

Dutch police use tear gas, water cannon amid rioting

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A firefighter extinguishes a container that was set alight during protests against a nation-wide curfew in Rotterdam, Netherlands, Monday, Jan. 25, 2021. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)Â Â Â

The Hague: Groups of youths confronted police in Dutch towns and cities Monday night, defying the country's coronavirus curfew and throwing fireworks.

Police in the port city of Rotterdam used a water cannon and tear gas in an attempt to disperse a crowd of rioters who also looted shops.

Police and local media reported trouble in the capital, Amsterdam, where at least eight people were arrested, Haarlem, where vandals set a large fire in a street, The Hague and other towns before and after the 9 pm to 4.30 am curfew began.

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“Unfortunately, we’re seeing the same things as last night,” police chief Willem Woelders told Dutch current affairs show Nieuwsuur.

He said around 70 rioters had been arrested and police had used tear gas in the western city of Haarlem as well as Rotterdam.

Rotterdam police said youths took to the streets “seeking a confrontation with police.” Riot officers attempted to break up the violence and made a number of arrests, before firing tear gas. Police warned people to stay away from the area. National broadcaster NOS showed video of police using a water cannon and reported that some shops had been looted.

Police in the southern city of Den Bosch said that a shop was looted there and riot police were attempting to restore order. By late Monday night, police in Rotterdam were left sweeping up shattered glass littering the street next to a vandalised bus stop.

The force tweeted that “calm is slowly returning, but the atmosphere is still grim.” In the southern town of Geleen, police tweeted that youths in the downtown area were throwing fireworks. Riot police charged at protesters in The Hague.

Dutch media reported calls on social media for further violent protests even as the country struggles to contain new coronavirus infections, hospitalisations and deaths.

Police in the southern town of Goes and the North Holland province said they detained people on suspicion of using social media to call for rioting. “It is unacceptable,” Prime Minister Mark Rutte said earlier Monday of rioting

Sunday.

“This has nothing to do with protesting, this is criminal violence and that’s how we’ll treat it.”

Worst hit Sunday was the southern city of Eindhoven, where police clashed with hundreds of rioters who torched a car, threw rocks and fireworks at officers, smashed windows and looted a supermarket at its railway station.

“My city is crying, and so am I,” Eindhoven Mayor John Jorritsma told reporters Sunday night in an emotional impromptu news conference.

He called the rioters “the scum of the earth” and added, “I am afraid that if we continue down this path, we’re on our way to civil war.”

Amsterdam police arrested 190 people amid rioting at a banned demonstration Sunday. The rioting coincided with the first weekend of a new national coronavirus curfew, but mayors stressed that the violence wasn’t the work of citizens concerned about their civil liberties.

“These demonstrations are being hijacked by people who only want one thing and that is to riot,” Hubert Bruls, mayor of the city of Nijmegen and leader of a group of local security organisations, told news talk show Op1.

Nijmegen was one of a number of towns and cities that issued emergency decrees giving police extra powers to keep people away from certain locations amid reports of possible riots there.

At least one store in Nijmegen was shown on Dutch television being boarded up as a precaution. Bruls, who chaired a meeting of security officials Monday, said despite the violence, he didn’t advocate further limiting demonstrations.

“You should be very reluctant to limit the right to demonstrate,” he said, noting that the rioting Sunday happened at protests that already had been banned by local authorities.

Police in Eindhoven said Monday they have detained 62 suspects and have launched a large-scale investigation to identify and arrest more. One woman not involved in the rioting in Eindhoven was injured by a police horse.

Local residents went to the scene of the rioting Monday morning to help in the cleanup operation. On Sunday, rioters threw rocks at the windows of a hospital in the eastern city of Enschede.

On Saturday night, youths in the fishing village of Urk torched a coronavirus testing facility. Police in the southern province of Limburg said military police were sent as reinforcements to two cities.

The Netherlands has seen over 13,600 confirmed virus deaths in the pandemic.

- AP