

Netherlands rocked by third night of rioting over COVID curfew

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Protests continue in the Netherlands

Rotterdam, January 26 (RHC)-- Police in the Netherlands arrested at least 150 people after rioting broke out for a third night on Monday, following weekend protests triggered by anger over a nighttime curfew and lockdown imposed because of the coronavirus.

Riot police clashed with groups of protesters and used water cannon against looters in the port city of Rotterdam, where the mayor issued a decree broadening police powers of arrest. Tear gas was used to disperse crowds in Haarlem, as the unrest spread to smaller towns and cities including Amersfoort in the east, Geleen in the south, and The Hague.

Police Chief Willem Woelders said on television that many arrests had taken place. Geleen police said in an earlier tweet that they were dealing with "rioting youths who are throwing fireworks." Earlier, Prime Minister Mark Rutte had condemned what he called the "criminal violence" of the previous night, which police officials described as the "worst rioting in 40 years."

The curfew, the first in the Netherlands since World War II, was imposed after the National Institute for Health (RIVM) warned of a new wave of cases due to the "British variant" of COVID-19, although numbers of new infections in the Netherlands have been declining for weeks. Some 4,129 new cases were reported on Monday, the lowest number since December 1st.

There are a number of exemptions including for people who have to work, attend funerals or walk their dogs, providing they present a certificate. The Netherlands was already under its toughest measures since the start of the pandemic, with bars and restaurants having closed in October, and schools and non-essential shops shut since December.

Images posted on social media on Monday showed rioters looting a shop in Den Bosch and a press photographer being hit in the head in Haarlem, after an angry mob chased him off and threw a brick at him. Police Union chief Koen Simmers on Monday told broadcaster NOS that police were prepared should the rioting continue.

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