

WILL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO KEEP MDP IN POWER, SAYS NASHEED

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Mohamed Nasheed

Mohamed Nasheed, Parliamentary Speaker and former President of the Maldives, on Tuesday vowed to do “whatever it takes” to ensure that the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which he leads, remains in power.

“I think it is getting more and more crucial that the MDP remains in government. There is a lot of bad blood, especially with President [Abdulla] Yameen, and his campaign and narrative against India that is making our people very uneasy,” Mr. Nasheed told *The Hindu* in Colombo, during his visit to address Sri Lanka’s National Youth Parliament.

‘India out’ campaign

He was referring to the ongoing ‘India out’ campaign in the Maldives that has acquired more momentum, with former President Yameen backing it, after the Maldivian Supreme Court recently overturned his conviction in a money laundering case. Mr. Yameen, who was in office from 2013 to 2018, is widely perceived as an ally of China.

On Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s recent visit to the island nation, Mr. Nasheed said: “I have always had the view that you cannot play one country against the other.” It is important for Male “to be good and honest with its friend”, he said. “India is our neighbour and the first port of call in everything. I don’t think that Indian assistance in the Maldives needs to be shadowed with something else,” he said.

Speaking of the economic challenge facing the Maldives, following the impact of the pandemic, Mr. Nasheed said: “We have to repay some \$500 million outstanding debt this year,” while pointing to climate vulnerable countries’ specific predicament of servicing debt incurred on infrastructure assets, at the same time ensuring assets are not stranded due to climate-related calamities.

Poll strategy

While underscoring “the need to” keep the MDP in power, “to ensure that democracy continues”, Mr. Nasheed did not rule out running for the top office himself, something he has indicated earlier too. Asked if he had decided to contest the Maldives’s presidential elections due next year, he said: “Well, you know, there is always the thought of running, it doesn’t change.”

Mr. Nasheed, who has also been pushing the idea of a parliamentary system of governance in place of the current presidential rule, observed that the current system makes it impossible for any political party to secure over 50% of the vote and win an election, without courting smaller political entities, some of them espousing “extremist” religious views. “And they have a disproportionate amount of power when we are in government,” he said.

Mr. Nasheed’s party colleague President Solih, he said, appreciates the challenges facing the Maldives and the solutions being put forward by him, but remained non-committal on who the

final candidate might be. "I can't see both of us contesting each other. I don't think he would, either." It could be either of the leaders, or neither, he indicated, adding he will do "whatever it takes" to keep their party in power.

The "most important thing", he reiterated, was that the MDP remains in power. "It is very important that we have another term, because of democracy. That is paramount for me," said the leader, who, in May, was targeted in an explosion outside his residence in what police called "an act of terror".

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