

Alcohol and hate

By LUKE McILVEEN and KARA LAWRENCE
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THEY called it a day of pride, but it will go down as a day of national disgrace.

Thousands of drunken youths descended on Cronulla yesterday for the race riots police had feared.

"I'm an Australian, I was born here," a Middle Eastern youth told locals who had taunted him with chants of "Kill Lebs".

Minutes later, he was left covered in blood, punched to the ground and kicked, before being led to safety by police.

Two Middle Eastern girls were also pushed to the ground and pelted with beer bottles as police tried to rescue them.

The day began as a show of solidarity with thousands of locals draping themselves in Australian flags and calling for peace in their beachside suburb.

Up to 150 police, including the dog squad and the PoAir helicopter, were positioned to cope with the 5000-strong crowd.

But as the beer flowed into the afternoon, the huge crowd became violent, roaming the streets in search of a target for their anger.

The threats had been made since two volunteer lifesavers were bashed eight days ago -- and yesterday, they were looking to get square.

Few Middle Eastern youths came to Cronulla, but those who did became victims of mob justice.

Police reacted only to rescue the victims of the bashings and rushed them to safety through the front entrance of the local Northies pub.

"What the Lebs did last week was low and it's time we showed a bit of pride towards where we live," Luke O'Brien, a volunteer lifesaver said.

Another local, Peter, said the huge show of force yesterday had been "coming for five or six years".

"Our girls can't get from the water to their towels without being threatened by these maggots," he said.

In one of the early outbreaks of violence, a Middle Eastern teenager was chased from the beachside park across the road to Northies by a mob of hundreds.

He was assaulted before seeking refuge inside the hotel.

A hotel security guard said he had seen the victim with two other young males and a young woman earlier in the day and they were not causing trouble.

Later, another man was trapped against the back of a ute and bashed in the back before a police officer stepped in.

Northies closed its doors at 2pm yesterday to avoid the mob and two bottle shops shut at the request of police at 5pm.

Ambulance officers treated dozens of injuries, mostly assault-related injuries or from broken glass.

Shortly before 3pm, word spread among thousands of youths that a Lebanese gang was arriving at Cronulla train station.

Some of the mob entered the train station and jumped on a train, where they proceeded to search for anyone of Middle Eastern appearance.

They found two males and began bashing them before police intervened, using batons as they dragged the youths off the train and formed a human shield around the station.

The violence peaked about 4.20pm near the North Cronulla Surf Club when a brawl broke out and six males were injured.

Police escorted them into the club and called an ambulance, which was chaperoned through the crowd by mounted officers.

The mob gathered to block the ambulance's path and then began shouting and throwing bottles, smashing its windows.

The crowd also tried to kick in the doors. One ambulance officer was struck in the head with a bottle and another was cut on the arm by shattered glass.

Five of the six patients in the ambulance were taken into the care of police while the sixth man was taken to St George Hospital suffering injuries to his face and body.

By late afternoon, the baying crowd, many of them drunk, began to turn on riot squad police and emergency services.

By 7pm, 10 people had been arrested.

They included a 28-year-old Cronulla man, charged with affray, a 16-year-old Sutherland teenager, charged with offensive conduct, a 35-year-old Kareela man, charged with offensive conduct, and a 17-year-old Cronulla teenager charged with assaulting police.

Assistant Police Commissioner Mark Goodwin -- himself a Cronulla local -- branded the day's events as "nothing short of disgusting, and disgraceful".

"What has been occurring on some fronts is that people of Middle Eastern backgrounds that have been seen in the Cronulla area -- a swarm of the crowd has approached these people with vile abuse, in the most un-Australian way." **Where you in Cronulla yesterday? Click the *Have Your Say* icon below to let us know.**

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Mob violence envelops Cronulla



A mob attacks a man in Cronulla.

Photo: *Andrew Meares*

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Police have been pushed, pelted with beer bottles and had their patrol cars stomped on as violence worsens at Sydney's Cronulla Beach.

Racial tension turned to violence today as at least 5000 angry people converged on the beach after simmering anger and disputes between beach users flared last week.

An ambulance spokesman said crews had treated at least five people after pockets of violence broke out among the crowd.

At least two of those would require hospital treatment, he said.

No details about their injuries were available. The two most seriously injured were at the Cronulla Surf Lifesaving Club, he said.

He could not comment on a report that a girl of Middle Eastern appearance had been pushed over and was kicked repeatedly as she lay on the ground.

Reporters at the scene said groups of young men had been seen hurling beer bottles at police cars.

Crowds also swarmed around police vehicles, stomping on them and preventing them from moving through the troubled community's foreshore area.

Roads have been closed down in the area and some traffic lights are out.

