Written by Taipei Times
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An anti-government protester yesterday in Hong Kong sprays graffiti on a shutter during a rally commemorating the fifth anniversary of the "Umbrella movement."
Photo: EPA-EFE

Thousands of people yesterday gathered for a rally in downtown Hong Kong, belting out songs, speeches and slogans to mark the fifth anniversary of the start of the 2014 "Umbrella movement" that called for democratic reforms in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory.

The rally at Tamar Park by the Civil Human Rights Front was approved by police, but security was tight, with barriers blocking access to government offices and the Legislative Council building, which was stormed by protesters in July.

Demonstrators unfurled a big banner that read "We are back" on a footbridge to the government office. Walls along a staircase leading to the bridge were filled with posters in a throwback to 2014, when protesters occupied key thoroughfares in the same area for 79 days, but failed to win any government concessions.

Just before yesterday's rally started, a small group of black-clad protesters wearing goggles and masks attempted to scale barricades outside the government offices, prompting riot police behind the barriers to fire pepper spray.

The protesters retreated, but returned, heckling police and thumping metal fencing.

Police used pepper spray again, and the scene repeated several times. Some journalists were

hit by the spray.

Earlier, democracy advocate Joshua Wong (□□□) — who played a key role as a youth leader in the 2014 protests — announced plans to contest district council elections in November.

Wong, 22, said the vote is crucial to send a message to Beijing that the people are more determined than ever to win the battle for more rights.

"Five years ago, we claimed that we will be back and now we are back with even stronger determination," he told a news conference. "The battle ahead is the battle for our home and our homeland."

Wong, who has been arrested and jailed repeatedly, said he is aware that he could be disqualified.

Members of the Demosisto party that he cofounded in 2016 have in the past been disqualified from serving and running for office because they advocated self-determination.

"If they disqualify me, it will just generate more and more momentum ... they will pay the price," he said.

Wong is out on bail after he was rearrested with several other people last month and charged with organizing an illegal rally.

It did not stop him from going to Taiwan, the US and Germany to drum up support for this year's protest movement, which started in June over an extradition bill, but has since snowballed into an anti-China campaign.

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