

## Troops storm Maldivian Supreme Court

Unrest spreads: Maldivian Opposition protesters demanding the release of political prisoners during a rally last week. APMohamed Sharuhaan

Less than an hour after Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen declared a state of emergency on Monday, troops stormed the Supreme Court premises, sources and Opposition members said.

At about 11 p.m. on Monday, @judiciarymv — the official Twitter handle of the Maldivian judiciary — said: “The National Defence Forces of the Maldives have broken into the Supreme Court of the Maldives.” Meanwhile, nearly a thousand protesters gathered outside the court, where some judges have sought refuge since Sunday following “death threats”.

“The military seems to be in charge tonight,” said Mickail Naseem, president of the Opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP)’s youth wing, who was among the protesters. “Police too are here, with riot gear and shields. They pepper-sprayed many protesters who gathered here,” he told *The Hindu* from the spot.

The emergency rule in the Maldives follows the Yameen administration’s refusal to comply with a recent Supreme Court order that dissident leaders be freed from prison and 12 expelled legislators be reinstated in Parliament.

Over the last five days, the government’s defiance has become increasingly clear. Authorities sacked two Police Commissioners in 48 hours, reportedly for trying to implement the ruling. The government shut Parliament, which was scheduled to convene on Monday.

The Attorney General on Sunday instructed the police and troops not to obey the court’s order, though the court maintained that there were “no legitimate reasons” to obstruct authorities from implementing it. In his only public address last week, Mr. Yameen said he did not expect such a ruling.

Since Thursday, international actors, including the UN and countries such as India, the U.S. and the U.K. have been urging the Male government to respect the ruling. Mr. Yameen’s declaration of a state of emergency on Monday elicited even stronger international reactions.

The U.S. National Security Council, in a tweet, said: “America stands with the people of Maldives. The Maldivian government and military must respect the rule of law, freedom of expression, and democratic institutions. The world is watching.”

International rights watchdog Amnesty International has warned Male that emergency rule “must not become a licence for further repression”, pointing to the country’s “appalling track record of suppressing freedom of expression.”

Meanwhile, Male-based media outlets said their websites were down and in some cases, Twitter handles were blocked.

### Travel advisories issued

Amid increasing turbulence in the archipelago over the last few days — marked by spontaneous protests on the streets — many countries, including the U.K. and China, issued travel advisories to their citizens.

India on Monday asked its nationals to cancel all “non-essential” travel to the Maldives. “The prevailing political developments in the Maldives are a matter of concern for India. Indian nationals are, therefore, advised to defer all non-essential travels to Male and other atolls until further notice. Indian expatriates in Maldives are also alerted to the need for heightened security awareness, and urged to exercise due caution in public and avoid public gatherings,” the Ministry of External Affairs said in the advisory.

China on Monday advised its citizens to avoid travelling to the Maldives till the ongoing tensions there subside. “China suggests that Chinese citizens who are preparing to go to the Maldives in the near term to postpone going until the situation on the ground stabilises,” said Geng Shuang, a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The statement precedes the upcoming spring festival holidays, when people travel in droves to the country.

*(With inputs from Kallol Bhattacharjee in New Delhi and Atul Aneja in Beijing)*

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