

Ecuador: Wounded President denounces Coup

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Ecuador in chaos as police sends president to hospital

Buenos Aires: President of Ecuador Rafael Correa remains in hospital after a tear gas attack during his speech to police, protesting against austerity cuts, regional and international media reported on Friday.

Police in the Latin American state, which has seen three presidents ousted in the past 13 years, took to the streets on Thursday a day after parliament passed a controversial bill to delay automatic promotions and ending bonuses and other benefits. The law is yet to officially enter force as it was not published by the state media.

One person was killed and dozens injured during the riots, Interior Minister Miguel Carvajal told on the CRE TV channel. Unconfirmed reports put the number of injured at about 50.

The turmoil in the politically turbulent state comes amid financial problems the country. The government defaulted more than \$3.2 billion in international debt since 2008.

"This is a coup d'état attempt by opposition forces. They resorted to [violence] because they will not win the elections. I call on the citizens to stay calm," the president told the national radio in a phone interview.

Correa, the first Ecuadorean president to win two terms in a row, said he had been taken to hospital after "a tear gas grenade blew up right next to my face" during his speech at a police barracks. Correa is unable to leave the building, which is surrounded by an angry crowd, chanting "Long live civil war!"

"It seems that the hospital is under siege," Correa said, adding that the uprising was "a conspiracy planned long ago."

The president said he was set to leave the ward "as soon as possible" and will not negotiate with protestors unless the violence comes to a halt.

"I will leave it [the hospital] as president, or they will have to carry my corpse out of here," he added.

The government subsequently declared a weeklong state of siege. Flights from the Mariscal Sucre International Airport serving the capital Quito were suspended as it was seized by protestors, but resumed earlier on Friday. There are also reports of violence and looting in the capital and other cities.

According to local media reports, the government is now discussing the possibility of dismissing the National Assembly and announcing early presidential and parliamentary elections. The decision, if made, is to be approved by the country's constitutional court.

The country's foreign minister, Ricardo Patino, called on the citizens to "walk peacefully to the hospital, where the president is blocked by police officers." The crowd of Correa's supporters, who marched towards the hospital, was teargassed by protestors.

"This is not Honduras. Correa is president," the supporters chanted, walking through the smoke, Reuters reported.

Protestors also broke into the building of the local ECTV TV channel in an attempt to cut signal.

The CRE TV channel reported that servicemen of the Ecuadorean air force have seized hangars where the presidential plane and helicopter are being kept, seeking to prevent the president from leaving the country.

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