

## Maldives on a collision course with India

The Maldives looked set for a collision course with India on Tuesday, as the Majlis (Parliament) cleared an extension of the current state of emergency by 30 days, defying India's expectation conveyed hours earlier.

According to an official statement from President Abdulla Yameen's office, the Parliament's National Security Committee approved the extension with additional amendments, including one stating that the emergency rule would apply only to those "alleged to have carried out illegal activities", and not to "law abiding residents of, or visitors".

On February 5, Mr. Yameen declared a state of emergency for 15 days, citing threats to "national security". The move came after his government refused to implement a dramatic Supreme Court ruling delivered on February 1, which ordered the release of nine jailed Opposition leaders, including exiled former President Mohamed Nasheed, and the reinstatement of 12 expelled legislators.

Releasing a statement earlier on Tuesday, the Ministry of External Affairs said: "It is our expectation that the government of Maldives will not be seeking extension of the state of emergency so that the political process in Maldives can resume with immediate effect."

### Illegal, says Nasheed

The Opposition has termed the move illegal. Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Nasheed said the government cannot legally extend the state of emergency because it does not have the 43 legislators in the Majlis that must vote in favour of it. "The Constitution states that 43 MPs must be present during a vote on a matter of public compliance and a state of emergency is a matter of public compliance."

By implication, Mr. Nasheed said, the emergency, or any extension to it, is illegal. "It also means that any actions taken by the government or security forces using emergency powers are illegal. "President Yameen is ruling down the barrel of a gun. There is zero legitimacy to anything he is doing," said Mr. Nasheed, who had earlier sought Indian military intervention to resolve the problem in Male.

However, in an official tweet on Tuesday evening, the President's office said: "It is unconstitutional to say that the state of emergency cannot be declared."

### 'Implement SC ruling'

While India is yet to indicate its strategy in responding to the ongoing political and constitutional crisis in its neighbourhood, New Delhi on Tuesday reiterated its earlier position and urged the Maldives to implement the SC ruling.

"It is important that Maldives quickly returns to the path of democracy and the rule of law so that the aspirations of Maldivian people are met and the concerns of the international community are assuaged," it said in a statement.

The UN, the U.S., the U.K., the European Union, Australia and Canada, among others, earlier asked Mr. Yameen to comply with the ruling and ensure that rule of law prevails. Many nations have issued travel advisories directing citizens to avoid travelling to the Maldives.

Karu Jayasuriya, Speaker of the Sri Lankan Parliament, and the Chairman of the Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians, has also appealed to the Speaker of the Majlis to “immediately take steps to restore normalcy and respect for the rule of law in the country through dialogue”.

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