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Bangladesh imposes curfew as protests continue

20 July 2024

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Ethirajan Anbarasan and Yogita Limaye, in London and Delhi
BBC News



An injured woman gets help on Thursday, the deadliest day since the protests began

Authorities in Bangladesh have imposed a nationwide curfew, after further rioting in the capital Dhaka left an additional 35 people dead.

Days of violence have been sparked by students calls for the government to axe a rule reserving scores of public jobs for the families of veterans of the country's independence war in 1971.

The prime minister's office announced the curfew after an attack on the Narsingdi prison on Friday saw hundreds of inmates released.

Government Press Secretary Naeemul Islam Khan said the army would be deployed to the streets in a bid to restore order.



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"The government has decided to impose a curfew and deploy the military in aid of the civilian authorities," he said in a statement.

Some 67 people have now died since violence broke out - although the exact toll is difficult to assess due in part to an almost complete communications shutdown, with mobile internet and telephone lines reportedly down.

Bus and train services have reportedly also been halted, while photos from Dhaka show large numbers of police in riot gear on the streets.

Schools and universities across Bangladesh have also been shut until further notice.

But this has done little to stop the protesters, who vowed to continue with their own "Complete Shutdown", which has seen them blockade roads across the city.

On Friday, students chanting "merit, merit" and "we won't let the blood that has been shed of our brothers go in vain" were joined by a number of parents outside Dhaka university.

The students are arguing that the quota system is discriminatory, and are asking for

recruitment based on merit. Critics say the system unfairly benefits the families of pro-government groups who support Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who won her fourth straight election in January.

A march organised by Islamist parties was met with tear gas, rubber bullets and stun grenades.

Protestors also stormed the Narsingdi district jail on Friday, where several hundred inmates were reported to have escaped onto the streets. Multiple witnesses confirmed the incident to BBC Bangla.



Numerous fires were lit across the capital, according to authorities

The main opposition Bangladesh National Party has also called for protest, with the exiled acting chairman Tarique Rahman asking people to support "these tender-hearted students" in a post on Twitter.

The party said one of its senior leaders, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed, had been taken into custody. Police did not give any reasons for Mr Rizvi's arrest.

Attempts to end the protests with talks have so far failed.

Law Minister Anisul Haque told BBC Bangla the government was open to discussing the issues: "I'm sure they are also discussing whether they will come to the talks or not."

But student Nahid Iqbal told the BBC on Thursday they would not consider joining the talks at present.

"The government has killed so many people in a day that we cannot join any discussions in the current circumstances."



People have told the BBC the streets are relatively quiet, apart from the police presence

Earlier, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Shafiqul Islam told the BBC that authorities had decided to ban rallies in the city in order to protect lives and property following Thursday's violence.

Separately, the police confirmed to BBC Bangla that two people had died on Friday.

Police said 100 officers had been injured on Thursday, while a government minister said several vehicles parked outside government buildings were set on fire.

The clashes have also not been confined to Dhaka, with 26 districts reporting incidents.

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A senior reporter told BBC Bangla the newsroom, studio and canteen had all been damaged in Thursday's fire.

Additional reporting by BBC Bangla

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Bangladesh Dhaka

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