

Maldives hopes PM Modi will visit soon

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Male: The Maldives government today expressed hoped that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would visit the country "very soon" as it admitted disappointment over his skipping the island nation on a tour to the region in March.

Maldivian Foreign Minister Dunya Maumoon said the country was facing "political tension" and that the visit by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj was a "signal" that India continues to be a close friend of the Indian Ocean archipelago.

Describing the two-day visit by Swaraj as "extremely important", Maumoon expressed happiness at the revival of the India-Maldives Joint Commission after a hiatus of 15 years.

"As you know, we have five decades of very close bilateral ties. I think this is a very significant visit because we have revived the joint commission between India and Maldives.

"We are facing some political tension in this country but at the same time the visit signals the close support that India has for Maldives and its continuation as a close friend of Maldives," she told PTI after her delegation level talks with Swaraj.

She said that the Maldives was "obviously" disappointed when Modi skipped Maldives on his tour to the region in March this year as they had made a lot of preparations.

"I think the situation was such that it was a difficult time and I am very hopeful that he (Modi) would be visiting Maldives very soon in the near future," she said.

Asked if Swaraj had raised the issue of jailed former president Mohammad Nasheed during talks held with her or President Abdulla Yameen, she said, "I am not at liberty to divulge information. We had discussions on a range of issues. That is all I can say".

Nasheed, 48, was imprisoned for 13 years in March on terror charges related to the arrest of an allegedly corrupt judge when he was still president in 2012.

A UN panel ruled last month that Nasheed's jailing was illegal and he should be freed immediately and be compensated for his arbitrary arrest and detention by the government of President Yameen.

Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Vikas Swarup had said last week that India hoped that a solution would be found to the situation involving Nasheed, now the Maldives' main opposition leader.

"We expect this situation to be handled in accordance with laws and rules of Maldives and hope that the outcome would be seen by everybody as being fair and just. I think that is the most important thing," he said adding that India was committed to peace, stability and progress in the Maldives.

- PTI