," a protester named Katya said. "The situation has escalated to a point where not even Beijing knows how to sort this, so they're using different tricks and lies. Hong Kong people have learned to ignore her."

Additional reporting by AP

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