Police are also standing guard at the kiosk adjoining the surf club, where roller doors have been

pulled down as the violence continues.

Seven people have been arrested and four people have been charged, a NSW police spokesman said.

A 28-year-old Cronulla man has been charged with affray and a 17-year-old Cronulla youth has been charged with assault police.

The pair will face Sutherland Local Court at a date to be fixed.

Two people - a 16-year-old Sutherland boy, and 33-year-old Kareela man - have been charged with offensive conduct.

The 33-year-old will also face Sutherland Local Court at a later date.

It was not known how the youth's charge will be handled.

Another three people have been arrested and are being questioned at Miranda police station.

No charges have been laid.

Witnesses at the beach reported seeing police use capsicum spray to subdue at least one man.

A reporter at Cronulla station, where violence has also flared, said police were involved in a physical struggle with a group trying to board a train.

They used capsicum spray to subdue the group.

It was not clear if any of the arrests related to earlier witness reports of at least three men being pursued and attacked as they tried to get away from angry members of the crowd chasing them on foot.

At least two of the men took refuge at Northies Pub, where police gathered to protect them, Macquarie Radio reported.

Broken beer bottles scattered Elouera Road, which runs along the foreshore, with many in the crowd drinking heavily. Police have had to close the road to traffic at times.

Mounted police and other units are maintaining a heavy presence at the beach today after two rival groups used text messages to urge attacks on each other.

Some of the text messages encouraged people to carry out vigilante style attacks, and some message had racial undertones.

One of the messages had urged "Aussies" to take revenge against "Lebs and wogs". Another urged locals to rally at points on the beach today to take retaliation against "Middle-Eastern" gangs.

As the crowd moved along the beach and foreshore area today, one man on the back of a ute began to shout "No more Lebs" - a chant picked up by the group around him.

Others in the crowd, carrying Australian flags and dressed in Australian shirts, yelled "Aussie, Aussie, Aussie ... Oi, Oi, Oi".

North Cronulla Beach, in Sydney's south, was the scene of two violent incidents last week - an attack on two lifesavers on Sunday and a brawl later in the week in which youths turned on a media crew.

Two ambulance officers were injured when an angry mob attacked their vehicle.

The ambulance was transporting six injured youths under police escort when the crowd descended upon the vehicle and began hurling beer bottles.

Windows on the ambulance were shattered and its panelling dented from kicking.

A NSW Ambulance spokesman said one officer was hit in the head with a bottle as it passed through a broken window.

A second ambulance officer received lacerations to the arm. A police officer in the vehicle was not hurt.

The six patients were taken to an area away from the crowd where they were assessed by doctors.

One patient was taken to St George Hospital with unspecified but minor injuries.

The other five were released.

Dozens of people have been treated for minor cuts and bruises, and some have been decontaminated for capsicum spray, the spokesman said.

Meanwhile, Sydney's Islamic community has blamed the violence on what it calls racist and irresponsible sections of the media.

Islamic Friendship Association of Australia president Keysar Trad said the violence was "bound to happen" because of racist rhetoric on Sydney talkback radio throughout the week.

"Sections of the media took this issue far too far and one can only surmise that the way this issues was dealt with on talkback radio amounts to incitement," Mr Trad said.

He said the media turned a common youth issue into an issue of ethnicity.

"One wonders how much further this can go before those people on talkback radio become more responsible," he said.

He said the racist chants show people are not acting rationally, but are "filled with hatred".

A disgusted NSW Police Commissioner Ken Moroney called the behaviour "un-Australian".

"Clearly there has been a level of racial vilification ... and those who are found to behave this way will be prosecuted," he said.

NSW Opposition leader Peter Debnam has called for a much tougher police response to the violence, describing it as "a real disgrace".

"Sydney is a violent city, with violence and intimidation occurring in many suburbs on a regular basis.

"But the biggest problem is Premier Morris Iemma, Police Minister Carl Scully and the Police Commissioner Ken Moroney have been in denial about the problem."

Mr Debnam said police numbers must be restored as part of any effort to head off further violence.

Mr Iemma, however, said police had the resources to deal with the problems.

He repeated calls for calm in the troubled community, which has been the scene of two violent incidents in the past week.

"We will do everything in our power to protect the right of all law abiding Australians and our life saving volunteers to use the beach in safety."

"The police have resources available to do their job and they will continue to do so for as long as necessary."

Mr Iemma said lawlessness would not be tolerated and there would be no compromises in upholding the law.

"I condemn in the strongest possible terms the attack on an ambulance at North Cronulla today," he said.

"There is never any excuse to attack any emergency vehicle."

Police Minister Carl Scully commended the professionalism shown by officers under the command of Assistant Commissioner Mark Goodwin.

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