

Baltimore police chief fired over spike in violence

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Washington: Two and a half months after the death of a black man in police custody sparked days of rioting in Baltimore, close to the American capital, the troubled city's mayor has fired the police commissioner.

Saying that spike in homicide rates since the April 19 death of Freddie Gray required a change in leadership, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake Wednesday replaced Police Commissioner Anthony Batts with his deputy Kevin Davis as interim commissioner.

"We need a change," Rawlings-Blake told a news conference. "We cannot grow Baltimore without making our city a safer place to live," she said.

Baltimore, a city of 600,000, about two thirds of them black, has seen a sharp increase in violence since April, with 155 homicides this year, a 48 percent increase over the same period last year.

The most recent violence happened Tuesday night, when gunmen jumped out of two vans and fired at a group of people a few blocks from an urban university campus, killing three people.

A fourth person who was wounded was in stable condition, CBS reported. Police said Wednesday that the shooting wasn't random, but no arrests have been made.

On Tuesday, the police department announced that an outside organization will review the department's response to the civil unrest that followed Gray's death.

The US Justice Department is also conducting a civil rights review of the department, and Batts has been criticized by the Baltimore police union.

According to an autopsy report obtained by The Baltimore Sun newspaper last month, a medical examiner found that Gray suffered a "high-energy injury," most likely caused when the Baltimore police van he was riding in braked sharply.

The report said Gray's death could not be ruled an accident and is instead a homicide because officers didn't follow safety procedures "through acts of omission."

Freddie Gray's death followed several other incidents. There have been at least 14 major instances of a white policeman shooting dead a black person since 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was fatally shot on Feb 26, 2012 in Sanford, Florida.

Earlier on Wednesday, the union released its report into the police handling of the rioting.

It said officers had complained "that they lacked basic riot equipment, training, and, as events unfolded, direction from leadership".

The report also said "officers repeatedly expressed concern that the passive response to the civil unrest had allowed the disorder to grow into full scale rioting".

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