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Hong Kong Protest Updates: Leader Condemns Violence as City Remains on Edge

Demonstrators, protesting a contentious extradition bill, threw bricks, bottles and umbrellas at riot police guarding the city's Legislative Council. The police responded with tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets.

By The New York Times

RIGHT NOW Hong Kong's chief executive called the protest an "organized riot," and compared the demonstrators to spoiled children.

Here's what you need to know:

- [Tear gas deployed after protesters succeed in delaying legislature's debate.](#)
- [Police chief tells protesters to disperse or they 'might regret' it.](#)
- [Hong Kong's leader compares demonstrators to spoiled children.](#)
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Tear gas deployed after protesters succeed in delaying legislature's debate.

Riot police turned downtown Hong Kong into a tear-gas covered battlefield as they pushed back against protesters who tried to storm Hong Kong's Legislative Council. The protesters, angry at an extradition bill that would allow people to be sent to mainland China for trial, hurled bricks, bottles and umbrellas as they clashed with the police, as the demonstrations intensified on Wednesday afternoon.

At least 20 people were injured, local news media reported, based on data from the city's hospitals.

A line of protesters, many of them young people in black T-shirts, repeatedly rushed toward a ring of heavily armored police, only to be repelled by the officers who lashed out with blows, rubber bullets, beanbag rounds, pepper spray and tear gas.

[What caused the protests? We took a look at the proposed extradition bill that has outraged residents.]

During their closest encounters, only a thin metal barrier separated the two groups as the protesters' front line slowly inched closer to the source of their anger — Hong Kong's legislature.

One police officer held a giant red sign warning protesters: "Stop charging or we will use force."

Many of the city's lawmakers, from both the pro-democracy camp that opposes the contentious extradition legislation at the heart of the protests and the pro-Beijing majority that supports it, failed to arrive at the council for a

scheduled debate on Wednesday morning, after protesters surrounded the complex and blocked traffic. The council later said the debate was postponed until further notice.

The police's use of tear gas and rubber bullets represented a turning point in their response to the demonstrations, and reflected the government's determination to keep the territory's legislature from being overrun by the people.

The police have not acknowledged using rubber bullets against protesters for decades and when tear gas was used five years ago against a student democracy protest, it incited public fury that brought tens of thousands of people onto the streets. That movement turned into a sustained occupation of several commercial districts for months in Hong Kong known as the Umbrella Movement, referring to the shield of choice used to fend off police pepper spray.

By late Wednesday afternoon, the area immediately adjacent to the council had been cleared of protesters, but tear gas hung in the air in the city's main financial and business district.

So much tear gas was used that commuters at nearby subway stations and people in shopping malls were coughing and tearing up, and many sought medical attention.



Police chief tells protesters to disperse or they ‘might regret’ it.

Hong Kong’s commissioner of police described Wednesday’s demonstrations as “riots” and called on protesters to go home, warning that those who refused “might regret your decision for your entire life.”

The remarks by Commissioner Stephen Lo at a news conference came moments after protesters stormed police barricades outside the Legislative Council, leading to the use of tear gas, beanbag rounds and rubber bullets.

“If they are peaceful protesters, please leave,” Mr. Lo said. “If they are violent protesters, then please think twice because you might regret your decision for your entire life.”

Mr. Lo said his officers had peacefully surrounded the legislature complex but would not permit demonstrators to cross over the barricade, adding that it was the demonstrators who were the first to use force.

“In terms of using violence, we have guidelines that we are following,” he said, adding that “I think we should all remember who initially started the protest.”

The commissioner’s remarks echoed those of an administration official earlier in the day.

The administration's chief secretary urged demonstrators to disperse after tens of thousands of protesting residents forced the body to delay a debate scheduled for the morning.



By Jin Wu | Satellite image by DigitalGlobe via Bing

Hong Kong's leader compares demonstrators to spoiled children.

The Beijing-backed leader of Hong Kong condemned Wednesday's violence, but gave no indication that she would stop pushing ahead with the proposed legislation that set off the protests.

