

Fierce Clashes: Hong Kong hit by more violence as protests enter 10th week

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Police fire teargas and beat demonstrators during fierce clashes across city.

Hong Kong has once more descended into violence, with police firing teargas at protesters across the city as mass demonstrations calling for democracy entered their 10th consecutive week.

Clashes with police were particularly intense on Sunday night compared with previous days, as riot police fired teargas into a railway station to disperse crowds and were captured on film beating protesters with batons as they fled down an escalator in another station.

Other protesters were injured as undercover riot police turned on a crowd in Causeway Bay and began to arrest people, while widely circulated photos on social media showed one woman bleeding profusely from her eye after she was hit by police fire at another demonstration. Police also suffered casualties, according to authorities.

It came as Cathay Pacific bowed to pressure from China, sacking two ground crew and suspending a pilot for “misconduct” in supporting the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests.

The Hong Kong flag carrier airline, whose biggest shareholder is the Swire Group, chaired by the British billionaire Barnaby Swire, said it had fired two ground staff members for allegedly leaking the travel arrangements for a Hong Kong police football team travelling to the mainland for a tournament.

The company said it was “aware of the inappropriate behaviour of an employee involving the misuse of company information” after a Cathay employee was accused by the Chinese state of posting details of the Hong Kong police officers travelling on the airline. The airline also said it had suspended a pilot who took part in pro-democracy protests, and faces charges for rioting. Cathay said the pilot was removed from flying duties on 30 July.

Cathay said it would also comply with a directive from Beijing banning all staff who support the protests from working on flights to the mainland or through its airspace. China’s aviation regulator has ordered the airline to hand over identifying information for staff on mainland-bound flights effective immediately.

The airline told all staff that it viewed the demonstrations as “illegal protests”, and if they took part they would be banned from flights. “Cathay Pacific Group’s operations in mainland China are key to our business. In addition to flying in and out of mainland China, a large number of our routes both to Europe and to the USA also fly through mainland China airspace,” its chief executive, Rupert Hogg, said.

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Hong Kong police fire teargas in city centre as clashes intensify - video

The luxury fashion label Versace and its artistic director, Donatella Versace, apologised to China after one of its T-shirts was criticised for identifying the semi-autonomous regions of Hong Kong and Macau as countries.

On a tumultuous day in the city, protesters dressed in protective masks and goggles with long-sleeved shirts and trousers to protect them from teargas moved back and forth across the city's subway system as police pushed crowds from one neighbourhood to the next. Chants such as "Liberate Hong Kong, the revolution of our time" rang out as demonstrators filed into escalators alongside commuters and baffled tourists.

"They sacrifice themselves," an admiring bystander said as groups of young protesters crowded into his subway carriage bound for the Kowloon peninsula to reinforce a police-protester standoff. "What they gain is for [all of] us."

At Kwai Fong station, police fired teargas to disperse crowds. Earlier, they used batons to try to stop protesters.

Police said one officer had been injured by a petrol bomb hurled by a protester in Tsim Sha Tsui and that bricks had also been hurled at officers.

While many in Hong Kong appear to support the protesters, including ordinary people who have shown up in their hundreds of thousands at peaceful marches this summer, its chief executive, Carrie Lam, has maintained that protesters are largely violent fringe elements who have taken advantage of a civil disobedience movement.

Beijing has also signalled that it is losing patience with the protests. Its Hong Kong affairs department has spoken to the media twice in recent weeks to warn protesters that their actions will not be tolerated.

Protests began in Hong Kong in early June when Lam attempted to push through a legislative bill that would have allowed for residents to appear before criminal courts in mainland China. Many residents saw the bill as a wedge issue that would lead to their loss of civil and political rights, promised until 2047 under the "one country, two systems" agreement.

The bill prompted the largest demonstrations since Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997, but Lam has steadfastly refused to meet any demands beyond a promise that the bill is now "suspended".

Many of its detractors, including a number of retirees and families, returned to Victoria Park in the thousands on Sunday afternoon for an assembly against the bill and to repeat their oft-heard demands that Lam withdraw it permanently and step down.

At about 5pm, many pushed out of the park despite a police ban and into the shopping district of Causeway Bay and down Hennessy Road where they gathered close to police headquarters.

"We are aware of what will happen," a protester, Cherry Tsang, said as she prepared to leave Victoria Park, "but I think it is actually freedom of speech."

Ting Wai Fong, a retiree, said she was determined to keep coming to protests and march through the city to support the young generation.

She said protesters now faced the dual terror of arrest and imprisonment as well as mobs of pro-China supporters, who attacked journalists including a reporter with the public broadcaster RTHK

on Sunday and clashed with protesters the previous week. "If we are afraid, if we are not coming out to rally, we are encouraging these people to spread the terror," she said.

As thousands brought traffic to a standstill on Hong Kong island, a smaller simultaneous demonstration at Sham Shui Po in Kowloon was the first to be hit with police teargas.

Similar standoffs followed near police headquarters before the mostly young protesters decamped en masse for the Kowloon peninsula where many had already barricaded an important cross-harbour tunnel.

Protests looked likely to continue well into the night with police stationed at a number of subway exits across the city in apparent preparation to tackle new flashmob protest tactics.

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P.S.

- The Guardian. Sun 11 Aug 2019 18.50 BST First published on Sun 11 Aug 2019 17.46:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/11/hong-kong-protesters-play-cat-and-mouse-game-with-police-on-subway>