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[Home](#) > Maldives: Election Trends.

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## Maldives: Election Trends.

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The Election Commission has finally announced the final list of eligible voters and this comes to a figure of 239, 593. Though a few are still left out, most of the names that were sought to be included have been accommodated.

The second round (if necessitated) of presidential elections will take place on October 28 and the new president will be taking over on November 11.

The Police have been doing an excellent job and their operation 'blue wave' that started from August 15 will continue till the elections and a little beyond. So far so good.

Former President Nasheed had voiced his concern in July itself over the neutrality of the Police. He alleged that the Police may try to influence the election by having individuals create disturbances as a pretext for Police officers' entry into polling stations.

Yameen of PPM had also expressed his fears that disturbances are likely on the election day.

The neutrality of Police is something that should be taken as granted, but the twitter sent by the Police Commissioner Riyaz is very disturbing. In his twitter he has urged the Police to say 'no' to Nasheed as it did earlier on February 7 an event that he described as "jihad." (The day of the rebellion). It is said that Riyaz had sent the twitter in his private capacity. This is no excuse and in any other country, such a person would have been asked to go on leave till the elections are over.

This gives rise to another question whether the Police would remain neutral once the elections results are announced. We also see the President going out of the way to please the security establishment. The first fifty houses constructed were distributed to the Police Officers by President Waheed. On the 18th August he announced the restarting of the project to construct 300 flats to the MNDF. It is one thing to restart the project but another when he injected some politics into the announcement by saying that the previous government (Nasheed's) failed to provide enough attention to the welfare of MNDF officers who also required "rights" as Maldivian citizens. This, to say the least was mischievous.

It may be recalled that Waheed's regime has promoted 100 Police officers so far and another 110 new Police officers have been recruited.

Having realised the seriousness of the situation, Nasheed has requested his party followers to behave gently with the Police and give a smile if they can when they see them.

With the elections coming so close in another ten days, some points need to be highlighted.

1. There is no wave in favour of any one candidate. Some candidates like Gasim Ibrahim get more attention than others but it is not that others are not campaigning.
2. One perceives a sort of ganging up by other candidates against Nasheed who is the front runner in the first round. It is not clear whether he would get a 50 percent majority and if not others are likely to gang up against him. Even old enemies like Yameen and Gasim may come together.
3. Every party other than the MDP is using religion as a tool in campaigning, but some like the Adhaalath head Shiekh Imran Abdulla appear to exceed the limits. It is surprising that the Elections Commission is not taking up with the Jumhoree party chief on such outlandish claims of the Adhaalath party. In one of the election meetings Sheikh Imran accused the MDP and Nasheed of using black magic to garner support for the party. He alleged that as a result of bringing in people from India, Sri Lanka and various parts of Maldives to perform black magic for Nasheed and then cast a spell on food to feed the masses, Nasheed has caused large number of people to become blind towards all his wrong doings and make them vote for MDP! He also accused Nasheed as an agent sent by enemies of Islam and Maldivian nationalism! A vote for Nasheed is said to be an act that will facilitate eradication of Islam in the country!

4. Surprising that the Jumhoree party chief Gasim Ibrahim has not bothered to curb such rabid outpourings from his own coalition group. On the other hand, his own deputy took strong objections to the type of questions asked by TVM in the interview given by Gasim. The TV anchor asked Gasim some personal questions like his sentence over his sexual misconduct and failure of some of his business ventures. The idea appeared to be to make Gasim appear "odd" in the interview.

5. President Waheed in his own way is hammering at the theme that Sovereignty of Maldives is at stake and that only he can stop it. He complained of foreign interference in interpreting the Maldivian constitution and holding elections earlier than the stipulated date in the constitution. ( a reference to India.) In one of the meetings (19th August) he said that Maldives has always been an independent sovereign nation and that Maldives would not accept any form of undue foreign influence in the country. What country is he referring to then?

6. The Thornton report has been leaked just on the eve of the elections and it makes a strong indictment on the way some influential rich groups like Sun Group, Villa of Gasim, Thasmeen Ali's group and others have been unduly favoured by the Bank of Maldives. The audit of 800 million dollars obtained by illegal trade of oil and the involvement of one of the candidates Yameen was abruptly stopped by the present regime for no reason. This could result in possible payment of heavy compensation to the auditor. It is surprising that the report is not hitting the headlines in Maldives so far.

7. The Commonwealth has unveiled a team of 17 members led by Dr. Lawrence Gonzi former prime minister of Malta to visit Maldives during the elections. The group has been mandated to "observe and consider all aspects of the electoral process" during the elections. The team is arriving on August 31. There is an Indian representative- Navin Chawla, former Election Commissioner.

8. The Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HRCM) is stationing its own elections observers in ten regions to monitor the polls. The MDP of Nasheed has decided to station its own election observers at an average of four per ballot box. The EU is also sending a team.

The next few days in Maldives should be very interesting. What worries me is the post election scenario.

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Political <sup>[5]</sup>

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- [4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/maldives>
- [5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/political>