

Indigenous groups in Ecuador defy curfew to protest fuel hike



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Quito, June 20 (RHC)-- Indigenous groups in Ecuador have defied a state of emergency imposed in three provinces as they continue to protest against the government's economic policies amid rising inflation and unemployment.

Demonstrators demanding cheaper fuel and food price controls blocked roads on Saturday, on a sixth day of sometimes violent demonstrations.

Police said Indigenous people kept up protests in most of the country's 24 provinces, including Imbabura, Cotopaxi, and Pichincha, where President Guillermo Lasso declared a state of emergency late on Friday.

Ecuador has been hit by rising inflation, unemployment and poverty exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Fuel prices have risen sharply since 2020, almost doubling for diesel from \$1 to \$1.90 per gallon and rising from \$1.75 to \$2.55 for petrol.

The anti-government protest launched by the country's Indigenous community – which numbers more than a million of Ecuador's 17.7 million inhabitants – was joined by students, workers and other groups.

Clashes with security forces have left at least 83 people injured, and 40 have been arrested. In a bid to ease the anger, Lasso announced late on Friday a small increase in a monthly subsidy paid to Ecuador's poorest, as well as a programme to ease the debt of those who have loans from state-run banks.

But the moves failed to end the demonstrations. "I called for dialogue and the response was more violence. There is no intention to seek solutions," the president said on television.

The state of emergency empowers him to mobilise the armed forces to maintain order, suspend civil rights and declare curfews. The measure will last for 30 days in Imbabura, Cotopaxi, and Pichincha – areas that include the capital Quito – which have seen greater violence.

Indigenous activists on Saturday urged national lawmakers to step in to end the state of emergency, which they are constitutionally entitled to do. The powerful Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Conaie) has been credited with helping topple three Ecuadoran presidents between 1997 and 2005.

It said it will maintain the road blockades until the government meets 10 demands, including the reduction of prices to \$1.50 for diesel and \$2.10 for petrol, a demand the government has so far rejected.

Its other demands include food price controls and renegotiating the personal bank loans of about four million families.

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