

Thousands rally in Mongolia, call for government to step down

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Protesters take part in a demonstration demanding the Mongolian leadership to step down, in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. (Reuters Photo)

Ulaanbaatar: Thousands of anti-government protesters took to the streets of Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar, on Thursday to demand the leadership step down over allegations of corruption and failure to revive a struggling economy. The resource-rich, landlocked country once boasted a booming economy that attracted billions of dollars in investment.

But disputes with foreign investors like Rio Tinto, government overspending and slipping commodity prices tipped Mongolia into an economic crisis in 2016 from which it has yet to fully recover.

“Resign! Resign! Resign!” protesters chanted.

Some carried banners with slogans castigating the government for its perceived failure to tackle corruption, pollution, a stagnant economy and a public health crisis.

“They are not fulfilling the promises they made,” a main protest organiser and general secretary of the opposition Democratic Party, Tsevegдорж Туваан, told Reuters.

“Parliament has been unable to make the government work and be responsible. So we are today demanding that they take responsibility.”

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Some demonstrators carried giant papier-mache caricatures of prominent politicians and life-size cut-outs of the prime minister dressed in a pirate's costume.

The government is run by the Mongolian People's Party, while the presidency is held by Battulga Khaltmaa, a member of the opposition Democratic Party.

Government critics were mollified to some extent when a previous parliamentary speaker, embroiled in a scandal, was forced to resign.

But tempers on both sides have frayed in recent months as they look ahead to a general election in 2020.

One activist, shouting through a loud speaker, said a “poor and tired population demands that the government resigns”.

“Prices have gone up like crazy and salaries not at all,” said another protester, Tseren Tsagaan, 62.

Mongolia, for years a satellite of the Soviet Union, transitioned to parliamentary democracy in 1990.

- Reuters