

Mongolia PM quits, blames president over Covid protests

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Prime Minister Khurelsukh Ukhnaa submitted his resignation and a proposal to dissolve his government Thursday after hundreds gathered outside the parliament building to demonstrate against the policies.

Mongolia's Prime Minister Khurelsukh Ukhnaa. (Photographer: Byambasuren Byamba-Ochir/AFP/Getty Images)

Mongolia's prime minister resigned a day after protests against his government's Covid-19 control measures erupted in capital Ulaanbaatar.

Prime Minister Khurelsukh Ukhnaa submitted his resignation and a proposal to dissolve his government Thursday after hundreds gathered outside the parliament building to demonstrate against the policies. Parliament, which is controlled by Khurelsukh's Mongolian People's Party, voted overwhelmingly Thursday to accept his resignation.

In a speech Thursday, the premier accused President Battulga Khaltmaa, from the rival Democratic Party, of orchestrating the protests. Battulga, whose term expires later this year, expressed shock at Khurelsukh's remarks in a separate speech.

"I wonder and wonder why the prime minister of Mongolia did such an act that undermined the trust of the Mongolian people, undermined national unity and openly slandered the president of Mongolia," Battulga said, according to a transcript on the presidential website.

The protests erupted after a video appearing to show a mother being hastily discharged from a local maternity hospital in a bathrobe because she had tested positive for the coronavirus was widely circulated online. Demonstrators flocked to parliament to protest her treatment Wednesday, some wearing only bathrobes and slippers to show solidarity with the woman.

While the protests were not unusually large, they lasted well into the winter night, where temperatures can fall as low as -40 degrees Celsius (-40 Fahrenheit). Protesters said they were upset more broadly with extended lockdowns and restrictions on movement, as well as a ban on cross-border travel.

The vast country of 3.3 million people "landlocked between Russia and China" has so far avoided the mass coronavirus outbreaks that have troubled others. Mongolia has reported fewer than 1,600 infections since March, with 526 active cases as of Thursday.

- Reuters