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Students In Panama City Protest Government Policies

by Deborah Tyroler

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On June 10, students at the National Institute (Instituto Nacional de Panama, a secondary school) led a demonstration protesting government price hikes on meat, privatization policies, and plans to reform legislation on social security and higher education. In a June 11 communique, the national police stated that protesters attacked police with home-made bombs, rocks and guns in several incidents throughout the day. According to the statement, hundreds of student protesters rallied at the national legislature building and pelted the structure with rocks. The crowd was dispersed by anti-riot police firing birdshot. Later in the day, when students returned to the site, security forces and several armed protesters reportedly exchanged fire. Another group of demonstrators attempted to occupy the presidential palace. Protesters blocked traffic on the capital city's main thoroughfares, and battled police with home-made bombs. The communique announced the creation of a commission to meet with student leaders. Commission members included Education Minister Marcos Alarcon, deputy interior minister Jose Miguel Aleman and a Catholic Church representative. Several protesters were arrested and an indeterminate number were injured. Education Minister Marcos Alarcon announced the indefinite closing of three high schools attended by students who participated in the protests, and expulsion of student opposition leaders. (Basic data from AFP, 06/10/91, 06/11/91; Notimex, 06/11/91)

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