



News | Protests

Bangladesh student protests over jobs escalate, telecoms disrupted

Death toll expected to rise amid violence that has seen government buildings torched and telecommunications disrupted.



Violent and fatal anti-quota protests rock Bangladesh

19 Jul 2024



Dozens of people have been killed in Bangladesh as nationwide student protests over the allocation of civil service jobs took an increasingly violent turn.

On Friday [student demonstrators](#) continued to clash with police and pro-government activists after days of protests, with government buildings torched and telecommunications severely disrupted.

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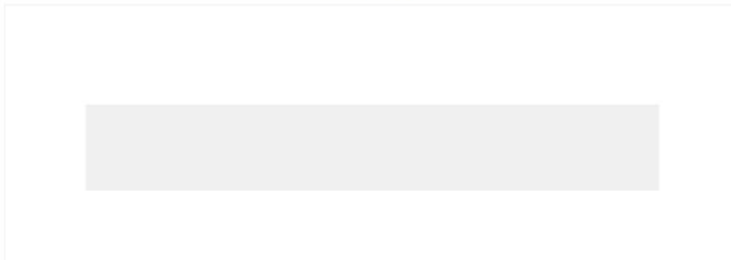
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"Everything remains very volatile, intense, and it's very critical right now," said Al Jazeera's Tanvir Chowdhury, reporting from the capital, Dhaka.

"Just a quarter mile from where I am, there are about six [universities](#), which were demonstrating since morning, and we can still hear gunfire, stun grenades and all sorts of noises coming from that area because the students refused to leave."

The death toll from Thursday's violence had risen to 32, the AFP news agency reported on Friday. That number could not be immediately verified.

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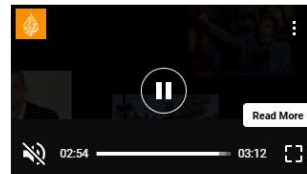
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Al Jazeera had previously reported that at least 19 protesters were killed by Thursday night, with the majority in the capital, Dhaka. Others were killed in protests in nearby Narayanganj and the eastern city of Chittagong.

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The death toll could rise with reports of clashes in nearly half of the country's 64 districts. More than 1,000 people have been injured.

A police statement issued after a near-total shutdown of the nation's internet – imposed by the government on Thursday – said protesters had torched, vandalised and carried out “destructive activities” on numerous police and government offices.

Among them was the Dhaka headquarters of state broadcaster Bangladesh Television, which remains offline after hundreds of students stormed the premises and set fire to a building.



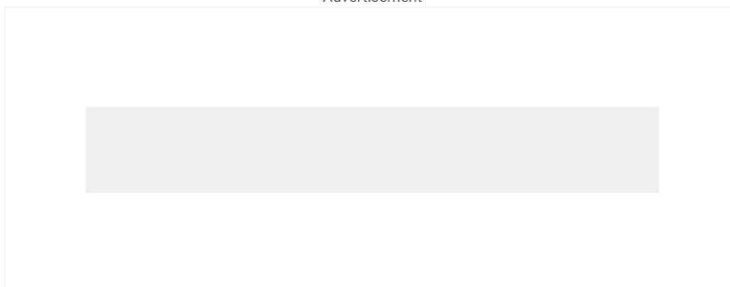
Smoke rises from burning vehicles after protesters set them on fire near the Disaster Management Directorate office in Dhaka on July 18 [AFP]

The police statement said that if the destruction continued, they would “be forced to make maximum use of law”.

Police issued a daylong ban on all public rallies in Dhaka on Friday, Commissioner Habibur Rahman told AFP.

Telecommunications networks were reportedly down, with only some voice calls working in the country and no mobile data or broadband on Friday morning. Calls from overseas were mostly not getting connected.

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Social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp were not loading.

Student protesters said they would extend their calls to impose a [national shutdown](#) on

Friday, and urged mosques across the country to hold funeral prayers for those who have been killed.

Government 'conciliatory'

The nationwide agitation, the biggest since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was re-elected earlier this year, has been fuelled by high youth unemployment, with about a fifth of the country's 170 million population out of work or education.

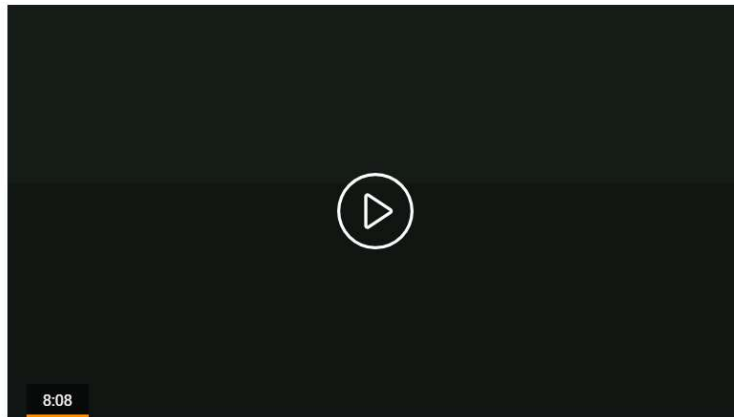
Protesters are demanding the state stop setting aside 30 percent of government jobs for allies of Hasina's Awami League party, which led the country's independence movement.

The jobs are reserved for family members of veterans who fought for the country's independence from Pakistan in 1971.

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A further 26 percent of jobs are allocated to women, disabled people and ethnic minorities. This leaves about 3,000 positions for which 400,000 graduates compete in the civil services exam.



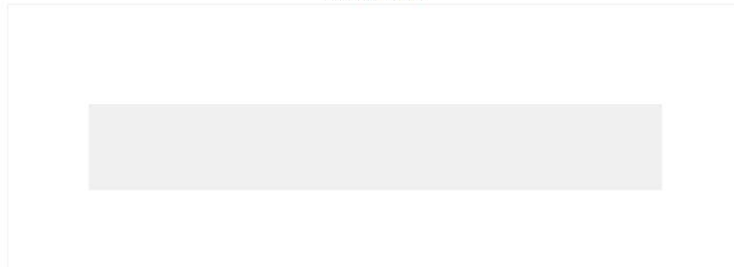
Students pushing for a merit-based system have been demonstrating for weeks but the protests escalated after violence broke out on the campus of Dhaka University on Monday, with students violently clashing with police and the student wing of the Awami League.

The government shut all public and private [universities](#) indefinitely on Wednesday and sent riot police and the Border Guard paramilitary force to campuses.

Al Jazeera's Chowdhury said the government had been "conciliatory".

"The law minister announced that the prime minister has instructed him to come to a compromise and sit down with the quota protesters," he said.

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But students he had spoken to said they wanted “police and pro-government student-wing members brought to justice” before they would “even consider sitting with the government”.

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SOURCE: AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES

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