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20 July 2024: A ‘shoot-on-sight’ curfew

The government imposed a national curfew,1672 effective from midnight 19 July until 10:00 on 21 July 2024, with one window of two hours (from 12:00–14:00) for public movement.1673 Security forces were ordered to shoot-on-sight,1674 and over 27 000 army soldiers were deployed.1675 Metro railway services were furthermore closed.1676 The Daily Star reported on ‘systematic government efforts’ to cover up medical records and hide the bodies of those killed during protests in recent days, for example by burying bodies in unnamed graves.1677

The streets of Dhaka City were largely empty1678 except for army troops on patrol1679 and setting up checkpoints.1680 In some areas, protesters defied the curfew1681 and sporadic clashes erupted1682 between protesters, police, army and Ansar forces.1683 According to the Daily Star, the neighbourhoods of Rayerbagh, Jatrabari, Mohammadpur and Mirpur experienced some of the ‘fiercest clashes’.1684 Police opened fire on protesters in several locations,1685 and a DW correspondent noted that protesters did not back down although shots were fired.1686 At least 26 people were reportedly killed in the cities of Dhaka, Mymensigh,1687 Savar (where three were shot dead by police fire1688) and Narayganj.1689 DMCH received injured patients and dead bodies from the Dhaka neighbourhoods of Jatrabari and Shanir Akhra,1690 and the Daily Star reported that over 100 people suffered bullet and pellet injuries in Mymensingh and Savar.1691 From 20 July 2024 and onwards, law enforcement officers reportedly pushed medical staff not to treat protesters and prevented one hospital from admitting patients.1692

Army personnel hesitated to shoot at protesters despite the ‘shoot-on-sight’ order,1693 especially many junior and mid-level officers as reported by UN OHCHR.1694 Nevertheless, there were instances of soldiers shooting at protesters,1695 including in the Dhaka neighbourhood of Mohammadpur where soldiers fired several rounds of lethal ammunition at a peaceful crowd, according to UN OHCHR.1696

On 20–21 July 2024,1697 security forces attempted to clear the Dhaka–Chattogram highway from protesters in the Dhaka neighbourhood of Jatrabari.1698 Police fired live and rubber bullets, as well as teargas, while protesters were throwing bricks and stones.1699 UN OHCHR reported on teargas being launched from RAB and police helicopters in the area, and further reported on the police and RAB ‘systematically using lethal force’ while army units provided coverage. The same source stated that the police had been ‘authorized to shoot rifles and shotguns loaded with lethal ammunition’ as they had been ordered to clear the highway ‘at all costs’.1700 Witnesses told the Daily Star that law enforcement ‘fired indiscriminately at protesters’ and more than 70 people were admitted to DMCH, most with bullet wounds.1701

Four deaths were reported in connection to clashes in the area[1702] – including a 10-year-old boy who was shot twice.[1703] UN OHCHR reported on the police firing at unarmed protesters, including protesters trying to run away, and one protester lying injured on the ground and pleading for mercy.[1704]

According to Netra News, a group of unidentified individuals in plainclothes opened fire against protesters and killed at least three persons in the Dhaka neighbourhood Uttara.[1705] The same source reported on thousands of protesters attacking and torching a police building in Narayanganj City.[1706]

The general curfew was extended indefinitely,[1707] leaving a window of two hours between 15:00-17:00, and the government declared 21–22 July 2024 public holidays.[1708]

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