Chinese Seaside Town Protesters in Police Standoff

GILLIAN WONG, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese authorities have detained a number of people in a southern seaside town where protests against a planned power plant resulted in clashes with police, an official said Thursday, as riot police fired tear gas during a third day of unrest.

Thousands of people in the town of Haimen wanting to block a highway were locked in a standoff with riot police, said protesters contacted by The Associated Press.

A city Communist Party propaganda official surnamed Chen said some people who had participated in "illegal activities that endanger public security" earlier this week had been detained, but said he was uncertain how many.

A resident also surnamed Chen, who is not related to the official, said a few thousand people gathered to face a roadblock set up by police. "Police set up a roadblock at the highway and threatened to arrest anyone who dared to cross," Chen said.

The protesters think an existing coal-fired power plant has contributed to what they say is a rise in cancer cases and heavy pollution in the seas, a serious problem for a town where fishing is a source of livelihood.

"We just want to ask the central government to order the construction of the coal power plant to be stopped," said Lin Fujin, a Haimen resident who was at the scene. "The pollution has turned the sky black and the fish are dead."

Footage from Hong Kong's Cable TV showed tear gas canisters hitting the ground in front of a gas station as panicked residents fled in various directions.

The broadcaster also showed riot police with helmets and shields lined up around a large water cannon truck facing dozens of people on the other side of a road.

"The police hit me," a woman with bloodied hands told Cable TV, surrounded by an angry crowd. "I just wanted to go over there to offer an explanation but they started to drag me on the road."

In response to protests earlier in the week, the local government said it would temporarily suspend the power plant project, according to a report by the local Shantou Daily newspaper which could not be immediately verified.

But protesters say they did not believe the report and that they have not heard directly from authorities on the matter.

After three decades of laxly regulated industrialization, China is seeing a surge in protests over such environmental worries.

In September, hundreds of villagers in an eastern Chinese city near Shanghai demonstrated against pollution they blamed on a solar panel factory. In August, 12,000 residents in the northeastern port city of Dalian protested against a chemical plant after waves from a tropical storm broke a dike guarding the plant and raised fears that flood waters could release toxic chemicals.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/26/2014 - 12:27pm*):
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