

ASIA

# Bangladesh is witnessing the deadliest protests in its history

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HEARD ON MORNING EDITION

Diaa Hadid

2-Minute Listen

+ PLAYLIST

Activists want the autocratic prime minister to step down.

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## Transcript

A MARTÍNEZ, HOST:

Now to Bangladesh, a country of more than 170 million people who inhabit a place a little bigger than Iowa. It has just experienced some of the deadliest protests in its history. NPR's Diaa Hadid reports from neighboring India. And a warning - this story contains the sound of gunfire.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "AWAAZ UTHA")

HANNAN HOSSAIN SHIMUL: (Rapping in Bengali).

DIAA HADID, BYLINE: Rapper Hannan Hossain Shimul is one of the thousands Bangladeshis detained since protests began in early July. He created this protest anthem.

(SOUNDBITE OF SONG, "AWAAZ UTHA")

SHIMUL: (Rapping in Bengali).

HADID: He says, "raise your voice, Bangladesh. So much blood on the streets. Who fired the shots?" He's referring to the shots that killed Abu Sayed, a protester who's become a symbol of this movement. In a video of that incident, Abu Sayed flings his arms wide, exposing his chest to security forces.

(SOUNDBITE OF ARCHIVED RECORDING)

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: (Non-English language spoken).

(SOUNDBITE OF GUNFIRE)

HADID: They shoot him dead. The protests began when students demanded the government reduce job quotas reserved for the descendants of war veterans. Protesters believe the ruling party uses the quotas to reserve lucrative government jobs for their loyalists.

Days after demonstrations began, men loyal to the ruling party set upon the protesters. Security forces joined the fray. The government shut down the internet, severing communication between protesters and to the world. The country is now back online, and information is dripping out. Media outlets say they've recorded the deaths of over 200 people. Newspapers report the toll is likely much higher.

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TAQBIR HUDA: The death toll is incomparable to anything we've witnessed in Bangladesh's recent history.

HADID: That's Taqbir Huda, researcher at Amnesty International, who follows Bangladesh. One student protester says, after all the bloodshed, the prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, must step down. The student spoke on condition of anonymity. He fears arrest or worse if he's identified.

UNIDENTIFIED PROTESTER #1: (Speaking Bengali).

HADID: The student says, "the prime minister has no right to be in power." He says, "our government is using guns purchased with our taxes to fire on civilians."

UNIDENTIFIED PROTESTER #2: We want justice.

HADID: For now, small protests are continuing, like these teachers on a campus.

UNIDENTIFIED PROTESTER #2: Justice, justice.

UNIDENTIFIED PROTESTERS: We want justice.

UNIDENTIFIED PROTESTER #2: Justice, justice.

UNIDENTIFIED PROTESTERS: We want justice.

HADID: The question is now whether or not protesters will park that demand for justice or keep fighting.

Diaa Hadid, NPR News, Mumbai.

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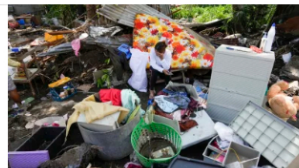
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