

## Melbourne Opposition Slams Pro-Palestine Protests

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Victorian Opposition Leader Brad Battin has warned that Melbourne's frequent pro-Palestine protests are leaving Victorians "less safe," arguing that police resources are being drained away from tackling crime across the state. The comments come after an estimated 100,000 people gathered in Melbourne's CBD on Sunday as part of nationwide demonstrations.

Despite the large turnout, Victoria Police confirmed no arrests were made during the rally. Officers maintained a highly visible presence and said they were investigating reports of two smoke emitters being released in the crowd. Police stressed their top priority was ensuring safety and preventing disorder.

Mr. Battin, however, argued the protests were placing unsustainable pressure on police. He said more than 22,000 police shifts had been diverted to manage demonstrations since the Gaza conflict began. “We’re seeing protests every day across Victoria,” he said. “We have a crisis when it comes to crime here in our state. Stabbings, carjackings, and home invasions are happening in broad daylight. Could you imagine if we had those 22,000 extra shifts? It may have saved a life.”

The state’s Liberal leader said the protests were stretching resources that should be used to address community safety. He also called for a protest registration system, arguing it would allow authorities to plan effectively and reduce strain on policing. “It’s time the Allan Labor government introduced a registration system to ensure safer streets,” he said.

Shadow Police Minister David Southwick echoed the concerns, stating that nearly 100 pro-Palestine demonstrations had taken place in Melbourne since the Gaza conflict began. He argued that Victorians had “had a gutful” of the disruption and accused protesters of spreading “hate.” Southwick, a member of the Jewish community and a strong supporter of Israel, said police officers were being forced to “babysit” protesters instead of responding to urgent crime.

“Unfortunately, the shifts have to be reallocated somewhere else,” he said. “We are the only state without a protest permit system. Some of these extremists want to burn flags and target businesses. We need stronger move-on laws and exclusion orders.”

The Allan government has rejected opposition calls for a New South Wales-style permit system. Premier Jacinta Allan said Victoria Police already had the necessary powers to maintain order and respond to violence. She stressed the importance of preserving democratic freedoms. “People have a right to come together and peacefully protest, and that right should absolutely be respected,” Ms. Allan said. “Police already have the tools they need to arrest people and move them on when protests cross the line.”

Human rights advocates have long opposed mandatory protest permits, warning such measures conflict with Victoria’s Charter of Human Rights, which guarantees the right to

peaceful assembly. The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission states that Section 16 of the Charter protects the right to gather for a common purpose.

Premier Allan argued that adopting a New South Wales-style system would create unnecessary bureaucracy. “It risks being a very lengthy, unwieldy, time-consuming process for both the police force and the courts,” she said.

As tensions continue between pro-Palestine activists and the state opposition, the debate highlights the ongoing clash between public order, police resources, and civil liberties. While police report minimal violence at demonstrations, concerns remain that repeated large-scale protests could undermine broader community safety if resources are continually diverted away from tackling crime.