

Hong Kong protesters and police clash, metro and shops targeted

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Hong Kong pro-democracy activists and riot police clashed in chaotic scenes around the city on Sunday 13, with police in riot gear chasing protesters through crowds of lunchtime shoppers.

Rallies in shopping malls on Hong Kong island and across the harbor in the Kowloon district began peacefully around midday with a few hundred people at each chanting "Free Hong Kong" and other slogans.

A few hours later, black-clad activists took to the streets and began trashing shops and metro stations and erecting road blocks.

Police said protesters threw bricks and petrol bombs at police, with one setting a police van alight in Kowloon's Sha Tin district. Police made several arrests and used tear gas to disperse protesters, saying they used "minimum force".

By Sunday night, most protesters had dispersed, but riot police remained on the streets in various districts.

The Hong Kong government said a large group of protesters threw 20 Molotov cocktail petrol bombs at Mong Kok police station in Kowloon on Sunday night. Local media said barricades outside the police station were set ablaze but police and firefighters extinguished the fires.

Television footage showed shoppers screaming and some injured when police charged inside a mall. The protesters, many wearing face masks to shield their identity, were **often supported by shoppers**.

In one mall, a group of riot police, shields out front and pepper spray canisters in hand, **were forced to retreat by chanting shoppers until they were outside of the mall**.

In another incident, **a group of 50 shoppers inside a mall faced off against riot police outside, chanting "Hong Kong police mafia"**. The shoppers cheered when police drove off.

CRITICISM OF POLICE

Hong Kong's police, once praised as "Asia's finest", have been accused of using excessive force in dealing with protesters and have lost the confidence and respect of many Hong Kongers.

"Hong Kong used to be a prosperous city and now she has become a police state. Hong Kong is my home. We should protect her. We should resist," said a 70-year-old who gave only his last name, Hui. He was part of **a group of 60- to 70-year-olds on Nathan Road, Kowloon, who were cheering the protesters**, urging them to block the road and warning them when police were returning.

Hong Kong has been rocked by four months of often huge and violent protests against what is seen as Beijing's tightening grip on the Chinese-ruled city.

The protests were sparked by a now-abandoned extradition bill but have widened into a pro-democracy movement and an outlet for anger at social inequality in the city, which boasts some of the world's most expensive real estate.

The unrest has plunged the city into its worst crisis since Britain handed it back to China in 1997 and poses the biggest popular challenge to Chinese President Xi Jinping since he came to power in 2012.

Hong Kong is facing its first recession in a decade because of the protests, with tourism and retail hardest hit.

Hong Kong's protests have also taken on an element of civil disobedience by residents angry at what they see as excessive force by riot police and a heavy-handed government which introduced colonial-era emergency laws to quell unrest.

Small protest rallies have included school children, office workers, shoppers and the elderly. Hardcore activists who clash with police tend to emerge later in the day.

"I think the police have been using their power to suppress the citizens," said resident Mary Lam, 26.

*"That's why **more and more young children come out and protest against the government and the police.** Those being arrested don't have human rights. This is not fair."*

The Hong Kong government introduced emergency laws to ban the wearing of face masks at public rallies, a move that sparked some of the worst violence since the unrest started in June.

Two people have been shot and wounded during protests.

Police have arrested more than 2,300 people since June. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam has said that, since September, **nearly 40% of those arrested were under the age of 18 and 10% under 15**, without giving the total number of arrests.

Hong Kong's MTR rail network, which usually carries some 5 million people daily, has borne the brunt of attacks, and several stations were closed after ticketing machines and entrances were damaged.

Protesters have also targeted Chinese banks and shops with links to mainland China. A group wielding hammers damaged a Huawei store on Sunday.

Demonstrators believe China has been eroding Hong Kong's freedoms, guaranteed under the "one country, two systems" formula introduced with the 1997 handover.

The now-withdrawn extradition bill, under which residents would have been sent to Communist-controlled mainland courts, was seen as the latest move to tighten control.

China denies the accusation and says foreign countries, including Britain and the United States, are fomenting unrest.

PANG Jessie (Reuters) - Reporting by James Promfret, Clare Jim, Poppy McPherson and Twinnie

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<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests/hong-kong-protesters-stage-shopping-mall-rallies-taunting-riot-police-idUSKBN1WS026>