

Several people killed during stampede in anti-government protest at Ethiopia religious event

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Bishoftu (Ethiopia): Dozens of people have been killed and injured during a religious celebration in Ethiopia that later turned in to an anti-government protest which led police to fire tear gas and rubber bullets.

Ethiopian soldiers block the street as people march

An estimated two million people were attending the annual Irrecha event in Bishoftu town southeast of the capital, Addis Ababa. The event took place in one of the country's most sensitive regions, Oromia, which has seen several months of sometimes deadly protests demanding wider freedoms.

Ethiopia's government acknowledged deaths during the event and, through a spokesman, blamed "people that prepared to cause trouble" for the chaos.

The spokesman's office said many people were taken to hospitals, but it did not provide any figures.

Witnesses said police dispersed protesters chanting anti-government slogans as they pushed toward a stage where religious leaders were speaking. Some threw rocks and plastic bottles.

As festival goers fled, some were crushed in nearby ditches.

An Associated Press reporter saw people holding up crossed wrists in a popular gesture of anti-government protest and police firing tear gas. The reporter also saw several injured people.

The months of anti-government protests in several parts of Ethiopia and the sometimes harsh government response has raised international concern. The United States recently spoke out against what it called the excessive use of force against protesters.

- (With inputs from AP)