

Sheikh Hasina quits as B'desh PM, flees, lands in India on way to UK

Modi chairs CCS meeting; Indian businesses in Bangladesh on alert

BS REPORTERS AND AGENCIES

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In a sudden turn of events, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, 76, had to resign and flee Dhaka on Monday, following weeks of massive anti-government protests resulting in hundreds of deaths. On her way to London in a military transport aircraft C 130J, Hasina, accompanied by her sister, landed at Hindon Airport—an Indian Air Force base near Delhi—Monday afternoon.

Earlier in the day, Bangladesh army chief Waker-uz-Zaman, in an address to the nation, announced Hasina's resignation and said he would work to form an interim government. Late in the evening, Bangladeshi President Mohammed Shahabuddin ordered the release of jailed

former prime minister and key opposition leader Khaleda Zia. Hasina's 15-year ten-



Protesters celebrate beside a defaced portrait of Sheikh Hasina after news of her resignation as Bangladesh prime minister, in Dhaka on Monday

PHOTO: AP/PTI

ure – she was elected for a fourth successive term earlier this year - saw an unprecedented strengthening of strategic and economic bilateral ties between India and Bangladesh.

According to sources, the

Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) met Monday evening at the Prime Minister's official residence on the latest developments in Bangladesh. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was joined by other members

of the CCS including Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at the meeting. Turn to Page 6 ▶



“WE WILL BRING JUSTICE TO ALL THE MURDERS AND INJUSTICE... GIVE US SOME TIME, AND TOGETHER WE WILL BE ABLE TO SOLVE ALL THE PROBLEM”
GENERAL WAKER-UZ-ZAMAN, Bangladesh army chief

NSA Doval meets Hasina

A Parliament statement is likely on Tuesday on the situation in India's neighbouring country. National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, accompanied by senior officials, met Hasina at the airbase near Delhi and is understood to have conveyed India's position on the developments in Bangladesh, sources said. It is learnt that Hasina has been moved to a safe location as it is unlikely that she would leave India on Monday night.

After the developments in Dhaka, the Border Security Force (BSF) issued a "high alert" across all its formations along the 4,096-km India-Bangladesh border. Air India cancelled its flights to Dhaka and a Dhaka-bound IndiGo flight from Chennai was diverted to Kolkata because of the closure of the airport in the Bangladeshi capital. Trains between India and Bangladesh remained suspended since July 19 after the protests started last month, and will remain suspended indefinitely. Indian exporters said the developments would hurt bilateral trade, but hoped that the situation would normalise soon.

As news of Hasina's departure from Dhaka spread, hundreds broke into her residence, vandalising and looting the interiors, providing dramatic expression to the anti-government protests that have killed more than 100 people in the last two days. At the centre of mass anger is the Hasina government's quota system reserving 30 per cent jobs for families of veterans who fought the 1971 liberation war. With volatile crowds taking to the streets — some clambering on Hasina's father and Bangladesh founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's stat-

ue and smashing it with hammers in a lasting image underscoring the fickleness of history — the Army chief announced that the PM had resigned.

An interim government will be taking over, he said in a televised address. "I'm taking all responsibility (of the country). Please cooperate," Zaman, appointed the Army Chief in June for a three year term, said. The Army chief said he had met political leaders and told them the Army would take over responsibility for law and order. However, there were no leaders from Hasina's Awami League party at the meeting.

As protests spiralled across the country, the army chief said he had asked both Army and police not to fire any shots.

Zaman also urged restraint and asked protesters to end the violence. He vowed "justice" for all. The Army controlled the politics in Bangladesh directly or indirectly for 15 years after the assassination of Rahman, Hasina's father, in a coup in August 1975, and continued to interfere until her election in 2008. Diplomatic sources in New Delhi confirmed that Hasina had landed at the Hindon airbase in Ghaziabad on her way to London. She is likely to meet her daughter Saima Wazed, who is based in Delhi and working as the WHO's regional director for South-East Asia, a report said.

The Bangabandhu memorial museum - dedicated to Mujibur Rahman who was assassinated along with his wife and their three sons while serving as president in 1975 - was also vandalised. Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana had survived the purge as they were abroad. Hasina then

spent six years in exile in India. The home of Dr Wajed Miah, Hasina's husband, was not spared either in the vortex of violence on Monday, local reports said. Four Hindu temples suffered "minor" damages across the country, eyewitnesses and a community leader said. An India-Bangladesh cultural centre, set up in 2010, suffered damage.

The violence was not restricted to Dhaka. In the eastern city of Sylhet, offices of the deputy commissioner and superintendent of police were reportedly set on fire, while the homes of several councillors were attacked, *BBC* reported.

The situation in Bangladesh also poses challenges for India's substantial public and private sector investments in the energy and infrastructure sector of Bangladesh. An investment that made headlines was Adani group's 800 MW Godda power project in Jharkhand, which is sourcing coal from the group company's coal mine in Australia to supply power to Bangladesh. In line with a long list of rail connectivity projects, both sides have also signed an MOU extending transit facilities for movement of Bangladeshi goods to Nepal and Bhutan through the Indian railway network. As of now, five links connecting India with Bangladesh have been made operational. Indo-Bangladesh trade 'halted' with the Bangladesh government on Sunday announcing a three-day trade holiday, excluding essential services, through a notification. Till July 22, about 2,894 Indian students studying in Bangladesh had crossed over to India, while another about 3,000 students are expected to come now, official sources said.