

6 April 1989

Activists commemorate riots

By DAPHNE CHENG 3.2

MORE than 200 Hongkong human rights activists staged an angry protest outside China's representative office yesterday to commemorate the 13th anniversary of the Tiananmen riots in Beijing.

Shouting "down with the one-party rule" and "rule by the people and democracy", they demanded the immediate release of political prisoners in China, including prominent democrat Wei Jingsheng and Hongkong resident Lau Shan-ching.

While calling for greater democracy and civil liberty, they said delegates to the Chinese National People's Congress (NPC) should be elected in a democratic way.

The three-hour protest, organised by the April 5 Action Group, also condemned last week's seizure by Tianjin customs officials of a petition containing 24,000 signatures addressed to the NPC Standing Committee.

Although the NPC standing body on Tuesday accepted the petition, they insisted China should apologise.

The organisers of the protest included Tianjin delegation members, the director of the Christian Industrial Committee, Mr Lau Chin-shek, and Kwai Chung District Board member Mr Leung Yiu-chung.

Holding placards and banners, the group marched from the Star Ferry concourse in Central to the New China News Agency

headquarters in Happy Valley.

The protest reached its climax when they gathered outside the NCNA offices and tied pieces of white cloth around a chain to symbolise the plight of political prisoners in China.

Then they handed a letter conveying their demands to an NCNA official.

A licence for yesterday's petition was approved on Tuesday but only handed over by the police to the organisers shortly before they gathered at the Central pier.

The protesters criticised the act as a means of suppressing public meetings.

They said they had informed the police about their protest a couple of days ago.

But Divisional Commander (Waterfront) Anthony McLoughlin said the move was to make sure the demonstration was carried out orderly and the public was not affected.

"We have been very flexible in giving them a licence which they did not apply for. We want to give them every single assistance," Mr McLoughlin said.

He said the licence was issued on Tuesday but the group did not pick it up.

The law on public meetings stipulates that any gatherings attended by more than 20 people must seek a licence.

As the group marched they distributed leaflets to passers-by calling on them to join in their action.