

Hong Kong Protests Resume as Police Headquarters Is Surrounded

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Thousands gathered outside Hong Kong's Legislative Council on Friday to protest an unpopular extradition bill and call for the city's chief executive to step down. Lam Yik Fei for *The New York Times*.

HONG KONG — Thousands of protesters blocked a major thoroughfare and surrounded the headquarters of Hong Kong's police force on Friday, putting new pressure on the city's leadership over an unpopular bill that has thrown the territory into a political crisis.



Thousands gathered outside Hong Kong's Legislative Council on Friday to protest an unpopular extradition bill and call for the city's chief executive to step down. Lam Yik Fei for The New York Times

The demonstrators, mostly teenagers and people in their 20s dressed in black, filled the main roads around the police complex in stifling 90-degree weather, chanting calls for the authorities to release protesters who were arrested last week. The government shut down its headquarters for the day, citing security concerns, and the legislature canceled meetings.

It was the latest of several mass demonstrations in the span of two weeks that have paralyzed parts of downtown Hong Kong, in scenes reminiscent of the 2014 pro-democracy Umbrella Movement protests, which saw major districts occupied for more than two months.



Composite photos help show the enormous scale of the demonstrations.

The protesters have felt emboldened since Carrie Lam, the city's chief executive, indefinitely suspended the contentious extradition bill last Saturday. As many as two million protesters poured into the streets the next day, organizers contend.



Friday's protest began as a sedate sit-in, but demonstrators then blocked major roads. Lam Yik Fei for The New York Times

The protesters are not satisfied with Mrs. Lam's suspension of the bill, which would allow extraditions to mainland China. Instead, the protesters want Mrs. Lam to withdraw the law fully.

The alarm over the bill underscores many Hong Kong residents' rising anxiety and frustration over the erosion of civil liberties that have set the city apart from the rest of China.

"This is Hong Kong, not China," declared a large, white banner displayed along the side of a pedestrian bridge on Friday.

The protesters began their day with a sit-in outside the Legislative Council building, but after several hours they mobilized to block streets. Kenneth Kwan, a 19-year-old student, said he had helped to shut down a major road because he thought it would make a stronger statement than a mere sit-in would.

"It's a helpless feeling, and we don't know how to make our government respond to our needs," he said through a face mask, standing in an eastbound lane of Harcourt Road. The protesters, he said, needed to keep pressure on the government until their demands were met.



The police made it clear they would not use force to stop protesters from gathering outside their headquarters. Lam Yik Fei for The New York Times

By midmorning, the protesters had set up barricades at police headquarters blocking an entrance and demanded a meeting with the police chief. "Shame on dirty cops," they chanted.

Joshua Wong, a key leader of the 2014 pro-democracy protests, who was released from prison on Monday, shouted slogans decrying the authorities for having previously labeled the June 12 demonstration a riot, which suggested serious potential legal ramifications for people who participated in it.

"No riots, only tyranny," he chanted, as others followed.

The police urged the demonstrators to disperse, saying they had prevented them from responding to dozens of emergency calls. Yolanda Yu, a police spokeswoman, said at a news conference steps from where protesters were gathered that a team of negotiators would be sent to persuade them to leave. The crowd shouted over her.

The police were “not clearing the grounds,” Ms. Yu said. “We respect the people to express their views in a peaceful manner.”

As of late afternoon, the police were maintaining a low-level presence at the protest sites, including their own headquarters, apparently trying to avoid escalating tensions. Local media reported that the protesters had blocked all of the street-level entrances at the police complex.



Protesters barricaded an entrance to police headquarters. Lam Yik Fei for The New York Times

Some protesters also filled the lobbies of at least two other government buildings.

“Although there were fewer participants today, we could occupy the police headquarters and the Revenue Tower, which we had never done before,” said Sunny Cheung, a 23-year-old university student, referring to one of the government buildings. “We will not retreat, nor will we give in, until the government takes our demands into account.”

The protesters had vowed to resume street demonstrations after a set of demands went unmet by a Thursday deadline. Aside from the scrapping of the bill, the protesters also called for Mrs. Lam’s resignation, the release of people arrested during clashes with the police last week and an investigation into the police’s use of batons, tear gas and rubber bullets against protesters in clashes on June 12.

The demonstrations on Friday signaled that the fight was not over for Mrs. Lam, the embattled leader, and foreshadowed more upheaval in the city.

“To not keep even the central government headquarters open, to not keep the police headquarters open, it’s a big humiliation,” said Willy Lam, a political analyst who teaches at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. “It means basically she has lost the ability to govern effectively.”

The massive outcry over the extradition bill this month prompted Mrs. Lam to deliver a personal, televised public apology on Tuesday for having proposed it in the first place.



Protesters blocked a major road near police headquarters. Lam Yik Fei for The New York Times

But she did not agree to resign or withdraw the bill entirely, as many protesters have demanded. Instead, she said that work on it would not resume in Hong Kong’s legislature as long as there was a public dispute over the bill’s content.

On Friday, Ann Chiang, a pro-Beijing lawmaker, said in an interview with a local TV station that the government could consider reintroducing the bill after a few months of educating the public about it — a suggestion sure to rankle protesters who already doubt Mrs. Lam's sincerity about suspending the bill. Ms. Chiang's pro-establishment party, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong, quickly distanced itself from her comments.

The extradition bill would allow the authorities in Hong Kong, a semiautonomous territory, to send people suspected of crimes to jurisdictions with which it does not have an extradition agreement, including mainland China. Opponents of the bill fear that if it becomes law, it would open a door for Beijing to take anyone from Hong Kong — including dissidents — into the mainland's opaque, politicized judicial system.

Under China's president, Xi Jinping, the ruling Communist Party has increasingly tried to exert control over Hong Kong, which has its own laws, independent courts and news outlets, as well as a vocal community of pro-democracy activists and lawmakers. On Friday, Albert del Rosario, a former Philippine foreign secretary who accused Mr. Xi of crimes against humanity in an international court, told The Associated Press by telephone that he had flown to Hong Kong for a business meeting but was blocked by immigration officers from entering, in what he described as an act of harassment.

Beijing has steadily eroded Hong Kong's liberties over the last several years, including by trying to silence critics and stacking the city's leadership with its supporters.

Mr. Lam, the analyst at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, said that Mrs. Lam, the city's leader, would be unlikely to bend on two of the protesters' major demands — the withdrawal of the bill and her own resignation — because those were decisions only Beijing could make.

"Xi Jinping must be very mad, but they can't just fire her because there would be a power vacuum," Mr. Lam said. "Particularly at this time, there are no obvious and viable successors on the horizon."

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Ezra Cheung, Tiffany May and Katherine Li contributed reporting from Hong Kong, and Alan Yuhas from New York.

P.S.

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/20/world/asia/hong-kong.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>