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Scorn as Bangladesh PM weeps at train station damage

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BBC News



Sheikh Hasina was photographed crying over a metro station destroyed during anti-government protests

Bangladesh's leader has been accused of crying "crocodile tears" after she was photographed weeping at a train station that was destroyed during anti-government protests.

At least 150 people have been killed as a result of nationwide clashes between police and university students, with security forces accused of excessive force.

Protesters had been calling for quotas on government jobs to be scrapped.

Online, many accused Ms Hasina of not expressing the same level of sympathy towards those who had died, or their families.



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The pictures were taken during Ms Hasina's visit to a metro rail station in the city of Mirpur on Thursday, where ticket vending machines and the signalling control station were shattered. Ms Hasina was pictured frowning and wiping her tears with tissue paper.

"What kind of mentality leads them to destroy facilities that make people's lives easier? Dhaka city was clogged with traffic. The metro rail offered respite. I cannot accept the destruction of this transport facility made with modern technology," Bangladeshi daily The Business Standard quoted the prime minister as saying.

These comments drew the ire of Bangladeshi internet users.

"We lost [hundreds of] students. But PM Sheikh Hasina had the time to go "cry" for a metro rail, not for the people who won't return ever again," said one Twitter user.

"Shedding crocodile tears for a railway track while others [have died]...." another chimed in.

Journalist Zulkarnian Saer, who has in the past spoken out against the government, said: "Hasina had the time to visit the vandalised train station, but she did not visit [the families] of the students... shot dead [during protests]."

Some called the photographs an attempt to drive attention away from deaths from the protests.

"No doubt that she went there to ... get some attention and empathy," said one Facebook user.

Security forces have been accused of using excessive force to quell the unrest, but Ms Hasina had instead **blamed her political opponents** for the wave of violence.

Her government is working to "suppress these militants and create a better environment", the 76-year-old said earlier this week, adding she was "forced" to impose a curfew for public safety.

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The protests, mostly by university students, began about two weeks ago over quotas imposed on government jobs.

Bangladesh had earlier reserved about 30% of its high-paying government jobs for relatives of those who fought in the country's war for independence from Pakistan in 1971.

On Sunday, Bangladesh's top court **rolled back most of these quotas** and ruled that 93% of roles would now be filled on merit - meeting a key demand of protesters.

The wave of unrest is an unprecedented test for Ms Hasina, who secured her fourth straight term as prime minister in January, in a controversial election boycotted by the country's main opposition parties.

Political analysts told the BBC that Ms Hasina's authoritarian regime and "over-politicising" of Bangladesh's war for independence from Pakistan in 1971 have angered large sections of society.

Limited internet connectivity was restored on Tuesday after a nationwide blackout since last Thursday.

Some student leaders have vowed to continue protesting to demand justice for protesters killed and detained in recent days. They are also seeking the resignation of government ministers and an apology from Ms Hasina.

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