

Three dead as Gujjar stir takes another violent turn

The Gujjar movement for affirmative action took another violent turn Friday in Rajasthan with three people killed in clashes with the police, just as some leaders were attempting to hammer out a compromise with the state government to end the eight-day impasse.

One day after the community's movement for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status disrupted life in the national capital and its surrounding areas, violence broke out in Sawai Madhopur district, about 170 km from here, when some Gujjars tried to block a road and stoned the police trying to disperse the mob.

Three people, including a policeman, were killed in the ensuing violence - taking the number of those killed in the latest round of violence since May 23 to 40.

'The incident occurred when a section of Gujjar protesters tried to block the road. When police tried to disperse the mob, they pelted stones. The police had to fire tear gas and use canes. After this we had to resort to firing,' Inspector General of Police Umesh Mishra told IANS.

The deaths, which are likely to make community members more intransigent, came as a section of the leadership was meeting here to try to bring the state government and the Gujjars to the negotiating table.

They had taken the initiative to work out a proposal acceptable to their leader, K.S. Bainsla, and his supporters, who for the last eight days have been squatting on train tracks near Bayana, 160 km from here, affecting traffic on the New Delhi-Mumbai sector.

'After working out a proposal, we would travel to Bayana where the proposal would be discussed with Col Bainsla,' Roop Singh, spokesperson of the Gujjar Sangarsh Aarakshan Samiti headed by Bainsla, said.

BJP MP Vishwendra Singh, scion of the erstwhile royal family of Bharatpur, who had been asked by BJP national president Rajnath Singh to help resolve the situation, said he had not been contacted by the state government but he would go to Bayana Saturday.

'I have been here since Thursday but there has been no contact so far. I am returning to Delhi Friday evening and will go to Bayana to initiate talks with the Gujjars on my own,' Vishwendra Singh said.

While tentative efforts at peace were being made, tension continued for the eighth day in succession, with the movement by Gujjars affecting train and highways passing through the state.

Bainsla and hundreds of his supporters - with some of the bodies of those killed in police firing - continued their sit in at Bayana. And, in adjoining Sikandra in Dausa district, over 300 Gujjars sat with six bodies, blocking the national highway connecting Jaipur-Agra.

Army and paramilitary forces are patrolling Bharatpur, Dausa, Sawai Madhopur, Karauli districts to control violence.

The traditional shepherd community are listed as other backward classes (OBCs) in the state and are entitled to 27 percent reservation. However, they are demanding ST status - and thereby 7.5 percent reservation - like the Meena community in the belief that this will give them a larger share of the quota pie.

They had held protests all over Rajasthan from May 29 to June 4 last year as well. At least 26 people were killed in the violence then.

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