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Muslim activists have rejected the ban on fatwas

By Zubair Ahmed in Dhaka

Activists belonging to radical Muslim groups have lynched a policeman during violence in the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka.

The violence marred the groups' call for a strike against a ban on religious edicts, or fatwas.

Dhaka police say they have arrested at least 40 people who are thought to be involved in the violence.

Meanwhile, the Muslim groups' strike call failed to prevent thousands of people from attending a rally in support of last month's High Court ruling banning fatwas, which had been organised by several non-governmental organisations.

The authorities say that a group of Muslim activists dragged a policeman to a mosque where he was killed.

Police have now recovered the constable's body and cordoned off the area.

Successful rally

It has been a day of high emotion on the streets of Dhaka, not least because of fears that the pro- and anti-fatwa camps might come into direct conflict.

The Muslim groups had threatened to prevent a rally, called by NGOs, in support of the ban on fatwas.

Earlier in the day police arrested several Muslim activists as they tried to block the route that would later be taken by Prime Minister Hasina's car.

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But the NGO's rally seems to have been a success. Thousands of villagers travelled into Dhaka to attend it.

Observers say it illustrates the extent to which the country's very active NGOs are seen as a counter-weight to radical Islamic groups in villages.

Death threat

It is thought that at least some of the violence threatened by Islamic groups here is just a desperate attempt to regain control.



The High Court decision has been welcomed by mainstream parties

On Friday, some of the more radical groups issued what they called a death threat against the two High Court Judges who, in a landmark judgement last month, ruled that any edict not passed by the courts was illegal.

The High Court ruling was welcomed by all the mainstream political parties and human rights organisations, but was angrily rejected by the Islamists who have since organised several nationwide protests against the judgement.

Now some Islamic groups are demanding that NGOs themselves be banned, saying that they are a negative influence on Bangladeshi society and culture and are especially bad for women.

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