

India seeks more time on protesters' call for Education Minister to resign

SAURABH SHARMA
AFTAB AHMED
SHILPA JAMKHANDIKAR
SAKSHI DAYAL NEW DELHI

Leaders of India's youth-led "cockroach" movement said on Friday that the government has sought time until Saturday afternoon to respond on their demand for the Education Minister's resignation over exam paper leaks, after talks between the two sides.

The talks came hours after activist Sonam Wangchuk ended his 26-day hunger strike, raising hopes that the two sides could reach a breakthrough after tens of thousands of angry youth converged in the capital Delhi this week to demand the minister's resignation.

The anti-government protests represent the biggest youth challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi since he came to power in 2014. Opposition parties have echoed the movement's demands and have disrupted the monsoon session of parliament that began this week.

Friday's talks were held between senior federal ministers J.P. Nadda and Jitendra Singh on one side, and Saurav Das and Ashutosh Ranka, spokespersons of the self-named Cockroach Janta Party youth movement, on the other.

The CJP leaders said they had conveyed that nothing would be acceptable to them without Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation, and warned that without this, protests would spread.

"The government has asked for time until tomorrow afternoon to respond on this point [the resignation]," Mr. Ranka told



Protesters in Mumbai on Friday demand India's Education Minister resign as part of the Cockroach Janta Party's protest movement.

RAFIQ MAQBOOL/ASSOCIATED PRESS

reporters. "We hope the government will dismiss Dharmendra Pradhan at the earliest, or that he will resign, so that we can bring this matter to a conclusion."

Mr. Nadda said the talks were cordial.

"They had three main demands. We have told them we will meet you tomorrow afternoon and discuss the demands," he said.

Besides the resignation of Mr. Pradhan, CJP wants police cases filed against protesters dropped, and compensation paid to families of more than a dozen students who local media reported took their own lives after the exam paper leak in May.

Although the protesters agreed to hold talks, they had also called for nationwide demonstrations on Friday over alleged police brutality against protesters who marched on parliament on Monday.

While thousands of protesters

continued to gather at the main protest site of Jantar Mantar in central Delhi, there were reports of scattered protests across the country.

Students, youth activists and opposition supporters staged protests in the states of West Bengal, Telangana, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, holding placards demanding Mr. Pradhan's resignation and boycotting classes in some places, local media reported.

Parliament was disrupted and suspended again on Friday as opposition lawmakers also demanded Mr. Pradhan's resignation, with no business conducted for the entire week.

The movement's surge in popularity reflects frustrations among young Indians over issues such as job shortages, as well as frequent exam leaks, analysts say.

REUTERS