

An opposition leader in the Maldives has called on India to intervene after President Abdulla Yameen declared a 15-day state of emergency amid a deepening political crisis in the island nation.



President Yameen (L) and Former President Nasheed | Image: Maldives Times

Mohamed Nasheed, the country's exiled former president, urged neighbouring India on Tuesday to send "an envoy, backed by its military" to free two Supreme Court judges and a former president who was arrested in the capital Male after the emergency declaration.

On behalf of Maldivian people we humbly request:

1. India to send envoy, backed by its military, to release judges & pol. detainees inc. Prez. Gayoom. We request a physical presence.
2. The US to stop all financial transactions of Maldives regime leaders going through US banks.

— Mohamed Nasheed (@MohamedNasheed) [February 6, 2018](#)

"We are asking for a physical presence," Nasheed said in his appeal.

He also urged the United States to impose targeted sanctions on Yameen and his associates.

The Maldives, an Indian Ocean archipelago, was plunged into turmoil on February 1 when its Supreme Court issued a shock ruling that overturned terrorism convictions against nine of Yameen's opponents, including Nasheed, and ordered those in jail be freed.

Yameen defied the ruling and ignored calls from the United Nations, European Union, and foreign governments, including India and the US, to comply with it.

In a televised address on Tuesday, the president said he declared a state of emergency to investigate a "coup" against him.

Indian Approach to Male

If India chooses to do nothing, then it is a signal that it supports Yameen. India's action will draw much criticism from China and Pakistan. But time is ripe for India to act, at least a political negotiation through coercive diplomacy. It's not a new recipe for India to use this kind of diplomacy. The Maldives may be a tiny island with no resources, India needs nothing from Maldives (in layman slang) but given its strategic location, it is more of a danger if the Maldives falls in the spheres of influence of India's adversaries. So no matter the cost India should have its toehold in the Maldives.

It may not be easy to control the outcomes of such intervention. But India should, in this case, intervene by acting as a torchbearer, but only after taking SAARC/IOR members in confidence. To avoid the 'big bully brother' allegations in the international community.

The Maldives need not be in India's favour, but it can't be in our adversaries' hands. Time to Coercive Diplomacy. And except Pakistan, no SAARC nation will oppose India's move. Because no SAARC nation except Pakistan can openly condemn India.

Operation Cactus and carrying its legacy

There is a doubt that military intervention is possible. During operation, Cactus India's intervention was justified on the lines that it was a group of armed militants. And India easily won the global community's praise for its intervention. Almost every citizen of Maldives was in support of Gayoom and India. Now it's not the case. Only the opposition seeks India's intervention. Also, operation cactus was invited by the president himself. So global support was like walk in a park to India.

Before intervening in 1988, to save the government of the day at its request for a coup, Rajiv Gandhi was careful to consult several countries, US included. Bahrain was the first to openly express support. Washington, London, everyone agreed.

G Parthasarthy, then JS in PMO, coordinated in the mobilisation of IAF IL 76 aircraft to ferry Army troops to the island. The Hulule airport incidentally was built by Airports Authority of India as a goodwill gift earlier, sanctioned by Mrs Indira Gandhi.

However, this time the entire issue is more complex as China is also getting involved here.

South Asia is more important for China, its interventionism is becoming routine in India's neighbourhood-from Nepal to the Maldives from Pakistan to Sri Lanka. Yameen rejected India's appeal to respect the Supreme Court's decision and is now trying to bully the apex court into submission. He has probably bet that he can ride out the internal storm and count on support from China.

This is the best time for New Delhi to show its capability of solving the crisis in the Indian Ocean Rim. Instead of fearing for the criticism of a handful of countries like Pakistan and China, this time if India could ride this Chinese wave then it would be a big success after the Doklam theatre.

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