

Statement regarding recent developments in Bangladesh

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (DR. SUBRAHMANYAM JAISHANKAR): Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to apprise this august House of certain recent developments pertaining to Bangladesh. As hon. Members are aware, India-Bangladesh relations have been exceptionally close for many decades over many governments. Concern about recent violence and instability there is shared across the political spectrum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the election in January 2024, there have been considerable tensions, deep divides and growing polarisation in Bangladesh politics.

This underlying foundation aggravated a student agitation that started in June this year. There was growing violence, including attacks on public buildings and infrastructure, as well as traffic and rail obstructions. The violence continued through the month of July. Throughout this period, we repeatedly counselled restraint and urged that the situation be defused through dialogue. Similar urgings were made to various political forces with whom we were in touch.

Speaker Sir, despite a Supreme Court judgement on 21st July, there was no let-up in the public agitation. Various decisions and actions taken thereafter only exacerbated the situation. The agitation at this stage coalesced around a one-point agenda, that is that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina should step down. On 4th August, events took a very serious turn. Attacks on police, including police stations and Government installations, intensified even as overall levels of violence greatly escalated. Properties of individuals associated with the regime were torched across the country. What was particularly worrying was that minorities, their businesses and temples also came under attack at multiple locations. The full extent of this is still not clear.

Speaker Sir, on 5th August, demonstrators converged in Dhaka despite the curfew. Our understanding is that after a meeting with leaders of the security establishment, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina apparently made the decision to resign. At very short notice, she requested approval to come for the moment to India. We simultaneously received a request for flight clearance from the Bangladesh authorities. She arrived yesterday evening in Delhi.

Speaker Sir, the situation in Bangladesh is still evolving. The Army Chief, General Waker-Uz-Zaman, addressed the nation on 5th August. He spoke about assuming responsibility and constituting an interim Government. We are in close and continuous touch with the Indian community in Bangladesh through our diplomatic Missions. There are an estimated 19,000 Indian nationals there, of which about 9,000 are students. The bulk of students have already returned to India in the month of July on the advice of the High Commission. In terms of our diplomatic presence, in addition to the High Commission in Dhaka, we have Assistant High Commissions in Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, and Sylhet. It is our expectation that the host Government will provide the required security protection for these establishments. We look forward to their normal functioning once the situation stabilizes.

Speaker Sir, we are also monitoring the situation with regard to the status of minorities. There are reports of initiatives by various groups and organizations to ensure their protection and well-being. We welcome that, but will naturally remain deeply concerned till law and order is visibly restored. Our border guarding forces have also been instructed to be exceptionally alert in view of this complex situation.

Speaker Sir, in the last 24 hours, we have been in regular touch with the authorities in Dhaka. This is the situation as of now. I seek the understanding and support of the House in regard to sensitive issues regarding an important neighbour on which there has always been a strong national consensus.

Thank you.

19.02 hrs

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock

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* Moved with the recommendation of the President.

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?. English translation of this part of speech was originally delivered in Tamil.

* Expunged as ordered by the Chair.

* Not recorded.