“It is very clear that this is no longer a peaceful assembly, but a public and organized riot,” Carrie Lam, the territory’s chief executive, said in an interview with a local television station. “And it is impossible that this is action that loves and protects Hong Kong.”

She urged the public to help restore order in Hong Kong and to resolve differences peacefully.

Earlier Wednesday and in a separate interview recorded before the protests turned violent, Ms. Lam was steadfast in her commitment to seeing the extradition bill passed and compared the protesters to spoiled children,

“I have never felt a guilty conscience over this,” Ms. Lam said in the interview, taped on Wednesday morning, but which aired that evening after a day of protests. “I continue to hold fast to the belief that it is the right thing to do,” she told the Hong Kong broadcaster TVB, regarding the extradition bill.

In her remarks, she compared the protesters — many of whom are young — to stubborn children who did not know better.

“To draw a comparison, I’m a mother too, I have two sons,” she said. “If my son was stubborn and I spoiled him and tolerated his stubborn behavior every time, I would just be going along with him.”

The widespread public outrage over the bill puts Ms. Lam, who was selected by China’s leaders to govern the territory two years ago, in a delicate position. Backing down risks making her look weak and drawing the ire of her party benefactors, who back the bill, but moving ahead with the vote on the proposal could incite even more protests and unrest.

Small businesses support protesters, but major firms stay quiet.

Small businesses across Hong Kong closed their shops in solidarity with the protesters. A hotel chain offered rooms where protesters could shower and rest free of charge. At some other companies, managers let employees leave work to join the demonstrations, and union leaders told members to find creative ways to participate without calling for a strike, that included the drivers at one bus company pledging to drive below the speed limit.

A teachers' union encouraged members to stage walkouts and explain to young students what was happening. "This is a critical moment for Hong Kong," the Hong Kong Professional Teachers Union said in a post on Facebook. "Educators have to uphold the responsibility of protecting conscience, and the sense of right and wrong. The union understands how striking would affect the operations of schools and sincerely asks the schools to understand."

But Hong Kong's most powerful voices, those of the large international banks that have long made the city a global financial hub, have remained largely quiet on the issue of extradition.

"The extradition bill is worrying because for business it starts to call into question whether there is now a blurred line between politics and business in a city that views itself as a commercial capital that puts business first," said Tara Joseph, the president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong.

While the international business community has mainly worried behind boardroom doors, more than a thousand small local Hong Kong businesses closed their doors on Wednesday.

On Instagram hundreds of coffee shops, restaurants and other businesses posted pictures with the hashtag "#612strike." One online floral company called Floraholic wrote, "Hong Kong is sick, let's take a day off for some rest! #NoChinaExtradition #612罷市."

“Striking is the only action we could take,” said Yanki Lam, the owner of a shop in the Kowloon district of the city.



Cars were used to block a road near the Legislative Council. Lam Yik Fei for The New York Times

Critics say the bill places anyone at risk of facing trial in the mainland.

The bill would allow Hong Kong to detain and transfer people wanted in countries and territories with which it has no formal extradition agreements, including Taiwan and the Chinese mainland.

Hong Kong's chief executive, Carrie Lam, has said the new law is urgently needed to prosecute a Hong Kong man who is wanted in Taiwan for the murder of his girlfriend. But the authorities in Taiwan, a self-governed island claimed by Beijing, say they would not agree to the extradition arrangement because it would treat Taiwan as part of China.

Critics contend that the law would allow virtually anyone in the city to be picked up and put on trial in mainland China, where judges must follow the orders of the Communist Party. They fear the new law would not just target criminals but political activists as well.

The extradition plan applies to 37 crimes. That excludes political ones, but critics fear the legislation would essentially legalize the sort of abductions to the mainland that have taken place in Hong Kong in recent years. The mainland Chinese authorities are typically not permitted to operate in the semiautonomous territory.

Photos From the Hong Kong Extradition Protests June 12, 2019



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