



WE'LL BE BACK. Protesters sit at an occupied area outside government headquarters in Hong Kong on December 11, 2014. Hong Kong authorities started clearing barricades from a pro-democracy protest camp spread across a busy highway as part of a final push to retake streets occupied by activists for two-and-a-half months. (AP Photo/Kin Cheung)

Hong Kong police arrest 209 protesters, demolish main camp

By Kelvin Chan
The Associated Press

HONG KONG — Hong Kong authorities have demolished a protest camp at the heart of the city's two-and-a-half month pro-democracy movement, but scores of activists taken away by police vowed their fight for genuine elections wasn't over.

Hundreds of police officers armed with chain saws and bolt cutters methodically dismantled barricades, tore down canopies, and removed banners in a daylong operation to shut down the protest site sprawled across a normally busy highway next to the specially administered Chinese city's business district.

Police said 209 people were arrested for unlawful assembly and obstructing police officers.

The operation was peaceful and unmarked by the violent clashes seen in previous confrontations between protesters and police. Traffic started

flowing on the road by mid-evening.

The student-led protesters had occupied streets in the Admiralty neighborhood and two other areas since September 28 to protest Beijing's restrictions on the first election of the city's top leader.

The unprecedented campaign, which began as a separate protest led by student and activist groups, got a jumpstart when police fired dozens of rounds of tear gas on a group of demonstrators flooding into the area. The resulting movement paralyzed traffic, polarized public opinion, and, activists said, marked the start of an era of civil disobedience in Hong Kong, an orderly Asian financial hub where residents are increasingly worried about mainland China's increasing sway.

It also adds to the challenges for Chinese President Xi Jinping, who has taken a tough stance against dissent in other regions at the country's edges.

Hundreds of demonstrators heeded

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China marks Constitution Day amid legal push

BEIJING (AP) — China marked its first Constitution Day as part of President Xi Jinping's drive to show that the country embraces rule of law while ensuring that the ruling Communist Party holds on to its unrivalled authority.

The holiday was commemorated with nationwide activities in schools, government offices, and state-owned companies.

It is part of Xi's campaign to institutionalize the party's powers while strengthening the country's legal system to reduce corruption and improve government efficiency. Scores of serving and retired top officials have been detained on corruption charges.

"The constitution is the highest law of the country and embodies the will of the party and the people," Xi said in remarks published on the front page of the Communist Party flagship newspaper *People's Daily*.

China needs more awareness of the constitution and better understanding of the role of law, Xi said.

Critics point to inherent contradictions in the rule of



CONSTITUTION CONTRADICTIONS. Students sit under a banner that reads, "Tsinghua affiliated Chaoyang School, the law and me together, legal series of talks," during a meeting coinciding with China's first Constitution Day at their school in Beijing, China. China marked its first Constitution Day as part of President Xi Jinping's drive to show that the country embraces rule of law while ensuring that the ruling Communist Party holds on to its unrivalled authority. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

law campaign, including the party's refusal to accept independent oversight and honor constitutional guarantees such as the right to free speech and religious assembly. Activists who have advocated stricter adherence to the constitution as a way of holding the country's leaders accountable typically have been treated as subversives and detained.

China has enacted four constitutions since the communist state's founding in 1949, with the current version adopted in 1982. Its first article forbids any challenge to the

country's socialist system, though it does not explicitly mention the Communist Party's control of the country.

However, in an editorial, *People's Daily* asserted that the primacy of the Communist Party was an essential element of the constitution.

"The nation's Constitution reflects the achievements from the revolutions, constructions, and reforms made by the people under the party's guidance, and it establishes the leading status of the Communist Party of China," the editorial said.

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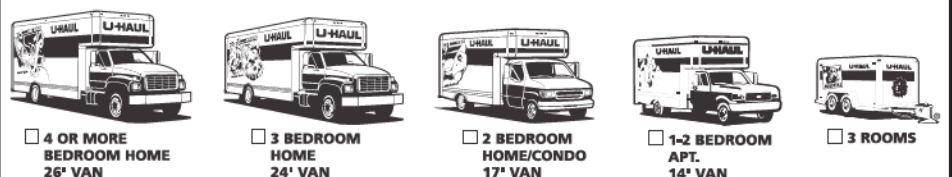
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