

3 MONTHS OF PROTESTS

# VIOLENCE HITS HK AGAIN

Cops fire tear gas and baton-charge protesters

HONG KONG

**H**ONG Kong riot police yesterday fired tear gas and baton-charged protesters who retaliated with a barrage of stones, bottles and bamboo poles, as a standoff in a working-class district descended into violence.

The city has been gripped by three months of street protests that started against a proposed extradition bill to China, but have spun out into a wider pro-democracy movement.

An uneasy peace had descended this week, but that was broken yesterday as demonstrators marched through the industrial Kwun Tong area, where they were blocked by dozens of officers with shields and batons outside a police station.

Frontline protesters pulled together a barricade of traffic barriers and bamboo construction poles, spray-painting walls with insults directed at the police.

As the afternoon wore on some

fired stones from slingshots, prompting a charge from police wielding batons and pepper spray.

Tear gas swept across the road as protesters retreated, leaving a trail of broken bottles and at least one small fire in their wake.

Several protesters were detained as officers swept through, with police justifying their charge on “a large group of violent protesters” who had set fires and hurled bricks.

The city had appeared to have pulled back from a sharp nose-dive into violence, with the last serious clashes taking place a week and a half ago just after protests paralysed the financial hub’s airport.

Tension flickered throughout the march, where dozens of the most radical demonstrators known as “braves” had gathered, battle-hardened by a three-month street campaign.

“I understand being peaceful will not solve the problem,” 19-year-old student protester Ryan said, giving one name.

“The government won’t respond to peaceful protest. If I am arrested it is because I come out to speak for justice.”

Hundreds of thousands marched peacefully last Sunday,



*A demonstrator throwing back a tear gas canister as they clash with riot police in Hong Kong yesterday. (Right) Riot police detaining an anti-government protester.* AGENCY PIX

as a key protest group sought to regain the moral high ground in a city shocked at the level of violence.

But yesterday’s face-off underscored the dangerous deadlock into which the city has sunk — with the government unmoving in the face of protester demands, and demonstrators stubbornly refusing to leave the streets.

China has used a blend of intimidation, propaganda and economic muscle to constrict the protests in a strategy dubbed “white terror” by the movement.

Hong Kong-based airline Cathay Pacific has sacked staff over their political activities, while the MTR — the city’s metro operator — has been pilloried for



closing stations after Chinese state-media accused it of offering an “exclusive” transport service to protesters.

Protests started against a bill

that would have allowed extradition to China, but have bled into wider calls for democracy and police accountability in the semi-autonomous city. **AFP**