

Hong Kong protests see weird, wonderful scenes

By Sylvia Hui
The Associated Press

HONG KONG — It's a protest for political reform — so why are people at the scene worshipping deities, playing ping-pong, and singing "Happy Birthday"?

As Hong Kong's pro-democracy street protests entered another week, the civil disobedience movement gave rise to some increasingly bizarre scenes, especially in Mong Kok, a boisterous, seedy district where a haphazard protest camp has attracted a motley cast of characters. Here are just a few of them:

Deities at barricades

At one of the barricades blocking off the Mong Kok protest zone, a bemused crowd is gathering around — not to support the demonstrators, but to gawk at a mini shrine set up for the Chinese folk hero and deity Guan Yu.

The makeshift worship station acquired a roof overnight, and is now complete with fruit and incense offerings.

"If you don't worship him, you may go to the other end of the protest zone. Someone has set up an altar to Jesus there," a demonstrator explained to an agitated woman who was clearly unhappy about the protests taking over her neighborhood.

The shrine was a clever response after several nights of brawling and violent clashes between protesters, police, and angry mobs. Mong Kok is a haven for Hong Kong's triads, or organized crime gangs, but neither mobsters nor police would want to offend Guan Yu, a figure adopted by both sides as their guardian deity.

"Someone dreamed this up, built it in a



short time, and now look — it's evolved into a temple," said Terry Li, a 27-year-old civil servant marvelling at the shrine. "I know Hong Kong people are creative, but I never expected it to be applied to protests like this."

The "Birthday Song" tactic

Who knew singing "Happy Birthday" could be a defense tactic?

Faced with angry residents and local shopkeepers who stop by every once in a while to hurl insults at the camp, the students sometimes break into song to drown out their opponents. Their song of choice: a ridiculously cheerful rendering of "Happy Birthday," which works remarkably well at turning away troublemakers.

The story goes that when a protester inadvertently played the tune on his phone during one vicious shouting match, the

crowd spontaneously decided to sing along. That was enough to leave those who had started the ruckus speechless.

The Ikea furniture man

Protesters have come out on the streets night after night, sleeping on mats and cardboard or setting up tents to make sure authorities do not retake the streets overnight.

One man has decided to take it further, bringing a wooden bed complete with sheets and a neatly rolled up duvet. Next to it are tiny Buddha figurines and a small matching bookcase, adorned with a Chinese paperback on economics and the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, among other titles.

A protester told reporters he had bought the furniture from Ikea to make the protest zone homier.

'Leftist' ping-pong tables?

One of the strangest scenes in Mong Kok

SINGING THEM SPEECHLESS. A man pays respect to a mini shrine set up on the spot for the Chinese folk hero and deity Guan Yu near barricades that protesters set up to block off main roads in the Mong Kok district of Hong Kong. The shrine was a clever response after several nights of brawling and violent clashes between protesters, police, and angry mobs. Mong Kok is a haven for Hong Kong's triads, or organized crime gangs, but neither mobsters nor police would want to offend Guan Yu, a figure adopted by both sides as their guardian deity. The Chinese words read: "The power of loyalty and justice protect us" (left) and "Righteousness abounds." (AP Photo/Vincent Yu)

was the appearance one night of ping-pong and mahjong tables on the occupied streets. Videos and photos showed people entertaining themselves at the games, while others laid out food for a hearty outdoor hotpot dinner. Most of the evidence vanished the next day — apparently after protesters complained that the frivolity showed the pro-democracy movement in a bad light.

Police were quick to seize on the episode to condemn the protesters, and a pro-Beijing newspaper put the photos on its front page. "Illegal occupiers are occupying the roads as their living space and playground," said Kong Man-keung, a police spokesman. "These acts are seriously damaging interests of the residents nearby, and are absolutely unacceptable to the general public."

Many in Mong Kok say they have no idea who brought in the furniture, but protesters suspect it was a smear campaign by rivals.

Numerous posters at the scene now warn demonstrators to beware of "leftist" — shorthand for Communist — tactics.

"I want true universal suffrage, not a carnival," one sign read.

Japan volcano victims leave photos of last moments

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — The victims include hiking enthusiasts from a major insurance company. Members of a group of nature lovers studying wild plants. A construction manager who snapped about 100 photos — found on his scratched and dented camera — to show his wife what she was missing because she had to work that day.

More than 50 people died when Mount Ontake, a popular hiking destination in central Japan, erupted without warning on September 27 in the country's deadliest volcanic eruption since World War II.

Together, they paint a typical picture of weekend recreational hikers in Japan. A few children and senior citizens, but mostly middle-aged working people enjoying the first Saturday of the fall foliage season.

Most were between 30 and 59 years old, and lived within a few hours drive or train ride from the mountain. Three were children, and only five were 60 or older.

"The best season for the leaves just started, the weather was beautiful, it was the weekend, and it was lunchtime," said Masahito Ono, a Nagano prefecture tourism official.

Hiking has become one of Japan's most popular outdoor activities. The core fans are middle-aged climbers with some experience, but there are a growing number of beginners: health-conscious senior citizens and fashionable women who sport a casual "mountain girl" look. The number of hikers in Nagano surged to 730,000 last year, a 30 percent increase from five years ago.

With modest slopes and a ropeway that takes visitors part way up, 10,062-foot Mount Ontake is one of the easier climbs in the region, recommended as a day trip for beginners. Several hundred people are

believed to have been on the mountain when it erupted at 11:52am.

Rescuers have found 51 bodies, and at least a dozen other people are still missing. Most of the bodies were found at the summit, with others on a trail a short way down.

Hideomi Takahashi, 41, was among nine climbers from a major Japanese insurance company, Sampo Japan Nipponkoa Holdings Inc. They worked at two branches near Tokyo. Only three survived.

At Takahashi's funeral, his family showed a close friend an iPhone with at least six photos from what would be the last few minutes of his life: a cotton candy-like cloud floating next to the mountain in a clear blue sky, a sacred gate to a mountaintop shrine, some of his colleagues making their way up. The last photo, apparently shot by a colleague, shows Takahashi standing next to the "Mount Ontake summit" sign, giving a thumbs-up.

"When I saw the iPhone still worked, I thought it's like a miracle," said the friend, Hiroyuki, who asked that only his first name be used after he was criticized online for posting some of the photos on Twitter. He has since taken the tweets down.

Takahashi seems happy in the final photo, but he's not quite smiling. "Maybe he saw signs of the eruption," Hiroyuki said, adding he has trouble accepting that his best friend died, leaving behind his wife and two children.

Construction company employee Izumi Noguchi, 59, was climbing alone, as his usual hiking companion, his wife Hiromi, had to work, she told Japanese broadcaster NHK and other TV stations. His compact camera was banged up, but the memory chip inside was undamaged. She printed all 100 shots. The last one is of an enormous plume billowing from the crater behind a mountaintop lodge.

Continued on page 7

U+HAUL®



In-Town moves from

\$19.95

Plus Mileage

AVAILABLE NOW

- ◆ TRUCKS
- ◆ TRAILERS
- ◆ HITCHES
- ◆ AUTO TRANSPORTS

503-538-2008

RESERVE one now



4 OR MORE
BEDROOM HOME
26' VAN



3 BEDROOM
HOME
24' VAN



2 BEDROOM
HOME/CONDO
17' VAN



1-2 BEDROOM
APT.
14' VAN



3 ROOMS

U+HAUL NEIGHBORHOOD DEALER
First United Engineering