

## Tanks Deployed Near Parliament and State of Emergency Declared in Sri Lanka

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*On Thursday, the Sri Lanka government announced a curfew in the capital Colombo and its suburbs that would run until 5am on Friday. To stop demonstrators from accessing the Parliament on Thursday, the Sri Lankan Army stationed tanks close to the building. Troops in green military uniforms and camouflage vests arrived by armored personnel carriers on Thursday to reinforce barricades around the parliament.*

Organizers of the protest fear a crackdown could be imminent after Prime Minister Wickremesinghe branded some protesters “fascists” in an address the previous evening.

The government has imposed a curfew in Colombo from noon on Thursday to early morning on Friday in a bid to prevent further unrest. Local media showed armored vehicles with soldiers atop patrolling the city’s streets.

The military said troops were empowered to use force to protect people and public property.

Protesters were withdrawing from the presidential palace after taking hold of it over the weekend.

### **Do Whatever Necessary, PM Tells Military**

PM Wickremesinghe has told the military to do “whatever is necessary to restore order” after protesters stormed his office on Wednesday.

In a television address, Wickremesinghe called on protesters to leave his occupied office and other state buildings and co-operate with authorities.

Outside the president’s office armed soldiers stood by impassively watching the protesters celebrate inside the office.

Demonstrators earlier ignored the PM's calls for the office to be emptied.

Wickremesinghe said he had formed a committee including the police and military chiefs to de-escalate the situation.

## **Rajapaksa Leaves the Maldives**

Sri Lanka's embattled President, **Gotabaya Rajapaksa**, has left the Maldives after fleeing his own country amid mass protests demanding he resign over his country's economic collapse.

Rajapaksa boarded a Saudia flight on Thursday bound for Singapore.

Sri Lankans are in political uncertainty, anger and confusion on Thursday as they find president of the country is yet to resign although he fled the country.

Earlier, demonstrators clashed with security officers who fired tear gas into the air.

On Wednesday, even as Ranil Wickremesinghe took over as acting president, he faced protesters' anger amid chants of 'Go Ranil, Go!', reports said.

The protesters have demanded that the planned interim government must only consist of politicians acceptable to them.

Politicians from other parties have been talking about forming a new unity government but there is no sign they are near agreement yet. It is also not clear if the public would accept what they come up with.

The crisis-hit island nation is in political flame over an economic meltdown leading to political chaos and confusion. Millions are struggling to buy food, medicine, fuel and essentials.

Political instability has intensified in the country facing the worst-ever economic challenge in seven decades.

President Rajapaksa and his wife fled to the Maldives on Wednesday aboard an air force jet. The absconding president made the PM acting president in his absence — a move that has further escalated the political crisis, angered the public, which has triggered a fresh wave of protests. The decision to leave him in charge sparked further protests demanding that the PM must also go. Many blame Wickremesinghe as part of the problem.

On Wednesday, protesters, undeterred by multiple rounds of tear gas, scaled the walls to enter the office of PM Wickremesinghe as the crowd outside cheered in support and tossed water bottles to them.

Protesters took turns posing at the PM's desk or stood on a rooftop terrace waving the Sri Lankan flag after the latest in a series of takeovers of government buildings by the demonstrators — who see the political maneuvers as delaying their goal of a new government for a nation of 22 millions.

Late on Wednesday night, crowds also gathered outside the Parliament.

## **Resign, Yet To Be Materialized**

Over the weekend, the president and the PM promised they would resign.

The protesters are furious both to the president and the PM. The protesters accuse the PM Wickremesinghe of protecting the president.

Wickremesinghe has said he will not leave until a new government is in place. He has urged the speaker of parliament to find a new PM acceptable to both the ruling and opposition parties.

On Wednesday the Parliament Speaker said that the President in a telephone conversation had informed that he would tender his letter of resignation during the day, before midnight.

Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena said that he informed the President to submit his letter of resignation as soon as possible, citing that he too is under pressure.

He said that since an Acting President has been appointed, the Office of the Speaker is exploring the legal provisions to consider the option of 'have vacated his post' if the President does not tender in his letter of resignation.

A Spokesperson from the Sri Lanka Parliament said that given that the President had not yet tendered his letter of resignation, it is uncertain if Parliament would be convened tomorrow, July 15.

The PM's Media Division on Wednesday said that the Acting President has informed Speaker Abeywardena to nominate a Prime Minister who is acceptable to both the Government and Opposition.

Rajapaksa could send his resignation to the speaker of the Sri Lankan parliament after landing in Singapore.

## **Leadership In A Bankrupt Country**

Last week, PM Wickremesinghe said Sri Lanka is now a bankrupt country.

The main opposition leader [Sajith Premadasa told he would be tilting for the presidency](#). But he, like Wickremesinghe, lacks public support. There is also deep public suspicion of politicians in general.

The protest movement which has brought Sri Lanka to the brink of change also does not have an obvious contender for the country's leadership.

It is unclear when that might happen since the opposition is deeply fractured. But assuming that Rajapaksa resigns as planned, Sri Lankan lawmakers have agreed to elect a new president on July 20 who will serve the remainder of Rajapaksa's term, which ends in 2024. That person could potentially appoint a new prime minister, who would then have to be approved by Parliament.

As per Sri Lanka's constitution, Rajapaksa's resignation would only be considered official once the speaker of the parliament receives a letter stating it.

