

India 'disturbed' by emergency

India issued another statement of concern over the growing crisis in the Maldives, but didn't respond to former President Mohamed Nasheed's appeal for military intervention.

"We are disturbed by the declaration of a state of emergency following the refusal of the government to abide by the unanimous ruling of the full bench of the Supreme Court on February 1, and also by the suspension of constitutional rights of the people of the Maldives," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement.

The government also criticised the arrest of the Supreme Court Chief Justice Abdulla Saeed and former President Abdul Gayoom on Monday night as "reasons for concern", adding that it "continues to carefully monitor the situation".

However, the MEA refused to respond to questions about Mr. Nasheed's call for international intervention.

On alert

Meanwhile defence sources said troops have been put on alert as the situation is still developing in the Maldives. No order has been issued to move any troops or aircraft towards the country, they said. Resources could be mobilised at a short notice, the sources added, but rejected the reports that India was preparing for action. "Talk of any kind of intervention seems premature," said former diplomat Rajiv Bhatia, advising caution and restraint.

"This is not the first time we have seen neighbouring countries move from democracy to dictatorship, or carrying out policies inimical to India," he added, saying New Delhi would have a reason to move if Indians in Male face any direct threat.

Former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran also said India's options would be limited if it decided to "go it alone" in the Maldives, even though President Yameen's actions to contravene the Constitution could be seen as a "challenge to international order".

Adding to the limitations is the fact that the Maldives has left the Commonwealth, and the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) is not meeting, and neither multilateral fora has much leverage over the Maldivian government at present.

Intervention in 1988

As New Delhi weighs its options, a former diplomat who was part of previous Indian interventions in the Maldives, including in 1988, when Indian troops defeated a coup d'etat against then President Gayoom, said it would be a mistake to see the situation there in isolation.

"The Maldives is only one part of the troubled region, and a misstep here could become a trigger for other problems for India in South Asia," the retired official, who preferred not to be named, told *The Hindu*.

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