

world

Thousands rally in support of Hong Kong police



People attend a pro-government rally outside the government headquarters in Hong Kong

Hong Kong, China

Tens of thousands of people rallied in support of Hong Kong's police and pro-Beijing leadership on Saturday, a vivid illustration of the polarisation coursing through the city after weeks of anti-government demonstrations.

Hong Kong has been rocked by more than a month of huge and largely peaceful protests -- as well as a series of separate violent confrontations with police -- sparked by a proposed law that would have allowed extraditions to mainland China and other countries.

The bill has since been suspended, but that has done little to quell public anger which has evolved into a wider movement calling for democratic reforms, universal suffrage and a halt to sliding freedoms in the semi-autonomous financial hub.

Saturday's rally was a moment for the establishment to muster their own supporters.

A predominantly older crowd was joined by families and younger residents, waving Chinese flags and holding banners supporting the police.

"Friends who used violence say they love Hong Kong too, but we absolutely cannot approve of their way of expressing themselves," said Sunny Wong, 42, who works in insurance.

A 60-year-old woman surnamed Leung said protesters who stormed and vandalised the legislature earlier this month must be held responsible for their acts.

"I really dislike people using violence on others... it was so extreme," Leung said.

Police estimated a turnout of 103,000 people at the peak of the rally, while local media cited organisers as saying 316,000 attended.

Hong Kong police uncover 'homemade explosive lab'



Police said they swooped on an industrial building in the district of Tsuen Wan on Friday evening and arrested a 27-year-old man

Hong Kong, China

Hong Kong police yesterday said they had uncovered a makeshift factory producing high-powered explosives alongside pro-independence leaflets, a discovery which comes as the city is rocked by unprecedented political protests.

Police said they swooped on an industrial building in the district of Tsuen Wan on Friday evening and arrested a 27-year-old man.

"We are dealing with a homemade laboratory for the manufacture of high explosive, specifically TATP," Superintendent Alick McWhirter, a bomb squad specialist, told reporters on Saturday.

"This is an extremely sensitive and an extremely powerful high explosive. It will

cause exceptional amounts of damage when used," he added.

TATP requires skill to manufacture but has been used in a number of major terror attacks, including the 2005 London suicide bombings and the recent deadly Easter attacks on hotels and churches in Sri Lanka earlier this year.

McWhirter said his team had carried out at least one controlled explosion and expected to do more because the TATP they had discovered was volatile.

Items also displayed by police after the raid included a T-shirt with the logo of the Hong Kong National Front, a pro-independence group, as well as leaflets related to huge anti-government protests currently engulfing the international finance hub.

New Delhi asks Iran to free 18 Indians on seized tanker



Stena Impero, a British-registered tanker, off the coast of Amsterdam. The British-registered tanker Stena Impero seized by Iran is now at anchor off the port of Bandar Abbas with all its crew aboard after colliding with a fishing boat, authorities said

New Delhi, India

India said yesterday it was in touch with Tehran to secure the release of 18 of its nationals serving on a British-registered tanker seized by Iran in the Strait of Hormuz.

The Philippines also said it would ask Iran to free a Filipino crew member on the Swedish-owned Stena Impero which was seized on Friday, as tensions mount in a key waterway for the world's oil supplies.

Raveesh Kumar, spokesman for India's foreign ministry, said that 18 of its nationals were on the ship and said New Delhi was "in touch with the government of Iran to secure (their) early release and repatriation".

The tanker was impounded off Bandar Abbas port for breaking "international maritime rules" after colliding with a fishing boat, Iranian authorities said.

The Philippine foreign department said a Filipino, three Russians and a Latvian were also among the ship's crew.

"(Philippine) Ambassador to Iran Fred Santos is contacting Iranian authorities to seek assurance that the Filipino seafarer is safe and will be released soon," it said, adding the unidentified crew member's family has been notified.

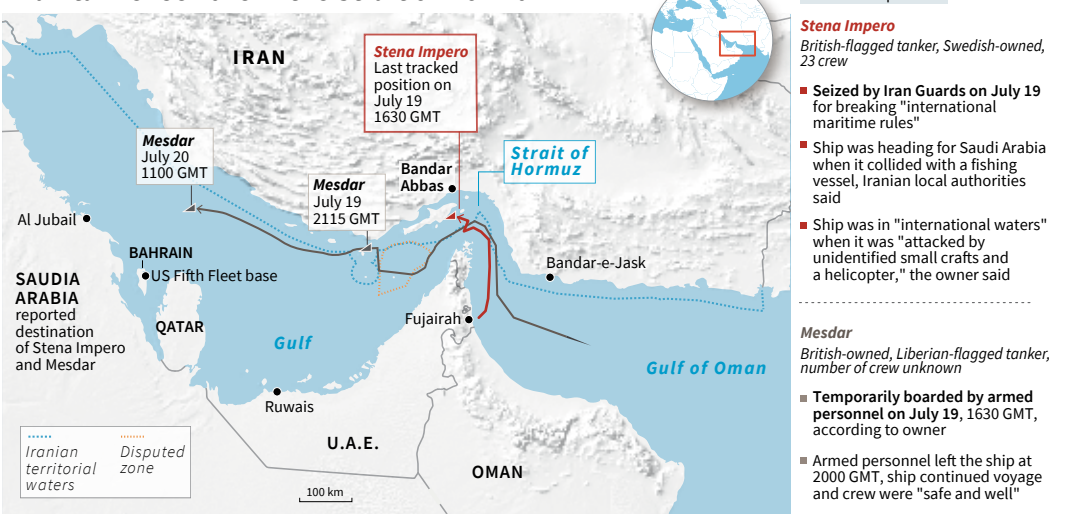
The recruitment agency that supplied the Filipino crew member told Manila there were no reported injuries as the vessel headed for the Iranian coast on Friday, the department added.

Iranian authorities said the tanker has anchored off Bandar Abbas with all its 23 crew aboard.

Britain said a second ship had also been seized in the Persian Gulf -- the Liberian-flagged Mesdar.

The Mesdar's British owner said the vessel had been temporarily boarded by armed personnel, but was free to leave and that all crew were "safe and well".

Iran tanker seizure in the Strait of Hormuz



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