

## Maldives govt. calls for all-party talks

Wait and watch: A Maldives soldier stands guard outside the President's residence in Male on Friday. AFP-

The Maldivian government on Thursday invited all political parties to re-convene talks, days after it shut down Parliament and declared a state of emergency, drawing sharp criticism at home and abroad.

"In view of the existing situation in the country, and the importance of all-party talks for the welfare of the people of the Maldives, the government has decided to reconvene all-party talks, and has issued invitations to all parties to engage in dialogue with the government," a statement from the President's office said.

However, a top Opposition source told *The Hindu* that all-party talks were "absolutely out of the question" in a situation where dissidents were arrested and "ill-treated", and the President had effectively "imposed martial law". "There can be no negotiating with a dictator like this," the source said, requesting anonymity.

Meanwhile, a visiting delegation of Ambassadors from Colombo-based German, the U.K. and EU missions — that flew to Male — on Thursday said its request to meet President Yameen was turned down.

"Sadly the Maldivian Govt refuses dialogue: today with my U.K./EU colleagues we requested to meet the President/Cabinet Ministers and speaker of majlis [Parliament] to discuss our concerns on the current situation. Our requests were unfortunately refused. That is surely not the way forward," a tweet from the German Embassy in Sri Lanka said on Thursday. The Maldivian Foreign Secretary met the delegation. The development came a day after the Yameen government invited interested international partners to visit the Maldives.

Following the government's refusal to implement a surprise Supreme Court ruling last week, its subsequent declaration of a state of emergency, and a series of high-profile arrests, the Maldives has plunged into a political crisis. The arrests of the Chief Justice and another Supreme Court judge — part of the bench that ordered the release of nine Opposition leaders including former President Mohamed Nasheed — escalated the tension. On Tuesday, three other judges annulled part of the earlier ruling, effectively revoking the release order of jailed dissidents.

Lawyers of the Supreme Court judge said the Chief Justice was threatened that he would be "cut into pieces unless he reversed the ruling", in a statement.

South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR), a regional network of human rights defenders, said it was "deeply concerned" by the political crisis engulfing the Maldives, following President Abdulla Yameen's increasingly "authoritarian and undemocratic actions".

Observing that "President Yameen stands accused of multiple charges of corruption and human rights violations" — allegations that he has denied in the past — the human rights organisation noted that the strongman President has been "politically isolated".

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