Hong Kong weekend ends again with protest violence, tear gas

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An unauthorized anti-government rally in Hong Kong quickly turned chaotic on Sunday as police used tear gas to disperse protesters on a major tourist strip, leading to hours of ugly confrontations in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory.

Pro-democracy protesters barricaded roads, hurled firebombs and set a subway entrance on fire as they used hit-and-run tactics against phalanxes of riot police.

Protesters in Hong Kong have taken to the streets for more than four months, in a movement sparked by concern about an unpopular China extradition bill that has since snowballed to include wider demands for political reform.

Protesters, who called the latest rally over concerns about police conduct, were met at the rally by a heavy police presence, which only ratcheted up the tensions. They yelled "Gangster cops, death to your whole family."

Police have faced criticism for using heavy-handed tactics including tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets and a water cannon to subdue protesters. On occasion they have fired live rounds, wounding a teenage activist in the chest last month. But police say they're the ones who are victims of violence, having been on the receiving end of hurled bricks and firebombs.

This month, an 18-year-old was charged with intentional wounding for a slashing attack on a riot officer.

At Sunday's rally, some protesters threw umbrellas and other objects at riot police, who responded with tear gas, bringing traffic on a main road to a standstill.

Protesters ripped up bricks from the sidewalk and scattered them on the streets to block cars.

Some protesters reportedly took refuge across the street in the luxury Peninsula Hotel, which promptly lowered its shutters.

Many protesters moved to the nearby Chungking Mansions, a focal point for South Asian residents and businesses, where they continued to face off with police, bringing the normally bustling Nathan Road tourist strip to a standstill.

They were showing support for the former British colony's ethnic and religious minorities — another aim of the rally — after police used a water cannon to spray a mosque and bystanders with a stinging blue-dyed liquid the previous weekend.

Police briefly used the cannon on a nearby street, but it appeared to be filled with ordinary water this time. The police dispersal operation lasted late into the night, as police engulfed streets in tear gas and called the protesters "rioters" for taking part in an "unauthorized assembly."

Hong Kong's protest movement shows no signs of cooling even after the government formally withdrew the unpopular China extradition bill on Wednesday, giving in to one of the movement's demands.

"Because the problem is much more than before," said a protester who only gave his name as Nephets, citing heavy-handed police tactics. "We can see the future is controlled by China. We can see all the rules and even the law is starting to be controlled by the China government. For the Hong Kong people, there's no say over our land and that is the problem."

Nephets, who said he was 40 and worked in media, said he attended protests in support of younger hardcore protesters who have led violent confrontations with police.

Despite repeated government appeals for people not to side with mobs involved in vandalism, throwing gasoline bombs and other violence, the protest movement is still rousing determined support from more moderate demonstrators. They're broadly worried about the future and freedoms of the city that reverted to Chinese rule in 1997, with promises from Beijing that it would largely be its own boss, its way of life unchanged.