The political confusion continues threatening the bankrupt economy's collapse since the absence of an alternative government could delay a hoped-for bailout from the International Monetary Fund. In the meantime, the country is relying on aid from neighboring India and from China.

Nominations for the top post will be presented before parliament starting July 19, then a vote will be taken to elect a new president a day later, according to the speaker.

Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Jayantha Jayasuriya will then swear in the next president. The date of the swearing in is typically chosen by the new elected president.

## **Key Administrative Buildings Occupied**

On Wednesday, for the second time in less than a week, protesters broke into a highly secure state building. This time it was the prime minister's office.

The protesters continued to occupy the key administrative buildings they had seized since Saturday.

The protesting people in the PM's office lounged on plush sofas snapping photos, while others stood on chairs and desks waving the Sri Lankan flag.

The protesters stressed that they would only hand over the properties to authorities after an interim government would be in place.

At the colonial-era PM's office, people could be seen on the balcony, lighting firecrackers and waving the Sri Lankan flag.

Demonstrators outside demanded that neither the President nor the Prime Minister "be spared."

As tensions ran high, the national broadcaster went off air after it was seized by agitators, according to a Bloomberg report.

In Colombo, a handful of protesters also entered the premises of state broadcaster Sri Lanka Rupavahini on Wednesday, negotiating a "deal" with broadcast staff to not give airtime to politicians such as Wickremesinghe. The broadcaster instead played history and culture programs.

## **1 Dead 84 Hospitalized**

Media reports said one person died during clash with security forces.

At least 84 people were hospitalized when protesters clashed with the security forces at the PM's office and at the main access junction to Parliament since mid-afternoon on Wednesday after Rajapaksa fled the country.

The police fired tear gas and water cannons at the mob who were trying to break barriers and enter the restricted zone.

A nurse at the hospital told CNN that many people were brought in due to tear gas inhalation, while others had cuts and bruises likely received when trying to jump over

fences. The nurse did not confirm any gunshot injuries.

A police spokesman said protesters had grabbed a T56 firearm and 60 bullets from a Sri Lanka Army soldier.

Wednesday's protests were more directed at Wickremesinghe. Calls for his resignation intensified after he was appointed the acting president.

Political party leaders are asking him to step down so that Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena can take control as acting president.

President Rajapaksa was likely to send his resignation letter only after reaching his final destination on Wednesday evening, Sri Lanka's The Morning news portal reported.

## **General's Call For Calm**

With the country in disarray, Chief of Defense Staff Gen. Shavendra Silva called for calm and for cooperation with security forces.

Similar comments have rankled opposition lawmakers, who insisted that civilian leaders would be the ones to find a solution.

## **Buddhist Clergy Chiefs**

The influential Buddhist clergy chiefs in a statement called for an end to violence. They said the country's security was in grave danger and Parliament must be summoned immediately to work out a political solution.

## **Rajapaksa's Family Members**

After the president fled to the Maldives the whereabouts of other Rajapaksa family members who had served in the government were unclear.

Protesters accuse the president and his relatives of siphoning money from government coffers for years and Rajapaksa's administration of hastening the country's collapse by mismanaging the economy.

The family has denied the corruption allegations, but Rajapaksa acknowledged some of his policies contributed to the meltdown, which has left the country laden with debt and unable to pay for imports of basic necessities.

## **Negotiation On Escape**

Rajapaksa's escape to the Maldives was negotiated by the Maldivian Majlis (Parliament) Speaker and former president Mohamed Nasheed, sources in the Maldives capital Male said.

Gotabaya, his wife and two bodyguards were the four passengers aboard a military aircraft, news agency AFP reported, citing military sources.

Maldivian air traffic control refused the plane's request to land until an intervention by Mohamed Nasheed. A spokesperson for Nasheed did not confirm or deny the intervention.

Sri Lanka's Air Force on Wednesday confirmed Rajapaksa's departure, saying in a

statement: “Pursuant to the request of the government and in accordance with the powers vested in a President in the Constitution of Sri Lanka, the Sri Lanka air force provided a plane early today to fly the President, his wife and two security officials to the Maldives.”

Rajapaksa was previously blocked from departing Bandaranaike International Airport, on Monday after refusing to join a public immigration queue, a high-ranking military source told CNN.

Aides for Rajapaksa arrived at the airport in Colombo on Monday with 15 passports belonging to the President and members of his family — including First Lady Ioma Rajapaksa — who had booked seats on a Sri Lankan Airlines flight leaving for Dubai at 6:25 p.m. local time, according to the military source.

But immigration officers declined to process the passports given to them by presidential aides, as Rajapaksa and his family were not physically present for cross checks. Eventually, the flight departed without the President and his family on board, the source added.

Another attempt was made to get the family on an Etihad flight scheduled to leave Colombo for Abu Dhabi at 9:20 p.m. local, according to the source, however the same problem occurred, as the Rajapaksas refused to join the public immigration queue for the flight.

In both instances, the Rajapaksa family was in a nearby airport lounge, waiting for confirmation they could board without queuing among members of the public, the source said.

On Tuesday, a video released by a former police officer claimed that Rajapaksa was staying in a private house belonging to a top air force commander. The Sri Lanka Air Force has denied the claim, describing it as propaganda intended to tarnish the image of the corps and its chief.

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