

## Clashes in Nepal over move to stop animal sacrifice

Large parts of the Nepali capital shut down Sunday following clashes between police and protestors demonstrating against a government decision not to finance traditional animal sacrifice.

Thousands of protestors, mostly from the Newar community - considered the original inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley - forced shops, educational institutions and main markets to shut down and prevented transport from operating in the Old City area.

Police said at least a dozen vehicles that defied the strike were vandalized by the demonstrators.

They also burnt tyres to set up road blocks and clashed with police in several parts of the city.

The government deployed hundreds of extra police to prevent the violence from spreading, but were facing difficulties controlling the crowd.

'The government is trying to interfere with our culture and is attempting to undermine it,' said Pabitra Bajracharya, president Newar National Association. 'The government must apologize and correct its decisions.'

The protests first flared up Friday night during Indra Jatra, one of the most important festivals of Newar community.

The protests and clashes stopped the chariot procession of the living goddess Kumari, and prevented Nepali president Ram Baran Yadav from receiving blessing from her.

It was the first time the tradition has been broken since it began nearly four centuries ago.

As part of tradition, the head of state receives blessing during the five-day festival in a symbolic gesture to rule the country for another year.

Until last year, the blessing was received by king, but president as the head of state took up the cultural duties after the country abolished the monarchy earlier this year.

Last week, the government said it would not provide funding for the animal sacrifice that is considered essential for several Hindu festivals across Nepal, calling it necessary to cut government expenditure.

Local media said the government decision to cut the funding would affect all major festivals across Nepal.

Last year, the government spent nearly 12.3 million rupees (\$166,000) on animal sacrifices. It spent another 54 million rupees organizing and funding various festivals, reports said.

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