

Gujjar protests hit Delhi, parts of north India

Tens of thousands of Gujjars took to the streets Thursday in north India in support of their community's demand for tribal status in Rajasthan, blocking all roads leading to the national capital and paralysing road and train traffic in parts of the region amid some violence.

Clashes erupted between the police and protestors who burnt tyres at Aya Nagar and on the Mehrauli-Gurgaon road in south Delhi. The police fired tear gas to disperse the mobs and detained around 50 people.

In most places, however, the protests by the Gujjar community passed off peacefully although it led to a virtual paralysis of Delhi's border regions, halting traffic to and from the city in the morning for a good four hours.

The situation began returning to normalcy after noon as the Gujjars -- who formed human chains to stop road traffic and squatted on railway tracks blocking trains -- started to disperse after shouting slogans against the Rajasthan government.

It was a show of strength by the mainly rural Gujjar community in support of their kin in Rajasthan, where 37 people have been killed in violent protests this month demanding that Gujjars be classified a Scheduled Tribe (ST) community to secure educational and job quotas.

The Rajasthan government is ready for talks with the community. But its leaders have vowed not to call off their campaign until the authorities kneel. Rajasthan, Delhi, Haryana, Jammu region and western Uttar Pradesh are home to millions of Gujjars.

The situation in the capital was serious enough for the US embassy to warn its citizens about traffic disruptions in New Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. It advised them 'to maintain a low profile, and avoid areas of traffic disruptions and political protest'.

Traffic has been badly hit between New Delhi,