

Cockroach party warns of more protests after student arrests in India

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Delhi

India's Cockroach movement has accused the government of backtracking on its promise not to act against student protesters and has threatened to restart demonstrations.

The Cockroach Janta party (CJP), which organised mass protests over exam paper leaks, said it had received reports of hundreds of students being detained or "harassed" by police.

Cases were filed against students in Delhi, Assam, West Bengal and Bihar, all states ruled by Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata party (BJP).

The CJP had agreed to call off the demonstrations on Saturday after the education minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, resigned and senior BJP ministers assured the group that no punitive action would be taken against protesters. But on Monday, the CJP accused the government of reneging on the agreement.

"If the government does not honour the agreement and release everyone detained or arrested we will be compelled to resume the protest," a CJP spokesperson, Ashutosh Ranka, told reporters.

At least 100 people have been arrested, many on stringent, non-bailable charges, according to the CJP. A legal fund has been set up to help cover their expenses.

The youth-led movement has won millions of followers on social media since it was launched in May by Abhijeet Dipke, a 30-year-old public relations graduate. Hundreds of thousands of protesters, mainly students, rallied last week in Delhi and other cities, demanding Pradhan's resignation and broader reforms of the examination system.

Demonstrations in the Indian capital turned violent on 20 July when huge crowds attempted to march to parliament. Police fired teargas and used batons to disperse them, causing clashes and a wave of detentions.

The protests were an unprecedented show of dissent against the Modi government, which has cracked down on critics and opposition over its 12 years in power. Pradhan's resignation was the first time a senior minister in the Modi government had been forced out by public pressure.

The chief justice of India called for an independent investigation after a petition was filed in the supreme court alleging police brutality, stating that the "right to peaceful, lawful protest is absolutely guaranteed" under the Indian constitution.

The government has promised to act on the issues that sparked the protests, and announced a panel to oversee an overhaul of India's examination system. On Monday, it introduced a measure in parliament seeking tougher penalties for exam paper leaks.