

# A CHRONOLOGY OF THE JUNE FOURTH CRACKDOWN

- April 15**      **Death of Hu Yaobang:** Party General Secretary from 1981 to 1987, Hu was accused of being too liberal with intellectuals and students and of promoting “bourgeois liberalization” during the 1986–1987 protests. Forced to resign in January 1987, he was replaced as Party General Secretary by Zhao Ziyang.
- April 15–April 17**      **Protests begin:** Students begin to gather on Tiananmen Square to mourn the death of Hu Yaobang.
- April 18**      **Petition to the government:** Students issue a petition to the National People’s Congress mourning Hu’s death and calling for reforms and greater openness.
- April 20**      **Government reacts:** At a Politburo meeting, Premier Li Peng states that the movement was instigated by “a small group of people.” Workers come out in support of the students’ demands.
- April 21**      **Intellectuals join the demonstrations:** A group of intellectuals try to deliver an open letter to the government, the first statement from intellectuals in support of the student movement. That night, 100,000 students and intellectuals enter Tiananmen Square to prevent the authorities from cordoning it off in preparation for Hu’s state funeral.
- April 22**      **Hu Yaobang’s funeral:** On the morning of Hu’s funeral, 100,000 Beijing residents defy the ban on demonstrations and converge on the square in support of the students. Kneeling on the steps of the Great Hall of the People, in the manner of petitions to the emperor, three students appeal to Li Peng to listen to their requests.
- April 24**      **Boycott of classes:** In an internal report, Beijing Party Secretary Li Ximing and Mayor Chen Xitong label the demonstrations an “anti-Party and anti-socialist political struggle” and advocate a crackdown. Students begin a mass boycott of classes in an attempt to pressure Party and government leaders into hearing their requests.
- April 26**      **People’s Daily editorial:** Deng Xiaoping’s speech in which he labeled the student movement as an anti-party, anti-socialist upheaval is printed in a *People’s Daily* editorial, which also proclaims that all further demonstrations are illegal. In a rare challenge, the official Chinese Democratic League calls on the government to refrain from using force.
- April 27**      **Demonstrations grow in size:** Students from the Beijing No. 54 High School disregard Party warnings and take to the streets to protest the April 26 *People’s Daily* editorial. In reaction to Deng’s condemnation, some 150,000 students peacefully break through police cordons on Chang’an Avenue and make their way to Tiananmen Square.
- April 28**      **The Beijing Students’ Autonomous Federation is founded formally:** Wu’er Kaixi, the student representative from Beijing Normal University, is elected chairman.
- April 29**      **Politburo discussion:** At a Politburo meeting, Zhao Ziyang makes suggestions to address official corruption in response to popular discontent. Li Peng opposes them.
- May 3**      **Journalists petition:** Journalists draft a petition to the Party Central Committee asking for a dialogue with the government. They collect more than 1,000 signatures and resolve to demonstrate on the next day to call for press freedom.

- May 4** **70th anniversary of the 1919 May Fourth Movement:** Initiated by students, more than 100,000 march through Beijing. In collaboration with the students, workers and journalists express their demands. Similar rallies are held in cities across the country.
- In the following days, students are divided on questions of strategy, with some advocating a return to classes and the establishment of a Dialogue Delegation to press for debate with the government that would be broadcast live, while others opt for a more radical course of action.
- May 11** **Zhao Ziyang advocates acceding to demands:** Zhao suggests in a Politburo meeting that the Party accede to students' demands on corruption and that press freedom be expanded.
- May 12** **Hunger strike debates:** In the evening, at Peking University, Chai Ling joins the efforts of students Wang Dan, Wu'er Kaixi, and six others to advocate a hunger strike as a strategy to force the government to listen to the students' pleas. Students at Peking University in favor of a hunger strike rapidly increase in number from 40 to over 200.
- May 13** **Hunger strike begins:** As a result of the delay in response from the government, hundreds of thousands of students converge on the square to stage a sit-in and hunger strike. The hunger strike begins, eventually drawing over 3,000 participants. Party leaders eventually agree to a dialogue with the students' Dialogue Delegation on May 14.
- May 14** **Meeting with government representatives:** A meeting between government officials and the student representatives breaks down with no result.
- May 15** **Foreign dignitary visit to Beijing:** Mikhail Gorbachev comes to Beijing for a summit meeting with Deng Xiaoping. Instead of an official welcome on Tiananmen Square, Gorbachev enters the Great Hall of the People by a back entrance. Thousands of intellectuals, teachers and scientists march to Tiananmen Square.
- May 17** **Intellectuals' response:** A declaration drafted by prominent intellectuals including Yan Jiaqi and Bao Zunxin urges the government to recognize the legitimacy of the Students' Autonomous Federation, to promote political reform and eliminate corruption, and to respect freedom of the press, of thought, and of assembly.
- May 17** **March of over one million:** More than one million people march in the capital, including workers, All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) officials, journalists, doctors, and nurses.
- May 18** **Government talks to students:** Li Peng holds inconclusive talks with some students in the Great Hall of the People at noon. Again, more than one million people demonstrate their support for the student movement. Bus and taxi drivers, railroad employees, factory and construction workers, and peasants from the outskirts roam through the capital.
- May 19** **Visit of Zhao Ziyang to the square:** During a surprise visit to the students on the square, Zhao says tearfully, "We have come too late. We deserve your criticism." Wen Jiabao accompanies him. In the early evening, the students call off the hunger strike. In a late night television address, Li Peng blames conspirators behind the students for instigating turmoil. The workers organize the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation (BWAFF). The government gets ready to announce martial law, while students abandon the hunger strike to engage in a massive, large-scale demonstration.

