

# French yellow vest protests to continue despite Macron outreach

Rallies are expected to honour hundreds injured since the movement began in November.



Protesters wearing yellow vests walk in a street of Beziers, southern France, during an anti-government demonstration called by the Yellow Vest movement on January 19, 2019. AFP

Yellow vest protesters are planning rallies in several French cities despite a national debate launched this week by President Emmanuel Macron aimed at assuaging their anger.

A prominent and provocative protester is promoting a march on Saturday starting at the Invalides monument in Paris, home to Napoleon's tomb, to honour hundreds injured since the movement kicked off on November 17. Ten people have been killed in protest-related traffic accidents.

Paris is deploying 5,000 police around the capital, notably around government buildings and the Champs-Elysees, stage of recent violence. Thousands of other police are fanned out nationwide.

Saturday marks the 10th straight weekend of yellow vest protests, and will test whether Mr Macron's debate is diminishing the movement's momentum. The protests started over fuel taxes but became a broader revolt against economic problems.

French police have come under fire for the injuries they have caused in response to the protests.

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Dozens of protesters have been seriously injured in clashes with police, whose sometimes heavy-handed tactics, particularly their use of 40-mm (1.6-inch) rubber projectiles and stun grenades, have drawn mounting criticism.

The “Disarm” collective, a local group that campaigns against police violence, has documented 98 cases of serious injuries since the first nationwide protests on November 17, including 15 cases of people losing an eye.

The leftwing Liberation daily counted 77 people with serious head injuries, 71 caused by rubber bullets and others by stun grenades.

In one incident that caused widespread outrage, a volunteer fireman and father of three suffered a stroke on January 10 after being hit in the head in Bordeaux, apparently by a rubber bullet.

Video footage of the incident, which was widely shared on social media, showed an officer firing at a group of retreating protesters, his rifle aimed at head level.

The footage then showed Olivier Beziade lying face down on the ground a few metres away, his back to the police. A rubber bullet was found at his feet.

France’s official police oversight body has received over 200 reports of police violence, though it has not given a breakdown of the cases.

The mounting list of injured has led to heightened scrutiny of police crowd-control techniques, long seen by some experts as aggravating tensions between the state and citizens in a country with a culture of violent protests.

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