

India Cracks Down, but Young Protesters Remain in the Streets

This article is by **Pragati K.B., Anupreeta Das and Alex Travelli.**

NEW DELHI — They flocked to New Delhi by the thousands. Young Indians demanding accountability from their government for a flawed education system, hoping for a promise or a signal from those in power that would reassure them about their futures.

Instead, the throng of protesters who tried to march to Parliament on Monday were confronted by security forces, batons in hand, tear gas canisters ready. As the crowd swelled, the police cracked down, striking people's shins, calves and backs, swinging their staves overhead. Protesters hurled flip flops and water bottles back. Many rushed to escape through back alleys and side roads. Plumes of tear gas left people choking.

The protesters — mostly young people who chanted slogans, carried posters or stood quietly in solidarity — said they were shocked by the police crackdown and the lack of any real government response. By Tuesday, their sense of anger remained palpable as thousands returned to the protest site near Jantar Mantar, an 18th century observatory, undeterred by spurts of monsoon rain.

Security forces had removed tents and parts of the main stage at the venue. But Abhijeet Dipke, the founder of the Cockroach Janta Party — a satirical movement that has become a vehicle for the frustrations of millions of young Indians — said that the protest will continue indefinitely. He implored people to keep it peaceful.

Leaders of the C.J.P. said 150 protesters were taken to the hospital from injuries in the protest on Monday. The Delhi Police said 118 of its officers were injured during "violent protests." Around 70 protesters were detained, according to lawyers' groups.

Although Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not responded publicly to the protests, on Tuesday he spoke through an emissary. Kiren Rijju, the parliamentary affairs minister, told reporters, "The safety, security and future of our youth are our priority."

He also provided assurances that future paper leaks would be prevented.

Mr. Modi rarely responds to critics, so the comments appear to be a sign of the importance the leader has placed on the youth protests and a tacit acknowledgment of the political risk of alienating young voters in a country where more than 40 percent of the



ADNAN ABIDI/REUTERS

Demonstrators held by the police during a sit-in outside the residence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Tuesday.

population is under the age of 25.

However, the government has said little in response to the specific demands of the C.J.P., which include the resignation of India's education minister, whom the C.J.P. holds directly accountable for a shoddy education system and leaks in recent entrance exam papers that forced millions of students to retake their tests.

"The government is in no mood to understand us and talk to us," Chandan Mandal, a 19-year-old high school senior from the state of Rajasthan, said on Tuesday. He said he first protested more than a month ago. According to the C.J.P., at least 21 students have died by suicide since the exam leak, unable to handle the stress.

The police struck him with a baton three times on Monday, Mr. Mandal said. Two reddish bruises, each about three inches long, and an open wound were visible on his back.

"I'm opposing the government itself now," said Mr. Mandal, who is studying for an entrance exam for engineering school.

A big reason for the frustration millions of young Indians feel is that there aren't enough jobs, or

that there is a mismatch between available jobs and qualifications, according to economists. A recent, widely cited study from Azim Premji University found that 40 percent of young people under 25 are unemployed, even as access to higher education has increased.

The protesters' most visible slogans as they gathered on Monday were less concerned with botched

A nation where 40 percent of those under 25 are unemployed.

exams than with the government's overall accountability.

"India is a Democracy! We Need Answers!" read one, in English. "In Search of the Misguided," read another, in Hindi, next to a hand-drawn sketch of Mr. Modi.

By the afternoon, the police waded in. Cries of pain rose above the shrill police whistles and sirens of riot control vans. A thin young woman crouched on a me-

dian, as her friends dressed a fresh wound on her forearm and rinsed her face, reddened by tear gas.

At the Janpath subway station nearby, a police van lay overturned on its side, its windshield smashed.

Further away from the violence, Wishwas Srivastav, 36, an engine builder, said he had traveled to Delhi from the state of Himachal Pradesh to join the protests.

"It hasn't been feeling like democracy here for the past 10 or 15 years," Mr. Srivastav said. Of the government, he said, "I hope they're listening."

By Tuesday, traffic along Janpath was back to normal, with some of the cross-streets more tightly barricaded. The police van at the metro station had been flipped upright.

At the protest site, volunteers distributed food and drinks to protesters, including burgers from McDonald's, samosas, water and electrolytes.

Abhishek Kumar, 20, sat in the shade, tired after a roughly eight-hour bus ride from his hometown,

Kanpur. After watching the protests on social media on Monday and seeing the police beat protesters, he said, he decided to join in person. Mr. Kumar, who recently took an entrance exam to join the armed forces, said he would stay for a few days.

Many who gathered were parents worried about the future their children stand to inherit. Mina Ganesh, 51, was at the protest site on Tuesday with her son Miher, 17.

"Finally someone in the country is willing to speak up," Ms. Ganesh said. "It took us long enough. Now that we have begun to speak up, there's no stopping us."

Miher, who wants to study either economics or engineering, said he was moved by the actions of Sonam Wangchuk, a prominent education activist who has backed the C.J.P.'s demands and joined its protest with a hunger strike.

Mr. Wangchuk is now 23 days into his fast and was forcibly moved to a hospital on Saturday by the government.

"He doesn't know any of us," Miher said. "How can I sit at home knowing he'll die for me?"