

Indian opposition leader Gandhi detained

Congress head and his sister held amid tensions over huge student rally

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Police briefly detained India's main opposition leader Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka yesterday as they staged a protest outside the residence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi — increasing political tension after Monday's clashes at a large student demonstration.

The Gandhis and other Congress party leaders and MPs had gathered outside Modi's official residence in New Delhi to demand his resignation after

the previous day's protests over failures in the education system, in which police tear-gassed thousands of demonstrators and beat some with sticks.

"Modi-ji, try every pressure, exert all your might — this fight for justice for students will now not stop," Rahul posted on X, after police jostled with his bodyguards as he lay on the ground, before carrying him to a waiting bus.

A Congress source said Gandhi and his sister, who is a party strategist and campaigner, were detained at separate locations, with opposition MPs removed from the premier's residence held at other sites in the capital.

Jitendra Singh, a minister sent to negotiate with Rahul Gandhi, accused the opposition leader of bad faith, say-

ing the government was ready to discuss education grievances in parliament but that the Congress leaders had instead demanded Modi's resignation. "Rahul Gandhi's behaviour does not align with the principles of democracy," he said.

Anger over leaks of exam papers and marking irregularities in crucial national medical entrance exams had been simmering for weeks. But the size of Monday's protest, one of the biggest in the capital in recent years, marked a step change in the level of public anger.

Modi ignored the protesters in his address to the opening of a new session of parliament on Monday and has not spoken publicly about the demonstration. Officials said he had taken swift and firm action after the national medi-

cal entrance exam papers were leaked, with 13 arrests, stricter laws and a successful re-test held.

The protests were called by leaders of the youth-led "Cockroach" movement, which began as an online satirical protest in May and started organising real-world demonstrations after its founder, Abhijeet Dipke, returned to India from postgraduate studies in the US.

Hundreds of protesters remained camped last night at Jantar Mantar, a designated protest site about 2km from parliament, vowing to stay until the education minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, resigns.

Video of police beating protesters with wooden sticks and plastic truncheons and tear-gassing them circu-

lated widely on social media, fuelling anger at police tactics. Some demonstrators yesterday brought gas masks and helmets with them as protection against a repeat of these tactics.

Yamini Aiyar, a former head of the CPR think-tank in New Delhi, said Monday's protest differed from previous demonstrations because it had attracted a large number of young people from across the country, including members of the urban middle class who had traditionally backed Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party.

"The failures of the system are now really hitting them," she said. "It is hitting the core vote . . . much of the protest yesterday was challenging the legitimacy of the government."