

17 dead in latest Peru clashes

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The Daily Morning Voice Online Desk: At least 17 people died Monday in Peru as protesters trying to storm an airport clashed with security forces in the latest violent spasm of a month-old political crisis. This new chapter of bloodshed took place in the southeastern city of Juliaca, in the Puno region, an official in the local ombudsman's office told AFP.

The previous death toll of 12 rose as five people among the 40 or so wounded in the clashes died of their injuries, the official said. Like others have for the past month, these protesters were demanding the departure of President Dina Boluarte, who took over after the ouster and arrest of then president Pedro Castillo on December 7. Castillo's removal after he tried to dissolve congress and start ruling by decree — he faced several corruption probes — has triggered weeks of clashes nationwide in this country beset by years of political instability. Protesters angry over the removal of the leftist Castillo want Boluarte to resign and new elections right away. They have already been moved up from 2026 to April of 2024.

Overall, with these new fatalities, the clashes sparked by the ouster of Castillo have now left 39 people dead around the country. The people killed Monday in Juliaca had gunshot wounds, an official at Calos Monge Hospital told a Peruvian TV channel. "The police are shooting at us," one demonstrator who declined to give his name told AFP. "We ask Dina to resign," he added. "Accept the fact that people do not want you." "What is happening is Peruvians are slaughtering each other. I ask for calm," Juliaca's Mayor Oscar Caceres said in a desperate plea for peace. Alberto Otarola, the new president's chief of staff, said thousands of protesters had approached the airport Monday and around 2,000 of them attacked police while trying to storm the facility with makeshift weapons and gun powder.

Demonstrators had already tried Saturday to overrun the Juliaca airport, which is being protected by police and soldiers. Juliaca, located in the Puno region on the border with Bolivia, is home to many people from the Aymara indigenous group. Puno has been a hotbed of anti-government protests since the latest crisis broke out. An open-ended strike was declared there on January 4. Protests against the Boluarte government took a break over the new year's holidays but resumed that day.

As of Monday, protesters were blocking roads in six of the country's 25 departments, including areas popular with tourists. Boluarte was Castillo's vice president and is a leftist like him. But many Indigenous people call her a traitor who does not defend their cause. In another development Monday, the government said it was barring entry to Evo Morales, the former president of Bolivia, accusing him of trying to interfere in Peru's affairs. Morales, who was his country's first Indigenous president, has expressed support for the protests against Boluarte, especially in the ethnic Aymara Puno region which borders Bolivia.