



Many of Students Protest Job Quotas in Bangladesh's Streets



Quota movement- Dhaka University

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Police fired tear gas and charged with batons during violent clashes between a pro-government student body and student protesters overnight, leaving dozens injured at a public university outside Bangladesh's capital, authorities and students said Tuesday.

The violence spread early Tuesday at Jahangir Nagar University in Savar, outside Dhaka, where protesters demanded an end to a quota reserved for family members of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971, allowing them to take up 30% of governmental jobs. While job opportunities have expanded in Bangladesh's private sector, many find government jobs stable and lucrative. Each year, some 3,000 such jobs open up to nearly 400,000 graduates.

Protesters argue such quota appointments are discriminatory and should be merit-based. Some even said the current system benefits groups supporting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Some Cabinet ministers criticized the protesters, saying they played on students' emotions.

Hasina said Tuesday war veterans — commonly known as “freedom fighters” — should receive the highest respect for their sacrifice in 1971 regardless of their current political ideologies.

“Abandoning the dream of their own life, leaving behind their families, parents and everything, they joined the war with whatever they had...,” she said during an event at her office in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, Protesters gathered in front of the university's official residence of the vice-chancellor early Tuesday when violence broke out. Demonstrators accused the Bangladesh Chhatra League, a student wing of Hasina's ruling Awami League party, of attacking their “peaceful protests.” According to local media reports, police and the ruling party-backed student wing attacked the protesters.

But Abdullahil Kafi, a senior police official, told the country's leading English-language newspaper Daily Star that they fired tear gas and “blank rounds” as protesters attacked the police. He said up to 15 police officers were injured.

More than 50 people were treated at Enam Medical College Hospital near Jahangir Nagar University as the violence continued for hours, said Ali Bin Solaiman, a medical officer of the hospital. He said at least 30 of them suffered pellet wounds.

On Monday, violence also spread at Dhaka University, the country's leading public university, as clashes gripped the campus in the capital. More than 100 students were injured in the clashes, police said.

On Tuesday, protesters blocked railways and some highways across the country, and in Dhaka, they halted traffic in many areas as they vowed to continue demonstrating until the demands were met.

Local media said police forces were spread across the capital to safeguard the peace.

Swapon, a protester and student of Dhaka University who only gave his first name, said they only want the “rational reformation of the quota system.” He said after studying for six years, if he can't find a job, “it will cause me and my family to suffer.”

Protesters say they are apolitical, but leaders of the ruling parties accused the opposition of using the demonstrations for political gains. A ruling party-backed student activist, who refused to give his name, told The Associated Press the protesters with the help of “goons” of the opposition's Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-e-Islami party vandalized their rooms at the student dormitories near the Curzon Hall of the Dhaka University.

The family of the veterans' quota system was halted following a court order after mass student protests in 2018. But last month, Bangladesh's High Court nulled the decision to reinstall the system once more, angering scores of students and triggering protests.

Last week, the Supreme Court halted the High Court's order for four weeks and the chief justice asked protesting students to return to

their classes, saying the court would issue a decision in four weeks.

However, the protests have continued daily, halting traffic in Dhaka.

The quota system also reserves government jobs for women, disabled people and ethnic minority groups, but students have only protested against jobs reserved for veterans' families.

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