- May 20**      **Martial law takes effect at 10:00 a.m.:** “Demonstrations, petitioning, class boycotts, strikes . . . are prohibited . . . [A]rmed police and People’s Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers have the right to exercise any force necessary to stop or prevent any violation of martial law orders.” PLA units are ordered to clear Tiananmen Square and return order to the city.
- May 21**      **One million march:** More than one million people defy martial law and successfully block soldiers from entering central Beijing.
- May 23**      **Defacing of Mao portrait:** Mao Zedong’s portrait on the Tiananmen Gate is defaced by Yu Zhijian, Yu Dongyue, and Lu Decheng who throw paint-filled eggs at it. It is soon removed and replaced with another, identical one. Students hand over the individuals who defaced the portrait to the authorities.
- May 27**      **Debates on whether to stay in the Square:** The Capital Joint Liaison Group, a group consisting of workers, students, and intellectuals, states that the students should stay on the square until May 30. A few student representatives refuse to agree to retreat on May 30, believing that a withdrawal without any concession from the government is tantamount to surrender. The Capital Joint Liaison Group agrees.
- May 28**      **Arrests begin:** Bao Tong, Zhao Ziyang’s former aide, is arrested in one of the first of tens of thousands of arrests in which protest leaders, participants, and sympathizers are detained across the country.
- May 29**      **Goddess of Democracy erected:** During the night, students of the Central Academy of Fine Arts assemble the 37-foot-high statue of the Goddess of Democracy, built in two days out of plaster and styrofoam. It stands opposite the giant portrait of Mao Zedong.
- May 30**      **Three leading members of the BWF detained:** The students are detained by the Beijing Public Security Bureau (PSB), which had ordered the workers to vacate the place they were occupying the night before. The BWF moves its headquarters to the north-west of the square.
- June 2**      **Hunger strike by Capital Joint Liaison Group:** The Liaison Group, now composed solely of intellectuals, decides to stage a series of 72-hour hunger strikes to show the students that others too are ready to put their lives at risk. Literary critic Liu Xiaobo, rock star Hou Dejian, and economist Zhou Duo are among the first to start fasting.
- June 3**      **Violent confrontations begin:** In the afternoon, violent clashes occur between soldiers and Beijing residents. In the evening, PLA troops force their way into the capital and converge on Tiananmen Square. An unknown number of Beijing citizens die, succumbing to gun shots—sometimes at point blank—or crushed by tanks and armored personnel carriers. In angry retaliation, civilians throw stones at the soldiers, who shoot back. Some soldiers are attacked and beaten up. Buses and cars are set on fire.
- June 4**      **1:00 a.m.** The troops have blocked off all approaches to Tiananmen Square. Various people who witnessed the killings of civilians report to the BWF and to the students’ Command Headquarters, urging them to withdraw.

**2:00 a.m.** The first troop transport trucks enter the square. Chai Ling and Li Lu call on those remaining on the square to gather around the Monument to the People's Heroes.

**3:00 a.m.** Hou Dejian and Zhou Duo negotiate with army officials to give the students time to vacate the square. Withdrawal will be unconditional, officials reply, adding that it must take place before daybreak. They indicate the southeast as the safest way to exit.

**4:00 a.m.** On the square the lights go off. The statue of the Goddess of Democracy is toppled by a tank.

**4:30 a.m.** The tanks and the troops stationed in the north corner of the Square begin to move forward. Students vote and eventually agree to leave. The soldiers shoot out the students' loud speakers. Led by the Command Headquarters, the students walk away from the Monument to the People's Heroes toward the southeast part of the square. A row of armored vehicles moves slowly toward the monument. Other troops arrive from the west, squeezing the crowd. As the students leave, army tanks crush tents on their way. The student guards are the last to leave, with soldiers about 18 feet behind them firing warning shots.

**5:00 a.m.** As the students pass Qianmen, residents line the streets and applaud. The army throws tear gas and shoots at students and citizens near the square and in other areas of the capital. Some people are crushed under tanks. The number of victims is not known.

**6:20 a.m.** Tanks crush retreating students.

**June 5**

**Tank Man appears:** A lone man stops a tank convoy heading for Tiananmen Square.

**June 9**

**A "counterrevolutionary rebellion":** In a speech, Deng Xiaoping states that the government has suppressed a "counterrevolutionary rebellion . . . determined by the international and domestic climate" where the "dregs of society" had sought to "establish a bourgeois republic entirely dependent on the West."

**June 13**

**Most wanted:** The Chinese authorities broadcast the list of the 21 most wanted student leaders.

**June 15**

**Death sentences imposed:** A court in Shanghai sentences three residents to death for involvement in the protests. Soon after, people in Beijing, Shandong, Sichuan, Hebei, and Hubei are sentenced to death. Throughout the country, there are tens of thousands of detentions and arrests. Approximately one thousand people are executed, and many others are investigated and harassed.

**September 19**

**Official denial:** "There were no deaths in the square," reads an article in the *People's Daily*.

**January 11, 1990**

Martial law ends in Beijing.

Chronology compiled by Human Rights in China.