The death of a student in police custody has set off massive student protests and the government closing of all universities

The death of a student in police custody has set off massive student protests and the government closing of all universities, dormitories, and student cafeterias in this West African nation.

Authorities used tear gas to disperse thousands of students marching Friday to protest the apparent murder of student Justin Zongo on Feb. 22. Red Cross officials said nearly 30 people were wounded at the rally.

Official reports stated meningitis as the cause of Zongo's death. But, the students claim it was police brutality. "There was a police blunder in Koudougou. We are in free country so we have the right to demand justice. Impunity is rampant in this country and it is frustrating", said student Ousmane Traoré.

"Burkina Faso's government appears worried about the possibility of a protest movement gaining steam," observed Alex Thurston, a blogger with the Christian Science Monitor. The country's rulers may be hoping to snuff out the movement before its turns its anger towards autocratic President Blaise Compaore.

A graduate of President Gaddafi's World Revolutionary Center, Compaore took power in a 1987 coup in which his predecessor, Thomas Sankara, was killed. He was voted President in disputed elections in 1991, 1998, 2005, and 2010.

The gold-rich nation has seen numerous general strikes over economic grievances and human rights violations.