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Mayhem, demos block road to Evian

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PROTESTERS took to the streets in Lausanne and Geneva ahead of the G8 summit. The scenic cities on the shores of Lake Geneva have been barricaded with many of the local residents either confined to their homes, while others chose to leave town.

The protesters who began their march around 8am yesterday in front of the Hotel Royal Savoy damaged two cars used by Malaysian officials - smashing the screen of one and puncturing a tyre of another.

The front door of the hotel was also broken and the protesters carted off hotel furniture and threw these on to the streets together with rubbish.

Hotel guests were told to remain indoors.

The anarchists and anti-capitalists rampaged through the Swiss cities hoping to stop delegates but had little chance of disrupting the tightly guarded summit itself.

The protesters who started gathering ahead of the meeting also smashed shop windows and looted petrol stations, according to witnesses.

Swiss paramilitary police and army used teargas and water cannons to disperse the protesters.

Wearing ski masks, the protesters and anti-G8 demonstrators blocked bridges and roads with burning tyres leading to Evian, the summit venue.

Helicopters circled and police boats kept a close watch on the protesters.

A no-fly zone has been enforced over the airspace around the lake and summit venue. Dozens of black-hooded protesters in Geneva blocked bridges

with burning tyres and daubed walls with slogans against the June 1-3 meeting, which many of them see as a selfish rich club.

The violence threatened to overshadow peaceful marches nearby in which tens of thousands of people chanted slogans against the war in Iraq and world poverty.

French and Swiss police have been on high alert after the mayhem that rocked the G8 summit in Genoa, Italy, two years ago when one protester was shot dead by police.

Most of the G8 leaders are staying on the French side while the leaders invited for the "enlarged dialogue" held yesterday, ahead of the summit are staying on the Swiss side in Lausanne.

Police also used teargas and water cannon at one point in Lausanne to force back a group of demonstrators who tried to approach hotels where some developing country leaders invited to the summit are staying.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is participating in the enlarged dialogue, arrived by boat from Lausanne and was met by French

President Jacques Chirac at the pier in Evian.