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Maldives: Disturbing Trends in the run off to presidential elections

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When the initial results of the first round of elections were announced, it was assessed that former president Nasheed will have a tough time in garnering the balance votes to reach the 50 percent margin. The reason was that all the other candidates had literally "ganged up " to ensure the defeat of Nasheed.

But there can be no denial that most of the voters preferred Nasheed to others though before the election day some of the candidates used their wealth and made out convincingly that Islam is in danger if Nasheed is to come to power.

Look at the blatant use of Islamic card by a person of the stature of Gayoom. In an election meeting after the 7th (12th) he said and I quote "One side there are people who love and uphold the religion of truth- Islam. They are those who love and want to protect the sovereignty and independence of the nation. The other side are the people who love and uphold religions other than Islam.

I wonder why the Election Commission is not objecting to such speeches. One can understand Adhaalath making such speeches but not Gayoom!

On the 12th, the DRP of Tasmeen Ali decided in its meeting to back and support the candidature of MDP. Thasmeen Ali who contested as a running mate for the incumbent president Dr. Waheed declared that he would fully participate in efforts to seek support for Nasheed.

It was thought that with the support of DRP (GIP's support would not have any difference), Nasheed will be able to sail through in the run off. But it was not to be.

There are dark forces that gathered together to topple President Nasheed on 23rd December 2011 are at work again. The Islamists and the Adhaalath are joining hands to prevent if possible or at least postpone the runoff to the elections. The calculation is that if Nasheed is not allowed to go through the run off, it will be very difficult to prevent the supporters of Nasheed from coming to the streets on a scale much bigger than what happened on February 7 this year and the Security forces may have to be called in to maintain peace. It is our hope that Nasheed does not play into the hands of these forces and advise his followers not to resort to violence.

The following points need to be noted.

1. The only party that is affected in the runoff is the Jumhooree party of Gasim Ibrahim who had high hopes of winning in the first round itself. Instead of taking the results sportingly, the party formed a "rigged votes" movement and alleged that the Election Commission has violated the rights of the people!
2. Gasim Ibrahim who has 40,000 votes behind Nasheed claimed that he ought to have come first- a ridiculous claim indeed as malpractice to the extent of gobbling 40,000 votes in the presence of international and neutral observers is near to impossible. All parties were given an equal opportunity to send observers and monitors and they observed the election in the presence of the people. Had Gasim won, there would not have been any complaint at all and this gives the impression that he is a "poor loser"
3. The Jumhooree filed a case in the High Court alleging rigging of the votes. They alleged that there were variations between the voters list and votes polled in various booths, votes being polled by voters who had no residential addresses, the names of many deceased were found in the list, repetition of some names in the lists etc. The Election Commission submitted that it was open for anyone to come down to the office and check the voters list. While the High Court allowed Jumhooree representatives to examine the voters list, it gave a ruling that the Jumhooree party was unable to offer any evidence to substantiate the claims of electoral fraud.
4. The Jumhooree party filed another case in the Supreme Court seeking an injunction to delay the second round of voting. Surprisingly, the PPM of Gayoom and Yameen which stands to lose in case of delay also supported the Jumhooree in the Supreme Court. Bigger surprise was that the State Attorney General who should have remained neutral if she was not inclined to support the govt. (the case is against the Election Commission), intervened on behalf of the Jumhooree in the court.
5. Most worrying, from my point of view is that most of the Islamic NGOs along with the Adhaalath party have called for a protest against the Election Commission alleging that the first round of presidential elections was rigged. All these entities were part of the December 23rd

movement and it is a question of time before all political parties other than the MDP will be forced to join this movement. A repeat of 23rd December movement cannot be ruled out.

The Supreme Court has ordered that electoral lists may be given to High Court for scrutiny. In our earlier papers I had indicated how weak the judicial system is and people say that one cannot be sure whether the election case will be dealt with objectively by the Supreme Court.

Recounting of 490 boxes will take many days and the EC has rightly pointed out that it is almost impossible to conduct the second round on the 28th as scheduled. There will be a constitutional vacuum on November 11 if the new President does not take over.

The UN Resident Coordinator issued a statement encouraging all the presidential candidates to respect the results. The UN Secretary General urged all political leaders to live up to their responsibilities, respect the democratic process and continue to all for a peaceful, inclusive and credible vote to take place . . . in accordance with the constitution. Dr. Hassan Saeed the running mate of Gasim Ibrahim who is personally arguing the case in the Supreme Court described the findings of the international observers as "light weight"- a strange comment indeed coming from a former Attorney General who had done his bit in the past for ushering democracy in the country!

President Waheed who had a humiliating defeat, added his bit by saying that the discrepancies that are being made out are "worryingly serious."

The MDP has convened the parliament the Sunday (22nd) in a bid to stop the Supreme Court from potentially annulling the election results.

The developments we see are serious as there are conscious attempts to prevent Nasheed from winning the presidential elections. One cannot ignore statements like the one made by Jamal Ahmed, former Home minister and running mate of Yameen- "Nasheed will not be allowed to take office even if he was to win the second round of elections.!"

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